THE COSTUME OF HECUBA’S ATTENDANTS*

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ABSTRACT
The silent attendants who accompany the queen throughout Euripides’ Hecuba are costumed in peploi, and use their dress pins in the blinding of Polymestor. This single visual detail provides an opportunity for Euripides to create multiple responses in his audience. Sexual associations of the costume emphasize the vulnerability of the women, and provide echoes of the baring of Polyxena’s breast and the description of the sack of Troy. This costuming decision evokes associations of Greek identity, anachronism in the theatre, and the nascent threat of female violence.

In Euripides’ Hecuba, the queen herself, though accepting full moral responsibility for the enacted revenge, physically performs neither of the actions against Polymestor. It is her attendants who kill the children and blind Polymestor with their dress pins (Hec. 1169-71), although line 1046 makes it clear that the moral situation is exactly as if Hecuba had done it herself. The purpose of this paper is to connect the language and visual markers of the blinding with two earlier moments in the play, and to suggest the network of ideas that Euripides evokes is designed to provoke multiple and conflicting audience responses. Each audience member will not necessarily recall each idea, but it is possible to detect a sophisticated attempt by Euripides to create a nuanced narrative, intended to establish multiple responses from a heterogeneous audience in performance. A single detail concerning the costumes of Hecuba will serve as an initial point investigation for polyvalent audience response to Euripidean drama.

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Dress pins, or *porpai* (Collard translates 1170 πόρπαις as ‘brooches’),\(^1\) were used to fasten the shoulder of the peplos, and this Doric style of dress would be reflected in the play’s costumes. The existence of the dress pins indicates that these women are wearing this simpler style: it is likely the ‘unmarked’ costume for women on the fifth-century stage was a form of the chiton, but it is doubtful that practices were rigid, and different plays could use costumes to symbolize different things. Based on the evidence of contemporary vase-painting, the chiton ‘is generally regarded by scholars as the typical tragic dress.’\(^2\) The audience has seen the pins throughout the play as part of the attendants’ costume, but has not recognized them as potential weapons: ‘[t]he dress pin is a domestic thing and, as such, seemingly harmless.’\(^3\) The women who do the blinding are not the chorus, but are Hecuba’s attendants who have been on stage with her since she first entered at line 55 and are therefore a familiar visual presence. That these mutae personae should act at all is in itself surprising. Expectations the audience may have about the vulnerability of women are belied by their resourcefulness, demonstrated by the women’s ability to produce weapons seemingly from nowhere. This use of cunning to capture their prey, combined with their many limbs entangling Polymestor which form living bonds, evokes the seemingly discordant image of an octopus at 1162 (accepting Verrall’s conjecture, with Diggle).\(^4\)

The chorus is dressed similarly, and Hecuba probably is as well: when they describe the sack of Troy, the chorus sings (933-34),

\[
\text{λέχῃ δὲ φίλια μονόπεπλος}
\text{λιπόϋσα, Δωρὶς ώς κόρα}
\]

I left my dear bed in only
a peplos, like the Spartan girl.

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The clothing they wear is shameful to them, given their current state. The women had been preparing to sleep with their husbands, and were dressing this way to be sexually provocative (923-26), perhaps even consciously modelling their style of dress on Helen. The phrase Δωρις ὃς κόρα in the mouths of the Trojan women is unlikely to refer to Spartan fashion generally, but is mediated by Euripides through the only Spartan woman the members of the chorus themselves have met, Helen. Unlike the chitón, the peplos is open at one side, and therefore from the side threatens to expose more of the body. The design is simpler, since it requires no stitching, but instead depends on the pins to stay in place. Euripides' Andromache 598 makes the sexual connotation explicit, when Peleus describes the γυμνόστιμπ μηροίς καὶ πέπλοις ἀνεμένοις ('naked thighs and loosened peploi') of Spartan girls, who 'wore a single garment ... open at the sides in such a way as to show their thighs when they moved about.' The chitón was more elaborate, safer, and, for Euripides' audience, more modern, but it was also associated with oriental luxury in a way that the peplos was not. The peplos therefore sends mixed signals, which different audience members will interpret differently: for some it will represent tradition and Greek identity, for others sexual immodesty. Their husbands are dead, and the women are being allocated as sexual partners for the Greeks who killed them: the costuming with its implication of sexuality (reinforced by the use of the hapax legomenon μονόπεπλος), is a painful reminder of the women's changing fortunes.

