

A Semonidian Fragment (7)

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χωρίς γυναικὸς θε<εὸ>ς ἐποίησεν νόον
τὰ πρῶτα. τὴν μὲν ἐξ ὑὸς τανύτριχος,
τῆι πάντ' ἀν' οἶκον βορβόρωι πεφυρμένα
ἄκοσμα κείται καὶ κυλίνδεται χαμαί·

αὐτὴ δ' ἄλουτος ἀπλύτοις ἐν εἵμασιν
ἐν κοπρήισιν ἡμένη πιαίνεται.
τὴν δ' ἐξ ἀλιτρῆς θε<εὸ>ς ἔθηκ' ἀλώπεκος
γυναῖκα πάντων ἴδριν· οὐδέ μιν κακῶν
λέληθεν οὐδὲν οὐδὲ τῶν ἀμεινόνων·

τὸ μὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν εἶπε πολλάκις κακόν,
τὸ δ' ἐσθλόν· ὀργὴν δ' ἄλλοτ' ἀλλοίην ἔχει.
τὴν δ' ἐκ κυνός, λιτοργόν, αὐτομήτορα,
ἢ πάντ' ἀκοῦσαι, πάντα δ' εἰδέναι θέλει,
πάντηι δὲ παπταίνουσα καὶ πλανωμένη

λέληκεν, ἦν καὶ μηδέν' ἀνθρώπων ὄραϊ.
παύσειε δ' ἄν μιν οὔτ' ἀπειλήσας ἀνὴρ,
οὐδ' εἰ χολωθεὶς ἐξαράξειεν λίθωι
ὀδόντας, οὐδ' ἄν μειλίχως μυθ<εὸ>μενος,
οὐδ' εἰ παρὰ ξείνοισιν ἡμένη τύχηι,

ἀλλ' ἐμπέδως ἄπρηκτον αὐονὴν ἔχει.
τὴν δὲ πλάσαντες γῆνιν Ὀλύμπιοι
ἔδωκαν ἀνδρὶ πηρόν· οὔτε γὰρ κακόν
οὔτ' ἐσθλόν οὐδὲν οἶδε τοιαύτη γυνή·
ἔργων δὲ μούνον ἐσθίειν ἐπίσταται.

κῶταν κακὸν χειμῶνα ποιήσῃ θεός,
ρίγῳσα δίφρον ἄσπον ἔλκεται πυρός.
τὴν δ' ἐκ θαλάσσης, ἢ δὴ ἐν φρεσὶν νοεῖ·
τὴν μὲν γελαῖ τε καὶ γέγηθεν ἡμέρη·
ἐπαινέσει μιν ξεῖνος ἐν δόμοις ἰδῶν·

“οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλη τῆσδε λωῖων γυνὴ
ἐν πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποισιν οὐδὲ καλλίων”·
τὴν δ' οὐκ ἀνεκτὸς οὐδ' ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς ἰδεῖν
οὔτ' ἄσπον ἐλθεῖν, ἀλλὰ μαίνεται τότε
ἄπλητον ὥσπερ ἀμφὶ τέκνοισιν κύων,

Apart from man did God make woman's mind and soul,
and from the start. Indeed, one from a bristling sow
who covers everything in filth throughout the house.
She lies down shamelessly and romps about in muck.

Herself unwashed and in her selfsame unwashed clothes
she sits upon the dung and fattens herself up.
One, from a wily fox God made a woman's kind.
She knows all things, this one, and nothing in its turn
escapes her sight at all, of evil or of good.

