Trojan Women

EURIPIDES

c. 480–406 BC

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Τρῳάδες

Translated from the Greek with AI (Claude) and edited



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Trojan Women · Euripides (c. 480–406 BC)

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INTRODUCTION

Troy has fallen. Its men are dead, and its women wait in the Greek camp to learn which of the victors will take each of them home as a slave. At the center is Hecuba, the old queen, who has lost her husband, her sons and her city, and who stays on stage from beginning to end as one blow after another falls.

One by one the women are brought before her: her daughter Cassandra, the prophetess, who has been given to Agamemnon and foresees the ruin she will bring on his house; her daughter-in-law Andromache, widow of Hector; and Helen, whom Hecuba confronts in front of Menelaus in a formal debate about who is to blame for the war. The Greek herald Talthybius, a decent man doing a hateful job, carries the victors' orders.

The play was staged in 415 BC, months after Athens had killed the men and enslaved the women and children of the island of Melos, and as it prepared its great expedition against Sicily. It remains one of the most powerful works ever written about what war does to those who survive it.

Trojan Women

Before the Greek tents outside the ruins of Troy.
The captive women of Troy wait to be shipped away as slaves.

PROLOGUE

Poseidon mourns fallen Troy, and Athena wins his help to wreck the Greek fleet on its way home.

POSEIDON [1] I have come, I, Poseidon, from the salt depths of the Aegean sea, where the choirs of Nereids weave the loveliest steps of their dancing feet. Phoebus and I once set towers of stone around this land of Troy, built true with straight measuring lines, and ever since, my heart has never lost its goodwill toward the city of my Phrygians. Now it smolders; the Argive spear has sacked it and it is gone. Epeius, the Phocian from Parnassus, used the devices of Pallas to fit together a horse big with weapons, and he sent that deadly image inside the walls.[1] [13] That is why men in later days will call it the Wooden Horse, the horse that wrapped hidden spears inside it. The groves are deserted, and the gods' sanctuaries run with slaughter. At the foot of the altar steps of Zeus of the Courtyard, Priam has fallen dead. Gold in plenty and Phrygian spoils are being carried off to the Achaean ships. The Greeks who marched against this city are waiting for a wind astern, so that in the tenth season of sowing they may have the joy of seeing their wives and children. [23] As for me, I am beaten by the Argive goddess Hera and by Athena, who joined in destroying the Phrygians, and so I am

1 Euripides often calls the Trojans "Phrygians," after the region of Asia Minor. The Greeks appear under several names: Argives, Achaeans, Danaans.

leaving famous Ilium and my altars. When cruel desolation seizes a city, the worship of the gods falls sick, and they are honored no more. The Scamander echoes with the many shrieks of the captive women as their masters are assigned by lot. Some have fallen by lot to the Arcadian people, some to the Thessalian, and some to the sons of Theseus, the leaders of the Athenians. [32] The Trojan women not yet allotted are in these tents, picked out for the leading men of the army. With them is the Spartan, Tyndareus' daughter Helen, and she is rightly counted a captive. And if anyone wants to see this poor woman, here she is: Hecuba, lying before the gates, shedding many tears for many losses. Her daughter Polyxena has died a pitiful, cruel death at the tomb of Achilles. Priam is gone, and her sons. And the maiden whom lord Apollo let run free in her frenzy, Cassandra, Agamemnon is taking by force to a secret bed, setting aside what is owed to the god and to piety. [45] So farewell, city that once was fortunate, and you, towers of dressed stone. If Pallas, daughter of Zeus, had not destroyed you, you would still be standing on your foundations.

ATHENA [48] May I speak to the one who is my father's nearest kin, a great power, honored among the gods, and put our old enmity aside?

POSEIDON [51] You may. Lady Athena, meetings between kin are no small charm for the heart.

ATHENA [53] I'm glad of your gentle mood. My lord, I bring a proposal to lay before us both, a matter for you and for me.

POSEIDON [55] You're not bringing some new message from one of the gods, are you? From Zeus, or from one of the other powers?

ATHENA [57] No. It's for Troy, where we are standing, that I've come to you and your power, to make it an ally of mine.

POSEIDON [59] Can it be that you've thrown off your old hatred, and now that Troy is burned to ashes you've come to pity it?

ATHENA [61] Go back to my first point. Will you share counsel with me and help me do what I mean to do?

POSEIDON [63] Certainly. But I do want to know your side of it too. Have you come for the Achaeans' sake or for the Phrygians'?

ATHENA [65] I want to bring joy to the Trojans, my former enemies, and to give the Achaean army a bitter homecoming.

POSEIDON [67] Why do you leap like this from one mood to another, hating too hard and loving whoever you happen to?

ATHENA [69] Don't you know how I was outraged, and my temple with me?

POSEIDON [70] I know: when Ajax dragged Cassandra off by force.[2]

ATHENA [71] And the Achaeans did nothing to him. They didn't even reproach him.

POSEIDON [72] And yet it was your strength they used to sack Ilium.

ATHENA [73] That's exactly why I want to harm them, with your help.

POSEIDON [74] Whatever you want from me is ready. What will you do?

ATHENA [75] I want to give them a miserable homecoming.

POSEIDON [76] While they stay on land, or out on the salt sea?

ATHENA [77] When they sail home from Ilium. Zeus will send rain, hail beyond telling, and black blasts of wind from the sky. He says he'll give me his thunderbolt fire, to strike the Achaeans and set their ships ablaze. You, for your part, make your Aegean crossing roar with towering waves and whirlpools, and fill the hollow gulf of Euboea with corpses. Then from now on the Achaeans will know to revere my shrines and to honor the other gods.

---

2 This is the lesser Ajax, son of Oileus, who dragged Cassandra away from Athena's image, where she had taken refuge.

POSEIDON [87] It will be done. A favor needs no long speeches. I'll churn up the open waters of the Aegean. The shores of Mykonos, the reefs of Delos, Scyros and Lemnos and the headlands of Caphareus will hold the bodies of many dead. Now go to Olympus, take the thunderbolts from your father's hands, and watch for the moment the Argive army casts off its cables. The mortal who sacks cities is a fool. He gives temples and tombs, the sanctuaries of the dead, over to desolation, and then he perishes himself.

HECUBA

98 Up, ill-fated woman, lift your head from the ground,
raise your neck. This is Troy no longer,
and we are no longer Troy's royal house.
Fortune is changing: bear it.
Sail with the current, sail with your fate.
Don't turn the prow of your life
against the wave, as chance carries you on.
Ah, ah.
What is there not for me to groan at, poor wretch,
whose country is gone, my children, my husband?
You vast swelling pride of my forefathers,
furled up now, so you were nothing after all.
What should I hold back? What should I not hold back?

111 What should I mourn?
Wretched me, how ill-fated is this posture
of my bent limbs as I lie here,
my back stretched out on this hard bed.
Oh, my head, oh, my temples,
my sides! How I long to roll over,
to shift my back and spine
from one side of my body to the other,
in time with my endless elegies of tears.
But this too is music for the wretched:
to cry out their ruin, with no dance.

122 Swift prows of ships,
you came with oars to holy Ilium
over the purple sea from the fine harbors of Greece,
to the hateful paean of pipes
and the voices of sweet-sounding reeds,
and you made fast the plaited craft of Egypt,
ah, in the bays of Troy,
in pursuit of Menelaus'
hateful wife, an outrage to Castor,
a disgrace to the Eurotas.
She has slaughtered
Priam, who sowed fifty children,
and run me, wretched Hecuba,
aground on this ruin.[3]

138 Oh, what a seat is this where I sit,
settled by Agamemnon's tents!
I am led from my home, an old woman, a slave,
my head pitifully ravaged,
shorn with the razor in mourning.
You wretched wives of the bronze-speared Trojans,
brides ill-wed,
Ilium is smoldering: let us wail.
Like a mother bird over her winged young,
I will lead off the shrieking cry,
a song not the same
as the one I once
led off for the gods,
leaning on Priam's scepter,
with the proud Phrygian beat
of the lead dancer's foot.

