

HECUBA

Marina Carr

\$35 Pick-Your-Price

directed by Dipankar Mukherjee

This is not war.

In war there
are rules,
laws, codes.

This is genocide.

April 5-April 21

The Southern Theater
1420 S Washington Ave
Minneapolis, MN 55454



Performance Guide

About the Playwright

Marina Carr



Marina Carr is an Irish playwright who has written nearly 30 plays. She came to notoriety in the 1990s and is known for writing intense and often dark plays, and for being a particularly prolific and skillful voice in Irish drama. She often writes about human tragedy, and her work often takes its inspiration from classical texts. Carr was born in County Offaly to an artistic family and was educated at University College Dublin. In addition to *Hecuba*, her works include a take on Lorca's *Blood Wedding*, an adaptation of *Anna Karenina*, *By the Bog of Cats*, *The Map of Argentina*, *Phaedra Backwards*, *Portia Coughlan*, *The Mai*, *Ullaloo*, *This Love Thing*, and *The Deer Surrender*. Carr often writes about disturbing situations and unsympathetic characters. When a revival of her play *On Raftery's Hill* received backlash for depicting a scene of incestuous rape, Carr told *The Guardian*, "The moral police will be the death of art. Political correctness is destroying our literature and our poetry. There is a place for the moral high ground, but it is not art. You can't have the thought police looking over your shoulder when you are writing a play. You have to let the characters have their say. Plays are written with the imagination, not with the head." She has been Writer-in-Residence at Trinity College, the Abbey Theatre, Princeton University and was the first John McGahern Writer-in-Residence in St Patrick's College, Drumcondra/DCU. Marina Carr is a member of Aosdána and lives with her family in Dublin.

'I am not aware of another woman who writes about tragedy with such grandeur. She goes to a deep place that has not just to do with society now but that touches an inner tragedy of existence.'

— Joyce McMillen, *New York Times*

A Note from the Director

Dipankar Mukherjee



As artists in Pangea, we are in search of understanding the complexity of the time we live in. Marina Carr's adaptation of *Hecuba* opens one portal to our current truth. Mythology holds many answers and many secrets. Myth is the repository of truths, both spoken and unspoken. It is up to us to learn from them. In our search for collective accountability, moments are marked when our conscience is put on trial, as during the current moment. This can be covered up with the dust of rhetoric, but the truth never fails to stare at our face. *Hecuba* asks us — can we salvage our humanity when women and children's bodies are weaponized in the name of war anywhere in the world?

About the Director

Dipankar Mukherjee is the co-Artistic Director of Pangea World Theater. Dipankar is a director originally from Kolkata, India, with a 35+ year history of directing. He has guest directed in India, England, Canada, and the United States including at the Guthrie Theater, Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival, New World Stages (NYC), Alliance Theatre (Atlanta), and the Young Vic in London. Awards and fellowships include: Twin Cities International Citizens Award by the Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul; McKnight's 2023 Distinguished Artist; Humphrey Institute Fellowship; Ford Foundation delegate to India and Lebanon; Bush Leadership Fellowship award; and Doris Duke Fellowship.

A Note from Directing Fellow Ismail Khalidi



As the world bears witness to a war that has given way to genocide, there is no shortage of historical precedents and ethical arguments to compare and contrast what is happening now to the past. Just as sometimes there are truly no words for what we are watching unfold on our screens.

This can be where art enters the conversation. Perhaps not to arrive at definitive conclusions so much as to elucidate and complicate and stupify and inspire, all at once. Marina Carr's magisterial *Hecuba* is one such play for this moment.

Turning Euripides' version on its head, Marina Carr makes us question mythologies of power and the accounts of the victors of war. In that sense and many others, this is a play that tackles head on the brutality of war, whether in antiquity or today, with a critically honest eye. Carr explores with a muscular and unadorned poetic flare the geopolitical and interpersonal consequences of machismo and male ambition, as well as the tragedies of wartime femicide, genocide and epistemicide.

Her re-writing of the Greek classic by painting Troy as the victim of massive war crimes is a brilliant stroke that makes us question power and abhor war itself.

"This is not war" says Hecuba in Carr's adaptation. "In war there are rules, laws, codes. This is genocide."

We believe this play will inspire meaningful dialogue about timeless and timely topics of utmost importance to all of us.