What's good is bad, she'll say, and often makes the case,
but has a mood that changes every hour, it seems.
One from a dog, a tramp, a whelp-birthing machine,
who wants to hear and see each thing that comes around.
Darting her eyes about, she barks at everything

whether or not she should see anyone at all.
A man can't quiet her by threatening her aloud,
nor, angered, if he'd dash her teeth in with a stone,
nor gently if he brings his dulcet tones to bear,
nor yet if even in the presence of a guest,

and constantly has with this imbroglgio to tend.
Olympians have formed from clay another one:
She's lame and helpless whom they've given unto men.
Ignorant, this wife knows neither saint nor sin.
The only skill she knows is how to eat, it seems,

and if, perchance, God should create a winter's chill,
shivering, she draws her chair up nearer to the fire.
One from the sea, who minds two moods within her breast:
one day she's giggling and cheerful as can be;
a guest esteems her then, when seeing her at home:

“There's not another more agreeable than her!
In all humanity there's not a finer wife!”
But on another day, one dares not look her in the eye,
nor happen near, for she is driven mad with ire,
unsociable as is a bitch among her pups,

ἀμείλιχος δὲ πᾶσι κάποθυμῆ
ἐχθροῖσιν ἴσα καὶ φίλοισι γίνεται·
ὥσπερ θάλασσα πολλάκις μὲν ἀτρεμῆς
ἔστηκ', ἀπήμων, χάρμα ναύτησιν μέγα,
θέρ<εο>ς ἐν ὄρῃ, πολλάκις δὲ μαίνεται

βαρυνκτύποισι κύμασιν φορ<εο>μένη.
ταύτη μάλιστ' ἔοικε τοιαύτη γυνὴ
ὀργήν· φυὴν δὲ πόντος ἀλλοίην ἔχει.
τὴν δ' ἔκ ἴτε σποδιῆς καὶ παλιντριβ<έο>ς ὄνου,
ἢ σὺν τ' ἀνάγκῃ σὺν τ' ἐνιπῆσιν μόγις

ἔστερξεν ὧν ἅπαντα κάπονήσατο
ἀρεστά· τόφρα δ' ἐσθίει μὲν ἐν μυχῶι
προνῦξ προῆμαρ, ἐσθίει δ' ἐπ' ἐσχάρηι.
ὁμῶς δὲ καὶ πρὸς ἔργον ἀφροδίσιον
ἐλθόντ' ἐταῖρον ὄντινῶν ἐδέξατο.

τὴν δ' ἐκ γαλῆς, δύστηνον οἰζυρὸν γένος·
κείνηι γὰρ οὐ τι καλὸν οὐδ' ἐπίμερον
πρόσεστιν οὐδὲ τερπνὸν οὐδ' ἐράσιμον.
εὐνῆς δ' ἀδηνῆς ἐστὶν ἀφροδίσης,
τὸν δ' ἄνδρα τὸν περῶντα ναυσίηι διδοῖ.

κλέπτουσα δ' ἔρδει πολλὰ γείτονας κακά,
ἄθυστα δ' ἱρὰ πολλάκις κατεσθίει.
τὴν δ' ἵππος ἀβρὴ χαιτέεσσ' ἐγείνατο,
ἢ δούλι' ἔργα καὶ δύνῃ περιτρέπει,
κοῦτ' ἂν μύλης ψαύσειεν, οὔτε κόσκινον

ἄρειεν, οὔτε κόπρον ἐξ οἴκου βάλοι,
οὔτε πρὸς ἱπνὸν ἀσβόλην ἀλ<εο>μένη
ἴζοιτ'. ἀνάγκῃ δ' ἄνδρα ποιεῖται φίλον·
λοῦται δὲ πάσης ἡμέρης ἄπο ρύπον
δίς, ἄλλοτε τρίς, καὶ μύροις ἀλείφεται,

αἰεὶ δὲ χαίτην ἐκτενισμένην φορεῖ
βαθεῖαν, ἀνθέμοισιν ἐσκιασμένην.
καλὸν μὲν ὧν θέημα τοιαύτη γυνὴ
ἄλλοισι, τῶι δ' ἔχοντι γίνεται κακόν,
ἦν μὴ τις ἦ τύραννος ἢ σκηπτοῦχος ἦι,

ὅστις τοιοῦτοῖς θυμὸν ἀγλαΐζεται.
τὴν δ' ἐκ πιθήκου· τοῦτο δὴ διακριδὸν
Ζεὺς ἀνδράσιν μέγιστον ὥπασεν κακόν.
αἰσχιστα μὲν πρόσωπα· τοιαύτη γυνὴ
εἴσιν δι' ἄστ<εο>ς πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις γέλως·

