

Euripides' *Andromache* (with Michael Walton, Nick Hern)

Hermione

I may be wearing a golden tiara and delicate clothes of many colours, but these are my own, not from the home of Achilles or Peleus. I brought them from the land of Sparta – my father Menelaus, the king, gave them to me. And other wealth besides. So I have the right to speak my mind, whenever I want. 150

You, on the other hand, are a slave, a possession of war, and you plan to oust me from my own house, do you? Because of your potions my husband hates me: because of you I can't have children.

I am barren. You Asiatics are good at that sort of thing. 160

Well, I shall put a stop to you! This sea nymph's shrine won't protect you. You're going to die! Even if you do manage to find some god or man prepared to save your skin, I'll curb those airs of yours. I'll make you bow your head and bend the knee. You can get your hands dirty a bit, dusting my house and scrubbing the floors with water from the river. You can have a gold pail to fetch it in. That will teach you what world you're living in.

You have no Hector here, no Priam, no wealth – you're in Greece now. You, you're so dim-witted, you pathetic creature, you were happy to go to bed with the son of your husband's murderer, and bear his child. Foreigners, they're all alike. Father in bed with daughter, mother with son, sister and brother at it. Nearest and dearest kill each other. And no law to stop them! We don't want your kind here. 170

No man should have two wives; he should love and be content with one alone, if he doesn't want trouble at home. 180

Chorus

A woman's a jealous creature, and hostile to a rival for her bed and marriage.

Andromache

Well now! Being young is a problem, especially when you can't tell right from wrong. I'm afraid you will stop me speaking, even if I'm right, simply because I'm a slave. If I win my point, the worse for me. Your sort, those who, like you, breathe rarefied air don't want to hear a better argument from some inferior. But I don't intend to give up my case by remaining silent. 190

Please tell me, young lady, what possible reason I could have for coming between you and your lawful marriage. Is Sparta inferior to Troy? Or do you think of me as a free

woman? Do you envy my youthful body, perhaps? My fine city and all those friends – they're a threat to you, are they?

Why would I ever want to bear children to be slaves like myself, 200  
millstones round my neck? If you don't have any children, would any Thessalian be  
happy to see *mine* on the throne? Are the Greeks so fond of me because of Hector? Was I  
a mere nobody in Troy?

It needed no drugs from me to turn your husband off you. The fact that you're unfit to  
live with was enough. It's a good heart, not beauty, that makes a welcome bedmate. Now  
that does work like a charm. When you're angry, oh then, Sparta's a metropolis 210  
and Thessaly so provincial; you're a wealthy woman – oh dear - living with paupers:  
Menelaus is a better man than Achilles ever was! If your husband can't stand you, it's  
your stuck-up attitude that's the cause. A woman should respect a man to whom she's  
been given in marriage, even an inferior man, and not argue with him or give herself airs.  
If you'd married a despot from snow-bound Thrace, where a man shares his bed with  
plenty of women, would you have murdered them all? You would have sent out a  
message that all women are insatiable. That is shameful. We may suffer  
from this disease more than men, but we should at least try 220  
to hide it.

O Hector, so dear to me! Even when you had your flings, I put up with it, and nursed  
your bastards to keep you happy. My husband loved me for behaving as a wife should.  
But you are so possessive of your man you daren't let him out in the rain.

When it comes to having it off with men, don't try to compete  
with your mother, Helen. The sensible child shuns the 230  
mother's vice.

Chorus

Madam, you really should try to meet her halfway.

Hermione

So holier than thou! A competition is it, in self-control?

Andromache

Self-control's not a major concern of yours, I suppose.

Hermione

Our ways of thinking are hardly the same.

Andromache

A young woman should never discuss sex.

Hermione

I know you'd rather do it than discuss it.

Andromache

Shouldn't you keep your frustration to yourself?

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Hermione

Why? Isn't sex women's favorite topic?

Andromache

Proper sex, not improper sex.

Hermione

Improper? We don't follow barbarian practices here.

Andromache

Improper is improper anywhere.

Hermione

Clever, very clever. But you're still dead.

Andromache

Thetis is watching.

Hermione

Yes, she blames your country for Achilles' death.

Andromache.

That was Helen, not me - YOUR mother.

Hermione

Do you have to bring that up again?

Andromache

Yes, well, that's all I have to say.

250

Hermione

Tell me what I came to hear. Are you going to leave the protection of Thetis' shrine, or not?

Andromache

You're out of your mind if you think I'm going to leave this shrine without my knowing my life is safe.

Hermione

My mind is made up. I'm not waiting for my husband.

Andromache

And I won't leave before he gets here.

Hermione

I'll burn you out! I don't care.

Andromache

Burn away. The gods will know.

Hermione

I'll break you! I'll tear that delicate skin.

Andromache

Bloody her altar and she won't forget.

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Hermione

You brazen foreign bitch! Look death in the eye, will you?  
But you'll leave soon enough, and voluntarily! I've got the bait. I won't tell you what it is, but you'll find out soon enough. You sit there. Even if you are glued to your seat, I'll pry you loose before Neoptolemus shows up to save you!