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Hekabe: The Aesthetic of the *Aischron*

I. Structure

We know of no other parallels between *Hekabe* and the lost Sophoclean *Polyxene;* but the prologue, at any rate, seems to present a variation on the Sophoclean one. Both use a ghost as speaker,[1] and the fact that the Euripidean ghost is not esssential to the plot, along with the reminiscence of Sophoclean wording, makes likely an allusion to other, more standard treatments of the Polyxene story.[2] The gesture also draws attention to the fact that the Euripidean play deals with the deaths of two of Hekabe's children rather than one, since the ghost represents the second strand of the play, the vengeance

1. The Sophoclean fragment *TGF* 523 has the appearance of a prologue, but the message attributed to the Ghost ought to come at the play's end (Conacher [1967, 148; 1961, 4]). Calder (1966, 41 – 42) has argued, to me convincingly, that Achilleus appeared twice, as a winged shade in the prologue and as an armed warrior, probably in the report of a messenger. *Hekabe* also uses two prophetic appearances, the shade of Polydoros at the prologue, and Polymestor, who predicts Agamemnon's fate not out of goodwill (as Achilleus presumably did, see the *Nostoi* in Proklos [5:108 Allen]) but out of malice.

2. Both open with "I come" (but this may be conventional, see *Pe.* 692) and a participle of *leipô*, "having left." I would argue that the apparent structural parallel is stronger evidence than verbal ones. Note that, even if we assume the temporal priority of *Polyxene*, that does not entitle us to suppose that all contrasts with Sophoclean technique in *Hekabe* are allusions to that play; see App. D.

of Hekabe for her son Polydoros. This early appearance of the second theme is virtually a necessity if the dual plot is to work and we are to transfer our concern, at some point later in the play, from one *pathos* to another.

In enlarging the story of Polyxene to include another and unrelated event, Euripides imposed a necessary change of focus, toward the single unifying link that makes the two stories into one. Hekabe is the mother bereaved of both these children; and it is in her, or rather in her experience of grief and loss, that the center of the new play must be located.[3] The role of Hekabe is in fact so dominant that there is no whole scene in which she does not take a major and active part.[4] Even during the agonized monody of Polymestor, the protagonist stands silent in the background, contemplating the success of her vengeance. The unifying force of Hekabe's role lies in her suffering. Hekabe is positioned at a convergence of events where pathos and misery are raised to an extraordinary level, not by the interaction of a peculiar ethos with a particular situation, as in some Sophoclean plays, but simply through the duplication of stresses.[5] The situation is intellectually intriguing in the same way that a scientific experiment is: carefully manufactured conditions can permit us to observe an ordinarily muddled process with clarity. Polydoros in the prologue lays considerable stress on a precise temporal convergence: for a brief time his mother will be in the Chersonnesos and able to discover her son's body; Polyxene is fated to die on this same day. "My mother will see the two corpses of her two children, me and the wretched girl."[6]

Hekabe's suffering is so remarkable as to evoke continual comment as the play progresses.[7] Polydoros ends with a word of pity.[8] Polyxene, who has no concern for her own sufferings or death (211 – 15), expresses violent sorrow at Hekabe's pain. Even the Greek herald is much struck by Hekabe and

3. Almost all the critics who do not complain of disunity make this point: Matthaei (1918, 119 – 23), resuming the original controversy between Hermann and Pflugk; Paley (1874, 513); H. Weil (1879, 203); Cataudella (1939, 127 – 28); Boella (1964, ix-x). In determining dramatic unity, Conacher has chosen a thematic rather than a structural link, arguing that such a use of Hekabe's character answers to "neither tragic, nor even dramatic, form" (1967, 152 n.16). He proposes instead the contrast between the characters of Polyxene and Hekabe (1961, 13). For a wholly negative view, see Lanza (1963, 424 – 25).

4. Medeia is the same sort of protagonist; for parallels between *Medeia* and *Hekabe*, see Steidle (1966, 141); Zürcher (1947, 73), who sees both as dramas of female *Leidenschaft*.

5. The notion that the sufferings of a protagonist must be uniquely fitted to a special "character" derives from Sophoclean models. These preconceptions have caused much difficulty with *Hekabe*. See Zürcher (1947, 84); Kirkwood (1947, 63 n.6); Abrahamson (1952, 129); Steidle (1966, 134ff.). This point is made by Conacher (1967, 83) in discussion of *Herakles*.

6. 44—there are numerous references to the day, and to one day in the play (e.g., lines 56, 317, 364, 412, 628). Such imagery is almost inevitable, given the shape of the play.

7. See Conacher (1961, 15).

8. "O mother, who from the tyrants' halls now see the day of slavery, how ill you fare—as much as once you prospered" (55 – 57).

comments on her exemplary misery in the same terms as Polydoros: she who has been so high has fallen so low.[9] After the discovery of Polydoros' body, a new theme emerges in the commiseration. Hekabe is repeatedly said to be the extreme of wretchedness, the very superlative of misery. The attendant who discovers the body calls Hekabe one who "surpasses the whole race of men and women in misery—no one will contest the crown" (660). Agamemnon, when he hears the story, exclaims, "Alas (ὦ σχετλία σύ), for your measureless sorrows! . . . Ah, what woman ever was so wretched?" Hekabe replies drily, "There is none, unless you mean Fortune herself."[10] Later in her appeal, listing her blows, she calls herself "the most pitiful of mortals" (811). This echoes the earlier assessment of the chorus, who called her πολυπονωτάτη βροτῶν (721).

The main structural support of the complex plot is Hekabe's role as exemplary sufferer, the focal point of the accumulated miseries of Troy and of the final sufferings detailed in this play. The success of the play will depend upon the effective integration of this role with the other themes to create a satisfying aesthetic whole.[11] The complexity of *Hekabe* has been called a major flaw;[12] and certainly, if structure could in itself constitute a flaw, the dual plot of *Hekabe* would be a gross one indeed. But a play must stand or fall on its own terms; and basic structure, being neither accidental nor peripheral, cannot be wished away as one wishes away a fault. Complaints about the play's disunity are usually based on presuppositions that derive from the work of Sophokles. In theme at least the play is traditional: the workings of excessive and violent stress on a human nature is in no way new or alien to tragedy as Aischylos and Sophokles created it. But what happens to Hekabe on the day of the play is an arbitrary and accidental concatenation of misfortunes; this means that, while Hekabe has a fairly distinct ethos of her own, the events that she experiences are only marginally relevant to her character.

9. See Aristoteles, *Rhet.* 1386b6 – 7, *Poet.* 1453a5, on the role of the *anaxion pathêma* in inducing pity. See also Boella (1964, 12). Harbsmeier (1968, 59) points out that Hekabe must be seen at the same time as slave and as queen.

10. 786. The meaning of Hekabe is not in doubt, but what she says is very singular. *Tychê* in fifth-century art would have been a beautiful young woman, symbolic of good rather than bad fortune. That fortune is the embodiment of misfortune seems to express the particularly black view of this play.

11. Spranger (1927.2) took an extreme view in seeing the "problem" of the play as lying in a mechanical and inadequate expansion from an original *Polyxene*. See the comment of Abrahamson (1952, 120 n.1) "Once the meaning of the play is understood, the problem seems to disappear; and its composition . . . is seen in its uniqueness and its necessity."

12. Critics have not hesitated to depreciate the play. Matthaei (1918, 124): it "leaves much to be desired"; Norwood (1920, 216): it is "on the whole poor and uninteresting," and only one good choral ode redeems it from "crude sensationalism" (1954, 41); Bates (1930, 92): it "is not an interesting play" and "in reality it is not a great drama" (94).

The blows that Hekabe suffers are annihilating in their accumulated force, and in their incomprehensibility. Oidipous' fate in some way is the expression of Oidipous' nature, marking him out for a unique destiny, and, when he names himself the child of Luck (*tychê*), he is wrong.[13] But, when Hekabe identifies her wretched self with the deity of cosmic misrule, she does not seem to be mistaken. Oidipous' response to his catastrophe, though self-destructive, seems in some way to assert human will and choice; Hekabe's revenge, apparently self-assertive, is merely a further step in her erasure from humanity. In this play the act of decision in the face of destiny belongs to Polyxene, who, by the manner in which she accepts the inevitable, contrives to win some glory out of a vagary of Hellenic democratic realpolitik. Polyxene's role, nature, fate, and character are thus virtually the precise inversion of her mother's. It is the presence of Polyxene, the Sophoclean element, we might say, in a Euripidean drama,[14] that defines and clarifies the role of Hekabe, enabling the play to project a figure of tragic intensity and dread that is yet, in its essence, entirely antiheroic.

Hekabe packs a double plot into a very small compass; in actual length it is among the shorter of the early plays, and only *Alkestis* is much briefer.[15] Everything seems arranged for maximum speed, especially at the opening.[16] The opening song or parodos, instead of being a self-contained lyric, is an anapaestic address to Hekabe that informs her in precise and circumstantial detail of the decision about Polyxene's sacrifice and the preceding debate in the Greek assembly.[17] Little argument is required to persuade Hekabe of the approaching danger, since she has already been alarmed by a dream, one of those useful sources of foreknowledge that, like the oracles in *Trachiniai* and

13. *OT* 1080.

14. Conacher describes Polyxene as "almost Sophoclean" (1967, 158; see also 1961, 19): note the similar conclusions of Pagani (1970, 51) and Buxton (1982, 176). We have no way of knowing whether this characterization is or is not part of an extended allusion to Sophokles' *Polyxene*. Calder's reconstruction (1966) has almost nothing to tell us about the role of the protagonist; and in any case the Euripidean stance is certainly not limited to or defined by the relations between particular plays; see App. D.

15. Two other plays of the twenties that are similar to *Hekabe* in length (1295 lines) are *Andromache* (1288) and *Suppliants* (1234); both are packed, as is *Hekabe*, with incident.

16. See Garzya (1954, 209): "tutto si svolge con rapidità estrema."

17. On this parodos, see Boella (1964, 16), "non ha un carattere propriamente lirico, ma piuttosto espositivo-oratorio." In no other tragic parodos is a message brought to a character on stage, and in no other is there no nonlyric discussion of the information conveyed in lyric. The treatment of the second crisis, the discovery of Polydoros' body, is not dissimilar. There, expression of grief is subordinated to the idea of vengeance, which takes shape inside the lyric that is Hekabe's first response.

Persians, are kept vague enough to be serviceable in various ways.[18] The chorus ends by warning that Odysseus is "all but here" to carry out his dread errand; and indeed he enters at the close of the lyric *amoibaion* between mother and daughter, before the two have exchanged any trimeter dialogue. Odysseus wastes no words at his entrance, remarking that he assumes Hekabe already knows what the Greeks have decided (218–19).

The pace with which events in the play move along forces constant impromptu reactions upon Hekabe. Appalled by the vague threat of the dream, she next reacts to the clearer news of the chorus with hysteria, expressing her doubts and confusion in a flood of deliberative questions.[19] Yet, at the sudden appearance of Odysseus, she is ready to commence the struggle for her child (229–30). After an interval of calm in which Polyxene's death is reported, a second blow follows with cruel speed. Yet, when Agamemnon enters, pressing her for haste in completing the burial of Polyxene,[20] Hekabe makes ready to gain his help in her vengeance; and, once assured of cooperation, she moves to act, impatient of any delay.[21] Agamemnon closes the scene by remarking that it is only because the winds have not yet begun to blow that he can permit her this favor (900ff.). The action of the play is thus hurried along constantly by the pressures of the outside reality, and by the urgency of Hekabe's response. After the accomplishment of Hekabe's revenge, the play closes, as Agamemnon announces the rising of the winds and the imminent departure of the Greeks for their homes (1289ff.).

II. Nature and Nurture

Not only is Hekabe on stage constantly, but she is active during the whole play, and in almost every scene she must react to threats or attempt to control the movement of events. At only one point in the play does the frantic pace

18. U. v. Wilamowitz (1909, 446–49) argued that the hexameters in which Hekabe reports the dream are inauthentic; along with them he removed lines 90–97, so that references to Polyxene are absent. In support, Biehl (1966, 412 n.7; 1957, 55–62); Bremer (1971, 232–45). It is true that there is a clash between the apparition of Polydoros and the animal allegory; but the vague content supports the polyvalent use of the dream, which unites forebodings for both children. W. H. Friedrich has seen this, calling (1953, 45–46) for retention of lines 92–97 only; see Lesky ([1956] 1972.1, 331 n.81). Without the hexameters, however, it is easier to sense the awkwardness with which one incident overlies the other. For ambivalent predictive devices, see Waldock (1951, 11ff., on the "Documentary Fallacy").

19. 154–64. On these desperate deliberatives, see Schadewaldt (1926, 149), who traces the practice back to Aischylos.

20. τί μέλλεις . . . (726); σὺ δὲ σχολάζεις, ὥστε θαυμάζειν ἐμέ (730).

21. Hekabe is brusque and peremptory in her dealings both with Talthybios (σὺ δ' ἐλθέ, 604) and with Agamemnon (ἀλλ' ὡς γενέσθω· τόνδε μὲν μέθες λόγον . . . , 888).

abate; this interval of calm is the second scene, where Talthybios narrates the death of Polyxene.[22] The scene is full of great pathos, yet it contains the only good news that anyone will bring Hekabe; and the pace slows as we hear the details of an event already known and expected. Only in this scene does Hekabe receive information to which she can react at some leisure, in a contemplative mood, rather than through frantic struggle.

The structural singularity of the messenger scene is paralleled by its evocation of important themes, such as those of education (*paideia*) and nobility, that illuminate the action before and after it. Polyxene is the figure that proposes and defines these themes: her previous experience of nobility has left her reluctant to experience the humiliations of slavery.[23] In her case, learning has been a single and irreversible process that has created a fixed attitude to life: "Not to live well is a great trouble," as she remarks, in a line whose lapidary sententiousness underlines its finality.[24] Although Polyxene appears in only one scene, she has already been given scope to develop a personality of her own. Other virgins in Euripidean tragedy are at least initially obedient and retiring, whereas Polyxene shows little reticence and even reverses roles in the trimeter scene by instructing her mother in deportment. It may be merely that Polyxene's single appearance has left no room for a gradual emergence of the unmarried girl (*parthenos*). But what we hear of her death scene deepens and defines the contrast of her attitudes with those of her mother, as Hekabe reacts to and reflects upon the last act of her daughter. The pause is the more valuable because, in Hekabe's frantic efforts to save Polyxene and in her emotional reaction to that loss, there is little chance for the audience to compare and weigh the mother and the daughter.

Hekabe reacts to the messenger's account first with a rather confused admission that this news of Polyxene's noble behavior has some alleviating effect on her own measureless sorrows.[25] She then dilates upon the theme of

22. Almost all critics have been struck by the change of pace: Matthaei (1918, 139), "this pause in the very center of the play"; King (1938, 82), "This beautiful scene brings to a quiet close the first half of the play"; Lanza (1963, 429–30) refers to the contrast between the epic and solemn style of this scene and the rest of *Hekabe* with its "concitazione tragica." See also Garzya (1954, 210). Conacher (1967, 160) calls the scene a "skilful *entr'acte*."

23. The theme of slavery has received much emphasis; see Steidle (1966, 140). Daitz (1971) and Kuch (1973, 106ff.) attempt to connect the theme to the contemporary attitudes.

24. τὸ γὰρ ζῆν μὴ καλῶς μέγας πόνος (378). The similarity to Sophokles' *Aias* 479–80 is obvious, as is the resumé of Tekmessa (357 = *Aias* 489; note the similar contexts). Euripides rouses some echoes from a great debate on heroic values. See Benedetto (1971.1, 51) on Polyxene as a representative of aristocratic values; Boella (1964, 48) "Si direbbe che Euripide abbia voluto attribuire la fierezza di Aiace ad una tenera giovinetta." For the connection of these Sophoclean echoes to the issue of freedom and slavery, see Knox (1964, 41).

25. The vivid imagery of lines 585–88, in which Hekabe's sorrows distract her by pulling her first in one direction, then in another, like so many importunate children, anticipates the second half of the play, in which she will be distracted by two major griefs. The image also

nobility (*gennaiôtês*) for eleven and a half lines (592–603).[26] Psychological explanations for the excursus have been offered; but none has seemed plausible.[27] It does not seem likely that persons ancient or modern would express violent grief through speculative philosophical remarks. More to the point, there is little literary precedent for such a response. Other grieving Euripidean characters tend to reflect, not on questions, now rendered irrelevant by death, of upbringing and natural endowments, but on the emptiness of life and human happiness; and there is usually a gradual progression from generalities to the personal situation of the sufferer.[28] Hekabe says of her remarks that they are "a vain shot from the mind's bow," and this implies that they are to be seen as irrelevant.[29] Such an uncommon reaction, if it were supported by other traits, could serve to characterize Hekabe; but she does not react to other blows of fate with meditations on remote topics.

Hekabe's remarks at line 592 stand out, and are meant to stand out, and openly present themselves as standing out against the background of dramatic illusion. Without making the blunder of assuming that "Euripides" here takes the occasion to address the audience directly, dropping the aesthetic of drama, and aiming at some political or didactic goal, we can say that the importance of these lines is strongly emphasized by their open failure to merge with the dramatic situation, as they would do if they could be

resembles the actual physical motions of Hekabe during the opening, when she rushed back and forth, uncertain what to do.

26. This passage has not met with much approval. See Grube (1941, 95): "More sarcasm has been concentrated [on this] than on any other passage of Euripides." Solmsen (1975, 69–70) refers to it as an "outburst," leaving it unclear whether we are to blame it on Hekabe's impulsiveness or Euripides'. See also Tierney (1946, 84–85); and Boella (1964, 73), Euripides writes "senza curarsi della coerenza artistica"; Willem (1929, 90), "une digression froide qui fait languir le drame." The indignation of the ancients echoes faintly in the scholiast to line 603 (p. 371 Dindorf); Eustathios' *Ilias* commentary (930.39 = 3:467 Van der Valk); and the *Progymnasmata* of one Theon (1:149 Walz, the reference is in H. Weil [1879]):τὸν δὲ Εὐριπίδην καταμεμφόμεθα ὅτι παρὰ καιρὸν αὐτῷ Ἑκάβη φιλοσοφεῖ. Conacher, however, (1967, 160 n.29; 1972, 204–5) notes the thematic significance of the passage.

