

TOWARDS A CULTURAL VICTIMOLOGY OF ATTIC TRAGEDY: EPITHETS OF MISERY IN EURIPIDES' *HECUBA*

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In recent scholarship, characters in Attic tragedies are often described as victims. Modern audiences may be familiar with the word 'victim', but victimological studies have shown that the notion of victimhood, the recognition of a person as a victim, is culturally and historically contingent. As a step towards a cultural victimology of Attic tragedy, this article posits that epithets of misery are markers of the undeserved and unjust suffering which often serves as a foundation for the development of victimhood. In order to illustrate how an analysis of epithets of misery can contribute to a victimological reading of an ancient text, the article discusses the use of these epithets in Euripides' *Hecuba*, the extant Attic tragedy with the highest number of occurrences of such epithets.

Key words: victimhood, victimology, Greek tragedy, Euripides, Hecuba.

Introduction

For more than a hundred years, classical scholars have classified the *dramatis personae* of 5th century BCE Attic tragedies as victims. At the beginning of the 20th century, commenting on the dramatic style of Euripides in his later years, Murray (1913:69) noted that one would expect the tragedian to '[swing the audience's] sympathies violently round to the side of the victim'. In the middle of the 20th century, Krauss (1948:40) suggested that Aeschylean and Sophoclean audience members would forget about their own suffering as their 'sympathy and fears were increased for the victim of tragic action'. Early in the 21st century, Scodel (2010:12) explains that the ancient tragedians often dramatize the suffering 'of completely innocent victims'. Scholars also describe characters as the victims of various agents. To Papi (1987:28), Helen and Menelaus in Euripides' *Helen* are both 'victims of the gods' deceptions'. Arrowsmith (1958:5) calls Hecuba in Euripides' *Hecuba* 'a victim of men in the process of corruption', while Foley (2015:2) calls her 'the quintessential female victim of war'. This brief survey demonstrates the ease with which modern scholars identify dramatic characters as victims, based on the assumption (most probably subconscious) that the notion of victimhood, *i.e.*, being recognised and acknowledged as a victim, is a universal one.

Contemporary victimologists have cautioned against conflating the notion of being a victim with the position of victimhood (Jensen & Ronsbo 2014:1; Jacoby

2015:513; Druliolle & Brett 2018:2). The discipline of victimology itself is generally understood as ‘the study of the experience of suffering wrongdoing’ (Pemberton 2015:7).¹ While anyone who experiences suffering may be described as a victim, victimhood is a status which can be assumed only when victims themselves believe their suffering is the result of wrongdoing and when others agree with their interpretation that their suffering is undeserved and unjust. As argued by Jacoby (2015:517–527), in order for a victim to develop victimhood, the victim must interpret their suffering as an injustice, make persuasive claims to victimhood based on their suffering, and have their claims recognised by other members of society. Victimhood, then, is a constructed status which does not always or necessarily follow victimisation: one can experience unjust suffering without interpreting it as such or without being recognised as a victim.² Owing to the constructed nature of victimhood, Strobl (2010:6) proposes the following victim categories: (1) actual victims, who actively make claims to victimhood and whose claims are recognised by others; (2) designated victims, who are assigned victimhood by others without making claims to victimhood themselves; and (3) rejected victims, who see themselves as victims but whose claims to victimhood are not acknowledged by others.

This paper aims to show that the study of Attic tragedy will be enhanced by victimological readings of the plays. The cultural victimologists Hoonderdt *et al.* (2019:12–13) argue that the discipline of victimology is relevant to the 21st century, a century thus far characterised by ‘rugged and unapologetic individualism and shattered communities’, since the acts of ‘suffering and mourning are social acts that bring people together’. Their argument is equally applicable to 5th century Athens, a city of shattered communities in the wake of first the Greco-Persian and then the Peloponnesian wars. During the City Dionysia, tragedians and tragic actors, Attic citizens and foreigners, men and women, young and old were all brought together by dramatic performances which featured suffering and mourning.³ Although most tragedies had mythical dramatic settings and did not explicitly comment on the contemporary suffering experienced by the city of Athens, Mills (2020:864) suggests that Attic audiences must have ‘[felt] moved by

¹ In this paper, the adjective ‘victimological’ will be used in two ways: as a general reference to an approach which is attuned to the experience of suffering, and as a specific reference to the established scholarly discipline of victimology.

² Jensen and Ronsbo 2014:1 call it a ‘political construction’, while Druliolle and Brett 2018:2 call it a ‘social construction’.

³ See Csapo and Slater 1994:286 for evidence of the varied nature of Attic dramatic audiences.

other cities' sufferings'. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle famously argues that tragedy primarily elicited two emotions from ancient audiences: fear and pity (φόβος καὶ ἔλεος). In particular, Aristotle argues that the emotion of pity was elicited when audiences witnessed undeserved suffering, and that the emotion of fear was elicited by the suffering of characters who were similar to the audience members (ὁ μὲν γὰρ περὶ τὸν ἀνάξιον ἐστὶν δυστυχοῦντα, ὁ δὲ περὶ τὸν ὅμοιον, ἔλεος μὲν περὶ τὸν ἀνάξιον, φόβος δὲ περὶ τὸν ὅμοιον, Arist. *Pol.* 1453a4–6). Literary critics and classicists have paraphrased Aristotle's explanations and arguments in a way which suggests victimological concerns. Goulimari (2015:31) paraphrases Aristotle by saying that ancient audiences would 'feel pity for the victim', while Visvardi (2020:632) paraphrases Aristotle's definition of pity as 'a kind of pain one experiences at encountering a victim of undeserved suffering' (ἔστω δὴ ἔλεος λύπη τις ἐπὶ φαινομένῳ κακῷ φθαρτικῷ ἢ λυπηρῷ τοῦ ἀναξίου τυγχάνειν, Arist. *Rhet.* 1485b13–14). The discipline of victimology and the study of Attic tragedy thus appears to share common concerns, suggesting that tragic scholarship would benefit from approaches informed by victimological scholarship.

