Introduction to *The Trojan Women*

Euripides is the third of the three great ancient Greek tragedians: Aeschylus (ca. 525-456 BC), 7 of whose plays survive out of approximately 80; Sophocles (ca. 496-406 BC), 7 of whose plays survive out of approximately 123; and Euripides (ca. 480-406 BC) with 19 out of approximately 90 plays. The details of Euripides' life that we owe to comic poets and later biographers are unreliable. He is mentioned by name in most of the eleven surviving plays of the comedian Aristophanes, and turns up as a stage character in no fewer than three of them. One biographer states he was born in 480 BC on the day that the Athenian fleet defeated the Persians at the Battle of Salamis; another suggests that he lived his life as a recluse on the island of Salamis. Gossip emanating from Aristophanes implies that his mother sold vegetables in the market; that his wife was unfaithful to him; and that his secretary had a hand in writing his plays.

He certainly lived through the rise of Athenian democracy and seems to have become disillusioned by the manner in which popular opinion came to be manipulated in the Assembly. He was a friend and associate of philosophers and intellectuals and his plays often depict characters who are skeptical about traditional beliefs. He was wary too of false patriotism, and his plays are full of thinly-veiled criticism of the Peloponnesian War being waged against Sparta by his fellow-Athenians, which dragged on for the last twenty-five years of his life and ended in total defeat for Athens soon after his death. This war produced a number of atrocities, which Euripides may have been condemning by alluding to parallel incidents in the mainly mythological scenarios of Greek tragedies. *The Women of Troy* was written in response to the events happening at the time.

Euripides is reputed to have spent the last two years of his life until his death in 406 BC as a guest of Archelaus, King of Macedon, and it may be that he left his native city to avoid the horrors of the impending Athenian defeat.

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1 This introduction owes much to McDonald’s *The Living Art of Greek Tragedy* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003); this edition for Methuen, with
Tragedy and Comedy in Athens were presented in competition at festivals in honour of the god Dionysus. Playwrights ‘applying for a chorus’ submitted a group of four plays, three tragedies and a comic satyr play. Euripides won his first victory at the Greater Dionysia - in 442 BC. Probably as a result of his controversial subject matter, he recorded only three other victories in his lifetime from an output of some ninety plays. A further first prize was awarded posthumously for a group which included *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Bacchae* in 405 BC.

Although in his own lifetime he was not as successful as Aeschylus and Sophocles, he became more popular than either after his death. Nineteen of his plays survive, more than those of Aeschylus and Sophocles combined, although this may be in part due to an accident of history. He certainly appealed to later generations: many today find him the most 'modern' of all the Greeks.

Amongst his surviving works is our only complete satyr play, *Cyclops; Alcestis* which IS hard to categorize as tragedy or satyr; and a number of other so-called tragedies, such as *Helen* and *Ion*, which have a comic touch and look forward rather more to the New Comedy of the following century than back to the savage dignity of Aeschylus. Indeed, there is more than one play in which Euripides appears to make fun of the work of his predecessors.

Definite dates of performance for eight of his surviving plays are known (and are shown in bold below). Others are tentatively proposed, on the basis of evidence provided by ancient writers, or of his own developing metrical practice:

- *Alcestis* 438 BC
- *Medea* 431 BC
- *Children of Heracles* ca. 430 BC
- *Hippolytus* 428 BC

Also additions from the preface written by McDonald with J. Michael Walton to Kenneth McLeish’s translation of this play (London: Nick Hern Books, 2004).
Andromache  ca. 425 BC
Electra  425-13 BC [most likely 420-416]
Hecuba  ca. 424 BC
Cyclops (possibly in the same group as Hecuba)
Suppliant Women  ?424-20 BC
Women of Troy  415 BC
Heracles  ca. 415 BC
Iphigenia among the Taurians  ca. 414 BC
Ion  ca. 413 BC
Helen  412 BC
The Phoenician Women  ca. 409 BC
Orestes  408 BC
Iphigenia at Aulis  405 BC (posthumous)
Bacchae  405 BC (posthumous)
Rhesus (undated, possibly not by Euripides)

In addition, there are extended fragments of several other plays, in particular: Antiope, Alexander, Archelaus, Bellerophon, Creshontes, Cretans, Erechtheus, Hypsipyle, Captive Melanippe, Wise Melanippe, Phaethon, and Stheneboea.

**Women of Troy: What Happens in the Play**

The play begins at the end of the Trojan War, fought by Greece against Troy after Helen had been kidnapped from her Greek husband, Menelaus, by a Trojan prince, Paris. This war has lasted ten years. Now Troy is smoking and in ruins.

In a prologue the god Poseidon grieves over the loss of Troy, which he helped build. Below him we see the figure of Hecuba, former Queen of Troy, now a prisoner, lying on the ground.
The goddess Athene, his niece, tries to enlist his help in taking vengeance on the Greeks because they have violated her temple by dragging the suppliant Cassandra, daughter of Hecuba, away from her altar. It is now a matter of honour for Athene. Poseidon consents.

As the play proper begins the women of Troy are waiting to hear who will be their new masters. Talthybius, the messenger of the Greeks, enters to tell them who will go to whom, and to take Cassandra to Agamemnon, leader of the Greeks. Cassandra, one of Hecuba’s daughters, rejected the god Apollo after she had promised to be his: for this she was punished by being able to prophesy, and yet never be believed. Talthybius thinks the tents are on fire, but Cassandra is simply rushing about with torches in her hands. She is celebrating her “marriage” to Agamemnon, which she says will end in his death. She tells her mother she will bring vengeance for the Trojans on the Greeks. Talthybius says he will pretend he did not hear this, and drags her off to Agamemnon’s ship.

Andromache, married to Hector, who was the greatest warrior of Troy, enters in a wagon of looted property, with her son, Astyanax. She and Hecuba list their many sorrows. Andromache tells Hecuba that Polyxena, Hecuba’s daughter, has been sacrificed at the grave of Achilles, the greatest warrior of Greece. Andromache herself is assigned as concubine to Neoptolemus, the murderer of Priam, King of Troy, and son of the man who killed her husband Hector. She says she wants to die, but Hecuba says she should live, have more children, with the possibility that Troy could be reborn: in life there is hope. Then Talthybius enters to say Andromache’s child Astyanax must die. Andromache parts with her son in a tear-filled farewell.

Menelaus encounters his wayward wife Helen again, still dressed in her finery, while the other women are in rags. Helen debates with Hecuba about the reasons she left Menelaus in favor of Paris, pleading first that Hecuba should not have let her son, Paris, live, following an oracle that he would be responsible for the destruction of Troy. Next she says that Aphrodite gave her to Paris against her will, and who can oppose the gods? Furthermore, Menelaus himself left Sparta when Paris was there, and if he had stayed, perhaps Paris would not have dared what he did. She claims she deserves praise and
deserves a crown for saving Greece from pillage and destruction. Hecuba refutes all these arguments saying that Helen left because of her own lust for wealth and power, to say nothing of desire for Paris. Menelaus insists on taking Helen on his own ship. Hecuba says bitterly that once one has been a lover, one is always a lover. She and the Chorus curse Helen.

The funeral of Astyanax follows, and the women contribute what they can to his burial. Hecuba says she thinks the vanities of a funeral are only for the living, not the dead.

What is left of Troy is set on fire. Hecuba tries to kill herself in the flames, but is dragged back to the other women. The women mourn their losses for the last time and go to the Greek ships.

_Women of Troy: Interpretation_

This is the greatest anti-war play ever written. It shows the suffering of women and children after every war. It has been used many times to protest against war and to act as a warning for audiences who see it. It can also be a consolation for those who are suffering from war, because in it they see that over the ages others too have suffered.

This play has something for everyone: gods appear at the beginning; soldiers collect their loot after a war; women suffer the worst they can suffer: the loss of their city, their men, and their children; there is a comic interlude when a femme fatale meets her ex-husband whom she deserted; and then darkness again, before the play ends with a faint ray of hope in the human spirit.

Euripides was called the most tragic of the Greek tragedians, and this is the most tragic of his plays. Greece had had its glorious victories in the Persian Wars (490 BC and 480 BC), but in its Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC), in which Greek fought Greek, there was much suffering and it was on this that Euripides concentrated in _Women of Troy._
This play was performed in 415 BC, the year after the Athenians killed all the men and enslaved the women and children on Melos because they refused to become military allies of Athens against Sparta, preferring to remain neutral. The Greek historian Thucydides tells us this in his contemporary account of the Peloponnesian War. The Athenians were just about to sail to Sicily, and there they would meet their greatest defeat in the war. *Women of Troy* is strangely prophetic. Apollo says, “When mortals rape cities, temples, /Graves, they condemn themselves. /They destroy; they die.”

The set of four plays which included *Women of Troy* only won second prize, being defeated by a group which included an *Oedipus* and a *Bacchae* by the virtually unknown Xenocles. *Women of Troy* was one of a trilogy of tragedies about characters associated with the Trojan War. The first play, *Alexander*, of which only fragments remain tells about Paris (Alexander is another name for him). The second play, *Palamedes*, also lost, described a hero who sailed to Troy and was killed because of a false accusation by, his enemy, Odysseus. Palamedes’ brother sent a message to their father about the treachery. He gave a false signal to the Greek fleet so that it crashed on rocks. The missing satyr play *Sisyphus* that followed the trilogy might have related to the other plays in that some have claimed that Sisyphus was the real father of Odysseus.

The rhythm of *Women of Troy* is musical. Dark themes alternate with lighter ones, until they all end in a tragic diminuendo. There are lyrical arias, such as Cassandra’s as she sings and dances while describing her disastrous “marriage” to Agamemnon. Andromache passionately sings her farewell to her son for the last time. There is a dirge in Hecuba’s lament over her dead grandson, buried on the shield of her son Hector, whose sweat is still on its rim. There is a final tragic chorus as the women sing their last farewells to their city and their former lives.

Euripides gives us a glimpse of the total devastation following a war. He shows not only what happens to the women and children, but how the victors will pay for what they did. No one wins in a war. This is not what the Athenians wanted to hear while they were fighting a war. Euripides was never popular in his own time. He told too many
inconvenient truths. Nevertheless he is probably the most read and performed in modern times because of his depiction of the corruption of those in power, which unfortunately speaks all to well to us now.

