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Beauty unblamed: A study on ancient portrayals of Helen of Troy

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The Ohio State University, 1987
BEAUTY UNBLAMED: A STUDY ON ANCIENT PORTRAYALS OF HELEN OF TROY

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of the Ohio State University

By

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To my parents
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UITA

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**INTRODUCTION**

Helen of Troy, "the face that launched a thousand ships, the name that caused a thousand deaths," has fascinated the imagination of writers of all ages [1], from Homer to the present day. Unlike other homeric women who exist primarily within the limits of Homer's poems, Helen enjoyed a diverse prehistory as a saga heroine before she made her first appearance at the Scaean Gate in the third Book of the *Iliad*. [2] There is enough evidence to suggest that Helen was originally a cult figure, a "faded goddess" who was later made into a mortal woman in the historical world [3]. The question of her nature, human or divine, has not yet been answered. One tradition makes her a goddess, daughter of Zeus and Nemesis or Oceanus and Tethys; another wants her entirely mortal, daughter of Leda and Tyndareus. According to the most widespread legend, she was semi-divine, product of Zeus' erotic epiphany to Leda in swan form. Pausanias and Theocritus speak of sacred trees dedicated to her and provide evidence which indicates that Helen was at some point a vegetation goddess. Her worship throughout Greece reveals Helen as a figure of cult [4]. Even when she appears as a mortal it is usually suggested that she attained immortality.
after her earthly death [5]. Her immortality, however, is traditionally portrayed as a mixed blessing, sinister and beneficial at once. For example, together with her two brothers, the Dioscuri, she is presented as protectress of mariners [6], but as daughter of Nemesis, according to the Hesiodic genealogy (Theo. 223ff.) she is also the niece of Doom, Death, Age, Strife and the three Fates. Thus, although she was known for her longevity and ageless beauty, she also exemplified the dangerous potential of a woman. The poet of the Cypria says that Zeus mated with Nemesis ἐν φιλότητι and had Helen, θαύμα βροτοῖοι, and these are the same words used by Hesiod for Pandora, the first woman, a beautiful evil which Zeus created as punishment for mankind and who by her sexual appeal distracted men from their noble pursuits (Theo. 565-589).

When Homer came to fashion Helen into the texture of his poem, he was apparently challenged by the mysterious shadow which surrounds her identity. Unable, perhaps, to resolve the enigma of her character, Homer incorporated the diverse elements of Helen's legend into his two epics, thereby creating not only an ambiguous character but two different portraits of the same heroine, deliberately ambiguous and inconsistent with each other. Later authors, puzzled about the diversity of Helen's myth and Homer's presentation, isolated or further developed specific aspects of her Homeric character in an attempt to explain her nature and interpret the motivation of her actions. The issue of
Helen's guilt has been a subject of continuous debate, and different historical periods have offered different assessments - ranging from fanatic hatred of her as the archetypal adulteress to sympathy and idealization of her beauty - usually depending upon their particular attitudes towards classicism, women, and moral and aesthetic values. Homer himself prompted this debate, first, by leaving open the question of Helen's ultimate judgment and possession in the Iliad and further, by restoring her to her royal status - enhanced with the promise of immortality - in the Odyssey. One would expect that in the ancient Greek world, in particular, Helen, because of her role as the direct cause of the outbreak of the Trojan War, would be considered the cause of death and destruction. A study of the ancient literary sources, however, shows that actually the opposite is the case. Attacks on her character and conduct, it is true, are not completely absent in classical literature - no one forgets Aeschylus' famous ἐλένας, ἐλαυνός, ἐλέηστοις (Ag. 689) - but for the most part such attacks appear as sporadic expressions of pain and anger from the victims of the Trojan War. No author uses them to mount a full scale negative characterization of Helen. In spite of the great number of modern studies on Helen's character and the various transformations [7] of her myth in classical literature, the positive view of Helen in antiquity has not been so far the subject of comprehensive discussion. It is generally accepted that Stesichorus and Euripides altered
her myth as to absolve her from culpability and Gorgias and Isocrates used rhetorical techniques to exculpate her and raise points in her favour. Modern scholarship, however, has not recognized the extent of the so-called "rehabilitation" of Helen. All ancient authors who undertook the task of presenting Helen and who turned her myth into literature not only did not present her as a wanton woman but they either evaded the moral issue of her actions or took it upon themselves to justify them. The purpose of the present study, therefore, will be to examine all classical works that centered on Helen's character and show that for the ancient Greeks Helen was a figure beyond blame. Although her elopement with Paris and the Trojan War are unquestionably parts of her legend, classical authors do not touch the issue of morality but they view Helen as the personification of female attraction and beauty, as an irresistible ideal whose pursuit and attainment entices men even when its presence threatens death and disaster.
NOTES

1. Helen's career in Western literature is beyond the scope of the present study. There is no doubt that her adventures were read in Western Europe in Latin through the works of Virgil, Ovid, Seneca and other authors even during the Middle Ages when Greek authors were not yet popular in the West, and that her beauty continued to fascinate authors in every literature such as Chaucer and Shakespeare (Troilus and Cressida), Goethe (Faust), Tennyson (Lucretius), Marlowe (Tragical History of Dr. Faustus), Giraudoux (La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu, translated into English by C. Fry as "Tiger at the Gates"), and many others.

2. For the pre-homeric nature of Helen and cults associated with her, see, L. L. Clader, Helen: The Evolution from Divine to Heroic in Greek Epic Tradition. (Leiden, 1976).

3. The "faded goddess" theory had been neglected for a while, until L. Clader (see n. 1) worked out the evidence again and came to the conclusion that Helen is a composite of motifs from Indo-European and Mycenean religion and mythology.


6. Euripides, Orestes 1687-90;

7. See Clader (above n. 1); H. Homeyer, Die Spartanische Helena und der trojanische Krieg (Palingenesia Bd. XII) Franz Steiner Verlag. (Wiesbaden, 1977); F. Decker, Die griechische Helena in Mythos und Epos. (Magdeburg, 1894).
CHAPTER I
HOMER

The Iliad

Homer, was a poet, not a moralist, and he did not compose his poems in order to declare or even define Helen's responsibility. In fact Homer did not attempt to accuse or justify any of his characters. In both the Iliad and the Odysseus the epic poet refrains from judging Helen, he presents her self-recreminations without comment and enhances her image by drawing attention to the mystery of her character.

Helen's portrait is revealed not only through her own words and actions but also through what other epic characters say about her. And it is indeed the discrepancy in the various judgements made on her by men and gods that shows the elusiveness of causality. On the divine level, Hera and Athena, the losers of Paris' Judgement, support the Achaeans and side with that part of the Homeric world which resents Helen and is ready to attach all kinds of accusations on her. Hera is the first to mention Helen's name in the Iliad (2.161) as the cause for the death of many Achaeans in Troy and Athena repeats the same words a few lines later (2.177f.). Hera's actions are motivated by such an unrestrained hatred for everything Trojan - a hatred that Zeus likens to
cannibalism (4.30-36)—that she does not hesitate to risk her own marital harmony with Zeus (1.539-567; 4.25-67), in order to accomplish the fall of Troy. In fact, she goes so far as to offer to abandon her favourite cities of Argos, Mycenae and Sparta to Zeus’ wrath, if he wishes to destroy them at a later time, as long as he promises the destruction of Troy. The sources of Hera’s hatred are many. First of all, by virtue of her marriage to Zeus, Hera is Helen’s stepmother while Helen is the product of Zeus’ infidelity with Leda. Helen is also the prize of a beauty contest which has caused a triple offence to Hera, as a woman, as protectress of marriage and as patroness of the city of Menelaus. Similarly, Athena is both one of the goddesses rejected by Helen’s Trojan husband and a vigorous supporter of the Achaeans. We are not surprised, therefore, to see Hera and Athena against Helen.

Among the Greeks Helen’s abduction is associated with national dishonor. For old Nestor the abduction means a cut in the domestic stability of the Greek world. Because a Greek house has been deprived of its wife and queen, every Greek must sleep with the wife of a Trojan (2.354-56). The issue is not Helen and Paris versus Menelaus or one’s actions against the other. Helen’s return to her proper husband is not enough to save Troy. Only conclusive sexual domination of Greeks over Trojans can reestablish the disturbed order and make up for the national dishonor and suffering. A formulaic expression is used to describe the purpose of the expedition from the Greek side and the feelings of the Greek world about
Although the grammar is ambiguous, Nestor seems to regard Helen as responsible for the strivings and groanings of the Greeks. Nevertheless no moral judgement is made and the problem seems to be rather on the national than personal level.

For Agamemnon Helen's role goes beyond the fact that she is Menelaus' wife. Her abduction has not only disrupted the stability of Menelaus' household but has also brought about a serious offence against the Argive national pride, an offence that can only be corrected with the destruction of Troy. Even if Menelaus were to die Agamemnon would not enjoy the idea of leaving Helen to the Trojans (4.170f.). Agamemnon knows, however, that without Menelaus the Achaeans would not continue the war, for they were willing to risk their own households only in order to reestablish Menelaus' household in Sparta. In other words, for the Greek army the objective of the whole expedition is the reestablishment of domestic stability in Sparta and if this is not possible each man would rank his well being higher than the national dishonor.

On the other side the Trojans show a diversity of attitude. First of all, they are guilty because of their support of Paris (3.56ff.), a support that has lasted ten years and is more or less given from the beginning of the Iliad. The Trojans have supported Paris
but not without some reservations. Interestingly enough, it is Paris that they blame for their sorrows (3.39ff, 87) and it is Paris who also refuses to end them (3.69, 7.362). They hate him, they wish his death (3.454) but yet they fight for him.

Homer makes it clear that there are at least two factions among the Trojans. Antenor in the nocturnal debate (7.350-353) suggests that they should end the war by restoring Helen and her possessions to Menelaus. Elsewhere, we see Antimachus opposing her return because he hoped to receive gifts from Paris (11.123). Cohesion; therefore, among the Trojans is maintained tenuously. They consider Paris responsible for the strife: τοῦ εἶναι υμᾶς ὑπὲρ τῆς ὁμάς, in the same way that the Greeks relate Helen to their sufferings, but they accept his decision not to let Helen go (7.362). Priam admits his son's responsibility but he also yields to Paris (7.374) while Hector is the only one who does not hesitate to chide his brother (33) and tell both Trojans and Achaeans that Paris is the cause of the struggle (3.87). Priam and Hector never blame Helen and they have always been kind to her, as she herself admits in her lament for Hector (24.762-775). It seems, however, that other members of the royal family - including Hecuba - have been hostile to Helen and they have been restrained by Hector (24.768ff.).

The poem presents the following situation. The Greeks have come to Troy seeking revenge for their offended pride. In their mind Helen is responsible for their
suffering but Paris is the one who has broken the ties of hospitality and should be punished (13.620ff.). Above all, their concern is that the domestic and political stability of Sparta has been disrupted. The Trojans caught in the trap set by their prince’s actions remain in a state of confusion. They know that Paris is the cause of all their suffering but they seem unable to control the situation. With this as background Homer draws the portraits of his main characters: Menelaus, Priam, Hector, Paris and Aphrodite. Their portrayal is very important for our understanding of Homer’s view of Helen.

Menelaus, the jilted husband, the only Greek leader who has a personal reason to be in Troy, never declares his personal feelings for his wife. His feelings are only revealed through the words of other heroes as, for example, when Achilles describes his feelings for Briseis:

\[
\text{tì òè òèì πολέμιζεμεναι Τρώεσιν,}
\]
\[
\text{Ἀρχείους; tì òè λισίν ἄνήσχεν ἐνθάδ' ἄχείρας}
\]
\[
\text{Ἀτρείδης; ὅ ὠξ Ἐλένης ἔνεκ' ἕυκόμοιο;}
\]
\[
\text{ἡ μονὸι φιλέουσα, ἀλόχους μερότων ἄνθρώπων}
\]
\[
\text{Ἀτρείδας;}
\]
\[
(9.337-41).
\]

The poet also tells us that Menelaus was fighting above all others: τίσαθαί Ἐλένης ὀρμήματά τε στουχάσας τε
\[
(2.590).
\]

Later in Book 3, however, Menelaus admits that Argives and Trojans have suffered because of "his quarrel and Paris' beginning" (3.100) while in his prayer to Zeus, right before the duel, he states that the purpose of his coming
to Troy is to take revenge on Paris who first did him wrong and broke the ties of hospitality (3.351-54). Paris has violated the guest-friend relationship which is protected by Zeus, and this gives Menelaus the authority to curse all Trojans. Menelaus has no word of blame for Helen whom he seems to associate with himself as a victim of Paris' sacrilege. For Menelaus, Helen received Paris in kindness when he had come to Sparta, and he "expressed his gratitude" by taking her away together with many possessions (13.626-27).

Priam is one of the most sympathetic and tragic figures in the Iliad. The pathos of his situation lies in the conflict between his role as Paris' father and head of the Trojan society and his inability to reconcile his kingly and paternal responsibilities. Paris' conduct has brought the kingdom of Priam under attack. Priam's inability to resolve the crisis after ten years has weakened his kingship. Yet the Greeks trust him and regard him as the leader of the Trojans (e.g. 3.105-6). In this sense he is a parallel to Agamemnon. Priam, however, is not capable of action - for example, he never goes to battle - and this is not only a result of his old age but a recognition of his inability to function effectively in the circumstances. His nobility, therefore, finds its expression not in his actions as the king of Troy but in his familial and paternal role [43].

Priam appears in person for the first time on the Trojan Wall, in the Teichoscopia (3.146ff.), memorable because of Helen's appearance. After the Elders have
expressed their wonder at Helen's beauty they express
the opinion that she should be sent back to the Greeks
lest she cause more trouble to Troy. Priam does not
respond to them but he reaffirms his determination to
protect Helen. His words in 3.164 are the most explicit
acquittal for Helen:

οὐ τί μοι αἰτίη ἔσσι, θεοὶ νῦ μοι αἰτίοι εἶσιν

Priam believes that Helen is not responsible for her
presence in Troy because the gods have intervened (3.165).
It is the gods that must be blamed for the war and not
Helen. He addresses her as φίλον τέκος ("dear child" 3.162)
and he refers to Menelaus as πρότερον τε πόσιν ("former
husband", 3.163) an indication that Priam has accepted
Helen into his family and he cares for her as a father.
His gentleness is also motivated by his desire to protect
a sacred institution, the guest-host relationship, which
Paris has so disgracefully violated. Helen is not only
Priam's daughter in law but also a guest, in fact a
vulnerable guest. Priam, who has failed, because of Paris'
actions, to insure peaceful existence for his city knows
that his last resort as a king is to maintain the social
order and provide a safe environment for Helen. His
attitude towards her becomes more obvious in Book 24
when he is faced with the death of Hector. He curses his
remaining children (24.248ff.) and, with Paris clearly in
mind, calls them "liars, dancers, champions of the chorus,
plunderers of their own people" (24.261-2). In fact, these
characterizations agree with Homer's description of Paris
throughout the *Iliad* and in particular Book 3 (3.393-4). This is the moment when Priam realizes that Paris’ deed and his own failure to prevent it has led to Hector’s death and has prepared the destruction of Troy. Still, he has nothing to say against Helen.

Hector, like his father, is gentle and kind to Helen. His positive attitude towards her, given his personality and his role in the poem becomes very important for our understanding of Homer’s intentions. Hector in contrast to Paris is the strong, responsible individual that Fate has chosen to defend his family and his whole polis. Hector has to sacrifice his personal and family interests to the rescue of the Trojan people. His attempts, like his society, are doomed and he probably knows the futility of the role he has to play (6.365-68). The only alternative left to him is to pursue by fighting that kind of glory which does not depend upon the existence of a particular society. In fact, Hector hopes that his deeds will make him immortal (8.538-40; 13.824ff.). Instead of this unattainable wish Helen promises a more realistic one—immortality in men’s memory for as long as there are men to sing (6.358).

Among Priam’s sons, Hector is the one who respects and protects the values and principles of his city. His association with family, women and children is very characteristic [5] and creates a contrast to the character of his self-centered brother, Paris [6]. Just as Andromache is undefined and doomed without him (6.430ff.) the whole city depends on him for its existence. It is easy
to understand why the opinion of such a noble and strongly committed individual weighs so much in the evaluation of Helen's responsibility. It is not a coincidence that Hector, the pillar of the Trojan society, a man who has to defend his city in a war that he himself neither wanted nor initiated, has no words of condemnation for Helen, even when she, herself, admits her guilt (6.360-368).

For Hector, all blame lies with Paris. At Paris' first appearance on the battlefield, Hector tells him that it would have been better if he had never been born (3.39ff.), and a little later Hector tells both the Achaeans and Trojans that Paris is the cause of the struggle (3.87). In Helen's and Paris' bedroom in Book 6 he confronts his brother. Although Helen is present, Hector tells Paris that it is because of him that the city is in war (6.328):

\[
\text{σέο δ' εἰνεκ' ἄυτή τε πόλεμός τε}
\]

\[
\text{ἀστυ τόδ' ἀμφιδέδης.}
\]

When he addresses Helen his tone shows impatience but not anger (6.360-368). He treats her as if she were a Trojan woman, his sister-in-law, victim of the same war, just like anyone else. When he stands in front of the wall waiting for Achilles, he blames himself because by slaying Patroclus he has shattered any hope left for the safety of his city. Achilles has reentered the battle and Hector knows that if Helen's abduction was the beginning of the strife, his error is the critical determinant of the outcome of the war. Last, Helen's speech in front of
Hector's dead body indicates best her attachment to her Trojan brother-in-law. Helen says that Hector had always been kind to her in her loneliness and painful search for a new identity (24.762ff.). It is very significant that Helen isolates Priam and Hector as the only people who cared to provide a secure environment for her. It cannot be a coincidence that Priam, the head of the Trojan society, and Hector, its only hope for survival, are the Trojans who respect and protect Helen.

What about Paris? What light does his presentation in Homer shed on Helen? Traditionally Paris is the one who gave Aphrodite the Apple of Discord preferring her gift to those of Hera and Athena (7). There is no doubt that all Homeric heroes, whether they come from the Trojan or Greek side, blame him as principally responsible for the war. The Trojans and their allies hate him as "black death" (3.454). For the Greeks he has violated the sacred rules of wedlock and hospitality and he should be punished as a warning to others not to abuse their host's kindness (3.350). The Trojans do not condone his actions - Hector, his own brother, says that Paris should have been stoned for his deed (3.52-3) and wishes he had never been born (3.39-40) and Helen feels ashamed of him (3.439; 6.350) - but yet they stand by him, apparently because Paris is the royal son and Helen a guest and the Trojans feel that they have to protect the same social norms that he has dishonored.

Paris' portrait consists first, of what the others say about him and second, of what he himself does. Homer
consistently presents Paris as the most undistinguished, unheroic warrior, a lover of peace and leisure whose fighting spirit is more suitable for a bedroom than a battlefield scene. His armour is described in such a way as to undercut his natural beauty and undermine his virility. In his first appearance he is described with a panther skin, a curved bow and a sword (3.16-20), a description which suits more the image of a conqueror of hearts than a fierce warrior. Menelaus' coming is enough to make him shrink in horror behind his companions (3.30ff.). His armour is described a second time, just before the duel with Menelaus. The description is detailed but very traditional, perhaps formulaic. His "fair greaves linked with silver fastenings", "his sword with nails of silver", "his great and heavy shield", his "well-fashioned crest" and his spear are not particularly distinguished while the fact that he borrows his brother's corselet (3.331ff.) may be a symbol of Paris' alienation from war-related activities. Homer tells us that Menelaus puts on his armour in a similar manner (3.339) but he does not describe Menelaus' armour. The contrast between the two men is brought out by the use of the adjective ἀρνίος "warlike" for Menelaus and ἐλευθής ἄλέγξανδρος, Ἂλέλευθος πόσις ἱπποκόμοιο (3.330) for Paris. Although line 3.330 is formulaic and is often used to characterize Paris, its use at this particular point stresses the difference between the two men, who also happen to be Helen's two husbands. Finally, before
the duel scene closes, the poet draws again our attention to Paris' "broidered strap" (ἄπαξαν ὄπος δειλήν) underlining thus his natural delicacy (3.371).

When Helen meets him in the bedroom after he has escaped from the duel, Paris is "gleaming with beauty and fair raiment...you would think that he was rather going to a dance, or rested and had been dancing lately" (3.393-94). Similarly when Hector finds him in his palace in Book 6, Paris is associated with womanly artifacts as he is sitting among the women who are busy with their περικάλυτα ἔργα (6.324). Paris is also busy with his "splendid armour" and he is turning in his hands his "curved bow". This description, however, among the women and away from the fighting, underlines the contrast between him and his warlike brother Hector (6.318-320). Interestingly enough, the "curved bow" is used elsewhere (11.357ff.) to associate him with beauty and love of women. When he fails to kill Diomedes with a bowshot, the victim-to-be calls him "ogler of girls" and compares him to a woman or child. Even when Paris is most warlike (6.506-11), as he comes to join Hector for battle, Hector underlines his brother's reluctance for fighting:

δειμόνι', οὐκ' ἂν τίς ἄνηρ, ὃς ἔνασιμος εἶν,
ἔρχον ἀτιμήσεις μάχης, ἐπεὶ ἁλκιμός ἐσσι·
(6.521-2).

Throughout the Iliad Paris is usually not identified by the patronymic nor with an epithet suggesting
communal action [8], but as the "lord of lovely-haired Helen" [9]. This is because in the context of the *Iliad* Paris is merely Helen's husband and abductor. Paris is portrayed as having achieved two things in his life: the fair palace (δώματα κατα, 312ff.) [10] - that he has built himself - and Helen's abduction, the cause of all the suffering and eventual destruction of his *polis*. The first achievement perhaps is intended to show Paris as a man of peacetime and attach some artistic qualities to his personality. At the same time the house is an especially appropriate image for Paris because he is not only a home builder but also a homewrecker. He has created a house where he and Helen can live their passion. In fact the house that Paris has built as the center of his family life with Helen shelters a passion which ironically puts into jeopardy the life of the whole city, the city which alone could offer safety for family life. While the rest of the Trojans fight to preserve the city and the environment that makes the family secure, Paris is depicted at home with Helen selfishly avoiding his social responsibility. The two scenes of the poem that take place in Paris' palace, one in Book 3 (421ff.) and the other in Book 6 (312ff.), are carefully juxtaposed to scenes of fighting. Both scenes emphasize the bedroom--this after all, as opposed to the battlefield, is Paris' domain. Book 3 opens with Paris' terror of battle and the contrast to the manly Menelaus. The duel proves Paris' ineffectiveness in fighting and the Book ends with the bedroom scene. Book 6 further explores Paris' unwarlike nature by presenting
the relationship of two completely different but equally tragic couples: Hector and Andromache, Paris and Helen.

On the other hand when Paris is compared to Menelaus, in the duel of Book 3, their actions are presented as equal. The common dual verbs ἔστιν ὄντος (3.341), δεινόν δερκόμενον (3.342), στήσον (3.344), κοτέοντε (3.345) indicate that both men are engaged in similar actions. The same amazement seizes the two armies (3.342), just as both armies rejoiced when the duel was first proposed (3.111-2). Helen's husbands, nevertheless, are definitely different. Menelaus is a brave and decent man, willing to fight in order to recover what he considers as belonging to him. He does not have Paris' beauty but he has that sense of social responsibility which Paris is lacking. His insistence on Paris' violation of the sacred rules of hospitality shows him as a man who respects social conventions. On the other hand, Paris is gifted with extraordinary beauty and a certain detachment from reality. He is not a coward but he would rather engage in other than warlike activities.

