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A New Take on the Wrath of the Aeacids in a 21st Century Portuguese Rewriting of *Trojan Women*

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The Portuguese novelist and playwright Hélia Correia's quest for understanding "the Greece within herself" had already led to three theatrical "Exercises" about major tragic protagonists – Antigone, Helen and Medea – when she focused on the Trojan Women, this time together with Jaime Rocha. The play As Troianas (2018) follows trends of the previous plays, like the denunciation of the horrors of war and its heroic framework. Following Euripides' The Trojan Women and Hecuba, the central events are the distribution of female trophies and the human sacrifices demanded by the merciless winners. However, to the aristocratic resolve of Euripides' Polyxena, As Troianas adds a feminist stance that gives her a wider reach. Furthermore, the prominence of the two Aeacids, whose wrath and cruelty stand out in successive scenes, suggests a parallel with Seneca the Younger's Troades. The colloquial tone of As Troianas, typical of our times, differs from Seneca's solemn and philosophic rhetoric, but both plays underline the brutality and hypocrisy of human deeds. In addition to the analysis of how As Troianas took inspiration from and innovated the creations of Antiquity, the present relevance of past reflections on the impact of war on women will be highlighted in this paper.

Understanding Humanity through Greek Tragedy

The passion of the Portuguese novelist and playwright Hélia Correia (Lisbon, 1949) for Greek culture is well known and evident in all her work. She sees ancient Greece, with its myths and "dilacerating syntheses",[1] as an irresistible mystery that keeps challenging us and demanding a constant search for meaning.[2] Within the Greek literary tradition, Hélia shows a particular

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1. Cfr. Jorge da Silva Melo, "Continuar a escrever," ("Continuing to write") in *Furor: ensaios sobre a obra dramática de Hélia Correia* (*Fury: essays on the dramatic works of Hélia Correia*), Maria de Fátima Silva (Coord.). Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2006, 7 (my translation).

2. "Maybe it's the Greece in me. There are multiple attempts to understand it in the light of our logic and it eludes them. That is what stimulates my everyday contact with the Greeks, something in the order of desire." (interview with Diário de Notícias newspaper, quoted by Melo, in "Continuar a escrever," 9 (my translation).

fascination with Tragedy, the "Essence of Hellenism" in Western culture since the end of the 18th century, according to George Steiner.

The most visible result of this fascination is the production of several rewritings, called "Exercícios" ("Exercises"), of Greek tragedies with outstanding female protagonists, namely *Perdição. Exercício sobre Antígona* (1991); *O Rancor, Exercício sobre Helena* (2000) and *Desmesura. Exercício com Medeia* (2007)[3]. These works are clearly related to the originals of Sophocles (c. 497/6 - 406/5 BC) and Euripides (c. 480 - c. 406 BC),[4] but use other sources of inspiration, ancient and modern[5], in addition to the interaction of the author with the characters who questioned her so much and so long.[6]

As a result, in these "Exercises", the canons and values of Attic tragedy and the heroic world constructed by the Homeric poems are mixed with and even

3. *Perdition. Exercise on Antigone* (1991); *Rancour, Exercise on Helen* (2000) and *Disproportion. Exercise with Medea* (2007). All the translations of Hélia Correia and Jaime Rocha's works are mine.

4. For example, *Desmesura. Exercício com Medeia* is dedicated by the author to Euripides.

5. The scholars of classical reception point out that the original Greco-Roman sources are inseparable from their rewritings and interpretations, which have created successive and interconnected layers of meaning since antiquity (cfr. Charles Martindale, *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 7).

6. About her long "relationship" with Antigone, Hélia wrote: "Ela, que sempre fora a heroína a quem eu dedicara temor e gratidão pelo longe que estava dos meus dias, com as suas convicções e o seu atrevimento. […] Com aquela coragem que parecia tão simples, tinha-se colocado para sempre entre nós e as grandes atitudes. Até que a vim a conhecer ainda menina, ainda emudecida pelo terror, quando a tragédia se abateu sobre a família e ela se limitou a socorrer o pai […]. Vi-a a chorar, sem fala. E, apesar de saber que anos mais tarde ela estaria transformada naquela personagem cuja estatura sempre me assustara, comecei a amá-la como se ama uma filha, devagarinho e a chamá-la para mim. E a sua tragédia era outra tragédia: uma ansiedade de rapariguinha. […] pude espreitar para o lado nunca exposto do seu coração de órfã. Limitei-me a escrever o que nele achei." ("She, who had always been the heroine to whom I had dedicated fear and gratitude for how distant she was from my days, with her convictions and her daring. […] With that courage that seemed so simple, she had forever placed herself between us and the great attitudes. Until I got to know her as a young girl, still speechless with terror, when tragedy befell the family and she limited herself to helping her father [...]. I saw her crying, speechless. And, despite knowing that years later she would be transformed into that character whose stature had always frightened me, I began to love her as one loves a daughter, slowly and to call her to me. And her tragedy was another tragedy: a little girl's anxiety. […] I was able to peek into the never-exposed side of her orphan heart. I limited myself to writing what I found in it.", my translation). Testimony of the author quoted in Maria de Fátima Silva. "Antígona, o fruto de uma cepa deformada. Hélia Correia, *Perdição*," in *Furor: ensaios sobre a obra dramática de Hélia Correia*, Maria de Fátima Silva (Coord.). Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2006, 15.

questioned by contemporary experience and postmodern freedom.[7] Hélia opted for a less rigid structure[8] and a more colloquial language, and provides a new ideological framework for old themes, like the consequences of war, the hypocrisy of labels such as barbarian and civilized, and the intrinsic blindness of humankind. In accordance with contemporary thought, the entrenched obsession with war and death, whose evident destructiveness is gilded by the promise of heroic honour and glory, is discussed at length; as well as the condition of women[9], objectified and confined to the private sphere by the indifference and fear of men towards them.

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7. The "tiredness of tradition" is characteristic of the 20th century, following the impact of Freud, Surrealism and the Great Wars. Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* is an example of the new approach to Greek myths and seems to be a forerunner of Hélia Correia's perspective, both in relation to her own Antigone (*Perdição. Exercício sobre Antígona*) and to other tragic characters who take part in her "Exercícios" (cfr. Maria do Céu Fialho. "O mito clássico no teatro de Hélia Correia ou o cansaço da tradição," in *Furor: ensaios sobre a obra dramática de Hélia Correia*, Maria de Fátima Silva (Coord.). Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2006, 50-51.

8. The structure of each "Exercício" varies. In *Perdição. Exercício sobre Antígona*, there are no acts or chapters, but a Ditirambo (Dithyramb) and two phases (the second of which deals with the aftermath of Eteocles and Polynices death), framed by Tiresias' three interventions. After the initial (and only) chant of the Coro das Bacantes (Chorus of the Maenads), and the introductory speech of the soothsayer, two parallel times and settings present the actions of the living characters converging with the reactions of the dead Antigone and her Ama (Nurse), who, as forgetfulness sets in, watch and relive their own past behaviour. *O Rancor, Exercício sobre Helena* is divided into three acts and an Epílogo (Epilogue); there is no Chorus, but the behaviour of the Erínias (Erinyes), though placed in the background, may appear somewhat similar. In *Desmesura, Exercício com Medeia*, there are four sections: "Hinos" ("Hymns", presented by a masculine and a feminine Chorus), and three parts, where only the five characters interact, with a final speech from the protagonist. The play *As Troianas* comprises a Prólogo (Prologus) by two of the three Choruses (more to follow), ten scenes and an Êxodo (Exodus). Again, there are no "canonical" interventions by the Chorus between the scenes. Indeed, one trait that stands out in Hélia's plays is the freedom of the Chorus, which, besides its absence in some cases, isn't confined to the *Stasima* and may act as a very critical voice in relevant moments of the play.

9. The position of fragility and dependence of women in heroic societies – and later on in the Polis – are a repeated theme in the tragic genre and already pointed out by the Homeric Poems. In the latter case, it is enough to recall the dialogue between Hector and Andromache in the *Iliad* (6. 392-502), where the terrible consequences suffered by women and their children in the event of the defeat of their husbands and relatives are exposed. In classical tragedy, Euripides stands out for having famously delved into the question in plays such as *Andromache* and *Medea*.

