

methuen | drama



EURIPIDES

THE  
WOMEN  
OF TROY

A version by Don Taylor



## The Women of Troy

**Euripides** was born near Athens between 485 and 480 BC and grew up during the years of Athenian recovery after the Persian Wars. His first play was presented in 455 BC and he wrote some hundred altogether. Nineteen survive – a greater number than those of Aeschylus and Sophocles combined – including *Alkestis*, *Medea*, *Bacchae*, *Hippolytos*, *Ion*, and *Iphigenia at Aulis*. His later plays are marked by a sense of disillusion at the futility of human aspiration which amounts on occasion to a philosophy of absurdism. A year or two before his death he left Athens to live at the court of the king of Macedon, dying there in 406 BC.

**Don Taylor** was a playwright and poet, and a director of theatre, television and radio plays. After leaving Oxford, he worked as drama director at the BBC, and between 1960 and 1990, he directed nearly a hundred television plays, the first works by David Mercer and Hugh Whitemore, as well as seventeen of his own original TV plays, and a number of large-scale classical productions of Shakespeare, Granville Barker, Arthur Miller, Sheridan, Bulgakov and Edward Bond. He translated and directed for BBC Television the Theban plays of Sophocles – *Oedipus the King*, *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. He followed this with translations of three Euripides war plays – *Iphigenia at Aulis* (directed by Katie Mitchell, initially at the Abbey Theatre in 2001 and at the National Theatre in 2004), *The Women of Troy* and *Helen*. He continued working in the theatre, directing Sir Anthony Quayle in his last *King Lear* and also in Gogol's *The Government Inspector* for Compass Theatre, of which he was co-director at the time. In 1996 he and Ellen Dryden set up First Writes Radio, an independent drama company, which continues to produce many original plays and adaptations of classic novels for BBC Radio. Don Taylor's many stage plays include *The Roses of Eyam*, *The Exorcism*, *Daughters of Venice*, *Brotherhood*,

*When the Actors Come, Retreat from Moscow, When the Barbarians Came,*  
and his last play, *The Road to the Sea*. He died in 2003.

*by the same author*

Euripides Plays: 1

(Medea, The Phoenician Women, Bacchae) Euripides Plays: 2  
(Cyclops, Hecuba, Iphigenia in Aulis, The Women of Troy) Euripides

Plays: 3

(Alkestis, Helen, Ion)

Euripides Plays: 4

(Elektra, Orestes, Iphigenia in Tauris) Euripides Plays: 5  
(Andromache, Herakles' Children, Herakles) Euripides Plays: 6  
(Hippolytos, Suppliants, Rhesos) *also translated by Don Taylor*

Iphigenia at Aulis

# Euripides

# **The Women of Troy**

*a version by*

**Don Taylor**

Bloomsbury Methuen Drama

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THE WOMEN OF TROY

Postscript: Reunion in Sarajevo



## Introduction

There has scarcely been any doubt what sort of play *The Women of Troy* is, nor of its central place in the repertoire as one of the masterpieces of Mediterranean civilisation. There are moments in the play which are almost unendurable to read, and must in the playing touch on emotions and levels of experience we would all rather not contemplate. One is reminded at times of the memoirs, on film and in print, of Auschwitz survivors, and the strangely compelled sense of horror that keeps us watching and reading.

The play's performance history is precise. Aelian, in *Varia Historia*, written at the beginning of the third century AD, says, 'In the first year of the ninety-first Olympiad [415 BC] Xenocles and Euripides competed against each other. Xenocles, whoever he may have been, won the first prize, with *Oedipus*, *Lycaon*, *Bacchae* and a satyr play *Athanas*. Euripides was second with *Alexander*, *Palamedes*, *The Women of Troy* and the satyr play *Sisyphus*.'

In the winter of 416-15, a few months before the play was presented, the Athenians had committed one of the many atrocities which disfigured the Peloponnesian War. They had laid siege to the Island of Melos, which had refused to join the Athenian alliance, and when the defenders capitulated, the Athenians murdered all the men of military age, down to boys of fifteen, and enslaved all the women. It has always been assumed that *The Women of Troy* is Euripides' attack on his fellow citizens for that dreadful act, and no doubt the assumption is correct. Certainly it must have been a subversive work, not only for its comment on the Melian massacre, but also for its implied criticism of the Sicilian invasion. The great fleet was assembling as Euripides' play was presented, and the prophecy of disaster on the Greek fleet returning from Troy, because they had dishonoured the gods' temples in sacking the city, must have seemed the worst possible omen for the Sicilian expedition. Everybody knew the Homeric story, that the returning Greek fleet was scattered in a storm, that most were drowned and many of the rest never reached their homes for many years, and in his opening scene Euripides strongly emphasises this aspect of the story. It really isn't surprising that he came second to Xenocles in those circumstances. We

might be tempted to think it even more surprising that his play was accepted at all. Of course, there is no way of knowing where the Archon's sympathies lay when he accepted Euripides' trilogy, nor that he saw how politically relevant the piece might seem in performance: though the Chorus's praise of the men of Sicily for their bravery and their integrity can hardly have been misinterpreted. It is as clear a warning as the Athenians were likely to get from one of their tragedians.

But the fact is that it didn't need the Melian massacre to inspire the play. The history of the war had been full of such atrocities: the execution of the Plataean conspirators after they had surrendered on terms in 431 at the very beginning of the conflict; the slaughter of the whole Plataean garrison, followed by the enslaving of the women and reducing the city to ashes when it finally fell to the Thebans and Spartans in 427; the murder of a thousand prisoners at Mitylene, also in 427; the slaughter of the whole male population of Scione in 421; the list goes on and on. It was a war conducted with little mercy on either side, and considering the small forces involved, with much bloodshed. Thucydides makes it clear Euripides' warning voice was not heard. In 413, a party of Thracians arriving too late to join the reinforcement convoy for Sicily were sent back home under an Athenian commander, with instructions to do as much damage as possible. They sailed up the Euripes, murdering and laying waste to Euboea as they went, and then crossed over into Boeotia to the city of Mycalessus where they 'sacked the houses and temples, and butchered the inhabitants, sparing neither the young nor the old, but methodically killing everyone they met, women and children alike, and even the farm animals, and every living thing they saw . . . Among other things they broke into a boys' school, the largest in the place, into which the children had just entered, and killed every one of them.' No doubt the Melos massacre was in the front of Euripides' mind, but what he was describing was behaviour that was commonplace, not exceptional.

Without the other two tragedies that comprised the trilogy we can't be sure, but it seems likely that Euripides composed a powerful protest cycle, probably with a quite clear political purpose. There was an impassioned debate in Athens about the wisdom of the Sicilian expedition, which was not only foolhardy in itself, but a stepping-up of the war, which had lain mostly dormant for about five years. What could be more likely than that Euripides was one of those Athenians who were against restarting the war,

and against the Sicilian expedition, and that he used the horror and guilt that must have existed in some men's minds about the recent slaughter on Melos as a powerful reminder of what war really meant in human terms? There is no evidence at all as to what part political influence played in the presentation of plays at the City Dionysia, but the plays deal so regularly with the ethical questions that are the basis of political decisions that it must have been considerable. The comedies of Aristophanes are openly political, even naming names, and it seems likely that the tragedies too, in their serious manner, considered political issues and perhaps even glanced at political personalities. More than one scholar has suggested that Sophocles' Oedipus might be a portrait of Pericles, and other similar attributions have been guessed at from time to time. Certainly it is inconceivable that Euripides could have presented such a subversive play, one likely to cause such fury among the supporters of a renewed war, off his own bat. He must have had powerful friends, beyond the producer who financed him, who were able to get the Archon's ear to ensure that Euripides' project was selected out of the doubtless many others presented. And the debate in Athens must have been reasonably evenly balanced too. If the anti-war party were in a small minority, would the play have been allowed, when the likelihood was that it would offend the majority of the audience? As with so many fascinating questions about Greek drama, we simply don't know. All we do know is that it was presented, so the Archon must have thought it, for whatever reasons, suitable material for the Dionysiac festival; and that it didn't win.

Whatever the truth of that, I suspect a good many people got more than they bargained for. There is a relentless quality, a harshness in *The Women of Troy* that leaves no room for compromise. The play's principal subject is the agony of war, the fact that it causes mass death, separation of loved ones, slavery and suffering. Euripides confronts us mercilessly with this unavoidable truth. There is hardly a word anywhere in the play about the glories of war, the manliness of conquest, still a genuine ideal in the Classical Age, only a eulogy of the dead Hector, as an attempt by the defeated Trojans to grasp some shred of dignity out of their disaster. Beyond that, the whole play is a heightened lament, the death song of a city, a culture, a whole population. Troy clearly stands in for all of us. It is civilisation that is going down in blood and fire, not just a city.

It is significant that the play has no messenger speech: but what is there to report? The catastrophe is being enacted in front of our eyes, not offstage. For a great master at the height of his powers, form is a servant not a master, a way of enabling him to express what has to be expressed, a structure that liberates rather than restricts.

Within the general picture of the horrors of war, there are three moments of unflinching precision, things which we know are part of human experience when men get weapons in their hands, but which in the normal run of things we prefer not to confront. The first is the dragging out of the incoherent prophetess Cassandra, the sanctified virgin whom even the god Apollo won't touch, to be Agamemnon's whore. Euripides spares us nothing here, not even the sexual perversity that we might think is our particular modern subject. Agamemnon is hot for Cassandra because she is a sanctified virgin. It is the very fact that she is forbidden that makes him desperate to have her, liberating the dark sexual fantasy that makes men want to rape nuns. In Greek classical culture the symbol is even more powerful, a blasphemy that dares to sully what the gods have decreed pure. It stands in for all the shameful desires that are unloosed when men let their savage fantasies usurp reason, and become creatures of appetite. We already know what this will cost Agamemnon. The two gods at the beginning of the play have sworn vengeance on the Greeks for precisely this reason, the dishonouring of their temples, and all the varieties of degraded behaviour that symbol represents. The inspired, raving Cassandra, after her grotesque parody of a marriage hymn, prophesies the horrors that will fall on the House of Atreus as a result of Agamemnon's blasphemy, but in truth we hardly need to be told that no good will come of it. An action beyond the bounds of decent human behaviour is being enacted before our eyes, and we are in no doubt that retribution will follow.

The second precisely delineated moment of horror is the tearing of the child Astyanax from his mother's bosom. In production, this almost goes beyond the bounds of the bearable, and a passionate actress playing Andromache can create a moment of horror as powerful as the blinding of Gloucester in *King Lear*, or the stoning of the baby in *Saved*. As we might expect, the officer in charge is a decent enough fellow, disgusted by the job he has been given to do. Talthybius is a very recognisable chap, with a suburban semi, no doubt, and two point five children, kind to his friends, who wouldn't hurt a fly. They always are. He hates what he has to do, he

says so, and we believe him. But he does it. Talthybius is a very modern seeming character, and in a sense, without thinking too deeply about it, we have come to assume men like him are our age's particular creation. The family man who runs a concentration camp, the state torturer who goes home at six and plays with his children, the policeman who beats up his victims to extract false confessions and then goes for a relaxing pint in the local, all these figures we claim as our own, together with the murderers who defend themselves by saying that they were only obeying the orders of their superiors. But Euripides was there a long way before us. It is his very decency that makes Talthybius such a powerful creation. He is like us, he knows these things are wrong and should not be happening. Yet it is he who commands the party that seizes Cassandra and drags her off to Agamemnon, shaking his head in disapproval all the while; it is he who orders his guards to tear the boy Astyanax by force from his mother's arms, and supervises his killing; and it is he who brings the dead boy back on Hector's shield, having washed the blood from his shattered body. He is a kind hearted fellow, does everything he can to ease the women's grief for the boy, arranges a decent burial, no doubt wipes away a tear or two himself. But what he actually does is to allow himself to be the instrument that enacts the play's two principal atrocities. He truly is the man who wipes away the blood, who tries to make the crime look decent, who hides the wounds.

