

DIRECTOR'S NOTE **KinoVideo DVD (2004) insert**

Whenever people talk of classical drama, I detect that ring of reverence in their voice that is reserved for the sacrosanct and the very old. It must make the poor authors turn in their graves. Surely, the essence of all great works lies in their triumph over time. Any approach that puts the emphasis on age rather than on agelessness can only diminish their impact by creating a false sense of distance between them and us.

The Greek plays, by virtue of their seniority, have suffered the longest and most from this approach, starting with the plodding, pedantic translations stuffed down our throats at school, down to those stage productions that one can only describe as parodies of academic reproduction.

It took me years — and I am not ashamed to admit it — to get past this barrier of respect and uninvolvedness. Suddenly, I discovered Euripides. His *ELECTRA* (a play that has been unfairly neglected because of scholarly disapproval) fell accidentally into my hands and I read it for the first time. Out of this, for me, extraordinary encounter, grew a film and an association with a great author which has gone on ever since.

The stage production of *THE TROJAN WOMEN* was next. This was a play I knew but whose full impact had escaped me until 1964 when I read Edith Hamilton's masterly translation. Masterly, because it succeeds in recreating the rhythmic structure of the original without imprisoning it in the poetic style of some other age — Elizabethan, Victorian or idiomatic modern — and with a clarity that continually illuminates it in depth. I've thanked her and loved her for it ever since. And I regret that she was never able to see the way American audiences responded when, later that same year, I staged the play at the Circle-in-the-Square in New York.

There have been many changes in my life since then. The most important resulted from the take-over by a military regime in Greece, with all the repercussions that such an event implies. Like many other Greek artists, I made the one free choice open to me. Not to surrender that freedom of expression which is every man's birthright, but to go on exercising it from countries other than my own. The need, stronger now than it had ever been before, to cry out against oppression in any shape, place or form, found its release, once again, through the words of my favorite author.

Directing his *IPHIGENIA IN AULIS* in New York, a play that rips open the festering evils of political and military ambition, I became convinced that, through sheer emotional impact, Euripides is as challenging to contemporary conscience as any author living today.

This conviction, and my growing horror at the massive crimes being committed in the name of political cause, culminated in my decision to transpose *THE TROJAN WOMEN* to the screen. Appalled by the Melos massacre of 416 B.C., Euripides used the Trojan wars to hold up the mirror to his own people. Twenty-four hundred years later, the mirror is as clear and as accusing to the contemporary image as ever.

The timing seemed right on another level. I felt that I now had gained enough distance from the stage production to approach the material from a purely cinematic viewpoint. To succeed in lifting it out of the bastard status of "filmed theater," and integrate the text into the visual reality of cinema in the most economical and emotionally effective way possible. There was no guilt involved in cutting or transposing words. It has always seemed to me more important to respect the spirit rather than the letter of the author's intentions.

What is extraordinary in Euripides is his technique of opening up the action to establish a dramatic situation and then focusing in on his characters at such close range that you feel you are looking straight into their souls. It is a technique so visually dynamic as to convince me that if he were alive today, film would be his favorite medium. Not only as a means of expression, but as a way of reaching the widest possible public, like that which flocked to see his plays in ancient Athens.

Whenever I can, I like to cast a film before I attack the script. Investing the characters with an identity gives me a dimension of reality that helps to stimulate my imagination. In the case of *THE TROJAN WOMEN*, pre-casting was an artistic necessity. There was no wavering in my choice of the four actresses. I made it as much on the basis of their talent as for their very special qualities as human beings, their outlook, their spirit. This spirit, and especially Katharine Hepburn's, who was the first to rally and the last to leave the location, not only made the film possible but radiates through their performances in a manner that makes the difficult art of acting seem as natural as breathing.

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