27. Schadewaldt (1926, 139) sees line 603 as an open admission that Hekabe is distracted by emotion. Conacher attributes the mental "spasm" (1961, 20) to emotional exhaustion (1967, 159). Sheppard (1924, 74) suggests that Hekabe is trying to calm herself, so as to be worthy of Polyxene.

28. See Iphis in *Suppl* 1080ff., Hekabe in *Tro*, 686ff.

29. καὶ ταῦτα μὲν δὴ νοῦς ἐτόξευσεν μάτην (603). See *Suppl* 456; Aischylos *Suppl.* 446. The most significant parallels are the great digressions in the Pindaric victory odes, where imagery of veering off course (*Py.* 11.37–39) alternates with metaphors from shooting and javelin throwing (*Ol.* 2.90, 13.93–95; *N.* 6.27, 7.71). While these moments were at one time attributed to mental aberrations of the poet, they are now recognized as transition formulae (see Bundy [1962]). In a Pindaric ode, as in a Euripidean play, disparate material is allusively juxtaposed, making for many sharp transitions. Cf. the remarks of Buxton (1982, 152–53) on "shifts of perspective" in Euripides.

perceived primarily as an expression of Hekabe's emotional state. As the illusion of coherent character becomes relatively transparent, it is possible for Hekabe, like the chorus in an Aeschylean play, to acquire a voice whose words can extend beyond the knowledge and psychology of the mimetic utterer. What she says is significant in direct proportion to its incongruity.[30]

Polyxene has displayed the behavior of a *gennaios*,[31] and these lines raise the question of the nature, source, and lifespan of such qualities. The analogy, a banal one, is from vegetable life and the relation of nature (*physis*) to planting and growth:[32] human life seems to violate a part of this traditional analogy, however, in its tendency to retain good qualities in spite of bad usage and nurture. Plants are dependent on nurture (*trophê*) for the production of good fruit, while by contrast the *gennaios* human being remains noble and uncorrupted to the end. Hekabe goes on to ask herself, in a rather meandering fashion, what the source of this incorruptible goodness might be. In trying to choose between parentage and upbringing (*trophê*), she opines that at least upbringing must make some contribution, through an "instruction in nobility" (*didaxis esthlou*), which, when properly learned, provides an internal standard (κανόνι τοῦ καλοῦ μαθών) for determining what is ignoble (*aischron*).[33]

30. This is essentially the point made by Conacher (1972).

31. 591–92:

τὸ δ' αὖ λίαν παρεῖλες ἀγγελθεῖσά μοι
γενναῖος

Tierney (1946, 84) points out the unparalleled absence of the supplementary participle; the strong enjambment of *gennaios* should also be noted. Both have the effect of emphasizing the single word. For its meaning, see Aristoteles, *Hist. Animal.* 488b19 (cf. *Rhet.* 1390b22):τὸ μὴ ἐξιστάμενον ἐκ τῆς αὑτοῦ φύσεως. We might say "true to breed."

32. 592–98:

οὔκουν δεινόν, εἰ γῆ μὲν κακὴ
τυχοῦσα καιροῦ θεόθεν εὖ στάχυν φέρει,
χρηστὴ δ' ἁμαρτοῦσ' ὧν χρεὼν αὐτὴν τυχεῖν
κακὸν δίδωσι καρπόν, ἀνθρώποις δ' ἀεὶ
ὁ μὲν πονηρὸς ουδὲν ἄλλο πλὴν κακός,
ὁ δ' ἐσθλὸς ἐσθλός, οὐδὲ συμφορᾶς ὕπο
φύσιν διέφθειρ', ἀλλὰ χρηστός ἐστ' ἀεί

See also the same analogy of the growth of the young person, used with a straightforward pathos by Polydoros at line 20: τροφαῖσιν ὥς τις πτόρθος ηὐξόμην τάλας.

33. 599–602:

ἆρ' οἱ τεκόντες διαφέρουσιν ἢ τροφαί
ἔχει γε μέντοι καὶ τὸ θρεφθῆναι καλῶς
δίδαξιν ἐσθλοῦ· τοῦτο δ' ἤν τις εὖ μάθῃ
οἶδεν τό γ' αἰσχρόν, κανόνι τοῦ καλοῦ μαθών.

The analogical use of *kanôn* in poetry begins for us with Euripides; see fragments 303.4 N2 (*Bel-*

The passage raises a major theme in contemporary thought, that of the opposition between *physis* and *trophê;* and the confusions in the ideas Hekabe expresses have as broad a base in intellectual tradition as do the ideas themselves. Hekabe's admission that *trophê* must play some role in human excellence, a modest statement that is neither startling nor unorthodox, undermines the truth of traditional notions, already characterized by her as paradoxical and inexplicable, about the incorruptibility of human inbred virtue. If there is "instruction in nobility" (*didaxis esthlou*), then, presumably, the *aischroi* have undergone the reverse, a *didaxis aischrou,* that gives them their conflicting and inferior system of values. The possibility of this kind of bad learning is inherent in the very idea of *trophê,* and is underscored by the reference to "knowing the shameful, having learned it by the measure of the good." The problem is a familiar one, worked out in detail by Platon in the fifth book of the *Republic:* the good must be able to recognize and judge evil, without having direct knowledge of it, for that knowledge is itself corrupting.[34] Hekabe's "vain shot" is therefore a mass of fruitful contradictions, coexisting under considerable tension, and ready to spring apart under any closer analysis. What Hekabe has said furnishes themes to connect and explicate the fates of her and her daughter, and to reveal the meaning of their different paths. Above all, the question of *gennaiotês* and its reverse, of the ugly-shameful (*aischron*) and the noble-beautiful (*kalon* or *esthlon*), and of the uses and meaning of education form the thematic fiber that runs through the play from its beginning to its end.

The question that Hekabe, and through her the play *Hekabe,* is struggling with is one that is central to tragedy; and, as so often in Euripides, the nature of the genre, codified for us by the work of Sophokles, is involved in these contradictions. Earlier modern studies of psychological portrayal in Greek drama noted the relatively "primitive" rigidity of character portrayal in even such a great master of the human soul as Sophokles. Rather than showing development, Sophoclean figures tend to display a single, well-defined *êthos* that remains essentially the same under the pressures of circumstance.[35] But Sophoclean psychology represents a familiar Hellenic ethic, as much as it

lerophontes) and 376.1 N2 (*Erechtheus*). Sophokles' use of *kanôn* in a simile in *Oinomaos* (*TGF* F474.5) does not have the same significance.

34. *Rep.* 5 408d-409e: physicians must risk their bodies' health to master knowledge about disease, but jurors cannot risk the soul's health to acquire experience. ἀλλ' ἄπειρον αὐτὴν καὶ ἀκέραιον δεῖ κακῶν ἠθῶν νέαν οὖσαν γεγονέναι (409a5). The ideal dicast is old, ὀψιμαθῆ γεγονότα τῆς ἀδικίας . . . ἐπιστήμῃ οὐκ ἐμπειρίᾳ οἰκείᾳ κεχρημένον (409b5). Paley (1874, 553) notes the continuing relevance of this problem in philosophy. Heberden (1901) points out the emphatic particle γε in line 602: it is the *aischron* that must be known through the *kalon*.

35. See Zürcher (1947, 14–15); and Knox (1964, 37), who documents but demurs from this view.

does an early stage of development in psychological thinking.[36] According to this ethic, *physis* is shaped somehow both by nurture and nature, so that Aias' son, if he is to become like his father and show himself a trueborn son, must also have appropriate early experiences.[37] The inherent contradiction was evident to the Sophists, and Euripides builds on it here: in spite of the importance of *trophê,* this *physis,* once shaped, becomes characteristic of the *agathos,* is by definition permanent, and cannot be erased.[38] When Euripides' play exposes the contradictions of the *physis* concept it does more than touch upon an interesting contemporary theme. Sophokles used traditional ideology about *physis* to support a rebirth of the concerns and tone of heroic epic; and this powerful synthesis created a new standard for "serious" art. In challenging this standard, Euripides was led to a different kind of tragedy, and to a different view of human psychology.

The question of *physis* was also linked to the issue of education and thus became crucial to the contemporary philosophical and rhetorical movements. Sophists, from Sokrates through Antiphon, argued that traditional *trophê* was inadequate and that new forms of training were needed, training which they often endeavored to design or to supply.[39] These curricula almost always included instruction in rhetoric, the new art of prose that was designed to short-circuit the traditional role of poetry in mediating between cultural values and political practice.[40] The fact that rhetoric was designed to be taught as a system made it relatively independent of *physis* and gave it much in common with the *technai* that the gentleman (*agathos anêr*) had in the past scorned.[41] Further, the urgency of the need for rhetoric derived from new political systems that gave more power to the citizen majority, and that

36. For this point, see Lesky (1972.2, 209 – 10).

37. *Aias* 545ff. Eurysakes will not fear blood, if he is truly Aias' son (547). His *physis* has to be made like that of his father by experience from an early age (548 – 49):

> ἀλλ' αὐτίκ' αὐτὸν ὠμοῖς ἐν νόμοις πατρὸς
> δεῖ πωλοδαμνεῖν κἀξομοιοῦσθαι φύσιν.

The contradiction is part of the traditional view of *eugeneia*.

38. See Adkins (1960, 76 – 77) for the fertile contradictions created by these concepts in the poetry of Theognis. Lesky (1968.2, 18) cites Antiphon (DK 2:87 fr. 60B), a passage that has most suggestive parallels with this. There the point is that *trophê* for the child, like that for the land, will produce a sound crop, which then endures (ζῇ τοῦτο καὶ θάλλει διὰ παντὸς τοῦ βίου, καὶ αὐτὸ οὔτε ὄμβρος οὔτε ἀνομβρία ἀφαιρεῖται). There *physis* doctrine blends harmoniously with *trophê*, while in our passage it becomes a paradox.

39. See Tedeschi (1978, 33 – 34).

40. See Johnson (1959) on the modeling of the orator's role on that of the poet.

41. On this paradox, see Turato (1974, 152).

thus promised rewards to those who could manipulate these masses.[42] The Sophistic training systems doubly challenged the traditional values based upon *physis,* first by suggesting that an art that could be learned (*mathêma*) was appropriate for the aristocrat,[43] and second by their assumption that power did not lie in the hands of the *agathos* himself, but derived from those he would have to persuade.

Hekabe's speculations about her daughter's noble or truebred *physis* suggest alternative views of human nature, and the controversy can be stated both in archaic terms—as in the contrasting figures of Achilleus and Odysseus—or in classical ones—as in the differing ethical systems of Sophoclean and Euripidean tragedy. Hekabe's musings also suggest, without actually revealing, the contradictions explored by the Sophistic debate over *trophê* and *physis.* If Polyxene's death appears to prove the truth of the unlikely proposition that aristocratic *physis* will persist through all the dyes of experience, Hekabe's life will turn out to prove the opposite, that human beings do learn and change in their learning, and that the experience of continued life often involves a *didaxis aischrou* that wipes out earlier training, as though it had never been.[44]

If we ask what *Hekabe* will prove about "Euripides' views" on the Sophistic and on rhetorical training, our answer will of course be that Euripides, like everyone else, seems to see great moral danger in such training; and we may conclude that the tenor of this play indicates the poet's essential allegiance to traditional values.[45] But the wrong answer results from the incorrectly posed question: as I have indicated above, the author's views cannot be extracted from an aesthetic construct like *Hekabe*. Euripidean drama is marked by tone, subject matter, and by theme, in this case that of rhetoric and education, as antitraditional. While it is true that rhetoric is presented in *Hekabe* in a negative and corrupt aspect, this dark side is implicit in the way the new discipline confronts the old culture. Rhetoric claimed to offer an inversion of the traditional value system; but this claim, in contrast to attempts to substitute other values, leaves the system intact, while depriving it of coherence. In portraying the tactics of rhetoric as ultimately self-destructive and self-betraying, *Hekabe* does not so much take the part of any

42. See R. Müller (1976, 21 – 22), on the class system and oratory; Turato (1974, 152ff.); Buxton (1982, 18 – 19).

43. Pindaros (using a poetic cognate *phya* instead of *physis*) depreciates learned skills as inferior to inborn ability: *Py.* 8.44, *Ol.* 2.86ff., *Ol.* 9.100: τὸ δὲ φυᾷ κράτιστον ἅπαν. πολλοὶ δὲ διδακταῖς ἀνθρώπων ἀρεταῖς . . .

44. See Luschnig (1975 – 76, 231).

45. This is the conclusion reached by Boella, who sees the moralizing material as simply an intrusion with no aesthetic value (1964, 136).

particular contemporary stance or view as suggest a truth that is inherent in the Sophistic movement and that it is the office of poetry to reveal.

III. Rhetoric and Persuasion

Because Euripides used the antitragic and even antipoetic themes of the Sophistic in creating his new approach to tragedy, it follows that rhetoric and rhetorical technique are a natural part of his style. But in this play rhetoric becomes a theme that has a particular and overt application to the case of Hekabe. As Conacher and Buxton have pointed out, Hekabe is faced again and again with a verbal contest (*agôn*) in which her role must be to persuade an indifferent or hostile audience to her side.[46] The old woman relies at first on the sheer pathos of her situation and on the justice of her cause to win sympathy and help. But this reliance proves worthless; and eventually, under the goad of utter desperation, Hekabe learns to adopt other techniques that lead to success.

Hekabe's first attempt at persuasion forces her to try her skill on the master of trickery himself, Odysseus; and in this she fails. Her second attempt, on an easier subject, is a success; and in the final *agôn logôn* she confutes her enemy Polymestor decisively, in a dazzling display of technique. Hekabe's progress in the techniques of persuasion parallels her steady descent on the moral plane. The theme of education, learning, and nobility that is introduced and fixed by the second episode has applications forward to the changes undergone by Hekabe, as well as backward to the refusal of Polyxene to live in a world of change and degeneration.[47]

The first mention of rhetoric occurs before the opening of the first scene, in the parodos (120–40). There, we hear of the speakers in the Greek assembly who argued for or against the death of Polyxene. Agamemnon, we learn at this early point, is on Hekabe's side, τὸ μὲν σὸν σπεύδων ἀγαθόν, because her daughter Kassandra has become his concubine (120–22). The opponents of Agamemnon, rather surprisingly, are the sons of Theseus. Although the Theseidai have some connections in the cyclic epics both with events after the fall of Troy and with Thrace, their injection here is

46. Conacher (1967, 163ff.); Buxton (1982, 170ff.). See also Tierney (1946) on lines 1132, 1187, 1240; and Sheppard (1924, 77, 84).

47. Critics are widely agreed that Hekabe degenerates from her previous noble status; see Conacher (1967, 165) on Hekabe's degradation: "only in characters such as Polyxena can *aretê* survive in splendid isolation." See also Matthaei (1918, 156), Grube (1941, 214). Hajistephanou (1975, 89–91) points out that in fact Hekabe's behavior consistently contrasts with that of Polyxene throughout. But this of course does not mean that Hekabe does not degenerate as well. It is the same chicken-egg problem of *physis:* Hekabe does not possess her daughter's inherent strength, and this makes her more prone to take bad instruction.

sufficiently gratuitous to attract some notice.[48] There might be an implication that Odysseus is in the right, since these figures of local myth are on his side. But the language used to describe Theseus' sons also pushes the audience to associate these figures with rhetoric and Sophistic debate.

Several odd usages converge, forcing us to make an association between the council of the Greeks and an Athenian assembly. First, there is the fact that the obscure sons of Theseus (called "offshoots of Athens") are mentioned here at all. Second, there is the collocation of two contemporary terms: the Theseidai are speakers (*rhêtores*) of "double arguments" (*dissoi mythoi/logoi*). *Rhêtôr,* as we see from Aristophanes, was the everyday term for the political leaders of the democracy.[49] Since the word appears nowhere else in Euripides, it is likely to represent for the audience a borrowing from nonpoetic usage and it should be understood here as it is usually understood there.[50]

The term *rhêtôr,* at least in the fourth century, could also refer to a polished and trained speaker, a master of the trade of rhetoric (*rhêtorikê technê*). In the absence of prose usage, we have no direct way of knowing whether this second meaning was already extant in the time of this play.[51] But the connection to rhetoric in any case is assured by the reference to the *dissoi mythoi* of the Theseidai. They as twins, of course, are "double"; and their arguments therefore are dual, though with a single import. But a reference in the late *Antiope* establishes the Sophistic meaning of the "double

48. Homeric epic does not mention the Theseidai, presumably Akamas and Demophon; but they did appear in the *Iliou Persis.* The Theseidai were associated with the Thracian Chersonnesos in myth, s.v. Akamas, *RE* 1144b (Reisch), Röscher 206b. I could find no evidence to support Lesky's statement ([1956] 1972.1, 330) that in the *Iliou Persis* Akamas and Demophon sacrificed Polyxene.

49. See e.g., *Ach.* 38; *Knights* 60, 358, 1350; *Thes.* 292, etc.

50. The word appears in no extant non-Euripidean tragedy; Sophokles may have used it once, with the meaning of *kritês* (*TGF* 1090). The word makes an appearance in *Peirithoos,* a play sometimes attributed to Euripides, in a strikingly anachronistic context (fr. 597.4 N2): a noble nature (*physis*) is more dependable than the law (*nomos*). The former cannot be altered by a mere *logos,* but as for the law, a *rhêtôr* can twist it at will:

> ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω
> ῥήτωρ σπαράσσων πολλάκις λυμαίνεται.

51. We can trace the development of meanings in the fourth century quite clearly. Platon's usage shows how *rhêtorikê* can be kept separate from *rhêtôr* to avoid confusion. In *Gorgias, rhêtôr* always can be translated as "politician" or "public speaker," while references to *rhêtorikos* and *rhêtorikê* abound; see 455a3, 457a5, 468d2. Note 520a7, where *sophistês* and *rhêtôr* are contrasting terms. It does not make sense, therefore, to assume that, because *rhêtôr* means "politician" in fifth-century usage, the cognate terms such as *rhêtorikê* were not yet in existence.

arguments'' (*dissoi logoi*) for that date,[52] while the association of the ''double arguments'' with Protagoras and *Clouds* indicates strongly that they belong in the period of *Hekabe* as well.[53] Thus democratic leaders who are public speakers are associated with professional training in rhetoric at this early point in the play.

