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HELEN IN THE *ILIAD*;
CAUSA BELLII AND VICTIM OF WAR:
FROM SILENT WEAVER TO PUBLIC SPEAKER

HANNA M. ROISMAN



Abstract. Homer creates Helen as a complex and suffering figure with a good mind, who strives for autonomy, expression, and belonging, within and despite the many constraints to which she is subject. The first part of the paper focuses on the constraints within which Helen operates: she is a captive and possession, she is subject to the wishes of the gods, and she is an abhorred foreigner viewed as the cause of suffering and strife. The second part examines her six encounters in the epic to show how she maneuvers within those constraints while retaining and increasingly asserting her own personhood.

IN THE *ILIAD*, AS IN THE *ODYSSEY*, Helen is repeatedly referred to as the woman for whose sake the Trojan War was fought.¹ This paper argues that Helen is more than that: that Homer creates a complex and suffering figure with a good mind, who strives for autonomy, expression, and belonging, within and despite the many constraints to which she is subject.² The first part of the paper focuses on the constraints within which

¹ *Iliad* 1.159–60; 3.126–28, 156–57; 4.173–74; 6.344–58; 7.350–51; 9.339; 19.325; 22.114–16; 24.762–74; *Odyssey* 4.235–89; 11.438; 14.68–69; 17.118–19; 22.226–30; 23.218–21.

² Reckford 1964, 12: “Rachel Bepaloff’s statement that of all the figures of the poem she [Helen] is the severest, the most austere, serves nicely to dispel misty ideas of Helen as ‘eternal feminine,’ beautiful, lightminded, irresponsible.” Taplin 1992, 97: “From her very first participation Helen is established as an exceptional person, far more than merely a sex-object or a *femme fatale*.” For critical scholarly views of Helen, see Ebbott 1999, 14, 17; Graver 1995, 53–59, assumes that there must have been a story of a shameless Helen. Cf. Ryan 1965.

Helen operates. The second examines her six encounters in the epic to show how she maneuvers within those constraints while retaining and increasingly asserting her own personhood.

MULTIPLE CONSTRAINTS

Helen is depicted within a framework of multiple constraints in the *Iliad*. She is a captive and possession in a world in which women are possessions. She is subjected to the wishes of the gods in a world ruled by the gods. And she is an abhorred foreigner viewed as the cause of suffering and strife, a disadvantage she shares with no one else in the epic.

Women as Possessions

In the environment of the *Iliad*, women are possessions, to be bartered or fought over, but are not free agents. This does not mean that they are all literally slaves. Andromakhe and Hekabe are obviously not, and Helen's formal status, like theirs, is that of a free woman and wife. Despite this, women's existence as possessions is established in Book 1.³ Most of the book concerns two quarrels over the possession of women taken in wartime. The first is over Khryseis, whom Agamemnon had taken in battle and initially refuses to return to her father in exchange for ransom. The second, between Agamemnon and Achilles, erupts when Agamemnon is compelled to return Khryseis and, in compensation for his loss, appropriates Briseis from Achilles. Briseis, for her part, had been given to Achilles as a *geras*, war prize, after Achilles had killed her parents. The quarrels, notably, are between men. Neither of the women has a say about whose hands she falls into. The idea of woman as possession is reinforced in 9.139–40, when Agamemnon tells Odysseus to offer Achilles his choice of the most beautiful Trojan women second to Helen and in 9.281–82, when Odysseus relays the offer to Achilles. In short, the *Iliad* presents a world in which women are property, to be taken, traded, quarreled over.⁴

³For female war captives treated in the *Iliad* as inanimate objects, see Farron 1979, esp. 27–30. For a general discussion of the theories about women's oppressed status, see Rubin 1975.

⁴Achilles compares Agamemnon's taking Briseis to Paris' taking Helen (*Il.* 9.334–43). Reckford 1964, 10–11, sees the "stealing" of Helen by Paris and of Briseis by Agamemnon as reflections of the theme of bride-stealing that he believes must have permeated versions of the oral narrative.

The goddesses (e.g., Hera, Aphrodite, Iris) are obvious exceptions. Helen, however, is situated in the same category as mortal women, despite her descent from Zeus. In her first mention in the epic, Nestor presents her as an unhappy captive longing to escape from Troy. Addressing the Akhaian troops who had run to the ships, he urges every soldier to stay on and fight “until after he has lain in bed with the wife of a Trojan to avenge Helen’s struggles and her groans” (ὀρμήματά τε στοναχάς τε, 2.355–56).⁵ By analogy to the type of vengeance that he proposes, Nestor seems to be implying that Helen has been abducted and raped.⁶ This is an exaggeration that the Homeric muse herself does not support. In 6.292, Helen says that Paris “led” (ἀνήγαγεν) her to Troy, using the same verb that Achilles uses to describe Agamemnon leading the Akhaians to Troy (9.338). In 3.174, Helen tells Priam that she “followed” (ἑπόμην) Paris to Troy, using the language of a wife who follows her husband (cf. *Od.* 22.324). In other words, Helen depicts her coming to Troy as more of an elopement than an abduction. Nonetheless, the description of her suffering implies that, even if she had once wanted to be in Troy, she no longer does.

This depiction of Helen as captive recurs when the poet explains Menelaos’ motives for fighting using the same terms as Nestor had: “and above all others was he eager in heart to avenge both Helen’s struggles and her groans” (2.589–90).⁷ In this connection, it is of interest to note the ambiguity of Helen’s account of her history in her speech at Hektor’s funeral, where she says that “my husband, godlike Alexandros, . . . led (ἄγαγε) me to Troy” (24.763–64). When used in the context of marriage,

⁵Lattimore translates ὀρμήματά (2.356) as “longing to escape.” According to Postlethwaite 2000, this translation “suggests that she was taken by Paris from Sparta against her will: the more usual version of the story (*Odyssey* 4.262–63) is that she was a willing partner in her abduction. Nestor uses whatever argument the troops are likely to accept, and if that entails a Helen who is lamenting and longing to escape, then he does not hesitate to picture her so.” As I argue, the *Iliad*’s presentation of Helen’s volition differs from that of the *Odyssey*. See Kirk 1987 on 2.356: “Admittedly the grammar is ambiguous, in that the struggles ὀρμήματά (rather than ‘cares’ as the exegetical scholiasts thought), could in theory either *belong* to Helen or be hers in an objective sense, that is, *be about* her or be undergone by others *because* of her.” He goes on to argue that it is unlikely that the struggles and groans were Helen’s. My reading is that they were.

⁶This is not to say that the prospect of raping the Trojan women was not also raised as an inducement for the troops to fight to the end. On the incompatibility of the suggestion that Helen was raped with what Helen says about her own condition, see Farron 1979, 16, n. 5.

⁷Kirk 1987, on 2.590, points out that, grammatically, the struggles and groans could also be Menelaos’. That is: “to avenge his struggles and groans for the sake of Helen.”

the verb—albeit in the middle voice—can refer to a groom leading his bride to a new home. But it can also refer to carrying off a captive or war spoils (cf. *Od.* 22.324).

Helen is not a slave in the literal sense that Khryseis and Briseis are. Nonetheless, she shares with them a measure of captivity. Her social standing is obviously higher than theirs, but her liberty is restricted. Even if she came to Troy willingly, which is not entirely clear, she is obviously not free to leave. At no point in the poem is it even hinted that Helen can simply climb onto a Greek ship and sail home with the army. The very thought seems to be beyond the world of the poem.

Helen's position as possession is made plain when Iris comes to fetch her to witness the duel that Menelaos and Paris will fight over her. Looking forward to a decisive end to the fighting, Iris eagerly informs Helen that "you shall be called the beloved wife of the man who wins you" (3.138). It is not only that Helen is not to have any choice in the matter; it is also that she is clearly viewed as an object who may be fought over and who will become the lawful possession of the winner. Much the same objectification informs the herald Idaïos' reference to Helen when he summons Priam to make the sacrifices for the upcoming duel. Within Helen's earshot, Idaïos tells Priam that Menelaos and Paris are going to fight "concerning a woman/wife" (ἀμφὶ γυναικί, 3.254). The fact that he does not even bother to mention Helen by name, as he does her two husbands, further highlights her position as an object. His repetition of the generic designation in the next line (3.255) makes it even clearer.

The motif of Helen as possession recurs in various forms throughout the *Iliad*. We see it again in Agamemnon's concern that, if Menelaos dies of his wound, his men will go home and "leave to Priam and the Trojans their boast, even Argive Helen" (4.173–74). The implication is that Helen, as a valuable object, should not remain in the possession of the Trojans.⁸ At various points in the epic, Helen is referred to in close conjunction with other possessions. The poet tells us that Paris had brought Helen back from Sidon on the same journey as that in which he brought the beautiful robe that Hektor's mother offers to Athena (6.288–93). In the Trojan assembly gathered to discuss her possible return, Antenor urges the return of Helen and her possessions in much the same breath (7.350). Paris refuses to return Helen but expresses his readiness to return all the other possessions he had taken from Argos (7.362–64). The impression is that Helen is a particularly valuable commodity to him. Later in the epic,

⁸For Helen being treated as an object, see also Farron 1979, esp. 16–17, 21.

Hektor contemplates returning Helen and the rest of the possessions his brother had brought back from Greece (22.114). The same link is made by the Akhaians, when Diomedes urges the Argives to refuse to accept either Helen or the possessions offered by the Trojans (7.400–401).

The idea of woman as possession and the idea of woman as loved blend together in the *Iliad*. Agamemnon claims to like Khryseis, whom he possesses through capture, better than he likes (προβέβουλα) his wife (1.113–15). Akhilles goes further. In refusing Agamemnon's gift offerings (as well as his agreement to return Briseis), he declares that "anyone who is good and of sound mind loves (φιλέει) his own woman and cares for her, as I too loved (φιλέον) her with all my heart, even though she was the captive of my spear" (9.341–43). There appears to be a good deal of bluster in the claims of both heroes. Certainly neither has demonstrated any love for his captive, and their quarrel is undoubtedly motivated more by pride than by depth of feeling for the women. Their claims show a lack of distinction between the idea of a woman as a person who is loved and a woman as an object that is possessed. At most, love seems to raise the value of the possession.

