

LAW AND SPECTACLE IN EURIPIDES' *HECUBA*

Judith Fletcher

It must have been a disturbing facsimile of their own lawmaking practices that confronted the Athenian audience who gathered to watch Euripides' *Hecuba* sometime in the late 420s. The Greek army, now encamped in Thrace, forms a democratic assembly that votes to sacrifice an innocent Trojan girl, Polyxena, to the ghost of Achilles. Hecuba calls the sacrifice of her daughter murder, but by the end of the play she will orchestrate an act of infanticide, and then be acquitted in a trial. What laws are operating in this bleak universe? Or are there any laws at all? Crafted with references to familiar legal and judicial processes and vocabulary, *Hecuba* asks questions about the nature of law that reveal the potential fallibilities of the Athenian legislative apparatus. Perhaps not every tragedy functioned as 'the critical conscience that accompanies the absolutely new and risky experience of power being exercised by the *demos*', as one critic puts it, but this particular text raises important issues about the legal authority of the communal voice that was essential to the political and civic life of Athens.¹

The following discussion offers a reading of *Hecuba* that places it in the context of Athenian legal praxis, but one that also understands the play more broadly as a meditation on the question of what gives law its authority. *Hecuba*, I shall argue, presents these ideas in a way that implicates the audience (or at least the intended audience) both as law-making citizens and as spectators of tragedy. A terrible act of retribution, the blinding of Polymestor after the murder of his sons, is the culmination of a series of references to spectatorship, spectacle, and sight throughout the play. My analysis connects this motif to the theme of law and justice in *Hecuba*. I argue that the conflation of vision and law contributes to and is enhanced by a textual strategy that embeds a version of the citizen spectators of this production within its fictive universe. *Hecuba*, in other words, exploits the often-noted kinship between the law and the theatre of classical Athens, and both represents a version

¹ The quotation is from Ost (1996) 11. The debate about the civic specificity of Greek tragedy is ongoing. In general I agree with Goldhill (1990) 115 and Seaford (2000) 35, who argue that tragedy should be read as a product of Athenian ideology. The opposing camp includes Griffin (1998) 47–48, who argues instead for a more universal meaning, and Rhodes (2003) 104–19, who suggests that tragedy is not so much concerned with Athenian democracy as with the concerns of all ancient Greek cities. For the relation between drama and democratic political culture at Athens, see Rosenbloom, this volume.

of the audience's gaze within the spectacle and then conceals from them an act of justice performed within a hidden female world.²

Spectacle and Decree

The audience initially enjoys a privileged 'behind the scenes' view, as it were. The first sight they encounter is the ghost of Polydorus, son of Hecuba, who appears before them with exclusive information: he has been murdered by the Thracian king Polymestor who has kept him as a guest along with a hoard of Trojan gold. The appearance of the ghost before the audience operates within a hierarchy of visual registers ranging from the seen to the obscured. Only the audience of the tragedy apprehends Polydorus' manifestation in the visible, waking world; he is invisible to the characters within the drama.³

Polydorus also provides an insider's report on the fate of his sister Polyxena who will be sacrificed to the ghost of Achilles. The chorus of captive Trojan women sings its entrance song to tell this news to Hecuba. They have been witness to a public assembly of the Greeks who (like the audience) have also seen a ghost, that of Achilles who has demanded that they delay their departure in order to give him the reward due to their champion. A political mechanism will authorize the sacrifice: the Greeks assemble in a replica of the audience's own democratic *ekklésia* and their debate leads to the slaughter of Polyxena. The parodos describes the deliberative process that results in the decision:

ἐν γὰρ Ἀχαιῶν πλήρει ζυνόδῳ
λέγεται δόξαι σὴν παῖδ' Ἀχιλλεΐ
σφάγιον θέσθαι · (107–09)

It is reported that in the full assembly of the Achaeans they have decided to sacrifice your daughter to Achilles. (Kovacs trans.)

Notice that the decision alludes in indirect discourse (*δόξαι*) to the enactment formula that prefaces Greek decrees: 'it seemed best to the people', or 'the people have decided'. Odysseus uses the same vocabulary when he reports the decision to Hecuba (*ἔδοξ' Ἀχαιοῖς παῖδα σὴν Πολυξένην / σφάξαι πρὸς ὄρθον χῶμ' Ἀχιλλείου τάφου*, 220–21, 'The Achaeans have resolved to sacrifice your child Polyxena at the raised mound of the Achillean tomb'). The formula is not unique to Athenian decrees, but the vocabulary and structure of the debate bear other similarities to that of the Athenian legislative assembly.⁴ The expression *πλήρει*

2 The relationship between law and theatre is well recognized. As Humphreys (1988) 482 notes, 'the experiences of watching plays and judging court cases were closely connected; dramatists and orators illuminate each other's texts'. See also Allen (2005) 374.

3 The ghost of her son has troubled Hecuba's dreams (704–05), but nothing suggests a visitation in the manner of Homeric ghosts. Lines 73–78 of Hecuba's opening monody, which suggest that she has seen the ghost in her dream, are probably spurious. See Collard (1991) 134 and Gregory (1999) 53–54 on the problems and editorial interventions. Lane (2007) 291 is right to insist on a distinction between the ghost onstage and the apparitions which Hecuba has seen in her dreams which 'flits above' her head (30–31).

4 The term *rhētōr* for example, does not appear elsewhere in Euripides, although Aristophanes uses it to denote the political leaders of democracy. Michelini (1987) 143 provides examples: *Ach.* 38; *Eq.* 60, 358,

ξυνόδῳ recalls the technical term πλήρης, used for example by Andocides (1.112) for the *ekklēsia*. Moreover, the public debate over the sacrifice of Polyxena belongs to Thucydides' Athens, not the Homeric past.⁵ The debaters include Agamemnon who out of loyalty to his concubine Cassandra argues against the decree, and the two unnamed sons of Theseus (shadowy and inconsequential figures in epic) who argue for the sacrifice (122–29).⁶ The intervention of the Theseids, mythical surrogates of the Athenians, brings the audience closer to the text while highlighting the commonalities with their own deliberative assembly. That a vote took place, and that it was in favour of the sacrifice, becomes obvious in the first episode: both Odysseus (218–19) and Hecuba (259) refer to the decision as a *psēphos*, thus emphasizing its democratic creation.⁷

Anachronistic representations of fifth-century democracy are not unique to this tragedy, but the cynicism of the passage deserves special attention.⁸ A democratic decree leads to the sacrifice of an innocent girl. Gregory contends that the anachronisms give the Athenian audience a 'model of intelligibility' that enables them to judge Odysseus, whose rhetorical skill convinces the assembly to vote for the sacrifice, more harshly – a reasonable assessment, but I think we should go further.⁹ Tragedy becomes profoundly self-reflexive when it depicts the creation and enactment of law. In *Hecuba*, references to Athenian legislative processes suggest a correspondence between the Greek army and the Athenian citizens in their role as spectators of the drama. The enactment of the decree is the spectacle of the slaughter of Polyxena, which provokes an emotional response in the Greek soldiers akin to that of a tragic audience.

The Greek army that votes like a democratic assembly to sacrifice Polyxena subsequently forms an audience at the spectacle of her death. The herald Talthybius, recounting this event to Hecuba, highlights the role of the troops as spectators: the whole Achaean army is there (παρῆν μὲν ὄχλος πᾶς Ἀχαιικοῦ στρατοῦ πλήρης, 'The entire crowd of the Achaean army was present in full assembly', 521–22; note that the term πλήρης is used again) – their presence is an important part of the narrative. The emphasis on the spectatorship of the Achaeans tightens the correspondence with the Athenian audience who are also watching an emotional spectacle. Talthybius reports how he himself wept at the performance – and what a performance it is! Polyxena makes a stirring speech in which she claims that she dies of her own accord as a free woman. The crowd roars its approval (λαοὶ δ' ἐπερρόθησαν, 553). Polyxena rips off her garment to expose her breasts and neck to her sacrificer. The visuality of the scene is emphasized by an image: Polyxena is as lovely as a statue (ὡς ἀγάλματος /

1350; *Th.* 292.