Many types of women are represented in this play. Euripides’ characterization of each is superb: the recklessness of the young women; the vamp secure in her sexual power; the mother concerned for her child; the grandmother giving advice to the young while lamenting her losses. The men are defined mainly by their relationships to the women, whether Talthybius bringing orders and pitying them, or Menelaus seduced by his wife. The women stay still in their grief, but the men come and go.

Even at the level of the gods Poseidon is shown responding to Athene and is won over by her request for vengeance. This play hardly gives confidence in the gods when we see one so easily swayed by another’s passionate whim.

Hecuba is masterfully drawn as the aging Queen of Troy, who loses her city, her husband, her son, her grandchild, her status, and finally her will to live. It is as if pain purifies her and tempers her like steel, so that by the end she is not only the *Mater Dolorosa*, “Mother of Sorrows,” but finally truly Hecuba. Shakespeare’s Hamlet asked of an actor supposedly lamenting his fate, “What’s Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba /That he should weep for her?” Even in the Renaissance she was a byword for suffering. Euripides makes us all weep finally for Hecuba.

By contrast with the grief of the women the barbarism of the so-called civilized Greeks is an indictment of all imperialists who lord it over others because of an innate belief that they are superior. Euripides shows that the Greeks are so afraid of a little child that they have to murder him. It shows them brutalizing women and sacrificing a virgin out of superstition. The real humanity is in the *philia*, or caring love, of the women of Troy for what they hold dear.
This play shows us a new type of heroism, that of the victim. The way that suffering purifies them may ultimately ennoble their souls. Any audience seeing this play also experiences the suffering of these women, and possibly a renewal, what the Greeks called *catharsis*. After such an experience, the lessons learnt may lead to a better life and better choices. Here the suggested choice is not to wage war, but, if one does, at least to be respectful of the gods and holy places, and merciful to prisoners.

*Women of Troy* has to be seen to be appreciated; it offers superb dramatic roles. Sometimes the play has been criticized for lack of action, but Euripides knew exactly what he was doing. He alternates the most despairing scenes with lighter ones and plays the audience like the psychological virtuoso that he is. He leads them into emotional crescendos that few plays can match. His curious structure is hugely effective in performance.

**Euripides and his Philosophy**

Euripides often reflected the sophistic elements of his time. Sophists were professional teachers in fifth-century Athens who claimed they could teach a person to win by sheer ability, rather than by the validity of their claim. Their philosophy is parodied by Aristophanes in the *Clouds*. Euripides often featured a debate, and in the *Women of Troy* he pits Helen against Hecuba and, true to what the sophists claim, Helen wins the argument on emotional grounds. Menelaus hands over the intellectual victory to Hecuba and says that she is quite right, but Helen gets her own way. Any sophist would be pleased to have Helen as his pupil. Hecuba also has a prayer in this play which begins by addressing Zeus as either a force in the universe or in the mind of man. This was a sophistic construction of the gods, and certainly not something which one would regard as typical of the Hecuba in this play. Even Menelaus comments on it being a strange prayer. Euripides lets his free thought about the gods reveal itself in dialogue like this.

Euripides questions traditional beliefs and attitudes. His philosophical musings bothered many critics in the nineteenth century, who would have preferred inspired emotionalism
without all this speculation. Nietzsche condemned Euripides for these rational interpolations, which he considered a debasement of the noble goals of tragedy.

Euripides sometimes has his characters speculate on how the future will view them. A self-conscious view of the artist can be found in what both Cassandra and Hecuba claim, namely that their sufferings were worth it because they will be remembered in times to come, celebrated by the poets in song. Euripides was one of these poets, and he did indeed make them immortal, or at least for the life of mankind.

In Aeschylus, god can confront god, and major questions are raised about conflicting rights. Sophocles shows man confronting god and a world which can never be entirely knowable. Euripides shows men and women forced to confront themselves, sometimes becoming the source of their own defeat.

In Euripides' universe, the gods could be actively hostile to man. If Sophocles presents us with the hero, Euripides shows us the anti-hero. According to the later philosopher Aristotle, Sophocles claimed he depicted men as they ought to be, but Euripides as they were. Euripides, who chose to be isolated from an active citizen's life, saw things more bleakly than did Sophocles. It is difficult to find or recognize any genuine heroes in Euripides except a few brave women, or old men, or innocent children. Instead of the heroism of the victor, Euripides emphasizes the heroism of the victim. The main recourse man has in the chaotic Euripidean world is personal friendship, *philia*. Euripides has been called the first psychological playwright. Longinus especially praised his telling depiction of madness and love.

He is indeed a scientist of the emotions and focused often on unconventional, passionate women. In the *Women of Troy*, he concentrates on all phases of women and shows them heroic in their defeat.
**Original Staging**

The original Athenian plays of the fifth century BC were usually performed in the theatre of Dionysus, which was outdoors, and featured a circular playing area called the *orchêstra*. It may have had an altar in the centre. It was built into the side of the hill that culminated in the acropolis on which the Parthenon stands. This theatre seated about 15,000 to 18,000 people, from a population of about 300,000 in Attica, comprised of male citizens, women, children, slaves and foreign residents. It is not known for sure whether women attended the theatre in Euripides’ day, though they did in the following century.

The main Athenian dramatic festival was called the Greater Dionysia, in honour of the god of theatre, Dionysus. The Greater Dionysia was held in early spring, the 9th-13th days of the month Elaphêbolion (March/April), when the seas were calm and Athenian allies and foreign traders and diplomats could safely make the sea journey. On the first day there was an elaborate show of tribute from the allies; war orphans were paraded; and prominent citizens were given awards. Going to the theatre was a social, civic, and religious event. The city was on show, and the mood of the city was on show. One purpose of the festival was to impress foreigners.

Three or four days of the Greater Dionysia were devoted to plays. The performances began at first light and lasted all day, and indeed there are several plays whose action begins at dawn, or even in the dark.

Three playwrights were selected by a state official (*archôn*) in early autumn to put on three tragedies and one satyr play that comically handled tragic themes. This process was known as 'awarding a chorus' and ensured some state support and finance. The rest of the production costs were met by a kind of semi-compulsory patronage by private citizens known as the *chorêgia*. After the tragedians' group of four, political comedies, like those of Aristophanes, were played, either one on the same day as the tragedies, or several on a separate day devoted simply to comic performance.
There are several candidates for the invention of tragedy, but it may well have been Thespis as the first actor who added prologue and speech to non-dramatic choral performance. Aristotle also writes that Aeschylus added a second actor and Sophocles a third.

Soon after Aeschylus began to present plays, a prize was given for the best tragic playwright and, later in the century, one for the best writer of comedy. The audience, who paid to attend, were closely involved with the performance and reputed to have openly expressed their feelings and reactions. The chorēgos who paid for the costuming and training of the chorus was also given a prize if his playwright won. The jury was selected, one from each of the ten tribes, but the winner was decided by randomly selecting only five votes from the ten that were cast. This helped avoid jury tampering.

All the actors, including the chorus, were male and masked, playing both male and female roles. The masks were quite realistic but demanded a very physical kind of acting. Characters could be recognized by the audience from emblematic costume or properties. At first all the actors were amateur, and the playwright acted too. Eventually acting became professional, and prizes were then awarded to the best actor at the festival.

The chorus in Aeschylus probably numbered twelve but this number rose to fifteen in Sophocles and Euripides, twenty-four for the comedies of Aristophanes. After their initial entrance the chorus usually stayed on stage until the end. The word choros means 'dance', orchēstra 'dancing-place', and their movements were accompanied by the aulos, a reed instrument (like an oboe), and sometimes drums. Spoken portions of the drama, mainly in iambic trimeter (a rhythm closest to that of ordinary speech) alternated with the choruses, which were always in lyric metres and usually arranged in strophēs and antistrophēs (‘turns’ and ‘turnings back’).

Euripides' language in dialogue scenes is accessible, and at times colloquial, but he specialized also in komnoi, formal sung laments for moments of heightened emotion. So popular were these that some Athenian soldiers imprisoned in the stone quarries of
Syracuse after the ill-fated Sicilian expedition were reputed to have gained their freedom if they were able to recite them. His choruses can range from being closely involved with the action and the characters to those that offer little more than breaks in the action between scenes.

According to Aristotle, Sophocles introduced scene-painting (*skênographia*) to suggest a visual background. Dead bodies could be displayed on a stage truck called the *ekkuklêma* which could be wheeled out from the central doors of the building depicted on the *skênê* (backdrop, literally 'tent'). A *mêchanê* ('machine', or mechanical crane) allowed aerial entrances and exits, usually of the gods. In *Women of Troy* the gods would probably appear on the *theologeion*, an elevated platform, or on the roof of the stage building.

A majority of Greek tragedies are set in front of a palace. This was probably the basic setting of a wooden scenic façade with the actual place identified by the use of doorways, porticoes and painted panels. Several plays refer to the presence of statues of gods beside the doorway. Euripides' *Electra* makes a point of emphasizing that Electra is living in a poor farm, rather than in a palace. Sophocles' *Philoctetes* is set before a cave on a desert island. His *Ajax* and Euripides' *Women of Troy* both have settings in front of a tent. It seems at least feasible that all such settings were presented by the same basic *skênê*, with the differences identified by the *skênographia*, detail painted on panels set between the columns.

