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Dramatic Publishing



The Women of Troy

A one-act adaptation
from Euripides' play
in modern prose

By
DAVID GROTE



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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(THE WOMEN OF TROY)

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THE WOMEN OF TROY
A One Act Play
For Four Men* and Twelve Women**

C H A R A C T E R S

POSEIDON

HECUBA queen of Troy

CASSANDRA her daughter

ANDROMACHE her daughter-in-law,
. wife of Hector

TALTHYBIUS a Greek soldier

MENELAUS Greek officer, husband of Helen

HELEN wife of Menelaus

WOMEN

GUARD

*Poseidon and Menelaus, or Poseidon and the Guard
may be doubled.

**Lines are apportioned to eight women. Fewer may
be used and lines merely rearranged. It is not recom-
mended that fewer than six be used, if at all possible.

A NOTE ON THE ADAPTATION

Although it is accepted at all levels that the ancient Greek theatre is fundamental to all our theatrical background, school groups (and especially high school groups) rarely, if ever, try to deal with it. There are a number of reasons for this, of course, but many of these have to do with some inherent difficulties in the scripts as they exist. This adaptation has been developed to try to remove as many of these difficulties as possible while still being (one hopes) faithful to the original in basic content.

First, the CHORUS. Most directors and casts find the choruses of Greek theatre intimidating, if not senseless. This adaptation tries to involve the chorus members more completely into the action of the play by treating them as individuals wherever possible. More controversially, the nature of the chorus speech has been altered. The originals gave long speeches to the chorus, probably chanted or even sung. Choral speaking, as such, is a lost art today and is close to incomprehensible for most people. The one form still in use is the choral response form used in many church services, and this is the basic approach chosen in this adaptation. Where the women speak as a group, it is to express a common emotion, and it is usually as a short response to a leader, either another woman or Hecuba.

Second, LENGTH. Obviously, reducing the Trojan women to a one-act of about thirty minutes playing time involves some major cutting. This has caused the removal of a great deal of information. However, a tremendous amount of the original is involved with exposition or explanation of historical

background, references to gods and ceremonies no longer of particular interest, or poetical embroidery on basic emotional ideas. Wherever possible, these have been condensed, but many long speeches, especially for the chorus, have been completely eliminated. Wherever possible, I have attempted to compress these into "scenes" rather than just shorter speeches. The most dramatic example is the section with Helen. In the original, Helen defends herself in a speech of over fifty lines, then waits patiently while Hecuba rebuts her for over sixty additional lines; in this version, that is a three person scene, with Hecuba interrupting Helen. Similar changes occur throughout, all designed to both shorten the play and to intensify for modern actors and audience the emotional line of the scene involved.

Third, the LANGUAGE. The original is in verse, and most translations are in verse of varying quality. This version is completely in prose. I hope that the result is still poetic, but it is the poetry of direct, simple English which is attempted. The emotional line and the immediate emotional experience were most important in preparing this adaptation; once a decision was made about that, the language chosen was simply the most direct and simple expression of that emotional moment. It is an adaptation, not a translation or even a shortened translation.

D. G.

THE WOMEN OF TROY

SCENE: A barren space outside the ruins of Troy.
Dawn.

AS LIGHTS COME UP: Around the stage are a number of WOMEN, in various postures of grief or sleep. To one side is HECUBA, prostrate. They are dimly visible at best. Enter POSEIDON, with his trident. He walks among the WOMEN, who do not see him, and he looks at the ruins of the city offstage, then crosses to DC.

