

Word count: 1493

Euripides's *The Trojan Women*, or *Troades*, was produced in 415 BC as the third play in a trilogy centered on events around the Trojan war. The play consists of a series of episodes about the fate of four women after the defeat of Troy, and it is easy to see the play as a critical commentary on war itself: "One strategy for questioning an ideological product like war is to represent its deleterious consequences (desecration of temples, various impieties, slavery, death, destruction etc.). This *Troades* performs with great power"¹. The timing of the play, coincident with the Athenian sack of the island of Melos, also leads to an interpretation of the play as a critique of the events at Melos. However, this perspective is convincingly refuted by Kovacs for reasons of chronology, lack of contemporary evidence, and conflicting sentiments in the text.² To the latter, consider that Cassandra, "the mouthpiece of Euripides"³ describes the fame and glory the Trojans have achieved in war, and promises bloody revenge.

Cassandra, princess of Troy and, in the tragic tradition, a prophet who was cursed to speak the truth but be disbelieved⁴, makes her entrance appearing to celebrate her upcoming "marriage" to Agamemnon. In lines 359-373, she explains the cause behind her celebration. She predicts her death and that of Agamemnon, and the fall of his house, events which are also referenced in the *Odyssey* and in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. She goes on to give a cutting summary of the poor trade the Greeks have made in going to war.

359 κτενῶ γὰρ αὐτὸν κἀντιπορθήσω δόμους
360 ποινὰς ἀδελφῶν καὶ πατρὸς λαβοῦσ' ἐμοῦ.
361 ἀλλ' αὖτ' ἐάσω· πέλεκυν οὐχ ὑμνήσομεν,
362 ὃς ἐς τράχηλον τὸν ἐμὸν εἴσι χάτερων·
363 μητροκτόνους τ' ἀγῶνας, οὓς οὔμοι γάμοι
364 θήσουσιν, οἴκων τ' Ἀτρέως ἀνάστασιν.
365 πόλιν δὲ δείξω τήνδε μακαριωτέραν
366 ἢ τοὺς Ἀχαιοὺς, ἔνθεος μὲν, ἀλλ' ὅμως
367 τοσόνδε γ' ἔξω στήσομαι βακχευμάτων·
368 οἱ διὰ μίαν γυναῖκα καὶ μίαν Κύπριν
369 θηρῶντες Ἑλένην μυρίουσ' ἀπώλεσαν.
370 ὁ δὲ στρατηγὸς ὁ σοφὸς ἐχθίστων ὕπερ
371 τὰ φίλτατ' ὤλεσ', ἡδονὰς τὰς οἰκοθεν
372 τέκνων ἀδελφῶ δούς γυναικὸς οὔνεκα,
373 καὶ ταῦθ' ἐκούσης κοῦ βία λελησμένης.⁵

359 For I will kill him, I will ravage his home in return,
360 in retribution for my brothers and my father.
361 But I will leave this alone: we will not sing of an axe,

¹ Croally, 2007, p. 130

² Kovacs, 2018, p. 8-16

³ Steiger, 1900, cited in Kovacs

⁴ Croally, 2007, p. 125-6

⁵ Greek text as in Kovacs, 1999, p. 52

362 going into my neck and that of the other;
 363 or of the matricidal struggle which my marriage
 364 will bring about, or of the ruin of the house of Atreus.
 365 But instead, I will show that this city is more blessed
 366 than the Greeks—indeed I’m gifted with prophecy, but still
 367 to an extent I’ll put aside my madness—
 368 who for one woman and one passion,
 369 pursuing Helen, wasted countless men.
 370 And their wise general destroyed his most beloved
 371 for the sake of his most hated, giving up the
 372 pleasures of children at home for his brother,
 373 and this on account of a woman who went willingly, not seized by force.

359 **κτενῶ** This word is surprising, as it is Agamemnon’s wife Clytemnestra who murders him, along with her lover Aegisthus. Barlow suggests that Cassandra uses this phrasing because it weighs on her to be an indirect cause of his death⁶, but the implication of guilt appears difficult to reconcile with the triumphant, even gleeful way that she recounts these events, and is inconsistent with the mocking language used before and after (see line 370, σοφὸς). In addition, Cassandra—or more accurately, Agamemnon’s infidelity with her—seems a tertiary reason for the murder. The more obviously significant reasons are Clytemnestra’s anger over the sacrifice of her daughter Iphigenia, and her own extramarital relationship.⁷

It is possible that Cassandra’s statement is not meant to be objective. As she knows her own future, it’s perhaps comforting to see herself as an agent of revenge, rather than as a passive victim: in her next speech she alludes to herself as an Erinyes⁸ and calls herself victorious.⁹ But contrast with Parmentier, who accepts Cassandra’s concubinage as the cause of Agamemnon’s murder, or Luschnig, who posits that Euripides is rewriting the motivations present in *Agamemnon*.¹⁰

δῶμους “Home”—the plural is used in a singular sense.¹¹

361 **ἀλλ’ αὖτ’ ἐάσω** Emended from ἀλλα τ’. Parmentier elects ἀλλ’ αἷσχω ἐάσω and translates as “...des ignominies que je veut taire”, “ignominies that I want to keep quiet”, and while Lee concedes that the line makes sense, notes that it’s not clear how the error could be introduced.¹²

⁶ Barlow, 1986, p. 177

⁷ This is admittedly an interpretation of Clytemnestra’s mental state, but seems logical given that the treatment of women as prizes is never in question in this text: it cannot have been a particularly surprising outcome that Agamemnon would take a concubine. The prominent extra-Troades sources suggest other motivations as well. The *Odyssey* makes Aegisthus an equal author of his murder: “It was Aegisthus who planned my death and murdered me, with help from my own wife.” (Od. 11.408-410, translation by Emily Wilson). It seems difficult to imagine that Cassandra was any part of Aegisthus’s motivations. And Clytemnestra in *Agamemnon* focuses explicitly on Iphigenia: “...when he, as casual as at one death among the crowding and luxuriant flocks, sacrificed his own child...wasn’t it that polluted criminal you should have driven out?” (Aes. *Ag.* 1415-20, translation by Sarah Ruden translated in Lefkowitz, 2017, p. 92).

