WAR AND THE DISSOLUTION OF WOMEN IN SENECA'S *TROADES*

by

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(Under the Direction of MARIO ERASMO)

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the titular heroines of Seneca's *Troades* with attention to the grotesque nature of their existence and the effects of this on their perceptions of identity and the self. While Hecuba and Andromache waver in the face of wartime horrors and experience the loss of their former identities as a form of disintegration, or dissolution, Polyxena experiences the same atrocities but braves the onslaught of ambiguity life post-Troy brings with it. As a result, while she cannot escape death, she is not undone psychologically by it. The theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva, particularly those of the grotesque, existence as dialogue, and abjection, provide the framework for reading this drama and the experiences of the women therein.

INDEX WORDS: Seneca the younger, Roman tragedy, Neronian age, Latin poetry, Bakhtin, Kristeva

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 BCE - 65 BCE) is attributed with the composition of seven tragedies, the *Troades*, or *Trojan Women*; *Medea; Phaedra*, sometimes referred to as *Hippolytus; Oedipus; Hercules Furens; Thyestes;* and *Agamemnon*, as well as the experimental or incomplete *Phoenissae*. The praetexta *Octavia* and drama *Hercules Oetaeus* are now assumed to have been written by imitators after Seneca's death.[1] The dating and order of composition of the plays is unknown.[2] *Troades*, considered one of Seneca's masterworks, presents the plights of Hecuba, Andromache and Polyxena after the fall of Troy at the hands of the Greeks. Beginning after the sack of the city, the play dramatizes the decision to sacrifice both Astyanax and Polyxena to appease fate and the monstrous shade of Achilles, reported onstage to have risen from his tomb. Andromache attempts and fails to conceal Astyanax in Hector's tomb, after which Helen helps Polyxena prepare for her "marriage" to Achilles' spirit and discloses which Greek commander has claimed each woman. The double deaths are then reported via a messenger speech, and the women are instructed to proceed to the Greek ships and enslavement.[3]

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[1] For an overview of Senecan tragedy and summary of works, see Christopher Trinacty, "Senecan Tragedy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Seneca*, edited by Shadi Bartsch and Alessandro Schiesaro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 29-40.

[2] Elaine Fantham, *Seneca's Troades* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 9-14. For a discussion of a possible order of composition based on thematic overlap, see Elaine Fantham, "Seneca's "Troades" and "Agamemnon": Continuity and Sequence." *The Classical Journal* 77, no. 2 (Dec., 1981 - Jan., 1982), 118-129.

[3] For discussion of the literary and mythic background of this story, see Fantham, *Seneca's Troades*, 50-75, as well as Boyle, *Seneca's Troades*, (Leeds: Francis Cairns (Publications) Ltd., 1994), 7-18.

The medium for the performance of the *Troades* and the other tragedies of Seneca has long been debated; those in favor of recitation[4] point to the surplus of violence and gore, the long, declamatory-style speeches, and the disconnected nature of the scenes within a single work. Scholarship has recently come to embrace the idea that the plays were performed, or at least intended for performance.[5]

While it is true that Senecan drama does not conform to Aristotelian ideals, the tragedies result from the literary and artistic culture in which Seneca composed. Living under the Julio-Claudian Dynasty, Seneca observed the excess and spectacle that pervaded the culture.[6] The intense self-awareness that marks Roman literature from its inception blossoms under Nero into full-blown metatragedy.[7] This appears partially in the *Troades* through an elaborate concentric structure which draws attention to the conventions of tragedy: "in the opening acts Seneca seems to be playing against the imperatives of the five-act structure, dissolving the first act into the

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4 Recitation, a salon-style solo performance of a dramatic text, was a popular practice in the early empire. Pliny the Younger lists tragedy as a standard feature of a recitation (Epistulae 7.17.3-5). For the literary evidence for recitation of drama and a possible reconstruction of how such a performance would appear, see Erica Bexley, "What is Dramatic Recitation?" Mnemosyne 68, no. 5 (2014).

[5] On the subject of intended medium, see Fantham, *Seneca's Troades*, 104-115; John G. Fitch, "Playing Seneca?" and Elaine Fantham, "Production of Seneca's *Trojan Women*, ancient? and modern," in *Seneca in Performance*, ed. George W. M. Harrison (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 2000). Tarrant takes Zwierlein's 1966 argument and interprets the *Agamemnon* in his 1976 commentary with the assumption that the work was meant for recitation, not performance. See R. J. Tarrant, *Seneca Agamemnon: edited with a commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 7-8.

[6] For a thorough discussion of Nero's reign and its artistic culture, see Miriam T. Griffin, *Nero: the End of a Dynasty* (New York: Routledge, 2000), in particular 143-184, as well as Emma Buckley and Martin Dinter, editors, *A Companion to the Neronian Age* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013). On the influence of Neronian visual artistic culture on Senecan tragedy, see Eric R. Varner, "Grotesque vision: Seneca's Tragedies and Neronian art," in *Seneca in Performance*, ed. George W. M. Harrison (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., Ltd., 2000), 119-137. For further thoughts on the influence of Neronian Rome on Seneca's corpus, see Denis and Elisabeth Henry, *The Mask of Power: Seneca's Tragedies and Imperial Rome* (Chicago: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1985).

[7] For a discussion of Seneca in relation to the development of metatheatricality in Roman drama, see Mario Erasmo, *Roman Tragedy: from Theatre to Theatricality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 122-140. See too Shadi Bartsch, *Actors in the Audience (*Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

opening chorus and the latter into the second act, and then creating a severe disjunction within the second act itself."[8]

The style of the *Troades*, like that of the other Senecan tragedies, is characterized by emotional intensity, character studies, visual spectacle, and the heavy use of rhetoric.[9][10] In recent scholarship, Alessandra Zenobi has revealed the influence of pantomime in the early imperial period on Seneca's work, which helps to explain and account for many of the stylistic aspects condemned by early twentieth century Senecan scholars.[11]

These stylistic tendencies lend themselves to analysis through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's description of the grotesque, an aesthetic that revels in the bodily aspects of existence. The grotesque is marked by attention to the physical body, in particular to orifices, which serve as entrances and exits to the body, places of permeation and penetration. The grotesque characterizes existence as well, since identity is not a stable entity but a process, an ongoing breakdown and reconstruction by means of a body's reaction to stimuli and the self's engagement with others. Julia Kristeva analyzes the psychological response to the grotesque in terms of abjection, which she describes as a preverbal revulsion towards one's own physical and mortal existence.[12]

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[8] A. J. Boyle, *Tragic Seneca*: *an essay in the theatrical tradition*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 76.

[9] On the visual spectacle of death in the *Troades*, see Mario Erasmo, *Reading Death in Ancient Rome* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2008), 40-53. Also Jo-Ann Shelton, "The spectacle of death in Seneca's *Troades*" in *Seneca in Performance*, ed. George W. M. Harrison (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., Ltd., 2000), 87-118.

[10] For an analysis of Seneca's use of description in the tragedies, see Victoria Tietze Larson, *The Role of Description in Senecan Tragedy* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994).

[11] For discussion of the aesthetics of Senecan tragedy and its origins in pantomime, see Alessandra Zanobi, *Seneca's Tragedies and the Aesthetics of Pantomime* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). See too the discussion of Seneca's "declamatory style," A. J. Boyle, *Tragic Seneca* (Routledge: New York, 1997), 15-31.

[12] For an introduction to and overview of Kristeva's works, see Toril Moi, ed., *The Kristeva Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 1-22. For a similar use of Kristeva's theory of abjection in the analysis of Roman poetry, see Dunstan Lowe, *Monsters and Monstrosity in Augustan Poetry* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

The grotesque manifests itself most in the *Troades* through the theme of dissolution, whether of the self or of the ideals which support it, such as statehood or nobility. Critics have long observed dissolution as a pervasive motif in the text;[13] my approach however is unique in relating it to the twentieth-century theorists noted above. Identity and selfhood, important throughout Seneca's corpus,[14] find special attention in the *Troades* due to the conflicting perspectives offered by the characters.[15] Characters debate the nature of the self and its post mortem existence; the chorus offers conflicting visions in response to the events onstage.[16]

Seneca's themes, like his style, are products of his culture. Abjection becomes a familiar sensation for Romans in the volatile years of Nero's reign. Reflecting on the period, Tacitus writes about how the prolific violence affected contemporary ethos. The horrific death and treatment of Octavia, for example, had the effect of disrupting the semiotic production of meaning for the Romans, so that "what formerly signaled rejoicing now indicated public disaster (*quaeque rerum secundarum olim, tum publicae cladis insignia fuisse*, *Annales* 14.64).[17] Similarly, Tacitus describes the Roman response to the Icenian revolt under Bouddica (*Annales*

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[13] See Boyle, *Tragic Seneca*, 67ff: "themes of death and dissolution pervade and unite the play...Categories, linguistic and behavioural forms, devised to order and control the world, dissolve." See too J. David Bishop, "Seneca's "Troades": Dissolution of a Way of Life," *Rheinisches Museum fur Philologie* 115, no. 4 (1972) 329-337; and Austin Busch, "Dissolution of the Self in the Senecan Corpus" in *Seneca and the Self*, ed. Shadi Bartsch and David Wray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 255-282.

[14]See Shadi Bartsch and David Wray, "Introduction: the self in Senecan scholarship," in *Seneca and the Self*, ed. Shadi Bartsch and David Wray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3-19.

[15] For an analysis of the problems of self and conflicting realities, see C. A. Littlewood, *Self-Representation and Illusion in Senecan Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 90-102. On the multi-layered structure of the self, see Alessandro Schiesaro, "Seneca and the denial of the self," in *Seneca and the Self*, ed. Shadi Bartsch and David Wray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For a discussion of wow these themes affects staging, see Gyllian Raby, "Seneca's *Trojan Women*: Identity and survival in the aftermath of war," in *Seneca in Performance*, ed. W. M. Harrison (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. Ltd., 2000), 173-196.

[16] On the influence of Stoicism on Senecan tragedy, see Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, *Senecan Drama and Stoic Cosmology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

[17] Translated by A. J. Boyle, *Seneca's Troades*, 4. Tacitus makes a similar point in regard to citizens' reactions to the deaths of their own family members at 15.71. For a discussion of the dissolution and inversion of meaning in literature contemporary with Seneca, see Shadi Bartsch, *Ideology in Cold Blood: A Reading of Lucan's* Civil War (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.

14.29-39): Boudicca, who was subjected to the lash and violated along with her daughters, declares to her people that "Roman cupidity had progressed so far that not their very persons, not age itself, nor maidenhood, were left unpolluted."[18]

Abjection and ontological responses to the grotesque are by no means limited to the ancient world, as the modern reader may see evidence of these phenomena in victims of war into the twenty-first century.[19] The contemporary performance artist Marina Abramović explores abjection and its productive possibilities through her work as well, with particular attention to bodily pain and its influence on the perception of the self.[20] Especially in her early "endurance" works, such as *Thomas Lips* (1975), Abramović "deploys the body as an index of experience."[21] She seeks through physical pain to explore and push the boundaries of the self. In other works she explores the relationship between actor and audience, self and other. Just as her earliest Body Art had eliminated the divide between artist and artwork, *Rhythm 0* (1974) and *The Artist is Present* (2010) in particular questioned the division between spectator and spectacle. Her work points toward the generative capabilities of human suffering and the reliance of the self on the other in the production of meaning.

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[18] Tacitus, *Annales* 14.35.3, trans. John Jackson.

[19] The BBC, for example, reports that the trauma experienced by refugees of war, in particular on refugees fleeing the Syrian civil war, has profound negative psychological repercussions. See Deirdre Finnerty, "Migrant crisis: Trauma takes toll on mental health," BBC News, December 22, 2015, accessed March 28, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35102320. The parallels between the psychological experiences of ancient war refugees and contemporary ones are made clear too by a Syrian women refugee group who deal with their experiences through classical drama. See Fernande van Tets, "Making a drama out of tragedy: Syrian refugees find catharsis on stage in Lebanon," The Independent, December 10, 2014, accessed April 6, 2016, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/making-a-drama-out-of-a-tragedy-syrian-refugees-find-catharsis-on-stage-in-lebanon-9916485.html, and Alice Fordham, "Syrian Women Displaced by War Make Tragedy of 'Antigone' Their Own," National Public Radio, December 13, 2014, accessed April 6, 2016, http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2014/12/12/370343232/syrian-women-displaced-by-war-make-tragedy-of-antigone-their-own.

[20] See Kristine Stiles, Klaus Biesenbach and Chrissie Iles, *Marina Abramović* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2008).

[21] Kristine Stiles, "Survey: Cloud with its Shadow," in *Marina Abramović,* Kristine Stiles et al. (New York: Phaidon Press, 2008), 52.

By comparison of the experiences described by Bakhtin and Kristeva with those voiced by the women of Seneca's *Troades*, readers may better understand both the psychological states of the women and the impact of war and the grotesque on the psyche.

CHAPTER 2

NO MAN'S LAND

The beginning of the *Troades* opens with Hecuba, queen of the fallen city, standing in front of the smoking ruins with her band of captive women. Seneca begins the dramatic action in a moment of flux, which he reflects through the theatrical staging. The dramatic setting is the beach of Troy, following the fall of the city to the Greeks. Hecuba and her chorus have left the burning city but have not yet boarded the Argive ships. Their fates are sealed as slaves, though whose property each woman will be has only yet to be determined (57-62). Every aspect of their temporal and spatial location, then, is liminal and without firm foundation, as evidenced by the key word *fragilis* (6).[22] The threshold of the sea and land offers unstable footing to the women who are neither free nor chained. Hecuba in her opening lament draws her audience's attention specifically to the ruins of Troy nearby (*en alta muri decora congesti iacent / tectis adustis*, "Look, the lofty ornament of the walls lie heaped, the houses charred,"15-6). In such a way, the burning city Hecuba indicates behind them reflects the interior status of the women whose nationality and identity have been irrevocably compromised, and throughout the play the city acts as a continual visual reminder of their status and condition.

Dramaturgical analysis indicates the opportunity for appropriate staging.[23] The entrances and exits of the characters demonstrate that one wing of the stage leads toward Troy and various

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[22] Fantham notes that *fragilis* "combined with *locus* generates a new image of crumbling ground beneath the powerful." Elaine Fantham, *Seneca's Troades: A Literary Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 207.