Synopsis

Hecuba follows Agamemnon, the victor, as he locks horns with Hecuba, the vanquished queen. Both have suffered intimate loss — the sacrifice of a daughter, and the murder of a son. In Marina Carr's bold engagement with Euripides' play of the same name written c. 424 BC ('the most intensely tragic of all poets' — Aristotle) there's a demand for further bloodshed. In a brilliant display of ventriloquism, the drama weaves threads of inconsolable rage and grief with fate, revenge, and inevitable carnage. The show explores the shreds of duty and honor as well as the terrible deeds hatred breeds as it touches bravely on Hecuba's heroic nature and 'the endless tears of women'.



Hecuba's Grief by Leonaert Bramer, 1630

Content Guidance

The production's text contains descriptions of violence, death and killing, and sexual content. Unrealistic depictions of death and sexual content will take place on stage. Minimal instances of adult language. Some disturbing references towards a young person.

Euripides' Hecuba

Euripides was so moved by Hecuba's suffering that he wrote two plays about her: *Hecuba* and *The Trojan Women*. *Hecuba* is a full-on revenge tragedy. Polymestor, King of Thrace, killed Hecuba's son Polydorus—even though he had been entrusted with Polydorus' safekeeping during the war. So Hecuba (with the help of women of Troy) kills Polymestor's children and blinds him. Revenge brings Hecuba to life. ("Revenge is a form of desire. It is on the side of things living," as Anne Carson puts it.)

The Trojan Women shows Hecuba as a helpless victim of fate. (And rages more strongly against the Greeks, as Euripides was furious with Athens invading other city-states, brutalizing them, growing ever more greedy for their resources. In *The Trojan Women*, Hecuba screams, "You Greeks are more proud of your spears than your minds!" What's especially horrifying in his versions of the story is that Polyxena's sacrifice is completely irrelevant: it does not change the winds, it does not change the story.



The Fall of Troy by Daniel van Heil, 17th Century

Marina Carr's *Hecuba*

An excerpt of an interview between The Royal Shakespeare Company and Marina Carr

Marina's version of *Hecuba* brings to life private thoughts, making the play resonate for a modern audience. The story also helps us understand what it means to live within a society, in much the same way the Greek playwrights themselves were trying to invent an idea of the world.

Marina, however, takes issue with a major plot-point in Hecuba's narrative: "I fundamentally disagreed with the idea of her killing her two little grandsons in revenge. I just never bought that. So I've written my own version of what might possibly have happened on that beach...I've always disagreed with the legacy of Hecuba and the way she's been treated, so I wanted to argue a bit with how she's been handed down to us."

These huge plays, Marina believes, are about "powerful emotion that we all carry around, even though we try to sift through it because our passions are so huge. But I think they were onto something trying to define and contain the immensity of what it is to be alive."



Polyxena (Anne Guadagnino), Hecuba (Suzanne Victoria Cross), and Cassandra (Ankita Ashrit) in Pangea World Theater's production of *Hecuba*. Photo by Bruce Silcox.

History of the Trojan War

Theater history

- Drama in Athens was inextricably linked to the social and political life of the state.
- Euripides wrote *Hecuba* during Athens' Golden Age in 424 BCE, in the midst of the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta.
- *Hecuba* is an allegorical commentary on the horrors Athens perpetuated during the Peloponnesian War, told through the lens of the Trojan War (12th century BCE)
- Marina Carr's adaptation continues this practice. She presents a modern retelling of women's suffering in times of war and genocide, building on Euripides' allegory.

Backstory

This war, more legend than historical fact, was already in the realm of myth and legend when Euripides wrote about it. He heard the tales from Homer's *The Iliad* which, interestingly, presents King Priam and Hector as noble—more ethical and moral than most of the Greeks in the tale. He seems to be attracted to Troy as a wealthy, cultured, welcoming city; the Trojans as hospitable to strangers (unlike the Greeks, who thought everyone who wasn't Greek was a "barbarian"); and angry at the greed and immorality of the Greeks, his own people. The Greeks destroyed the most important ethic of the ancient Mediterranean: hospitality to the guest-friend.

The myth has it that the Greeks declared war on Troy because the prince of Troy, Paris, abducted Helen, wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta. (Carr takes Helen out of the story so the men don't have her as an excuse for their desire to rampage and take more land and resources.)

