

Introduction

Euripides, His Life and Times

EURIPIDES, ATHENIAN

*He grew old between the fires of Troy
and the quarries of Sicily.*

*He liked caves on sandy beaches, and seascapes.
He saw the veins of men
as the toils of the gods, in which they snared us like game.
He tried to rip holes in them.
He was dour. His friends were few.
When the time came, dogs tore him apart.*

—GEORGE SEFERIS, 1955; TRANS. A. E. STALLINGS

It is nearly impossible to discern fact from legend in the biographies of ancient poets, but that doesn't stop us from searching for the bright sharp needles in the stacks of hay. Our fuller biographies of Euripides come centuries after his death, in the Byzantine encyclopedia the Suda (tenth century C.E.) and the work of grammarian Aulus Gellius (second century C.E.), with other scattered details coming from Plutarch (also second century C.E.) or the snarky remarks of contemporary Athenian comedians, who may not be excused from the motive of professional envy. As often with the lives of poets, there is a temptation to reconstruct Euripides' life through the words spoken by his characters, as well as through the plots of his plays.

Tradition has it that Euripides was born in 480 B.C.E. on Salamis on the very day of the famous Athenian naval victory over the Persians in

the straits between Salamis and Piraeus. In an almost novelistic touch, his mother is said to have been heavily pregnant when she and a handful of other Athenians fled the city for the safety of the nearby island (only one nautical mile from the port of Piraeus, and elsewhere even closer to the mainland), where Euripides' family had property; she went into labor with the future poet on the spot. The Battle of Salamis marks a date in the life of all three of the major Athenian tragedians—Aeschylus fought in it, Sophocles was the handsome youth chosen to lead the victory chorus, and Euripides emerged into the world (presumably with a wail) on that day. This is a convenient shorthand for understanding both their contemporaneity and their relative ages, and as such is suspect; on the other hand, coincidences happen, and dates of major events in the ancient world (such as the Olympiads) were one firm way of nailing down a year. A pregnant woman fleeing war in a flimsy boat and going into labor from the stress is not an uncommon story in the news in recent years in the eastern Mediterranean. Stranger things have happened.

Another appealing story about Euripides and Salamis was that he used a cave there as a writer's retreat, rowing over from Piraeus, and writing his poetry there against the backdrop of the Saronic Gulf. Some have taken this to be a metaphor for Euripides' misanthropy, his desire to avoid people, or as an explanation for the extensive sea-imagery in his work. (Later biographical accounts also assert that Euripides was a painter, and had trained as a boxer.) Excavations of Salaminian caves in the late 1990s revealed that a cave in the south of the island was visited as a shrine to Euripides, at least in later times, with a potsherd there (possibly the offering of a fan in the second century B.C.E.) bearing the first six letters of his name. It is a scholar's job to hold all such stories suspect, and to consider even this archaeological tidbit as proof of nothing more than that there existed a sort of literary worship cum tourism; other poets such as Homer, Hesiod, Aeschylus, and Sophocles likewise had a (literal) cult following. As a poet, I will just say I do not know a writer who, if he or she had a cave on Salamis and lived in Athens, would not gladly row over a stretch of sea to their writer's retreat with a view, thinking metrically along with the oar strokes. It's certainly attractive to think of Euripides looking

out at the water while writing, of Medea in her anguish, “She’s like a wave beating against a sea-wall.”

Euripides’ father was a man named Mnesarchus, who may have owned a tavern or other shop. Athenian playwrights enjoyed relating that Euripides’ mother, Cleito, was an herb woman or a sort of grocer. (Clearly he was not so highborn as Sophocles, but some of this gossip may again be a way of reading his plays, which feature people from all walks of life, and register something closer to common speech.) Ancient gossip tells us he married twice, having divorced his first wife for infidelity with a house slave, and had three sons. He died, perhaps in exile, away from Athens, in the kingdom of Macedonia. Legend has it that he was torn apart by King Archelaus’s Molossian hounds (Greek mastiffs). There was a centotaph for him in Athens, which was said to have been struck by lightning.

