

Dying like a Woman: Euripides' Polyxena as Exemplum between Philo and Clement of Alexandria

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THE EMPEROR MARCUS AURELIUS observed that the rational soul must be prepared for separation from the body, and must face this with self-determination and dignity (11.3). This should not be undertaken, however, he insists, “as the Christians.” In contrast to them, the soul must welcome its departure, “not as open defiance” (μη̄ κατὰ ψιλὴν παράταξι), but rather “untragically” (ἀτραγώδως). The emperor’s insinuation that Christian martyrs die “tragically” is not entirely without justification. Already around 50 CE, the apostle Paul had asserted that God displayed his and his fellow apostles’ condemnation to death as “a theater for the cosmos” (θέατρον τῷ κόσμῳ, 1 Cor 4:9), and in the subsequent decades and centuries numerous Christians would be put to death in public spectacles. The fate of the celebrated martyr Perpetua, executed about two decades after the reign of Marcus Aurelius, was depicted in an unmistakably theatrical manner, as the narrator borrowed a gesture from Polyxena in Euripides’ *Hecuba*. Like her tragic counterpart, while falling under a violent blow, Perpetua carefully arranges her garment in a final (improbable) act of modesty: “she restored her tunic, which had fallen from her side, as a covering for her thigh, more mindful of modesty than of pain” (*tunicam a latere discissam ad uelamentum femoris reduxit, pudoris potius memor quam doloris, Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 20.4, cf. Eur. *Hec.* 568–570).¹ That the Christian author alludes

¹ Ed. J. Amat (Paris 1996). Translations throughout are mine.

to this famous dramatic scene is well known and has occasioned frequent comment.² Insufficient attention, however, has been paid to the wider reception history of the *Hecuba* as literary background for the *Passio*'s mimetic gesture toward the tragedy. This study traces the fate of the heroine through the reception of the *Hecuba* as a means of discerning the how the tragedy came to function as a model for martyrdom. Polyxena was a popular figure in ancient ethical discourse, cited as an exemplum, on the one hand, of heroic (masculine) courage and, on the other, of feminine purity. For the purposes of this study, the applications of her death by Philo and Clement of Alexandria are particularly relevant, as each deploys her as a gendered paradigm of virtue but in strikingly different directions. Philo views moral and spiritual advancement as a distinctly masculine achievement, and thus Polyxena's courage in death serves as a model for his male readers. By contrast, Clement is preoccupied with eroticism, and thus he finds in Polyxena's modest collapse a prototype for the Christian wife. These paradoxical appropriations of the tragedy reflect a broader literary milieu which was variously fixated on the maiden's gender. Through an analysis of these two writers, this study contends that the reception of classical tragedy remained a dynamic site through which diverse readers, including Jews and Christians, constructed their religious and ethical ideals. Before investigating them in turn, however, I briefly comment on the play itself, observing the ways in which it problematizes the relationship between gender and heroic virtue.

² R. Braun, "‘Honeste cadere’: un topos d'hagiographie antique," *Bulletin du Centre de romanistique et de latinité tardive* 1 (1983) 1–12, esp. 2–4; P. Habermehl, *Perpetua und der Ägypter oder Bilder des Bösen im frühen afrikanischen Christentum*² (Berlin 2004) 226–227; T. J. Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (Oxford 2012) 346–347; J. N. Bremmer, "Felicitas: The Martyrdom of a Young African Woman," in J. N. Bremmer and M. Formisano (eds.), *Perpetua's Passions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (Oxford 2012) 35–53, at 48; D. Konstan, "Perpetua's Martyrdom and the Metamorphosis of Narrative," in *Perpetua's Passions* 291–299, at 299 n.15 (with qualifications).

1. Polyxena on (and off) the Athenian stage

The *Hecuba* was first performed in the late 420s during the Peloponnesian War and, like the *Troades* and *Andromache*, it is set in the aftermath of the Trojan War, vividly portraying the fate of the captive women.³ In the prologue, the ghost of Hecuba's son Polydorus informs the audience that Achilles' ghost had appeared to the Greeks and insisted that Polyxena, the Trojan princess, be sacrificed as a prize on his tomb or he would continue to thwart their travel homeward (*Hec.* 35–39). The first half of the play, thereafter, concerns the sacrifice of the maiden, which is followed in the second half by Hecuba's revenge upon the Polymestor, the treacherous murderer of her son.⁴ Despite her mother's desperate pleas, the decision for her sacrifice cannot be overturned. Polyxena, on the other hand, accepts her fate with courage and gracefulness, desiring death over slavery (346–349, 547–552).⁵ The willingness with which Polyxena offers herself for sacrifice and the distinctive manner of her death inspired admiration throughout antiquity. These features may well have been Euripidean inno-

³ Among works on the *Hecuba* see esp. S. G. Daitz, "Concepts of Freedom and Slavery in Euripides' *Hecuba*," *Hermes* 99 (1971) 217–226; N. Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1987) 56–60; C. Segal, "Violence and Other: Greek, Female and Barbarian in Euripides' *Hecuba*," *TAPA* 120 (1990) 109–131; C. Collard, *Euripides: Hecuba with Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Warminster 1991); J. Mossman, *Wild Justice: A Study of Euripides' Hecuba*² (Bristol 1999); K. Matthiessen, *Euripides, Hecuba: Edition und Kommentar* (Berlin 2010). On the play's ancient reception see M. Heath, "'Jure principem locum tenet': Euripides' *Hecuba*," *BICS* 34 (1987) 40–68, esp. 40–43; A. J. Quiroga Puertas, "*Hecuba* Revisited: Euripidean Echoes in Libanius *Or.* 22.22," *GRBS* 54 (2014) 69–86.

⁴ The drama's unity (or disunity) has occasioned much discussion; but, for the purposes of the present study, the fate of Polyxena in the first half is most relevant. For a defense of thematic unity see Segal, *TAPA* 120 (1990) 109–131.