The characterization of Odysseus, which immediately follows, is in the same vein. Already in epic Odysseus is the master of speech, persuasion, and counsel.[54] Now his traditional wiliness (*poikilophrôn kopis*) is explicitly linked with demagoguery (*hêdulogos dêmocharistês*): the sons of Theseus have prepared the way for a dual vision of Odysseus, as mythological figure and as modern politician.[55] Odysseus is both judge and rhetorical opponent in Hekabe's first attempt at persuasion. He opens the scene briskly, advising Hekabe not to resist violently and to recognize her own powerlessness. But Hekabe is not inclined to yield. She responds, ''Alas, it seems that I am presented with a great contest (*agôn megas*), full of groans and not empty of tears.''[56]

She proceeds to attempt to persuade Odysseus to spare Polyxene, reminding him that he owes her *charis* for a favor in the past. The event, in which a disguised Odysseus was saved by Hekabe at Helene's intercession, is not a familiar tale;[57] but it places Odysseus in the past in a situation exactly symmetrical with that of Hekabe in the present. Odysseus, clad in rags and in the disguise of a blind cripple, was Hekabe's slave (δοῦλος ὢν ἐμὸς τότε, 249), dependent on her for his life. Blindness, the same handicap that Hekabe will later inflict on her enemy Polymestor, seems to make a strong male like Odysseus equivalent to Hekabe in weakness. Like Hekabe now, he was then ''lowly'' (*tapeinos*) in attitude; and he supplicated desperately for her help. Of course, if Odysseus was using the tricks of rhetoric on that occasion, then what Hekabe sees as a bond between the two was to Odysseus only part of a

52. *Antiope* was put on with *Phoinissai* in 410 (see the scholiast to *Frogs* 53 [276 Dübner]). Fr. 189 N2:

ἐκ παντὸς ἄν τις πράγματος δισσῶν λόγων
ἀγῶνα θεῖτ' ἄν, εἰ λέγειν εἴη σοφός

53. See the comments of O'Brien (1967, 75 n.47) on *Antiope* and on Protagoras.

54. See Detienne & Vernant (1974) on Odysseus as a model of craft (217–18); on his skill at *mêtis* (227).

55. See Buxton's discussion of this passage (1982, 172). The mock history of rhetoric naturally picked Odysseus as the first practitioner; see pp.4–5, fr. 4–9 Radermacher.

56. 229ff., *agôn* is naturally susceptible to interpretation as meaning simply ''suffering'' or, metaphorically, ''trial''; see Paley (1874, 531); but, given contexts already established in this play, the rhetorical implication cannot be suppressed.

57. In *Od.* 4.242ff., Hekabe did not appear; and Odysseus did not pretend blindness; see Abrahamson (1952, 124–25).

successful deception.[58] Hekabe, in blaming Odysseus for treachery, seems to confirm the link between her yielding and his verbal skill, since she begins by attacking the whole race of demagogues: ''You who seek political honors (*dêmêgorous timas*) are a thankless breed; I would not know you, who think nothing of harming your friends, if only you speak to please the many.''[59]

Hekabe's speech falls into two parts. First, she argues the merits of the case: Polyxene has done nothing to Achilleus or the Greeks for which she deserves death. The legal and moral part of the argument is carefully set off from the aspects of the plea that are intended to persuade by other means (271).[60] In the orators too the question of justice (*dikê* or *to dikaion*) is often bolstered by an appeal to the self-interest of the jurors.[61] But since it is to the speaker's advantage to confuse the motive of gain (*kerdos*) and that of *dikê* as much as possible, the kind of overt division that Hekabe makes here is unusual and has contradictory effects. In spite of the rhetorical elegance, the audience may be faintly disturbed by a division that leaves ethical issues in such a vulnerable position. Next, supplicating Odysseus as he once did her, Hekabe asks to have returned now the favor (*charis*) that she gave then, pointing to her annihilating misery and her dependence on Polyxene as her one support.

Hekabe's plea is eloquent and forceful, but it is not likely to be effective. At the opening and the close, when the speaker attempts to rise to a peak of pathos, her anger and her violent contempt for Odysseus break through her cajoling speech and rather spoil its effect.[62] She concludes with the sarcastic suggestion that he persuade the Greeks that it is ''a shame [*phthonos*] to kill women that you didn't kill at first, when you dragged them away from the altars.''[63] Even in her peroration, Hekabe's rage (recognized by Odysseus at

58. ''What did you say then, when you were my slave?'' she asks. And he responds, πολλῶν λόγων εὑρήμαθ', ὥστε μὴ θανεῖν, ''many verbal inventions, to avoid death'' (249–50).

59. μηδὲ γιγνώσκοισθ' ἐμοί (255), a somewhat unusual phrase. Tierney (1946) translates, ''Would you were unknown to me!'' Sheppard (1924) translates, ''May I not even know you!'' The latter points out that the offensive lines are phrased impersonally so as not to pose a direct affront to Odysseus. But the affront is clear enough; cf. *Il.* 9.312–13. Hekabe's reference to *philoi* is a moral standard of the aristocratic past—see Kovacs (1976, 37–39); Sheppard (1924) on line 606.

60. Noted by Buxton (1982, 175).

61. This usually occurs as part of the closing plea; see Lysias 7.30, 18.24, 19.61–62, 21.22.

62. Conacher (1961, 16–17) sees Hekabe as a ''brilliant'' and accomplished orator from the start. But her eloquence, like that of Medeia, is designed to sting her opponent, not to convince him (*Med* 473–74). See 251–57: Hekabe begins οὔκουν κακύνῃ, and proceeds to denounce the ''thankless breed'' (ἀχάριστον . . . σπέρμα) of politicians.

63. 288–90. Following H. Weil (1879, 234) editors have been content to agree with the scholiast, referring *phthonos* to ''the indignation (*nemesis*) which such impious murder would excite'' (Heberden [1901]; cf. Boella [1964]). I would see this as a racy colloquialism, built on the idiom οὐδεὶς φθόνος; see *Rep.* 5.476e5, *Timaios* 23d4, Aischylos *Prom.* 628. The scholiast

line 299) deforms her attempt to plead; her words are charged with a transparent and awkward malice: "Your reputation [*axiôma*], even if you speak ill, will persuade . . ."[64] Hekabe certainly does not suppose that Odysseus, whom she has repeatedly characterized as a practiced orator, will not speak well. Her sarcasm must be meant to imply that he has no reputation (*axiôma*) on which to rely.

Hekabe's inability to maintain an appropriate rhetorical mode in her appeal for pity is founded in her own sense of the falsity of that mode. In order to work, the appeal to justice and pity must assume a concern for these values in the audience, must indeed flatter the audience by presuming, and by making them believe, that they are themselves *dikaioi* and full of an *axiôma* that must be maintained by further good acts. Since Hekabe's experience of Odysseus and the Greeks indicates that he and they are lawless and cruel, her plea carries an inherent contradiction that she is not skillful enough to conceal or assimilate. Then too, Odysseus is not concerned to appear fair and just to Hekabe. Being only a slave, and an enemy slave at that, she has no leverage with a man whose value (*axiôma*) derives from his powers as a demagogue. Her appeal may be moving and effective for us, the audience; but its failure with Odysseus can hardly be surprising.

Odysseus' response we may take to be the epitome of a good and convincing argument. We have heard that he is a man of low morality and consummate verbal skill; what he says, therefore, will have less weight as showing his true thought, and more as indicating his way of arguing. And indeed his arguments are the same as those reported in the parodos. He begins with an apposite lesson in rhetorical technique: "Hekabe, be instructed (*didaskou*). Do not by being angered make one who speaks well hostile in mind."[65] When Odysseus advises Hekabe to learn, the inappropriateness of such advice to one of her years enhances its piquancy, and prepares for other, clearly thematic, references to learning and teaching. His claim to be willing

to Aristoph. *Ploutos* 87 (p. 329 Dübner) cites this passage as indicating that *phthonos* can mean *mempsis* (also, Eustath. *Od.* 1422.14). The οὐδεὶς φθόνος idiom, a colloquialism equivalent to "It's no problem" (see the modern Greek 'δὲν πειράζει), gives rise to its obverse, which has a tone of heavy sarcasm. The rest of what Hekabe says is certainly meant to be insulting. The implication that Greeks are in the habit of killing or dragging away refugees at altars picks up the death of Priamos (*Hek* 23–24) and the rape of Kassandra.

64. 293: τὸ δ' ἀξίωμα, κἂν κακῶς λέγεις, τὸ σὸν / πείσει. The text is doubtful; but the reading λέγει does not materially change the interpretation, unless (as in Sheppard [1924]) the verb is treated as a passive. Editors rather perversely translate, "Even if you seem to speak in a bad cause," or "even if you say unpleasant things," (Boella [1964]). But the sense of the line is quite plain; cf. Ennius (fr. 84 Jocelyn and nn. 307–8)—haec tu etsi perverse dices; and Helene's apology, *Tro* 914.

65. 299–300. Τὸν εὖ λέγοντα is ambivalent, presumably between "having rhetorical talent" and "one who speaks well to you."

to save Hekabe's life is in no way indicative of his sincerity,[66] although it correlates with other offers made to Hekabe and with her own statements about her prospects. Odysseus' reason for supporting human sacrifice is public and patriotic: *charis* owed to Achilleus, unlike that owed to Hekabe, has concrete political significance, since the Greek nation cannot subsist without public confidence that public service will be rewarded.[67] The issue of whether the *charis* requested in this instance is appropriate or not never comes up in Odysseus' formulation. For him, all questions of values are to be measured only in public terms.

Having disposed of the merits of the case, Odysseus briskly passes on to Hekabe's appeal to the emotions. "If you say that your sufferings are pitiable, hear this reply. We have on our side no less wretched old gray crones,[68] even older than you—and brides bereaved of the best of grooms, whose bodies this Trojan dust hides." For Odysseus, when Greek suffering is juxtaposed with Trojan suffering, the former alone is worthy of consideration. Further, unlike all other speakers, who profess pity at Hekabe's sufferings, Odysseus is unmoved. He finds her appeal hackneyed: as his brutal language suggests, old and wretched women are nothing new.

He ends with a retort that underlines the pro-Hellenic bias of his speech: unlike Greeks, barbarians do not honor those who have died well. They deserve misfortune, therefore, as the Greeks deserve success. This is a shallow and unconvincing argument, but it cannot altogether lack appeal.[69] As in Iason's arguments against Medeia, weak rationalizing by an unsympathetic character is propped up with Hellenic chauvinism. The hearers feel a reflexive desire to agree, while at the same time they sense the rage of Hekabe and Medeia at these maddeningly unfair and frivolous exercises in

66. Abrahamson (1952, 123) points out that Odysseus is "a master at specious reasoning." For a kinder view, see Sheppard (1924), who cites line 395; and Kovacs (1976, 39ff.). But, after what we have been told about Odysseus, such perfunctory regrets are unlikely to change our view of him. When Adkins (1966.1, 198) argues that fifth-century Greeks would have had no basis for condemning a human sacrifice unless somebody could argue that it was *aischron*, he confuses complex moral issues with the limitations of moral terminology. Stylistic reasons do mute Hekabe's attack on the sacrifice; for a way in which *aischron* can be attached to such a death, see *Tro* 1191.

67. 310–11:

> θανὼν ὑπὲρ γῆς Ἑλλάδος κάλλιστ' ἀνήρ
> οὔκουν τόδ' αἰσχρόν . . .

Note the contrast between the noble (*kalon*) and shameful (*aischron*), an important theme for the play.

68. 322–23: ἄθλιαι / γραῖαι γυναῖκες, suggests *graus*, a mild term of contempt in Plutarchos' anecdote about Perikles and Elpinike, *Per.* 10.

69. See the comment of Tierney (1946, 64): Odysseus shows a Sophistic "skill in representing as a token of higher civilization what was in fact a savage crime."

casuistry. In this case it cannot be easy for the audience to set aside sympathy with a character in whose suffering they will by this point have made a substantial emotional investment. One clear impression, however, must emerge: Hekabe is hopelessly far from having any effective means of persuading the Greeks or reaching a ground of common interest with them. Her case is desperate indeed.

The second *agôn* is preceded by a brief scene that presents the climactic event for the sake of which the complex plot was designed. Hekabe, who has just heard of Polyxene's death and intends to bury the body herself, sees that the maidservant is carrying a body and assumes it to be that of Polyxene (671). The woman had in fact been sent to the seashore to get water for cleansing Polyxene's body (609–10); but Hekabe's confusion is believable, and the audience will have corresponding difficulty in remembering where she had sent the servant. As Hekabe bends over the body and removes its covering, the grief that she has already learned to bear is replaced by a new, unforeseen, and climactic bereavement. The moment oddly resembles the tricking of Aigisthos in Sophokles' *Elektra*, and both plays are probably drawing upon the same traditional material. The Sophoclean version uses the scene type in a more natural way: Orestes in his vengeance on his enemy wants Aigisthos' experience of his *peripeteia* to be *pikron*, sharp and bitter. But the maidservant has no motivation to torture Hekabe, and the irony in what she says expresses only the bitterness of her own grief.[70] The cruelty of the *Hekabe* scene is generated by the structure of the play, which has been engineered for this moment of supreme coincidence.

Hekabe's violent reaction to this torment is appropriately expressed in lyric; and, as in the first scene, the close of the lyric finds her again confronting a verbal contest (*agôn logôn*), with a second Greek lord to persuade. She wants Agamemnon's help in revenging herself against Polymestor, the murderer of Polydoros. Because he is already connected to her through his love for Kassandra, Agamemnon is an easier subject than Odysseus; but Hekabe does not embark on this second attempt at persuasion with the vigor and impetuosity that she displayed in the first. There, in spite of Odysseus' dissuasion, she threw herself into the struggle without hesitation. Here, although Agamemnon expresses concern, she turns aside from him and debates with herself her prospects for success (736ff.). The social awkwardness of the moment emphasizes the new role of calculation and strategy in Hekabe's actions;[71] but at the end, she decides once again in favor of

70. Hekabe replies with equal irony (670); for a different interpretation, see Tierney (1946).

71. Orban (1970, 329) suggests that Hekabe "a trop souffert pour être responsable"; in support, see Sheppard (1924, 75). Boella, however, points out the coldness and clarity that Hekabe displays (1964, xiii) in the second part of the play.

activism, remarking with a determination that we now see to be characteristic, "I must dare it, whether I win or not."[72] Agamemnon is struck by Hekabe's misery and the enormity of Polymestor's crime; and indeed even the cynical Odysseus could not now dismiss her suffering as common or easily surpassed. But the sympathy of her hearer and the extremity of her plight are not themselves sufficient to win Hekabe's case. She will not persuade even Agamemnon without changing her whole approach to persuasion.

Hekabe begins in the same way as she began her original plea to Odysseus, with an argument according to moral principles.[73] She lists the various circumstances that make the crime more heinous: Polymestor was a host (*xenos*), he killed the boy deliberately, and he did not bury the body but cast it into the sea. "We may be slaves and weak," she cries, "but the gods and the law [*nomos*] that rules them are strong. For it is by custom [*nomos*] that we believe in the gods and that we distinguish just from unjust in our lives."[74] In contrast to other Euripidean plays, *Hekabe* does not make use of gods as agents in the action: no divinity will emerge at the end to set the myth into perspective. Hekabe herself seems to be a modernist in religion; and her formulation leaves it open that the gods may be, as contemporary thinkers hinted, a product of social convention.[75] But Hekabe still leans strongly on the conventional standards of right and wrong; according to these standards, Polymestor has performed an action of egregious evil that demands punishment.

The appeal to morality is followed by Hekabe's strongest appeal to pathos.

72. 751: τολμᾶν ἀνάγκη κἂν τύχω κἂν μὴ τύχω.

73. Cf. line 271.

74. 799–801:

> ἀλλ' οἱ θεοὶ σθένουσι χὠ κείνων κρατῶν
> νόμος· νόμῳ γὰρ τοὺς θεοὺς ἡγούμεθα
> καὶ ζῶμεν ἄδικα καὶ δίκαι' ὡρισμένοι.

Lanza (1963, 416–22) discusses this passage at length, showing its links to other fifth-century formulations about the concept of *nomos*. In attempting to explicate this passage, however, he assumes, as I would not, that a uniform concept of *nomos* will emerge from comparing various passages in the play.

75. The passage plays upon the phrase *hêgeisthai theous* (more commonly, *nomizein theous*, to believe in/worship gods) to imply a link between *nomos* and the gods. H. Weil (1879, 268) complains that "Euripide n'a pas assez distingué ici l'existence réelle des dieux et leur existence dans la pensée des hommes." The failure to be clear is intended. Boella (1964) suggests that the passage may mean that the idea of justice creates the necessity for gods to exist. This is somewhat persuasive, but as in the case of other glorifications of *nomos*, the implications for our belief in the gods are not good. See Massimi (1960, 46) and Tierney (1946, on line 800ff.) on these contradictions and ambiguities. Vernant, discussing the traditional value system around *dikê* and *nomos*, remarks that we confront "un univers de valeurs ambiguës, où rien jamais n'est stable ni univoque" (1968, 248).

Agamemnon is to "stand aside like an artist and contemplate the evils that I suffer."[76] In the reversal of her previous prosperity, Hekabe is truly "the most wretched of mortals" (811). Her invitation to Agamemnon to contemplate the picture she presents points to Hekabe's confidence that, just as her ethical argument (according to *to dikaion,* 271) is extremely strong, so her appeal to pity is extreme. Hekabe is virtually a test example of unjust suffering: and, if the appeal to justice and sympathy can ever work, it must be in this case. The audience, too, who have seen the arbitrarily cruel workings of Hekabe's torment, may mentally step aside at this point and contemplate Hekabe with equal degrees of pity and detachment. It is a very Euripidean moment.

