



## HECTOR RETURNS TO TROY

### GUIDE FOR READING

**FOCUS** In the following scene, Hector's wife pleads with her husband to stay in the city with her. As you read, look for the reasons that she gives.

*After Achilles withdraws from the war, the fighting between Trojans and Greeks begins again. Even without their best warrior, the Greeks do well on the battlefield. Hector, fearful that the Greeks are near victory, returns to Troy and tells the Trojans to ask the goddess Athena for help. He then visits his wife and child. Hector's wife, Andromache, pleads with him to stay in the city.*

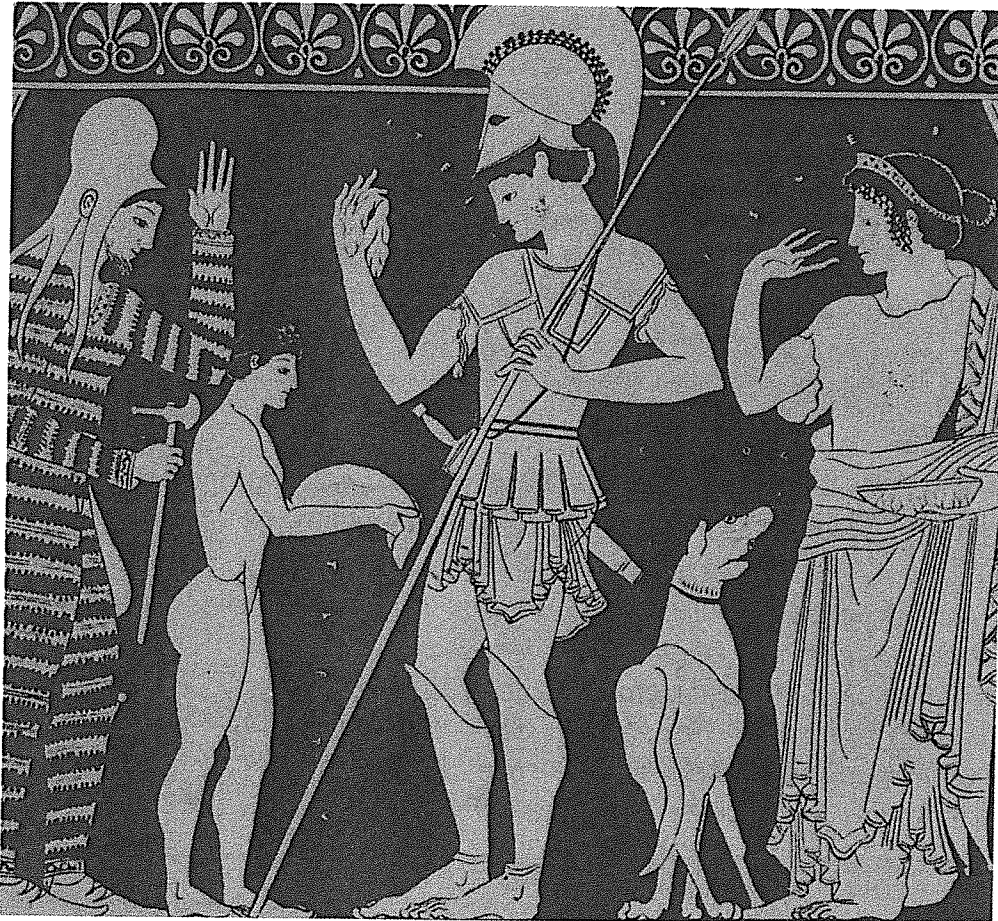
**A**t that, Hector spun and rushed from his house, back by the same way down the wide, well-paved streets throughout the city until he reached the Scaean Gates, the last point he would pass to gain the field of battle.  
5 There his warm, generous wife came running up to meet him, Andromache the daughter of gallant-hearted Eetion who had lived below Mount Placos rich with timber, in Thebe below the peaks, and ruled Cilicia's people. His daughter had married Hector helmed in bronze.  
10 She joined him now, and following in her steps a servant holding the boy against her breast, in the first flush of life, only a baby, Hector's son, the darling of his eyes and radiant as a star . . .  
15 Hector would always call the boy Scamandrius, townsmen called him Astyanax, Lord of the City, since Hector was the lone defense of Troy. The great man of war breaking into a broad smile, his gaze fixed on his son, in silence. Andromache,