⁵ On the peculiarity of Polyxena's choice of death in the *Hecuba* see R. Scodel, "The Captive's Dilemma: Sexual Acquiescence in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Troades*," *HSCP* 98 (1998) 137–154, esp. 144–145.

vations, although, in the absence of pre-Euripidean literary sources for the death of Polyxena, this is impossible to establish with confidence.⁶ In the earliest extant visual representation—a famous sixth-century Attic black-figure vase, now in the British Museum (*ABV* 97.27)—Polyxena is depicted as about to be sacrificed while bound and carried horizontally by three soldiers at the altar.⁷ Similarly, on a sarcophagus discovered in 1994 at Gümüşçay (Turkey) and dated to the same period, Polyxena is carried in like manner while her throat is cut.⁸ By contrast, Euripides' heroine declares "let no one touch my body" (μή τις ἄψηται χροῶς τοῦμοῦ, 548–549).⁹ The

⁶ Polyxena is not mentioned by Homer, and the scarce pre-Euripidean sources are divided on how she died. E.g. the *Cypria*, according to schol. *Hec.* 41, asserted that she died during the siege of Troy from a wound by Odysseus and Diomedes. Simonides is the earliest attested author to have Achilles demand the sacrifice (*PMG* fr.557). In the fragments of Sophocles' *Polyxena* (*TrGF* IV 522–528), both the manner of her death and this play's relationship to the *Hecuba* remain uncertain. For discussion see W. A. Calder III, "A Reconstruction of Sophocles' *Polyxena*," *GRBS* 7 (1966) 31–56; Mossman, *Wild Justice* 19–47.

⁷ Also, on a black figure hydria in Berlin (*ABV* 363.37) she is portrayed as being led by the wrists to the burial mound of Achilles. For a survey of Polyxena in art see O. Touchefeu-Meynier, "Polyxene," *LIMC* VII.1 (1994) 431–435; and on the Greek archaic and Roman imperial periods see respectively G. Schwarz, "Der Tod und das Mädchen: Frühe Polyxena-Bilder," *AthMitt* 116 (2001) 35–50, and "Achill und Polyxena in der römischen Kaiserzeit," *AthMitt* 99 (1992) 265–299.

⁸ N. Sevinç, "A New Sarcophagus of Polyxena from the Salvage Excavations at Gümüşçay," *ST* 6 (1996) 251–64; Schwarz, *AthMitt* 116 (2001) 35–36; R. Neer, "'A Tomb Both Great and Blameless': Marriage and Murder on a Sarcophagus from the Hellespont," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 61/62 (2012) 98–115.

⁹ Ed. J. Diggle (Oxford 1984). Some later visual representations correspond more closely to the Euripidean version, i.e. with Polyxena untouched by the soldiers and nude from the waist up: for example, a late-fourth-century BCE Etruscan sarcophagus in Orvieto (Museo dell'Opera del Duomo); and the Capitoline Tabula Iliaca in Rome (Museo Capitolino). On these see respectively R. Herbig, *Die jüngeretruskischen Steinsarkophage* (Berlin 1952) 40–41, with fig. 73; A. Sadurska, *Les tables iliaques* (Warsaw 1964) 29,

exceptionality of this is further evident when compared with the sacrifice of Iphigenia. In Aeschylus' account of the latter, to which the *Hecuba* alludes at several points, the maiden is dragged, bound and gagged, to the altar (*Ag.* 228–238).¹⁰ Thus, what emerges from the Euripidean drama is an extraordinary exhibition of the courageous acceptance of death.

For good reason, therefore, the meaning and significance of Polyxena's mode of dying have spawned extensive scholarly comment. At one level, the maiden's willingness can be understood as fulfilling the ritual requirement that sacrificial victims assent to their killing.¹¹ There is more, however. In keeping with a common tragic trope, her embrace of dying is suggestive of a marriage to Hades: whereas she was brought up with the hope of becoming a "bride for kings" (βασιλεῦσι νύμφη, 352), now she laments, "there I shall lie in Hades apart from you [mother], without bridegroom or wedding which I ought to have had" (ἐκεῖ δ' ἐν Ἅιδου κείσομαι χωρὶς σέθεν [...] ἄνυμφος ἀνυμέναιος ὧν μ' ἐχρῆν τυχεῖν, 418, 416).¹² Consequently, Hecuba describes her as a "bride that is

with plate 1. See also Schwarz, *AthMitt* 99 (1992) 275–276.

¹⁰ For this comparison see Scodel, *HSCP* 98 (1998) 121; Mossman, *Wild Justice* 151–154. Both Iphigenia (*Ag.* 208) and Polyxena (*Hec.* 560) are described as an ἄγαλμα ("statue," or "ornament").

¹¹ See Loraux, *Tragic Ways* 42–47; J. N. Bremmer, "Myth and Ritual in Greek Human Sacrifice: Lykaon, Polyxena and the Case of the Rhodian Criminal," in *The Strange World of Human Sacrifice* (Leuven 2007) 55–79, esp. 62–64. More broadly on this sacrificial procedure, W. Burkert, *Homo Necans* (Berkeley 1983) 4. F. S. Naiden has recently questioned this, however, arguing that sacrificial procedures were aimed at establishing victims' vitality not their consent ("The Fallacy of the Willing Victim," *JHS* 127 [2007] 61–73). On the wider use of sacrificial themes by Euripides see H. P. Foley, *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* (Ithaca 1985); A. Henrichs, "Drama and *Dromena*: Bloodshed, Violence, and Sacrificial Metaphor in Euripides," *HSCP* 100 (2000) 173–188.

¹² On this see Segal, *TAPA* 120 (1990) 115–117; Mossman, *Wild Justice* 154. That a maiden's death should be presented as marriage to Hades is well attested in tragedy (perhaps most famously with Antigone [Soph. *Ant.*

no bride” (νόμφην τ’ ἄνυμφον, 612).

Polyxena would choose such a death over slavery, however, and, in her commitment to freedom, offers the killer the choice between cutting her neck or her chest (563–565). This gesture transgresses conventional distinctions in tragic modes of death for women and men: women tend to die by the throat, whereas men do not.¹³ Indeed, a stab to the chest was an honorable means of slaughter for a warrior, but sacrificial victims were never struck there. In view of this, Polyxena’s alternative functions as a choice between a feminine or a masculine death. Nicole Loraux has argued that in Neoptolemus’ decision to cut her throat (562) Polyxena is denied the latter.¹⁴ At the same time, her sacrifice is eroticized: she tore her robe and exposed her breasts which are described as “most beautiful, as those of a statue” (ὡς ἀγάλματος κάλλιστα, 560–561).¹⁵ It is significant that Talthybius narrates the events from the perspective of the Greek army, and thus he fixates on the potential sexuality of the maiden’s gesture rather than its implied masculinity.¹⁶ In spite of this, however, he is quick to

814–816]) and other Greek literature, and is reflective of common ritual elements shared in the two rites of passage (weddings and funerals); see R. Seaford, “The Tragic Wedding,” *JHS* 107 (1987) 106–130. As C. Fontinoy, “Le sacrifice nuptial de Polyxène,” *AntCl* 19 (1950) 383–396, esp. 384–386, demonstrates, however, the depiction of Polyxena’s death as a “nuptial sacrifice” is relatively absent from Euripides compared with its development in later treatments of the myth (esp. Seneca’s *Troades*; cf. Lycoph. *Alex.* 323–325; see further below on Clement). An increased interest in a marital relationship between Achilles and Polyxena is also evident in the iconography of the Roman imperial period: Schwarz, *AthMitt* 99 (1992) 272–274.

