

DIDASKALIA 

The Journal for Ancient Performance



photo: P. Winters/Theater of War

Didaskalia is an electronic journal dedicated to the study of all aspects of ancient Greek and Roman performance.

DIDASKALIA

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About Didaskalia

Didaskalia (διδασκαλία) is the term used since ancient times to describe the work a playwright did to teach his chorus and actors the play. The official records of the dramatic festivals in Athens were the διδασκαλία. *Didaskalia* now furthers the scholarship of the ancient performance.

Didaskalia is an English-language, online publication about the performance of Greek and Roman drama, dance, and music. We publish peer-reviewed scholarship on performance and reviews of the professional activity of artists and scholars who work on ancient drama.

We welcome submissions on any aspect of the field. If you would like your work to be reviewed, please write to editor@didaskalia.net at least three weeks in advance of the performance date. We also seek interviews with practitioners and opinion pieces. For submission guidelines, go to didaskalia.net.

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Note

Didaskalia is an online journal. This print representation of Volume 8 is an inadequate approximation of the web publication at didaskalia.net, which includes sound, video, and live hyperlinks.

Hecuba in a New Translation

Jay Kardan and Laura-Gray Street

Randolph College

Introduction by Jay Kardan

It was late in the fall of 2008 that Laura-Gray Street and I approached Dr. Amy R. Cohen with a suggestion that we provide her with a translation of Euripides' *Hecuba* to be used as a script for her production of the 2010 Randolph College Greek Play. Our interest in this project was born not of any perceived deficiency in existing published translations of the *Hecuba*, but rather of a wish to engage with a colleague in a start-to-finish process of creating a tailor-made script for the production of an ancient tragedy. Prof. Cohen had made cuts and alterations in the scripts used in her previous Randolph College productions, but she had always worked from existing translations, and we believe it was the opportunity to participate in crafting a script from the beginning that made her welcome our proposal.

The process started with a fairly literal rendering of Euripides' text into English by Jay Kardan, a professional translator and instructor of Latin and Greek at the college. From this preliminary version, Laura-Gray Street, a poet and professor of creative writing, prepared the first draft of a versified script, which was shown to Kardan and Cohen for their review. Then began a series of three-way conversations in which artistic and literal fidelity to the original was tempered by the exigencies of production. As rehearsals began in the summer of 2010, responsibility for shaping the script shifted appropriately along the three-collaborator line, away from Kardan and toward Cohen, who would direct the resulting play. Chris Cohen, composer of the music used in the production, and Randall Speer, the orchestrator and music director, contributed to the final form of the lyric passages. An examination of the two posted versions will reveal the differences between Street's rendering and the working script. The accompanying video shows the ultimate product of this collaborative process.

We flatter ourselves that the result is a *Hecuba* uniquely adapted to the aesthetic traditions, outdoor theater, and student cast of the Randolph College Greek Play. Both translators found a satisfying challenge in the collaborative process, which enabled two writers without experience in drama to contribute to a dramatic performance and to learn something of the long road leading from an inanimate text to its staged realization.



Conference Performance of Hecuba
video: Randolph College
youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1lsE

To go directly to chapters:

1. The Ghost of Polydorus at [0:08](#)
youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1lsE#t=0m8s
2. Hecuba, The Chorus, and Polyxena at [3:39](#)
youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1lsE#t=3m39s
3. Odysseus at [10:02](#)
youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1lsE#t=10m2s
4. Ode 1 - O Sea Breeze at [23:25](#)
youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1lsE#t=23m25s
5. Talthybius at [25:38](#)
youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1lsE#t=25m38s
6. Ode 2 - When Paris First Cut the Pine at [33:26](#)
youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1lsE#t=33m26s
7. Hecuba Laments, and Agamemnon at [35:04](#)
youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1lsE#t=35m4s
8. Ode 3 - Troy Impaled at [49:15](#)
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9. Polymestor and His Sons at [52:44](#)
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10. Revenge Taken at [57:22](#)
youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1lsE#t=57m22s
11. Credits at [1:11:50](#)
youtube.com/watch?v=-bh-4LL1lsE#t=71m50s

HECUBA
by Euripides

translated by
Jay Kardan and Laura-Gray Street

POLYDORUS
HECUBA
CHORUS
POLYXENA
ODYSSEUS
TALTHYBIUS
THERAPAINA
AGAMEMNON
POLYMESTOR

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Alas!

Old mother, your royal palaces are reduced to meager
corners in another ruler's tents. How poorly you fare
—as poorly as you once fared well. To balance out
your past prosperity, some god has ruined you.

HECUBA

I am old. I am plagued
by bad dreams. Once your queen, (60)

I am frail, a worn hag
you must lead from the huts.
My dear friends, sister slaves,
help me walk, hold my hand,
let me lean on your arms
like a staff. Bear me up.

My own legs are too weak
to support me. O lightning
of Zeus, tell me why

I am snatched from my sleep
by these specters of dread.

Goddess Earth, from whose womb (70)
these nocturnal invasions
emerge like the stirring
of bats, I recoil

from these nightmares
O you underworld gods,
please protect Polydorus,
my anchor and last

of my house, who abides (80)
in this Thracian domain,
in the home of a friend.

Oh the horrors I dreamed—

I still shudder with fear!

Find Cassandra or Helenus—

Ask them to read

these phantasms and explain
the young doe that was torn
from my lap and destroyed
by a wolf with bloody jaws. (90)

CHORUS

I am here—I arrived—
Hecuba— just as fast
as I could—from the tent
of my master—where my lot
is now cast—where command
made me slave—I was caught
like an animal, marched
out of Troy at the point
of a spear. —I bring news
—It’s not good—I regret
I must say—I’ve been told—
the Greek army convened—
they have voted—your daughter,
Polyxena—she
is the one—it’s decided—
that she will be sacrificed.

—To Achilles.

—His ghost,
reappeared at his tomb,
as you know, in a blaze
of gold armor and rage.
—The Greek sails were unfurled,
all aboard for the launch,
when the warrior’s ghost
intervened. — “Do you think
you can leave,” the wraith howled,
“without honoring me?”

—Then rough waves of dispute
overran the composure
of captain and crew—
—and the Greeks were now split
between those who would kill
a young girl—your daughter—
to appease fierce Achilles
and those who disagreed

—To your cause spoke that chief

in command, Agamemnon,
—proprietor of Cassandra.

—The sons of Theseus
rebutted, —exclaiming
the tomb of Achilles
deserved the girl’s blood;
—that Cassandra’s lush bed
must kneel down and defer
to the warrior’s brave spear.

—There things stood, at a stand-
off, —an intractable draw.

—Then that wily Odysseus
spoke. —He festooned
and perfumed his appeal
—the air thick with his words— (130)
—till his audience swooned
at his feet as he crooned,
“Who could suffer the dead
telling tales down in Hades
about Greeks who deserted
the soldiers who died
for Hellas on the fields
of war?”

—Every soldier
agreed that to slight
brave Achilles was
sacrilege.

—Sacrifice
carried the day,
I’m afraid. (140)

—And Odysseus is coming—
—At any moment—
—He will tear the sweet foal from your breast—
—You must go—
—He will wrench your Polyxena out of your hands—

—To the ships—
—To the altars—
—At the knees of Agamemnon—
—Pray—
—Ask the gods of heaven—
—And Hades—
—If your prayers convey—
—Then your daughter is saved—
—If they fail, you must see your own child put to death—
—Her throat cut—
—And the flow of her blood from her gold-bearing neck— (150)

HECUBA *Woe-dazed, what to say,
what howl, what lament?
Forlorn and now old.
Enslaved. It's too hard,
too much to be borne.
No one to protect me.
No house. No estate.
Alas, all is gone—
my husband, my lambs.
Which way should I go?
What road should I take?
What god can I trust?
What guide can avail?
O bearers of grief,
I no longer care
for life in the light.*

Feet, lead me—step right,
left—lead this old crone
to the tent. (170)

My child! O Polyxena!
Come out and attend
your mother. Come out,
hear me!

POLYXENA The distress in your voice,

your sharp cries of dismay,
dearest mother, have flushed me
from the tent like a bird
What on earth is your news?

HECUBA O my child, my own lamb— (180)

POLYXENA Why this chill in your tone?

HECUBA I am afraid—

POLYXENA Don't stop now—
no, now I am afraid.
I hear such fear in your voice.

HECUBA My child—child
of a wretched mother!

POLYXENA And why do you say this? Tell me!

HECUBA Because they have voted—
the Greeks—to kill you
on the tomb of Achilles. (190)

POLYXENA Alas, that you utter
unspeakable woes!

HECUBA I must speak the unspeakable,
child, though it tears
me to pieces. You must know.

POLYXENA *Sad mother of mine,
what more can you take?
Such outrage and woe
abound. It's too much.
Defenseless myself,
I can't defend you;
can't lighten your grief.
Alas, I must die—*

*be slain like a lamb.
And you'll have to watch
in pain. I'll be snatched
away and impaled.
My torment will end.
I'll lie with the dead.
O mother, for you,
I weep and lament.*

CHORUS And here comes Odysseus now, Hecuba,
hurrying to tell you something.

ODYSSEUS Hecuba, I think you know the army's will
and verdict. I'll state it anyway: The Greeks have voted
to offer up your daughter on Achilles' tomb. (220)
They've authorized me to be her guard and escort.
Neoptolemus will preside over the rites of sacrifice.
Now, be sensible about this. Don't make us drag you off
by force or come to blows. The state of affairs is difficult,
I know, but accept your lot. Hard luck is best met
with levelheadedness and expediency.

HECUBA Oh dear gods, here it comes: a pitched battle
thick with groans and anything but dry of tears. (230)
I didn't die when and where I should have.
But in my suffering, mighty Zeus spares me yet,
miserable as I am, to live—and suffer more.
If a slave may ask a free man some harmless questions—
—nothing out of hand, I assure you, nothing with teeth—
then you, Odysseus, should be free to answer, and I
to hear what you have to say. Within these parameters,
may I speak?

ODYSSEUS Permission granted. Ask away.

HECUBA Remember how you came to Ilium, a spy cloaked
in beggar's rags, with blood from self-inflicted wounds (240)
blurring your eyes, masking your face, staining you Trojan?

ODYSSEUS I do. The memory cuts deep.

HECUBA How when Helen spotted you, she told me alone?

ODYSSEUS I thought I was sunk, a goner.

HECUBA Remember the beggar you were then? How you grabbed my knees?

ODYSSEUS My hands grew numb holding your robes in that death grip.

HECUBA And I spared you, *freed* you.

ODYSSEUS I see the sun today because of you.

HECUBA When you were *my* slave, remember how you said—

ODYSSEUS Hecuba, I *said* whatever it took to stay alive. (250)

HECUBA Aren't you shameless in this conduct of yours?
You yourself just admitted the mercy you got from me
and now you do me such evil in return?
O gods save us from politicians and demagogues like you
who don't care what harm you do as long as the multitudes
are pleased and the applause is loud. But tell me, what counseled
expediency led them to cast their ballots in favor
of killing my child? What in your so-called necessity (260)
requires this brutal murder at a tomb where, by custom,
oxen ought to die? Does the ghost's thirst for revenge
justify his demand for human slaughter? Polyxena
has done no harm to Achilles. Rather, he should've asked
for Helen's sacrifice, since *she* destroyed him
by steering him to Troy. Or if beauty is prerequisite
in this tribute, logic still exempts *us*
and points to Helen: she's the epitome, after all,
the absolute knockout, the stunner, the dazzling mantrap
who wronged Achilles far more than we.

And thus, (270)

my case for justice against the ghost's. Now hear my claim
on your gratitude. As you yourself have readily confirmed,

when our positions were reversed in Troy, you fell
at my feet, begging for your life. You clasped my hand
and touched my aging cheek, here. But now it's *my* turn
to fall, clasping *your* hand, touching your cheek, just so.
To ask that you return the favor and spare my child.
Please, I beg you. Don't take my daughter from me.
Let her live. Haven't enough died already?
All I've lost lives on in her. She is my solace. (280)
She is my staff, my nurse, my guide. She is my Troy.
Those with power should use that power carefully.
Those in luck should not assume that luck will hold,
as I well know. Once, I was powerful and lucky,
a queen—but no more. A day obliterated all.
Odysseus, I implore you, by your bearded chin,
have pity on me. Reconvene the army, persuade them
it's wrong to kill the very women you spared—because
you pitied them—in Troy. Remind your men that Greek
laws pertaining to murder protect enslaved and free (290)
alike, without distinction. You have the power—the authority
and the lucky eloquence. But even if you babble
or stutter, your esteemed reputation, like a steady
wind, will swell the sail of your words, carrying them
farther than those of blowhards and other lesser men.

