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Dossier

¿"Casi humana"? La divinidad y la humanidad de la Helena de Homero

'Sort of human'? The divinity and humanity of Homer's Helen

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Resumen

El propósito del presente artículo es demostrar que la Helena de Homero no es un híbrido humano-no humano, a pesar de que en la *Ilíada* y la *Odisea* el poeta parece reacio a elegir entre su origen divino, por un lado, y su apariencia y comportamiento humanos, por otro. Helena aparece en la literatura como hija de Zeus, hermana de gemelos semidivinos y esposa y madre de mortales. Supuestamente, fue la causante de la Guerra de Troya. Resulta irrefutable que ella se muestra como el centro de atención en sus acciones y discursos, ya que mientras actúa y habla, Helena es un par de los dioses, que no toma en cuenta seriamente a los mortales. Intentaré demostrar que la incapacidad del poeta para distinguir claramente entre los distintos personajes delata su predilección implícita por Helena como diosa disfrazada, más que como ser humano sobrenatural. La tradición y la recepción posteriores han reconocido que Helena funciona como una divinidad.

Palabras clave: Helena, Épica griega antigua, Divinidad, Recepción, Ley de Monro.

Abstract

In this contribution,[1] I will argue that Homer's Helen is not a human-nonhuman hybrid, though in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the poet seems reluctant to choose between her divine origin on the one hand, and her human appearance and demeanour on the other. Helen surfaces in literature as a daughter of Zeus, sister of semi-divine twins, and wife and mother to mortals. Allegedly, she caused the Trojan War. In her performance and her speeches, she shows herself as the center of attention, a claim that is never disputed. As she acts and speaks, Helen is on a par with the gods, but without serious regard for mortals. I will argue that the poet's inability to clearly distinguish between the various *personae* betrays his implicit predilection for Helen as a goddess in disguise, rather than a supernatural human being. Later tradition and reception acknowledges Helen's working as a divinity.

Keywords: Helen, Ancient greek epic poetry, Divinity, Reception, Monro's Law.

Introduction: epic gods[2]

In general, the epic poet Homer (ca. 800 BCE) appears to maintain a clear distinction between the human and the divine characters that populate the two epics ascribed to him, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.[3] In the world of epic, gods are conceived as anthropomorphic.[4] What distinguishes them from humans is primarily their immortality: though vulnerable and sensitive to loss of privilege, epic gods are ever-living.[5] In the human sphere, gods may choose to remain invisible or unrecognisable for humans, or to appear to them in non-human form.[6] Though the 'tribe of gods and that of earthbound men are never the same' (οὔ ποτε φῦλον ὁμοῖον | ἀθανάτων τε θεῶν χαμαὶ ἐρχομένων τ' ἀνθρώπων, *Il.* V.441b-442), it is the gods' very resemblance to mortals that underscores the irreducible gulf between those 'immortal and ageless' gods who 'live easily' and the mortals for whom they 'spin destruction' (Slatkin, 2011, p. 319).

In the narrative of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, encountering a god is an everyday experience. However, the ontological gap between mortals and deathless gods necessitates the emphasising of the discrepancy in alimentary, executive, and sexual norms between men and divinities in their encounters. When Achilles is impeded by Athena from killing Agamemnon (*Il.* I.193-221), his recognizance of the goddess results in immediate obedience.[7] Patroclus' encounter with Apollo (*Il.* XVI.789-849), on the other hand, has already been sealed by the former's doom before the god reveals his identity, as is the case with Hector assisted by Deiphobus/Athena (*Il.* XXII.296-301).[8] Odysseus' encounter with Athena on Ithaca (*Od.* 13.226-330) is explicitly staged by the goddess as a hide-your-identity game which she, inevitably, wins (Richardson, 2006, p. 337).

Next to the epiphanies, the resemblance and exchange between gods and humans is equally expressed in the epithet 'godlike' and its cognates, which may indicate divine descent as well as human beauty and grace's reflexion of the gods' radiance.[9] The latter is prominently brought to the fore in the epithet-verse αἰνῶς ἀθανάτῃσι θεῇς εἰς ὦπα ἔοικεν ('she terribly resembles the immortal goddesses in her face', *Il.* III.158), a unique expression describing Helen. In the *Iliad* and *Odyssey's* depiction of the heroic age as an era when gods and humans of both genders mingled erotically and socially, but without bridging or annihilating the ontological gap between them, Helen alone appears to be the exception: a 'human-nonhuman hybrid' (Hughes, 2005). In the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, however, the poet seems reluctant to choose between her divine origin on the one hand,[10] and her human appearance and demeanour on the other; Nagy (2016), among others, argues for a mortal Helen in Troy, and an immortal goddess in Sparta –with the Trojan Helen nonetheless referenced and recognised as a goddess.[11] There are more characters in ancient Greek epic, of course, that seem, or prove, to combine both human and nonhuman characteristics and abilities. In the case of Helen, however, I will argue that the poet's inability to clearly distinguish between the various *personae*[12] betrays his implicit predilection for Helen as a goddess in disguise in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, rather than a (supernatural) human being.

Homer's Helen

In her 2005 'biography' *Helen of Troy. Goddess, Princess, Whore*, Bettany Hughes argues against an originally divine Helen in Mycenaean cult. Unfortunately, there is no written or material evidence to support either this claim,[13] nor hers that Helen must have been a formidable mortal woman.[14] When Helen surfaces in literature, she figures prominently in early Greek epic, a genre that looks back at the cultural context of the legendary 'heroic age'. In itself, and as the material fixation of some 500 years of orally transmitted narrative, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* present their listening audience with a mixture of reminiscences and references that encompass elements inherited from both the Mycenaean and the Dark Ages, and from the early archaic age.[15] Helen is piece and parcel of this mixture: she appears in both the Iliad and the Odyssey, and may have had a substantial role in the Cyclic poems.[16] In the *Iliad*, Helen is

presented by the poet as related to Zeus twice at her first appearance: she is not merely δῖα γυναικῶν ('radiant among women', *Il.* III.171)[17] but also Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα ('daughter of Zeus', *Il.* III.199). Some verses further, Helen herself claims that Castor and Polydeuces are her full brothers (*Il.* III.237-238); in *Iliad* III.243-244, the poet claims the 'earth already held both', whereas the Odyssean poet (*Od.* 11.300-304) relates the version of the myth where they are alive in the netherworld in turn, sharing some form of part-time immortality. Either way, the epic poet emphasises Helen's status as a heroine,[18] and at least a semi-divine being –a species that gradually becomes rare in the heroic environment of epic (Slatkin, 2011, p. 319). In the *Odyssey*, Helen is explicitly described as wife and mother of mortals (*Od.* 4.12).

Allegedly, she caused the Trojan War[19] (*Il.* II.161 and *passim*). Helen's responsibility is regularly mitigated by reference to Aphrodite as the driving force behind what is reprehensible in her actions. Those around her reflect this ambiguity in their judgements.[20] In *Iliad* III.156-160, the Trojan elders acknowledge her beauty as the reason behind the Greeks' zeal, but wish to avoid their own downfall because of it.