5 Collard (1991) 137.

6 The Theseids are not major figures in the *Iliad*, but the *Little Iliad* names one as Demophon (fr. 20 *PEG*). The other, Akamas, shows up in the *Chrestomathia* account of the *Ilioupersis*. See Gantz (1993) 283.

7 Hecuba's condemnation of demagoguery (254–57) resonates with political concerns of the Athenian democracy and in particular with Thucydides' Cleon. A scholiast on the eleventh-century Marcianus manuscript was the first to note the anachronism with reference to this speech.

8 See Easterling (1985) 2–3 for a survey of the political anachronisms of tragedy.

9 Gregory (1999) xxi.

κάλλιστα, 560–61).¹⁰ The emotional valence is one of pity and admiration for the spectacle; the audience has been moved, as the audience of Euripides' *Hecuba* will be moved.

The sequence of the assembly and subsequent enactment of its decree produces a kind of a conceptual fusion: the decree is like a script actualized by the involvement of its audience. This synthesis is meaningful within a civic context because the participation of the masses was fundamental to Athenian democracy. It is the public and visible nature of law – its creation, proclamation and performance in the presence of an audience – that is at the core of the Athenian polis. An important component of democracy is the publication of laws to be viewed by all citizens. Laws were made and enforced in the open air before an audience who were once called (disparagingly but accurately) 'spectators of speeches' by Thucydides' Cleon (3.38.4). The transparency of legislative and judicial processes in Athens was essential to democratic justice. It is significant that the oligarchic revolution in 411 was enabled by the removal of the *ekklêsia* from public access to the grove of Colonus out of sight of most of the demos. Not all members of the *ekklêsia* participated in the debates that preceded a vote, but their regulatory gaze was an important aspect of the democratic process. And as members of the jury, or even as spectators of the trials, the citizens formed an audience for the performance of the legal scripts that they had helped to create. Thus the army/audience who watch the enactment of the edict resembles the theatre audience in its role as the demos: the maiden's death is constructed as a performance before the audience that created the decree. It is a chillingly perverse reproduction of Athenian democracy.

An Illegal Decree?

Although the Athenian demos, like the Achaean army, had the notional power to condemn innocent children to death by their vote, their laws did acknowledge that a decree, a *psêphisma*, could be illegal. Eventually there was a formal distinction between a decree and more permanent law (*nomos*), although not until the constitutional reforms of 403/2. This reform was the result of a series of factors that included the use of the decree to overthrow the democracy in 411, but also other tensions that must have been felt earlier than that.¹¹ Even before the reforms, however, a *psêphisma* passed by the *ekklêsia* could be made invalid by a jury if it was deemed to clash with established laws. This process, known as the *graphê paranomôn*, was a check on illegal decrees.¹² The earliest reference to the procedure occurs in Andocides (1.17) regarding events in 415, less than a decade after *Hecuba* was produced.¹³

10 Commentary on Polyxena's self display and on the simile 'as lovely as a statue' is varied and abundant. See Rabinowitz (1993) 54–62 for the fetishistic overtones of the tableau; Dué (2006) 128–30 discusses the resonance with artistic representations of the sacrifice. See Gregory (1999) 112–13 for a summary of the scholarship. Mossman's (1995) 158–62 excellent discussion emphasizes the pathos of the simile rather than any eroticism.

11 A survey can be found in Quass (1971) 1–20.

12 The *graphê* could be used to challenge both laws and decrees until the constitutional reforms in 403. After this there was a corresponding procedure for challenging *nomoi* known as the *graphê nomôn mē epitêdeion theinai*. The procedures are mentioned by [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 59.2 and discussed by Sealey (1982) 291.

13 See MacDowell (1962) 202 on Andocides' reference to his father's use of the *graphê paranomôn*. Xenophon

Is it possible that the audience of *Hecuba* in the late 420s would recognize that the Achaean decree, democratic though it may be, was fundamentally *paranomos*, 'illegal'? And can we go even further with this idea to suggest that they would have to confront a disparity between the formulation of a decree that resembled their own legislative procedures, and a broader concept of law that underwrote their own legislative apparatus?

It is Hecuba, barbarian slave and former queen, who exposes a problematic gap between *psêphisma* and *nomos* in her supplication of the arch-democrat Odysseus. Reminding him that he had supplicated her in the past when he sneaked into Troy as a beggar, and that he owes her his life, Hecuba tries to position herself in a social system based on an exchange of favours. It is, however, a very selective interpretation of the noble virtue of *charis* that prevails for the Achaean leaders, and Odysseus downgrades any obligation for past favours by replying that he is returning Hecuba's *charis* by letting her live now. As Hecuba sees it, Odysseus sets prestige in the eyes of the lower classes (254–55) ahead of the obligation to repay a favour. Her claims are displaced by the ostensible *charis* owed to Achilles by the Greek army, although Odysseus later reveals a more profit-motivated rationale.¹⁴ The sacrifice of her daughter is an honour that is due to a warrior who gave his life in battle, claims the wily politician who then poses the question (309–20): how can we get men to fight if we do not reward those who die on our behalf? To give honour to the tomb of a worthy hero is a *charis* that endures.

For some readers of the play, this is an adequate rebuttal. Adkins argues that Euripides' audience would accept a Homeric value system that viewed the reward of *aretê* as the preeminent social ideal: Achilles deserves an external signifier of his glory; therefore the death of Polyxena is necessary.¹⁵ To a certain extent Adkins is right. *Charis* was the lubricant of Athenian social relations, so the arguments of Odysseus are somewhat comprehensible. But posthumous glory for military service did not really motivate either Homeric heroes or Athenian citizens.¹⁶

More importantly, the arguments and ideals that Odysseus calls into play ignore Hecuba's strongest argument: that the sacrifice of her daughter is homicide. This important point frames her speech of appeal. She begins with the ingenuous suggestion that the death of Polyxena is a retributive murder. If Achilles wants reprisal for his own death (*ἐνδίκως τείνει φόνον*, 263), she asks, 'is it right to kill Polyxena, who has done no wrong to Achilles'? Retributive murder was not an institutionalized practice in Athens (as the *Oresteia*

cites a famous attempt in 406 to use the procedure to block a motion made in the assembly to punish the generals who had abandoned the survivors and the dead after Arginusae (*HG* 1.7.12). The motion was opposed by the *graphê paranomôn* on the grounds that the proposal was illegal without a formal trial. See Humphreys (1985) 474 on the hostile reaction of the demos who opposed the move. For the likely date of the introduction of the *graphê paranomôn* in the period 427–415, see Ober (1989) 95.

14 Stanton's analysis, which considers each relationship in the play separately, faults Odysseus' desire for *charis* from the lower classes rather than more aristocratic obligations toward Hecuba (1995) 20–23. As Burnett (1998) 161 notes, Odysseus may talk about *charis*, but his real motive has more to do with profit than with repaying a favour.

