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SENECA'S *TROJAN WOMEN*
Identity and Survival in the Aftermath of War

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Everybody knows somebody who has been directly affected by war, and has thoughts about the radical ways in which one's sense of one's place in the world is affected by war. My *mise en scène* for *Trojan Women* (Seneca, 1996) grew from the premise that Troy represents any decimated culture whose women face butchery or assimilation. The Cheyenne nation has a saying that sums it up: '*a people is not defeated until the hearts of the women lie trampled on the ground*'. In recent decades we've seen many noble, cosmopolitan cities ruined by war, accompanied by the systematic rape of women which is an integral part of the war effort. For example, Seneca's *Trojan Women* has similarities to Goran Stefanovski's play *Sara in the Horrorland* (1995) about the bombardment of Sarajevo. Where Seneca uses the great soul of Hecuba to embody the suffering of his city, Stefanovski uses a young girl, Sara.

When a playwright characterizes a great city not just as a mutable way of life but as a soul, unique and irreplaceable, it is incumbent on that playwright to reach an understanding of the hostilities that destroy the spirit of place. Stefanovski echoes Seneca in his description of the confused context of the war in Sarajevo: division among the aggressors, confusion among the losers, the failure of heroics, no clear-cut villains, emotion without sentimentality. Both authors ring out the 'holocaust mantra' of exorcism and polemic: 'never forget, never again'. This is to tell us that the experience of this war, this play, must leave us changed for good. Since neither the identity of the victor nor that of the victim can remain stable under war conditions, the observer must also be irrevocably changed. Since our production was produced by an American University in February 1998 – a time when the government administration was readying its war machine against Iraq – the resonance of this mantra was a prime objective of the production.

David Slavitt (1992) has noted that Seneca's anger is not merely that of a shrewd, cynical observer but testifies 'to the wreck of an idealist's

faith' (p. x). Our contemporary, Stefanovski, also describes the war-time difficulty of holding on to the fundamental ideals in which identity is founded. Stefanovski (1995) sees the destroyed architecture of his city as a metanym for the identity of his people; it also signifies the lost humanity of the destroyers. 'A specific cultural Atlantis is sweeping away', he writes, '...the fall of Sarajevo is a fall both of Europe and the World' (p.48).

From the start, these observations on war, place and identity directed me towards a contemporary production dramaturgy which would place situation in the foreground, with an emphasis on action and a flow across Seneca's act divisions. For an accelerating urgency and cumulative effect I decided to cut the text for action so as to present the play with no intermission. Any rhetorical 'mythologizing' which did not relate to the situation of the Trojan women was snipped. My aggressive and decisive policy in determining the cuts aimed to clarify the ambiguous questions in the drama that have traditionally caused devotees of Seneca most grief in production. A play text is a blueprint for which any production is necessarily a translation. A clear attack helps to focus a production; it is also a catalyst for animated discussion. To bridge the distance between today and a Troy that was mythic even to Seneca, I planned a production based on my answers to the following questions about situation, action, Seneca's use of character foil, and the imaginative sensibility of his play.

I. Imagining the situation

The once and future Troy

I agree with Talthybius' statement at line1050, that culture and mythology are cumulative processes. I take him at his word: wherever smoke snakes into the air; wherever the air is particularly black with denominational hatred; wherever a war of attrition settles over our species, Troy is there. Troy inspired warrior philosophers and warrior poets down through the ages, including even the aristocrat poets who contributed to our notions of modernity while dying at Gallipoli and so many other killing fields. The sheer magnitude of the idea of Troy meant that we, cast of Trojan women and Greek conquerors, had to engage in exercises first of imagining a fabulous culture, then in destroying it.

What is Troy? How can the significance of its demise be communicated to an audience unfamiliar with its ontological myths?

Seneca's Troy is ancient, potent, culturally exquisite. Reaching up through its towers to the divine, it has become a timeless archetype.

The problem with eternity is stasis – the absence of desire. Troy has therefore stolen Helen, the temporal quality of desire, but as organization culture theory indicates (Nahavandi and Malekzadeh 1993), superficial borrowings cannot give a static culture the flexibility it needs to deal with 'new procedural challenges' (p. 19), such as an invasion of Greeks.

In the first weeks of rehearsal we created splendid rituals celebrating Troy's past, celebrating its mythological origins, using the text of the formal lamenting from act 1 to steer improvisations which our composer, James Hart, used subsequently as the basis for his score. Our Troy is proud and undemonstrative save for formalized mourning ritual. The society is pre-industrial, slave-based and rigidly hierarchical. The women live segregated, but wield considerable power depending on their social station and marriage. Beauty is defined by artifice, which is highly valued. The living are divided from the invisible world of the gods and the realm of the dead by a gauze curtain which certain rituals can temporarily brush aside. Tallness denotes spiritual ascendancy: this led us to build up the shoes of the aristocrats and temple workers, and to elevate the ghosts on four-foot high stilts.

The cast researched accounts of post-bombardment shock from Hiroshima, Dresden and the East Bank. We examined the art forms inspired by these experiences, such as Japanese Bhuto dance and the performance art of Joseph Beuys. We worked through discussion but mainly up on our feet, for it is only through bodily imagination that we could research the physical experiences of awakening from the surreal nightmare of bombardment into a forever-altered reality. We represented the brain-numbing shock sustained by the ragged, barefoot women of the chorus by their slow-motion stumble to Hector's tomb during the overture, three full minutes in duration.

The bones and the flesh of Troy

Hecuba is the skeleton, the lesser women, the flesh of Troy. Hecuba adheres to the cultural structures of Troy, while the weaker members of the chorus fall away from her. Quite apart from the unpleasant irony, it makes sense for Hecuba to be coupled with Ulysses by the lottery because she's the only one who approaches his strength of will.

What is the dramatic situation of the Trojan Women? When are they on stage? How are their journies defined?

