

DOMMAR[®]

Study guide for

Euripides' **HECUBA**

In a new version by

Frank McGuinness



Written by Sophie Watkiss

Edited by Leona Felton and Su-Fern Lee

Photographs by Ivan Kyncl

Contents

Introduction	Cast List & Creative Team	3
Section One	Bronze Age Mythology in Classical Greek Tragedy	4
Section Two	The story of HECUBA and the play's associated themes and issues.	7
Section Three	HECUBA: a Twenty First Century version of a Classical Greek Tragedy	12
Section Four	The role of Women in the Euripidean Tragedy	17
Section Five	Euripides' HECUBA in a new version by Frank McGuinness: the production in rehearsal	23
Section Six	The technical challenges of staging HECUBA at the Donmar Warehouse	30
Section Seven	Ideas for further practical work	32

Introduction

This study guide focuses on elements of preparing, rehearsing and performing the Donmar Warehouse's production of Euripides' HECUBA in a new version by Frank McGuinness. The emphasis of the guide is very much on making a classical text accessible to a contemporary audience under modern performance conditions. Where relevant, background information on classical Greek culture has been given to enhance students' understanding of the play in its original context.

Cast in order of appearance

Polydorus	Eddie Redmayne
Hecuba	Clare Higgins
Spoken Chorus	Susan Engel
Polyxena	Kate Fleetwood
Odysseus	Nicholas Day
Sung Chorus	Eve Polycarpou
Talthybius	Alfred Burke
Agamemnon	Tim Pigott-Smith
Polymestor	Finbar Lynch

Creative Team

Director	Jonathan Kent
Designer	Paul Brown
Lighting	Mark Henderson
Music	Nikola Kodjabashia
Sound	Christopher Shutt

Bronze Age Mythology in Classical Greek Tragedy

The majority of Greek tragedies were based on myths and stories well known to the audience, many of which were rooted in the distant past of the Bronze Age. Each dramatist would present his chosen story from a perspective that would capitalise on its dramatic potential. The plays were performed at large, competitive festivals and prizes were awarded for the ingenuity of the 'spin' that the writer put on the well known material. Of the work of the three major tragedians which survives from the fifth century BC – that of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, it is the latter, Euripides, whose work is considered to be the most radical and politically challenging. In his plays, he often presents a perspective diametrically opposed to the views of the time: that war was heroic, the Gods were to be revered, and men were superior in status to women.

The Trojan War

In more than a third of his plays, including *Hecuba*, Euripides drew on the myth of the Trojan War for his material. This includes six of his surviving plays. His focus is usually not on the war itself, but on the aftermath of war – in particular, the effects of the war on women caught up in the conflict. The Trojan War was the best known of all Greek myths. So well known was the myth that many believed it to be distant history as opposed to fictional mythology. The war was instigated by the Gods as a means of reducing the number of bickering heroes in the world – heroes such as Achilles, Hector and Odysseus. They conspired to have Helen – purported to be the most beautiful woman in the world – stolen from her Greek husband, Menelaus, by Prince Paris of Troy. The Greeks – led by Menelaus' brother, Agamemnon - would then gather a huge army, sack Troy and win Helen back. The war lasted for ten years, ending with the Greeks entering Troy inside the famous Wooden Horse – a trick devised by Odysseus. The role of the Gods in the war is unparalleled in Greek mythology: Poseidon and Apollo collaborated with humans to build the city of Troy; Paris became embroiled when he rashly agreed to say which of the three goddesses – Hera, Athene and Aphrodite – was the most beautiful. During the fighting, the Gods even chose sides to support, which meant that by the end of the war, Heaven required as much sorting out as Earth. Hence Euripides' device of using the gods Poseidon and Athene to set the scene of the aftermath of the war in *The Trojan Women*.

The Real Troy

Euripides' Troy was built by gods and inhabited by humans. The real Troy - modern Hissarlik in Turkey – was a large fortified city excavated by Heinrich Schliemann between 1870 and 1890; a Bronze Age city sacked and rebuilt six times over a millennium and finally destroyed by an earthquake around 1300 BC.¹

The motive for war: fact or fiction?

The traditional explanation for the Greeks waging war against the Trojans for ten years was to punish them for stealing Helen. This is based on the fictional belief that Helen's father had made all her suitors promise to retrieve her if she should ever be stolen.² But how credible was it for men to fight a lengthy war over a woman? Thucydides – the Ancient Greek Philosopher - rejected the story that the loss of Helen was the primary cause of war and took the position that the Greeks fought the Trojans to extend their political and economic domination over the eastern Mediterranean world.³

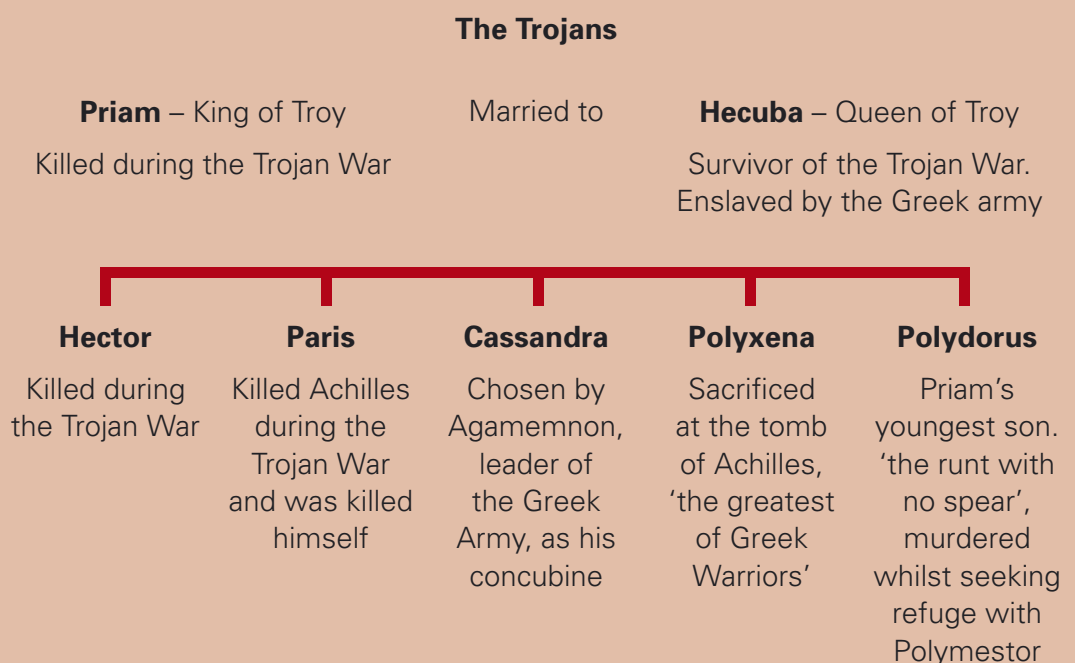


Discussion Point

Drawing on both your knowledge of Bronze Age culture (the period during which the Trojan War is set) and the culture of Greece in the fifth century BC, assess what you believe to be the true motive for the Trojan War. As a director, would this motive influence the way that you interpret *Hecuba* for performance?

Can you think of any recent wars in our own culture where the motives for the war have been questioned?