A dress pin (for which the word περόνη may also be used) is used in the blinding of Oedipus (E. Ph. 62; S. OT 1268-69), to kill the sole survivor of the Athenian expedition against Aegina (Hdt. 5.87), and is removed before Deianeira stabs herself (S. Tr. 924-25). However, we cannot say whether the sight of Doric dress alone would convey an implied threat

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5 Collard (note 1) 179, compares line 926 with Alc. 1059 and Hel. 1093, the similar phrasing of which assures the amatory intentions of the women. The euphemistic reference to their husbands as 'bedmate' (936 ἀναρατόν) supports this.
7 Margaret C. Miller, Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century BC. A Study in Cultural Receptivity (Cambridge 1997) 156-65, discusses the use of the chitón in Athens as part of what she calls a general 'Perserie', and the problematic history of its relationship with the stage (163-64).
of violence to the audience or not; I suspect this is unlikely. Euripides complicates these associations by texturing his tragedy with elements of sexuality. In turn this ties the play’s resolution to the play’s ongoing examination of appropriate and inappropriate expressions of female power, which were earlier epitomized in lines 880-81.

Agamemnon asks where Hecuba will find support for her revenge, to which she replies:

880  Εκ.  στέγαι κεκεύθαναι αἰδέ Τρωάδων ὡχλον.
Aγ.  τὰς αἰχμαλώτους εἶπας, Ἐλλήνων ἀγραν;

Hec: These walls conceal a Trojan mob.
Aga: You mean the captives, Greek plunder?

Gender, social status, place of origin, and potential power are all evoked by this couplet. The words Τρωάδων ὡχλον are intended to surprise Agamemnon, providing an answer to his question in 879 that he meant to be rhetorical. Just twelve lines earlier (at 868), ὡχλος was used by Hecuba to describe the Greek army (as it had been at 533). Hecuba equates her followers with Agamemnon’s. He counters this phrase with Ἐλλήνων ἀγραν. Hecuba has presented her fellow captives as ‘a mob of Trojan women’ who will support her revenge. Agamemnon’s rebuff occurs at the same position in the line, scanning identically, but emphasizing not their unpredictability (ὡχλος can also mean ‘riot’) but their servitude (‘the booty of the Greeks’). In making this switch, there is also a subtle shift from a defining genitive to a possessive one: Agamemnon is asserting control. The two mythological examples soon provided (886-87) demonstrate the potential strength of women, and what can be accomplished by their gender, a difference Agamemnon seems unable to acknowledge. The story of the Danaids was common in myth (in extant drama, cf. A. Hik.), in which the fifty daughters of Danaus married the sons of his brother Aegyptus (886:

Aiyfat-cou τέκνοι) and killed them on their wedding night (with only Hypermnestra sparing her husband Lynceus). The other mythological example invoked is the Lemnian women (887: άνυμνον; cf. A. Cho. 631-38): neglected by their husbands due to Aphrodite's curse, they killed them ἄροδην (887: 'utterly') and lived under the rule of Hypsipyle until encountered by the Argonauts. The purpose of these examples in Hecuba is to clarify in the audience's mind the extent of violence that can be accomplished by a large group of women, and to mentally prepare for what will be accomplished by the Τροφόδων δραχα, despite their also being the 'Ελλήνεπ άργανε. Examples certainly could have been found to represent an individual's revenge, if that had been what Euripides had wanted, such as Aerepe and Atreus, or Eriphyle and Amphiaraus (an example used at S. El. 837-41). Clytemnestra and Agamemnon also fit this pattern, but since it is an action that follows this play, it would not have been cited in this context. The blinded Polymestor later does interpret what he has suffered at the hands of many women in light of a prophecy concerning what will befall Agamemnon (cf. 1277).