At the end of the war, Achilles' son Neoptolemus kills Priam in a very disturbing way: he beheads him as he clutches an altar to Zeus. This signals that the Greeks have violated the gods and the laws of divine protection—that they've lost any moral high ground and are acting barbarically. They have become the villains.

In the prologue to Euripides' later play *The Trojan Women*, Athena and Poseidon meet to discuss how they will destroy the Greeks on their way back to their homes for this terrible and immoral behavior.

Timeline of the Trojan War

The events of the Trojan War are pieced together from myth, legend, and a bit of historical fact. Until the end of the 19th century, most scholars believed the war had never actually taken place. However, recent archeological and geographical evidence suggests that Troy did exist, and its collapse occurred around the presumed time of the war.

<i>The Judgement of Paris</i>	Paris awards a golden apple to the goddess of love, Aphrodite, and is rewarded with the promise of the most beautiful woman in the world: Helen.
<i>Abduction of Helen</i>	Paris abducts Helen from her husband, King Menelaus of Sparta
1334 BCE	Start of the Trojan War, according to Duris of Samos (c. 271-381 BCE)
1250 BCE	Start of the Trojan War, according to Herodotus (c. 484-425 BCE)
1184 BCE*	Start of the Trojan War, according to Eratosthenes (c. 276-194 BCE) *This is the date generally agreed upon by scholars.
<i>Siege of Troy</i>	Menelaus' brother, Agamemnon, King of Mycenae, consolidates his Achaean forces and sails for Troy. The siege of Troy lasts for 9 more years.
<i>Achilles Refuses to Fight</i>	Agamemnon takes Achilles' concubine Briseis as a war prize in exchange for returning a captured priestess of Apollo. Achilles lays down his arms in protest.
<i>Achilles Returns</i>	Achilles' dear friend and possibly lover, Patroclus, is killed by Hecuba's son Hector in battle. Achilles returns for vengeance, killing Hector, and rejoins the Achaean effort.
<i>Achilles' Heel</i>	Paris, son of Hecuba, kills Achilles with an arrow shot through the one spot on his body that is not immortal: his heel. Achilles' mother, Thetis, had dipped him in the river Styx as a baby to confer immortality but had held onto his heel, leaving it vulnerable. Aphrodite is said to have guided Paris' arrow as he was not a talented marksman.
<i>The Trojan Horse (The End of the Trojan War)</i>	Odysseus devised a method of ending the war. The Achaeans built a giant wooden horse to present to Troy as a peace offering. Seeing the Achaean ships sailing away, the Trojans celebrated with a feast and heavy drink. In the middle of the night, the Achaeans left their hiding place inside the wooden horse, opened the gates of Troy, and laid waste to the city, killing the men and taking the women prisoner.
c. 800-700 BCE	Homer writes <i>The Illiad</i>

Character Breakdown

While different productions may pronounce these names differently, it is important for every actor to pronounce them the same way as they are supposed to be from the same world, place, and time. Not all of the below characters appear in the play, some are merely mentioned but play an important part in the story.

Hecuba (HEK-yoo-ba): Second wife of King Priam of Troy. While pregnant with her son Paris, she dreamt she would give birth to a fiery torch wrapped with snakes. The prophets of Troy declared that if the child lived, it would mean the fall of Troy. Hecuba ordered two servants to kill Paris, but they could not and left him on a mountain to die. Paris survived to be raised by a shepherd. He ultimately returned to Troy, and as predicted, his abduction of Helen from Sparta led to the city's destruction.


Cassandra: Daughter of Hecuba and Priam, Cassandra was gifted with the power of prophecy by Apollo. However, when she did not return her affections, Apollo cursed her power to never be believed. Her attempts to warn Troy of its coming fall went unheeded.

Polyxena (paul-IX-e-na): The youngest daughter of Hecuba and Priam. Polyxena was sacrificed to the spirit of Achilles at the end of the Trojan War, her throat slit by his son Neoptolemus (In Carr's version, Polyxena is killed by Agemmemnon).

Polydorous (paul-ee-DOR-us): Polydorous is the youngest son of Priam and Hecuba. Because he is too young to fight in the war, he is sent to Thrace under the protection of his sister's husband, Polymestor, who betrays and kills him for his accompanying treasure.

Polymestor (paul-ee-MES-tor): Polymestor was a Thracian king and husband to Priam and Hecuba's daughter, Ilione.

