

XII: Medea to Jason

Scorned Medea, the helpless exile, speaks to her recent husband,
surely you can spare some time from your kingship? Oh, as I remember, the Queen of
Colchis found time to bring you riches, when you sought my arts!
Then you might have died well, Medea! Whatever
life is brought since that time is been punishment.
Ah me! Why was that Pelian ship driven forward
by youthful arms, seeking the ram of Phrixus?
Why did we of Colchis ever see the Thessalian Argo,
and your Greek crew drink the waters of Phasis?
Why did I take more pleasure than I should in your golden hair,
and your comeliness, and the lying favours of your tongue? If not, once your strange ship
had beached on our sands, and had brought your brave warriors here,
Aeson's son might have gone unmindful, unprotected by charms,
into the fiery breath, and burning muzzles, of the bulls! He might have scattered the seed,
and sown as many enemies,
so that the one who sowed fell prey to his own sowing! What great treachery would have
died with you, wicked man!

(...)

Ordered to turn your untried ship towards Colchis,
you entered the lovely kingdom of my native land.
Medea was, there, what your new bride is here:
as rich as her father is, my father was as rich.
Her father holds Corinth, mine all
that lies to the left of Pontus, as far as the Scythian snows. Aeetes welcomes the young
Greek heroes as guests,
and Pelasgian bodies grace the ornate beds.
Then I saw you: then I began to know what you might be: that was the first ruin of my
affections.
I saw and I perished! I burnt, not with familiar fires,
but as a pine torch might burn before the great gods.
For who can, easily, hide love?
its flame is obvious, displaying the evidence.
Meanwhile rules were laid down for you.
They were the bulls of Mars.
Besides that, you were ordered to scatter seed to breed a nation,
through the wide fields, with dutiful hands,

who would attack your body with co-born spears:
a harvest hostile to the farmer.

Your last labour, by some art, to deceive the guardian that knows no sleep, and make its
eyes succumb.

So said King Aeetes: all rose sorrowfully,

Though I reached the bed, made up in my room, stricken grievously, how much of that night
for me was spent in tears.

Before my eyes were the brazen bulls, the impious harvest, before my sleepless eyes was
the serpent.

Here is love, here fear ñ fear itself increased my love.

It was morning and my dear sister entered my room
She prays for help for the Minyans
There is a wood, in it, there is was for certain a temple of Diana:

Do you know it, or has the place been forgotten, along with me?
We came there: you began to speak first, with false words: "Fortune indeed has given you
the means of my salvation and my life and death are in your hands.

It is enough to destroy me if you were to delight in that: but it will be more honour to you to
help me.

I beg you by our troubles, which you can lighten,
and if my people's gods have worth, those too:
O Virgin, take pity on me, grant me your services for all time!
let my spirit vanish into thin air, if any bride
enters my bed, unless that bride be you.

Let Juno share in this,

This passion and how much of it was words?
moved a naive girl, and our right hands touched.

I even saw tears or were they partly lies?

So I quickly became a girl captivated by your words.

Behold the sleepless guardian, coated with rattling scales, hissed, and swept the ground
with his writhing body. Where was the rich dowry then?

I, the woman who has come to seem, at last, a barbarian to you,

.

My father is betrayed,
my virginity becomes the prize of a foreign thief,
my most dearly beloved sister, with my mother, lost. But Absyrtus, my brother, I did not
abandon you, fleeing without me.

This letter of mine is lacking in one thing:
what I dared to do my right hand cannot write.

Where is divine power?

You return safe to the cities of Thessaly:

Why speak of the daughters of Pelias, piously harming him, and carving their father's body
with virgin hands?

Though others blame me, you must praise me,
you for whom I was forced to be so guilty.

As you ordered, I left the house, accompanied by our two children,
and, what will pursue me always, my love of you.

I was afraid, I hadn't thought till now so much wickedness could be,
but still I was chilled through my whole body.

The crowd rushed on, continually shouting: "Hymen, Hymenaeae!"
the nearer they came the worse it was for me.

The servants wept apart, and hid their tears ñ
who wants to be the bearer of such evil news?

It would have been better for me not to know what happened,
Jason, my father, is leading the procession,
and he is driving a team of gilded horses!

Straightaway, tearing my clothes, I beat my breasts,
nor was my face safe from my nails.

My heart urged me to go, in procession, among the crowd, and to throw away the garlands
arranged in my hair.

My wounded father, rejoice! Colchians, forsaken, rejoice! My brother's shade, in me find
offerings to the dead!

I abandon my lost kingdom, my country, my home,
my husband, who alone was everything to me.

Thus, I could subdue serpents and raging bulls,
but I could not subdue this one man.

And I've driven off wild fires with skilful potions,
but I've no power to turn the flames from myself.

What cannot make me sleep made a dragon sleep.

My cures are more use to others than myself.

My rival clasps that body that I saved
and she has the fruits of my labours.

Indeed, perhaps when you wish to mention married foolishness,
and speak in a way that suits unjust ears,
you invent new faults in my face, and my manner.

Let her laugh, and lie there, lifted up on Tyrian purple shell weep, and, scorched, she'll
surpass my fires.

While there are blades, and flames, and poisonous juices, no enemy will go unpunished by
Medea.

If by chance my prayers move your breast of steel
now hear these humble words from my heart.

If I'm worthless to you, consider the children we have:
a dread stepmother, in my place, will be cruel to them.

by my kindness to you, and by our two children, our pledges,
return to the bed for which I, insanely, abandoned so many things!

Add truth to your words, and return the help I gave you!

I don't beg your help against bulls, or warriors,
or that a dragon sleeps conquered by your aid:

I ask for you, whom I deserve, who gave yourself to me,
a father by whom I was equally made a mother.

That you live, that you have a wife and powerful father-in-law,
that you can even be ungrateful, all that's due to me. Indeed, what's on hand ñ but why
should I be concerned to warn you of your punishment? Great anger teems with threats.
I'll follow where anger takes me. Perhaps I'll regret my deeds:

I regret having been concerned for an unfaithful husband. Let the god see to that, who now
disturbs my heart. Assuredly I do not know what moves my spirit most.