

Classical war reporting

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A surprisingly young audience whooped with perverse pleasure at the end of the harrowing [Women Of Troy](#) which I went to see at the National last night. It was one of the best bits of war reporting I have seen for a long time. Euripides' 2,500 year-old drama tells the story of the Trojan women after the fall of their City as the Greeks decide whether to kill, enslave or torture the babies, children and women that remain. They pretty much do all three.

women-of-troy_149x225j4ldw.jpg

[Don Taylor's](#) version is spare and naturalistic but full of the original meaning and it is set on a very dynamic and contemporary stage by director [Katie Mitchell](#). It evokes a post-war scene such as Sarajevo, Berlin, or even Baghdad. It is full of the human grief, contradictions and grim dilemmas that military defeat brings – especially after a long and bitter clash of civilisations. It's a flawed production which some [critics](#) hated. I confess I wasn't convinced by Kate Duchene as Hecuba, but it is entertaining and thought-provoking, which is, after all, what Euripides intended.

What I hadn't realised was that Euripides originally wrote the piece as part of a drama Olympiad as the Greeks were about to embark on yet another assault on their neighbours. They had also just recently committed an appalling atrocity while leveling a rival city state. Despite being the "cradle of Western civilisation" Greece was also a rather brutal place. In effect, this was Euripides' anti-war protest play put on at a very sensitive moment. In our age of heavily subsidised theatre where anti-authoritarianism is promoted by the authorities it's difficult for drama to have the same significance.

euripides.jpg

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