

WOMEN OF TROY

When Astyanax, son of acclaimed Trojan hero Hector, is thrown off a cliff as a means of denying future vengeance and war, it can be seen that in Euripides' play The Women of Troy, war is condemned. The extraordinary anguish of the women, shown regardless of their status, points out the unfairness of war. The pyrrhic nature of and the Greeks victory, wherein they won only as a technicality, are devoid of any true spoils that were not earned by equal losses, demonstrates the ostensible nature of winning at war. The individual characters, such as Menelaus and Helen, display a complete lack of balanced sophrosyne principles in wartime, making them appear ignorant to the true nature of war for their own gain. With these ideas, Euripides contends that war is not only a waste of life and resources, but is also emotionally spiritually and morally detrimental.

The suffering of the women in war as depicted throughout The Women of Troy is shown as cruel and unnecessary, as regardless of whether the women are queens like Hecuba, or are the common populace as displayed by the Chorus, their anguish is equal. The stark, harrowing imagery of Hecuba, the "mother bird" of Troy, lamenting over her "utterly destroyed" nest presents a look at the aftermath of war, granting nobody refuge from its destruction. The Chorus empathise with Hecuba, saying their "suffering is like" hers, showing that the emotional damages of war grant no preference based on status. Furthering this, Andromache labels herself the "perfect wife" but denies the honour of that title as it was ironically the cause of her downfall. She calls her marriage to Hector "unlucky" as it was his celebration of her virtues at war that turned Andromache into "soldier's plunder", and inevitably caused the death of their son Astyanax. This point would have been a brutal insight into the nature of war from Euripides to his contemporary Athenian audience, as their values of the purpose and sanctity of women in the oikos would have poignantly been decried as false. Accompanying this, the actions of the Athenians themselves in wars overseas at the time the play was performed would have imbued The Women of Troy with a bitter sense of verisimilitude; forcing them to reflect on the anguish they have caused to women and children overseas. The sheer magnitude of destruction; the imagery of a city "no longer... worth a God's consideration", is exacerbated by Hecuba's frequent threnodies which detail her "rack of pain" and "ravaged" existence. With these imagery and poetry, Euripides poignantly conveys the nature of war's unsparing savagery.

The apparent cause of the women's pain, the Greeks, while shown to have won through their faux self-proclaimed arete are also shown to have remarkable losses, making the exercise of war seem arbitrary. The "numberless dead" on both sides of the war depict this, accompanied with frequent references to bloody turmoil such as the "purple sea" Talthybius, one of the Greek soldiers reflects on the pyrrhic nature of the Greeks victory by saying that "indecent acts" have been pursued in order to win the war. "We are capable of dealing with one woman if we have to" he tells the women, ironically capitulating the entirety of the war's cause in order to justify to himself their reasoning, despite their losses. The Gods themselves, who in the prologos present impartial to which side to pick, with Poseidon suggesting they are "casual whom (they) love or hate", are shown still to remark upon the ubiquity of suffering on both the "Greek war machine" and Trojans' side, referencing the "numberless dead" at the hands of their capriciousness, with Poseidon directly blaming Athene for having "utterly destroyed" Troy. This egotistical blindness towards mortal suffering is what caused it, as the prayers of the innocent women go "unheard" by the "mysterious" Gods. King of the Greeks Menelaus is shown to be aware of how pathetic and meaningless his reasoning is, suggesting he "didn't only" come for Helen, the "one woman" they were supposedly capable of dealing with. He posits himself as one of the soldiers as well, trying desperately to boost the morale of the soldiers who have not seen their wife and children in ten years, something Talthybius adds. It is clear that Euripides intends not just to show the physical losses of war, but also the emotional, with "decent" Greek men forced to

perform “indecent acts”. The Greeks “oh-so-wise commander” Menelaus is shown to lose nothing, whilst the Greek soldiers remain “slaves... doing great mens’ dirty work. Echoing the losses of the Trojans, the Greeks prove no further advancement by their supposed victory, an idea Euripides uses to entirely condemn war.

The duality of both *nomos* and *physis* in the Greek’s *sophrosyne* value system is shown in extremes, with its unbalancing causing the barbarity of the war. Hecuba says “necessity is logical, and merciless”, alluding to the regimented principles of *nomos*, when in overabundance, causing “those that seem” the noblest to reveal themselves “to be... much less”; ruled by their compulsion to follow orders as is displayed by the Greeks. Contrasting this, the *physis* displayed by those at the helm of the war, who are engaged in adultery and bitterness over lovers, translates into poor leadership and thus deaths. Euripides argues that if it is only extremes that cause the war, then it can never be a fair, balanced procedure. Principles are completely abandoned when Ajax grabs Cassandra at her temple; when Andromache is turned into “loot”, when Astyanax’ body is placed underneath his father’s shield as a makeshift grave, presenting a graphic, vivid image of the effects of the Greek’s lack of *sophrosyne* and this willingness to perform “indecent” acts. The landscape of war gives rise to this, with frequent references to the tipping of scales causing anguish, with Talthybius suggesting Hecuba’s suffering “has unbalanced” her, making her not able to think clearly and consequently blaming Helen when it is in actuality Menelaus who decreed the war must begin and persist. Menelaus attempts to veil how lust has “blinded” him by suggesting his principles are founded in *nomos*, saying that it was due to Paris “thumbing his nose at every known principle of hospitality” that fueled him. To the synchronic audience, however, the knowledge that once Menelaus and Helen returned to Greece he would completely forget revenge undermines this.