

## TROADES

Poseidon:

I am Poseidon from the Aegean Sea  
Where choruses of nymphs whirl gracefully.  
Since Lord Apollo with strict measuring  
Set towers of stone, placing them in a ring.  
Round Ilium, I've loved her, though since then  
She has been prey of troops of Argive men  
And lies in ashes now. An Argive man,  
Epeus, came from Parnassus with a plan  
Devised by Pallas, for he framed of wood  
A horse within which many warriors could        10  
Be hidden, sending it to stand below  
The battlements – an image boding woe.  
And many poets in the days to come  
Will write of this wonder of Ilium  
That hid its troops of men. Groves, every one,  
Now stand forsaken and the temples run  
With blood, and at the altar's base before  
His guardian gods, Priam, alive no more,  
Lies, and Achaean ships load up a pile  
Of solid gold and Phrygian plunder, while        20  
They wait for winds to follow in their wake  
That after ten long years once more they'll take  
Their loved ones in their arms. For I have been  
Vanquished by Zeus's consort and by Queen  
Athena, who have helped to crush that land,  
And so I'm leaving famous Ilium and

My altars. When a town sees desolation,  
 In worship there ensues degeneration.  
 Scamander's banks re-echo with the sound  
 Of captive maidens' screams as they are bound     30  
 By lot to their new masters – Thessaly  
 Takes some, Arcadia others; some will be  
 Slaves of Athenian chiefs, while those not yet  
 Assigned sit in their tents, for they are set  
 Apart for generals. Helen, progeny  
 Of Tyndareus, is there, too, rightfully  
 A captive. That queen of unhappiness,  
 Hecuba, is there in her great distress  
 Before the gates in tears. At Achilles' tomb,  
 Unknown to her, the product of her womb,     40  
 Polyxena, has died most wretchedly.  
 Priam is gone, and all his family.  
 Cassandra, by Apollo left to stay  
 A virgin, in a frenzy of dismay  
 Despite the god's decree of piety  
 By Agamemnon has been forced to be  
 His wife. My Troy, once prosperous, farewell!  
 Farewell, you polished-stone-built citadel!  
 Had Pallas, Zeus's daughter, not decreed  
 Your fall you would be standing yet indeed.     50  
 Athena:  
 May I address the god whom gods revere,  
 To whom my father is so very near  
 In blood?  
 Poseidon:

You may, for there's great potency

In kin, Athena.

Athena:

Your serenity

I praise, lord. I have tidings to convey

To you affecting both of us.

Poseidon:

Are they

From Heaven or some lesser authority?

Athena:

Neither – it touches Troy, whose pastures we

Still tread. I seek your aid.

Poseidon:

What? Is your hate

Now turned aside and do you now relate 60

To Troy now it's in ashes?

Athena:

Hear my theme

Once more! Will you assist me in my scheme?

Poseidon:

Yes, certainly, but I would like to know

If you intend to help your former foe

Or Greece.

Athena:

I wish to bring to Ilium joy

But bitterness to those who conquered Troy

When they return.

Poseidon:

Whence came this fickleness?

In both your love and hate you show excess.

Athena:

My shrine has been insulted.

Poseidon:

What you say

I know. For Ajax dragged Cassandra away

By force.

Athena:

The Greeks did nothing!

Poseidon:

And yet you

Helped to sack Troy!

Athena:

That's why I want us two

To do them harm.

Poseidon:

I'm ready: what's your will?

Athena:

To make their coming home a cursèd ill.

Poseidon:

On land or sea?

Athena:

On sea. Once they set sail

Lord Zeus will send them dreadful rain and hail.

He grants me thunderbolts which he will hurl

At them, while you must make your billows whirl

And roar and fill Euboea's hollow bay

With corpses so that the Achaeans may

80

Learn to respect the gods.

Poseidon:

This shall I do:

The words required for this are very few.

I'll agitate the broad Aegean Sea,

Both Myconos and Delos equally,

Scyros and Lemnos. Corpses I shall strew

Upon the cliffs of Capaneus, while you

Go to Olympus and from Zeus receive

His bolts and then watch out for when they leave.

That man's a fool who sacks men's towns as well

As smashing shrines and tombs, where dead men dwell, 90

For he'll be desolate before he dies. [enter Hecuba]

Hecuba:

O you unhappy one, lift up your eyes!

For this is Troy no more, and you are queen

No longer. So forget what you have been!

Endure your lot and follow fortune's course!

Sai with the present stream and do not force

Your ship against the tide! Your fate you must

Accept with weeping. All is turned to dust –

Your country, children, husband, all are lost!

Our high-blown pride has come with such a cost! 100

What woe must I suppress? Or what declare?

What dirge shall I let forth into the air?

Upon this hard pallet I suffer so.

My head, my sides, my temples! Ah, such woe!

To turn myself from left to right I pine

So that I may relieve my back and spine.

I chant a grim lament unceasingly,

For even this sounds musical to me.

Swift ships that rowed across the deep, dark seas,

Hearing the flute's ill-omened melodies 110

And dulcet pipes, to Troy where – curse the day! –

Your hawsers you secured inside her bay,

The handiwork of the Egyptian nation,

In quest of her who brought humiliation

To Castor, visiting indignity

On the Eurotas – yes, that hateful she,

Helen! She murdered Priam, who begot

Full fifty children. I beweeep my lot,

For she has wrecked my life. That I should sit,

Of every place in Ilium, opposite 120

The tent of Agamemnon! I shall be

Led far away, an ancient refugee,

My hair in sorrow piteously shorn.

The widows of the warriors I mourn.

Poor maidens, luckless brides, come weep with me,

For Troy is but a smouldering tragedy.

I, like a mother-bird who shrieks her pain

Over her fledglings, will begin the strain,

Different, though, from that which once I sent

To the gods as on King Priam's staff I leant 130

As I to Phrygian cadences would beat

The ground in tempo with my dancing feet.

Chorus:

O Hecuba! What are these cries? What do

They mean? I heard your wailing echo through

The building and a pang of horrid fear

Within each captive Trojan's breast I hear.

Hecuba:

My child, the Argive ships –

Chorus:

The oarsman's hand

Is busy? Ah, I'm doomed! What have they planned?

Do they intend to carry me away?

Hecuba:

I do not know but guess this is our day 140

Of doom.

Chorus:

You wretched Trojan maids, come out

And hear your fate! The Argive fleet's about

To leave.

Hecuba:

Men, don't bring out my daughter, dear

Cassandra! Please don't bring my daughter here!

She'll have one more attack, distressing me

In front of all the Argive soldiery.

Like Troy, we're lost, alive or dead.

Chorus:

I fear

And tremble so. I've left my tent to hear

Of you, my queen. Do they intend to take

My wretched life, or do the sailors make 150

Ready to ply the oars?

