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ANTONIS K. PETRIDES

*EURIPIDES, THE TROJAN WOMEN: A COMIC*  
BY ROSANNA BRUNO AND ANNE CARSON.

A SURVEY



ABSTRACT: This article examines the basic parameters of *Euripides The Trojan Women: A Comic* by Rosanna Bruno and Anne Carson, a beautiful and moving new version of Euripides's classic drama, which combines the profundity of tragedy with the quirkiness of the comics genre. Bruno and Carson's black-and-white graphic narrative follows the structure of the *Trojan Women* closely but retells the story by transforming the characters into speaking animals and objects — with the odd ironical exception of figures retaining their human form. Carson's adaptation of Euripides's Greek mixes high poetry, paracomedy, and intertextuality with coarse language, North American argot, and ample anachronisms. Carson's text even develops an 'agonistic' relationship with the original, directly or indirectly questioning the 'propriety' of tragic diction. Bruno and Carson deliberately toe the line between 'high' and 'low'. Even as a 'comic', or perhaps thanks to the generally perceived antinomy between medium and content, this newfangled *Trojan Women* remains overwhelmingly tragic.

WHAT IS THERE in common between the modern poet Frederick Seidel, the gay black author James Baldwin, and Robert Graves's WWI memoir *Goodbye to All That* (1929)? How do Raymond Pettibon's sketches of tidal waves connect with an American company making workers' clothes? What unites *The Foot Book: Dr Seuss's Wacky Book of Opposites* (1968), a picture guide for young children to learn about feet, and Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (1980–1991), a sombre graphic novel about the Holocaust, where the Jews are zoomorphically represented as mice and the Nazis as evil cats and pigs? Does Shakespeare's *Othello* relate to Samuel

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\* Heartfelt thanks are due to Professor Stavros Tsitsiridis and the anonymous reviewer of *Logeion* for the insightful observations.

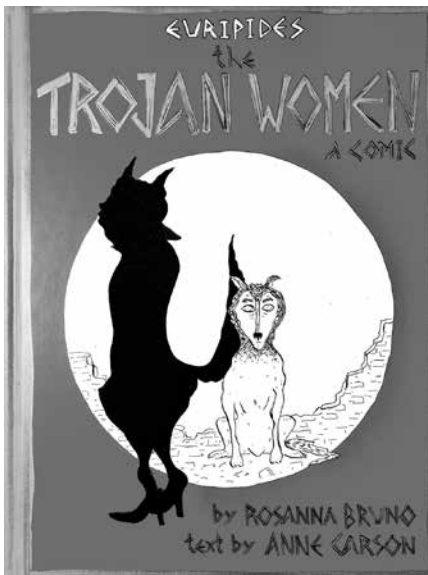


Fig. 1

Beckett's *The Unnameable* any more than a sticker book presenting canine breeds to Socrates's quip about "the unexamined life" (βίος ἀνεξέταστος) or the ancient myth of the Heliaides? Can you mix poplars, gearboxes, vanity mirrors, goddesses in the hybrid form of talking overalls with floating owl heads (or masks), crows, cats, foxes, cows, and dogs into anything making any sense? And even if you could, what would that have to do with Euripides's *Trojan Women*?

In Rosanna Bruno and Anne Carson's new comic-book version of Euripides's timeless play, *The Trojan Women: A Comic* (New York: New Directions Publishing 2021), the answer is "everything". [Fig. 1]

Of course, this gem of a book, the latest and most quirky chapter in the history of *Trojan Women* receptions,<sup>1</sup> is not simply a treasure trove of intertextual and intervisual references.<sup>2</sup> It is also a masterpiece of imaginative sketching, compact storytelling, and evocative poetry. It transmutes, in the most pleasantly surprising fashion and with the effortless ease in which its new Helen changes from silver fox to vanity mirror, an ancient dramatic text into an arresting, highly theatrical black-and-white visual narrative, boasting a rare blend of quirky humour and tragic pathos.

Could a light-hearted and, for many, lightweight genre<sup>3</sup> like the comic book encapsulate the intellectual gravity and moral complexity of Greek tragedy, its multitonality, multimodality, and multimodality? Could it ever approximate the clamouring desperation, almost the nihilism, of especially the *Trojan Women*, arguably the bleakest play in the Greek tragic corpus? Counterintuitive as that may be, the answer is positive. In the time

1. For an overview of the reception of *Trojan Women* mainly in the Anglo-Saxon world, see Goff (2009) 78–135. A complete 'cultural history' of the play that would comprise its continuous worldwide appeal is yet to be written.
2. Not every critic was impressed by this overload of referentiality; cf. Hall (21.05.2021): "I prefer my art less cluttered by displays of intertextual bravura".
3. On comics and the 'low' see Kovacs and Marshall (2011) vii–ix.

of #MeToo,<sup>4</sup> global pandemics, and unending wars,<sup>5</sup> Bruno and Carson turned to an ageless tale of commodifying women and dehumanising men, recasting it into a medium not universally acknowledged as conducive to deep emotion and intricate storytelling. What they produced is an utterly original and profoundly moving *version*<sup>6</sup> of Euripides's drama — relevant, fresh, ironical, shocking, and, thanks to Bruno's "distinctively funky drawing style",<sup>7</sup> Carson's brilliant mixture of high poetry and North American argot, and the duo's fearless use of humour, wondrously in sync with Euripides's own subversive use of paracomedy.<sup>8</sup>

Bruno and Carson deliberately toe the line between 'high' and 'low', the 'tragic' and the 'comic' (pun intended!). Preferring the traditional term 'comic' over the defensive (and rather pretentious) current labels, such as 'graphic novel' or 'sequential art', Bruno and Carson take a stance in the debate about their genre's legitimacy and fundamental seriousness, rebutting elitist distinctions between 'high' and 'popular' art. Meanwhile, they also produce a pleasing paradox on the very cover of their book. The cover reserves another mind-blowing revelation for the reader/viewer, divulged by the image of an erect, curvy, sensual fox in high heels ogled by an old dog crouching in front of a torn wall: this most grave of Greek stories will be zoomorphically told. Is that possible? Apparently, it is. Even as a 'comic', even eschewing the overt pathos of anthropomorphy, or perhaps thanks to

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4. One can only wonder if p. 20, an emphatic 'splash page' (i.e. a page containing a single illustration, without borders) reiterating in the form of a resounding cry Hekabe's futile "No" to her becoming Odysseus' slave, echoes the central slogan/demand of the #MeToo movement that "No means No". As the Anonymous reviewer adds, 'splash pages' in comics "usually have meta- or extra- diegetic intention".

5. Cf. Carson at the online book launch event, at 28:00 onwards: "For some reason [the *Trojan Women*] seemed to be a play suitable to our strange pandemic times." The host of the event, Ryan Cook, added that the 'mug shots' of the chorus (see below, p. 284) appeared as if they were participating in a Zoom call.

6. I italicize the term *version* as I use it as a term of reception studies, "a refiguration of a source (usually literary or dramatic) which is too free and selective to rank as a translation" (Hardwick 2003, 10).

7. Bruno's style is thus described on the Amazon.com page of her first book, *The Slanted Life of Emily Dickinson* (2017).

8. As the Anonymous reviewer kindly notes, Euripides's "humour" can be gruesome on occasions, "as it is in the *Bacchae*'s cross-dressing scene; far from an 'anti-climax', that paracomical scene renders the very peak of Pentheus' tragic madness". A similarly unsettling effect is produced in the *Trojan Women* by Menelaus's sarcastic answer to Hekabe's plea not to take Helen with him on the same ship: *τί δ' ἔστι; μείζον βροῖτος ἢ πάροιθ' ἔχει;* (*Tr.* 1050). On "paracomedy" in Greek tragedy see Jendza (2020).

the perceived antinomy between medium and content, the *Trojan Women* can remain disturbingly, overwhelmingly tragic.

Bruno gives the following chronicle of her collaboration with Carson:<sup>9</sup>

*Anne and I met through a mutual friend a few years ago. One day she asked me if I'd like to collaborate with her. I thought maybe she was kidding, but I said yes, even though I wasn't going to hold her to it. Not long after, she asked if I had read the Trojan Women by Euripides. I said I hadn't, nor had I seen the film with Katherine Hepburn. She told me NOT to see that film but to pick up a translation of the play and let her know if I saw any images. I read what seemed to be an acceptable version (never having read the original in Greek), and I saw nothing. Not a single image popped into my head. I was so disappointed to tell her I couldn't do it. Then she sent her text. Images hit me instantly. Hekabe and the 'women' of Troy were suddenly very real and, ironically, more human. Anne allowed me so much freedom to respond to her text. We corresponded occasionally via email, and I would send a few images. She sent me a sticker book of dog breeds and suggested mug shots would be a great way to introduce the chorus, which, of course, it was. And whenever I doubted if I was taking something in the right direction, I just referred back to Anne's description of Athene as a pair of overalls and knew everything was okay.*

Bruno had experimented with the graphic novel five years before the *Trojan Women*, painting an alternative (public) life for “America’s favourite recluse”, Emily Dickinson (*The Slanted Life of Emily Dickinson*, 2017). Neither was this Carson’s virginal brush combining (creative) translation and the visual arts: in *Antigonick* (2012), the Canadian classicist/translator/poet collaborated with artist Bianca Stone, who accompanied Carson’s text with stunning drawings. But despite being an exercise in generic hybridity, *Antigonick* was no comic book; for Carson, who never ceases to break new ground, the comic-book adaptation of a complete Greek tragedy was a first.

