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A Section

The Flawed System of the Greek Gods

The Trojan war was a vicious battle fought between the Greeks and the Trojans over the beautiful figure, Helen. This war took place over the span of ten years, but was extremely impactful to the Greek culture centuries later. Poets and authors were engrossed in the stories surrounding this war, which led to the production of countless works of literature. In the influential works, Book Six of the **Iliad**, written by Homer in c. 750 BC, and **The Women of Troy**, written by Euripides in c. 415 BC, the existing culture of the people, such as the Greek gods and their mythologies, was an integral part. However, the belief in the gods is flawed because of their pettiness, lack of compassion, and inability to deliver hope.

The flawed system of belief of the Greek gods is apparent in both the **Iliad** and **The Women of Troy** due to the pettiness of the gods. An instance in **The Women of Troy** that highlights this behavior is when Helen blames the war on the goddesses of Olympus in an attempt to divert the focus away from herself. She explains how Paris was made to judge between the three goddesses. Each goddess bribed Paris to choose her; Athena vowed military power, Hera promised the throne of Asia and Europe, and Aphrodite enticed with the offer of the most beautiful woman. After choosing Aphrodite, Paris was rewarded with Helen, who was already married to the King of Sparta. After Helen explains her side of the story, Hecabe responds with “I will vindicate the goddesses and show how [Helen] has slandered them. I don’t believe gods to be capable of such folly.” Hecabe’s disbelief of the idea that the gods act foolishly proves how their behavior is unlike the usual composure they are expected to maintain.

The paltry contest between the goddesses caused resentment towards the Trojans as well as unnecessary human conflict, which resulted in the Trojan War. The reckless actions of the goddesses for bragging rights is unscrupulous, and it runs contrary to the grace and compassion they are supposed to possess and teach to humans. In contrast, the characters in the **Iliad** are more sympathetic and selfless than the gods themselves. This is portrayed in the scene where Diomedes and Glaukos refrain from killing each other although they are on different sides of the battle. Diomedes says ““See now, you are my guest friend from far in the time of our fathers... Let us avoid each other’s spears, even in the close fighting”” to Glaukos. Diomedes and Glaukos choose to renew the ancient friendship between their families, which exemplifies the humility and honor that exists in humans. Those same characteristics are missing from the gods, which is apparent through their trifling arguments with each other. The disparity between the pettiness of the gods and the lack thereof in humans proves how the purpose of the Greek gods is blemished.

The actions of the Greek gods lack compassion and humility compared to the actions of the humans in **The Women of Troy**. This concept is proven by the goodness shown by the character Talthybius, who is the herald from the Achaean camp. He offers assistance and empathy towards the Trojans, who are the enemies of the Achaeans. He displays compassion towards Hecabe after she asks him about the well-being of her favorite daughter, Polyxena. Talthybius’s response to her dreaded question is simply ““Her fate is settled. She is free from suffering.”” This act by Talthybius is important because he shows sympathy towards Hecabe even though the majority of Achaeans despise the Trojans. He uses his free will to help, which is the exact opposite of what the Greek gods did in **The Women of Troy**. Talthybius’s kindness and humility towards the Trojans is an exemplar of modesty to the audience. Another example of his humility is shown in **The Women of Troy**, when Talthybius decides to bury Astyanax. He

informs Andromache about the ““One small task I have saved you... I bathed [Astyanax] in the running stream and cleaned his wounds. I am going now to break the ground for a grave.”” This honorable act of kindness by Talthibius is inspiring because not only does he take the burden of burying Astyanax upon his own shoulders instead of giving him back to Hecabe or leaving him to rot, but also because he defies the orders of the Greek by assisting the Trojans. His actions are not only a model for the audience to follow, but also a symbol of the virtuousness that all humans have the ability to possess. In contrast to Talthibius’s kindness, the gods are portrayed as villains with no consideration towards humans or one another. This idea is expressed in **The Women of Troy** by the Chorus when they cry ““Zeus our God, you have forsaken us; Given to Troy’s enemies temple and ritual.”” The betrayal of trust of the people of Troy by the gods causes resentment of the gods by the people because of the lack of divine intervention to save them from the perilous war. The gods display an absence of compassion by disregarding the prayers from their faithful believers’, which thus demonstrates the selfishness and cruelty they possess. The gods portrayed in **The Women of Troy** predominantly exhibit less benevolence than the mere mortal humans.

The Greek gods in both works of literature offer false hope to the humans when called upon. The gods show their passiveness towards mortals in the **Iliad** when the Trojan women pray to Athena hoping for a divine intervention to “have pity on the town of Troy, and the Trojan wives, and their innocent children.” However, “Pallas Athene turned her head from” the women because of her favoritism towards the Greeks. Athena disregards the prayers and gifts given to her by the Trojans who beg for help, which proves that the gods fail to perform their foremost duties: to provide hope to the mortals who are in jeopardy. Another instance where the gods are biased and unforgiving to mortals is found in **The Women of Troy**, when Hecabe questions the

gods in anguish, begging ““Gods! Gods! Where are you? – Why should I clamour to the gods? We called on them before, and not one heard us call.”” Hecabe cries in disbelief because she realizes that the gods have not heard her prayers or helped her throughout the war. Her pleas for help to the gods and the subsequent lack of assistance demonstrates just how unforgiving and harsh the gods are toward the people who are not in their favor. Because many of the gods chose the Greek side in the war, the Trojans were left with no means of having their prayers fulfilled. The belief in the Greek gods is flawed because they give false hope to the people they view as unfavorable.

The pettiness of the gods, their lack of compassion compared to humans, and inability to provide hope, demonstrate how the system of belief in the Greek gods is portrayed as crooked and flawed. The stories describe the listed negative qualities of the gods, which overshadow the positives greatly in both **The Women of Troy** and **Iliad**. The importance of recognizing the immorality and insignificance of the gods led to the deviation of the belief of gods. This divergence expanded into many advancements in areas such as philosophy and realism, which led to the progression of human kind.