Flow Chart of characters whom either appear in, or are associated with, the play



The Greeks

Agamemnon	Commander-in-Chief of the Greek Army
Clytemnestra	Wife of Agamemnon
Odysseus	A Commander of the Greek Army
Polymestor	King of Thrace
Talthybius	Herald of the Greek Army
Helen	Wife of Menelaus, a Commander of the Greek Army, and the woman stolen by the son of the King of Troy, Paris. This event initiated the war between the Greeks and the Trojans (the Trojan War).

The Gods

Zeus	King of the Gods <i>'Down and out – aye. A bitter battle's ahead. Rough, and stained with tears. I did not die when I should have. Zeus didn't destroy me.'</i> Hecuba's words to Odysseus
-------------	--

Athena	Goddess of War and giver of wisdom, whom the city of Athens is named after.
---------------	---

Hecuba tells Polymestor that there is gold hidden at *'Athena's temple in Troy.'*



Practical Exercise

The characters in *Hecuba* all derive from Bronze Age Mythology. During the first week of rehearsals, the cast researched their characters, creating what is called the 'backstory' of the play. Choose one character from the cast list of the play and research the backstory for that character. Try to ensure that every character in the play is researched. Bring your research back to the group to share.

Note: Take care if you are using other plays by Euripides to develop the backstory for your character. *The Trojan Women* for example will give you a good understanding of Hecuba's immediate plight after the sacking of Troy. However, be aware that Euripides manipulated the stories he used to suit his plays – as did all the tragedians. For example, to maximise dramatic impact in *The Trojan Women*, Hecuba learns of Polyxena's sacrifice whilst still in Troy. She also learns that she is to become the concubine of Odysseus. However, in her own play, *Hecuba*, she is very much the suffering mother and there is no sexual link between her and Odysseus.

The story of HECUBA and the play's associated themes and issues.

'I see the play as one continuous piece of action, in scenes. There will be no interval.'

Frank McGuinness in interview.

The Structure of the Play

The action takes place on the shores of Thrace, where the becalmed Greek army have encamped on their journey home from Troy to Greece.

The ghost of Hecuba's son, Polydorus, gives us the background to the circumstances of the play. He tells us how his father, King Priam sent him from the besieged city of Troy, to the safety of the home of his friend, Polymestor, King of Thrace. Priam sent him on his journey with a hoard of gold to safeguard the future of his children should Troy fall. Polydorus describes how Troy was subsequently razed to the ground and his father and brother, Hector, both killed. He then goes on to explain how Polymestor murdered him for his gold, his corpse being kicked into the ocean. The Greeks and their ships have now been becalmed and are sheltering in Thrace. Polydorus then reveals the two events which will drive Hecuba's actions in the play: the sacrifice of her daughter Polyxena and the discovery of his own body.

The Spoken Chorus informs Hecuba that the Greeks have decided to sacrifice her daughter, Polyxena, at the tomb of the dead warrior, Achilles. Hecuba calls her daughter from her tent to tell her the news. Polyxena responds selflessly to the news of her own death, more concerned with the effect it will have on her mother than for herself. She says that 'dying is better when life has no light.'

Odysseus enters. He demonstrates an unrelenting, callous attitude towards Hecuba: he will take Polyxena to her fate regardless of the personal debt he owes to Hecuba for saving his life in Troy. The political expediency of honouring the dead warrior, Achilles, is superior to personal responsibility. Hecuba cannot talk Odysseus round, her words 'fly into the wind'. She tells Polyxena to 'sing like the nightingale' and try anything to save her own skin. But Polyxena refuses to plead with him, preferring to choose death over life as a sexual slave to a cruel Greek. Odysseus exits with Polyxena, leading her to her death.

The Sung Chorus laments the loss of her past life in Troy. Talthybius enters. He has come to tell Hecuba that the sacrifice has taken place. He recounts the sacrifice in detail to her, accentuating how each of the Greeks honoured Polyxena in death. After Talthybius leaves, Hecuba asks the Spoken Chorus to fetch water from the sea ready to bath Polyxena's body in preparation for her burial. Hecuba goes inside as the Sung Chorus laments the loss of dead sons and daughters through the tragedy of the fall of Troy.

The Spoken Chorus discovers the dead body of Polydorus washed up on the shore. Hecuba re-enters to discover that the body is that of her son. She knows that Polymestor murdered him for the gold.

Agamemnon enters. He inquires why Hecuba has left Polyxena's body unburied. He sees the body on the shore and asks Hecuba whose it is. During several lines spoken in isolation, Hecuba weighs up how she should respond to Agamemnon. Should she confide in him and get his approval to seek revenge for the death of her son? She does confide in him and Agamemnon expresses his pity for her mighty misfortune. However, he cannot condone revenge on Polymestor as the Greek army look on him as an ally. However, he does agree to summon Polymestor to meet Hecuba. He then leaves.

The Sung Chorus recalls the night when Troy fell to the Greeks. Polymestor enters, accompanied by his two sons. Both he and Hecuba greet each other as old friends, denying the knowledge that they both have of the murder of Polydorus. Hecuba tricks Polymestor into entering the women's tent with his sons on the pretext that she has more gold for him to look after. The group leave the stage.



The Sung Chorus tells of his fate as we hear Polymestor's cries from within the tent. He is being blinded and brutalised by the women in the tent.

Hecuba enters carrying the bodies of Polymestor's murdered children. The blinded Polymestor then enters, crawling on all fours. He calls for help. Agamemnon enters, incredulous that the sight before him was the doing of Hecuba. A trial scene ensues, with Agamemnon acting as judge. He hears the horrifying account of the actual revenge, followed by Hecuba's justification for seeking such revenge. Agamemnon's judgement comes down on the side of Hecuba. In his fury at the judgement, Polymestor relates the prophesies of Hecuba's fate – that she will be turned into a 'mad dog with eyes on fire' - and Agamemnon's murder by his own wife when he returns home. Agamemnon demands Polymestor's silence and orders him to be 'hauled to some island' and abandoned there. He tells Hecuba to go and bury her two dead children. The wind is now blowing in their favour and he orders the ships to be prepared for sailing.

Themes and Issues

The aftermath of war is a major theme in HECUBA. The devastating defeat of war is seen from the perspective of the conquered. Hecuba, the Trojan Queen who saw her husband and children murdered and her city razed to the ground, is a powerful symbol of the misery caused by war. This was a strong reason for Euripides to develop the tragedy of Hecuba's life dramatically in a play dedicated to her name. When the play was first written and performed, Greece itself was fighting in the Archidamian War. Like the mythical Greek Army of the Bronze Age, the real Greek Army of the fifth century BC was capable of annihilating a city: two years before HECUBA was first staged, in 427BC, it had been decided to annihilate Mytilene – a decision that was revoked at the very last minute. The city of Melos was not so fortunate: it was destroyed by the Greeks in 416BC, two years before the first production of *The Trojan Women*.⁴

War and political expediency are the causes of misery in this play: Polyxena is murdered because of the political necessity to satisfy the demands of Achilles 'the greatest of our dead warriors' as Odysseus describes him. In a culture where war is considered noble and the warrior supreme - to the extent that he must be honoured in death - it is politically expedient for Odysseus to favour the dead Achilles over the living Polyxena. Indeed, Euripides chooses Odysseus to be the messenger of Polyxena's fate, as opposed to Talthibius who is traditionally the messenger of the Greek army, to illustrate how political expediency can involve personal dishonour. For Hecuba saved Odysseus's life when he entered Troy as a spy and was recognised by Helen. Hecuba took pity on him, when he used 'all the words in the world' to save his life, which, he acknowledges, is why he is alive today. The theme is accentuated by the behaviour of Agamemnon. On a personal level, he appears to be a well-meaning friend to Hecuba, who is sympathetic to her plight, willing to offer her freedom and anxious that she should be avenged on Polymestor for barbarically murdering her son. But Polymestor, King of Thrace, is an ally of the Greeks and so, although admitting that punishment is desirable, Agamemnon puts political expediency first. And so, in the second part of the play, this punishment denied becomes a frightful revenge.