However, more than a personal bet, Bruno and Carson’s shared endeavour braved a relatively untrodden frontier of adaptation and transmediality. Contrary to the fecund Shakespearean scene where ‘illustrated’ versions of the Bard’s tragedies abound, and barring cases such as the Greek *Κλασικά Εικονογραφημένα* (*Classics Illustrated*) series<sup>10</sup> or Ali Smith and Laura

9. Reported in Blaisdell (19.06.2021).

10. This series included adaptations of Aeschylus’ *Persians*, *Choephoroi*, and *Eumenides*; pseudo-Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*; Sophocles’ *Antigone*, *Oedipus Rex*, *Electra*,

Paoletti's *The Story of Antigone* (2011) which addressed younger audiences, 'adult' graphic-novel do-overs of Greek tragic dramas are few and far between. My research (in the Greek and Anglophone markets) produced only a few relevant examples predating Bruno and Carson's work, the most recent one being Nikos Dachris' *Oedipus Rex* (2019).<sup>11</sup> In 2022, one year after the *Trojan Women*, Eric Shanower and Edward Einhorn published an *Iphigenia in Aulis: The Age of Bronze*.<sup>12</sup>

#### AESTHETIC OVERVIEW

Bruno and Carson's comic follows the Euripidean play's structure closely. Even the relative emphasis on the constitutive parts reflects the original's flow: the Prologue (pp. 6–13), the Cassandra scene (pp. 21–29), the Agon (pp. 52–62), and Astyanax's burial are naturally accentuated; the Andromache-episode (pp. 36–48) is the apogee of the book. Bruno's drawing style is distinctive and striking. Assimilating influences from Art Spiegelman<sup>13</sup> as well as Alison Bechdel, Ben Katchor, and Lynda Barry, Bruno paints the story entirely in black and white — a “visually powerful” choice and “not a crossover into [Bruno's] other worlds” (Bruno is an artist otherwise working exclusively with colour).<sup>14</sup> All visual narrative elements are thoughtfully chosen, advancing the overall vivid effect:

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*Philoctetes*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*; and Euripides' *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, and *Iphigenia in Aulis*. An overview of the series is accessible here: <https://www.mycomics.gr/classics/classics%20illustrated.htm>.

11. In the Greek market, there are also: *Antigone* (2006) and *Iphigenia in Aulis* (2006) by (author) T. Apostolides and (illustrators) K. Aronis and G. Tragakis; a *Medea* (1998) by (author and illustrator) N. Giamalakis; and a *Helen* (2009) by (author) V. Anastasiadis and (illustrator) G. Antonopoulos.
12. The *Age of Bronze* is, in fact, a series of comic books, which started being published in 2013, aiming to tell the complete story of the Trojan War in comics format. A version of the Iphigenia story was already included in the series as *Age of Bronze, Book 2: Sacrifice* (2019). *Age of Bronze, Book 3: Betrayal, Part One*, published in 2022, tackles the story of Philoctetes. For the series see Kovacs (2016). Peter Milligan and Davide Gianfelice's *Greek Street, Volume 1: Blood Calls for Blood* (2010) is another interesting case, conflating various Greek dramas as well as Homer's epics and transposing them to modern-day London. On this comic, see Marshall and Kovacs (2016) xvii.
13. Cf. Trinacty (23.07.2021).
14. Bruno at the online book launch event, at 32:30 onwards.





Fig. 2



Fig. 4

1. *The page's layout* is judiciously exploited. Bruno alternates between panel-based pages that create a sense of quick motion and 'splash pages' functioning as spotlights. The 'gutters'<sup>15</sup> are commonly violated in the Andromache scene, where the poplar's branches attack the typographical boundaries of the book as much as Andromache's suffering exceeds human limits.<sup>16</sup> [Fig. 2] Most importantly, to highlight emotion and underline crucial plot turns, panels or splash pages with a black background and white figures alternate with their opposite (white background, black figures). [Fig. 3] To achieve the necessary result, Bruno used a special Japanese ink, Kamei Lettering Sol:

*This Japanese ink is my go-to for drawing comics... I used Kamei to paint the large areas of black in The Trojan Women... I needed the deepest black with a matte finish — it had to appear that there was no end to the depths of darkness.<sup>17</sup>*

15. In comic-book lingo, 'gutters' are the spaces between panels.

16. I cite the Anonymous reviewer's astute addition: "Not only that, but also the sequence of the 'bubbles' is questionable, with their labyrinth-esque connection, thus rendering Andromache's anxious/spasmodic thoughts."

17. Bruno in Davidson (09.07.2021).

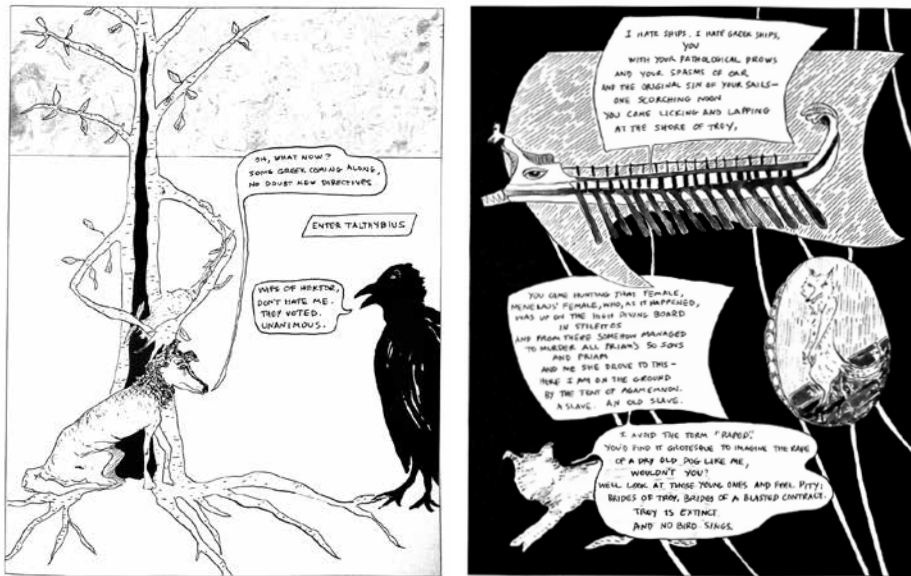


Fig. 3

2. *The textual elements* blend well with the images. Carson's stage directions —deliberately used “to explain, without extra verbiage, the weird frames that [Bruno and Carson gave] to the story”—<sup>18</sup> commonly fall half inside the panel and half in the ‘gutter’, underscoring their liminal nature as textual elements. The speech bubbles are idiosyncratic. Rarely in clear shapes but usually ‘messy’ and ‘trembling’, they seem to reflect the figures’ tension and ontological angst.<sup>19</sup> The lettering produces the same effect: the

18. Bruno at the online book launch event, at 37:44 onwards.

19. On Bruno's use of the speech bubbles, cf. Bamlett (21.06.21): “The speech balloons use a convention we see in other comics to communicate the tonal variation of dialogue by allowing themselves to form a dual intersecting tree structure that is almost organic, except that it grows downwards, one stem for each speaker. Each speaker's words are linked by a narrow channel. Think of it now as a trickle in a fast-moving waterfall that pools every time there is a plateau in the rocks, that is when the character speaks. The position of the trickle is sometimes occluded and shifts directionally. We are tempted to find meaning in those visually comprehended spatial dispositions. Note for instance how Talthybius's link line between speeches (or ‘narrow channel’) is occluded as he sneaks in a reference to the fact that her eldest daughter is no longer probably a virgin and has already been taken by Agamemnon. The effect is to reproduce pools of speech that shape themselves into an integral structure even though fractured by tonal shifts as speech plays different roles — to inform, to persuade and to assert the reality of distinctly gendered military power. This is a masterful use of the genre by the collaborators



Fig. 5



Fig. 7

words are written in irregular handwriting that “actually echoes the state of Troy”.<sup>20</sup> [Fig. 4] Writing entirely in uppercase is the norm in comic books; however, capital letters have acquired a special significance in the era of social media, which, in my view, Bruno and Carson use: caps express an exasperated state of mind — again echoing “the state of Troy”.

3. *Specific techniques*, like using washed-out ink to make it look like the characters are disappearing, make some panels stand out. On p. 32, this method underlines Helen’s elusive, deceptive nature [Fig. 5] however, it mainly encompasses the presentation of the chorus, Hekabe, and the ruins of Troy. Troy is literally being wiped off the map, and her inhabitants are being “erased”. The facing pages 16–17, where 17 is the ‘effaced’ mirror of 16, are a striking example of the effect produced. [Fig. 6] Equally remarkable is p. 77: as the chorus glumly announces to Hekabe that she “will be erased”, their figures are half-blotted out by washed-out ink. [Fig. 7]

where the appearance of the verse is revived as a factor in poetry (as we sometimes forget —except in the obvious cases such as Herbert’s *Easter Wings* which shape the angel’s open wings— it always is).”

