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READING HELEN'S EXCUSES IN QUINTUS SMYRNAEUS' *POSTHOMERICA*

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READING HELEN'S EXCUSES IN QUINTUS SMYRNAEUS' *POSTHOMERICA*

At *Posthomerica* 14.149–78, Helen and Menelaus converse in bed (14.150: Ἀτρείδης δάριξε μετ' ἠγκόμοιο γυναικός), together again now that Troy has been sacked. Aphrodite helps them to remember their love of old and to forget past grief (14.152–3).¹ It is just then that Helen takes the opportunity to excuse her actions:

Πρώτη δ' αἰθ' Ἑλένη τοῖον ποτὶ μῦθον ἔειπε·
Μή νύ μοι, ὦ Μενέλαε, χόλον ποτιβάλλεο θυμῶ·
οὐ γὰρ ἐγὼν ἐθέλουσα λίπον σέο δῶμα καὶ εὐνήν,
ἀλλὰ μ' Ἀλεξάνδροιο βίη καὶ Τρῳοὶ νῆες
σεῦ ἀπὸ νόσφιν ἐόντος ἀνηρέψαντο κιόντες.
Καί μ' <ἄμοτον> μεμαυῖαν διζυρῶς ἀπολέσθαι
ἢ βρόχῳ ἀργαλέῳ ἢ καὶ ξίφει σπονδεντι
εἶργον ἐνὶ μεγάροισι παρηγορέοντες ἔπεσσι
σεῦ ἔνεκ' ἀχθυμένην καὶ τηλυγέτοιο θυγατρὸς·
τῆς νύ σε πρὸς τε γάμου πολυγηθέος ἡδὲ σεῦ αὐτοῦ
λίσσομαι ἄμφ' ἐμέθεν στυγερῆς λελαθέσθαι ἀνίης.
(PH 14.154–64)

In this article I will focus on Helen's words at line 156: in her attempt to assuage her husband, she states that she left his home and bed unwillingly: οὐ γὰρ ἐγὼν ἐθέλουσα λίπον σέο δῶμα καὶ εὐνήν. This line evokes one of the most famous and complex of intertextual nexuses. Helen's words mirror those of Aeneas to Dido at *Aeneid* 6.460, those of Medea at *Argonautica* 4.1021–2, those of the *Coma Berenices* at Catullus 66.39 and those of the *Coma Berenices* in Callimachus *Fr.* 110 (Pfeiffer).² These passages, forming only part of the rich matrix from which Helen's plea for leniency is constructed, are themselves in a controversial dialogue,³

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¹ The text of Quintus throughout is that of F. Vian (ed.), *La Suite d'Homère* (Paris, 1963 [vol. 1], 1966 [vol. 2], 1969 [vol. 3]); for Apollonius Rhodius that of F. Vian (ed.), *Apollonius de Rhodes: Argonautiques*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1981); for the *Iliad* that of M.L. West (ed.), *Homeri Ilias* (Stuttgart, 1998, 2000); for the *Aeneid* that of R.A.B. Mynors (ed.), *P. Virgili Maronis: Aeneis* (Oxford, 1969) and for Catullus that of R.A.B. Mynors (ed.), *C. Valerii Catulli: Carmina* (Oxford, 1958).

² Surprisingly, the parallel with the *Aeneid* is not noted elsewhere, not even in U. Gärtner, *Quintus Smyrnaeus und die Aeneis: Zur Nachwirkung Virgils in der griechischen Literatur der Kaiserzeit* (Munich, 2005), the most detailed treatment of the relationship between the *Posthomerica* and the *Aeneid*.

³ One scholar (R.D. Griffith, 'Catullus' *Coma Berenices* and Aeneas' farewell to Dido', *TAPhA* 125 [1995], 47–59, at 47) has called this schema of parallels 'a test case' in studies of the nature of Virgilian intertextuality.

and their relationship has provoked many diverse opinions.⁴ In the first part of the article, I will set Helen's words in their Homeric and Posthomeric context and put them into dialogue with instances of other epic desertions and excuses, intertextuality that, in itself, contributes much to our understanding of Helen's speech. My focus will then turn to Medea's words to Arete at *Argonautica* 4 and to Aeneas' words to Dido in *Aeneid* 6, and to their impact on our reading of Helen at *PosthomERICA* 14. By discussing Helen's plea and its intertextuality, I will enter an intertextual complex of scholarship, and show that the many texts alluded to have a vital impact on the interpretation of a text that demands a learned reader response.⁵

I

In the twentieth century, there was one issue in particular that dominated the sparse scholarship on the *PosthomERICA*: the 'Latin question', namely, whether or not Quintus had read the *Aeneid* (and Latin literature generally), and, if so, whether there were definitive allusions in the poem that pointed to and proved this.⁶ From Richard Heinze's analysis (1903) to Ursula Gärtner's detailed monograph (2005), scholars have attempted to provide an answer to this 'question'.⁷ The approach used by these scholars, however, has frequently centred round a conception of the poetic abilities (or lack thereof) of the historical figure Quintus. Thus, the two foremost scholars who discussed the Latin question, Rudolf Keydell (for influence) and Francis Vian (against influence), in their sometimes polemical disputations on the subject, both grounded their discussions of Quintus' possible use of Virgil not only on the *minutiae* of verbal parallels but also on the inferiority of Quintus (to Virgil).⁸ Keydell does argue convincingly, however, for direct influence, using an example of a minor passage in Virgil alluded to by Quintus to state the case that Quintus used the *Aeneid* carefully and did not just imitate the major episodes from the second book of the *Aeneid* for his own version of the sack of Troy.⁹ Vian, in

⁴ See J. Wills, 'Divided allusion: Virgil and the *Coma Berenices*', *HSPH* 98 (1998), 277–305, at 287, n. 20.

⁵ This kind of learning exhibited in an epic text has more readily been acknowledged for the poetic capabilities of Virgil than Quintus: even Francis Vian, whose work dominated studies of the *PosthomERICA* in the twentieth century, asserts that the poem's 'deficiencies' are down to the author: 'ces défauts trahissent un manque certain de personnalité chez l'auteur' (F. Vian, *Recherches sur les PosthomERICA de Quintus de Smyrne* [Paris, 1959], 250).

