HECUBA by Euripides

translated by Jay Kardan and Laura-Gray Street

POLYDORUS HECUBA CHORUS POLYXENA ODYSSEUS TALTHYBIUS THERAPAINA AGAMEMNON POLYMESTOR

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

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

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

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

-To Achilles.

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

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

To your cause spoke that chief in command, Agamemnon,proprietor of Cassandra. (100)

(110)

(120)

-The sons of Theseus rebutted, -exclaiming the tomb of Achilles deserved the girl's blood; -that Cassandra's lush bed must kneel down and defer to the warrior's brave spear. -There things stood, at a standoff, -an intractable draw. -Then that wily Odysseus spoke. -He festooned and perfumed his appeal -the air thick with his words-(130) -till his audience swooned at his feet as he crooned, "Who could suffer the dead telling tales down in Hades about Greeks who deserted the soldiers who died for Hellas on the fields of war?" -Every soldier agreed that to slight brave Achilles was sacrilege. -Sacrifice carried the day, I'm afraid. (140)-And Odysseus is coming--At any moment--He will tear the sweet foal from your breast--You must go--He will wrench your Polyxena out of your hands--To the ships--To the altars--At the knees of Agamemnon-

-Pray-

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

HECUBA

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

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

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

POLYXENA

The distress in your voice, your sharp cries of dismay, dearest mother, have flushed me from the tent like a bird What on earth is your news? (170)

HECUBA	O my child, my own lamb—	(180)
POLYXENA	Why this chill in your tone?	
HECUBA	I am afraid—	
POLYXENA	Don't stop now— no, now I am afraid. I hear such fear in your voice.	
HECUBA	My child—child of a wretched mother!	
POLYXENA	And why do you say this? Tell me!	
HECUBA	Because they have voted— the Greeks—to kill you on the tomb of Achilles.	(190)
POLYXENA	Alas, that you utter unspeakable woes!	
HECUBA	I must speak the unspeakable, child, though it tears me to pieces. You must know.	
POLYXENA	Sad mother of mine, what more can you take? Such outrage and woe abound. It's too much. Defenseless myself, I can't defend you; can't lighten your grief. Alas, I must die— be slain like a lamb. And you'll have to watch in pain. I'll be snatched away and impaled. My torment will end. I'll lie with the dead.	

	O mother, for you,	
	I weep and lament.	
CHORUS	And here comes Odysseus now, Hecuba,	
	hurrying to tell you something.	
ODYSSEUS	Hecuba, I think you know the army's will	
	and verdict. I'll state it anyway: The Greeks have voted	
	to offer up your daughter on Achilles' tomb.	(220)
	They've authorized me to be her guard and escort.	
	Neoptolemus will preside over the rites of sacrifice.	
	Now, be sensible about this. Don't make us drag you off	
	by force or come to blows. The state of affairs is difficult,	
	I know, but accept your lot. Hard luck is best met	
	with levelheadedness and expediency.	
HECUBA	Oh dear gods, here it comes: a pitched battle	
	thick with groans and anything but dry of tears.	(230)
	I didn't die when and where I should have.	
	But in my suffering, mighty Zeus spares me yet,	
	miserable as I am, to live—and suffer more.	
	If a slave may ask a free man some harmless questions—	
	—nothing out of hand, I assure you, nothing with teeth—	
	then you, Odysseus, should be free to answer, and I	
	to hear what you have to say. Within these parameters,	
	may I speak?	
ODYSSEUS	Permission granted. Ask away.	
HECUBA	Remember how you came to Ilium, a spy cloaked	
	in beggar's rags, with blood from self-inflicted wounds	(240)
	blurring your eyes, masking your face, staining you Trojan?	
ODYSSEUS	I do. The memory cuts deep.	
HECUBA	How when Helen spotted you, she told me alone?	
ODYSSEUS	I thought I was sunk, a goner.	
HECUBA	Remember the beggar you were then? How you grabbed my knees?	

ODYSSEUS	My hands grew numb holding your robes in that death grip.	
HECUBA	And I spared you, <i>freed</i> you.	
ODYSSEUS	I see the sun today because of you.	
HECUBA	When you were <i>my</i> slave, remember how you said—	
ODYSSEUS	Hecuba, I said whatever it took to stay alive.	(250)
HECUBA	Aren't you shameless in this conduct of yours? You yourself just admitted the mercy you got from me and now you do me such evil in return? O gods save us from politicians and demagogues like you who don't care what harm you do as long as the multitudes are pleased and the applause is loud. But tell me, what counseled <i>expediency</i> led them to cast their ballots in favor of killing my child? What in your so-called necessity requires this brutal murder at a tomb where, by custom, oxen ought to die? Does the ghost's thirst for revenge justify his demand for human slaughter? Polyxena has done no harm to Achilles. Rather, he should've asked for Helen's sacrifice, since <i>she</i> destroyed him by steering him to Troy. Or if beauty is prerequisite in this tribute, logic still exempts <i>us</i> and points to Helen: she's the epitome, after all, the absolute knockout, the stunner, the dazzling mantrap who wronged Achilles far more than we. <i>And thus</i> , my case for justice against the ghost's. Now hear my claim on your gratitude. As you yourself have readily confirmed,	(260)
	when our positions were reversed in Troy, you fell at my feet, begging for your life. You clasped my hand and touched my aging cheek, here. But now it's <i>my</i> turn to fall, clasping <i>your</i> hand, touching your cheek, just so. To ask that you return the favor and spare my child.	
	Please, I beg you. Don't take my daughter from me. Let her live. Haven't enough died already?	
	All I've lost lives on in her. She is my solace.	(280)