While one may safely assume that any 21st century audience or readership is familiar with the term 'victim', scholars working within the discipline of critical victimology have shown that the notion of victimhood is culturally and historically contingent.⁴ As succinctly stated by Jensen and Ronsbo (2014:1), 'to be a victim here and now is not the same as being one there and then'. The uncritical assumption that ancient tragedians and ancient audiences had an understanding of the notion of victims and victimhood that is similar to 21st century understandings, is flawed. A victimological approach to Attic tragedy which is sensitive to the way in which the *dramatis personae* are presented as victims, needs to be attuned to the particular notion of victimhood in 5th century Athens. However, tuning in to an ancient Greek notion of victimhood is complicated by the fact that there is no ancient Greek lexical equivalent for 'victim'. As a step towards a cultural victimology of Attic tragedy, this article posits that epithets of misery are markers of the type of suffering on which claims to victimhood are based. In order to illustrate how an analysis of epithets of misery can contribute to a victimological reading of an ancient text, the article discusses the use of such epithets in Euripides' *Hecuba*, the extant Attic tragedy with the highest number of occurrences of these epithets. Mossman (1995:2) calls *Hecuba* 'the archetype of extreme unhappiness and misfortune from antiquity onwards ... [whose] sorrow can be used to illumine countless other tragedies'. The *Hecuba* is also the tragedy which has been said to

⁴ Two edited volumes which clearly demonstrate the cultural-historical contingency of victimhood are *Histories of Victimhood* (2014) edited by Jensen and Ronsbo, and *Cultural Practices of Victimhood* (2019) edited by Hoondert *et al.*

be the clearest example of ‘Euripides’ fascination with the suffering of the powerless’ (Turkeltaub 2017:136), making it a promising starting point for a victimological approach to Greek tragedy.

Euripides’ *Hecuba* was likely first performed in Athens in 424 BCE, some years after the start of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE).⁵ While Athens and its allies continued to wage war against Sparta and its allies, Euripides crafted a play for an Athenian audience set shortly after the end of the Trojan war on the wild, uninhabited peninsula of the Thracian Chersonese. The victorious Achaean army is stuck here, along with their Trojan prisoners of war, owing to the lack of favourable winds without which their fleet cannot return home. The geographical setting is generally accepted to have been a Euripidean invention (Gregory 1999:xvii). Foley (2015:21) calls it a ‘liminal, barbarian-dominated space’ which serves to heighten the distinctions between Greeks and barbarians. In this liminal space, it is never quite clear whose values or whose sense of justice reign. The Achaean warriors and the Trojan victims find themselves in a post-war transitional space, between Troy and Greece and between the times of war and peace.

In the 21st century, international institutions like the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the United Nations (UN) advocate for processes of transitional justice in post-war contexts which promote the voices of victims. In ancient Greece, however, victims of war had no legal recourse. In the *Hecuba*, the Achaeans decide to sacrifice Polyxena, Hecuba’s daughter, in honour of Achilles. Hecuba directs impassioned pleas to Odysseus based on the reciprocal values of χάρις to save her daughter, but when she is ultimately unsuccessful in persuading him, she has nowhere else to turn. When Hecuba discovers that the Thracian Polymestor has murdered her son Polydorus, she appeals to Agamemnon to ensure that the Thracian is brought to justice. Her appeals are only partially successful, and Hecuba and the Trojan women use what little agency they have to enact their own version of justice by murdering Polymestor’s children and blinding him. To a modern audience, it may seem obvious that the Trojan captives are victims: Polyxena is a victim who is unfairly sacrificed, Polydorus is a victim of murder, and Hecuba is a victim of war who does not deserve to lose her children. It may also seem as if Polymestor and his children are victims of Hecuba’s revenge. The action of the play raises the critical victimological question about which victims are recognised when and by whom. This article argues that analysing Euripides’

⁵ While some scholars do not believe that there is any evidence to securely date the play other than to say it was likely first performed during the 420s BCE (Gregory 1999:xii–xv; Tzanetou 2020:159), a number of scholars have accepted 424 BCE as the most likely year (Foley 2015:4; Dugdale 2015:101; Turkeltaub 2017:137; Battezzato 2018:2–4).

use of epithets of misery in the *Hecuba* is a crucial step towards answering this question.⁶

Epithets of misery

Since antiquity, scholars have studied the Homeric epithets. There has also been substantial scholarly focus on divine epithets (Rose and Hornblower 2012:528–529). Tragic epithets, however, have not received the same scholarly attention. This article defines epithets of misery as adjectives employed by tragedians to indicate that certain characters should be pitied for the undeserved suffering they experience.⁷ These adjectives are often used in emotive interjections, and are primarily used to characterise mortal characters, usually tragic victims. Since a victimological perspective is attuned to the experience of suffering, studying epithets of misery which indicate the presence of suffering is a useful first step towards a victimological reading of a play. By consulting the extant tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, I have identified 25 tragic epithets of misery, here provided in descending order of frequency: *τάλας*, *τλήμων*, *δύστηνος*, *ἄθλιος*, *μέλεος*, *δυστυχής*, *ταλαίπωρος*, *δύσμορος*, *δειλαιος*, *δυσδαίμων*, *δειλός*, *δύσποτος*, *μογερός*, *δυστάλας*, *πολύμοχθος*, *πανάθλιος*, *ἄνολβος*, *μοχθηρός*, *παντάλας*, *παντλήμων*, *ἀμέγαρτος*, *ἄμορος*, *σφυγερός*, *μελεόπονος*, *μελεοπαθής*. A survey of these epithets' commonly accepted connotations according to the LSJ and the CGL reveals the following: 24 of the 25 epithets are associated with misery, unhappiness or wretchedness; ten of the epithets are associated with suffering or pain; nine epithets are associated with being pitiful; and nine of the epithets are associated with misfortune or bad luck.⁸

The association with misfortune may indicate that these epithets emphasise Hecuba's tragic reversal of fate, since she is no longer a queen surrounded by her family in a thriving city, but a slave who has lost most of her family members and

⁶ This article focuses on tragic epithets, but analysing these alone is not sufficient for a full victimological reading of a play. Analysing the use of verbs like *πάσχω* will also be useful. Where the *Hecuba* is concerned, however, the verb *πάσχω* occurs only seventeen times, while the most frequently used epithets of misery, *τάλας*, is used 25 times. Focusing on epithets of misery may provide more material to work with than focusing on verbs related to suffering.

⁷ Many of these epithets are clearly not Homeric epithets and should rather be viewed as tragic epithets. The epithet *τάλας*, for example, which occurs 367 times in the extant tragedies, does not occur in the *Iliad* at all, and occurs in the *Odyssey* only twice (18.327; 19.68), where it does not seem to indicate that the character is to be pitied.