CHORUS Who could be so calloused as to remain unmoved, hearing
your sad complaints and mournful refrains of abundant woe?

ODYSSEUS A prefatory caveat, Hecuba: Just because
I make political speeches doesn't mean that I
must therefore be your enemy, so don't in anger (300)
misconstrue me so.

 First off, I acknowledge,
unconditionally, your claim on my gratitude.
You saved my life, and, by the gods, I owe you. I stand
ready to honor my debt by saving *your* life. But
my public vow to the Greek troops I must also
stand by, and that is to reward our best warrior
with Polyxena, your daughter. It's an invalid premise,
you see, to think that these two lives—yours; hers—

can be interchanged.

Furthermore, our cities
will fail if noble and devoted soldiers earn
no greater returns than do lesser men. Achilles
deserves honor and tribute more than anyone:
He died for Greece, and by the gods we owe him. (310)

What conduct is more shameless than enlisting
a man's good and faithful service while he lives,
only to throw him to the dogs when he's dead?
Well, then. And if we had to go to war again,
would we have troops ready and willing to deploy
Or would men think, *Why bother? Better to lie
low and save my own skin.* Imagine what
adverse effects dishonoring the dead would have on
recruiting efforts, on public perception, on morale.
For me, a few essential crumbs will suffice (320)
while I'm alive. But I want the full-out display
of honors and commemorations when I die,
a worthy tomb to make this life worthwhile. That's
the thing that lasts.

Third, you complain how you've suffered.
Well, we Greeks have suffered, too. Our old women
and our old men are no less wretched than yours.
Our young brides are likewise widowed of fine grooms
who sleep in Trojan dust instead their marriage beds.
Just as *we* endure these hardships, so can you.
And if you think I'm wrong to honor the legacy
of a great warrior like Achilles, then go ahead
and call me callous. The barbaric way you foreigners
use your friends and disrespect the dead—I say
keep it up. That way Greece stays on top, (330)
and you people get the fate that you deserve.

CHORUS Witness here how the violence of war enslaves,
 forcing its captives to endure the unendurable.

HECUBA O daughter, all my arguments against your murder
 were useless, feeble puffs of air accomplishing nothing.
 If you have more skill than your mother, use it now.

Like the nightingale, sing out all your notes, or you
will lose your life. Fall prostrate at this man's knee
and persuade him. He has children, too, I know. (340)
You may yet move him to pity.

POLYXENA I see you, Odysseus, how you've hidden your right
hand in your cloak and turned your face away so I
can't touch your hand or beard in supplication.
But you have nothing to worry about. I'll follow you
to Achilles' tomb, both out of necessity and
because I wish to. I want to die. I won't grovel
for my life like some lowly coward of a woman.
Why should I live? My father was king of Troy, ruler
of all Phrygians. I was born royalty, and I was reared (350)
to expect I'd marry my choice of kings, exciting rivalry
over whose home and hearth I'd grace as bride. I was
mistress of the Idaeans, center of their attention, godlike
—except in my mortality. Now that I'm
a slave, I am infatuated with death. Imagine:
some cruel-minded master could buy me for money—me,
the daughter of Priam, sister of Hector and many others (360)
—and take me to his house, force me to cook for him,
to sweep and tend the shuttle, to work day after day
while my bed, once thought fit for rulers, is polluted
by some bought slave. No, it will not happen.
That life is inconceivable. While the light
in my eyes is still free, I yield it up, giving
my body to Hades. So lead me, Odysseus; take me
to my death. I see no reason to hope for or believe (370)
in anything better. And, Mother, don't you interfere.
Help me instead. I would rather die than suffer
the shame of wearing slavery's yoke around my neck.

CHORUS The signs of good breeding are always impressive. But
nobility is even more noble when it's deserved. (380)

HECUBA You're spoken well, daughter, but there is pain in that
good speaking.
Odysseus, I understand

that Peleus's son must be granted his sacrifice
and that your reputation must be preserved. Here's
how to accomplish both without killing this girl:
Lead me to the pyre and appease the ghost by killing me.
Indeed, I—who gave birth to Paris who with his bow
slew the great Achilles—should not be spared.

ODYSSEUS
Achilles didn't ask for your death, (390)
old woman, but for hers.

HECUBA
Then slaughter me
with my daughter. That gives the earth and Achilles' corpse
twice as much blood to drink.

ODYSSEUS
That's unnecessary. Your daughter's death is enough.
Believe me when I say I wish this one death
didn't have to be.

HECUBA
Then I must to die with her.

ODYSSEUS
Excuse me? I'm not aware that I was taking orders.

HECUBA
I'll cling to her like ivy.

ODYSSEUS
Not if you obey
those wiser than you.

HECUBA
She's my daughter. I won't let go. (400)

ODYSSEUS
And I won't go away. So take your leave of her.

POLYXENA
Mother, do as I say—wait, Odysseus, have some
patience with a parent's understandable fury—
Mother, listen to me, don't try to fight those
who have you in their power. Do you want to be shoved around,
to have your fragile aged skin scraped and torn
when you fall to the ground? To risk losing your dignity
being dragged off by some young soldier? No,
Mother, it would be unseemly. Instead, dear

unhappy one, give me your sweet hand and lay
your cheek to mine. Now for the very last time,
I see the brilliant circle of the sun. Now I say
my final words to you, o one who carried me in
her womb and bore me. And now I go— (410)

HECUBA Dear child, how I,
still leashed to daylight, will mourn for you.

POLYXENA —unmarried, not royally
wed as I should have been!

HECUBA You're pitiful, child, and I'm
a wretched woman.

POLYXENA In Hades' darkness I will lie alone.

HECUBA O gods! What shall I do? Where turn to end my life?

POLYXENA I, born in freedom, to die a slave. (420)

HECUBA And I,
bereft of fifty children.

POLYXENA Mother, what do you want me
to tell my brother Hector, and Priam, my father, your husband?

HECUBA Tell them how wretched I am.

POLYXENA O breasts that suckled me!

HECUBA O daughter who grieves me with an untimely, unhappy fate!

POLYXENA Farewell, Mother, and say farewell to Cassandra for me—

HECUBA Others may fare well, but not your mother.

POLYXENA Now lead me away, Odysseus, with a veil shrouding
my head. My mother's grief has melted my heart, and I

have melted hers.

O sunlight! I will savor you
in the short time left between this moment and the sword
at Achilles' tomb.

HECUBA

Aah! I faint. My legs dissolve.
Polyxena, stay with me! Reach out your hand,
grab hold of mine. Don't go, daughter, don't leave me
childless! Let me die, my friends.

(440)

CHORUS

[Strophe A]

*O sea-breeze, wind that carries ships
across the heaving waves,
where are you now carrying me?
In what home will I be slave?*

*Will I be goods for Argos or Sparta?
Phthia, maybe?—where
they say the full Apidanus
departs the fertile plains?*

[Antistrophe A]

*Or in Delos, sent by sea-oar
to suffer life in the temple
where palm and laurel sprang up
at Leto's twinned birth-pangs?*

*Shall I, there with Delian maidens,
praise the goddess Artemis,
her golden garment, and her bow,
as I did in Troy?*

[Strophe B]

*Or in Athens? There, shall I sew
brightly threaded ponies
and yoke them cunningly to chariots
on fair Athena's robe?*

*Or perhaps embroider Titans,
which Zeus, son of Kronos,
with fists of double-edged lightening
laid quite low?*

[Antistrophe B]

*Alas for my children, alas for the fathers,
and for our native land
now leveled, slashed by Argive spears
to ash-heaps and shreds of smoke,*

*while I am taken far from Asia,
to Europe, to be a slave.
This is what I'll call home now:
the bed-chamber of Hades.*

TALTHYBIUS Women of Troy, I'd thank you to tell me where I may find
Hecuba, she who once was Queen of Ilium Troy.

CHORUS She's sitting over there, Talthybius. She's the one
wrapped in her robes with her head down.

TALTHYBIUS O Zeus, how
can I say you care for humans now? Or that you oversee (490)
the fortune of all mortal affairs? Was not this woman
once the queen of gold-rich Phrygia and wife of Priam?
Now that lively city is a spear-gutted carcass,
And Hecuba herself is a ragged slave, bereft and sunk
to the ground. What a pity. I'm an old man,
but I'd rather die than live this shame.

Stand up,
Hecuba. Pick yourself up from the dirt. Push that gray
hair out of your eyes. I know you hear me. (500)

HECUBA Go away
and leave me alone. Why are you here? Who are you
anyway? Just let me lie here. Don't disturb
my dusty grief.

TALTHYBIUS I'm Talthybius, Greek herald,
delivering a message to you, as I was ordered.

HECUBA Are you kind, then? A friend?—come to tell me
the Greeks want my death, too? If so, you bring good news.
Extend your hand and help me up. Let's hurry along.
Lead me, old man.

TALTHYBIUS To say you may now bury your dead child, ma'am,
that's the reason I've come to you. The news
I was sent to tell you. (510)

HECUBA What? No merciful death?
Just more woe?
And so you're dead, my child, commandeered
from life, from me. Your mother's now more childless than
she was this morning, having lost you.
Who could carry
all this grief?
—How was my daughter handled, sir?
Did your people execute her with respect?
Or did you kill her like a slave and an enemy?
Tell me the truth, old man, however shocking or painful.

TALTHYBIUS You're doubling the steep cost of sorrow, woman,
by asking me to retell these troubles. My eyes are wet
a second time. I paid in tears once already
at the grave when she died. But you will hear. In full
force the Greeks gathered at the tomb for your girl's death. (520)
Achilles' son led your daughter by the hand to the top
of the mound. I was standing nearby. A designated corps
of young guards followed, on hand to restrain any bucking
or bolting of your calf. Neoptolemus took a gold cup,
filled it with wine, and lifted it in honor of his dead father.
He nodded to me, and on that cue, I raised my voice
over the chatter gusting around me and said, "Silence
in the ranks. All soldiers hereby stand at attention (530)
until further orders." Thus I becalmed the entire army.
They stood hushed and breathless as Neoptolemus prayed,
"O Achilles, greatest of warriors, accept this cup
that the army and I offer you as a gift. Let this libation
entice your ghost to appear and drink the maiden's blood,
dark and pure. In return, grant us winds,
strong and favorable. Free the prows and bridling ropes (540)
of our ships, and fill our sails for safe passage home."
Then, seizing his double-gilt sword by the hilt, he drew it

from its sheath and motioned to the guards to seize Polyxena.
Your daughter, when she saw this, gave this proud speech:
“O Greeks who sacked my city, know that I die willingly,
so keep your hands off me. I will bare the nape
of my own neck to the sword. For the gods’ sakes, let me
be free of fetters when you kill me so that I may die free, (550)
and among the dead I won’t have to be ashamed,
being a queen, to be called a slave.” The troops roared
their approval, and, when Agamemnon ordered the guards
to release the maiden, they did so immediately. And immediately
Polyxena grabbed the fabric at her neckline with both hands
and ripped her dress open, exposing her breasts, her torso
smooth and perfect as a statue’s. Nude to the waist, (560)
she dropped on one knee before her executioner
and said, “Behold, young man—if it’s my breast you want
to strike, strike here; if here beneath the neck, my throat
is ready.” Neoptolemus both unwillingly and willingly
cut her throat at the windpipe. His steel sword
sliced deep, and her blood gushed out. Even as she died,
your courageous daughter took care to fall decently,
modestly covering what must be hid from men’s eyes. (570)
When she was fully dead, the soldiers busied themselves
with the tasks of death. Some scattered leaves over the body,
while others piled the pyre with pine logs. Those working
reprimanded anyone idle: “Do you stand there,
cur, doing nothing, holding neither gown
nor ornament? Won’t you go find something to give
to the bravest and most noble of maidens?” That’s how the solders
spoke of your dead daughter, Hecuba. Now you’ve heard (580)
the whole story. Having witnessed it myself,
I see you are the luckiest—and most unlucky—of mothers.

CHORUS This sorrow boils up and overruns the house of Priam
and Troy, my city, so the gods want it to.

HECUBA Polyxena, dear, I don’t know which ordeal to manage
first with so many rolling in. There is a vast
sea of pain out there. If I brace against one, another
upends me, then another again. Wave upon wave
of pain. And now I can’t sponge away all you suffered

in dying or keep myself from groaning. But I'm glad (590)
to know you died well, to have at least that bleak
comfort.

Strange to think how barren ground can,
with care—or chance, perhaps—bear fruit; while fertile land
neglected goes to seed, or worse. With people, though,
the worthless are never anything but. The noble,
likewise. Character doesn't change with life's conditions,
But what am I saying? These thoughts are arrows shot in vain.

—A moment, Talthybius. Go tell Agammenmon
something for me. Tell him: No one touches my daughter.
Ask him to keep everyone away until
I get there.

