

THE TROJAN WOMEN

Translated by RICHMOND LATTIMORE

THE TROJAN WOMEN: INTRODUCTION

The Play: Date and Composition

External evidence indicates that *The Trojan Women* was most likely produced in 415 BCE, as the third play of a tetralogy with *Alexander*, *Palamedes*, and the satyr-play *Sisyphus* (all lost). Unusually for Euripides, all three tragedies were thus drawn from the same body of mythic material involving the Trojan War: *Alexander* (of which quite substantial fragments survive) dealt with the rediscovery of Paris as an adult after he had been exposed as an infant, *Palamedes* with Odysseus' treachery by which he tricked the Greeks into killing their fellow soldier Palamedes. Though the three plays did not form a single coherently connected narrative of the sort Aeschylus seems to have favored in his trilogies, they did present the three episodes in chronological order and were linked with one another by various shared themes. In the competition that year, Euripides came in second to the obscure playwright Xenocles' tetralogy of *Oedipus*, *Lycaon*, *The Bacchae*, and the satyr-play *Athamas* (all lost).

A few months before the date on which, according to most scholars, the play was produced, the Athenians had captured the small Greek island of Melos and slaughtered all the adult men and enslaved all the women and children. Under the circumstances, it is difficult not to see Euripides' play, with its extended reflection on the piteous fate of a defeated city and its people, as being colored by that recent event.

The Myth

Euripides' *Trojan Women* portrays the fall of Troy from the point of view of the defeated: given that all the Trojan men have been slain by the Greek victors, it is their women—mothers, daughters, wives—who give voice to the suffering of the city. The play begins with the two gods Poseidon and

Athena setting aside their previous opposition during the Trojan War and amicably negotiating the destruction of the victorious Greeks for their sacrilege during the sack of the city. But then it moves to a purely human level of unrelieved distress focused above all on Hecuba, the aged former queen of the city, and her family. In contrast to the play *Hecuba*, here the woman who had ruled Troy and, with her, all the defeated Trojan women and children are deprived not only of the act of vengeance, but even of the bare hope for it. Amid the laments of the chorus of anonymous Trojan captives, the various members of Hecuba's family are assigned as slaves or concubines to their future Greek masters; the prophetess Cassandra exults over the death of Agamemnon, which she can foresee; Hector's widow Andromache announces that Polyxena has been sacrificed to the dead Achilles (in contrast to *Hecuba*, Polyxena's death is much less prominent here); and Andromache's young son Astyanax is carried off to be hurled down from the city's walls. Then Helen, Menelaus' wife, whose elopement with the Trojan prince Paris (a son of Hecuba and Priam) had caused the war, debates with Menelaus and Hecuba about how much she should be blamed for what has happened and whether or not she ought to be punished; Menelaus promises to have her killed when they arrive home in Sparta (but we know he will not do so). Finally the corpse of little Astyanax is brought on stage and mourned, and Hecuba and the remaining Trojan women leave to sail off with Odysseus, to whom she has been assigned.

The bloody and heart-rending aftermath of the Trojan War—including all the episodes dramatized here—was extensively depicted in ancient Greek epic, lyric poetry, and art. Euripides himself chose to base a number of different tragedies upon these stories. For example, about ten years before he wrote *The Trojan Women*, he had dramatized later events in *Andromache*. In *Hecuba*, written about nine years before *The Trojan Women*, he portrayed many of the same incidents as he does here. So the main events of this play are likely to have been well known to Euripides' audience already, though the formal and rather legalistic debate between Helen and Hecuba seems characteristically Euripidean and in this form is probably his invention. The play seeks to create an effect upon its audience less by surprise and original plot inventions than by its exploration of the

traumatic consequences of war and its almost unrelieved, yet lyrical, portrayal of loss and displacement.

Transmission and Reception

The Trojan Women was not especially popular in antiquity, certainly much less so than *Hecuba*, which treats much of the same legendary material. For example, only a couple of papyri of the play have survived, containing fragments of a plot summary and of some lines. But it did end up being selected as one of the ten canonical plays most studied and read in antiquity. As a result, it is transmitted by three medieval manuscripts and is equipped with ancient and medieval commentaries.

Greek and Latin authors who portrayed Hecuba's sufferings after the fall of Troy inevitably drew upon this play and upon *Hecuba*. Roman tragedies by Ennius (*Andromache*) and Accius (*Astyanax*) are lost; but Seneca's *Troades* (*Trojan Women*) does survive, containing many close echoes of this play of Euripides along with others from his *Hecuba*, and was widely read during the Renaissance. Epic poets like Virgil, Ovid, and Quintus of Smyrna also followed the outlines of Euripides' plot at least in part and presumed their readers' familiarity with his text; and Hecuba eventually became a standard example for the vicissitudes of fortune.

