

THE REALISM OF THE HUMBLE AND OF THE GRAND IN EURIPIDES' *ELECTRA*
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Black-figure hydria of the Priam Painter, last quarter of the sixth century BCE. (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts inv. 61.195.)

Aristoph. *Lys.* 327-32

Νυνδὴ γὰρ ἐμπλησαμένη τὴν ὑδρίαν κνεφαία
μόλις ἀπὸ κρήνης ὑπ' ὄχλου καὶ θορύβου καὶ πατάγου χυτρείου,
δούλαισιν ὠστιζομένη
στιγματαίαις θ', ἀρπαλέως
ἀραμένη, ...

I have just come from the well with my pitcher; I could hardly fill it from the fountain in the dawn twilight, in the throng and crash and clatter of pots, jostling with slave-girls and rogues, and I eagerly hoisted it onto my head, etc.

Eur. *El.* 53-7

ὦ νύξ μέλαινα, χρυσέων ἄστρον τροφέ,
ἐν ἧι τόδ' ἄγγος τῶιδ' ἐφεδρεῦον κάραι
φέρουσα πηγᾶς ποταμίας μετέρχομαι
γόους τ' ἀφίημι αἰθέρ' ἐς μέγαν πατρί,
οὐ δὴ τι χρείας ἐς τοσόνδ' ἀφιγμένη
ἀλλ' ὡς ὕβριν δείξωμεν Αἰγίσθου θεοῖς.

O dark Night, nurse of the golden stars, in which I bear this pitcher sitting here on my head as I go for water from the stream—not that I have come to such a degree of need, but to display Aegisthus' hybris to the gods.

Eur. *El.* 64-80

(Peas.) τί γὰρ τάδ', ὦ δύστην', ἐμὴν μοχθεῖς χάριν
πόνους ἔχουσα, πρόσθεν εὖ τεθραμμένη,
καὶ ταῦτ' ἐμοῦ λέγοντος οὐκ ἀφίστασαι;
(El.) ... δεῖ δὴ με κάκέλευστον εἰς ὅσον σθένω
μόχθου ἴπικουφίζουσαν, ὡς ῥᾷον φέρηρις,
συνεκομίζειν σοι πόνους. ἄλλ' ἔχεις
τάξωθεν ἔργα· τὰν δόμοις δ' ἡμᾶς χρεῶν
ἐξευτρεπίζειν. εἰσιόντι δ' ἐργάτηι
θύραθεν ἡδὺ τᾶνδον εὐρίσκειν καλῶς.
(Peas.) εἴ τοι δοκεῖ σοι, στείχε· καὶ γὰρ οὐ πρόσω
πηγαὶ μελάθρων τῶνδ'. ἐγὼ δ' ἄμ' ἡμέραι
βοῦς εἰς ἀρούρας ἐσβαλὼν σπερῶ γύας.
ἀργὸς γὰρ οὐδεὶς θεοῦς ἔχων ἀνά στόμα
βίον δύναιτ' ἄν ξυλλέγειν ἄνευ πόνου.

(Peasant) Why, unhappy woman, do you labour at these tasks for my sake, taking on drudgery, when you were finely raised before, and do not refrain from them though I tell you? (El.) ... Even without your bidding, then, I ought, so far as I can, to lighten your toil so you may more easily bear it, and share with the outdoor tasks; my job is to keep things in the house in order. It is nice for a worker coming in from outdoors to find things properly organized within. (Peas.) Well, if you think so, go on; in fact the spring is not far from his dwelling of ours, And I at daybreak will drive the oxen in the ploughland and sow the furrows. No one, you know, can just keep the gods on his lips in idleness and collect a living without labour.

