

## Art Critique:

### The Voyage to Chi Mei Museum

#### --- The Helpless Women Under The War

#### 藝評：奇美博物館之旅－戰火下無助的女人

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#### 【中文摘要】

第一幅作品，筆者從該弑女悲劇的背景故事談起，溯源阿楚斯家族的詛咒為其遠因，而阿提密斯女神的憤怒則為近因，此乃特洛伊遠征軍出發前的一精采小插曲，於是被藝術家的豐富想像力給記錄了下來。在欣賞古典繪畫，特別是以希臘神話故事為題材的作品，若未對該典故來由有所了解，便難以得知作者可能於畫作中之精心安排、或嘗試表現出的意含。而筆者多著墨於該神話背景之考究，並兼論阿格曼儂(Agamemnon)的心理狀態，同時對畫作提出個人評析觀點，以期更加清楚、全面地認識整個圖畫的來龍始末。

第二幅則是特洛伊城主帥赫克托(Hector)與愛妻安德柔美姬(Andromache)訣別的那一刻，畫中充滿丈夫的身不由己、妻子強忍淚眼依依不捨，且預示了剛出世孩子悲慘的未來。古典繪畫一基本核心即在於「縱使人物處於強烈情緒之當下，仍需維持著畫面整體的安定和諧」，該圖表現正是此精神之典型。這兩幅作品現為台南奇美博物館收藏。

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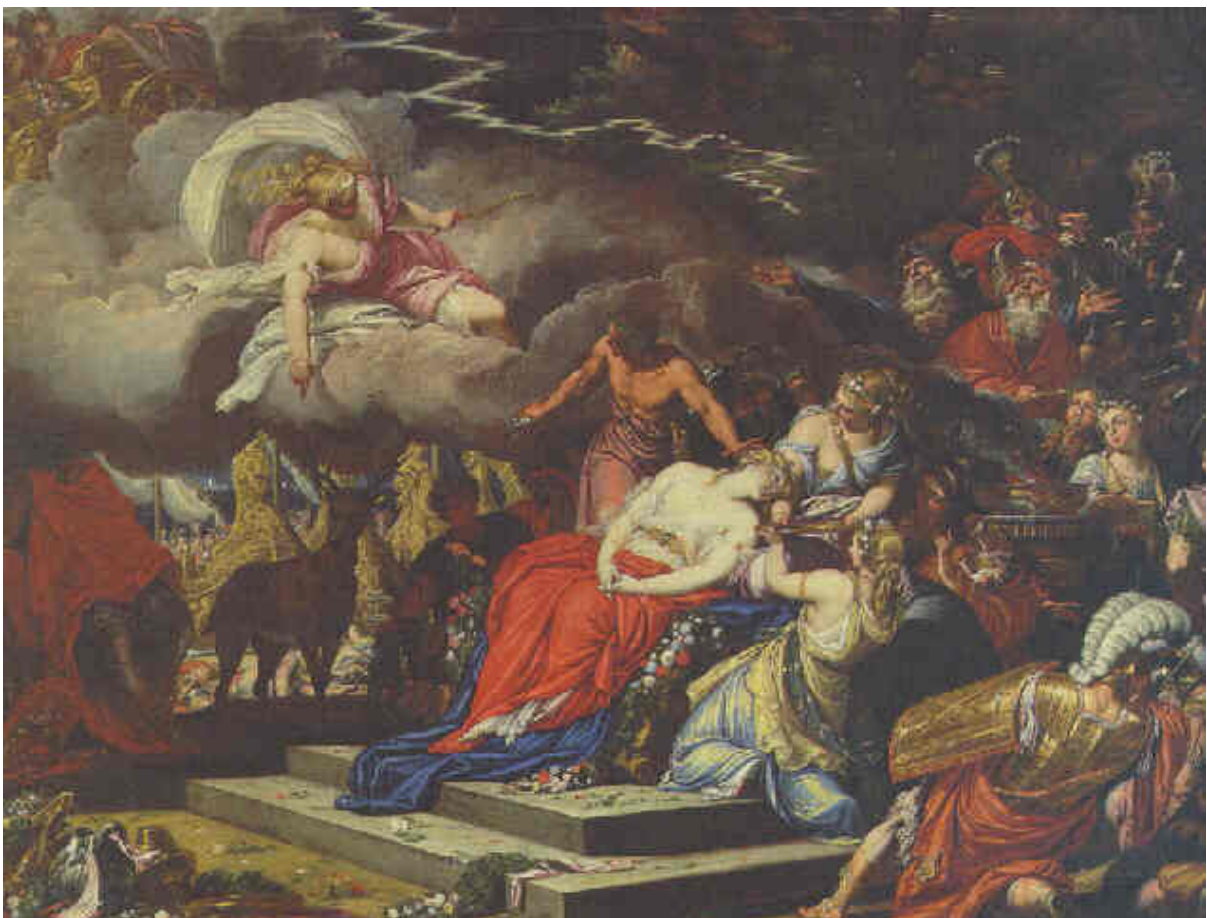
<sup>1</sup> 本稿完成於 95 年 6 月 27 日，為美藝所 吳介祥教授所開授「藝術批評」課程之要求，本人至奇美博物館參訪後回來所作之藝評研究報告。