Hélia Correia and Jaime Rocha's *AsTroianas*: Between Tradition and Innovation

In 2018, Hélia Correia wrote and published, in collaboration with Jaime Rocha (1949[10]), *As Troianas* (*The Trojan Women*), a title that doesn't include "Exercício" and points, no longer to an individual heroine, but to the collective of the women of Troy. It is, in fact, a play full of female figures, who reaffirm their position the day after the destruction of their city. In addition to the Coro de Cativas (Chorus of the Captive Women), Hecuba, Andromache, Cassandra and Polyxena stand out. The Argive Helen also enjoys an opportunity to defend her ambivalent position of victim and accomplice.[11]

The two tragedies by Euripides[12] that address the aftermath of the Trojan War – *Hecuba*, c. 424 BC and *The Trojan Women*, written in 415 BC – seem to be the logical starting point for analyzing how the authors follow and deconstruct the tradition around the link between Polyxena and the Aeacids. At the same time, inspirations will be traced to other classical sources, particularly Seneca the Younger's (c. 4 BC – 65 AD) tragedy *Troades* (c. 52-54 AD).

Like Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, Hélia Correia and Jaime Rocha chose Ilion as the setting and Polyxena and little Astyanax as the young and innocent victims sacrificed by the Greek victors. However, Polyxena's prominent role evokes *Hecuba*, a tragedy with different setting – transferred to the Chersonese of Thrace, thus leaving the destruction of Troy to be less evident –, and another victim – Polydorus. On the other hand, it is also in *Hecuba* that Euripides evidences a justification – albeit not very detailed[13] – for the choice of Polyxena as the sacrificial victim. This implies the presence, even if fleeting and indirect, of the ghost of Achilles. Hélia Correia and Jaime Rocha follow and develop this suggestion absent from Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, where the princess does not even go on stage[14] and her death is succinctly presented by Andromache.[15] To

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10. Pseudonym of the Portuguese poet, writer, journalist, and playwright Rui Ferreira de Sousa.

11. The group of male characters is also vast (more to follow), which is contrary to the classical practice.

12. Sophocles wrote an influential *Polyxena*, which may be older than the Euripidean texts, but did not survive. There have been attempts to rebuild the work, namely by William Calder ("A Reconstruction of Sophocles' Polyxena," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, Nº 7, 1966, 31-56).

13. Achilles never presents his reasons for choosing Polyxena.

14. Polyxena's fate is announced by Poseidon at the beginning of the play, and shortly after, in the first episode, Talthybius is purposely ambiguous when disclosing to Hecuba the identity of the owners of each royal captive: "Talthybius: To minister at Achilles' tomb has been appointed her." (vv. 263-264). These excerpts belong to the edition Euripides, *The Plays of Euripides*, translated by E. P. Coleridge, Volume I. London: George Bell and Sons, 1891.

this end, the authors expand the presence of the two Aeacids, whose anger generates new confrontations marked by a return to past grievances.

A particularly relevant and innovative aspect in *As Troianas* is the use of the Chorus as a clear advocate of the play's message, and its polyphonic multiplication.[16] Indeed, three Choruses coexist and assume themselves as spokespersons of not only human, but also natural consciousness: the Chorus of Wolves, and its prominent Coryphaeus, is introduced at the beginning and at the end to denounce the unnatural destructiveness of humankind;[17] the Chorus of Citizens challenges and holds Menelaus civically accountable for his unwillingness to punish Helen;[18] the Chorus of Captive Women reiterates the denunciation of the heroic and patriotic mentality underlying the disasters of war, through a poem sung on several significant occasions.[19] In the last scene of the play, immediately before the Exodus and as they embark on the Greek ships, the Trojan princesses merge with the Chorus of Captive Women, singing together

15. "Andromache: Your daughter Polyxena is dead, slain at Achilles' tomb, an offering to his lifeless corpse. […] I saw her myself; so I alighted from the chariot, and covered her corpse with a mantle, and struck upon my breast." (vv. 623-24 and 626-27).

16. The functions of the Chorus in classical Athens also included commenting upon the events and characters of the play, while providing an artistic moment where several performative arts were shown. Hélia Correia's Choruses appear as more incisive but share the lyrical and pertformative element. According to historical data, the Chorus was an essential component not only of tragedies, but also in the life of the Polis. Among other things, it was a way of showing young boys' skills at singing and dancing. Most tragedies featured only one Chorus, although there are cases in which more are suspected (cfr. Helene Foley, "Choral Identity in Greek Tragedy," *Classical Philology*, Vol. 98, No. 1 (January 2003), 1-30).

17. For example: "Corifeu: Tão estranho, na verdade. / Eles já partiram/ mas, quando a terra arrefecer, / regressam, /para começar de novo. /Casas, templos / trigo, cavalos, guerra."; ("Coryphaeus: So strange, indeed. / They are gone/ but when the earth grows cold,/ they return, / to start again. /Houses, temples / wheat, horses, war.") "Lobos: Nada. É o nada, aqui. / Ninguém como eles/ para lançar o nada/ sobre as coisas. / Sobre os seus semelhantes." ("Wolves: Nothing. It's nothingness, here. / No one like them / to cast nothingness / over things. / Over their fellow men."). The quotes belong to the edition Hélia Correia & Jaime Rocha, *As Troianas*. Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2018, the translations are mine.

18. The intervention of this Chorus takes place in the sixth scene, constituting the only moment of consistent dialogue between a Chorus and a character.

19. In addition to the full performance of their song at the end of the Prologue (pp. 23-31), the Captives repeat parts of the composition visibly only in scenes 1 (after the warlords' conversation about the distribution of captives) and 7 (after the argument between Polyxena and Pyrrhus, coinciding with the undisclosed sacrifice of the princess); but in scenes 3 (after Achilles' apparition) and 8 (after the decision to kill Astianax) their voices are heard in the background.

four verses of that hymn.[20] The failed prophetess Cassandra also sings her own song in scene 5, emphasizing the suffering her lucidity and the destruction of Troy inflicted on her.[21]

The Prologus of *As Troianas* takes place in a devastated Troy,[22] a wasteland infected with ashes and death visited by the Chorus of Wolves. Intrigued by Hecuba's howls of pain, the archetypal predators of the European imaginary approach the dangerous terrain of humans in the hope of dialogue. However, they only confirm the impossibility of communication[23] and, even worse, the place's unsuitability for life. Hecuba's immense misery, which will increase throughout the play, symbolizes, more than the volatility of fortune and the indifference of the gods,[24] the irrepressible self-destructive drive of humankind.

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20. "Quem nos dera que a neve nos tivesse/ obrigado a vogar de terra em terra. / Feliz daquele que sem pátria erra/ e do lugar onde nasceu se esquece." ("We wish that the snow had / forced us to wander from land to land. / Happy is he who wanders without a homeland / and forgets the place where he was born.").

21. It is this frenetic display of singing and dancing on the beach that captures Agamemnon's attention.

22. Interestingly, like in Seneca's *Troades*, only the tower used by Priam to observe the fighting remains standing, and is now used to precipitate Astyanax.

23. Despite the openness of Hecuba, recognized by them as a grieving mother, the languages are mutually unintelligible.

24. In Euripides *Hecuba*, the herald Thaltybius, horrified by the amount of loss the Trojan queen has endured, and assuming his own human frailty, links the arbitrariness of fortune with the indifference of the gods (vv. 488-498): *ὦ Ζεῦ, τί λέξω; πότερά σ᾽ ἀνθρώπους ὁρᾶν;/ ἢ δόξαν ἄλλως τήνδε κεκτῆσθαι μάτην, / ψευδῆ, δοκοῦντας δαιμόνων εἶναι γένος τύχην δὲ πάντα τὰν βροτοῖς ἐπισκοπεῖν; / οὐχ ἥδ᾽ ἄνασσα τῶν πολυχρύσων Φρυγῶν, / οὐχ ἥδε Πριάμου τοῦ μέγ᾽ ὀλβίου δάμαρ; / καὶ νῦν πόλις μὲν πᾶσ᾽ ἀνέστηκεν δορί, / αὐτὴ δὲ δούλη γραῦς ἄπαις ἐπὶ χθονὶ / κεῖται, κόνει φύρουσα δύστηνον κάρα. / φεῦ φεῦ: γέρων μέν εἰμ᾽, ὅμως δέ μοι θανεῖν/ εἴη πρὶν αἰσχρᾷ περιπεσεῖν τύχῃ τινί.* ("O Zeus! what can I say? that your eye is over man? or that we hold this opinion all to no purpose, [falsely thinking there is any race of gods,] when it is chance that rules the mortal sphere? Was not this the queen of wealthy Phrygia, the wife of Priam highly blessed? And now her city is utterly overthrown by the foe, and she, a slave in her old age, her children dead, lies upon the ground, soiling her wretched head in the dust. Ah! old as I am, may death be my lot before I am caught in any shameful mischance.") Hecuba, both in this play and in *The Trojan Women*, insistently laments her monstruous bad luck. The gods are clearly present only in *The Trojan Women*, where Euripides shows their selfishness at work: Poseidon will abandon Troy, because there's nobody left to worship him; Athena wants his help to get revenge for the Greeks sacrilegious behaviour towards her cult. The unpredictability of fortune is a fundamental theme of Seneca's *Troades* since the initial speech by Hecuba (act 1, v. 2), and gets an aphoristic treatment by Agamemnon during his violent quarrel with Pyrrhus (act 2), with statements like: *Tu me superbum, Priame? tu timidum facis.* (vv. 270-271) ("Thou, Priam, mak'st me proud – and fearful, too"). Hecuba also mentions the gods' cruelty towards her – *Testor deorum numen aduersum mihi* ("I call to witness the divinity of the gods, hostile to me") (v. 28). Chalchas frivolous announcement