[23] Cf. Thomas D. Kohn, *The Dramaturgy of Senecan Tragedy* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 110-123. Fantham discusses the issue of staging versus recitation; despite Seneca's movement from Aristotelian

places around the ruined city; the other wing leads toward the Greek ships. As the play progresses, the Trojan characters gesture toward the Greek ships with fear and horror; the Greeks look to it with hope and longing.[24] Such staging overlays the perspectives of the two groups, the Greek men and the Trojan captives, and further confuses for the audience the heroines' already uncertain state. Even the state of the sky, Hecuba notes, throws the time of day into question.

> ... nec caelum patet
> undante fumo: nube ceu densa obsitus
> ater favilla squalet Iliaca dies. (*Tr.* 19-21)
>
> *Even the sky is obscured*
> *With roiling smoke: as if covered by a haze*
> *The dim daylight is smeared with the ashes of Ilium.*

Just as the Greek army threatens and obscures the Trojan women's fate, the ashes of Troy obscure the daylight in a suffocating cloud.

Hecuba presents the setting to her audience of captives with horror and desperate indignation. She begins the play by naming Troy as the ultimate warning to anyone experiencing prosperity:

> Quicumque regno fidit et magna potens dominatur
> aula nec leves metuit deos
> animumque rebus credulum laetis dedit,
> me videat et te, Troia… (*Tr.* 1-4)
>
> *Whoever trusts in kingdoms, whoever powerful*
> *Rules on a great throne and does not fear the flighty gods*
> *And believes in his own lucky affairs,*
> *Let him look on me and on you, Troy...*

---

ideal tragic form, staging would be both possible and appreciated by a Neronian audience, although no documented performances appear on historical record. Cf. Fantham, *Seneca's Troades*, 34-49.

[24] Kohn, *Dramaturgy*, 113.

She interprets her situation as dire, utterly without hope of redemption, and so horrific that dying is a longed-for alternative. She stands at a threshold between what she was and what she will be. At this moment she has the opportunity to define (or redefine) herself, and with it she possesses immense disruptive and epistemological power. However, due to the horrors of war she has witnessed, she cannot recognize the potential productivity of her state. Instead, she surrenders to the idea that her identity -- as mother, wife, Trojan -- is crumbling, without recognizing the regenerative capacity of destruction. What she does not see is that her ongoing existence indicates the simultaneous deconstruction *and* reconstruction of her identity.

Hecuba's opening song places the action at the peak of her emotional experience. This is in keeping with Senecan dramatic construction, which often focuses on characters at their emotional extremes (*e.g.* Clytemnestra's waves of emotion as she deliberates at the beginning of the *Agamemnon*, the moment of paternal realization in *Thyestes*, 1006ff.), and which shifts with scenes from one character to another, thereby creating a composite picture of an event and its emotional consequences.[25]

The immediate cause for Hecuba's extreme emotional state is the final fall of Troy following ten years of siege and warfare; she has seen ten years' worth of horrors that have compromised her sanity, and now she has behind her the razed city as a physical demonstration of her inner collapse. Hecuba's emotional state exists for the unmoving moment of her

[25] Zenobi posits that such a tendency results from the aesthetic influence of pantomime at Rome during the early empire. Pantomime differs from tragedy (in its Aristotelian ideal form) in its episodic nature that presents moments from a (typically mythological) narrative rather than a continuous development of action; Cf. Alessandra Zenobi, *Seneca's Tragedies and the Aesthetics of Pantomime* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014). These same elements lead to Erasmo's conclusion of metatheatricality in Senecan tragedy, which he also attributes to the influence of pantomimic authors like Publius Syrus; Erasmo, *Roman Tragedy*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004) 134.

monologue at the peak of anguish.[26] However, rather than cresting and decreasing in emotional intensity, her monologic song and desire to cling to her shattered former identity prevent her from any forward movement and thus any respite.

The Troades' identities lie within a vague liminal area; they can only call themselves "Trojan" so long as they remain together, for their captive band, in the absence of the city that now lies in ashes, represents all that remains of their community as they know it. However, at any moment they will be divided as prizes among the conquering Greeks. This raises important questions that echo through the choral odes and unsettle the dramatic action: without Troy, can the women call themselves Trojan? Furthermore, what does it mean for them to be Trojan at this juncture? What will it mean for each woman tomorrow? Following Hecuba's opening song, she leads the chorus in contemplation of these quandaries. Hecuba, who identifies herself as the personification of the city (a point with which Fantham begins her discussion of the play[27] and which I discuss in detail below), offers the chorus members the death and destruction they have endured. From it they unwittingly harness the feminine and communal strengths of lamentation.

The first act makes clear Hecuba's mental state as she outlines the extent of the destruction the Greeks have subjected her to, physically and existentially. She has lost faith in the key establishments that previously governed her existence. The ten years of war compromised the integrity of these institutions; the brutality that accompanied the Greeks' sack

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[26] Monologues, especially the retrospective kind that Hecuba delivers, describe the current moment and its creation but do not propel the narrative forward into the next moment. As such, they operate in what Kristeva calls "women's time," which can also be described as non-cursive time (Kristeva uses 'women' as a keyword indicating the binary opposite to a default state, in this case linear or cursive time). Women's time as she describes it is marked by repetition, isolation, and eternity. For a reprinting of her original essay, translated by Alice Jardin and Harry Blake, see Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 187-213. See too Gardner's discussion of gendered time in the Roman elegiac poets, whose work expresses tension between the conflicting elegiac goals: both to move forward in time toward consummation of the elegiac relationship, and to halt cursive time in order to curtail the relationship's conclusion. Hunter H. Gardner, *Gendering Time in Augustan Love Elegy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[27] Fantham, *Seneca's Troades*, 203.

dismantled the sanctity of the city, its gods, its leaders, and the promise of continuity through progeny. These exist now only in her lament, through the collective memory of the chorus whose dissolution as a community is imminent. Hecuba names the pillars that make up her identity when she calls them as witnesses to her misfortune:

> Testor deorum numen adversum mihi,
> patriaeque cineres teque rectorem Phrygum
> quem Troia toto conditum regno tegit,
> tuosque manes quo stetit stante Ilium,
> et vos meorum liberum magni greges,
> umbrae minores … (*Tr.* 28-33)
>
> *I can as witness the power of the gods, adverse as it is,*
> *The ashes of my fatherland and you, ruler of Phrygia,*
> *Whom now Troy covers, interred with your whole kingdom,*
> *And you, ghosts, who stood around me when Troy still did,*
> *And you too, the once-famous flocks of my children*
> *Now little ghosts...*

The appeal establishes Hecuba as a suppliant, but by describing the first of her witnesses as *adversum* negates any hope of successful supplication. Perhaps she remembers the moment in Book Six of the *Iliad* when Athena rejects her prayers; perhaps the crimes against her family and city are proof enough of divine disfavor.[28] One such piece of evidence is the *magni greges, umbrae minores* to whom she appeals (*Tr.* 32-3); Hecuba, mythical mother of fifty sons and fifty daughters, now has but one daughter remaining. Children best represent the hope for continuation of existence, and the remarkable fecundity of Priam's family is often mentioned as evidence of their prosperity. Through a line of direct descent, individuals may seem to exist past their natural life spans, with their intentions and genes prospering together. Progeny thus act as relief from the existential fears the chorus express, but without them, such hope is extinguished. The pitiful image of the *umbrae minores* lack definite form not only because of their post-

[28] "ὣς ἔφατ᾽ εὐχομένη, ἀνένευε δὲ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη," Homer, *Il.* 6.311.

mortem state but also because, for Hecuba, they embody maternal dreams dashed out against grim reality.

The result of all of this is the necessity for a paradigm shift -- everything Hecuba deemed necessary to her existence and identity has either been compromised or utterly destroyed, and yet she continues to suffer and to breathe. Redefining the means of her existence, however, requires acceptance of the increasing irrelevance of her previous mode of thought. Doing so would involve recognition first of her identity and existence as something fluid and penetrable, and consequently of the false hopes offered by emblems of permanence and stability such as glory or children. In her opening song, Hecuba stands at the moment of *anagnorisis* of these facts, but she clings in terror to her old reckoning of self and finally to the idea of Priam safe and unviolated in death. Even as she does so however, she cannot deny the evidence she's witnessed; her very opening thought warns against the permanence of structures, including those such as identity and self.

Echoing the futility she named in her appeal to the gods as *testatores* in line 28, Hecuba explains that her fate has been dire long before the Greek fleet arrived on the shores of Troy.

> prior Hecuba vidi gravida nec tacui metus
> et vana vates ante Cassandram fui. (*Tr.* 36-7)
>
> *Earlier, pregnant, I saw -- nor was I afraid to speak,*
> *I was an unheard prophetess even before Cassandra.*

The key word *vana*, given emphasis with the alliterative and archaic *vates* succeeding it, indicates either that she has always perceived her existence as doomed, or that she has re-written her memory to reflect her current desperate view of the world. Nevertheless, the futility with which she paints her past and present result from her crisis of self and the unending moment of collapse in which she is fixed. She complains that even the completely *nefas* transgressions done

against Priam and Cassandra at the altars *non tamen superis sat est*, ("but this is not enough for the gods," 56) with the implication that nothing will be enough. When she reaches the upper limit of suffering and finds it to be a false boundary, Hecuba declares that there is no end to her pain, nor end to the injustices she faces. From this she concludes that *life* is suffering, and that the Trojan identity must be defined by suffering, which persists as the only constant.

Through her speeches and exchanges with the chorus, Hecuba makes clear the connection between the city and her identity. In the opening of her song, she entangles her fate with that of the city and demands that any consideration of the events at Troy requires evaluation of her lot first, and consequently of Troy's. She thus assumes the position simultaneously of the chorus leader, representative of the other captive women, and that of the city personified. As a result, the suffering of the city is her suffering, and she endures the torments done to the other women as if they are done to her. This dualistic position allows her the authority to declare to her lamenting Troades,

> placet hic habitus,
> placet: agnosco Troada turbam. (*Tr.* 95-96)
>
> *This dress is right,*
> *I'm satisfied: I recognize the Trojan crowd.*

She goes on to explain that her experience as a Trojan woman has been nothing but mourning, so that lamentation appears the most fitting mode for her companions by default. Suffering has become for her a sign of Trojan identity, as her daily existence -- on the level of private citizen and of city personified -- is filled with misery. She explains:

> ut nulla dies maerore caret,
> sed nova fletus causa ministrat. (*Tr.* 77-78)
>
> *So that no day is free from sorrow,*
> *But delivers new causes for tears.*

As a result of her continual suffering, Hecuba has come to associate her identity -- and the Trojan identity -- with destruction. Her identity as she sees it has over the course of the war crumbled and dissolved to such an extent that she can only recognize it *as* something in the process of dissolution. Lamentation best represents this existential crisis in its physicality, especially in the mode in which Hecuba and her women engage: the tearing of their hair, skin and clothes reflects outwardly their inner disintegration.

Hecuba's position as the embodiment of the city and leader of the Trojan chorus gives double weight to her words, so that when she describes the plight of the city and its ruined (penetrated, permanently altered) state, she describes herself. When she states to her unnamed audience that *excisa ferro est: Pergamum incubuit sibi* ("It's been razed by the sword: the city collapses into itself," 14), her ambiguous participle serves the function of explaining both her experience and the city's. Additionally, when she attests that Pergamum collapses inward, she gives words to the implosion of what she considered sacrosanct. Thus she too "is pillaged while she burns," like Troy (*diripitur ardens Troia*, 19). Her experiences as a prisoner of war and witness of atrocities have resulted in a continuous destruction and collapse of her self. In the despairing light in by which Hecuba views it, her dialogic existence and subsequent framing of her identity is one constantly under attack, constantly falling in on itself. However, even as it is subjected to continuous destruction, an individual, by merely existing, reshapes itself. It follows logically that if dissolution is truly continuous and infinite, as Hecuba describes her fate to be, construction of identity must take place at a rate equal to the existential deconstruction. The result is a fluid and dialogic existence, so that with each new stimulus – a destructive force in that it compromises stability of self – one must re-evaluate the terms by which one defines one's identity. For Hecuba, who responds to the horrors surrounding her with fear, the physical ruin of

the city with which she identifies directs her focus not to the regenerative capability of change but to the permanent dissolution of what she mistakenly believed to be stable and permanent. As such, her faith in the city and its ideological structures (marriage, the gods, the existential comfort of children) parallels her faith in her self as a monologic entity, capable of existing in a vacuum, of being accurately described, and of resisting change or influence. With the destruction of the prior category, the latter becomes compromised

The terms Hecuba uses to describe both herself and the city are grotesque in the Bakhtinian sense. Bakhtin, in his book *Rabelais and His World*, describes the grotesque as an aesthetic that revels in the bodily aspects of existence. The grotesque is marked by attention to the physical body, in particular to orifices, which serve as entrances and exits to the body, places of permeation and penetration. Its focuses are sites of intake and output: copulation, defecation, the excretion of fluids, the shedding of blood, eating and drinking, birth, death. The grotesque disrupts the illusion of the body, both corporeal and existential, as an inviolable whole. Thus the grotesque deals with the body in pieces, a catalogue of parts. Skin plays an important role in the conjuring the grotesque, as skin embodies the barrier between the outside self and inside. Penetration of the skin demonstrates that a divide between inside and outside, self and non-self, is tenuous at best, and that any such barrier may inevitably transgressed. Consequently, bodily penetration demonstrates the fallacious nature of a sense of self modeled on the inviolability of the body.

The female body is especially prone to treatment of the grotesque. Female procreative abilities hinge on the penetrable nature of the body, as all stages of reproduction blur the line between inside and outside as well as self and non-self. Additionally, the feminine form demonstrates that any penetration by a foreign body risks the subsummation of the external force

by the internal. The interior, especially as expressed by fluids that originate within the body and escape outward, possesses the capacity to alter penetrative forces through mutual contamination.

Such is the contaminating nature of the grotesque, as grotesque imagery invites the blurring of not only bodies but also of categories and institutions. The grotesque reveals the impermanence of humanity and its subjection to change as a driving force in the identity-building process. These qualities pertain not only to individual bodies, which through the process of living decay and change, but also to the metaphysical entities they postulate. Definition of the body depends on a stable entity that may be accurately observed and reported; the nature of the body, however, eludes such analysis and thus renders any definition false. Attention paid to the shifting of the physical body demonstrates equally the impossibility of defining the self as an entity, as it too constantly undergoes transformation.