Hecuba:

Child, at the crack

Of dawn I woke in terror – wits I lack.

Chorus:

Is there an Argive herald for us here?

Whose slave am I to be?

Hecuba:

The time draws near

That lots be drawn.

Chorus:

A soldier will it be

From Argos or a Phthian one, maybe?

Or else some islander? I'm sick with dread.

Hecuba:

A withered soul, I might as well be dead.

Whom will I serve? And where? Assigned to what?

Will waiting on the guest-friends be my lot? 160

A children's nurse? What, I, but recently

The honoured queen of Troy?

Chorus:

What threnody

Can aid your pain? – Or mine? – Now I'll not send

My shuttle up and down the loom. – Attend!

This is the last time I can cast my eye

On my dead sons. – Worse will come by and by. –

An Argive's cursèd bed! – A fate that's worse

Than death. – Upon such fate I cast my curse. –

Or carrying water from a sacred spring! –

But maybe I'll dwell in the welcoming

Arms of blest Athens. – O gods, hear my plea

That I will never be compelled to be

The underling of that foul murderess



And Menelaus, causer of distress  
In vanished Troy. That land by Peneus fed  
Beneath Olympus, as I've heard it said,  
Is such a holy, beauteous granary  
Of wealth that teems in splendid luxury –  
Next to Athens, I'd wish to settle there.  
They tell me, too, Hephaestus' dwelling where      180  
Mt. Etna, greatest hill in Sicily,  
Looms high above, gives crowns for bravery.  
Or may I find a home upon that strand  
That lies near the Ionian Sea, a land  
Fed by the fair Crathis whose auburn hair  
She dyes, and with her holy streamlets there  
She cheers the homes of heroes. But I see  
A herald from the Argive soldiery:  
With fresh news he is hastening this way.  
What is his charge? What does he have to say?      190

For we're their slaves. [enter Talthybius]

Talthybius:

O Hecuba, you know

Me from my many journeys to and fro  
Between the armies, and before that, too.  
I have a fresh report to give to you.

Hecuba:

What I have dreaded for so long is here,  
Kind friends, at last.

Talthybius:

If what you had to fear

Is news about your fate, then you're correct.

Hecuba:

O gods! What city am I to expect?

Phthia or Thebes or maybe Thessaly?

Talthybius:

You were not all marked simultaneously - 200

Each warrior took his prize in turn.

Hecuba:

Then say

To whom we are assigned. Is this a day

Of joy for some at least?

Talthybius:

Ask separately,

Not all at once.

Hecuba:

Well then, report to me

Who gets my poor Cassandra.

Talthybius:

Our great king

Has chosen her.

Hecuba:

To be the underling

Of Clytaemnestra? What a wretched life!

Talthybius:

No, she will share his bed, screened from his wife.

Hecuba:

What's that you say? Apollo's priestess? She

To whom he has bestowed virginity? 210

Talthybius:

Love for the frenzied maid has pierced his heart.

Hecuba:

Throw down your sacred keys, child! Tear apart

Your holy wreaths!

Talthybius:

Is she not honoured so?

Hecuba:

She whom you took some little while ago,

My child – what have you done to her?

Talthybius:

You mean

Polyxena?

Hecuba:

Yes. To whom has she been

Assigned?

Talthybius:

Achilles' tomb is now her task –

She'll be its keeper.

Hecuba:

O ye gods, I ask

What sort of ordinance is this, my friend.

That a queen's daughter should be forced to tend 220

A dead man's grave!

Talthybius:

Your daughter is content –

All's well with her.

Hecuba:

But what on earth is meant

By that? Is she alive?

Talthybius:

She's been set free

From troubles.

Hecuba:

And the sad Andromache,

The wife of valiant Hector? Where is she

To be assigned?

Talthybius:

Achilles' progeny

Chose her.

Hecuba.

And as for me, whose hair is grey

With age, who need a staff to be my stay,

Whose servant will I be?

Talthybius:

You're due to go

To Ithaca to serve Odysseus.

Hecuba:

No!

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Now beat against your close-shorn head and tear

Your cheeks! For I am trapped within the snare

Of a foe I hate, who deals in treachery,

In double-dealing and chicanery:

Though once a friend, he turned against us all,

Oh, weep for me, you women, as I fall

Into a dreadful fate!

Chorus:

Ah, now you know,

Mistress, but as for me, where will I go?

And who is master of my destiny?

Talthybius:

Go, servants, bring Cassandra here to be 240

Given to Agamemnon! Then convey

The captives to the other chiefs as they

Have been assigned! But look – what is this flare

Of brands within? What are they doing there?

Burning the rooms since they must leave this land?

Or do they long for death and use a brand

Upon themselves? All mortals who are free

Are loath to don the yoke of slavery.

Open the door in case I take the blame

For what these women want but, all the same, 250

The Greeks would hate!

Hecuba:

There isn't anything

They're burning, but Cassandra, scampering

Madly, is coming here.

Cassandra:

Ah, bring the light

And show its flame, for I conduct the rite

For him I serve, and make the altar glow!

Hymen, the groom is blest, as I also,

For I am soon to wed a mighty king

In Argos. Mother, you are sorrowing

For Troy and Father's death, but with its rays  
I cause this torch to show its light and blaze,        260

As custom is. So now, with nimble feet,  
Start off the dance with joy as though to greet  
My father in his happy days gone by.

The dance is sacred, and you, Phoebus, I  
Minister at your shrine among the trees  
Of bay. God of the blest solemnities  
Of marriage, hail! Laugh, Mother, dance with me,  
And circle to the rhythm happily.

Salute the bride with hymns and joyful cries.  
You, Phrygian maids, dressed in delightful guise,    270  
Sing of the marriage with the husband I  
Have been ordained to marry by and by.

Chorus:

Mistress, restrain the frantic maiden lest  
She rushes to the Greeks.

Hecuba:

Hephaestus, blest

With lighting bridegrooms' bridal torches, see  
The flame you kindle here is totally  
Beyond my worse prospects. I little thought  
That you to such a marriage would be brought –  
In Argos, too! Give me the torch! Its light,  
In your wild course, you do not hold upright.        280

You're frenzied still. My friends, as she is wed  
Do not sing madrigals – shed tears instead.

Take in the torches!

