THE TROJAN WOMEN

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INTRODUCTION TO
THE TROJAN WOMEN

In Aelian's *Varia historica* (ii. 8), written about the beginning of the third century A.D., we find the following notice: "In [the first year of] the twenty-first Olympiad [415 B.C.]... Xenocrates and Euripides competed against each other. Xenocrates, whoever he may have been, won the first prize with *Oedipus, Lycaon, Bacchae*, and *Athamas* (a satyr-play). Euripides was second with *Alexander, Palamedes, The Trojan Women*, and *Sisyphus* (a satyr-play)."

Athens was nominally at peace when Euripides composed this set of tragedies, of which only *The Trojan Women* is extant; but Athens had only a few years earlier emerged from an indecisive ten years' war with Sparta and her allies and was in the spring of 415 weeks away from launching the great Sicilian Expedition, which touched off the next war or, more accurately, the next phase of the same war. This was to end in 404 B.C. with the capitulation of Athens.

During the earlier years of the war Euripides wrote a number of "patriotic" plays and may have believed or tried to force himself to believe in the rightness of the Periclean cause and the wickedness of the enemy. By 415 he had reason to conclude that, at least in the treatment of captives, neither side was better than the other. A group of Thebans, working with Plataean traitors, tried to seize Plataea, failed, surrendered in the belief that their lives would be spared, and were executed (Thuc. ii. 1-6). Four years later, when Plataea surrendered to the Lacedaemonians and Thebans, the entire garrison was put to death, the women were sold as slaves, and the city itself systematically destroyed (Thuc. iii. 68). About the same time the Athenians suppressed a revolt by the people of Mytilene and other cities of Lesbos. They voted to kill all grown men and enslave the women and children but then thought better of it, rescinded the order just in time, and ended by putting to death only rather more than a thousand men (Thuc. iii. 50). In 421 the Athenians recaptured Scione, which had revolted, put all grown men to death, and enslaved the women and children (Thuc. v. 32). In 417 the Lacedaemonians seized a small town called Hysiae and killed all free persons whom they caught (Thuc. v. 83). The neutral island city of Melos was invited, in peacetime, to join the Athenian alliance, refused, was besieged in force, and capitulated. The Athenians put all grown males to death and enslaved the women and children (Thuc. v. 116). This was in the winter of 416-415, a few months before *The Trojan Women* was presented. That same winter, the Athenians decided to conquer Sicily (Thuc. vi. 1). This expedition was, like that against Melos, unprovoked; unlike the Melian aggression, it was foolhardy, at least obviously very dangerous. It ended in disaster, and Athens never completely recovered.

The Sicilian venture had been voted and was in preparation when Euripides presented his trilogy, which, in the manner of Aeschylus, dealt with three successive episodes in the story of Troy, complemented with a burlesque of satyrs on a kindred theme. The first play is the story of Paris (Alexander), how it was foretold at his birth that he must destroy his own city, how the baby was left to die in the mountains, miraculously rescued (as such babies invariably are), and at last recognized and restored. The hero of the second story is Palamedes, the wisest and most inventive of the Achaeans at Troy, more truly wise than Odysseus, who therefore hated him and treacherously contrived his condemnation and death. While the third tragedy, our play, ends with the destruction of Troy, the prologue looks into the future, beyond the end of the action, where the conquerors are to be wrecked on the home voyage because they have abused their conquest and turned the gods against them. The plot of *Sisyphus* is not known, but the Athenian poets were partial to the scandalous story that Sisyphus, a notorious liar and cheat, seduced Anticlea and was therefore the true father of Odysseus. This story is *post-Homeric*, as is most of the matter of the whole trilogy (Homer does not mention Palamedes, shows no knowledge of the exposure of Paris, makes Poseidon the enemy not the protector of Troy, etc.);

1. Not only is the parallel of (Troy with Sisyphus) painfully close, but, with an armada about to set forth, nothing could have been worse-omened than this dramatic prediction of a great fleet wrecked at sea. Aelian seems outraged that Euripides came second to Xenocrates; I can hardly understand how the Athenians let him present this play at all.
it would go well with the fact that Odysseus, here seen as the unscrupulous politician, is the open villain of Palamedes and the villain-behind-the-scenes of The Trojan Women.

The effect of current events and policies on The Trojan Women is, I think, so obvious that it scarcely needs further elaboration, but I do not believe in the view that the play, loose as it is, is nothing but an outburst, a denunciation of aggressive war and imperialism. The general shapelessness is perhaps permitted partly because the play was one member of a trilogy; no piece which stood by itself could pass with so little dramatic action and such a nihilistic conclusion. The play-long presence of Hecuba on the stage necessitates padding, which is supplied by elaborate rhetorical debates between Hecuba and Cassandra, and Hecuba and Andromache. Out-of-character generalizations bespeak the inspirations of Euripides rather than of his dramatis personae. The trial scene of Helen is a bitter little comedy-within-tragedy, but its juridical refinements defeat themselves and turn preposterous, halting for a time the emotional force of the play. In candor, one can hardly call The Trojan Women a good piece of work, but it seems nevertheless to be a great tragedy.
THE TROJAN WOMEN

Scene: The action takes place shortly after the capture of Troy. All Trojan men have been killed, or have fled; all women and children are captives. The scene is an open space before the city, which is visible in the background, partly demolished and smoldering. Against the walls are tents, or huts, which temporarily house the captive women. The entrance of the Chorus is made, in two separate groups which subsequently unite, from these buildings, as are those of Cassandra and Helen. The entrances of Talthybius, Andromache, and Menelaus are made from the wings. It is imaginative that the gods are made to appear high up, above the level of the other actors, as if near their own temples on the Citadel. As the play opens, Hecuba is prostrate on the ground (it is understood that she hears nothing of what the gods say).

(Enter Poseidon.)

Poseidon

I am Poseidon. I come from the Aegean depths
of the sea beneath whose waters Nereid choirs evolve
the intricate bright circle of their dancing feet.
For since that day when Phoebus Apollo and I laid down
on Trojan soil the close of these stone walls, drawn true
and straight, there has always been affection in my heart
unfading, for these Phrygians and for their city;
which smolders now, fallen before the Argive spears,
ruined, sacked, gutted. Such is Athene’s work, and his,
the Parnassian, Epeius of Phocis, architect
and builder of the horse that swarmed with inward steel,
that fatal bulk which passed within the battlements,
whose fame hereafter shall be loud among men unborn,
the Wooden Horse, which hid the secret spears within.
Now the gods’ groves are desolate, their thrones of power
blood-spattered where beside the lift of the altar steps
of Zeus Defender, Priam was cut down and died.
The ships of the Achaeans load with spoils of Troy now, the piled gold of Phrygia. And the men of Greece who made this expedition and took the city, stay only for the favoring stern-wind now to greet their wives and children after ten years' harvests wasted here.

The will of Argive Hera and Athene won its way against my will. Between them they broke Troy. So I must leave my altars and great Ilium, since once a city sinks into vast desolation the gods' state sickens also, and their worship fades. Scamander's valley echoes to the wail of slaves, the captive women given to their masters now, some to Arcadia or the men of Thessaly assigned, or to the lords of Athens, Theseus' strain; while all the women of Troy yet unassigned are here beneath the shelter of these walls, chosen to wait the will of princes, and among them Tyndareus' child Helen of Sparta, named—with right—a captive slave.

Nearby, beside the gates, for any to look upon who has the heart, she lies face upward, Hecuba weeping for multitudes her multitude of tears. Polyxena, one daughter, even now was killed in secrecy and pain beside Achilles' tomb. Priam is gone, their children dead; one girl is left, Cassandra, reeling crazed at King Apollo's stroke, whom Agamemnon, in despite of the gods' will and all religion, will lead by force to his secret bed.