When he leaves Hecuba with her dead grandson, cradled in her dead son's shield, the play lifts off into immortality. Hecuba's lament is the greatest speech in the whole canon of Greek tragedy, its power surviving every kind of translation, from the most clumsy or old-fashioned to the most prosaically modern. Confronting it, every translator feels the presence of its author very near and is tempted to say, 'Dear old friend, I'll do the best I can for you, but I need to be Shakespeare!' The part is one of the great peaks of the female repertoire. Any actress who can get anywhere near the summit of Hecuba is by definition one of the mistresses of her craft, and it is this heartrending speech, this third moment of horror precisely delineated, that is the greatest test and the greatest opportunity. In it, Hecuba speaks for every woman in history who has ever lost a loved one in war, and particularly for the unnatural sorrow of an old woman grieving for a young life destroyed before it has had the opportunity to live. Even beyond that, she speaks for all of us, regardless of sex, as Lear does,

protesting against the pain and injustice of existence, and the agony of the suffering that human beings inflict upon their own kind. Reading her grief is like standing at the Nations' memorial at Auschwitz, confronting the grave slabs all carrying the same message in so many languages, listening to the wind jangling the ropes on the metal flagpole. It is to bear witness at the graveyard of the human spirit, head bowed in apology.

The play is a sustained lyrical poem of grief, a dark cloud heightened by stabs of terrifying lightning; but as you would expect with Euripides, savage irony is present too. In the debate that invariably constitutes the central section of a play by Euripides, Menelaus comes to seize Helen, the woman who caused the war, and who is in that sense the author of all the suffering we are witnessing. Euripides gives us a masterly character-study as well as an exercise in forensic rhetoric, as Helen argues for her life. When Menelaus enters, he intends to kill her on the spot. Helen too is scared, seeing summary execution very close at hand. By the end of the scene Helen has not only managed to persuade him to put off all punishment till they arrive in Sparta, she has gone half way to convincing him of her own innocence. Menelaus, prompted by Hecuba, who has seen Helen at work many times before, has at least agreed that they shall sail back to Sparta in different ships, but how long do we believe that arrangement will last? Between the ruins and the beach Helen will surely wheedle him into letting her share his vessel, and eventually his bed. Even before the scene has ended it is clear that he is lost, as much her sexual slave as he was ten years before, when he called up his Greek compatriots and launched a war for her sake. The power of Helen verges on the awesome, the divine. She is destructive Aphrodite in human form, and men will kill, torture, destroy and abase themselves for the chance to kiss her skirt hem.

The destructive power of instinct is one of Euripides' central themes. In the rational Greek world, he was the great affirmer of the power of the irrational, and he wrote two of his greatest plays, *Hippolytus* and *Bacchae*, to dramatise its destructive force. In this play too, it is clear that the goddess Helen/Aphrodite is going to have her way, but that is not the central matter being considered here. Euripides did not need to include a scene with Helen, or any of this material. He chose to do so, not simply to dramatise the irrational power of sexual love, but to demonstrate the essential pointlessness of all the suffering we have seen enacted and heard described

in the play. Helen will not be punished, she and Menelaus will live in Sparta as before. So the war's great end has apparently been accomplished. But was it worth it? Is that why all those men, a whole civilisation, died? So that Helen can twist Menelaus round her little finger, just as she has done before our eyes? Euripides not only confronts us with the suffering, but also with a question. If this is what we do to each other, and for this reason, can it possibly be worth it?

It is a question that must have echoed in a good many Athenian minds as they went down between the Long Walls to Piraeus and saw the great Sicilian task force assembling in the bay.

Don Taylor  
*from The War Plays*

# **The Women of Troy**



This version of *The Women of Troy* was adapted and presented in the Lyttelton auditorium of the National Theatre on 21 November 2007. The cast was as follows:

<b>Chorus</b>	Rachel Clarke
<b>Chorus</b>	Pandora Colin
<b>Hecuba</b>	Kate Duchêne
<b>Chorus</b>	Laura Elphinstone
<b>Chorus</b>	Beth Fitzgerald
<b>Talthybius</b>	Michael Gould
<b>Andromache</b>	Anastasia Hille
<b>Soldier</b>	Mark Holgate
<b>Menelaus</b>	Stephen Kennedy
<b>Chorus</b>	Helena Lymbery
<b>Cassandra</b>	Sinead Matthews
<b>Chorus</b>	Penelope McGhie
<b>Chorus</b>	Charlotte Roach
<b>Soldier</b>	Jonah Russell
<b>Helen</b>	Susie Trayling
<i>Director</i>	Katie Mitchell
<i>Set Designer</i>	Bunny Christie
<i>Costume Designer</i>	Vicki Mortimer
<i>Lighting Designers</i>	Paule Constable and John Clark
<i>Movement and Choreography</i>	Struan Leslie
<i>Sound Designer</i>	Gareth Fry

For further information about the National Theatre's production and resources on the play, visit <http://www.stagework.org>.

## **Characters**

**Poseidon**, god of the sea **Athene**, goddess of wisdom **Hecuba**, widow of Priam, King of Troy **Cassandra**, their daughter, a prophetess **Andromache**, their daughter in law, widow of Hector **Talthybius**, a Greek officer **Menelaus**, King of Sparta **Helen**, his wife **Chorus** of Trojan women, captured, and soon to be enslaved **Astyanax**, a small boy, Hector's son (non-speaking) **Greek Soldiers**

*The ruins of Troy. Hecuba is lying face down and quite still. Enter the god Poseidon.*

### **Poseidon**

I have come here from the bottom of the sea, The salt waters of the Aegean, where the daughters Of Nereus, fifty sea-nymphs in chorus, Circle in their intricate and beautiful dance.

My name is Poseidon. I am a god.

I built this city – with Apollo I built it – Every stone we laid, every tower,

Even the walls we dressed and levelled With plumb line and mason's square.

So I've always had a particular love For this city of the Phrygians: and look at it now: A smoking ruin, devastated by the power Of the Greek war machine. A Phocian inventor By the name of Epeios, who lived on Parnassus, With skills he learned from Athene, and probably With her help, designed and built

A horse, whose capacious belly was pregnant With armed commandos, and managed to get it – Together with its murderous payload – Inside the walls; so that no one

In the future will ever forget the stratagem That goes by the name of the Wooden Horse, Nor the ferocious strike force it concealed.

And now, the temple gardens are deserted, And puddles of blood smear the sanctuaries Of all the gods. King Priam lies dead On the steps of the temple of Zeus protector Of the city. More gold than can be counted And anything soldiers can loot finds its way Down to the Greek ships; and all

They're waiting for now is a following wind, So that after ten years, and ten sowing seasons, They can joyfully set eyes on their wives and children, These Greeks, who brought an army to sack Troy!

As for me, I have been defeated

Too, by Athene, and Hera, goddesses Who supported the Greeks, and who, between them, Have utterly devastated this city of the Phrygians.

So now I too shall desert famous Troy, And all those altars and temples  
raised In my name. For when a town  
Is destroyed, and becomes a wilderness, All worship ceases, and  
there's no longer Anything left worth a god's consideration.  
Now the riverbank of the Scamander echoes With the screams and  
moans of captured women, As various Greek lords draw lots for  
them And they become their slaves. Arcadian Princes draw some,  
Thessalians others, And the Princes of Athens, Theseus'  
descendants, Get their share. All the women  
Of Troy who've not yet been allocated Are in this building here.  
They've been reserved For the leaders of the Greek army. And with  
them, A prisoner, like the rest – and quite right too – Is the Spartan  
daughter of Tyndareus, Helen.  
But to see the true face of misery  
You need to look no further than the poor creature Lying here, in front  
of the gate, Hecuba, Whose unnumbered tears match the numberless  
dead She grieves for. Her daughter, Polyxena, Has been secretly and  
brutally murdered At the tomb of Achilles, in payment for his death.  
Priam is dead too, and her sons by him: And her daughter Cassandra,  
the frenzied visionary Whom even the god Apollo left  
Untouched as a virgin, Agamemnon  
Intends to make his concubine –  
A dangerous business, best kept in the dark, That flouts all religious  
feeling.  
Well then, most prosperous of cities, home Of the rich and fortunate,  
time to say goodbye!  
Shining towers and citadels, farewell for ever.  
If Pallas Athene, daughter of Zeus, Had not determined to destroy you,  
your foundations Would be as firm and solid as ever they were.

*Enter Athene.*

**Athene**

May our old antagonism be forgotten?  
I have something to say to you, brother of my father, Great god as you  
are, whom other gods honour.

**Poseidon**

Certainly it may. We are blood relations, Queen Athene, and that warms my heart.

**Athene**

You are generous to say so. The question at issue is a matter of equal concern to us both.

**Poseidon**

What is it? Some new dispensation from the gods?  
From Zeus himself? Or some other divinity?

**Athene**

No, it concerns Troy, on whose ground we now stand.  
I want to make a pact: join your power to mine.

**Poseidon**

Is that so? You pity your ancient enemy now, You see her a smoke  
blackened ruin, do you?

**Athene**

That's not the point. First, give me your answer.  
Will you join me, and help to carry out my plan?

**Poseidon**

By all means. Though I'd be glad to know what it is.  
Are you helping the Greeks now, or the Trojans?

**Athene**

My former enemies, the Trojans, will be comforted.  
I shall make the Greeks' return home a disaster.

**Poseidon**

A somewhat cavalier change of mind, surely?  
Are you usually so casual whom you love or hate?

**Athene**

Haven't you heard. I've been insulted, my temple desecrated!

**Poseidon**

Yes, I know. When Ajax dragged Cassandra from sanctuary.

**Athene**

The Greeks didn't punish him. Not even a reprimand.

**Poseidon**

When your power had enabled them to bring Troy to its knees!

**Athene**

I shall punish them for that. With your help.

**Poseidon**

I'm entirely at your service. What can I do?

**Athene**

I want their voyage home to be complete disaster.

**Poseidon**

Before they set sail? Or out at sea?

**Athene**

When they've left Troy and are nearing home.

Zeus has promised me a savage hail storm, Torrential rain and gale force winds In the middle of the night. And he's given me The use of his thunderbolts, to strike the Greek ships With lightning, and burn them at sea.

Your task will be to make the Aegean Heave with mountainous waves, every third wave even higher Than the rest, and swirl and eddy the salt waters With dangerous whirlpools, and fill The whole bay of Euboea with floating corpses So thick you could walk on them. So that the Greeks Will learn their lesson, and in future, respect My temples, and fear the power of the gods.

**Poseidon**

Athene, you need not waste more words, I shall do that with pleasure.

The whole Aegean From the shores of Mykonos and the rocks of  
Delos To Skyros and Lemnos and the headlands of Capheria And  
the open salt sea, I shall whip up to a foam, So that the number of  
the drowned will be beyond counting.

You get off to Olympus now, get hold Of the thunderbolts, and watch  
your opportunity When the Greek fleet casts off for home.

When a man sacks a town and destroys everything, Even sacred  
temples and the tombs of the dead, He's asking for trouble. The  
same destruction Sooner or later, will fall on his own head.