⁶ The *PosthomERICA*'s relationship to the epic cycle has also received a considerable amount of attention in modern scholarship: for a list of scholars who dealt with this topic, see Gärtner (n. 2), 28, n. 10.

⁷ R. Heinze, *Virgils epische Technik* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1915³), 63–78 (1st edition, Leipzig, Berlin, 1903); and Gärtner (n. 2). For a survey of the scholarship on the 'Latin question', see Gärtner (n. 2), 30–7, and esp. 30 for a detailed list of scholars (dating from 1783 onwards) for and against Virgilian influence; Gärtner (n. 2), 287, herself concludes that we cannot rule out direct influence, just as we cannot definitively prove it. See also, most recently, A. James, 'Quintus of Smyrna and Virgil: a matter of prejudice', in M. Baumbach and S. Bär (edd.), *Quintus Smyrnaeus: Transforming Homer in Second Sophistic Epic* (Berlin, 2007), 145–57.

⁸ E.g. R. Keydell, 'Quintus von Smyrna', *RE* 24 (1963), 1271–96, at 1295 and Vian (n. 5); cf. James (n. 7), 147–8.

⁹ R. Keydell, 'Quintus von Smyrna und Vergil', *Hermes* 82 (1954), 254–6, at 255–6: he draws attention to the parallel between the description of the Greeks locking shields together above their heads at *PH* 11.356–74 and the description of a *testudo* at *Aen.* 9.512–18.

his ground-breaking study on the *Posthomerica*, proves that the poem displays a thorough and wide-ranging learning,¹⁰ but stops short of including Latin poetry in this learning. Vian was reluctant to consider seriously close verbal parallels between Quintus and Virgil: he felt, *contra* Keydell, that Virgilian presence would be more pervasive in the *Posthomerica* had Quintus made use of Virgil so closely, which he felt was not the case, and argued that there were too many differences between the two narratives to allow for any idea that Quintus followed the Virgilian model. Instead, his overall key argument was that both Quintus and Virgil had recourse to a common (Greek) source, sometimes verifiable, and if not, then lost.¹¹

This article will avoid these historicising parameters associated with scholarship to date on the Latin question,¹² and will instead illustrate what Latin (as well as Greek) intertexts actually *do* when we bring them into dialogue with the strategies of the *Posthomerica*.¹³ Intertextuality and the advanced studies on imitation that have been applied to other classical texts with such success are markedly absent, for example, from the recent book-length treatment by Gärtner.¹⁴ Thus, I will not try to provide the final answer to this arguably unanswerable question, but will tread a path less worn by scholarship on the *Posthomerica*, especially in respect to the poem's relationship with the *Aeneid*. Virgil necessarily exists within the Homeric template that forms the mainframe of the *Posthomerica*, both as supplementary code model – since the *Aeneid*, too, forms part of the mass of epic material that feeds into *our* reading of the *Posthomerica* – and as exemplary model.¹⁵ There is no evidence beyond any doubt to suggest that Quintus did *not* use the *Aeneid*, and so on this basis, when an intertext, or allusion, lying latent in the text, is activated by the reader, because of that reader's active role in giving the exemplary text (the text remembered) a participation in the imitating text (the text being read), there is an interaction between an implied author's allusion to a part of another work with the reader's memory of that work activated in the text being read. Thus, when I read an allusion to the *Aeneid* in the *Posthomerica*, I (as subjective reader) make

¹⁰ Vian (n. 5), *passim* and especially 250: 'Quintus a beaucoup lu'.

¹¹ See James (n. 7), 147–8, and Vian (n. 5), 95–101 and especially 98–9, where he also states that Quintus probably used a (Greek) mythological summary as a source (rather than Virgil directly). As James (n. 7), 149, points out, scholars such as Vian were reluctant to allow Quintus any originality in composition (and originality in imitation).

¹² See also the methodology set out by Gärtner (n. 2), 38–40. When I use 'allusion' in this article, I follow the definition given by J. Pucci, *The Full-knowing Reader: Allusion and the Power of the Reader in the Western Literary Tradition* (New Haven, CT, 1998), 47: 'The literary allusion is the verbal moment in a subsequent text of a specific and verifiable moment in a prior text, generated through the collusion of authorial and readerly intent, neither controlled nor limited by the language that constitutes it, in which a bundle of potential meanings obtains, retrievable at any given time only in part.' An allusion is activated by the reader and depends on his/her reading background, and any notion of 'author' is a constructed, unnecessarily historical, one. Cf. S. Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (Cambridge, 1998), 50: 'For us as critics, the alluding poet is ultimately and necessarily a figure whom we ourselves read out from the text.'

¹³ Cf. the approach of G.B. Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, trans. and ed. C. Segal (Ithaca and London, 1986), 28: 'Even when the resemblances do not appear gratuitous – that is, even when some form of intentionality seems undeniable – my concern is with describing how such resemblances *function* within the literary text.'

¹⁴ Gärtner (n. 2).

¹⁵ I borrow the terminology of Conte (n. 13), 31, where he writes of Homer as both code and exemplary model of Virgil.

Quintus a poet who alludes to the *Aeneid*. With such a scheme, the poetic merits and richly interpretable intertextual heritage of the poem will become clear.¹⁶

II

The scene of Helen's appeal to Menelaus in *Posthomerica* 14 is constructed from the intertextuality of Helen herself in Homer and in all previous (and logically, but ahistorically, later) literature where she makes an appearance, from similar encounters between rejecters and those whom they rejected,¹⁷ but also from specific verbal moments in other texts alluded to in this text. Helen's claim that she left Menelaus' bed and home unwillingly concurs with her Homeric utterances. She makes clear at *Iliad* 3.173–4 that she wished death had been her pleasure when she followed Paris to Troy:

ὡς ὄφελεν θάνατός μοι ἀδεῖν κακὸς ὅπποτε δεῦρο
 υἱεῖ σῶ ἐπόμην θάλαμον γνωτούς τε λιποῦσα.