Cassandra:

Oh, give me a crown  
To wreath about my tresses! Do not frown  
At this most royal match! If you should find  
I am unwilling, push me from behind!  
If Phoebus is a prophet, he will see  
That that Achaean king shall find in me  
A woman more vexatious even than  
Helen, for I will slay him – that’s my plan – 290  
And lay waste to his home in punishment  
Because so many of my kin he sent  
To Hades. But – enough. I will ignore  
The axe which will slay me – though there’ll be more  
Who’ll die. Nor will I mention the affray  
My marriage will soon bring about and slay  
A mother; I’ll dismiss the overthrow  
Of Atreus’ family, but I will show  
Troy happier than the Argive troops, for they  
Lost many men through hunting for their prey – 300  
Helen! Then the “wise” leader of the host –  
In trying to kill what he hated most  
He killed whom he loved best, surrendering,  
Just for a woman, to his brother-king –  
And Helen wasn’t taken forcibly! –  
The joy he had from his own progeny  
In Argos. Since they reached Scamander’s strand,  
Their doom began, and not for loss of land  
Or borders, and the victims of the war  
Would never see their children anymore, 310  
Unshrouded by their wives, for here they lie.

Back home in Argos, too, their widows die,  
While parents must die childless, for they bred  
Them all in vain, none left to pay the dead  
Tribute of blood. They can make ample claim  
To praise like this, but I'll pass by their shame.  
Our men were dying, first for Troy and then  
To win great fame. Whoever of our men  
Were slain in battle had friends to convey  
Their bodies home and in their own land lay        320  
Them all to rest, their rites befittingly  
Paid with pious responsibility.  
Those who could circumvent the sword and stay  
Alive, would live thereafter day by day  
With wife and children by them, such a joy  
As the Achaeans left behind in Troy.  
As for Lord Hector and his griefs, he's gone,  
And yet his reputation will live on,  
For he was nonpareil in bravery..  
But if the Argives had not crossed the sea,        330  
His virtue would have been unseen instead  
Of being propagated. Paris wed  
The child of Zeus – had he not acted thus  
The union that he had made with us  
Would be forgotten. Wise men ought to flee  
From making war, but if a man should be  
Involved in one, a noble death will crown  
His town with fame, the coward sinking down  
In shame. Do not feel pity for my bed,  
Mother, or Troy, for once that I am wed,        340



I'll slay your enemies.

Chorus:

How charmingly

You smile at fate, chanting a melody,

Though it may prove you wrong.

Talthybius:

If Phoebus had

Not turned your wits around and made you mad,

I'd have severely punished you for these

Predictions, these foreboding prophecies.

The so-called wise, though, are no better than

Those who are held as nothing. That great man,

The king of Greece, has yielded to a love

For this mad maid, appraising her above 350

All others. Well, although I am but poor,

I'd never wed that woman, that's for sure.

You're crazy, so I'll cast your adoration

For Troy and curses for the Grecian nation

Into the winds. To the ships, then, follow me

To grace the wedding with solemnity.

Hecuba, follow, for Laertes' son

Will call for you to see your chores are done.

You'll serve a prudent woman, so they say.

Cassandra:

A clever fellow, that! But why do they 360

Call heralds "heralds"? Ah, we all detest

Servants of kings and towns. Do you attest

My mother goes to Ithaca? Let's hear

Apollo's words, for they are very clear

To me, for they declare that she will die  
In Troy. For the rest of what you've spoken I  
Will not reproach you. Poor Odysseus! For  
He's not aware of what there is in store  
For him – the suffering time will unfold  
Shall make both mine and Troy's look like pure gold. 370  
After ten years he'll see another ten  
Before he gets to see his home again.  
His welcome, too, will cause a lot of pain –  
He'll be delayed upon the foaming main  
By foul Charybdis as he passes through  
Her rocky gorge, that mountain-dweller, too,  
The Cyclops and Ligurian Circe, she  
Who turns men into swine; he on the sea  
Will be shipwrecked; and he'll long to consume  
The lotus-fruit; and he'll risk mortal doom 380  
When he accosts the Sun's most sacred herds,  
Which will in days to come speak human words,  
A bitter sound. In brief, then he'll go down  
To Hades and, although he will not drown,  
In Ithaca he'll find so much more woe.  
And yet enough of that! Why should I go  
To greater lengths? Lead on, that I might wed  
King Agamemnon, causing him to tread  
The halls of Hades! You were base since birth  
And basely you'll be buried in the earth 390  
At dead of night, a man so very proud  
To be the leader of that Argive crowd.  
I in that wintry chasm will be cast,

Borne by those thrashing waves as I whirl past  
Your grave. Wild beasts will feed on me. Yes, I,  
Apollo's priestess! Dearest wreaths, goodbye!  
Goodbye, you mystic symbols! I resign  
Your feasts on which I happily would dine.  
I fling you off while I'm a virgin still,  
And to the rushing winds I therefore will 400  
Waft them to you, my prince of prophecy!  
Where is that general's ship? Where must I be  
To board it? Don't watch for a favouring breeze,  
For you will have the three Eumenides  
On board! Mother, farewell! Dear country, dry  
Your tears. My brothers and my father lie  
Beneath the earth and soon will welcome me,  
Whose advent will be crowned by victory  
Among the dead when I've destroyed the house  
Of Atreus.

Chorus:

Guardians of King Priam's spouse, 410  
Old Hecuba, look! She's about to fall  
Without a word. Grab her, you whom I call  
Worthless! Ah, lift her up!

Hecuba:

No, let me be!  
Let me lie here! Unasked-for sympathy  
Isn't sympathy at all. The pains that I  
Have borne and bear and will bear by and by  
Deserve this lowly posture. Those I call  
Upon won't succour me, but when we fall

On evil days, then we should send our plea  
 To Heaven. My bygone felicity 420  
 I'll tell to you in order that you may  
 Observe the dreadful state I'm in today.  
 Royal myself, I wed the king of Troy  
 And I gave birth to many a gallant boy.  
 Nor were they merely ciphers – no, for they  
 Were Phrygia's greatest treasures, non-pareil,  
 And of such men no mother anywhere  
 Could boast – all slain by Greeks! I cut my hair  
 Where they're interred; and in the palace I  
 Saw their own father, Priam, cruelly die, 430  
 Butchered; I saw our city razed as well.  
 The daughters, too, whom I raised up to swell  
 Their husbands' pride and joy have now been wed  
 To strangers from the land of Greece instead.  
 I cannot hope to see them now or be  
 Seen by them. And, to crown my misery,  
 I'll be an aged slave on Grecian soil,  
 Where in the evening of my life the toil  
 Will least befit me – I, the woman who  
 Bore Hector – for the things I'll have to do 440  
 Will be to guard and lock the gates or bake  
 Their bread and on the filthy ground to make  
 My bed, with tattered rags about my frame,  
 Bringing to one once prosperous great shame.  
 All this for just one woman I must bear.  
 My child Cassandra, you who have a share  
 In Heaven's frenzy, what dread misery

