Notes on the Hecuba of Euripides

James Diggle

The textual tradition of Hecuba has been surveyed fully by K. Matthiessen. In this paper I cite manuscript readings from the collations of his own which Dr Matthiessen, with very great generosity, has allowed me to use.

1. Hecuba 414–22

(Po.) ὡ μῆτερ, ὡ τεκόσι, ἀπεμι δὴ κάτω.
He. ὡ θύγατερ, ήμεῖς δὲ ἐν φαίει δουλεύομεν. 415
Po. ἄνυμφος ἀνυμέναιος ὄν μὴ ἔχρην τυχεῖν.
He. οἰκτρὰ σὺ, τέκνον, ἀδία δὲ ἐγὼ γυνή.
Po. ἐκεῖ δὲ ἐν Ἀιδοὺν κείσομαι χωρὶς σέθεν.
He. οἴμοι τι δράσω; ποὺ τελευτήσω βίων;
Po. δούλη μανυμαί, πατρὸς ὦσι' ἐλευθέρον. 420
He. ήμεῖς δὲ πεντήκοντά γ' ἀμμοροι τέκνων.
Po. τί σοι πρὸς Ἐκτόρ' ἢ γέροντ' εἴπω πόσιν;

The sequence of exchanges between Polyxena and Hecuba has caused no offence to editors. At certain points, however, it proceeds without the close logical or syntactical connections which we should expect to find.

1 Studien zur Textüberlieferung der Hekabe des Euripides (Heidelberg 1974). To his list of papyri (108) add P.Oxy. XLV 3215 fr.2 (lines 223–28). But one papyrus should be subtracted from the list: Fitzwilliam Museum inv. 2 (Pack 1571), identified by F. M. Heichelheim (AJP 61 [1940] 209–10) as the scanty remains of lines 20–21 and 503–04, as well as of IA 790–91 and Soph. Ant. 689–90, has been identified as Coptic not Greek by R. V. Nicholls, Senior Keeper in the Fitzwilliam Museum, and J. M. Plumley, Emeritus Professor of Egyptology in the University of Cambridge. Mr P. J. Parsons, who was kind enough to inspect the papyrus at my request, endorses their identification.


3 With two exceptions. J. King (Cambridge 1726) transposed 415 with 416 and deleted 417 (“mira vel audacia vel negligentia,” Musgrave). This is not reported by Wecklein. And A. Jenni deleted 419–21 (presumably in his Kritische Mittheilungen zu Euripides I [Frauenfeld 1865], which I have not seen), and this deletion is adopted by Wecklein.
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415: Hecuba, in reply to Polyxena's valediction, says that she will live the life of a slave on earth. J. D. Denniston\(^4\) has some difficulty in classifying the δέ. Citing LSJ s.v. II.4, he observes that δέ is normally postponed after a vocative "when the speaker turns from one person to another," and he is obliged to admit this passage as an exception, together with Soph. OC 1459. But in that passage δέ introduces a question, and in such circumstances δέ is regularly postponed (see Denniston 174). Denniston, however, is unduly restrictive. There is no question of the speaker turning from one person to another at [Aesch.] PV 3 Ἡφαίστε, σοι δέ κτλ., or Soph. OC 592 δ' μορφήν, θυμὸς δ' ἐν κακοῖς οὐ ξύμφωρον ("δέ sometimes corrects or objects," Jebb pertinently observes), or Hdt. 1.115.2 δ' δέσποτα, ἐγὼ δέ (again, a correction or objection). In fact, as is noted by Kühner/Gerth I 51, such postponement also occurs "beim Übergang zu einem neuen Gedanken," and "von der Erzählung zu einem Anrufe." An essential difference between our passage and the majority of the passages cited by Denniston and Kühner/Gerth is that (whether or not the speaker turns to a new person or a new point) in those passages the δέ-clause contains remarks applicable to the addressee, which our δέ-clause does not. We shall have to take the δέ as introducing a contrast with the preceding statement ("I shall go below the earth"—"But I shall live a life of slavery"), which seems acceptable, even if no exact parallel exists.

416: Polyxena ignores Hecuba's statement and adds an appositional clause to her own preceding statement.

417: Hecuba remarks upon her daughter's pitiful state and her own misery, aptly enough.

418: ἐκεῖ δ' is a mildly surprising beginning, for ἐκεῖ provides a link not with Polyxena's immediately preceding line but with her last but one (414 ἄπειρον δὴ κάτω). While it may be held that 414, 416, 418 form a reasonable continuous discourse, the direct point of reference for ἐκεῖ is a long way back.

