

DIDASKALIA 

The Journal for Ancient Performance



photo: P. Winters/Theater of War

*Didaskalia is an electronic journal dedicated to the study of all aspects of ancient Greek and Roman performance.*

# DIDASKALIA

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## About Didaskalia

Didaskalia (διδασκαλία) is the term used since ancient times to describe the work a playwright did to teach his chorus and actors the play. The official records of the dramatic festivals in Athens were the διδασκαλία. *Didaskalia* now furthers the scholarship of the ancient performance.

*Didaskalia* is an English-language, online publication about the performance of Greek and Roman drama, dance, and music. We publish peer-reviewed scholarship on performance and reviews of the professional activity of artists and scholars who work on ancient drama.

We welcome submissions on any aspect of the field. If you would like your work to be reviewed, please write to [editor@didaskalia.net](mailto:editor@didaskalia.net) at least three weeks in advance of the performance date. We also seek interviews with practitioners and opinion pieces. For submission guidelines, go to [didaskalia.net](http://didaskalia.net).

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## Note

*Didaskalia* is an online journal. This print representation of Volume 8 is an inadequate approximation of the web publication at [didaskalia.net](http://didaskalia.net), which includes sound, video, and live hyperlinks.

## Delivering the Message in Kosky's *The Women of Troy*

Helen Slaney  
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On the brink of leading away Andromache's infant son to execution, Euripides' Greek messenger pauses. 'This kind of delivery work should be done by someone pitiless,' he chokes, 'someone more enamoured of cruelty than me' (786-89). Whether Talthybius is to be interpreted as spineless or sympathetic, an apologist for torture or a man doing his best to alleviate an intolerable situation, the character has a crucial role in the drama as conceived by Euripides. How this figure is represented onstage therefore provides a telling insight into the strategies of any given production. Talthybius becomes a barometer both for its treatment of the ancient source-text and its treatment of the target environment.<sup>1</sup> It is the combination—or collision, or collusion—of these two factors (ancient text and current events) which creates theatrical reception.<sup>2</sup> There is still a conservative tendency to regard any production of a classical play as a site of struggle between the "original" text and the modern director's interpretation, as though it were possible to collapse the polysemy which proliferates in performance—translation, bodies, voices, costume, set, the theatre building and its social scripts, the ideological diversity of the audience—into a singularity. As a performance, Euripides' *Troïades* expired in 413 BC. As the source of future performances, however, much like the Troy it represents, *Troïades* converts its own desecration into something much more far-reaching. In order to speak to the cynical, image-saturated condition of postmodern Australia, Wright and Kosky violate tragic form, because—as Cassandra, Hecuba and Euripides are well aware—only through such violation can the vitality of ancient drama be sustained. Starting from the representation of Euripides' conflicted messenger, therefore, I hope to outline how the Wright/Kosky *The Women of Troy* transmits its material.

Anyone who saw the production will have noticed the apparent flaw in this proposition: there is no Talthybius in the play as conceived by Wright and Kosky. A few of his lines issue from the sinister loudspeaker that dominates stage left, but the unfortunate individual whom Hecuba calls "friend," who gets a tongue-lashing from Cassandra (text disputed), who fumbles his lines in the face of Andromache's impending grief and who finally prepares her son's body for burial, has been eliminated, subsumed into the institutionalised horror of Kosky's concentration camp. Aside from becoming collateral damage as the women of Troy are stripped back to bare raw bones, joining the gods and the glory that was Greece on the cutting-room floor, Talthybius the character and Talthybius the structural device are eloquent in their absence. This paper identifies three functions of the messenger in Euripides' *Troïades*. First, I examine Talthybius as witness and mediator; second, Talthybius as perversely sympathetic; and finally, Talthybius as simultaneous destroyer and preserver, returning the body of the murdered child and ordering Ilium to burn. The absence of a mimetically represented Talthybius in the Wright/Kosky *The Women of Troy* does not mean these functions go unrealised. Rather, they are displaced, confronting the audience directly with the unbearable responsibility of witnessing.

**1. Witnesses** The messenger-speech (*angelia*), like the choral ode in praise of moderation or the show-stopping debate, is an indispensable element of Attic tragedy. Introducing extended verbal narrative into the *dramata*, the staged action, it enables events otherwise too distant or too shocking for display to be incorporated into the theatrical experience. As James Barrett has shown, the messenger-speech also performs a metatheatrical role: variations on its formal conventions serve as explorations of the play's broader themes, particularly in relation to vision and spectatorship, epistemology and perception, truth and the integrity of language.<sup>3</sup> Barrett also points to the paradox whereby a messenger's reliability depends simultaneously on his disinterest and his involvement, his privileged status as on-the-spot eyewitness conflicting with his privileged status as 'extradiagetic' commentator. Typically, then, the messenger is anonymous and marginal, occupying a position that permits plausible presence on the scene

without demanding extreme investment: Slave, Shepherd, Herald. Beyond the formal confines of that single dramatic entrance and that single knockout monologue, he has no identity and no autonomous existence. The message is his medium.

Talthybius is different. For a start, he is the only named messenger in extant Greek tragedy. Instead of a faceless mouthpiece rushing on to report disaster, Euripides creates a fully-developed character who eventually comes to participate in the action he has observed and directed. *Troïades'* other deviation from standard practice is that Talthybius delivers no *angelia* whatsoever. It may be objected that he cannot be properly counted as a messenger at all, if such a defining feature is missing. Euripides' Talthybius identifies himself, however, in terms that leave no room for doubt:

Hecuba, you know me as one who has often taken the road to Troy  
as a herald [κήρυκ'] from the Achaian army:  
someone you should recognise, lady:  
Talthybius, playing the messenger [ἄγγελῶν], I've come now with news (235–38).

