

ABSTRACT

A Director's Approach to Euripides' *Hecuba*

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This thesis explores a production of Euripides' *Hecuba* as it was directed by Christopher Peck. Chapter One articulates a unique Euripidean dramatic structure to demonstrate the contemporary viability of Euripides' play. Chapter Two utilizes this dramatic structure as the basis for an aggressive analysis of themes inherent in the production. Chapter Three is devoted to the conceptualization of this particular production and the relationship between the director and the designers in pursuit of this concept. Chapter Four catalogs the rehearsal process and how the director and actors worked together to realize the dramatic needs of the production. Finally Chapter Five is a postmortem of the production emphasizing the strengths and weaknesses of the final product of Baylor University's *Hecuba*.

A Director's Approach to Euripides' *Hecuba*

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Hecuba: The Playwright

Euripides: He's Not a Problem

It is difficult to overstate the influence of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Aristotelian dramatic structure is the traditional organization which has motivated literary criticism and analysis in the west, not just as it defines Greek literature but also as a model for play structure over the last twenty-five hundred years. Aristotle describes a series of dramatic standards to follow in order to produce tragedy that is both efficacious and socially instructive. His *Poetics* were written one hundred years after the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides and serve as a reflection on these influential playwrights at the height of classical Greek theatre. As such Aristotle does not treat all dramatists equally. Aristotle and subsequent scholars throughout the ages utilize Sophocles as a prime example of accomplished complex tragedy, while the work of Euripides is often marked as dramatically fragile, inconsistent, and even defective. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle admits Euripides to be "the most tragic of the poets," but not before he points out that Euripides, is "faulty...in the general management of his subject."¹ The twentieth century further developed criticism against Euripides as scholars attempted to reconcile Euripidean content with Aristotelian structure.

A logical conclusion from this continuing critical debate is that Euripides' canon is problematic in form and content and deficient in comparison to his Greek contemporaries. However, a director interested in and motivated by Euripidean content

¹ Aristotle, "Poetics," trans. S.H. Butcher, *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski*. ed. Bernard F. Dukore (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc, 1974) 42.

must assert that Euripides' plays are not a problem but rather demonstrate structural components that suggest his work exists outside of the traditional Aristotelian dramatic framework. As practitioners, we should look to the exceptionality of Euripides work in order to search for strategies to analyze, conceptualize, and produce Euripidean tragedy. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that there is a unique Euripidean dramatic form. This form tends to place emphasis on an idea over a character, present an active and engaged dialectic often pitting myth vs. fact, and weave together two seemingly incongruent lines of action to demonstrate their interdependency. This is the dramatic structure by which we can best understand Euripides' *Hecuba*.

Euripides and Aristotle

There is some contention around the date of Euripides' birth. Moses Hadas suggests 485 B.C.E. as a birth year² while others argue 480 B.C.E. and still other as early as 486 B.C.E. What we know for certain is that his life closely coincided with the rise and fall of the great city-state of Athens. In 480, the Greeks were victorious against a Persian assault. Athens responded to this victory with profound optimism which ignited a prolific educational and cultural reform establishing Athens as a progressive city-state.³ Artistic creativity was abundant and influential during this golden age; in fact Euripides wrote his first play within a few years after viewing Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy.⁴ However, in the middle of the fifth century Athens fell out of favor with other Greek states and war broke out between Sparta and Athens. This was the time of Euripides'

² Moses Hadas, Introduction, *Ten Plays by Euripides*, by Euripides, trans. Moses Hadas and John McLean (New York: Bantam Dell, 1960) vii.

³ Harold Bloom, ed, *Euripides* (Broomall: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002) 13.

⁴ Bloom, 14.

dramatic activity and much of it—for example *Andromache*—was a reaction to the Peloponnesian War.⁵ By the time Euripides died, in 404 B.C.E., Athens had been devastated by war; Euripides spent the final two years of his life in exile. Due to Euripides' direct relationship with the war, scholars such as Harold Bloom argue for the relevance of such calamity on the playwright's work. "The fact that these tumultuous events coincided with the production of Euripides' dramas," writes Bloom in his book *Euripides*, "leads many critics to focus on the nearly ubiquitous presence of irony in Euripides' work."⁶ The events of the Peloponnesian War led to a unique dramatic structure, which places emphasis on idea as opposed to character, and which differs from the Aristotelian model that would be defined one hundred years later.

Aristotle's tragic form favors the work of Sophocles, specifically *Oedipus the King*, which Paul Roche, in his introduction to the play, calls Aristotle's "perfect specimen."

Aristotle conceived tragedy as the 'imitation' (that is, representation) of a certain action with great magnitude in dramatic form embellished with poetry. In this action a person of upright character but dogged by a certain flaw heads for his downfall. The flaw is the lever for his destruction, but the irony is that it does its work, trips him up, through his finest qualities: in Oedipus, his honesty and courage.⁷

The flaw, or *hamartia*, is one of Aristotle's necessary elements of complex tragedy and can be defined as a behavioral component which the hero possesses in excess. Therefore the *hamartia* is less a "tragic flaw" as it is commonly considered today and more the excess of a superior quality. This *hamartia*, as Aristotle defined it, must lead to the fall of

⁵ Hadas, ix.

⁶ Bloom, 14-15.

⁷ Paul Roche, Introduction, *Oedipus the King*, by Sophocles, *Sophocles: The Complete Plays*, trans. Paul Roche (New York: Signet Classics, 2010) 211.

a great man. “There are three forms of plot to be avoided. (1) A good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery, or (2) a bad man from misery to happiness...Nor, on the other hand, should (3) an extremely bad man be seen falling from happiness to misery.”⁸ Oedipus' *hamartia*, as Roche points out, is an excess of honesty and courage.

The second component of Aristotle's complex tragedy is the *peripeteia* which is defined by Aristotle as, “A change by which the action veers around to its opposite...Thus in the Oedipus, the messenger comes to cheer Oedipus and free him from his alarms about his mother, but by revealing who he is, he produces the opposite effect.”⁹ Finally there is *anagnorisis*, or recognition, defined as “A change from ignorance to knowledge.”¹⁰ Aristotle has already cited the moment in the play when the *peripeteia* happens, while the *anagnorisis* is found when Oedipus realizes the truth. “Lost! Ah, lost! At last it's blazing clear...My birth all sprung revealed from those it never should.”¹¹

These three elements of tragedy all relate to plot, which is one of the six necessary elements that Aristotle described as part of drama: Plot, character, thought, language, music and spectacle. Aristotle believed these elements exist in an order of importance, ranking plot and character as the two most significant. “The Plot, then is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of tragedy: Character holds the second place...Third in

⁸ Aristotle, “The Poetics,” trans. Ingram Bywater, *Theatre Theory Theatre: The Major Critical texts from Aristotle to Zeami to Soyinka and Havel*, ed. Daniel Gerould (New York: Applause, 2000) 55.

⁹ Aristotle, “The Poetics,” trans. S.H. Butcher 40.

¹⁰ Aristotle, “The Poetics,” trans. S.H. Butcher 40.

¹¹ Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, trans. Paul Roche, *Sophocles: The Complete Plays*, trans. and ed. by Paul Roche (New York: Signet Classics, 2010) 253.

order is thought.”¹² We can identify this prejudice to plot and character through the employment of *peripeteia*, *hamartia* and *anagnorisis*. Each of these elements helps bind the plot to a significant singular character, as in the case of Oedipus. While many Euripidean plays do not exemplify the Aristotelian model, his *Hippolytus* is an example of the plot-to-character structure. In the opening prologue of the play, Aphrodite identifies Hippolytus’ *hamartia* which will eventually bring about his downfall.

“Theseus’ son Hippolytus, born of the Amazon and brought up by temperate Pitheus, is the only inhabitant of this land of Troezen who declares that I am the very vilest of divinities. He spurns love and will have nothing to do with sex.”¹³ By this we can define Hippolytus’ tragic flaw, his excess of good, as purity. Hippolytus’ unexpected death serves as the play’s *peripeteia*. Hippolytus’ moment of *anagnorisis* comes at the end of the play when he says, “Ah me! I recognize the deity that ruined me.”¹⁴ Here we actually have a two-fold recognition as Hippolytus not only recognizes that Aphrodite brought about his downfall but also he acknowledges his *hamartia* which originally set her against him. As in the case of *Oedipus*, Euripides’ *Hippolytus* is following a character driven plot. The play hinges on a singular tragic individual whose *peripeteia*, *hamartia*, and *anagnorisis* drive the story of the play.

Structurally, *Hippolytus* appears to be an exception for Euripides. Euripides’ wrote some eighty plays during his life. Of those, eighteen are extant: *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Children of Heracles*, *Hippolytus*, *Andromache*, *Hecuba*, *Suppliant Women*, *Electra*,

¹² Aristotle, “The Poetics,” trans. S.H. Butcher 37.

¹³ Euripides, *Hippolytus*, trans. Moses Hadas and John McLean, *Ten Plays by Euripides*, trans. by Moses Hadas and John McLean (New York: Bantam Dell, 1960) 75.

¹⁴ Euripides, *Hippolytus*, trans. Moses Hadas and John McLean 108.

Heracles, *Trojan Women*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Ion*, *Helen*, *Phoenician Women*, *Orestes*, *Bacchae*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, as well as his only surviving satyr play *The Cyclops*. For a complete listing of all of Euripides' plays with dates, see Appendix A. In reading his greater canon, we can observe that most of his work does not neatly fit the Aristotelian format. It is for that reason that Euripides' work has received such an extensive negative response. The episodic nature of plays such as *Hecuba*, *Heracles*, and *Andromache* is condemned by Aristotle. Scholars point out the two-dimensionality of the characters in *Iphigenia Among the Taurians* even if they appreciate the vivid romantic nature of the play. *Heracles* and *Hecuba* are both criticized for their seemingly conflicting lines of action. In fact, considerable scholarship tries to reconcile *Hecuba* with Aristotelian structure by hypothesizing the existence of what is often thought to be two independent stories.

In the early nineteenth century, August Wilhelm von Schlegel pointed out the inconsistency of the two plotlines of *Hecuba*. He argued that the sacrifice of Polyxena and the revenge taken against Polymestor are only relatable given the character of Hecuba: furthermore, the second half of the play undermines the intention of the first.¹⁵ Just over one hundred years later, J.A. Spranger not only continues this criticism but also assumes unanimous agreement by anyone familiar with the play.¹⁶ This suggests that the scholarship of the nineteenth and early twentieth century produced a considerable anti-Euripidean movement. William Arrowsmith, in the introduction to his translation of

¹⁵ August Wilhelm von Schlegel, *A Course of Lectures of Dramatic Art and Literature*, trans. by John Black (London: H.G. Bohn, 1861) 137.

¹⁶ J.A. Spranger, "The Problem of the *Hecuba*," *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. ¾ (Jun.-Oct., 1927) 155.

Hecuba published in 1958, points out that before the nineteenth century *Hecuba* was held in high esteem.¹⁷ It was the criticism of the nineteenth century which focused on the dual action lines of plays like *Hecuba* and *Heracles* which created a Euripidean crisis that did not exist before Schlegel. Arrowsmith and his contemporaries as well as more current scholars all sought to solve this Euripidean problem. In her 1991 book, *Euripides and the Instruction of the Athenians*, Justina Gregory asserted the antithetical nature of the play's two climaxes by distinguishing an inherently good Polyxena versus an inherently evil Polymestor.¹⁸ In the late 1960's D.J. Conacher engaged in an intense analysis of the text in order to point out an interdependent need between the two action lines. However, even Conacher admits, "This is a strange tragedy, in that at no point does the tragic sufferer achieve heroic stature: tragic decline, rather than tragic peripety, informs the action."¹⁹ Given this identification of the peripety, it is clear that Conacher takes an Aristotelian approach to his analysis of the play and as such admits the inherent flaws of *Hecuba* within a character-driven form.

Unlike other critics who seek to define Euripides in terms of Aristotle, William Arrowsmith argues for an exceptional Euripidean tragic model in order to comprehend Euripides' style, form and thematic content. Arrowsmith maintains that instead of working within the context of character and the Aristotelian tragic hero, Euripides' plays are based on a "theater of an idea." For Arrowsmith, this means, "In such a theater I assume that the emphasis will be upon ideas rather than character, and that a thesis or

¹⁷ William Arrowsmith, Introduction, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith, *Euripides III: Four Tragedies*. Ed. David Greene and Richard Lattimore (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958) 3.

¹⁸ Justina Gregory, *Euripides and the Instruction of the Athenians* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991) 112.

¹⁹ D.J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama: Myth, Theme and Structure* (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1967) 164.

problem will normally take precedence over development of character or heroism.”²⁰ If in fact we are working with a unique dramatic form, as Arrowsmith suggests, the “problems” with Euripides’ plays do not lie in his form but rather the analytical approach that scholars have taken in interpreting that form.

Within Euripides’ theater of an idea, Arrowsmith identifies an intense dialectic between two concepts. For example, from an Aristotelian perspective, *Iphigenia Among the Taurians* is sentimental, with a much welcomed resolution between brother and sister that comes at the end of the play. It is light, with very little substance and therefore not an exemplary tragedy. However, Arrowsmith takes a different position on the play as he allows it to reveal a specific idea with an intensely poignant dialectic at work. “But the romantic atmosphere is by no means absolute; again and again Euripides intrudes into this artificial world the jarring dissonance of a harsh contemporary reality.”²¹ Here Arrowsmith points out the dialectic that is at work between the romantic atmosphere of the play and the contemporary world in which the play is being produced. Rather than placing emphasis on the characters of Iphigenia and Orestes, Arrowsmith proposes that Euripides is instead focused on the audience responding to the idea of war. Arrowsmith continues:

But I wonder what Athenian, even the most insensitive, could have failed to grasp or respond to the image which this play sets before him, especially in the light of that experience of war which the play so powerfully exploits. A sister dedicates her brother to death by the sword. It seems perhaps melodramatic to moderns, but unless I am badly mistaken, that symbolism is directly addressed to the experience and the conscience

²⁰ William Arrowsmith, “A Greek Theater of Ideas,” *Arion*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Autumn 1963) 32.

²¹ Arrowsmith, “A Greek Theater of Ideas” 44.

of a people which, for nearly twenty years, had suffered all the horrors of fratricidal war.²²

Unlike the Aristotelian character-driven catharsis that is produced by the actions of an individual, it is through this idea of war—a contemporary and relevant theme for individuals viewing Euripides' play—that an emotional response is achieved.

Arrowsmith considers that Euripides accomplished the “theater of an idea” by developing a dialectic that contemplates myth vs. fact. He constructs a romantic moment of recognition between Iphigenia and Orestes that is artificially viewed as nothing more than a satisfying happy ending. However, he has placed this moment in harsh contrast with the world as it is realistically defined. Hence he has juxtaposed the myth of the romantic recognition scene with the fact of the contemporary war and the harsh reality of fratricide.

As Schlegel points out, Euripides' *Heracles* also exhibits two competing plotlines that from an Aristotelian perspective are incongruent. Even Arrowsmith recognizes, “Given Aristotelian standards of judgment...the play's dislocation could not but appear either pointless or gratuitous; for at almost every conceivable point the play is in flat contradiction to the principles of the *Poetics*.”²³ The play lacks an essential *hamartia*, is episodic, and contains two disjointed plotlines. The first is that of Heracles and the protection of his family upon his return to Thebes. While Heracles is sent to Hades to capture and bring back Cerberus, the three-headed dog that guards the gates to the underworld, Lycos, a Euboean, attacked and captured Thebes for himself. Lycos intends

²² Arrowsmith, “A Greek Theater of Ideas” 44.

²³ William Arrowsmith, Introduction, *Heracles*, trans. William Arrowsmith, *Euripides II: Four Tragedies*, ed. David Greene and Richard Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956) 45.

to execute Heracles' children, father, and wife but Heracles returns in time to rescue his family and Thebes and slay Lycos. Standing alone, this portion of the play could be seen as a romantic play with little more substance than a happy ending. In the second portion of the play, Heracles is driven mad by Hera and takes the lives of his wife and children. When he returns to sanity he mourns the death of his family and wishes to take his own life. It is not until his friend and ally, Theseus, comes to Thebes and demonstrates to Heracles the importance of continuing to live that Heracles chooses not to take his own life. This portion of the play is at least tragic, although with its lack of a *hamartia*, it fails as a complex tragedy. An Aristotelian critical response fails to unify these two plotlines. However, within the construct of the theater of an idea, these two plotlines can exist interdependently without a logical relationship. In fact, as Arrowsmith points out, it is the illogical nature of these two plotlines which give them power: "The result is a structure in which two apparently autonomous actions are jammed savagely against each other in almost total contradiction, with no attempt to minimize or even modulate the profound formal rift."²⁴ For Arrowsmith, this dialectic again centers on myth vs. fact. "The whole play exhibits, as though on two plateaus, a *conversion* of reality. A story or legend derived from received beliefs—the world of myth and the corpus of 'things as they are said to be'—is suddenly in all of its parts, terms, characters, and the values it invokes is *converted* under dramatic pressure to another phase of reality."²⁵ The first plotline of *Heracles* demonstrates the pre-conceived mythical relationship that a classical Greek audience would have with the Heracleian character. He is strong, brave, a protector, and Euripides spares nothing in continually reminding us of his heroism. This

²⁴ Arrowsmith, Introduction, *Heracles* 50.

²⁵ Arrowsmith, Introduction, *Heracles* 50.

is the mythical Heracles that an audience wants and respects. The second plotline establishes a new reality for the character of Heracles; one that demonstrates weakness, shame and mortality. Euripides' dialectic of the familiar hero presents an important deconstruction that pits the mythic against the real. In a turbulent time of war in Athens, a chaotic restructuring of the societal norm had significant weight.

Euripides' theater of an idea can even be found in his most Aristotelian play, *Hippolytus*. Here, Euripides explores the idea of the extremes of sexuality contrasting Hippolytus' purity with Phaedra's sexuality. The significance of this theater of an idea is that there is a demonstrated Euripidean model that confirms a rich dialectic at work within his plays. This dialectic allows for two contrasting plotlines to share an interdependent relationship with one another which then exists under the umbrella of a unified idea. This structure explains the form of *Hecuba* and opens an analytical door to the play's themes and idea.