Implacable, she fumes at everyone that day,
behaving thus to friends and enemies alike.
Just as the sea frequently stands unmoved and calm
for sailors – a great joy – and kindly does no harm
in summertime, often it is consumed with rage

And heavy-sounding billows, tossing violently.
She's most like this, the wife whose temper is the sea,
although the ocean cuts a different form than she.
One from an ass was made, who's obdurate and grey,
she who, by force together with admonishment

Scarcely acquiesces in whatever work needs done,
but not too well. Meanwhile she eats both day and night
and takes repast in corners, and by hearths as well.
But all the same, when she is plying Venus' trade
she gives a welcome to whomever comes her way.

One from a weasel – wretched, woeful kind, she is –
for whom there is no air of pulchritude at all
nor anything so lovely or desirable.
She's inexperienced in Venus' pillioned bed
and gives the chap who's riding seasickness instead.

She steals from all the neighbors, works her many ills,
and eats the offal that was meant for sacrifice.
A horse begat another, dainty and well-maned,
who shrinks from every chore and turns away from work,
who will not paw the millstone lightly, nor yet lift the

sieve, nor yet even throw the shit out from the stall,
nor sit before the stove because she's frightened of
the soot; and yet compels a man to be her mate.
She bathes away the dirt at least two times a day,
or even three, anoints her skin with fragrances,

and makes the habit consummate to comb her hair
out straight, bedecking it with flowers for their shades.
Indeed, this wife may be a spectacle of grace
to others, woe is she, however, to her man.
Unless he were a tyrant, or a sceptered king;

whoever glorifies such vanities as these.
One from an ape, and this, in fact, distinctly was
the worst calamity that Zeus apportioned men.
An incongruous countenance this woman sports,
ridiculous to all the people in the town:

ἐπ' ἀρχένα βραχεῖα· κινεῖται μόγις·
ἄπυγος, αὐτόκωλος. ἅ τάλας ἀνὴρ
ὅστις κακὸν τοιοῦτον ἀγκαλίζεται.
δήν<εα> δὲ πάντα καὶ τρόπους ἐπίσταται
ὥσπερ πίθηκος· οὐδέ οἱ γέλωσ μέλει·

οὐδ' ἄν τιν' εὖ ἔρξειεν, ἀλλὰ τοῦτ' ὄραϊ
καὶ τοῦτο πᾶσαν ἡμέρην βουλεύεται,
ὅκως τι κῶς μέγιστον ἔρξειεν κακόν.
τὴν δ' ἐκ μελίσσης· τὴν τις εὐτυχεῖ λαβών·
κείνη γὰρ οἴη μῶμος οὐ προσιζάνει,

θάλλει δ' ὑπ' αὐτῆς κάπαέξεται βίος,
φίλη δὲ σὺν φιλ<έο>ντι γηράσκει πόσει
τεκοῦσα καλὸν κώνομάκλυτον γένος.
κάριπρεπῆς μὲν ἐν γυναιξὶ γίνεται
πάσησι, θεῖη δ' ἀμφιδέδρομεν χάρις.

οὐδ' ἐν γυναιξὶν ἦδετα καθημένῃ
ὄκου λέγουσιν ἀφροδίσιους λόγους.
τοίας γυναικας ἀνδράσιν χαρίζεται
Ζεὺς τὰς ἀρίστας καὶ πολυφραδεστάτας·
τὰ δ' ἄλλα φῦλα ταῦτα μηχανῆτι Διὸς

ἔστιν τε πάντα καὶ παρ' ἀνδράσιν μενεῖ.
Ζεὺς γὰρ μέγιστον τοῦτ' ἐποίησεν κακόν,
γυναικας· ἦν τι καὶ δοκ<έω>σιν ὠφελεῖν
ἔχοντι, τῶι μάλιστα γίνεται κακόν·
οὐ γάρ κοτ' εὐφρων ἡμέρην διέρχεται