As Barrett points out, the key terms κήρυξ (herald) and ἄγγελος (messenger) are interchangeable in Homeric discourse,<sup>4</sup> and it is a blighted post-Homeric landscape that *Troïades* must negotiate. In identifying himself as κήρυξ, Talthybius assumes the almost sacred connotations of his former epic role. However tattered this mantle will become, it nevertheless provides his initial entrance with recognisable, resonant definition. Talthybius plays on his familiarity. Not only is he well-known to Hecuba, but also to the audience; and not only from the *Iliad*, but from the *Troïades'* grimmer companion in postwar survival, Euripides' *Hecuba* (first staged in 424 BCE). In this play, although delivering a classic *angelia*, Talthybius is already beginning to show signs of losing his balance and slipping into an excess of sympathy.

The *Hecuba* resurrects Homer's θεῖον κήρυκα, 'godlike herald' (*Il.* 4.192) as a faltering and sentimental old man. ὦ Ζεῦ, τί λέξω? Talthybius asks as he enters. 'What shall I say?' (*Hec.* 488). Crucially, speech also fails him in the *Troïades* at the point of enunciating crisis: πῶς εἶπω λόγον?—'How do I deliver this account?' (713). Pity saturates his account of Polyxena's sacrifice, which he precedes with an unusually personal statement:

Lady, you're asking me to pay double the tears [διπλᾶ δάκρυα]  
in pity for your child; for now I will wet my face again  
while relating these evils, just like by her tomb when she was killed (*Hec.* 518–20).

Recollecting the scene and speaking the words that make it a theatrical presence provokes in the messenger an identical emotional response—διπλᾶ δάκρυα—to that provoked by witnessing the act itself. Unusually among Euripidean and indeed among any Greek tragic messengers, *Hecuba's* Talthybius lingers self-reflexively on his personal reaction to witnessing pain. As in the *Troïades*, it is particularly jarring that the empathy is not that of a dutiful servant or faithful companion but that of an enemy. ὦ φίλτατε, Hecuba addresses him, her irony a bitter antidote to his syrupy pathos. 'O best beloved, have you come to kill me, too?' (*Hec.* 505).<sup>5</sup> When Talthybius first enters the *Troïades'* camp, then, he already bears a considerable burden of identity and anticipation, and seals himself firmly into the messenger's role by describing himself as ἄγγελῶν, cognate of ἄγγελος and obvious cue as to what to expect from his appearance. That Euripides repeatedly confounds these expectations makes *Troïades* as radical a comment on the relationship between war and artistic form as Kosky's *The Women of Troy* itself.

Euripides adapts the role of the otherwise impersonal messenger to suit his material. In the aftermath of war, no identity remains unaffected. The messenger is supposed to be sufficiently detached from the events he must witness offstage to report them coherently.<sup>6</sup> In *Troïades*, however, Talthybius becomes inextricably involved in the consequences of his reporting, and the audience witness him witnessing in

mounting distress as ‘pain is piled on pain’ (596). Although some scholars have condemned him as ‘little more than a conveyor of information’ or even ‘a harsh, sinister figure... used to represent the impersonal cruelty of the Achaeans,’<sup>7</sup> more considered assessments of the herald’s role have correctly emphasised his sympathetic characterisation and crucial dramaturgical function. Kristine Gilmartin, in particular, shows how his presence mitigates the play’s nihilism by establishing ‘a means of communication between the victors and the vanquished.’<sup>8</sup> Euripides’ Talthybius is a bridging device, however meager the hope he offers. In this capacity, he also represents a surrogate audience: an outsider, a Greek, a reporter, an internal spectator demonstrating to Athenians as to how they might respond. As internal observer, he watches scenes such as Cassandra’s wedding-song and Andromache’s farewell to her son, scenes to which he responds with increasing intensity. Neutrality is just not an option when even the messenger is getting his hands dirty playing the gravedigger.

In *The Women of Troy*, however, the human interface vanishes. Contact is replaced by surveillance. Orders to the women are delivered by an oversized loudspeaker that hangs overhead like a mechanical hybrid of mouth and eye, compared by one reviewer to ‘a Big Brother from some cartoon dystopia.’<sup>9</sup> Euripides offers the consolation to witnesses of trauma that seeing can potentially inspire sympathy, and sympathy lead to intervention; Wright, on the other hand, cuts off this channel to practical action. We are offered no position from which it is possible to intercede. Instead, we are reminded of our status as invisible observers by the loudspeaker’s malevolent presence, and the consequent implication that we are not alone in watching the scene in this camp. Like the unseen “Greek” authorities, we occupy a privileged vantage point from which we can see everything that transpires below without risking our own bodies or security; unlike these authorities, we cannot remain unmoved by the pain on show. *The Women of Troy* forces its audience into the suddenly uncomfortable role of passive spectator.

Kosky’s uncompromising onstage representation of war-crime evokes the medium through which such acts are regularly relayed as spectacle to the affluent West: news-media, whether televised or online, guarantee to keep a ceaseless supply of traumas and conflict streaming into otherwise unaffected personal space.<sup>10</sup> In the interests of staying informed, the television viewer assimilates tragedy in accessible capsules, expected neither to suffer unduly nor necessarily to intervene.<sup>11</sup> We are offered a choice of roles, cast by the broadcast either as potential victims—*there but for the grace of God*—or informed citizens whose duty has been discharged in the act of observation. The one role not made sympathetically available is that of perpetrator. We are therefore effectively stripped of agency and constructed as powerless to change what has been (is being) shown on the screen.<sup>12</sup> As long ago as 1981, Peter Dahlgren argued that ‘viewer consciousness is situated in a relationship of subordination and dependence... [and] socialised to be essentially inefficacious.’<sup>13</sup> Witnessing the violence enacted in *The Women of Troy* constructs the viewer as similarly inefficacious. Rather than counteracting this by incorporating an intermediary figure from behind the camera, as it were, Kosky reinforces it by introducing a regime of remote surveillance and mechanized, systemic brutality.