Both men are responsible for the war (3.100). The difference is that Menelaus is fighting for the reestablishment of his family, the stability of his house and the recovery of his honor. He is ready to fight to recover what is his social context whereas Paris enjoys an essentially undefined status that he has not even earned. Paris is guilty because he has violated not only Menelaus' marriage but also the sacred guest-friend...
relationship. He claims that he could not have had Helen, even if he wanted to, without divine aid (3.64ff.). This is the only justification that Homer presents for his crime. And although we may dislike his ignoble behaviour, there is no doubt that both he and Helen are instruments of a supernatural power. In fact, Paris expresses a basic condition of life which Achilles carries further in Book 24 when he says that mortals receive their gifts from the gods without the right of appeal (24.525-533).

In the context of the Iliad the Trojan War was part of a divine scheme to bring destruction to Troy. Although none of the Homeric heroes questions the divine decree or adduces a reason to explain the motivation behind this divine scheme (as for example, in the Cycria (Fr.1)), it appears that the Trojan War was destined from the beginning and Helen was not its true cause but merely a pretext. This idea is first expressed in Helen’s defence by Priam:

οὐ τί μοι αἰτή ἔσσι, θεοὶ νῦ μοι αἴτιοι εἶσιν,
οἵ μοι ἐφώρμησαν πόλεμον πολύδακρν Ἀχαῖων
(3.164-5)

and later by Helen herself (6.349; 357). Regardless of any divine interference preceding the beginning of the War, all the Olympian gods seem to be actively involved in it by supporting either the Greek or the Trojan side. The goddess, however, who appears to have regulated the life of Helen and Paris before and during the war and who is clearly regarded as responsible for their conduct,
is Aphrodite. When Hector chides Paris for his actions (3.64f.), Paris answers that a man cannot reject the gifts of the gods and that his gifts are bestowed by Aphrodite. Aphrodite has arranged Paris’ and Helen’s union. Moreover, the disorder of the Iliadic world is the result of her selfish vanity. By promising Paris the most beautiful woman, a woman that belonged to someone else, Aphrodite has intervened in human affairs in the most destructive way. Aphrodite promised Paris something that he did not have the right to have. When later Paris goes to fight Menelaus, it is again Aphrodite who intervenes at the most crucial point and moves Paris from the field of war to the bed of love (3.373ff.). The only hope for peace is lost because of her and soon the fighting begins again, this time with the Achaeans convinced of the justice of their cause. In other words, Aphrodite is not only the reason for the beginning of the war but she is also responsible for its continuation. Helen and Paris are her tragic instruments and all the other Greeks and Trojans victims of her destructive power.

In the Homeric world Aphrodite is a mixture of horror and amusement. She is terrible when she forces Helen to obedience. Helen tries to maintain her will against Aphrodite and refuses to sleep with the man whom she despises: νεμεσιστόν δὲ κεν ἐ ἴν (3.410) but she knows that she has been trapped in an inescapable fate, that her will has been suspended. She understands the unnaturalness of the goddess’ intervention in human life when she suggests that Aphrodite should leave Olympus.
and go to live with Paris as his wife or slave [12]. Helen knows that Aphrodite is using her to achieve her ends and that the goddess' games have tragic consequences for mortals—consequences which do not affect Aphrodite. Helen yields reluctantly and follows Paris (3.447) but we know that she is not her own mistress but Aphrodite's victim. Homer tells us only that she is frightened (3.418). The goddess has threatened to make her hated by both Greeks and Trojans. Helen, who has been seeking an identity in Troy needs to know that she has at least the Trojan protection, especially Priam's protection [13].

The bedroom scene (3.421ff.) is central to the action of the Iliad. Greeks and Trojans are fighting and the cause of their fighting is Helen's and Paris' adultery. At the very moment that both sides are seeking an orderly peace, Helen and Paris are engaged in the very action that constitutes the cause of the war. Aphrodite, who brought them together ten years ago, is the one who has prepared the scene. First she snatched Paris from the duel to assure that no peace will be reached and then she made sure that Helen would follow her orders. Paris is as selfish and irresponsible as his protectress goddess. Helen cares about blame and is sensitive to what people will say (3.411f.;24.768f.). She knows the meaning of nemesis and shame, which Paris does not (6.351), but she submits to her destiny. She rebels against the goddess in a way that no other Homeric character does or can be expected to, but she is overruled. The poet makes it clear that it is Aphrodite who moves the threads of this fatal game. Helen
does not claim the goddess as an excuse for her behaviour. It is Homer who shows her power.

Homer makes Aphrodite terrible when she forces Helen to obedience but he also makes her ridiculous. Her character is the least respected among the Olympian goddesses. Hera uses her when she needs her girdle to trick Zeus (14.214ff.) but when she no longer needs her she calls her κυνάμβουλα (21.421). In the aristeia of Diomedes, Aphrodite and Ares are joined as gods of passion and both are subject to ridicule and humiliation by Athena. Aphrodite who has just removed Paris from the duel with Menelaus and has just been praised by Zeus at the divine assembly for looking so well after Paris (4.10-11), comes back to the battlefield to rescue her son, Aeneas. She is held up to ridicule, when having been wounded by Diomedes in battle she runs crying to her mother for comfort (5.375ff.). The wounding of Aphrodite is soon followed by Diomedes' attack on Ares. Ares also seeks comfort from his divine parent, Zeus, who has, however, no sympathy for him (5.889-91). Ares and Aphrodite are probably the least respected gods of the Iliadic world. The poet acknowledges their power. Helen's submission to Aphrodite and the ruins of Troy are its sad manifestations. Nevertheless, Athena's triumph, which is repeated in the Battle of the Gods (21.391), and the Odyssean story of Ares and Aphrodite, indicate that the ethos of the Homeric Iliad is different from the world of love and war, represented by Ares and Aphrodite. Furthermore, by having Diomedes attack Aphrodite, Homer
draws our attention to another point. Men usually do not attack gods. There are perhaps certain instances like those that Dione mentions to Aphrodite (5.384 ff.) but they are rather exceptions than the rule. Diomedes does something unnatural but he knows that Aphrodite's intervention in the war is also something unnatural [14]. Zeus expresses the same opinion when he tells Aphrodite to concern herself with marriage and leave the works of warfare to Ares and Athena (5.428-30). Aphrodite’s intervention in warfare is as wrongheaded as is her action to give Helen to Paris. Because of this unrightful intervention love turns into war. Troy falls because it is under the protection of Aphrodite [15].

Helen appears four times in the Iliad, the first time in Book 3. The audience knows who she is and the poet does not feel the need to introduce her. Before we actually see her, her name has been mentioned 4 times, always associated with the death of many Achaeans (2.161, 2.177, 2.356). Hera and Athena use the same formulaic expression to refer to Helen:

'Αρχείνυ Ἐλένην, ἢσ εἰνεκα πολλοί Ἀχαϊῶν
ἐν Τροϊᾷ ἀπόλουτοι:

(2.161; 177)

and Nestor uses the formulaic:

τίσασθαι δ' Ἐλένης ὀρμήματα τε στοιχάσ τε

(2.356)

which also describes Menelaus’ intentions (2.590) who has
come to Troy to avenge her abduction. The use of formulaic expressions may indicate a tradition according to which Helen was responsible for the death of many Achaeans, but although Homer kept the formulas and the mythical tradition, in general he did not feel the need to portray Helen accordingly.

Homer has no condemnation of Helen in his masterful picture of her. In Book 3 while Paris (3.70; 91) volunteers to fight with Menelaus for Helen and her possessions, Iris, the messenger of the gods, finds Helen in Paris' palace weaving and tells her to go to the wall to watch Paris and Menelaus fighting over her. This is the first and only time in the poem that Iris appears in disguise [15] - as Laodike, Helen's sister in law - and the only time that we do not know the originator of Iris' mission. The choice of disguise is definitely deliberate. As the loveliest daughter of Priam (3.124). Laodike's beauty reminds us that Helen is supposedly the most beautiful woman in the world, although the poet does not describe her. Laodike is defined by reference to her social position, i.e. the name of her husband and father-in-law. Helen has two husbands and two fathers-in-law and her social position is yet to be determined. In fact, Iris comes to Helen as Laodike in order to inform her about the duel that will supposedly determine her social position.

Iris finds Helen weaving. She is also weaving when Hector comes to Paris' palace in Book 6, as is Andromache in Book 22 (440-41) before she hears the news of Hector's death. Agamemnon imagines Chryseis at the loom in
Clytemnestra's place (1.31) and Hector envisions Andromache plying someone else's loom. Therefore, in the Homeric society, the loom was part of women's daily life and it symbolized domestic harmony. The webs of Andromache and Helen are the only ones described in detail in the Iliad. Despite their similarities, the two webs are so strikingly different that we do not doubt Homer's intention to draw the contrast between the two women, their fate and their role in the poem. The resemblance between the two looms is limited only to the technical aspects of the tapestry. Andromache's web is purple in color and of double fold like Helen's (3.126; 22.441) but it is not "great" (μέγας, 3.125). Andromache's web displays artistic elaboration but it does not record history. Andromache's weaving is part of her domestic duties and shows the harmony of her marriage with Hector (6.486-493). It is ironic that when we see her weaving in Book 22 (437ff.) she is simply introduced as "Hector's wife" at the very moment that she is about to see her domestic role destroyed. Andromache is weaving flowers (22.441). For Hector's wife war cannot be reduced to art. Her weaving of flowers expresses, perhaps, her hope for life at the time that she foresees. The sudden interruption of her creation when she drops the shuttle (22.448) reflects the disruption of her marriage. With the death of Hector, the loom's function, both actual and symbolic, ends.

Helen's web is not associated with Paris and her life
with him. Her art deals with the struggles of the Trojans and the Achaeans for her sake:

\[ \text{Helen is weaving history. When she weaves designs of struggling warriors she is essentially weaving the very fabric of heroic epic, Homer's description of the martial events takes shape upon her loom. Helen is not only the author but also the subject of her art and because of her personal involvement with her subject she possesses intimate knowledge of the world that she creates. This is why she ceases weaving at the same time that men cease fighting and she goes to the Wall to see the subject of her art in reality. Iris' role is to make sure that Helen has the knowledge that she needs for her artistic creation. For the same reason, Homer makes Priam ask Helen to name the leaders of the Achaeans for him (3.162ff.). Priam can see for himself but it is Helen who has, from personal experience, that special insight and inspiration which characterize a poet and enable him to communicate to his audience the true identity of gods and heroes. Instead of introducing the names of the most eminent Greek heroes, Homer has Helen introduce them to us and make us involved through her involvement.}

\[ \text{Helen, therefore, is like Homer, a composer of memory. Her poetic self-consciousness is reflected in her} \]
Helen is aware of being ἀοιδόμοι for men to come, and she also knows that the only consolation for men is a position in the memory of future generations. Hector does not understand her suggestion at this time but he comes to realize the meaning of Helen's words when he is faced with a futile death:

At this very moment, Hector, realizing the role of the gods and his own impotence to control the present events, entrusts his glory to the transcendent memory of poetry.

Having thus introduced Helen, Homer proceeds to her physical appearance with the scene on the Trojan Wall (Tēichoscopia). Instead of describing her, the poet allows the audience to estimate her beauty by the effect she produces on others and especially the Trojan elders. Helen is so beautiful that she can only be compared to a goddess. The experienced elders express their fear for the power of her beauty (3.159f.) but they also realize...
that there is no blame for suffering because of Helen (3.157). Beauty is dangerous but it cannot be blamed. This is how the Homeric world views beauty and it is very important that this view is expressed by Priam and the Elder Trojans. Because of their old age, Priam and the Trojan Elders are not afraid of being seduced by youthful beauty: therefore, their assessment bears unquestionable validity.

The Helen of the Iliad does not deny her guilt. In front of Priam she admits having followed Paris (3.174), regrets her own existence [17] and calls herself κυνώτης ("dog-faced" 3.180) [18]. Nevertheless, Homer calls her δία γυναικῶν (divine of women) [19]. Her speech to Aphrodite (3.399ff.) and later to Hector (6.344ff.) show that she does not value Paris at all. She feels ashamed for his willful blindness (6.350-51) while her affection for Hector shows that she recognizes in him (6.354-5) all those heroic virtues that Paris is lacking. Helen is deeper and more complex than her Trojan husband. It has been suggested that Homer portrayed his heroine beautiful but empty, "the plaything" of Aphrodite, "the fickle lady who is now tired of the man she followed in flight from her husband" [20]. I find this a very unfair and superficial view of the Homeric Helen. The Helen of the Iliad is not empty. Her knowledge of man's inability to control fate makes her stand above the events and all other Homeric characters. She knows that the gods are involved in the present circumstances (6.349f; 357f.) and that they are
the ones who have regulated her life and that of Paris from the beginning. Although the final responsibility rests on the gods, Helen does not deny her guilt. She, herself, emphasizes its irreducible character in each one of her appearances without even permitting herself the right to self-defence. When Priam and the Elders absolve her from any blame for the woes of Troy, she does not accept the excuse offered (3.172-176). She repents her past and blames herself for her behavior. Helen knows better than any other Homeric hero that the Trojan war was destined to bring glory to those involved, an idea that is well in keeping with the Homeric ideal of glory that comes from a short and praise-worthy life instead of a long but inglorious one (11.9.412-416, Od. 8.577-80).

Homer has no words of blame for Helen. Her only "negative" characterization comes from Achilles who finds her πρεσβυν ἀβορρετόν (19.325), but no one denies that beauty can cause fear. For Homer Helen is a victim of the inevitability of her situation. The most beautiful of women was chosen to work misfortune on two nations and to be the reward of the winner, whoever the winner would be. Unlike Andromache and all other Trojan women, Helen does not have to fear a life of slavery (6.450-456). The outcome of the war cannot change her destiny and she knows it. It is exactly this knowledge and self-consciousness that elevates her above the human limits. Homer has invested her with that blend of responsibility and lack of ultimate power that makes her a truly tragic figure.
Homer did not say anything about the fate of Helen between the death of Hector and the Fall of Troy or the circumstances of her delivery to Menelaus. The earliest extant reference to her recovery is found in Euripides' Andromache (627-631), staged about 425 B.C., while the description of her reunion with Menelaus is credited to the Cyclic poets Arktinos and Lesches and the lyric poets Stesichorus and Ibycus [21]. According to the summary of Arctinos' Iliou Persis in Proclus' Chrestomathia, Menelaus, "found Helen, killed Deiphobos and led Helen down to the ships":

\[
\text{Μενέλας δὲ ἀνευρὼν Ἐλένην, ἐπὶ τὰς ναῦς κατάγει,}
\]

\[
\O ηὐφοβοῦν φονεύσας.
\]

The account is, perhaps, underlined by Demodokos' song in Od. 8.516-518, where Odysseus and Menelaus are going together to Deiphobos' house after they left the wooden horse. Homer does not describe the events which took place there and he does not mention Helen. Nevertheless, if Menelaus' words in the Odyssey (4.276) suggest that Deiphobos took Paris' place as Helen's husband, then it is understandable - even though Homer does not say it explicitly - that after Menelaus left the wooden horse, he would first head towards Deiphobos' house in order to find his wife. We have no indications as to when and for what reasons Menelaus forgave Helen [22]. Homer maintains the emotional balance of his poetry by remaining
silent.

We do know from the Iliad that Menelaus' anger was never directed against Helen. The object of his curses was always Paris (I.3.351f.). The Trojan Expedition achieved the destruction of Troy and Paris' punishment. Argive and consequently Spartan honor was recovered, while the return of Helen to her proper husband insured the reestablishment of the Spartan royal community and Menelaus' household, both disrupted by the decade-long adulterous alliance. Thus, when we meet the Spartan royal couple again in the fourth Book of the Odyssey, Menelaus does not only have his desirable consort back but we are also told that because of his marriage to her he is granted immortality (Od.4.561-569).

Book 4 of the Odyssey opens with the arrival of Telemachus and Peisistratus at the Spartan palace, which is alive with joy and wedding feasting. Megapenthes and Hermione, the son and daughter of Menelaus, are being married at the same time. Hermione, Helen's only child, is to wed the son of Achilles - as her father had promised when still in Troy (Od.4.6). Far away from the cruelty and sorrows of the war the offspring of the Iliadic protagonists are united in a different world full of the joys of life and hope for the future. Lines 1-19 introduce the action of Book 4 and prepare the audience before the appearance of the protagonists. Homer carefully points out that all is not well in Sparta. At lines 12-14 we are reminded that Helen had no children after Hermione. We know that her ten-year marriage to Paris was sterile. In
the ancient world the social object of a legal marriage is the contribution of new members to the community [23]. Helen's marriage to Paris was unnatural because she was still Menelaus' wife and she was supposed to bear the continuation of Meneleus' line. Her marriage to Paris, was sterile because it was illegal and improper while her marriage to Menelaus was legal and, therefore, properly fruitful. Homer stresses the fact that Helen had only one child from her legal marriage with Menelaus, Hermione, who is going away to marry Neoptolemus (8-9). Megapenthes, who is staying in Sparta to assume later Menelaus' duties as a king, is not Helen's son, but the son of a slave (11-12). Menelaus' friends and relatives are enjoying the wedding celebrations, and it is not even certain that Helen is present.

After an elaborate description of the Spartan palace (1.37ff.) Homer introduces Menelaus first. We sense a tone of bitterness in his speech. These are not the words we would expect on an occasion such as the marriage of his children. First, Menelaus tempers Telemachus' enthusiasm for his palace (1.78-80). Mortals should not compare themselves to the gods; but Menelaus because of his marriage to Helen is no longer strictly speaking a mortal (4.561-569). Apparently, wealth and the promise of immortality have not made Menelaus happy, for he knows that they have cost the lives of so many heroes in Troy (98-99) and Agamemnon's death in Argos (91f). Although he never mentions Helen by name he knows well, as does the audience, that all these brave men died for Helen's
recovery, while Agamemnon was killed by Clytemnestra, who also happens to be Helen's sister [24]. Menelaus is implying, without actually saying, that wealth and royal power have not brought domestic happiness and stability to him or his brother. Both men had very unfortunate marital relationships that also brought disaster to other innocent people. Menelaus comments that he has ἀχος ἀὼστον (4.108) for Odysseus but his whole speech suggests that his ἀχος derives from his role as the bereft husband and the consequences of Helen's abduction. In fact, his son's name is Megapenthes, "great grief", and we know that in epic the name of a son frequently indicates a characteristic of the father. Hector's son was named Astyanax because Hector was the Lord of the City. Orestes' son was called Teisomenos because of his father's role as avenger. Accordingly, Megapenthes' name may indicate that μέγα μένθος was an important aspect of Menelaus' life at the time when his son was born.

Menelaus in Book 4 is an unhappy man who would gladly sacrifice most of his possessions for the lives of his comrades. We realize that the recovery of Helen and promise of immortality can not undo the harm that has been done. The bitter consequences of the war are still present for some of its victims. Menelaus' speech ends with a reference to Odysseus (107ff.) which causes Telemachus to weep for his lost father. Odysseus' family does not know whether he is dead or alive. Among those who are mourning Odysseus is Penelope (111), the wife who
has set the standard of marital fidelity in the Homeric world. The implication is clear. The faithful Penelope is yet another victim of the war for the sake of an unfaithful wife.

This is how Homer sets up Helen's grand entrance (121). Amidst the joy of the wedding celebrations Menelaus has introduced a strong tone of melancholy which is now reflected in Telemachus' weeping. Helen comes to relieve the tension and uneasiness of the moment and alter the effect of Menelaus' speech by recalling with her appearance the initial impression of Telemachus and Peisistratus. Just as the palace looked divine in the youths' eyes (74) so is Helen herself presented as an Olympian goddess:

'Hélen's comparison to Artemis surprises us. We know that other female figures are compared to Artemis in Homer. Odysseus tells Nausikaa that she looks like Artemis in ἐίδος, μέγεθος and φύ (6.151f.) and Penelope is compared to Artemis twice, as she comes from her bedchamber (17.37, 19.54). Artemis is the virgin goddess of the hunt, Nausikaa as an unmarried girl and Penelope as a faithful and chaste wife can naturally be compared to her. That Helen should be compared to Artemis, given her traditional role in the story of Troy is surprising. A few lines later Helen's servants bring her her golden distaff (χρυσήν τ' ἴδακάτην, 131) for her spinning. O.S. Due [25] has shown that the word ἴδακάτη means the smooth part of a reed
which can be used as an arrow shaft or distaff. Thus the epithet χρυσάκατος could mean either "she of the golden arrows" or "she of the golden distaff." Given Artemis' traditional role as a huntress, we would expect the adjective to mean "she of the golden arrows." The word ἥλικατη however, is invariably used in both the Iliad and the Odyssey to mean "distaff." Homer deliberately links Helen and Artemis through their ἥλικατη. By reinforcing the Artemis-like qualities of Helen, as he introduces her into the Odyssey, Homer puts the hearer on notice that this Helen is different from the Helen of the Iliad. Aphrodite does not dominate her any longer. It is not incidental that Aphrodite's name is mentioned only twice and in passing in Book 4 (4.14, 261). In line 261 she is named by Helen as the power which led her away from home. Aphrodite, however, belongs to Helen's past, a past which is foreign to her now as she settles down to her role as a perfectly loyal wife. Her spinning, as C. H. Whitman [25] notes, marks her return to "domestic propriety" and this time her golden distaff associates her with Artemis, the most chaste of the Olympian goddesses.

In the Iliad, we saw Helen weaving. There her web was not only an expression of the domestic side of her character but also an attempt to outlast mortality through the creation of an artifact that would survive its creator. In Troy, when not only her identity but life itself was uncertain, Helen could only await the outcome of the war hoping that she would overcome death through
the songs of future generations. Aphrodite interrupted her creation when she took her away from her web which is never again mentioned. When we see Helen again in the *Iliad* (6.323) she is not weaving but supervising the work of her servants. In the context of the *Odyssey* Helen is no longer weaving but spinning. In the Homeric world both spinning and weaving are parts of the domestic life of a married woman. Spinning, however, is the particular activity of women whose marital status has been fully defined. When Homeric women enjoy peace and domestic harmony they appear spinning. When their domestic harmony is being threatened they resort to weaving. Hector and Telemachus use the same formulaic expression to order Andromache and Penelope respectively to take care of their domestic duties:

\[
\text{ιστόν τ' ἕλκατ'ν τέ, καὶ ἀμφίπολοις κέλευσε}
\]

(II. 6.491 and OD.1.357).

Andromache and Penelope are the only women (besides Helen) who are associated with both spinning and weaving. Both women are devoted to their husbands and both are fighting to maintain their primary identity as wives while their family well-being is being threatened by external factors (war-suitors). Penelope uses weaving to deceive her suitors (Od. 2.94-5, 104, 15.516f., 19.139f., 24.125f.). Odysseus' order to the maids to help Penelope with her spinning signifies their reunion and Penelope's return to her wifely role (Od.18.315). Andromache appears weaving a robe, a symbol of her dutiful fulfillment to her...
husband’s wishes, when she receives the news of Hector’s death. Hector himself had made the image of the loom a symbol of disrupted domestic harmony when he predicted that Andromache would serve at the loom of a foreign warrior (11.6.456). Similarly, Agamemnon expresses his desire to establish an improper domesticity when he envisions Chryseis plying at the loom (11.1.31). In the *Odyssey*, Arete is often described as spinning among her handmaidens (*Ad*, 6.53, 306; 7.105). Arete enjoys not only domestic harmony but she is honored as Alcinous’ wife as much as no other woman:

\[\text{τὴν ἀ’ Ἀλκίνους ποιήσατ’ ἀκοιτώ, καὶ μεὶν ἔτειν’, ὃς οὐ τίς ἐπὶ χθονὶ τίσται ἀλήθη, ὡςαὶ νῦν ὡς κυναίκες ὑπ’ ἀνδρόσυν οἶκον ἔχουσιν.} (\textit{Od.} 7.66-68)

The Helen of the *Odyssey* has no longer to worry about her status. Her spinning is a different process of creation than her weaving, a process which marks her return to domestic stability. Now that her identity is certain and her immortality insured, Helen can turn her energies towards others. Just as the Moirai spin the fate of men, Helen creates a thread which surrounds and protects everything around her.