Helen herself is ruthlessly severe in her self-blame.[21] Those in power generally favour Helen despite the trouble her presence in Troy causes. Priam comforts her by putting the blame on the gods (*Il.* III.164-165).[22] Hector equally responds to Helen's self-blame[23] with mitigating words, but he does not explicitly excuse her. He merely refers to her affection for him (φιλέουσά περ, *Il.* III.360), an impact of her personality comparable to her impressive beauty (cf. *Il.* III.164-158 above) and her sought-for knowledge (*Il.* III.161-244).[24]

The poet of the *Iliad* is ambiguous in his portrayal of Helen. He acknowledges her divinity, but none of his characters (including Helen) does or says anything that aligns her ancestry from Zeus. The unique epithet-verse αἰνῶς ἀθανάτῃσι θεῇς εἰς ὦπα ἔοικεν ('she terribly resembles the immortal goddesses in her face', *Il.* III.158) turns her first appearance in the Homeric epic into an epiphany.[25] Her charm, beauty, and knowledge impress all bystanders, though she has a particularly strong effect on men. With the epithet Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα ('daughter of Zeus', *Il.* III.199) the poet of the *Iliad* emphasises her close link with divinity, but he does not claim immortality for Helen,[26] thus seemingly designating her to the realm of humans, as do his characters.

One Iliadic passage in particular confronts the listening audience with Helen's possibly larger-than-human condition: her direct confrontation with Aphrodite. The latter stages a *rendez-vouz* of her *protégés* Paris and Helen under debatable circumstances. On the one hand, she rescues Paris from defeat and death in a duel with Menelaus ('for the woman', ἀμφὶ γυναικί, *Il.* III.254), a duel meant to end the lingering war (*Il.* III.255-258, τῷ δέ κε νικήσαντι γυνὴ καὶ κτήμαθ' ἕποιτο· | οἱ δ' ἄλλοι φιλότητα καὶ ὅρκια πιστὰ ταμόντες | ναίοιμεν Τροίην ἐριβώλακα, τοὶ δὲ νέονται | Αργος ἐς ἱππόβοτον καὶ Αχαιΐδα καλλιγύναικα, 'may the woman and the possessions go with whomsoever proves victorious; and may we, the others, after swearing friendship and reliable oaths, dwell in fertile Troy, and they will return to Argos, pastureland of horses, and to Greece with its beautiful women'),[27] by tearing the helmet's strap when it threatens to suffocate the pulled-along hero (*Il.* III.375-383a). On the other hand, Aphrodite summons Helen to come to the room to entertain Paris. She goes disguised as a trusted servant Helen brought with her from Sparta, and tries[28] to convince Helen by referring to what makes Paris sexually attractive. From the goddess' appearance, however, Helen recognises Aphrodite (*Il.* III.396-398a, καί ῥ' ὡς οὖν ἐνόησε θεᾶς περικαλλέα δειρὴν | στήθεά θ' ἱμερόεντα καὶ ὄμματα μαρμαίροντα, | θάμβησέν, 'but when she noticed the goddesses' beautiful neck, | her attractive bosom, and her shiny eyes, she felt amazed).[29] Aphrodite fails to elude Helen despite her effort to guile her:[30] her disguise was not primarily meant to fool Helen with regard to identity, but to give her orders without others noticing their divine origin (*Il.* III.390 δεῦρ' ἴθ'· Αλέξανδρός σε καλεῖ οἶκον δὲ νέεσθαι, 'Come with me: Paris summons you to return to your quarters!'). Given that Helen is aware of the divine identity of her addressee her response is remarkable: she refuses to obey the goddess' words (*Il.* III.339-412) and suggests she takes her place (346-349, ἧσο παρ' αὐτὸν ἰοῦσα, θεῶν δ' ἀπόεικε κελεύθου, | μηδ' ἔτι σοῖσι πόδεσσιν ὑποστρέψειας Ολυμπον, | ἀλλ' αἰεὶ περὶ κεῖνον ὀΐζυε καί ἑ φύλασσε, | εἰς ὅ κέ σ' ἢ ἄλοχον

ποιήσεται ἢ ὅ γε δούλην, 'Go sit with him yourself, step beyond the way of the gods! | Refrain, I pray, from following your footsteps back to Olympus: | come on, worry about him from now on and guard him | until he makes *you* his wife or his slave.').[31] In the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Helen is not the only one able to refuse a god's orders,[32] but her refusal is particularly headstrong, and without any backup from an immortal choosing her side. When compared to other Iliadic heroes and heroines confronting immortals, Helen is presented as remarkedly equal to Aphrodite.[33] She has to give in and obey the goddess eventually, but even in doing so she claims her individuality and autonomy,[34] also in her forced response to Paris.[35] Subsequently, Helen seemingly moves around unseen, much like the gods do (*Il.* III.419-420). It remains unclear whether this invisibility is due to the goddess' lead, or that it is in accordance with Helen's wish to remain without reproach from the women of Troy.[36] In his description of the *hemitheos* Helen, the poet of the *Iliad* carefully evokes both her human and her divine nature, leaving both open as a possibility, and without making a definite choice.[37]

In the *Odyssey*, the poet pushes Helen's ontological ambiguity further by zooming in closer on the wondrous in both her words and her acts. Working from Monro's Law,[38] the Odyssean poet carefully circumnavigates the Iliadic episodes with mere references, and builds a new narrative along alternative and unexplored lines. The main characteristics that suggested Helen's divinity in the *Iliad* remain visible throughout the *Odyssey*, though: a clear and comprehensive overview of past, present, and future events, a high level of self-centeredness with little regard for mortals, and an imperishable and eternal youth and beauty.

To start with the latter: after her return to Menelaus' palace in Sparta, ten years have passed since the fall of Troy, but Helen has not lost any of her beauty nor her youthful appearance.[39] In fact she does not seem to have aged much since she followed Paris to Troy, twenty years ago. For other characters in the *Odyssey*, the twenty-year period the epic looks back to is often referenced as an unpleasant interlude in the character's pursuit of happiness: both Odysseus and Penelope feel that there happiness is delayed, possibly even irrefutably frustrated, by the Trojan War and its prolonged aftermath. Both also comment on their own and the other's wasted years, prolonged hardship, and changed physical appearance: Penelope claims that she lost her beauty since, and due to, Odysseus' departure for Troy. Speaking to Eurycleia she points out that Odysseus' hands would be as aged as those of the unrecognised beggar by now (*Od.* 19.357-360). Helen, on the other hand, is as young and desirable as she was when she left Sparta for Troy.[40] The ten years of war,[41] and the troublesome return home left her unaffected.[42] The Odyssean poet emphasises her unweaning beauty and liveliness, in contrast with Menelaus' self-proclaimed decline: at her first appearance (*Od.* 4.120-121), Helen is compared to Artemis, the stock *comparandum* for female youthfulness and the pre-wedded state.[43] The comparison is the more remarkable as she has been described as a mother earlier (*Od.* 4.13),[44] and as a dutiful housewife immediately after her first Odyssean staging (*Od.* 4.134-135).[45] Subsequently, she takes the initiative in both speaking (*Od.* 4.137) and responding to speech (*Od.* 4.184). Taking her place in the bed later, next to Menelaus, the poet calls her 'peerless among women' (*Od.* 4.305). When Peisistratus and Telemachus take their leave, Helen participates in the gift-giving, with special attention to her handmade textiles (Olson, 2015, p. 126) and Telemachus' future involvement with women (*Od.* 15.125-128a). Only by now has she changed her approach of Odysseus' son into that of a friendly, and elderly, mother-like figure. But this does not stop Telemachus from asserting that, in the future, he will pray to her 'like a goddess' (*Od.* 15.181, τῷ κέν τοι καὶ κεῖθι θεῷ ὡς εὐχετοώμην) after her interpretation of an omen.