Whatever the unknowable details, the real life of Euripides played out against a time of tensions between Athens and Sparta, and of the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War in 431 (the year in which *Medea* was first produced, and as it happens the year in which the video game *Assassin’s Creed Odyssey* is set). It’s worth noting that the city that is the setting of the play, Corinth, was a rival of Athens, and an ally of Sparta, at the time of the play’s debut. It’s also notable that Aspasia, the consort of Pericles, the lead statesman of Athens at the time, was a controversial and powerful woman of great mental acuity, as well as an immigrant from Asia Minor. (This might have added to the effect on an Athenian audience of a play about a brilliant and dangerous foreign woman wed to a Greek leader; indeed, imagine if, in defiance of Athenian norms for freeborn Athenian women, she were present at the performance.) Euripides died in 406, two years before the final defeat of Athens by Sparta, a defeat marking the end of Athenian hegemony, but perhaps the beginning of Athens’ enduring cultural legacy, the afterlife of Athens’ philosophers and poets.

In fact, it’s hard to think of an ancient playwright with a more popular afterlife. While he lived, Euripides’ plays were not as successful as his rivals’, at least if we go by prizes at the Dionysia festival (and Athenian playwriting existed strictly in the context of such competitions); out of his ninety odd plays—most now lost to us, or existing only in

fragments—only five won prizes, and of those, there were only three firsts; two won seconds, and *Medea* placed a disappointing third. But if not an immediate critical hit when it debuted, *Medea* went on to have a huge influence on art—Greek vases depicting *Medea* almost invariably depict scenes from Euripides’ stage—and on later Greek and Roman (and English) literature.

Despite Euripides’ paucity of ancient Greek Oscars, two stories, one from during the playwright’s lifetime, and one from not long after, tell us much about the esteem in which Euripides’ poetry was held by the ancient Hellenic world. And both are stage-worthy (or cinema-worthy) in their own right. Thucydides, in his history of the Peloponnesian War, relates that as a result of the disastrous Sicilian expedition (in 415 B.C.E.), 7,000 Athenian prisoners were kept corralled in the Sicilian quarries for months, with no shelter from the elements; given only a pint of barley meal and a half pint of water a day, many died from hunger, thirst, or exposure before the rest were eventually sold into slavery. What evidently *had* kept many of the prisoners of war alive was their knowledge of Euripides:

For the Sicilians, it would seem, more than any other Hellenes outside the home land, had a yearning fondness for his poetry. They were forever learning by heart the little specimens and morsels of it which visitors brought them from time to time, and imparting them to one another with fond delight. In the present case, at any rate, they say that many Athenians who reached home in safety greeted Euripides with affectionate hearts, and recounted to him, some that they had been set free from slavery for rehearsing what they remembered of his works; and some that when they were roaming about after the final battle they had received food and drink for singing some of his choral hymns. (Plutarch, Life of Nicias 29.2–3)¹

Also (according to Plutarch), Euripides posthumously saved Athens itself with his poetry. When the Spartan admiral Lysander,

1. Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 3, *Pericles and Fabius Maximus, Nicias and Crassus*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916).

exasperated that the defeated Athenians had not observed the conditions of their surrender, was considering proposals to not only tear down the long walls of the city, but to raze Athens and enslave its inhabitants, a singer came in to entertain the assembly, and began with a chorus from Euripides' *Electra*. Deeply moved, those in the audience broke down: all "felt it to be a cruel deed to abolish and destroy a city which was so famous and produced such poets" (Plutarch, *Life of Lysander* 15.3).² That the singer should have begun with a chorus from Euripides is not surprising if we consider that Plutarch gives the date for this debate as the "sixteenth of the month Munychion," which is to say, the playwright's traditional birthday: the anniversary of the Battle of Salamis.

—A. E. Stallings

THE PLAY

Medea's story has always been impossible to disentangle from the adventures of Jason and the golden fleece, a mission that takes the hero all the way to the coast of the Black Sea, where Medea is a princess, but not one in distress. It is Jason who needs saving. Medea, having fallen head over heels in love with him (herself bewitched, perhaps, by the goddess of love), uses her sorceress knowledge of potions and magic to help him overcome lethal and seemingly impossible fairy-tale tasks, such as harnessing fire-breathing robot bulls to plow a field, killing an army of warriors sprung out of the sown furrows, and snatching the golden fleece out from under the jaws of a watchful dragon. Set in the generation before the Trojan War, this story seems to be known to the earliest Greek poets, though we tend to read it through the Hellenistic *Argonautica* by Apollonius of Rhodes. In some earlier Greek poets, such as Hesiod and Pindar, Medea is a witch (granddaughter of the Sun and niece to Circe), but not necessarily a bad witch—a tyrannicide (of the bad king Pelias), but no murderess. Her name derives from the Greek *medomai*—"to pay attention, think, calculate, prepare, plan,

2. Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 4, *Alcibiades and Coriolanus, Lysander and Sulla*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916).

plot, concoct, devise.” To be Medea is to premeditate. Her witchiness seems to be part and parcel of her intelligence.