The first intervention by the Chorus of the Captive Women closes the Prologus' message with its anti-war anthem, which presents the victims' point of view. In it stands out a quatrain, unusually rhymed, which disputes the foundations of the heroic *modus vivendi*:

Cativas:
Maldito o lar, malditos os cantores
que com beleza enganam os meninos
dando o nome de heróis aos assassinos,
dando o nome de pátria ao chão das dores. (p. 31)

Captives:
Cursed the home, cursed the singers
who with beauty deceive children
giving the name of heroes to murderers,
giving the name of homeland to the ground of pain.

The action of *As Troianas* begins from a masculine perspective (scene 1, pp. 32-39), exposing the obsession with "a guerra e seus entusiasmos" ("war and its enthusiasms")[25] that possesses the victorious warriors – both the living, like Agamemnon, Odysseus, Pyrrhus, Menelaus and Talthybius; and the dead, like the ghost of Achilles.[26] Significantly, the Greek warlords comment, in an amused tone,[27] on the choice of captives, the homage to Achilles – which the Mycenaean

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Dant fata Danais, quo solent pretio, uiam (v. 360). ("'Tis at the accustomed price fate grants the Danaï their voyage.") highlights even more the aloof cruelty of the gods. The excerpts from *Hecuba* belong to the edition Euripides, *The Complete Greek Drama*, edited by Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill, Jr. volume 1, translated by E. P. Coleridge. New York: Random House, 1938. The translation of *Troades* belongs to the edition Seneca, *Tragedies*, Translated by Frank Justus Miller, Loeb Classical Library Volumes. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1917.

25. Expression used by Tiresias in *Perdição*. *Exercício sobre Antígona*, 40.

26. Euripides' tragedies do not present a similarly large number of characters simultaneously. In *Hecuba*, besides the protagonist, and after the initial intervention of Polydorus' ghost, there are Odysseus, the herald Talthybius, Agamemnon, Polymestor (king of the Chersonese of Thrace), Polyxena, a servant of Hecuba and the Chorus of Trojan Captives. The "son of Achilles", who performs the sacrifice of Polyxena, is not listed as a character, since he is nothing more than a mute extra, nor is the ghost of Achilles, whose intervention is only reported. In *Trojan Women*, after the initial intervention of the gods Athena and Poseidon, Hecuba, Talthybius, Cassandra, Andromache, Helen, Menelaus and the Chorus of Trojan Captives and Widows appear. Polyxena never takes to the stage, unlike Astyanax's mute presence. In *As Troianas*, there is a mix of both casts, with small exceptions.

27. Agamemnon says: "Menelau está muito calado. Não dizes nada, / porque não escolhes a tua escrava entre as troianas/ disponíveis. Não faltam por aí jovens mulheres para / te acudir nas noites de insónia," p. 35 ("Menelaus is very silent. You don't say

king wants to pay in Greek territory –, and even the likelihood of Menelaus killing Helen.[28] Female trophies, insistently referred to as slaves, are, in the words of Odysseus, "a melhor parte da guerra" ("the best part of war", p. 32).

This obsession with obtaining and controlling women continues after death, as Achilles demonstrates with his wrathful apparition, in scene 3, demanding Polyxena as a reward for his heroic deeds. The captives assume the status of *geras*[29] – a prize or gift essential to maintain the hero's honour (*time*) and glory (*kleos*), as it occurs in the *Iliad* with Chryseis and Briseis. Violence against women is at the heart of the heroic mentality, for even Pyrrhus, at his most sensible, states: "Não executo mulheres a não ser/ quando invado uma cidade." ("I don't execute women unless/ when I invade a city," p. 48).

In *Hecuba*, Euripides had underlined through Odysseus the patriotic imperative of rewarding fallen heroes, or risking not having anyone willing to sacrifice themselves for the homeland.[30] In *As Troianas*, this justification of heinous crimes with patriotic interest is assumed above all by the newly politically savvy and influential Talthybius.[31]

Instead of a herald, rather sympathetic as in Euripides, or horrified by the cruelty of war and fortune as in Seneca's *Troades*, Talthybius is in *As Troianas* an

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anything, / why don't you choose your slave among the Trojan women / available. There is no shortage of young women out there to / help you on sleepless nights."). Later in scene 7 (p. 83), shortly before departing to Greece, he remarks: "Os nossos soldados podem fazer a festa,/ embebedar-se, dormir com as escravas" ("Our soldiers can party, / get drunk, sleep with the slaves").

28. In Euripides' *Trojan Women*, a simulacrum of Helen's trial takes place, in which Hecuba features as a prosecuting attorney. Menelaus seems at first willing to punish Helen, but Hecuba knows that her grip over him is still strong.

29. Ποῖ δή, Δαναοί, / τὸν ἐμὸν τύμβον / στέλλεσθ᾽ ἀγέραστον ἀφέντες; – and the word ἀγέραστον, from *agerastos*, which means "without *geras*" – ("Where away so fast, you Danaans, leaving my tomb/ without its prize?") exclaims the ghost of Achilles in *Hecuba*, vv. 114-115.

30. Odysseus states this clearly while contradicting the Trojan queen's arguments against sacrificing her daughter Polyxena to fulfil Achilles' demand for *geras*: ἡμῖν δ᾽ Ἀχιλλεὺς ἄξιος τιμῆς, γύναι, / θανὼν ὑπὲρ γῆς Ἑλλάδος κάλλιστ᾽ ἀνήρ. / οὔκουν τόδ᾽ αἰσχρόν, εἰ βλέποντι μὲν φίλῳ / χρώμεσθ᾽, ἐπεὶ δ᾽ ὄλωλε μὴ χρώμεσθ᾽ ἔτι; / εἶέν· τί δῆτ᾽ ἐρεῖ τις, ἤν τις αὖ φανῇ / στρατοῦ τ᾽ ἄθροισις πολεμίων τ᾽ ἀγωνία; / πότερα μαχούμεθ᾽ ἢ φιλοψυχήσομεν, / τὸν κατθανόνθ᾽ ὁρῶντες οὐ τιμώμενον;" ("Now Achilles, lady, deserves honor at our hands, since on behalf of Hellas the man died most nobly. Is not this a foul reproach to treat him as a friend in life, but, when he is gone from us, to treat him so no more? Enough! what will they say, if once more there comes a gathering of the army and a contest with the foe? Shall we fight or nurse our lives, seeing the dead have no honors?"), *Hecuba*, vv. 309-316.

31. In *As Troianas*, Odysseus continues to follow the most ruthless principles of war and politics. He helps to convince Agamemnon to let go of Polyxena and allow her sacrifice; and reinforces Talthybius' thesis that Astianax cannot remain alive. However, he does not appear as the master-manipulator like in *Hecuba*.

audacious and cynical bureaucrat[32] who reminds his lords that even the most inhuman norms must be fulfilled, not only for "realpolitik" reasons, but also to comply with the heroic code.[33] This is why he openly criticises Odysseus' desire to return home ("Falam como maridos e não como heróis", "They speak like husbands and not like heroes", p. 84); and soon afterwards emphasises that, before sailing back to Greece, it was necessary to deal with Pyrrhus' desire to adopt Astianax, the last male descendant of the Trojan Royal House. In Talthybius' inflexible logic, it is important to quash what he sees as detrimental "para a honra da Hélade e para o dever que temos com os deuses" ("for the honour of Hellas and for the duty we owe to/ the gods", scene 8, p. 86) – which he identifies with the brutal whim of the strongest. The sheer contradiction with both human and divine laws doesn't matter, nor does the fact that, since the necessary winds began to blow after Polyxena's death, there is no immediate reason for the child's death.