3 The "plaited craft of Egypt" is rope of papyrus, the ships' mooring cables. Castor was Helen's brother; the Eurotas is the river of Sparta.

PARODOS

The captive women gather around Hecuba, fearing which Greek master and which land they will be sent to.

HALF-CHORUS

153 Hecuba, what are you crying out? Why this shouting?
What is it you mean? Through the tent walls
I heard the laments you were crying.
And fear darts through the hearts
of the Trojan women inside these tents
who wail for their slavery.

HECUBA 159 My child, already at the Argive ships / the hands are moving to the oars.

HALF-CHORUS 161 Oh, poor me, what do they want? Can it be / they're about to ship me off from my homeland?

HECUBA 163 I don't know, but I can guess at ruin.

HALF-CHORUS

164 Oh, oh!
Poor Trojan women, come out of the tents
to hear what you must suffer:
the Argives are making ready to sail home.

HECUBA

168 No, no!
Don't send her out to me,
Cassandra in her Bacchic frenzy,
a disgrace before the Argives,
a maenad, to bring me pain on pain.
Oh,
Troy, Troy, unhappy Troy, you are gone,
and unhappy those who are leaving you,
the living and the slain.

HALF-CHORUS

176 Oh, no. Trembling, I left
these tents of Agamemnon to hear from you,
my queen: have the Argives decided
to kill me, poor wretch,
or are the sailors at the sterns
already making ready to ply their oars?

HECUBA 182 My child, rouse your soul at this dawn. / I came out struck with dread.

HALF-CHORUS 184 Has some herald of the Danaans come already? / To whom am I given, a wretched slave?

HECUBA 186 You must be close to the drawing of the lot.

HALF-CHORUS

187 Oh, oh!
Which man from Argos or from Phthia
or from some island land will carry me off,
poor wretch, far from Troy?[4]

HECUBA

190 Ah, ah.
Whose slave will I be, poor old woman,
where, in what corner of the earth,
like a drone,
a miserable shape of a corpse,
a strengthless image of the dead,
keeping watch at someone's door
or nursing his children,
I who held the first honors in Troy?

4 Phthia, in Thessaly, was the home of Achilles and his son Neoptolemus.

CHORUS

197 Ah, ah! With what laments
you wail for your outrage!
No more at the looms of Ida
will I send the shuttle whirling to and fro.
For the last time I see my children's bodies,
the last time. Worse toils will be mine:
either brought to the bed of some Greek
(curse that night, and that fate!)
or drawing water from Peirene,
a servant at its holy spring.
Oh, may we come to the famous,
happy land of Theseus!
But never to the eddies of the Eurotas,
Helen's most hateful home,
where I would face Menelaus as a slave,
the sacker of Troy.[5]

5 Peirene was the famous spring of Corinth; "the land of Theseus" is Athens.

214 The holy land of the Peneus,
the lovely foot of Olympus,
is loaded with wealth, I have heard it said,
and with the bloom of rich harvests.
That would be my second choice,
after the holy, sacred land of Theseus.
And the land of Etna, Hephaestus' land,
that faces Phoenicia,
mother of Sicily's mountains: I hear
it is proclaimed with crowns for its excellence.
And the land that lies close
to the Ionian ... sea,
watered by the loveliest of rivers,
the Crathis that turns hair to golden flame,
nourishing it with holy springs
and blessing a land of fine men.[6]

230 But look, here comes a herald from the Danaan army,
steward of fresh news,
covering the ground with rapid strides.
What does he bring? What does he say? For we are slaves
of the Dorian land already.

FIRST EPISODE

Talthybius announces the lots; Cassandra sings her own wedding song and foretells the ruin of Agamemnon and Odysseus.

TALTHYBIUS 235 Hecuba, you know I've often made the journey to Troy as herald of the Achaean army, and you've known me before, lady. I am Talthybius, and I've come to bring you news.

HECUBA 239 This is it, my dear Trojan women, the thing we have long dreaded.

TALTHYBIUS 240 You've already been allotted, if that's what you were afraid of.

6 Sicily faces Carthage, a Phoenician colony. The Crathis is a river in southern Italy whose water was said to make hair blond.

HECUBA 241 Ah! To what city, did you say? / In Thessaly, in Phthia, or in the land of Cadmus?[7]

TALTHYBIUS 243 You've each been allotted to a different man, not all together.

HECUBA 244 Then who has drawn whom? Which of the women of Ilium / has a happy fate waiting for her?

TALTHYBIUS 246 I know. But ask one thing at a time, not everything at once.

HECUBA 247 My child, who, who has drawn her? Tell me, / my poor Cassandra?

TALTHYBIUS 249 Lord Agamemnon took her as his special prize.

HECUBA 250 To be a slave to his Spartan bride? / Oh, no, no!

TALTHYBIUS 252 No. To be the secret bride of his bed.

HECUBA 253 What, Phoebus' maiden, to whom the god / with golden hair gave the gift of a life unwed?

TALTHYBIUS 255 Desire for the inspired girl shot him with its arrow.

HECUBA

256 Throw them away, my child,
the sacred keys; strip from your body
the holy trappings of your garlands.

TALTHYBIUS 259 Well, isn't it a great thing for her to win a king's bed?

HECUBA 261 And my child you took from me just now, where is she?

TALTHYBIUS 262 You mean Polyxena? Or who is it you're asking about?

HECUBA 263 Her. To whom has the lot yoked her?

TALTHYBIUS 264 She's been assigned to serve at Achilles' tomb.

7 The land of Cadmus is Thebes.

HECUBA

Oh, no! I bore a servant for a grave.
But what custom is this,
what law of the Greeks, my friend?

TALTHYBIUS Count your daughter happy. All is well with her.

HECUBA What did you say? Tell me, does she still see the sun?

TALTHYBIUS Fate has her, so she is free of her troubles.

HECUBA And the wife of bronze-minded Hector, / poor Andromache, what fortune is hers?

TALTHYBIUS Achilles' son took her too, as his special prize.[8]

HECUBA

And I, whose servant am I,
an old head that needs a staff
in my hand for a third foot?

TALTHYBIUS Odysseus, lord of Ithaca, has drawn you as his slave.

HECUBA

No, no!
Beat your shorn head,
tear both your cheeks with your nails.
Oh, no, no!
I have drawn a loathsome, treacherous man to be slave to,
an enemy of justice, a lawless beast,
who twists everything from there to here
and back again to there with his double tongue,
turning what was friendly once to hatred.
Mourn for me, women of Troy, mourn with all your hearts.
I am gone, ill-starred, I am finished,
wretched me. I have fallen
to the unluckiest lot of all.

8 Achilles' son is Neoptolemus.

CHORUS [292] You know your own fate, my lady. But mine, who has it? Which of the Achaeans, which of the Greeks?

TALTHYBIUS [294] Go, men. You must bring Cassandra out here as fast as you can, so we can put her into the commander's hands. After that I'll take the women allotted to the others too. Hey! Why is there a blaze of pine torches inside? Are the Trojan women setting fire to the inner rooms? What are they doing, now that they're about to be taken from this land to Argos? Are they burning their own bodies, wanting to die? It's true that in situations like this a free spirit takes its troubles very hard. Open up, open up, or what suits these women and is hateful to the Achaeans will bring the blame down on me.