Kosky and Wright do not dispense altogether with the announcements which Euripides assigns to an increasingly distraught κήρυξ. A voice remains, but it is disembodied. Orders come from a faceless, unidentified authority to which there can be no appeal, a deaf imperative void that can neither be corrupted nor resisted. Technological mediation allows the voice to remain dispassionate and detached—even, on occasion, coolly amused. We never see who is speaking, and they never have to meet our eyes. According to the program, it could have been the actor who later plays Menelaus (Arthur Dignam); in the script, the lines are assigned to an anonymous ‘Male Voice’. The presence of a reporter, like that of an eyewitness messenger, fulfils an implicit contract between network and viewer: first, that footage is impartially relayed, and second that the viewer is entitled to assume an analogously grave but impassive demeanor. Patricia Mellencamp identifies the reassuring presence of the anchorman, the authoritative commentator delivering rational patter amid the chaos, as a significant factor in maintaining the viewers’

sense of security.<sup>14</sup> News footage, like systemic violence, is a *fait accompli*. Reporters are not supposed to get involved. The newscaster who loses discursive control before human disaster is no longer a conduit for information, but has become part of the spectacle. Reporter and messenger exist in a state of privileged neutrality. Euripides upsets this conventional equilibrium by dragging his messenger out of reportage and into the drama. Kosky upsets it by doing entirely the opposite: his ἄγγελος / κήρυξ / messenger / witness / reporter has no presence on the scene whatsoever. The surveillance is total, the voiceover implacable. By not only recreating spectatorial disengagement from atrocity but also by taking it to an extreme, *The Women of Troy* foregrounds the scandalous fact which the transparency of the media lens tends to occlude: that other woman, the one on last night's news, caught on camera keening over the corpse of her grandson, occupies a reality contiguous to my own, even as she is framed as safely elsewhere. Kosky brings home to me my own impotence, rubbing salt into my Anglo middle-class guilt.

Wright and Kosky eliminate human contact between the Trojan women and those who observe and (re)possess them: the Greeks, and ourselves. The mode of viewing fostered by the removal of a mediating personality results in a kind of glazed apathy. Instead of the optimistic reassurance that every little gesture helps, we receive the bleak message that there is no alternative to complicity. Whereas the Euripidean Talthybius makes manifest the potential for positive action,<sup>15</sup> Kosky makes you acutely conscious of your position as viewer and draws conspicuous attention to its disadvantages. Responding to the spectacle of pain, an audience can choose (or vacillate) between masochistic identification with the victim or self-protective voyeurism, but neither position is ultimately empowering.<sup>16</sup> Some members of Kosky's audience took refuge in the aesthetic high ground, protesting that the simulation of torture in this context was excessive, or—even graver—offensive to those who cannot wash the scars off afterwards. Others declined to confront it altogether, and simply left the theatre. Continuing to watch, however, indicates your consent to act as witness to a representation of such acts; and while this particular representation—despite its realistic violence—is staged, analogous televised representations are not. In this way, Kosky challenges his audience to interrogate their own responsibilities as viewers. Richard Schechner, comparing the vitality of live performance to the stupefying effects of television, once argued that

as observers, they [the TV audience] are stripped of all possibility of intervention—that is, they are turned into an audience in the formal sense—the reaction of anger quickly dissolves into paralysis and despair, or indifference.<sup>17</sup>

It is not altogether inimical to Schechner's argument to observe that this kind of paralysis need not be an restricted to electronic media. Indeed, the duplicity of the live performance medium itself sets up a cycle of frustrated desire, eliciting the desperate wish to somehow alleviate the suffering on display while inherently inhibiting the possibility. This performance is present, but fictive. Last night's news was remote, but real. Both representations induce an identical state of frozen, systematically short-circuited compassion. *The Women of Troy* isolates this response and brings it to the surface, demanding a self-consciousness in its spectators that goes beyond discomfort. It does not permit indulgence in the altruistic, soft-left gratification of assuming that your personal condemnation of the military-industrial complex might somehow be making a difference. As witness to *The Women of Troy*, you can play the disengaged spectator or the suffering martyr, but in the absence of any figure capable of crossing the borders of experience—Greek to Trojan, victor to victim, stage space to fictional space—you remain sealed off from the action, insulated in your own private hell of helplessness.

**2. Sympathies** Complicity, compromise, collaboration. To what extent should a captive or subordinate be prepared to transfer her loyalties or compromise her integrity in the interests of survival? This is another of Euripides' more troubling themes in his treatment of what Ruth Scodel has called 'the survivors' dilemma.'<sup>18</sup> Essentially, Scodel argues that the women must negotiate new patterns of allegiance in a



post-Trojan world, superficially accommodating themselves to the interests of their captors in order to guarantee a future. This is primarily articulated through the only bargaining power available to the Trojan women: their sexual desirability and acquiescence. Cassandra rejoices that she has been selected as Agamemnon's concubine, representing her enslavement as a marriage not only legitimate but victorious (308-41, 353). She tenders her body willingly, but at the same time, she gloats that she will prove 'a bride more hostile than Helen' (357). As catalyst for Agamemnon's murder, Cassandra can claim to be his killer, conflating capitulation with vengeance and sexual sacrifice with sacrificial slaughter. Cassandra's solution to a post-traumatic existence is to embrace both her own degradation and the retribution it appears to hold out. If she can only 'annihilate those she hates' (404-05), no alliance is too abhorrent. Wright's translation appears to give Cassandra even more opportunity to revel in her role as *alastor*. 'This fucking will destroy Agamemnon,' she babbles. 'We'll be creating more pain than Helen ever could / We'll choking out his thing demise man / Stripping striprip hard king he has no things he has no me he hasn't / Till he's paiding for my bed dead DEADBROTHER / My DEADFATHER...' In performance, however, Cassandra's words surge out in a torrent that is less vituperative than incomprehensible. In addition, Kosky's graphic treatment of her rape (which immediately precedes this scene) smothers the cry of revenge with images so abject that it is difficult to regard her as anything other than a traumatised victim.