The constant process of transformation that characterizes the grotesque results in simultaneous death and rebirth. Whereas in higher registers, which aim for the sublime rather than the bathetic, death renders entities static and permanent (as the chorus, responding to Hecuba, describes Priam, 156-163), the grotesque turns every instance of decay into the generation of a new form. Thus the grotesque body is, in Bakhtin's words, "a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world."[29]

This aspect of the grotesque results in its status as an ambivalent force, one which characters like Hecuba, who is psychologically entrenched in the forces that collapse around her, perceive as destructive. However, with this destruction necessarily comes construction, and the

[29] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 315.

opportunity for Hecuba and her chorus members to avenge themselves through the production of meaning. Hecuba, for the most part, fails to recognize the opportunity for self-creation that is latent in her demise due to her attachment to her old identity and institutions. Whereas the grotesque body is one in the act of becoming, Hecuba is trapped in the act of dissolution.

Though Hecuba clings to her previous frame of reckoning, that which Bakhtin describes as the "new bodily canon," evidence of the grotesque body is evident throughout her speech and interactive lament with the chorus.

> solvite crinem;
> per colla fluant maesta capilli
> tepido Troiae pulvere turpes (*Tr.* 84-86)
>
> *Shake loose your hair,*
> *Let it stream across your mournful necks,*
> *Filthy with the warm dust of Troy.*

Hecuba exhorts the chorus to compose – or decompose – themselves in such a way that better reflects the chaos surrounding them. One such way is through the consideration of their bodies as constituent parts, rather than as a unified whole. This bodily division not only better suits their internal turmoil, it also reflects their discovery of their bodies as objects that can be enslaved, pillaged, and divided among the plunderers. The intermingling of dust with their hair accomplishes contradictory ends: even as Hecuba seeks to physically unite herself with the country on which she has based her identity, the very act alludes to the futility of such a desire, as the country she longs for no longer exists. War has altered the physical makeup of the soil through burning and bloodshed. In such a way, the horrors of war have permanently altered Hecuba. She longs for some reassurance from the permanent, but the physicality of her home, like that of her body, mean that the comfort of stable identity cannot be found there.

Through lamentation, the women find physical expression of their metaphysical pain. In doing so, they render their bodies no longer subject to metaphysical restrictions regarding abstract concepts like chastity (*pudor*).

> paret exertos turba lacertos;
> veste remissa substringe sinus
> uteroque tenus pateant artus.
> cui coniugio pectora velas,
> captive pudor? (*Tr*. 87-91)
>
> *Crowd, prepare your bared limbs,*
> *Loosen your garments, bind them around your waists*
> *So that your bodies lay naked to the womb.*
> *For what husband do you cover your breasts,*
> *Captive shame?*

When women have been broken into parts (womb, limbs, hair, breasts), solemn institutions that apply to women as Women, rather than as female bodies, cease to have relevance. Hecuba's question calls attention to the irrelevance of modesty now that the city and civic institutions that maintained behavioral standards are no longer extant. Without the structures that define nobility and seemliness, the women who define their behavior and identity through these ideals lack support for their mode of understanding the world. As a result, they experience their bodies not as holders of souls that can experience secondary emotions (such as shame), but as purely physical entities that feel physically induced primary emotions (such as pain and fear).

Lamentation is an ideal mode of expression for the women who have been reduced to a purely physical existence, as lamentation expresses non-physical pain through the physical body as an instrument. As such, lamentation is an act that operates with a grotesque aesthetic. It focuses on the transitive moment between the body as self and body as object. Appropriately, these reflections become evident through physical demonstrations of the body's nature as

destructible, penetrable, and capable of suffering. Hecuba's commands to her captive band demonstrate this:

> Lamenta cessant, turba captivae mea?
> ferite palmis pectora et planctus date
> et iusta Troiae facite. iamdudum sonet
> fatalis Ide, iudicis diri domus. (*Tr.* 63-66)
>
> *Have you stopped your groans, my captive crowd?*
> *Beat your breasts with your palms, let the blows rain,*
> *Make yourselves suitable for Troy. Already fateful Ida*
> *Should sound forth, the home of that unlucky judge.*

For Hecuba, the body exists as both an expression and a cause of suffering. The physicality of the women's bodies hosts the capacity for physical suffering and violation. Similarly, the physical existence of the city beyond the cultural and psychological ideas that constitute it in the women's minds allows for its forcible destruction, and subsequently the violation of those ideas. Thus Hecuba's body in its physicality betrays her self, which she desires to see as an independent and impenetrable whole. However, due the ambivalent nature of the grotesque, the physicality of the women's bodies also allows for self-expression, for communication and physical sympathizing with each other, which itself is an act of identity and community building.

In the lines above, Hecuba uses a triple imperative to convey the necessity of the actions for their psychological existence. She emphasizes this with the repetitious commands *ferite palmis pectora* and *planctus date*; the rephrasing of an identical idea establishes the expectation that the third command will also restate the concept. And indeed, for Hecuba the idea *iusta Troiae facite* is a restatement, as in her conception of the body, it is not just for the physical exterior to be at discord with the psychological interior, and given her identification with the city, it is imperative that her body reflect the city's broken state.

Hecuba's reprimand lamenta cessant, echoes the theme of perpetual suffering that pervades her interaction with the chorus. She describes her lament as continuous and perpetual; she begins lamenting long before the capture of the city (36-7); her sorrow, like Troy's fall, continues indefinitely without resolution.

When the chorus replies, they respond both to Hecuba's perpetual grief and her conception of the body as a reflection of self:

> non rude vulgus lacrimis novem
> lugere iubes:
> hoc continuis egimus annis
> [...]
> decies nivibus canuit Ide,
> decies nostris nudata rogis (*Tr.* 67-69 … 73-74)
>
> *It's not a crowd new to tears*
> *You order to weep:*
> *We haven't ceased for years ongoing*
> *…*
> *Ten times Ida grew white with frosts,*
> *Ten times naked, stripped for our pyres*

The city is laid bare like their breasts, from which they have torn their mourning garb (iam nuda vocant pectora dextras, "Already our bare breasts demand blows" 106). They thus resolve to continue their lament.

Lamentation carries a dualistic disruptive/productive tradition on the tragic stage. Foley describes lamentation in the archaic Greek world as a phenomenon that is by nature feminine and communal.[30] The chorus invokes these qualities through their references to themselves as a *vulgus* in lines 67 and 81. This label frames their first response to Hecuba's opening song, and stresses first their fall in status (from respectable women of Troy to a common crowd). Hecuba

[30] Helene P. Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 23 ff.

in turn refers to them as a *turba* at 63, 87 and 95, and allies herself with them by calling them *comites* at 83.

Lamentation, Foley explains, is disruptive by its very nature. In Athenian tragedy, excessive lamentation embodies the conflict between *oikos* and *polis*, the feminine-dominated private sphere and the masculine-controlled public arena. Private lamentation, which concentrates on an individual and on personal grief, lies in opposition to state funerals, which forgo violent and emotionally-driven mourning in favor of a politically beneficial ordeal governed by rhetoric and reason. Feminine grief, with its tearing of skin, undemure ululations and public disruption, threatens the existing order of private and feminine concerns subjugated by public and masculine interests.[31]

The productive power of lamentation lies in these points of contention. Women, en masse, possess the capacity to overturn civic order through their collective denial of ideal feminine qualities (quiescence, composure, modesty). 6th-century Athens, recognizing this as disruptive, issued legislation curbing the intensity of private lamentation and redirecting mourning energy to state-controlled funerals.[32] Such legislation removed mourning ritual from female hands, where it had resided in archaic times, and where it carried the minatory opportunity to turn from an outpouring of grief to a call for vengeance.

Hecuba and her band, as lamenting women still bound to each other by cultural ties, possess the power to disrupt the total control of their captors. Hecuba, however, who still clings to the comforts of stability offered by the new bodily canon, fails to see the productive potential

[31] While the nuances of the politics of lamentation differ between fifth century Athens and first century Rome, lamentation as a collective and feminine phenomenon would be familiar to a Roman audience, at least within Homeric tradition and setting. Cf. Mario Erasmo, *Death: Antiquity and Its Legacy* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 20.
[32] Foley, *Female Acts*, 23.

present in the destruction of her previous self. “The body of the new canon is merely one body, no signs of duality have been left. It is self-sufficient and speaks in its name alone [...] Therefore all the events taking place within it acquire one single meaning: death is only death, it never coincides with birth,” Bakhtin writes. “In the grotesque body, on the contrary, death brings nothing to an end.”[33] In her abjection, Hecuba can only interpret her fate through a single lens, so that no rebirth comes with the deaths she has experienced, and no productivity emerges from her destruction.

In a similar way, Hecuba recognizes the fear she inspires in both the Greeks (62) and in death itself (1171-75), but she cannot use this to her advantage. Fantham notes that Hecuba’s dreaded status “reestablishes a sort of balance between the victors and the conquered, who may yet have comfort from the destruction of their masters.”[34] Hecuba, like Andromache in the following acts, struggles to understand her world, which has changed so drastically through the horrors of war. In the wake of Troy’s fall, she can only perceive her state as a prolonged and torturous collapse. She fears that the destruction of the city means the destruction of her self, that to let go of the remnants of her identity will result in total dehumanization that is symbolized in the tragic tradition through her metamorphosis into a bitch (Eur. *Hec*. 1265; Ov. *Met.* 13.567-71). This fate, which is not alluded to in Seneca’s play, but which lurks in the minds of the audience and which seems to haunt Hecuba, embodies the end result of identity dissolution within a monologic conception of self (Bakhtin’s new bodily canon). Seneca’s Hecuba endures no such transformation, no dehumanized end, for within the dialogic world of the *Troades*, death as a continued form of existence brings no conclusion.

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[33] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 321-2.
[34] Fantham, *Seneca’s Troades*, 203.

The chorus expresses the force of their reaction to the events they have witnessed as a disruption of nature. They frame their suffering on a cosmic scale, so that Echo, here representative for all natural spirits, returns not repeated words but everywhere the groans of the city:

> habitansque cavis montibus Echo
> non, ut solita est,
> extrema brevis verba remitat:
> totos reddat Troiae gemitus. (*Tr.* 109-112)
>
> *Echo, living in her mountain cave,*
> *Doesn't just reply with the last word heard*
> *As she's wont to do:*
> *She returns Troy's every groan.*

By describing their experience through the image of a sympathetic universe, they attempt to unite their own physical and psychological experiences and to process the sudden disruption to their identities.

As Bakhtin discusses, the vision of the body as grotesque parallels a conception of identity as such. Hecuba struggles with the realization that her bodily existence allows for suffering and balks against the truth that her psychological existence is tied to such physicality. However, the fiction of a separate physical and psychological existence quickly shows itself to be unstable. Bakhtin writes of existence as dialogic, meaning that both human existence and human identity comes together not by a distinct, metaphysical identity in the Hegelian sense, but through the constant dialogue between physical body and external stimuli. As the body responds to stimuli, the mind seeks to make sense of both the stimuli and the reactions. As such, identity is the composite effect of this constant dialogue. Existence for Bakhtin is reaction, and when a body ceases to react to stimuli, it ceases to exist, it ceases to live. At no moment can an identity be stable or independent, as stability – the cessation of response – means death. Identity, or the

self, cannot be a metaphysical constant, as no entity exists in a vacuum. The self is therefore constantly shifting, constantly remade in the dialogue with the external world.

Hecuba, through exposure to the war, has come to realize that nothing is secure and impenetrable: neither the city, her body, nor her identity. Though Hecuba may long for an identity of the past, even against her will she continues to respond to the events of the present and therefore finds her identity recast by those around her, both Trojan and Greek. Hecuba longs for the stable identity that is impenetrable to external threats, but the very nature of her existence requires engagement with these threats. What's more, the moment she fails to respond to them is the moment of her death. She and the other Trojan women cannot exist in their world without responding to the events around them, so that these events – the very ones Hecuba views as having destroyed her city and her self – define their existence. Though she struggles against the realization, Hecuba expresses knowledge of her position when she tells the chorus that her identity is defined by suffering, which can be understood as a form of response to external stimuli, devoid of meaning except in the immediate physical context. When she says with satisfaction to her lamenting women, *placet hic habitus, | placet: agnosco Troada turbam,* (95-6) she tells them that this form of expression, this form of existence, is pleasing to her: it is something that she recognizes. After her years of suffering, even before the Greeks arrived on Trojan shores, the only way she can recognize herself and her companions is in the guise of lamentation. She stresses this point with the repetition of *placet,* an ironic choice of diction, as only through distress can she find something familiar with which to relate. However, even as she accepts her existence as a series of misfortunes and her suffering in response, she cannot yet recognize the implications for her identity.

Like her body and like the city, her identity, her self, is dependent on the constantly shifting stimuli of her environment. She cannot depend on a static, isolated, monologic self, for as the war proves, no city or person can exist in a vacuum. For Hecuba and the women, suffering has become their mode of existence. This suffering does not originate in themselves; it is caused by conflict with the "other," that is with the Greeks. Therefore the ongoing war and conflict is now necessary to their identities, but the women struggle against the horror that their foes are necessary for their own identities. Hecuba however demonstrates this necessity in her opening song when she defines Troy by means of her enemies (8-13): Rhesus, king of Thrace, Memnon, king of the Ethiopians, and Penthesilea, leader of the Amazons.[35] Such a catalogue points to her, and Troy's, dialogic existence, in which the other is not only necessary for one's identity, but a crucial component in one's very existence.

Thus the debate regarding Priam is especially important, but paradoxical, and one which is continued through the choral debate of the afterlife and the driving presences of the deceased in the dramatic action. Hecuba leads the chorus in lament of Priam, whom she believes to be more fortunate than the women left alive. She states that Priam's safety in the underworld is a hope for all of them, and that he is blessed in comparison, *felix Priamus* (144). He is "felix" as he who no longer lives, no longer suffers. Priam will never look on the faces of his captors, nor walk in a triumph, the apparent fate of his wife and the other women his kingship protected. Now in death, he walks free:

> nunc Elysii nemoris tutus
> errat in umbris interque pias
> felix animas Hectora quaerit. (*Tr.* 159-161)

[35] Fantham, *Seneca's Troades*, 208.

Now he wanders safe through the
Glades of Elysium; and among the other shades
He searches for Hector's fortunate spirit.