But the plea does not work. Hekabe notices that Agamemnon betrays by his physical gesture, turning aside from her (812), that he is unmoved and unwon. "It seems I will accomplish nothing, poor wretch that I am," she cries. At this point occurs another of those moments of significant inconsequence that are a common device of Euripidean drama. Hekabe, contemplating her apparent failure, wonders why people are reluctant to acquire the all-important art of persuasion (*peithô*). "Why do we mortals then toil at other lessons [*mathêmata*] and practice them as we ought; but persuasion, who alone is tyrant among humans, we still do not pursue effectively, paying money [*misthous didontes*] to learn [*manthanein*] . . ." The appearance of so many terms from the contemporary debate about the new art of rhetoric suggests an explicit analogy between Hekabe's situation and contemporary life.[77] As in the previous references to *physis* and *trophê*, the anachronism enlarges the significance of what Hekabe says beyond whatever meaning it

76. 807–8:

> οἴκτιρον ἡμᾶς, ὡς γραφεύς τ' ἀποσταθεὶς
> ἰδοῦ με κἀνάθρησον οἷ' ἔχω κακά.

Murray's proposal to emend *grapheus* (painter) in line 807 to *brabeus* (judge, referee) is not persuasive. Platon's usage provides evidence for the change from the ambiguous *grapheus* (which could also mean writer) to the unambiguous *zôgraphos*. (*Grapheus* is used in *Rep.* 377e2, in conjunction with *graphein;* see 601c11. But *zôgraphos* is used just above, probably because we are not to think of a craftsman painting *on* the leather reins.) It is true that analogies with fine arts are rare, but *Hekabe* in particular is rich in them (see line 560, and perhaps 786, if we are to think of a personified figure of cosmic misrule). Hekabe's status as a typical and exemplary figure of misery has been mentioned already. The word used for gazing or contemplation (ἀναθρέω) is so rare as hardly to possess a context; it is used once in Thukydides (4.87.1) for close contemplation. It may, of course, be a technical term from painting; but we have no way of knowing.

77. Key terms such as *misthos* (pay, salary) suggest the common reproach of commercialism directed at the Sophists; see Boella (1964, 97), H. Weil (1879, 269), Avery (1982, 153). For *peithô*, see Platon, *Gorgias* 453a2. For *mathêma* (cf. *manthanein*), see Tierney (1946, on line 814) who suggests the Sophists may have been the first to use this term. For *spoudazein*, see discussion below. Further comments by Benedetto (1971.1, 88–89).

could hold for her own dramatic character. Ostensibly, she merely underlines her own lack of persuasive skills; but people who are paid to teach persuasion do not appear inside the world of myth, and therefore what Hekabe describes cannot serve to distinguish her from practiced speakers like Odysseus. Rather, her speculations about the value of training in *peithô* can have only a vague and prophetic significance, introducing the fifth-century future as something dreamed about in the mythological past and encouraging the audience to make the connection with their contemporary world.[78]

After this preface, Hekabe describes her second attempt at persuasion with an openness typical of fifth-century rhetoric. "Perhaps it is an empty aspect of my argument to mention sex—yet still it will be said." The terms she uses to make her argument are equally frank, even vulgar: "My child sleeps against your ribs. . . . How will you show [your appreciation for] those dear nights, my lord; or what favor [*charis*] for intimate embraces in bed will my child have of you, and I of her?"[79] The role that Hekabe assumes here is quite plain: without really having done anything to deserve it, she is taking to herself the status of pimp.[80] Sexual services should win something for the daughter, and something too for the woman who bore her. Even among the tribe of "poor old women" (ἄθλιαι / γραῖαι γυναῖκες) there are few who sink to a more despised status than Hekabe does here.

Hekabe goes on to argue that "From darkness and the charms of night comes the greatest *charis* for mortals."[81] The argument suggests the *Helene* of Gorgias, where, defending the most beautiful of women against offended sexual morality, the rhetorician likened the charm of the *logos* to that of *erôs* itself, assimilating both to enchantments (*philtra*) and potions (*pharmaka*)

78. On anachronism in Euripides see Reckford (1968, 340). Boella (1964, xiv) complains that these passages disturb the coherency of Hekabe's character; and Tierney (1946, 59) cites the scholiast to line 254 (p. 281 Dindorf): καὶ ἔστι τοιοῦτος ὁ Εὐριπίδης περιάπτων τὰ καθ' ἑαυτὸν τοῖς ἥρωσι καὶ τοὺς χρόνους συγχέων. See also on *Orestes*, Fuqua (1978, 9 n.23), and Fresco (1976, 109).

79. 828–30:

> ποῦ τὰς φίλας δῆτ' εὐφρόνας δείξεις, ἄναξ,
> ἢ τῶν ἐν εὐνῇ φιλτάτων ἀσπασμάτων
> χάριν τίν' ἕξει παῖς ἐμή, κείνης δ' ἐγώ

For the language, see H. Weil (1879, 269), who deplores Euripides' lack of "délicatesse de sentiment"; Casa (1962, 67–68) points out that the lines were amended in Ennius' version (fr. 90 Jocelyn); see also the traces of ancient critique in the scholiast to *Aias* 520 (p. 234 Elmsley), comparing Tekmessa's modesty and restraint: μαστροπικώτατα εἰσάγει τὴν Ἑκάβην λέγουσαν.

80. See Conacher (1967, 162; 1961, 23); Luschnig (1975–76, 232); Kirkwood (1947, 67).

81. Lines 831–32 have been unjustly suspected; see the note in Daitz's edn. (1973). Tierney (1946, 101) points out that the connection between *Erôs* and *Peithô* is a traditional one. See the detailed presentation of evidence from a variety of sources in Buxton (1982, 32–34, 38–39).

that intoxicate the mind and body.[82] The kind of rhetorical and erotic *charis* that Hekabe is now invoking, unlike that which she attempted to invoke earlier with Odysseus, is based not on a fair exchange of honorable service but upon the ability of sexual appeal to overmaster other considerations.[83] Immediately after, Hekabe moves to a daring and fallacious argument that will give Agamemnon a rationale, however meretricious, for assisting the dead Polydoros. "Do you see that dead man there? In helping him you will be helping a marriage relation [*kêdestês*] of yours." In no real sense is Hekabe or her son a relative by marriage (*kêdestês*) of Agamemnon's; the relation is quite another, and less honorable, one. Only the dazzling effect of erotic *charis* could make such a bizarre argument effective.[84]

Having made her most telling point, Hekabe states her intention to close, remarking, "My speech lacks one thing yet." This will presumably be the ending summary, which in conventional rhetorical style would recapitulate the speaker's arguments and conclusions. But the final plea is preceded by a formal introduction of its own that is astonishingly grotesque. "If there were a voice in my arms, hands, hair, and sole of foot, whether [contrived] by the arts of Daidalos or some god, all in unison would cling to your knees wailing and conjuring you with all sorts of arguments."[85] It might just be possible to tolerate the bizarreness of Hekabe's speaking anatomy, and to repress the picture of an eloquent foot embracing Agamemnon's knee, if the reference to Daidalos' arts did not suggest some actual grotesque realization of what otherwise could be mere wordplay.[86]

82. For these arguments in Gorgias, see Segal (1962, 104–05; 1982, 309ff.). On *pharmaka* and poetry, see also Pucci (1980, 25ff., etc.). The passages in Gorgias are *Helene* DK 2:82 fr. 11B 8–10 and 14.

83. *Charis* (variously translated as "favor," "charm," or "grace") has close attachments to sexual pleasure; see the analysis of Latacz (1966, 87), and Buxton (1982, 179).

84. For the sophistry of this argument, see Boella (1964, 99) and Conacher (1967, 162). The *kêdestês* takes part in a social relation whereby men exchange women; slaves taken in war are not given by their male relatives, who have been killed by the conquerors. Cf. the ode following this scene, and App. C.

85. 836–40:

εἴ μοι γένοιτο φθόγγος ἐν βραχίοσι
καὶ χερσὶ καὶ κόμαισι καὶ ποδῶν βάσει
ἢ Δαιδάλου τέχναισιν ἢ θεῶν τινος
ὡς πάνθ᾽ ὁμαρτῇ σῶν ἔχοιντο γουνάτων
κλαίοντ᾽, ἐπισκήπτοντα παντοίους λόγους.

Several editors mention the moving statues of Daidalos, e.g. H. Weil (1879, 270). If it is true that this particular feat of the technician would occur to the audience, we could see this passage as another oblique allusion to visual art.

86. For bathos, see comments on line 570 below. Tierney (1946, 103) remarks that "there is a certain exaggeration, not free from frigidity," in the passage.

This grossly bathetic language, in its ugliness and in its repellent flattery, provides a dissonant aesthetic effect that matches the moral bad taste of Hekabe's invocation of erotic *charis*.[87] The passage links the sometimes extravagant and forced style of early rhetoric to the moral contradictions in its methods of persuasion, and it drives both to extremes. The theme of physical decorum is raised also by the strange physicality of the image: to the conventions of moral, verbal, and physical behavior, *Hekabe* continually opposes a grotesqueness that is the appropriate expression of an inverted cultural tradition.

Hekabe closes on a moral argument, but its effect is tarnished by what preceded; and this final plea is appropriately introduced by a servile address to Agamemnon as "O master, o greatest light to all the Greeks" (841). The chorus' comment has ironic significance: they remark that laws define (*nomoi diôrisan*) necessity for mortals, so that friends become enemies and enemies, friends.[88] The phrase in Greek recalls Hekabe's earlier appeal to morality and the *nomoi*, but the ambiguities there inherent between *nomos* as humanly devised convention and *nomos* as source of dependable traditional standards have disappeared.[89] In this new formulation *nomos* has become only the arbitrary play of convention, constantly shifting and thus offering no fixed guide to morality.

Agamemnon's response lays out the problem of public and private in clear terms. It was apparent earlier that the Greeks had seen the death of Polyxene as necessary to maintain their social obligations to each other. Similarly, the vengeance of Hekabe against Polymestor will go contrary to Greek public policy, because Polydoros is an enemy (*echthros*) to them, while Polymestor is considered a friend (*philos*, 858–59). If Hekabe cares for Polydoros, that has no public significance (χωρὶς τοῦτο κοὐ κοινὸν στρατῷ); only as a private (and corrupt) *philos* can Agamemnon pursue Hekabe's interest. She responds with a general statement that again touches major themes of the play. The meaning of such concepts as "enslaved" (*doulos*) and "free" (*eleutheros*) has already been explored in the case of Polyxene, who died because she could not bear to have the name of "slave" (*doulê*), and who was concerned even in her last moments to die "free." Hekabe, by contrast,

87. It would be worth much to know whether Euripides is more directly alluding to inept use of figures of speech by early rhetors. The evidence is scanty, mostly limited to a few outré or poetic epithets; see Aristoteles, *Rhet.* 1405b35ff.

88. While line 800ff. is ambiguous, line 846ff. has been more often recognized as straightforwardly Sophistic; see Boella (1964, 100–1).

89. Kirkwood (1947) argued that Polyxene's death was an act in accordance with *nomos;* but this raises the question of the validity of *nomos* as an absolute standard all over again. On this, see Abrahamson (1952, 123–24 n.10), who points out that Odysseus' case could be presented much more powerfully than it is.

has been offered her freedom by Agamemnon (755) and has rejected it in favor of revenge. She argues here that "no mortal is free," since we are all at the disposal of one or the other outside force, whether that force is fate, or the vagaries of the mob (*ochlos*), or the ordinances of the laws (864–67).

Such a viewpoint fits the dramatic character of Hekabe, who has no experience of any middle ground between despotic power and slavery.[90] But what Hekabe says could also serve as an indictment of the kind of public policy that—in Polyxene's case—could demand, for the best of public reasons, the worst of deeds. The play, of course, takes no stand vis-à-vis democracy and the rule of the *ochlos;* instead, it uses this theme to mark a contrast between world views. Polyxene, who is the most devoted to the aristocratic standard of honor, also brings out the best in the Greek mob; Hekabe, whose view is more cynical, sees the relation between the politician (*dêmêgoros*) and the multitude (*plêthos*) as that between slave and master, manipulator and manipulated. The techniques of rhetoric that she embraces are used appropriately to manipulate Agamemnon, as Odysseus would use them to manipulate his master, the *ochlos*. This scene marks a turning point for Hekabe, just as the horrific discovery that precedes the scene marks a turning point in the plot. That the intensity of Hekabe's suffering should be reflected in a correspondingly intense drive to revenge will have been obvious to the audience through social and artistic convention,[91] and only the end point of the psychological process is permitted to appear.[92] When Hekabe firmly rejects even her freedom in favor of vengeance,[93] we realize that the play has created a situation in which a human being is given the very strongest reason imaginable to persuade and win over another; and, as Hekabe herself points out, this is what rhetorical training is made for.

The theme of the *ochlos* serves also to bridge a necessary gap in the play's structure. Rhetoric typically is exercised before *ochloi* and *plêthê*;[94] but Hekabe, because of the limitations of the drama, must exercise it on

90. See Kovacs (1976, 37ff.).

91. On revenge as a social convention, see Adkins (1960, 55); Meridor (1978, 28–32); Paley (1874, 515). As Adkins points out, the social values of the Greeks made revenge a virtual necessity for an individual who had suffered a loss of *timê*. Hekabe's need for revenge is obvious; but the audience must be reassured that, through her dream, she is able to identify Polymestor as the murderer.

92. Kirkwood (1947, 62) argued that the lack of psychological development indicates that the resolution to revenge is formed during the scene with Agamemnon. But he must ignore the significance of line 756 and make a false distinction between revenge through Agamemnon and revenge carried out by Hekabe herself.

93. She replies to Agamemnon's offer of freedom, "Not at all" (οὐ δῆτα, 756), a very firm refusal. See Boella (1964, 90).

94. For the relation of oratory to the *ochlos*, see Gorgias, *Helene* DK 2:82 fr. 11B.13, and remarks of Segal (1962, 108–9); and *Hipp* 986; *Or* 612, 871.

individuals. Emphasis on the *ochlos* reinjects into Hekabe's impromptu discovery of the arts of *peithô* the political elements that would otherwise necessarily be absent. The system of meanings that belonged to rhetoric as a cultural phenomenon is retained, with a slight realignment. Like the rhetoricians' pupils Hekabe is an aristocrat who despises the crowd. That the apprentice rhetor is a poor, widowed, and bereaved barbarian woman adds piquancy to the exercise but does not falsify it: Hekabe's plight and situation are precisely those best calculated to arouse pity in her audience and to provide an opening (*aphormê*) for the appeal to sympathy.[95] The play's design, with its arbitrary conjunction of random stresses, is on the aesthetic plane an indication of calculated artifice. The result of the experiment is a strong and convincing proof that success in rhetoric does not derive from appeals to pity, fairness, or moral standards.

Hekabe's third *agôn* is no contest at all, since the results are assured by the patronage of Agamemnon, already gained in the second. But dramatic trials, from *Eumenides* to *The Merchant of Venice*, are not less effective or significant for being rigged. It would be as impossible for Hekabe to lose her third *agôn* as it would have been impossible for her to persuade Odysseus in the first; but each scene is well suited to display respectively the components of rhetorical failure and success. This time it is Polymestor who makes an appeal for pity. His approach is naive and straightforward, since he assumes Agamemnon's goodwill. While Polymestor does explain the murder of Polydoros, much as Odysseus did Polyxene's sacrifice, on grounds of a rather far-fetched realpolitik, his proclaimed motivation, that he killed the boy because he feared that a resurgent Troy would cause his people to suffer from a second Greek invasion (1138–44), is hardly calculated to flatter his audience. The rest of the speech, which relates Polymestor's sufferings at the hands of Hekabe and her friends, is couched in a tone of naive pathos.[96] The failure of such appeals in earlier scenes will lead the audience to expect his rejection, and they will not be confused by any strong sympathies for this speaker.

95. Appeals to sympathy were the specialty of one of the most innovative rhetoricians of the day, Thrasymachos of Chalkedon; see DK 2:85 fr. 6B. That he was known at the time of *Hekabe* is indicated by the reference in the *Daitaleis* of Aristophanes, in 427; see DK fr. 4A. On Thrasymachos' style, see Gotoff (1980). For Hekabe's suitability as a figure of pity, see Aristoteles, *Rhet.* 1386a6ff.: sufferings due to *tychê* provoke pity, because the sufferer is guiltless (*anaitios*). Also, 8ff., αἰκίαι σωμάτων καὶ κακώσεις καὶ γῆρας καὶ νόσοι . . . ὀλιγοφιλία (διὸ καὶ τὸ διασπᾶσθαι ἀπὸ φίλων καὶ συνήθων ἐλεινόν) . . .

96. Note that on the plane of dramatic economy the speech functions as the missing messenger's account of the revenge. An interesting touch is Polymestor's use of the interjection πῶς δοκεῖς (1160). H. Weil (1879, 38, on *Hipp* 446) calls it "parenthèse vive et familière"; see Tierney (1946). At this moment of supposedly pathetic reversal, it injects a jarring, faintly comic note— "And then—guess what!" See Stevens (1976, 39) on this colloquialism.

Hekabe begins her reply with another strong and highly significant piece of inconsequence. Like other references to rhetoric and persuasion, this passage acquires meaning precisely from its failure to mesh entirely with its immediate function in the play. Hekabe deplores the predominance of speech (*glôssa*) over reality (*pragmata*). To good deeds should correspond good *logoi;* to bad deeds, weak (*sathroi*) *logoi.*[97] There is no immediate application to her opponent, since Polymestor has not made any overt display of rhetorical method or any allusions to these techniques.[98] We must therefore see the reference of the passage in a broader context, in its application to Hekabe's continuing progress in the use of argument and persuasion. Introductions in which speakers state their difficulties in making an adequate presentation are a routine feature of fifth-century rhetoric and present an interesting instance of that art's propensity to self-exposure. Often the dangerous and specious skills of the adversary are deprecated, and frequently the speaker apologizes for his own lack of training.[99] What Hekabe says is founded in the paradox of a discipline that parades its skill in deception, while attempting to build arguments through the manipulation of moral themes.

Hekabe ends with a curse on learned or clever people (*sophoi*): all have ended badly and none has ever escaped. If the opening of the gnomic introduction is conventional, its close is not. The strange curse has loud reverberations of tragic irony,[100] since the speaker herself has become adept in the technique of saying bad things well.[101] Her denunciation of these professionals (οἱ τάδ' ἠκριβωκότες) exposes the self-destructive principles of contemporary rhetoric, while it reveals Hekabe's own moral vulnerability.

