

THE TROJAN WOMEN

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CHARACTERS

Poseidon

Athene

Hecuba

Talthybius

Cassandra

Andromache

Astyanax

Menelaus

Helen

Chorus of Trojan women

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

(Enter Poseidon.)

Poseidon

I am Poseidon. I come from the Aegean depths
of the sea beneath whose waters Nereid choirs evolve
the intricate bright circle of their dancing feet.
For since that day when Phoebus Apollo and I laid down
on Trojan soil the close of these stone walls, drawn true
and straight, there has always been affection in my heart
unfading, for these Phrygians and for their city;
which smolders now, fallen before the Argive spears,
ruined, sacked, gutted. Such is Athene's work, and his,
the Parnassian, Epeius of Phocis, architect
and builder of the horse that swarmed with inward steel,
that fatal bulk which passed within the battlements,
whose fame hereafter shall be loud among men unborn,
the Wooden Horse, which hid the secret spears within.
Now the gods' groves are desolate, their thrones of power
blood-spattered where beside the lift of the altar steps
of Zeus Defender, Priam was cut down and died.

5

10

15

The ships of the Achaeans load with spoils of Troy
 now, the piled gold of Phrygia. And the men of Greece
 who made this expedition and took the city, stay
 only for the favoring stern-wind now to greet their wives
 and children after ten years' harvests wasted here.

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

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

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

(Athene enters.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Poseidon
 I know that Ajax dragged Cassandra there by force.

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

Poseidon

Yet Ilium was taken by your strength alone.

Athene

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

Poseidon

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

Athene

Make the home voyage a most unhappy coming home.

75

Poseidon

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

Athene

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

80

85

Poseidon

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

90

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

95

(*The gods leave the stage. Hecuba seems to waken, and
 gets slowly to her feet as she speaks.*)

Hecuba

Rise, stricken head, from the dust;
 lift up the throat. This is Troy, but Troy
 and we, Troy's kings, are perished.

100

Stoop to the changing fortune.
 Steer for the crossing and the death-god,
 hold not life's prow on the course against
 wave beat and accident.

Ah me,
 what need I further for tears' occasion,
 state perished, my sons, and my husband?
 O massive pride that my fathers heaped
 to magnificence, you meant nothing.
 Must I be hushed? Were it better thus?
 Should I cry a lament?

105

110

Unhappy, accursed,
 limbs cramped, I lie
 backed on earth's stiff bed.

O head, O temples
 and sides; sweet, to shift,
 let the tired spine rest
 weight eased by the sides alternate,
 against the strain of the tears' song
 where the stricken people find music yet
 in the song undanced of their wretchedness.

115

120

You ships' prows, that the fugitive
 oars swept back to blessed Ilium
 over the sea's blue water
 by the placid harbors of Hellas
 to the flute's grim beat
 and the swing of the shrill boat whistles;
 you made the crossing, made fast ashore
 the Egyptians' skill, the sea cables,
 alas, by the coasts of Troy;

125

130

it was you, ships, that carried the fatal bride
of Menelaus, Castor her brother's shame,
the stain on the Eurotas.

Now she has killed
the sire of the fifty sons,
Priam; me, unhappy Hecuba,
she drove on this reef of ruin.

Such state I keep
to sit by the tents of Agamemnon.
I am led captive
from my house, an old, unhappy woman,
like my city ruined and pitiful.
Come then, sad wives of the Trojans
whose spears were bronze,
their daughters, brides of disaster,
let us mourn the smoke of Ilium.
And I, as among winged birds
the mother, lead out
the clashing cry, the song; not that song
wherein once long ago,
when I held the scepter of Priam,
my feet were queens of the choir and led
the proud dance to the gods of Phrygia.

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

First Half-chorus

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

Hecuba

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

First Half-chorus

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

Hecuba

I know nothing. I look for disaster.

First Half-chorus

Alas!

Poor women of Troy, torn from your homes,
bent to forced hard work.
The Argives push for home.

Hecuba

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

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

Second Half-chorus

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

Hecuba

My child, do not fear so. Lighten your heart.
But I go stunned with terror.

Second Half-chorus

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

185

Hecuba

You are near the lot now.