Hecuba opens and closes the play: the stage is her territory. In our production she remained on stage for the Ulysses-Andromache

confrontation in act 3 (where, after all, would she go?). Similarly, the chorus remained on stage throughout, crouching traumatized during the 'interior' second act played upstage by the Greeks. Andromache speaks most lines and has most swinging emotional transitions: hers is the most savage arc of change in the play, but Hecuba's will represents the Trojan problem the Greeks must deal with – and so she drives the action. She never relaxes her sense of who she is, or her efforts to force her fellow Trojans in line with her. The gods *are* sick, the Greeks *are* evil, Hecuba is and will remain even in slavery, a queen.

The divergence between Hecuba and the chorus is difficult to plot, yet necessary if the events of the play are to expose the collapse of the identifications, solidarities and agreements on which their cultural practices rest. John Rajchman's (1991) definition of event as a 'moment of erosion, collapse, questioning or problematisation of the very settings within which a drama may take place' (p. viii) is appropriate to the 'holocaust mantra' of the play because it begs the possibility of alternative events and settings. Indeed, the preoccupation of the Trojan women is to imagine what might come out of the collapse of their world. The imagining undertaken by the chorus provides a 'norm' against which the different journies of Hecuba and Andromache can be contrasted and understood.

The chorus begin numbed and vaguely relieved to find a leader still alive. Hecuba has refused the comfort of shock. She maintains an ironic commentary: that Troy, at its greatest in defeat, has never awed the Greeks as now. Hecuba's voice hardly reaches the chorus in their extremity, however, and I felt that something more than Hecuba's railing should catalyse them back into consciousness. In our production a mad captive woman is carried across the stage by Greek soldiers. Wailing in a song which fragments into five different voices the loss of her father and homeland, Cassandra prophesies her captor's death in a speech drawn from Seneca's *Agamemnon*.

The rather radical decision to import this brief new scene from *Agamemnon* into *Trojan Women* has three purposes. It illustrates Hecuba's physical helplessness to save her daughter, and exacerbates her guilty need to find herself culpable for the destruction of Troy. It introduces, as a warning to the other women, the terrifying geography of lost identity, fraught with hallucination and the divine whimsy of the gods. Lastly, it pummels the Trojan women into horrified recognition that the immediate fate of Cassandra is what they must all face, with the lottery. Their initial shock now gives way to their realization that they have survived to face new disasters, and that they must quickly find

a way to understand the new world which is taking shape out of the combustion and collapse of the old.

First the women of the chorus hold fast to each other and to the glories of their past. They insist defiantly to the Greek Talthybius that their dead enjoy 'the fruits of happiness' (158) in Elysium. But then, chastened by his description of Achilles' powerful ghost, they lose faith in Hecuba, who is of no use in protecting them from the Greeks, and in fact endangers them with her uncompromising attitudes. Privately, they question the foundations of their religion, meditating at length on the afterlife, 'They say the soul lives on when we are dead – | Can this be true? Or is it just a myth | an opiate to dull our fears?' (371–408). When they conclude that 'Nothing exists after death' they threaten to destroy the fragile metaphysics that Hecuba insists on, and this marks their point of greatest dissent with the royal family. Andromache manages to bring them back from this existentialist isolation, temporarily. Her account of Hector's suffering ghost exhorts them to act together to hide the child Astyanax: they now defy the Greeks so as to empower themselves.

It is a tense and challenging moment for the chorus when they hear their own words of exhausted despair at the arduous ten years of war (68–80) echoed by Ulysses as he tries to persuade Andromache it is within her power to end the pain (548–50). They resist him, and none of them turns traitor. But after their strategy to save Astyanax has failed, they feel their identity slipping from them. From holding fast to Troy's dust in the first act, the chorus at the end of act 3 envision themselves lost and alone in the far-flung kingdoms of Greece. By act 4, all they have left to share is hatred for Helen: hatred being the lowest common denominator of group identity. At the end of the play when the soldiers compel them to the ships, there is nothing binding them but the tie of shared suffering.

The mental territory of the aftermath of war

We concluded that, with the exception of Hecuba, it is unlikely the Trojan women have much chance of maintaining a living cultural identity across their diaspora. We also agreed: the psychological exercise of tracking their journey through the play would, on its own, have fulfilled any educational goal we hoped to gain from doing the show. Their journey provides the ground against which all other ideas discussed in the script can be seen. This suggested that they should be perpetually on stage. Why would they leave Hector's tomb? Where else is there for them to go but to the ships?

The women of the chorus would cling to their Trojan-ness, but it eludes them. The old social order is dead, their gods have ceased to protect them, and as the action develops they come to understand that they must strategize furiously if an iota of their Trojan-ness is to survive.

II. Imagining the action

Identities are reconfigured in the aftermath of war

Elaine Scarry (1985) writes that war is the declaration that 'reality is officially up for grabs' (p. 137). It is part of the state of war that reality will be systematically deconstructed by means of lies, falsifications and fictions. We are familiar with this scenario; our newspapers are full of it. It follows that, although the bombardment may be over and the casualty lists drawn up, war continues in the conflict over these unresolved issues: who will define reality; who will be forced to recant, to formally apologize; who will define war crimes – how will identity be defined in the new order; where will the new boundaries for culturally acceptable behaviour be drawn?

In treating the Trojan women, Seneca is not obsessively concerned with the victims. He is equally interested in the process of conquering, and this is what makes his play relevant to powerful governments today. Seneca's *Trojan Women* occurs here, in the aftermath of war, during the suspended reality of the fall-out where power struggles among the victors determine morality, and indeed, can change even the meaning of the weather.

What does Seneca reveal about war by showing scenes of dissent among the victors and confusion aong the defeated? How does he view conquest?

Conquest and victory are unstable terms, that depend for their definition on the identity of the defeated. In order to call themselves conquerors, the victors must first agree on a definition of what constitutes total victory. Is it to be the razing of the city; the propitiation of Greek war heroes, or a Trojan genocide to prevent repercussions? After some argument, the Greeks opt for all three – and it is significant that each strategy undermines the existing identity of Troy in a different way.

