

HECUBA

by Euripides

translated by
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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 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 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. 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, 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. 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. 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.

[Scene 1]

(10)

(20)

(30)

(40)

(50)

HECUBA	<p>I am old. I am plagued by bad dreams. Once your queen, 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 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 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.</p>	<p>[Scene 2a] (60)</p> <p>(70)</p> <p>(80)</p> <p>(90)</p>
CHORUS	<p>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 Greek spear. »» I bring news</p>	<p>[Scene 2b]</p> <p>(100)</p>

»» 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 *What howl, what lament?
Forlorn now and old.
Enslaved. It's too hard,
too much to be borne.
No one to protect me.
No family. No house.
Alas, all is gone—
my husband, my lambs.* (160)

*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, (Scene 2c)
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!

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. (290)

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
misconstrue me so. (300)

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 (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 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, old woman, but for hers. (390)

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

Scene 3

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

[Scene 4]

*O sea-breeze
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?
Or in Delos,
sent by sea-oar,
In what land will I be slave?*

(450)

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

(460)

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

(470)

*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,
to Europe, to be a slave.
In what foreign land does death's dark escape
condemn me to slavery and rape?*

(480)

- TALTHYBIUS Women of Troy, I'd thank you to tell me where I may find [Scene 5]
 Hecuba, she who once was Queen of Ilium Troy.
- CHORUS She's there on the ground, Talthybius. 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, herald from the Greeks.
- HECUBA Are you kind, then? A friend? Come to tell me
 the Greeks want my death, too? If so, you bring good news.
 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, more childless now, 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 (520)
 at the grave when she died. But you will hear. In full
 force the Greeks gathered at the tomb for your girl's death.
 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, 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, 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. (550)

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 (560)

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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 (590)
in dying or keep myself from groaning. But I’m glad
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 (610)
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 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)

*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 Talthibius. 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.
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.

(730)

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, 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. (750)

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. 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 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. (790)

(800)

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
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.

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 and your son, Hecuba, (850)
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 seem to act *for* me, but restrain the Greeks if they 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 Trojan 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 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
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.”

(890)

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.
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.

(900)

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)

hags? Where did the wretches 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, for vengeance.

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 or turn? Where can I go?

I'm a ship anchored at sea, my sails furled tight, (1080)

over the death bed of 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 me!

Hear me, you Thracians!

Bring spears, you soldiers!

Use spurs, you horsemen!

Come to me!

(1090)

Help me! Aid me!

Help, I am crying!

By the blessed gods,

please hear! where are you?

I need help!

These women, they've . . .

—won't someone help me?—

these captive women . . .

—won't someone help me?—

they've destroyed me!

They have weapons!

My sons are murdered!

They have weapons!

My sons are butchered!

I need help!

(1100)

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, (1140)
devastate Thrace in the process, and once again
your battles would be ours to bear.

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 (1160)
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.

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 (1170)
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.

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 (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.

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. (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 - Ode One

C. Cohen

Piano

Am Dm

What No howl what la ment? For

7

Dm Am Dm Dm Am Am

No las all is old. En my slaved it's too hard lambs to much to be borne. No

13

E Dm Dm Am Dm Am Dm

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

20

Dm Am Dm Dm E Dm Dm Am

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

Hecuba - Ode One

28

A m D m D m A m

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

35

D m D m A m A m E D m D m A m

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

D m A m D m D m A m D m

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

49

D m E D m D m A m

you I weep and la me ent!

Hecuba - Ode One Reprise

C. Cohen

Piano

Am Dm

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

7 Dm Am Dm Dm Am Am E

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

Hecuba - Ode One

28

A m D m D m A m

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

35

D m D m A m A m E D m D m A m

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

42

D m A m D m D m A m D m

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

49

D m E D m D m A m

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
Delian maidens
there shall I sew

ships across the
goods for Sparta
praise the bow of
on Athena's

heaving waves
or Pthia
Artemis
bright new robe

oh where are you
or in Delos
golden garment
or perhaps there

D# D# D# Gm F Cm Cm

ta king me now
sent by sea oar
in the temple
weave in Titans

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 laso for my
I am

Hecuba - Ode Two

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

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

tears,
rape?

Hecuba - Ode 3

C. Cohen
Dm

Am $\text{♩} \overline{m} 160$ 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 Suf
Pa ris first en
cut the pine
circled by worse
On Mt. and the
I da to
fol ly that
carve a
launched on

15 G Dm Dm E Am Am

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

22 Am E Am Am Dm Am

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

Hecuba - Ode 3

AmAmAm AmAmAm DmDmDm DmDmDm AmAmAm AmAmAm

29

Spear and slaughter and shame

AmAmAm AmAmAm AnAmAm AmAmAm DmDmDm DmDmDm AnAmAm AnAmAm AmAmAm

38

a widowed bride in Sparta

Am Am Am AmAmAm AmAmAm DmDmDm DmDmDm AmAmAm AmAmAm AmAmAm

47

groans while a mother in Troy

Am Am Am AmAmAm AmAmAm DmDmDm DmDmDm AmAmAm AmAmAm AmAmAm

55

tears at her grey thinning hair

Am Am Am AmAmAm AmAmAm DmDmDm DmDmDm AmAmAm AmAmAm DmDmDm

63

and claws and claws and claws at her red

Hecuba - Ode 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 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 sleep of Greeks en veloped you
 rich _____ foods? Mists of fog sleep _____ of soothing en eyes _____
 rea - dy to sink in to bed _____ and join _____ our love _____
 left _____ my love To plead in vain at Artemis' _____ 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 _____ shouts _____ Battle _____ orders _____ Troy _____ im
 my hus band dead _____ I was bound. _____ In _____ chains _____ yanked to

