

Semonides, *Types of Women* (Poem 7) (trans. Diane Arnson Svarlien; from www.stoa.org/diotima) [Greek text; 7th century BCE]

From the start, the gods made women different.
One type is from a pig--a hairy sow
whose house is like a rolling heap of filth;
and she herself, unbathed, in unwashed clothes,
5 reposes on the shit-pile, growing fat.
Another type the gods made from a fox:
pure evil, and aware of everything.
This woman misses nothing: good or bad,
she notices, considers, and declares
10 that good is bad and bad is good. Her mood
changes from one moment to the next.
One type is from a dog--a no-good bitch,
a mother through and through; she wants to hear
everything, know everything, go everywhere,
15 and stick her nose in everything, and bark
whether she sees anyone or not.
A man can't stop her barking; not with threats,
not (when he's had enough) by knocking out
her teeth with a stone, and not with sweet talk either;
20 even among guests, she'll sit and yap;
the onslaught of her voice cannot be stopped.
One type the gods of Mount Olympus crafted
out of Earth--their gift to man! She's lame
and has no sense of either good or bad.
25 She knows no useful skill, except to eat
--and, when the gods make winter cold and hard
to drag her chair up closer to the fire.
Another type is from the Sea; she's two-faced.
One day she's calm and smiling--any guest
30 who sees her in your home will praise her then:
"This woman is the best in all the world
and also the most beautiful." The next day
she's wild and unapproachable, unbearable
even to look at, filled with snapping hate,
35 ferocious, like a bitch with pups, enraged
at loved ones and at enemies alike.
Just as the smooth unrippled sea at times
stands still, a joy to mariners in summer,
and then at times is wild with pounding waves--
40 This woman's temperament is just like that.
The ocean has its own perplexing ways.
Another type is from a drab, gray ass;
she's used to getting smacked, and won't give in

until you threaten her and really force her.
45 She'll do her work all right, and won't complain;
but then she eats all day, all night--she eats
everything in sight, in every room.
And when it comes to sex, she's just as bad;
she welcomes any man that passes by.
50 Another loathsome, miserable type
is from a weasel: undesirable
in every way--un-charming, un-alluring.
She's sex-crazed, too; but any man who climbs
aboard her will get seasick. And she steals
55 from neighbors, and from sacrificial feasts.
Another type a horse with flowing mane
gave birth to. She avoids all kinds of work
and hardship; she would never touch a mill
or lift a sieve, or throw the shit outside,
60 or sit beside the oven (all that soot!).
She'll touch her husband only when she has to.
She washes off her body every day
twice, sometimes three times! then rubs herself
with perfumed oil. She always wears her hair
65 combed-out, and dressed with overhanging flowers.
Such a wife is beautiful to look at
for others; for her keeper, she's a pain
--unless he is a king, or head of state
who can afford extravagant delights.
70 Another type is from an ape. I'd say
that Zeus made her the greatest pain of all--
his gift to man! Her face is hideous.
This woman is a total laughingstock
when she walks through the town. She has no neck,
75 no butt--she's all legs. You should see the way
she moves around. I pity the poor man
who holds this horrid woman in his arms.
She's well-versed in every kind of trick
just like an ape; what's more, she has no shame
80 and doesn't care if people laugh at her.
She'd never think of doing something kind
to anyone; she plots the whole day long
to see how she can do the greatest harm.
Another type is from a bee. Good luck
85 in finding such a woman! Only she
deserves to be exempt from stinging blame.
The household that she manages will thrive;
a loving wife beside her loving man,
she'll grow old, having borne illustrious

90 and handsome children; she herself shines bright
among all women. Grace envelops her.
She doesn't like to sit with other women
discussing sex. Zeus gratifies mankind
with these most excellent and thoughtful wives.

95 But by the grim contrivances of Zeus
all these other types are here to stay
side by side with man forever. Yes,
Zeus made this the greatest pain of all:
Woman.

If she seems to want to help
100 that's when she does her keeper the most harm.
A man who's with a woman can't get through
a single day without a troubled mind.
He'll never banish Hunger from his house:
unwelcome, hateful lodger, hostile god.

105 Just when a man seems most content at home
and ready for enjoyment, by the grace
of god or man, that's when she'll pick a fight,
her battle-helmet flashing, full of blame.
A household with a woman is at a loss

110 to give a decent welcome to a guest.
The wife who seems the most restrained and good,
she's the most disastrous of them all;
for while her slack-jawed husband gapes at her
the neighbors laugh at how he's been deceived.

115 Each man will diligently praise his own
and blame the next man's wife; we just don't see
that we all share alike in this hard luck.
For Zeus made this the greatest pain of all
and locked us in a shackle hard as iron

120 and never to be broken, ever since
the day that Hades opened up his gates
for all the men who fought that woman's war.