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*Gods and Men in Euripides' Trojan Trilogy**

By DAVID KOVACS

FOR A LONG TIME, INTERPRETATION of Euripides' *Troades* had one fixed point of departure. The play was produced in 415 some months after the Melian massacre and in the year of the vote that resulted in the Sicilian Expedition. It seemed clear that the play must be in some way alluding to the massacre, and the consensus was that the Trojans are meant to remind the audience of the Melians and the Greeks of the Athenians. The play was also seen as a warning against grand designs of conquest in Sicily. This, it was maintained, explains the play's gloomy, even nihilistic, tone.[1]

Several years ago this anchor came unstuck. In an article published in 1987, A. M. van Erp Taalman Kip performed calculations that cast serious doubt on the whole thesis that had been the basis for interpretation.[2] Using Thucydides' account of the Melian affair and our knowledge of the workings of Athenian democracy and of the City Dionysia, she showed that there was not nearly enough time between the slaughter of the Melians, early December at the earliest, and the Dionysia in March for Euripides to have conceived, written and rehearsed a new play in reaction to the Melian massacre. Unless we assume that Euripides drew his inspiration from what he *anticipated* would happen to Melos, it follows that any resemblance between the fate of the Trojan women and that of the Melians is coincidental.[3] The

* After I had finished this paper and submitted it to the editors, J. Roisman sent me a copy of his "Contemporary Allusions in Euripides' *Trojan Women*" forthcoming in *SIFC*. I am gratified to note that his paper comes independently, and on different grounds, to some of the same conclusions as mine. It has unfortunately not been possible to cite particulars or to engage this stimulating paper in its details.

1. This equation is most baldly stated by Norwood (1948) 244: "No spectator could doubt that 'Troy' is Melos, 'the Greeks' Athens." See also Murray (1946b), Steiger (1900), and Lattimore's introduction to the play in the Chicago translation. Other critics, though not finding in contemporary history the key to the play, nevertheless see an allusion to contemporary events: Conacher (1967) 136, Lee (1976) ix-x, Barlow (1986) 26-27, von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1906) 287-97. There are exceptions, some critics having declined to invoke history, e.g., Kitto (1961), or explicitly refused to do so, e.g., Steidle (1968) 55 and Gregory (1991) 179 n. 2.

2. Van Erp Taalman Kip (1987).

3. Croally (1994) 232 n. 170 tries to avoid this conclusion in two ways. "[W]e should not forget the possibility that Euripides could respond to events as he was writing, and that he could have changed elements of the play at a late stage." But I find nothing in the play that is striking enough to arrest the audience's attention as an allusion. Why not at least have some of the Trojan adult males massacred, as happened to the Melians? There is no clear indication that any Trojan adult male except Priam died anywhere but on the field of battle. At the very least, if Euripides had been revising in light of Athens' crimes against humanity, he would have deleted the praise of the city and the depreciation of its enemies. "Most important, though, is the fact that the writing of the play is not really the issue: it was a matter for the audience to decide in March whether they saw the play as a response (as *their* response) to Melos." But surely, given the frequency with which the Trojan War figured in tragedy, they would need some encouragement to engage in allegorical interpretation.

allusion to Athens' imperial designs in Sicily had already been challenged in 1925 by L. Parmentier.[4]

Even before van Erp Taalman Kip's article, there were two other pieces of evidence against the Melian allusion, one external and slight, the second internal and weighty. The first is the discussion of the trilogy at Aelian, *Varia Historia* 2.8, one of our two sources for the play's date:

κατὰ τὴν πρώτην καὶ ἐνενηκοστὴν ὀλυμπιάδα, καθ' ἣν ἐνίκα Ἐξαίνετος ὁ Ἀκραγαντῖνος στάδιον, ἀντηγωνίσαντο ἀλλήλοις Ξενοκλῆς καὶ Εὐριπίδης. καὶ πρῶτός γε ἦν Ξενοκλῆς, ὅστις ποτὲ οὗτός ἐστιν, Οἰδίποδι καὶ Λυκάονι καὶ Βάκχαις καὶ Ἀθάμαντι σατυρικῷ. τούτου δεύτερος Εὐριπίδης ἦν Ἀλεξάνδρῳ καὶ Παλαμήδει καὶ Τρῳάσι καὶ Σισύφῳ σατυρικῷ. γελοῖον δὲ (οὐ γάρ;) Ξενοκλέα μὲν νικᾶν, Εὐριπίδην δὲ ἡττᾶσθαι, καὶ ταῦτα τοιούτοις δράμασι. τῶν δύο τοίνυν τὸ ἕτερον· ἢ ἀνόητοι ἦσαν οἱ τῆς ψήφου κύριοι καὶ ἀμαθεῖς καὶ πόρρω κρίσεως ὀρθῆς, ἢ ἐδεκάσθησαν. ἄτοπον δὲ ἑκάτερον καὶ Ἀθηναίων ἥκιστα ἄξιον.