As someone who must ensure that the Trojans, who fight because of her, keep her as much as possible in their favour, Helen's words to Priam and the Trojan elders are also designed to portray her as the unwilling victim on enemy soil.¹⁸ Helen may indeed have been unwilling to follow Paris, but any interpretation of her statement before the Trojans must still be tempered with the knowledge that she is careful to say the right thing. Paris, later in the same book, speaks of having snatched Helen away from Sparta (*ἀρπάξας*, 3.444).¹⁹ Helen also emphasises divine influence. In *Iliad* 3 she blames Aphrodite for her predicament: she mocks her by asking (3.400–2) whether she will now carry her off to some other place to be with another man, now that Alexander (she presumes) has been killed by Menelaus. There she puts the blame for her separation from Menelaus squarely with Aphrodite, Aphrodite implied not merely as a (more nebulous) divine motivation but as a personal instigator. Similarly in *Iliad* 6, she explicitly states that the gods devised these ills for her in exactly the way they happened (*τάδε γ' ὦδε θεοὶ κακὰ τεκμήραντο*, 6.349), and that Zeus sent an evil lot on both her and Paris (*κακὸν μόνον*, 6.357). She expresses similar sentiments, in retrospect, at *Odyssey*

¹⁶ Richly interpretable, that is, in contrast to the traditional negative reception of the poem: cf. M. Baumbach, S. Bär, 'An introduction to Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Posthomerica*', in Baumbach and Bär (n. 7), 1–26, at 23–5. The unflattering remarks of H. Lloyd-Jones, Review of F.M. Combellack, *The War at Troy: What Homer Didn't Tell*, by Quintus of Smyrna (Oklahoma, 1968), *CR* 19 (1969), 101, are a mere representation of such negativity: 'The anaemic pastiche served up by Quintus is utterly devoid of life.'

¹⁷ Cf. D. Fowler, *Roman Constructions: Readings in Postmodern Latin* (Oxford, 2000), 120: 'The character of Dido is constructed out of her intertextuality with a superset of Circe, Nausicaa, Calypso, Penelope, Medea (in Euripides and Apollonius), Ariadne, Ajax, Phaedra, Semiramis, Cleopatra ...'.

¹⁸ Cf. H.M. Roisman, 'Helen in the *Iliad*: *causa belli* and victim of war: from silent weaver to public speaker', *AJPh* 127 (2006), 1–36, at 8.

¹⁹ Compare Helen's statement at *Iliad* 24.764 (marked as an interpolation by West [n. 1]) that Alexander brought her to Troy: against Paris' statement we should assume that he did use force to an extent (*ὄς μ' ἄγαγε Τροίηνδε*).

4.259–64, where she speaks of the *ἄτρη* that Aphrodite gave her when she led her away from her homeland (4.261–2).²⁰

This is the broader impression in Homer of Helen and her abduction: she is portrayed as unwilling and powerless. A more nuanced reading, however, is possible. Despite her constant upbraiding of Paris in the *Iliad*, both in his presence and in the presence of others, there are indications that she was not completely unwilling to follow him. In the passage above from *Iliad* 3, she tells Priam and the elders on the wall that she wished death had been her pleasure when she followed Paris. If death was not her pleasure, then what was? Ancient interpreters already read this statement as a sign that, conversely, it was her pleasure instead to follow Paris.²¹ When Helen meets Paris later in the same book, she scorns him for not fighting Menelaus, and exclaims that she wishes he had died, beaten by her former husband, the better man (3.428–30). Just as she taunts him to go and face Menelaus (3.432–3), she changes tack (3.433–6) and bids him to cease from fighting foolishly against Menelaus (*ἀλλά σ' ἐγὼ γε / παύεσθαι κέλομαι*, 433–4), lest he be slain by him. Her wish that Paris cease from fighting has provoked varying opinions. Some critics have been unwilling to allow Helen any positive feelings towards Paris in her speech,²² but the point that she bids Paris now not to fight lest he die is a toning down of her initial (surely exaggerated) wish (3.428) that he had been slain by Menelaus.²³ In the light of these passages, a more subtle portrait of Helen emerges. Beyond the self-deprecation and castigation of Paris, there are indications that Helen was not altogether unwilling in following Paris. Her statements in the *Posthomeric* are built upon, and refract, her statements in the *Iliad*, and through the reader's recollection of her Homeric portrayal, Helen's words are interpreted in the light of the *Iliad*; similarly, we read Quintus' interpretation of the Homeric Helen in his presentation of Helen in the *Posthomeric*. Any willingness on the part of Quintus' Helen to blame the gods, or even to put all the blame on Paris, is read as part of an intertextual continuum between the *Iliad* and the *Posthomeric*.²⁴

²⁰ Her praise for her husband's looks and intelligence (4.264) suggests that her words are designed to please Menelaus. That her pro-Greek, anti-Trojan bias is not as straightforward as she expresses is suggested by Menelaus' recollection of how she imitated the voices of the Greeks' wives in an attempt to get the men inside the wooden horse to cry out. See W. Allan (ed.), *Euripides: Helen* (Cambridge, 2008), 11–12, on this scene in the *Odyssey* as reflecting 'the uneasy reunion of husband and wife'.

²¹ Σ bT (Erbse) on *Il.* 3.173: *ἐραθείσα γὰρ ἠκολούθησεν Ἀλεξάνδρῳ*. Cf. H. Erbse, 'Über Götter und Menschen in der *Ilias* Homers', *Hermes* 124 (1996), 1–16, at 1–2, on Helen's state of mind here.

²² E.g. G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary, Vol. 1: Books 1–4* (Cambridge, 1985), 327: 'The truth is that the whole address is of a piece, bitterly sarcastic and hostile; what she actually feels is hard to divine.' Most recently, Roisman (n. 18), 22, argues that the very fact that Helen *orders* Paris to stop reverses the normal hierarchy, shows disrespect and thus proves that she is being contemptuous. An order to stop, however, can still be a desire to see that Paris comes to no harm.

²³ Cf. O. Taplin, *Homeric Soundings: The Shaping of the Iliad* (Oxford, 1992), 101, on Helen's love for Paris 'despite herself'.

²⁴ The fact that the *Posthomeric* begins exactly at the point in the Trojan story where the *Iliad* ends can be understood as signifying the status of the new epic: Quintus is completing Homer, or is even 'still' Homer. Cf. S. Bär, 'Quintus Smyrnaeus und die Tradition des epischen Musenanrufs', in Baumbach and Bär (n. 7), 29–64, at 32–3 and 61.

