

Although some scholars (e.g. Lloyd 1994, Mossman 1996, Hall 1997, Allan 2000, Dué 2006) have recognized that Euripides' *Andromache* is formally structured as a tragedy of return, the scant critical attention that has been given to the play's *nostos* theme has focused on the hero Neoptolemus (see esp. Mossman 1996). This focus is understandable since it is indeed the drawn out expectation and rather macabre fulfillment of Neoptolemus's return that gives *Andromache* the overall coherence it possesses as a *nostos* tragedy. However, this paper takes Neoptolemus's grandfather, Peleus, as its focus, for Peleus can be seen as a *nostos* hero in his own right. Not only does Peleus's entrance midway through the play substitute for the expected return of Neoptolemus, but the play itself is set in a locale that Peleus once called home, making his entrance not just a substitutive but in fact a genuine *nostos*.

If we take Peleus as an alternative *nostos* hero, then the first part of this notoriously tripartite play can be seen as the initial installment in the play's repeated engagement with the *nostos* theme. In the course of his return, Peleus drives away Menelaus (Neoptolemus's intrusive father-in-law), threatens to banish Hermione (Neoptolemus's new wife), and rescues Andromache and her child (Neoptolemus's slave-concubine and son). I argue that this exciting—even melodramatic—*nostos* enacts a fantasy of return that would resonate quite powerfully with the Athenian male audience. For, much like the finale of the *Odyssey* and the first part of Euripides' *Herakles*, the enactment of Peleus's *nostos* promotes a reassuring negotiation of male anxieties surrounding the gendered structure of authority in the *oikos*. But this particular staging of the *nostos* fantasy is undermined by a number of incongruous elements, not least of which are Peleus's advanced age, the semi-comical quality of the rescue scene, and the fact that the woman and child he rescues are not his own wife and son but rather his grandson's slave-concubine and *nothos*.

The goal of the paper, then, is to draw attention to Euripides' ambivalent presentation of Peleus's *nostos*—as simultaneously heroic and comical—and to suggest that the cause of this ambivalence is Euripides' commitment in the *Andromache* to critiquing the *nostos* fantasy that is so prevalent in Greek literature and culture. As I suggest in conclusion, Euripides stages this felicitous but ultimately ambivalent version of the *nostos* fantasy in the first part of the play only in order to collapse that fantasy completely in the third part, when Neoptolemus is returned home as a corpse and Peleus is reduced from rejuvenated, semi-comical hero to tragically bereft old man.

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