

‘WE ARE LOOT, MY SON AND I, SOLDIERS’ PLUNDER.’
DISCUSS HOW EURIPIDES HIGHLIGHTS THE PLIGHT OF WOMEN TAKEN AS
SLAVES OF WAR.

Euripides’ Greek tragedy *The Women of Troy* highlights the atrocities of war through the suffering and agony of the survivors – the women, who are completely disregarded in society. As Andromache laments, ‘we are loot, my son and I, soldiers’ plunder’, it is evident that women are objectified and portrayed as a commodity to be traded in war. In an attempt to compel the audience to consider the grim reality of the violence involved in warfare, Euripides condemns the dehumanisation of women as their anguish is presented to be a result of the actions of men and the unreliability of the gods, while he simultaneously advocates for the importance of home and family. The insignificance and mistreatment of the women is exposed, as despite their piety, the gods neglect them. Moreover, the hubristic actions of men are denounced as they brutally torture women in a cruel exercise of patriarchal power. In addition, the plight of Andromache and Hecuba all reveal the notion that life is crueller than death. Through nautical and animalistic imagery, the women of Troy are presented to be dehumanised. Thus, the barbarity of war through the devastation the men and gods create are denounced, while it is revealed how it is ultimately the women who suffer the most in times of conflict.

Despite their blind faith in the deities, the women are deserted, revealing the unreliability of the gods and Euripides’ questioning of the effectiveness of devotion. Through the characterisation of the Gods Poseidon and Athene, gods are portrayed as untrustworthy as they are ultimately transient allies due to their changeable loyalties. Poseidon’s apathy towards the state of Troy in the prologue reveals his egotism as although the women survive, he believes there is ‘no longer anything left worth a god’s consideration’. His agreeance to Athene’s plan before discovering what it is further proves his unreliability as he decides to perform excessive vengeance ‘with pleasure’. In addition, Athene’s ‘cavalier change of mind’ presents her as ruthless and wrathful, as she is determined to punish the Greeks for Ajax’s sacrilege of desecrating her temple and the lack of punishment he received. Her desire for mortals to ‘respect [her] temples, and fear the power of the gods’ is ironic as whilst the Trojans were devoted, they were destroyed. Hecuba’s lamentation captures this as she loses faith in the gods, calling them ‘Betrayers!’ and questioning ‘what good were you to us?’. This exemplifies Euripides’ denouncement of the worship of gods as he invites the audience to challenge the effectiveness of the gods. Hecuba’s mournful tone in ‘gods have drowned [clear] in an ocean of misery’ further demonstrates the gods’ unreliability as a cause of women’s suffering. Thus, Euripides iconoclastically exposes the mortal obsession with the divine to be futile, as he aligns the sufferings of mortals with the superciliousness and flippancy of the Gods, while revealing their tendency for narcissism

Euripides denounces the hubristic actions of men to be the cause of women’s suffering. Due to their egotism, the ‘victorious’ men draw lots for women to take as their concubines or ‘slaves’. This humiliating act reveals the women to be the greatest victims of war, as they are objectified and ‘allocated’ like commodities. Euripides critiques the dehumanisation of slavery and condemns the insensitivity of men by displaying their agony, as evident through the ‘screams and moans of captured women’. Moreover, Euripides censures Greek men for brutally torturing women in a cruel exercise of patriarchal power. He emphasises the powerlessness of the Trojan women through their enslavement as conveyed through the plight of Cassandra. Deemed a ‘consecrated virgin’, Cassandra’s purity is taken from her by Ajax and his sacrilegious act of raping her on the steps of Athene’s temple. Hecuba’s advice to Andromache to ‘make much of your new master, be pleasant, make yourself attractive to him’ further conveys the helplessness and lack of options for the women as they have to maximise their situation. In addition, Agamemnon taking Cassandra as a ‘slave of his lust’ and Talthibiuss’ dismissal of the depravity of the situation in claiming ‘to be a King’s mistress

is no bad thing' highlights the male's perspective and insensitivity. Through the anguish of women, Euripides criticises the selfish and self-important nature of men and their horrific treatment of women.

In addition, the plight of Hecuba and Cassandra reveal the notion that life is crueller than death and the futility of hope. As both women have experienced a fall in status, either socially or religiously, they are the embodiment of suffering. In their antiphonal lament, Andromache and Hecuba mourn for their loss as 'no grief can encompass what [Hecuba] feel[s]' and Andromache 'aimed at the highest...[then] lost everything'. Euripides conveys the notion that there are harsher conditions for those living compared to deceased, as Andromache believes Polyxena, Hecuba's daughter is 'happier dead than [she is] living'. This is followed by Andromache's nihilistic statement that 'to be dead is the same as never to have been born', and how 'to die is better than a life of agony'. She compares herself to the dead, and presents her suffering to be the worst imagined as she had 'been prosperous and lucky, and is then overwhelmed by disasters'. Euripides highlights the destructive nature of war through the character of Andromache, as she is portrayed to be the ideal wife possessing traits of virtue and compliance yet experiences equal agony to every other woman, or arguably worse. Similarly, the duality between royalty and slavery is displayed through Hecuba's self-pity. She mourns the loss of her status, as her feet 'so used to deep carpets, all the luxury of Troy...belong to a slave now', signifying her complete loss of hope as she declares 'the lucky ones are dead'. Through the downfall of Hecuba and Cassandra, Euripides suggests 'wealth, good fortune, it's all worth nothing' as the aftermath of war makes life harsher than death.

Through the employment of animalistic and nautical imagery, Euripides presents the dehumanisation of women. The graphic imagery of Hecuba's 'poor girl, butchered like an animal' is representative of the loss of morality evident in the aftermath of war that Euripides criticises. The repetition of 'butchered' casts the Greeks as immoral, and this is followed by the imagery of Astyanax, Andromache's son who has to 'break [his] neck, smash the breath in [his] mouth without pity from anyone!'. This violent depiction of the state of Astyanax is intended to shock the classical Athenian audience and evoke reflection in themselves on their own war tactics and behaviour in the siege of Melos at the time. In addition, the nautical imagery the chorus uses to describe Andromache with the 'breasts...[ris]ing and fall[ing] like a bank of oars in the sea' and the depth of her agony to be as boundless as the sea. As Hecuba's prostate position in the prologue is symbolic of the state of women abandoned and left to suffer, the nautical imagery in Hecuba being 'empty as a sail when the winds fall' is symbolic of her unknown fate and the helplessness of all women, as they are deserted and vulnerable. Moreover, 'the gentle rocking of a boat, to keep time' indicates the rhythm of Hecuba's grief as it exemplifies the repetitive nature of her mourning song and the endless torment. Thus, the depravity women face as a result of the war is displayed through animalistic and nautical imagery.

Although first performed in 415 BC during the Peloponnesian war, Euripides conveys significant messages that are still relevant to today's society. Andromache's bemoan that 'we are loot, my son and I, soldiers' plunder', highlights the objectification and commodification of women that Euripides condemns, as their distress is suggested to be a consequence of the men's actions and the gods' untrustworthiness. Whilst Euripides censures the barbarity of war, he simultaneously advocates for the importance of home and family. The insignificance and mistreatment of the women is exposed, as despite their piety, the gods neglect them. Moreover, the hubristic actions of men are denounced as they brutally torture women in a cruel exercise of patriarchal power. In addition, the plight of Andromache and Hecuba all reveal the notion that life is crueller than death. Through nautical and animalistic imagery, the women of Troy are presented to be dehumanised. Ultimately, through the perspectives and distress of women, Euripides advocates for hope and human dignity, demonstrating the importance of family in everyone's lives.