The manner of the depiction of women in the *Iliad* does not necessarily mean either that Homer consciously viewed women as possessions or that he was criticizing the societal view of them. We have no way of knowing. The fact that women are possessions—and, by definition, unfree—is simply a given in the *Iliad*. It is a given that is made salient in the epic—emphasized in the opening book and returned to throughout—and thus forms a crucial element of the background against which Helen's character is drawn. Even the fates of Andromakhe and Hekabe, respected wife and royal mother, are determined far less by their own actions than by what the men in their lives, whether husband or son, do.

Subjugation to the Gods

Throughout the *Iliad*, the actions, motives, and conflicts of the gods are related by the narrator, along with those of the humans. The gods interact with the human characters, giving them orders and advice, and actively interfere in human events. Hera and Zeus essentially plot the course of the Trojan War, with Zeus ensuring Trojan advances until Akhilles returns to the battlefield, and Hera, with Zeus' agreement, predetermining the final rout of Troy. The younger gods, Apollo, Athene, and Aphrodite, contribute to the action as they pursue their own interests in the human world or act on behalf of Hera or Zeus. The incidents are too numerous

to tell, the involvement of the gods so extensive and obvious that it need not be proven.

Here is not the place to delve into Homer's theology or into the complex question of how much freedom it allotted to human beings. In any case, others have already done so.⁹ What is relevant here is that, in most cases, the directives of the gods are not incongruent with the wishes of the people with whom the gods interact. Akhilles heeds, without opposition, Athena's orders to refrain from attacking Agamemnon. Agamemnon is persuaded by the lying dream that Zeus sends because he is eager to fight, as the figure in the dream urges him to do (2.23–34). Diomedes, young, rash, and daring, happily takes courage from Athena's urging him on in battle (5.124–32). On the whole, while the narrative shows a great deal of divine intervention and a good measure of divine control over the course of events, it does not show omnipotent gods governing every human action, or human characters constrained and oppressed by the divine will.

Helen is an exception. As will be discussed in greater detail below, Helen is shown being ordered around first by Iris and, then, more seriously, by Aphrodite. Whether she is happy to follow Iris' commands is not stated, but she clearly chafes under the compulsion of Aphrodite. Yet she does as both goddesses command.

Abhorred Foreigner and Cause of Suffering and Strife

In the *Odyssey*, Helen explicitly acknowledges her part in the elopement that led to the Trojan War. Relating her encounter with Odysseus after the sack of Troy, she tells Telemakhos that she was pleased by the wreckage: “for already my heart was turned to go back to my home, and I grieved for the blindness that Aphrodite gave me when she led me here from my dear native land . . .” (4.259–62).¹⁰ In the *Iliad*, her volition is less clear.¹¹

⁹E.g., Otto 1954, *passim*, but esp. 261–86.

¹⁰Penelope later affirms Helen's volition in the elopement, as she tells Odysseus that Helen would not have “lain in love with an outlander, if she had known that the warlike sons of the Akhaians would bring her home again to the beloved land of her fathers” (23.218–21). Most scholars read this passage, in which Penelope explains why she maintained her chastity in Odysseus' long absence, as a later insert, inconsistent with Penelope's character and position. See, however, Roisman 1987, where I argue that these words accurately express Penelope's motives and feelings.

¹¹See Kirk 1987, on 2.356, about different views on how the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* depict Helen.

Although, as will be seen below, she repeatedly reproaches herself for her conduct, she nowhere acknowledges her willful participation in her transport to Troy in the *Iliad* with the clarity with which she asserts it in the *Odyssey*.

Logically, the depiction of Helen as a captive and possession and constrained by the gods should free her of ascriptions of culpability for her transfer to Troy and for the ensuing war and suffering. From the social perspective, however, it does not. Most Trojans and at least some Greeks apparently blamed Helen for willfully eloping with Paris and igniting the Trojan War.¹² This view is most clearly described by Helen herself, when, at Hektor's funeral, she says that Hektor and Priam were the only persons in her husband's entire family who were kind to her and that Hektor was the only one in all of Troy who did not shrink from her in revulsion (24.767). This accusation is restricted to the royal family and may be thought to be tainted by Helen's subjectivity. But it is implicitly corroborated by the old men at the Scaean gate, who, as they see Helen approaching, observe among themselves: "There is no blame to the Trojans and the strong-greaved Akhaians for suffering woes for so long for such a woman" (3.156–57). At the same time as this statement exonerates the Trojans and Akhaians for fighting over Helen, it also places the onus of events on them, not Helen. If Helen had not generally been viewed as culpable, there would have been no need or incentive for these men to make clear that they themselves did not hold her responsible. Nor would there have been any point in Priam's exculpation a few lines later: "You are not culpable in my eyes. . . ." (3.164).

But Helen also has a few defenders. The old men at the gate, explaining that they do not blame the Trojans for fighting for Helen because "terribly she resembles to the eye immortal goddesses" (3.158), place the blame on Helen's beauty (not her will) and, by implication, on the passion that it engenders in men. Priam, after specifically exonerating Helen, assigns responsibility directly to the gods, stating: "the gods, I think, are to blame, who stirred up against me this baneful war with the Akhaians" (3.164–65). Nestor and Hektor place the blame on Paris. Nestor, as indicated above, implies that Helen was abducted by Paris. Hektor makes the case for Paris' responsibility more explicitly, calling Paris "evil . . . , handsome, woman-crazy, deceiver" (3.39) and charging that "having mixed with foreign people, you led from a distant land a good-looking woman,

¹²Reckford 1964, 17, sees the overall power of Aphrodite over Helen as "the power of fate."

a daughter-in-law of warriors who wield a spear, and to your father and city and all the people a great disaster” (3.48–50).

All in all, the tenor of the *Iliad* seems to support the view of Helen as a victim—of her beauty, of the gods, and of Paris. Other than Helen herself (whose self-blame will be discussed below), the only person in the *Iliad* we hear actually speaking ill of her is Achilles, who calls her “bone-chilling (ρίγεδονή) Helen” (19.325).¹³ The fact that he makes the statement soon after Patroklos is killed, however, makes it the personal view of a man who is grieving and distraught (so much so that he even wishes Briseis dead, 19.59) and not a considered assessment with general validity. On the other hand, Hektor’s view of Paris as a womanizing fop responsible for the abduction or seduction is supported by the poet’s presentation of Paris as a blusterer, coward, dandy, and robber, who retreats into the crowd in a panic as soon as he sees Menelaos jump from his chariot to fight him (3.30–32). On the whole, the text channels the reader’s anger and indignation toward Paris and harnesses the reader’s sympathy for Helen.

At the same time, the more tolerant view of Helen is clearly the minority view among the characters and is held by relatively few persons in Helen’s social sphere. Moreover, even those who view her kindly are wary of her or, more precisely, of the destructive power of her beauty. Thus, the old men at the gate suggest that she be returned to her homeland lest she endanger them and their children in Troy: “But all the same, in spite of her being such a woman, let her go back in the ships, so she be not left here as a bane to us and our children” (3.159–60).

Essentially, the epic’s treatment of Helen’s culpability highlights her isolation and vulnerability as an unwelcome stranger in a foreign land, unwelcome even among those who are kindly disposed to her. It shows yet another form of the constraints surrounding Helen.

FROM SILENT WEAVER TO PUBLIC SPEAKER

Helen appears in only six encounters in the *Iliad*, with a different audience in each. As the encounters progress, she reveals more and more aspects of her personality and becomes increasingly assertive, increasingly her own person, and increasingly a part of the society in which she is an outcast. The remainder of this paper discusses her progression through the six encounters.

¹³ On Achilles’ comment and choice of word, see Clader 1976, 19–22; Suzuki 1989, 20; Ebbott 1999, 4. On Helen as cause of war and scapegoat, see Suzuki 1989, 35–43.

1. Helen and Iris (3.121–45)

The first we actually see of Helen is in Book 3 when Iris, taking the form of her sister-in-law Laodike, comes to fetch her to witness the duel that will determine whose possession she will be. Up until then, we have only heard about her: from Nestor, Hektor, and Paris. The filter creates a certain dramatic expectation but also mimics the way in which Helen is defined by others before she has the chance to define herself and thus points to the challenge she faces in any effort at autonomy, self-definition, or self-assertion.

This scene shows Helen silently obeying the somewhat abrupt summons of Iris, a minor god, to “go there” (δεῦρ’ ἴθι, 3.130) to watch the duel. The fact that Iris approaches Helen and gives her directives without having been bidden to do so by any of the major gods, as would be expected given that Iris is a messenger, suggests that even a minor goddess can do with Helen what she wants.¹⁴ That Iris is disguised as Helen’s sister-in-law Laodike points to Helen’s subjugation to her husband’s family as well. The scene further shows Helen acting under the influence of Iris, who, we are told, “cast a sweet yearning into Helen’s heart for her former husband and her city and her parents” (ὥς εἰποῦσα θεὰ γλυκὺν ἴμερον ἔμβαλε θυμῷ / ἀνδρός τε προτέρου καὶ ἄστεος ἠδὲ τοκῆων, 3.139–40). Although this longing for home is observed again in later scenes (e.g., 3.173–76) and comes across as both strong and genuine, the emphasis on Iris having implanted it suggests that even Helen’s emotions are not entirely her own at this point in the narrative.

At the same time, the scene shows Helen asserting herself as her own woman—creative, independent, and responsible—through the act of weaving. Iris comes to Helen in her chamber as she is weaving a purple robe into which she has worked the sufferings that the Trojans and Akhaians “endured for her sake at the hands of Ares” (3.128). Weaving was a typical occupation of a free woman in Homeric times and, as is clear from the *Odyssey*, the proper work of a chaste wife.¹⁵ Indeed, the *Iliad* shows Andromakhe, the devoted wife who serves as a foil for Helen, weaving while Hektor is pursued and slain (22.440–41). But Helen’s weaving in the *Iliad* is distinct. While Andromakhe weaves a conventional and impersonal floral design,¹⁶ Helen’s weaving is both self-referential and historical.

