

HELEN IN *TROJAN WOMEN*:
MYTHOS vs. *LOGOS*



ABSTRACT: In epic and later literature, Helen is a consummate performer of tales and songs. This is an aspect that informs Helen’s defence speech in Euripides’ *Trojan Women*, in which she manipulates to her advantage a poetic tradition that was largely hostile to her. It is thanks to her skilful appropriation of poet’s tales that Helen, the supreme performer, albeit starting from a disadvantageous position, manages to carry the day in the debate against her opponent Hecuba and her sophisticatedly informed rationalistic argumentation.

1. BEFORE *TROJAN WOMEN*: HELEN AS A PERFORMER

IN ANCIENT GREEK poetic tradition, Helen is not only the supremely beautiful woman over whom the Trojan War was fought; she is also a consummate performer, a paragon of song-making virtuosity. Although, for us, this is one of the less pronounced aspects of Helen’s mythic persona, it is explicitly referenced in Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* 1308–15, where the Spartan ambassador, in a description of Spartan festivities, singles out Helen as the perceived leader of the chorus of Spartan maidens:

<ὄχ’> ἄτε πῶλοι τὰ κόραι
παρ τὸν Εὐρώταν
ἀμπαδίοντι, πυκνὰ ποδοῖν
ἀγκονίωαί, 1310

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ται δὲ κόμαι σείονται
 ἄπερ Βακχᾶν θυρσαδδῶᾶν καὶ παιδδῶᾶν.
 Ἀγῆται δ' ἅ Λήδας παῖς
 ἀγνὰ χοραγὸς εὐπρεπής.

1315

...when the young girls, like fillies, jump about near the Eurotas raising a cloud of dust with their feet, and shake their manes like bacchantes brandishing the thyrsus and frolicking around. Their leader is the daughter of Leda (= Helen), that holy, comely chorus-leader.

And in Theocritus 18.35–7, Helen's friends say that their former playmate, now newly wed to Menelaus, is the most accomplished lyre-player they know:

οὐ μὰν οὐδὲ λύραν τις ἐπίσταται ὧδε κροτῆσαι
 Ἄρτεμιν ἀείδοισα καὶ εὐρύστερνον Ἀθάναν
 ὧς Ἑλένα, τᾶς πάντες ἐπ' ὄμμασιν ἴμεροί ἐντί.

What's more, no one knows how to strike the lyre's strings, hymning Artemis and broad-breasted Athena, quite as Helen does, she whose eyes are the seat of all desire.

In fact, Helen's status as an exemplary performer is acknowledged already in the Homeric epics, albeit in less explicit ways. As pointed out by Linda Clader, all of Helen's appearances in the *Iliad* are associated with poetry.¹ Helen enters the Iliadic narrative (3.121–45) as a deviser of non-verbal narratives, as she is shown weaving the very subject of the *Iliad*: “the struggles (*ἀέθλους*) that horse-taming Trojans and bronze-clad Achaeans endured for her sake at the hands of Ares” (126–8). Insofar as she immortalizes the heroes' ordeals through an artistic medium, Helen is as much a teller of epic tales as Homer himself,² and the medium she chooses — textile weaving — is one associated with poetic composition already in the Indo-European tradition.³ A perceptive Homeric scholium says as much:

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1. Clader (1976) 6.
 2. Cf. Roisman (2006) 10: “The focus of Helen's weaving [...] is not on herself but on the heroes who suffered. In a sense, this makes her as much the artist who immortalizes their actions as is Homer”. For a list of scholars discussing the significance of Helen's weaving for Iliadic poetics see Heath (2011) 71 n. 5.
 3. Durante (1960); West (2007) 36–8.

ἀξιόχρεων ἀρχέτυπον ἀνέπλασεν ὁ ποιητῆς τῆς ἰδίας ποιήσεως, “the Poet has created a worthy archetype [or “model”] of his own poetry”.⁴ As Melissa Mueller observes, the textile Helen weaves becomes “a shorthand for the Trojan War itself”: it is through her agency that the military conflict was occasioned, and it is through her agency that the war is immortalized in a visual narrative, itself enshrined in the epic narrative.⁵

Helen is not the author only of visual narratives. Famously, she performs a verbal narrative as well, an archetypally epic one, later in the *Iliad*, when she recites, in the *Teichoskopia*, what amounts to a Catalogue of the Greek warriors fighting on the Trojan field.⁶ What is more, as Clader (1976) 11 observes, Helen “does have the last long speech in the *Iliad*”, namely the final lament at Hector’s funeral (24.761–6) — a lament which by virtue of its effusive praise for the dead hero may be seen as representing “the beginnings of the memorial of oral poetry” that Hector was subsequently to win.⁷ Finally, in *Iliad* 6.354–8, Helen predicts that the story of her elopement with Paris will be the subject of future songs:

ἀλλ’ ἄγε νῦν εἴσελθε καὶ ἔζεο τῶδ’ ἐπὶ δίφρῳ
 δᾶεο, ἐπεὶ σε μάλιστα πόνος φρένας ἀμφιβέβηκεν
 εἴνεκ’ ἐμεῖο κυνός καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρου ἔνεκ’ ἄτης,
 οἷσιν ἐπὶ Ζεὸς θῆκε κακὸν μόρον, ὡς καὶ ὀπίσσω
 ἀνθρώποισι πελώμεθ’ αἰοίδιμοι ἐσσομένοισι.

(Helen to Hector:) “Come now, brother-in-law, come on in and sit on this couch. For it is your heart above everyone else’s that is drowned in pain because of my folly, bitch that I am, and Alexander’s. It is some evil fate that Zeus ordained for us, so that generations to come may make songs out of our story.”

When, in the passage above, Helen notoriously refers to herself as a “bitch” (356 εἴνεκ’ ἐμεῖο κυνός), she may be implicitly casting herself as an obliterator of epic *kleos*: in Homeric epic, dogs are most often scavengers preying

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4. Σ bT to *Il.* 3.126–7 (I 381.72–3 Erbse). Another textile woven by Helen, namely the robe she gifts to Menelaus in *Od.* 15. 123–30, has also been interpreted as a means of immortalizing female *kleos* independently of male control, as well as of forging social alliances separate from but complementary to those of men: see Mueller (2010), esp. 10–14.
 5. Mueller (2010) 12–13.
 6. See further Clader (1976) 9–11; cf. Suzuki (1989) 40.
 7. Quotation from Clader (1976) 11. In a similar vein, Pantelia (2002) 23 has argued that Helen’s position as the final mourner is relevant to “her unique understanding of the importance of *kleos* and of poetry as a means of conferring *kleos*”.

on the flesh of dead warriors, thereby depriving them of the *kleos* associated with a “beautiful death” and an honourable funeral.⁸ If Helen is an eliminator of heroic *kleos*, who has doomed countless warriors to inglorious annihilation, then it is to be expected that future songs will confer on her a negative sort of *kleos*.⁹

Helen’s role as a consummate performer acquires a more intriguing aspect in *Odyssey* 4.277–9. Here, Menelaus narrates how Helen tried to lure the Greek warriors out of the Trojan Horse by imitating their wives’ voices in order to trick them into believing that they were being called by their actual bedmates:

τρὶς δὲ περίστειξας κοῖλον λόγον ἀμφαφώωσα,
ἐκ δ’ ὄνομακλήδην Δαναῶν ὄνόμαζες ἀρίστους,
πάντων Ἀργείων φωνήν ἴσκουσ’ ἀλόχοισιν.