Agamemnon: Agamemnon is the legendary king of Mycenae and leader of the Greek army in the Trojan War of Homer's *Illiad*. When Paris, son of King Priam of Troy, carried off Helen, Agamemnon began a war of revenge against the Trojans. His fleet assembled at the port but the winds were not in their favor - believed to be the work of goddess Artemis. To appease the wrath of Artemis, Agamemnon was forced to sacrifice his own daughter Iphigeneia.

 **FUN FACT:** *The cast worked with dramaturg Amy Muse from the University of St Thomas to learn how to pronounce these names.*

Character Breakdown (continued)

Odysseus: (Oh-dis-EE-us): Odysseus was a Greek king of Ithaca and the hero of Homer's *The Odyssey*. He feigned madness to avoid joining the alliance of Greeks because an oracle had prophesized he would be long delayed returning home if he left for the war. True to the oracle's word, and recounted in the *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, Odysseus spent ten years fighting in Troy and another ten lost on his voyage home.

Neoptolemus: (nee-op-TOL-e-mus): As the son of Achilles, Neoptolemus was a skilled warrior. He is best known for killing King Priam on the altar of Zeus during the Trojan War.

Priam (PRY-um): King of Troy and husband of Hecuba.

Achilles (a-KILL-ees): The greatest of all Greek warriors. He was the son of Thetis, a sea-nymph/water goddess, and Peleus, the King of Myrmidons. His mother dipped him into the river Styx to confer onto him immortality. However, he was left vulnerable on his heel, the place his mother held when she submerged him in the water.