The Athenian theatre was not a theatre of realism. The playwrights did, on the other hand, make dramatic and theatrical points about space, about status, and about the public and private areas, which were enhanced by senses of depth and height. There is no reason why the 'tent' where the women are housed in *Women of Troy* should not have had a roof where the gods could play the opening scene. Where characters come from and go to adds immeasurably to the overall mood of almost all the tragedies we have. Properties are used sparingly but tellingly. Few scenes in Greek tragedy carry quite such a tragic impact as the entry of Andromache and her son as objects on a cart, and later the removal of the tiny body of Astyanax on his father's shield.
**Performance History**

The more popular plays were often revived in the fourth century. During these revivals they were vulnerable to adaptation and additions by actors and producers. Around 330 BC, the Athenian politician Lycurgus prescribed that copies of the texts of the plays should be deposited in official archives, and that future performances should conform to these texts. These copies were lent to the Egyptian king, Ptolemy Euergetes I, and passed into the library at Alexandria, to form the basis of the critical edition made by the Librarian, Aristophanes of Byzantium (ca. 257-180 BC). Although the performance tradition is not well documented for this period, the plays continued to be widely read, and scholars in Alexandria wrote commentaries on them, parts of which still survive. But by the second to third century AD, the number of plays that were being read had diminished. The seven plays of Aeschylus and the seven of Sophocles that survive were the only ones which were still available for performance. Of Euripides there were ten such plays, but a further nine of his survive, preserved in a manuscript which presents them in a quasi-alphabetical order.

The Romans prized Euripides: Ennius (239-169 BC) adapted *Andromache, Hecuba, Iphigenia at Aulis, Medea*; Pacuvius (c. 220-130 BC) *Antiope*; and Accius (170-?86 BC) *Alcestis, Bacchae, Hecuba, Medea*, and *Women of Troy*. Half of the plays by Seneca (?1-65 AD) are based wholly or partly on Euripides: *Hercules Furens, Women of Troy, Phoenician Women, Medea*, and *Phaedra*.

After the Athenian Academy was closed in 529 AD, classical texts and performance disappeared from sight for several centuries and did not reemerge until the revival of learning in the early Byzantine period. Greek tragedy became known in the West mainly through Latin translations, and came to Shakespeare via Seneca. Euripides' *Medea, Hippolytus, Alcestis* and *Andromache* were first printed in Greek in Florence about 1494; an edition of eighteen plays by Euripides followed in 1503.
The most popular of Euripides’ plays were *Medea, Hippolytus, Trojan Women and Bacchae* and they have been revived throughout the ages. Several of the plays of Euripides were translated into English earlier than those of Aeschylus or Sophocles. The first translation of *Trojan Women* into English was by J. Bannister in 1780.

Michael Cacoyannis’ filmed trilogy comprised *Electra* (1961), *Trojan Women* (1971) and *Iphigenia* (1976), all protesting in their own way unjust oppression. In his *Trojan Women*, Cacoyannis uses the voices of the women in the chorus in a dramatically effective way, particularly when they recount the taking of Troy. Their staccato rhythms well convey the panic of that night. Irene Papas plays a seductive Helen, complete with her convincing a guard to give her extra water. This was followed by glimpses of her bathing. Papas said she would have preferred to play Andromach. Vanessa Redgrave brought a British coolness to that role, and one wonders how Papas would have handled it. Papas realized the tragic potential in Andromache’s role as a mother who loses her child in contrast with Helen’s more limited role as a *femme fatale*. Cacoyannis adds dialogue that shows that Helen is a mere excuse for this war. Katharine Hepburn creates a moving Hecuba. The young Geneviève Bujold was a good choice for the innocent and violated Cassandra. The mixture of accents is startling at times, but the genius of the work overrides this anomaly. Cacoyannis has a closing statement appear on the screen: “We who have made this film dedicate it to all those who fearlessly oppose the oppression of man by man.”

McDonald had a version performed in 2000 by the Old Globe Theatre, San Diego, directed by Seret Scott, and this translation performed in 2009 by Ion Theatre, San Diego, directed by Claudio Raygoza.

**Text in Greek for Euripides**

For Further Reading


**Euripides: Key Dates**

*NB All dates are BC*

ca. 485/4 or 480 Euripides born

455 First competed at the Greater Dionysia.

442 Won his first victory at the Greater Dionysia.

438 First extant play, *Alcestis*, performed fourth in a group of four.

431 *Medea*

Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War.

428 *Hippolytus*

416 The sack of the island of Melos.
Women of Troy

Euripides left Athens for the court of Archelaus of Macedon.

Death in Macedon.

Iphigenia at Aulis and Bacchae performed posthumously.

Euripides featured as a character (now dead and in Hades) in Aristophanes' Frogs.

Glossary and Identification

ACHILLES (ah-KILL-eese), greatest warrior of Greece, killer of Hector.

AGAMEMNON (AG-ah-MEM-non), king of Mycenae/Argos, married to Clytemnestra.

ANDROMACHE (and-DROM-a-key), married to Hector, mother of Astyanax.

APHRODITE (APH-row-DITE-ee), goddess of love.

APOLLO (ah-POL-oh), also Phoebus, god of the sun, brother to Artemis, son of Leto.

ARTEMIS (ART-em-iss), virgin goddess of the hunt.

ASTYANAX (ass-STY-a-nacks), son of Hector and Andromache, grandson of Hecuba.

ATHENE (ah-THEE-nee), virgin goddess of wisdom, patron of Athens, who fought on the side of the Greeks. Odysseus is her special favorite.
CASSANDRA (ca-SAN-drah), daughter of Hecuba, prophetess who always told the truth and foresaw the future but was never believed, a punishment from Apollo whom she rejected.

CASTOR (CAST-or), brother of Pollux/Polydeuces, Clytemnestra and Helen.

EPEIUS (EP-ee-us), builder of the Trojan Horse, the stratagem for taking Troy: a gigantic horse filled with armed Greek soldiers which the Trojans dragged into their city thinking it was a sacred offering.

CIRCE (SIR-see), the first witch, related to Medea and Hecate, turned Odysseus’ men into pigs.

CRONUS (CRONE-us), son of Uranus, father of Zeus.

DARDANUS (DAR-dan-us), son of Zeus and Electra, early King of Troy, some say the first.

GANYMEDE (GAN-ee-meed), son of Laomedon, beloved of Zeus, who seized him in the form of an eagle and brought him to Olympus to serve as his cupbearer.

HECATE (HECK-a-tee), the crone of the crossroads, noted for magical powers, related to Circe.

HECTOR (HECK-tor), greatest warrior of Troy, son of Priam and Hecuba, married to Andromache and father of Astyanax.

HELEN (HELL-en) married to Menelaus. Her abduction by Paris was reputed to be the cause of the Trojan War.

HEPHAESTUS (heph-EYE-stus), god of fire and carpenter god.

HERA (HERE-rah), wife of Zeus and goddess of marriage.

HYMEN (HIGH-man), god of marriage.

LAOMEDON (lay-OMM-edon), early king of Troy, father of Priam, who cheated Poseidon and Apollo of their payment in building Troy, and then again cheated Heracles, who slew the sea-monster the gods sent to punish him. Father of Ganymede.

MENELAUS (me-neh-LAY-us), king of Sparta, brother of Agamemnon and married to Helen.

ODYSSEUS (oh-DISS-yoos), king of Ithaca, one of the leaders who went to Troy.

OLYMPUS (oh-LIMP-us), mountain where the gods were reputed to live. Highest mountain in Greece (northeast).

PELEUS (PEE-lyoos), father of Achilles.

PHOCIS (PHO-kis), country of central Greece, near Mt. Parnassus.

PIRENE (PIE-rene), sacred spring at Corinth. Pegasus, the flying horse, drank from it.

POSEIDON (Pos-EYE-don), god of the ocean, builder of Troy, who fought on the side of Troy.

PHRYGIA (FRIDGE-ee-ah) where Troy was located, Asia Minor.
SCAMANDER (sca-MAND-er), river in Troy.

TALTHYBIUS (tal-THIB-ee-us), messenger of the Greeks.

TELAMON (TELL-ah-moan), father of the warrior Ajax who fought at Troy, Telamon had sacked Troy along with Heracles after Laomedon refused Heracles payment for killing a sea-monster.

THESSALY (THESS- a-lee), region of northern Greece, next to Olympus. Phthia, the birthplace of Achilles, is located in Thessaly.

TYNDAREUS (tyn-DAR-yoos), co-father, along with Zeus, of Helen and Clytemnestra, and Castor and Pollux/Polydeuces.

ZEUS (ZYOOS), king of the gods.
Characters

Poseidon, God of the Sea
Athena, Goddess of Wisdom
Hecuba, Queen of Troy
Talthybius, An army messenger
Cassandra, Hecuba's daughter
Andromache, wife of Hecuba’s son Hector,
Menelaus, King of Sparta
Helen, his wife
Chorus of Trojan Captives
Astyanax, Andromache's son
Greek Soldiers
I, Poseidon, have come from the salty sea depths,  
where choruses of Nereids weave elaborate patterns  
in their beautiful dance. Apollo and I built this city’s stone towers,  
measuring them carefully inch by inch. Never once  
did my heart falter in its love for this Phygian city,  
smoking now, sacked, and destroyed by Argive spears.  
Phocian Epeius, the man from Parnassus, with Pallas Athena’s help,  
built a horse pregnant with weapons, and sent it into the city with its deadly load.  
Men in times to come will call it the Trojan Horse,  
the horse that hid the spears of a deadly ambush.  
Now the groves are deserted and the altars of the gods drip blood;  
Priam lies dead just below the stairs to the altar of Zeus, the defender of homes.  
Much gold and Phrygian spoils are loaded on the Greek ships,  
only waiting for a favorable wind; the Greeks who warred against this city  
for ten years are eager to see their wives and children.  
I’m defeated also by Argive Hera and Athena, who destroyed this Phrygian people,  
so I’m leaving this noble city and my altars.  
When cruel desolation seizes a city, belief in the gods grows weak  
and they are no longer honoured.  
Scamander’s shore echoes with the weeping of the prisoners,  
allotted to their lords. Arcadians will own these, and Thessalians those;  
the leaders of Athens and the sons of Theseus win yet others.  
Those who have not been allotted are under these roofs, selected for the army’s leaders,  
and with them is Spartan Helen, the daughter of Tyndareus,  
rightly counted one of the prisoners.  
But if one wants to look on misery, it’s here to see:  
Hecuba lies on the ground, weeping tears for her many sorrows.  
She does not know that her child Polyxena died pitifully at Achilles tomb;  
Priam and her children are gone; and Cassandra, whom lord Apollo drove mad,  
Agamemnon, with no regard for what is sacred, will drag to his bed for secret love.