Although during the Middle Ages and Renaissance *The Trojan Women* was largely overshadowed by *Hecuba* (and Seneca), things have been very different in modern times. Already in the middle of the nineteenth century, Hector Berlioz based the first two acts of his opera *Les Troyennes* (1856–59) not only, unsurprisingly, upon Virgil's *Aeneid* but also, innovatively, upon *The Trojan Women*. Since the mid-twentieth century, the experience of the horrors of war, along with changes in dramatic taste, have led to a remarkable resurgence in the play's popularity, and in recent decades it has been one of the most frequently staged of all Greek tragedies. The play has been successfully adapted by such authors as Jean-Paul Sartre (*The Trojan Women*, 1965), Suzuki Tadashi (1974), Hanoch Levin (*The Lost Women of Troy*, 1984), Andrei Serban (1974/1996; with music by Elizabeth Swados), Charles Mee (n.d.), and Ellen McLaughlin (2008). It has also been the subject of notable films by such directors as the Mexican Sergio Véjar (Las

Troyanas, 1963) and the Greek Michael Cacoyannis (*The Trojan Women*, 1971, starring Katharine Hepburn, Vanessa Redgrave, and Irene Papas).

THE TROJAN WOMEN

Characters

POSEIDON

ATHENA

HECUBA, former queen of Troy

TALTHYBIUS, herald of the Greeks

CASSANDRA, daughter of Priam and Hecuba

ANDROMACHE, widow of Hector

ASTYANAX, young son of Hector and

Andromache (silent character)

MENELAUS, co-leader of the Greek army

HELEN, wife of Menelaus

CHORUS of Trojan women

Scene: An open space before the walls of the ruined city of Troy, with a tent that temporarily houses the captive women. As the play opens, Hecuba is lying on the ground in front of the tent.

(Enter Poseidon above the scene.)

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

5 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
Athena's work, and his,
10 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,^o
the wooden horse, which hid the
secret spears within.
Now the gods' groves are
15 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
20 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
Athena won
its way against my will. Between
them they broke Troy.

25 So I must leave my altars and
great Ilium,
since once a city sinks into sad
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,
30 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
35 Helen of Sparta, treated—rightly
—as 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
40 in secrecy and pain beside
Achilles' tomb.
Priam is gone, their children dead;
one girl is left,
the maiden Cassandra, crazed by
Lord Apollo's stroke,
whom Agamemnon, in despite of
the gods' will
and all religion, will lead by force
to his secret bed.
45 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.

(Enter Athena above the scene.)

ATHENA

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

POSEIDON

You may, lady Athena; for the strands of kinship,
close drawn, work no small magic to enchant the mind.

ATHENA

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

POSEIDON

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

ATHENA

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

POSEIDON

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

ATHENA

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?

ATHENA

65 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 character. Why must
you hate too hard, and love too hard, your loves and hates?

ATHENA

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

POSEIDON

70 I know that Ajax dragged Cassandra thence by force.

ATHENA

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

POSEIDON

Yet they captured Ilium by your strength alone.

ATHENA

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

POSEIDON

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

ATHENA

75 Make their home voyage a most unhappy coming home.

POSEIDON

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

ATHENA

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.

80 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 Aegean crossing. Make
the sea thunder to the tripled wave and spinning surf,
cram thick the hollow Euboean fold with floating dead;
85 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 Aegean Sea.
Myconos' headlands and the swine-back reefs of Delos,
90 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.
95 That mortal who sacks fallen cities is a fool
if he gives the temples and the tombs, the hallowed places
of the dead, to desolation. His own turn must come.

(Exit Poseidon and Athena. Hecuba rises slowly to her feet.)

HECUBA [*chanting*]

*Rise, stricken head, from the dust;
lift up the throat. This is Troy, but
Troy
100 and we, Troy's kings, are perished.
Stoop to the changing fortune.
Steer for the crossing and your
fortune,
hold not life's prow on the course
against*

wave beat and accident.
105 *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.
110 *Must I be hushed? Were it better*
thus?
Should I cry a lament?
Unhappy, accursed,
limbs cramped, I lie
backed on this stiff bed.
115 *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
120 *where stricken people find music yet*
in the song undanced of their
wretchedness.