Xenia (ZEE-nee-ya): Servant of Hecuba

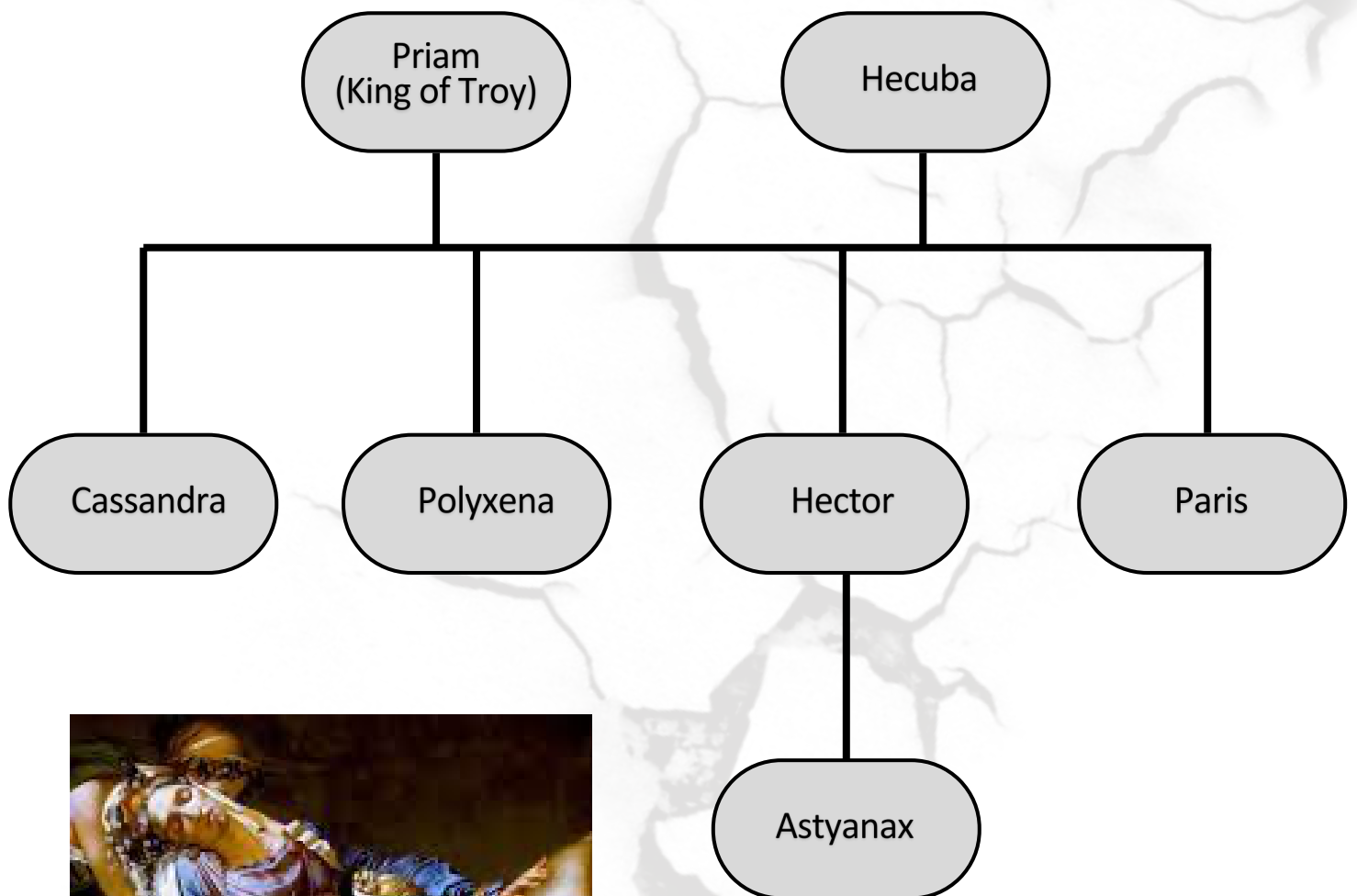


Mask of Agamemnon (golden funerary mask).
Gold. Created 1550 - 1500 BC. Discovered 1876
at Mycenae, Greece.



Cassandra by Evelyn De Morgan, 1898

Hecuba's Family Tree



Hecuba and Polyxena by Merry-Joseph
Blondel, after 1814

Journey through Play

THE SHORELINE



The body of Hecuba's youngest son, Polydorus, washes up on the shore. This discovery leads to Hecuba's intense grief for revenge.

TENT



The prologue of the play occurs before the tent of Agamemnon, the chief of the Greek army. It is within the Greek camp on the coast of the Thracian.

TOMB



A significant event in the play involves the sacrifice of Polyxena, one of Hecuba's daughters, on the tomb of Achilles. This blood sacrifice is meant to honor Achilles, echoing the earlier sacrifice of Iphigenia at the start of the Trojan war.

CAMP



The play is set on the coast of Thrace, specifically the Thracian Chersonese, where the Greek navy has returned from the Trojan war. This is the primary location where most action takes place.

Ancient Greek / Mediterranean Funerals

There were three primary stages of preparing the body (washing the body and closing the eyes and mouth so that the spirit stays inside, wrapping it in a shroud and laying it out on a bier); carrying the body to the place of burial or cremation (the funeral procession, accompanied by musicians and songs of lamentation); and burying or cremating it. (There are burial grounds and tombs at Mycenae, but the Athenians tended to cremate their dead.)

Women played a central role in the funeral rites, particularly in preparing the body: singing, washing the corpse, recounting the day of the deceased's birth, stories, paeans [songs of praise], dirges [songs of lamentation], panegyric [speeches in praise / eulogies], sitting with the body, stroking the body, weeping, laughter, over the course of three days before the public procession. Libations (e.g., honey, milk, wine, water, perfumed oils) would be poured at the grave as an offering to the gods. Then everyone would gather for a banquet.



Terracotta funerary plaque

Greek, Attic

ca. 520–510 BCE

Prothesis (laying out of the dead); below, chariot race

In the latter sixth century B.C., the elaborate series of funerary plaques set into the walls of rectangular tombs were replaced by single plaques with holes for attachment. The chariot race, a recurring theme in Attic funerary art, may evoke the funeral games held in honor of legendary heroes, such as those in book 23 of the Iliad, when Achilles honored his deceased friend Patroklos. (Department of Greek and Roman Art, 2003)



What are some practices you have in your culture to remember, celebrate, or honor your ancestors?

Costumes

Costumes for this production were designed by Mary Ann Kelling and her assistant Laura Jones.

Before rehearsals even begin, the costume designer works with the director to imagine what the world will look like and how that story can be told through costumes.

Some things designers consider...



Textures

Character Arcs

Color Palette

Time Period

Location

EXERCISE: What are some design choices you might make if you were working on *Hecuba*? Pick a character in the play and sketch out a costume or two. Write a short description about your design and the choices you made.

Initial Designs

As the costume designers learn more about the director's vision, they begin to work on designs to present to the creative team. Here is one initial design sketched by Laura Jones, Assistant Costume Designer.