Armies—any large crowd of men—can't be
predicted. Big fields like that are always full of weeds.
Inflamed sailors, like fires, run wild. Things spin out
of control: even good men get singed with badness.

—Old woman, take this pitcher to the beach. Fill it (610)
with sea water. Carry it back to me without
spilling any. I need it all to give my child
her last washing. A bride unwedded; a virgin
bedded by death. I must bathe and lay her out
as she deserves—But how? With what treasures? —I
have nothing left. —So now what? Think, Hecuba.

—My women,
captives like me, but maybe they smuggled out a few
pretty trinkets. I'll go see.

Oh, how much (620)
greatness gone! My home, my Priam, our palace and fortune,
our children—gone now, stripped to the bone. How pointless, all
that boasting of wealth and fame. The richest are those who live
uneventfully, day after day after day.

CHORUS [Strophe]

I was tied to this fate, this sorrow, (630)
when Paris cut the first pine
on Mt. Ida to carve a mast

*to sail the ocean's surge
to anchor in the bed of Helen,
that sun-kissed, golden girl.*

[Antistrophe]

*Suffering encircled by worse
necessity, all entangled—* (640)
One man's folly launched

*a host of woes on Ilium
when the Idean herdsman judged
three bickering goddesses,*

[Epode]

*legislating strife
by spear and slaughter, and shame
of my bedchamber. A widowed bride*

is groaning in Sparta. A mother (650)
*now childless tears gray hair
and claws her cheeks red.*

THERAPAINA Where is the queen? Hecuba, who wears so many
woes no one will ever take that crown from her? (660)

CHORUS What is it now? Does it never end?

THERAPAINA I bring this pain
for Hecuba. It's hard to speak, and hard to keep silent.

CHORUS Here comes Hecuba now, in time for your announcement.

THERAPAINA O queen of woes—more wretched than you imagine—
I bring you news—you're dead and gone from light to darkness,
childless, widowed, exiled, quite destroyed.

HECUBA But how (670)
is this called news? You tell me what I already know.
But what is this? Why do you bring Polyxena's corpse
here? I'd made burial arrangements with the Greeks.

- THERAPAINA She doesn't see, so caught up in mourning Polyxena
she doesn't recognize the new pain set before her.
- HECUBA O gods, don't tell me it's Cassandra you've brought?
- THERAPAINA It's not Cassandra; she's alive. Prepare yourself.
I'll unwrap the corpse so you see the one you mourn. (680)
- HECUBA Aah! It's my son! My youngest son, dead!
He was supposed to be safe with the Thracian king. O Polydorus!
I'm truly dead. This sight annihilates me utterly.
- O child, child—
I start the song—
The song of death—
Sung from the heart—*
- THERAPAINA You recognize your son now.
- HECUBA Stunningly new;
newly stunning, what I see here. I see all now. (690)
- Wave after wave—
Blow after blow—
Day after day—
Sighs— Groans—*
- CHORUS It's terrible, wretched lady, the terrible ills we suffer.
- HECUBA *O precious child—
Full-wretched mother—
What fate? — What hand? —
What brought you here? —*
- THERAPAINA I do not know, my queen. I found him on the beach.
- HECUBA Did he drown? Or was he killed there on the sand? (700)
- THERAPAINA It seemed to me the waves had washed him up on shore.

HECUBA *Black-winged nightmares—
They told the truth—
My son, dead in dreams—
My son, dead in life—*

CHORUS Who killed him then? Did your dreams show you that?

HECUBA I tell you friends, a friend and ally murdered him. (710)
The king of Thrace. To whom my careful husband sent
our son—and his future wealth—for safekeeping.

CHORUS You're saying Polydorus killed your son for gold?

HECUBA *Unspeakable— Unnamable—
Unholy— Unbearable—
A monstrous host—
A murdered guest—

His broken limbs—
His mangled flesh—
The traitor's sword—
No pity—None—* (720)

CHORUS I've never seen you in a state like this, Hecuba.
The gods have loaded you with more pain than you
can bear.
—But look, I see Lord Agamemnon coming.
—Let's be quiet now.

AGAMEMNON Hecuba, why on earth haven't you buried your daughter?
I got your message from Talthybius. You said none
of us should touch her, and so, as you directed, we've
left her alone, not laying a hand on her. But you,
you take your time in a way that makes me wonder. (730)
I've come to hurry you along. We Greeks take pride
in doing things well, if such things be worth doing.
—Hold on, what corpse is this I see before the tents?
A Trojan? Those are no familiar Greek wrappings.

- HECUBA O you unfortunate (and I mean me by saying
“you”), Hecuba! What should I do? Do I
beg at his knees for mercy, or bite my tongue in silence?
- AGAMEMNON Why are you turning your back to me, Hecuba?
What has happened here? Tell me about this body. (740)
- HECUBA If to him I’m nothing but a contemptible enemy and slave,
he’ll push me from his knees. I couldn’t bear that.
- AGAMEMNON I can’t read minds, you know. I can’t help unless
you speak.
- HECUBA But maybe I’m seeing him as an enemy,
when, really, he isn’t?
- AGAMEMNON Still nothing? Suit yourself then.
If you don’t want me to know, I don’t want to hear.
- HECUBA I can’t do what I need to do without his help.
Why do I waste time debating? Win or lose, (750)
he’s my only hope of avenging my children.
- Agamemnon, hear my supplication. I beg you
by your knees, your chin, and your happy right hand.
- AGAMEMNON What are you asking for, Hecuba? For your freedom?
That’s easy enough.
- HECUBA Sir, not what you expect. Do you see this corpse
I’m crying over? (760)
- AGAMEMNON Of course I see it. I’ve been trying
to get you to tell me about it.
- HECUBA This is the body of my son.
I carried him in my womb. I gave birth to him.

AGAMEMNON I see. Which son, poor woman?

HECUBA Not one of those who died
defending Troy.

AGAMEMNON You had another?

HECUBA I did, in vain.
You see him here.

AGAMEMNON But where was he when Troy fell?

HECUBA To save his young life, his father sent him away.

AGAMEMNON Sent him where?

HECUBA To this very country in which
he now lies dead. (770)

AGAMEMNON He sent his son to Polymestor?

HECUBA Yes, and sent with him a sum of bitter gold.

AGAMEMNON But how did your son die? Who killed him?

HECUBA Who else?
Our dear, loving, loyal Thracian friend.

AGAMEMNON How shameful!
Was it lust for gold?

HECUBA Yes, Polymestor
killed for it the minute he learned Troy had fallen.

AGAMEMNON Where was your son found? Who brought him here?

HECUBA This old servant. She found his body tumbling in the surf.

AGAMEMNON Was she looking for him?

HECUBA No, she went to fetch
sea water to wash Polyxena's body. (780)

AGAMEMNON Polymestor
must have killed him and then thrown him in the sea.

HECUBA Hacked up, pounded by waves. Look at the lacerations
on his skin.

AGAMEMNON You are indeed a wretched woman.

HECUBA I'm already dead, Agamemnon. I'm past suffering.

AGAMEMNON Alas! Is there a woman more unfortunate?

HECUBA None, except Misfortune herself.

But listen
to my request, my supplication. See if you think
my hardships are justified. If so, that's it; I won't
bother you further. But if not, then please help me.
Help me get revenge on that deceitful friend,
that fiendish and malignant host. (790)

I can't count
the number of times he sat at my table, an honored guest.
In thanks, he kills my son? He's a calculated, cold-blooded
murderer.

I know I'm nothing but a powerless slave, but the gods
have power—as does the underlying law that governs
them. It is by virtue of this law—this basic
moral code—that the gods and our belief in them (800)
exists, and we know right from wrong, good from evil.
If you defy this law, allowing those who murder
guests and violate the gods to go unpunished,
you poison the root of our humanity. Justice
withers and dies.

Preserve us, then, and pity me.
Step back like an artist and see the whole picture of me.

Behold a woman royal once upon a time
but now your slave; once rich in children but now
impoverished and childless; exiled, deserted, a prisoner
of war, the most wretched of humans—

(810)

No, don't go,
Agamemnon! Why do you turn away? O gods,
can I accomplish nothing? Why do we work so hard
to learn unnecessary things, when what we need
to know is how to persuade. Without the polished
art of persuasion, we can't get what we want.

It's hopeless.

(820)

I've watched my husband and all my children die; I'm now
a slave; on the horizon, smoke still spirals up
from Troy's smoldering ashes, haunting me.

All but

Cassandra.

No point invoking bonds of love, as if
caresses could be called to testify—but still,
why not?

—My lord, Agamemnon, hear me!

My daughter shares your bed. She sleeps beside you, and you
enjoy her favors. What are they worth to you, these nights
of love? What thanks are due to Cassandra? To me, my lord?
Think of this and hear me: Do you see this corpse,
this dead boy who is Cassandra's brother? By doing
good to him, you do the same for her, the one
who shares your bed. But let me speak a little more!
If I could, I'd grow tongues in my arms and hands
and hair, in the soles of my feet—a thousand tongues
all talking, all crying together, in one voice clinging
to your knees, begging you, imploring you: O lord,
O greatest light of Hellas, lend your avenging hand
to this old woman, even though she's nothing. Help her
anyway. Do your duty. Mete out justice.
Punish this heinous crime against gods and man.

(840)

CHORUS

Strange how our lives ebb and flow, defined
by circumstance and necessity, making

friends our worst enemies and making foes
our inadvertent friends.

AGAMEMNON I truly pity you (850)
and your son, Hecuba, and I'm genuinely moved
by your request. I tell you, nothing would please me more
than seeing justice served. But I'm in an awkward position
with the army. Any part I might play
in helping you exact revenge would be seen
as motivated by my love for Cassandra.
The army thinks of Polymestor as an ally
—and of your murdered son as an enemy.
You love your son, of course, but that means nothing (860)
to the Greek troops. So know that if I can, I'll help—
but not if the army starts to grumble.

HECUBA Then no one is free
in this world. He's chained to money, or to luck, or to majority
opinion, or to law. Any way you look at it,
he's still a slave.
And so, because your fears constrain you,
hold you hostage to the mob, let a captive
set you free. Be aware of my plans to get (870)
revenge, but don't be party to them. Don't act
for me, but don't act quickly if the Greeks respond
to Polymestor's distress. Just look the other way.
That's all you need to do. I'll take care of the rest.

AGAMEMNON But how? With what? Do you believe your shaking hands
can lift a heavy sword? Or do you plan to use
poison? And who will be your accomplice in all this?

HECUBA Remember, there are women hidden in these tents. (880)

AGAMEMNON The women we took captive? The Greek prisoners?

HECUBA Yes, they will help me get revenge.

AGAMEMNON But how?

You are women. How will women defeat men?

HECUBA There is unnerving strength in numbers, especially when you add deceit.

AGAMEMNON Unnerving maybe. But still, you can't expect women to have the strength.

HECUBA Why not? Didn't women kill Aegyptus's sons? Didn't women murder the men of Lemnos, every last one?

We're wasting time talking. Give this woman leave to run an errand for me. Guarantee her safe passage through the Greek encampments.

You, woman, take (890)
this message to Polymestor: "Hecuba, the former queen of Troy, invites your presence, and that of your sons, to speak of pressing matters that touch us all."

One last thing, Agamemnon. Delay Polyxena's funeral. I want her and Polydorus cremated and buried together, joining in one flame my doubled woes.

AGAMEMNON If that's what you want, lady, so be it. (900)
If we had wind to sail, I couldn't grant this. But we're still becalmed, with nothing to do but stand by until the god sends fair weather.

Best of luck.
I hope it all turns out. It's in the interests of both states and individuals that evil suffers evil and good fares well.

CHORUS [Strophe A]

*You, my hometown Ilium, no longer
can you be called unravished, unspoiled.
Such a fog of Greeks enveloped you*

with honed swords, so many swords!

Your towers are crownless, shaved bare, (910)
Bruised with black ash and smoke.
Wounded Ilium, torn from your shores;
I can no longer call you home.

[Antistrophe A]

My ruin struck after midnight.
Our bellies were full of rich foods.
Mists of sleep soothed our eyes
after thanksgiving sacrifice and dance.

In our bed, my husband slept soundly— (920)
his spear at last retired to its peg—
unaware of ships at our shores
the Greeks disgorging on Ilium Troy.

[Strophe B]

I was braiding my hair, absorbed
in my sea-deep mirror, ready to sink
into bed and join my love
in woolen fleeces. But then —shouts,

battle orders, Troy impaled
by war cries: Ooh-rah, Greeks! (930)
Will you storm these hills with fire,
secure your target, and get home?

[Antistrophe B]

Wearing only a thin nightgown
like a simple girl, I left my love
to plead in vain at Artemis' shrine—
My husband dead, I was bound

in chains and yanked to sea.