O city, long ago a happy place, good-bye; good-bye, hewn bastions. Pallas, child of Zeus, did this. But for her hatred, you might stand strong-founded still.

(Athene enters.)

Athene
August among the gods, O vast divinity, closest in kinship to the father of all, may one who quarreled with you in the past make peace, and speak?

_poseidon_
You may, lady Athene; for the strands of kinship close drawn work no weak magic to enchant the mind.

Athene
I thank you for your gentleness, and bring you now questions whose issue touches you and me, my lord.

_poseidon_
Is this the annunciation of some new word spoken by Zeus, or any other of the divinities?

Athene
No; but for Troy's sake, on whose ground we stand, I come to win the favor of your power, and an ally.

_poseidon_
You hated Troy once; did you throw your hate away and change to pity now its walls are black with fire?

Athene
Come back to the question. Will you take counsel with me and help me gladly in all that I would bring to pass?

_poseidon_
I will indeed; but tell me what you wish to do.
Are you here for the Achaeans' or the Phrygians' sake?

Athene
For the Trojans, whom I hated this short time since, to make the Achaeans' homecoming a thing of sorrow.

_poseidon_
This is a springing change of sympathy. Why must you hate too hard, and love too hard, your loves and hates?

Athene
Did you not know they outraged my temple, and shamed me?

_poseidon_
I know that Ajax dragged Cassandra there by force.

Athene
And the Achaeans did nothing. They did not even speak.
Poseidon

Yet Ilium was taken by your strength alone.

_ATHENE_

True: therefore help me. I would do some evil to them.

Poseidon

I am ready for anything you ask. What will you do?

_ATHENE_

Make the home voyage a most unhappy coming home.

Poseidon

While they stay here ashore, or out on the deep sea?

_ATHENE_

When they take ship from Ilium and set sail for home
Zeus will shower down his rainstorms and the weariless beat
of hail, to make black the bright air with roaring winds;
He has promised my hand the gift of the blazing thunderbolt
to dash and overwhelm with fire the Achaean ships.
Yours is your own domain, the Aegaean crossing. Make
the sea thunder to the tripled wave and spinning surf,
cram thick the hollow Euboean fold with floating dead;
so after this Greeks may learn how to use with fear
my sacred places, and respect all gods beside.

Poseidon

This shall be done, and joyfully. It needs no long
discourse to tell you. I will shake the Aegaean Sea.
Myconos' nesses and the swine-back reefs of Delos,
the Capherean promontories, Scyros, Lemnos
shall take the washed up bodies of men drowned at sea.
Back to Olympus now, gather the thunderbolts
from your father's hands, then take your watcher's post, to wait
the chance, when the Achaean fleet puts out to sea.

That mortal who sacks fallen cities is a fool,
who gives the temples and the tombs, the hallowed places
of the dead to desolation. His own turn must come.

HECUBA

_Rise, stricken head, from the dust;

lift up the throat. This is Troy, but Troy

and we, Troy's kings, are perished.

Stoop to the changing fortune.

Steer for the crossing and the death-god,

hold not life's prow on the course against

wave beat and accident.

Ah me,

what need I further for tears' occasion,

state perished, my sons, and my husband?

O massive pride that my fathers heaped
to magnificence, you meant nothing.

Must I be hushed? Were it better thus?

Should I cry a lament?

Unhappy, accursed,

limbs cramped, I lie

backed on earth's stiff bed.

O head, O temples

and sides; sweet, to shift,

let the tired spine rest

weight eased by the sides alternate,

against the strain of the tears' song

where the stricken people find music yet

in the song undanced of their wretchedness.

You ships' prows, that the fugitive

oars swept back to blessed Ilium

over the sea's blue water

by the placid harbors of Hellas

to the flute's grim beat

and the swing of the shrill boat whistles;
you made the crossing, made fast ashore
the Egyptians' skill, the sea cables,

alas, by the coasts of Troy;
it was you, ships, that carried the fatal bride
of Menelaus, Castor her brother’s shame,
the stain on the Eurotas.
Now she has killed
the sire of the fifty sons,
Priam; me, unhappy Hecuba,
she drove on this reef of ruin.
Such state I keep
to sit by the tents of Agamemnon.
I am led captive
from my house, an old, unhappy woman,
like my city ruined and pitiful.
Come then, sad wives of the Trojans
whose spears were bronze,
their daughters, brides of disaster,
let us mourn the smoke of Ilium.
And I, as among winged birds
the mother, lead out
the clashing cry, the song; not that song
wherein once long ago,
when I held the scepter of Priam,
my feet were queens of the choir and led
the proud dance to the gods of Phrygia.

(The First Half-chorus comes out of the shelter
at the back.)

First Half-chorus
Hecuba, what are these cries?
What news now? For through the walls
I heard your pitiful weeping.
and fear shivered in the breasts
of the Trojan women, who within
sob out the day of their slavery.

Hecuba
My children, the ships of the Argives
will move today. The hand is at the oar.

(The Second Half-chorus comes out of the shelter
at the back.)

Second Half-chorus
Ah me. Shivering, I left the tents
of Agamemnon to listen.
Tell us, our queen. Did the Argive council
decree our death?
Or are the seamen manning the ships now,
oces ready for action?

Hecuba
My child, do not fear so. Lighten your heart.
But I go stunned with terror.
Second Half-chorus

Has a herald come from the Danaans yet?
Whose wretched slave shall I be ordained?

Hecuba

You are near the lot now.

Second Half-chorus

Alas!
Who will lead me away? An Argive?
To an island home? To Phthiotis?
Unhappy, surely, and far from Troy.

Hecuba

And I,
whose wretched slave
shall I be? Where, in my gray age,
a faint drone,
poor image of a corpse,
weak shining among dead men? Shall
I stand and keep guard at their doors,
shall I nurse their children, I who in Troy
held state as a princess?

(The two half-choruses now unite to form a
single Chorus.)

Chorus

So pitiful, so pitiful
your shame and your lamentation.
No longer shall I move the shifting pace
of the shuttle at the looms of Ida.
I shall look no more on the bodies of my sons.
No more. Shall I be a drudge besides
or be forced to the bed of Greek masters?
Night is a queen, but I curse her.
Must I draw the water of Pirene,
a servant at sacred springs?
Might I only be taken to Athens, domain
of Theseus, the bright, the blessed!

Never to the whirl of Eurotas, not Sparta
detested, who gave us Helen,
not look with slave’s eyes on the scourge
of Troy, Menelaus.

I have heard the rumor
of the hallowed ground by Peneus,
bright doorstone of Olympus,
deep burdened in beauty of flower and harvest.
There would I be next after the blessed,
the sacrosanct hold of Theseus.
And they say that the land of Aetna,
the Fire God’s keep against Punic men,
mother of Sicilian mountains, sounds
in the herald’s cry for games’ garlands;
and the land washed
by the streaming Ionian Sea,
that land watered by the loveliest
of rivers, Crathis, with the red-gold tresses
who draws from the depths of enchanted wells
blessings on a strong people.

See now, from the host of the Danaans
the herald, charged with new orders, takes
the speed of his way toward us.
What message? What command? Since we count as slaves
even now in the Dorian kingdom.

(Talthybius enters, followed by a detail of
armed soldiers.)

Talthybius

Hecuba, incessantly my ways have led me to Troy
as the messenger of all the Achaean armament.
You know me from the old days, my lady; I am sent,
Talthybius, with new messages for you to hear.

Hecuba

It comes, beloved daughters of Troy; the thing I feared.
Euripides
You are all given your masters now. Was this your dread?

Hecuba
Ah, yes. Is it Thibia, then? A city of Thessaly?
Tell me. The land of Cadmus?

Talthybius
All are allotted separately, each to a man.

