

A Topic of Song for Later Mortals:  
Exploring Perspectives in Euripides's *Trojan Women* and *Hecuba*

Among Euripides's extant plays based on myths from the Trojan Cycle, *Hecuba* (c. 425 - 424 B.C.) and *The Trojan Women* (415 B.C.) share a close thematic affinity. Both plays are set soon after the fall of Troy and explore the fate of the Trojan women and children at the hand of the conquering Greek army. Yet, as Gärtner has observed, although Euripides has set the plays "in immediately adjacent, sometimes even overlapping mythical spheres," he has placed the accent differently in each play. *The Trojan Women* highlights the contrast "between Greek action and Trojan suffering," while "the conflict between Greece and Troy fades into the background in *Hecuba*, where the focus goes to the complex relationships between the main characters" (Gärtner 2005: 61).

Gärtner's concept of accent seems typical of those who approach these similarly-themed plays. Charles Segal and Ruth Scodel place that accent on the fate of the women captives. Segal posits that the play *Hecuba* "contrasts women's suffering in war, female vengeance, and the contrasts of Greek and barbarian" to create "a disturbing commentary both on war and on male-female relations in the *polis*" (Segal 1990: 109); Scodel considers ways in which both plays blur "the distinction between rape and a consensual relationship" for the women (Scodel 1998: 138). Justina Gregory, examining the similarities between both plays, writes that "the postwar setting seems to have crystallized for Euripides the moral questions associated with disparities in power" (Gregory 1991: 86).

This essay will develop Gärtner's insight regarding accent and Gregory's insights regarding the postwar setting and the moral questions that arise in that environment. It is my belief that in the plays *The Trojan Women* and *Hecuba* it is not accent alone but a shift in

perspective that permits Euripides to open an inquiry into heroic values. In a manner similar to that in which the nineteenth-century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard pondered alternative versions of the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in *Fear and Trembling* as meditations on the concept of faith, Euripides's method seems to be to look and then look again at the fall of Troy from the perspective of the conquered and the conquerors, and then to look again at the fall especially of Hecuba and another barbarian, Polymestor, in order to shed light on the depths of civilian suffering in the aftermath of war. This essay will examine the ways in which Euripides focuses attention on the captive women in both plays and how that focus in turn sheds light on the Euripidean reevaluation of values seen in the other Trojan- and Mycenaean-cycle plays.

#### Selected Bibliography

- Gärtner, Thomas. (2005). "Leiden nach dem Krieg. Beobachtungen zu den Euripideischen Tragödien "Hekabe" und "Troerinnen". *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica*, N.S. 79.1. 37-64.
- Gregory, Justina. (1991). *Euripides and the Instruction of the Athenians*. Ann Arbor.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. (1843). *Frygt og Bæven*. Copenhagen (= *Fear and Trembling*. Ed and trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. (1983). Princeton.
- Kovacs, David. (1995). *Euripides II: Children of Heracles, Hippolytus, Andromache, Hecuba*. Cambridge, MA.
- Kovacs, David. (1999). *Euripides IV: Trojan Women, Iphigenia Among the Taurians, Ion*. Cambridge, MA.
- Segal, Charles. (1990). "Violence and the Other: Greek, Female, and Barbarian in Euripides' *Hecuba*." *Transactions of the American Philological Association*. 120.109-131.

Scodel, Ruth. (1998). "The Captive's Dilemma: Sexual Acquiescence in Euripides *Hecuba* and *Troades*." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*. 98.137-154.