### **The Voyage to Chi Mei Museum**

Chi Mei Museum, situated at Je-Te Town (仁德鄉), Tainan County, is a small but integral western art and cultural temple shining in southern part of the island. Found by the chairman, Wen-Long Shi, the goal of collecting private work of art, out of his personal interest, mainly centers on the classical paintings and sculptures from Renaissance to Barbizon school and early Impressionism. Because of the financial policy in Chi Mei Corp., ten percent of annual profit from the enterprise can help the Foundation acquiring a lot of rare items in the American or European markets, including major auctions worldwide. The exhibition rooms are located from the fifth through the eighth floors in the Corporation Building. The tour does give us a spiritual banquet by offering so many amazing artworks and masterpieces, in which the two menus I have savored and ruminated follow as below:

### **The Helpless Woman Under The War ---**

### **The Haunting Curse and Agamemnon's Choice**



Just like every drawing based on epic contains its long tales behind, happy ending or on the contrary, tragical denouement, one of the works that I especially notice in the gallery is The Sacrifice of Iphigenia done by Flemish painter Valentin Lefebvre (1642-1682) at about mid-seventeenth century. The story of Iphigenia can be traced back to the beginning of Trojan War, while the young maiden was the daughter of King Agamemnon and Queen Clytemnestra<sup>2</sup>, sacrificed by her father at Aulis (a port at Boeotia) to secure favorable winds for the Greek fleet in the expedition against Troy, on instructions from the prophet Calchas.<sup>3</sup> For some might be not acquainted with it all, let's give the prior reviews of the intricate contexts in the disastrous families to appreciation of the Fleming's piece.

How did it happen to the mighty king and his innocent daughter? The imprecation on the House of Atreus was actually derived from the first generation, Lydian king Tantalus, the son of Zeus and nymph Plouto, who was kind of spoiled by godsends, the ambrosia and nectar, or any blessing that mortals could hardly deserve in Olympus, should he return heavenly favor with his own boy, Pelops, segmented and boiled as a dish serving for Gods. Surely they didn't fall into the trap, but punished this ungrateful sinner into Hades. Standing in a pool, with water beneath and fruit trees around, the penalty showed that as he was about to drink, the water flowed away but soon refilled after he stood up, and so did the branches move away from his

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<sup>2</sup> This is the version which most people admit. But the other report is that Iphigenia may be the daughter of Theseus and Helen. King Theseus of Athens, infatuated by the beauty of Helen, once abducted her and held her in his power somewhere in Attica. Out of the rage, Helen's brothers Dioscuri, raised an army and came looking for her, and finally exiled Theseus. On her return to Sparta with Dioscuri, she entrusted Iphigenia to her sister Clytaemnestra, who brought her up as her own child, so that Helen could pretend that she was still a virgin. Later Clytaemnestra married Agamemnon, and Helen chose Agamemnon's brother Menelaus as husband among her many suitors. See "Clytaemnestra: Iphigenia's parentage," or "Iphigenia: First abduction of Helen, Iphigenia taken care by Clytaemnestra," Greek Mythology Link, 1997-2006, Carlos Parada, 28 June 2006 <<http://homepage.mac.com/cparada/GML/Clytaemnestra.html>>, <<http://homepage.mac.com/cparada/GML/Iphigenia.html>>.