	She is my staff, my nurse, my guide. She is my Troy.	
	Those with power should use that power carefully.	
	Those in luck should not assume that luck will hold,	
	as I well know. Once, I was powerful and lucky,	
	a queen—but no more. A day obliterated all.	
	Odysseus, I implore you, by your bearded chin,	
	have pity on me. Reconvene the army, persuade them	
	it's wrong to kill the very women you spared—because	
	you pitied them—in Troy. Remind your men that Greek	
	laws pertaining to murder protect enslaved and free	(290)
	alike, without distinction. You have the power—the authority	
	and the lucky eloquence. But even if you babble	
	or stutter, your esteemed reputation, like a steady	
	wind, will swell the sail of your words, carrying them	
	farther than those of blowhards and other lesser men.	
CHORUS	Who could be so calloused as to remain unmoved, hearing	
	your sad complaints and mournful refrains of abundant woe?	
ODYSSEUS	A prefatory caveat, Hecuba: Just because	
	I make political speeches doesn't mean that I	
	must therefore be your enemy, so don't in anger	(300)
	misconstrue me so.	
	First off, I acknowledge,	
	unconditionally, your claim on my gratitude.	
	You saved my life, and, by the gods, I owe you. I stand	
	ready to honor my debt by saving <i>your</i> life. But	
	my public vow to the Greek troops I must also	
	stand by, and that is to reward our best warrior	
	with Polyxena, your daughter. It's an invalid premise,	
	you see, to think that these two lives—yours; hers—	
	can be interchanged.	
	Furthermore, our cities	
	will fail if noble and devoted soldiers earn	
	no greater returns than do lesser men. Achilles	
	deserves honor and tribute more than anyone:	
	He died for Greece, and by the gods we owe him.	(310)
	What conduct is more shameless than enlisting	
	a man's good and faithful service while he lives,	
	only to throw him to the dogs when he's dead?	

	Well, then. And if we had to go to war again,	
	would we have troops ready and willing to deploy	
	Or would men think, <i>Why bother? Better to lie</i>	
	low and save my own skin. Imagine what	
	adverse effects dishonoring the dead would have on	
	recruiting efforts, on public perception, on morale.	
	For me, a few essential crumbs will suffice	
	while I'm alive. But I want the full-out display	(320)
	of honors and commemorations when I die,	
	a worthy tomb to make this life worthwhile. That's	
	the thing that lasts.	
	Third, you complain how you've suffered.	
	Well, we Greeks have suffered, too. Our old women	
	and our old men are no less wretched than yours.	
	Our young brides are likewise widowed of fine grooms	
	who sleep in Trojan dust instead their marriage beds.	
	Just as <i>we</i> endure these hardships, so can you.	
	And if you think I'm wrong to honor the legacy	
	of a great warrior like Achilles, then go ahead	
	and call me callous. The barbaric way you foreigners	
	use your friends and disrespect the dead—I say	
	keep it up. That way Greece stays on top,	(330)
	and you people get the fate that you deserve.	
CHORUS	Witness here how the violence of war enslaves,	
	forcing its captives to endure the unendurable.	
HECUBA	O daughter, all my arguments against your murder	
	were useless, feeble puffs of air accomplishing nothing.	
	If you have more skill than your mother, use it now.	
	Like the nightingale, sing out all your notes, or you	
	will lose your life. Fall prostrate at this man's knee	
	and persuade him. He has children, too, I know.	(340)
	You may yet move him to pity.	
POLYXENA	I see you, Odysseus, how you've hidden your right	
	hand in your cloak and turned your face away so I	
	can't touch your hand or beard in supplication.	
	But you have nothing to worry about. I'll follow you	
	to Achilles' tomb, both out of necessity and	

	because I wish to. I want to die. I won't grovel	
	for my life like some lowly coward of a woman. Why should I live? My father was king of Troy, ruler	
	of all Phrygians. I was born royalty, and I was reared	(350)
	to expect I'd marry my choice of kings, exciting rivalry	(350)
	over whose home and hearth I'd grace as bride. I was	
	mistress of the Idaeans, center of their attention, godlike	
	—except in my mortality. Now that I'm	
	a slave, I am infatuated with death. Imagine:	
	some cruel-minded master could buy me for money—me,	
	the daughter of Priam, sister of Hector and many others	(360)
		(300)
	—and take me to his house, force me to cook for him, to sweep and tend the shuttle, to work day after day	
	while my bed, once thought fit for rulers, is polluted	
	by some bought slave. No, it will not happen.	
	That life is inconceivable. While the light	
	in my eyes is still free, I yield it up, giving	
	my body to Hades. So lead me, Odysseus; take me	(070)
	to my death. I see no reason to hope for or believe	(370)
	in anything better. And, Mother, don't you interfere.	
	Help me instead. I would rather die than suffer	
	the shame of wearing slavery's yoke around my neck.	
CHORUS	The signs of good breeding are always impressive. But	
	nobility is even more noble when it's deserved.	(380)
HECUBA	You're spoken well, daughter, but there is pain in that	
	good speaking.	
	Odysseus, I understand	
	that Peleus's son must be granted his sacrifice	
	and that your reputation must be preserved. Here's	
	how to accomplish both without killing this girl:	
	Lead me to the pyre and appease the ghost by killing me.	
	Indeed, I—who gave birth to Paris who with his bow	
	slew the great Achilles—should not be spared.	
ODYSSEUS	Achilles didn't ask for your death,	(390)
	old woman, but for hers.	
HECUBA	Then slaughter me	

	with my daughter. That gives the earth and Achilles' corpse twice as much blood to drink.	
ODYSSEUS	That's unnecessary. Your daughter's death is enough. Believe me when I say I wish this one death didn't have to be.	
HECUBA	Then I must to die with her.	
ODYSSEUS	Excuse me? I'm not aware that I was taking orders.	
HECUBA	I'll cling to her like ivy.	
ODYSSEUS	Not if you obey those wiser than you.	
HECUBA	She's my daughter. I won't let go.	(400)
ODYSSEUS	And I won't go away. So take your leave of her.	
POLYXENA	Mother, do as I say—wait, Odysseus, have some patience with a parent's understandable fury— Mother, listen to me, don't try to fight those who have you in their power. Do you want to be shoved around, to have your fragile aged skin scraped and torn when you fall to the ground? To risk losing your dignity being dragged off by some young soldier? No, Mother, it would be unseemly. Instead, dear unhappy one, give me your sweet hand and lay your cheek to mine. Now for the very last time, I see the brilliant circle of the sun. Now I say my final words to you, o one who carried me in her womb and bore me. And now I go—	(410)
HECUBA	Dear child, how I, still leashed to daylight, will mourn for you.	
POLYXENA	—unmarried, not royally wed as I should have been!	