⁸ These associations are often presented in the lexica as possible English translational equivalents of the Greek terms.

who has witnessed the destruction of her city. According to Aristotle, this kind of reversal is characteristic of Attic tragedy (Ar. *Po.* 1452a22–24), and usually involves eliciting pity and fear (περιπέτεια ἢ ἔλεον ἔξει ἢ φόβον, Ar. *Po.* 1452a38–1452b1). If epithets like δούστηνος, δυστυχής, or δυσδαίμων are associated with the reversal of good fortune, it may be argued that they do not signal the presence of victims who suffer unjustly. From a criminological perspective which defines victims as those who suffer because their victimisers transgress codified laws or explicitly stated behaviour expectations, this may be true. From a cultural victimological perspective, however, any undeserved suffering may be interpreted by victims or those who witness their suffering as unjust. Shklar (1990:2) suggests that ‘the difference between misfortune and injustice frequently involves our willingness and our capacity to act or not to act on behalf of victims, to blame or to absolve, to help, mitigate, and compensate, or to just turn away’. The difference between misfortune and injustice is not to be found in the nature of the victimising incident, but in the way in which it is interpreted after the suffering has been incurred.

There are seventy occurrences of epithets of misery in Euripides’ *Hecuba*. In the prologue (1–97), there are six occurrences of epithets of misery. In the *parodos* (98–153) there is only one occurrence. In the first episode (154–443) epithets of misery appear twenty-two times. In the first stasimon (443–483) they appear only twice. In the second episode (484–628), they occur five times. There are no epithets of misery in the second stasimon (629–657). In the third episode (658–904) there are sixteen occurrences, while in the third stasimon (905–952) there are only three. In the *exodos* (953–1295), there are fifteen occurrences. In the *Hecuba*, then, epithets of misery can be found in most parts of the play with the exception of the second stasimon.⁹

Of the seventy epithets of misery in the *Hecuba*, thirty-two are used self-referentially by characters who foreground their own unjust suffering, twenty-five are used in direct addresses by characters who witness their addressee’s suffering, and thirteen are used to describe a general situation or an absent character’s suffering. As is befitting of a titular female character in a Euripidean tragedy, Hecuba is both the character who uses these epithets most frequently and the character to whom these epithets are most frequently applied. In total, thirty-four of the seventy epithets of misery in the play are used to qualify Hecuba: sixteen of these are used self-referentially, sixteen are used by other characters to address

⁹ Further study is necessary to determine whether tragic choral odes often do not include these epithets.

Hecuba as one who suffers, and two are used by characters who talk about Hecuba to other characters.¹⁰

While there are nineteen instances in which Hecuba uses these epithets, there are only three instances in which Hecuba uses it to describe someone other than herself. The first of these three occurs in a section of debated authenticity (92–97).¹¹ At the end of her first monody, Hecuba fearfully relates Achilles' request for a gift in the form of one of the much-suffering Trojan women (ἥτιται δὲ γέρας / τῶν πολυμόχθων τινὰ Τρωϊάδων, 94–95). The epithet πολύμοχθος is relatively rare in the tragic corpus; with regard to the extant tragedies, it does not occur in Aeschylean tragedies at all, only twice in Sophoclean tragedies, and seven times in Euripidean tragedies.¹² In terms of Euripidean lexical choice, the lines do not appear immediately suspicious since the epithet is attested in other Euripidean tragedies. However, it is worth nothing that this is the only occurrence in the *Hecuba* where Hecuba directly refers to the suffering of the Trojans; nowhere else does she directly acknowledge the victimhood of her fellow Trojan women. When it comes to the suffering of others, Hecuba recognises only the suffering of her own family members. Considering the entire play from a victimological perspective, it is certainly unusual for Hecuba to use an epithet of misery with reference to the Trojans, lending further credence to the argument that the lines may not be authentic.

In the rest of this article, I discuss the prominent epithets of misery to be found in various sections of the play, namely the prologue, first episode, second episode, third episode, and the *exodos*.

The prologue

Euripidean prologues typically start with long expository monologues in which a single character contextualises the dramatic setting in narrative style.¹³ The

¹⁰ Since Hecuba remains in the audience's view for the duration of the play, there are very few instances in which characters converse about her without her participating in the conversation.

¹¹ For a brief summary of scholarly positions on the authenticity of these lines, see Gregory 1999:56, who finds these lines to be 'emphatic rather than redundant'. In contrast, Battezzato 2018:86 questions the authenticity of the lines on metrical grounds and considers them to be awkwardly redundant. Nevertheless, since the lines are present in the manuscripts, Battezzato still includes them in his edition (albeit demarcated with square brackets).

¹² It occurs twice in Soph. *OC* 165 and 1231; in Euripides' tragedies, *Hec.* 95; *El.* 1330; *Her.* 1197; *Phoen.* 784, 800; *Iph. Aul.* 1330 (twice).

¹³ See Duranti 2017 for an argument about the purpose of the undramatic nature of Euripidean prologues.

prologue of the *Hecuba* can be divided into two parts: the first part is a narrative monologue performed by the ghost of Polydorus on an empty stage (1–58), while the second part is a more dramatic monody performed by Hecuba witnessed only by a group of silent attendants (59–97). This section focuses on the epithets of misery in Polydorus' monologue (20, 25, 34, 46, 47), since Hecuba's monody contains only the dubious one (l. 95) already discussed.

Polydorus' monologue serves to introduce various victims of the Trojan war, with epithets of misery used to single out the suffering of the primary victims of the play: Polydorus himself, his mother Hecuba, and his sister Polyxena. In contrast, Hecuba's monody mainly concerns terrifying and confusing dreams she had the night before. Whereas Polydorus knows about the unjust suffering he has experienced at the hands of the murderous Polymestor, and prophecies about the undeserved death his sister will soon meet, Hecuba does not have any certainty about what suffering her children may experience. From this perspective, the epithets of misery employed by Polydorus and the lack of epithets used by Hecuba seem to be indicative of the knowledge they have of the victimisation experienced (or soon to be experienced) by themselves and their loved ones.

When Polydorus starts his monologue, he immediately makes it clear to the audience that he is a ghost who has arrived at the plains of the Chersonese after leaving behind the depths of the underworld and the gates of darkness (Ἦκω νεκρῶν κευθμῶνα καὶ σκότου πύλας, 1).¹⁴ He does not, however, immediately tell the audience that he is a victim of murder, and it is highly likely that an Athenian audience may not have had any reason to suppose that his death was the result of an injustice.¹⁵ Polydorus tells the audience about how Priam sent him, the youngest son, away to Polymestor's house, with enough gold to provide for his needs even if Troy were to fall (4–15). At first, while the city of Troy prevailed against the

¹⁴ Meltzer 2006:115 finds it significant that the first character to speak in the play is one who is 'utterly powerless to act on his own', a decision which aptly introduces the tragedy's central question about what voice victims of war can possibly raise to ensure that they receive justice for the injustices they experience.