Second Half-chorus

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

Hecuba

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

190

195

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

Chorus

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

200

205

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

210

I have heard the rumor
of the hallowed ground by Peneus,
bright doorstone of Olympus,
deep burdened in beauty of flower and harvest.
There would I be next after the blessed,
the sacrosanct hold of Theseus.

215

And they say that the land of Aetna,
the Fire God's keep against Punic men,
mother of Sicilian mountains, sounds
in the herald's cry for games' garlands;
and the land washed

220

by the streaming Ionian Sea,
that land watered by the loveliest
of rivers, Crathis, with the red-gold tresses
who draws from the depths of enchanted wells
blessings on a strong people.

225

See now, from the host of the Danaans
the herald, charged with new orders, takes
the speed of his way toward us.

230

What message? What command? Since we count as slaves
even now in the Dorian kingdom.

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

Talthybius

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

235

Hecuba

It comes, beloved daughters of Troy; the thing I feared.

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

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

Talthybius
 All are allotted separately, each to a man.

Hecuba
 Who is given to whom? Oh, is there any hope
 left for the women of Troy? 245

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

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

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

Hecuba
 Slave woman to that Lacedaemonian wife?
 My unhappy child! 250

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

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

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

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

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

Hecuba
 My poor youngest, why did you take her away from me? 260

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

Hecuba
 To whose arms did the lot force her?

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

Hecuba
 To watch, my child? Over a tomb? 265
 Tell me, is this their way,
 some law, friend, established among the Greeks?

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

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

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

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

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

Hecuba
 And I, my aged strength crutched for support on staves, 275
 whom shall I serve?

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

Hecuba
 Oh no, no!
 Tear the shorn head,
 rip nails through the folded cheeks. 280

Must I?

To be given as slave to serve that vile, that slippery man,
right's enemy, brute, murderous beast,
that mouth of lies and treachery, that makes void
faith in things promised
and that which was beloved turns to hate. Oh, mourn,
daughters of Ilium, weep as one for me.
I am gone, doomed, undone,
O wretched, given
the worst lot of all.

285

290

Chorus

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

Talthybius

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

295

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Hecuba

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

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

Cassandra

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

310

Blessed the bridegroom.

Blessed am I indeed to lie at a king's side,
blessed the bride of Argos.

Hymen, my lord, Hymenaeus.

Yours were the tears, my mother,
yours was the lamentation for my father fallen,
for your city so dear beloved,
but mine this marriage, my marriage,
and I shake out the torch-flare,
brightness, dazzle,
light for you, Hymenaeus,
Hecate, light for you,
for the bed of virginity as man's custom ordains.

315

320

Let your feet dance, rippling the air; let go the chorus,
as when my father's
fate went in blessedness.

325

O sacred circle of dance.

Lead now, Phoebos Apollo; I wear your laurel,
I tend your temple,
Hymen, O Hymenaeus.

330

Dance, Mother, dance, laugh; lead; let your feet
wind in the shifting pattern and follow mine,
keep the sweet step with me,
cry out the name Hymenaeus
and the bride's name in the shrill
and the blessed incantation.

335

O you daughters of Phrygia robed in splendor,
dance for my wedding,
for the lord fate appointed to lie beside me.

340

Chorus

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

Hecuba

Fire God, in mortal marriages you lift up your torch,
but here you throw a melancholy light, not seen

through my hopes that went so high in days gone past. O
child,

there was a time I dreamed you would not wed like this,
not at the spear's edge, not under force of Argive arms.
Let me take the light; crazed, passionate, you cannot carry
it straight enough, poor child. Your fate is intemperate
as you are, always. There is no relief for you.

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

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

Cassandra

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

day after day, though none sought to wrench their land from
them

nor their own towering cities. Those the War God caught
never saw their sons again, nor were they laid to rest
decently in winding sheets by their wives' hands, but lie
buried in alien ground; while all went wrong at home
as the widows perished, and barren couples raised and nursed
the children of others, no survivor left to tend
the tombs, and what is left there, with blood sacrificed.
For such success as this congratulate the Greeks.

No, but the shame is better left in silence, for fear
my singing voice become the voice of wretchedness.