One consequence of removing a dress pin is that the peplos falls open, exposing a breast, as Sophocles' Trachiniae 923-26 makes clear. For some in the audience, the mention of this action by Hecuba's attendants at lines 1169-71 will also recall Polyxena's rending of her peplos to similar effect (558-61), a detail emphasized in Talthybus' narrative. In light of this, Mossman's insistence that there is no hint of sexuality in Polyxena's exposing of her breast seems difficult to maintain. There are clear erotic associations with Helen's breast at Andromache 629-30 (and scholia), and at Aristophanes' Lysistrata 155-56. So certain was the orator Hyperides of

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12 J. Mossman, 'Plutarch's use of statues,' in M.A. Flower & M. Toher (eds), Georgica: Studies in Honour of George Cawkwell (BICS Supp. 58; London 1991)198-119, at 105-06, and (note 8) 143-45 and 159. Gregory (note 6) 112-13, discusses the varieties of interpretation that have been given to lines 560-61.
the erotic associations his audience would have with the female breast that, when his rhetoric was failing him, he exposed the breasts of Phryné, the defendant, to avoid a conviction for impiety (Plut. Mor. 849e). It may be that Euripides introduced this detail to the pre-existing Polyxena story, but it must have resonated on an erotic level to some degree with a significant portion of his audience, as the chorister’s breast does with Xanthias at Aristophanes’ Ranae 409-12. If the use of a dress pin does indirectly recall Polyxena’s self-sacrifice, it becomes natural to assume that there is a sexual overtone in the events that happened once Polymestor entered the tent. This is an added nuance, described well after the fact at 1150-56, by which time the audience has already experienced the shock of the blinding itself, but not yet been told how it occurred. These details are provided during the agon, precisely the point where audience members are forming their own interpretations and evaluations of what transpired within the skênê.

The women examine Polymestor’s elaborately woven outer garments, and they remove his weaponry: γυμνὸν μ’ ἔθηκαν διπτόχου στολίσματος (1156: ‘they stripped me of my double equipment’). The timing of these details is important, and how the audience experiences the play linearly in performance must always be borne in mind. After the blinded Polymestor has appeared and sung his monody, the audience is challenged by Euripides to discern the place of diké (‘justice’) in the events depicted. This is problematized, however, since Polymestor’s contribution to the agon also serves the function of a messenger speech. This doubling of functions diminishes Polymestor’s rhetorical effectiveness, but does provide additional details that enable audience members to reflect on moments earlier in the play about which they have already formed preliminary conclusions. In particular, lines 1150-56 establish a series of possible echoes with two moments earlier in the play, both of which are also sexually-charged: Polyxena’s baring of her breast (esp. 557-68) and the chorus’s preparations for bed before the sack of Troy (esp. 923-26, 933-34). In stating these

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13 The word order of lines 1150-56 has led to several corruptions, but Diggle’s text provides the best sense possible.

14 I.D. Jenkins, ‘The ambiguity of Greek textiles,’ Arethusa 18 (1985) 109-32, at 115, notes ‘the apparently wholesome task of weaving and a woman’s interest in ... the art may turn out to be a front for a devious intent.’ This further destabilizes how the audience interprets this description.
associations, I am not claiming that audience members specifically remember a word or expression used in the earlier passages during the course of hearing lines 1150-56, though I suspect their facility to do so in a much more oral culture than our own was correspondingly improved. Instead, I am suggesting that Euripides is using Polymestor's speech to examine issues of victimization, femininity, and ethical action. He does this by introducing verbal echoes which, even if not explicitly recalled, will at some level help unify the play's three moments where sex and violence coincide: the sacrifice of Polyxena, the sack of Troy, and the disarming of Polymestor.