**3 Scaean** (skē'ən) **Gates:** a gateway in Troy's wall, facing the Greek camp.

**6 Eetion** (ē-ēt'ē-ōn').

**8 Thebe** (thē'bē): a town near Troy; **Cilicia's** (sī-līsh'əz) **people:** the inhabitants of the region surrounding Thebe.

**15 Scamandrius** (ske-măn'drē-əs).



Soldier leaving his family for battle. Bildarchiv Preuss, Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Germany.

**HUMANITIES CONNECTION**  
 This painting on a Greek vase shows a soldier preparing to leave home. The soldier is inspecting the entrails, or intestines, of an animal that has been sacrificed to the gods. The striped figure to the left is a slave in native dress.

20 pressing close beside him and weeping freely now,  
 clung to his hand, urged him, called him: “Reckless one,  
 my Hector—your own fiery courage will destroy you!  
 Have you no pity for him, our helpless son? Or me,  
 and the destiny that weighs me down, your widow,  
 25 now so soon. Yes, soon they will kill you off,  
 all the Achaean forces massed for assault, and then,  
 bereft of you, better for me to sink beneath the earth.  
 What other warmth, what comfort’s left for me,  
 once you have met your doom? Nothing but torment!  
 30 I have lost my father. Mother’s gone as well.  
 Father . . . the brilliant Achilles laid him low  
 when he stormed Cilicia’s city filled with people,  
 Thebe with her towering gates. He killed Eetion,  
 not that he stripped his gear—he’d some respect at least—  
 35 for he burned his corpse in all his blazoned bronze,

27 **bereft:** deprived.

34 **he’d some respect at least:**  
 Achilles showed respect for Eetion  
 by not plundering his armor and  
 by treating his corpse with appropriate ceremony.

35 **blazoned bronze:** decorated armor.

then heaped a grave-mound high above the ashes  
and nymphs of the mountain planted elms around it,  
daughters of Zeus whose shield is storm and thunder.

And the seven brothers I had within our halls . . .

40 all in the same day went down to the House of Death,  
the great godlike runner Achilles butchered them all,  
tending their shambling oxen, shining flocks.

And mother,  
who ruled under the timberline of woody Placos once—  
he no sooner haled her here with his other plunder

45 than he took a priceless ransom, set her free  
and home she went to her father's royal halls  
where Artemis, showering arrows, shot her down.  
You, Hector—you are my father now, my noble mother,  
a brother too, and you are my husband, young and warm  
and strong!

50 Pity me, please! Take your stand on the rampart here,  
before you orphan your son and make your wife a widow.

Draw your armies up where the wild fig tree stands,  
there, where the city lies most open to assault,  
the walls lower, easily overrun. Three times

55 they have tried that point, hoping to storm Troy,  
their best fighters led by the Great and Little Ajax,  
famous Idomeneus, Atreus' sons, valiant Diomedes.  
Perhaps a skilled prophet revealed the spot—  
or their own fury whips them on to attack.”

**PAUSE & REFLECT** Why is it so important to  
Andromache that Hector not return to the battlefield?

**FOCUS** Hector is determined to fight, even though he  
believes that Troy is doomed. As you read, pay attention to  
his reasons for fighting, as well as his worries about his  
wife's future.

60 **A**nd tall Hector nodded, his helmet flashing:

“All this weighs on my mind too, dear woman.  
But I would die of shame to face the men of Troy  
and the Trojan women trailing their long robes  
if I would shrink from battle now, a coward.