¹⁴For discussion of Iris’ unmotivated act, see Kennedy 1986, 6–8.

¹⁵Kennedy 1986, 8; Edwards 1987, 192.

¹⁶For the general meaning of θρόνα (22.441) whether “flowers” or “figured patterns,” see Richardson 1993 on 22.441.

Theoretically, the self-reference may be seen as a sign of arrogance, self-pity, and/or self-absorption.¹⁷ The focus of Helen's weaving, however, 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.¹⁸ In this role, Helen ceases to be merely an object of male possession and becomes a creator in her own right. Her weaving gives her consolation, but it also makes her an interpreter of history and a maker of meaning.

Moreover, as a record of the sufferings endured for her sake, her weaving implies her readiness to take responsibility for the course of events, a readiness that will soon be expressed in verbal self-recrimination.¹⁹ In taking responsibility, Helen seems to accept society's generally negative view of her conduct. This does not, however, demean her. On the contrary. In taking responsibility, Helen sets herself apart from and above Paris. Only a little bit earlier in the book, Paris had replied to Hektor's rebuke for his abduction of Helen with the facile justification: "Not to be cast away are the splendid gifts the gods themselves give" (3.65–66), that is, by claiming that he was merely accepting Aphrodite's gift. Later on in the narrative, Helen will mete out to both Paris and Aphrodite some of the blame that she now takes solely upon herself. But, unlike Paris, she never denies or mitigates her own responsibility. Her assumption of responsibility here makes her weaving a liberating act by which she refuses to accept as adequate the external definitions of herself either as a helpless possession without any power to make or act on her own decisions or as a woman without scruples and morality.

Through her weaving, Helen turns a quintessentially feminine occupation into a means of communication—that is, telling others about the events in which she took part—and a vehicle of self-expression. Through this vehicle, she not only gives vent to her suffering but also records the sufferings of others and, in so doing, asserts her freedom and responsibility. Her self-referential weaving, with all that it implies,

¹⁷Vivante 1985, 90, sees her self-recrimination as her grief over what "has been denied her." Cf. 86, 96.

¹⁸For the association in ancient Greece between poetic composition and weaving, and for Helen as Homer's parallel, see Scholia bT on *Iliad* 3.126–27: ἀξιόχρεων ἀρχέτυπον ἀνέπλασεν ὁ ποιητὴς τῆς ἰδίας ποιήσεως ("the poet has formed a worthy archetype of his own *poiesis*"). Cf. Clader 1976, 7–9; Kennedy 1986; Suzuki 1989, 40; Austin 1994, 38, and bibliography there. Her weaving can be also conceived as an analog for her actual culpability, or a remnant of a magical fairy tale version in which she wove the events and so made them happen, as much as Homer does.

¹⁹For Helen's perspective as marked by her self-referentiality, see Vivante 1985, 85–86; Collins 1988, 42–43; Ebbott 1999, 15.

endows her with stature and raises her above her plight as a captive and possession and above the plight of the other females who seem to be possessions in the *Iliad*.

The weaving, however, is done in silence. One of the striking features of this scene is that Helen does not speak. She says not a single word. Her silence creates a certain mystique, but it also emphasizes her powerlessness and her isolation. Her weaving may be seen as an effort to break through these barriers to being and belonging, but, like poetry, it is a one-way form of communication in which the maker stands apart from the persons addressed.

2. *Helen and Priam (3.161–242)*

The scene with the old men at the Scaean gate is the beginning of two-way communication for Helen. It is the first scene in which Helen actually speaks, though, significantly, not of her own initiative. In this scene Helen responds to Priam when he invites her to sit down next to him and asks her to identify the regal and magnificent-looking man who turns out to be Agamemnon, the burly-looking man who turns out to be Odysseus, and, following an interjection by Antenor, the tall warrior who turns out to be Aias.

Helen's replies are constrained by her gender, by her foreignness, and by the societal view of her culpability. These combine to make her dependent on Paris and his family for her survival and require her to do whatever she can to retain Priam's favor and protection, both as her father-in-law and as King of Troy. Her part in the conversation with him and the other old men must thus be read as more than a simple expression of what she feels and thinks. It must also be seen as a construction by which she tries to win and keep the sympathy she requires for survival, while, at the same time, asserting and retaining her independent personhood.

We thus see Helen assuming a humble pose, in which she is tactful and attentive to Priam's cues and intermingles motifs of loneliness and self-blame. Helen responds to Priam without indicating that there is anything anomalous in his questions. After ten years of war, in which the Greeks were camped outside the city walls, it is highly unlikely that Priam would not know what the key warriors looked like and would need her to identify them.²⁰ In all likelihood, Priam's questions are polite

²⁰Scholars have observed the chronological incongruity of the *teichoskopia* in general and of Priam's questions in particular. These concerns, however, did not seem to trouble

conversation, which allows him to pass the time until the duel, to chat with his beautiful daughter-in-law, and to try, gallant and kind as he is, to include her, make her feel welcome, and put her at ease in a situation that he recognizes may be awkward for her.²¹

The text does not tell us whether or not Helen recognizes his motives. It does, however, show her politely identifying all three figures and, furthermore, picking up on and reinforcing what Priam has said about them. Priam had praised Agamemnon as lordly and splendid and suggested that he might be royal; Helen calls Agamemnon “wide ruling” and “a good spearfighter.” Priam had compared Odysseus to “some ram of thick fleece”; Helen tells him not only that Odysseus is resourceful and crafty but also that he was reared in rugged Ithaca, which Homer’s audience would have understood as out in the hinterland. Priam had spoken of Aias’ power, stature, and large size in comparison to the other Akhaians; Helen calls Aias “gigantic” and “the bulwark of the Akhaians.” In picking up on Priam’s cues and adapting her responses to his observations, Helen shows him the attentiveness that women are expected to show to men and subtly flatters his ego, ingratiates herself with him, and justifies and encourages the kindness that he shows her.

Similar efforts to ensure Priam’s sympathy may be seen in the opening part of Helen’s reply, before she identifies Agamemnon. Picking up on Priam’s earlier address to her as “dear child” (φίλον τέκος, 3.162), Helen addresses him as follows: αἰδοῖός τέ μοί ἐσσι, φίλε ἔκυρέ, δεινός τε. (“Dear father-in-law, you arouse in me both respect and awe,” 3.172.) Her designation of Priam as her “dear father-in-law” reinforces their family relationship, wherein, as the head of the family, Priam is responsible for her safety and well-being. Her expression of awe and respect puts her in a humble position in relation to him and highlights his power over her.

Homer. Cf. Owen 1946, 34–35: “Of course for the literal-minded there is the obvious objection that it is absurd for Priam to be asking Helen to identify the foemen with whom he has been contending for so many years, and accordingly it has been said that this portion is an excerpt from an account of the beginning of the war. That may or may not be so . . . the scene broadens and deepens; the stage fills, the characters grow clearer and more familiar; and always there is, superficially, an apparent movement forward in time. . . .” Reckford 1964, 9: “The poet may not have cared about time; but if Helen surveys the Greek forces in the tenth year of war, it is because the absence of Akhilles permits a respite not otherwise possible.” Bergren 1979/80, 23: “Like a tapestry the Teichoskopia is at once historical and universal and what is more, just as we see not only her web, but also Helen weaving it, so, too, the Teichoskopia points by being so obviously traditional to the process of its creation, for it is by means of tradition that epic can make the historical universal.”

²¹For further discussion, see H. M. Roisman 2005 and bibliography there.

In this opening statement, Helen thus positions herself as a weak and humble woman in awe of her father-in-law, flatters the elderly Priam by highlighting his power, and subtly reminds him of his obligations to her as a member of his household in need of his protection.

In the next four lines, she plays on Priam's compassion, first by presenting herself as so miserable that she wishes she had died before following Paris to Troy, then by drawing an emotive sketch of all that she left behind:

ὥς ὄφελεν θάνατός μοι ἄδειν κακὸς ὅππότε δεῦρο
 υἱεῖ σῶ ἐπόμην, θάλαμον γωατούς τε λιποῦσα
 παῖδά τε τηλυγέτην καὶ ὀμηλικίην ἐρατεινήν.
 ἀλλὰ τὰ γ' οὐκ ἐγένοντο· τὸ καὶ κλαίουσα τέτηκα. (3.173–76)

Would that evil death had been my pleasure when I followed your son
 over here, and left behind my bedchamber, my relatives,
 and my beloved daughter and my lovely companions.
 But that was not to be, and I melt weeping because of it.²²

This sketch picks up the idea of Priam's invitation that she come sit next to him so that she will be able to look at "your former husband, your relatives by marriage, and your friends" (3.163). In this statement, too, Helen assumes a humble pose, making no effort to minimize or defend her role in the abduction. Instead, a few lines later, she harshly describes herself as *κυνῶπις*, "dog-faced" (3.180), a strong term of opprobrium applied to persons who had committed an unacceptable act.²³ With this harsh self-criticism, she preempts any strictures that anyone else might make and implicitly invites her sympathetic listeners to say: "No, you're not."

The utilitarian purpose served by her stance does not imply that Helen does not mean what she says. We have already seen that she misses her homeland and that she holds herself responsible for her transfer to Troy. Her calling herself "dog-faced" is another expression of the sense of guilt that is evident in her weaving. The purpose and import of her behavior, however, should not be overlooked. Its aim is to cultivate

²²Translations are based on Murray 1999 (1925).

²³In one mythical tradition Helen was the daughter of Zeus and Nemesis, whose name translates as "blame" or "disgrace"; see Hesiod fragments 197.8W, 204.82 W; Call. *Hymn to Artemis* 232. Helen refers to herself as both "dog" (*κύων*) and "dog-face" (*κυνῶπις*), terms that no one else applies with self-reference in the *Iliad*. Graver 1995 claims that dog-related insults point to greed, in which case, Helen would be portrayed as taking more than her share. The only other person of whom the term is used in the *Iliad* is Hera, to whom Hephaistos applies it in his criticism of her for hurling him from Olympus (18.396).

the sympathy and good will of someone whose protection she needs by adopting a stereotypically feminine posture (just as in weaving she had adopted a typically feminine occupation): humble, needy, and non-threatening. It demonstrates her skill and proficiency in making people feel good and in looking after herself as an unwelcome woman in a stressful environment.