Razing the city destroys the birthplace of Trojan identity and defiles its religion by the sacrilegious killing of Priam in the temple and the rape of Cassandra. Seneca describes the destruction of Troy on various occasions, but only Hector's tomb, the quintessential Trojan artifact, is actually destroyed on stage. Monument to Troy's mightiest, the tomb works first as a gathering place for survivors, a sort of beacon drawing

them to the memory of what Troy was. The power of the tomb as a receptacle of Trojan identity makes it the metaphorically optimal place to hide Astyanax, and also causes Ulysses to seize it as a weapon in his strategic psychological torture of Andromache.

The honouring of Achilles' ghost with the death of Polyxena places the old mortal Trojan hierarchy under the control of immortal – therefore eternal – Greek ascendancy. Polyxena's death is, of course, also part of the destruction of the Priam/Hector line. Not content with sacrificing her, the Greeks send Helen to push Polyxena beyond emotional endurance with a false offer of life in exchange for marriage to Pyrrhus. The deceit is reminiscent of the Nazis' technique of sending Jews quietly to slaughter by promising a train to Palestine. Why does Seneca do this? Not just to show how nasty the Greeks and Helen can be, but to show how the manipulation of reality in this psychological warfare breaks Hecuba's spirit. The torment of Polyxena is actually aimed at Hecuba. To win, the Greeks must destroy the Trojan identity emanating from Hecuba, the mythic mother of Troy.

The 'lottery' assigning the noble Trojan women to Greek masters concludes and stands for the assimilation which often accompanies genocide through rape and abduction. The Trojan blood line, newly identified as slaves' blood line, will be consumed by the Greek master race until it is lost without trace. The killing of Hector's male heir, Astyanax, represents the Greeks' refusal to allow Trojan warrior identity to survive even in a debased form.

The destruction of an artifact, a psychic identity and a human body are complementary acts of war.

The killing of Astyanax should be understood in relation to the desecration of Hector's tomb. Scarry (1985) shows that the 'systematic destruction of all benign forms of meaning from the artifacts of the vanquished civilization' works as a corollary to torture 'which destroys the physical basis of reality within the human body' (p. 137). Seneca's play provides a textbook demonstration of these parallel processes.

Why does the action centre on Hector's tomb?

Hector's tomb is central to the Trojans' fight for psychic survival. The tomb is Troy's past, Astyanax the Trojans' future. To destroy Hector's tomb is to destroy the remaining fragments of what it is to be Trojan. To kill Astyanax, son of Hector and, to the Greeks' knowledge, Priam's last living male descendant, is to end Troy's hope of contiguous cultural identity and revenge. Containing, as it does, her husband's spirit and

her child's life, the tomb is an extension of Andromache's body – and Ulysses' attack on it is tantamount to a physical attack on her.

By placing Troy's past and future in this 'body' of Andromache, Seneca is delivering her to Ulysses for torture. Scarry contends that the purpose of torture is always psychological. Despite torturers' pretences to the contrary,

> the first function of injury is the establishment of the categories of winner and loser [the designation of winner earns one the right to enact one's own constructs]. Injuring in its second function...provides the radical material base for the winning issues, investing them with the bodily attribute of reality until there is time for both of the populations [winning and losing] to consent to them, enact them, make them real. (Scarry, 1985, p. 132)

The injuring of Andromache by means of the attack on the tomb implies that Ulysses' purpose is more than ending the threat of Hector's line. It is more than changing the direction of the wind. Ultimately, it is the torture of Andromache. The purpose of his torture is that of all torture: to make the victim betray her 'self' and so eradicate her identity. To break Andromache's will, her ability to imagine herself as part of a group, a cultural belief system, must be destroyed.

Both sides use deceit, and it must be remembered that Ulysses is right to fear: Andromache *does* want Astyanax to grow up to fight back. 'He must live to avenge you', she says to Hector's ashes, 'so I can see your face again in his' (687). Since Andromache, as well as Ulysses, equates Astyanax with Trojan retribution, we see how her love and her warrior ethic are so inextricably bound together in her psyche that her desire to win as a mother is subsumed in her desire to win as a Trojan.

Andromache's tragedy is that she bases her struggle for the future on the past glories of Hector. In her mind's eye, she sees him riding to save her like a white knight, terrifying the Greeks. Only a vision of the future can save the future, and torturers do not stop until the victim relinquishes all claim on defining reality. Thus, Andromache's spirit is broken at the moment where she acknowledges the Greeks' laughter at her fantasies, and realizes her hope of a Trojan future is empty. ' Am I the only person to see [Hector]?' (684).

To intensify the moment of her defeat, I changed the moment where Andromache pulls Astyanax from hiding, so that her pleading for clemency and her blessing of her enemy – a classic response of the victim to torture – is made with the boy as grudging witness.

Is Andromache truly willing to see her son enslaved, or is she merely engaging in another strategy to keep him alive for future revenge?

When she allows her son to see her beg shamefully before an enemy, Andromache shows that she has no pride left. I cut her line 'Try pleading with the Greeks. That just might work' (687) because it implies that her pleading may not be sincere. In order to place dramatic emphasis on Ulysses' decision concerning the boy, there should be no doubt that she is completely beaten and now has no strategy left, no recourse but to Ulysses' compassion.