Hecuba
Who is given to whom? Oh, is there any hope left for the women of Troy?

Talthybius
I understand. Yet ask not for all, but for each apart.

Hecuba
Who was given my child? Tell me, who shall be lord of my poor abused Cassandra?

Talthybius
King Agamemnon chose her. She was given to him.

Hecuba
Slave woman to that Lacedaemonian wife?
My unhappy child!

Talthybius
No. Rather to be joined with him in the dark bed of love.

Hecuba
She, Apollo's virgin, blessed in the privilege the gold-haired god gave her, a life forever unwed?

Talthybius
Love's archery and the prophetic maiden struck him hard.

Hecuba
Dash down, my daughter, the keys of your consecration, break the god's garlands to your throat gathered.

Talthybius
Is it not high favor to be brought to a king's bed?

Hecuba
My poor youngest, why did you take her away from me?

Talthybius
You spoke now of Polyxena. Is it not so?

Hecuba
To whose arms did the lot force her?

Talthybius
She is given a guardianship, to keep Achilles' tomb.

Hecuba
To watch, my child? Over a tomb? Tell me, is this their way, some law, friend, established among the Greeks?

Talthybius
Speak of your child in words of blessing. She feels no pain.

Hecuba
What did that mean? Does she live in the sunlight still?

Talthybius
She lives her destiny, and her cares are over now.

Hecuba
The wife of bronze-embattled Hector: tell me of her, Andromache the forlorn. What shall she suffer now?

Talthybius
The son of Achilles chose her. She was given to him.

Hecuba
And I, my aged strength crutched for support on staves, whom shall I serve?

Talthybius
You shall be slave to Odysseus, lord of Ithaca.

Hecuba
Oh, no, no!
Tear the shorn head, rip nails through the folded cheeks.
Must I?
To be given as slave to serve that vile, that slippery man,
right's enemy, brute, murderous beast;
that mouth of lies and treachery, that makes void
faith in things promised
and that which was beloved turns to hate. Oh, mourn,
daughters of Ilion, weep as one for me.
I am gone, doomed, undone,
O wretched, given
the worst lot of all.

Chorus
I know your destiny now, Queen Hecuba. But mine?
What Hellene, what Achaeans is my master now?

Talthybius
Men-at-arms, do your duty. Bring Cassandra forth
without delay. Our orders are to deliver her
to the general at once. And afterwards we can bring
to the rest of the princes their allotted captive women.
But see! What is that burst of a torch flame inside?
What can it mean? Are the Trojan women setting fire
to their chambers, at point of being torn from their land
to sail for Argos? Have they set themselves aflame
in longing for death? I know it is the way of freedom
in times like these to stiffen the neck against disaster.
Open, there, open; let not the fate desired by these,
dreaded by the Achaeans, hurl their wrath on me.

Hecuba
You are wrong, there is no fire there. It is my Cassandra
whirled out on running feet in the passion of her frenzy.

(Cassandra, carrying a flaming torch, bursts
from the shelter.)

Cassandra
Lift up, heave up; carry the flame; I bring fire of worship,
torches to the temple.
Io, Hymen, my lord. Hymenaeus.

Blessed the bridegroom.
Blessed am I indeed to lie at a king’s side,
blessed the bride of Argos.
Hymen, my lord, Hymenaeus.
Yours were the tears, my mother,
yours was the lamentation for my father fallen,
for your city so dear beloved,
but mine this marriage, my marriage,
and I shake out the torch-flare,
brightness, dazzle,
light for you, Hymenaeus,
Hecate, light for you,
for the bed of virginity as man’s custom ordains.
Let your feet dance, rippling the air; let go the chorus,
as when my father’s
fate went in blessedness.
O sacred circle of dance.
Lead now, Phoebos Apollo; I wear your laurel,
I tend your temple,
Hymen, O Hymenaeus.
Dance, Mother, dance, laugh; lead; let your feet
wind in the shifting pattern and follow mine,
keep the sweet step with me,
cry out the name Hymenaeus
and the bride’s name in the shrill
and the blessed incantation.
O you daughters of Phrygia robed in splendor,
dance for my wedding,
for the lord fate appointed to lie beside me.

Chorus
Can you not, Queen Hecuba, stop this bacchanal before
her light feet whirl her away into the Argive camp?

Hecuba
Fire God, in mortal marriages you lift up your torch,
but here you throw a melancholy light, not seen
through my hopes that went so high in days gone past. O child,
there was a time I dreamed you would not wed like this,
not at the spear’s edge, not under force of Argive arms.
Let me take the light; crazed, passionate, you cannot carry
it straight enough, poor child. Your fate is intemperate
as you are, always. There is no relief for you.

(Attendants come from the shelter. Hecuba gently takes the
torch from Cassandra and gives
it to them to carry away.)

You Trojan women, take the torch inside, and change
to songs of tears this poor girl’s marriage melodies.

Cassandra

O Mother, star my hair with flowers of victory.
I know you would not have it happen thus; and yet
this is a king I marry; then be glad; escort
the bride. Oh, thrust her strongly on. If Loxias
is Loxias still, the Achaeans’ pride, great Agamemnon
has won a wife more fatal than ever Helen was.
Since I will kill him; and avenge my brothers’ blood
and my father’s in the desolation of his house.
But I leave this in silence and sing not now the ax
to drop against my throat and other throats than mine,
the agony of the mother murdred, brought to pass
from our marriage rites, and Aretes’ house made desolate,
I am ridden by God’s curse still, yet I will step so far
out of my frenzy as to show this city’s fate
is blessed beside the Achaeans’. For one woman’s sake,
one act of love, these hunted Helen down and threw
thousands of lives away. Their general—clever man—
in the name of a vile woman cut his darling down,
gave up for a brother the sweetness of children in his house,
all to bring back that brother’s wife, a woman who went
of her free will, not caught in constraint of violence.
The Achaeans came beside Scamander’s banks, and died

day after day, though none sought to wrench their land from
them
nor their own towering cities. Those the War God caught
never saw their sons again, nor were they laid to rest
decently in winding sheets by their wives’ hands, but lie
buried in alien ground; while all went wrong at home
as the widows perished, and barren couples raised and nursed
the children of others, no survivor left to tend
the tombs, and what is left there, with blood sacrificed.
For such success as this congratulate the Greeks.
No, but the shame is better left in silence, for fear
my singing voice become the voice of wretchedness.
The Trojans have that glory which is loveliest:
they died for their own country. So the bodies of all
who took the spears were carried home in loving hands,
brought, in the land of their fathers, to the embrace of earth
and buried becomingly as the rite fell due. The rest,
those Phrygians who escaped death in battle, day by day
came home to happiness the Achaeans could not know;
their wives, their children. Then was Hector’s fate so sad?
You think so. Listen to the truth. He is dead and gone
surely, but with reputation, as a valiant man.
How could this be, except for the Achaeans’ coming?
Had they held back, none might have known how great he
was.
The bride of Paris was the daughter of Zeus. Had he
not married her, fame in our house would sleep in silence still.
Though surely the wise man will forever shrink from war,
yet if war come, the hero’s death will lay a wreath
not lustreless on the city. The coward alone brings shame.
Let no more tears fall, Mother, for our land, nor for
this marriage I make; it is by marriage that I bring
to destruction those whom you and I have hated most.

Chorus

You smile on your disasters. Can it be that you
some day will illuminate the darkness of this song?
Talthybius

Were it not Apollo who has driven wild your wits
I would make you sorry for sending the princes of our host
on their way home in augury of foul speech like this.
Now pride of majesty and wisdom’s outward show
have fallen to stature less than what was nothing worth
since he, almighty prince of the assembled Hellenes,
Atreus’ son beloved, has stooped—by his own will—
to find his love in a crazed girl. I, a plain man,
would not marry this woman or keep her as my slave.
You then, with your wits unhinged by idiocy,
your scolding of Argos and your Trojans glorified
I throw to the winds to scatter them. Come now with me
to the ships, a bride—and such a bride—for Agamemnon.