This behavior does not negate her independence of mind. Even as she plays for Priam's sympathy and support in a typically feminine way, Helen obliquely asserts herself as an independent woman with her own views of her situation. By noting her fear or awe of Priam, she distances him.²⁴ After all, how close can one feel toward someone who evokes dread or awe? And how close does one want such a person to get? Then, instead of expressing gratitude for Priam's offer of a better view of her former husband and her relatives by marriage (πηνόυς, 3.163), she replies that she wishes she had died before following Paris to Troy and that she misses all the relationships of her former life. For all that these words play on Priam's sympathy and flatter him by echoing his earlier statements, they clearly express her regret for her elopement with Paris and her unhappiness at being in Troy.

Her reference to Paris as "your son" (υἱέϊ σῶ, 3.174) is charged. As a circumlocution that pointedly avoids naming Paris, it obliterates any personal connection between herself and her Trojan husband and subtly expresses her aversion to him. It also seems to implicate Priam in his son's conduct. In stating that she had followed "your son," Helen apportions some of the responsibility for her elopement to Paris and, by association, to Priam. This does not mean that she ceases to accept her own responsibility. Her repeated assertions of self-blame to the very end of the epic show otherwise. So does her erroneous assumption, only a few lines later, that her brothers Kastor and Polydeukes, who she does not know are dead, had left Troy out of shame at her elopement (3.240–42). Nonetheless, the phrasing smacks of blame, with which Helen both somewhat mitigates the totality of the responsibility she elsewhere takes for the elopement and lets Priam know that she does not consider him entirely blameless.

Following this rather sharp barb, Helen's short four-line reply to Priam's transparent query about Odysseus and her terse one-line identification of Aias convey the sense that she is running out of patience with the small talk and that she would like to bring the conversation to an end. So do her failure to respond at all to Antenor's long speech and her

²⁴For the use of the distancing δεινός (3.172), cf. also 18.394, Hephaistos to Thetis.

brief, unsolicited identification of Idomeneus, as if she both anticipated Priam's next question and wished to put an end to his inquiry.²⁵

Helen brings an end to the colloquy by changing the subject to her brothers, Kastor and Polydeukes, whose absence she notices and of whom, she says, she has heard nothing since she left Sparta.²⁶ Her sudden interest in them represents a further expression of her homesickness and a further criticism of the Trojans, Priam included, who are in effect keeping her in Troy against her will.²⁷ It is yet another way of letting Priam know that, for all that she is dependant on him, she does not view his family as her own and that for the last nine years she has been away from her "real" family in Sparta.

Helen's replies to Priam represent yet another effort on her part to assert her personhood under difficult circumstances. Yet while they give direct expression to her grief, loneliness, and sense of guilt, they convey only indirectly her anger and indignation at what has clearly become her involuntary presence in Troy and in Priam's household. Her replies show her balancing the need for safety and protection, as a woman, a foreigner, and a moral outcast, with her determination to say what she feels and thinks. The intensity of her anger is thus softened by the envelope of humility and flattery within which it is expressed. In her next encounter, Helen no longer cloaks her strong feelings but expresses them clearly and forthrightly.

3. *Helen and Aphrodite (3.380–420)*²⁸

This encounter features Helen's response to Aphrodite after the goddess summons her to Paris' bedchamber following his mysterious escape from

²⁵For further discussion of this point, see H. M. Roisman 2005, 111–13.

²⁶Most scholars are of the opinion that Helen's ignorance of her brothers' whereabouts is a temporal incongruity, which, like the *teichoskopia* itself, more rightly belongs at the beginning of the war rather than nine years into it.

²⁷Bowra 1930, 112: "This scene . . . develops with great skill the position of Helen. In Troy she is still a stranger, and she feels guilt and her loneliness. But she is equally severed from her own people, from her first husband's brother. . . . Her loneliness is made more painful by the end of the scene where she looks for her brothers, Castor and Polydeuces, and cannot find them . . ."

²⁸This episode is seen by scholars as part of a reenactment of the way in which the war was caused. Owen 1946, 33–36; Whitman 1965, 268: "The whole narrative from III.395 to IV.219—that is, the scenes of Aphrodite, Paris, and Helen, Menelaus in mad frustration hunting for a vanished Paris, and finally Pandarus shooting Menelaus—form a kind of compressed reënactment of the original treachery which caused the war." Cf. Vivante 1985, 95–96; Reckford 1964, 15.

the duel with Menelaos. The scene shows her voicing her opposition with forthright and fearless candor, even as it leaves no doubt about her subjugation to the powerful goddess.²⁹

Helen's reply to Aphrodite opens with a two-pronged accusation of deception and ends with an assertion of her independent identity:

Δαιμονίη, τί με ταῦτα λιλαίεαι ἠπεροπεύειν;
 ἦ πῆ με προτέρω πόλιων εὖ ναιομενάων
 ἄξις, ἢ Φρυγίης ἢ Μηονίης ἐρατεινῆς,
 εἴ τίς τοι καὶ κείθι φίλος μερόπων ἀνθρώπων·
 οὔνεκα δὴ νῦν διὸν Ἀλέξανδρον Μενέλαος
 νικήσας ἐθέλει στυγερὴν ἐμὲ οἴκαδ' ἄγεσθαι,
 τοὔνεκα δὴ νῦν δεῦρο δολοφρονέουσα παρέστης;
 ἦσο παρ' αὐτὸν ἰούσα, θεῶν δ' ἀπόεικε κελεύθου,
 μηδ' ἔτι σοῖσι πόδεσσιν ὑποστρέψειας Ὀλυμπον,
 ἀλλ' αἰεὶ περὶ κείνον οἴζυε καὶ ἐ φύλασσε,
 εἰς ὃ κέ σ' ἢ ἄλοχον ποιήσεται, ἢ ὃ γε δούλην.
 κείσε δ' ἐγὼν οὐκ εἶμι - νεμεσητὸν δέ κεν εἶη -
 κείνου προσανέουσα λέχος· Τρωαὶ δέ μ' ὀπίσσω
 πᾶσαι μωμήσονται· ἔχω δ' ἄχε' ἄκριτα θυμῷ.

(3.399–412)

Goddess, why do you desire to deceive me thus?
 Will you lead me somewhere yet beyond the
 well-peopled cities of Phrygia or lovely Maeonia,
 if there is someone there also of mortal men who is dear to you,
 because at last now Menelaos, having defeated godlike Paris,
 wishes to lead me, hateful me, back home? And is this why
 you have taken your stand here with guileful thought?
 Go and sit by his side, and depart from the way of gods,
 and may you not any more return with your feet to Olympus,
 but always fuss about him and guard him,
 until he may make you his wife or maybe his slave.
 But there I will not go—it would be disgraceful—
 to share his bed. All the women of Troy will
 reproach me afterward. I have endless griefs in my heart.

Helen's opening question, "Goddess, why do you desire to deceive me thus?" (3.399), is insistent and demanding. It introduces a new, challenging tone, which we did not hear in her response to Priam. The ac-

²⁹Reckford 1964, 17, on the scene with Aphrodite: "But Helen is not just used by Homer to demonstrate the power of the gods, as shown in the fulfillment of the Trojan War. Homer also asks (and perhaps this is new in his poem), what would a person feel who is being used as a pawn of the gods."

cusation that the question carries refers to two deceptions. The first is to Aphrodite's disguise as an old wool-carding woman whom Helen had liked in Sparta. The lines immediately preceding the question inform us that Helen had seen through the disguise in which Aphrodite approached her: "... she noticed the beautiful neck of the goddess, her lovely breasts, and her flashing eyes, and amazement seized her . . ." (3.396–98). Helen not only discerns the disguise but also expresses her objections to it to Aphrodite's face. She has progressed considerably from her mute state in the scene with Iris, where she had not even spotted the goddess's disguise, never mind objected to it.

The second deception involves Aphrodite's twin manipulations in bringing Helen to Troy and in trying to draw her into Paris' bedchamber. It is on these manipulations that Helen elaborates in the next six lines. In lines 3.400–402, Helen asserts, with a certain mockery, that Aphrodite would just as soon lead her to all ends of the earth to follow a man the goddess fancied. This statement taunts Aphrodite with having many favorites—not only Paris—and with being quite capable of giving Helen as a gift to any one of them to satisfy her own desires. Beyond this, the accusation sets up an equivalence between Aphrodite's having tricked Helen into following Paris to Troy, which, as far as Helen is concerned, might as well be the end of the inhabited world,³⁰ and the goddess's attempt to manipulate her now into going to Paris' bedchamber. In the next three lines, 3.403–405, Helen refers to Aphrodite's deceptiveness more directly as she accuses her of having come with "guileful thought" so as to prevent Menelaos (whom Helen believes to have won the duel for her possession) from taking her back to Sparta. In protesting these deceptions, Helen conveys her indignation at Aphrodite's manipulations, both past and present. She in effect tells the goddess that she has grown and developed and that she is not to be as easily manipulated as she had been in the past.

Helen reinforces the point by using the word οἴκαδ' ("back home," 3.404) to designate Sparta.³¹ Οἴκαδ' here is a barbed term that harks back to Aphrodite's summons to Helen at the beginning of this scene: "Come on, Paris calls you to go home" (δεῦρ' ἴθι· Ἀλέξανδρός σε καλεῖ οἴκόνδε νέεσθαι, 3.390). In this summons, Aphrodite identified Helen's

³⁰ Kirk 1987, points out (on 3.400–402) that Phrygia and Maeonia would seem even further afield than Troy to the Homeric audience.

³¹ In fourteen of the twenty-two occurrences of οἴκαδ', the term refers to the Akhaians returning home: 1.19, 170, 179; 2.154, 236; 3.404; 7.335; 9.393, 414, 418; 16.205; 18.60, 90, 441.

home as Paris' home.³² Helen had already indicated in the *teichoskopia* that she did not view Troy as her home. She now tells Aphrodite this in no uncertain terms. Going to Paris' chamber now will no more bring her "home" than had following him to Troy earlier, Helen tells Aphrodite, and she will not be duped by Aphrodite's ploy.