65 Nor does the spirit urge me on that way.  
I've learned it all too well. To stand up bravely,

37 **nymphs** (nĭmfs): minor nature  
goddesses.

44 **haled**: dragged.

47 **Artemis** (är'te-mĭs): goddess of  
the hunt and twin sister of Apollo.

56 **Little Ajax**: a Greek warrior  
known for his swiftness.

57 **Diomedes** (dĭ'ə-mē'dēz):  
another celebrated Greek warrior.

always to fight in the front ranks of Trojan soldiers,  
winning my father great glory, glory for myself.

For in my heart and soul I also know this well:

70 the day will come when sacred Troy must die,  
Priam must die and all his people with him,  
Priam who hurls the strong ash spear . . .

Even so,

it is less the pain of the Trojans still to come  
that weighs me down, not even of Hecuba herself  
75 or King Priam, or the thought that my own brothers  
in all their numbers, all their gallant courage,  
may tumble in the dust, crushed by enemies—

That is nothing, nothing beside your agony  
when some brazen Argive hales you off in tears,  
80 wrenching away your day of light and freedom!  
Then far off in the land of Argos you must live,  
laboring at a loom, at another woman's beck and call,  
fetching water at some spring, Messeis or Hyperia,  
resisting it all the way—

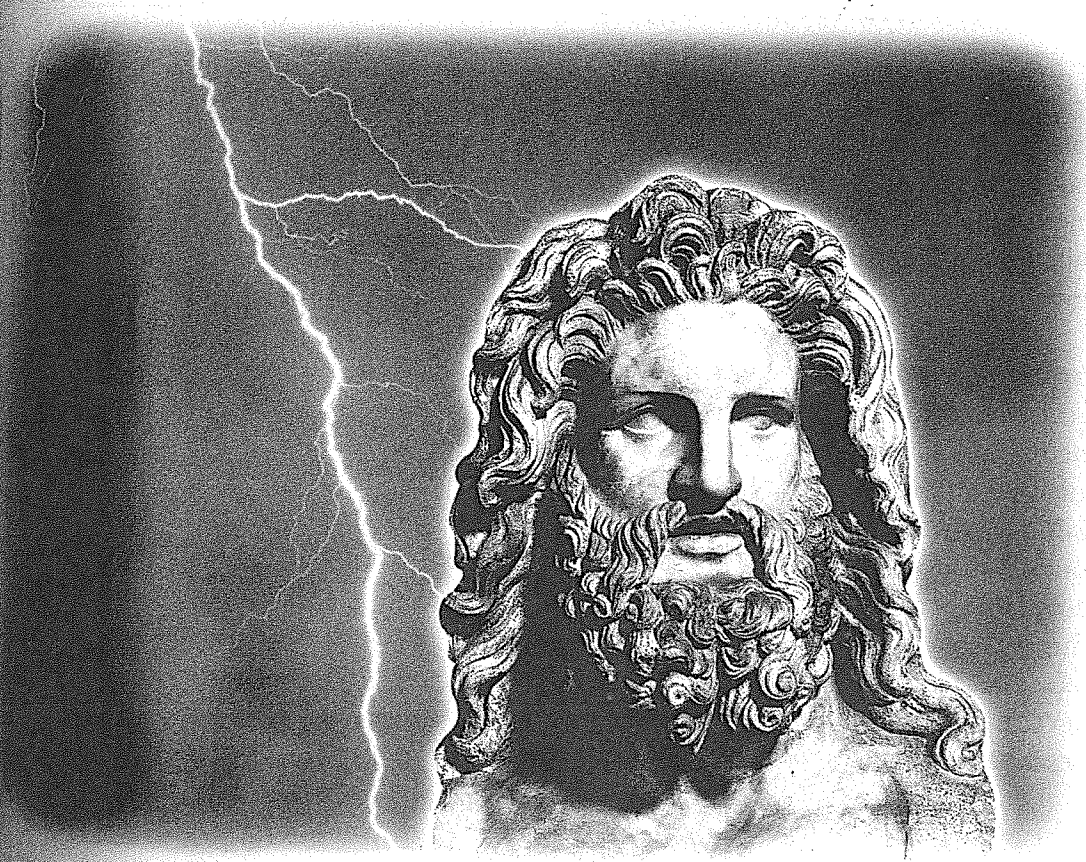
85 the rough yoke of necessity at your neck.  
And a man may say, who sees you streaming tears,  
'There is the wife of Hector, the bravest fighter  
they could field, those stallion-breaking Trojans,  
long ago when the men fought for Troy.' So he will say  
90 and the fresh grief will swell your heart once more,  
widowed, robbed of the one man strong enough  
to fight off your day of slavery.

