

## **DRANCES INFENSUS: A STUDY IN VERGILIAN CHARACTER PORTRAYAL**

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In memoriam: Brooks Otis

The uniqueness of Vergil's portrayal of Drances, the cynical and repellant political manipulator of *Aeneid* 11, has long been noted; the character has not yet, however, been explained fully in terms of the poet's overall goals in Book 11 and in the epic as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Previous scholarly attention to this character, a purely Vergilian invention who does not appear in other accounts of Aeneas' adventures in Latium, has generally been directed at the explicit and detailed thumbnail sketch of Drances' personality<sup>2</sup> at *Aeneid* 11.336–42:

Tum Drances idem infensus, quem gloria Turni  
obliqua invidia stimulisque agitabat amaris,  
largus opum et lingua melior, sed frigida bello  
dextera, consiliis habitus non futilis auctor,  
seditione potens (genus huic materna superbum  
nobilitas dabat, incertum de patre ferebat),  
surgit et his onerat dictis atque aggerat iras.

Richard Heinze<sup>3</sup> points out that it is only in the case of a *Nebenfigur* such as Drances that Vergil himself reports on characters' motives rather than causing these motives to emerge from the action of the epic. This method of, in Heinze's phrase, "direkte Charakterisierung" is described by Kenneth Quinn<sup>4</sup> as "more in the style of a prose historian" and thus suitable for a character whose motivation is so blatantly squalid and unheroic.

Although Heinze is surely correct when he explains Vergil's rare use of direct characterization here as a method reserved for lesser characters, I

<sup>1</sup>This paper is a revised and expanded version of one presented orally before the annual meeting of the American Philological Association in New York City on 30 December 1976.

<sup>2</sup>K. Quinn, *Vergil's Aeneid: A Critical Description* (Ann Arbor 1968) 240–41, 307–09.

<sup>3</sup>R. Heinze, *Virgils Epische Technik* (Stuttgart 1957<sup>4</sup>) 281.

<sup>4</sup>K. Quinn (above, note 2) 241.

will demonstrate that Vergil's portrayal of Drances in the Latin council of *Aeneid* 11<sup>5</sup> was not simply forced upon Vergil by the desire for brevity. Vergil's overall portrayal of this character has been artfully calculated in order to evoke in the minds of his audience a host of reminiscences from Homer which greatly influence our understanding of the quarrel between Drances and Turnus.

The most obvious of these associations is the general similarity between Drances and the ignominious Thersites who rises to speak at the Greek council of war in *Iliad* 2. Both characters receive comparable descriptive introductions (cf. *Il.* 2.212-19) and there is a general resemblance between the Homeric and Vergilian councils of war. Klingner<sup>6</sup> correctly points out that the portrayal of Drances as despicable serves to increase the honor of Turnus; Drances recalls the headstrong and contemptible Thersites, Turnus evokes the eloquent and resourceful Odysseus. Drances, however, is more than the simple *Kontrastfigur* of Klingner's analysis. The character functions also in a much more complex way; through verbal and structural reminiscence of Homeric situations, the portrayal of Drances vastly enriches the significance of Turnus and greatly affects our understanding of the Rutulian hero's fatal duel with Aeneas.

It is clear that Vergil wishes to stress Drances' close association with Turnus. In his first appearance, at *Aeneid* 11.122-32, Drances is leader of the Latin embassy to Aeneas; Vergil tells us in lines 122-24 that he seeks peace not as a benefit to be sought for its own sake but as a tactic in his political opposition to Turnus:

Tum senior semperque odiis et crimine Drances  
infensus iuveni Turno sic ore vicissim  
orsa refert.

At 11.220-21, Drances addresses the mourning Latin mothers and wives who demand that Turnus end the war, which has killed their sons and husbands, by meeting Aeneas in single combat:

ingravat haec saevus Drances solumque vocari  
testatur, solum posci in certamina Turnum.

The Latin council, 11.336-467, consists largely of the conflict between Turnus and Drances. I intend now to examine some of the numerous Homeric situations which have been suggested<sup>7</sup> as parallels to the Vergilian

<sup>5</sup>Cf. G. Highet, *The Speeches in Vergil's Aeneid* (Princeton 1972) 58-59.