In the ninety-first Olympiad [416/5-413/2], in which the stade-race was won by Exainetos of Acragas, Xenocles and Euripides were in competition with each other. The winner was Xenocles, whoever in the world that is, with *Oedipus, Lycaon, Bacchae,* and the satyr-play *Athamas*. Second to him was Euripides with *Alexandros, Palamedes, Troades,* and the satyr-play *Sisyphus*. A ridiculous result, is it not, for Xenocles to win and Euripides to lose, especially competing with plays of this quality? We must accordingly accept one or the other conclusion, either that those in charge of the vote were silly and ignorant and lacking in correct judgment or that they were bribed. Either supposition is bizarre and unworthy of the Athenians.

Aelian knows the date of the trilogy, but he cannot explain why Euripides was beaten by Xenocles. If he had guessed that the play was perceived as a devastating criticism of Athenian policy, he would not have had recourse to hypotheses such as bribery. Aelian is late, to be sure, but it should be noted that *no* ancient source connects the play with Melos or suggests that it represents a criticism of Athenian policy.

The second piece of evidence is the opening choral ode of *Troades*, lines 197-229, where the Chorus discuss various Greek cities to which they may be sent as slaves and their attitudes towards them. Prominent among those they wish for is Athens, prominent among those they pray may not be their lot is Sparta, the two cities being emphatically contrasted in 208-19.

τὰν κλεινὰν εἴθ' ἔλθοιμεν
Θησέως εὐδαίμονα χώραν.
μὴ γὰρ δὴ δίναν γ' Εὐρώτα
τάν ⟨τ'⟩ ἐχθίσταν θεράπναν Ἑλένας,
ἔνθ' ἀντάσω Μενέλᾳ δούλα,
τῷ τᾶς Τροίας πορθητᾷ.
τὰν Πηνειοῦ σεμνὰν χώραν,
κρηπῖδ' Οὐλύμπου καλλίσταν,
ὄλβῳ βρίθειν φάμαν ἤκουσ'
εὐθαλεῖ τ' εὐκαρπείᾳ·
τάδε δεύτερά μοι μετὰ τὰν ἱερὰν
Θησέως ζαθέαν ἐλθεῖν χώραν.

4. See Parmentier (1925) 13-14.

> O that we might come
> to Theseus' glorious and blessed land!
> Never to the eddies of the Eurotas
> and the hated home of Helen
> where I would be a slave to Menelaus, Troy's sacker!
> I have heard it said
> that the revered land of the Peneus,
> the lovely foundation of Mount Olympus,
> is brimful with blessedness and rich fecundity.
> This would be my second choice to go to
> after Theseus' holy, sacred country.

Such patriotic sentiments, praising Athens and criticizing Sparta, are quite ordinary in the plays of Euripides, and parallels may be found at *Med.* 824-50, *Hcld.* 303-05, 320-26, and 957-58, *Andr.* 435-52 and 595-601, *Su.* 184-92 and 403-08, and *HF* 1322-33. Prima facie the *Troades* parodos is a similar compliment to his audience. There is nothing here to suggest that Athens in the present is excluded, and it is special pleading to say that it refers only to Athens' distant past. An unprejudiced reader must surely note that if Euripides is setting out to rebuke his countrymen for their crimes against humanity, this is an odd way to begin going about it.

If the interpretation of the play as a rebuke and a warning to Euripides' countrymen is a mistake, its consequences are not going to be slight, partial, or isolated. For if the play was not meant by the poet or understood by its first audience as an attack on Athenian policy, an interpretation that insists on emphasizing those aspects of the play that accord with this interpretation is in danger of missing much that is actually in the play. In actual fact it can be shown that determination to lay a great deal of stress on Greek (read Athenian) guilt in destroying the Trojans (read Melians or Sicilians) has driven from consideration something the text of the play says repeatedly and emphatically, namely that it was the gods who destroyed Troy, using the Greeks as their agents. This, of course, does not let the Greeks off the hook, and they must pay for the impieties they commit in the course of carrying out the gods' plan for Troy. But it does mean that outrage at the Greeks' destruction of Troy will not be the only ingredient in the reaction Euripides expected from his first audience. A divine background gives scope for other kinds of emotions, sadness that so often the gods bring low what is mighty, the dim sense that there may be justice of some sort in the inscrutable workings of Zeus, and the sense of awe at the characteristic irony of things, that what erring mortals embraced as great blessing turned out once again to be great bane and what they ran from as their greatest hurt turned out once again to be their only solace. I will argue that *Troades* has a sensibility that is considerably closer to that of Herodotus' Lydian Logos or the end of the *Iliad* than to the play of war protest it is usually imagined to be.

The pathos of this play and the misery of the Trojan women, which they as individuals have done little or nothing to deserve, are unmistakable, and it is this that has made plausible the view of the play as an indictment of the

horror and brutality of war and especially of the Athenian conquest of Melos. Yet there are several things in the play that such a view of it cannot account for and that ought to give us pause. We would feel much more confidence in a view of the play that could make plausible sense of the whole text.

