

Euripides: *Medea*

(Enter Medea from the house, attended by the Nurse and other female servants. Here spoken dialogue resumes.)

MEDEA:

Women of Corinth, I have stepped outside
so you will not condemn me. Many people
act superior—I'm well aware of this.
Some keep it private; some are arrogant
in public view. Yet there are other people
who, just because they lead a quiet life,
are thought to be aloof. There is no justice
in human eyesight: people take one look
and hate a man, before they know his heart,
though no injustice has been done to them.
A foreigner must adapt to a new city,
certainly. Nor can I praise a citizen
who's willful, and who treats his fellow townsmen
harshly, out of narrow-mindedness.

My case is different. Unexpected trouble
has crushed my soul. It's over now; I take
no joy in life. My friends, I want to die.
My husband, who was everything to me—
how well I know it—is the worst of men.

Of all the living creatures with a soul
and mind, we women are the most pathetic.
First of all, we have to buy a husband:
spend vast amounts of money, just to get
a master for our body—to add insult
to injury. And the stakes could not be higher:
will you get a decent husband, or a bad one?
If a woman leaves her husband, then she loses
her virtuous reputation. To refuse him
is just not possible. When a girl leaves home
and comes to live with new ways, different rules,
she has to be a prophet—learn somehow
the art of dealing smoothly with her bedmate.
If we do well, and if our husbands bear
the yoke without discomfort or complaint,
our lives are admired. If not, it's best to die.
A man, when he gets fed up with the people
at home, can go elsewhere to ease his heart
—he has friends, companions his own age.

We must rely on just one single soul.
They say that we lead safe, untroubled lives

at home while they do battle with the spear.
They're wrong. I'd rather take my stand behind
a shield three times than go through childbirth once.

Still, my account is quite distinct from yours.
This is your city. You have your fathers' homes,
your lives bring joy and profit. You have friends.
But I have been deserted and outraged—
left without a city by my husband,
who stole me as his plunder from the land
of the barbarians. Here I have no mother,
no brother, no blood relative to help
unmoor me from this terrible disaster.
So, I will need to ask you one small favor.
If I should find some way, some strategy
to pay my husband back, bring him to justice,
keep silent. Most of the time, I know, a woman
is filled with fear. She's worthless in a battle
and flinches at the sight of steel. But when
she's faced with an injustice in the bedroom,
there is no other mind more murderous.