

## VIII.—Euripides' Tragedy of Hecuba

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Euripides' tragedy of Hecuba has not met with particular admiration from most of its modern interpreters. Indeed, some of them have criticized the play rather harshly.<sup>1</sup> Yet it seems to me that the work is especially meaningful for our generation, that it has gained a new and terrible relevance in our time. It is possible that the horrible experiences of the last two decades were necessary to open our eyes again to the significance of this great and powerful tragedy. We have seen in our own days innumerable men and women dragged away from their devastated countries and burning homes, thrown into captivity and subjected to the most atrocious and infamous cruelty; we have seen them, as soon as their fortunes turned, betrayed by those whom they had called friends, and driven to the limits of abjection and despair.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Among those who condemn the play are Gilbert Norwood, *Greek Tragedy* (London 1920) 215–219, and William N. Bates, *Euripides, A Student of Human Nature* (Philadelphia 1930) 91–95. André Rivier, *Essai sur le tragique d'Euripide* (Lausanne 1944) 172–173, classifies it among the *pièces mineures*. Croiset, *Histoire de la littérature grecque* (Paris 1899) 3.304, called it *une des belles pièces d'Euripide*, but maintained that the second part was inferior to the first and that the two parts were badly connected. On the whole, the interpretation of the *Hecuba* has been hampered, as Gordon M. Kirkwood, "Hecuba and Nomos," *TAPA* 78 (1947) 61–68, rightly observes, "by the tendency of the critics to think too exclusively of the play as being divided into two parts" (p. 63). Many important and illuminating discussions, like those of Louise E. Matthaei, *Studies in Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1918) 118–157, H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (London 1939) 215–221, G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London 1941) 82–84; 93–97; 214–228, yet start from the "problem of the two parts" and then demonstrate the fundamental unity of the drama from a unifying principle. I wonder whether this is necessary and whether the formal approach from presupposed standards has not created a somewhat artificial difficulty. Once the meaning of the play is understood the problem seems to disappear; and its composition, i.e. the particular development of its action, is seen in its uniqueness and its necessity. Critics who consider the structure in this way are Max Pohlenz, *Die Griechische Tragödie* (Leipzig and Berlin 1930) 282–297, Georges Méautis in his excellent discussion of the *Hecuba* in *Mythes inconnus de la Grèce Antique* (Paris 1944) 97–130, and Walter Zürcher, *Die Darstellung des Menschen im Drama des Euripides* (Basel 1947) 73–84.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Grube, *op. cit.* 214: "The tragedy of Hecuba does not require from us any very great effort of historical adjustment. Her sorrows at the death of her children, the horrors of war and defeat, the thirst for revenge; these are all familiar enough in the modern world. . . ."

This is the theme of the *Hecuba*. It is a prisoner's tragedy; if a modern analogy be permitted, a concentration camp play. The mythological guise is slight indeed. One is reminded, strikingly as in few other tragedies, of Aristotle's statement that the tragic poet should first invent a story, and put the mythological names in later.<sup>3</sup> The story of the *Hecuba* is born out of contemporary experience; it is a bitterly human and darkly profound reflection of the ills of the Peloponnesian War. The tragedy was probably performed about the mid-420's;<sup>4</sup> 427 was the year of Mytilene, of Plataeae, of Corcyra. Thucydides has reported these events; and it is immediately after his description of what happened in Corcyra that he interrupts his account and reflects upon the frightful demoralization and depravation which the war had brought about in individual as well as in social and political life.<sup>5</sup> Euripides, in his *Hecuba*, presents a similar indictment of this time; and, in its universal meaning, going beyond his time, of man's insufficiency and cruelty.

As a prisoner's tragedy, the *Hecuba* has three main aspects: the suffering of the enslaved woman, the characters of her masters and tormentors, and the effect which unbearable suffering has on her. Here, in this last aspect, lies the real and truly terrible tragedy: Under the pressure of torture beyond endurance the sufferer becomes as bestial as the tormentors. A most pitiable woman is transformed into a fiery-eyed dog.