The Trojans have that glory which is loveliest:

they died for their own country. So the bodies of all
who took the spears were carried home in loving hands,
brought, in the land of their fathers, to the embrace of earth
and buried becomingly as the rite fell due. The rest,
those Phrygians who escaped death in battle, day by day
came home to happiness the Achaeans could not know;
their wives, their children. Then was Hector's fate so sad?
You think so. Listen to the truth. He is dead and gone
surely, but with reputation, as a valiant man.

How could this be, except for the Achaeans' coming?

Had they held back, none might have known how great he
was.

The bride of Paris was the daughter of Zeus. Had he
not married her, fame in our house would sleep in silence still.

Though surely the wise man will forever shrink from war,
yet if war come, the hero's death will lay a wreath
not lustreless on the city. The coward alone brings shame.

Let no more tears fall, Mother, for our land, nor for
this marriage I make; it is by marriage that I bring
to destruction those whom you and I have hated most.

Chorus

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

Talthybius

Were it not Apollo who has driven wild your wits
 I would make you sorry for sending the princes of our host
 on their way home in augury of foul speech like this. 410
 Now pride of majesty and wisdom's outward show
 have fallen to stature less than what was nothing worth
 since he, almighty prince of the assembled Hellenes,
 Atreus' son beloved, has stooped—by his own will—
 to find his love in a crazed girl. I, a plain man, 415
 would not marry this woman or keep her as my slave.
 You then, with your wits unhinged by idiocy,
 your scolding of Argos and your Trojans glorified
 I throw to the winds to scatter them. Come now with me
 to the ships, a bride—and such a bride—for Agamemnon. 420
 Hecuba, when Laertes' son calls you, be sure
 you follow; if what all say who came to Ilium
 is true, at the worst you will be a good woman's slave.

Cassandra

That servant is a vile thing. Oh, how can heralds keep
 their name of honor? Lackeys for despots be they, or
 lackeys to the people, all men must despise them still. 425
 You tell me that my mother must be slave in the house
 of Odysseus? Where are all Apollo's promises
 uttered to me, to my own ears, that Hecuba
 should die in Troy? Odysseus I will curse no more,
 poor wretch, who little dreams of what he must go through 430
 when he will think Troy's pain and mine were golden grace
 beside his own luck. Ten years he spent here, and ten
 more years will follow before he at last comes home, forlorn
 after the terror of the rock and the thin strait,
 Charybdis; and the mountain striding Cyclops, who eats
 men's flesh; the Ligyan witch who changes men to swine,
 Circe; the wreck of all his ships on the salt sea,
 the lotus passion, the sacred oxen of the Sun 435

slaughtered, and dead flesh moaning into speech, to make
 Odysseus listening shiver. Cut the story short: 440
 he will go down to the water of death, and return alive
 to reach home and the thousand sorrows waiting there.
 Why must I transfix each of Odysseus' labors one by one?
 Lead the way quick to the house of death where I shall
 take my mate. 445
 Lord of all the sons of Danaus, haughty in your mind of pride,
 not by day, but evil in the evil night you shall find your grave
 when I lie corpse-cold and naked next my husband's sepulcher,
 piled in the ditch for animals to rip and feed on, beaten by
 streaming storms of winter, I who wore Apollo's sacraments. 450
 Garlands of the god I loved so well, the spirit's dress of pride,
 leave me, as I leave those festivals where once I was so gay.
 See, I tear your adornments from my skin not yet defiled by
 touch,
 throw them to the running winds to scatter, O lord of prophecy,
 Where is this general's ship, then? Lead me where I must set my
 feet on board. 455
 Wait the wind of favor in the sails; yet when the ship goes out
 from this shore, she carries one of the three Furies in my shape.
 Land of my ancestors, good-bye; O Mother, weep no more for
 me.
 You beneath the ground, my brothers, Priam, father of us all,
 I will be with you soon and come triumphant to the dead below, 460
 leaving behind me, wrecked, the house of Atreus, which de-
 stroyed our house.

