

Refiguration of Andromache : Presentation Notes

Notes

In the Iliad (Wilson's translation, original Greek lines cited):

- Hector is advised by his brother to go back to Troy and tell the elder women to pray for Troy in the temple of Athena.
- Hector sends Hecuba, then he stumbles upon Paris and Helen
 - Yelling at Paris for not being helpful, Helen trying to help, Hector mad at her too
 - "I must go see my family at home- my darling wife and little baby son. You see, I do not know if I will ever return to them again. This time the gods may crush me underneath the hands of Greeks." (book 6, line 366)
- Getting to his own house, Hector couldn't find Andromache anywhere. He asks some servants where she is: on the wall of Troy
 - "She rushed towards the wall because she heard the Trojans have been losing and the Greeks have gained enormous power. She ran off as if beside herself with manic frenzy. The nurse slave went with her and brought the baby" (book 6, line 386).
- Then Hector races to the wall of Troy, Andromache rushed to meet him
 - Crying, described really peacefully yet heavily.
- Andromache begins to argue with Hector for being so willing to risk his life when he has a wife and son at home, and begs him to put his life first.
 - "Please think of me, have pity, and stay here on the wall. Please do not make your son an orphan and your wife a widow" (book 6, line 431).
- Andromache then gives Hector advise on how to fight the Greeks for the best shot of winning without Hector dying:
 - "Line up the troops beside the wild fig tree, the place the enemy might scale the wall and strike the town of troy. The Greeks have come to try that very spot three times already." (book 6, line 434).
 - Hector supports her ideas ("Woman, I care about all these things too" [book 6, line 441]) but tells her he won't stop fighting on the front for the glory of Troy and Priam
- Hector and Andromache's love and family unit: Hector has been described as the perfect husband
 - "But as for me, I hope I will be dead, and lying underneath a pile of earth, so that I do not have to hear your screams or watch when they are dragging you away" (book 6, line 465). Hector talks about how nothing about the war pains him more than the idea that Andromache will get taken as a slave when they lose.
- The Scene : Hector reaches for his son, but Astyanax screams and recoils because he is scared of Hector's armor. Hector and Andromache laugh, Hector removes his helmet, and Astyanax is no longer afraid when Hector lifts him to the sky and prays for his son to have the best life.
 - Book 6, lines 476-483
 - Hector then gives Astyanax back to Andromache who's crying, and comfort's her about his upcoming death.
- Hector asks Andromache to go back to her loom, and tells her that the men will see to the fighting

- Book 6, line 490

Interpretations:

- Andromache has a lot of agency in this scene, speaking up to Hector and even suggesting orders for him to follow. And Hector doesn't criticize this at all. He supports her ideas and feelings, and comforts her, even if he doesn't necessarily agree with her plan.
- Andromache acts like a general, despite being a Trojan woman, and isn't shut down.
- Hector tells her to go back to her loom, but for her protection and so she didn't have to deal with the fighting like he had to. He wants her to stay busy somewhere where it was safe and where she could be shielded, not that she should be working on the loom derogatorily.
- Weaving and loom work/fiber arts is something strictly for women to do, especially enslaved women.
 - Hector refers to this when he talks about how he fears Andromache being enslaved by the Greeks, and forced to labor at the loom at another's beck and call (book 6, line 543)
 - This is also seen through the epics, most famously towards Penelope, Queen of Ithaca, who uses weaving as a strategy to fend off the suitors. Loom work was Penelope's only tool of agency without Odysseus, but can it still be agency if looming is looked at so strictly as women's work?
- Other sources discussing this scene disagree and view Hector as being dismissive of Andromache and holds her less than human despite being very family oriented (Farron 1979).
 - Hector is not perfect, despite being a much more modern version of a hero and husband/father, he still has shortcomings from his time and this is what those sources focus on.
 - While I don't fully agree with the idea that Andromache is still being dismissed, I don't think either side is strictly correct or incorrect. On top of this, different translations of the Iliad can change how the scene is read, and how Hector sounds as a husband, and a man. These two examples are different translations for the same line:
 - "Strange woman! Come on now, you must not be too sad on my account." (Wilson's Iliad, book 6, line 485).
 - "Andromache, dear one, why so desperate? Why so much grief for me?" (Fagles' Iliad, book 6, line 579).
- By recreating a depiction of Andromache's strongest moment through fiber arts, I am almost reclaiming how weaving is women's work to show her strength and glory in standing up for her husband and son even when it would be practically appalling for women to be so outspoken.

The Vase:

- Apulian red figure pottery
- Dated to 380-360 BC
- Two scenes on either side
 - One side depicts a soldier with an elaborate helmet, a woman sitting with a baby on her knee, and a man with a sword and shield behind her.
 - Other side depicts 3 men, two holding staff, and it has been interpreted that they are spectators discussing the first scene.

