

## 'THE WOMEN OF TROY' CONDEMNS THE ACTIONS OF MEN.' DO YOU AGREE?

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. The war, as the consequence of one man, Paris, who was driven by desire and irrational thinking, and the abduction of Helen, is representative of the illogical motivations behind conflict that Euripides criticises. Although the play is critical of the actions of men, it simultaneously discloses the uselessness of religious worship. Both the hubristic behaviour of men in their treatment of women and the valour they attain due to the glorification of war is denounced by Euripides, whilst he reveals the futility of devotion to gods. Through the suffering of women, he ultimately advocates for hope and human dignity. Thus, despite the tragic outcomes for the female characters, the audience retains a sense of sanguinity as Euripides suggests that 'the living at least have hope. To be dead is to be nothing'.

Through the anguish of women, Euripides condemns the arrogance of men. 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'. The character of Hecuba is representative of this as she is first presented 'lying face down and quite still', symbolic of the city of Troy and an embodiment of the suffering of all women. This evokes empathy in the audience as they are presented with the depth of torment the women are experiencing, especially due to Hecuba's fall in status as she 'was royal by birth and...married a King' and now prepares herself to 'finish [her] life as a slave'. 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. In addition, Agamemnon taking Cassandra as a 'slave of his lust' and Talthylbius' 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. This defiance and disrespect for the Gods' will demonstrate the hubristic outlook of men. Euripides exposes the danger in men being driven by desire and lust and reveals it to be the superfluous cause of war.

Furthermore, the honour and pride of men as gained through the glorification of war is criticised, as Euripides endorses the importance of home and family instead. The cost of war is exemplified in Hecuba's 'unnumbered tears [that] match the numberless dead'. Despite this, the men are still glorified in their labels of 'heroes' and 'incomparable warrior' even after their death. Cassandra proudly proclaims the Trojans 'won the greatest of all glories', presenting the bravery and nobility of the Trojan men, whilst the Greek men are portrayed as immoral and merciless. However, Euripides demonstrates how victory in war is short-lived, and question the motivations behind war as defeat and atrocities occur to everyone as apparent through the Greeks suffering on their journey home. In addition, the description of the city that is now 'a smoking ruin, devastated by the power of the Greek war machine' is evidently Euripides' condemnation of the population as he suggests the soldiers are devoid of human emotion by objectifying them. The juxtaposition of the fates of the Greeks with the Trojans compels the audience to deliberate the notion of triumph as both sides evidently experience loss. Euripides condemns the actions in war and the impulses of men in questioning 'for what reason?' do people start conflict. This further emphasises the association of war with the tendency of men to act on their desires and codes of honour in order to be considered worthy. Through Cassandra's ironic joy song, Euripides reveals his views that 'any sensible man must avoid war, he does his best to avoid it'. Along with

Hecuba's monody in lamenting that her 'old life is gone...and home, destroyed', Euripides denounces the veneration of men in war and simultaneously advocates for the significance of home and family instead.

Conversely, Euripides exposes the futility of devotion to gods and suggests the mortal obsession with the divine to be a factor of the downfall for both the Trojans and Greeks. Through the characterisation of the Gods Poseidon and Athene, gods are portrayed as unreliable as they are ultimately transient allies with changeable loyalties. Poseidon's apathy towards the state of Troy in the prologue reveals his egotism as he believes there is 'no longer anything left worth a god's consideration'. 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 did so, they were destroyed. Moreover, Poseidon's agreeance to her plan before discovering what it is further proves his unreliability as he decides to perform excessive vengeance 'with pleasure'. Hecuba's lamentation captures this as she loses faith in the gods, calling them 'Traitors!' 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. Thus, Euripides is iconoclastic as he 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.

Although first performed in 415 BC during the Peloponnesian war, Euripides conveys significant messages that are still relevant to today's society. Whilst *The Women of Troy* is critical of the actions of men, it simultaneously exposes the pointlessness of faith in deities. The hubristic behaviour of men in their treatment of women, as well as the heroism that men gain due to the glorification of war is censured by Euripides, whilst he reveals the futility of religious worship. Through the perspectives and distress of women, he ultimately advocates for hope and human dignity, demonstrating the importance of family in everyone's lives.