[singing]
You ships' prows, that the rapid
oars swept here to blessed Ilium
over the sea's blue water
125 *and the placid harbors of Hellas*
to the pipes' grim beat
and the swing of the shrill boat
whistles;

you made the crossing, made fast
ashore
the Egyptians' skill, the sea cables,
130 alas, by the coasts of Troy;
it was you, ships, that carried the
fatal bride
of Menelaus, her brother Castor's
shame,
the stain on the Eurotas.
Now she has killed
135 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.*

140 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,
145 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,
150 when Priam leaned on his scepter,
my feet were queens of the choir and
led

*the proud dance to the gods of
Phrygia.*

(Enter the First Half-Chorus from the tent.)

FIRST HALF-CHORUS [*singing this lyric interchange with Hecuba, who continues to sing in reply*]

STROPHE A

*Hecuba, what are these cries?
What news now? Through the tent walls
155 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
160 will move today. The hand is at the oar.*

FIRST HALF-CHORUS

*They will? Why? Must I take ship
so soon from the land of my fathers?*

HECUBA

I know nothing. I look for disaster.

FIRST HALF-CHORUS

*Alas!
165 Poor women of Troy, torn from your homes,
come, hear of miseries.
The Argives push for home.*

HECUBA

*Oh,
let her not come forth,
not now, my child*
170 *Cassandra, driven delirious
to shame us before the Argives;
not the mad one, to bring fresh pain to my pain.
Ah no.
Troy, ill-starred Troy, this is the end;*
175 *your last sad people leave you now,
both living and broken.*

(Enter the Second Half-Chorus from the tent.)

SECOND HALF-CHORUS [*singing, while Hecuba continues to sing in reply*]

ANTISTROPHE A

*Ah me. Trembling, I left the tents
of Agamemnon to listen.
Tell us, our queen. Did the Argive council
decree my death?*
180 *Or are the seamen manning the ships now,
oars ready for action?*

HECUBA

*My child, I have come stunned with terror in my soul,
awake ever since the dawn.*

SECOND HALF-CHORUS

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

HECUBA

You are near the lots 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

190 *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,

195 *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 [*all singing together*]

STROPHE B

So pitiful, so pitiful

your shame and your lamentation.

No longer shall I move the shifting pace

200 *of the shuttle at the looms of Ida.*

I shall look no more on the houses of my parents. ◦

No more. I shall have worse troubles.

Shall I be forced to the bed of Greek masters?

I curse that night and my fortune.

205 *Must I draw the water of Peirene,
a servant at sacred springs?
Might I only be taken to Athens, domain
of Theseus, the bright, the blessed!*
210 *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.*

ANTISTROPHE B

I have heard the rumor
215 *of the hallowed ground by Peneus,
bright doorstone of Olympus,
deep burdened in beauty of wealth and harvest.
There would I be next after the blessed,
the sacrosanct land of Theseus.*
220 *And they say that the land of Aetna,
the keep against Punic men,
mother of Sicilian mountains, sounds
in the herald's cry for games' garlands;
and the land washed*
225 *by the streaming Ionian Sea,
that land watered by the loveliest
of rivers, Crathis, that turns hair red-gold
and draws from the depths of sacred wells
blessings on a strong people.*
[chanting]
230 *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 from the side, accompanied by some soldiers.)

TALTHYBIUS

235 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 [*singing in this interchange with Talthybius, who speaks in reply*]
It comes, beloved daughters of Troy; the thing I feared.

TALTHYBIUS

240 You are all given your masters now. Was this your dread?

HECUBA

*Ah, yes. Is it Phthia, 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
245 *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?

250 *My unhappy child!*

TALTHYBIUS

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

HECUBA

She, Apollo's virgin, blessed in the privilege

the gold-haired god gave her, a life forever unwed?

TALTHYBIUS

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

HECUBA

Dash down, my daughter,

the twigs 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

And my poor youngest whom you took away,

260 *where is she?*^o

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 serve Achilles' tomb.

HECUBA

265 *To serve, 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

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

HECUBA

And 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

275 *And I, my aged frailty 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,
280 *rip nails through both cheeks.*
Must I?
To be given as slave to serve that vile, that slippery man,
right's enemy, brute, murderous beast,
285 *that mouth of lies and treachery, that makes void*
faith in things promised
and turns to hate what was beloved! Oh, mourn,
daughters of Ilium, weep as one for me.
I am gone, doomed, undone,
290 *O wretched, given*
the worst lot of all.

CHORUS LEADER

You know your destiny now, Queen Hecuba. But mine?
What Hellene, what Achaean is my master now?

TALTHYBIUS

Men-at-arms, do your duty. Bring Cassandra forth
295 without delay. Our orders are to deliver her
to the general at once. And afterward 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
300 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,
305 dreaded by the Achaeans, hurl their wrath on me.