¹⁵ The version of Polydorus' lineage, his experience during the war, and his death as presented by Euripides in the *Hecuba* is very different to that presented in the *Iliad*. In the *Iliad*, Polydorus is the son of Laothoë and Priam who is killed on the battlefield by Achilles (Il. 22.46–48). In the *Hecuba*, Polydorus is the son of Hecuba and Priam, and is sent away from the war to the safety of the halls of the Thracian leader Polymestor, who murders Polydorus to steal his gold. Since the *Hecuba* is the first extant source to reference Polydorus after the *Iliad*, scholars assume that Euripides either adapted a Thracian myth which involves Polydorus or created his own version of the myth. For an overview of scholars' theories about the origin of Euripides' version of the myth, see Turkeltaub 2017:138.

military attacks of the Achaeans with the help of Hector's spear, Polydorus is nurtured by Polymestor in a fatherly manner, growing as if he were a young sapling (16–20). This description of the way he was raised unexpectedly ends with the epithet of misery *τάλας*, the first occurring in the play. With the use of this self-referential epithet, the tone of Polydorus' narrative drastically shifts. Up until this point, with the exception of the first three lines and their ominous descriptions of the underworld, Polydorus' speech could be classified as either neutral or even positive. With the use of *τάλας*, however, the epithet of misery used most often in ancient tragedy, Polydorus signals to the audience that he is a victim of some sort.

Immediately thereafter, to convince his audience about his status as a victim, Polydorus lists all the calamities which preceded the dramatic present, some of which are undoubtedly injustices: the city of Troy has been destroyed (21), his brother Hector has been killed (21), his family hearth has been razed to the ground (22), his father has been sacrilegiously slaughtered over the sacred altar by Achilles' son (23–24), and Polydorus himself has been killed for the sake of his gold by Polymestor (25) and his body unceremoniously thrown into the swelling sea instead of being buried (26). The fallen city of Troy is not qualified by an epithet of misery, which is not unusual, as these epithets are primarily used to describe mortal human characters.¹⁶ His brother Hector is also not qualified by any of these epithets, possibly because he died a warrior's death which is not an unjust or undeserved way to die. It would not have been surprising if Priam were qualified by an epithet of misery as his death was certainly unjust, but he is also not described with one of these epithets. Instead, Polydorus uses another self-referential epithet, *ταλαίπωρος* (25), when revealing that he was murdered by Polymestor. Unlike *τάλας*, which occurs quite frequently in extant tragedies, *ταλαίπωρος* occurs infrequently in twenty extant tragedies.¹⁷

The third epithet of misery in Polydorus' prologue is used to qualify Hecuba, whom Polydorus describes as his unfortunate mother (*μήτηρ ἐμὴ δύστηνος*, 34). At first, when narrating how he left his body behind to flit above his mother, he describes her quite conventionally as his dear or beloved mother (*νῦν δ' ὑπὲρ μητρὸς φίλης / Ἐκάβης αἰίσσω*, 30–31).¹⁸ Describing one's mother as *δύστηνος*, however, is not what one would expect from a son. Polydorus applies this epithet to Hecuba when narrating where she finds herself in the dramatic

¹⁶ A notable exception is Euripides' *Troades*, in which the city of Troy is qualified by epithets of misery six times: 173, 601, 780, 1276, 1324, and 1331.

¹⁷ It occurs five times in Euripides' *Orestes*: 258, 392, 662, 1026, 1051.

¹⁸ The adjective *φίλος* is often used of close familial relationships. Briakou 2022:56 suggests that this description of Hecuba may have elicited a sense of compassion from the audience even before Hecuba's suffering is explicitly introduced.

present: on the land of the Chersonese, having been brought there from Troy. Syntactically, the subject phrase is placed between the prepositional phrase referring to the Chersonese and the prepositional phrase referring to Troy (ἐν γῇ τῇδε Χερσονησίαι / μήτηρ ἐμὴ δύστηνος ἐκ Τροίας, 33–34). The placement is suggestive of the reality of a captive woman in war, a specific type of war victim who is taken away from her home and city after it is conquered by the enemy.¹⁹

Hecuba is not the only family member whom Polydorus qualifies with an epithet of misery. After narrating how Achilles appeared above his own tomb and demanded Polyxena as a sacrifice (38–41), Polydorus prophesies that his mother will look upon the two corpses of both her children: his own, and that of her unfortunate daughter, *i.e.*, Polyxena (κατόψεται / μήτηρ, ἐμοῦ τε τῆς τε δυστήνου κόρης, 45–46).

The first episode

With the primary victims having been introduced in the prologue, the first episode (154–443) develops Hecuba's victimhood further by focusing on her suffering as she unsuccessfully attempts to save her daughter from an unfair death. This episode can be divided into two parts: the first part consists of Hecuba and Polyxena's lyric laments, while the second part is dominated by an *agon*-like scene between Hecuba and Odysseus, which is resolved when Polyxena joins as a third speaker and announces her intention to go to her death willingly.²⁰ With reference to the use of epithets of misery, I will argue that these two parts of the first episode perform very different functions in the development of Hecuba's victimhood. Of the twenty-two epithets of misery to be found in this episode, sixteen occur in the lyric laments shared between Hecuba and Polyxena. Surprisingly, however, Hecuba does not use any epithets of misery in her *rhesis* (251–298) and Odysseus uses only one of these epithets in his rebuttal (299–331).

¹⁹ See for example Euripides' *Andromache*, in which Andromache delivers the prologue, recounting her blessed days in Thebes and Troy, before noting that she is now the most unfortunate of all women (δυστυχιστάτη γυνή, 6) as she has been taken away from her fatherland and that of her slain husband to serve as a slave in the household of Neoptolemus.

²⁰ Segal 1993:175 calls Polyxena an 'ideal victim' on account of her lack of resistance and passive acceptance of her situation. This designation is not to be confused with the victimological notion of the ideal victim as developed by Christie (1986). Segal uses the epithet 'ideal' to suggest that Polyxena is the perfect sacrificial victim who does not spoil the sacrifice by resisting it. In contrast, Christie's notion of the ideal victim involves a set of characteristics which describes the archetypal victim of crime for whom a society may feel sympathy.