Another aspect that sets Helen apart from other mortal women in the *Iliad*, resurfaces in the *Odyssey*: her lack of regard for the trouble of others. In the *Iliad*, this inadvertency became painfully noticeable in her self-complaint, and in her perspective with regard to the end of the war: whereas all the Trojan women surrounding her face captivity, slavery, and loss of family with the fall of the city, Helen alone has the prospect of a return to a normal life after the Greeks' victory.[46] In the *Odyssey*, Helen has returned to Sparta with Menelaus, but she still combines her feelings of shame and regret with a sense of light-

heartedness with regard to the feelings of others. Thinking back of the time she recognised Odysseus on a spying mission within the walls of Troy and having helped him to escape the city at the cost of many Trojan lives,[47] she returns the Trojan women's alleged hostility (*Od.* 4.259-264, cf. *Il.* XXIV.768-770). Nor are her own countrymen and her former husband safe for her whimsiness: ten years after returning home with her, Menelaus fondly recalls his wife's potentially disastrous approach of the Greeks inside the Trojan horse, imitating the voice of every individual's spouse (*Od.* 4.274-289).[48] Again, Helen is easily exculpated –even after ten years the amazement over her marvellous scheme and ability is clearly more lasting than any grudge or lust for revenge. Helen herself actively mitigates any hard feelings or painful emotions through the use of drugs:[49]

ἔνθ' αὖτ' ἄλλ' ἐνόησ' Ελένη Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα·

αὐτίκ' ἄρ' εἰς οἶνον βάλε φάρμακον, ἔνθεν ἔπινον,

νηπενθές τ' ἄχολόν τε, κακῶν ἐπίληθον ἁπάντων.

ὅς τὸ καταβρόξειεν, ἐπὴν κρητῆρι μιγείη,

οὔ κεν ἐφημέριός γε βάλοι κατὰ δάκρυ παρειῶν,

οὐδ' εἴ οἱ κατατεθναίη μήτηρ τε πατήρ τε,

οὐδ' εἴ οἱ προπάροιθεν ἀδελφεὸν ἢ φίλον υἱόν

χαλκῷ δηϊόῳεν, ὁ δ' ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ὁρῷτο. (*Od.* 4.219-226)

At that moment Helen, daughter of Zeus, thought of something else: |

she added a drug directly to the wine that they drank, | to free them from

pain and anger, a means to forget all ill.| Whoso drank it down, when it

had been mingled in the bowl, | would not shed a tear from his eyes for a

whole day, | not even when his mother or father would die, | or rather

they would kill his brother or his son | with a sword, and he would

watch it happen before his very eyes.

The effectiveness of her wondrous treatment compares with the soothing effect of sleep sent by a goddess (e.g. in *Od.* 21.357-358).

This god-like ability points the way to two final characteristics that highlight Helen's divinity against her seemingly human background in the Homeric epic: her omniscience and her contribution to immortality. Helen regularly speaks uninvited and her claim to *parrhesia* is commonly applauded. In her speeches, she always presents herself as very self-centred: she either talks about what she is, or what she did –her interest in others is not very long-lived (Boyd, 1998). Her knowledge, however, is such that the poet presents this character as a walking catalogue.[50] In *Iliad* III.162-242 Priam invites her to elucidate him with regard to the Greek warriors fighting the Trojans in the plain between the city and the Greek camp. She helpfully answers his questions and regularly provides more information than asked for. In *Iliad* III.234-235 she claims to be able to continue her catalogue, only to turn attention to her two brothers whom she happens to have missed. In the *Odyssey*, she recounts some memories featuring Odysseus (and –inevitably– herself), but not before she claims to limit herself to only narrate a few 'fitting' fragments from a whole of knowledge that is too large to recapitulate or name completely (*Od.* 4.239b-241, ἐοικότα γὰρ καταλέξω. | πάντα μὲν οὐκ ἂν ἐγὼ μυθήσομαι οὐδ' ὀνομήνω, | ὅσσοι Οδυσσῆος ταλασίφρονός εἰσιν ἄεθλοι, 'for I

will list what fits the time: I cannot possibly tell everything, not properly distinguish how many challenges there are for enduring Odysseus'[51]). At other time, Helen is urged on by her heart to divulge her knowledge, as when she is sure she recognises traits of Odysseus (and even Telemachus) in the stranger at her table (*Od.* 4.140-145a). She even proves herself a prophetess: in *Odyssey* 15.172-178 she interprets the appearance of an eagle holding a goose in its talons as a sure sign of Odysseus' successful revenge on his wife's suitors, possibly even of his presence on Ithaca already.[52]

Helen's likeliness to a goddess is most explicitly expressed in the *Odyssey* in the unique future treatment by the gods of her mortal husband on her behalf (*Od.* 4.561-569).[53] Helen's contribution to the future immortality of Menelaus is comparable to Ino's moistening his lips with 'sweet-scented ambrosia' (ἀμβροσίην [...] | ἡδὺ μάλα πνείουσαν, *Od.* 4.445-446a) as a means deployed by an immortal to make a mortal man equal to a god in his circumstances.

Helen's divine shadow

In Homer's *Odyssey*, both Helen's appearance and her attitude testify to a strong self-consciousness (if not egocentrism) and a refusal to grow older. In her performance and her speeches, she shows herself as the centre of attention, a claim that is never disputed. As she acts and speaks, Helen is on a par with the gods, but without serious regard for mortals. Others speak reproachfully of her: Odysseus recognises Zeus' hatred towards the Atrides in the workings of their wives Helen and Clytaemnestra (*Od.* 11.436-439), Eumaius (*Od.* 14.68-71) and Telemachus (having returned home safely, *Od.* 17.118-119) blame her for the death of many.[54] Penelope rebukes Helen most of all: in her view, even her own detached behaviour vis-à-vis the unrecognised beggar is ultimately the result of Helen's actions (*Od.* 23.209-224).[55] Like his characters, the Odyssean poet has trouble distinguishing between the various *personae* of Helen.[56] At times, she is described as a goddess, or as equal to a goddess, with regard to her words and her actions, then again her likeness to mortal women is emphasised. Homer, however, clearly sets her apart from other mortal, especially female, characters: she alone is capable of speaking as a male, an oracle, and every man's best and fully exculpated friend. She alone masters the *pharmaka* that make humans forget pain and sorrow. She alone is insusceptible to the process of aging, and even instrumental in warding off the 'god-given ending of one's days' (*Od.* 4.561-562) for those most closely associated with her.[57] Homeric Helen is a goddess in disguise, rather than a supernatural human being.