Individually, none of the echoes that follow have any significant interpretative value. Together, however, they provide a pattern that, on some level, resonates with the audience, connecting the scenes. At 1152-53 the attendants are described as πολλακί... Τρόων χόραι ("many... young girls from Troy"), and this echoes 934 Δωρίς ώς χόραι. At 1154 the attendants examine τούσσε... πέπλους ("these robes"), and this echoes 558 πέπλους and 933 μονόπελος. At 1150, Polymestor is κάμψας γόνυ ("bending my knee"), perhaps recalling Polyxena in 561 καθέσας πρός γοίταν γόνυ ("falling to the earth on her knee"): both victims share the same vulnerable body position. Some in the audience may also hear an echo between 1150 ἐν μέσῳ ("in the middle [of the couch]") and 559 ἐς μέσος ("to the middle [of her flank]"; both phrases conclude the second trimeter of the line. At 1152, the women sit ὦς δὴ παρὰ φίλῳ ("as if beside a friend"), which recalls the chorus' λέχη... φίλιο (933: "friendly marriage-bed"). At 1154, the attendants are ὅπ' αὐγάς... λεύσαονος ("gazing [at the robe] against the [sun's] rays"); ὅπο is used because the light comes in from the opening in the ceiling, and suggests the garment has been removed). This echoes the chorus' bedtime activity of

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A.Eucrouo... εἶχαν ύπότας (925: 'gazing into the rays') reflected from the golden mirror. Further, the removal of the κόμαξε (1156: 'twin spears') makes Polymestor as vulnerable as were the Trojan men when the city was being sacked; they had placed their ξυστόν δ' ἐπὶ ποσσόλω (920: 'spear-shaft on a peg'). Though there is no verbal parallel here, a contextual association in light of the foregoing is not implausible. Few in the audience, I suspect, would actively recognize all of these allusions. Each, however, is possible and different audience members will make different associative combinations in their appreciation of the play's literary texture.

Polymestor's appearance at 1053 marks his change. In addition to a change of mask to indicate the blinding, it is clear that he no longer carries the spears he held when he entered the tent (at 1022), and that his elaborate Thracian outer clothing, the Edonian weave mentioned at 1153, has been removed. Such a complete costume change is paralleled only by Helen's assumption of a guise of mourning, including a mask with scratched cheeks (Hel. 1087-89, 1186-92). Euripides' deliberate and concentrated linking of Polymestor's blinding with the exposure of Polyxena and the fate of the women generally at the sack of Troy challenges individual audience members to seek similarities in the three situations. In the end, Polymestor is made to resemble Polydorus, whom he had slain, and whose corpse is called γυμνωθέν (679: 'uncovered'). It is possible that the same actor played Polymestor, Polyxena, and Polydorus.

The audience is in the process of evaluating the moral positions of Hecuba and Polymestor. It is waiting for a narrative explanation of how Polymestor has been blinded, and the description of the preliminaries has created associations with other moments of sexual violence. A few lines later Polymestor identifies the weapon used by the women: εὗθυς