In the *Iliad*, Helen was not only the knower of names and identities but she also possessed a self-consciousness that allowed her to stand beyond contemporary and ephemeral objects and see the underlying truth. In the *Odyssey*, too, Helen displays the power of recognition, a power to see through appearances [28]. Before Menelaus
can say a word she immediately recognizes Telemachus, whom she could not have seen since he was a child (4.138-44). Besides her ability to recognize identities, Helen can also recognize her own responsibility and accept her past:

"ὅτ' ἐμὲ ἐκ κυνῳδίδος ἐνεκ' Ἀχαιοὶ
ηλθέθ' ὑπὸ Τροίην, πόλεμον θραύσαν ὀρμᾶνοντες."

(4.145f.)

When the memories of the past bring pain, Helen acts to relieve it by mixing drugs into the wine, drugs which can bring "forgetfulness of all evils" (4.221). Homer tells us that Helen acquired her witch-like powers from her Egyptian friend Polydamna but we notice that the vocabulary used to describe the φάρμακα deliberately suggests epic poetry. The φάρμακα is υπνευθές, ἄχολος and ἐπιληθές. All three terms occur only here in Homer but they do recall Hesiod’s statement in Theogony (98-103) where it is suggested that singing κλέα προτέρων ἀνθρώπων can relieve men from πένθος:

εἰ γὰρ τίς καὶ πένθος ἔχων νεοκηδεῖ θυμῷ
ἀξίᾳ καὶ πραγμάτων ἀκαχήμενοι, αὐτὰρ ἀολίδος
Μουσῶν θεράπτων κλέεσ προτέρων ἄνθρωπων
ὕμνησι μάκαρὰς τε θεοὺς, οἳ ὀλυμποῦν ἔχουσιν,
ἀλλ' ὃ θεῷ δυσφοροσυνεῖν ἐπιληθέοτα οὐδὲ τι κηδέων
μέμυνται: τάχεως δὲ παρέτραπε δῶρα θεών

The idea that song relieves sorrow is not new [29]. In the Iliad, Helen promised Hector immortality through the songs of men to come (6. 304-5). When her identity
was uncertain and her life in danger Helen could only hope that the creation of an artifact would overcome death, just as only the memory of poetry could insure Hector his glory. In the *Odyssey*, where Helen's immortality is insured, she can redirect her energies for the benefit of others. By relieving πεινόν with her drugs Helen acts as an epic poet. As soon as the wine with the drug has been offered, Helen actually becomes a poet and recounts a lengthy tale of herself and Odysseus.

Her story (235-264) pictures her on the side of the Greeks. As Odysseus entered Troy, disguised as a beggar, Helen recognized him, but did not betray him. Menelaus follows with his own story in an attempt to deny Helen's assertion of loyalty to the Greek cause. Both stories reveal significant similarities and differences and a comparison of the two speeches is crucial to our understanding of the whole scene.

Helen begins with a reference to Zeus, who gives good and evil now to one now to another person (4. 236f). Her introduction sounds like a comment on Menelaus' speech in lines 78-112 and a reminder that his troubles were indeed a decision of the gods and not her fault. Helen goes on to tell her story about how she recognized and took care of Odysseus when he secretly entered Troy. Her emphasis on bathing and clothing him (4.252-3) reflects perhaps her attempt to present herself as a domestic Greek woman and certainly recalls the image of
domesticity which characterized her first appearance in the *Odyssey* (4.121ff.). She describes Odysseus as the active character of the story while her role was to act discreetly and remain silent. She concludes her story with an *apologia*, in which she states how glad she was that Odysseus killed many Trojans, and blames Aphrodite for making her leave her country, her child and her flawless husband. Menelaus responds with another story. In his version, it is the Greeks inside the Horse that must be silent while it is Helen who plays the active role by parading around the Horse and mimicking the voices of Greek wives. Menelaus asserts that the gods must have bidden Helen to do it while Helen presents her elopement with Paris as the result of Aphrodite’s manipulation (30]. The mention of Deiphobus, however, makes us less willing to believe that Menelaus actually considers the gods responsible for his wife’s actions. Because of the presence of his guests Menelaus is trying to soften his accusations but his hurt pride as the bereft husband does not let him remain silent. The mention of Deiphobus is also a response to Helen’s belated discovery that her husband does not lack mental and physical perfection (4.264).

It is interesting to note that although both stories are supposedly about Odysseus and they are told for the benefit of Telemachus, they essentially focus on Helen’s behaviour. It is clear that Helen’s story provides an excuse for herself while Menelaus’ story accuses her. Helen’s story presents her actions as patriotic, Menelaus’
shows them to be traitorous. What is the purpose of these two contradicting presentations of Helen's behavior in Troy and which one of the two are we to believe? Helen's presentation of the facts is consistent with what we know from the *Iliad*. Although Homer does not specify the time when Odysseus entered Troy and was recognized by Helen, we know that Helen did indeed feel longing for her former husband, her city and her parents (*Il.3.139-40*), and that she actually expressed her feelings to Priam (*3.174-5*). The role of Aphrodite is clearly manifested in the *Iliad* (*3.383ff.*), when the goddess forces Helen to meet Paris in his bedroom. Helen's claim, therefore, that Aphrodite took her away from her home and husband (*Od. 4.261*) finds support in the *Iliad*. Furthermore, the idea that the gods intervene in human affairs and bid mortals to do shameful things is not unknown in Homer's poetry. The gods played an active role not only in the beginning but also during the Trojan War. Menelaus' words (*Od.4.275*) may sound sarcastic in their context but they still express a reality of the Homeric world that Menelaus himself cannot deny. On the other hand, there is no doubt that Menelaus is not happy with his life and marriage and we have no reason to believe that his story is not true. The purpose of the scene, however, is not to prove Helen's guilt or innocence. By presenting the imperfection of the relationship between Helen and Menelaus, Homer wants us to think of Odysseus and Penelope. Will Ithaca be another Sparta? Although the message is too subtle for Telemachus to understand, the audience certainly
thinks of Helen and Menelaus as a foil for Odysseus and Penelope. Beyond physical return, many problems await a husband and wife who resume their life after a long period of separation. Menelaus' discontent and the mixture of failure and success which characterizes the married life of Helen and Menelaus prove that in their case, reunion is only physical. Their stories show the conflict between them. The ideal which Odysseus expresses to Nausikaa in Book 6 of the Odyssey is apparently not realized by Helen and Menelaus:

Θ' ὁμοφρονέοντε νοήμασιν οἴκον ἔχουσιν
ἀνήρ ἡδὲ χυμή.

Helen as a character reenters the scene in Book 15 (104ff) where she chooses a peplos for Telemachus' future bride which Penelope is to save till the wedding day. Menelaus also offers Telemachus a two handled cup (102). The number two is certainly significant for Menelaus, who happens to be one of the two Atreidae and who is one of Helen's two husbands. Megapenthes chooses a κρατέρα, "a mixing bowl", a gift which perhaps indicates his "mixed" descendance since he is the offspring of the union of a king to a slave. Helen chooses a robe she has herself woven, a fact that Homer is careful to emphasize (15.105). The words used to describe Helen's gift are the same words used in the Iliad to describe Hecuba's offering in supplication to Athena:

ἔνθι' ἐσθοι οἱ πέπλοι παμποίκιλα ἔργα χυμαίκων
Σιδονίων............
The two passages are almost identical. The only differences are: the emphasis on the fact that Helen has made the robe herself (15.105), instead of the Sidonian women (11.6.289), and the substitution of δώρου Ἀθηνα (11.6.253) by δία γυναικῶν (Od. 15.106). The Iliadic line gives the name of the goddess who receives the gift, whereas the Odyssean line gives the name of the creator of the robe. In Hecuba’s case the gift is rejected (11.6.311), obviously because its origin and association (6.290-2) reminds Athena of the reasons of her hatred for Troy. In the Odyssean passage, the emphasis is not on the receiver of the gift but on its creator (οussions κάμεν αὐτή...δία γυναικῶν). In the Odyssey Helen’s creativity is directed towards others and here we see that one of the products of her creation is being offered as a gift to Telemachus. In other words the creator of the artifact becomes its transmitter. Her gift to Telemachus for his bride suggests the marriage theme which governs the whole Book 4. Penelope herself, the temporary recipient of the peplos is urged by her suitors and family to marry one of them (15.16f.) but she will remain faithful to
Odysseus. Penelope, who still hopes for her reunion with her husband, is the symbol of marital loyalty in the Homeric world and possesses the qualities that Helen wants for herself as she settles down to her new domestic role. The robe which Helen offers Telemachus connects the past with the future by associating Helen's past creativity with her present domesticity.

Before Telemachus leaves Sparta, Helen demonstrates another mysterious power, the power of prediction. As Menelaus pours a libation, an eagle flies with a white goose in its talons (15.160-165), and Helen interprets the omen correctly, as we know, as a sign that Odysseus will return home and avenge the suitors. It is interesting that the dream which Penelope tells Odysseus (Od.19.536-543), also involves the geese killed by an eagle. Odysseus himself interprets the dream as meaning exactly what Helen had predicted earlier.

It is important to note that Penelope herself, in her speech to Odysseus, presents Helen as a victim of the gods, who have laid upon her an ἐκτροχία which caused her to run away with a foreign man (Od.23.215-224). Homer deliberately associates the two women. Helen and Penelope represent two extremes. Helen's imperfect relationship with Menelaus is suggestive of Odysseus' and Penelope's relationship. That is not to say that Penelope's presentation as the perfect wife darkens Helen's portrait in the Odyssey. Domesticity is only one aspect of the Odyssean Helen. The Helen of the Odyssey also has mysterious and supernatural powers, such as the power
of recognition and understanding of omens. Although she is never actually called a goddess, she has the power to relieve pain with the use of mysterious drugs and she can bestow immortality on her husband.
1. The genitive Ἐλένης can be objective if the ὀρμήματα belong to Helen or are hers or they can be undergone by others because of her. Given that in the Odyssey Helen is supposed to have left home willingly (4.261-3) the second interpretation seems more probable. See also G. S. Kirk, The Iliad: A Commentary (Cambridge 1985) p. 153.

2. Idaeus 7.388; Hector 3.87.

3. e.g. 3.39ff.; 6.326ff.

4. The best illustration of this role is the exchange between Achilles and Priam in Book 24.

5. Ἐκτωρ δ᾽ ὡς Σκαίας τε πύλας καὶ φηγοῦν ἴκανευ, ἀμφ᾽ ἀρα μιν Τρόων ἀλοχοὶ θέου ἤδε θυρατρεῖ ἐιρόμεναι παιδάς τε και ἵππητος τε ἕττας τε καὶ πόσιας (6.237-40)

See also scene with Andromache (6.371ff.)

6. Paris never mentions children and his ties with his family are very loose. His marriage with Helen has given no children, symbolizing the sterility of their relationship.

7. The only allusion to Paris' Judgment in the Iliad is in 24.30.

8. e.g. Menelaus is usually called ἄρηφιλος βοῦν ἄρηθός. Aias is the ἀρχος 'Αχαιῶν etc.


10. δόμον περικαλλέα in 3.421.

11. Helen is possibly referring to Aphrodite's union with Anchises.

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12. Helen calls Aphrodite δαμαύιν (3.399; 420). Helen feels Aphrodite's divine possession.

13. This is reflected in his words to Aphrodite (5.348-351)

14. Ibycus, Οξ. Pap. 1790, 8-9:

Πέριγχευμον ἄνεῳ ταλαπερίουν εἰς
χρυσοκεφαλον δεὶς Ἐνρίδα

further shows that Homer was understood this way in antiquity.

15. Iris is usually sent by Zeus or Hera to gods or mortals without disguise. Only once (5.353ff.) she is not a messenger but she escorts the wounded Aphrodite. She is a messenger of Zeus to the Trojan Assembly (2.786ff.), to Hera (8.398ff.), to Hector (11.185ff.), to Poseidon (15.206ff.) and to Priam (24.117ff.) Hera sends her to Achilles (18.166ff.) and only once a mortal, Achilles, sends her to the winds.

16. Hector sends her back to her loom (6.491).

17. Also in 6.345ff. she wishes she had never been born.

18. In 6.344 she calls herself: κυνός κακομηχάνου ὄκρυοεσσης. Helen calls herself a "bitch" four times in Homer, always referring to her shame for having brought about the War. (II.3.180, 6.344,356; Od. 4.145)

19. Helen is indeed διὰ χυμακωῦν. Her beauty is inhuman, like that of a goddess, as the Trojan Elders say, but it is not purely divine.


22. Euripides dramatized in his Troiades the episode where Menelaus is leading Helen to his ship.


27. Note in this regard that the unmarried goddesses Circe and Calypso also weave (Od. 5.61-2; 10.220ff, 226-8, 254f.).

28. Later in her story (4.259) she tells us that she had identified Odysseus when he entered Troy disguised as a beggar.

29. Achilles too says that singing the κάεα άνθρωπον relieves his sorrow (Il. 9.185-191)

30. Od.4.261.

31. Homer also implies that Menelaus’ marriage has not been successful in child begetting (4.1ff.) The description of the two palaces, at Pylos and Sparta, suggests that Homer intended to make a contrast between Nestor and Menelaus, Pylos and Sparta. In both cases, Telemachus arrives at a palace in the middle of festivities. In both cases the discussion leads to memories and the telling of stories related to the Trojan events. Nevertheless the situation at Pylos is very different than Sparta. Even when Nestor remembers unpleasant events such as the death of his son (3.103ff.) we do not sense the tension and uncontrolled grief which dominate the scene at the Spartan palace and is only relieved with the use of Helen’s drugs. There is nothing in Book 3 to indicate that Nestor is not completely satisfied with his family life. His wife Eurydice is called αἵδοιη παρακοίτες and we can hardly imagine that she could cause Nestor the kind of troubles that Helen caused to Menelaus. Nestor appears among his sons and daughters and daughter’s in law (3.450ff.). Nor do we sense any kind of domestic strife such as the one we witness between Helen and Menelaus. The purpose of Telemachus’ visit to both kingdoms was both informative (to collect information about his father) and educational. Pylos and Sparta illustrate two extreme
possibilities open to the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope. The example of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra mentioned by both Nestor (3.256ff.) and Menelaus (4.91-92) is, perhaps, another.
Sappho

Lyric poetry marks a transition from the heroic epic world to the world of passionate individuality. Here, poetry becomes the expression of vivid personal emotions while the poetic ego emerges in order to sing the poet's experience from life itself. In this new conception of poetic expression the use of myth changes. From the impersonal epic tradition we pass into a different situation where myths and mythical characters survive by becoming examples that illustrate and verify the lyric poet's view.

Sappho expresses best this new function of the myth in lyric poetry in her Φc.16 (L.P.), well-known as the Sapphic Priamel. The poem is particularly interesting for our discussion because it presents Helen as the mythological exemplum in an encomium of love. Regardless of whether the ultimate subject of this encomium is love as an entity or Anactoria, Sappho's "beloved", many useful remarks can be made concerning Sappho's view of Helen. Some, says Sappho, proclaim a host of horsemen as the most beautiful thing, others a host of infantry, others a host of ships, but I contend that the most beautiful thing (καλαλοστον) is whatever one
verifies this thesis. For, she that "far surpassed all mortals in beauty" (6-7) abandoned her excellent husband and a most worthy family for Paris (7-10). Helen's example reminds Sappho of Anactoria, who is no longer with her, and the poetess expresses her preference to see her absent friend rather than the Lydian army.

The apparent simplicity of the poem has disturbed many scholars and a number of exegeses have been suggested in an attempt to "decode" Sappho's "hidden and complex" message. Thus it has been argued that Sappho is contrasting the masculine ideal of a warlike "most beautiful" against her own feminine ideal [1]. Merkelbach has suggested that the poem is a consolatio that Sappho wrote because Anactoria abandoned the Sapphic circle and went away with a man just as Helen abandoned her excellent husband for a stranger [2]. Bagg [3] has argued that Sappho introduced military elements in the poem in order to transfuse "power" to the person or thing beloved - in this case Anactoria - so that it can "defeat the world's impersonal judgement." He goes on to say that the military introduction of the poem is associated with "destruction and slaughter" and Helen's appearance in the poem implies "murderous destruction or a feared death of the heart, Sappho's heart" [3]. J. G. Howie [4] has claimed that the poem expresses Sappho's moral view of Helen and that the myth of Helen is a negative moral exemplum in the poem. According to Howie the poem is an example of the type of encomiastic poetry common to Sappho and Pindar [5]. Sappho's ability to see
the danger in her feelings has encomiastic value. Her judgment is better than Helen’s and Anactoria is a better object of love for Sappho than Paris was for Helen.

All the above interpretations and many other similar ones seem to overlook a basic fact, that poetry can be most effective in its simplicity. Sappho 16 L.P. is a simple poem because it expresses a simple truth: there are many beautiful things on the earth and different people value different things as more or less worthy. But for the human lover, man or woman, the most beautiful thing is ὀτιμώ τις ἔραταί. There is a certain dimension present in every poem which is based on knowledge that both the audience and the poet share so that poetry does not have to state explicitly what can be easily understood. We, today, do not have the knowledge that Sappho’s audience had. In this sense, some of the suggested interpretations can neither be affirmed nor rejected. We do, however, have a poem which even in its fragmentary form, preserves Sappho’s poetic voice. Our interpretation becomes more valid when it can be substantiated by the text itself.

With the first strophe of the poem, Sappho takes a distance from those who, like her contemporary Alcaeus, (Ep. 357 L.P.) value the splendor of cavalry, infantry and navy [7]. For her the most beautiful thing is ὀτιμώ τις ἔραταί. We know that for Sappho Eros is the personified passion [6]. Thus the verb ἔραταί of line 4 expresses desire for something, just as in lines 17-18 she wants to
see Anactoria's ἔρατον τε βάμα and ἡμέρυκς. Having established the κάλλιστον for her, Sappho promises to prove that her conclusion is correct and she does it with an example drawn from myth. It is important to understand here that when Sappho says ἐγώ (3) she speaks as the lyric ego but she does not mean "I being a woman". There is nothing in the poem to indicate that men enjoy only the warlike activities mentioned in the first 3 lines of the poem, whereas women appreciate love. It may be true that men are more interested in war but this, in the context of Sappho's poem, is at least irrelevant. Similarly, it is wrong to assume that Helen's example in the poem presents the power of love from the woman's point of view. Helen must rather be seen as the lover, in fact, the human lover that proves Sappho's point. This is why Helen is introduced as daughter of mortal parents and not as daughter of Zeus and Leda.

The first question one asks is: what are the advantages of using Helen in particular, as the mythological exemplum in the poem? Helen is traditionally "she that far surpassed all mortals in κάλλιος" (6-7). In other words, she has κάλλιος in the superlative degree. Helen's beauty is unquestionable, a consensus of all poets and readers. Thus, in contrast to the relative claims of horses, footsoldiers and ships to be the most beautiful, her beauty can be taken as something superior. Moreover, Helen is a heroine of the epic world, a world where the three components of the Priamel are most appropriate. In
this sense, Helen connects the second strophe of the poem to the first one. Even in this epic world Helen's beauty proved to be more powerful than anything else since she was able to set all three kinds of armament in motion. Yet it was her love, her desire for Paris, her perception of a κάλλιστον that set her in motion and made her desert her most noble husband, her daughter and her dear parents [8]. Sappho has nothing to say about Paris, Helen's fairest thing in the world [9]. Paris' beauty is part of the tradition but this is about all that can be said about him. In fact nothing positive can be said about him given his epic presentation. Sappho does not need to add his description or even name him. Her subject is not the object of Helen's love or what she followed when she left but what she decided to leave behind.

It is usually accepted that Cypris or Eros should be restored at the beginning of line 14. [10] A divinity that forces her will on a mortal is not unknown in Sappho's poetry, as for example, in Ἐκ 1, 23-34:

αὐτὸς ἀλλὰς
καὶ καὶ ἔθέλοισα

This does not mean that Sappho makes Helen Aphrodite's toy or a passive object of desire. I think that Aphrodite must be viewed as the power or divinity that inspires the kind of love that led Helen away from her husband and family and the kind of love that Sappho is concerned with in this poem. Sappho wants a Helen that is autonomous and in control of her actions. The verbal forms
Kαθελέτισσα, ἔβα, πλέοντα, ἐμνάσθη of lines 9 and 11 express motion and determination. We see Helen leaving, going, sailing, endlessly moving. The intervention of Aphrodite or Eros, if it occurred in line 14, would not materially change the active picture of Helen suggested in lines 6-11.

What is Sappho’s attitude towards Helen’s myth?

J. G. Howie [11] has argued that the prefix παρα- of παράφαξε means that "Helen took the wrong course". Howie believes that even though Helen is presented as having gone astray by an outside force, still Sappho’s position is that Helen made the wrong decision. Howie bases his argument on evidence from Homer and Pindar but not Sappho herself. There is nothing in Sappho, Ι6ΛΡ, to support such a view, in fact a number of scholars have emphasized Sappho’s sympathetic attitude towards Helen’s myth [12]. The poem neither commends nor condemns Helen’s behavior simply because Sappho’s purpose is not to write a poem on Helen’s morality. Helen is merely an example which demonstrates the poem’s argument that the most beautiful thing, no matter how subjective one may be, is what a person loves. Sappho makes no mention of the sufferings that the Trojan war brought on both the Greeks and the Trojans because of Helen’s choice. Had she wanted to evaluate Helen by moral standards, we would expect her to have mentioned the consequences of her elopement. Instead of this, Sappho contrasts Helen’s desire to three other kinds of love: love of husband,
child and parents. Eros is proved to be above all things.

Helen’s myth is a second introduction to the central matter of the song. Now that Sappho has proved the supremacy of love over all things she comes to what is most beautiful to her: Anactoria. The singer becomes the lover and Anactoria the ultimate subject of desire. The girl is absent and Sappho does not express the wish to follow her [13]. Without any expression of anguish or despair Sappho recalls Anactoria’s dancing step and glancing eye which to her is more beautiful than the most splendid army.
Alcaeus

In Alcaeus' poetry, myth seems to have a similar function to the one we have seen in Sappho. It is the mythological example, a case that time has proved to be universally true and can, therefore, verify the thesis that the lyric poet wants to establish. The primary difference between the two Lesbian poets lies in their selection of themes and ideas. Sappho is more interested in presenting emotions, such as happiness, sorrow or pain which comes from the experiences, of love, marriage or separation. Alcaeus by contrast takes as his major subject matter politics and aristocratic ideals, revolution and civil war, in short, problems of his time and society. His scenes and themes may often seem to be reminiscent of the epic temper but they are in fact primarily creations of a lyric spirit that views life from "inside".

Among Alcaeus' surviving fragments two (EP. 283 and 42 L.P.) speak of Helen. Numerous interpretations of both poems have been proposed [14], most of which are concerned with the subject of Helen's culpability in an attempt to show Alcaeus' disapproval of Helen's actions. All these interpretations fail to take into account that, for the lyric poet, myth is not the ultimate purpose but simply an illustration of an undeniable truth of human life that the poet wants to emphasize. The discussion that follows will show that Alcaeus is not concerned with the approval or disapproval of any mythical personality, Helen in this case, but he is merely using the traditional Helen
story for his own poetic purpose.