Ulysses has said, 'Produce your son, then pray' (784), so giving Andromache reason to hope. Obediently, she prays to him, and forces her son to join her. Subsequently, when Ulysses ignores her prayers, she feels his betrayal more bitterly, and Ulysses' trickery is more apparent. A great arc of emotional development is available to the actress playing Andromache if, in her defeat, she abandons her political strategy: she goes to the very depths of beggary. Moreover, when the defeated Andromache separates her warrior ethic from her love for Astyanax to the point that she chooses the person of the boy over the nobility of her husband's blood line, she has undergone a change of values. This makes her exceptionally gripping as a dramatic character. The hysterical Andromache who is so fixated by Hector that she can only weep over his cloak as her son is led to his death – this stereotyped Roman wife Andromache who never develops or changes – is far less interesting to me and, I contend, less relevant to our contemporary concerns with motherhood and peace politics. To return to Hector personified in his cloak at the end of the scene would put her emotional journey into reverse gear, so I cut the cloak. Our Andromache renegotiates her identity to the point where she lets go of Hector, lets go of being Trojan, and just loves the boy.

What does Astyanax do during all that stage time, other than cling to his mother?

Astyanax is a non-speaking role whose function is bathos. I dislike using child actors as pieces of furniture: I think it always shows poorly. We echoed the larger themes of the play by casting a twelve-year-old youth who understands the symbolic significance of his lineage and is involved in renegotiating the Trojan identity. Our Astyanax and his mother join the other Trojan women on stage in act 1, rather than where Andromache's text announces their 'arrival' in act 3. This gives both the women and the audience more time to consider his predicament as he lives through a traumatic narrowing of limited

choices of identity as a mini-Hector who subscribes to the cult of his father, to a child begging for life, to a last ditch attempt to 'die well' in the Roman fashion.

Andromache only 'sees' her son independently of Hector when she forces him to beg for life in slavery. Ironically, as she comes to love him, he wants to reject her. My aim was to stress the boy's psychological turmoil as he tries to work out 'right behaviour' throughout the roller-coaster ride of events he is subjected to. After he is discovered hiding in the tomb, Astyanax breaks with his princely upbringing when his mother makes him genuflect to the Greeks. Then, in an about-face where she ritually prepares him to meet his ancestors, she seems to enwrap him in Trojan-ness. She asks permission to, 'close his eyes though he's still alive', and while he is in this state of suggestible blindness gives him the courage to die well:

> You are so small
> but, even now they are afraid of you.
> Your country waits. Buoyed with freedom's pride,
> go, join the other Trojans who are free.
> (787–91)

Andromache is unable to follow through, however. Having given him dignity she takes it away from him again by reminding him in her message to Hector that she has no male to protect her: 'is your Andromache | to serve a Greek man's lust?' (805–6).

At this point Astyanax can no longer look to his mother for guidance because of her abject confusion. He chooses the warrior role he is most familiar with, and takes on the entire Greek army with his fists. Although, initially, they laugh at him, he dies proud and vengeful with his attempt to outwit Calchas' wind-altering prayers to the gods by leaping off the precipice before their completion. Astyanax's journey shows in microcosm the fatal confusion of the Trojan identity. With his death, Andromache's attempt to redefine Trojans as slaves has failed.

Ulysses' definition of Troy wins. Hector's ghost will *not* save Andromache, Astyanax *cannot* be assimilated into Greek culture and Andromache's Troy is refigured as emotionally disproportionate and culturally barbaric (782–8). The dominant Greek cultural imagination allows the soldiers to see Achilles' ghost clearly. Trojan ghosts, on the other hand, are dislodged from the underworld, and suffer in agony; the Trojan imagination itself is unhinged. This achieves Ulysses' goal, for he will keep the Trojans from retribution by making it impossible for them *to imagine themselves*.

In his actions, is Ulysses cruel, just or both?

As do all torturers, Ulysses sees the situation as bigger than the individuals. The obligations of bloodline in a warrior culture make it *impossible* for Astyanax ever to be anything other than Trojan. No matter how sincerely Andromache tries to redefine her son as a household slave, Ulysses knows it cannot be. He is Seneca's model of the Roman leadership which makes similar moral-political decisions every day to rule an empire. This is not to suggest that he is a hero, however. Seneca uses him to probe how secure the Romans are in their 'rightness', by showing how difficult it is for Ulysses the torturer to justify his work despite his ideological conviction that he is making the world a better, safer place for his own kind. 'This mother's grief and shock really moves me,' he says, 'but still it moves me even more to think | of Greek mothers' (736).

Research shows that torturers are not cartoon villains

Torturers are regular people who use ideological compartmentalization and double-think to justify their actions. They are not monsters, but complex human beings. The depiction of Ulysses is very modern: he feels shame at the role he plays. Don't believe Helen when she reports that Ulysses doesn't want Hecuba because she's old and ugly; Hecuba would be a constant and uncomfortable reminder of his savagery in Troy's killing fields. No torturer takes his work home.

Ulysses is motivated neither by Pyrrhus' blood lust nor Agamemnon's superficial empathy for the Trojans, yet he is still too emotional to be a mere political cipher. He feels admiration and compassion for his foe. In the very long act 3 we see Andromache earn Ulysses' respect by her cunning, her passion, and the strength of her will. He does not enjoy breaking her. He has difficulty hiding his genuine emotion at the end of the scene when she bids farewell to her son; he must work to curtail his soldiers' compassion, too. Her accusations of child murder bite hard, and her distress over Astyanax excites his pity. Ulysses is genuinely moved by Andromache's bravery and tears – but he understands the potent force Astyanax represents. He has conflicting motivations: his hatred of war and his duty to Greece. Seneca applauds both Ulysses' humanity and the strong vision of necessity and the strength of will it takes him to proceed with executing the boy.

The imperial strategy of 'assimilate or eradicate' has come down to us through Machiavelli. We hear it from people who argue that Iraq should be flattened until they can't hit back. I think it's important for a director to acknowledge where her moral viewpoint differs from

a playwright, and my view on empire is not Roman. Consequently, my interest in Ulysses lies in his own dislike of his actions.

III. Imagining the characters

Seneca's cleverness at repeating themes in major, minor and sharp is one of the reasons I felt the play should be musically scored. The complex double motivation of Ulysses is thrust still further into relief by the system of character foils that Seneca has designed for him.

What do we conclude from the spectrum of characters Ulysses, Pyrrhus, Agamemnon, Helen and Talthybius?

