

Trojan Women

(Troïades)

of
Euripides

Translated by
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Trojan Women

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Poseidon, god of the sea

Athena, warrior god, patron of Athens

Hecuba (Hecabe/Hekabe), queen of Troy

Chorus of Trojan Captive Women

Talthybius, herald of the Greek army

Cassandra, prophet, daughter of Hecuba

Andromache, wife of Hector

Astyanax, non-speaking role, son of Andromache and Hector

Menelaus, husband of Helen, brother of Agamemnon

Helen of Troy, nee of Sparta, wife of Menelaus, Paris (Alexandros), Deiphobus

SETTING: Troy the morning after its capture. The *skēnē* (scene building) represents the quarters of the captive Trojan women.

DATE OF FIRST PRODUCTION: 415 BCE, final tragedy of a Trojan trilogy¹ (connected, loosely connected, or unconnected), with *Alexandros* and *Palamedes* (along with the satyr play *Sisyphus*)

I have relied on the texts of K. H. Lee (Bristol, 2001, with fine commentary) and Gilbert Murray (Oxford, 1913). I regret that I was unable to consult the text and commentary of David Kovacs. Permission is granted for public reading of the play by non-profit and educational groups, with acknowledgment of Diotima and the translator.

¹Whether *Trojan Women* is the last play of a connected, loosely connected, or unconnected trilogy is disputed. We can call the three tragedies (of which only fragments of the first two are extant) a Trojan trilogy because they are all about events leading up to, or taking place during or following the Trojan War. All three have themes and dramatic set pieces (trial scenes, for example) in common, but to allege that the *Trojan Women* does not stand alone as a drama without knowing the scripts of the two earlier plays seems off the mark.

Prologue (1–97)

*Poseidon enters along the parodos that leads to the sea and ships.²
Hecuba is lying in front of the stage building with attendants.*

POSEIDON

I've left the bitter salty depths of the Aegean Sea and
come here, I, the god Poseidon. Where I've come from
choirs of Nereids whirl their feet in rhythms full of grace.³
From that time back when all around this Trojan land
Phoebus Apollo and I laid out the rocky towers using 5
masons' rules to guide our hands, never since has kind feeling
for the city of the Phrygians been far from my heart.⁴
Now the city is going up in smoke as I stand watch. It is in ruins,
ransacked by the Argive spear. A man from Parnassus, Epeius
the Phocian, through the machinations of Pallas Athena, 10
fashioned a hollow horse, pregnant with weapons of war,
and conveyed it inside the towers, the gods' image of doom.⁵
The sacred groves are abandoned and the gods' shrines 15
are streaming with human blood. On the steps of the altar
of Zeus, guardian of the house, Priam has been slaughtered.
Uncounted hoards of Phrygian gold and plunder are being

²Entrance of Poseidon: how does he enter? From where? Where does he stand? It is hard sometimes for a reader to remember that these plays are actions and not just words. In fact the play may be said to begin even before the entrance of Poseidon with a “silent action” (see Alan Shapiro and Peter Burian, *Euripides*, Trojan Women, OUP: 2009: 12) in which Hecuba comes on stage (probably with attendants) and sinks to the ground in despair, for Poseidon tells us she is already there (36–8). Such actions are also called “cancelled entrances”: that is, the audience sees them but discounts them as part of setting the stage.

³3: Oddly enough, *dance* is a theme in this sorrowful play: see, for example, 120, 151–2, 325–333, 500, 545–6, 555, but Poseidon's mentioning the dance of the Nereids is meant to be a contrast to the smoking ruins of the city.

⁴7: “The city of *my* Phrygians. . . far from *my* heart” is another possible interpretation. In Homer Poseidon is an enemy to the Trojans, but his special powers are needed for Athena's revenge plot in *Trojan Women*. Zeus sentenced Poseidon and Apollo (who had taken part in a plot to overthrow him) to serve the Trojan king Laomedon (son of Ilus, the founder of Ilium or Troy; father of Priam) for a year.

⁵13–14: these lines seem to be added by a commentator: [“For this reason it will be called by people at a later time The Wooden (*Doureios*) Horse, enclosing the hidden spears (*doru*)”]. Such etymologies are more common in epilogues than prologues (see J. Wilson, “The Etymology in Euripides, *Troades*, 13-14,” *AJP* 89 (1968):71).

hauled to the Achaeans' ships. But they are waiting for
a wind from the stern, so that in this the tenth sowing season 20
they will with joy see their wives and children again,
those Greeks who made this military foray against this city.⁶

And I—I am defeated by Hera, god of Argos,
and Athena, who together annihilated the Phrygians—
I am leaving the legendary city of Troy and my altars; 25
for when an evil desolation takes hold of a city,
what belongs to the gods falls into disuse and is honored no more.
The river Scamander⁷ roars to the constant wailings of
the war-captives being allotted to their masters.
Some have gone to Arcadians, others to Thessalians; 30
the scions of Theseus, leaders of Athens, have their share.
All the Trojan women who have not yet been chosen
are in these huts, set apart for the first men of the army.
Among them is the Spartan, daughter of Tyndareus,
Helen, rightly considered a spear-won prize. 35

If anyone wants to look upon *this* unhappy soul,
here is Hecuba, lying on the ground in front of the gates,
shedding many tears for her many loved ones lost.
Beside the memorial mound of Achilles, her child,
Polyxena, has been killed wretchedly, in secret from her. 40
Priam is gone, and their many children. And Cassandra . . .
Lord Apollo turned her into a god-mad celibate prophet,
but Agamemnon, disregarding the god's sanctity
will force her into an illicit marriage of sorts with himself.

O, once happy city, I bid you farewell with all my heart, 45
and your polished stone towers. Had Zeus' daughter Pallas
not overthrown you, you would stand firm on your foundations.

*Athena enters along the parodos leading to the occupied city of Troy.*⁸

ATHENA

May I put aside my former bitter enmity

⁶20–22: Are the Greeks also to be seen as victims? Poseidon shows some sympathy for their ten years away from home. Cassandra makes the case that the losers are winners and the winners losers (368–382).

⁷28: Scamander and Simois are the two rivers of Troy mentioned in the *Iliad*.

⁸Athena's entrance: This is speculation, but Athena is interested in the details of the Greeks' decisions and reports them, making her entrance from the city more likely.

and address you, a great god, in high honor
among the gods, and closest in kin to my father?⁹ 50

POSEIDON
Of course, you may. Our ties of kin, Queen Athena,
are no small inducement to our mutual love.

ATHENA
I'm glad. Thank you for your gracious spirit, Lord Poseidon.
I offer words of interest we both can share in common.

POSEIDON
Are you by any chance bringing some new proclamation 55
from on high, either from Zeus or another of the divinities?

ATHENA
Not that. But for the sake of Troy whose land we are treading,
I have come to ask to make use of your power in a common cause.

POSEIDON
Have you cast aside your ancient hatred for the moment
and come to feel pity now that the city is burnt to ashes? 60

ATHENA
Don't go off on a tangent. Will you share in my plan and
be willing to act with me in something I want to undertake?

POSEIDON
Yes, but I want to know what you have in mind,
whether you have come for the sake of Argives or Phrygians.

ATHENA
I want to uplift my former enemies the Trojans 65
and provide a bitter homecoming for the Greek forces.

POSEIDON
Why do you jump so easily from one thing to its opposite?
Whatever you choose, you hate too much and you love too much.

ATHENA
Don't you know that I have been insulted, I and my temple?

POSEIDON
Yes, I do know. Ajax dragged away Cassandra by force.¹⁰ 70

⁹48 //: On this carefully worded and oddly stilted dialogue between a niece and her uncle, see Michael Lloyd, "The Language of the Gods: Politeness in the Prologue of the *Troades*" pp 183–192 in Cousland, Cropp, Hume, *The Play of Texts and Fragments : Essays in Honour of Martin Cropp*, Brill: 2009.

¹⁰70: The Locrian Ajax (Ajax the Lesser), son of Oileus dragged away Cassandra while she was clutching the image of Athena. Big Ajax, hero of Salamis, is already dead (by suicide) and is innocent of this crime. His father Telamon who came as a hero to sack Troy is named in the second stasimon (799). Andromache suggests that Agamemnon, in taking Cassandra, is a second Ajax (618). There are various versions of this Ajax' death. In one he was swallowed up by the sea after boasting he could escape Poseidon's wrath and was washed up on Mykonos; in

ATHENA

And he suffers no punishment from the Argives, not even a rebuke.

POSEIDON

And yet it was your power that brought the ruin of Ilium.

ATHENA

That is why—with your help—I want to do them harm.

POSEIDON

I am ready to do what you want. What do you want?