Discussion Point

Can you recall the actions of a political leader who you perceived to be acting out of political expediency at the expense of personal responsibility?

Loss of Identity

The main characters find themselves robbed of what defines their identities: Hecuba loses her City, her husband, her children and her freedom; Polymestor his sons, his sight and - through banishment – his kingdom. Only Polyxena maintains the dignity of self, achieved, ironically, through her premature death.

Violence begets violence

From the moment we step foot into the play, we enter a world where the moral order has already broken down. Troy has been obliterated, razed to the ground – and with it has gone the civilised culture that it represented. Sons and husbands have been brutally murdered, homes destroyed, women raped and brutalised. Barbarism appears to be the new moral code and it becomes the language of Hecuba's revenge.



Observation point

From either reading the play or seeing it in production, how many references are there to 'barbaric' actions? How relevant are these references to our understanding of the play?

HECUBA: a twenty first century version of a Classical Greek Tragedy

‘Euripides seems to have a terrible hardness in his writing - he is rock, rock, rock, in his heart there is a rock.’

Frank McGuinness in interview

Why HECUBA? Why now?

What is the relevance of staging HECUBA - a play written in the fifth century BC that looks at the aftermath of war - for a twenty first century audience? To Frank McGuinness, the playwright who has written this version of the play, it is singularly appropriate: as an Irish writer, he is rooted to the aftermath of, in his own words, ‘a very long war’ in Northern Ireland.

To a British audience, who is seeing its soldiers still going through a war in Iraq, he believes that it is premature to talk about the ‘aftermath’ of war. Unlike many Classical scholars, who define the central theme of HECUBA as being the effects of the aftermath war, McGuinness believes that what the play says is that war is never over.

‘The natural condition of human kind is to be at war: human suffering is an actual condition. The Greeks seemed to have this profoundly pessimistic view of existence until you realise that they looked at that existence with unflinching honesty and great authenticity – and there is a dignity about that – which is reflected in the tragedy.’

Frank McGuinness in interview



Discussion Point

By 8th September 2004, 1000 American troops had lost their lives in active service in Iraq. All but 138 of these deaths occurred after President Bush announced the ‘mission accomplished’ and the Iraq war over.

Why have these deaths occurred and how do they relate to the central idea of *Hecuba* that war is never over?

From the more pragmatic view of a playwright, McGuinness thinks HECUBA 'is a marvellous story, with marvellous parts', and he wanted to get his teeth into something of that depth and nature.

A new version of a classical text

Frank McGuinness finds it 'extremely liberating' to work on classical texts:

'If people ask me 'are you working on a play of your own at the moment or somebody else's?' I always reply, 'Everything I write is my own'. That is very disrespectful to Euripides, but let's be disrespectful! If you take a comparison between a painter, such as Francis Bacon, he goes and looks at a famous painting and he does versions of it - or Picasso, looking at an impressionist painting and going and doing four variances on it. You're nurturing your own creative ambitions, your own achievements, and you're challenging yourself by looking at these people who absolutely know what they are doing - and you learn from them. That's incredibly important for a writer - you learn from doing these big demanding plays. The directors, designers and actors that I really respect have all to some extent steeped themselves in these big plays as well, and I want to meet them, if you like, on an equal footing. The only way to truly know these writers is to do what I'm doing - to get absolutely into their way of thinking and imagining and try to write a play for your time in your language.'

Frank McGuinness in interview

Creative Choices: the play's language

When creating a new version of a classical text, a writer has to make certain creative choices about how they will write their play. For example, McGuinness had to make the decision as to whether his play would be in verse or in prose. What he finally chose to write in was sentence form: every sentence, every clause in the play would have a beat to it, and would be a self-contained thought. This was the biggest linguistic challenge in the play.

'It has to be as spare as possible, because it's telling an enormous elemental story and the language reflects that. You can't start embroidering, you can't start throwing in metaphors; you can't start using very obscure classical references if it is going to work with a contemporary audience because we just don't know what they mean.'

Frank McGuinness in interview



Practical Exercise

Read the following extract from the speech which opens the play. It is spoken by the ghost of Polydorus, and gives us the background to the circumstances of the play. It also draws together the two events which will drive Hecuba's actions in the play: the sacrifice of her daughter Polyxena and the discovery of Polydorus's own body.

For the purposes of this exercise, the speech has been divided into three sections.

Divide into 3 groups, with each group taking one of the sections of the speech to work on.

By experimenting with reading your chosen passage aloud, try to identify:

- each sentence or clause where there is a self-contained thought
- where the beat should lie in each of these sentences or clauses

Note: take it in turns to read extracts from the speech, rather than working as a chorus, because the speech is written to be vocalised by one character rather a group.

Come back together as a class and present your findings. What effect does this style of writing have on the speech in performance?

'We found that the metre acted as a heartbeat; it was there as a prop that pushes the speeches through.'

Charlotte Westenra, Assistant Director

Section One

The ghost of Polydorus enters.

Polydorus I am Polydorus, son of Hecuba.
 Priam is my father.
 I am dead.
 I come from that darkness –
 The abyss, the gates of godless
 hell.
 Son of Hecuba,
 Priam is my father –
 He sent me from Troy,
 Besieged by the Greeks;
 Fearing the fall of Troy,
 He secreted me
 Away here to Thrace,
 To the home of his friend,
 Polymestor, old friend
 Who ploughs this fertile land,
 Who rules its horsemen.
 My father hid with me
 A hoard of gold.
 Should the walls of Troy fall,
 His children would not want.
 I was Priam's youngest son.
 The runt with no spear,
 The arm without armour,
 That's why he sped me
 In secret from my home.

Section Two

Polydorus The war went our way –
 The city was not shafted –
 The towers did not break,
 Troy, towers of Troy –
 And my brother Hector,
 He won the lucky day,
 Then I was the pet, the pup,
 Fawned on by my father's friends,
 Honoured guest in Thrace,
 Though my pampered heart ached.
 Troy fell, destroyed,
 And so too did Hector.
 My father's hearth smashed,
 Razed to the ground,
 He too turned to dust,
 At the altars our gods built,
 Slaughtered by Achilles' son,
 His dirty blood hand.
 My father's friend killed me,
 His friend killed myself.
 He did it for the gold.
 I had none to defend me.
 He kicked my corpse,
 Kicked it into the ocean.
 He did it for the gold,
 To keep it in his house.
 Times I lie on the shore,
 Times I roll in the sea's swell,
 The water's ebb and flow,
 None to mourn me,
 Nor to bury me.
 Now I leave my corpse,
 I fly above Hecuba,
 My mother – three days,
 The same days since she,
 My heart sore mother,
 Came to this alien land,
 From Troy – Troy.