Yet the play does not open with the jilted princess Medea. Most Greek tragedies begin with a supernatural being, or royalty, or even the Chorus itself. This play, though, has no gods; it opens in the voice of the mortal of absolute lowest status in Greek society—not only a woman, but a slave; not only a slave, but a foreigner; indeed a female foreign slave whose mistress is herself a refugee. Throughout the play, the emphasis is on those without power or protection, and their limited choices when faced with injustice.

Euripides was notorious for piling on exposition at the opening of his plays, but the Nurse’s opening monologue is not the famous backstory, but an unraveling of it, a contrary-to-fact wish that none of it had ever happened—not only that Medea had never left their home in Colchis, but that Jason had never come on his adventures, and that the magic ship the *Argo* herself had never been built.

Interestingly, those who have been interviewing migrants today who have come over the seas seeking asylum in Greece come across such negative wishes again and again. “If I had known about how I would be treated along this journey, I might have never left my country. Better to die under the bombs in my home than to be treated like this in Europe,” says one Syrian man; a woman from Yemen says, “Sometimes I think it would have been better to have died in the sea rather than be in this place.” Similar laments, spontaneous and yet an ancient genre unto themselves, are a chorus to be heard in all the refugee camps of Greece.³

The children’s Tutor is also a slave; likewise his fortunes are caught up with the household and the fate of his young charges. The Nurse knows what goes on inside the house; the Tutor knows the word on the street, eavesdropping, as he does, at the sacred spring, a sort of town square

3. “Nonviolent Peaceforce Conducts Assessment along Refugee Migration Route in Europe,” *Read Stories* (blog), June 22, 2016, Nonviolent Peaceforce, www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/blog/middle-east-news/596-nonviolent-peaceforce-conducts-assessment-along-refugee-migration-route-in-europe; Marianna Karakoulaki, “Women Struggle to Survive Greece’s Notorious Refugee Camp,” *Deutsche Welle*, October 21, 2018, www.dw.com/p/36i77.

where the men hang out playing *tavli* and talking politics (as today, in modern Greece, one might catch conversation against the clatter of backgammon under a plane tree). Medea may be churning with anger and hurt, dangerous to herself and others, but she is about to receive information—about the looming “deportation,” in Charles Martin’s contemporary language, of herself and her children, a future of exile, that will compel her to act. Gossip and rumor were personified divine forces in ancient Greece (Rumor in Hesiod “is a kind of god”), and we see how the thoughts and actions of the highest in society are “leaked” by the lowest, unnoticed members, flowing freely in and out of doors.⁴ Perhaps Fame—the ultimate goal of Greek heroes, to be immortalized in song—may be thought of as publicity, a controlled glorification of one’s story, while Rumor is what escapes control, is even decried as fake news, damaging reputations, particularly the reputations of women. Consider Pericles’ funeral oration, delivered in 430 B.C.E. (a year after the play’s debut), on the fame of women: “The greatest glory of a woman is to be least talked about by men, whether they are praising you or criticising you.”⁵ It seems plausible that Pericles had seen Euripides’ play.

Medea’s first utterance, her aria (Greek drama being closer to opera than to our idea of a play), from inside the house, is pure voice, pure vowel—the Greek *io!* would have been intoned, sung. For us, this might sound more like a howl, but *io* was the Greek expression both of triumph and of grief, as if we had one word that meant both “alas!” and “hallelujah!” And indeed in the course of the play, Medea will make a triumph of her grief, and a grief of her triumph. The utterance resists translation, but Martin’s solution is a good and bold one, to begin on an incantatory trochaic tetrameter (a meter we might also associate with witches and their spells, as in “Double, double, toil and trouble”), with a vowel music ranging from the long *o*’s of “sorrow” to high *e*’s. Medea is voice before she is visible, and her eerie vocal entrance should raise hairs on the back of the neck.