ATHENA

I want to hit them with a disastrous return home. 75

POSEIDON

While they are waiting on land or out on the open sea?

ATHENA

When they are making the homeward voyage from Ilium.
Zeus will send down rain and relentless beating hail
and the darkening blasts of storms turning day to night.
And he promises to lend me the fiery thunderbolt 80
to strike the Achaean ships and burn them to ashes.

And you, for your part, make the Aegean crossing
roar with triple-headed waves and whirlpools
and fill the hollow bay of Euboea with bodies of dead men,
so that for the future the Achaeans will know 85
to pay respect to my temple and worship the other gods.

POSEIDON

It will be done. The favor you ask needs no long
reply. I will shake the surface of the Aegean Sea.
The beaches of Mykonos, the rocky hogsback of Delos
and Skyros and Lemnos and the Capharean headlands 90
will teem with the bodies of the multitudinous dead.
But, you, go to Olympus and take the thunderbolt
from your father's hands and be ready there
for the moment the Argive host casts off its cables.

*Exit Athena.*¹¹

That mortal is a fool who devastates cities 95
and temples and tombs, the sacred places of the dead,
turning them to emptiness. His doom is coming.

Exit Poseidon, back to the sea and ships.

another his ship was wrecked near the Capharean promontory on the coast of Euboea and he was struck in the chest by Athena's borrowed thunderbolt.

¹¹Exit Athena: Where does she go? I think she would likely go towards the ships since her next planned action is to wreck them. She is done with protecting the Greeks.

Hecuba's Monody (96–153)

Hecuba is lying on the ground near the stage building and sings from there.

HECUBA (*Intoning in recitative anapests and singing in lyrical anapests*)

Get up, wretch of a woman, raise your head
and neck off the ground.¹² This is not Troy.
Troy is gone. I am Queen of Troy, queen of nothing. 100
Fortune shifts—we must be ready to bear it.
Sail along the current, sail with chance,
don't set your prow against life's course,
but sail on the wave of whatever comes.
Alas [*Aiai aiai.*] 105
What is left to lament in my misery,
when my homeland is gone, husband and children gone?
O great wealth of our forebears, with your sail shortened
how you have come to nothing.
Why should I keep my silence, and yet why not?¹³ 110
What should I lament?
I am in agony over the cruel knots
in my limbs, lying as I lie here
stretching my back on this hard rocky bed.
Oh my aching head, oh my throbbing temples 115
and sore ribs. How I yearn to turn over
and move my back and spine
from one side to the other of my aching body,
always going over the same dirges of tears.
For this is music to the broken-hearted 120
to give sound to disasters not fit for dancing.

Prows of ships, that with swift
oars moving toward holy Ilium
through the purple sea
and beautiful harbors of Hellas 125
with a hated paeon of flutes
and the sound of tuneful pipes
you hung the woven ropes,

¹²98–9: Although he does not use the stage devices (*mechanē*, flying machine, or *eccyclēma*, rolling out device) in *Trojan Women*, Euripides makes good use of the levels of the stage, Hecuba at her lowest, lying on the ground, the herald at the end (if he is in sight) perhaps on top of the stage building setting the towers on fire.

¹³110–111: This kind of questioning is very common in Greek tragedy.

Egyptian handiwork,¹⁴
 alas [*ai ai*] in the bays of Troy 130
 going after the hated wife
 of Menelaus, the bane of Castor¹⁵,
 disgrace to the River Eurotas¹⁶,
 who caused the death
 of Priam, father of fifty children, 135
 and ran me, wretched Hecuba,
 aground into this disaster.
 Ah me [*omoi*], what a place I keep
 next to the shelter of Agamemnon.
 I am to be led away a slave 140
 away from home, a grief-stricken old woman,
 my hair plundered from my head.
 You unhappy wives
 of the bronze-speared Trojans
 and sadly married daughters: 145
 smoke rises from Troy. Cry woe!
 Like a mother bird to her fledglings
 I will begin the screeching call,
 not the same song as once long ago
 relying on Priam's scepter, 150
 I began the choral hymn to Phrygia's gods
 with pounding rhythms of my feet.

Parodos (197–234)

Strophe a

HALF CHORUS A

HALF CHORUS LEADER

Hecuba, what is it you mourn? And why mutter like a dog?
 Where is your story going? Through these quarters
 I keep hearing the pitiful sounds you make. 155
 Fear rushes through my heart
 for the Trojan women inside these rooms, who
 are lamenting their slavery.

¹⁴129: Egyptian handiwork is rope made from the papyrus plant.

¹⁵132: Castor and Polydeuces (a.k.a. Pollux) the twins (Dioscuri) were Helen's brothers. They were turned into stars, according to a common version, when Castor died.

¹⁶133: The Eurotas runs through Sparta and is used to stand for the city. It is the longest river in the Peloponnese.

HECUBA

Even now to the Achaean ships . . .

HALF CHORUS A

Is the oarsman's hand getting ready? 160

Ah me [*oi ego*], what do they intend? Where now
will they take me by sea, far from my fathers' land?

HECUBA

I do not know, but I foresee disaster.

HALF CHORUS A

Calling to Half Chorus B, still inside the huts.

Ah, ah [*io io*]

You, Trojan women, unhappy ones 165

come outside to hear your troubles.

The Argives are preparing for their return home.

HECUBA

Ah ah [*ai ai*]

Do not bring out to me

Cassandra, mad bacchant, 170

shame to the Argives

raving maenad, to add grief on top of grief.

Woe [*io*]

Troy, Troy, unhappy city, you are gone.

And unhappy those who are leaving you 175

both living and done to death.

Antistrophe a

HALF CHORUS B

HALF CHORUS LEADER

Ah me [*oimoi*]. Quaking in fear I leave

Agamemnon's quarters to hear

you, my Queen. To put me to death in my misery,

is that the decision of the Argives?

Or are the sailors getting ready 180

to ply their oars at the sterns?

HECUBA

O child, raise up your spirits.

HALF CHORUS B

I have come struck with terror.

Has a herald from the Greeks come already?

Whom am I to lie with, a wretched slave? 185

HECUBA

The time for our allotment is near.

HALF CHORUS B

Woe [*io io*]
What Argive or Phthiotian will lead me away?
Or will I be taken to a place in the islands,
in my despair, far from Troy?

HECUBA

Woe woe [*pheu, pheu*]. Who will own me, body and soul? 190
Where in the world will I be enslaved, an old woman,
like a drone bee, in my misery,
looking like a corpse, a feeble image of the dead,
alas [*aiai*], keeping guard at the front door
or a nurse for children, I who once 195
held the royal power in Troy?

Strophe b

FULL CHORUS

Alas alas [*aiai aiai*], with what piteous sounds
you cry out your outrage.
Not on looms of Ida will I ply
the whirling spindle. 200

For the last time I shall look on the bodies of my children,
now, for the last time.
Now I shall have heavier hardships,
either forced into a Greek's bed
—a curse on that night and fate!
Or as a pitiful slave drawing 205
the sacred waters of Pirene.
I wish I could go to the famous
happy land of Theseus.
But not to the swirling Eurotas 210
the most hated abode of Helen
where as a slave I will meet Menelaus
the destroyer of my city, sacker of Troy.

Antistrophe b

The sacred land of Peneus¹⁷,
the beautiful foundations of Olympus 215
brimming with wealth, I hear,
for fertile fruitfulness:

¹⁷214: Peneus, a river flowing between Ossa and Olympus: Thessaly is their second choice.

this is second after the holy
and godly land of Theseus to be sent to.

And Etna's land, the island of Hephaestus 220
facing Phoenicia,
mother of Sicilian mountains, I hear
is heralded for its laurels of excellence.
The land nearest
the waves of the Ionian Sea 225
which the beautiful river Crathis
waters, reddening her flaxen hair
feeding with sacred streams
and blessing a land of good people.¹⁸

First Episode (235–510)

CHORUS LEADER

Look there, a herald is coming from the army 230
of Danaans, guardian of new stories.
His hurried pace tells us he has breaking news.
What news does he bring? What will he tell us?
Now we will truly be slaves of the Dorian land.

Enter Talthybius, the herald, followed by two or more soldiers from the occupied city.

TALTHYBIUS

Hecuba, you already know me as herald 235
of the Achaean army from my frequent trips
to Troy. Familiar to you from the past, I come,
lady, to bring you the new proclamations.

HECUBA

Alas [*ai ai*].
It has come now, dear women, what we feared before.

TALTHYBIUS

You have been allotted, if that was your fear. 240

HECUBA

Alas [*ai ai*], to what city
of Thessaly or Phthia, do you mean,
or the land of Cadmus?

TALTHYBIUS

You are allotted to each man, one by one, not as a group.

HECUBA

Tell us the individual allotments, then.