Section Three

Polydorus The Greeks and their ships,
 They sit idle in Thrace.
 Achilles' ghost has appeared
 Above his tomb –
 He's halted the army's sails
 As they steered the sea to home.
 He desires my sister,
 He asks for Polyxena,
 He wants her as his sacrifice,
 Her life for his honour.
 He'll get what he craves –
 His cronies will see to that.
 My sister will die today.
 That is sealed and settled.
 My mother shall look down,
 She'll see two dead children,
 Her son and doomed daughter.
 The broken waves carry me
 To land at a servant's feet –
 That way I will be buried.
 I asked a favour from the dead,
 From those who rule over them.
 Free me into my mother's hand,
 Let her put me in the earth.
 That's what I want – what I'll get.
 She's seen me somehow –
 I'll back away from her,
 Get out of Hecuba's way
 She's frightened,
 She who was queen,
 Housed in a palace.
 Now your days are bondage,
 You are last who once was first,
 Your good fortune's soured to bad,
 For a god devours you.

Polydorus exits.

Creative choices: the role of the Chorus.

'The chorus seems to have developed along the following lines. In Aeschylus it serves as a vehicle of the dramatic action, and in Sophocles becomes a distinct dramatis persona with a minor part in the action. The Euripidean chorus, by contrast, dismayed at what is happening around and in part because of it, no longer participates in the action but only sympathizes with the actors.'

Bernhard Zimmermann⁵

The chorus, as the term suggests, usually consists of a group of performers. In Euripides' original version of *Hecuba* this group was a chorus of Trojan Women. In this version of the play, the chorus has been divided into a Spoken and a Sung Chorus, each of which has been written for a single voice. McGuinness describes this as 'an enormous liberation for a modern production':

'We just don't hear choral speaking any more, we don't know how to decipher it. It is a skill – for good or for bad – that we have lost. But certainly in this particular play it works very well because the Spoken Chorus is a character and she develops and she changes and she reacts as the play progresses and so I think it's right that it is acted rather than chanted. The chanting part is the Singer herself – another part of the Chorus – and she tells a very different story - to accompany the rest.'

Frank McGuinness in interview



Practical Exercise

Read the extracts printed below. The first extract is delivered by the Spoken Chorus –and is directed to Hecuba – in the opening scene of the play. The second extract is delivered by the Sung Chorus after Polyxena leaves the stage with Odysseus to meet her death, and prior to Talthibius’ entrance to report her death which has now taken place.

Discuss each extract on its own merits, identifying its function in the play as a whole.

Can you identify the ‘very different story’ that the Sung Chorus contributes to the play?

Extract One

The Chorus enters.

Chorus I have hard tidings, my lady –
 There is rough news for you.
 The Greeks have decided to a
 man –
 Your daughter, Polyxena,
 Your daughter is to be sacrificed,
 A sacrifice to Achilles.
 He’d risen from the dead,
 He wore golden armour,
 He stood upon his tomb,
 He stopped the ships sailing,
 He held the sails in his hands.
 He opened his mouth, shouting:
 Where are you going, Greeks?
 Are you deserting my grave?
 Do you leave no gift nor honour?
 They fought among themselves,
 The Grecian warriors,
 Some saying, honour the hero,
 Others arguing not.
 Agamemnon sleeps with your sad
 girl,
 Holy crazed Cassandra.
 He argued your good case.
 Then the sons of Theseus, the two
 of them,
 The boys from Athens,
 They each had their spoke,
 They were of one mind.
 Wash with fresh blood
 The tomb of Achilles.
 They said, the two of them,
 Better the spear of Achilles
 Than shacking up with Cassandra.
 One word borrowed another,
 One insult after injury,

Then Odysseus hopped up,
 Snake charmer, sweet mouth,
 arselick,
 Odysseus, he won the day –
 Don’t dishonour the best of the
 Greeks,
 Sacrifice the child, he says.
 Don’t let the dead turn to their
 gods
 And complain the Greeks give no
 thanks
 To their own breed who bled for
 their sake.
 Odysseus will head here,
 He’ll haul your child from your
 breast,
 He’ll tear her from your mother’s
 hand.
 Go to the temple,
 Kneel at the altars,
 Beg the gods in heaven and hell,
 Call out their names,
 Pray for your daughter
 Or you will be bereft of her,
 You will see the girl falling,
 Falling forward on the tomb,
 The tomb red with her blood,
 The dark stream of her blood,
 Flowing, gleaming from the gold at
 her throat.

Extract Two

The Chorus sings.

Singer The breeze,
 Swift sea breeze,
 Carried ships –
 When will you carry me?
 Where will I sleep,
 A slave in pain,
 What harbour,
 What house,
 Whose water
 On whose plains?

The oar
 Sweeps the sea
 To islands –
 Where will I find pity?
 A kindly hand?
 Do I go where
 The laurel tree
 And date palm
 Praise Artemis,
 Great goddess?

Europe
 Steals me from
 Asia
 Leaving me no hope.
 Fathers, children,
 Country, laid waste,
 Where is my past?
 A lost saga,
 Smell of smoke,
 A burning book.



Observation point

When you see the play in performance, try and:

- Identify the different roles played by the Spoken and Sung Chorus
- Comment on how the presence of the Sung Chorus enhances your response to the production
- Analyse how the character of the Spoken Chorus develops as the play progresses

The role of Women in the Euripidean Tragedy

‘Many women perpetrate villainous deeds in Euripidean tragedy. However, old myths are paraded not to illustrate that the female sex is evil, but rather to induce the audience to question the traditional judgement on these women. Euripides counters the ideas expressed in the misogynistic platitudes by portraying individual women and their reasons for their actions.’⁶

The consequences for women living in a patriarchal society.

Euripides is the earliest extant dramatist to examine his stories from both the woman’s and the man’s point of view. The horrors of patriarchy weave a backdrop of unrelenting misery for the women who appear – or are discussed – in his plays. Some examples of these horrors are listed below:

Alcestis , 438 BC	Alcestis returns from the dead to “remarry” the husband who let her die in his stead.
Medea , 431 BC	Medea is expected to suffer in silence the indignity of her husband, Jason, abandoning her for a royal princess to further his social standing.
Hippolytus , 428 BC	Phaedra is married to the hero who seduced her sister and conquered her country.
Andromache , circa 420 BC	Andromache is forced to share a bed with the son of Achilles, who murdered her husband, Hector.
The Women of Troy , 415 BC	Cassandra becomes the concubine of Agamemnon, destroyer of her family and city, a point that Hecuba refers to in her play.
Orestes , 408 BC	Hermione marries Orestes, who had threatened to kill her.
Iphigenia at aulis , circa 406 BC	We learn that Clytemnestra’s present husband, Agamemnon, murdered her first husband and their son.

All of Euripides’ women demonstrate unconditional love for their children and fight ferociously on their behalf. Hecuba’s unrelenting attempts to save her daughter, Polyxena, and her vengeance on Polymestor for her son Polydorus’ murder demonstrate this. Even Medea never stopped loving her children, despite murdering them to seek vengeance on their father, Jason. The lamentation of mothers over sons killed in war is prominent in Euripides’ anti-war plays, particularly *Hecuba* and *The Trojan Women*.