Four stanzas of four lines each have survived of Ec. 283. The extant part reveals a symmetrical division into two parts of two stanzas each, organized in a cause-effect sequence. The first two stanzas refer to Helen's "madness" for Paris that made her leave her child and husband whereas the last two describe the consequences of her action. These two parts are constructed around a series of oppositions. The fragment begins with Helen out of her mind (ἐκμανείσα, 5) and ends with the young Trojans dead among many chariots (15-17). In other words the extreme lust and desire which originated in Sparta become death on the plain of Troy. From Helen as she moves off, alone, on a single ship, going over the sea, we pass to the many young Trojans, as they lie motionless among the many chariots broken in the dust. Because of the desire that Paris started up in the heart of Helen countless young Trojans - who would otherwise be pursuing, like Helen, the object of their desire - are now lying in the dust. The contrast is further emphasized with the Homeric adjective ἐλάικωμες "glancing eyed" [15]. Here strikingly the adjective is used of the dead young warriors, poignantly underlining their loss of the vitality which so characterizes youth. The lust of the first stanza and the death of the last one form a ring around the tragic victims of both families that occupy the second and third stanza of the poem: Helen's child and husband on one side, Paris' many brothers on the other. The word
Isvanctas (5) is rare [16], - it may well have been invented for this passage - and seems to connect Helen's action of the first stanza with the involvement of the two families in stanzas two and three. The adjective ἐναμάτας expresses violation of the guest-host relationship, which is basically a relationship between families. When such a relationship is violated all family members share the responsibility and, in this case, the tragic consequences. Helen was out of her mind, ἐκμαυές when she chose Ἐναμάτας Paris "the host cheating Paris" to her husband's "well spread" bed, and such a choice definitely implies divine intervention, Cypris' intervention. The focus, therefore, is not on Helen's guilt; rather she seems to be portrayed as a victim of divine action.

The mention of Paris in line 5 contrasts with the name of Achilles in the last line [17]. They not only represent the two sides, Greek vs. the Trojan, but each is the palpable agent of the action in the two major sections of this short fragment. Paris is the object of Helen's desire and madness. Achilles, who is happy for the death of many Trojans, is most probably the one who wrought the destruction. In this sense Achilles' name in the last line is also in contrast with Helen's name in the first line, since Paris' brothers (13-14) as well as the Trojans of the last stanza, die by him ἔναματα κόνας (14).

It is the opinion of most scholars that the poem is Alcaeus' expression of disapproval for Helen's unfaithfulness. Thus D. Page thinks that: "The tone of
the narrative is clearly one of disapproval" and the story "is portrayed as a great misfortune to the world, an illustration of the power of love for evil, of disaster as the wages of sin" [18]. A. Setti believes that the poem is a passionless and moralistic treatment of an old story in which "the poet engaged in approval or disapproval of mythic personages" [19]. According to Bowra, "In Helen's unfaithfulness Alcaeus sees the cause of a huge slaughter... With his strong loyalties and hatred of treachery he was likely to draw such a moral from the old story" [20]. Barner [21] considers the poem a "Dichterstreit" between Sappho and Alcaeus while Kirkwood and Treu [22] agree that the guilt is upon Paris. I do not think that Alcaeus even touches the subject of Helen's culpability. In fact any moralistic interpretation reduces the effect of the poem and denies Alcaeus' art the credit it deserves. The poem is so carefully structured that it is very likely that Alcaeus was more interested in poetic technique than the myth itself. The only character that is negatively characterized is Paris with the epithet ἓλπιθάτας (5). If any responsibility is to be claimed it is on Aphrodite who persuaded with desire Helen's heart ἔρωτι (9) to follow Paris (5-6). If any fault is to be attached to Helen, it is lack of reason (ἐμπάνως, 5) for which again Aphrodite is responsible. The poem, as we have seen, revolves around the themes of extreme love and death; Helen's story provides, it seems, an excellent mythological example which illustrates their connection.
Er. 42L.P. is another fine example of Alcaeus’ poetic technique. This poem presents two myths, actually two marriages. Helen’s story is interconnected with the marriage of Thetis to Peleus in a way that leaves many unanswered questions in the mind of the listener. The most usual question is: what is Alcaeus’ purpose in comparing Helen to Thetis? For most critics any poem that involves Helen has a tone of disapproval for her actions and usually it has a moralising purpose. Thus Thetis is the model of good wife who ought to be imitated while Helen’s example should be avoided [23]. Some scholars, however, are puzzled with the choice of Thetis as model wife [24] and with the role of Achilles who besides being the great epic hero is also responsible for Priam’s ἀχος (1-2). [25]

The poem consists of four very simple stanzas all structured paratactically. The first and last stanza create in a ring composition the setting of the poem with the destruction of Troy. Helen is also addressed in these two stanzas, ἐκ σέθεν (3) and ἀμφ᾽ Ἐλένας (15). Inside this ring of war and destruction, Alcaeus describes a peaceful scene, the marriage of Thetis to Peleus. The bride is πάρθενον ἄβραυ (8) who is to have a famous son in one year (ἐγὼ δ' ἡνίαυτος, 12). Although there is no explicit connection the reader does not fail to realize that the product of this wedding is unavoidably associated with the war and he is actually one of those included in οἱ δ' ἄμφοτεροι, 15). The reader also notices that until Achilles appears in the last stanza, Peleus is the only
person who moves and is addressed in the two central stanzas. He performs the duties of the groom, he invites guests, he leads out the bride and finally loosens the girdle, initiating thus the act of love and the birth of Achilles. Thetis is not even mentioned by name, she is not the author of any action, except that she γέννατ' (13) Achilles. This is why I think the poem is not a poetic, moralising comparison of Helen to Thetis. The two brides play a minor role in the action and only one marriage is actually described. The one marriage description implies the other so that finally both marriages are being implicitly compared. One marriage produces death and destruction, the other life. But does it really? Achilles who is born in line 13, becomes immediately the one who causes the destruction as he drives his ponies across the plain of Troy (14). In this sense his name is joined to Helen's name as the agent of the Trojan deaths in lines 15-16. Not only Phrygians but also Greeks died in Troy and Achilles was one of the first to suffer. Alcaeus' audience would probably remember that at II. 18.86-7 Achilles himself wished that his parents' wedding had never occurred.

It is clear therefore that the poem does not reward the legitimate marriage. Nor are there any words of moral evaluation of Helen. In fact, the first line makes it clear that past Dardanian crimes caused Zeus' anger. The introduction of the poem implies that what follows is a discussion of the tradition, whether that means epic in general or Homeric tradition. In this tradition, Helen is
only an instrument of the gods who draw from her their punishment. This is the point that Alcaeus wants to make. The same god who sent Helen to Troy had also sent Thetis to Peleus in order to avoid a heavenly revolt that was fated to displace him. The offspring of this marriage was to cause suffering and suffer himself in a war that the gods had decided. The two marriages of the poem are therefore interconnected not in order to judge Helen’s actions but rather in order to comment on the reality of human life. In this sense both Ep. 283 and 42LP deal with the same thing, i.e. the role of gods in human affairs. Aphrodite is the leading force behind Helen’s actions in Ep. 283, the gods are responsible for the human suffering in the Trojan war in 42 LP. There is a kind of equation of Achilles and Helen in both poems which is based on the fact that both have been victims of divine intervention.
Stesichorus

Antiquity attributed to Stesichorus the invention of the *eidos* motif and the story that Helen never sailed to Troy and the Trojan War was fought only for the sake of her phantom [26]. Unfortunately very few fragments of Stesichorus' poetry have survived and these are short and not particularly illuminating. Scholars are left with no other choice but to try to reconstruct what Stesichorus might have said on the basis of his few extant fragments and some references to his poems in the works of later authors. These references -contradictory for the most part - merely prove that Stesichorus' influence was widely recognized in antiquity. Our questions about his poetry remain without answer, while any discussion about Stesichorus is a matter of likelihood rather than textual interpretation.

It is generally agreed that Stesichorus wrote two poems on Helen: *Helen* and the *Palinode*. He also mentioned Helen in his *Nostoi* and most probably in his *Iliou Persis*. In his *Iliou Persis* [27] he told the story of the Achaeans who went to stone Helen, but let the stones fall from their hands when they saw her beauty [28]. A fragment from the *Nostoi* [29] preserves an episode very similar to that in *Odyssey* 15.43-181, where before Telemachus' departure from Sparta, an eagle flies carrying a goose and Helen interprets the omen to mean that Odysseus will return home and exact vengeance from the Suitors.
There are a few differences between this passage and the Homeric description of the same episode. In Homer the bowl that Menelaus gives to Telemachus (15.155ff.) is a gift from the king of the Sidonians whereas in Stesichorus it is loot from Priam's palace. Stesichorus mentions an αἰχμαλώτις and also a crow that do not appear in Homer.

These minor differences indicate either that Stesichorus knew the Homeric version and deliberately made his own innovations or that Stesichorus knew a different version of the story.

*Helen* and the *Palinode* are perhaps the most famous and influential among Stesichorus' poems [303]. Few lines have survived and later references to either poem do not add much to our knowledge. We know that the *Helen* covered a wide range of episodes from the wrath of Aphrodite against Tyndareos to Helen's arrival at Troy. Our evidence shows that in his *Helen* Stesichorus used
the same mythical material that we know from Homer but he went even further to accuse Helen as the cause of the Trojan war. One of the surviving fragments which may have come from this poem [31] states that Tyndareos forgot to sacrifice to Aphrodite and she, in wrath, made his daughters to be wed two and three times and forsake their husbands:

Στησίχορος φησιν ὃς θύων τοῖς Θεοῖς Τυνδάρεως
'Αφροδίτης ἐπελάθετο. διὸ ὀργισθέατην τὴν θεοῦ διήγαμος
καὶ τριήγαμος καὶ λευψάνδρους αὐτοῦ τὰς θυκατέρας
ποιήσαι (ἐποίησεν codd., corr. Schw.). ἔχει δὲ ἡ χρησίς
οὕτως:

οὖνεκα Τυνδάρεως

ῥέξων ποτὲ πᾶσι θεοῖς μόνοις λάβητε· ἡπιοδώρου
Κύπριδος· κείνα δὲ Τυνδαρέου κόραις
χολωσάμενα διήγαμος τε καὶ τριήγαμος τίθησι
5 καὶ λίπεσάνορας.

Pausanias also makes Stesichorus the author of a story - which if it really came from Stesichorus, could have been part of the Helen - according to which Helen, before she married Menelaus, had a child from Theseus, Iphigeneia that she gave to the care of Clytemnestra. According to the same source, Helen dedicated a temple to Eilithyia at Argos. This story was certainly not very flattering for Helen and it anticipates Aeschylus’ idea of Helen as

πολυάνωρ [32]. Another fragment from the Helen [33] is a description of a bridal procession:

Κυδωνίων δὲ μήλῳ μυημονεύει Στησίχορος ἐν 'Ελένηι
οὕτως:

πολλὰ μὲν κυδώνια μᾶλα ποτερρίστουν ποτὶ δίφροιν ἄνακτι,
The scene must be part of the wedding of Helen to Menelaus, the same scene which is supposed to have influenced Theocritus in his Epithalamium [34].

From the *Palinode* three very important lines have survived quoted by Plato in his *Phaedrus* 243a:

οὔκ' ἔστ' ἔτυμος ἰόχος οὐτος
οὐδ' ἔβασ ἐν νυσίν εὐσέβοις
οὐδ' ἵκεο πέργαμα Τροίας.

Here Stesichorus denies emphatically that Helen went to Troy or that she even sailed anywhere. The poem bore the name *Palinode* even in Plato's time and it must have been what its name says, a palinode from an earlier poem of Stesichorus [35]. Plato's quotation is supported by the statement of Dio Chrysostom [36] that, according to Stesichorus, Helen never sailed anywhere:

καὶ τὸν μὲν Στησίχορον λέξειν ὅτι τὸ παράπαυ οὔδὲ πλεύσειν ὢ Ἐλέευ σουδαμόσε.

Stesichorus has usually been considered to be the source for the story of Helen's career in Egypt, later adapted by Euripides in his *Helen*. The evidence here is, in fact, confusing. The papyrus from Oxyrhynchus with the commentary on Stesichorus says that in the *Palinode* Stesichorus blames Homer for not saying that it was a phantom of Helen that went to Troy whereas Stesichorus himself οὐτοῖς ἐξέ φησίν (12-13) said that her phantom
went to Troy and Helen stayed in Egypt with Proteus. The papyrus is not the only evidence that Stesichorus' Helen stayed in Egypt. Tzetzes (ad Lycoth. Alex. 113, ii 59 Schw.) and a scholiast on Aristeides (ad Or. 13.131, iii 150 Di) agree that Paris carried off Helen by ship to Egypt where Proteus deprived him of her and both quote Stesichorus as their authority. Tzetzes however, says that Proteus gave Paris the phantom and he sailed off with it to Troy, whereas the scholiast says that Proteus gave Paris a picture to comfort him for the loss. This discrepancy raises doubts about both accounts derived directly from Stesichorus. But even if we accept the one or the other version, they agree that Helen sailed off with Paris at least to Egypt. If, however, Stesichorus blamed Homer for having Helen and not her phantom follow Paris, why would he send her with Paris as far as Egypt. Had his intention been to absolve Helen from responsibility, would his version not be taken as equally derogatory for Helen? The answer to this question lies perhaps in a statement of Dio Chrysostom (Or. 11.40): Καὶ τὸν μὲν Στεσίχορον ἐν τῇ ὑστερον ὡδῇ ἠλευθὲρον ὅτι τὸ παράπαν οὐδὲ πλεύσειεν ἢ Ἐλένη οὐδαμόσε, ἀλλ' οἶδ' τινὲς ὡς ἀρπασθεῖσα μὲν Ἐλένη ὑπὸ τοῦ 'Ἀλεξάνδρου, δεύος δὲ πάρ' ἡμᾶς εἰς Ἀιγυπτόν ἀφίκοιτο.

This statement agrees with our evidence from the surviving fragment of the Palinode that Helen did not sail anywhere. In short, it seems apparent that in Stesichorus' poem Helen did not follow Paris on board ship anywhere. That was in fact one of the main points of the Palinode.
How did she go to Egypt then, if she did? Herodotus, who attempts to find precedent for Helen's visit to Egypt in Homer (2.116-117), does not mention Stesichorus at all and he claims that he heard the story from an Egyptian source (37). Euripides gives us an alternative which Stesichorus could have introduced himself and which would be consistent with our evidence from the papyrus. In Euripides Helen was transported to Egypt in a cloud by Hermes (Hel. 44-46):

άρειν δὲ μ’ Ἑρμήν ἐν πυκναίσιν αἰθέρος
νεφέλη καλύψας — οὐ χάρ ἡμέλησέ μου
Ζεὺς — τὸν ἐς οἶκον Πρωτέως ἰδρύσατο.

The Greeks went to Troy but they fought only for a phantom while Helen's reputation was saved since she never ran away with Paris. This solution also explains Aristeides statement (Or. 13.131) when he says: ὃσπερ τῶν πολεμῶν φασὶ τινες, τὸν Ἀδελφιδρόου τῆς Ἐλένης τὸ εἰδωλὸν Ἀμφίπολιν, αὐτὴν δὲ οὐ δυνηθήναι.

We, of course, do not know how Stesichorus transported Helen to Egypt. All that we can say for certain is that Stesichorus wrote one poem, Helen where following the Homeric version he described Helen's flight to Troy with Paris and then for some reason about which we can only speculate, he wrote another poem the Palinode where he took back what he said in the first place and acquitted Helen of any responsibility for the Trojan War. The question that follows is: What were Stesichorus' reasons
for recanting in his *Palinode* what he said in his *Helen*? According to the tradition [38] Stesichorus insulted Helen in his *Helen* and was blinded for it [39] until he apologized in his *Palinode* [40] and regained his sight. C. M. Bowra [41] has proposed an historical/political explanation of the *Palinode*. According to Bowra, Stesichorus' account in the *Helen* would cause great offence at Sparta where Helen had a special position. She had a shrine, a festival called 'Eēveia and was apparently associated with a tree cult [42]. In order to apologize for his insults Stesichorus wrote the *Palinode* and stated a view acceptable to Sparta. Bowra supports his argument with evidence from Stesichorus' fragments, particularly the *Oresteia*. He believes that the *Helen* poem recounted a story well-received among the Argives whereas the *Palinode* and the *Oresteia* reflect Stesichorus' sympathies for Sparta which at this time, in the early part of the 6th century B.C., was extending its control over Arcadia and the relics of the Argive kingdom of Pheidon.

Bergk [43] has suggested that Stesichorus spoke about his blindness metaphorically, namely that his blindness was not physical but the kind that a poet can experience, the loss of his poetic vision [44]. Bergk's view is the most reasonable explanation in this case. We know that in early poetry men see in their φέεις or θυμός. In Homer Demodocus' blindness did not prevent him from singing whereas Thamyris (II. 2,599-600) lost his physical sight and his poetic vision. In Alcman (Fr. 133 PMG Page)
Memory, the mother of the Muses, is connected with vision and in the famous scene of the Oedipus Tyrannus, the blind Teiresias confronts the blindness of Oedipus. It is very likely, therefore, that Stesichorus’ loss of vision actually means loss of his poetic vision, in other words his ability to see and sing the right things. In his Helen Stesichorus failed to see the right things. As Plato says (Phaedr.243a), Stesichorus recognized the cause of his error and his cure, whereas Homer failed to do so. Having realized that Helen was not responsible for the Trojan expedition Stesichorus recovered both his literary consciousness and poetic vision and he told the story of the phantom in his Palinode. Such a theory does not exclude Bowra’s view about the political Stesichorus. It is certainly possible that part of Stesichorus’ blindness was his inability to evaluate the political circumstances of his time. Realizing Sparta’s increasing power he could well have concluded that a divine Helen was a more appropriate subject for his songs.
NOTES


2. Merkelbach bases his arguments on the theory that in lyric poetry the myth corresponds fully to reality. Such a theory cannot be substantiated at least in the case of Sappho. Anactoria does not correspond to Helen completely for it is difficult to imagine that Anactoria had a daughter or that she became the cause of a war. Carl Theander (Eranos 32 (1934) p. 78) was the one to suggest the most extreme idea that Anactoria is absent because she has married a Lydian soldier.


5. Pind. Nem. 8,35-39 and Ruth. 3

6. Sappho, Fr. 47,1; 54; 73a,4; 130,1; 159; 194

7. Alcaeus, Fr. 357 L.P. shows that the flash of armor was impressive to Lesbians. Horses and ships as visual splendors occur also in Pindar, Isthm. 5,4-6; Fr. 221 (Snell); and elsewhere. In Alcman, 1. 92-95 ships and horses are examples of steering and control. Tyrtaeus in his Priamel (Fr. 91) contrasts other ἀρεταί to θούρις ᾗκῆ, i.e. the ἀρετή most useful in war, which is the ἄριστος and καλλίστον ἔεθλον for a man (9-14).

8. Menelaus, if we accept D. Page’s text, is worthy to be characterized with a superlative form, too (Σπανάρξιστου. Helen, the most beautiful, has to choose between two
superlatives, her desire which is the καλύτερος and a
πανύψητον husband. Euripides is making fun of the idea of
Menelaus as πανύψητος in Ὀιλ. 185-186 with the use of
the diminutive ἀνθρώπου:
Μενέλαος ἀνθρώπου ἰστον ἰππόως

9. As far as we can tell from the preserved text, Paris's
name might have appeared in lines 13-14 but Cypri or Eros
are usually restored here.

10. This would be in agreement with Aphrodite's role in the
Ilad and the Cypria.

11. J. M. Milne, Augurs 13 (1933) p. 177. For line 12 Page (D.
Page, Sappho and Alcaeus (Oxford 1959) p. 54 on line 12)
suggests οὐκ ἐκέλοσαν whereas Milne suggests οὕτω
ἐκέλοσαν. Milne's supplement seems more logical in the text
because if we accept Page's suggestion that Helen
followed Paris not against her will, then the intervention
of Aphrodite sounds less effective if not redundant. Howie
also notes that the verb παράγαγε is used of superior
powers when they mislead mortals as in Pind. Pyth. 3,34f.,
55, Hom. Il. 9.600f.

57ff.; C.M. Bowra, pp. 180ff.; G.A. Privatera, "Su una nuova
182ff. esp. p. 352 and 354; M.L. West, "Burning Sappho" Maia

13. Merkelbach (pp. 1ff.) suggests that Sappho intended to
remind the audience of another Paris who took Anactoria
away from her. I think that if there is any
correspondence between Helen's myth and Sappho's poem, it
is between Helen and Sappho as lovers.

14. For references see discussion of individual poems.

15. The meaning of the epithet ἐλάκωμεσ is not clear. It is
certain that it qualifies eyes. Page cites Pfeiffer at Call.
fr. 299.1 and suggests that the word means "dark-eyed".
Barner ("Neuere Alkaios-Papyri aus Oxyrhynchos",
Spudasmata xiv (Hildesheim 1967) p. 213) suggests "in der
Blute ihres Lebens". In any case, eyes are expression of
life.

16. The word is also found in Ibycus 30.10 (282a in Page,
17. Achilles' name must be certain in 18 and is also supported by the reference to Achilles in 42. 13 L.P.


19. A. Setti, "Nota a un nuovo frammento di Alceo" SIFC 28 (1956) p. 519


23. Bowra (GLP, 169) talks about the moral that can be drawn from the poem that an evil action leads to disaster. According to Bowra, Thetis is the good wife and an alternative to Helen. Page (S & A, 280) talks about "second hand- moralising" that is unique in Lesbian poetry.

24. Traditionally Thetis was neither happy with Peleus nor a model wife.

25. A. W. Gomme, "Interpretations" JHS 77 (1957) p. 255 thinks that Alcaeus has forgotten that Greeks and not only Trojans died in the Trojan war. Kirkwood (EMG, 90) notes that Alcaeus forgot the tale of Thetis and failed to see Achilles as the destroyer.

26. Plato, Rep. 586c; Tzetz. ad Luc. Alex. 113; Arist. 1,212, 2,572 Dindorf;


28. Ibycus had another version that Menelaus found Helen in the temple of Aphrodite and dropped his sword in front of Helen because of love (Schol. Eur. Andr., ii 293 Schw.).


30. The Oresteia must also have been famous and influential but it does not pertain to our discussion.

32. Aeschylus, Agam. 62.

33. Athen. iii 81D (In D.L. Page, PMG p. 101)

34. Argum. Theocr. 18, p. 331 W.

35. Ancient sources agree that Stesichorus wrote the poem to make up for all bad things he said about Helen in his homonymous poem. For ancient references to Palinode and Stesichorus' blindness see n.13. Schol. Aristid. 3,p.150; Tzetz. ad Lic. 113 (D. L. Page, p.104)

36. Hellanicus must have known of Helen's visit to Egypt (F 153 FGrHist) because he has a story about an attack on Helen by King Thonos, similar to the one that Euripides has in Helen by King Theoclymenus.

37. Plato, Phaedrus 243A; Isocr. Helen 64; Dio Chrys. Or. xi 40,i 159 de Bude; Pausanias iii 19.II, i 293. Also two Christian testimonia: Hippolytos contra haereses 6,19,3 Wendland.

38. G. Devereux, "Stesichoros' Palinodes: Two further Testimonia and some comments" Rh.M. 1973 pp. 206-209.)

Irenaeus, Contra haereses 1.23.2 Migne, 1.16.2 Harvey:

Fuisse autem eam et in illa Helena, propter quum Trojanum contractum est bellum, quapropter et Stesichorum per carmina maledicitem eam, orbatum oculis: post deinde poenitentem et scribentem eas, quae vocantur, palinodias, in quibus hymnizavit eam, rursus vidisse.

39. G. Devereux, "Stesichoros' Palinodes: Two further Testimonia and some comments" Rh.M. 1973 pp. 206-209) has suggested that Stesichorus suffered from attacks of "hysterical blindness" which he attributed to Helen's vengeance and his writing palinodes may be viewed as ritual attempts of self-healing. I do not think that our evidence on Stesichorus or any ancient poet allows us to make this sort of hypothesis. Devereux's theory may be medically possible but there is no way of proving whether
Stesichorus suffered from any kind of physical or psychological blindness. Stesichorus may well have been the beneficiary of the same tradition that made Homer the blind rhapsode. In the absence of textual or biographical evidence any answer is nothing more than a guess.