20. Bruno in Davidson (09.07.2021).

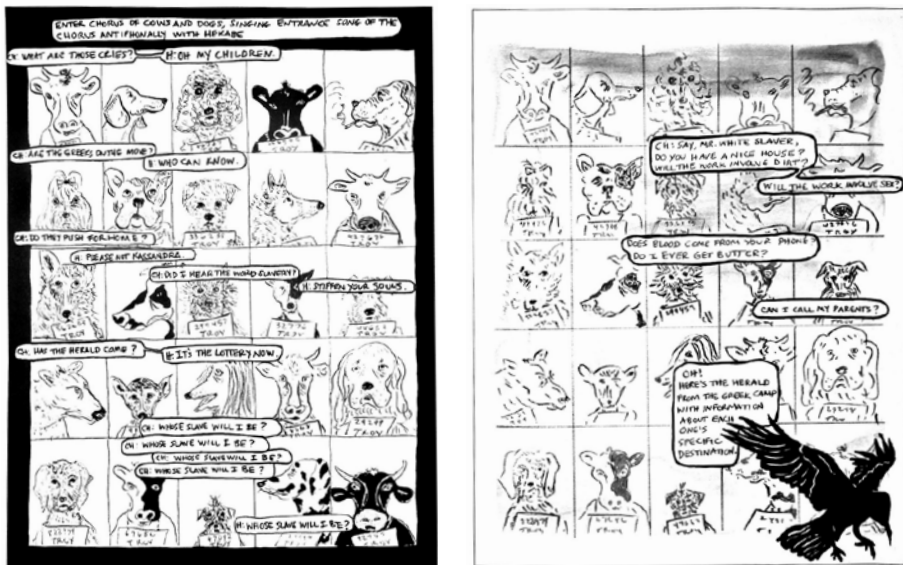


Fig. 6

#### THE CHARACTERS: ZOOMORPHY, PRAGMATOMORPHY, (IRONIC) ANTHROPOMORPHY

Bruno's account of her collaboration with Carson quoted above reveals that the book's fundamental conceit, representing the characters zoomorphically (as animals) and 'pragmatomorphically' (as inanimate objects), was developed at Carson's behest. Several external influences may be traced or suspected. Spiegelman's *Maus*, the first graphic novel awarded a Pulitzer Prize (1992), must have been a strong inspiration. Moreover, in Ali Smith's *The Story of Antigone*, the messenger is already depicted as a crow, like Bruno and Carson's Talthybius. Additional ancient Greek and medieval sources are also likely to have had an impact, at least indirectly: Aesop's speaking animals, the zoomorphic Hellenistic epic parodies (which may already have influenced Spiegelman), the various Byzantine animal romances, and possibly even western medieval tales like Reynard the Fox. Still, it is Euripides's text itself that guided its visual transformation, even though "*Troades* does not concentrate at any length on man/animal".<sup>21</sup> Some drawings, like Poseidon as a giant wave, Helen as a fox, and Andromache as a poplar tree, are the iconised results of analysing the Euripidean characters and situa-

21. Croally (1994) 70 n. 1.

tions. Other images, like Helen's secondary depiction as a vanity mirror, were probably suggested to Carson by specific lines in Euripides's play.<sup>22</sup>

Zoomorphy and pragmatomorphy enact the dialectics of high/low, juxtaposing the comic to the tragic and creating an *anoikeyōsis* / *Verfremdungseffekt*: the non-human forms magnify the impression of the characters' suffering on the viewer/reader by pushing it towards the absurd. As Bruno put it, the illustrations' implicit humour enhances the work's emotional tenor, making it more tragic.<sup>23</sup> Carson elaborated:

*It has something to do with what you can do with your face: extreme grief contorts the face in the same way that extreme laughter does. It's like they meet at the back, the too much and the too little. Maybe, just because we are so limited as human beings, that's the whole circumference that we have.*<sup>24</sup>

In this spirit, Bruno and Carson's reducing the characters to animals and objects literalises a metaphor and stages Euripides's fundamental premise in solid, tangible form: war dehumanises victims and victimisers alike.<sup>25</sup> Bruno and Carson's characters fall into three categories, which I would term (a) *zoomorphic*, comprising personages in animal form (Hekabe, the captive women of the chorus, Polyxene, the Greek herald Talthybius, and the 'silent chorus' of his henchmen); (b) *pragmatomorphic*, including *dramatis personae* drawn as inanimate objects or plants (the gods Poseidon and Athene, Menelaus, and, astonishingly, Andromache and Astyanax); and (c) *ironically anthropomorphic*, containing the exceptional characters that retain their human figure for special discursive purposes (Cassandra, and a group of characters that are mere mentions in Euripides, but, in the comic, feature

22. For Helen and vanity mirrors, see *Tr.* 1107–9: *χρύσεια δ' ἔνοπτρα, παρθένων / χάριτας, ἔχουσα τυγχάνει Διὸς κόρα.*

23. Online book launch event, at 47:40 onwards.

24. Online book launch event, at 48:33 onwards.

25. The Anonymous reviewer's comment is worth quoting: "Biologically speaking, we are (genetically programmed to be) more compassionate/empathetic towards other humans than animals. And, as far as animals are concerned, we are more compassionate/empathetic towards those species which, in evolutionary terms, we are closer to (i.e., mammals rather than reptiles or fish). See, for example, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-019-56006-9>". The reviewer wonders whether "this biological basis has played any role in the creators' decision to employ dogs, foxes and cows (rather than, e.g., ants)" and if "that decision, [was] perhaps, a fine way to both picture the dehumanisation which war entails and to still provoke empathy". By inkling, I believe that the answer to both questions is positive.

briefly as physical presences, namely, Paris, Ganymedes, Hera and Aphrodite). The zoomorphic and anthropomorphic categories are subdivided into subgroups. Some figures are drawn to elicit pity (the Trojan victims); others are malevolent depictions (the ‘silent chorus’ of Greek soldiers accompanying first Talthybius and then Menelaus), evoking the violence and brutality of the victors. Some characters, like the dimorphic, shape-shifting Helen, straddle the zoomorphic and anthropomorphic categories. Others, like Talthybius, blur the boundaries between benevolence and malevolence. In a special way, Troy itself, represented as a decrepit, decadent hotel reduced to rubble, becomes a character in its own right.

Table 1: List of characters by category in Bruno and Carson’s  
*Trojan Women: A Comic*

<i>Zoomorphic</i>	<i>Pragmatomorphic</i>	<i>(Ironically) anthropomorphic</i>	<i>Liminal/ Dimorphous</i>	<i>Sui generis</i>
Hekabe	Poseidon	Cassandra	Helen	Troy
Chorus	Athene	Paris		
Polyxene	Menelaus	Ganymedes		
Talthybius	<i>Characters represented as plants</i>			
The Greek army	Andromache	Aphrodite		
	Astyanax	Hera		

Benignly zoomorphic are the images of the victimised Trojan captives—women and their young children—and Hekabe. The Trojan women have become cows and dogs: reduced to slavery, “they are being herded here and there” like lifeless commodities.<sup>26</sup> This figuration, however, also carries positive value: “the dog”, mused Carson, “is an animal that has enormous dignity no matter what happens to it — and bad things are happening to dogs”.<sup>27</sup> For the chorus, Bruno drew inspiration from John W. Golden’s *Dogs*, a 2014 sticker book depicting various dog breeds in an amusing cartoon-like and mug shot-like fashion. [Fig. 8] The cows and dogs of the chorus are

26. To Hall (21.05.2021), this choice is also “reminiscent of the lauded public cattle herds of Troy that grazed outside its walls as well as the dogs that Homer tells roamed at Priam’s gates”.

27. Online book launch event, at 29:40 onwards.



Fig. 8

shown *en face* or *en profile*, wearing a label with the word Troy and an individual number on it for each member: they are now literally ‘captives’, prisoners of war *and* animals for sale. In the choral odes, the ‘mug shots’ of the chorus occupy the margins of facing pages, perhaps evoking the relevant ancient and modern theories about the tragic chorus’ rectangular arrangement and stationery placement during the *stasima*.<sup>28</sup> [Fig. 9]

Drawing human beings in extreme misery as adorable house pets is a powerful visual irony. Interviewed by Zach Davidson, Bruno unpacked her process as follows:

*Carson gave this book to me with a note suggesting it might be a good idea to introduce the chorus in The Trojan Women as a page of mug shots. I knew then that this collaboration was going to be fun. The images in the sticker book are meant to be classic representations of well-known breeds. I wanted to create personalised versions of popular breeds as well as a few atypical mutts. Some of the dogs I drew are based on my friends’ pets. I wanted each creature to have a look of fear or grief—for the animals to inspire empathy. I learned to see the cows as dogs by the end of it—their stature reduced to canine proportions.*<sup>29</sup>

Hekabe’s canine metamorphosis is already a datum of her myth. In Euripides’s *Hecuba*, she is eventually transformed into a dog and buried at Cynossema (Eur. *Hec.* 1259–74). In Bruno and Carson, she is “an ancient, emaciated sled dog — of filth and wrath” (p. 14). Her reaction to the news that she is to become Odysseus’ slave (p. 19) shows the *πυρρὰ δέργματα* mentioned in Eur. *Hec.* 1265. [Fig. 10 & 11] Her stance during the Agon