¹³ Loraux, *Tragic Ways* 50–53.

¹⁴ Loraux, *Tragic Ways* 56–60. This last point is disputed by Mossman, *Wild Justice* 160.

¹⁵ The exposing of breasts need not be erotic, however; it can also be a maternal act of supplicating one’s child (e.g. Hom. *Il.* 22.82–85; Aesch. *Cho.* 896–898). See Scodel, *HSCP* 98 (1998) 122–123; Mossman, *Wild Justice* 157–162.

¹⁶ As Loraux observes, “Polyxena could indeed offer up her bosom like a

emphasize the nobility of Polyxena in her final collapse (568–570). After receiving the fatal wound,

ἡ δὲ καὶ θνήσκουσ' ὄμως
πολλὴν πρόνοιαν εἶχεν εὐσχήμων πεσεῖν,
κρύπτουσ' ἃ κρύπτειν ὄμματ' ἀρσένων χρεών.

even while dying she nevertheless took much forethought to fall honorably, concealing the parts one must conceal from the eyes of men.

From this brief summary, it is clear that Euripides' depiction of Polyxena's willing death problematizes relationships between gender and heroic courage. On the one hand, the maiden is portrayed conventionally as a bride of Hades, and her body is consequently described erotically; on the other, her actions exhibit a degree of autonomy characteristic of heroic men, as particularly evident in her presentation of her chest to the sword. As Loraux has shown regarding tragedy more broadly, female deaths, particularly those that are self-chosen or self-inflicted, granted to women a level of independence not typically enjoyed in Athenian society. Indeed, the tragic genre, "as a civic institution, delighted in blurring the formal frontier between masculine and feminine and freed women's deaths from the banalities to which they were restricted by private mourning."¹⁷

warrior, but the Greek army saw in the gesture only a virgin unveiling her woman's breast" (*Tragic Ways* 60). The eroticization of virgin sacrifices in tragedy functions to highlight its moral outrage: see Segal, *TAPA* 120 (1990) 111–113; Scodel, *HSCP* 98 (1998) 111–112. This reading of Polyxena's death coheres well with Burkert's anthropological theorization of a fundamental connection between sexual aggression and sacrifice (*Homo Necans* 58–72).

¹⁷ Loraux, *Tragic Ways* 3. "Euripides prefers generally to grant the *parthenos* the courage and free choice that, in the untragic conditions of real life, were denied to the young Greek girl by society." These women "use the freedom of choice that characterizes the *kynios*, by taking the sacrifice imposed on them and turning it into *their* death, a death that is fully their own" (at 45–46).

2. Polyxena as a measure of masculine virtue in Philo's *Quod omnis probus liber sit*

Among Jewish and Christian writers, the earliest attested reference to the *Hecuba* comes in Philo of Alexandria's *Quod omnis probus liber sit*.¹⁸ Philo is best known for his innovative methods of interpreting Jewish scripture in harmony with contemporary philosophy, particularly because they were highly influential among early Christians.¹⁹ Less commonly appreciated, however, is the extent to which Philo was acquainted with classical Greek poetry.²⁰ He cites Homer and the tragedians in the manner of other educated elites and he was conversant with the practices of literary criticism.²¹ Not only did he read

¹⁸ Ed. L. Cohn and R. Wendland (Berlin 1896–1930). On this treatise see M. Petit, *Quod omnis probus liber sit: Introduction, texte, traduction et notes* (Paris 1974) 17–132.

¹⁹ For Clement see A. van den Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria and his Use of Philo in the Stromateis* (Leiden 1988); D. T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature* (Assen 1993) 132–156.

²⁰ On the breadth of Philo's use of classical poetry see E. Koskenniemi, "Philo and Greek Poets," *JStJ* 41 (2010) 301–322; D. Lincicum, "A Preliminary Index to Philo's Non-Biblical Citations and Allusions," *StudPhilon* 25 (2013) 139–167; P. N. Hernández, "Philo and Greek Poetry," *StudPhilon* 26 (2014) 135–149.

²¹ For analyses of the textual practices involved in elite education and reading in Alexandria which are relevant to the contexts of both Philo and Clement, see R. Criboire, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton 2001) 185–219; W. A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities* (Oxford 2010) 179–192. On Philo's interpretive methods see A. A. Long, "Allegory in Philo and Etymology in Stoicism: A Plea for Drawing Distinctions," *StudPhilon* 9 (1997) 198–210; K. Berthelot, "Philon d'Alexandrie, lecteur d'Homère: quelques éléments de réflexion," in A. Balansard et al. (eds.), *Prolongements et renouvellements de la tradition classique* (Aix-en-Provence 2011) 145–157, esp. 150–153; M. R. Niehoff, "Philo and Plutarch on Homer," in *Homer and the Bible in the Eyes of Ancient Interpreters* (Leiden 2012) 127–153, and *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* (Cambridge 2011) 133–185; C. J. P. Friesen, "Hannah's 'Hard Day' and Hesiod's 'Two Roads': Poetic Wisdom in Philo's *De ebrietate*," *JStJ* 46 (2015) 44–64.

classical texts, he claims to have attended the theater and comments on his recent experience among the audience at a production of Euripides.²²

Philo's evocation of the death of Polyxena in the *Probus* well illustrates his cultural hybridity as he reads the drama alongside Jewish ethical ideals. In this treatise, he engages a popular Stoic paradox that the virtuous person is free, even if enslaved, an issue also treated by Cicero (*Parad.Stoic.* 5) and Epictetus (Arr. *Epict.diss.* 4.1), who both employ similar lines of argument, though more briefly.²³ True freedom requires virtue, and it is characterized by the ability to act with independence rather than external constraint.²⁴ The liberty of the soul, rather than the body, is Philo's chief concern and it is to be exercised with respect to the "passions" (πάθη, *Prob.* 17–18). For although "myriad human fortunes" (μυρία γὰρ αἱ ἀνθρώπων τύχαι) are

²² *Prob.* 141, *Ebr.* 177. On his theater attendance see R. Bloch, "Von Szene zu Szene: Das jüdische Theater in der Antike," in M. Konradt and R. C. Schwinges (eds.), *Juden in ihrer Umelt: Akkulturation des Judentums in Antike und Mittelalter* (Basel 2009) 57–86, esp. 66–67, 70–72; J. Jay, "The Problem of the Theater in Early Judaism," *JSS* 44 (2013) 218–253, esp. 221–232. Philo is, however, also critical of Roman spectacle entertainments (*Agr.* 35, 111–126), and he is particularly contemptuous of both Gaius and Flaccus for the theatricality of their actions against the Jews (*Leg.* 78–79, 349–367; *In Flacc.* 34–39, 72); see F. Calabi, "Theatrical Language in Philo's *In Flaccum*," in *Italian Studies on Philo of Alexandria* (Boston 2003) 91–116; Bloch 73–74; C. J. P. Friesen, *Reading Dionysus: Euripides' Bacchae and the Cultural Contestations of Greeks, Jews, Romans and Christians* (Tübingen 2015) 90–92. For Philo's engagement with dramatic texts see M. R. Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture* (Tübingen 2001) 52–58; E. Koskeniemi, "Philo and Classical Drama," in J. Neusner et al. (eds.), *Ancient Israel, Judaism, and Christianity in Contemporary Perspective: Essays in Memory of Karl-Johan Illman* (Lanham 2006) 137–151.