(Enter Cassandra from the tent, carrying a flaming torch.)

HECUBA [now *speaking*]

You are wrong, they're not setting fires. It is my Cassandra
whirled out on running feet in the passion of her frenzy.

CASSANDRA [*singing*]

STROPHE

*Lift up, heave up; carry the flame; I
bring fire of worship,
torches to the temple.*
310 *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!*
315 *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,*
320 *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.

ANTISTROPHE

325 *Let your feet dance, rippling the air; let the chorus go,
as when my father's fate went in blessedness.
O sacred circle of dance.
Lead now, Phoebus Apollo; I wear your laurel,*
330 *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,*
335 *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,*
340 *for the husband fate appointed to lie beside me.*

CHORUS LEADER

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.
345 O child,
there never was a time I dreamed you'd wed like this,
like this, at spear's edge, under force of Argive arms.
Let me take the light; crazed, passionate, you cannot carry

it straight enough, poor child. Your fate is intemperate
350 as you are, always. There is no relief for you.

*(Hecuba takes the torch from Cassandra and
gives it to some Trojan women.)*

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

(Exit these women with the torch into the tent.)

CASSANDRA

O Mother, star my hair with flowers of victory.
355 This is a king I marry; then be glad; escort
the bride—and if she falters, thrust her strongly on.
If Loxias lives, 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
360 and my father's in the desolation of his house.
But I leave this in silence and sing not now the axe
to drop against my throat and other throats than mine,
the agony of the mother murdered, brought to pass
from our marriage rites, and Atreus' house made desolate.
365 I am ridden by god's curse still, yet I will step so far
out of my frenzy as to show our city's fate
is blessed beyond 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—
370 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
375 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
380 as the widows perished, and couples who had raised in vain
their children were left childless, no one left to tend
their tombs and give to them the sacrificial blood.
For such success as this congratulate the Greeks.°
No, but the shame is better left in silence, for fear
385 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
390 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
395 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, his wife's name would sleep in endless silence.
400 Though surely the wise man will forever shrink from war,
yet if war come, the hero's death will lay a wreath
not lusterless 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

405 to destruction those whom you and I have hated most.

CHORUS LEADER

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

TALTHYBIUS

Were it not that Apollo has driven wild your wits
I would make you sorry for sending the princes of our host
410 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—
415 to find his love in a crazed girl. I, a plain man,
would not marry this woman or keep her as my lover.
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
420 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 virtuous woman's slave.

CASSANDRA

That servant is a vile thing. Oh, how can heralds keep
425 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
430 would die in Troy? What else awaits her—but enough!
Poor wretch, he 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^o
435 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
440 slaughtered, their 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 his home and thousand sorrows waiting there.

Why must I hurl forth each of Odysseus’ labors one by one?
445 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,
piled in the ditch for animals to rip and feed on, beaten by
450 streaming storms of winter, I who wore Apollo’s sacraments.
Garlands of the god I loved so well, prophetic spirit’s dress,
leave me, as I leave those festivals where once I was so proud.
See, I tear your adornments from my skin not yet defiled by touch,
throw them to the running winds to carry off, O lord of prophecy.
455 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,
460 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.

*(Exit Cassandra escorted by Talthybius and his
soldiers to the side. Hecuba collapses.)*

CHORUS LEADER

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.
465 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
470 although the decorous action is to invoke their aid
when all our hands lay hold on is 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,
475 mother by him of sons preeminent, not just
mere empty numbers of them, but the lords of the Phrygian domain,
such sons for pride to point to as not one woman ever,
no Hellene, none in the wide barbarian world might match.
And then I saw them fall before the spears of Greece,

480 and cut my 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, at the altar of the protecting god.
I saw my city taken. And the girls I nursed,
485 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:
490 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
495 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.
500 Cassandra, O Daughter, whose inspiration was god-shared,
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.
505 And you would lift me from the ground? What hope? What use?

(Hecuba rises painfully.)

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
510 call not one happy yet, until the man is dead.

*(Hecuba is led to the back of the stage, and
then falls to the ground once more.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

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

ANTISTROPHE

*And the generation of Troy
swept solid to the gates
to give the goddess
her pleasure: the horse immortal, unbroken,
the nest of Argive spears,
535 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
540 in the shrine of Pallas Athena,
stone paved, washed now in the blood of our people.
Strong, joyful work
deep into black night
to the stroke of the Libyan lute
545 and all Troy singing, and girls'
light feet pulsing the air
in joyous dance measures;
indoors, lights everywhere,
torchflares on black
550 to forbid sleep's onset.*

EPODE

*I was there also: in the great
room
I danced for the maiden of the
mountains,
Artemis, Zeus' daughter.
555 Then 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 their mother's dress.
War stalked from his hiding
560 place.
Pallas did this.
Beside their altars the Trojans
died in their blood. Desolate
now,
men murdered, our sleeping
rooms gave up
565 their brides' beauty
to breed sons for Greek men,
sorrow for our own country.