28. See, e.g., Lawler (1964) 82–5, Pickard-Cambridge (1988), 239–42. *Contra*: Wiles (1997) 87–113.

29. Bruno in Davidson (09.07.2021).

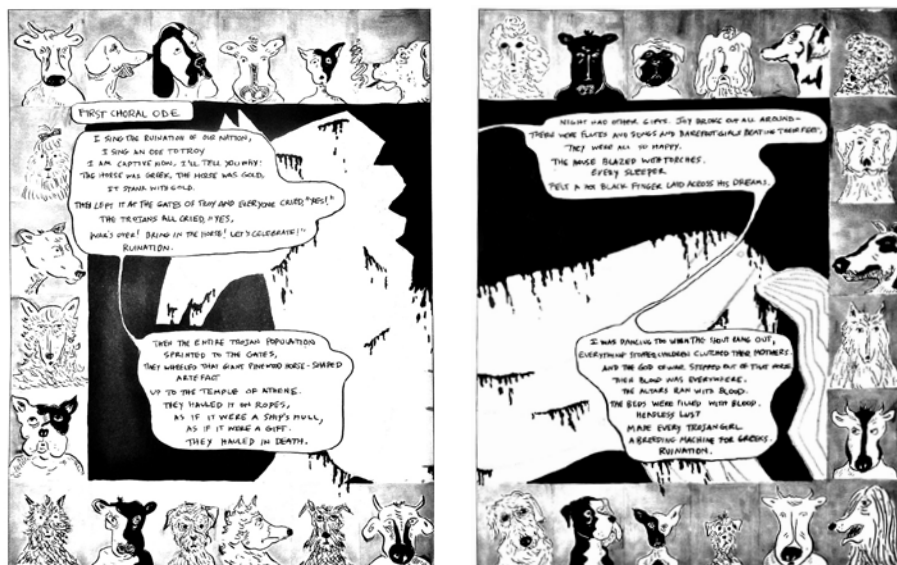


Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

with Helen is just as forcefully depicted. For the most part, however, Hekabe is shown as a dejected, defeated creature whose glory days are gone — like Troy. Sledge dogs “carry other people’s weight”.<sup>30</sup> Hekabe’s stupendous loss of fifty children measures Troy’s collective pain. As in Euripides’s play, Bruno and Carson’s Hekabe barely lifts herself up — razed to the ground, as it were, like her city itself.<sup>31</sup>

30. Online book launch event, at 29:10 onwards.

31. Cf. Chute (29.07.2021): “How to portray this boundless anguish? ‘Oh let me lie’, Hekabe beseeches the Chorus, in one of Carson’s typically engaging formulations. ‘Good posture’s kind of a right-wing concept. I’m past it. God! Now, why did I say that? Gods never helped me’. Her weary, resigned face, and the horizontal flattening of her body on the ground, pack a wallop — as does the posture of the shrunk, eviscerated tree when





Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

The Trojan civilians, especially the children, are also depicted as dogs, specifically young cubs. Bruno's drawing of these cubs behind a tall fence crying out for their mothers as they are being taken away is poignant (p. 65): by drawing thick, tall and narrowly-spaced rails, the illustrator possibly alludes to the (thus-built) notorious Trump Wall.<sup>32</sup> [Fig. 12] Polyxene stands out among the young cubs of Troy. Sitting by Achilles' tomb, waiting to be sacrificed to please the dead man's whim, she is reading a book (p. 19). This is *The Foot Book: Dr Seuss's Wacky Book of Opposites*. [Fig. 13] Bruno and Carson bittersweetly make Hekabe's youngest child so young as to be attracted by such a reading. It may also not be irrelevant that Dr Seuss authored this book soon after his wife's passing, "to feel no pain" for her loss. What for him was a *πανσίλυπον* becomes, for Bruno and Carson's Hekabe, a mordant cue of the inanity of Polyxene's murder.

Malevolent zoomorphy affects the Greek army, except for Menelaus, who is otherwise portrayed

her son is taken from her. Carson and Bruno are keenly attentive to the shape-shifting of the bereft."

32. One also wonders whether Bruno was influenced by the images of Latino children being separated from their mothers by cruel US immigration officers. Images such as this circulated widely: see, for example, these two reportages: (a) <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/sep/12/us-immigration-detention-facilities>, (b) <https://www.thedailybeast.com/inhumane-advocates-decry-the-separation-of-families-at-border>.



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

(further below). The ‘silent chorus’ of soldiers following Talthybius and Menelaus are crows and cats, respectively, malicious but in a ridiculous manner, like cardboard baddies. The Greek officers’ feline lackeys are reminiscent of, perhaps even directly descendent from, Spiegelman’s cat Nazis in *Maus*.<sup>33</sup> [Fig. 14 & 15] Talthybius himself is a liminal form — evoking this character’s own oscillation between humane pity and pragmatic apathy in the play. Talthybius is a black crow. As the Greek army’s mouthpiece announcing the women’s lottery, he is drawn with harsher lines. However, in his second appearance as the harbinger of bad news, revealing the horrible fates of Astyanax and Troy, who are sentenced, correspondingly, to death and obliteration, the drawing becomes gentler, almost sympathetic. In the Astyanax scene, Talthybius’s black wings are extended over the pitiful little corpse in a loving, funereal gesture (p. 48). [Fig. 16]

Turning to pragmatomorphy, that is, characters represented as inanimate objects or plants, one comes across two gods, a Greek general

33. The Anonymous reviewer doubts this since Spiegelman’s cat Nazis “are well built and scary”, whereas the Greek cat army in Bruno and Carson “are indeed ridiculous”. To the reviewer Bruno’s drawings are “more reminiscent of the silly cat gang of the 2001 spy-comedy film *Cats & Dogs*”.

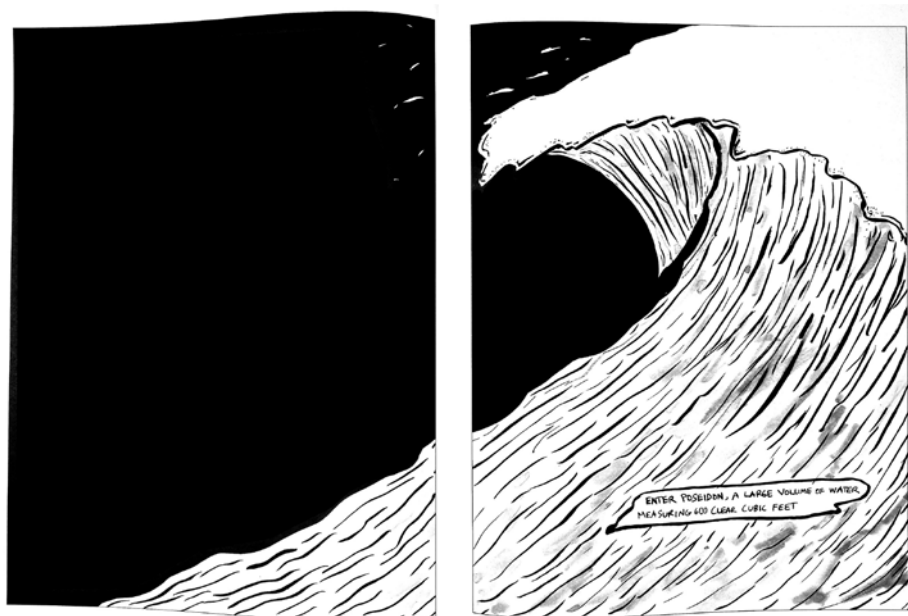


Fig. 17

(Menelaus), and two Trojans, Andromache and Astyanax, Hector's be-reaved wife and young son. Poseidon, drawn under the influence of Raymond Pettibon,<sup>34</sup> is literally the giant wave that will engulf the Greek fleet upon its νόστος (pp. 4–5). [Fig. 17] Athene is a hybrid figure: a pair of work-man's overalls and an owl mask. The latter does not need much explanation, but the overalls are baffling. Some think that this is the outfit befitting an asexual goddess.<sup>35</sup> Maybe so, but we must also consider details like the

34. Additionally, the Anonymous reviewer postulates a possible influence from Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, "given its reverse direction of viewing/interpreting in Japanese standards — and also given the wide circulation of its copies in the US".

35. Houston Smith (25.05.2021): "What to make, for example, of the decision to depict Athena as a pair of denim overalls? — not anthropomorphized in any way, just floating, disembodied, with an owl mask tucked under its left strap? The owl mask provides some clue, as owls are an established visual symbol of the goddess, but the overalls are trickier to parse. Is it something to do with the inherent asexuality of overalls (Athena being the virgin goddess and all)? Or perhaps with their rugged utility — alluding to her rough-and-tumble knowhow on the battlefield? That her physical form hovers — emotionless, expressionless— spewing impassioned pleas to Poseidon, seems to gesture toward the unknowability of the gods: their elusiveness, fickleness, how their allegiances aren't dictated by the same human impulses that dictate our own."



