

Talthybius in Euripides' *Troades*

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TROADES is unique among the plays of Euripides in that it has no messenger speech. On the other hand the role of the herald Talthybius, who has four separate entries, is remarkable, and each new stage of events is initiated by his arrival, with the single exception of the confrontation of Helen and Hecuba before Menelaus, in which the presence of a Greek leader in person obviates the requirement for a herald. Talthybius is the chief representative of the Greeks, and he is not himself one of the engines of the conquest but merely a servant whose office is to convey orders. His attitude offsets the brutality of the Greeks and gives us a different point of view on what is happening. In other plays we have this from the Chorus, but here, in the midst of misery themselves, they cannot play that detached role.

The role of Talthybius has been much discussed, though generally only incidentally to other matters. All writers are agreed upon Talthybius' commitment to the interests of the Greek commanders and the care he takes to avoid their disapproval. In his dealings with the captive women he is felt in the main to be a sympathetic figure, although there is some disagreement about his attitude towards them in the scene in which he first appears (235–461), where most commentators regard his outlook as too limited to allow him to see what the disaster means to the women.¹ The aims of the present article are, within the frame-

¹ K. Gilmartin, "Talthybius in the *Trojan Women*," *AJP* 91 (1970) 213–222, examines Talthybius' role and the way it has been treated by various critics, and draws conclusions about the significance of his humane attitudes for the

work of an overview of Talthybius' role, firstly to focus on features of this scene to which sufficient attention has not always been paid and secondly to suggest that in the Andromache scene he show initiative in a way hitherto not remarked by critics. On this basis a more precise reading can be given of Talthybius' exchanges with Hecuba and his conduct towards Cassandra, and a nuance can be observed in his role as herald in that, although essentially an instrument of others, he exercises significant independence in the way he carries out his orders. The relevant lines in the two main passages (235–461 and 706–798) will be discussed in detail, and formal considerations will be offered to support the view that there is but one herald, Talthybius, throughout the play. Finally we survey Talthybius' undervaluation of the religious aspect of events, and we remark on the significance of our conclusions for the play as a whole.

Because of the prominence of his part we treat Talthybius as a fully developed dramatic character, that is, we regard his language as constitutive of a dramatic personage meant to be recognizable as a living human being. There is of course no living mind behind his words which can be consulted as to the meaning of those words, yet where ambiguities arise, as they do in any play, we have thought it legitimate to prefer meanings

interpretation of the play as a whole. Much relevant material is also to be found in R. Aélion, *Euripide, Héritier d'Eschyle* II (Paris 1983) 54–59, including a comparison with the herald in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Talthybius' treatment of Cassandra is discussed by C. Mueller-Goldingen, "Die Kassandraszene in Euripides' *Troades* (308–461)," in C. Mueller-Goldingen and K. Sier, edd., *Festschrift für Carl Werner Müller* (Stuttgart 1996) 33–51, who stresses the uniqueness of Cassandra's vision oriented towards the divine. See also the commentaries of G. Schiassi (Firenze 1953), K. H. Lee (Warminster 1976), S. A. Barlow (Warminster 1986) and W. Biehl (Heidelberg 1989). The works of Gilmartin, Aélion, Lee, and Biehl will be referred to by the authors' names alone.

which are appropriate to such a person as we think is hinted in the text and which best harmonise with the details of the text, and to attribute attitudes and intentions accordingly, while acknowledging that these are reasonable interpretations and not hard facts.

I

Some details of the exchange between Hecuba and Talthybius in the first episode only make sense if it is understood that the answers which he gives her are not merely informative but are intended to relieve her anxiety. These are Hecuba's acceptance of his ambiguous report on Polyxena's fate, in particular her address ὦ φίλος (264–271), and her lack of response to his news about Andromache (274).² In the course of the exchange Talthybius is marked out as a character with an important and developing role.

His first word, Hecuba's name, is very deliberately explained, and suggests that his relationship with the women on stage goes beyond that of a mere bearer of news. His first task is to be the removal of Cassandra for Agamemnon (294–296), and Talthybius was typically regarded as the herald of Agamemnon, but in this play he has a wider range of tasks to perform, including the removal of other prisoners (296–297), the seizure of Astyanax for execution on general orders (710–711), and the giving of the command to the captains to begin the conflagration (1260–1263). Other considerations may be relevant as well. It is dramatically appropriate that the space left vacant on the stage by Greek leaders should be filled by a determinate character: their commands are faceless, but the identification of Talthybius enables the mode of transmission of the commands

² Gilmartin 221 suggests that the switches of topic in this dialogue are awkward and reveal Hecuba's distraction. Our argument is meant to spell out the nature of this distraction and to track more precisely Talthybius' responses to it, thus restoring coherence to the exchange. A degree of conventionality might be expected in the exchange, especially since it has a lyric element, but this should not rule out a search for a naturalistic explanation.

to be characterised. The mutual knowledge of Hecuba and Talthybius of each other apparent in his opening words, of course, formally allows him to address her by name immediately and without discourtesy,³ but there is considerable stress on the fact that Hecuba knows him, as if Euripides thinks it important for us to bear in mind that Talthybius is dealing with someone with whom he has associated in earlier days.

He tells the women that they are to go severally to different destinations (243) and gives information about specific individuals not on the stage. Hitherto the Chorus have spoken about a variety of destinations but without any suggestion that they are not all to go together (161–162, 185–189, 205–213, 233–234). On the other hand, not all destinations are regarded as equal. Of course the blanket prospect of slavery unites them all in misery, but it is most important to give active recognition to the fact that within this uniformity there are grades of dislike: some destinations and some destinies are preferable to others. One half of the Chorus do not know what will happen to them and are full of fear (156) and among the other there is worry even that they might be killed (178–179). When the Chorus unites, the destination which appals them most is Sparta (210–213); by contrast with that they would want to go to Athens (208–209, 218–219), while Thessaly, Sicily, and Italy seem to have almost a dreamlike attraction. Euripides is no doubt evoking an almost indefeasible optimism that may fortify mankind in adversity and from which the Trojan women will be dislodged in the course of the play,⁴ but for immediate purposes

³ γύναι (237, cf. 1269) here is not “markedly off-hand” (Biehl *ad loc.*). This form of address can be brusque, even harshly rude: cf. *Med.* 337, *Andr.* 366. But there are many examples where it denotes respect or polite detachment: see *Hec.* 508, *Ion* 244, *IT* 483, *Hel.* 83, *Soph.* *OT* 678, 934.

⁴ For this movement see for example D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama: Myth, Theme and Structure* (Toronto 1967) 139. It is perhaps because the successive entrances of Talthybius are the chief mode by which the sparks of hope are quenched that Conacher exaggerates the grimness of the herald (“Talthybius is a harsh, sinister figure,” 144) while acknowledging his personal innocence. But Conacher implies that Talthybius openly tells Hecuba of the death of Polyxena

we are meant to register that the women are full of fear and ignorant of what might happen to them, and that the primary place to which they fear to be sent is Sparta. And when they see the herald approach they are plunged into depression and assume that they are as good as slaves already: "We are already slaves of the Dorian land" (233–234). In order to present vividly to the audience the Chorus' wretched state of mind, Euripides has enlisted the contemporary hatred of his countrymen towards Sparta. The combination of Athens and Sparta at lines 208–214 can hardly fail to evoke the passions of the Peloponnesian War, and we should take the striking anachronism of "Dorian land" to imply Sparta, rather than the insignificant Doris in central Greece or the Peloponnese as a geographical area with which many of the Greek heroes at Troy were associated.⁵

Hecuba too, along with the other women, is frightened, and Talthybius is aware of their fear and divines its cause

(141) and omits any mention of his tears at lines 1130–1131; *i.e.* he misrepresents the way in which Talthybius reports.