For such a plot Euripides could find no better subject than the tales of Hecuba.<sup>6</sup> There is no other story which, first of all, exemplifies so powerfully and radically the change in fortune and condition. Hecuba has not only lost her home and her country. She was a queen and ruled; now she is a slave helplessly dependent on the will of others. She was rich and prosperous; now she is

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* 1455 b.

<sup>4</sup> There is no agreement about the date of the *Hecuba*. Norwood, *op. cit.* 215, puts it "about 425"; Pohlenz, *op. cit.* 288, and *Erläuterungen* 80, "vor 423." Wilhelm Schmid, *Geschichte der Griechischen Literatur* 1.3 (Munich 1940) 463 note 2, however, presents an extensive argument for a much later date, about 417.

<sup>5</sup> Thucydides 3.82-83. As a graphic instance of the cruelty of the war Méautis, *op. cit.* 98 f., recalls Thucydides' account of the raid on Mycalessus (7.29).

<sup>6</sup> The sources of the *Hecuba* are discussed by Pohlenz, *Die griechische Tragödie* 288 and *Erläuterungen* 79 f., and by Schmid, *op. cit.* 465. They disagree mainly with respect to the Polymestor-Polydorus episode for which Pohlenz assumes a *Lokalsage* while Schmid considers it Euripides' own invention. I am inclined to agree with Pohlenz.

poor and wretched. A mother of many children, she has lost her sons in the war and has seen her aged husband and her daughters killed in the days of conquest. Of her few surviving children, Cassandra, the virgin priestess of Apollo, has been made the concubine of the enemy general. And, to make Hecuba's fall even more terrible and pitiable, she is old and infirm.

But all this is, in terms of the action of the play, only the exposition. We will learn, in the horror of Hecuba's fate, what it means to be a prisoner. In the course of one day she loses all that is left her, her last two children, the two youngest ones, and both in a most terrible manner. Polyxena, who is a prisoner with her, is taken away by her masters, the Greeks, to be killed as a sacrifice to the spirit of Achilles. And immediately after the death of Polyxena she finds, washed to the shore by the sea, the mangled body of Polydorus, whom she had sent with treasures to their friend of old, king Polymestor of Thrace, in order to save the boy in case Troy fell.

Hecuba's masters, the men who hold power over her, the "camp commanders" if I may use my analogy again, are Agamemnon and Odysseus. In the characters of these two men Euripides represents two types of human viciousness which are the source of Hecuba's suffering: weakness and cruelty. It is a fine and subtle point (sanctioned, by the way, by the wisdom of tradition from Homer on<sup>7</sup>) that the one who is superior in rank and power is the weakling; while the active inhumanity of Odysseus, who is Agamemnon's inferior, is actually responsible for the decision to kill as well as for the efficient preparation of the execution. Euripides has made it perfectly clear that no religious necessity is involved in the sacrifice of Polyxena.<sup>8</sup> The Greeks in the assembly are about equally divided in their opinions, and are finally swayed by Odysseus' demagogic oratory.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> This is, of course, to be understood *mutatis mutandis*. Yet it is certainly not by accident, but rather meaningful indeed, that in the *Iliad* the most powerful man is not the best man.

<sup>8</sup> Grube, *op. cit.* 217, goes even further. He feels, obviously on the basis of Hecuba's lines 288-290, "that Polyxena who had been spared as a suppliant at the capture of Troy, in common with the other women, cannot now be killed without impiety."

<sup>9</sup> 116-140. We might suspect the harsh words which the Trojan women have for Odysseus (cf. Pohlenz, *op. cit.* 292; Grube, *op. cit.* 217); for the outcome of the assembly for which he is responsible is such a blow to them that they may not be able to judge his position on its merits. But would we suspect them if instead of reading

The reason for Odysseus' interest in the death of Polyxena is probably militarist psychological expediency. I say "probably," for he is a master at specious reasoning and ad hoc arguing, and one cannot be sure of his real motives. It is a sign of Euripides' profound human insight, as well as of his poetic power, that he has shown in great detail, and in the strongest colors, Odysseus' character in action, yet has underplayed his motives. Euripides seems to be saying that with such men any specific motives in a particular situation are only consequences of the abysmal inhumanity which is the true source of their actions.<sup>10</sup>

the play we saw it? Is not this description of Odysseus rather meant to convey a first and strong impression of the man as he actually is? Indeed, the judgment of the chorus is borne out when he later appears on the stage in person. It is to be noted, too, that the Trojan women have no words of blame for the Thesidae who also advocated the sacrifice (cf. Kitto, *op. cit.* 217). — The assembly is described by the chorus as a rather unruly affair. The argument is long and noisy. The Thesidae attack Agamemnon on personal grounds. Finally the demagogy of Odysseus carries the day.

