

The Helen Episode and the Myth of Scylla: Two Arguments for Vergilian Authorship

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1. *Aeneid* 2.567-587

Iamque adeo super unus eram, cum limina Vestae
seruantem et tacitam secreta in sede latentem
Tyndarida aspicio; dant claram incendia lucem
erranti passimque oculos per cuncta ferenti. 2.570
illa sibi infestos euersa ob Pergama Teucros
et Danaum poenam et deserti coniugis iras
praemetuens, Troiae et patriae communis Erinys,
abdiderat sese atque aris inuisa sedebat.
exarsere ignes animo; subit ira cadentem 2.575
ulcisci patriam et sceleratas sumere poenas.
'scilicet haec Spartam incolumis patriasque Mycenae
aspiciet, partoque ibit regina triumpho?
coniugiumque domumque patris natosque uidebit
Iliadum turba et Phrygiis comitata ministris? 2.580
occiderit ferro Priamus? Troia arserit igni?
Dardanium totiens sudarit sanguine litus?
non ita. namque etsi nullum memorabile nomen
feminea in poena est, habet haec uictoria laudem;
extinxisse nefas tamen et sumpsisse merentis 2.585
laudabor poenas, animumque explesse iuuabit
ultricis †famam et cineres satiasset meorum.'

Now that I was alone, I caught sight of the daughter of Tyndareus keeping watch on the doors of the temple of Vesta, where she was staying quietly in hiding. The fires gave a bright light and I was gazing all around me wherever I went. This Erinys for both Troy and her homeland was afraid of the Trojans, who hated her for the overthrow of Pergamum. She was afraid the Greeks would punish her and afraid of the wrath of the husband she had deserted, so, hated by all, she had gone into hiding and was sitting there at the altar. The fire of passion blazed up in my heart and I longed in my anger to avenge my homeland even as it fell and to exact the penalty for her crimes. 'So this woman will live to set eyes on Sparta and her native Mycenae again and walk as queen in the triumph she has won? Will she see her husband, her father's home and her children, and be attended by women of Troy and Phrygian slaves, while Priam lies dead by the sword, Troy has been put to the flames and the shores of the land of Dardanus have sweated so much blood? This will not be.

Although there is no fame worth remembering to be won by punishing a woman and such a victory wins no praise, nevertheless I *shall* win praise for blotting out this evil and exacting punishment which is richly deserved. I shall also take pleasure in feeding the flames of vengeance and appeasing the ashes of my people.'

[translation by D. West, modified]

2. *Aeneid* 6.513-530

namque ut supremam falsa **inter gaudia noctem**
egerimus, nosti: et nimium meminisse necesse est.
cum fatalis equus saltu super ardua uenit 6.515
Pergama et armatum peditem grauis attulit aluo,
illa chorum simulans euhantis orgia circum
ducebat Phrygias; flammam media ipsa tenebat
ingentem et summa Danaos ex arce uocabat.
tum me confectum curis somnoque grauatum 6.520
infelix habuit thalamus, pressitque iacentem
dulcis et alta quies placidaeque simillima morti.
egregia interea coniunx arma omnia tectis
emouet, et **fidum capiti subduxerat ensem**:
intra tecta uocat Menelaum et limina pandit, 6.525
scilicet id magnum sperans fore **munus amanti**,
et famam exstingui ueterum sic posse malorum.
quid moror? inrumpunt thalamo, comes additus una
hortator scelerum Aeolides. di, talia Graeis
instaurate, pio si poenas ore reposco. 6.530

You know how we spent that last night in false joy. It is our lot to remember it only too well. When the horse, heavy with the brood of armed men in its belly, leapt over the high walls of Pergamum, Helen was pretending to be worshipping Bacchus, leading the women of Phrygia around the city, dancing and shrieking their ritual cries. There she was in the middle of them with a huge torch, signalling to the Greeks from the top of the citadel. Meanwhile, in our accursed bed, worn out by all I had suffered, I sunk in a sleep that was sweet and deep and most like death. Then this excellent wife of mine moves all my arms out of the house and sneaks my trusty sword from beneath my head. She calls in Menelaus and throws open the doors, hoping no doubt that this might make a grand gift for her lover and the memory of her past evils could be thus wiped out. Why do I linger? They burst into the room, taking with them the exhorter of crimes, Aeolus' scion. Dear gods, if I ask with a pious mouth, punish the Greeks, punish them in kind!