You walked around the hollow ambuscade (= the Trojan Horse), feeling it all over with your hands. And you called the best of the Danaans by name, making your voice like that of the wives of all those Argives (i.e., those hidden in the Horse).

On that occasion, it was Odysseus who saved the day by preventing the other heroes from responding to Helen’s call (*Od.* 4.280–8). Thanks to his timely action, Odysseus effectively saved the entire epic tradition of the Trojan War from obliteration, as he made sure that the Fall of Troy would, after all, take place.

Ostensibly, Helen’s public mimicry of other people’s voices is a clever trick meant to deflect the Greek warriors from their objective and thus to alter the outcome of the Trojan War. But voice-mimicry is also a distinct performance mode, involving an apparently primitive but (as we shall now see)

8. See Clader (1976) 17–18; Graver (1995), esp. 58–9; Worman (2001) 21, 23. Taking a rather different approach, Blondell (2010), esp. 9–10, 14–16 thinks that Helen’s self-disparagement is a means of pre-emptively disarming her potential accusers, as well as of empowering herself by acknowledging her own active (and destructive) part in the events that led to the Trojan War.

9. In this respect, I beg to differ from Pantelia (2002) 25, who claims that “Helen tries to comfort Hector by reminding him that epic characters receive their reward in the songs of future generations”. I can see no hint of a “reward” in the future songs that Helen foresees. For a more apposite formulation see Clader (1976) 16–17: “With Helen’s comment that they all suffer so that they may become things of song for future men, Homer sharpens the focus on the tragedy of the conflict and thus the tragic nature of his own poem”.

legitimate type of *mimēsis*, which Helen employs to forestall or at least fundamentally to modify any future song performances that might, as we saw, take as their subject-matter her less-than-savoury conduct and the bloodshed and destruction it eventually caused. Voice-mimicry as a legitimate performance mode is famously attested in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (156–64), where the Delian Maidens, expert singers in the poetry of the past (their song makes mention of “the men and women of old”), are said to be able to imitate “the voice and babble of all people” with amazing verisimilitude:¹⁰

πρὸς δὲ τόδε μέγα θαῦμα, ὄν κλέος οὔποτ’ ὀλεῖται,
 κοῦραι Δηλιάδες Ἐκατηβελέταο θεράπναι·
 αἶ τ’ ἐπεὶ ἄρ’ πρῶτον μὲν Ἀπόλλων’ ὑμνήσωσιν,
 αἴτις δ’ αὖ Λητώ τε καὶ Ἄρτεμιν ἰοχέαιραν,
 μνησάμεναι ἀνδρῶν τε παλαιῶν ἠδὲ γυναικῶν 160
 ὕμνον αἰίδουσιν, θέλγουσι δὲ φῦλ’ ἀνθρώπων.
 πάντων δ’ ἀνθρώπων φωνὰς καὶ βαμβαλιαστὴν
 μιμεῖσθ’ ἴσασιν· φαίη δέ κεν αὐτὸς ἕκαστος
 φθέγγεσθ’· οὔτω σφιν καλῆ συνάρησεν ἀοιδή.

And besides, this great wonder, the fame of which will never perish: the Maidens of Delos, the servants of the Far-shooter, who, after first hymning Apollo, and then in turn Leto and Artemis profuse of arrows, turn their thoughts to the men and women of old and sing a song that charms the peoples. They know how to mimic all people’s voices and their babble;¹¹ anyone might think it was he himself speaking, so well is their singing constructed. (tr. West 2003, 83)

An ability to imitate a variety of sounds is admiringly predicated also of Magnes, the poet of Old Comedy, as evidence of his supreme poetic skill, in the *parabasis* of Aristophanes’ *Knights* (520–5):

10. Cf. Worman (2001) 34.

11. In line 162, most scholars favour *βαμβαλιαστὴν*, “babble”. However, Peponi (2009) argues in favour of the variant reading *κρεμβαλιαστὴν*, “rattling with castanets”; according to her, *κρεμβαλιαστὴς* denotes the rhythmic clacking of *krembala* (which may be identical to *krotala* or “castanets”) to govern the stylized movements of the chorus. According to Peponi, the Delian maidens’ ability to “represent” (her preferred translation of *μιμεῖσθ’*, as opposed to the more common “imitate”) the voices and “the rhythmic patterns of all people” is an expression of their ability to deploy their exceptional vocal and kinetic skills to make for a unified choral performance.

τοῦτο μὲν εἰδὼς ἄπαθε Μάγνης ἅμα ταῖς πολιαῖς κατιούσαις,
 ὃς πλεῖστα χορῶν τῶν ἀντιπάλων νίκης ἔστησε τροπαῖα·
 πάσας δ' ὑμῖν φωνὰς ἰεῖς καὶ ψάλλων καὶ περὶ γλῶσσης
 καὶ λυδίζων καὶ ψηγίζων καὶ βαπτόμενος βατραχειοῖς
 οὐκ ἐξήρκεσεν.

He (= Aristophanes) knew all too well what happened to Magnes as soon as his hair went grey — Magnes who had erected so many trophies of victory against his rival choruses! All voices did he utter for you, he strummed on the lyre, he flapped his wings, he turned Lydian, he played the fruit fly, he even painted himself frog-green — all in vain!

Such mimicry may strike modern audiences as a trick fit for the vaudeville,¹² but in the texts cited above it clearly represents a valid performance mode, which was evidently integrated into prominent Greek festivals such as the Delian *panēgyris* or the Athenian Dionysia. When Helen uses her mimetic performance in front of the Trojan Horse to pre-empt future song-performances on the fall of Troy and (inevitably) on her significant share in the disaster, she effectively takes on the role of an *avoidos* who attempts to rival Homer himself by trying to forestall and neutralize Homeric epic and, indeed, the entire Trojan epic cycle.

