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"Bitch that I Am": Self-Blame and Self-Assertion in the *Iliad*[*]

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SUMMARY: In the *Iliad*, Helen 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 thus agency) in her original elopement. Her erotic subjectivity is also shown in the Aphrodite scene, where Helen both takes responsibility for her transgression and implies that the impulse prompting it has not been quenched.

HELEN OF TROY OWES HER PERENNIAL FASCINATION IN PART TO HER elusiveness as an agent and/or object of desire. As a contested object, she initiates the havoc of the Trojan war irrespective of her own subjectivity or agency.[1] Though often objectified, however, she is almost never a mere object. She is an agent as well as a victim, a viewer as well as viewed, active as well as

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[1] Though subjectivity and agency are closely intertwined, I resist equating these two terms (as, e.g., Holmberg does in denying the Homeric Helen subjectivity because she does not "bring to fruition a plan of action," 1995: 21). On the other hand, I do not confine subjectivity to "inwardness" (Holmberg 1995: 28; cf. Suzuki 1989: 16, 34–35, 43). I define subjectivity rather as the potential for responsible agency (agency for which one may be held responsible) within the physical and ideological constraints that construct particular identities, together with a sense of the self as such a (potential) agent. Such a sense of self is constructed through a self-awareness formed in relationships, i.e., through the variety of social roles and relationships (including objectification by others). The process by which one achieves such self-awareness and exercises agency is conditioned by historical circumstances, and admits of varying kinds and degrees of possibility.

passive, a generator of signs as well as a sign herself.[2] As such she is an iconic figure of the Greek bride, embodying the problematic tension that lies at the heart of the traffic in women.[3] In the *Iliad*, however—the most canonical version of her story—Helen's subjectivity and agency are minimized both by the narrative and by characters within it. This emphasis is echoed in the critical tradition, where she appears less as an agent than as a victim of a variety of objectifying forces, whether human or divine.[4] Not coincidentally, the Iliadic Helen is also widely perceived as an extraordinarily charming and sympathetic figure.[5] My purpose in this paper is to reexamine the Iliadic evidence with an eye to uncovering her subjectivity and agency while acknowledging the complexity and appeal of her character.

I

Helen's elopement is presented in the *Iliad* as an assertion not of her own desire, but of Paris's or Aphrodite's. A variety of speakers—Menelaus, Hector, Helen herself, and the narrator—speak of Paris "taking" her to Troy, using the verb ἄγω or ἀνάγω (3.48, 6.292, 13.627, 22.115–16, 24.764), and Helen uses the same verb with Aphrodite as subject (3.400–1).[6] This verb does not exclude volition in a person who is "taken" (see, e.g., *Od.* 4.175); but it can also be used, among other things, for dragging a resistant animal (13.572) and for the outright abduction of women and children in warfare (6.426, *Od.* 14.264; cf. *Hom. Hymn* 2.30). Paris himself goes so far as to speak of having "seized" Helen (ἁρπάξας, 3.444), using the vox propria for violent abduction.[7] But he does so, interestingly, in a scene where he is seducing Helen—enticing her to bed, not raping or abducting her. He is appealing to the overwhelming desire that shrouds his φρένες (3.442) and has him in its grip (αἱρεῖ, 3.446)—the same power that drove him to "seize" her in the first place. In other words, while apparently taking sole responsibility as agent of the abduction, he presents himself as an object, the victim of ἔρως, and

[2] Lévi-Strauss's famous discussion of woman as a sign that is also a generator of signs is often cited in connection with Helen (e.g., Bergren 1983: 75–76; Suzuki 1989: 27–29, 42; Worman 1997: 159, 2001: 19, 2002: 215n13).

[3] On which see Rubin 1975 (with reference to Lévi-Strauss on p. 201).

[4] For examples, see nn91 and 98 below.

[5] The rhapsodies of Tronquart 1953: 28, 41–42 are not atypical. A rare exception is Ryan, who finds her "wanton, self-centered, deceitful," and yet so "irresistibly beautiful and charming" that "we perhaps forgive her everything" (1965: 117).

[6] Cf. also *Od.* 4.262, *Cypria* 103.8.

[7] E.g., *Hom. Hymn* 2.19–21, 5.203, 5.208, Hdt. 1.5.2. But even this verb does not rule out the abductee's complicity (cf. Hdt. 1.4.2, Aesch. *Ag.* 534).

(by implication) of the power of Helen's beauty.[8] Yet his language denies her any active exercise of that power, reducing her to a plundered object whose subjectivity was irrelevant to the transaction. The language of seizure allows Paris to retain erotic control even as he submits to his own desire.