Later tradition and reception acknowledges Helen's working as a divinity, and subsequently –but more explicitly– proceeds from the suspicions fostered by the epic poet. His hints at the divine identity of the seemingly human character Helen have been reinterpreted as sure signs of her status as a goddess. A particularly telling instance, and one that sparked, as far as we can see, a complete tradition of its own, is Stesichorus' *Palinode*,[58] a literary revocation of what he had divulged on Helen in an earlier poem (*Helen*, fr. 187-191 Davies), and for which he had been blinded by the 'goddess' Helen (Pausanias III.19.11-13). Stesichorus aims to acquit Helen through an alternative version of her abduction involving not Helen herself, but a mere *eidolon* being taken to Troy.[59] Regardless of the presentation of Helen in the poem itself, Stesichorus metatextual framing of Muse-like Helen puts her on a par with the agent divinities inspiring and manipulating epic and lyric poets. The poetess Sappho, leaning heavily on Homeric diction and concepts of the divine, includes Helen as an example in a series of programmatic statements on what is 'most beautiful' (fr. 16): as her gaze is the determining factor for 'what one loves', Paris is 'most beautiful' through her 'beautification' of him.[60] Helen's agency through mere physical presence is also commented on by Gorgias in his epideictic *Encomium of Helen*, a showpiece in which he defends the mythological character against accusations that she willingly caused the Trojan War. In *Helen* 31, he states that Helen may use her body as a weapon that gives her the power to lead many bodies in competition.[61]

Euripides' *Troades* (415 BCE) and *Helen* (412 BCE) transfer the question of Helen's identity to tragedy, and respond to the gratuitous, traditional view of her in, for example, Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*

681-689, and 1455-1460.[62] Acting as a character on stage, Helen is identified by Hecabe as 'Cypris' (*Troades* 983-988). In *Helen*, Euripides picks up on the version attested in Stesichorus and Herodotus: a god-made *eidolon* of Helen resided in Troy, whereas the 'real' Helen dwelled in Proteus' palace in Egypt, waiting for Menelaus to come and collect her unharmed.[63] A disturbing piece, *Helen* features a titular heroine who unresponsively takes part in a killing spree on her way to freedom, without much regard for the fate of fellow men (Jansen, 2012, pp. 328, 344-345). Her performance seems to emphasise the 'schism expressing the contrast between reality and appearance and the unreliability of sensible knowledge',[64] a schism tied in with the discrepancies between the world of men and the realm of the gods.[65] And a schism Helen herself brings to the fore by describing both herself and her life as a 'marvellous thing' (τέρας; Moles, 2019, p. 53):

> ἆρ᾽ ἡ τεκοῦσά μ᾽ ἔτεκεν ἀνθρώποις τέρας;
>
> γυνὴ γὰρ οὔθ᾽ Ἑλληνὶς οὔτε βάρβαρος
>
> τεῦχος νεοσσῶν λευκὸν ἐκλοχεύεται,
>
> ἐν ᾧ με Λήδαν φασὶν ἐκ Διὸς τεκεῖν.
>
> τέρας γὰρ ὁ βίος καὶ τὰ πράγματ᾽ ἐστί μου,
>
> τὰ μὲν δι᾽ Ηραν, τὰ δὲ τὸ κάλλος αἴτιον. (*Hel.* 256-261)
>
> 'Did my mother give birth to me as a marvellous thing for men? | For no
>
> Greek or non-Greek woman | brings forth a white vessel of chicks, | in
>
> which they say that Leda bore me for Zeus. | My life is a marvellous
>
> thing, and so are my deeds, | in part due to Hera, and in part the
>
> consequence of my beauty.'

The 'god-made Helen' is equally marvellous: in Euripides' play she is the one to 'confess' and die (*Helen* 608-615) instead of the 'real' Spartan queen.[66] The latter, yet again, refuses to grow old and die, and ends the play by sailing back to Sparta with her husband.[67] Euripides does stage her death, however, in his play *Orestes* (408 BCE, four years after *Helen*). Here, Helen is ambushed by a vengeful Orestes (Ελένην φονεύειν· μανθάνω τὸ σύμβολον, 'To kill Helen: I understand the watch word', *Orestes* 1130) who blames her for the death of his father and the subsequent inevitability of him killing his mother, making him known as 'matricide'. On Pylades' advice, he decides to slit her throat so that he may be known as 'the man who killed Helen, killer of thousands' (Ελένης λεγόμενος τῆς πολυκτόνου φονεύς, *Orestes* 1142). The chorus wants to see the corpse first before they believe that she is dead (πρὶν τύμως ἴδω τὸν Ελένας φόνον | καθαιμακτὸν ἐν δόμοις κείμενον, *Orestes* 1357-1358), but from the Phrygian slave's account it remains unclear whether Orestes has actually plunged his sword into her body (*Orestes* 1472-1473).[68] All he knows for certain is that there is no body to prove that the plan was successful (*Orestes* 1493-1497 πάλιν δὲ τὰν Διὸς κόραν | ἐπὶ σφαγὰν ἔτεινον· δ᾽ [ἐκ θαλάμων] | ἐγένετο διαπρὸ δωμάτων ἄφαντος, | ὦ Ζεῦ καὶ γᾶ καὶ φῶς κα νύξ, | ἤτοι φαρμάκοισιν | ἢ μάγων τέχναις ἢ θεῶν κλοπαῖς, 'they turned again to the daughter of Zeus | to murder her. But [from the room] she | had disappeared straightaway through the house, | o Zeus, Earth, Day and Night, | be it by *pharmaka*, | by the tricks of sorcerers, or theft by the gods').[69] The last option proves right in the final lines of the play: Apollo appears as *deus ex machina* with Helen at his side, proclaiming her a goddess and as meant to be immortal, despite her being the deliberate cause of death of many (*Orestes* 1629-1643a, 1683b-1690).[70] Euripides' Apollo merely makes explicit what Homer has always fathomed.

Concluding remarks

For centuries, Helen of Troy has enchanted poets and artists. Gradually, she has grown into a divinity whose workings and appearance were definitely more-than-human and larger-than-life;[71] she may originally have been a worshipped being in pre-Greek and Mycenaean times. The epic poet Homer wrestles with Helen's identity. On the one hand, he places her in the human world, and subjects her to other humans' wishes and mistakes; on the other, she clearly transcends their realm, and speaks and acts not only individually and authoritatively, but also selfishly –and with impunity. Women revile her, mesmerized men (including the *epigoni*) cannot help but forgive and foster her (Blondell, 2010a, p. 7), the gods and the poet reserve her a special place and future benevolent powers. Male humans cannot resist her charm and seductive power; nor can the epic poet.

Homer's inability to clearly distinguish between Helen's various *personae* betrays his conception of Helen as a goddess rather than a human being. Her wondrous presence and marvellous deeds beguile the composing poet as gods, and muses, beguile their mortal victims: Homer did not stand a chance. Reception pieces took their cue from Homer, but were less reluctant to succumb to the consequences of Helen's immortal nature: they nonetheless reluctantly deal with her death, or turn it into an apotheosis. Reception in modern media, like film, equally stresses Helen's elusiveness.[72] They too rightly fathom what Homer felt –but did not make his characters say out loud in the *Iliad*– himself.