Hecuba and her women look to Priam in the underworld as hope for a stable identity and a cessation of change, without external forces that impose suffering. They conclude their lament and the first scene with the morbidly optimistic note

felix Priamus, felix quisquis
bello moriens omnia secum
consumpta tulit. (*Tr.* 162-164)

Oh lucky Priam, lucky is anyone
Who dies in war and takes everything
With him, his affairs spent.

with the idea that one's affairs, once spent (*consumpta*), are finally at rest. However, her logic regarding Priam is unstable, as the shades of Achilles and Hector demonstrate, who appear to characters later in the play. The absence of suffering implies no further motivation to suffer, no antagonist, and no other in the dialogue of existence; without an other, there is no change, only a monologic existence in which the self is able to exist as a complete and finished entity. However, this is problematic in terms of analysis of both Hecuba and the dramatic action. Andromache and Pyrrhus both take their courses of action from the ghosts who visit them; both ghosts express desires that indicate not only the absence of peace in the underworld, but also that death is not a cessation, but a continuation of pain and change. The uneasy dead in the *Troades* point to a living world that still concerns these dead, and one in which the dead not only have the ability to influence the living, but also possess wills and desires and enact changes themselves. Thus the souls that Hecuba envisions as static and complete (monologic) are impossible. The image of Priam safe in the underworld contrasts sharply with the other dead, who indicate that identity cannot remain stable even in death.

Hecuba's shaken faith in identity/body/city institutions extends to other, previously stable concepts and barriers, like that between life and death. Her identity, and that of the other women, exists at the onset of the dramatic action in a moment of flux. No longer the queen of a glorious city, mother to countless children, Hecuba is now a prisoner of war, her city destroyed, her fate uncertain. The uncertainty of her existence casts uncertainty on other institutions (like chastity, as discussed above, as well as morality, the value of life). This effect is doubled when one considers the impact of the horrors Hecuba has witnessed thus far, which, as they point to the physicality of existence and the impermanence of the self, have equally disruptive effects. Julia Kristeva discusses in *The Powers of Horror* the effects of exposure to wartime horrors, in particular to the sight of blood, open wounds, excrement, and especially corpses, in terms of what she calls abjection. Abjection prohibits detachment; it is an inescapable awareness of one's own animalistic physicality. It renders one incapable of viewing oneself as an entity distinct and separate from the parts of one's body; thus the abject "draws [one] to toward the place where meaning collapses."[36] The abject comes through the harshest reminders of our nature, in our instinctive and *physical* reactions to defilement, filth,[37] with corpses as "the most sickening of wastes."[38] Though abjection results from physical waste, excrement, blood, pus, "it is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules." In the face of abjection, values – the rules we create in order to govern an ultimately ungovernable existence – such as nobility, freedom, and justice, break down and are corrupted by the physicality of human existence.

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[36] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.
[37] "And all the organs shrivel up in the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire." Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3.
[38] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3.

The matter of the underworld and its fate for one's existence and identity is pertinent, as Hecuba's faith in a blessedly dead Priam indicates not only a static and safe identity for the dead, but also a clearly marked boundary between life and death. This boundary separates the two categories irrevocably, and protects the dead from the living (and vice versa). However, the immediate action following Hecuba's lament in Act One demonstrates that this division is *not* stable, nor clear cut, as the dead continue to have influence over the living, more so than the living (such as Hecuba, bound by fate, and Agamemnon, bound by obligation). Thus the categories of life and death become for Hecuba and the other Trojan women as permeable as their identities, and as impermanent and subject to decay as the city and the institutions it stood for.

CHAPTER 3

BEHIND ENEMY LINES

Like Hecuba, Andromache also experiences the permeable boundaries of self and ordering systems of thought as she ventures into Greek-occupied territory. Following Hecuba's lament and the chorus' first song on the beach, the dramatic action moves from the liminal space of the shore to the decidedly hostile Greek camp. The focus shifts as a Greek messenger, Talthybius, appears onstage and delivers news of portents that indicate a monstrous interruption of the natural order:

> … summa iam Titan iuga
> stringebat ortu, vicerat noctem dies,
> cum subito caeco terra mugitu fremens
> concussa totos traxit ex imo sinus (*Tr.* 170a-172)
>
> *The sun was grazing the mountaintops*
> *with dawn's light, day had overcome night,*
> *when suddenly the earth, groaning with a confused rumble,*
> *restless, pulled forth its innards from the deep.*

He concludes this description with an account of the terrifying appearance of Achilles himself from the underworld:

> tum scissa vallis aperit immensos specus
> et hiatus Erebi pervium ad superos iter
> tellure fracta praebet ac tumulum levat (*Tr.* 178-180).
>
> *Then the rent valley revealed vast abysses*
> *And the maw of Erebus, with the earth shattered,*
> *Provides a pervious passage to the upper reaches*
> *and lifts aside the tomb.*

Achilles clarifies the reason for his appearance, which Talthybius quotes to the chorus:

desponsa nostris cineribus Polyxene
Pyrrhi manu mactetur et tumulum riget (*Tr.* 195-6)

With Polyxena promised to our ashes in marriage
Let her be slaughtered by the hand of Pyrrus, and let her water our grave.

Talthybius compares the violent apparition of Achilles' to another instance of the warrior disrupting nature during his life, when he slowed and diverted the flow of the river Xanthus with the number of bodies he had slain (185-187).[39] He responds to this quasi-divine specter as Andromache does to Hector's appearance when she recounts her dream at the beginning of Act Three, although without the spectacles on stage their audiences must decide for themselves the true effects of the ghosts on the natural order.

The chorus responds to Talthybius, bemoaning their fate and that of their companion. Again the focus shifts as Talthybius exits the stage and Agamemnon and Pyrrhus enter, so that their conversation is framed by the reports of unnatural appearances. Though the chorus remains onstage, they do not participate in the dialogue and do not seem to hear the Greek commanders' argument. Although it is unclear exactly when the spatial transition occurs, whether it comes before or after Talthybius, the dramatic action has moved into the Greek camp by the time Agamemnon and Pyrrhus enter the stage and begin speaking.[40] When Calchas enters and confirms that Polyxena must die as demanded before the Greek fleet may depart, and that furthermore Astyanax must die as well, this information must travel in a penetrating trajectory from the heart of the Greek encampment outward to its Trojan victims.

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[39] *Iliad* 21.210ff.
[40] Kohn argues the shift happens preceding Talthybius' entrance: "The absence of Hecuba and the presence of the Greek messenger indicate that the setting has changed to the tents of the Achaeans," Kohn, *Dramaturgy*, 116. Davis, Boyle and Fantham read the setting change following Talthybius' exit, rather than before. All agree however that the second Act moves from the location of the first, though the action still takes place around Troy (as Agamemnon says, *stamus hoc Danai loco,* 265).

Thus when Andromache enters at 409, she steps into enemy territory, land which was once Trojan but which now, occupied by alien forces, is both foreign and hostile. Her opening words begin the longest act in Senecan drama (404 lines beginning at 409 and ending at 813) and what A. J. Boyle refers to as "one of the most tense and harrowing acts in ancient drama."[41]

Andromache first berates the Trojan chorus, for their sufferings are only beginning while hers have long been active (*Ilium vobis modo, mihi cecedit olim*, "Ilium fell just now for you, but fell long ago for me," 412-413). Even so, her hardships did not end with Hector's life. Her surviving son, Astyanax, ensures that she cannot join her husband in the grave; instead she must continue suffering (*iam erepta Danais coniugem sequerer meum, nisi hic teneret,* "Already, rescued from the Greeks, I would follow my spouse, if it weren't that this one holds me here" 418-419). When the *senex* presses her, she describes her dream of Hector and his warning (438-461). The *senex* confirms her decision to hide Astyanax in Hector's grave and advises her to move away so as not to reveal the tomb's repurposing.

The conversation with the *senex* establishes Andromache's vulnerable state prior to Ulysses' entrance. Unlike Hecuba and the women of the chorus in Act One, who stood at the cusp of their transformation from free women to prisoners of war, Andromache is already a victim of her fate and subject to the whims of her overlords, as the old man reminds her when he says *Miser occupet praesidia, securus legat* ("Let the unfortunate grab protection, let one free from care be selective," 495). In addition to the violence she has witnessed and experienced during the war, Andromache is still psychologically under attack as she careens toward her fate. Her identity is endangered as a Trojan woman, bereft of a city and surrounded by enemies, and as a mother by the threat of Astyanax's sacrifice. These threats are represented dramatically in

[41] A. J. Boyle, *Tragic Seneca* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 66.

two ways, first through the presence of the Greek and the verbal indications of the action as located in the Greek camp, and second through the physical presence of Hector's tomb onstage, which Andromache refers to with imperatives directed at Astyanax (*succede tumulo, nate*, 503) and later as she debates with herself over Ulysses' ultimatum (*Hector est illinc tuus*, 558); Ulysses himself refers to the tomb with deictics (*Tumulus hic campo statim toto iacebit*, 667-8).

As a result of these threats, Andromache over the course of Act Three faces her post war existence, one which lacks stable touchstones and which is always in flux. Through her dialogue with Ulysses, Andromache recognizes the necessity of an "other" to the existence of one's self. That such a realization comes in dialogue with the enemy is not inconsequential, as Andromache moves inexorably toward a future in which, with Troy finally ashes, she will be forced to exist and define her identity through others who are foreign and abhorrent to her.

For Bakhtin, the self, as discussed in Chapter 1, is not a stable entity, but instead is a balancing act of dialogism[42]. What individuals experience as "self" is the multiple phenomena? of a central point, a non-center, and the relation between them.[43] Thus an individual's existence depends equally on self and non-self; the self can never be an independent self-sufficient construct. Self/other is a relation of simultaneity, which deals with ratios of same or different in space or time. This results in a necessary multiplicity in human perception, and a consequential fluidity of identity.[44] An individual only experiences existence when in dialogue with on other, a non-self, by which the self can be measured. The result is that all meaning is relative, in that it

[42] Holquist uses "dialogism" to describe the overarching significance of dialogue (in existential and linguistic senses) to Bakhtin's philosophy as expressed across his words, though the term is not used by Bakhtin himself. See Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (New York: Routledge, 1990). 15.
[43] Holquist, *Dialogism*, 19. See too "The problem of content, material, and form in verbal art," trans. Kenneth R. Brostrom in M. M. Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Works by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990).
[44] Holquist, *Dialogism*, 22.

comes about as a result of the relation of two bodies "occupying *simultaneous but different* space."[45]

The concept of an "other" is familiar and necessary to stories and storytelling. Existence itself may be termed a story, in that an individual must author himself and existence through narrativity.[46] Storytelling implies an audience, an other to whom the differences of experiences between the self and non-self must be explained. The relationship between the self and other becomes complicated as the author acknowledges this aspect of identity through allusion or intertextuality, qualities which overwhelmingly characterizes Seneca's tragedies.[47] By invoking earlier authors in the literary tradition, Seneca invites the reader to identify the others to his authorial self and to derive meaning through the distance between them. Intertextuality, then, is abdication of primacy by the self, an acknowledgement that meaning originates only through relations.

Drama, as a performative genre, clearly expresses the role of the other in the creation of meaning (which may be understood as either the experience of existence or, in the case of drama, the crafting of plot). The actors onstage operate in a theatricalized reality in which their actions only have meaning when the actor and audience participate in a shared fictional reality. The audience's suspension of disbelief therefore is as necessary as an actor's use of speech or gesture

[45] Emphasis original. Holquist, *Dialogism*, 21.
[46] "I author a unified version of the event of our joint existence from my unique place in it by means of combining the things I see which are different from (in addition to) those you see, and the things you see which are different from (in addition to) that difference." Holquist, *Dialogism*, 36-7.
[47] "As any commentary shows, Senecan tragedy is stitched together from lines of Virgil and Ovid… [Seneca's] tragedy shows the allusive quality distinctive of other Latin poetry." C. A. Littlewood, *Self-Representation and Illusion in Senecan Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6-7. For a survey of Seneca's use of Augustan poetry in particular, see Christopher V. Trinacty, *Senecan Tragedy and the Reception of Augustan Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

in the production of meaning.[48] The spectacles of Senecan drama replicate this process onstage. Spectacles by nature require spectators, just as testimony requires a witness and supplication requires a supplicant. The extent of the suffering experienced by the women of the *Troades* is made all the clearer by the presence of witnesses. The chorus remarks on this when they sing how shared pain is easier to bear:

> dulce maerenti populus dolentum,
> dulce lamentis resonare gentes;
> lenius luctus lacrimae mordent,
> turba quas fletu similis frequentat. (*Tr.* 1009-1012)
>
> *An unhappy throng is sweet to one grieving,*
> *Sweet are countrymen voicing their woes.*
> *Tear of grief sting less fiercely*
> *Which the crowd repeats with shared pain.*

The repetition of "dulce" serves to emphasise their point, as does the pile-up of words indicating "grief," which create a veritable crowd of synonyms. The alliteration of 'l's and 'f's produces a *carmen*-style effect and draws attention to the chorus's tears.[49] In the scenario they describe, they take comfort from the sympathetic presence of witnesses who can share their sorrow.

When she reflects on the singular nature of her own grief, Helen echoes their sentiment that *semper a semper dolor est malignus* ("grief is always, always spiteful," 1013) and is better endured with company. She compares her suffering to that of Andromache and Hecuba, who may mourn publicly with the other Trojan women:

> ...luget Andromacha Hectorem
> et Hecuba Priamum: solus occulte Paris
> lugendus Helenae est. (*Tr.* 907-909)

[48] Ker identifies death in particular as an object of spectation. Ker, *The Deaths of Seneca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 126.
[49] See Mario Erasmo, *Archaic Latin Verse* (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2004).

Andromache weeps for Hector
And Hecuba for Priam: Paris alone
Must be mourned in secret by Helen.

She implies that her grief would be more bearable with an audience, ideally a sympathetic one.