Hecuba, when Laertes’ son calls you, be sure
you follow; if what all say who came to Ilium
is true, at the worst you will be a good woman’s slave.

Cassandra

That servant is a vile thing. Oh, how can herals keep
their name of honor? Lackeys for despots be they, or
lackeys to the people, all men must despise them still.
You tell me that my mother must be slave in the house
of Odysseus? Where are all Apollo’s promises
uttered to me, to my own ears, that Hecuba
should die in Troy? Odysseus I will curse no more,
poor wretch, who little dreams of what he must go through
when he will think Troy’s pain and mine were golden grace
beside his own luck. Ten years he spent here, and ten
more years will follow before he at last comes home, forlorn
after the terror of the rock and the thin strait,
Charybdis; and the mountain striding Cyclops, who eats
men’s flesh; the Ligyan witch who changes men to swine,
Circe; the wreck of all his ships on the salt sea,
the lotus passion, the sacred oxen of the Sun

slighted, and dead flesh moaning into speech, to make
Odysseus listening shiver. Cut the story short:
he will go down to the water of death, and return alive
to reach home and the thousand sorrows waiting there.
Why must I transfixed each of Odysseus’ labors one by one?
Lead the way quick to the house of death where I shall
take my mate.

Lord of all the sons of Danaus, haughty in your mind of pride,
not by day, but evil in the evil night you shall find your grave
when I lie corpse-cold and naked next my husband’s sepulcher,
pled in the ditch for animals to rip and feed on, beaten by
streaming storms of winter, I who wore Apollo’s sacraments.
Garlands of the god I loved so well, the spirit’s dress of pride,
leave me, as I leave those festivals where once I was so gay.
See, I tear your adornments from my skin not yet defiled by
touch,
throw them to the running winds to scatter, O lord of prophecy,
Where is this general’s ship, then? Lead me where I must set my
feet on board.

Wait the wind of favor in the sails; yet when the ship goes out
from this shore, she carries one of the three Furies in my shape.
Land of my ancestors, good-bye; O Mother, weep no more for
me.

You beneath the ground, my brothers, Priam, father of us all,
I will be with you soon and come triumphant to the dead below,
leaving behind me, wrecked, the house of Atreus, which
destroyed our house.

(Cassandra is taken away by Talthybius and his soldiers.
Hecuba collapses.)

Chorus

Handmaids of aged Hecuba, can you not see
how your mistress, powerless to cry out, lies prone? Oh, take
her hand and help her to her feet, you wretched maids.
Will you let an aged helpless woman lie so long?
Hecuba

No. Let me lie where I have fallen. Kind acts, my maids, must be unkind, unwanted. All that I endure and have endured and shall, deserves to strike me down. O gods! What wretched things to call on—gods!—for help although the decorous action is to invoke their aid when all our hands lay hold on unhappiness. No. It is my pleasure first to tell good fortune’s tale, to cast its count more sadly against disasters now. I was a princess, who was once a prince’s bride, mother by him of sons pre-eminent, beyond the mere numbers of them, lords of the Phrygian domain, such sons for pride to point to as no woman of Troy, no Hellene, none in the outlander’s wide world might match. And then I saw them fall before the spears of Greece, and cut this hair for them, and laid it on their graves. I mourned their father, Priam. None told me the tale of his death. I saw it, with these eyes. I stood to watch his throat cut, next the altar of the protecting god. I saw my city taken. And the girls I nursed, choice flowers to wear the pride of any husband’s eyes, matured to be dragged by hands of strangers from my arms. There is no hope left that they will ever see me more, no hope that I shall ever look on them again. There is one more stone to key this arch of wretchedness: I must be carried away to Hellas now, an old slave woman, where all those tasks that wrack old age shall be given me by my masters. I must work the bolt that bars their doorway, I whose son was Hector once; or bake their bread; lay down these withered limbs to sleep on the bare ground, whose bed was royal once; abuse this skin once delicate the slattern’s way, exposed through robes whose rags will mock my luxury of long since. Unhappy, O unhappy, And all this came to pass and shall be, for the way one woman chose a man. Cassandra, O Daughter, whose excitments were the god’s,

you have paid for your consecration now; at what a price! And you, my poor Polyxena, where are you now? Not here, nor any boy or girl of mine, who were so many once, is near me in my unhappiness. And you would lift me from the ground? What hope? What use? Guide these feet long ago so delicate in Troy, a slave’s feet now, to the straw sacks laid on the ground and the piled stones; let me lay down my head and die in an exhaustion of tears. Of all who walk in bliss call not one happy yet, until the man is dead.

(Hecuba, after being led to the back of the stage, flings herself to the ground once more.)

Chorus

Voice of singing, stay with me now, for Ilium’s sake; take up the burden of tears, the song of sorrow; the dirge for Troy’s death must be chanted; the tale of my captivity by the wheeled stride of the four-foot beast of the Argives, the horse they left in the gates, thin gold at its brows, inward, the spears’ high thunder. Our people thronging the rock of Troy let go the great cry: “The war is over! Go down, bring back the idol’s enchanted wood to the Maiden of Ilium, Zeus' daughter.” Who stayed then? Not one girl, not one old man, in their houses, but singing for happiness let the lurking death in.

And the generation of Troy swept solid to the gates
to give the goddess
her pleasure: the colt immortal, unbroken,
the nest of Argive spears,
death for the children of Dardanus
sealed in the sleek hill pine chamber.
In the sling of the flax twist shipwise
they berthed the black hull
in the house of Pallas Athene
stone paved, washed now in the blood of our people.

Strong, gay work
deep into black night
to the stroke of the Libyan lute
and all Troy singing, and girls'
light feet pulsing the air
in the kind dance measures;
doors, lights everywhere,
torchflares on black
to forbid sleep's onset.

I was there also: in the great room
I danced the maiden of the mountains,
Artemis, Zeus' daughter.

When the cry went up, sudden,
bloodshot, up and down the city, to stun
the keep of the citadel. Children
reached shivering hands to clutch
at the mother's dress.

War stalked from his hiding place.
Pallas did this.
Beside their altars the Trojans
died in their blood. Desolate now,
men murdered, our sleeping rooms gave up
their brides' beauty
to breed sons for Greek men,
sorrow for our own country.

« Euripides »

« The Trojan Women »

(A wagon comes on the stage. It is heaped with a number of
spoils of war, in the midst of which sits Andromache
holding Astyanax. While the chorus continues
speaking, Hecuba rises once more.)

Hecuba look, I see her, rapt
to the alien wagon, Andromache,
close to whose beating breast clings
the boy Astyanax, Hector's sweet child.

O carried away—to what land?—unhappy woman,
on the wagon floor, with the brazen arms
of Hector, of Troy
captive and heaped beside you,
torn now from Troy, for Achilles' son
to hang in the shrines of Phthia.

Andromache
I am in the hands of Greek masters.

Hecuba
Alas!

Andromache
Must the incantation

Hecuba
(ah me!)
Andromache
of my own grief win tears from you?

Hecuba
It must—O Zeus!

Andromache
My own distress?

Hecuba
O my children

Andromache
once. No longer.

