



HECUBA

BY MARINA CARR



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HECUBA was first produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, on September 17, 2015. It was directed by Erica Whyman, the set designer was Soutra Gilmour, the lighting designer was Charles Balfour, the composer was Isobel Waller-Bridge, and the sound designer was Andrew Franks. The cast was as follows:

HECUBA Derbhle Crotty
AGAMEMNON Ray Fearon
CASSANDRA Nadia Albina
POLYXENA Amy McAllister
POLYMESTOR Edmund Kingsley
ODYSSEUS Chu Omambala
POLYDOROUS Marcus Acquari/Nilay Sah/
Luca Saraceni
NEPOTOLEMUS David Ajao
XENIA, HECUBA'S WOMAN Lara Stubbs
SON OF POLYMESTOR Sebastian Luc Gibb/
Christopher Kingdom/Daniel Vincente Thomas/
Yiannis Vogiaridis

CHARACTERS

HECUBA. Queen of Troy. Wife of Priam.

AGAMEMNON. King of the Achaeans.

CASSANDRA. Daughter of Hecuba.

POLYXENA. Daughter of Hecuba.

POLYMESTOR. King of Thrace.

ODYSSEUS. King of Ithaca.

POLYDOROUS. Youngest son of Hecuba.

NEPOTOLEMUS. Son of Achilles.

SERVANT. One of Hecuba's household.

SOLDIERS. Thousands. Achaean.

HECUBA'S WOMEN. Five of them.

2 SMALL BOYS. Sons of Polymestor.

SETTING

Troy and the beach at Thrace.

TIME

Long ago.

STAGING

The staging can be as simple or as elaborate as director, actors and creative team imagine.

MUSIC

Paramount.

HECUBA

Scene 1

The throne room. Hecuba surrounded by her women.

HECUBA. So I'm in the throne room. Surrounded by the limbs, torsos, heads, corpses of my sons. My women trying to dress me, blood between my toes, my sons' blood, six of them, seven of them, eight? I've lost count, not that you can count anyway, they're not complete, more an assortment of legs, arms, chests, some with the armour still on, some stripped, hands in a pile, whose hands are they? Ears missing, eyes hanging out of sockets, and then Andromache comes in screaming, holding this bloody bundle. My grandson, intact except for his head, smashed off a wall, like an eggshell. They're through the south gate she says, they've breached the citadel, they're here. I say put him with the rest, put him beside Hector, his father's mangled body. She won't stop screaming, shut up I say, you'll draw them on us. I tell the women to cover her mouth, we have no soldiers to protect us, all dead, or still fighting, trying to save their own women, children. And I don't know where Priam is. He went out a while ago, when was it? Last night? Yesterday? My women are putting perfume on me. Perfume! I swat them away. The smell of blood, wading in it, the tang of rotting bodies everywhere. Bodies that came out of this body and I want to vomit but there's nothing in my stomach, they've cut off our food supplies. And Cassandra standing at the throne, that smirk on her face, I told you so, did I not tell you so? And I could kill her right now. And Polyxena looking at me. Petulant. Willing me to turn this around, make it alright, make sense of it. And I'm glad at least my little Polydorous is safe. We've sent him to Thrace away from all of this. And then a soldier comes reeling in the door, Priam's head in

his hands. My husband's head. They've beheaded him in the Great Sky God's temple. I say where's the rest of him? What good is a head? We can't bury his head without the rest of him. And the soldier says, I don't know, they've burned the temple. Burned the temple? The whole city's in flames he says and he puts Priam's head into my hands. I sit on the throne holding it like a baby. His tongue's hanging out, his eyes are terrifying, a ferocious death. I try to close his eyes. They're caked with blood, crust, dust. I can't close them. And the soldier is weeping on his knees, holding my ankles, all the men castrated he says, not enough to kill them, must desecrate them too. And I say, the women? What about the women? The children? The women too, they're killing the women he says, all the old ones, the ugly ones, the ones past childbearing, past work. And the children? I say. Priam's head is oozing onto my dress. The children he says, all the boys and all girls under ten. Why? I say though I know it's a stupid question. Not enough room on the ships he says. They're rounding them up, have them in the cattle pens. And I think this is not war. In war there are rules, laws, codes. This is genocide. They're wiping us out. And then there's shouting, clashing of swords, more screams and Agamemnon is in the throne room.

