ANALYSIS OF REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE
OF THE ROLE OF HELENA IN
EUROPIDES' THE TROJAN WOMEN

A Thesis
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by
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Approved by

Advisor

Department of Theatre
To
Martin for the positive,
Ranona for the practical,
C.J. for the concrete,
and
Deb for the faith.
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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I will assess my growth as an actress in the preparation and performance of the role of Hector in Euripides' *The Trojan Women* as presented by The Ohio State University Department of Theatre in the West Hall Studio Theatre on February 17, 18, 19 and 20, 1981. The production was directed by Deborah Rickwald with choreography by Jean-Ann Marshall. The cast was as follows:

Hector: Patricia Comgrove
Cassandra: Christina Frank
Andromache: Catherine Mix
Helen: Penelope Speedie
Menelaus: Hugh Murphy
Trosidon: Joel Kassar
Athena: Patricia Kennedy
Thyestes: Martin Merritt
Chorus: Linda Kroeger
Ram Johnson
Debra Williams

The role of Hector, although certainly a wonderful role for an actress to play, was not a typical role for me at the time. When Deborah Rickwald, the director, first came to me with the idea of doing *The Trojan Women* and casting me as Hector, I could not agree to accept the role at first, simply because I had so many misgivings about playing a character so different from myself. To begin with, Hector is normally played as a man of about fifty to seventy years of age and, at the time, I was all of twenty five. Secondly, as an actress, I find myself more comfortable with light comedy than with heavy tragedy, and although at the time, I had only a passing acquaintance with *The Trojan Women*, I knew that it was heavy material. But rather than discount the idea immediately, I decided to discuss the idea further with Deborah. She
helped to calm my fears by telling me that she intended to approach the production as an experiment. Instead of concentrating on mounting a full-blown production, she wanted to do the play in the West Hall Studio Theatre, a small space provided by the Theatre Department for student directors to mount low budget plays of their own choosing. *The Trojan Women* would be presented only for small audiences consisting mostly of students and faculty members. It would not be open to the public and there would be no admission charge. Experimentation would be encouraged during the rehearsal period. Deborah wanted everyone involved with the production to approach it as a learning process. The accent would be on the exploration and not on the results. The more she talked about her experimental approach to the production the more intrigued I became by the thought of attempting *Hecuba*. If the emphasis would be on the journey and not on the destination, and if, indeed, the final product would not be as important as the artistic process experienced, might not it be valuable for me to attempt a role as challenging as *Hecuba*?

At the time, I was in my last year of graduate school. Soon I would be entering the world of professional theatre in which roles such as *Hecuba* would not be available to me. Might it not be better for me to choose something foreign and difficult for my thesis role rather than to settle for something familiar and easy? After weighing all the pros and cons, after balancing the possible rewards against the almost certain headaches that I knew I would suffer for attempting such a project, I decided to accept the challenge and take the role.

Because of the experimental approach to the role, and because
Hecuba was such a difficult challenge for me to undertake, I will be stressing practical rather than the academic considerations in this thesis. There is a great deal of scholarly research on this play, much of which I took into account while rehearsing the show, and indeed, mention will be made of some of the items I found in my reading, but the primary focus of this paper will be on the problems I encountered during the rehearsal process and not on what scholars have to say about the play.
CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH AND PREPARATION

After the meeting with Deborah in which I decided to accept the role of Hecuba, I got a copy of the script and sat down to read the play. This reading is important because it is the actor's first impression and it can color the actor's whole attitude toward the project. When I sat down with *The Trojan Women* for the first time, I tried to keep my mind as free and clear from prejudices and preconceptions as I could. I selected a nice quiet place (my apartment) and time (in the evening after I had finished all the tasks of the day) in which to do my first reading of the play. I wanted my head to be as clear as possible so I could accurately view the task I had set for myself.

When I had finished the play, I realized that my first task would be to personalize the world of *The Trojan Women* for myself. I perceived that there was a huge distance between my world and the world of ancient Troy and that my chief task would be to make the world created by Euripides real for myself. I needed to discover how Hecuba felt about the world in which she lived. I needed to know how she felt about her city before it fell and how she felt about it now that it was in ashes. I needed to know what she thought about herself, and how she saw her place in society. I needed to know what was important to her, what she considered valuable. Then, and only then, could I make what was important to her important to me. Then I would be able to personalize
the world of the play and bridge the gap between Hecuba and myself. In my research on Greek society, I began to discover facts that helped to make Hecuba's situation seem more real for me. For instance, during my first reading of the script, I found it difficult to identify with the sense of deep, personal loss that Hecuba feels for her city. However, as I began to investigate Greek society and found that at that time, the Greek world was comprised of completely separate and independent city-states, I realized that the way Hecuba feels about losing her city might be synonymous with the way I might feel if the United States were taken over by a foreign power. The sense of loss and the feeling that I had absolutely no control over what would happen to me next would be awesome. I would feel totally powerless.

My research also showed that the Greeks considered the individual as secondary to the state. Unlike American society in which the rights of the individual are at least professed to be revered above the rights of the government, the Greeks felt that the welfare of the state was all important and that it should take priority over the welfare of the individual. The state must remain intact at all costs, even at the expense of the people. Again, this belief would contribute to Hecuba's sense of loss and the fall of Troy.

I also found in my research that the Greeks felt a deep sense of personal identity with the particular city in which they lived. Their sense of patriotism was very strong. This extreme love of city/state was partially due to the fact that each individual city/state was so closely surrounded by other unfriendly city/states, and the possibility of invasion was always great. But the Greek sense of patriotism went beyond
the practical consideration. The Greek individual identified so strongly with his city/state that when a person lost his city, whether through destruction or banishment, he lost his identity. It was like becoming a non-person. Everything would be lost, personal identity included.

Hecuba, of course, would be feeling this loss of identity keenly during the course of The Trojan Women, and indeed much of the text of the play is devoted to the expression of that loss. Just before her final departure, Hecuba says goodbye to her city.

Ah wretched me! It has come at last, the culmination and crown of all my sorrows. I leave my country; the torch is put to my city. Legs, press on, try hard; let me bid farewell to my hapless city. O Troy, that once held your head so high amongst barbarians, soon you will be robbed of your name and your fame. They are burning you and leading us out of the land to slavery.