⁵ Cf. E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian* (Oxford 1989) 218: Euripides reinterprets the myth of Troy to the detriment of the Dorians, for "during this bitter period of the conflict [between Athens and Sparta] the Athenian stage could characterise the Trojans as victims of outrageous Spartan violence and sacrilege." W. Poole, "Euripides and Sparta," in A. Powell and S. Hodkinson, ed., *The Shadow of Sparta* (London/New York 1994) 1–33, and J. Roisman, "Contemporary Allusions in Euripides' *Trojan Women*," *StlIt* 15 (1997) 38–47, also see a reference to the Peloponnesian War in this passage. The adjective "Dorian" in its various forms for Euripides' contemporaries is a racial or geographic term referring either to Doris in central Greece or the peoples of the Peloponnese and their kin. Kinship opposition of Dorian and Ionian was a factor in the Peloponnesian War clearly evidenced by Thucydides: see S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides II* (Oxford 1996) 70, and J. Alty, "Dorians and Ionians," *JHS* 102 (1982) 1–14. Sparta may of course be singled out for hatred solely because it is the city of Helen and Menelaus (210–214): see L. Parmentier, *Euripide IV* (Paris 1964) 23. However, the striking collocation of Athens and Sparta (208–214) and the remarkable anachronisms of Sicily (220–223) and Italy (228), the uniqueness in tragedy of the adjective Λακεδαιμόνιος (250)—see Lee 115—as well as "Doris" seem designed to break out of the strict context of the legend. Lines 208–214 in particular suggest the context of the Peloponnesian War and militate against the encomiastic interpretation of the Western references advanced by P. E. Easterling, "Euripides outside Athens: a Speculative Note," *ICS* 19 (1994) 73–80.

(239–240). This emotion colours Hecuba's reply to his news that the women are going to different destinations. She wants to know not only who is going to which master, but which of the Trojan women has a fortunate fate in store (πότμος εὐτυχής, 244). No doubt there is grim irony in her words, for all fates must be bad, but the content of the preceding lyrics suggests that some fates are worse than others, and that Hecuba wants not just information but the relief of urgent anxieties. It will be seen that, as Talthybius replies in connection with each of the four women mentioned, the expressions which he uses can be understood to reflect the range of possible outcomes, and to provide consolation for the former queen, a person whom he knows.⁶

Cassandra, he says with the implication that she was not subject to lottery, has been specially selected (ἐξάριετον) by Agamemnon (249). He thus starts with someone whose fate he can call fortunate in direct response to Hecuba's question. Hecuba's shocked but mistaken reaction keeps the hatred of Sparta before our mind, for Clytemnestra, as the daughter of Tyndareus, is called strikingly the Lacedaemonian bride (250); Cassandra, however, is not to be the slave of a Spartan woman, but something which, because she is a virgin sacred to Apollo, seems even worse and draws from Hecuba a still more horrified response. All Talthybius does is to ask Hecuba to see that it is a good thing for Cassandra to share a king's bed (259).

Cruel or obtuse⁷ these words could be indeed, and there is no

⁶ The range of possible destinations and fates, the fear of the women, which Hecuba shares, and Talthybius' contrasting knowledge and security, reflected metrically in Hecuba's dochmiacs and the herald's iambics, are standardly recognized in discussions; but what is underestimated is the degree to which Talthybius' answers make better sense if they are taken as informed by his recognition that Hecuba is terrified.

⁷ Biehl *ad loc.* Calls the reference to Cassandra's "royal marriage" in 259 cynical and ironic, which Hecuba ignores with contempt and passes on to her next question. Other commentators are less damning but still critical: for instance, Aélion 158 takes the idea that Cassandra is honoured by the king's bed as a striking instance of the limitations of the herald's good sense. Gilmartin 216–

sign that Talthybius is touched by the sacrilegious aspects of Agamemnon's behaviour, which are evident from Poseidon's comment in the prologue (41–44) and Cassandra's parody of her wedding (308–341), as well as from Hecuba's sense of outrage at the news. The religious question will be treated separately later, but first we offer some considerations in defence of Talthybius' attitude. One tragic heroine at least evaluates her position as a concubine very positively: Tecmessa in her plea to Ajax acknowledges that she is a slave, but in her fear for the future she imagines that, if he dies and abandons her, her new owners will sneer at her servile degradation after her enviable station while Ajax was alive: ἴδετε τὴν ὁμευνέτιν Αἴαντος ... οἴας λατρέας ἀνθ' ὅσου ζήλου τρέφει (Soph. *Ajax* 501–503). In the real world, too, execution or enslavement of men and enslavement of women and children were not unknown as consequences of the capture of cities in Classical Greece. The Athenians had inflicted this fate on others and were to come close to suffering it themselves.⁸ In addition to the degradation of loss of liberty slaves could be subject to extreme abuse: branding, rape, pack-rape, and enforced prostitution are instanced.⁹ Cassandra's fate could certainly be compared favourably with such possibilities, especially by one who divines and aims to dispel a deeper dread in a person well known to him. Talthybius knows, we must remember, that Polyxena has been killed already.

217 observes that 259 is part of Talthybius' attempt to speak euphemistically throughout his exchanges with Hecuba, just as his attitude to Cassandra's ill-omened words about the Greeks is "actually far less hostile than it might have been." We are in agreement with Gilmartin's position and seek to strengthen it with fuller argument.

⁸ Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 2.3: after the disaster at Aegospotami the Athenians mourned their fate, thinking that they would suffer what they had done to the people of Melos, Histiaea, Scione, Torone, Aegina, and many others. For a survey of the brutalities see W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War* V (Berkeley 1991) 218–219, 226–229.

⁹ Pritchett (*supra* n.8) 238–242 discusses the abusive treatment of slaves and captives.

However, the bare text does not make Talthybius' attitude so far entirely clear, Cassandra being the first person discussed, and we are uncertain how to treat the ambiguities. His ensuing report about Polyxena is deliberately evasive, and Hecuba's acquiescence in his answer may seem dramatically implausible. "To whom has the lot yoked her?" asks Hecuba (263), the ambiguity in ἔζευξεν hinting at a fate like Cassandra's. The reply implies that in her case, too, there was no lottery at all, for she was appointed (τέτακται) as attendant for Achilles' tomb. If Talthybius reads Hecuba's anxiety aright, the verb τάσσειν corrects and consoles her, implying that Polyxena, like Cassandra, was ἐξάιρετος,¹⁰ as if the very fact of being appointed raised her above the status of those subject to an indiscriminate lottery. Hecuba laments her daughter's fate, but seems to seek for reassurance that her status has social sanction: "But what Greek custom is this, my friend?" φίλος is very striking here as being addressed to a member of the enemy army which has destroyed Troy, and it has been taken as ironic; perhaps, rather, it has something of the pleading tone of one who hopes for confirmation, and it suits a context where the speaker is relieved to have heard something which rules out a deeper fear.

¹⁰ Selection may honour those in whose interest it is made, as Xenophon imagines Cyrus giving to his generals and personal retinue selected spoils first according to the worth of each man (ἐξάιρετα ἐδίδου πρὸς τὴν ἀξίαν ἐκάστω) and then distributing the rest (*Cyr.* 8.4.29). But it also has regard to the value of the item or person selected: so the prophetess in Euripides' *Ion* is manifestly proud of her status (πασῶν Δελφίδων ἐξάιρετος 1323), and we find at *Tro.* 658–660 that Neoptolemus, for whom Andromache is ἐξάιρετος (274), wanted to acquire her because of her renowned wifely virtues. Value is frequently implied in the word, e.g. Hom. *Il.* 2.227; Cassandra herself is described by Agamemnon as "the chosen flower of many treasures" (Page), πολλῶν χρημάτων ἐξάιρετον ἄνθος, στρατοῦ δῶρημα (Aesch. *Ag.* 954–955). The word is thoroughly capable of carrying the positive connotations appropriate to the consolatory attitude attributed to Talthybius; someone "selected" has special qualities. Conversely, to say that someone fell by lot may be to imply lack of value: Hecuba fell by lot to Odysseus, presumably because, being an old woman, she would have little value as a slave, and would therefore not be chosen; cf. Menander *Sic.* 2–7: of three captured persons one, an old woman, was not thought worth taking to market, but the manservant and the baby girl were sold. Hecuba's falling to Odysseus by lot emphasises by contrast the consolation implicit in the selection of the others.