Will bring the loss of your virginity!  
Polyxena, my child of sorrow, where  
Are you? None of my children will be there                    450  
To aid a wretched mother. Why, then, lift  
Me up? For we're divested of the gift  
Of hope. Guide me, who ambled formerly  
Upon the streets of Troy so daintily,  
Though now a slave, and let me take my rest  
Upon the ground beside some rocky crest  
Whence, having wept, I may leap to my death.  
Don't rate the rich, until their final breath,  
As happy!  
Chorus;

                  Sing out, Muse, the tragic tale  
Of Troy in strains not heard of yet and wail!                    460  
For I'll uplift a piteous chant and tell  
How I received my present fate and fell  
Captive to Greece, for the Achaeans brought  
A massive horse of mountain-pinewood wrought  
To Troy, whose rumbling clangour penetrated  
The heavens high above, whose cheeks were plated  
With gold, whose guts were filled with soldiery.  
Upon the citadel the citizenry  
Cried out, "Rise up! Our toil's behind us now.  
Take up this sacred image here and vow                    470  
It to Athena!" Young and old came out  
And took that snare with many a joyful shout.  
They hastened to the gates that they might take  
The image to Athena's shrine and make

A present of that thing which held, in fact,  
An Argive band of warriors, an act  
That ruined us. They thought it would have been  
A welcome present for the virgin queen  
Of deathless steeds. They dragged the thing as though  
It were a ship's black hull, eager to go 480  
To Athena's shrine in order that it might  
Drink Ilium's blood, but on came pitchy night  
As they made merry in their labouring,  
And now the Libyan flute was echoing  
And songs were heard and maidens beat the ground  
With delicate feet and lifted up the sound  
With happiness. And in the halls the blaze  
Of torchlight penetrated with its rays  
The flickering shadows, causing those who slept  
To wake, and all around the house I kept 490  
On singing. I was dancing as I sang  
To Zeus's progeny, but then there rang  
Along the town, around the homes, a shriek  
Of death that caused the infants all to seek  
Their mothers' skirts in terror. Then and there  
The band of Argives leapt out from their lair –  
Athena's deadly work. The altars ran  
With Phrygian blood, and many a young man  
Beheaded lay, a famed crown for our foe,  
The nurse of youth, to us a bitter woe. 500  
Hecuba, do you see Andromache  
Upon a foreign chariot? Look, she  
Holds to her throbbing breast her little lad,

Astyanax, child of Hector. Tell me, sad  
Andromache, where are they taking you,  
With Hector's arms and Phrygian booty, too?  
Phthia's shrines will by Neoptolemus  
Be decked with them.

Andromache:

The Greeks are taking us  
Away. Why do you chant a strain of woe  
That's mine to sing? For surely you must know      510  
Our day is past to mourn this tragedy.

Hecuba:

No joy! No Troy!

Andromache:

I feel your misery.

Hecuba:

I mourn my gallant sons. How piteous  
Our fate is!

Andromache:

Troy...

Hecuba:

Now smoulders over us.

Andromache:

Come to me, husband!

Hecuba:

Ah, you hapless wife!

He's my dead son.

Andromache:

Defender of my life!

Hecuba:

My eldest son, who caused the Argives grief,

Take me to Hades' mansion, death's relief!

Andromache:

These woes –

Hecuba:

Unhappy one, they're hard to bear.

Andromache;

Our city's gone –

Hecuba:

Care added to more care! 520

Andromache:

Through angry Heaven's will, ever since your son

Paris avoided death, who was the one

Whose hated wife brought down our citadel.

The gory corpses of the slain there dwell,

Beside Athena's shrine, the vultures' prey,

And finally has Troy come to her day

Of slavery.

Hecuba:

Unhappy Troy!

Andromache:

I grieve

For you now I'm about to take my leave

Of you.

Hecuba:

You see your final fate is nigh.

Andromache:

And you, my house, where I gave birth, goodbye! 530

Hecuba:



Goodbye, my children! Ah, such grief, such woe!

Andromache:

What streams of cruel tears endlessly flow

In both our houses! For only the dead

Forget their grief and no tears do they shed.

Chorus:

For those who suffer it is sweet relief

To weep and chant the dirge that tells of grief.

Andromache:

Do you see this, then, mother of the man

Who slew so many Greeks?

Hecuba:

It's Heaven's plan,

I know, to praise ciphers and pulverize

Those they most treasure.

Andromache:

As a warrior's prize,      540I'

I'm being abducted with my progeny,

A slave – a harsh blow to nobility.

Hecuba:

Grim fate! Cassandra, too, to my dismay

Was only now cruelly snatched away.

Andromache:

A second Ajax has appeared to do

You wrong, it seems. But other evils you

Must bear.

Hecuba:

Yes, they're beyond all measuring,

As evil vies with evil, struggling

To be the greatest.

Andromache:

And your other daughter,

Polyxena, lies dead, victim of slaughter 550

To grace Achilles' tomb.

Hecuba:

Such pain, such woe!

Talthybius once told me long ago

A riddle that concerned her, though he spoke

Obscurely.

Andromache:

On my way I with my cloak

Covered her corpse and beat upon my breast.

Hecuba:

Unholy sacrifice! How I'm distressed

By your outrageous death!

Andromache:

And yet her death

Was happier than the life that gives me breath.

Hecuba:

And yet, my child, while death's the terminus

Of life, yet life itself still offers us 560

Some hope.

Andromache:

You've given birth, so lend an ear

To what I'm urging so that I may cheer

My drooping spirit, for it must be said

That never to be born and to be dead

Are both the same. To live in misery

Is worse than death – there's no despondency  
 In death. When he who's lived in happy days  
 Then finds his fate reversed, his spirit strays  
 From scenes of his bygone felicity.  
 Your child is lying dead now, as though she           570  
 Had never lived, and little does she know  
 Of her calamity, whereas, although,  
 Seeking a fair position, I have won  
 A higher lot than almost anyone,  
 I missed my luck in life. In the abode  
 Where I was brought as Hector's bride, I showed  
 Myself as virtuous in every way,  
 As people would expect. I didn't stray  
 Outdoors because there would be gossiping  
 Abroad against a woman venturing                   580  
 Outside the house. And I would not agree  
 To let those gossips in that I might be  
 Informed by them about the world outside.  
 I listened to my own mind, satisfied  
 With that. A silent tongue and modest eye  
 I kept before my husband – I could spy  
 When I might rule him and where I should yield.  
 All this has to the Argives been revealed,  
 Proving my overthrow. Achilles' son,  
 Once I was captured by the army, won               590  
 Me for his wife – thus I would then reside  
 Where murderers dwelt. And if I set aside  
 My love for Hector and happily wed  
 That man, I would be traitor to the dead,

While if I hate him, then that would invite  
His anger. Yet they say one single night  
Removes a wife's dislike. I truly hate  
A woman who, losing her former mate,  
Marries and loves another man instead.  
Even a horse before the yoke won't tread 600  
Happily once his partner is no more;  
And animals have neither reason nor  
Speech, inferior to humanity.  
Dear Hector, blessed with such sagacity,  
Nobility, wealth, bravery and might,  
You chose as bride a maiden at the height  
Of virtue. Now you're dead, and soon the sea  
Will carry me to Greece and slavery.  
Does not Polyxena, for whom you cry,  
Though she is dead, suffer less woe than I? 610  
All hope, the last resource that we possess,  
I lack, and dreams of future happiness  
I can't expect, although the very thought  
Is wonderful.