Part of Hecuba's loss, of course, is strictly monetary. With the fall of Troy, Hecuba has been reduced from a woman of wealth to a veritable pauper. The play makes mention, occasionally, of what has been lost in terms of wealth. Hecuba, for example, taunts Helen with the line, "You looked forward to a deluge of extravagance in Phrygia with its rivers of gold" (p. 29). There is also mention in the script of the "plied gold" of Troy. Again and again the script makes reference to the great wealth of the city. Naturally, the extreme patriotism of the characters in the play is ample motivation for them to make repeated references to how rich Troy was before it was destroyed by the Greeks. Their pride might encourage them to describe Troy as somewhat richer than it was in

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1. The Trojan Women, unpublished version by Deborah Rickwald, p. 37. All subsequent quotations from the play are taken from this edition.
reality. However, in considering Necuba's sense of loss, I considered it useful to take everything into account, including the simple fact that she has lost a lot of wealth.

All of these facts I found valuable in helping me to identify with Necuba's sense of loss. But the item I found most valuable was a photograph of what is thought to be the ruins of Troy situated on an arid treeless plain. Here was this apparently hot, rocky barren plain on which the city of Troy stood. I began to feel what it would be like for Necuba to stand on that flatness without an arch or wall remaining to break the monotony. I could see her surrounded by the heat and smoke of the battle. At that moment, I felt very close to Necuba. It was exciting, but frightening at the same time because I knew that feelings like that would be few and far between during my search for Necuba.

As I continued my research, I also realised that I would have to become more familiar with the way in which the Greeks viewed their gods. Coming from a Judeo-Christian tradition, I realised that I would have to abandon the notion of one god that was all-seeing and all-powerful and who embraced all men impartially. Instead, I would be dealing with a battery of gods with human emotions and who were capable of cheating and deceiving the human beings whom they ruled. I realised that I would be wrong if I viewed the gods as perfect beings. It would be better to view them simply as powerful human beings capable of manipulating the destiny of mankind. In this way I could avoid the temptation to perceive these Greek gods in a Judeo-Christian manner. For example, as an actress from a Judeo-Christian background, my temptation would be to view Troy's disaster as a punishment from the gods. However, the Greeks would tend to view this disaster as the temporary abandonment of the gods. And
looking at the script, I realized that this, indeed, is the prevalent attitude among the Trojans as the show opens. The feeling is that Poseidon, the protector of Troy, can do nothing to help the city because he has been defeated by Athena. Thus, I realized that at the end of the play when Hecuba calls once more on the gods and then says, "Yet why should I call upon the gods? In the past they did not hear when they were called," (p. 37), she has simply realized the futility of depending on the intervention of the gods at this particular time. While in the Judeo-Christian tradition, her statement might be taken to be a renunciation of her religion, in the Greek tradition it is simply an acceptance of the facts. In *Ironic Drama - A Study of Euripides' Method and Meaning*, Phillip Vellacott sums up this feeling of abandonment with the statement, "Trust no god, blame no god. Look only to yourself." Statements like this helped me to realize how the Greeks viewed themselves in relationship to the gods, and gave me further insight into Hecuba's feelings.

My research also gave me some insight into how the Greeks viewed the position of women in society. As one would expect, in Greek society a woman's place was in the home. When, on the rare occasions that she did go out, she went veiled and attended by various servants. A wife had little or no part in her husband's life outside the home and any entertaining in the home was done by the husband while his wife remained in seclusion upstairs. Women were to remain always respectful of men and never were allowed to step beyond the bounds of modesty. In *Hecabe*,

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another of Euripides' works devoted to Hecuba, Hecuba tells Polynestes, "Custom too is partly my excuse, which requires women's eyes not to be raised to men." This information made me realize that Hecuba would deal differently with the men in the play than she would with the women. This difference would be especially evident in her dealings with Talthybus. When reading this scene I realized that, while Hecuba had probably seen Talthybus before at court during the ten years of war, she had never before dealt directly with him in an official capacity. Therefore she would probably feel out of her element in dealing with him.

While it is true that Hecuba was a Queen, I assumed that Hecuba's part in governing the state was largely ceremonial. Although she would be expected to appear at state functions and formal audiences, she would normally not be present at conferences where policy decisions would be made. While I assumed there would be some confidentiality between Priam and herself, she would have learned the aptness at diplomacy and political intrigue that she demonstrates during the play by maintaining a large household of well over two hundred people. But now, suddenly, she is responsible not only for dealing with Talthybus, but for governing what is left of Troy. Having always had a man to take the lead, she is now forced to accept the responsibility of leading her people. I realized that for Hecuba, the responsibility would be terrifying. The feeling of pressure would be enormous.

One cannot properly approach The Trojan Women without understanding

Greek burial and mourning customs. It was crucial that I understand how Greek society viewed death. Then and only then could I begin to deal with Hecuba's feelings toward those who have died in the fall of Troy. The play itself is a threnody; a song of lamentation for war's death and destruction. In her first speech, Hecuba likens the sound of the Trojan women's grieving to a song.

Sad wives of Troy's warriors, and you virgin brides of violence, Troy is in smoke, let us weep for Troy. I shall lead your song — ah, how unlike those songs I used to lead in honor of the gods, leaning on Priam's sceptre as my foot gave the loud stamp, and the dance started to the gods of Phrygia, (p. 5).

Coming at the end of Euripides' Trojan trilogy, the play encompasses little or no conventional dramatic action but instead serves as a kind of epilogue and is in most ways a form of the mourning ritual. The play itself is a kind of funeral.

First and foremost, the Greeks believed that the body must be buried in order for the soul to be put to rest. This was of paramount importance. Witness, in particular, Sophocles' Antigone who commits deliberate civil disobedience in order to bury the body of her brother. This, then, becomes part of Hecuba's sorrow in knowing that so many of her family and subjects lie on the battlefield unburied. She laments over Priam "unburied, unfriended," (p. 7). Thus, Hecuba's chance to bury the body of Astyarax becomes crucially important as it not only becomes his ceremony but that of all the others left unburied.