Hecuba
Lost, lost, Troy our dominion

« 146 »

« 147 »
Andromache
  unhappy
Hecuba
  and my lordly children.
Andromache
  Gone, alas!
Hecuba
  They were mine.
Andromache
  Sorrows only.
Hecuba
  Sad destiny
Andromache
  of our city
Hecuba
  a wreck, and burning.
Andromache
  Come back, O my husband.
Hecuba
  Poor child, you invoke
a dead man; my son once
Andromache
  my defender.
Hecuba
  And you, whose death shamed the Achaeans,
Andromache
  lord of us all once,
O patriarch, Priam,
Hecuba
  take me to my death now.
Andromache
  Longing for death drives deep;

Hecuba
  O sorrowful, such is our fortune;
Andromache
  lost our city
Hecuba
  and our pain lies deep under pain piled over.
Andromache
  We are the hated of God, since once your youngest escaping
death, brought down Troy's towers in the arms of a worthless
woman,
piling at the feet of Pallas the bleeding bodies of our young men
sprawled, kites' food, while Troy takes up the yoke of captivity.
Hecuba
  O my city, my city forlorn
Andromache
  abandoned, I weep this
Hecuba
  miserable last hour
Andromache
  of the house where I bore my children.
Hecuba
  O my sons, this city and your mother are desolate of you.
Sound of lamentation and sorrow,
tears on tears shed. Home, farewell, since the dead have forgotten
all sorrows, and weep no longer.
Chorus
They who are sad find somehow sweetness in tears, the song
of lamentation and the melancholy Muse.
Andromache
Hecuba, mother of the man whose spear was death
to the Argives, Hector: do you see what they have done to us?
Hecuba
I see the work of gods who pile tower-high the pride
of those who were nothing, and dash present grandeur down.
Andromache
We are carried away, sad spoils, my boy and I; our life transformed, as the aristocrat becomes the serf.

Hecuba
Such is the terror of necessity. I lost
Cassandra, roughly torn from my arms before you came.

Andromache
Another Ajax to haunt your daughter? Some such thing it must be. Yet you have lost still more than you yet know.

Hecuba
There is no numbering my losses. Infinitely misfortune comes to outrage misfortune known before.

Andromache
Polyxena is dead. They cut your daughter's throat to pleasure dead Achilles' corpse, above his grave.

Hecuba
O wretched. This was what Talithybius meant, that speech cryptic, incomprehensible, yet now so clear.

Andromache
I saw her die, and left this wagon seat to lay a robe upon her body and sing the threnody.

Hecuba
Poor child, poor wretched, wretched darling, sacrificed, but without pity, and in pain, to a dead man.

Andromache
She is dead, and this was death indeed; and yet to die as she did was better than to live as I live now.

Hecuba
Child, no. No life, no light is any kind of death, since death is nothing, and in life the hopes live still.

Andromache
O Mother, our mother, hear me while I reason through this matter fairly—might it even hush your grief?

Death, I am sure, is like never being born, but death is better thus by far than to live a life of pain, since the dead with no perception of evil feel no grief, while he who was happy once, and then unfortunate, finds his heart driven far from the old lost happiness.

She died; it is as if she never saw the light of day, for she knows nothing now of what she suffered.

But I, who aimed the arrows of ambition high at honor, and made them good, see now how far I fall, I, who in Hector's house worked out all custom that brings discretion's name to women. Blame them or blame them not, there is one act that swings the scandalous speech their way beyond all else: to leave the house and walk abroad.

I longed to do it, but put the longing aside, and stayed always within the inclosure of my own house and court.

The witty speech some women cultivate I would not practice, but kept my honest inward thought, and made my mind my only and sufficient teacher. I gave my lord's presence the tribute of hushed lips, and eyes quietly downcast. I knew when my will must have its way over his, knew also how to give way to him in turn.

Men learned of this; I was talked of in the Achaean camp, and reputation has destroyed me now. At the choice of women, Achilles' son picked me from the rest, to be his wife: a lordly house, yet I shall be a slave.

If I dash back the beloved memory of Hector and open wide my heart to my new lord, I shall be a traitor to the dead love, and know it; if I cling faithful to the past, I win my master's hatred. Yet they say one night of love suffices to dissolve a woman's aversion to share the bed of any man.

I hate and loathe that woman who casts away the once beloved, and takes another in her arms of love.

Even the young mare torn from her running mate and teamed with another will not easily wear the yoke. And yet this is a brute and speechless beast of burden, not
like us intelligent, lower far in nature's scale.
Dear Hector, when I had you I had a husband, great
in understanding, rank, wealth, courage: all my wish.
I was a virgin when you took me from the house
of my father; I gave you all my maiden love, my first,
and now you are dead, and I must cross the sea, to serve,
prisoner of war, the slave's yoke on my neck, in Greece.
No, Hecuba; can you not see my fate is worse
than hers you grieve, Polyxena's? That one thing left
always while life lasts, hope, is not for me. I keep
no secret deception in my heart—sweet though it be
to dream—that I shall ever be happy any more.

Chorus
You stand where I do in misfortune, and while you mourn
your own life, tell me what I, too, am suffering.

Hecuba
I have never been inside the hull of a ship, but know
what I know only by hearsay and from painted scenes,
yet think that seamen, while the gale blows moderately,
take pains to spare unnecessary work, and send
one man to the steering oar, another aloft, and crews
to pump the bilge from the hold. But when the tempest comes,
and seawash over the decks they lose their nerve, and let
her go by the run at the waves' will, leaving all to chance.
So I, in this succession of disasters, swamped,
battered by this storm immortally inspired, have lost
my lips' control and let them go, say anything
they will. Yet still, beloved child, you must forget
what happened with Hector. Tears will never save you now.
Give your obedience to the new master; let your ways
entice his heart to make him love you. If you do
it will be better for all who are close to you. This boy,
my own son's child, might grow to manhood and bring back—he alone could do it—something of our city's strength.

On some far day the children of your children might
come home, and build. There still may be another Troy.

But we say this, and others will speak also. See,
here is some runner of the Achaeans come again.
Who is he? What news? What counsel have they taken now?
(Talthybius enters again with his escort.)

Talthybius
O wife of Hector, once the bravest man in Troy,
do not hate me. This is the will of the Danaans and
the kings. I wish I did not have to give this message.

Andromache
What can this mean, this hint of hateful things to come?

Talthybius
The council has decreed for your son—how can I say this?

Andromache
That he shall serve some other master than I serve?

Talthybius
No man of Achaean shall ever make this boy his slave.

Andromache
Must he be left behind in Phrygia, all alone?

Talthybius
Worse; horrible. There is no easy way to tell it.

Andromache
I thank your courtesy—unless your news be really good.

Talthybius
They will kill your son. It is monstrous. Now you know the truth.

Andromache
Oh, this is worse than anything I heard before.

Talthybius
Odysseus. He urged it before the Greeks, and got his way.

Andromache
This is too much grief, and more than anyone could bear.
Euripides

Talthybius
He said a hero's son could not be allowed to live.

Andromache
Even thus may his own sons some day find no mercy.

Talthybius
He must be hurled from the battlements of Troy.

(He goes toward Andromache, who clings fast
to her child, as if to resist.)

No, wait!

Let it happen this way. It will be wiser in the end.
Do not fight it. Take your grief as you were born to take it,
give up the struggle where your strength is feebleness
with no force anywhere to help. Listen to me!
Your city is gone, your husband. You are in our power.
How can one woman hope to struggle against the arms
of Greece? Think, then. Give up the passionate contest.

This will bring no shame. No man can laugh at your submission.
And please—I request you—hurl no curse at the Achaeans
for fear the army, savage over some reckless word,
forbid the child his burial and the dirge of honor.
Be brave, be silent; out of such patience you can hope
the child you leave behind will not lie unburied here,
and that to you the Achaeans will be less unkind.

Andromache
O darling child I loved too well for happiness,
your enemies will kill you and leave your mother forlorn.
Your own father's nobility, where others found
protection, means your murder now. The memory
of his valor comes ill-timed for you. O bridal bed,
O marriage rites that brought me home to Hector's house
a bride, you were unhappy in the end. I lived
never thinking the baby I had was born for butchery
by Greeks, but for lordship over all Asia's pride of earth.