Criticism Related to Euripides' HECUBA

While most nineteenth and twentieth century Euripidean scholarship has been devoted to reconciling the Euripidean crisis, other scholars question the contemporary relevance of works such as *Hecuba*. In 1993, David P. Kubiak writes of *Hecuba*: "The tradition of ritual lament is simply too far removed from possible modes of contemporary expression, and the tears and dirges of a play like the *Hecuba*, no matter how well rendered, are not likely to achieve their original effect."²⁶ However, Kubiak's position does not seem to be shared by the theatrical community as several important and influential productions of *Hecuba* have been performed over the last two decades. These

²⁶ David P. Kubiak, Rev. of *Euripides: Hecuba* by Janet Lemke and Kenneth J. Reckford, *The Classical World*, Vol. 86, No. 3 (Jan.-Feb., 1993) 255.

productions employ important performance devices such as the use of the chorus in story-telling, an investigation of the themes of humanity and war, double casting, and contemporary costume and set design choices in an effort to display the relevance of this production to a present-day audience. This portion of Chapter One will explore these choices in order to establish effective directorial decisions that have led to relevant, contemporary productions of *Hecuba*. Furthermore, the failure of a 2005 production of *Hecuba* will determine that making connections to contemporary war is not enough to make this play significant.

In August of 2010, Ricky Dukes directed *Hecuba* at the Lazurus Theatre Company for The New Diorama Theatre in London. While the reviewer makes note of the inherent gender themes in the play, she seems most interested in the role of the chorus in the production.

The chorus perform an unexpectedly effective series of tableau through which they depict the fall of the city: as Troy falls above the heads of the audience, we share the gut-wrenching loss its inhabitants feel. With much of the choral speech divided between individual speakers, Dukes' manipulation of this sometimes wordy play enables personal stories to emerge.²⁷

The importance of the chorus in this production helps to solidify the societal quality of the tragedy. The uniquely personalized story-telling of the chorus members provides insight into the tragic ramifications on the society as a whole. The story becomes about the chorus too as their identities aid in developing the tragedy.

Another recent production starred Karen Linklater in October of 2004 at the 45 Bleecker Theatre in New York. Reviewer Gwen Orel notes the plays potency when she

²⁷ Helena Rampley, *Hecuba*, 13 August 2010, WhatsOnStage.com, 22 June 2012.
<<http://www.whatsonstage.com/reviews/theatre/off-west+end/E8831281706904/Hecuba.html>>.

says, “This production is not just powerful, it’s thrilling. Euripides’ play is not performed very often compared to *Medea* or *The Bacchae*, but as an antiwar drama it’s as powerful as anything playing on television or on the boards.”²⁸ This production used the thematic hinge of war by which to reveal itself to a contemporary audience. Orel also notes the existence of the two seemingly independent plots that exist to make the whole of *Hecuba*, though it appears that the final stage picture aids in bringing these two pieces together. “But the justice has led to more bloodshed of innocents, and the ghosts of children inhabit the stage in the final tableau.”²⁹ It is fitting that this final tableau highlights the helpless victims trapped in their father’s war. This production is interested in the concept that war knows no singular tragic victim nor is it partial to bystanders. As the play comes to its conclusion, the audience is aware of the senseless mutilation of the children of Polymester just as they were the criminal deaths of the children of Hecuba.

Shepard Sobel and The Pearl Theatre Company’s 2006 New York production of *Hecuba* further explored the relationship between human nature and war. Reviewer Martin Denton writes:

2,400 intervening years of history have not made *Hecuba* any less necessary than it was when Euripides first wrote it: its message, decrying the seemingly endless cycles of attack and revenge that we call war, remains as unheeded today as it was then...In *Hecuba* we see, over and over, the scenes where people lament and wail about warfare’s cruelty and destruction; and then we see the same people fail to prevent more of the same from happening.³⁰

²⁸ Gwen Orel, *Hecuba*, 25 October 2004, theatrescene.net, 22 June 2012
<[http://www.theaterscene.net/ts%5Carticles.nsf/\(AlphaH\)/E82DE4E0CDD2B4B985256F3900271D44?OpenDocument](http://www.theaterscene.net/ts%5Carticles.nsf/(AlphaH)/E82DE4E0CDD2B4B985256F3900271D44?OpenDocument)>.

²⁹ Orel.

³⁰ Martin Denton, *Hecuba*, 13 January 2006, nytheatre.com, 22 June 2012
<<http://www.nytheatre.com/Show/Review/5006207>>.

Sobel's production, according to Denton, investigated a duality that human beings have in relationship to war. Why do people gravitate toward violence when they understand the destructive and devastating repercussions it will have? Sobel continues to explore this duality with the double casting chosen for the production. Again, Denton points out:

Agamemnon and Odysseus are both portrayed by John Livingstone Rolle, the soldier as slave to the "will" of his people and the king as manipulator non-pareil. The messenger and the Thracian king are both played by Dominic Cuskern, who delivers a truly great performance whose highlights are two remarkable monologues about the catastrophic results of taking an eye for an eye.³¹

This choice allowed the production to make contemporary use of Greek conventions without historicizing the concept. It also significantly aids in the production's ability to exemplify this inherent duality. The doubling of Talthylus and Polymestor is ingenious in that the same actor plays a key character in each of the plays two climaxes. The once beautifully orated death of Polyxena is now directly connected to the savagery taken against Polymestor via the double-casted character. Not only are we unable to view Polyxena's death with the same beauty it once displayed but we are similarly compromised in accepting the vengeful death of Polymestor's two sons. This is an exciting directorial choice that complicates the relationship between human nature and war.

Jonathan Kent's 2004 production of *Hecuba* at the Donmar Warehouse in London utilized a fresh version of the play, by Frank McGuinness, and a costume and set design that cannot help but transport the audience into a contemporary world. Philip Fisher writes, "In the play's depiction of conflict and the human cost of war, parallels will be drawn with events today. The use of modern dress, with the Trojans looking like dirty

³¹ Denton.

gypsies – or possibly illegal immigrants – may hint at this.”³² The parallels found between the production and contemporary society manifest themselves in design choices and reminds the audience of the relevance of the story.

The success of one contemporary twenty-first century production does not legitimize every contemporary production. In fact, it appears that the 2005 Royal Shakespeare Company production at the Brooklyn Academy of Music falls short because it relies exclusively on the perception of the relevance of war in contemporary society. The production promoted itself with the words “eerily relevant,” to which reviewer Stan Richardson responds:

I could not understand the importance of watching this play at this time. So I found myself stuck on the Eerie Relevance. Certainly there are women suffering this way in Iraq at the moment, as there are mothers in the Sudan and other places where there are genocides occurring that are under-(or simply un)reported in the United States newspapers. But I found myself trying to recall a period in history when there were NOT women facing these wartime atrocities. So does that make this play so important that it must be seen now? Harrison’s production of *Hecuba*, at least, does not make a very convincing argument for itself.³³

If *Hecuba* is always relevant then how do you construct the production so that audiences cannot ignore its poignancy? One of the largest struggles facing the RSC production is the lack of immediate action in Tony Harrison’s adaptation. Richardson says, “Harrison’s script is indeed poetic, but the language is directly undramatic, even idle.”³⁴ Richardson also suggests that the pairing of this undramatic adaptation with a production that is

³² Philip Fisher, *Hecuba*, 2004, The British Theatre Guide, 22 June 2012
<<http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/hecuba-rev>>.

³³ Stan Richardson, *Hecuba*, 18 June 2005, nytheatre.com, 22 June 2012
<<http://www.nytheatre.com/Show/Review/5006206>>.

³⁴ Richardson.

already labeled as “more rhetorical than most other Greek tragedies” means that the production loses too much momentum to ever be dramatically effective.³⁵ What is most valuable to take away from this production is that the contemporary wartime connection is not enough to make a play relevant. The play’s inherent themes and ideas have to be delivered with poignancy and accessibility. Otherwise, the production will fail.

For two hundred years, *Hecuba* has been fighting a nineteenth century pre-occupation with Aristotelian structure and the question of relevance in order to reclaim itself as a great dramatic work. Euripidean criticism suggests that the play will be most dramatically relevant and engaging if it is motivated by idea instead of characters. The productions that have been most successful with a contemporary audience are those that rely on an idea, whether that is war, slavery, or barbarism. When approaching this play, it will be necessary to examine *Hecuba* within the framework of idea in order to identify a relevant theme and conceptualization for the production.

³⁵ Richardson.

CHAPTER TWO

Hecuba: The Play

The Dramatic Structure

Using an Aristotelian vocabulary to define the works of Euripides has proven problematic and has resulted in the open criticism of his work by scholars, particularly over the last two hundred years. However, based on contemporary productions discussed in the previous chapter, an argument can be made for a *Hecuba* that is alive and vibrant and applicable to a contemporary audience. Rather than viewing the text as a poorly written Greek tragedy or perhaps worse, a problem play, defining and exploring the unique qualities of Euripidean tragedy can lead to an analysis that is beneficial in defining a successful conceptual approach to *Hecuba*.

In Chapter One, *Heracles* was used as an example of a Euripidean play that takes Arrowsmith's concept of the Greek theater of an idea and presents a rich dialectic. In *Heracles*, Euripides presents the play with two climactic moments that engage in conversation with one another. The juxtaposition of Heracles as mythical hero and factual human being creates the platform for this play's theater of an idea. *Hecuba* utilizes a similar structure, with dual climaxes in conversation, in order to develop the major ideas of the play. As in the case of *Heracles*, *Hecuba*'s dual climaxes and lack of an Aristotelian tragic hero has made the play awkward to approach from a plot-to-character analytical perspective. This is to say that the weight that Aristotle places on character has proven insufficient in defining certain Euripidean plays. However, Aristotle can still be relevant in analyzing *Hecuba*. In this chapter, Aristotle's six elements will be

utilized to analyze the production. However emphasis will be placed on Aristotle's thought, or idea, as opposed to character. Furthermore, when we reach "thought," special attention will be placed on Arrowsmith's concept of a Greek theater of an idea and how this concept can be applied directly to *Hecuba*.

Plot

Hecuba takes place in the aftermath of the Trojan War when Troy was destroyed by the Greeks. Like Sophocles and Aeschylus, Euripides was heavily influenced by the Homeric epic poems written hundreds of years earlier. The actual events of the Trojan War are believed to have occurred between the fifteenth and eleventh century B.C.E. Euripides' play takes place on the Thracian shore in the camp of the Greeks. He opens his play with a prologue, delivered by Hecuba's son, Polydorus, who discloses to the audience certain tragic events that are going to unfold. Polydorus tells us that his sister, Polyxena, is going to be sacrificed in honor of the fallen Greek soldier, Achilles. He then explains that he has already died at the hands of King Polymestor of Thrace. Polymestor—a supposed friend to Hecuba's family—was instructed by Priam, King of Troy, to protect Polydorus and the treasure that was sent with Polydorus to Thrace. However, when the war turned against Troy, Polymestor's greed overtook him and he killed Polydorus, keeping the treasure for himself. After the Prologue is completed, Polydorus exits and Hecuba enters. The chorus follows quickly behind Hecuba and announces that her daughter, Polyxena, is to be sacrificed to honor Achilles. Odysseus enters to claim the young girl and Hecuba pleads with Odysseus to set her daughter free. Despite all efforts to persuade Odysseus, he is unrelenting and demands the girl. Polyxena, rather than beg for her own life, is content to end it in this way. She takes

ownership of her death and discusses the liberation her death will bring. Eventually Polyxena settles her distraught mother and is taken away to be executed. Talthybias, messenger of Agamemnon, enters and recounts the sacrifice of Polyxena, giving special attention to the grace and dignity that the death demonstrated to the watching soldiers.

In the wake of Hecuba's mourning for her daughter, the chorus finds Hecuba's dead son washed up on the shore. Hecuba immediately flies into a rage and seeks vengeance against the boy's failed protector, Polymestor. Agamemnon enters and Hecuba asks him for the means to exact revenge against Polymestor. Agamemnon, thinking as a politician, refuses to play any physical part in the revenge but agrees to turn a blind eye. Hecuba then sends a messenger to Polymestor, requesting to see him and his two sons. Upon the arrival of Polymestor, Hecuba tells him that she wants to share information in regards to a significant amount of treasure that has been hidden. Hecuba takes Polymestor and his sons into her tent, followed by the chorus of Trojan women, and then the women shed their false friendship as they stab Polymestor's eyes and brutally murder his two sons. Upon hearing the commotion, Agamemnon returns to the disturbance and finds Polymestor blinded and holding his death children. Agamemnon acts as judge and allows both Hecuba and Polymestor to speak in regards to these vengeful actions and then finally rules in favor of Hecuba. Polymestor prophesies that Hecuba will die at sea and Agamemnon will be ruthlessly slayed by his wife Clytemnestra. Agamemnon has the guards carry Polymestor out, and the play ends with a final choral ode.

Crucial to understanding a plot is exploring what Stanislavski referred to as the "given circumstances" of a play. In his book, *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and*

Designers, James Thomas defines “given circumstances” as everything that the play contains that is important for actors/designers/directors to know.¹ Central to these given circumstances is a discussion of the time and place of the world of the play. For *Hecuba*, this means exploring both the mytho-historical time period of the play and focusing on the non-linear progression of the play’s plot. Discussing the episodic nature of *Hecuba* will help to reinforce the Euripidean structure we will be discussing later in the chapter.

The play begins during the aftermath of the Trojan War, a battle fought between the Greeks and the Trojans over Helen of Troy. Euripides’ play content, as has been stated, was extracted from the Homeric poems written centuries earlier. This is by no means a foreign concept as each of the major Greek playwrights draw significantly from Homer’s poems. Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, Sophocles’ lost play *Polyxena*, and many of the plays of Euripides’ including *The Trojan Women*, *Andromache*, and of course *Hecuba* all utilize Homer’s interpretation of this mighty Greek/Trojan war. As such, audiences were considerably familiar with these stories through both the works of Homer and the recycling of this content at the play festivals.

To summarize key historical events, the Greeks defeat the Trojans, and the house of Priam is almost completely destroyed. Priam was slaughtered by Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles while Troy’s champion fighter, Hector, was killed in battle by Achilles who was then killed by Paris. When *Hecuba* begins, the once Queen of Troy believes herself to have three surviving children: daughters Cassandra and Polyxena, and son Polydorus. What the audience learns in the prologue of the play is that Polydorus is already dead and Polyxena will soon be offered as a sacrifice for the fallen Greek soldier,

¹ James Thomas, *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers*, 4th ed (United States: Elsevier Inc, 2009) 38.

Achilles. Cassandra has become concubine to the Greek general Agamemnon and thus Hecuba believes her to already be lost. Within the prologue we understand that by the end of the play the family of Hecuba will be completely destroyed.

The Trojan women prisoners, including Hecuba, have already been promised as slaves to specific individuals in the Greek army. During the play, the women of Troy are packing their few remaining possessions in order to sail to their new homes. Currently they are waiting on the shores of Thrace, a city neighboring Troy that in the past was Troy's ally but changed its alliance as the momentum of the war shifted in the Greek's favor. While the character of Polymestor, King of Thrace, is believed to be an invention of Euripides, Homer does mention the Thracians as one time allies of the Trojans during the war. In book ten of the *Iliad*, Odysseus and a group of followers steal into the Thracian camp, kill Rhesus—king of Thrace—and his men, and let loose their horses. Thrace is important to Euripides' play not only because of the antagonist, Polymestor, but also because the Greeks are currently unable to leave the Thracian shores because of unfavorable winds.

This brief information gives a historical context for the place and time of the action of the play. Equally significant is the elapsed time during the course of the play. I have discussed in Chapter One the episodic nature of *Hecuba*, meaning that the action of the play is not linked causally. One of the concerns with *Hecuba* is the lacking connection between the two seemingly different action lines: the sacrifice of Polyxena and the revenge against Polymestor. Returning briefly to the discussion of *Heracles* allows us to point out another instance in Euripides' canon when he utilizes this episodic quality. In *Heracles*, Euripides establishes two actions that have no causal link: 1)

Heracles saves his family from Lycos and, 2) Heracles kills his family. In fact, these two actions are entirely antithetical. For Aristotle this concern is irreconcilable because characters act as the agents that carry out the action of a unified plot. However, within the concept of the theater of an idea, juxtaposing actions are necessary in order to create a dialogue. In the case of *Heracles*, the myth of the hero and the reality of the man have to be equally highlighted in order to offer a discussion by which an audience can formulate an opinion. In this way, the episodic nature of the plot of *Heracles* is an essential component of Euripidean structure.

If we consider for a moment that *Hecuba* shares the same necessity for its episodic action line, we can begin to surmise that the play is not an Aristotelian tragedy with a clearly defined singular tragic hero but rather a Euripidean tragedy interested in the theater of an idea. If this is the case then the questionable placement of two dynamic climaxes is no longer a problem but instead a crucial, structural element. Instead of trying to reconcile these two actions into one, we should accept that the plot requires these two actions in order to establish the play's idea.

Thought

Traditionally it would make the most sense to follow a discussion of plot with one of character because of their Aristotelian interdependency. However, because of the unique dual-action that occurs in *Hecuba*, it is fitting to first discuss how understanding this double action will lead the analysis to unlocking the major thought, or in Arrowsmith's case, the major idea of the play. Arrowsmith's theater of an idea focuses on an idea constructed by a dialectic presenting myth vs. fact. *Hecuba*'s climaxes serve as the two sides of this dialectic. Euripides outlines for us the glorious, honorable,

sacrificial death of Polyxena and juxtaposes this with the vicious, barbarous, brutal gouging of Polymestor's eyes and terrible slaying of his two sons. These two moments, in their apposition, are clearly in communication and as such define the dialectic of the tragedy. This is not only clear textually but, as Justina Gregory points out, aesthetically. "As described by the victim himself, the blinding of Polymestor and the murder of his two children is horrific—as repugnant aesthetically as Polyxena's self-sacrifice was aesthetically attractive."² These two moments are interdependently woven into one another. The identification of the myth and the fact found within this dialectic will lead to the play's major thematic components.