Chorus:

With sadness.

I've never set my foot, though from hearsay  
And pictures I have seen such things. It's said  
That when a moderate tempest looms ahead,      620  
The mariners, in their anxiety,

To save themselves labour exhaustingly –  
One stands beside the tiller, while the sails  
Another manages, a third man bales;  
But if the storm is violent, threatening  
To overwhelm them, to the billowing  
Waves they commit themselves. But even so  
I, who am overcome with endless woe,  
Say nothing, for the surge of misery  
Sent by the gods is much too strong for me.           630

Dear child, cease speaking of your husband's fate –  
Your tears can't save him now, for it's too late.  
Honour your present husband. As a lure  
To win him over, offer him your pure  
And lovely nature – that way you will cheer  
Your friends and your own self, and you shall rear  
My grandson as an aid to Troy, and so  
Will our posterity cause her to grow  
And be established. But our talk must veer  
A different way. Who is this coming here,           640  
Thia Argive herald? Has he something new  
That he has come to tell us?

Talthybius:

Lady, you

Who wed Hector, the bravest of the best  
In all the Trojan host, do not detect  
Me for the news that I'm loath to relate.  
The Greeks demand –

Hecuba:

Your words prognosticate

Evil.

Talthybius:

Your son must... Oh, how can I tell

My news?

Andromache:

Ah, surely he'll not have to dwell

Away from me?

Talthybius:

He'll have no master.

Andromache:

Oh!

Will he be left in Troy?

Talthybius:

I do not know 650

How to say this!

Andromache:

For the kindheartedness

You show to me I give my thanks – unless

You have *good* news to tell.

Talthybius:

Your son they'll slay –

Those are the hateful words I had to say.

Andromache:

Oh no! These tidings that you bring to me

Are worse than my forced marriage.

Talthybius:

The decree

Was spoken by Odysseus, and his word

Prevails.

Andromache:

The worst words I have ever heard!

Talthybius:

So brave a father's son they should not rear,

He said.

Andromache:

What would he say if he should hear 660

Such news about *his* son?

Talthybius:

They plan to throw

Him from Troy's battlements. Let it be so

And you will show your wisdom. Do not cling

To him but bravely bear your sorrowing;

Don't think you're strong in your fragility,

For nowhere will you find a remedy.

Now gone are Hector and your Ilium,

And so within our power you have come,

And I can match one woman; I'd not see

You bent on strife, hate or ignominy 670

Or rashly cursing Greeks. Say anything

To rile them and this child to whom you cling

Won't be interred or pitied. Hold your peace

And with composure bear your fate and Greece

Will bury him with more goodwill.

Andromache:

My dear,

My sweet and priceless darling boy, I fear

The foe demands your death, and you must be

Snatched from your mother in her misery.

Your father's grandeur's killing you, my boy,  
Though grandeur rescues others. Ah, no joy                    680  
Have you in his prowess. I hoped my son  
Would live to govern the dominion  
Of fruitful Asia. Dearest, do you cry?  
Are you aware of what will happen? Why  
Do you clutch me and to my garment cling,  
Nestling like a chick beneath my wing?  
Hector won't rise up with his famous spear  
To save you, and no kinsman will appear,  
No Phrygian host. You, from a dizzy height,  
Will be hurled down in a dread, headlong flight,    690  
Unpitied. Ah, I wish to clasp my boy  
Within my arms, your mother's tender joy!  
To breathe your fragrant breath! It was in vain  
I suckled you: for nothing did I strain  
And toil. Now kiss your mother! – it will be  
The last time that you snuggle close to me,  
Who bore you, so about my neck entwine  
Your little arms and put your lips to mine!  
You Greeks, this cunning cruelty is new.  
Why slay a child who never injured you?                    700  
Helen, you are no child of Zeus – I say  
That you have many fathers, an array  
Of demon, Envy, Murder, Death – indeed  
Of every horror that the earth may breed.  
That you're not born of Zeus I will attest  
Boldly, for you are she we all detest –  
Damnation take you! Your fair eyes have brought



Shame to the fields of glorious Troy and wrought  
Ruin upon us. Take the child and bear  
Him hence, if that's your will, and though the air 710  
Cast him and feed upon him! All must die –  
The deadly stroke upon my darling I  
Cannot avert. Hide me! Cast me below  
The vessel's deck where I may nurse my woe!  
Hah, what a splendid wedding, now my boy  
Is gone, must I look forward to!

Chorus:

Ah, Troy!

The deaths we see continue endlessly  
Because of Helen's infidelity.

Talthybius:

Child, leave your mother's fond embrace and climb  
Up to the towers' peaks, for it is time 720  
For you to die! Take him away! The man  
To do this herald's work is he who can  
Be pitiless, and that man isn't me. [exit Talthybius, Andromache and Astyanax]

Hecuba:

Grandson, my hapless Hector's progeny,  
An unjust fate has taken you away  
From us. O luckless little one, how may  
I help? The only things that I can do  
Are strike my head and beat my breast for you,  
My only gift. My city merits grief:  
We're full of sorrow, knowing no relief. 730

Chorus:

O king of Salamis, the feeding-spot

Of bees, O Telamon, whose island plot  
Lies near the holy hills where long ago  
Athena caused the olive-branch to grow  
Before men's eyes, a crown to canonize  
The heavenly gods and to immortalize  
Athens. In knightly brotherhood he came  
With Heracles to put Troy to the flame  
In days gone by. He came here with the best  
Of Greece's chosen warriors, distressed 740  
About the promised steeds he'd been denied.  
On Simois his vessel's ropes he tied.  
A splendid archer, in his hands a bow  
He took and then he laid Laomedon low.  
Apollo's walls he wasted as he sacked  
The city of Troy. Thus Troy was twice attacked.  
In vain the Phrygian boy, pacing amid  
The chalices with gentle footsteps, did  
A lovely service as he filled the cup  
Of Zeus, for all of Troy was eaten up 750  
With fire. Our cries re-echo on the shore:  
As birds bewail their young, we sorrow for  
Our husbands, mothers, children, and the dew-  
Fed springs where you once bathed, the course where you  
Have trained are now no more, and so you grace  
The throne of Zeus, and on your fair young face  
The sweetest, calmest smile was seen, while we  
Were being destroyed by Grecian weaponry.  
Love, once seen in the halls of Dardanus,  
While you were here, you elevated us 760

In Troy, allying us with deities.