*(Enter Andromache holding Astyanax and sitting in
a wagon that comes from the side accompanied by
Greek soldiers and heaped with spoils of war.)*

[chanting]
Hecuba look, I see her, rapt
to the enemy wagon, Andromache,
570 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,
575 torn now from Troy, for Achilles' son
to hang in the shrines of Phthia.

ANDROMACHE [*singing in this lyric interchange together with Hecuba, who sings in reply*]

STROPHE A

I go at 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

580

My own distress?

HECUBA

O my children...

ANDROMACHE

...once. No longer.

HECUBA

ANTISTROPHE A

Lost, lost, Troy our dominion...

ANDROMACHE

...unhappy...

HECUBA

...and my lordly children.

ANDROMACHE

Gone, alas!

HECUBA

They were mine.

ANDROMACHE

Sorrows only.

HECUBA

585

Sad destiny...

ANDROMACHE

...of our city...

HECUBA

...a wreck, and burning.

ANDROMACHE

STROPHE B

Come back, O my husband. ^o

HECUBA

*Poor child, you invoke
a dead man; my son once...*

ANDROMACHE

590 *...my defender.*

ANDROMACHE

ANTISTROPHE B

You, who once killed the Greeks...

HECUBA

...oldest of the sons

I bore to Priam...

ANDROMACHE

...take me to my death now.

ANDROMACHE

STROPHE C

Longing for death drives deep...

HECUBA

595

...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 the gods, since once your youngest, escaping
death, brought down Troy's towers in the arms of a worthless
woman;*

600 *...piled at the feet of Pallas the bleeding bodies of our young men
sprawled, kites' food, while Troy takes up the yoke of captivity.*

HECUBA

ANTISTROPHE C

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,^o
605 *tears on tears shed. Home, farewell.
The dead have forgotten all sorrows.**

CHORUS LEADER

*They who are sad find somehow sweetness in tears, the song
of lamentation and the melancholy Muse.*

ANDROMACHE [now *speaking*]

610 *Hecuba, mother of the man whose spear was death
to the Argives, Hector: do you see what they have done to us?*

HECUBA [now *speaking*]

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
615 transformed, we who were noble have now become mere slaves.

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

620 There is no numbering my losses. Infinitely
misfortune comes to outrace 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 Talthybius meant, that speech
625 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,
in pain, to a dead man. What monstrous sacrilege!

ANDROMACHE

630 She is dead, and this was death indeed; and yet to die
as she did was happier 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^o
635 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,^o
while he who was happy once and
then unfortunate
640 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,
645 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
650 always within the enclosure 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
655 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

660 his wife: a murderer's house, and I
shall be his 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
665 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

670 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.

675 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
680 than hers you mourn, 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 LEADER

You stand where I do in misfortune, and while you mourn
685 your life, you 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
690 one man to the steering oar, another aloft, and one
to pump the bilge from the hold. But when the tempest comes
and seas wash 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,
695 battered by this storm immortally inspired, have lost
my voice. I hold my tongue and let misfortune go

as it 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
700 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
705 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 coming now.
Who is he? What news? What counsel have they taken now?

(Enter Talthybius again from the side with his escort.)

TALTHYBIUS

O wife of Hector, once the bravest man in Troy,
710 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 that your son—how can I say this?

ANDROMACHE

That he shall serve some other master than I serve?

TALTHYBIUS

715 No man of Achaea 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

720 O 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.

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

725 He must be hurled down from the
battlements of Troy.

Let it happen this way. It will be
wiser in the end.

Do not fight it. Take your grief

nobly, as you were born;
give up the struggle where your
strength is feebleness
with no force anywhere to help.
Listen to me!

730

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.

Don't

do any shameful thing, or any
deed of hatred.

And please—I request you—hurl
no curse at the Achaeans

735

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'll be sure
the child you leave behind will
not lie unburied here,
and that to you the Achaeans will
be less unkind.