(The Trojan Women)

Poor child, are you crying too? Do you know what they
will do to you? Your fingers clutch my dress. What use,
to nestle like a young bird under the mother's wing?
Hector cannot come back, not burst from underground
to save you, that spear of glory caught in the quick hand,
Hector's kin, nor any strength of Phrygian arms.
Yours the sick leap head downward from the height, the fall
where none have pity, and the spirit smashed out in death.
O last and loveliest embrace of all, O child's
sweet fragrant body. Vanity in the end. I nursed
for nothing the swaddled baby at this mother's breast;
in vain the wreck of the labor pains and the long sickness.
Now once again, and never after this, come close
to your mother, lean against my breast and wind your arms
around my neck, and put your lips against my lips.

(She kisses Astyanax and relinquishes him.)

Greeks! Your Greek cleverness is simple barbarity.
Why kill this child, who never did you any harm?
O flowering of the house of Tyndarces! Not his,
not God's daughter, never that, but child of many fathers
I say; the daughter of Vindictiveness, of Hate,
of Blood, Death; of all wickedness that swarms on earth.
I cry it aloud: Zeus never was your father, but you
were born a pestilence to all Greeks and the world beside.
Accursed; who from those lovely and accursed eyes
brought down to shame and ruin the bright plains of Troy.
Oh, seize him, take him, dash him to death if it must be done;
feed on his flesh if it is your will. These are the gods
who damn us to this death, and I have no strength to save
my boy from execution. Cover this wretched face
and throw me into the ship and that sweet bridal bed
I walk to now across the death of my own child.

(Talthybius gently lifts the child out of the wagon, which
leaves the stage, carrying Andromache away.)
Chorus:
Unhappy Troy! For the sweetness in one woman's arms' embrace, unspeakable, you lost these thousands slain.

Talthybios
Come, boy, taken from the embrace beloved of your mourning mother. Climb the high circle of the walls your fathers built. There end life. This was the order. Take him.

(He hands Astyanax to the guards, who lead him out.)
I am not the man
to do this. Some other
without pity, not as I ashamed,
should be herald of messages like this.

(He goes out.)

Hecuba
O child of my own unhappy child,
shall your life be torn from your mother and from me? Wicked. Can I help, dear child, not only suffer? What help?
Tear face, beat bosom. This is all my power now. O city,
O child, what have we left to suffer?
Are we not hurled down the whole length of disaster?

Chorus
Telamon, O king in the land where the bees swarm,
Salamis the surf-pounded isle where you founded your city to front that hallowed coast where Athene broke forth the primeval pale branch of olive,
wreath of the bright air and a glory on Athens the shining:
O Telamon, you came in your pride of arms with Alcmena's archer
to Ilium, our city, to sack and destroy it on that age-old venture.

This was the first flower of Hellenic strength Heracles brought in anger for the horses promised; and by Simois' calm waters checked the surf-wandering oars and made fast the ships' stern cables.

From which vessels came out the deadly bow hand, death to Laomedon, as the scarlet wind of the flames swept over masonry straight-hewn by the hands of Apollo.

This was a desolation of Troy twice taken; twice in the welter of blood the walls Dardanian went down before the red spear.

In vain, then, Laomedon's child, you walk in delicate pride by the golden pitchers in loveliest servitude to fillZeus' wine cups;
while Troy your mother is given to the flame to eat, and the lonely beaches mourn, as sad birds sing for the young lost, for the sword hand and the children and the aged women.

Gone now the shining pools where you bathed, the fields where you ran all desolate. And you, Ganymede, go in grace by the thrones of God with your young, calm smile even now as Priam's kingdom falls to the Greek spear.

O Love, Love, it was you in the high halls of Dardanus, the sky-daughters of melody beside you, who piled the huge strength of Troy in towers, the gods' own hands concerned. I speak no more
against Zeus' name.
But the light men love, who shines
through the pale wings of morning,
fares on this earth now,
watched the collapse of tall towers:
Dawn. Her lord was of this land;
she bore his children,
Tithonus, caught away by the golden car
and the starry horses,
who made our hopes so high.
For the gods loved Troy once.
Now they have forgotten.

(Menelaus comes on the stage, attended by a detail of armed soldiers.)

Menelaus

O splendor of sunburst breaking forth this day, wherein
I lay my hands once more on Helen, my wife. And yet
it is not, so much as men think, for the woman's sake
I came to Troy, but against that guest proved treacherous,
who like a robber carried the woman from my house.
Since the gods have seen to it that he paid the penalty,
fallen before the Hellenic spear, his kingdom wrecked,
I come for her now, the wife once my own, whose name
I can no longer speak with any happiness,
to take her away. In this house of captivity
she is numbered among the other women of Troy, a slave.
And those men whose work with the spear has won her back
gave her to me, to kill, or not to kill, but lead
away to the land of Argos, if such be my pleasure.
And such it is; the death of Helen in Troy I will let pass, have the oars take her by sea ways back to Greek
soil, and there give her over to execution;
blood penalty for friends who are dead in Ilium here.
Go to the house, my followers, and take her out;
no, drag her out; lay hands upon that hair so stained

(HECUBA)

with men's destruction. When the winds blow fair astern
we will take ship again and bring her back to Hellas.

HECUBA

O power, who mount the world, wheel where the world rides,
O mystery of man's knowledge, whosoever you be,
Zeus named, nature's necessity or mortal mind,
I call upon you; for you walk the path none hears
yet bring all human action back to right at last.

Menelaus

What can this mean? How strange a way to call on gods.

HECUBA

Kill your wife, Menelaus, and I will bless your name.
But keep your eyes away from her. Desire will win.
She looks enchantment, and where she looks homes are set fire;
she captures cities as she captures the eyes of men.
We have had experience, you and I. We know the truth.

(Men at arms bring Helen roughly out of the shelter.
She makes no resistance.)

HELEN

Menelaus, your first acts are argument of terror
to come. Your lackeys put their hands on me. I am dragged
out of my chambers by brute force. I know you hate
me; I am almost sure. And still there is one question
I would ask you, if I may. What have the Greeks decided
to do with me? Or shall I be allowed to live?

Menelaus

You are not strictly condemned, but all the army gave
you into my hands, to kill you for the wrong you did.

HELEN

Is it permitted that I argue this, and prove
that my death, if I am put to death, will be unjust?

Menelaus

I did not come to talk with you. I came to kill.
Hecuba

No, Menelaus, listen to her. She should not die unheard. But give me leave to take the opposite case; the prosecution. There are things that happened in Troy which you know nothing of, and the long-drawn argument will mean her death. She never can escape us now.

Menelaus

This is a gift of leisure. If she wishes to speak she may. But it is for your sake, understand, that I give this privilege I never would have given to her.

Helen

Perhaps it will make no difference if I speak well or badly, and your hate will not let you answer me. All I can do is to foresee the arguments you will use in accusation of me, and set against the force of your charges, charges of my own.

First, then! She mothered the beginning of all this wickedness. For Paris was her child. And next to her the old king, who would not destroy the infant Alexander, that dream of the firebrand's agony, has ruined Troy, and me. This is not all; listen to the rest I have to say. Alexander was the judge of the goddess trinity. Pallas Athene would have given him power, to lead the Phrygian arms on Hellas and make it desolate. All Asia was Hera's promise, and the uttermost zones of Europe for his lordship, if her way prevailed. But Aphrodite, picturing my loveliness, promised it to him, if he would say her beauty surpassed all others. Think what this means, and all the consequence. Cypris prevailed, and I was won in marriage: all for Greek advantage. Asia is not your lord; you serve no tyrant now, nor take the spear in his defense. Yet Hellas' fortune was my own misfortune. I, sold once for my body's beauty stand accused, who should for what has been done wear garlands on my head.

