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**"Astyanax and the Athenian War Orphans. Challenging War Ideology
in Euripides' *Trojan Women*"**

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The *Trojan Women* is one of those Greek tragedies in which people of our times find a mirror for their own concerns and sufferings. Its pathetic depiction of the effects of war on a community, and especially on helpless women and children appeals spontaneously to many modern readers and spectators. The play has been translated and staged during the past century for its striking analogies with most of the great conflicts that have affected the world and influenced the work of European and American classicists and dramatists: the Boer War, World War II, wars in Algeria and Vietnam, the struggle against the colonels in Greece, the war in Iraq²... But however universal the play might seem in its topic and characters, however fruitful and creative its constant readaptations, I believe there is still a lot to be said and uncovered about the specific context of the tragedy's creation, where it retrieves its full meaning and power.

In his essay on “The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology”, published in a now classic collection of papers on Athenian drama³, Simon Goldhill examined the relation between the dramatic competitions and a series of ceremonies that preceded them during the Dionysiac festival. He showed that civic ideology, the “city's sense of self”, was publicly affirmed just before being questioned in tragedy and comedy: “the libations of the ten generals, the display of tribute, the announcement of the city's benefactors, the parade of state-educated boys [the war orphans], now men, in full military uniform⁴, all stressed the power of the *polis*, the duties of an individual to the *polis*.”⁵ He then proceeded to analyze how this juxtaposition influenced the interpretation of Sophokles' *Ajax* and *Philoktetes* and how both plays questioned the values and duties of the democratic city that had been so forcefully assessed in the theatre before the dramatic performance.

¹ I wish to thank all the colleagues and students who helped me by responding to early versions of this paper in UC Davis, Stanford University, UC Santa Cruz, University of Florida. My work would not have been possible without the generosity and support of the Center for Hellenic Studies, its director, Greg Nagy, its staff and its fellows. Patrick Lee Miller deserves special gratitude for his friendly and careful revision.

² See Goff 2009:78–135.

³ Winkler and Zeitlin 1990:97–129.

⁴ For the documentation about these ceremonies, see Csapo and Slater 1995:117–119. Pickard-Cambridge 1968 barely mentions them p. 67.

⁵ Goldhill 1990:114.

I wish to show that Euripides in his *Trojan Women* is also challenging certain fundamental speeches and ceremonies that either express or enact the Athenian war ideology. In particular, he is making equal (or even more radical) dramatic use of the context of the Dionysia, for the murder of Astyanax, the orphan of the greatest Trojan warrior, is presented as a systematic reversal of the ceremony of the Athenian war orphans. Examining these features will lead me to reassess the provocative and critical strength of the play. Recent scholarship has insisted on the lamentation of the Trojan women and seen in the female lyricism of the play its most subversive aspect⁶, whereas work such as N.T. Croally's⁷ put the stress on polemical speeches and arguments. I believe we should try to reconcile the political and intellectual aspects of the play with the emphasis on mourning, but also with the analysis of Euripides' theatrical artistry, including visual effects and manipulation of genres in song and speech. In the present paper, I would like to show how Athenian war ideology is integrated to the play, not to be refuted by argument, but to be contrasted with the experience of war victims and spectacularly reversed.

The *Trojan Women* is the third play of a trilogy that Euripides devoted to the Trojan war, the first ones being *Alexandros* and *Palamedes*, of which we have only fragments⁸. In the most comprehensive work written on the three plays, R. Scodel has argued in favor of a linked trilogy⁹ and it is clear that the *Alexandros* shares with the *Trojan Women* several characters – Hecuba and Cassandra appear in both plays, while Hector, Priam and Paris are present in the first play and constantly remembered in the last. They also share themes (slavery and nobility, Greeks and barbarians, victory and defeat) and elements of plot (the *Alexandros* foretells the tragic role of Paris in the fall of Troy, while his unexpected survival as an infant is contrasted with the untimely death of Astyanax). As for the links with the *Palamedes*, they are more difficult to establish given the state of the fragments. At least we know that 1) Troy was the setting of the play as in the other two, 2) the events it stages take place between those of the *Alexandros* and those of the *Trojan Women*, and 3) Odysseus, whose evil influence is denounced by the Trojan women, is one of the main characters.

At the time the trilogy was performed in 415 bc, the city had been engaged in warfare for years, and was preparing for a great military expedition to Sicily that would eventually bring about the Athenian defeat. The city that gathered that spring in the theatre during the Dionysiac festivals was physically and psychologically wounded by

⁶ Following M. Alexiou's seminal work 1974, 2002, see Loraux 1999, Suter 2003, Dué 2006.

⁷ Croally 1994.

⁸ See Jouan and Van Looy 1998–2000.