I won't reproach Zeus's iniquities,

For white-winged Dawn, dear to humanity,

Then looked upon our country balefully

And watched our ruin, even though she'd wed

Tithonus and obtained a bridal bed,

A husband whom she snatched and took away

In a starry chariot! A joyful day,

Great source of hope! But now that love is gone. [enter Menelaus]

Menelaus:

Hail, radiant sun whom I now look upon! 770

Let me take back my wife by your clear light!

I and my army toiled hard in the fight.

I came to Troy not, as people surmise,

For a woman's sake but that I might chastise

Him who betrayed my hospitality

And took my rightful wife away from me.

But he's already suffered punishment,

By the gods' will, through Troy's beleaguerment.

I've come to take that wretched bitch away –

For I find it impossible to say 780

"My wife" although she once was mine – for she

With other women shares captivity

Within these tents. The very men who tried

To take her with the spear waere on my side,

Allowing me to slay her or to spare

Her life, if I preferred, and then to bear

Her back to Argos. I don't plan to slay

Her here in Troy but rather to convey

Her back, *then* dispatch her as recompense

To friends of those who died here. Servants, hence! 790

Enter the tent and drag her by the hair

To me, the murderous bitch! When winds are fair,

I'll take her back to Greece.

Hecuba: O Zeus, you who

Are pillar of the earth, whoever you

May be, a natural necessity,

Perhaps, or mankind's rationality,

To you I pray, for you, although you tread

A noiseless path, with all mankind you're led

By justice.

Menelaus:

How outlandishly you pray!

Hecuba:

I thank you, Menelaus, if you'll slay 800

Your wife. You dare not look at her in case

You're filled with longing for her lovely face.

For she's a siren and she overthrows

Men's towns and burns their houses – oh, yes, those

Spells of hers can do much. I know her – you

Know her as well as do her victims, too. [enter Helen]

Helen:

Menelaus, this first meeting could fill me

With panic, for your servants cruelly

Have dragged me here. Yes, yes, I know the hate

You feel for me, but would you please relate 810

The fate that I must face?

Menelaus:

Quite simply, then,  
With one consent the troops of Argive men,  
Whom you have wronged, resolved with one decree  
That I should kill you.

Helen:

If I am to be  
Slaughtered, may I state that this punishment  
Is unjust?

Menelaus:

I don't want an argument –  
I'm here to slay you.

Hecuba:

Sir, let her reply –  
For want of that you should not let her die.  
However, hear my answer to her plea,  
For you are ignorant of the villainy 820  
She wrought in Troy, and when this is reviewed  
In full, it will be clear she won't elude  
Her death.

Menelaus:

This will take time, but go ahead  
And let her speak – because of what *you* said  
And not for her own sake.

Helen:

You'll not, maybe,  
Reply because I'm thought an enemy,  
Whether the words I say are good or ill.  
Your charges, nonetheless, and mine I will  
Set one against the other, and then I

To all your accusations will reply. 830

First, Hecuba gave birth to Paris – she

Was thus to blame for all this misery.

Then Priam caused the overthrow of Troy

Because he did not slay his little boy,

Who came to Hecuba as a firebrand

In dreams when she was pregnant. Understand

That Paris then was born, and it was he

Who in a beauty contest judged the three

Goddesses. Queen Athena bribed him, though,

By promising that he would bring much woe 840

To Greece in her defeat while at the head

Of Trojan troops, and then that he would spread

His rule through Asia, moving far away

To Europe's utmost bounds and there hold sway.

But Cypris spoke of my voluptuousness

And said that, if he granted her success,

I would be his. She thus found victory.

See how my marriage has convincingly

Aided my country. You were not brought low

By foreign troops. Greece profited from my woe: 850

Sold for my beauty, now I am to blame

For that which should have brought to me great fame,

A crown upon my head. But you will say

I'm mute about the day I slipped away.

With mighty Cypris Paris came – or call

Him Alexander! – bringing the downfall

Of Troy. You brought him to our palace, where

You left him while you sailed to Crete. Well, there

I'll end all that! For all that followed I  
Must question my own self and not you – why      860  
Did I pursue that stranger and betray  
My country and my home and sail away?  
Punish the goddess, then! Are you more strong  
Than Zeus, huh? Though he's mighty when among  
The other gods, yet he's her slave: maybe  
I will be pardoned, then! Yet against me  
You may dispute that once Paris was dead  
I should in fact have left his house instead  
And sought the Argive fleet and sailed away  
Because my marriage, ever since that day,      870  
Was not controlled by gods. For that I pined,  
For all the watchmen in the towers, you'd find,  
Could bear me witness, for they often found  
Me trying stealthily to reach the ground  
By clinging to a cord, but my new spouse,  
Deiphobus, conveyed me to his house  
Against my will. Therefore, why should I die?  
Now all the other natural gifts that I  
Possess have led to bitter slavery  
Instead of taking me to victory.      880

Argue against the gods?? Would you do that?

Then you are ignorant, I tell you flat!

Chorus:

Defend your children and your Troy, my queen!

Her speech was cogent, vivid, forceful, keen.

Hecuba:

I'll side with the goddesses and I'll show

How she perverts the truth, for I don't know  
How Hera and Athena could have been  
So idiotic – first, the former queen  
To sell Argos to a barbaric foe,  
The latter to make Athens undergo                      890  
Bondage to Trojans, who to Ida came  
In wanton sport that one goddess could claim  
The prize of beauty. Would Queen Hera yearn  
For such a prize? What, so that she might earn  
A nobler spouse than Zeus? Did Athena pursue  
A spouse among the gods, that goddess who  
In her dislike of marriage would obtain  
From Zeus the blessing that she might remain  
Unwed? Gracing your own iniquity,  
Don't taint the goddesses with lunacy!                      900  
You won't persuade the wise. What you said then –  
What may cause jeers of laughter among men –  
To Menelaus' house Queen Cypris went  
With Paris. Was she not, then, quite content  
To stay in Heaven and bring to Troy both you  
And all those who lived in Amyclae, too?  
Paris was strikingly good-looking – when  
You saw him you *were* Cypris; all that men  
Perform in folly will be laid in blame  
Upon this goddess, for her very name                      910  
Rightly begins the word for 'senselessness',  
So when you looked on him in foreign dress,  
Ablaze with gold, your senses utterly  
Took flight. In Greece you acted naturally,



But once you had left Sparta's bounds you planned  
To flood the gold-encrusted Trojan land  
With reckless luxury. Your riotous  
Behaviour soon was too superfluous  
For Menelaus' palace. Anyway,  
My son took you away by force, you say. 920

What Spartan saw this? Did a cry of woe  
And call for succour pass your lips, although  
Your brothers were alive and not yet placed  
Among the stars? While you were being traced  
By Greeks in Troy, and the hostilities  
Between the troops had started, you would seize  
On tidings of your husband's bravery  
And praise him, causing Paris misery,  
But if the Trojans prospered in the war,

Your husband then was nothing to you. For 930  
Your eyes were fixed on Fortune as your guide  
As in her steps you trod, casting aside  
Virtue. Then from the battlements you say  
You clambered down, as though averse to stay.