¹⁸224//: The chorus refers to Thurii in southern Italy.

Of the Trojan women, who can expect a happy fate? 245

TALTHYBIUS
I can answer your questions, but ask about each one, not all at once.

HECUBA
Who has been allotted
my poor daughter, Cassandra? Tell me this.

TALTHYBIUS
King Agamemnon took her as his chosen prize.

HECUBA
Is it true? As a slave to his Lacedaemonian wife? 250
Ah me, ah me [*io moi moi*].

TALTHYBIUS
No, but as a secret “bride” for his bed.

HECUBA
My daughter! Phoebus Apollo’s virgin? On whom
the golden-haired god bestowed the honor of a life unwed?

TALTHYBIUS
Eros stung his heart for the god-inspired girl. 255

HECUBA
My daughter, my daughter,
throw off the holy branches
and the sacred wreaths you wear.

TALTHYBIUS
Isn’t it a great piece of good luck for her to share a king’s bed?

HECUBA
What of her, the daughter you just took from me? Where is she? 260

TALTHYBIUS
Do you mean Polyxena? Or someone else you want to know about?

HECUBA
Her. In the allotment who got her?

TALTHYBIUS
She is assigned to serve at Achilles’ tomb.

HECUBA
Ah me [*omoi ego*]. We have given birth to a tomb attendant. 265
But what law or custom
of the Greeks is this, my friend?

TALTHYBIUS
Count her blessed. She is well off.

HECUBA
Why did you say that? Is she still alive?

TALTHYBIUS
She is in the hands of fate. Her troubles are over. 270

HECUBA
What then of the wife of Hector, master of bronze,
sorrowful Andromache, where has fate taken her?

TALTHYBIUS

The son of Achilles has chosen her as his prize.

HECUBA

And I?

Whose slave am I to be, hobbling on three feet, 275
needing a stick in my aged hand?

TALTHYBIUS

The king of Ithaca, Odysseus, has chosen to keep you as his slave.

HECUBA

Alas [*e e*]

Tear your cropped head,
drag your nails over your wrinkled cheek. 280

Ah me ah me [*io moi moi*].

I am allotted to be the slave to a foul, deceitful man,
the enemy of justice, a lawless monster,
who turns all things this way, that way 285

with his double tongue,
making what once was loved hated.

Trojan women, mourn for me.

I am lost, I am defeated by fate. 290

I have fallen upon
the most wretched lot.

CHORUS LEADER

My lady, you know your lot. But my fate?

What Achaean, what Greek controls my fortune?¹⁹

TALTHYBIUS

Come on, men, it's time to bring
Cassandra here as quickly as possible 295
so I can deliver her into the hands of the commander
and the other chosen prisoners to the others.

Ha! [*ea*] Why is the flame of a torch lit up inside?

Are the Trojan women burning their quarters
or what are they doing before being taken from this land 300

to Argos? Are they immolating themselves
wishing for death? The free spirit, you know,
in such circumstances finds evils hard to bear.

Open up, open up, we cannot let their whims
anger the Achaeans and bring blame on me. 305

¹⁹293–4: a poignant reminder that the members of the chorus, though nameless, are also captive women, each with her own tragic story. At the end they leave for the ships, each to be the property of an unnamed Greek soldier.

HECUBA

That isn't it. They are not setting the place on fire,
but my child, Cassandra, is running wild in her frenzy.

CASSANDRA

Strophe a

Raise high the lamp,²⁰
we need fire. I honor this holy place . . .
Look! Look! . . . with torches.
O Lord, Hymenaeus, god of marriage. 310
Blessed is the bridegroom.
And blessed am I to be married
in Argos in a royal wedding.
Hymen, o Lord Hymenaeus.
Mother, since you are mourning 315
with tears and laments
for my dead father and our beloved country,
I am kindling the fire of the torch
for my own wedding
into a bright gleam, a splendid flame, 320
giving light to you, Hymenaeus,
giving light to you, Hecate,
as is the custom
at the weddings of girls.

Antistrophe a

Swing high your feet, lead the dance 325
Euan, Euoi.
The way we did at the happiest times
in my father's day.
Our dance is sacred.
Phoebus, you take the lead now. In laurel 330
I fill your temple with sacrifice,
Hymen, o Hymenaeus, Hymen.
Dance, Mother, laugh out loud,
whirl your feet here and there

²⁰308//: Cassandra comes out of the women's huts, dancing wildly, waving a torch, and singing the wedding cry Hymenaeus Hymen, all features of the ancient Greek wedding ceremony. A wedding is a family celebration, but her family is dead, her mother in mourning, so it is up to her to light the torches and lead the dance to which she invites her mother and the women of the chorus. Hecate attended the wedding of Peleus and Thetis (another beginning of the troubles since it produced Achilles, the killing machine of the *Iliad*), but, as goddess of the dark arts and crossroads, she is not usually associated with weddings.

direct your dear step in step with my feet.
Cry out and celebrate 335
the bride with blessed songs
and glad noises.
Come, Phrygian girls
in beautiful dresses,
sing of the husband destined 340
for my marriage bed.

CHORUS LEADER

My Queen, will you not stop the maddened girl
from raising her light step into the Argive camp?

HECUBA

Hephaestus, you bear the torches at the weddings
of us mortals, but this sad flame you kindle
is far removed from my high hopes. Ah [*oimoi*] my child. 345
I never expected that you would be married
at the point of a spear or under Greek arms.
Hand me the torch. You are not carrying it straight,
flitting about recklessly. You haven't come back
to your good senses but remain the same. 350
Take the torch inside and shed tears in place
of her wedding songs, women of Troy.

CASSANDRA

Mother, cover my head with crowns of victory;
rejoice and be glad in my royal marriage.
Escort me and even if I seem less than eager, 355
push me by force. If Loxias²¹ is Loxias still,
Agamemnon, the illustrious king of the Achaeans,
in marrying me will make a marriage more lethal than Helen's.
For I shall kill him and I shall lay waste his house
taking vengeance for my brothers and father. 360
I shall say no more. I will not sing praises of the axe
which will be thrust into my own neck and others'
and the matricidal agonies his marriage to me
will bring, and the overthrow of the house of Atreus.²²

²¹356: Loxias, a name for Apollo, often used of the god in his prophetic capacity.

²²353//: Cassandra is the prophet whom nobody believes. On the other hand her prophecy here is not notable for its accuracy. Agamemnon is indeed killed, but by Clytemnestra (or Clytemnestra and Aegisthus) and not by Cassandra whose function may be one of Clytemnestra's motives for killing him. His house is devastated at least in some versions of the

I will also show that this city is more blessed 365
 than the Greeks, though I am god-mad, but still
 I will stand that much outside my bacchic frenzy.
 The Greeks for the sake of one woman, one desire,
 in pursuing Helen, caused tens of thousands of deaths.
 And their wise general for what he hated most 370
 killed what he loved most, the pleasures of children
 at home,²³ giving that to his brother for the woman's sake
 who went of her freewill and was not taken by force.
 And when they reached the banks of the Scamander
 they kept dying, not because of raids on their borders 375
 or their towered fatherland. Those whom Ares took
 did not see their children, nor were they wrapped
 in shrouds by their wives' hands, but in a strange land
 they lie dead. And at home similar things happened.
 Women were dying widows or childless in the homes 380
 of others after bringing up their children. And at their tombs
 there is no one to give an offering of blood to earth.
 This is the kind of praise the Greek army deserves to hear.
 It's better to keep what is shameful quiet. My Muse
 should never be a singer who sings the praises of evil.²⁴ 385

Now the Trojans, first of all, died for their country,
 the brightest fame there is. Those whom the spear took
 were carried dead to their homes by their loved ones
 and are embraced in the native soil of their country,
 shrouded for burial by hands that were meant to do it. 390
 Those of the Phrygians who did not die in battle,
 always, day after day, continued to live with their wives
 and children, a pleasure the Achaians did not share.²⁵
 But Hector's fate, pitiful in your eyes—hear how it
 really is: though he is dead and gone, he has his glory 395
 and the coming of the Greeks caused this to be so.
 If they had stayed home his greatness would never have been

myth. Cassandra will be killed (362) and Orestes will kill his mother (363).

²³370–2: She refers to Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia to obtain a fair sailing.

²⁴384–5: It is not unlikely that she is referring to the cohabitation of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus after the departure of Agamemnon.

²⁵386–93: The scenes of life going on inside the city of Troy are one of the aspects of the *Iliad* that gives it its humanity amid the gore and brutality of the war.

known. Paris married the daughter of Zeus, any one else
and it would have been just a secret liaison in the palace.