*my city recedes as the Greeks set sail
Severing me forever from home,
I sank into fathomless grief.* (940)

[Epode]

*Helen, lovely but two-faced,
and her vile cowhand Paris.
Damn them both to hell!*

*I am ruined, wrenched
from my own native land
by their foul marriage-defiling bed.*

*O headwinds, over the black waves
shackle the whore at sea.* (950)
May she never see home.

POLYMESTOR My dearest Hecuba, wife of my late friend
Priam! How I pity you and your ruined Troy.
And now your precious Polyxena—dead—it's just too much.
Oh, what can we count on in this life? Nothing, I say!
Not reputation or good fortune. The gods make it all
pitch and yaw, back and forth, until we're seasick
and confused enough to worship them.

But what help (960)

is any of this with your loss?

Are you bothered I haven't
been to visit you before now? I came here as fast
as I could, Hecuba. It just so happened that I was inland,
seeing about Thracian business, when you arrived here.
As a matter of fact, I was just setting out to see you
when your servant arrived and gave me your message

HECUBA I'm mortified for you to see me in this state, Polymestor.
I've fallen so low since we last met. I'm too ashamed now (970)
to look you in the eye. So don't think of it as hostility toward you,
Polymestor. Besides, it's not customary for a woman to meet
a man's gaze.

POLYMESTOR Indeed. No offense taken, my dear. Now how can I be of service?
What are the “pressing matters” your message spoke of?

HECUBA I have some information to share with you
and your sons, but it’s private. Would you ask
your attendants to leave us for a while? (980)

POLYMESTOR Go away. I’m safe here.
Hecuba is my friend, and the Greek army
is well disposed to me.

But tell me:
How may a fortunate man such as I help
an unfortunate friend?

HECUBA First things first: tell me about the child Priam
and I gave to you for safekeeping. How is he? Does he live?

POLYMESTOR Alive and well, I assure you. In his case anyway, you’re in luck.

HECUBA O dearest friend! Your words speak to your worth! (990)

POLYMESTOR Is there anything else you wish to know?

HECUBA Does he still remember me, his mother?

POLYMESTOR Does he! He even tried to come here secretly to see you.

HECUBA The gold he brought with him from Troy—is it safe?

POLYMESTOR Quite safe—under lock and key in my palace.

HECUBA Guard it well. I hope it isn’t a burdensome temptation.

POLYMESTOR Not at all. I’m content to enjoy the wealth I already have.

HECUBA Do you know why I’ve sent for you and your sons?

POLYMESTOR I don’t. You were just going to tell me.

our business is finished, you can take your sons
back to the place you house my son.

CHORUS —You haven't yet paid the price, but you will.
—Like a man stumbling into foul bilge-water.
—Or swept from shore and drowning in the undertow.
—As the waves cover your head, you'll see how your life
is just a loan that's come due.
—Death is the payment the gods demand.
—Where justice and the gods converge, there's a maelstrom. (1030)
—Your greed for gold leads you down the road to hell.
—Hands that never held a sword will cut your life away.

POLYMESTOR O wretched me, I'm blind! Blinded of my eyes' light!

HEMICHORUS Did you hear the Thracian? Why is he screaming, my friends?

POLYMESTOR O me! My children! You have slaughtered them!

HEMICHORUS Something new and terrible has been done inside the tent!

POLYMESTOR Run, will you? But you won't escape! I will tear
this tent down with my bare hands. (1040)

CHORUS —See that? It looks like—
—Like something heavy thrown against the tent wall!
—What is all the clatter and commotion?
—Should we rush in?
—What should we do?
—Should we break down the door?
—Crisis calls! Hurry now! Hecuba needs us!

HECUBA That's right! Smash it all! Rage and roar! Break
down the door: Nothing will bring your sight back,
or let you see your sons alive again. I've killed them.

CHORUS Did you really do the things you say, Hecuba?
Have you taken down the Thracian?

- HECUBA Just watch.
In a minute you'll see him come stumbling out, blind (1050)
and flailing. You'll see his sons, whom I killed with the help
of these excellent Trojan women. He's paid his debt.
I've had my revenge. And here he comes, just
as I said. I'll get out of the way of his Thracian fury.
- POLYMESTOR Where go? Where stand? Run? Where?
A beast on all fours. Hard on the trail of my prey
Where? Here? This way? That way? To corner (1060)
those murderous Trojan hags? Where are you,
hags? Where did the witches go? God of sun,
cure my bloody eyes. Give me light.
- Hsst. I hear their footsteps. I smell them.
- But where? O gods, to leap, to gorge (1070)
on their flesh and bones. Rabid
for blood. Vengeance is mine.
Where now? My children deserted.
Torn apart by those Bacchantes of Hell.
Slaughtered, a gory meal for dogs.
A wild thing thrown out on a mountain.
Where can I stand? Where turn? Where go?—
Run for my lair. Sail like a ship. My cloak, a sail (1080)
unfurling. Run! Guard my sons.
- CHORUS Tormented man, in the grip of unbearable suffering
brought on by your unbearable deeds. A heavy-
handed god weighs you down with punishments.
- POLYMESTOR *Help me! Aid! Hear me,*
you Thracians! Soldiers, (1090)
bring your spears! Horsemen,
use your spurs!
Come to me, sons of Atreus!
Help, help, I cry, help!
For the gods' sake,
where are you? Do you hear?

*I need help. These
women, they've—won't someone
help me?—these woman
have destroyed me!
They have weapons!
My sons! Murder! Butchery!
Help! I need help!
Oh gods, the horrors.
Where can I run?
Where can I go?—Wings,
gods give me wings—
let me fly to the heavens, (1100)
into the light of Orion
or Sirius—or in my wretchedness
I must plunge into the frothing
black chasms of Hades!*

CHORUS Who can blame this man for wanting to die,
for thinking death the cure for so much pain?

AGAMEMNON I came when I heard shouts. Echo ricocheted off
the rock, spreading uproar through the army. (1110)
If we didn't know firsthand that Troy's towers
had fallen to Greek spears, the commotion
would have caused some concern.

POLYMESTOR I know that voice! O my dear friend, Agamemnon!
See what I suffer!

AGAMEMNON Dear gods! O wretched man, who has ruined you?
Who gouged your eyes and blinded you? Who killed
your sons? Whoever it was truly hated all of you.

POLYMESTOR It was Hecuba. She did all of this. She and her women. (1120)
They destroyed me. No, worse.

AGAMEMNON You, Hecuba? Is this true? Did you do these horrible things?

POLYMESTOR What? Is Hecuba here? Where? Show me so I can

rip her apart. Tear her flesh into pieces with my very own hands.

AGAMEMNON Stop, Polymestor! What’s wrong with you?

POLYMESTOR For the gods’ sake, let me go. I will shred her limb by limb!

AGAMEMNON Enough! No more savagery. I will hear your case—and hers—and judge you both fairly. (1130)

POLYMESTOR I’ll speak. There was boy named Polydorus, Hecuba’s youngest son. His father Priam brought him to me to live when Troy seemed in danger of falling. Yes, I did, I killed Polydorus. I admit it. But I’ll tell you why so you’ll see that it was well and wisely planned. I reasoned that if this child survived, he would re-gather and re-found Troy. And if the Greeks found out this heir to the Trojan throne still lived, they would set out a second expedition, devastate Thrace in the process, and we’d bear the collateral damage of your battles once again. (1140)

But Hecuba, hearing her son was dead, lured me here with reports of treasure hidden in Troy’s ruins. She said we might be overheard, so she coaxed us into the tent, my sons and me. They sat us on a couch. (1150)

I was surrounded by many hands, some to the left, some to the right. Everyone seemed friendly. Some women sat beside me, exclaiming over my robe. They held the cloth up to the light and praised the craftsmanship of the weave. Others admired my spear and shield, and before I knew it my weapons were gone. Young mothers fussed over my sons, fondling them, bouncing them in their arms, passing them from hand to hand until my boys were out of reach. Then, out of the blue, these placid women, these mothers, pulled daggers from their robes and stabbed my sons to death, while other women pinned me down so that I couldn’t move. I tried to raise my head, but they pulled me down by my hair. (1160)

I couldn't free my arms because so many of them
pressed against me. And then—o agony!—they pulled
off their brooches and pierced my eyes until the blood
ran thick. Then they ran away. I sprang up after them
like a raging animal, bashing and banging my way
along the walls, searching for them; hunting them. (1170)

These are the things I've suffered in looking out for your
interests, Agamemnon; killing your enemy.
Let me tell you, if anyone in the past has spoken
ill of women, or speaks so now or will speak so
in the future, I'll sum it up for him: Neither sea
nor land has ever produced a more monstrous
creature than woman. I say this for a fact. (1180)

CHORUS Don't blame us all solely on the basis of your woes!

HECUBA Agamemnon, never in the affairs of men
Should the tongue have more power than facts,
Rather, when someone acts well, he should speak well,
And if the opposite, his words should be rotten. (1190)
Glib rhetoric may win us over for a while,
but in the end the smooth talkers die foully.
So much for my prologue to you, Agamemnon.
Now to deal with him.

You claim that by killing my son
you saved the Greeks from another quagmire of war.
What a lie. Tell me, you scum, what possible help
could a barbarian like you be to the Greeks? Whose
favor were you currying in your eager zeal? Trying
to marry into a family? To help a relative? I remember: (1200)
you said the Greeks were going to trample all over
your country's crops. Who in earth do you think
will believe that? I'll tell you the real reason:

It was the gold. You killed my son so you could
get your hands on his gold. If not, then why is it that
while Troy still flourished, while its towers remained
intact, while Priam lived, and while Hector's spear
thrived—and you really wanted to help out Agamemnon— (1210)

how come you didn't kill Polydorus then or at least
turned him over as a threat? Instead, you waited until
you saw the smoke rising from the city that told
you our fortunes had turned for the worse. Only then
did you kill the guest you had taken into your home,
who sat helpless at your hearth. Here's more proof
of your evil: If you really had the interests of the Greeks
at heart as you claim, why didn't you give them the gold
right away—that gold you say isn't yours but Agamemnon's? (1220)
They were in desperate need then, exhausted from battle,
just barely scraping by in a foreign land. But no, even now
you're hoarding that treasure. It's locked up and well
guarded in your house, as you told me yourself. And
another thing: If you had taken care of my child,
as you ought to have, and kept him safe, you'd earn
respect and honor and worthy fame. Hard times
prove the honest friendship of good men, while
prosperity always has friends. If at some point you
were in need and Polydorus was doing well,
my child would have been a great treasury for you.
As it is, you have no friend in Agamemnon there. (1230)
Your gold is gone, as are your children,
And you must live on as you are.

Agamemnon,
if you side with Polymestor, you endorse evil.
This man has betrayed all trust. He has broken
the laws of man and god. He is faithless, irreverent,
and thoroughly corrupt. If you acquit him, what
then do your actions say about you?

CHORUS Just causes make fertile soil for strong arguments!

AGAMEMNON It pains me to sit in judgment of others' troubles, (1240)
but I must. What kind of leader would I be if I pushed
this case aside, having agreed to take it up? So here's
my verdict: Polymestor, you are guilty of murder.
Clearly, it wasn't for my sake or the Greeks' that you
killed Polydorus when he was a guest in your home,
but for the sake of getting his gold. Your rhetoric

exudes the oily panic of a guilty man uncovered.
You've misconstrued facts to put yourself
in a more favorable light. Maybe you think
killing a guest—in this case a child who'd been
put in your care—is a small matter in the larger
scheme of things. But we Greeks think of it
as heinous murder. How could I rule you innocent
and maintain a shred of credibility? I can't.
You committed a brutal crime; be prepared, (1250)
therefore, for a justly brutal punishment.

POLYMESTOR Argh! How can it be? I'm defeated by a woman,
a slave! Condemned and punished by my inferior.

HECUBA But isn't that just, since you committed crimes?

POLYMESTOR Oh my children! Oh my eyes!

HECUBA You're suffering? What of it? I, too, lost a child.

POLYMESTOR Do you enjoy abusing me, you monster?

HECUBA Shouldn't I be enjoying my revenge on you?

POLYMESTOR But you won't be soon, when the sea spray—

HECUBA Takes me on a one-way trip to Greece? (1260)

POLYMESTOR —swallows you up as you fall from the masthead.

HECUBA And who does the honors of pushing me into the salty brink?

POLYMESTOR You yourself will climb the ship's mast.

HECUBA Will I grow wings on my back, or what?

POLYMESTOR You'll be transformed—into a dog, a bitch with fiery eyes.

HECUBA How do you know of this metamorphosis of mine?