2. HELEN IN *TROJAN WOMEN*: FROM *LOGOS* TO *MYTHOS*

In his *Encomium of Helen*, the sophist Gorgias proposes to refute the poets who blame Helen; he admits, however, that his task is rendered difficult by the “credence” (*πίστις*) generally attaching to the poets’ tales about her — tales which, Gorgias implies, are unreliable.¹³ In *Trojan Women*, the Euripidean Helen, in the context of an *agōn logōn*, or rhetorical debate, with

12. And not only modern audiences: in Plato, *Republic* 396b, 397a, it is a base poet who attempts to “imitate everything” (*πάντα ... μιμεῖσθαι*), including thunder, the noise of wind, or of machinery, the sound of musical instruments, the cries of animals etc. Cf. also Aristotle, *Poetics* 26.1461b26–35.

13. Gorgias 82 B11 Diels/Kranz = D24 Laks/Most (§2): ... ἐλέγξει τοὺς μεμφομένους Ἑλένην, γυναικὰ περὶ ἧς ὁμόφρονος καὶ ὁμόφρονος γέγονεν ἢ τε τῶν ποιητῶν † ἀκουσάντων † πίστις κτλ. On Gorgias’ dismissal of the poets’ tales in *Encomium of Helen* see Morgan (2000) 125, 128–9.

Hecuba, appears to take on an even more difficult task than the one Gorgias had set himself: she defends herself not by refuting or even side-lining the poetic tradition about her, as Gorgias does, but by manipulating it to her advantage.¹⁴ To Helen's adoption of the modalities and tropes of (principally epic) poetry Hecuba responds, in her speech for the prosecution, with rational arguments, which are often reminiscent of the sophists' criticisms against traditional religion. In *Trojan Women*, and in this *agōn logōn* in particular, Helen is portrayed as anything but a sympathetic character; moreover, contrary to normal forensic practice, she is made to speak first, which weakens her position rhetorically, since her opponent has the last word.¹⁵ Still, as we shall see, she appears to win the day in the debate, largely thanks to her adroit manoeuvring of poetic (particularly epic) ideas and themes.

2.1 HELEN'S *APOLOGIA PRO VITA SUA*

Even before she embarks on her defence speech, Helen draws attention to her status as a performer of tales by presenting her situation in terms reminiscent of an *aidos*' performance: she calls her being forcibly seized by Menelaus' henchmen "a fearsome prelude", *φοροίμιον μὲν ἄξιον φόβου* (*Troades* 895), using the technical term that signifies a prelude to a performance of epic song.¹⁶ Precisely such a performance is what Helen is about to launch into — a performance in which she will subtly manipulate epic tradition.

In her opening statement, Helen claims that Hecuba's giving birth to Paris, and the boy's being allowed to live despite his mother's ominous dream, were "the origin of these evils" (*Tro.* 919–22). The phrase Helen chooses, namely *ἀρχὴν . . . τῶν κακῶν* (919), is a well-known Homericism used to signal pivotal moments in the narrative, when events are about to take a turn for the worse.¹⁷ In Helen's case, however, the narrative

14. It is doubtful — but also immaterial for my argument — whether Gorgias' *Encomium* is one of the hypotexts (Genette 1997: 5) underlying Helen's defence speech in *Trojan Women*: the matter is complicated by the uncertain chronology of Gorgias' work. See the detailed treatment of Spatharas (2002). For differences of emphasis between Gorgias and Euripides see Lloyd (1992) 100–1.

15. See Lee (1976) *ad* 912–13; Spatharas (2002) 167; Rabinowitz (2017) 208. There are, however, tragic examples of the stronger case in a debate being presented first: Lloyd (1984) 304.

16. The point is made by Munteanu (2010–2011) 140–41, who sees the *agōn logōn* between Helen and Hecuba as a kind of competition between epic performers.

17. See esp. *Il.* 5.63–4 *δς* (sc. Harmonides) *καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρωι τεκμήρατο νῆας εἶσας | ἀρχεκά-*

introduced by ἀρχὴν . . . τῶν κακῶν, is a rather idiosyncratic one. For one thing, it is not concerned with the “facts” established by poetic tradition but presents rather a “what-if”, counterfactual kind of history. For another, it eventually identifies the origins not of evil but of blessings for Greece. In Helen’s “historical” fantasy (*Tro.* 924–37), her elopement with Paris was actually beneficial to Greece, as it saved it from barbarian rule; for if at the beauty contest Paris had chosen Athena or Hera instead of Aphrodite, he would have received as a reward not Helen but, respectively, either the generalship of a victorious Trojan expedition against Greece or absolute rule over both Asia and Europe (including, of course, Greece). If Greece is free from barbarian control, then, she owes it to Helen.

For her revisionist version to work, however, Helen needs to modify a crucial detail in the traditional tale of the Judgement of Paris. She must have Paris being offered, as a reward, military victory (from Athena) or sovereignty (from Hera) specifically *over Greece*. This crucial detail is absent from all other known versions of the myth, which probably go back to the *Cypria*: it may well be a Euripidean invention.¹⁸ Intriguingly, however, the “historical” fantasy sketched by Helen, in which the Trojans could have laid waste to Greece rather than the other way around, is not entirely without parallels. In the pseudo-Euripidean *Rhesus* (469–84), the title character proposes to

κοις, αἱ πᾶσι κακὸν Τρώεσσι γέγοντο, where the ultimate responsibility for the Trojan War is again laid on Paris; cf. also *Il.* 11.603–4 δ δὲ (sc. Patroclus) κλισίῃθεν ἀκούσας / ἔκμολεν ἴσος Ἀρηΐ· κακοῦ δ’ ἄρα οἱ πέλεν ἀρχή. The Homerism is also adopted by Herodotus, esp. 6.97.3 αὐται δὲ αἱ νέες (viz., the ships sent by the Athenians to help with the Ionian revolt) ἀρχὴ κακῶν ἐγένοντο Ἑλλησί τε καὶ βαρβάροισι. See also Lloyd (1984) 305–6. There is no confusion here between *post hoc* and *propter hoc* as maintained by Croally (1994) 94 n. 49, 139 after Vellacott (1975) 140 (*non vidi*): as Lee (1976) *ad* 919, reminds us, identifying Paris and his Judgement as the ἀρχὴ κακῶν is a traditional motif (e.g., *E. Hel.* 23–43, *Andr.* 274–308 with Stevens [1971] 127).

