HECUBA SUCCUMBS: WORDPLAY in SENECA'S TROADES

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23 April 2024

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Hecuba's grief upon learning of Hector's death in *Il*. 22.430–6 and in the presence of his corpse later on in *Il*. 24.747–59 seems to foreshadow the queen's miserable fate in the aftermath of the fall of Troy. In the subsequent literary tradition, the character of Hecuba ends up merging with the destiny of her city: as Harrison points out with reference to Seneca's *Troades*, Hecuba, the Latin counterpart of Greek Hekabe, functions as a metaphor for the fall of Troy (118), even represents the fallen Troy itself (128)[1]. In turning into an exemplar of maternal grief, she also comes to embody

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[1] See G.W.M. Harrison, 'Seneca and the Fall of Troy', in G.W.M. Harrison (ed.), *Brill's Companion to Roman Tragedy* (Leiden, 2015), 118–50, especially at 137–43. He considers Troy more than just an evocative setting: the city is a proper character in the play (138). The link between the queen and her city is also underlined by the 'active' role Hecuba has in the destruction of Troy: cf. Eur. *Tro*. 919–20, in which Helen accuses Hecuba of being the origin of all evils, since she gave birth to Paris. Cicero in *Div*. 1.21.42 refers to the famous prophecy of the fire-brand, quoting from Ennius, *Alexander*, fr. 18 Jocelyn: the *fax ardens* Hecuba has dreamt of will turn into the *exitium Troiae, pestis Pergamo*. Cf. also Sen. *Tro*. 40 *meus ignis iste est, facibus ardetis meis* (Hecuba is speaking). On the death of Troy as the death of a place as well as a cultural entity in Euripides' *Hecuba*, cf. N.T. Croally, *Euripidean Polemic. The Trojan Women and the Function of Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1994), 192. E. Dugdale, 'Hecuba', in R. Lauriola and K.N. Demetriou (edd.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Euripides* (Leiden, 2015), 100–42 offers a detailed survey of the figure of Hecuba across literature and art; cf. also H.P. Foley, *Euripides. Hecuba* (London, 2015).

the vicissitudes of fortune[2]. In these pages, I am interested in exploring a possible wordplay on the queen's name in Seneca's *Troades*, which may have originated, as I suggest, from Hecuba's distinctive posture in Euripides' diptych *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women* (for convenience's sake I will employ the Latin form of the name throughout these pages with the exception of a few passages, in which the Greek form 'Hekabe' will be used in order to bring to the fore an etymological connection I will discuss below).

In Seneca's *Troades* 945–54, a passage to which I will return below, Andromache describes Hecuba's reaction upon discovering that Polyxena is to be sacrificed to Achilles' *cinis* (949–50):

> at misera luctu mater audito stupet;
>
> labefacta mens **succubuit** […].

One may certainly agree with Fantham that Hecuba's collapse (*succubuit*) is spiritual rather than physical[3]. By contrast, in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women*, arguably the Greek models of Seneca's play[4], the idea of physical fainting is predominant.

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[2] Cf. M. McAuley, *Reproducing Rome: Motherhood in Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, and Statius* (Oxford, 2014), 261–2 and N. Hopkinson, *Ovid. Metamorphoses Book XIII* (Cambridge, 2001), 23.

[3] See E. Fantham, *Seneca's* Troades (Princeton, 1983), ad loc.; cf. also McAuley (n. 2), 261 n. 14.

[4] On the question of the models of Senecan tragedies cf. J.A. Stevens, 'Etymology and Plot in Senecan Tragedy', *SC* 13 (2002), 126–51, at 127–30 and *passim* with further bibliography; cf. also Dugdale (n. 1), 110. With regard to *mater audito stupet*, S. Hinds, 'Seneca's Ovidian *Loci*', *SIFC* 9 (2011), 5–63, at 41–2 argues that, despite the fact that Hecuba's collapse reactivates the memory of Eur. *Hec.* 438–40, there is strong lexical connection with Ov. *Met.* 5.509 *mater ad auditas stupuit*, in which another mythological mother grieves for her daughter, Ceres for Proserpina (both Proserpina's and Polyxena's perverse marriages are connected with death).