In the first place, comparatively little emphasis is placed by the Trojan women themselves throughout the play on the Greeks as the authors of their suffering. There is Andromache's outburst in line 764, ὦ βάρβαρ' ἐξευρόντες Ἕλληνες κακά, "Greeks, authors of barbarian cruelty," but this is followed immediately by a disquisition (766-73) on Helen as the cause of Trojan (and Greek) misery. Hecuba (1158-66) indicts the Greeks for cowardice and folly. Elsewhere, however, the persons indicted are the gods or Helen or both. The list of such passages is long. In 134-37 Helen is arraigned for the death of Priam and for Hecuba's desolation. In 469-72 Hecuba blames the gods as faithless allies. In 498-99 she mentions as cause "the single marriage of a single woman." In 509-10 she echoes the Solonian "call no man happy until he is dead," a saying which always carries with it the thought that the gods are capable of undoing human success. The first stasimon explicitly blames Athena (561) for the ruse of the horse, and references to her elsewhere in the ode suggest the same. This merely confirms what we know from the prologue (10, 24, 46-47, 72). In 597-98 Andromache cites "the ill-will of the gods when your son [Paris] escaped death, the man who for the sake of a hateful marriage destroyed the citadel of Troy." Hecuba says (612-13) that the gods build up what is nothing and tear down what is highly regarded. In 696 she says that she has been overcome by a wave of misfortune sent by the gods. The Chorus' response to the departure of Astyanax (780-81) is "O unhappy Troy, countless are the losses you have suffered for the sake of one woman and one hateful marriage." Just seconds before that, Andromache says (775-76), "We are being destroyed by the gods and cannot ward off death from this boy." The second stasimon, the third stasimon, and the play's exodos all offer variations on the same two themes. It is reasonable to ask why Helen and the gods are given so much prominence and the Greeks so little.

Consider also the Helen scene and what it does to our play of embittered protest against Greek brutality. The scene introduces a topic, the personal guilt or innocence of Helen, that is far removed from the theme of the brutality of war and the injustice of the Greeks. If anyone's responsibility for fatal choices deserved to be mentioned in a play such as *Troades* is usually thought to be, it ought to be those of Menelaus and the other Greek kings, who chose to make war for a trivial cause. But the Helen scene does not (and could not) raise that question at all.

On the usual view of the play, the Helen scene makes the contrary-to-fact assertion, "If only Helen had been more self-controlled and had chosen more wisely, all this misery could have been avoided." I see no evidence that those who write on this play have really considered what an absurd disproportion

there is between one act of free will by a somewhat frivolous individual, an offense against marital fidelity whose consequences could not possibly have been foreseen, and the root-and-branch destruction of Troy. It is true that if Helen had not run off with Paris, Troy would not have been destroyed. It is also true that if Desdemona had kept track of her handkerchief, Iago could not have convinced Othello that she was unfaithful to him. But although there is said to be an essay on *Othello* which sees as the moral of the play "Young ladies should be careful of their personal possessions," no one would take such a reading of the play seriously. It is only slightly more plausible to suppose that Euripides' point is that the lustful Helen should have controlled herself for fear that she would bring about the destruction of an innocent city half a world away.

The prominence given to Helen not only in the third episode but throughout the play and the prominence of complaints against the gods as the authors of Troy's destruction, two of the most salient facts about the play, come down, I suggest, to the same thing. It is impossible to understand why Helen is given such a large role in this play unless we realize who she is, in particular who her father is. What this play suggests strongly in all its parts is that it was the gods who destroyed Troy, with Helen and the Greeks as their instruments. Let us see whether this view of the play will explain the text as a whole.

Unfortunately, the text of the whole play is not the whole of what is relevant, for, as most scholars agree, *Troades* was intended to form an artistic unity with the two plays that preceded it in its first performance, *Alexandros* and *Palamedes*.[5] We are therefore in roughly the same position with regard to *Troades* as we are with *Seven Against Thebes*: we possess the last play of a trilogy. It has its own artistic unity, to be sure, but we should not be surprised if some features of the extant play come to be fully understood only in light of what can be known or inferred about the plays which preceded it.

I. *Alexandros*

Alexandros tells how Paris, who had been exposed in infancy as the fated destroyer of his city, survived to manhood and was reunited with his family, thus becoming the bane to his city that his mother's dream had foretold he would be.[6] While she was pregnant with Paris, she dreamt that she had given birth to a firebrand. The interpreters declared that the child would cause the destruction of Troy. The order was accordingly given to expose the child,

5. This has been denied by Koniaris (1973), and it is true that the connection is not as close as that between the plays of the *Oresteia*. But the links between the plays, particularly the first and the third, suggest strongly that the audience was meant to think of *Alexandros* when watching *Troades*.

6. The reconstruction of this play has been helped in recent years by the discovery of a papyrus hypothesis: see Coles (1974). Material known earlier is collected in Snell (1937). The reconstruction offered here differs in some respects from previous attempts, e.g., by Scodel (1980). I set forth my reasons in Kovacs (1984). None of these differences has much effect on the themes I am pursuing here.

but the herdsman who was to have done so saved him instead and raised him as his own. When he has grown to manhood (the play begins at this point) the other herdsmen bring him bound before Priam to punish him for behavior that is too proud for his station. (Nature, as so often in Greek myth, triumphs over nurture.) He confutes his accusers and is then allowed to compete with his putative betters in athletic contests, contests Hecuba had instituted in memory of her exposed son. He defeats his brothers, and one of them, Deïphobus, angry at being defeated by a supposed slave, resolves to bring about his death. He persuades his mother Hecuba to urge Priam to put him to death as a dangerously overtalented slave. Cassandra in a moment of prophetic vision recognizes her brother and prophesies the doom of Troy unless he is killed, but no one believes her. After her departure the trial of Paris takes place, he is condemned, flees to an altar and is there recognized owing to the intervention of the herdsman who brought him up. It is a moment of great joy as he is received into the royal house as its long-lost and deeply mourned son, but the audience, who know that Cassandra speaks the truth, realize how deceptive this joy is.