<sup>6</sup>F. Klingner, *Virgil: Bucolica, Georgica, Aeneis* (Zurich 1967) 584.

<sup>7</sup>Most useful in this regard have been the invaluable indices in G. Knauer, *Die Aeneis und Homer* (Göttingen 1964); cf. also Macrobius, Conington-Nettleship and discussions by G. Highet (above, note 5) 210-12, 248-51, 282-83.

Drances-Turnus quarrel in addition to the Thersites-Odysseus incident mentioned above. Generally speaking, six debates from the *Iliad* seem especially appropriate to this investigation; they are summarized below:

<i>Drances</i>	<i>Turnus</i>
1. Speech of Thersites: accuses Agamemnon of greed ( <i>Il.</i> 2.225–42)	Speech of Odysseus: threatens Thersites with a beating ( <i>Il.</i> 2.246–64)
2. Speech of Polydamas: advises caution ( <i>Il.</i> 12.211–29)	Speech of Hector: reacts angrily ( <i>Il.</i> 12.231–50)
3. Speech of Polydamas: “return to the city” ( <i>Il.</i> 18.254–83)	Speech of Hector: reacts angrily ( <i>Il.</i> 18.285–309)
4. Speech of Hector: accuses Paris of cowardice, suggests duel with Menelaus ( <i>Il.</i> 3.39–57)	Speech of Paris: accepts idea of single combat for Helen ( <i>Il.</i> 3.59–75)
5. Speech of Hector: accuses Paris of indolence ( <i>Il.</i> 6.326–31)	Speech of Paris: expresses willingness to join battle ( <i>Il.</i> 6.333–41)
6. Speech of Antenor: suggests giving up Helen ( <i>Il.</i> 7.348–53)	Speech of Paris: angrily refuses to give her up ( <i>Il.</i> 7.357–64)

The table should make it clear that the situation is considerably more complex than Klinger suggests in commenting on the man-of-words vs. man-of-action contrast which, as we have seen, depends primarily upon the parallel to Thersites and Odysseus. We find in Vergil a quite complex system of Homeric parallels and reminiscences designed to create in the mind of the audience a number of simultaneous and quite different possible interpretations of the Drances-Turnus quarrel. In situation 1, Drances does recall Thersites who is repulsive, speaks out of turn and makes the clearly unacceptable, though sensible, suggestion that the Trojan War be called off; however, Drances is also similar to Polydamas who in situations 2 and 3 gives sound and prudent advice to the headstrong Hector. We must remember that despite Drances' deplorable motives, the suggestion that Turnus face Aeneas in single combat *is* the most sensible solution to the

problem at hand and is of course the ultimate resolution of the Trojan-Italian conflict. In suggesting the single combat to end the war, however, Drances takes on characteristics of Hector who makes a similar request of Paris in *Iliad* 3 (situation 4 in the table); correspondingly, both Turnus and Paris claim that they are ready for the duel: *ibo animis contra*, says Turnus at *Aeneid* 11.438.

Turnus recalls Paris a second time with respect to Homeric situation 5 from *Iliad* 6 where Paris expresses his willingness to join the battle after being upbraided by Hector for indolence. The distinction then is not so clearly between Drances the man of words and Turnus the man of action; Turnus is thrown into a distinctly unfavorable light here. He is likened to Paris, the recalcitrant warrior and languid lover of Helen. Drances gains stature by his being seen as parallel to Hector, the leader who is justly indignant with his disputant's indolence and timidity.

Turnus is reminiscent of Paris a third time when we take notice of situation 6 from *Iliad* 7; by continuing to address Latinus as *socer*, father-in-law, at *Aeneid* 11.440, Turnus is implicitly rejecting Drances' request that he give up his claim for the girl over whom the war is fought. Drances here evokes another prudent Homeric counsellor, Antenor.