As discussed in Section One, Euripides' plays are set in the Bronze Age. However, the conventions regarding acceptable female behaviour made in the plays also applied to Classical Athens. For example women, especially those who are not married, should remain indoors; when out of doors they should wear a veil; and a women should not look a man in the face, not even her husband:

Hecuba

Polymestor, I am embarrassed
To look at you face to face.
I am much reduced in circumstances.
I am ashamed to be in your company.
You saw me in much better days – much better.
Now you see what I am lowered to –
I cannot gaze at you straight in the face.
Please don't take that as a sign of bad feeling.
You know, dear sir, we observe old customs:
Women don't look at men, eyeball to eyeball.

Hecuba's greeting of Polymestor.

Both the Greek and the Trojan Royal Families were patriarchal in structure. In the Royal Greek Household, the availability of slave women made sexual double standards easy for the royal men, who would have slave concubines in their household. Agamemnon would have expected his wife, Clytemnestra, to welcome Cassandra – his spoil of war – as warmly as himself on his return from Troy after a ten-year absence. Women were not permitted the same sexual freedom as men, as the infidelity of Helen illustrates. The virginity of young girls - coupled with their good reputations - was highly prized, as is customary in a patriarchal society. In the Trojan Royal Household, the men were polygamous. Hecuba might have been Priam's Queen, but he had numerous other wives and concubines. However, the offspring of these concubines would have been of a lower status in the heroic hierarchy, hence it is Hecuba's children who play the leading roles in the Trojan myths.⁷

We know from Homer that the Greeks not only destroyed the Trojans' city, but also raped their wives in requital. As the Chorus points out to Hecuba in *The Trojan Women*, 'These Greeks are like rampant animals. / They will make whores of us all; / That night will be cursed when they rape each one of us.'⁸

*'In the sense of conquest, an extra measure of prestige accrued to the warrior who possessed a slave who was once the wife or daughter of a man of high status. Thus, after the fall of Troy, the women of the Trojan royal family were allotted as special prizes to the heroes of the Greek army.'*⁹

Polyxena's acceptance of her fate – to be sacrificed at the tomb of Achilles - earns her respect in death amongst the men, reflecting the belief of the age that assertiveness in a woman was considered evil. But Euripides makes the circumstances of Hecuba's – and indeed Medea's – actions more complex: they are tormented to the point where they refuse to be passive and perpetrate a horrendous revenge on their tormentors. The desire for revenge was believed to be unfeminine by the Greeks. Hecuba is often referred to with masculine

adjectives. Her vengeance earns her the fate of being transformed into a barking dog.



Discussion Point

Define the term 'patriarchy'.

What is the impact of being enslaved into the patriarchal culture of the Greeks for the women who appear in *Hecuba* and *The Trojan Women*?

McGuinness sees Euripides' preoccupation with the stories of women as being rooted in Western Theatre's preoccupation with the outsider:

'I think what you've got to remember is that almost from the word go in Western Theatre the outsider has been a key figure - you've got it in the Oedipus trilogy, Oedipus is perhaps the greatest outsider of all time - and because women were apparently on the periphery of Greek Society, they had an inherent quality of being outsiders. Now, theatre's ultimately only interested in the defeated, not because it's only interested in victims, but because it can find something to say about the defeated which shows them to some extent as the victors, that their experience has left them stronger. So, theatre has always been interested in the outsider – and Hecuba is the supreme outsider in this play – even though she is tended by the Chorus, even though she has a daughter, even though there is a son there – in the course of the play she loses daughter and son, she's already lost power, she has lost status; the chorus has no status and can only remind her of what was there – in fact it is more of an irritant than anything. But in the course of the play she gains a powerful sense of her own selfhood, her own isolation and her own loneliness. In getting that awareness she gets power of a different type than anything she's ever had before and suddenly, the loser becomes – in Euripides' terms - the winner; suddenly the outsider becomes the one who absolutely dominates what's going to happen.'

Frank McGuinness in interview

The role of Hecuba perceived through the eyes of a patriarchal society.

It was not only the Greeks and the Trojans of the Bronze Age who lived in a patriarchal society: the audiences of fifth century BC Athens were rooted in an exclusively masculine culture. It would have been profoundly shocking for them to see Hecuba - an old woman - becoming the embodiment of the warrior ethos in the play as she actively seeks revenge on Polymestor.

The great dramatic turning point in the play, from which Hecuba emerges as a warrior queen, is when she starts to talk to herself and decide which course she is going to pursue; either to court Agamemnon or to reject him. In courting Agamemnon she is going to pursue her revenge and he is going to support her. McGuinness believes that the psychology of this play is so modern and so accurate that an awful lot of what happens to Hecuba happens in the silence that she greets certain speeches with:

'I think she makes a great interior transition when she hears Talthybius, the old man, describe the death of her daughter – and he describes it in great graphic detail. Clare Higgins, the actress playing Hecuba, has asked 'is this because he's not sparing me anything? Because he wants me to know how my daughter died as fiercely and as bravely as she did?' But I think that what Euripides is doing here is taking two characters – the old man Talthybius and Hecuba – who have seen so much bloodshed, so much violence – and he's not concentrating our minds on the act of killing one innocent girl, one child practically. It is in the detail that Hecuba has to confront the individual death of her daughter and she's seen so many deaths, pile upon pile, but this one I think completely unhinges her – and it unhinges her in a very strange way: she becomes more and more rational, rather than irrational, more and more determined and more and more clear sighted at how she can get revenge and in that way she becomes a lot more strategic, she becomes a lot more militaristic in her pursuit of revenge and in fact she ends up coming across as this warrior. We know that the quality of being a warrior was deeply respected in Greece: it won them the Trojan War. Suddenly here it is in this woman – this old woman. She is the embodiment of the warrior ethos in the play. It's profoundly shocking – shocking to us and shocking for the Greeks as well, which was such a masculine society. And it's Euripides really doing their heads in.'

Frank McGuinness in interview



Practical Exercise

If you have a copy of HECUBA, you may want to explore this scene practically. Pay particular attention to Hecuba's asides in the scene. At what moment does she decide to confide in Agamemnon?

Note: If you are attending one of the workshops on HECUBA run by the Donmar, this will be one of the scenes that we will be exploring practically.

'The women of Sophocles and Aeschylus have a heroic dimension which says little about women in Classical Athens. The women of Euripides are scaled down closer to real life, and in this respect the tragic poetry of Euripides approaches comedy.'¹⁰

Euripides' HECUBA in a new version by Frank McGuinness: the production in rehearsal

This section charts an early rehearsal of the scene between Polymestor and Hecuba.

Before reading this section of the study guide, students are advised to complete the practical exercise below and consider their own directorial decisions for the scene.



Practical Exercise

Read through the extract of text printed below.

As a director, what do you consider to be the main practical considerations to be made when staging this scene?

What advice would you give to the actress playing Hecuba in the scene?

Polymestor enters, accompanied by his two young sons.