Still, there are some hints of conscience and even self-criticism among warlords:

> Pyrrhus:
> Sinto-vos muito divertidos a falar de escravas
> e da morte de mulheres.
> […]
> Há outros troféus de guerra para além do corpo das
> mulheres. (p. 38)

> Pyrrhus:
> I sense you are very amused talking about slaves
> and the death of women.
> […]
> There are other trophies of war besides the body of
> women.

Pyrrhus' humanitarian streak continues in scene 3, with his short-lived refusal to comply with his father's order to sacrifice Polyxena. Similarly, in scene 4, Agamemnon emphatically opposes this inhuman demand, now championed by an angry Pyrrhus. But he soon forgets his disgust, pressed by the impatience

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32. He is a politician, as Odysseus comments rather disapprovingly: "Agora que acabou a guerra e estamos prontos/ a levar o saque e as escravas para a grande/ nação grega, Taltíbio já pode passar o tempo/ com conversas e enigmas próprios dos / políticos." ("Now that the war is over and we are ready / to take booty and slaves to the great / Greek nation, Talthybius can spend his time / with conversations and riddles proper to / politicians.") (scene 8, p. 85). It is curious that also in *Perdição. Exercício sobre Antígona* it is a courtier who forces king Creon to apply the law to his niece.

33. He is also the one who instigates the discussion about Helen's punishment.

of the army and justified by divine command.[34] The king, who wishes above all, as in Seneca's *Troades*,[35] "chegar a Micenas com uma jovem princesa no / meu carro e entrar triunfante pela porta dos leões! ("to arrive in Mycenae with a young princess in/ my chariot and enter triumphantly through the lions' gate!") (scene 4, p. 61), quickly found a substitute trophy, as he watched Cassandra sing and dance[36] (scene 5, pp. 63-66).

Thus, personal whims and the desire for honour and glory – including political survival – always end up overriding manifestos recognizing the dignity of the other, an ambivalence that seems another symptom of humankind's fundamental blindness.

The Prominent Role of the Aeacids

The role of Pyrrhus stands out among the innovations introduced by Hélia Correia and Jaime Rocha in Euripides' already varied double account of Polyxena's story. Even in *Hecuba*, where the young Aeacid apparently performs the princess's sacrifice following the request of his father's ghost,[37] he is nothing

34. "Agamémnon: (*Reconsiderando*) Seja. Se os deuses se intrometerem/ deste modo nos desejos humanos, pois que seja." ("Agamemnon: (*Reconsidering*) Be it. If the gods meddle / in this way with human desires, so be it."), scene 4, p. 62.

35. This wish is transmitted by Hecuba, reflecting on Priam's liberation through death: "*Non Argolici praeda triumphi, / Subiecta feret colla tropaeis/ […] currusque sequens Agamemnonios, aurea dextra/ Vincula gestans, laetis fiet/ Pompa Mycenis*". ("He will not, as booty of Argolic triumph, bend neck 'neath their trophies; […] nor, following the car of Agamemnon, wearing gold fetters, will he make show for wide-spreading Mycenae."), act 1, vv. 150-156. The whole concept and in particular words such as "*pompa*" and "*triumphi*" reveal the Roman experience. The English translation of Seneca's tragedy belongs to the edition Seneca (1917). *Tragedies*, Translated by Frank Justus Miller, Loeb Classical Library Volumes. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd.

36. "Agamémnon: **[…]** Mas aquela mulher, vê como dança e como/ a sua voz se estende pela praia como uma sereia.

Taltíbio: É uma mulher perigosa, marcada pelos deuses. Agamémnon: É a mulher que me convém. Não é preciso mais/ discussões, está escolhido o meu troféu. Que me / seja entregue essa Cassandra ainda esta noite. E tu/ mesmo tratarás disso." ("Agamemnon: […] But that woman, see how she dances and how / her voice stretches across the beach like a siren. Talthybius: she is a dangerous woman, marked by the gods. Agamemnon: It is the woman that suits me. No more discussions needed, my trophy is chosen. May this Cassandra be delivered to me this evening. And you yourself will see to it."). In *Troades*, Agamemnon chooses to stop the violent escalation of the argument with Pyrrhus and consult the soothsayer Calchas, whose orders are taken without question.

37. Achilles does not go onstage, his appearance being reported twice. First, the ghost of Polydorus (murdered by the Thracian king as soon as he learned of the fall of Troy, to take hold of his treasure), when presenting the background of the play, tells that the Greek

more than a mute extra. The cunning Odysseus is the one with the task of convincing the assembly of the Achaeans to approve the sacrifice, and then has to face Hecuba and Polyxena and lead the royal victim to the tomb of Achilles.

Hélia Correia had already staged Pyrrhus in *O Rancor, Exercício sobre Helena*, where, in addition to his sarcastic and offensive speech,[38] he showed himself hopelessly addicted to violence.[39] In *As Troianas*, Pyrrhus is placed in a context that enhances this aggressiveness by interacting with an Achilles who, despite being dead, is still dominated by anger, and makes his son assume his grievances. Past and present resentments come to a head in the violent argument of the following scene, (scene 4, pp. 50-53), between the young Aeacid and Agamemnon.

This dramatic line of events suggests an inspiration in Seneca's tragedy *Troades*, notable for its rhetorical resources and for exposing some principles of the Stoic doctrine of the passions.[40] However, Seneca's Pyrrhus is one-

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ships had been immobilized by the ghost of Achilles, until Polyxena's sacrifice on his tomb (*λέγεται δόξαι σὴν παῖδ΄ Ἀχιλεῖ/ σφάγιον θέσθαι.*, vv. 108-109). Afterwards, the Chorus confirms the apparition to Hecuba, reproducing the interpellation launched by Achilles on the tomb (vv. 113-114), and describing him as "standing on his tomb in golden armor" (οἶσθ΄ ὅτε χρυσέοις ἐφάνη σὺν ὅπλοις, v. 110). He is therefore a menacing Achilles, but somewhat ceremonial, as his fearsome look on the battlefield is not mentioned.

38. The well-mannered and apparently unheroic Telemachus, on a visit to Sparta to obtain news of his father, is the main target of Pyrrhus' violent disposition and lack of urbanity. Throughout the play, Menelaus tries to keep up appearances in his dysfunctional family, but the characters' interactions become gradually more violent, partly because his son-in-law wears everybody's patience thin with insults. In the end, however, the king manages to achieve his purpose, and Telemachus, with his ability to play along, stands out as the perfect guest.

39. Hermione denounces her husband Pyrrhus as impotent and a necrophiliac serial killer of female slaves. The disturbing connection between love and death already present in Achilles' passion for Penthesilea is therefore explored and repeated in *As Troianas*. Polyxena appears intrigued by that story (scene 7, p. 79), a revealing detail of her curiosity towards the heroic world.

40. As a stoic and a Roman, Seneca the Younger thought that he had the moral obligation to help his fellow citizens in the path towards happiness, namely by trying to moderate the rule of the Caesars. This idea, clearly stated in *de Tranquilitate animi*, 10,1, underlies his dangerous but persistent relationship with the Julio-Claudian family and the production of moral treaties and literary works like tragedies, to influence the imperial family and the wider public. *De Ira* is particularly relevant for the discussion of the consequences of absolute power in the hands of someone prone to anger (*de Ira*, 3,19,5). Published at the beginning of Claudius rule (41 AD), it features many tyrants among whom Caligula deserves a prominent position. Seneca suggests some strategies to deal with anger, namely self-analysis, self-criticism, and wise maxims (*Ira praeceptis fugatur*) on the fickleness of Fortune and the exercise of power (*de Ira* 2,2,2). In *Troades*, written close to the beginning of the rule of his pupil, theatre-loving Nero, Seneca stages the ugliness of anger by setting Pyrrhus and Agamemnon against each other in a quarrel that almost

dimensional, embodying the excesses associated with absolute power experienced in Julio-Claudian Rome.[41] Hélia Correia and Jaime Rocha opted for an ambivalent personality, in which the awareness of the abuses and the intention to protect some war victims is mixed with aggressiveness and cruelty against the most fragile, like the old (Priam) and women (Polyxena).