In light of the importance of the burial in general and this ceremony in particular, another source of Hecuba's agony is her lack of materials with which to conduct a proper burial. The Greeks believed in a show of wealth to the dead as a sign of respect. In Hecuba, Odysseus
say "When I'm alive, I'm satisfied with very little, enough for daily needs; but when I'm dead, I want my tomb to be a thing men gaze on reverently. That is a gift that lasts." The best that one has - clothing, building materials, wines, oils, and ointments - are used to honor the dead. Hecuba, however, has nothing or very little. She says "Come let such stores as we have afford a decent burial to this poor corpse. As god has shaped our circumstances we cannot aim at splendor. But all I have is yours to take," (p. 36). She buries the boy with what she can salvage from the ruins.

In designing a burial rite specifically for this production, there were certain customs that were of use. First, the ritual robing of the body was indicated in the script by the lines "The robes, the pride of Phrygia... I now put on your body," (p. 35). Second, there is a custom of crowning the body with a wreath of flowers. Since the women of Troy have no source for flowers, the body of Astyanax was crowned instead with the wreath torn from Cassandra's head during her frenzy. Third, we used the custom of libations, that is, the pouring of wine or oil on the ground as a sacrifice to the gods and the departed one. In a circle around the shield of Hector, Hecuba sprinkled the ground with the only liquid she could obtain, water. Finally, in the last effort to give the soul rest, dirt was sprinkled over the body. It is the final gesture. It is the burial of the body and sending of the soul to the other world. By understanding the importance that the Greeks placed on the burial of the dead, I understood better what Hecuba is suffering in The Trojan Women.

own particular needs. She told us that if difficulties arose during rehearsals with particular phrases or passages, we would have the option of trying all the translations to see which one felt best at that particular moment. In this way the actors would have some say about which words were being used. This gave us some leeway in terms of dealing with passages that might turn out to be uncomfortable, and, as it turned out, up to the final week of rehearsal we were adding and/or subtracting, re-writing and reordering lines in order to aid their flow and maximize understanding for the modern audience.

I was certain that some problems would present themselves simply because of the poetic language. As with Shakespearean dialogue, with which I had had some experience at the time, the actor must not only be aware of the mechanics of the scene, but also of his delivery of the dialogue. A part of the actor's attention must be on protecting and grouping the poetic images and using the words for a specific and calculated effect. For example in the following speech, Euripides is clearly using language to create a poetic effect.

Hecuba: Never have I set foot on a ship myself, but the pictures I have seen and the stories I have heard have taught me. If sailors have to face a storm that is not too great, they rally eagerly to the task of saving themselves from peril; one man takes the helm another looks to the sails, another keeps out the sea water. But if the waves are too high, the storm too fierce, they give in to fate and submit to the mercy of the running seas. So I who have sorrows aplenty as dumb, I submit, I have no use for words. The waves of misery, heaven-sent, overpower me, (p. 21).

When performing this speech, I had to be careful not to lose the poetic sense of the words. Euripides has carefully constructed a metaphor here in which he likens Hecuba to a sailor lost in a storm. It is a
beautiful passage and I did not want to lose that beauty. But at the same time, I had to be careful while delivering this speech not to lose my spontaneity. Even though the words have been carefully arranged by the author, I had to make it seem as if these words were occurring to me on the spot, and that this is the first time these words have ever been spoken. The actor must forget the poetry and remember the poetry at the same time. I would always be aware of this as a consideration.

One thing I knew from the start was that if the language of the script was elevated, the diction of the actor must be elevated as well. That is to say, the more heightened the language of the script, the closer to standard diction the actor must be. Since the words of the play do not sound natural or even conversational to the modern ear, the actor's diction must be that much clearer in order to convey the meaning of the words to the audience. Since I was familiar with the type of audiences the West Hall Studio productions received, I realized that many of the people in the audiences would be introduction to Theatre students who had little or no background in Greek drama. In fact, for many of them, this would be the first live stage play they had ever seen. I realized that if I was to convey the meaning of Euripides' highly elevated dialogue to them, I would have to make sure that my enunciation was clear.

To help ensure this clarity of diction, I decided that I would do vocal warm ups before each rehearsal in order to get my vocal apparatus in shape for the production. I placed special emphasis on the pronunciation of consonants in order to achieve clarity of speech. Tongue twisters emphasizing the plosive sounds had been very helpful in the past so I resolved that I would work especially hard on them so as to ready
myself for the vocal task ahead. I also knew that soon I would begin to look forward to doing these exercises because in the past I had found that I enjoyed doing them.

I knew before I even started that one particular problem would be breath control. When dealing with modern, realistic dialogue, an actor can afford to incorporate breaths wherever he pleases, provided he doesn’t seriously undermine the playwright’s intent. But with the poetry of Euripides, one has to be aware of the meter. One must be careful not to break the line of the phrase. One must avoid a sing-song approach to the material, otherwise the actor will put the audience to sleep. The actor is not always at liberty to breath where he pleases. I resolved also to incorporate breathing exercises into my vocal warm ups. I knew that I would enjoy these less than the tongue twisters, but, as they were necessary, I decided to do them.

There was one aspect of the heightened language that I knew would present a large difficulty, namely the dramatic monologue. The long, impassioned speech is a typical problem for many actors, and I knew from past experience that it would probably remain a problem for me with The Trojan Women. Modern plays have made us so used to the easy give and take of casual dialogue onstage, that when confronted with a long, passionate speech that is seemingly directed at no one in particular, an actor will sometimes flinch. Many of the scenes in The Trojan Women read like a long series of monologues strung together. This, I knew, would create problems in building relationships between Hecuba and the other characters. However, various techniques are available to the actor if he wants to combat these difficulties. Separation of the thoughts within the
speech is helpful. Variation of the tempo in the delivery of the speech is also an aid. Experimenting with movement is helpful, as is endowing the supposed listener with attitudes that will spur the actor on. There are also many other techniques that an actor can employ to prepare himself for the dramatic monologue, and I wanted to have all these techniques ready in case I ran into difficulties with Hecuba's long speeches.

One of the biggest difficulties I saw in doing Hecuba would be in dealing with emotional size. There is an emotional size that is imposed by the text that is an immediate problem for a twentieth century actress. With all our modern realistic plays dealing with everyday people and their everyday emotions, it can be difficult when confronted with material as inflamed and impassioned as The Trojan Women. We are used to plays in which characters tend to hide their emotions, but in Greek drama such as this, the display of emotion is not only desirable, it is necessary. These characters live in a world of overwrought, extremely heightened emotions. The play itself takes the form of a funeral dirge or lament. It immediately assumes that the audience will have a degree of familiarity and ease with the degree of emotion that leads to breast rending, cheek tearing, hair pulling and wailing. A good example of this occurs after Andromache's child is taken from her. As Talthybius exits with the child in order to slay him, Hecuba bemoans her fate.