4. Angela Taraskiewicz, “*Medea Volans: The Bride’s Tragedy in Euripides’ Medea*” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, n.d.).

5. Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, Penguin Classics, book 2, chapter 46.

Medea's cries trigger the entrance of the Chorus of native-born Corinthian women (the Chorus will remain onstage till the end of the play):

I have heard the voice, I have heard the cry
Of the anguished woman of Colchis:
Is she not calm yet?

The Corinthian women prove a sympathetic sisterhood to the foreign woman in their midst, and Medea, having gathered herself, knows how to approach and persuade them. With caution and self-control, she admits the need for assimilation:

A foreigner who lives in a strange city
Must ever be compliant to its customs,

while also calling on civility from the native-born. Medea carefully draws comparisons between her situation and theirs, on the universal difficulties of being a woman. Marriage itself, declares Medea, is a kind of exile:

When a young bride goes to her husband's home
With all of its new customs and arrangements
Untaught to her beforehand, she must become
A prophet or a mind-reader to cope
With this complete unknown who's now her mate.

(Remember that Medea is also a prophetess.) And she argues that motherhood is its own kind of heroism, in her rousing comparison of childbirth to being on the front line of battle:

I'd rather fight three battles, shield to shield,
In the first line of men, than once give birth!

One can imagine a sort of "amen" from the Chorus here, nodding and gesturing in approval. The audience too would have been struck by this comparison—all Athenian freeborn men were on active-duty status in the military, and had either seen combat, or were about to do so. It was an audience of veterans.

The Chorus, too, continues the play's concern with the contrary-to-fact, with wishing things hadn't happened, or had happened otherwise—if only women, not men, had written the stories and songs that gave glory to male heroes while casting women in the shade:

Verses made by men of old
 Sang of our inconstancy;
 Their songs will now be put on hold.
 Had Phoebus given *us* the lyre,
 I could well have made reply
 To lies about female desire.

(As Jane Austen might chime in, “Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story.”) The choral ode then proceeds to invert expectations and to reweave the story from Medea's point of view.

Compared to the sympathetic portrayal the playwright provides of Medea, the slaves, and the Chorus, when it comes to the two principal men in power—King Creon and the legendary Jason himself—Euripides depicts them as bullies and buffoons. *Medea* is a tragedy, but one whose protagonist is not a traditional tragic hero; Medea's rage is epic rather than tragic, and the mortal sin of hubris is beneath her as the granddaughter of a god. If there is a character with a tragic flaw or hubris in the play, it is Jason, at the peak of his fame, relentlessly self-interested and self-esculpatory, consistently minimizing or erasing the debt he owes Medea, and cavalier when it comes to his past oaths; he is more politician than hero. (The contemporary term “gaslighting” comes to mind.) Yet if Jason seems something of a caricature of dimness to set off Medea's cleverness, the portrait Euripides paints of an unhappy marriage in the cut and thrust of their exchange, with its bitterness, misunderstandings, recriminations, and tug-of-war over shared history, rings uncannily true and timeless. That the marriage is beyond repair is emphasized by Medea's twisting a quotation from Homer, on the perfect marriage of true minds, as applying to herself alone: “A joy to friends, a danger to my foes!”

Interestingly, each spouse is the claim to fame of the other in their he says/she says argument: Medea points out that Jason could not have completed the tasks that make him famous without her; Jason scoffs,

with a Make Greece Great Again nativism, that Medea would have no fame at all if she still lived in the obscurity of the Black Sea. A princess and a sorceress, outside of Greece, she would still be a nobody.

As Martin notes, the interlude with King Aegeus of Athens, which falls smack in the middle and divides the work, was thought problematic by Aristotle, an “irrational” occurrence. (Aristotle likewise frowned at the play’s *deus-ex-machina* ending.) But the interlude serves many purposes. For one, it offers up a release from the claustrophobic tension, putting off the moment of crisis. Having seen Medea only as a wronged foreign bride, treated with contempt by her host Creon, and with condescension by Jason, we have a glimpse into what Medea was like before, and, in an alternative universe, could be again. Treated with respect and even affection, on equal footing with a man and a king, Medea behaves like the self-possessed royalty and priestess that she is. King Aegeus and Medea greet one another with the affection of old friends.