In the *Posthomerica*, Helen is mentioned 24 times²⁵ but appears only five times:²⁶ in these appearances, she speaks only once before her reconciliation with Menelaus, at 10.392–405 after the death of Paris. She states that she would rather have been snatched away by the Harpies than follow Paris:

Ὠς ὄφελόν μ' Ἄρπυιαι ἀνηρείψαντο πάροισιν,
ὀπότε σοί <γ> ἐπόμην ὀλοῆ ὑπὸ Δαίμονος Αἴσῃ. 395

Helen's locution here alludes to her Iliadic pronouncement to Priam at *Iliad* 3.173–4, quoted above.²⁷ Note that, as she states in the *Iliad*, Helen followed Paris, albeit here under the compulsion of a *Daemon's* decree (396: ἐπόμην ὀλοῆ ὑπὸ Δαίμονος Αἴσῃ). Her words are spoken to herself, and we are therefore invited to interpret them as truthful.²⁸ The expression *Δαίμονος Αἴσῃ* occurs on three other occasions in the *Posthomerica*: all of the instances imply a force of fate that is irresistible, connected with death (by means of deception).²⁹ *Aisa* in the *Posthomerica* broadly follows the role given to it in Homer, where it is a synonym for *Moira*.³⁰ There are, however, specific instances where *Aisa* is described explicitly as the fundamental principle behind the transpiring of events. At *Posthomerica* 11.272–7, for example, the primary narrator summarises, in an extended *gnome*, the superiority of *Aisa* over the immortals, and the ineluctability of the thread that she spins for all mortals when they are born.³¹ The idea of the thread of destiny as fixed from the day of one's birth is Homeric: it occurs, for example, three times in Homer.³² In the passage in *Posthomerica* 11, however, there is a particular emphasis on Fate as more powerful than the gods, including Zeus. Helen's fate was truly fixed,

²⁵ At *PH* 2.54, 66, 97; 6.24, 152, 156, 157; 9.89, 143; 10.287, 324, 346, 363, 389; 12.548; 13.356, 379, 412, 470, 519, 525; 14.39, 55, 154.

²⁶ In Book 6 (153–65), where Helen and Eurypylos exchange marvelling gazes; in Book 9 (143) – only the Trojan women and the old men are left on the walls looking down on battle, but Helen stays away; in Book 10 (389–405), where she 'laments' for Paris; and in Book 14, at 40–62, where she is led out from Troy by Menelaus, and here at 154–64 in her reconciliation with her husband.

²⁷ The recurrent ἐπόμην is also in identical metrical *sedes* in each case.

²⁸ Note 10.391: φίλον δ' ἀνὰ θυμὸν ἔειπεν ('she spoke secretly in her dear heart'). Of course the 'truthfulness' of Helen's words is open to interpretation in the sense that she might be self-deceiving, or in the sense that the narrator constructs Helen's words to point the reader in a particular textual direction.

²⁹ So U. Gärtner, 'Zur Rolle der Personifikationen des Schicksals in den *Posthomerica* des Quintus Smyrnaeus', in Baumbach and Bär (n. 7), 211–40, at 216. The three other passages are *PH* 1.103–4 (Andromache to Penthesileia, where the former advises the latter of the stupidity of thinking success possible against Achilles), 3.374 (of the Trojan dead, brought about by *Aisa*) and 5.594 (of the madness of Ajax and its source, as discoursed upon by Odysseus). It is difficult to define what exactly is meant by *Δαίμονος*. Gärtner (n. 29), 216, n. 47, suggests a general divine influence, similar to the use of the generalised *θεός* in the *Iliad*. Cf. F.A. Wilford, 'ΔΑΙΜΩΝ in Homer', *Numen* 12 (1965), 217–32, at 222–4.

³⁰ Cf. LSJ s.v. Αἴσα: 'Like *Μοῖρα*, the divinity who dispenses to everyone his lot or destiny.' Gärtner (n. 29), 221, states that *Μοῖρα*, personified or un-personified, and *Μοῖραι* 'lassen sich ähnliche Beobachtungen machen wie zur *Aisa*'.

³¹ The same idea is reinforced at *PH* 14.97–100, where the primary narrator states that the gods who favoured Troy could not have changed the outcome of the war, since they (and even Zeus) cannot easily change fate.

³² At *Il.* 24.209–11 (*Μοῖρα*), 20.127–8 (*Aisa*) and *Odyssey* 7.196–8 (the *Klothes*): so B.C. Dietrich, 'The spinning of fate in Homer', *Phoenix* 16 (1962), 86–101, at 86, who discusses these Homeric passages.

and she soliloquises in Book 10 on the unavoidable path that she followed, laid down for her by Fate. Nevertheless, the influence of Fate, however irresistible, does not of course exclude the *possibility* that Helen might still have followed Paris willingly.

When she addresses Menelaus in *Posthomerica* 14, however, she states rather that she was seized by force by Paris and the Trojans (14.157–8):³³

ἀλλὰ μ' Ἀλεξάνδροιο βίη καὶ Τρώιοι νῆες
σεῦ ἀπὸ νόσφιν ἔοντος ἀνηρέψαντο κιόντες.

Why the change from blaming the gods to blaming Paris?³⁴ Nowhere in the Homeric poems does Helen explicitly lay the blame on Paris for her abduction;³⁵ here, though, she is careful to word her excuses in a way to reinforce the idea that she was his unwilling victim.³⁶ She left Menelaus unwillingly, only because she was physically seized by Paris, not because of infatuation, which goes unmentioned.³⁷ Helen is astute: in Book 13 she heard Agamemnon assuage his brother's anger against her by explaining that Paris was to blame:

Οὐ γάρ τοι Ἑλένη πέλει αἰτίη, ὡς σύ γ' ἔολπας,
ἀλλὰ Πάρις ξενίοιο Διὸς καὶ σείο τραπέζης
λησάμενος· τῷ καὶ μιν ἐν ἄλγεσι τίσατο δαίμων. (PH 13.412–14)

Menelaus listened to his brother's persuasions (δ' δ' αἰψ' ἐπίθησε, 415), although little did either Agamemnon or Helen know that he had been prevented from killing his wife, visibly because of her beauty, invisibly through Aphrodite's agency (PH 13.389–92: Aphrodite also knocks the sword out of his hand and checks him).³⁸

³³ At Eur. *Tro.* 962–4, Helen states that Paris forced her to marry him, and that she suffered slavery in Troy.