The verb ἄγω is also used for a man "taking" a bride to his home in marriage (e.g., 9.146, 16.190). In the *Iliad*, the objectification of Helen as "bride" is most obvious in the duel that Menelaus and Paris fight over her while she looks on from the walls of Troy. The scene reflects a common mythic courtship pattern in which the bride is represented as a prize disposed of by men, like a horse or a tripod.[9] It evokes, in particular, the original courtship of Helen herself when, according to the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, she was essentially sold to the highest bidder (204.85–87 M–W).[10] In preparing for the duel, the men declare that they will fight over Helen and "all the goods" (3.70) that Paris stole from Menelaus, and speak of the winner "taking" her, along with "all the goods": κτήματ' ἐλὼν εὖ πάντα γυναῖκα τε οἴκαδ' ἄγέσθω (3.72 = 3.93; cf. also 3.404, 4.19).[11] The pun on Helen's name (ἑλών) underlines her objectification through reversal: she is not the taker, but the taken.[12] Though a herald is sent to inform Priam of the duel (3.245–58), the men do not notify the woman whose future depends on the outcome. Instead, Iris comes to tell her, in the guise of a sister-in-law (3.121–38). The goddess's spontaneous appearance has bothered commentators since antiquity (see Kirk 1985 ad loc.). But whatever else it may signify, one of its effects is to suggest that no human being took the trouble to let Helen know her fate was hanging in the balance.

[8] Cf. the ἔρως that seized (εἷλεν) Anchises at the sight of Aphrodite (*Hom. Hymn* 5.144) and the ἔρως that "shrouds" the φρένες of Zeus at the sight of Hera (14.294). In both these cases the male is a victim of female erotic power, actively deployed. For the male lyric poets' use of a similar strategy (the male lover as subjugated by Eros while subjugating the object of his desire), see Williamson 1996: 251–53.

[9] The compensatory gifts that Agamemnon offers Achilles in Book 9 include the pick of his own daughters in marriage (9.141–48). A bride is a more complicated and more precious *kind* of object, but she still takes her place on the list with the tripods, horses, and slave-women, and her wishes seem equally irrelevant. On the duel and Teichoskopia as reflections of courtship patterns, see Kakridis 1971: 31–39; Austin 1994: 31, 37–41; cf. also Jamison 1994.

[10] Cf. Clader 1976: 10.

[11] The combination of Helen and other stolen goods is reiterated by other male speakers, e.g., 3.255 (herald), 3.281–87 (Agamemnon), 3.458–59 (Agamemnon), 7.350–51 (Antenor).

[12] For the punning significance of the verb ἑλεῖν, see Cassin 2000: 88–90, who argues that its active/passive meanings reflect the ambiguity of female sexuality.

This unabashed objectification plays to Helen's advantage in an important respect. Agency entails responsibility, and responsibility entails susceptibility to blame and, most importantly, punishment. As long as the question is whether Paris stole her, or whether the Trojans should return her, then she cannot be held accountable: he is to blame for starting the war, and they for allowing it to continue. The objectification of Helen therefore dovetails with the well-known fact that blame directed towards her by Iliadic characters other than herself is muted or non-existent. It is Paris who takes the blame, from Achaeans and Trojans alike, in acknowledgment of the larger scope for agency assigned to the male.[13] Qua stolen object, Helen is off the hook.[14] Priam, notoriously, declares that in *his* opinion the gods are to blame, as opposed to Helen (3.164). Hector calls her a major disaster (μέγα πῆμα) for Troy and a source of shame to Paris (3.50–51),[15] but the context makes it clear that he ascribes to her no agency or blame.[16] The Trojan elders recommend her removal despite her awesome beauty, but even they do not blame her personally; they simply wish to be rid of her because she is trouble (πῆμα again, 3.159–60). The Achaeans are, for the most part, silent on the matter. But the strongest and most emotional negative reaction to Helen in the entire epic comes from Achilles, in his lament for Patroclus, where he calls her "chilling,"

[13] 3.28, 3.38, 3.46–49, 3.55–56, 3.321–22, 3.351–54, 3.453–54, 6.280–85, 6.325, 6.523–25, 7.390, 13.768. On the blame of Paris by Hector and Helen, see Vodoklys 1992: 26–36. On Paris and the blame tradition, see Suter 1993.

[14] She is also off the hook, of course, even as a subject, if she was taken against her will. This may be implied in the problematic passage where Nestor urges mass rape of the Trojan women in retribution for the "struggles" (ὁρμήματα) and groans of/for Helen (2.354–56; the key line is repeated at 2.590 from Menelaus's point of view). The context—tit-for-tat retaliation—might suggest that this indicates Helen was violently raped by Paris (i.e., the genitive is subjective), and most interpreters, from ancient times on, have taken it this way (see Kirk 1985 ad loc. and, e.g., Kakridis 1971: 25; Graver 1995: 55; Maronitis 1999: 125). If this is right, and the "struggles and laments" belong to Helen, the line is unique in showing any concern among men for her subjectivity as a putative victim. But this representation comes from Nestor's (and then Menelaus's) perspective (cf. Willcock 1956/57: 23; Groten 1968: 33; Roisman 2006: 3), and thus serves the Achaean agenda. It is also possible that the genitive is objective (the "struggles and laments" are those of men fighting over her: so, e.g., Kirk 1985 ad loc.), since retaliatory justice might well take the form "one act of sex with someone else's wife in exchange for another." Loraux uses the indeterminacy of the passage to underline Helen's status as caught "between subject and object" (1995: 196).