The messenger who brings Medea the welcome news of the death of Creon and his daughter will be counted among her friends (*Med.* 1127–1128), and in urging him to tell her the story Medea addresses him as φίλος (1133). Medea has of course no love for the messenger at all, but she adopts a role in a relationship: the bringer of good news expects to get credit.¹¹ Thus the word “friend” in our passage best signifies Hecuba’s gratitude towards Talthybius for news that is in some way welcome and her hope for further reassurance. For all the dismay which she expresses, we can feel in her question a wave of relief from greater terrors, deepest that Polyxena is safe, more immediately that she is not a concubine. And if, as lines 237–238 suggest, Talthybius was well known to Hecuba and reminds her of that relationship, her address to him as a friend is all the more intelligible. Her fears are assuaged by someone whom she knows, but the audience will feel the irony in anticipation of the eventual revelation to Hecuba of the truth they already know (39–40).

His response to her query about ritual is reassuring in the very strongest terms: Hecuba should regard her as happy, things are well with Polyxena (εὐδαιμόνιζε ... ἔχει καλῶς, 268). Resonances of terminology typically applied to the dead trouble Hecuba, whose request for clarification is taken further by her next question, based upon fear of the worst: “Does she still look upon the light of the sun?” But Talthybius repeats his assurances, again in strong terms: ἔχει πότμος νιν ὥστ’ ἀπηλλάχθαι πόνων (270). Hecuba’s apparent satisfaction with the reply that Polyxena’s fate has freed her from her troubles is intelligible only on the assumption that her question at verse 245 (τίνα πότμος εὐτυχῆς ... μένει;) really supposed that some outcomes could be good, and that she is hoping for something of the kind in her present anxious query. Talthybius answers her using her

¹¹ See D. B. Gregor, “ὦ φίλτατ’,” *CR* N.S. 7 (1957) 14–15, for the formulaic response to good news.

own term *πότμος*: "Who has a lucky fate?" "Her fate means she has no more troubles." The direct reference overrules the ambiguity for Hecuba, who otherwise would have accepted a reply which was just as ominous as the words which prompted suspicions of Polyxena's death in line 268, and Talthybius' answer would not have assuaged those qualms. Here we see the decisive impact on his exchange with Hecuba of the gradation of destinations established in the *parodos*: Polyxena can be taken to be one who has in the circumstances done well. Only if we see Talthybius in fact, whether from sympathy or diplomacy, consoling Hecuba who feared something worse, is her acceptance of his answer and the immediate transition to the next topic plausible.¹²

We have seen that the future that confronts all the women is described as a "fate" (*πότμος* 245), and that this "fate" takes various forms. In the prologue some captives have already been allocated as slaves by "lot" (29, 31), while those exempted from the lot (*ἄκληροι* 32) have been "selected" (33) for the Greek leaders, and these are the Trojan women who appear in our play. The women whom we see, therefore, are a group of selected prisoners, but they do not themselves know to which of the leaders they are to belong, and Hecuba assumes that the method of allocation is by "lot" (186). Both Talthybius and Hecuba, in the early part of their exchange, talk of "lot" (240, 244, 245). It is clear, therefore, that some of these women who were originally selected out for the leaders have now been al-

¹² See Lee 120 for discussion of the transition and quotation of the scholiast's dissatisfaction: if Hecuba knows the truth she should mourn, if she does not she should ask further how her daughter has escaped her troubles. Biehl 167 sees Hecuba's growing suspicion that Polyxena might be dead and the sudden dropping of the suspicion as alike belonging to the expression of pathos in the scene: but to ascribe the incoherence to her agitation is tantamount to saying that there is no regular explanation available. D. Kovacs, *Euripides IV* (Cambridge [Mass.]/London 1999) 42, accepts the addition of *αἰᾶ* (Willink) at the start of 271, comparing *Hel.* 688. This removes the awkwardness of Hecuba making no reply, but at the price of making her understand that Talthybius is referring to Polyxena's death; this will hardly do, since manifestly she only learns the truth from Andromache (624–625).

located by “lot,” as if at a second, higher-level ballot. But from line 249 onwards it appears that others among them have not been distributed by “lot,” but have been selected again, as if at a second, higher-level round of selection. In the present scene, then, in addition to the inclusive sense of their allocation as a fate or fortune (πότμος), a distinction is made in the mode of allocation: some women are distributed by lot, others are specially selected by their masters. Consistently with the preceding dialogue Hecuba asks about the lot that has fallen to Cassandra (248) and Polyxena (263), and, as we have seen, in both cases Talthybius implies that there was no lot involved in their treatment but special selection. It was suggested that he thereby implied a superior treatment which might be seen as a consolatory feature, and if this is the case then the brevity of the exchange about Andromache is explained: “What fortune (τύχη) has befallen Andromache?” “She too has been specially selected, by Achilles’ son” (ἐξείρετον 274, *cf.* 249). The pattern of reassurance by reference to a superior outcome already established allows Hecuba to be satisfied without further enquiry that Andromache too has been accorded some distinction, which could console in the context of the general misery and her dread of the worst.

The final individual discussed is Hecuba herself. There is no special selection to console her, for she has fallen by lot¹³ (277, 282, 292, 1271) to Odysseus, a circumstance in which, again with the terms of the question at line 245 in mind, she regards herself as ill-fated (δύσποτμος 290). Yet even so Talthybius can reassuringly remind her later of the virtues of her mistress-to-be (422–423).

Although taken on its own the language of this section of the play is ambiguous as regards the attitude one should ascribe to Talthybius, there are several prominent factors which cohere

¹³ See the end of n.10 *supra* for the effect of completing a series of selections by an allocation by lot.

and make sense of the detail of the exchanges, if we regard him as treating Hecuba considerately as he calms her anxieties. Whether this consideration is based on sympathy for her as a mother, or is merely an exercise of the insight required for getting an unpleasant job done with a minimum of trouble for himself, or includes something of both, are questions to which the nature of dramatic language may not offer a sure answer. Still one may and indeed must assume, without excessive psychologising, that Euripides wants to suggest a particular sort of person, and since this person reappears throughout the play showing attitudes which are of great significance for the action, it is important to try to bring some precision to this aspect of one's response to the language. So the idea can be excluded that Euripides would want his audience to see Talthybius here as cruelly cynical or obtuse, because his later and indubitably positive attitudes towards Andromache and Hecuba would require a change of heart which would be unexplained. Between unemotional diplomacy and sympathy, however, the issue is perhaps beyond the limit of determinability; later developments would be consistent, whether displaying a more intense expression of a pity already felt, or arousal of pity in a mind capable of seeing how others feel but hitherto uninvolved. The remarkable emphasis on their previous acquaintance would tie in with a degree of personal sympathy of Talthybius for Hecuba, and the preference here taken is to read his exchange with Hecuba as showing diplomacy coloured by sympathy, a combination of practicality and humanity evinced later in connection with Andromache and with the burial of Astyanax. But so far he has been answering questions before getting down to work, for all that he entered in a hurry (232). Will his actions be consonant with a favourable interpretation of his conversation?