Hecuba's lyric lament (154–176) marks the start of the first episode. It is a reaction to the news shared by the chorus about the Achaean army's decision to sacrifice Polyxena. The chorus encourages Hecuba to pray to the gods to prevent being separated from her miserable daughter (παιδὸς μελέας, 149), using an epithet of misery to indicate that Polyxena is not only a sacrificial victim, but a suffering victim who should be pitied. The parodos ends with the chorus' gruesome prediction about what will happen if Hecuba's prayers are unsuccessful: she will see blood streaming from her daughter's neck as she lies sacrificed on the tomb of Achilles. In response to this image, Hecuba does not lament her daughter's fate as one may expect. Instead, the lament starts with an exclamation in which Hecuba bemoans her miserable state, using the epithet μέλεος, the same epithet the chorus uses to describe Polyxena, to explicitly refer to her own suffering (οἱ ἐγὼ μελέα, 154).

Battezzato (2018:99) notes that Hecuba's introductory exclamation is typical of tragic songs, with similar introductions to be found in the first lines of Medea's song in the prologue of Euripides' *Medea* (ιώ, δύστανος ἐγὼ μελέα τε πόνων, 96) and Hippolytus' final song in Euripides' *Hippolytus* (αἰαῖ αἰαῖ / δύστηνος ἐγώ, 1347–1348). The beginning of Polyxena's lament is also marked with exclamations containing epithets of misery. Unlike Hecuba, however, Polyxena does not cry out to draw attention to her own suffering. Instead, she addresses her mother, the one experiencing terrible suffering, the 'all-suffering' and 'miserable one' (ὃ δεινὰ παθοῦς, ὃ παντλήμων, / ὃ δυστάνου, μᾶτερ, βιοτᾶς, 197–198). The thrice-repeated ὃ-exclamation and the intensified epithet παντλήμων, followed immediately by a second epithet of misery, magnify the sense of Hecuba's suffering. Although Polyxena is not on stage while Hecuba performs her first lament, being called to come out from the tent only in the last lines of Hecuba's song (ἔξελθ' οἴκων, αὖ' αὐδάν, 174), she unwittingly uses the same epithets to qualify Hecuba's suffering as Hecuba does. This serves not only as an acknowledgement of Hecuba's suffering, but also as corroboration for Hecuba's assessment of herself as a suffering victim. Hecuba uses the epithet τλήμων in her lament (170), and Polyxena uses the intensified παντλήμων to describe her mother (197). Hecuba describes herself as the most unfortunate mother using the epithet δύστηνος towards the end of her lament (173), and Polyxena uses the same epithet to describe her mother at the beginning of her lament (197). Hecuba repeats the epithet δαίμων in her lament (156), and Polyxena repeats it twice in two different lines (203; 206). The second time Polyxena repeats the epithet, the first nominative form refers to Hecuba, while the second accusative form is used self-referentially. Towards the end of her lament, Polyxena also describes herself as wretched (τάλαινα, 210) indicating that she is not unaware of her own suffering. She has, however, focused more on her mother's suffering than her own, with the overall

effect that the audience is continuously bombarded with reminders of Hecuba's victimhood in the first part of this episode.

When Odysseus arrives on the stage (216), however, the atmosphere changes completely. Odysseus is the first non-Trojan character to appear before the audience, and up until this point in the play the only character besides Polydorus whose speech does not give way to song (Mossman, 1995:54). With the performance of his first speech (218–228), it is immediately evident that Odysseus is completely apathetic to Hecuba's plight (Battezzato 2018:106). He is, as Reckford (1991:29) calls him, 'a coldly rational officer and politician who serves necessity and expects others to do the same.' This effect is achieved, in part, by the lack of epithets of misery in Odysseus' speech, even when he addresses Hecuba who has by this point been qualified by epithets of misery eleven times. After Odysseus' first speech, Hecuba groans in a short aside (229–233) for the benefit of the audience that a great debate is about to take place which will be filled with her tears. The aside ends with a phrase that includes a self-referential epithet of misery (ἡ τάλαιν' ἐγώ, 233), before Hecuba petitions Odysseus to allow her, a slave, to address him, a free man (234–237).

Odysseus grants Hecuba's request, and Hecuba launches into an attempt to persuade Odysseus not to take her daughter to be sacrificed. She makes various appeals to Odysseus' sense of justice, begging him to honour the debt of χάρις he owes her and engaging in a supplication ritual to convince him that her daughter does not have to die. Hecuba implies that it is unjust for Achilles to demand her daughter's death from such a distance (ἐς τήνδ' Ἀχιλλεὺς ἐνδίκως τείνει φονον, 263). She also reminds Odysseus that Polyxena never harmed Achilles (ἀλλ' οὐδὲν αὐτὸν ἤδε γ' εἴργασται κακόν, 264) and claims that Helen would be a better sacrificial victim for Achilles' tomb, since she is ultimately responsible for his destruction (265–270). In her argument there is an implication that Polyxena is an innocent victim whose death will be unjust, but she does not rely on any epithets of misery to convince Odysseus of Polyxena's suffering.

In his opposing speech, Odysseus refers to Polyxena only once when telling Hecuba that she must give her child to Achilles as he demands (304–305). He does not address Hecuba's claims about Helen being a more just sacrifice, expanding instead on his belief that the heroes of the army should be shown honour. Although Hecuba does not use any epithets of misery, Odysseus tells her that there are many old women, old men, and young brides deprived of their bridegrooms who are much more miserable than Hecuba is (εἰσὶν παρ' ἡμῖν οὐδὲν ἥσσον ἄθλιναι, 322).²¹

²¹ Briakou 2022:66 suggests that Odysseus' reference to the Achaean elders who had suffered would have elicited different emotional responses from Euripides' ancient

This is the first time in the play that the epithet ἄθλιος is used; it seems to be used not to show pity for the suffering of the Achaeans, but to dismiss Hecuba's suffering as unexceptional. Achilles is an individual worthy of honour (ἡμῖν δ' Ἀχιλλεὺς ἄξιος τιμῆς, 309), while Hecuba and Polyxena are just two of many inevitable victims of war, and to Odysseus there is no military benefit in acknowledging or alleviating their suffering. At the end of this episode, however, as Polyxena is preparing to be taken away by Odysseus, Hecuba uses the epithet ἄθλιος three times: she calls herself a wretched woman (ἄθλία δ' ἐγὼ γυνή, 417), asks Polyxena to tell Hector in death that Hecuba is the most wretched of all (ἄγγελλε πασῶν ἀθλιωτάτην ἐμέ, 423) and laments the untimely fate of her wretched daughter (ὦ τῆς ἁώρου θύγατερ ἄθλία τύχης, 425). The reference to the untimeliness of Polyxena's fate further suggests that the victimisation of Polyxena is completely undeserved. Odysseus may not be concerned with the misery of the women in front of him, but Euripides wants his audience to be acutely aware of and acknowledge Hecuba and Polyxena's victimhood.