*Exeunt **Athene and Poseidon.***

**Hecuba**

Lift up your head from the dust,



Heave up from the earth  
The weight of your misery, you whom the gods have cursed.  
Troy has ceased to exist: and we, by birth Troy's Kings and Queens,  
rule nothing now.  
The old life is gone, old gods, old hearth And home, destroyed. We  
must endure it, flow With the stream, let the new wind fill our sail,  
Not breast a running tide with our fragile prow.  
Oh, weep, weep, for my burning home, howl For my children dead, for  
my husband dead, the boast Of my noble family, empty as a sail  
when the winds fall.

Some agonies are beyond telling,  
And some must be told.  
Let my stretched limbs shake with it then, this keening, On my rack of  
pain, my bed of cold  
Stone. My temples are throbbing, my head Will burst, my heart shatters  
the walled Prison of my breast. Oh to sway, flow, lifted By the  
gentle rocking of a boat, to keep time With the dirge I must sing  
now, the song of the dead, My threnody of tears. This is the only  
theme For the black clad Muse of the destroyed, no dancing Can  
express it, dissonant music, harsh rhyme.

Oh you ships, whose sharp prows

Cut the purple sea  
As your oars pulled in a cloud of spray From the sanctuary  
Of the harbours of Greece, till your bows Grounded in the bay of Troy,  
sad Troy, Ominous your flutes' bleak song,  
Your pipes' deathlike cry  
As on taut Egyptian cables you swung At your moorings at Troy, sad  
Troy, Like hunters on the scent  
Of Menelaus' Helen, born to dismay  
Her brother Castor, and bring  
Shame to the banks of Eurotas, you brought Death to Priam whose  
seed bred fifty sons, a headlong Fall to suffering Hecuba, and a  
broken heart.

Look at me now, throned in the dust By Agamemnon's tentflap,  
An old woman, dragged as a slave  
From my home, all hope  
Plundered from my god-cursed  
Ravaged grey head, with no reprieve From my punishment of  
everlasting sorrow.

Weep, wives of the bronze armoured Trojans, grieve For your heroes  
dead, daughters, harrow The clouds with your tears for husbands  
lost!

Troy is burning.

Like the mother bird at her plundered nest, My song has become a  
scream, no music can I borrow From the stately dance or the solemn  
psalming To the gods of Troy I sang among the women, nor the  
slow Rhythm I began, Priam's sceptre in my hand, when I led the  
dancing.

*Enter the* **Chorus.**

### **Chorus**

Hecuba, did you shout aloud,  
Or was it a howl of agony?  
How far did it carry? Through the walls we heard A sound that made  
us shiver in our misery As we hid in the ruins, wretched women of

Troy, Facing a life of slavery.

**Hecuba**

My women, my girls, already the Greeks deploy  
Their ships, their hands reach for the oars!

**Chorus**

No, no! Will they really drag us away  
From our homes, and ship us overseas to theirs?

**Hecuba**

I know nothing: but sense that the worst will come.

**Chorus**

I can't bear it! Soon we will hear them shout, 'Get moving, you Trojan women, hey, slave, Kiss your home goodbye, and now, move out And get on board. We're sailing for home!'

**Hecuba**

But not Cassandra, not her, dear heaven, leave That child inside, my god-crazed daughter In her visionary ecstasy.  
Don't let the Greek soldiers deport her, Not a poor mad girl. How can I grieve More than I do, is there more pain for me?  
Oh Troy, you are lost.  
We all leave you now. And whose misery Is greater, the dead, whose day is passed,  
Or the living, who must live in slavery?

**Chorus**

I'm so frightened, look, I'm shaking with terror!  
I crept from Agamemnon's tents, dear Queen, When I heard you cry out. What new horror Must I suffer? Surely the Greeks don't mean To kill me here? Are they mustering at their ships, Getting ready to row, in groups by the stern?

**Hecuba**

My children, a blasted mind never sleeps.

I came out here at dawn. But there's no relief.

**Chorus**

Is there any decision? No message from the Greeks  
About the slave allocation? Who'll be master of my grief?

**Hecuba**

It won't be long now till you hear the worst.

**Chorus**

I can't bear it. Who will it be, which lord  
Of the Greeks will carry me over the sea  
To Argos, or Phthia, or some bleak island  
Far, far from Troy, one of the accursed!

**Hecuba**

Oh you gods, where in my misery  
Shall I go, what corner of the earth  
Shall I burden with my old age,  
Like a drone in the hive, or an image of death  
Still in the flesh: a shadow from the country  
Of forgotten shadows? I'll be a concierge,  
They'll sit me at the outer gate,  
Or in the nursery with the children, in the entourage  
Of some Greek Princeling: I, who in Troy held my state  
As a Queen, half divine, with Kings to pay me homage!

**Chorus**

Oh the pity of it, the pity! What words,  
What howling, can give tongue to a pain  
No animal could endure!  
Never again in the shadow  
Of Mount Ida will these hands of mine  
Pass the shuttle back and forth between the threads  
As I sit at my loom. For the last time I harrow  
My heart with the sight of my dead sons,  
The last time, before greater sorrow  
Overwhelms me, and my slavery begins:  
Perhaps forced into the bed of some loathsome  
Greek, - Gods curse such a night, and the evil  
Powers that bring me to it! - Or maybe my slave's back  
Will break drawing holy water from Peirene.  
O, Athens, God-favoured city of Theseus,  
may I come to you, not grovel  
By the turbulent Eurotas, at Menelaus' mercy,  
part of Helen's Loathed household, under the Troy-sacker's heel!

I have heard men say that the foothills Of Peneius, beneath Olympus,  
are famous for their wealth And the fertility of their green fields.

There, of all places on earth,

Would be my second choice, after the sacred halls Of Athens. And the  
land of Mount Etna, which scalds Its slopes with Hephaestos' fire,  
the mountain homeland Of Sicily, across the strait from Tunis, holds  
Pride of place for integrity, and is renowned For its brave men. And  
there is a secluded valley They tell me, watered by a beautiful river  
Named Crathis, close to the Ionian sea, Whose dark streams, like  
hair, as they flow become reddened Into the richest gold. Its springs  
are sacred, and for ever Blessed with plenty is that valley, breeding  
heroes hardened For war. I'd be happy enough to live there.

But look: a staff officer of the Greek army Has some news for us. I can  
see him hurrying At a brisk march in our direction.

What will he tell us? What more worth saying?

The Dorian Greeks have reduced us to slavery.

*Enter Talthybius with guards.*

**Talthybius**

Hecuba . . . you are not unaware that on many occasions As officer in  
charge of negotiations, or outlining our proposals, I have come here  
from the Greek camp. So I'm no stranger – Talthybius, you may  
remember me – I have some news for you.

**Hecuba**

This is it my dears, what we've feared for so long . . .

**Talthybius**

You've been allocated to your masters . . . if that's what you're afraid  
of.

**Hecuba**

Aieeeee . . .! Where then? Phthia? Somewhere else in Thessaly?  
Or is it to be Thebes, Cadmus' city?

**Talthybius**

You are allocated separately: not all together.

**Hecuba**

So who goes to whom? Which of the women of Troy Has been lucky,  
and will dance for joy?

**Talthybius**

The fact is . . . ask one at a time, not all at once . . .

**Hecuba**

My poor child, who has won her, Cassandra, My god stricken  
daughter?

**Talthybius**

Agamemnon made a special note of her, and took her for himself.

**Hecuba**

Ah God! – Must she be slave to his Spartan wife, Her bondservant for  
life?

**Talthybius**

Not at all, she's for him. In darkness. In his bed.

**Hecuba**

What! She is a consecrated virgin, Apollo's nun.  
Lifelong virginity she was promised, by Zeus' golden-haired son!

**Talthybius**

He wants her *because* she's sacred. He's shot through with lust.

**Hecuba**

Throw away the keys of the temple, my child, Strip off your sacred  
habit,  
Trample the flowers on the ground!

**Talthybius**

Now look here, to be a King's mistress is no bad thing.

**Hecuba**

And my youngest child, where's she? You tore her from my arms.

**Talthybius**

Polyxena, you mean ... or is it someone else?

**Hecuba**

Yes. Who gets her by the luck of the draw?

**Talthybius**

She is to serve Achilles, at his tomb.

**Hecuba**

Dear heavens, must a child I bore

Be a servant at a tomb?

Is this a custom among you Greeks, my friend, or some new law?

**Talthybius**

Consider your child fortunate. All's well with her.

**Hecuba**

What does that mean? She is alive? Is she?

**Talthybius**

Her fate is settled. All her troubles are over.

**Hecuba**

And the wife of Hector, the incomparable warrior?

What happens to Andromache? What Greek draws her?

**Talthybius**

She was chosen specially, by the son of Achilles.

**Hecuba**

And whose slave am I? Grey-haired Hecuba.

Who needs a stick as a third foot to support her?

**Talthybius**

Odysseus, King of Ithaca, drew you, as his slave.

**Hecuba**

Ah . . . pain, and still more pain . . . !

Let me tear the hair in handfuls from my head, Plough my face with  
my nails, till the wrinkles run red, Still agony, and greater agony . .  
.!

I've drawn the shortest straw, even worse than I feared To be the  
slave of a man without morality, A liar, a deceiver, to whom laws of  
gods and men Mean nothing, whose animal appetite Savages all  
decency, and whose double tongue Twists truth into lies, friendship  
to enmity!

Weep for me, women of Troy, this last lottery of fate Will be the end of  
me. Veil me in shadows, I belong In the deepest pit of misery.

**Chorus**

We know the worst now for you, dear Queen, But which of the Greeks  
has my future in his power?

**Talthybius**

All right you men, guard detachment, Go in there and bring Cassandra  
out.

And move it! When I've handed her over To the Commander-in-Chief,  
I can take the rest Of you enslaved women to your masters,  
According to the allocation. Hey . . . ! What's that?

Have they got lighted torches in there?

Are they setting fire to the place, or what?

These Trojan women, just because we're taking them From their  
homes across to Argos . . . dear God, Are they trying to commit  
suicide in there, Setting light to themselves? To tell the truth, These  
are a proud people. In circumstances like these They don't take  
kindly to humiliation.

All right, open up, open up in there!



It may suit their dignity to insult the Greeks  
Like this, but I shall have  
to carry the can.

**Hecuba**

No, no one's setting fire to anything. It's my poor Manic daughter,  
Cassandra, she's running out here . . .!

*Enter Cassandra.*

**Cassandra**

Hold it up, the torch, take it, let it flame Higher, oh hold it higher!

Let it burn everything sacred to Apollo!

Hymen, god of marriage, hallow

The bridegroom and his desire,

And bless me, the bride, and my new home, The royal bedroom of

Argos! Hymen, bless my wedding, As I glorify you with my  
singing!

You, Mother, you sing

For my father murdered, our city

Destroyed, a sad keening song,

Dirge for our country!

But I fired these torches, illuminating My holy wedding feast, a blazing  
light To celebrate the marriage of virginity, And Hymen, god of lust,  
and the dark night Of Hecate, the consecrated virgin's deflowering!

Begin the dance then, let our feet take wing, float higher In ecstasy, ah,  
ecstasy,

As if this were a feast in celebration Of my father's good luck, the  
zenith of his fortune!

This ritual dance is holy,

God Apollo, lead us to your altar

Under the laurel tree, where I dedicated my life.

Now, Hymen, god of marriage, make me a good wife!

Dance, Mother, dance with me!

You should be laughing. Let your flying feet Keep time with mine,  
whirling in ecstasy Faster and faster, and shout,

Shout, Mother, the old songs of matrimony!  
Sing, sing, women of Troy,  
Put on your most glittering dresses, celebrate The virgin's lucky  
marriage! I shall enjoy A husband bedded by the hand of destiny!