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

Chorus

Handmaids of aged Hecuba, can you not see
 how your mistress, powerless to cry out, lies prone? Oh, take
 her hand and help her to her feet, you wretched maids.
 Will you let an aged helpless woman lie so long? 465

Hecuba

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

470

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495

500

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

505

510

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

Chorus

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

515

520

525

530

to give the goddess
her pleasure: the colt immortal, unbroken,
the nest of Argive spears,
death for the children of Dardanus
sealed in the sleek hill pine chamber.
In the sling of the flax twist shipwise
they berthed the black hull
in the house of Pallas Athene
stone paved, washed now in the blood of our people.
Strong, gay work
deep into black night
to the stroke of the Libyan lute
and all Troy singing, and girls'
light feet pulsing the air
in the kind dance measures;
indoors, lights everywhere,
torchflares on black
to forbid sleep's onset.
I was there also: in the great room
I danced the maiden of the mountains,
Artemis, Zeus' daughter.
When the cry went up, sudden,
bloodshot, up and down the city, to stun
the keep of the citadel. Children
reached shivering hands to clutch
at the mother's dress.
War stalked from his hiding place.
Pallas did this.
Beside their altars the Trojans
died in their blood. Desolate now,
men murdered, our sleeping rooms gave up
their brides' beauty
to breed sons for Greek men,
sorrow for our own country.

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

Hecuba look, I see her, rapt
to the alien wagon, Andromache,
close to whose beating breast clings
the boy Astyanax, Hector's sweet child.
O carried away—to what land?—unhappy woman,
on the wagon floor, with the brazen arms
of Hector, of Troy
captive and heaped beside you,
torn now from Troy, for Achilles' son
to hang in the shrines of Phthia.

Andromache

I am in the hands of Greek masters.

Hecuba

Alas!

Andromache

Must the incantation

Hecuba

(ah me!)

Andromache

of my own grief win tears from you?

Hecuba

It must—O Zeus!

Andromache

My own distress?

Hecuba

O my children

Andromache

once. No longer.

Hecuba

Lost, lost, Troy our dominion

Andromache
unhappy

Hecuba
and my lordly children.

Andromache
Gone, alas!

Hecuba
They were mine.

Andromache
Sorrows only.

Hecuba
Sad destiny 585

Andromache
of our city

Hecuba
a wreck, and burning.

Andromache
Come back, O my husband.

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

Andromache
my defender. 590

Hecuba
And you, whose death shamed the Achaeans,

Andromache
lord of us all once,
O patriarch, Priam,

Hecuba
take me to my death now.

Andromache
Longing for death drives deep;

Hecuba
O sorrowful, such is our fortune; 595

Andromache
lost our city

Hecuba
and our pain lies deep under pain piled over.

Andromache
We are the hated of God, since once your youngest escaping
death, brought down Troy's towers in the arms of a worthless
woman,
piling at the feet of Pallas the bleeding bodies of our young men
sprawled, kites' food, while Troy takes up the yoke of captivity. 600

Hecuba
O my city, my city forlorn

Andromache
abandoned, I weep this

Hecuba
miserable last hour

Andromache
of the house where I bore my children.

Hecuba
O my sons, this city and your mother are desolate of you.
Sound of lamentation and sorrow,
tears on tears shed. Home, farewell, since the dead have forgotten 605
all sorrows, and weep no longer.

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

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

Hecuba
I see the work of gods who pile tower-high the pride
of those who were nothing, and dash present grandeur down.

Andromache

We are carried away, sad spoils, my boy and I; our life transformed, as the aristocrat becomes the serf.

615

Hecuba

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

Andromache

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

Hecuba

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

620

Andromache

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

Hecuba

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

625

Andromache

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

Hecuba

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

Andromache

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

630

Hecuba

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

Andromache

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

635

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

640

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

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

645

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

650

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

655

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

660

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

665

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

Even the young mare torn from her running mate and teamed
with another will not easily wear the yoke. And yet
this is a brute and speechless beast of burden, not

670

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

Chorus

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

Hecuba

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

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

705

But *we* say this, and others will speak also. See,
 here is some runner of the Achaeans come again.
 Who is he? What news? What counsel have they taken now?

(*Talthybius enters again with his escort.*)

Talthybius

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

710

Andromache

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

Talthybius

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

685

Andromache

That he shall serve some other master than I serve?

Talthybius

No man of Achaea shall ever make this boy his slave.

715

Andromache

Must he be left behind in Phrygia, all alone?