Fig. 18

brand label on the overalls. “Warhartt” must be a pun on Carhartt, a popular American company making heavy-duty workers’ clothes, including overalls. Athene is hard at work, not building (like Apollo and Poseidon) but destroying, bent on the *ἔργον*, not of peace, but vengeful, spiteful war (“Then came the Greeks. Came Athene. Came the Trojan Horse”, p. 8; cf. *Tr.* 561, κόρας ἔργα Παλλάδος). [Fig. 18]

Menelaus is even more intriguing. He is depicted as “some sort of a gearbox, clutch or coupling mechanism, once sleek, not this year’s model” (p. 52). Carson comments on her choice as follows:

*The Trojans are animals because, obviously, they have been reduced to subhuman status. But the Greek army are even less than animals<sup>36</sup> ontologically and spiritually; they would have to be tools. Menelaus is a kind of second-rate hero; Agamemnon takes command of the expedition, and Menelaus runs around behind his brother. He is the tool that facilitates the moving of other tools and the accomplishment of other tasks.<sup>37</sup>*

The Menelaus drawing has a palpable phallic quality:<sup>38</sup> Euripides’s spectators and those among Bruno and Carson’s readers with a little *Odyssey* under their belts know that his macho posturing vis-à-vis Helen will result in total defeat. The comic book version of this character is the absolute send-up of patriarchy. [Fig. 19]

It is evident that pragmatomorphy affects mostly heartless or mindless characters like this play’s cynical and vindictive gods and the general cursed by his wife as an “utter fool” (p. 57; Cf. *Tr.* 943, 965: ὦ κάκιστε ... ἀμαθὲς ἐστὶ σοι τόδε). Andromache and Astyanax break this pattern (see Figures

36. Sic. Carson here disregards the zoomorphic section of the Greek army.

37. Online book launch event, at 19:00 onwards.

38. Hall (21.05.2021)



Fig. 19



Fig. 20

2 and 16). They are not animals, but neither are they lifeless objects; they are something in-between: plants. Andromache takes the form of a poplar tree — white (*λεύκη*, *λόγδη*, *ἀχερωῖς*) or black poplar (*αἰγυριος*) according to the page's background. She always has a large split in the middle of her trunk, and her roots are dragging out: Andromache's insides have been cut open by the loss of city, husband, and, soon enough, child. She is slim and tall as poplars are (cf. the epithets *μακεδνή* and *μακρή* in Hom. *Od.* 7.106, 10.510, *Il.* 4.482) — often too tall to fit in the frame as if the sheer volume of her suffering is uncontainable. Poplar Andromache is no longer planted in the ground; she is literally uprooted, carried, as in Euripides, on the Achaean cart that will transport her to slavery (*Tr.* 569, 571). By her side, as in Euripides (*Tr.* 574), is Hector's *ὄπλα*: his shield will soon serve as little Astyanax's coffin. The poplar tree's characteristic trembling movement and rustling sound (one variety of poplar, common in Carson's North America, is called *Populus tremuloides*) are spectacularly exploited on p. 45, where Andromache, having heard of Astyanax's death sentence, explodes into "a blizzard of broken branches, twigs, and leaves". [Fig. 20]

That Astyanax is represented as a sucker (a root sprout) is phytologically accurate. Poplars are reproduced through such root sprouts, which form extensive clonal colonies, often metres away from the parent tree. Astyanax, a root sprout intimately connected with and clinging tightly to his mother

plant (the image is inspired by *Tr.* 570–1, 750–1, 761–3), will be violently torn from her. There is also phytological irony here. Poplar sprouts keep growing underground long after the parent tree is gone. In *Trojan Women*, the process is reversed. *Malgré soi*, poplar Andromache will live on; Astyanax, sadly, will perish. The hope Hekabe expresses that he would one day revive Troy is belied by the Greeks, who fear this very eventuality.

Andromache and Astyanax's pragmatomorphy is, therefore, of an entirely different intent than the other 'objectified' characters. It derives from a long —ancient and modern— tradition associating the poplar tree with extreme female sorrow and mourning. One of the Greek words for poplar, *ἄχερωίς*, suggests a (paretymological?) connection with Acheron and the underworld.<sup>39</sup> More appositely, in Greek mythology, the poplar is also associated with metamorphosis expedited by death and mourning: the relevant myths are those of the nymph Leuke, who was carried off to Hades by Pluto and transformed into a white poplar (*λέυκη*),<sup>40</sup> and the Heliades, daughters of the Sun, who turned into black poplars (*αἰγέιροι*) mourning their dead brother Phaethon.<sup>41</sup> Bruno and Carson's Andromache, like their Hekabe, is metamorphosed not in death, but in life, and her metamorphosis is not redemptive, a release from suffering so overwhelming that surpasses human endurance, but expressive of a tragic pathos that will extend, like the root sprouts of the poplar tree but unlike Andromache's own sapling who shall die, far beyond the last page of the book.

Helen is a special figure, appearing now as a seductive, curvy, high-heeled silver fox, now as a vanity mirror. [Fig. 21] As the cover of the comic book already makes evident, Helen is designed (and drawn) as Hekabe's dialectical opposite (young/old, luscious/ "emaciated", seductive/ "dry", etc.). This way, Bruno and Carson prepare their viewers/readers for the confrontation of the two in the Agon.<sup>42</sup> In "foxy" Helen, Hall saw a reflection of the medieval tales of Reynard the Fox, another anthropomorphic

39. LSJ s.v.

40. Servius on Verg. *Ecl.* 7.61.

41. For the myth and the iconography of the Heliades, see *LIMC* VII.1, s.v. "Phaethon", 350–4 (Baratte). The connection with Bruno and Carson's comic book was first suggested by Hall (21.05.2021).

42. The relevant splash-page drawing on p. 9 is impressive. I quote the commentary of Bamlett (21.06.2021): "Mentally the zoomorphic queens are differentiated by the contents of their dreams which are placed as images (rather than words) in a thought-bubble for each. Hekabe dreams of her long years of pregnancy and motherhood, seeing herself elongated to give suck to multiple pups whose recent loss has all become too much for her. Her teats still drop the milk her now dead sons and removed daughters no longer

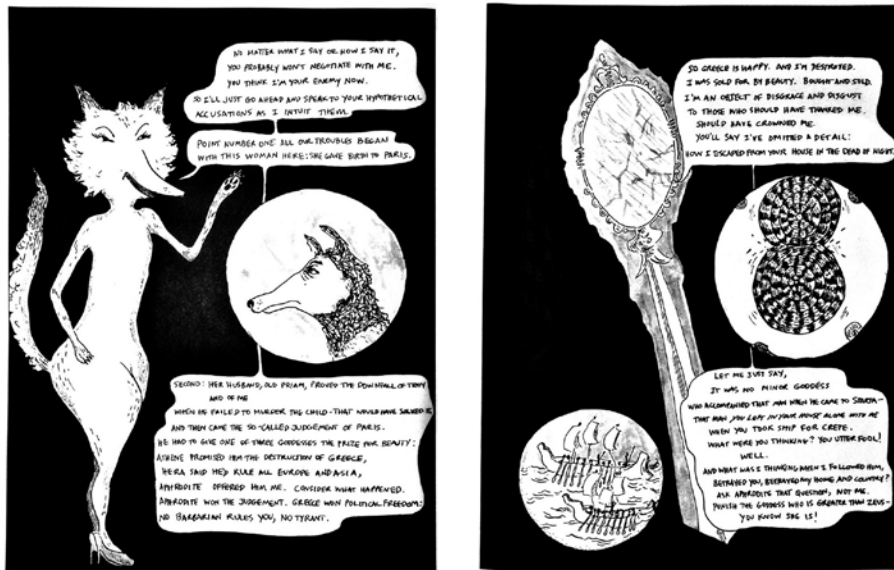


Fig. 21

trickster.<sup>43</sup> Reynard, I counter, is male, not female. Moreover, vitally, Helen's animal form is semi-anthropomorphic: she has toned, feminine thighs and false, batting eyelashes. It is the fox's folkloric load that seems to take precedence over any specific associations. Bruno and Carson's Helen is the quintessentially guileful female, and her character does not fall far from Semonides's fox-woman (Sem. fr. 7, 7–11). The following passage must have weighed on Carson's conception of this new Helen:

τὴν δ' ἔξ ἀλιτροῦς θεὸς ἔθηκ' ἀλώπεκος  
γυναιῖκα πάντων ἴδριν· οὐδέ μιν κακῶν  
λέληθεν οὐδὲν οὐδὲ τῶν ἀμεινόνων·  
τὸ μὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν εἶπε πολλάκις κακόν,  
τὸ δ' ἐσθλόν· ὀργὴν δ' ἄλλοτ' ἄλλοιην ἔχει.

ask to drink. Helen imagines an armoured animal (which may recall the Wooden Horse through which the Greeks infiltrated Troy and who now have become her lifeline) but it need not. It is a disturbing hard-to-interpret image even down to the attachment to its belly through which it is fed or drained... And the appendage to the artificial animal in Helen's dream bubble hangs down the page, reaching towards the sea. Now the latter represents not only Poseidon's 'wall of water' but the medium of her conveyance back to Greece. It is also a determination in Helen herself to remain fluid enough to survive, which we see later in the play, a fluidity not available to Hekabe."

43. Hall (21.05.2021): "...the feral, 'foxy' Helen, a Reynardian antiheroine in false eyelashes".

In her command of all things, both good and evil, Semonides's fox-woman displays the sophistic rhetorical versatility that Euripides's Helen displays in the Agon. More crucially, her mood swings (ὀργήν δ' ἄλλοτ' ἀλλοίην ἔχει) match the feature that matters most in her Brunonian-Carsonian instantiation: the shapeshifting. Helen takes the secondary form of a vanity mirror — but not randomly; she does so while facing Menelaus. Helen *is* the vanity mirror; she does not look at it; her interlocutor does. Bruno and Carson seem here to address especially the male reader/viewer, who, identified with Menelaus, is invited to think of Helen as *his* vanity mirror. Helen is the instrument — the product, even — of *male* vanity: in this sense, Bruno and Carson partly exonerate her.

