

Safe at Home: Andromache's Priorities in the *Iliad*

It is commonly accepted that the reunion between Hector and Andromache in Book 6 of the *Iliad* places a contrast between the concerns of the battlefield and the anxieties of the domestic sphere. However, there has been a wide and varied disagreement about how to best define the specific outlook and motivations of both Hector and Andromache in this famous scene. For example, W. Schaderwaldt argues that Hector and Andromache are representatives of their respective sphere and thus “speak from the full, total necessity of their existence, which was sketched out for them in the law according to which they grew up” (133). But Van Nortwick points out that Andromache actually ventures into the warrior mindset during their discussion: “she seems to enter into her husband’s world, giving him strategic advice and already suffering the isolation that attends all masculine heroes” (226-7).

My analysis seeks to add to this fruitful discussion by delineating the specific priorities that Andromache espouses. In the first part of the paper, I focus on her famous words to Hector: more than simply expressing concern for the potential loss of her husband, Andromache stakes out her own position in opposition to Hector’s ethic which Michael Clarke has convincingly argued to be an ethic rooted in *αἰδώς*, or shame. But in her speech, Andromache critiques Hector’s warrior ethic on the grounds that it only serves to endanger herself, her son and the entire city. As a result, Andromache fleshes out an ideology that prioritizes achieving a state of *σῶος*, a safety from physical harm. I have found that examining Andromache’s speech within this framework of *σῶος* allows for a more robust appreciation for a continuity within the various critiques of the warrior ethic throughout the *Iliad*.

In the second part of the paper, I offer a close examination of Agamemnon's exhortation to his troops in Book 5, lines 529-532. In that speech, Agamemnon weighs conceptions of *κλέος* and *αἰδώς* but importantly, he believes them not to be ends in of themselves but rather constructs that bring about a safety for the troops. I believe that Andromache also understands this important nuance. Thus, when she begs Hector to reposition his attack and thereby take pity on the plight of his wife and child, she is not impulsively critiquing a broader, indisputable ethos to which Hector inevitably conforms. Rather, she spars with his particular understanding of the warrior ethic and attempts to reorient his conception of *αἰδώς* to be in service of the greater *σῶος*.

In the third part of my paper, I plan to demonstrate how Glaucus' speech at the start of Book 6 serves as a thematic precedent for Andromache's ideology. This interpretation follows upon Barbara Graziosi's argument for the unity of Book 6 as a whole. Though famous in its own right, Glaucus' speech comparing the lives of men to leaves on a tree is not frequently examined in conjunction with the conversation between Hector and Andromache which ends the book. However, I believe that my interpretation of Andromache's speech makes clear two main similarities between the two passages. First, Glaucus' idea, like Andromache's, sharply critiques central aspects of the warrior ethic because it diminishes the importance of individual glory in the face of the reality of man's precarious mortality. Secondly, it presents an outlook in which a cyclic, uninterrupted progression of human life is the idealized norm. Violence, such as Agamemnon's threat to rip a young child from his mother's womb (6.58-9), becomes the ultimate violation of Glaucus' tenet. Thus, Book 6 repeatedly scrutinizes the priorities of the warrior ethic by examining the tremendous violence it causes. Observations about the primacy of safety above all help reveal how Book 6 pushes its way toward surprising and unconventional ground.

Finally, I suggest that this observation about Andromache's specific priorities elucidates the way her character has been received. In Euripides' *Trojan Women*, for example, Andromache's concerns about physical safety shift instead to concerns about reaching psychological security. There, Andromache becomes a champion for Greek pessimism: only death can provide true safety from suffering. Further, by the time of Seneca's *Troades*, Andromache becomes a representation of how only Stoic resolve provides safety. Acknowledging the coherency and lucidity of Andromache's priorities in the *Iliad* makes clear why so many later writers chose that character to champion psychological tranquility.

Bibliography

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