²³ For comparison of Cicero and Epictetus see Petit, *Quod omnis probus* 54–57.

²⁴ Philo employs the term ἀυτοπραγία (*Prob.* 21). See similarly *quid est enim libertas? potestas vivendi, ut velis*, Cic. *Parad.Stoic.* 5.34; ἐλεύθερός ἐστιν ὁ ζῶν ὡς βούλεται, Arr. *Epict.diss.* 4.1.1. Moreover, fear is the chief obstacle to freedom (Cic. 5.40; Arr. 4.1.5, 4.1.82–85; Philo *Prob.* 22).

able to destroy the freedom of the body, “this study is concerning character which neither desires nor fears nor pleasures nor griefs have yoked” (ἔστιν ἡ σκέψις περὶ τρόπων, οὐς οὔτ’ ἐπιθυμῖαι οὔτε φόβοι οὔθ’ ἡδοναὶ οὔτε λύπαι κατέζευξαν, 18). Those who exemplify it have been truly liberated, as from prison, and God is their only master (19–20). Thus, Philo insists, genuine freedom derives from one’s virtue so that it can be acquired even by those in captivity (35–40). Moreover, one demonstrates this freedom by one’s actions: “the good man does all things intelligently; therefore, he alone is free” (πάντα φρονίμως ποιεῖ ὁ ἀστεῖος· μόνος ἄρα ἐστὶν ἐλεύθερος, 59).

After these preliminaries, Philo devotes the bulk of the treatise to an extensive list of exempla drawn from contemporary life, history, and literature, figures who have embodied this ideal (62–160).²⁵ Such individuals are rare, Philo avers, but with careful research, “the Greek and barbarian lands are witnesses” (μάρτυς δὲ ἡ Ἑλλάς καὶ ἡ βάρβαρος) to this point (73). Amongst these, he numbers the Seven Sages of Greece, the Persian Magi, and the Indian Gymnosophists (73–74, 93–97). Above all, however, are the Essenes, a community of more than 4000 Jews in Palestinian Syria, whose philosophical lifestyle “produces athletes of virtue” (ἀθλητὰς ἀρετῆς ἀπεργάζεται, 75–91, at 88).²⁶ So complete is their virtue that

²⁵ For a numbered list of Philo’s exempla see Petit, *Quod omnis probus* 29–34. Cicero and Epictetus similarly point to several individuals who support the premise of the argument, but Philo’s compilation is both longer and different, and reflects his own religious and cultural context. He shares at least one with Epictetus, however—the abduction of the Cynic Diogenes by robbers (Arr. *Epict.diss.* 4.1.114–118; Philo *Prob.* 121–124; see also Diog. Laert. 4.75). Two exempla—Zeno of Elea and Anaxarchus—are also shared by Cicero, though in a different treatise (*Tusc.* 2.52; Philo *Prob.* 108–109). For broader discussions of Philo and Stoic ethics see M. R. Niehoff, “Philo and Plutarch as Biographers: Parallel Responses to Roman Stoicism,” *GRBS* 52 (2012) 361–392; S. Weisser, “Why Does Philo Criticize the Stoic Ideal of Apatheia in *On Abraham* 257? Philo and Consolatory Literature,” *CQ* 62 (2012) 242–259; Friesen, *JStJ* 46 (2015), esp. 50 n.24.

²⁶ See also Petit, *Quod omnis probus* 38–39.

freedom extends beyond their souls such that the institution of slavery does not even exist in their community (79).²⁷

Among Philo's subsequent exempla, dramatic texts figure prominently. He writes, "Poets and prose writers are witnesses of the freedom of good people; on their ideas Greeks and barbarians alike are reared nearly from their swaddling-clothes and as a result become better in their character" (τῆς δὲ σπουδαίων ἐλευθερίας μάρτυρές εἰσι ποιηταὶ καὶ συγγραφεῖς, ὧν ταῖς γνώμας Ἕλληνες ὁμοῦ καὶ βάρβαροι σχεδὸν ἐξ αὐτῶν σπαργάνων ἐντρεφόμενοι βελτιοῦνται τὰ ἦθη, 98). Later he underscores the pedagogical power of theater, recounting a recent performance in which the actors recited "trimeters from Euripides: 'for freedom is a name worthy of everything; even if someone has little, let him perceive that he has much'" (τὰ παρ' Εὐριπίδη τρίμετρα [...] τοῦλεύθερον γὰρ ὄνομα παντὸς ἄξιον, / κἂν σμίκρ' ἔχη τις, μεγάλ' ἔχειν νομιζέτω, 141; *TrGF* V 275).²⁸ The spectators rose in elation, lauding both the "maxim" (γνώμη) and the poet.²⁹ Consequently, Philo concludes that it is "fitting to heed poets" (ποιηταῖς προσέχειν ἄξιον); they are educators (παιδευταί) who "publically train cities in moderation" (δημοσίᾳ τὰς πόλεις σωφρονίζοντες, 143).³⁰

²⁷ On Philo's Essenes see Petit, *Quod omnis probus* 104–128. Philo gives a similar idealization of Jewish piety in his account of the Therapeutae in *De vita contemplativa*.

²⁸ This fragment (*Auge*) is quoted by Stobaeus (4.8.3) with two additional lines.

²⁹ The dramas of Euripides often challenge the correlation of physical and natural slavery, and thus are especially illustrative of Philo's thesis. As Collard observes, "those in physical slavery (almost always women) often demonstrate a greater freedom of spirit, and probity, than their 'free' masters" (*Euripides: Hecuba* 27). See similarly Daitz, *Hermes* 99 (1971) 217–226; Matthiessen, *Euripides, Hecuba* 40–42.

