

Euridice

When Orpheus took Euridice by hand,
he sang to her his visions of love:
a home with a manageable mortgage;
he would teach, so summers off
to travel; two kids, or three, her choice;
then they retire overseas, a Greek island
perhaps. Then Euridice made a profound choice,
as befit her name. She paused. Looked back.
Hell never looked so good. She would live
in a small apartment. Alone. And write.
She would cherish her husband, forever.
He had led to her where she was at.
On the threshold, Orpheus turned to his wife.
Her tunic fluttered in the hot air. He blamed himself.

Trojan Women

Inside the bloodied flesh walls of their wombs,
they carried men. As women, they could bear
only so long, until they broke. The air
thickened with smoke. The water festered. Fumes
from burning bodies roamed through palace rooms.
The Trojan women let down their dark hair,
danced and sang. Around the horse in the square,
through the impregnable gates, they bore loom,
and shuttle, shaft, heddle, and reed. Then dead
tired, they slept beneath the wooden horse.
Its mighty legs spread. Its head held erect.
The next day, the women, perfumed and bedecked,
would be too aware of tears wept, blood shed.
Peace is always taken by force.

Medusa

Medusa: "I knew my beauty was true.
"Men fell at my feet, as if a broad axe
"severed their turgid trunks. Those men would mew
"their tame love. I would lay them on their backs,
and mount them bare."

Athena: "Like a slut,
"she denied she yielded to the white-headed
"Poseidon. I gave her the coldest cut:
"repulsive and beautiful. If she bedded
any man, he would die stiff as stone."

Chorus:
"This we know: all beauty must have its flaw.
"A nappy nest of hair hid her clitoris.
"Men, and woman, held her in dreadful awe."

The statue "Medusa with the Head of Perseus" stood
across from the New York County Criminal Court.

Clytemnestra

For the full ten years, she fed the home front
and stoked vengeful fires of hate in her breast.
She would sit on the threshing floor to rest
and ruminate and seethe and plot the hunt
for a man's heart. Her dry breasts were a blunt
fetish. Her bleeding, staunch. Time could not wrest
the girl's cries from her mind. Back from his quest,
Agamemnon smirked, "Your mother's a cunt."
Orestes covered his face at this word,
His mother's shame, too much for him to bear.
The child bride listened with abandoned eyes.
Pregnant with hate, eyes blood-red, undone hair,
she marked his drink, his dreams of bed, his slurred
speech, her coming small death with his faint cries.

Briseis

The *Iliad* commenced with a rape,
though you're sore to miss it. Achilles' wrath,
blood-purified in a ritual bath,
concealed the violation, as a drape
curtains the *naós*, or a blue-bruised nape
by a carelessly tossed cloak. Down the path,
into his dark tent, he dragged her. Hell hath
no fury, he warned, if she should escape.
After, Hecuba came, and sat, and spoke,
"None suffered more than me." She freed a plait
of the girl's matted hair, then finger-combed
the locks. Briseis's vacant eyes roamed
the gilt sheets, then she laughed, as if a joke
had been told. She hid her expecting hate.