Performing Motherhood: Andromache's Navigation of Familial Identities in Seneca's *Troades*

In the third act of his *Troades,* Seneca departs from the Euripidean telling of the myth by staging an *agon* between Andromache and Ulysses. In this scene, Ulysses has come to Andromache to take Astyanax after Calchas has announced that the boy's death will be necessary for the Greek fleet to return home. Having heard about this beforehand and subsequently hidden her son in Hector's tomb, Andromache then attempts to trick Ulysses into believing Astyanax has already died. What follows is a battle of trickery and rhetoric before Andromache is forced to reveal her son at the prospect of desecration of Hector's tomb and to attempt to persuade Ulysses into allowing Astyanax to live. The distance between one's words and one's personal thoughts is emphasized by Seneca from the beginning of the *agon* through one of Ulysses' opening statements (ut, *ore quamvis verba dicantur meo, / non esse credas nostra, Tro*. 525–26) and remains a theme throughout as Ulysses demands Andromache *simulata remove verba* (*Tro*. 568) and then appraises her actions (*scrutare matrem, Tro*. 615) before deciding they are inauthentic *magis haec timet, quam maeret, Tro.* 618).

This act has received considerable attention both for the departure from Euripides, who makes the decision entirely Odysseus' and includes no such interaction between him and Andromache, and as the "longest [act] in Senecan tragedy" and "almost a play in itself" (Keulen 2001: 12). Stoic readings of this *agon* have interpreted it as a model of using hope as a therapy for fear (Currie 2023) and an exploration of how women handle emotions and fear (Fabre-Serris 2015). Scholars have also viewed the *agon* through the lens of Roman declamation to show how it interacts with the genre and its treatment of torture (Payne 2022). Yet, little attention has been given to the difference between Andromache's internal struggle between the identities of wife

and mother and the performance of motherhood she shows to Ulysses. Building upon scholarship on Greek tragedy (e.g., Katz 1994, Mossman 2001), I will put forth a new reading of the *agon* that focuses on Andromache's performance of motherhood to Ulysses and the ways in which this differs from the struggle between familial identities seen in her asides.

I will examine Andromache's asides (*Tro*. 642–62, 686–91), which show her internal struggle between her identities both as the wife of Hector and as the mother of Astyanax in her asides (*animum distrahit geminus timor: / hinc natus, illinc coniugis cari cinis, Tro*. 642–42), alongside how Andromache presents herself to Ulysses, both before she reveals Astyanax (*Tro*. 556–704) and after (*Tro*. 705–813). In both phases, though Andromache privately conveys her reluctance to act more as a mother than a wife, she fully performs the identity of a mother to Ulysses both in speech and in action. Andromache's speeches in this scene, for example, contain repetition of words related to motherhood, such as *mater* and *maternus,* particularly at key argumentative and emotional moments (*Tro*. 556–67, 691–735, 792–812). Andromache's physical actions are revealed by Ulysses as he narrates her weeping and anxious steps (*maeret, illacrimat, gemit; / sed huc et illuc anxios gressus refert*, *Tro*. 615–16). I will thus argue that in this *agon* Seneca consciously problematizes Andromache's performance of gender and specifically of the identity of mother. We can go on to compare Andromache's navigation of familial identities in this *agon* with other scenes in Senecan tragedy which throws into sharper relief how Seneca's female characters utilize these identities for rhetorical effect.

Examining the *agon* of Andromache and Ulysses in this way allows us to explore how women on the Roman stage are presenting themselves and how one elite Roman man and member of Nero's imperial court explored issues related to gender and power. This brings a different approach to Senecan tragedy that seeks to contribute to better understanding of how

Senecan tragedy characterizes women's speech, a topic that has proved incredibly fruitful in analogous studies of Greek tragedy.

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