Laura saw Hecuba's narrative arc in four stages:

1. **Full glory** in the throne room - Wearing belted robe over jumpsuit
2. **Changing status** after capture on a ship - Remove outer robe, belt, all jewelry
3. **Lowest point** after her daughter has been sacrificed on a beach - Remove shoes
4. **Intimate Scene** - Add sheer robe



Why do you think Laura made these choices? How do you see the influence of Greek aesthetic in the design?

What time period do you think this production is set in? Why do you think so?

Pre-show Questions

- Music plays a big role in this production and the story telling. Pay attention to the music. How does it contribute to the world of the play?
- Look at the color of the lights as you walk in, do these colors represent feeling? How does this add to the storyline?
- Are there any props on stage? How does this contribute to the show and environment?
- Notice where you are sitting, are you close to the stage? How may the story be experienced differently by each audience member in the theater?
- Pangea World Theater works with rituals in our rehearsals and performances. Pay attention to where you might see rituals being practiced or emerging - how are the rituals contributing to the story telling?

Post-show Questions

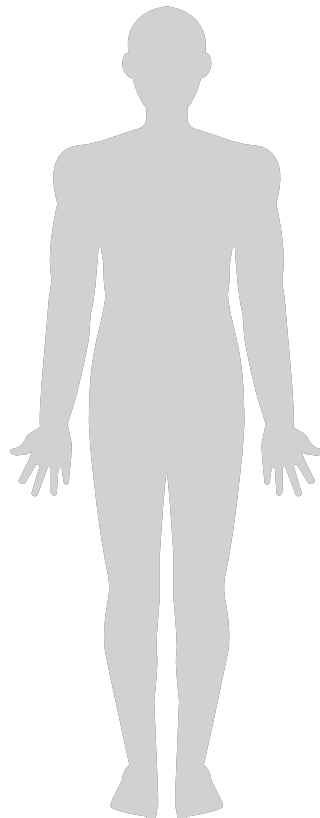
- What emotions, thoughts, or ideas are coming to mind after watching *Hecuba*? Take some time to write them down and reflect on them.
- What elements of design (costume, set, lights, sound) stood out to you in this production? Identify a powerful or significant moment of design. Elaborate on why it felt powerful for you.
- The actors in the production never leave the stage. How did this directing choice inform your experience of the story? Why do you think this choice was made?
- What role does *Hecuba* by Marina Carr play in today's world? Why do you think Pangea chose to produce this play at this time?
- What statement do you think is being made about the atrocities and injustices in war and genocide? What connections can you make from the production about the wars or genocides happening around the world in the present day?
- The text in this play is unlike other plays in that the characters verbalize their intentions and that of other characters. Why do you think Carr made this choice?
- Scholar W. Michelle Wang states that Carr used a writing technique that “(desired) to capture the contradictions between speech and ‘interior voice’” and “further serves to simulate the experience of trauma-induced dissociation that is commonly associated with wartime survival.” (Wang, 405-406) What do you think about this statement? Do you agree with Wang? Why or why not?

EXPLORE A CHARACTER

Marina Carr stresses the importance of creating characters that are complex people with human actions. Pick a character from *Hecuba* and identify three core characteristics that you see in them. In the spaces provided, write or identify moments where you saw each characteristic emerge. These moments can be taken from the script itself or in the actor's performance on stage.

CHARACTER: _____

TRAIT 1:



TRAIT 2:

TRAIT 3:

Discuss:

- Do the traits you identified feel similar or different to each other? If they are different, how do you think they work together to inform the actions of the character?
- In what ways do you see these traits adding complexity and humanness to the character?

Additional Resources

Articles

"Music for the Wretched: Euripides' Trojan Women as Refugee Theatre" by Paul Eberwine

"Writing is essentially a very, very innocent thing": In Conversation with Marina Carr,
Melania Terrazas Gallego

"Greek Tragedy as a Window on the Dispossessed" by Steve Wilmer [2017]

"Bitter Tears" by Tony Harrison, 2005

"Readerly Plays: Narration and Formal Experimentation in Marina Carr's Hecuba" by W.
Michelle Wang

An interview with The Royal Shakespeare Company and Marina Carr. 2015

"Anger, Hatred, and Genocide in Ancient Greece" by David Konstan. 2007

Video

An interview with Marina Carr on Hecuba by Rough Magic Theater. 2022