HECUBA [306] It's not that, they're not setting fires. It's my daughter Cassandra, running wild like a maenad, rushing out here.

CASSANDRA

[308] Hold it up, hand it here, bring the light! I honor, I set ablaze
this shrine with torches.
Hymen, O Hymenaeus, lord! Oh, joy, oh, joy!
Blessed is the bridegroom,
and blessed am I, to be married
to a royal bed in Argos.
Hymen, O Hymenaeus, lord!
Since you, Mother, with tears
and with groans keep mourning
my dead father and our dear country,
I myself for my wedding
light up the fire's blaze,
to brilliance, to gleaming,
giving it to you, Hymenaeus,
giving you light, Hecate,
for the beds of maidens, as custom has it.[9]

9 Cassandra sings a wedding hymn as if leading her own bridal procession; Hymen or Hymenaeus is the god of marriage, invoked in the refrain.

325 Kick your foot high, lead the dance, euhan, euhoi!
as in my father's
most blessed days.
The dance is holy.
Lead it now, Phoebus: in your temple among the laurels
I serve as your priestess.
Hymen, O Hymenaeus, Hymen!
Dance, Mother, lead off, whirl your foot
this way and that with mine,
step the dearest step.
Shout out the Hymenaeus, oh,
shout for the bride
with blessed songs and cries.

338 Come, Phrygian girls in your lovely robes,
sing for my wedding
the husband fated for my bed.

CHORUS 341 My queen, won't you hold on to the girl in her frenzy,

342 so she doesn't go dancing lightly off to the Argive army?

HECUBA 343 Hephaestus, you carry the torch at mortals' weddings, but this flame you're flashing up is a grim one, far from our great hopes. Oh, my child, I never imagined you would be married like this, at the point of the spear, at the point of an Argive spear. Give me the light. You're not carrying the fire straight, rushing about in your madness, and your misfortunes haven't brought you to your senses, child. You're still just as you were. Take the pine torches inside, women of Troy, and answer her wedding songs with your tears.

CASSANDRA 353 Mother, crown my victorious head, and rejoice at my royal marriage. Send me on my way, and if I seem less than eager to you, push me by force. For if Loxias exists, the famous lord of the Achaeans, Agamemnon, will find his marriage to me more bitter than Helen's. I will kill him, and sack his house in return, and take vengeance for my brothers and my father. But I'll let that be. I won't sing of the axe that will come

down on my neck and on others', or of the struggles of a matricide that my marriage will set in motion, or of the overthrow of the house of Atreus.[10] 365 But I will show that this city is more blessed than the Achaeans. I am possessed by the god, yes, but even so I will stand outside my frenzy this far. For the sake of one woman and one passion, hunting down Helen, they lost thousands. And their clever general destroyed what he loved most for the sake of what he hated most: he gave up his joy in his own children at home as a favor to his brother, for a woman's sake, and a woman who went willingly, not one carried off by force. When they reached the shores of the Scamander, they died, though no one was robbing them of their borders or their high-towered country. Those whom Ares took never saw their children again. No wife's hands wrapped them in their shrouds. They lie in a foreign land. And things at home were just as bad:[11] 380 women died widows, and men died childless in their homes, having raised children for nothing, and there is no one to pour an offering of blood on the ground at their graves. Truly the army deserves this praise! Shameful things are better left unsaid; let my Muse not be a singer who hymns evils. The Trojans, first of all, died for their country, the finest glory there is. Those whom the spear took were carried home as corpses by their loved ones, and the earth of their fathers' land embraced them, laid out by the hands that ought to do it. 391 And those Phrygians who did not die in battle lived day after day with their wives and children, joys the Achaeans went without. And Hector's fate, which grieves you, hear how it really stands. He has died and is gone, but proved the best of men, and it was the Achaeans' coming that achieved this. If they had stayed at home, his worth would have gone unnoticed. And Paris married the daughter of Zeus; if he hadn't, no one would ever have spoken of the glory in his house. So whoever has sense should avoid war.

10 Loxias is a title of Apollo. Cassandra foresees Agamemnon's murder by his wife Clytemnestra and their son Orestes' revenge on his mother.

11 Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia at Aulis to win a wind for the fleet.

401 But if it comes to that, to die nobly is no shameful crown for a city, and to die ignobly is a disgrace. That is why, Mother, you shouldn't pity our land, or my marriage bed. Through my marriage I will destroy the ones you and I hate most.

CHORUS 406 How sweetly you laugh at your own family's troubles, and sing what your singing may not prove true.

TALTHYBIUS 408 If Apollo hadn't driven your wits to frenzy, you wouldn't get away with sending my generals off from this land with words like these. But it turns out the grand, the ones reputed wise, are no better than nobodies. The greatest lord of all the Greeks, the dear son of Atreus, has given in to a special passion for this mad girl. I'm a poor man myself, but I wouldn't have taken her to my bed. 417 As for you, since your wits aren't sound, I hand your insults against the Argives and your praise of the Phrygians over to the winds to carry off. Follow me to the ships, a fine bride for the general. And you, when Laertes' son wants to take you away, follow him. You'll be the servant of a sensible woman, so say those who came to Ilium.[12]

CASSANDRA 424 What a clever fellow this lackey is! Why do heralds have that name at all? They're one thing all mortals hate alike, these underlings who hang around kings and cities. You say my mother will go to Odysseus' halls? Then what about Apollo's words, revealed to me, which say she will die here? The rest I won't throw in her face. Poor wretch, he doesn't know what sufferings are waiting for him. Some day my troubles and the Phrygians' will look like gold to him. When he has filled out ten years on top of those he spent here, he will reach his homeland alone, 435 passing where dread Charybdis has her home in the narrow channel of rock, and the mountain-roaming Cyclops who eats raw flesh, and Ligurian Circe who turns men into swine, and wrecks on the salt sea, and longing for the lotus, and the holy cattle of the Sun, whose flesh will one day find a voice, a voice bitter to Odysseus. To cut it short, he will go down alive to Hades, and when he has escaped the sea's waters he will come

12 The sensible woman is Penelope, wife of Odysseus, son of Laertes.

home and find countless troubles in his house. But why do I keep hurling out Odysseus' labors? Go, as fast as you can. Let me be married to my bridegroom in Hades. [446] Vile man, you'll have a vile burial, at night, not by day, you who think you're doing something grand, leader of the Danaans! And as for me, my corpse will be thrown out naked, and the ravines flowing with winter torrents near my bridegroom's grave will give it to wild beasts to tear apart—me, Apollo's servant. Garlands of the god I love most, ornaments of my ecstasy, farewell. I have left the festivals I once delighted in. Go, torn from my skin, so that while my body is still pure I may give them to the swift winds to carry to you, lord of prophecy. [455] Where is the general's ship? Where do I go aboard? Waste no more time watching for a wind to fill your sails: you'll be taking me from this land as one of the three Furies. Farewell, Mother; don't cry at all. Dear country, and my brothers under the earth, and the father who begot us, you won't wait long to welcome me. I will come to the dead in triumph, having sacked the house of the sons of Atreus, who destroyed us.

CHORUS [462] You who look after old Hecuba, don't you see your mistress falling to the ground without a word? Won't you catch hold of her? Or will you leave an old woman lying where she fell, you useless women? Lift her up, get her upright.