### **Chorus**

Dear Queen, your daughter's possessed! Hold on to her, Or she'll  
dance her way right down to the Greek camp.

### **Hecuba**

Oh Hephaestos, you gave flaming torches To mortal men, to carry in  
honour of marriage.  
But these torches are a grotesque parody Of everything I hoped for for  
my daughter.  
Oh my dear child, when I dreamed of your marriage I never imagined  
it would be like this, thrust At spear-point into some Greek's bed As  
a slave of his lust! Give me the torch, Poor child, you're not fit to  
carry anything burning In your half-crazed state. All this suffering  
Hasn't brought you to your senses, has it, You're just as much a  
poor mad thing As you ever were. Here, women of Troy, Take these  
torches back inside,  
And let her dreadful parody of a wedding song Be drowned by the  
sound of your tears.

### **Cassandra**

Mother, you must cover my hair with flowers, A victory crown to  
celebrate my triumph, Marrying a King. You must lead me to him,  
And if I don't seem overwhelmed at the prospect, Take no notice,  
give me a good shove, Force me, by violence, if you have to!  
Because, if the god Apollo exists  
At all, then Agamemnon, the world famous leader Of the Greeks, will  
find me more destructive As a wife than ever Helen was!  
Because I'll kill him, and destroy his whole family In return for my  
father and brothers destroyed.  
But that's enough. No more now. Some things Are best passed over in  
silence. Why should I sing Prophetic songs about the axe that will

sever my neck, And some other necks too? Or the son Murdering  
the mother, or the total annihilation Of the House of Atreus, all the  
rich fruit Which the tree of my marriage will bear!

Look! Let me tell you. This city of Troy Is far happier than the whole  
nation of the Greeks: And I'll prove it to you. Yes, I'm possessed,  
Inspired, call it what you like. But, For one moment, let me stand  
outside This god drunken ecstasy, and speak As though my voice  
were my own. These Greeks, For the sake of one woman, and one  
moment Of uncontrollable lust, sent a hunting party To track down  
Helen, to smoke her out, And it cost them tens of thousands dead!

And their oh-so-wise Commander, to achieve What he hated most, lose  
what he loved most, Giving up the pleasure of his family and  
children For the sake of his brother Menelaus' wife, Who was not  
dragged away from her home by force, But ran away and was  
unfaithful, because she wanted to!

And when they came here, to the banks of Scamander, These Greeks,  
then they began to die, And they kept on dying. And for what  
reason?

They weren't being robbed, they weren't being invaded, They didn't  
see the towers and battlements Of their homeland being occupied.

And those who became the war god's victims Had forgotten what their  
children looked like.

They weren't washed and shrouded and laid to rest By their wives'  
loving hands: and now Their bodies lie forgotten in a foreign  
country.

And things were no better at home. Their women Died in the loneliness  
of widowhood, Their fathers became childless old men, Who had  
bred up their sons . . . for nothing, To lie in a distant country, with  
no relatives To honour them and make sacrifices at their graves.

Oh yes, the whole Greek nation

Has a great deal to thank their army for!

There were other things too, terrible things, Things better left unsaid,  
not fit

To be spoken by the tongue of a consecrated virgin.

But our Trojans! What a contrast there! They won The greatest of all  
glories. They died Fighting for their fatherland! And if an enemy

spear Found its target, and in a moment made a living man  
Into a corpse, that man was carried from the field  
By his own platoon, the earth that covered him  
Was the sacred soil of the land of his fathers.  
The hands that wrapped him in his shroud  
Were the right hands, according to the customs  
Of burial in our country. And those Trojan  
soldiers Who didn't die in battle, lived at home,  
Spending every day with their wives and children,  
The simplest of pleasures, denied to the Greeks.

And when you grieve for Hector, remember this.

Listen to me now, because this is the truth.

He proved, in action, he was the greatest of men.

And now he is gone. Dead. And all this  
Has been the direct result of the coming of the Greeks.

Supposing they had stayed at home? We would never  
Have seen Hector's glory, all that brightness  
Would have remained hidden! And Paris. He married  
The daughter of Zeus. If he hadn't married her  
Who would have sung songs in his honour in our palaces?

Any sensible man must hate war,

He does his best to avoid it. But if it should come,  
Even if it should end like this, it is no shame  
For a city, indeed, it is a crown of honour  
To die nobly, with dignity. The really shameful thing  
Is to die dishonourably, ignobly, without pride.

So you see, Mother, you need not pity our country,  
Nor weep for my 'marriage'. Think of those  
We hate the most, you and I,

And be sure, that by means of this marriage of mine  
I shall destroy them.

### **Chorus**

You make light of all these horrors, and laugh at your own pain,  
The disasters you prophesy are fantasies. They won't happen.

### **Talthybius**

If it weren't for the fact that your devotion  
To Apollo has left you mentally disturbed,  
You would be severely punished for cursing our  
Generals Like that, just as they are about to set sail.

It's surprising how often those that seem the wisest And of the highest regard, do things which show them To be something a good deal less. The greatest, The most powerful General in the Greek army, The son of Atreus himself, has let uncontrollable lust For this madwoman get the better of him.

I'm a poor man. But there's no way I'd let her anywhere near my bed!

And as for you. Since you're out of your mind, We'll let your insults to the Greeks, and ridiculously Overblown compliments to your own side, float away On the breeze, with the breath that uttered them.

Come on then, follow me, it's time

You were getting on board. What a lovely bride For my Commander-in-Chief! And you, Hecuba, You can follow us down where Laertes' son Comes to get you. You'll be his wife's slave, Penelope. She's a decent, sensible woman.

You won't find a Greek at Troy to say otherwise.

### **Chorus**

What a clever fellow he is,  
This underling! Officers of your kind Are always hated by everyone,  
lackeys.

Slaves yourselves, doing great men's dirty work.

You say my mother will be taken from here To Odysseus' palace. But what about the words Of Apollo, spoken through my mouth?

They say that she will die here,  
And other things, about her death,

Too terrible to be spoken. And as for Odysseus, What can I say about his sufferings, Except that what I suffer, and what Troy suffers Will one day seem like a golden age To him? He will add ten further years To the ten years he has spent here

Before he reaches his fatherland,  
And he'll reach it alone. He will have endured The terrifying passage through the rocky gorge Of Charybdis, and the mountain pastures Of the Cyclops, who eats human flesh.

On the Ligurian coast he will meet the witch Circe, who turns men into pigs;

He will be shipwrecked more than once In the open sea, and have to  
face

The seductive desire for oblivion  
In the drugged land of the Lotus eaters, And the sacred oxen of the sun  
god, Whose slaughtered and jointed flesh will moan Like a human  
being in pain, a sound To strike terror into Odysseus' breast.  
Finally, to cut short this catalogue of horrors, He will pass through  
Hell, while still alive, And after crossing the marshes of the lake of  
the dead, When he reaches Ithaca, he will find his old home Torn  
apart by troubles, ten thousand of them!  
But why should we waste our breath on the sorrows that lie in wait For  
Odysseus? That arrow has left the string, but not yet Hit the bull.  
Take me then, to marry my bridegroom In the very doorway of Hell!  
In the dead of night they'll come To bury you, vilest, filthiest of  
men, as though The daylight were ashamed to see you, the great  
Greek leader brought low Who dreamed of mounting so high! Me  
too, my naked flesh Will be thrown into a rocky gulley, where the  
storm waters rush Close by my bridegroom's grave! Wild animals  
will eat Apollo's consecrated priestess. My crown of flowers, my  
white Robe of the most beautiful of the gods, and all the ritual of  
Dionysus, Goodbye to all of it, the feasting and celebrations, so  
precious To me! Tear them all off, and my skin too in strips, let the  
wind Carry them back to the god of prophecy, while my flesh is still  
untouched.  
Where is the General's flagship? Which way must I go? Who Could  
wait for the wind that fills her sails more eagerly than I do?  
One of the avenging furies, dragged from the ruins of Troy!  
Goodbye Mother. No tears. Oh land of my fathers, dead brothers who  
lie Under this earth, Father who sired me, soon, soon we'll meet,  
Short, oh short my journey, in the house of the dead, and you'll  
greet Me with joy for the victory I bring: the family at whose hands  
Troy died And all her people perished, the House of Atreus,  
destroyed!

*Exit Cassandra with the guards.*

### **Chorus**

Where are Hecuba's women? Your venerable Queen Has fainted, she's  
collapsed, and lies speechless on the ground.

Don't let her just lie there, you bitches, an old woman Fallen flat on her face. Get her up on her feet!

### **Hecuba**

No, leave me alone. Your kindness, my girls, Is no kindness to me. Let me lie here Just as I fell. What I am suffering, And have suffered, what I will suffer yet, Is more than enough to make anyone fall And never get up again. Oh you gods, What good were you to us? Betrayers!

And yet people still call upon gods When bad luck, or history, has flattened them And the whole of their world has collapsed.

So let me tell you how fortunate I was, Born lucky, to heighten the tragedy Of what has happened to me now. I was royal By birth, and I married a King. My sons Excelled, not merely because I bore so many, But because they were the best among the Phrygians.

What's more, they were Trojans, and such Trojans As no Greek woman or barbarian

Could ever boast of bearing. And I saw Every one of them slaughtered by the swords And spears of the Greeks! By their open graves I have stood, and cut my hair in mourning To cast upon their bodies; and so many bitter tears I have wept for their father, Priam. No one Told me of his death, no one

Brought me the news. With my own eyes I saw him hacked down on the altar steps Of our holiest temple, and the whole city sacked As the Greeks ran riot; all the daughters I brought up With such care, to make them fit brides for Princes, I saw them snatched from my arms, their good breeding Wasted on brutal soldiery and foreigners.

There's no hope they'll ever see me again Or that I will ever see them. And now, Like the keystone to my arch of misery, In my old age I must go to Greece

To finish my life as a slave. And what work They will give me, a woman of my years, To be a gatekeeper, looking after the keys, Me, the mother of Hector, or a kitchen skivvy Kneading the bread dough. I won't sleep On a royal mattress any more, the floor Will be good enough for my bony back And wasted flesh; worn out, second hand Dresses will do for me, rags even,



The sort that well bred women never see Let alone wear, they will have  
to make do For my worn out, second hand body.

Dear gods, what a terrible retribution, All that has happened to me, and  
will happen, Because of that one woman and her love affair!

Cassandra, my child, what violation will end Your consecrated  
virginity, that mystic ecstasy You shared with Dionysus, and all the  
gods?

And you, my poor girl, Polyxena,

Where are you now? None of my children Neither sons nor daughters  
and there were so many of them – Can give me so much as a helping  
hand In my misery. They are all gone.

So why try to help me up? What for?

What have I to look forward to? Well. Take my hand And lead me step  
by step – these feet of mine – So used to deep carpets, all the luxury  
of Troy, They belong to a slave now. Bring me to my bed, My straw  
palliasse and stone pillow, Throw me down there on my face

And let these tears, my torturers, whip me senseless.

Wealth, good fortune, it's all worth nothing.

There is no happiness. The lucky ones are dead.

### **Chorus**

Teach me, gods of song, some harsh lament Dissonant with tears and  
howls,

Help me to sing Troy's sorrows, invent New sounds for my grief: the  
Greek horse on wheels Has ruined me, brought me to the edge of the  
grave Made me a slave.

Unguarded they left it, by the main gate, Its gold cheek pieces  
gleaming,

And from its belly the clash of armour plate Rumbled like thunder,  
muffled and threatening.