The connections between this play and *Troades* are apparent, for this is an earlier part of the same fatal story. Hecuba's dream was probably related in the prologue of the play (fr. 1 Snell is a Latin translation of what is likely to be the prologue of *Alexandros*; cf. also fr. 10), and its image of Paris as firebrand occurs in our extant play too (line 922). Hecuba's metamorphosis into a hound was foretold by Cassandra in the earlier play (fr. 14 Snell) and is alluded to by Cassandra again at *Tro.* 428-30. There can be no reasonable doubt that the events of *Alexandros* are part of the design of *Troades* as well.

There are tantalizing hints in the fragments of *Alexandros* concerning the role of the gods in that play and hence in *Troades* as well. Paris belongs to the mythical category of curse children like Oedipus, doomed to ruin his family. The curse child in Greek myth is no mere accident—about which the gods happen to know in advance and warn the parents to no avail—but is precisely an instrument of the gods, used to bring about intentional ruin. The prophecy of the ruin the child is to cause is not meant to help the parents avert disaster but is either an empty mockery or helps to bring about the very thing prophesied, as in the case of Oedipus, who would not have killed his father if he had not been exposed and a prophecy given both to his parents and to him. The curse child is an unwitting agent of the gods' justice. In Aeschylus, the coming of Paris with his bride Helen to Troy is described (*Ag.* 744-50) as the arrival of an Erinys, one of the ministers of Zeus' justice.

A fragment (fr. 10 Snell) of the *Alexandros* of Ennius, which we have reason to believe is a fairly close translation of Euripides, describes Helen as "one of the Furiae," i.e., an Erinys. These lines come from the prophecy of Cassandra. If we take the prophecy literally, it suggests that Zeus, who makes use of the Erinyes to do his bidding, wills the destruction of Troy, and that his agents are Helen and her abductor Paris. That Paris survived is due, as Andromache says at *Tro.* 597, to the malice of the gods. But it is not only

the Trojans who are doomed. In our play Cassandra speaks of herself as an Erinys, this time in connection with the death of Agamemnon and the ruin of his house (*Tro.* 457; cf. also 356-60). It seems likely then that the plan of Zeus encompasses ruin for both sides, as it does in the *Oresteia* and in the *Iliad*. In fact, another fragment, assigned with some likelihood to the *Alexandros* (fr. 45 Snell), makes this explicit:

> Ζεὺς γὰρ κακὸν μὲν Τρωσί, πῆμα δ' Ἑλλάδι
> θέλων γενέσθαι ταῦτ' ἐβούλευσεν πατήρ.
>
> Zeus Father, wishing bane on Trojans, grief
> on Greeks, has plotted that these things should happen.

This divine perspective throws new light on large numbers of passages in *Troades*, as we shall see presently.

II. *Palamedes*

ABOUT *PALAMEDES*, THE SECOND play in the trilogy, we know considerably less. The main outline of the story, however, is clear from later accounts that seem to be summarizing Euripides or, at any rate, the myth that was already current before he wrote. The setting is the Greek camp before Troy. Palamedes is the cleverest and most inventive of the Greeks. Among his many accomplishments for the benefit of his countrymen is the art of writing, an art by which, as he says in a fragment probably coming from his speech in defense (fr. 578 N^2), a man may learn clearly of events far away, a dying man may leave the exact account of his wealth to his heirs so that they may check it, and other disputes may be resolved.

But Palamedes' cleverness is the cause of his downfall. It was a ruse of his that forced Odysseus to join the Trojan expedition. Odysseus had pretended to be mad in order to avoid military service and was plowing his field with two unlike animals yoked together and sowing it with salt. Palamedes, who guessed that Odysseus was only feigning madness, put the baby Telemachus in the path of the furrow, and his father swerved aside, thereby showing his sanity.

In the action of the lost play itself, Odysseus decided to kill Palamedes, probably in revenge for this trick and because he was jealous of Palamedes' preeminence in his own field of strategem. By an elaborate ruse he managed to bury gold in Palamedes' tent and then arranged for the interception of a forged letter from Priam to Palamedes offering him as the price of betraying the Greek camp the exact sum of gold Odysseus had buried in his tent. A trial took place in which (presumably) Odysseus spoke for the prosecution. He alleged, in addition to the obvious arguments from the planted evidence, that all arts aim at monetary gain for their practitioners and hence it was not surprising that Palamedes should betray the Greeks for gain (fr. 580 N^2).