⁸ Eur. *Tro.* 457

⁹ Eur. *Tro.* 459

¹⁰ Parmentier, 1964, p. 42; Luschnig, 1971 p. 4

¹¹ LSJ, s.v. δῶμος

¹² Lee, 1976, p. 135

ὑμνήσομεν The verb is “to sing of” but especially “to sing in praise, to laud”. We can understand the choice as part of Cassandra’s discomfiting celebration of her own disastrous future, or as a concession: to praise the axe that will kill Agamemnon, even though it will also kill her.

362 χάτερον The unexpected breathing indicates crasis; read καὶ ἐτέρων “and (the neck) of the other”. The other refers to Agamemnon, who will be killed at the same time as Cassandra, and the plural is the allusive plural, in which one person is referred to with a plural.¹³ In addition, Lee suggests that the vagueness here creates an ominous tone.¹⁴

τράχηλον Some authors see a criticism here of the bloodiness of Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon*.¹⁵ Lee, however, argues that Cassandra’s speech is sufficient to remind the audience of the events, and appropriately enigmatic for information that was transmitted through Apollo.¹⁶

363 μητροκτόνους τ’ ἄγῶνας “Matricidal struggles”. Kovacs again refers to the allusive plural here, although most translators seem to keep the plural, including Kovacs (1999). The plural may be seen as sensical given that the matricide (of Clytemnestra by Orestes) is not the end of tragedy for the house of Atreus, as Orestes is pursued by the Erinyes and eventually is brought to trial in Aeschylus’s *Eumenides*.

364 θήσουσιν In the sense of “which my marriage *will bring about*.”¹⁷

ἀνάστασιν The benign meanings “setting up (e.g. of a building)” or “making to rise and leave” exist, but here, the somewhat surprising “desolation, ruin.”¹⁸

365 δὲ the contrast is with οὐχ ὑμνήσομεν: “I won’t tell of...*but instead*...”

μακαριωτέραν “Blessed”, and echoes Cassandra’s repeated use of the word in the wedding song she sings while making her entrance.¹⁹

367 βακχευμάτων Genitive plural of βᾶκχευμα; literally “Bacchic revelries” but figuratively “delirium” or “madness.”²⁰

367 ἔξω στήσομαι βακχευμάτων Literally: “I will stand outside my madness.” The meaning can be taken as indicating that what she will say is not a prophecy, but rather a rational assessment of past events. It may also be taken as Cassandra saying that she will speak plainly.²¹

368 Κύπριν A name for Aphrodite, referring to Cyprus, but used here to mean love or passion.

μίαν the repetition reinforces the contrast with μυρίους and the poor calculus Cassandra believes the Greeks made by going to war.²²

370 σοφός The statement is ironic, as her description of Agamemnon’s decisions clearly frames them as unwise. Cassandra’s mocking tone begins with ὁ τῶν Ἀχαιῶν κλεινὸς Ἀγαμέμνων ἄναξ, “This famous Greek king, Agamemnon”²³ and is echoed in the subsequent speech by Talthybius,

¹³ Kovacs, 2018, p. 187; Smyth, 1956, 4.35

¹⁴ Lee, 1976, p. 136

¹⁵ Paley, 1872, p. 498

¹⁶ Lee, 1976, p. 135

¹⁷ LSJ, s.v. τίθημι

¹⁸ LSJ (VII) and Bailly, s.v. ἀνάστασις

¹⁹ Eur. *Tro.* 311-336

²⁰ Diccionario Griego-Español, s.v. βᾶκχευμα

²¹ Croally, 2007, p. 133

²² Biehl, 1989, p. 190

²³ Eur. *Tro.* 358, translated by Emily Wilson in Lefkowitz, 2017, p. 651

who declares that he would never go to bed with Cassandra, and then calls her “a fine bride for our leader”—perhaps another criticism of Agamemnon.²⁴

ἐχθίστων Irregular superlative of ἐχθιστος; refers to Helen, though Lee includes the expedition to Troy in general.²⁵

371 **φίλτατ'** Agamemnon's daughter, Iphigenia, who he sacrificed for favorable winds in order to sail to Troy.

ἐχθίστων ὕπερ τὰ φίλτατ' ὄλεσ' This contrast is stated again in Euripides's later play, *Iphigenia in Aulis*: “It is buying what we most detest with what we hold most dear.”²⁶

οἴκοθεν This adverb is equivalent to “at home”²⁷

373 **καὶ ταῦθ** Specifies an additional circumstance that intensifies what has been said.²⁸

²⁴ Eur. *Tro.* 416, 420, translated by Emily Wilson in Lefkowitz, 2017, p. 652-3

²⁵ Lee, 1976, p.136

²⁶ Eur. *IA.* 1170, translation by Coleridge

²⁷ Lee, 1976, p. 136

²⁸ LSJ, s.v. οὐτος VIII.2; Lee, 1976, p. 136

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