³⁴ Cf. Vian (n. 1), 3.127.

³⁵ *Iliad* 6.356 is the closest she comes to blaming Paris in this way: she mentions his *Ate* but only in reference to the *ponos* it gives Hector (she also states that she herself is also the cause of Hector's trouble).

³⁶ That Helen in the *Posthomerica* was other than an unwilling victim is suggested cogently by a simile and its narrative context at PH 14.39–61: Helen is compared to Aphrodite caught with Ares in the bonds of Hephaestus (a reference to the song of Demodocus in *Odyssey* 8). The *gnome* in the simile that there is nothing worse than to be caught in the act of adultery before the eyes of a husband (14.53–4: δεινὸν γὰρ ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἀκοίτῳ / ἀμφαδὸν εἰσοράσθαι ἐπ' αἴσχει θηλυτέρῃσι) transfers the guilt of adultery to the compared Helen as she is led out by Menelaus from Troy. The primary narrator elsewhere makes only one explicit statement on Helen's guilt: at 13.400 it is stated that Menelaus, through Aphrodite's power, forgot all Helen's errors with respect to the marriage bed (ὄσσα οἱ ἐν λεχέεσσι παρήλιτε κουριδίοισι). For further discussion of Helen in Book 14, see the recent commentary by K. Carvounis, 'Transformations of Epic: Reading Quintus of Smyrna, *Posthomerica* XIV' (Diss., University of Oxford, 2005).

³⁷ Note how ἀνηρέψαντο (14.158) is also used at 10.395: Helen has altered her wish into a fact. She now claims that she was seized, instead of indicating that she followed (under the compulsion of Fate, and perhaps willingly) Paris. Cf. *Odyssey* 4.261–2, where it is clear that the *Ate* she speaks of is infatuation, influenced by Aphrodite (ἄτην δὲ μετέστενον, ἦν Ἀφροδίτη / δῶχ'): cf. A. Heubeck, S. West and J.B. Hainsworth, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey: Volume I: Introduction and Books I–VIII* (Oxford, 1988), 210: 'Helen is not disclaiming responsibility for her actions; she means that she acted under the influence of overwhelming passion.'

³⁸ Cf. the Helen episode at *Aen.* 2.567–603, and especially 2.592–3, where Venus stops Aeneas by the hand as he contemplates killing Helen. The Helen episode may not be genuinely Virgilian: for a systematic and convincing article against Virgilian authorship, see G.P. Goold, 'Servius

Helen noted her husband's reaction to Agamemnon's words, and reuses them in her reconciliation, even opening her speech with similar phrasing to that used by Agamemnon (*Ἴσχεο νῦν, Μενέλαε, χολούμενος*, 13.409 ~ *Μή νύ μοι, ὦ Μενέλαε, χόλον ποτιβάλλεο θυμῷ*, 14.155).³⁹ Helen's subtlety in recreating an excuse that has already proved successful reflects her Homeric ability to 'cultivate the sympathy and good will of someone whose protection she needs'.⁴⁰

Her claims to have attempted suicide on several occasions for his sake and their daughter's (14.159–62) give an exaggerated picture of a suffering woman estranged from her true husband.⁴¹ Intertextuality creates a different picture. Helen's excuses echo the version in Euripides' *Troades*:⁴² the blame that she places on Paris and the Trojans (*PH* 14.155–8) matches her excuses to Menelaus at *Troades* 919–94. However, her assertions that she attempted suicide (*PH* 14.159–62) are undercut by Hecuba's accusation that the very absence of such actions highlighted Helen's unwillingness to return to Menelaus (*Tro.* 1012–13).⁴³ The Euripidean account points to the insincerity of Posthomeric Helen's suicide claims, and has a similar effect on how we read her 'unwillingness' to leave Menelaus.

Helen's words also activate a series of statements by previous epic deserters bent on recapturing their former lover's affections. In the *Posthomeric*, Paris' plea to Oenone provides an ironic parallel. Injured mortally by Philoctetes' arrow, Paris begs help of Oenone and her cures (*PH* 10.284–305). His speech to her follows a similar pattern to that of Helen to Menelaus: he begins with a plea for Oenone to ease her hatred against him (284–5) and states that he was compelled by the Fates to leave her unwillingly (285–7). He exclaims that he would rather have died in her arms than have slept with Helen. He then begs for Oenone to help him (289–97), pleads with her to forget any jealousy (298) and finally warns of the consequences of not paying heed to the *Litai* (300–5). It is Paris' claim to have left Oenone unwillingly that receives a specific echo in Helen's reconciliatory words; he asks Oenone not to hate him (10.284–5), since he left her against his will (285–6):

ἐπεὶ ἄρ σε πάρος λίπον ἐν μεγάροισι
χίρην οὐκ ἐθέλων περ' ἄγον δέ με Κῆρες ἄφυκτοι ...

285

The similarity to Helen's words belies the insincerity in her speech, given that Paris uniformly did not want to give Helen up to the Greeks.⁴⁴ The echo pairs Helen and Paris together as deserters, desperately and deceitfully trying to persuade those whom they deserted to accept them back, and to forgive them. The twin causes of the war are united intertextually in their pleas for acceptance against spurious

and the Helen episode', *HSPH* 74 (1970), 101–68; for an opposing view, cf. esp. R.G. Austin, 'Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.567–88', *CQ* 11 (1961), 185–98.

³⁹ Note, again, the careful metrical alignment of the vocatives.

⁴⁰ Roisman (n. 18), 13–14.

⁴¹ Cf. Vian (n. 1), 3.157: 'Hélène fait retomber toute la responsabilité des événements sur Paris et sur ses compatriotes ... elle prétend n'avoir été qu'une victime et, pour prouver sa sincérité, elle assure qu'elle a tenté maintes fois de mettre fin à ses jours.'

⁴² As Vian (n. 5), 76, notes.

⁴³ She states that a noble wife longing for her husband would attempt suicide (*ἂ γενναία γυνή / δράσειεν ἂν ποθοῦσα τὸν πάρος πόσων*, 1013–14). Cf. Vian (n. 1), 3.157, n. 5.