Palamedes spoke in his own defense. What arguments he used, apart, perhaps, from reciting his benefactions to the Greeks, we cannot say, but he was

convicted and put to death. His brother Oeax wrote about his fate on the blades of numerous oars, set them adrift on the Aegean, and thus sent a message to their father Nauplius. (Cf. the allusion at Ar. *Thesmo.* 770-71 and the scholia ad loc.) Legend told how Nauplius set false beacons on the coast of Greece and wrecked the Greek ships on their homecoming in order to avenge the death of his son.

To discuss the many possible thematic connections between this play and the other two would be, in view of the meagreness of the remains, highly speculative. But some correspondences are less speculative than others. The general tragic theme of the unknowability of the future and the deceptiveness of appearances could scarcely have failed to be developed in this play. Palamedes, like many another tragic hero, is done to death because of his excellences. (Cf. Paris' words in *Alexandros*, fr. 44 Snell: "Alas, I am to die because of the excellence of my mind, which is the salvation of other men.") It was not only his excellence in general that caused his death by exciting Odysseus' jealousy. It was also his invention of writing that allowed Odysseus to concoct such convincing evidence against him. (The tally between the amount of gold in the letter and under the tent ironically reflects the use of writing in fr. 578.6-7 to allow the heir to check his inheritance.) And the Greeks are convinced by seemingly irrefutable evidence of a charge which is quite false.

Yet though he was destroyed by his own invention, this invention gave him posthumous revenge, for by it Oeax managed to communicate with his and Palamedes' father. (Cf. the remark in fr. 578.4-5, "so that a man at home could be well informed about events far away across the sea.") Just as important as the vengeance is his reputation with posterity. Writing helps Oeax to tell the truth about Palamedes to later generations, including the poet's own, and instead of going down in history as a traitor, he is the sympathetic hero of a tragedy. The consolation of song about oneself is a theme of *Troades*, as we will see later. We may compare the figure of Hippolytus, also brought down by his very virtues as Artemis points out (*Hip.* 1390), and likewise offered vengeance and posthumous fame. Whether the gods had any part—behind the scenes—in the action of this play we cannot say for certain.

III. *Troades*

THE FIRST TWO PLAYS RAISE expectations that are fulfilled in the third. *Alexandros* leads us to expect that Troy will fall and *Palamedes* that the Greek fleet will be wrecked. The fulfilment of the first is shown and the second is clearly adumbrated in *Troades*. The dialogue of Poseidon and Athena makes it clear that the Greek fleet is doomed, and the allusion (90) to the cliffs of Caphereus in Euboea, Palamedes' home, may be there to remind the audience of the false beacons set by Nauplius. The rest of the play shows the aftermath of Troy's destruction. Zeus' plan has been fulfilled.

In considering *Troades* itself we would do well to see it against the background of inherited beliefs and attitudes often described as the Archaic Greek world view.[7] In particular we should consider whether those critics who see in the play something like modern nihilism are not in fact looking at traditional Greek pessimism. The fact that there is undeserved suffering or suffering all out of proportion to desert, and that reality, to put it mildly, notoriously fails to conform itself to our heart's desire—this was not the discovery of some late decadent sophist or disillusioned skeptic but one of the best established traditional themes in Greek literature. In the Greek poetic tradition we hear a great deal about the radical instability of human fortune, the deceptiveness of hope, and the blindness of the human condition, a blindness natural to man but also augmented from time to time by special visitations of ἄτη, divinely sent delusion. Human agents often find themselves mistaking their bane for their blessing and vice versa, and carrying out the purposes of the gods by those very acts by which they hope to thwart them.[8] The only consolation for irretrievable ruin is often the thought of future glory, of living on in the poetic tradition itself.

There are few tragedies that exhibit this constellation of ideas more clearly and insistently than does *Troades*. A speech-by-speech summary of the play reveals much that the nihilist and the antiwar interpretations find useless for their purposes.

Poseidon opens the play with a meditative monologue on the fall of Troy which has just taken place. He describes the desolation of the city he himself helped to build, the pollution of its shrines and altars by Trojan blood and corpses, and names Athena and Hera as the authors of its destruction. He prepares to bid it a last farewell.[9] He points to Hecuba lying prostrate before a Greek tent that contains the noblest of the captive Trojan women as well as Helen herself and enumerates the causes she has for tears: the sacrifice of her daughter Polyxena on Achilles' tomb, a fact of which she is still ignorant, the death of her husband and sons, and Agamemnon's taking of Cassandra, the virgin priestess of Apollo, as his concubine. Three times (10, 24, 47) he names Pallas Athena as the cause of Troy's destruction, and at the last of these the goddess herself appears.

She has come to persuade her uncle Poseidon to join her in destroying the Greeks on their homeward journey. Poseidon is surprised at her apparent change of heart, but she tells him that the Greeks, who sacked Troy by the aid of her might, have insulted her. For the Locrian Ajax forcibly removed

7. The best summary of the archaic Greek view of man's place in the world is Lloyd-Jones (1983b).

8. Gilbert Murray's discussion of this trilogy (1946b) brings out many of these themes. The surprising thing is that Murray regards Euripides' insistence on the harm wrought by apparent goods and the good derived from what is apparently harmful as evidence that Euripides was distancing himself from traditional values. But the tradition insists strongly on this very point. There is no need to point to the Cynic notion of *metacharaxis* or recoining of received values. The Cynics have nothing to do with it. It is all there in Homer, Hesiod, and Herodotus.