The second episode

In the second episode (484–628), the character who uses the most epithets of misery to describe Hecuba's suffering is not Hecuba herself, but the Achaean herald Talthybius. Talthybius is shocked that Hecuba, once the queen of Troy and the wife of blessed Priam (492–493), now lies on the ground, covering her wretched head with dust in mourning (κεῖται, κόνει φύρουσα δύστηνον κάρα, 496). Here the epithet of misery is applied to one of Hecuba's specific body parts, namely her head. Shortly thereafter, Talthybius uses the same epithet to address Hecuba directly (ὦ δύστηνε, 499). Unlike Odysseus, Talthybius is not unmoved by witnessing Hecuba's suffering. He is shocked to see this childless old woman who has now become a slave (αὐτὴ δὲ δούλη γραυῶς ἄπαις, 495) and reflects that he himself is an old man (γέρων μὲν εἰμ', 497) who would rather die than face the fate that has befallen her. After narrating the circumstances of Polyxena's death, Talthybius' final statement is that he sees Hecuba as the most miserable of all women, using the superlative form of the epithet δυστυχῆς (πασῶν γυναικῶν δυστυχεστάτην θ' ὁρῶ, 582). Talthybius does not tell Hecuba that there are other Achaean mothers who are δυστυχῆς as Odysseus may have done. Instead, his final statement implies that he has never seen any woman suffer as much as Hecuba has.

audience: some may have been horrified at Odysseus' apathy for a mother terrified of losing her child, while those whose relatives had died in military campaigns may have been comforted by Odysseus' acknowledgement of the suffering of a broader category of war victims.

From a victimological perspective which is attuned to the experience of suffering, this suggests that it is possible for the suffering of victims to be acknowledged across enemy divides.

The third episode

The third episode (658–904) provides further examples of Achaeans who use epithets of misery to explicitly refer to Hecuba as a suffering victim. The third episode is structured similarly to the first episode, in that it can be divided into two parts: the first consists of lyric dialogue after the announcement of Polydorus' death, and the second is dominated by an *agon*-like scene in which Hecuba attempts to convince Agamemnon to recognise her victimhood and address the injustice of Polydorus' death. In this episode, there are sixteen epithets of misery, fifteen of which are applied to Hecuba.²² Importantly, Agamemnon acknowledges Hecuba's undeserved suffering by using epithets of misery to describe her, unlike Odysseus. Hecuba's attempt to persuade Agamemnon of her victimhood is thus more successful than her attempt to persuade Odysseus.

At the beginning of the third episode, a servant woman appears who asks the chorus where she may find Hecuba, the all-wretched one (γυναικες, Ἑκάβη ποῦ ποθ' ἢ παναθλία, 657). Shortly thereafter, she notes that Hecuba is more miserable than she can express in words (ὃ παντάλαινα καὶ μᾶλλον ἢ λέγω, 667). Although the prefix παν- acts as a hyperbolic intensifier of ἄθλιος and τάλαινα, the servant woman finds that Hecuba's suffering transcends even that description. Epithets of misery, then, can be inadequate to indicate the suffering experienced by victims. The servant woman's words display an understanding of the impossibility of conveying the full sense of a victim's experiences that 21st century victimologists have also expressed. Strobl (2010:4), for example, warns that verbal communication cannot adequately bridge the gap between victims' subjective experiences and the interpretations of those who are able to recognise their victimhood. In the first episode, Polyxena cries out in frustration that her mother's suffering is unspeakable (199–201). Similarly, in the third episode, Hecuba cries out in shock and horror at the unspeakable nature of Polydorus' unjust murder at the hands of a guest friend (714–715). However impossible it may seem to verbalise the suffering they have experienced, Hecuba forges ahead to find words to appeal to the Achaean leaders to recognise their victimhood.

When Agamemnon appears and asks who the dead Trojan body belong to, Hecuba wonders in an aside whether she, the miserable one (δύστην', 736), should

²² The epithet τάλαινα is used by the chorus to address the servant girl who enters at the beginning of the episode, 661.

supplicate Agamemnon or whether she should bear the injustice of Polydorus' murder in silence (φέρω σιγῇ κακά, 738). She decides to try to persuade Agamemnon to honour justice, despite the failure of her earlier appeal to Odysseus. Agamemnon's use of epithets of misery show that he is much more sympathetic than Odysseus. When Hecuba reveals that the body in front of them is one of her children, Agamemnon addresses her as the wretched one, asking her which of her children it is (ἔστιν δὲ τίς σὼν οὗτος, ὃ τλήμων, τέκνων, 763). When Hecuba tells him that the Thracian Polymestor murdered her son, Agamemnon uses the same epithet in a sympathetic exclamation (ὃ τλήμων, 775). Finally, before Hecuba starts her impassioned speech (786–845), Agamemnon cries out, questioning whether there is any other woman who is as miserably ill-fated as Hecuba is (φεῦ φεῦ τίς οὕτω δυστυχῆς ἔφυ γυνή, 785). Agamemnon's question mirrors the earlier statement by Talthybius that Hecuba is the most miserable of all women (πασῶν γυναικῶν δυστυχεστάτην θ' ὁρῶ, 582), using the same epithet. As Agamemnon is the second Achaean to acknowledge Hecuba's suffering, it strengthens the validity of Hecuba's claims to victimhood in the eyes of the audience, even if Odysseus completely disregarded them.

Midway through her speech directed at persuading Agamemnon of the injustice she has experienced, Hecuba employs three epithets of misery in quick succession. After entreating Agamemnon to pity her (οἰκτιρον ἡμᾶς, 807), to see her as she stands before him and to witness all the bad things she has experienced as a victim (ἰδοῦ με κἀνάθρησον οἷ' ἔχω κακά, 808), Hecuba draws attention to her status as a childless old woman without a city (νῦν δὲ γραῦς ἄπαις θ' ἄμα, / ἄπολις ἔρημος, 810–811), the same three elements which so horrified Talthybius in the second episode (495). Thereafter, Hecuba refers to herself with the superlative form of ἄθλιος as the most wretched of all mortals (ἄθλιωτάτη βροτῶν, 811), and twice exclaims that she is a miserable wretch (οἷμοι τάλαινα, 812; ὃ τάλαιν' ἐγώ, 813).