AGAMEMNON. Fabled Queen, I say. She hears the mockery in my voice though it's not complete mockery. I've been wanting to get a good look at her for a while. And there she is, perched on her husband's throne, holding what? His head? The blood flowing down her arms. And what arms they are, long and powerful. What's that I say? She doesn't answer, just looks at me as if I'm a goatherd, the snout cocked, the straight back, three thousand years of breeding in that pose.

HECUBA. They told me many things about him, this terror of the Aegean, this monster from Mycenae, but they forgot to tell me about the eyes. Sapphires. Transcendental eyes, fringed by lashes any girl would kill for. I pretend I don't know who he is. And you are? I say. You know damn well who I am he laughs, and you may stand.

AGAMEMNON. And she says she'll stand when she feels like it. So I lift her off the throne. Now that wasn't too difficult was it? I say. I can't resist twirling her though I know I should show more respect. Used but good. Still good. I was expecting an auld hag with her belly hanging down to her knees. But she's alright, there's

bedding in her yet. I wonder if she still bleeds, will I ask her? No. Not now. Leave her, she's lost everything. She's a Queen, was a Queen. Behave yourself.

HECUBA. God bless you he says as he twirls me, God bless you but war is hard on the women. He smiles at Cassandra. Cassandra smiles back the little trollop. So you're the man slit his daughter's throat to change the wind I say.

AGAMEMNON. And the wind changed I tell her. The wind changed.

HECUBA. And I wonder what sort of wife he must have, this barbarian who calls himself King.

AGAMEMNON. And she's looking me up and down. She has an eye on her. Eighteen children I'm told. I wonder if they're all Priam's. I wouldn't mind making a son with her. Only way to sort a woman like that out is in bed. Take the haughty sheen off her, the arrogance even while she's skidding in blood, stepping over corpses, the lip curling. This is my husband's head she says, brandishing it at me. You didn't even have the decency to give me back his body.

HECUBA. These are the remains of my sons I say pointing to the dung heap of limbs, heads, hearts, necks, necks I loved and kissed. I have to bury them I say.

AGAMEMNON. My men'll take care of it. I see the corpse of an infant. Who's that? I say.

HECUBA. Scamandrius. Hector's babe.

AGAMEMNON. I thought his name was Astyinx.

HECUBA. No. Scamandrius. Why do you want to know?

AGAMEMNON. I wonder did Hector have two sons then. These Trojans, so sly. Can't have any of them alive. Where's the boy? I say. What boy? She says. You know what boy I say. Polydorus. Your boy. Your lastborn.

HECUBA. I don't know.

AGAMEMNON. You know.

HECUBA. He's nine. He's a child.

AGAMEMNON. Children grow up fast. Last thing I want is Trojan sails on the wide Aegean, your boy at the helm.

HECUBA. He's no threat to you. Where is he? he says. Can see the anger rising in him, a man of sudden rages, can't be thwarted. I must be careful. Priam sent him away for safe keeping six months ago I say. I don't know where. A stab goes through me. Polydorus. They're going to take you too.

AGAMEMNON. You know well where he is and the longer this business goes on the worse it'll be for you. And she starts crying, please she whispers, please, the face crumpling. I've seen that look before. On my wife's face when they made me drag Iphigenia from her arms. But I can't let the boy live. This is war. These things have to be done. Don't you have children she says. I have lots of children. The daughters are stunners, can see the Mother in them, what she must've been in her prime, not that I mind the old hens, have a weakness for them all said. I'm bored to the nostrils with girls these long years. They know nothing, understand nothing. But the look in this one's eye when you're on top of her. I'd give plenty to see that look, hostile, weighted, challenging, and then transported once I'd get to the animal in her. The young ones won't reveal that, think it's all flowers and moonlight and concealing. Think they've all of time to declare themselves. But this one in starlight, might take a while to get her down and willing but by God when you did. Magnificent in the sack I'll wager and I'm rarely wrong in these matters. And I say we'll find him whether you tell us or not. And she's muttering now, the children, why're you killing the children? Sell them as slaves on Lesbos, Lemnos, or we can ransom them, they're children, they've done nothing. My husband's body she says walking round in circles, this is too much, she has to bury them all, with her own hands if need be.

HECUBA. My husband's body. Where is it?

AGAMEMNON. I tell her there's no time, she has to get on the ships, but she's not listening, she's losing it. We're evacuating Troy, burning it to the ground, this city of liars and rapists. She's listening now, turns on me, blood rising, hands shaking with rage, goes into a reel, spittle on her lips as she gives vent. You came as guests she hisses.