In addition to protesting Aphrodite's deceptions, Helen lets the goddess know that she is unwilling to accept a demeaning reduction to a woman driven only by sexual desires. Aphrodite had attempted to entice Helen to Paris' bedchamber by describing him in richly sensuous terms: sitting or reclining on his ornamental couch and "gleaming in beauty and [fine] clothes" (3.392), as if he had come from a dance rather than from a duel (3.391–94). Behind this choice of details is the assumption that women are governed by their strong sexual cravings, which they find extremely hard to resist,³³ and that Helen, who had already proven her susceptibility to Paris' attractions, will succumb again. Helen pours scorn on this assumption. She makes no mention whatsoever of Paris' erotic appeal. She is stirred to anger by Aphrodite's words (3.395),³⁴ and she derisively suggests that, since Aphrodite is so fond of Paris, she should go to him herself and become his wife or his slave. The taunt is particularly insulting, suggesting not only that Aphrodite's fondness for Paris reduces her to a slave—the lowest social echelon in Homeric society—but also that it makes her a slave to her passions. The taunt declares that it is Aphrodite, not Helen, who is faithless, fickle, and driven by, or slave to, her passions.

By refusing to accept Aphrodite's reductive view of her, Helen demarcates her own identity as a woman from what Aphrodite would impose on her. She continues to do so by supporting her refusal to go to Paris' chamber with the explanation that, if she does, she will reap the reproaches of the women of Troy. Superficially, this seems a rather strange explanation. It is difficult to believe that Helen has withheld herself from Paris during her nine years in Troy. There is no evidence or even any

³²In fact, up until this point in the narrative, the term οἰκόνδε νέεσθαι ("to go home") had been used mostly to refer to the Akhaians going home to Greece. In the *Iliad* as a whole, it refers to going home to Greece in six out of its eleven occurrences: 2.158, 174, 290, 354, 357; 4.180.

³³Cf. Thornton 1997, 70–89; Just 1989, 163; Cohen 1991, 144–45.

³⁴Kirk 1987, on 3.395, following Aristarkhos, suggests that we should understand the statement θυμὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσι ὄρινε as saying that Aphrodite's words stirred Helen's heart. I think that reading *thymos* as "anger" conveys Helen's emotional reaction more accurately and more precisely. "Stirred" implies that Aphrodite's description aroused Helen, though it obviously did not.

hint in the text that she has. Moreover, Helen is already a social pariah. So why should the women's reproach make any difference now? For all its apparent illogic, though, the explanation is revealing. It shows Helen creating for herself an identity as a woman who is capable of restraint and of shame, and it reveals her longing for social acceptance, especially by the women of Troy.

Helen's reference to herself as *κυνῶπις* ("dog-faced," 3.180) in her reply to Priam had already pointed to her sense of guilt. Shame differs from guilt in its social dimension. Guilt is an emotion prompted by an inner sense of wrongdoing and remorse, whereas shame is experienced when the wrongdoing is seen by others. In the shame culture of ancient Greece, emphasis was placed on good name and public persona, and the opinions of the members of the group were viewed as important in shaping the individual's outlook and conduct.³⁵ Shame was viewed as a force in guiding moral behavior. Later Greek writers regarded the capacity for shame as a quality that distinguished a good person from a bad. Good persons were susceptible to shame and deterred from wrongdoing by their fear of it; bad persons were not.³⁶ Helen's explanation tells Aphrodite that she is a good woman with a keen moral sense. Her concern with the good opinion of the Trojan women reflects that identity and shows the great care she takes to avoid alienating them any more than she already has. Her preoccupation with reputation also aligns her with this male sensibility as we know it from the *Iliad*.

Helen's response to Aphrodite's summons is forthright, sharp, and sarcastic. It shows her alertness of mind, her readiness to speak up for herself, and her courage in opposing a full goddess, who is by definition more powerful than herself. Helen continues to demonstrate resistance even as she is finally forced to accede to the summons. The text shows Aphrodite threatening to "forsake her" if she does not obey and to intensify the already strong hatred that both the Trojans and the Greeks feel toward her. These are powerful threats, which, if implemented, as Aphrodite takes care to point out, will result in "a wretched death" (3.417). These are not threats that a woman who is already a pariah in a foreign land can be expected to withstand.³⁷ The statement that "the

³⁵Adkins 1960. For the shame culture of ancient Greece, see Dodds 1951. For a critique of the view that Greece was a shame culture, see Cairns 1993, 27–47, esp. 44.

³⁶J. Roisman 2005, chap. 3.

³⁷Even those who see her altercation with Aphrodite as an inner conflict have to admit that Helen goes to Paris out of fear rather than love or desire. Cf. Postlethwaite 2000 on line 3.418.

goddess led the way” (ἦρχε δὲ δαίμων, 3.420) to Paris’ chamber highlights Aphrodite’s power and Helen’s subjugation. Yet, even as Helen submits as she must, she goes to Paris on her own terms: in silence and covered up in a robe so she will not be seen (3.419). Her silence is an expression of her unwillingness to go,³⁸ her effective invisibility a means of protecting the social acceptance she is working so hard to attain. If no one sees her going to Paris’ chamber, no one can criticize or shun her for it.

4. *Helen and Paris (3.421–47)*

Helen’s address to Paris is the first speech that she actually initiates in the *Iliad*, the first time that she speaks before she is spoken to. Her speech to Priam had been in reply to his questions and was required by courtesy. It reflected not only her feelings but also her concern for her personal safety. Her speech to Aphrodite had been a rejection of the goddess’s summons, necessary to avert, as Helen believed she could at the time, the undesired meeting with her husband. Her address to Paris is unbidden and has no practical purpose. Its chief aim is to express the contempt that Helen apparently feels for him.

The meeting with Paris takes place under the oppressive aegis of Aphrodite, who, not content with having forced Helen to attend, continues to exercise her power by placing a chair for Helen to sit on in front of Paris. Ordinarily such a task, highly inappropriate for a goddess, would be performed by a servant. That Aphrodite takes it upon herself makes it difficult for Helen to oppose the seating.³⁹ Even so, Helen maintains a measure of independence by refusing to look at Paris (3.427)⁴⁰ and, with eyes averted, by unleashing a mocking and indignant invective, far more derisive and acerbic than anything she had said to Aphrodite:

³⁸ Cramer 1976, 304: “. . . silence in the *Iliad* is usually not a positive obligation, but a negative sign, for example, of the soldiers’ fear of their commanders (4.431).”

³⁹ Taplin 1992, 100–101, sees the fact that Aphrodite brings the stool for Helen as a mark of the familiarity between Helen and Aphrodite, which is also evidenced, in his view, in the strong words Helen dares to say to the goddess. For the latter, cf. Clader 1976, 13.

⁴⁰ Leaf and Bayfield 1965, on 3.427, following the scholiast who suggests that Helen’s refusal to look at Paris is a contrived way of resisting Aphrodite (ὑπογράφει τὸ σῶφρον τῆς Ἑλένης· τέχνη γὰρ ἀντιτάσσεται τῇ Ἀφροδίτῃ) see it as evidence not only of her struggle against the overpowering will of the goddess but also of her vacillation “between repentance and love.” But the scholiast does not go so far as to say that Helen feels love for Paris. Aristarkhos athetized lines 432–36; as Kirk 1987 says on 3.430–36: “That is surely unjustified.”

ἤλυθες ἐκ πολέμοι'· ὡς ὄφελες αὐτόθ' ὀλέσθαι,
 ἀνδρὶ δαμεις κρατερῶ, ὅς ἐμός πρότερος πόσις ἦεν.
 ἦ μὲν δὴ πρὶν γ' εὖχε' ἀρηϊφίλου Μενελάου
 σῆ τε βίη καὶ χερσὶ καὶ ἔργει φέρτερος εἶναι·
 ἀλλ' ἴθι νῦν προκάλεσσαι ἀρηϊφίλον Μενέλαον
 ἐξ αὐτίς μαχέσασθαι ἐναντίον· ἀλλὰ σ' ἔγωγε
 παύεσθαι κέλομαι, μηδὲ ξανθῶ Μενελάω
 ἀντίβιον πόλεμον πολεμίζειν ἠδὲ μάχεσθαι
 ἀφραδέως, μή πως τάχ' ὑπ' αὐτοῦ δουρὶ δαμήησθαι. (3.428–36)

You have come from the fighting. Would that you had perished there, mastered by the stronger man, who was my own former husband. Indeed you have boasted before now that in your power, your hands, and in your spear you were stronger than Menelaos, dear to Ares. But go on now, challenge Menelaos dear to Ares again to do with you battle, man to man. But I myself order you to stop, and not fight a face-to-face fight with yellow-haired Menelaos or foolishly give battle against him, lest perhaps you be mastered by his spear.

Her first three words, “You have come from the fighting,” are usually taken as a simple indicative statement about where Paris has been before their meeting. But the words also contain a heavy dose of sarcasm: the suggestion that a man who has just come from battle does not loll about on an ornamented bed in a perfumed room, dressed in fine clothes, and looking as if he has just come from a dance. To this scorn for Paris’ masculinity, Helen adds the wish that Menelaos had killed him in the duel and adds a slew of other insults impugning his manhood while extolling that of her former husband. She debunks his boast of being a stronger and better warrior than Menelaos, contemptuously dares him to “challenge” Menelaos “man to man” (ἐξ αὐτίς μαχέσασθαι ἐναντίον, 3.433), implying that he does not have the nerve, and, immediately afterward, commands (κέλομαι, 3.434) Paris to refrain from fighting him, lest he lose.