Ultimately, however, she is not able to persuade Agamemnon completely. Agamemnon acknowledges that he feels pity for Hecuba, her child, and her fate (850–851), implying that he acknowledges her undeserving suffering. He explicitly states that he wishes he could give her justice (βούλομαι ... τήνδε σοι δοῦναι δίκην, 852–853), but that he cannot betray the Achaean army which views Polymestor as a friend. Agamemnon also affirms that in him, Hecuba has a listener who suffers with her (ἔχεις / σοὶ ξυμπονῆσαι, 860–861). While he does not use any epithets of misery here, one can extrapolate the sympathy inherent in his address of Hecuba to the sense of shared suffering displayed. Importantly, however, one must note that merely acknowledging a victim with the same epithets of misery they use self-referentially is not enough to spur the witness to action.

The exodos

The *exodos* (953–1295) contains fifteen epithets of misery with the most complex applications and connotations of the play as a whole.²³ Of these fifteen occurrences, nine are used to qualify Polymestor and his murdered children as ones who suffer, not only by Polymestor himself, but also by the chorus. Similarly, Polymestor uses epithets of misery to describe the Trojan women, those who are responsible for causing his suffering. Hecuba, however, does not use these epithets to describe Polymestor, arguing in the *agon* scene of the play that Polymestor suffers deservedly, not unjustly. Polymestor, for his part, attempts to persuade Agamemnon that Hecuba and the Trojan women have victimised him unjustly.²⁴ Polymestor is ultimately unable to convince Agamemnon that he is the victim of injustice, and Hecuba is the victim whose miserable status is the last to be foregrounded at the end of the play.

At the beginning of the *exodos*, after Hecuba leads Polymestor into the tent in order to enact her revenge (1018–1022), the chorus remarks that Polymestor has not yet given but will soon give the justice he owes to Hecuba (οὐπω δέδωκας ἀλλ’ ἴσως δώσεις δίκην, 1024). A few lines later, this promise is followed by another, when the chorus apostrophises the wretched Polymestor and promise that he will leave this life by an unwarlike, *i.e.*, female, hand (ὃ τάλας, ἀπολέμω δὲ χειρὶ λείγεις βίον, 1033–1034). For the chorus to describe Polymestor as a wretch (τάλας) is unexpected, seeing that the previous times the chorus used this epithet it referred to the undeserved suffering of the Trojan women (456, 941), the Trojan female servant, 661), Hecuba (693), and the city of Troy itself (913). How can it then be used to refer to the just suffering that Polymestor, the sacrilegious traitor of the guest–friend relationship, is to experience? Possibly, the chorus uses this term so as not to seem too bloodthirsty to the audience. Calling for a man to be murdered by a woman is not conventional by 5th century Athenian standards at all, and the shocking nature of their bloodlust may be tempered by an awareness of the pain he will experience. It may also be that they revel in reducing Polymestor to the same level to which they were reduced: experiencing extreme suffering with no

²³ Cf. Battezzato 2018:202 for a brief discussion about the complex nature of the structure of the *exodos*.

²⁴ Scholars are divided about how Agamemnon approaches the resulting *agon* between Polymestor and Hecuba: Gregory (1999), Fletcher (2012) and Tzanetou (2020) read it as a conventional *agon* presided over by an impartial judge, while Luschnig (1976) and Battezzato (2018) read it as mere pretense, since Agamemnon has in truth already allied himself with Hecuba as the true victim before the *agon* starts, invalidating Polymestor’s claims to victimhood before he has a chance to make them.

recourse to undo what they have suffered. Most likely, as is suggested by Polymestor's uses of the epithet later in the third episode, it indicates that the epithet *τάλας*, like the English term 'wretched', can have two different connotations: a victim who is to be pitied, or a suffering person who is to be disdained.

Polymestor also uses the epithet in two different ways. After the chorus' prediction, Polymestor shouts from within the *skēnē* that he has been blinded and his children have been killed. Both exclamations contain epithets of misery: the first contains the epithet *τάλας* (1035), and the second the epithet *δύστηνος* (1037). These epithets are to be expected from someone who, in his eyes, has been unfairly maimed and attacked. Polymestor's self-referential use of *τάλας* is a plea to anyone who hears to help and pity him. Contrastingly, having emerged from the *skēnē* in a blind rage, Polydorus cries out asking where the wretched girls, the wretched women of the Phrygians (*i.e.*, Trojans), are hiding (1063–1065), using the epithet *τάλας* twice to refer to his tormentors (*τάλαινα κόραι, τάλαινα Φρυγῶν*, 1063). Here Polymestor's use of the epithet does not imply that the Trojan women are to be pitied but that they are to be scorned. In the preceding sections of the play, it was quite clear that epithets of misery signal that characters are deserving of pity, but the use of *τάλας* in the third episode shows that at least some epithets may have more complex applications.

While Polymestor and the chorus' use of the epithet *τάλας* reveals the complex connotations of epithets of misery, the use of epithets shortly before and after the *agon* are more conventional. When Agamemnon enters the stage, having been summoned by Polymestor's desperate cries, Polymestor asks him whether he sees that which Polymestor has suffered (*εἰσορᾷς ἃ πάσχομεν*, 1115). Agamemnon answers in the affirmative, addressing Polymestor with an epithet of misery as an acknowledgement of his pitiable state (*ἔα Πολυμήστορ ὃ δύστηνε*, 1116). It would have been difficult for anyone suddenly coming upon the recently blinded Polymestor not to feel some measure of pity for him. However, this is the only instance in which Agamemnon's pity for Polymestor is captured with an epithet of misery, in contrast to the four times in which Agamemnon qualifies Hecuba as one who suffers. Although Polymestor attempts to convince Agamemnon that his decision to murder Polydorus was to benefit the Achaean army, Agamemnon is not swayed by his lies and does not punish Hecuba for her vengeful act, since the Greeks considered murdering a guest–friend as Polydorus did to be shameful (*ἡμῖν δέ γ' αἰσχρὸν τοῖσιν Ἕλλησιν τόδε*, 1248). In his final speech, Agamemnon dismissively orders his attendants to throw Polydorus on some deserted island, but respectfully encourages Hecuba, the wretched one (*ὦ τάλαινα*, 1287), to bury her two children. This final occurrence of an epithet of misery in the play reminds the audience about who the primary victim is, even though the use of these epithets in

the *exodos* suggests that they do not always signal that a victim of undeserved suffering is to be pitied.²⁵