If we turn now to Euripides' plays and Hecuba's position within that dramatic space, at the outset of the *Hecuba* we encounter the character entering the stage ~~with the aid of a walking stick~~<u>supported by her attendants</u> (59–67). However, she abandons her upright posture in the following lines after Odysseus has led Polyxena away: in 438–43 Hecuba announces she is about to faint and sinks to the ground ('Alas! I faint: my limbs sink under me', Coleridge). When in 486–7 the messenger Talthybius, bringing the news of Polyxena's death, looks for Hecuba, the chorus draws his attention to the queen lying supine on the ground:

αὕτη πέλας[5] σου νῶτ' ἔχουσ' ἐπὶ χθονί,

Ταλθύβιε, **κεῖται** ξυγκεκλημένη πέπλοις

Shortly afterwards, picking up on the chorus' words, Talthybius himself refers to the queen's horizontal posture, also underlining her deplorable state (495–6):

αὐτὴ δὲ δούλη γραῦς ἄπαις ἐπὶ χθονὶ

κεῖται, κόνει φύρουσα δύστηνον κάρα

In the *Trojan Women*, Euripides assigns the prologue to Poseidon, who introduces the character of Hecuba to the public, which has likely already caught sight of her on stage. She appears as a silent

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[5] As Andreas Michalopoulos has kindly pointed out to me, there may be at this point an etymological play on the queen's name toying with the opposition of πέλας ('near') vs ἑκάς ('afar', 'far off') underlying Hekabe's name. A similar *ex contrario* wordplay may also be spotted in Euripides' *Trojan Women* 37–8 πάρεστιν Ἑκάβην quoted above.

body lying on the ground and pouring many tears, whose presence is verbally revealed by the god[6] (36–8):

> τὴν δ᾽ ἀθλίαν τήνδ᾽ εἴ τις εἰσορᾶν θέλει,
>
> πάρεστιν Ἑκάβη κειμένη πυλῶν πάρος,
>
> δάκρυα χέουσα πολλὰ καὶ πολλῶν ὕπερ

Only after the prologue does Hecuba start to talk, exhorting herself to raise her head from the ground (98–9) and pointing to the physical pain she suffers from lying (1123–45; cf. also 1156–9):

> δύστηνος ἐγὼ τῆς βαρυδαίμονος
>
> ἄρθρων κλίσεως, ὡς διάκειμαι,
>
> νῶτ᾽ ἐν στερροῖς λέκτροισι ταθεῖσ᾽

Later on, after Cassandra bids farewell and leaves, Hecuba, replaying a gesture with which Euripides' public was already familiar[7], sinks again to the ground (462–5), denying her servants' help to lift her up (466–7):

> ἐᾶτέ μ᾽ — οὔτοι φίλα τὰ μὴ φίλ᾽, ὦ κόραι —
>
> κεῖσθαι πεσοῦσαν [...]

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[6] On Hecuba's presence and silence during Poseidon's prologue, cf. S. Montiglio, *Silence in the Land of Logos* (Princeton, 2000), 189–90.

[7] Euripides' *Trojan Women* was produced after the *Hecuba* (around 412 BCE, whereas the *Hecuba* apparently dates to the late 420s BCE, cf. Foley [n. 1], 4).

Hecuba's horizontal posture is highly suggestive, in that it evokes a dead body[8]. It may also, especially in Euripides' *Hecuba*, hint at the queen's imminent metamorphosis into a dog, adumbrated in the close of the play (1265–73), in which the process of her notorious spiritual and physical 'animalization' reaches its end[9].