Eur. *El.* 175-89

οὐκ ἐπ' ἀγλαΐαις, φίλαι,
θυμὸν οὐδ' ἐπὶ χρυσεῖς
ὄρμοις ἐκπεπτόταμαι
τάλαιν', οὐδ' ἰστᾶσα χοροῦς
Ἀργεῖαις ἅμα νύμφαις
εἰλικτὸν κρούσω πόδι' ἐμόν.
δάκρυσι νυχεύω, δακρύων δέ μοι μέλει
δειλαίαι τὸ κατ' ἡμαρ.
σκέψαι μου πιναρὰν κόμαν
καὶ τρύχη τάδ' ἐμῶν πέπλων,
εἰ πρέποντ' Ἀγαμέμνονος
κούραι τᾶι βασιλείαι

τᾶι Τροίαι θ', ἃ 'μοῦ πατέρος
μέμναται ποθ' ἄλοῦσα.

No fineries, my friends, no golden necklaces can set my wretched heart in flight, nor shall I take my place in choruses and stamp my whirling foot along with the brides of Argos. In tears I pass my nights, tears are my sorrowful care day by day. Look at my filthy hair, this threadbare clothing of mine, and see if they are seemly for Agamemnon's royal daughter, and for Troy which does not forget she once was conquered by my father.

Eur. *El.* 193-5

δοκεῖς τοῖσι σοῖς δακρύοις
μὴ τιμῶσα θεοὺς κρατή-
σειν ἐχθρῶν;

Do you suppose that with your tears, without giving honour to the gods, you will overcome your enemies?

Eur. *El.* 303-10

ἄγγελλ' Ὀρέστηι τὰμὰ κάκείου κακά,
πρῶτον μὲν οἷσις ἐν πέπλοις αὐλίζομαι,
πίνωι θ' ὄσωι βέβριθ', ὑπὸ στέγαισι τε
οἴαισι ναίω βασιλικῶν ἐκ δωμάτων,
αὐτὴ μὲν ἐκμοχθοῦσα κερκίσιν πέπλους
[ἢ γυμνὸν ἔξω σῶμα καὶ στερήσομαι]
αὐτὴ δὲ πηγὰς ποταμίους φορουμένη.
ἀνέορτος ἱερῶν καὶ χορῶν τητωμένη ...

Report to Orestes these troubles are mine and his as well. First, the kind of clothes I must lie in, the dirt I am loaded with, the kind of shelter I live in, exiled from those royal halls, working the shuttle to make clothes with my own labour [or else shall I have my body unclothed and be deprived], and carrying fresh water from the stream myself, missing festive rites, excluded from choruses ...

Eur. *El.* 367-90

οὐκ ἔστ' ἀκριβὲς οὐδὲν εἰς εὐανδρίαν·
ἔχουσι γὰρ ταραγμὸν αἱ φύσεις βροτῶν.
ἤδη γὰρ εἶδον ἄνδρα γενναίου πατρὸς
τὸ μηδὲν ὄντα, χρηστὰ δ' ἐκ κακῶν τέκνα,
λιμὸν τ' ἐν ἀνδρὸς πλουσίου φρονήματι,
γνώμην δὲ μεγάλην ἐν πένητι σώματι.
[πῶς οὖν τις αὐτὰ διαλαβὼν ὀρθῶς κρινεῖ;
πλούτῳ; πονηρῶι τᾶρα χρήσεται κριτῆι.
ἢ τοῖς ἔχουσι μηδέν; ἀλλ' ἔχει νόσον
πενία, διδάσκει δ' ἄνδρα τῆι χρεῖαι κακόν.
ἀλλ' εἰς ὄπλ' ἐλθῶν; τίς δὲ πρὸς λόγχην βλέπων
μάρτυς γένοιτ' ἂν ὅστις ἐστὶν ἀγαθός;
κράτιστον εἰκῆι ταῦτ' ἔἴην ἀφειμένα.]
οὗτος γὰρ ἀνὴρ οὔτ' ἐν Ἀργείοις μέγας
οὔτ' αὖ δοκήσει δωμάτων ὠγκωμένος,
ἐν τοῖς δὲ πολλοῖς ὦν, ἄριστος ἠυρέθη.
οὐ μὴ ἀφρονήσῃθ', οἱ κενῶν δοξασμάτων
πλήρεις πλανᾶσθε, τῆι δ' ὁμίλια βροτῶν
κρινεῖτε καὶ τοῖς ἠθεσιν τοὺς εὐγενεῖς;
[οἱ γὰρ τοιοῦτοι τὰς πόλεις οἰκοῦσιν εὖ
καὶ δώμαθ'· αἱ δὲ σάρκες αἱ κεναὶ φρενῶν

ἀγάλματ' ἀγορᾶς εἰσιν. οὐδὲ γὰρ δόρυ
μᾶλλον βραχίων σθεναρὸς ἀσθενοῦς μένει·
ἐν τῇ φύσει δὲ τοῦτο κᾶν εὐψυχία.]