39. After the publication of a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus containing the remains of a commentary on Stesichorus (D. L. Page, PMG p.106) which recognizes two Palinodes, there has been a lot of discussion as to whether Stesichorus wrote one or two Palinodes and what the subject of each one must have been. For discussion see, C. M. Bowra, The Two Palinodes of Stesichorus C.R., N.S. (1963) 245-52 who argues for two Palinodes and L. Woodbury, "Helen and the Palinode" Phoenix 21 (1967) pp. 157-176 (esp. pp. 161-162) who argues against a second Palinode.


41. Pausanias III 15,3; Hesychius s.v. 'Ενυδέλτα, Theocritus 18. 43ff.; Aristophanes makes her lead a chorus of Lacedaemonian girls in Lys. 1314-5:

\[ \text{ἀξείται δ'} \ \text{α Νήδας παίς} \\
\text{άξυνα χοραγός εὔπρεπής} \]

Horace uses similar words in his Epode 17. 40.4 where he calls Canidia "pudica" and "proba" as he hopes to be pardoned for his insults. Then he says that Canidia will become a star. Horace is perhaps following Stesichorus who might have also placed his Helen in the sky next to the Dioscuroi, as did Euripides (Helen. 1666-8; Orestes 1635-7).


43. F.M. Cornford, Principium Sapientiae (Cambridge 1952) chpt. 5. Cornford discusses the connection between poet, prophet and seer.
CHAPTER III
THE SOPHISTS

Gorgias

The first attempt to make a systematic presentation of Helen's case in terms of concepts borrowed from contemporary philosophical debates comes from the Sicilian rhetorician Gorgias. Gorgias was challenged by the variety of opinions about Helen's conduct to compose an epideictic speech, the Encomium on Helen, in which he displays why Helen should not be condemned for abandoning her husband and causing the Trojan War.

After a brief introduction, Gorgias justifies the choice of Helen as his subject by stating that it is right to praise the praiseworthy and blame the blameworthy (2). Gorgias believes that he can rescue Helen's reputation by subjecting her story to critical examination. He depicts Helen as a woman of exceptional nobility and beauty (3) who deserves to be defended. He maintains that Helen acted as she did because she was irresistibly compelled to do so and suggests four hypothetical reasons for Helen's actions, each one of which involves a particular justification. Helen must have yielded to Paris either through divine power or because she was abducted by force or persuaded by words or carried away by passion. Gorgias then examines in turn each of these four reasons.
and argues that each one is a mighty power and Helen should not be blamed for having submitted to them.

1) Helen may have been compelled by divine power (6) Under this heading Gorgias includes τύχης βουλήματα, θεών βουλήματα and Ἀνάγκης ὑψηλόματα [12]. All three express the idea that mortals cannot resist divine will because divinity surpasses humanity. The argument that the gods and particularly Aphrodite should be blamed for Helen's actions is an old one and its most explicit expression is to be found in Priam's words to Helen (II. 3.164): οὔ τί μοι σίτιν ἔσσι, θεοί μοι σίτιοι εἰσίν. Gorgias, however, takes a traditional argument used for Helen's defence and connects it with words that recall contemporary theories of the natural right of the stronger. "It is not in nature for the strong to be thwarted by the weaker, but for the weaker to be ruled and led by the stronger, for the strong to lead and the weak to follow" [2].

2) Helen may have been abducted by force (7) and if this is the case, she deserves our pity for having been violated and separated from her country and loved ones, whereas the barbarian wrongdoer (Paris), who attempted the barbarous attempt, καὶ ἀγὼν καὶ νόμῳ καὶ ἔργῳ, deserves punishment. Gorgias is perhaps founding his assumption on an ancient tradition, according to which Helen was abducted by Paris. Although the extant sources of this tradition are later than Gorgias [3], the author can still claim abduction as a possible scenario and if this is the case, Helen's innocence is obvious.
3) Helen may have been won over by the power of λόγος (8-14). Speech is a "powerful ruler" (λόγος δυνάμεις μέγας ἔστιν), says Gorgias [4]. It can arouse or subdue fear, sorrow, joy and pity [5]. λόγος differs from poetry by the absence of meter, but it is has the same emotional force, i.e. it can evoke contradictory sentiments and either relieve human soul or delude it. Since there is no way of "either recollecting the past, or investigating the present, or divining the future (11) men are at the mercy of opinion. Since there is no permanent truth to be known (opinion is slippery and insecure, 11) for each one of us, truth is whatever we can be persuaded to believe. When persuasion is added to speech (13) then both combined act upon the mind of the hearer and mould it as they want (τὴν ψυχὴν ἑταομέσα ὄψως ἔθοιησα, 13) in the same way that drugs affect the human body (14). Just as the body cannot choose but obey a powerful drug, so the mind obeys a powerful speech. [6] If speech is so powerful, we must blame the persuader, who is guilty because he compelled (ὁ πείθεσας ὡς ἀναγκάζεις ἀδίκει, 12) and not the persuaded (Helen, in this case) who has been compelled by the power of words to both obey what was said (πείθεσας τοῖς ἄγομένοις, 12) and approve what was done (συνανέσας τοῖς πολομένοις, 12).

4) The fourth possible cause of Helen's departure to Troy may have been passion (15-19), which for Gorgias, has qualities similar to those of λόγος, the
difference being that speech reaches the mind by way of hearing, whereas eros operates through sight. Just as the sight of an enemy causes alarm and makes men run away (16), painting and sculpture give the eyes a pleasant vision. And Helen beholding Paris' beauty through her όψις, fell in love with him (7). The assumption that Helen left her home because of love is actually the traditional version (8) but Gorgias adds an emphasis on the power of όψις. He also suggests that Eros has the power of a god and gods are irresistible (9). Eros should be treated as υόσημα and not blamed as an impropriety (ὡς άμάρτημα μεμπτέου, 19). And Helen whether she did what she did because she was enamoured or persuaded by speech or compelled by force or divine necessity, is deprived of any accusation (αίτία, 20).

Gorgias set himself to write an ἐγκώμιον of Helen. Instead, he ended up assuming the role of her advocate and he was criticized for the deviation from his original objective by Isocrates (10). The starting point of his treatise is that Helen is under some kind of accusation. Accordingly, he describes her as the helpless victim of circumstances as a mortal who cannot be blamed for actions dictated by superhuman powers, against her will. The details of Helen's story do not seem to interest Gorgias who appears to be more concerned with demonstrating a method of logical proof than with mythology itself. Stesichorus' eidolon theme is not mentioned anywhere apparently because it would not offer
anything to Gorgias' argument. Gorgias also avoids mentioning the legality of Helen's choice of Paris which is found in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (1401 b 36) and Menelaus' victory among her wooers, considering it perhaps, unhelpful to talk about the chosen husband whom Helen subsequently betrayed. All his arguments (with the exception of the power of *Jogos*) are the traditional excuses often offered in Helen's defence. Yet the classification of his presentation under four headings with clear distinction among the motivations assigned to each one, oversimplifies his point. The Homeric Helen, for example, admits that she followed Paris out of love but her action as a whole is considered the result of divine intervention. Gorgias, denies complexity in the causes of human conduct and appears to be interested only in the presentation of the argument itself. Gorgias did not care to reestablish Helen's ruined reputation. This may be the reason why, at the end of his treatise, he calls his production a παιιγμα, a "trifle". Helen is merely a mythical personage, not a real person whose guilt or innocence must be proven in a real trial. Her role, however, in antiquity, is the role of the woman judged. Helen appears often in a trial situation centering on indictments or apologies for her. Gorgias who enjoyed showing off his rhetorical skill in defending conduct which is actually indefensible soon realized Helen's rhetorical appeal in classical literature. He used therefore Helen for his own rhetorical purposes.
Isocrates

Isocrates agreed with Gorgias that Helen is an appropriate subject for an encomium but he also criticized him for assuming the role of Helen’s advocate and writing an *apologia* rather than an *encomium* [11]. Isocrates took the role of the encomiast and postulated in his treatise Στατική Εὐκλεία not only that Helen should not be accused of anything but that in fact she stands above any guilt. For Isocrates Helen is a sublime character whose deeds contribute to her glory. He rejects the idea that Helen was the victim of circumstances and divine intervention and claims that she is a heroic woman who won divine status and has the ability to exert her powers over human beings (61-66). The dominant divine power which shapes Helen’s external appearance and character in order to bestow eternal glory on her is Zeus who made Helen’s φύσις, περίβλεπτον καὶ περιμέχητον (16). Isocrates denies the negative aspects of Helen’s φύσις περιμέχητος and any moral implications involved and regards it as praiseworthy, in the sense that it leads the noblest men to great deeds (39). Theseus was the first hero affected by Helen’s nature, who kidnapped her to Αφιδνα in Attica causing thus the first war between Sparta and Athens. Helen’s value is appraised not only by the fact that a hero such as Theseus was won over by the irresistible impact of her nature and beauty (18, 21) [12] but also by the opinion of her other wooers, who
took an oath to support her future husband (39) [13]. Consequently, the Trojan War was fought for the sake of magnifying the glory of Helen and in this aspect Isocrates disagrees with Homer whose Helen regards her life as κακός μορός (II.6.357) for which both Zeus and Aphrodite are responsible [14].

Isocrates accepts the Homeric version of the Trojan War and like Herodotus, he considers it a contest between Asia and Europe [15]. But while Herodotus thinks that a woman's kidnap is a senseless motive for a war, Isocrates stresses the positive results that followed the Trojan Expedition and views it as an important event which brought about the unification of Greece (67).

Furthermore, Isocrates claims that the war was important not only for the Greeks but also for the gods who sacrificed their sons and fought themselves in it for the sake of Zeus’ daughter (52-53).

Helen’s eulogy is also supported by an apology for Alexander. By justifying Paris’ conduct Isocrates asserts once more that Helen is above guilt. Paris proved his excellence by choosing Helen for whose sake, demigods and heroes chose to die and on whose account a great war
was fought. Since Helen was offered to Paris by Aphrodite as a gift, their union is not considered an ἀρρατὴ but a lawful marriage (42). Paris' choice was not motivated by passion but by highly respectable ideals—his desire to become Zeus' son-in-law and his awareness that εὐγένεια is a permanent quality in human life contrary to other temporary gifts (44). Above all, if gods valued beauty so highly to fight over it, then Paris' judgement was sound (48). In fact, Isocrates offers a number of arguments in favour of beauty:

1) Beauty enhances the qualities it accompanies whereas values such as ἄνθρωπος, σοφία and δικαιοσύνη are contemptible without beauty (54).

2) Subjugation to beauty is preferable (56-57)

3) Zeus who rules over everything has often succumbed to beauty (59)

4) More mortals became gods because of their beauty than because of any other quality. Helen herself became immortal and acquired the power to bestow immortality on others because of her beauty (60-61).

Helen is both a human of divine extraction and a goddess who can use her divine power to extend grace, as we see, for example in the deification of her brothers, the Dioscuri and Menelaus (61-62) or inflict punishment as in the case of Stesichorus (64) who lost his sight because of his blasphemy against her. Isocrates also claims that Helen herself prompted Homer to write the Iliad (65), it was therefore her own will to be represented as φῶς ἔπος
It has been suggested that Isocrates' speech has political implications of his own time [18]. The emphasis on the union of Greek cities during the Trojan War may have been intended as a comment on the disability of a disunified Greece to fight Persia in the 4th century. 6. Kennedy [19] interprets the speech as a Panhellenic political document and compares it to Isocrates' Panegyricus where the Trojan War is also treated as an example of Panhellenic activity against Persia [20]. According to Kennedy speeches such as Helen and the Panegyricus were used by educators to train students in rhetorical technique and political thought. On the other hand Buchheit [21] considers the speech a exhibition of rhetorical skill. Whether the speech is a rhetorical exercise in mythology or a serious treatise with political implications, it reflects Isocrates' view and perhaps the contemporary view about Helen. What is important for the purpose of the present study is that rhetoricians like Gorgias and Isocrates realized the ambivalent tradition surrounding Helen. They realized that although Helen has traditionally been considered the cause of the Trojan War, her case can be argued either way. What is more important, is that both Gorgias and Isocrates drew their arguments from the preceding literary tradition but they chose to defend Helen by stressing the positive aspects of her character.
NOTES

1. The phrase ἀνάγκης ψήφισματα is reminiscent of Empedocles’ line ἔστιν Ἀνάγκης ἔρημα, θεῶν ψήφισμα παλαίου, “there is an oracle of Necessity, an ancient decree of the gods” (Empedocles 115). The word ἰστιασία is seldom used for decisions of the gods. (An exception would be Aristophanes, Wasps 378).

2. The ethic of Might is Right is presented by Callicles in Plato’s Gorgias and summarized in Plat. Laws, 890a; In the Melian Dialogue (Thuc. 5.105.2) the Athenians claim that the rule of the stronger occurs by natural necessity (ὑπὸ φύσεως ἀνάγκαιας). The idea of necessity (ἀνάγκη) appears very often in Presocratic thought.


4. Eur. Hecuba 814-19, πειθώ is a τύπανους and everyone should pay fees to learn it.

5. Fear and pity remind us of Arist. Poetics 1449b 27 but I do not think that Gorgias here anticipates Aristotle’s καθάρσις.

6. In other words, if a speaker has mastered the art of rhetoric, he can compel other people to do anything he wishes. The same idea is expressed in Plat. Gorg. 452e. Gorgias seems, however, to suggest that, even through deceit, λόγος can make people wiser, as happens with the fictions of tragedy which is rhetoric in verse (λόγον ἐκὼν μέτρου, 9). In the case of Helen, λόγος has apparently a harmful effect.


8. Hom. Il. 3.174,399ff.; Od. 4.261f.; Sappho. 16LP; AEn. 283.5; Eur. Iro 373, 946ff., 1037; Fl. 1065; LA, 75f.,584; Andr.
9. This is certainly not a new idea in poetry. Sophocles sang invincible Eros in *Antigone* (781-800) and Aristophanes (*Clouds* 1082) and Euripides (*Helen* 948-50) argued that a human being cannot be expected to be stronger than the gods. In everyday life, however, few people would agree with Gorgias that love justifies any kind of misconduct.


11. It is now generally accepted that Isocrates' quotation γράψατα περὶ τῆς 'Ελέυθης refers to Gorgias.

12. The mention of Theseus' name would probably arouse the sympathy of the Athenian audience.

13. Isocrates, like Gorgias, only alludes to Menelaus' victory in passing (40-41).


15. Herodotus treats the Trojan War as a series of mythological clashes between Asia and Europe (1,4).

16. Helen uses the same argument in her confrontation with Hecuba (*Eur. *Ira* 932-937) and Menelaus repeats the same plea in *Andromache*:

   "Ελέυθης δ' ἐμόχθεσον οὐκ ἔκοψας', ἄρα ἐκ θεῶν,
   καὶ τούτῳ παξίστου ὧφέλησεν 'Ελλάδα:
   δῆλον γὰρ δυτες καὶ μάχης ἀἱστορές
   ἠβησαν εἰς ταύτεροιον.

17. Thucydides, too, emphasizes this aspect of the Trojan War (1.3.1).


that the celebration of the Trojan War simply serves Isocrates' rhetorical purpose to exclude any apologetic elements from his encomium.

Stesichorus may have been the first to introduce the idea of Helen's career in Egypt but he was definitely not the last one. A version similar to the one of Stesichorus' *Palinode* was repeated by Herodotus, who spends considerable time in the second Book of his *Histories* (2.112-120) talking about Helen's arrival and stay in Egypt with Proteus without mentioning either the *eidolon* or Stesichorus as its inventor. For Herodotus Helen's presence in Egypt is part of the Egyptian priestly tradition. In fact, when the historian seeks a Greek authority for the story, he turns to Homer instead of Stesichorus going as far as denying historical accuracy in Homer by claiming that the poet knew of Helen's stay in Egypt but that he suppressed this version of the myth as unfit for the rest of his poetry:

\[
\text{où yap οἱ τῶν ἐποιεῖσθαι ἑν τῷ}
\text{ἐπερ ἐκράσατο.}
\]

(2.120)

Our question then is: Did Herodotus know Stesichorus' work? If he did, which is most likely, why did he ignore it? The sole fragment of the *Palinode* that has survived (Plat.*Phaedros* 243A) does not tell us much about
Stesichorus’ version. It may only be inferred from that fragment that instead of arguing against the Homeric version, Stesichorus chose to deny it completely by substituting the eidolon for Helen [11]. His purpose was to exonerate Helen for reasons I have already discussed, and in this sense his criticism of the traditional story is a moral one, contrary to Herodotus’ account which is clearly an attempt to offer a rational explanation of the myth. The historian does not deny Helen’s sin of adultery; he is rather concerned with the irrationality of the entire Trojan War. The Trojans’ decision to risk their city and their lives so that Helen and Paris could live together does not make much sense to Herodotus. The Egyptian tradition provides a more rational explanation for the Trojan’s conduct. The Trojans could not give Helen back, simply because they did not have her. Helen did leave Sparta (adultery was therefore committed), but she never made it to Troy because she was detained at Egypt by Proteus. Herodotus accepts apparently the historical reality of Paris, Helen and Menelaus, but Stesichorus’ *eidolon*-theme doubtless seemed to come from a world of miracles and magic, a world which could have no place in his pursuit of the historical truth. The historian, therefore, interprets the war as a manifestation of divine power:

οὐ τῶν μεγάλων ἀδελφήματων μεγάλαι εἴσοι καὶ
αἱ ζημωρίαι παρὰ τῶν θεῶν.

(2.120)
The tragedians of the 5th C. B.C. paid their tribute to the Trojan War by making it one of the most, if not the most, common theme for their tragedies. Recognizing that neither Homer nor the later generations of poets attempted to pass judgement on Helen, tragedy did not dramatize Helen's abduction but concerned itself mostly with the outcome of the War and the feelings of its victims towards Helen and Paris. In this context Helen is often the source of pain and anger for those who paid the consequences of her adultery.

Aeschylus adopted the standard Homeric version. The chorus of the Agamemnon addresses Helen several times as the cause, perhaps the only cause, of death and destruction. In a famous verbal play around her name, in the second choral passage of the Agamemnon, she is called destroyer of ships, men and cities:

ελένας, ἐλαυδρὸς ἐλέπτολις (689)

She is a bride of the spear (δορίγομβρου, 686), one who causes strife on two sides (ἐμφυευκῇ, 688), an Erinys, bride of woe (νυμφόκαλαυτος Ἐπινύς, 749), to mention only a few of the adjectives that Aeschylus uses to refer to her conduct. Does this mean that Aeschylus blames Helen for the Trojan War? At first, it appears that he does. Still, the parable of the lion-cub in the second choral passage hints at the opposite. The chorus compares Helen to a lion-cub that grew up in a house like a child until one day, its wild nature was revealed through a carnage
and it was proved to be a priest of ruin, sent by the gods (ἐκ θεοῦ δ' ἱερέως τις Ἀ/ τας ἔμοις προσεθρέφθη, 735-6). Aeschylus' implicit message is clear: we cannot blame a lion-cub, just as we cannot blame Helen.

The question of Helen's responsibility in the Trojan War became an important issue in Euripides. Euripides influenced by the cognition theories of the sophists and their principle (ὁ οὐκ οἶδα) that it is possible to see things from different angles, chose to deal with contrasts such as reality versus appearance. In his attempt to touch the problem of the impossibility of true knowledge and the dangers of ignorance, Euripides dramatized in his Helen the story of the Egyptian Helen and the idea that the entire war was fought for the sake of a phantom. If we accept, as all antiquity believed, that the eidolon-story was Stesichorus' invention, then Stesichorus' Palinode was the predecessor of Euripides' Helen. The question of Euripides' literary debt to Stesichorus, no matter how interesting a subject it may be, will not be part of this discussion. My main interest is Euripides' view of Helen and the Trojan War as it is reflected in the way he incorporated different, often contradictory, mythical elements about Helen in his various plays.

The Trojan War is the subject or background of a number of Euripidean tragedies. In five plays, Andromache, Hecuba, Electra, Iphigeneia in Tauris and Iphigeneia in Aulis,
Helen is spoken of by actors or the Chorus. In almost all cases, her name is a source of hatred and curse. In Orestes she is a subordinate actor whereas in the _Troades_ and especially _Helen_, the play named after her, she becomes one of the main characters on stage. It is in these two tragedies that her character and motives find their full development through her own words or through the dramatic confrontation between her and other characters. My discussion, therefore, will concentrate on these two tragedies although evidence from other tragedies will also be used in order to form a more complete picture of Helen's characterization in Euripides.

Does Euripides consider Helen responsible for the Trojan War? This is the question we need to answer. The victims of the war, from Hecuba and Andromache to Orestes and Iphigeneia, certainly accuse Helen. Within the general frame of the myth, however, both Helen and Menelaus are victims of divine plots and deceptions. In the _Troades_ (914-965) Menelaus enters the stage admitting that he has come to Troy not in order to find Helen, as people think, but in order to find the man who violated his hospitality and carried off his wife (864-866). And although the Trojan women see Helen as the seducer, the one who "captivates the eyes of men, destroys cities and sets homes on fire" (892-3) Helen herself blames both men and gods for the war and claims that she is being driven to death ou δικαίως "unjustly" (904). Her _apologia_, in front of Hecuba and Menelaus, is the first known attempt, since Homer, to allow Helen to speak for
herself. She, cleverly, gives prominence to what removes
the blame from her shoulders and suppresses any
detrimental issues. The arguments she presents are
similar to the ones we encounter in Gorgias' and to some
extent Isocrates' rhetorical treatises and can be
summarized as follows:

1) The beginning of the war was not her adultery. Hecuba
and Priam have their share of the blame: she, for giving
birth to Paris; he, for not killing him as an infant [43].
Menelaus too must assume responsibility since he left
Helen alone to entertain Paris, while he went off to
Crete (943f.) [5].

2) Helen's marriage to Paris saved Greece from the
subjugation that would have followed, had Paris chosen
Hera or Athena (924-937) [6]. Helen was promised to Paris
by Aphrodite (930), and was, therefore, sacrificed for the
common good (935). Instead of being honored with garlands
(937) for having saved Greece, she is reproached by
everyone.

3) Although she does not disclaim responsibility, Helen
claims that it was Aphrodite who came to Sparta with
Paris and made her leave her country and home. This is
why she refers to her marriage to Paris as θεομόνητα
αέχνη, 953). Helen's words reflect late fifth century
theories of the natural right of the stronger and they
certainly recall Gorgias (Helen 6):

πέφυκε γὰρ οὖ τὸ κρείσσον ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἡσσοῦς κωλύεσθαι,
ἀλλὰ τὸ Ἡσσοῦ ὑπὸ τοῦ κρείσσονος ἀρχεσθαι καὶ ἀγέσθαι.
After all, if Aphrodite is so powerful that even Zeus cannot resist, how could Helen? Therefore, Helen pleads and deserves συγχωνώμην. [7] She does not try to say that it is justifiable to imitate the gods but that it is excusable for mortals to share divine weaknesses.

4) After the death of Paris she tried to escape [8], but she was abducted against her will and forced to marry Deiphobus, while her attempts to escape were prevented by the guards (951-60). Force was one of the reasons that Gorgias used to justify Helen's actions (Helen 7). Euripides does not use force as an alternative reason for Helen's flight with Paris, but he uses it to justify her marriage to Deiphobus.

Helen's arguments are essentially a dramatization of Gorgias speech and it is very likely that Euripides is playing with his source. Out of the four reasons that Gorgias suggested for Helen's action, force, divine power, eros and persuasion only persuasion is handled indirectly, as a theme of any agon; force, is used to justify Helen's marriage to Deiphobus, while eros and divine power are arguments in the debate between Helen and Hecuba.

Helen is careful to shift away from herself any responsibility. She does not say a word about the effect that Paris had on her and she carefully covers the passion that she felt once with the hatred she feels now. She stresses Aphrodite's role and she accuses Menelaus
for not being there to prevent the disaster. Even if we accept her arguments as valid, this Helen is not a very likeable figure.

