

EURIPIDES *HECUBA* 54

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POLYDORUS' GHOST delivers the opening monologue of the *Hecuba*. At line 52 the ghost sees Hecuba approaching and prepares to withdraw:¹

γεραιᾷ δ' ἐκποδὼν χωρήσομαι
 Ἐκάβη· περᾷ γὰρ ἥδ' ὑπὸ σκηνῆς πόδα
 Ἀγαμέμνονος, φάντασμα δειμαίνουσ' ἐμόν.

52 γεραιᾷς GLPa (~ G^cL^cPa^c et Thom. Mag. 107. I) 53 ἐκάβης GL et Pa^s (~ G^cL^c et Thom. Mag.) σκηνῆς ΩΞΤ^t et P^c et Σ^{mv}: -ἤν FLPζ et Σ^{rec}. ad 762

Line 54 was condemned by Klinkenberg and Usener and suspected by Murray.² Kovacs has recently reopened the issue of its authenticity.³ In what follows I shall try to show that 54 is compatible with the rest of the play, and consistent with Euripidean prologue practice.

The first difficulty concerns Hecuba's location. The scholiast (17.30–18.9 Schwartz) draws attention to the problem: if the captive women are lodged separately from their masters, as Hecuba assures Polymestor at 1016, what is Hecuba doing in Agamemnon's tent? What, the scholiast wonders further, is Cassandra doing out of it? He notes that at 87–89 Hecuba requires her daughter as a dream-interpreter, but she is not to be found.

Seeking to mend matters, the scholiast suggests that Hecuba has left her own tent and entered Agamemnon's in search of Cassandra. He speculates that Cassandra may have gone to the seashore to wash. Alternatively (taking πόδα with ὑπό in 53, or reading σκηνήν), Hecuba has not yet entered Agamemnon's tent, but is on the point of doing so.

As Kovacs observes, the first of these scenarios is inordinately complicated. It is also fanciful, since the text gives no hint of Cassandra's whereabouts. Hecuba's request for dream-interpreters focuses attention not on

¹J. Diggle, *Euripidis fabulae* 1² (Oxford 1987).

²J. Klinkenberg, *De Euripideorum prologorum arte et interpolatione* (Bonn 1881) 34–35, objects to the mention of Polydorus' φάντασμα and to Hecuba's presence in Agamemnon's tent. He reports (34, n. 2) that his teacher Usener also favored deletion. G. Murray (*Euripidis fabulae* 1¹² [Oxford 1963]) terms the line *suspectus*.

³D. Kovacs, "Coniectanea Euripidea," *GRBS* 29 (1988) 115–134, at 126.

Cassandra or Helenus, but on Hecuba's own agitation and bewilderment in the wake of her terrifying dream.

Kovacs disposes of the second possibility suggested in the scholia by adducing line 59, where Hecuba asks her fellow-slaves to conduct her *πρὸ δόμων*. He notes that Euripides typically uses this prepositional phrase with a verb of motion to indicate exit from a structure. Kovacs thus establishes that Hecuba comes out of Agamemnon's tent, but he cannot account for her presence within it. He mentions the possibility that she has her lodging there only to reject it. Yet such, I believe, is the arrangement implied by other passages in the play.⁴

When the action begins the captive women have already been assigned to their Greek masters.⁵ The chorus of Trojan women arrives on stage (98) *τὰς δεσποσύνους σκηναὶς προλιπούς' / ἵν' ἐκκληρώθην καὶ προσετάχθην*. Their phraseology suggests that they are being quartered in their masters' tents. Polymestor assumes (1015) that such is the case; when Hecuba informs him otherwise (1016), he remains doubtful (1017). The same arrangement seems to underlie Agamemnon's directive to the women *δεσποτῶν ... σκηναῖς πελάζειν* (1288–89) because a favorable wind has at last begun to blow. Presumably they must return to their lodgings to pack for departure.