- POLYMESTOR Our Thracian prophet, Dionysus, told me.
- HECUBA Well, he failed to warn you of your own fate.
- POLYMESTOR If he had, you'd never have tricked me.
- HECUBA So, will I live or will I die? (1270)
- POLYMESTOR You'll die, and when you do your tomb will be called . . .
- HECUBA What? Hecuba's doghouse?
- POLYMESTOR . . . Cynossema, the Sign of the Wretched Bitch.
A bitch's grave for a landmark and warning for sailors.
- HECUBA It makes no difference to me. I've had my revenge.
- POLYMESTOR Your child Cassandra will also die.
- HECUBA That prophecy I spit back in your face! Keep it for yourself.
- POLYMESTOR This man's wife, his bitter housekeeper, will kill her.
- HECUBA May Clytemnestra never be so insane!
- POLYMESTOR She'll kill him, too, lifting her bloody axe again—
- AGAMEMNON Are you out of your mind? Or just asking for trouble? (1280)
- POLYMESTOR Kill me if you like, but a bloody bath still awaits you in Argos.
- AGAMEMNON You, get this man out of my sight!
- POLYMESTOR Did I hit close to home?
- AGAMEMNON And gag him, too.
- POLYMESTOR Go ahead, gag me; I've already spoken.

AGAMEMNON Remove him immediately. Toss him
on a desert island where no one has to listen
to his insolence.

Hecuba, you go and bury your
two dead children.

The rest of you return
to the tents of your masters. It's time to cast off.
See how the ships' sails flap and billow? The wind
is finally blowing.

(1290)

Let us pray for fair weather
and safe passage on our voyage. May this be
the end of our ordeal. May we find all things
well at home. In all our homes.

CHORUS —To the harbor now. —To the tents.
—It is time to embark. —It is time to board
our new lives as slaves. —But the taste
is bitter. —Necessity is hard.

HECUBA

by Euripides

translated by
Jay Kardan and Laura-Gray Street

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*Working Script for
The 2010 Randolph College Greek Play
directed by Amy R. Cohen*

POLYDORUS

HECUBA

CHORUS OF CAPTIVE TROJAN WOMEN

POLYXENA

ODYSSEUS

TALTHYBIUS

THERAPAINA

AGAMEMNON

POLYMESTOR

SONS OF POLYMESTOR

SOLDIERS

GUARDS

SERVANTS

Notes on the text:

- You will find no stage directions here. Most are implied if you take cues from the text, and the rest we'll sort out in blocking. If you have a particular question, email Cohen.
- *Text in italics* will be sung, and may change somewhat by the time the songs are fully written.
- In Chorus speeches, this symbol— »» —means a change of speaker or speakers within the Chorus.
- The line numbers in parentheses on the right margin correspond to the original Greek.
- The scene numbers are our own breakdown of scenes.
- “Strophe,” “Antistrophe,” and “Epode” correspond to the matching stanzas and the codas of the original Greek.

POLYDORUS I come from bleakest darkness, where corpses lurk [Scene 1]
and Hades lives apart from other gods. I am
Polydorus, youngest son of Hecuba and Priam.
My father, worried Troy might fall to Greek offensives,
sent me here, to Thrace, my mother's father's home
and land of his friend Polymestor, who controls
with his spear this rich plain of the Chersonese
and its people. My father sent a large stash of gold
with me, to insure that, if Ilium's walls indeed (10)
were toppled, I'd be provided for. He did all this
because I was too young to wear armor, my arms
too gangly to carry a lance. As long as the towers
of Troy remained intact, and the stones that marked
our boundaries stood upright, and my brother Hector
was lucky with his spear, I thrived living here
with my father's Thracian friend, like some hapless sapling. (20)
But once Troy was shattered—Hector dead, our home
eviscerated, and my father himself slaughtered
on Apollo's altar by Achilles' murderous son—
then Polymester killed me. This "friend" tossed me dead
into the ocean for the sake of gold, so he could keep
Priam's wealth for himself. My lifeless body washes
ashore and washes back to sea with the waves' endless
ebb and flow, and remains unmourned, unburied.
Disembodied, I hover now above Hecuba, my dear mother, (30)
as I have for the three days since she and the other women
were brought here, captives on their way to Greece.
But however eager for home, the Greeks must wait here
on the coast of Thrace, sails slack because Achilles stilled
the winds. Appearing above his tomb, he demands my sister
Polyxena as a sacrifice to appease his wounded honor. (40)
He'll get it, too. His men won't dare refuse him. So fate
leads my sister to her death today. And my mother
will see two corpses of two children: mine and Polyxena's.
My body will wash up in the surf so she can bury me
properly. I begged this crumb of Hades, and it was granted. (50)
But for now I'll get out of the way. See how Hecuba
stumbles from the doorway of Agamemnon's tent,
upset by nightmares and visions of my ghost.
Alas! Old mother, your royal palaces are reduced to meager
corners in another ruler's tents. How poorly you fare
—as poorly as you once fared well. To balance out

your past prosperity, some god has ruined you.

HECUBA I am old. I am plagued [Scene 2a]
by bad dreams. Once your queen, (60)
I am frail, a worn hag
you must lead from the huts.
My dear friends, sister slaves,
help me walk, hold my hand,
let me lean on your arms
like a staff. Bear me up.
My own legs are too weak
to support me. O lightning
of Zeus, tell me why
I am snatched from my sleep
by these specters of dread.
Goddess Earth, from whose womb (70)
these nocturnal invasions
emerge like the stirring
of bats, I recoil
from these nightmares
O you underworld gods,
please protect Polydorus,
my anchor and last
of my house, who abides (80)
in this Thracian domain,
in the home of a friend.
Oh the horrors I dreamed—
I still shudder with fear!
Find Cassandra or Helenus—
Ask them to read
these phantasms and explain
the young doe that was torn
from my lap and destroyed
by a wolf with bloody jaws. (90)

CHORUS I am here—I arrived— [Scene 2b]
Hecuba— just as fast
as I could—from the tent
of my master—where my lot (100)
is now cast—where command
made me slave—I was caught
like an animal, marched
out of Troy at the point
of a Greek spear.

»» I bring news
»» It's not good—I regret
I must say—I've been told—
the Greek army convened—
they have voted—your daughter,
Polyxena—she
is the one—it's decided—
that she will be sacrificed.

»» To Achilles.

»» His ghost, reappeared at his tomb,
as you know, in a blaze
of gold armor and rage.

(110)

»» The Greek sails were unfurled,
all aboard for the launch,
when the warrior's ghost
intervened.

»» "Do you think
you can leave," the wraith howled,
"without honoring me?"

»» Then rough waves of dispute
overran the composure
of captain and crew—

»» and the Greeks were now split
between those who would kill
a young girl—your daughter—
to appease fierce Achilles
and those who disagreed

»» To your cause spoke that chief
in command, Agamemnon,

(120)

»» master of Cassandra.

»» The sons of Theseus rebutted,
»» exclaiming the tomb of Achilles
deserved the girl's blood;

»» that Cassandra's bed must defer
to the warrior's brave spear.

»» There things stood, at a stand-off,
»» an intractable draw.

»» Then that wily Odysseus spoke.

»» He festooned

and perfumed his appeal
the air thick with his words— (130)

»» till his audience swooned
at his feet as he crooned,
“Who could suffer the dead
telling tales down in Hades
about Greeks who deserted
the soldiers who died
for Hellas on the fields
of war?”

»» Every soldier
agreed that to slight
brave Achilles was
sacrilege.

»» Sacrifice
carried the day. (140)

»» And Odysseus is coming—

»» At any moment—

»» He will tear the sweet foal from your breast—

»» You must go—

»» He will wrench your Polyxena out of your hands—

»» To the ships—

»» To the altars—

»» At the knees of Agamemnon—

»» Pray—

»» Ask the gods of heaven—

»» And Hades—

»» If your prayers convey—

»» Then your daughter is saved—

»» If they fail, you must see your own child put to death—

»» Her throat cut—

»» And the flow of red blood from her gold-bearing neck— (150)

- HECUBA Because they have voted—
the Greeks—to kill you
on the tomb of Achilles. (190)
- POLYXENA Alas, that you utter
unspeakable woes!
- HECUBA I must speak the unspeakable,
child, though it tears
me to pieces. You must know.
- POLYXENA *Sad mother of mine,
what more can you take?
Such outrage and woe.
Condemned. It’s too much. (200)
I cannot defend you;
Defenseless myself,
Alas, I must die—
be slain like a lamb.
And so you will watch
as I’m snatched away.
My torment will end.
I’ll lie with the dead. (210)
O mother, for you,
I weep and lament.*
- CHORUS And here comes Odysseus now, Hecuba,
hurrying to tell you something.
- ODYSSEUS Hecuba, I think you know the army’s will [Scene 3]
and verdict. I’ll state it anyway: The Greeks have voted (220)
to offer up your daughter on Achilles’ tomb.
They’ve authorized me to be her guard and escort.
Neoptolemus will preside over the rites of sacrifice.
Now, be sensible about this. Don’t make us drag you off
by force or come to blows. The state of affairs is difficult,
I know, but accept your lot. Hard luck is best met
with levelheadedness and expediency.
- HECUBA Oh dear gods, here it comes: a pitched battle
thick with groans and anything but dry of tears. (230)
I didn’t die when and where I should have.
But in my suffering, mighty Zeus spares me yet,
miserable as I am, to live—and suffer more.

If a slave may ask a free man some harmless questions
—nothing out of hand, I assure you, nothing with teeth—
then you, Odysseus, should be free to answer, and I
to hear what you have to say. Within these parameters,
may I speak?

ODYSSEUS Permission granted. Ask away.

HECUBA Remember how you came to Ilium, a spy cloaked
in beggar's rags, with blood from self-inflicted wounds (240)
blurring your eyes, masking your face, staining you Trojan?

ODYSSEUS I do. The memory cuts deep.

HECUBA How when Helen spotted you, she told me alone?

ODYSSEUS I thought I was sunk, a goner.

HECUBA Remember the beggar you were then? How you grabbed my knees?

ODYSSEUS My hands grew numb holding your robes in that death grip.

HECUBA And I spared you, *freed* you.

ODYSSEUS I see the sun today because of you.

HECUBA When you were *my* slave, remember how you said—

ODYSSEUS Hecuba, I *said* whatever it took to stay alive. (250)

HECUBA Aren't you shameless in this conduct of yours?
You yourself just admitted the mercy you got from me
and now you do me such evil in return?
O gods save us from politicians and demagogues like you
who don't care what harm you do as long as the multitudes
are pleased and the applause is loud. But tell me, what counseled
expediency led them to cast their ballots in favor (260)
of killing my child? What in your so-called necessity
requires this brutal murder at a tomb where, by custom,
oxen ought to die? Does the ghost's thirst for revenge
justify his demand for human slaughter? Polyxena
has done no harm to Achilles. Rather, he should've asked
for Helen's sacrifice, since *she* destroyed him
by steering him to Troy. Or if beauty is prerequisite
in this tribute, logic still exempts *us*
and points to Helen: she's the epitome, after all,
the absolute knockout, the stunner, the dazzling mantrap

who wronged Achilles far more than we.
And thus, (270)

my case for justice against the ghost's. Now hear my claim
on your gratitude. As you yourself have readily confirmed,
when our positions were reversed in Troy, you fell
at my feet, begging for your life. You clasped my hand
and touched my aging cheek, here. But now it's *my* turn
to fall, clasping *your* hand, touching your cheek, just so.
To ask that you return the favor and spare my child.
Please, I beg you. Don't take my daughter from me.
Let her live. Haven't enough died already?

All I've lost lives on in her. She is my solace. (280)

She is my staff, my nurse, my guide. She is my Troy.
Those with power should use that power carefully.
Those in luck should not assume that luck will hold,
as I well know. Once, I was powerful and lucky,
a queen—but no more. A day obliterated all.
Odysseus, I implore you, by your bearded chin,
have pity on me. Reconvene the army, persuade them
it's wrong to kill the very women you spared—because
you pitied them—in Troy. Remind your men that Greek
laws pertaining to murder protect enslaved and free
alike, without distinction. You have the power—the authority
and the lucky eloquence. But even if you babble
or stutter, your esteemed reputation, like a steady
wind, will swell the sail of your words, carrying them
farther than those of blowhards and other lesser men.

CHORUS Who could be so calloused as to remain unmoved, hearing
your sad complaints and mournful refrains of abundant woe?

ODYSSEUS A prefatory caveat, Hecuba: Just because
I make political speeches doesn't mean that I
must therefore be your enemy, so don't in anger (300)
misconstrue me so.

First off, I acknowledge,
unconditionally, your claim on my gratitude.
You saved my life, and, by the gods, I owe you. I stand
ready to honor my debt by saving *your* life. But
my public vow to the Greek troops I must also
stand by, and that is to reward our best warrior
with Polyxena, your daughter. It's an invalid premise,
you see, to think that these two lives—yours, hers—

can be interchanged.