HECUBA [466] Let me be, girls. Kindness nobody wants is no kindness. Let me lie where I've fallen. What I suffer, what I have suffered, and what I have still to suffer are worth falling down for. Gods! I know I'm calling on poor allies. Still, there's something fitting in calling on the gods when one of us meets with misfortune. So first I want to sing out the good things I've had, because that way I'll stir more pity for my troubles. I was royal, and I married into royalty, and there I bore sons who were the best. They weren't just a number, either; they were the finest of the Phrygians. [477] No woman, Trojan or Greek or foreign, could ever boast of bearing sons like them. And I saw them fall to the Greek spear, and I cut off this hair of mine at the graves of the dead. And Priam, who fathered them, I didn't weep for because others told me of it. I saw him with these eyes of mine,

slaughtered at the altar fire of our own courtyard, and I saw the city taken. The daughters I raised to be worthy of the choicest bridegrooms, I raised for others: they were torn from my hands. There's no hope they'll ever see me again, and I'll never see them again either. [489] And last of all, the capstone of my miserable troubles: I'll go to Greece an old woman and a slave. They'll set me to the tasks least suited to my age. I, who bore Hector, will be a servant at the door keeping the keys, or I'll bake bread. I'll lay my wrinkled back on the ground after a royal bed, and wrap my worn-out body in worn-out rags of robes, clothes the prosperous would be ashamed to wear. Oh, no, how wretched I am! Look what I've met with, and what I've yet to meet with, all because of one woman's marriage! My child, Cassandra, you who shared the gods' Bacchic frenzy, what a disaster has ended your purity! [502] And you, poor girl, Polyxena, where are you? I had many children, sons and daughters, and not one of them is any help to me in my misery. So why are you lifting me up? What hope is there? This foot was once so delicate in Troy and is now a slave's. Lead it to a bed of straw on the ground and a pillow of stone, so I can fall there and waste away, worn down by tears. Of those who prosper, don't count any of them fortunate until he's dead.

FIRST STASIMON

The chorus sings of the night the Trojans brought the wooden horse into their city.

CHORUS

Sing to me of Ilium, Muse,
a funeral song of new hymns,
sung through tears.
For now I'll cry out a song for Troy:
how I was destroyed, a wretched captive of the spear,
by the Argives' four-footed wagon,
when the Achaeans left the horse at our gates,
roaring to the sky,
gold-trapped, full of armed men.
And the people shouted out,
standing on the Trojan rock:
"Come, your labors are over,
bring this holy image up
for the Zeus-born maiden of Ilium!"

Which young woman didn't go,
which old man stayed at home?
Delighting in songs,
they took in their ruin, a trick.
The whole race of Phrygians
rushed to the gates
to give the goddess the polished ambush of the Argives
in mountain pine,
the ruin of Dardania,
a gift for the unwedded goddess of the immortal horses.
With ropes of spun flax, as if it were a ship's dark hull,
they hauled it to the stone seat
of the goddess Pallas,
to the floor that would mean slaughter for our country.

Over the toil and the joy
the darkness of night came on.
The Libyan pipe was sounding,
and Phrygian songs, and girls
lifting their feet high to the beat
sang a happy shout. In the houses
the blaze of fire shone everywhere,
... gave a dark gleam to sleep.
And I was singing then
in the dances about the halls
of the mountain maiden,
Zeus' daughter, when a murderous cry
through the city took hold
of Pergamum's dwellings. Dear little children
threw their frightened hands
around their mothers' robes.[13]

Out of the ambush came Ares,
the work of the maiden Pallas.
Phrygians were slaughtered around the altars,
and in the beds, the desolation of men beheaded
brought a crown of young women
to Greece, to raise its children,
and grief to the Phrygians' homeland.

13 The mountain maiden, daughter of Zeus, is Artemis; Pergamum is the citadel of Troy.

SECOND EPISODE

Andromache reports Polyxena's death, and the Greeks decide to throw her son Astyanax from the walls.

CHORUS

Hecuba, do you see Andromache here,
carried off on a foreign cart?
Beside her heaving breast
goes her dear Astyanax, Hector's son.
Where are you being taken on the wagon's back,
unhappy lady,
sitting beside Hector's bronze armor
and the Phrygians' spoils, hunted down with the spear,
with which Achilles' son from Phthia
will crown his temples, trophies from Troy?

ANDROMACHE My masters, the Achaeans, are taking me away.

HECUBA Oh, no.

ANDROMACHE Why groan out my victory song

HECUBA Ah, ah.

ANDROMACHE of these pains

HECUBA Zeus!

ANDROMACHE and this disaster?

HECUBA My children—

ANDROMACHE we were, once.

HECUBA Gone, our prosperity, gone is Troy—

ANDROMACHE poor Troy.

HECUBA and my children's noble birth.

ANDROMACHE Ah, ah.

HECUBA Ah, yes, for my

ANDROMACHE troubles.

HECUBA Pitiful, the fate

ANDROMACHE [586] of the city

HECUBA going up in smoke.

ANDROMACHE [587] Come to me, my husband,

HECUBA [588] You're calling my son, / who is with Hades, poor thing.

ANDROMACHE [590] your wife's defender!

HECUBA [591] And you, the Achaeans' bane,

ANDROMACHE [592] master of our children, / aged Priam,

HECUBA [594] lull me to sleep in Hades.

ANDROMACHE

[595] Such is our great longing. Poor woman, these are the pains we suffer.
The city is gone, and pain is heaped on pain
by the gods' ill will, ever since your son escaped Hades,
the one who destroyed Troy's citadel for a hateful bed.
Bloodied bodies of the dead lie stretched beside the goddess Pallas
for the vultures to carry off, and Troy has accepted the yoke of slavery.[14]

HECUBA

[601] My country, my poor country, I weep for you as you're left behind.
Now you see your pitiful end, and my house, where I gave birth.
Children, your mother, the city, is left desolate without you.
What wailing, what grief ...
tears upon tears pour down ...
for our house. The dead forget ...
their pains and shed no tears.

14 Before Paris was born, Hecuba dreamed she gave birth to a firebrand; the baby was exposed on the mountain to die, but he survived.

CHORUS 608 How sweet tears are to those who have fared badly, and the wailing of laments, and the song that holds grief.

ANDROMACHE 610 Mother of Hector, the man whose spear once killed so many Argives, do you see this?

HECUBA 612 I see the gods' work: how they tower up what is nothing, and destroy what seems to be something.

ANDROMACHE 614 We're being carried off as plunder, my child and I. Nobility has come to slavery. That's the kind of reversal it suffers.

HECUBA 616 Necessity is a terrible thing. Just now Cassandra too was torn away from me by force and taken off.

ANDROMACHE 617 Ah, ah. It seems another Ajax has turned up for your daughter, a second one. But you have other troubles too.

HECUBA 620 I have troubles beyond measure and beyond counting. One trouble comes to compete with another.

ANDROMACHE 622 Your daughter Polyxena is dead. They slaughtered her at Achilles' grave, a gift to a lifeless corpse.

HECUBA 624 Oh, no, how wretched I am! So that was the riddle Talthybius told me a while ago. The truth was plain, but he didn't put it plainly.

ANDROMACHE 626 I saw her myself. I got down from this cart, covered her with robes, and mourned over the body.

HECUBA 628 Ah, ah, my child, for your unholy sacrifice! Ah, ah, and again, how cruelly you've died!

ANDROMACHE 630 She has died the way she died. Still, her death is a happier lot than my life.

HECUBA 632 Seeing the light and being dead aren't the same, child. Death is nothing, but in life there are hopes.