Farewell my city, once prosperous with your gleaming towers;  
if Pallas Athena, the daughter of Zeus, had not destroyed you,  
you would still be standing.

Enter Athena.

May we set aside our quarrel, and may I address the closest  
relative of my father, you who are great, and honoured
among the gods?

Poseidon

Yes, lady Athena. The ties between relatives are tight; they do indeed bind my heart to yours.

Athena

I’m glad you’re not angry; I shall tell you something that concerns us both, lord.

Poseidon

Are you bringing some new message from heaven, perhaps Zeus, or some other divinity?

Athena

No. It’s about Troy, here where we stand; I want us to join forces and you to give me your help.

Poseidon

You’ve burned her to the ground; now has your anger now turned to pity?

Athena

First back to my question. Will you be my ally and agree to do what I want?

Poseidon

Of course, but I would like to know what you want; whose side are you on, Greek or Trojan?

Athena

I want to help the Trojans who were my enemies, and make the Greek army’s homecoming a bitter one.

Poseidon

You’re so fickle. Your mind leaps here and there: now you hate, and now you love, and both in excess.
Athena
Did you know that the Greeks violated my shrine?

Poseidon
Yes, when Ajax assaulted Cassandra at your altar.

Athena
He was neither punished nor reprimanded by the Greeks.

Poseidon
Yes, and they sacked Troy all because of your power.

Athena
Which I now want to join with yours to punish them.

Poseidon
I’m ready to help; what will you do?

Athena
I want their homecoming to be miserable.

Poseidon
While they are still on land, or out at sea?

Athena
When they have set sail for home from Ilium, Zeus has promised to send rain and thick hail and dark squalls from the heavens, and he has given me his word that he will strike their ships with his thunderbolts and burn them to a crisp; you make the Aegean passage roar with huge waves and dizzying whirlpools, and fill the Euboean gulf with corpses, so that for the rest of time the Greeks may learn to honour my temples and give proper worship to all the gods.
Poseidon

I’ll do it. This favor needs no long speech. I shall make the Aegean seethe with storms; the shores of Myconos, and the Delian shoals, Skyros and Lemnos, and the Capherean headlands will be littered with corpses of the many dead. Go to Olympus and get the thunderbolts from your father’s own hands, and watch for the hour when the Greek army cast off their ropes and set sail.

People are mad to sack cities, temples, and tombs, those holy places for the dead; those who send others into darkness will soon enough end their own brief day in night.

[Exeunt gods]

Hecuba

Lift up your unhappy head,  
Raise your neck from the ground,  
Troy is no more, no more do we rule.  
Accept the changes destiny brings,  
Sail with the stream, flow with fate,  
Don’t oppose the waves of life,  
Just sail on the sea of chance.

[Keening, beating her breast with grief]

Aiai Aiai.
What is left but my song of sorrow,  
Lost my country, children, and husband?  
The sail is trimmed now,  
Those pretensions of noble ancestors,  
And now I see you were nothing.

Why should I be silent? Or not silent?  
Why should I weep?  
In pain I lie on this bed of doom,  
My back stretched on hard stone.  
My head hurts, my temples, my sides,  
I turn this way and that,  
Trying to ease my back, again and again,  
Keeping time with my ceaseless song of sorrow.  
This is the muse for those in despair,  
That sings their destruction, a song without dance.

From Greece’s safe harbours,
The prows of the ships
With swift beats of oars
Keeping time to the hated songs of pipes and syrinx,
Sailed to holy Ilium
Over the deep purple sea,
Then docked secure with ropes of Egyptian weave.
You were pursuing the hated
Wife of Menelaus, reproach to the Eurotas,
And shame of Castor.
She killed Priam, the sower of fifty sons,
And drove me, Hecuba, into misery.

Such is my grief as I sit here waiting,
On the ground before the tents of Agamemnon.
I am dragged a slave out of my home,
An old grey woman, my head scarred with sorrow.
Come you miserable wives of Trojans
Who once bore spears of bronze,
And you daughters, brides of sorrow,
Let us sing our tears for Troy as it burns.
Like a mother of winged birds
I lead the shrill cry
Not the song of yesterday,
When Priam leaned on his scepter,
And my feet led the dance tapping out the beat
To honour the Phrygian gods.

[Enter Half-Chorus A]

Half-Chorus A

Hecuba, why did you cry? Baying like a dog?
Have you heard any news? I heard your sad cry
Echo in the tents. Fear shot through our hearts,
We Trojan women waiting inside
Weeping over our life of slavery.

Hecuba

The hands of the Greeks are busy now
Readying the oars for the ships.

Half-Chorus A

Oh God, is this what they want? Will I
Sail away so soon from my father’s land?
Hecuba

I don’t know, but I suspect the worst.

Half-Chorus A

[Keening]
Io io.
Sorrow and suffering,
For you Trojan women,
Forced into hard labour,
Driven from your homes;
The Argives are ready to sail.

Hecuba

[Keening]
E e.
Do not send out my mad Cassandra,
A shameful sight before the Greeks,
My maenad, who adds more pain to my pains.
Io io.
Troy, double-doomed Troy
You are no more,
Your desolate people are leaving you,
We who live, yes, but now as slaves.

[Half-Chorus B enters]

Half-Chorus B

[Keening]
Oimoi.
Terrified I left the tents
Of Agamemnon when I heard you, Queen.
Have the Greeks decided to kill us?
Or are the sailors about to set sail,
Manning their oars on the sterns of the ships?

Hecuba

O daughters, my sleepless soul
Is filled with terror.
Half-chorus B

Has some Greek messenger come?
To whom am I assigned
To serve as a miserable slave?

Hecuba

You won’t have long to wait for decisions.

Half-chorus B

[Keening]

Io io.
What Argive, or man from Phthia,
Or islander, will take me far from Troy
To a life of misery?

Hecuba

[Keening]

Pheu Pheu.
Where will I, an old grey women,
Go to be a slave?
A useless old drone,
Stand-in for a corpse,
Pale ghost of the dead?

[Keening]

Aiai aiai,
Will I be a doorkeeper,
Or nurse to some child,
I, who was honoured as Queen of Troy?

Half-chorus B

[Keening]

Aiai aiai.
What pitiful song
Can equal this outrage?
And I must leave my Trojan weaving,
Where I worked the shuttle back and forth.
For the last time
Shall I look on my dead children.
For the last time.
But there is worse to come,
Serving some Greek bed:
I curse that night, that fate.
Or shall I draw water serving
The sacred spring Pirene?
I’d like to go to Theseus’ fair and famed land,
But not to the swirling Eurotas,
That nurtured hated Helen,
To be a slave to Menelaus
The destroyer of Troy.

My second choice after
The god-haunted holy land of Theseus,
Would be glorious Peneus,
Just before you reach Olympus.
I’ve heard of its rich harvests,
Flowers, and sweet fruits.
Perhaps the land of Hephaestus,
That faces Phoenicia,
And Etna, the mother of Sicily’s mountains,
Whose strong people win victory crowns.
Or the land near the Ionian sea,
Into which flows the stream Krathis,
That makes hair golden, like a flame,
Who nourishes and enriches
That land of brave men.

Look! A herald from the Greek army
is hurrying this way with the latest news.
What word does he bring? What will he say
to us who are slaves of Greeks?

[Enter Talthybius]

Talthybius

Hecuba, You know me, Talthybius I’ve often come
to you from the Greek camp, bringing messages to Troy.
I have a new message for you now.
Hecuba
Here it is women. The moment we dreaded.

Talthybius
Yes. You have been assigned masters by lot, if that is what you dreaded.

Hecuba
[Keening]

Ai Ai.
Is it a city of Thessaly, or Phthia? Tell me. Or Thebes, Cadmus’ land?

Talthybius
Each woman has a different master.

Hecuba
Who gets whom? What woman of Troy will ever find happiness?

Talthybius
Ask about them one by one, not altogether.

Hecuba
Tell me. Who got my daughter, my poor Cassandra?

Talthybius
She was Lord Agamemnon’s special choice.

Hecuba
A slave to his Spartan wife Clytemnestra?

Io moi moi.

Talthybius
No, as a bride of his secret lust.
Hecuba

But she is a virgin dedicated to Apollo, the golden-haired, who blessed her with a celibate life.

Talthybius

That very sanctity made him desire her.

Hecuba

Daughter, throw your holy keys away, and the sacred wreaths you wear.

Talthybius

Don’t you realize how fortunate she is to share a king’s bed?

Hecuba

And my other daughter – the one you took from me now? Where is she?

Talthybius

You mean Polyxena. Is that your question?

Hecuba

Yes. Who’s her master?

Talthybius

It was decided she would watch over Achilles’ tomb.

Hecuba

[Keening]

More woe for me. Did I give birth to her so she could watch over a tomb? Please tell me, is this some Greek custom, or law?

Talthybius

Consider your daughter fortunate. She’s better off.
Hecuba, giving him a withering look

What are you saying? She’s alive, isn’t she?

Talthybius

She’s fine, and she’s free from care.

Hecuba

And poor Andromache, the wife of Hector, our leader in battle. Who drew her?

Talthybius

Achilles’ son took her as his prize.

Hecuba

And this grey old lady, who leans on a walking stick, who am I to serve?

Talthybius

Ithacan Odysseus won you to be his slave.

Hecuba

[Keening]

E e.
Tear your hair, and rake your cheeks
Io moi moi.
Allotted to serve that filthy cheat, Enemy of justice, law-breaking beast. His double tongue turns an argument This way and that Until you don’t know where you are, Making foe a friend, and friend a foe. Weep for me women, this is the worst; I have drawn the shortest straw of all.

Chorus

At least you know what will happen to you. What about us? What Greek will take us,
And where are we to go?

Talthybius

[Addressing soldiers who came with him.]

Go, men, bring Cassandra out to me quickly; I’m to deliver her to our leader; after that I’ll bring the other prisoners to their masters. Hey! What’s that fire inside the tent? Are the Trojan women burning it up because they have to leave for Argos? Setting themselves on fire, hoping to die? Those who are born free suffer most its loss. Open up! Open up! However much it pleases them, the army won’t like it and I’ll be blamed.