³⁰ Dio Chrysostom would later lament in his *Alexandrian Oration* that, in contrast to Athens, Alexandria lacked dramatic poets who were able "to reproach not only individual men but also the city collectively" (μὴ μόνον

Of the ten plays quoted by Philo in this treatise, two by Euripides provide specific *dramatis personae* as moral exempla.³¹ First, in a satyr-play, the *Syleus*, Heracles exhibits his true freedom even while temporarily pretending to be a slave (99–104; *TrGF* V 687–91).³² Because Heracles was a demigod, however, Philo concedes that his heroic virtue may fall beyond the reach of mere mortals (105); thus, he offers a range of human models, potentially more proximate to his readers.³³ The practice of such virtue is not limited to men, however; women and children have done likewise (114–117), and the *Hecuba* is especially illustrative (*Prob.* 116, quoting *Hec.* 548–551):³⁴

Πολυξένην δὲ ὁ τραγικὸς Εὐριπίδης ἀλογοῦσαν μὲν θανά-
του φροντίζουσαν δὲ ἐλευθερίας εἰσάγει δι' ὧν φησιν·
ἐκοῦσα θνήσκω, μή τις ἄψηται χρὸς
τοῦμοῦ· παρέξω γὰρ δέρην εὐκαρδίως,
ἐλευθέραν δέ μ', ὡς ἐλευθέρα θάνω,
πρὸς θεῶν μεθέντες κτείνατε.

Euripides the tragedian presents Polyxena as paying no heed to death but pondering freedom through what she says:

τοὺς κατ' ἄνδρα ἐλέγχειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ κοινῇ τὴν πόλιν, *Or.* 32.6).

³¹ For a list of these see Lincicum, *StudPhilon* 25 (2013) 139–167.

³² On this play see G. K. Galinsky, *The Herakles Theme: The Adaptations of the Hero in Literature from Homer to the Twentieth Century* (Oxford 1972) 83–84; N. Pechstein, *Euripides Satyrographos: Ein Kommentar zu den Euripideischen Satyrspielfragmenten* (Stuttgart 1998) 243–283. The first of five excerpts from the *Syleus* is quoted by Philo earlier in the treatise at *Prob.* 25, and also in *Leg. alleg.* 3.102 and *Ios.* 78.

³³ These include Anaxarchus and Zeno the Eleatic who endured torture (106–109), and wrestlers and pancratiasts who exhibit fearlessness in the face of death (110–113).

³⁴ In addition to the *Hecuba*, Philo cites a Laconian boy who committed suicide rather than be taken as a slave (*Prob.* 114); and Dardanian women who, captured by the Macedonians, cast their children into the river to prevent them from becoming slaves (115).

I die willingly, lest someone touch my body; for I shall offer my neck gladly, but, by the gods, allow me to be free when you kill me, so that I might die free.

In the wider context of Philo's argument, it is important not only that Polyxena was a human (in contrast to Heracles), but also that she was a woman. After his quotation from this dramatic scene he advances an *a fortiori* argument in support of his thesis, asking, "can we suppose that such a love of freedom be absorbed in women and boys, the former possessing little understanding by nature, the latter an unstable age, but that those who draw in unmixed wisdom not be free immediately" (εἴτ' οἰόμεθα γυναίκοις μὲν καὶ μειρακίοις, ὧν τὰ μὲν φύσει ὀλιγόφρονα τὰ δὲ ἡλικία εὐολίσθω χρώμενα, τοσοῦτον ἐλευθερίας ἔρωτα ἐντήκεσθαι [...] τοὺς δὲ σοφίας ἀκράτου σπᾶσαντας οὐκ εὐθὺς ἐλευθέρους εἶναι, 117). This application of Polyxena's death is consistent with a wider theme in Philo's writings, his so-called "gender-gradient," in which spiritual advancement is represented as progress away from the feminine toward the masculine (see e.g. *Opif.* 165, *Leg.alleg.* 2.38–39, *Spec.* 1.200–201, *Ebr.* 33, *Post.* 177).³⁵ Philo approaches biblical heroines similarly: the matriarch Sarah, for example, had a "virtue-loving mind" (τὴν φιλάρετον διάνοιαν), but this only because she "left behind all the ways of women" (τὰ γυναικεῖα πάντ' ἐκλιποῦσα, *Ebr.* 59–60, quoting LXX Gen

³⁵ This term was apparently first applied to Philo by S. L. Mattila, "Wisdom, Sense Perception, Nature, and Philo's Gender Gradient," *HThR* 89 (1996) 103–129. For other discussions of gender in Philo see D. I. Sly, *Philo's Perception of Women* (Atlanta 1990); R. S. Kraemer, "The Other as Woman: An Aspect of Polemic among Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Greco-Roman World," in L. J. Silberstein and R. L. Cohn (eds.), *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity* (New York 1994) 121–144, esp. 133–135; J. E. Taylor, *Jewish Women Philosophers of First-Century Alexandria: Philo's "Therapeutae" Reconsidered* (Oxford 2003) 227–264; M. R. D'Angelo, "Gender and Geopolitics in the Work of Philo of Alexandria: Jewish Piety and Imperial Family Values," in T. Penner and C. Vander Stichele (eds.), *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses* (Leiden 2007) 63–88; Friesen, *Reading Dionysus* 198–206.

18:11).³⁶

In keeping with this gendered reading of the *Hecuba*, like Philo, several other ancient authors employed Polyxena's fearlessness in death as a measure of *masculine* virtue. For example, Pseudo-Lucian attributes a speech to Demosthenes in which, before committing suicide so as not to become a captive of Antipater, the orator quotes *Hec.* 568–569, then asserts, “even a girl did these things; but will Demosthenes choose a dishonorable life over an honorable death?” (κόρη καὶ ταῦτα· Δημοσθένης δὲ εὐσχήμονος θανάτου βίον προκρινεῖ ἀσχήμονα, *Encom. Demosth.* 47). Ovid, who closely follows Euripides' depiction of Polyxena, similarly emphasizes her gender, describing her as “a brave and miserable girl, and more than a female” (*fortis et infelix et plus quam femina uirgo*, *Met.* 13.451).³⁷ In an entirely different evocation of Polyxena's gender, Lucian humorously compares dilettantes in philosophy to “an actor of tragedy who is himself soft and feminine” (τις ὑποκριτῆς τραγωδίας μαλθακὸς αὐτὸς ὢν καὶ γυναικεῖος). Such a one not only fails to portray successfully masculine characters, such as Achilles, Theseus, and Heracles, but “not even Helen or Polyxena would ever accept him as exceedingly fitting to themselves” (οὐδ' ἂν ἡ Ἑλένη ποτὲ ἢ Πολυξένη ἀνάσχοιντο πέρα τοῦ μετρίου αὐταῖς προσεοικότα, *Pisc.* 31.16; cf. *Nigr.* 11.8). In other words, Lucian implies, these women are more

³⁶ Cf. Clement *Strom.* 6.12.100.3. On the larger treatment of Sarah in the works of Philo see Sly, *Philo's Perception of Women* 147–154.