Both Pyrrhuses display an obsessive, but understandable, admiration for Achilles' deeds and glory. In *As Troianas*, the young prince reminds Agamemnon of his father heroics, but for the king the two Aeacids are insufferable: "ambos são feitos de amuos e de iras" ("both are made of sulks and anger", scene 8, p. 88). Seneca also makes Pyrrhus recall with rhetorically charged anger the episodes narrated by Homer, as a starting point for his invective against the greed and ingratitude of the Mycenaean king (act 2, vv. 204-353[42]), thus staging a replay of the first book of the *Iliad*. However, Hélia Correia and Jaime Barros went further than Seneca, as they reenact the confiscation of the captive Briseis – the public humiliation that motivates the anger of Achilles, and sets the events of the *Iliad* in motion – thanks to the unprecedented choice of Polyxena as a trophy by the king of Mycenae, despite her alleged betrothal to Thetis' son.

Hélia Correia and Jaime Barros also widen Pyrrhus's desire to enter his father's world by ascribing him a morbid curiosity for Achilles' great Trojan rival Hector. The young Aeacid takes his fixation to the point of trying to appropriate Priam's son's family. First, by receiving his widow as a trophy he seems to want to turn into a wife:[43]

Pirro:

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ends in bloodshed and shows a self-reflective and maxims-uttering Mycenaean king. Agamemnon says about his past: *Fateor, aliquando impotens regno ac superbus, altius memet tuli;/ Sed fregit illos spiritus haec*, vv. 267-269 ("In the past, I grant, I have been headstrong in government and borne myself too haughtily; but such pride has been broken"); on fortune: *Magna momento obrui uincendo didici,* v. 260 ("That greatness can be in a moment overthrown I have learned by conquering."); on anger: (vv. 259-260) *Violenta nemo imperia continuit diu; Moderata durant.* ("Ungoverned power no one can long retain; controlled, it lasts."); and decency beyond the law (v. 335): *Quod non uetat lex, hoc uetat fieri pudor* ("What law forbids not, shame forbids be done.").

41. Some of Pyrrhus words resemble notorious statements by Caligula, e.g. when he justifies himself by saying *Quodcumque libuit facere uictori, licet*, v. 329. ("The victor is allowed to do whatever pleases him"), words that echo Gaius' threat to his grandmother Antonia (*Memento […] omnia mihi et in omnis licere.*), according to Suetonius (*Vita Gaii*, 4.29.3.) The young Aeacid's claims about the rights of his father, to whom genealogy allegedly gave possession of the universe, also resemble Caligula's arrogance.

42. This long quarrel starts with the also long and rhetorically enhanced speech by Pyrrhus about his father merits and Agamemnon's shortcomings. The king responds with sharp put-downs about the crimes commited by both Aeacids.

43. The other Achaean leaders consider him capricious and arrogant, as well as incapable of dealing with a woman of such lofty status and qualities (scene 8, p. 87).

Eu dou-me
por satisfeito por me ter calhado Andrómaca,
filha de rei e rainha, mulher do ilustre Heitor,
morto por meu pai. Talvez possa apaziguar o
luto dela, tornar a sua vida mais serena. (p. 37)

Pyrrhus:
I am
satisfied that I got Andromache,
daughter of king and queen, wife of illustrious Hector,
killed by my father. Maybe I can appease her
mourning, make her life more serene.

And then, by expressing his intention to adopt Astyanax, a wish secretly thwarted by Talthybius, whose inherent cowardice is exposed when tasked with killing the infant prince (scene 8). Pyrrhus does not return to the stage, his reaction thus unknown.

Polyxena: A Feminist Rewriting

The royal captives are introduced in the second scene of *As Troianas* (pp. 40-45), as they express their uneasiness with the lack of definition about their new masters. Polyxena stands out by accumulating statements laden with involuntary *hybris*, which reveal her *naivete* and tragic blindness. Cassandra, amid a nervous breakdown, contradicts her sarcastically, thus revealing future events nobody understands or believes.[44]

With the apparition of Achilles (scene 3, pp. 46-49), Polyxena's tragedy is set in motion. The dead Aeacid resembles his Senecan persona in *Troades*[45]: terrifying,[46] arrogant, resentful,[47] indifferent to his son's affection[48], and

44. For instance: "Políxena: Se falta o vento, pois que venha o vento./ Sacrifiquem aos deuses qualquer coisa, esses Helenos! Uma vaca, um bode!" ("Polyxena: If the wind is missing, let the wind come./ Sacrifice anything to the gods,/ these Hellenes! A cow, a goat!"). "Cassandra: Oh, uma vaca, um bode! Uma pombinha!", p. 43 ("Cassandra: Oh, a cow, a goat! A dove!").

45. In *As Troianas* there is no description of the setting or of Achilles, but his behaviou points tht way. In *Troades*, Thaltybius witnessed the apparition at dawn and describes the earthquake that opened the way for Achilles to ascend from the underworld. In his terror, the herald emphasises how all the natural elements duly obeyed him: *Nec sola tellus tremuit: et pontus suum/ Adesse Achillem sensit, ac strauit uada*, vv. 187-188 ("Nor did the earth only tremble; the sea, too, felt its own Achilles near and stilled its waters.").

46. Seneca states that the Aeacid had the same appearance as in the heat of battle – which means disheveled and bloody: *Emicuit ingens umbra Thessalici ducis, / Threicia qualis arma proludens tuis/ Iam, Troia, fatis strauit,* vv. 182 sqq. ("Forth leaped the mighty shade of

demanding the sacrifice of the young Trojan princess to avenge yet another affront from Agamemnon:[49]

> Aquiles:
> […] Sou
> aquele que não consegue dormir enquanto a minha
> alma não for vingada, enquanto as cinzas de
> Políxena não forem colocadas sobre o meu túmulo. (p. 47)
>
> Achilles:
> [...] I am
> one who cannot sleep until my
> soul is not avenged, while the ashes of
> Polyxena are not placed on my tomb.

Faced with his son's disgusted refusal,[50] Achilles unleashes his wrath and, although less ostensibly than in *Troades*, flaunts his power over the winds, bestowed on him by his mother Thetis:

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the Thessalian chief, such shape as when practising for thy fate, O Troy, he laid low the Thracian arms").

47. "Esse homem [Agamémnon] pensa que ainda manda nos exércitos e/ na armada. Ele é o culpado de todos os males com/ a sua arrogância e despotismo. Gosta de afrontar os/ deuses, de roubar as mulheres dos outros. Primeiro/ Ifigénia em Áulis, agora Políxena em Troia.", p. 46 ("That man [Agamemnon] thinks he still commands the armies and/ the navy. He is the culprit of all evils/ with his arrogance and despotism. He likes to affront the / gods, to steal other people's women. First / Iphigenia at Aulis, now Polyxena at Troy.").

48. Pyrrhus reacts emotionally, but gets no paternal response, just orders: "Não posso acreditar. Momento inesperado este que/ me é concedido. És o meu querido pai, morto e, no entanto, falando comigo. Se eu pudesse tocar-te ao/ menos que fosse, mas és apenas uma sombra, sem/ carne. Mas ao que vens? O que pode uma sombra/ querer dos vivos? O que posso eu fazer por ti, ainda?", p. 47. ("I can not believe. What an unexpected moment/ is granted to me. You are my dear father, dead and yet speaking to me. If only I could touch you/ at least, but you're just a shadow, without/ flesh. But what are you coming for? What can a shadow / want from the living? What can I do for you, yet?").

49. In *Troades*, it is Achilles himself who explains the reasons for the sacrifice (vv. 191-196): his irate voice filled the air (*Impleuit omne litus irati sonus*), stating, besides the sinister parallel with Aulis, that Polyxena belonged to him, because she had been bethroted to his ashes (*Desponsa nostris cineribus Polyxena*).

50. "Não aceito essas ordens. Não te fartaste de guerra, / de tanta crueldade? Isto acaba aqui, pai. Os/ sacrifícios são devidos aos deuses. E já não se/ sacrificam seres humanos entre nós. Nem Ifigénia/ foi realmente sacrificada", p. 49 ("I do not accept these orders. Didn't you get tired of war, / of so much cruelty? It ends here, father. The/ sacrifices are due to the gods. And human beings/ are no longer sacrificed among us. Nor Iphigenia/ was actually sacrificed."). In *Troades*, Pyrrhus does not present any objection.