King Aegeus also serves as a foil for Creon, showing how a king (an Athenian and a gentleman, as it were) *ought* to behave, as both a tactful guest and a generous host. Aegeus’s greeting of Medea could not draw a sharper contrast with Creon’s brute rudeness. As Martin captures it, compare King Aegeus’s “I wish you joy, Medea!” with Creon’s sneering “You there, Medea.”

The further irony—even comic relief—of the incident is that King Aegeus, no intellectual match for Medea (after all, who is?), is the business around the prophecy. Having sought the reason for his childlessness from the oracle at Delphi, he has been given a riddle, “words that could not be understood by men.” (Euripides uses the Greek word for “male,” not “human being.”) He starts the prophecy, “Do not . . . the wineskin’s . . . outreaching foot . . . untie . . .,” only to have Medea, gently but impatiently, one imagines, try to finish it for him, “Until you do what, or come to what place?” Medea knows full well what the implication of the bawdy metaphor is—as does the Athenian audience, who were familiar with the story—that King Aegeus needs to “keep it zipped” as it were until he gets back to Athens; but she deliberately omits telling him. In fact, she effectively sends him on his way to the very man whose daughter he will get tricked into impregnating, producing in the process the greatest of the legendary national Athenian heroes, Theseus.

King Aegeus's sorrow in his childlessness adds another level of irony and poignancy to Medea's unchilding of Jason and herself. As a representative of civilized Athens, the king is also the occasion for the Chorus to hymn praises of the city. Jason, in his own description of barbarism on the one hand, and Greek civilization on the other, is shown to be a hypocrite.

With Medea having secured protection in the sanctuary city of Athens and a promise that she will be free from "extradition" to her enemies, we can glimpse an improbable but possible happy ending, the eucatastrophe of Tolkien rather than the catastrophe—the violent downturn—that helps to define tragedy in Aristotle.⁶

What follows therefore is all the more distressing. As the Nurse had imagined a past contrary-to-fact world, where the story of Jason and the golden fleece had never happened, as the Chorus imagines a topsy-turvy universe where the laws of physics are suspended and streams flow uphill, so Medea imagines the alternative peaceful future that might exist but that doubly cannot be: how in her exile, she would never live to see her boys married, nor will her children tend to her in old age and death. At any event, once the machine of her revenge is put into motion, the slaying of the children is mandated to protect them from worse retributions:

My friends, I have decided what to do:
I'll kill my children now, at once, then flee
This land, for if I linger, hands less kind
Will bring them far more crudely to their deaths.

Whose hands? we might wonder, as might the Chorus, and the audience. What worse fate for the children is she aiming to avoid?

As is common in Greek tragedy, the violence of Medea takes place offstage. Messenger scenes like the one describing the death of Creon and his daughter are a staple of ancient drama, allowing us to imagine, almost cinematically, violence that would involve changes of scenery (not an aspect of Greek plays), additional characters, and perhaps special effects. That they are left to the audience's imagination increases

6. See Taraskiewicz, "Medea Volans."

their power.⁷ The *Medea* messenger speech, one of the longest such in ancient literature, allows us to see and get to know the proud princess who has displaced Medea in Jason's affections—the new bridecum-stepmother who cannot stand the children—“Soon as she noticed them, she veiled her eyes / And turned away her pale cheek in disgust”—but is vain with respect to her own beauty and greedy for the costly adornments with which Medea has tempted her (“as pleased as any girl by a new bonnet”). It is a neat trick that Euripides makes the princess both dislikable and an object of pity, even though we never set eyes on her.

Horror, perhaps, rather than tragedy is the proper genre for describing the murder of the children; Euripides uses the almost Hitchcockian device of having their murders happen in earshot but not eyeshot, as the audience becomes somehow complicit along with the Chorus, which does not lift a hand to stop it.

The end of the play chillingly shows Medea and Jason still locked in grim contention, both calling the dead children as witnesses to their unbridgeable grievances. And the power that Medea has had all along (we have hints of it in the magic—radioactive?—tiara and gown, heirlooms from granddaddy Sun, and her skill in medicine and soothsaying) is made visible in the chariot, the *dracones ex machina*, in which Medea escapes. The play begins with the whispers of gossip, and ends in the rush of monstrous wings.