Did it not once occur to you to set  
A fashioned rope about your neck or whet  
A knife as noble wives are wont to do  
In grief? And yet I've often counselled you  
To leave, that other brides my son would take,  
And I would tell you that I'd help you make 940

Away upon a Grecian ship, thereby  
Ending our international strife. But I  
Could see you found in this great bitterness

As you continued with your wantonness  
In Paris' house, expecting folk to do  
You homage. What a splendid time for you!  
Now you've adorned yourself and dare be seen  
With Menelaus. Better to have been  
In tattered garb in all humility  
And cowering before him fearfully, 950  
Your hair cut short, for what you did before  
Ashamed! Now, Menelaus, hear the core  
Of what I say: give all of Greece the crown –  
Give her her just deserts and send her down  
To Hades, and establish this decree:  
That every woman for disloyalty  
Must die.

Chorus:

Revenge your race, my lord, and clear  
Yourself from the objectionable smear,  
Spread by the gods, of being womanly,  
And show your spirit to the enemy. 960

Menelaus:

Yes, I concur. Without constraint she went  
From my palatial residence, intent  
Upon a stranger's bed. Her sinful past  
Shows by her citing Cypris mere bombast.  
Go! You'll be stoned to death. Soon you'll repay  
The Greeks for all the weary toils that they  
Have undergone. Do not defile my name!

Helen:

Husband, I beg – don't kill me for the shame

The gods imposed!

Hecuba:

Oh sir, do not betray

The Greeks whose deaths this woman caused, I pray, 970

For their sakes and my children's!

Menelaus:

Lady, peace!

She's nothing to me. She will sail to Greece,

As I have bid.

Hecuba:

Oh do not let her be

On the same ship as you!

Menelaus:

Why's that? Has she

Gained so much weight??

Hecuba:

Because a lover stays

In love once he has loved and will always.

Menelaus:

That hinges on his mind. But I'll concede,

For your advice is sensible indeed.

She'll die a shameful death, a fate that's just,

Showing that chastity in women must 980

Be stressed – no easy task, yet on that day

That she is slain, all women with dismay

And terror will be struck, even if they be

More lost than Helen is to infamy.

Chorus:

O Zeus, you've brought into Achaea's hand

Your shrine and sacred altar from Troy's land.  
The smoke of myrrh sends many an offering  
Of burning sacrifice meandering  
To Heaven. Ida's glens with ivy grow  
And, flooding down, are rills of melting snow – 990  
A holy, sun-lit region which confines  
The world as on us all the god's light shines.  
Husband, you are a spectre aimlessly  
Roaming, unwashed, unburied, while the sea  
Speeds me to Argos, that horse-loving land,  
Where the Cyclopan walls of stone still stand,  
Reaching to Heaven. The children congregate  
Before the gates and in their piteous state  
Cry out: "Mother, the Greeks force me to go  
To their dark ship, upon which they will row 1000  
To Salamis or to the eminence where  
Two seas may be espied, and it is there  
The gates of Pelops stand. Would that the blast  
Of a sacred blazing thunderbolt were cast  
On Menelaus' ship upon the sea,  
Since in my bitter grief he's taking me  
To be a slave in Greece, while Zeus's child  
Keeps her gold mirrors, which have oft beguiled  
Young maids. May he not go back home or see  
The gates of bronze that front the sanctuary 1010  
Of Queen Athena! His captive has brought  
Disgrace to all Achaea and has wrought  
Anguish along the Simois. I see  
My country stricken with new misery

Upon the heels of those which still cause pain.

Behold Astyanax, so cruelly slain,

Flung from the walls, the hapless widows, too! [enter Talthylbius]

Talthylbius:

There is one ship alone that is yet due

To leave the shore, and soon, as it is planned,

It will set sail across the sea to land 1020

Upon the shores of Phthia with the rest

Of the spoils with which Neoptolemus is blessed,

Who is already on the sea, for he's

Just heard about yet more calamities.

For Peleus from his isle was sent away

And therefore he has left without delay,

And with him went Andromache, for she,

As she set out, drew many tears from me

As for her country she gave out a cry

And to her husband's tomb said her goodbye. 1030

She begged her master that she might inter

The poor dead child of Hector and of her –

Wretched Astyanax, who breathed his last

When he had from the battlements been cast.

She begged him, too, that he not bear his shield,

A dreadful thing Achilles used to wield,

A shield with plates of brass, when they'd repair

To Peleus' home and to the bower where

She was to wed his grandson – ah, a sight

Bitter to her! She begged, too, that she might 1040

Bury the boy inside the shield instead

Of a cedar coffin or tomb of stone. She pled

That you care for the corpse as you think fit  
And wrap it in a shroud and over it  
Put wreaths, as best you can. She's far away,  
And through her master's haste she could not stay  
To bury him. We'll deck him all around,  
And then above him we will heap a mound  
Of earth and set a spear on it. But you  
Must swiftly do the work you have to do. 1050  
One toil, however, I have spared you, for  
Crossing Scamander, I performed the chore  
Of washing the boy's wounds. Now I'll prepare  
His grave so that our efforts we will share  
And speed the ship's departure. [exit Talthybius]  
Hecuba:

On the ground

Set down the shield of Hector, deftly round,  
A piteous sight, a bitter grief to me!  
You Greeks, you may boast of your bravery  
But not your wisdom. Why have you, in fear  
Of acts the child would one day with his spear 1060  
Perform, sinned as no-one in history  
Has sinned? You were, perhaps, afraid that he  
Would raise Troy's fallen walls. Pathetic! Though  
Hector inflicted much upon our foe,  
Ten thousand men to back him, gone is Troy  
And all our men, and yet a little boy  
Is what you dread! Without a cause you fear.

