

TRIAL EXAM WOMEN OF TROY

In his play 'The Women of Troy' Euripides subverts the ancient Greek idea of heroism and brutally strips away heroic illusions surrounding the glory of battle. Whilst Euripides suggests that women and children are victims of war, his overarching critique on the destructive, means that the play portrays all characters as victims, including belligerents. As a powerful protest against imperialistic war common in ancient Greece and a warning against waging war, as the Greeks were preparing to do in Sicily, the play radically focuses on the immense anguish of the Trojan women. The death of the children is used to by Euripides to brutally expose the devastating impacts of war on those who are innocent and powerless. However Euripides inclusion of the suffering of the Greek soldiers displays how women and children are not the only victims of war, which is universally destructive in nature.

The torment of the Trojan women is the focal point of the play as Euripides emphasises their abject misery relentlessly throughout the play. This is initially evident in the prologue where Hecuba, the "true face of misery", laments her downfall from queen to slave and sarcastically describes her now being "throned in the dust", highlighting to the readership her loss of status and all worldly possessions. Through Hecuba, Euripides illustrates the women's grief using brutal and sensory imagery as she state her desire to "plough my face with my nails until the wrinkles run red". Euripides poignantly connects her emotional pain to her physical pain to present the magnitude of her suffering in a way that is conceivable to the audience. Euripides portrayal of the women as powerless further displays how they are victims as they are undeserving of their suffering as they did not cause the war but are simply collateral damage. Euripides uses apostrophe, where a character addresses another who is not there, in Andromache calling her dead husband to "save me". This creates pathos from the audience as it highlights her powerlessness as evidently her husband cannot save her and yet she is still reliant on him. By focusing on the plight of the Trojan women, the play is subversive to the ancient Greek idea of being a warrior as Euripides exposes his contemporary audience to the brutal aftermath of war through the immense suffering of the Trojan women that was not common in the Hellenic repertoire.

The destructive effects of war upon children is used by Euripides to elucidate the barbarity of war, and how those that are innocent can become victims. The murder of Astyanax due to the Greek's fear that the "son of such a father" will one day avenge Troy, is particularly horrifying as Euripides uses Astyanax as a symbol of innocent victims. This is evident in Astyanax's lack of dialogue which implies that he is more of a prop than a character, used as a vehicle to critique the brutality of war. Euripides used the severe contrast between Astyanax's youth and his dead body, to underscore the barbarity of such an act. Hecuba vividly describes Astyanax's blood "still oozing from broken bones" and his "head shaved by the walls" of Troy, and the drastically contrasts this by mourning his "sweet little hands" and "childish chattering". This is designed to horrify the audience and evoke sympathy for the senseless murder of this child. Furthermore Euripides uses the chorus, who represent all Trojan women, to vocalise the plight of future generations of Trojan children who are doomed to being products of rape and "bastards" of Greek soldiers. In alluding to the future Euripides emphasises the great magnitude of innocent lives that have been damaged due to war and the barbarous acts of murder and rape that it facilitates. Euripides illustration of the suffering of children shows how they are victims of war.

However, whilst undoubtedly the play presents women and children as victims of war, Euripides portrayal of the hardships of Greek soldiers demonstrates that there are many real victims of war as both the Greeks and Trojans experience a loss of life. Euripides uses Cassandra's monody to juxtapose the experiences of Greek and Trojan soldiers and expose how the Greeks have suffered. Euripides targets his contemporary audience's belief in the importance of burial rites as unlike the Trojans the Greeks bodies lie not "washed and

shrouded” and “forgotten in a foreign country”. This denial of an ancient custom violates the sanctity of the soldier’s death and presents them as victims despite their victory over the Trojans. Cassandra’s use of an incredulous rhetorical question “and for what reason?” highlights to the audience the ridiculousness of the Greeks cause for war. Redolent of the powerlessness of the women, the soldiers are under the control of Menelaus and are forced to fight for an ignoble cause. This is contrasted to the Trojans who “won the greatest of all glories” and died “fighting for their fatherland”. The comparison between the two soldiers focuses on what the Greeks lost and exposes to the audience how they are also victims. Additionally, Euripides uses Talthybius to humanise the Greek soldiers and enable the audience to understand their actions. Talthybius’ desire to “go home” and for his “work [to] end” is repeated throughout the play. By providing insight into the lives of the Greek soldiers through Talthybius, Euripides prevents the audience from villainising them or viewing them as one dimensional victors. Euripides focuses on the humanity of Greek soldiers to paint them as victims, displaying how women and children are not the only real victims of war.

The play exposes how war creates many victims and whilst the suffering of women and children is a focal point throughout, others who are involved in war are almost victimised as this is pivotal to Euripides overall condemnation of war.