ANDROMACHE 634 Mother, you who bore him, listen to an argument, a very fine one, so I can bring some comfort to your heart. I say that never being born is the same as being dead, and being

dead is better than living in misery. Someone who has never felt his troubles feels no pain. But someone who has fared well and then falls into misfortune wanders in his soul, cut off from his former happiness. She is dead as if she had never seen the light, and she knows nothing of her own troubles. 643 As for me, I aimed at a good name, and I won the greatest share of it, but I missed good fortune. All the conduct that has been found sensible in women, I worked hard to practice in Hector's house. First, a woman draws ill report on herself simply by not staying at home, whether there's anything else to blame her for or not. So I gave up any wish to go out and stayed in the house, inside its halls. I didn't let the clever talk of women in. I had my own good mind as my teacher, from home, and that was enough for me. 654 I offered my husband a silent tongue and a quiet face. I knew where I ought to win against my husband, and where I ought to let him win. And the report of all this reached the Achaean army and destroyed me. When I was captured, Achilles' son wanted to take me as his wife. I'll be a slave in the house of the very men who killed my husband. If I push aside Hector's dear face and open my heart to the husband I have now, I'll look false to the dead. But if I hold on to my love for him instead, I'll be hated by my own masters. 665 And yet they say one night is enough to soften a woman's hostility to a man's bed. I spit on any woman who throws over her former husband for a new bed and loves another. Why, not even a filly will easily pull the yoke once she's been unyoked from the mare she was raised with. And yet a beast is born without speech, has no use for reason, and is inferior by nature. But you, dear Hector, I had as a husband who was all I needed, great in understanding, birth, wealth and courage. 675 You took me untouched from my father's house, and you were the first to yoke my virgin bed. And now you are dead, and I'm being shipped to Greece as a captive, to the yoke of slavery. Don't you think Polyxena's death, which you're lamenting, is a smaller thing than my troubles? I don't even have what's left to all mortals, hope. I don't fool myself that I'll ever have any good luck, though even imagining it is sweet.

CHORUS 684 You've come to the same disaster as I have. In lamenting your own lot, you teach me where I stand in my sufferings.

HECUBA 686 I've never set foot on a ship myself, but I know about them from pictures I've seen and stories I've heard. If a storm is moderate enough to bear, sailors are eager to get safely out of trouble. One takes the tiller, one stands at the sails, one keeps the bilge-water out of the ship. But if a high, churning sea overwhelms them, they give in to fortune and let themselves go with the running of the waves. In the same way I, with all my sufferings, am speechless; I give up and let my mouth be still. 696 The wretched surge the gods have sent overpowers me. But, my dear child, let Hector's fate be. Your tears won't save him. Honor your present master, and give the man the sweet bait of your ways. If you do this, you'll cheer all of us who love you, and you might raise this child of my child to be the greatest help to Troy. Children born of you might someday settle it again, and there might still be a city. 706 But one word leads to another. Who's this I see, the Achaeans' servant, coming as messenger of new decisions?

TALTHYBIUS 709 Wife of Hector, once the best of the Phrygians, don't hate me. It's not by my choice that I announce the joint decision of the Danaans and the sons of Pelops.[15]

ANDROMACHE 712 What is it? You open with a prelude to bad news.

TALTHYBIUS 713 It's been decided that this boy—how can I say it?

ANDROMACHE 714 Surely not that he's to have a different master from me?

TALTHYBIUS 715 No Achaean will ever be his master.

ANDROMACHE 716 Then he's to be left here, all that's left of the Phrygians?

15 The sons of Pelops are the royal house of Agamemnon and Menelaus.

TALTHYBIUS [717] I don't know how to tell you bad news gently.

ANDROMACHE [718] I commend your reluctance, unless your news is good.

TALTHYBIUS [719] They're going to kill your son. There, now you know the whole terrible thing.

ANDROMACHE [720] Oh, no! What I'm hearing is a greater evil than all my evils.

TALTHYBIUS [721] Odysseus carried the day, speaking before all the Greeks.

ANDROMACHE [722] Ah, ah, ah! What we suffer is beyond all measure.

TALTHYBIUS [723] He said they mustn't raise the son of so great a father—

ANDROMACHE [724] May he carry a vote like that about his own son!

TALTHYBIUS [725] —and that he must be thrown from the towers of Troy. Let it happen; you'll show yourself wiser that way. Don't cling to him. Bear the pain of your troubles nobly. And don't imagine you have any strength when you have none. You have no defense anywhere. You must look at the facts: your city is gone, and your husband, and you are in our power. How could one woman fight against us? So I don't want you to be eager for a fight, or to do anything shameful or anything that will provoke resentment. Nor do I want you hurling curses at the Achaeans. [735] If you say anything that angers the army, this boy won't be buried, and he won't get any pity. But if you keep quiet and make the best of your fortunes, you won't leave his body unburied, and you yourself will find the Achaeans kinder.

ANDROMACHE [740] My dearest, my child, too highly prized, you'll die at your enemies' hands and leave your poor mother behind. Your father's nobility has killed you, though it brings other children safety. Your father's greatness came at the wrong time for you. My bed, my marriage, how unlucky you were! You brought me once to Hector's house, not to bear my son as a vic-

tim for the Danaans to slaughter, but to be king of fertile Asia. My boy, are you crying? Do you sense what's happening to you? 750 Why do you clutch me with your hands and hold on to my robes, nestling under my wings like a chick? Hector won't come back up from the earth with his famous spear in his hand to bring you safety, nor will your father's kin, nor the strength of the Phrygians. You'll fall from on high, a horrible leap, and land on your neck without pity, and break the breath out of your body. Little one, so dear to your mother's arms, sweet smell of your skin! So it was all for nothing that this breast nursed you in your swaddling clothes. I toiled in vain, worn out with the labor. 761 Now, and never again, kiss your mother. Throw yourself on me, the one who bore you, wind your arms around my back and press your lips to mine. You Greeks, inventors of foreign cruelties, why are you killing this child? He's guilty of nothing. Daughter of Tyndareus, you are no child of Zeus. I say you were born of many fathers: first the Spirit of Vengeance, then Envy, Murder, Death, and every evil the earth breeds. I will never claim that Zeus fathered you, a doom to so many foreigners and Greeks.[16] 772 Death take you! With those most beautiful eyes you've shamefully destroyed the famous plains of the Phrygians. Go on: take him, carry him, throw him, if you've decided to throw him. Feast on his flesh. The gods are destroying us, and I couldn't keep death from my child. Cover my miserable body and throw me into the ships. It's a fine wedding I'm going to, now that I've lost my own child.

CHORUS 780 Poor Troy, you've lost thousands for the sake of one woman and her hateful bed.

16 Helen was the daughter of Leda, wife of Tyndareus; Zeus was said to be her real father.

TALTHYBIUS

Come, child, let go of your loving embrace
of your miserable mother, and climb
to the topmost crown of your fathers' towers,
where the vote has decreed
that you breathe your last.
Take him. Messages like these
ought to be carried by someone pitiless,
someone fonder of shamelessness
than my mind is.

HECUBA

Child, son of my unhappy son,
we are robbed of your life unjustly,
your mother and I. What will become of me?
What can I do for you, poor boy? We give you these,
blows to the head and the beating of breasts;
these are what we still have power over. Oh, no, my city!
Oh, no, for you! What don't we have?
What do we lack
to go headlong to utter ruin?

SECOND STASIMON

The chorus recalls Troy's earlier sack by Heracles and how the gods' love for Troy has come to nothing.

