

Dying Like a Woman

Philo on the Tragic Death of Polyxena

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This study explores an intersection of two themes in Philo’s writings: his gendered construction of virtue; and his engagement with classical Greek poetry. These come together in a distinctive manner in his application of the exemplum of Polyxena’s death from Euripides’ *Hecuba* in the *Quod omnis probus liber sit*. Here Philo’s reading of the tragedy reflects his so-called gender-gradient, while at the same time sharing in a wider ancient (and modern) interpretive tradition. In particular, the play’s portrayal of the death of Polyxena problematizes gender boundaries, as the heroine gestures toward masculine valour. Philo, along with several other ancient readers of the play, exploits this feature in his appropriation of Polyxena as a model for masculine virtue. In so doing, Philo interestingly anticipates a modern feminist reading of female deaths on the tragic stage: the distinction between masculine and feminine is blurred as the agency of women moves beyond its conventional limitations and passivity into the realm of male *kleos*.

These two themes in have been well treated in recent Philonic scholarship. First, his “gender-gradient,” so named in a 1996 article by Sharon Lea Mattila, depicts spiritual advancement as progress away from the feminine toward the masculine (e.g., *Opif.* 165; *Leg.* 2.38–39; *Spec.* 1.200–01; *Post.* 177).¹ This can be seen at numerous points in his writings, but here one example will suffice as illustrative: in an interpretation of the parents of a disobedient son described in Deuteronomy 21:18–21, Philo allegorizes the father as the δημιουργός, the cosmic creator, and the mother as ἐπιστήμη, the skill by which the δημιουργός made it. In this construct, “we say then that the father is the masculine, perfect, and right reason, whereas the

¹ On this, see Mattila (1996); Mackie (2014) 142–46. For Philo’s treatment of gender more broadly, see also Sly (1990); Kraemer (1994) 133–35; D’Angelo (2007).

mother is the intermediate and encyclical dancing and instruction” (πατέρα τοίνυν εἶναί φαμεν τὸν ἄρρενα καὶ τέλειον καὶ ὀρθὸν λόγον, μητέρα δὲ τὴν μέσσην καὶ ἐγκύκλιον χορείαν τε καὶ παιδείαν, *Ebr.* 33). The mother’s role is to train the child in obedience to “custom” (ἔθος), as this belongs to “the weaker more feminine soul” (ἀσθενεστέρας καὶ θηλυτέρας ψυχῆς). But as a child advances, he is to “follow a nature characterized by reason, truly strong and masculine” (ἐρρωμένου καὶ ἄρρενος ὡς ἀληθῶς λογισμοῦ ἔπεσθαι φύσει, 55). This paradigm is applied by Philo in his use of female exempla of virtue: for example, Sarah is 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 18:11).²

Similarly, Philonic scholarship has become increasingly attentive to his engagement with classical poetry.³ Not only does he cite texts frequently, he does so in a manner that demonstrates his close acquaintance with contemporary modes of interpretation.⁴ Of particular relevance for this study, Philo often quotes dramatic texts and even claims to have attended performances in the theater (*Ebr.* 177; *Prob.* 141).⁵

The *Quod omnis probus liber sit* is an especially interesting site to observe engagements with classical sources and their interpretations. Philo treats a popular Stoic paradox that the virtuous person is free, even if enslaved.⁶ The same issue is discussed more briefly by Cicero

² On the larger treatment of Sarah in the works of Philo, see Sly (1990) 147–54. And for gender in *De ebrietate*, see Mackie (2014); Friesen (2015b) 198–206.

³ For the breadth of Philo’s use of classical poetry, see Kokenniemi; (2010); Lincicum (2013); Hernández (2014).

⁴ For example, he deploys allegorical methods as applied to Homer; see Amir (1984); Lamberton (1986) 44–54; Long (1997); Berthelot (2011) 150–53; Berthelot (2012). In addition to allegory, he adopted interpretive methods akin to those of Alexandrian literary scholars. This is evident in with respect to Homer (see Niehoff [2012b]), Hesiod (Friesen [2015a]), and also scripture (Niehoff [2011] 133–85).