Well, nothing is precise when it comes to virtue! For there is confusion in the natures of men. Before now I have seen a worthless man sprung from a noble father, and estimable children from low born parents; emptiness I have seen in a rich man's thinking, and a great mind in a poor man's body. How then shall a man distinguish and rate them correctly? By wealth? A faulty guide he will then be using! Or by lack of possessions? Yet poverty is unhealthy, and trains a man in badness, because of his need. Turning. the, to arms? Yet who when facing an enemy's spears can testify which man is the virtuous one? It is best to let these things go and leave them in disorder. For this man, who is not eminent among the Argives, nor yet puffed up by family reputation, but belongs amongst the many, has been found excellent. Will you not cease your foolishness, you who stray about full of empty opinions, and use men's company and their conduct to distinguish the noble amongst them? It is men of this kind who order cities properly, and homes as well, while fleshbags devoid of brains are nothing but ornaments of the town square. Even in battle a strong arm abides the spear no more than a weak one; that depends on a man's nature and his courage.

Eur. *El.* 404-5

ὦ τλήμον, εἰδὼς δωμάτων χρεῖαν σέθεν
τί τοῦσδ' ἐδέξω μείζονας σαυτοῦ ξένους;

You thoughtless man! You know the poverty of your home; so why have you received these guests who are greater men than you?"

Aristoph. *Frogs* 1026-7

Εἶτα διδάξας Πέρσας μετὰ τοῦτ' ἐπιθυμεῖν ἐξεδίδαξα
νικᾶν ἀεὶ τοὺς ἀντιπάλους, κοσμήσας ἔργον ἄριστον

Thereafter I produced my *Persians*, which taught them (=the Athenians) to yearn always to defeat the enemy, and thus I adorned an excellent achievement.

Aristoph. *Frogs* 1030-1

ταῦτα γὰρ ἄνδρας χρὴ ποιητὰς ἀσκεῖν. Σκέψαι γὰρ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς
ὡς ὠφέλιμοι τῶν ποιητῶν οἱ γενναῖοι γεγένηται.

That is the sort of things that poets should practice. Just consider how beneficial the noble poets have been from the earlier times.

Aristoph. *Frogs* 1058b-62a

... 'Ἄλλ', ὦ κακόδαιμον, ἀνάγκη
μεγάλων γνωμῶν καὶ διανοιῶν ἴσα καὶ τὰ ῥήματα τίκτειν.
Κᾶλλως εἰκὸς τοὺς ἡμιθέους τοῖς ῥήμασι μείζοσι χρῆσθαι·
καὶ γὰρ τοῖς ἱματίοις ἡμῶν χρῶνται πολὺ σεμνοτέροισιν.
'Ἄμοῦ χρηστῶς καταδείξαντος διελυμήνω σύ.

Look, you wretch, great thoughts and ideas force us to produce expressions that are equal to them. And anyway, it suits the demigods to use exalted expressions, just as they wear much more impressive clothing than we do; that is where I set a good example that you completely corrupted.

Aristoph. *Frogs* 1063-4a

Πρῶτον μὲν τοὺς βασιλεύοντας ῥάκι' ἀμπισχῶν, ἴν' ἐλείνοι
τοῖς ἀνθρώποις φαίνονται εἶναι.

First of all, you made your royals wear rags, so that they would strike people as being piteous.