HECUBA	You're pitiful, child, and I'm a wretched woman.	
POLYXENA	In Hades' darkness I will lie alone.	
FULIAENA	in naues darkness i win he alone.	
HECUBA	O gods! What shall I do? Where turn to end my life?	
POLYXENA	I, born in freedom, to die a slave.	(420)
HECUBA	And I, bereft of fifty children.	
POLYXENA	Mother, what do you want me to tell my brother Hector, and Priam, my father, your husband?	
HECUBA	Tell them how wretched I am.	
POLYXENA	O breasts that suckled me!	
HECUBA	O daughter who grieves me with an untimely, unhappy fate!	
POLYXENA	Farewell, Mother, and say farewell to Cassandra for me—	
HECUBA	Others may fare well, but not your mother.	
POLYXENA	Now lead me away, Odysseus, with a veil shrouding my head. My mother's grief has melted my heart, and I have melted hers. O sunlight! I will savor you in the short time left between this moment and the sword at Achilles' tomb.	
HECUBA	Aah! I faint. My legs dissolve. Polyxena, stay with me! Reach out your hand, grab hold of mine. Don't go, daughter, don't leave me childless! Let me die, my friends.	(440)
CHORUS	[Strophe A]	
	O sea-breeze, wind that carries ships across the heaving waves,	

where are you now carrying me? In what home will I be slave?

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

[Antistrophe A]

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

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

[Strophe B]

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

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

[Antistrophe B]

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

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

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

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

TALTHYBIUS	O Zeus, how	
	can I say you care for humans now? Or that you oversee	(490)
	the fortune of all mortal affairs? Was not this woman	
	once the queen of gold-rich Phrygia and wife of Priam?	
	Now that lively city is a spear-gutted carcass,	
	And Hecuba herself is a ragged slave, bereft and sunk	
	to the ground. What a pity. I'm an old man,	
	but I'd rather die than live this shame.	
	Stand up,	
	Hecuba. Pick yourself up from the dirt. Push that gray	
	hair out of your eyes. I know you hear me.	(500)
HECUBA	Go away	
	and leave me alone. Why are you here? Who are you	
	anyway? Just let me lie here. Don't disturb	
	my dusty grief.	
TALTHYBIUS	I'm Talthybius, Greek herald,	
	delivering a message to you, as I was ordered.	
HECUBA	Are you kind, then? A friend?—come to tell me	
	the Greeks want my death, too? If so, you bring good news.	
	Extend your hand and help me up. Let's hurry along.	
	Lead me, old man.	
TALTHYBIUS	To say you may now bury your dead child, ma'am,	
	that's the reason I've come to you. The news	
	I was sent to tell you.	(510)
HECUBA	What? No merciful death?	
	Just more woe?	
	And so you're dead, my child, commandeered	
	from life, from me. Your mother's now more childless than	
	she was this morning, having lost you.	
	Who could carry	
	all this grief?	
	—How was my daughter handled, sir?	
	Did your people execute her with respect?	
	Or did you kill her like a slave and an enemy?	

Tell me the truth, old man, however shocking or painful.

TALTHYBIUS	You're doubling the steep cost of sorrow, woman,	
	by asking me to retell these troubles. My eyes are wet	
	a second time. I paid in tears once already	
	at the grave when she died. But you will hear. In full	(520)
	force the Greeks gathered at the tomb for your girl's death.	
	Achilles' son led your daughter by the hand to the top	
	of the mound. I was standing nearby. A designated corps	
	of young guards followed, on hand to restrain any bucking	
	or bolting of your calf. Neoptolemus took a gold cup,	
	filled it with wine, and lifted it in honor of his dead father.	
	He nodded to me, and on that cue, I raised my voice	
	over the chatter gusting around me and said, "Silence	
	in the ranks. All soldiers hereby stand at attention	(530)
	until further orders." Thus I becalmed the entire army.	
	They stood hushed and breathless as Neoptolemus prayed,	
	"O Achilles, greatest of warriors, accept this cup	
	that the army and I offer you as a gift. Let this libation	
	entice your ghost to appear and drink the maiden's blood,	
	dark and pure. In return, grant us winds,	
	strong and favorable. Free the prows and bridling ropes	(540)
	of our ships, and fill our sails for safe passage home."	
	Then, seizing his double-gilt sword by the hilt, he drew it	
	from its sheath and motioned to the guards to seize Polyxena.	
	Your daughter, when she saw this, gave this proud speech:	
	"O Greeks who sacked my city, know that I die willingly,	
	so keep your hands off me. I will bare the nape	
	of my own neck to the sword. For the gods' sakes, let me	
	be free of fetters when you kill me so that I may die free,	(550)
	and among the dead I won't have to be ashamed,	
	being a queen, to be called a slave." The troops roared	
	their approval, and, when Agamemnon ordered the guards	
	to release the maiden, they did so immediately. And immediately	
	Polyxena grabbed the fabric at her neckline with both hands	
	and ripped her dress open, exposing her breasts, her torso	
	smooth and perfect as a statue's. Nude to the waist,	(560)
	she dropped on one knee before her executioner	
	and said, "Behold, young man—if it's my breast you want	
	to strike, strike here; if here beneath the neck, my throat	