15 Adkins (1966). See Hogan's (1972) challenge.

16 Gregory (1999) 84.

emphasizes), but Hecuba's suggestion raises questions about the possible legitimate reasons for killing another human being. At the end of her speech she makes a more specific reference to Athenian homicide laws:

νόμος δ' ἐν ὑμῖν τοῖς τ' ἐλευθέροις ἴσος
καὶ τοῖσι δούλοις ἀίματος κεῖται πέρι. (291–92)

Among your people there is a law laid down, the same for free men and slaves, concerning the shedding of blood.¹⁷

Hecuba labels her daughter's death as murder, and thus a transgression against *nomos*. Indeed, the emphasis on the deliberative process that led to the killing of Polyxena makes it clear that this is 'intentional' homicide, the more heinous crime according to the law of Draco.¹⁸ The democratic principal of *isonomia*, which Hecuba invokes, helps to contextualize the debate in terms of Athenian law. Her argument against the decree therefore encapsulates a possible *de facto* distinction between *psêphisma* and *nomos*, even though this distinction may not yet have been *de jure*.

Scholars of Greek law interpret historical texts and inscriptions to suggest a broad cultural concern about the temporality and mutability of the *psêphisma* (a decree formulated and ratified by vote in the Athenian assembly) and more permanent forms of law (*nomos*) handed down from lawgivers like Solon as general standing rules binding all Athenians in perpetuity.¹⁹ As I have argued, *Hecuba* already suggests the superior status of *nomos* (permanent established law) over *psêphisma* (a potentially mutable decree).²⁰

Historical Context

If Hecuba's legal critique highlights a discrepancy between a *nomos* against homicide and a democratic vote that decrees murder, then this distinction should be meaningful to an audience in 423–420, the most probable range of dates for the play.²¹ Is there other evidence

17 Kirkwood (1947) 64 is wrong to suggest that the sacrifice of Polyxena was 'made by the Greeks in obedience to the demands of *Nomos*'. This interpretation is based on Odysseus' statement that it is not 'ill conceived' to honour a good man. The verb νομίζομεν seldom has a legal connotation, and means something more like 'we think' or 'consider'.

18 See Gagarin (1981) 36 on the two categories of homicide. Draco's homicide law (*IG I³ 104*) preserved on a stele in 409/8 only seems to treat cases of unintentional homicide, but Gagarin (96–98) makes a good case that the stele gives the basic statement of the law on all homicide, intentional and unintentional.

19 See e.g. Dover (1955); Ostwald (1969); MacDowell (1978) 43–52; Sealey (1982); Boegehold (1996); Ober (1989) 108–11.

20 Ostwald (1969) 2–3 notes that the term *nomos* was used for the laws of Solon and Cleisthenes in the fifth century (although earlier they had been referred to by the term *thesmoi*), even though they had been passed by the assembly in the form of *psêphismata*.

21 Although there is no evidence that pins a precise date to the original production of the play, metrical style (i.e. rate of resolved trimeters) indicates that this was not one of Euripides' later plays. The most expert speculations date the play to about 423. Aristophanes' parody of *Hecuba* (159–61, 171–74) in *Clouds* (718–19, 1165–66) is not helpful since that comedy was reworked after its initial production in 423. Collard (1991) 35 notes that the sympathetic treatment of Spartan war dead (*Hec.* 650–56) might only be possible when peace

from this period that suggests a tension between *nomos* and *psêphisma* was already in the air? Scholars diverge on whether or not Thucydides' account of the Mytilenaeen debate reflects the distinction.²² Significantly the treatment of Trojan War captives in the *Hecuba* is often read in connection with this debate (Th. 3.37.3), or other insurrections against the Athenian empire that occurred in the 420s.²³ Thucydides is reporting events that occurred in 427, and although he is not offering a verbatim report of the debate it is quite possible that he is providing a sense of the anxieties surrounding the status of the *psêphisma*.

After the Athenian assembly passed the decree to execute the men and enslave the women and children of Mytilene, they re-convened the next day to debate revoking the decree. In opposition, Cleon argued that decree passed by the demos was a *nomos*, and hence should be immutable. It seems that Cleon's assertion that the decree is something permanent, followed by the assembly's decision to repeal it, may evoke the differentiation made between *nomos* and *psêphisma*. Despite Cleon's arguments, the assembly exercised its constitutional power to repeal the decree.²⁴

As Andrews notes, Cleon does not elaborate on why the decree should be considered a law and its repeal a subversion of *nomos* because he is exploiting the likelihood that 'his audience is at this point more attuned to his criticism of their democracy than to the Mytilene question'.²⁵ Cleon is also exploiting a slippage made possible by the semantic flexibility of the term *nomos* (a point to which we must return): until the constitutional reforms at the end of the century a decree passed by an assembly could be called a *nomos*. Nonetheless, when Thucydides makes Cleon argue as if the decree were an inflexible law that could not be altered, and then recounts how the assembly did actually change its mind, he exposes a natural distinction between immutable *nomoi* and impermanent *psêphismata*, even though a procedural distinction did not yet exist.²⁶ In 427, when Cleon supposedly made this speech, there were in fact two different kinds of *nomoi* – those created by the lawgivers or *thesmothetai*, which were permanent, and those created by the assembly. What Cleon is suggesting here is that the latter type of *nomos* is the former. Nonetheless the suggestion that a decree to kill and enslave Greek men and women is an immutable form of law is decidedly problematic.

Admittedly the speech of Cleon is not a transcript of the deliberations of the democratic

between Athens and Sparta was imminent. Gregory (1999) xiii–xiv discusses some of the geographical and possible political references in *Hecuba* as tentative support for a date in the late 420s.

22 Hornblower (1997) 423–24 argues that there was no discernible distinction until the fourth century (*i.e.* after the constitutional reforms), while MacLeod (1983) 69 argues that the distinction was felt earlier.

23 See Gregory's comments (1999) xv on the possible relationship between Euripides' *Hecuba* and Th. 3.37.

24 What clouds the issue is the indisputable fact that decrees were often referred to as *nomoi* in the fifth century. Euripides, for example, calls a decree a *nomos* (*Ion* 1250–56; *Hcl.* 141).

25 Andrews (2000) 53 n. 33.

26 There is a natural distinction between *nomoi* that could be created by an authoritative body such as the demos, and what were often called 'established laws'. According to Harris (2004) 31, this distinction is obvious from the ephobic oath which obligates the new citizen to 'obey those who are ruling prudently and the established laws and those which they may prudently establish for themselves in the future'.

assembly, but the text does reveal concerns about the authority and nature of *nomos*. Scholars generally date *Hecuba* to the 420s based on similar concerns about the democratic decree in relationship to the treatment of war captives. As I have argued, both texts reflect concerns about the authority of a democratic *psêphisma*, although each represents the conflict between *nomos* and *psêphisma* in different ways. The important point here is that the status of a decree is already being questioned in the 420s. Euripides' *Hecuba* corresponds to the same concerns about the distinction between *nomos* and *psêphisma*.

Divine Law

While *Hecuba* exposes the dichotomy between a decree and a more permanent *nomos* forbidding murder, it goes even further than this. There is yet another level to Euripides' meditation on the authority of law. As the play goes on to show, the concept of *nomos* includes a transcendent force that supersedes mortal sovereignty. Particularly in its second half, the tragedy considers the divine authority that sustains mortal law. These are ideas that Sophocles had already explored in his *Antigone* (probably the 440s), a play that shares *Hecuba*'s concerns with law, gender and authority. Both texts are interested in a confrontation between a man-made edict imposed by brute force and a more universal established law articulated by a woman on behalf of a family member.²⁷ There are important differences, of course. In *Antigone*, the edict of Creon is a unilateral decision that bypasses any democratic process. In *Hecuba* the decree is created in a democratic forum that resembles the Athenian assembly. The most significant difference is that Hecuba, who seems to share Antigone's understanding of *nomos*, enacts brutal retaliation with the blinding of Polymestor and the murder of his children.

