

Euripides' *Hippolytus* in *Aeneid* IV

This paper argues for an extended program in Book IV of Vergil's *Aeneid* that alludes to the extant version of Euripides' *Hippolytus*. In the first part of the paper, I show that in the characters of Phaedra and her nurse Euripides dramatizes the characters of Virtue and Vice from the anecdote about Heracles attributed the sophist Prodicus and preserved by Xenophon (*Mem.* 2.1.21-34). In the second I argue that in *Aeneid* IV Vergil mobilizes both the tragedy and its sophistic source in his treatment of Dido, Aeneas, and Anna in an effort to exonerate the queen of culpability in her death and therefore heighten the tragic effect of the episode. I follow the approach of Panoussi (2002), who argues for an extended allusive program in the *Aeneid* that imbues the characters of Dido and Turnus with the virtues characteristic of both Sophocles' Ajax and that of his Homeric source material; she points out that these "heroic ideals" are qualities absent from the empire which the epic's hero will establish (Panoussi 2002, 115). My argument that Vergil also alludes in Book IV to the *Hippolytus* and its source material demonstrates the depth and scope of this tragic effect, while showing Vergil's profound debt to Greek tragedy.

In the first part of my paper I show that Euripides maps onto the debate he stages between Phaedra and her nurse the ethical alignment of Prodicus' Virtue and Vice. It is this dichotomy between august deeds and the reputation they render on the one hand, and unbridled sensual indulgence on the other, that is at work in the conflict between Phaedra and her nurse in *Hippolytus*. Phaedra's principal concern is her reputation and the effect it will have on that of her sons; this she intends to protect by concealing her faults and publicizing her good deeds, including her suicide. The nurse, meanwhile, confronts

Phaedra's plan with a sophistic speech that argues that the best possible course of action is for Phaedra to give in to her sexual desire for Hippolytus, claiming that such indulgences are commonplace and therefore licit; she substitutes for Phaedra's ethic of absolute virtue one based on appetite. Euripides, therefore, models Phaedra's nurse after Vice.

In the second part of my paper I point out a system of allusions in the text of *Aeneid* IV that aligns Dido and Aeneas with their tragic counterparts, Phaedra and Hippolytus. On the most fundamental level, Phaedra and Dido are aligned by both their victimization at the hands of Aphrodite/Venus, which each characterizes as a wound, and by the love goddess' willful apathy for their suffering. Multiple references to hunting, meanwhile, cast Aeneas as a Hippolytus figure as well as allude to scenes in Euripides play.

Dido's sister Anna too fits into the *Hippolytus* schema, since it is she that, like Phaedra's nurse, helps to advise Dido on the best course of action in coping with her sudden and apparently illicit erotic affliction. However, unlike the nurse or Vice who are willing to sacrifice ethical principles for expediency, Anna instead appeals to Dido's civic preoccupation. Anna assuages Dido's anxieties over her late husband by insisting the dead have no interest in the living and advises her to consider a bond with the expatriated Trojans a political advantage and so a reasonably just course of action (*Aen.* IV. 31-53). In exchanging indulgent expediency for civic responsibility, Vergil adapts the Vice-like advisor character and inverts it to render its advice virtuous, despite its catastrophic effect. Civic duty is the only basis on which Dido will allow herself to abandon her celibacy, and so her indulgence is as virtuous as Anna's advice since it

corresponds by analogy to Phaedra's concern for her children's reputation. With Dido exonerated, the tragic impact of her death at the hand of the gods and its necessity for the foundation of Rome is augmented.

Bibliography

Panoussi, Vassiliki. 2002. April 1. "Vergil's Ajax: Allusion, Tragedy, and Heroic Identity in the *Aeneid*." *Classical Antiquity* 21 1 (April 1): 95–134.