	is ready." Neoptolemus both unwillingly and willingly cut her throat at the windpipe. His steel sword	
	sliced deep, and her blood gushed out. Even as she died,	
	your courageous daughter took care to fall decently,	
	modestly covering what must be hid from men's eyes.	(570)
	When she was fully dead, the soldiers busied themselves	
	with the tasks of death. Some scattered leaves over the body,	
	while others piled the pyre with pine logs. Those working	
	reprimanded anyone idle: "Do you stand there,	
	cur, doing nothing, holding neither gown	
	nor ornament? Won't you go find something to give	
	to the bravest and most noble of maidens?" That's how the solders	
	spoke of your dead daughter, Hecuba. Now you've heard	(580)
	the whole story. Having witnessed it myself,	
	I see you are the luckiest—and most unlucky—of mothers.	
CHORUS	This sorrow boils up and overruns the house of Priam	
	and Troy, my city, so the gods want it to.	
HECUBA	Polyxena, dear, I don't know which ordeal to manage	
	first with so many rolling in. There is a vast	
	sea of pain out there. If I brace against one, another	
	upends me, then another again. Wave upon wave	
	of pain. And now I can't sponge away all you suffered	
	in dying or keep myself from groaning. But I'm glad	(590)
	to know you died well, to have at least that bleak	
	comfort.	
	Strange to think how barren ground can,	
	with care—or chance, perhaps—bear fruit; while fertile land	
	neglected goes to seed, or worse. With people, though,	
	the worthless are never anything but. The noble,	
	likewise. Character doesn't change with life's conditions,	
	But what am I saying? These thoughts are arrows shot in vain.	
	—A moment, Talthybius. Go tell Agammenmon	
	something for me. Tell him: No one touches my daughter.	
	Ask him to keep everyone away until	
	I get there.	
	Armies—any large crowd of men—can't be	
	predicted. Big fields like that are always full of weeds.	

Inflamed sailors, like fires, run wild. Things spin out

	of control: even good men get singed with badness.	
	—Old woman, take this pitcher to the beach. Fill it	
	with sea water. Carry it back to me without	(610)
	spilling any. I need it all to give my child	
	her last washing. A bride unwedded; a virgin	
	bedded by death. I must bathe and lay her out	
	as she deserves—But how? With what treasures? —I	
	have nothing left. —So now what? Think, Hecuba.	
	–My women,	
	captives like me, but maybe they smuggled out a few	
	pretty trinkets. I'll go see.	
	Oh, how much	
	greatness gone! My home, my Priam, our palace and fortune,	(620)
	our children—gone now, stripped to the bone. How pointless, all	
	that boasting of wealth and fame. The richest are those who live	
	uneventfully, day after day after day.	
CHORUS	[Strophe]	
	I was tied to this fate, this sorrow,	(630)
	when Paris cut the first pine	
	on Mt. Ida to carve a mast	
	to sail the ocean's surge	
	to anchor in the bed of Helen,	
	that sun-kissed, golden girl.	
	[Antistrophe]	
	-	
	Suffering encircled by worse	((10)
	necessity, all entangled— One man's folly launched	(640)
	one man sjong laanenea	
	a host of woes on Ilium	
	when the Idean herdsman judged	
	three bickering goddesses,	
	[Epode]	
	legislating strife	
	by spear and slaughter, and shame	
	of my bedchamber. A widowed bride	

	is groaning in Sparta. A mother now childless tears gray hair and claws her cheeks red.	(650)
THERAPAINA	Where is the queen? Hecuba, who wears so many woes no one will ever take that crown from her?	(660)
CHORUS	What is it now? Does it never end?	
THERAPAINA	I bring this pain for Hecuba. It's hard to speak, and hard to keep silent.	
CHORUS	Here comes Hecuba now, in time for your announcement.	
THERAPAINA	O queen of woes—more wretched than you imagine— I bring you news—you're dead and gone from light to darkness, childless, widowed, exiled, quite destroyed.	
HECUBA	But how is this called news? You tell me what I already know. But what is this? Why do you bring Polyxena's corpse here? I'd made burial arrangements with the Greeks.	(670)
THERAPAINA	She doesn't see, so caught up in mourning Polyxena she doesn't recognize the new pain set before her.	
HECUBA	O gods, don't tell me it's Cassandra you've brought?	
THERAPAINA	It's not Cassandra; she's alive. Prepare yourself. I'll unwrap the corpse so you see the one you mourn.	(680)
HECUBA	Aah! It's my son! My youngest son, dead! He was supposed to be safe with the Thracian king. O Polydorus! I'm truly dead. This sight annihilates me utterly.	
	O child, child— I start the song— The song of death— Sung from the heart—	
	N7 ·	

THERAPAINA You recognize your son now.

HECUBA	Stunningly new;	
	newly stunning, what I see here. I see all now.	(690)
	Wave after wave—	
	Blow after blow—	
	Day after day—	
	Sighs— Groans—	
CHORUS	It's terrible, wretched lady, the terrible ills we suffer.	
HECUBA	O precious child—	
	Full-wretched mother—	
	What fate? — What hand? —	
	What brought you here? —	
THERAPAINA	I do not know, my queen. I found him on the beach.	
HECUBA	Did he drown? Or was he killed there on the sand?	(700)
THERAPAINA	It seemed to me the waves had washed him up on shore.	
HECUBA	Black-winged nightmares—	
	They told the truth—	
	My son, dead in dreams—	
	My son, dead in life—	
CHORUS	Who killed him then? Did your dreams show you that?	
HECUBA	I tell you friends, a friend and ally murdered him.	(710)
	The king of Thrace. To whom my careful husband sent	
	our son—and his future wealth—for safekeeping.	
CHORUS	You're saying Polydorus killed your son for gold?	
HECUBA	Unspeakable— Unnamable—	
	Unholy— Unbearable—	
	A monstrous host—	
	A murdered guest—	

	His broken limbs—	
	His mangled flesh—	
	The traitor's sword—	
	No pity—None—	(720)
CHORUS	I've never seen you in a state like this, Hecuba.	
	The gods have loaded you with more pain than you	
	can bear.	
	—But look, I see Lord Agamemnon coming.	
	—Let's be quiet now.	
AGAMEMNON	Hecuba, why on earth haven't you buried your daughter?	
	I got your message from Talthybius. You said none	
	of us should touch her, and so, as you directed, we've	
	left her alone, not laying a hand on her. But you,	
	you take your time in a way that makes me wonder.	(730)
	I've come to hurry you along. We Greeks take pride	(750)
	in doing things well, if such things be worth doing.	
	-Hold on, what corpse is this I see before the tents?	
	A Trojan? Those are no familiar Greek wrappings.	
	Triojan, Those are no fammar Greek wrappings.	
HECUBA	O you unfortunate (and I mean me by saying	
	"you"), Hecuba! What should I do? Do I	
	beg at his knees for mercy, or bite my tongue in silence?	
AGAMEMNON	Why are you turning your back to me, Hecuba?	
	What has happened here? Tell me about this body.	(740)
HECUBA	If to him I'm nothing but a contemptible enemy and slave,	
	he'll push me from his knees. I couldn't bear that.	
AGAMEMNON	I can't read minds, you know. I can't help unless	
	you speak.	
HECUBA	But maybe I'm gooing him as an anomy	
HECODA	But maybe I'm seeing him as an enemy, when, really, he isn't?	
	when, really, lie isii t:	
AGAMEMNON	Still nothing? Suit yourself then.	
	If you don't want me to know, I don't want to hear.	