Hecuba's violent retaliation differentiates her resistance from Antigone's; nonetheless both tragedies grapple with the same essential question: is law something more than its articulation by an authoritative mortal voice (be it democratic or tyrannical)? As Antigone claims, mortal speech acts are not fully authorized laws if they are separate from the transcendent force that gives true law its authority. Creon makes a decree that forbids the burial of Polyneices. He refers to his decree as *nomoi* when he interrogates Antigone (449), while Antigone insists that 'As far as I'm concerned, Zeus was not the one who proclaimed this nor did Justice (*Dikê*), who dwells with the gods below, enact such laws (*nomous*) for mortals' (450–52).

Although modern analyses of *Antigone* tend to represent the play as a contest between divine precepts and secular law, this is probably not how the original audience would have understood Antigone's argument. There is abundant evidence that for the Greeks law, *nomos*, was in some sense divinely authored.²⁸ As Phillipson puts it: 'Law and Religion

27 My brief remarks on *Antigone* do not fully represent the nuances of the debate around the legality of Creon's decree. I am influenced by Harris' (2004) treatment of the issue of *nomos* and his argument that Antigone articulates a democratic notion of law. For the opposing point of view – that an Athenian audience would disapprove of Antigone because she did not obey a law created by a figure of authority – see Sourvinou-Inwood (1989) 134–48. I discuss the decree and its relationship to democratic law in Fletcher (2008) 66–87.

28 See Harris (2004) 27–30.

were so closely interwoven that it is difficult to say where religion ends and law begins'.²⁹ The source of all human *nomoi*, according to Heraclitus, was a singular 'fountain-head' of divine *nomos*: 'For all the laws of men are nourished by one law, the divine law. For it has as much power as it wishes and is sufficient for all and is still left over' (fr. 114 D-K).³⁰ The sense of *nomoi* in this fragment is probably more than 'law' in the political sense, but it certainly subsumes the meaning of law/statute. A frequent tradition associated with lawgivers such as Solon and Lycurgus is the bestowal of laws by the gods. Solon asks Zeus to grant success to his new laws (fr. 31 West). The transcendent quality of law was an idea that might initially have arisen from the political ascendancy of the aristocracy who promulgated the idea that their own authority was divinely ordained.³¹ But the concept of divine authorization was deeply entrenched in Athenian democratic ideology. An explicit connection between the gods and human law occurs when Demosthenes (25.16) argues that 'every law is an invention and gift of the gods'. According to Plato, 'to serve the laws is to serve the gods' (*Lg.* 762e). The religious dimension of lawmaking is evident from the sacrifices and prayers that opened each meeting of the *ekklësia* (Aeschin. 1.23). Indeed, the inscriptions of numerous laws and decrees draw the attention of the gods and seek their authorization with the vocative *theoi*.³² The addition of curses to laws and decrees augments the supernatural force of law.

A relevant literary example of the role of the gods in human law occurs in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* when Athena creates homicide courts to judge the case of Orestes. Yet while the gods may provide the social institution to control homicide, they themselves do at times (in myth at least) demand human sacrifice. In the parodos of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Artemis insists on the slaughter of Iphigenia as recompense for the victims of the Trojan War. In *Hecuba*, by contrast, the gods have absolutely nothing to do with the decree of the army at Troy to slaughter Polyxena as demanded by the ghost of Achilles. Yet the text invites comparison between the two maiden sacrifices. Iphigenia is 'like a picture' (*Ag.* 242) and Polyxena's breast is 'like a statue' (*Hec.* 560); both girls uncover their bodies (*Ag.* 239; *Hec.* 560–61). But these similarities also draw attention to some of the significant differences between the two maiden sacrifices. As noted above, it was Artemis who insisted on the sacrifice of Iphigenia, while the ghost of a dead hero demands the sacrifice of Polyxena. So while the army's decree is authoritative in the sense that it is passed in a deliberative assembly, it lacks any divine validation and indeed, as *Hecuba* implies (260–61), it actually contravenes religious norms, since it is animals not humans who should be sacrificed at the tomb of a hero.³³

As we turn to the second half of the play, which deals with the murder of Hecuba's son,

29 Phillipson (1911) 43.

30 The fragment reads 'Those who speak with intelligence must rely with all their strength on what is common to all, as a city relies on its *nomos* and with even greater strength. For all human *nomoi* are sustained by the one divine law; it exerts as much power as it wishes, it is sufficient for all and is still left over'. The idea of a divine 'fountainhead' of *nomos* comes from Ostwald (1969) 26–28.

31 See Papakonstantinou (2008) 36.

32 Harris (2003) 30 provides a list of examples which include *ML*² 46, 64, 69, 77, 89, 90.

33 See Gregory (1999) xxviii.

Polydorus, allusions to the *Oresteia* become more salient, thus highlighting relationships between law, retaliatory justice and the gods. While Aeschylus revealed a system that evolves from revenge-based murders to democratic justice and courts of law, *Hecuba* evinces the opposite trend from democratic legal practice to retaliatory justice. In the *Oresteia* this institutionalized justice is divinely authored, while in *Hecuba* it is retaliatory justice that is facilitated by and associated with the gods.

Polydorus

The Polyxena half of the play posed an important question about law: what is the status of a decree that contravenes mortal laws against homicide and is not authorized by any transcendent authority? What happens in a universe where the rule of law is equated with brute force? The second half of the play, which follows the discovery of the corpse of Polydorus, articulates the consequences of a society in which mortal lawmaking is deformed. The two halves of the play are organically and thematically linked.³⁴ A servant dispatched to get seawater to bathe the corpse of Polyxena finds that of Polydorus washed ashore. Hecuba realizes immediately that he has been murdered by Polymestor, who has used the defeat of the Trojans as an opportunity to take the gold in his safekeeping.

The question of justice, and how it relates to the reciprocal economy of *charis*, is a thematic link between the two halves. While the killing of Hecuba's daughter is the consequence of a heroic ghost's command and a democratic decree, there is now no legislative or ritual pretence that the murder of her son is in any way rightful. The relationship between law and divine authorization becomes increasingly more explicit. As Hecuba emphasizes, the deed is an unholy violation of the laws of *xenia* (715). Denying Polydorus burial offends the gods below (τοὺς γῆς νέρθεν), while the murder itself is an offence against the Olympian gods (τοὺς ἄνω, 791).³⁵ Her language implies that a divine force of justice exists, although only Hecuba has any sense of the immortals' concern with *dikê*. Scholars such as Reckford are mistaken that this is a 'world without justice'; for although the social apparatus of law is absent, there is still a more brutal form of *dikê* at work.³⁶ It is Hecuba, and only Hecuba, who understands, articulates, and performs this justice.

The justice that Hecuba desires and enacts is related to the *dikê* operating in the *Oresteia* described by Gagarin as 'an overall system of balance and retribution operating to redress wrongs and prevent unlawful gain'.³⁷ In the wake of the devastating loss of two children, Hecuba's objective is vengeance, a vengeance that obtains a balance. As she realizes, it will

34 Kirkwood (1947) 63 n. 7 lists the devices that link the two halves of the play: the mention by Polydorus in the prologue of Polyxena's sacrifice (40–44); Hecuba's dream (73–75); Agamemnon's entrance to ask Hecuba to prepare Polyxena for burial (726), which involves him in the revenge; the single funeral for both children (894–97); Agamemnon's reference to two corpses (1287–88).

35 I follow Gregory (1999) 138 with this interpretation.

36 Reckford (1985) 114.

37 Gagarin (1976) 73 discusses the motivation of the Erinyes in seeking redress for the matricide; see also 66–67 on *dikê* as a force of balance and reciprocity.

depend on the cooperation of Agamemnon: 'I cannot avenge my children without this man'. It is significant that she uses the plural here (τέκνοισι τοῖς ἐμοῖσι, 749–50) – as if the vengeance that she will enact on Polymestor compensates for the loss of both her children. In the calculus of revenge the death of his two children will balance the murder of hers.

