

# Hector and Andromache in Book VI (Rewrite)

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In Book VI of the *Iliad* Homer retells the scene between Hector and Andromache, ending with Hector's departure for battle, where valiant Diomedes is killing the Trojans by the dozen. The dynamics of this scene come from the different motives of the characters. To Andromache, her husband represents her whole family and she wants him to stay at home (because she is afraid of losing him) and protect her and their child at any cost. Although Hector loves his family, he chooses the path of honor because he wants to serve his community and does not want his fellow citizens to see him as a coward. Hector thus serves as the ideal Homeric warrior who behaves completely according to the expectations of society.

Andromache fears that she will lose Hector and that their child will grow up without a father (447). She remembers how Achilles killed her father and her brothers; why should she let him or some other Achean kill her husband? She fears that the same situation will repeat itself and her predictions will come true (eventually, they do). Most importantly, she fears that she will not be able to do anything about it.

Andromache uses rational arguments to persuade her husband to stay. When her feelings cannot persuade him, she switches to reasoning and notes that the attackers know the weak part of the wall (477). Thus she implies that he should focus on defense and not go to the battlefield full of raging Argives. This example illustrates that Andromache discusses issues with her husband and, as opposed to other women, is not treated as an object. On the contrary, she delivers her arguments convincingly and Hector respects her (485).

Finally, Andromache has to bear the consequences of his determination to go to the war. Although her husband decides what will happen, she will have to raise the baby alone, she will have to work as two, and she will be a slave for the rest of her life. For this tough fate she will, however, get neither respect nor honor. Likewise, she will be reminded by the men around of her husband and his *brave* deeds:

Look there at the wife of Hector, the best in battle of all the horse-taming Trojans  
in the war we fought about Ilium. (507)

Hector, on the other hand, argues that staying with his wife would not help, as he would only have to watch her being taken away after Troy's fall, which would happen regardless of his presence. He chooses the easier path because he either wins and gains glory, or dies and does not have to care about anything. Consequently, he tries to rationalize his decision although the impulse for it comes from his inner hunger for honor.

Hector assuages his wife's fears and justifies his decision by pointing out that everything is predetermined (540), hence he tries to rid himself of the responsibility his wife threw upon him. But is it really comforting when you cannot do absolutely anything to change your fate? By emphasizing complete predestination, he refuses any responsibility and decides what to do, ignoring the opinion of his wife.

Hector sticks to the rules of society, and cannot therefore become a tragic hero. Firstly, he claims that to go to war is the duty of all Trojan men, and since he considers himself the best among them, he cannot stay at home (543). Similarly, this can be interpreted as assurance that women cannot gain honor since they cannot participate in war. More importantly, he does not want the Trojan community to see him as a poltroon. His own wife wants him to stay, but what about all the other Trojan wives; how could he face them, were he to "skulk away as a coward" (487)?

No matter what the effort, Hector believes that "the day of ruin shall surely come for holy Troy" (493), and he can only postpone it—he can therefore die as a timid defender, hated by his own people, or as a hero in the battle and moreover, gain honor and respect

(492). Hector feels that as the leader of his people he has to serve as a model. Additionally, he has great responsibility for all the people (not *to* the people; the responsibility can be to the Gods or to some higher order), which urges him to fight; for he can either win, or be acquitted of this burden by his death—but he can never do as badly as when sitting at home.

Both Hector and Andromache display a fundamental property of real people (critical for literature): they are in tension, and that makes them dynamic. Andromache demonstrates this contrast by weeping in the beginning and by her later laughing at the baby (520), and impresses the reader by her emotions. Hector shows the contrast by his belief in the fall of Troy and by the prayer for his son. Surely, he knows that his son will either be killed after the fall of Troy, or he will go to battle, which would mean that his whole life had only one purpose: death in the battle. Unsurprisingly, the concept of predestination comes from the only certainty of existence: it will end. Only one way leads from this trap—eternal life in the memories of others, which one gets only through honor and war, and that is the deeper origin of Hector's decision.

### **Work cited**

Homer. The *Iliad*. Translated by Eennis Rees. New York: Barnes & Nobles Books, 2005.