9. That the gods leave a city when it is destroyed (26-27) is only to be expected. See Aeschylus, *Sept.* 217-18.

Cassandra from Athena's sanctuary, a grievous affront to the goddess. The other Greeks became implicated in his crime by failing to punish his sacrilege or even to reprimand it. Poseidon agrees to raise a storm, and Athena is to strike with her father's thunderbolt. Poseidon ends their dialogue with a reflection on the folly of winning great successes in war only to be struck down later oneself.[10]

After his departure, Hecuba laments her misfortune and its cause, the coming of Helen to Troy. She calls the Chorus, who are the captured women of Troy, out of their tents to tell them that the Greeks are taking to their ships and that the hour has come when each of them will be allotted to a Greek master. The Chorus dwell on the indignities of slavery and pray to be sent to some good city, such as Athens or one of the cities of Thessaly or Magna Graecia, and not to Sparta to serve Menelaus, the sacker of Troy.

The herald Talthybius arrives to tell them their fates. He first tells Hecuba that Agamemnon has fallen in love with Cassandra and that she is to be his slave-mistress. About Polyxena's sacrifice to the ghost of Achilles he speaks with misleading vagueness and tells Hecuba merely that her daughter will attend Achilles' tomb. Hector's widow, Andromache, is to be the slave of Neoptolemus, the son of the man who killed her husband. Hecuba herself has been allotted to the wily and treacherous Odysseus, a monstrous indignity. The members of the Chorus never learn of their destination, for Talthybius gives orders for Cassandra to be brought out of the tent. She is to be given to her master first, the others later.

Cassandra's entrance is a *coup de theâtre*, for she comes out brandishing a torch. Its gleam is seen within the tent before Cassandra's entrance, and Talthybius' first thought is that the Trojan women are trying to set fire to themselves. Hecuba reassures him: it is merely her daughter's madness. Cassandra soon makes it clear that she is conducting her own marriage procession. She shouts and dances for joy at the prospect of her coming union with Agamemnon. Her mother is convinced that she is mad, and in one sense she is, for the spirit of prophecy is upon her. In another sense, however, she has grounds for her joy, as she explains in two lucid speeches of some length. For although the loss of her virginity to the Greek commander is a terrible thing in itself, her union with Agamemnon, Apollo has told her, will be the cause of greater ruin to Agamemnon and his house than Helen ever brought to Paris and his family, for Agamemnon will die by his wife's hand and his house will be ruined. Troy will thus be avenged.

She demonstrates further that the Greeks are rather to be pitied than envied since they sustained terrible losses fighting for someone else's wife and many of them died in Troy without ever seeing their wives and children again. The Trojans, by contrast, fought bravely in defense of their country and were buried by their kinsmen in their native soil. The coming of the

10. *Tro.* 95-97 are often regarded as the "moral" of the play and are interpreted to mean that the Greeks will be punished for sacking Troy (rather than for sacrilege). But both grammar and dramatic context are against such a reading: see Kovacs (1983) and (1996).

Greeks brought glory to Hector. And even Paris won great fame for himself by marrying Zeus' daughter Helen. The fall of Troy is terrible, but it has its consolations.

In a second speech she alludes to the sorrows and wanderings that await Odysseus before she returns to her main theme and repeats that she will prove to be an Erinys, an agent of Zeus' justice, to Agamemnon and will go victorious to her death. After her departure, Hecuba makes no reference at all to what she said (it is Cassandra's fate never to be believed) but describes the good fortune she had and lost. Call no man happy, she says, until he is dead.

The Chorus sing a stasimon describing the deceptive joy of Troy's last night when the citizens, having taken the wooden horse into their city walls, rejoiced at the departure of the Greeks. At the beginning of this ode the Chorus assume the character of an epic poet as they invoke the Muse, something done nowhere else in tragedy. We see already the shape this story will assume in future poetry, the contrast between appearance and reality, apparent good and hidden ruin, and the Chorus' invocation of the Muses indicates that they have the Muses' authority to comment on the meaning of the events they relate. The story of Troy's fall is one of divinely sent ἄτη (536).[11]

In the next scene Andromache with her child Astyanax is carried by on a wagon, bound for the ship of her new master, Neoptolemus. She and Hecuba engage in a lyric antiphonal lament for the fall of Troy, the death of Hector, and the cruelty of the gods who allowed Paris to escape death and go on to destroy his country. In a spoken interchange which follows this sung lament, they exchange news of their kinsmen's fates. Hecuba tells Andromache about the departure of Cassandra, and Andromache reports the death of Polyxena.

This last report is the occasion for reflection by Andromache. In a long speech she argues that Polyxena's lot is better than her own, for though Polyxena is dead and she herself is alive, Polyxena does not feel the loss of her former happiness as she herself must. Andromache has done her utmost to be a good wife to her husband and has practiced to an exemplary degree all the wifely virtues as the heroic age (and fifth-century Athens) understood them. Now her efforts have reaped ruin as their reward, for her goodness has reached the ears of the Greeks, and Neoptolemus claims her as his prize. (Once more, excellences are the cause of destruction.) She must serve in the house of the man who was her husband's slayer and face daily an impossible choice: either to love Neoptolemus at the cost of disloyalty to Hector or to remain true to Hector's memory but incur thereby the hatred of her new master. Polyxena is thus better off, for Andromache has not even the hope of faring better.