Hecuba

It’s nothing. No fire. Only my child.
My mad Cassandra is running towards us.

[Enter Cassandra, waving torches]

Cassandra

Lift up the torches, here take them, I worship!
I light the torch! See, here!
I fill this temple with flame!
Come Hymen, god of marriage,
Bless the bridegroom, bless the bride
Who serves a royal bed in Argos,
Hymen, god of marriage.

You, mother are drowned in mourning,
In tears for my dead father
And sweet land I called home.
But I lift the torches high
Creating light, shining light,
And its flashing splendour,
A tribute to you Hymen.
And you Hecate, bless us with your brilliant light,
As is usual when a virgin becomes a wife.

Dance, dance up to the sky!
Shout yes, and celebrate
The blessed fate of my father.
You Phoebus, lead the holy dance,
There in your holy grove of laurels,
Where I served you as my lord.
Hymen, O marriage, Hymen.

Dance mother, Dance with me,
Whirl your sweet foot with mine,
Shout out a hymn to Hymen!
Celebrate the bride
With blessed songs and cries,
Go maids of Phrygia, dressed in your best,
Sing for my marriage and celebrate my husband
For whose bed I’m destined.

Chorus

Queen, stop your mad daughter,
Before she dances straight into the Greek camp.

Hecuba

Hephaestus, you light torches to celebrate marriage,
but this flame is a grim one for her.
O sweet child, what great hopes I had for you.
How little I dreamed that Argive spears would force you
into marriage. Give me your torches, dear, you can’t hold
them straight in your wild dance. All your sufferings have
hardly made you wise; my child, you’re still the same…
out of your head. Here, women, take the torches;
this marriage needs tears, not celebration.

Cassandra

Mother, crown me with a victory wreath, and celebrate my
marriage to a king! Take me to him, and if I hesitate, force me.
For if Apollo told the truth, my marriage to Agamemnon,
leader of the Greeks, will be more painful to him than Helen’s.
I shall kill Agamemnon, and destroy his home;
he will pay in blood for what he did to my brothers and father.
I won’t talk about the rest: I won’t sing about the ax at my throat,
or the murder of the others, or the agony of matricide
that my marriage will set in motion,
besides the overthrow of the house of Atreus.

Now, mother, I shall show you how we are more fortunate
than the Greeks. I’ve been rambling, but I’ll speak plainly now.
When they chased after Helen. They sent thousands to their deaths
for the sake of one woman, and one love affair
Look at this clever general, who destroyed what he loved most, for what was most hated; he gave up the pleasures of his children for the sake of his brother’s wife who left home willingly: she was not raped. After they reached the shore of Scamander, they died in droves, protecting neither their borders nor high-towered city. Those who died did not see their children, nor had they wives to bury them properly, and they lie in a foreign land. Same misery back home. Their wives die as widows, and the old men have no sons to take care of them or when they die, to offer a sacrifice at their tombs. Should an army be praised for this? Better is silence for such shame: this suffering won’t inspire my muse to song.

But the Trojans have the true glory, because they died for their country. When they fell by the sword, their loved ones took them home; they lie in their native soil’s embrace, and they were buried by the hands of those that should have buried them. The Trojans who were not killed in battle came home each day to wife and children. No Greek had such pleasures.

Look at Hector, whose death was so painful for you. When he died, he was thought best of all the heroes. All this, the coming of the Greeks achieved; if they had stayed at home, no one would have seen his glory.

Paris too married Zeus’s daughter, and if he hadn’t, his marriage would not have been famous.

A wise man will avoid war, but if war comes, it’s best to die fighting for your city; not to do so would be shameful.

So mother don’t weep for your country or my marriage; This marriage of mine will destroy our enemies.

Chorus

How lightly she laughs at her misery. And sings of things that are still unseen.

Talthybius

If you were not mad, I would punish you for sending our leaders on their way with these curses.

36
[Aside]

These men in their high station, who are reputed to be wise,
are really not much better than ordinary men like us.
This great lord of the Greeks, the son of Atreus,
lusts after this mad girl. Poor as I am,
I’d not have asked for a girl like her.

[To Cassandra]

You there, you’re not right in your mind,
so the insults you gave to Greece, and all your praise
of the Trojans, I throw to the winds; I didn’t hear a word.
Now follow me to the ship: a fine bride for our leader.

[To Hecuba]

And you there, go with the son of Laertes when he comes
for you; people say that Penelope, Odysseus’ wife,
whom you will serve, is a good woman.

   Cassandra

Filthy slave. Why do we give him the honourable name of herald,
a man whom everyone hates, a servant to tyrants and government.
He says my mother will go to Odysseus’ halls, but Apollo told me
that she would die here. I won’t insult her by mentioning the rest.

Odysseus does not know the sufferings in store for him. My sorrows
along with Troy’s are golden by comparison. He will add ten years
to the ten he spent here until he finally reaches his land, all alone,
without his men. He will see the narrow straits between rocks
where fierce Charybdis lives, and the Cyclops who eats raw meat
and roams in the mountains; Ligurian Circe who turns men into swine;
shipwrecks on the salty sea; lotus addictions; the sacred cattle of the sun,
whose slaughtered flesh will speak, a grim sound for Odysseus;
but to make a long story short, he will visit Hades, the underworld, then
finally escape the sea, and reach home, only to find a thousand more miseries.

Why do I sling these arrows at
Odysseus’ outrageous fortune?
Go! Take me quickly to my marriage in hell!
Oh you, leader of the Greeks,
Who prided yourself on your great achievements!
You, vile man, will be buried
Like a thief in the night, not in the day.
Close to my bridegroom’s tomb,
My naked body will be thrown
Into a ravine washed by winter rains,
To feed wild animals, I, who served Apollo. 450
Farewell to the headbands, holy symbols of the god
Whom I loved most of all the gods.
No longer shall I go to holy feasts
My former delight.
I tear these ornaments from my flesh,
Which is still holy,
And entrust them to the winds
To carry up to you,
My lord of prophecy.

Where is the general’s ship?
Where shall I embark?
Stop looking for breezes to fill your sails.
In taking me from this land
You take a fury, one of the dreaded three.

Good-bye mother,
Don’t weep.
Good-bye to the land I love.
My brothers and father who bore me,
Will soon welcome me in the underworld.
I shall come triumphant to the world of the dead,
Destroyer of the house of Atreus,
By whom we were destroyed.

[Exit Cassandra with Talthybius and guards.]

Chorus

Attendants of aged Hecuba, don’t you see how our mistress
has fallen to the ground without saying a word? Won’t you help her up?
You are cruel to leave her there, an old woman, who has fallen. Pick her up.

Hecuba

Leave me alone and let me lie here. Help unwanted is no help at all.
This is right after all I suffer, have suffered and shall suffer.
Oh gods, they have proved themselves useless, but there’s
still something proper in invoking the gods when things go wrong.
First I want to speak about my past life and how good it was,
to show you how great the loss is that I now face.
I was royal and I married royalty, and then I bore the noblest of children, no ordinary ones, but leaders of the Trojans. No Trojan, Greek, or barbarian wife could ever boast of children such as mine. I saw them slain by Greek spears, and I cut my hair as an offering for their graves.

I did not hear about their father Priam’s death: I saw him with my own eyes slaughtered on our household altar. And I saw our city sacked. Those daughters that I raised for excellent marriages, I raised instead for beds of foreigners: they were ripped from my hands. I have no hope of seeing them, or of ever being seen by them again.

And last of all, to crown this sad tale, I, now an old woman, will go as a slave to Greece. They will set me tasks unsuitable for someone my age: to keep keys and open doors, I who was the mother of Hector. Or to bake bread, to lay my weak and wasted back on the ground to sleep, after a royal bed. To wear rags on my wasted body, torn clothes unsuitable for one used to luxury. I suffered all this for one woman’s marriage, and there is more to come. O Cassandra, my child, ardent worshipper of the gods, you will lose your sanctity with so much suffering. And you my poor Polyxena, where are you?

Of all my sons and daughters, there’s no one left to help me in my misery.

So why should I stand up? What hope is left? Bring me, who was royally pampered, to my earthen bed with stone for a pillow: let me waste away in the flow of my tears. Don’t think any woman happy until the day she dies.

Chorus

Muse, sing a song of sorrow for my Troy, A song filled with tears, something new: I shall chant its miserable death-dirge. I was made prisoner by the spear, Destroyed by the four-footed wooden beast, When the Greeks left it at our gates, That horse adorned with gold And rattling its armor So that even heaven could hear. The Trojan people shouted As they stood on the cliffs, “Come, the war is over! Bring in the holy wooden idol To Ilian Athena, the maiden of Zeus.”
What young woman did not come,
Nor old man from their homes?
Celebrating in song,
They embraced their wily destruction.

All the Phrygian people
Raced to the gates
To bring the well-carved horse,
Made out of mountain pine,
That trap from the Greeks,
And death of Trojans,
As a gift for the goddess unwed,
Known for her immortal horses.
They dragged it with knotted ropes of linen;
Like the hull of a dark boat, it nosed its way
Into the shrine of Pallas Athena,
Onto its marble floors,
Soon to run with Trojan blood.
Over their toil and joy,
Night’s darkness fell.
While the Libyan pipe played,
Phrygian songs were sung,
And young girls danced away,
Singing a glad song.
In the houses a bright gleam of fire,
Shed a dark sheen on those who slept.

I was singing and dancing
In honour of the mountain maiden,
Artemis, the daughter of Zeus,
When a bloody cry arose in the city,
And froze the heart of Troy.
Children clung to their mother’s skirts
With frightened hands.
The god of war, Ares,
Lurched out of his hiding place,
That work of Pallas Athena.
Trojans were slaughtered at their altars,
And heads hacked off in bed.
The destitute women were prizes,
To give birth to sons for the Greeks,
And shame for our country.

[Hector’s wife Andromache is wheeled in on stage with her son Astyanax]
Hecuba, See here’s Andromache,  
Brought in an enemy wagon,  
And dear Astyanax, the child of Hector,  
Snuggling close to her beating heart.