³⁷ As in Euripides, in Ovid's account Polyxena offers the choice to strike her neck or chest (13.458–459), but it departs from the tragedy in that she dies by the latter (13.475–476). On Ovid's use of the *Hecuba* see Mossman, *Wild Justice* 248–251. Seneca's reproduction of Polyxena's death differs in this regard. While he notes her strength and bravery (*Tro.* 1146, 1151–1153), he also emphasizes her beauty (1138–1139, 1144) and, as will be noted below in comparison with Clement, he particularly foregrounds her status as a bride. It is often presumed that Seneca's portrayal of Polyxena's death is dependent on the *Hecuba*; however, this has been questioned by W. M. Calder III, “Originality in Seneca's *Troades*,” *CP* 65 (1970) 75–82, who emphasizes the multiplicity of his Greek sources.

masculine than the male actors who attempt to play their role.³⁸ Such evocations of Polyxena's model of virtue reveal a persistent and widespread interest in her gender closely akin to Philo's moralizing application in the *Probus*.

That the intellectual and courageous virtues of women should be characterized as specifically masculine is of course not unique to the reception of the *Hecuba* (e.g. Xen. *Oec.* 10.1).³⁹ Nevertheless, in discussions of willing deaths this is frequently foregrounded, often explicitly in the martyr tradition.⁴⁰ In 2 Maccabees, the narrative of the death of the much-celebrated mother along with her seven sons under Antiochus Epiphanes emphasizes the masculinity of her actions. Exhorting them to maintain the ancestral laws even unto death, she "stirred up her feminine reasoning by way of a masculine courage" (τὸν θῆλυον λογισμὸν ἄρσενι θυμῷ διεγείρασα, 7:21). Fourth Maccabees likewise asserts that "pious reason made her heart manly in its emotions" (τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτῆς ὁ εὐσεβῆς λογισμὸς ἐν αὐτοῖς τοῖς πάθεσιν ἀνδρειώσας, 15:23), and that "in words and deeds you were found more powerful than a man" (ἔργοις δυνατωτέρα καὶ λόγοις εὐρέθης ἀνδρός, 16:14).⁴¹ In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*,

³⁸ For additional citations of the *Hecuba* emphasizing the nobility of Polyxena's death see Plin. *Ep.* 4.11.9; Hermog. *Inv.* 4.12; Clem. *Strom.* 2.23.144.2, discussed below.

³⁹ As seen above regarding Philo's gender gradient, becoming a male as an ethical and religious ideal is attested much more broadly in his writings. See also K. Aspegren, *A Male Woman: A Feminine Ideal in the Early Church* (Stockholm 1990).

⁴⁰ As E. A. Castelli notes, "[i]n the martyrological sources, masculinity is repeatedly figured as a heightened state of being, potentially attainable by both men and women, but one that requires repeated shoring up" (*Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* [New York 2004] 61). See also L. S. Cobb, *Dying to Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (New York 2008).

⁴¹ For discussion see S. D. Moore and J. Capel Anderson, "Taking it like a man: Masculinity in 4 Maccabees," *JBL* 117 (1998) 249–273.

the hero is exhorted by a heavenly voice to “be strong and act like a man” (ἀνδρίζου, 9.1).⁴² Perpetua, similarly, while in her prison cell anticipating execution, records in her diary a vision of entering the arena to engage in gladiatorial combat, symbolizing her eventual victorious martyrdom. In the process, she reports, “I was stripped and I became a man” (*et expoliata sum et facta sum masculus*, *Passio* 10.7).⁴³ In each of these examples, facing martyrdom is characterized as a specifically masculine virtue.⁴⁴

Returning to the reception of the *Hecuba*, the common emphasis on the masculinity of Polyxena’s heroic death reflects prevailing views of gender in antiquity. Philo’s appropriation

⁴² On this verb in relation to the wider martyrological tradition see R. Moriarty, “‘Playing the Man’: The Courage of Christian Martyrs, Translated and Transposed,” in R. N. Swanson (ed.), *Gender and Christian Religion* (Suffolk 1998) 1–11. In the account of the martyrs of Lyons (177 CE) preserved by Eusebius, the authorities imagined that by torturing Biblis they might compel her to blaspheme, viewing her “as already easy to break and without manhood” (ὡς εὐθραυστον ἤδη καὶ ἀνανδρον, *HE* 5.1.26). By withstanding she demonstrates otherwise.

⁴³ This has attracted significant scholarly attention, particularly within feminist criticism: see E. A. Castelli, “‘I Will Make Mary Male’: Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity,” in J. Epstein and K. Straub (eds.), *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (New York 1991) 29–49, esp. 33–43, and *Martyrdom and Memory* 85–92; C. Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome* (New Haven 2007) 211–214; Cobb, *Dying to Be Men* 105–107; G. P. C. Streete, *Redeemed Bodies: Women Martyrs in Early Christianity* (Louisville 2009) 37–42; B. K. Gold, “‘And I Became a Man’: Gender Fluidity and Closure in Perpetua’s Prison Narrative,” in D. Lateiner et al. (eds.), *Roman Literature, Gender, and Reception: Domina Illustris: Essays in Honor of Judith Peller Hallett* (New York 2013) 153–164, and “Remaking Perpetua: A Female Martyr Reconstructed,” in M. Masterson et al. (eds.), *Sex in Antiquity: Exploring Gender and Sexuality in the Ancient World* (London 2015) 482–489.

⁴⁴ Conversely, a death lacking courage could be labeled as feminine: for instance, in *Joseph and Aseneth* when Pharaoh’s son attempts to persuade the sons of Jacob to conspire against Joseph he asserts, “you will not die like women; rather, play the man and requite your enemies” (οὐκ ἀποθανεῖσθε ὡς γυναῖκες, ἀλλ’ ἀνδρίζεσθε καὶ ἀμύνεσθε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν, 24.7).

of this dramatic exemplum shares this interest and correlates with his own vision of the masculinity of spiritual advancement. At the same time, his *a fortiori* application of Polyxena as an exemplum for his male readers is consistent with the development of discourses on martyrdom in Judaism and Christianity that increasingly characterized noble death as uniquely masculine, even when achieved by women.