CHORUS

Telamon, king of Salamis, where the bees are fed,
you who made your home on the wave-washed island
that lies facing the holy hills where Athena
first showed the branch of the gray-green olive,
a heavenly crown and an ornament for shining Athens—
you came, you came, with the archer, Alcmene's son,
to win glory together,
to sack Ilium, Ilium, our city,
long ago, when you came from Greece.[17]

Then he led the flower of Greece, furious
over the horses, and at the fair-flowing Simois
he rested his sea-going oar and fastened the cables to the stern,
and took from the ships the sure aim of his hand,
death for Laomedon. The walls built true to Phoebus' rule
... he brought down with fire's red blast
and ravaged the land of Troy.
Twice, in two onslaughts, the murderous spear
brought down the walls around Dardania.
In vain, then, son of Laomedon,
you who step so delicately
among golden wine-jugs,
you have the task of filling Zeus' cups,
the finest of services.[18]

17 A generation earlier, Heracles (son of Alcmene) and Telamon sacked Troy after its king Laomedon cheated Heracles of promised horses.
18 The son of Laomedon is Ganymede, whom Zeus carried off to be his cupbearer.

825 The land that bore you is burning in fire.
The seashores
cried out, as a bird
... cries over its young:
some for husbands, some for children,
some for their aged mothers.
Your dewy bathing places
and the running tracks of the gymnasium
are gone. But you keep your young face
beside the throne of Zeus,
calm and lovely in its grace,
while the Greek spear
has destroyed the land of Priam.
Love, Love, who once came
to the halls of Dardanus,
dear to the heavenly gods,

843 how high you raised Troy's towers then,
binding her to the gods by marriage! As for Zeus,
I'll speak no more of his disgrace.
But the light of white-winged Day,
so dear to mortals, saw the land destroyed,
saw the ruin of the citadel,
though in her bedchamber she had a husband from this land,
the father of her children,
whom the golden four-horsed chariot of the stars
snatched up and carried away,
a great hope for his native land.
But the gods' love for Troy is gone.[19]

19 Day, or Dawn, carried off the Trojan prince Tithonus to be her husband.

THIRD EPISODE

Menelaus comes for Helen, who pleads her case, and Hecuba answers her point by point.

MENELAUS [860] How beautifully the sunlight shines today, the day I'll get my hands on my wife, Helen! For I am Menelaus, the man who has toiled so much, I and the Achaean army. I came to Troy not so much for a woman's sake, as people think, but against the man who deceived his host and stole my wife from my house. Well, with the gods' help he has paid the penalty, he and his land, fallen to the Greek spear. [869] I've come to take away the wretch—I don't like to say the name of the woman who was once my wife. She's been counted with the other Trojan women here in the captives' quarters. The men who won her back with the toil of the spear have given her to me to kill, or, if I prefer not to kill her, to take back to the land of the Argives. I've decided not to put Helen to death here in Troy, but to take her by ship to Greek soil and there hand her over to be killed, as atonement for all my friends who died at Ilium. [880] Come on, men, go into the quarters and bring her out. Drag her by that bloodstained hair. When the winds come round in our favor, we'll send her to Greece.

HECUBA [884] You who carry the earth and have your seat upon the earth, whoever you are, so hard to guess and to know, Zeus, whether you're the necessity of nature or the mind of mortals, I pray to you. For you move along a silent path and guide all mortal affairs with justice.

MENELAUS [889] What's this? What a strange new prayer to the gods!

HECUBA [890] I commend you, Menelaus, if you'll kill your wife. But steer clear of seeing her, or she'll take you captive with longing. She takes men's eyes captive, takes cities, burns houses to the ground. That's how her spells work. I know her, and so do you, and so do all who've suffered for her.

HELEN [895] Menelaus, this prelude is enough to frighten me. Your servants have laid hands on me and forced me out in front of these quarters. I'm fairly sure you hate me, but still I want to ask: what have the Greeks and you decided about my life?

MENELAUS [901] It never came to a careful vote. The whole army, the army you wronged, handed you over to me to kill.

HELEN [903] Then may I answer that with a speech, and show that if I die, I'll die unjustly?

MENELAUS [905] I didn't come here to talk. I came to kill you.

HECUBA [906] Listen to her, Menelaus, so she doesn't die without having this. And let me speak the case against her. You know nothing of the wrongs she did in Troy. Once the whole case is put together, it will kill her so surely that she can't possibly escape.

MENELAUS [911] It's a gift of time I can spare. If she wants to speak, she may. But understand: I'll grant her this because of your arguments, so she can learn from them. I won't grant it as a favor to her.

HELEN [914] Whether I seem to you to speak well or badly, perhaps you won't answer me, since you think of me as an enemy. But I'll answer the charges I expect you to make as you go through your case, setting my accusations against yours. First: this woman gave birth to the beginning of our troubles when she gave birth to Paris. Second: the old man destroyed Troy, and me, when he didn't kill the baby—that bitter likeness of a firebrand—Alexander, as he was then. Now hear how the rest of it goes. This man judged a team of three goddesses.[20] [925] Pallas' offer to Alexander was that he would lead the Phrygians and overthrow Greece. Hera promised he would rule over Asia and the farthest bounds of Europe, if Paris judged in her favor. Cypris, marveling at my beauty, promised to give me to him, if she outran the other goddesses in beauty. Now consider how the story goes from there. Cypris wins—and this is how much my marriage benefited

20 Paris was also called Alexander.

Greece: you aren't ruled by foreigners, you didn't face them in battle, you aren't under a tyrant. But what was good fortune for Greece was my ruin. I was sold for my beauty, and I'm reproached for what should have earned me a crown on my head. 938 You'll say I haven't yet come to the point right in front of us: how I slipped away from your house in secret. He came with no small goddess at his side, this woman's avenging spirit—call him by the name Alexander, if you like, or Paris. And you, you worst of men, left him in your house and sailed off from Sparta to Crete. Well then. The next question I'll put not to you but to myself: what was I thinking, that I followed a guest out of the house, betraying my country and my home? 948 Punish the goddess, and be stronger than Zeus, who has power over all the other gods but is her slave. I deserve to be forgiven. Here, though, you might have a plausible argument against me: once Alexander was dead and gone to the depths of the earth, and my marriage was no longer the gods' work, I ought to have left the house and gone over to the Argive ships. That is exactly what I was trying to do. My witnesses are the gatekeepers on the towers and the lookouts on the walls, who caught me again and again letting myself down from the battlements by ropes, trying to steal this body of mine away to the ground. 959 But this new husband, Deiphobus, seized me by force and kept me as his wife, against the Phrygians' will. So how could I justly die, husband—and die rightly at your hands—when he married me by force, and when what I brought from home, instead of winning me a victor's prize, has made me a bitter slave? If you want to overpower the gods, that wish of yours is folly.[21]

CHORUS 966 My queen, defend your children and your country, and destroy her persuasion. She speaks well, and she's a criminal. That's what makes it dangerous.

