Melancholy Becomes Andromache: War Trauma and Hallucinatory Mourning in Seneca's *Troades*

Andromache interrupts the dirge her fellow captives sing to complain that ceaseless lament risks diminishing their earlier suffering (*levia perpessae sumus, / si flenda patimur*, *Tr.* 411-12). This criticism of mourning is sometimes understood as evidence of Andromache's stoic courage (Fabre-Serris), but her description of herself as "numb" (*torpens, rigens*) and "without feeling" (*sine sensu*) suggests that she is experiencing something more akin to modern depression. Moreover, Seneca's heroine suffers bouts of panic and hallucinations, both of which are symptoms ancient writers associate with melancholy brought on by extreme grief and characterized by fear and sadness (Arist. *Parv. nat.* 2.460b3-16, Hippoc. *Aph*. 6.23, Men. *Asp*. 329-39). Andromache's mental state resembles a condition that modern psychiatrists term hallucinatory mourning, wherein the bereaved hears voices and sees visions of the recently deceased (Alroe, Boska, Larøi, *et. al*.). This pathology can be particularly intense if the deceased has suffered a violent death. Andromache has lost not only her husband, but also her father and seven brothers, to the violence of war (*Il.* 6.414-30).

I argue that Seneca has portrayed Andromache's psychological underpinnings in a sophisticated, realistic manner that reveals the depth of his engagement with contemporary theories about mental illness and corresponds to how we conceive of the devastating effects of war loss today. The hallucinations Andromache experiences are of two types: dream visions in which she hears voices and sees images (438-60) and waking "delusions" (Most's terminology) that result from momentarily mistaking a living person for a dead one (642-62). While some subset of Greco-Roman society understood these visions as divinely inspired, secular

explanations are found in authors as early as Euripides, who "diagnoses" Orestes' hallucinations as stemming from grief (λύπη, *Or*. 396-400).

After Andromache elaborates her suicidal despair, she relates a vision of Hector's ghost (444-60). Although her negligent execution of the ghost's command to hide Astyanax has been thought to reflect Seneca's clumsy poetics (Fantham), I aim to show that Andromache's reluctance to act is an integral part of Seneca's portrayal of her psychological trauma. Reeling from the disappearance of Hector's shade, Andromache turns to the boy at her side, but the sight of her son, instead of motivating her to act, activates another vision of her late husband (464-68). While it is a trope of ancient epic to see the father's facial features in the son, Andromache's description of the boy moves from plausible to unrealistic. It is reasonable enough to suppose that the boy's face and gait recall Hector's (464-66), but a threatening expression (*fronte sic torva minax*, 467) and a mane of flowing hair (*cervice fusam dissipans iacta comam,* 468) hardly befit a small child.

Andromache is not comparing Astyanax to Hector (as, for example, Evander compares Aeneas to Anchises at *Aen*. 8.152-64), but experiencing a second hallucination, the severity of which becomes more extreme when she is compelled by a sadistic Ulysses to choose between preserving her husband's tomb and her son's life. In what is perhaps the most haunting monologue of the play, Andromache imagines two Hectors standing before her vying for her allegiance (*utrimque est Hector,* 659). Andromache's failure to act decisively and to grieve appropriately in the immediate aftermath of the Trojan war ought to be understood neither as a representation of a stoic ideal nor as unsympathetic depiction of a negligent mother, but as a moving portrayal of a woman who has experienced extreme trauma.

Bibliography

Alroe, C.J. and McIntyre, J.N. 1983. "Visual hallucinations. The Charles Bonnet syndrome and bereavement," in *Med J Aust.* 2.12: 674-5.

Boska, P. 2009. "On the neurobiology of hallucinations," in *J Psychiatry Neurosci* 34.4: 260–262.

Cilliers, L. and Retief, F. P. 2009. "Mental Illness in the Greco-Roman Era," in *Mania: Madness in the Greco-Roman World.* Ed. Bosman. Pretoria.

Fabre-Serris, J. 2015. "Women after War in Seneca's Troades: A Reflection on Emotions," in *Women and War in Antiquity.* Ed. Fabre-Serris and Keith. Baltimore.

Fantham, E. 1982. *Seneca's Troades.* Princeton.

Larøi, F., Luhrmann, T.M., Bell, V., et. al. 2013. "Culture and Hallucinations: Overview and Future Directions." *Schizophrenia Bulletin* 40.4: 213-220.

Harris, W.V. 2013. "Greek and Roman Hallucinations," in *Mental Disorders in the Classical World*. Ed. Harris. Leiden.

Most, G. W. 2013. "The Madness of Tragedy," in *Mental Disorders in the Classical World*. Ed. Harris. Leiden.

Keulen, A. 2001. *L. Annaeus Seneca: Troades.* Boston: Brill.

Sterbenc-Erker, D. 2004. "Voix dangereuses et force des larmes: Le deuil feminine dans la Rome antique." *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 221.3: 259-91.

Prescendi, F. 2000. "Klagende Frauen: Zur weiblichen Trauerhaltung in Rom," in *Frauenwelten in der Antike*. Ed. Späth and Wagner-Hasel. Stuttgart.

Wilcox, A. 2006. "Exemplary Grief: Gender and Virtue in Seneca's Consolations to Women." *Helios* 33.1: 73-100.

Zissos, A. 2009. “Shades of Virgil: Seneca’s *Troades*.” *MD* 61: 191-210.