Initially shocked by Cassandra's strategy of accommodation, Hecuba later proposes it to the upright Andromache as a means of saving her son. When Andromache declares her intention to mourn for Hector in perpetuity, Hecuba attempts to dissuade her, advising that she should dry her tears and honour her new master, 'offering all her charms to the man as bait' (700), with the devious intention of raising Astyanax as a secret weapon of future retaliation. For all the moral bankruptcy of infanticide, the Greeks' precautions are not altogether malicious. Wright retains Hecuba's advice regarding co-operation ('Your new master—/ obey him, do everything he wants / no matter how disgusting. / Snare him. / It's survival'), but omits the reference to Astyanax's potential, depriving the Greeks of even a dubious *Realpolitik* rationale. Further emphasising the arbitrary exercise of violence that dominates his camp, Kosky's heavily pregnant Andromache is kicked in the stomach by one of guards. Later, when Helen – the ultimate sexual double-agent – demonstrates her sophistic chameleon's ability to switch sides with a change of wind, Hecuba is not averse to deploying the slipperiest of rhetoric if it will get her adversary stoned to death. Many of Helen's defenses, according to Croally's analysis, in fact go undisputed in Hecuba's rebuttal, most seriously perhaps the power of the gods and the responsibility of Paris.<sup>19</sup> Opportunistic co-operation with Menelaus is less repugnant to Euripides' Hecuba, it seems, than releasing the catalyst of the Trojan War unharmed. Helen bargains with her body for her life while Hecuba argues with spite and specious logic for her death. War brutalises. There are casualties of conscience on both sides.

Euripides' Trojans are not altogether spotless, and his Greeks are not altogether monsters. Talthybius, described like the women themselves as a *λάτριν*, a slave or hired drudge (422, 424, 450, 707), comes across as a kind-hearted, even sentimental man required to not only co-operate in war crimes but (unlike his superiors) to endure continual face-to-face contact with the victims. Refusing to divulge the full extent of Polyxena's abuse, he takes refuge in cryptic remarks: she is to serve at the tomb of Achilles; she is blessed, she has been released from toil. There can be no motive for such circumspection other than tact, or at worst a reluctance to bear witness to the anguish full revelation would bring. Later, when Cassandra curses the Greeks and vows to become the scourge of Agamemnon's house, he responds not with outrage but with tolerance, recognising her diminished responsibility: as a madwoman (*μαϊνάς*), driven out of her mind by Apollo, she is to be pitied rather than punished. Using his discretion, Talthybius permits her to 'reproach the Argives and praise the Trojans' (418) without retribution.

Talthybius' voice becomes progressively less representative of the Achaians. 'I do not announce this

willingly,' he states (οὐχ ἑκὼν γὰρ ἀγγελλῶ, 710), entering for the second time, and then begins to stumble over the words. 'The child must... How can I say it?' (713). Andromache prompts him, but the violence of articulation still sticks in his throat. This is irreversible. 'I don't know how I can say this to you easily' (717). Unlike Polyxena's sacrifice, he can find no appropriate euphemism with which to veil this particular atrocity. Talthybius' silences, and in particular that awful beat that breaks up line 713, the faultlines in his official persona, betray flaws in the representation of other people's injury. When a newsreader falters, according to cultural critic Meaghan Morris, the sudden crack in composure can affect an audience more profoundly than sensational footage or tear-jerking on-the-spot testimony. 'The announcer's stammer was devastating,' she recalls;<sup>20</sup> it signaled a breakdown in the network's ability to control the disaster in its sights, to convert the cataclysmic into the readily communicable. If the anchor's professional defenses can be breached, the viewers' complacency is similarly disturbed. Like the newsreader who stammers, the messenger whose speech has failed him reveals a scandal, a breakdown in the medium more provocative than any war-crime flawlessly depicted. The fabric of the form itself, when Talthybius hesitates, momentarily comes unstuck. Penetrated by emotional identification, he cannot maintain the façade of detachment necessary to impart his observations unaffected. Instead of remaining a transparent communications device, he comes into focus as a human actor, just as vulnerable as both viewers and victims of crisis. Such a recognition undermines impartiality and gives his audience permission to experience a corresponding moment of involvement.

Talthybius' involvement with the women increases in proportion to the harshness of the commands he delivers. Andromache's departure brings him to tears again (πολλῶν ἐμοὶ δακρῶν ἀγωγός, 1130-31), affecting him in fact so deeply that he performs an extraordinary act of atonement in carrying out Andromache's plea that her son's remains receive a proper burial. Although Andromache addresses the request to her new master Neoptolemus, it is Talthybius, overhearing, who assumes personal responsibility for conducting the funeral rites. He makes it clear that these rites are to be a shared endeavour. The women are to lay out the body, but he has already cleansed the blood from Astyanax's wounds—his τραύματα—and will meanwhile be the one to dig the grave (1151-55). The implications of Talthybius' contribution are discussed in more detail below, but for the moment it is sufficient to realise the extent to which he has abandoned the messenger's objective façade, transformed by ongoing contact with the victims into a participant rather than an observer.

In contrast, much of Euripides' moral ambiguity has been excised from the Kosky/Wright production. Rather than taking refuge in euphemism—'Polyxena's troubles are over' (*Troïades* 270)—the intercom announces laconically, 'We slit her throat.' Later, it advises Andromache that 'Whatever you do will make the boy's death / Worse. Much worse. / He won't die easily. / Put it that way. / ...If you behave / You'll earn his body for burial.' The speaker's sadistic coercion is haunted by Talthybius' milder, more personal appeal to Andromache's 'nobility' [εὐγενῶς]: 'I don't want you lusting for violence,' he tells her, 'and being disgraced or demeaned' (732-33). He warns her not to anger the army in case they withhold the body, and offers burial as a concession to pity and guilt. There is a convincing argument to be made that this offer is extended on his personal initiative.<sup>21</sup> The boy is quietly removed as the messenger adds his own tormented voice to the women's chorus: 'This kind of delivery work should be done by someone pitiless...' (786-87). *The Women of Troy* will not permit Astyanax's exit to retain such classical restraint. Instead, the women attempt to shield the child from the guards in a desperate scramble that strips the scene of false dignity, exposing the raw humiliation underneath.<sup>22</sup>