As exemplified by the Euripidean passages above, Hecuba's lying is always expressed by the verb *keimai* (or one of his compound forms as in *diakeimai*) signifying 'to lie down'. This verb can be used to point to various kinds of lying down, such as resting, lying sick or wounded, lying dead or buried[10] or, simply, being situated[11]. Hecuba's scenic position, recurrent as it is, almost winds up being part of her grammar of tragic gestures[12]. Hecuba, in fact, makes expressive use of her body as an alternative to word and action on stage[13]. As Di Benedetto points out with regard to Euripides' *Trojan Women*, Hecuba's gestures, often endowed with realism as in 112–19, are

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[8] She is likely to appear veiled on stage (cf. Montiglio [n. 6], 189) so as to recall a cadaver wrapped in a shroud. In Euripides' *Hecuba* she covers her head with her cloak (cf. 487).

[9] On this cf. especially M.C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness. Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2001), 396–421. Interestingly, Ovid's narrative on Hecuba's transformation into a dog is effectively prepared by an animal simile, in which the queen is compared to a lioness bereft of her suckling cub (*leaena*, *Met*. 13.547). Cf. also *Il*. 24.212–4, which gives us a savage picture of Hecuba wishing she could devour Achilles' liver.

[10] As in Eur. *Tro*. 378–9 (κεῖνται); in *Il*. 24.758 Hecuba employs this verb to refer to Hector's body lying in the palace after Priam's rescue.

[11] Cf. LSJ, ~~at 934~~s.v.~~.~~

[12] On this cf. e.g. M. Telò, 'Per una grammatica dei gesti nella tragedia greca (I): cadere a terra, alzarsi; coprirsi, scoprirsi il volto', *MD* 48 (2002), 9–75.

[13] See B. Goff, *Euripides. Trojan Women* (London, 2009), 43–4.

specifically functional to the production of *pathos*, to such a point that the queen also embodies, by means of her physical suffering, the image of a dying city losing its freedom[14]. In Euripides' *Trojan Women* 37 the participle of the verb *keimai* is directly referred to the queen, whose name is explicitly mentioned: Ἑκάβη κειμένη. In Greek there is no connection at all, not even slight assonance, between the verb *keimai* and the anthroponym Hekabe, which, according to Chantraine[15], is related to the form *Ἑκαβόλος corresponding to Artemis' and Apollo's epithet ἑκηβόλος[16]. However, I believe that such a recurrent association of the Greek version of Hecuba's name with the verb *keimai* did not go unnoticed to Seneca, an attentive reader of his Greek models. As Stevens argues[17], Seneca was operating in a bilingual environment, in which translation between Latin and Greek and correlation on stems were common practice. He also shows that etymological plays on the characters' names deeply permeate the Senecan tragic corpus and are strictly connected with the plot itself: names often have the potential to reveal, by means of etymological or, rather, paretymological moments, the characters' actions.

If we go back to the Latin form of the name, Hecuba, nothing is to be found either in the Ernout–Meillet dictionary or in Maltby's lexicon[18] as far as the name's derivation is concerned.

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[14] See V. Di Benedetto, *Euripide. Troiane*, transl. by E. Cerbo (Milan, 1998), at 27–32. Cf. the closing lines of Eur. *Tro.* 1327–30, in which Hecuba points to the weakness of her limbs. She calls her foot 'old' in 1275.

[15] P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (Paris, 1968), 327.

[16] Cf. M. Stoevesandt, *Homers Iliad, Band IV, 6. Gesang* (Berlin, 2008), at 102 who, besides the usual etymology, suggests a connection of the name Hekabe with Artemis–Hekate, given her transformation into a bitch, which was a sacred animal to the goddess Hekate.

[17] Stevens (n. 4), 126 and *passim*.

[18] See A. Ernout and A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine. Histoire des mots* (Paris, 1967); R. Maltby, *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies* (Leeds, 1991).

Ovid's text offers a famous example of ~~etymologising~~ etymologizing derived from the episode of Hecuba's metamorphosis in *Metamorphoses* 13.565–71, in which wordplay is also visibly signalled by an etymological marker[19]: after the queen has been metamorphosed into a dog, the place of her tomb is consequently named Cynosema (569–70 *locus exstat et ex re / nomen habet*). To my knowledge, however, considering also that Roman tragedy has mostly come down to us in fragments, there seems to be no direct etymological wordplay on Hecuba's proper name in the Latin world[20]. None the less, despite the apparent lack of evidence elsewhere, Seneca, as I shall argue, may have retrieved the association underlined above between the Greek name Hekabe and the verb *keimai* to bring about original wordplay on the queen's Latin anthroponym.