I know.

You will say all this is nothing to the immediate charge: I did run away; I did go secretly from your house. But when he came to me—call him any name you will: Paris? or Alexander? or the spirit of blood to haunt this woman?—he came with a goddess at his side; no weak one. And you—it was criminal—took ship for Crete and left me there in Sparta in the house, alone.

You see?

I wonder—and I ask this of myself, not you—why did I do it? What made me run away from home with the stranger, and betray my country and my hearth? Challenge the goddess then, show your greater strength than Zeus' who has the other gods in his power, and still is slave to Aphrodite alone. Shall I not be forgiven? Still you might have some show of argument against me. When Paris was gone to the deep places of death, below ground, and the immortal practice on my love was gone, I should have come back to the Argive ships, left Troy. I did try to do it, and I have witnesses, the towers' gatekeepers and the sentinels on the wall, who caught me again and again as I let down the rope from the battlements and tried to slip away to the ground. For Deiphobus, my second husband: he took me away by force and kept me his wife against the Phrygians' will.

O my husband, can you kill me now and think you kill in righteousness? I was the bride of force. Before, I brought their houses to the sorrow of slavery instead of conquest. Would you be stronger than the gods? Try, then. But even such ambition is absurd.
Chorus
O Queen of Troy, stand by your children and your country! Break down the beguilement of this woman, since she speaks well, and has done wickedly. This is dangerous.

Hecuba
First, to defend the honor of the gods, and show that the woman is a scandalous liar. I will not believe it! Hera and the virgin Pallas Athene could never be so silly and empty-headed that Hera would sell Argos to the barbarians, or Pallas let Athenians be the slaves of Troy. They went to Ida in girlish emulation, vain of their own loveliness? Why? Tell me the reason Hera should fall so much in love with the idea of beauty. To win some other lord more powerful than Zeus? Or has Athene marked some god to be her mate, she, whose virginity is a privilege won from Zeus, who abjures marriage? Do not trick out your own sins by calling the gods stupid. No wise man will believe you. You claim, and I must smile to hear it, that Aphrodite came at my son’s side to the house of Menelaus; who could have caught up you and your city of Amyclae and set you in Ilion, moving not from the quiet of heaven. Nonsense. My son was handsome beyond all other men. You looked at him, and sense went Cyprian at the sight, since Aphrodite is nothing but the human lust, named rightly, since the word of lust begins the god’s name. You saw him in the barbaric splendor of his robes, gorgeous with gold. It made your senses itch. You thought, being queen only in Argos, in little luxury, that once you got rid of Sparta for the Phrygian city where gold streamed everywhere, you could let extravagance run wild. No longer were Menelaus and his house sufficient to your spoiled luxurious appetites.
Helen. Thus make it the custom toward all womankind hereafter, that the price of adultery is death.

Chorus
Menelaus, keep the ancestral honor of your house.
Punish your wife, and purge away from Greece the stigma on women. You shall seem great even to your enemies.

Menelaus
All you have said falls into line with my own thought.
This woman left my household for a stranger's bed of her own free will, and all this talk of Aphrodite is for pure show. Away, and face the stones of the mob.
Atone for the long labors of the Achaeans in the brief act of dying, and know your penance for my shame.

Helen
No, by your knees! I am not guilty of the mind's infection, which the gods sent. Do not kill! Have pity!

Hecuba
Be true to the memory of all your friends she murdered.
It is for them and for their children that I plead.

Menelaus
Enough, Hecuba. I am not listening to her now.
I speak to my servants: see that she is taken away to where the ships are beached. She will make the voyage home.

Hecuba
But let her not be put in the same ship with you.

Menelaus
What can you mean? That she is heavier than she was?

Hecuba
A man in love once never is out of love again.

Menelaus
Sometimes; when the beloved's heart turns false to him.
Yet it shall be as you wish. She shall not be allowed in the same ship I sail in. This was well advised.
And once in Argos she must die the vile death earned by her vile life, and be an example to all women to live temperately. This is not the easier way;
and yet her execution will tincture with fear the lust of women even more depraved than she.

(Helen is led out, Menelaus following.)

Chorus
Thus, O Zeus, you betrayed all
to the Achaeans: your temple
in Ilium, your misted altar,
the flame of the clotted sacraments,
the smoke of the skying incense,
Pergamum the hallowed,
the ivied ravines of Ida, washed
by the running snow. The utter peaks that surprise the sun bolts,
shining and primeval place of divinity.

Gone are your sacrifices, the choirs'
glad voices singing to the gods
night long, deep into darkness;
gone the images, gold on wood
laid, the twelves of the sacred moons,
the magic Phrygian number.
Can it be, can it be, my lord, you have forgotten from your throne high in heaven's
bright air, my city which is ruined
and the flame storm that broke it?

O my dear, my husband,
O wandering ghost
unwashed, unburied; the sea hull must carry me
in the flash of its wings' speed
to Argos, city of horses, where
the stone walls built by giants invade the sky.
The multitudes of our children stand
clinging to the gates and cry through their tears.
And one girl weeps:
"O Mother, the Achaeans take me away
lonely from your eyes
to the black ship
where the oars dip surf
toward Salamis the blessed,
or the peak between two seas
where Pelops' hold
keeps the gates at the Isthmus."

Oh that as Menelaus' ship
makes way through the mid-sea
the bright pronged spear immortal of thunder might smash it
far out in the Aegaean,
as in tears, in bondage to Hellas
I am cut from my country;
as she holds the golden mirror
in her hands, girls' grace,
she, God's daughter.
Let him never come home again, to a room in Laconia
and the hearth of his fathers;
never more to Pitana's streets
and the bronze gates of the Maiden;
since he forgave his shame
and the vile marriage, the sorrors
of great Hellas and the land
watered by Simois.

(Talthybius returns. His men carry, laid on the shield of
Hector, the body of Astyanax.)

But see!
Now evils multiply in our land.
Behold, O pitiful wives
of the Trojans. This is Astyanax,
dead, dashed without pity from the walls, and borne
by the Danaans, who murdered him.

Hecuba, one last vessel of Achilles' son
remains, manned at the oar sweeps now, to carry back
to the shores of Phthiotis his last spoils of war.
Neoptolemus himself has put to sea. He heard
news of old Peleus in difficulty and the land
invaded by Acastus, son of Pelias.
Such news put speed above all pleasure of delay.
So he is gone, and took with him Andromache,
whose lamentations for her country and farewells
to Hector's tomb as she departed brought these tears
crowding into my eyes. And she implored that you
bury this dead child, your own Hector's son, who died
flung from the battlements of Troy. She asked as well
that the bronze-backed shield, terror of the Achaeans once,
when the boy's father slung its defense across his side,
be not taken to the hearth of Peleus, nor the room
where the slain child's Andromache must be a bride
once more, to waken memories by its sight, but used
in place of the cedar coffin and stone-chambered tomb
for the boy's burial. He shall be laid in your arms
to wrap the body about with winding sheets, and flowers,
and all such as you can, out of that which is left to you.
Since she is gone. Her master's speed prevented her
from giving the rites of burial to her little child.
The rest of us, once the corpse is laid out, and earth
is piled above it, must raise the mast tree, and go.
Do therefore quickly everything that you must do.
There is one labor I myself have spared you. As
we forded on our way here Scamander's running water,
I washed the body and made clean the wounds. I go
now, to break ground and dig the grave for him, that my
work be made brief, as yours must be, and our tasks end
together, and the ships be put to sea, for home.
Hecuba

Lay down the circled shield of Hector on the ground:
a hateful thing to look at; it means no love to me.