<sup>10</sup> Miss Matthaei who found the theme of the *Hecuba* in the contrast between Conventional Justice (Nomos) and Natural Justice (*op. cit.* 128) saw in Odysseus an exponent of a community justice which required the sacrifice of Polyxena. "Achilles was, still is, though in death, the greatest, the best member of his society. . . . Justice, rather than expediency, requires that the society which he saved should fulfill all due obligations to him. . . . In a pre-eminent degree its accredited leaders, Agamemnon, Odysseus, are bound to see that these duties, these responsibilities, are carried out" (*op. cit.* 130 f.). Many critics have followed her in this. Pohlenz writes (*op. cit.* 295): "Der Nomos bestimmt aber auch im ersten Teile Polyxenes Schicksal. . . . Mit rein menschlichen Erwägungen, mit Gründen der Staatsraison, die das Verdienst auch nach dem Tode zu ehren gebietet, tritt Odysseus für Achills Forderung ein." Kirkwood (*op. cit.* 64): "The sacrifice of Polyxena was made by the Greeks in obedience to the demands of Nomos. . . . Odysseus . . . states the principle with perfect clarity in the course of the debate between him and Hecuba. . . ." But Miss Matthaei had gone further. She pointed out the limitations of the community justice which, except in the Perfect State, may do injustice to the individual and, in the case of Hecuba and Polyxena, clearly did (*op. cit.* 137 f.). "Ultimately [Achilles' demand] is not just" (*op. cit.* 129). And she also noted Euripides' criticism of Odysseus (particularly with reference to lines 135 and 328 ff.). Yet she felt that "Euripides makes us see how Odysseus and Agamemnon come to believe that [Achilles' demand] is just" (*loc. cit.*).

But what kind of Nomos is this — that requires the sacrifice of innocent prisoners? Miss Matthaei's argument may be extended to justify any atrocity as long as it is legal or corresponds to a community spirit however perverted this may be. And is the subjective conviction of an evildoer, whether or not he act in the name of an unjust community, a defence of his action? The answer to all the arguments of Odysseus is given by Hecuba before he even begins to speak (291–292):

νόμος δ' ἐν ὑμῖν τοῖς τ' ἐλευθέρους ἴσος  
καὶ τοῖσι δούλοις αἵματος κείται πέρι.

An analysis of Odysseus' speech in the scene with Hecuba, insofar as it is concerned with the justification of the sacrifice, is interesting. His argument consists of four

Within the action of the drama Odysseus is the typical henchman (in the moral, not in the literal meaning of the word). It is in this rôle that we see him in his scene with Hecuba and Polyxena (218–440). Euripides has emphasized Odysseus' inhumanity in all its heinousness by a trait which may be his own invention<sup>11</sup> (and for which he has been criticized in antiquity on grounds of *manque de vraisemblance*).<sup>12</sup> This man who is most responsible for Polyx-

points which, instead of adding up to a powerful case, weaken each other; also each following point is weaker than the preceding one. His reasoning runs as follows:

1. (306–312)

a) Many cities come to ruin because they do not honor their good men more than the *κακίους*.

b) Achilles who fell for Greece deserves honor.

This gives a strange twist to (a) which means, in itself, that states are ruined when they have bad leaders rather than when they neglect to honor their dead good leaders.

c) Is it not shameful if he who was a friend when living should cease to be our friend when dead?

The argument as a whole misses the point; which is not that Achilles should not be honored, but that he should not be "honored" by the spilling of innocent blood.

2. (313–316) This would be a bad example for the future; how are soldiers going to be willing to fight if they see the dead deprived of their honor?

This point does not strengthen the previous one. If the necessity of honoring the dead was established the reference to expedient consequences was superfluous. But this may be, if any, Odysseus' true reason.