Seneca's love of silent characters further evinces the role of witnesses in his tragedies: their physical presence onstage both offers the necessary audience to the spectacle of the women's sufferings, and draws attention to the very act of spectatorship as the offstage audience watches the onstage one. Such meta-scrutiny produces a surplus of meaning and with it an element of the uncanny for the exterior audience. So important is the role of the witness to the emotional progression of the *Troades* that nearly each act brings with it a new silent character.[50] Hecuba mentions Cassandra in Act One and later indicates her presence onstage with the vocative (37, 61). In Act Two Polyxena enters, possibly with Pyrrhus and Agamemnon at 203 or later with Calchas at line 353; the seer addresses her at 366, implying she is onstage at that moment.[51] Act Three centers around the mostly silent Astyanax, who most likely enters with Andromache at line 409 (Andromache addresses him at 461). His piteous single line, *misere, mater* at 792, marks the critical role of his onstage presence and comes as a jarring shock to the audience. After nearly four hundred lines of silence, his speech is as unexpected as an utterance from the tomb behind him. Act Four features two silent characters: Polyxena, whom Helen addresses upon entering in order to prepare the girl for her "marriage" (871-2 and again at 942). Later, Pyrrhus is reported to enter (*sed incitato Pyrrhus accurrit gradu vultuque torvo*, 999-1000), but he does not speak.

[50] Kohn, *Dramaturgy*, 110.
[51] Kohn reads Polyxena entering with Pyrrhus and Agamemnon. "She could come on with the seer at 353; but it would be quite powerful to have the mute girl standing in full view while Pyrrhus and Agamemnon debate her fate." Kohn, *Dramaturgy*, 117

Though there is no textual evidence for a silent character onstage physically, the ghosts of Polyxena and Astyanax make their presence felt in the final Act. The Trojan women, however, undergo a shift from actors to audience as they listen in horror to the messenger's account of Polyxena's and Astyanax's demise. Implied internal audiences play significant parts too; the messenger relating the events of Act Five takes time in his account to position his gory message between descriptions of the spectators' positions and demeanors (1068-1087) and each crowd's reaction to the acts (1125-1131; 1160-2).[52]

The concept of the other is important for both identity and identification; within a tragic setting characters who do not proclaim their identity to the audience (as Hecuba does explicitly at 36, *prior Hecuba vidi*...) require identification by another character on-stage. In the second Act of the *Troades*, Agamemnon's is identified only when Pyrrhus cites Iphigenia's sacrifice as a precedent (248-9). Similarly, Andromache and Astyanax are only named when Andromache recounts the words of Hector's ghost (452-3).

The chorus notably engages in dramatic dialogue for the first and only time when the dramatic action necessitates their role as interlocutor with Talthybius; they pose "rhetorically necessary questions."[53] Indeed, the other is necessary for the very dramatic structure of tragedy, which according to generic guidelines requires multiple speakers. The importance of interlocutors expresses itself metrically in the stichomythia between Andromache and Ulysses when, at a moment of dramatic tension, only mid-line interruptions complete the metrical formula (664-668).[54]

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[52] These silent characters and the nature of the Trojan women's suffering leads Littlewood to remark that "of all the tragedies *Troades* offers the most developed study of tragic spectatorship." Littlewood, *Self-Representation*, 13.
[53] Kohn, *Dramaturgy*, 116.
[54] Kohn notes the dramatic effect of this when he remarks that "emotions run high on both sides, reflected by an increase in midline interruptions." Kohn, *Dramaturgy*, 119.

Andromache experiences the role of the other in her own existence when she reflects on Astyanax, who alone remains of the ontologically supportive structures of city, husband, and progeny. At a time when her very identity is rewritten by the enemy, Andromache has only Astyanax left as a familiar part of herself. This, however, is a burdensome blessing. His desperate significance to her -- he alone ties her to life -- makes devastatingly clear that existence is a shared experience, that the self consists not of a unified and insoluble entity, but a continually fluctuating relationship of parts. The relationship, furthermore, "is never static, but always in the process of being made or unmade."[55] Andromache, as a prisoner of war and witness to her city and family's total destruction, can only perceive this as a continual unmaking.

Andromache describes Astyanax as the single line tying her to life:

> iam erepta Danais coniugem sequerer meum,
> nisi hic teneret: hic meos animos domat
> morique prohibet; cogit hic aliquid deos
> adhuc rogare -- tempus aerumnae addidit. (418-21)
>
> *Already, rescued from the Greeks, I would follow my spouse,*
> *If it weren't that this one (Astyanax) holds me fast: this one conquers my spirits*
> *And forbids me to die; this one compels me still to beg*
> *Favors from the gods -- he adds further time to my trouble.*

The theme of a child forcibly torn from its mother pervades the body of the drama; here Andromache makes explicit that dissolution of the bond to life follows such separation. She looks with longing toward death, however; her speech continues the theme established in the first Act that living existence is suffering. As a result of the horrors of war, Andromache and the other Trojan women experience the continual barrage of the other on the ego. Andromache, furthermore, views her suffering as something which is still growing in intensity (*exoritur aliquod maius ex magno malum*, "some greater evil rises from our already great one," 427). Act

[55] Holquist, *Dialogism*, 29.

Three tracks her crescendo over the course of the episode with Ulysses. Hecuba, prior to the events of the dramatic action, believes her suffering to be so marked as to be unsurpassable: while she foresaw the events of the war (35-36), she has not yet imagined the horrors that yet lie in store. Act Three thus presents in motion the still image (marked, like Kristeva's "women's time," by eternity, isolation, and repetition) of the feminine suffering of Hecuba's lament in Act One. Both women, however, verbalize this process through the lens of a Troy still (and perpetually) in the process of disintegration (*diripitur ardens Troia*, 19; *nondum ruentis Ilii fatum stetit*, 428).

Andromache's mention of the gods in line 421 presents an example of a self-ordering system threatened by a dialogic existence. Dialogism threatens institutions which operate on the illusion of stability and continuity; the immortality of the gods and the tradition of religious ritual challenge the idea of a universe permanently in flux. Evidence of dialogism as a controlling factor of both identity and existence therefore upsets the illusion of consistency afforded by deities and ritual. Such realizations may be weathered by a stalwart soul, but Andromache, already psychologically affected by the horror which has come to dominate her existence, collapses when her psychological and ontological foundations are compromised.

The episode of Hector's apparition, which Andromache recounts to the *senex* as her son listens in silence, embodies the horror of Andromache's post-Troy life. Hector's appearance is disturbingly physical for the shade of a dead man, and it and provokes in Andromache a visceral and psychological reaction similar to that which Julia Kristeva calls "abjection."[56] The echoes of

[56] Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: an essay on abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

this psychological state compromise Andromache's confidence in the structures defining her existence.

Andromache's account of her dream, though relatively brief at twenty-two lines, 438-460, is noteworthy both for its descriptive elements and for its characterization of the heroine; interpretation of it sways one's reading of Andromache and the pivotal third Act of the drama. Hector and Achilles' shades together drive the entirety of the dramatic action. In a similar way, Hector's manifestation and message to Andromache singularly affect her psychological state.

Hector, like Achilles, appears suddenly (*cum subito*, 171; *cum subito*, 443), but unlike Achilles as he seemed to Talthybius and the Achaeans, he is wounded and defeated. Achilles appears as a glorious youth, prior even to his arrival on the shores of Troy:

> Emicuit ingens umbra Thessalici ducis,
> Threicia qualis arma proludens tuis
> iam, Troia, fatis stravit aut Neptunium
> cana nitentem perculit iuvenem coma; (*Tr.*181-184)
>
> *He burst forth, the huge specter of the Thessalian leader,*
> *Just as when he, practicing for your fate, Troy,*
> *Scattered the Thracian forces, or struck down*
> *The shining, white-haired son of Neptune*

Hector, however, looks not as he did before ten years of war, but at the very nadir of his defeat:

> non ille vultus flammeum intendens iubar,
> sed fessus ac deiectus et fletu gravis
> similisque nostro, squalida obtectus coma.
> iuvat tamen vidisse … (*Tr.* 448-451)
>
> *His face wasn't full of its fiery radiance,*
> *But fatigued and defeated, and heavy with tears,*
> *Just like ours, and covered by filthy hair.*

Hector possesses an unnatural physicality, a heaviness beyond mere mortal mass, which Andromache describes as *fletu gravis*. *Fletu* acts metonymically for Hector's sorrow, the pain he experienced in life and continues to experience in death, but the metaphor grounds his

experiences in a physical body. This body is not a house for a glorious and inviolable spirit, but instead is a leaking and penetrable entity. Above all, it is a grotesque body. Moreover, it is one in which the external state reflects the internal. Braginton notes that Hector "shares the misfortunes of his people, being like them downcast and unkempt in appearance."[57] Hector, Andromache and the other women have come to experience their bodies as vulnerable and in a constant state of disintegration as their insides escape outward through blood and tears. The recognition not only of her husband but of a body sympathetic to her own suffering causes Andromache to cry out that even in such a state, *iuvat tamen vidisse*. She envisions Hector as understanding her pain, physical and existential, and takes comfort from this. Even defeated, he offers a link to her previous life in which she defined herself through an other which seemed constant. Her suffering now comes in part as a result of her realization that such a partner in dialogue is neither constant nor singular.

Hector's state gives the impression of ignoble dejection,? especially in comparison with Achilles.' The Greek commander appears in daylight (170-170a) amid spectacular natural phenomena (173-177) and delivers his message so loudly that his demand fills the shore (*implevit omne litus irati sonus,* 190). Hector, however, appears to Andromache alone and under the cover of night (438-439). Talthybius' description of Achilles abounds with action verbs (*emicuit*, *stravit*, and *perculit* in just the lines above), while Hector barely exists, his only "action" beyond his sudden presence (*cum subito … stetit*, 443) an implied *esse* until he speaks (*inquit*, 452).

[57] Mary V. Braginton, *The Supernatural in Seneca's Tragedies* (Menasha, WI: George Banta Publishing Company, 1933), 8.

Also in contrast to Achilles is the actuality of Hector's appearance. Andromache reacts as though he is real, but her words are haunted by the possibility that Hector was merely a dream, or that the second choral ode reflects truth, and not even a pitiful shade of the Trojan prince. Despite his dubious presence, the ghost speaks forcefully and delivers news of eminent danger to Andromache with a series of imperatives:

> 'dispelle somnos,' inquit 'et natum eripe,
> o fida coniunx: lateat, haec una est salus.
> omitte fletus - Troia quod cecidit gemis?
> utinam iaceret tota. Festina, amove
> quocumque nostrae parvulam stirpem domus.' (*Tr.* 452-456)
>
> *"Shake off your sleep," he said, "and grab the child,*
> *A faithful wife: let him be hidden, only this is safe.*
> *Stop your tears -- are you grieving that Troy has fallen?*
> *I wish it were razed utterly. Hurry, take him away,*
> *Anywhere, the little heir of our house."*

By saying "I wish it were razed utterly," Andromache reflects Hecuba's sentiments in Act One. Her words also resonate with the expressions of the chorus in the second choral ode, where they hope that death ends violation and suffering but fear it does not. Andromache understands with his words that so long as she lives there are new pains to tolerate. She explains her reaction:

> mihi gelidus horror ac tremor somnum excutit,
> oculos nunc huc pavida, nunc illuc ferens
> oblita nati misera quaesivi Hectorem: (457-459)
>
> *Icy dread and trembling cut through my sleep,*
> *Fearful, casting my eyes all about,*
> *Forgetful of my son, I sought Hector …*

Despite her agitated searching, Hector is gone, a reminder of the uncertainty of our talismans.

The grotesque comes to dominate Andromache's focus following this encounter. She perceives the physicality of existence, the tenuousness of the body, and the fragility of its

barriers. She addresses the women of the chorus hyper-aware of their mourning garb, torn hair (*lacertis comas*, 409), beaten breasts (*miserumque tunsae pectus*, 410), and tear-stained cheeks (*effuso genas fletu*, 410-11). She acknowledges her own grotesque physicality when she remarks that *sudor per artus frigidus totos cadit*, ("cold sweat suffuses my limbs," 487) as she panics over how to hide Astyanax.

Andromache's inner suffering continues to find external manifestation throughout her conflict with Ulysses, despite her best efforts. Ulysses observes that in her fear she moans, weeps, and groans (*maeret, illacrimat, gemit*, 615); she paces (*sed huc et illuc anxios gressus refert*, 616); her limbs shake (*quatiuntur*, 623; *intremuit*, 625); her blood goes cold (*labant torpetque vinctus frigido sanguis gelu*, 623-624). When Ulysses pretends to find Astyanax, she trembles again, causing him to ask *quid respicis trepidasque?* (631). Finally, when the Greeks bodily remove Astyanax, after the boy prostrates himself (*iacet ante pedes supplex*, 732-733), Andromache deconstructs herself to offer pieces of herself to her son: *oscula et fletus, puer, laceros crines excipe*, "Take, son, my kisses and tears and torn hair," (799-800).

The most evident effect of the abjection Andromache feels as a result of her exposure to the horrors of post-war Troy and her own grotesque existence comes in her lyric address to Astyanax and then Ulysses as the Greeks pull the boy from his hiding place in Hector's tomb (705-735). In response to the agony of choosing between her son's life and her husband's memory, she changes from the iambic meter that predominates Senecan dialogue to anapests, the same meter that Hecuba and the chorus use for their laments in the first episode.[58] Andromache first calls Astyanax out from his hiding place:

Huc e latebris procede tuis,

[58] Kohn, *Dramaturgy*, 120.

flebile matris furtum miserae.
hic est, hic est terror, Ulixe,
mille carinis. (*Tr.* 705-708)

Come here, out of your hiding place,
Your miserable mother's pitiful plot.
Here he is, here is the terror, Ulysses,
of a thousand ships.

Synchysis and alliteration in 706 emphasize the extent of her emotion; the fricative "f" and nasal "m" interlock so that enunciation of the phonemes requires special care. The effect when spoken is a necessary slowing of speech similar to that of a woman in extreme torment. Andromache additionally interlocks her interlocutors, first using the imperative to address Astyanax (*procede,* 705), then looking to Ulysses and calling him by name (*Ulixe,* 707). This confuses her addressees, thereby illustrating Astyanax's fate. Having begun to recognize the implications of a dialogic existence, Andromache understands that both she and her son cannot count on their identities as Trojans to remain static. Instead, the web of others has come to include, and be dominated by, their captors. The longer they remain alive, the more they will change, as the memories of Hector and Priam become increasingly less relevant to their identities. Astyanax, therefore, so long as he remains alive -- and possibly longer -- exists only in relation to his captors.