HECUBA	I can't do what I need to do without his help.	(
	Why do I waste time debating? Win or lose, he's my only hope of avenging my children.	(750)
	Agamemnon, hear my supplication. I beg you by your knees, your chin, and your happy right hand.	
AGAMEMNON	What are you asking for, Hecuba? For your freedom? That's easy enough.	
HECUBA	Sir, not what you expect. Do you see this corpse I'm crying over?	(760)
AGAMEMNON	Of course I see it. I've been trying to get you to tell me about it.	
HECUBA	This is the body of my son. I carried him in my womb. I gave birth to him.	
AGAMEMNON	I see. Which son, poor woman?	
HECUBA	Not one of those who died defending Troy.	
AGAMEMNON	You had another?	
HECUBA	I did, in vain. You see him here.	
AGAMEMNON	But where was he when Troy fell?	
HECUBA	To save his young life, his father sent him away.	
AGAMEMNON	Sent him where?	
HECUBA	To this very country in which he now lies dead.	(770)
AGAMEMNON	He sent his son to Polymestor?	

HECUBA	Yes, and sent with him a sum of bitter gold.	
AGAMEMNON	But how did your son die? Who killed him?	
HECUBA	Who else? Our dear, loving, loyal Thracian friend.	
AGAMEMNON	How shameful! Was it lust for gold?	
HECUBA	Yes, Polymestor killed for it the minute he learned Troy had fallen.	
AGAMEMNON	Where was your son found? Who brought him here?	
HECUBA	This old servant. She found his body tumbling in the surf.	
AGAMEMNON	Was she looking for him?	
HECUBA	No, she went to fetch sea water to wash Polyxena's body.	(780)
AGAMEMNON	Polymestor must have killed him and then thrown him in the sea.	
HECUBA	Hacked up, pounded by waves. Look at the lacerations on his skin.	
AGAMEMNON	You are indeed a wretched woman.	
HECUBA	I'm already dead, Agamemnon. I'm past suffering.	
AGAMEMNON	Alas! Is there a woman more unfortunate?	
HECUBA	None, except Misfortune herself. But listen to my request, my supplication. See if you think my hardships are justified. If so, that's it; I won't bother you further. But if not, then please help me.	
	Help me get revenge on that deceitful friend,	(790)

that fiendish and malignant host. I can't count the number of times he sat at my table, an honored guest. In thanks, he kills my son? He's a calculated, cold-blooded murderer. I know I'm nothing but a powerless slave, but the gods have power-as does the underlying law that governs them. It is by virtue of this law-this basic moral code-that the gods and our belief in them (800)exists, and we know right from wrong, good from evil. If you defy this law, allowing those who murder guests and violate the gods to go unpunished, you poison the root of our humanity. Justice withers and dies. Preserve us, then, and pity me. Step back like an artist and see the whole picture of me. Behold a woman royal once upon a time but now your slave; once rich in children but now (810)impoverished and childless; exiled, deserted, a prisoner of war, the most wretched of humans-No, don't go, Agamemnon! Why do you turn away? O gods, can I accomplish nothing? Why do we work so hard to learn unnecessary things, when what we need to know is how to persuade. Without the polished art of persuasion, we can't get what we want. It's hopeless. (820)I've watched my husband and all my children die; I'm now a slave; on the horizon, smoke still spirals up from Troy's smoldering ashes, haunting me. All but Cassandra. No point invoking bonds of love, as if caresses could be called to testify—but still, why not? -My lord, Agamemnon, hear me!

My daughter shares your bed. She sleeps beside you, and you enjoy her favors. What are they worth to you, these nights

	of love? What thanks are due to Cassandra? To me, my lord? Think of this and hear me: Do you see this corpse, this dead boy who is Cassandra's brother? By doing good to him, you do the same for her, the one who shares your bed. But let me speak a little more! If I could, I'd grow tongues in my arms and hands and hair, in the soles of my feet—a thousand tongues all talking, all crying together, in one voice clinging to your knees, begging you, imploring you: O lord, O greatest light of Hellas, lend your avenging hand to this old woman, even though she's nothing. Help her anyway. Do your duty. Mete out justice. Punish this heinous crime against gods and man.	(840)
CHORUS	Strange how our lives ebb and flow, defined	
	by circumstance and necessity, making	
	friends our worst enemies and making foes	
	our inadvertent friends.	
AGAMEMNON	I truly pity you	(850)
	and your son, Hecuba, and I'm genuinely moved	
	by your request. I tell you, nothing would please me more	
	than seeing justice served. But I'm in an awkward position	
	with the army. Any part I might play	
	in helping you exact revenge would be seen	
	as motivated by my love for Cassandra.	
	The army thinks of Polymestor as an ally	
	—and of your murdered son as an enemy.	
	You love your son, of course, but that means nothing	(860)
	to the Greek troops. So know that if I can, I'll help— but not if the army starts to grumble.	
HECUBA	Then no one is free	
	in this world. He's chained to money, or to luck, or to majority	
	opinion, or to law. Any way you look at it,	
	he's still a slave.	
	And so, because your fears constrain you,	
	hold you hostage to the mob, let a captive	
	set you free. Be aware of my plans to get	(870)
	revenge, but don't be party to them. Don't act	

for me, but don't act quickly if the Greeks respond to Polymestor's distress. Just look the other way. That's all you need to do. I'll take care of the rest.