But Hecuba's desire for justice is more than the emotional response of a grieving mother, although it is certainly that. It was a requirement of Greek homicide law that murder be requited, and the family of the victim was obligated to take action. Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* imagines the miasma of unrequited homicide: the plague and sterility that afflict Thebes are the consequences of the undiscovered murderer of Laius, as the oracle reveals. Ironically Oedipus acts both as a magistrate and a kinsman when he initiates the investigation of the murder.³⁸ In cases where the identity of the offender is known, the necessity for some requital was equally urgent; the first step towards justice and cosmic balance was the public declaration of the killer by a family member. Hecuba follows this procedure when she names 'the horseman of Thrace' (*i.e.* Polymestor, 710) as the perpetrator of the deed.³⁹

Hecuba thus has an ethical responsibility to initiate a legal proceeding, but the process of justice in the Greek camp has been deformed and occluded. There is no attempt by those in power to deal with the murder of an innocent boy (indeed they themselves have just murdered an innocent girl). A balance will be achieved through requital, but it will perforce operate beyond social institutions. The *charis*-reciprocity that should lead to friendship and social harmony has been perverted in this post-apocalyptic world. Correspondingly, a different mode of reciprocity that requires no social authorization, the *lex talionis*, will click into gear.

While institutionalized *nomos* – the laws created and enforced by men – may be beyond Hecuba's control, she is aware of and can implement an immutable form of law that transcends the social code. This kind of justice, her last resort, was a recognizable modality. A category of inscriptions known as 'judicial prayers' suggest that the families, and even more specifically the mothers, of homicide victims made direct appeals to the gods to punish perpetrators who for whatever reason had evaded more formal mechanisms of justice.⁴⁰ Ideally the mortal and the immortal forms of law overlap, but what this play illustrates, I believe, is that when these two aspects of law disconnect, or when the modulating force of law is absent or corrupt, the cosmic laws that come into play are brutally effective.

It is significant that Hecuba is the only character to talk about *nomos* or the gods in this play. Odysseus is completely oblivious or uninterested in divine authority; Agamemnon recognizes that the gods are connected with justice and that Polymestor's crime is an offence against divine law ('for the gods' sake I wish that the unholy host pay this penalty of justice to you', 852–53), but he prefers to let Hecuba work her own form of justice rather

38 Carawan (1999) 187–222 notes how the tragedy mirrors Athenian processes for homicide prosecution.

39 Burnett (1998) 164 observes that Hecuba stands by the body of her murdered son like the head of the household and makes a formal declaration.

40 Prayers for revenge are exemplified by two *stelai* found on Rheneia which feature two upturned hands, and an inscription calling for revenge on behalf of women who were apparently murdered. For further discussion of judicial prayers see Versnel (1991) 60–106; Gager (1992) 175–99, esp. 185–88.

than administer the institutionalized justice over which he should preside. Only Hecuba seems to understand a *nomos* so preeminent that it governs even the gods. In her appeal for Agamemnon's intervention, the former queen observes that although she is a slave, she knows that 'the gods have force and so does the law (*nomos*) that rules over them' (ἀλλ' οἱ θεοὶ σθένουσι χῶ κείνων κρατῶν νόμος, 799–801). Hecuba's articulation of a universal *nomos* accords with the Heraclitus fragment mentioned above which posits a divine source of *nomos* upon which mortal and immortal laws depend.⁴¹ As Hecuba continues to say, law (*nomos*) is proof of the gods' existence:

For it is by virtue of the law that we believe in the gods (νόμῳ γὰρ τοὺς θεοὺς ἠγνούμεθα, 800) and distinguish right from wrong in our lives. If this law comes before your tribunal and is set at naught, if those who murder their guests or plunder the temples of the gods are not punished, then there is no more justice among men (800–05, Kovacs trans.).

The translation of *nomos* here is crucial not only for the meaning of the passage, but also of the entire play. Scholars who translate νόμῳ as 'popular belief' or 'custom' rather than 'law' support an interpretation of the play that sees religion and hence justice as a human invention. In other words Hecuba's act of revenge is an entirely godless act.⁴² More recent translations and commentaries, however, realize that Hecuba must mean 'law' here, since she has just used the word in this sense, and continues to discuss different offences against universal law in the following lines.⁴³

In her supplication of Agamemnon, Hecuba still hopes that he will be concerned with justice. The theme of visuality comes into play when she asks him to look at her 'like a painter' (ὡς γράφεις) and see what misery is mine' (807–08). The simile belongs to the same constellation of imagery in which her daughter was a beautiful statue. Polyxena's status as an object of the democratic gaze was in the context of the spectacle of her death. Within the severe constraints upon her autonomy Hecuba's daughter had stage-managed her own sacrifice in a way that fused her audience's admiration for her heroism with pity for her death. Now Hecuba wants to be part of that visual domain but to reconstruct it so as to evoke the pity that she thinks will lead to justice. As Kastely understands it, Hecuba is offering Agamemnon 'a new pair of eyes that will allow him to see *nomos*'.⁴⁴ If

41 Oswald (1969) 26–29 includes the Heraclitus fragment and the *Hecuba* passage in a category of *nomos* that is the source issuing and guaranteeing norms. Kastely (1993) 1040 observes that Hecuba 'attempts to ground political action in an understanding of a moral order. For if *nomos* is universal, standing above even the gods, human justice depends on acknowledging it as a moral order'.

42 Heinimann (1945) 121–22 argues that Hecuba's first use of *nomos* is in the religious sense, but that she undercuts this by suggesting that belief in the gods is conventional. Oswald (1969) 38 approves of this interpretation and Reckford (1985) 120 uses this translation to support his negative interpretation of Hecuba's actions. Michelini (1987) 149 remarks that Hecuba 'seems to be a modernist in religion' because she suggests that the gods are a product of convention. For other interpretations based on the 'convention' translation, see Nussbaum (1986) 400; Segal (1989) 71.

43 See Collard (1991) 171; Mossman (1995) 182. Gregory (1999) 139 remarks: 'Through the existence of a universal order, human beings infer the existence of the gods'. Kovacs' translation (1995) 473 gives a comparable sense.

44 Kastely (1993) 1041.

law must be transparent and visible, then Hecuba wants to be in the picture. What is most arresting about her appropriation of visual imagery here is that she creates the spectacle by constructing herself as a subject of representation.⁴⁵ Polyxena did this to a certain extent by ripping her garment and offering herself to the sacrificer in a gesture of free will, but the tableau had already been set and the audience in place. Hecuba's simile suggests a greater control of the spectacle by putting Agamemnon in the audience. Unfortunately, he will not accept that role. This will be the first of Hecuba's attempts to control the spectacle, and the blinding of Polymestor that is Hecuba's own implementation of justice flows from Agamemnon's reluctance to assume a subject position that could spur him to action.

When Agamemnon replies that he cannot publicly condone the punishment of Polymestor, Hecuba cynically remarks that no man can be free: he is either enslaved to money or prevented by 'the city's multitude (*πληθῆθος*) or its written laws (*νόμων γραφαί*) from acting as he sees best' (864–67). Only moments before Hecuba had valorized a universal *nomos*, but here we see her notion of law being stripped of its social connotations. Even earlier she appealed to the democratic ideal of *isonomia* when she argued that homicide laws protected all; but these laws and institutions, she has learned, do not apply to her.⁴⁶ It is specifically written laws that she now disparages, a term that by contrast immediately evokes the concept of unwritten laws, or the universal laws that prohibited murder. Antigone made the same distinction when she critiqued Creon's edict for being less authoritative than the 'unwritten and unshakeable laws of the gods' (455). Such unwritten laws can be understood as 'a pre-existing set of customs, traditions and assumptions' that include the sanctions against murder.⁴⁷ Ideally they should form a basis for written law, that is, formalized *nomoi*, and function as a democratic means of disseminating law. As we have already seen from Cleon's language in Thucydides, decrees could be called *nomoi* at least until the constitutional reforms of 403, and perhaps now Hecuba is referring to decrees like the one that caused her daughter to be executed. The most important point here, however, is that Hecuba now sees herself as excluded from society's laws.