HECUBA 969 First I'll stand as the goddesses' ally and show that she isn't speaking justly. I don't believe Hera and the virgin Pallas ever sank to such folly that one would sell Argos to foreign-

21 Deiphobus was a brother of Paris.

ers, and Pallas would someday make Athens a slave to the Phrygians—goddesses going off to Ida for a game, preening over their looks! Why would the goddess Hera have had such a passion for beauty? To get a better husband than Zeus? Or was Athena hunting for a marriage with one of the gods—she who begged her father to let her stay a virgin, running from the marriage bed? Don't make fools of the goddesses to dress up your own wickedness. I don't think you'll persuade the wise. 983 And Cypris—this is a fine joke—you say she came with my son to Menelaus' house. Couldn't she have stayed quietly in heaven and brought you to Ilium, Amyclae and all? My son was outstandingly handsome, and your own mind, when it saw him, turned itself into Cypris. Every folly men commit is Aphrodite to them, and the goddess's name rightly begins like *aphrosynē*, "folly." You, at least, saw him in his foreign clothes, gleaming with gold, and went out of your mind with lust.[22] 993 In Argos you lived with little to spend. Once you were rid of Sparta you hoped to flood the Phrygians' city, flowing with gold, with your extravagance. Menelaus' halls weren't enough for you to run riot in with your luxuries. Well then: you say my son carried you off by force. Which Spartan noticed? What scream did you raise—when young Castor was there, and his twin, not yet among the stars? And when you came to Troy, with the Argives on your trail, and the struggle of spears began, if news came that this man was winning, you'd praise Menelaus, to hurt my son with the thought of a great rival in love;[23] 1007 but if the Trojans were lucky, he was nothing. You kept your eye on fortune and made a practice of following wherever it went; you had no wish to follow excellence. And then you say you tried to steal yourself away, letting yourself down from the towers by rope, as if you stayed against your will? Where were you ever caught tying a noose or sharpening a sword, as a noble woman would have done, longing for her former husband? And yet I warned you,

22 Amyclae was a town near Sparta, home of Helen's family.
23 Castor and his twin Polydeuces were later placed among the stars as the constellation of the Twins.

over and over: "Daughter, leave. My sons will make other marriages. I'll help you slip out and send you to the Achaean ships. Stop the war between the Greeks and us." But you hated that. [1020] You were living in arrogance in Alexander's house, and you wanted foreigners bowing down to you. That meant a great deal to you. And on top of all this you've come out with your body dressed up, breathing the same air as your husband, you loathsome creature. You should have come humbly, in ragged clothes, shivering with fear, your head shorn like a Scythian's, showing more modesty than shamelessness after the wrongs you've done. Menelaus, so you know where I'll end my speech: crown Greece by killing her, as befits you, and set this law for all other women: death for any woman who betrays her husband.

CHORUS [1033] Menelaus, punish your wife in a way worthy of your ancestors and your house, and rid yourself of Greece's reproach that you're weak. Show yourself noble before your enemies.

MENELAUS [1036] You and I have arrived at the same conclusion: she left my house of her own free will for a stranger's bed, and Cypris has been dragged into her speech for show. Go to the men who'll stone you, and pay for the Achaeans' long labors with a short death, so you'll learn not to disgrace me.

HELEN [1042] No, I beg you by your knees, don't lay the gods' sickness at my door and kill me. Forgive me.

HECUBA [1044] And don't betray your allies, the men she killed. I beg you, for them and for their children.

MENELAUS [1046] Enough, old woman. I haven't given her a thought. I'm telling my servants to take her off to the ships' sterns, where she'll sail.

HECUBA [1049] Then don't let her board the same ship as you.

MENELAUS [1050] Why? Does she weigh more than she used to?

HECUBA [1051] There's no lover who doesn't love forever.

MENELAUS [1052] That depends on how the beloved's mind turns out. But you'll have what you want: she won't board the ship I'm

on—you've made a good point. And when she gets to Argos she'll die a bad death, as a bad woman deserves, and teach all women to be chaste. That's not easy. Still, her death will frighten their folly, even if they're worse than she is.

THIRD STASIMON

The chorus reproaches Zeus for abandoning Troy and prays that lightning strike Menelaus' ship.

CHORUS

So then, Zeus, you have betrayed to the Achaeans
your temple in Ilium
and your fragrant altar,
the flame of the offering cakes,
the smoke of myrrh rising to the sky,
and holy Pergamum,
and Ida's ivy-hung glens, the glens of Ida,
streaming with snow-fed rivers,
and the peak first struck by the sun,
the radiant, sacred dwelling.
Gone are your sacrifices,
the glad songs of dancing choruses,
the gods' night-long festivals in the dark,
the forms of golden statues,
and the Phrygians' sacred moon-feasts,
twelve in number.

1077 I wonder, I wonder, my lord, whether you heed this,
seated on your heavenly throne
high in the air, while my city is destroyed,
brought down by the blazing rush of fire.
My love, my husband,
you are dead and wander
unburied, unwashed, and me
a seagoing ship,
darting on its wings, will carry
to horse-grazing Argos, where the walls
of Cyclopean stone rise to the sky.
And at the gates a crowd of children
clings to us in tears and cries, cries out:

1092 "Mother, oh no, the Achaeans are taking me away alone,
out of your sight,
onto a dark ship,
with oars that ply the sea,
to holy Salamis,
or the peak of the Isthmus between two seas,
where the halls of Pelops
hold the gates."
If only, as Menelaus' boat
goes out into the open sea,
the holy fire of the Aegean,
flashing with lightning, hurled with both hands,
would fall right among his oars,
since he drives me from Ilium, from my land,
in tears, to be a slave in Greece,
while the daughter of Zeus holds
her golden mirrors, the delight of girls.[24]

24 The Isthmus of Corinth, between two seas, is the gateway to the Peloponnese, the "island of Pelops." The daughter of Zeus is Helen.

1110 May he never reach the land of Laconia,
or the bedroom and hearth of his fathers,
or the city of Pitane,
or the goddess of the bronze gates,
now that he has taken back the bride of the evil marriage,
a disgrace to great Greece
and bitter suffering
to the streams of Simois.[25]

EXODOS

Hecuba buries Astyanax on Hector's shield, Troy is set on fire, and the women are led to the ships.

CHORUS

1118 Oh, oh!
New fortunes on this land
give way to newer still. Look,
poor wives of the Trojans,
at Astyanax, dead,
whom the Danaans flung from the towers, a bitter cast,
and killed, and carry here.

TALTHYBIUS 1123 Hecuba, one ship's crew of oarsmen is left, about to sail for the shores of Phthia with the rest of the spoils of Achilles' son. Neoptolemus himself has already put out to sea. He heard of some new troubles of Peleus: that Acastus, son of Pelias, has driven him out of his land.[26] 1129 That's why he's gone in such haste, with no time to spare for staying, and Andromache with him. She brought many tears to my eyes when she set out from this land, mourning her country and calling farewell to Hector's tomb. And she asked him to bury this body, Hector's son, who fell from the walls and gave up his life; and not to take this bronze-backed shield, the Achaeans' terror,

25 Pitane was a district of Sparta; the goddess of the bronze gates is Athena of the Bronze House, worshiped at Sparta.
26 Peleus, father of Achilles and grandfather of Neoptolemus, ruled Phthia in Thessaly.

which the boy's father used to hold around his side, to Peleus' hearth, nor into the same bedroom where Andromache, the dead boy's mother, will be made a bride—a grief for her to look at— [1141] but to bury the boy in it, instead of a cedar coffin and a tomb of stone; and to give him into your arms, so that you could wrap the body in robes and garlands, as far as you can, given your state. For she has gone, and her master's haste kept her from laying her child in his grave herself. So when you've dressed the body, we'll cover him with earth and raise our mast. [1149] You, do what you've been asked as quickly as you can. I've already spared you one task: as I crossed the streams of Scamander here, I bathed the body and washed his wounds. Now I'll go and break open the ground to dig his grave, so that your work and mine, done together quickly, can speed our oars homeward.