Kosky further dehumanises his "Greeks" by having Astyanax removed not by an identifiable character, but by a squad of anonymous torturers. Masked and unspeaking, these figures reflect the loudspeaker's lack of identity, appearing at intervals throughout the play to exercise power with arbitrary beatings and bullets. They are not individuals; they are drones, incapable of compassion. Euripides' intricate mesh of survival narratives has been torn apart, and split into villains and victims. All your sympathy has to rest

with the women, all your horror directed towards their violators. As a protest against the treatment of civilians in a defeated state, the political statement could not be more urgently delivered. *Troiades*, according to D.M. Carter, deals above all with a 'sense of crisis over the treatment of the vanquished.'<sup>23</sup> In order to make the analogy more explicit, Kosky makes repeated visual references to the Abu Ghraib photographs which were made public in 2004: his "Trojans" are bruised, hooded, trailing wires, forced to stand on upturned boxes, photographed with a guard's phone. Kosky's production thus tapped into a deep vein of anxiety and outrage running through the Australian community, a reaction to our government's continued support for a controversial war. However, although speaking bluntly to our condition, depriving the torturers of all humanity nevertheless constitutes an evasion of responsibility as well as an act of protest. It is all too easy to empathise with the oppressed, less palatable to recognise oneself among the damned.

**3. Afterlives** Kosky's *The Women of Troy* takes aim at an altogether different target from Euripides' *Troiades*. The adaptation is designed to achieve maximum impact a culture where the democracy is representative, the theatre is entertainment, and war is indistinguishable from crime. I would argue that some of the production's more radical measures—scenes hacked off, odes ripped out, prologues slashed, whole characters silenced—deliberately mutilate the pre-existing idealised text in order to thrash it into effective stageable material.<sup>24</sup> Francis Dunn suggests that Euripides was in fact inflicting a similar violation on conventional tragic form. Aristotle's after-the-fact prescriptions for dramatic composition require a clear protagonist, a case of *hamartia*, an ironic gap between intent and result, a plot run by strict logical causality, and a gripping climax (*Poetics* 6-16). They do not include cumulative laments, a spiral of despair, the deepening twilight, a threnody for the inevitable. According to Dunn, the structural dislocations that 'give [*Troiades*] its remarkable emotional intensity... also leave the drama itself violently dismembered.'<sup>25</sup> *The Women of Troy* continues the process, smashing the classical canon into shards that will resonate here and now.

Both in *Troiades* and in *The Women of Troy* it is Astyanax who represents the destruction of form.<sup>26</sup> The boy's broken body signals that Troy is no longer incarnate in the bodies of its citizens. The child whose survival could have prevented this from being utter genocide (703-05) is displayed as a bloody corpse. Hecuba explicitly compares his vanished beauty, like that of Troy the physical city, to its current abject condition (1175-79).<sup>27</sup> And Talthibius was responsible. However reluctant, however drenched in crocodile tears, it was still Talthibius who led him up the tower. Someone else might have pushed him off, but Talthibius is the face and the voice of the Greeks in this play, and wears the mask of the murderer. Moreover, although Kosky's production finishes with Hecuba's lament for the child, Euripides goes further. The messenger enters yet again, this time to order that the citadel itself be burned down. All trace of walls and towers is to be erased from the landscape. After its physical obliteration, as N.T. Croally argues, 'the space of what was formerly Troy can only be defined as stage space, for there is nothing else.'<sup>28</sup>

Yet Troy survives. The structural function of Talthibius in relation to Trojan destiny is as both annihilator and guarantor. As Euripides' Hecuba points out, 'If some god hadn't overturned us, hurling what was above the earth underground, we would be obscure and unremembered, not providing songs to inspire future generations' (1242-45). Fame, which may be defined as future survival in textual form, is predicated in appropriately Homeric fashion on present suffering.<sup>29</sup> Talthibius' announcements systematically drive the daughters of Dardanus deeper into despair, but simultaneously stimulate the lament that comprises the play. Tragedy, as Susan Letzler-Cole has argued, is a genre of mourning and lament. The grieving process is sometimes structurally encoded, but sometimes—as in Greek tragedy—actually comprises the action itself.<sup>30</sup> The formal activity of mourning is performed throughout Euripides' *Troiades*, beginning with Hecuba's *δακρῶν ἐλέγους*, the 'elegies of tears' (119) which she also refers to as 'threnody' (111),<sup>31</sup> to cry aloud what cannot be danced (*κελαδεῖν ἀχορεύτους*, 121) provides a form of

release. The lyric duet sung by Andromache and Helen (577-607) is identified by the chorus as fulfilling a similar function, transforming otherwise overwhelming trauma into the communal vocalizations which allow it to be uttered aloud and given shape. Tears, the chorus cry, are a pleasure (ἡδὺ), and the wailing of threnody (θρήνων ὄδυμοί), and the art or song—μουσα—which contains grief (608-609). The therapeutic properties of lament are as important as its commemorative capacity.

The play involves two further major ceremonies of mourning: Astyanax's funeral and the final keening over Troy itself that rises as the city falls (significantly eliminated from the Wright/Kosky production, which cuts off Hecuba in the midst of her funeral oration). To focus for a moment on Euripides' final scene, it becomes apparent here that it constructs an intimately reciprocal relationship between the absence of physical Troy and its re-embodied, secondary presence in the vocal and imaginal space of tragedy. There is a self-conscious irony in the insistence of Hecuba and the chorus that Troy will lose its name (1278, 1319, 1323) even as they etch its repetition deeper into the literary and performative record. Troy's extinction is protracted, even incomplete; twice the chorus proclaim that 'Troy no longer exists' (οὐδ' ἔτ' ἔσται Τροία, 1292 and 1324). In a substantial sense, the city's obliteration is final, but the women return over and over to the panoramic extent of its death-throes, giving vocal and thus sensory form to the flares, the flames, the shuddering crash of towers coming down, the dust-cloud drifting into the wind. Ilium is arrested in a perpetual state of dissolution, dropping into the hands and throats and imaginative resources of global performance practice. To mourn is to memorialize, to reclaim the dead and identify temporarily with their nonexistence. Tragedy, as Letzler-Cole argues, allows unique, funereal embodiments of absence to occur.<sup>32</sup> Loss is manifest. Troy falls, and the voices rise.