- AGAMEMNON But how? With what? Do you believe your shaking hands can lift a heavy sword? Or do you plan to use poison? And who will be your accomplice in all this?
- HECUBA Remember, there are women hidden in these tents.

(880)

(890)

- AGAMEMNON The women we took captive? The Greek prisoners?
- HECUBA Yes, they will help me get revenge.
- AGAMEMNON But how? You are women. How will women defeat men?
- HECUBA There is unnerving strength in numbers, especially when you add deceit.
- AGAMEMNON Unnerving maybe. But still, you can't expect women to have the strength.
- HECUBA Why not? Didn't women kill Aegyptus's sons? Didn't women murder the men of Lemnos, every last one?
 - We're wasting time talking. Give this woman leave to run an errand for me. Guarantee her safe passage through the Greek encampments.
 - You, woman, take this message to Polymestor: "Hecuba, the former queen of Troy, invites your presence, and that of your sons, to speak of pressing matters that touch us all."
 - One last thing, Agamemnon. Delay Polyxena's funeral. I want her and Polydorus cremated and buried together, joining in one flame my doubled woes.

AGAMEMNON	If that's what you want, lady, so be it.	
	If we had wind to sail, I couldn't grant this. But	
	we're still becalmed, with nothing to do but stand by	
	until the god sends fair weather.	(900)
	Best of luck.	(900)
	I hope it all turns out. It's in the interests of both	
	states and individuals that evil suffers evil	
	and good fares well.	
	and good fales well.	
CHORUS	[Strophe A]	
	You, my hometown Ilium, no longer	
	can you be called unravished, unspoiled.	
	Such a fog of Greeks enveloped you	
	with honed swords, so many swords!	
	Your towers are crownless, shaved bare,	(910)
	Bruised with black ash and smoke.	()
	Wounded Ilium, torn from your shores;	
	I can no longer call you home.	
	[Antistrophe A]	
	My ruin struck after midnight.	
	Our bellies were full of rich foods.	
	Mists of sleep soothed our eyes	
	after thanksgiving sacrifice and dance.	
	In our bed, my husband slept soundly—	(920)
	his spear at last retired to its peg—	(920)
	unaware of ships at our shores	
	the Greeks disgorging on Ilium Troy.	
	the Greeks disgorging on man frog.	
	[Strophe B]	
	I was braiding my hair, absorbed	
	in my sea-deep mirror, ready to sink	
	into bed and join my love	
	in woolen fleeces. But then —shouts,	

	battle orders, Troy impaled	
	<i>by war cries:</i> Ooh-rah, Greeks!	(930)
	Will you storm these hills with fire,	
	secure your target, and get home?	
	[Antistrophe B]	
	Wearing only a thin nightgown	
	like a simple girl, I left my love	
	to plead in vain at Artemis' shrine—	
	My husband dead, I was bound	
	in chains and yanked to sea.	
	my city recedes as the Greeks set sail	
	Severing me forever from home,	
	I sank into fathomless grief.	(940)
	[Epode]	
	Helen, lovely but two-faced,	
	and her vile cowhand Paris.	
	Damn them both to hell!	
	I am ruined, wrenched	
	from my own native land	
	by their foul marriage-defiling bed.	
	O headwinds, over the black waves	
	shackle the whore at sea.	(950)
	May she never see home.	
POLYMESTOR	My dearest Hecuba, wife of my late friend	
	Priam! How I pity you and your ruined Troy.	
	And now your precious Polyxena—dead—it's just too much.	
	Oh, what can we count on in this life? Nothing, I say!	
	Not reputation or good fortune. The gods make it all	
	pitch and yaw, back and forth, until we're seasick	
	and confused enough to worship them.	
	But what help	(960)
	is any of this with your loss?	

	Are you bothered I haven't	
	been to visit you before now? I came here as fast	
	as I could, Hecuba. It just so happened that I was inland,	
	seeing about Thracian business, when you arrived here.	
	As a matter of fact, I was just setting out to see you	
	when your servant arrived and gave me your message	
HECUBA	I'm mortified for you to see me in this state, Polymestor.	
	I've fallen so low since we last met. I'm too ashamed now	(970)
	to look you in the eye. So don't think of it as hostility toward you,	
	Polymestor. Besides, it's not customary for a woman to meet	
	a man's gaze.	
POLYMESTOR	Indeed. No offense taken, my dear. Now how can I be of service?	
	What are the "pressing matters" your message spoke of?	
HECUBA	I have some information to share with you	
	and your sons, but it's private. Would you ask	
	your attendants to leave us for a while?	(980)
POLYMESTOR	Go away. I'm safe here.	
	Hecuba is my friend, and the Greek army	
	is well disposed to me.	
	But tell me:	
	How may a fortunate man such as I help	
	an unfortunate friend?	
	First this as first well as a heart that hild Dairan	
HECUBA	First things first: tell me about the child Priam	
	and I gave to you for safekeeping. How is he? Does he live?	
POLYMESTOR	Alive and well, I assure you. In his case anyway, you're in luck.	
TOLIMESTOR	Anve and wen, I assure you. In his case anyway, you ie in luck.	
HECUBA	O dearest friend! Your words speak to your worth!	
POLYMESTOR	Is there anything else you wish to know?	
HECUBA	Does he still remember me, his mother?	
POLYMESTOR	Does he! He even tried to come here secretly to see you.	