Helen’s injunction to desist is less a change of mind⁴¹ than yet another statement pouring derision on Paris’ martial boasting and undercutting his virility. Hooker interprets Helen’s apparent reversal as testimony of her love for Paris, that is, “she cannot bear to think of his encountering Menelaos again.” Taplin reads it as evidence of Helen’s ambivalence, caught between wishing Paris’ death and wishing to have

⁴¹ A claim made by Vivante 1965, 95, describing it as “a swift transition from hatred and rage to renewed self-surrender.”

him alive.⁴² These readings have a certain plausibility in view of the fact that Aphrodite represents not only an external force but the inner reality of Helen's love. Nonetheless, Helen's contempt comes across more strongly than any attraction or concern she may feel. The very fact that the statement is a command reverses the accepted hierarchy between husband and wife, shows disrespect, and undermines the man's position and authority. We may note the very different tone of Andromakhe, who serves as Helen's foil. Learning that Hektor intends to take up arms against Akhilles, this "perfect wife" (6.374), as the poet calls Andromakhe, rushes to the city walls to urge him to be careful lest he be killed and leave her bereft. Addressing Hektor in supplicating tones, she calls him her father, mother, brother, and husband and begs him to take pity on her (6.429–30). There is no mistaking her anxiety and grief. Helen's injunction to refrain from fighting, so different in spirit, is an expression of her contempt and yet another way for her to tell Paris that he is an effeminate weakling and no match for her former husband, whom she lauds as the better warrior and more attractive man. Within the nine lines of her barrage, she names Menelaos four times, twice terming him "dear to Ares" (430, 432), thereby emphasizing his martial qualities, and once terming him ξανθός ("yellow-haired," 3.434), which, according to Eustathius, indicates that Menelaos was no less handsome than Paris. Her pointed reference to Menelaos as "my own former husband" (3.429) accentuates the contrast between the two men and the insult it entails.

Willcock (1987) on 3.427 claims that "The vehemence of her criticism shows that she still loves Paris." Yet even if Helen has mixed feelings for her husband, this would not invalidate Kirk's (1987) observation that "the whole address is . . . bitterly sarcastic and hostile; . . . [and] seems to include resentment and even contempt" (on 3.430–36).⁴³ Paris himself well understands that Helen's words are a bitter reproach and not an expression of love. He opens his reply with the request: "Do not berate my heart with harsh reproaches" (3.438), and he finds it necessary to explain his defeat by Menelaos. Despite his awareness of her anger, he ends his speech with an invitation to make love.⁴⁴

⁴² Hooker 1979 on 3.433; Taplin 1992, 101.

⁴³ Edwards 1987, 195, sees in Helen's defiant retort to Aphrodite: "a powerful demonstration of Helen's strength of mind, and her contempt for Paris and for own past folly." See also Postlethwaite 2000 on lines 3.433–34. Graver 1995, 41, points out that no one else insults Paris the way Helen does.

⁴⁴ Already in antiquity critics discussed what Kirk 1987, on 3.441, terms Paris's "ill-timed attack of ἔπος," asking whether Paris really desired Helen, wanted to mollify her, or was simply aroused by the fact that she so obviously did not want him (Arist. Frag. 150). In

The exchange, like that with Aphrodite, ends with Helen's acquiescence. Given Helen's position as one whose wants do not have to be heeded, and Paris' thick skin, ending the meeting in the sexual act is virtually inevitable, so much so that Helen does not even try to forestall it or bother to object. The text informs us of their coitus in two spare lines: "He spoke and led the way to the bed, and with him followed his wife. Thus the two were couched on the corded bed" (3.447–48). The lines tell us Helen's action but not her feelings. Giving no indication whatsoever of whether she does or does not want to go to bed with Paris, they point up the irrelevance of her volition—her utter powerlessness—with respect to the most intimate of acts.⁴⁵

Against this background of powerlessness, Helen's forceful and forthright expression of contempt for Paris, to his face and in Aphrodite's presence, further reflect her refusal to be cowed and her determination to preserve her inner independence and integrity even as she yields, as she must, to his sexual desire, just as she had to yield to Aphrodite's summons. Her speech to Aphrodite had been sharp, sarcastic, and even insulting, but there was a familiar, good-humored, woman-to-woman quality to it, which stopped short of vituperation. Her address to Paris is a derisive and contempt-filled declaration of aversion and dislike. By means of it, Helen not only lets Paris know what she thinks of him in no uncertain terms, but yet further defines herself by distancing herself from him.

5. *Helen and Hektor* (6.323–24, 343–68)

This distancing continues in Book 6, where we meet Helen, as Hektor finds her, in the home that Paris had built for himself, sitting among her attendant women and directing the "magnificent work" of her handmaids (6.323–24). The setting recalls the scene with Iris, where the goddess had found Helen, presumably in the same home, occupied with her own weaving. The authorial comment that Helen is in the home that Paris had built highlights the fact that she is not in her own home. It reminds us how little say she has in where she lives and that her situation is no different

a way, Paris' sudden interest is consistent with the very fickleness on which Helen remarks. About his fickleness, see Clarke 1969, 247–49. It should also be pointed out, however, that incongruous as Paris' desire might seem, the entire scene was set up to end in coitus. Paris is dressed for the part, and Aphrodite ushered Helen to him for this precise purpose.

⁴⁵Suzuki 1989, 36: "The poet only portrays the present Helen and leaves her past self a mystery. He represents Helen as an almost disembodied consciousness passively living out the effects of her fatal act."

than it was when she silently followed Iris to watch the duel for her possession, silently followed Aphrodite to Paris' bedchamber, and silently followed Paris to bed. At the same time, this scene shows Helen more as the manager of the household, performing the day-to-day actions and wielding the authority common to married women. It depicts Helen in a domestic role, which lends her a measure of the respectability she longs for and which puts her more on a par with the other women of Troy.

It is from this position, constrained by her circumstances but acting the role that brings her closer to the woman she wants to be, that Helen addresses Hektor. Her address follows shortly upon Paris' defense against Hektor's angry reproach for not having joined the battle while people are dying and Troy is in jeopardy. By way of self-justification, Paris claims that he stayed in his room not out of indifference but to give himself over to sorrow, and he goes on to tell his brother that "just now my wife was persuading me and urging me with soft words to the war" (6.337–38). His depiction is of Helen as a loving wife, ministering to him in his sadness and gently prodding him to join the Trojan warriors on the battlefield.⁴⁶

Little in the text supports this depiction. In fact, Paris' words paint him a liar. The temporal reference of "just now" (νῦν δέ, 6.337) is not entirely clear. It may refer either to the scene at hand, just before Hektor entered, or, as is generally assumed, to the scene in Book 3, where Helen told Paris to "challenge Menelaos, dear to Ares" (3.432–33). If it refers to the scene at hand, the readers or listeners know that Helen has been directing her handmaids, not talking with her husband. If it refers to the scene in Book 3, they know that her words were biting and sarcastic, not soft or gentle.

In her address to Hektor, Helen replaces Paris' mendacious depiction of her with her own self-presentation. Like her earlier speech to Paris, this speech, too, is of her own initiation. Totally ignoring her husband's account, the speech indicates her refusal to be defined by his words and her determination to make her own statement about who she is:

δαερ ἐμείο κυνὸς κακομηχάνου ὄκρυόεσσης,
 ὡς μ' ὄφελ' ἤματι τῷ ὅτε με πρῶτον τέκε μήτηρ
 οὔχεσθαι προφέρουσα κακὴ ἀνέμοιο θύελλα
 εἰς ὄρος ἢ εἰς κῦμα πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης,

⁴⁶Kirk 1990, on 6.337, reads Paris' depiction of Helen speaking softly or gently as sarcastic. If it is, the sarcasm in his tone, which Hektor could be expected to pick up, would surely work against what seems to be Paris' effort to placate his brother.

ἔνθα με κῦμ' ἀπόερσε πάρος τάδε ἔργα γενέσθαι.
 αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ τάδε γ' ᾧδε θεοὶ κακὰ τεκμήριαντο,
 ἀνδρὸς ἔπειτ' ᾧφελλον ἀμείνονος εἶναι ἄκοιτις,
 ὅς ἤδη νέμεσίν τε καὶ αἴσχεα πόλλ' ἀνθρώπων.
 τούτῳ δ' οὔτ' ἄρ νῦν φρένες ἔμπεδοι οὔτ' ἄρ' ὀπίσσω
 ἔσσονται· τῷ καὶ μιν ἐπαυρήσεσθαι οἴω.
 ἀλλ' ἄγε νῦν εἴσελθε καὶ ἔξεο τῷδ' ἐπὶ δίφρῳ,
 δᾶερ, ἐπεὶ σε μάλιστα πόνοος φρένας ἀμιβέβηκεν
 εἶνεκ' ἐμείο κυνὸς καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρου ἔνεκ' ἄτης,
 οἴσιν ἐπὶ Ζεὺς θῆκε κακὸν μόρον, ὡς καὶ ὀπίσσω
 ἀνθρώποισι πελώμεθ' ἀοίδιμοι ἔσσομένοισι.

(6.344–58)

Brother-by-marriage to me, who am a dog, evil-contriving and abhorred,
 I wish that on that day my mother first bore me
 a fierce evil storm had carried me away to some
 mountain or to a wave of the loud-roaring sea,
 where the wave could have swept me away before these things came to
 pass.

But since the gods thus decreed these evil things,
 I wish I were the wife of a better man, who would have recognized both
 the anger and the many reproaches of men.
 But the mind of this man is not steadfast now nor will be in the future;
 therefore I think that he will reap the fruits.
 But come now, enter and sit on the chair, brother-by-marriage,
 since, more than any other, distress has encompassed your heart because
 of me, a dog, and because of Alexandros' infatuation,
 on whom Zeus has placed an evil destiny, so that in future
 we may become a song for men who are yet to be.

The speech consists of three parts of five lines each. The first part (6.344–48) has been recognized as an expanded rendition of the wish for death and the self-deprecation that Helen had expressed in her remarks to Priam.⁴⁷ The somewhat greater length at which she expatiates on this wish (five lines instead of the four in Book 3), the amplified harshness of her self-deprecation (she calls herself not only a “dog,” as in Book 3 [3.180] but also “a contriver of evil and abhorred”), and the vehemence produced by her violent and destructive images of nature (e.g., storm, sweeping wave, raging sea) bespeak a level of agitation and an intensity of despair that exceed the emotions evident in her earlier statements to Priam.⁴⁸ In addition to venting her strong feelings, she tells Hektor that

⁴⁷ Cf. Kirk 1990 on 6.344–58; Postlethwaite 2000 on 6.343–58.