This interdependence of suffering and survival is wound tighter and tighter with each of the messenger's entrances. His first appearance reports the allocation of captives to masters, facilitating diaspora; his second removes Astyanax; his third brings back the shattered remains for interment; and finally he gives the order to torch the now-vacant citadel. Each time, fresh lament breaks out to underscore the progressively more concentrated remnants of the women and their voices.<sup>33</sup> Even as he eradicates Troy the physical place, Talthylbius is releasing it into post-traumatic circulation. "Troy" is now common property, a cipher for Hiroshima, Vietnam, Iraq.<sup>34</sup> Euripides' Trojan women are a study in projected reception, self-consciously aware that their future in dramatic form will match their future enslavement to Greece. What's Hecuba to us, if not a famous example of *Greek* tragic nobility?

Wright's translation picks up this theme, while giving it a bitter twist that implies Homeric glory is probably not worth the sweat. Hecuba demands to know why she has to be trampled over and over again: 'To make us history? / To tell a fine story / For actors to groan / For a thousand years?' The Homeric response would be a sonorous affirmative, enabling the name of Troy—like Lucan's *exustae nomen memorabile Troiae* (*Bellum Civile* 9.964)—to outlast its substance. Like Andromache's remarriage, however, Euripidean self-sacrifice has now become just another act of collaboration. In order to survive, the characters in this text must accommodate themselves to the needs or desires of their current masters, benevolent or otherwise. The act of dramatic reanimation is also inescapably an act of repossession, partially enjoying the *kleos* attached to owning (playing, directing) Hecuba for a time, but largely bleeding her for whatever contemporary significance she and the other Trojan ciphers can be brought to bear. Enslaved to their own representation, these characters cannot afford to cling too closely to some predetermined essence. The question of ownership is raised explicitly in the text of Wright's own translation as the women of Troy are passed from hand to hand. Wright's Hecuba introduces herself as 'a museum piece... / a relic. / Who will own me now? / In whose hand will I squirm?' In the immediate dramatic context, Odysseus will claim her; but in the ongoing travail of her reception, "Hecuba" is also a relic of the classical canon, reanimated over and over again to be repossessed by successive productions. What happens to the characters in *Troïades* and *The Women of Troy* is inseparable from what happens to the text. Both sustain mortal injury on Kosky's stage even as their survival is ensured.<sup>35</sup>

Modern adaptation, like Talthybius, functions as the conduit of transmission. Hecuba and the chorus make it clear that violence is at the source of their presence onstage. As translators, adaptors (and scholars), we are culpable and must accept responsibility. This raises the crucial question common to *Troïades* and performance reception: *How should we deal with the dead?* Proper treatment of corpses is a prevalent theme in ancient Greek literature, implicating everyone from Achilles to Antigone,<sup>36</sup> and it is in this context that Astyanax's funeral should be regarded. The reading of this scene by Dyson & Lee stresses its representative function as a memorial for the whole Trojan community,<sup>37</sup> but omits two further significant aspects: firstly, the implications of staging funeral rites within a tragic performance, and the relationship of tragedy to mourning; secondly, the part played by Talthybius in the realisation of these rites. It is generally agreed that the structure of Astyanax's funeral corresponds to fifth-century Athenian tradition: the corpse is washed (1152), its wounds are dressed (1232-33), it is laid out and adorned by grieving female relatives (1207-37), the deceased receives an encomium (1156-1206) and antiphonal lamentation (1209-37), and is borne offstage in a procession to the grave-site (1246).<sup>38</sup> The detail of Hector's shield may add an anachronistically epic note, but essentially what is enacted here is a complete—if necessarily condensed—Attic funeral.

Talthybius' re-entry with the child's corpse and his contribution to Astyanax's funeral rites constitute a profound statement, making his elimination from the Kosky/Wright production equally powerful. The messenger crosses every conceivable line to ensure Andromache's last instructions are respected. Having washed away the worst of the blood from the wounds—the *τραύματα*—he prepares to dig a grave 'so that what you and I perform together will bring us swiftly home' (1154-55). Bathing the body is usually an activity performed by the female mourners as part of the purification process necessary to socialise death.<sup>39</sup> As Rehm has noted, this effectively feminises Talthybius;<sup>40</sup> more importantly, it further dissolves the distinctions that are rapidly losing their meaning now the walls of Troy have been breached. "Trojan" identity, no longer jealously contained, seeps out to permeate global sympathies as the women of Troy disperse into Greek mythology, ultimately providing an aesthetic vehicle for Australian social commentary.

Conducting an appropriate ceremony of mourning performs a dual function: it memorialises the dead, preventing their otherwise uncontrollable return; and it enables the living to reach a communal point of reconciliation to loss.<sup>41</sup> The performance of such closural practices *as tragedy* represents a further extension or release of private grieving into the public domain. Holst-Warhaft calls Attic tragedy 'a force that subsumes traditional lament within elaborately *staged* lament.'<sup>42</sup> While she understands this as part of democratic Athens' systematic suppression of chthonic female power,<sup>43</sup> it is perhaps more useful for the present discussion to retain a concept of tragedy as refigured—not necessarily *disfigured*—lament. Effectively, the (repeated) performance of a funeral for Astyanax and for Troy assumes the broader social paradoxes of both ritualised mourning and of tragic theatre: embodying an absence, articulating a loss, lending form to the unspeakable. A funeral enables the women to transform raw grief, raw trauma, into a communal sequence of vocal and physical actions that give it a surface, a tangible and separate presence. Just as the fall of Troy elicits epic tragedy, so Astyanax's death elicits tragic threnody. In both cases, the Greek Talthybius has functioned as agent of memorial as well as catalyst for destruction.