30

(990)

- HECUBA The gold he brought with him from Troy—is it safe?
- POLYMESTOR Quite safe—under lock and key in my palace.
- HECUBA Guard it well. I hope it isn't a burdensome temptation.
- POLYMESTOR Not at all. I'm content to enjoy the wealth I already have.
- HECUBA Do you know why I've sent for you and your sons?
- POLYMESTOR I don't. You were just going to tell me.
- HECUBA There are—O beloved friend, you are so dear to me . . . (1000)
- POLYMESTOR Yes, yes, go on. What is it we must know?
- HECUBA —ancient vaults, with Priam's gold.
- POLYMESTOR And you want me to convey this to your son?
- HECUBA That's it. You are an upright man.
- POLYMESTOR Why do my sons need to be here?
- HECUBA If something happened to you, they would need to know of this.
- POLYMESTOR I see what you mean. Smart thinking.
- HECUBA Do you know Athena's temple in Troy, where it once stood?
- POLYMESTOR Is that where the gold is? How can it be found now?
- HECUBA Look for sheer outcroppings of black rock. (1010)
- POLYMESTOR Is there anything I need to know?
- HECUBA Yes, the treasure I smuggled out of Troy—can you keep it for me?
- POLYMESTOR You have it with you? Where? In your gown, or have you hidden it?

HECUBA	It's under a pile of plunder in these tents.	
POLYMESTOR	Here? But this is the Greek encampment.	
HECUBA	Female captives are housed in separate quarters.	
POLYMESTOR	Is it safe to go inside? Are there any men around?	
HECUBA	No men, only us women. But hurry because the Greeks are restless to weigh anchor and sail for home. Once our business is finished, you can take your sons back to the place you house my son.	(1020)
CHORUS	 You haven't yet paid the price, but you will. Like a man stumbling into foul bilge-water. Or swept from shore and drowning in the undertow. As the waves cover your head, you'll see how your life is just a loan that's come due. Death is the payment the gods demand. Where justice and the gods converge, there's a maelstrom. Your greed for gold leads you down the road to hell. Hands that never held a sword will cut your life away. 	(1030)
POLYMESTOR	O wretched me, I'm blind! Blinded of my eyes' light!	
HEMI CHORUS	Did you hear the Thracian? Why is he screaming, my friends?	
POLYMESTOR	O me! My children! You have slaughtered them!	
HEMI CHORUS	Something new and terrible has been done inside the tent!	
POLYMESTOR	Run, will you? But you won't escape! I will tear this tent down with my bare hands.	(1040)
CHORUS	 See that? It looks like— Like something heavy thrown against the tent wall! What is all the clatter and commotion? Should we rush in? What should we do? Should we break down the door? 	

	—Crisis calls! Hurry now! Hecuba needs us!	
HECUBA	That's right! Smash it all! Rage and roar! Break down the door: Nothing will bring your sight back, or let you see your sons alive again. I've killed them.	
CHORUS	Did you really do the things you say, Hecuba? Have you taken down the Thracian?	
HECUBA	Just watch. In a minute you'll see him come stumbling out, blind and flailing. You'll see his sons, whom I killed with the help of these excellent Trojan women. He's paid his debt. I've had my revenge. And here he comes, just as I said. I'll get out of the way of his Thracian fury.	(1050)
POLYMESTOR	Where go? Where stand? Run? Where? A beast on all fours. Hard on the trail of my prey Where? Here? This way? That way? To corner those murderous Trojan hags? Where are you, hags? Where did the witches go? God of sun, cure my bloody eyes. Give me light.	(1060)
	Hssst. I hear their footsteps. I smell them. But where? O gods, to leap, to gorge on their flesh and bones. Rabid for blood. Vengeance is mine. Where now? My children deserted. Torn apart by those Bacchantes of Hell. Slaughtered, a gory meal for dogs. A wild thing thrown out on a mountain. Where can I stand? Where turn? Where go?—	(1070)
	Run for my lair. Sail like a ship. My cloak, a sail unfurling. Run! Guard my sons.	(1080)
CHORUS	Tormented man, in the grip of unbearable suffering brought on by your unbearable deeds. A heavy- handed god weighs you down with punishments.	

POLYMESTOR	Help me! Aid! Hear me,	
	you Thracians! Soldiers,	(1090)
	bring your spears! Horsemen,	
	use your spurs!	
	Come to me, sons of Atreus!	
	Help, help, I cry, help!	
	For the gods' sake,	
	where are you? Do you hear?	
	I need help. These	
	women, they've—won't someone	
	help me?—these woman	
	have destroyed me!	
	They have weapons!	
	My sons! Murder! Butchery!	
	Help! I need help!	
	Oh gods, the horrors.	
	Where can I run?	
	Where can I go?—Wings,	
	gods give me wings—	
	let me fly to the heavens,	(1100)
	into the light of Orion	
	or Sirius—or in my wretchedness	
	I must plunge into the frothing	
	black chasms of Hades!	
CHORUS	Who can blame this man for wanting to die,	
	for thinking death the cure for so much pain?	
AGAMEMNON	I came when I heard shouts. Echo ricocheted off	
	the rock, spreading uproar through the army.	(1110)
	If we didn't know firsthand that Troy's towers	
	had fallen to Greek spears, the commotion	
	would have caused some concern.	
POLYMESTOR	I know that voice! O my dear friend, Agamemnon!	
	See what I suffer!	
AGAMEMNON	Dear gods! O wretched man, who has ruined you?	
	Who gouged your eyes and blinded you? Who killed	
	your sons? Whoever it was truly hated all of you.	

POLYMESTOR	It was Hecuba. She did all of this. She and her women. They destroyed me. No, worse.	(1120)
AGAMEMNON	You, Hecuba? Is this true? Did you do these horrible things?	
POLYMESTOR	What? Is Hecuba here? Where? Show me so I can	
	rip her apart. Tear her flesh into pieces with my very own hands.	
AGAMEMNON	Stop, Polymestor! What's wrong with you?	
POLYMESTOR	For the gods' sake, let me go. I will shred her limb by limb!	
AGAMEMNON	Enough! No more savagery. I	
	will hear your case—and hers—and judge you both fairly.	(1130)
POLYMESTOR	I'll speak. There was boy named Polydorus, Hecuba's	
	youngest son. His father Priam brought him to me	
	to live when Troy seemed in danger of falling. Yes, I did, I killed Polydorus. I admit it.	
	But I'll tell you why so you'll see that it was well	
	and wisely planned. I reasoned that if this child	
	survived, he would re-gather and re-found Troy.	
	And if the Greeks found out this heir to the Trojan throne	
	still lived, they would set out a second expedition,	(1140)
	devastate Thrace in the process, and we'd bear	(
	the collateral damage of your battles once again.	
	But Hecuba, hearing her son was dead, lured	
	me here with reports of treasure hidden in Troy's ruins.	
	She said we might be overheard, so she coaxed us	
	into the tent, my sons and me. They sat us on a couch.	(1150)
	I was surrounded by many hands, some to the left, some	
	to the right. Everyone seemed friendly. Some women	
	sat beside me, exclaiming over my robe. They held	
	the cloth up to the light and praised the craftsmanship	
	of the weave. Others admired my spear and shield,	
	and before I knew it my weapons were gone. Young mothers	
	fussed over my sons, fondling them, bouncing them	