With her usual precision, Hekabe marks off this excursus as an introduction (*phroimion*) to her main *logos,* before passing on to the main argument. This argument is a reply to Polymestor's implied—though not really effectively presented—argument that he killed Polydoros as a service to the Greeks (1175–76). She argues that there can be no relation of *philia*

97. For the history of the very old opposition between reality and language, see Heinimann (1945, 42ff.).

98. Buxton (1982, 181) remarks that Polymestor is "not sophisticated"; cf. Tierney (1946, on lines 1132 and 1187ff.).

99. For a naive presentation of the paradox, see Antiphon 5.3–5. The speaker in Lysias 25.2 suggests that his opponents are either *adynatoi legein* or else liars. In Isaios 10.1, the opponents are bold liars who are *legein deinoi.* Lysian speakers very often apologize for inexperience, e.g., 12.3, 17.1, 19.1–2, 23.1. Cf. the opening of Polyneikes in *Phoin* 469–72, which also has a reference to rhetoric and *pharmaka.*

100. See Conacher (1967, 164; 1961, 25).

101. "To say unjust things well [τἄδικ' εὖ λέγειν]" (1191) is precisely the trick that Protagoras and others were accused of teaching; see North (1981, 243–44). The watchword of *Clouds* (882–84) is attached to Protagoras by Aristoteles, *Rhet.* 1402a24–28.

between barbarian and Greek and follows up with words that copy and distort her opponent's. "What favor [*charis*] were you pursuing in making these helpful efforts—was it that you hoped to be a marriage relation (*kêdestês*), or as a relative (*suggenês*)?"[102] The scornful questions apply with better force to the arguments of Hekabe in the second *agôn* than they do to any made by Polymestor.[103] Although she demolishes what she built then, Agamemnon's complicity has already been assured; and like any Sophist Hekabe keeps her contradicting *logoi* separate. She presents a persuasive motivation for Polymestor's acts: the argument that he killed the boy out of loyalty to the Greeks can be dismissed, since he did not act while they were still prosecuting the conflict and in need of money (1218ff.). While Hekabe denies Polymestor his attempt to make common cause with the Greeks, his allies, she herself pretends sympathy for the invaders of her country, who were "poverty-stricken and long estranged from their native land" (1220–21). Hekabe's emotions no longer prevent her, as they did in the first *agôn,* from appealing effectively to her audience; her hypocrisy is perfect.

The play has demonstrated that in the Greek view moral norms have no force as long as political goals are in question. It is thus only after her argument has cut the links of common interest between Polymestor and the Greeks that Hekabe is free to return to the question of values. Polymestor's present sufferings, she points out, are a proof that by seeking unjust gain and betraying friends one may lose everything. In closing she warns Agamemnon that if he supports Polymestor, "We will say that you enjoy vile men as being such yourself—but I won't insult my masters" (1236–37). The aposiopesis combines forcefulness with servility; but the latter is effective, while the former is otiose, since Agamemnon is already on Hekabe's side. The chorus close the *agôn* by a return to the theme of Hekabe's opening, as they piously remark that (morally) good content (*ta chrêsta pragmata*) always gives one material (*aphormas*) for *chrêstoi logoi.* Their lines stress once more the rhetorical nature of the contest between the two speakers. In relation to Hekabe's speech the significance is inverted and ironic. Good content was never enough to win Hekabe's arguments in the past; and her new techniques produce success that is independent of the quality of the material.

102. 1201–2: τίνα δὲ καὶ σπεύδων χάριν / πρόθυμος ἦσθα πότερα κηδεύσων τινὰ / ἢ συγγενὴς ὤν, ἢ τίν' αἰτίαν ἔχων Cf. line 1175, τοιάδε σπεύδων χάριν.

103. In Adkins' singular interpretation (1966.1, 203–7) Agamemnon was unaffected by Hekabe's pleas then (he "ignores this part of her speech" and thus "tacitly rejects" it) and is persuaded only now by this argument that Polymestor is not really a *philos* because he kept the gold for himself not the Greeks. Adkins admits that such a concept of *philia* as defined by or canceled by motivation does not fit his own models.

IV. Polyxene's Death Scene

The rhetorical education of Hekabe is now complete. We have yet to consider the revenge that she accomplishes and its effect on the shape and texture of the play. But first the themes and subjects developed in the series of agonal encounters must be reassessed in the light of the remarkable scene in which Polyxene's death is reported. As I stated earlier, that scene stands out as the only point of rest in an extraordinarily fast-moving and tense play. The scene sets up a model, the heroic end of Hekabe's daughter, by which we gain perspective on Hekabe's contrasting experience and sufferings.

Talthybios, who brings the news of Polyxene's death, is not brisk and hardhearted like Odysseus. He pauses first, struck with pity at the sight of Hekabe, wrapped in her robes and groveling on the ground. He then urges her to get up and to hear his story about Polyxene's death. Hekabe wonders whether the Greeks killed the girl decently (*aidoumenoi*) or dreadfully (πρὸς τὸ δεινὸν ἤλθεθ'), as killing one hated (*echthran*) (516). Talthybios partly answers the query by saying that Hekabe forces him "to gain double tears in pity at your child," since he wept to see her death and must now weep again to tell it.[104] The tale then will be not dreadful (*deinon*), but pitiful (*oiktron*); and we are prepared for the moving and even sentimental content of the speech to follow.

Polyxene's death occurred in a great assembly of all the Greeks, as of course it should have, given the reasons of state adduced by Odysseus for the sacrifice. We have noted the theme of the "crowd" (*ochlos*) in the references to oratory. Talthybios characterizes the assembled host as an *ochlos*, first in the first line of his narrative: "The whole mob of the Greek host was present in full numbers before the tomb for the sacrifice of your daughter."[105] Talthybios is told to quiet the host; and he boasts that, by bawling out, "Be quiet, silence!" several times he "made the mob still."[106] The repetition of *ochlos*, like the rather otiose detail given to the Herald's activities, has its significance, since the presence of the crowd is crucial to the death scene.

The setting of the sacrifice is familiar from the *Agamemnon* parodos: chosen youths (525) stand ready to hold up the victim, while the son of Achilleus officiates with libations to the shade of his father. But, as the sign is given to seize the victim and lift her up, Polyxene, abandoning her passive role, speaks out: "O Greeks who sacked my city, I die willingly. Let no one touch my body for I will offer my neck bravely. That I may die free, in the gods' name, let me loose before you kill me. Among the dead I am ashamed to be called slave, who am a queen."[107]

Polyxene showed in the first scene a horror of slavery; after listing its humiliations, ending with that of marriage to an inferior, the girl had said, "No! I let go this light from eyes that are free,[108] offering my body to Hades." The last ambiguous phrase suggests that Polyxene prefers to "wed death" rather than accept a low-born mate,[109] a suggestion that reflects back on her earlier statement that slavery makes her feel a longing for death (*thanein eran*, 358). Her wish to die with dignity matches her rejection of slavery and her concern that Hekabe should avoid an unseemly struggle with Odysseus (408). Just as Hekabe, by her physical gestures, shows her abjection and helplessness, as well as her desperate willingness to struggle on when hope is gone, so Polyxene's concern for physical dignity expresses her valuation of herself, her *axiôma* we might say, to use the term that Hekabe applies sarcastically to Odysseus.[110]

104. 518–19:

> διπλᾶ με χρῄζεις δάκρυα κερδᾶναι, γύναι,
> σῆς παιδὸς οἴκτῳ.

Pucci (1980) used this line as the basis for an interpretation of *Medeia*. Although his work seems to me to rely too heavily on cross-references between plays, P. explores an interesting semantic vein that is also used with considerable subtlety in this play. In this case the use of the term "gain" (κερδᾶναι) is specially appropriate to the Polyxene narrative, with its invitation to indulge in a grief whose sharpness will be blurred by sentimental glamour. Our response to Hekabe herself, however, will also play upon our pleasure and lack of pleasure in contemplating her grief; cf. discussion of line 807ff., above.

105. 521. *Ochlos* is related to *plêthos* as English "mob" is to, e.g., "mass" or "multitude." See LSJ s.v. *ochlos*, I.2.

106. 533. "Still [Νήνεμος]" is "windless," a strong metaphor. See Boella (1964, 67): νήνεμος "presuppone 'inquietudine, agitazione.'" The multitude could, like the sea, be stirred up easily to violent action; see a reversal of this motif in *Aeneid* 1.148–53.

107. 547–52:

> Ὦ τὴν ἐμὴν πέρσαντες Ἀργεῖοι πόλιν,
> ἑκοῦσα θνῄσκω· μή τις ἅψηται χροὸς
> τοὐμοῦ· παρέξω γὰρ δέρην εὐκαρδίως.
> ἐλευθέραν δέ μ', ὡς ἐλευθέρα θάνω,
> πρὸς θεῶν μεθέντες κτείνατ'· ἐν νεκροῖσι γὰρ
> δούλη κεκλῆσθαι βασιλὶς οὖσ' αἰσχύνομαι.

108. ἀφίημ' ὀμμάτων ἐλευθέρων φέγγος τόδε (367–68). I accept the reading of Blomfield; but reading ἐλεύθερον with the manuscripts would leave the meaning essentially unchanged.

109. Ἅιδῃ προστιθεῖσ' ἐμὸν δέμας. Literally, "putting my body next to Hades." The word *prostithêmi* is often used for marriage and adoption relations; see Hdt. 6.126.2. For Euripides, see *IA* 540, a similar context, and *Ion* 1545, of adoption. Hadley (1894, 60) calls Polyxene "the bride of Hades."

110. She wishes to die, "before meeting shame [that would be] unworthy [*mê kat' axian*]" (374, cf. line 408). See other references to *axion* and *axioma* (e.g., lines 293, 319, 381, 613).

Polyxene's bold speech catches the fancy of the *ochlos*, which roars its approval; and Agamemnon, working as always on behalf of the Trojan captives, orders her to be released (453–54). So far the scene has been conducted on a very high plane. The indignity of the manhandled *parthenos*, so pathetic and moving in the *Agamemnon* parodos, has been erased in this version.[111] The emendation of the tradition brings it into alignment with contemporary Hellenic mores, which dictated a very strict seclusion for unmarried girls.[112] The first step in modifying the picture of the sacrifice may have come in Sophokles' *Polyxene;* but we do not know how the death was described in that play.[113] What happens next, however, is quite astounding, could not and would not happen in the work of any other tragic poet, and requires the very closest attention.

Polyxene, stepping out of her captors' hands, deliberately disrobes herself, pulling down the front of her *peplos* and exposing breasts and a bosom that Talthybios informs us were "as lovely as a statue's."[114] She offers herself, kneeling, to Neoptolemos, giving him a choice of breast or neck for the stroke (563–65). The exact degree of Polyxene's nudity is not left to the imagination: she tears her robe down to the "midflank, by the navel,"[115] thus exposing the whole upper body along with the belly.[116] It is unclear why

111. See *Ag.* 232: the girl is hoisted like a goat over the altar; for the parallel between the two passages, see J. Schmitt (1921, 58). Fraenkel thought that Iphigeneia's robes had slipped off at line 239, κρόκου βαφὰς ἐς πέδον χέουσα (1950, 2:138); but see the objections of Lloyd-Jones (1952). Recently light has been cast on the matter by Sourvinou-Inwood (1971); see also Stinton (1976.1). Sourvinou emends Aristoph. *Lys.* 645 to read καταχέουσα, thus giving a motivation for the use of this verb in *Agamemnon*, where other words, e.g., *ataurôtos*, also suggest the rituals of Artemis. By placing hints of this gesture in a context suggesting purity and the lack of sexuality favored by Artemis, Aischylos has partly muted the incongruity involved in the implied sexuality of Iphigeneia's appeal; see discussion below. A further touch is the curious reminiscence of Iphigeneia's performances at banquets (*Ag.* 243–47), something that would have been unthinkable in contemporary Athenian society. It would seem that Aischylos is working to allay the discomfort caused by dissonance between heroic mores and contemporary mores; the aim of Euripides, of course, is just the opposite.

112. The *parthenos* belonged indoors and was not accustomed to see any nonfamily males; see Lysias 3.6, Xen. *Oik.* 7.6, and earlier Hes. *WD* 519–23, where the comfort of remaining indoors in winter is associated with the *parthenos*, whose beauty is sheltered and cared for, as she "lies deep inside the house [μυχίη καταλέξεται ἔνδοθι οἴκου]" (523).

113. See Calder's reconstruction (1966); the fragments make Agamemnon's role evident, but leave Polyxene's essentially in the dark.

114. 560–61: μαστούς τ' ἔδειξε στέρνα θ' ὡς ἀγάλματος κάλλιστα . . .

115. Polyxene tears her robe down from the shoulder blade (*epômis*, see Xen. *Mem.* 3.10.13), to the belly (λαγόνας ἐς μέσας παρ' ὀμφαλόν). Cf. such anatomical expressions in the *Ilias* (21.117, see 8.325) where the collarbone is referred to as παρ' αὐχένα, that is, beside and below the neck.

116. The degree of nudity is familiar in Greek art from such statues as the Venus of Arles. Paley (1874, 550) points this out, also citing Chairemon (*TGF* F14), where a maiden's dance has "freed her left flank."

Polyxene should disrobe to such an extent: she had earlier mentioned offering her neck, the usual place for the sacrificial blow.[117] She evidently hopes to win sympathy for her courage, as she does; but, as in many crucial moments in drama, when symbolic action is shown or narrated, the significance of this strange gesture is of greater import than its motivation.[118] In this brief passage, Euripides gives us in miniature some of the flavor of the great dramas of sexual shock that have been lost. Polyxene's bold action clashes with almost every context to which we can assimilate the scene, with social and literary tradition, as well as with other extant work of Euripides himself. This is Euripidean sensationalism at its most striking.

To us, who are used to the frequent detailing of female physical beauty in modern Western literature, it is hard to sense the rigidity of tragic decorum in these matters. In fact, in extant fifth-century tragedy, there is hardly a place where a woman's face or body is described as beautiful (*kalos*).[119] There is certainly no reference to breasts and their beauty anywhere else in tragedy.[120]

While nudity in informal art, such as vase painting, is not rare in the fifth century, nudity in full-size *agalmata* came later and hesitantly. On nudity, see *Encicloped. dell' arte antica*, s.v. *Nudo.* An interesting transitional example is the Niobid (datable between 440 and 430, see Ridgway [1981, 56]) who, kneeling in death, reveals a nude upper body, with the lower body draped. On this statue, see Seta (1930, 224–25). Euripides of course had his own effect on later art; see the painting (M. Schmidt [1965, 174 and pl. 59.1]) of a nude sacrificed maiden, with two wounds (one in the neck, one in the chest—an interesting iconographic reference to our passage), modestly concealing her genitalia with one hand. See also the late epigram of Pollianos (*AP* 16.150), and comment by Valgiglio (1966, 113 n.215).

117. *Sphazein* (549) properly means "to cut the throat," or "to sacrifice." See LSJ and Vermeule & Chapman (1971, 291 and n.18). The best representation remaining is the Tyrrhenian amphora *ABV* 97.27, discussed by Walters (1898).

118. See the comment of Taplin (1977, 312ff.) on the carpet scene of *Agamemnon.* Matthaei (1918, 134–35) suggests another symbolic significance, namely that Polyxene's physical perfection, like her willingness to die, marks her as the ideal sacrificial victim. This thematic significance complements the other, since the clash between the pious atmosphere pointed to by M. and the impious nature of the sacrifice parallels that between Polyxene's effect on the Greeks and the cynical view Hekabe takes of their sentiment.

119. *Kalê* or *kallistê* is not used to describe women or their bodies except here or in hymns to goddesses (e.g., *Hipp* 66). (The reference to Helene in *Tro* 772 makes a moral point; two others occur in this play [lines 636, 442] and are thus likely to be significant of the erotic atmosphere being developed in *Hekabe.*) The strong associations of *erôs* and *kalos* in everyday language apparently kept the word from being used in tragedy to describe physical appearance as readily as it had been in epic. Pagani (1970, 57) pointed out the way in which a strong enjambment emphasizes the epithet here.

120. Breasts are not mentioned at all, outside the context of nursing infants, except at *Andr* 629 (a reproach to Menelaos for being overcome by the sight of Helene's breasts and thus failing to avenge himself) and *Trach.* 925, where Deianeira denudes herself in the privacy of her own chamber, as she prepares suicide. For the changes in these conventions in the fourth century, see the valuable article by Piatkowski (1981). P. points out that physical description is largely absent from fifth-century drama, while in the fourth a code for such descriptions derived from visual art began to develop (206–8). Here, as in so much else, Euripides inaugurates cultural changes that

Descriptive language applied to female appearance tends to be conventional and is limited to brief qualifications of the neck, cheek, or foot of a woman as "white" or "well formed."[121] The dramatic situation itself is equally astonishing and anomalous. Polyxene's boldness sets her apart from every other Euripidean *parthenos*. They, without exception, show the modesty appropriate for Greek virgins, shrinking above all from contact with males in groups.[122]

If the audience's natural repugnance at seeing a young and chaste girl among a crowd of males has in this scene been ignored or lulled to sleep, we may be certain that the play will at some later point take advantage of that dissonance. We can already sense the elements of incongruity, for instance in the insistence on the presence and participation of the "mob (*ochlos*)."[123] The audience, while this conflict builds in the speech, will be torn between rejection of the scene and their natural tendency to accept what they see and hear on the stage. If the scene succeeds, the audience will be deeply moved; and the sensational and outré actions of Polyxene will be accepted as part of the abnormal and intense atmosphere of the high mimetic, where things occur that are not like everyday life.

Polyxene's action, if baffling in other ways, evokes a familiar complex of associations that has been admirably documented by W. H. Friedrich in "Medeia in Kolchis." The victim, threatened with a violent death, appeals by sexual charm to the sacrificer or avenger, who is often moved to turn aside

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seem still embryonic in the late fifth century. Chairemon's seductive descriptions of females *en déshabillé* frequently allude to visual art; see *TGF* F1.5.

121. E.g., *Alk* 159; *Med* 30, 923, 1164; *Hel* 1570. There is no detail and no overt eroticism in these references; the parts of the body mentioned are those usually not covered by clothing. But even these are not entirely without sexual significance: Alkestis' blooming beauty is relevant to what she loses by choosing early death; in *Medeia* the heroine's return to a more emotional and appealing mode is signaled by the reference to her "white cheek," while the princess's innocent vanity enhances the pathos of her death. For *Ant.* 1239, a most significant reference to the "white cheek," see Chap. 3, above. Whiteness is significant simply of femininity, by artistic as well as social convention.