11. Against the view that this ode is an alien body inserted into the play, see the discussion in Neitzel (1967) 42-68.

Hecuba disagrees: there is one hope. If she wins over her new master, Astyanax may grow to manhood, and he and his descendants may once more settle Troy. By an irony of breathtaking cruelty this single hope is immediately dashed, for the herald Talthybius enters with the news—news he is extremely reluctant to bring—that the Greeks have decided to kill Astyanax: the son of their most dangerous foe must not be allowed to live. He is to be hurled from the battlements of Troy. Andromache's reaction to this is surprisingly lucid. The nobility of the boy's father, she says, has proved no benefit to him. Neither Hector nor his kin nor his city can now prevent the fatal leap to death that lies before him. She reproaches the Greeks for their cruelty against an innocent child and then utters an execration against Helen who, she claims, can be no child of Zeus but rather of Ruin, Malice, Murder, and Death. (Andromache here is right about the role of Helen in the fall of Troy, but her conclusion that Zeus cannot be her father is clearly mistaken.) She continues:

> ⟨ἀλλ'⟩ ἄγετε φέρετε ῥίπτετ', εἰ ῥίπτειν δοκεῖ·
> δαίνυσθε τοῦδε σάρκας. ἔκ τε γὰρ θεῶν
> διολλύμεσθα παιδί τ' οὐ δυναίμεθ' ἂν
> θάνατον ἀρῆξαι.
>
> But come, take, hurl him, if that is your will.
> Feast on his flesh. For it is by the gods
> that we are done to death, and from this child
> we cannot ward off doom.

Astyanax is taken away by Talthybius.

After this moving scene, the Chorus sing a stasimon. Like the first stasimon, this ode has little obvious relevance to a play about the cruelty of the Athenians. The Chorus sing about the first expedition against Troy a generation earlier led by Heracles to recover the horses King Laomedon, Priam's father, had cheated him of. The Chorus mean to invoke Troy's glorious past, as they do also in the second pair of stanzas when they speak of Ganymede and Tithonus, Trojans beloved of the gods. But in so doing they touch on the guilt of Troy. Whether or not that guilt is the reason for Troy's fall, it is clear that the gods no longer favor her.[12]

The next scene is no less strange.[13] Menelaus enters in search of Helen, intending, as he says, to kill her as soon as they get back to Argos. He bids his servants go into the tent and forcibly bring her forth. Hecuba, who is standing nearby, sees in this announced action the workings of a mysterious force, the purpose of Zeus acting invisibly in earthly events:

> ὦ γῆς ὄχημα κἀπὶ γῆς ἔχων ἕδραν,
> ὅστις ποτ' εἶ σύ, δυστόπαστος εἰδέναι,
> Ζεύς, εἴτ' ἀνάγκη φύσεος εἴτε νοῦς βροτῶν,

12. On the ode and especially the guilt of Laomedon, see Burnett (1977).
13. Many of the points made about this scene are argued for at greater length by Lloyd (1992) 99-112 and his earlier study of the *Troades* (1984).

προσηυξάμην σε· πάντα γὰρ δι' ἀψόφου
βαίνων κελεύθου κατὰ δίκην τὰ θνήτ' ἄγεις.

Thou that hold'st up the earth yet rest'st upon it
whoe'er thou art, unknown to mortal guessing,
Zeus, whether thou art Fate or mortal mind,
To thee I pray. For on a noiseless path
Thou guidest all mortal things to their just end.

Menelaus is puzzled by her novel prayer, novel in its language, which smacks of philosophical speculation, rather than its sentiment, which is in accordance with traditional notions of Zeus' unobtrusive ("noiseless") intervention in the affairs of men. Hecuba does not bother to explain but merely says she commends Menelaus for his intention.

Helen is brought forth, and when Menelaus tells her he means to kill her, she begs to be heard. Menelaus at first refuses. But then Hecuba intervenes. Her intervention ironically proves the truth of her statements about Zeus, for she fulfills Zeus' purposes in the very act of trying to thwart them. It is only because of Hecuba that Helen is allowed to speak at all. Hecuba had earlier warned Menelaus not to look at Helen for fear that he may fall under the spell of her beauty, but now she herself requests the right to prosecute Helen and thereby provides Menelaus the occasion for a long look at his wife.

Helen speaks first. She points out that she is under a disadvantage in that her accuser will have the last word and she must try to anticipate Hecuba's arguments. She begins first with past events. Hecuba began the trouble, she says, by giving birth to Paris, and the old man (perhaps she means Priam, perhaps the herdsman) ruined both Troy and herself by failing to kill the child, the firebrand of Hecuba's dream. Paris survived to judge the three goddesses. Because Aphrodite won, Greece has not been enslaved by the Trojans as it would have been if Hera or Athena had won.