Hecuba naturally rejects Helen’s arguments, denying any divine presence. She argues that it is not Aphrodite but Helen’s ἀφοσίων that caused the disaster (989). Is Hecuba simply speaking out of desire for revenge or does she express the standard Fifth Century views about human responsibility and divine intervention? At the end of Plato’s Republic (617e), in the myth of Er, a voice reminds the souls, when they choose a fate before returning to earth that ἀνίκη ὠνέοις θεός ἄναίτιος (“the blame is his who chooses, do not blame the god”). It is generally agreed that Euripides’ characters are capable of interacting responsibly with the situations in which they find themselves [9]. Hecuba’s argument, however, that people are capable of controlling their own desires, deprives the gods of their main instrument of action which is internal intervention [10], and suggests a radical and rather anthropocentric position. This is not to say that radical views are not expected from Euripides. The Troades, however, is a basically theocentric play. The prologue as a whole deals with the power of the gods over mortals, and Hecuba herself expresses towards the end of the play the traditional view that the divine and human fortune are contradictory and unpredictable (1203-6). Hecuba admits the power of the gods in lines 612-613, 696 and 1240-41, and the Ganymede Ode (799ff.).
expresses the chorus' belief that the gods should have helped them. Hecuba's arguments against divine intervention, therefore, contradict her own attitude in the play. Hecuba has to rebut Helen's speech point by point and since Helen used divine intervention to excuse herself, Hecuba has to argue the opposite. In fact, her response to Helen is simply an argument from probability. She asserts that one cannot believe that Hera and Athena would subdue their favourite cities to Phrygia (973-982) for the sake of a beauty contest. Helen's wickedness was, therefore, the cause of everything. First of all, Hecuba is wrong to deny a well-known event, such as the Judgment of Paris, but she has to do it, for otherwise she would have to accept that Helen had no choice but to go to Troy. The play itself disproves her argument. Poseidon in the prologue attributes the destruction of Troy to the Judgement by saying that Hera and Athena destroyed the city (23-24). The Athenian audience also knew that in Alexander Cassandra prophesied the judgement:

iudicavit inclitum iudicium inter deas tris aliquis:
quo iudicio Lacedaemonia mulier, furiarum una adveniet.

(Ec. 10)

Further, Helen's argument that her marriage to Paris was good for Greece, cannot be easily dismissed. Euripides' audience must have been willing to assume that, with or without divine intervention, there was oriental interest in an empire centered on Greece, as much as there was Greek interest in foreign conquest and control over Asia.
Helen presents the traditional anthropomorphic view that the gods are not perfect, and, moreover, that they are capable of using people or their favourite cities to win a beauty contest. Hecuba may be trying to deny this view of the gods, arguing that disasters are results of human folly and delinquency, but the play as a whole proves her to be wrong. Her view of the gods is more idealistic such as is her attitude towards the future in lines 632f. The Trojan War, however, and the situation that Hecuba and the other Trojan women have to face, is a natural event in a world which is far from being perfect or ideal. Euripides' Helen is a very egoistic character, a woman who will stop at nothing in order to avoid her responsibility and reach her goal. Nevertheless, she is as imperfect as the world whose product she is, and this is the way Euripides wants us to see her. The purpose of the agon is to bring out a contrast of attitudes and not necessarily to resolve the question of Helen's guilt. For the same reason, Euripides does not show Menelaus pardoning Helen according to the traditional story (Andr. 627-31; Æc.1287). Does this mean that Hecuba wins? Menelaus agrees with her and leaves the stage speaking as if there is no doubt that he will kill Helen when they return to Sparta but the audience knows that in fact, he will not. Hecuba persuades Menelaus not to allow Helen on the same ship with himself but it is obvious that she is fighting a battle she has already lost. The play ends with no hope left for the Trojan women and the fear of Helen's re-establishment in Sparta. Both Hecuba and the
Chorus turn completely from the gods (1240, 1242). Hecuba doubts that gods can help them (1280-81) and when she does call upon them it is more in indignation than in prayer (1280-93). The Chorus pray that Helen never reach home but their description of Helen (now wrapped in luxury (1107-8) in contrast to her description in the prologue among the captive women (34-5)) shows at least that the situation has changed for Helen. When Hecuba warns Menelaus against the power of Helen's beauty (891-93) she does not realize that his weakness to resist Helen is analogous to Helen's failure to resist Paris. Helen's real defence lies in the fact that she is never punished for her presumed guilt. And Menelaus, with his failure to kill Helen, proves that he himself succumbs to the same irresistible power which Helen used as her excuse.

In Helen Euripides has followed the myth as narrated in the Cupria (Schol. ad Hom. II.1.5, Cupria Fr.1). In the Cupria the ἀρχή κόσμου was Zeus' design which was brought about both by men's impiety and by Zeus' decision to relieve the earth from its weight and finally fulfilled with Helen's birth and Paris' judgement. Euripides, however, places the beginning of the story at the competition between Hera, Athena and Aphrodite (25) removing thus any moral foundation that could justify the war. Zeus' intervention comes later (39-41), simply to place the events into a general pattern of disasters. In the prologue of the play Helen says that Hermes carried her to Egypt, as part of Zeus' plan to keep her chaste for
Menelaus (46-58). In line 246, however, Hermes "snatches up" Helen (αὐσφαιράς) in order to prevent her "actual" rape by Paris (αὐσφαιράς,58) this time sent by Hera (242) [11], who created the eidolon as an act of revenge (31). In any case, Helen who has never gone to Troy (31-36), has unjustly been accused of having betrayed her husband and caused the war. Both she and Menelaus have suffered, each in their own way (716-717), and their suffering is clearly a result of divine conspiracy against men.

At the opening of the play, Helen is sitting as a suppliant at the tomb of Proteus in an attempt to escape the advances of Proteus' son, Theoclymenus, who wants to marry her. What a triumph of innocence! She who has so wrongly been accused of following the Trojan prince to Troy, is not only innocent of adultery, but she is now resisting the desire of another prince. The Athenian audience must have been quite surprised to see a Helen who is not only innocent of her reputation but who also has to become a suppliant in order to remain faithful to her husband. Euripides' introduction could have been very effective in gaining the audience's sympathy and restoring Helen to favour in our eyes. Very soon, however, this potentially tragic situation becomes less serious, if not comic, when we realize that Helen does not run any of a suppliant's risks and she has actually transformed Proteus' tomb into what A.P. Burnett calls an "outdoor boudoir" [12]. She appears to be in no danger and moves in
and out of the scene building, as, for example, at the end of the first episode (385). Although some of her clothes are apparently kept inside the palace (1186-87), she is not deprived of any comforts, including food, and her pursuer does not seem to be disturbed with her camping in front of his gate. In fact, Theoclymenus honors his father's tomb (1165-1169) and obviously has no intention of violating Helen's sanctuary [13]. But what makes Helen's situation even less tragic is the fact that she knows from Hermes, as she herself admits (56-59), that the end of her troubles will be a happy one. Had Helen not known Hermes' promise that some day she and Menelaus would be reunited, would she have remained faithful to her husband?

The Athenian audience, who had experienced a different Helen in Euripides' Iphigenia, a few years earlier, was probably amused with Euripides' techniques of role reversal. In the Iphigenia Helen does not appear on stage until line 895, but her appearance there is already prepared by the accusations made against her by the Trojan women. On the surface, the Helen of the Iphigenia bears no similarity to the innocent suppliant of Helen. Looking more carefully at the two plays, however, we apprehend the implicit resemblance of the two characters. Hecuba had considered Helen's aphroisyne the cause of the war in the Iphigenia. If the audience remembered Euripides' playing around the words Aphrodite - aphroisyne, it would probably notice that Helen has now been placed under the protection of Proteus whose
σωφροσύνη (47) is a guarantee of Helen’s chastity. The prologue of Helen has the same function that Helen’s defence in front of Hecuba had in the Troades, and is very important for our understanding of her character. She complains about her suffering (53-55), but actually bad reputation is the only evil she has suffered (54) and she is terribly upset about it, as we see in her repeated assertions of innocence (30, 33, 35, 42, 54, 58f. 65ff). The whole prologue is essentially an enumeration of what others have suffered, but Helen has pity only for herself [14]. The cause of the disaster was her beauty. Κόραλος lay behind the three goddesses’ contest (κόραλους πέρι, 23) and it was Helen’s beauty that Aphrodite promised Paris (27) making him sail to Sparta in quest of Helen, ἐπὶ τὸ δυστυχὲς κόραλος (236-38). In fact, Helen wishes that she could become ugly so that the Greeks could forget the misfortunes caused by her beauty (262-266). Her wish becomes a very significant argument given that in other Euripidean plays Helen is accused of having preserved and consciously misused her beauty in a destructive way [15]. It is only in this play that Helen’s beauty becomes both a means of self-justification and a cause of self-pity.

Helen’s sole purpose in life derives from Hermes’ promise that she will return to Sparta, and her hopes are only temporarily shattered after her encounter with Teucer. When she is faced with the alternative to marry Theoclymenus, her first consideration is physical attraction. Hecuba in the Troades 987-97 had made the
accusation that it was lust for Paris that made her follow him to Troy. Here, obviously, lack of attraction is one of the reasons which keeps Helen away from the young king. The idea of having a barbarian husband does not appeal to her (295ff.). In fact, for this Helen, living with barbarians equals slavery (273-276). In *Troades*, however, Helen was supposedly the one who enjoyed barbaric luxury (991-92) and honors attributed to the despots of Asia (1020-21). According to Hecuba, Helen was possessed by desire for Paris when she saw the splendor of gold and his barbaric raiment (991-2). It is interesting that these same attributes make Theoclymenus less attractive. The young king is wealthy (295-296) but according to Helen he is not attractive because he is a barbarian. "When a bitter husband lives with a woman, her body is bitter too", she says (296f.) [16]. Well, what can we say? Obviously, this Helen has a different taste. The bad news, including the report of Leda's death make Helen think of possible ways of suicide. Again, we are not convinced about the seriousness of her intentions. The idea of the noose is rejected as unseemly (299). The sword sounds like a better idea, perhaps it involves something of heroic quality [17]. In any case, the whole idea of death is soon dismissed completely and the audience is once again reminded of Hecuba's words in the *Troades*, when she attacked Helen for refusing to commit suicide after Paris' death, by noose or sword, as any self-respecting woman would have done. The comparison between the Helen of the *Troades* and the innocent Helen
of Helen here is very effective and certainly deliberate. The Helen of the *Troiades* was so shameless that despite her involvement in the War, she refused to consider suicide. This Helen is such a dignified lady that she is willing to kill herself, although she is innocent, as long as the method is *chic*. Death is preferable to an unattractive husband, she says (298), and we wonder: had Theoclymenus been attractive, would Helen have felt differently? The poet seems to suggest it.

How sincere is Helen, then, when she pleads her innocence? Is she honestly innocent or does she remain faithful because she knows that she will return to Sparta and regain her good reputation? If we limit ourselves to lines 65-66, we will have to admit that Helen is an honest victim of evil fame who is desperately trying to save her innocent body. If we attempt to judge Helen under the light of Teucer’s news we may reach a different conclusion. In lines 270-71 she declares that to be δυσκαλείς without being δάξιος is μείζον τῆς ἀληθείας κακόν. Instead of distress for the three deaths and one suicide in her family, all we see is Helen’s obsession with the loss of her reputation. Does Helen have any guilt feelings? She certainly accepts responsibility for her mother’s death, “my mother is dead and I am her murderer” (278), but the guilt is not really hers: τὰ δέκαν τοῦτ’ ἐστ’ ἐμὸν (281). As for Menelaus, he was only an ἀπαλαθησίας κακόν, a practical necessity. Now that he is dead she can no longer prove who she is and regain her
position as queen in Sparta (287-289). And this is the ἐσχάτου κακοῦ, "the worst of all", for Helen (18).

Her tactics in front of Menelaus prove the same selfishness. Menelaus is the only person in the world who can save both her name and body and Helen certainly attempts to gain control over him. After the recognition and once Menelaus is convinced of her identity, she exaggerates on purpose Theoclymenus' behaviour (777-8, 780-81, 803, 807, 811, 833), first in order to prove her fidelity and strong persistence and second, in order to stir up Menelaus' jealousy and pride, just as Hecuba accused her of having done with Paris by praising Menelaus' deeds (Iro. 1004-6). Helen may be innocent and faithful but she is also a woman. If her beauty has given her so many problems, she should at least have the satisfaction of having had many suitors. Menelaus does not seem to care much, anyway. At the beginning, he is not even certain he wants to take Helen along when he leaves (741), but the thought of leaving her to Theoclymenus makes him resolved to take her with him. His Trojan glory is an obsession for Menelaus. (19) Having arrived in an unfamiliar place where the person in power is ready to kill any Greek visitor (155, 468), Menelaus thinks that his reputation will win him favor and food (501-4). Ironically, it is his identity which could destroy him if Theoclymenus found out (780ff.817f.). To his question: τὰ κατευθὲν νῦν ἀστι μοι στρατεύματα (453), the old woman answers very effectively: You may have been
mighty in Troy but you are not here. But Menelaus still lives with his obsession. He introduces himself as the commander of the mightiest host on earth, who rules over the young men of Greece with their consent (393-6).[20] He is proud to have "lit the glorious flames of Troy" (κατευόν τὸ Τροίας πῦρ, 503-4), and his αἰσχύνει lies in having lost his army (453) and his cloaks, the external signs of his royal rank (423-24). Even after he discovers that the object of the expedition was an empty image (707,751), he tells Helen who never went to Troy: I sacked Troy for you (806), and insists that he will not bring shame on his Trojan κλέος (τὸ Τρωικόν γὰρ οὗ καταλαμκὺν κλέος, 845).

He is always ready to resolve in violence, as when he threatens to stain Proteus' tomb "with streams of blood" (984) or when he invokes Hades as his ally, for he has sent so many men there with his sword (970-1). With his military prowess, Menelaus probably expresses the traditional male aggressive values. His world is full of enemies to be killed, full of prizes to be possessed, and Euripides makes it clear that this world is far from being ideal. As soon as he realizes that the phantom is gone, Menelaus clings to the real Helen with the same possessiveness that characterized him in his first entrance when he thought he had the real Helen hidden in the cave (425-7).

Helen's character is different in many aspects. If Troy is the center of Menelaus' κλέος, it is the center of her αἰσχύνη and δύσκης (66-67, 201-2, 270, 687, 697).
When Menelaus proposes action (814) even if it means death, Helen suggests ἀληθής (815-826), μηχανή, (813) and πείθειν (825-828). Menelaus' heart desires combat (872) but he decides to give in to Helen's σοφία (1049-52). The qualities of Helen and Menelaus are different but in some ways complementary. These two, definitely, need each other, and Euripides makes it clear that it is practical necessity and not love and true values that bring them together. Line 806 is the first line in which Menelaus expresses any feelings for Helen and this becomes more interesting if we consider Menelaus' admission in the Troades (865) that he did not sack Troy for Helen. In any case, he did not sack Troy for this Helen. Helen is Menelaus' symbol of victory. Now that the phantom is gone, Helen is his only trophy. He needs Helen as proof of his Trojan success (808), just as Helen needs him to restore her in her former status as queen of Sparta. From this point on, Helen, freed from her role as victim, behaves in the way she herself had condemned (38-39, 109, 196-99, 362-74, 383-85). In her speech in front of Theonoe, the most virtuous, moral and sympathetic character in the whole play [21], Helen appeals to the prophetess' principles by saying that "Gods hate violence" (903). It is the gods, however, that have provoked the war and it is Helen who, now that she has regained her identity, will not hesitate to use violence to achieve her aim. As the Chorus moves towards the conclusion of the play, away from the sorrows of the war, the audience,
surprised, will hear the angelos announcing another act of violence against innocent victims (1593-1613). Shortly before in the first stasimon of the famous anti-war passage the chorus had condemned violence and those who consider war as a means of gaining glory:

\[\text{αφρονεσ όσοι τας ἀρετας πολέμῳ κτάσθε δορὸς ἄλκαίου λόγχαι—σιν καταπαυόμενοι πόνου θυστών ἄμαθῶν.}\]

(1151-54)
The words of the chorus sound ironic as Menelaus, followed by Helen, invokes the sack of Troy reminiscent once more of his "Trojan glory" (1560,1603). The audience who had hoped that the escape of Helen and Menelaus would be the end in a chain of "contests of blood" (1155-6) is now faced with the most unnecessary slaughter in a miniature reenactment of the Trojan War.

The Dioscuroi intervene to prevent more bloodshed and declare that the outcome of the events was the will of gods (1659-53,1661). The gods do not hate the eὐγενεῖς, and those who are made to suffer are common people (1678-88). The eugeneis, the main characters in this case, may celebrate their victory after a brutal slaughter. Menelaus can exult in his triumph over rowers who defend themselves with broken oars (1600-1601) and Helen can be proud for having deceived the naively enamored Theoclymenus. Helen the eugenestate among many women (1686) will be able to return to Sparta and regain her lost reputation, this time reinforced by the reaffirmation
of her fatal beauty through Theoclymenus and the
promise of her future deification. Menelaus, who fought a
useless war for the sake of a cloud (787) will be able
through a parody of a battle to justify the war and
claim his share of military glory by returning home with
Helen. The Athenian audience must have certainly been
sceptical. With or without Helen, the war was fought and
its victims were neither Menelaus, nor the innocent
suppliant of Proteus' tomb whose destiny has been
blessed by the gods. The victims are the nameless Greeks
and Trojans, the innocent rowers. Tragedy or comedy [223],
Helen stands, above all, as a complete condemnation of
war, any war, as an occasion for earning heroic status.

Euripides has further used the story of Helen to
illustrate the destructive role of the divinities in the
human world. The theme of Leda's rape, introduced first
by Helen at the beginning of the play (18-21) and then by
the Chorus (210-217), underlines the idea that gods use
mortals for their own pleasures and often achieve their
lustful desires through deceit. While Paris sent by
Aphrodite was stealing Helen's phantom, Hermes sent by
Hera seized the real Helen (28ff.) causing the sufferings
of Greeks and Trojans alike. The Chorus expresses
Euripides' most intense criticism of the god's actions in
the Nightingale Ode (1107-1164) and especially in line
1137:

"οτι θεός ἦ μὴ θεός ἦ τό μέσον"
If Helen, despite her direct relationship to the highest
deity, Zeus, could acquire the reputation of ἄδικος, προδότης, ἀπιστός, ἄθεος (1148) how can men establish any veracity and good reputation in a world governed by the gods' capriciousness? The angelos who comes to announce that the eidoλon has vanished introduces the same theological speculation that Hecuba had expressed in Τριάδες (1203-7) that the divine is incomprehensible and unpredictable (Helen 711f, 715).

The theme of Helen's Apotheosis is repeated in Orestes. Here Apollo appears at the time that all protagonists and the audience believe that Helen has been murdered by Orestes, to announce that Helen has been saved and become a goddess together with her two brothers (1625-1642). Apollo states that Helen is Zeus' daughter and she cannot be judged with human standards. The war was the gods' wish and Helen's beauty was a ploy of punishment. In her new role beside the Dioscuroi Helen will not be an instrument of punishment but a positive force, a saviour of mariners. Helen's deification, therefore, which was only predicted in Helen, here takes place in the course of the play, completing a circle of divine intervention which began with destruction and ends with grace for human beings.

Is this a negative picture of Helen? Euripides' Helen is not a character beyond criticism. She is not a Penelope, even though she would like to see herself as one; she is not the most innocent and heroic figure we have
experienced, - in any event, how many Euripidean figures
are truly heroic? - but she is a very human being, whose
beauty has undoubtedly been exploited by men and gods
and whose only objective has been survival against all
opposition. In all Euripidean tragedies, dealing with the
Trojan War, the real cause of the war appears to be the
will of gods and not Helen. The _Troiades_ is the only play
where Helen's will is explicitly discussed but even there
the presence of a divine scheme is forcefully presented
and not completely rejected. It is worth noting that in
most of his tragedies, Euripides follows the traditional
version of the story. The _eido/lon_ version was used for
the first time in his _Electra_ (1279-1283) - probably
produced in 414/413 B.C. [23] - and was further developed
in _Helen_ the following year (412 B.C.). Tellingly, Euripides
does not use the idea of the phantom in two of his latest
tragedies, _Orestes_ and _Iphigenia in Aulis_, produced in 408
and 405 respectively. Regardless of the variety of
interpretations that critics have offered, it is evident
that at least Helen was intended by Euripides to be
represent condemnation of a war fought for no purpose,
for the sake of a cloud (_Helen, 707_).

The introduction of the idea of a phantom to the
Athenian audience, at this particular historical point
(413/412B.C.) may reflect Euripides' intention to associate
the Trojan War with the Sicilian Expedition. The Trojan War
was fought for a beautiful illusion which bore the name
Helen just as the Sicilian Expedition was based on a dream
called Athenian Empire. The same gods who used Greeks and
Trojans for their own purposes deluded the Athenians into a hopeless and destructive expedition. Only a few years earlier, the shameful destruction of Melos by the Athenians had inspired Euripides to produce the *Troades*, another poetic expression of the horror and degradation of war. Consequently, Euripides was not interested in Helen herself. Although his name has often been associated with the so-called process of "Helen's rehabilitation", Euripides did not care to establish the character of an innocent Helen in contrast to the "guilty" Helen of the tradition. His purpose was to emphasize the vanity of war and question divine actions and their human perception. In this sense, he simply used the myth of Helen in order to challenge the Athenian audience and bring out serious intellectual questions by mixing contradictory elements into theatrical entertainment.
NOTES

1. The invention of the *eidolon*-theme is usually attributed to Stesichorus, although the sole surviving fragment (Plat. *Phaedr.* 243A) does not give any indications about it. For the *eidolon* in Stesichorus see, *Pap.* Oxy. 2586, fr. 26 i; Plat. *Rep.* 9.586C; Aristid. *Oratrices* 13.131; Tzetz. ad *Luc.* *Alex.* 113. In Schol. Paraph. *Luc.* *Alex.* 822 it is attributed to Hesiod (*fr.* 266 Rzach) but it is clear that the scholiast has confused the issue. (See A. M. Dale, *Euripides, Helen* (Oxford 1967) xvii–xxiv).

2. Sophocles may be an exception. Helen apparently appeared in two of his lost plays, *'Ενείας ἀμαρτησίας* and *'Ενείας γέμος* (a satirical drama). The titles of these plays indicate that they were dramatizations of Helen's relationship with Menelaus and Paris.

3. Aesch. *Agam.* 399ff., 681ff. In 1455ff. the Chorus says that she alone has worked the destruction of many lives under the Walls of Troy.

4. It is interesting that Andromache blames Paris' birth (597–598). The chorus of Andromache also expresses the wish that Hecuba had killed Paris (293–300) although the beginning of the war is identified as the Judgement of Paris (274ff.). Helen's attempt to put the blame on others is an example of συνεκκατηγορία, an argument popular towards the end of the fifth century. See Plut. *Per.* 36.3; Ar. *Rhet.* 1397b 23–5; Rh. ad *Alex.* 1442b 7–8. Also in Euripides: *Oc.* 585–7.

5. Euripides follows the version of the *Cuaria* according to which Menelaus left Helen after Paris' arrival. In *La.* 76 Menelaus was already away when Paris arrived. Similarly, Menelaus is criticised by Peleus at *Andr.* 596–5. Helen does not criticise him for having wasted so many lives in order to retrieve a woman that he actually does not want, but such accusations are expressed in *Andr.* 605–9. *Oc.* 521ff., 647–50, 717ff., and *La.* 389ff.
6. We do not know whether Helen here quotes a well-known fact or whether Euripides has made this story up. Isocrates (Hel. 41) says:

διδούσης Ἡρας μὲν ἀπότης αὐτῷ τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς βασιλεύουσι, Ἀθηνᾶς δὲ κρατεῖν ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις

and Pseudo-Apollodorus (Epit. 3,2) states that Hera offered Paris rule over the entire world.