HECUBA [1156] Set Hector's round shield on the ground—a painful sight, and no joy for me to look at. You Achaeans, with more weight in your spears than in your wits, why were you so afraid of this child that you carried out a murder never seen before? Afraid he might someday raise up fallen Troy? Then you were nothing after all. When Hector was winning with his spear, and countless other hands were with him, we were still being destroyed. Now the city's taken, the Phrygians wiped out, and you were afraid of a baby this small? I have no praise for fear, when someone fears without thinking it through. [1167] Dearest, what an unhappy death came to you. If you had died for your city, after you'd reached manhood, and marriage, and the godlike power of a king, you'd have been blessed—if any of that is blessed. As it is, child, you glimpsed those things and your soul knew of them, but you never knew them; they were in your house, and you never had the use of them. Poor boy, how cruelly your father's walls, the towers Loxias built, have shorn your head—your curls, which your mother so often tended and kissed. There, the murder grins out from the broken bones, not to speak of uglier things. [1178] Hands—what a sweet likeness of your father's you have, and now you lie in front of me, limp at the joints. Dear mouth that made so many proud promises, you're gone. You lied

to me, when you used to tumble into my bed and say, "Grandmother, I'll cut off a great lock of my hair for you, and bring my friends to your grave, and speak loving words to you." But you aren't burying me. I, an old woman without a city, without children, am burying you, the younger one, a wretched corpse. Oh, no—all those embraces, my nursing, all that care for you, gone. What could a poet ever write on your grave? 1190 "This boy the Argives once killed because they were afraid of him"? That inscription would shame Greece. Still, though you didn't inherit what was your father's, you'll have his bronze-backed willow shield to be buried in. Shield, you kept safe Hector's well-made arm, and you've lost your best guardian. How sweet his print lies on your arm-strap, and the sweat on your well-turned rim, which Hector often dripped from his forehead in the thick of his labors, pressing you to his chin. Come, bring what adornment we have for the poor body. Fate doesn't give us fortunes that allow for beauty. But what I have, you'll have. 1203 The mortal who thinks he's doing well and rejoices as if it were secure is a fool. Fortune, in its ways, like a man out of his mind, leaps now this way, now that, and no one stays fortunate forever.

CHORUS 1207 Look, these women are bringing you finery in their hands, from the Phrygian spoils, to put on the body.

HECUBA 1209 Child, it isn't for beating your friends at racing horses, or with the bow—customs the Phrygians honor without pursuing them to excess—that your father's mother lays these ornaments on you, from what was once yours. Now Helen, whom the gods hate, has robbed you of them; and besides, she has taken your life and destroyed your whole house.

CHORUS

1216 Ah, ah, my heart—
you've touched it, touched it! You who were once
a great lord of my city.

HECUBA 1219 The Phrygian finery you should have worn on your body at your wedding, when you married the highest princess of Asia, I now fasten on your skin. And you, Hector's beloved

shield, once glorious in victory, mother of countless trophies, take your garland. You'll die, though you're not dying, with the dead. You deserve honor far more than the arms of clever, wicked Odysseus.[27]

CHORUS

Ah, ah!
With bitter lament the earth
will receive you, child.
Groan, Mother,

HECUBA Ah!

CHORUS the wail for the dead.

HECUBA Oh, no, no!

CHORUS Oh, no, for your sorrows that can't be forgotten.

HECUBA Some of your wounds I'll heal with bandages—a poor doctor, with the name but not the skill. The rest your father will tend among the dead.

CHORUS

Strike, strike your head,
beating it with the stroke of your hand.
Oh, no, no!

HECUBA Dearest women!

CHORUS ... Speak—what is this cry you're raising?

HECUBA So there was nothing in the gods' minds but my sufferings, and Troy, hated above all cities. We sacrificed oxen for nothing. Yet if the god had overturned us and flung all that was on top down beneath the earth, we would have vanished and never been sung of; we would never have given the Muses undying songs for mortals to come. Go, bury the body in its poor grave. It has the garlands the dead below must have. I think it makes little difference to the dead whether they get rich funeral offerings. That's an empty show for the living.

27 After Achilles' death his armor was awarded to Odysseus over Ajax.

CHORUS

Oh, oh!
Unhappy mother, who saw
the great hopes of her life in you broken.
You were counted greatly blessed
for your noble fathers,
and you've perished by a terrible death.
Ah, ah!
Who are these I see on the heights of Ilium,
waving hands that blaze
with torches? Upon Troy

some new evil is about to fall.

TALTHYBIUS I call on the captains assigned to burn this city of Priam: don't keep the flame idle in your hands any longer. Set the fire, so that once we've razed the city of Ilium we can set off home from Troy, glad to go. And you—so the same order has two parts—daughters of Troy, when the army's leaders sound the high blast of the trumpet, go to the Achaeans' ships, to be taken away from this land. And you, old woman, unhappiest of all, follow. These men have come for you from Odysseus, whose slave the lot sends you from this land to be.

HECUBA Oh, no, poor me. This is the last, the very end of all my sorrows. I'm leaving my country; my city is being set on fire. Old feet, hurry, hard as it is, so I can say goodbye to my wretched city. Troy, once so great, so splendid among the foreign nations, soon you'll lose your famous name. They're burning you, and already they're leading us out of the land as slaves. Oh, gods! But why do I call on the gods? Before this, too, they didn't listen when they were called. Come, let's run into the fire. It would be the finest thing for me to die with this country of mine as it burns.

TALTHYBIUS Your sorrows have driven you out of your mind, poor woman. Come, take her, don't be gentle. She has to be handed over to Odysseus and delivered as his prize.

HECUBA

1287 Oh—oh—oh—oh!
Son of Cronus, lord of Phrygia,
father who begot us,
do you see what we suffer,
unworthy of the race of Dardanus?[28]

CHORUS 1292 He sees. And the great city / is a city no more; it has perished; Troy is no more.

HECUBA

1294 Oh—oh—oh—oh!
Ilium is ablaze,
the roofs of Pergamum burn with fire,
and the city, and the tops of the walls.

CHORUS

1298 Like smoke on the wing to the sky,
our land, fallen to the spear, fades away.
The halls rage with fire, overrun
by flame and the enemy spear.

HECUBA 1302 Oh, land that nursed my children!

CHORUS 1303 Ah, ah!

HECUBA 1304 Children, hear me, listen to your mother's voice!

CHORUS 1305 With a dirge you call to the dead.

HECUBA Old as I am, I lay my limbs on the ground, / and beat the earth with both my hands.

CHORUS

1307 After you, I set my knee on the earth,
calling up from below
my own poor husbands.

HECUBA 1310 We're led away, carried off—

28 Dardanus, a son of Zeus, was the ancestor of the Trojan kings.

CHORUS It's pain, pain you cry.

HECUBA

under a slave's roof, from my own country!
Oh, oh!
Priam, Priam, you're dead,
unburied, with none of your own to mourn you,
and you know nothing of my ruin.

CHORUS For black death has covered his eyes, / a holy man, by unholy slaughter.

HECUBA Oh, temples of the gods, and my beloved city!

CHORUS Ah, ah!

HECUBA You have the murderous flame and the spearpoint.

CHORUS Soon you'll fall to the dear earth, without a name.

HECUBA And the dust, like smoke on the wing to the sky, / will hide my home from my sight.

CHORUS

The land's name will pass into darkness. One thing here,
another there, is gone. Wretched Troy
is no more.

HECUBA Did you hear? Did you understand?

CHORUS The crash of Pergamum.

HECUBA

A quake, a quake will flood over the whole city!
Oh, oh!
Trembling, trembling limbs, carry
my steps. Go on to the wretched
day of a slave's life.

CHORUS Oh, wretched city! But still, / move your feet forward to the Achaeans' ships.