Hecuba: Oh my child, son of my poor son, we are robbed of you, unjustly robbed, your mother and I. What has come over me? What can I do for you, luckless one? Here is my offering to you; I am my head, I rend my breasts. This is all I am mistress of. I grieve for my city, I grieve for you. What sorrow is not ours? What more is wanting to complete our utter ruin? (She collapses), (p. 25).

Words such as "Alas" and "Ooe" punctuate the dialogue, and although they
sound a bit archaic to us today, they were nonetheless taken very seriously by the Greeks. In fact, the whole notion of a funeral dirge or lament, while extremely familiar to the Greeks, is totally alien to twentieth century audiences. There is simply no modern equivalent.

As if the emotional size of the play weren't enough to deal with, the episodic structure of the play demands that the actress shape this huge emotional size so that it builds from scene to scene. Not only must the emotions be big, they must get bigger and bigger as the play progresses. Each episode, each scene for Hecuba is strong and important. But each meeting must also build on the one that went before. Throughout the play, Hecuba must carry with her the sense of tragedy mounting on tragedy. I realised that the task of playing Hecuba not only entails the creation of huge emotions onstage, but the shaping of them as well.

Huge emotions have always been a big challenge for me. I often find it difficult to play scenes in which characters have emotional breakdowns. I worry about looking like a ham onstage, and consequently I tend to close off completely. I'm so afraid of doing something wrong that I don't do anything at all. I start censoring myself. "Is this too much?" "Is that believable?" I realised that in playing Hecuba, I would have to fight this censor in my head. I couldn't allow it to get in my way. I would have to commit to the choices that I made onstage; commit totally and without reserve. Only then could I break through to the other side and be swept up into the emotional surge that is overwhelming Hecuba.

I also decided to commit to the emotion of the play as early as possible. This is a major problem that I have as an actress. This hinders not only my performance but also the performances of others in the show and gives very little for the director to shape until well into the last stages.
of rehearsal. I knew this role would force me to commit early and commit completely. I knew that this role could not be done if there was any holding back at all. This was very much a personal goal, a major step in my development that needed to be taken. With the non-judgmental, non-result-oriented atmosphere that would be provided at the rehearsals, I knew that I would feel free to experiment. It would be an ideal atmosphere in which to fight that personal censor. I would be able to let loose. There would be no one saying, "What will an audience think of this," or "What kind of reviews do you think you'll get if you do something like that on a stage?" Bearing all this in mind, I was ready to start rehearsing.
CHAPTER II

THE REHEARSAL PERIOD

I was now faced with the task of creating the physical presence of Necuba onstage. It was time to stop thinking about it and start doing it. But I wondered where to begin. The gap between Necuba and myself seemed enormous. Here I was, a twenty-five year old graduate student from Kansas City, Missouri setting out to play a sixty-year old Queen of Troy - a mythic figure, no less. I certainly had my hands full.

My first concern was in finding specific character traits for Necuba. As she was a mythological figure, it would be easy for me simply to view her in generalities. But I wanted to avoid that at all costs. It was very important for me to see Necuba as a real, flesh and blood human being. I wanted her to be a unique and distinct individual. It could easily become this generalized Greek tragedy stuff in which mythological figures talk loudly and extend their vowels when they speak.

An early decision, made in collaboration with the director, dealt with the problem of playing a woman significantly older than myself. In the text, Necuba is of an unspecified age but the facts of her surroundings put her anywhere between fifty and seventy years old. Both the director and I decided that since the guts of the play would lie in the emotional truth presented, I should not concentrate directly on age, especially not through physical and vocal tricks. Even age make-up would be kept to a minimum since the performance space was small and the make-up wouldn’t carry. The hope was that my subtext, in the circumstances of the scene, would lead to an unconscious aging of my body and voice. We both agreed
that the emotional truth was the most important thing to maintaining the show.

I also needed to bear in mind the fact that Hecuba is a Queen. As a member of the aristocracy, she would probably speak and move in a manner that indicated her social rank. Of course, I didn't want to start using a set of tricks to indicate a general sense of "queenliness." The last thing I wanted to do was to make Hecuba a parody. But I did realize that, as an actress, I would have to adopt the way I moved and spoke in order at least to seem more like a Queen. As with the age problem, I decided not to attack the difficulty directly but instead submerge myself in the circumstances of the scenes in the hope that my body and voice would adapt accordingly. I did realize at least one advantage I had in terms of sounding queenly. Since the space in which we were performing the show was very small, I did not have to worry as much about vocal projection. I realized that there could be moments in the play where I could speak fairly softly, and thus in a more dignified, controlled and queenly manner, than I might have been required to do if we were performing in a larger house. I also have the advantage of having a fairly dark quality to my voice already.

In terms of movement, I realized that Hecuba, both as a Queen and as an older woman, would probably move with more reserve than I do normally. Her movements would not be as sudden and quick as my own. Although I did not want to concentrate on this directly, I did allow this notion of physical reserve to remain in the back of my mind whenever I was rehearsing a scene. If I couldn't immediately capture Hecuba's queenly physical bearing, I could at least remove from my movements those things
that she would not do. I could, at least, clean my physical slate, so
to speak, and then build from there. This whole notion of physical control
was an exciting challenge for me and it was another reason I took the role
in the first place. In the learning process of the show, I wanted to
increase my physical control as an actress.

Working with Jean-Anne, the choreographer, was a great help to me.
She designed a physical warm-up for the cast that was used to improve
posture, ease and fluidity of movement. As a modern dancer, she was well
acquainted with many concepts and techniques of movement that were help-
ful to me. She gave me a sense of the proper alignment of the body and
how to work for it. She also gave me a sense of how to continue and
extend movement through space and time. She gave me several physical images
that helped me to keep the energy in my body always awake and ready for
action.