Because of this, Andromache begs her son to forget the elements which made up his identity prior to Troy's fall:

Pone ex animo reges atavos
magnique senis iura per omnes
incluta terras. excidat Hector;
gere captivum positoque genu,
si tua nondum funera sentis,
matris fletus imitare tuae. (*Tr.* 713-718)

Put your ancestral kings out of your mind,
And the laws of that great patriarch,
Celebrated across all lands.
May Hector be purged from your memory;
Put on the guise of a prisoner on bended knee,
If you haven't yet felt your fate,
Mimic your mother's lamenting.

In order to embrace his new and now unavoidable identity, which itself is the only way to escape death, Astyanax must forget the others from whom he derived his sense of self: his ancestors, in particular his father. Andromache, however, cannot bear to ask Astyanax to forget her. To do so would upset her last connection to her pre-war self, which she clings to even as she admits the burden that accompanies it. Instead, she tells Astyanax to mimic her, the ontological equivalent of clutching her child to her breast.

Like Hecuba, Andromache also experiences the breakdown of reason and order as a result, most obviously through the decreasing distinction between life and death. The boundary between life and death becomes as permeable as the physical boundaries of the body and as unstable as the institutions which Hecuba bemoans in Act One. Death, like the city, progeny or nobility, is no longer a permanent and defined category, but one in which there are varying shades of grey. Other inversions that indicate the breakdown of order include the lot of the king of kings who is the slave to fate (352ff.); the free and the victorious who are as helpless as the conquered and captive (224ff., 256ff.); falsehood in the guise of truth (599ff., 871ff.); and Astyanax's burial which offers the hope of salvation. The disruptive inversions continue beyond

Act Three; in Act Four and Five, Polyxena's "wedding" is in actuality a funeral, while her sacrifice is sacrilegious murder.

The increasing lack of controlling order in the world of the play speaks particularly to the brand of Stoicism practiced by Seneca, which "urges disengagement and withdrawal from an irredeemably corrupt world."[59] Andromache, however, cannot disengage, as Astyanax holds her to life. She therefore struggles with a desire to trust in the conceptual institutions even as they waver before her eyes, in the hope that they will save her son. She trusts in the natural laws of human conduct which she believes will make Hector's grave a safe hiding place: no man would dare disturb it after Achilles' promise (665 ff.).

An especially clear example of the increasing chaos of Andromache's existence is the confusion of time through the pull of the past on the present, which Littlewood refers to as "temporal incoherencies."[60] The infiltration of the past into the present (164 ff., 360ff.) confuses for Andromache a linear perception of time. This has an effect on the audience's perception of time within the play: the "drama of a death already told, an existence already ended, is essentially static.[61] The debate regarding Astyanax's death merely prolongs the inevitable outcome. Meanwhile, Astyanx, moving in and out of the tomb, mirrors Troy itself – conquered but still falling. The flattening of Andromache's suffering into an eternal present distorts her experience so that when Ulysses tells her *Nullus est flendi modus*, "there is no end to your weeping," he speaks the truth of her existence (812).

One such instance of temporal fluidity is expressed through the funereal vocabulary used to describe Hector's tomb. Though the terms *bustum, tumulus, sepulcrum* and *pyra* are not

[59] Littlewood, *Self-Representation*, 16.
[60] Littlewood, *Self-Representation*, 91.
[61] Ibid.

strictly synonymous, Seneca uses them interchangeably. "The effect," Erasmo explains, "is to have Hector's tomb constantly burned, built, and rebuilt in random figurative reconstructions as the actual tomb represented on stage does not change."[62]

The permeable boundary between life and death which Andromache perceives is expressed in two ways: through the denial of Astyanax's living existence and through the claim of Hector's dead existence. The living status of each becomes increasingly unsure. Hector's apparition obscures the status of both father and son; following Andromache's account of the episode, she turns to Astyanax and remarks on his resemblance to his father (461-468). Hector's appearance both calls the Trojan hero's position into question and foreshadows Astyanax's death. While the boy now resembles a whole and healthy Hector, he will later resemble the mutilated shade who speaks to Andromache. Andromache herself will comment a final time on her son's resemblance to his father after his leap from the walls (1117).

Andromache's blurred perception of the threshold between life and death comes about through her uncertainty regarding her own living state. With her identity tied to both Astyanax and Hector, she is stranded between life and death. She lives but wants to die; she expresses a willingness to die for Hector (676-7) but also feels compelled to live in order to protect her son. The placement of Astyanax within the tomb further complicates this effect, since in order to save him Andromache must suffer his death. Shamming a lament for her son is insufficient in such a dire circumstance; her best chance of success comes in a totally convincing charade that he is dead, with her own belief in his death presenting the most convincing performance. Andromache thus metaphorically kills Astyanax by hiding him in Hector's tomb, and ontologically kills him by denying his living existence.

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[62] Mario Erasmo, *Reading Death in Ancient Rome* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2008), 43.

Doing so compromises the sign of Hector's tomb, previously a symbol of stability. Andromache, believing in the sacrosanctity of a pledge, thinks Hector's tomb inviolable; the revelation that it is not undoes her. She must choose between Hector and Astyanax when Calchas informs her and Ulysses that if the Greeks cannot have Hector's son, Hector's ashes will suffice to bring fortunate winds (636-639). Andromache calls this choice her *geminus timor*, a recognition of the intertwined identities of her husband and son and of the suffering which both bring to her (642).

By hiding Astyanax in Hector's tomb, Andromache turns the tomb from a marker of the dead to a sign of the living. The tomb becomes a focus for the problem of identification as posed by Bakhtin: one defines oneself primarily by what one is not.[63] Andromache's plan relies on the static relationship between signifier and signified. However, just as the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary, no amount of hope can keep interpretation of Hector's tomb from changing as events take their course.[64] Andromache's very actions undermine the tomb as a safe place (first when she hides Astyanax and later as her nervous pacing and glances betray her intentions to Ulysses). As a result, the physical threat to the tomb (*tumulus hic campo statim | totum iacebit*, 667-668) comes merely as a confirmation of a suspected danger.

As she struggles with the breakdown of reality in these ways, Andromache is simultaneously required to face an implication of the ersatz reality she must convince Ulysses (and herself) is true. If Astyanax is dead, as she claims, she must face life in which she has neither Astyanax nor Hector as stable presences by which to define her identity. This is too much

[63] Saussure argues a similar point in his explanation for the function of the sign; the "most precise characteristic [of a word] is in being what the others are not." Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin, ed. Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 120.
[64] "From a semiotic perspective, however, the metonymy of tomb equals Hector leads **t**o confusion over the identity of Hector and the relation of father to son." Erasmo, *Reading Death*, 44.

for her to bear. Her erratic behavior as she paces and speaks in asides has long drawn the attention of readers; Littlewood speaks bluntly when he calls her mad, like Hercules of the *Hercules Furens*, "they see what no one else sees."[65]

Andromache's asides best illustrate her fragmented mental state. In them, she externalizes her frantic debate over what to do and whether she should give in to Ulysses' threats. She describes the physical experience of her helplessness as something that happens to her; she struggles to find the right words to express her state:

> reliquit animus membra, quatiuntur, labant
> torpetque vinctus frigido sanguis gelu. (*Tr.* 623-4)
>
> *My will goes from my limbs, they tremble, they give way,*
> *and an overwhelming cold numbs them with icy chill.*

She asks herself series of questions, especially regarding what she can bear, as all of her options appear unendurable.

> poteris nefandae deditum mater neci
> videre? poteris celsa per fastigia
> missum rotari? potero, perpetiar, feram,
> dum non meus post fata victoris manu
> iactetur Hector… (*Tr.* 651-655)
>
> *Will you, a mother, be able to see him given to*
> *an unholy death? To watch him tossed from the*
> *high walls? I will be able, I will endure, will bear it,*
> *If it means my Hector, already dead, isn't tormented*
> *Further by the hand of his conquering foe…*

In her confusion, Astyanax and Hector lose their distinct identities. Andromache sees her son's death as his father's, and she cannot untangle who will suffer from what choice.

> Hector est illinc tuus --
> erras: utrimque est Hector; hic sensus potens,
> forsan futurus ultor extincti patris. (*Tr.* 658-660)

[65] Littlewood, *Self-Representation*, 93-4.

Your Hector is there --
Wrong, Hector is both here and there; here is feeling and strength,
Perhaps he may be the future avenger of his fallen father.

Her confusion grows as the choices seem to fold together, damning both father and son regardless of her actions:

...conditum elidet statim
immane busti pondus -- intereat miser
ubicumque potius, ne pater natum obruat
prematque patrem natus. (*Tr.* 686-691)

… The weight of the tomb
Will crush him in hiding immediately -- let the poor boy
Die anywhere, so the father won't bury the son
And the son crush his father.

Erasmo cites the shifting language describing Hector's tomb as reflective of Andromache's psychological state "as she confuses the dead with the living."[66] These asides culminate dramatically in the revelation of Astyanax's location and in Andromache's lyrically expressed abjection.

Andromache's "madness" may be accounted for by the stress put on her center of cognitive time and space as she is pulled in different directions by Hector, Astyanax and Ulysses. R. D. Lang explains in *The Divided Self*:

> …a man *may* have a sense of his presence in the world as a real, alive, whole, and in a temporal sense, a continuous person. As such, he can live out in the world and meet others: a world and others experienced as equally real, alive, whole and continuous. Such a basically *ontologically* secure person will encounter all the hazards of life, social, ethical, spiritual, biological, from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people's reality and identity.[67]

[66] Erasmo, *Reading Death*, 43.
[67] R D Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1990, 39.

Thus Andromache, pulled in various directions by the men who constitute her web of others and psychologically weakened by the horrors she has seen and her resultant abjection, becomes uncentered. She loses her sense of ontological security, unable to find her self in the difference between her center of perspective and those of the others. Such difficulty is understandable when the very basis of human identity -- the status as a living being -- cannot be assumed. Her madness, or the appearance of madness to the sane Ulysses, stems from Astyanax's ontological insecurity, and as a result, her own.

Hecuba and Andromache's compromised psychological states add especial tension to the events of Acts Four and Five, in which the silent Polyxena becomes central. Hecuba and Andromache lose control and become consumed by their abjection, with the result that evidence of their identities as dialogic and fluid merely intensifies their suffering. Watching them, Polyxena empathetically experiences the attack on her stable identity and the penetration of the abject. In contrast with the other women, Polyxena embraces her grotesque existence and confounds the crisis of the afterlife debated by the chorus.

CHAPTER 4

AFTERSHOCKS OF WAR

In this chapter, I discuss the role Polyxena plays and the events of Acts Four and Five. Polyxena plays a significant role in the motivation of the dramatic action. Her impending death and that of Astyanax are the axes around which the dramatic action revolves. They serve as the living antitheses to the shades of Hector and Achilles: the dead heroes continue to exert their influence, while the living victims are powerless, casualties of a war that has already ended. However, despite her ostensible powerlessness and even her silence throughout the dramatic action, Polyxena remains a compelling figure as someone who expresses autonomy of action. Seneca's Polyxena is more ambiguous in her motivations than those of Euripides and Ovid, who present the heroine as paradigms of nobility and aristocracy.[68] Her final actions and their uncertain motivation unsettle Hecuba and Andromache and prompt disagreement among contemporary critics.[69] Polyxena experiences all the things Hecuba and Andromache do, but unlike them, she is not undone by the horrors she has witnessed. In her final moments she demonstrates that just as the grotesque in Bakhtin's analysis is both degenerative and regenerative, abjection, as defined by Kristeva, may lead not only to the loss of the self as subject but also the freedom from the self as object. Psychological response to grotesque, reminders of

[68]Eurpides has Polyxena demand that Hecuba not interfere, as Polyxena would rather die than disgrace her rank (*μῆτερ, σὺ δ΄ἡμῖν μηδὲν ἐμποδῶν γένῃ | λέγοθσα μηδὲ δρῶσα, σμβούλου δέ μοι | θανεῖν πρὶν αἰσχρῶν μὴ κατ'ἀξίαν τθχεῖν*, Eur. *Hec*. 372-374); Ovid's Polyxena manages to cover herself chastely even in her dying pose (*tunc quoque cura fuit partes velare tegendas, | cum caderet, castique decus servare pudoris*, Ovid, *Met.* XIII.479-480).

[69] See, for example, Boyle's insightful summary of the problems: "What does Pol.'s final act signify? Is the anger Pol.'s own or the Messenger's reading of her death? If the former, does Pol.'s anger towards Ach.'s buried corpse imply a belief in Ach.s' survival contradicted by all her previous behaviour, esp. her welcoming of death? … This brilliant climax to the Messenger's narrative leaves the play's central contradiction unresolved." A. J. Boyle, *Seneca's Troades* (Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1994), 232.

one's physical existence may have productive results. Through the course of the dramatic action, Polyxena surrenders herself by embracing the ambiguity of the central paradox of the tragedy: that of the nature of the self and the effect of death on it. By embracing the ambiguity debated by the chorus, Polyxena turns her death into a meaningful act, rather than something which is enacted upon her.

Through the debate in choral odes one and two regarding the nature of post mortem existence, the Trojan chorus compromises death as agency. The conflicting ideas regarding death and the self alongside the dramatic action confirm that death is *not* freedom, at least not in the simplistic sense which Hecuba presents.[70] Hecuba, in response to the fall of Troy, the death of her children, and in particular the death of Priam, leads the chorus in an affirmation of the afterlife as safe from pain: Priam walks free among the dead and will never suffer the chains of slavery (*liber manes vadit ad imos, | nec feret umquam victa Graium | cervice iugum,* 145-147). The chorus affirms that Priam is blessed, having taken his kingdom with him (*secum excedens sua regna tulit*, 157), as is anyone who "dying in war takes with him all affairs, consumed" (*bello moriens omnia secum | consumpta tulit*, 162-163). However, the presentation of Priam comes only after a demand for self-inflicted bodily harm due to Hector's demise. Both Hecuba (117ff) and the chorus (113-116) demand physical suffering as an expression of the Trojan identity they share with their fallen prince. Thus even in the first ode the idea of post mortem survival, and how a living self must react to the prospect, is conflicted.