⁴⁴ At *PH* 2.68–80, for example, Paris rebukes Polydamas for daring to suggest that they should hand back Helen and stop the war.

claims of innocence. In Paris' case, Oenone rejects his pleas, but reneges after Paris' death to die beside him on his funeral pyre. Menelaus has already accepted Helen back, through Aphrodite's influence, and Helen's words have all the desired effect. Her pleas of innocence and good conduct win him over through the agency of Aphrodite, but the reader is more powerful: we read Helen's protestations against her complex Homeric persona and a deceitful Posthomeric Paris.

The Apollonian Medea adds to this background. At *Argonautica* 4.1021–2,⁴⁵ Medea explains to Arete that she left Colchis against her will:

*μη̄ μὲν ἐγὼν ἐθέλουσα σὺν ἀνδράσιν ἀλλοδαποῖσιν
κείθεν ἀφωρμήθην.*

The verbal similarity (underlined) to Helen's words is matched by the similarity of Medea's status as one who has deserted her homeland (with the Argonauts, *σὺν ἀνδράσιν ἀλλοδαποῖσιν*, 4.1021). Her insistence that she left her homeland unwillingly must be interpreted against the earlier Apollonian narrative. Medea left primarily because of Hera, who put fear into her heart and caused her to flee with the Argonauts.⁴⁶ Medea, addressing Arete, puts the reason for her actions as down to fear on account of her error in helping Jason in his quest:

*στυγερόν δέ με τάρβος ἔπεισε
τῆσδε φυγῆς μνήσασθαι, ὅτ' ἤλιτον.* (*Argon.* 4.1022–3)

Medea openly acknowledges the wrong that she has caused,⁴⁷ and the fear that she says is the cause of her flight can be vouched for by the reader.⁴⁸ However, the underlying root of her error, and the resulting fear, is clear, despite the influence of Hera: as Hunter notes, 'Medea tries to conceal her passion as one of those common human misdemeanours.'⁴⁹ The divine causation behind Medea's behaviour in the *Argonautica*, from Eros in Book 3 to Hera in Book 4, engages our sympathy: she states simply that it was fear, not Hera-inspired fear, that caused her to leave her home, and shamefully tries to disguise her love for Jason, a love inflamed by the god Eros.⁵⁰ A virginal innocence and ignorance of the causes of emotions, however, does not fit well with Helen. Her willingness to blame the gods openly, in Homer and in the *Posthomeric*, contrasts with her words to Menelaus: Helen

⁴⁵ Vian (n. 1), 3.182, n. 4, indicates this passage as a parallel for Helen's words to Menelaus, but does not discuss the implications of the allusion.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Argon.* 4.11–23, esp. 11 and 22.

⁴⁷ On the admissions of error by Medea, see R.L. Hunter, *The Argonautica of Apollonius: Literary Studies* (Cambridge, 1993), 63–4.

⁴⁸ Cf. H. Fränkel, *Noten zu den Argonautika des Apollonios* (Munich, 1968), 556: 'Medea spricht die reine Wahrheit.'

⁴⁹ R.L. Hunter, 'Medea's flight: the fourth book of the *Argonautica*', *CQ* 37 (1987), 129–39, at 139. Medea is quick to tell Arete that her virgin's belt remains unstained and unpolluted (4.1024–5), proving that her affair with Jason, rather than her role in the recovery of the fleece, is at the forefront of her thoughts here.

⁵⁰ Medea does not try to mislead Arete: she downplays her love, but still speaks truthfully about the fear that caused her to leave her home. For the view that Medea cunningly misleads Arete, and for examples of Medea's deceit in the *Argonautica*, see I.E. Holmberg, 'Μῆτις and gender in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*', *TAPhA* 128 (1998), 135–59, at 146 (where she writes of Medea's ability 'to manipulate language or to lie').

is aware of the divine activity in her story, but pleads a more human element, cunningly, to assuage Menelaus.

III

We have no reason to assume that Aeneas is being untruthful when he tells Dido, in *Aeneid* 6, that he left her shore unwillingly:⁵¹

invitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi. 460
 sed me iussa deum, quae nunc has ire per umbras,
 per loca senta situ cogunt noctemque profundam,
 imperiis egere suis.

Much has been written on these words.⁵² For the purposes of this article, what is of significance is the reunion of Aeneas and Dido, to which the reunion of Helen and Menelaus is bound by intertextuality. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that the *PosthomERICA* alludes here to the words of Aeneas to Dido:

οὐ γὰρ ἐγὼν ἐθέλουσα λίπον σέο δῶμα καὶ εὐνήν,
 ἀλλὰ μ' Ἀλεξάνδροιο βίη καὶ Τρώιοι υἶες
 σεῦ ἀπὸ νόσφιν ἐόντος ἀηρεΐψαντο κίοντες. (PH 14.156–8)

invitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi.
 sed me iussa deum, quae nunc has ire per umbras
 per loca senta situ cogunt noctemque profundam
 imperiis egere suis. (Aen. 6.460–3)

This allusion has perhaps long been overlooked because of the dissimilarity of contexts. Aeneas is settled on a mission to found a city, and parts forever from Dido. Menelaus destroys a city to be reunited with Helen. The verbal parallelism builds similarities and points to the interpretable potentiality of differences.⁵³ Both Aeneas and Helen speak again for the first time with the loved one whom they deserted. The allusion to *Aeneid* 6 conjures up Aeneas' and Dido's parting exchanges in *Aeneid* 4. There, Aeneas pleaded abstracts: duty, Fate, the gods, a founding destiny (Rome) gave him little choice but to leave Dido and Carthage.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Cf. J. Tatum, 'Allusion and interpretation in *Aeneid* 6.440–76', *AJPh* 105 (1984), 434–52, at 440: 'One would need a heart of flint (or possibly Marpesian marble) not to believe in the sincerity of his words here.'

⁵² For a summary of scholarship on these lines, see Griffith (n. 3), 47–50, and Wills (n. 4), 287–91. One point that is undisputed in the varied scholarship is that *Aen.* 6.460 alludes to Catullus 66.39. The famous problem of this allusion is neatly summed up by R.G. Austin, *P. Virgili Maronis: Aeneidos Liber Sextus* (Oxford, 1977), 164: 'Modern susceptibilities are pained by Virgil's presumed indifference to the incongruity so produced [i.e. frivolous moment (Catullus) in high epic tension (Virgil)], and suggest that his line is an unconscious reminiscence: this is mere wishful thinking.' More recent scholarship does not exhibit such pained susceptibilities.