⁵ On his theater attendance, see Bloch (2009) 66–67, 70–72; Jay (2013) 221–32. Philo is, however, also critical of Roman spectacle entertainments (*Agr.* 35, 111–26), and he is particularly contemptuous of both Gaius and Flaccus for the theatricality of their actions against the Jews (*Legat.* 78–79, 349–67; *Flacc.* 34–39, 72); see Calabi (2003); Bloch (2009) 73–74; Friesen (2015b) 90–92. For Philo’s engagement with dramatic texts, see Niehoff (2001) 52–58; Koskenniemi (2006).

⁶ On this treatise, see Petit (1974) 17–132.

(*Parad.* 5) and Epictetus (*Diatr.* 4.1), who both employ similar lines of argument.⁷ True freedom requires virtue, and it is characterized by the ability to act with independence rather than external constraint.⁸ Philo’s treatise opens by addressing numerous issues of theoretical background emerging from the paradox. Importantly, there are two types of slavery, “the one of souls, the other of bodies” (ἡ μὲν ψυχῶν, ἡ δὲ σωμάτων, *Prob.* 17), and likewise two types of freedom. Philo’s chief concern is the soul’s freedom “from the domination of the passions” (ἀπὸ τῆς τῶν παθῶν δυναστείας, 18). For whereas there are “myriad human fortunes” (μυρία γὰρ αἱ ἀνθρώπων τύχαι) that can destroy the freedom of the body, that is, the condition into which one is born, “this study is concerning character which neither desires nor fears nor pleasures nor griefs have yoked” (ἔστιν ἡ σκέψις περὶ τρόπων, οὐς οὔτ’ ἐπιθυμίας οὔτε φόβοι οὔθ’ ἡδοναὶ οὔτε λῦπαι κατέζευξαν, 18). People embodying this have been truly liberated, as though from prison, and they have God alone as master (19–20). Thus, genuine freedom, Philo argues, resides in one’s virtue so that even those who are born or sold into slavery can possess it (35–40). And one’s true status, as slave or free, is demonstrated in 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).

In much of the remainder of the treatise (62–160), then, Philo compiles an expansive list of exempla—individuals known from contemporary society, history, and literature who have embodied this ideal of virtue and freedom.⁹ Cicero and Epictetus similarly point out several individuals who support the premise of the argument, but Philo’s compilation is both

⁷ For comparison, see Petit (1974) 54–57.

⁸ Philo employs the term, *αὐτοπραγία* (*Prob.* 21). See similarly, *quid est enim libertas? Potestas vivendi, ut velis*, Cicero, *Parad.* 5.34; Ἐλεύθερός ἐστιν ὁ ζῶν ὡς βούλεται, *Diatr.* 4.1.1. Moreover, fear is the chief obstacle of freedom (Cicero, *Parad.* 5.40; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 4.1.5; 4.1.82–85; Philo, *Prob.* 22).

⁹ On the structural outline of the treatise and for a numbered list of Philo’s exempla, see Petit (1974) 29–34.

longer and different, and reflects his own religious and cultural context.¹⁰ Such examples are scarce, Philo asserts, but if sought zealously, “the Greek and barbarian lands are witnesses” (μάρτυς δὲ ἡ Ἑλλάς καὶ ἡ βάρβαρος) to this point (73). Amongst these, he praises the Seven Sages of Greece as well as the Persian Magi and Indian Gymnosophists (73–74, 93–97), but pride of place goes to the Essenes (75–91).¹¹ This group of more than 4,000 Jews living in Palestinian Syria practice a philosophy which “produces athletes of virtue” (ἀθλητὰς ἀρετῆς ἀπεργάζεται, 88). The collective piety of this society results not merely in the freedom of their souls, but in fact the institution of slavery itself does not even exist among them (79).¹²

Among Philo’s subsequent exempla, dramatic texts figure prominently. Introducing a series of these, 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 γνώμαις Ἕλληνας ὁμοῦ καὶ βάρβαροι σχεδὸν ἐξ αὐτῶν σπαργάνων ἐντρεφόμενοι βελτιοῦνται τὰ ἦθη, 98). The first instance is Euripides’ satyr-play, the *Syleus*, in which Heracles exhibits his true freedom even while temporarily pretending to be a slave (99–104; *TrGF* 5.687–91).¹³ Then, toward the end of the treatise, Philo underscores the pedagogical