The first climactic moment, the death of Polyxena, is elevated as the noblest event in the entire play. Talthybias, messenger of Agamemnon, enters the play and praises the dignity, honor, and grace by which Polyxena died.

The blood gushed out, and she fell, dying, to the ground, but even as she dropped, managed to fall somehow with grace, modestly hiding what should be hidden from men's eyes...For my part, having seen your daughter die, I count you of all women the one most blessed in her children.³

Talthybias' words of praise establish Polyxena as heroic and honorable, willing to face death in order to obtain her own freedom. Talthybias' opinion is shared by many academics who regard Polyxena's death as a shining moment of freedom and courage. "Simply but effectively," writes Conacher, "she converts the impending slaughter of a

² Justina Gregory, *Euripides and the Instruction of the Athenians* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991) 109.

³ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith, *Euripides III: Four Tragedies*, ed. David Greene and Richard Lattimore (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958) 33.

chattel into the heroic deed of a free woman.”⁴ Conacher makes an argument for the celebration of Polyxena’s character. Certainly the Greeks—at least according to Talthybius—demonstrate respect for Polyxena’s death. However, this elevation of her character comes at an ironic cost. Despite this consecration of the Polyxena character, the reader/viewer is fully aware that Polyxena’s “choice” is a fabrication; we are made to feel somewhat cynical of this moment. Odysseus’ first speech to Hecuba identifies that Polyxena has no power over her eventual outcome.

By now, Hecuba, I think you know what decision the army has taken and how we voted. But let me review the facts. By majority vote the Greeks have decreed as follows: your daughter, Polyxena, must die as a victim and prize of honor for the grave of Achilles.⁵

This opening speech provides no information by which we can conclude that Polyxena has any degree of choice. The sacrifice does not call for a willing participant. Furthermore, given Odysseus’ firmness, we are just as well to think that he would be willing to drag Polyxena off screaming. Polyxena’s only semblance of choice comes in her personal resignation to fulfill a sacrifice that was not her decision to begin with. Her freedom is no more a reality than Hecuba’s is when Agamemnon says he is prepared to grant her freedom. “What can I do to help you, Hecuba? Your freedom is yours for the asking.”⁶ There is no freedom for Hecuba to obtain. Even freedom from the Greeks means continued slavery to the desolation of Troy. The freedom of Polyxena is a myth. It is a dominant myth which says that glory, honor, and freedom can be achieved in war.

⁴ D.J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama: Myth, Theme and Structure* (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1967) 158.

⁵ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 18.

⁶ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 40.

But Polyxena achieves none of these things. She merely relents to a death that has already been decided upon.

If then we have identified the “myth” within the dramatic structure, it stands to reason that Hecuba’s revenge must demonstrate itself as the “fact” within the play. In his retelling of this savage act of violence, Polymestor reports:

Then, incredibly, out of that scene of domestic peace, they suddenly pulled daggers from their robes and butchered both my sons...And then—O gods!—they crowned their hideous work with worse outrage, the most inhuman brutal crime of all. They lifted their brooches and stabbed these bleeding eyes through and through.⁷

Euripides is able to establish this moment as a counterpoint in his dialectic in two ways. First he defines that peace is an illusion. The pretense that this is a peaceful rendezvous between Polymester and Hecuba is fictional. What is not an illusion is the hatred, savagery, and violence demonstrated in this terrible act of vengeance. This is the second way Euripides identifies that this moment is the factual portion of the dialectic. This climactic vision establishes itself as the antithesis of the Polyxena sacrifice. To juxtapose her death, which is colored as something beautiful, elevated, honorable and even liberating, the assault on Polymester is dirty, back-handed, dehumanizing, and gruesome.

The myth and fact of violence, as suggested by both climactic moments, leads to the major theme of this play. The dialectic within the play is not between violence and non-violence. Rather both climaxes demonstrate violence in retaliation to violence. The dialectic of the play pits the myth that such retribution can be noble against the fact that revenge is always brutal. Euripides crafts the play to reveal that any positive response to counter-violence is a myth. Therefore this play is about the hollowness of violence. For

⁷ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 61.

this reason, *Hecuba* is a non-conventional anti-war play in that Euripides de-glorifies war while simultaneously recognizing its inevitability.

Character

We have already established the difficulty in finding a singular tragic hero in *Hecuba*. Aristotelian analysis has experienced the problem of the two actions of the play and how that complicates the tragic character. Some suggest that the tragedy belongs to Polyxena and then shifts to Hecuba. Others claim a portion of the tragedy belongs to Polymestor while still others establish a through line for Hecuba that makes her the lone tragic hero. Of course, within the theater of an idea structure, it is not necessary to establish a singular tragic figure. In the case of *Heracles*, the major idea designates that Heracles be the focal point of the play. The dialectic exists in response to his mythical heroism versus his humanity and therefore the conclusion that he is the tragic character is appropriate. *Hecuba* is more conflicting because the major idea of war has a dialectical fallout that influences more than just one character. Polyxena, Hecuba, Polymestor, the Trojan women, and Agamemnon all arguably share equally in the destruction brought about by war. In this sense we are dealing with a tragedy that is larger than a singular person. It is a tragedy that affects society and humanity as well. However, within the destructive nature of war we can use Hecuba to identify with the dehumanization brought about by war. The devolving of her character from royalty to barbarism demonstrates the negative repercussions of war.

Hecuba

The character line of Hecuba can be viewed as a series of events that strip her of her freedom, her fortune, and eventually her humanity. Before the play begins, Troy has been destroyed, Hecuba's husband Priam and most of her children are dead, and she has been taken into captivity by the Greeks. When the reader is first introduced to Hecuba, she learns that her daughter, Polyxena, is to be sacrificed in honor of the war hero Achilles. She unsuccessfully begs with Odysseus for the life of her daughter, demonstrating a fall from free woman to slave. Not only does the power shift assume that Hecuba is subservient to Odysseus, but her inability to sway his opinion despite her considerable begging demonstrates how far she has fallen in terms of influence. She reacquires some superficial dignity for a moment when Polyxena's death is described to her but that is immediately shaken when she discovers that her son, Polydorus, has been betrayed and killed by Polymestor. In this instance, Hecuba has fallen further from power as her allies are turning on her for their own personal gain.

Where Hecuba's devolution becomes most interesting is when she seeks counter-action against Polymestor. This measure starts with enlisting the aid of Agamemnon. However, this effort is entirely conditional on Agamemnon granting Hecuba the freedom to exact revenge. Once granted this freedom, Hecuba allows herself to sink further by committing what is arguably the most vicious act of violence in the play. Polyxena's death is exalted for its beauty and honor, and even the death of Polydorus is not described with the same violence and gruesomeness. Hecuba's revenge against Polymestor completes her journey from royalty to slave to barbarian. The final dehumanizing blow comes in Polymestor's concluding prophecy as he foretells Hecuba's physical change

from human to animal. The ramifications of war have sent Hecuba from nobility to slavery to barbarism to animal. This unbearable devastation allows the character of Hecuba to be viewed as a starved lion. She is weak and on the brink of powerlessness; however, she has just enough volatility remaining that when she is stripped of everything, she lashes back with an unmerciful passion for revenge.

Hecuba's relationship to other characters in the play allows for a further analysis of her position in the world. Beginning with Polydorus, we can use her relationship to help define what the play is about. There is no direct contact between these two characters, so the relationship is defined within the prologue and again when Hecuba responds to his dead body. Polydorus was very young when he was sent away to be taken care of by Polymestor. When Troy is defeated, Hecuba has made no arrangements that take into account what happens to Polydorus next. It appears that he will remain in Thrace while Hecuba and his sisters are taken into slavery. In this sense, Polydorus is lost to Hecuba when the war is lost. This may speak to Hecuba's intense need for Polyxena to stay alive as Polydorus and Cassandra are lost to her before the play begins.

There has been an enormous amount of trust placed on Polymestor by the house of Priam, but this is severed when Polymester kills Polydorus and takes his gold. Historically the Greeks viewed the Thracians as an inferior and barbaric race so there is an element of irony as the once civilized Hecuba commits an act of brutality against a barbaric tribe. This plays into the myth and fact of war. Counter-violence does not re-establish power. It only pushes one further from humanity.

Hecuba's daughter Cassandra does not appear in the play, a sign that she is already counted as lost to her mother. She is inconsistently referred to in the text. For

example, in the prologue Polydorus says, “On this day destiny shall take my sister down to death. And you, poor Mother, you must see your two last children dead this day, my sister slaughtered and my unburied body washed up on the shore at the feet of a slave.”⁸ Polydorus refers to Polyxena and himself as Hecuba’s two remaining children even though we discover, in the course of the play, that Hecuba’s daughter Cassandra still lives. Polymestor states in his prophecy: “And your daughter Cassandra must also die.”⁹ Twice in the play Hecuba refers to her daughter. “O gods no! Not my poor daughter Cassandra.”¹⁰ The second time is when she says to Agamemnon, “At your side sleeps my daughter Cassandra, once the priestess of Apollo. What will you give, my lord, for those nights of love?”¹¹ However at times she neglects the acknowledgement of Cassandra: “Once a queen, and now a slave; blessed with children, happy once, now old, childless, utterly alone.”¹² Despite being alive, Cassandra is recognized otherwise by her family. Cassandra is not a part of the family in the same way as Polyxena and Polydorus. The play is defining for us that Cassandra has already been lost to the family. Her enslavement to Agamemnon means she has been indefinitely removed from Hecuba’s life.

This transference of Cassandra from the house of Priam to the ownership of Agamemnon leads us into the relationship between Agamemnon and Hecuba. The relationship between Hecuba and Agamemnon is compromised because of Cassandra.

⁸ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 10.

⁹ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 67.

¹⁰ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 37.

¹¹ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 44.

¹² Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 44.

Agamemnon has considerable power over Hecuba as demonstrated by Hecuba's need for permission to kill Polymestor and then again when Agamemnon serves as judge over Hecuba and Polymestor. However, it is the existence of Cassandra that gives Hecuba a foothold in her persuasion of Agamemnon. In fact, Hecuba's tactic changes from playing on her own deprivation to playing on the relationship of Cassandra and Agamemnon. "Look now at this dead boy, Cassandra's brother. Revenge him. Be kind to her by being kind to him."¹³ This actually complicates the matter for Agamemnon because the Greeks are already fearful that Agamemnon is making decisions based on his relationship with a Trojan slave. "But my position here is delicate. If I give you your revenge, the army is sure to charge that I connived at the death of the King of Thrace because of my love for Cassandra."¹⁴ This briefly gives the reader a false sense of the equalization of power until Agamemnon asserts his political concerns and reestablishes the master-slave relationship with Hecuba.

The relationship between Hecuba and Odysseus may be the most interesting to look at when viewing the reversal of power for Hecuba. We have already discussed Hecuba's fall but her relationship with Odysseus is an opportunity to explore the irony of her *peripeteia*.

Hecuba: Do you remember once how you came to Troy, a spy, in beggar's disguise smeared with filth, in rags, and tears of blood were streaming down your beard?

Odysseus: I remember the incident. It left its mark on me.

Hecuba: But Helen penetrated your disguise and told me who you were? Told me alone?

Odysseus: I stood, I remember, in danger of death.

¹³ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 44.

¹⁴ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 45.

Hecuba: And how humble you were? How you fell at my knees and begged for life?
Odysseus: And my hand almost froze on your dress.
Hecuba: And you were at my mercy, my slave then. Do you remember what you said?
Odysseus: Said? Anything I could. Anything to live.
Hecuba: And I let you have your life? I set you free?
Odysseus: Because of what you did, I live today.¹⁵

This passage demonstrates a considerable power switch between these two characters.

The reader discovers that Odysseus and Hecuba have shared a similar experience in which one character was at the mercy of the other. Hecuba reminds Odysseus that he now owes her. This passage demonstrates a time in her life when she was more than free and more than royalty; in the past Hecuba felt compassion for those weaker than herself. This compassion, a human characteristic, further displays the dehumanizing path that Hecuba has taken during the course of the play.

Polydorus

Polydorus is the young son of Hecuba and the late Priam. During the war he was sent to Thrace under the care of Polymestor. When the war turned in favor of the Greeks, Polydorus was killed by Polymestor for his gold. Polydorus opens the play with the prologue and then we see his dead body after the climax of Polyxena's death. The death of young, defenseless Polydorus represents the failure of alliances in a time of war. His death is the catalyst for the unraveling relationship between Hecuba and Polymestor and also seals Hecuba's dehumanization. Polydorus' youthfulness and need for protection give him the quality of a sheep. He depends on the strength of others to survive and when that strength no longer exists he becomes completely exposed.

¹⁵ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 18-19.

Polyxena

Polyxena's death marks the first major climax of the play. This death, seen as brave, honorable, noble, and liberating, is heralded by Talthibius and the Greek warriors and serves as the myth of the dialectic. She leaves her Greek captors in awe as she handles her execution with the utmost dignity. Her executioner, Neoptolemus, handles her death with hesitancy as he marvels at her grace. It is everything we would like this death to be: the liberation of a human being unwilling to be taken into captivity. However, this is merely an illusion as her death is non-negotiable. Polyxena does not choose between death and slavery, and she does not choose between nobility and degradation because Polyxena has no actual freedom in regards to her fate. Polyxena is a lit candle in a dark room juxtaposing the environment around her. Her light is crucial in such an environment and carries with it an illusory power to penetrate the dark. However, that power is ephemeral because it is at the mercy of the forces around it.

The Trojan Chorus

It is important for the chorus to represent individuals, society, and humanity. They speak to the world of the play and to tragedy on these three levels and bind the plays thematic content together. The chorus is comprised of individuals who symbolize the devastation of war. They have their own identities, yet they are the shadow of Hecuba's fury and revenge. Each shadow has its own unique and individual shape, but these shapes combine and forsake individuality to become something greater. The audience member is ever mindful of their distinct traits, and yet as a unit the chorus brings focus and attention to the play. They are the singular human beings affected by

war that make up this tragic society, and in both ways they remind us of our humanity and the continual suffering of war.

Odysseus

Odysseus delivers the information that seals the fate of Polyxena. Furthermore, we learn that he was essential in rallying the Greeks to support the sacrifice of Polyxena on behalf of the fallen soldier Achilles. Odysseus is placed in a position of power over both Polyxena and Hecuba. The mythic honor of Polyxena's death is falsified by the presence of Odysseus who did not give Polyxena a choice but rather an order. "By now, Hecuba, I think you know what decision the army has taken and how we voted."¹⁶ Odysseus enters with a decision already in hand and immediately speaks to Hecuba, not to Polyxena, even though Polyxena is present. Odysseus represents the lack of freedom that Polyxena possesses. While the myth, in this theater of an idea, suggests that Polyxena dies in order to maintain her freedom, we understand that her freedom has already been stripped away from her, and her will is no longer her own.

Odysseus, "that hypocrite with honeyed tongue, that demagogue"¹⁷ possesses a canny ability to charm and coax a person or crowd into seeing things his way. He is not threatening or over-bearing, but rather he accomplishes what he needs through manipulation. When Hecuba describes the reversal of fortune that Odysseus found himself in when he was recognized by Helen, it was Odysseus playing to the humanity of Hecuba that allowed him to be released. Now, with the situation reversed, Odysseus will not provide the same humanity.

¹⁶ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 17.

¹⁷ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 13.

Agamemnon

Agamemnon is viewed very differently than we might assume a warrior general to be identified. He is a politician more than a warrior and his decisions are often compromised because of his rank and political stature. We learn early in the play that Agamemnon opposes the execution of Polyxena. However, men from his army—including Odysseus and the sons of Theseus—second guess his stance as they believe he is being influenced by his concubine Cassandra. So as to not lose favor with the soldiers, Agamemnon quickly changes his stance and allows the execution to happen. His relationship with Cassandra compromises him again when Hecuba plays into that relationship in hopes that he will aid her in her revenge against Polymestor. Agamemnon has to refuse, knowing that his compromising relationship with Cassandra has been seen once by the army. However he does agree to turn a blind eye to Hecuba's revenge.

Talthybius

Talthybius is a representation of the Greek collective and the voice of the dialectical myth. Talthybius enters the play with an agenda to honor the death of Polyxena. By uplifting her death, Talthybius accomplishes two important elements of the play. First, he satisfies Hecuba's need to hear that her daughter died with dignity. Secondly, and most importantly, Talthybius ameliorates the severity of the Greek responsibility of Polyxena's death. By defining her death as honorable and paying special attention to the Greek's respect for this death, Talthybius reinforces the myth of violence. He defines the violence against her as beautiful and focuses specifically on the end result which is the honorable sacrifice of an honorable individual for an honorable soldier. Perhaps most importantly he emphasizes Polyxena's false free will when he

reports her declaration: “Wait you Greeks who sacked my city! Of my own free will I die!”¹⁸ Of course this free will is undercut by the power demonstrated by Odysseus, earlier in the play. However, Euripides still uses Talthybius to stress the myth of the dialectic at work.

Polymestor

The character of Polymestor serves as the catalyst for the second climax of the play. His treachery against Hecuba results in the vengeful and murderous actions taken against his children. The relationship of Hecuba and Polymestor speaks to the reversal of Hecuba as she has fallen from queen to slave. Polymestor takes advantage of the fallen queen unaware that Agamemnon will grant her revenge against him. Polymestor is greedy, cowardly and self-serving. The Thracian relationship with both Troy and the Greeks is contingent on their ability to either protect or threaten his city. His friendship with Hecuba and Priam is a relationship of convenience as his true colors are displayed when his Trojan allies can no longer support him. He is a leech, sucking dry those individuals who would befriend him before turning his back and seeking new, powerful friends.