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18 We should also presume that the appearance of Polydorus's ghost in the prologue reflected this partially clad state. As at 1156, the γυμν-root is used of someone who is still partially clothed, as Agamemnon makes clear at 734-35.
19 This actor would also play the Servant. In this case, another actor would play Hecuba, and a third Odysseus, Talthybios, and Agamemnon, thereby uniting the three Greek characters. This distribution was suggested in my Ph.D. dissertation (Edinburgh 1992) 104-05. For role division generally, cf. Mark Dumen, 'Actor and character in Greek tragedy,' Theatre Journal 41 (1989) 316-40, and my 'Rule of three actors in practice,' Text & Presentation 15 (1994) 53-61.
λαβοῦσαι φάσγαν ἐκ πέπλων ποθέν (1161: 'suddenly they took swords from somewhere in their clothes'). The ability of captive women to secrete significant weapons within their peploi is not questioned in the haste of the narrative. 20 Earlier, Polymestor had recognized the possibility that the women could be concealing treasure among the folds of their peploi (1013). It is possible that Polymestor’s use of σφακτή (1077: ‘slaughtered’) during his monody would evoke the image of a blade weapon for the audience, and perhaps this misleading effect was deliberate. The more specific accusation does not come until later, when Polymestor is building his case in the agōn. Nevertheless, it becomes clear by 1170, when the porpai are mentioned, that the captive women have access both to the dress pins and to swords. The convenient availability of swords in the captives’ tent is problematic, and it is possible — perhaps even likely — that Polymestor is exaggerating the danger he faced, inflating the threat in an attempt to win Agamemnon’s pity. It is at any rate suspicious that multiple weapons were available, in addition to Polymestor’s own spears.

In performance, this particular issue would be clear. The attendants re-emerge from the skênê with Hecuba (note the demonstrative τοιοῦτος at 1052) and swords either are visible or they are not. I suspect that the audience does not see weapons, and that the porpai have been re-affixed to the attendants’ peploi. The attendants would therefore be dressed as they had been when they entered the tent. This maintains the uncertainty of what has happened inside until the agōn. The absence of visible swords would then undercut (but not disprove) Polymestor’s claim at 1160. There are certainly enough distortions in his narrative already (especially concerning his motive for killing Polydorus, cf. 1138-41) that the incongruity would not be exceptional. But this is not the only option that was available to Euripides, and the literary texture being traced here does not depend on it.

The contradictory elements in Polymestor’s speech demonstrate that Polymestor’s lines in the exodos are coloured by his emotional state, which is understandably agitated. This forces the audience to question the accuracy and tone of his other pronouncements. In particular, the absolute moral value typically given to his later prophecy of Hecuba’s fate, κύουν

20 Some scholars have minimized the contradiction presented by the detail, and translate φάσγαν as ‘daggers’; e.g. Charles Segal, Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow (Durham & London 1993) 167.
γενήσῃ πόρος ἔχουσα δέρματα (1265: ‘You will become a dog, with burning eyes’), for at least some of the audience, will be compromised and seen as reflecting Polymestor’s prejudices, and not those of the playwright.

Two consequences proceed from this. First, it appears that in *Hecuba*, the chorus and the attendants were costumed in the Doric style with a *peplos*, against the probable tragic norm of the *chiton*. In *Hecuba* at least, Euripides shows himself aware of fashion and uses its meaning to help nuance his play. The signification of the costuming in the play is further enhanced if ‘ordinary’ costuming practice was used for other characters. It is possible Euripides is creating an on-stage situation where the three Greek characters are wearing costumes which reflect contemporary Athenian interests in Persian styles, while the ‘foreign’ Trojans are clothed in more traditional Greek clothing. Again, different audience members will understand this differently: some in terms of contemporary fashion, some in terms of situational irony, some in terms of anachronism, and some in terms of cultural appropriation.21 Resonances with the war with Sparta are also reinforced if the Trojans wear clothes that appear Spartan. A similar manipulation of codes of cultural identity is to be found in Euripides’ *Trojan Women*. The traditional use of a pseudo-Doric dialect by the chorus perhaps complicates this picture further.

The second point to notice is that the use of Dorian costume by the attendants demonstrates the possibility of polyvalent audience response to the blinding of Polymestor as experienced during the performance of *Hecuba*. Segal notes that ‘on the Attic stage in general clothing has an important symbolic and expressive function...it gives visual enactment to catastrophic changes in status.’22 In *Hecuba*, the clothing of the silent attendants shows Euripides using costuming to effect a different sort of status reversal. In this case, the desperate suffering of the Trojan women is transformed into a symbol of strength.

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21 Gregory (note 6) 158, mentions ‘a blurring of ethnicities’ at work in these scenes.
22 Segal (note 20) 165.
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