The initial blocking rehearsals were conducted in collaboration
with the choreographer. Emphasis was placed on the physical expression
of emotion. Each movement was designed as a physical expression of what
the character might be feeling at the time. Both the director and the
choreographer cautioned us that these were only beginning ideas. We were
not to expect that these were the movements we would end up with, nor were
we necessarily expected to match immediately our internal feelings to the
movements given us. These highly stylized choreographed movements were
only a point of departure, a way into the material. These movements were
a giant help to me because they gave me encouragement at the outset to
seek a physical expression for my emotions. These movements freed me up.
I found that I could not only use them, but go beyond them as well. As
often happens during the course of a production, a lot of the early
design had changed radically by the time we owned the show, but
nonetheless, I found this early groundwork very rewarding.

Posture was a problem from the outset. The choreographer worked
closely with me to eradicate neck and shoulder tension which led to what
the choreographer informally dubbed "dangling arms," a condition in which
the arms seem to be hanging out in space with no apparent reason for being
there. While not a large problem it is a very specific physical quirk of
my and the director was dedicated (with good reason) to eradicating it
from my performances. Good posture would not only look better and be more
attractive, it would also be a physical expression of an emotion — pride—
that was tightly linked to the action of the play. It would not only be
good for my external physical expression of the character of Hecuba, it
would help my internal work also.

Early in rehearsals I had difficulty with being able to play things
out to the audience. My tendency was to face too much toward the other
actors onstage. Every day I received notes from the director telling me
to play things out toward the house. My difficulty, I think, was partly
due to the fact that I had been doing a lot of contemporary plays at the
time and was used to facing other actors more directly onstage. However
the size and theatricality of The Trojan Women demanded that I play out
more than I was used to. Eventually I got into the habit of playing out.

One very big difference between Hecuba and myself is the fact that
Hecuba is a mother and I am not. Hecuba's deep sense of personal loss
stems from the fact that she is another who has seen her children destroyed.
After Cassandra exits, Hecuba recounts her woes.
I was a queen, I married into a king's house, and there I bore my excellent children, or whose like no mother can boast, Trojan or Greek or barbarian. These children I saw fall in battle with the Greeks, and I cut my hair over their tombs... O my child, O Cassandra and your divine ecstasies, how horrible the circumstances that have destroyed your sacred purity! And O Polyxena, poor girl, where, where are you? Of all my many children, neither son or daughter is their poor mother. Why then do you lift me up? What is there to hope for? (p. 15).

Her sense of grief over the children and grandchildren that she has lost and will lose during the course of the play must be truly devastating. This grief must surely be overwhelming. I have no children and I have never lost anyone close enough to approximate Hecuba's grief. I have lost older relatives, but these deaths were expected and, in some cases, almost welcomed because the individuals had suffered so much pain. Since I did not have any first hand experience on which to rely in dealing with Hecuba's grief at losing her children, I tried, instead, to substitute for each of Hecuba's children a person in my own life for whom I cared deeply. I used the thought of how I might feel if I lost them to give me an idea of how Hecuba might feel toward the loss of her own children.

In a sense the character of Hecuba is motherhood. Her maternal instincts of love, protection, and responsibility extend not only to her immediate family, but to the city of Troy as well. She is the embodiment of motherhood mourning over the loss of a child. The story of The Trojan Women is the story of a mother deprived of her children. The fact that Hecuba's sense of motherhood extends beyond her own children to the city of Troy itself makes the final scene of the play in which Troy is actually destroyed more personal and, therefore, more horrifying.

Another consideration about the character of Hecuba is the fact
that she is a mythological figure. The original audience for this play would see her not as an equal, nor as an everyday person, but as a character out of mythology. For an actress playing a woman of such grandiose proportions, especially in a modern production without the use of masks, this can be a particular problem. "Should I try to convey a sense of mythology or should I simply be as realistic as possible? If I try to be too realistic, I might be working at cross-purposes with the script. But if I play it too grandly, might it not be too much for a modern audience, especially in such a small space? Where is that fine line between too much and too little?" For the purposes of this production we had decided to emphasize the emotional truth of the script, and although we were devoting a lot of attention to the physical expression of emotion, we all agreed that we wanted these emotions to be believable. "Tearing a passion to tatters," or "chewing scenery" would be much too much especially in such a small space. However, I realized that the mythological aspects of the script could not be ignored completely. This was, after all, a Greek tragedy and not Neil Simon. I decided to remain aware of the mythological side of the script without emphasizing it. Again, the concentration would be on the emotional truth of the script.

As rehearsals continued, we began to run into some problems with the movement. It started to become apparent that we were not integrating the movement with the blocking. The movement began to look like movement for movement's sake. It was standing out. The fluidity we had hoped to capture by choreographing much of the blocking was now being hindered by an excess of choreography. We spoke as characters but moved as dancers. The time had come to pull back from creating any more movement patterns.
The spontaneity was being lost. It was time, instead, to concentrate on combining character with movement. Internal motivation for the movement needed to be found. This was accomplished simply by returning our total concentration to the action of the play and to character relationships, thus allowing the movement to become more subliminal.

After a couple of weeks of rehearsal, the physical and vocal warm-ups that we had been doing began to pay off. The director told me that not only did I look better, but I had greater control of my voice. I also noticed an increase in my physical stamina. For example, I noticed that during the early runthroughs I was having trouble getting through the show. By the end, I would be physically exhausted and vocally hoarse. However, as rehearsals progressed, I found it easier to maintain my energy. I had built up stamina so that at the end of a rehearsal, I wouldn't feel as if I was completely spent both physically and vocally.

As rehearsals progressed I began to find it more and more difficult to maintain my belief in what I was doing onstage. As so often happens after the first couple of weeks of rehearsal, I began to feel mechanical. It began to feel as if I had said these same words a hundred times before. I felt false and stagey. My emotions felt dry and tired rather than fresh and alive. It became increasingly difficult for me to build the emotional intensity of the show. I realized that I would have to start experimenting with ways to restore my belief in the world of the play.

I began to endow the physical reality of the stage on which we were rehearsing with imaginary physical properties of my own creation. Instead of seeing the plywood floor on which we were rehearsing, I began to imagine a stoney ground full of dirt and rubble beneath my feet. Instead
of the back wall of the theatre, I saw clouds and smoke. Instead of the
stuffy smell of the theatre, I smelled burning rubble. I began to par-
ticularize the space in which I was acting in order to strengthen my belief
in the situation at hand.

I also began to particularize the areas off stage. I created con-
crete pictures in my mind of where the Greeks were located. I decided
just exactly how far away from me they were. I imagined what their camp
looked like. I imagined that I could hear them constantly in the distance.
I decided in what part of the city they were and in what part of the city
I was. I imagined the heat and filth of the battle around me.