It is best to avoid war, if you are in your right mind, 400
but if war comes, it is an honorable crown,
to die gloriously, inglorious to die a coward.
For this reason, Mother, do not pity our country
or my marriage. It is with this marriage that
I will bring death to those most hated by me and you. 405

CHORUS LEADER

With what nonchalance you scoff at your own misfortunes,
but when you sing, what you sing does not make things clear.

TALTHYBIUS

If Apollo had not frenzied your mind
you would not get away with the send-off
you give my commanders as they leave this land.
But what is reputed solemn and sage 410
is no better than things that are of no account.
For the greatest king of the Panhellenic army
Atreus' own son, has succumbed willingly to
love for this madwoman. Now I'm a poor man 415
but I would not accept the bed of this woman.
And your reproach to the Greeks—for you are not
in your senses— and praise of the Phrygians
I cast to the winds to carry away. Follow me now
to the ships, a fine bride for our commander. 420
And you, since the son of Laertes desires
to take you home, follow him. You will be the slave
of a good woman; or so they say who came to Ilium.²⁶

CASSANDRA

This slave is dreadful. Why do they have the name
heralds, one common hatred for all mankind, 425
these men who are the lackeys of tyrants and states?
You say my mother will go to the halls
of Odysseus? When the words of Apollo
made it clear to me that she will die here in Troy?

²⁶422–3: Penelope, Odysseus' wife, had a good reputation among the soldiers. She is the opposite of Helen. This is a way of introducing Cassandra's summary of the Odyssey that follows.

The other shame I will not mention.²⁷ That wretched man, 430
 he knows nothing of what remains for him to suffer.
 My troubles and those of the Phrygians will seem
 like gold to him. For after sailing ten years
 besides those spent here, he will reach home alone.
 Where terrifying Charybdis inhabits the narrow strait 435
 of rocks, and the mountain-roving Cyclops
 eating the raw flesh of men and Ligurian Circe
 who turns men into swine, and the shipwreck at sea
 and the addicts of lotus, the sacred cattle of the Sun
 who with bloody flesh will one day let out a sound 440
 bitter to Odysseus. Now I will cut the story short.
 He will go living into Hades, and escaping the waters
 of death's lake, he will find ten thousand troubles at home.²⁸
 But why am I spouting out about Odysseus' troubles?
 Let's go as quickly as possible: in Hades I'll wed the bridegroom. 445
 Truly vile, he will find an evil burial at night, not in daylight,
 though he thought he had done some grand deed, as the Greeks' leader.
 And me cast out a naked corpse, the mountain gullies
 streaming with winter runoff near the tomb of my bridegroom
 will give me to beasts to gnaw, me, the servant of Apollo. 450
 Holy crowns of the god I loved, sacred adornments,
 farewell, I have left the festivals in which I once delighted.
 Go, ripped from my skin, while my skin is still pure
 I give them to you to bear in the swift breezes, prophetic lord.²⁹
 Where is the general's ship, where must I go to embark? 455
 Don't wait expecting a fair wind in your sails, since by
 taking me on board from this land you are taking one of the Furies.
 Goodbye, Mother, don't weep for me. My beloved country,
 and my brothers, buried in the earth, and father, it is not long
 before you will welcome me. I will come victorious to the dead 460
 after destroying the house of Atreus' sons by whom we were ruined.

Exit Cassandra to the ships.

CHORUS LEADER (*to attendants of Hecuba*)

You, women, who tend to aged Hecuba don't you see
 the queen, how listless she lies fallen on the ground?

²⁷ 430: Perhaps she refers to the story that Hecuba, her own mother, was turned into a snarling bitch (K. H. Lee, *Euripides*, Troades, Bristol, 1997: ad 430, p 145).

²⁸ 430–443: Cassandra gives a 14 line summary of the *Odyssey*. Earlier (374–9, 387–93) she had summarized the *Iliad*: the back and forth of war up to Hector's burial.

²⁹ 451–54: As in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Cassandra throws off the accouterments of her priestly office, 1264–67.

Won't you help her? Will you, you wretched women,
leave the old woman lying there. Help her get up. 465

HECUBA

Leave me to lie on the ground—for unwanted kindness
is no kindness—I am suffering things worthy of
lying here. I have suffered and will go on and on suffering.
O gods! I call on them as worthless allies,
but still there is some dignity to calling on the gods 470
when one of us falls into ill fortune.

First, then, I would like to sing of my good fortune,
for then I will arouse more pity telling of the bad.
I was royal myself and I married into royalty
and I gave birth to heroic children, not just in 475
their number, but they were leaders of the Phrygians,
whom no Trojan or Greek or barbarian woman
could ever boast to have brought into the world.

And for those I saw fallen to the Greek spear,
beside the tombs of the dead, this hair I cut myself; 480
and their father Priam, I wept for him, not hearing
it from others but with these eyes I saw him myself
slaughtered and fallen at the household altar
and I saw the city fall. The girls I raised as brides
for bridegrooms worthy and chosen for them, 485
were taken from my arms: I raised them for aliens.

And there is no hope they will see me again
and I know I will never see them in this life.
For the rest: here is the capstone of my tragedy,
as an ancient slave woman I shall go to Greece. 490

These things are most unfitting for my old age:
they will impose this on me, to be servant of the door
to guard the keys, I who am mother of Hector,
or to make bread and have my bed on the ground,
with my shriveled back after my royal mattresses, 495
rough garments to surround my roughened skin
tatters of clothes unseemly for decent people to wear.
How wretched I am! Because of one marriage of one
woman I have met with such disasters that have no end.

O my daughter, O Cassandra, dance your bacchic dance, 500
amid such disasters you will leave your chaste life.

And you, unhappy one, where are you, Polyxena?
No male child, no female of the many I brought into
this world can help me now in my absolute misery.
Why then help me stand up? What good would it do? 505

Lead on my feet once graceful in Troy, in those days;
 now they belong to a slave, on a bed of straw lying
 on the ground with a headrest of stone, so I may perish
 when I fall, wearing away my barren life in tears.
 Of the prosperous, think no one happy until he is dead. 510

First Stasimon (511-67)

CHORUS

Strophe a

Sing, O Muse, with tears,
 sing to me of Ilium
 a funeral elegy with new songs.³⁰
 Now I shall cry out a dirge for Troy 515
 how from a four-wheeled wagon full
 of Argives, my life was ruined, a spear-won wretch.
 When they left that horse at the gates,
 its gold-studded spears booming to the sky, 520
 planted by the Achaians.
 And the people standing on the Trojan citadel
 shouted aloud:
 “Go, end our troubles,
 bring up this sacred image of wood 525
 to the Trojan goddess, daughter of Zeus.”
 What young man did not go
 what old man did not leave his home?
 Singing joyously
 they took hold of this doom of deceit. 530

Antistrophe a

All the people of the Phrygians
 swarmed to the gates
 to give the goddess the image made of pine, the polished
 hiding place of Argives and destruction of Dardanian Troy, 535
 a gift to the unyoked goddess of the divine horse.
 They put it on ropes of twisted flax and dragged it
 like the dark hull of a ship into the stone dwelling
 and onto the floor of the goddess Pallas, 540
 death to our homeland.
 But when night’s darkness came over

³⁰511ll: This song imitates epic poetry by calling on the Muse and in the words of D. Sansone, “Euripides’ New Song: The First Stasimon of *Trojan Women*” (Cousland, Cropp, Hume, *The play of texts and fragments : essays in honour of Martin Cropp*, Brill: 2009) “asserts the role of tragedy as successor to epic.”

this joyful labor
a Libyan flute rang out
with Phrygian tunes and maidens 545
raised their beating feet
and sang glad songs.
In the halls the bright flash
of fire gave off a dark
gleam in sleep. 550

Epode

And in the palace then
I was singing with the dance
to the mountain virgin
daughter of Zeus, when a murderous 555
shout up and down the city took hold
of the site of Troy. Precious babies
were throwing fluttering hands
around their mothers' dresses. 560
Ares came out of hiding,
the work of Pallas,
slaughters of Phrygians at the altars
and in their beds
savage deeds — heads cut off—
brought a circling crown of young women 565
with children to rear to Greece:
grief to the homeland of the Phrygians.

Second Episode (567–798)

Enter Andromache with her son on a wagon with random Trojan spoils

CHORUS LEADER

Hecuba, do you see here is Andromache
being conveyed in a foreigners' wagon?
At her throbbing breast is 570
our darling Astyanax, Hector's son.
Where are you being taken on that cart,
unhappy woman, sitting beside
Hector's bronze arms and spear-won
spoils of the Phrygians,
taken from Troy, with which Achilles' son 575
will adorn Phthiotian temples?

Strophe a

ANDROMACHE

My Achaean masters are taking me away.

