



Miriam R. Haier

Miriam Reviews *Trojan Women* at Stages of Learning



A whiny Greek god Apollo is the first to drop the buzzword: On Poseidon's insider talk-show, he accuses Athena of "flip-flopping." The term somehow still brings to mind neon-colored beach footwear on a sunny summer day, but it served its purpose for the 2004 presidential election. Now the easily recognizable catch phrase helps to adapt Euripides's tragedy *Trojan Women* to a modern context. Although the ancient Greek playwright penned the original tragedy to highlight the aftermath of the Trojan War, the Stages of Learning production makes it clear that the ideas and events surrounding that conflict are painfully relevant to the present.

A sheet of background information about the *Trojan Women* is provided for those interested, but this production is understandable either way. After Poseidon, Apollo and even the hard-hearted Athena agree to punish the recently favored Greeks, there is a frenetic scene-change. Soon the audience is with Hecuba in Troy, as the once-queen awaits her enslavement to one of the detestable Greek victors.

Although the production never returns to the initial setting of a Poseidon-hosted talk show, modern-day media methods are used throughout. A meddling ÒShock and AweÓ news reporter facilitates much of the drama, announcing everything from the enslavement arrangements to the fate of Prince Hector's young son -- all while the camera is rolling. His cheesy Òand we're backÓ announcements are ridiculous; it soon becomes clear that the anything-for-



ratings, rubbernecking camera hog is a direct bite on modern media and its viewers' lust for tragedy (as long as it isn't theirs). When ÓShock and AweÓ staff members finally look saddened at the Trojans' plight, it seems as though there is hope for humanity. But alas, they are only looking to capitalize on another's hurt -- their tears stop rolling as soon as the cameras do. Sincerity is scarce, and cruelty is rampant. Finally, an outraged Hecuba screams into the camera at the Greek public: ÓYou love war more than you love being human!Ó A pregnant pause allows time for theatre audience members to shift uncomfortably in their seats. The fallen Trojan queen is speaking directly to us.

Hecuba and her fellow Trojan women have lost everything, and even their wails are ineffective against a stronghold of indifferent malice. Between the turmoil and torment, there are commercial breaks and opportunities for the Greek television audience members to vote on the womens' fate. One by one, the women are led to the Greek ships to start new lives as mistresses or slaves. Soon, a dramatic Jerry-Springer-like show sweeps the stage, the ultimate market for exploiting one's worst moments. The Trojan women are easily recognizable when they switch to roles as obnoxious audience members, sending a clear message: sometimes one suffers, and sometimes one feeds off another's pain.

*Trojan Women* is an excellent example of how a solid production can turn even an ancient Greek tragedy into an up-close look at today's brand of apathy. The actors' antics are hilarious, but laughter at truth cannot last long. Dying chuckles are buried under a disturbing sense of reality. *Trojan Women* requires complete suspension of disbelief, with gods running around and ancient Greeks enjoying airtime -- but, in cases such as these, fiction is the best way to discover an unsettling truth.