⁴⁸ Kirk 1990, on 6.344–58, contends that “her tone is depressed rather than passionate,” as it had been in her reproach of Paris in 3.428–36. He claims that her “self-denunciation

she is not the loving and caring wife that Paris depicts her as being but rather a wife consumed by guilt and self-revulsion and reviled by those around her.

From revulsion against herself, Helen moves in the second part of the speech to further vent her antipathy toward Paris (6.349–53).⁴⁹ There is nothing ambiguous in her wish to have been the wife of “a better man” or in her condemnation of Paris for his lack of concern about the opinion of his peers and his lack of steadfastness (φρένες ἔμπεδοι, 6.352). In naming these character flaws, both deficiencies in manhood,⁵⁰ Helen heaps yet further scorn on Paris’ masculinity, extending her deprecation from the realm of physical courage, his lack of which she had criticized in Book 3, to the realm of mind and morals. In addition to conveying her unhappiness with Paris, her critique serves as yet a further assertion of self-identity: She is not the type of woman to be happy with a man of Paris’ sort, her criticisms say; she is too discerning and possesses, for all her misdeeds, too fine a moral sense. For it is she, not Paris, who has the capacity for shame. The critique is all the stronger because of the circumstances under which it is made. The measure of Helen’s unhappiness is conveyed by the fact that she delivers the critique soon after her coitus with Paris and that she addresses it not to Paris but to his brother, thereby violating the privacy of the spousal relationship.

Helen also conveys her sense of helplessness and entrapment in this part of the speech. She introduces her protestation of aversion to Paris with the statement that the gods had “decreed” the “evils” besetting her and the others. Though she does not name the evils, one can presume that they refer to her leaving Sparta, the war, her marriage to Paris, and the sufferings that ensued from these acts. Her attribution of blame here echoes and extends her earlier and more oblique accusation that Aphrodite had tricked her into following Paris to Troy. Logically, her ascribing blame to the gods would contradict her various expressions of guilt and assumption of responsibility. But it does not, any more than had her earlier ascription of responsibility to Paris (and perhaps by extension to Priam). We hear here a mixture of resignation, anger at the

resembles the way she speaks of herself to Priam in the Teichoskopia. 3.172–5 . . . her manner . . . is melancholy rather than agitated.”

⁴⁹Aphrodite’s presence during Helen’s mockery of Paris in Book 3 would not have had the same effect, since the goddess would be aware of the couple’s conflict in any event.

⁵⁰For the tendency of the Greeks to oppose masculine and feminine traits, see Just 1989, 153–93; Cohen 1991, 144–45. For steadfastness as a masculine trait, see J. Roisman 2005, chap. 8.

gods' manipulations, and a deep sense of powerlessness, not an excuse, special pleading, or abnegation of responsibility.

In the third part of the speech, Helen invites Hektor to sit down and rest. Her attitude toward Hektor contrasts starkly with her bearing toward her husband. Earlier, in introducing this speech, the authorial voice had stated that Helen spoke "with honeyed/soothing words to Hektor" (μῦθοισι . . . μειλίχοισι, 6.343). Those words include her address to him as her "brother-by-marriage" (6.344, 355). As she uses them, these appellations are expressions of fondness and closeness as much as, and perhaps even more than, designations of the family tie. The μῦθοι μειλίχοι also include the entire third part of the speech, with Helen's invitation to Hektor to come in and sit down and her expression of appreciation for his persisting in the hard work that befell him as a result of her elopement with his brother. Helen does not say why she is inviting Hektor in or provide any excuse: for example, so that he can rest before going back to the war or so that he can wait while Paris finishes putting on his armor and go back with his brother. In turning down her invitation, Hektor understands it as stemming from her love for him: "Do not, Helen, make me sit, though you love me" (6.360). One cannot help but notice that in the course of the epic Helen never addresses Paris as her husband (though she refers to him as such in 24.763), sat with him only because she was forced to do so, never names a single trait or act that she values in him, and shows little if any fondness or affection for him.⁵¹

Ryan puts Helen's demonstration of affection for Hektor down to flirtatiousness and self-interest.⁵² Her behavior toward Hektor is certainly that of a woman who likes the man she is talking to and wants his company. There is more than a broad hint that Hektor would meet the bill for the "better man" Helen wishes she had. One may assume, too, that the hint was understood by Hektor and flattering to his ego, even though he rejected her invitation to stay in favor of going to bid goodbye to his wife and baby son before rejoining the battle. It is easy to interpret Helen's words, including her outpouring of intimate and intense emotions, as a self-serving attempt to woo her brother-in-law, whether because she really hoped to win him as a lover or because she sought to secure his protection, much as she had Priam's. Indeed, the similarity of the family reference in her address to Hektor as her brother by marriage

⁵¹Postlethwaite 2000, on 6.345–58, says: "Her anxiety that Hektor rest from the fighting, and her affection for her brother-in-law contrasts with her loathing for her husband."

⁵²Ryan 1965, 116. She also calls Hektor by name in 24.762.

(6.344) and to Priam as her “dear father of my husband” (φίλε ἔκυρέ, 3.172) invites the reader to compare her demeanor toward Hektor with that toward Priam.

The interpretation of Helen here as flirting or seeking protection, however, ignores her demonstrated efforts to define herself as a woman capable of restraint and shame and does not do credit to her demonstrated sagacity in encounters with Priam and Aphrodite. Surely Helen would have understood that any scheme to seduce Hektor, so loyal to his wife, would have failed and, moreover, brought her into further disrepute. The affection and respect Helen lavishes on Hektor rather show qualities we have not yet seen in her. Up until this point in the epic, Helen has shown herself flattering and manipulative, sharp and sarcastic, angry and indignant. The gentle tone in which her words to Hektor are couched is new to Helen, as is her appreciation of Hektor’s endeavors. The speech, especially though not only the last segment, shows her hitherto unseen capacities for warmth, discernment, and a more sincere bonding than that which had been evident in the exchange with Priam or any other figure in the epic. It also points to her strong desire for connection and belonging. In her speech to Aphrodite, Helen had conveyed her yearning to be an accepted member of society through her concern for the women’s opinion of her. Here she conveys this desire by distancing herself from a husband who knows no shame and by seeking affiliation, not romance, with the family member who is the most respected of the Trojan heroes.

6. *Helen’s Speech at Hektor’s Funeral (24.761–76)*

The next and last time we meet Helen in the *Iliad* is at the end of Book 24 (761–76), where she speaks at the rites performed during Hektor’s funeral.⁵³ In her lament, Helen recites ideas and themes by now familiar: her affection for Hektor; her sense that Paris had brought her to Troy without her full volition, her wish that she had died before going with him, her intense loneliness, her feeling that she had betrayed, or forsaken, her homeland, and her appreciation of the kindness shown to her by Priam and Hektor, who protected her from the hostility of the other Trojans. We see the same mingling of regret and self-blame with a strong sense of powerlessness and helplessness:

⁵³ For a general discussion of laments, see Alexiou 2002, 10, 31–35, 124–25; Derderian 2001, 31–52 (which includes the traditional elements in Andromakhe’s lament). See also Richardson 1993 on 24.719–22.

Ἴκτορ, ἐμῷ θυμῷ δαέρων πολὺ φίλτατε πάντων,
 ἦ μὲν μοι πόσις ἐστὶν Ἀλέξανδρος θεοειδής,
 ὅς μ' ἄγαγε Τροίηνδ'· ὡς πρὶν ὄφελλον ὀλέσθαι.
 ἦδη γὰρ νῦν μοι τόδ' ἔεικοστὸν ἔτος ἐστὶν
 ἐξ οὗ κείθεν ἔβην καὶ ἐμῆς ἀπελήλυθα πάτρης·
 ἀλλ' οὐ πω σεῦ ἄκουσα κακὸν ἔπος οὐδ' ἀσύφηλον·
 ἀλλ' εἴ τίς με καὶ ἄλλος ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ἐνίπτοι
 δαέρων ἢ γαλόων ἢ εἰνατέρων εὐπέπλων,
 ἦ ἐκυρή - ἐκυρὸς δὲ πατήρ ὡς ἦπιος αἰεὶ -,
 ἀλλὰ σὺ τὸν ἐπέεσσι παραιφάμενος κατέρυκες,
 σῆ τ' ἀγανοφροσύνη καὶ σοῖς ἀγανοῖς ἐπέεσι.
 τῷ σέ θ' ἅμα κλαίω καὶ ἔμ' ἄμμορον ἀχνυμένη κῆρ·
 οὐ γάρ τίς μοι ἔτ' ἄλλος ἐνὶ Τροίῃ εὐρείῃ
 ἦπιος οὐδὲ φίλος, πάντες δέ με πεφρίκασιν.

(24.762–75)

Hektor, far dearest to me of all my brothers by marriage,
 indeed my husband is godlike Alexandros,
 who led me to Troy; if only I had died first.
 For now it is the twentieth year for me⁵⁴
 since the time I went from there and left the land of my fathers;
 but never have I heard a bad or insulting word from you;
 and, if another in the halls upbraided me, whether one of my brothers or
 sisters by marriage, or the lovely-robed wife of a brother by marriage, or
 my mother-in-law—my father-in-law, was always kind to me as my own
 father—yet you would persuade them with words and hold them back
 both by your own gentleness and by your gentle words.
 Therefore I cry, sorrowing at heart both for you and for myself, ill-fated,
 for no longer do I have anyone in wide Troy
 who is kind or friendly to me, but all men shudder at me.

If anything, Helen gives even stronger voice to her isolation in this speech than in previous ones, through her specific mention, for the first time in the epic, of the hostility and petty cruelties of her Trojan family and through the powerful physicality of the image of the Trojans “shuddering” at her, which conveys the intense, visceral quality of the revulsion she experiences in the community.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Richardson 1993, on 24.765–67, reads twenty years as a figure of speech denoting a long time but observes that it has been variously explained. AbT and Eustathius explained it as including the years that it took Menelaos to gather the expedition. Others read it as including the years that Paris and Helen wandered before they reached Troy, or the years of an abortive first expedition, when the Akhaians landed in Mysia instead of Troy.