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Notas

1 I thank *Synthesis*' editor for the kind invitation and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

2 Editions from which quotations of primary texts have been taken are listed in the bibliography. All translations are by the author.

3 Herodotus 2.53 credits Homer and Hesiod with "having composed the theogony for the Greeks, assigning the gods their names, defining their honors, and abilities, and describing their forms." Burkert (1985, p. 12) acknowledges the significant parallels with the divinities of antecedent Mesopotamian and Anatolian epic indicating a shared mythopoeic terrain, but with regard to the proof of religious continuity over more than five millennia, it "is nevertheless questionable whether on the basis of East-West culture drift this evidence can be used to shed light on Neolithic religion as such, and in particular on the religion of Neolithic Greece." The decipherment of Linear B has indisputably shown that parts of the epic pantheon predate Homer by at least four centuries: tablet KN V 52 lists as names of gods who receive offerings the Mistress of At(h)ane, Enyalios, Paiaon, and Poseidon, all known from Homer, though the epic poet uses the terminology 'mistress' (πότνια, cf. TH Of 36.2, PY An 1281, MY Oi 701/704) as a generic denominator for female goddesses and nymphs (Parker, 2017, p. 18). KN Gg 705 adds Eleuthyia to the list, and a third tablet from Knossos, KN Fp 1, supplies Zeus and Erinys. Pylos tablet PY Tn 316 further mentions, next to familiar Zeus, Hera and Poseidon, the Mistress in *Pakijane*, *Manasa*, Trisheros, *Dopota*, *Ipimedeja* (Iphimedeia?), *Diwija*, *Emaa Areja* (Hermas Areias?), and Drimios, all without equivalent in early epic. PY Fr 1202 refers to a Divine Mother and to Artemis, PY Xa 102 to Dionysus. An unknown god, *Pere*-82 (Persephone?), is found on KN Ga 1058. In the period between the Linear B documents and Homer, the so-called Dark Ages, Apollo and Aphrodite seem to have taken center stage (Burkert, 1985, p. 51).

4 Despite their alleged origin in Egyptian forbearers, as assumed by Herodotus 2.50-52. Full theriomorphic conception of Greek gods cannot be evidenced, though there are various myths depicting (especially male) deities making a sexual overture in animal disguise. In iconography, gods and animal are intimately associated (Burkert, 1985, pp. 64-65). Female deities are sometimes referenced through theriomorphic features: Athena is γλαυκῶπις ("with owl-eyes" or "owl-voice"; Grand-Clément, 2013, interprets the epithet as describing color), Hera is βοῶπις ("with cow-like eyes"). Dionysus is the exception: a hymn (*PMG* 871) images him as a bull as does a tauromorphic stele from Kyzikos.

5 Vernant (1986) describes the gods' body as significantly other than the human body, as its constitution lies somewhere between "hyper-body" and "no-body". Purves (2006) links the gods' human-like vulnerability to their "falling into human time", a consequence of their leaving the apparently unchangeable sphere of the divine (as in *Il.*V.334-340, Stamatopoulou, 2017). Numerous stories (e.g. *Il.* XIV.315-328, *Od.* 8.266-366) within the epic on the gods' susceptibility to feelings of love, anger, and jealously (all criticised by early philosophers like Xenophanes, and subsequently modified into allegories by the Stoics), however, show that the gods of epic experience human-like emotions and physical pain within the divine realm. Homer's alleged contemporary and colleague epic poet Hesiod describes the extremes of divine physical agony in *Theogony* 793-804: as a result of perjury, a god may lie breathless, spiritless, and voiceless for a year, bereft of the divine nourishments ambrosia and nectar (cf. *Od.* 5.196-199). Subsequently, he/she will be cut off from feasts and councils for nine years.

6 As Apollo and Athene in *Iliad* VII.58-61. In *Odyssey* 1.320a Athena leaves Telemachus in a bird epiphany (ὄρνις δ' ὡς ἀν' ὀπαῖα διέπτατο, "she flew upwards like a bird") through which he recognises the goddess (cf. *Od.* 3.372, 22.240). In the human sphere, gods express themselves in ways that clearly distinguish them from humans: gods are larger than men (cf. the simile in *Od.* 6.102-109), they have shiny eyes, possibly a radiant body (cf. *Homeric Hymn to Demeter h.Cer.* 277-278, τῆλε δὲ φέγγος ἀπὸ χροὸς ἀθανάτοιο|λάμπε θεᾶς, "a light shone afar from the skin of the immortal goddess", and below on *Il.* III.396-397), a very loud voice (cf. *Il.* V.859-863, ὃ δ'

ἔβραχε χάλκεος Αρης |ὅσσόν τ' ἐννεάχιλοι πίαχον ἢ δεκάχιλοι |ἀνέρες ἐν πολέμῳ ἔριδα ξυνάγοντες Αρηος, "brazen Ares bellowed as loud as nine or ten thousand men cry joining in the strife of Ares in war."), and they work miraculous deeds (*Il.* XVI.791-806a, Apollo immobilising Patroclus; Il. XXII.276-277, Athena returning his spear to Achilles; Il. XXIV.445-446, Hermes guiding Priam unseen through the Greek c *Od.* 5.351, Ino Leucothea rescuing Odysseus; *Od.* 24.530-535, Athena repelling the suitors' kinsmen; cf. Penelope's suspicion that the beggar must be a god given his killing of all the suitors in *Od.* 23.62-63).

7 In *Iliad* V.127-128 Athena explains to Diomedes that the gods are usually unperceived by mortal characters as a mist veils mortal eyes. Turkelbaum (2007, p. 63) argues that Athena's visual epiphany to Achilles 'seems to be modelled on aural recognition' despite the explicit mention of her "pair of flashing eyes" when he recognises her (*Il.* I.199b-200 αὐτίκα δ' ἔγνω | Παλλάδ' Αθηναίην· δεινὼ δέ οἱ ὄσσε φάανθεν, "He immediately recognised Pallas Athena: her two eyes shone impressively").

8 Cf. Hermes revealing his identity to Priam after successfully escorting him to Achilles' tent in the Greek camp (*Il.* XXIV.341-469).

9 Bakker (1997, pp. 162-165) argues for epithets, including "godlike", as epiphanies, stagings effected in performance. Slatkin (2011, p. 319) points at the "relentless disparity between mortals and immortals" expressed by formulaic δαίμονι ἴσος ("equal to a god", e.g. *Il.* XVI.786) signalling imminent death.

10 Despite the fact that she names a mortal woman as her mother in *Iliad* III.238. Nagy, who stated that a single mortal in a family tree makes all descendants equally mortal (Nagy, 2013), repeals his view in the case of Helen: through comparison with her brothers, the Dioscuri, and with reference to her alleged *eidolon*, Nagy (2016) argues for either Helen, both the immortal *eidolon* and the mortal woman, as a "stranded twin".