⁹ Scodel 1980.

war, and many an Athenian spectator had probably lost a father, a brother or a son on the battlefield. But Athenians were also responsible for horrible massacres in different cities of the Greek world, the latest one being Melos in the fall of 416, where they had wiped out the male population and enslaved the women and children because the city attempted to remain neutral and refused to join the Delian league.

Whether Euripides meant his trilogy to denounce precisely the Melian events is still debated and it is not my purpose to solve the question¹⁰. Whatever Euripides' intention was while composing the play, it seems to me very unlikely that the audience would draw no relation at all between the events on stage and the ones it was experiencing. If not all the spectators, at least some of them must have linked the sack of mythical Troy and the fate of its population to that of Melos, and seen there an allusion to, if not a sublimation of contemporary issues. Nevertheless, I believe reading the *Trojan Women* as an allegory where the Trojans represent the Melians and the Greeks the Athenians is an oversimplification. In the mythical and epic traditions, Troy could embody at the same time a distant city, a city over the sea, which Greek warriors had defeated and sacked, and a city that had been fighting for its preservation on its own ground. The Athenians could thus both, or in turn, relate to it as imperialist conquerers and identify with it as defenders of their own city¹¹.

The structure of the *Trojan Women* is a simple one. When it starts, Troy has been defeated by the Greeks, the Trojan men and warriors are all dead, and the women are waiting to be allotted to their new masters. Soon the ships of the victors will set sail and take them to exile and slavery. During the prologue, the god Poseidon appears to bid the city farewell. He is leaving the deserted temple where the Trojans used to honor him. Athena, who has defeated him in the divine conflict over Troy, joins him to ask for a favor: although she has led them to victory, the Greeks have offended her and now she wants to destroy them at sea. Poseidon agrees to help her, but we will not witness the Greek disaster in the course of the play. Instead, the main action consists of the distribution and departure of the Trojan princesses, the most valuable of the conquered women, the ones who have been chosen (*exairetoi*) by the masters and not simply allocated at random. First Cassandra, whom Agamemnon wants to marry despite the fact that she is a priestess of Apollo and thus a holy virgin. Then Andromache, the widow of Hector, the best of the Trojans: she and her son Astyanax will belong to Neoptolemos, the best of the Achaeans but also the son of Achilles, Hector's killer. Next Helen, whom Menelaus retrieves after a ten years of fighting but whom he can not make himself

¹⁰ See most recently the balanced summaries of this controversy by P. Burian in Burian and Shapiro 2009:4–6, and B. Goff in Goff 2009:27–35.

¹¹ See Dué 2006:91–116.

punish. Finally Hecuba herself, who will be slave to Odysseus, and the women of the chorus are dragged away to the ships.

Along the way, however, the Greeks decide to kill Astyanax, the son of Hector and Andromache, and throw him down the walls of Troy. Hecuba gets to mourn her grandson in the spectacular and poignant final episode. At the end, the community of Troy is definitely wiped out: the last male, who embodied the city's future and might have later reconstructed Troy, has been killed; all the women have been separated and are about to be integrated into Greek households where they will bear Greek children – they have danced their final chorus and will never again be able to recreate their community in shared memories or laments; Troy itself has been burnt to the ground; the gods have departed, and the plain of Troy, as the stage, is finally empty.

The entrance of Andromache and Astyanax at the beginning of the second episode is a remarkable theatrical moment. The fact has been noted by many commentators, but there are aspects of its visual power and significance that have not yet been fully explored¹². My goal is to suggest different possible readings, some conjectural, some firmly grounded, that might enrich our understanding of the scene and, from there, of the whole play.

As mother and son enter, the women of the chorus describe what they see (568–576). Here comes Hector's widow, sitting on a foreign cart and holding her fatherless son. They are surrounded by the weapons that once belonged to the Trojan hero and by the spoils of the defeated Trojans that Neoptolemos will donate to the gods when he returns. For a brief and sad instant, the Trojan women recreate the unity of Hector's household: both child and mother are linked to the hero, Astyanax being called Ἑκτορος ἴνις, and Andromache πάρεδρος χαλκείοις Ἑκτορος ὄπλοις. The use of the word πάρεδρος, which usually means “seated next to another person”¹³, gives a human presence to Hector's armor. It is even plausible that the trio was visually recomposed, for although Hector's weapons are not strictly speaking a trophy (they are not meant to be left on the scene of the Trojan defeat but belong to Neoptolemos as part of his booty and will be brought to his home), it is worth noting that trophies were made of weapons arranged in an

¹² For a good but limited analysis, see Dyson and Lee 2000; Halleran 1985:11, 60, 96–97. On chariot scenes, see Taplin 1977:76–77.

¹³ Out of the 23 instances of the word in the VIth et Vth centuries BC, 21 mean “seated next to someone”, be it god or man. In one case it is used of the Pythia seated next to Zeus' golden eagles, but even though the eagles can be considered as objects, they embody Zeus' presence and the context is that of two deities enthroned together. It is therefore clear that Euripides is using πάρεδρος to give the armor and the spoils a bodily presence.

anthropomorphic shape¹⁴. It is therefore not impossible to imagine that the synecdoche present in the word *πάρεδρος* was translated visually and that Hector's weapons were displayed in a fashion that evoked a man's body.

