

Anne Chen

Per: 2

Journal

“Giorgio de Chirico, *Hector and Andromache*”

“Hector from Andromache's embrace went to arms, and it was his wife who placed his helmet upon his head.¹”

The poignant love story of Hector and Andromache can draw “tears down Pluto’s cheek.²” Andromache, the epitome of the loyal and beautiful wife, sends her husband, Hector, off to the Trojan War. Although Hector does not believe in the cause of the Trojan War, he fights out of obligation to his country. The brave Hector leaves his wife and son, Astyanax, behind the safe walls of Troy. Upon leaving Troy, Hector faces the Greek warrior, Ajax. These two courageous warriors fight to a standstill; both admit their admiration for each other, trade gifts, and depart. However, Hector must face a tougher opponent. After a long and savage battle, Achilles rises as the victor. He drags the body of Hector throughout the battlefield, around the walls of Troy, and right under the weeping eyes of Andromache. The wailing Andromache declares, “Then [myself] having been overpowered and ruined, whatever has come to pass, I endure rigid and without emotion, being numbed by hardships.³”

The tragedy of their romance rings true in Giorgio de Chirico’s painting. The haunting dreamscapes infused with illogical images, bizarre spatial constructions, and a pervasive melancholic mood perfectly portrays the chaos where Hector and Andromache’s love flourished. Inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche’s writing, de Chirico used strange juxtapositions such as large shadows of public monuments cast by a setting sun; these odd depictions surround the lovers with hidden realities. When Hector and Andromache embrace, all else is but an illusion. Only love prevails. De Chirico dubbed his art as “metaphysical” and with it hoped to destabilize the meaning of everyday objects by making them symbols of uncertainty, alienation, and fear. In *Hector and Andromache*, the two intertwined lovers’ caress is reduced to simple geometric shapes and yet it portrays such a powerful love. The setting sun over the horizon reflects their melancholy and tragic mood. The buildings, equally simplified, frame the image lending it an almost stage-like quality. It seems almost as if their passion freezes in time and in the frame of the painting.

“Sailing to Byzantium” perfectly captures the emotion and beauty of the painting. In the poem, the narrator, an old man, wishes to leave behind “that old country.” He wants to leave the material-obsessed world of the flesh; the

¹ *Amores* I.9 by Ovid

² *Il Penseroso. Line 105* by John Milton

³ *Troades. Line 412* by Seneca

world where “the salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas” – the first stanza is littered with “procreative” connotation. He believes that people have become too accustomed to falling into the rhythm of the cycle of birth, maturity, and death. They are caught in “that sensual music” of the desires of their physical body; they forget “monuments of aging intellect” – things of the mind, which never grows old. The painting by de Chirico represents the elimination of all details and elaborations, and the simple portrayal of Hector and Andromache as they desperately cling to each other for perhaps the last time. The man in the poem wants what the painting reveals: a reduction to the bare essentials of intellect and emotions.

The old man embarks to Byzantium on a voyage of intellect. He believes that Byzantium once marked the unification of practicality, religion, and aesthetics. Once reaching Byzantium, the poet appeals to the “sages.” He wants them to liberate his soul by consuming his heart, which is fastened to a “dying animal” – the material world. Upon casting off the “chains⁴” of his desires, he yearns to do something fantastical like Hephaestus, “a form as Grecian gold smiths make.” Yet art is oftentimes a form of expression of the opulent outside world; however, I believe that the art that the old man starves for is de Chirico’s art. De Chirico’s art possesses a raw and simple beauty that transcends the decadent “world of flesh.”

⁴ Jean Jacques Rousseau