11 But cf. Edmunds (2019, p. 124, n. 36) who considers Nagy's position "odd" since, although the narrator rightly identifies Helen as "daughter of Zeus", the *Iliad's* characters do not.

12 *Not* including Nagy's (2016) *eidolon* as an "image-double", cf. Pucci (2012); Edmunds (2016, pp. 162-196); Vintges (2017, pp. 129-164); Edmunds (2019).

13 Larson, 1995, pp. 78-100 identifies hero-cults that combine male and female characters, e.g., Helen and Menelaus in Sparta, Pelops and Hippodameia in Olympia, and Cassandra/Alexandra and Agamemnon in Amyclae. In Sparta, Helen was worshipped as goddess in Therapne (West, 1975; Burkert, 1985, p. 205; Ratinaud-Lachkar, 2000, pp. 252-253), and as a heroine in Platanistas (Rogier-Blanc, 2009, p. 25; Rozokoki, 2011).

14 Hughes speculates that she may have been, among other, a priestess, a princess, or a queen. In mythology, she is the daughter of Zeus and Nemesis (*Cypria fr.* 7), or of Zeus and Leda –his only immortal child with a mortal woman, together with Polydeuces (Burkert, 1985, p. 185).

15 Debate on the origin and the transmission of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* has been at the heart of Homeric research since antiquity. "Dictation Theory" holds that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are the written outcome of a long oral tradition, possibly reflecting a particularly successful occasion of performance (Jensen, 2011; West, 2013, 2017b; Ready, 2015) or an authoritative standardisation like the alleged "Peisistratean Recension" (ca. 565 BCE, cf. Finkelberg, 2018). The evolutionary model (Nagy, 2004) works from the notion that in the course of four centuries "script", "transcript", and "scripture" constituted a much more fluid text transmission; Bird (2010) shows that this fluid text can be evidenced into the 1st century BCE. The Alexandrian and Byzantine scholars tried to criticise what was transmitted and added their comments to the text (Dickey, 2008). The "Homeric question" centres around the person of the poet and the attribution of both epics to a single artist. During the last century and a half, analysts and unitarians discussed this issue, but they were overshadowed by Milman Parry's and Albert Lord's comparative approach of the Homeric epic as orally composed and transmitted literature. Narratological study deals with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as thematically coherent narrative along equally comparative lines (De Jong, 2001; 2014).

16 Holmberg (1995, p. 19, n. 3; Forbis Mazurek, 2013; Spelman, 2017, pp. 747-750).

17 The epithet δῖα, apparently the feminine of δῖος "godlike", is an adjective cognate related to the name Zeus ("Zeus-like", cf. the goddess *Diwija* in PY Tn 316). Rougier-Blanc (2009, p. 27): "Dans le register de l'héroïsm homérique s'établit donc une equivalence entre les exploits masculins et les qualités physiques féminins" (cf. *Il.* II.714-715).

18 Edmunds (2019, p. 3, on the identification of Helen as a goddess by the poet): "[...] the narrator, and thus his audience, always knows exactly who the god is. He knows, and imparts to his audience, what the god knows. The same is true of the epithets: the narrator's tell us the truth about Helen. Other's may or may not do so."

19 Itself "Mythistory", cf. Prosperi (2016, pp. 93-94). Later authors derive Helen's responsibility from her portrayal in Homer and the Epic Cycle, cf. Holmberg (1995, p. 19, n. 3).

20 Roisman (2006, p. 2) describes judgements on Helen as reflecting the multiple constraints to which she is subject as "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."

21 In response to Priam's kind words, Helen claims she had preferred death over her arrival in Troy (*Il.* III.173-174a, ὡς ὄφελεν θάνατός μοι ἀδεῖν κακὸς ὁππότε δεῦρο |υἱεῖ σῷ ἑπόμην, "if only evil death had been my pleasure when I followed your son here"). Blondell (2010a, p. 1) states that she is "objectified by the male characters in ways that excuse her from male blame and thus serve the heroic agenda. Yet her self-blame is an implicit assertion of agency on her part. It not only disarms male reproach by characterizing her as a "good" woman, but affirms her responsibility (and this agency) in her original elopement." Helen claims that "all shudder" at her (*Il.* XXIV.775, πάντες δέ με πεφρίκασιν).

22 Allan (2006, pp. 3-5) argues that Priam's lenience towards Helen, resulting in his refusal to hand her back to Menelaus (against popular demand in Troy to do so) is a "disastrous mistake [...]. No less than Paris, Priam is responsible for the destruction of Troy, his city. He acts wrongly, and he – and everyone else who depends on him –must suffer the consequences."

23 In *Iliad* VI.344-358, Helen refers to herself as an "abhorred, warmonger bitch" (cf. Graver, 1995 and especially Franco, 2005, who describes the dog as the totemic animal for the race of women, including the negative 'dogness' of unfaithfulness and cheating) and wishes she had been taken away by natural disaster or, since events cannot be undone, married to a better man. Whereas the powers that be in Troy generally excuse Helen as responsible for the war, the Greeks in the *Iliad* remain silent on the matter with the exception of Achilles who calls her "shudder-inducing" (ῥιγεδανῆς Ελένης) in *Iliad* XIX.325 (Blondell, 2010a, p. 5).

24 Acknowledging the long-standing debate on Helen's "introductory remarks" as out of place, or inserted, in *Iliad* 3, Gaertner (2001, p. 300) argues that the *Teichoskopia* puts a limelight on Helen, thus "putting special emphasis on [...] a person". Later in the *Iliad*, Helen will again speak in an authoritative manner, particularly to Hector (*Il.* VI.323-369), and about Hector, in her lament (*Il.* XXIV.761-775, cf. Pantelia, 2002).

25 Facilitated by Iris, as Helen is "prodded out by one goddess [...] and threatened home by another" (Olson, 2015, p. 127).

26 Nor does she claim immortality for herself. Remarkedly enough, though, Helen's repeated death wish-in-the-past (as cited in footnotes 25 and 27 above) strengthens the impression that her inability to die is the cause of her (and the others') current situation. First-person death wishes by others (e.g. by Penelope in *Odyssey* 18.201-205, 20.68-82) mention death as a possible way to avoid unwanted future situations (Larson, 2010, pp. 180-181).

27 Divine assistance may enhance the hero's status, as in *Iliad* XXII.276-277 when Athena returns his spear to Achilles. In the case of Paris, however, Aphrodite merely rescues him so he be preserved for further lovemaking. Paris is conscious of the ambiguity of the divine assistance he received: defending himself against Helen's rebuke of his supposed cowardness (*Il.* III.428-436) he claims –undeservedly– that his opponent was aided by Athena (*Il.* III.439 νῦν μὲν γὰρ Μενέλαος ἐνίκησεν σὺν Αθήνῃ, "this time Menelaus was victorious through Athena."). The Greeks interpret the divine assistance for Paris as a confirmation of their own victory and the validity of their claim to Helen and her possessions (*Il.* III.457-460). Even the gods in assembly question the justification of Aphrodite's assistance at the cost of Menelaus' victory (*Il.* IV.10-13).