18. In Cratinus’ *Dionysalexandros*, according to the *hypothesis* to that play preserved in *P. Oxy.* 663.14–16, Paris was offered “unshakable tyranny” (τυραννίδος ἀκινήτου) by Hera and “bravery in war” (εὐφροσύνας κατὰ πόλεμον) by Athena. In Isocrates’ *Encomium of Helen* (10.41), Hera offered “kingship over the whole of Asia” (not Europe!) and Athena “victory in war”. And Apollodorus (*Epit.* 3.2) less specifically says that Hera promised Paris “kingship over all” (βασιλείαν πάντων) and Athena “victory at war” (πολέμου νίκην). See Stephanopoulos (1980) 96–8 (standard form of the myth probably deriving from the *Cypria*); Stinton (1965), 36 = (1990) 44–5 and Erbse (1984) 69–70 (crucial changes introduced by Euripides to facilitate Helen’s argument); cf. Scodel (1980) 101. For a more sceptical approach see Lloyd (1984) 306, who doubts that there even *was* a standard version of the Judgement of Paris story. At any rate, Helen’s variation of the myth is subtle enough to prevent her argument from “actually contradicting the tradition in a way that would make her argument seem obviously false” (Lloyd [1992] 102–3).

Hector to launch, as soon as they annihilate the Greek aggressors, a military expedition against Greece by way of revenge. Similar fantasies are toyed with in Virgil's *Aeneid*. In 2.192–4, in the context of Sinon's lying tale, it is said that if the Trojans managed to carry the Trojan Horse inside their walls, then Asia would wage a mighty war against Greece; and in 11.285–7, Diomedes' envoys to Latinus claim that, if Troy had borne two more men like Aeneas, then the Trojans would have reached the towns of Argos, "and Greece would be mourning a reversed fate" (*et versis lugeret Graecia fatis*). In her manipulation of mythic tradition, then, Helen makes use of a device which other poets also toyed with, certainly after Euripides and perhaps even before him.

A further point Helen makes in her defence is introduced with the familiar rhetorical technique of *hypophora* (*subiectio*): Helen anticipates an objection Menelaus might raise (938–9) and then proceeds to refute it (940–4).¹⁹ Helen admits that the anticipated objection is a most obvious one:²⁰ why did she secretly elope with Paris? To this, she responds that she succumbed not to Paris himself but to the mighty goddess who accompanied him, namely Aphrodite. It is not entirely clear whether Helen means this literally or figuratively: her wording may suggest either that Aphrodite was physically at Paris's side or that she merely lent him her divine support.²¹ Either way, Helen's claim has precedents in the poetic tradition. Famously, Aphrodite is physically present at an erotic encounter between Helen and Paris in *Iliad* 3.383–448. There, Aphrodite herself, disguised as a trusted old servant of Helen's, encourages her to join Paris in his bed; Helen immediately sees through the disguise and disgustedly refuses to comply, but is eventually coerced to do so when faced with Aphrodite's threats (3.413–7).²² But even Aphrodite's non-physical influence over Helen has epic precedents too: in *Odyssey* 4.261–6, Helen claims that her elopement with Paris was the result of the "blindness" (261 ἄτην) Aphrodite caused her; remarkably, Menelaus fully confirms his wife's account (266 ναὶ δὴ ταῦτά γε πάντα, γύναι, κατὰ μοῖραν ἔειπες).

19. On *hypophora* see Lausberg (1998) §§ 772–5.

20. *Tro.* 938: ἀτὰ τὰν ποσὶν with Kovacs (2018) *ad loc.* Less forcefully, Lee (1976) *ad* 938–9 translates "the matter at hand".

21. Cf. Scodel (1980) 96–7.

22. See also *Il.* 3.164–5, where Priam absolves Helen of all responsibility and blames the gods for her actions; and in *Il.* 6.355–7, it is Helen herself who blames Zeus for her and Paris' "evil doom"; cf. Kovacs (2018) *ad E. Tro.* 940–4.

The Euripidean Helen concludes her argument concerning Aphrodite's power over her by pointing out that she could not have resisted the one goddess who is superior even to Zeus himself (945–50). The idea that sexual desire, in the form of Aphrodite or Eros, is irresistible for both gods and humans is a ubiquitous one in the Greek poetic tradition from Hesiod down to Hellenistic poetry and even later.²³ Once again, then, Helen takes on the role of a consummate performer, who cleverly manipulates epic tradition to bolster her case. Much as she may be disliked by both her onstage and her theatrical audience, she has the power of poetic lore on her side, a power too strong to be overcome by Hecuba's rationalist, almost sophistic argumentation (on which more below). In this case in particular, as Nancy Worman has argued, Helen pre-empts Hecuba's ethical arguments by insisting that she had been deprived by what is a central component of moral action, namely freedom of choice: "Since Helen's central position rests on the absence of choice in the face of desire, on the overwhelming attraction of physical and verbal beauty, she preempts ethical debate, structuring her arguments like an Iliadic narrative that follows the journey of her body, compelled by the forceful persuasion of Aphrodite".²⁴

As the final point of her defence speech (951–58), Helen addresses what she terms a "specious argument" (951 *εὐπρεπῆ λόγον*): why did she not escape from Troy once Paris was dead and her "god-devised marriage" (953 *θεοπόνητά μου λέχη*) was no more? To this she responds that she did, in fact, repeatedly attempt to escape, lowering herself with ropes from Troy's battlements, but she was discovered by Trojan watchmen before she could make off. There seems to be no precedent, in epic or elsewhere, for Helen's attempt to escape, and this detail may well be yet another Euripidean invention. Even if it is, there are adequate precedents for it. Suffice it to recall Helen's clandestine anti-Trojan role in the story she narrates in *Odyssey* 4.240–64: when Odysseus entered Troy disguised as a beggar, in order to kill Trojans and gather intelligence (257–8), Helen was the only one to recognize him, and eventually she persuaded him to reveal to her "all the

23. See the passages cited by Stinton (1976) 135 n. 58 = (1990) 219 n. 58; add also those cited by Davies (1991) 137. A similar argument ('even Zeus is conquered by desire') is made by the Lesser Logos in Aristophanes' *Clouds* (1080–2) in support of unrestrained lechery. It is often assumed that the Aristophanic passage echoes sophistic discourse; but the assumption is gratuitous. The satire both of *Clouds* and of other comic texts is directed against "intellectuals" or "experts" broadly defined rather than specifically against the sophists; and echoes of sophistic thought are likely to be, at best, distorted; cf. Carey 2000.

24. Worman (1997) 183.

designs of the Achaeans” (256 πάντα νόον κατέλεξεν Ἀχαιῶν), on the condition that she would not make his identity known to the Trojans. As a result, Odysseus was able to go ahead with his mission, thereby naturally causing great wailing among the women of Troy; but Helen herself “was glad in her heart”, for she had already decided to go back home, having realized the folly of abandoning her homeland, her daughter, and her husband (259–64). Albeit indirectly the cause of much Trojan bloodshed, Helen’s role in this episode is largely passive: she merely refrains from making Odysseus’ presence known to the Trojans. By contrast, Euripides’ Helen purports to take on a more active role and even risks her life in attempting a dangerous getaway. Taking her cue from a famous Homeric episode, the Euripidean Helen, ever the consummate myth-maker, weaves an almost romantic story of captivity and audacious, if failed, escape.