So we ran to the rock of the citadel The whole population, shouting,  
'Come out everybody, all

Our troubles are over, wheel

This wooden offering for Zeus' daughter, Athene of Troy, inside the  
wall!'

And who ran from their houses the faster, The young men or the old?

All high

On the singing and the joy, as they laid hands on the monster That was  
more than it seemed, and would doom them all to die.

Then it seemed the whole nation of the Phrygians ran To the gates,  
eager to bring

That smooth planed icon of mountain pine And the Greek ambush  
within it, as an offering To the virgin who drives the immortal  
horses of heaven – For the Trojans, destruction.

Roped with cables of twisted flax

They heaved it, like a black ship,

To the stone shrine at the heart of the temple complex Of Pallas Athene  
altars soon to drip And smooth floors run slippery with Trojan  
blood.

Then the melodious African pipe  
Honeyed the air, as the dark hood  
Of night enfolded Troy. In celebration After the day's exhaustion, the  
whole city was singing, Dancing feet stamping in exhilaration To  
the rhythm of young girls' voices, flickering Torches casting  
puddles of light  
In the darkened palaces, and on the faces sleeping, And in eyes wide  
awake and glittering in the pitch dark night.  
At that time in our great hall  
With the others, I was singing  
All our favourite songs to Artemis, Zeus' daughter, Virgin of the  
mountains, and joining in the dancing; When suddenly I heard a  
terrible howl, The unmistakable sound of murder,  
A terrified scream rising from the streets of the whole City. Children  
grabbed hold of their mothers'  
Skirts, their pale hands plucked at her gown, Fluttering with fear. The  
god of war Had sprung his trap, the ambush strategy Worked  
perfectly, thanks to Pallas Athene, whose power Secretly inspired it.  
The Trojans were cut down In their own homes, in sanctuary,  
beheaded where they lay Sleeping, a whole generation of women  
raped in their own Bedrooms, breeding bastards for the Greeks,  
desolation for Troy.  
Look, Hecuba, they're bringing Andromache In a Greek baggage  
wagon. Her bosom is heaving With sobs, as she grasps Hector's son,  
Astyanax, clinging To her breasts, as they rise and fall like a bank of  
oars in the sea.

*Enter **Andromache** and her young son, **Astyanax**, wheeled in on top of a  
baggage wagon loaded with spoils.*

The son of Achilles will hang up Troy's plundered splendour As a  
trophy under some Phthian temple roof!

**Andromache**

My Greek masters are only taking what's theirs.

**Hecuba**

Aiee, Aiee!

**Andromache**

Don't sing *my* victory song!

**Hecuba**

Agony!

**Andromache**

The agonies are all mine.

**Hecuba**

Oh Zeus!

**Andromache**

Hard learned, to be suffered long.

**Hecuba**

My children!

**Andromache**

No longer. Grown old in tears.

**Hecuba**

All our happiness. Troy, our city. Gone.

**Andromache**

Into misery.

**Hecuba**

My children, my heroic sons!

**Andromache**

All gone, all gone.

**Hecuba**

What grief is like mine?

**Andromache**

My suffering.

**Hecuba**

The sobbing, the moans.

**Andromache**

Of our city.

**Hecuba**

Ruined. Smoke blackened stone.

**Andromache**

My husband! Where are you? I need you now. Save me!

**Hecuba**

You're calling for a dead man. My firstborn son Is in Hades, and I am in misery.

**Andromache**

Protect me now, as you've always done.

**Hecuba**

Oh my Priam, whom the Greeks barbarously killed!

**Andromache**

Old man, great King, princely father, Your sons were famous throughout the world.

**Hecuba**

Let me sleep in the arms of death for ever.

**Andromache**

So bitter, these longings.

**Hecuba**

Sharp pains now, and sorrows unceasing.

**Andromache**

For the city we have lost.

**Hecuba**

And miseries ever increasing.

**Andromache**

The gods always hated us. Their malice spared your son.  
So that his contemptible marriage should bring ruin To the citadel of  
Troy! Now in bloody pieces he's lying For the vultures, in Pallas'  
temple. Our slavery is his doing!

**Hecuba**

Troy, mother of us all!

**Andromache**

Tears blind me. Deserted. A ruin.

**Hecuba**

This pitiful end.

**Andromache**

The house my children were born in.

**Hecuba**

I've lost my home. I've lost my children. Everything.  
No grief can encompass what I feel. No funeral song.  
Flow, tears, for a city, and family, shattered past hoping.  
Only the dead shed no tears. They are beyond weeping.

**Chorus**

Suffering people find some comfort in tears.  
To give voice to grief is a kind of pleasure.

**Andromache**

Oh Hecuba, mother of the son who speared So many of these Greeks,  
do you see what they are doing?

**Hecuba**

I see what the gods are doing, making monuments Of worthless men,  
and demolishing the good.

**Andromache**

We are loot, my son and I, soldiers' plunder, Born royal, and made  
slaves! The whole world's overturned.

**Hecuba**

Necessity is logical, and merciless. Cassandra Has just been torn from  
my arms by force.

**Andromache**

No, no more. I can't bear it. . .  
So some second Ajax flatters his masculinity By dragging off your  
daughter. But . . . there's worse pain to come.

**Hecuba**

Of course there is. There's no end to pain.  
The next horror will always be worse than the last.

**Andromache**

She's dead. Your daughter, Polyxena. Murdered At Achilles' tomb, as a  
sacrifice to the dead.

**Hecuba**

And it is ... So that's what Talthybius meant, The truth his diplomatic  
evasion concealed.

**Andromache**

I saw it with my own eyes. I got down from the cart, Cut down the  
body, covered it with her dress.

**Hecuba**

My poor child . . . ritually murdered, filthy, Sacrilege ... oh my poor  
girl, butchered like an animal . . .!

### **Andromache**

Anyway she's dead, however it happened, And she's happier dead than I am living.

### **Hecuba**

No, no one is happier dead. The living At least have hope. To be dead is to be nothing.

### **Andromache**

Dear Mother, listen. You are my mother too, Even though you didn't give me birth; listen And draw some comfort from what I'm saying. To be dead is the same as never to have been born.

But to die is better than a life of agony, Because the dead feel nothing, and no pain Can touch them any more. Whereas someone whose life Has been prosperous and lucky, and is then overwhelmed By disasters, knows what it's like to have been happy, And is heartbroken to be excluded from that paradise . . .

For your child, it's as though she had never seen The light of day, she's dead, and knows nothing Of her suffering now. It's different for me. Being Hector's wife, I aimed at the highest A woman could wish for, and I hit the mark.

And now I have lost everything. Living with Hector I made it my business to be the perfect wife, Never wanted even to leave his house, Because that's the certain way to compromise A woman's reputation, gave up all desire To go anywhere and was joyfully fulfilled at home.

And even at home, I admitted no fashionable Gossip or women's chatter, but used my intelligence To improve my own mind, and was content with that.

I lived quietly with my husband, my happiness was obvious Whenever our eyes met. I knew what things Were my prerogative, and how to give in gracefully To his authority in matters that were his.

But my reputation as the ideal wife Reached the Greek camp, and that ruined me.

As soon as I was captured, Achilles' son Asked for me as his wife, meaning his whore, To be a slave in the very house



Of the man who murdered my husband . . .  
If I drive the memory of my beloved Hector Out of my mind, and open  
the doors  
Of my heart to the man who owns me now, I shall betray the love of  
the dead man, And mine to him. And if I refuse  
To allow this Prince to touch me, I'll provoke The hatred of the man  
whose power is total Over me and mine. They say one night In bed  
with a man will convince any woman And pleasure away her hatred.  
I spit in the face Of any woman who forgets her dead husband To  
jump into bed with the next one. Dear God, Not even a mare,  
uncoupled from her old yokefellow And stablemate will pull in  
harness willingly!  
And animals are supposed to be inferior to men, With no power to  
reason or speak their thoughts!  
But you, Hector, my love, you had everything I dreamed of in a  
husband, in intelligence, good family, Wealth and courage the  
greatest of men!  
You took me as a virgin from my father's house, And I gave my body  
for the first time to you In our marriage bed. Now you are dead, And  
I am to be transported across the sea To Greece as a prisoner, to be  
yoked as a slave.  
And Polyxena, whom you groan and weep for, Isn't her suffering far  
less than mine?  
You say everyone living has hope. What hope Have I? I'm not stupid  
enough to delude Myself with false expectations, pleasant Though  
such comforting daydreams might be . . .

### **Chorus**

Your suffering is like mine. Your anguished words Give voice to my  
deepest agonies and fears.

### **Hecuba**

I've never been on board ship in my life, But I've seen pictures of  
them, and heard men talking, So I know that if the storm is not too  
violent, And there's some chance of survival, the sailors Will do

everything they can to come through it, hanging on To the tiller,  
scrambling aloft to the sails, And bailing out the water for dear life.  
But if the waves run higher, and towering rollers Overwhelm them,  
they accept the inevitable And give themselves to the sea. And so do  
I too.

The gods have drowned me in an ocean of misery.  
After so many sorrows, and in such despair, Words mean nothing.  
There's nothing left to say.

But you, dear daughter, dry your eyes.

No more grieving for Hector now.

You must forget him. Even your tears Can't help him now. My advice  
to you Is to make much of your new master.

Be pleasant, make yourself attractive to him.

That way you will make everyone's captivity Easier to bear, and your  
own life more pleasant.

With luck, you may bring up this grandson of mine To be the saviour  
of Troy. Sons of yours May return to the ruins of Ilium one day And  
build a new city from the ashes . . .

But look . . . the next chapter is already beginning.

The Greek minion is coming back,

To tell us, no doubt, what the Greek Council Has finally decided to do  
with us all.

**Talthybius** *returns, with the guards.*

**Talthybius**

Hector's wife, widow of the greatest of the Trojans . . .

I ask you not to hate me. With the greatest reluctance I must tell you  
the news, the joint decision Of the Council of the Greeks and the  
two sons of Pelops.

**Andromache**

What is it? That sounds like a prelude to disaster.

**Talthybius**

This child. They have decided ... I don't know how to say it.

**Andromache**

No, don't take him away . . .! We have different masters . . .?

**Talthybius**

No Greek will ever be his master.

**Andromache**

How . . .? Is he to be the last of the Trojans? Left here?

**Talthybius**

There is no decent way to say an indecent thing.

**Andromache**

Thank you for your decency . . . but no more bad news . . .

**Talthybius**

They mean to kill him. That's the worst. Now you know.

**Andromache**

Oh my God . . .! That sentence is worse than my marriage . . .

**Talthybius**

Odysseus' speech carried the whole Council. . .

**Andromache**

Aieeee, Aieeee, I can't bear it, I can't. . .!

**Talthybius**

That the son of such a father must not be allowed to grow up . . .

**Andromache**

May those arguments condemn his own son!

**Talthybius**

And that he should be thrown from the battlements of Troy. This has to be. So please be sensible.

Don't hang on to him like that, but bear this pain Like the Queen you are. There's nothing you can do.

You are quite without any power to prevent it So don't imagine otherwise. No one can help you.

The city is in ruins, your husband dead.

You are quite alone, and believe me We are capable of dealing with a single woman If we have to. So don't make a fight of it, Or kick or struggle, or curse the Greeks.

If you say anything to anger the army Your child may not be properly buried And no tears be shed at his grave. But if You keep quiet, and resign yourself to what must happen, They might allow you to bury your child Decently, and treat you with more consideration.

### **Andromache**

My darling, my precious, too dangerous to live, Your enemies will kill you, and leave your mother in misery, Your father's courage, that saved so many, Is a death sentence for you. Everything That made him great for you proves fatal.