<p>Polymestor Priam was the best of men, And you, Hecuba, dearest woman, I weep to see your city, Your daughter now dead. Misfortune, misfortune. No one and nothing can be trusted, Neither a good name nor good deed. The gods play their games with us – We're here for their sport. We worship them in our ignorance. But why do we lament these things? There is no escape from what's coming. If you're cross about my absence, don't be. I was in the wilds of Thrace when you got here. I was making my way to meet you, When your message was delivered to me I come to you as soon as I heard it.</p>	<p>I am much reduced in circumstances. I am ashamed to be in your company. You saw me in better days – much better. Now you see what I am lowered to – I cannot gaze at you straight in the face. Please don't take that as sign of bad feeling. You know, dear sir, we observe old customs: Women don't look at men, eyeball to eyeball.</p>	<p>Polymestor Alive? Certainly so. He will see you proud.</p>
<p>Hecuba Excellent words, dear friend. They show your worth.</p>	<p>Polymestor I don't wonder. Why do you need me? Why did you summon me?</p>	<p>Hecuba Excellent words, dear friend. They show your worth.</p>
<p>Polymestor What else do you wish to know?</p>	<p>Hecuba I have something to say – To you and to your sons.</p>	<p>Polymestor What else do you wish to know?</p>
<p>Hecuba Does he remember his old mother?</p>	<p>Polymestor We are friends here. You are mine, and so are the Greeks. Now, tell me this. How can a man who stands at the top Help his friends who lie at the bottom? I'm ready to give a hand.</p>	<p>Hecuba Does he remember his old mother?</p>
<p>Polymestor He does – He wanted to sneak over here – A surprise.</p>	<p>Hecuba We handed – myself, his father – Our son into your house. You took him from us. Tell me first, is he alive? The rest I'll ask you later.</p>	<p>Polymestor He does – He wanted to sneak over here – A surprise.</p>
<p>Hecuba The gold – Is it safe? The gold he carried from Troy?</p>	<p>Polymestor Safe and sound. Well protected in my house.</p>	<p>Hecuba The gold – Is it safe? The gold he carried from Troy?</p>
<p>Polymestor Keep it safe. And don't be greedy.</p>	<p>Hecuba So have you guessed my secret? What do I want to tell you and your sons?</p>	<p>Polymestor Keep it safe. And don't be greedy.</p>
<p>Polymestor That I'm not. What's mine is mine – That's enough.</p>	<p>Polymestor I don't know. Do let us in on it.</p>	<p>Polymestor That I'm not. What's mine is mine – That's enough.</p>
<p>Hecuba I love you as you love me -</p>	<p>Hecuba Ancient caverns, crammed with gold, The gold of the sons of Priam –</p>	<p>Hecuba I love you as you love me -</p>
<p>Polymestor What do myself and my sons need to know?</p>	<p>Polymestor You want me to tell your son this?</p>	<p>Polymestor What do myself and my sons need to know?</p>
<p>Hecuba Ancient caverns, crammed with gold, The gold of the sons of Priam –</p>		<p>Hecuba Ancient caverns, crammed with gold, The gold of the sons of Priam –</p>
<p>Polymestor You want me to tell your son this?</p>		<p>Polymestor You want me to tell your son this?</p>

Hecuba	I do, and you alone. You are a pious man.	Polymestor	Run from me – you won't get away. I will wreck this place. You'll feel the power of my fists.	Throw them to the dogs, Hurlled on the mountain. Where do I stand, Where is there shelter, Where do I go? I am on a ship Sea monsters circle Smelling the flesh Of my dead children I must protect.	
Polymestor	Why do my sons need to know?	Singer	Tear him!	Chorus	You pay a terrible price For committing terrible crimes. You did the unspeakable, Now you suffer it. God has been watching you.
Hecuba	It's best they do, were you to die	<i>Hecuba enters.</i>			
Polymestor	Well said – that's the wisest way.	Hecuba	Do your damned worse. Leave nothing standing. Kick open the doors. Your eyes are darkness now. You'll never see your sons. I have killed them alive.		
Hecuba	Athena's temple in Troy – Do you know where –	Chorus	Have you done what you said?		
Polymestor	Is the gold there? What marks where it's hidden?	Hecuba	See his sons' bodies. I killed them with the women, He has paid what he owes me. You will see him soon, Staggering about the place, Dark sightless eyes and feet. Look – look – here he comes. Stand well back from the king of Thrace.	Polymestor	Men of Thrace, Horsemen, warriors In your armour, Greeks, sons of Atreus, I'm crying for help – Help me, help. In the name of the gods, Come to my aid. Does anyone hear? Will no one help? Why take your time? The women, the slaves, They have destroyed me. I have suffered Their savage outrage. Where do I turn, Where do I go? Shall I soar to heaven, Feel the fire of Orion? The eyes of the Dog Star, Sirius, blazing? Shall I sink into The river of death, Black and despairing, Crawl towards Hell?
Hecuba	A black rock juts out of the ground.				
Polymestor	Is there more you wish to tell me?	<i>Polymestor enters, crawling from the tent.</i>			
Hecuba	I spirited money away with me – I want you to keep it safe.	Polymestor	Am I not a pity? Where do I go, Where do I stand, Where is there shelter? I must crawl like a beast, A mountain beast, On my four feet. Which way do I take? This one or that one? I will lay my hands On the mankilling Women of Troy. Accursed dirt, Filth of Troy, Where do you snout, Pigs in your pen, Fearing my fierce anger? God of the sun, heal me, Wash blood from my face. My blind eyes, let see.	Chorus	You suffer so much – too much. You are free to stop living.
Polymestor	Where is it?				
Hecuba	It's hidden safe and sound. I have private quarters here.				
Polymestor	Are they clear of men?				
Hecuba	No Greek is in there. Only women. Creep into the tent. We'll do what we must do – Then you can go back, You and your youngsters, Where you lodged my son.				
<i>Hecuba, Polymestor and his sons go into the tent.</i>					
<i>The Chorus sings.</i>					
Singer	You will fall into the harbour, The cruel sea water. You will gain your fill of pain And you will lose your heart. You will swim to the far shore Through cruel sea water You will never arrive. You will never arrive. You have defied god and man. You will pay with your life,				
<i>Polymestor cries from within.</i>					
<i>Women tear him apart</i>					
Polymestor	Pity me – They are blinding the light in my eyes.	Polymestor	Quiet – quiet – I hear a woman's steps – Quiet steps of a woman. I want to gorge On their flesh, their bones. Feed on their faces. Wild animals they are. What have they done to me? Mauled me apart. Devoured me. What do I do? Abandon my young To the cruel mercy Of mad women from Hell? They will dismember My sons limb by limb.		
Singer	Women, tear him apart,				
Chorus	Do you hear him wail, The great king of Thrace?				
Singer	Tear him apart,				
Polymestor	Pity me – pity my poor children – They are slaughtering them.				
Singer	Tear him apart				
Chorus	What evil is being done?				
Singer	Tear him				

A day in rehearsal

It is the tenth day of rehearsal and the cast is beginning to work 'off the book' ie. without scripts.

Since day four the set has been rigged up in the rehearsal space. This is essential for the cast, as the design features a steeply undulating beach, which is fairly challenging for the actors to negotiate – both in terms of its texture and its rake (gradient). The day is spent working from Polymestor's entrance with his two sons to the end of the play. This is a particularly demanding session for Polymestor, played by the actor Finbar Lynch, whose role in this section of the play demands him to be blind and crawling on his knees. Finbar spends much of the day wearing a scarf over his eyes to obscure his vision, and using kneepads to protect his joints.