2.2 HECUBA’S RESPONSE: THE FAILURE OF RATIONALITY

Hecuba’s speech for the prosecution is an excellent example of rationalist argumentation, often with sophistic inflections. It has rightly been said that her arguments “suggest a worldview that [...] has little room for piety as traditionally conceived”.²⁵ Her speech enjoys a twofold advantage which appears, at first sight, certain to ensure that she will carry the day: not only does she address an audience biased against Helen but she also has the last word over her opponent (cf. p. 57 with n. 15 above). Still, Hecuba’s speech fails to produce the effect she desires, which is to induce Menelaus to put his wife to death (*Troades* 907–10).

Although forceful and rhetorically adroit, and despite the twofold advantage mentioned in the previous paragraph, Hecuba’s speech begins with a handicap. She does not even attempt to refute Helen’s first argument to the effect that Hecuba’s giving birth to Paris was the origin of the present evils. There would be no point in trying to disprove this claim before a theatrical audience who would have already watched the first part of the trilogy, *Alexandros*, which featured the ominous dream Hecuba had while pregnant

25. Kovacs (2018) 265. As further evidence for Hecuba’s sophistic aspects see, e.g., her prayer (*Troades* 884–88) with its echoes of Ionian cosmological speculation (Lloyd (1984) 310; Kovacs (2018) *ad loc.*), or her etymologizing of Aphrodite’s name (*Tro.* 989–90) in a manner reminiscent of Prodicus (Kovacs [2018] 987–90).

with Paris.²⁶ Equally important, in *Troades* itself (597–600), Andromache has already placed the responsibility for Troy’s misfortune squarely on Paris and on the malice of the gods.²⁷

Hecuba’s argumentation fares only marginally better in her response to Helen’s further claim, namely that her elopement with Paris saved Greece from the barbarian rule that his choice of one of the other goddesses’ rewards would have entailed. Against this claim Hecuba offers a specious counterargument (*Tro.* 971–74): it is incredible that Hera and Athena would have been so foolish as to abandon their favourite cities of, respectively, Argos and Athens to barbarian rule. Although seemingly plausible, Hecuba’s argument is belied by epic tradition, which as we have seen is Helen’s major weapon. In *Iliad* 4.50–67, Hera says that she would gladly allow Zeus to destroy her three favourite cities, Argos, Sparta, and Mycenae, provided he would be willing to grant her the destruction of his own favourite city of Troy.²⁸ The Iliadic passage, Ruth Scodel argues, was “clearly in [Euripides’] mind when he composed Hecuba’s argument”.²⁹ The same passage, we may add, will have been in the audience’s mind as well, and this would present them with an obvious and potent counterargument to dispute and even invalidate Hecuba’s point.

In the same context, Hecuba argues (*Tro.* 975–82) that it would be absurd to imagine that either Hera or Athena were so vain about their looks as “to engage in the frivolous extravagance of a beauty contest” (975).³⁰ What need did these goddesses have, says Hecuba, to flaunt their beauty, when neither Hera would be likely to seek a husband better than Zeus nor Athena, the eternal virgin, to wish to marry? Still, in the context of myth, Hecuba’s argument, reasonable as it may seem to more enlightened spirits, falls flat on its face. For it is belied by Cassandra’s prophecy in *Alexandros*, the first play of the Trojan trilogy, in which the Judgement of Paris must have featured prominently, to judge from Ennius’ version of the Euripidean play (*Alexander* 17(d).47–9 Jocelyn):

26. See the ancient *hypothesis* to *Alexandros* in *P.Oxy.* 3650 col. I, 4 *Ἐκάβης καθ’ ὕπνον ὄψεις*. Cf. Meridor (2000) 17–18; Rabinowitz (2017) 208. Against the assumption that Euripides’ tetralogy of 415 BCE consisted of thematically connected plays see, however, Koniaris 1973. For the most recent case in favour of a connected tetralogy see Karamanou (2016).

27. Cf. Croally (1994) 93; Kovacs (2018) 262; even Dubishar (2001) 355, who is otherwise dismissive of Helen’s argumentation, admits that this particular point is a strong one.

28. See Scodel (1980) 101 n. 45; Kovacs (2018) *ad* 973–4.

29. Scodel, *l.c.* (n. 26 above).

30. Tr. Kovacs (1999) 109.

*iudicavit inclitum iudicium inter deas tris aliquis:
quo iudicio Lacedaemonia mulier Furiarum una adveniet,*

Someone pronounced a famous judgement among three goddesses: as a result of this judgement, a woman from Sparta will come as one of the Furies.³¹

To the original audience, Hecuba's argument will inevitably have sounded hollow, as it clashed so blatantly with the first play of the trilogy.³²

Further, in her response to Helen's claim that she succumbed to Aphrodite's irresistible power, Hecuba (*Tro.* 983–6) takes her opponent's words to signify that Aphrodite had physically accompanied Paris (cf. p. 59 above) and proceeds scornfully to brush the suggestion aside as an absurdity. Surely, Hecuba says, Aphrodite did not need to go all the way to Sparta to achieve her purpose of sending Helen to Troy, when she could have simply done as much without budging from her celestial abode.³³ Hecuba's point is valid from the point of view of sophistic rationalism and its criticism of traditional religion and myth; it is in this context that one can fully appreciate her dismissal of Helen's invocation of Aphrodite's power as a sham intended to justify her own lust and greed for barbarian luxury (987–97).³⁴ Still, as Nancy Worman has pointed out, Hecuba fails to address the substance of Helen's argument, namely that "resistance to divinely inspired desire is not possible, regardless of the literal location of the god [...] Helen's claim that Aphrodite is responsible for her actions does not depend, as Hecuba thinks it does, on the literal presence of the goddess".³⁵ What is more, Helen once

31. Cf. Scodel (1980) 97; Karamanou (2016) 357; Kovacs (2018) 263.

32. Cf. Lloyd (1992) 106, who (despite finding Hecuba's speech adequately forceful) admits that her dismissal of the Judgement of Paris story flies in the face of all known versions of the myth. Rabinowitz (2008) 135 is among the few scholars who doubt that Hecuba carries the day in the debate with Helen: "while modern secularists might agree [viz., with Hecuba's rationalizing scepticism], it is not clear that she would have been perceived as the victor by an ancient audience". For scholars who declare Hecuba the winner, as well as for more cautious approaches, see Kovacs (2018) 262. For a much too clear-cut dichotomy between a wholly negative Helen and a wholly positive Hecuba see Dubishar (2001) 342–57.