Hecuba

Where are they taking you poor woman,  
On this wagon loaded with spoils,  
Hector’s weapons and armor;  
Now Neoptolemus will  
Decorate his Phthian shrines  
With his Trojan loot.

Andromache

My Achaean masters are hauling me away.

Hecuba

[Keening]

Oimoi.  

Andromache

Why do you sing my song of pain.

Hecuba

[Keening]

Aiai.

Andromache

My song of suffering.

Hecuba

O Zeus.

Andromache

And sorrow.
Hecuba

Children!

Andromache

Once, no more.

Hecuba

Gone my happiness, gone my Troy.

Andromache

You poor woman.

Hecuba

Gone are my noble children.

Andromache

[Keening]

Pheu pheu.

Hecuba

Pheu.
That song for my …

Andromache

Pain.

Hecuba

Pitiful luck.

Andromache

For the city.
Hecuba

All in smoke.

Andromache

Oh husband, husband, come to me!

Hecuba

Poor thing, you call for my son,
But he’s dead.

Andromache

Defend your wife!
You who shamed the Greeks…

Hecuba

You were the first child
That I bore to Priam,

Andromache

Carry me off to Hades.
I long so for death…

Hecuba

Poor woman, this is the pain we suffer.

Andromache

Our city gone…

Hecuba

Pain heaped on pain.

Andromache

The gods hate us,
Because your other son
Escaped death;
He destroyed lofty Troy
For the sake of his loathsome lust.
Food for the vultures,
Bloody corpses lie next to
The goddess Athena,
And Troy now wears the yoke of slavery.

Hecuba
Oh my city, my city lost…

Andromache
Abandoned, I weep for you.

Hecuba
Now you face a miserable end.

Andromache
The home where I bore my children.

Hecuba
Oh children! Your mother who has lost her city
Is losing you too!
What cries, what sorrow,
What tears shed on tears,
For my home lost.
At least our dead are free from pain.

Chorus
Tears and songs of sorrow sung by the muse of suffering
Are sweet salves for those who suffer bitterness.

Andromache
Oh mother of him whose spear brought destruction
On the Greeks, do you see what we suffer?

Hecuba
I see the hand of the gods: they raise to the heights those
Who are nothing, but those on top, they bring down.
Andromache
We are dragged off as booty, my child and I.
It is a steep fall for those born as nobles to become slaves.

Hecuba

Necessity drives us hard. Just now Cassandra
Was taken from me, snatched from my arms.

Andromache

[Keening]
It seems another Ajax has appeared to rape her,
But there is more suffering for you.

Hecuba

There’s no limit to my suffering;
Each new horror challenges the one before.

Andromache

Your daughter Polyxena is dead; they slaughtered her
At the tomb of Achilles, A gift for his lifeless corpse.

Hecuba

Oh misery. That was Talthybius’ riddle; unclear then, but all too clear now.

Andromache

When I saw her corpse, I left this cart to cover her with a robe
And beat my breast in mourning.

Hecuba

[Keening]
Aiai. My child, for your unholy slaughter,
Aiai again, for this foul murder.
Andromache

She’s dead and gone; she’s better off than I who live.

Hecuba

Dying cannot be compared with living;
Death is nothing, in life there is hope.

Andromache

Mother, oh mother, listen as I try to word this well;
perhaps I can say something that will lift your spirits.
I think not to be born is the same as death, and to live
with suffering is worse than dying. If one does not feel pain,
then there is no pain; the sorrow of a long fall
from happiness into unhappiness drives a soul mad.
Polyxena, is dead and it’s as if she never had seen the light;
she is free from suffering.

I aimed high, at good repute, and I got it, but not good luck.
I brought to Hector’s house all the virtues of a good wife.
First, if a wife does not stay indoors, whether she is to blame or not,
she gets a bad reputation, so I tamed my desire and stayed at home.
I would not allow women’s wheedling gossip inside my house.
My own good sense taught me, and I put goodness into practice.
My tongue was quiet, and my eye modest;
I knew when my judgement should prevail,
and when I should give in to my husband.

My reputation reached the Greeks and this was my ruin.
When I was taken prisoner, the son of Achilles wanted me
for his bedmate; I shall be a slave
in the house of my husband’s murderer.
If I drive my dear Hector out of my heart,
and open it to my present lover, I will betray the dead;
but if I show myself unwilling, I shall be hated by my new master.
They say that a night in bed with a man wins a woman over.
That’s disgusting, and I despise the woman who rejects
her former husband for love in a new bed. Not even a horse,
if you take her mate from the harness, will bear a new yoke easily.
Yet animals lack speech and are inferior in nature to man.
You, my beloved Hector, were the mate for me;
you were great in intelligence, birth, wealth, and bravery.
You took me pure from my father’s house, and tamed me,
a virgin, in your bed. And now you are dead. I shall sail.
to Greece, a prisoner of the spear, to endure the yoke of slavery. As for the death of Polyxena whom you mourn, don’t you think she suffers less that I do? I have no hope, that last resource for the desperate; and I don’t deceive myself into thinking something good will happen, sweet though that deception would be.

Chorus

You suffer as much as I do.
Your weeping has taught me the extent of my misery.

Hecuba

I have never been on board a ship, but I know about it from pictures, and what people tell me. If a storm is manageable, the sailors are eager to save themselves; this one steers, that one mans the sails, and this one bales. If a rough stormy sea overwhelms them, they accept their fate and hand themselves over to the racing waves. My troubles rise up like these waves, but no voice, no speech rises from my lips. This wave of misfortune from the gods has silenced me.

But you, my dear child, you must forget Hector; your tears cannot save him now. Honour your present master, and charm him with your sweet ways. if you do this you will please us all, and so you might raise the son of my son to be the savior of Troy, and your children to come may one day rebuild it, and Troy will live once again. But here’s a new worry. I see that Greek lackey coming again. Are there new decisions?

[Enter Talthybius]

Talthybius

Wife of Hector, bravest man of Troy, don’t hate me for the news I bring from the Greeks and their leaders, the sons of Pelops. I wish I weren’t the messenger.

Andromache

That’s a bad beginning. What is it?
Talthybius
They voted that your child…How can I go on?

Andromache
Is he to have a different master?
Talthybius
None of the Greeks will be his master.

Andromache
Are we to leave him here alone in Troy?
Talthybius
There is no easy way to deliver bad news.

Andromache
I admire your tact, but tact is not needed if the news is good.
Talthybius
They will execute your child; there you know the worst.

Andromache
[Agonized scream]
Oimoi, I thought I had heard the worst, when I heard whose bed I had to share.
Talthybius
Odysseus won the Greeks over in assembly…

Andromache
[Keening]
Aiai again and again. Will my sufferings ever end?
Talthybius
He warned them against raising the son of noble Hector.
Andromache

May his sons also suffer the same.

Talthybius

He must be thrown from the towers of Troy. Accept it; you’ll be the wiser for that; don’t stand in the way, but bear your pain like the great lady you are and don’t imagine that you have any power to change this: you don’t. You are powerless; just look around! Your city is destroyed and your husband is dead; you are a slave; we can easily deal with a single woman. So I do not want you to fight, nor do anything to incur anger, nor call down any curses on the Greeks. If you say anything that will anger the Greek army, they will neither allow your child’s body to be buried nor lamented. So be still and accept what you cannot change; that way your child will be buried, and you will find the Greeks kinder towards you.

Andromache

[To her child]

Oh darling boy, child that I prized too much, You must leave your mother, and your enemies will kill you. Your father’s nobility has destroyed you, that nobility that saved so many others, but was useless for you. Oh doomed bed and marriage, for which I came to Hector’s halls! I did not bear a son for Greeks to slay, but to be a king over fertile Asia.

Oh my baby, you’re crying. Do you know what terrible things will happen to you? You cling to me and hide in my clothes. You’re like a little bird, nestling under his mother’s wings. Hector will not rise out of the earth, seizing his famous spear to save you, nor any of his relatives, nor any force from Troy; but you will fall a horrible fall, smashed piteously against the hard ground, your breath torn away. Oh dearest young thing, nestling against your mother, how sweet is your breath. It was for nothing that this breast nursed you when you were a baby, for nothing I suffered birth pains, and struggled to raise you. Now for the last time kiss your mother; put your arms around me and press your body close to her who bore you, and kiss me, lips to lips.
Oh you Greeks you have found torture worse than any barbarian’s!
Why do you kill this child who has never done you any wrong?
Oh Helen, daughter of Tyndareus, you are not the child of Zeus.
You are the child of many fathers: an avenging Fury first,
then Envy, and Slaughter, and Death: as many miseries as the earth has borne.
I say you were never Zeus’s daughter, but rather evil incarnate,
a curse on both barbarians and Greeks. Your beautiful eyes
brought ugly destruction to the noble fields of Phrygia.

[To Talthybius]

Here, take him away, carry him off, throw him down,
since that’s your decision, and feast on his flesh.
I am destroyed by the gods, and cannot save my child from death.
Hide my miserable body, throw me in the ship.
I go to a fine marriage after losing my child.

Chorus

Poor Troy, you have lost thousands for the
sake of one hateful woman and her marriage.

Talthybius

Come child, let your poor mother go,
Leave her embrace,
Go to the top of your ancestral towers,
The crown of the city,
Where they voted
You will breathe your last.

[To the guards]

Take him.

[Aside]

A man to deliver messages like these
Should be pitiless and shameless,
Not think and feel the way that I do.

[Exeunt guards and boy; Talthybius with Andromache.]

Hecuba

Child, son of my poor son,
Your life is ripped away from us,
from your mother and me.
This is a crime.
What will my life be now?
What can I do to help you,
My poor little one?
All that we can do is strike our heads,
Beat our breasts!
I’ll begin the mourning,
For the city,
Laments for you.
What has not happened to us?
What keeps us now from
Hurtling to the bottom of hell?

Chorus

King Telamon, who made his home
On the bee-humming island of Salamis,
Washed by its many waves,
Lying opposite the holy hills
Where Athena first revealed
The branch of grey olive,
That heavenly crown
A wreath to adorn shining Athens.
Telamon, you came from Greece
A hero with the other hero,
The bow-bearing son of Alcmena,
To sack the city of Troy,
Troy, our city,
That first time long ago.