The second choral ode contradicts the first: whereas the chorus pictures Priam at the end of the first ode as peacefully wandering Elysium in search of Hector (159-160), after the events of Act Two the chorus can conjure no such hopeful scene. Instead they take the stance that it is

[70] In contrast with titular heroine of *Phaedra* and the Trojan chorus in *Agamemnon*. Ker, *The Deaths of Seneca*, 130.

only "empty rumors and hollow words, a story like that of a bad dream" (*rumores vacui verbaque inania | et par sollicito fabula somnio,* 371). Instead, death brings total cessation, so that "the one who has touched the lake on which the gods swear no longer exists at all" (*nec amplius, | iuratos superis qui tetigit lacus, | usquam est*, 389-391). This view "presents death as personal dissolution absolute," in that it is *noxia corpori / nec parcens animae*, ("Destructive to the body, and unsparing to the soul," 401-2).[71] Not only that, but they speak of the alternative, a continued existence after death, as a continued burden for the wretched (*sed restat miseris vivere longius?* 377). The chorus uses the same image of smoke to describe the soul's dissolution in death (392-395) as in Hecuba's description of the death and fall of Troy (19-21), with the implication that Troy, too, has passed out of existence, and possesses no more hope for a post-fall state than one of its citizens.

The ambivalence of the chorus, or their apparent reversal of thought, has hindered many productive conversations about the *Troades*. Davis observes that "the principal obstacle to criticism of this play has been the fact that the chorus presents two incompatible views on the question of post mortem survival,"[72] citing Zwierlein's conclusion that the second choral ode is evidence of Seneca's incompetence.[73] Fantham in her commentary is so bothered by the about-face that she proposes a different chorus for choral ode two (in her introduction to the *Troades*), reading it as an editorial intrusion and a reflection of the thoughts of Seneca's contemporaries.[74] However, Davis considers the chorus's change of heart "explicable as a normal human reaction."[75] It is comforting for them to believe that Priam exists safely in the underworld, as the

[71] Boyle, *Tragic Seneca*, 68.
[72] Peter J. Davis, *Shifting Song: the Chorus in Seneca's Tragedies* (Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 1993), 135.
[73] Otto Zwierlein, *Die Rezitationsdramen Senecas* (Meisenheim-am-Glen: Verlag Anton Haig, 1966), 78.
[74] Fantham, *Seneca's Troades*, 85.
[75] Davis, *Shifting Song*, 48.

image Hecuba suggests is preferable to their own situation. After the events of Act Two such an image is no longer comforting.[76] The continuing menace of Achilles and his demand for Polyxena's death make death-as-absolute-end far more desirable than the traditional Elysian option.

"The third and fourth ode (814-60, 1009-55) focus on social dissolution: the scattering of Trojan women through every part of Greece, the dissolving of their union and their land."[77] The third, coming at the end of Andromache's struggle with the implications of a dialogic self, asks the question *quae vocat sedes habitanda captas?* ("what forced home awaits us captives?" 814). In light of Andromache's interaction with Ulysses, the question of where the captives will go is also one of who they will be, what people will act as the necessary other in their dialogic existence. It foreshadows the revelation in Act Four regarding the division of the captives, when Helen announces that Greek leaders have turned the matter to fortune and that *versata dominos urna captivis dedit*, ("The overturned urns have given masters to the captives," 974).

The fourth ode enforces the necessity of others -- grief, for instance, finds meaning and comfort in the presence of others' grieving -- and the consequent dissolution of identity when the defining community collapses. This view is similar to that which opens Book Two of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, that it is comforting to view the sufferings of another (Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 2.1-13). An awareness of the universality of misfortune brings solace to the chorus, as it affirms their belonging to a community of suffering, so that *est miser nemo nisi comparatus* (*No one is miserable except in comparison*, 1023). This is especially relevant now as they anticipate

[76] Boyle, *Tragic Seneca*, 68. Wilson comes to a similar conclusion: "The ramifications of their own ritual self-consolation, of the funerary language they use, become pernicious and unpalatable, further fuel for yet another destructive fire; hence their careful redefinition of death in the following choral ode." Marcus Wilson, "The Tragic Mode of Seneca's *Troades*" in *Seneca Tragicus: Ramus Essays on Senecan Drama*, ed. A. J. Boyle (Melbourne: Aureal Publications, 1983), 32.
[77] Boyle, *Tragic Seneca*, 68.

the division of their band among their captors (*solvet hunc coetum lacrimas nostras | sparget huc illuc agitata classis*, "the agile fleet will dissolve our gathering and will scatter our tears far and wide," 1042-1043).

The role of the chorus in Senecan drama is markedly different than those of Attic tragedies. For example, because the chorus is not on stage during the entirety of the dramatic action, it cannot be expected to reflect all events, only those it witnesses. The exact nature of the chorus in relation to the dramatic action differs from play to play within the Senecan corpus; clarification as to its role in the *Troades* is therefore necessary. Unlike other choruses (like that of *Hercules Furens*), the *Troades'* chorus is straightforward in its identity: Hecuba's address of the women at 63 attests that they are Trojan women, and captives. Andromache at the start of Act Two addresses the chorus as *maesta Phrygiae turba*, which confirms that the chorus with whom Hecuba laments, and who speak of Priam's continued existence, is the same which then denies this possibility in the second ode. As Trojan women, the chorus embodies the position of the principal characters. The very uncertainty of their setting and staging demonstrate their mental state to the audience: "the women neither know nor care where they are. They only know that they are helpless and soon to be transported from one place to another by the whim of fate," demonstrated dramatically by the frequent changes in setting from the captives' tents, to the Greek camp, to the tomb of Achilles, and back to the captive's tents.[78] In their odes, the chorus presents the metaphysical debate that accounts for the abjection felt by the protagonists in response to the horrors they continue to suffer. Their songs attempt to comprehend the experiences of Hecuba, Andromache and Polyxena in philosophical terms.[79]

[78] Kohn, *Dramaturgy*, 123.
[79] Davis, *Shifting Song*, 146.

The ambivalence embodied in the first and second ode is critical for interpretation of the text. The two views are seemingly incompatible, but each finds supporting evidence in the dramatic action. Achilles' apparition confirms the view of the first chorus, while Hector's appearance -- and Andromache's inability to prove his existence (*cernitis, Danai, Hectorem? | an sola video?* "Do you see Hector, you Greeks? Or do I alone see him?" 684-685) -- confirms that of the second. Seneca therefore presents a universe in which *both* are true.

Such ambivalence is also present in Seneca's prose works.[80] In his *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, he makes clear that the precise nature of existence after death is, for him, unimportant: *Mors nos consumit aut exuit. Emissis meliora restant onere detracto, consumptis nihil restat, bona pariter malaque submota sunt* ("Death either consumes or extends us. The better parts may remain, with the burden lifted, or nothing remains, and both the good and the bad are carried away," *Ep.* 24.18). Critical readers of the play must therefore hold these possibilities not as mutually exclusive but as coexistent in order to interpret the events related by the messenger in the final act.

Watching the suffering of Hecuba and Andromache, Polyxena empathetically experiences the attack on her stable identity and the penetration of the abject. Polyxena's silence makes her presence difficult to remember for a reader of the tragic text, as it certainly would for a listener of a recitation; spectators of the tragedy on stage would have no such uncertainty. It is unclear whether she is part of the chorus of Trojan women who sing in dialogue with Hecuba in Act One. If so, she may exit with Hecuba and Cassandra after 156. We may assume she is *not* a member of the chorus, which stays onstage to hear Talthybius' message and which remains onstage, unaware of the dramatic action, during the conversation between Agamemnon and

[80] Fantham, *Seneca's Troades*, 78ff.

Pyrrhus. If onstage, Polyxena witnesses and participates in Hecuba's crisis of self, and recognizes with the other women the risk Troy's fall poses for their own identities.

Polyxena may enter in Act II, either with the Greek commanders at 203, or later with Calchas at 353. Manuscript family E states that Pyrrhus, Agamemnon and Calchas (and, presumably, Polyxena) enter together at 203, but dramaturgical analysis makes this impractical. Additionally, Agamemnon calls Calchas onstage at 351-2 (*potius interpres deum Calchas vocetur, "*Rather, let Calchas, the interpreter of the gods be summoned"*)*, leading Kohn to conclude that manuscript family A, which lists only Pyrrhus and Agamemnon entering at 203, must be correct.[81] Boyle however takes the opposite view: "it is far better to have Calchas on stage as an ominous presence throughout the preceding and (in respect of what will happen) irrelevant debate, rather than enter unannounced after, say, 348, or enter here."[82] The seer addresses her in the vocative at 366-67 (*nobilior tuo, Polyxene, cruore debetur cruor*), which may imply she is onstage at that moment. (Boyle disagrees; he interprets the direct address to Polyxena and the formal repetition as means to "sustain the "sacral" mode of Calchas' pronouncement.")[83]

If she is present for all or part of the *agon* between Agamemnon and Pyrrhus (which Kohn believes would be particularly dramatically effective[84]), she witnesses the decision not merely to kill her, but to spatter the grave mound with her blood (*Quid caede dira nobiles clari ducis aspergis umbras?* "Why spatter the noble shades of that renowned leader with ill-starred slaughter?" 255-256). If she enters with Calchas, she hears that fate has granted return home to

[81] Kohn, *Dramaturgy*, 117.
[82] Boyle, *Seneca's Troades*, 169.
[83] Boyle, *Seneca's Troades*, 171.
[84] "But it would be quite powerful to have the mute girl standing in full view while Pyrrhus and Agamemnon debate her fate." Kohn, *Dramaturgy*, 117.

the Greeks, but only by means of her death and her nephew's. Furthermore, she must suffer the profanation of sacred marriage rites and the debasement of her status as a marriageable daughter of Troy. Though Calchas uses vocabulary suited for a wedding, the giving away of the bride he describes is instead ritual slaughter.

> Mactanda virgo est Thessali busto ducis;
> Sed quo iugari Thessalae cultu solent
> Ionidesve vel Mycenaeae nurus,
> Pyrrhus parenti coniugem tradat suo:
> Sic rite dabitur. (*Tr.* 360-365)
>
> *The girl must be slaughtered on the pyre of the Aeolian leader;*
> *But she must be married garbed in traditional Thessalian dress,*
> *Or that which Ionian and Mycenean prospective brides favor.*
> *Pyrrhus must give away the bride to his own father:*
> *Only thus she will be duly wed.*

The juxtaposition of *mactanda* with marital diction (*virgo, nurus, coniugem tradat, dabitur*) demeans both rituals: the proposed "marriage" and the ostensible "sacrifice." Calchas' uneasy proclamation establishes that neither idea is wholly sacrosanct.

Fate, according to Calchas, favors the Greeks and has turned its back on the Trojans (*Dant fata Danais quo solent pretio viam,* "the fates grant voyage to the Greeks at their usual price," 360; *quem fata quaerunt, turre de summa cadat Priami nepos Hectoreus et letum oppetat,* "The one whom the fates demand will fall from the parapet and meet his death, Hector's son, Priam's grandson," 368-369). This idea echoes Hecuba's claim that the gods have turned away from her (*deorum numen adversum mihi,* 28). Furthermore, by order of fate, Polyxena cannot even hope to die in the garb of her native land. Instead, she must discard her own identity and assume that of a foreigner, the very one who helped bring her civilization to ruin.

If Polyxena is present during the events of Act Two, she witnesses not only the debate over her fate, but also the plan to "marry" her to a vengeful spirit. This would both destabilize

Polyxena's conceptions of proper marriage and sacrifice and would complicate her, and the other Trojan women's, already conflicted views of the underworld. These ideas are compounded for the audience by Pyrrhus' use of the word *despondeo* in reference to Polyxena (*desposa...cineribus*, "engaged to the ashes," 195), and Hecuba's bitter employment of the word to describe the Greeks' allocation of the Trojan prisoners in the first act:

> Hic Hectoris coniugia despondet sibi,
> hic optat Heleni coniugem, hic Antenoris (*Tr*. 59-60)
>
> *This one betroths the wives of Hector to himself,*
> *This one hopes for Helenus', this one Antenor's...*

Boyle explains that "the Latin term (lit. "betroths") implies the legal authority (held by the male head of the Roman household, the *paterfamilias*) to give a member of the household to another in marriage. Here the victor usurps that authority and "betroths" his allotted prisoner "to himself" (*sibi*).[85] In the world after Troy, the institution of marriage is defiled for all characters involved.

More likely, Polyxena does not appear until Act Four and is unaware of the plan until Helen reluctantly admits the truth (938ff). When she hears that she is destined not for true marriage but for death, she appears happier, and allows Helen and the other women to prepare her for the "wedding."

> Vide ut animus ingens laetus audierit necem.
> Cultus decoros regiae vestis petit
> et admoveri crinibus patitur manum (*Tr*. 945-947)
>
> *See, her remarkable spirit grows happy hearing of her death.*
> *She reaches for the splendid finery of royal robes,*
> *And suffers the hand that arranges her hair.*

[85] Boyle, *Seneca's Troades*, 142.

Such a change in affect indicates surprise at this revelation. However, the blurring of the ostensibly divine-ordained institutions of marriage and sacrifice would occur regardless, as Helen reluctantly admits the Greeks' intentions:

> Polyxene miseranda, quam tradi sibi
> Cineremque Achilles ante mactari suum,
> Campo maritus ut sit Elysio, iubet. (*Tr*. 942-944)
>
> *Pititful Polyxena, whom Achilles orders to be surrendered*
> *And slaughtered before his very ashes,*
> *That he may be married in the Elysian field.*

Though Polyxena is of royal lineage and a eligible virgin, the plan Pyrrhus dedicates himself to fulfilling reduces her to the status of an animal, even while the bridegroom enjoys the privileges reserved for living men.

Andromache observes the effect this has on Polyxena, who rejoices at her death as she may have celebrated a prospective marriage before Troy's fall. Andromache remarks that the girl *mortem putabat illud, hoc thalamos putat* ("was considering that marriage death, and considers this death a marriage," 948).[86] The blurring of sacrosanct and sacrilegious contributes to the breakdown of order and other cultural touchstones experienced by the women, so that even language fails to adequately describe their psychological trauma.