122. Most tragic virgins are timid about coming out, until reassured and commanded by a guardian. E.g., Antigone in *Phoinissai,* who appears jealously guarded by her *paidagôgos* and who shuns the chorus, that *ochlos gynaikôn* (196). Later, she is reluctant to face a group, until reassured by Iokaste (1264–66). In *Iphigeneia at Aulis* the heroine emerges into a nonfamily setting only at her mother's urging, and with reluctance (1338). Note especially the words of "Makaria," who also accepts a sacrificial death but who is reluctant to meet this death "in male hands [ἐν ἀρσένων . . . χεροίν]" (*Hkld* 565–66).

123. The semantic juxtaposition *parthenos/ochlos* is antithetic in Euripidean drama, and undoubtedly was so in ordinary language and thought of the day. See the note of Reckford (Review [1968, 232] of Benedetto [1965]) on the significance of *Or* 108. See also *Hkld* 44, *IA* 1030, *Phoin* 196.

his or her anger.[124] The suggestion of this motif appears in the *Agamemnon* parodos, and it would have been odd if Sophokles had not alluded to it in his lost *Polyxene*. In other versions of the Polyxene story, Polyxene's relation to Achilleus was a sexual one.[125] Since that part of the story has been suppressed in *Hekabe,* the element of sexual appeal emerges here rather suddenly, with a glaring and lurid intensity. But the conventional motivation for the appeal has been severely distorted. Polyxene uses nudity, not to enhance a plea for survival, but to win honor and respect from her captors; and there is an evident contradiction between her refusal to be touched and her provocative preparations for the sacrifice.

After signaling that the traditional seclusion of the *parthenos* has some relevance to the dramatic world of the scene, the play then flouts all such proprieties; and Polyxene's dying actions are more bizarre still. As Neoptolemos reluctantly cuts the throat of the girl, she dies with great care for decorum:

> She, though dying, still
> took great care to fall mannerly,
> hiding what must be hidden from the eyes of males.[126]

To put it bluntly, Polyxene's dignity in arranging her clothing as she falls dying is as impressive as it is improbable. Those who are charmed by Polyxene's death have good company in antiquity, as do those who are repelled and indignant.[127] The passage is "sentimental," in that its moral and

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124. 1966. Suppliants come in both sexes, but in most cases a combination of sexual appeal and helplessness (which signifies sexual availability) is designed to bend the will of the attacker. Note, however, the prevalence of the typology, even in the Lykaon episode, *Il.* 21.34ff., where sexuality is not directly at issue.

125. There is no reason to assume that these stories are a late addition: the encounter of Achilleus and Polyxene at the spring where he killed Troilos was described in the *Kypria* (5:105.12 Allen) and depicted frequently in vase painting. On erotic and romantic themes in cyclic epic and their absence from Homeric epic, see Kullman (1960, 8–9); Griffin (1977, 40): "The fantastic, the miraculous, and the romantic all exceeded in the Cycle the austere limits to which the *Iliad* confines them." (See also p. 45, on Polyxene.)

126. 568–70:

> ἡ δὲ καὶ θνῄσκουσ' ὅμως
> πολλὴν πρόνοιαν εἶχεν εὐσχήμων πεσεῖν,
> κρύπτουσ' ἃ κρύπτειν ὄμματ' ἀρσένων χρεών.

127. Favorable views: Steiger (1900, 392: "Friede und Grösse ruhen über der ganzen Darstellung"); King (1938, 84), a "vividly beautiful and imaginative narrative. It has upon Hecuba the calming effect that it must have on all its readers." Pagani (1970, 57–58): "Tutta la semplicità e la sublimità castissima di un momento estatico consumato in un clima di silenzio religioso: un trasalimento del poeta e della moltitudine nella contemplazione ammirata della bellezza e della virtu . . ." etc. See also Hartung (1843, 517); Rivier ([1944] 1975, 155). Mild discomfort is voiced by Cataudella (1939, 122): the scene is affecting, though a bit theatrical; Masqueray

aesthetic beauty is at odds with reality. Death is diminished here, where it comes second, not just to morality, but even to manners; and Polyxene's concern for appearance is correspondingly elevated to a very grandiose level. The passage was much admired in later antiquity and often quoted, and it produced a number of imitations: the chaste Lucretia and even Julius Caesar himself fell in equally good order.[128] But the long series of noble and unlikely death scenes modeled on this passage[129] reveal the gulf between Euripides and his numerous but not wholly legitimate posterity. None of the imitators produced a version as extreme as the original: a nicer observance of propriety in extremis would be hard to imagine, short of the *Mikado*.

The suggestion of the ludicrous rises very close to the surface at line 569, which emphasizes the self-conscious aspect of the girl's action: she took "great care [*pollên pronoian*] to fall in a mannerly [fashion] [*euschêmôn*]." Then, in an extra touch that pushes the passage just beyond the pale, Polyxene falls, "hiding what must be hidden from the eyes of males" (570). Hermogenes recognized and was disturbed by this line, which, with its excessive concreteness, injects many dissonant echoes.[130] But line 570 is not an anomalous mistake. It plays upon contradictions already built into the scene; and, when we are reminded of the difficulties in dying gracefully with one's clothing partly on and partly off, part of our discomfort derives directly from the earlier concrete description of Polyxene's body.

How could the audience respond to such a barrage of contradictory

(1908, 322–23). Cutting comments on Euripidean plays are often made glancingly, in discussions of the work of other playwrights; see Radt (1973, 122): comparing the *Agamemnon* description with *Hekabe*, "Um zu sehen, was 'an unnecessary piece of exhibitionism' ist, lese man die oft hier verglichene Szene bei Euripides *Hec.* 558ff., wo Polyxena, die sich *freiwillig* opfern lässt, sich trotzdem im letzten Augenblick ihr Kleid vom Körper reisst: der einzige Zweck den diese Gebärde dort hat, ist das Kitzeln der Sinnlichkeit, wie zum Überfluss die Aufzählung der entblössten Körperteile (559f.) und die unglaublich geschmacklose Hervorhebung des anständigen Fallens (568ff.) zeigt."

128. Later citations of the passage include Plinius, *Ep.* 4.11; Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 144.2 = 182 Stählin; Eustathios on *Il.* 2.262, 216.7 (1:328 Van der Valk) and Ps. Lukianos *Dem. Enc.* 47. Ovidius follows Euripides (*Met.* 13.479) but corrects his model: Polyxene requests that no male hands touch her in death and asks that her body be returned to Hekabe. For Lucretia, see Ov. *Fast.* 2.833; for Caesar, Suetonius 82. Seneca's Polyxene threw herself down *irato impetu* (*Tro.* 1158–59), so as to fall heavily onto the grave of her enemy. As often in Euripides, this is an amended version of the original: Polyxene now shows not mere decorousness in death but a proper resentment against her sacrificers.

129. Elegant death scenes may begin in literature, but they soon extend into literary accounts of real deaths (see the accounts of Sokrates, Theramenes, and others) and finally become a cultural norm; cf. the carefully stage-managed death of Augustus (Suetonius 99.1).

130. *De invent.* 4.12 (quoting 568–69): τοῦτο σεμνῶς εἰπὼν ἐπήνεγκεν εὐτελὲς καὶ κοινὸν καὶ κακόζηλον. See also the scholiast (p. 362 Dindorf), ἔπεσεν εἰς τὸ κακόζηλον ὅπερ κακίζουσιν οἱ ὀβελίζοντες.

signals? The scene has been promised to be pathetic, and indeed it is. Polyxene's motivation, in so far as it has been established, is noble, brave, and decorous. Further, the picture of her nudity is appealing in the pathetic as well as the sexual sense: it imitates a familiar gesture of supplication that the audience will have recognized and enjoyed. Finally, the combination of apparent innocence and purity with sexual appeal permits us, as Talthybios does, to ogle Polyxene, even as we sympathize with her. The appeal to shameful pleasures is very satisfyingly blended with high moral tone: what audience could fail to indulge themselves? It is the same technique—here driven to harsh and glaring extremes—that Sophokles had employed so subtly in *Antigone*.[131]

The tensions built into the scene, the elements of "bad taste" and contradiction, are delayed charges that will explode later, when the spell of the speech has passed.[132] The Euripidean trick depends upon the fact that audiences must trust and accept the world of the play as best they can, while the tenor of the scene maintains itself. Only when a change of mood has been signaled can a more critical viewpoint begin to emerge. If such a scene were presented without irony, then a sophisticated audience would probably experience an initial enthusiasm, followed by a sensation of uneasiness and distance that, perhaps after several more scenes of overdone and inappropriate pathos, might result in the failure of the play.

For the time, however, the audience will be held fast, charmed by the combination of sexual titillation and idealism, and stretching their credulity to accept the premise of the speech—that a decent girl by exposing herself before a crowd of males may win honor instead of humiliation. The same *ochlos* that roared applause at the girl's first words are now so powerfully affected by her dying gesture that they want to accord her the same honor, a public funeral rite, that is the mark of esteem for their own heroes.[133] The power of public opinion, always strong in the *ochlos*, is invoked against any Greek who fails to contribute something of his own to this best of women.[134]

Hekabe's response to this remarkable narration is the countering element that creates Euripidean irony. She begins with the striking excursus on inbred nobility (*gennaiotês*) that was discussed above. Hekabe's inconsequence itself will serve to break the spell of emotion cast by the previous speech; and her excursus, which is a key to so many of the play's themes,

131. See Chap. 3, above.

132. See discussion of a similar technique in App. B on *Alkestis*.

133. Note that the *Kypria* reported that Neoptolemos had provided burial for Polyxene. The source is a scholiast to *Hek* 41 (pp. 229–30 Dindorf), who quotes the fifth-century Glaukos of Rhegion. On these legends see Jouan (1966, 368–71); Robertson (1970, 13); Förster (1883, 476).

134. 579–80: τῇ περίσσ' εὐκαρδίῳ, ψυχήν τ' ἀρίστῃ.

also has a number of applications to the contrast between herself and her daughter. It is immediately evident that the ability that enables the *gennaios* to make fine and precise estimations of the shameful (*aischron*), using the noble (*kalon*) as a standard, has been amply displayed by Polyxene in her death scene. Because of her aristocratic certainty of self, Polyxene could perform an action that would ordinarily be labeled *aischron* and make it *kalon*.

After Hekabe abruptly drops the reflective mode, she reacts to the message by rejecting the Greeks' honors to Polyxene: she will see to the funeral herself. She then passes to rather conventional reflections on the fall of the house of Priamos, which, in the wake of misfortune, appears to have been a mirage, composed rather of thoughts and words than of realities.[135] These generalities also have a direct application: the wealth and honor (*timê*) that marked Polyxene's early life made her unable to endure the world of slavery; but to Hekabe, that previous life was a mere appearance, a *schêma* (619). The difference between *kalon* and *aischron* too is a difference in appearance only, and there seems to be here a faint implied criticism of the standards for which Polyxene died.

The central portion of this speech, in which Hekabe declares her intention to perform the burial herself, contains a singular passage that virtually inverts the meaning of what Talthybios has told us. Lines 605 – 8 have been ignored by Euripidean apologists and detractors alike; Denys Page, however, was sufficiently struck by them to propose their excision as an actor's interpolation, although he was unable to suggest what might have inspired such an odd piece of tampering.[136] In fact the lines could not have been inserted by anyone except the artist who designed Polyxene's sublimely mawkish death scene. They are the dash of cold water that makes us aware of the incongruity and inappropriateness of all that we had accepted before. By doing so, they provide an effective transition from Hekabe's speculation that virtue may persist unchanged in adversity, a notion as idealizing and as unlikely as the death scene itself, to the end of the speech, in which we see that the transition from royalty to slavery is as swift as the awakening from a dream.

"Let no one touch her," says Hekabe. "Keep the mob (*ochlos*) from the girl, for in a numberless host the mob (*ochlos*) is licentious, and the anarchy

135. 626 – 27: τὰ δ' οὐδέν, ἄλλως φροντίδων βουλεύματα γλώσσης τε κόμποι.

136. 1934, 67: Page admits that sexually "indelicate" references are not usually interpolated. On the standards for determining interpolations, see the critical assessments of Page's work by Mastronarde (1978, 118, on a passage in *Phoinissai*) and Hamilton (1974, an attack on the notion that actors' interpolations were widespread in our texts).

of sailors is worse than fire—he is vile who does nothing vile."[137] In the first place, interpolation is out of the question, both because no rational motivation can be assigned, and because the passage exactly corresponds to Hekabe's first reaction to the Messenger's news. She asked there whether the Greeks treated Polyxene dreadfully, as an enemy, or not. Talthybios' reply made clear that the behavior of the Greeks was decent and modest (*aidoumenoi*); but Hekabe now returns to the second alternative, which clearly seems still the more likely to her. It is obvious what Hekabe hints at. She fears that the "mob of sailors" may violate Polyxene's body. Whereas the Herald had shown that the Greeks were vying with each other to honor Polyxene, Hekabe suspects that the power of mob conformity can work both ways;[138] and, though apparently convinced of the nobility of her daughter's gesture, Hekabe is not willing to trust the Greek reception of it. All the repressed discomfort generated by the aberrant situation in the previous speech is discharged to lend force to Hekabe's cynical and repellent suspicion. We have descended from the lofty plane of the high mimetic with a sudden and sickening movement.

For us, a reference to necrophilia at such a point in a serious drama would be a bizarre obscenity, so aberrant as to overstep entirely the boundaries of comprehensibility in a tragic context. But for the Greeks *erôs* was a disease of the eyes. Gorgias' assumption that the source of erotic attachment is the visual aspect of the beloved derives from an erotic tradition as old as Sappho.[139] In the fringes of Greek erotic lore appear a number of bizarre lovers who are seized with passion for the lifeless image of a human body—a statue, or a corpse.[140] Polyxene has already been described as offering such an image of physical perfection, when Talthybios likened her breasts to those of an *agalma*, a statue.[141] The myth of Laodameia and her statue underlines the

137. 608: κακὸς δ' ὁ μή τι δρῶν κακόν. On sailors, who were identified with the poorer class of citizens, see *IA* 914, *Frogs* 1070ff.; Platon (*Phaidr.* 243c7) depreciates the erotic habits of this group.

138. The question of mob values relates to the original decision to sacrifice Polyxene as well, since there too public policy seemed to lack a moral perspective outside its own interests; see Matthaei (1918, 137 – 38).

139. See Sappho 16.31, for the effect of a vision of the beloved. On the eyes, see Gorgias' theory of sense perception, in *Helene* DK 2:82 fr. 11B.15 – 16; see Platon *Phaedr.* 251b2, 255c6 and Sophokles *Oinomaos*, *TGF* F474.

140. For statues, see Lukian. *Erotes* 15 – 16. Pygmalion is attributable wholly to one Philostephanos (*RE* 39.109), who found the story on Cyprus. For an earlier story, see Alexis (40K) and Philemon (139K), Ath. 13.506f. See also the necrophiliac episode in Parthenius (31). The latter theme was worn out by rhetoricians; see Libanios *Prog.* 11.27 (8:435 Förster), and Philostratos, *Vit. Soph.* 261 (101K).

141. For the statue as a model of visual perfection, see also Chap. 3, above. This is one of several references to visual art in the play. Hadley (1894, 70) cites *Hipp* 631, and Platon *Charm.* 154c8, *Phaidr.* 251a, for the erotic import of the *agalma*.

logical connection between necrophilia and statue love: the lifeless statue, like the lifeless body of the beloved, can inspire a powerful *erôs*, or can assuage the pangs of loss, "cold delight though it is," as Admetos remarks.[142]

The fear of Hekabe therefore is not so far beyond the pale as to confuse the audience. Of course there is a distinction between the passion of Laodameia and what Hekabe is concerned with. She anticipates a violation, inspired by the crudest lust, in a mob of the vilest and lowest men. But, in another sense, we could say that she simply grasps the erotic element in the Greeks' admiration for Polyxene and inverts it, so that what at first seemed noble and high-minded becomes vile and crude. The *Aithiopis* seems to furnish a literary parallel: when Achilleus was apparently taken with the beauty of the dead or dying Penthesileia,[143] there Thersites, as here Hekabe, spoiled the hero's noble feeling by attributing it to mere lechery.[144] Erotic themes, perhaps more even than others, are subject to sudden switches between the *aischron* and the *kalon*, depending on whether one takes the view of the high mimetic, or that of the comic and critical. No wonder that the very highest reaches of the high mimetic excluded these dangerous themes altogether. The scene offers a number of interesting contrasts between the heroic and idealistic world of Polyxene, and the darker one of the old queen.

One reason for Hekabe's cynical viewpoint is her age, which by definition

142. *Alk* 353: ψυχρὰν μέν, οἶμαι, τέρψιν, ἀλλ' ὅμως. Admetos, like Laodameia, promises to cherish a statue of Alkestis in his bed; for the stories see Mayer (1885), and the tale in Hyg. 103–4. For the connection between *Alkestis* and the lost *Protesilaos*, see U. v. Wilamowitz (1906.1, 29 n.1); Dale (1954, 79); Paduano (1969, 75–77). Admetos is promising an obsessive and unending grief, such as Laodameia felt for Protesilaos. But note also the stylistic associations of "cold" (*psychros*), discussed in Chap. 4, above.

143. The story is in the *Aithiopis* plot summary by Proklos (5:105 Allen); see Griffin (1977, 44–45). When accused of erotic feelings for Penthesileia by the rude Thersites, Achilleus killed him, precipitating a quarrel in the army. Cf. Thersites' role in *Il.* 2.212ff. For the treatment of ugliness and the contrasting emphasis on female beauty in fourth-century visual art, see Piatkowski (1981, 201). See also Petersen (1915, 15–17) and recently Krischer (1982, 53–54, 63) on development in mimesis from type to individual. Chairemon, whose erotic descriptions of women's bodies were quoted above, probably used this myth in his *Achilleus Thersitoktonos*. For the plot, see *TGF* 71, F 1a; and Collard (1970, 26): Achilleus gave the Amazon an honorable burial, as the Greeks here wish to do for Polyxene.