He led the flower of Greece,
Angered by the fraud of the promised steeds,
He docked the sea-stroking oars
By the shores of fair-flowing Simois,
And fastened the ropes from the sterns.
He took his bow in his hand from the ship
To deal death to Laomedon.
He destroyed the well-measured walls of Phoebus,
With a blast of red fire;
He destroyed the land of Troy.
Two times were the walls of Troy spattered with blood,
Two times did the bloody spear shatter the city.

In vain do you walk with graceful step
To fill the golden goblets,
Ganymede, child of Laomedon,
Cup-bearer of mighty Zeus,
In fairest servitude.
She who bore you
Flames with fire,
And the sea shores moan
With the cry of a bird
Who has lost its young.
Here women weep for their husbands,
These weep for their children,
And those for their grey-haired mothers.
Gone are the cool pools where you bathed,
Gone are the fields where you used to run.
You stand gracefully with smile serene
Next to the gleaming throne of Zeus
While Greece’s spear
Razes the city of Priam.

Love, you came to the halls of Troy,
Love, you seduce even the gods!
You raised up Troy to greatness
Blessing her with divine relations.
I shall not blame Zeus.
But the light of white-winged Dawn
So dear to man, sheds an evil glow,
And gazed on the death of Troy.
The goddess Dawn had a husband from this land,
And bore him children;
The golden chariot with four horses from the stars
Took him up to heaven,
A fine hope for his native land,
But gone is the love of gods for Troy.

[Enter Menelaus, with some guards]

Menelaus

Oh fair bright light of the sun on this day,
the day when I lay my hands on my wife Helen again.
I, Menelaus who fought with the Greek army for all these years,
did not come to Troy as most people think for the sake of my wife.
No. I came for him who betrayed his host and stole my wife
from out of my house. He paid the price with the god’s help,
he and his land which fell to Greek spears. I’ll take away
the vile creature whom I hesitate to call by the name of wife as I once did.
She is one of the defeated slaves, along with the other Trojan women. My men, who conquered Troy, handed her over to me to kill, or not kill, or take her back home if I want. I think it’s best not to kill her at Troy, but take her home on my ship and then execute her in Greece as payment for all my men who died in Troy.

[Menelaus to guards]

Go to the tents and bring her to me; drag her here by her bloodstained hair. When the wind starts to blow, we’ll take her to Greece.

Hecuba

O God, who guides and rules the earth, Whoever you are, dark riddle of the universe, Whether law of nature, or mind of man, I pray to you who silently but surely Leads mankind in the ways of justice.

Menelaus

What’s that? Some new prayer you have made up?

Hecuba

Please Menelaus: kill your wife. But be careful; if you look at her you will come under her spell. Her eyes enslave men, destroy cities, and set homes on fire; such is the power of their enchantment I, and all those who have suffered because of her, know her all too well.

[Enter Helen, dragged by soldiers]

Helen

Menelaus, this beginning could well make a woman afraid. I am dragged by force from my tent by your servants. I imagine you must hate me, but I want to know what you and the other Greeks have decided to do with me: am I to live or die?
Menelaus

Nothing decided, but the whole army handed you over to me, whom you’ve wronged, to kill.

Helen

May I at least answer the charges, and show that if I die, it is unjust?

Menelaus

I have not come to debate with you, but to kill you.

Hecuba

Oh listen to her Menelaus, don’t let her die without a hearing, and then let me answer her. You do not know the terrible things she did at Troy; after you hear the whole story you will kill her, and she won’t have a chance to escape.

Menelaus

I suppose I can spare the time. Let her speak if she wants to. But I want her to know that it is because you ask; I do not grant her this for her sake.

Helen

I see you are against me, so whether I speak well or not does not matter; you will not talk to me because you regard me as the enemy. I shall guess what you would say and answer your charges, point by point. First, she, by giving birth to Paris, was the cause of all these evils. Second, the old king, in not slaying the child, Alexander, that grim firebrand, destroyed me and Troy. Listen to what followed. He became the judge in a contest between three goddesses. Athena promised him that he could head an army of Phrygians and conquer Greece. Hera promised that he would rule Asia, and Europe’s borders, if he would declare her the winner. Cypris boasting of my beauty, promised me to him if she would be chosen fairest. Look what happened then: Cypris won, and my marriage helped Greece; it is not conquered by barbarians, nor subjected to war, nor ruled by a tyrant. All these benefits came to Greece, but I was ruined, sold for my beauty; and I am now blamed rather than crowned with a victory wreath, as I should have been. You will say this is off the point because I have not said why I left your house in secret;
he came, that nemesis, whether you call him Alexander or Paris,
with a great goddess at his side; and you, you fool,
you left him alone with me when you sailed from Sparta to Crete.
There you are.

Now I shall question myself, because you may well ask
what inspired me to leave your house and follow this stranger,
betraying my country and my home.
Punish the goddess, and be stronger than Zeus who rules all the gods
and yet is her slave. So you see, I deserve forgiveness.
You might well ask now, when Alexander died,
and my heaven-sent marriage was over, why did I not leave his house
and go to the Greek ships? But that’s exactly what I tried to do.
And I have witnesses, those who guarded the tower gates, and the walls:
how many times did they find me dangling from strong ropes,
stealthily trying to lower my body from the ramparts down to the ground.
My new husband, Deiphobus, seized me by force, and made me his wife,
even though the Phrygians disapproved. So why is it just that I die,
my husband, since he took me forcibly, and my domestic life here
was as a slave not an honoured prize? Go on, fight the gods!
If you want to be stronger than the almighty, you are mad!

Chorus

Queen, defend your children and your country; destroy her
case. Her clever words cover foul crimes, and that is terrible.

Hecuba

First I shall defend the goddesses and show that what she says
can’t be right. I hardly think that Hera or the virgin Athena
would ever descend to such foolishness, to come to Ida
and compete in a beauty contest. On its account would Hera
sell out her Argos to barbarians, and Athena enslave Athens to Phrygians?
Is the goddess Hera concerned about her beauty so that she could
win a husband mightier than Zeus? Or Athena, who begged her father
that she could keep her virginity, does she now seek marriage
with one of the gods? Don’t turn the goddesses into idiots
to cover up your own crime; you won’t convince any sensible person.
And you say Cypris came with my son to Menelaus’ halls?
That’s a big laugh! Even if she stayed at home in heaven,
couldn’t she have brought you and Amyclae too to Troy?

My son was the handsomest of men, and when you saw him,
your own desire became Cypris. Men call their foolishness “Aphrodite,”
and it’s no accident that love and lunacy share the first letter.
You saw him wearing his foreign robes, which shone with golden splendor, and you went mad for him. Argos simply wasn’t up to your taste, so you exchanged your Sparta for a Phrygian city flowing with gold and you hoped to spend it all. Menelaus’ halls were not good enough to satisfy your desire for wanton luxury. So you say that my son forced you to leave? Hardly. What Spartan heard you call out? What cry for help did you raise? Your brothers, young Castor, and his twin, were still alive, not yet stars in the sky; why didn’t they hear you?

You came to Troy, with the Argives hot on your track: they battled with deadly spears. If news came that your husband was winning you would praise him and shame my child, who had this great rival for his love; but if the Trojans were winning, Menelaus was worthless. You always looked to the winning side; intrinsic merit meant nothing to you. You say you were kept here against your will, and you secretly tried to let your body down from the towers using ropes to escape? Did anyone find you trying to commit suicide by fitting a noose to your neck or sharpening a sword, as any woman who missed her former husband would have done?

How many times I pleaded with you, saying, “Daughter, please go. My son can find a new bride. I’ll secretly escort you to the Argive ships. Put an end to this war between the Greeks and us.” But that was not what you wanted to do. You ran riot in the halls of Alexander and luxuriated in barbarian customs. These were important to you. And look at you now, dressed to the hilt, looking shamelessly on the same sky your husband does, you despicable woman. You should have come without airs, dressed in rags, and trembling with fear, your head shaven for shame, and shown more modesty than audacity before the husband you wronged.

Menelaus, to sum up, crown Greece with her death, and do what you know is right. Show women that if they betray their husbands, they will die.

Chorus

Menelaus, show yourself worthy of your ancestors and punish your wife. Be a brave foe to your enemies and by her death erase this blot on womankind.
Menelaus

[To Hecuba]
I agree with you: she went of her own accord from my home into a foreign bed. That’s just empty boasting when she talks about Cypris.

[To Helen]
Go and let my people stone you; compensate for the long suffering of the Greeks with the brief moment of your death, and learn what it means to shame me.

Helen

No! Clutching your knees, I beseech you; do not blame me for Heaven’s madness. Forgive me!

Hecuba

Do not betray your dead allies; I beg you on their behalf and the sake of your children.

Menelaus

Stop, Hecuba. She means nothing to me. I’ll give my orders to my servants now: take her to where the ships lie, and she will sail with us.

Hecuba

Don’t take her on the same ship with you.

Menelaus

Why not? Has she grown heavy with disaster?

Hecuba

Once a lover, always a lover.
Menelaus

No. It depends on what that beloved has done.
But I’ll do what you say. She won’t go on the same ship with me.
You give good advice. When we get to Greece
she will die a terrible death for the terrible things she did,
and be a lesson for all women to control their lust.
This is not easy for me. But her destruction
will terrify them in their sexual misdeeds,
even if they are still more shameless than she.

[Exeunt Menelaus with Helen, making it obvious he will not kill her]

Chorus

Zeus, you betrayed your own shrine to the Achaeans,
Even while its altar was smoking with incense and flame of sacrifice,
And holy Pergamon whose smoky myrrh floats to heaven;
The vales of Ida covered with ivy
And washed by streaming snow,
Ida the limit of the world
First to be struck by the sun’s rays
That shining holy haunt of the gods.

No more sacrifices
Nor sacred chants and dances in the dark,
In all night worship for the gods.
Gone the sacred wooden images covered with gold,
And the twelve holy rites for Phrygia’s full moons.
This is now my worry, Zeus:
Do you care at all for these rites, you who are
Seated high above on your heavenly throne?
Any care for me and my city in ruins
Or the raging storm of fire that brought it down?