7. The argument that what is permitted for the gods is permitted for men was thought to be sophistical (Arist. Hub. 1082). In any case, Helen had been offered as a bribe to Paris and she had certainly no way of preventing the goddess’ decision. She does not say, however, that Aphrodite forced her by threats as in II. 383ff. As for her plea for συγγνώμη, Aristotle says (Rh. ad Alex. 1444a, 6-16): ἐμπράταις κολύμου πάνων ἀνθρώπων.

8. Helen’s desire to return to Sparta is attested already in Homer: II. 3,139f.; Od. 4,259ff.

9. This is, perhaps, one of the reasons why Euripides makes Helen’s eidolon in the Helen assume all the responsibility that the real Helen would otherwise have to take while the real Helen vindicates herself by resisting Theoclymenus.

10. K. J. Dover, Greek Popular Morality (Oxford 1974), pp. 133ff. discusses popular beliefs in the fifth and fourth centuries and shows that gods intervened in both internal and external events.

11. Helen was seized by Hermes while gathering spring flowers. The theme recalls images of rape and links Helen with Persephone (175; 1301-1368) who was also abducted by Hades while picking flowers. We may also recall the seduction of Creusa by Apollo (Ion 888-96) while she was picking flowers.


13. Theoclymenus proves to be a very kind man. Besides his respect for his father’s tomb, he shows sincere concern for Helen, even for Menelaus (1197, 1220, 1226, 1236, 1256, 1264, 1278ff., 1392ff.)

14. As G. M. A. Grube notes (The Drama of Euripides, (London
1941), pp. 338f. Helen is "fascinated by her troubles in a rather proud and twisted way, and by her terrible fate, even to having been born from an egg."

15. Eur. **Op.** 128f.; **Hel.** 150f., 1188; **Ipp.** 772ff., 891ff., 1922ff.; **Hec.** 442f.; **La.** 1417f.; **Andr.** 629ff.

16. Commentators have been troubled with this. A number of conjectures have been suggested for **soma** (see Dale, ad loc.). I agree with R. Schmiel, ("The Recognition Duo in Euripides' Helen," **Hermes** 100 (1970) p. 283) that there is nothing obscure in Helen's words. As Schmiel maintains: "Helen the sensualist, the devotee of physical pleasure, is simply saying that an undesirable partner spoils the normal delights of the body."

17. According to Helen's words (**Helen**, 841) death must be accompanied by glory.


20. Menelaus' words sound like democratic propaganda, and his style must have been quite popular in fifth century Athens.

21. Theonoe represents a new kind of prophetess who gives up the art of prophecy in the traditional sense and chooses human moral responsibility, in order to protect concepts such as respect to parents and the dead, hospitality and sanctity in marriage. Theonoe agrees to suppress the truth in order to prevent violence and injustice. In this sense she is the opposite of Helen. The character of Theonoe is discussed in detail by R. Kannicht, *Euripides. Helena* I (Heidelberg 1969), pp. 71-77; II, 229ff., 255ff.). See also A. M. Pippin, "Euripides' **Helen**: A comedy of Ideas" CPh. LVI, No 3 (1968), pp. 157-162.

22. Scholars who have written about the **Helen** have not come to an agreement as to the category of dramatic composition to which the play belongs. **Helen** has been
called a "farce," a "comedy of ideas," "no tragedy," a "parody of the Iphigeneia in Tauris," "tragedy manquee," a mixture of "theology and irony" etc.

23. C. W. Fornara, "Evidence for the date of Herodotus' publication" JHS 91 (1971), pp.38-31, dates the Electra to 414 and Helen to 412 and believes that Herodotus' Histories reached the Athenian public around 414 B.C. and Euripides' attention was directed to this version by Herodotus' adaptation of Stesichorus.
CHAPTER V
THEOCRITUS

Theocritus' 18th Idyll, an Epithalamium for Helen and Menelaus, has puzzled modern readers and critics with its subject. How can anyone read a Wedding-Song for Helen and Menelaus without remembering the tragic outcome of their marriage? Theocritus could hardly have expected his readers to be ignorant or even pretend ignorance of one of the best known Greek tales. We certainly know that before Theocritus' time, Stesichorus and Euripides had altered Helen's myth, questioning her traditional culpability, and Gorgias and Isocrates had offered arguments in her favour. Even under the most sympathetic treatment of Helen's character, however, her marriage to Menelaus can hardly be considered happy.

Is Theocritus' 18th Idyll the only example of an epithalamium sung for a tragic couple? A survey among the surviving epithalamia would, in fact, show that sad or tragic themes are not at all unusual in ancient marriage songs. Let us, for example, mention Cassandra's song about her ironic marriage with Agamemnon at I.roaides 308-340 [13], the marriage song for Peleus and Thetis in I. 1836-1879 (overshadowed first by the imminent sacrifice of Iphigeneia and second by the prophecy of Achilles future violence), the hymeneal for the already dead Phaedon at

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Phaedon 227ff., the diegertikon for the dead husbands of the Danaids (Aesch. Fr. 43 Nauck) and many others [2]. A general observation about all these songs would be that they are placed in the heroic world [3] and they were not, apparently, designed for performance at actual weddings.

Two more examples of tragic epithalamia are to be found in Stesichorus' Helen and Sappho's 44LP. According to the Scholia on Idyll 18, Theocritus was influenced in writing his Epithalamium by Stesichorus' Helen [4]. One of the surviving fragments of the poem (81D) appears to be a description of a bridal procession prompting Kaibel [5] and Bowra [6] to suggest that Stesichorus' poem included an epithalamium. Even if this is correct, however, without the actual epithalamium we cannot tell what its influence might have been on Theocritus' poem. On the other hand, we do know that Helen was Stesichorus' poem which attacked Helen. Therefore, if the poem did include a Wedding-Song, it most probably would have highlighted with irony the joyful marriage, in keeping with the tone of the whole poem. There is little or nothing within Theocritus' poem to suggest an ironic undercurrent to Helen's marriage. His bride is clearly divine and as innocent as any bride can be.

Sappho 44LP is a more precise parallel to Idyll 18. In this poem the tragic couple is Hector and Andromache. Because of their thematic resemblance (each poem treats the wedding of a mythologically famous couple whose future is tragic) the two poems have traditionally been
associated. Hector and Andromache are certainly associated with Helen and as a couple they are often juxtaposed in Homer's Iliad (Book 6 in particular) with Helen and Paris. There is no doubt that Theocritus owes a debt to Sappho's Epithalamia [7]. Sappho was very famous in antiquity and any poet writing an Epithalamium would most probably turn to her. Theocritus knew Sappho's Epithalamia. He also knew that if he wanted to write a sad or ironic epithalamium, his poem would be within the tradition of the genre. This is not enough, however, to explain either his choice of Helen and Menelaus as the couple of his song or the numerous problems of interpretation which the poem raises.

I suggest that Theocritus had a number of reasons to choose Helen and Menelaus as the couple of his Epithalamium. I hope to show, by a detailed study of the epithalamium that Helen, because of the richness of the tradition associated with her, offered the poet a unique opportunity to play with the myth and his readers' expectations.

The poem consists of 58 lines, the first eight of which set the scene in the author's narrative voice. Twelve chosen maidens dance and sing before the bridal chamber of Helen and Menelaus. The hymeneal song itself, lines 9-58, can be divided into three parts of ten-thirty-ten lines. The first 10 lines (9-19) are addressed to Menelaus in a rather humorous tone. The bridegroom is first rebuked as being θερυγωνευτὸς and
φιλονυσος or even drunk (10-11) although later he is addressed as Ὑαντος (16) for having won the hand of the divine Helen in marriage. Gow notes that the exchange of obscene jokes was a regular feature of Greek and Roman marriages [8] but the Greek Epithalamia show no certain evidence of a Fescennine convention [9]. In what survives from Sappho's epithalamia we rather see a praise of the bridegroom [10] and in Sappho 44LP lines 21 and 34, in particular, both the bride and the bridegroom are likened to gods. Nevertheless, given the limited number of surviving epithalamia we cannot exclude the possibility that some good natured kidding at the expense of the groom was a commonplace of the genre. It is also quite possible that we are dealing with a reduction of the heroic to the mundane which is not unusual in Theocritus [11]. Even in this case the comic treatment of Menelaus contrasts dramatically with the emphasis on the excellence of Helen whose praises occupy the largest part of the poem [12].

The following thirty lines can be divided into two sections. Similar motifs occur in both sections but Helen's conception is different in each part. Lines 19-37 present the human Helen, whereas after line 37 we have indications of her divine status and her plane-tree cult. In the first section Helen is spoken of in the third person while in the second section she is addressed with vocatives and second person verbs. The first section is characterized by typical hymeneal motifs. We find an
emphasis on plants (133): the chorus wears crowns of hyacinth (2), Helen is called ῥοδόχρους (32) and her excellence is compared to a cypress in a garden (38). We also notice an emphasis on the season of the year and the hour of the day (14). The song is obviously sung in the evening but the girls mention twice the coming of the new dawn (14, 26). The passing of the years is indicated first when the chorus assures Menelaus that Helen will be his: ἐπεὶ καὶ ἔνας καὶ ἐς ὄω καὶ ἔτεος ἔχω ἔτεος (14-15) and second when Helen is compared to the appearance of the spring after winter (27). In all these motifs, which are commonplace of the genre, we notice an emphasis on returning cycles of the natural world and fertility. Menelaus may go to sleep early (9) but he will wake up the next morning (55) and the chorus will sing again a διεχρηστικόν. The girls hope that Helen will bear a child like herself (21). The future is therefore strongly suggested to the audience and although Theocritus says nothing specific about the tragic future of Helen and Menelaus, his audience would certainly know how the future will be fulfilled in Helen’s case. Instead of quietening our apprehensions Theocritus ends the section with a deliberately ambiguous clause: τὰς πάντες ἐν τῷ ὄμμασιν ὢμερον ἐν τῇ (37) which could mean “whose eyes kindle a desire surpassing all others” or “in whose eyes is all desire”. This reminds us, in case we have forgotten, that Helen is not completely the innocent bride.

In the second section (38-48) we find no specific
indications of the tragic consequences of Helen’s marriage, but a description of her future deification. The motifs of the first section, mostly commonplaces of wedding songs are repeated in the second part but this time in the form of ritual acts of Helen’s cult. Helen who was before called Tyndareus’ daughter (1.5) becomes now Ζευς τοι Θυγάτηρ (19) and Menelaus progresses from ὁ νεώτερος Ἅτρεως ζύγου (6) to Zeus’ son-in-law (49) and demi-god (19). The girls, her συγγόμαλικες (22), become her worshippers and the founders of her cult. Their new relationship is indicated in lines 41-42:

μεμναμέναι ως γαλαθναι ἄρνες
χειναμέναι ὅλοι μαυτὸν ποθέοισαι.

The twelve girls who were the πρῶταί πόλιος (4) become now πρῶται (43,45) founders of her cult, who will go to gather flowers that bloom in the meadows, always missing Helen, as the new-born lambs miss their mother. In line 39 they mention their race as part of their ritual for Helen just as in line 22 they had recalled their racing together with Helen. As they had anointed themselves with oil (23), now they will pour the oil to the plane-tree (45-46). The crowns of hyacinth that the girls wore in honor of the bride become a lotus crown and Helen who was earlier compared to a cypress now becomes a plane-tree goddess. Finally the girls promise to inscribe in the plane-tree:

σέβεμα μ’ Ἐλένας φυτόν εἶμι (48). The verb γράφεται (47) certainly reminds us of γράφαμαι, which was used in
line 3 to describe the bridal chamber. The adjective
υεογράμμω occurs only here and there has been some
attempt of emending the word [15]. Rumpel [16] accepts
it as an hapax in the sense of "nuper pictus" and Gow
takes it as a reference to the fresh decoration of the
bridal chamber. The use of γραμμα in Idyll 10.28 suggests,
perhaps, another interpretation for the use of the word
in Idyll 18. Theocritus calls the hyacinth "lettered",
probably referring to the marks on its petals. In
Moschus' Lament for Bion 6-7 the singer calls on the
hyacinth to "speak out its letters" and "add more cries of
sorrow to its petals" indicating that the marks on the
petals of hyacinth were held to be a cry of woe. The
same idea can also be seen in the context of Idyll 10.28
where Bucaeus adds that despite its darkness, hyacinth is
used for garlands. Interestingly enough, Helen's friends
are wearing crowns of hyacinth (2) as they sing before
the νεογράμμω chamber. After Helen's deification the
crowns of hyacinth become lotus crowns (43) and this
time it is the plane-tree, Helen's center of worship that
becomes "lettered". The rarity of the word νεογράμμω and
the sound repetition of γράμματα ... γραφήματα (47) lead
us to suspect that Theocritus' choice of words is
deliberate. If the lettered hyacinth indicates sorrow in
Theocritus, then the chamber may point to the tragic
future of the newly-married couple. Consequently, the
replacement of hyacinth with lotus, after Helen's
deification, may be Theocritus' way of suggesting that
Helen’s tragic human future is rendered less important after her deification.

Kaibel [17] has argued that the poem is an aetiological explanation of an otherwise unknown tree-cult of Helen. Although Kaibel may be correct, I think that Theocritus had much more in mind than simply concocting an elegant action. I suggest that the deliberate repetition of motifs was meant by Theocritus to point to and comment on the ambiguity of Helen’s nature. It is for this reason, I think, that the poem does not stop here but returns as it closes to the human Helen without resolving the issue of Helen’s nature, human or divine. The chorus addresses again the bride (49) and the almost forgotten groom with words that recall Sappho [18]. Theocritus, however, does not limit himself to the traditional address of the couple but he adds the adjective εὐνέβερε [19] to characterize the groom. In case we have had any ominous feelings about this marriage, we are reminded that Menelaus, after all, because of his marriage to the divine Helen, has become Zeus’ son-in-law. As Zeus’ son-in-law, he receives more respect than he had received at the beginning as a mere bridegroom. The chorus wishes εὐτέκνίαν from Leto, Ἰδου ἐρασθαι ἀνδρῶν from Aphrodite and ᾿αδιου ᾿αβου from Zeus. The reader cannot fail to notice the underlying irony of this triple prayer. If εὐτέκνίαν means noble children, we are reminded that Helen had only one daughter, Hermione [20] who did not exceed or even reach her parents’ nobility. Aphrodite
certainly did not bless this wedding with mutual love and it is precisely here that we are reminded of Aphrodite's role in Helen's elopement with Paris. The last part of the prayer refers to Zeus traditional role as giver of ὀρέσσος [21]. Helen, as daughter of Zeus, was traditionally guaranteed endless prosperity and a place in the home of the gods [22] and because of his marriage to her, Menelaus has been promised entrance to the Elysian fields [23]. At the human level, however, Helen and Menelaus' life can hardly be called happy.

The final lines (especially lines 54-58) are a typical epilogue of an epithalamium. The girls promise to come back with the dawn and sing a morning διεξερτικόν. To whom is this song to be sung? To the human homeric heroine or to the plane-tree goddess? Theocritus, unable perhaps, to resolve the mystery of Helen's character, lets his audience decide.

The poem often echoes Homer and particularly Book Four of the Ὀδύσσεια. For most of us and probably for Theocritus' audience, Helen is the homeric heroine of the Iliad. The woman who left Menelaus for Paris and became the cause of the Trojan War. This, at least in part, is why we are so uncomfortable to see Menelaus playing the role of the happy groom in this poem. Theocritus knows our thoughts and he makes the effect of his poem depend largely on their presence. His poem is full of Homeric allusions, but mostly allusions to Book 4 of the Ὀδύσσεια.
In this book, for the first time in literature, Helen and Menelaus appear together. The war is over and the couple is living together in Sparta. The Helen of the *Odyssey* is particularly connected with marriage themes that make her presentation there very appropriate for Theocritus' poem. In Book 4, Helen and Menelaus are actually celebrating a double wedding ceremony for Helen's daughter and Menelaus' son. In addition, the Helen of the *Odyssey* possesses divine qualities, such as the power of recognition and the art of relieving pain with the use of drugs. This Helen, who is both human and mysteriously divine, has the same aspects that Theocritus emphasizes in his *Epithalamium*. It thus suited Theocritus' purpose to make extensive reference to the Helen of *Odyssey* 4.

Menelaus is the happy groom in Theocritus' poem because he is Zeus' son-in-law (lines 18 and 49), just as in the *Odyssey* 4.569, Proteus prophesied that Menelaus would have a happy end and enter the isles of the Blest because of his marriage to Helen. When the girls of the chorus talk about Helen's spinning-basket (ταξάρω, 32) we should recall Helen's first appearance in the *Odyssey* 4.131 with her golden distaff and a basket (χρυσήν τ’ ἡλικάτην ταξάρων 8'). Spinning and weaving characterize Helen in Homer. Her first appearance in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are associated with these activities. In Theocritus' poem Helen is unequalled both for the wool she has spun and the use that she makes of it at the loom. Lines 32-35 were meant to recall Helen's weaving in
the Homeric epics. Similarly, her skill in playing the lyre (35) recalls Helen's association with singing in the Iliad, especially 6.358, and is further supported by Theocritus' Idyll 22 where the Dioscuri are invoked as protectors of singing that brings κρέος ἔσθαν. Finally the mention of the lotus that Helen's worshippers will use for garlands (44) recalls Telemachus' speech to Menelaus in Book Four of the Odyssey again (602). Telemachus there says that Menelaus' land is abundant with lotus and this is the same plant that the girls will find in abundance in the fields. I suggest, therefore, that Theocritus deliberately alludes to the Odyssey to underline those aspects of Helen's character that are usually overlooked if we think of Helen only as the Helen of the Iliad. Theocritus wants us to think of Helen at home, that is, he wants us to think of the Helen of the Odyssey.

The plane-tree cult which Theocritus describes in the poem is unknown otherwise but a close reading of his description shows that this cult is not too far from what we know about other cults of Helen in antiquity and it may simply indicate the existence a cult of Helen in Hellenistic Alexandria of Theocritus' time.

According to the Idyll Helen's worshippers are the twelve maidens who sing her wedding-song. It is clear, therefore, that Helen is a goddess of unmarried girls. In line 22 the girls recall their racing in past days: Gow [24] notes that "the word ἐπόμηνos here, denotes the exercise rather than the scene". From Pausanias [25], however, we
know that Ὄρόμος was the name of a place for exercise, near Sparta:

"καλούσι δὲ Πακεδαιμόνιοι Ὄρόμου ἐνθα τοῖς νέοις καὶ ἔφ' ἡμῶν ἔτει Ὄρομου μελέτη καθέστηκεν ... πεποίητε δὲ καὶ χυμνάσσα ἐν τῷ Ὄρομῳ".

We also know from the same source, that at the entrance of Ὄρόμος there was a shrine of Castor and Polydeuces and that Helen also had her shrine near it [26].

Theocritus perhaps thought of Ὄρόμος as a proper name, presumably an open ground near the Eurotas where races were held and Helen was worshipped. Theocritus is not the only one who relates Helen to races among girls. The evidence suggests [27] that Helen is the Aotis of Alcman's Maidensong in which she is presented as the patroness of a group of maidens who are taking part in a horse race [28]. In the Idyll Helen is compared to the Dawn:

'Αὼς ἀντέλθουσα καλὸν διέφανεν πρόσωπον (26).

This may be additional evidence that Helen is the Aotis of the Maidensong. In the song of the Laconian women at the end of Lysistrata Helen is presented as the leader of the maidens who dance like "fillies" beside Eurotas:

ἐνε τῷ λόποι ταῖ κόραι
πάρ τὸν Εὐρώταν
ἀμπαλάουντι πυκνά ποδοῖν
ἀγκοιώαι,
ταὶ δὲ κόμαι σείουθ' ἀπερ βακχαῖν
ἀγείται δ' οἵ Μήδος παῖς
ἀγνὰ χοραγός ἐὐπρεπὴς.

(Arist. Lysistrata 1308-15)

In Euripides, Helen, the chorus addresses Helen, when she
is going back to Laconia, as the leader of a dance of the
Νευκίνπιδες, maidens traditionally attached to Helen and
the Dioscuroi:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ἡ που κόραις ἀν πνταμοῦ}
\text{πάρ' οἴδημα Νευκίνπιδας ἢ πρό ναοῦ}
\text{Παρθάδος ἀν λάθοις}
\text{χρόνω ξύνελθοῦσα χοροῖς.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Eur. Helen 1465-7) [29]

There is also a number of sporadic references to other
cults that could be related to Helen's cult. We know for
example that Helen had a feast, the ἔκκεντρικα [30], during
which maidens drove in wagons called κάνυναβρα [31].
Κάνυναβρα were also used in the Spartan festival in honor
of Hyacinthus, an old vegetation deity, who had some
importance around Sparta and whose tomb was situated at
Amyklai. At the beginning of the Idyll the girls wear
crowns of hyacinth (2) so there may be a connection
between Helen and Hyacinthus. In Sparta eleven maidens
called Ολυμπιάδες held a δρόμος ἄγνων [32] and Hesychius
mentions a δρόμος παρθένων ἐν Ακαδημίῳ [33].

It is almost certain, therefore, that Helen was
worshipped in Laconia and part of her worship were races
among girls near the Eurotas. Theocritus himself tells us
in the Idyll that Helen participated in races as the first
and the best among her friends (22-25). These races,
however, belong to Helen's past. When Theocritus comes
to talk about Helen's future (39-48) there is no mention
of a race but the girls say that they will go to Ὄπρωμος which now is a specific place, to gather flowers (39). We may, therefore, speculate that the ritual that Theocritus describes did not involve a race and this ritual perhaps took place not in Laconia but in Hellenistic Alexandria. Theocritus tells us that in the past Helen and her friends used to go to the Eurotas and compete in running. In the same way, in the Laconian ritual unmarried maidens held a race in honor of Helen, their patroness. In the ritual of the Idyll, however, the girls mindful of Helen will go to the fields, but this time, not in order to compete, but in order to make garlands which they will eventually dedicate to Helen, their old friend who has now become a goddess. As for the time when the ritual takes place, Theocritus uses the word ἡρι. Gow [34] takes ἡρι as an adverb which means "in the morning". He also notes that the word occurs three times in Homer always with μάλα (Il. 8.360; Od. 18.320; 19.156) but is common in Apollonius (e.g. 1.601; 929). Hesychius, however, and the Suda [35] point out that the word can mean not only "in the morning" (ὄρθρον) but also "in the spring", as a contracted form from ἐφρι. In fact the Scholiast adds: εἰς τῷ γυμνάσιον καὶ τὸν ἄνθιστον πορευόμεθα ἐνθολογοῦσα ἐν ἐφρι. If we translate ἡρι "in the morning" we cannot explain the promise of the chorus (56) to return at dawn to sing a διεγερτικόν. Also, if Helen has left her friends just the night before, it is difficult to understand the
intensity of their longing, which is compared to the desire of newly-born lambs for the udder of their mother (41f.). If we accept the scholiast's interpretation that ἄπτ means "in the spring", then the girls will return the next morning to sing a δειευρωτικόν and next spring they will go to the fields to perform the ritual in honor of Helen. It is in the spring that all flowers bloom in the meadows (36) and the new-born lambs desire their mother's udder. In addition, in the Idyll Helen appears to be a plane-tree goddess, and the ritual of a vegetation goddess is normally held in spring. This second interpretation is not without problems. Theocritus uses the form ἄπτ only twice, here and in Idyll 24.93 where it clearly means "in the morning". On the other hand, he uses the uncontracted form quite often (37). Furthermore, the antithesis μέν... δέ in lines 38-39 implies two coincidental actions. While Helen will be οἰκετής, her friends will go to the fields, as they used to do. We already know that if Helen had not been married she would have been allowed to play with her friends (14). If the ritual is reminiscent of the past days, it has to be held early in the morning. In addition, if Helen is Aotis, she is goddess of the Dawn and her ritual should be performed early in the morning. Theocritus then appears to have adopted an ambiguous word to denote Helen's ambiguous nature. As a tree goddess Helen will be worshipped in the spring, but her worshippers, mindful of their common games, will keep playing early in the morning as if she had never left them. As for their promise to
return for the δευτερϊκόν, the two levels of the poem, the human and the divine, offer a natural explanation. On the human level, the girls will return in the morning to sing for the newly-married couple. This is their duty towards their mortal friend. On the divine level the ritual will be held every spring by all the young girls who will recognize Helen as their patroness.