POSEIDON. I am Poseidon, and this was Troy, my city. With my own hands I laid the stones and built the walls of that great city. Its people were my people, and I loved every stone and every person in it. (Short pause.) And now, Athena's vengeance on Paris has become a vengeance on my city. By a wicked treachery, it has been destroyed. Troy lies dead, sacked and gutted, its sacred groves destroyed, its temples red with blood. (The light begins to increase, showing the WOMEN.) All the Trojans are gone, all but these women. They are the last, reserved for the chiefs of Greece to do with as they wish — spoils of war to be slaves and concubines. Helen, who caused it all, is with them, a special prisoner, waiting for a special end. But worst of all to see is Hecuba, queen of Troy. (He

indicates where she lies.) Her son Paris, who stole Helen away, is dead. Hector, the noblest son in all of Troy, is dead. Priam, the king, her husband, lies murdered on the temple steps. And the future holds even more for her: unknown to her, Polyxena, her daughter, has been butchered like an animal, a sacrifice at the tomb of Achilles, and Cassandra, her other child, assigned now to Agamemnon, has gone mad. (Short pause.) And I could do nothing to prevent it. Only a witness who had no heart could watch and be unmoved. (He exits. The light grows stronger and the WOMEN begin to stir slightly. HECUBA slowly pushes herself to a sitting position. She is old, gray-haired, yet still retains a suggestion of her former regal attitudes.)

HECUBA (talking to herself). Come, old woman, enough of crying. Troy is dead, your tears cannot bring her back. The tide of fortune has gone out and you must go along with it. You cannot stand against its force. (She laughs bitterly.) It would be brave to stand, to lift my head high and say, "I will not weep." I should be a queen and show my strength and my nobility, set an example for all these pitiful women. They have lost, but I have lost more. My sons, my husband, are gone, my town, my kingdom lies burning before me, and yet I will not cry. They would learn from me how to be brave. (Shaking her head.) But the truth is simpler, isn't it, old woman? You sit here a prisoner, your past gone and your future nothing, and you are not any braver or more noble than any one of those. There are just no more tears to weep, that's all. (Crying out to the WOMEN.) Come, you women of Troy, you widows and

orphans. Come and weep for me. Cry the tears I cannot cry, sing the dirges I cannot sing. Stand and witness the end of Troy and feel for your queen, your mother, who can herself feel nothing. (The WOMEN look at her, but do not move.)

WOMAN 1. Why do you call us now? We have our own agonies.

WOMAN 2. We have suffered, too.

HECUBA (indicating in the distance, over the audience). Look down at the bay.

WOMAN 3. What's happening?

HECUBA. The Greeks are ready to sail. (The WOMEN rise, some go DC to look for themselves, others cross to surround HECUBA. There is a great deal of concern and fear as they move.)

WOMAN 4. Will they come for us now?

WOMAN 5 (to HECUBA). Have you heard any news?

WOMAN 6 (to another WOMAN). What will they do with us now?

HECUBA (interrupting, to WOMAN 6). Expect the worst.

WOMAN 2. You know something we don't.

HECUBA. No.

WOMAN 7 (a girl). O gods, they mean to kill us all.

WOMAN 5. Is that what you heard?

HECUBA. No, child, I didn't hear anything. They tell me nothing more than they tell you. We are all equals here. But there will be no more killing. That would make it easy on us, wouldn't it? No, they have much worse in store for us than only death.

WOMAN 8. They will draw lots for us. Like gambling prizes.

WOMAN 1. We will be slaves.

WOMAN 3. Scattered at random, like sheep.

WOMAN 5. Passed among them like candies passed out for little boys' rewards.

WOMAN 7. Who will claim me?

WOMAN 2. What does it matter?

HECUBA. And for what? (The WOMEN separate themselves slightly, each alone, considering her own future, their thoughts voiced by HECUBA.)

Shall I end my life a kitchen maid, scrubbing pans for some other woman's table? Or wait outside a bedroom door until called to do up some Greek biddy's hair? Or nurse and teach the brats of those who ruined my home, watching them prosper where all my children are gone? I who was queen of Troy?

WOMEN.

Weaving someone else's loom,
Washing someone else's children,
Working someone else's fields,
Cleaning someone else's home,
This will be our future,
This will be our life.

(A pause as each WOMAN considers her future.
TALTHYBIUS starts to enter.)