Helen's presence further delegitimizes the "wedding" Pyrrhus demands. Helen's participation is almost farcical; "the marriage-breaker is a marriage-broker (861ff),"[87] and Helen's status as unpunished adulteress casts the injustice of the Greeks' plan for Polyxena in

[86] The "wedding as funeral" is, of course, a popular trope in tragedy (see Antigone's lament in Sophocles' *Antigone*, 891ff.) as well as in Latin literature (see the funeral vocabulary in the wedding of Cato Marcia in Lucan's *Civil War*, 326ff.).
[87] Boyle, *Tragic Seneca*, 69.

sharper relief. She acts as Polyxena's *pronuba* at Achilles' tomb (1133), and she argues in her opening monologue that it is fitting that she is Polyxena's *auspex*.[88]

> Quicumque hymen funestus, inlaetabilis
> Lamenta caedes sanguidem gemitus habet,
> Et auspice Helena dignus. (*Tr.* 861-863)
>
> *Whatever marriage, funereal and cheerless,*
> *Bearing with it wailing, slaughter, bloodshed and grief,*
> *Deserves Helen as aide.*

Helen concludes her speech with the reminder that *profuit multis capi* ("enslavement profited many" 827). Contrasted with Polyxena of Euripides' *Hecuba*, who voices the opposite opinion, her words are especially unsavory.

Polyxena remains onstage to witness her mother swoon and recover to bemoan her daughter's fate; only at her mother's distress does Polyxena weep (*Inrigat fletus genas | imberque victo subitus e vultu cadit*, "Tears dampen her cheeks; suddenly a shower passes across her fallen face," 965-966). Andromache weeps that she, unlike Polyxena, won't be buried in her homeland (969-971). Helen grimly confirms the sentiment and delivers further news: the Greek commanders have cast the urn and sent Helen to report who must call whom master. Pyrrhus enters amidst Hecuba's laments to bear away Polyxena, and as he leaves Hecuba attempts to shame him: *Abreptam trahe. Maculate superos caede funesta deos, maculate manes* ("Grab her, an abductee; defile the gods below with your miasmic slaughter, defile the shades," 1003-1004). Hecuba in her abjection has lost hope of any redemption or growth; Polyxena, even to her own mother, is only a pawn in a bloodthirsty victor's sacrilegious act. Polyxena departs having witnessed in full the drama of her mother and sister-in-law's dissolution, but unlike the other

[88] Boyle notes Seneca's predilection for an ironic use of "dignus," citing *HF* 112, *Pha.* 853, *Oed.* 977, *Ag.* 34, and *Pho.* 333. Boyle, *Seneca's Troades*, 209.

women she does not collapse in the face of a grotesque existence. Instead, she uses her final moments to upset the Greeks' parody of ceremony and to call into question for a final time the possibility of self, truth and existence as monologic.

Within her silence one may read the refusal or inability to express her lived experience verbally, but Polyxena's actions at the tomb of Achilles do not express helplessness. Instead, Polyxena manages with her silence to resolve the conundrum posed by choral odes one and two in a way unavailable to Hecuba and Andromache. Verbal expression would mean first the ordering of innumerable stimuli into a system of reason and meaning, and second the limiting of other potential meanings as some inputs are giving priority over others in the expression. Truth inevitably escapes through the seams of language. By choosing some words over others, a speaker excludes possibilities (as every signifier asserts, *I am this*, endless echoes of *I am not that* naturally arise), so that while speech demands mutually exclusive possibilities, these conflicts do not exist in silence. Furthermore, verbal expression thus embodies the individual's assertion to a personal existence even as she experiences it; it simultaneously stresses the self as evidenced by experience and posits the lie that existence can be entirely and accurately reflected in language. Polyxena's silence embodies a surrendering of the self, an acknowledgment of the absence of a stable, metaphysical form.

By denying her self, Polyxena resists the human urge to interpret reality and to thus eliminate certain other interpretations. She thereby achieves a form of what Bakhtin calls transgredience, which "is reached when the *whole* existence of others is seen from the outside."[89] By not engaging in speech, Polyxena never posits herself as subject, but also escapes

[89] Holquist, *Dialogism,* 32.

classification as object. No longer trapped in the subject-object paradigm, she achieves clarity of sight and is borne up, rather than torn down, by her experiences.

Such an effect as transgredience results from brushes with the sublime, a state which Kristeva describes as bordering the abject. Kristeva writes about the phenomenon Andromache experiences during Act Three, when she has lost ontological security and has become, in Kristeva's terminology, abject. Kristeva explains: "I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be "me." Not at all an other with whom I identify and incorporate," (such as Hector and Astyanax for Andromache) "but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be."[90] Polyxena experiences the same effect, though second-hand. However, she does not despair. Through her abjection, specifically that of her community, she achieves sublimation. For "the abject is edged with the sublime. It is not the same moment on the journey, but the same subject and speech bring them into being."[91] Through her mute role, Polyxena digests the evidence of grotesque physical and metaphysical existence.

The abject is a pre-verbal state, one in which neither subject nor object function. Whereas Hecuba and Andromache experience this as an attack on their selves, Polyxena discovers that an absence of subject (or of a monologic self) infers an absence of object, so that "the "sublime" object dissolves in the raptures of a bottomless memory."[92] As soon as one perceives the sublime via abjection, "I then forget the point of departure and find myself removed to a secondary universe, set off from the one where "I" am -- delight and loss."[93] Sublimation achieves the Stoic

[90] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 10.
[91] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 11.
[92] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 12.
[93] Ibid.

ideal of eliminating fear of death, for when one has accepted the loss of an impenetrable self that never was, death poses no threats.

The state of sublimation allows her to reject ordering systems of thought, including that of a stable, monologic self. In this mode of thought, the mutually exclusive binaries proposed by the first two choral odes no longer necessarily exclude each other; the "truth" of post mortem existence in the Trojans' universe is polyvalent. Polyxena therefore faces her execution and potential marital servitude in the afterlife with defiant nonchalance. Unlike Hecuba and Andromache, who in attempting to preserve their identities find themselves caught in an eternally collapsing city which mirrors their ceaseless dissolution, Polyxena surrenders of her self and defeats fear of death.

Such an attitude allows her to die unaffected by either captivity or fear, and also allows her to reflect the grotesque rites enacted on her onto her captors. The Greeks are also susceptible to abjection, as they too have witnessed atrocities both human and inhuman (such as the sacrifice of Iphigenia, and the appearance of Achilles' shade) and have been exposed to the grotesque. Agamemnon and Odysseus seek justification for their actions,[94] which threaten their own ontological security, and the Greeks validate their crimes with ritual and lawful observation of custom. Kristeva describes ritual as an attempt to "purify" the abject: "An unshakable adherence to Prohibition and Law is necessary if that perverse interspace of abjection is to be hemmed in and thrust aside. Religion, Morality, Law. Obviously always arbitrary, more or less; unfailingly oppressive, rather more than less; laboriously prevailing, more and more so."[95] However, Polyxena's sublimation compromises the Greeks' attempt to justify their actions through the

[94] Agamemnon seeks divine judgment for the problem at hand and calls Calchas for confirmation, 358-359; Ulysses cites the destruction Astyanax may bring on the greeks, 535-545.
[95] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 16.

cover of ritual. The perversion of sacred institutions, rather than compromising Polyxena's sense of self, enables her to extort the ambiguity of her sacrifice.

Through "exaggerated verbal form,"[96] the messenger describes Polyxena's death as a metatheatrical spectacle.[97] As the deaths do not occur onstage but are instead reported through the *nuntius*, the site of Achilles' tomb (not physically present but conjured visually through the onstage existence of Hector's *bustum*) becomes "a metaphorical stage that competes with the fictional or dramatic reality of the text as witnesses become spectators/voyeurs of Polyxena's murder."[98] Polyxena's contact with the sublime allows her the perspective to recognize the interpretive layers of her sacrifice; she sees that "the episode of her death forms a play within a play."[99] In addition to staging a competing spectacle within his own tragedy, Seneca draws attention with the messenger speech to the pageantry of ritual. Polyxena must play two roles, and wear the costume appropriate for each: she must dress the bride and act the innocent victim for sacrifice.

By accepting her fate, rather than being undone by it, Polyxena implicates her murderers in their own plot. The Greeks become the *spectatores* within the natural amphitheatre (1118-1131); their initial revulsion and compulsive viewing (1129) "dissolves into the prescribed (Aristotelian) tragic emotions:"[100] *Pyrrhum antecedit. Omnium mentes tremunt, | mirantur ac miserantur* ("She walks before Pyrrhus. The minds of all shudder; they marvel and pity" (1147-

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[96] Ker, *Deaths of Seneca*, 125.
[97] "Spectatorial dynamics are at work most fully in the final act of the *Troades*, in which the messenger's speech overlays several points of view." Ker, *The Deaths of Seneca*, 131. See too Erasmo, *Reading Death*, 49-53; Boyle, *Seneca's Troades*, 36-37. It is worth noting that in relating Astyanax's and Polyxena's deaths, the messenger stays in iambic trimeter, "not changing to another meter, such as trochees, which Seneca sometimes uses to describe unpleasant events" (Kohn, *Dramaturgy*, 122). Such a metrical choice contrasts Polyxena's death with other, less ambiguous atrocities (like that of Hippolytus' dismemberment as reported in *Phaedra* 1000-1113)
[98] Erasmo, *Reading Death*, 51.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Boyle, *Seneca's Troades*, 37, 231.

1148). The messenger recounts how Polyxena, as part of the double spectacle of her and Astyanax's deaths, approaches her death with dignity. Undefeated by abjection, she appears more beautiful than ever: *ipsa deiectos gerit | vultus pudore, sed tamen fulgent genae | magisque solito splendet extremus decor* ("She lowers her gaze in shame, but her cheeks shine, and her last beauty glitters more brightly than ever before," 1137-1139). The *audax virgo* keeps her ground and faces her fate with such ferocity (*ferox*) that it moves the hearts of both Trojans and Greeks (1151-1153); even Pyrrhus hesitates to inflict the mortal blow (1154-1155). In her last moment Polyxena embraces death but upsets the pattern of noble and passive victim by hurling herself onto the burial mound with angry force: *cecedit, ut Achilli gravem | factura terram, prona et irato impetu* (She fell headlong with angry force, that she may make the earth heavy on Achilles, 1158-1159). By doing so, she enacts the inversion of the standard wish for the dead, *sit tibi terra levis*.[101]

Polyxena's intentions are ambiguous and seemingly conflicting regardless of interpretation. Her happy anticipation of death demonstrated in Act Four indicates a belief that Achilles has not survived in any form after death, but one may read her action as genuine anger toward the buried corpse, thus presenting an ostensible contradiction. The key to interpreting her final act then is to accept ambiguity, as she has done. The effect is unsettling to both internal and external audiences, and serves to upset the intended purpose of the ritual, so that the victorious Greeks lament her death more even than the Trojans (1160-1161).

As a silent witness to the other women's dissolution, Polyxena does not collapse under the symptoms of abjection but instead keeps them under control.[102] Rather than authoring her

[101] Boyle, *Seneca's Troades*, 232.
[102] "In the symptom, the abject permeates me, I become abject. Through sublimation, I keep it under control." Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 11.

death (which would depend on her continued attachment to the idea of self as monologic and which would leave her vulnerable to abjection, a fundamentally narcissistic phenomenon), she leaves aside interpretation and certainty, thereby enacting in her death the ambiguity she must face post mortem. Told through the lens of the messenger speech, a reader cannot even be certain of the anger behind her dying act; Polyxena has left herself open to innumerable interpretations, rather than proposing one at the expense of the others. Her death clarifies nothing, but only confuses the last, fragile monoliths of the stable ego -- marriage and ritual sacrifice -- this time belonging to the Greeks.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The grotesque nature of war has dramatic consequences for those involved; the violence and exposure to wounds, sickness and corpses bring about a psychological state of abjection, in which the self recognizes and despairs its own physicality and mortality. Because of this, war also has the effect of destabilizing moral and civic institutions. War brings with it a new set of moral guidelines, as well as the weakening of power structures. For those caught in the crossfire, the instability of structures or ideals like statehood, nobility and religion forces a confrontation with the truth of reality, which possesses no stable truths such as a self, or ego, independent of physical experience, but instead exists only in dialogue with other, non-selves.

Women in particular are vulnerable during wartime; as traditional non-combatants, women must sit by and watch the destruction of their cities and families. These women are often helpless in the aftermath of war, during which they must reevaluate their identities within the new socio-political climate. The Trojan women of Seneca's *Troades* have difficulty in adjusting to their new world. Due to the extreme length and violence of the war, the total demise of their home, and their fates as slaves to the victors, they question the sanctity of the self and its existence post mortem.

At the beginning of the dramatic action, Hecuba leads the chorus in the belief that death must be a desirable alternative to life, as her life thus far has become unbearable. She voices this opinion but is immediately followed by Talthybius, who reports that the shade of Achilles has appeared. Achilles' ghost demonstrates that as long as she lives, there are new indignities to

suffer. Furthermore, Achilles demands her last daughter as a bride in the afterlife. The idea that one of their own must continue to exist in pain and servitude even after death causes the chorus to reverse their stance, and to declare that death is a total cessation of being.

The post-war atrocities also compromise Andromache's ontological security. Whereas before she identified herself in relation to Hector and Astyanax, their sudden absences reveal to her that not only can she not hold on to her identity from before, but also that without a stable and monologic identity she must be prepared to identify herself in relation to her enemy. As Hecuba and Andromache struggle with the implications of a dialogic existence and their own grotesque natures, they fail to recognize the productive power of the grotesque. By clinging to an identity that is fallacious in its ostensible stability, the two women experience life as a continuous barrage of injustices and violations of their selves.

Polyxena avoids this by refusing to interpret her existence via speech, thereby leaving open the possibility of ambiguity. Hecuba and Andromache despair at the uncertainty regarding a post mortem existence, but Polyxena embraces it. By rejecting the self as something whole and inviolable, Polyxena passes through the abject and instead experiences sublimation: the dissolution of the self as subject, and thus the impossibility of self as object. In this way she does not escape death, but achieves the Stoic ideal of defeating her fear of death

Though the Trojans possess a "special monopoly on extreme grief"[103] in ancient thought, the experiences of the women find reflection in many other victims of war. This analysis of Seneca's *Troades* demonstrates how the theories of Bakhtin and Kristeva may be applied to Roman literature on the topic of women and their existence during wartime. These twentieth-century thinkers may bring further illumination to both classical modes of thought regarding the

[103] Littlewood, *Self-Representation*, 132.

self and the nature of human grief. A comparison of artists such as Seneca and Marina Abramović reveals similarities in suffering which transcend historical era, while psychoanalytical and critical approaches help make sense of these similarities. The intensity of the Trojan women's experiences draws awareness to the integral part of suffering in the human experience and to the productive power of grief.

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