⁵⁵Ebbott 1999 analyzes Helen’s regret and her awareness of others’ perceptions of her as expressed in her lament for Hektor as two integral parts of her characterization in the epic.

At the same time, the speech is very different from Helen's previous speeches. It is Helen's first and only public speech in the *Iliad*, made not to one or a few individuals but before what can be assumed to be a sizeable audience. Moreover, it finally brings her into the commonality she so longs for while showing her distinctive voice and view.

Following upon the speeches of Andromakhe (24.725–45) and Hekabe (24.748–59), her address is part of the women's formal funeral lamentations. The very fact that Helen speaks at Hektor's funeral is significant. For all that she feels excluded, her speaking at the funeral, presumably with the agreement of the rest of the family, situates her in a key position, on a par with that of Hektor's wife and mother, in an important ceremony both for the family and for the community.⁵⁶ The funeral is, in fact, the first time in the *Iliad* in which Helen is shown included in the activities of the other women of the royal family. And not only included: for as the last to speak, she is given a prominent place in the ceremony and in the family circle.⁵⁷

It is also the first time in which she is shown to have the acceptance of the community at large. Her inclusion and acceptance are highlighted by the structural parallels in the three speeches. All three speeches are preceded by the authorial introduction of the speaker; all begin with the speaker's referring to Hektor's family relationship to herself (husband, son, brother-in-law); all express grief and loss; and all are followed by the authorial assertion that the speaker had spoken in tears and the rest of the community mourned with her (24.746, 760, 776). That the structural framework of Helen's lamentation is much the same as that of the lamentations of Hektor's wife and mother anchors her place in the family. That she cries, as they do, joins her with them in grief. That her lamenta-

⁵⁶For the ritual lament as part of "a collective tribute to the dead from the whole community," see Alexiou 2002, 44, cf. 50, 134.

⁵⁷Monsacré 1984, 119–21, notes the special status of Helen's lament, both because it is the last one quoted in the *Iliad* and because Hektor is neither a husband nor a son to her. Pantelia 2002 attempts to explain Helen's position as the last woman in view of Kakridis' 1949 claim that the last speaker is usually closest in affinity to the hero. Helen's position violates this thesis. Pantelia explains this violation by claiming that the scene in Book 24 does not represent personal or familial mourning, which took place in Book 22, but is a ritual of and for the entire city: "the emphasis of the poem shifts from the human and personal to the universal and transcendent. The Trojans come together to grieve for the death of their leader and celebrate his glory with songs that will keep his memory and name alive" (25). Helen, according to Pantelia, is best suited for this emphatic spot "by virtue of her particular understanding of the importance of heroic *kleos* and poetry as the means for conferring it" (21).

tion evokes the same responsive mourning from the populace as theirs do suggests a new-found place in the community as well.

Moreover, even though neither Andromakhe nor Hekabe mentions Helen, their lamentations create a community of female victimhood. Andromakhe and Hekabe both speak of Hektor the warrior and the consequences of his having lived that role. Andromakhe speaks of the disaster that Hektor has sown for her, their son, and the Trojan people by his merciless brutality on the battlefield. She tells of her likely enslavement, their son's probable murder by people whose relatives Hektor had killed, and the inevitable sacking of Troy now that Hektor is dead and the Greeks have won the war. Hekabe counts Hektor's death as yet another of the losses inflicted on her by Akhilles, who, she relates, had captured others of her sons and sold them into slavery in distant lands. She depicts herself as a mother bereft of her sons by the brutality of battle. Although Hekabe does not blame Hektor explicitly, as Andromakhe had, she does so indirectly, alluding to Hektor's contribution to her suffering by his having killed Patroklos, which was the motive for Akhilles' re-entry into the war and subsequent desecration of Hektor's corpse. In short, both women present themselves as helpless to curb Hektor's aggression but as paying the price for it, that is, as victims of war and masculine aggression.⁵⁸

Spoken just before the end of the epic, the three lamentations serve not only to relate the women's personal feelings but also as a partial summary of the meaning of the epic's events. As such, Andromakhe's and Hekabe's lamentations make a statement about the terrible price of war and convey the sense that women are its true victims. Against this background, Helen, the prize possession being fought over in the Trojan War, ceases to be defined solely or primarily as the war's cause or instigator. She becomes, with the other women, one of its female victims.

Moreover, just as the lamentations bring Helen into the family fold, they close the distance between the mother and wife of the royal household, free women of high standing, and the less fortunate women in the epic. As Andromakhe and Hekabe lament Hektor's death and anticipate their own futures, we cannot but note that the almost certain enslavement that awaits them is much the same as that suffered by Khriseis and Briseis.

⁵⁸For the contrast between the dead and the mourner in ritual laments, between the dead man's fate and the present or future condition of the mourner's past, see Alexiou 2002, 171–77; Richardson 1993, on 24.740–42, points out that “Later, classical laments and epitaphs often emphasize the sorrow which the dead man has left to those who survive.”

At the same time, Helen's lamentation sets her apart from Andromakhe and Hekabe in that it offers a distinctive view of Hektor, different from the view found in their lamentations. Where they had focused on his military role, Helen focuses on his role of family man. Where they had described him largely as an aggressive and even brutal man, Helen describes him as kind, gentle, and protective and as a man of words and reason who knows how to use speech to mollify and temper people's anger and spite.⁵⁹ This does not mean that either Andromakhe or Hekabe fail to appreciate Hektor's familial qualities. Andromakhe's reproach to Hektor for not having died in his bed, reaching out his arms to her and saying some richly felt word (24.742–45) hints at a satisfying marital life with a warm and gentle husband, as do her interaction with him in Book 6 (405–502), her preparing a bath for him in Book 22 (437–46), and, later in the scene (466–67), fainting when she learns that he has been killed. Hekabe's plea in Book 22, that he refrain from fighting Akhilles (82–89), is a mother's plea to a well-loved and loving son. However, the tenor of Helen's remarks clearly differs from that of Andromakhe's and Hekabe's. The difference can probably be attributed to the difference in fate that awaits the women with the war's end. While Andromakhe and Hekabe anticipate their own enslavement and the death or enslavement of their sons, Helen, who knows that Menelaos wants her back and that she can rely on him to protect her from the hostility of those who want to harm her, eulogizes Hektor as she looks forward to a relatively secure future. The terror that Andromakhe and Hekabe probably feel would leave little room for them to focus on Hektor's softer qualities. The perspective that Helen brings to bear on Hektor rounds out his portrait for the audience while doing credit to her discernment and gratitude.

Moreover, the contrast that Helen draws between Hektor's kindness and the petty cruelty of the women in the household and the revulsion of the populace functions as an indictment of the public attitude toward her. As a statement made in public, before the members of the royal household and the community at large, it both asks that others behave toward her as Hektor did and rebukes them for not having done so. This is thus the first speech in which Helen not only tells of her isolation but protests against it publicly, even as she continues to reproach herself for her role in the Trojan War and even as she continues to wish for death.

⁵⁹ It is of interest that when Briseis stands over Patroklos' mangled body and laments his death, she also speaks of his kindness to her (19.282–300).

CONCLUSION

Helen's funeral lamentation elevates her dignity and authority. As a public address near the end of the epic and just before Priam's closing speech, it occupies a significant position in the poem. It augments Helen's stature and bestows resonance on her words.

The funeral scene epitomizes the great distance that Helen has come since her first appearance in the poem. From a silent weaver, she becomes a public speaker and outspoken critic of Trojan society. From solely the cause of the war, she becomes, along with Andromakhe and Hekabe, one of its female victims. From an outcast and moral reprobate, she joins the royal family in grief and moves the community by what she says.

At the beginning of my discussion of what I termed Helen's "encounters," I stated that they show her progressing to ever-increasing personhood, self-definition, and autonomy. This progression does not necessarily reflect development. That is, it cannot be said that Helen changes or grows in the course of the epic. By way of contrast, we may note that Homer shows Agamemnon reconsidering his obstinate refusal to return Briseis (9.115, cf. 19.85–90) and agreeing to make amends for having dishonored Achilles (9.119–20, 19.137–38). Similarly, we may note that Homer shows Achilles' mind change and return after Patroklos' death and his rejoining the battle he had hitherto boycotted. No similar change, clearly defined and its causes noted, is shown in Helen. The progression the poem traces is rather the graduated unveiling of her personality in all of its richness.

This richness comes through as she is shown operating within and despite the constraints that circumscribe her. She remains at the end, as she is throughout the epic, a captive and possession, a pawn of the gods, and an abhorred foreigner who will always be identified, in her own mind as well as the minds of others, as the woman for whom the Trojan War was fought. Her greatness lies in the many acts by which she asserts her freedom and autonomy even as her power to choose her actions is clearly limited: in her letting Priam know that she does not consider Troy her home, even though she is dependant on his good will; in the silence and invisibility she assumes when she is forced to go to Paris' chamber; in her lashing out at Paris even though she will obviously have to go to bed with him and in her persistent distancing from him; in her affiliation with Hektor not only for his kindness but also for the respect in which he is held; and in the unique perception of him that she brings to bear in her lamentation. Her greatness lies, too, in her taking responsibility for the war, whereas Paris had denied his responsibility, and in her refusal to accept

the definitions imposed on her by Aphrodite and Paris, instead persistently defining herself as a woman capable of shame and restraint.

Since so many avenues of action are closed to Helen, and the main, if not the only, possibility she has of exercising any freedom is by expressing what she sees, feels, and thinks, it is quite apt that the one clear progression that the epic traces is in the nature of her expression. Here there is obvious progress, starting with her silent and solitary weaving and going on to her oblique expression of her anger to Priam, where she delivers it, so to speak, in a wrapping of courtesy and flattery; to her outspoken, sarcastic, and indignant objections to Aphrodite's summons; to her derisive and contempt-filled words to Paris; to her softer tones to Hektor; and, finally, to her public lamentation at Hektor's funeral. In each of these encounters, Homer reveals a somewhat different aspect of Helen and yet another way in which she copes with the constraints by which she is circumscribed.⁶⁰

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