Ah, God, when I came into Hector's palace On that unlucky wedding day,

And that unluckier wedding night,

I thought I would conceive a son to rule Over the whole of Asia, not a victim To be callously murdered, butchered by the Greeks!

My dear little boy, are you crying too?

Do you understand what's happening? Why else Do you hang on to my hand like that, and bury Your timid face in the folds of my dress Like a bird creeping under his mother's wing?

There is no Hector rising from the grave With his spear in his hand, coming to save you, Nor any of your father's brothers, no army Of Trojans. You must jump from that terrifying height, Fall, and break your neck, smash the breath in your mouth Without pity from anyone! My sweet baby, So tender in my arms, dearer than all the world To your mother, the softness of your breath, The baby smell of your skin . . .! All for nothing, My labour pains when you were born, all for nothing When I gave you my breast, and dressed you so tenderly In your baby clothes, all nothing, all for nothing.

Hold me tight now, hang on to me, for the last time.  
I gave you birth, put your arms round my shoulders And hang on to  
me, hard, and kiss me, my boy . . .  
You Greeks! You have dreamed up such cruelties Even the barbarians  
would flinch at! Why Are you killing this child? What has he done  
In his innocence? He's guilty of nothing!  
Helen! You Daughter of Tyndareus! You Are not Zeus' daughter! More  
fathers than one You had, and I know their names too!  
Destruction, first of all, and Envy and Murder And Death, and every  
evil thing  
That crawls on the face of the earth! Zeus could never Have fathered  
you to bring ruin and slaughter On Greeks and barbarians alike, by  
thousands!  
Die in agony, and be damned for ever, You and your beautiful eyes,  
whose inviting looks Have brought this famous country of Phrygia  
To complete destruction! Come on then! Take him!  
Carry him away. Throw him down from the walls If that's what your  
Generals have decided, and then Make a banquet of his dead body!  
The gods Are destroying us all. I can't save My own child from  
death! Parcel up  
My disgraced body, and throw it on board ship.  
It's a fine wedding I'm sailing to  
With my poor son left dead at my back!

### **Chorus**

Poor Troy. Ten thousand men are dead For one woman, and her hated  
marriage bed.

### **Talthybius**

Come on boy. You must break that embrace Now, in spite of your  
mother's agony, And climb the walls to the highest bluff That  
crowns ancestral Troy. At that place, According to the vote of the  
Army Committee, You must give up your life. Take him then.  
Someone tough And unthinking they need for this job, without pity  
And no scruples. I'm not half hard enough.

## **Hecuba**

Poor child, son of my dead son,  
To tear you like that from your mother and from me Is wicked. How  
can I suffer

This, and learn to bear it? What can be done To help you now, enduring  
this? We can only Beat our breasts in anguish, tear our hair, And  
that's all we can do. Our city is gone, And soon you will be gone  
too. There is no agony We don't already feel, no abyss of pain to  
discover.

***Andromache** is dragged out by the guards one way as  
**Astyanax** is taken the other.*

## **Chorus**

From the sea fringed shore of Salamis, the island of beehives That  
faces the sacred slopes where the first bough Of the blue-grey olive  
was unveiled by Pallas, ancestor of the groves That sit like a wreath  
of honour on the shining brow Of Athens, came Telamon, Salamis'  
founder, across the waves Of the Aegean to destroy

The ancient city of Troy,

With the archer Heracles, in the distant past When Greece first came to  
Ilium, to bring it to the dust.

The flower of Hellas he led in his rage for the immortal horses Of  
Zeus, first promised, then denied. In the calm Shallows of Simois  
they rested their sea going oars, cast hawsers To make fast the  
sterns, while Heracles' mighty arm Took the bow from his ship and  
killed Laomedon, and with flashes Of fire like a whirlwind

Shattered and burned

The very stones of Apollo's city. Once in the past And now again,  
Greek arms have brought Dardanus' city to the dust.

Oh Ganymede, son of Laomedon,

As you step so delicately among the golden Wine cups, pouring the  
vintage

For Zeus, enjoying a favourite's privileges, What use are you to your  
city, as it rages In flames, and the Greeks bring carnage To the land  
of your birth? Is that the cry Of seagulls screaming for their young  
On the sea shore? No. Women of Troy, Wives for their husbands  
screaming, For their dead sons, daughters weeping desperately For  
mothers too old to live slaves for long.

Your pools for freshwater swimming, that trackway Where you always  
loved to go running, All obliterated now. While you were reclining  
Serene in your youthful beauty

By the throne of Zeus, the Greeks were destroying Troy's people and  
Priam's city.

Love, consuming love, once came

To the palace of Dardanus, Laomedon's home.

The gods themselves were trembling  
With the excitement of it, and Troy Seemed promised an immortal  
destiny At the Olympian wedding  
Of Tithonus with Aurora, goddess of the dawn.  
No further reproach will pass my lips Against Zeus or his doings.  
What's done is done.  
But the pure light of morning  
That cheers everyone, saw destruction Dawn on our city, saw our  
citadels collapse; And yet, Aurora herself had a Trojan Husband in  
her bed, was breeding  
Children by him, after abducting  
Him in her four-horsed chariot, to enjoy Her love among the stars. For  
us, vain dreaming, False hopes. The gods hate Troy.

*Enter Menelaus.*

### **Menelaus**

Even the sun shines brighter today, This most glorious of days when I  
shall finally Get my hands on that wife of mine, Helen.  
Yes, I am the man, Menelaus,  
Who for ten years have endured this terrible war Together with the  
Greek army. But it wasn't only For my wife's sake that I came to  
Troy.  
People say that, I know. My real motive Was to get my hands on the  
man who stole My wife, violated the sanctity  
Of my much loved home, treacherously Deceived me, his host, and  
thumbed his nose At every known principle of hospitality!  
Well. I've certainly made him pay for that – With the gods' help of  
course – him, And all his people – the Greeks have butchered The  
lot, and turned his great city  
Into a wilderness. But certainly, too, I have come to fetch the Spartan  
woman – It gives me no pleasure to speak her name – The woman  
who was my wife. She's been counted Into this temporary prison  
with the rest Of the Trojan women. The Greek soldiers, Whose  
blood and guts have been tested and spent In so many battles to get  
her back



Have handed her over to me, to kill her Here on the spot unless I  
decide  
To take her back to our Argive homeland.  
That's up to me. In fact, I've decided To pass up the opportunity of  
killing Helen Here in Troy, and to row her home  
To Greece, where she will be handed over To the relatives of all those  
who died at Troy To be executed in payment for their blood.  
Get in there, you guards, into that building, And bring her out here,  
drag her out By the hair, sticky with dead men's blood, The  
murderess! And as soon as the wind's In the right quarter, we'll ship  
her off to Greece.

### **Hecuba**

Oh Zeus, you who at the same time  
Support the earth like a great pillar And sit throned upon it, unknown,  
unknowable, Whether we call you a force of nature Or an image in  
the mind of man, hear The prayer I offer, as mysteriously, unheard,  
You lead men's footsteps in the paths of Justice!

### **Menelaus**

That's a new way to pray to the gods!

### **Hecuba**

If you mean to kill your wife, Menelaus, You'll have my support. But  
don't see her, Don't risk becoming a slave  
Of your lust again. With one look  
She makes men's eyes her prisoners, she sacks Whole cities, burns  
houses to the ground With that bewitching smile! I know her, And  
so do you, everyone who's met her And suffered for it knows her  
well enough!

*Enter Helen, guarded.*

### **Helen**

Menelaus ... if this is just the start I'm terrified of what may come next.  
. .! Your guards Have dragged me out here in front of the building  
With such violence and contempt. . . You hate me, I know.

I'm almost sure you do. But this one question I must ask you nevertheless. What have the Greeks Decided – what have you decided . . .

To do with me? Am I to live or die?

**Menelaus**

Nothing definite was decided. But the army unanimously Gave you to me, your wronged husband, to kill you.

**Helen**

Can I speak in my own defence, and show How unjust it would be to kill me – if you do?

**Menelaus**

I've come for an execution, not an argument.

**Hecuba**

Hear her Menelaus, let her speak,  
Don't let her die without a word  
In her own defence! And then let me Make the case against her! What do you know Of the havoc she has caused in Troy? Nothing.  
When I've had my say, read the whole indictment, There'll be no room for any doubt that she's guilty.

**Menelaus**

You're asking a favour, and that will take time.  
But if she wants to speak, that can be allowed.  
It's for your sake, be quite clear, that I allow it, not hers.

**Helen**

It probably doesn't matter if I speak well Or badly, if you've already decided Against me. You won't even bother to answer.  
But if your accusations against me  
Are what I think they will be, I shall answer Your arguments with arguments of my own.  
First of all, this woman, Hecuba,

She gave birth to all the trouble by giving birth To Paris. Secondly, *he*  
destroyed Troy, Priam did, the old King, and he destroyed me too,  
When he failed to strangle his brat at birth, Paris Alexander, seeing  
in him, as he did, An image of that firebrand that would burn Troy.  
And then what happened? Listen, and I'll tell you.  
Paris had three goddesses in one harness, And sat in judgement on their  
beauty. Pallas Offered him the leadership

Of a Trojan expeditionary force

That would take out the whole of Greece! Hera Promised that if he gave her the prize He would become the master of Europe And the whole of Asia. But Aphrodite Simply and rapturously described how beautiful I was, promised him he should have me If he chose her as the most beautiful Of the three goddesses. Think carefully About what happened next. Aphrodite won the prize, And think what a blessing my marriage to Paris Was to Greece! You are not under the heel Of a barbarian conqueror, not defeated in battle, No totalitarian dictator has you at his mercy.

But Hellas' good fortune was my ruin, Exported, I was, sold off abroad,

My exceptional beauty was a saleable asset For Greece! And now all I get is vulgar abuse Instead of the respect and honour I deserve!

You will say, no doubt, that I have ignored The main point, the reason why

I ran away from your home in secret.

He came, call him Paris, or Alexander, Whichever of his names you like, that genius Of destruction Hecuba gave birth to, and with him Came a goddess, well, not exactly a weakling As goddesses go . . . And you, spineless idiot.

You chose that moment of all moments To leave your home and take ship for Crete!

Are you beginning to understand? The next question Is the crucial one, and I ask it of myself, Not you. What, if anything at all,

Was I thinking of when I tamely followed This foreigner, whom I hardly knew, Betraying my country, and my home, and my family In the process? Ask the goddess, not me, Punish her, punish the destructive power Of love; and in doing so, proclaim yourself Superior to Zeus, who is the master Of all the gods, but the slave of that one, Aphrodite! That being the case,

What can you honestly do but forgive me?

There is, I suppose, one further accusation You might make against me. Once Paris was dead And in his grave, since my marriage was no longer The direct responsibility of the goddess, I should Have left his house and made my escape To the Greek ships. God knows, I

wanted to, And God knows how I tried! Ask the guard commanders  
At the great tower posterns, ask the sentries On the walls, ask them  
how many times They caught me lowering my clumsy body In  
secret from the battlements of Troy, Or shinning down ropes to  
reach the ground!

But my new husband Deiphobus – he’s dead too – Took me by force,  
made me be his wife!

All the Trojans were against it. Well then.

Husband. Can you still think it right to kill me?

Could you do such a thing with any justice?

I had no choice. I was raped, not married.

My life in Troy was the most abject slavery, Nothing glorious about it.

And I have destroyed them.

The gods have acted. Will you oppose them?

Only a fool would dare to do that.