The actual description of the plane tree-cult comes in lines 43-48. The girls will make garlands of lotus (43) and they will dedicate them with a libation of oil ἐξ ὀλιββοσ at the plane-tree (ἐς Πλατανιοτόν, 44) in the bark of which there will be an inscription dedicating the tree to Helen. Helen's connection with a tree cult can be seen in her title as δευτερϊς θεὰ in Rhodes [38], although the story related to this cult does not involve a plane-tree. Nevertheless, Helen is associated with the plane-tree in the "suitors' oath" [39]. Pausanias tells us that "Tyndareus administered an oath to the suitors of Helen making them stand upon the pieces of a horse that he had sacrificed in a place called Tomb of the Horse which is close to the Plane Tree Grove (Πλατανιοτάσ)". Near Platanistas there was a sanctuary of Helen [40]. Theocritus himself mentions an assembly of suitors when he refers to Menelaus success in wooing Helen (17). According to Pausanias again [41], at Caphyae in Arcadia there was a spring and Πλατανος μεγάλον both called Menelais. The plane tree was planted at the spring by Menelaus who came to the spot when he was collecting his
army against Troy. Pausanias does not mention a cult of Helen in the area, but he does mention a shrine and cult of Artemis Kondyleatis, whose name was later changed to ἀμαθομένη ("strangled or hanged"). If we think that the cult of Helen Dendritis involved the hanging motif, it is possible that Helen was also worshipped or somehow associated with Artemis Kondyleatis. All the above evidence indicates that Theocritus must have known of a cult of Helen, which most probably had its origins in Laconia and was associated with a plane-tree. What is left to examine is whether such a cult could be popular among the Greeks of Ptolemaic Alexandria.

Early evidence about a cult of Helen in Egypt comes from Herodotus [43] who identified the Ἡ καὶ Ἀφροδίτη with Helen. According to Herodotus this is the only shrine dedicated to Ἡ καὶ Ἀφροδίτη and it must belong to Helen because of a story related to him by the priests of the shrine that Helen never went to Troy but was detained at Memphis. The epithet Aphrodite refers probably to Astarte [44] and Herodotus' claims have not yet found support in the excavations of the area. Nevertheless, regardless of the accuracy of its sources the Herodotean evidence shows that even at this early period there had been at least a tradition of a cult of Helen in Egypt. Furthermore, Herodotus' story may have had an effect on the Greeks of Egypt who would naturally be proud that their country had been chosen by the gods as a shelter for the famous Helen. Plutarch [45], commenting on a
detail of Herodotus' story, mentions cults of Helen and Menelaus in Egypt. These cults could have arisen among the Greeks as a result of Herodotus' story. In the *Hymn to Isis* from Oxyrhynchus \[46\] Helen's name is taken as an epithet for Isis. Finally, Stephanus of Byzantium mentions a place called 'Εἰνευλοῦ at Canopus and quotes Hecataios Milesios \[47\] for the name. Eustathius (on Dionysus the Periegete \[13\]) says that Heleneion is an island near Canopus. The form of the name suggests a sanctuary dedicated to Helen and must in any case be related to the story of Helen's residence in Egypt.\[48\].

Besides these sporadic references to Helen in Egypt, we have some knowledge about other cults that could have been related to her as well as some evidence about religious life in Ptolemaic Alexandria. The study of the religious life in Alexandria reveals two important trends: First, the tendency for assimilation with or identification of queens with deities \[49\] as we see, for example in the assimilation of Arsinoe to Aphrodite and Isis, and second, the phenomenon of "syncretism" or "theocrasia" by which individual deities absorbed elements, usually of foreign origin, originally distinct from their mythologies. Thus, native Egyptian gods were often identified with their Greek counterparts as, for example, Isis who absorbs and is absorbed into a number of Greek goddesses such as Demeter and Aphrodite, while at the same time she remains an identifiable deity \[50\].

Our evidence shows that Helen was identified with both goddesses and a queen, Arsinoe Philadelphos. The *Hymn*
to Isis identifies Helen as Isis. Given that Isis was a major Egyptian deity, we may presume that Helen had divine status to be associated with her. In Theocritus’ Idyll 15 Arsinoe who is often associated with Isis or Aphrodite [52], is also compared to Helen: ἡ Βερευκεία θυγάτηρ, Ἐλένη εἰκὼν Ἀρσινόης. Although Helen as a symbol of beauty can be the measure of comparison for any woman, still it is possible that Arsinoe is not being compared to the epic heroine but to the goddess Helen, in the same way that we see her associated with Isis and Aphrodite.

Helen has traditionally been closely related to Aphrodite for obvious reasons; Aphrodite is always the bestower of beauty and Helen is the woman most endowed with it. Herodotus regards Helen as a second Aphrodite and places the source of his story in Egypt. Ptolemaeus (3,7,7) calls Helen the daughter of Aphrodite and an Egyptian inscription from Nero’s time calls Helen the sister of Aphrodite [53]. Whether Helen was considered a double of Aphrodite or her sister, it is not unlikely that her cult had its position beside the cult of Aphrodite and enjoyed the same or similar encouragement by the royal family, especially Arsinoe Philadelphos [54].

Another source of information is the cult of the Dioscuroi. This cult may have been introduced and was certainly encouraged by Arsinoe. Arsinoe’s interest was probably related to her devotion to the Sanctuary of the Cabiri at Samothrace [55] when she was married to
Lysimachus, before her marriage to Philadelphos. The Cabiri were early equated with the Dioscuroi. The connection between Helen and the Dioscuroi is well established. We know that they rescued her from Aphidnai where Theseus had left her [56]; Euripides in the closing scene of the Orestes [57] imagines them as celestial beings "enthroned in the folds of aether" with their sister Helen who, like them, becomes after her assumption the saviour of mariners; Callimachus in his Pannychis [58] invokes Helen along with her brothers and the Themis that he mentions seems to be for Helen; Theocritus himself dedicates his Idyll 15 to the Dioscuroi where he considers them and consequently Helen protectors of singing and bestowers of the kAëos that comes from it. Finally in Callimachus' Ep. 228, the so-called Apotheosis of Arsinoe, the dead Arsinoe is carried off by the Dioscuroi to heaven just as Helen is in Euripides [59]. The above information shows first that Helen's name was inseparably connected with her divine brothers, and second that Arsinoe had something to do with both Helen and her worship with the Dioscuri in Egypt. Since Arsinoe was deified after death, her replacing of Helen in Callimachus' fragment can be taken as one more indication of Helen's divine status in Egypt. Whether Helen's worship was independent or connected with the cult of the Dioscuroi, is difficult to determine. As Farnell [60] notes: "In regard to the development of the cult of Helen, it owed much no doubt to the growth of the stronger Dioscuroi worship into whose circle she would be
naturally attracted”.

Given the above and especially Helen’s association with Arsinoe, it has often been suggested that the epithalamium was addressed or intended as an εγκύμλιον for the Ptolemies [61]. We know that Helen’s worship was very strong in Sparta and that the Ptolemies, perhaps Arsinoe most of all, favored Sparta politically. The alliance with Areus of Sparta before the Chremonidean War was a result of this, and, in the Attic Decree of Chremonides, Philadelphos is described as “following the inclination of his sister” who was already dead at the time [62].

If Theocritus was seeking some Homeric model as a way of flattering his royal patrons, Helen and Menelaus could offer many advantages. Menelaus’ visit to Egypt, to the island of Pharus, gave Alexandria major claim as a Homeric site. Homer says that Helen visited Egypt and it was the Dioscuroi who were immortalized in the lighthouse [63]. Most importantly, Helen and Menelaus were the only Homeric figures to escape their mortal fate and go to the Isles of the Blest (Od. 4.569). This would certainly make them particularly attractive antecedents for the Theoi Adelphoi. Proteus’ explanation of Menelaus’ Elysian destiny:

ουνεκα ἔξεις Ἑλένην καὶ σηλυ γαματὸς Ὀλος ἔσσι

(Id. 3.569)

reminds of the words of the maidens:

μοῦνος ἐν ἡμῖνεος Κρονίδαν οἶναν πευθεροῦ ἔξεις

(Id. 18.18)
In fact, Kuiper [64] has suggested that the Epithalamium like Callimachus’ Ec. 392 was intended for the marriage of Ptolemy and Arsinoe. Kuiper based his hypothesis on comparative evidence from Idulls 15 and 17. The description of Ptolemy as ἔνθοθομάς Πτολεμαῖος (Idull 17.103) reminds us of ἔνθοθτριῆς Μενελάου (Idull 18.1).

Arsinoe herself is compared to Helen (15.110) and the last lines of Idull 17 present the same idea as lines 19-20 of the Epithalamium:

αὐτός τ’ ἤθιμα τ’ ἄλοχος, τὰς οὕτις ἄρειν ὑμηφίου ἐν μεγάροις γυνὰ περιβάλλετ’ ἄχοστῳ

and:

Ζαυός τοι θυγάτηρ ὑπὸ τὰν μίαν ἱκετο χλαῖναν, οἵα Ἀχαιλάδων χαῖαν πατεῖ οὐδεμί’ ἕλλαν.

The Epithalamium does bear a close resemblance to Idull 17, perhaps closer than Kuiper has seen. Menelaus is not only called ἔνθοθτριῆς but he is also the younger son (17.64; 18.6). Helen herself is ἄγαμταν (18.5) as is Philadelphos (17.64). Menelaus is μῶνος ἐν ἡμιθέοις (18.18) as Philadelphos is μοῦνος... προτέρων (17.121f.) and the marriage-bed μίαν... χλαῖναι (18.19) recalls the ἐν...

Αἴξος (17.133) of Zeus and Hera. Mutual love is the attractive force (17.38-40 and 130; 18 54f.). Zeus is addressed as giver of ὂμοιος (18.52 and 17.75f.) and Aphrodite as guardian of marital fidelity (17.36-52 and 18.51f.).
We know that Ptolemy was not his father's eldest son. There were two older sons by a previous marriage who had rightful claims on the throne. We also know that by native Egyptian custom the Pharaoh's right to the throne derived from his position as husband of the female in a matrilineal succession. Arsinoe as Ptolemy's sister was also in line of patrilineal succession to their father. Thus Ptolemy's marriage to Arsinoe strengthened his claim to the throne just as Menelaus' Elysian destiny was due to his marriage with Zeus' daughter. One may remark, however, that the Idyll is not best suited to be the actual song celebrating the marriage of the Ptolemies. Even if Helen was worshipped in Egypt, Theocritus could not expect his audience to be ignorant of the traditional story. On the other hand, we know that the marriage of Arsinoe and Philadelphos would have been rather scandalous to the Greek eyes, and in fact Theocritus compares this marriage to that of Zeus and Hera (Idyll 17) to lessen its moral and religious effect. Helen and Menelaus, despite their late deification, do not constitute the best mythological exemplum for a wedding so much suspected and discussed. Furthermore, the comic treatment of Menelaus in the Idyll is not the one expected for a song addressed to the wedding of Theocritus' royal patrons. [65]

Let us now come back to the central question of the Epithalamium. What are the advantages of having Helen and Menelaus as the couple of a wedding song? Since we have seen that sad epithalamia are not unusual in antiquity,
Theocritus' decision to use a tragic couple in his song was in keeping with the tradition of the genre. Moreover, Theocritus is careful enough not only to skip over the sad or tragic events resulting from Helen's marriage but also to emphasize her deification. All evidence shows that Helen in Egypt, and more specifically Alexandria, was treated as a goddess. In this sense the reader who might have some ominous thoughts about her marriage to Menelaus, would also think of Helen's later deification.

There is nothing in the song itself to indicate that it was intended to be performed at a real wedding and external evidence rather disproves such a hypothesis. Therefore, if Theocritus had intended to write a poem elaborating on or experimenting with the mythological tradition, Helen with the ambiguities of her character would be an excellent choice. In fact what we see in the poem is that epic elements are often mixed with elements of the tradition of a divine Helen. The cult of Helen that originated in Sparta seems to have been transferred to a Ptolemaic environment. Theocritus does not need to assert that Arsinoe is Helen or Philadelphos Menelaus. The Ptolemies could certainly think of themselves on hearing the poem. Theocritus provides only the mythological landscape where the patrons could feel themselves welcome if they so wished. And Helen with the ambiguities of her character, in literature and cult, provided Theocritus an ideal figure with which to manipulate his audience's expectations as he practiced that learnedly playful art which we call "Alexandrian poetry".
NOTES

1. Cassandra is imagining that she is about to be married to Agamemnon in Apollo's temple and the god himself leads the choir. The irony is obvious. Cassandra is going to follow Agamemnon to Argos, not as his wife but as a slave, and there she will be murdered by Clytemnestra. The song itself is not joyful since Cassandra talks about tears and lamentations about her dead father and ruined country. She calls herself a "bride more fatal than Helen" and promises to kill Agamemnon (357-360)

2. In Apollonius Argonautica 4.1160 there is an indirectly reported marriage song sung under the threat of violence by Jason's warriors. Also in Catullus 64, 323-381 the hymeneal of Peleus and Thetis is interrupted by the violent description of Polyxena's sacrifice.

3. H. W. Smyth (Greek Melic Poets (London 1900), p.cxvii.) points out that "the introduction of a mythological element gave a certain divine attestation to the present happiness: the transference of a human institution to the divine sphere, the picture of the marriage festivals of the gods and heroes, such as Kadmos and Harmonia, Peleus and Thetis, or Menelaus and Helen, dignified the marriage of common people".


7. Theocritus' language contains many parallels to Sappho's Epithalamia. For specific examples see Gow, Idyll 18, pp. 349-361.

8. Gow, p.351

10. Sappho, 111, 115LP.

11. e.g. Idyll 11 (Polyphemus), Idyll 24 (Heracles)

12. Helen's superiority over her mortal husband must be considered a standard feature of her presentation among ancient authors. The domination of women over men is common in Theocritus' poetry. Helen overshadows Menelaus as much as does Alcmena in Idyll 24 or Berenice in Idyll 15 and 17.

13. Sappho 105a, 105c, 115 LP; Euripides IA 1058; Bion 1,88; Cat. 61.6ff.etc. The idea occurs in the rhetoricians. Menander advises the wedding orator that he may remind the pair, if it should be spring, that trees are now forming unions with trees (Περί κατευναστικοῦ, 408), or he compares the bride to a flower or a fruit and the groom to a tree (Menander, Περί 'Επιθαλαμίου, 404).

14. See Menander, Περί κατευναστικοῦ, 408, 410; For example, Sappho 104aLP; Catullus 61.192; 62.1-3,20

15. see e.g. H. Fritzscbe, Bursians Jahresh. 3 (1874), p.176

16. J. Rumpel, Lexicon Theocriteum (Leipsig 1879).

17. Kaibel, p.249

18. Sappho 103: καίροισα νύμφα, καίρετω δ' ὁ γάμβρος 105LP: καίρε νύμφα, καίρε, τίμει γάμβρε πόλλα

19. The adjective appears only here and reminds us of line 18. Also Od. 4.569.

20. Although according to the Scholiast, Helen and Menelaus had 4 children: Μενελάου δὲ καὶ Ἕλενος ἄνω- γραφονται παῖδες Σωτηφάνης Νικόστρατος καὶ Ἀἰθιόπεια.

21. e.g. Od. 4.207; 6.188


24. See Gowy, p. 354

25. Pausanias, 3.14.6

26. Pausanias, 3.15.3

27. See Bowra, pp.51ff.

28. Evidence may also be Hesychius’ entry: "Ἀωὶ θεοὶ οἱ ἐκ ἄρομον μετακομισθέντες εἰς Σομοθράκην καὶ Νήμνου.

29. There seems to be a further connection between Helen and the Νευκίππιδες. In the cult of the Leucippides (see, S. Wide, *Laconische Kulte* (Leipsig,1893) p. 331) two priestesses were called *poloi*.

30. Hesychius s.v. Άλεντια

31. Hesychius s.v. Κάμυαθαρα

32. Pausanias, 3.13.7

33. Hesychius s.v. Ἔνθρωποι

34. Gowy, p. 348

35. s.v. ἱπτ

36. Flowers blossoming in the spring, also in Theoc. 22.42; A.P. 10.5.3; A.P. 7.657-12.


38. Pausanias, 3.19.10. After the death of Menelaus, Helen came to Rhodes. Polyxo, the wife of Tlepolemus, an Argive by descent, who was queen of the island decided to avenge the death of Tlepolemus on Helen and sent her handmaidens, dressed as Furies, who seized Helen while she was bathing and hanged her on a tree.

39. Pausanias, 3.20.8

40. Pausanias, 3.15.3

41. Pausanias, 8.23.4
42. Pausanias, 8.23.6
43. Herodotus, 2.112
44. C.E. Visser, Gotter und Kulte im Ptolemaischen Alexandria (Amsterdam 1938), p. 44.
45. Plutarch, Moralia 857B
46. P. Ox. 1300.111/112
47. Step. Byz. 265.1 (Hecataios)
49. Fraser, Chapter 5, pp. 245-6.
50. Fraser, pp. 192,3
51. See note 46 above.
52. For a detailed discussion of this association see Fraser, pp. 197f.
53. Perdrizet, Ann. Serv. XXXVI 305.10 (SEG VIII500): Πλαούτας Ἡρακλῆου Ἐλέυθη ἠτελφῇ Ἀφροδίτης ('Ετοὺς) ε' Νέρωνος τοῦ κυρίου Τυθί λέ'
54. Arsinoe’s patronage of the cult of Aphrodite can be seen in Idyll 15 where a performance concerning the love of Aphrodite and Adonis is staged in the royal palace by Arsinoe.
55. L. R. Farnell, Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality (Oxford 1921), pp. 186f.
56. Pausanias 1.41.4. According to Pausanias (Theseus 34) and Pausanias (5.19.4) when the Dioscuri rescued Helen from Theseus at Aphidnai, they also captured his mother to be Helen’s servant.
57. Euripides, Orestes 1636-7
58. Callimachus, Fr. 221
59. Like Helen in Orestes 163ff.; Helen 1665f.
60. Farnell, p. 325


62. Fraser, Chapter 5, n. 378-9

63. Fraser, Chapter 1, pp.18f.

64. Kuiper, pp.226f.

65. The poet Sotades of Maroneia who expressed his feelings about the union of Ptolemy and Arsinoe was first imprisoned by Philadelphos and later killed by the admiral Patroclus.
CONCLUSION

The Helen who has emerged from this study is a complex and often contradictory character. Unlike other mythical figures who have more or less maintained their standard characteristics in classical literature - usually drawn from their Homeric appearance - Helen's presentation varies from one author to another depending on the function she performs in each particular context. There is no dispute that she was the most beautiful woman in the world and that she has exerted continuing fascination on all writers. Her treatment, however, by individual authors is usually affected by the context and always depends on the cause that the particular author wishes to plead. Although the outline of her story is basically the same it appears to have been open to literary invention and imaginative amplification.

We have seen that all classical works that centered on Helen deal with the question of her responsibility but they either avoid discussing the issue of her morality or they involve some sort of formal or informal debate which focuses on Helen's defense and ends with an explicit or implicit acquittal.

In the Homeric epics she plays a secondary role. Although Homer abstains from the description of her beauty her presence is continuously felt in both poems. On
hostile feelings towards her we are informed mostly through her own statements and repeated mentions of her sin [1] while there is no external manifestation of such feelings from the part of either the Greeks or the Trojans. Although she is conscious of shame, there is no personal guilt attached to her, since Aphrodite bears the real responsibility for her situation. The poet lifts his voice through Priam to exonerate beauty and proclaim Helen's innocence at her very first appearance at the Scaean Gate (11.3.164f.). The force or fate which has turned beauty into destructive fatality does not originate in Helen. Helen has come to be the cause of the war and its stake but the sin is not really hers. For the epic poet, the guilt lies with what R. Bespaloff called "the happy carelessness of the Immortals". [2]

The Cyclic Epics on the one hand, and Lyric Poetry and Drama on the other, approach the question of Helen's responsibility differently. The Cyclic Epics deal mainly, as far as we know, with the obscure and not explicit details of the story, and particularly what preceded the meeting between Helen and Paris. The role of Zeus in the outbreak of the Trojan War is clearly emphasized. [3] Lyric Poetry and especially Sappho and Alcaeus view the affair of Helen and Paris from their own particular standpoint. Sappho, who evades the moral issue, depicts Helen as the woman who materialized to perfection what to Sappho was the most beautiful thing, namely love. Alcaeus, on the other hand contrasts the story of Helen to the marriage of Peleus and Thetis in order to comment on a reality of
human life, i.e. divine intervention in human affairs. Stesichorus, composed a *Palinode* and claimed that Helen never went to Troy in an attempt to entirely exculpate her and erase the impact of his *Helen*. His version was apparently taken up by Euripides who used it to illustrate the brutal reality of the war fought for the sake of a cloud. Tragedy, in general concerned itself with the outcome of the Trojan War and the feelings of its victims towards Helen and Paris. However, even in the most adverse situations, when the context requires that Helen be considered responsible for the War and the misfortune of its victims, (e.g. *Iphigeneia*), poets do not directly blame her but they use her case to show the destructive role of divine intervention in human life. Gorgias and Isocrates realizing the elusiveness of causality in Helen’s case, devoted orations to her and showed that the judgment of Helen depends on the choice of arguments. Finally, Theocritus showed how classical tradition can be manipulated and become an artistic game in which even Helen and Menelaus can be the happy couple of a wedding song.

Why did classical authors care to establish Helen’s innocence? If we accept the theory of the “faded goddess” we may speculate that Helen’s worship was strong around Sparta at the historical period and authors felt that Helen should be treated with respect appropriate to a goddess. Our literary sources, however, treat Helen as a mortal. Clader’s theory of Helen as a Sun-princess may be well founded but it is not reflected in our literary
sources and it certainly does not explain why classical authors went into so much pain in order to absolve Helen from culpability.

There is always the possibility that Helen was never a historical figure and that her legend is a literary development, possibly in the initial phase a creation of oral literature based on multiple elements --folk-tale, cult practice and various "historical incidents" [4] not necessarily only those related to the Trojan War. War may be the favourite subject of epic poetry but the cruelty of war is not the most pleasant subject for a song unless this war is completely justified. It may very well have been that oral poets attributed the cause of the Expedition to the abduction of the most beautiful woman in order to lessen its dark aspects. [5] Helen, however, carried with her a long tradition as a goddess. This tradition mixed with poetic additions produced an ambiguous character. Homer's presentation intensified the debate and left open questions which prompted later authors to use the ambivalence of Helen's story for their own purposes. In fact it is the arguing for and against Helen's case which has continued the development of her story from antiquity until today.

The present study has shown that although Helen has traditionally been viewed as the fabled beauty who was stolen by the Trojan prince and became the cause of the Trojan War, ancient Greek authors felt that the blame for the Trojan War was not hers but that it was gods' wish or rather an expedition undertaken in the
illusion of an empire. To put it in the words of a modern Helen:

it could all have been hushed up by some half-witted diplomat if they'd had a mind to. But no, Troy must be taught a lesson - and beside, there was our balance of payment problems. So old feuds were patched, old enemies allied, and a hundred thousand men, even though it was a woman to blame as usual, died. [6]
NOTES


4. There may have been, for example, an incident in which a queen, possibly a Spartan Queen was stolen and recovered.

5. The destructive nature of beauty is almost a τοπός in Greek thought. One thinks of Paris (Il.3.54ff.) and Pandora whom Hesiod calls a "lovely evil" (Theog. 585). In the Trachiniae Deianeira and Iole are victims of their own beauty (25,465) as is Iphigeneia in Ili 20ff.

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