From here on, Hecuba must rely on a more transcendent, undiluted form of *nomos* that emanates directly from the gods. The chorus leader calls this the 'laws of necessity' in a brief comment made after Hecuba's great speech of appeal: 'the laws of necessity (*τῆς ἀνάγκης*

45 O'Sullivan (2008) 190 associates the image with ancient aesthetic theory that suggested painters must assume the emotions of the subject or scenes they were depicting. 'Agamemnon, in other words, will, like a painter depicting a pitiable scene, experience pity on some level'. See also Dué (2006) 132 on the possible artistic representations of Hecuba familiar to the audience.

46 Gregory (1999) 148, observing that 'majority rule and written law were the foundation-stones of Athenian democracy', comments that Hecuba invoked democratic principles when it suited her argument, but it should be noted that Hecuba has now abandoned all hope of legal remedies. Mossman's (1995) 183 understanding of the distinction between written laws and universal *nomos* is close to my own.

47 Thomas (2005) 52. In other words they existed before law codes were written down, and included the treatment of one's parents, the worship of the gods, proper treatment of the dead, etc. The term was in wide circulation during the fifth century. Th. 2.37.3 records Pericles' discussion of unwritten laws; Lys. 6.10 similarly makes Pericles say that unwritten laws should be obeyed; also see X. *Mem.* 4.4.19 (spoken by Socrates). For a recent treatment of the evolution of 'oral law' into written law see Gagarin (2008).

οἱ νόμοι) determine everything' (846–49). Hecuba now becomes the agent of these laws of necessity because Agamemnon is willing to look the other way when her messenger summons Polymestor to her tent. As the most authoritative male in the camp he could do more; his spineless approbation, an indication that the rule of law has no force here, is a poor substitute for a trial.⁴⁸ That process should have been set in motion once Hecuba initiated homicide proceedings by naming the culprit and submitting the charge to the proper magistrate (in Athens this would be the Archon Basileus) whose responsibility was to make a public proclamation and arrangements for a trial if a suspect was named ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 57.2–3).⁴⁹

Blinded by Justice

Agamemnon does not accept his social responsibility because the Greeks are now obligated by *philia* to Polymestor who harmed their enemy, the Trojan prince Polydorus. But he does grant Hecuba the opportunity to enact her own form of justice because of his sexual relationship with her daughter Cassandra.⁵⁰ And he says that he can bestow this *charis* because the 'god does not send a favourable wind' (899–900).⁵¹ In other words Hecuba and the Greeks are staying put for the time being. This is the first direct mention of the winds; the text gives no conclusive indication that Achilles stayed the winds to coerce the troops to make the sacrifice.⁵² This is also the first time that the gods have been cited as agents of the tragic events. By quelling the winds the unnamed god keeps Hecuba in Thrace just long enough to enact justice. Polymestor is summoned and enters Hecuba's tent with his two small sons. The chorus sings a short ode that emphasizes divine approbation: 'When the debt to justice (*dikê*) and to the gods comes together the hurt is deadly' (1029–31).

The vengeance that Hecuba's women exact on Polymestor is at the opposite end of the thematic spectrum to the democratic decree that was created and enacted before the public gaze. The spectacle of law, now divine rather than socially controlled, has become

48 Burnett (1998) 165 notes that Hecuba 'is to punish in the king's stead, shielding him from all responsibility', but even the earliest homicide cases (*e.g. Il.* 18.497–508) indicate that a trial functioned to determine the penalty. It seems more in keeping with Greek homicide law to expect Agamemnon to arrange for a murder trial.

49 The role of the Basileus is highlighted in the Draco inscription (*IG I³ 104*). In the classical period these functions were assumed by the Archon Basileus. See MacDowell (1966) 25–26, 33–38 and Gagarin (1981) 38 on the responsibilities of the Basileus in homicide cases.

50 The negotiations disgusted Kirkwood (1947) 67 who argues that she 'flings Nomos aside and becomes the embodiment of Peitho, utterly reckless of her own decency'. Burnett (1998) 164 n. 87 persuasively counters such responses by noting that the social norms of reciprocity can include erotic *charis*.

51 Thalmann (1993) 150 notes that Agamemnon is complicit in the re-enactment (or is it the rehearsal?) of his own murder.

52 As Kovacs (1995) 409 observes, there is no evidence (as the scholiast suggested) that Achilles prevented the Greeks from leaving by windlessness. The chorus says that Achilles 'stayed the ships as they pressed their sails against the forestays' (111–12). Thalmann (1993) 153 points out this means the winds are 'favorable and strong', since the assembly debate indicates that the Greeks had a choice in giving Achilles a prize, which would not be the case if the winds had ceased. Cf. Burnett (1998) 160 n. 72.

increasing veiled. When Polymestor arrived Hecuba refused to look at her former friend, and with eyes averted lured him and his small sons into the tent. Inside, beyond the gaze of the theatre audience, a *plêthos* (assembly) of Trojan women, counterbalancing the public assembly of Greek men, convenes to enact a different kind of law. While the obligations of *philia* to Achilles motivated the Achaean decree to kill Polyxena, the assembly of women act as *philai* to Hecuba.⁵³ This private unseen justice takes on a special significance within the thematization of vision and spectacle in this play. The theatre audience who had enjoyed a privileged gaze on the ghost of Polydorus, are now in a way as blind as Polymestor. The convention of performing acts of violence within the *skênê* takes on a unique meaning. Hecuba and the Trojan women, who by their ethnicity, servile status, and gender are the antithesis of the Greek male spectator, have troubled the conflation of law, power, and vision by taking control of the spectacle.

The winds stayed by 'the god's' inclination, and the chorus' comments suggest that Hecuba is enacting divine justice. But it is a brutal form of justice untempered by human culture. When Polymestor comes out from the *skênê* on all fours (1057–59), Hecuba uses legal terminology familiar to an Athenian audience (*δίτιχην δέ μοι δέδωκε*, 'he has paid the penalty to me', 1052–53). But she has found herself in a world where the processes of law do not apply to the murder of her son. The penalties that Polymestor suffers are the consequences of a universe in which favours exchanged between men take precedence over *nomos*. The theme of repayment of debts has prevailed throughout the text. Now the cosmic books are balanced as Hecuba has exacted her *dikê*.⁵⁴

Judging Hecuba

The devolution from public male legal processes (the decree) to a feminized form of retributive justice reverses the evolution of justice in the *Oresteia*. Allusions to the trilogy emphasize this: the luring of Polymestor inside the *skênê* recalls Clytemnestra's beguilement of Agamemnon; the throng of fury-like women who bind (and blind) him as his children are killed are, like the Erinyes, the embodiment of retributive justice.⁵⁵ Is Hecuba, who is pushed to this cruel justice by the slaughter of her children, cut from the same cloth

53 See Stanton (1995) 18 on the relationship between Hecuba and the Trojan women who, although they might be of lower status than she, still honour the aristocratic code of friendship. Burnett (1998) 158–59 comments on the two 'communities', one of men, 'conquerors, masters, and killers', balanced by one of women who 'because of their shared memory ... have, in contrast to the men, a perfect solidarity among themselves.'

54 See Burnett (1998) 170–71 on the reciprocity of Hecuba's revenge: in return for violating the guest/host relationship Polymestor is treated as a guest himself, 'a repayment that leaves him in a condition parallel to that of Hecuba'. McHardy (2008) 42 also sees the revenge as 'very carefully balanced' against Polymestor's attack.