HECUBA

Ah me [*oimoi*]!
ANDROMACHE
 Why do you sing a lament that is mine?
HECUBA
 Alas [*ai ai*]!
ANDROMACHE
 for these pains . . .
HECUBA
 O Zeus!
ANDROMACHE
 and this tragedy . . .
HECUBA
 my children,
ANDROMACHE
 we were once, in the past.

580

Antistrophe a

HECUBA
 Prosperity is gone. Troy is gone,
ANDROMACHE
 Our sorrow.
HECUBA
 The nobility of my children:
ANDROMACHE
 woe woe [*pheu pheu*],
HECUBA
 woe [*pheu*] for mine, too,
ANDROMACHE
 and for your troubles.
HECUBA
 The pitiful fate
ANDROMACHE
 of the city
HECUBA
 which rises up in smoke.

585

Strophe b

ANDROMACHE
 Come back to me, my husband.
HECUBA
 You cry for my son
 who is gone to Hades, my poor dear.
ANDROMACHE
 Your wife's defender.

590

Antistrophe b

HECUBA

And you, the Achaeans' outrage ,
lord of my children,
ancient-born Priam,

ANDROMACHE

take me to Hades.

Strophe c

ANDROMACHE

These longings are strong.

HECUBA

Unhappy woman, we suffer grief.

ANDROMACHE

Our city gone.

HECUBA

On top of pains there lie more pains.

ANDROMACHE

By the ill will of the gods your son escaped Hades
and for a sordid marriage brought down Troy's towers
and now the bloodied flesh of corpses
are laid out for the goddess Pallas,
for vultures to carry off; he is the one who brought
the yoke of slavery to Troy.

600

Antistrophe c

HECUBA

Homeland, tragic homeland,

ANDROMACHE

I weep for you left behind.

HECUBA

Now you see its sad end

ANDROMACHE

and my home where I gave birth.

HECUBA

Children, your mother is left without a city
such wailing, such sorrows.
Tears flow down from tears
in our houses. The tearless dead are forgetful of suffering.

605

CHORUS

How sweet somehow are tears to the suffering:
the threnodies of pain and the music of grief.

ANDROMACHE

Mother of my husband, Hector, the man who once
killed so many of the Argives, do you see this?

610

HECUBA

I see the gods' doings, how they tower up
what is nothing and destroy what seems something.

ANDROMACHE

We are taken as spoils, my child and I. Nobility
descends to slavery, after such a change.

615

HECUBA

Necessity's power is terrible. Just now Cassandra
has gone from me, snatched away by force.

ANDROMACHE

Woe woe [*pheu pheu*]
Some other second Ajax, it seems, has appeared
for your child, and you have other troubles.

HECUBA

Of which there is no limit or number
for one evil comes to contest with another.

620

ANDROMACHE

Your daughter is dead, Polyxena, slaughtered
at Achilles' tomb, a sacrifice to his lifeless corpse.³¹

HECUBA

Ah, how my misery increases. This is what Talthybius
meant in his riddle, speaking clearly, and yet obscurely.

625

ANDROMACHE

I saw her myself, and getting down from the wagon
I covered her with clothing and beat my breast in mourning for her.

HECUBA

Ah me [*ai ai*], my child, alas for your godless slaughter
and again alas [*ai ai*], how cruelly you were killed.

ANDROMACHE

She is dead as she died. But even dead
she is better off than I am alive.

630

HECUBA

O my dear child, it is not the same to be alive and dead.
The one is nothing but in the other there is hope.

ANDROMACHE

Mother, listen to my argument, a powerful one,
that I offer as a comfort to your heart.
I say that never to have been is the same as death,
but to die is better than to live in grief.

635

³¹623–4: In Euripides' *Hecuba*, Odysseus himself brings the news to Hecuba that Polyxena is to be sacrificed to Achilles' ghost. Polyxena accepts her death as preferable to life as a slave.

For the dead have no pain after feeling life's woes,
but when a happy person falls into misery she
is tormented at heart because of her former hopes. 640
But *she*, as if she had never seen the sun,
is dead and knows nothing of her troubles.
But I aimed for good repute and for the most part
achieved it, but missed my chance at lasting happiness.
Under Hector's roof I strove for the virtues that
are found admirable in women. First of all 645
I avoided anything that ruins a reputation
(whether or not a woman is held in bad odor):
as when a wife strays from her home, I put off any
desire for this and I stayed in the house. 650
And inside the halls I did not let in idle gossip
of women, but using my mind as a good teacher
inside the house I was content in myself.
I offered quietness of tongue and a serene eye
to my husband. And I knew when it was right for me 655
to win and when to yield the victory to him.
Then my reputation for these things reached the army
of the Achaeans and ruined me. For when I was
captured Achilles' son wanted to take me as a "wife."
I shall be a slave in the house of his murderers. 660
If I thrust aside my love for my dear Hector
and open my heart to the present husband,
I shall appear disloyal to the dead. But if I hate
this one, I shall be hated by my masters.
And yet they say that a single night loosens 665
a woman's hostility to a man's bed.
I reject utterly the woman who casts out her present
husband and loves another in a new liaison.
Not even a horse that is unyoked from the one
it has grown up with easily takes up the yoke. 670
And yet the beast is without voice, making no use
of intelligence and its nature is inferior to ours.
But in you, dear Hector, I had a man sufficient
to me, great in understanding, birth, wealth, and valor.
You took me untouched from my fathers's house 675
you first yoked my virgin bed in marriage.
And now you are dead and I shall be carried by ship
to Greece, a captive, into the yoke of slavery.
Is not the death of Polyxena for whom
you are mourning, less than my evils? 680
For to me there is left not even what all men
share—hope. And I do not delude my mind

that I will fare well. Though it is sweet to think so.

Chorus Leader

You have reached the same suffering as I. In lamenting
your own woes you teach me what agony I have reached. 685

HECUBA

I have never boarded the hull of a ship myself,
though I have seen them in pictures and heard about them.
Yet I know if a storm at sea is moderate enough to bear,
the sailors are eager to be saved from troubles,
one stationed at the helm, another at the sails, 690

another draining the bilge water. But if the sea is
heavy and agitated and gets to be too much for them
giving in to fate they surrender themselves to the waves.
So, I, too, suffering much distress, am voiceless
and keep my tongue in check, for a surge 695
of sadness from the gods overwhelms me.

But, my dear child, let go of Hector's fate:
there is no way your tears can bring him back.
Show respect to your current master, offering
him the welcome enticement of your ways. 700

If you do this you will please those who love you
and bring up this child, son of my son
as a great benefit to Troy, so that one day
children born from you may settle Troy
again and Troy will be a city once more. 705

But another story is coming after this one:
I see this servant of the Achaeans coming
here again, a messenger of new decisions.

TALTHYBIUS

Wife of Hector, once the most valiant of Phrygians,
don't hate me for this. I wish I didn't have to tell you
the common declaration of Danaans and the sons of Pelops. 710

ANDROMACHE

What is it? You begin with what sounds like bad news.

TALTHYBIUS

They decided that your son How can I say this?

ANDROMACHE

Not that we won't have the same master? 715

TALTHYBIUS

No Achaean will ever be this boy's master.

ANDROMACHE

But to leave him here as a last remnant of the Phrygians?

TALTHYBIUS

I don't know how to simply tell you the bad news.

ANDROMACHE

Thank you for your respect, except you have brought bad news.

TALTHYBIUS

They are going to kill your son. Now you know the horror.

ANDROMACHE

Ah me [*oimoi*], this is an evil greater than my marriage. 720

TALTHYBIUS

Odysseus won out, speaking among all the Greeks.

ANDROMACHE

Alas [*aiiai*], for we suffer agonies without end.

TALTHYBIUS

Arguing not to bring up the son of the bravest father.

ANDROMACHE

I hope such an argument wins out against his own son.

TALTHYBIUS

It is decreed to cast him from the tower of Troy. 725

Just accept it and you will seem more prudent.

Do not cling to him, but grieve nobly for your loss,
and don't suppose you have strength when you have none.

You have no power: you must see that is so.

Your city is gone and your husband and you are defeated. 730

We are capable of contending with one woman,

and so I advise you not to crave a battle

nor do anything shameful or hostile,

and not to hurl curses at the Achaeans.

For if you say anything to anger the army 735

the child will not be buried nor meet with any pity.

But if you are silent and bear up under your tragedy

you will not leave his body unburied

and you will find the Achaeans more kindly.

ANDROMACHE

My dearest boy, respected too much, you will die 740

at the hands of enemies, leaving your poor mother.

A father's nobility has destroyed you, something

that to others turns out to be their salvation, but

your father's valor has done you no good.

O my ill-fated married life and marriage 745

to which I came into Hector's house, back then,

not to bear my son to be slaughtered by Danaans

but to be master of fruitful Asia. My baby, are you crying?