ἅπασαν, ὅστις σὺν γυναικὶ φέλεται,
οὐδ' αἶψα Λιμὸν οἰκίης ἀπόσεται,
ἐχθρὸν συνοικητῆρα, δυσμεν<έα> θεῶν.
ἀνὴρ δ' ὅταν μάλιστα θυμηδεῖν δοκῆι
κατ' οἶκον, ἢ θ<εοῦ> μοῖραν <ἢ ἀ>νθρώπου χάρι

εὐροῦσα μῶμον ἐς μάχην κορύσσεται.
ὄκου γυνὴ γάρ ἐστιν οὐδ' ἐς οἰκίην
ξεῖνον μολόντα προφρόνως δεκοῖατο.
ἦτις δὲ τοι μάλιστα σωφρονεῖν δοκεῖ,
αὕτη μέγιστα τυγχάνει λωβωμένην.

her neck is short, her movements arduous, and she's
bumless, all skin and bone. Hah! Hapless is the man
whoever cuddles such a wretched thing as she.
She knows all of the tricks, and all the little turns
just like an ape, but never cares when people laugh.

She'd never do a thing if it meant doing good,
but calculates and watches all day long to see
if in some manner she can do the greatest harm.
One from a bee – whoever marries her is blessed –
for onto her alone one cannot fasten blame.

Life flourishes and under her is made to grow.
A joy, with her beloved husband she grows old.
She brings forth children blessed in body and in name.
Indeed, she comes to be distinguished among wives.
She's radiant, and grace divine envelops her.

She takes no mirth in sitting down with other wives
when they are telling tales of Venus' escapades.
That woman unto men was given graciously
by Zeus. She is the greatest and the most acclaimed.
But all those other kinds (by Zeus' contrivances)

exist, are here withal, and do abide with men.
For Zeus did vouchsafe this, the greatest of the ills:
the wife. And even if some seem that they could help,
those are the ones who cause the husband greatest pains.
He never goes through any day, you see, with cheer

entirely, he who has come upon a wife,
nor swiftly will he drive out Hunger from his house
(a spiteful tenant, and an ill-will from the gods).
Whenever fellows seem the most glad-hearted with
their homes, by God's esteem or by the grace of man,

she finds a blemish and equips herself for war.
Wherever there's a woman, she may not be keen
to take a guest into the house so zealously.
In this way, mark you well, that she who seems to be
the wisest is in fact the greatest peccancy,

κεχηνότος γὰρ ἀνδρός, οἱ δὲ γείτονες
χαίρουσ' ὀρῶντες καὶ τόν, ὡς ἀμαρτάνει.
τὴν ἦν δ' ἕκαστος αἰνέσει μεμνημένος
γυναῖκα, τὴν δὲ τοῦτέρου μωμήσεται·
ἴσῃν δ' ἔχοντες μοῖραν οὐ γινώσκομεν.

Ζεὺς γὰρ μέγιστον τοῦτ' ἐποίησεν κακόν,
καὶ δεσμὸν ἀμφέθηκεν ἄρρηκτον πέδην,
ἐξ οὗ τε τοὺς μὲν Ἄϊδης ἐδέξατο
γυναϊκὸς εἶνεκ' ἀμφιδηριωμένους
.....

although her man is all agape, and neighbors praise
her, looking on, they are mistaken all, of course.
And her whom one might laud (when speaking of his wife)
the other man he's talking to will castigate,
but neither will believe their lot's identical.

For Zeus gave them to us, the greatest ill of all,
and fettered us in bonds – an adamantine spell –
since Hades first appropriated all those men
who fought the war for Helen's sake in Ilium.

Translator's note: The poet Semonides flourished during either the 7th or 8th century B.C. He composed iambic and elegiac poetry, as well as invective strains in the style of Hipponax and Archilochus, who are believed to have been his near contemporaries. This is his longest surviving fragment, and outlines a satirical --if not misogynist -- view of women in Archaic Greece.