There is nothing recognisable as a funeral of any kind in Kosky's realisation. Hecuba is alone onstage with the child's battered, even dismembered body: Astyanax is visible only as two pale legs, running scarlet with blood, dangling out of a cardboard box. Hecuba's grief remains private bitterness, unresolved. Unlike its Greek counterpart, Kosky's *The Women of Troy* offers no opportunity to reconfigure trauma into any kind of socially manageable discourse. This is no therapeutic process, but rather an infliction of original injury. The play breaks off with Hecuba repeating an unanswerable question, all that poetry reduced to an almost inarticulate monosyllable swollen to breaking point with pain: 'Why? / Why? / Why?' As a coda, Wright offers a solution which resolves nothing but instead interrogates our

respective motives for staging and observing this wounding, wounded material: what does it mean that this woman should have provided 'a fine story / for actors to groan / for a thousand years?'

How do we deal with the dead? And what do we need to inflict on their captive remnants, these relics, in order to transmit them? Returning to the unresolved issues of performance reception, it remains to consider how Talthybius' role within the play might correspond to the external roles of translator and director. Like photographing a ghost, accommodating autonomous text to a particular performance moment forces the script's infinite potential into producing a visible manifestation.<sup>44</sup> Director Jonathan Miller once observed, "I don't believe one has any duty or obligation to an author once he's dead. The play becomes a public object". (Or, as Andrei Serban put it: "I prefer dead playwrights".)<sup>45</sup> It is not the playwrights, however, who must endure perpetual passage through the violence of dramatisation. The Wright/Kosky *The Women of Troy* confronts the fundamental questions of how we relate to classical texts themselves, and what form they must assume to convey meaning on a modern stage. Euripides' Troy is progressively dismantled by Talthybius, until all that remains is smoke on the beach and a name to be passed from hand to mouth. Ironically, Talthybius himself is absent from the Wright/Kosky production, leaving a jagged hole in the canonical material through which a very different play can be viewed. This adaptation is not a service undertaken in reverence for some vanished ideal, but a ruthless cannibalisation of whatever components will serve a current vision. Again, Troy makes the compromise, integrity sacrificed and survival temporarily guaranteed. Like Euripides' Talthybius, adaptation transforms into performance the substance it must destroy.

Hecuba herself is fully aware of whose interests tragedy is designed to serve. After sealing Astyanax—and Troy—into dramatic ritual, she comments cynically, 'I don't think it matters much to the dead / if anyone performs elaborate funeral rites. They're just an empty conceit of the living' (1249-50). If a classical play can be exploited to serve a current cause, it should be. Wright and Kosky have taken Euripides' fatalistic dirge and re-mastered it into caustic political condemnation. Eradicating the messenger, Euripides' intermediary, creates a dynamic of spectatorship that challenges the audience aesthetically, politically and emotionally. Although I cannot altogether count myself in accord with the kind of despair that results in paralysis and, by default, quiescence, *The Women of Troy* nevertheless forces a confrontation with the principles of bearing witness and the limits of its efficacy. Even in his absence, or perhaps especially in his absence, Talthybius endures, in the radical revisions that plunder classical form and enable ancient pain to keep on speaking.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Terminology from P. Pavis, 'Problems of translation for the stage: interculturalism and post-modern theatre' (trans. L. Kruger) in H. Scolnicov & P. Holland (eds.), *The play out of context: transferring plays from culture to culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 25-42.

<sup>2</sup> A. Green, *The revisionist stage: American directors reinvent the classics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 4-15 supplies the basic methodology used in this paper. For more recent discussions of authenticity and the text/performance debate, see M. K. Gamel, 'Revising "authenticity" in staging ancient Mediterranean drama' in E. Hall & S. Harrop(eds.), *Theorising performance: Greek drama, cultural history and performance practice* (London: Duckworth, 2010), 153-70 and S. Perris 'Performance reception and the "textual twist": towards a theory of literary reception', 181-91 in the same volume. Perspectives on the performance reception of Troiades can be found in K. V. Hartigan, *Greek tragedy on the American stage: ancient drama in the commercial theatre 1882-1994* (Westport: Greenwood, 1995), 39-45 and I. Carruthers & T. Yasunari, *The theatre of Suzuki Tadashi* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 124-47. For related issues of textual transmission, see M. Walton, *Found in translation: Greek drama in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. 25 & 51; and W. B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the authority of performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), esp. 2-16, 51-52, 189-90.

<sup>3</sup> J. Barrett, *Staged narrative: poetics and the messenger in Greek tragedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), esp. 61–62.

<sup>4</sup> Barrett (2002), 57–58.

<sup>5</sup> She also addresses Talthybius as φίλος at *Troïades* 267.

<sup>6</sup> S. A. Barlow, 'Introduction', *Euripides' Trojan Women* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1986), 14, comments the tragic messenger's objectivity. See also I. de Jong, *Narrative in drama: the art of the Euripidean messenger speech* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 30–62, on messengers' inescapable focalisation of their narrative, and Barrett (2002), esp. 43–35, on the paradox of omniscience in conflict with autopsy.

<sup>7</sup> Respectively M. J. Anderson, *The fall of Troy in early Greek poetry and art* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 157; and D.J. Conacher, *Euripidean drama: myth, theme and structure* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 144.

<sup>8</sup> K. Gilmartin, 'Talthybius in the Trojan Women', *American Journal of Philology* 91.2, 1970, 213–22 at 221. Another nuanced reading of Talthybius' role may be found in M. Dyson & K.H. Lee, 'Talthybius in Euripides' *Troades*', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 41, 2000, 141–73.

<sup>9</sup> P. Craven, 'A nightmare by glaring torturer's light', *The Australian literary review*, Nov 5, 2008, 27. The same comparison occurs to C. Woodhead, 2008. 'A Trojan horse for modern ills', *The Age*, Nov 15 2008, 23.

<sup>10</sup> J.R. Compton, *The integrated news spectacle: a political economy of cultural performance* (New York: P. Lang, 2004), 170, comments that 'the experience of warfare is, for a majority of Western citizens, limited to spectacle.' See also S. Sontag, *Regarding the pain of others* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003), 21, on war spectacularised and domesticated.

<sup>11</sup> Coverage of natural disasters often includes appeals for aid, but in general the studied objectivity of news reports remains aloof from its material.