[translation by D. West, modified]

3. H-P. Stahl. 1981. "Aeneas - an 'Unheroic Hero?'" *Arethusa* 14: 157-77. Helen's fear of Menelaus' wrath (*praemetuens* 2.573) does not exclude an earlier (2.310f.: *Deiphobi ... domus*) cooperation with Menelaus and Ulysses (6.525ff., or with the Greeks in general, 6.517ff.), from hope (*sperans* 6.526) to gain a point with her former husband. [176]

4. R. O. A. M. Lyne. 1987. *Further Voices in Vergil's Aeneid*. Oxford.

A frequent phenomenon [within dense and allusive poetry like Vergil's] is 'implicit myth'. Poets can and do assume great familiarity in their readers with myths and fables; and they often expect readers to sense a myth or fable behind a text with the aid of minimal explicit reference - ('signal')... [139]

5. *Georgics* 1.404-9

apparet liquido sublimis in aëre Nisus,
et pro purpureo poenas dat Scylla capillo:
quacumque illa leuem fugiens secat aethera pennis,
ecce inimicus atrox magno stridore per auras
insequitur Nisus; qua se fert Nisus ad auras,
illa leuem fugiens raptim secat aethera pennis.

High in the bright skies Nisus comes into view, and Scylla pays the price for his lock of purple hair. Wherever she flees, splitting the light ether with her wings, look! there is Nisus, her fierce foe, in shrill pursuit through the breezes. Where in the breezes Nisus takes himself, she splits the light ether with her wings in hasty flight.

6. *Aeneid* 2.567-598

[Iamque adeo super unus eram, cum limina Vestae
seruantem et tacitam secreta in sede latentem
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erranti passimque oculos per cuncta ferenti. 2.570
illa sibi infestos euersa ob Pergama Teucros
et Danaum poenam et **deserti coniugis iras**
praemetuens, Troiae et **patriae** communis Erinys,
abdiderat sese atque aris inuisa sedebat.
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exstinxisse nefas tamen et sumpsisse **merentis** 2.585
laudabor poenas, animumque explesse iuuabit
ultricies †famam et cineres satiasset meorum.'
talia iactabam et **furiata** mente ferebar,]
cum mihi se, non ante oculis tam clara, uidendam
obtulit et pura per noctem in luce refulsit 2.590
alma **parens**, **confessa deam** qualisque uideri
caelicolis et quanta solet, dextraque prehensum
continuit roseoque haec insuper addidit **ore**:
'**nate**, quis indomitas tantus dolor excitat **iras**?
quid **furis**? aut quonam nostri tibi cura recessit? 2.595
non prius aspicias ubi fessum aetate **parentem**
liqueris Anchisen, **superet coniunx**ne Creusa
Ascaniusque puer?

7. Ovid, *Met.* 8.104-133

Scylla freto postquam deductas nare carinas
nec praestare ducem **sceleris** sibi praemia **vidit**, 8.105
consumptis precibus violentam transit in iram
intendensque manus passis **furibunda** capillis
'quo fugis' exclamat '**meritorum** auctore **relicta**,
o **patriae** praelate meae, praelate **parenti**?
quo fugis immitis, cuius **victoria** nostrum 8.110
et **scelus** et **meritum** est? nec te **data** munera, nec te
noster amor movit, nec quod spes omnis in unum
te mea congesta est? nam quo **deserta** revertar?
in **patriam**? **superata** iacet! sed finge manere:
prodizione mea clausa est mihi! **patriis** ad **ora**? 8.115
quem tibi donavi? cives odere **merentem**,
finitimi exemplum **metuunt**: obstruximus orbem
terrarum, nobis ut Crete sola pateret.
hac quoque si prohibes et nos, ingrata, **relinquis**,
non genetrix Europa tibi est sed inhospita Syrtis, 8.120
Armeniae tigres austroque agitata Charybdis.
nec Iove tu **natus** nec mater imagine tauri
ducta tua est: (generis falsa est ea fabula); verus,
[et ferus et captus nullius amore iuvencae]
qui te progenuit, taurus fuit. exige **poenas**, 8.125
Nise **pater**! gaudete malis modo prodita nostris,
moenia! nam, **fateor**, **merui** et sum digna perire.
sed tamen ex illis aliquis quos impia laesi
me perimat. cur qui vicisti crimine nostro
insequeris crimen? **scelus** hoc **patriae**que patrique est, 8.130
officium tibi sit. te vere **coniuge** digna est,
quae torvum ligno decepit adultera taurum
discordemque utero fetum tulit.

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