3. Polyxena as a model of the chaste wife in Clement's *Stromateis*

In early Christianity, martyrdom is especially lionized, and Clement of Alexandria extols its virtues at length in the fourth book of the *Stromateis*.⁴⁵ It is an idealized state of spiritual perfection, because above all the martyr repudiates sensual pleasure in favor of the perfection of life in God's presence (*Strom.* 4.5.22–23).⁴⁶ In this context, Clement devotes considerable attention to female martyrs. Whereas elsewhere he often belittles the female nature as inferior to the male, in the case of martyrdom the achievements of women approach those of men: “the entire church is full of people who throughout their life have trained for a life-giving death in Christ, as is the case for men, so also for chaste women” (μεστὴ μὲν οὖν πᾶσα ἡ ἐκκλησία τῶν μελετησάντων τὸν ζωοποιὸν θάνατον εἰς Χριστὸν παρ’ ὅλον τὸν βίον καθάπερ ἀνδρῶν οὕτω δὲ καὶ γυναικῶν σωφρόνων, 4.8.58.2; cf. Tert. *Mart.* 4.4). For Clement, the heroines of classical tragedy corroborate his view of feminine virtue. Earlier in this discussion, he quoted four lines from a play (*TrGF* II 114 *adespota*), in which a female protagonist declared her willingness to die; he

⁴⁵ On Clement's treatment of martyrdom in *Strom.* 4 see W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford 1967) 351–361; A. van den Hoek, “Clement of Alexandria on Martyrdom,” *Studia patristica* 26 (1993) 324–341; G. W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge 1995) 65–71; C. R. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom* (New Haven 2012) 145–162; Friesen, *Reading Dionysus* 128–133.

⁴⁶ Ed. L. Früchtel, O. Stählin, and U. Treu (Berlin 1960–1970).

adds, “a woman is speaking fearlessly in the tragedy, playing the man” (ἀφόβως ἀνδρεῖζομένη παρὰ τῆ τραγωδία λέγει γυνή). This is followed immediately by a citation of Sophocles’ *Antigone* (450) as an additional tragic exemplum of a woman choosing death rather than transgressing divine law (4.7.48.1–3). Thus, as with Philo’s reference to Polyxena, female death in tragedy is deployed by Clement as a model of specifically masculine virtue.⁴⁷

In contrast to these evocations of dramatic heroines as proto-martyrs in Book 4 of the *Stromateis*, in Book 2 Clement cites Polyxena’s death in Euripides’ *Hecuba* in a different context. As in Book 4, he is concerned with delineating the appropriate attitude toward sensuality and pleasure, whereas here he discusses marriage as illustrative of his wider ethical program (2.23.137–147; see also *Strom.* 3, *Paed.* 2.10.83–115).⁴⁸ For Clement, marriage is above all a legal arrangement which exists for the purposes of procreation (2.23.137.1, citing

⁴⁷ Like Philo, Clement quoted Greek poetry frequently, including tragedy; see A. Méhat, *Etude sur les “Stromates” de Clément d’Alexandrie* (Paris 1966) 187–190; N. Zeegers-vander Vorst, *Les citations des poètes grecs chez les apologistes chrétiens du II^e siècle* (Louvain 1972) 265–285; E. Des Places, “Les citations profanes du IV^e Stromate de Clément d’Alexandrie,” *REA* 90 (1988) 389–397; A. van den Hoek, “Techniques of Quotation in Clement of Alexandria: A View of Ancient Literary Working Methods,” *VigChr* 50 (1996) 223–243; Friesen, *Reading Dionysus* 118–123. As H. Chadwick demonstrates, Clement employed florilegia akin to those of Stobaeus: “Florilegium,” *ReallexAntChr* 7 (1950) 1131–1159, esp. 1144–1145.

⁴⁸ Cf. 2.20.103.1: “Truly, patient perseverance even itself through endurance forces itself toward divine likeness, bearing freedom from passion as fruit” (ἢ γε μὴν καρτερία καὶ αὐτὴ εἰς τὴν θεῖαν ἐξομοίωσιν βιάζεται δι’ ὑπομονῆς ἀπάθειαν καρπουμένη). On Clement’s view of pleasure within his broader ethical reflections see P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York 1988) 122–139; H. O. Maier, “Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62 (1994) 719–745; M. Spanneut, “L’Apatheia chrétienne aux quatre premiers siècles,” *Proche-Orient chrétien* 52 (2002) 165–302, esp. 247–260.

Menander fr.453 *PCG*).⁴⁹ It must, therefore, be conducted in a philosophical manner, that is, not directed toward pleasures and passions: “whereas the marriage of others unites for pleasure, that of philosophers leads to a unanimity in accordance with the Logos” (ὁ μὲν γὰρ τῶν ἄλλων γάμος ἐφ’ ἡδυπαθείᾳ ὁμονοεῖ, ὁ δὲ τῶν φιλοσοφούντων ἐπὶ τὴν κατὰ λόγον ὁμόνοιαν ἄγει, 2.23.143.1). This Logos “commands women to adorn not their outward appearance but their character,” and, conversely, husbands “not to employ their wives as objects of desire,” but rather “to preserve marriage for the highest self-restraint” (ὁ μὴ τὸ εἶδος, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἦθος ἐπιτρέπων ταῖς γυναῖξι κοσμεῖσθαι μηδ’ ὡς ἐρωμέναις χρῆσθαι ταῖς γαμεταῖς [...] τὴν ἀρίστην σωφροσύνην περιποιεῖσθαι τὸν γάμον, 2.23.143.1). The manner of Polyxena’s death demonstrates this ideal:

τοῖς τραγωδοποιοῖς δὲ ἡ Πολυξένη καίτοι ἀποσφαττομένη ἀναγέγραπται, ἀλλὰ καὶ “θνήσκουσα ὅμως πολλὴν πρόνοιαν” πεποιήσθαι τοῦ “εὐσχημόνως πεσεῖν,” κρύπτουσ’ ἃ κρύπτειν ὄμματα ἀρρένων ἐχρῆν.

It is recorded by the tragedians that Polyxena, though having her throat cut, yet even “while dying she nevertheless took much forethought” to ensure that she “would fall honorably,” concealing the parts one must conceal from the eyes of men. (2.23.144.2; *Hec.* 568–570)⁵⁰

That the maiden’s death, carried out in the tragedy as a human sacrifice for Achilles, should be applied by Clement to the practice of marriage presupposes an interpretation of her death as a wedding to Hades. As noted above, this theme is

⁴⁹ For Clement’s view of sexuality and marriage see J.-P. Broudéhoux, *Mariage et famille chez Clément d’Alexandrie* (Paris 1970) 99–137; Brown, *Body and Society* 131–139; Maier, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62 (1994) 734–739.