The work began to pay off. I felt my emotions being aroused. The
stones beneath my feet made me feel tired and abandoned. The sound of the
Greeks in the distance made me feel enraged. The burning smell made me
frightened that more destruction lay ahead. I began to feel possessive
towards the onstage area as if it were my last refuge from the enemy. I
felt like a caged animal with no escape. My attempts to particularize the
environment had led me to corresponding emotions and thereby increased my
belief in the reality of the situation.

I also found that I was having difficulty with a lack of vocal
variety. Finding many avenues of grief was becoming a continuing battle.

How do I express this? What makes this grief different from the one before?
How do I make all this grief interesting? So I began to experiment. I
decided to make a list of words associated with the state of sorrow. I
wanted both nouns that express the state in general and verbs to show ways
in which sorrow can be expressed.

Here is the list I came up with at the time.
Although seemingly a cold and analytical way of approaching the situation, I found this list to be a great help. Many of the words, of course, were of very little use to me. But some of them triggered strong emotional responses in my head. They gave me ideas about how I might express certain scenes in a slightly different manner than I had before. In this way they helped me to create more variety in my expression of grief and also helped to freshen up some scenes that were beginning to feel pretty dreary.

I also found it helpful to realize that there was a positive side to all this grief. For Necuba, there is a glory in all this ruin. Although her children are all dead and the city of Troy has been destroyed, the sheer magnitude of the disaster is something she can take pride in. If the city of Troy must be destroyed, at least it will be destroyed in a grand manner. In _Euripides and His Age_, Gilbert Murray writes, "No friend among the dead, no help in God, no illusion anywhere, Necuba faces That Which Is and finds somewhere, a splendour that cannot die in the intensity of Troy's affliction."5 Necuba herself says at the end of the play "... our greatest glory will be to perish in the flames in which our country perishes," (p. 37).

Hecuba takes a fierce pride in all her woes. There is glory in her ruin. Realizing this helped me to find variety in Hecuba's grief. I realized her sorrows were not without their positive side.

As we drew nearer to opening night, certain scenes began to present particular difficulties. The scene with Helen, in particular, posed a problem. The logical arguments that occur in the scene between Helen and Hecuba made sense, and Hecuba's objective of attempting to gain vengeance for Troy and Astyanax seemed clear. But the tone of the scene gave me problems. I didn't know how the scene should be played. While I understood that a Greek audience would enjoy the logicality of a debate such as this and, in fact, would expect it in a play, I didn't know how much emotion should be evident throughout the debate. How does Hecuba react and, more importantly, how strongly does she react to Helen's arguments? How much emotion would make the scene untrue and how much cold, clinical logic would make it seem uninteresting? If it is played too coldly, the transition between this scene and the highly emotional scene before it in which Astyanax is taken away to be killed will be too abrupt. If the scene is too emotional there will be no difference between this scene and the one before it and hence, no variety. Where's the line?

In order to solve the problem, the director decided to devote one rehearsal to this particular scene. In order to find the median between logic and emotion, we ran the scene several times, exploring the extremes available to us. We tried the scene once going strictly for the emotional side of the situation. By the end of the scene, emotions were so high that the chorus had to be restrained from harming Helen. Then we tried the scene again trying for the logical side. This time the actress playing Helen and I became so engrossed in the logicality of our arguments that
by the end of it the scene took on the quality of a good natured tete
tete. By exploring our options with this scene, we began to get an idea
of the wide variety of choices that we had in playing it. Eventually we
voted to emphasize the less emotional side of the scene in order to pro-
vide a contrast with the rest of the show.

This scene became very enjoyable for me to play because it gave me
a chance to abandon the sorrow for a minute and gain back a little of the
personality of the Necuba before the fall of Troy; the queen who enjoyed
this kind of logical argumentation and who even at this point in the play
cannot conceal her pleasure as she slowly takes apart her opponent's
arguments point by point. Of course, her pleasure comes not only from this
but from her belief that Menelaus will recognize the superiority of her
arguments and judge Helen accordingly. Menelaus' decision at the end of
the scene to take Helen back then becomes an unexpected betrayal and jolts
Necuba back to the desperation of her situation. This provides a dram-
atic transition into the horror of the next scene over the body of Astyanax.

The scene with Cassandra also provided some difficulties. Of all
the scenes in the play, this one was the slowest in developing. Although
I understood that as Cassandra's mother, Necuba would be concerned about
her daughter's welfare, I wasn't exactly sure of what to do with the scene.
In an effort to find out what to do, I went over the text of the scene and
took the following notes in an effort to explore the possibilities.

- Do I want to stop her from rushing around?
- Am I afraid of her? For her?
- She is the last child I have with me.
- I feel protective - I want to be a good mother -
  I must protect her.
- What do I want from her in this scene?
- I have never seen her like this before - she seems
  truly crazed.
- I am embarrassed in front of Talthybius.
- She is special to the gods and therefore to me.
  (To have a daughter in the religious is my honor)
- I want to get the torch from her.
- She is a mentally disturbed child who has a special
  place in my heart.
- Do I begin to be taken in by the spell?
- To believe what she says?

Despite all my efforts, I still felt like a spectator with no
specific reason for being there. I was never quite sure of what Hecuba
wanted. Obviously, she wanted to stop Cassandra's wild talk and to prevent
her from hurting herself with the torch that she is carrying, and these
objectives I would express physically by attempting to silence her. How-
ever, doing this merely made me feel frenetic. I tried playing the frus-
tration of the situation but this didn't seem to lead me anywhere either.
Of course it was impossible for me to really listen to Cassandra's prophe-
cies because that might imply that I was believing them which would
contradict the mythological facts about Cassandra which state that she is
destined to foretell the future accurately but that no one would believe
her. So I was left in liabo without knowing what to do. I continued to
work on the scene, but I was never quite satisfied with it.