Yet the logical necessity and inevitability of Medea's infanticide seem far from fixed. The Chorus tries over and over to persuade her to change her mind, and she also wavers. (Again, the etymology of the name Medea suggests someone pondering and thinking; in Roman art she is often shown at just the moment where she tries to steel herself to the deed.) Even after her plan is accomplished, the Chorus struggles to find any antecedent for such an act. They can think of only one, and that involves suicide as well as infanticide:

7. A modern cinematic example is Hattie McDaniel's hair-raising performance as Mammy in *Gone with the Wind*, in which she describes in detail to Melanie the death of the child Bonnie from a fall from her pony, and Rhett's subsequent derangement in grief, off-screen scenes drenched in Aristotelian pity and fear.

Ino, maddened by Hera,
 Chased from her house to wander
 Until she fell into the sea!
 —Until she stepped over the cliff's
 Edge with a child in each hand,
 And all three perished together!

Based on the accounts of Medea that we know to have been in circulation at this point, the Chorus is right to be surprised. (That this play placed third, which is to say last, may indicate the audience itself was discomfited.) Euripides seems to signal innovations; at the very least, adoption of a little-known variant. Ancient scholia (the ancient commentary) on the play suggest Euripides may have borrowed elements of the plot from Neophron, who had a play of the same name. But it seems more plausible that Euripides put his own twist on this ancient and well-known tale.

A bit of old slander, or gossip maybe, lurks in the margins of the play, pointing in this direction. An ancient scholion asserts that Euripides took a bribe of five silver talents from the Corinthians to change Medea's story, and to make *her*, and not the Corinthians, responsible for the deaths of her children—other versions being that either the Corinthian women had stoned Medea's children after her murder of the Corinthian royal family, or that they sacrilegiously slew them at Hera's altar, where Medea had left the children as supplicants. (A third variation holds that Medea was unwittingly responsible, and the children's deaths were an accident following a botched immortality ritual in which she buried them at the altar of Hera.)⁸

An alert listener may have caught some foreshadowing of this twist earlier in the play, when the Nurse says:

She loathes her children, can't bear the sight of them,
 And I'm afraid she's plotting wickedness!

8. Centuries later (second century CE), the travel writer Pausanias, visiting the ruined city of Corinth, which had been razed and sacked by the Romans in 146 BCE, mentions these tales as still having currency, and that a memorial still stood to Medea's children near the city's famous spring; he also remarks that Corinthian children used to

In the Greek, what is rendered as “wickedness” is literally “something new”—the connotation in Greek, as Martin rightly suggests in his translation, being that what is new is inherently bad. (For instance, in Greek, the verb for “to make new” usually indicates the instigation of violent revolution.) On a more literal level, perhaps it is not only Medea who is plotting something revolutionary; it is also the playwright.

That the whole ending of the play, from the murder of the children on, may have come as a surprise, even a shock, to the first audience is underscored by the final words of the Chorus, who declare:

What we expect does not occur,
For some god always finds a way
To bring about the unforeseen;
That is what happened in this play.

The audience must have been left to debate not only the ethics of Medea’s actions, but also those of Jason’s, and the position of Athens itself as a center of enlightenment and sanctuary, and the Greek world’s claim to civilization over the barbarism of others. (“Barbarian,” in fact, simply meant “one who does not speak Greek.”)

These are still topical issues in the eastern Aegean—that sea named after King Aegeus—issues that promise to become more urgent worldwide: refugee, foreigner, citizen, deportation, extradition, asylum, exile—Martin emphasizes these timeless issues with a modern vocabulary out of our news cycles. In the light of this modern *Medea*, the British-Somalian poet Warsan Shire’s contemporary “Home” could be a lost choral ode from the play:

no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well

.....

observe a hero cult in honor of their unhappy shades, rituals in which they would wear black and cut off their hair. For a fuller look at the Medea story variations, as well as evidence of the hero cult, see Corinne Ondine Pache’s chapter on Medea’s children in *Baby and Child Heroes in Ancient Greece* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

no one crawls under fences
wants to be beaten
pitied

Euripides' Chorus seems to reply:

May I never lose my city
And lead a life of helplessness
Exposed to random cruelty,
Or condescending looks of pity.
 Before that happens, let me die,
Let the light of my life end:
There is no source of greater woe
That anyone may ever know
Than to lose one's native land.

—A. E. Stallings with Angela Taraskiewicz