At the same time, everything is pointing to Hector's absence¹⁵ – the armor is but a shallow reminder of his existence and courage – and to its consequences: defeat and death for the men, enslavement to a triumphant master for the woman and the child. The spectacle of the living but terrified widow and orphan among the instruments of death is a pitiful one that stresses both the vanity and destructive power of men's violence. The woman and child have been left exposed to the brutality of the victors¹⁶, and the shining helmets, breast-plates and shields lie emptied of the male bodies they formerly protected, like the hides of hunted animals (*σκύλοις... δοριθηράτοις*, 574). They are the tokens of wealth and strength that once flourished but are now shattered by defeat.

The image of Andromache and Astyanax on the cart also symbolizes their fall from royal status to captivity, especially in contrast to other dramas – notably the *Agamemnon* – where characters make regal entrances on chariots¹⁷. Mother and son are pictured as being part of the booty even before Andromache expresses the idea in words (614). Nothing at first distinguishes them from the inanimate objects with which they are carried away, until the princess breaks into lamentation and voices the pain and fear she is experiencing. The tragedy allows this distinction to be made, allows the captive to voice her humanity¹⁸. To the ears of an Athenian audience of 415 BC, this might be unsettling. There are reasons to believe that the Athenians could identify themselves with the Trojans after the sack of their own city by the Persians¹⁹. Moreover, because Andromache is a familiar and dignified Iliadic figure and expresses in the tragedy such nobility of character, her grief certainly arouses pity. But the memory of the Persian wars might be fading and the situation of Hector's widow is that of Athens' enemies: she is being enslaved and carried away just as if she were one of the women of Scione or Melos. Sympathizing with her sufferings implies acknowledging that Athens' victims have every reason to lament.

This complex process of identification might be enhanced by yet another element. I suggest that the entrance of the wagon full of precious objects might have reminded the Athenian audience and their foreign guests of the display of the allies' tribute that had preceded the tragic performance. We know very little about this ceremony, and this

¹⁴ Lonis 1979:129.

¹⁵ On Hector's absence and its function in the play, see Poole 1976.

¹⁶ Talthybios makes this plain at lines 729 f.

¹⁷ Lee 1976:174; Halleran 1985:97.

¹⁸ This is N. Loraux's main thesis in Loraux 1999; see also Dué 2006.

¹⁹ On this topic, I find Ferrari 2000 convincing.

paragraph will remain conjectural, but I believe the idea is worth considering. Isocrates tells us that the tribute was converted and divided into talents that were brought into the theatre²⁰. Raubitschek, commenting on this text²¹, develops the hypothesis that each talent was transported by a man in a vessel or a money bag and uses as evidence a relief showing vases and money bags decorating a stele on which is engraved a decree concerning the tribute²². But to assess the way the tribute was brought into the theatre, he simply extrapolates from the Parthenon frieze which shows young men carrying vases on their shoulders in another context. Although I can bring no stronger evidence than the fact that Euripides, as we will see, makes a sensational use of others elements of the City Dionysia in the *Trojan Women*, I think we can not rule out the possibility that the tribute was rather brought on one or several wagons. The poet would then be drawing a relation between the Greek victors' booty and the wealth of imperialistic Athens. By superimposing the spectacle of the Trojan spoils upon that of the allies' contribution, Euripides might be suggesting how thin the line is between empire and conquest, between legitimate leadership and odious mastery. The presence of the widow and the orphan, deprived of their husband and father, of their freedom, might point to the human cost of Athens' *archê* and to the destructive effect that wars meant to secure and expand its dominion have on families – Greek families, that is.

It is clear that if this hypothesis is right, the meaning of Euripides' challenge to war is to be understood not only as a general issue, but as more precisely political, and that it refers to imperialistic conflicts like the one in Melos or the forthcoming expedition to Sicily²³. The audience composed of Athenians and their foreign guests would likely have become ashamed, pained, or even afraid upon seeing this scene, revealing as it does the potential destructiveness of the relation between Athens and its allies.

So far I have examined the entrance of Andromache and Astyanax as a striking visual tableau, rich with symbolic meaning. But the spectacle and the chorus' comment also have a strong dramatic function: to prepare the *coup de théâtre* of the boy's murder, for it is his relation to his father that will condemn him to die. Both his name (the "Prince of the city" is first and foremost Hector, as we are reminded by the poet of the *Iliad*²⁴) and the designation of the chorus, Ἑκτορος ἱνίς, carry the weight of this fatal relationship. As for Hector's weapons, they will ultimately play an important role in his son's funeral, in which object and human body will indeed share a common fate.

²⁰ *On the Peace*, 82.