<sup>3</sup> According to the different accounts, there might be three reasons that Artemis requests her recompense from Agamemnon: (1) He used to offend the goddess by boasting that he was superior to her in hunting skill; (2) He, or the Achaean shot the favorite pet, a doe or rabbit, of Artemis; (3) Atreus, father of Agamemnon, once told Artemis in a prayer that he would sacrifice his finest sheep to her, but they say that when a golden lamb appeared in his flocks, he was heedless of his vow. Instead, he throttled the lamb and put it in a chest for safekeeping. Artemis' wrath was inflicted on Agamemnon, the son of Atreus, who demanded the sacrifice of his daughter before she would let the Greek fleet sail to Troy. "Artemis Wrath 2", Theoi Project: Guide to Greek Mythology, 2000-2006, Aaron Atsma, 26 June 2006 <<http://www.theoi.com/Olympios/ArtemisWrath2.html>>.

intended grasp, endless hunger and thirst namely. As for his dismembered son, Gods tried to rebuild him back to life, except one shoulder, carelessly eaten by distracted Demeter out of the abduction of Persephone, which was patched with ivory allegedly.

Pelops later wooed Hippodameia, whose paternal king Oenomaus opposed any courter unless they can win in the chariot race. Many died in the unfair game, because Oenomaus' horses were sent from God-of-Wars, his father Ares. However, by the help of Poseidon's love gift, a winged quadriga to the lucky youth, and another advantage that the Pisa princess probably fell in love with the handsome lad, bribing charioteer, Myrtilus, to remove the linchpins attaching the wheels to the carriage, the result of competition finally came out soon, and the king was entangled in the reins and dragged to his death. Thereafter, Pelops killed Myrtilus by throwing him into the sea, either because the latter had tried to rape Hippodameia or because the former resent the promise for sharing half of his realm. As Myrtilus, the son of Hermes, was dying, he cursed the house of the betrayer, and the imprecation had been continually haunting the lives of his descendents, in addition to his wife (hanging herself), the bastard Chrysippus (begotten from with nymph Astioche and then killed by his step-brothers, the legal twin Atreus and Thyestes,) his sons Atreus and Thyestes (Atreus keeping the golden lamb for himself breaking his promises to Artemis at first without any payment, and secondly he slaughtered Thyestes' sons to feast their own father due to this younger brother's adultery with his wife, Aerope, while Thyestes' revengeful plan under the oracle to bear Aegisthus incestuously with his daughter Pelopia, finally avenged his sons) and his grandsons Agamemnon (Atreus' son, murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra, for one good reason is that her husband's cheating on her in the name of marrying Iphigenia to heroic Achilles, but in fact sacrificed "the apple in her eyes" 「掌上明珠」) and Aegisthus (Thyestes' son, seduced Agamemnon's queen, conspiring to retrieve his father's kingdom).

It certainly needs a detailed prolog above for us to figure out the immoral source of this family and its lengthwise background in the labyrinthian texts as a subterranean plot in relation to the motif of the victimization. In the picture, we find the scene is full of sadness, mourning and actually, horror from its tune to the countenance of each participant, for how could a

begetter does this kind of violence to his own flesh and blood, which becomes the vary topic to discuss. In Plato's *Symposium*, the debates among six addressers were concluded by Socrates, who quoted from the lesson of Diotima, the priestess/seer of Mantinea, trying to teach everyone about the real purpose that Love (Eros) drives inside us, the human beings, lies in the pursuit of "immortality":

"Of that, Socrates, you may be assured; think only of the ambition of men, and you will wonder at the senselessness of their ways, unless you consider how they are stirred by the love of an immortality of fame. They are ready to run all risks greater far than they would have for their children, and to spend money and undergo any sort of toil, and even to die, for the sake of leaving behind them a name which shall be eternal. Do you imagine that Alcestis would have died to save Admetus, or Achilles to avenge Patroclus, or your own Codrus in order to preserve the kingdom for his sons, if they had not imagined that the memory of their virtues, which still survives among us, would be immortal? Nay," she said, "I am persuaded that all men do all things, and the better they are the more they do them, in hope of the glorious fame of immortal virtue; for they desire the immortal."<sup>4</sup>

That is, to earn reputation, and leave one's good name to be carved in the stone or passed down in the minds of generations, which will last forever after the demise. Even at the cost of one's child, he is likely to do that. Before the slaying, Agamemnon's dilemmas were, to let the fleets go on in exchange for one life of his offspring, won the triumph back home, and then the guilt might be forgiven, or to keep his family dependant alive regardless of the allies whom he'd persuaded for the combined operations which are ready to launch. If he had chosen the latter, how could he have possibly accounted for such cancellation to the assembled armies from different countries? And to those rapacious potentates in other poleis who has been trying to find fault with, so they could unite as a result of his discreditable behavior to overthrow him? Suppose he had picked up the latter choice, not only would he have to face up with each condemnation and disparagement from his countrymen, but definitely have lost his dignity as a sovereign, and a proud man. However, he needs to cope only with one person, his possessive

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<sup>4</sup> Jowett, Benjamin. *The Dialogues of Plato: Volume I*. Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1997. 579.

wife, the daughter's mother, when he goes the former way, which must be relatively easier in that critical circumstance. Undoubtedly he should have fought with the inner conflicts, agonizingly and reluctantly which we can image, but as we know, he was very clear in mind that he himself at that point, was "an involuntary soldier alike in the chess, unable to retreat but can only advance" (「過河卒子」) and, of no return.

