ENGLISH – THE WOMEN OF TROY ESSAY

"*The Women of Troy* serves only to highlight the immoral behaviour of men during war time." Discuss.

Euripides' 415 BC tragedy entitled *The Women of Troy* investigates the barbaric actions of those that abuse their position of power in a time of war. Set against the backdrop of the Peloponnesian war, and performed one year after the atrocious occurrences at Melos, Euripides challenges his largely male Athenian audience with the notion that the plight of women in a time of conflict is heightened by the barbaric actions of remorseless men. Euripides presents this tragedy as a reminder and a warning, allowing him to truly express his anti-war agenda.

Cassandra's assignment "to the bed" of Agamemnon highlights the lack of empathy men display for women during the Trojan War. Hecuba's "god crazed daughter" is assigned to Agamemnon as his "concubine", after the fall of Troy and the slaughter of its men. Despite Cassandra's prophetic ability to foresee the death of her new master and of herself, the barbaric actions of men become pronounced by the Chorus of grieving women believing her words "to be lies" and they cannot believe her "god-stricken ecstacy" ramblings. She asks Hecuba to "give her a good shove" if she does not seem "enthused" at the prospect of "marrying Agamemnon," accentuating to the audience his severe absence of moral values. Euripides shows the cruelty to which Agamemnon subjects to those intended to serve him. The prophetic words of Cassandra serve to show that even in her ramblings, her authority to foresee the future is undermined once she is associated with Agamemnon. The Chorus warns that "she might dance right down to the Greek camp" further alluding to the magnitude of terror that has been instilled within Cassandra for her to conduct herself in such a way. The barbaric actions of men at the conclusion of the fall of Troy are ultimately heightened by the treatment of the surviving women as slaves.

Menelaus, the king of the Greek army, shows the futility of war by inadvertently creating the suffering of many men and women as a result of his desire to recapture Helen. The war on Troy was precisely "all for the love of one woman," being Helen, and the futility of the extent of the destruction is found throughout the play. "Moans of the captured women" are "carried down the banks of the Scamander", "king Priam lays dead" and Hecuba laments that "there is no abyss of pain left to discover." The audience is brutally exposed to the recurring notion that conflict itself is futile and meaningless, Euripides utilising Menelaus as a selfish king with no other interests at heart to illustrate this pointlessness. Although *The Women of Troy* effectively denounces war in all its forms, Euripides anti-war message is especially potent when expressed through the words of Cassandra. She reflects that "any sensible man must hate war," embodying the suffering that has occurred as a result of Menelaus' decision to utilise "the Greek War Machine" and "destroy everything in its path." It is because of the ravaging of Troy that the inhabitants can now reflect that all destruction of their lives is in vain at the hands of brutal men. In this way, Euripides highlights the plight of the defenceless women against the life imposed by the merciless Greek victors.

Euripides utilises the character of Talthybius to reinforce the theme of devious and barbaric men, consolidating the narrative that men act unconstrained in a time of war. However, Talthybius also presents himself as an ally to the fallen women of Troy, showing sympathy and encouraging them to "embrace their new lives" as Greek slaves. Nevertheless, the sympathy shown in this situation is starkly contrasted to moments of brutal and inhumane indifference. He reflects that although "there is no decent way to say an indecent thing," regarding the decided fate of Astyanax, he has no trouble in "washing the body," bypassing sacred burial traditions. This is an affront to all the women of Troy, as he concludes that "my work can finish as soon as yours must." His barbaric behaviour is further heightened by his

decisive dodge of the whole and complete truth, telling Hecuba that Polyxena's "fate is settled" and "all her troubles are over." Euripides illustrates how the barbaric nature of victorious Greek men damage women in these circumstances. His anti-war message embodies the belief that condemnation of war is not enough to hinder future tragedy, as the agency of the women of Troy suffers under the rule of barbaric men.

Euripides tragedy, "The Women of Troy" illustrates to his Athenian audience the atrocious occurrences that come hand-in-hand with an abuse of power. The victorious Greek men exploit the Trojan women into slave hood remorselessly. Euripides' tragedy explores the notion that barbaric and inhumane actions often artificially heighten the suffering of others. Audiences today are not too far removed from receiving this message, as Euripides asks us to be thoughtful and respectful in our interactions with others.