Troy deserves special notice in this discussion. The city, I argue, represents a case of *reverse pragmatomorphy*: it is an inanimate object elevated to the status of a living character. For Troy, Bruno and Carson utilise a *prima facie* heterogeneous mixture of literary and visual references. Edith Hall believes that the authors recall “Hotel Troy”, an abandoned North Carolina sanatorium featuring classical revival architecture.<sup>44</sup> Be that as it may, the overt reference (p. 6) to James Baldwin's 1955 essay *Equal in Paris*<sup>45</sup> and Frederick Seidel's recent poem inspired by that essay, where this author is likened to a leopard killing its trainer,<sup>46</sup> are more solid departure points. Bruno and Carson “render the city of Troy as a hotel that has fallen into disrepair, as if the Gods were slumlords who are unresponsive to the prayerful maintenance requests of their long-suffering Trojan tenants”.<sup>47</sup> This is, in fact, a conception almost identical to James Baldwin's description of the Paris hotel where he was arrested for allegedly receiving stolen goods:

...a ludicrously grim hotel on the rue du Lac, one of those enormous dark, cold, and hideous establishments in which Paris abounds that seem to breathe forth, in their airless, humid, stone-cold halls, the weak light, scurrying chambermaids, and creaking stairs, an odor of gentility long-long dead.<sup>48</sup>

44. Details on Hotel Troy are provided at <<https://bit.ly/3n4gFGR>>.

45. Baldwin (1998).

46. Frederick Seidel, “James Baldwin in Paris”, *The Paris Review*, Issue 150, Spring 1999, <<https://bit.ly/3JWkuqz>>.

47. Davidson (09.07.2021).

48. Baldwin (1998) 101.



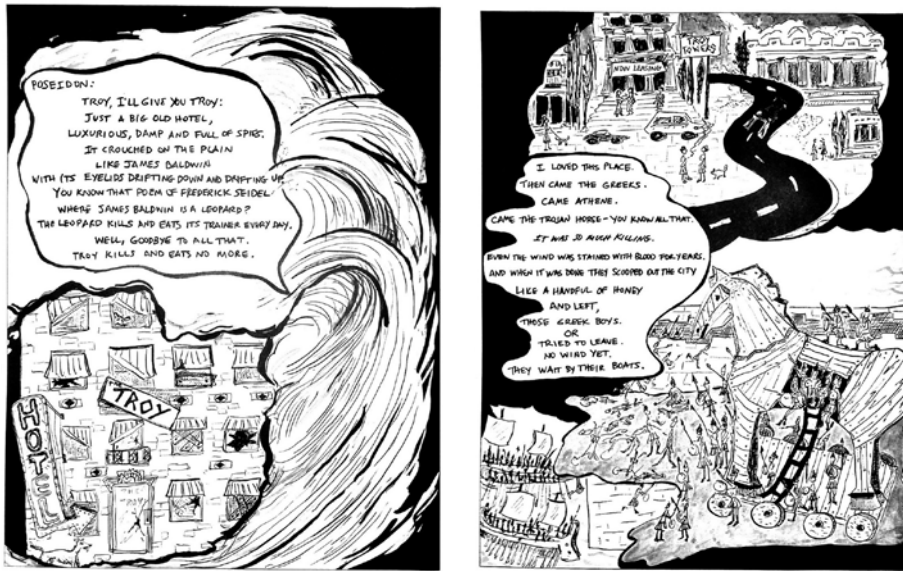


Fig. 22

[Fig. 22] Bruno and Carson's "Hotel Troy", like Baldwin's Parisian lodging, is a place that reeks of old grandeur, decadence, and death. In this story, though, Troy, like in Seidel's poem about Baldwin, is a leopard that "attacks the trainer it / loves" and all the strangers around it: the victorious Greeks temporarily tamed its ferocity, but the Trojan beast, as the play's prologue and the Cassandra scene makes clear, will eventually fight back. However, it will not be Astyanax who exacts vengeance in his city's name; the gods will punish the Greek hubris, albeit not out of moral outrage but personal spite. One of the gods' instruments will be the crazy maiden who, among the actual *dramatis personae* of the play, is the only one who retains her human form.

Cassandra's anthropomorphy is part of this vengeance discourse. "Everything is upside down" in Troy, says Carson.<sup>49</sup> In a world where everybody is bestialised or objectified, Cassandra's human form ironically accentuates that she is "the oddball". Again ironically, her 'odd' humanity also underlines that she is "more than human":<sup>50</sup> it comes with a clear vision of the future, tantamount to her chilling ability to foresee the death of

49. Online book launch event, at 51:21 onwards.

50. Online book launch event, at 51:42 onwards.

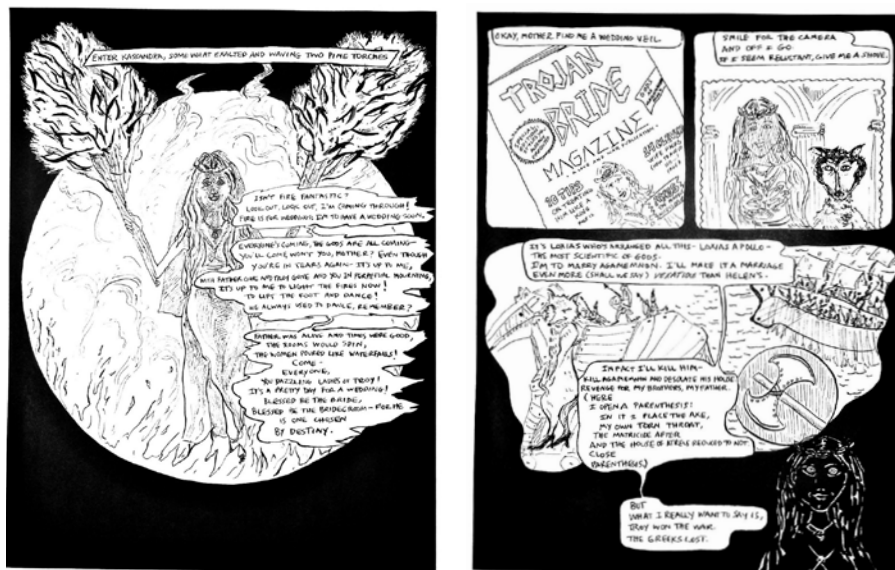


Fig. 23

herself and the Greeks. Bruno and Carson's handling of the Cassandra scene verges consciously on the ridiculous, informed by the aesthetics of tabloids and glossy magazines. Cassandra's deranged-looking exaltation, underscored by the flaming torches she carries and the crazy glare of her huge, wide-open eyes, eerily captures the horror that came and is to come. [Figure 23]

### THE TEXT

This survey concludes with a word on Carson's adaptation. Carson alternates between (brief) moments of literal rendition and large swathes of visceral creative rewriting of Euripides's Greek, characterised by short, heavily punctuated sentences (often a staccato of single words): Carson thus discovers additional value in the space restrictions placed by comic bubbles. The distinguishing features of her text are the use of colloquial language (complete with anachronisms), the allusive load, and the numerous instances in which Carson's version constitutes a direct or indirect commentary on the original and its ideological underpinnings. The selective analysis that follows highlights Carson's most distinctive techniques.

A. (*Ironic*) use of colloquial, even coarse language. The use of such language is, of course, not in disharmony with Euripides's own occasional endorsement of less than lofty discourse.<sup>51</sup> Carson employs North American argot and even openly obscene language as part of the book's overall play with the dialectics of high/low and for various other effects:

1. In some cases, the 'vulgar' language underscores the situation's absurdity, preventing a sentimentalism that would sit ill with the comic book genre: e.g., *Tr.* 628: αἰαῖ, τέκνον, σὼν ἀνοσίων προσφαγμάτων ("Alas, my child, for your unhallowed slaughter!", tr. Kovacs) is rendered as "and they called it an offering? That stinks" (p. 37, emphasis is Carson's).

2. Often, the colloquial expressions have an ironic tinge, 'correcting' the Greek, which sounds too soft or circuitous for Carson's liking. On p. 40, for example, colloquial language makes Euripidean Andromache's veiled criticism of patriarchal expectations of female/wifely propriety (*Tr.* 647–56) coarsely explicit: "sneaking out... and no gabbing with the girls... no backtalk". On p. 44, a direct English command substitutes the courtly, verbose politeness of the Greek, which seems absurdly at odds with the situation's urgency: "spit it out" for *Tr.* 718, ἐπήνεσ' αἰδῶ, πλὴν ἐὰν λέγῃς καλὰ ("I approve of such hesitation unless you are telling good news", tr. Kovacs).<sup>52</sup> Similarly, hurled against Helen, the phrase "not flashing your latest pedicure" (p. 61) is much brusquer than Euripides's vaguer σὸν δέμας / ἐξῆλθες ἀσκήσασα ("And after that have you come out dressed in finery?", *Tr.* 1022–23, tr. Kovacs).

3. Such slanted jibes at what one could term the "unseemly propriety" of tragic language are even better served by employing coarse sexual vocabulary absent in the Greek, which Carson seems to consider almost puritanical for the circumstances. Adapting *Tr.* 780–81, τάλαινα Τροία, μυρίους ἀπώλεσας / μιᾶς γυναικὸς καὶ λέχους στυγνοῦ χάριν ("Poor Troy, countless are the folk you have lost because of one woman and one hated marriage bed!", tr. Kovacs, adapted), Carson rejects the simple στυγνοῦ for the clamorously alliterative and dryly rhyming "Troy, you made a bad deal: ten thousand men for a single coracle of cunt appeal" (p. 48). On p. 50, the Euripidean chorus's high lyric style (μάταν ἄρ', ὃ χρυσέαις ἐν οἴνοχόαις ἀβρὰ βαίνων, / Λαομεδόντι παῖ, / Ζητὸς ἔχεις κυλίκων πλήρωμα, καλλίσταν

51. On Euripides's colloquialisms see, e.g., Stevens (1976) and Collard (2018).

52. The paradosis is questioned. Kovacs (2018, 243–4) came to prefer Lane's emendation πλὴν ἐὰν στέγγῃ κακά. Even if he is right (Kovacs's text would make Andromache passive-aggressive rather than impolite), Carson's "spit it out" is still more directly coarse.