²¹ Raubitschek 1941.

²² IG I³ 1, 68.

²³ See Croally 1994:232–234, Dué 2006:147–150.

²⁴ *Iliad* VI 403.

When Talthybios re-enters the stage, interrupting the lamentation of Andromache and Hecuba, it is to announce that the Greeks have decided to kill Astyanax. The comforting hope that the child might one day rebuild Troy is destroyed as soon as it has been voiced²⁵. This comes as a surprise to the audience²⁶ as well as the characters, for the event has not been alluded to earlier, either by the gods in the prologue, or by Cassandra or by Talthybios, who seems to be surprised himself. The unusual return of the herald within an episode stresses the sudden character of the Greeks' decision and turns his message into a dreadful unexpected blow. The murder has not been planned, nor has it been prepared or asked for by the gods; it appears disconnected from any superhuman necessity; it is but a tragic expression of human freedom and will.

I will not insist on the pathos of the dialogue between the reluctant messenger and the pitiful mother²⁷. Commentators and directors have always analyzed the universal feelings and power struggle that are at stake and made the most of this heart-breaking theatrical moment. But I believe it is precisely the universal and immediate appeal of the scene that has prevented generations of readers and spectators from realizing how specific it was. For what is staged is not only the dreadful spectacle of victors forcing a captive to surrender her child, of a mother facing the murder of her son. It is also the systematic reversal of a ceremony that has taken place in the Athenian theatre just before the performance of the play. The words exchanged by Andromache and Talthybios refer in a striking way to the presentation of the war orphans and to the Athenian herald's proclamation. The day before the tragic competition, the sons of dead Athenian warriors who have reached ἥβη have been publicly honored in the theatre. They have been raised at the expenses of the state since the death of their fathers and have received on that occasion a hoplite panoply. Here is what Aeschines tells us about the ceremony and proclamation:

προελθὼν ὁ κήρυξ καὶ παραστησάμενος τοὺς ὀρφανούς, ὧν οἱ πατέρες ἦσαν ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ τετελευτηκότες, νεανίσκους πανοπλία κεκοσμημένους, ἐκήρυττε τὸ κάλλιστον κήρυγμα καὶ προτρεπτικώτατον πρὸς ἀρετήν, ὅτι τούσδε τοὺς νεανίσκους, ὧν οἱ πατέρες ἐτελεύτησαν ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ ἄνδρες (10) ἀγαθοὶ γενόμενοι, μέχρι μὲν ἥβης ὁ δῆμος ἔτρεφε, νυνὶ δὲ καθοπλίσας τῆδε τῇ πανοπλίᾳ, ἀφίησιν ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ τρέπεσθαι ἐπὶ τὰ ἑαυτῶν, καὶ καλεῖ εἰς προεδρίαν.

²⁵ See lines 702–705.

²⁶ One can discuss about the expectations of the external audience. It is true that the murder of Astyanax is alluded to as a possible outcome of Hector's death at the end of the *Iliad* (XXIV 725–737) and that it belongs to the tradition of the *cccct*. It is therefore known to the audience. On the other hand, any mythical innovation could be expected of Euripides. Has he not transformed Poseidon into an ally of the Trojans in the very prologue of this play, in obvious contradiction with the Iliadic tradition?

²⁷ See Dyson and Lee 2000:17–22.

“The herald would come forward and place before [the Athenians] the orphans whose fathers had died in battle, young men clad in the panoply of war; and he would utter that proclamation so honorable and so incentive to valor: ‘These young men, whose fathers showed themselves brave men and died in war, have been supported by the state until they have come of age; and now, clad thus in full armor by their fellow-citizens, they are sent out with the prayers of the city, to go each his way; and they are invited to seats of honor in the theatre.’”²⁸

This means that the orphans who have reached *hēbē* and received their armor are sitting in the front rows of the theatre when the tragedies, and the *Trojan Women* in particular, are performed. Behind them are fathers who go to battle for their city knowing that, should they die, the state will take care of their sons²⁹. What they see is the orphan of Troy's greatest warrior, what they hear from the herald is that this child will be killed because his father was an ἄριστος ἀνήρ (723), and that the community of the Greeks – Talthybios insists on the collective nature of both the decision (711) and the act (719) – has decreed that it would not support him (μὴ τρέφειν, 723). He will not be “sent out” (ἀφ-ίησιν) to go his way, but “thrown off” the walls of Troy (ῥίψαι δὲ πύργων ... Τρωικῶν ἄπο, 725). Just as the Athenian herald imposes a response on his audience, Talthybios attempts to control Andromache's reaction, and he forbids her to substitute curses to the Achaeans for the good wishes that the Athenian orphans must receive from their fellow-citizens:

οὔτ' αὖ σ' Ἀχαιοῖς βούλομαι ῥίπτειν ἄρας.