The contrast of these lesser minds with Ulysses reveals the deep humanity of the latter and serves to show his understanding of the proper relationship between sentiment and pragmatism which is the pedagogical purpose of Seneca's play.

Agamemnon has plenty of philosophical rhetoric about the excesses of war which he will never translate into merciful action. He has perfected, superficially, the five sources of Longinus' sublime (Longinus, 1995, pp. 181–3): competence in speaking, the power of grand conception, vehemence of emotion, proper construction of figures of thought and metaphor and elevated dignity in speaking. One of the ironies in the play is that Agamemnon speaks well of restraint but allows himself to be emotionally baited into a power struggle with Pyrrhus. Ulysses, on the other hand, believes what Agamemnon mouths, but is forced by his conviction of the necessity to wipe out Hector's line, to act in a Pyrrhus-like way.

Ulysses' ironic double bind makes his journey the most interesting on the Greek side. To emphasize it in the dramatic action, I elected to introduce Ulysses early, in act 2 instead of act 3 where his text begins (I never considered myself to be restricted by the three-speaker rule). Consequently, as Ulysses witnesses the struggle between the Greek leaders, the audience sees his double bind develop in the action. Ulysses is stuck between Pyrrhus and Agamemnon, while they vie for his support on the Polyxena issue.

In my interpretation, Ulysses prevents Pyrrhus from killing Agamemnon, maintaining a fragile unity among the Greeks, by proposing that Calchas mediate between them by asking the gods for direction. Ulysses pretends to honour Calchas' pronouncement even though we know from his inner thoughts in act 3 that he despises superstition. His conviction of the political necessity of eliminating Hector's male heir forces Ulysses into an unholy alliance not just with Calchas, but with

Pyrrhus in the sacrifice of Polyxena. He must suffer for his political convictions.

Flaubert wrote *La Sylphide* about the particular melancholy of the Romans,

> their dreams loom and vanish against a background of immutable ebony. No crying out, no convulsions – nothing but the fixity of a pensive gaze. Just when the gods had ceased to be and Christ had not yet come, there was a unique moment in history between Cicero and Marcus Aurelius, when man stood alone. Nowhere else do I find that particular grandeur.
> (Cited by Bailey, 1986, p. 7)

The grandeur here is not that of Agamemnon's fake sublime. It is that of the human will to envision and to appreciate a fabulous cultural identity such as Troy. The concomitant melancholy derives from the consistent failure of us petty tribal creatures to maintain the vision. The political necessity which forces Ulysses into his unholy alliance with Pyrrhus and Calchas expresses both his grand vision and his melancholy cynicism. At the end of the play, when he's watched the sacrifice of Polyxena and waits for Hecuba, the fixity of his 'pensive gaze' contrasts with the wailing of the chorus women as they are dragged away. His gaze replaces the crying out and convulsions characteristic of a character more rooted in temporal emotion – characteristic, let's say, of Helen.

Helen's double bind in act 4 is a restatement of Ulysses' but in a context less politically urgent and less emotionally genuine. In act 4, Helen, like Ulysses, lies to the Trojan women. She justifies the deceit to herself by saying she's only obeying orders, and anyway Polyxena will be happier going to a surprise death – but something much deeper is going on. Helen is isolated by the hatred of both the Trojans and the Greeks, and she is undergoing the difficult identity crisis of the collaborator. She mourns Paris, and is being towed off to Sparta as if she were a Trojan woman – she *has been* a Trojan woman for ten long years – but she doesn't want to be a slave and so now adjusts her almost infinitely flexible identity so as to ally herself with the Greeks.

Helen is a brilliantly modern portrait of a confused and dysfunctional abuse-survivor. The child of rape, pawned off by the gods, kidnapped, warred over and resented, Helen has not developed a secure identity. She is stuck in the victim's cycle of accusation and empathy. The contextual pattern of her predicament is not clear to her: she lives only in the present tense.

Helen is tired of the isolation imposed on her by the curse of her beauty – but she can't stop using it as a weapon. She wants solidarity with the community of Trojan women – but without sharing their fate.

Filtered through dishonesty and confusion, Helen's double bind mirrors that of Ulysses – political expedience (I am Greek!) and emotional sensibility (I want to be with my Trojan sisters). However, since she lacks both his vision of a politically stable world and his fixity of purpose, she can't attain his dubious victory, and is left with the sense that she is sinking alone. Lacking an identity, she has no sense of justice and can only be cruel. Helen's grand vision is only of herself as a 'tragedy queen'. Her melancholy is only that of the diva.

I assigned Helen the third choral lament at the end of act 4 in order to clarify her conflicting desires to crow over the other women, but at the same time to despair at her own loneliness:

> It's sweet to see your whole nation
> suffering as you suffer –
> moaning as you moan –
> Grief and tears bite
> much less savagely
> when everyone is weeping –
> You always, always wish evil on others
> when sorrow strikes –
> You love to see thousands go to their doom
> ...
> But when yours is the only ship that sinks
> as you cross the sea –
> when you swim ashore naked,
> and alone –
> then you cry, then you lament your fate. (1009–30)

Meanwhile, as an important side benefit to reassigning the choral song, the women of the chorus remain banded together in their grief for Polyxena. If they descended into the solitary cell of that chorus, 'naked and alone', at the end of act 4, then the agony of their parting at the end of the play would be diminished. I made this choice to emphasise Helen's complexity and to give the emotional journey of the chorus the maximum arc, covering the whole span of the play.