<sup>12</sup> This is not to perpetuate the myth of media consumers as mindless dupes of the system, just to point out that the packaging and delivery of distressing information via news–media encourages consumption rather than intervention. Compton (2004), esp. 167–91 provides a balanced discussion of consumer behaviour towards news–media imagery.

<sup>13</sup> P. Dahlgren, 'TV news and the suppression of reflexivity' in E. Katz & T Szecsku (eds.), *Mass media and social change* (London: Sage, 1981), 105.

<sup>14</sup> According to P. Mellencamp, 'TV time and catastrophe, or beyond the pleasure principle of television' in P. Mellencamp(ed.), *Logics of television: essays in cultural criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 262, as witnesses to such crises 'we exist as vicarious participants... yet we are never in danger of being touched... [and] neither do we need to act.'

<sup>15</sup> On this point, see in particular Gilmartin (1970), 213–21.

<sup>16</sup> M. Leigh, *Lucan: spectacle and engagement* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), esp. 4–5; 157; 241–76, makes a similar point about Roman arena culture. G. Debord, *The society of the spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 1–72 esp. 12–13 & 27, regards mass spectacle—including that of violence—as a form of political domination.

<sup>17</sup> R. Schechner, *Performance theory*, (Routledge: New York, 1988), 172–73.

<sup>18</sup> R. Scodel, 'The captive's dilemma: sexual acquiescence in Euripides' *Hecuba and Troades*', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 98, 1998, 137–54. See also Hall (2004), 45 on the concept of survival as 'one of the hallmarks of our age.'

<sup>19</sup> On Hecuba's rhetoric, see N.T. Croally, *Euripidean polemic: the Trojan Women and the function of tragedy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 135–59. Anderson (1997), 166, also points out that Hecuba is just as vengeful and vindictive as the Greeks, perfectly prepared to see Helen suffer and die.

<sup>20</sup> M. Morris, 'Banality in cultural studies' in P. Mellencamp (ed.), *Logics of television: essays in cultural criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 17.

<sup>21</sup> Dyson & Lee (2000a), 61; also Barlow (1986), 34.

<sup>22</sup> A similar role-division occurred in the Suzuki production., on which see Carruthers & Yasunari (2004), 142–43.

<sup>23</sup> D.M. Carter, *The politics of Greek tragedy* (Bristol: Phoenix, 2007), 142.

<sup>24</sup> E. Fischer-Lichte, 'Thinking about the origins of theatre in the 1970s' in E.Hall, F. Macintosh & A. Wrigley (eds.), *Dionysus since 69: Greek tragedy at the dawn of the third millennium* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 341–43, identifies a similar process at work in Gruber's production of Euripides' *Bacchae*, arguing that 'to stage a text means to perform a sparagmos,' and 'a text can never keep its so-called "integrity" unless it is dismembered... Without the dismemberment of the text, there cannot be a performance.' Each (re)-staging is thus a sacrificial act.

<sup>25</sup> Dunn (1996), 102. Carruthers & Yasunari (2004), 173, comment on Suzuki's similar continuation of Euripidean deconstruction.

<sup>26</sup> Dunn (1996), 109–12, focuses instead on the body of Hecuba as the site where Troiades' textual "disfigurement" is realised onstage.

<sup>27</sup> See Barlow (1986), 35, on Troy's reconstruction via the choral odes.

<sup>28</sup> Croally (1994), 205.

<sup>29</sup> Conacher (1967), 145, more cautiously identifies the 'recognition that, in a sense, Trojan greatness and future fame depend on this utter ruin which the gods have sent.' Fame is antithetical to wholeness.

<sup>30</sup> S. Letzler-Cole, *The absent one: mourning ritual, tragedy and the performance of ambivalence* (London: Pennsylvania University Press, 1985), 1–40. See also G. Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous voices: women's laments and Greek literature* (London: Routledge, 1992), esp. 127–70 on lament in Greek tragedy specifically.

<sup>31</sup> This line is deleted by Tyrrell on metrical grounds, but Lee (1976), 82–83 states that 'it is better to leave the text unaltered... The verses are not intended to be antistrophic.'

<sup>32</sup> Letzler Cole (1985), 9.

<sup>33</sup> The Kosky production replaces Euripides' choral odes with a range of European music drawn from a range of classical, folk, and popular registers, which both fragments and universalizes female suffering.

<sup>34</sup> Carruthers & Yasunari (2004), 124–47; Hartigan (1995), 39–45; Hall (2004), 19; Carter (2007), 155–58, discuss various war-torn twentieth-century states to which productions of *Trojan Women* have referred.



<sup>35</sup> See Fischer–Lichte (2004), 339.

<sup>36</sup> R. Garland, *The Greek way of death* (London: Bristol Classical, 1985), 101; Croally (1994), 74; C. Sourvinou–Inwood, “Reading” Greek death: to the end of the classical period (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 123ff.

<sup>37</sup> M. Dyson & K. H. Lee, ‘The funeral of Astyanax in Euripides’ *Troades*’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 120, 17–33, 2000, 17–33.

<sup>38</sup> M. Alexiou, *The ritual lament in Greek tradition*, revised by D. Yatromanolakis & P. Roilos (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 4–7, 131–39; Garland (1985), 21–37.

<sup>39</sup> R. Rehm, *Marriage to death: the conflation of wedding and funeral rituals in Greek tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 22; Garland (1985), 24.

<sup>40</sup> Rehm (1994), 133.

<sup>41</sup> Letzler Cole (1985), 5; Sourvinou–Inwood (1995), 109–30, on Greek burial and closure.

<sup>42</sup> Holst–Warhaft (1992), 128.

<sup>43</sup> Holst–Warhaft (1992), 127–70. Alexiou (2002), 14–23, reviews the evidence.

<sup>44</sup> Perris (2010), 181–91, and Gamel (2010), 153–70, provide the most recent theoretical positions on the text / performance dialectic. For further bibliography on this topic, see n.2 above.

<sup>45</sup> Green (1994), 5.

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