He is carrying out orders but his method may well be his own. He shows understanding of what the prospect of slavery might

mean to people accustomed to freedom (302–303),¹⁴ and acts urgently lest the suicide which is honourable to them but against Greek interests might lay him open to blame (304–305). He makes allowances for Cassandra's forecast of the destruction which she will bring upon Agamemnon, surely an unpropitious start to a voyage, because he thinks Apollo has made her mad, as if Apollo is a god who can derange the mind but not one whose prophetic invasion of a mind foretells the future (408–410). When Polymestor tells Agamemnon much the same information he is marooned on a deserted island for the boldness of his tongue (*Hec.* 1280–1287). Although the unpropitious quality of what is said is not affected by the responsibility of the speaker, since omens are typically not intentional, nevertheless, in his view, because she has no malice Cassandra will not pay for her words.¹⁵ His failure to feel any threat to the fleet will contribute to the gulf between them that explains the ferocity of her subsequent attack. As for her praise of the Trojans and insults to the Greeks, well, she is deranged and he will disregard it (417–419). Again he addresses Cassandra directly, and there must be at least irony in his calling her a fine bride for the commander (420), but though he tells her to her face that she is not in her right mind the important point is that twice in fact he takes no offence at what he regards as punishable in the one case and at least provocative in the other. Of course, his words

¹⁴ Biehl 173 treats Talthybius' mistaken idea that the Trojan women might be burning themselves to death in order to escape servitude as the exaggerated notion of a man of lower station who cannot grasp the attitude of free people. Surely Talthybius' mistake is one of fact—the torches are those of Cassandra's mockery of a wedding—but his remark about the behaviour of free people seems rather to prove that in principle he has the insight denied to him by Biehl. What Talthybius has no inkling of is the horror of the sacrilege that forces Cassandra into her distorted torch-dance.

¹⁵ Voyages in the ancient world were typically dangerous and generated a nervousness in which attention to omens thrived. Sailing with the sacrilegious Ajax was doubly critical, since those traveling with sinners would be subject to any divine punishment inflicted on fellow passengers; see *e.g.* Antiph. 5.81–83, Aesch. *Sept.* 602–604, Xen. *Cyr.* 8.1.25. Thus Talthybius might be expected to be particularly wary. The significance of his lack of religious insight will be discussed below.

are hardly models of deference or tact, but he is not much more blunt than is Agave to her father in *Bacch.* 1251ff.

We should not take the abuse with which Cassandra attacks him as a decisive pointer to the way Euripides wants us to see Talthybius as a person. She is dominated by the huge and dreadful future that fills her mind and takes no cognisance of the Greek herald's concessions. He is a mere servant, and she abuses him as one of a hateful breed of political lackeys, wrong about Hecuba's fate and in conflict with Apollo's prophecies (424–430). The very fact that he has forgiven her because she has been afflicted with frenzy *by Apollo* brings his vision into conflict with hers. They live on different levels, the herald and the seer, though both are retailers of commands received from above: he thinks to bring about the world which his masters ordain, but her mind inhabits a vaster universe whose masters, as we know from the prologue, have quite different dispositions. We can see that her scorn is fired by her sense of the chasm between their outlooks—what are tyrants and their lackeys compared with Apollo's words?—and what she attacks in Talthybius is not so much the man as his office.¹⁶ The audience may see that Talthybius is not a heartless automaton, but from her perspective his only characteristic is ignorance coupled with a blind assumption of knowledge. Thus she reverts from him to her visions, and then turns his command

¹⁶ Cf. the attack on Calchas by Agamemnon at *Il.* 1.106, and the treatment of Teiresias by Oedipus at *OT* 334ff, and by Creon at *Ant.* 1033–1063. We are not convinced by the argument of D. Kovacs, *Euripidea Altera* (Leiden 1996) 149–150 against the authenticity of 424–426. Kovacs says that Talthybius exhibits neither the stupidity nor the fearsomeness to warrant Cassandra's abuse. But she sarcastically calls him "clever" because he is out of touch with her supernatural perception of events, and a herald's role as the minion of political authority does something at least to explain the sneer that follows, which is directed not at the individual but at the typical holder of the office. Thus the enormity of the gulf between the official voices of the two worlds, the secular and the religious, seems sufficient grounds to make the scorn in her attack intelligible. For Cassandra his retailed commands and his assumption of knowledge must seem exasperatingly impertinent and presumptuous, hence her acerbic use of *λάτρις* in 424 to echo his word for her mother in 422.

(419) on its head by ordering him to be off to Agamemnon's ship, which will take her as an Erinyes away from her home (445, 456–457).

Talthybius has apparently acted with restraint independently of the bare requirements of his commission, and between his addresses to Cassandra he has an aside which reveals an attitude of mind which is equally independent of his masters. He himself, poor man though he is, would not have taken this woman for his bed, as great Agamemnon has chosen to do (413–416). So, he reflects, the high and the reputed wise are no better than the nobodies (411–412). This is a perspective which accords with the absence of the mighty from most of the play. Greek response to Trojan suffering is going to be almost entirely a response of an ordinary man whose values are based on the world of men, a subordinate who has someone else's orders to carry out, but in his own way and with attitudes not entirely those of his commanders. Above all it is the response of one who is not a mere spectator of Trojan suffering nor one who can ignore them, but one who has to deal with the women and inflict upon them wounds of other people's causing.

II

In the *Andromache* scene the herald's sympathy for the women and the distress which his duties cause him is unmistakable. He is not identified by name, and the terms of Hecuba's question "What lackey of the Greeks do I see this time...?" (707–708) prompted the scholiast and some later scholars to think that the character entering cannot be Talthybius.¹⁷ Although all recent editors agree that the entrant is Talthybius, the manner of his introduction has not received sufficient considera-

¹⁷ The scholiast's ground for doubting that the entrant is Talthybius is not that Hecuba fails to recognize him, but that she (or Euripides) usually (εἰωθεῖν) calls the herald by his name, and not a "lackey." In fact Talthybius is named earlier only twice, by himself (238) and by Hecuba (625).

tion. We see this, however, as an important factor in Euripides' management of this central scene.

To begin with, formal considerations strongly indicate that the person entering to speak lines 709ff is not a character new to the play. The introduction of an entrant by means of an explicit or implied question as to his identity is a common technique, more lively than a straightforward entrance announcement. But in no case is such a question left unanswered either by the entrant or another party in the following dialogue; for examples see *Supp.* 395–397, *El.* 107–119, 765–768, *HF* 514–519, *Andr.* 879–885, *Hec.* 501. The situation in *Heracl.* 630–660 is particularly interesting: Iolaos at first fails to recognize a new entrant, who has to identify himself to him as someone whom he knows, the servant of Hyllos (639); Alcmene is summoned and enters in consternation fearing the intrusion of another Argive herald. She asks who the new arrival is (658), and although the man has already been identified by Iolaos and therefore by the audience, even so in the following line the question is answered for Alcmene's benefit, at least in terms of the entrant's function, which is all that the situation requires.

The conclusion must be that Hecuba's question in *Tro.* 707–708 is given no answer because none is needed, the entrant not being a new arrival. He is seen by Hecuba to be a Greek herald; the audience will identify him as Talthybius on entry, while Andromache does not ask about him, the fact that he is described as a messenger being sufficient. Hecuba will recognize him as he speaks. He does not need to identify himself by name, and in any case such an identification would militate against his evident desire to stress the authorities who made the decision which he has to report, namely the Greeks, the Pelopidae, and Odysseus, thus distancing himself from his task.