Talthybius provides the sharpest character foil for Ulysses, where Seneca shows that compassion is fleeting whether voiced in the philosophical tones of Agamemnon or Talthybius' empirical simplicity. Neither of them grasps the framework of political necessity in which Ulysses operates, where the possibility of mercy depends on a considered context of legal precedent and probable consequences. In the *Trojan Women*, Seneca demonstrates dramatically the principle outlined in his treatise 'On Mercy' (Cope and Procopé 1995): compassion exists independent of case, while mercy takes case into account. Compassion is

not an adequate moral response because it does not relate to judgment or to action. For example, Agamemnon can lament the fall of Troy without lifting a finger to stop it. Helen can grieve for Polyxena while dressing her for her death. Talthybius can weep over Astyanax then run for a front-row seat at the death of Polyxena. Only Ulysses resists the wild emotional swings that make the others *subject* to their destinies, *not* forgers of destiny.

He rises above the emotional trammels of traditional superstition, familial empathy and political intrigue to achieve a sort of immutable Roman identity that can never be undermined by the multiple realities of modern times.

IV. Imagining the sensibility of the play

Our language of 'inalienable rights' diminishes the concept of identity as an inherited thing, tied to territory, ontological myths and ancestry. Warrior concepts of blood-ordained status would clash with contemporary United Nations human rights standards. We would insist that Astyanax should be considered as a child before a Trojan. We would require individual autonomy for him, and assert his right to grow up as a citizen of Disneyland if he wanted to. The Trojan mindset, on the contrary, is indigenous, aboriginal where the concepts of gods and landscapes are inseparable. It is a great stretch for contemporary actors to comprehend the absolutism of such identity.

How powerful are the gods? What is their role?

The gods flicker in and out of sight throughout the play, as does Hector's ghost in Andromache's dream. Ulysses does not believe in the gods, save in their power to influence others who are conditioned to believe. As an arch politician unencumbered by belief, he manipulates others through a religion they hold and that he does not. When he urges his men against Andromache in act 3, we see that he doesn't share his soldiers' fear of Achilles' ghost. A good Stoic, Ulysses strives to work the big picture, objectively and rationally choosing political strategies which project a world vision beyond the present-tense superstition and emotional involvement which envelop the others.

In rehearsal, one of the most difficult things to remember was that Seneca's people live in a pre-Enlightenment, pre-Newtonian-physics universe. Their world abounds in hieroglyphic signs: meanings for humans to divine. Seneca's language carries the essential elements of his world. It is impossible to miss the fact that the most important recurrent metaphors are the Stoics' components of the universe: fire,

(both Hector's celestial creative fire and the destructive fire of war) and water (Achilles' sea storm); also dust, earth and rock (to which the chorus cling), and the important wind, or air (which stops the Greeks from sailing). Interestingly, this all-important sense of Troy's being came to us only after we began to shoot the video sequences.

How can one communicate the unified, continuous, sentient universe of the Stoic to a contemporary audience?

Associatively structured 'video poems' provide an 'environmental image bed' for the dramatic world of the play. I did not want the actors to be upstaged by a video visual narrative, and so designed the imagery to work as an underscore, much like the music. According to a system derived as much from feeling as from logic, I wrote a video shoot script to take us in cycles of fire, water, earth and air throughout the entire duration of the play. We shot seven hours of our own expressionistic images during twenty-four hours' work in January, which were then digitally edited to layer-in with the environmental images of fire, water, earth and air, to a length of seventy-five minutes.

Our images were designed to illustrate the subliminal states of the characters by showing their hopes and fears. For example, the chorus are seen repeating their first appearance, walking in slow motion through smoke, across desert, on the ocean floor and through flames. A bare aerial landscape accompanies their attempt to envision the lands where they will be prisoner. They are seen hanging by the neck in a row, being buried alive by sand and lying dead in a heap of anonymous corpses. Hecuba sees blood and fire, skies filled with mocking eyes, and Helen; Ulysses sees the triumphant superstition of Calchas' incantations; Talthybius sees Achilles and Hector in battle; Andromache sees her husband and her son.

The act 3 scene of the Greeks' hunt for Astyanax was the first of just two moments where I allowed the video to narrate action by showing Astyanax listening inside the tomb. Audiences thought it was a live camera on the boy, but in fact it was pre-recorded, the inside of the tomb being a mere crawl space of bare plywood. In such moments of suspense there is no subliminal state, only the conscious pounding of the heart. It is her inability to hide her inner consciousness that betrays Andromache to Ulysses, so it seemed appropriate to narrate the hidden action via the video. The second narrative instance was intended for the only black-out in the production, at the end of act 4. We filmed the jump of Astyanax and his slow motion fall, which was to play for six seconds without accompanying live action, to cue Talthybius' cry

of 'Harsh fate!' at the beginning of act 5. However, I cut this image after our second preview, as technical restrictions made the effect less visceral than I envisioned.

The video was time-edited with the music so as to accompany specific moments of the action. Our video technology was 'cool', open and participative in the McLuhan sense (McLuhan, 1964, p. 37), in that the switching between the pre-recorded bed and the three live cameras inevitably varied from performance to performance. The live-camera operator and the switcher operator played an important creative role in timing the zooms, pans, steady cam dollies and switches between tape and live images. Consequently, the live connection so important to theatrical interaction with audience was not undermined by the video.

What can twentieth-century staging theory and practice offer the Trojan Women?

My choice to position the live cameras, crew and musicians on stage in plain view of the audience was influenced partly by the Brechtian tone I wanted the production to have.

Brecht and Seneca

No theatre practitioner can come across the indictment of sentimentality Talthybius represents without thinking of Brecht's rejection of 'dramatic theatre' – the western tradition from Aristotle through the poetics of the 'well-made play' where cosy coincidences and rigged misunderstandings manipulate the audience through a cathartic gamut of emotions, then resolve everything in a forced dénouement.

Brecht, on the contrary, urged an 'epic theatre' which emphasizes social power structures and political strategies by showing situations step by step in development rather than from the forced perspective of *in medias res*. Brechtian theatre decries the seductive techniques of building suspense by means of plot mechanics and emotive language, and seeks to expose the tricks of illusion and of purple passages by announcing, 'look, audience, this is a performance; here is a character type; here are the lights, the cameras, the stage crew'.