As the rehearsal period drew to a close, one major problem remained.
I found myself having difficulty in relating to the chorus. I was blocked
to remain onstage during the choral odes, but I never felt a part of what
they were saying. I found it difficult to follow and react to them as
people. I tried seeing them as particular characters, even though this
is contrary to the traditional view of the Greek chorus. However, since
we only had three chorus members and were dealing with such a small space
I thought that relating to them individually might be permissible. It
never seemed to work though. I think part of the problem was the fact that
the choreography of the odes demanded that the chorus members relate
physically only to each other. There was a quality of self-absorption about their movements, into which I felt it would be improper for Hecuba to intrude. The only solution I could find was to see Hecuba as totally separate from their world. When a choral ode started, I played it as though Hecuba was in her world and the chorus members were in theirs. This solution, though hardly satisfactory, seemed the best thing I could do within the time left. The performance period was about to begin.
CHAPTER III

THE PERIOD

Opening night arrived too soon, as usual. Although there was ample time for me to prepare the role of Hecuba, nothing could prepare me for that first moment when the lights came up. During the rehearsal period, I had been happy with some of the things I was doing, and not so happy with others but ultimately, I did not want to judge myself too harshly. This was, after all, an experiment, and the whole point was to grow as an actress. But when the lights came up, all thoughts of experimentation were gone. I was now in front of an audience, sink or swim.

I found it rather difficult to maintain my concentration during that first performance. My problem was that I was too aware of the audience's presence in the theatre. I had been spoiled by the rehearsal period in which the director had maintained an atmosphere of strict silence in the theatre. Now, suddenly, there were living breathing bodies out there, watching my every move. I realized that if I were to maintain my concentration, I would have to find a way to deal with this sense of audience pressure. If I couldn't get rid of it altogether, I could, at least, minimize it.

I noticed immediately that the audience seemed a lot closer to me physically than I had expected them to be. Although the seating pattern in the theatre remained the same as it had been during the rehearsal period, somehow those seats seemed a lot closer to me when they were filled with people. Unfortunately, I started to get nervous and my hands started to
shake. This reaction, it seems to me now, was aggravated by the fact that I went the first scene lying face down on the floor within easy reaching distance of the first row of audience members. I could actually hear them breathing during the first scene. And when the time came for me to deliver some of the louder lines, I began to be afraid I was so close that I might be shouting in their ears. I found myself especially distracted by the audience’s presence during the sections in which I was not directly involved in the action on stage. The choral odes were a particular problem in this respect. I found that my mind wandered the most during those sections. I did my best to regain my concentration and usually was successful in doing so, but invariably some unexpected audience reaction would attract my attention and my concentration would be broken again.

I went the next performance attempting to rid myself of this problem. To some extent, I was successful in getting myself accustomed to the closeness of the audience, but I still remained too aware of them. Vorse still, my mind was becoming preoccupied not only with what the audience was doing but with who was out there as well. I found myself wondering who was in the back row of the theatre and whether or not they liked what they were seeing. As the performance progressed, I relaxed a little and the problem for the most part went away. But during the final scene, I noticed my mind wandering back to who was in the audience and my concentration was broken for a bit.

After the second performance, I decided it might be best to analyze my fears. Who exactly was in the audience? It seemed to me that the audience members could be divided into three groups: faculty members, peers, and Theatre 100 students. My reactions to each group differed, of course.
I found myself caring more about the reactions of some faculty members over the reactions of others depending upon how much I had dealt with them in the past. I had taken acting classes with a couple of the faculty members and was therefore more aware of them. I found that I was checking myself to make sure I wasn't doing certain things that these teachers had nagged me about in class. I realized that this desire to please these faculty members was getting in the way of my concentration, so I resolved to banish all thoughts of their opinions from my mind.

I also was very aware of the presence of certain friends at each given performance, and I realized, to my surprise, that I was more worried about some of their reactions than I was about faculty reaction. I found that my fears about what my friends and other students thought were more bound up with personal feelings and ego. After all, I only had to face faculty members in the classroom but my peers I saw everyday. I would be seeing them not only in the classroom but socially as well. In battling this, I found it helpful not to ask my friends beforehand which performance they were planning on coming to see. That way, I would be less tempted to think about them during the show. I also found that concentrating for a few minutes before each show on those close friends whose support and encouragement I could count on was useful in relaxing me and concentrating my mind.

Surprisingly, I even found myself somewhat concerned with the reactions of the Theatre 100 students. My fears, of course, were different in relationship to them. It wasn't their criticism I was afraid of. It was their boredom. All of sudden, when I saw these young undergraduates out on a date to see The Trojan Women, I was seized by a desire to be entertaining. I found myself listening for sounds of boredom from them.
I began to wonder whether or not they found the show funny, or stupid, or just plain dull. I found myself checking to see if any of my own students were out there and I began cursing myself for even allowing them to come and see the show.

To a large extent, once I had identified my fears, I found them a lot easier to control. By the third performance, I had become used to the closeness of the audience, and even began to enjoy it. I found that I could use the tension created by their closeness to spur me on creatively. I began to look upon them as friends who were sympathetic to Šecuba's plight. Instead of being enemies, the audience members were now my friends, and being such were not likely to judge me too harshly. By using this substitution, I became less worried about who was out there in the audience and I became more free to concentrate on what I was doing.

I was now confronted with a new problem. My emotions were beginning to dry up. In the process of conquering my nerves, I lost touch with the material temporarily. Concentration, even momentarily, on something other than the text had made the emotional life of the show seem dry and forced. After the third performance, I asked the director whether or not the performance that day had seemed down. She indicated that she hadn't perceived any difference in my performance. This made me feel a little better and so I stopped worrying about it. But the dried up feeling returned during the first half of the next performance and this time it was worse. Every moment, every action seemed sterile. I felt over-rehearsed. It felt like I had done the play a hundred times before. It was as if I was on automatic pilot and only going through the motions. When this happened, I took a deep breath and tried to relax. I tried simply to concentrate on the relaxing, letting myself complete the actions as if I
were doing them for the first time. My strategy worked, for soon I felt my concentration returning and I was once again involved and even excited by the action onstage.

I encountered some vocal difficulty during the performance period. Necuba is an extremely demanding role vocally, so it's not surprising that I might be a bit hoarse after the show. But the first show went particularly badly, and I had to rest my voice afterwards so as to be ready for the next performance. I attributed the difficulty to nerves. Although I had had plenty of runthroughs during the rehearsal period and had learned to pace myself vocally, I obviously hadn't accounted for performance jitters. Luckily, resting my voice repaired the damage, and I was more ready for the next show when curtain time arrived. However, from then on, I learned to be aware of what opening night jitters can do to my voice and to account for them whenever I open a show.

