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

In 2.567-588 of many editions of Vergil's *Aeneid* - known as the Helen Episode (HE) - Aeneas narrates how, amid the pandemonium of Troy's sacking, he spies Helen (fearfully hiding from the wrath of Menelaus and the hatred of both sides) and becomes incensed enough to deliberate her murder. The episode's irregular transmission has given rise to much scholarly debate concerning its authorship. Prominent arguments against the HE's authenticity include its purported incompatibility with Deiphobus' words at 6.513-529 (Servius, Horsfall 2008: 556, etc.) and the lack of references to the episode before Servius (most notably, Goold 1970: 162-5). In regard to Deiphobus' report - that on the night Aeneas last saw her, Helen had treacherously summoned the Greeks, stolen his weapons as a gift to Menelaus, termed her *amanti* (6.526), and caused Deiphobus' destruction - Stahl points out that "Helen's fear of Menelaus' wrath (*praemetuens* 2.573) does not exclude an earlier ... cooperation with Menelaus ... from hope (*sperans* 6.526) to gain a point with her former husband" (1981: 176). As for the second argument, possible echoes of the HE have been observed in Lucan and Horace (Austin 1961: 196; Bruere 1964; Basto 1984).

My aim is to boost both defences of the HE's authenticity by looking at a heretofore undetected echo of the myth of Scylla (daughter of Nisus king of Megara) which connects the HE with Deiphobus' narrative and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8.6-151). First attested in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* (v. 613-622 contain a partial account), the myth involves Scylla's removal of her father's life-protecting lock of hair as he sleeps, which she the gives to Minos, her beloved, who also happens to be besieging Megara. Once the city falls, however, Minos reviles Scylla for her treachery, and she ends up alone, hated by both sides. Many points of this story are echoed in the aforementioned reports of Aeneas and Deiphobus concerning Helen. Moreover, recognition of

the *Aeneid*'s absorption of this mythic model sheds light on Deiphobus' odd declaration that Helen had removed his trusty sword from underneath his head (*fidum capiti subduxerat ensem*, 6.524) as he slept. For it makes little sense for Deiphobus to sleep with a weapon, overjoyed as he was (*gaudia*, 6.513) that the Greeks had gone and Troy was at last free from danger. Vergil's predilection for references to Crete and certain links between the Homeric Helen and Scylla also lend support to the *Aeneid*' utilizing the myth of latter. For instance, Scylla's very name (female puppy) and Aeschylus' play on it (κυνόφρων, 621) can be connected with Helen's characterization of herself as dog-like (κυνὸς, *Il*. 6.344, κυνώπιδος, *Od*. 4.145). And since the allusion spans both the HE and Deiphobus' report - in effect, uniting them on a narrative level (Deiphobus' words echoing the initial part of Scylla's story, the HE its conclusion) - it offers a new challenge to claims of incongruity between the two passages.

Furthermore, I will argue that an intertextual relationship connects the HE and Ovid's rendition of Scylla's myth in his *Metamorphoses*, since a close examination of the two texts reveals substantial structural and narrative similarities alongside numerous lexical parallels. For instance, both texts present characters growing violently angry and, in a passionate monologue, reviling the individuals they deem responsible for their misfortunes and the downfall of their fatherlands. Both Scylla and Aeneas (either literately or figuratively) see the objects of their hate returning unscathed whence they had come, and, to varying degrees, both are presented as forsaking their families for the sake of an overwhelming passion. Moreover, in his account of Scylla's miserable predicament and reaction (8.105-32) Ovid employs seventeen significant words found in the description of Helen's situation and the reactions it inspires (*Aen.* 2.567-600): *scelus, ira, manus, furio, mereo, patria, parens, victoria, desertus, supero, pater, (prae)metuo, (re)linquere, natus, poena, (con)fateor, coniunx*. In fact, *patria* occurs three times in each

passage, the first two forms being identical: *patriae*, *patriam* (*Met.* 8.110 & 115, *Aen.* 2.583 & 586). The Ovidian question *nec te noster amor movit* (8.113) resembles the Vergilian *quonam nostri tibi cura recessit?* (2.595). Drawing on these and other illustrations, I propose to show that Ovid may have used the HE as a literary model and that this likely familiarity of his with the episode, in turn, considerably increases the likelihood of its authenticity.

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