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The Trojan Wars Made Meaningful for Today

by R. B. MARRIOTT

FOUR Euripides plays under the title of "The Trojan Wars" is the ambitious programme at the Mermaid, the opening being made on May 17 with "Iphiginea in Aulis" and "Hecuba". They will be followed next Tuesday by "Electra" and "Orestes". New adaptations have been made for the occasion by Jack Lindsay, who gives the dialogue a contemporary slangy, loose-speaking tang and focuses the plays as works capable of speaking to us here and now about our own cruelties, falsities, needless sacrifice, and passion and wealth wasted in war.

INVASION

Mr. Lindsay's work, I think, is most telling in "Hecuba". "Iphiginea in Aulis" seems flattened out by cliché phrases. The drama of General Agamemnon waiting for the shallow waters of the Aegean Sea to change so that he can sail with his army to invade Troy, and, in the background, the imminence of the blood sacrifice to Artemis of the young Iphiginea, strike one as being quite ordinary things. The personal drama and clash have been reduced to chatter. There is little sense of gods presiding over everything, nor of tremendous events that have influenced, and are to influence, kings, peoples, lands.

The Greek army chiefs, including Agamemnon, are dressed in long grey coats and spiked helmets — Huns of 1913, which makes an interesting feature of the production but has an unpleasant chauventistic element. The women, with Clytemnestra grave and sonorous as played by Josephine Wilson, are in what appears to be Edwardian fashion-plate costume. This works well and does not fix the women to a certain nation at a certain time, like the Hun costumes.

There is a touching performance by Michele Dotrice as Iphiginea and a forthright Agamemnon by Roy Purcell, who looks strong as a pillar.

Perhaps because "Hecuba" has at its centre a performance in the title rôle by Beatrix Lehmann that belongs to the old all-out raving tradition of Greek tragedy in English, the production is more arousing, and Mr. Lindsay's colloquial pattern of talk comes over better. Miss Lehmann certainly gives a gripping, penetrating, all-passion embracing study, rising to shattering grief and anger when she dwells on the sacrifice of her daughter and the loss of her sons. She creates an atmosphere into which one is instantly drawn, as she has her revenge by murdering Polymestor's little sons and blinding the father.

Around Miss Lehmann matters do not have quite such a powerful impact, though the production as a whole shows Bernard Miles, who directed both plays, at his most imaginative and assured. Christopher Guinee as Polydorus, Michele Dotrice as Polyxena and Stephen Moore as Polymestor are notable among the other players.

Roy Purcell, Michele Dotrice and Josephine Wilson in "Iphiginea in Aulis" at the Mermaid.

CAST

THE TROJAN WARS

Sequence of four plays by Euripides, translated by Jack Lindsay. The first two, "Iphiginea in Aulis" and "Hecuba", presented by the Mermaid Theatre Trust at the Mermaid on May 17. Designed by Adrian Vaux; costumes by Adrian Vaux and Sheelagh Killeen; music by Carl Davis, realised in collaboration with Desmond Briscoe; stage manager, Derek Snook. The plays, with "Electra" and "Orestes", to be presented in repertory.

'IPHIGINEA IN AULIS'

Agamemnon	Roy Purcell
Old Man	Raymond Llewellyn
Menelaus	Patrick Connor
Messenger	Robert Grange
Clytemnestra	Josephine Wilson
Iphiginea	Michele Dotrice
Achilles	Stephen Moore

'HECUBA'

Polydorus	Christopher Guinee
Hecuba	Beatrix Lehmann
Polyxena	Michele Dotrice
Odysseus	Raymond Llewellyn
Talthybios	Patrick Connor
Servant	Robert Grange
Agamemnon	Roy Purcell
Polymestor	Stephen Moore
Polymestor's Sons	Robert Donegan John Salmon
Guards	Hugh Keays-Byrne Gene Sandys
Women of Troy	Paddy Ward Josephine Wilson Carol Drinkwater
Chorus	Candida Fawsitt Vilma Hollingbery Morag Forsyth Jacqueline Skarvellis Sydney Sturgess

Directed by Bernard Miles.