55 See Thalmann (1993) 126–59 for a full discussion of the citations of the *Oresteia* in *Hecuba*. As the mother of a sacrificial virgin Hecuba corresponds to Clytemnestra. The blinding of Polymestor is structurally similar to the murder of Agamemnon: Thalmann (1993) 148–50. Like Agamemnon he is offered hospitality; his cries from the *skênê* (1035–37) recall those of Agamemnon. However, there are significant differences as Thalmann points out: Polydorus becomes the equivalent of Polyxena, for example.

as Clytemnestra, another vindictive mother? Critical reactions to the murder range from Kirkwood who contends that Hecuba ‘robbed of her reliance on *Nomos* and of her belief in it...yields to a frenzy of revenge and commits the most revolting atrocities without a trace of moral compunction’.⁵⁶ Other critics are more appreciative of the legitimacy of Hecuba’s actions. Meridor argues that the legalistic vocabulary (*e.g.* 1052–53 cited above) puts the blinding and infanticide into a judicial context and suggests that ‘The action taken against Polymestor is made to look compatible with fifth-century Athenian concepts of justice and legal procedure’.⁵⁷ I would argue instead that these common terms emphasize the disparity between the very personal individualized justice that Hecuba must undertake and the form of justice familiar to the fifth-century audience. Any justice here transcends human institutions.

Mossman has also argued for contextualizing the revenge in the morality of the times; she cites Herodotus’ account (8.104–06) of the revenge of Hermodimus against Panionius.⁵⁸ But child murder (thinking here of the death of Astyanax in *Trojan Women* or the murder of Medea’s children) is among the most hideous acts of Greek tragedy. The brutality of Hecuba’s act, I would repeat, is symptomatic of a world where divine and human *nomos* have become separated. The gods often demand a form of justice that is awful: Apollo commanded Orestes to kill his own mother. Medea kills Jason’s children as punishment for breaking an oath; she repeatedly uses the word *dikê* to describe her revenge. These terrible acts occur because the society in which these characters exist offers them no structures to deal with murder and perjury.

The figure of Hecuba in the *Iliad* is a strong protective mother of a heroic son; Euripides extends this vision of her to bestow a unique kind of heroism. In Kastely’s words, Hecuba demonstrates:

...a more complex heroism in her opposition to a bureaucracy that will not recognize the legitimacy of her claims to justice. She refuses to submit to bureaucratic power and to acquiesce in its cruelties. In a world that by its indifference to her pain has told her that she does not count, she can nonetheless feel an ethical obligation to act...in this debased universe a claim of justice is translated inevitably into a need for revenge, as the willingness to undertake revenge becomes an act of resistance and an assertion of dignity.⁵⁹

After her brutal revenge Hecuba earns a moment of official recognition, but it is virtually meaningless. The tragedy concludes with Agamemnon supervising a tribunal that acquits her of murder. The Argive leader finally assumes the role of official arbitrator, although it is only in a most attenuated capacity. He now rules that Polymestor murdered a *xenos* because he wanted his wealth, and not as Polymestor argues as a *charis* for the Achaeans (1243–45).⁶⁰ While this judgment seems to be consistent with the social code of *philia*

56 Kirkwood (1947) 68.

57 Meridor (1978) 30.

58 Mossman (1995) 188–89.

59 Kastely (1993) 1039.

60 Stanton (1995) 30 observes that Polymestor has ‘broken the aristocratic code’ by killing his friend’s child, and that he cannot appeal to Agamemnon on the grounds of *philia*.

and *xenia*, Agamemnon has accepted the argument that infanticide and mutilation are just punishment for the violation of the guest-host relationship and murder of Polydorus. This exoneration is otiose for Hecuba, whose metamorphosis into a dog immediately before her suicide (she hurls herself off the ship's mast as she is taken to Greece) is predicted by Polymestor. For the queen whose life has already effectively ended and who wished to die with her daughter, this prophecy is of little concern. Her transformation into a dog moments before her death represents the final stage in the reconfiguration of spectacle and vision: she will become a hound with fiery eyes (κύνων γενήσῃ πύρσ' ἔχουσα δέργματα, 1265), a spectacle with a gaze.⁶¹ The burning glare of the petrified dog will become the beacon that alerts sailors to the dangerous promontory ahead. As Gregory reads it, Hecuba's monument 'serves to draw together the heroic age and the fifth century', and 'puts the mighty on notice that abuse of power is not without consequences, for the victims' suffering may, as in the case of Hecuba, be transformed into terrible retribution'.⁶² Hecuba's ultimate fate then is to conflate the gaze and the spectacle as a permanent reminder of the consequences that await the lawless man. As a beacon she will shine in the same night as those fiery signals that will announce Agamemnon's arrival to Clytemnestra. As for Agamemnon, he condoned this form of justice which led to brutal personal forms of retribution, but he himself will step into just such a world when he returns home to Clytemnestra.

References

Abbreviations

- D-K H. Diels and W. Kranz eds, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. 3 Vols. Berlin, 1956–1959, 8th edn.
- IG I³ D. M. Lewis ed., *Inscriptiones Graecae I: Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis anno anteriores*. Berlin, 1981, 3rd edn.
- LSJ⁹ H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford, 1996, 9th edn. with revised supplement.
- ML² R. Meiggs and D. M. Lewis eds, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions*. Oxford, 1988, 2nd edn.
- PEG A. Bernabé ed., *Poetarum Epicorum Graecorum: Testimonia et Fragmenta Pars I*. Leipzig, 1996, 2nd edn.
- TrGF 5.1 R. Kannicht ed., *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta: Euripides*. Vol. 5.1. Göttingen, 2004.
- West M. L. West ed., *Iambi et Elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum Cantatati*. 2 Vols. Oxford, 1972–1989, 2nd edn.

61 Collard following LSJ⁹ translates 'a bitch with glaring blood-shot (πύρσ') eyes', but Burnett (1998) 175 argues this meaning is not attested for πύρσος elsewhere in Euripides and that in using the form πύρσος rather than πυρρός, he is suggesting 'flaming', in association with torches. Kovacs follows suit with 'fiery'. A fragment of Euripides' *Alexandros* (TrGF 5.1 fr. 62h) supports this translation: someone (probably Cassandra) prophesies that Hecuba 'will become a dog, a monument (*agalma*) of fire-bearing Hecate'. See, however, Gregory (1992) 192 for her objections against Burnett's interpretation; she offers 'shining' as an alternative.