Line 1016 gives a different account, for Hecuba assures Polymestor: *ἴδιαι γυναικῶν αἰχμαλωτίδων στέγαι*. However, the context strongly suggests that she is not telling the truth. The dialogue of Hecuba and Polymestor is marked by mendacity on both sides.⁶ Hecuba's contribution consists of *doubles entendres* (968–972, 1018–22), sarcastic truisms (1000), and outright inventions (1008, 1010). Since 1016 is at odds with the arrangement envisaged elsewhere, it seems reasonable to class it among Hecuba's inventions. Hecuba's motive for the deception is made clear from the context: to induce her enemy to enter the tent, she must convince him that there are no armed men lurking within.

⁴The tent is home also to Polyxena and to the fellow-slaves who support Hecuba on her entrance in 59. Cf. C. Collard, *Euripides: Hecuba* (Warminster 1991) 36, on the significance of the tent and on its door as "the visual focus of the action" throughout the play.

⁵H. Weil, *Sept tragédies d'Euripide*² (Paris 1879), note on 447–449, and J. Rassow, "Zur Hekabe des Euripides," *Hermes* 22 (1887) 515–534, at 529–530, both see a contradiction between 98–100 and the women's uncertainty about their ultimate destinations in Greece (447 ff.). However, E. Maass, "Zur Hekabe des Euripides," *Hermes* 24 (1889) 509–519, at 518, points out that the women cannot be certain of remaining with the Greeks to whom they have been assigned; they may well be sold subsequently to different masters. Indeed, this very possibility is mentioned by Polyxena (359–360).

⁶For discussion of this scene see E.-R. Schwinge, *Die Verwendung der Stichomythie in den Dramen des Euripides* (Heidelberg 1968) 144–148, and M. Marcovich, *Three-Word Trimeter in Greek Tragedy* (Königstein 1984) 87–88.

If the captives are lodged with their masters, we should like to be clear as to the identity of Hecuba's. No explicit information is forthcoming, but there are some indications that the Trojan queen is the property of Agamemnon.⁷ That she refers to him as δεσπότης (841, 1237) is not significant, for Agamemnon merits that title as leader of the expedition.⁸ More suggestive is the fact that Hecuba describes herself with some emphasis as Agamemnon's slave.⁹ Agamemnon assures her, moreover, that she can readily obtain her freedom (754–755)—a remark that would issue most naturally from her master, implying as it does an offer of manumission.

The second difficulty of line 54 is Polydorus' description of Hecuba as φάντασμα δειμαίνουσα ἐμὸν. "Hecuba comes out seeking oneirocritical advice," notes Kovacs, "not in flight from an apparition."¹⁰ Polydorus can term himself a φάντασμα because he is at that very moment appearing to the audience. But the line does not say that Polydorus has appeared to Hecuba either as a ghost or as a dream. Hecuba makes no mention of having seen him during her waking hours, and the form of the ghost's self-description militates against the notion that he has appeared to her in her sleep. When the dramatists use φάντασμα (or its more common synonym, φάσμα) in reference to a vision seen in a dream, they are careful to specify that sense by means of a qualifier.¹¹

Polydorus describes his mother as "frightened by [his] phantom," and Hecuba herself will allude to her pervasive sense of fear in her upcoming monody (69–70, 85–86). When she does so, the audience will be in a position to understand its source. The play opens on the third day after the Greeks' arrival in Thrace; throughout that time, as Polydorus explains, he has been hovering over his mother.¹² Polydorus must possess the power to influence

⁷The situation implied in *Hecuba* is different from that described in *Troades*. At the opening of *Troades* "Agamemnon's tent" (i.e., the *skene*) serves as a holding area for those Trojan captives who are still without masters (cf. 33–34, 176–177). When the women's individual assignments are announced by Talthybius (240 ff.), Hecuba learns that her master is not Agamemnon but Odysseus (277). H. Weil (above, n. 5) in his note on 53–54 comments on the dramatists' freedom to vary such mythical details. Alternatively, Weil suggests that the Agamemnon of both plays can be envisaged as Hecuba's master *pro tem*.

⁸Cf. 557, 723. For master/slave terminology in the play see H. Kuch, *Kriegsgefangenschaft und Sklaverei bei Euripides* (Berlin 1974) 43–44.