Oh, you my dear husband,
You are now a ghost,
Wandering unburied
Unwashed by hands that loved you.
A ship will take me over the sea
Swiftly sailing on wings of pine,
To horse-blest Argos
With its stony Cyclopean walls
That rend the sky.
Our children crowd the gates
And shout as they weep.
A little girl cries out,
“Mother, the Greeks are taking me away,
All alone, far from your eyes,
To a dark-blue ship with sea-faring oars
Off to holy Salamis,
Or the Isthmian heights that split two seas,
Where Pelops rules behind Lion gates.”

How I wish the double-pronged lightning,
The thunder-bearing fire of the Aegean
Would strike the ship of Menelaus
As it sails on the high sea,
When he takes me from Troy to Greece
A slave weeping many a tear,
While Helen the daughter of Zeus
Holds her golden mirrors,
Those delights for young girls.
May he never reach his Grecian home,
Nor enter his ancestral hearth,
Nor walk in the streets of Pitana,
Nor enter the brazen-gated temple of the goddess,
Since he took her back, and by his rotten marriage,
Brought shame on great Greece
And untold misery to the streams of the Simois.

[Keening]
Io io.
New miseries pile up on the old for our land.
Unhappy Trojan wives, see our dead Astyanax,
Whom the Greeks threw pitilessly from the city’s towers;
Now his murderers bring him to us.

[Enter Talthybius, carrying the body of Astyanax on the shield of Achilles]

Talthybius

Hecuba, one last ship, manned with its oars,
is ready to take back to the shores of Phthia
the booty left behind for Achilles’ son.
Neoptolemus himself set sail because he heard
of his father Peleus’ new troubles: Acastus the son of Pelias
has exiled him. For that reason Neoptolemus did not delay,
but left quickly and took Andromache with him.
As she wept for her country and sobbed over the grave of her husband,
Hector, she made me weep. She begged Neoptolemus that her child, who breathed his last when he fell from the walls, that child of your Hector, be granted a funeral.

In addition, she asked that instead of in cedar or stone, he be buried in Hector’s bronze shield, the same one his father wrapped around his own body to protect himself and that struck terror in the Greeks. Andromache begged that it not be hung on the wall of her new room, where she would be bedded, as a grim reminder of her past. She asked that I lay his dead body in your arms, so that you might cover him with some clothing and wreaths, from whatever is left to you, since her master’s hasty departure prevented her from burying him herself. When you have prepared the body, I shall heap a mound over him and stick a spear in the earth to mark it. Do what you have to do as quickly as possible.

One trouble I spared you: when I crossed Scamander, I washed his body in the stream and cleaned his wounds. I’ll go and dig him a grave, so between us both we’ll shorten the work and hasten our return home.

Hecuba

Lay Hector’s rimmed shield on the ground, now a joyless sight and bitter for me to see. O you Greeks who have more strength in spear than in brain, why did you fear a child so much that you committed this barbaric murder? Did you think he would raise again our fallen Troy? Did you consider yourselves so weak? When Hector was winning, with all his allies at his side, we still died in droves.

Now that Troy is taken, and Phrygia no more, Do you fear this little child? I hate the fear that comes when reason flies away.

O my best beloved, how unlucky you were in your death. If you had grown up and died fighting for your city, had wed, and ruled like a god, you would have been happy, if happiness can be found in such things. You saw all this and knew what it was in your young mind, child, but you had no chance to experience it yourself and never enjoyed it in your own house. Poor sweet child, how cruelly your father’s walls,
built high by Loxias, have shorn from your head
the curls your mother used to caress and kiss.
The broken bones grin between bloody gashes;
why should I conceal the horror of it?
Your hands, sweet miniatures of your father’s, now lie limp.

O sweet mouth that made such grand promises,
you are now silent. You lied when you clung to my dress,
snuggling close, and said, “Grandmother, when you die
I’ll come with lots of friends to visit your grave,
and cut off some of my curls and leave them
as an offering and tell you how much I loved you.”
You did not bury me, but I, an old woman, now without
a city or child, must bury your poor young corpse.
Oh terrible, those kisses, and all my care of you,
watching over you as you slept, all for nothing.
What will some poet inscribe on your tomb?
“This is the innocent child whom the Greeks feared and murdered!”
An inscription to bring shame on Greece.

You who had no share in your father’s heritage,
at least will have his brazen shield in your grave.
O shield that protected the mighty arm of Hector,
you have lost your noble master. How sweet to see the marks
my son left on your handle, and the sweat that stained
the smooth rim, that sweat that dripped down the face of Hector
as he held you close to his beard in the heat of battle.

Bring me some clothing from what you have for
this poor body; our circumstance has not left us much
for adornment. What I have, he will have.

A man is a fool who, when things go well,
thinks that his happiness will endure;
fate is like a madman, lurching here and there.
No one’s happiness ever lasts.

Chorus

Here is what is left from the ruins of Troy;
We give it into your hands to adorn his corpse.
Hecuba

Your father’s mother adorns you from the treasures which once were yours, but not to celebrate a victory with horses or in archery. Now Helen the god-cursed has deprived you of all this: she slew you and destroyed all our city.

Chorus

[Keening]

E e.
You touch my heart, Touch it with sorrow. You were once a great prince in the city.

Hecuba

Here I cover your skin with fine Phrygian robes, that you should have worn for your wedding with the most powerful princess of Asia.

You, dear shield of Hector, mighty mother of countless victories, receive your crown: you who are deathless will die with this corpse, you, so much more deserving of honour than that armor won by that crafty criminal Odysseus.

Chorus

[Keening]

Aiai aiai, Bitter sorrow, The earth will receive you, child. Mother, weep…

Hecuba

[Keening]

Aiai. Chorus

Keen for the dead.
Hecuba

[Keening]

Oimoi moi.

Chorus

[Keening]

Oimoi.
Deathless memory of sorrow.

Hecuba

I bandage your wounds, but I can heal nothing, all I can do is try, a useless effort. Your father will take care of you among the dead.

Chorus

[Keening]

Strike your head
And strike again,
Keep the beat with your hands,
Io moi moi.

Hecuba

Dearest women…

[Seeing her struggle to speak.]

Chorus

Hecuba, say what is in your heart.

Hecuba

All the gods have given us was suffering, to me and Troy, hated above all cities; in vain we sacrificed to them. But if God had not overthrown us, and buried us, no one would have had any fame. But now we are celebrated in hymns, and shall provide songs for future generations.

Go, bury the corpse in his sorry grave. It now has the offerings that are due the dead. I think to be buried with pomp
and luxury means little to the dead; it is just vain show for the living.  

Chorus

[Keening]

Io io.

Your poor mother who had such great hopes for you.  
You had so much wealth and luxury, and came from noble ancestors.

Ea ea.

What is this I see?  
People brandishing flaming torches  
On the heights of Ilium?  
New evils on top of the old  
Assail Troy.

Talthybius

I speak to you captains who are ordered to set Troy on fire,  
don’t hold back any longer, but do your work quickly.  
After the city is leveled to the ground, then we’ll sail happily home from Troy.

You women, I have two messages for you. When the army leaders  
sound the trumpet, go to the Greek ships to sail away from this land.

[Pointing to some soldiers]

And you, old woman, unhappiest of all, follow them. They have come  
from Odysseus; the lot gave you to him as a slave and takes you away from this land.

Hecuba

Oh miserable. This is the last and worst of all the sorrows I’ve suffered.  
I leave my country and my city burns. Old feet, make an effort,  
carry me to the embrace of the flame so that I may die along with my city.  
O Troy, great among all the barbarian cities, soon your famous name  
will be forgotten. They have set you on fire, and me they take away  
from this land as a slave. O gods! But why do I call on the gods?  
They never listened to my prayers before. Come, let’s run  
into the fire, so that I may die gloriously in my city’s flames.
Talthybius

[To his soldiers]
Seize her, and don’t let her go. You have to hand her over to Odysseus; she is his war prize.

[To Hecuba]
Poor creature, your suffering has driven you mad.

Hecuba

[Keening]

Ototo ototo! 
O son of Cronus, lord of Phrygia, father, 
And begetter of our race, 
Do you see what indignities we suffer? 
We, the offspring of Dardanus?

Chorus

He has seen. 
But Troy, the greatest of cities 
Is a city no longer. 
Troy is no more.

Hecuba

[Keening]

Ototo ototo! 
Troy is burning bright, 
The buildings of Troy blaze with fire, 
The heart of the city, 
With its high walls.

Chorus

Our land, fallen to the spear, 
Is utterly destroyed, 
And floats heavenward
On a wing of smoke.
O halls raging, running with flames,
Defeated by fire, and the foeman’s spear.

Hecuba

Children hear me!
Heed your mother’s voice!

Chorus

You call the dead with your cries.

Hecuba

[Throwing herself to the ground]
An old woman, I lie on the ground,
And beat the earth with my two hands.

Chorus

We follow you and kneel on the ground,
Calling on our poor dead husbands.

Hecuba

We are carried off, dragged away….

Chorus

Pain, pain you cry.

Hecuba

Leaving my country for a house of slavery.

Io io.

Priam, Priam,
You are dead, without a tomb,
No loved one close,
No knowledge of my suffering.

Chorus

Dark death covered his eyes
A holy man in unholy slaughter.

Hecuba

O shrines of the gods,
Beloved city.

Chorus

[Keening]
E e.

Hecuba

Bloody flame and spear shafts rule.

Chorus

Now nameless you are rubble on our beloved earth.

Hecuba

On smoke’s wing,
As it flies to the sky,
Ash covers my home,
I see it no more.

Chorus

The name of this land, unknown.
One person vanished here, another there.
Troy, poor Troy, is no more.

Hecuba

Did you see?
Did you hear?

Chorus

The fall of Troy.
Hecuba

An earthquake,
A violent shaking, collapsed the city.
Io io,
Trembling frail legs, trembling body,
Carry me on.
Go to the first day of this life of slavery.

Chorus

O suffering city…
But we must carry on now,
And go to the ships of the Greeks.

[Exeunt omnes]