The day begins with working on the scene between Polymestor and Hecuba. This scene is loaded with subtext and deep irony, as both characters greet each other as old friends, both concealing horrific truths: Polymestor concealing his murder of Polydorus (Hecuba's son), from her, and Hecuba in turn concealing her knowledge of this murder whilst goading Polymestor into a situation where his sons will be slaughtered and he will be physically brutalised.

After the actors work through the scene once, the director, Jonathan Kent, sets them an exercise. He wants them to play the text as two old friends meeting on the beach, with no past history. Everything they say to each other is true in this version. It is interesting to observe what this exercise does: the scene - which was a bit loaded and slower before – becomes swifter. It certainly does not diminish what was in the scene when the actors played it through the first time– but it is all that is required for the scene, because the audience already know the story behind it. As Hecuba (Clare Higgins) puts it, 'it lets the audience do the acting'.

'It still signalled that something was going to happen - we still got a certain unconcealable abhorrence from Polymestor and flashes of brightness from Hecuba. It's useful to hold onto.'

Jonathan Kent, Director of HECUBA, giving notes in rehearsal.

The scene is played a third time. It becomes a nice cosy meeting over tea, as Hecuba invites Polymestor to sit on a picnic rug centre stage, with the sons moving in closer to join them on Hecuba's line 'I have something to say – to you and your sons.' As Hecuba asks Polymestor to 'keep the gold safe. And don't be greedy', Clare delivers the line humorously, sharing a 'joke' with Polymestor, whose response, that he's not greedy, is laughingly delivered by Finbar.

And so the picnic is cleared away and Hecuba jauntily leads Polymestor and his sons into the tent - supposedly to collect her gold for safekeeping.

'Hecuba is a brilliant actress: she allays any suspicions Polymestor might have of her. It's the ghoulishness of her ordinariness as she clears away the blanket; there is something ghoulish about her domesticity as she clears up. It is a nice reversal, linking in with Agamemnon's belief aired during the judgement scene that killing guests is a custom which fills the Greeks with horror.'

Jonathan Kent, Director of HECUBA, giving notes in rehearsal.

There are several practical issues to be resolved during rehearsals for the next section of text:

- It has to be worked out where the screams from Polymestor will be placed in the text; there also needs to be a build up of sound of women tearing the children apart, 'like harpies falling from the skies' as Jonathan phrases it.
- Hecuba's entrance with the bodies of the dead children needs to be considered. Jonathan told Clare that she will only have to carry one child actor onstage, the other body will be a dummy in a bag; it just isn't practical for Clare to carry the weight of two 'real' children. After experimenting with pillows – which substitute for bodies – Clare decides that she will carry one child over her shoulder, 'like a hunter', creating a strong masculine image for her new role as warrior queen.
- Polymestor is to make his re-entrance by desperately digging himself out of a trap door upstage left. This will be quite a challenge as sand will fall down on him as the trap door is opened.

Here are some of the creative decisions that were arrived at as the scene was rehearsed:

Clare should deliver Hecuba's opening speech upstage towards the tent from which she has just come:

Hecuba Do your dammed worse.
 Leave nothing standing.
 Kick open the doors.
 Your eyes are darkness now.
 You'll never see your sons.
 I have killed them alive.

Her next speech will to be addressed to her son's body as she picks it up:

Hecuba You will see him soon,
 Staggering about the place,
 Dark sightless eyes and feet.
 You will see his son's bodies.
 I killed them with the women,
 He has paid what he owes me.
 Look – look – here he comes.



It is debated as to whether this is 'too much' to load into the action, but the argument finally comes down on the side of the action:

If you can't do it in Greek Tragedy, where can you? It is very Titus Andronicus – and where did Shakespeare get it from? Seneca, who got it from the Greeks. By picking up the body, it's literally showing Polydorus why I've done it, ie instigated the brutalising of Polymestor and the murder of his sons.

Clare Higgins in rehearsal

Polymestor's first speech after he has desperately dug his way out of the trap, concludes with the lines:

Polymestor God of the sun, heal me,
 Wash blood from my face.
 My blind eyes, let see.

This is followed by the Stage Direction, *He roars in agony, then quietens*. Clare spontaneously kicks him into the water at the front of the stage, the roar of agony arising from the salt water splashing into his eye sockets.

Clare discovers that Hecuba had an exuberant energy during this scene:

'I must remember that I'm old – but have got a psychopathic strength from getting what I want.'

Clare Higgins in rehearsal

For Polymestor's subsequent speech, beginning 'Quiet – quiet/I hear a woman's steps/Quiet steps of a women', Jonathan sets Clare and Finbar another exercise: Polymestor is to physically crawl towards any sound that he hears Hecuba make. If he manages to touch her, the play is over. One of the outcomes of this exercise is Hecuba making a 'trick' sound by throwing the body of one of Polymestor's sons towards him. He then picks it up and is left cradling it during his speech:

Polymestor Where do I turn?
 What do I do?
 Abandon my young
 To the cruel mercy
 Of a mad women from hell?
 They will dismember
 My sons limb by limb.
 Throw them to the dogs,
 Hurlled on the mountain.

It is decided to keep this sequence as part of the action.

All this time, the Spoken Chorus (Susan Engel) has been curled up in the sand, appalled by all that she has witnessed – ‘someone waiting to be an inanimate object’, as Jonathan terms it. She then delivers the scene’s final line:

Chorus You suffer so much – too much.
 You are free to stop living now.

‘At the beginning of the play the Chorus is Hecuba’s dear old retainer – but she feels in a different way for Hecuba by the end of the play: she is with Hecuba at first, but withdraws when Hecuba becomes an animal and becomes stoic.....I thought the Chorus would be bound up with the protagonist all the time – but she is not, she is apart sometimes – her comments at these times appear to be away from the action. I don’t know how it will work yet – we are still at an early stage in rehearsal.’

Susan Engel in rehearsal

The technical challenges of staging HECUBA.

Interview with Lucy McEwan, Production Manager for HECUBA

What is the role of the Production Manager?

The production manager co-ordinates the technical aspects of the show, which include finding a builder and supervising the construction of the set, ensuring that the show is produced within the given budget, ensuring that all equipment is ordered and delivered, scheduling the installation of the set fit up and rehearsal time in the theatre up to press night, and liaising between the creative team and technical departments.

Can you describe the set for HECUBA, and the materials used?

The set for HECUBA is an undulating white sandy beach, which drops down into the sea. The back wall of the theatre is exposed and covered with the names of female casualties of war in the last 50 years, written in chalk. There is a cradle suspended above the set against the back wall which moves from the centre of the wall across to stage left during the show. The beach area is constructed from a steel frame clad with plywood and polystyrene, which is carved and then coated with futura hardcoat. Paint and sand was then applied to the surface of the set, with loose sand on the flat areas. The tank is also constructed from steel and plywood, with a double liner to contain the water.

What are the complexities of building this set on the Donmar's stage?

This set was built by two different companies. Capital Scenery constructed the beach area, Aquality applied the tough water-resistant futura coating, and then Capital painted, textured and finished it. Aquality constructed the tank and fitted the liner and the heating and filtration system. Part of the set is submerged so in order to make changes to the finish once it was in the theatre we had to drain the tank to expose and dry the area to be altered.

What are the challenges for the actors working on the set?