(Talthybius and his escort leave. Two soldiers wait.)

Achaens! All your strength is in your spears, not in the mind. What were you afraid of, that it made you kill this child so savagely? That Troy, which fell, might be raised from the ground once more? Your strength meant nothing, then.

When Hector’s spear was fortunate, and numberless strong hands were there to help him, we were still destroyed. Now when the city is fallen and the Phrygians slain, this baby terrified you? I despise the fear which is pure terror in a mind unreasoning.

O darling child, how wretched was this death. You might have fallen fighting for your city, grown to man’s age, and married, and with the king’s power like a god’s, and died happy, if there is any happiness here.

But no. You grew to where you could see and learn, my child, yet your mind was not old enough to win advantage of fortune. How wickedly, poor boy, your fathers’ walls, Apollo’s handiwork, have crushed your pitiful head tended and trimmed to ringlets by your mother’s hand, and the face she kissed once, where the brightness now is blood shining through the torn bones—too horrible to say more.

O little hands, sweet likenesses of Hector’s once, now you lie broken at the wrists before my feet; and mouth beloved whose words were once so confident, you are dead; and all was false, when you would lean across my bed, and say: “Mother, when you die I will cut my long hair in your memory, and at your grave bring companies of boys my age, to sing farewell.”

It did not happen; now I, a homeless, childless, old woman must bury your poor corpse, which is so young. Alas for all the tendernesses, my nursing care,

and all your slumbers gone. What shall the poet say, what words will he inscribe upon your monument?

Here lies a little child the Argives killed, because they were afraid of him. That? The epitaph of Greek shame. You will not win your father’s heritage, except for this, which is your coffin now: the brazen shield.

O shield, who guarded the strong shape of Hector’s arm: the bravest man of all, who wore you once, is dead.

How sweet the impression of his body on your sling, and at the true circle of your rim the stain of sweat where in the grind of his many combats Hector leaned his chin against you, and the drops fell from his brow!

Take up your work now; bring from what is left some robes to wrap the tragic dead. The gods will not allow us to do it right. But let him have what we can give.

That mortal is a fool who, prospering, thinks his life has any strong foundation; since our fortune’s course of action is the reeling way a madman takes, and no one person is ever happy all the time.

(Hecuba’s handmaidens bring out from the shelter a basket of robes and ornaments. During the scene which follows, the body of Astyanax is being made ready for burial.)

Chorus

Here are your women, who bring you from the Trojan spoils such as is left, to deck the corpse for burial.

Hecuba

O child, it is not for victory in riding, won from boys your age, not archery—in which acts our people take pride, without driving competition to excess—that your sire’s mother lays upon you now these treasures from what was yours before; though now the accursed of God, Helen, has robbed you, she who has destroyed as well the life in you, and brought to ruin all our house.
Chorus
    My heart,
you touched my heart, you who were once
a great lord in my city.

Hecuba
    These Phrygian robes’ magnificence you should have worn
at your marriage: to some princess uttermost in pride
in all the East, I lay upon your body now.
And you, once so victorious and mother of
a thousand conquests, Hector’s huge beloved shield:
here is a wreath for you, who die not, yet are dead
with this body; since it is better far to honor you
than the armor of Odysseus the wicked and wise.

Chorus
    Ah me.
Earth takes you, child;
our tears of sorrow.
Cry aloud, our mother.

Hecuba
    Yes.

Chorus
    The dirge of the dead.

Hecuba
    Ah me.

Chorus
    Evils never to be forgotten.

Hecuba
    I will bind up your wounds with bandages, and be
your healer: a wretched one, in name alone, no use.
Among the dead your father will take care of you.

Chorus
    Rip, tear your faces with hands
that beat like oars.
Alas.

Hecuba
    Dear women....

Chorus
    Hecuba, speak to us. We are yours. What did you cry aloud?

Hecuba
    The gods meant nothing except to make life hard for me,
and of all cities they chose Troy to hate. In vain
we sacrificed. And yet had not the very hand
of God gripped and crushed this city deep in the ground,
we should have disappeared in darkness, and not given
a theme for music, and the songs of men to come.
You may go now, and hide the dead in his poor tomb;
he has those flowers that are the right of the underworld.
I think it makes small difference to the dead, if they
are buried in the tokens of luxury. All this
is an empty glorification left for those who live.
(The soldiers take up and carry away the body
of Astyanax.)

Chorus
    Sad mother, whose hopes were so huge
for your life. They are broken now.
Born to high blessedness
and a lordly line
your death was horror.

But see, see
on the high places of Ilium
the torches whirling in the hands
of men. For Troy
some ultimate agony.

Talthybius
    I call to the captains who have orders to set fire
to the city of Priam: shield no longer in the hand
the shining flame. Let loose the fire upon it. So
with the citadel of Ilium broken to the ground
we can take leave of Troy, in gladness, and go home.

I speak to you, too, for my orders include this.
Children of Troy, when the lords of the armament sound
the high echoing crack of the trumpet call, then go
to the ships of the Achaeans, to be taken away
from this land. And you, unhappiest and aged woman,
go with them. For Odysseus' men are here, to whom
enslaved the lot exiles you from your native land.

Hecuba
Ah, wretched me. So this is the unhappy end
and goal of all the sorrows I have lived. I go
forth from my country and a city lit with flames.
Come, aged feet; make one last weary struggle, that I
may hail my city in its affliction. O Troy, once
so huge over all Asia in the drawn wind of pride,
your very name of glory shall be stripped away.
They are burning you, and as they drag forth from our land
enslaved. O gods! Do I call upon those gods for help?
I cried to them before now, and they would not hear.
Come then, hurl ourselves into the pyre. Best now
to die in the flaming ruins of our fathers' house!

Talthybius
Unhappy creature, ecstatic in your sorrows! Men,
take her, spare not. She is Odysseus' property.
You have orders to deliver her into his hands.

Hecuba
O sorrow.
Cronion, Zeus, lord of Phrygia,
prince of our house, have you seen
the dishonor done to the seed of Dardanus?

Chorus
He has seen, but the great city
is a city no more, it is gone. There is no Troy.

Hecuba
O sorrow.
Ilium flares.
The chambers of Pergamum take fire,
the citadel and the wall's high places.

Chorus
Our city fallen to the spear
fades as smoke winged in the sky.
halls hot in the swept fire
and the fierce lances.

Hecuba
O soil where my children grew.

Chorus
Alas.

Hecuba
O children, hear me; it is your mother who calls.

Chorus
They are dead you cry to. This is a dirge.

Hecuba
I lean my old body against the earth
and both hands beat the ground.

Chorus
I kneel to the earth, take up
the cry to my own dead,
poor buried husband.

Hecuba
We are taken, dragged away

Chorus
a cry of pain, pain

Hecuba
under the slave's roof

Chorus
away from my country.
Hecuba
Priam, my Priam. Dead
groundless, forlorn,
you know not what they have done to me.

Chorus
Now dark, holy death
in the brutal butchery closed his eyes.

Hecuba
O gods’ house, city beloved

Chorus
alas

Hecuba
you are given the red flame and the spear’s iron.

Chorus
You will collapse to the dear ground and be nameless.

Hecuba
Ash as the skyward smoke wing
piled will blot from my sight the house where I lived once.

Chorus
Lost shall be the name on the land,
all gone, perished. Troy, city of sorrow,
is there no longer.

Hecuba
Did you see, did you hear?

Chorus
The crash of the citadel.

Hecuba
The earth shook, riven

Chorus
to engulf the city.

Hecuba
O
shaking, tremulous limbs,

this is the way. Forward:
into the slave’s life.

Chorus
Mourn for the ruined city, then go away
to the ships of the Achaeans.

(Hecuba is led away, and all go out, leaving
the stage empty.)