

WOMEN OF TROY PRACTICE ESSAY

“THE ACTION OF ‘THE WOMEN OF TROY IS DRIVEN BY THE DESIRE FOR REVENGE.’ DISCUSS.

Euripides's 415BC Ancient Greek Tragedy *The Women of Troy* explores how those who have been wronged by an injustice often use their power to accentuate the continued suffering of others. Set against the backdrop of the Peloponnesian war, and written a year after the atrocious occurrences at Melos, Euripides challenges his largely male Athenian audience to question the actions of those who abuse their positions of power and consequently make others suffer. Many actions within *Women of Troy* are fuelled by a desire to seek revenge, and it is this aggression that allows Euripides to truly express his anti-war agenda in this tragedy. Retribution is sought by those who feel like a wrong has been committed against them, namely Menelaus and the Gods. While vengeance appears to be the propelling emotion fuelling the war and the Greek war machine, it also empowers the action of some key Trojans who feel socially wronged, Euripides shows their strength facing adversity in this regard. In contrast, the women of Troy are largely propelled by a desire simply for justice and a sense of freedom, often wishing for the suffering to cease entirely.

Retribution is sought by those who feel wronged in the aftermath of the Trojan War. Euripides conveys his ultimate disdain at characters who have abused their position of power to entice others into circumstances of great suffering, this can be seen in Menelaus' selfish attitude when his real motives for bringing the Greeks to battle for the unfaithful Helen are uncovered. Apart from coming to claim Helen “as mine,” he elaborates that his “real motive was to get my hands on the man who stole my wife.” The significance of this is that the audience is positioned to interpret Menelaus as a vengeance filled, self-centred man who will happily sacrifice the lives thousands of Trojans, who the “Greeks have butchered” simply to settle a personal dispute with Paris. Likewise, Euripides also presents the Gods as fickle and not above a “cavalier change of mind” when it comes to punishing the Greeks for the sacking of Troy. Athena specifically wants “The whole bay of Euboea with floating corpses so thick you could walk on them.” By presenting the Gods as susceptible to the variations of human emotion, Euripides explores the concept of human mortality, calling into the futility of war, as the Gods in physical form are more than capable of intervention and ultimately stopping the carnage. Athena would rather wait and inflict more death upon the Greeks during their return home, showing clearly that the actions of those who feel wronged are consistent with emotions of vengeance, even for immortal deities. Euripides shows that bloodlust caused by war does not escape anyone.

While vengeance appears to be the driving factor of the war, it also empowers the actions of Cassandra and other Trojans. Euripides presents the vengeful actions in the tragedy as a double-edged blade. When revenge leads to an abuse of power, Euripides portrays that “puddles of blood smear the sanctuaries” in recognition of this gross imbalance of power, but when retribution is sought for an injustice by an oppressed woman, it is often viewed with understanding and humility. This is the case for Cassandra, Hecuba's “god-crazed daughter” who has been cursed with prophesying what are only interpreted as lies by all those around her. Cassandra is arguably noble in the acceptance of her fate, exclaiming that “mother, you must cover my hair with flowers,” even though she is fully aware that this marriage will lead to her “naked flesh ... thrown into a rocky gully, where the storm waters rush.” Euripides presents her as isolated and oppressed, representing many of the women of Troy in their current position, and this allows the audience to sympathise with her current plight, serving “Agamemnon... in his bed,” as a concubine. Cassandra is seen as revengeful during her “god-drunken ecstasy” ramblings, as she claims that she will “kill [Agamemnon]” and be “more destructive of a wife than ever Helen was.”

She goes on to claim she will “destroy his whole family,” a spiteful act birthed only by the destruction the Greeks have bestowed on the city of Troy. Euripides highlights that vengeful thought can be an acceptable course of action to process immense grief, as Cassandra does, with the curse of her ability to prophesise.

Most of the women of Troy, in contrast, are propelled by a desire for justice and a sense of freedom. Euripides portrays the characters of Hecuba and Andromache and their immense suffering that all women of Troy suffer. It is for this reason that Hecuba especially is able to become representative of the plight of all women in the tragedy, often lamenting for the loss of her status, family and the city of Troy. Hecuba blames Helen for the destruction suffered by the city of Troy, but has accepted the destruction of her city enough to argue justice, ensuring she doesn't “die without a word in her own defence,” when before Menelaus. The significance of this action is that Hecuba is shown as above all as equitable, even in front of a powerful Greek warrior that has “come for an execution, not an argument.” By allowing Helen to speak, she is in turn guaranteeing that she is able to “make the case against her,” further outlining the otherwise hidden plight of the women to the Greek warriors. Andromache is positioned by Euripides to suffer the tragedy of the climax of the play, the unnecessary death of Astyanax at the hands of the Greek Officers. But instead of becoming vengeful and spiteful, she directs her anger inwards, lamenting that she “can't save [her] own child from death!” and that she has to accept they will “throw him down from the walls if that's what your Generals have decided.” Euripides constructs an opposition to the vengeful characters of the fickle Gods and self-centred Menelaus in the form of Hecuba and Andromache, showing that retribution is not the only emotion to come from immense devastation and hardship. *The Women of Troy* challenges the audience to develop sympathy for those mourning during a time of tragedy.

Through the unending images of death and suffering in his tragedy, Euripides highlights the plight of women during the conclusion of the sacking of Troy. However, it is the despair of the women that is sharply accentuated by the vengeful actions of the Gods and Menelaus. Euripides presents ideas relating to the futility of war and how pointlessly forcing pain and anguish onto others is ignoble. Although this is the case, Euripides also shows how oppressed characters like Cassandra can find solace in vengeful wishing, as it is used as a coping mechanism to process harsh news, namely her assignment to Agamemnon upon their return to Greece. Ultimately, Euripides questions the circumstances in which retribution is birthed, arguing that to suffer does not mean revenge is necessary. This is shown through the internal and suppressed suffering of both Hecuba and Andromache, true victims of the war of Troy. Euripides poses to the audience that revenge is a tool if utilised to restore an injustice, but if used in conjunction with an abuse of power, is unacceptable. Euripides explores the human condition and argues that engaging in conflict for brash reasons is tactless and will lead to unnecessary pain.