Even so, we may never forget that in the Chinese adage, there is one saying: "Vicious as a tigress can be, she never eats her own cubs."<sup>5</sup>(「虎毒不食子」) It's the human and also animal nature. Thus those who should eliminate their children for his/her own sake are worse than the beasts. Here, it's truly a good opportunity for such a well-known commander of the troops and also the ruler of Argos and Mycenae to show his wisdom in time, how he can maneuver adequately in an unpredictable quandary. He didn't walk out of the mortal limitation, to work it out in the goddess' trial, nor even think up the third possibility, but opted for the former choice. Hence his Trojan victory kept the record in history while behind the glorious pages marked the inerasable bloodstain ---the undeniable crime--- to murder his own daughter.

The truth is, two reasons could be both egoistic. Of course, to fight for a woman, Sparta queen would be a righteous ground ostensibly. Yet the mobilization of countless people and the warfare over a decade must have stronger intention than for merely a beauty Helen, which we really doubt. Is it not, like the Mantenia prophetess foresaw, that men are inherent in aspiring after fortune, power, or fame? Beyond the avidity for everlasting possession of the honor and name, the cruelty and great panic that the naïve young lass had suffered before the last breath and the incapability of believing that her father, under the pretense of a marriage, should send her to the guillotine, virtually, may be unimaginable to us. In Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Dream of Fair Women*, Iphigenia is represented as thus describing her feelings at the moment of sacrifice:

‘I was cut off from hope in that sad place,  
Which men call'd Aulis in those iron years:  
My father held his hand upon his face;

<sup>5</sup> Yuan, Haiwang. "Chinese Proverbs," *China*, June 14, 2006, Western Kentucky U, 27 June 2006 <<http://www.wku.edu/~yuanh/China/proverbs/v.html>>.

I, blinded with my tears,'

Still strove to speak: 'my voice was thick with sighs

As in a dream. Dimly I could descry

The stern black-bearded kings, with wolfish eyes

Waiting to see me die.'

'The high masts flicker'd as they lay afloat;

The crowds, the temples, waver'd, and the shore;

The bright death quiver'd at the victim's throat;