⁹τύραννος ἢ ποτ' ἀλλὰ νῦν δοῦλη σέθεν (809). R. Meridor, "The *Hecuba* of Euripides," *Eranos* 81 (1983) 13–20, at 15, n. 20, points out that "σέθεν is not necessitated by the construction and [is] therefore stressed."

¹⁰Kovacs (above, n. 3) 126.

¹¹Cf. Aesch. *Septem* 710, Ag. 274, Soph. *El.* 501, and A. H. M. Kessels, *Studies on the Dream in Greek Literature* (Utrecht 1978) 196, who, however, incorrectly associates *Hec.* 54 with a dream-vision.

¹²Cf. ὑπὲρ μητρὸς . . . ἀίσσω (30–31) and αἰωρούμενος (32). For the staging of the scene see D. Mastronarde, "Actors on High" *CA* 9 (1990) 247–294, at 276–277.

her by his proximity alone, arousing an uneasiness that eventually finds expression in her dream of a fawn savaged by a wolf.¹³ It is this ominous dream that startles her from sleep and drives her forth in search of dream-interpreters.

Such indirect influence exerted on sleepers by a restless ghost is not without parallel. In the opening scene of *Eumenides* the phantom of Clytemnestra appears on stage and reviles the sleeping Furies for allowing Orestes to escape. Although the ghost provides the impetus for the sleepers' collective dream, it becomes clear as the Furies begin to stir and mutter that they are dreaming not about Clytemnestra but "about something else, namely, their pursuit of Orestes."¹⁴ At the same time as Clytemnestra's ghost appears to the audience, it stimulates the sleeping Furies and creates a climate for their dream. Polydorus' ghost can be understood as fulfilling a similar function.

Euripides generally specifies in his prologue what structure the *skene* is supposed to represent.¹⁵ L. 54 provides that information here. He is also generally careful to motivate, and in some cases connect, the entrances and exits that follow the initial rhesis.¹⁶ Like the *Hecuba*, the *Hippolytus* and *Ion* open with a supernatural speaker who withdraws from the stage as a mortal approaches. In both cases Euripides offers an explanation for the mortal's entrance: Hippolytus is returning from the hunt (52), Ion is about to sweep the temple steps (79–80). That line 54 conforms to this pattern, supplying a plausible motive for Hecuba's appearance at this juncture, is a final consideration in favor of its authenticity.¹⁷

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¹³Wilamowitz, "Lesefrüchte," *Hermes* 44 (1909) 445–476, at 446–449, bracketed the hexameter lines 73–78 and 90–91 because he assumed that Hecuba dreamed not of a fawn and a wolf, but of the εἰδωλον of Polydorus. He is followed in this interpretation by W. Biehl, "Die Interpolationen in Euripides' *Hekabe* vv. 59–215," *Philologus* 101 (1957) 55–69; by J. M. Bremer, "Euripides *Hecuba* 59–215: A Reconsideration," *Mnemosyne* 24 (1971) 232–250; and by Diggle in his new Oxford Text (above, n. 1). The case against the *Traumhexameter* becomes less compelling if it is recognized that 54 does not say that Polydorus appeared to Hecuba in her dream.

¹⁴A. L. Brown, "The Erinyes in the *Oresteia*," *JHS* 103 (1983) 13–34, at 31. His own, less economical interpretation of the scene is that the Furies have one dream of Clytemnestra, and another of pursuing Orestes. The two-dream hypothesis has also been advanced for the *Hecuba*; cf. H. Erbse, *Studien zum Prolog der euripideischen Tragödie*, (Berlin and New York 1984) 52.

¹⁵E.g., at *Alc.* 1, *Herac.* 42, *Andr.* 21.

¹⁶Cf. J. R. Wilson, "An Interpolation in the Prologue of Euripides' *Troades*," *GRBS* 8 (1967) 205–223, at 205–209, and M. Halleran, *Stagecraft in Euripides* (London and Sydney 1985) 8–9.

¹⁷I thank the referees of *Phoenix* for their improvements.