690

Talthybius

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

Andromache

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

695

Talthybius

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

Andromache

Oh, this is worse than anything I heard before.

720

700

Talthybius

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

Andromache

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

Talthybius

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

Andromache

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

Talthybius

He must be hurled from the battlements of Troy.

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

No, wait!

725

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

730

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

735

Andromache

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

740

745

Poor child, are you crying too? Do you know what they
will do to you? Your fingers clutch my dress. What use,
to nestle like a young bird under the mother's wing?

750

Hector cannot come back, not burst from underground
to save you, that spear of glory caught in the quick hand,
nor Hector's kin, nor any strength of Phrygian arms.

Yours the sick leap head downward from the height, the fall
where none have pity, and the spirit smashed out in death.

755

O last and loveliest embrace of all, O child's
sweet fragrant body. Vanity in the end. I nursed
for nothing the swaddled baby at this mother's breast;
in vain the wrack of the labor pains and the long sickness.

760

Now once again, and never after this, come close
to your mother, lean against my breast and wind your arms
around my neck, and put your lips against my lips.

(She kisses Astyanax and relinquishes him.)

Greeks! Your Greek cleverness is simple barbarity.
Why kill this child, who never did you any harm?

765

O flowering of the house of Tyndareus! Not his,
not God's daughter, never that, but child of many fathers
I say; the daughter of Vindictiveness, of Hate,
of Blood, Death; of all wickedness that swarms on earth.

I cry it aloud: Zeus never was your father, but you
were born a pestilence to all Greeks and the world beside.

770

Accursed; who from those lovely and accursed eyes
brought down to shame and ruin the bright plains of Troy.

Oh, seize him, take him, dash him to death if it must be done;
feed on his flesh if it is your will. These are the gods

775

who damn us to this death, and I have no strength to save
my boy from execution. Cover this wretched face
and throw me into the ship and that sweet bridal bed
I walk to now across the death of my own child.

(Talthybius gently lifts the child out of the wagon, which leaves the stage, carrying Andromache away.)

Chorus

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

Talthybius

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

Take him.

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

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

(He goes out.)

Hecuba

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

Chorus

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

This was the first flower of Hellenic strength Heracles brought in anger

for the horses promised; and by Simois' calm waters checked the surf-wandering oars and made fast the ships' stern cables.

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

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

In vain, then, Laomedon's child, you walk in delicate pride by the golden pitchers in loveliest servitude

to fill Zeus' wine cups; while Troy your mother is given to the flame to eat, and the lonely beaches mourn, as sad birds sing for the young lost, for the sword hand and the children and the aged women.

Gone now the shining pools where you bathed, the fields where you ran all desolate. And you,

Ganymede, go in grace by the thrones of God with your young, calm smile even now as Priam's kingdom falls to the Greek spear.

O Love, Love, it was you in the high halls of Dardanus, the sky-daughters of melody beside you, who piled the huge strength of Troy in towers, the gods' own hands concerned. I speak no more

against Zeus' name.

But the light men love, who shines
through the pale wings of morning,
balestar on this earth now,
watched the collapse of tall towers:
Dawn. Her lord was of this land;
she bore his children,
Tithonus, caught away by the golden car
and the starry horses,
who made our hopes so high.
For the gods loved Troy once.
Now they have forgotten.

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

Menelaus

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

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

Hecuba

850 O power, who mount the world, wheel where the world rides,
O mystery of man's knowledge, whosoever you be, 885
Zeus named, nature's necessity or mortal mind,
I call upon you; for you walk the path none hears
yet bring all human action back to right at last.

Menelaus

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

Hecuba

Kill your wife, Menelaus, and I will bless your name. 890
But keep your eyes away from her. Desire will win.
She looks enchantment, and where she looks homes are set fire;
she captures cities as she captures the eyes of men.
We have had experience, you and I. We know the truth.

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

Helen

Menelaus, your first acts are argument of terror 895
to come. Your lackeys put their hands on me. I am dragged
out of my chambers by brute force. I know you hate
me; I am almost sure. And still there is one question
I would ask you, if I may. What have the Greeks decided
to do with me? Or shall I be allowed to live? 900

Menelaus

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

Helen

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

Menelaus

880 I did not come to talk with you. I came to kill. 905

Hecuba

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

Menelaus

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

Helen

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

First, then!