Do you understand what they are going to do to you?

Why are your hands grasping my robe and clinging to it 750

like a little bird falling under my wings?
Hector will not come springing up from the earth
and seize his famous spear to come to your rescue
nor any of your father's kin, once the Phrygians' strength.
But plummeting unpitied in a tragic fall on your neck 755
from a towering height, you will spill your life's breath.
O my darling boy, most loved by your mother,
o sweet smell of your skin; it was in vain then
when you were in swaddling clothes my breasts fed you.
In vain I toiled and was worn away by toil. 760
Now and never again, kiss your mother,
fall into your mother's arms, wind your arms
around my back and join your lips to mine.
You Greeks have invented savage new crimes:
why are you killing this innocent baby? 765
You, spawn of Tyndareus, you never were Zeus' child
but I would say you were born of many fathers,
first of the curse of Vengeance, then of Envy,
of Murder and Death and whatever evils Earth spawns.
For I would never believe that Zeus sired you, 770
death to countless men, barbarians and Greeks.
I wish you were dead. From your dazzling eyes
brazenly you devastated the renowned plains of Phrygia.
Go ahead, take him, drag him, hurl him, if that's what
you want; feast on his flesh. By the gods' work 775
I am ruined and I cannot save my little boy
from death. Cover my wretched body
and throw it on the ship. To a splendid wedding
I am going after seeing my own child murdered.

CHORUS

Unhappy Troy, you have lost your people beyond numbering 780
for the sake of one woman and her abominable mating.

TALTHYBIUS

Come, child, leave your grieving mother's
embrace, you go now to the high crown of
the ancient walls of your fathers, where
the vote has decreed you must leave your life. 785

Take him. To herald such things one ought
to be pitiless and more a friend to
shamelessness than is in my philosophy.

Exit soldiers with the child.

*Exit Talthybius to occupied city.
Exit Andromache in cart to ships.*

HECUBA

My poor boy, child of my ill-fated child, 790

unjustly we are stripped of your life,
 your mother and I. What to do? What, unhappy one,
 can I do for you? We can only offer you these
 blows to our heads and beating of our breasts.
 This much we can control. Alas [*oi 'go*] for the city 795
 alas [*oimoi*] for you. What more is in store for us?
 Is there anything left to stop us in one fell swoop
 from descending into utter obliteration?

Second Stasimon (799–859)

CHORUS

Strophe a

Telamon, king of Salamis, home of bees,
 wave-washed island you settled as your home, 800
 lying opposite the sacred hills, where first
 Athena revealed the branch of the gray-green olive,
 a heavenly crown adding to the rich beauty of Athens,
 you came here, yes, came here to be a hero with
 the archer Heracles, son of Alcmene, 805
 to sack the city of Ilium,³²
 Ilium our city once,
 when you came from Greece.

Antistrophe a

When Heracles was cheated of the mares and led the first flower
 of Greece beside the fair-flowing river 810
 he let drop his sea-going oar and fastened the cable from the stern.
 In his hand he took from the ship his bow that never missed,
 death to Laomedon. But the dressings of Phoebus' wall
 he destroyed with the red blast of fire. 815
 He sacked Troy's land.
 Twice with two sets of repeated blows
 the bloody spear battered the Dardanians about their walls.

Strophe b

In vain walking gracefully among golden wine jars,

³²799–818: Laomedon, king of Troy before Priam, cheated Heracles and brought on the first assault against Troy and its destruction by Heracles with the hero Telamon of Salamis and the flower of the Greeks.

Ganymede, son of Laomedon,³³
 as Zeus' cupbearer, fill a glorious service. 825
 But Troy who bore you is ablaze with fire.
 The sea banks
 shrill like a bird,
 crying for her young, 830
 here husbands, here children
 here the elderly mothers.
 But your dewy bathing spots
 and the running tracks of the gymnasium
 are gone, while you wear your young 835
 face sweetly tranquil beside the throne of Zeus
 with boyish charm. While the Greek spear
 has now annihilated the land of Priam.

Antistrophe b

Love, Love, who once came to the Dardanian halls,
 then a care to the heavenly ones,
 how greatly you towered up Troy, joining
 in marriage with gods. The reproach against Zeus 845
 I shall say no more of.³⁴
 But the light of white-winged
 Dawn, dear to mortals,
 saw the destruction of the land, 850
 though she had a husband, Tithonus, father of her children,
 in her marriage bed in this land,
 but the four-horse golden chariot
 of the stars took him, snatching him away, 855
 a great hope once to our native land. The gods'
 love for Troy is gone now.

Third Episode (Agon) 860–1059

Enter Menelaus from the occupied city, with attendants.

MENELAUS

Bright shining ray of this day's morning sun! 860

³³819–857: The chorus celebrates the former prosperity and blessedness of Troy through the stories of Ganymede, Zeus' beloved cup-bearer (son of Laomedon), and Tithonus (another son of Laomedon) the lover of Eos (Dawn), both taken to Olympus and leaving Troy vulnerable.

³⁴845–6: The reproach that Zeus carried off Ganymede and gave no further consideration to Troy.

Today I will get these hands on my wife.³⁵
 You know, I came to Troy, not as people think,
 to retrieve my wife, but against the man 865
 who stole her from my home, betraying me, his host.
 With gods' help he has paid the ultimate price,
 himself and his country—falling to the Greek spear.
 I have come for the Spartan woman (it gives me
 no pleasure to say the name of the wife who once was mine) 870
 to take her away. She is quartered here with the captives
 numbered among the other Trojan women.
 The men who fought for her in armed combat
 awarded her to me to kill, or if, instead of killing her,
 I wanted to take her back to the Argive land. . . . 875
 But I have decided to leave alone Helen's fate
 while we are in Troy, but to take her by sea-going oar
 back to the land of Greece and put her to death there
 in vengeance for so many friends who died in Ilium. 880
 But, up, servants, go inside the quarters
 and bring her out, dragging her by her hair,
 her murderous hair. When favorable winds
 are at our back, we will escort her to Greece.

HECUBA

You who hold up the world and have your seat on earth
 whoever you are, hard to imagine or understand, 885
 Zeus, whether the laws of nature or mind of mortals,
 I pray to you, for going through a soundless
 track you direct all our mortal affairs in justice.

MENELAUS

What is this? You are inventing new prayers to the gods?

HECUBA

You have my praise, Menelaus, if you plan to kill your wife. 890
 But avoid looking at her lest she overwhelm you with desire.
 For she captivates men's eyes, she annihilates cities,
 she sets homes ablaze. Such sorcery she has:
 I know her, as do you and all who suffered here.

Enter Helen, dragged by soldiers from the women's quarters.

HELEN

Menelaus, this is an entrance to make me 895

³⁵862–3: ["Helen. I am the one who bore the most toils / over her, I, Menelaus, with the Achaian army."] These lines are probably a commentator's interpolation. As Menelaus says in lines 869–70 he can hardly bear to say her name and calls her "the Spartan woman."

afraid. Your servants are manhandling me
and dragging me by force from these quarters.
Now, I am quite certain that you hate me,
but even so, I would like to have my say. What
decisions did you and the Greeks make about my life? 900

MENELAUS
It has not come to a final decision, but the whole army
has deemed fit for me to put you to death: I'm the one you wronged.

HELEN
Is it possible to have a discussion about this:
how unjust it is to put me death, if you do it?

MENELAUS
I did not come here for a debate, but to kill you. 905

HECUBA
Listen to her, she should not die deprived of this,
Menelaus, and let me make the opposing
arguments against her. For you know nothing
of what went on in Troy. But all the evidence taken
together will convict her, leaving her no escape. 910

MENELAUS
As if we had all the time in the world. But if she desires
to speak, I will allow it. But be assured it is for you
that I grant this. There is no favor I would do for her.