ANDROMACHE

740

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 luckless for you. O bridal bed,
745 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.
Poor child, are you crying too? Do you know what they
750 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,
nor Hector's kin, nor any strength of Phrygian arms.
755 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;
760 in vain the wrack of the labor pains and the long weakness.
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.
Greeks! Your Greek cleverness is simple barbarity.
765 Why kill this child, who never did you any harm?
O flower of the house of Tyndareus! Not his,
not Zeus' 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.
770 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;
775 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 my 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 lifts the child out of the wagon, which
exits to the side carrying Andromache.)*

CHORUS LEADER

780 Unhappy Troy! For the sweetness in one woman's arms,
embrace unspeakable, you lost these thousands slain.

TALTHYBIUS [*chanting*]

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

(He hands Astyanax to the guards, who carry him out to the side.)

*I am not the man
to do this. Some other
without pity, not as I ashamed,
should be herald of messages like this.*

(Exit to the side.)

HECUBA [*chanting*]

790 *O child of my own unhappy son,
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
795 my power now. O city,
O child, what have we left to suffer?
Are we not hurled
down the whole length of disaster?*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*Telamon, O king in the land where the bees swarm,
800 Salamis the surf-pounded isle where you founded your city
to front that hallowed coast where Athena 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
805 with Alcmene's archer from Greece
to Ilium, our city, to sack and destroy it
on that age-old venture.*

ANTISTROPHE A

*This was the first flower of Hellenic strength Heracles brought in
anger
810 for the horses promised; and by Simois' fair waters
checked his surf-wandering oars and made fast the ships' stern
cables.
From those vessels came out the deadly bow hand,
death to Laomedon, as the scarlet wind of the flames swept over
815 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.

STROPHE B

820 *In vain, then, Laomedon's child,
you walk in delicate pride
by the golden pitchers
in loveliest servitude
to fill Zeus' wine cups;
825 while Troy your mother is given to the flame to eat,
and the lonely beaches
mourn, as sad birds sing
830 for the young lost,
for the wives and the children
and the aged mothers.
Gone now the shining pools where you bathed,
the fields where you ran
all desolate. And you,
835 Ganymede, go in grace by the throne of Zeus
with your young, calm smile even now
as Priam's kingdom
840 falls to the Greek spear.*

ANTISTROPHE B

*O Love, Love, it was you
in the high halls of Dardanus,
the gods were thinking of you,
who greatly glorified Troy
845 on that day, binding her in marriage
with the gods. I speak no more
against Zeus' name.
But the light men love, that shines*

through the pale wings of morning,
850 *baleful star for this earth,*
 watched the collapse of Pergamum:
 Dawn. Her lord was of this land;
 she bore his children,
 Tithonus, caught away by the golden car
855 *and the starry horses,*
 who made our hopes so high.
 For the gods loved Troy once.
 Now they have forgotten.

(Enter Menelaus from the side, attended by soldiers.)

MENELAUS

860 O splendor of sunburst breaking forth this day, whereon
 I lay my hands once more on Helen, my wife.° And yet
 it is not, so much as men think, for a woman's sake
865 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 Spartan once my own, whose name
870 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
875 alive 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 seaways back to Greek
 soil, and there give her over to execution;

blood penalty for friends who are dead in Ilium here.
880 Go to the house, my followers, and take her out;
no, drag her out; lay hands upon that hair so stained
with men's destruction. When the winds blow fair astern
we will take ship again and bring her back to Hellas.

(Exit several soldiers into the tent.)

HECUBA

O power, who mount the world, wheel where the world rides,
885 O mystery of man's knowledge, whosoever you be,
named Zeus, 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

890 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.

(Enter Helen from the tent escorted by soldiers.)

HELEN

895 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
900 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 me.

HELEN

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

MENELAUS

905 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 make the opposite case;
the prosecution. There are things that happened in Troy
which you know nothing of, and the long-drawn argument
910 will mean her death. She never can escape us now.

MENELAUS

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

(To Menelaus.)

HELEN

Perhaps it will make no difference if I speak
915 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!

(Pointing to Hecuba.)

She mothered the beginning of all this wickedness.

920 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.

925 Pallas Athena 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, marveling at my loveliness,

930 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. You are not ruled by barbarians,
you have not been defeated in war nor serve a tyrant.

935 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.

940 But when he came to me—call him any name you will:

Paris? or Alexander? that ruinous spirit sent
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?

- 945 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 strength greater than Zeus’
who has the other gods in his power, and still is slave
950 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 my marriage given by the gods was gone,
I should have come back to the Argive ships, left Troy.
955 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.
As for Deiphobus, my second husband: he took me away^o
960 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?^o I was the bride of force. Besides,
my natural beauty brought me the sorrow of slavery
instead of victory. Would you be stronger than the gods?
965 Try, then. But any such ambition is absurd.