Then why does Euripides have Hecuba fail to recognize Talthybius? Is it to tell the audience something about the herald? Since he is evidently downcast at the grievous task before

him—unlike his first appearance he does not come in haste but unwillingly (οὐχ ἑκόν 710, cf. 232)—this may be an indication of his altered mien. Or is it something about Hecuba? It could be interpreted as a sign of Hecuba's absorption in other things. We can compare again the situation in *Heracl.* 630–640, where Iolaos does not at first recognize the Servant, who is well known to him. He is slumped in grief on the departure of Macaria to her death and is hidden under his robes (603–604), but converses with the newcomer and it is clear from ὀρῶν (639) that he sees him before recognition dawns. Grief, then, has distracted him.¹⁸ Hecuba is ravaged by sorrow at Polyxena's death and at the time when Talthybius arrives she is rapt in her imagination in the one ray of hope offered by the prospect of her grandson's survival. Her failure to recognize the familiar herald could express her confusion and betray the deeper delusion of her futile hopes. Such a suggestion is in the nature of things incapable of proof, but the fact of Hecuba's incomprehension will not just go away. In the absence of a more concrete explanation one might be content with a suggestion which suits the context and is in line with Euripides' well-known interest of the behaviour of minds under stress.

There is the additional point that the management of this entrance allows Euripides to focus properly on the central interest of the ensuing scene, in which Hecuba plays no part. We may instructively contrast the way in which the arrival of the Theban herald is managed at *Supp.* 395–398. There Theseus, having asked with surprise about the identity of the newcomer, himself identifies him before proceeding to address him. Beyond the fact that the Theban herald needs identifying at his first entrance is the point that Euripides is preparing for the lively

¹⁸ The situation at *Hec.* 501–505 is rather different: Hecuba does not recognize the newly arrived Talthybius, even though she must know him no less than do the Chorus who identify him by name at lines 486–487. She is lying on the ground wrapped in her cloak (487), so that she does not actually see him at all.

dialogue between Theseus and the new entrant which follows. But Hecuba is not going to speak to the herald in our passage, nor is his message directed at her. It is true that, given that the personal identity of the entrant is known and his role as herald is clearly indicated, further identification is unnecessary, but the very omission itself positively contributes to the fading of Hecuba from our attention while our interest is immediately absorbed in Andromache, whom the herald addresses with such emphasis¹⁹ and to whom his dread news is to be delivered.

There is no dispute among readers about Talthybius' manifest reluctance²⁰ in breaking the news to Andromache that her baby is to be killed, but it is worth observing that Euripides has used all the resources of his art in conveying the herald's confusion along with the mother's dismay: his feelings are important, as well as hers. He asks her not to hate him for the orders which he brings from the Greeks and their commanders, that is, in effect, he wants her to distinguish himself from his office, as Cassandra did not do. He hesitates as soon as he starts (713; contrast the smooth report of Odysseus in *Hec.* 220–221), and as he brings himself to say what he has to say²¹ the word "evil" recurs in mounting intensity at the end of four lines in succession, *κακᾶ, κακά, κακὸν μέγα, μεῖζον κακόν* (717–720). The form of the report of Odysseus' condemnatory speech among the assembled Greeks distances the herald himself from his message. One continuous sentence spread over three verses and interrupted by two separate verses of interjection by

¹⁹ Compare the elaborate way in which Talthybius addressed not the Chorus but Hecuba alone, with whom he was about to talk (235–238); here too he addresses Andromache since she is the person for whom his message is intended.

²⁰ Talthybius thus takes his place in a literary line of reluctant heralds, which starts with Talthybius and his fellow herald in *Il.* 1.327. There the reluctance is based on personal fear (330–331) for the consequences; here, Talthybius hesitates through compassion, as to a lesser extent does Lichas at Soph. *Trach.* 481–483.

²¹ For the use of broken syntax as an expression of Talthybius' hesitation see D. J. Mastrorarde, *Contact and Discontinuity* (Berkeley 1979) 55.

Andromache with one more instance of *κακά* culminates in a tremendous climax of the revelation of the mode of death (721–725). Such an extension of continuous but interrupted syntax in stichomythia is a most unusual and striking effect, and in combination with the hint of language at the limits of coherence conveyed by the repetition of *κακά* is a perfect expression of the emotional tensions of the two speakers.

And now Talthybius, having given his news with such difficulty, must act, and in doing so he uses no force but that of persuasion. He gets Andromache to see the hopelessness of resistance and to relinquish her child herself. He appeals to her nobility (727, *cf.* 302), and urges her not to curse the Greeks, in order to avoid her child being refused burial (735–736). It was her fame for wifely compliance that was her downfall, says Andromache (657–658), and it is to her sense of compliance that Talthybius appeals. His clinching argument to Andromache is the stipulation of her cooperation as the condition of the child's burial.

Now this proposal is simply presented by Euripides as a dilemma facing Andromache. No clear indication is given as to whether the offer of burial for the child was part of the decision of the Greek army or whether it is Talthybius' own idea. It is true that he twice mentions the Greeks in his stipulation: if she says anything to anger the army the child will not be buried, whereas if she accepts her misfortune quietly it will, and she will find the Greeks better disposed towards her (735–739).²² This, however, is the language of the emissary and does not

²² Biehl 247 implies that the burial is part of the Greek decision, which Talthybius adds on to the end of his message in a thoughtlessly hurtful manner, which seems hard to reconcile with his confusion at entry and his reflections on departure. Barlow (*supra* n.1) 34 regards Talthybius' initiative as first shown after the child's death: Talthybius starts with an outsider's reactions yet finally gets drawn into the women's tragedy; "the whole point is that he develops initiative when he prepares the child's body for funeral." But in this scene she well notes that Talthybius goes beyond his mere role as herald, in so far as he presumes to give Andromache advice (195); we are suggesting that this advice includes the offer of burial, and thus that he already exercises initiative.

ascribe the burial to a decision of the army; naturally a promise of his own would not be presented as merely dependent upon himself, for this would carry less weight. One could therefore argue that this is not a question of any importance in the immediate context: the precise origin of the proposal would be a distracting triviality for the audience as it concentrates on Andromache confronting the inescapable loss of her child. Further, where Euripides gives no sign, it might be said, as far as the play goes the question of authorship of the idea does not arise; the real-life requirement that an idea must be suggested by someone does not apply. The bargain, then, simply has no determinate origin and an audience just accepts it as a *datum* of the play.

There is some force in this view. On the other hand the scene enacts the separation of Andromache from her child in a way far different from the violence implied by the version of the *Little Iliad* and the brutal slaughter of children depicted in art.²³ The bargain is crucial for this distinction, since it allows Talthybius to obtain the child without physical force, and this suggests that the offer of burial belongs to the process of the seizing of the child for execution and is not part of the decree of execution itself. Consider the emphasis with which Talthybius identifies the authors of the decision to kill the child (711, 721); but no author is given for the bargain. There is no doubt that Greek provision for burial of the slain Astyanax would run entirely counter to all the evidence which the play contains on the subject of treatment of the dead at the sack: corpses are left exposed for the vultures round Athena's temple (599–600); the husbands of the Chorus are unburied (1085); Priam is unburied

²³ *Ilias Parva* 19.4 Allen: Neoptolemus led Andromache to the ships, and "taking the child from the bosom of the nurse with the beautiful tresses he held him by the foot and threw him from a tower." For the iconography of related vase-painting see M. J. Anderson, *The Fall of Troy in Early Greek Poetry and Art* (Oxford 1997) 192–199, and the illustrations in S. P. Morris, "The Sacrifice of Astyanax: Near Eastern Contributions to the Siege of Troy," in J. B. Carter and S. P. Morris, *The Ages of Homer* (Austin 1995) 221–245.