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

sold once for my body's beauty stand accused, who should for what has been done wear garlands on my head.

I know.

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

You see?

I wonder—and I ask this of myself, not you—why *did* I do it? What made me run away from home with the stranger, and betray my country and my hearth? Challenge the goddess then, show your greater strength than Zeus'

who has the other gods in his power, and still is slave to Aphrodite alone. Shall I not be forgiven? Still you might have some show of argument against me. When Paris was gone to the deep places of death, below ground, and the immortal practice on my love was gone, I should have come back to the Argive ships, left Troy. I did try to do it, and I have witnesses, the towers' gatekeepers and the sentinels on the wall, who caught me again and again as I let down the rope from the battlements and tried to slip away to the ground. For Deiphobus, my second husband: he took me away by force and kept me his wife against the Phrygians' will.

O my husband, can you kill me now and think you kill in righteousness? I was the bride of force. Before, I brought their houses to the sorrow of slavery instead of conquest. Would you be stronger than the gods? Try, then. But even such ambition is absurd.

Chorus

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

Hecuba

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

So much for that. You say my son took you away
by force. What Spartan heard you cry for help? You did
cry out? Or did you? Castor, your brother, was there, a young
man, and his twin not yet caught up among the stars. 1000
Then when you had reached Troy, and the Argives at your heels
came, and the agony of the murderous spears began,
when the reports came in that Menelaus' side
was winning, you would praise him, simply to make my son 1005
unhappy at the strength of his love's challenger,
forgetting your husband when the luck went back to Troy.
You worked hard: not to make yourself a better woman,
but to make sure always to be on the winning side.
You claim you tried to slip away with ropes let down, 1010
from the ramparts, and this proves you stayed against your will?
Perhaps. But when were you ever caught in the strangling noose,
caught sharpening a dagger? Which any noble wife
would do, desperate with longing for her lord's return.
Yet over and over again I gave you good advice: 1015
"Make your escape, my daughter; there are other girls
for my sons to marry. I will help you get away
to the ships of the Achaeans. Let the Greeks, and us,
stop fighting." So I argued, but you were not pleased.
Spoiled in the luxury of Alexander's house 1020
you liked foreigners to kiss the ground before your feet.
All that impressed you.

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

O Menelaus,
mark this, the end of my argument. Be true to your
high reputation and to Hellas. Grace both, and kill 1030

Helen. Thus make it the custom toward all womankind hereafter, that the price of adultery is death.

Chorus

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

1035

Menelaus

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

1040

(Helen drops before him and embraces his knees.)

Helen

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

Hecuba

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

1045

(Menelaus pushes Helen away.)

Menelaus

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

Hecuba

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

Menelaus

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

1050

Hecuba

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

Menelaus

Sometimes; when the beloved's heart turns false to him. Yet it shall be as you wish. She shall not be allowed

in the same ship I sail in. This was well advised. And once in Argos she must die the vile death earned by her vile life, and be an example to all women to live temperately. This is not the easier way; and yet her execution will tincture with fear the lust of women even more depraved than she.

1055

(Helen is led out, Menelaus following.)

Chorus

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

1060

1065

1070

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

1075

1080

O my dear, my husband, O wandering ghost unwashed, unburied; the sea hull must carry me in the flash of its wings' speed to Argos, city of horses, where the stone walls built by giants invade the sky. The multitudes of our children stand

1085

1090

clinging to the gates and cry through their tears.
And one girl weeps:

“O Mother, the Achaeans take me away
lonely from your eyes
to the black ship
where the oars dip surf
toward Salamis the blessed,
or the peak between two seas
where Pelops’ hold
keeps the gates at the Isthmus.”

Oh that as Menelaus’ ship
makes way through the mid-sea
the bright pronged spear immortal of thunder might smash it
far out in the Aegaeon,
as in tears, in bondage to Hellas
I am cut from my country;
as she holds the golden mirror
in her hands, girls’ grace,
she, God’s daughter.

Let him never come home again, to a room in Laconia
and the hearth of his fathers;
never more to Pitana’s streets
and the bronze gates of the Maiden;
since he forgave his shame
and the vile marriage, the sorrows
of great Hellas and the land
watered by Simois.

