The Wall of Troy

Maryline Arthur’s influential study of *Iliad* 6 criticizes the argument that the wall of Troy divides the masculine and feminine worlds of the *Iliad* and suggests instead that the wall is a point where the two worlds, combative and non-combative, merge (Arthur 1981). Thus the wall becomes a neutral space where the ideologies of both the combatants and their families engage in a dialectic, rather than polarized manner (Arthur 1981). Arthur’s model describes the wall as a meeting place between two inherently different experiences, but this paper argues that the wall of Troy is better understood as the focal point of the non-combative community rather than an unclaimed, neutral space. Though the non-combative experience is often gendered as feminine, in actuality the *Iliad* depicts non-combative men and women on the wall or near the wall together in a variety of discursive contexts. Combatants rarely linger in this space – it is reserved for the men, women and children of Troy whose wartime experiences are metaphorically transmitted by their activity on and around the wall.

The homefront experiences of the non-combatives in the *Iliad* are defined primarily by their responses to the stimuli supplied by the vicissitudes of the war. The liminal position of the wall makes it an appropriate space for presenting those responses, for it becomes a semi-public space where non-combatants may engage with each other as well as with combatants. Depictions of the Trojan homefront are typically set in this semi-public space, while scenes set in private, domestic space, while evocatively drawn, are few and brief. Men and women address each other in this space while the combat zone is visible (3.139-244; 24.281-301), they supplicate warriors both upon and outside the wall (6.407-439; 22.25-91), and they perform lamentations in each other’s presence, mimicking the public, ritualistic *gooi* of the funeral (22.416-515). The varying degrees of mobility on, around, or through the walls also subtly shades the characters on the homefront. For example, Hecuba, positioned near the gates at Hector’s return in Book 6 (251-262) and Priam’s departure at Book 24 (24.281-301) acts as a gatekeeper, urging both travelers to propitiate the gods in their comings and goings. It is to her that Hector entrusts the supplication of Athena in Book 6. In contrast, Andromache’s wartime experience is defined by her position upon the wall, not near or beside it. Her tragedy is played out in the harsh transition between ignorance and certainty: the cruelly excellent vantage point of the wall supplies her with the knowledge she both fears and desperately desires and provides a public audience to which she can express the ramifications of that recognition (22.460-515). As a male, Priam’s mobility on, around, near and through the wall mirrors that of his son, even to the point of passing through the combat zone into enemy territory. Yet even his contact with the combatants is restricted to ritual events. Priam is more often depicted on or near the wall in the presence of the female members of his family. More so than any other character in the *Iliad*, Priam explores the liminality of old age: not wholly feminine but no longer completely masculine, he is a participant in both the combative and non-combative spheres. His liminal position also metonymically connects Priam to Troy itself: Troy is a conflation of the extra- and intra-mural experience, combative and non-combative together.

Troy’s wall is pressed on one side by the combative experience, and on the other by the non-combative, yet its boundary is most fully utilized by the non-combatants whose access to the combatants is restricted. In their eagerness to make contact with those beyond their reach, they stretch their restrictive tethers up to the very dividing line itself and claim a space for themselves on the drop-off point.

Works Cited

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