The set is very steeply raked in places, so moving about on it presents challenges for the acting company. They rehearsed on the set in the rehearsal room for three weeks before coming into the theatre, and a physiotherapist came into rehearsals to give the company advice on how best to deal with standing and moving on the slopes. Sand has been stuck to the surface of the set to make it non-slip, but this in turn makes it quite rough in places, difficult for those on their hands and knees during the show. Eddie Redmayne makes his entrances from under the water, and to do this he must climb into the tank underneath the beach area of the set, and then swim under the set through a tunnel to appear in the main area of water. He exits using the same route, and then his next entrance is through the tunnel again, this time with an extended snorkel which he uses to breathe for about a minute while he floats face down as a dead body.



Have you had to adapt or make compromises in any way to overcome technical issues?

When the set model originally came in the water was 1 metre deep. That amount of water is extremely heavy, and as the theatre is on the first floor, we had to consult engineers to discover what limitations we were dealing with. We ended up with a tank that was 900mm deep in the downstage area, and 300mm deep underneath the set, an effective compromise.

What have been the main issues for you in your role as Deputy Production Manager for HECUBA?

SAND! We have been through about 6 different versions of sand for this show, before finally arriving on a mix that is the correct colour and texture.

What have you enjoyed most about working on this production?

The unusual nature of the set – sand and water and a set that is submerged in places present their own very unique challenges - and it's not often you get to wear a wet suit to work and hammer nails into a set underwater!

What has been your career path to your present job?

I trained as a stage manager at The Central School of Speech and Drama. I then worked as an Assistant Stage Manager, Deputy Stage Manager and Company Manager in various theatres around the country. I was looking to broaden my role and the perfect position here at the Donmar came up at just the right time.

What advice would you give to students who would like to become a Production Manager?

While you do have to have a good knowledge and experience of theatre practice, you don't have to be an expert in every field. Communication and thinking ahead are the most important skills.

Ideas for further practical work: directing a production of *The Trojan Women*

As Frank McGuinness commented in Section Three, he learns a great deal from the work of other theatre practitioners:

'You're challenging yourself by looking at these people who absolutely know what they are doing – and you learn from them.'

Frank McGuinness in interview

This exercise is designed to encourage you to do the same. Frank McGuinness, Jonathan Kent, the Cast and Creative Team of HECUBA have gone through the process of creating a new version of a Greek Tragedy for a contemporary audience in a modern performance space. You might want to consider which elements of their production would work for you when directing a production of *The Trojan Women*. Here are some ideas to get you started:

The Chorus

Frank McGuinness divided his chorus into a spoken and a sung chorus, writing each part for a single voice. The very title of the play *The Trojan Women* suggests that this idea probably wouldn't work here, the title of the play referring to the chorus itself. But how far could you use the ideas of:

- developing a character for each member of your chorus
- dividing the group into a spoken and a sung chorus

Costume:

One of the first issues that Frank McGuinness and Jonathan Kent discussed was the visual style they were going to impose on their production of HECUBA. When Frank was asked what advice he would give to students directing a production of his version of HECUBA, this is what he said:

'I don't think the cast can be prancing around in short skirts. Much as we would love Brad Pitt to be here, we can't dress them in that way. So you've got to decide first of all how are the men going to look to convey their militarism without overdoing it – and the other thing you've got to remember is that they have been fighting for ten years, so they can't be in pristine uniforms. The women have to look as if they have been dragged from Troy – and maybe there is some tattered finery about Hecuba. I would say that the first stage is looking at a language of costume.'

Frank McGuinness in interview

Bearing Frank's advice in mind, what sort of visual style would you envisage imposing on a production of *The Trojan Women*?

Design:

The Donmar has the technical support to be able to incorporate elements such as water, a steep rake and a trap door into their set design. Consider the resources available to you and performance space where you would be staging your production of *The Trojan Women* and decide how you would design your set. What would inspire your design?

Beg, Steal & Borrow:

Are there any other ideas from this production of *Hecuba* that you would like to use in a production of *The Trojan Women*? For example, has the insight into the way this production has handled the bodies of Polymestor's two dead children, helped you to see how you would show the body of the dead child, Astynax?

End note

Did you know that the Suffragettes used to recite speeches from Euripides' plays at their meetings?

Notes and References

- ¹ Cited in 'Women of Troy, Prisoners of War', NT programme for *Women of Troy*, (NT publications, 1995).
- ² Cited in *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, Sarah B. Pomeroy, page 17, (Pimlico, 1994).
- ³ Ibid, page 18.
- ⁴ Cited in the introduction to *Euripides: Medea and Other Plays*, translated by Philip Vellacott, page 10, (Penguin Books, 1984).
- ⁵ Cited in *Greek Tragedy: an introduction*, Bernhard Zimmermann, page 24, (The John Hopkins University Press, 1991).
- ⁶ Cited in *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, Sarah B. Pomeroy, page 108, (Pimlico, 1994).
- ⁷ Ibid, page 28.
- ⁸ *The Trojan Women*, Euripides, copyright Edexcel Foundation 2000, page 17.
- ⁹ Cited in *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, Sarah B. Pomeroy, page 26, (Pimlico, 1994).
- ¹⁰ Ibid, page 112.

Credits

Photos by Ivan Kyncl

Education Pack designed and produced by JSW Creative Ltd

With thanks to :

Jonathan Kent, Frank McGuinness, Charlotte Westenra and the Cast and Creative Team of HECUBA.

Primary Sources

Rehearsal script for Euripides' HECUBA, in a new version by Frank McGuinness, from a literal translation by Fionnuala Murphy, July 2004.

Interview with Frank McGuinness by Sophie Watkiss, Donmar Warehouse rehearsal space, August 2004.

Attendance by the Sophie Watkiss at rehearsals for HECUBA, August 2004.

Bibliography

'An Introduction to Greek Theatre', Peter D. Arnott, (Macmillan Press), 1985.

'Greek Tragedy', H. D. F. Kitto, (Methuen), 1986.

'Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity', Sarah B. Pomeroy, (Pimlico), 1994.

'Violence in Drama', edited by James Redmond, (Cambridge University Press), 1991.

'Greek Tragedy in Action', Oliver Taplin, (Routledge), 1991.

'Euripides: Medea and Other Plays', translated by Philip Vellacott, (Penguin Books), 1984.

'The Trojan Women', Euripides, (EdexcelFoundation), 2000.

'Greek Tragedy: an introduction', Bernhard Zimmermann, (The John Hopkins University Press), 1991.

About the Donmar Warehouse –

a special insight into the theatre

The Donmar Warehouse is an intimate (not for profit) 251 seat theatre located in the heart of London's West End. The theatre attracts almost 100,000 people to its productions a year. Since 1992, under the Artistic Direction of Michael Grandage and his predecessor, Sam Mendes, the theatre has presented some of London's most memorable theatrical experiences as well as garnered critical acclaim at home and abroad. With a diverse artistic policy that includes new writing, contemporary reappraising of European classics, British and American drama and music theatre, the Donmar has created a reputation for artistic excellence over the last 12 years and has won 25 Olivier Awards, 12 Critics' Circle Awards, 10 Evening Standard Awards and 10 Tony Awards for Broadway transfers.

For more information about the Donmar's Education Activities, please contact:

Development Department,
Donmar Warehouse,
41 Earlham Street,
London WC2H 9LX.

T: 020 7845 5815,
F: 020 7240 4878,
E: friends@donmarwarehouse.com.