There is a common misconception about Brecht that he didn't want audiences to care about his characters. In numerous essays and interviews, Brecht makes it clear that he wants to draw every emotion from the audience, *except* empathy. 'The actor must explore the character with all the emotional detail of Stanislawsky's method, but the direction of the exploration must remain the character's social identity' (Rouse, 1989, p. 27). Let me be clear that in invoking Brecht

I did not intend to alienate the audience from the emotional experience of the characters, but to place the *situation* causing that experience in the foreground. The aesthetic I was pursuing was that of Brecht's classic play *Mother Courage*, where the contradictions of her social and economic beliefs eventually trap Courage in a dead end.

Brecht required his audience to use their emotional intelligence to think. As his expertise in epic theatre techniques matured, so did his use of extreme dramatic emotion and theatrical spectacle. He found that the more he emphasized his characters' decision-making processes, as they thought their way through the double binds inherent in their political circumstances, the less likely it was that the audience would become the sensation-addicted, Talthybius-type audience that he, like Seneca, dreaded.

I thought it would go counter to the desired purpose of the production to indulge overly in the pain and suffering inherent in the story. In directing the play I was, therefore, rigorously Brechtian in the degree of picturization I used to communicate the characters' emotional journeys. The most obvious example is perhaps Hecuba's crazed laughter as the chorus wail at the results of the lottery and her circular movement which counters that of the other women and of the Greek soldiers as she curses them. The main theme of the play, identity (personified by Hecuba) versus survival (personified by the women of the chorus), is expressed visually at this moment where Hecuba's madness provides a pressure-valve escape from the double bind of her queenly identity and her powerlessness. The stage picture says that the chorus, grouped spatially with the soldiers, will eventually buckle under their destiny – Hecuba will not.

Such picturization does not so much undermine emotional extremity as provide a context for it. Hecuba's ability to divide herself so that, even as she burns with Troy, she is able to comment on it from a distance, denotes a will so powerful that the mythic stature of Troy will live on in her epic grief. Her combination of grand-vision (what Troy was) and cynical melancholy (look over your shoulder, no-one is safe) provides the overwhelming key note of the play that I would not wish to diminish – only to clarify through the technique of picturization.

A case could be argued that I crossed the Brechtian line sometimes, by asking empathy from the audience. For example, the moving video of the Andromache–Astyanax farewell which played during the third choral lament, after Astyanax has been dragged away to execution, where they wonder 'where are we doomed to live, we prisoners?' (815). In this scene, the chorus are imagining their future; Andromache is

shackled to the past, remembering the last time she touched her son and the ways in which she failed him. I lit her so that video close-ups of her live emotion as she wept alone could dissolve imperceptibly into the pre-recorded farewell scene inside the tomb where she embraced the boy.

This choice came from my conviction that Andromache must examine profoundly the role she played in Astyanax's death, and sink to the deepest place of her failure, so that her climb back into strength in her scene with Helen is more apparent, and her wisdom there is honestly won. I argue that although it was emotionally moving to watch, the Andromache–Astyanax farewell transcends easy sentiment in that it makes *this* statement about identity: that in the quintessence of the self which absolute bereavement exposes, motherhood is imprinted as deeply, *more* deeply than nation; indeed, Andromache has learned, motherhood is a political state with its own territory, identity, constitution and loss.

Her insight contrasts with Hecuba's fanatical determination to remain proudly Trojan no-matter-what. Polyxena's death brings Hecuba to the same place of loss as Andromache, robbing her even of breath, but she never begs the enemy, and her madness prevents her from learning out of her heartbreak, as does Andromache. Hecuba's madness is the very extremity of personal vengeance. When Andromache excoriates Helen with her guilt, on the other hand, it is clear that she has come to understand how the world – and not just Troy – has suffered from the war,

> Two nations you have shattered, ruined, smashed.
> See these graves of mighty men, those bones
> unburied, bleached, scattered across the plain,
> the withered petals of your bride's bouquet.
> Asia's blood and Europe's flowed for you. (892–6).

Somehow, notwithstanding her bitterness, Andromache has acquired a depth of understanding which embraces Greece. Seneca's character-foil spectrum from Hecuba to Helen, and from the chorus to Andromache, presents a range of choices with regard to defining 'victim'. I think that at the end of the play Hecuba has grandeur, but Andromache has wisdom. In Brecht's philosophy, the latter is more worthy.

If the politics of story and situation are emphasized, how can the production still be true to the undeniably lurid qualities of Seneca's vision?

Hecuba's consciousness contains such will, megalomania, self-loathing and madness, it is monumental in scale. When the theatre director seeks a theatrical tradition of similar scale, it's natural to evoke the precedent

of Jacobean tragedy which is widely held to have been inspired by Seneca. I drew heavily on its imagination in my production plan.

Seneca and revenge tragedy

The post-Reformation, post-Renaissance playwrights shared with Seneca an aptitude for coupling grand-vision and melancholic-cynicism in dramatic expression. They, too, felt themselves to be on the threshold of soul-altering nobility and yet despaired. The Jacobeans were particularly inspired by Seneca's interest in altered states of consciousness: the dream, the apparition, the delusion of madness. Robert Orenstein (1974) could be describing the *Trojan Women* when he writes of the moral vision of Jacobean Tragedy, 'Cynicism, outrage, loathing and horror are fused in...a morbid fascination with the erotic' (p. 89). What else is Polyxena's last dance?

A quick survey of the characteristics of revenge tragedy indicates the riches this theatre tradition offers the director of Seneca: five-episode dramatic structure, designed to flow with epic rapidity through time and place, with suspense as the factor driving the action. A moral philosophy which illustrates the evil of unrestrained passion through scenes of violent horror juxtaposed with moral debate. Characters obsessed with a single motive, often revenge, which leads them to their doom. Techniques of soliloquy and aside. A fascination with madness, supernatural events which reflect and reinforce human doings, and an interest in exotic modes of death. The Jacobean universe is unified: comets bode ill, and evil upsets the balance of reality so that ghosts walk abroad. Characters are melodramatic, lurid and violent: stage fights abound. Today the tradition speaks to us through the films of David Lynch and Peter Greenaway and the theatre of Peter Barnes and Howard Barker.