419: Hecuba's expression of helplessness and her wish to die are a satisfactory continuation. "This line is in answer to the preceding one, in which Polyxena lamented her impending separation from her mother. Hecuba replies with a wish, expressed in question form, that she too might find death" (Hadley).\(^5\)

\(^4\) The Greek Particles\(^2\) (Oxford 1954) 189.

\(^5\) οἱ τελευτήσω βῶνι is faultless: "ad quem exitum vitam perducam?" (Matthiae), "vers quelle fin précipiter ma vie?" (Weil), "whither shall I take my life and end it?" (Hadley). There is no need for πη, attributed by editors to A. Nauck (Euripidische Studien I [MémSt-Petersb 7.1 (1859)] 9) but already reported by Hermann from 'Aug.
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420: Polyxena’s “I shall die a slave” also follows well enough.

421: “And I (shall die) bereft of fifty children.” We cannot help supplying the verb θανοῦμεθα, but it is not the verb that we should most wish to supply. “I shall live bereft of fifty children” would excite pity, but “I shall die bereft of fifty children” seems a muddled thing to say.

422: “What am I to say to Hector or Priam?” is an acceptable continuation.

Now see what we gain if lines 415–16 are placed after 420:

A minor gain is that Polyxena’s statement in 418 is now the immediate continuation of her statement in 414, with έκεί δ’ picking up κάτω. The greatest gain is at 420–15, where Polyxena’s δουλη θανοῦμαι could hardly be better answered than it is by Hecuba’s άθυγατερ, ήμεις δ’ έν φαεί δουλεύσομεν. The δέ is now as natural as could be, for Hecuba is providing a precise verbal antithesis to the statement that preceded. Polyxena’s next line (416 άνιμποσ άνυμενιασ ών μ’ ἔχρην τυχεύν) is a much better continuation of δουλη θανοῦμαι, πατρός ουσι’ ἐλευθερον, for it continues the syntax of the appositional phrase πατρός ουσι’ ἐλευθερον by adding a second, parallel expression in apposition. And this lament by Polyxena for the marriage of which she will be deprived is now most aptly followed by Hecuba’s lament for her own greatest...
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loss (421 Ἡμεῖς δὲ πεντήκοντά γ’ ἄμμοροι τέκνων), which gives a perfect syntactical balance with Polyxena’s preceding line, and in which the verb to be supplied is no longer θανοῦμεθα but ‘I shall live’ (supplied from Ἡμεῖς δ’ ἐν φαίει δουλεύσομεν).

2. Hecuba 619–21

(He.) ὃ σχήματ’ οἶκων, ὃ ποτ’ ευτυχεῖς δόμοι,
ἢ πλεῖστ’ ἔχων κάλλιστα τ’, εὑτεκνώτατε
Πράμα, γεραιά 7’ ἥδ’ ἐγὼ μὴν τέκνων...

620 κάλλιστά τ’ FGPPaZzZcZmΓ et B<2K<ε<υ<3: -τα κ’ MBKVT et O<α<λ<ε<τ<α<ζ(α) OALSXXaXb

"... O you who had very many and very fine possessions, most blessed with children Priam.” Disquiet has often been felt over the banal ὃ πλεῖστ’ ἔχων κάλλιστα τ’. In itself πλεῖστα ... κάλλιστα τε is acceptable Greek: Ar. Ran. 1254–55 ἐπίλο πλεῖστα δὴ καὶ κάλλιστα μέλη, cf. Hor. Epist. 1.8.3 multa et pulchra minantem. But while ὃ πλεῖστ’ ἔχων κάλλιστα τε ... Πράμα might be tolerable, the addition of a further epithet εὑτεκνώτατε makes the invocation very oddly expressed, though I have not seen this feature remarked on by editors. The oddity would be lessened if we could take εὑτεκνώτατε as exemplifying πλεῖστ’ ἔχων κάλλιστα τε, as Weil, Hadley, and Méridier do. “I see no difficulty in understanding from εὑτεκνώτατε in this line and τέκνων in the next τέκνα as object of ἔχων: reference to the number and beauty of Priam’s children is frequent and here appropriate” (Hadley). But this is very artificial. The variant κευτεκνώτατε, accepted by Kirchhoff and Wecklein, scarcely helps.