### **Chorus**

Speak up for your children now, dear Queen, Speak for your country!  
Show her arguments for what they are, Fluent, but wicked. She’s a  
dangerous woman!

### **Hecuba**

First I shall speak for the goddesses, and expose This woman’s  
slanders for the rubbish they are!

The gods are not fools. Hera and the virgin Pallas would never have  
perpetrated Such acts of brainless stupidity. Would Hera Ever sell  
her own city of Argos

To the barbarians? Or could Pallas conceivably Allow Athens to come  
under foreign domination Simply for the sake of a game? If they  
went To Mount Ida at all, for mere childish amusement, And the  
vanity of beautiful women!

Why should Hera so suddenly fall victim To an insatiable craving to be  
thought beautiful?

To get a more aristocratic husband

For herself than Zeus? And is Athene Now on the lookout for a  
husband among the gods?

Her hatred of marriage is well known, she pleaded  
With her father for eternal virginity,  
And he granted it. Don't attempt to disguise  
Your own wickedness by accusing the Immortals  
Of such stupidity. No sensible person  
Will be taken in. And Aphrodite herself,  
You say – this is ludicrous, laughable  
Came with my son to Menelaus'  
house!

Is it likely? She could have stayed at home  
On Olympus, and taken you, the Royal Palace  
At Amyclae, the whole lot, to Ilium,  
With the merest gesture, if she'd wanted to.

But that wasn't it! My son had the sort  
Of good looks women run mad for,

You were wet with lust the moment you saw him!

That was your Aphrodite! And doesn't everyone  
Dignify their appetite and stupidity  
By invoking the goddess' name, blaming her?

Sensuality and senselessness have more in common  
Than a first syllable. The moment you saw him  
In his exotic oriental dress

And dripping with gold, you lost your head  
Completely. Life in Sparta was austere  
By comparison; but once Sparta was behind you  
You saw yourself drowning in an ever flowing river  
Of Phrygian gold, submerging the whole city  
Under a tidal wave of riotous expense!

They were too bleak a stage for you, the bare  
Rooms of Menelaus' palace, to overplay  
Your fantasies of luxury and indulgence!

And then, my son, you say, dragged you off  
By force, that's your version of the story!

Which one of the Spartans saw this happen?

Were there no witnesses? How loudly did you scream?

Your brother Castor was a young man, still alive,  
Still living there with his twin, neither of them  
Had yet been transformed into heavenly  
bodies And taken their places among the stars.

And when you arrived in Troy, with the Greek army  
Hot on your heels, and the battles began,  
If news reached you that this man's divisions  
Had fought a successful engagement, O Menelaus,  
No praise was too good for him, so that my son  
Ran mad with jealousy and despair  
That his rival in love had the upper hand.

But if the Trojans won the day, Menelaus,  
Pooh, what was he, he was nothing!

Yes, you always kept a very beady eye  
On the main chance, you would  
make sure You were on the winning side! Loyalty, duty, Love? Not  
worth that much to you, any of it!

And as for this story of yours, how desperate You were to escape, how  
you lowered yourself By rope from the city walls, as if we Kept you  
here against your will – Well, how many times, may I ask, were you  
caught In the act of hanging yourself, or sharpening A knife to cut  
your own throat, things Any woman of breeding or nobility

Would be expected at least to attempt, if she were truly Grieving for  
her former husband? Not you.

I've lost count of the times I said to you, 'Listen, Daughter, you should  
get out of here.

My son can find other women

Easily enough. I'll help you to escape In secret, I'll arrange an escort  
for you To the Greek ships, and so we'll make an end Of this  
pointless slaughter of Greeks and Trojans.'

But that was not at all the kind of thing You had in mind. In  
Alexander's palace Your most arrogant whim could be indulged,  
You loved nothing better than seeing Asiatics Prostrating themselves  
at your feet! And how That mattered to you, how important it made  
you feel!

And even now, you dare to parade yourself Like this, wearing make-  
up, your hair brushed, With your best dress on, brazenly confronting  
Your husband in the open air

Under the eye of heaven! You're worthless.

Respectable women spit at you in contempt.

If you had any decency in you at all You would have come here on  
your knees in rags, Shaven headed, and shivering with fear,  
Prepared to humiliate yourself

With every kind of self-abasement and shame For the wicked things  
you have done. Menelaus, You can see what I'm getting at. My  
arguments All point the same way. Consummate

The Greek victory by killing your wife!

Death is what she deserves. And other women Will learn from her  
example that wives who betray Their husbands must expect to die  
for it.

**Chorus**

Menelaus, punish your wife in a way Worthy of the traditions of your family. Rescue The reputation of Greek womanhood by the nobility of your revenge!

**Menelaus**

Your conclusions are exactly the same as my own, That this woman left my house of her own free will To go to bed with a foreigner.

To drag in Aphrodite is a mere smokescreen Of pretentious self-importance! Take her away.

Let her face death in the stoning pit.

You can atone for the ten year suffering of the Greeks With an hour of dying: or however long it takes.

That'll teach you what it costs to humiliate me.

**Helen**

I beg you on my knees, I implore you, Don't kill because the gods are diseased!

**Hecuba**

Remember all your friends who are dead, murdered By this woman!  
On my knees, I beg you, remember!

**Menelaus**

All right old woman, that'll do! I'm not listening To her. I'm speaking to my staff . . . Take her To where the ships are moored. We're sending her back home.

**Hecuba**

Don't travel in the same ship with her!

**Menelaus**

Why? Has she put on weight? Will she sink it?

**Hecuba**

Once a lover, always besotted.



## **Menelaus**

No. A sensible man loves someone worthy of his love.  
However, I shall do as you say. We won't Go on board the same ship.  
A reasonable precaution.

When we arrive in Argos she will be punished As she deserves. She's a  
wicked woman, And she will endure a terrible death That will be a  
warning to all women in the future To be chaste and moral in their  
behaviour.

That's by no means an easy lesson to teach, But the manner of her  
death will terrify The most frivolous of females, or others who  
might be tempted To be even more degraded than she is.

*Exeunt Helen, Menelaus and guards.*

## **Chorus**

O Zeus, our eyes are open now!

You have betrayed us to the Greeks – the great Temple of Ilium, the  
flames that glow Eternally on the altar of offerings, the sweet Pillars  
of myrrh smoke that rise to heaven, The incense thick in the air,  
even

The sanctuary of Pergamon, the sacred mountain Of Ida, where the  
melted snow leaps In torrents down the ivy covered slopes, And first  
light flushes the eastern crest of dawn's handmaiden.

The beauty of ritual is destroyed, all the sacrifices Are over, no more  
hushed singing

Of sacred psalms, watch night services, Vigils from first dark till dawn,  
no carrying Of images cast in gold to the festivals Of the twelve full  
moons of Troy. A shadow falls Like ice in my heart. Do you care, on  
your radiant throne In the heavens, do you even remember, King of  
gods, That we exist, while the very air explodes Around us, and fire  
reduces our city to ashes and stone?

Oh my love, my husband, you are dead!

You are out there somewhere unwashed, unburied Your poor ghost  
wanders aimlessly in the dark.

And ships will carry me over the sea, Their fast oars beating like  
wings, to the city Of the horse breeders, Argos, whose great stone

walls are the work Of the Cyclops, and seem to touch the sky.  
But our children, a great crowd of them, weep and moan Down by the  
gates, clinging desperately to their mothers, all their pain,  
Screaming and tears to no avail.  
'Mother,' they sob, 'the Greeks will haul Me away to their black ships,  
I shall be all Alone, and the sea-going oars  
Will sweep me across to sacred Salamis, Or to where between two seas  
the Acropolis Of Corinth guards Pelops' doors!'

I have one wish: that when Menelaus' ship Is in the open sea, with a  
terrifying thunderclap From the hand of Zeus it will be struck by  
lightning Amidships, right between the oars,

And far out in the Aegean! I shall be in tears Then, exiled from Troy,  
dehumanised, reduced to a thing That slaves for the Greeks: while  
Helen peers Like a self-regarding schoolgirl in her mirrors of gold  
Admiring her good looks. My wish for her's soon told.

Dear gods, let her never come safe home To Sparta, never repossess  
that bedroom In her own house and hearth, never come Again to the  
village of Pitaña, as once she could, Nor re-enter Athene's temple  
with the great bronze door, This woman whose promiscuity shamed  
Greece, and stained the pure Waters of Simois with blood.

No, no, no more agony!

Our land is under the whip, the next Stroke falls while we still bleed  
from the last.

Yes, yes, you may weep, women of Troy! But the worst Is still to  
come. They are bringing Astyanax' body, cast Like a stone by the  
Greeks from the towers of Troy.

*Enter **Talhybius** and guards with **Astyanax**' body, carried in **Hector**'s  
battle shield.*

### **Talhybius**

Hecuba . . . there's only one ship  
Of Neoptolemus' squadron still here. The crew Are currently loading  
his share of the booty Before sailing for Phthia. Neoptolemus  
himself Has already set sail, having heard bad news From home –

his grandfather Peleus, apparently, Has been the victim of a military  
coup, Organised by Acastus, the son of Pelias, And has had to flee  
the country. Time Is of the essence, so he left at once, Taking  
Andromache with him, whose heartbroken Tears as she left her  
native land,

And grief-stricken outbursts over the tomb Of Hector, brought tears to  
my eyes too.

She begged the Prince that you should be allowed To bury the body,  
the son of your son Hector, Who gave up his life, as ordered, thrown  
down From the walls of Troy. She begged too, that this shield With  
its bronze back, which has terrified The Greeks so many times in the  
hands Of the boy's father, when he advanced protecting The whole  
of his body behind it, should not Be sent across the sea to Peleus'  
house, Nor stand as a mute reminder in the same chamber Where the  
boy's mother, Andromache, to her grief, Must give herself a second  
time as a bride, But be used instead of a coffin and cairn Of stones,  
and that the boy should be buried Lying beneath it. She asked me to  
make sure That the body came into your hands, so that you Could  
shroud it with some of your own clothes And garland it with flowers  
– insofar as you can In your present difficult circumstances.

She, because of her master's great haste, Is robbed of the opportunity  
of burying her child Herself, and is already gone. We, let me  
emphasise, As soon as you have laid out the body, Buried him, and  
heaped up the earth on his grave, Must step the mast, make sail, and  
away.

So you must do what you have to do

As quickly as possible. One thing

I have done for you. As we came back Across the Scamander, I took  
the opportunity To wash the body, and wipe away

The dirt and blood from his wounds. Well then . . .

I shall now make it my business to dig A grave for the boy, so that my  
work will end As quickly as yours must; and then, with the greatest  
Possible expedition, we can all go home.

**Hecuba**

Oh, the great arc of Hector's shield! Here, Put it on the ground . . . My  
eyes  
Are stabbed to the brain. I never dreamed They would see such a sight.  
O you Greeks, You are so proud of yourselves as fighting men And  
thinkers! Are you proud of this too?  
Why him? Were you so frightened of a child You had to invent this  
unheard of savagery?  
Did you think he would rebuild fallen Troy From this rubble on his  
own? You're nothing, You're worth nothing, we could all see that  
When Hector was riding his good fortune, With ten thousand men  
fighting at his side, Destroying you beneath his spear. But now,  
When the city is taken, and every Trojan Fighting man lies dead,  
you have become terrified Of a little child. What cowards you are,  
How I despise blind panic,  
Unreasoning terror in rational men!  
My little darling . . . what a wretched, meaningless death Has been  
meted out to you! If you had died On your feet, defending your city,  
In the full glory of your young manhood, Having tasted the pleasures  
of marriage, One of the god-Kings of Troy, everyone Would have  
called you a happy man – if Any of these things is worth the name  
Of happiness. But though your child's soul May have glimpsed or  
sensed the glories You were born to, they have slipped from your  
grasp.  
Before you were old enough to enjoy them.  
My poor little boy, how dreadfully your head Has been shaved by the  
walls of your own city, Built by the prophetic god Apollo  
For your ancestors. These beautiful curls Your mother so much loved  
to stroke and kiss And bury her face in, torn out, shorn to stubble.  
The blood's still oozing from the broken bones Laughing at us in its  
mockery of life . . .  
No ... no more of that. It degrades the decency Of speech to put such  
things into words . . .  
Sweet little hands, the image of your father's, So limp and lifeless now,  
mere appendages Flopping at the end of your arms. And your lips,  
So delicious in all their childish chattering, And now so cold and

dead! What lies you told me  
When you snuggled down among my  
bedclothes.