(1313); and Andromache has to cover with clothing the body of Polyxena upon which she chanced (626–627). In this context it seems almost unthinkable that the Greek decision would provide for burial at all.²⁴ On the other hand the proposal sounds very much like one which the envoy entrusted with the execution might devise in order to facilitate his task of extricating the child from his mother's clasp, the idea, too, of someone who understands the importance of burial to the bereaved and who offers it as a consolation. This is not a matter of the content of the order but of the mode of its execution, as is implied by the transition at line 726 ("but let it be so and ..."),²⁵ and Talthybius has earlier shown himself to be capable of exercising some sympathetic independence in carrying out his orders.

Could an Athenian audience be expected to have accepted such an action on the part of a herald? The frequent references in tragedy to the proper limits of a herald's duty in conveying messages, and complaints about excesses, suggest that the limits were not always observed, and in the suppliant plays heralds threaten or actually use force. Notable is the herald in *Heracleidae* who disregards the inviolability of suppliants at an altar and knocks old Iolaos to the ground (76, 127–129).²⁶ From Homer onwards a herald's role is treated as involving persuasion as well as verbatim transmission of messages: when Poseidon overreacts to Zeus's command to leave the battlefield, Iris diplomatically asks him if he really wants her to take back

²⁴ It does not seem clear how the dead were disposed of at the destruction of a city in historical fact. The victor after a battle had to allow the defeated to collect their dead for burial, not to see to their burial himself. But at the destruction of a city there may have been no-one to carry out the collection or perform the lamentation and interment. See W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War* IV (Berkeley 1985) 240, discussing the bodies of the oligarchs at Corcyra in 425 B.C. (Thuc. 4.48.4).

²⁵ Compare the similar transition from a report of a decree to its application in practice at *Hec.* 225.

²⁶ For proper "heraldry" see Aesch. *Supp.* 931–932, Soph. *Trach.* 617, Eur. *Supp.* 459–461. For exaggerated reports: *Heracl.* 292–293. Violence is threatened by the herald at Aesch. *Supp.* 882–884, 903–904, 909; and in Eur. *Heracl.* 63, carried out 76, 127–129.

such a bellicose reply. Zeus, she observes, is an elder brother and can expect deference. Poseidon takes her point and shows his appreciation: ἐσθλὸν ... ὅτ' ἄγγελος αἴσιμα εἶδη (*Il.* 15.207).²⁷ In tragedy correspondingly the limits which heralds are most likely to transgress are those of speech rather than action. The Theban herald in Euripides' *Supplikes* incurs a rebuke from Theseus for his uninvited expatiation on the superiority of dictatorship over democracy (409–425), but is given sufficient prominence for him to meet Theseus in a formal debate with subsequent stichomythic exchange (465–580). In *Heracleidae* too the herald figures in a formal *agon*, where he and Iolaos argue their cases before Demophon, and his prominence is reinforced by his being the main addressee of a choral ode (353–370). In both plays the heralds conduct their business with latitude to persuade, and in *Heracleidae* the herald's violence is paralleled by his sophism in creative negotiation: Demophon need not fear impiety by surrendering the suppliants, for the herald willingly takes the fault upon himself (253–258). There is nothing exactly to parallel the bargain with Andromache which we are attributing to Talthybius, but such an offer would seem entirely in harmony with the freedom to persuade enjoyed by other heralds mentioned in tragedy, and in particular the great importance of the herald's role in *Supplikes* and *Heracleidae* provides a background for the prominence and independence of Talthybius.

There is no proof, but such initiative would appear a highly attractive feature of the scene as a consistent development of the herald's views and behaviour implicit but less markedly present in the earlier exchanges with Hecuba and the treatment of Cassandra, as well as consistent with his behaviour throughout this scene. The alternative is to take the bargain objectively as an unexplained but unquestioned fact, but even so it stands

²⁷ In the capacity of umpires the heralds Talthybius and Idaeus intervene on their own initiative to suggest an end to the single combat at *Il.* 7.274–282; but the final decision is taken by the fighters themselves.

before the audience as part of the herald's means rather than of the ends purposed by the army, and the burial is visually associated with him rather than with them both in this and in the later scenes concerned with it. As Andromache relinquishes the child to go to her fine wedding (*ἐπὶ καλὸν ὑμέναιον* 778–779, *cf.* 420), Talthybius speaks with what cannot but be gentleness to the child, but once he has detached him from his mother he is firm in his command to his attendants to hold him (786).²⁸ His job has been done with as little trouble for all concerned as possible. But it was not merely a cold, practical act of management, for, as at the start of the scene he asked her not to hate him as a person for what he had to do as a herald, so now at the end his reflection on his job brings out into the open a misfit between the sort of person he is and the sort of tasks he has to perform: that kind of herald's work should be done by someone more pitiless and shameless than he is (*ἄνοικτος καὶ ἀναιδεῖα ... μᾶλλον φίλος*, 786–789). Further, as happens with decisions made in tragedy, Talthybius is going to get involved in ways he did not imagine when he made the bargain with Andromache.

III

Talthybius returns at verse 1123 with the boy's body. Something entirely unexpected has happened. When he took the body for burial to Andromache as agreed, she was already embarked for Greece and only had time to arrange for Hecuba to perform the funeral ceremony. Here again there is nothing definite to indicate whether the burial was prescribed by the assembled army or was suggested by Talthybius. However, the detail that Andromache has to ask Neoptolemos just before their departure to have him buried suggests that burial was not part of the whole provision for his death, and might well have been lost

²⁸ *λαμβάνετε* need not imply rough handling; *cf.* *IA* 622, where Clytemnestra says *λάζυθε* to her attendants as she hands over the baby Orestes.

by default had she not made other arrangements. This point, as far as it goes, suits Talthybius' initiative better. Again the tension in the herald's feelings is well brought out: he admits to weeping freely at Andromache's departure (πολλῶν ἐμοὶ δακρύων ἄγωγός, 1130–1131), an extraordinary admission of overt sympathy by one of the conquerors, which surely marks a key stage in the development of his attitude in that it goes far beyond any emotion he has shown hitherto. His insight into Andromache's values permeates his account of her request, given in *oratio obliqua*, for burial and not to have the shield of Hector taken to the bedroom of her new marriage.²⁹ At the same time he can remember that shield as it appeared to the Greeks, as an object of terror (1136). As at lines 302–303 Talthybius showed that he understood the way free spirits might react to demeaning adversity, so here he grasps the abhorrence felt by Andromache, and again his insight is fused with his identification of his interests with those of the Greeks.

So now he has inherited the task of bringing the body to Hecuba, but instead of merely contenting himself with doing that, and without any need to find the most diplomatic way of negotiating his objective, he will cooperate with her in the funeral, for thus his desire to return home will most quickly be met. For a moment the interests of the ordinary Greek and the suffering woman coincide; he has washed the corpse and will dig the grave; she will perform the dressing and lament (1146–1155).