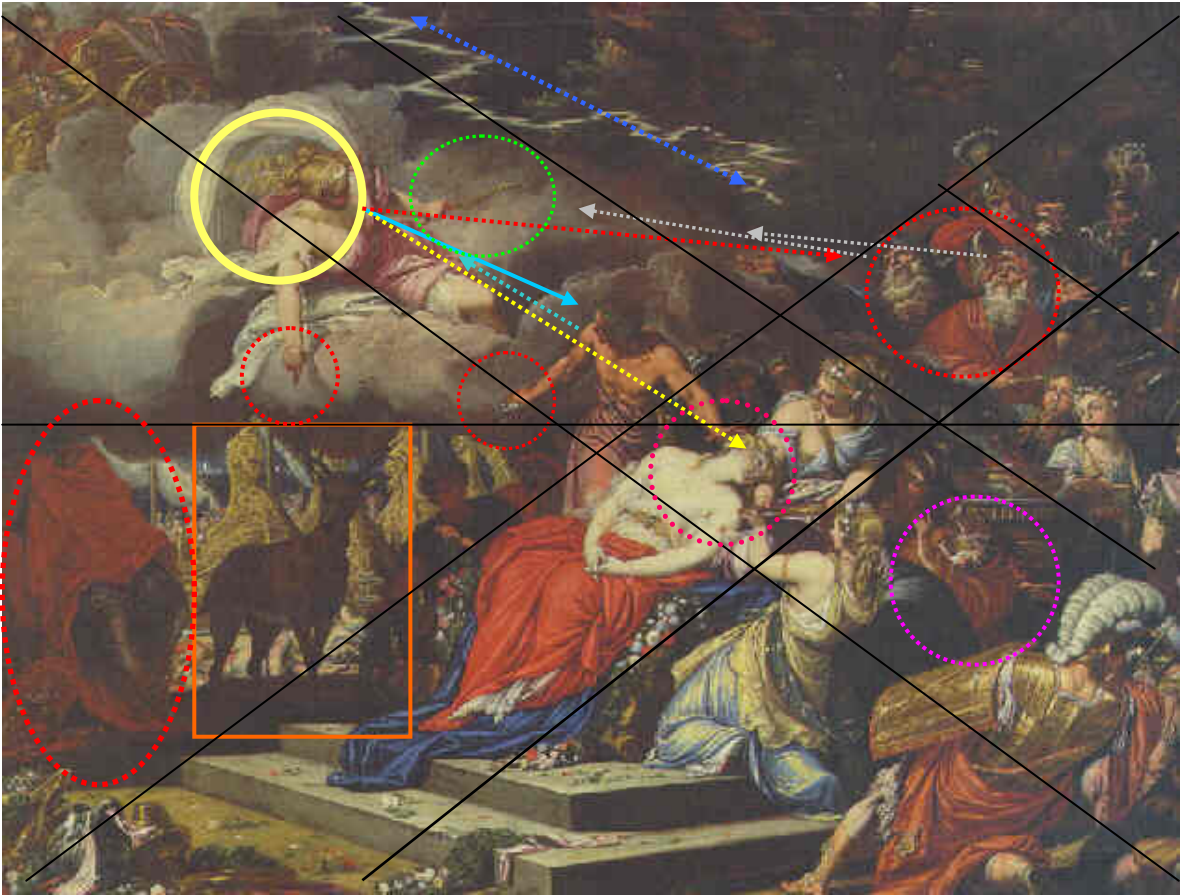
Touch'd; and I knew no more.'<sup>6</sup>

By the artist's marvelous imagination and ingenious disposition in the picture, the Homeric poem is vividly presented just in front of our eyes. On the spot everybody, the warriors or the royals, lament so bitterly over the dying girl, while the hunting goddess, the instigator throughout the whole course, emerges herself in the shroud of the darkened clouds and gestures simply like the God in Creation of the Sun and the Moon by Michelangelo, that archetype in the ceiling painting at The Sistine Chapel. With her left hand holding a symbolic bow, her right hand seems to point at the ships impatiently awaiting, or the deer in the shade, reputedly as her preparing substitute? Her eyesight contacts exactly with the headsman, whose right hand seizing the dagger, approaching the victim and about to carry out the mandate. The sullen Deity comes right to claim her sacrifice, the 'selected sheep' which the grandfather reneged but she never forget. Her silky-white chiton is wrapped with the fluttering himation behind her blowing in the shape of the Moon, resplendently as her very emblem. The weird bolt of lightning crosses over the clouds, leading to the two bearded elders, priests apparently who seem to anticipate for the merciful treatment and better result after the ritual. The one in red, supposedly Calchas, gazes at Artemis in awe, appearing in anxiety whether his soothsaying is correct. The spotlight illuminates, despite two perhaps irrelevant maidservants, upon our heroine in the

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<sup>6</sup> Tennyson, Alfred. "A Dream of Fair Women," A Collection of Poems by Alfred Tennyson. Ed. Christopher Ricks, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1972). The Complete Poetical Works of Tennyson. Ed. W.J. Rolfe, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1898). Alfred Lord Tennyson's Poetry, March 1998, Webstats4U.com., 27 June 2006 < <http://home.att.net/%7ETennysonPoetry/dfw.htm>>.

center altar. Hopeless Iphigenia, almost perishes away, her pale skin like the dead, which has she fainted, or in despair so close to the last moment of her end, maybe on the other hand, the relief from the misfortune-befogged household. The once desperate mother, now totally collapsed with her face covered, couldn't bear watching the terrified and heart-smashed sight while the shameful and blameful father hides himself from the light, head-cloaked as obscurely at the left bottom corner.