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

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

Talthybius

Hecuba, one last vessel of Achilles’ son
remains, manned at the oar sweeps now, to carry back
to the shores of Phthiotis his last spoils of war.
Neoptolemus himself has put to sea. He heard
news of old Peleus in difficulty and the land
invaded by Acastus, son of Pelias.

Such news put speed above all pleasure of delay.
So he is gone, and took with him Andromache,
whose lamentations for her country and farewells
to Hector’s tomb as she departed brought these tears
crowding into my eyes. And she implored that you
bury this dead child, your own Hector’s son, who died
flung from the battlements of Troy. She asked as well
that the bronze-backed shield, terror of the Achaeans once,
when the boy’s father slung its defense across his side,
be not taken to the hearth of Peleus, nor the room
where the slain child’s Andromache must be a bride
once more, to waken memories by its sight, but used
in place of the cedar coffin and stone-chambered tomb
for the boy’s burial. He shall be laid in your arms
to wrap the body about with winding sheets, and flowers,
as well as you can, out of that which is left to you.
Since she is gone. Her master’s speed prevented her
from giving the rites of burial to her little child.

The rest of us, once the corpse is laid out, and earth
is piled above it, must raise the mast tree, and go.
Do therefore quickly everything that you must do.
There is one labor I myself have spared you. As
we forded on our way here Scamander’s running water,
I washed the body and made clean the wounds. I go
now, to break ground and dig the grave for him, that my
work be made brief, as yours must be, and our tasks end
together, and the ships be put to sea, for home.

Hecuba

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

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

Achaean! All your strength is in your spears, not in
the mind. What were you afraid of, that it made you kill
this child so savagely? That Troy, which fell, might be
raised from the ground once more? Your strength meant
nothing, then. 1160

When Hector's spear was fortunate, and numberless
strong hands were there to help him, we were still destroyed.
Now when the city is fallen and the Phrygians slain,
this baby terrified you? I despise the fear 1165
which is pure terror in a mind unreasoning.

O darling child, how wretched was this death. You might
have fallen fighting for your city, grown to man's
age, and married, and with the king's power like a god's,
and died happy, if there is any happiness here. 1170

But no. You grew to where you could see and learn, my child,
yet your mind was not old enough to win advantage
of fortune. How wickedly, poor boy, your fathers' walls,
Apollo's handiwork, have crushed your pitiful head
tended and trimmed to ringlets by your mother's hand,
and the face she kissed once, where the brightness now is blood
shining through the torn bones—too horrible to say more. 1175

O little hands, sweet likenesses of Hector's once,
now you lie broken at the wrists before my feet;
and mouth beloved whose words were once so confident,
you are dead; and all was false, when you would lean across
my bed, and say: "Mother, when you die I will cut
my long hair in your memory, and at your grave
bring companies of boys my age, to sing farewell."
It did not happen; now I, a homeless, childless, old
woman must bury your poor corpse, which is so young. 1180
Alas for all the tendernesses, my nursing care, 1185

and all your slumbers gone. What shall the poet say,
what words will he inscribe upon your monument?
Here lies a little child the Argives killed, because 1190
they were afraid of him. That? The epitaph of Greek shame.

You will not win your father's heritage, except
for this, which is your coffin now: the brazen shield.

O shield, who guarded the strong shape of Hector's arm:
the bravest man of all, who wore you once, is dead. 1195
How sweet the impression of his body on your sling,
and at the true circle of your rim the stain of sweat
where in the grind of his many combats Hector leaned
his chin against you, and the drops fell from his brow!

Take up your work now; bring from what is left some robes
to wrap the tragic dead. The gods will not allow us
to do it right. But let him have what we can give. 1200

That mortal is a fool who, prospering, thinks his life
has any strong foundation; since our fortune's course
of action is the reeling way a madman takes, 1205
and no one person is ever happy all the time.

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

Chorus

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

Hecuba

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

Chorus

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

Hecuba

These Phrygian robes' magnificence you should have worn
at your marriage to some princess uttermost in pride
in all the East, I lay upon your body now.