Furthermore, our cities
will fail if noble and devoted soldiers earn
no greater returns than do lesser men. Achilles
deserves honor and tribute more than anyone:
He died for Greece, and by the gods we owe him. (310)

What conduct is more shameless than enlisting
a man's good and faithful service while he lives,
only to throw him to the dogs when he's dead?
Well, then. And if we had to go to war again,
would we have troops ready and willing to deploy
Or would men think, "Why bother? Better to lie
low and save my own skin." Imagine what
adverse effects dishonoring the dead would have on
recruiting efforts, on public perception, on morale.
For me, a few essential crumbs will suffice
while I'm alive. But I want the full-out display (320)
of honors and commemorations when I die,
a worthy tomb to make this life worthwhile. That's
the thing that lasts.

Third, you complain how you've suffered.
Well, we Greeks have suffered, too. Our old women
and our old men are no less wretched than yours.
Our young brides are likewise widowed of fine grooms
who sleep in Trojan dust instead their marriage beds.
Just as *we* endure these hardships, so can you.
And if you think I'm wrong to honor the legacy
of a great warrior like Achilles, then go ahead
and call me callous. You foreigners, feel free—
don't keep your friends friends and don't
respect the dead. That way Greece stays on top, (330)
and you get the barbarous fate that you deserve.

CHORUS Witness here how the violence of war enslaves,
 forcing its captives to endure the unendurable.

HECUBA O daughter, all my arguments against your murder
 were useless, feeble puffs of air accomplishing nothing.
 If you have more skill than your mother, use it now.
 Like the nightingale, sing out all your notes, or you
 will lose your life. Fall prostrate at this man's knee
 and persuade him. He has children, too, I know. (340)
 You may yet move him to pity.

- POLYXENA I see you, Odysseus, how you've hidden your right
hand in your cloak and turned your face away so I
can't touch your hand or beard in supplication.
But you have nothing to worry about. I'll follow you
to Achilles' tomb, both out of necessity and
because I wish to. I want to die. If I didn't
I could be called a lowly coward of a woman.
Why should I live? My father was king of Troy, ruler
of all Phrygians. I was born royalty, and I was reared
to expect I'd marry my choice of kings, exciting rivalry
over whose home and hearth I'd grace as bride. I was
mistress of the Idaeans, center of their attention, godlike
—except in my mortality. Now that I'm
a slave, I am infatuated with death. Imagine:
some cruel-minded master could buy me for money—me,
the daughter of Priam, sister of Hector and many others
—and take me to his house, force me to cook for him,
to sweep and tend the shuttle, to work day after day
while my bed, once thought fit for rulers, is polluted
by some bought slave. No, it will not happen.
That life is inconceivable. While the light
in my eyes is still free, I yield it up, giving
my body to Hades. So lead me, Odysseus; take me
to my death. I see no reason to hope for or believe
in anything better. And, Mother, don't interfere.
Help me instead. I would rather die than suffer
the shame of wearing slavery's yoke around my neck. (350)
- CHORUS The signs of good breeding are always impressive. But
nobility is even more noble when it's deserved. (360)
- HECUBA You're spoken well, daughter, but there is pain in that
good speaking. Odysseus, I understand
that Peleus's son must be granted his sacrifice
and that your reputation must be preserved. Here's
how to accomplish both without killing this girl:
Lead me to the pyre and appease the ghost by killing me.
Indeed, I—who gave birth to Paris who with his bow
slew the great Achilles—should not be spared. (370)
- ODYSSEUS Achilles didn't ask for your death, old woman, but for hers. (380)
- HECUBA Then slaughter me with my daughter. That gives the earth

and Achilles' corpse twice as much blood to drink.

ODYSSEUS That's unnecessary. Your daughter's death is enough.
Believe me when I say I wish this one death
didn't have to be.

HECUBA Then I must die with her.

ODYSSEUS Excuse me? I'm not aware that I was taking orders.

HECUBA I'll cling to her like ivy.

ODYSSEUS Not if you obey those wiser than you.

HECUBA She's my daughter. I won't let go. (400)

ODYSSEUS And I won't go away. So take your leave of her.

POLYXENA Mother, do as I say—wait, Odysseus, have some
patience with a parent's understandable fury—
Mother, listen to me, don't try to fight those
who have you in their power. Do you want to be shoved around,
to have your fragile aged skin scraped and torn
when you fall to the ground? To risk losing your dignity
being dragged off by some young soldier? No,
Mother, it would be unseemly. Instead, dear
unhappy one, give me your sweet hand and lay (410)
your cheek to mine. Now for the very last time,
I see the brilliant circle of the sun. Now I say
my final words to you, O one who carried me in
her womb and bore me. And now I go . . .

HECUBA Dear child, how I, still leashed to daylight, will mourn for you.

POLYXENA . . . unmarried, not royally wed as I should have been!

HECUBA You're pitiful, child, and I'm a wretched woman.

POLYXENA In Hades' darkness I will lie apart from you.

HECUBA O gods! What shall I do? Where turn to end my life?

POLYXENA I, born in freedom, to die a slave. (420)

HECUBA And I, bereft of fifty children.

POLYXENA Mother, what do you want me to tell my brother
Hector, and Priam, my father, your husband?

HECUBA Tell them how wretched I am.

POLYXENA O breasts that suckled me!

HECUBA O daughter who grieves me with an untimely, unhappy fate!

POLYXENA Farewell, Mother, and say farewell to Cassandra for me . . .

HECUBA Others may fare well, but not your mother. (430)

POLYXENA Now lead me away, Odysseus, with a veil shrouding
my head. My mother's grief has melted my heart, and I
have melted hers.

O sunlight! I will savor you
in the short time left between this moment and the sword
at Achilles' tomb.

HECUBA Aah! I faint. My legs dissolve.
Polyxena, stay with me! Reach out your hand,
grab hold of mine. Don't go, daughter, don't leave me
childless! Let me die, my friends. (440)

CHORUS *O sea-breeze* [Scene 4]
that carries
ships across heaving waves,
Oh, where are you
taking me now?
In what home will I be slave?

Will I be
goods for Argos?
goods for Sparta or Phthia? (450)
Or in Delos,
sent by sea-oar,
In what land will I be slave?

Shall I, there
with Delian maidens,
praise the bow of Artemis, (460)
golden garment in the temple,
In what land will I be slave?

Or in Athens?
There, shall I sew
on Athena's bright new robe?
Or perhaps there
weave in Titans. (470)
In what land will I be slave?

Alas for my children,
alas for the fathers,
alas for our native land
now leveled and slashed by Argive spears
to ash-heaps and smoke and tears.

And so I am taken
so far from my Asia, (480)
to Europe, to be a slave.
In what foreign land does death's dark escape
condemn me to slavery and rape?

Achilles' son led your daughter by the hand to the top
of the mound. I was standing nearby. A designated corps
of young guards followed, on hand to restrain any rearing
or bolting of your calf. Neoptolemus took a gold cup,
filled it with wine, and lifted it in honor of his dead father.
He nodded to me, and on that cue, I raised my voice
over the chatter gusting around me and said, "Silence
in the ranks. All soldiers hereby stand at attention
until further orders." Thus I becalmed the entire army. (530)

They stood hushed and breathless as Neoptolemus prayed,
"O Achilles, father and warrior, accept this cup
that the army and I offer you as a gift. Let this libation
entice your ghost to appear and drink the maiden's blood,
dark and pure. In return, grant us winds,
strong and favorable. Free the prows and bridling ropes
of our ships, and fill our sails for safe passage home." (540)

Then, seizing his double-gilt sword by the hilt, he drew it
from its sheath and motioned to the guards to seize Polyxena.
Your daughter, when she saw this, gave this proud speech:
"O Greeks who sacked my city, know that I die willingly.
Let no man touch me. I will bare the nape
of my own neck to the sword. For the gods' sakes, let me
be free of fetters when you kill me so that I may die free,
and among the dead I won't have to be ashamed, (550)

being a queen, to be called a slave." The troops roared
their approval, and, when Agamemnon ordered the guards
to release the maiden, they did so immediately. And immediately
Polyxena grabbed the fabric at her neckline with both hands
and ripped her dress open, exposing her breasts, her torso
smooth and perfect as a statue's. Nude to the waist, (560)

she dropped on one knee before her executioner
and said, "Behold, young man—if it's my breast you want
to strike, strike here; if here beneath the neck, my throat
is ready." Neoptolemus both unwillingly and willingly
cut her throat at the windpipe. His steel sword
sliced deep, and her blood gushed out. Even as she died,
your courageous daughter took care to fall decently,
modestly covering what must be hid from men's eyes. (570)

When she was fully dead, the soldiers busied themselves
with the tasks of death. Some scattered leaves over the body,
while others piled the pyre with pine logs. Those working
reprimanded anyone idle: "Do you stand there,

cur, doing nothing, holding neither gown
nor ornament? Won't you go find something to give
to the bravest and most noble of maidens?" That's how the solders
spoke of your dead daughter, Hecuba. Now you've heard (580)
the whole story. Having witnessed it myself,
I see you: the luckiest—and most unlucky—of mothers.

CHORUS This sorrow boils up and overruns the house of Priam
and Troy, my city, so the gods want it.

HECUBA Polyxena, dear, I don't know which ordeal to face
first with so many rolling in. There is a vast
sea of pain out there. If I brace against one, another
upends me, then another again. Wave upon wave
of pain. And now I can't sponge away all you suffered
in dying or keep myself from groaning. But I'm glad (590)
to know you died well, to have at least that bleak comfort.

Strange to think how barren ground can,
with care—or chance, perhaps—bear fruit; while fertile land
neglected goes to seed, or worse. With people, though,
the worthless are never anything but. The noble,
likewise. Character doesn't change with life's conditions. (600)
But what am I saying? These thoughts are arrows shot in vain.

A moment, Talthybius. Go tell the Greeks
something for me. Tell them: No one touches my daughter.
Keep everyone away until I get there.

Armies—any large crowd of men—can't be predicted.
Inflamed sailors, like fires, run wild. Things spin out
of control: even good men get singed with badness.

Old woman, take this pitcher to the beach. Fill it
with sea water. Carry it back to me without
spilling any. I need it all to give my child (610)
her last washing. A bride unwedded; a virgin
bedded by death. I must bathe and lay her out
as she deserves. But how? With what treasures? I
have nothing left. So now what? Think, Hecuba.

My women, captives like me, but maybe
they smuggled out a few pretty trinkets. I'll go see.

Oh, how much greatness gone!
My home, my Priam, our palace and fortune, (620)
our children—gone now, stripped to the bone. How pointless, all

that boasting of wealth and fame. The richest are those who live
uneventfully, day after day after day.

CHORUS

*I was tied to this fate, this sorrow,
when Paris first cut the pine
on Mt. Ida to carve a ship's beam
to sail cross the ocean's brine
to anchor the bed of Helen,
that sun-kissed, golden girl.*

[Strophe] [Scene 6] (630)

*Necessity, all entangled—
Suffering encircled by worse.
The folly that launched on Ilium
A host of woes and curse
Began when the Idean herdsman
Judged the three bickering gods.*

[Antistrophe]
(640)

*Spear and slaughter and shame:
A widowed bride in Sparta
Groans while a mother in Troy
tears at her grey thinning hair
and claws and claws
and claws at her red childless cheeks.*

[Epode]

(650)

*Your full-wretched mother—
What fate? — Oh what hand? —
What doom brought you here? —*

THERAPAINA I do not know, my queen. I found him on the beach.

HECUBA Did he drown? Or was he killed there on the sand? (700)

THERAPAINA It seemed to me the waves had washed him up on shore.

HECUBA *The nightmares winged black
They told me the truth—
My son, dead in dreams—
My son, dead in life—*

CHORUS Who killed him then? Did your dreams show you that?

HECUBA I tell you friends, a friend and ally murdered him. (710)
The king of Thrace. To whom my careful husband sent
our son—and his future wealth—for safekeeping.

CHORUS You're saying Polymestor killed your son for gold?

HECUBA *Unbearable ghost
Unspeakable death
A monstrous bad host—
A murdered young guest—

His poor broken limbs—
His sweet mangled flesh—
The traitor's damned sword—
No pity—None—* (720)

CHORUS The gods have loaded you with more pain than you
can bear.
»» But look, I see Lord Agamemnon coming.
»» Let's be quiet now.

AGAMEMNON Hecuba, why on earth haven't you buried your daughter? [Scene 7b]
I got your message from Talthybius. You said none
of us should touch her, and so, as you directed, we've
left her alone, not laying a hand on her. But you, (730)
you take your time in a way that makes me wonder.
I've come to hurry you along. We Greeks take pride
in doing things well, if such things be worth doing.
Hold on, what corpse is this I see before the tents?

A Trojan? Those are no familiar Greek wrappings.