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[19] On this cf. A. Michalopoulos, *Ancient Etymologies in Ovid's Metamorphoses: A Commented Lexicon* (Leeds, 2001), 65–6 and 110–11. He also refers to the Greek sources recounting the queen's transformation. Cf. also Hopkinson (n. 2), 186 (commenting on line 551, he points to bilingual wordplay on the name of Polymestor, referred to as *artificem*).

[20] In J.J. O'Hara, *True Names: Vergil and the Alexandrian Tradition of Etymological Wordplay* (Ann Arbor, 1996) there is no wordplay or etymological interpretation linked to Hecuba's name. ~~For~~ M. Paschalis, *Virgil's Aeneid: Semantic Relations and Proper Names* (Oxford, 1997), 89 points to the cluster formed by *incumbens* and *Hecubam* in Verg. *Aen*. 2.514–5 with reference to the queen's protective role towards Priam, paralleling that of the laurel (on this cf. also further). B. Pavlock, *The Image of the Poet in Ovid's* Metamorphoses (London, 2009), at 56–7 makes the fascinating suggestion that Ovid creates his own etymology for Hecuba by means of the adjective *maesta* in Ov. *Met*. 13.570–1 *veterumque diu memor illa malorum / tum quoque Sithonios ululavit maesta per agros*. *Maesta*, being related to the verb *maereo*, conjures up the name of Maera, the dog who revealed to Erigone the location of her father's corpse, mentioned by Ovid in *Met*. 7.362. On Maera and Hecuba cf. also Lycoph. *Alex*. 334, in which Hecuba's metamorphosis is announced through the mediation of Maira, the Greek name of Erigone's dog.

ha formattato: Tipo di carattere: Corsivo

The prologue to Seneca's *Troades* is delivered in person by Hecuba, who begins with a lengthy lament over the fall of Troy, with which she immediately links herself (*me videat et te, Troia* […], 4). This tragic *incipit* clearly gestures towards the close of Euripides' *Trojan Women* (1320–6), which is analogously dominated by the image of the burning of Troy (for *fumat* at 17, cf. Eur. *Tro*. 1320 κόνις δ᾽ ἴσα καπνῷ, and also Verg. *Aen*. 3.3 … *fumat Neptunia Troia*). In particular, lines 14–17 of Seneca's play, containing some of Hecuba's utterances, read thus:

> excisa ferro est, Pergamum **incubuit** sibi.
>
> en alta muri decora congesti **iacent**
>
> tectis adustis; regiam flammae ambiunt,
>
> omnisque late fumat Assaraci domus.

Whereas the Euripidean model opens with a divine prologue and the image of the suffering of the queen lying on the ground, in Seneca's play, Hecuba, giving voice to her grief, draws attention in the first person to the destruction of Troy: she evokes the image of a city that, after tumbling down (*incubuit*), now lies in ruins (*iacent*)[21]. In applying to Troy the same horizontal posture previously encountered in the Euripidean plays as Hecuba's distinctive feature, Seneca thus reinforces the connection between the shattered city and her queen[22].

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[21] Troy represents the ruined city *par excellence. Iaceo* is used also e.g. at 54 *regni iacentis* and 550 *Troiam iacentem* (cf. also Ov. *Met*. 13.505 *iacet Ilion ingens*). This verb is recurrent in the play. A. Keulen, *L. Annaeus Seneca. Troades* (Leiden, 2001), 86 also quotes Verg. *Aen*. 2.624–31, especially 624–5 *tum vero omne mihi visum* **considere** *in ignis / Ilium* along with Austin's comment on the Senecan rewriting: 'Seneca improves upon the idea'.

[22] Also, in the prologue, Hecuba ties up the image of Troy with that of Priam by employing different inflections of the verb *sto*: […] *quo stetit stante Ilium* (31).

