This article explores the motif of alternative futures for the child Astyanax, presented as action or imagined by other characters, as that motif was used and developed in a sequence of closely interconnected dramatic works stretching from Euripides to Craig Raine’s 1990 reworking of Racine’s Andromaque, his ‘1953’. Considering the range of legendary possibilities for the child’s future available to Euripides (death for private revenge, death at the hands of Neoptolemos/Pyrhus, death by collective policy decision of the Greeks, survival to participate in the restoration of his people), the article examines how Euripides exploited these possibilities in Troades, and how Seneca in his Troades followed and developed themes and patterns which Euripides had established in treating the motif. The persistence of alternative versions of Astyanax’s future in late Latin, medieval and renaissance texts, running parallel to the Senecan tradition, is then explored; Racine’s reworking of Astyanax’s story in Andromaque (1667) is examined in the light of the influence on him both of these and of the way in which Senecan/Euripidean elements had developed sequentially through earlier dramatic works of the 16th–17th centuries. The article concludes by exploring developments of Racine’s innovations to the motif, in the work of his contemporary Pradon and of the 20th-century English poet Raine.

[VITTORIO MUSSOLINI:] Can you understand that, woman? Have you grasped exactly what I’m offering? If we win the war I’ll rebuild London, free you

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Craig Raine’s play ‘1953’, a novel twist on Racine’s Andromaque, centres on an alternative twentieth-century history, where the Axis powers (Racine’s Greeks) have defeated the British (Racine’s Trojans) in World War II. Racine’s play from which Raine worked, however, was already playing with ‘alternative futures’, in a post-Trojan-War context, in ways crucial to the dynamics of the play. Andromaque both actualises a future where Hector’s son Astyanax survives the fall of Troy, and presents an envisaged future where Troy itself rises from the ashes with Astyanax as its king — the latter a future which can be dreamed of, feared, denied, rejected, and in all those guises used as a tool in the battle of words and wills between the characters. These futures in their turn sprang from motifs which had been handled and rehandled in the literature of the classical world and then the modern European tradition from Homer on.

Several of the works in that tradition show clear interconnections regarding these motifs, particularly in passages where a character articulates an imagined picture of Astyanax’s future after the fall of Troy. Some of these interconnections build up sequentially, with each new version responding to details in its predecessor(s) and in turn influencing what the next writer did with the idea. In Andromaque, Racine’s treatment of Astyanax and his story is shaped both by links with the works of individual predecessors and by this ‘chain reaction’ process as a whole, as well as responding to trends in the wider tradition. In its turn, Raine’s specific reworking of Racine’s play is thus connected via Racine to the tradition behind the French dramatist: both to the broader unfolding of the variant forms of the Astyanax legend, and to the closely interlinked texts which helped shape Racine’s particular deployment of that legend in his play. This article aims to consider the possibilities presented by the legendary tradition for Astyanax’s fate and how those possibilities were then exploited to a variety of dramatic and thematic ends in works presenting that fate as yet to be decided. We shall explore this ‘exploitation’ firstly in the key classical works in the dramatic tradition, by Euripides and Seneca, and then in a particular sequence of closely interconnected modern European works for which Euripides and Seneca served as inspiration and springboard: the sequence within which Racine’s Andromaque and Raine’s ‘1953’ take their place.²

2. Kern, “Der antike Astyanax-Mythus und seine späteren Auswüchse”, gives a descriptive account of the Astyanax legend as it appears in many of the works cov-