

424 BCE- Euripides: Hecuba

Figure 1:
Incomplete Female
Tragic Mask.

(Image from:
https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1420825&partId=1&searchText=greek+theatre&page=1)



Hecuba was likely to have been written by Euripides in 424 BCE, though this is just an approximate date, the play, however, was definitely performed in the 420s (Gould, 2012).

Euripides was an Athenian playwright who wrote within the tragedy genre (Gould, 2012). In the tragic agon, Euripides won first prizes four times during his lifetime and once posthumously-making it five in total (Zimmermann, 2006). Therefore, demonstrating him as a successful playwright, but that did not mean that he was without critics- a major one being Aristophanes, a playwright for Old Comedy who made reference to qualities of Euripides' work within his own plays (Zimmermann, 2006; Aristoph, 407).

In the first half of the play, Hecuba is dealing with her daughter's sacrifice, though it then progresses to her getting revenge on Polymestor who was the Thracian king for being responsible for the murder of her youngest son (Brown, 2012; Eur, 59; Eur, 767). Her journey is therefore from one of a victim, to one strong enough to avenge wrongdoings against her. In fact, one of Hecuba's major strengths is her ability with the form of rhetoric, though the tragedy comes from the fact that those in power will not be swayed with persuasion (Kastely, 1993, p.1036). Tragedies as a genre generally had a lot of rhetoric included, which falls in line with Hecuba's decisions as a character and how she tries to solve her problems (Macintosh, 2012). This is especially true since Euripides himself was very talented in writing rhetoric speeches (Gould, 2012).

The play could also be seen as being influenced by the Peloponnesian War, with it looking at military defeat from those in such an unfortunate position (Zimmermann, 2006). This is definitely possible, as tragedies were an art form used to connect with the lives of the audience whilst also commonly (at least as evidenced by any surviving tragedies) drawing from popular myths (Macintosh, 2012).

Euripides' Hecuba exemplifies that fact that those without power will not be listened to and those in power are sheltered (Kastely, 1993, p.1038). Hecuba's want for avenge falls in line with the heroic code, as justice falls in line with revenge (Kastely, 1993, p.1039). Though the play is also often criticised for just how brutal such revenge was when enacted, it demonstrates that she is a strong character who was suffering and wanted vengeance because of that (Barker, 2009, p.326).

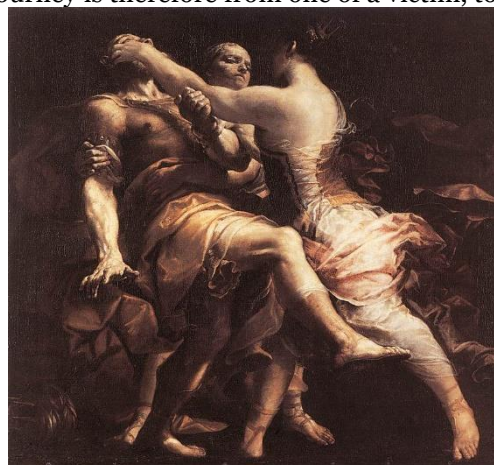


Figure 2: Hecuba
Blinds
Polymestor.

(Image from:
<https://www.wga.hu/detail/c/crespi/giuseppe/hecuba.jpg>)

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