We have suggested elsewhere that the Greek Talthybius' presence would be an intrusive factor in the scene of Hecuba's grieving and that, while his absence preparing the grave forwards the movement towards the ships, it allows our

²⁹ Talthybius' account of Andromache's request concerning the funeral has been called a "missed opportunity" for a passage in *oratio recta*; see V. Bers, *Speech in Speech* (Lanham 1997) 79. But the use of indirect speech remarkably identifies Talthybius' own feelings with Andromache's thoughts.

exclusive contemplation of the Trojan women enacting the last funeral of Troy.³⁰ The Greek attendants, one must suppose, are in the background after they have put down the shield in which the boy is to be laid (1156) until they take it up again for the procession (1246), but anonymous mute attendants are regular in tragedy,³¹ and would not intrude like Talthybius, a speaking character who has been identified so clearly. His presence would overcomplicate the scene: he is a Greek, an enemy, the very man in charge of the boy's killing. In Sophocles' *Ajax* (1378–1380, 1394–1397) Odysseus wants to participate in the funeral of his personal enemy Ajax, but is refused permission by Teucer on the ground that the dead would be offended; yet Odysseus is invited to help in any other way. Admetus will not let Alcestis' father Pheres attend her funeral because he no longer regards him as a friend (Eur. *Alc.* 629–631). For Talthybius to overcome such barriers would stamp him as a closer friend than he can reasonably be, and would require an acceptance by Hecuba which would need explanation. Thus his absence is required, but, if the reading suggested above is correct, the funeral is as much his work as it is anybody else's. It was he who urged compliance from Andromache so that the boy would not be unburied (737–738). Things have come about as he suggested but in an unexpected way, for the first sign of Greek kindness was the permission granted by Neoptolemus to have the body buried in Hector's shield, and it is Talthybius himself who will lay the body in the grave. And here too is the great gain realised by the omission of a Messenger's speech. If Talthybius had described the death and burial of Astyanax, as he did that of Polyxena in *Hecuba*, no doubt the potential for a pathetic description was considerable; but it would have been

³⁰ M. Dyson and K. H. Lee, "The Funeral of Astyanax in Euripides' *Troades*," *JHS* 120 (2000) 17–33.

³¹ Cf. the attendants who stand through the powerful scenes involving Ion, Creousa, and the Pythia (*Ion* 1260–1552, cf. 1402), and those who watch the confrontation of Agave and Cadmus (*Bacch.* 1216–1327, cf. 1218).

Andromache, not Hecuba, who performed the rites, and the play would have lost the direct intervention of the sympathetic herald, the actual presence of the boy's corpse, and the visible use of that most moving image of the Trojan past, the shield of Hecuba's own son Hector. That Talthybius should not be present at the lament epitomises the play's main absence from the prison camp, that of the Greek commanders. If Talthybius is the face of ordinary human sympathy intervening between the impersonal destroyers and the suffering victims, then his absence from the funeral rites which his sympathy made possible focuses our concentration with even greater intensity upon the sorrowing of Troy in a self-absorption which nothing external can disturb. Talthybius is no hero and his feelings cannot measure those of Hecuba bending over her dead grandson. We do not want to be reminded here of mere acts of kindness, these sorrows are too grand and the tragedy too august. Hecuba and the women can only be alone for this final Trojan ceremony.

In the exodos Talthybius returns from burying the child and with a voice of general authority orders the burning of the city (1260–1264). He bids Hecuba follow Odysseus' men who have come for her (1269–1271), with a word of pity—ὦ γεραιὰ δυστυχιστάτη γύναι—which contrasts with the more matter-of-fact address he used at lines 235–237 before his exposure to the successive stages of her misery. As she tries to immolate herself in the burning city as on a pyre he mingles sympathy for the poor grief-maddened wretch with firmness, ordering the soldiers to take her without sparing her (1284–1286). Again the scene and the tone are reminiscent of his fears of Trojan self-immolation before Cassandra's entry: he has sympathy, but he has respect for his superiors and their rights, and gives a clear priority to looking after his own interests. Hecuba is not to be spared (μὴ φείδεσθ' 1285)³² but will be dragged away from the flames. This

³² The sense here is probably close to "don't hang back" or even "don't let your feelings interfere with what has to be done," Talthybius projecting his

is the only time Talthybius orders anything like force. But in view of his behaviour in connection with the boy it would be wrong to accuse him of brutality on the strength of line 1285. He is an agent in the sack of a city, carrying out cruel orders, too insignificant a figure to aspire to the tragic stature of defiance in obedience to a higher law. That is the emptiness which Euripides has caught at the heart of his play. But on that dismal day it is hard to imagine how Talthybius could have gone about the wretched tasks imposed upon a herald with greater humanity.

IV

Talthybius, then, is humane and shows a certain degree of independence. One thing, however, that he does share with his commanders is a limited grasp of the religious dimension of events. Examination of his comments, mainly in connection with Cassandra, shows that he tends to explain actions in human terms and to evaluate them by human standards, and that he is oblivious to omens and sacrilege.

Consider how, when Talthybius tells Hecuba that Cassandra has been allocated to Agamemnon (248–259), the sacrilegious aspect of the situation is brought out step by step: for Hecuba, initially her daughter is poor (τλάμων) Cassandra, but Talthybius counters with the implied honour of her selection by the king. “Alas, then, is she to be a slave for his Spartan wife?” “No, to be herself a sort of wife, his concubine.” Hecuba is outraged: “What! Apollo’s maiden, to whom the god gave a life of virginity as a mark of honour!” (252–254). “Desire for the inspired girl pierced him” (255). Talthybius responds to Hecuba’s sense of religious outrage by offering a naturalistic explanation: he fell in love. The object of Agamemnon’s desire is acknowl-

own views onto his men. See *HF* 1400, *Hec.* 387, and *Or.* 394, where the positive imperative means little more than “stop,” “forbear from.” Barlow (*supra* n.1) *ad loc.* thinks it means “be quick” here; cf. Kovacs (*supra* n. 12) 135: “Come take her, no delaying.” Certainly there is nothing to justify the judgement of Aélion 156: “tant pis s’il faut brutaliser quelque peu les captives.”

edged to be possessed by a god (ἔνθεος), but the word here seems merely descriptive and drained of any vivid sense of what it might imply; Talthybius uses it simply to look back to “Apollo’s maiden,” and he takes no notice at all of the privilege (γέρας) of lifelong virginity granted her by Apollo. He recognizes the existence of the god and Cassandra’s connection with him, but does not take on board the way that such things might work. He is a person keenly aware of the value of a *geras* in the human sphere, and is eager to ensure that his aristocratic masters receive theirs (1286), but seems not to register any reaction to the parallel concept in the divine world. This pattern is repeated in the next exchange: “Cast off your sacred trappings,” cries Hecuba. Though such wear is an external symbol of a very special status, Talthybius’ response matches it with another symbol, one of high worldly status; it is a king’s bed she will share. Again the divine is reduced to the same level as the human because both have the same place in an argument: she will lose one symbol but gain another, and by implication the status lost will be balanced by the status acquired. He is, we have argued, trying to console Hecuba, but all his consolations are based on human values, whereas a great part of the relevant loss belongs to the sphere of the sacred.

Talthybius exhibits much the same characteristics when he speaks to Cassandra (407ff): she would be punished for her ill-omened utterances (φήμῃ) before a voyage, were it not for the fact that Apollo had deranged her wits. Talthybius, correctly enough, regards Apollo as a god who can affect the mind, but he treats such mental states as aberrations, not as a prophetic trance. Greek piety must have seen his breathtaking blindness as almost worthy of an Oedipus: in the context of an impending voyage, a moment always fraught with danger where superstitious sensibilities were traditionally sharp, he will ignore her utterances—and φήμη was a word used almost in a technical

sense of verbal omens³³—because her mind has been disturbed by the god of prophecy. This is tantamount to saying that he will ignore her ominous words because she is a prophet. How can he miss the possibility that her abnormal mental state might be veridical, when he has just witnessed a living example of it with his own eyes, Cassandra's mockery of her wedding? For that parody had started off-stage before he has had time to tell her of Agamemnon's choice. For Cassandra, Apollo is a mighty, personal divinity; for him, not much more than a metonymy for madness. But, as the prologue shows, for the purposes of the play the reality is that the gods are as Cassandra envisages them to be. Talthybius' reflection on Agamemnon's infatuation (411–416) is based entirely on human values: the great king has done what a wiser, poor man would not have done, taken this maniac for his bed because he fell for her. Again he is oblivious of any sacrilege involved, and offers naturalistic motivation and social measures. His ironic final summary of Cassandra as a fine bride for the commander-in-chief (420) is loaded with social and bare of religious content.