28 That Aphrodite's encouragement remains an unsuccessful attempt is expressed by the use of the present-aspect stem imperfect ὄρινε in *Il.* III.395.

29 Suter (1987, pp. 51-52) argues that Helen and Aphrodite are in a way substitutes as Helen suggests when she tells Aphrodite to go entertain Paris herself (*Il.* III.406): the encounter equals Helen looking at her mirror image. At other places in Homeric epic, gods are only recognised by mortals if, and when, they wish to be, e.g., Athena in *Il.* I.199-200, *Il.* XXII.214-299 (but not by Hector), and *Od.* 13.221-313. Turkelbaum (2007, pp. 64-65) points out that "visual recognition" of gods is the privilege of *hemitheoi* (ΣbT *Il.* III.396-397, τοῖς διογενέσι δηλοῦντα οἱ θεοί, ὡς τῇ Ελένῃ) whereas mortals only experience "aural recognition". On "shiny eyes" as a signal of female desire, Toscano (2013).

30 It is not necessarily remarkable that Helen sees through the goddess' disguise (cf. Turkelbaum, 2007, pp. 65-66). In other instances, such disguise is primarily meant to remain unrecognisable for the bystanders, whereas the human spoken to is supposed the identify the speaker as a divinity, e.g. *Il.* XIII.72, ἀρίγνωτοι δὲ θεοί περ, "though gods are not hard to recognise".

31 Roisman, 2006, pp. 15-20.

32 In the heat of battle, both Diomedes (*Il.* V.330b-332, 855-857) and Achilles (*Il.* XXI.211-227) continue their attack on opponents that declare themselves divine (Purves, 2006, pp. 200-203). In contrast to Helen, however, both heroes are supported by divine brothers and sisters-in-arms.
33 Even in her 'powerlessness with respect to the most intimate of acts' (Roisman, 2006, p. 23 on *Iliad* III.447-448) Helen resembles the goddess whom she has accused of the same weakness only forty lines earlier.
34 Roisman, 2006, pp. 19-20. Whereas Aphrodite addresses Helen as "rash woman" (σχετλίη, *Il.* III.414), the poet reconfirms her status as a *hemitheos* with the epithet "daughter of Zeus" (Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα, *Il.* III.418).
35 Minchin (2010, pp. 390-391) argues that Helen's words to the goddess are sarcastic, and prepare for her harsh and taunting words to Paris later (cf. Roisman, 2006, pp. 20-23).
36 Face to face with Paris, she again tries to be unseen by looking at the ground. Cf. Roisman (2006, p. 20): "[...] Helen maintains a measure of independence by refusing to look at Paris".
37 Boyd (1998, pp. 14-17) argues for Homeric Helen as a "demigoddess [...] able to possess the power to summon" (based on her recognising Odysseus in disguise and her "magically" stroking the Trojan horse while walking around it trice).
38 Minchin (2018) approaches the *Odyssey* as a reception work that looks back at the *Iliad*.
39 Cf. Austin (1994, pp. 71-89); Blondell (2013).
40 Either against her will (*Il.* II.356, 590) or voluntarily (*Od.* 23.218, 221). Paris' remark that he lusts for her as he did on their first sexual encounter (*Il.* III.442-446) denies the passing of time for Helen in a way that is reminiscent of Zeus' first thought as he sees Hera approach him on Mount Ida: "As he saw her, lust immediately clouded his right mind –just as it did when the two of them made love for the first time" (ὡς δ' ἴδεν, ὥς μιν ἔρως πυκινὰς φρένας ἀμφεκάλυψεν, | οἷον ὅτε πρῶτόν περ ἐμισγέσθην φιλότητι, *Il.* XIV.293-294).
41 The awkward mention of Helen's twenty years absence from Sparta (*Il.* XXIV.765) may refer to the Greeks' failed first attempt to retrieve her which ended in Mysia, a version of the myth mentioned in Proclus' *Chrestomachia*, and possibly taken from the *Cypria*. Proclus, however, does not allow for a ten-year interval between the Greeks' first and second attempt to arrive at Troy.
42 Penelope comments on the distinctive appearance of Odysseus upon entering the Trojan War (*Od.* 20.88-89). Menelaus claims that it took eight years for him and Helen to return to Sparta, via Cyprus, Phoenicia, Libya, and Egypt (*Od.* 4.81-85): it caused him to lose his brother, any enjoyment of his possessions, the viability of his dynasty (*Od.* 4.91-96), and his bodily strength (*Od.* 4.51 describes Menelaus as sitting when receiving guests. Cf. *Od.* 4. 342-345 on the supposed loss of strength for Odysseus.
43 Cf. the simile in *Od.* 6.102-109 comparing Nausicaa, surrounded by peers and about to be wedded off, to the maiden goddess Artemis, surrounded by her chaste nymph companions.
44 The poet of the *Iliad* does not mentions her motherhood. According to the Odyssean poet, Helen was destined to have only one child, equal (as she is herself) in beauty to Aphrodite (*Od.* 4.12b-14).
45 Note the deliberate correspondence between "golden-distaff" Artemis (Αρτέμιδι χρυσηλακάτῳ, "golden-arrow" according to Hesychius, cf. *Il.* XX.70) in *Od.* 4.122, and the golden distaff given to Helen by Alcandre, wife of Egyptian Thebe's ruler Polybus (*Od.* 4.131) and presented to her by her servant Phylo (*Od.* 4.135) on this occasion. Olson (2015) argues that the Homeric setting of Helen working with her handmaids reflects a transfer of the Mycenaean practice of specialist palace workers (e.g. PY Ab 578, PY Aa 891, PY Ad 694, PY Ad 480) to the *oikos*-setting.
46 This becomes especially poignant in Helen's lament for Hector (*Il.* XXIV.761-776) which attracts attention because of its remarkable positioning: Helen is the third woman to speak (following Hector's wife Andromache and his mother Hecabe), thus occupying a significant place as member of the family (Roisman, 2006, pp. 30-31) or as an indication of "her particular understanding of the importance of heroic *kleos* and poetry as the means of conveying it" (Pantelia, 2002).
47 Both in her own tale and in the next one told by Menelaus, Helen is indisputably the main character. Cf. Boyd (1998).
48 Possibly referring to each woman's regional accent. Boyd (2008) argues that Helen's seeing through the ambush (and knowing who is inside) and her calling out in the various women's voices are indicative of magical powers. Peisistratus, however, comments on Helen's and Menelaus' "godlike voice" (*Od.* 4.160; cf. *Od.* 4.595-598a).
49 One of the magical elements in the narrative of the *Odyssey* as opposed to the *Iliad* (cf. the Lotophagoi's offer in *Od.* 9.93-97, and Hermes' use of *molu* in *Od.* 10.287-306); Helen applies *pharmaka*, a practice she learned in Egypt (*Od.* 4.227-232).