Aquiles
(*Furioso*) Como te atreves? E que sabes tu
dos deuses? Da deusa Tétis, minha mãe e tua
avó, consegui, mesmo morto, uma promessa.
À semelhança do que aconteceu à vinda, os
ventos não soprarão para vos levar enquanto não
sacrificarem Políxena. (p. 49)
Achilles:
(Furious) How dare you? And what do you know
about the gods? From the goddess Thetis, my mother and your
grandmother, I got, even in death, a promise.
As with the coming, the winds will not blow for you
winds will not blow to carry you away until
you sacrifice Polyxena.

Despite the humanitarian statements made shortly before, the starstruck and now frightened Pyrrhus subserviently acquiesces. So, against the backdrop of the troops' growing impatience and the captives' threat of suicide,[51] there follows a quarrel with the king of Mycenae to obtain Polyxena (scene 4, pp. 50-62). Agamemnon victimizes himself and tries to impose his weak authority in this kind of situation, as the *Iliad* character had done with Briseis. The attacks between the king and Pyrrhus are fierce, but less violent than those depicted by Seneca in *Troades.*[52] The topics of the argument are similar[53], and so is the bottomline: as

51. "Taltíbio: Há agitação na praia, as mulheres estão em fúria e/ ameaçam suicidar-se uma a uma, fugindo assim à/ escravatura e à cama dos vencedores.", p. 54 ("Talthybius: There is commotion on the beach, the women are furious and/ they threaten to commit suicide one by one, thus fleeing the/ slavery and the bed of the victors.").

52. Seneca's Pyrrhus has the same arrogant and cruel attitude as Achilles: *Iuuenile uitium est, regere non posse inmpetum*, v. 251 ("Ungoverned violence is a fault of youth"), is Agamemnon's verdict. However, bereft of his own fierce father's sensibility, Pyrrhus' "most glorious deed of war" (*maximum in bello decus*, v. 312), as the king sarcastically calls it, was killing the suppliant Priam at the altar, though the Atreides also lists Achilles' numerous criminal acts, including the rape of Deidamia. In *Troades*, Pyrrhus also threatens to kill Agamemnon and attempts to mutiny the army. Both leaders engage in a violent exchange that threatens to end in bloodshed. Eventually, the king manages to reign in his anger and to let the decision about Polyxena's sacrifice in the hands of Chalcas, the only person who has access to the the gods' wishes.

53. E.g., the king's conflicts with Achilles; the brutality of both the Aeacids, including the sacrilegious murder of Priam – "um mau exemplo do que é a honra dos aqueus.", p. 50 ("a bad example of what the honour of the Achaeans is") – ; the precedent of Iphigenia's sacrifice – an example of "da dor que é preciso suportar para que ela [Grécia] se mantenha"pp. 50-51("the pain that must be endured if she [Greece] is to stand") – so traumatizing for Agamemnon, who refuses further human sacrifices; the cruelty and obsession with death that unites father and son, manifest in the necrophilic passion for Pentesileia.

dead and living embodiment of the heroic mentality, Achilles and Pyrrhus glorify destruction:[54]

> Agamémnon
> Falas como filho do teu pai, Pirro. Vejo nos teus
> olhos a mesma paixão pela morte, esse fulgor pelo
> silêncio da carne, pela ausência da voz. A paixão
> dele por Pentesileia. E tu vais pelo mesmo caminho,
> o teu sangue fala do mundo das sombras como se
> esse fosse o mundo dos vivos. Deixa esse destino
> para os abutres, para os lobos. (p. 58)
>
> Agamemnon
> You speak like your father's son, Pyrrhus.
> I see in your eyes the same passion for death, that glow for the
> silence of the flesh, the absence of the voice. His
> passion for Pentesileia. And you go the same way,
> your blood speaks of the world of shadows as if
> this is the world of the living. Leave this fate
> to the vultures, to the wolves.
>
> **[…]**
> Ah, cão, vejo que estás feliz com isto! Queres
> causar mais sofrimento a uma mãe?
> Não ouves como Hécuba uiva de dor, a ver o
> sangue dos filhos a escorrer a seus próprios pés.
> Não se pode tirar todas as crias a uma fêmea.
> Páris, Heitor, chega de matança. Um grego
> nasce com compaixão nas veias, a morte só é
> justa numa guerra. Não para castigar mulheres
> vencidas. (p. 60)
>
> **[…]**
> Ah, you dog, I see you're happy about this! Do you want to
> cause more suffering to a mother?
> Don't you hear how Hecuba howls in pain, watching
> the blood of her children flowing at her own feet.
> You can't take away all of a female's young.

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54. Hecuba will point the same to Pyrrhus, highlighting the endless cycle of violence he is immersed in: **"**Que é isto, filha? Que me diz este homem? **/** (*Para Pyrrhus*) Ah, maldita linguagem! Assassino **/** e filho de assassino. Certamente / pai de assassino, tu virás a ser. / Foi Deidamia tua mãe? Não foi. /Mulher alguma te deu o peito. /Bebeste sangue em vez de leite, ó cão!", p. 76 ("What is this, my daughter? What is this man telling me? / (*To Pyrrhus*) Ah, cursed language! Murderer / and son of murderer. Certainly/ father of a murderer, you will become. / Was Deidamia your mother? She was not. / No woman gave her breast to you. / You drank blood instead of milk, O dog!").

Paris, Hector, no more killing. A Greek
is born with compassion in his veins, death is only
just in a war. Not to punish vanquished women.

Once the king's opposition is overcome, the sacrifice of the maiden follows. When, in the seventh scene, Pyrrhus – and not Odysseus, as in *Hecuba*[55] – goes to fetch Polyxena for the sacrifice (scene 7, pp. 75-82), he expected to see her humiliate herself as is the "duty" of female victims. Consequently, her haughtiness exasperates him:[56]

Políxena**:**
Não sabia
que tinhas dado em moço de recados. (p. 74)

Polyxena:
I didn't know
that you had turned into an errand boy.

Pirro:
Que desdenhosa! Em breve baixarás de vez essa
cabeça. Em breve abraçarás os meus joelhos,
suplicando pela vida. (p. 75)

Pyrrhus:
How dismissive of you! You'll soon get that
head down for good. Soon you'll be hugging my knees,
begging for life.

55. In *Troades*, the Achaeans decided for a ruse, sending the much-hated Helen as a wedding planner for a purported marriage with Pyrrhus (act 4, vv. 862-999). She is quickly unmasked by Andromache, who forces her to admit Polyxena will be sacrificed. However, the princess seems to accept both her fate and the mock-wedding and is taken in a bridal procession to the tomb of Achilles, where Pyrrhus awaits her. The staging of a wedding appears as an original addition by Seneca and may represent another attack on the excesses of luxury and violence of Roman theatre and circus.

56. Seneca chose to keep Polyxena silent and to "translate" her reactions through Andromache. Hector's widow says, on her behalf, that she prefers death to losing her freedom and status (vv. 945-949): *Vide, ut animus ingens laetus audierit necem. / Cultus decoros regiae uestis petit, / Et admoueri crinibus patitur manum. / Mortem putabat illud, hoc thalamos putat.* ("See with what joy her mighty soul has heard her doom! The becoming attire of royal robes she seeks, and allows Helen's hand to approach her locks. Death she deemed that other, this, her bridal."). Her attitude in death is told by a messenger, who underlines her fiery look (act 5, vv. 1130-1165).

As in *Hecuba*, Polyxena does not beg, but her "voluntary adherence"[57] goes further than the desire to keep her own freedom and regal status intact, and becomes a manifesto of feminine empowerment:

> Políxena:
> […] Caberá
> a mim, e a mim só, este final.
> Pois existe um final para cada um
> e há que fazê-lo grande. Nós, mulheres,
> temos lágrima fácil; vejo agora
> que outros papéis, além de suplicantes,
> podemos escolher. (p. 78)
>
> Polyxena:
> [...] It will be up to
> to me, and to me alone, this ending.
> For there is an ending for each one
> and we have to make it big. We, women,
> have easy tears; I see now
> What other roles, besides suppliants
> we can choose.

Through her emphatic "we women have," Polyxena presents herself as a spokesperson for all women. Furthermore, she evolved from the naïve young woman who saw herself as superior to the plebeian captives – "À vista delas/ somos escravas de alta nobreza." ("Compared to them / We are slaves of high nobility.") (scene 2, p. 42) – and thus as part of a circumscribed and privileged "we."