3. (317–320) I myself am not so much interested in having much in life as in being honored after my death.

Falling back on an old commonplace (the shortness of life and the length of death) Odysseus uses an argument of the type "Take me, for example. . . ." It carries no conviction, adds nothing to the previous points, and is particularly grotesque since the victor who has everything in life is speaking to the enslaved mother (a "nothing") of the girl who is going to die.

4. (328–331) You barbarians do not know what friendship is, but we Greeks (to quote Miss Matthaei, *op. cit.* 130) "sacrifice young girls."

In this statement which actually defeats Odysseus' case Euripides' irony is obvious.

Euripides could have written a better speech had it been his intention to present a real justification of a Nomos. As it stands, Odysseus' argument is a masterpiece of transparently pseudo-idealist rhetoric — with which we are, alas, only too familiar. The critics have generally overlooked the strong element of *ἡθοποιία* in the representation of Odysseus. His "justification" of the sacrifice comes after his character has been firmly established in the first part of the scene; and the first part whose purpose can be no other than to characterize the man is most probably Euripides' own invention (see below, notes 21 and 24).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Kitto, *op. cit.* 216, note 1.

<sup>12</sup> Schol. ad *Hec.* 241 (Eduard Schwartz, *Scholia in Eur.* I [Berlin 1887] 32): ἀπθανον δὲ τὸ πλάσμα καὶ οὐχ Ὀμηρικόν· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἐσίγησεν Ἑκάβη, πολέμιον θεασαμένη κατοπτρεύοντα τὰ κατὰ τοὺς Τρῶας πράγματα. ἡ δὲ Ἑλένη εἰκότως ἄτην γὰρ μετέστανεν Ἀφροδίτης. — M(arcianus 417). Cf. Eustathius ad *Od.* δ 250, p. 1495 ed. Rom.

I am indebted to Professor Alexander Turyn, of the University of Illinois, for the

ena's death is under the greatest obligation to Hecuba; she once saved his life. And in the light of this his treatment of Hecuba becomes even more atrocious. We are shocked by the cold and official formality with which he enters and announces to Hecuba the decision of the Greeks.<sup>13</sup> But we shudder when Hecuba reminds him of the time when, as a spy in Troy, he sat at her knees and begged for his life, and he then answers with cynical ambiguities (239–250). And who does not remember, to cite only a few examples of his inhumanity, the inappropriate impertinence of his reference to the sufferings of the Greek women (321–325), the gratuitous insult in his remarks about the barbarians who know neither friendship nor honor (328–331), or the bestiality of the words with which he begins his reply to Hecuba's desperate plea for the life of her child (299–302):

Ἑκάβη, διδάσκου, μηδὲ τῷ θυμουμένῳ  
τὸν εὖ λέγοντα δυσμενῇ ποιῶ φρενί.  
ἐγὼ τὸ μὲν σὸν σῶμ' ὑφ' οὐπερ ἡτύχουν  
σῶζ' εἰν ἔτοιμός εἰμι κοῦκ ἄλλως λέγω.

Odysseus' cruelty finds its fitting complement in Agamemnon's weakness. This most unkingly king cannot even open his mouth in the assembly without having his infatuation with Cassandra thrown in his face. That this is the obvious and only reason why he opposes the sacrifice of Polyxena is known to everyone; no one suspects him of justice or humaneness.<sup>14</sup> And indeed, they know him well. For this supreme commander lacks every virtue of leadership. He is fearful and selfish, and fundamentally completely uninterested in the duties of his office. He likes to stay out of trouble and continually yields to pressure — these are his principles of action. He accedes to Polyxena's plea to die freely

information that the scholia in M go back to antiquity, possibly to the second century A.D.

<sup>13</sup> 218–224 (and the lines that follow, 225–228).