Later on in the play, upon hearing the news about Polyxena's imminent death, Hecuba falls in a faint, as shown in the passage quoted at the beginning of these pages, which is now worth citing at fuller length. Seneca has the character of Andromache comment on the impending events and her mother–in–law's reaction (945–54):

Vide ut animus ingens laetus audierit necem.

cultus decoros regiae vestis petit

et admoveri crinibus patitur manum.

mortem putabat illud, hoc thalamos putat.

at misera luctu mater audito stupet;

labefacta mens **succubuit**. assurge, alleva   950

animum et cadentem, misera, firma spiritum.

quam tenuis anima vinculo pendet levi—

minimum est quod **Hecubam** facere felicem potest.

spirat, revixit, prima mors miseros fugit.

Andromache announces that Polyxena's *animus … laetus* has learned about her death (945), since for her keeping on living would have been the real death (948). She then beholds Hecuba collapse under the weight of such woeful news (*stupet*, 949). As Andromache observes in the next line, the queen shows signs of an exhaustion that is both physical and spiritual: her *mens* too sinks together with her body (*labefacta*, *succubuit*)[23]. Interestingly, *labefacta … succubuit* looks like an amplified rendition into Latin of line 467 of Euripides' *Trojan Women* (κεῖσθαι πεσοῦσαν). Just as in Euripides' *Hecuba* Talthybius encourages the queen to rise (499–507), in the *Troades* Seneca has

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[23] By contrast, Ovid's *mens* refuses to succumb to misfortune: *Tr.* 4.10.103 *indignata malis mens est succumbere* [...].

Andromache inviting Hecuba to reanimate and strengthen her *animus* and *spiritus* (*assurge*, *alleva*, *firma*). Shortly after, noticing that the queen remains breathing, although death would be better for her as well, Andromache mentions her proper name, *Hecubam* (953).

The conspicuous presence of compound forms of the verb **cumbo*/*cubo* (*incubuit*, *succubuit*) in association with the queen's name appears worth noticing. It recalls the Greek combination of *keimai* with the character or name of Hekabe, but the pun in Latin may reactivate also a paretymological connection[24]. The idea underlying such a link is that the queen's very name in the Latin form alludes to the character's prostrate posture and state of mind. Although there seems to be no direct etymological connection between *keimai* and *cubo* (the form without nasal infix)[25], they share a very close meaning, which also corresponds to Latin *iaceo*. Moreover, the

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[24] On the aspect of true and false etymologies, on how false connections may produce a poetic truth and on whether etymologies were recovered by ancient readers see Stevens (n. 4), 130–1. It is generally accepted that distinctions between short and long syllables in wordplay are ignored by Latin writers: see F. Ahl, *Metaformations. Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets* (Ithaca/London, 1985), 56.

[25] Cf. J.K. Ingram, 'Etymological Notes on Liddell and Scott's Lexicon', *Hermathena* 7 (1881), 105–20, at 111, who opposes the comparison between *cubo*/**cumbo* and *keimai* proposed by Liddell–Scott, which he considers wrong (by contrast, Lat. *quies* likely stems from the same root as *keimai*). On the verbal pair *cubo*/**cumbo* (the latter only in compound forms), the nasal infix originally expressed the dynamism of the verbal process, the so-called *infectum*, so that *cubo*, being a *perfectum*, signifies 'to be lying down' (on this cf. e.g. A. Traina, *Propedeutica al latino universitario* [Bologna, 1998[6]], 150). The Proto-Indo-European origin of **kub-* is uncertain: cf. M. de Vaan, *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the Other Italic Languages* (Leiden, 2008), 152.

radical *cub-* is especially noteworthy, for it gestures towards the homophonic syllable *-cub-* in Hecuba's name, providing a sort of aural etymology from unrelated words[26].

