

From the Mouths of Slaves: Slave-Speech and Sympathy in Euripidean Tragedy

1. Euripides *Hippolytus*, 250-60

κρύπτω: τὸ δ' ἔμὸν πότε δὴ θάνατος
σῶμα καλύψει;
πολλὰ διδάσκει μ' ὁ πολὺς βίος:
χρῆν γὰρ μετρίας εἰς ἀλλήλους
φιλίας θνητοὺς ἀνακίρνασθαι
καὶ μὴ πρὸς ἄκρον μυελὸν ψυχῆς,
εὐλυτὰ δ' εἶναι στέργηθρα φρενῶν
ἀπὸ τ' ὄσασθαι καὶ ξυντεῖναι.
τὸ δ' ὑπὲρ δισσῶν μίαν ὠδίνειν
ψυχὴν χαλεπὸν βᾶρος, ὡς κάγῳ
τῆσδ' ὑπεραλγῶ.

I cover (your head): but when will death
then cover my body?
My long lifetime teaches me many things
for it is necessary for mortals to mix
moderate love amongst each other
and not into the deepest marrow of the soul,
and that affections of their hearts be easily untied
pushed away or braced against.
It is a heavy burden for one soul
to grieve over two, just as I
grieve over her.

2. Aeschylus *Choephoroi*, 749-53

φίλον δ' Ὀρέστην, τῆς ἐμῆς ψυχῆς τριβήν,
ὄν ἐξέθρεψα μητρόθεν δεδεγμένη,—
κάκ' νυκτιπλάγκτων ὀρθίων κελευμάτων
καὶ πολλὰ καὶ μοχθήρ' ἀνωφέλητ' ἐμοὶ
τλάση:—

Dear Orestes, a care to my soul,
whom I raised having delivered him from his mother,
with his shrill cries having made me wander in the night
and there were many other useless sufferings to wretched
me;

3. Euripides *Medea*, 36-45

στυγεῖ δὲ παῖδας οὐδ' ὀρῶσ' εὐφραίνεται.
δέδοικα δ' αὐτὴν μὴ τι βουλεύση νέον:

βαρεῖα γὰρ φρήν, οὐδ' ἀνέξεται κακῶς
πάσχουσ' (ἐγῶδα τήνδε) δειμαίνω τέ νιν
μὴ θηκτόν ὡση φάσγανον δι' ἥπατος
[σιγῇ δόμους εἰσβᾶσ', ἵν' ἔστρωται λέχος,]
ἢ καὶ τυράννους τόν τε γήμαντα κτάνη
καὶ ἄπειτα μείζω συμφορὰν λάβη τινά.
δεινὴ γάρ: οὔτοι ῥαδίως γε συμβαλῶν
ἔχθραν τις αὐτῇ καλλίνικος ἄσεται.

She hates the children and seeing them doesn't rejoice
I fear lest she plan some fresh thing
for she is strong in spirit and will not tolerate
suffering badly (I know her) and I fear
that she might thrust a sharpened sword through her liver
[in silence having entered the house, where the bed is laid out]
or that she might kill the royal household and his wife
and then she might seize some greater misfortune.
For she is awesome, no man fighting her as an enemy
will easily sing victory against her.

4. Aeschylus *Choephoroi*, 753-8

τὸ μὴ φρονοῦν γὰρ ὡσπερὶ βοτὸν
τρέφειν ἀνάγκη, πῶς γὰρ οὔ; τρόπῳ φρενός:
οὐ γὰρ τι φωνεῖ παῖς ἔτ' ὦν ἐν σπαργάνοις,
εἴ λιμός, ἢ δίψη τις, ἢ λιψουρία
ἔχει: νέα δὲ νηδὺς αὐτάρκης τέκνων.
τούτων πρόμαντις οὔσα, πολλὰ δ', οἴομαι,

like a speechless beast
it was necessary to raise him, how else? according to his humor;
For the child doesn't speak being still in swaddling clothes,
if some hunger or thirst or call of nature
holds him; young intestines are self-ruled.
Attempting to be a prophet, I made predictions...