Cassandra

In the original Euripidean text, as well as subsequent translations, the character of Cassandra is only mentioned and never seen onstage. However, for this production of *Hecuba*, a physical Cassandra will exist in the world of the play. This decision came out of the dramaturgical interest in a physical presence that would complicate the character of Agamemnon, and in turn his relationship with Hecuba, as well as heighten Polymestor’s

¹⁸ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 32.

final prophecy about the death of Cassandra and Agamemnon. This will be discussed further in Chapter Four. For now, we will simply mention Cassandra as a shattered image of the once glorified Troy. Raped in the temple of Apollo and forced to be Agamemnon's concubine, Cassandra is a shell of her former chaste and honorable self. She has been stripped of self-worth and dignity and, as has already been mentioned, she is no longer recognized as a member of Hecuba's household. However, the favoritism that Agamemnon demonstrates to Cassandra provides Hecuba leverage to sway Agamemnon to permit her revenge.

Language

An analysis of the language of *Hecuba* reveals the irregularity of its structure which speaks to the volatility of the climate Euripides has created. Most Greek plays were written in iambic trimeter. Aristotle argued that this was the most conversational form of verse available. In his introduction to *Hecuba*, written in 1979, Michael Tierney states that this meter requires three iambic "metra" or six iambic feet.¹⁹ It is also possible to define this in other terms: iambic hexameter. *Hecuba* utilizes this base approach but Tierney discusses significant exceptions to this verse form which points out precise moments of intense emotion. Most Greek tragedies that are translated to English are translated to fit an iambic pentameter verse form, or five iambic feet, as in the case of M. Woodhull's 1906 translation of *Hecuba*:

¹⁹ Michael Tierney, Introduction, *Hecuba*, by Euripides (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1979) xxii.

Leaving/ the ca/vern of/ the dead/, and gates
Of dark/ness, where/ from all/ the gods/ apart
Dwells Plu/to, come/ I Po/lydore/, the son
Of He/cuba/ from ro/yal Ci/sseus sprung...²⁰

Woodhull's translation is an excellent example of iambic pentameter but it fails to break that regular form with the severity necessary to produce the aggravated emotion that Tierney describes. In fact, the only deviation that Woodhull makes from the iambic pentameter is a movement to tetrameter—or four iambic feet—for the choral odes. William Arrowsmith's translation justifies the iambic pentameter but also finds the necessary deviation that produces the emotional tone of the play. I wish to illustrate the brokenness of *Hecuba*'s language by contrasting Arrowsmith's translation of it in comparison to his translations of *The Cyclops* and *Heracles*.

To begin this discussion we can look at the opening prologues for each of these three plays. The first six lines of *The Cyclops* read:

O Bro/mios,
thanks to/ you, my/ troubles/ are ma/ny now
as in/ my youth/ when my bo/dy still/ was strong!
First I/ remem/ber when Her/a drove/ you mad
and you/ left your/ nurses/, the moun/tain nymphs.
And then/ there was/ that war/ with the/ Giants:²¹

For this opening I have broken down each line into its five feet. It is not perfectly iambic: there are variations and fluctuations in the rhythm but it fits the five feet mould. The same can be said of the first four lines of *Heracles*:

What mor/tal lives/ who has/ not heard/ this name—
Amphi/tryon/ of Ar/gos, who shared/ his wife

²⁰ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. M. Woodhall, *The Plays of Euripides*, ed. Ernest Rhys (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1906) 22.

²¹ Euripides, *The Cyclops*, trans. William Arrowsmith, *Euripides II: Four Tragedies*, ed. David Greene and Richard Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956) 11.

with Zeus/? I am/ he: son/ of Al/caeus
Perse/us' son/, but fa/ther of Her/acles.²²

Arrowsmith's translation of *Heracles* again fits the iambic pentameter with relative regularity. The first and third lines scan perfectly with some variation on lines two and four. However, in moving to the opening lines of *Hecuba* we see a vastly more irregular beginning to the play.

Back from/ the pit/ of the dead/, from the som/ber door
that o/pens in/to hell/, where no/ god goes,
I have/ come,
 the/ ghost of/ Poly/dorus
son and/ last sur/viving/ heir of/ Hecuba
and Pri/am, king/ of Troy.
 My fa/ther fearing
that Troy/ might fall/ to the assem/bled arms /of Hellas,²³

Hecuba employs an interesting structural technique to us early in the play. Here we have what is usually considered the marking for a shared line but it is within the speech of a certain character. Arrowsmith's translations of *The Cyclops* uses a similar device:

Pure pleasure! Ohhh. Earth and sky going round,
all mixed up together! Look: I can see
the throne of Zeus and the holy glory
of the gods.
(The satyrs dance around him suggestively)
No, I couldn't make love to you!²⁴

However, in the case of *The Cyclops*, this device is used when a stage direction has been inserted.

Returning to its usage in *Hecuba* we can explore tactical reasons for this particular structure. For Polydorus this moment happens on an appositive, similar to

²² Euripides, *Heracles*, trans. William Arrowsmith, *Euripides II: Four Tragedies*, ed. David Greene and Richard Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956) 61.

²³ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 9.

²⁴ Euripides, *The Cyclops*, trans. William Arrowsmith 35.

partitioning specific information within a sentence with an em dash. This information is meant to enhance or better describe the subject of a sentence. In the aforementioned Hecubean example, the partitioned information within Polydorus' opening monologue suggests a beat shift as Polydorus' thoughts move from himself to his family. This phrase, while not meant to disrupt the flow of the scansion, carries its own weight and importance. This concept becomes important when we discover that this device is used several times throughout the duration of the text. Later in the same prologue Polydorus has twenty-two continuous lines of text that have been sectioned off in this manner. In these lines he tells of the imminent death of his sister Polyxena. This portion of the prologue is being given specific weight within the entire speech.

Hecuba's speech to Odysseus, imploring that he spares Polyxena, uses this device sixteen times. Odysseus' counter-argument uses it eight times. We know that Greek text is dominated by long speeches. If Arrowsmith is using this device to highlight information and identify beat changes, then this notated differentiation provides the actor/director/reader with the accommodating tools necessary to discover the rich layering of these speeches. Rather than simply delivering well-constructed iambic pentameter—as in the case of the Woodhull translation—Arrowsmith works to develop a similar verse deconstruction that Euripides would have employed in order to aid the reader in the emotional development and thought shifts of the characters. For example, the scene in which Polymestor comes out of the tent after his children have been slain and he has been blinded is one of extreme chaos. The verse dictates that Polymestor is experiencing four different thoughts within the same line of iambic pentameter.

Polymester

Help!

Look out children!

Murder!

Run! Murder!²⁵

If Arrowsmith remains accurate to the proposal that broken verse suggests intense emotion then the broken structure of Polymester's speech helps define *Hecuba* as extraordinary in its content.

There is one more area within the language of *Hecuba* that speaks to the mounting aggravation of the text. We have already identified that the Woodhull translation shifts from iambic pentameter to tetrameter during the choral odes. Arrowsmith employs a similar shift from pentameter to tri-meter for *Heracles*:

Antistrophe

Do not falter. Drag your weary feet
onward like the colt that, yoked and slow,
tugs uphill, on rock, the heavy wain.

If any man should fall,
support him with your hands,
age hold up his years
as once when he was young
in the toils of war
and was no blot of his country's fame.²⁶

The regular lines are all pentameter minus a stress, suggesting a breath after each line. Then the meter changes to three feet for a short moment before returning to its regular meter. Arrowsmith uses this technique in *Hecuba*, *The Cyclops* and *Heracles* which allows for the disruption of the status quo. In the case of *The Cyclops*—Euripides only surviving satyr play—the chorus is the play's disruption. In *Heracles* this early

²⁵ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 55.

²⁶ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 65.

disruption foreshadows the breakdown of Heracles later in the play. After Heracles is driven mad the chorus again responds in this broken fashion, but this time accompanied by Heracles father, Amphytrion. The reader, or audience, is aware that something is wrong not simply because we are being told so but also because of the disjointed form of the language. However, what is consistent in the Arrowsmith translations of *The Cyclops* and *Heracles* is that this broken form is not sustained for long and it is never used by the protagonist.

This is in stark contrast to *Hecuba* where this broken rhythmic form encompasses much of the play and many of the characters. As opposed to *The Cyclops* and *Heracles*, where the first rhythmic change is adopted by the chorus, *Hecuba* initializes the tri-meter immediately following the prologue of Polydorus.

Hecuba
O helplessness of age!
Too old, too weak, too stand—
Help me, women of Troy
Give this slave those hands...²⁷

This disjointed verse does not stop with *Hecuba* or the chorus but continues, eventually involving Polyxena, and does not end until the entrance of Odysseus. The verse form speaks to the idea of order versus chaos within the world of the play and establishes the myth versus fact of this theater of an idea. The first climactic moment—the description of Polyxena’s death by Talthybius—carries the orderly verse structure. This is juxtaposed by the second climactic moment that is rhythmically chaotic. Polymester comes from the tent—eyes bloodied—speaking disruptive trimeter. The rhythm and structure of the language demonstrates the themes of this play.

²⁷ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 11.

Music

In a Greek verse drama there is an obvious connection between language and musicality. The function of the chorus is largely to enhance the musical structure of the play. As Tierney points out, Aristotle defines choral odes as *stasimon* or “songs of the chorus.”²⁸ In his translation of *Hecuba*, Arrowsmith determines moments of individuality for the chorus. For example the chorus’ first speech to Hecuba—imploing Hecuba to save Polyxena—is written as one group speech in the original Greek and the Woodhull translation. However, Arrowsmith has broken the speech up among the differing Trojan women. Rather than the chorus functioning as a singular unit, Arrowsmith’s translation invites the reader to accept the chorus women as unique personalities.

This initial structure further suggests an examination of the characteristics of the three choral odes and makes the argument that they be performed individually as opposed to by the group. In the first choral speech, beginning on line 443 in the Arrowsmith translation, the speaker laments the future of her fate. One can argue for the societal implications of this choral speech, however its content suggests a single personal history. The singular “I” and “me” are used instead of the suggestion of a group of individuals, see for example line 475 where the speaker says, “O my children! My father, my mother!”²⁹ This is one individual expressing grief over the relationship of her children, her mother, her father as opposed to words spoken by a collective. This is supported with the second and third choral odes that not only seem to resonate from a singular individual but also tell a very specific story of one person. The second choral ode, beginning on line

²⁸ Tierney, 72.

²⁹ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 29.

629, reads, “That morning was my fate, that hour doom was done, when Paris felled the tree that grew on Ida’s height.”³⁰ Again this ode serves as the story of a Trojan woman and her relationship to the end of the war. It is her hardship and her pain. If we then move to the third choral ode, we see the appearance of yet a different individual speaking of her personal connection to the war and the fall of Troy. Line 913 reads, “At midnight came my doom. Midnight when the feast is done and sleep falls sweetly on the eyes. The songs and sacrifice, the dances, all were done. My husband lay asleep, his spear upon the wall, forgetting for a while the ships drawn up on Ilium’s shore.”³¹ Note that this individual’s doom comes at midnight whereas in the previous choral ode, the speaker’s fate came in the morning. These three odes have eccentricities that suggest they are three unique personalities relating to the same tragedy.

Accepting that these choral odes are in fact the stories of three different individuals allows the chorus to function as both individuals and as a society. These women, despite their differences, are united by a singular nationality. For this reason we understand that this play is also dealing with tragedy on a societal or communal level. This is a theme often used by Euripides as in the case of *The Trojan Women* or *The Phoenician Women*. Finally, it is the action of war and the ripple effect from individual to humankind that brings humanity into this play. The atrocities of war do not end with the destruction of Troy and the enslaving of the Trojan woman but rather begins there. The actions taken by Hecuba and the Trojan women against Polymestor, and Polymestor’s

³⁰ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 35.

³¹ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 48.

subsequent prophecy implicates the Thracians as well as the victorious Greeks in the tragedy of war.

Spectacle

Greek playwrights were not allowed to stage violence. Violent acts were committed offstage and then explained later by a character in the play. Greek spectacle then included masks, rolling carts and the flying crane or *mekane*.³² In the case of *Hecuba*, the *mekane* would have been used for the entrance of Polydorus to identify him as a supernatural character and open the play with a bold moment of spectacle. That being said, the spectacle of *Hecuba* is primarily textual as opposed to visual. This demonstrates an emphasis on text as spectacle and justifies the heightened language of the two climactic moments. These moments—the first orated by Talthybius and the second by Polymestor—are colored by the text to juxtapose one another. The broken verse of Polymestor’s climactic speech acts in direct contrast with Talthybius’ verbal re-enactment of Polyxena’s death. In both instances the spectacle is the language of the play.

³² *Mekane* is the original Greek term for the Latin “machine” as in *deus ex machina*.

CHAPTER THREE

Hecuba: The Design Process

Working with a Design Team

In Chapter Two it was mentioned that the spectacle of *Hecuba* is often directly linked to the language of the play. Heightened language provides an avenue by which to demonstrate the intensity and emotion of the production. However, this production of *Hecuba* was interested in developing spectacle far beyond that of the language. For this reason, the design elements of the play were crucial in the success of the production as they both demonstrated and were motivated by the themes of the play. Euripides' anti-war play presents a dialectic arguing that the honorable qualities of war are mythical while the death and brutality of war is factual. However, we understand that Euripides' play is not anti-war in the sense that he presents a hypothetical climate in which war does not exist. Euripides' acknowledgment of the inevitability of war instead de-glorifies war and recognizes its horror and destruction. So war is unavoidable and terrible; it produces slavery, suffering, pity, death, and fear. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the themes of this dialectic and how they influenced a conceptual approach for the direction of *Hecuba*. Furthermore, this conceptualization served as the unifying structure that would inspire the design elements for the production.

The responsibility of the concept of a production is to stimulate a unified visual and stylistic approach to a play. It was therefore imperative that the concept embody the major theme of war that is present in the text. To move in the direction of conceptualization, key descriptive words were chosen that represented the qualities of

war as it is perceived in the play. For example, war is volatile. It is capable of erupting without warning. Furthermore, war is cold and mechanical. The word mechanical and subsequently, industrial, is used because war relies on the ingenuity and inventiveness of technology. Technology is an important facet in the outcome of war and because of this war is almost always devising ways to remain technologically advanced. Additionally, from our exploration of the individual/communal/global repercussions of the play, a word that can be used for the play is “layered.” War exists on each of the aforementioned levels and as such its devastation exists both at its smallest level—the most insignificant person—and its largest capacity, the devastation of humankind as a whole. The concept that was chosen speaks to the volatile, unavoidable, industrial, fearful, pitying, suffering, and layering qualities that are generated by war. To this effect, I selected the metaphorical image of a bomb that cannot be diffused. This image informs the direction of the play while encompassing each of these important thematic ideas.

Scenery

Healthy communication between a director and a designer is imperative in producing a well-conceived final product. Since both individuals are engaging in separate research, initial discussion is crucial to guarantee the unification of the individual design elements. Such preliminary conversations with the scenic designer were considerably productive because the independent research conducted by him and me led to similar conclusions about the world of the play. Agreement was established on the industrial and mechanized post-war environment. Additionally, the scenic designer was attracted to my ideas of producing a world defined by hostility, volatility, danger and terror.

What came from our preliminary discussions was the interior of an industrial warehouse. The scenic designer liked the style of industrialization and was also interested in the dilapidated and abandoned warehouse placed in a post-war environment. The playing space was conceived to be gritty, dirty, unattractive, and intimidating. The scenic designer wanted to create a fence to designate the space as well as a massive sliding metal door that separates the captive Trojan women from their Greek captors. He was interested in standing or dripping water on stage that would help with the murkiness of the space. Beyond this, the scenic designer and I both agreed that this environment should feel unsafe. I was interested in laying metal grating down on the stage floor to create a sense of uneasiness. To me this choice resembles how I feel when I walk across the metal grating on the sidewalks of New York City. Creating a similar convention would heighten the ever present danger of movement in the playing space.

With the early success and agreement of these preliminary discussions, the scenic designer went to work implementing our decisions. The designer's initial sketch (see fig. 3.1) interlaced elements of fear and hostility that we both felt was crucial to the production. Upstage was a massive curved wall that loomed over the entire playing space, suggesting the imprisonment of the Trojan women and allowing for a split level playing space with a door elevated at eight feet. The addition of an upper level would give actors a much needed location for powerful moments onstage. Stage right was a one foot elevation that allowed for another level. The wall featured a large sliding doorway that separated the Trojan women from civilization. Additionally the implementation of the three grates allowed for precarious locations for the actors to walk as well as key lighting positions.

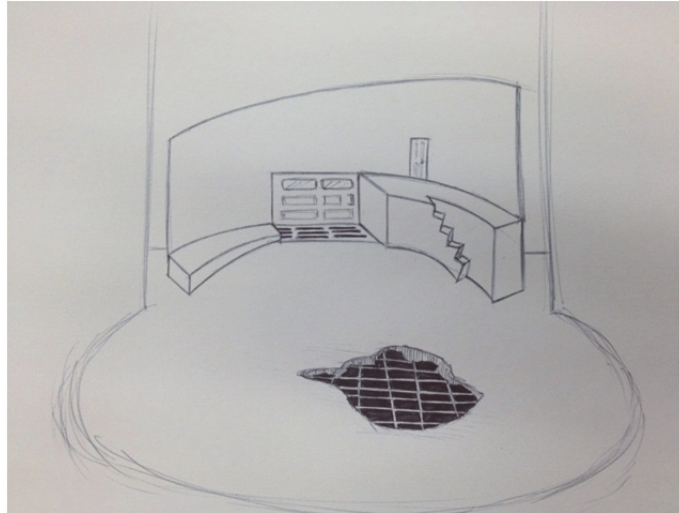


Fig. 3.1. Set designer's initial design sketch for *Hecuba*

With initial ideas now on paper, discussion progressed to plans for isolating and heightening the two climaxes of the play. An early interest in movement and silhouette led to an idea that shadow play could be utilized for both climactic moments. The idea was to stage both the Talthybius and Polymestor scenes in silhouette. To accomplish this device for the Talthybius scene actors would perform upstage of the wall which was translucent when lit from behind. Staging the second climax in the same location was contrary to my analysis which dictated the need for separation between the two moments. What the designer crafted (see fig. 3.2) was a revolve on the second level of the stair unit. The initial suggestion was that Hecuba and the Trojan women would enter with Polymestor and his two sons into the room beyond the second level door. The level would then revolve, revealing the characters through a translucent material. Again the scene would be back lit so that it played in shadow, allowing for both of these two moments to be sculpted similarly and therefore associating the two scenes with one another.