Aside from these difficulties the performance period went fairly smoothly. There were none of the huge accidents or embarrassing mishaps that plague many shows. I only wish I could have had a longer performance period so that I could have dealt with these problems more fully. Unfortunately, the studio theatre schedule only permitted a few performances, so I will never know what I would have done had there been more time. But at least these performances gave me an indication of what the problems were and what I would need to do in order to deal with them. Now the only thing left was for me to allow some time to pass so that I could look back objectively on the experience and determine what I had learned.
CHAPTER IV

EVALUATION

Now that the project is completed and I have had some time to reflect back on the experience, my feelings about the project are, for the most part, positive. As an experiment in stretching myself and learning to grow as an actress, I feel the project was somewhat successful. The director and I had set ourselves the task of exploring the possibilities of performing The Trojan Women. We tried to enter the endeavor with as few preconceptions as possible. We tried not to limit ourselves to the easy, quick solutions. We tried to avoid clichés and, above all, we tried not to worry about the end result. With us, the journey would be more important than the destination. We hoped that by not concentrating on the end product we would free ourselves to explore and find more interesting and exciting performance possibilities than we would if we had settled for the easiest solutions. To this extent, I think we were successful.

In terms of my own personal growth, I find that I learned a great deal about movement while doing The Trojan Women. More specifically, I learned about sustaining movement through time. Much of this I learned during the early work I did with the choreographer, but the issue cropped up during the later rehearsals as well. I learned how important it is for an actress to be able to slow a movement down so that the audience can recognize and enjoy it. I learned how much more powerful it can be when a gesture is not merely thrown out into space but, instead is presented smoothly and confidently. How much more expressive it is for a gesture
to be made slowly and easily, rather than quickly and furtively. That way it can be appreciated by an audience.

I also learned how to sustain movement through space. I learned how important it is for an actress to be capable of extending gestures out and away from the body. As an actress, I have particular difficulty with gestures that involve the full arm. I tend to keep my elbows near my sides, and use only the forearms and the hands. My work with the choreographer helped me to appreciate the necessity to extend my range of movement to include the full arm. This type of movement is more expressive and it becomes especially important in period plays, where body language is more stylized.

My posture also improved as a result of doing this play. The dangling arms and hunched shoulders that I had when I went into rehearsals were less pronounced when the show went into performance. This, in turn, allowed me more expressiveness in my gestures, and also added to Medea’s physical dignity, making her look more regal. Since the show’s closing, I have found my dangling arms and hunched shoulders to be less of a problem than they were before I did the show. True, the difficulty has not disappeared entirely, but the problem is less pronounced now and I have more control over it.

I also found that The Trojan Women taught me to be aware of unnecessary physical movements, such as motions and gestures that say nothing to an audience and add nothing to an actor’s physical expressiveness. They only serve to cloud the picture and confuse the audience. While rehearsing, I learned to be on the watch for any movements that were unnecessary. Along with the director and choreographer, I gave myself notes to eliminate gestures and movement that made no sense or that added nothing
to a scene. By the time the performance period came along, I had success-
fully eliminated nearly all unnecessary movements. Since then, I find that
I have been aware of guarding against that fault in every role that I do.

I have also found that since I performed the role of Necuba, I
have become more capable of finding ways to express physically what is
going on inside my head. I am now more able to find an external expression
for the emotions I am feeling. Before I did The Trojan Women, my emotions
would tend to remain bottled up inside me. There would be no way for them
to escape. My physical expressiveness as an actress was limited. Since
the show, I find I am more capable of letting these emotions out physically,
and, in turn, I find I am more able to give artistic expression to the
emotions I am feeling.

I also feel that I now do fewer of the same things, physically.
Those characteristic movements and gestures of mine that identify me as
me are less prominent now than they were before. I am less tempted to
fall back on them. Even when the going gets tough and rehearsals start to
get difficult, I find that I am capable of ridding myself of these charac-
teristic gestures whenever I need to. They no longer control me. I con-
trol them. Of course, these are more suited to some roles than to others,
and when the time comes that these gestures are appropriate, I don't
hesitate to use them. But I now have more of a choice about when to use
them and when not to use them.

I also have a greater variety of physical expression as an actress.
I am able to find more ways to express myself physically. I am no longer
stuck with just a few ways to express the action of the show. Instead of
the same dead gestures and movements, I find I am more capable of finding
something unique to do. This increase in physical creativeness is one of
the most exciting rewards from the show.

I am also less afraid of emotional size as an actress. Before doing *The Trojan Women*, I would tend to shy away from scenes which call for big emotional outbursts. And when it came to performing them, I would censor myself so much, that I would tend to close myself up completely. But the role of Hecuba would not allow me to do that. I was forced to deal with strong emotions in this play and I couldn't afford to stand back and wait for something to happen. I had to get in there and fight immediately. The fact that I had to deal with these strong emotions and deal with them immediately helped me to conquer my fear of large emotions onstage. I still have that fear but now it is less pronounced and I am more able to rise above it.

In general, I find that I am more confident as an actress now. I realized that, as an actress, I am not as limited as I thought I was. I learned there are many things inside me that I can explore and use for the roles that I play in the future. I am not necessarily limited to just a few types of roles. There are other things that I can play. True, I am not going to be playing roles like Hecuba very often. But, I have more possibilities now than I had before.

I've also learned the value of experimentation in the rehearsal process. I've realized that all too often actors feel called upon to make a scene work immediately, and, in an effort to solve all of the problems right away, they settle for the easiest solution. They don't take the time to explore all the possibilities. This is especially true in the professional world where time is of the essence, and rehearsal time is usually limited. In settling for the easiest solution, the actor often comes up with a product that is bland and lifeless. It would be better for him to
take a little time to explore all the possibilities and then decide which one is best. That way the actor can find the choice that is special.

In the final analysis, I learned more during the rehearsals of *The Trojan Women* than I did during the performances. And in an educational atmosphere, this is as it should be. Once an actor is out in the professional world, there is little time for experimentation. I have seen this in my own experiences over and over again. In most professional productions, rehearsal time is limited and the director wants to get the show up and working as soon as possible. Only in school is there time to explore the endless possibilities of a script. Only in school can the journey be more important than the destination and I am very grateful to many for having the chance to explore in this way. I learned a great deal about myself as an actress and about how I prepare myself for a role.

Taking the time to explore on this journey made me better equipped to handle the journeys to come.
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