

Euripides' *Hecuba* exposes a problematic gap between the manmade decree (*psephisma*) and a more permanent form of law (*nomos*) authorized by the gods. Like Sophocles' *Antigone* the play investigates the mystical foundation of authority in law, and the relationship between force and law. The unilateral interdiction of Creon in *Antigone* is not validated by divine power, although ancient sources emphasize that true law originates from the gods (e.g. *O.T.* 863-70). *Hecuba* investigates an even more disquieting possibility: a democratic decree produced by communal deliberation that is not authorized by any transcendent power. By embedding this issue in the context of spectatorship, Euripides comments on the participation of the fifth century audience as viewers not only of the civic event of the dramatic festival, but also of the democratic assemblies in which they were "spectators of speeches" (Thuc. 3.38). The vision motif culminates with the blinding of Polymestor. This retributive *dikē* enacted by Hecuba is symptomatic of a schism between mortal decrees and divine *nomos*.

*Hecuba* deploys the overlapping identities of the citizen-spectator by retrojecting the citizen's role in the fifth-century democratic assembly into the narration of the debate leading to the sacrifice of Polyxena. The decision is phrased in the well known "enactment formula" appended to fifth century decrees ("It seemed best to the people," 108), and by other recognizable procedural details. This anachronistic realism, as Gregory notes (1999: xxviii), implies that the sacrifice is not demanded by the gods, but is rather a strictly human decision. It is both an allusion and a contrast to Aeschylus' version of the sacrifice of Iphigenia which was demanded by Artemis (*Ag.* 231 ff). References to Athenian legislative practices suggest a correspondence between the Greek army and the Athenian citizen audience. The enactment of the decree is the spectacle of the slaughter of Polyxena, which provokes an emotional response in the Greek soldiers akin to that of a tragic audience.

The transparency of legislative and judicial processes in Athens was the cornerstone of democratic justice, but law is much more than communal speech acts performed before the regulatory public gaze. Demosthenes (25.16) states that "every law is an invention and gift of the gods." But as Kovacs points out (1987: 86), the "democratic" army seems to have no dealings with Zeus, while Hecuba, who makes appeals to Zeus, understands that "By reason of the law (*nomos*), we believe that the gods exist" (800). Hecuba and the Trojan women, who by their ethnicity, servile status and gender are the antithesis of the Greek male spectator, trouble the conflation of law, power and vision by taking control of the spectacle. The audience would probably comprehend the justice of Hecuba's revenge (Mossman 1995: 163-203, contra Nussbaum 1986: 400), yet their own spectatorship of the event is subverted. The blinding of Polymestor occurs in dramatic time, but out of sight of the audience. Although Hecuba's vengeance is not the direct result of the sacrifice of Polyxena, the two events are linked by the themes of vision and law. It is a provocative combination that would provide a citizen audience with the opportunity to reflect on their own legislative power, and the limitations and fallibility of that power.