<sup>14</sup> When Agamemnon is mentioned for the first time in the play the Chorus interpret his defence of Polyxena in the same way as the Thesidae (120–129):

ἦν δ' ὁ τὸ μὲν σὸν σπείδων ἀγαθὸν  
τῆς μαντιπόλου Βάκχης ἀνέχων  
λέκτρ' Ἀγαμέμνων.  
τῷ Θησείδῃ δ' . . .  
(127) τὰ . . . Κασσάνδρας  
λέκτρ' οὐκ ἐφάτην τῆς Ἀχιλλείας  
πρόσθεν θήσειν ποτὲ λόγχης.

after the army has acclaimed her words.<sup>15</sup> He sends for Hecuba to bury her dead child after the soldiers have shown their reverence for the body of the noble girl.<sup>16</sup> When Hecuba, upon the discovery of the murdered Polydorus, asks Agamemnon for justice he turns away,<sup>17</sup> but when she then — how much this must cost her! — appeals to his nights of love with Cassandra (824–835) he becomes willing to see Polymestor punished . . . provided a way can be found that would not cause the Greeks to accuse him again of his infatuation.<sup>18</sup> He is only too glad when Hecuba wants to do the job herself (864–904), and he hides his relief under a pompous derogatory remark about women.<sup>19</sup> What may appear as compassion in his attitude toward Hecuba is rather a frightened helplessness, a direct consequence of his love affair and his uneasiness about it.<sup>20</sup> But he is never smaller and more untrue to his office

<sup>15</sup> Talthybius, after reporting Polyxena's words, continues (553–554):

λαοὶ δ' ἐπερρόθησαν, Ἀγαμέμνων τ' ἀναξ  
εἶπεν μεθεῖναι παρθένον νεανίας.

<sup>16</sup> 571–582 and 508–510:

<sup>17</sup> 787–811; 812.

<sup>18</sup> The protestations with which Agamemnon begins his reply would sound more true had he not remained deaf when Hecuba first implored him by the same gods and the same justice that he now professes to honor. Cf. Méautis, *op. cit.* 121: "Agamemnon, on le voit, n'est pas seulement vil, il est lâche. Il n'ose pas avouer que c'est l'amour qu'il ressent pour Cassandre qui le pousse à l'action, alors que tout dans ses paroles crie que c'est le souvenir des nuits que cette jeune victime donne à sa maturité, qui le pousse à considérer comme ami l'ennemi de la veille."

It is to be noted that all the key words in the first lines of Agamemnon's reply are taken from the first part of Hecuba's speech. He does not even find words of his own, but forms a high-sounding phrase from terms that Hecuba had used (850–853):

ἐγὼ σὲ καὶ σὸν παῖδα καὶ τύχας σέθεν,  
Ἐκάβη, δι' οἴκτου χεῖρα θ' ἱκεσίαν ἔχω.<sup>a</sup>  
καὶ βούλομαι θεῶν θ' εἶνεκ' <sup>b</sup> ἀνόσιον ξένον<sup>c</sup>  
καὶ τοῦ δικαίου<sup>b</sup> τήνδε σοὶ δοῦναι δίκην<sup>c</sup> . . .

<sup>a</sup> ∞ 807: οἴκτιρον

<sup>b</sup> ∞ 799 ff.: ἀλλ' οἱ θεοὶ σθένουσιν χῶ κεινῶν κρατῶν  
νόμος· νόμῳ γὰρ τοὺς θεοὺς ἡγούμεθα  
καὶ ζῶμεν ἄδικοι καὶ δίκαι' ὠρισμένοι.

<sup>c</sup> ∞ 789 ff.: σὺ μοι γενοῦ  
τιμωρὸς ἀνδρὸς ἀνοσιωτάτου ξένου  
ὃς οὔτε τοὺς γῆς νέρθεν οὔτε τοὺς ἄνω  
δέσσας δέδρακεν ἔργον ἀνοσιώτατον.

∞ 802 ff.: . . . εἰ . . .  
. . . μὴ δίκην δώσουσιν οὔτινες ξένους  
κτείνουσιν.

<sup>19</sup> 885 . . . τὸ μέντοι θῆλυ μέμφομαι γένος.