“And I want you not to hurl curses at the Achaeans” (734)

This comes at the end of the speech in which Talthybios advises Andromache not to resist the Greeks' decision. Using the argument of force that Thucydides develops so fully in the Melian dialogue³⁰, the herald tries to prevent the backlash of motherly anger and grief and to preserve an illusion of normality: the dead will be buried and pitied, given that Andromache responds to his threats by being, as ever, a dignified woman, one who knows “when to be the winner and when to yield victory”³¹. The consensus surrounding the presentation of the Athenian orphans is thus replaced by a forced acquiescence, which Andromache, surrendering her child, expresses in desperate and heart-rending imperatives:

²⁸ *Against Ctesiphon*, 154, transl. C.D. Adams.

²⁹ See Ober 2008:256–258.

³⁰ Thucydides *History of the Peloponnesian War*, IV 85–113. It is interesting to see that Andromache, on the verge of cursing the Greeks for their barbarian deeds, finally diverts her anger towards Helen, whose death she calls for (772).

³¹ This is how Andromache herself defines the art of being a good wife, lines 655–656.

ἄλλ' ἄγετε φέρετε ρίπτει', εἰ ρίπτειν δοκεῖ·
δαίνυσθε τοῦδε σάρκας,

“Come, take him, hurl him, if to hurl him is your decision: feast on his flesh!”³²

The Athenian orphans ceremony is thus integrated into the play and inverted in every respect³³. As opposed to the spectators, Astyanax will never grow up and get the chance to prove himself as brave as his father. He will not join the adult men in banquets to pour their wine or drink with them, but instead resembles a sacrificed animal cut into pieces and eaten in a gruesome feast (*dais*)³⁴. In the lamentation that follows, Andromache blames Hector's εὐγένεια, his noble birth and behavior, for the death of his son:

ἢ τοῦ πατρὸς δέ σ' εὐγένει' ἀποκτενεῖ
ἢ τοῖσιν ἄλλοις γίγνεται σωτηρία

“It is a father's nobility, a salvation to the(se) others, that will be your undoing”³⁵ (742–743)

D. Kovacs and L. Parmentier, among others, interpret these lines as referring to Hector only, and ἄλλοις to the Trojans whom Hector protected when he was alive, but this leads them to mistranslate γίγνεται as a past tense. K.H. Lee persuasively argues that τοῦ πατρὸς εὐγένεια does not refer exclusively to Hector's nobility but to paternal nobility in general, which makes sense of the present tense of γίγνεται³⁶. In this perspective, who are the “others” for whom paternal nobility means salvation? The Greeks' children, of course, and in particular those of Odysseus whom Andromache curses, wishing their father's arguments against Astyanax would be applied to them as well and earn them a similar fate (724). But I would go further to suggest that Euripides can be referring directly to the audience³⁷. If the listener gives τοῖσιν the demonstrative meaning that it had in Homer and can still bear in tragedy, τοῖσιν ἄλλοις can refer only to the sons who

³² I modified D. Kovacs' translation.

³³ Compare with the use of the list of the Athenian war dead in Aeschylus: Ebbott 2000:95–96.

³⁴ The image of the Greeks sharing and eating Astyanax' flesh reminds the audience of Iliadic fears and threats of anthropophagy (the most relevant occurrence here is probably XXII 346–348 where Achilles wishes he could eat Hector), but also of Andromache's lamentation at the death of Hector in which she pictures her son rejected from the banquet by men who are not his father (XXII 494–498).

³⁵ Kovacs' translation modified.

³⁶ Lee 1976, ad v. 742–43.

³⁷ Pace Taplin 1986:166–167.

are present among the spectators since there is no boy or young man on stage to whom it can allude. Andromache is thus directly comparing her son's fate to that of the Athenian sons, and in particular of the orphans sitting in the front rows. The father's virtue, this incentive *topos* of official Athenian speeches, normally meant to inspire not only their generation but the entire body of citizens with courage, has been twisted into an unexpected cause for murder. It has been used against Astyanax as a deadly weapon.

Euripides does not satisfy himself with these verbal allusions and inversions. He turns them into a spectacle in the last episode of the play, giving flesh to the abstract proclamation of the herald and the distant decision of the Greeks. When Talthybios brings back the body of the boy, who has been hurled off the walls of Troy, and hands it over to Hecuba so that she can give him a proper burial, this is what the audience sees: the corpse of a child lying on a shield, carried by Greek soldiers³⁸. It is Andromache who has asked that Astyanax be given his father's *aspis* as a grave, so that the shield would not be brought to the home of her new master where it would have been an unbearable reminder of her past³⁹.