62 Gregory (1999) xxxvi.

Works Cited

- Adkins, A. W. H. (1966) 'Basic Greek values in *Hecuba* and *Heracles*', *CQ* 16, 193–219.
- Allen, D. (2005) 'Greek Tragedy and Law', in Gagarin/Cohen, 374–93.
- Andrews, J. A. (2000) 'Cleon's Hidden Appeals', *CQ* 50, 45–62.
- Boegehold, A. (1996) 'Resistance to Change in the Law in Athens', in J. Ober and C. Hedrick eds, *Dēmokratia: A Conversation on Democracies Ancient and Modern*. Princeton, 201–14.
- Burnett, A. P. (1998) *Revenge in Attic and Later Tragedy*. Berkeley.
- Carawan, E. (1999) 'The Edict of Oedipus (*Oedipus Tyrannus* 223–251)', *AJP* 120, 187–222.
- Collard, C. ed. (1991) *Euripides Hecuba*. Warminster.
- Dover, K. J. (1955) 'Anapsephisis in Fifth-Century Athens', *JHS* 75, 17–20.
- Dué, C. (2006) *The Captive Woman's Lament in Greek Tragedy*. Austin.
- Easterling, P. E. (1985) 'Anachronism in Greek Tragedy', *JHS* 105, 1–10.
- Fletcher, J. (2008) 'Citing the Law in Sophocles' *Antigone*', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 41, 66–87.
- Gagarin M. and D. Cohen eds (2005) *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Law*. Cambridge.
- Gagarin, M. (1976) *Aeschylean Drama*. Berkeley.
- Gagarin, M. (1981) *Drakon and Early Greek Homicide Law*. New Haven.
- Gagarin, M. (2008) *Writing Greek Law*. Cambridge.
- Gager, J. G. ed. (1992) *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*. Oxford.
- Gantz, T. (1993) *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*. 2 Vols. Baltimore.
- Goldhill, S. (1990) 'The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology', in J. J. Winkler and F. I. Zeitlin eds, *Nothing to do with Dionysos?* Princeton, 97–129.
- Gregory, J. ed. (1999) *Euripides: Hecuba*. Atlanta.
- Griffin, J. (1998) 'The Social Function of Attic Tragedy', *CQ* 48, 39–61.
- Harris, E. M. (2004) 'Antigone the Lawyer, or the Ambiguities of *Nomos*', in E. M. Harris and L. R. Rubinstein eds, *The Law and the Courts in Ancient Greece*. London, 19–56.
- Harrison, A. R. W. (1955) 'Law Making at Athens at the End of the Fifth Century BC', *JHS* 75, 26–35.
- Heinimann, F. (1945) *Nomos und Physis*. Basel.
- Hogan, J. C. (1972) 'Thucydides 3.52–68 and Euripides' *Hecuba*', *Phoenix* 26, 241–57.
- Hornblower, S. (1997) *A Commentary on Thucydides*. Vol.1. Oxford.
- Humphreys, S. (1985) 'Law as discourse', *History and Anthropology* 1, 241–64.
- Humphreys, S. (1988) 'The Discourse of Law in Archaic and Classical Greece', *Law & History Review* 6, 465–93.
- Kagan, D. (1975) 'The Speeches in Thucydides and the Mytilene Debate', *YCS* 24, 71–94.
- Kastely, J. L. (1993) 'Violence and Rhetoric in Euripides' *Hecuba*', *PMLA* 108, 1036–49.
- Kirkwood, G. M. (1947) 'Hecuba and *Nomos*', *TAPA* 78, 61–68.
- Kovacs, D. (1987) *The Heroic Muse: Studies in the Hippolytus and Hecuba of Euripides*. Baltimore.
- Kovacs, D. (1995) *Euripides II: Children of Heracles, Hippolytus, Andromache, Hecuba*. Cambridge, Mass.
- Lane, R. (2007) 'Staging Polydorus' Ghost in the Prologue of the *Hecuba*', *CQ* 57, 290–94.
- MacDowell, D. M. (1978) *The Law in Classical Athens*. London.
- Macleod, C. (1983) 'Thucydides and Tragedy', in *Collected Essays*. Oxford, 140–158.
- McHardy, F. (2008) *Revenge in Athenian Culture*. London.
- Meridor, R. (1978) 'Hecuba's Revenge', *AJP* 99, 28–35.

- Michellini, A. N. (1987) *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition*. Madison.
- Mossman, J. (1995) *Wild Justice: A Study of Euripides' Hecuba*. Oxford.
- Nussbaum, M. (1986) *The Fragility of Goodness*. Cambridge.
- O'Sullivan, P. (2008) 'Aeschylus, Euripides, and Tragic Painting: Two Scenes from *Agamemnon* and *Hecuba*', *AJP* 129: 173–98.
- Ober, J. (1989) *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens*. Princeton.
- Ost, F. (2006) 'The Law as Mirrored in Literature', *SubStance* 35, 3–19. R. Lapidus trans.
- Ostwald, M. (1969) *Nomos and the Beginnings of Athenian Democracy*. Oxford.
- Papakonstantinou, Z. (2008) *Lawmaking and Adjudication in Archaic Greece*. London.
- Phillipson, C. (1911) *The International Law and Custom of Ancient Greece and Rome*. Vol. 1. London.
- Quass, F. (1971) *Nomos und Psephisma: Untersuchung zum griechischen Staatsrecht*. Zetemata 55. Munich.
- Rabinowitz, N. (1993) *Anxiety Veiled: Euripides and the Traffic in Women*. Ithaca.
- Reckford, K. J. (1985) 'Concepts of Demoralization in the *Hecuba*', in P. Burian ed., *Directions in Euripidean Criticism: A Collection of Essays*. Durham, N.C., 114–28.
- Rhodes, P. J. (2003) 'Nothing to Do with Democracy: Athenian Drama and the Polis', *JHS* 123, 104–19.
- Seaford, R. (2000) 'The Social Function of Attic Tragedy: A Response to Jasper Griffin', *CQ* 50, 30–44.
- Sealey, R. (1982) 'On the Athenian Concept of Law', *CJ* 77, 289–302.
- Segal, C. (1989) 'Law and Universals in Euripides' *Hecuba*', in T. Viljamaa, S. Jäkel, and K. Nyholm eds, *Sprachaspekte als Experiment*. Turku, 78–123.
- Sourvinou-Inwood, C. (1989) 'Assumptions and the creation of meaning: reading Sophocles' *Antigone*', *JHS* 109, 134–48.
- Thalmann, W. G. (1993) 'Euripides and Aeschylus: The Case of the *Hekabe*', *ClasAnt* 12, 126–59.
- Thomas, R. (2005) 'Writing, Law and Written Law', in Gagarin/Cohen, 41–60.
- Versnel, H. S. (1991) 'Beyond Cursing: The Appeal to Justice in Judicial Prayers', in C. A. Faraone and D. Obbink eds, *Magika Hiera*. New York and Oxford, 60–106.
- Woodhead, A. G. (1960) 'Thucydides' Portrait of Cleon', *Mnemosyne* 13, 289–317.

13 Behind the hideousness of this spectacle Hecuba can recognize the man who murdered her child and as he knows him, she knows how to react too. See Burnnet 1998, 164. 14 See Pomeroy 1976, 109. 15 While Polymestor, an ex friend, becomes the worst enemy of Hecuba, at the same time Agamemnon, this hated opponent of Trojans, becomes a temporary ally! I would say that Euripides emphasizes and also teaches the variability of trust in times of crisis. 16 See Abrahamson 1952, 125. "Law and Spectacle in Euripides' Hecuba" in Greek Drama IV, ed. D. Rosenbloom and J. Davidson, Aris and Phillips (2012). By Judith Fletcher. Other articles where Hecuba is discussed: Hecuba: According to Euripides (in the Hecuba), her youngest son, Polydorus, had been placed under the care of Polymestor, king of Thrace. When the Greeks reached the Thracian Chersonese on their way home, she discovered that her son had been murdered and in revenge put out the eyes of Polymestor and Hecuba. Sections. Directory. References. Hecuba. play by Euripides. Share. Start studying Euripides' Hecuba:. Learn vocabulary, terms and more with flashcards, games and other study tools. Only RUB 220.84/month. Euripides' Hecuba: STUDY. Flashcards. Homeric world: - supplication as a gesture of humility - "customs of equality" - Justice -guest/host laws Classical Athens: - "the invention of many words" - Public opinion (vote) - Political necessity -sacrifice of Polyxena - Murder of Polydorus for property. Euripides (c. 484-407 BCE) was one of the greatest authors of Greek tragedy. In 5th century BCE Athens his classic works such as Medea cemented his... Euripides was credited with being on an intellectual par with philosophers and his characters are given great rhetorical skills (sometimes even in sung speeches, previously the exclusive role of the chorus) and plots are made both intricate and unpredictable. Familiar myths are treated with unconventional twists and altered chronologies to freshen the tales and ensure the audience was gripped by the story. In competitions, Euripides was not particularly successful. Indeed, his very first competition trilogy, performed in 455 BCE, came in third and last place.