<sup>20</sup> His very first words (726–732) are motivated by his concern, not for Hecuba, but about her delay in burying her daughter. He is afraid of the possible consequences

than in the final scene, one of the weirdest that Euripides has written (1109–1251): in the pseudo-orderly procedure of his arbitration between Hecuba and Polymestor. He had known of Hecuba's plan (although not in all its terrible details) and had given her a free hand. And now he listens, an earnest judge, solemnly to Hecuba's and Polymestor's pleas!<sup>21</sup>

These are the men, this Agamemnon and this Odysseus, in whose power Hecuba finds herself, on whom her daily life and fate depend.<sup>22</sup> Yet even beyond the walls of the prison there is no hope, no help, no trust; on the contrary, there is more, and more horrible, despair. In the greedy and shamelessly hypocritical Polymestor Euripides has drawn a further and differently significant picture of human depravity. As soon as Troy had fallen he killed Polydorus in order to get possession of his treasures. The

which may result from this delay. "We have not touched the body," he says (729–730), "but you let us wait." There is a note of reproach as well as of self-praise in these words. The mixture of uneasiness and self-satisfaction also dictates his next sentence (731–732): "I have come to call for you; for things over there are in a good way" — and while he is saying this he suddenly realizes how it must sound to Hecuba and corrects himself: *εἰ τι τῶνδ' ἐστὶν καλῶς*.

His exclamations (783 and 785) upon learning of the murder of Polydorus (and also his question 763) may be taken as an expression of real feeling. This would be completely in character. Agamemnon is not cold, as Odysseus is. And Hecuba is Cassandra's mother. He is overcome by the horror of Hecuba's fate and pities her. But he forgets his pity as soon as his own interests are involved. Cf. Miss Matthaëi, *op. cit.* 150: "It is the inspiration of fear, not of mercy, which moves him."

<sup>21</sup> Agamemnon makes his judgment (1240–1251) as brief as possible. He finds it burdensome to judge the case (1240). And his decision is motivated by his desire "to escape blame" (1249). He gets it over with as quickly as he can. He does not interfere in the following altercation between Polymestor and Hecuba. But when Polymestor later prophesies his own death at the hands of Clytemnestra — then he becomes furious; he has Polymestor dragged away, gagged, and gives orders that he be sent to a desert island (1279–1286). Once more, at the very end of the play, Euripides emphasizes the character of the man. After he has calmly betrayed every principle he violently reacts to a personal offence.

As has been said above, it is Euripides' conscious elaboration of the contrast between the man and his office which gives the characterization of Agamemnon its profound significance. As the supreme commander he is responsible for the happenings under his command. Since he can never take a stand on principles, disorder results. His weakness makes Odysseus' ruthlessness possible. Indeed, Polyxena's sacrifice and Hecuba's revenge, not to speak of his own final arbitration, are, each in a different way, parodies on justice. Not νόμος, but ἀνομία is represented in Agamemnon, and through him in the Greeks.

<sup>22</sup> It is of course true that, to use Grube's words, "the play gives us the last and crowning disasters that befell Hecuba" (*op. cit.* 83). But these are, in the wider meaning of the prisoner's tragedy, typical of her sufferings, and the play thus represents a day in a prisoner's life.



plight of the prisoner is not limited to the sufferings which his masters put upon him; the outside world also turns against him. Friends cease to be friends when freedom and prosperity are lost. The construction of the drama has sometimes been criticized for its apparent lack of unity;<sup>23</sup> very unjustly, it seems to me. For the death of Polyxena, the cruelty of the enemy, represents only one side of Hecuba's *δυστυχία*; the death of Polydorus, the betrayal of friendship as a consequence of Hecuba's fall, and for greed, the lowest of motives, represents the other side. Without it the tragedy of the prisoner would not be complete.

But even so it is not complete, yet. For this is not only a tragedy of suffering, but also a tragedy of action. What has happened to Hecuba was enough to drive her to suicide, or into insanity. Either would have been a convincing psychological solution, full of pity and terror, but not tragic in the sense in which this is here understood. Hecuba cries for justice and revenge, and so do we. The terrible things which we have seen cannot go unpunished. She appeals to Agamemnon who, as the supreme commander, is the lawful dispenser of justice. But the cowardly king is deaf to her plea. And now, as orderly justice is denied her, she takes revenge into her own hands. We might even feel that there is something profoundly right in this; even if Agamemnon were capable of justice, there are things so horrible that they seem to defy any satisfaction that law can give. But this is precisely the tragic paradox: that evil is necessary to right evil. Hecuba blinds Polymestor and kills his children. And she glories in her deed; twice she calls out *οὐς ἔκτειν' ἐγώ* (1046, 1051). The poor and tormented woman, having suffered the worst from enemy and friend alike, has become as they. Suffering has turned a pitiable human being into a ferocious animal. This is the moral tragedy of Hecuba, fittingly symbolized in the transformation which the blinded Polymestor prophesies.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See above, note 1.