Νηρήιδες δ' Εύβοϊδας ἄκρας λιποῦσαι
 μόχθους ἀσπιστὰς ἀκμόνων
 Ἑφαιστου χρυσέων ἔφερον τευχέων,
 ἀνά τε Πήλιον ἀνά τ' ἔρυ-
 μνᾶς Ὀσσας ἱεράς νάπας
 Νυμφαίας σκοπιάς
 †κόρας μάτευσ'† ἔνθα πατήρ
 ἰππότης τρέφεν Ἑλλάδι φῶς
 Θέτιδος εἰναλίας γόνον
 ταχύπορον πόδ' Ἀτρείδαις.
 Ἰλιόθεν δ' ἔκλυόν τινας ἐν λιμέσιν
 Ναυπλίους βεβῶτος
 τᾶς σᾶς, ὦ Θέτιδος παῖ,
 κλεινᾶς ἀσπίδος ἐν κύκλῳ
 τοιάδε σήματα †δείματα
 Φρύγια† τετύχθαι·
 περιδρόμῳ μὲν ἵτιος ἔδραι
 Περσέα λαιμοτόμαν ὑπὲρ ἄλλος
 ποτανοῖσι πεδίλοις κορυφὰν Γοργόνος ἴσχειν,
 Διὸς ἀγγέλωι σὺν Ἑρμᾶι,
 τῷ Μαιίας ἀγροτῆρι κούρῳι.
 ἐν δὲ μέσῳι κατέλαμπε σάκει φαέθων
 κύκλος ἀλίῳιο
 ἵπποις ἄμ περοέσσαις
 ἄστρον τ' αἰθέριοι χοροί,
 Πλειάδες Ἰάδες, †Ἑκτορος
 ὄμμασι† τροπαῖοι·
 ἐπὶ δὲ χρυσοτύπῳι κρᾶνει
 Σφίγγες ὄνουξιν ἀοίδιμον ἄγραν
 φέρουσαι· περιπλεύρῳι δὲ κύτει πύρπνοος ἔσπευ-
 δε δρόμῳι λέαινα χαλαῖς
 Πειρηναῖον ὀρῶσα πῶλον.
 ἄορι δ' ἐν φονίῳι τετραβάμονες ἵπποι ἔπαλλον,
 κελαινὰ δ' ἀμφὶ νῶθ' ἔτετο κόνις.
 τοιῶνδ' ἀνακτα δοριπόνων
 ἔκανεν ἀνδρῶν, Τυνδαρί,
 σὰ λέχεα, κακόφρον κόρα.
 τοιγάρ σοί ποτ' οὐρανίδαι
 πέμψουσιν θανάτου δίκαν.
 ἔτ' ἔτι φόνιον ὑπὸ δέραν
 ὄψομαι αἶμα χυθὲν σιδάρῳι.

Nereids leaving Euboean capes bore golden workings from Hephaestus' anvil, a shield-bearer's
 equipage, up along Pelion, along sheer Ossa's sacred wooded slopes, lookouts of the Nymphs,
 †seeking the maidens (?)† where the old horse-man was nurturing for Hellas a bright light, sea-
 dwelling Thetis' child, a swift-moving runner for the Atreidae. From a man arrived from Troy in
 Nauplia's harbour I heard, O son of Thetis, that on the circle of your famous shield these emblems
 were fashioned, terrors for the Phrygians. On the rim's encircling field was Perseus above the brine
 on flying sandals, holding, throat severed, the Gorgon's head, in company with Zeus' herald Hermes,
 that rustic son of Maia. And on the buckler's centre shone, radiant, the circle of the sun on his
 winged horses, and ethereal choruses of stars – Pleiades, Hyades – to turn back Hector's eyes. And

on the helm of beaten gold were Sphinxes bearing in their talons their sung prey; and on the hollow corselet, breathing fire, sped at a run the lioness on clawed feet, as she saw the Peirenean colt. And on the slaughtering spear leapt four-stepping horses and dust was billowing dark about their backs. Such were those spear-toiling men whose lord your union killed, you evil-minded daughter of Tyndareus. For that shall the gods in heaven one day send death upon you in retribution. Yet, yet shall I see beneath your throat the deadly gush of iron-spilled blood.

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