33. Hecuba may be echoing here Xenophanes' conception of the divine as eternally immobile, for whom it would not be fitting to move here and there (21B26 Diels/Kranz = D19 Laks/Most); see Lloyd (1984) 312; (1992) 107.

34. See Guthrie (1971) 226–34, esp. 230 on the *Troades* passage.

35. Worman (1997) 196; cf. Croally (1994) 148, 157.

again has poetic tradition on her side. In the *Iliad*, for instance, it is not uncommon for gods physically to intervene by entering the fray, and Aphrodite is no exception. She intervenes in the duel between Paris and Menelaus to save the former from the latter's hands and carry him off to safety and to Helen's bosom (*Il.* 3.373–83). And when her son Aeneas is wounded by Diomedes, the goddess rushes to whisk him off the battlefield (*Il.* 5.302–18); she is even wounded herself in the wrist by Diomedes and has to drop her son, who is subsequently rescued by Apollo (5.330–54).

The rest of Hecuba's speech is marred by casuistry and pettifoggery. I shall limit myself to three representative cases. Firstly, in her argument in 998–1001, Hecuba takes it for granted that Helen claims she was “forcibly” (998 βίᾳ) carried off by Paris. But all that Helen said (940–50) is that she was overpowered by Aphrodite into eloping with Alexander. In other words, what Hecuba responds to here is “not the defendant's argument but a straw man”.³⁶

Secondly, Hecuba claims (*Tro.* 1015–22) that she “repeatedly” (1015 πολλὰ πολλάκις) advised Helen to abscond with her help (1018 πέμψω συνεκκλέψασα) to the Greek camp, but the latter allegedly resisted, for she preferred the aggrandizement her status as a barbarian princess offered her.³⁷ By identifying petty ambition and love of luxury as the principal motives behind Helen's refusal, Hecuba evidently attempts to belittle the importance of Aphrodite's influence, which Helen had claimed as a major impulse for her behaviour. Hecuba's argument would have carried instant conviction if Paris were dead, and Helen free from Aphrodite's power and thus inexcusable in her failure to return to her husband. But Hecuba specifies that one of the inducements she used to prevail on Helen was that Paris could marry someone else (1016–17 οἱ δ' ἐμοὶ παῖδες γάμους | ἄλλους γαμοῦσι).³⁸ She thus undermines her own argument by leaving open the very real possibility that Helen's refusal was due to the irresistible hold Aphrodite continued to have over her rather than to self-serving motives.

Thirdly, to Helen's final point, namely that she repeatedly tried to escape to the Greek camp, Hecuba offers no real counterargument. Instead,

36. Quotation from Kovacs (2018) *ad* 998–1001, who also offers arguments against Scodel's (1980: 144) proposed deletion of the lines.

37. This is a point Hecuba also makes in an earlier part of her speech (990–7): bedazzled by Paris' finery, Helen followed him to Troy, where she expected to indulge in extravagant expenditure. For the idea cf. E. *Cyc.* 182–5; Hor. *Carm.* 4.9.13–16.

38. On οἱ δ' ἐμοὶ παῖδες as an “allusive” plural referring principally to Paris see Kovacs (2018) *ad* 1016–17.

as Kovacs puts it, she resorts to the subterfuge of “shift[ing] the ground to the question why Helen did not try to commit suicide” as any honourable woman supposedly would have done in her position (*Tro.* 1010–14).³⁹ In so doing, Hecuba ends up lending a sort of *e contrario* support to Helen’s case: if she cannot disprove Helen’s claim concerning her escape attempts, then the audience is allowed to surmise that Helen’s story must be essentially correct.

A major point arising from the foregoing observations is that Hecuba’s argumentation gradually disintegrates into specious reasoning, which seems designed to weaken her case subtly but unmistakably. Although starting off from a rhetorically advantageous position, armed with the weapons of sophistic rationalism, Hecuba eventually fails to ensure her opponent’s conviction. Her rationalistic, almost sophistic discourse is worsted by Helen’s mythically informed and mythically inflected argumentation. By redeploying her traditional persona as a consummate *aidos* and unrivalled performer (see section 1 above), Euripides’ Helen weaponizes *mythos* and succeeds thereby in neutralizing Hecuba’s *logos*.

2.3 *HYPOPHORA*: HELEN AND THE SOPHISTS

Taking a leaf out of Helen’s book (cf. p. 59 above), I shall conclude my argument by offering a sort of *hypophora* of my own to forestall a potential objection to my general thesis. The objection I anticipate is this: is it really accurate to claim, without further qualification, that Helen’s speech is simply opposed to sophistic rationalism and remains completely unaffected by sophistic discourse?

As we saw above (p. 57), it is conceivable, though not provable, that the Euripidean Helen’s *apologia* self-consciously grafts itself upon such sophistic attempts to exonerate Helen as Gorgias’ *Encomium of Helen*. Rather than renouncing the poetic tradition about Helen as Stesichorus famously did in his *Palinode*, both Euripides and Gorgias explicitly reference it and accept it as the context within which they choose to make their case for Helen. It is important to underline that Gorgias would not be the only sophist to associate himself with the modalities of mythic narrative. Suffice it to recall Protagoras’ myth of Prometheus in Plato’s *Protagoras*, or Prodicus’ myth of Heracles as recounted in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, or Hippias’ moralizing

39. Quotation from Kovacs (2018) *ad* 1010–14.

dialogue between Nestor and Neoptolemus, which supposedly took place after the fall of Troy.⁴⁰ Sophists also engaged actively with poetic tradition in an attempt “to appropriate the cultural authority and respectability of poetry”.⁴¹ If sophists could appropriate myth and poetry as instruments to further their own purposes, then the Euripidean Helen’s weaponizing of myth will not have been perceived as being too different from contemporary sophistic practice. This would mean that my distinction between Helen’s mythically inflected argumentation and Hecuba’s “sophistic” rationalism would be neither as clear-cut nor as watertight as I have made it out to be.