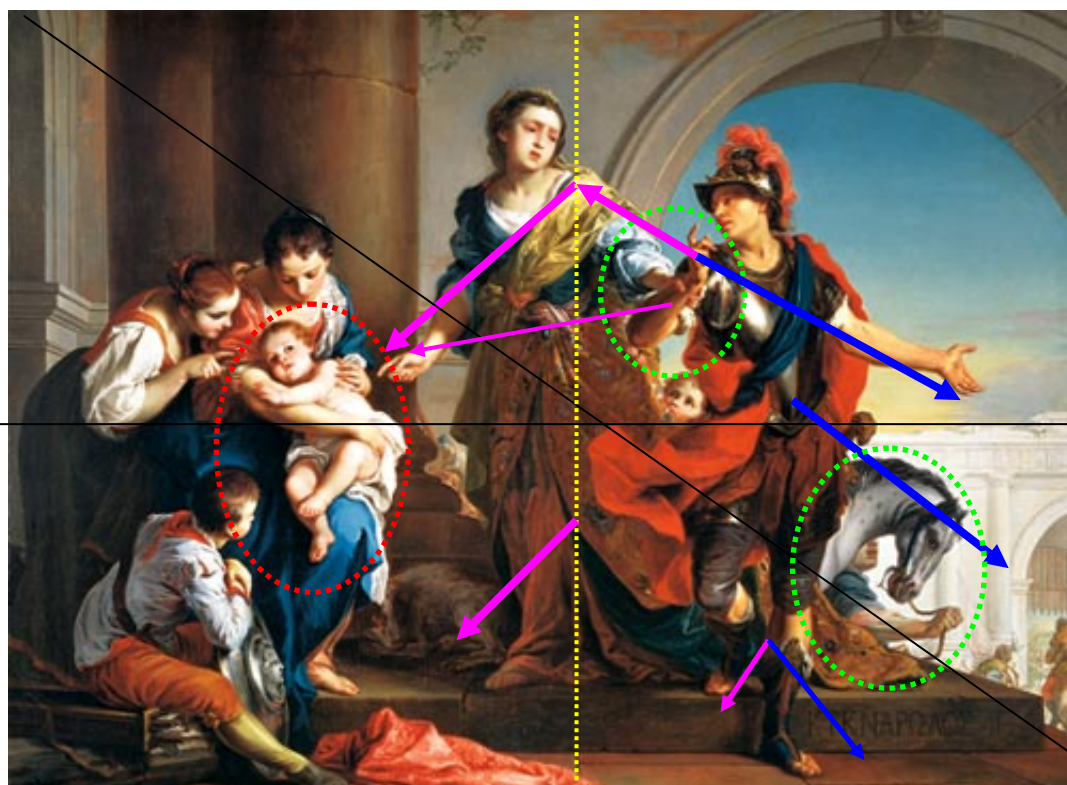




In Euripides' Iphigenia At Aulis (circa 410 B.C.), the playwright makes the full description of how the main roles were involved and acted themselves in the mishap. Though it may be dramatized by extracting from simply one section in Greek mythology, the play would be second to none when it becomes another successful work of art, and also may we view it to be the pre-episode after his predecessor Aeschylus' masterwork Agamemnon. Surely in other version(s), according to some accounts, Iphigenia was saved by Artemis in replace of a deer at altar, and brought the girl to the land of the Taurians (today the Crimea) on the shore of the Unfriendly Sea (Black Sea), making her a priestess in her shrine. Aside from the follow-up development, the dramatic story itself have been told again and again in the Western art history, and till today, still it is an inspiration not only being performed in the stage but also brushed in the paints repeatedly by different artists in different times. It seems that this sort of theme, like the passion of the scapegoat, in the hue similar to an image of martyr, can possibly arouse the inner emotions, deeply and immensely, both for the creators a motivation to create and for the observer a stimulation to think.

### The Helpless Woman Under the War ---

#### Andromache's Tears



The other representative 'helpless woman' can be found in Hector's Farewell to

Andromache at the Scoeian Gate done by Giambettino Cignaroli (1706-1770) at mid Eighteen century. The faithful wife, as her shedding eyes full of beads, tried to dissuade her beloved from accepting Achilles' challenge, for as a woman's sixth sense, she has discerned that her husband would never come back this time. She attempted to detain him, indicating that their newborn baby Astyanax was still in need of his father. Two kinds of opposite forces work in counterbalance amid the seemingly serene ambiance. That is, to hide or suppress the strong emotions under the form of implicative manners, the typifying style of neoclassicism. While comparing with the left part, the rejoycing maids and the young servant, the crucial persona, as the wailing Adromache, standing in the middle line, pulling inward the outgoing Hector at the right, tells us that the subject, ironically by a harmonious form, is but the parting forever. Furthermore, we could detect a tinge of unspoken fright within the neonate's eyes, as if he had known his eventual fate. In the end of Euripides' another renowned script The Trojan Women (circa 415 B.C.), the infant's destiny was doomed by a Greek soldier hurling down from the tower.

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