Hecuba:

You die a piteous death indeed, poor dear.  
If you had died for Troy in adulthood,  
Married, with godlike mastery, you would           1070  
Be happy, if one could be so in Troy.  
But after just one glimpse, my darling boy,  
You do not know them now and have no care  
Or joy in them, though you are still the heir  
Of Troy. The battlements your father reared,  
The towers of Apollo, now have sheared  
The locks from off your head which frequently  
Your mother fondled, but now grinningly  
The face of murder shows itself across  
The fractured bones – ah, such a bitter loss!       1080  
You have your father's hands, unhappily  
Now lying here. Your mouth, so dear to me,  
Once speaking proudly now is sealed – for now  
You won't be able to fulfil the vow  
You made while nestling in my robe. You said,  
"Grandmother, when you die, from off my head  
I'll cut off many locks, and then I'll tell  
My friends to go with me and bid farewell  
Fondly to you at your graveside." But I  
Will not be buried by you – no, you'll lie           1090  
Already in your grave, interred by me,  
On whom old age has brought the misery  
Of losing home and children. I caressed  
You often, many nights I had no rest,  
I brought you up – but all those days are gone.  
Whatever will the bard inscribe upon

Your tomb? “The Greeks slew him for fear”? – such shame

For every Greek! Although you now can’t claim

Hector’s estate, his brazen shield shall be

Your resting-place for all eternity. 1100

Ah, shield that kept him safe, you now have lost

Your valiant keeper with his name embossed

Upon your handle while upon your rim

Are marks of sweat immortalizing him,

Sweat that from Hector’s brow had frequently

Trickled when in the stress of battle he

Had pressed his beard against it. From such store

As you possess, bring forth adornment for

The hapless dead, for fortune cannot bring

To funerals a lovely offering. 1110

And yet you shall receive from me largess,

For I shall offer such as I possess.

It is a foolish man who thinks that he

Is safe and so is glad, for destiny

Is fickle – no-one feels the self-same joy

From day to day. Look here! The spoils of Troy

To deck the dead! It’s not for victory

In horsemanship or yet in archery,

My child – customs that all of Troy holds dear,

Though not excessively – that I am here 1120

With decorations from your erstwhile store,

Although now Helen, whom the gods abhor,

Has robbed you of these trophies, robbed you, too,

Of life and home. It’s I who offer you

What you should have possessed eventually.



You dear, dear child, you've touched the heart of me,  
Our one-time Trojan prince. Though now we mourn,  
This is the splendid cloak you would have worn  
Upon your wedding-day, while marrying  
An Asian princess, which I'm swaddling                      1130  
You in, and on your father's shield you'll lie,  
With which he triumphed in the days gone by.  
Dear shield, accept the crown, for though you share  
Astyanax's tomb, death cannot dare  
Touch you – those arms Odysseus craftily  
Attained are of inferior quality.

Chorus:

Dear child, the earth receives you to her breast  
As you go to your everlasting rest.  
Dear mother, weep! Unending woe!  
Hecuba;

I'll bind

Your wounds with bandages, although you'll find    1140  
They are imperfect healers. Further care  
Must be your father's occupation where  
He lies beneath the earth.

Chorus:

Beat, beat your head

With frequent blows in sorrow for the dead!

Hecuba:

Kind friends –

Chorus:

Lady, speak out!

Hecuba:

It seems to me

That it is only my anxiety  
And hate of Troy in cities everywhere  
That is the one concern and constant care  
Of Heaven. Our sacrifices bootlessly  
Were made to all the gods. And yet had we  
Not been caught in their grip and hurled headlong  
Beneath the earth, we'd not be known in song  
Forevermore. Go now, inter the dead  
Within his tomb, all duly garlanded!  
The dead, though, do not care if they receive  
A glorious interment, I believe,  
Though it's a cause of empty pride for us,  
The living.

Chorus:

I grieve for your dolorous  
Mother, her hopes all gone for her young boy.  
A noble princeling, thought to have much joy      1160  
In life, your death is tragic. Tell me who  
Are they who on those peaks are darting to  
And fro and bearing flaming torches? Some  
New woe shall soon alight on Ilium. [enter Talthybius]

Talthybius:

You captains who are ordered to set fire  
To Priam's city, to you I desire  
To speak. Now is the time to launch the flame  
That we may sail away to whence we came.  
Trojans, start for the Argive ships! Prepare  
To leave once you have heard the trumpets blare. 1170

And you, distressed old lady, go behind  
The men – Odysseus' servants are assigned  
To fetch you, for it's now your lot to be  
Far from your land and toil in slavery.

Hecuba:

This surely has to be the very last  
Of all my woes now that I have been cast  
From Troy, my city, now ablaze with flame.  
I struggle painfully, for I am lame,  
To bid my wretched Troy a fond farewell,  
For in her former days she would excel                      1180  
Among barbarian towns. Your splendid name  
Will soon be gone. Your buildings are aflame  
And now we're being led from Ilium  
To bondage. O you gods, why are you mum  
And do not hearken to our every plea?  
Let's rush into the flames, for it would be  
A noble death to die with my poor city  
Ablaze.

Talthybius:

    Poor lady, your mad grief I pity. [to the servants]  
Make no delay and take her off! Entrust  
The lady to Odysseus, as you must!                      1190

Hecuba:

O son of Cronus, father of our race,  
Our Phrygian prince, look on the very face  
Of woe, unworthy of our ancient breed,  
The breed of Dardanus!

Chorus:

He does indeed,

But now our mighty city's day is done.

Hecuba:

Our homes and towering walls are seen as one  
Great sheet of flame.

Chorus:

The smoke to Heaven flies

As, sinking to the ground, our city dies.

With furious urgency both fire and foe

Devour each residence and lay it low. 1200

Hecuba:

O earth, nourisher of my progeny!

Hearken, my children! Listen now to me!

Chorus:

Lamenting, you are calling on the dead.

Hecuba:

I am, and as upon the ground I spread

My limbs, upon the earth my hands I smite.

Chorus:

I kneel beside you, then, so that I might

Invoke my husband in the world below.

Hecuba:

I'm being dragged away –

Chorus:

The woe, the woe

That cry evoked!

Hecuba:

I do not wish to dwell

Beneath a master's roof.

Chorus:

Away, as well, 1210

From Troy!

Hecuba:

O Priam, slaughtered, uninterred  
And friendless, of my fate you have not heard.

Chorus:

His eyes are covered by black death, for he  
Was pure, dispatched by an impure enemy.

Chorus:

Woe for our temples! Spears and conflagration  
Are now the lot of our beloved nation.  
Soon you will tumble, lost to all men's eyes.  
The dust, as up to Heaven's heights it flies  
Like smoke, will rob me of the sight of you.

Chorus:

Your very name will be forgotten, too. 1220  
Now everything is scattered far and near,  
And Troy has ceased to be.

Hecuba:

Hah! Did you hear?

Chorus:

Indeed! Our stronghold's tumbled to the ground.

Hecuba:

Oh, how it shook the earth!

Chorus:

It will confound

Our city utterly.

Hecuba:

I tremble so.

Support me, for today I have to go

And live in slavery. Let us go down

To meet the Grecian fleet. Unhappy town!