HELEN
I guess, whether I appear to speak well or poorly,
you will not answer me, considering me your enemy. 915
But I will answer in a counter-argument what I think
you will accuse me of as you go over the charges:
meeting your charges in response to mine.
First, this woman gave birth to the first cause of evil,
when she bore Paris; second, the old man Priam 920
was the death of Troy and me when he did not kill
the infant, clear image of a fire brand, then called Alexandros.
Listen now how everything else followed from that.
He judged the three goddesses vying with each other.
Pallas' gift to Alexandros was to be commander 925
of the Phrygian army and to overthrow Greece.
Hera promised he would have the rule of all Asia
and the boundaries of Europe if he chose her.
But Cypris touting my beauty promised him *me*
as prize if she outstripped the other goddesses in beauty. 930
But look at the logic of this, how it really works out:
Cypris won and to this extent my marriage
benefitted Greece: you are not under the thumb

of barbarians, neither from war nor by tyranny.
But while Greece was fortunate, I was ruined: 935
I was sold for my beauty and am reproached
when I should have received a crown for my head.
You will say that I have not yet spoken of the main point
how I made my escape in secret from your house.
He arrived accompanied by no minor goddess, 940
my avenging spirit, whatever name you prefer
to call him by, heroic Alexandros or homely Paris.
Then you left him in your home, a terrible thing to do,
and you sailed from Sparta in a ship bound for Crete.
Very well, then.
I shall ask myself this, not you, on this point: 945
what was in my mind when I accompanied a stranger,
betraying my fatherland and my home?
Punish the goddess and be more powerful than Zeus,
who has control over all the other gods
but is *her* slave. Well in any case I should be pardoned. 950
Now here you might have a specious argument to make:
when Alexandros died and went into the hollows of earth,
since my god-imposed marriage was over, I should
have left the house and made my way to the Achaean ships.
I was eager for this very thing and my witnesses are 955
the gate-keepers of the towers and watchers of the walls
who many times caught me trying to steal myself
down from the parapets clinging onto ropes.
But my new husband, Deiphobus, kept me
by force as his wife, against the Phrygians' will. 960
How, then, would I rightly be put to death by you,
my husband, when I was married to the man by force,
while my life here, instead, by making of me the prize
for which you fought, has cruelly enslaved me? Be more
powerful than the gods if you wish, but it's a foolish desire. 965

CHORUS LEADER

My queen Hecuba, defend your children and homeland,
countering her persuasive speech: she speaks well,
but she is a wrong-doer which makes it more dangerous.

HECUBA

First I shall be an ally to the goddesses and show
that what she is saying about them is all wrong. 970
I do not think that Hera and the virgin goddess
Pallas came to such a state of foolishness
that the one would sell Hellas to non-Greeks

and Pallas would enslave Athens to the Phrygians,
 or that for childish games and vanity about beauty 975
 they came to Ida. Why would the goddess Hera
 conceive such a passion to be seen as beautiful?
 Was it to find a better husband than Zeus?
 Or is Athena hunting for a marriage with some god,
 after she begged her father to let her keep her virginity 980
 and avoid the marriage bed? Don't make the gods
 out to be fools to cover up your own wickedness.
 You won't persuade people with sense. You say Cypris
 —that's a laugh—came to Menelaus' house with my son.
 As if she could not have stayed peacefully in heaven 985
 and brought you and Paris, Sparta, Amyclai and all, to Troy?
 My son was preternaturally handsome and your mind,
 on catching a glimpse of him, was turned into Cypris.
 All that mortals lust for becomes Aphrodite to them.
 Even the goddess' name has come to suggest immodest desire. 990
 When you saw him in his exotic foreign attire
 shining with gold, you went mad with lust.
 You had little luxury in Argos where you lived, but
 once rid of Sparta you hoped to overwhelm
 the city of the Phrygians flowing with gold 995
 with your sense of style. The palace of Menelaus
 was too puny for your extravagance to run rampant.
 Well then: you say my son took you by force.
 What Spartan heard or saw it? Or what cry
 did you scream? Your brother Castor was young then 1000
 and his twin brother — they were not yet stars in the sky.
 And then when you came to Troy and the Argives were on
 your track, and the contest of spears was upon us,
 if you got news of their side prevailing in the war,
 you lauded Menelaus so my son would feel bad 1005
 as if he still had a great rival for your love
 but if the Trojans were doing well, he was nothing.
 And looking out for your own good you acted this way
 so you could follow fortune with no thought of virtue.
 And now you say you tried to sneak away with ropes 1010
 letting yourself down from the towers, as if you were here
 against your will? Where were you caught fitting a noose
 or whetting a sword, as a decent noble woman
 would do if she missed her former husband?
 And yet I gave you advice again and again. 1015
 “My daughter, go ahead and leave, my sons will take
 other wives, and I will escort you to the Achaian
 ships in secret and we'll put an end to the war

between the Greeks and us. But this made you angry. 1020
 For you acted like a tramp in Alexandros' house
 and wanted the barbarians to bow and scrape to you.
 This was what you cared about. And after all this
 here you come dressed in your best, sharing the
 same air as your husband, you despicable creature.
 You should have come humbly, dressed in rags, 1025
 trembling in terror, your head plucked bare.
 Modesty counts for more than shamelessness
 considering your past transgressions.
 Menelaus, so you know, this is the end of my speech.
 Give Greece a crown. Kill this woman as she 1030
 deserves, and set this down as law for other women:
 death is the reward for betraying your husband.

CHORUS LEADER
 Menelaus, as befits your ancestors and your house
 make your wife pay and remove from yourself
 the charge of cowardice and appear noble to your enemies. 1035

MENELAUS
 You have stumbled onto the same argument as I have,
 that of her own free will this woman left my home
 for a stranger's bed. Cypris was thrown into her speech
 for bragging rights. You belong where whores are stoned to death.
 That would soon free the Achaeans of their long labors 1040
 and by dying you would learn not to bring shame on me.

HELEN
 No, by your knees I beg you, do not me kill because
 of the gods' sickness, but be more forgiving.

HECUBA
 Do not betray your companions in arms whose deaths
 she caused. I beseech you on behalf of them and their children. 1045

MENELAUS
 Enough, old woman. I pay no mind to her.
 I have given orders to my servants to conduct her
 to the ships where she will be carried away by sea.

HECUBA
 Do not let her go aboard the same ship as you.

MENELAUS
 Why is that? Or is she heavier than before? 1050

HECUBA
 There is no lover who can forget his passion.

MENELAUS
 That would depend on the lover's state of mind.
 But I'll do as you wish. She will not get on the ship

on which we are sailing. Your advice is not bad.
And when we reach Argos, as she is worthy, she will die
shamefully, a shameless woman and make all women
prefer chastity. This is no easy thing for us to do,
but still her execution will turn their wantonness
into fear even if they are more shameless than ever. 1055

Third Stasimon (1060–1117)

CHORUS

Strophe a

Thus, O Zeus, 1060
did you betray your temple in Troy
and altars, fragrant with incense, to the Achaeans
and the fire of sacrifice
and the smoke of myrrh rising to the sky
and the sacred citadel of Pergamon. 1065
and Mount Ida, the glens of Ida covered in ivy
running with rivers of melted snow
and the boundary first struck by dawn's light,
your shimmering sacred handmaid. 1070

Antistrophe a

Gone are the sacrifices and chorus'
harmonious sounds all night long
in the darkness for the gods
and the images of carved wood and gold
and the Phrygians' sacred monthly festivals
twelve in number. 1075
This is my care, my care: do you think of this, O Lord,
mounted on your heavenly seat, the sky,
over our devastated city
that the burning blast of the fire has consumed? 1080

Strophe b

O my dear one, my husband
you wander dead
unburied, unwashed, while a sea-faring ship 1085
will carry me swiftly on its wings
to horse-grazing Argos, where they dwell inside
stone Cyclopeian walls rising to the sky.
A throng of children at the gates
in tears lament: 1090
they cry and cry
“Mother, alas [*omoi*], Achaeans are taking
me alone from your sight

in a dark ship
to row over the sea
either to holy Salamis 1095
or the hill of Isthmus between two seas
where Pelops' palace
has its gates."

Antistrophe b

I pray Menelaus' ship,
sailing in the middle of the ocean, 1100
be struck by the holy thunderbolt hurled in two hands
since he is banishing me from Ilium,
full of tears to Greece, far from my homeland. 1105
But Helen, the daughter of Zeus, is holding
her golden mirrors, maidens' delights.
May he never reach the Lakanian land 1110
and the hearth of his fathers
nor the city of Pitane
and the bronze-gated temple of Athene
after taking captive the shame of great
Greece, illicitly married, 1115
and the cause of dire suffering
to Simois' streams.

Exodos (1118–1332)

CHORUS

Ah ah [*io io*]
New misery arises from recent sufferings
for our land. Unhappy wives of Trojans,
look, here is the body of Astyanax, 1120
barbarously killed by the Greeks
thrown like trash over the wall.

