

Extract from Euripides, *Medea*, in Marvin Perry,
*Sources of the Western Tradition, Vol 1: From Ancient
Times to the Enlightenment* (Houghton Mifflin
Company: Boston & New York, 2006), p. 42

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Euripides *MEDEA*

The Greek dramatist Euripides (c. 485–406 B.C.) applied a keen critical spirit to the great question of individual life versus the demands of society. His play *Medea* focuses on a strong-willed woman whose despair at being cast off by her husband leads her to exact a terrible revenge. But in the following passage, Medea might speak for the deepest feelings of any Greek woman.

It was everything to me to think well of one man, And he, my own husband, has turned out wholly vile. Of all things which are living and can form a judgement We women are the most unfortunate creatures. Firstly, with an excess of wealth it is required For us to buy a husband and take for our bodies A master; for not to take one is even worse. And now the question is serious whether we take A good or bad one; for there is no easy escape For a woman, nor can she say no to her marriage. She arrives among new modes of behaviour and manners, And needs prophetic power, unless she has learnt at home, How best to manage him who shares the bed with her.	And if we work out all this well and carefully, And the husband lives with us and lightly bears his yoke, Then life is enviable. If not, I'd rather die. A man, when he's tired of the company in his home, Goes out of the house and puts an end to his boredom And turns to a friend or companion of his own age. But we are forced to keep our eyes on one alone. What they say of us is that we have a peaceful time Living at home, while they do the fighting in war. How wrong they are! I would very much rather stand Three times in the front of battle than bear one child.
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