λατρείαν. / ἃ δέ σε γειναμένα πρὸς δαίεται, *Tr.* 820–25)<sup>53</sup> is replaced by a scurrilous literality that practically debunks it: beating around the lexical bush will not do; Ganymede here becomes the “butt-boy of Zeus”. The same goes for Troy and her “bond by marriage”, in Euripides’ formulation, to the Olympians (ὥς τότε μὲν μεγάλως Τροίαν ἐπύργωσας, θεοῖσι / κῆδος ἀναγόμενος, “how greatly did you exalt Troy on that day, making a marriage tie for her with the gods!”, *Tr.* 844–45, tr. Kovacs): lofty euphemisms aside, Troy was “pimped to the gods” (p. 51).

B. *Anachronistic references/allusions to contemporary reality*. Carson’s text often makes unequivocal connections with modern-day reality, presumably to tease the reader by momentarily violating all the ‘alienation’ process:

1. On p. 17, Carson blends the *κομμός* of Euripides’s chorus and Hecuba. All the words are now the chorus’s, and they are much blunter. In Euripides, Hecuba mentions being a doorkeeper or a nurse for Greek children (*Tr.* 190–96); the chorus speaks obliquely of sexual and other menial services to the Greeks (197–209). In Carson, all is said straight out, and the context is modernised: “CH: Say, Mr White Slaver, do you have a nice house? Will the work involve sex?” Soon after, Carson’s chorus anachronistically speaks of phones dripping blood (“Does blood come from your phone?”) and naively wonders: “Can I call my parents?” In Euripides, the chorus knows that this is the last time they lay eyes on their progenitors (νέατον τοκέων δώματα λεύσσω, / νέατον, “I look my last on the house of my parents, my last!”, *Tr.* 201–2, tr. Kovacs).

2. On p. 41, Euripides’s *ναυσθλοῦμαι δ’ ἐγὼ / πρὸς Ἑλλάδ’ αἰχμάλωτος ἐς δοῦλον ζυγόν* (“I am going by ship to Greece as a captive to bear the yoke of slavery”, *Tr.* 677–78, tr. Kovacs) becomes “I’m trafficked to Greeks”, a clear allusion to the modern sex trade.

3. The “Troy Towers” of p. 50 may conceal a playful reference to Trump Towers. This possibility is strengthened by the use, further down, of the phrase “You made Troy great” (p. 51), and by the possible reference to the Trump Wall mentioned above.

C. *Connotative translation (mixing intertextual references)*. Carson often compounds her text with intertextual resonances:

53. In Kovacs’s translation: “It is for nought, son of Laomedon, you that go with delicate step amid the ewers of gold, that you have the office of filling Zeus’ s cups, service most noble. The land that gave you birth is burnt with fire.”

1. On p. 6, Poseidon's 'farewell' to Troy ("Well, goodbye to all that. Troy kills and eats no more"), apart from the overt references to Baldwin and Seidel discussed above, alludes to Robert Graves' memoir *Goodbye to All That* (1929), the author's "bitter leave-taking of England".

2. On p. 19, Talthybius's *ἔχει πότμος νιν, ὥστ' ἀπηλλάχθαι πόνων* ("It is her fate to be released from trouble", *Tr.* 270, tr. Kovacs) becomes: "'Tis fate unshunnable, as the poets say", a reference to Shakespeare's *Othello*: "'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death" (*Othello*, III, iii, 267–69) — only the word death cannot cross Talthybius's lips.

3. On p. 38, Carson's text reads: "It's the contrast stuns me. Yesterday we were royal persons living unexamined lives. Now what?" One could call this an interpretative rendition of *Tr.* 614–15 (*ἀγόμεθα λεία σὺν τέκνω· τὸ δ' εὐγενὲς / ἐς δοῦλον ἤκει, μεταβολὰς τοσάσδ' ἔχον*, "I am carried away as booty with my son: nobility has been enslaved and has suffered so great a change!", tr. Kovacs), where intertextuality meets irony. "Unexamined lives" recalls Socrates's famous proclamation *ὁ δὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπῳ* (*Pl. Apol.* 38a5–6). For Socrates, an unexamined life is unbearable; for Andromache, however, it was bliss, now gone.

4. The book's final words (pp. 77–78) are also intertextually loaded:

*The work ends on a strong note, as smoke envelopes the final pages; the characters are shrouded and gradually disappear in fire and fumes. The final words echo Samuel Beckett's The Unnamable, as Hecuba says, "We can't go on. We go on," taken up by the Chorus claiming, on the final page, "we go on".<sup>54</sup>*

The Trojans "go on", even to a life of utmost misery, but Troy is "the unnameable": she exists no more.

D. *Ironic commentary (direct)*: There are cases in which Carson's text is a caustic commentary on Euripides's original rather than a mere adaptation (cf. examples A2, A3). This commentary can be either direct or indirect. Here are some examples of the first category:

1. Eur. *Tr.* 466–68 reads: *ἔατέ μ' (οὔτοι φίλα τὰ μὴ φίλ', ὧ κόρα) / κεῖσθαι πεσοῦσαν· πτωμάτων γὰρ ἄξια / πάσχω τε καὶ πέπονθα κἄτι πείσομαι* ("Let me lie where I have fallen (for unwelcome help is not kindness,

54. Trinacty (23.07.2021). Beckett's novel ends with the words: "You must go on. I can't go on. You must go on. I'll go on."

my daughters). Collapse is the proper response to what I have suffered, am suffering, and will suffer”, tr. Kovacs). In Carson’s hands, p. 30, this becomes: “Oh, let me lie. Good posture’s kind of a right-wing concept, I’m past it. God!” Carson’s Hekabe exchanges Euripides’s lament for a caustic comment. Her quip straddles my categories B and D as it involves an anachronism. The “politics of posture” were at the centre of public discourse, especially in 18th-century England, where “deformed, crooked or twisted bodies could seriously impede the social ambitions of their owners”.<sup>55</sup> Hekabe can only scoff at such ambitions now — and at any demands of propriety at such moments of extreme despair.

2. In *Tr.* 470–73, Hekabe says the following: ὦ θεοί· κακούς μὲν ἀνακαλῶ τοὺς συμμάχους, / ὅμως δ’ ἔχει τι σχῆμα κικλήσκειν θεούς, / ὅταν τις ἡμῶν δυστυχῇ λάβῃ τύχην. / πρῶτον μὲν οὔν μοι τὰγάθ’ ἐξᾶσαι φίλον· / τοῖς γὰρ κακοῖσι πλείον’ οἴκτον ἐμβαλῶ (“O gods! To be sure, I am calling on allies that are faithless, yet nonetheless it is proper to invoke them when we suffer misfortune. My desire therefore is first to sing of my blessings. For in this way I shall make my woes seem the more to be pitied”, tr. Kovacs). In Carsonian Hekabe’s mouth, all this becomes intensely sarcastic. Hekabe has no interest in anyone’s pity. She repeats her Euripidean alter ego’s words as if to deflate their risible grandiosity: “Now, why did I say that? Gods never helped me. Though I do admire that old mannerism of calling out to some divinity when things go wrong. Better yet — I’ll list all my blessings! Isn’t that what people do when they’re feeling spiritual?” (p. 30).

3. Describing how the Greek army treated her, Euripides’s Hekabe comments (*Tr.* 140–42): δούλα δ’ ἄγομαι / γρᾶς ἐξ οἴκων πενθήρη κρᾶτ’ ἐκπορθηθεῖς / οἴκτως (“I am taken away as an aged slave from my house, my head ravaged in grief pitifully!”, tr. Kovacs). Carson has no patience for such semantic niceties, demanding, in classic #MeToo spirit, that things be called by their name. Her Hekabe exposes Euripides’s roundaboutness using a *praeteritio*: “I avoid the term ‘raped’. You’d find it grotesque [sc. as Euripides did, Carson may be implying] to imagine the rape of a dry old dog like me, wouldn’t you?” (p. 15).

E. *Irony commentary (indirect)*: Carson’s ironic commentary on Euripides can take two more intricate forms. There are cases of reshaping Euripides’s meaning, focus or emphasis, and other instances in which Carson articu-

55. Withey (2016).

lates *expressis verbis* Euripides's subtle hints as if, again, she does not tolerate his circumlocutions (cf. A2, A3, and D3 above):

1. In the Cassandra scene, Carson's Hekabe attempts to calm her daughter down like this: "Oh you're right, dear. It's a pretty day for a military wedding. Give me the torch now..." (p. 23). This paternalising tone is entirely absent in Euripides (*Tr.* 346–47): οἷμοι, τέκνον, / ὥς οὐχ ὑπ' αἰχμῆς <σ> οὐδ' ὑπ' Ἀργείου δορός / γάμους γαμεῖσθαι τούσδ' ἐδόξαζόν ποτε ("Ah me, my daughter, how little did I think you would ever make a marriage like this at the point of an Argive spear!", tr. Kovacs). Carson's Hekabe, unlike Euripides's, refuses to talk to Cassandra as if she is a sane person.

2. Similarly, Menelaus's τί δ' ἔστιν; εὐχὰς ὥς ἐκαίνισας θεῶν (*Tr.* 889, "What does this mean? How strange your prayer to the gods is!", tr. Kovacs), a bewildered rather than mocking reaction to Hekabe's strange prayer to Zeus, is turned by Carson into outright sarcasm: "What's this, some new-age spirituality?" (p. 53).