144. For Thersites' role, see Eustath. 208 on *Il.* 2.219–22 (1:317 Van der Valk): "[Thersites] mocks [*skôptei*] the noble hero as a lecher [ἐπὶ λαγνείᾳ]." Proklos (1.105 Allen) uses the verbs *loidorein* and *oneidizein* for Thersites' words about Achilleus and Penthesileia. See Nagy (1979, Chap. 14) for the comic and scoptic nature of Thersites in epic. Thersites reverses the values of the heroic genre and sees the heroes perversely through the comic lens. An erotic interpretation of Achilleus' feelings for Penthesileia appears in the appropriately titled *Psogos Achilleôs* of Libanios (*Prog.* 9.1; 8:282 Förster). Some of what is said there may reflect the *Aithiopis* as ultimate source, but the theme was not uncommon. Cf. the elaborate working out of the whole *topos* of love on the battlefield in Nonnos *Dion.* 35.21–79.

removes her from the heroic ethic. In spite of the prestige of aged wisdom, the Greek worship of physical prowess and beauty dictated that, in terms of Adkins' assertive and cooperative virtues, old people would be assigned the weaker side.[145] But further, to be old is to be a survivor, to have fallen short of the best of ends, death in battle that takes the hero in his youth and beauty, endowing him with a glory that can survive him.[146] Of course Greek women had no judicial or deliberative role, and the ideal fulfillment of their social destiny did not require them to die young. But the traditional evaluation of age and youth still applies here, because Polyxene does end her life heroically by a voluntary sacrifice accepted, like that of the warrior, to avoid a charge of cowardice.[147] Talthybios sounds the theme of old age at the opening of the scene; contemplating Hekabe, he summarizes her misfortunes and concludes: "Ah, I am old; and yet may it be granted me to die before falling upon some shameful fate [πρὶν αἰσχρᾷ περιπεσεῖν τύχῃ τινί]" (498). The logic at this point is alien to us, but, in the view of a morality that is descriptive more than prescriptive, the old have already undergone the shame of losing youth and beauty. Being no longer *kaloi*, they are unlikely to have the pride required for courage and self-sacrifice.

A close thematic parallel to our passage is the poem of Tyrtaios where the death of the aged in battle is proposed as a theme of shame, contrasting with the appropriateness and beauty of the death of the young.[148] There, too, the paradox that the freshness and beauty of the young are more appealing even

145. See Vernant (1982, 57): the old are limited to *logoi* and *mythoi*: deeds (*erga*) belong to those who possess youthful vigor (*hêbê*). This division also corresponds to Adkins' hierarchy (1960, 37ff.), in which the "active" virtues, constituting *aretê* on the battlefield, supersede the "passive" ones in status.

146. This whole ethic is examined by Vernant (1982). One becomes *agathos anêr* only through the heroic death that can render *aretê* permanent (45). The aim is to escape death through immortality in song (53) and old age through meeting a *kalos thanatos* in youth (56). On this theme see also MacCary's analysis of Achilleus as a narcissistic figure (1982, Chap. II.11; "'He Whom the Gods Love Dies Young'").

147. Polyxene argues that to resist death would label her as *kakê* and cowardly (*philopsychos*, 348); cf. Makaria (*Hkld* 518, 533). Adkins (1966.1, 200) attempts to deny that Polyxene, a woman and a slave, can have anything to do with *aretê* here. But the word is one of a group of terms (e.g., *gennaios, andreios, agathos, eugenês*): that *aretê* is too indicative of power and activity to apply directly to Polyxene here is true, but without much significance.

148. Tyrtaios 10W 21–30, cf. *Il.* 22.71–76. Vernant (1982, 60–63) shows that the old risk humiliation by death in battle, a death which for them is, like other things that are decorous in younger people, *aischron*. He points to the cult of physical beauty in Sparta as a support to the cult of martial valor. I would add that, since war reverses the cultural norm according to which the old hope to be buried by the young (Hdt. 1.87.4), a major function of the heroic ethic is the commendation and explication of this contradiction in basic values.

in violent death is underlined by a hint of necrophilia.[149] The theme of sexuality makes the point perfectly, since the beauty of the young makes sexuality as *kalon* for them as it is *aischron* for the old.[150]

In this scene Euripides has contrasted two views of Polyxene's death. As often in Euripidean drama the heroic model is reduced to an episode of youthful sacrifice, while the viewpoint of others in the play intervenes to assert other and balancing ethics. To Polyxene is assigned the high morality of the high mimetic; but the morality, and the aesthetic, of heroic drama in her case are ultimately exaggerated into an unreal sentimentalization. This sentimentalized heroic is then corrected and annulled by Hekabe's comment. Her crude suspicions, and her references to sailors' habits, cause the tone of the scene to veer violently toward the vile and the ludicrous, almost to the *geloion*. But, since this play belongs to Hekabe, who dominates it from first to last, her correction of the sentimental death scene is valid for this dramatic universe. The heroic has no home here, where the human condition is seen in terms not of freedom and of will but of slavery and helplessness.

V. Revenge and Complementarity

Hekabe contains enough plot elements to make up several ordinary tragedies. First the sequence of two deaths focuses attention upon the aged heroine and the pathos of her situation. But the addition of the second death also generates a new direction in the plot, as the play changes from a drama of suffering to a drama of revenge.[151] As an avenger, Hekabe experiences a success as complete as was her previous failure. The perfect revenge demands reciprocity between the wronged and the wronger, so that exactly comparable wounds are suffered by each, and each becomes the image of the other.[152] Like Hekabe, Polymestor is reduced to powerlessness, weakness, friendlessness, and physical humiliation; and like her he loses two children in a single day.

Revenge dramas share a peculiar structural problem in that, unless steps

149. See Adkins' evaluation (1960, 163). Mutilation, as Vernant points out, is implied by an ethic that glorifies the beauty of the dead warrior's body: to destroy your enemy utterly, you must then mutilate his body (1982, 64). Of course the distinction of the Tyrtaios poem is nonlogical, since mutilation is as dreadful for the young warrior as for the old. See discussion of castration motifs in MacCary (1982, Chap. II.7; "Naked Men as Women").

150. See Harbsmeier (1968, 2): part of the Euripidean treatment of old age may have been a portrait of the aged lover (*gerôn erastês*)—see fr. 317 N2, *Danaë*; fr. 804 N2, *Phoinix*. Euripidean oldsters do not behave as they "ought," and their antics awaken what Harbsmeier suggests may be a "beklemmendes Gefühl" in the spectator (48).

151. Harbsmeier (1968, 59); Matthaei (1918, 153–54).

152. For this attempt to create an equivalency, see Burnett (1973, 2 and 22 n.50).

are taken to mute the actual event of revenge, the focus of the play must necessarily be split between the sufferings of the avengers and the sufferings that are produced by their revenge. In Sophokles' *Elektra,* the play retains its focus upon the children of Agamemnon by muting the death of Klytaimestra, who never encounters her son on stage. Aigisthos does face Orestes, but we see only the beginning of the villain's downfall;[153] and the play closes before the reversal of contemplation or remorse can be possible. Aischylos, by contrast, had stressed the suffering of Klytaimestra precisely because the reversal from revenge to responsibility is of cardinal importance to his trilogy.[154] In *Hekabe,* we are given a full-dress treatment of the revenge; and this treatment, which necessarily involves including yet another action in an already busy play, introduces a new figure in the role of victim, while it allows Hekabe to appear in the unaccustomed role of aggressor. Hekabe's status as supremely miserable is thus called into question first by her new role and second by Polymestor's suffering, which is the mirror image of her own.

Polymestor is certainly not a sympathetic figure. Unlike Eurystheus in *Herakleidai,* he does not confound us by turning out to be a less obvious villain than we had imagined. The lure that Hekabe uses, a promise of buried treasure, must satisfy the audience that Polymestor's real motivation is one of reckless greed. The presentation of his suffering is both graphic and alienating. He comes on, blinded and bereft, as a kind of parody Oidipous, singing his sorrow in lyric monody; and as we watch his mime of agony and rage, we are likely to be moved and repelled, glad of the punishment and revolted by it in almost equal measure. Polymestor goes on all fours, like an animal tracking its prey.[155] He wishes to fill himself with the flesh of his enemies, for they—like himself—are "wild beasts" (1073ff.). This theme eventually culminates in Polymestor's final prophecy that Hekabe will be transformed into a monstrous animal. Avenger and victim join in a lower realm, where the two struggle endlessly on, each seeking to achieve parity (λώβαν λύμας ἀντίποιν' ἐμᾶς, 1074–75).

The final stichomythy brings the play to a closing twist of misery, as the fates of three disparate and inimical figures mesh together. Polymestor, helpless and enraged at his betrayal, attempts a final vengeance by calling on his knowledge of certain Thracian prophecies that will open up the future and

153. See Burnett (1973, 3–4).

154. On the reversal of Klytaimestra's role, see Winnington-Ingram ([1961] 1983, 112–13); Lesky (1973, 220–221); Michelini (1979, 155).

155. In the earlier part of the play animal references, also in lyric, emphasize the pathetic loss of Hekabe's children, lines 90–91, 141–42, 205–6, 337. There is a reversal from the humanized animal as object of pity to the animalized human as object of horror.

place the events of the play in perspective. His role in this instance parallels that of the *deus ex machina*, but Polymestor has neither the moral stature of the god nor his magisterial remoteness from human suffering.[156] In attempting to strike out from a position of helplessness and dependency, he only involves himself more deeply in the darkness that spreads before the protagonists. His prediction for Hekabe holds the greatest measure of horror for the audience, since it provides concrete confirmation that Hekabe's successful revenge will not be without its effect on her. The bitch is a common epithet for an evil woman among the Greeks too: but Hekabe will be both a bitch and a monster, with eyes of fire, like Sphinx or Gorgon.[157] Her tomb will bear no trace of her human identity but will be merely "the wretched bitch's tomb [κυνὸς ταλαίνης σῆμα], a sign for sailors."[158] The utter eradication of Hekabe's name does indeed seem to be the one misfortune that she has not yet endured. But, predictably enough, having traded so much to buy her revenge, she will not renege at any cost: "I care nothing, if *you* are punished" (σοῦ γέ μοι δόντος δίκην, 1274).

Polymestor's second prophecy has more effect on the protagonists. He predicts the deaths of Kassandra and Agamemnon. Hekabe, who was unmoved before, is stung: "I spit upon it—same to you!"[159] The low insult shows her continuing vulnerability, as she is reduced to hoping that Klytaimestra may not be capable of such madness. Agamemnon too is stung, as his own death is predicted; and he orders the wretch to be marooned on an island. Polymestor's response is the same as Hekabe's to himself: "Kill me!—but a bloody bath awaits you in Argos. . . . Does it pain you to hear it?" (1281–83). All three are doomed, and all are mutually involved in ruin. Agamemnon and Hekabe, in league against Polymestor, are natural enemies, even as Polymestor was originally the friend of each. Hekabe's means of

156. Medeia's similar role at the end of her play differs, in that she is talking from the same position of invulnerability as the gods do.

157. For woman as bitch, s.v. *kyôn* LSJ II. In non-Homeric references the bitch is typified by her loud and evil language: she is like a dog who will not stop barking; see *Wasps* 1402ff., Semonides 7W 12ff., Menandros 546K and 802K: πολὺ χεῖρόν ἐστιν ἐρεθίσαι γραῦν ἢ κύνα.

158. Note the exact words of Polymestor: τύμβῳ δ' ὄνομα σῷ κεκλήσεται . . . Hekabe (1272) guesses the riddle: the name (*onoma*) will not be her own but will reflect her transformation, μορφῆς ἐπῳδόν. See the earlier remarks of Odysseus on the importance of tombs (317ff.). For *onoma*, see the chorus on Polyxene (381). Vernant (1982, 68) points to the horror of being eaten by birds and dogs as coming in part from a total loss of human identity. The only loss that could be more extreme is that suffered by Hekabe, who becomes a dog and is entombed and memorialized as a dog.

159. *Apeptysa* (1276; literally, "I spit it out"), as Boella says (1964, 145), is "espressione realistica"; cf. Sheppard (1924, 84–85). Αὐτῷ ταὐτὰ σοὶ δίδωμ' ἔχειν = "same to you": see Tierney (1946, 133).

persuasion, the sexual relation beween her surviving child and the king, will cause the death of both; and the weakness that induced Agamemnon to betray Polymestor will also lead to the king's own betrayal by a *philos* whom he trusts.

VI. Some Central Themes

The analysis of the play's dramatic structure is now complete. It remains to assemble some major themes and show their interrelation. This is an especially important task in a play like *Hekabe*, which carries through a strong line of contemporary allusion, sometimes blending and sometimes contrasting its two modes of reference. Most important for this analysis will be a part of the play's visual aspect, its use of the ritual gesture of suppliancy. Readers of plays have a natural tendency to overlook the importance of thematic development in the visual plane:[160] a series of repeated tableaux and gestures is, like other things in the dramatic performance, cumulative in its effect. In this case, the essentially grotesque effect of vigorous activity by an aged and ungainly figure is stressed from the start.[161]

In her first scene, the urgency of Hekabe's attempt at speed (66–67) contrasts with her lameness and incapacity.[162] In the second scene, great attention is called to the suppliant gesture. Hekabe supplicates, recalling the posture of Odysseus on an earlier occasion.[163] Polyxene in her turn repudiates such gestures with equal explicitness; and she mentions Odysseus' awkward posture, as he attempts to evade her expected plea (342–44). Later, in her despair Hekabe grasps her daughter tightly ("like the ivy on the oak," 398), only to have her struggle rejected by Polyxene, who deprecates the ugly picture of an old woman dragged on the ground by a younger male.[164] But

160. On the significance of visual effect, see the important statement by Taplin (1977, 19ff.).

161. Harbsmeier (1968, 16) points out that Euripidean oldsters share a common quality of extreme infirmity combined paradoxically with great and desperate energy: p. 23 (Peleus in *Andromache*); pp. 40–49 (Iolaos in *Herakleidai*); p. 60ff. (*Hekabe*. See also Cataudella [1939, 122], who, however, overrates Hekabe's strength.)

162. When Hekabe first appears, she is being led onto the scene by her attendants, whom she exhorts to assist her (62). For her attempts at speed, see her frantic questions at line 162ff., where she debates what to do to save her daughter. At line 169, she rather grotesquely urges her own foot to "lead" her toward the tent.

163. His hand "died" (ἐνθανεῖν) in her robes (246): i.e., his tight clinging to her clothing caused the hand to become numb. Cf. her restressing of the posture at lines 273–75: ἀνθάπτομαί σου τῶνδε τῶν αὐτῶν ἐγώ.

164. 405–8:

> βούλῃ πεσεῖν πρὸς οὖδας ἑλκῶσαί τε σὸν
> γέροντα χρῶτα πρὸς βίαν ὠθουμένη,
> ἀσχημονῆσαί τ' ἐκ νέου βραχίονος
> σπασθεῖσ', ἃ πείσῃ μὴ σύ γ'· οὐ γὰρ ἄξιον.

Hekabe ultimately does not heed this advice: she ends the scene groveling on the ground, crying out to her daughter to "stretch out your hand" (438–40). Polyxene, in strong contrast, is led off veiled, concealing her emotional reaction to Hekabe's misery.[165]

In the rest of the play, Hekabe continues her odd postures. Talthybios finds her lying, "her back on the ground, locked up in her robes [ξυνκεκλῃμένη πέπλοις]" (487). Her scene with Agamemnon begins with Hekabe crouching, her face turned aside from the king.[166] Once Hekabe has decided upon suppliancy, the whole scene may have been played with the protagonist in the ritual posture, embracing the king's knees.[167] In an awkward moment at line 812 Agamemnon begins to turn away from Hekabe as Odysseus had from Polyxene earlier;[168] and the old woman is forced to resort to more desperate pleas, climaxing in the remarkable rhetoric in which her supplication is replicated by every part of her clamorous body, every limb a voice crying out in appeal to the master. In the final scene, it is Polymestor whose movements are helpless, clumsy, and lame, repeating the same desperate questions and reenacting the same grotesque pantomime as Hekabe did in her first scene. Like hers, his clumsy movements reflect frantic indecision as he first darts after his unseen enemies, then lurches back to the tent to protect his children's bodies.[169]

Polyxene's attitude to physical decorum is the foil for Hekabe's. Her concern for *schêma,* appearance, is extreme. The terms *euschêmôn* and *aschêmôn,* associated with Polyxene at lines 407 and 569, belong to etiquette,

165. The girl asks Odysseus to cover her head, "Since, before my death, I have melted my heart [ἐκτέτηκα καρδίαν, 433] with weeping at the mourning of my mother . . ." Willem (1924) and Boella (1964, 54) point to the motivation: Polyxene wants to escape more emotional pain. For veiling of the head as emotional withdrawal, see *Hippolytos.*

166. 739, προσώπῳ νῶτον ἐγκλίνασα σὸν. Note also the last scene, in which she refuses to look Polymestor in the face; this too may have been accompanied with some striking gesture (968ff.).

167. Hekabe alludes to the posture again at lines 787 and 839, so that it would appear she has never left it.

168. οἴμοι τάλαινα, ποῖ μ' ὑπεξάγεις πόδα; Porson (1851, 95) translated, "pedetentim a scena recedere conatur." But, if as I suppose Hekabe is still clutching Agamemnon's knees, what we should really understand is an attempt to withdraw from the suppliant posture and relation. See the scholiast to line 812 (p. 418 Dindorf), κρατοῦσα τὰ γόνατα τοῦ Ἀγαμέμνονος ᾔσθετο τοὺς πόδας κινοῦντα. *Hupexagein* is used in epic, but not in tragedy elsewhere. In prose, it is used for a slow military retreat (Xen. *Kyr.* 3.3.60) or for any attempt to get something out of harm's way (Herodotos, of women and children in the Persian invasion, 8.40.1). It does suggest the embarrassed awkwardness of Agamemnon's attempt to reject Hekabe; cf. the corresponding maneuvers of Odysseus (342–43). The interpretation of this scene by Gould is discussed below.