Dm Am Am Am Am Dm Dm

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

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

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

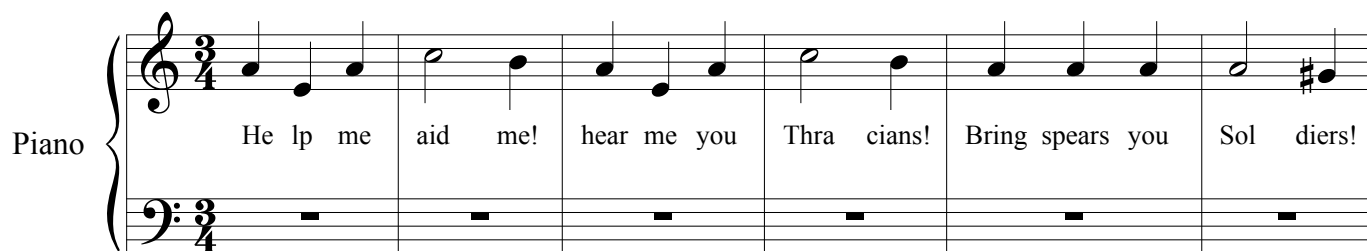
the cow na whore hand tive at Pa land sea ris Damn bytheirfoul mayshe them marriage never

both fi see to ling hell bed home!

Hecuba - Ode Five

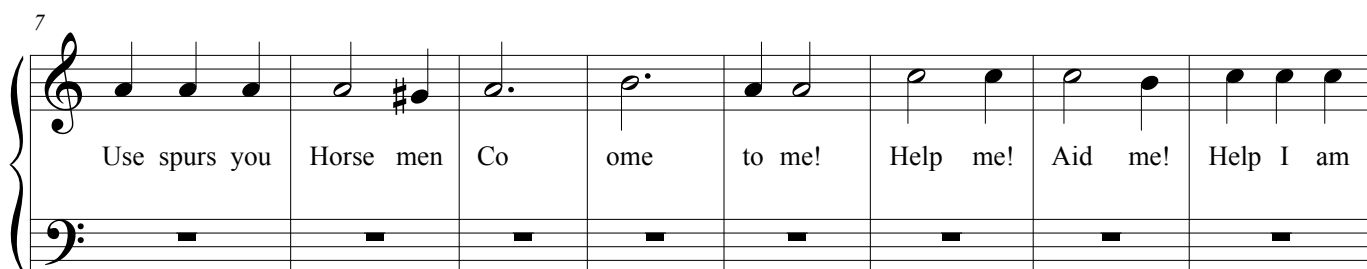
C. Cohen

Piano



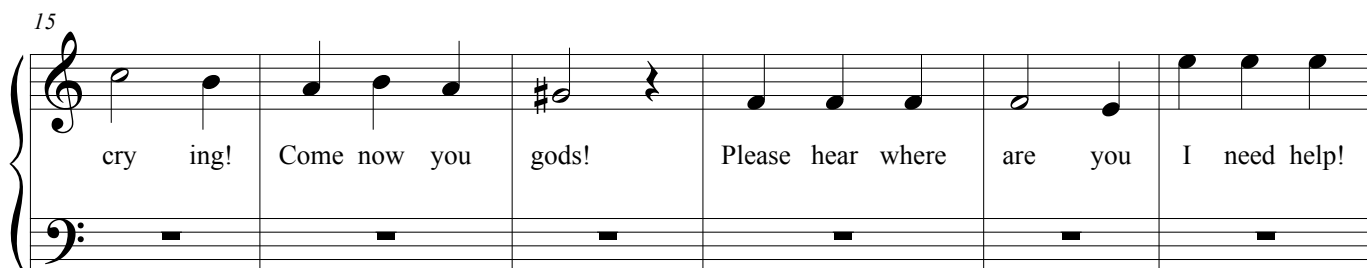
He lp me aid me! hear me you Thra cians! Bring spears you Sol diers!

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

Hecuba - Ode Five

26

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

This musical system covers measures 26 through 33. The vocal line begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The melody consists of quarter notes in measures 26-27, followed by half notes in measures 28-29, and quarter notes in measures 30-31. Measure 32 features a whole note, and measure 33 ends with a half note. The piano accompaniment is minimal, with a few notes in the bass line.

34

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

This musical system covers measures 34 through 40. The vocal line continues with quarter notes in measures 34-35, half notes in measures 36-37, and quarter notes in measures 38-39. Measure 40 features a half note with a sharp sign. The piano accompaniment remains sparse, with a few notes in the bass line.

41

cha sms I in Ha des.

This musical system covers measures 41 through 45. The vocal line consists of half notes in measures 41-42, quarter notes in measure 43, and half notes in measures 44-45. The piano accompaniment is minimal, with a few notes in the bass line.