The desire to break the stereotypes of women's physical and psychological weakness leads Polyxena to suggest right away, through the words "For there is an end for each one/ and one must make it great," a parallel with the concept of *kalos thanatos*. The "beautiful death", a fundamental concept in heroic mentality, famously expressed in the Homeric Poems (Priam to Hector, Il. 22, 71-76) and in a patriotic excerpt from the VII century BC Spartan poet Tyrtaeus (10 W. 1-2, 21-

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57. Euripides innovated in *Hecuba* by crediting Polyxena with an attitude of voluntary submission which counts as resistance to arbitrary and heinous decisions (cfr. Maria de Fátima Silva, "Sacrifício voluntário, teatralidade de um motivo euripidiano." ("Voluntary sacrifice, the theatricality of a Euripidean motif"), in Maria de Fátima Silva, *Ensaios sobre Eurípides* (*Essays on Euripides*). Lisboa: Cotovia, 145). Thus, he ignited the debate on the freedom and dignity of the most fragile victims of war, which was a particularly relevant topic in Athens, then in the midst of the fratricidal Peloponnesian War.

30)[58], was adapted to the feminine precisely by Euripides, in *Hecuba*.[59] As for Seneca, in *Troades* the stoic made his beautiful[60] but mute Polyxena act fiercely – *irato impetu* (act 5, v. 1160) –, like a male warrior, which surprised and moved both Greeks and Trojans, but without achieving the apotheotic reaction shown in *Hecuba.*[61]

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58. Cfr. Styliani Papastamati (2017), "The Poetics of kalos thanatos in Euripides' Hecuba: Masculine and Feminine Motifs in Polyxena's Death.," *Mnemosyne*, Fourth Series, Vol. 70, Fasc. 3 (2017), 361-385.

59. Both Homer and Tyrtaeus underline that a violent death can only appear beautiful if the dead is young and athletic himself (Papasmati 2017, 362-364). Euripides follows this pattern with a detailed and focused description of Polyxena that gave her the "statuary" traits of youth, beauty and athleticism typical of the beautiful dead: *λαβοῦσα πέπλους ἐξ ἄκρας ἐπωμίδος/ ἔρρηξε λαγόνας ἐς μέσας παρ´ ὀμφαλὸν/ μαστούς τ´ ἔδειξε στέρνα θ´ ὡς ἀγάλματος / κάλλιστα*, vv. 558-561 ("And she, hearing her master's words, took her robe and tore it open from the shoulder to the waist, displaying a breast and bosom fair as a statue's."); all the while she displays a bravery typical of a warrior (*Ἰδού, τόδ´, εἰ μὲν στέρνον, ὦ νεανία, / παίειν προθυμῆι, παῖσον, εἰ δ´ ὑπ´ αὐχένα / χρήιζεις πάρεστι λαιμὸς εὐτρεπὴς ὅδε*, vv. 563-565 ("Young prince, if it is my breast you are eager to strike, see, here it is, strike home! or if at my neck your sword you will aim, that throat is here and ready."); and manages to keep her modesty: *ἡ δὲ καὶ θνήισκους´ ὅμως / πολλὴν πρόνοιαν εἶχεν εὐσχήμων πεσεῖν, / κρύπτους´ ἃ κρύπτειν ὄμματ´ ἀρσένων χρεών.*, vv. 568-570 ("but she, even in death, took good heed to fall with grace, hiding from the gaze of men what must be hidden.").

60. Seneca also hoghlights Polyxena's beauty, enhanced by her dignified posture and bridal garments, and its effect on the spectators: *ipsa deiectos gerit / Vultus pudore; sed tamen fulgent genae, / Magisque solito splendet extremus decor:/ Ut esse Phoebi dulcius lumen solet / Iam iam cadentis, astra quum repetunt uices, / Premiturque dubius nocte uicina dies. / Stupet omne uulgus; et fere cuncti magis / Peritura laudant : hos mouet formae decus, / Hos mollis aetas, hos uagae rerum uices./ Mouet animus omnes fortis, et leto obuius,* vv.1138-1147 ("The maid herself comes on with eyes in modesty cast down, but yet her face is radiant and the dying splendour of her beauty shines beyond its wont; as Phoebus' light is wont to appear more glorious at the moment of his setting, when the stars come back to their stations and the uncertain daylight is dimmed by the approach of night. Astonished gazes the whole multitude, for all ever admire the more what must soon pass from them. Some, her beauty moves; some, her tender youth; some, the shifting changes of her fortune; but one and all, her courage, dauntless and death-confronting.").

61. In Euripides' *Hecuba*, the entire Achaean army, impressed by Polyxena's heroic attitude, feverishly tried to prepare her pyre, gathering symbols of athletic apotheosis like leaves, scrubs and fine clothes. They even taunt each other: *Ἕστηκας, ὦ κάκιστε, τῆι νεάνιδι / οὐ πέπλον οὐδὲ κόσμον ἐν χεροῖν ἔχων;* vv. 577-579 ("Do you stand still, ignoble wretch, with no robe or ornament to bring for the maiden? will you give nothing to her that showed such peerless bravery and spirit?"). This admiration is also conveyed by Talthybius to Hecuba, who, amid her horrible misery and pain, still manages to feel proud: *καὶ νῦν τὸ μὲν σὸν ὥστε μὴ στένειν πάθος / οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην ἐξαλείψασθαι φρενός· / τὸ δ´ αὖ λίαν παρεῖλες ἀγγελθεῖσά μοι/ γενναῖος.*, vv. 589-591 ("I can not efface from my mind the memory of your sufferings sufficiently to stay my tears; yet the story of

In this heroic world death is seen as a spectacle, and therefore a confirmation of stereotypes. To break this cycle of female inferiority before the morbid mob of warriors and other onlookers, Polyxena takes on the task of staging her own death. It will be a beautiful death, but she allows neither direct broadcast nor subsequent reporting. Polyxena's plans are only revealed by herself, in her own terms; and her walk to the place of sacrifice is made alone,[62] followed by a hesitant Pyrrhus (scene 7, pp. 81-82), and with the guards at a distance.[63]

Aware of the present and future significance of her gestures, she further provokes Pyrrhus:

> Políxena:
> Sim. Estraguei-te o espetáculo, não foi?
> Tenciono estragá-lo até ao fim.
> Não me atareis as mãos, soldados. Não
> me tocareis sequer. Altivamente
> caminharei. E mais altivamente
> receberei o golpe no pescoço. (p. 80)
>
> Polyxena:
> Yes. I ruined your show, didn't I?
> I intend to ruin it to the very end.

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your noble death has taken from the keenness of my grief."). Seneca doesn't mention Polyxena's funeral, but takes the opportunity to criticise the staging of violence and the voyeurism around it, so typical of the Roman civilization. Thus, he focuses on the hypocritical emotion of the audience, in which Greeks and Trojans acted as one, epitomised by the terse sentence *Odit scelus, spectatque* – they hate the show, and yet can't help watching. (*Praeceps ut altis cecidit e muris puer, / Fleuitque Achiuum turba, quod fecit, nefas; / Idem ille populus aliud ad facinus redit, / Tumulumque Achillis. […] / Crescit theatri more. Concursus frequens/ Impleuit omne litus. Hi classis moras/ Hac morte solui rentur; hi stirpem hostium/ Gaudent recidi: magna pars uulgi leuis/. Odit scelus, spectatque : nec Troes minus/ Suum frequentant funus, et pauidi metu/ Partem ruentis ultimam Troiae uident*.", vv. 1119-1122; 1126-1132; "After the boy fell headlong from the lofty tower, and the throng of Greeks wept for the crime it wrought, that same host turned to a second crime and to Achilles' tomb. […] The surging mass increases as if thronging to a theatre and has filled all the shore. Some think that by this death the fleet's delay is ended; some joy that the foeman's stock is cut away; the greater part of the heedless mob detest the crime – and gaze. Nor any less do the Trojans throng their own funeral and, quaking with fear, look on at the last act of the fall of Troy").

62. In *Troades*, when the wedding procession that so chocked the mob arrived at Achilles mausoleum, the princess ascended to the top of the tomb with Pyrrhus right behind her: *Pyrrhum antecedit: omnium mentes tremunt: / Mirantur, ac miserantur*, vv. 1148-1149 ("Pyrrhus follows; the hearts of all are filled with terror, wonder, pity.").

63. Hélia Correia and Jaime Rocha do not follow Euripides and Seneca in the detail of the description of Polyxena's beauty and dignity: only her words give information about the sacrifice.

You will not tie my hands, soldiers. You won't
touch me at all. Haughtily
I will walk. And more proudly
I will receive the blow on my neck.

Pirro:
Confesso, mulher, que me deixaste muito
desconcertado. Esperava choros, arranhões na face. (p. 80)

Pyrrhus:
I confess, woman, you have left me very
disconcerted. I expected cries, scratches on the cheek.