- Figures
 - The right soldier: has a helmet with an elaborate design and long plume, a large decorated shield, a spear, and is dressed in clothing reminiscent of indigenous Apulian clothes. He holds the helmet in his right hand.
 - The woman: sitting in the center looking towards the helmet, wearing a very decorated Greek cloak, holding an infant on her lap
 - The infant: one hand outstretched towards the right soldier, possibly touching the helmet, while the woman holds his other hand
 - The left soldier: no helmet, also dressed in Apulian style clothes, a shield leans against his leg and he holds a shortsword, showing how he is a soldier.
- Hector is almost always depicted with his helmet and battle gear. With the helmet having elaborate decorations with the long plume and swirled design, this soldier is clearly high ranking and important, like Hector.
- The presence of this soldier interacting with an infant, especially with his helmet off and the baby reaching for him, makes it clear that this must be Hector and Astyanax on the wall of Troy. From this, the woman must be Andromache.
 - The other soldier doesn't have a clear identification, and I've deemed him not important for this conversation. I wonder if he is Paris gearing up to go back to the battlefield after Hector talked to him, but that's just unrelated, personal speculation.
- The woman is seated center, her chair being on a slight pedestal. My interpretation for this is that it could symbolize her power in this scene and in general: she is renowned and loved.

Cross stitch:

- 14 count black aida as my canvas - this is my first time working with black aida which was a difficult change from the normal white fabric, but I love the dimension and authenticity it gives this piece.
- Orange floss as my material - I picked a floss that most resembled pictures of red figures in Apulian pottery, and used about 4 skeins for a total of 4681 stitches.
- I worked on the piece on and off for around 3 weeks, stitching whenever I had down time or during lectures where I could multitask. I didn't keep track but I estimate that it took me around 50 hours to complete.
 - The calculated range was 40-60 hours so I just took the median.
- I created the pattern on a website called Floss Cross. I was able to upload an image of the vase painting, change the dimensions to a reasonable size (around 8x8 inches), and the website creates a messy pattern where it converts the image to pixel art with the DMC colors in its database. From there, I toggled the opacity of the original image to better trace out the figures so it was readable as a cross stitch piece, and then recolor each part to be red or black.
 - The border was hard to translate because there are only 2 pictures of the vase and neither are good quality and cut off parts of the border. But based on what I could see in the pictures, I reinterpreted the border patterns into something able to be stitched in my size constraints.
 - I also cut out the second soldier because of his unclear identity, and irrelevance to the topic of Andromache and Hector.

- I saved the pattern on my computer under my Etsy shop's handle in case I wanted to sell it (I create and sell cross stitch patterns on my page Vulcan's Creation), and worked off the pdf and website to translate the pattern into thread.
- Cross stitch is similar to weaving in that it is a fiber art created by the interlacing of string (in the form of floss or yarn).
 - It's a more modern craft relative to weaving, but it still has strong female connotations even in the modern day, even if it's not in a derogatory sense.
 - The epics tend to portray women as being forced to weave and work on their loom, especially when enslaved like Andromache is after the events of the Iliad. I have the choice to weave/work in similar mediums, and I can use the opportunity to lift up women in literature and history who don't get the recognition they deserve.

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Script

I recreated this vase painting that depicts Andromache, Hector and Astyanax into a cross stitch piece. This piece is about 4600 stitches, and took me around 55 hours to complete over the course of 3 weeks. Cross stitch is similar to embroidery where thread is stitched into fabric to make a design, but this is similar to pixel art where the stitches are all x's. I created this design by importing an image of the original vase into the pattern-making website Floss Cross. Then I was able to trace the design in a way that would read well through cross stitch. Then I used that digital version as a pattern to follow for the physical piece.

The original art I recreated is an Apulian red figure vase painting that depicts 2 soldiers, a woman and a baby. It's titled "Hector, Andromache and Astyanax" but is part of a private collection so there isn't too much information about it online. However, we know that this shows Hector and his family based on context clues of iconography, and the interaction it depicts. Hector is almost always shown with a helmet and other armor and weapons. This helmet has a large plume and is decorated, showing that it belongs to someone of high status. He also is holding a shield and spear, further supporting that he is a soldier. Most notably, he is interacting with a baby, having his helmet off as the baby is reaching towards him. This is undoubtedly a depiction of the wall scene in book 6 of the Iliad where Astyanax is scared of his father when he's dressed in his armor, so Hector takes his helmet off for his son to recognize him before he says goodbye. By proxy, the woman holding the baby must be Andromache, who has a very important role in this scene and was the reason I wanted to recreate it through cross stitch.

Before Hector removes his helmet for his son, he and Andromache are talking about the war. Andromache has an interesting position where she gives Hector advice on how to fight the Greeks in a way that could keep him from harm. In my interpretation of Hector's response, he doesn't really disagree with her ideas other than he won't back down from the fight for his own honor. Most if not all women in the Iliad and the Odyssey are treated with very little respect and don't have much autonomy, but Andromache is able to give war advice like a general and isn't shunned for it. Andromache isn't just a wife or a mother, she has ideas and a voice that most women in this story don't get. This scene also juxtaposes the Trojan War in a really stark but emotional way. Going from the brutal descriptions of death to a bittersweet scene of a family knowing this is the last time they will see each other tells a great story about war vs love.

Weaving is a skill heavily associated with women, and the Iliad and Odyssey often reference weaving in a derogatory way. The idea that all women should be doing is weaving is something that doesn't even escape Hector and Andromache, despite how they tend to feel like a more modern couple. The conversation on the wall ends with Hector telling Andromache to return to her loom and let the men figure out the war stuff. While cross stitch is not the weaving they refer to, it is still a form of weaving and by depicting Andromache in one of her strongest moments from the Iliad through this medium, I believe it's a strong message towards giving the women of antiquity the honor they deserve.