50 In accordance with the various references to Helen's capacity as a composing artist, on a par with the performing poet, or to Helen as an allegory for poetry and storytelling herself. Cf. Lu Hsu (2018). Her weaving of a tapestry in *Il.* III.128 is commonly regarded as a metaphor for her ability to control storytelling. Cf. Roisman (2006, pp. 9-11).
51 The use of present tense εἰσιν contradicts the truth of Menelaus' observation that "to Odysseus alone the god did not grant a safe homecoming" (*Od.* 4.181-182).
52 In her role as a prophetess, Helen outpaces her husband Menelaus, who was asked by Peisistratus to interpret the sign but "lingered, so that he may answer in accordance with provenance and knowingly" (*Od.* 4.169-170).
53 Zeus' son in law via Helen's mortal twin-sister Clytaemnestra, Agamemnon, has proven to be as mortal as his treacherous wife.
54 Reversely, the goddess Athena refers to Helen as the cause of the Trojan War as a way to positively encourage Odysseus to fight the suitors (*Od.* 22.226-230).
55 Penelope refers to Helen not as a parallel for her own attitude and actions, but rather as a contrast. Morgan (1991: 3): "Thus by invoking Helen, Penelope not only provides a rhetorically effective defense of her seemingly overzealous circumspection, but also emphasizes her commitment to the prevalent mores of the institution of marriage itself at the very moment she is accepting Odysseus back in her marriage bed".
56 Aptly described as "sexual personae" (*personae* meaning characters in a play or public settings) in Vintges (2017, pp. 129-131), citing art historian Camille Paglia: "[...] the Hollywood stars of the 1930s revived pagan myth. Western popular culture and especially Hollywood restored the pagan pantheon of physically perfect, openly sexual gods and goddesses' (Paglia, 2013, p. 2). The creation of "glamour" in early Hollywood had magical properties, since "ordinary men and women were turned into divinities by the vast machinery of the star system" (3). Edmunds (2016, pp. 162-196) lists all the well-known *personae* of mythical and historical Helen, but argues (in comparative, constructivist terms) that the Helen of Troy narrative is a mere *parole* (a "narrative possibility") against the background of an "abduction of the beautiful wife" *langue* evidenced in a collection of folktale and other texts (pp. 18-19).
57 Foley (2001, p. 305): "Though Euripides's eidolon of Helen ′dies′, she is preserved through the ′real′ Helen's skilful deception as a means of creating a topos in which Menelaus may be reborn a hero. Helen succeeds at securing her own reputation as well as the survival of her husband in Penelopic fashion. Reconciled with Menelaus through the cognitive process of *sungnome*, the Persephonic figure of Helen restores the fertility of civilization and brings about ′a mitigation of past suffering and destruction,′ as she returns to her rightful place in Sparta."
58 Stesich. fr. 193 Davies (*P.Oxy.* 2506) proves that he wrote at least two *Palinodes*. Cf. Moles (2019, pp. 52-54).
59 The version is supported by the historiographer Herodotus. Cf. Austin (1994). Nagy (2016) considers the possibility it is the fundament of Helen's divine-human hybridity in the *Iliad*.
60 Blondell (2010b. pp. 378-382) points at Helen's heightened agency when compared to Alcaeus' portrayal of her in fr. 42 and 283. Decker (2019) argues that Sappho aligns with Aphrodite as a "subversive goddess" that rejects patriarchal virtues; in my view, Helen's behaviour in fr. 16 aligns with them, too. For the possibility of fr. 16 encompassing parts of two separate poems, Thévenas (2015).
61 Cf. Worman (1997). In the same passage, while exculpating Helen as a victim of the "power of speech", and deliberately referencing Helen's command of soothing *pharmaka* in the *Odyssey*, Gorgias compares this power to the effect of drugs on their user. Dieba (2008) gives an overview of the arguments to consider the *Encomium of Helen* as discussing or arguing with the new Euripidean version of the myth of Helen.
62 Moles (2018) points out that Euripides moves away from the fear Helen induces in others in favour of the fear she experiences herself.
63 On Helen's claim that she kept Menelaus' bed 'unravaged', cf. Griffith (2016). Juffras (1993) argues for interpretation of the prologue and the parodos as emphasising Helen's position as a possible victim of sexual violence.
64 Jansen (2012, p. 337): "Rather, it would seem that Menelaus is searching for not only more reasonable answers than a woman made of ether by the gods can provide but for a common humanity with Helen, something in her that he may truly recognize and understand. Pressing her for the details of her divine abduction, Menelaus attempts to identify imaginatively with Helen. He suggests that they will gain pleasure out of hearing about her hardship, that it will be a kind of cathartic experience for the couple. Through listening to her tale, Menelaus hopes that he may empathetically think with Helen, ultimately defusing his anger and mitigating his confusion. Despite Menelaus's attempts at understanding Helen's plight, he still functions as an individual rather than an equal partner of this reunion duo." Novo-Taragna (1986); Moles (2019, p. 63) –having quoted from John Keats'

Ode on a Grecian Urn–: "[...] beauty is a way to attain knowledge because of its eternity. In the complex world of the *Helen*, Euripides displays the exact contrary: we do not know what truth really is and we do not know what beauty really is, because we are simply human beings and we simply cannot really know." Note the use of the epithtet "with beautiful ankels" (εὐσφύρῳ) in *Helen* 1570, an epic reminder (cf. *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 2) to refer to the virgin maiden (Jansen, 2012, p. 329).

65 *Helen* thus ties in with historical actuality at the time of its first performance. Cf. Inglese (2003); Perotti (2004-2005); Lu Hsu (2018).

66 Starting from a self-inculpating and exonerated-by-others Helen in the *Iliad*, her responsibility and guilt for the Trojan War and the death of many remain a *non liquet* for the classical tradition (Carbonero, 1989; Viarre, 2008). While struggling with her responsibility, the roman poets, especially Virgil and Ovid, "depict Troy's deadly captive in positive terms that relate to her part in the ultimate foundation of the city of Rome" (Fratantuono & Braff, 2012, p. 43).

67 Friedman (2007, p. 196) argues that Euripides uses the Odyssean material suggestive of return and safe homecoming "not to imply a happy ending, but to point to an incompleteness in [...] resolutions."

68 Though the slave acknowledges that Orestes' threatening sword is bloody (*Orestes* 1519).

69 Menelaus considers the disappearance of the body part of Orestes' scheme (*Orestes* 1557-1560). The latter denies that he killed her –if only he had (cf. εἰ γὰρ τόδ' ἦν, "if only she had been [a victim]", *Orestes* 1614)! Her disappearance frustrates his sending her to Hades (*Orestes* 1580-1582).

70 The same reason for the Trojan War is given in the *Cypria* and in Aristoxenus' alternative openings verses of the *Iliad*.

71 Bettini & Brillante (2002, pp. 158-186) add late- and post-classical identification of Helen as a symbol of virtue, an equivalent of the moon-goddess Selene or an Erinys (Seneca), and her afterlife in Pythagorean and Gnostic thought (cf. Eusthatius, *Parekbolai ad loc.*).

72 Roisman (2008). Maguire (2009, pp. 17-18) points out that it took until 1580 before Helen "died" (she commits suicide) for the first time in literature and art (in Thomas Proctor's *The Triumph of Truth*). In modern visual fiction, Helen continues to live in order for others to die (pp. 107-108, 173).