169. 1056, 1081; cf. Hekabe's indecision at line 162ff. At line 1082ff. Polymestor veers back to the tent, like a ship tacking about.

where proper behavior is seen in terms of appearance.[170] *Schêma* or physical outline may be created by the stance of the person, by the way in which the body is held, or by movements in accordance with the patterns of conventional behavior, or, in other contexts, with the conventions of the dance.[171] To be graceful and mannerly is to be *euschêmôn,* as Polyxene is, when she deftly conceals her naked body in death. The thematic of gesture and appearance, of etiquette and the faux pas, is amplified, of course, by the thread of references to visual art that run through the play. The *schêma* is the outline that the artist creates; and the play continually invites us to compare the conventions and decorum of one art form with those of another.[172]

Hekabe's suppliant gestures are replicated in her attempts to cling to or be raised from a fallen position by such friendly figures as the attendants, Polyxene, and Talthybios. All these postures share the combination of violent energy and total helplessness typical of suppliancy,[173] as the suppliant attempts to plead for his life, while warding off rejection from the object of supplication—who in extreme cases may be an enemy bent on killing him.[174] The struggle for survival often noted as typical of Euripidean characters

170. On the meaning of these terms, see Tierney (1946, on line 407): *aschêmonêsai* is "evidently colloquial." Boella (1964, 51) also notes the connection of line 407 with the theme of decorum (see line 569). Most of the references to etiquette come from the fourth century, simply because we have so little fifth-century work dealing with the trivia of everyday life—see Platon *Rep.* 3.401c5; Aristoteles *EN* 1119a30; Demosth. 22.53. For a fifth-century example of advice on manners, see Bdelykleon on dining etiquette, *Wasps* 1210. Elsewhere in Euripides the meaning of *euschêmôn* is closer to "specious"; see *Med* 584, *Hipp* 490.

171. In line 619 ὦ σχήματ' οἴκων is bland and acquires its color through the other words with *schêma* that we have already discussed; see H. Weil's translation: "ô apparence imposante" (1879, 257). Here, as in *Andr* 1, the word refers to something that once looked impressive but is no longer in existence. For the emptiness of the *schêma,* see *Aiolos* fr. 25.3 N2, *Erechtheus* fr. 360.27 N2. *Schêma* typically refers to outward appearance (see *IT* 292, *Ion* 992, *Hel* 379) or to clothing and accoutrements (*Ba* 832, Aristoph. *Frogs* 463). For movements in dance, see *schêmatizein* in Aristoph. *Peace* 324. While it is possible that the rhetorical usages of *schêma* had already become current in the classical period, there seems to be no evidence for these usages until after the fourth century.

172. What the artist produces is a reproduction in lines on a flat surface, the *schêma,* not the thing itself. See Gorgias *Helene* DK2:82 fr. 11B.18: οἱ γραφεῖς ὅταν ἐκ πολλῶν χρωμάτων καὶ σωμάτων ἓν σῶμα καὶ σχῆμα τελείως ἀπεργάσωνται, τέρπουσι τὴν ὄψιν. Note the earlier reference of Hekabe to herself as a kind of artist's model of misery.

173. See the valuable article by J. Gould (1973): supplication is "symbolically aggressive, yet unhurtful" (97), because the suppliant abjures all potential for threat or competition through a humiliating self-abasement (89).

174. See the suppliancy of Lykaon, *Il.* 21.67–72. J. Gould (1973, 75, 97) sees suppliancy at the hearth as the basic ritual, emergency supplications without any altar and supplications at other types of altars being divergent offshoots. Obviously in a situation of extreme danger, suppliancy becomes more problematic but also more urgent. Suppliancy is designed (Gould [90–91]) as a preventive to acts of violence, or to establish a relationship where none would normally exist.

becomes thematically central in this play, where it is underlined by so much striking visual effect.[175]

The suppliant posture is a confession of powerlessness, and as such more appropriate to women than to men, to slaves than to free citizens.[176] Hekabe finds it easy to see herself as a slave and eventually to act as one.[177] When she argues that the slavish condition is the lot of most human beings, the norm of human existence, she touches upon a key theme of Sophistic argument, in which *nomos* is the tyrant that controls an inherently hybristic human nature.[178] This view treats human history as a process of progressive degeneration from any potential of freedom or honor, as capable individuals are subjected to the needs of the inferior majority. The Sophist, trained in the arts of verbal suppliancy, must plead with, cajole, and deceive his masters.

An important motif that has references to both suppliancy and rhetoric is that of *spoudê*.[179] *Hekabe* is a play of *spoudê*, in both the meanings of that word: there is great haste and urgency in its events and in its pace, and there is great and desperate eagerness in Hekabe's struggle to save some scrap of her humanity out of annihilation. The word and its cognates appear with striking frequency, to indicate sometimes merely the speed with which an

175. J. Gould (1973, 84–87 nn.54, 55) recognizes the importance of *hiketeia* to *Hekabe*, but his interpretation fails to allow for the aberrant stance of this play vis-à-vis the code of suppliancy. G. (85–86) traces a subtly managed crescendo of acts in *Med* 324ff., ending with the successful supplication of Kreon by Medeia. His previous account of *Hekabe* is formed on this same model: thus G. concludes that Hekabe is not really embracing Odysseus' knees, though she says that she is, and that she does not touch Agamemnon until the very end, when she is successful. As G. points out, "there is no escaping [from the embrace of a suppliant] without an act of physical violence" (86). Normally, such awkward moments would be taboo on the tragic stage; but the awkwardness of suppliant gesture is part of the system of signification in *Hekabe*.

176. See J. Gould (1973, 88): self-abasement in suppliancy fits women and children. Both the wife of the house and household slaves were welcomed to the hearth with a ritual resembling that of supplication (97–98). A number of Euripidean male characters either refuse to supplicate or refer to the inappropriateness of the action for persons like them. Adrastos (*Suppl* 164–67): ἐν μὲν αἰσχύναις ἔχω . . . πόλιος ἀνὴρ τύραννος εὐδαίμων πάρος. Menelaos (*Hel* 947–49): he would shame Troy. Oidipous (*Phoin* 1622–24): τὸ γὰρ ἐμόν ποτ' εὐγενὲς οὐκ ἂν προδοίην.

177. She is *homodoulos* to her servants (60); she is a slave, Odysseus an *eleutheros* (234); same law for slave as for free (291–92); ἐν φάει δουλεύσομεν (415). Note that Hekabe rejects freedom with the same emphatic phrase (οὐ δῆτα, 756) that Polyxene used to reject slavery (367).

178. Antiphon's account of the attempt of *nomos* to hamper *physis* is not far removed: DK 2:87 fr. 44B.4: τὰ μὲν ὑπὸ τῶν νόμων κείμενα δεσμὰ τῆς φύσεώς ἐστι. *Sisyphos:* νόμους / θέσθαι κολαστάς, ἵνα δίκη τύραννος ᾖ / . . . τὴν θ' ὕβριν δούλην ἔχῃ. Platon gives a similar remark to Hippias in *Prot.* 337d: *nomos* is a *tyrannos*, who "often does violence to natural self-interest [πολλὰ παρὰ τὴν φύσιν βιάζεται]."

179. For occurrences, see the following note. *Spoudê, spoudazein*, and *speudein* are all related both etymologically and in current meaning, in that all share the common linkage between an original (?) notion of haste and the idea of will and effort.

actor enters, but always with an indication of will or participation also.[180] Hekabe urges Polyxene to "put forth an effort" (*spoudazein*) in her plea to Odysseus, but Polyxene opposes to this her own counsel of good manners and restraint. The theme of etiquette correlates well with that of *nomos*, since manners and customs are sometimes called *nomoi*;[181] and, while it is uncertain whether *nomos* in its basic meaning of law is predetermined by human nature, it is evident that manners are used to control natural impulses and responses.

The cognate verb, *spoudazein*, reappears in the crucial passage about training in persuasion (*peithô*, 816). There, it means something approaching the Latin *studere*, to pursue an activity with energy and zeal.[182] Hekabe remarks that, in spite of the obvious utility of the art of *peithô*, "We yet do not pursue it (*spoudazomen*) to the end." The idea behind *eis telos* (to the end)[183] seems to be picked up in the second rhetorical excursus following line 1192, where professionals are "those who have reached precision."[184] *Telos* reappears in the second passage in a parallel phrase with different meaning: those who pursue rhetoric to professional levels (*êkribôkotes, eis telos*) are yet not able to be *sophoi* in any final sense (*dia telous*). Thematic emphasis on these phrases with *telos* recalls a familiar *topos* that is emphasized in Solon's *Hymn to the Muses*, a piece undoubtedly familiar to Euripides' audience.[185] Solon contrasts the efficacy of divine plans with the ineffectual efforts of human beings to acquire wealth and master the world. Phrases using *telos*, the "end" or "goal" which is known only to Zeus, underscore the limits of human knowledge and the tendency of human striving to fall into destruction (*atê*).[186] The theme of *spoudê* also appears in Solon: *speudein* is the key term describing human exertions in the professions, from seafaring and farming through such sophisticated *technai* as pro-

180. 66, 98, 120, 130, 216, 337, 507, 673, 817, 1175, 1201. The chorus (98) and Odysseus (216) enter *spoudêi*. Hekabe hurries on (66), and urges Talthybios on (507). The Greeks display *spoudê* in the mass (130, 673); Agamemnon and Polymestor wish (*speudein*) good things for their friends (120, 1175, 1201).

181. Shipp (1978, 6–7) argues that the notion that *nomos* (custom) precedes *nomos* (law) is a false one. He points to similar vague uses of "law" in English, usages that were prevalent before concepts of law were narrowed and fixed.

182. *Spoudazein* (see Platon, *Gorg.* 502b2), like *studere*, never quite approaches the English "study," perhaps because ancient learning and studying were usually thought of as amateur work.

183. 817: οὐδέν τι μᾶλλον εἰς τέλος σπουδάζομεν.

184. οἱ τάδ' ἠκριβωκότες; for *êkribôkotes*, see Pucci (1980, 106–7); Tierney (1946, 128).

185. The same theme appears in Semonides 1W; cf. Bakchylides 1.160–84.

186. See 13W 17, 28, 58. The theme and language are traditional, as is indicated by the verbal overlaps with Semonides 1W.5 and 12.

phecy and medicine.[187] The Sophist, with his pursuit of wealth through expertise, belongs in this group; and the link between extreme rationalism and dangerous folly fits our play well. The theme of *spoudê* then serves to link gesture and etiquette, Sophistic training, and traditional moral themes into a single complex, through which we can trace to their origins the internal contradictions in the pretensions of rhetoric.

Another thematic link between gesture and rhetoric, references to signs and communication through signs (*sêmata*), is not directly tied to major themes. Most instances can be seen as a reflex of tragic diction, where "to make a sign" (*sêmainô*) often becomes a mere synonym for "to speak" (*legô*).[188] These are obvious and bland usages, but their number is rather striking.[189] Two uses of the *sêma* root seem more significant: the chorus responds to Polyxene's speech by remarking on the *charaktêr* of noble birth, which is marked (*episêmos*) among human beings;[190] and, at the play's end, Polymestor predicts that Hekabe's tomb will be *kunos . . . sêma* (1273). Links with major themes are not developed, but are easy to make: gesture is a *sêma*, as is speech. Both or either can be a token of social value, the *axiôma* of a person. Polyxene seems to communicate effectively with the Greek masses through her words and gestures; but, as Hekabe's response shows us, *sêmata* are ambiguous. There seem to be no certain tokens and no fixed values. Worship of the gods themselves derives from lines of definition or boundaries (*horoi*) established by *nomos* (847), *horoi* which now prove too weak to give meaning to words and to the moral concepts they embody.[191] In the case of individuals, standards of value stamped on certain

187. 13W 43: σπεύδει δ' ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος; 73: διπλάσιον σπεύδουσι.

188. Odysseus enters in haste *sêmanôn epos* (217); Hekabe blames Talthybios for *sêmanôn kaka* (512); Talthybios responds to a sign of Neoptolemos (529); Polyxene offers a *logos* as a sign. *tond' esêmênen logon* (546); Hekabe sends a message to the Argives (604); Polymestor uses the word three times to refer to the message sent him by Hekabe (983, 999, 1003). See also *sêmeion* 1009, 1125.

189. The usage *sêmainein* = *legein* is ubiquitous in Euripides. It appears at least four times in eight of the plays; but only three of these use it ten or more times. For two, *Phoinissai* and *Iphigeneia Among the Taurians*, thematic connections are obvious: in the latter play there is much imparting of *sêmata* by letter, while in *Phoinissai* there are the famous *sêmata* on the shields of the combatants. It seems likely, therefore, that in *Hekabe*, where usage is equivalent (twelve times), references to signing do build a significant trace in the play.

190. 379: δεινὸς χαρακτὴρ κἀπίσημος ἐν βροτοῖς. Both *charaktêr* (see LSJ, I) and *episêmos* (LSJ, II) are in ordinary language associated with coinage. While either alone would not be metaphorically striking, together they are very strong.

191. Talthybios fears that blind *tychê* may have replaced the gods as governor (488–91), while Polymestor suggests that it is the gods themselves who have mixed up (*phyrousi*) fortune and misfortune, "imposing confusion [ταραγμὸν ἐπιθέντες] so that we may worship them out of ignorance [ἀγνωσίᾳ]" (956ff.).

human beings by birth and status do not retain their *charaktêr* and are effaced by experience.[192]

The theme of the tomb, the *sêma* of an individual's life, and the measure of human worth (*axiôma*),[193] is struck throughout the piece, from the very opening, when Polydoros' ghost appears, seeking the tomb that has been denied him by Polymestor (30, 50). It was over a question of burial that Hekabe differed with the Greeks and their response to Polyxene's death. The location of the play involves a number of confusions between Sigeion and Thrace;[194] and a major motivation for alteration in the setting may have been the introduction of the myth about Kynossema.[195] We might say that Euripides has sacrificed the location of Achilleus' tomb to that of Hekabe's. In the code of burial Achilleus and Hekabe represent the exact inversion of each other: the former must receive the ultimate in honor to preserve his name forever, while Hekabe receives the ultimate in dishonor, including the obliteration of her name and nature.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the blackness of this play, or the horror of the closing scene, as the three doomed protagonists exchange hatred and predictions of death and degradation. The watchword of *Hekabe* is ugliness, *to aischron*. Tragedy traditionally deals with sufferings (*deina pathê*) such as death and pain, which are inherently *aischron*, ugly and shameful; but in Sophoclean tragedy irreducible suffering can at least be seen as a test of *aretê*. By throwing aside the heroic, this play grapples more directly with evil. Yet evil and pain in themselves are alien to poetry, since they carry with them the constant threat of grotesquerie, of the ludicrous that lies always so close to the horrible, of a lack of proportion, grace, and measure. *Hekabe* dares the audience to throw aside identification with idealized figures, and to recognize a truth about themselves in a commonplace, yet grotesque, world that falls outside the norm. Poor old women (*athliai graiai gynaikes*) were common in fifth-century Hellas, as in every time; and identification with human beings so degraded in value by age, sex, and lack of social ties was even slighter then than now. The play forces us to see in a single focus what

192. For the use of *axiôma* and *axion* in the play, see Thukydides 3.82.4, and the article of Hogan (1980) who argues that *axiôsis* there means "value."

193. For *axios* and its cognates, see discussion above, and Odysseus' remarks about honors for Achilleus' tomb (309, 319). Hekabe also uses the word for her poor burial of Polyxene: her offerings could hardly be *axia*, but they are all she can muster (613).

194. The problems are discussed by Lesky ([1956] 1972.1, 331).

195. Mentioned by F. della Corte (1962, 10). The location also makes it easy to picture Polydoros' body drifting back to the same coast from which it was thrown out. (The throwing-out is nonlogical in the first place; it serves largely to motivate the chance discovery.) For other possible motivations for the odd choice of location, see Corte (1962, 6–8); Kuch (1971, 49–50); H. Weil (1879, 207). Of course, it is not necessary to eliminate all subordinate "reasons."

the division in genres and the division between self and other serve jointly to conceal: the sense of powerlessness and insignificance that underlies all human pretensions.

Through the foil of Hekabe, Polyxene, the play sketches another model of heroism, one based on prescriptive morality rather than achievement. The perversity of Polyxene's exaggerated and improbable supplication corresponds to the perversity of a heroism that asserts the self only by annihilating the self. The erotic charm that plays over her death scene anticipates a time when *erôs* will emerge rehabilitated, purified of its physical attachments, and refined into a longing of the soul. It is typical of Euripides that here, as in *Alkestis,* the new moral theory is subjected to the same corrosive irony that attacks traditional values, a process that leads in both cases to revelation rather than advocacy.

Like the Sophistic itself, the play is both false and valid, empty and futile, yet filled with a demonic energy—*spoudê*—that is itself a celebration of the aspirations that it mocks. The ugliness of the action is matched by violations of taste and literary decorum, by anachronism and topicality, by awkward digression and equally awkward pantomime, by clashing modes of refinement and vulgarity. In the end, *Hekabe* creates its beauty, not by ennobling what is ordinarily shameful/ugly (*aischron*), but out of the very elements of the *aischron* itself. These elements, which are the inverse pattern of the cultural tradition, are juxtaposed and balanced to form a system that as a whole possesses a beauty denied by its parts.

7

Elektra: The "Low" Style

This first part of this chapter will concentrate upon the problems of genre raised by Elektra's personality and her sham marriage. The second will concern aspects of the play that fit better in the mainstream of its tradition, the relation between Elektra and Orestes and the vengeance plot that they jointly perpetrate. These divisions correspond roughly to two segments that can be marked off by the notorious scene of recognition, a point at which the tension between this *Elektra* and its tradition reaches a climax. The initial delay of the recognition scene permits a sustained focus on the country setting and its dominant figures, first the farmer husband of Elektra and next the old tutor, now a mountain herdsman. After the recognition, the vengeance plot proceeds relatively directly to its ends, with the focus shifting to confrontations between the siblings and their two adversaries. The fact that this analytic scheme requires me to postpone discussion of the first dialogue between Elektra and Orestes indicates that the play itself is in no real sense more bipartite than other dramas of recognition (*anagnôrisis*) and conspiracy (*mêchanêma*). The themes of the second half are already present in the first, just as the themes of the first half find their interpretation and development in the events of the second.

I. Anti-traditional Aspects

I.A. Realism and Comic Tone

Elektra makes a uniquely striking use of certain techniques that appear in a more subtle and fugitive way in other plays. The concentration of these qualities apparently derives from this play's relation to previous treatments of

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