It is possible that the immediate model of the scene should be the carrying of dead warriors fallen on the battlefield. We do not know about such things in the Athenian army, and there is no evidence of soldiers being buried with their weapons after 700 BC, but Plutarch mentions several times that the dead Spartan soldiers were brought back on their shield⁴⁰: the image might have been present to the mind of the audience. The spectacle of the little body, its contrast with the impressive paternal shield and the soldiers who carry him would then at the same time underline the brutality of the adults' decision against the innocent child⁴¹ and, giving a glimpse of the warrior that Astyanax will never be, suggest the annihilation of his future as another defender of Troy.

But even more ironically, the association of Astyanax with the shield also completes the perversion of the ceremony involving the Athenian orphans clad in their armor. The shield, as part of Hector's *hopla*, functions as a metonymy for a *panoplia*, even though it is designated by the poetic words *ἀσπίς*, *ἰτέα* and *σάκος*, not by *ὄπλον*. This new allusion to the ceremony celebrating the young men crudely reminds the audience that Hector's son will not live to meet his parents' and city's expectations, that he

³⁸ Halleran (1985:100) notices that, unlike conventional entrance announcements, the chorus' speech does not mention the entering Talthybios, which draws the attention exclusively to the corpse (1119–1122).

³⁹ 1133–1142.

⁴⁰ Plutarch *Sayings of the Spartan Women*, 235, A, 1 sq.; 241, F, 4–6.

⁴¹ See line 765. Astyanax' innocence stands in sharp contrast to Helen's guilt in the *agôn* scene that takes place while he is being murdered.

is prevented from imitating his father⁴². Most cruel is the fact that Hector, for all his courage and virtue, was eventually defeated, and that the Greeks have therefore little reason to dread his example⁴³.

Andromache's gift of the shield also introduces a significant difference between Astyanax and the Athenian orphans. It is a gesture of separation and oblivion – in order to live on and deal with the necessities of her own survival as the spouse of Neoptolemos, she has resolved to leave her shattered past behind⁴⁴ –, whereas the Athenian orphans in their armor are meant to remember and to remind their fellow-citizens of their glorious fathers, and to embody the eternal renewal of the community. Andromache does reunite Hector and his son, but in the world of the dead, a world in which she has no part, while Troy, emptied of its people, is about to disappear forever. She thus sanctions the dislocation of her family and city.

Assessing the polemical effect of the way Euripides frames the murder of Astyanax – that is, understanding the possible responses of the audience – is a difficult task. The reversal of the Athenian ceremony certainly contributes to making the Greeks' action something abnormal. It is not only the murder of an innocent child, which we consider an ethical problem, that is operative here, but the reference to and the inversion of a very specific ritual that the Athenians probably recognized easily, having witnessed its performance a day or two earlier. That does not in itself mean that everyone in the audience would see the Greeks' decision as wrong, though, for it can be objected that Astyanax is the child of an enemy and of a barbarian, not a Greek or Athenian boy. I believe Andromache's exclamation that the Greeks are inventing barbarian deeds (ὦ βάρβαρ' ἐξευρόντες Ἑλληνες κακα / τί τόνδε παῖδα κτείνειτ' οὐδὲν αἴτιον; l. 764–765) is meant to counter that objection in two ways. First, it questions the distinction between Greeks and barbarians (people who reverse Greek rituals must be non-Greek) and gives it a moral rather than ethnic definition; accordingly, it then stresses the responsibility of the doers of the deed, instead of its object, who does not deserve his fate. The reaction of Talthybios, one of uneasiness and pity, is also guiding the external audience's response. So the murder can be seen as all the more shocking and pathetic because the Greeks are

⁴² In Sophocles' *Ajax*, on the contrary, the hero himself gives his shield to his son (lines 574–577) after having encouraged him to follow his father's example and entrusted him to other adults who would protect him until he reached manhood. I will deal elsewhere with this important intertextual relation.

⁴³ 1158–1166.

⁴⁴ The gesture of leaving Hector's shield behind also represents the resolution of Andromache's dilemma: she, the good wife *par excellence*, must either betray Hector in order to be true to her new husband, or cherish the memory of him and prove an unsatisfying spouse to Neoptolemos.

denying Astyanax precisely what they (or more precisely what the Athenians) give their own orphans.

The next step is to examine whether the use of this reversed ceremony is a challenge to the war ideology expressed and enacted in the ritual. N. Croally has thoroughly examined how “Euripides exploits the context of war, and of the consequent crisis, to show the problems of polarities constitutive of Athenian ideology”⁴⁵ – meaning the oppositions between Greeks and barbarians, friends and enemies, free men and slaves, men and women, etc. – through “the spatial and temporal constitution of [a distinctive] dramatic world and the increasing use of self-reference”⁴⁶. By realizing that this self-reference extends to the integration of the orphans ceremony to the tragic world of the Trojan women, we can reinforce his thesis about the intellectual aspects of the play and ground it in the action of the drama. When superimposing the civic ritual on the myth of Astyanax, Euripides forces the members of the audience to remember the ceremony they attended in the same theater a few days before, to relate it to the Trojan drama, and to compare at the same time the events, their meaning and their own response to them, thus achieving a powerful and unsettling moment of self-reference.