HECUBA O you unfortunate (and I mean me by saying
“you”), Hecuba! What should I do? Do I
beg at his knees for mercy, or bite my tongue in silence?

AGAMEMNON Why are you turning your back to me, Hecuba?
What has happened here? Tell me about this body. (740)

HECUBA If to him I’m nothing but a contemptible enemy and slave,
he’ll push me from his knees. I couldn’t bear that.

AGAMEMNON I can’t read minds, you know. I can’t help unless you speak.

HECUBA But maybe I’m seeing him as an enemy,
when, really, he isn’t?

AGAMEMNON Still nothing? Suit yourself then.
If you don’t want me to know, I don’t want to hear.

HECUBA I can’t do what I need to do without his help.
Why do I waste time debating? Win or lose, (750)
he’s my only hope of avenging my children.
Agamemnon, hear my supplication. I beg you
by your knees, your chin, and your happy right hand.

AGAMEMNON What are you asking for, Hecuba? For your freedom?
That’s easy enough.

HECUBA Sir, not what you expect. Do you see this corpse
I’m crying over? (760)

AGAMEMNON Of course I see it. I’ve been trying
to get you to tell me about it.

HECUBA This is the body of my son.
I carried him in my womb. I gave birth to him.

AGAMEMNON I see. Which son, poor woman?

HECUBA Not one of those who died defending Troy.

AGAMEMNON You had another?

HECUBA I did, in vain. You see him here.

AGAMEMNON But where was he when Troy fell?

HECUBA To save his young life, his father sent him away.

AGAMEMNON Sent him where?

HECUBA To this very country in which he now lies dead. (770)

AGAMEMNON He sent his son to Polymestor?

HECUBA Yes, and sent with him a sum of bitter gold.

AGAMEMNON But how did your son die? Who killed him?

HECUBA Who else? Our dear, loving, loyal Thracian friend.

AGAMEMNON How shameful! Was it lust for gold?

HECUBA Yes, Polymestor killed for it the minute he learned Troy had fallen.

AGAMEMNON Where was your son found? Who brought him here?

HECUBA This old servant. She found his body tumbling in the surf.

~~AGAMEMNON Was she looking for him?~~

~~HECUBA No, she went to fetch
 sea water to wash Polyxena's body.~~ (780)

AGAMEMNON Polymestor must have killed him and then thrown him in the sea.

HECUBA Hacked up, pounded by waves. Look at the lacerations
 on his skin.

AGAMEMNON You are indeed a wretched woman.

HECUBA I'm already dead, Agamemnon. I'm past suffering.

AGAMEMNON Alas! Is there a woman more unfortunate?

HECUBA None, except Misfortune herself. But listen
 to my request, my supplication. See if you think
 my hardships are justified. If so, that's it; I won't
 bother you further. But if not, then please help me.
 Help me get revenge on that deceitful friend, (790)
 that fiendish and malignant host. I can't count
 the number of times he sat at my table, an honored guest.
 In thanks, he kills my son? He's a calculated, cold-blooded
 murderer. I know I'm nothing but a powerless slave, but the gods
 have power—as does the underlying law that governs
 them. It is by virtue of this law—this basic

moral code—that the gods and our belief in them (800)
exists, and we know right from wrong, good from evil.
If you corrupt this law, allowing those who murder
guests and violate the gods to go unpunished,
you poison the root of our humanity. Justice
withers and dies.

Preserve us, then, and pity me.
Step back like an artist and see the whole picture of me.
Behold a woman royal once upon a time
but now your slave; once rich in children but now (810)
impoverished and childless; exiled, deserted, a prisoner
of war, the most wretched of humans—

~~No, don't go,~~
~~Agamemnon!~~ Why do you turn away? O gods,
can I accomplish nothing? Why do we work so hard
to learn unnecessary things, when what we need
to know is how to persuade. Without the polished
art of persuasion, we can't get what we want.

It's hopeless. (820)
I've watched my husband and all my children die; I'm now
a slave; on the horizon, smoke still spirals up
from Troy's smoldering ashes, haunting me.

All but Cassandra.

No point invoking bonds of love, as if
caresses could be called to testify—but still,
why not?

My daughter shares your bed. She sleeps beside you, and you
enjoy her favors. What are they worth to you, these nights
of love? What thanks are due to Cassandra? To me, my lord? (830)

Think of this and hear me: Do you see this corpse,
this dead boy who is Cassandra's brother? By doing
good to him, you do the same for her, the one
who shares your bed. But let me speak a little more!
If I could, I'd grow tongues in my arms and hands
and hair, in the soles of my feet—a thousand tongues
all talking, all crying together, in one voice clinging
to your knees, begging you, imploring you: O lord, (840)
O greatest light of Hellas, lend your avenging hand

HECUBA There is unnerving strength in numbers, especially when
you add deceit.

AGAMEMNON Unnerving maybe. But still, you can't
expect women to have the strength.

HECUBA Why not? Didn't women kill Egypt's sons? Didn't women
murder the men of Lemnos, every last one?

We're wasting time talking. Give this woman leave to run
an errand for me. Guarantee her safe passage
~~through the Greek encampments.~~

You, woman, take (890)
this message to Polymestor: "Hecuba, the former
queen of Troy, invites your presence, and that of your
sons, to speak of pressing matters that touch us all."

One last thing, Agamemnon. Delay
Polyxena's funeral. I want her and Polydorus
cremated and buried together, joining in one flame
my doubled woes.

AGAMEMNON If that's what you want, lady, so be it.
If we had wind to sail, I couldn't grant this. But
we're still becalmed, with nothing to do but stand by
until the god sends fair weather. (900)

Best of luck.
I hope it all turns out. It's in the interests of both
states and individuals that evil suffers evil
and good fares well.

CHORUS

*You, my hometown Ilium, no longer
can you be called unravished, unspoiled.
Such a fog of Greeks enveloped you
with honed swords, so many swords!*

[Strophe A] [Scene 8]

*Your towers crownless, shaved bare,
Bruised with black ash and smoke.
Wounded Ilium, torn from your shores;
I can no longer call you home.*

(910)

*My ruin struck after midnight.
Our bellies were full of rich foods.
Mists of sleep soothing our eyes
when we had sacrificed and danced.*

[Antistrophe A]

*In our bed, my husband slept soundly—
his spear at last retired to its peg—
unaware of ships at our shores
the Greeks disgorging on Ilium Troy.*

(920)

*I was braiding my hair, absorbed
in my sea-deep mirror, ready to sink
into bed and join my love
in woolen fleeces. But then —shouts,*

[Strophe B]

*battle orders, Troy impaled
by war cries: "Ooh-rah, Greeks!
Will you storm these hills with fire,
secure your target, and get home?"*

(930)

*Wearing only a thin nightgown
a simple girl, I left my love
to plead in vain at Artemis' shrine—
My husband dead, I was bound*

[Antistrophe B]

*in chains and yanked to sea.
my city recedes as the Greeks set sail
Severing me forever from home,
I sank into fathomless grief.*

(940)

*Helen, lovely but two-faced,
and her vile cowhand Paris.
Damn them both to hell!*

[Epode]

*I am ruined, wrenched
from my own native land
by their foul marriage-defiling bed.*

*O headwinds, over the black waves
shackle the whore at sea.
May she never see home.*

(950)

in the future, I'll sum it up for him: Neither sea (1180)
nor land has ever produced a more monstrous
creature than woman. I say this for a fact.

CHORUS Don't blame us all solely on the basis of your woes!

HECUBA Agamemnon, never in the affairs of men
Should the tongue have more power than facts,
Rather, when someone acts well, he should speak well,
And if the opposite, his words should be rotten. (1190)
Glib rhetoric may win us over for a while,
but in the end the smooth talkers die foully.
So much for my prologue to you, Agamemnon.
Now to deal with him.

You claim that by killing my son
you saved the Greeks from another quagmire of war.
What a lie. Tell me, you scum, what possible help
could a barbarian like you be to the Greeks? Whose
favor were you trying to curry in your zeal? Trying
to marry into a family? To help a relative? I remember: (1200)
you said the Greeks were going to trample all over
your country's crops. Who in earth do you think
will believe that? I'll tell you the real reason:

It was the gold. You killed my son so you could
get your hands on his gold. If not, then why is it that
while Troy still flourished, while its towers remained
intact, while Priam lived, and while Hector's spear (1210)
thrived—and you really wanted to help out Agamemnon—

how come you didn't kill Polydorus then or at least
turned him over as a threat? Instead, you waited until
you saw the smoke rising from the city that told
you our fortunes had turned for the worse. Only then
did you kill the guest you had taken into your home,
who sat helpless at your hearth. Here's more proof
of your evil: If you really had the interests of the Greeks
at heart as you claim, why didn't you give them the gold
right away—that gold you say isn't yours but Agamemnon's? (1220)
They were in desperate need then, exhausted from battle,
just barely scraping by in a foreign land. But no, even now
you're hoarding that treasure. It's locked up and well
guarded in your house, as you told me yourself. And
another thing: If you had taken care of my child,
as you ought to have, and kept him safe, you'd earn

respect and honor and worthy fame. Hard times
prove the honest friendship of good men, while
prosperity always has friends. If at some point you
were in need and Polydorus was doing well,
my child would have been a great treasury for you.
As it is, you have no friend in Agamemnon there. (1230)
Your gold is gone, as are your children,
And you must live on as you are.

Agamemnon,
if you side with Polymestor, you endorse evil.
This man has betrayed all trust. He has broken
the laws of man and god. He is faithless, irreverent,
and thoroughly corrupt. If you acquit him, what
would your actions say about you? No disrespect, sir.

CHORUS □□□ □□□ Just causes make fertile soil for strong arguments!

AGAMEMNON It pains me to sit in judgment of others' troubles, (1240)
but I must. What kind of leader would I be if I pushed
this case aside, having agreed to take it up? So here's
my verdict: Polymestor, you are guilty of murder.
Clearly, it wasn't for my sake or the Greeks' that you
killed Polydorus when he was a guest in your home,
but for the sake of getting his gold. Your rhetoric
exudes the oily panic of a guilty man uncovered.
You've misconstrued facts to put yourself
in a more favorable light. Maybe to you
killing a guest is a small matter in the larger
scheme of things. But we Greeks think of it
as heinous murder. How could I rule you innocent
and maintain a shred of credibility? I can't.
You dared to do a brutal crime; be prepared, (1250)
therefore, to endure a brutal punishment.

POLYMESTOR □□□□ How can it be? I'm defeated by a woman,
a slave! Condemned and punished by my inferior.

HECUBA But isn't that just, since you committed crimes?

POLYMESTOR Oh my children! Oh my eyes!

HECUBA You're suffering? What of it? I, too, lost a child.

POLYMESTOR Do you enjoy abusing me, you monster?

HECUBA Shouldn't I be enjoying my revenge on you?

POLYMESTOR But you won't be soon, when the sea spray . . .

HECUBA Takes me on a one-way trip to Greece? (1260)

POLYMESTOR . . . swallows you up as you fall from the masthead.

HECUBA And who does the honors of pushing me into the salty brink?

POLYMESTOR You yourself will climb the ship's mast.

HECUBA Will I grow wings on my back, or what?

POLYMESTOR You'll be transformed—into a dog, a bitch with fiery eyes.

HECUBA How do you know of this metamorphosis of mine?

POLYMESTOR Our Thracian prophet, Dionysus, told me.

HECUBA Well, he failed to warn you of your own fate.

POLYMESTOR If he had, you'd never have tricked me.

HECUBA So, will I live or will I die? (1270)

POLYMESTOR You'll die, and when you do your tomb will be called . . .

HECUBA What? Hecuba's doghouse?

POLYMESTOR . . . Cynossema, the Sign of the Wretched Bitch.
A bitch's grave for a landmark and warning for sailors.

HECUBA It makes no difference to me. I've had my revenge.

POLYMESTOR Your child Cassandra will also die.

HECUBA That prophecy I spit back in your face! Keep it for yourself.

POLYMESTOR This man's wife, his bitter housekeeper, will kill her.

HECUBA May Clytemnestra never be so insane!

POLYMESTOR She'll kill him, too, lifting her bloody axe again—

AGAMEMNON Are you out of your mind? Or just asking for trouble? (1280)

POLYMESTOR Kill me if you like, but a bloody bath still awaits you in Argos.

AGAMEMNON You, get this man out of my sight!

POLYMESTOR Did I hit close to home?

AGAMEMNON And gag him, too.

POLYMESTOR Go ahead, gag me; I've already spoken.

AGAMEMNON Remove him immediately. Toss him
 on a desert island where no one has to listen
 to his insolence. Hecuba—
 Hecuba, you go and bury your two dead children.
 The rest of you return
 to the tents of your masters. It's time to cast off.
 See how our sails flap and billow? The wind
 is finally blowing.
 Let us pray for fair weather
 and safe passage on our voyage. May this be
 the end of our ordeal. May we find all things
 well at home. In all our homes.