No, no,

let the earth come piling over my dead body  
before I hear your cries, I hear you dragged away!"

95 In the same breath, shining Hector reached down  
for his son—but the boy recoiled,  
cringing against his nurse's full breast,  
screaming out at the sight of his own father,  
terrified by the flashing bronze, the horsehair crest,  
100 the great ridge of the helmet nodding, bristling terror—  
so it struck his eyes. And his loving father laughed,  
his mother laughed as well, and glorious Hector,  
quickly lifting the helmet from his head,  
set it down on the ground, fiery in the sunlight,  
105 and raising his son he kissed him, tossed him in his arms,

83 Messeis (mə-sē'yz) . . . Hyperia  
(hī'pə-rī'ə): springs in Greece.



Greek bust of Zeus. Museo Nazionale, Naples Italy. Photograph copyright © Alinari-Viollet.

lifting a prayer to Zeus and the other deathless gods:

“Zeus, all you immortals! Grant this boy, my son,  
may be like me, first in glory among the Trojans,  
strong and brave like me, and rule all Troy in power  
and one day let them say, ‘He is a better man than his  
110 father!’—

when he comes home from battle bearing the bloody gear  
of the mortal enemy he has killed in war—  
a joy to his mother’s heart.”

So Hector prayed

and placed his son in the arms of his loving wife.

115 Andromache pressed the child to her scented breast,  
smiling through her tears. Her husband noticed,  
and filled with pity now, Hector stroked her gently,  
trying to reassure her, repeating her name: “Andromache,  
dear one, why so desperate? Why so much grief for me?  
120 No man will hurl me down to Death, against my fate.

And fate? No one alive has ever escaped it,  
neither brave man nor coward, I tell you—  
it's born with us the day that we are born.  
125 So please go home and tend to your own tasks,  
the distaff and the loom, and keep the women  
working hard as well. As for the fighting,  
men will see to that, all who were born in Troy  
but I most of all.”

**125 distaff** (d'ys'tăf'): a device used  
in making wool or other fibers into  
thread.

Hector aflash in arms  
took up his horsehair-crested helmet once again.  
130 And his loving wife went home, turning, glancing  
back again and again and weeping live warm tears.  
She quickly reached the sturdy house of Hector,  
man-killing Hector,  
and found her women gathered there inside  
135 and stirred them all to a high pitch of mourning.  
So in his house they raised the dirges for the dead,  
for Hector still alive, his people were so convinced  
that never again would he come home from battle,  
never escape the Argives' rage and bloody hands.

**136 dirges** (dŭr'jĭz): funeral songs.

### Thinking Through the Literature

1. Why is Hector so determined to keep fighting?
2. What does Hector think the future holds for his wife?
3. Hector says that “no man alive has ever escaped” fate (line 121). How would you describe Hector’s attitude toward fate? Use details from Hector’s speech to his wife in lines 61–94 to support your judgment.
4. What do you learn about the **character** of Hector in the excerpt from Book 6? Consider his roles as husband, father, and warrior.
5. Review the description of an **epic hero** on page 181. In light of that description, who seems more heroic to you, Hector or Achilles? Use details from the poem to support your response.