Drances, in short, is both loathsome for his motives (which consist not of a desire for peace but rather hatred and jealousy of Turnus) and admirable in that, like Polydamas and Antenor in the *Iliad*, he gives sound and prudent advice; Turnus, on the other hand, is both the noble man of action (Hector) and the selfish lover (Paris). This is subtly done: Vergil hints that his characters are many-sided and that the situations in which they find themselves are ambiguous. The resulting ironies in Vergil's complex narrative are far too numerous to treat in detail here. For example though, we see in Turnus in Book 11 elements of Paris, whereas at 7.321 Juno, Turnus' protectress, referred to Aeneas as *Paris alter*. Again, the ironic portrayal of both Turnus' and Drances' displaying some of the characteristics of Hector greatly increases the depth and complexity of each character. In fact, since the Drances-Turnus debate can also be seen as being modelled on the mythical debate between Odysseus and Ajax for the arms of Achilles (the man of guile against the warrior),<sup>8</sup> both Vergilian characters may also be seen as sharing in the attributes of Odysseus.

In general, then, the poet uses multiple Homeric reminiscences to modulate and complicate our understanding of the events in the Latin council, as well as our reactions to Turnus. Drances is indeed a *Konstrastfigur* but in a richer sense than Klingner intended to convey by the term.

<sup>8</sup>W. Anderson, *The Art of the Aeneid* (Englewood Cliffs 1969) ch. 7, note 3.

Vergil's purpose in setting up this complex system of Homeric reminiscences was not merely to dazzle his audience with poetic gymnastics; rather, the various elements of Drances' personality can largely be explained by what *must* be the case at this particular point in the *Aeneid*. Turnus is a Latin hero and must not therefore be unrelievedly evil; he is, after all, king of a future allied state.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, Turnus is the enemy of Aeneas, the tool of Juno in the prosecution of the futile and blasphemous war in Latium and he is to be killed by Aeneas; he must, therefore, not be merely noble and heroic. Drances then takes on the oddly positive poetic coloring of Polydamas, Hector and Antenor *in order* to enable the poet to represent Turnus in the rôles of *both* Hector and Paris. Turnus is both "the noble but inadequate Trojan"<sup>10</sup> and, due to his refusal to give up Lavinia, he also plays the part of the languid and recalcitrant seducer and abductor of Helen. This parallel gives a new dimension to the opposition of Drances and Turnus, and the stature of Turnus is thereby greatly diminished by the presence in his actions and words of elements of Homer's Paris. Vergil supplies us then with a variety of ways of interpreting this single scene, the quarrel between Drances and Turnus.

The complex relationship between the Homeric parallels for Drances and those for Turnus is in large part *determined* by the poetic necessities of the plot, which are in turn dictated by Vergil's Roman-historical purpose. Drances is Vergil's solution to two problems: first, and most obviously, he functions as a delaying element which allows Vergil to defer the duel and the end of the epic until the twelfth book; secondly, and this is the aspect of Drances which concerns me here, he enables the poet to portray Turnus as both bad (enemy of Aeneas and the future Rome; ally of Juno) and good (a hero of sturdy though undisciplined Latin stock; king of a future allied state). Turnus' ambiguity is essentially demanded by the Roman intent of the *Aeneid*; to a great extent, this ambiguity is conveyed to the reader by the ambiguity of Drances. Drances is a bad man who supports the good cause (cessation of war); Turnus is essentially a good man who is committed to a bad cause. The irony implicit in the representation of the political actions of Drances enables Vergil to spotlight for the reader the tragedy of Turnus' position: Turnus is doomed by the incompatibility of his political actions with his heroic inner nature. As soon as he realizes the destructive and self-seeking nature of his actions in prolonging the war, his essential nobility drives him to seek Aeneas and death. Since it is part of Vergil's purpose in

<sup>9</sup>Likewise, even Mezentius, Vergil's *contemptor deorum*, is not purely villainous; his personality contains elements of Homeric heroism and Roman *pietas* towards his attractive son Lausus. Cf. my article, "The Role of Mezentius in the *Aeneid*," *CJ* 69 (1974) 202-09.

<sup>10</sup>W. Anderson (above, note 8) 57.

the *Aeneid* to show the war in Latium as tragic and not simply evil, it is clear that the portrayal of Turnus in this way has been determined by the larger necessities of the plot. The character of Drances, therefore, since it is largely responsible for directing our attention to the tragic qualities of Turnus' position, seems clearly to have been similarly determined by the poet's overriding, all-pervasive Roman-historical purpose.