¹⁰ Philo shares at least one with Epictetus, however—the abduction of the Cynic Diogenes by robbers (*Diatr.* 4.1.114–18; Philo, *Prob.* 121–24; see also Diogenes Laertius 4.75). Two exempla—Zeno of Elea and Anaxarchus—are also shared by Cicero in a different treatise (*Tusc.* 2.52; Philo, *Prob.* 108–09); for discussion, see Pope (2015). That Philo shares a common application of moral exempla with Stoic discourse is consistent with his biographical writing. As Maren Niehoff (2012a) has shown through a comparison with Plutarch’s *Lives*, both writers were concerned with moral advancement reflective of an increased interest in the Self within Stoicism; “[f]or both, the heroes of the past are living models for contemporary readers to emulate” (at 384). Elsewhere, Philo engages directly with ethical problems emerging from Stoicism, e.g., whether the wise person will get drunk (*Plant* 140–77); on which, see Friesen (2015a) esp. 50 n. 24. For a broader discussion of Philo’s ethical theory in relation to Stoicism and other philosophical schools, see Lévy (2009); Weisser (2012).

¹¹ See also Petit (1974) 38–39.

¹² For larger discussion of Philo’s Essenes, see Petit (1974) 104–28. Compare also the account of the Therapeutae in *De vita contemplativa*, whom Philo elevates as ideals of Jewish piety over against “pagan” religion; see Hay (2003); Scott (2008).

¹³ On this play, see Galinsky (1972) 83–84; Pechstein (1998) 243–83. The first of these excerpts from the *Syleus* is quoted earlier in the treatise at *Prob.* 25, and also in *Leg.* 3.102 and *Ios.* 78

value of theater. Recounting his recent experience at a performance, he writes that on this occasion 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 [...] τοῦλευθέρου γὰρ ὄνομα παντὸς ἄξιον, / κἂν σμίκρ’ ἔχη τις, μεγάλ’ ἔχει νομιζέτω, 141; *TrGF* 5.275).¹⁴ The audience stood in elation and applause, praising both the “maxim” (γνώμη) and the poet.¹⁵ In view of this, Philo asserts that it is “fitting to heed poets” (ποιητῶν προσέχειν ἄξιον) because they are educators (παιδευταί); as parents do for their children privately, poets “publically train cities in moderation” (δημοσίᾳ τὰς πόλεις σωφρονίζοντες, 143).¹⁶

Because Heracles was a demigod, Philo admits that his heroic virtue may fall beyond the reach of mere mortals (105); thus, he offers a range of human models, potentially more proximate with his readers, including Anaxarchus and Zeno the Eleatic who endured torture (106–09), and wrestlers and pancratiasts who exhibit fearless in the face of death (110–13). Not only men, but also children and women have practiced such virtue and demonstrated their freedom (114–17). Here, Philo lists three, of which Euripides provides the third:¹⁷

Πολυξένην δὲ ὁ τραγικὸς Εὐριπίδης ἀλογοῦσαν μὲν θανάτου φροντίζουσαν δὲ ἐλευθερίας εἰσάγει δι’ ὧν φησιν·
 ἐκοῦσα θνήσκω, μή τις ἄνηται χροὸς
 τοῦμοῦ· παρέξω γὰρ δέρην εὐκαρδίως,

¹⁴ This fragment is from the *Auge* and also quoted by Stobaeus (4.8.3). Throughout this treatise Philo quotes from ten plays, but only from the *Syleus* and *Hecuba* does he identify specific *dramatis personae* as moral exempla (though interestingly Jason’s ship the *Argo* is personified and endowed with a love of freedom; *Prob.* 143, quoting *TrGF* 3.20).

¹⁵ Euripidean plays are particularly effective in supporting Philo’s thesis because they often problematize the relationship between physical and natural slavery. As Collard (1991) observes regarding his plays generally and the *Hecuba* in particular, “those in physical slavery (almost always women) often demonstrate a greater freedom of spirit, and probity, than their ‘free’ masters” (at 27). See similarly Daitz (1971); Matthiessen (2010) 40–42.