In their ceremony, the Athenians have celebrated through their war orphans the continuity of a community that transcends personal and individual losses. They have demonstrated their ability to restore the family bonds damaged by war with a substitution of the state for the missing fathers and have managed to perpetuate the heroic virtue of the dead by training their sons. But the death of Astyanax is framed by Hecuba's expressions of concern for Troy's continuity, embodied in this single child. Before Talthybios enters to announce the Greeks' decree, Hecuba seeks to comfort Andromache and give her a reason to choose painful survival over death, be it at the hands of Neoptolemos:

καὶ παῖδα τόνδε παιδὸς ἐκθρέψειας ἄν
Τροίᾳ μέγιστον ὠφέλημ' εἶναί ποτε
ἐξ οὗ γενόμενοι παῖδες Ἴλιον πάλιν
κατοικίσειαν, καὶ πόλις γένοιτ' ἔτι.

“You would raise to manhood this son of my son to be some day of great use to Troy, him whose sons, I pray, may resettle Ilion – and may the city live again.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Croally 1994:252–253.

⁴⁶ Croally 1994:253.

⁴⁷ 702–705. The text here is very difficult. Some manuscripts read ἐκ σοῦ (meaning Andromache) instead of ἐξ οὗ, but it seems unlikely that the sons of Neoptolemos and Andromache should be considered by Hecuba as the natural rebuilders of Troy, and that

Raising Astyanax completely (ἐκ-τρέφειν), until he reaches his majority and becomes a man, is presented as a necessity for the whole of Troy, for in the aristocratic world of myth the continuity of the king's race – the son of the son (παῖδα... παιδὸς) will be father to new sons (ἐξ οὗ γινόμενοι παῖδες) – is equivalent to the survival of the city. Hecuba believes, or at least tries to convince Andromache that she, as a loving mother and a potentially obliging concubine, has the power to shelter the boy in a new *oikos*, to offer him a full life and the city a future. But she is brutally contradicted by Talthibios' message: the choice is not hers, it belongs to the Greek masters who refuse to raise the child and uproot the Trojan community. When mourning her grandson, Hecuba returns to the topic, this time in a hypothetical condition, and insists on the rupture that his death, unlike others, represents:

ὦ φίλταθ', ὥς σοι θάνατος ἦλθε δυστυχίης.
 εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἔθανες πρὸ πόλεως ἤβης τυχῶν
 γάμων τε καὶ τῆς ἰσοθέου τυραννίδος,
 μακάριος ἦσθ' ἄν, εἴ τι τῶνδε μακάριον.

“Dear child! What an unlucky death was yours! If you had been killed defending the city, having attained manhood and marriage and godlike kingship, you would have been blessed, if blessedness lies in any of these things.”⁴⁸

Astyanax has not reached ἤβη (1168); he will not marry, nor become a king (1169), which means that family and state disappear with him. In her despair, Hecuba comes to regret that – unlike his father or the Athenian orphans – he was denied the possibility to fall for his country and earn the happy fate of the illustrious brave. Interestingly, death for the city appears as secondary to enjoying youth, marriage and kingship, and its happiness remains dubious. Still, it would have been better than the horror of the child's gruesome and untimely death. This appears to some as an inconsistency in Hecuba's behavior or thought, for the queen resisted Cassandra's attempt to comfort her by stating that the city and Hector, having fought and died for a nobler cause, were finally μακαριότεροι than the Greeks⁴⁹. Her new reaction can be understood, I believe, if we take into account the implicit comparison she makes between the child's ending and his father's. Now that Hecuba is confronted with the paroxysm of violence, she is willing to admit that, set against the murder of Astyanax, Hector's type of death at battle at least gave him time to accomplish vital and enjoyable activities, earned him good reputation as a defender of his homeland and was overall preferable. At least he died a father.

reading does not explain why it would be important to raise Astyanax. I adopt Lee's edition.

⁴⁸ 1167–1170. Transl. Kovacs modified.

⁴⁹ 466 ff.

That comforting thought does not last, though. Hecuba soon goes back to lamenting the child's bloody wounds. His head has been wounded by the paternal walls (τείχη πατρῶα, 1174); his hands, so similar to his father's, are now pathetically broken (1178–1179), as is his mouth, which used to be confident in the future and full of promises (1180–1184). The hurling of Astyanax is not an abstract word anymore, it has visible, tangible effects. As when she answered Cassandra's paradoxical and abstract eulogy of Troy by dwelling on her personal experience and pain⁵⁰, the old queen counters the idealized vision of a grown-up and blessed Astyanax by focusing her lamentation and the audience's attention on the sufferings of the body⁵¹. Pathos reaches a peak as she addresses the little corpse, and the first thing the audience is given to pity is the vulnerability of the child.