Porson, in his second edition, punctuated κάλλιστα τ’ εὑτεκνώτατε, but there appears to be no parallel for καλῶς or κάλλιστα qualifying a superlative, although we find καλῶς qualifying an adjective at Aesch. fr.317 N. (628 M.) = Soph. fr.848 N. (934 Pearson and Radt) τὸν καλῶς ἐδαίμονα, an expression parodied by the comic poets (see Nauck and Radt ad locc.).

J. N. Madvig’s κευτεκνώτατα and F. W. Schmidt’s κευτεχν’ ὀργανα are absurd. Substitutes for κάλλιστα τ’, like ἄγάλματ’ or κεμήλι’ (Wecklein), ὀλβίσματ’ or κάλλη ποτ’ (Murray), have no

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6 This interpretation is as old as the gloss in Gu (Gudianus gr. 15, on which see Turyn [supra n.5] 61–66, Matthiessen [supra n.1] 50, 94–95) κτήματα ἥ τέκνα (377 of W. Dindorf’s edition of the scholia).

7 For the crasis see my Studies on the Text of Euripides (Oxford 1981) 70.

8 The former in Adversaria I (Copenhagen 1871) 109–10, the latter in Kritische Studien zu den griechischen Dramatikern II (Berlin 1886) 85–86.

9 The former in JhrbClasPhil 121 (1880) 392, the latter in SitzMünchen 1921, 8–9.
plausibility. Much the best solution is J. E. Harry's μάλιστα τ' ευ- 
1323, LSJ s.v. μάλα III.3, Kühner/Gerth I 27, O. Schwab, Historische 
Syntax der griechischen Comparation III (Würzburg 1895) 69–72. For 
the corruption see Herac. 794 μάλιστα, πράξας γ' (Elmsley: δ' L)11 
ἐκ θεῶν κάλλιστα (apogr. Par.: μάλιστα L) δή (though here the 
corruption was influenced by the preceding μάλιστα), Soph. OT 1172 
kάλλιστ' πλορίγκυ (κάλλιστ' V: μάλιστ' ΗΝα [conj. Nauck]).12 If 
πλορίγκυ ἔχων should seem a rather bare expression, compare Eur. 
fr.580.5 δς δ' ἀν πλορίγκυ ἔχη (though here we understand χρήματα 
from the preceding clause).13 For wealth coupled with children as the 

3. Hecuba 653–57

CH. πολιόν τ' ἐπὶ κρᾶτα μάτηρ τέκνων θανόντων 
tίθεται χέρα δρύπτεται τε παρειάν, 
διάμον δύνχα τιθεμένα σπαραγμόίς.

653 πολιόν MBOLFKPAPRSXXaXbT et V2: -ἀν LVZZcZm et 
Σ'

655 τε AFGKPPAXXaXbZm et Zc1c: δὲ V: om. MBOLRSZZcT

656 διάμον] διδιμον \bn\bn\bn\bn'

There is nothing demonstrably amiss with the language: “The mother 
of dead children lays her hand on her grey head,14 and scratches her 
cheek, making her nail bloody by tearing.” Objection has, indeed, 
been taken to the sequence τίθεται . . . τιθεμένα,15 but “repetition of 
the neutral word τίθεσθαι need not cause offence.”16 In fact there are 
many parallels for the occurrence of a participle and a verb of the 
same stem in the same sentence.17 The expression ἐπὶ κρᾶτα . . .

10 The Greek Tragic Poets (Cincinnati 1914) 103.
12 Cf. R. D. Dawe, Studies on the Text of Sophocles I (Leiden 1973) 255.
13 Tierney’s claim that “the real difficulty is in the tense of ἔχων, which seems to 
require some complement such as ποτὲ” is misguided. ἔχων is an imperfect participle: 
see Kühner/Gerth I 200. Ignorance of this use probably accounts for the variants at 821 
οὶ μὲν γὰρ ὄντες (MOGKLRSZZcZm et Va:\: τοσοῦτοι APPLLaXaXb et F2G\G' 
G\Va\Va\T: τοσοῦδε BF\Va) παίδες οὐκέτ' εἰσί μοι, as it does for the conjectures of 
Nauck (οὶ μὲν γὰρ ἦσαν), Weil (ποτὲ ὄντες), and B. Stumpo, RivIndGrital 18 (1934) 
45 (παράφητές).
14 πολιόν not πολιάν, which is preferred by several editors and by M. L. West, BICS 
27 (1980) 12, who cites Supp. 50, where πολιάν should be taken not with χείρων but 
with σαρκών.
15 E.g. by Wilamowitz, Griechische Verskunst (Berlin 1921) 547 n.2 (“die Dublette 
unerträglich ist”), and West (supra n.14).
17 See Diggle (supra n.7) 66–67, 120.
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τίθεται χέρα is supported by Andr. 1210–11, El. 148–49, Hel. 372, all quoted below.