<sup>24</sup> The meaning of the transformation is briefly mentioned by Miss Matthaei, *op. cit.* 155, Pohlenz, *op. cit.* 293, Grube, *op. cit.* 84, and extensively interpreted by Méautis, *op. cit.* 112-126.

For the moral tragedy of Hecuba cf., in the context of different interpretations, Grube, *op. cit.*, 84: ". . . here we have the moral degradation of the conquered and the close connexion between sorrow and vengeance, two elements that appear in all his plays on war and conquest," and Kirkwood, *op. cit.* 67 and 68, who speaks of a "moral *peripeteia*."

The tragedy of Hecuba, the prisoner, ends in her moral destruction. The forces that destroy her are realistically represented and forever symbolized in Agamemnon, Odysseus, Polymestor. It is indeed a dark and frightful world which Euripides paints in this drama, a world of depravation and murder, of betrayal and hypocrisy, of cruelty and humiliation. Yet there seems to be, in this inferno of evil, a ray of consolation. The same world harbors the noble Polyxena and the good Talthybius, and those many Greeks who honor Polyxena before and after her death. But who are those who represent human decency, or even greatness, in this play? Not the "kings" who hold the power; but a child who has not lived yet, a simple old man, and unnamed soldiers. They remain on the sidelines of the action, and have no influence on the course of events.

The question of Hecuba's character and of its significance for the meaning of the play has been discussed widely. Pohlenz, *op. cit.* 292, went so far as to write: "In dieser Tragödie macht die Heldin eine wirkliche Entwicklung durch. In kunstvoller Steigerung wird die Greisin vom willenlosen Schmerze über den Willen zur Pflichterfüllung gegenüber der Tochter bis zu wildfrolockender Rachetat geführt." Kitto begins his interpretation with the question (*op. cit.* 215) whether "the view that the aim and purpose of the play is to study the character of Hecuba is tenable." Zürcher has shown that "[Hekabes] Verhalten ist nicht der Ausfluss eines Characters, sondern die Reaktion auf ein ungeheuerliches Leiden . . ." (*op. cit.* 81). "Ein Mensch dem es so ergeht, wie es der Dichter . . . Hekabe hier ergehen lässt, wird oder kann zumindest so handeln wie Hekabe, ohne dass es einer individuellen seelischen Voraussetzung bedarf" (*op. cit.* 84). To state it more specifically: Euripides is not, and does not have to be, concerned with an individual characterization of Hecuba because she is the prisoner *κατ' ἔξοχην*. The theme of the tragedy is the sufferings of the prisoner (sufferings in the widest sense of the word, so as to include her moral destruction). Therefore Hecuba's fate follows from her situation, not from her character. For the same reason we cannot agree with Grube who, rejecting the idea of a character development, writes (*op. cit.* 84): "There are two sides to her character from the beginning. This is not so much the development of a character from sorrow to hate, as the picture of the two complementary sides of one personality, exciting both pity and fear." Euripides does not represent Hecuba in terms of personality; and the traits which he emphasizes in the beginning are those which bring out most strongly the lot of the prisoner (see above pp. 121 f). The *Hecuba* is, for all its magnificent psychology, not a psychological tragedy, but a moral tragedy. It is the story of a human being that is being broken and breaks.

As the lack of individualization in Hecuba follows from her function in the play, so does the strong emphasis on character in Agamemnon and Odysseus follow from theirs. (Or, instead of limiting ourselves to the function in the play, we might speak of the reality which Euripides depicts and of the idea which he represents.) The way in which they treat Hecuba, in which they "run the camp," is entirely a matter of character. Hence the concentration on *ῥητορικὰ* in these two men.