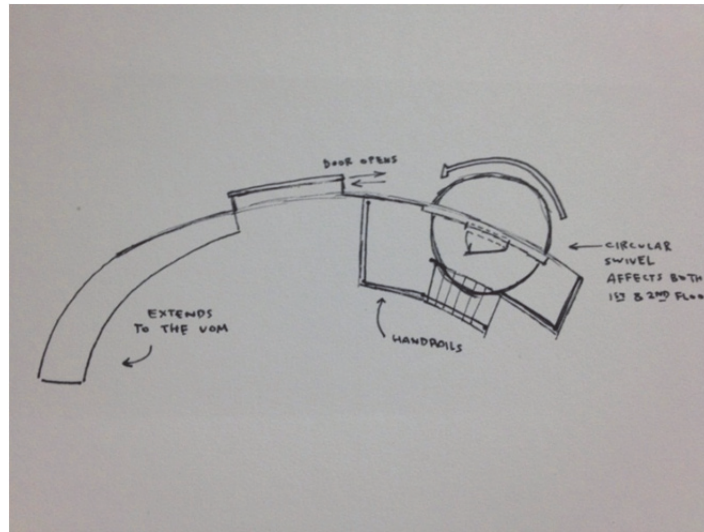


Fig. 3.2. *Hecuba* set design sketch, 8-27-2012.

Audience sight lines became a significant concern when considering this idea. The second climactic moment, which would utilize the revolve, was not a problem because the revolve was able to be viewed by all audience members in the thrust space. However, the first climax would have been performed far upstage. Since a shadow picture is two-dimensional and a thrust-stage relies on its three-dimensionality, it would have been impossible for audience members in extreme areas of the house to see the shadow performance. So the major issue became developing a two-dimensional moment in a three-dimensional space. My conclusion was that I had become married to a staging idea that could easily be accomplished by other aesthetically pleasing techniques. It was eventually determined that these two climactic moments could be achieved using conventions outside of the silhouettes.

As the process moved forward I found myself wanting more usable levels onstage. One obstacle in creating dynamic blocking and stage pictures is developing a playing space that allows for interesting horizontal and vertical movement. Directors

often spend considerable time on the horizontal movement of actors in space but fail to diversify the vertical. This diversification can manifest itself through actor shape but is also aided by a variety of levels that an actor can use. At this point the only levels that existed in the initial design were the split level and the one foot rise that now wrapped all the way around to the stage right vomitorium. The designer and I suggested that perhaps the floor could be broken up in such a way that it created natural levels (see fig. 3.3). This was a good option but the floor felt too organic. The floor itself needed to seem manmade and industrial.

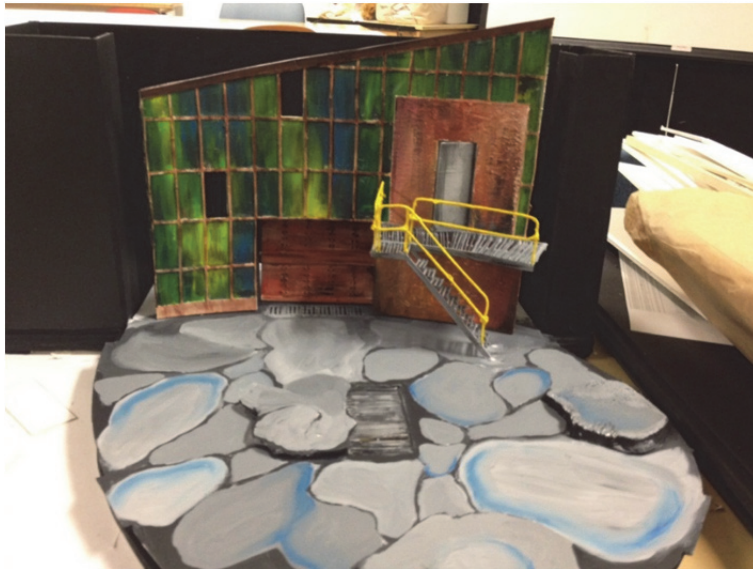


Fig. 3.3. First model for *Hecuba* set.

In discussion about metal floor grates, it was decided that the grating would no longer be in front of the large sliding door but rather on top of the one-foot rise that wraps around the stage right edge. A secondary grate was then placed center stage. Leading into the stage left vomitorium was a ramp and so the suggestion was that the third piece of metal grating would be placed on or next to that ramp. The designer gave me three

options (see fig. 3.4, fig. 3.5, and fig. 3.6). Due to the expected volume of traffic that would be utilized on the ramp as well as the high level of difficulty in placing the grating in the other suggested locations, we agreed that the third option offered the best solution for the final location for the metal grating.

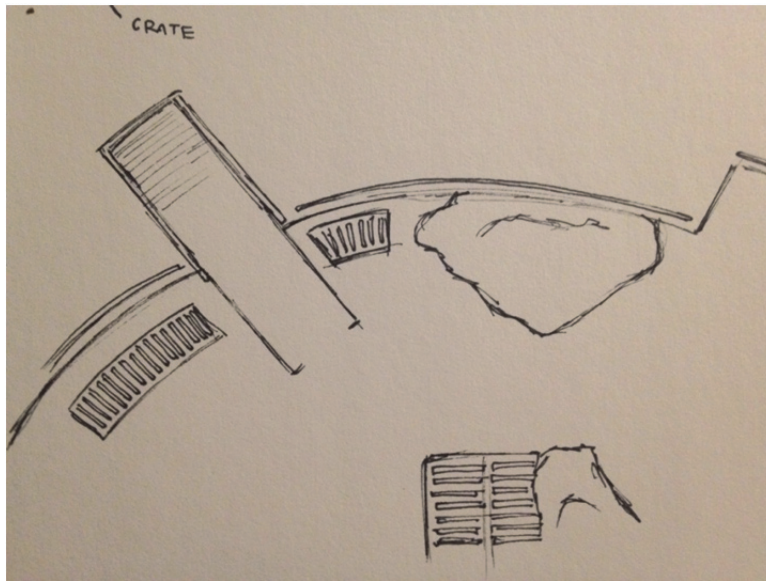


Fig. 3.4. Set designer sketch for grating left and right of stage left ramp.

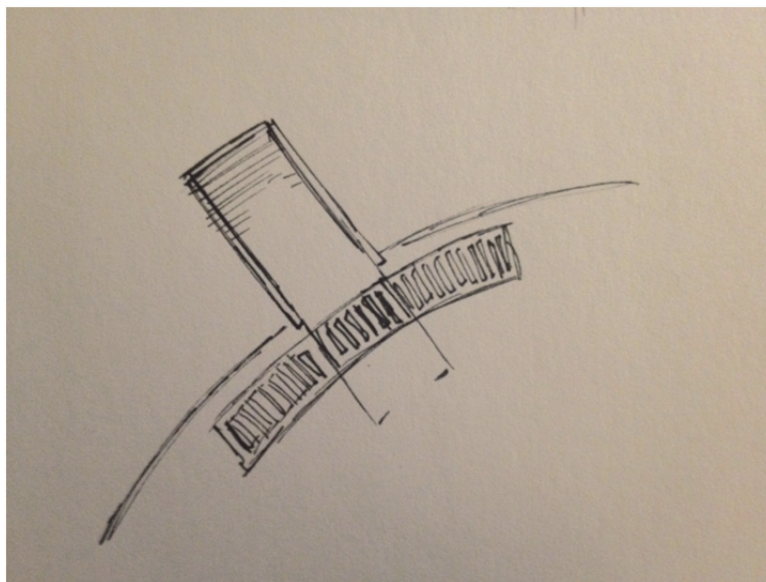


Fig. 3.5. Set designer sketch for grating running across stage left ramp.

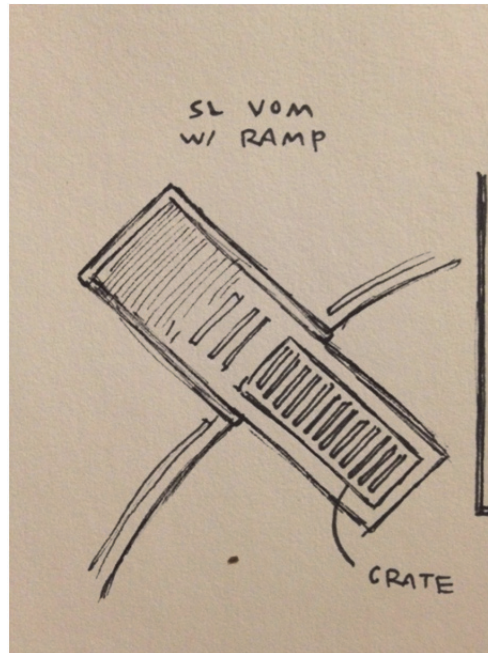


Fig. 3.6. Set designer sketch for grating only on stage left ramp.

All of these conversations were immensely beneficial in bringing the set designer and myself to a conclusion for the world of the play. Fig. 3.7 demonstrates important changes that were made to finalize the structure of the set.

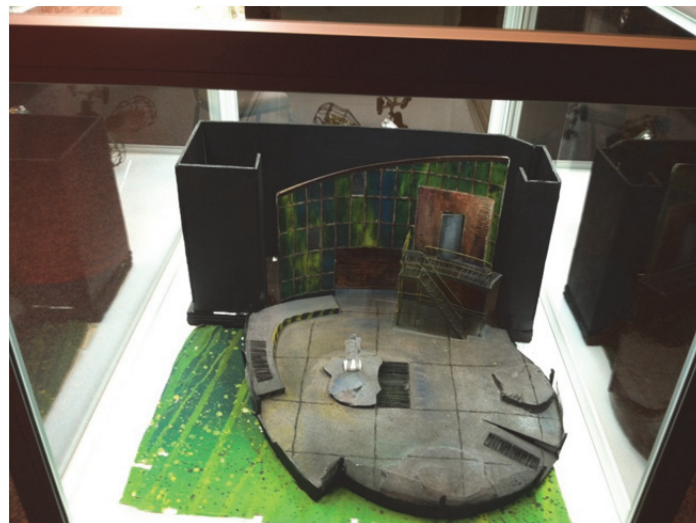


Fig. 3.7. *Hecuba* finished model, full view.

In the final model the designer stripped away the organic quality of the stage floor and gave it a very obvious man-made feel. The three levels, located downstage center, stage left and stage right of the center grate, now felt like pieces of the floor that had shifted over time or perhaps even because of the war. The floor itself no longer possessed its natural or organic appearance; however this quality was not executed in production. Fig. 3.8 and fig. 3.9 provide photos of the final floor product.



Fig. 3.8. Finalized *Hecuba* stage floor from house center-left.



Fig. 3.9. Finalized *Hecuba* stage floor from house center-right

The ability for the designer and I to articulate and decide upon a world for the play meant a smooth and efficient build not encumbered by extensive additions to the set during the building process. In fig. 3.10 it is clear that the realized set is nearly identical to the final model.



Fig. 3.10. Finalized *Hecuba* set design.

However, the request was made for the addition of a small opening, in the sliding door, which could be manipulated from the outside. The opening in the door provided the women a way to look out and additionally motivated another playing space. The component enriched the feeling of imprisonment as it was controlled from the outside.

While the work of the sound designer will be discussed later in this chapter, the set produced many of its own sound elements in order to layer the stage with a heightened sense of hostility and danger. The large door was designed to scrape across the floor, providing an ominous and jarring sound that was unsettling to an audience. The set designer also developed locations where dripping water could fall onto the stage. The

barrels located in the upstage left corner and downstage right corner of the playing space caught these drips at different intervals to create an eerie musicality to the set. Water also dripped into the center grate at its own unique interval. This dripping water occurred throughout the performance, often forgotten by the audience until moments of stillness and silence when it became naturally more noticeable. Finally, the metal grates on the ground produced varying sounds with the movement of the actors. When feet hit the grate the audience was reminded of the uneasiness of this walking structure and as such the volatility of the women's captive environment.

To further isolate and imprison the Trojan women, a chain-link fence was designed that wrapped around the stage separating the audience from the actors. This fence created a very specific barrier that clearly delineated the area in which the Trojan women are confined. The original thought was that the chain-link fence would wrap behind the audience so that the audience was physically in the same playing space as the actors. Safety concerns dictated that the fence could not be placed behind the audience so instead the fence was placed along the perimeter of the stage. While the final placement of the fence separated the audience from the playing space as opposed to bringing the audience into the playing space, the placement of the fence supported the hostility and confinement of the design.

Finalizing texture and color for the set design reinforced the unclean quality of the playing space. The choice to use grimy greens, yellows, blues and browns on the back wall provided the lighting designer with a canvas to demonstrate the unattractive nature of this industrialized warehouse. Additionally the texture of the floor, as it moves from concrete to metal to disjointed concrete, affirms the volatility of this environment. The

creation of an unattractive atmosphere was essential in developing the conceptual continuity of the play.

Costumes

The costume design built on the concept of the volatility and hostility of the environment while providing a sense of the familiar to the world of the play. During my early analytical work, I had considered the possibility of a “Steampunk” influence on the costume design. However I quickly dismissed the idea as facile and excessive. Steampunk is a fashion movement related to science fiction that combines the nineteenth century Victorian silhouette with contemporary mechanical or industrial details. There is considerable metalwork involved, ranging from the practical to the outlandish. Bionic arms or eyes, space-aged weaponry and metal gears are frequently utilized in the style.¹ The Steampunk idea was reintroduced after exploring the element of danger that the style had to offer, although I did not want to adhere precisely to the fashion trend. For example, I thought the grit of Steampunk was something exciting to explore but I was hesitant to impose too much of the sexiness of the style on the play. Furthermore, the costume designer and I wanted to move away from the recognizable Victorian influence and utilize a design that was less specific to a particular time period. This early work morphed into the initial direction for the costume designer as she used the influence of the Steampunk fashion to create a specific design for the world of the play.

The costume designer proposed a plan that would utilize the Steampunk influence for the Trojans as well as a Cyberpunk influence for the Greeks. Cyberpunk is actually

¹ Steampunk Magazine, Vagrants of Ruins and Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness, 19 January 2013 <www.steampunkmagazine.com>.

the influential ancestor of Steampunk, questioning the tidiness and modern optimism of science fiction and replacing it with a grim dystopic world controlled by mega-corporations. While Steampunk came after Cyberpunk, Cyberpunk identifies with a modern clothing palette while the Steampunk is influenced by the Victorian silhouette.² The Trojan women were given a softer color palette utilizing browns and tans and incorporating leather work. The costume designer found an excellent way to use the softness of the ancient Greek silhouette without specifically identifying the play with that time and place. For example, in the costume design for Hecuba the designer uses the distressing of the Trojan garment in order to magnify the volume of the silhouette (see fig. 3.11).



Fig. 3.11. Hecuba costume design rough sketch.

² Steampunk Magazine, 1.

This was an approach to all of the Trojan women to add fullness to their garments. Fig. 3.12 shows a rough rendering of the Polyxena costume that most directly borrows from the ancient Greek silhouette.



Fig. 3.12. Polyxena costume design rough sketch.

Fig. 3.13 and fig. 3.14 show renderings of Agamemnon and his guard. These silhouettes demonstrate a sleeker look for the characters and aid in defining the difference between the Greeks and the Trojans.



Fig. 3.13. Agamemnon costume design rough sketch.

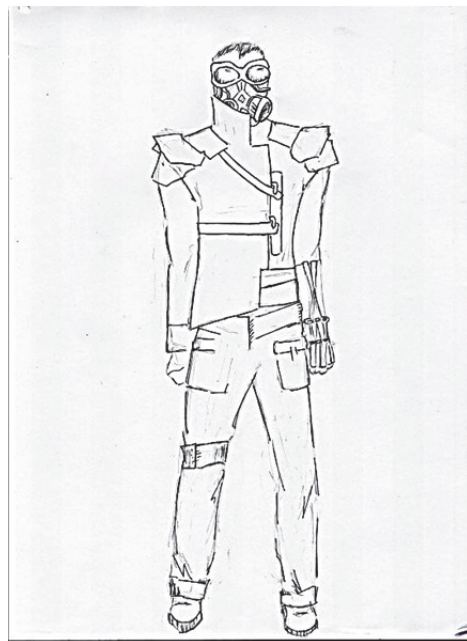


Fig. 3.14. Agamemnon's guard costume design rough sketch.

Cassandra is an interesting figure because she is the only Trojan character and only woman dressed in Greek clothing. Her femininity juxtaposes the Greek militant

silhouette, heightening her captivity. These differences are further defined by the Greek color palette which relies on black and silver as its primary color source.

Originally I was uncertain if and how I would use mask work in the production. Initial thoughts concluded that masks did not fit with the environment that was being created. The concern was that mask work would identify too closely with ancient Greece and disconnect the audience from the contemporary environment that was being created. However, the Steampunk influence of the production allowed for mask work to be utilized without creating an overt “Greek” feel. Steampunk often employs masks as an important element of its design. What was intriguing about this use of mask is the element of dehumanization that is brought to the characters. The costume design utilized gas masks, half-masks, and facial armor to cover some part of the face of almost every character in the play. Full masks or masks that cover the mouth were given to non-speaking characters including the guards and Cassandra. Fig. 3.15 is a picture of the gas mask that was worn by one of the guards.



Fig. 3.15. Gas mask worn by Agamemnon’s guard.

It is clear how the facial covering strips the individual of his humanity. Not being able to see eyes, mouths, lips makes it difficult for the audience to identify with the human qualities of the person wearing the mask. Fig. 3.16 is a production photo of both guards wearing their masks.