(1290)

CHORUS »» To the harbor now.
 »» To the tents.
 »» It is time to embark.
 »» It is time to board our new lives as slaves.
 »» But the taste is bitter.
 »» Necessity is hard.

Hecuba - Ode One

C. Cohen

Piano

Am Dm

What No howl what la ment? For
No fam ily no house, A

7

Dm Am Dm Dm Am Am

lorn now and old. En slaved it's too hard to much to be borne. No
las all is gone my hus band my lambs Which road should I take What

13

E Dm Dm Am Dm Am Dm

one god to can pro tect me! What guide can a vail O
god can I tru ust?

20

Dm Am Dm Dm E Dm Dm Am

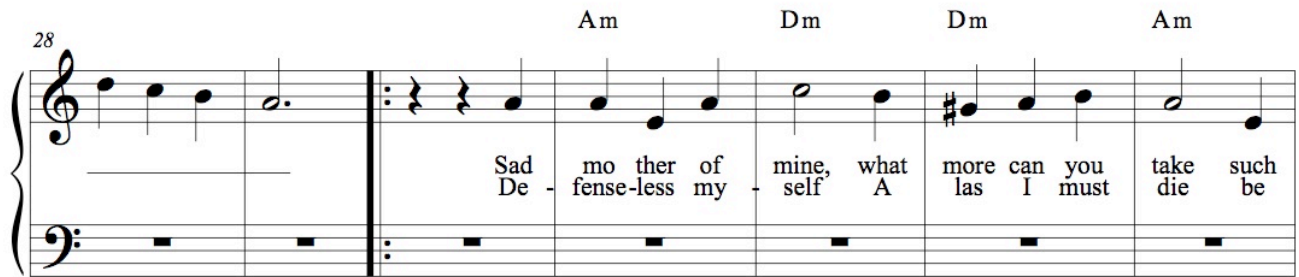
bear ers of grief I no lon ger care for Life in the li ight!

2

Hecuba - Ode One

28

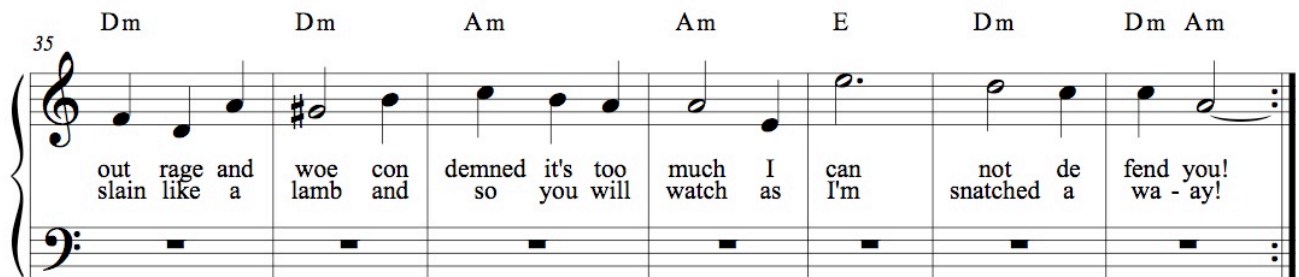
Am Dm Dm Am



Sad De- mo-ther of mine, what more can you take such
De-fense-less my self A-las I must die be

35

Dm Dm Am Am E Dm Dm Am



out rage and woe con- demned it's too much I can not de fend you!
slain like a lamb and so you will watch as I'm snatched a wa-ay!

42

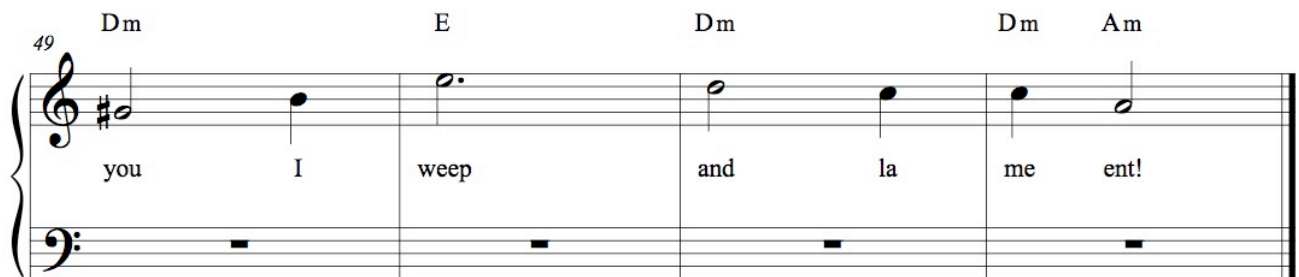
Dm Am Dm Dm Am Dm



My tor-ment will end I'll lie with the dead, O mo-ther for

49

Dm E Dm Dm Am



you I weep and la-me-ent!

Hecuba - Ode One Reprise

C. Cohen

Piano

Am Dm

O Now child wave O my af - ter child wave I and

7

Dm Am Dm Dm Am Am E

start now my blow af - ter song blow The on song for your day af - ter death day from the deep in my sighs and the heart. groans

14

Dm Dm Am Dm Am Dm Dm

My own pre-cious child your full wre-tched

21

Am Dm Dm E Dm Dm Am

mother what fate oh what hand What doom brought you he - ere?

2

Hecuba - Ode One

28

Am Dm Dm Am

The night-mares winged black They told me the truth My
Un bear-a-ble ghost Un

35

Dm Dm Am Am E Dm Dm Am

son, dead in speak-a-ble dreams, my death A son dead in mon-strous bad life host A murdered young gue-est

42

Dm Am Dm Dm Am Dm

His poor bro-ken limbs His sweet man-gled flesh The trai-tor's damned

49

Dm E Dm Dm Am

sword No pi-ty no-one

Hecuba - Ode Two

C. Cohen

Piano

Cm D# F Cm Cm Cm

O sea breeze
Will I be
Shall I there with
Orin A thens

D# D# Cm Cm D# F Cm Cm

that carries
goods for Argos
De lian mai dens
there shall I sew
ships a cross the
goods for Spar ta
praise the bow of
on A the na's
hea ving waves
or Pth ia
Ar te mis
bright new robe
oh where are you
or in De los
gol den gar ment
or per haps there

D# D# D# Gm F Cm Cm

ta king me now
sent by sea oar
in the tem ple
weave in Ti tans
In what home will
In what land will
In what land will
In what land will
I be slave?
I be slave?
I be slave?
I be slave?
And las so for my
I am

2 D# A# Cm Hecuba- Ode Two D# A# Cm

chil dren A las for the fa thers A las for our na tive land!
ta ken so far from my A sia to Eu rope to be a slave!

G Cm Cm Cm Cm Cm G

Now le veled and slashed by Ar give spears to ash heaps and smoke and
In what for eign land does death's dark es cape con demn me to sla 'vryand

Cm

tears.
rape?

Hecuba - Ode 3

C. Cohen
Dm

Am $\text{♩} = 160$ Am Am Am

Piano

I was tied to this fate this sor
Ne ces si ty all en tan

8 Am Am Dm E Dm Dm

row gled When Paris first cut the pine On Mt. I da to carve a
gled Suf fer ing en circled by worse and the fol ly that launched on

15 G Dm Dm E Am Am

ship's beam to sail cross the o cean's brine to an chor the
Il ium a host of woes and curse be gan when the

22 Am E Am Am Dm Am

bed of He len man that sun kissed go ol den girl.
I de an herds man judged the three bick er ing gods.

2

Hecuba - Ode 3

29 AmAmAm AmAmAm DmDmDm DmDmDm AmAmAm AmAmAm

Spear and slaughter and shame

38 AmAmAm AmAmAm AnAnAm AmAmAm DmDmDm DmDmDm AnAnAm AnAnAm AmAmAm

a widowed bride in Sparta

47 Am Am Am AmAmAm AmAmAm DmDmDm DmDmDm AmAmAm AmAmAm AmAmAm

groans while a mother in Troy

55 Am Am Am AmAmAm AmAmAm DmDmDm DmDmDm AmAmAm AmAmAm AmAmAm

tears at her grey thinning hair

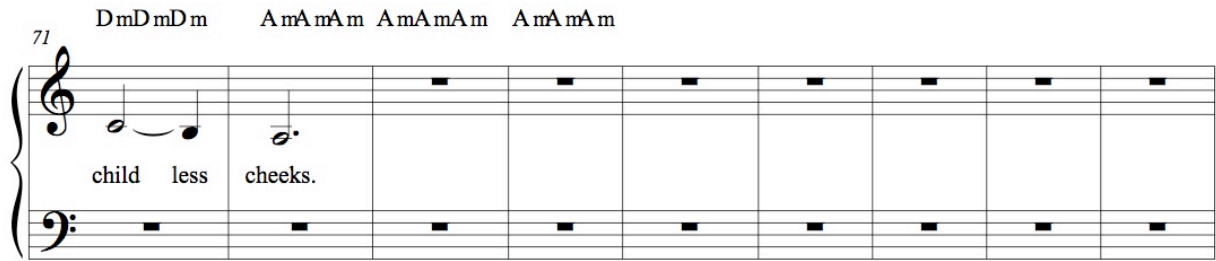
63 Am Am Am AmAmAm AmAmAm DmDmDm DmDmDm AmAmAm AmAmAm DmDmDm

and claws and claws and claws at her red

Hecuba - Ode 3

3

71 DmDmDm AmAmAm AmAmAm AmAmAm



child less cheeks.

80



Hecuba - Ode Four

C. Cohen

Piano

Am Am E Am Am Dm

You my home town Il - ium no long er can you be called un
My ruin struck af - ter mid - night(our) bel - lies were full of
I wasbraiding my hair ab sorbed in my - sea deep mir - ror
Wearing only a thin night gown a simple girl I

Am E Am Am E Am

rav ished un spoiled? Such a fog of Greeks en veloped you
rich foods Mists of sleep and soothing our eyes
rea - dy to sink love To plead in bed and join my love
left my love To plead in vain at Artemis' my shrine

Am Dm E Am Dm Dm Dm

with ho ned swordsso many swords. Your towers crownless shaved
when we had sac - ri ficed and danced. In our bed my husband slept
in woo - len fleece but then and shouts Battle orders Troy im
my hus band dead I was bound. In chains yanked to

Dm Am Am Am Am Dm Dm

bare soundlyhis paled sea
bruised with spear at war Troy re
black last re - cries ceeds as
ash and tired to its "Ooh rah we set
smoke peg Greeks!" sail
Wounded un - a Will you Severing
Illium ware of storm these
me for

2 Dm Dm Am Hecuba- Ode Four E Am

torn from your ships at our hills ever from shores I shores the fire se home can Greeks cure I no dis your sank longer gor-ging on target in to a call you Il-i-um and get thom less home! Troy! home? grief.

Am Am E Am Am E E Am

He I O len am headwinds lovely ru over but ined the two wrenched black faced waves and her from my vile own shackle

Am E E Am Am E E Am Am

the cow na whore hand tive at Pa land sea ris Damn bytheirfoul mayshe them marriede never

E E Am Am

both fi see to ling hell bed home!

Hecuba - Ode Five

C. Cohen

Piano



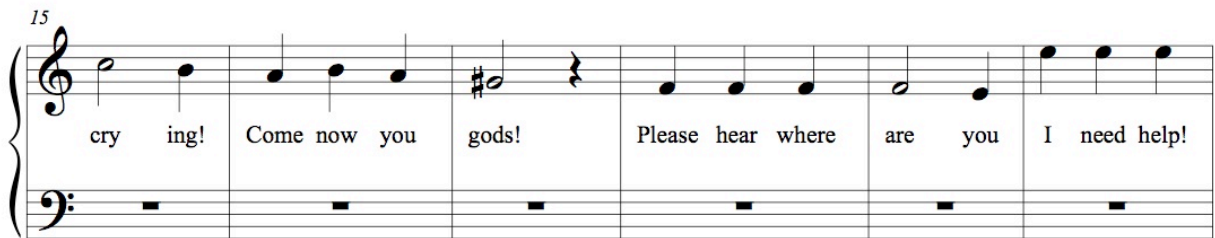
He lp me aid me! hear me you Thra cians! Bring spears you Sol diers!

7



Use spurs you Horse men Co ome to me! Help me! Aid me! Help I am

15



cry ing! Come now you gods! Please hear where are you I need help!

21



These women they've. Won't some one help me! These captive wo men

2

Hecuba - Ode Five

26

Won't someone help me? I am de stroyed! O

34

gods I need wings to fly to the hea vens or I plunge down to the black

41

cha sms I in Ha des.