⁵³ It is not within the compass of this article to discuss the close correspondence between *Argon.* 4.1021–2 and *Aen.* 6.460, noticed first by Hunter (n. 49), 138–9.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Aen.* 4.340–61, and especially the close identification of 'true' love with patriotism: *hic amor, hic patria est* (347). Cf. the curious remarks by R.G. Austin, *P. Virgili Maronis: Aeneidos Liber Quartus* (Oxford, 1963), 110: 'But this is not his real feeling ... it is only what his "nagging gods" have made him feel.'

By Book 6, he has still not changed his tune,⁵⁵ unlike the alterations to her story made by Helen. She does not blame abstracts such as Fate or the gods, as in her other proclamations in Homer and elsewhere in the *Posthomeric*, but personality – Paris. This juxtaposition of excuses is exacerbated by the similarity of syntax but dissimilarity of reasons: the adversative conjunctions with emphatic personal pronouns (*ἀλλά μ'* and *sed me*) are followed, in the case of Helen, by the violence of Paris and the Trojans (*Ἀλεξάνδροιο βίη καὶ Τρώιοι νῆες*, 14.157), and, in the case of Aeneas, by the gods' mandates (*iussa deum*, 6.460).

The allusion also summons up the circumstances of Dido's death in *Aeneid* 4, since it is the *ghost* of Dido to whom Aeneas speaks. Dido died on a funeral pyre symbolically laden with the effigy and sword of the departing Aeneas:⁵⁶ with Aeneas as good as dead, Dido seeks to join her former husband in death.⁵⁷ Oenone, in *Posthomeric* 10, commits suicide by jumping onto the burning funeral pyre of Paris, deciding to die and be reunited with her former husband. Helen, linked as an epic female figure to both Dido and Oenone,⁵⁸ on the other hand, claims to have tried to commit suicide, but lives on to meet her former husband in life, now that Paris is dead and Troy sacked. In her attempt to fit into the sequence of tragic heroines separated from their husbands and seeking death, she makes specious claims to her husband about suicide, reunited with him now in life.

The cost of Helen's desertion of Menelaus is manifest: the destruction of Troy and the deaths of so many Greeks and Trojans fighting because of her.⁵⁹ Yet in this Helen is much more an Aeneas-figure than a tragic heroine, a causer of tragic death, not herself among the tragic dead. Within the broader intertextual framework, a comparison between Helen, Oenone and Dido seems natural. Helen, however, is linked in her speech to Menelaus, not to Dido primarily but to Aeneas, who speaks to Dido. Their claims to have left their respective lovers unwillingly are spoken against a background of suffering and destruction. In Dido's suicide is symbolised not only the tragic end of a love affair but also the Roman destruction of Carthage,⁶⁰ brought about by Aeneas' unavoidable quest to found the new Troy.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Yet again, Aeneas is 'admirably aware of his fated historical mission yet insensitive to the emotional nuances of the situation in which he finds himself' (S. Skulsky, "'Invitus, regina ...': Aeneas and the love of Rome', *AJPh* 106 [1985], 447–55, at 448).

⁵⁶ *Aen.* 4.507–8: *super exuvias enseque relictum / effigiemque toro locat haud ignara futuri*. I follow T.E. Goud and J.C. Yardley, 'Dido's burning effigy: *Aeneid* 4.508', *RhM* 131 (1988), 386–8, in that the effigy and weapons of Aeneas on the pyre are part of a symbolic funeral of Aeneas rather than items in a sympathetic magic ritual to restore Aeneas to Dido; Dido dies, symbolically at least, *with* Aeneas (cf. *Aen.* 4.651–62, and then especially *nostrae* at 662).

⁵⁷ It is interesting that Dido seeks to join in death the one whom she betrayed by her love for Aeneas, which mirrors to an extent the Helen story, only that Helen meets her first husband alive. On Dido's *culpa*, cf. N. Rudd, 'Dido's *culpa*', in S.J. Harrison (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Vergil's Aeneid* (Oxford, 1990), 145–66, esp. 154.

⁵⁸ Note also the echo between Helen's repeated wish that she had died rather than followed Paris (*Iliad* 3.173–4 and *PH* 10.395–6, discussed above) and Oenone's wish that she had died rather than rejected Paris' pleas for her help (*PH* 10.428–9). The recurrence of *ἀνηρείψαντο* in Oenone's words brings up the contrast with Helen's wish: Oenone regrets rejecting Paris, while Helen regrets following him.

⁵⁹ Aeneas sums this up neatly at *Aeneid* 2.581–2 [*versus suspecti*]. Cf. Helen's portrayal in the epic cycle, where she is an instrument in the hands of the gods (*Cypria* fr. 1 Bernabé *Διὸς δ' ἔτελείετο βουλῆ;* see the discussion by Allan [n. 20], 12).

⁶⁰ Cf. P.R. Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford, 1986), 283–4.

⁶¹ Dido herself is made to evoke eternal enmity between Carthage and Rome: cf. *Aen.* 4.628–9, with Austin (n. 54), 182: 'Nothing could better express the interlocked struggle of Rome and

Helen's desertion of Menelaus causes the destruction of the old Troy and indeed initiates the story of the *Aeneid*. Her excuse puts personality (Paris) to the fore, in a way that comments on the *iussa* of Aeneas' excuse. Verbal interplay works in retrospect, and Helen's emphasis on individual responsibility instead of her typical referral to the gods' workings in fate, in a *sedes* that evokes Virgil's portrayal of Aeneas, subverts tradition, and, at the end of Trojan epic, realigns the blame for desertion onto the human plane.