Concluding remarks

Euripides carefully uses epithets of misery to focus his audience's attention on the suffering of victims, but which victims are recognised when and by whom may at times be surprising to modern audiences. In the prologue, Polydorus introduces the three primary victims of the tragedy: Hecuba, Polyxena, and himself. The titular character's opening monody, however, contains only one dubious use of an epithet of misery. The lack of these epithets in Hecuba's monody, in contrast to Polydorus' monologue, may imply that Hecuba does not interpret her suffering as victimisation yet, as she has not yet been confronted with the unjust deaths of Polyxena and Polydorus. At this point in the play, however, a modern audience would designate her as a victim of war. If Hecuba has any understanding of herself as such a victim of war, she does not explicitly refer to it with epithets of misery.

In the first episode, after Hecuba and Polyxena learn that Polyxena is to be sacrificed on Achilles' tomb, they do not focus on Polyxena's imminent suffering, but foreground Hecuba's suffering by describing her with epithets of misery more frequently. The one whose victimhood is most lamentable in this episode is not the one who dies undeservedly, but the one who is left to live with the knowledge that her daughter has been taken from her unjustly. The secondary victim's suffering is more important than the primary victim's suffering, in contrast to 21st century legal custom to focus on the suffering of the primary victim.

In the first episode, Odysseus' apathy towards Hecuba and her passionate appeals reveal the expectation that war will inevitably cause suffering. However, Odysseus is the only Achaean character in this play who does not refer to Hecuba with epithets of misery. Mossman (1995:38) notes that the Euripidean Odysseus is a much darker character than in the Homeric epics. An analysis of the use of epithets of misery in this play suggests that Odysseus is unfeeling and cold-hearted, caring only for the military valour and glory which results in the successful sacking

²⁵ Some scholars may disagree that the final epithet of misery used in line 1287 by Agamemnon indicates that she is to be pitied, as they read the play as following the transformation of Hecuba from 'a pitiable *mater dolorosa* [into] a monster of vengeful hatred' (Segal 1993:158). Rabinowitz 1993:109 suggests that Hecuba is a victim with 'moral superiority' at the beginning of the tragedy, but that the way in which her vengefulness disregards traditional gender roles renders her a terrifying spectre by the end of the play. Tzanetou 2020:158 has similarly noted that some interpreters view Hecuba by the end of the play as 'a pitiless avenger'.

of cities, with no concern for the undeserved suffering of women and children.²⁶ In the *Iliad*, when Odysseus accuses the Achaeans of breaking their promise to sack the city of Troy, he insults them by comparing them to young children and widowed women who lament to each other about returning home (ὥς τε γὰρ ἢ παῖδες νεαροὶ χῆραί τε γυναῖκες / ἀλλήλοισιν ὀδύρονται οἰκόνδε νέεσθαι, Hom. *Il.* 2.289–290). It should thus come as no surprise that he is unmoved by the tears and laments of victims in the *Hecuba*, even though the chorus of Trojan women is assured that there could be no man who is so unfeeling that he himself would not cry upon hearing Hecuba's laments and wailing (296–298).

The Homeric epics provide a literary precedent for the conqueror in war to show sympathy for the suffering experienced by his enemies. In the final book of the *Iliad* (507–551), Achilles and Priam mourn together, even though they find themselves on opposite sides of the war. Priam begs Achilles to pity him who is so much more pitiable than Achilles' own father (ἐγὼ δ' ἐλπεινότερός περ, Hom. *Il.* 24.504). Achilles does not reply, as Odysseus does in the *Hecuba*, that Priam cannot be nearly as pitiable as the other Achaean elders who have lost sons in the war. Instead, he addresses Priam sympathetically with the epic epithet of misery δειλός (ᾧ δειλ', Hom. *Il.* 24.518), before reflecting on the shared destiny of humans who are at the mercy of the gods.²⁷ Being aware of the inescapable suffering which life in general and war in particular brings, does not preclude one from acknowledging the suffering of other victims by describing them with epithets of misery, which Odysseus refuses to do.

In contrast to Odysseus' unsympathetic nature, both the herald Talthybius in the second episode and Agamemnon in the third episode are moved by Hecuba's suffering and acknowledge her victim status. Talthybius extends his sympathies to Hecuba for the same reasons which Odysseus rejected as without merit. Agamemnon uses an epithet of misery to refer to Hecuba when he witnesses her shedding tears over an unnamed corpse, before he learns of Polymestor's murderous act. This does not mean, however, that they are willing to lessen her suffering in any way. At the end of the play, Agamemnon still expects Hecuba to embark on an Achaean ship with the other enslaved Trojan women.

Finally, the use of the epithet *τάλας* by Polymestor and the chorus in the *exodos* reveals that these epithets are not always used to elicit sympathy. At times, they can be used to signal that the person qualified with the epithet should be an object of scorn. Whether *τάλας* primarily elicits pity or disdain when qualifying

²⁶ In the Homeric epics, Odysseus is often described as the city-sacker (Hom. *Il.* 2.278, 10.363; Hom. *Od.* 8.3, 14.447, 16.442, 18.356, 22.283, 24.119).

²⁷ This epithet does not appear in the *Hecuba* and very infrequently in other extant tragedies.

tragic characters, and how the context influences the emotion to be elicited in other tragedies, requires further study.

Epithets of misery are used throughout the *Hecuba*, appearing in the prologue, all three episodes, the first and third stasima, and in the *exodos*. This suggests that the tragedian constantly reminds the audience about the undeserved suffering experienced by the characters. The tragedy cannot simply be divided into two halves as many commentators do, with one half foregrounding Hecuba the victim and the second half foregrounding Hecuba the avenger.²⁸ With his last words, Agamemnon the Achaean extends his final sympathies to Hecuba the Trojan woman, referring to her as the wretched one (ὦ τάλαινα, 1287) before encouraging her to bury her two children. Throughout the tragedy, the playwright develops Hecuba's victimhood as a suffering mother who has lost two children to undeserved and unjust deaths.

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²⁸ For views on the play's bipartite structure, see Luschnig 1976:227 and Reckford 1991:29.

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