Fig. 3.16. “By now Hecuba, I think you know what decision the army has taken.” Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith, *Euripides III: Four Tragedies*, ed. by David Greene and Richard Lattimore (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958) 17.

What is most striking is how the eye gravitates away from the guards and toward the face of Odysseus. Not being able to see the guard’s faces encourages us not to look at them; the dehumanization of the character also encourages their invisibility. This is most striking with Cassandra who wears a mask that covers her mouth. In mythology, Cassandra is a prophetess who is cursed by Apollo to make prophecies no one believes.

Furthermore, the brutal rape of Cassandra has stripped her of her humanity. Fig. 3.17 shows Cassandra's mask which serves as the visual metaphor for her silence.



Fig. 3.17. “At your side sleeps my daughter Cassandra...” (Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 44)

The final costume design addressed the concern of distinguishing between the Greeks and Trojans. The costume designer maintained the individuality of each character while making certain that everyone existed in the same unified world. The utilization of the Steampunk and Cyberpunk styles along with the decision to use masks created necessary visual costume components that aided in the development of the conceptual approach to the play.

Hair and Makeup

Like its costume counterpart, hair and makeup was used to define the difference between the Trojans and the Greeks. For the Trojans, the designers explored dread-locks and braids along with size and volume for the hairstyles. Additionally, the Trojans were

made to look dirty to communicate their captivity. On the other hand, the Greeks were clean cut and militant. Exploring these choices was necessary in distinguishing the two different societies. Fig. 3.18 shows a picture of the Trojan woman together while fig. 3.19 shows selected members of the Greek men.



Fig. 3.18. “From the gleaming golden chain that lies broken at her throat.” (Euripides, Hecuba, trans. William Arrowsmith 14)



Fig. 3.19. “The whole army of the Greeks...” (Euripides, Hecuba, trans. William Arrowsmith 31)

The make-up for Polydorus required the implementation of specialized design and technique. The design team wanted to give the appearance that the character was water-logged and washed up on shore. There was preliminary skepticism to this decision because usually such an effect requires the intimacy of film in order to fully appreciate the details of the design. However, the makeup artists gave Polydorus a look that was readable from stage and enhanced the effect of the character.



Fig. 3.20. “But when Troy fell and Hector died...” (Euripides, Hecuba, trans. William Arrowsmith 9)

In pre-production work, “fake blood” was not considered because the play seemed to call for a more abstract approach. However, the analysis of the play needed the violent look of blood on stage. The hair and makeup team was able to locate a blood substance that cleaned up easily but was believably messy. The Trojan Women—including

Hecuba—had it on their hands and arms and faces. It dripped from Hecuba’s weapon. Once an appropriate consistency for the blood was established, it lingered on Polymestor’s face, dripping from his bloodied eyes. The visceral nature of this blood enhanced the savagery of the second climax. Seeing the bloodied children implicated the audience who moments before were eagerly anticipating Hecuba’s revenge (see fig. 3.21).



Fig. 3.21. “Women have killed my sons.” (Euripides, Hecuba, trans. William Arrowsmith 58

Sound

Building off of the sound design of the set—mentioned earlier in the chapter—the sound designer and I were interested in creating a design that was produced by the environment. The sound designer was motivated by the natural occurring sounds produced within a warehouse including dripping water and the hollow echo produced by the cavernous structure. The sound designer placed microphones in the space which amplified voices and created a harsh echo. The ability to adjust the volume of the microphones meant that certain scenes could be given additional aural size. This effect not only aided the sound of the actors but also the sound of the set. The set designer produced a sliding door that everyone agreed should have a harsh sound to support the suggestion of captivity and entrapment. However, for practical reasons, the door was built to be light weight so one crew member could open and shut it. So the physical door did not provide the heavy sound we were hoping would be created. However, the sound designer placed a microphone on the upper track of the door to pick up the noise created by the sliding action which amplified the noise created by the closing of the door. The effect of this amplification was disconcerting and claustrophobic.

The employment of the ambient microphones allowed for the heightening of necessary moments in order to find the strength of these specific scenes. For example, the play opens with the prologue delivered by Polydorus, who we learn is deceased. This character should possess a sense of the supernatural. Costumes, hair and makeup had already given the character the look of being washed up on shore but it was also appropriate for him to exist outside of the natural world of the play. For this reason, Polydorus was the only character in the play who wore a body microphone which

amplified beyond naturalism. Additionally, his voice was projected through multiple speakers in the theatre developing uneasiness among audience members by not immediately revealing his location.

It was decided that the three choral odes should be given some aural distinction because they also represent the passage of time within the episodic narrative. This was accomplished by increasing the volume and range of the microphones during these odes. Similarly this idea was utilized in moments of important story-telling such as when the chorus members warn Hecuba of Polyxena's fate and again before the chorus' violent act against Polymestor. In both situations, the volume boost aided the intensity of the moment while further supporting important plot points. To develop consistency with this device, the chorus women were amplified for their final group speech as they exit the stage at the end of the play.

Most importantly, the amplification effect was used to heighten the two climaxes of the play. In the first climax, Talthybius' retelling of the death of Polyxena, the staging blocked Talthybius on the stage right one foot platform. Additionally, the two guards were present to reinforce the solemnity of the moment. It was decided that this was also an appropriate moment for sound amplification to enhance the scene with nobility and triumph, playing into the dialectic that develops this first climax as the myth of war. In the second climax, voice amplification was used when Polymestor mourns for his children and shortly thereafter when he foretells the fate of Hecuba. Polymestor's speeches, establishing that the blood and violence of war will continue, were necessary to heighten so that the information was not lost in the chaos of the play's final moments.

Another important sound convention that was used, which further aided in the heightening of the two climaxes, was to underscore each climax with music. With the exception of the prologue, these were the only two places in the play with music. The sound designer used music by a German language alternative band which allowed for the tone and the emotionality of the music to influence the audience as opposed to the words of the song. By highlighting these two moments with similar music they were in dialogue with one another.

Lights

Discussions with the lighting designer again focused on creating an environment of hostility and danger. It was the lighting designer who introduced the idea of fog machines into the play which enhanced the feeling of the environment's volatility. Fog machines were placed under the center stage grate as well as under the stage right grate which was located on the one foot platform (see fig 3.22). The fog rose steadily throughout the production from the center stage grate giving the sense of the combustible or volatile nature of the environment. The Waco Tribune review of Baylor's *Hecuba* read, "Smoke rising from a floor grate hints at Troy's smoldering ruins."³ The fog rising served its purpose to demonstrate the destruction and precarious nature of the environment. Additionally, the second fog machine was turned on during key moments of the play, for example during Talthybius' speech. As Talthybius recounts Polyxena's death, smoke rises from this second location to further heighten and highlight this

³ Carl Hoover, "Theatre Review: Baylor's 'Hecuba' Sober Look at War and Violence," 16 November 2012, [wacotrib.com](http://www.wacotrib.com), 2 December 2012
< http://www.wacotrib.com/blogs/staff/sound_sight/Theater-review-Baylors-Hecuba-sober-look-at-war-violence.html>.

important narrative moment. In hindsight, placing a third fog machine under the stage left grate, leading into the vomitorium, would have tied the two climaxes together aesthetically.



Fig. 3.22. “Let this woman have your safe-conduct through the army.” (Euripides, Hecuba, trans. William Arrowsmith 47)

As in the case with the sound, it was important to create a lighting look for the choral odes that distinguished them from the rest of the production. The lighting designer used a natural, dusty, dilapidated look for a majority of the production to aid in the disparaging warehouse ambience. However, he was able to experiment abstractly with the choral odes because they existed between the time periods of the episodes of the play. So the lighting designer explored looks that were able to transcend the plays’ overall naturalistic design.

The two climaxes of the play were also lit outside of the common natural lighting used for the rest of the production. Based on my analysis of the text, I wanted the first

climax—Talthybius’ telling of Polyxena’s suicide—to be bright, attractive and appealing. As Talthybius’ story is unfolding, the lights gradually rise in intensity so that eventually the scene glows just as Talthybius and the two guards glow in their account of Polyxena’s death (see fig. 3.23). As much as brightness was important in the first climax, the second climax needed to be dirty, dark, ugly and savage. So the lighting designer stripped away the brightness of the first climax and found a dim, shadowy look for the second climax, creating a lighting look saturated with deep reds, enhancing the juxtaposition (see fig. 3.24).



Fig. 3.23. “Grant us all our day of coming home.” (Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 32)



Fig. 3.24. “You gods in heaven, give me wings to fly!” (Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 58)

Both the scenic designer and the lighting designer were interested in decreasing the distance between the world of the audience and the world of the play. The lighting designer attached lights to the chain-link fence around the set that helped illuminate the perimeter. It was originally our intention that these lights would also be in the audience so that the audience was actually part of this hostile environment. However, for safety reasons this was impossible.



Fig. 3.25. “But as long as Troy’s great ramparts stood proud...” (Euripides, Hecuba, trans. William Arrowsmith 9)

Properties

Much of the prop work, the weapons for example, required a collaborative effort between the props master and the costume designer. The Steampunk/Cyberpunk quality of the play could have allowed us to move in the direction of space-aged weaponry such as laser-guns. However, I did not feel that this type of weaponry fit in the environment we were attempting to create. It was more appropriate to use a variety of traditional weapons as well as “found objects”. So, for example, Odysseus was able to wear sai on his back while a guard carried a piece of heavy chain and Agamemnon had a sword.

Early in the process interest was developed for the Trojan women to be armed in surprising ways. This comes from one of Polymestor’s lines, when he says, “They

suddenly pulled daggers from their robes.”⁴ I wanted the audience to share in the same surprise. The costume designer invented weapons that could be worn by the Trojan women and yet look harmless. For example one of the Trojan women is wearing a necklace with claws attached to it that could be unhooked and placed on her fingers. Another pulled a brooch, made to look like a pendant, from her dress and another pulled a sharp-toothed comb from her hair. So as all of these women are preparing for battle, we see them arming themselves with objects that we have been staring at the entire production.

The value of a unifying conceptual approach to *Hecuba* is proven by the cohesive work presented by the design team. A working vocabulary defining the world of the play as hostile, volatile, dangerous, scary and industrial influenced each designer to produce design elements that supported the themes of the production. Moreover, a strong and relatable concept, supported by the play’s analysis, allowed me to be decisive and direct with the designers while also creating a world of rules in which they could explore their personal creativity.

⁴ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith, *Euripides III: Four Tragedies*, ed. David Greene and Richard Lattimore (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958) 61.

CHAPTER FOUR

Hecuba: In Rehearsal

Working with the Actors

The analysis of *Hecuba*'s rich dialectic informed the conceptual statement that drove the design work for this production of *Hecuba*. In this chapter I will discuss how the conceptual statement was used to bring the actors into the world of the play and shape their characters into effective elements of this important anti-war dialectic. I will catalog the efforts taken to bring a unified acting style to the production including how we approached the two important climaxes of the play, discuss the hardships of what came to be known as the "awkward phase" of the production, talk about working with the actress playing Hecuba as well as a child actor, and recount arrangements that were made when a member of the chorus was suddenly unable to perform on the second night of the run.

Defining the Acting Style of the Production

The choice to make this production relevant for a contemporary audience was instrumental in shaping the rehearsal process for *Hecuba*. The early stages of the rehearsal process proved difficult in determining an acting style that would satisfy the demands of Greek tragedy while offering the audience a sense of the familiar. Arrowsmith refers to Euripides as modern but the playwright's work is clearly steeped in the acting conventions of the ancient Greeks. Like Shakespeare, Euripides' plays rely on heightened language and emotionalism which could be dangerously undermined by an acting style shaped by conventional realism. One of the most important obstacles to

overcome in rehearsal was working with the actors to achieve heightened storytelling while developing characters with emotional honesty.

The actors initially approached the production with an acting style they were comfortable with: realism rooted in the psychological actor training they have received in their schooling. These modern realistic acting concepts—Meisner, Strasberg, etc—have become dominated by film acting. The success of Lee Strasberg’s “method acting,” which capitalizes on the technique of Stanislavski, began as practice for the stage but has become influential in the film careers of individuals such as Dustin Hoffman and Sally Field. The establishment of the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute demonstrates the success of twentieth century acting technique and its crossover to film. When engaged in this method of acting it is possible to lose sight of the demands of the stage in an attempt to discover emotional honesty. For example, most individuals would agree that vocal size has to change when moving from the stage to the screen. Screen acting has the luxury of microphones that pick up the smallest details of the voice. Most stage productions do not use microphones and therefore require projection and physical size allowing the actor to translate their “acting choices” to every individual in the theatre. vocal projection is just as ludicrous to film acting as inaudible whispers are to a nine-hundred seat theatre auditorium. Secondly, screen acting requires individuals to make acting choices between their spoken lines as opposed to stage acting which encourages acting choices to be made while an actor is speaking.

In an effort to counter the actor’s impulse to underplay the size of their characters and overplay the emotional tone of the play, I encouraged vocal strength and physical size to create larger-than-life stage characters. With this direction, the actors overcame

some of the pitfalls of mundane realism. Unfortunately, this choice lost sight of the action of the play and unintentionally shaped shallow, two-dimensional characters. Several faculty members came in to observe and watch run-throughs of the production and many of them commented on moments in which the acting had lost its sense of playing objective. In pushing size and strength, I had lost sight of creating characters relatable to a contemporary audience.

Developing an appropriate working acting style for the production was established when the cast and I returned to the action of the story as the driving force for the acting style. Playing action allowed for a rehearsal language that was familiar to the actors but would also allow us to reach the heightened quality necessary for the production. What twentieth and twenty-first century acting technique has taught us is that we arrive at emotion through playing action. Stanislavski says, “Take for example love, what incidents go into the make-up of this human passion? What actions arouse it?”¹ In early rehearsals, the actors were attempting to achieve honest emotion without playing action. I too lost sight of action and instead pushed volume, size, strength and variety. The cast and I had to recognize that emotional honesty and dynamism will come about as a result of action. This dedication to action justified the heightened “Greek-like” moments of the play as well as the now deserved moments of emotionalism. For example, we were able to craft powerful moments when silence on stage was key to heightening the tension of the production. When Agamemnon enters, he does a full cross around the outer most perimeter of the stage as he takes in the full weight of what he sees as well as asserts his quiet dominance over the Trojan women. This moment loses its

¹ Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Handbook*, ed. and trans. by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre and Books, 1963) 53.

potency if the entire production is allowed this type of silent indulgence. This is why characters were expected to aggressively pursue their objectives with immediacy and directness in order to off-set moments of emotional weight that were sculpted in silence. A contemporary action-centered performance vocabulary allowed this production of *Hecuba* to have moments of size and splendor while further embodying a familiar acting style that did not alienate a young, modern audience.

The Awkward Phase of Rehearsal

A typical rehearsal process will consist of blocking rehearsals in which the play is staged. This is followed by working rehearsals when the director and actors look to explore, tighten and expound on current staging and character choices. Next, the play goes through a series of run-throughs where the actors and director get a sense of the play as it works from beginning to end. The process ends with technical rehearsals and dress performances when technical elements are added to the production. The awkward phase comes late in working rehearsals. At this time the play has lost its freshness, actors are often struggling to be completely off-book and directors are going back and forth between staging choices. It is a very difficult time for the production and can be exacerbated by a director who is unprepared to provide supportive feedback and decision making to the cast and crew.

In the case of *Hecuba*, one difficulty faced during this “awkward phase” was navigating how to communicate with seventeen very different actors. Actors are often fragile and needy, and each requires direction, stimulation, criticism and praise in a manner specific to their individual idiosyncrasies. Elia Kazan understood this when he wrote of the needs of actors. “The film director must be prepared by knowledge and

training to handle neurotics. Why? Because most actors are.”² What I faced during the awkward phase were several actors who were in need of more feedback than I was providing during rehearsal. This frustrated me because notes were being given but when I shared this aggravation with my directing mentor I learned that this was not about actors unable to pay attention during notes but rather individuals with a need for personal validation. They need to know that they are an essential part of the production and that what they do on stage matters. My solution was to pay specific attention to each actor in the play and search for moments to provide feedback. Whether it was during rehearsal or during notes, I tried to give everyone something to work on every night. This hopefully encouraged each actor to recognize their part in this larger story, and, more importantly, it forced me to be more attentive and more specific when watching rehearsal.

The intense analytical work that went into the preparation for *Hecuba* is what allowed this production to overcome its awkward phase. This analysis allowed me to have the intelligent and informed conversations that the actors needed. The analysis of *Hecuba* stimulated my own specificity with each actor. I was able to encourage individuals to take chances and make choices, knowing that if they became stuck in their character development I would be able to push them in a unified direction. My mistake was not realizing sooner that these were conversations they wanted to have.

The trust that came out of these personalized conversations with the actors allowed me the liberty of suggesting large changes that helped redefine individual characters and the production as a whole. Very late in the process I had a conversation with the young woman playing Coryphaeus. She was struggling with the intention of her character and feeling obsolete. I suggested that she re-imagine her role as a liaison to the

² Elia Kazan, *Kazan on Directing* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009) 243.

audience. The character of Coryphaeus often sums up large speeches, delivered by other characters. Rather than viewing her as unnecessary or a nuisance—which I believe this actress was beginning to feel—we developed her into an individual who delivers this information directly to the audience. This approach to Coryphaeus was a way to bring the play to the audience and in turn the audience back to the play.

The analysis also allowed for an informed conversation with objective eyes. One of the most beneficial individuals working on this production was the dramaturg. She and I began conversations early in the process and by the time rehearsals started we were speaking the same language. I invited her into several rehearsals to receive her feedback on the production and in return she gave me insightful notes. Since the two of us had already spoken about my intentions for the production, she was able to honestly respond to certain moments and comment on whether or not this response was what I had originally envisioned. For example in an early rehearsal she writes, “The choral odes yesterday seemed a bit angry. I think the goal was intensity and high stakes, but it made me feel like they were yelling at me, the audience, which tends to make me sympathize with them less instead of more.”³ This informed communication demonstrates her understanding of what should be happening and then her honesty about what she perceives is actually taking place in the production. Having individuals this aware of my intentions was imperative during this awkward teenage phase. Similarly my directing advisor came to several rehearsals during this time. He and I had been communicating weekly about my process which allowed him to make informed comments about my intentions while also offering the advice of a mentor who has frequently been in my position. *Hecuba*’s awkward phase clarifies the need for specificity when communicating

³ Quoted from email correspondence.

notes to actors, the importance of thorough analysis, and the benefit of feedback from informed critical collaborators.