I submit that that there is a crucial difference between the use of myth by the Euripidean Helen on the one hand and by the majority of sophists on the other (Gorgias being the exception that proves the rule); and that difference, I argue, is so fundamental that it suffices to dissociate Euripides’ Helen from fifth-century sophistic discourse. In her defence speech, the Euripidean Helen preserves the familiar outline of traditional myth and its basic premises, even though she may otherwise manipulate it or imperceptibly twist its details. In Helen’s account, the Judgement of Paris did take place pretty much in the form in which it has been handed down in mythic tradition;⁴² Aphrodite shows unabashed favouritism towards her protégés as she does in epic and elsewhere; and everyone (including Zeus) is prey to sexual desire, just as typically happens in the mythic and poetic tradition. By contrast, sophists like Hippias, Protagoras and Prodicus typically engage in a wholesale overhaul of mythic material, from which they end up retaining only a few familiar figures as signposts to throw into higher relief their radical departure from traditional mythical templates. Thus, in Hippias’ dialogue, Neoptolemus, who is eager to learn from wise Nestor about the “fine pursuits” (*καλὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα*) a young man might devote himself to in order to gain distinction, is evidently a very different character from the bloodthirsty, sacrilegious brute who killed aged Priam on Zeus’ altar.⁴³ In a

40. See, respectively, Protagoras 80C1 Diels/Kranz = D40 Laks/Most (= Plato, *Protagoras* 320d–322d); Prodicus 84B2 Diels/Kranz = D21 Laks/Most (= Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.21–34); Hippias 86A9 Diels/Kranz = D 10 Laks/Most (= Plato, *Hippias Maior* 286a–b).

41. Hence, e.g., their efforts in Homeric exegesis: see Morgan (2000) 90 (whence the quotation), 94–105 (on the sophists’ philologic and exegetic activities).

42. For a subtle deviation see, however, p. 57 with n. 17 above.

43. Morgan (2000) 109–10 supposes that the Neoptolemus who seeks Nestor’s advice has already slain Priam, since Hippias’ dialogue takes place after the fall of Troy. But as Morgan remarks (although she eventually rejects this hypothesis), Hippias may well have avoided the incongruity of having a sacrilegious murderer seek moral advice by simply omitting or ignoring Neoptolemus’ impious behaviour.

similar vein, Protagoras' Prometheus myth — more accurately, a speculative account of the origins of society disguised as a mythic tale — retains from the traditional tale only the theft of fire, and relegates the traditionally central episode of Prometheus' punishment to what is almost an afterthought: “later, as they say, Prometheus was punished, through Epimetheus' fault, for the theft”.⁴⁴ And Prodicus' Heracles is a far cry from his anger-prone, hedonistic counterpart in myth — so much so that we would be justified in saying that he has undergone a complete makeover.⁴⁵ It may well be, as Kathryn Morgan argues, that Prodicus' *Hercule moralisé*, who chose the rough path of Virtue over the easy life promised by Vice, represented in fact a development of traits already present in earlier traditions — e.g., in Pindar, whose Heracles rid the world of evildoers and monsters and founded the Olympic Games.⁴⁶ But even the Pindaric Heracles, for all his beneficent aspects as a culture hero, is not always immune to the violence and brutality traditionally associated with him.⁴⁷

By comparison to the three aforementioned sophists, Gorgias seems to cut a solitary figure: as we have already remarked, in his *Encomium of Helen*, far from radically remaking the traditional myth, he chooses to work within its communally accepted framework. His purpose is not to refute traditional narratives about Helen but to use them as a background against

44. Plato, *Protagoras* 322a: Προμηθεά δὲ δι' Ἐπιμηθεά ὕστερον, ἥπερ λέγεται, κλοπῆς δίκην μετῆλθεν. Morgan (2000) 135–6 argues plausibly both that Protagoras' account of the origins of society must have been a response to a proliferation of similarly speculative accounts in the late fifth century (cf. Kerferd [1981] 139–62) and that Plato's report of it must be substantially accurate. However, her conclusion that Protagoras used “a currently popular myth about the origins of society” is a non sequitur: he may just as well have fabricated the myth himself, either from whole cloth or at least with a large amount of personal invention.

45. Cf. Morgan (2000) 107: Prodicus “pre-empts that entire tradition and gives himself narrative priority over any Herakles we think we know”; on Prodicus' Heracles see also Galinsky (1972) 101–3. A less radical approach may have been taken by Antisthenes, who used perhaps traditional episodes of the Heracles myth (such as his encounters with Chiron and Prometheus), which he manipulated to suit his moral message; see Morgan (2000) 114–15; cf. Galinsky (1972) 106–7.

46. See Pike (1984).

47. Cf., e.g., Heracles' ambush and murder of the brothers Kteatos and Eurytos and his utter destruction of King Augeias and his city in Pindar's *Olympian* 10.27–38 — an episode whose unsavoury aspects are underplayed by Galinsky (1972) 32. Significantly for Heracles' duality even in Pindar, the murderous acts lead to the foundation of the Olympic Games, which the hero institutes by offering to the gods the best portion of the booty obtained in his murderous exploits (see Liapis [2020] 15). In Bacchylides, by contrast, Heracles cuts a distinctly humanized figure: Galinsky (1972) 25–9.

which to demonstrate, by means of his own sophisticated prose, that Helen is innocent even in the context of the traditional poetic accounts of her acts. What Gorgias wishes to establish “is that his art can claim the same power of charm and persuasion (*θέλξις καὶ πειθώ*) as poetry possesses”.⁴⁸ And in so doing, he demonstrates the sovereign power of *logos*, so much so that his speech becomes, in effect, an encomium of *logos* rather of Helen herself and a demonstration of Gorgias’ own skills and methods in the art of persuasion.⁴⁹ In this respect, Gorgias’ speech appears to provide a parallel for the Euripidean Helen’s more intensive and broad-ranging engagement with traditional myth and poetry as tools for her defence and eventual exoneration.⁵⁰

3. EPILOGUE: MYTH, REASON, AND DIVINE INSCRUTABILITY

In the debate between Helen and Hecuba, a central point of contention is the clash between opposing perceptions of divinity. As we saw above, Helen, on the one hand, relies heavily on the traditional, poetically sanctioned image of the gods as beings who do not consider it above themselves to meddle in human affairs or fall prey to sexual lust. On the other hand, Hecuba offers, in response, a sanitized, rationalistic version, in which the gods cannot possibly stoop so low as to concern themselves with petty human desires, or (worse) to share them: they can only remain in splendid isolation, breathing the rarefied air of their Olympian abode.

There can be little doubt that Hecuba’s vision of the gods will have appealed to enlightened minds. In addition, it has the advantage of according quite well with the stern moralism Athena expresses in the prologue in relation to Ajax’s blasphemy: fickle as it may seem to Poseidon (*Troades* 67–8), Athena’s change of heart towards the Greeks is firmly motivated by strong moral considerations, namely by her disgust at Ajax’s sacrilegious crime in her own temple and at the failure of the Greeks to punish him for his deeds

48. Quotation from Duncan (1938) 405.

49. Segal (1962), 102; cf. Worman (1997) 171, 175 on Gorgias using the figure of Helen as a fulcrum for his abstract argumentation on “the subjectivity of the viewer, the power of the persuasive image, and what can thus be known to be true” (quotation from p. 171). That Gorgias’ speech is not in fact an encomium of Helen is pointed out already by Isocrates in his own *Helen* (§ 14–15).