HECUBA. You came as guests, rolling in here stinking of goat shit and mackerel and you came with malice in your hearts. You saw our beautiful city, our valleys, our fields, green and giving. You had never seen such abundance. You wanted it. You must have it. You came to plunder and destroy.

AGAMEMNON. She rattles on about their paved streets, their temples, their marbled libraries, their holy Joe priests, their palaces of turquoise and pink gold. I say, where's Helen? We can't find her.

HECUBA. Helen? Helen? Helen was never here and well you know it!

AGAMEMNON. You have to admire her, the brazen stance. I say you stand here, everything lost and still you lie. Who is this Helen she says and if she could get her hands on her she'd tear her asunder. To enter a man's house, I say, to bed his wife, to kidnap her, to kill her, to do away with the evidence. We want Helen back. We have our dead to bury too.

HECUBA. Helen does not exist. You made her up. You needed a reason to take it all. There is no Helen. There never was a Helen. Yeah, yeah, yeah, he says, that's your version. Cassandra snorts, plays with her bangles, stares at him. We need a treaty I say. I must calm down, save what I can. We need to hammer out a treaty.

AGAMEMNON. Now you want a treaty? The little prophetess is wearing the bracelet I sent her. Young, far too young. The other girl glares though I know she's no innocent, gave many happy hours with the bold Achilles. Way past time for treaties my good lady. I tell the soldiers to round them up, get them on the ships. I'm going nowhere she says till I've buried these. She waves her hands helplessly. The place is an abattoir.

HECUBA. His men will do it he says. I know they won't. And then he sits on Priam's throne. I ignore the outrage, I say these are my women, they've served me faithfully, they mustn't be harmed. Okay he says, keep them near, it's wild out there. He's making himself comfortable on my husband's throne, clicks his fingers, his men produce what? A goblet in the shape of a lion, pour for him. He sits there legs apart, looking at me, drunk on his success, never thought he'd see this day. We never thought so either. He's got what he wanted Priam, your throne, your head at his feet. I say I have to have my things packed, I'll inform him when we're ready to depart. He says I like your cheek.

AGAMEMNON. You'll inform me of nothing. Different rules now. Everything is in my gift. Show me your gratitude.

HECUBA. And he offers me his hand to kiss. Now he's being ridiculous. Come girls I say. Andromache? She's holding her dead baby. My darling little grandson. Leave the baby I say. She won't. Leave him! And she comes and takes my hand.

AGAMEMNON. I'll excuse your bad temper on account of the day is in it I say. Bury them together she says, find my husband's body, as if I'm her slave. If you don't do this your own death will be terrible.

HECUBA. You putting a curse on me now he says. If I had the gift of curses. Take them to my ships, he says. You mean my ships I say.

HECUBA

by Marina Carr

6M, 8W 3 boys (doubling, flexible casting)

Troy has fallen. It's the end of war and the beginning of something else. Something worse. As the cries die down after the final battle, there are reckonings to be made. Humiliated by her defeat and imprisoned by the charismatic victor Agamemnon, the great queen Hecuba must wash the blood of her buried sons from her hands and lead her daughters forward into a world they no longer recognize. Agamemnon has slaughtered his own daughter to win this war. But now another sacrifice is demanded... In a world where human instinct has been ravaged by violence, is everything as it seems in the hearts of the winners and those they have defeated?

"Marina Carr's [play is] clearly intended as a corrective to Euripides, who portrays Hecuba as an enraged avenger. The result is eloquent and intelligent..."

—**The Guardian (UK)**

"The Irish dramatist Marina Carr contends... that, in general, Western culture has been too hard-eyed about the woman who was its queen when Troy so hideously collapsed. She offers a counterbalance to the 'bad press' Hecuba has copped (with Euripides transforming her into a scheming wild dog of revenge for the atrocities she suffered) in this beautiful, terrifying, almost uncannily eloquent play."

—**The Independent (London)**

"Carr has imbued the characters' rhetoric with passion and a brisk immediacy."

—**Evening Standard (London)**

"Marina Carr's stunning new version... teases out the barbaric aftermath of the fall of Troy, while also presenting it as a metaphor for the modern day plight of those dispossessed by warfare—especially women and children. ... unusual and challenging..."

—**The Stage**

Also by Marina Carr
BY THE BOG OF CATS
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