Helen's intertextual alignment with Aeneas is dissonant with a possible role as a tragic heroine in the mould of Oenone or Dido. The gender sequence of deserters and those they deserted has been reversed in her case: Aeneas left Dido, Paris left Oenone, but she is the *woman* who left Menelaus. Thus, it is rather Menelaus who takes the role of the deserted, echoing the places taken by Dido and Oenone. Intertextuality emasculates Menelaus, and puts Helen in a role that belongs, by rights, to the perfidious male. The switch brings about consequences that break a habit. Helen succeeds where Paris and Aeneas failed, and her reunion with Menelaus is a happy one, through the agency of Aphrodite, whose power brought help (Dido) to the mission of Aeneas with destructive consequences for Dido, and brought Helen to Paris with tragic consequences for Oenone. While Aeneas' words to Dido in *Aeneid* 6 do not even receive a response, Helen's words to Menelaus prove convincing, and the two, embraced in love, are compared to the intertwining leaves of ivy and vine.⁶²

Ἀσπασίως δ' ἄρα τώ γε παρ' ἀλλήλοισι κλιθέντε
 σφωιτέρου κατὰ θυμὸν ἀνεμνήσαντο γάμοιο.
 Ὡς δ' ὅτε που κισσός τε καὶ ἡμερὶς ἀμφιβάλωνται
 ἀλλήλοισι περὶ πρέμνα, τὰ δ' οὐ ποτε ἴς ἀνέμοιο
 σφῶν ἀπὸ νόσφι βαλέσθαι ἐπισθέναι ὥς ἄρα τώ γε
 ἀλλήλοισι συνέχοντο λυλαιόμενοι φιλότῆτος. (PH 14.173–8)

IV

So Helen 'plays' Aeneas, and does not 'play' Aeneas. She succeeds in her aim of winning over Menelaus. But to an extent she also plays the *Coma Berenices*, to which I now turn as a brief epilogue to this article. Just as the *Posthomeric* alludes to the *Aeneid* in Helen's words of exoneration, so too does it allude to Catullus 66.39 (~ Callimachus *Fr.* 110 [Pfeiffer]):

invita, o regina, tuo de vertice cessi.

οὐ γὰρ ἐγὼν ἐθέλουσα λίπον σέο δῶμα καὶ εὐνήν.

Some of the significances adduced from the Catullan/Callimachean passages for the *Aeneid* could quite easily be reiterated, to an extent, for the *Posthomeric*.⁶³

Carthage then these two lines.' On the Dido story as a symbol of Rome's wars with Carthage, see N.M. Horsfall, 'Dido in the light of history', in Harrison (n. 57), 127–44.

⁶² The reunion, involving as it does husband and wife separated by time and trials, also evokes that of Odysseus and Penelope at *Od.* 23.296 (the traditional *telos* of the *Odyssey*).

⁶³ As summarised by Griffith (n. 3), 47–50.

One key factor is that of transference of atmosphere through intertext. The *coma* speaks in what is undoubtedly a mock-heroic poem: despite views to the contrary,⁶⁴ a talking lock of hair is not to be taken seriously. The intertext adds to our impression that Helen is not entirely straightforward in her explanation to Menelaus; in a moment of high drama, the reader identifies an echo of the *Coma Berenices*, which stated that it left its queen's head unwillingly. The hint of parody through intertext creates an incongruity of moods,⁶⁵ and undercuts how seriously the reader takes Helen's words and their ingenuousness. Helen also serves as a contrast to the *coma*'s addressee, Queen Berenice. Ptolemy III's wife dedicated this lock of her hair for the safe return of her husband from war, as she herself stayed at home awaiting his return.⁶⁶ Helen, on the other hand, was herself dedicated to Paris, the promised prize from a correctly judged beauty contest, a wife on whose account a husband went to war. Strictly speaking, Helen corresponds to the lock of hair (they are the speakers), and thus she is, by transference, the part of Menelaus that was shorn off, the part that was lost. The allusion also invites appropriation of context: the disapprobation of adultery spoken by the *coma* at Catullus 66.84–5 is particularly fitting for Helen.⁶⁷ Ironically, the adulteress (Helen) echoes the scorner of adultery. Thus, as with Oenone, Dido and Medea, intertextuality provides examples of dedication, morals and love, against which Helen is read.

There was an opportunity for me, in this article, to wheel out the typical assertion that Quintus is more likely to have followed Greek sources than a Latin source, that the marked similarity between Virgil and Quintus here is accidental and explicable only by the fact that they both allude to the same Callimachean and Apollonian passages.⁶⁸ Scholars' reluctance to incorporate Virgilian intertexts into discussion of the *Posthomeric* was always on the basis of unempirical evidence.⁶⁹ Critics such as Malcolm Campbell, for example, vehemently opposed any notion that Quintus used Virgil with the idea that the *Aeneid*'s influence would be much more widespread and easily identifiable if Quintus had in fact used him.⁷⁰ Perhaps Quintus did only read the Callimachean passage, and was entirely unaware of the *Aeneid*.⁷¹ However, the comfortable intertextual fit between the situations of Aeneas and Helen can be discussed without the caution of the past. With the knowledge

⁶⁴ So Griffith (n. 3), 49 and *passim*, following Tatum (n. 51), 49, and W. Clausen, 'Catullus and Callimachus', *HSPH* 74 (1970), 90–4. Cf. also R.A. Smith, 'A lock and a promise: myth and allusion in Aeneas' farewell to Dido in *Aeneid* 6', *Phoenix* 47 (1993), 305–12, at 306–8.

⁶⁵ On the irony inherent in Aeneas' words to Dido, echoing the *coma*, see R.O.A.M. Lyne, 'Vergil's *Aeneid*: subversion by intertextuality, Catullus 66.39–40 and other examples', *G&R* 41 (1994), 187–204, at 192–3.

⁶⁶ See Wills (n. 4), 288.

⁶⁷ The *coma* exclaims (84–5): *sed quae se impuro dedit adulterio / illius a mala dona levis bibit irrita pulvis*.

⁶⁸ The common-source theory: see note 11, above.

⁶⁹ More often such reluctance was related to mere prejudice against the capabilities of Quintus as a poet, as discussed above.

⁷⁰ M. Campbell, *A Commentary on Quintus Smyrnaeus Posthomeric XII* (Leiden, 1981), *passim* (following Vian [n. 5], 98–9): his 'vehemence' is evident in 'it may be said at once that direct imitation is *out of the question*' (117, my emphasis) and 'it may be stated at the outset *with absolute certainty* that Quintus' source or ultimate source was a Hellenistic poem [*sc.* and not Virgil]' (133, my emphasis).

⁷¹ Callimachean influence has been noticed in the muse invocation at *PH* 12.310. See Bär (n. 24), 47–51.

that there is no evidence to suggest, *with absolute certainty*, that Quintus did not use Virgil, Helen can play Aeneas as well as the *Coma Berenices*, both in terms of historical allusion, and in terms of the modern reader's engagement with texts.

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