50. Cf. Worman (1997) 189–95 on Helen using her body as essentially a leitmotif around which she structures her speech, often with mesmerizing cadences and bedazzling devices redolent of Gorgianic stylistic patterning.

(*Tro.* 69–71). Still, appealing as it may be, this image of the gods as champions of morality and guarantors of justice is belied by the eventual outcome of the action: Helen will avoid punishment and Hecuba, by contrast, will be led away to captivity.

Are we then to dismiss the gods as an irrelevance, or as impotent human fancies with no power to impose moral justice? The question is to be answered in the negative — and not because this might offend against pietistic sensibilities but because the play itself offers an alternative, much more complex conception of the divine. Shortly before the debate between Helen and Hecuba, Menelaus declares his resolve to kill Helen — but not until they have reached Greece (*Tro.* 876–83). Sensing that Menelaus may be faltering, Hecuba reacts by breaking into an impromptu prayer:

ὦ γῆς ὄχημα καπὶ γῆς ἔχων ἔδραν,
 ὅστις ποτ' εἶ σύ, δυστόπαστος εἰδέναι,
 Ζεὺς, εἴτ' ἀνάγκη φύσεως εἴτε νοῦς βροτῶν,
 προσηυξάμην σε· πάντα γὰρ δι' ἀφόφου
 βαίων κελεύθου κατὰ δίκην τὰ θνήτ' ἄγεις.

O Thou, support of the earth, who hast Thy seat upon the earth,
 Zeus, whoever Thou art, hard to read,
 Whether a necessity ordained by nature or the brood of men's minds,
 'Tis to Thee I offer this prayer. For treading a soundless path
 Thou steerest to righteousness all things mortal.

(*Tro.* 884–8)

Hecuba's prayer surprises Menelaus, who pronounces, in effect, “unusual” (*Tro.* 889 *εὐχὰς ὡς ἐκαίνισας θεῶν*). No doubt, many members of the original audience may have felt, as we do, that a prayer is not the first thing one should expect at this moment — a short speech to strengthen Menelaus' resolve might be better suited to the circumstances. Still, unusual or not, ill-fitting or not, the prayer introduces an all-important image: that of an inscrutable Zeus, who cannot be apprehended by the limited resources of the human intellect and remains impossible to subsume to human mental categories. This is precisely the point of Hecuba's seemingly idle speculation about whether Zeus may be a necessity of nature or the product of mortal minds: far from merely reflecting fifth-century philosophical theories⁵¹

51. On which see Lloyd (1984) 310 nn. 42, 43.

or giving “a reductive account of Zeus”,⁵² these possibilities are implicitly negated by the tenor of Hecuba’s prayer, which is one of earnest devotion, and raised in order to show that Zeus is to be neither described nor circumscribed by any kind of attribute. And even though Hecuba wishfully ends her prayer on a confident note (Zeus will eventually arrange things according to justice, *κατὰ δίκην*), her hopes will soon be shattered when it will become apparent that Helen will escape the consequences of her action.⁵³ What remains of Hecuba’s prayer, then, is the overall image of the supreme god as essentially unknowable — an image which cannot be reconciled with human perceptions of justice or morality, or anything else for that matter: the divine remains fundamentally alien, unapproachable, and impenetrable. Accordingly, the moral universe of the play remains uncompromisingly contradictory: its attitude is one of *aporia*, or perhaps of epistemic *epokhē*, a suspension of judgement resulting from the human inability to conceive the divine.⁵⁴ On the one hand, the prevailing mood is one of almost uninterrupted grief both at the destruction of Troy and the succession of intra- and extra-dramatic deaths (Hector, Priam, Polyxena, Astyanax), and at the prospect of a life of captivity in Greece — a fate relentlessly bemoaned both in the last stasimon (*Tro.* 1060–99) and in the final kommos (*Tro.* 1287–1332). On the other hand, Menelaus’ failure to kill Helen there and then, and his ridiculous shilly-shallying (cf. *Tro.* 876–83, 1036–41, 1046–59), not only provoke Hecuba’s (and, no doubt, the audience’s) consternation, not only make him the living proof of Helen’s argument that resistance to erotic attraction is futile,⁵⁵ but also trivialize the momentous issue of Helen’s

52. Quotation from Lloyd (1992) 107.

53. Cf. Meridor (1991/2) 19: “The short-lived hope for Helen’s death elicits the only Trojan utterance in the play that discerns a pattern of divine justice in the events”. But the comforting thought of divine justice is just as short-lived as the hope for Helen’s death.

54. This accords well with the play’s unusual structure, in which the prologue looks like an epilogue and the ending offers no real closure: see Dunn (1993), esp. 33: “If *The Trojan Women* lacks conventional dramatic structure, it is because the play deals with events and experiences which lack a coherent or comforting structure”.

55. Cf. Worman (1997) 197: “If Menelaus is the test case (although not a very bright one) for the claim that resistance to the force of desire is possible, he fails to support it”. Lloyd (1992) 111, stresses Menelaus’ repeated declarations of his decision to kill Helen once back in Greece as proof of his determination; but at the same time he admits that Menelaus’ decision is “odd” and raises a “superfluous and confusing possibility”, which allows Euripides “the greatest possible scope for leaving [Helen’s] fate uncertain”. This is all that is needed for the audience to surmise that in repeatedly professing his determination Menelaus surely doth protest too much. Cf. Dubishar (2001) 350–2.

responsibility for the countless lives lost in the Trojan War and of her punishment for those deaths.⁵⁶

Albeit often reduced (especially on the stage) to an anti-war morality play, *Trojan Women* is much too complex to allow such monolithic labeling. On the one hand, it gives full throat to the horrors of war without the slightest hint of understatement; on the other, it interrogates and problematizes our perceptions of, and attitudes to the mass slaughter and misery occasioned by war, by discouraging easy moralizing and the comforting certainties we might be tempted to foist on the messy, tangled, complicated state of human affairs.⁵⁷ In this respect, *Trojan Women* is as relevant in today's world as it was in 415 BCE.

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56. When Hecuba attempts to dissuade Menelaus from sailing back to Greece on the same boat as Helen, presumably to avoid succumbing to her charms and foregoing his vengeance against her, he initially pooh-poohs her suggestion with a lame joke (*Tro.* 1049): is it because Helen has put on weight that she must not be allowed to board the same ship as himself? Even Lloyd (1992) 111, admits here that Menelaus' "fatuous response raises doubts about his seriousness." Cf. also Stinton (1965) 38–9 = (1990) 46–7 for the trivializing tone of the debate ("a tone almost of burlesque").

57. Against a simplistically moralizing reading of *Trojan Women* see Worman (1997) 198–200.

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