What to do With the Chorus?

As discussed fully in Chapter Three, this production explored variations with the chorus which provided an individual analysis and subsequent costume design for each unique Trojan woman. This is supported textually by Arrowsmith's translation which views the chorus women as singular personalities. Early in the process I decided five chorus members would be the ideal number for the production. One would serve as Coryphaeus, the leader of the chorus, and another would be the handmaiden to Hecuba. The remaining three would be other women in the camp who would each get one of the choral odes. This allowed for each choral member to play a significant role in the action of the play. It also provided actors the opportunity to personalize their role and to give their character a creative and unique identity.

One of the discoveries that has already briefly been mentioned was in identifying the role of Coryphaeus. As the leader of the chorus, Coryphaeus offers a response to many of the lengthy monologues that are delivered by characters in the play. For example, when Hecuba ends a very lengthy and persuasive speech to Odysseus, Coryphaeus follows this up by saying, "Surely no man could be so callous or so hard of heart he could hear this mother's heartbroken cry and not be touched."⁴ The actress playing Coryphaeus was struggling with this role because she felt that much of her dialogue was unnecessarily repetitive. In the aforementioned example, she was playing this line to Odysseus which made her feel overshadowed by Hecuba and lacking an

⁴ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith, *Euripides III: Four Tragedies*, ed. David Greene and Richard Lattimore (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958) 22.

action of her own. After considering it, we decided to focus on Coryphaeus being an homage to the original Greek presentational style. Coryphaeus became a liaison between the audience and the production. Instead of playing her line to Odysseus, she was playing it to the audience and inviting the audience to have an informed opinion of the situation that is taking place on stage. She relayed the action to the audience and in turn took the audience's emotion and verbalized that back into the production. As the women are in the tent and the massacre against Polymestor and his sons is taking place, Coryphaeus re-enters the stage alone and says, "That scream of anguish! Did you hear that scream?"⁵ Isolated from the vicious action that is taking place, Coryphaeus becomes a member of the audience and shares in our confusion. Later Coryphaeus speaks for us when she says to Polymestor, "Tormented man! Tortured past enduring. You suffer now as you made others suffer."⁶ Coryphaeus summarizes the audience's gratification as justice has been served against Polymestor. In turn, Coryphaeus allows the audience to play an important role in the production and to remain fused to the outcome of the story.

The character of the handmaiden provided an opportunity to enhance the individual character relationships for the Trojan women. In the script she is identified as an older woman. However in the interest of not playing age we identified the character more with the physical type of the actress. As the actress for the role is tall with an athletic build, we decided to conceive her as a warrior and a bodyguard for Hecuba. This allowed us to play with some specific moments in the play including an altercation that takes place between the handmaiden and one of Odysseus' guards. In this moment, Odysseus physically threatens Hecuba. The handmaiden responds by charging Odysseus.

⁵ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 55.

⁶ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 58.

She is then held back by the guards and left at the mercy of Odysseus who, after a moment, allows her to be unharmed.



Figure 4.1. “A great soldier who died greatly for his country.” Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith, *Euripides III: Four Tragedies*, ed. by David Greene and Richard Lattimore (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958) 22.

This allowed for the production to gain a sense of the violence and hostility of the environment. Furthermore it focused our attention on the individual lives and emotions of each of the chorus women and provided each character with rich, sub-textual layering. This relationship between the guard and the handmaiden was further exploited the next time he entered the stage to pat down the chorus women to make sure they are unarmed before Agamemnon arrives. The guard was encouraged to take his time patting down the handmaiden in a violating manner which humanizes the handmaiden and highlights her individuality. She is no longer merely a vessel to deliver information to the protagonist but an important human being whose tragic outcome is necessary for this anti-war play.



Figure 4.2. “I see our master Agamemnon, coming here.” (Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 39)

Through the exploration of choral individuality, crucial relationships were discovered and presented as an important component of the production. Coryphaeus has a relationship with the audience while the handmaiden has an unexpected relationship with the guard. For the three remaining choral members, their individually assigned choral odes were the foundation for specific character development. This establishes a history for each choral member before the violence of the war. The angst of the second choral ode suggested a youthfulness for the character that later influenced the character’s fear and apprehension around the Greek men. As a teenage woman who has just lost her family, she relied on other Trojan women for protection and was intimidated by men of power. The individuality of these Trojan women invites the audience to view the violent de-evolution of the Trojan society.

To further develop this sense of the Trojan society and the downfall of all the Trojan women, the choice was made for the women to aid Hecuba in her arguments against characters like Agamemnon and Odysseus. The text makes the choral women a

part of the massacre against Polymestor and his children but I wanted to take their active role in the production further by heightening Hecuba's speeches with their own supporting movements. Originally several options were explored to create a sense of unity between the physicality of the Trojan women and the words of Hecuba. However their dynamic silhouettes pulled focus from Hecuba. In response to this we opted for moments of subtlety which effectively supported Hecuba. In figure 4.3. you can see Hecuba kneeling toward Odysseus as she pleads for the life of Polyxena (standing). Behind Polyxena are two of the chorus women who are also kneeling to Odysseus and aiding Hecuba in her plea. The image of these six women kneeling to Odysseus was much more powerful than Hecuba kneeling alone.



Figure 4.3. “Now I touch you back as you touched me.” (Euripides, Hecuba, trans. William Arrowsmith 20)

A similar look was developed when Hecuba was imploring Agamemnon to allow her to take revenge against Polymestor. Figure 4.4. shows Hecuba kneeling to Agamemnon with her choral women also kneeling.



Figure 4.4. “Do your duty as a man of honor.” (Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 45)

However, this time Hecuba’s daughter, Cassandra, is also kneeling to Agamemnon.

Cassandra is a character that does not appear in the text of *Hecuba* but we decided the play needed a physical Cassandra on stage. Her presence calls attention to a conflict for the character of Agamemnon who is torn between his love for her and his role as Greek general/politician. Again the Trojan women, this time with the help of Cassandra, create a dynamic and powerful stage picture which assists Hecuba in her desperate petition for Agamemnon’s aid.

Working with a Greek chorus requires solving unique issues of character development and creative blocking in rehearsal. As individuals they were able to build relationships with other characters in the play such as the relationship between the handmaiden and the guard. Additionally they were able to connect and have a relationship with the audience as in the case of Coryphaeus. However, their necessary function as members of a larger society went a long way in developing powerful stage

pictures that were both visually interesting and supportive of Hecuba as she advocated her needs to the Greek men of power.

Heightening the Climaxes

Thematically, analytically, and conceptually this production of *Hecuba* hinged on the dialectic presented by the Greek theater of an idea. I wanted to demonstrate the myth and fact of war. The myth is constructed with the glorious account of Polyxena's death which amplifies her honorability, bravery and nobility. Death is noted as something to aspire to as Polyxena seemingly chooses to die a war hero. However, this is a myth because her heroism is not real as she has no control over her fate. This is juxtaposed later by the bloody, ignoble fact of war as demonstrated by the savage murder of Polymestor's two sons and the gauging of his eyes. In staging this rich dialectic, it was crucial for these two moments to stand out from the rest of the play.

In the first climax, when Talthybius gives a glorious account of the death of Polyxena, it was important to make the moment as grand, exceptional and visually pleasing as possible. In order to achieve the "mythological" tone of Talthybius' speech, the moment needed to be too pretty, too grand, and too clean. It is uncomfortable to see the death of an individual uplifted to such extreme standards when we are aware that this person had no choice in their death. The mood changes from the grimness of Talthybius notifying Hecuba of her daughter's death to a brightness and positivity that comes with the account of Polyxena's sacrifice. The speech is underscored by music and Talthybius takes the stage on the one-foot platform on the stage right side. To help heighten this moment, the reverb effect from the ambient microphones was increased and haze rose from the grate that was placed on the one-foot platform. This was not a moment of

intimacy but rather one of presentation. Here Talthylus is not only sharing this magnificent death with the women of Troy but also the entire audience.

In order to accomplish the size and grandeur that I wanted from Talthylus I devoted additional rehearsal time to working on this monologue. During this rehearsal time I moved the Trojan women into the furthest corners of the theatre and encouraged Talthylus to play the monologue to them. My hope was that Talthylus would stop playing merely to those individuals onstage and rather fill the entire theatre space with his voice and actions. This was also a moment in the play when I felt comfortable allowing the physical gestures of the actor to reach beyond the relative intimacy of the space and adopt the size and scope of the traditional Greek acting style. Talthylus was instructed to take up as much space as he could with his silhouette. The actor had the liberty to utilize the full extension of his arms when he made a gesture and to speak as though he were addressing a crowd of thousands. Originally the actor resisted the direction but with diligence and reinforcement, he found a balance of size and honesty while effectively delivering the story within the play. This dynamic performance, paired with the bright light and underscoring sound felt out of place and hopefully encouraged the audience to question the moment.

This moment in the play was further developed by utilizing the guards as crucial visual components in the retelling of Polyxena's death. In the same way the chorus was employed to aid Hecuba, the two guards support Talthylus' speech. The guards were instructed to stand on either side of Talthylus (see fig. 3.20). In this moment the guards stripped away their masks, revealing their humanity for the only time in the play. The audience needed to be a witness to their expressions and reactions as Talthylus tells his

story and additionally share in their voyeurism as they re-experience the sacrifice of Polyxena. The two guards were told to respond to Talthybius as if they were experiencing Polyxena's death for the first time. This allowed for moments in the speech to be heightened because of the multiple bodies working together to honor the death of Polyxena. The almost erotic nature of these Greek men as they remember her death places this first climax on the edge of discomfort.

I juxtaposed the second climax by stripping it of light and moving it as far downstage left as was possible, creating literal distance between the death of Polyxena and Hecuba's revenge against Polymestor. Again the moment was underscored with music, a similar sound to the first climax but with a much more disturbing and uncomfortable flavor. Whereas Talthybius was elevated on the platform upstage right, Polymestor was down on his knees. Just as the first climax had been too clean and too pretty, the second climax was raw and messy and volatile. Polymestor drags his first dead son up the ramp leaving a trail of blood behind him. He then carries his second son up the ramp and kneels (see fig. 3.21). The chorus was used to heighten the danger of this moment. As the blind Polymestor is collecting his dead sons and shouting for help at the foot of the ramp, the Trojan women are slowly encroaching on him to demonstrate that the danger is not yet over. It is not until Agamemnon returns that the Trojan women remove themselves to a safe distance from Polymestor.

Euripides' heightened and hectic second climax provided a challenge within the agreed upon acting style. Whereas the first climax is controlled and almost calculated, Polymestor is a violent, weeping wreck. Arrowsmith's translation severely breaks up the iambic pentameter in this speech. With such an emotional scene, the actor used rehearsal

to freely explore vocal and physical size. During moments of insecurity for the actor, we returned to the language of action and discussed the chaotic needs of the character.

Rather than allowing the actor to rationalize the character, we agreed that allowing his irrational behavior to occur, in the midst of such tragedy, would assist the actor in finding the disorder inherent in Euripides' heightened second climax.

Working with Hecuba

How do you prepare a college student to take on the demands of the title role of a Greek tragedy? While the development of strong story telling skills was crucial for every character, the play hinges on the failure or success of Hecuba. Rehearsal time was designated to work only with Hecuba. During this time she and I worked methodically through the beats and action choices of her character. Hecuba's persuasive speeches were taken one by one so that together we could find the through line and objective for these long monologues. Most importantly, patience was shown to Hecuba. Her hard work in developing a three-dimensional character as well as memorizing this title role was met with admiration and praise. When Hecuba would become frustrated, it was important for me to meet that frustration with positivity. The development of a title role takes time, effort, and an abundance of energy. There is no one correct way to prepare a young actor to take on the demands of such an important role. What worked well for this production was my ability to be a cheerleader for Hecuba. This element eventually made it easier for me to relate to each actor and encourage their work throughout the process.

The Addition of Cassandra

As has already been stated earlier in the chapter as well as in Chapter Two, the existence of the character of Cassandra is unique to this production of *Hecuba*. In early discussions with my writing advisor as well as the dramaturg of the play, conversation was developed over what benefits the existence of this character could bring to the play. Originally, this character is only referred to and never seen onstage, however given the obviously intense relationship between Agamemnon and Cassandra the existence of her character could further complicate the bargaining scene between Agamemnon and Hecuba. It was decided that an actress would play the character of Cassandra and enter with Agamemnon during this scene. Cassandra enters, face covered as seen in fig. 3.17, and her presence weighs over the dialogue between Agamemnon and Hecuba as Hecuba implores Agamemnon for revenge against Polymestor. Cassandra becomes a tool for Hecuba who leads Cassandra to Agamemnon while saying, “At your side sleeps my daughter Cassandra.”⁷ Cassandra further aids her mother as they both kneel when Hecuba delivers her final plea to Agamemnon. The physical presence of this character humanizes Agamemnon whose leadership and decision making is visually compromised by his relationship with her. The power of Cassandra’s presence is again demonstrated when Polymestor foretells of her death. The audience has seen the faces of all three of Hecuba’s children who die as a result of the actions of this story. For this reason, the presence of Cassandra not only humanizes Agamemnon, but further demonstrates the destruction of Hecuba.

⁷ Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. William Arrowsmith 44.

Working With Kids

The decision was made early on that Polymestor's older son would be played by a university actor while the younger child would be played by a young boy. The arresting image of a bloodied, brutalized, dead child would stir emotions more powerfully than if both Polymestor's sons been played by college actors. The practical side of this was that the production had a nine-year old boy in it. I was familiar with working with young actors as the production I assistant directed this summer also had a child actor involved. For *Hecuba*, it was important that this child actor feel like an insider in the production. The actor playing Polymestor's other son was assigned to make the child feel welcome and to look out for him. What was pleasant to witness was that the entire cast worked together to see that this young actor enjoy his time in the production. For my part, it was refreshing to work with a very young actor who took direction well, was not a distraction, and who was patient during some very long rehearsals. W.C. Fields once said, "Never get on stage with kids or dogs." While there is merit to this suggestion, building an environment conducive to a child actor fosters an exciting rehearsal experience. The cast's hard work to befriend him and make him feel important allowed the production the opportunity to implement a child actor which in turn aided in the success of the overall production.

A Night Without Coryphaeus

The unpredictability of the theatre means that a director, along with the cast and crew, has to be flexible and decisive in moments when the unexpected occurs. Such an occasion took place on the second night of the run when the actress playing Coryphaeus was injured. Not yet knowing the extent of her injury, a contingency plan was developed

with the stage manager and assistant stage manager in case this actress was unable to perform. This plan involved cutting any Coryphaeus lines from the production that did not further the plot and distributing the remaining lines among the chorus.

When it was discovered that the actress would not be able to perform, the stage manager and assistant stage manager made copies of the changes to the play and at 5:00pm the cast met to rehearse the changes. Everyone in the cast and crew handled this crisis with a considerable amount of professionalism. The young actress was devastated that she would not be able to perform but the cast rallied around her to come together to make the show work. I decided that in the interest of time I would not try to fix the staging to close the hole left by Coryphaeus but rather allow the actors to focus on covering Coryphaeus' lines. Looking back, Coryphaeus was probably the easiest character to work around in this manner, not because she is unimportant, but rather because we developed her as this liaison to the audience. So while this particular Wednesday evening audience missed that component of the production, it was easier to navigate this situation. Had it been the handmaiden, I would have re-blocked several moments in the play and had it been a choral member with a choral ode then we would have had to cut an entire choral ode which would potentially disrupt quick changes back stage.

Again, what was so crucial to the rehearsal process of this production was an informed and aggressive analytical approach to *Hecuba*. Grounded in a concrete conceptual statement, the rehearsal process was fueled by specific choices which enabled us to build a production that was relevant and dynamic. Foresight going into rehearsals allowed me to communicate with actors, make better use of rehearsal time, and listen to

the opinions of others as I looked to create a focused production. Additionally I was able to realize my intentions for the two important climaxes of the play as well as encourage individualized character development among the chorus. Finally, a strong foundation meant I was immediately prepared to construct a contingency plan when one of the actors was unable to perform.

CHAPTER FIVE

Hecuba: The Postmortem

Things That Worked

Hecuba was chosen because despite its age, the themes inherent in the play strike at the heart of modern society. Through the exploration of a unique analysis of *Hecuba* as well as a contemporary conceptual approach, the design team, crew, cast members and I sought to provide the audience with a rich theatrical experience that would bridge the gap between Euripides' time and a predominately young, university-educated audience. The purpose of this postmortem is to reflect on the goals of the director, designers, cast, and crew in order to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the overall production.

HECUBA's Contemporary Relevance

One of the strengths of this production was its ability to offer something to every member of the audience. Feedback from a variety of different sources revealed that the production possessed elements that lent itself to a wide range of audience types. Former Baylor theatre students contacted me to tell me how excited they were to see this show and discussed its relevancy with a modern audience. "Congratulations! I saw *Hecuba* last night and was enthralled with it all. This play IS still relevant." This comment was particularly encouraging as it supported the production's effort to connect with a contemporary audience. Another former Baylor Theatre student wrote, "I was so impressed with every single element of the show. You had a phenomenal design team, and each of their production elements complimented each other and they effectively

helped portray the design concept.”¹ This speaks to the value of a unified production which will be discussed further in this chapter. Additionally students, enrolled in my Fall 2012 Acting for Non-Majors class, provided feedback from a different perspective. Their opinions were almost unanimously positive and commented on the success of the overall quality of the production as well as the relevancy of this twenty-five hundred year old play. A couple of individuals admitted to disliking or being uncomfortable with the content of the production but recognized the strength of the actors and their portrayal of these difficult characters.