The problem is largely, perhaps entirely, a metrical one. In 655 the copula τε, which is attested by only half the tradition, ruins the metre.18 If τε is omitted, we have a form of enoplian (----- ----) which is found at 927 ~ 937 and often elsewhere in Euripides.19 But can we dispense with the copula? Stinton believes that we can. I do not. The asyndeton is most unwelcome.

The solutions that have been offered entail considerable change.20 Wilamowitz, combining excision with transposition, proposed πολόν τ’ επί κράτα μάτηρ / δίαμον ὄνυχα τιθμένα σπαραγμοῖ / τέκνων βανόντων δρύπτεται παρειάν. This is thoroughly bad in style and sense ("laying a bloody nail on her grey head, with tearing, she rends her cheek, her children being dead"). One does not rend the cheek while laying a bloody nail on the head; and τέκνων βανόντων is very awkwardly placed.

West (supra n.14) deletes δρύπτεται, changes ὄνυχα to ὄνυχι and τιθμένα to τεμνομένα, and accepts the variant δίδυμον for δίαμον. This gives τέκνων βανόντων τίθεται χέρα, παρειάν δίδυμον ὄνυχι τεμ­

18 Editors who accept the copula divide ... μάτηρ / ... τίθεται / χέρα δρύπτεται τε 

19 See PCPhS n.s. 20 (1974) 19 and (supra n.7) 102.

20 I record without comment two proposals which may otherwise pass unnoticed: τέκνων βανόντων del. R. Lohmann, Nova Studia Euripidea (Halle 1905) 38; ἀπάλαν χέρι γιά τίθεται χέρα C. B. Sneller, De Rheso Tragoedia (Amsterdam 1949) 123.

21 Euripides Elektra (Oxford 1939) ad 146–49.

22 Cf. also R. Kannicht, Euripides Helena (Heidelberg 1969) ad 372–74.
West’s alternative proposal, τίθεται χέρα <διὰ> παρειάς / δίαμον ὄννυχα τιθεμένα σπαραγμοίς, is open to the same objection, and it entails a resolution in the enoplian (---) for which no parallel is quoted.

If, as I believe, the language of the passage as a whole is faultless, and we need the copula with δρύπτεται, then the most economical way of mending the metre may be to suppose that a word has been lost: e.g. τίθεται χέρα δρύπτεται τε <δίπτυχον> παρειάν. For δίπτυχον παρειάν see Ττ. 280 (quoted above). And δίδυμον may have begun life as a gloss on δίπτυχον rather than as a corruption of δίαμον. The colon --- is the same as Med. 645-46 ~ 655-56, Hipp. 755-56 ~ 768-69. Alternatively, τ’ <<*θλιαν> will give the same colon as the previous line: this colon is found again at Eur. fr.118.2-3.

4. Hecuba 828–30

(He.) ποῦ τὰς φίλας δήτ’ εὐφρόνας δείξεις, ἄναξ; ἢ τῶν ἐν εὐνήι φιλτάτων ἀσπασμάτων χάριν τίν’ ἔξει παῖς ἐμῆ, κείμης δ’ ἐγώ;


“In what way will you show your gratitude for those nights of love that you call (δήτ’) so dear?” is Hadley’s translation of 828. But he confesses that “ποῦ δείξεις is an odd phrase: it may = ‘in what esteem (ποῦ) will you show that you hold?’” Perhaps he meant that we are to supply the participle οὐσας with ποῦ, i.e. ποῦ (οὐσας) τὰς φίλας εὐφρόνας δείξεις; This is probably the best explanation available. But the expression remains unparalleled and unconvincing. Méridier’s translation “Comment montreras-tu … que ses nuits te sont chères?” and his note “On attendrait τὰς εὐφρόνας φίλας οὐσας. Mais ce complément de l’idée est impliqué dans φίλας. L’attribut se sous-entend parfois en pareil cas” are wishful thinking.
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Attempts have been made to turn τὰς φίλας δῆτ’ into a predicative expression: δὴ φίλας τὰς (or τάσδ’),26 προσφιλεῖς δῆτ’ (Weil), μοι φίλας δῆτ’ (H. van Herwerden), σοι φίλας δῆτ’.27 The results are insipid. Better sense, but at an unacceptable cost, is given by G. M. Sakorraphos’ τοῦ τοῖς φίλας δῆτ’ εὖ φρονῶν κτλ.28 (cf. Or. 802 τοῦ γὰρ ὧν δείξω φίλος; IA 406 δείξεις δὲ ποῦ μοι πατρὸς ἐκ ταύτον γεγώς;)·