CHORUS LEADER

O Queen of Troy, stand by your children and your country!
Break down the beguilement of this woman, since she speaks
well, but has done wickedly. This is dangerous.

HECUBA

First, to defend the honor of the gods, and show
970 that the woman is a scandalous liar. I will not
believe it! Hera and the virgin Pallas Athena
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.
975 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 had Athena marked some god to be her mate,
980 she, whose virginity is a privilege won from Zeus,
she 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 laugh to hear it, that Aphrodite
came at my son's side to the house of Menelaus?
985 She could have caught up you and your city of Amyclae
and set you in Ilium, 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,
990 named rightly, since the word of lust begins the god's name.^o
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
995 where gold streamed everywhere, you could let extravagance
run wild. No longer were Menelaus and his house
sufficient for your spoiled luxurious appetites.
So much for that. You say my son took you away
by force. What Spartan heard you cry for help? You did

1000 cry out? Or did you? Castor, your brother, was there, a young
man, and his twin not yet caught up among the stars.
Then when you had reached Troy, and the Argives at your heels
came, and the agony of the murderous spears began,
when the reports came in that Menelaus' side
1005 was winning, you would praise him, simply to make my son
unhappy at the strength of his love's challenger,
forgetting your husband when the luck went back to Troy.
You worked hard: not to make yourself a better woman,
but to make sure always to be on the winning side.
1010 You claim you tried to slip away with ropes let down
from the ramparts, and this proves you stayed against your will?
Perhaps. But when were you ever caught in the strangling noose,
or sharpening a dagger? Which any noble wife
would do, desperate with longing for her lord's return.
1015 Yet over and over again I gave you good advice:
"Make your escape, my daughter; there are other girls
for my sons to marry. I will help you get away
to the ships of the Achaeans. Let the Greeks, and us,
stop fighting." So I argued, but you were not pleased.
1005 Spoiled in the luxury of Alexander's house
you liked foreigners to kiss the ground before your feet.
All that impressed you.

And now you dare to come outside,
figure fastidiously arranged, to look upon
the same sky as your husband, O abominable
1025 heart, who should walk submissively in rags of robes,
shivering with anxiety, head Scythian-cropped,
your old impudence gone and modesty gained at last
with reference to your sinful life.

O Menelaus,
mark this, the end of my argument. Be true to your
1030 high reputation and to Hellas. Grace both, and kill
Helen. Thus make it the custom toward all womankind
hereafter, that the price of adultery is death.

CHORUS LEADER

Menelaus, keep the ancestral honor of your house.
Punish your wife, and clear your name of the accusation
1035 of cowardice. 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.
1040 Atone for the long labors of the Achaeans in
the brief act of dying, and know your penance for my shame.

(Helen falls before him and embraces his knees.)

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.
1045 It is for them and for their children that I plead.

(Menelaus pushes Helen away.)

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

1050 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.
1055 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.

(Exit Menelaus and Helen to the side escorted by soldiers.)

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

1060 *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,*

1065 *Pergamum the hallowed,
the ivied ravines of Ida, washed
by the running snow, the utter
peaks that surprise the sun bolts,
1070 shining and primeval place of divinity.*

ANTISTROPHE A

*Gone are your sacrifices, the choirs'
glad voices singing, for the gods
night long festivals in the dark;
gone the images, gold on wood
1075 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
1080 and the flame storm that broke it?*

STROPHE B

*O my dear, my husband, O wandering ghost
1085 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.
1090 And one girl weeps: ^o
"O Mother, the Achaeans take me away
lonely from your eyes*

to the black ship

1095

*where the oars dip
surf*

*toward Salamis the blessed,
or the peak between two seas
where Pelops' castle
keeps the gates at the Isthmus."*

ANTISTROPHE B

1100

*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 Aegean,*

1105

*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, Zeus' daughter.*

1110

*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 Athena;
since he possesses his shame*

1115

*and the vile marriage, the sorrows
of great Hellas and the land
watered by Simois.*

*(Enter Talthybius again from the side, accompanied by soldiers
who carry the body of Astyanax, laid on the shield of Hector.)*

[chanting]

But see!

*New evils multiply in our land.
Behold, O pitiful wives
1120 of the Trojans. This is Astyanax,
dead, dashed without pity from the walls, and borne
by the Danaans, who murdered him.*

TALTHYBIUS

Hecuba, one last ship, that of Achilles' son,
remains, manned at the oar sweeps now, to carry back
1125 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 his land
invaded by Acastus, son of Pelias.
Such news put speed above all pleasure of delay.
1130 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 we
bury this dead child, your own Hector's son, who died
1135 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
1140 once more, to waken memories by its sight, but used^o
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,
as well as you can, out of that which is left to you.
1145 For 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.
1150 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
1155 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.