But Hellas' good fortune has proved to be Helen's ruin, for in order to assure Greece's prosperity she has become a pawn, bought and sold for her beauty. Insults are heaped upon her when she deserves credit for saving Greece. She admits that she does not understand how she could have been so thoughtless as to leave home and country behind, but Aphrodite's power, she says, is great and has even conquered Zeus. And when Paris died, she attempted to escape from Troy but was prevented by force.

Hecuba in her reply begins by casting doubt on the whole story of the three goddesses as discreditable to them. She argues quite plausibly. Why would Hera and Athena be so eager to win a beauty contest? Could Hera be looking for a better husband than the king of gods and men? Or was Pallas now planning to marry after having secured from her father the privilege of perpetual virginity? This story, she says, is a mere dodge to cover the fact of Helen's lust for Paris and her vain desire for barbarian luxury. She paints a picture of Helen in Troy now favoring Menelaus in order to annoy Paris, now disparaging him. And now can she have the hardihood to face her husband dressed in her finery?

Helen's speech in her own defense scarcely provides her with any moral exoneration. She is clearly a frivolous character, used to getting her way because of her beauty. But what she says about the goddesses is true. It is not only *Alexandros* that makes this plain. The prologue to our play shows us the anger of Athena against Troy and mentions the anger of Hera. The only motive given or implied in the play is the Judgment. Hecuba's view of the gods is too clever by half.[14] She misunderstands what the gods have done and also unwittingly contributes to the survival of Helen. For although Menelaus pronounces Helen guilty at the end of the debate, the audience know that the sentence will never be carried out.

The third stasimon reproaches Zeus for betraying the city of Troy, whose people gave him sacrifices, feasts, and golden statues. It is richly evocative of the whole religious life of the Trojans. All this is now gone. Does Zeus care? The Chorus bid farewell to their dead husbands and pray that the thunderbolt may destroy Menelaus' ship as it carries Helen and themselves to Greece.

Then Talthybius enters with the body of Astyanax and the shield of his father Hector. He bears a request to Hecuba from Andromache. Neoptolemus has had to depart quickly because of news from home, and Andromache has gone with him. She therefore asks Hecuba to bury their child, using his father's shield as a makeshift coffin. Talthybius tells them he will help with this task by digging the grave and goes off. Hecuba takes the body and adorns it as best she can, reproaching the Greeks for their cowardice and folly in killing an innocent boy. The epitaph for his tomb, she says, might well read, "This boy the Greeks once put to death—afraid." She apostrophizes the shield of Hector, emblem of his nobility and bravery, and then moralizes on the instability of fortune. That man is a fool who thinks in his prosperity that his joy is secure. For fortune like a crazed man leaps from one place to another and no man always enjoys its favor. The metaphor of leaping is precisely the one used by Poseidon to describe the behavior of Athena (67-68).

After an antiphonal lament, she voices once more the thought that Troy's fall is due to the gods' hatred. But there is a consolation (1242-45).

> εἰ δὲ μὴ θεὸς
> ἔστρεψε τἄνω περιβαλὼν κάτω χθονός,
> ἀφανεῖς ἂν ὄντες οὐκ ἂν ὑμνηθεῖμεν ἂν
> μούσαις ἀοιδὰς δόντες ὑστέρων βροτῶν.
>
> Yet if a god
> had not brought low all that is high and lofty,
> obscure would we be and never furnish song
> to Muses of an after generation.

14. Mastronarde (1986) 201-11 shows that the "optimistic rationalist who is tragically wrong" is a common figure in Euripides. Hecuba belongs in this group, as pointed out by Lloyd (1992) 108.

These are precisely Helen's sentiments in *Iliad* 6.357-58: "Zeus has set an evil destiny on us, so that we hereafter may be a theme in song for men yet to be born." Hecuba, it seems, has finally managed to take in the truth about the world. She sends the corpse off for burial.

The city is being set on fire, and Talthybius appears once more to tell the women that it is time, when they hear the trumpet, to depart for their masters' ships. After more antiphonal lament, amid the crashing of the city's walls, all go off. "Alas, unhappy city. Yet, Hecuba, forward now to the ships of the Achaeans."

If we have read this play at all correctly, it is not a nihilistic play or an angry one. No ancient source makes a connection between this play and the events of Melos, nor is this surprising. There is far too much about the role of the gods in the destruction of Troy for us to make a facile connection between Troy and Melos—unless, that is, we are prepared to make Euripides imply that the Melians too have been destroyed by the gods.

The Greeks in this play are only slightly less pitiable than the Trojans. All alike are involved in a complex web of destruction. The Erinys that visited Troy in the shape of Helen will visit Argos in the shape of Cassandra. Troy has fallen, but the Greeks will not be unscathed either. The only consolation available to the sufferers is not hope, which is so often a delusion, but the assurance that they will not be forgotten by posterity. It is also a paradoxical consolation that their misfortunes are no mere accident but the work of divine malevolence. It is something, at any rate, to go down before the greatest forces the universe can muster. Only slight consolation, then, for the sufferers on stage. The audience for their part receive the bracing reminder that uncertainty about the future is the human condition's most salient feature, and that it is the part of a wise man not to take today's happiness for granted.