⁵⁰ The same Euripidean lines are adapted for Latin in Ovid’s account of Polyxena: “she was careful to cover the parts needing to be concealed while she fell and to preserve the dignity of pure modesty” (*cura fuit partes uelare tegendas, cum caderet, castique decus seruare pudoris*, *Met.* 13.479–480); see Braun, *Bulletin du Centre de romanistique et de latinité tardive* 1 (1983) 4–5.

suggested in the *Hecuba* (e.g. 416, 418, 612), but it becomes increasingly prominent in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, in both art and literature (see n.12 above). In Seneca's *Troades*, for example, Polyxena's procession to the sacrifice is said to have occurred "in the manner of a wedding" (*thalami more*, 1132).⁵¹ In a similar vein, Clement explains that "indeed, [Polyxena] had calamity as her wedding" (ἦν δὲ κακείνη γάμος ἢ συμφορά, 2.23.144.3). As such, this tragic scene could be applied to his ethical program for marriage: Polyxena's gesture of modesty as she approached her chthonic bridegroom corresponds to the Christian bride who minimizes the sensuality of her physical appearance. Thus, Clement proceeds, "to be subjected to and succumb to the passions is utter servitude, even as to rule them is the only freedom" (τὸ ὑποπεσεῖν οὖν καὶ παραχωρῆσαι τοῖς πάθεσιν ἐσχάτη δουλεία, ὥσπερ ἀμέλει τὸ κρατεῖν τούτων ἐλευθερία μόνη, 2.23.144.3). As with Philo, therefore, Polyxena's actions illustrate the nature of true freedom practiced even amidst corporeal slavery. Yet, whereas Philo situated this within a gendered framework applied to masculine virtue, for Clement Polyxena is an ideal of feminine chastity, thus a model for the Christian wife. Like martyrdom, celibacy represents the repudiation of the body in favor of consecration to God.⁵²

A similar interest in chastity underlies Pliny the Younger's application of Polyxena's death in his discussion of the execution of the Vestal Virgin Cornelia under Domitian. Although she was charged with unchastity, Pliny was convinced of her innocence and describes her final gestures as proof of her true

⁵¹ See also 202, 289–290, 360–365, 871–885, 942–44; cf. Catull. 64.367–375)

⁵² Clement viewed celibacy as optional, not a requirement for the Christian: see Broudéhoux, *Mariage et famille* 99–113. On the interplay between virginity and martyrdom in late antique Judaism and Christianity see D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford 1999) 67–92.

character.⁵³ Like Euripides' Polyxena, Cornelia maintained her chaste modesty to the end by re-covering her body as her garment fell, and rebuffing the touch of her executioner (*Ep.* 4.11.9):

*haesissetque descendenti stola, uertit se ac recollegit, cumque ei manum
carnifex daret, auersata est et resiliuit foedumque contactum quasi plane a
casto puroque corpore nouissima sanctitate reiecit omnibusque numeris
pudoris πολλήν πρόνοιαν ἔσχεν εὐσχήμων πεσεῖν.*

While she was descending [into the pit], her garment caught up, and she turned and took it up again, and when the executioner offered her his hand, she turned away and recoiled, and she repelled the foul touch entirely as from a chaste and undefiled body, with the highest sanctity and all the measures of modesty, she “took much forethought to fall honorably.”

For both Pliny and Clement, therefore, the final actions of Polyxena model distinctly feminine virtue—that is, they demonstrate commitment to chastity even up to the moment of death. Whereas for Pliny Cornelia's imitation of the tragic maiden reinforced his view that she had in fact maintained her virginity, Clement cites Polyxena as a model for the Christian wife who values modesty over seduction.⁵⁴

4. Conclusions

For the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, the deaths of Christian martyrs were distasteful because he saw them as excessively “tragic.” In at least one respect, however, the theater provided a model for the most noble of deaths, one deployed clearly by the narrator of Perpetua's martyrdom. As Polyxena had done in the *Hecuba* of Euripides, Perpetua covered herself out of concern for modesty, even as she fell under violent assault. This Christian appropriation of a dramatic gesture

⁵³ See Braun, *Bulletin du Centre de romanistique et de latinité tardive* 6–7.

⁵⁴ Roman heroines, such as Cornelia, became an important influence on Christian discourses on martyrdom: see H. A. Musurillo, *Acts of the Pagan Martyrs: Acta Alexandrinorum* (Oxford 1954) 240–242. On heroic deaths of Roman women see Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome* 179–206.

was not an isolated literary occurrence. The distinctively masculine courage and feminine decorum of Polyxena were greatly admired throughout antiquity and had occasioned frequent comment and imitation. Reflections upon the manner of her death were often framed in these conspicuously gendered categories, as exemplified in the application of the tragedy by Philo and Clement, who both foreground Polyxena's gender, albeit with vastly different emphases. On the one hand, her independence and self-determination approach that of a man, and significantly the offering of her chest to the blade is suggestive of a warrior's death, rather than a woman's. For Philo, her unwavering commitment to freedom is thus a model for his male readers, and he argues that if a woman could choose to act in this way so much more must a man. This interpretive move is in keeping with Philo's gender ideology, which envisions spiritual ascent as masculinizing; at the same time, it reflects a valorization of manly martyrdom already evident in Jewish literature and later to become prominent in Christianity. Such deaths were often characterized as essentially masculine, even in narratives of female martyrs. Clement shares this gendered ideology of martyrdom; yet Polyxena functions differently for him than for Philo. Rather than focusing on the masculinity inherent in her self-chosen death, Clement is concerned with the manner of her fall. Her final act of modesty exemplifies the ideal of the Christian bride who eschews sensuality and seduction. Anxious to counteract perceived deleterious influences of widespread eroticism, Clement aims to regulate Christian sexuality, even within marriage. As such, Polyxena vividly illustrates the importance of purity, which she maintains even as she approaches her chthonic bridegroom.

This indecision with respect to gendering Polyxena's noble death finds an interesting analogue in Perpetua. Whereas in her symbolic vision of a victorious martyrdom she becomes a man and defeats her gladiatorial opponent (*Passio* 10.7), in the end the narrator reiterates her femininity, describing her body with sensuality even as Perpetua carefully covers herself out of

concern for modesty (20.2–4). Likewise, in the *Hecuba*, whereas Polyxena acts with masculine self-determination, this gives way to the messenger's fixation on her beauty as an erotic spectacle to be observed by the Greek army. In this manner, tragedy's influenced persisted upon the ways in which ancients reflected on and constructed their moral and religious ideals.⁵⁵

August, 2016

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⁵⁵ Earlier abbreviated versions of this paper were presented in the Philo of Alexandria Seminar at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting (2015) and at the University of Heidelberg (2016) in a colloquium sponsored by Manfred Lautenschläger. I am grateful to the participants for their helpful suggestions.