(Exit Talthybius and his escort to the side.)

Achaeans! All your strength is in your spears, not in
the mind. What were you afraid of, that it made you kill
1160 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,
1165 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,
1170 and died happy, if there is any happiness here.

But no. You grew to where you could see and learn, my child,
 yet your life was not old enough to win advantage
 of fortune. How wickedly, poor boy, your fathers' walls,
 Apollo's handiwork, have shorn your pitiful curls
 1175 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;
 1180 and mouth beloved whose words were once so confident,
 you are dead; and all was false, when you would jump into
 my bed, and say: "Grandmother, 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."
 1185 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 our shared slumbers gone. What would the poet say,
 what words might he inscribe upon your monument?
 1190 "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, that guarded the strong shape of Hector's arm:
 1195 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!

1200 Take up your work now; bring from what is left some fair
coverings to wrap this poor dead child. The gods will not
allow us much. 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
1205 of action is the reeling way a madman takes,
and no one person is ever happy all the time.

*(Hecuba's handmaidens bring out a robe and ornaments from the
tent and help Hecuba prepare the body of Astyanax for burial.)*

CHORUS LEADER

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

HECUBA

O child, it is not for victory in riding, won
1210 from boys your age, not archery—in which acts our people
take pride, without driving competition to excess^o—
that your sire's mother lays upon you now these treasures
from what was yours before; though now the god-accursed,
Helen, has robbed you, she who has destroyed as well
1215 the life in you, and brought to ruin all our house.

CHORUS [*singing in this interchange with Hecuba, who for the most part
replies speaking*]

*My heart,
you touched my heart, you who were once
a great lord in my city.^o*

HECUBA [*speaking*]

These Phrygian robes' magnificence you should have worn

at your marriage to some princess uttermost in pride
1220 in all the East. I lay them on 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
1225 than the armor of Odysseus the wicked and clever.

CHORUS

Ah me.

Earth takes you, child;

our tears of sorrow.

Cry aloud, our mother.

HECUBA [*singing*]

Yes.

CHORUS

The dirge of the dead.

HECUBA [*singing*]

1230 *Ah me.*

CHORUS

Evils never to be forgotten.

HECUBA [*speaking*]

I'll bind some of 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 the others.

CHORUS

1235 *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

1240 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 a god gripped and crushed this city deep in the ground,
 we should have disappeared in darkness, and not given
1245 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 that
1250 is an empty glorification left for those who live.

(The body of Astyanax is carried off to the side.)

CHORUS [*singing*]

*Sad mother, whose hopes were so huge
for your life. They are broken now.
Born to high blessedness
and a lordly line, child,
1255 your death was horror.*

*But see, see
on the high places of Ilium
the torchflares whirling in the hands
of men. For Troy
some other new agony.*

(Enter Talthymbius with soldiers from the side.)

TALTHYBIUS

- 1260 I call to the captains who have orders to set fire
to the city of Priam: keep 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.
- 1265 I speak to you, too, for my orders include this,
daughters of Troy. When the lords of the armament sound
the high echoing crash 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,
1270 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.
- 1275 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 us they drag forth from our land

1280 enslaved. O gods! Do I call upon the gods for help?
We 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,
1285 take her, don't wait. She is Odysseus' property.
You have orders to deliver her into his hands.

HECUBA [*singing, with the Chorus also singing in reply*]

STROPHE A

O sorrow.
Cronion, Zeus, lord of Phrygia,
prince of our house, have you seen
1290 *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

ANTISTROPHE A

O sorrow.
1295 *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,

1300 *halls hot in the swept fire^o*
 and the fierce lances.

HECUBA

STROPHE B

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
1305 *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

1310 *...a cry of pain, pain ...*

HECUBA

...under the slave's roof ...

CHORUS

...away from my country.

HECUBA

*Priam, my Priam. Dead,
graveless, forlorn,
you know not what they have done to me.*

CHORUS

1315 *Now dark, holy death
in the brutal butchery closed his eyes.*

HECUBA

ANTISTROPHE B

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

1320 *Ash as the skyward smoke wing
piled will blot from my sight the house where I lived once.*

CHORUS

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

(A loud crash is heard.)

HECUBA

Did you see, did you hear?

CHORUS

1325 *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:
1330 into the slave's life.*

CHORUS

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

(Exit all.)