But in her tender words to her grandson's body, Hecuba also reveals the subversive force of the spectacle. The smashed head⁵² is a token of Hector's ultimate failure to protect his son and of his vain fight to defend city-walls that eventually became deadly to Ilion's prince and only heir. It signifies the abandonment of Troy by Apollo, who built these walls. Finally it is a moving reminder of Andromache's helpless, pointless love and care: she was not even allowed to mourn her son herself. The dislocated fingers and wrists embody both the likeness between father and son and the rupture of the transmission from one to the other. The mouth now silent, the promises left unfulfilled express the disturbance caused by violence to the normal course of time, where a grandson should bury his grandmother and not the reverse. War and murder have also affected the normal use of ritual, where the boy's curls should be cut in honor of the dead and not ripped off his head in his deadly fall⁵³, where he would earn a garland "for a victory in horsemanship or bowcraft" (1209–1210) instead of being adorned for burial.

With the life of Astyanax, the Greeks have destroyed not only the Trojan community, but also the meaning of their men's struggle: the risk of annihilation was at the heart of the war they so proudly fought, so that Hector's shield now deserves a garland not because it is *kallinikos* and the mother of many trophies, but because it will paradoxically die with the child (1221–1223). The Trojan heroes have left their orphans without anyone to protect them and have exposed the city to extinction.

Through the borderline case of Troy's absolute defeat and of Astyanax – as a single royal child, he concentrates in the myth the expectations that the Athenian city puts in the whole generation of its young men –, the Athenians of the audience are invited to

⁵⁰ 466–510.

⁵¹ Froma Zeitlin sees this as typical of the tragic female characters: Zeitlin 1990:1, 71f.

⁵² On the importance of the head in the Iliadic imagery and symbolism of Troy, see Brillet-Dubois 1999.

⁵³ Compare 1173–1175 to 1182–1184.

envision the threat present at the core of their own war ideology and to question the eternity of their own city, that rests on the implicit assumption of victory. What if Athens were defeated? What if the Athenians were to be treated like the Trojans – or like the Melians – by victorious enemies? Some spectators could even wonder more disturbingly: what if “sending the young men off” to war after having honored them was potentially equivalent to “throwing them off” the city-walls? Does the substitution of ῥίπτω for ἵημι – and the subsequent repetition of the word, that looms over the second and fourth episodes – not actualize the most violent of the possible meanings of ἵημι (“to throw, to hurl”)? What if raising boys to become warriors and equating dedication to the city with life-sacrifice was ultimately self-destructive?

These questions are mediated by the twists of language, the symbolic possibilities of the spectacle of Astyanax' body in his father's shield, but also by the use of ritual lament. Aborted victory and wedding belong to the *topoi* of lamentation over someone who has died young. The female viewpoint of the mourners supplements the male ideological discourse about young men by making room for aspects of their life – marriage and family, peace-time activities – that are obliterated in proclamations like the one concerning the orphans or in funeral orations dedicated to the fallen warriors. After the celebration of the city's self during the first part of the City Dionysia, the women of Troy draw the attention of the Athenian audience to the entirety of a man's relation to the world, and to the risk of putting all of that at stake by focusing only on his value as a warrior.

Now some commentators⁵⁴ have seen in the performance of the mourning ritual during the last episode of the *Trojan Women* a brief and welcome moment of normality: at least this dead body is treated as it should be⁵⁵ and some order is restored through female lamentation, so that the play is not to be interpreted as totally nihilistic. And it is true that thanks to a compassionate Talthybios, Astyanax receives a proper burial at the hands of his grandmother. But I hope to have shown that the whole scene is in no way meant to bring peace of mind to the audience. Apart from being untimely, the funeral replaces or reverses other rituals that should have been performed: the celebration of the war orphan's accession to adulthood, his crowning as a victor in games, his wedding. The problem does not lie in the performance of the funeral but rather in the fact that it prevents the performance of these other ceremonies which are fundamental to the existence and permanence of the city.

⁵⁴ See for ex. Dyson and Lee 2000:28.

⁵⁵ The Trojan women lament over other corpses that have not been properly buried (599-600).

The very specific reversal of the war orphans ceremony departs from the *topoi* about a young boy's interrupted future and I believe it is the element of self-reference that makes the scene uniquely shocking. It is through its subversion that the Athenians are brought to relate Astyanax' fate to their own world, to their own future. They are invited to identify themselves not only with the Greek victors but with the doomed city of Troy, whose glorious ideals were so close to theirs. They are forced to reflect on the implications of their own ideology, and in particular on its denial or questionable sublimation of the damages caused by war both to Athens and to its enemies. Through Astyanax, it is the whole set of values attached to war that is questioned: the worth and meaning of victory, of glory, of devotion to the state. The threat that war ideology constitutes for the continuity and cohesion of the city, and ultimately its existence, is revealed in full and painful light. It is no wonder that Euripides did not win the competition that year.

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