1220

And you, once so victorious and mother of
a thousand conquests, Hector's huge beloved shield:
here is a wreath for you, who die not, yet are dead
with this body; since it is better far to honor you
than the armor of Odysseus the wicked and wise.

1225

Chorus

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

Hecuba

Yes.

Chorus

The dirge of the dead.

Hecuba

Ah me.

1230

Chorus

Evils never to be forgotten.

Hecuba

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

Chorus

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

1235

Hecuba

Dear women. . . .

Chorus

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

Hecuba

The gods meant nothing except to make life hard for me,
and of all cities they chose Troy to hate. In vain

1240

we sacrificed. And yet had not the very hand
of God gripped and crushed this city deep in the ground,
we should have disappeared in darkness, and not given
a theme for music, and the songs of men to come.

1245

You may go now, and hide the dead in his poor tomb;
he has those flowers that are the right of the underworld.
I think it makes small difference to the dead, if they
are buried in the tokens of luxury. All this
is an empty glorification left for those who live.

1250

*(The soldiers take up and carry away the body
of Astyanax.)*

Chorus

Sad mother, whose hopes were so huge
for your life. They are broken now.

Born to high blessedness
and a lordly line
your death was horror.

1255

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

(Talthybius comes back, with numerous men.)

Talthybius

I call to the captains who have orders to set fire
to the city of Priam: shield no longer in the hand
the shining flame. Let loose the fire upon it. So

1260

with the citadel of Ilium broken to the ground
we can take leave of Troy, in gladness, and go home.

I speak to you, too, for my orders include this. 1265
Children of Troy, when the lords of the armament sound
the high echoing crash of the trumpet call, then go
to the ships of the Achaeans, to be taken away
from this land. And you, unhappiest and aged woman,
go with them. For Odysseus' men are here, to whom 1270
enslaved the lot exiles you from your native land.

Hecuba

Ah, wretched me. So this is the unhappy end
and goal of all the sorrows I have lived. I go
forth from my country and a city lit with flames.
Come, aged feet; make one last weary struggle, that I 1275
may hail my city in its affliction. O Troy, once
so huge over all Asia in the drawn wind of pride,
your very name of glory shall be stripped away.
They are burning you, and us they drag forth from our land
enslaved. O gods! Do I call upon those gods for help? 1280
I cried to them before now, and they would not hear.
Come then, hurl ourselves into the pyre. Best now
to die in the flaming ruins of our fathers' house!

Talthybius

Unhappy creature, ecstatic in your sorrows! Men,
take her, spare not. She is Odysseus' property. 1285
You have orders to deliver her into his hands.

Hecuba

O sorrow.
Cronion, Zeus, lord of Phrygia,
prince of our house, have you seen
the dishonor done to the seed of Dardanus? 1290

Chorus

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

Hecuba

O sorrow.
Ilium flares. 1295
The chambers of Pergamum take fire,
the citadel and the wall's high places.

Chorus

Our city fallen to the spear
fades as smoke winged in the sky.
halls hot in the swept fire
and the fierce lances. 1300

Hecuba

O soil where my children grew.

Chorus

Alas.

Hecuba

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

Chorus

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

Hecuba

I lean my old body against the earth
and both hands beat the ground. 1305

Chorus

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

Hecuba

We are taken, dragged away

Chorus

a cry of pain, pain

1310

Hecuba

under the slave's roof

Chorus

away from my country.

Hecuba

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

Chorus

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

1315

Hecuba

O gods' house, city beloved

Chorus

alas

Hecuba

you are given the red flame and the spear's iron.

Chorus

You will collapse to the dear ground and be nameless.

Hecuba

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

1320

Chorus

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

Hecuba

Did you see, did you hear?

Chorus

The crash of the citadel.

1325

Hecuba

The earth shook, riven

Chorus

to engulf the city.

Hecuba

O
shaking, tremulous limbs,

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

1330

Chorus

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

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

THE COMPLETE GREEK TRAGEDIES

Edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore

EURIPIDES • III

HECUBA

Translated by William Arrowsmith

ANDROMACHE

Translated by John Frederick Nims

THE TROJAN WOMEN

Translated by Richmond Lattimore

ION

Translated by Ronald Frederick Willetts

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