¹⁶ Compare the comment of Dio Chrysostom in his *Alexandrian Oration* that this city lacked dramatic poets, such as those who flourished in Athens where they had the freedom “to reproach not only individual men but also the city collectively” (μὴ μόνον τοὺς κατ’ ἄνδρα ἐλέγχειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ κοινῇ τὴν πόλιν, *Or.* 32.6).

¹⁷ The first is a Laconian boy who committed suicide rather than endure slavery (*Prob.* 114); the second is Dardanian women, who when captured by the Macedonians, throw their children into the river rather than allow them to experience slavery (115).

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:

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.
(*Prob.* 116, quoting *Hec.* 548–51)

Within the wider context of Philo's argument, it is important that Polyxena was not only a human, but that she was a woman. He follows the quotation from this dramatic scene with an *a fortiori* argument in support of his thesis, asking, "can we suppose that such a love of freedom be absorbed within 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 μαιρακίοις, ὧν τὰ μὲν φύσει ὀλιγόφρονα τὰ δὲ ἡλικία εὐολίσθη χρώμενα, τοσοῦτον ἐλευθερίας ἔρωτα ἐντήκεσθαι [...] τοὺς δὲ σοφίας ἀκράτου σπᾶσαντας οὐκ εὐθὺς ἐλευθέρους εἶναι, 117).

To appreciate more fully the significance of Philo's approach to the *Hecuba* one must first consider the context play itself, then its reception across antiquity.¹⁸ In the prologue, the audience is informed that the ghost of Achilles had appeared to the Greeks and demanded that Polyxena, the captive Trojan princess, be sacrificed in his honor lest the winds continue to thwart their journey home (*Hec.* 35–39). In spite of her mother Hecuba's efforts the decision cannot be reversed. For her part, Polyxena does not resist her fate; rather, she declares her preference for death over against her present lot as a slave (346–49).¹⁹ Thus, like Heracles in

¹⁸ Among the literature on the *Hecuba*, see esp. Daitz (1971); Loraux (1987) 56–60; Kovacs (1987) 78–114; Segal (1990); Collard (1991) 21–42; Mossman (1999); Nussbaum (2001) 397–421; Matthiessen (2010) 3–79. With particular attention to the play's ancient reception, see Heath (1987) 40–43; Collard (1991) 37–38; Mossman (1999) 211–19; Matthiessen (2010) 52–59.

¹⁹ It has been suggested that Polyxena's willingness to die in the context of a sacrifice follows a ritual requirement that victims assent to their slaughter; see Loraux (1987) 42–47; more broadly, Burkert (1983) 4. Recently, this view of sacrifice has been disputed by Naiden (2007) who argues rather that its vitality not willingness was the central concern.

the *Syleus*, her true noble nature shows forth even in the midst of temporary servitude. This is particularly evident in Talthybius' report of her sacrifice (518–82). So committed was she to freedom that she insisted no man touch her and instead offers to her slayer the choice to cut her neck or her chest (563–65). This gesture is especially relevant in connection to gender. As Nicole Loraux has observed, in tragedy women tend to die by the throat whereas men do not.²⁰ Indeed, a stab to the chest was an honorable means of death for a warrior, but sacrificial victims were never struck there. In view of this, Polyxena's alternative represents a choice between a feminine or a masculine death. Thus, Loraux argues, in Neoptolemus' choice to cut her throat (*Hec.* 562), Polyxena is denied the latter.²¹ At the same time, the sacrifice is eroticized: Polyxena tore her garment and showed her breasts which are described as “most beautiful, as those of a statue” (ὡς ἀγάλματος κάλλιστα, *Hec.* 560–61).²² 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.²³ In spite of this, however, Talthybius is quick to emphasize the nobility of Polyxena in the manner of her final collapse. After receiving the fatal wound,

ἡ δὲ καὶ θνήσκουσ' ὄμωσ
πολλὴν πρόνοιαν εἶχεν εὐσχήμων πεσεῖν,
κρύπτουσ' ἅ κρύπτειν ὄμματ' ἀρσένων χρεῶν.