3. *Tr.* 562–67 reads σφαγαὶ δ' ἀμφιβώμοι / Φρυγῶν ἔν τε δεμνίοις / καράτομος ἐρημία / νεανίδων στέφανον ἔφερεν / Ἑλλάδι κουροτρόφον / Φρυγῶν δὲ πατρίδι πένθος ("The slaughtering of Phrygians about the altars and, in our beds, desolation wrought by the headsman's blade brought a victory garland of young women to Greece to bear them children, but grief to the land of the Phrygians", tr. Kovacs). Carson lays bare the motive behind the Greeks' head-chopping frenzy, which Euripides's chorus only implies: "Headless lust made every Trojan girl a breeding machine for the Greeks" (p. 35, my emphasis).

4. The following example is subtler. After Talthybius's exit with Astyanax, right before the second choral ode, Carson's Hekabe comments (p. 49): "We hold certain elements in tension, but they fail to form up into a tiny paradox. Mother. Child. Death. Being. Nonbeing. Justice. City. No City. Alas. I'm not being ironic. Irony is a luxury I lost." These philosophical musings replace the following lament in *Tr.* 790–98: ὦ τέκνον, ὦ παῖ παιδὸς μογεροῦ, / συλώμεθα σὴν ψυχὴν ἀδίκως / μήτηρ καὶ γῶ. τί πάθω; τί σ' ἐγώ, / δύσμορε, δράσω; τάδε σοι δίδομεν / πλήγματα κρατὸς στέρνων τε κόπους / τῶνδε γὰρ ἄρχομεν. οἳ γὼ πόλεως, / οἷμοι δὲ σέθεν· τί γὰρ οὐκ ἔχομεν, / τίς ἑνδέομεν μὴ οὐ πανσυνδία / χωρεῖν ὀλέθρου διὰ παντός;<sup>56</sup> The new Hekabe

56. "My child, son of my luckless son, we are robbed of your life unjustly, your mother and I. What am I to do? What can I do for you, ill-starred one? Our gifts to you are these, to strike our breasts and head: that much lies in our power! Alas for my city, alas for you! What do we not have, what more is needed for our utter and immediate destruction?" tr. Kovacs.

no longer addresses Astyanax. She no longer laments, beating her head and breasts. She only utters disjointed words that cannot cohere into meaning. She cannot catch her Euripidean counterpart's drift. Everything around her is a pandemonium of unfathomable brutality. The anguish is too great to elicit anything other than utter bewilderment. Forming "tiny paradoxes" would impose order upon the semantic chaos, revealing hidden meaning in the apparent meaninglessness. But Carson's Hekabe cannot make any sense of anything. Suffering injustice (*συνώμεθα... ἀδίκως*) is objectionable, but it can be understood; it is the common fate of the vanquished. But Bruno and Carson's emaciated canine queen cannot discern even this smidgen of meaning in her plight. Ironically, while she is ironising Euripides's original, she denies even the possibility of irony in such contexts.

F. *Expansion*: In several cases, Carson expands Euripides's more compact text — in another gesture of 'agonistic' engagement with the original:

1. The most conspicuous example occurs on pp. 31–32, where Euripides's relatively tame οἷ' γὼ τάλαινα, διὰ γάμον μιᾷς ἑνα / γυναικὸς οἶων ἔτυχον ὧν τε τεύξομαι (*Tr.* 498–99, "Ah unhappy me, what sufferings I have and shall continue to have because of a single marriage of one woman!", tr. Kovacs) becomes a vehement denunciation of Helen, culminating on a splash-page portrait of the culprit: "And the cause of it all, the salt in my wound, the splinter under my nail, the acid in my eye, the reason, root, purpose, occasion, foundation, basis, motive, hinge, axis, determinant, why and fucking wherefore of it all... is that one woman".

2. Similarly, on p. 33, a literal Euripidean image (*χαμαιπετῇ / πέτρυνά τε δέμνι*, *Tr.* 508–9, "to my pallet on the ground and my stony bedding", tr. Kovacs) becomes an extended poetic metaphor: "Nobody's left. Not one boy. Not one girl. So why lift me up? Leave me with the stones. I'm made of stones. I weep stones. And when I've wept all the stones there are, I'll be done."

3. In *Tr.* 782–84, Talthybius's address to *moriturus* Astyanax is phrased as follows: ἄγε παῖ, φίλιον πρόσπτυγμα μεθείς / μητρὸς μογεῖρας, βαῖνε πατρῶων / πύργων ἐπ' ἄκρας στεφάνας ("Come, child, leave the loving embrace of your dear mother, come to the high coronal of your father's towers", tr. Kovacs). Carson turns this into a much more poignant long asyndeton, full of metaphors featuring animate and inanimate forms to which Astyanax clinging to his mother is compared. The child, after all, is now literally a sapling, and his mother, still literally, a broken tree on which he can no longer hold: "Come along, little mushroom, little rootlet, little sip, little milk fly, little asterisk, little welkin, little silhouette, little sugar bubble — let



go of your mother, she's broken." This sentimental outbreak, along with Bruno's drawing of a now-benevolent bird spreading his wings protectively over the "little rootlet", make Carson's new Talthybius more openly sympathetic than the original.

G. *Wordplay and wit* are also Carson's penchant:

1. Above we saw Carson toying with rhyme (deal/appeal). A similar application of homoioteleuton appears on p. 34 (ruination, nation, population).

2. More sophisticatedly, on p. 25, Cassandra, prophesying the Greeks' ruin, proclaims: "Lost to them all their lives at home. The wife, the child, the hearth, the winding sheet... Their tomb is homelessness. Their name is *nothing*. Air" (emphasis Carson). Speaking to the woman who shall soon become Odysseus' slave, Cassandra lets slip the name Odysseus devises for himself in *Odyssey* 9 to escape Polyphemos's curse: *Οὔτις*, "Nobody" — only in Cassandra's lips, "nothing" has the force of inescapable doom.

3. Similar wit is displayed on p. 42. Here, the common informal expression "We're all in the same boat" is a rendition of *Tr.* 684–85 (*ἐς ταῦτόν ἦκεις συμφορᾶς· θρηνοῦσα δὲ / τὸ σὸν διδάσκεις μ' ἔνθα πημάτων κυρῶ*, "You have come into as much misfortune as I have. But as you lament your circumstances, you teach me where I stand in misery", tr. Kovacs), which creates a tragic irony: the captives will *not* be in the same boat, literally speaking; they will be dispersed in the four corners of the Greek world, each becoming the slave of a different Greek leader.

Generally, Carson's text is poetically potent and accurate if not 'faithful'. One comes across only minor errors and infelicities:

1. "It was your first fucking born who brought on this war" (p. 37): In Kovacs's text, these are not Andromache's but Hekabe's words; moreover, the phrase is an exhortation, not a statement of fact: *τέκνων δὴ ποθ' ἁμῶν / πρεσβυγενὲς Πριάμω, / κόμισαί μ' ἐς Αἶδαν*<sup>57</sup> (*Tr.* 592–94, "Yes, eldest of my children I bore to Priam, bring me to Hades!", tr. Kovacs). Hekabe's eldest son was Hector, not Paris, as Carson's text suggests.

2. Carson's Andromache fears that if she spurns "Achilles", she will make "a real enemy" (p. 41): This is an error: *τόνδε* (*Tr.* 663) is *Ἀχιλλέως παῖς*, Neoptolemus, not the dead Achilles himself.

57. The text is corrupt; hence the speaker's identity is debatable. In Kovacs (2018) it reads differently: *λεχέων δέσποθ' ἁμῶν / πρεσβυγενὲς Πριάμ' ὦ / κόμισαί μ' ἐς Αἶδαν*.

3. *Tr.* 1038–9, *χῆ Κύπρις κόμπων χάριν / λόγοις ἐνεῖται* (“Cypris was introduced into her story to allow her to boast”, tr. Kovacs) is inaccurately rendered as “She throws in Aphrodite to distract us” (p. 62).

4. On p. 71, “Finally, may you overcome evil Odysseus” is an unhappy rendition of *ἐπεὶ σὲ πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἢ τὰ τοῦ σοφοῦ / κακοῦ τ’ Ὀδυσσέως ἄξιον τιμᾶν ὅπλα* (*Tr.* 1224–5). Kovacs correctly translates: “It is far better to honor you than the arms of the clever but cowardly Odysseus.”

\* \* \*

“Whatever the motive, from the adapter’s perspective”, write L. Hutcheon and S. O’Flynn, “adaptation is an act of appropriating or salvaging, and this is always a double process of interpreting and then creating something new”.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Bruno and Carson have regaled us with a stunning fresh version of the *Trojan Women*, which successfully marries the profundity and pathos of the Euripidean original with the wackiness of the comics genre. In a sense, this intergeneric/transmedial relocation injected an *Aristophanic* flavour into Bruno and Carson’s adaptation. Speaking animals and objects, wit, sexual explicitness and offensive language, loads of intertexts, anachronisms, antagonistic relation to the source play, and, above all, channelling tragedy into a ‘comic’ form — an accumulation of techniques that engraft the essence of Aristophanic comedy into an adapted Euripidean tragic drama. The newfangled *Trojan Women* is an innovative, trailblazing artwork of self-standing merit. But it is also, I sense, a readily performable piece of its own: a stage version of it would be a sight to behold.

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58. Hutcheon and O’Flynn (2013) 30.

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