It is small wonder, then, that Cassandra turns on him as he concludes with self-confident directives for embarkation to her and to Hecuba: he has simply rejected as irrelevant her forecasts of Agamemnon's homecoming (356–364). But when Cassandra has left the stage, the last direct link with the supernatural vanishes from the play, and Troy seems to be the land of sufferings inflicted upon itself by mankind. Here Talthybius is fully himself, for he is involved in a world which does not exist on more than one level and its parameters match those of his spirit. When he faces Andromache he cannot put any

³³ For this regular use of *φήμη* see LSJ I.1. The meaning given is "utterance prompted by the gods, significant or prophetic saying." Xenophon *Eq.Mag.* 9.7–9 speaks of signs given by the gods to men in dreams, sacrifices, bird-omens, and *φήμῃσι*; cf. *Symp.* 4.49: Hermogenes receives *φήμῃσι*, dreams, and bird-omens as to what to do and not to do. Surely an audience is meant to see that Talthybius is using the word without full awareness of the religious significance of what he is saying.

consolatory spin on the news which he has to tell her, but neither is there any religious dimension; to take the child from its mother and kill it is not to misconstrue reality by ignoring the supernatural. But as the religious aspect dwindles from the play so Talthybius' expressions of human sympathy become more unrestrained and his instinct for fellow-feeling more confident: he weeps at Andromache's departure and spontaneously contributes to the boy's burial, which, as we have argued, he may well have engineered.

Alongside his humanity and scrupulous sense of duty, therefore, Talthybius is characterised by a deficient appreciation of a divine aspect of affairs. Of course, typically nobody ever believes Cassandra, but Euripides is using this point rather than telling us that Talthybius makes the same mistake. For his disbelief is associated with the wider deficiency, and this is not merely an interesting feature of his *persona*, but has a profound significance for the meaning of the play. In the prologue Athena and Poseidon make it clear that there are two reasons why Athena is angry with the Greeks, firstly because Ajax violated the goddess' temple in dragging off Cassandra from sanctuary there, and secondly because he was neither punished nor reviled by the Greeks for what he did, despite the fact that it was through Athena's power that they sacked Troy (69–73). Not just the sacrilege, therefore, constituted the insult to the goddess, but the fact also that the sacrilege was ignored by the Greeks. Now Agamemnon, too, is guilty of transgression against religion and piety in his violation of Cassandra, whom Apollo had left a virgin, as Poseidon tells us with emphasis in the prologue (41–44). Agamemnon's treatment of Cassandra is as impious as is Ajax's, and if the audience misses the parallel then Andromache's words will remind them at lines 618–619: Agamemnon is a second Ajax.³⁴ This is the key to the function

³⁴ In this play, as in Greek literature in general before the Alexandrian period, Cassandra is not raped by Ajax, whatever his intention in dragging her

of Talthybius in the play's religious economy: we see enacted on the stage his failure to recognize even, never mind criticize, Agamemnon's sacrilegious treatment of Cassandra, and this, given the expressly noticed similarity of the behaviour of Agamemnon and Ajax, gives us a glimpse of the failure of the Greeks to take action against Ajax. But this failure is the reason why the Greeks as a whole, not Ajax alone, have drawn upon themselves the avenging wrath of Athena. The imminent destruction of the fleet hangs over the play, not least because we can see dramatised on the stage the religious blindness in which was grounded the disastrous indifference of the Greeks to Ajax's outrage.

Gilmartin well suggested that there was special significance in the fact that the voice of humane feeling in the play is found in the role of the herald, the established means of communication, as if Euripides were hinting at an order of common humanity which had not been exhausted. Others, too, have seen a positive element in the prominence given to the observance of burial rites as the last act performed by the women before the city is obliterated, and a degree of activity towards this end has been noted in *Andromache* and *Hecuba*.³⁵ If, as we have suggested, the proposal of burial is a product of Talthybius' own initiative,

from Athena's temple might have been; his sin is violation of the right of sanctuary offered to a suppliant. See P. G. Mason, "Kassandra," *JHS* 79 (1959) 80–93, who observes that line 453 (ἔτ' οὐδ' ἀγνή χροά) implies avoidance of actual rape (89). Further, R. Meridor, "Euripides' *Troades* 28–44 and the *Andromache* Scene," *AJP* 110 (1989) 17–34, emphasises the "untraditional sacred virginity" of Cassandra in this play, which is the basis of Agamemnon's sacrilege against Apollo. *Andromache* is responding to Hecuba's news that Cassandra has been dragged from her (ἀποσπασθείσα 617) by comparing the previous occasion on which she was dragged off. Biehl *ad loc.* usefully refers to the "dragging" of Polyxena from Hecuba in *Hec.* 142, 225, 277, 408, where as here rape is not implied. The full significance of the association of Ajax and Agamemnon is meant only for the audience's ears, for *Andromache* speaks not of Agamemnon but of some unspecified person as a "second Ajax."

³⁵ For the dramatic importance of the funeral rite see P. E. Easterling, "Tragedy and Ritual," in R. Scodel, ed., *Tragedy and Society in the Classical World* (Ann Arbor 1993) 23, and "Form and Performance," in P. E. Easterling, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1997) 151–157; Dyson and Lee (*supra* n. 30).

then he knows what due burial means for Andromache and he, too, could embody the instinct for the rightness of proper disposal of the dead which plays such a remarkable part in Greek life, whether in social and military practice or in the imaginative constructs of epic and tragedy. The importance of the theme of due burial in the *Iliad* defines the achievement of the Sophoclean *Antigone* and Hecuba in *Troades* alike; Talthybius' sympathy, then, is not only a matter of feeling but of initiating one of the deepest enacted symbols of human fulfilment.

The above may be called the human conclusion of the play, for although burial has religious significance this is not the issue here, as it is in the *Iliad* and *Antigone*. As Mikalson says,³⁶ the religious issues with which this play are concerned are firstly why the Greeks lost the goodwill of the gods, and secondly what life was like for the Trojans without that goodwill. It is with the first issue that the other, the divine conclusion is concerned, but this conclusion will only be reached after the play is over. The prologue assumes the reality of Olympian gods who will smash the Greek fleet on the voyage home, and it is for embarkation on this fleet that the people of the play depart. The presence of these gods is strongly felt in the inspired personage of Cassandra, in connection with whom the secular outlook of Talthybius appears strikingly limited, for all his humane feeling. But this very inadequacy of comprehension of the divine stamps the herald as a representative Greek, in that some such

³⁶ J. D. Mikalson, *Honor thy Gods: Popular Religion in Greek Tragedy* (Chapel Hill/London 1991) 156. There is of course very much more that could be said about the religious language of this play; see for example N. T. Croally, *Euripidean Polemic* (Cambridge 1994) 133–134. Discussion of this would, however, take us too far afield, and we have confined ourselves to the main point about Talthybius. Nor are we claiming that the failure of the Greeks to recognize a supernatural element in the situation, a failure the mentality behind which is revealed by Talthybius' attitude, justifies the behaviour of the gods and turns *Troades* into a simple morality play. Far from it; we only point to Talthybius' role in representing a factor in the pattern of neglect and punishment which itself comes under scrutiny in the wider question of Euripides' attitude towards the gods.

shortcoming as his must have aroused Athena's anger.³⁷ Talthybius, then, as the play moves towards the impending ruin, keeps before our eyes something of the fatal indifference which generates the second, divine conclusion.

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³⁷ Talthybius does not alone represent the Greeks, for Menelaus appears in the Helen scene. There are signs that he is no more alert to reverberations of religion as presented in the prologue and by Cassandra than is Talthybius, but discussion of the attitudes displayed towards the divine in that scene is outside the scope of this article.