Even while dying she nevertheless took much forethought to fall honorably, concealing the parts one must conceal from the eyes of men. (568–70)

²⁰ Loraux (1987) 50–53.

²¹ Loraux (1987) 56–60. This last point is disputed by Mossman (1999) 160.

²² The exposing of breasts need not be erotic, however; it can also be a maternal act of supplicating one's child. See Scodel (1996) 122–23; Mossman (1999) 157–62.

²³ As Loraux (1987) observes, “Polyxena could indeed offer up her bosom like a warrior, but the Greek army saw in the gesture only a virgin unveiling her woman's breast” (at 60). The eroticization of virgin sacrifices in tragedy functions to highlight its moral outrage; see Segal (1990) 111–13; Scodel (1996) 111–12. This reading of Polyxena's death coheres well with Walter Burkert's (1983) anthropological theorization of a fundamental connection between sexual aggression and sacrifice (58–72).

From this brief summary, it is clear that Euripides' depiction of Polyxena's willing death problematizes relationships between gender and heroic courage. As Loraux has shown regarding tragedy more broadly, female deaths, particularly those that are self-chosen or self-inflicted, granted to women a degree of autonomy 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."²⁴

In keeping with this gendered reading of the *Hecuba*, as with Philo, several other ancient authors employed Polyxena's fearlessness in death as a measure of *masculine* virtue. For example, in a speech attributed by Pseudo-Lucian to Demosthenes prior to committing suicide in order to avoid capture by Antipater, the orator quotes *Hecuba* 568–69, 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's narrative of Polyxena, which follows Euripides closely, is likewise interested in her gender, depicting her as "a brave and miserable girl, and more than a female" (*fortis et infelix et plus quam femina virgo*, *Metam.* 13.451).²⁵ In an entirely different evocation of Polyxena's gender, Lucian humorously compares dilatants in philosophy with "an actor of tragedy who is himself soft and feminine" (τις ὑποκριτῆς τραγωδίας μαλθακὸς αὐτὸς ὢν καὶ γυναικεῖος). Such a one not only fails successfully to portray masculine characters, such as Achilles, Theseus, and Heracles, "not even Helen or Polyxena would ever uphold him

²⁴ Loraux (1987) 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 *kyrios*, by taking the sacrifice imposed on them and turning it into *their* death, a death that is fully their own" (at 45–46). In fact, the willingness of Polyxena to offer herself in death may be a Euripidean innovation. A famous sixth-century Attic black-figure vase, now in the British Museum, depicts Polyxena sacrificed while bound and carried by three soldiers at the altar (*ABV* 97.27).

²⁵ As with Euripides, in Ovid's account Polyxena offers the choice to strike her neck or chest (*Meta.* 13.458–59), but it departs from the tragedy in that she dies by the latter (13.475–76).

as exceedingly fitting to themselves” (οὐδ’ ἂν ἡ Ἑλένη ποτὲ ἢ Πολυξένη ἀνάσχοιντο πέρα τοῦ μετρίου αὐταῖς προσεικότα, *Pisc.* 31.16; cf. *Nigr.* 11.8). In other words, Lucian implies, these women or more masculine than the male actors who attempt to play their role.²⁶ These applications of Polyxena’s model of virtue reveal a persistent and widespread interest in her gender. Thus, Philo’s application of the *Hecuba* participates in a wider literary milieu which had at its disposal a common stock of moralizing applications of classical texts.²⁷

At the same time, Philo’s approach to Polyxena’s death anticipates subsequent discourses on martyrdom. Already in 2 Maccabees, the narrative of the famous death of the mother along with her seven sons under Antiochus Epiphanes suggested the masculinity of her actions. In 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). In Christianity also, the female martyr is especially lionized. Clement of Alexandria, for example, was particularly concerned with martyrdom, viewing it as an idealized state of spiritual perfection. Above all, the martyr repudiated sensual pleasure in favor of the perfection of life in God’s presence (*Strom.* 4.5.22–23).²⁸ Although Clement 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 those 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, *Strom.* 4.8.58.2). Earlier in

²⁶ For other citations of the *Hecuba* that focus on the nobility of Polyxena’s death, see Pliny, *Ep.* 4.11.9; Hermogenes, *On Invention* 4.12; Clement, *Strom.* 2.23.144.2; see also Seneca, *Troades* 1118–64.