Communication

An area of weakness for me in the past has been the inability to communicate the needs of a production with the designers and production team. As a former high school teacher, I grew accustomed to handling all production responsibility myself. This mentality produced an inability to communicate the needs of my summer production, *Circle Mirror Transformation*, produced in 2011. It was necessary to approach *Hecuba* differently, and tackle the production with a communicative and collaborative spirit. My successful navigation of this process for *Hecuba* alleviated unnecessary stress for everyone involved.

Timing and scheduling was less than ideal: 1) The set designer did not meet his design deadlines, 2) the production build began late because of the overlapping build of the previous production, and 3) the costume designer was trying to make costume decisions before casting. Despite these struggles, the design team remained in constant communication with one another to encourage the production to make up for time that

¹ The aforementioned quotations were both extracted from personal correspondence.

had been lost. In turn, I resolved to do a better job communicating with designers and crew and allow those individuals the necessary information for them to be collaborative partners in the production. An example of this was my determination to be available to the set designer and the technical director to oversee unified decisions so that we could circumvent the potential complications of building and then rebuilding. By remaining in communication, the build process was effective and without serious incident.

Another communicative success was establishing a director voice that was neither too weak nor too domineering. One of my areas of enjoyment in this process was working with a design team made up of student designers. Working with undergraduate students meant I felt at ease taking charge as the leader and director of the production. However, I did worry that I would inadvertently bully designers with my ideas as opposed to cultivate the trust necessary to work imaginatively and creatively. I have asked my directing advisor about this specific concern and have been assured that I navigated an appropriate line between confident decision maker and trusting collaborator. Finding this important middle ground was only possible because of the development of a shared conceptual vision that motivated the design team to be bold and creative without drifting beyond the limits of an agreed upon world for the play.

My own ability to remain within the agreed upon world of the play was tested at auditions when an impressive turnout of female talent made me consider expanding the chorus from five women to seven women. My proposal was accepted by the student costume designer but eventually rejected by her costume advisor on the grounds that the costume shop did not have the labor or the resources to build two more costumes in the time allotted. The advisor also suggested that asking the designer to create two more

distinct choral characters would compromise the overall design project. As can be expected, there was initial disappointment in this rejection. However this costume advisor was reminding me of the world of the play as it had already been unanimously agreed upon. Listening to this colleague allowed me to see beyond my director tunnel vision to understand that I was breaking the rules of the play. What is more, the play was better with five chorus members. The addition of two more characters would have overwhelmed the costume shop and complicated stage pictures. This conversation was influential in developing the understanding that designers share the responsibility to be faithful to a production especially when that means reminding a director of their vision.

The need for the director to be able to answer questions readily and immediately, have important conversations at a moment's notice, and in general be close to the production as often as possible is invaluable in the unified execution of a play. The props master complimented me on my ability to accomplish this throughout the production process. This availability was an enormous success because it led to and encouraged conversations that may otherwise not have occurred. It is essential for a director to allow themselves to be close to the work at hand in order to be available for questions, comments, and considerations.

A Unified Production

The largest advantage of pre-production work for *Hecuba* was entering the process with a strong direction for the play. The efforts put into the analysis and conceptualization, along with the pre-production conversations between the dramaturg and me, resulted in a unified vocabulary by which to engage in conversation with designers, actors, and crew members. As has already been stated in earlier chapters, it

was not necessarily the concept of a bomb that cannot be disarmed that fueled conversation but rather the descriptive words that encouraged that conceptual idea. The ability to enter discussion with representatives from sets, costumes, lights, hair and makeup, sound, and props using the same words—volatility, hostile, scariness, dangerous, industrial, mechanical—meant that each independent design aspect was working toward a singular and unified goal. For this particular production these vocabulary words, rather than my conceptual statement, benefited the production because it resisted literalism. Despite my conceptual statement, I was not interested in the word “bomb” literally imposing itself upon the production any more than I wanted the words “Steampunk” or “post-apocalyptic” to overly invade the production. A shared vocabulary allowed the production teams to attack this process with creativity and cohesiveness.

The Cast Rallies without Coryphaeus

The development of confidence in this production allowed individuals to be flexible in moments of extreme problem solving. In Chapter Four, it was mentioned that during the second performance of *Hecuba* the actress playing Coryphaeus was unable to perform because of an injury. Immediately developing a contingency plan and trusting the actors to quickly put that plan into action allowed this performance to happen with very little stress. The stage managers were able to quickly master how the loss of this character would affect cues for the production, the chorus stepped up to learn Coryphaeus’s part, and the rest of the cast were prepared to counter for her absence. I do not believe that these actions would have occurred so effortlessly if it were not for the rapport developed between the cast, the crew, and myself.

Areas of Improvement

The successes of *Hecuba* allow for an understanding of process practices that are healthy, productive, and improve the quality of a production. Concurrently it is necessary to analyze the weaknesses of a production process in order to cultivate a proficient model by which to lead and direct individuals through the process of play producing. Without recognizing the weaknesses of a production, the director cannot learn from his/her own deficiencies.

Start the Conversation Sooner

In any production process directors want more rehearsal time, actors need more time to explore character, crew members need more time to become acclimated to their responsibilities, and designers need more time to execute their work. While this statement is as true for *Hecuba* as it is any play, beginning preliminary discussion with designers, stage managers, and dramaturgs sooner would have relieved some of the stress of deadlines that needed to be met throughout the process. My sparse availability throughout the summer before *Hecuba* made it impossible for these months to be used for face-to-face conversations with the set designer. His deadlines were the first that needed to be met and by the time I arrived in Waco at the beginning of August, we were already behind. This resulted in the set designer not meeting initial deadlines which resulted in the technical director pushing back the beginning of the build. Had the time been available during the summer, this problem could have been avoided; however summers are always difficult to navigate in a university environment because individuals are scattering in all directions. Looking back, discussions with designers needed to begin before Baylor ended classes in the spring semester of 2012. Starting conversations at this

time would have meant establishing a world for the play earlier so that designers could begin their process during the summer months. While this would mean starting the director's analysis and conceptualization much earlier in the process, it would also mean that designers could return from the summer break prepared to show their ideas and in turn meet crucial early semester deadlines.

Delayed conversations with the set designer resulted in pushing back discussions with other design areas. Initial contact with the costume designer did not occur until well after school started and it was another several weeks before I engaged with lights and sound. This further disrupted the set designers due date because of how long we waited to have full production meetings with all design team members. The delay of the set designers' deadlines was my decision as I did not feel comfortable with the set designer's work being submitted until the entire design team had seen it.

One area of concern that was not foreseeable was the delay of *Hecuba* auditions. Initially I was interested in having auditions early so that actors could prepare for the process. What eventually occurred was an audition process that took place the week before rehearsals began. This proved to be a problem for the costume designer who had very specific silhouettes in mind for the characters of the play. Unfortunately, the late audition period meant that the costume designer had already completed finished renderings of her costume design with no knowledge of the body type and shape of the individuals who would be playing each character. There was a concern that major changes would have to be made to the design if the actor body type did not complement the designer's silhouettes. In the end the casting choices did not require a change in the

design. Nonetheless, it would have been a better choice to have an earlier audition so that the costume designer knew of the cast before her designs were due.

Each of these concerns of time suggest that a detailed working production calendar is necessary for the successful show season. This pre-determined production calendar should schedule everything including design dates, auditions, production meetings, and design presentations in order to keep productions on pace for a timely completion. The more information that goes on the production calendar, the more foreknowledge directors, designers, and crews will have to facilitate completing shows on time. However a good director must actively seek out early conversations with designers, allowing those designers ample time to complete their work. Furthermore a director who anticipates the needs of his/her designers and schedules production aspects, such as auditions, with those designers in mind will help alleviate the tension and stress that goes into meeting production deadlines on time.

Taking Charge

The unified conceptual approach to the production meant that decisions could be made quickly and efficiently within the construct of the world of the play. However, there were two areas in which, as a director, I failed to take charge of a situation resulting in confusion and a design element that did not work. The first instance was a result of a year-old departmental policy that stated that the director was responsible for overseeing the building and locating of essential props for the production. *Hecuba* requires very few props but the production was fortunate to have an undergraduate volunteer to be props master. Due to the important influence the costume and set design would have on the look and feel of the props, the decision was made for the set designer, costume designer,

properties master, and me to sit down together and discuss the properties situation. There were specific elements such as the weapons which required the costume designer and the props master to agree on designing and building responsibilities.

After this constructive meeting my attention moved to other areas of the production and I no longer played any role in overseeing props. However, there remained confusion on assignments and responsibility which I was not notified of until the *Hecuba* postmortem. As the director, I was charged to oversee props for *Hecuba*, and as such should have been more involved in making sure that everyone was aware of their responsibilities—including myself—so that prop building and finding could be as effortless as possible. By not taking charge in this situation I allowed this area of the design to become more cumbersome than it originally should have been. As director of the production it is crucial to remain aware of the needs of the design team and take charge in situations of confusion.

The other area of the production where I failed to take charge was in pursuing the final look of the three rocks on stage. See figure 3.7. In that picture you can clearly see two elevated pieces on the floor: one stage right of the center stage grate and one far stage left. The set designer and I had agreed that these elevated areas would provide levels for the set that would allow variety for stage blocking and picturization. In an earlier model, the set designer had created these rocks with an organic, natural look. To remain consistent with the themes and concept of the production we agreed that rather than organic, these distorted rock shapes should look man-made or as a result of the war. However, as can be seen in figure 3.10., both the center stage rock and the stage left rock have a natural and organic feel to their distortion. Whereas the model had the very

unnatural, jagged raised surface, the actual rocks were very smooth in their elevation. This was another situation where I did not take charge to see that the rocks were completed in a way that was congruent with the conceptualization of the production and in keeping with the approved model. Numerous conversations were held with the set designer about the look of these rocks but I needed to speak up as soon as I knew these rocks were not going to look like the model. Had a conversation occurred early, a different approach could have been taken to create these levels to satisfy their function and their aesthetic appeal.

A Director Needs to Play with His Toys

With so much effort put forth by designers to develop an exciting world for this play, a director has to take advantage of all the toys at his/her disposal. One area I fell short in was my ability to fully utilize the set. The designers provided me with levels and I failed to take full advantage of the playing space. For example, the center stage level was monopolized for stage blocking, however I could have explored the levels downstage and stage left. During the rehearsal process, these areas became an afterthought as the edges of the stage were never completely explored. Another exciting element of the set was the barrels that were placed in the upstage left corner of the stage and downstage right. These two barrels caught dripping water which produced a marvelous sound but in considering the hostility of this environment these items could have been explored as dangerous or unstable. Additionally, the fence surrounding the stage looked good but was never used. The lights hanging from the fence gave the fence a sense of fragility and I was apprehensive to find ways to shake the fence or kick it to utilize its sound. In

hindsight, I wish I had engaged in conversation with the set and lighting designers in order to encourage the use of this object.

Revisiting the Issue of Style

In Chapter Four we discussed the actor playing Polymestor and how the action of the second climax required the execution of a heightened and emotional playing style. Polymestor stuck out negatively to some audience members because he played this scene with so much vocal size and presence. While this actor's ability to capture the size of this role was the leading reason he was cast, his strength in this moment was out of the ordinary relative to the rest of the production. I disagree with the negativity of this criticism because leading the character in a more natural direction would have inhibited the necessary choices to appropriately define the massacred Polymestor. However, this criticism does reveal a stylistic problem in the staging of the first climax. Despite the efforts taken—as documented in chapter four—to encourage Talthybius to find a more theatrical size and shape for his account of Polyxena's sacrifice, the actor settled in a more comfortable “honest” approach to the monologue. This choice was met with considerable success as I received significant positive feedback concerning the acting choices of this character. However, the heightened first climax was never fully achieved meaning that the death of Polymestor's sons and the blinding of Polymestor stood as the only recognizable climax of the play. This of course stands as a significant failure in developing the two climactic moments that serve as the play's dialectic. I believe the failure of the first climactic moment stems from two specific directing choices. 1) The overall stakes of the play were too high throughout hindering the perceived difference between the first climax and the actions that take place around it. 2) The production

established a contradiction within the first climax as opposed to allowing the second climax to serve as the contradiction of the first. The heightened qualities of Greek theatre invaded the entire production and left little room for moments of softness and lightness in the play and in turn the first climax blended with the actions that surrounded it. The pure visceral and barbaric quality of the second climax of the play allows it to easily stand out as an important moment in the play; however, the first climax is subtle and does not claim the obvious emotional size that allows it to readily be perceived as a climactic moment. I believe that the emotional tone and weight of the play, surrounding the first climax, needed to be pulled back. The overall stakes of the play were too high and therefore the size necessary to produce the first climax was too demanding for the production. Rooting the action of the play, surrounding the first climax, in objectives that allow for low-intensity moments would have developed an extreme variance between the first climax and its surrounding action and would therefore allow this climax to stand out in the play. Additionally, the decision was made for the first climax to contradict itself. Given that Polyxena is celebrated for her death, despite the fact that she has no choice in the decision, I wanted the audience to feel the irony of this moment as it occurred. In doing so, I searched for ways to undercut the greatness of Talthybius' speech. Looking back on that decision the play's second climax is responsible for undercutting the first as it is the "fact" that undermines the "myth". Therefore, I unnecessarily robbed the first climax of some of its power and in turn diluted its ability to serve as the play's first climax. For these reasons the duel climax structure, as articulated by the analysis, was not achieved by the production.

The problem of style was an issue again with one of the chorus members whose commitment to shape and gesture often pulled focus. Throughout the play, the chorus regularly dedicated themselves to poses that were meant to heighten key words spoken by Hecuba. Most of these chorus women adopted natural and simple poses, however one chorus woman—because of her athleticism and devotion to physicalization—chose very strong, eye-catching poses. Her ingenuity in discovering these poses was a large reason why she was cast in the production. She delivered a very exciting audition, making strong movement choices. However a failure on my part was to regulate the chorus women so that they existed in the same play. The style we were discovering did not call for physically abstract poses but at the same time it was difficult to reign in this particular actress when her movement choices were what drew me to casting her. In the end, I think a stronger commitment to style continuity is essential. I believe, in the case of this actress, I became attached to a choice she made in auditions and allowed her to keep that rather than emphasizing that she explore movement within the stylistic world of the play.

Conclusion

This production of *Hecuba* validates the need for creativity, imagination and decisiveness in producing a historical play for a contemporary audience. William Arrowsmith's Greek theater of an idea sparks an approach to the play that relies on a unique structure for the play in order to define relevant themes. These themes developed a conceptual approach that unified the design elements of the production as well as impacting the acting style and the creation of dynamic stage picturization. By crafting a unified production, inspired by analysis, the play spoke with boldness to a young, contemporary audience. Directors have a responsibility to each and every play—young

or old—and to close the gap between the world of the play and the world of the audience.

Hecuba's great success was its ability to accomplish this most important goal.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Euripides: Complete List of Works

Euripides – c. 480-406/5

Aegeus – Date unknown

Aeolus – Date unknown

Alcestis – 438, 2nd prize (extant)

Alcmaeon in Corinth (posthumously produced) – 405 with *The Bacchae* and *Iphegenia in Aulis*

Alcmaeon in Psophis – 438 with *Alcestis*

Alcmene – Date unknown

Alexander or *Alexandros* – 415, 2nd prize with *Trojan Women*

Alope or *Cercyon* – Date unknown

Andromache – 425 (extant)

Andromeda – 412 with *Helen*

Antigone – Date unknown

Antiope – 410

Archelaus – 410

Auge – Date unknown

Autolycus – Date unknown

Bacchae (posthumously produced) – after 406, 1st prize (extant)

Bellorophon – 430

Busiris – Date unknown

Cadmis – Date unknown

Captive Melanippe – c. 412

Chrysippus – Date unknown

Cresphontes – ca. 425

Cretans – c. 435

Cretan Women – 438 with *Alcestis*

Cyclops – 412, satyr play with *Helen* (extant)

Danae – Date unknown

Dictys – 431 with *Medea*

Electra – c. 420 (extant)

Epeius – Date unknown

Erechtheus – 422

Eurystheus – Date unknown

Hecuba – c. 424 (extant)

Helen – 412 (extant)

Heracleidae or *Children of Heracles* – c. 430

Heracles – c. 416 (extant)

Hippolytus – 428, 1st prize (extant)

Hippolytus Veiled – Date unknown

Hypsipyle – Date unknown

Ion – c. 414

Ino – Date unknown

Iphegenia in Aulis (posthumously produced) – 405, 1st prize (extant)

Iphegenia in Tauris or *Iphegenia Among the Taurians* – c. 414 (extant)

Ixion – Date unknown

Lamia – Date Unknown

Licymnius – Date unknown

Medea – 431, 3rd prize (extant)

Meleager – Date unknown

Mysians – Date unknown

Oedipus – Date unknown

Oeneus – Date unknown

Oenomaus – Date unknown

Orestes – 408

Palamedes – 415, 2nd prize with *Trojan Women*

Peirithous – Date unknown

Peleus – Date unknown

Peliades – 455

Phaethon – c. 420

Philoctetes – 431, 3rd prize with *Medea*

Phoenix – Date unknown

Phonecian Women – c. 410

Phrixus – Date unknown

Pleisthenes – Date unknown

Polyidus – Date unknown

Protesilaus – Date unknown

Reapers – Date unknown

Rhadamanthys – Date unknown

Sciron – Date unknown

Scyrians – Date unknown

Sisyphus – 415, 2nd prize satyr play with *Trojan Women*

Stheneboea – before 429

The Suppliants or *Suppliant Women* – c. 423 (extant)

Syleus – Date unknown

Telephus – 438 with *Alcestis*

Temenidae – Date unknown

Temenos – Date unknown

Tennes – Date unknown

Theristai – 431, 3rd prize satyr play with *Medea*

Theseus – Date unknown

Thyestes – Date unknown

Trojan Woman – 415, 2nd prize (extant)

Wise Melanippe – c. 420

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