

Marina Carr

HECUBA



Gallery Books

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
XENIA, Hecuba's woman
SOLDIERS, thousands
BOY, son of Polymestor
HECUBA'S WOMEN, five of them

Set

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 was first performed in the Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, by the Royal Shakespeare Company on 24 September 2015, with the following cast:

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-Gunner
NEPOTOLEMUS	David Ajao
XENIA / SINGER	Lara Stubbs
BOY	Sebastian Luc Dibb/ Christopher Kingdom/ Daniel Vicente Thomas/ Yiannis Vogiaridis

All other parts played by members of the Company.

<i>Director</i>	Erica Whyman
<i>Designer</i>	Soutra Gilmour
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	Charles Balfour
<i>Music</i>	Isobel Waller-Bridge
<i>Sound</i>	Andrew Franks
<i>Movement</i>	Ayse Tashkiran
<i>Producer</i>	Kevin Fitzmaurice

Scene One

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 out a woman like that 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 Astyanax.

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. Polydorous. 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. Polydorous. 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.