In revenge tragedy, the absence of a stable concept of justice suspends reality much as does the aftermath of war. Characters modelled on Kyd's Hieronimo (Kyd 1984) fall into a grotesque style of madness very Hecuban in nature. It is madness inspired by grief so powerful that it infects the whole dramatic world. Ghosts, comets, and unfriendly winds expressionistically reinforce the mad person's vision. The key to directing revenge tragedy lies in marking the lead characters' gear shifts as they move from everyday consciousness into crazed, expressionistic modes of perception. In my revenge-style treatment of *Trojan Women*, then, I decided to mark these changes clearly with music and video-image transitions. The audience *sees* the ritual trance states of chorus, Astyanax and Polyxena, *sees and hears* the ghosts first hand. Other modes

of mental activity in the *Trojan Women* include ontological thought, philosophizing, alpha-wave improvisation, obsession, and madness.

To vary the theatrical reality according to the emotional tone of a scene seems, from the little we know about classic Greek performance, quite congruent with ancient playing conventions. The Greeks used different musical modalities to communicate different emotive styles: elegiac, lyric, iambic. Our focus on their poetry lulls us to forget that the orchestra was a dancing place, and that Greek plays were probably scored from start to finish. There is little sure evidence as to whether Roman theatre borrowed this convention from the Greeks, but at any rate, some of the later Jacobean revenge dramas that played in the private theatres of the nobility had the benefit of accompaniment by harp, tambour and trumpet, and have been called the first melodramas (Orenstein, p.36). My point here is simply that I had at my disposal a rich tradition of scored spectacle theatre which is ancient in origins but accessible to contemporary audiences. Our music score for the production emerged from *this* starting place: one mode for temple ritual evoking the grandeur of Troy; a related mode for ghosts, madness and prophecy; a third for fighting, mental or physical conflict; a fourth for rumination and philosophy, and a fifth for heartbreak.

What environmental elements and spatial tensions does the script evoke?

The open, emblematic stage of the Jacobean theatre also influenced our design. The *Trojan Women* needs vastness, the moral threshing ground of Hector's tomb as a focal point, potential for hierarchy, an interior for the Greek leaders and the capacity for extreme mood changes generated by light. It demands an environment of devastation and an implacable sky in which clouds move – I have always felt the inciting incident in the play to be the onshore wind.

The sensibility of the play expressed in the set design

For our production, Nigel Scott designed a forced perspective by rigging seven white sails so as to lead the eyes to a 12' x 16' rear projection screen upstage right. This is countered, on the down stage left diagonal, by Hector's tomb, which contains a smaller TV monitor. Between the screens an impossible tension is created which must – and does, eventually – tear and fall away upstage right, where the beach and the Greek ships are located.

To focus on the main obstacle of the play – the inability of the Greeks to leave – the ships and the sky must be always with us. I became convinced that the *mise en scène* needed *moving* clouds. Nigel Scott

proposed video. We collaborated with Greg Ganger and Kevin Lewis of Xavier University's Television Centre to create the expressionistic video I have described above, using our own imagery in digital composition with stock images. What we gained from the video was far more than the sky. Indeed, I had an ulterior motive in making the video poems of the Stoic world beautiful, emotional and lyrical.

The sensibility of the play expressed in video images

The video expresses the way that emotion shapes our experience of the world. Humans process data through memory, which is deeply emotional. In other words, emotional experience can be of permanent value. This, I believe, is not Stoic.

Stoics mistrust emotion. Emotion causes one to betray oneself. In the *Trojan Women* examples of this abound. As long as Hecuba can rise above her emotion, controlling and directing it, she remains strong. But when pity engulfs her she breaks, and is mad. It is Andromache's emotions that make her fall prey to Ulysses' strategy. Astyanax and Polyxena die nobly because they channel and control their fear. If Ulysses took pity on Astyanax, the Greeks would be betrayed to Trojan retribution in the future.

This mistrust of emotion is a very interesting and seductive theory but I don't subscribe to it. I think Seneca also believed in the world-shaping value of profound emotion, which he suggested by Talthybius' lines about the way Troy will be remembered: *by its destruction*. In the towering personality of Hecuba, in the suffering of Andromache, in the fact that we are still using their stories to understand our own reality, there may be something of lasting value about extreme emotion. Emotion is not all temporary, as Pyrrhus and Helen would imply. Neither is it Virgil's hymn to terminal passion: there is nothing Dido-esque, or pre-destined, about the *Trojan Women*. Despite the melancholy cynicism of Ulysses and the prevailing tone of irony, the tone of the play is not one of despairing anti-humanism, but determined liberalism. Richard Rorty (1989) asserts that although 'ironism has often seemed intrinsically hostile not only to democracy but to human solidarity...it is not. Hostility to a particularly historically conditioned and possibly transient form of solidarity is not hostility to solidarity as such.' Rorty's proposal of 'a liberal utopia: one in which ironism, in the relevant sense, is universal' (p. 34.), encouraged me in my interpretation of Seneca as an ironic humanist. I see the building blocks of a better world in the play. Talthybius travels a journey, from Greek soldier agog at Achilles' ghost, to weeping for Astyanax, to questioning, albeit momentarily,

Why? There's nothing he can do to stop the women being carted off, but he will make sure it is remembered. He will fulfill Hecuba's prophecy that 'the fall of Troy is history', told mother to son, son to mother (1053).

This is where the holocaust mantra sounds. I moved Talthybius' lines to the end of the play to emphasize it. It is the reason I value the play and am so happy to have had the opportunity to direct it. I believe it is also the reason that Seneca, agonized by the excesses of Roman imperialism, wrote the play. 'Never forget, never again.'

Till tomorrow.

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