One should always be wary of pressing analogies as such too far[27], but I believe that this play on the radical *cub-* and the name of Hecuba may also have been prompted by a Vergilian passage. In *Aeneid* 2, Aeneas recounts the events that occurred inside Priam's palace upon his death (501–5):

> vidi **Hecubam** centumque nurus Priamumque per aras
>
> sanguine foedantem quos ipse sacraverat ignis.
>
> quinquaginta illi thalami, spes tanta nepotum,
>
> barbarico postes auro spoliisque superbi
>
> **procubuere** […]

The verb *procubuere* (505), referring to the palace's doors collapsing under the fury of the Greeks[28], is to be found not too far from the proper name *Hecubam* (501). *Procubuere* clearly points to the falling down of an object (*thalami*, *postes*), but it does not seem completely

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[26] Cf. Stevens (n. 4), 131.

[27] As Di Benedetto (n. 14), 255 n. 313 observes in commenting on loaded aural effects in lines 1291–2 of Euripides' *Trojan Women* (Troy as a *polis* has written its destiny of death in its own denomination owing to the iterated presence of the sound *-ol-* related to a morpheme signifying destruction), 'ricerche di questo tipo sono facili, e perciò vi si indulge troppo: ma il fenomeno ha un fondamento reale'.

[28] On this cf. N. Horsfall, *Vergil. Aeneid 2* (Leiden, 2008), 388. It is worth mentioning that the same verb is employed in the present form at 493 *procumbunt ... postes* with reference to Pyrrhus's assault on the main entrance.

incongruous to extend it to the overall exhaustion of Priam's family[29] (cf. 503 *spes tanta nepotum*, which grafts a sympathetic, almost 'sentimental' element onto the descriptive objectivity of Homer's model, *Il*. 6.244[30]). Besides, just a few lines below, Hecuba is mentioned again near a compound of *cubo* (514–5): ***incumbens*** (scil. *laurus*) *arae atque umbra complexa penatis.* | *hic* ***Hecuba*** *et natae nequiquam altaria circum*[31].

Therefore, what in Vergil appears to be an accidental homophonic moment in *Aen*. 2.501–5 (*Hecubam* | *procubuere*)[32] and *Aen*. 2.514–5 (*incumbens* | *Hecuba*) becomes semantically meaningful in Seneca's *Troades*. Seneca's wordplay, injecting new life into the association between the queen's proper name and the verb *keimai* found in the Euripidean models, seems thus to conjure up, by means of sound correspondences (-*cub*-), the idea of Hecuba's physical and mental

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[29] Cf. Ov. *Met*. 13.281–2 *Achilles / procubuit*; on Ovid's use of this verb with reference to the event of people's death cf. F. Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso. Metamorphosen XII–XIII* (Heidelberg, 1982), on *Metamorphoses* 12.292, at 106. Vergil too employs it with this meaning in *Aen*. 2.426 (cf. also Cat. 64.389 *procumbere tauros*). In *Aen*. 2.624–33 Aeneas compares the fall of Troy to the collapse of an ash–tree (on this see D. Nelis, 'Vergilian Cities. Visions of Troy, Carthage and Rome', in T. Fuhrer, F. Mundt and J. Stenger [edd.], *Cityscaping. Constructing and Modelling Images of the City* [Berlin, 2015], 19–45, at 36).

[30] On this cf. G.B. Conte, *The Poetry of Pathos. Studies in Virgilian Epic*, ed. by S.J. Harrison (Oxford, 2007), 28 and 183.

[31] On this cf. n. 20. ~~The cluster formed by *incumbens* and *Hecubam* is noted by Paschalis (n. 20), 89 with reference to the queen's protective role towards Priam, paralleling that of the laurel.~~

[32] Assonance seems accidental in Hyg. *Fab*. 91.1.1 *Priamus Laomedontis filius cum complures liberos haberet ex con**cub**itu **Hecubae** Cissei sive Dymantis filiae.*

exhaustion, which also lies at the heart of her tragic portrayal in Euripides' plays[33]. Hecuba succumbs in Seneca's play as in his models, but now her succumbing is a moral and physical condition directly conveyed by her own name.

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[33] In fact, etymology and plot shares a deep connection, as Stevens (n. 4), 136 and *passim* argues in discussing examples of wordplay in Seneca's plays.