	in their arms, passing them from hand to hand until my boys were out of reach. Then, out of the blue, these placid women, these mothers, pulled daggers from their robes and stabbed my sons to death, while other women pinned me down so that I couldn't move. I tried to raise my head, but they pulled me down by my hair. I couldn't free my arms because so many of them pressed against me. And then—o agony!—they pulled off their brooches and pierced my eyes until the blood ran thick. Then they ran away. I sprang up after them like a raging animal, bashing and banging my way along the walls, searching for them; hunting them.	(1160) (1170)
	These are the things I've suffered in looking out for your interests, Agamemnon; killing your enemy. Let me tell you, if anyone in the past has spoken ill of women, or speaks so now or will speak so in the future, I'll sum it up for him: Neither sea nor land has ever produced a more monstrous creature than woman. I say this for a fact.	(1180)
CHORUS HECUBA	Don't blame us all solely on the basis of your woes! Agamemnon, never in the affairs of men Should the tongue have more power than facts, Rather, when someone acts well, he should speak well, And if the opposite, his words should be rotten. Glib rhetoric may win us over for a while, but in the end the smooth talkers die foully. So much for my prologue to you, Agamemnon. Now to deal with him.	(1190)
	You claim that by killing my son you saved the Greeks from another quagmire of war. What a lie. Tell me, you scum, what possible help could a barbarian like you be to the Greeks? Whose favor were you currying in your eager zeal? Trying to marry into a family? To help a relative? I remember: you said the Greeks were going to trample all over your country's crops. Who in earth do you think will believe that? I'll tell you the real reason:	(1200)

It was the gold. You killed my son so you could get your hands on his gold. If not, then why is it that while Troy still flourished, while its towers remained intact, while Priam lived, and while Hector's spear (1210)thrived-and you really wanted to help out Agamemnonhow come you didn't kill Polydorus then or at least turned him over as a threat? Instead, you waited until you saw the smoke rising from the city that told you our fortunes had turned for the worse. Only then did you kill the guest you had taken into your home, who sat helpless at your hearth. Here's more proof of your evil: If you really had the interests of the Greeks at heart as you claim, why didn't you give them the gold right away-that gold you say isn't yours but Agamemnon's? (1220)They were in desperate need then, exhausted from battle, just barely scraping by in a foreign land. But no, even now you're hoarding that treasure. It's locked up and well guarded in your house, as you told me yourself. And another thing: If you had taken care of my child, as you ought to have, and kept him safe, you'd earn respect and honor and worthy fame. Hard times prove the honest friendship of good men, while prosperity always has friends. If at some point you were in need and Polydorus was doing well, my child would have been a great treasury for you. As it is, you have no friend in Agamemnon there. (1230)Your gold is gone, as are your children, And you must live on as you are. Agamemnon, if you side with Polymestor, you endorse evil. This man has betrayed all trust. He has broken the laws of man and god. He is faithless, irreverent, and thoroughly corrupt. If you acquit him, what then do your actions say about you? Just causes make fertile soil for strong arguments! AGAMEMNON It pains me to sit in judgment of others' troubles, (1240)but I must. What kind of leader would I be if I pushed this case aside, having agreed to take it up? So here's

CHORUS

	my verdict: Polymestor, you are guilty of murder. Clearly, it wasn't for my sake or the Greeks' that you killed Polydorus when he was a guest in your home, but for the sake of getting his gold. Your rhetoric exudes the oily panic of a guilty man uncovered. You've misconstrued facts to put yourself in a more favorable light. Maybe you think killing a guest—in this case a child who'd been put in your care—is a small matter in the larger scheme of things. But we Greeks think of it as heinous murder. How could I rule you innocent and maintain a shred of credibility? I can't. You committed a brutal crime; be prepared, therefore, for a justly brutal punishment.	(1250)
POLYMESTOR	Argh! How can it be? I'm defeated by a woman, a slave! Condemned and punished by my inferior.	
HECUBA	But isn't that just, since you committed crimes?	
POLYMESTOR	Oh my children! Oh my eyes!	
HECUBA	You're suffering? What of it? I, too, lost a child.	
POLYMESTOR	Do you enjoy abusing me, you monster?	
HECUBA	Shouldn't I be enjoying my revenge on you?	
POLYMESTOR	But you won't be soon, when the sea spray—	
HECUBA	Takes me on a one-way trip to Greece?	(1260)
POLYMESTOR	—swallows you up as you fall from the masthead.	
HECUBA	And who does the honors of pushing me into the salty brink?	
POLYMESTOR	You yourself will climb the ship's mast.	
HECUBA	Will I grow wings on my back, or what?	

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

POLYMESTOR	Go ahead, gag me; I've already spoken.	
AGAMEMNON	Remove him immediately. Toss him	
	on a desert island where no one has to listen	
	to his insolence.	
	Hecuba, you go and bury your	
	two dead children.	
	The rest of you return	
	to the tents of your masters. It's time to cast off.	
	See how the ships' sails flap and billow? The wind	
	is finally blowing.	(1290)
	Let us pray for fair weather	
	and safe passage on our voyage. May this be	
	the end of our ordeal. May we find all things	
	well at home. In all our homes.	
CHORUS	—To the harbor now. —To the tents.	
	—It is time to embark. —It is time to board	
	our new lives as slaves. $-But$ the taste	
	is bitter. —Necessity is hard.	