‘Grandmother,’ you used to say, ‘I shall cut  
The biggest curl you ever  
saw from my head  
For you when you are dead, and I’ll bring  
All my  
friends to your tomb, to make speeches  
And sing songs of farewell.’  
But now,  
That promise will never be kept. And I  
An old woman,  
with her city destroyed  
And all her children dead, must bury you, So  
much younger than I am, such a tender corpse.

My dear little sweetheart, what use were all  
Those cuddles I gave you,  
the times I nursed you, Fed you, and got you off to sleep, All my  
love wasted when it comes to this, With you dead in my arms. What  
memorial verses  
Would a poet write to be carved on your  
tombstone?

‘This child was murdered by the Greeks  
Because they were afraid of  
him!’ May all Hellas  
For ever be ashamed of such an epitaph!

Well, little grandson, everything

You should have inherited from your father you have lost, Except this  
shield with its curved bronze back, And that, my dear, you will keep  
for ever As it covers you in the earth. Women, Do you see? This is  
the shield that protected Hector’s magnificent arm! He for sure  
Was  
this shield’s best protector, and now he is dead.

Look, you can clearly see the imprint  
Of his powerful hand on the grip,  
and here  
On the brass facing and the smooth rim  
You can see how  
his beard has burnished it  
As he held it up to his chin, and where  
The sweat, pouring down from his forehead and temples  
In so many  
hot fought afternoons of battle  
Has left its dark stain. Come now, my  
women, See what you can find, some robe, if you can, Or some  
flowers somewhere, to dress his poor body  
For burial. It’s little  
enough, child, We can give you, in this time of disaster.

But what we can find, you shall have. Anyone  
Born mortal and living  
in this world, who thinks  
Himself prosperous and secure, is a fool.

Historical necessity, or whatever else you call  
The force that governs  
our lives, what else is it  
But a madman dancing, leaping one way  
then the next  
Without pattern or meaning? What’s certain  
Is that  
luck always runs out, and that no happy man  
Ever stays happy or  
lucky for long.

**Chorus**

Look Hecuba, we found these things among the ruins.  
They'll do to prepare the body for burial.

**Hecuba**

Dear child, it's not after some victory At horse racing with fellows  
your own age, Or archery, that I, your father's mother, Award you  
these meagre prizes. We Trojans Esteem such achievements, and  
honour them as they deserve.

These poor things are the only remnants Of the legendary wealth of  
Troy, your inheritance, Of which Helen, whom all the gods hate,  
Has robbed you. And more than that, she has taken Your life, and  
utterly destroyed your family.

**Chorus**

Let your tears flow!  
My heart is breaking, weep and sing For the dead child who was born  
to be King!

**Hecuba**

This magnificent robe, the height of Trojan fashion!  
You should have worn it at your wedding To the most aristocratic  
Princess of Asia.

Now I can only use it as a shroud

Or winding sheet to wrap round your body.

And for you, great shield, who protected Hector Like a mother, and  
gave birth to victories Beyond number, a garland of flowers.

You are not dead, nor will ever be, Though you lie with the dead in the  
earth: an honour Greater than the Greeks can pay to the armour Of  
that black-hearted politician, Odysseus!

**Chorus**

Howl then, howl!

Now, if ever, tear the tears from your breast As the earth receives this  
child to rest.

Mother, you must share our pain.

**Hecuba**

Howl. . .

**Chorus**

Lead our song for the dead.

**Hecuba**

For grief!

**Chorus**

Who can forget these sufferings? Time will bring no relief.

**Hecuba**

With these strips of linen, as if I could heal them Let me bind up your  
wounds. The mere shadow of a doctor Without the substance. My  
fingers are skilful But have no art to cure. Your father's hand Must  
care for you now, among the dead.

**Chorus**

Beat your temples, tear out your hair Let your nails rake your face like  
a bank of oars.

**Hecuba**

My daughters, listen, women of Troy . . .

**Chorus**

We're still here. Say what you want to say.

**Hecuba**

Everything I have done in my life has meant nothing To the vindictive  
gods and Troy, of all cities, They have persecuted with a particular  
hatred.

All our sacrifices, all our offerings Have been quite worthless, a waste  
of time.

And yet . . . if the god had not decided To make the greatest suffer  
most

And trample us all in the mud, what nonentities We would all have  
been! No one would ever Have heard of us, no songs would have  
been written In memory of our suffering, nor would the poets A  
hundred generations hence have taken us As their great theme. So  
take up the body, And let us bring it to its dishonoured grave.

We have given it all we can of the flowers And offerings customary for  
the dead And what difference does it make to them If they are  
buried in luxury, loaded with gifts.

None at all, I think. Funerals are for the living, An empty show to  
impress their friends.

*The body of **Astyanax** is removed.*

**Chorus**



Weep and sing  
For your suffering mother, who teased out the cloth Of your life with  
such care, all torn and rumped in death.  
And for the child, a hero's son, no family could be greater Than his,  
born to be King.  
His terrible death men will remember with horror.  
But look. What are they doing?  
There are men with torches, will they destroy Even these ruins? On  
Ilium's surviving towers In many hands the bud of flame flowers.  
What more can they do to Troy?

**Talthybius**

All company commanders with orders  
To fire the city, there's no need to wait Any longer, till your torches  
burn out In your hands. Burn everything down!  
When we have reduced the whole lot to ashes Then we can celebrate,  
leave Troy, and go home!  
My other orders concern you women.  
As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet Follow these officers  
along that path.  
They will lead you to the Greek ships.  
You, old woman, you're the unluckiest Of the lot. You must go too,  
with these Officers of Odysseus' regiment. You must leave Your old  
home. You're designated one of his slaves.

### **Hecuba**

So this is how it ends. My crown of pain, All my sufferings, each new  
loss  
Worse than the last, till it comes to this: To leave my homeland, to  
leave my city, To watch them burning it to the ground.  
Come on then, old worn out feet,  
Make one last effort, so that I can say My last goodbyes to my poor  
city  
In its death agony . . .  
Troy! While you lived, you were the greatest And most glorious of all  
the cities of Asia.  
Now they are destroying even your name.  
They are burning you to the ground, and taking us Into exile to be  
slaves. O, you gods!  
But why bother to call on them? We called before, And they didn't  
hear us. They ignored our prayers.  
Well then. Why not run into the flames?  
What could be better for me, the Queen Of this burning city, than to die  
in its embrace And make its funeral pyre my own!

### **Talthybius**

Poor woman. You've suffered so much It's unbalanced you, like an  
ecstasy of pain.

Hang on to her! You need not treat her with kid gloves!  
She belongs to Odysseus now, and your orders Are to deliver her  
personally into his hands.

**Hecuba**

Howl! Howl! Howl!  
Son of Cronos, god of Troy,  
Father of our fatherland, do you see?  
Dardanus' children don't deserve such a fall!

**Chorus**

He sees, and does nothing. Troy, our beautiful city, No longer exists.  
They are burning, burning it all.

**Hecuba**

Howl! Howl! Howl!  
Troy is burning, every house is in flames Even the citadel, walls and  
domes,  
The hungry flames are consuming it all!

**Chorus**

The black wing of heaven shadows the dying houses Of the murdered  
Trojans. Smoke is their funeral pall.

**Hecuba**

My beloved city, my children's nurse.

**Chorus**

Weep louder, weep long.

**Hecuba**

My children, do you hear your mother's voice?

**Chorus**

Cry to the dead. Can they hear your song?

**Hecuba**

Let me kneel, lay my old legs on the ground, And my old woman's  
hands, let them beat the earth!

**Chorus**

Let me kneel beside you, let my voice sound In the dark halls of  
Hades, the Kingdom of Death!  
Husband, can you hear me underground?

**Hecuba**

Like loot they are stealing us.

**Chorus**

Let the dead hear our pain.

**Hecuba**

To live in their slave huts, to be a slave.

**Chorus**

Home gone, country gone.

**Hecuba**

Priam, you are dead, but you have no grave, No friend to weep or keen,  
Can you hear my anguished moan?

**Chorus**

He hears nothing. The black veil of death Has darkened his sacred eyes  
with the desecration of earth.

**Hecuba**

My beloved country, temples of the gods . . .

**Chorus**

Weep louder, weep long.

**Hecuba**

The fire consumes, and the spear invades.

**Chorus**

Soon anonymous earth, like a forgotten song.

**Hecuba**

A cloud of dust darkens the sky  
Like a shadowy wing, blots out my old home.

**Chorus**

Soon no one will remember this city, Everything is dying, even the  
name: There is no place on earth called Troy.

**Hecuba**

Do you hear that sound?

**Chorus**

Troy has fallen!

**Hecuba**

It's like an earthquake. Everything's shaking!

**Chorus**

The city sinks, we all drown!

**Hecuba**

Into the abyss. My legs are trembling, But I won't fall. Old limbs,  
strengthen Yourselves. Your slavery is beginning.

**Chorus**

Troy is finished. We must turn our weary feet To the harbour. The oars  
are waiting. March down to the Achaean fleet!

*Exeunt Hecuba, Talthybius and Chorus.*

# Postscript

## REUNION IN SARAJEVO

They meet regularly, the dark-robed women.  
The time and place  
Of the next meeting is never known, Only that there will be one.  
The ancient disgrace  
Will be re-enacted, the old moan By the fresh earth, the white face  
That says everything and nothing: and always a boy Broken on the  
stones of Troy.

It was the Athenians who first troubled the graves Of the dark-robed  
dead.

Triremes cut the unprotected waves To Melos: the decree leaves  
Nothing male living: the boys bleed With the men, the women rostered  
as slaves.

And Hecuba stirs in her dark bed, Andromache's ashes gather,  
Cassandra's lust For prophecy is born again in the dust.

They have lost count now, the dark-robed mourners, Of the many times  
they have met.

Fresh blood draws them, injustice gathers These shadowy ladies, so  
that whatever suffers Shares the remembrance of suffering, the wet  
Cheeks, the torn hair, the terrors Repeated again and again. They  
meet Always in the hope that this will be the last Reunion, that they  
may return in peace to the past: Always disappointed. In the  
mortared market place Andromache shovels her son

Into a bag. Raped Cassandra's crazed face Stares from the TV screen.  
No trace Of Polyxena's tomb. Dog like, Hecuba digs alone In the  
shelled graveyard. No peace For the mutilated child-body, thrown  
Into a cellar and burned. No identification: An unknown daughter of  
a murdered nation.

They stand silently, the dark robed women, Heads leaning together in mourning.

No words can express their centuries of pain, Only brushing of hands and cheeks, the fallen Beauty of having seen too much, sensing Too keenly that it will happen again.

They depart to their temporary graves, knowing The next reunion is pencilled: only who will destroy Is still uncertain, and what particular Troy.

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