Others have altered δείξεις. E. Holzner’s ποῦ σοὶ … τεύχους is negligible.29 E. B. England’s τείχεως cannot give the meaning which he intended (“how will you repay?”).30 Much the most promising proposal is Herwerden’s θῆςες (“quo numero habebis?” “how will you value?”),31 for which he compared Andr. 210 τὴν δὲ Σκύρου οὐδαμοῦ τίθης, Soph. Phil. 451 ποῦ χρὴ τίθεσαι ταύτα, ποῦ δ’ αἰνεῖν … ; The sense is perfect. But the corruption of θῆςες to δείξεις is inexplicable.

The same sense is given by a word with which δείξεις is readily confused: λέξεις. See Med. 741 ἐδείξας Sigonius: ἐλέξας codd.; Supp. 340 ἐδεικνύμη Hieronym: ἐδεικνύμη L; Phoen. 530 λέξαι: δείξας Stob. 4.50.1; Soph. Phil. 426 ἐδείξας: ἐδείξας LvpSm.32 With ποῦ … λέξεις compare Soph. Ant. 183 τοῦτον οὐδαμοῦ λέγω.33 The verb is used in similar connections (with the sense ‘count’, ‘reckon’) at 906 τῶν ἀπορθήτων πόλεως οὐκέτι λέξη, Alc. 322 ἐν τοῖς οὐκέτι οὖν λέξομαι, HF 41 εἰ τι δὴ χρῆ κάμ’ εἰν ἀνδράσιν λέγειν, [Aesch.] PV 973 καὶ σε δ’ ἐν τοῦτοι λέγω, Soph. Ant. 462 κέρδος αὐτ’ ἐγὼ λέγω. For ποῦ introducing a question of this type see Supp. 127 τὸ δ’ Ἀργος ἦμῶν ποῦ ’στων; with C. Collard’s note.

In 829–30 it is worth considering whether we should write ἦ … τω’ for ἦ … τω’. It is the difference between “What value will you put on those nights of love? Or what gratitude will my daughter have for her favours?” and “What value will you put on those nights of love? Will my daughter have any gratitude … ” The latter reads more naturally. In its support is the late position in the sentence

26 H. Gloël, WochKlasPhil 1 (1884) 556.
27 T. Halbertsma, Adversaria Critica (Leiden 1896) 44.
28 Mnemosyne N.S. 21 (1893) 200.
29 Studien zu Euripides (Vienna 1895) 48.
30 CR 9 (1895) 171.
32 Note also Aesch. Cho. 566 δεέας" Turnebus: λέξας’ M.
which the interrogative τίν' would otherwise occupy. G. Thomson\textsuperscript{34} includes this passage in the category which he defines thus: “When two questions are asked in succession, the second amplifying the first, the interrogative introducing the second question loses something of its force by reason of the fact that it has been anticipated, and therefore it is liable to be postponed.” But there is no example on his list in which the interrogative is postponed to so late a position as it occupies here.

The enclitic τίν' was silently printed by Porson, and after him by Matthiae and Hermann, a fact of which modern editors seem unaware.\textsuperscript{35} But, with the enclitic, the disjunctive ἃ is less natural than the interrogative ἃ.\textsuperscript{36}

\textbf{Queens’ College, Cambridge}

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\textsuperscript{34} “The Postponement of Interrogatives in Attic Drama,” \textit{CQ} 33 (1939) 148.

\textsuperscript{35} Herwerden, recanting his earlier proposals, also restored the enclitic, but wished to delete 828 and replace ἃ by ποιεῖ: \textit{RevPhil} n.s. 7 (1893) 225. Both deleted 829. C. G. Cobet, \textit{Variae Leciones}\textsuperscript{2} (Leiden 1873) 564, deleted 828–30.

\textsuperscript{36} I am grateful to Dr R. D. Dawe for helpful comments.