The princely haughtiness of Polyxena in *As Troianas* is not the fierce and furious silence of *Troades*, it is rather based on the indifference allowed by empowerment and reinforced by successive statements:

Políxena:
Querias que eu confirmasse o teu poder.
E é o meu que confirmo. Este poder
de humilhar-te através da indiferença. (p. 80)

Polyxena:
You wanted me to confirm your power.
And it is mine that I confirm. This power
of humiliating you through indifference.

This behaviour, so far away from the stereotypes of the feminine, worries Pyrrhus, who immediately associates it with those of the masculine:[64]

Pirro:
Isto está a ficar muito difícil. Tanta conversa.
Tanta ausência de temor. Como se fossem os
soldados a criar-te. (p. 80)

Pyrrhus:
This is getting really hard. So much talk.
So much absence of fear. As if the
soldiers raised you.

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64. In *Troades*, Polyxena's fierce attitude leaves Pyrrhus hesitant, which is extraordinary, given his readiness for violence: *Conuersa ad ictum stat truci uultu ferox ./ Tam fortis animus omnium mentes ferit :/ Nouumque monstrum est, Pyrrhus ad caedem piger.*, vv. 1153-1155 (She, "facing the stroke, stood there with stern look and courageous. A spirit so bold strikes the hearts of all and – strange prodigy – Pyrrhus is slow to kill.").

Polyxena's statements define the freedom available to someone – and particularly to a woman – who has lost everything but can keep the dignity intact. She is not yet a *de facto* slave,[65] but even in death she will not bow to her ghostly groom:

Políxena:
[…]
[Aquiles] Não terá o prazer de ouvir os gritos,
os rogos de uma vítima. O silêncio,
uma tranquilidade principesca,
não a resignação, não. A distância
entre os meus sentimentos e os teus
longe me manterá do teu alcance. (p. 81)

Polyxena:
[...]
[Achilles] He will not have the pleasure of hearing the cries,
the pleas of a victim. Silence,
a princely tranquility,
not resignation, no. The distance
between my feelings and yours
far will keep me from your grasp.

The spectacle of her death has thus been turned into a triumph:

Políxena:
(*Para os guardas*)
Não me toqueis, já disse. Eu sou princesa
e daqui saio em passos de triunfo.
Quem nos não dobra não nos vencerá. (p. 81)

Polyxena:
(To the guards)
Don't touch me, I said. I am a princess
and I leave here in triumphal steps.
He who does not bend us will not overcome us.

This maxim – "He who does not bend us will not overcome us." – reveals the power that is available to a seemingly helpless victim forced into supreme humiliation and anihilation. This power persists after death, through freedom in Hades and fame on earth:

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65. "Políxena: Sinto-me tão aliviada, sabes? / Pois uma coisa é certa, não serei/ a escrava de ninguém. Não terei dono.", p. 80 ("Polyxena: I feel so relieved, you know? / For one thing is certain, I won't be/ anybody's slave. I will not have an owner.").

Pirro
Serás a escrava de meu pai no Hades.

Políxena
No Hades não há escravos. Há só sombras.
Feliz de quem deixar a sua história
na boca dos mortais. Eu deixo a minha. (p. 81)

Pyrrhus
You will be my father's slave in Hades.

Polyxena
In Hades there are no slaves. There are only shadows.
Happy are those who leave their story
in the mouth of mortals. I leave mine.

It is, after all, a feminine *kleos*, one which convinces Pyrrhus, as it defeats him in his own male domain, leading him to pay homage:

Pirro
Serias uma digna esposa de meu pai se ele tivesse
vivido…Digna dele serás na morte[66].

Pyrrhus
You would have been a worthy wife to my father if he had
lived... Worthy of him you would be in death. (p. 81)

This reinforces the idea, already visible in Euripides' *Hecuba*, that a *kalos thanatos* allows anyone to achieve glory, through the same singers who maintain the heroic system...

Polyxena's empowerment in *As Troianas* is followed by that of Andromache, who also prefers to direct the narrative and control the death of her son.[67] Finally,

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66. This lack of submission may prevent Achilles' spirit from being appeased. Pyrrhus admits defeat: "o sangue nobre e gelado que dela sairá para impregnar o altar e as/ cinzas não vai matar-lhe a sede de vingança" (p. 82). ("the noble and icy blood that will come out of her to impregnate the altar and the / ashes will not quench his thirst for revenge"). In Seneca's *Troades*, the boycott of Achilles' plan may be also hinted: *nec tamen, moriens, adhuc/ Deponit animos; cecidit, ut Achilli grauem/ Factura terram, prona, et irato impetu.* ("Yet, though in the very act of death, she put not by her spirit; she fell, as if thus to make the earth heavy on Achilles, prone and with angry thud.", vv. 1158-1160). Even so, *non stetit fusus cruor,/ Humoue summa fluxit : obduxit statim,/ Saeuusque totum sanguinem tumulus bibit*. ("The shed blood stayed not nor flowed off on the surface of the ground; instantly the savage mound sucked it down and drank the whole draught of gore.", vv. 1163-1165).

67. Andromache doesn't let Thaltybius kill her son and chokes the child herself. To keep the appearances, the Greek throws the little body from the top of the tower.

Cassandra decides to end her fate as a discredited mouthpiece of misfortune by cutting out her own tongue, before embarking for her death in Mycenae.

Some Concluding Remarks: Polyxena and Kleos in the Feminine

It seems clear that the Polyxena of Hélia Correia and Jaime Rocha shares most of her traits with that of Euripides, particularly in *Hecuba*: both haughty and claiming their freedom and status as Princesses, they manage to win the respect of their killers and lasting honour and fame. However, to achieve this, both follow the principles usually associated with male heroism. This attitude is shared by the silent Polyxena of *Troades*, whose fierce behaviour when facing death is significantly the same as that of young Astianax. In Euripides, however, she is more concerned with fulfilling her obligations as a member of a royal house, and unable to tolerate the loss of her haughty status and privileges. Seneca follows that stance, as Andromache points out when verbalizing Polyxena's thoughts. Hélia Correia and Jaime Rocha, on the other hand, take the solidary defense of women's dignity as Polyxena's fundamental driving force, although her privilege was patent at the beginning.

Another difference in relation to Euripides' plays concerns the level of prominence of the Aeacids, much greater in *As Troianas* by Hélia Correia and Jaime Rocha, both in the time on stage and importance in the action, and in the emphasis given to their arrogance, cruelty and passion for death. Such characteristics evoke Seneca's *Troades*, where Pyrrhus and Agamemnon reenact the violent quarrels of the *Iliad*, with the contributions of the Roman experience and a gnomic Stoicism that seems to have put the king of Mycenae on the path to wisdom.

It is in the work of Hélia Correia and Jaime Rocha that the contemporary updating of the theme of violence and the condition of women allow a more complete approach to the heroic mentality personified by the Aeacids. They use honour and future glory – *time* and *kleos* – as justification and compensation for violence, in a cycle as vicious as that of war itself. There also occurs a repositioning of Polyxena in her traditional status as an insubmissive victim. Euripides had portrayed a young woman unable to abandon her status as a princess and presenting herself primarily as an individual. Seneca kept her quiet, perhaps because he considered that the victory of the Euripidean Polyxena had no philosophical basis.[68] Hélia Correia and Jaime Rocha transform her into a symbol of female resistance to the repeated and constant forms of oppression unleashed by the masculine values that Homer, and later on the tragics, so

68. Cfr. Stuart Lawrence, "Stoic morality and Polyxena's 'free' death in Euripides' Hecuba", *Acta Classica*, 2010, Vol. 53 (2010), 21-32.

sublimely verbalised. Even so, her final victory was fought and won on that same battlefield of glory Hector had described long before:

> νῦν αὖτέ με μοῖρα κιχάνει.
> μὴ μὰν ἀσπουδί γε καὶ ἀκλειῶς ἀπολοίμην,
> ἀλλὰ μέγα ῥέξας τι καὶ ἐσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι. (*Il.* 22, 303-305).[69]

My doom has come upon me; let me not then die ingloriously and without a struggle, but let me first do some great thing that shall be told among men hereafter.

Polyxena's and the Aeacids' story is thus an outstanding example of the perennial fascination for the Homeric world and its classical reassessment through tragedy. Those "dilacerating syntheses", contradictory like the human condition, still offer almost infinite possibilities for the discussion about who we are.

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