²⁷ See also Koskenniemi (2010), who argues that Philo’s use of poetry follows that of Chrysippus and the Stoics. Elsewhere, I have shown that Philo’s quotation and application of a well-known passage from Hesiod (*Works and Days* 287–292) is influenced by its use by Plato as well as contemporary Alexandrian literary criticism; Friesen (2015a).

²⁸ On Clement’s treatment of martyrdom in *Stromateis* 4, see van den Hoek (1993); Bowersock (1995) 65–71; Moss (2012) 145–62.

this discussion, Clement had quoted four lines from a tragedy (*TrGF* 2.114 *adespota*), in which a female protagonist declared her willingness to die; he adds, “a woman is speaking fearlessly in the tragedy, playing the man” (ἀφόβως ἀνδρεϊζομένη παρὰ τῆ τραγωδία λέγει γυνή, *Strom.* 4.7.48.1–2).²⁹ Thus, as with Philo before him, Clement deploys female death in tragedy as a model of specifically masculine virtue.³⁰

A fixation on the virgin martyr persists throughout antiquity. While this lies beyond the scope of the present study, here I simply signal the ways in which Philo’s reading of Polyxena anticipates Daniel Boyarin’s analysis of patristic and rabbinic discourses of martyrdom. In a chapter entitled, “Thinking with Virgins: Engendering Judeo-Christian Difference,” he shows how in both contexts the virgin functioned as “an ego ideal for men.”³¹ Resistance to sex becomes analogous to resistance to Rome, and at the same time both rabbis and church fathers advocated for men to become feminine as an antidote to sin. For Christians, then, starting in the fourth century as the threat of martyrdom receded, the virgin martyr is reimagined as a model for male ascetics.³² Thus, the trope underlying Philo’s reading of Polyxena persists, even while being redirected so that the maiden not only acts like a man, but the man also acts like a maiden. At the same time, it is worth noting that the quest for Greco-Roman and Jewish precursors to Christian martyrdom has tended to focus on, among others, Socrates and the

²⁹ He follows this immediately with a citation of Sophocles’ *Antigone* (450) as an additional tragic exemplum of a woman who dies willingly rather than transgress divine law (*Strom.* 4.7.48.2–3). In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the hero is similarly exhorted by a heavenly voice to “be strong and act like a man (ἀνδρίζου)” (9.1).

³⁰ It is of interest that on a different occasion Clement cites Euripides’ *Hecuba* (568–70) in reference to the death to Polyxena (*Strom.* 2.23.144.2), but his focus is on the modesty of her collapse, which he takes as an ideal of the chaste bride and wife. He notes, however, that “for her calamity was the wedding” (ἦν δὲ κακείνη γάμος ἢ συμφορά, *Strom.* 2.23.144.3). With this, then, Clement employs Polyxena as a model for the Stoic ideal of not succumbing to the passions. For a similar interest in Polyxena’s chastity even unto death, see also Pliny, *Ep.* 4.11.9.

³¹ Boyarin (1999) 67–92.

³² Boyarin (1999) 74–81.

Maccabees.³³ Perhaps, however, the scope of inquiry should be expanded to include the stage, where idealized maidens had long performed such acts of valor.³⁴

In sum: This study has shown how Philo's gender-gradient of virtue, evident at numerous other points in his writings, is operative in his application of the death of Polyxena to his argument that the good person is free even if enslaved. If even a woman displays such a love of freedom, Philo argues, how much more will a man do the same? This gendered reading of the play captures a central dynamic within the drama. Female deaths generally in tragedy, and that of Polyxena in particular, transgress gender boundaries—her presentation of her chest to the sword is suggestive of a warrior's death even as the male response was preoccupied on the eroticism of the maiden's gesture. In thus applying the *Hecuba*, Philo shares in a wider literary milieu of men fixated on Polyxena's gender as she dies.

³³ Bowersock (1995) 7–13. Moss (2012) 5, 33–36, 39–44.

³⁴ Helpfully in this direction see Boyarin (1999) 76–77; Moss (2012) 30–33.

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