TALTHYBIUS

Hecuba, the plashing oars of one ship are left
ready to ferry the remaining spoils
of Achilles' son to the rocky promontory of Phthia. 1125
Neoptolemus himself has set sail; he has heard
some bad news of his father Peleus: that Acastus,
Pelias' son had driven him from the land.
For this reason he put haste before any further delay.
He is gone and with him Andromache, the cause of many 1130
tears to me, when she set out from the land,
grieving aloud her homeland and falling

before the tomb of Hector she begged you
to bury the boy who was hurtled from the tower
losing his life, the son of your son Hector. 1135
And this, the Achaeans' terror, the bronze-backed
shield which his father put around his body,
not to bring it into the chamber where she would be wed.
The boy's mother, Andromache, a painful sight, 1140
begged to bury the child in this instead of a cedar coffin
and stone tomb and to give it into your hands
so that you may cover the body with clothing
and garlands as much as is in your power
since she is gone and her master's haste 1145
prevented her putting the child in the grave.
While you are decking the body, after
covering it with earth we will set sail.
But do as you have been told as quickly as possible.
Of one bitter task I have relieved you: 1150
for while crossing the streams of Scamander
I washed the body and cleansed the wounds.
Now I'll go to break through a dug out grave
so that my part and yours done together with dispatch
may set the oars in motion for our homeward voyage. 1155

Exit Talthibius.

HECUBA

Lay the round shield of Hector on the ground,
a powerful sight and not dear for me to look at.
You, Achaeans, have greater pretense at the spear
than sense, why, in fear of this child, have you
committed a new murder? Lest fallen Troy 1160
might one day rise again? You were nothing then
when, though Hector was successful with the spear
and myriad other forces, we were still losing,
and now that the city is taken and the Phrygians
slaughtered, you feared this baby. I can only despise 1165
your fear which fears without understanding the reasons.
Oh, my darling, how haplessly death has come to you.
If you had died for the city after reaching your youth
and marriage and royal power equal to the gods'
you would have been blessed if any of this is blessed. 1170
Now though you saw these things in your child's mind,
you were unaware of them, that they were in your life.
Unhappy child how tragically your father's walls,
Loxias' towers, sheared the curls off your head,
that your mother often tended like a garden 1175
and covered in kisses, where blood gurgles out

of your broken bones — I will not hide the shame of it.
O hands, how you possess the sweet likeness
of your father. Your joints are snapped, you lie lifeless.
Dear mouth, that often uttered a boy's boast, 1180
you were wrong when you threw yourself on my robes
and said, "Grandmother, I will cut a full lock
of my curls for your grave and I will lead
a band of my companions bidding you fond farewell."
No, you did not bury me, but I am burying you, 1185
a baby, a pitiful corpse, I, old, cityless, childless.
Ah me [*oimoi*], the many hugs, all my nurturing care,
and those nights we shared are gone. What in the world
would a poet compose to inscribe on your tomb
"Once upon a time the Greeks killed this child 1190
because they were afraid of him." An epitaph of shame.
But though you did not attain your patrimony, still
you will have his bronze covered shield to be buried in.
O shield, protector of Hector's stalwart arms,
you have lost your staunchest guardian. 1195
How sweet his imprint lies on your handle,
sweat on the well-turned circumference of the rim
which often from his forehead in the thick of battle
Hector let drip, holding you against his chin.

Come, bring adornment for this poor little corpse 1200
from whatever you have on hand. The gods do not
give us a chance for a fine show. What I have, you will get.
He is a fool, that mortal who thinks he fares well
and rejoices in a secure fortune. In its course our fortune
leaps about now one way, now another 1205
like an unsteady man. No one is ever happy in himself.

CHORUS LEADER

These women are bringing adornment that's at hand
to give to the corpse from the Phrygian spoils.

HECUBA

My child, not for winning a horse race
nor surpassing your peers with the bow, customs that 1210
the Phrygians practice, though not to excess,
the mother of your father offers you adornments
of things that once were yours, but now the god-hated
Helen has robbed you, and besides destroyed
your life and brought down the whole house. 1215

CHORUS

Ah ah [*e e*] you've touched my heart

oh great prince
of my city once.

HECUBA

I put upon your body splendid Phrygian robes
which you ought to have worn at your wedding
when you were to marry a noble woman of Asia. 1220
And you [*to the shield*] glorious, once mother of ten
thousand trophies of battle, dear shield of Hector,
receive a crown; though not dead you die with this body
since it is much more worthy to honor you than
the weapons of wily and malicious Odysseus. 1225

CHORUS

—Alas alas [*ai ai ai ai*] bitter wailing . . .
— Earth will take you, my child.
— Cry out, mother. HECUBA alas [*ai ai*]
— Wailing for the dead HECUBA ah me [*omoi moi*] 1230
— Alas [*oimoi*] then for the unforgotten evils.

HECUBA

I will treat your wounds with linen bandages
worthless healers, having the name but not the deed.
Your father will care for you among the dead.

CHORUS

— Strike your head, strike again 1235
making oar strokes with your hands
Ah me, ah me [*io moi moi*]

HECUBA

O dearest women . . .

CHORUS

— Hecuba, say what you mean, what sounds do you cry out?

HECUBA

It was not in the gods' will— except my toils 1240
and Troy hated above all cities.
In vain we sacrificed oxen. But if the gods had not
overthrown our land and turned it upside down,
we would lie in obscurity and would not be sung of
giving songs to the muses of mortals yet to come. 1245
Go now, bury this baby in a pitiful tomb.
For he has such garlands as are fitting for the dead.
I think for mortals it makes little difference
if someone receives rich grave offerings,
but this is just an empty fetish of the living.

CHORUS

Strophe a

— Ah ah [*io io*]

Unhappy mother who had such
great hopes in your life,
born to great wealth, you were
of noble heritage.

You were put down by an evil death.

1255

Strophe b

— Ah ah [*ea ea*]

Who are these I see on Troy's
parapets swinging hands about
with blazing firebrands. There is
some new disaster in store for Troy.

TALTHYBIUS

To the captains assigned to set fire to the city
of Priam, I say this: do not keep the fire
idle in your hands, but let it fly to its goal,
so that after razing Ilium to utter annihilation
we may happily set sail home from Troy.

1260

And you, daughters of Troy, that same order
can have two forms, when the leaders of the army
give the high sound of the trumpet blast,
go to the ships of the Achaeans, to be taken from the land.

1265

And you, most unhappy old woman, come along:
these men have come for you from Odysseus
to whom the lot gives you as slave far from your home.

1270

HECUBA

Ah me [*oi 'go*] I am in misery. This now is the last
and limit of all my past and present sufferings;
I will go from my country, the city is blazing with fire.

But, old foot, with difficulty, hurry along
that I may say farewell to my most wretched city.

1275

O Troy once breathing proudly among the barbarians
you quickly are robbed of your famous name.
They are lighting you on fire; they are taking us now
as slaves from the land. O gods! Yet why do I call on the gods?

1280

They were invoked before and did not hear us.
Come, let me run to the pyre; it is best for me
to die here along with my burning homeland.

TALTHYBIUS

Poor woman, you are made mad by your sufferings.

But take her, don't hold back. She must be
put into Odysseus' hands and delivered as his prize.

Kommos

Strophe a

HECUBA

otototoi

Son of Cronos, Phrygian overlord, ancestor,
have you seen what we suffer?

Unworthy of the race of Dardanus.

1290

CHORUS

He has seen. The great city, no longer a city,
is gone. There is no Troy.

Antistrophe a

HECUBA

otototoi

Troy is on fire and Pergamon is burning to the ground;
its buildings and the high turrets of the walls.

1295

CHORUS

Like smoke on a wing of the wind
our land fallen to the spear is vanishing.

[The houses are blazing and overrun
by a hostile spear.]

1300

Strophe b

HECUBA

Alas [*io*] land that mothered my children.

CHORUS

Ah ah [*e e*]

HECUBA

O Children hear me, hear your mother's cry.

CHORUS

With your dirge you call on the dead.

HECUBA.

Letting my old limbs fall to the ground
and beating the earth with both hands.

1305

CHORUS

Following you, I put my knee to the ground
calling on my poor husband
in the world below.

HECUBA

We are taken and led away. . .

CHORUS

Pain, pain is what you cry.

1310

HECUBA

. . . to a house of slavery

CHORUS

. . . far from my country.

HECUBA

Woe (*io*)

Priam, Priam, though dead

unburied, friendless

you are unaware of my destruction.

CHORUS

Dusky death closed his eyes

holy in unholy slaughter.

1315

Antistrophe b

HECUBA

O homes of the gods, dear city.

CHORUS

Ah ah [*e e*]

HECUBA

You have the deadly fire and point of the spear.

CHORUS

Soon you will fall without a name in kindly earth.

HECUBA

The ash like smoke on the wing to the sky

will make me unable to see my home.

1320

CHORUS

The name of the land has vanished.

Everything is gone and unhappy Troy is no more.

HECUBA

Do you understand? Do you hear . . .

CHORUS

. . . the sound of towers

HECUBA

. . . quaking everywhere.

CHORUS

The city is in ruins.

HECUBA

Alas [*io*]

Quaking limbs,

make your way

go to life's day of slavery.

1330

CHORUS

Oh unhappy city. Yet still

guide your steps to the Achaeans' ships.