[15] The "race" of women derived from Pandora is likewise a πῆμα μέγα (Hes. *Theog.* 592).

[16] Contrast his use of μέγα πῆμα for Paris in clearly reproachful contexts (3.50, 6.282; cf. also, e.g., *Od.* 10.344).

or "shudder-inducing" (ῥιγεδανή, 19.325). This is the only acknowledgment of her destructive power by any of the Achaeans.[17] Though such language is familiar from the discourse of misogyny (e.g., Hes. *Op.* 702, Semon. 6.1), it says nothing about personal guilt or agency. Like the word πῆμα, it allows her to be a cause without being an agent of destruction.

This denial of Helen's culpability serves the heroic agenda of Achaeans and Trojans alike. Menelaus, and the Greeks generally, can afford to objectify her, since the justice of their cause depends on treating her as a stolen object that should be returned. Indeed, they cannot afford *not* to do so, since any acknowledgment of her agency risks complicating that simple model of justice.[18] Making Paris, not Helen, the target of blame makes the Achaean quest for revenge (τίσις)—for men's retribution against men—central to the complex of excuses for the war (cf., e.g., 2.356 = 2.590, 3.28). In general, revenge is viewed in Greek texts as an understandable, often even admirable, impulse, but one that should not be taken to excess, as the *Iliad* itself reminds us in Book 24. The sack of an entire city in retaliation for the theft of a single woman was therefore to raise eyebrows later on (cf., e.g., Hdt. 1.4.2). In the *Iliad* itself, however, no one directly challenges Helen's worth as a casus belli.[19]

Yet there are moments suggesting that the Achaeans are over-vengeful, notably the ferocity with which Agamemnon voices his desire for revenge, which outstrips even that of his brother, the injured party (6.55–60; cf. also Nestor at 2.354–56).[20] In order to salvage the Achaean enterprise, Helen's value must transcend any such anxieties. The Trojan War must be a glorious quest for an ineffably precious object. Thus Athena successfully spurs Odysseus into rallying the army by urging him not to let Helen, for whom so many Achaeans have already lost their lives, remain as a "boast" (εὐχωλή)—an object to glory in—for Priam and the Trojans (2.176–78; cf. 2.160–62). Such an outcome would bring Agamemnon the greatest disgrace (4.171–82). The legitimacy of Achaean heroism—the value of the pursuit of κλέος itself—

[17] "Shuddering" is a response to any terrifying threat, such as warfare, death, or the power of the gods (see Clader 1976: 22).

[18] Note that the oath of Helen's suitors, according to the *Catalogue*, was to come to her husband's defense and seek *revenge* if she was *violently* stolen (204.78–84 M-W). But there is no explicit mention of the oath in Homer (Gantz 1993: 564).

[19] Contrast Achilles' rueful admission that Briseis was not worth quarrelling over (19.56–64), despite her alleged equivalence to Helen (9.337–43). Ajax, similarly, tries to convince him that Briseis is not worth it (9.628–38).

[20] Agamemnon's moral authority is also undermined by his theft of Briseis from Achilles (cf. Suzuki 1989: 23–24). For other subtextual challenges to Helen's value as casus belli, see Suzuki 1989: 29–34.

would be undercut if its object were not worth the struggle, if it were contemptible or of illusory value. And blame would compromise Helen's value, contaminating her reputation and making her damaged goods.[21] Why would anyone in his right mind fight to regain such a woman? Helen *must* be worth it. Hence the avoidance of Achaean blame.

The objectification of Helen serves a different purpose for the men on the other side of the fight. Among the Trojans, Paris has his own reasons for referring to Helen as a plundered object, as we saw. But it is also in the Trojans' interest more generally, especially in the context of the duel, to present Helen as a mere object that can conveniently be "given back," or assigned to its proper owner. The theft of an object is more easily rectified than the seduction of a wife.[22] Indeed, the Trojans have an even greater stake than the Achaeans in affirming Helen's ultimate value, since they not only lack the "justice" of the Greek cause but are fighting in self-defense—a situation that makes the retention of Helen ludicrous on its face. This is particularly true for Priam, who presumably has the authority to return her, but seems reluctant (or unable) to exercise it.[23] It is therefore not surprising that he avoids admitting not only Helen's responsibility but even that of Paris, who, everyone else agrees, is the guilty party.[24] Any such admission would make the Trojan refusal to return Helen inexplicable, since it is the retention of Helen—as opposed to the original elopement—that is the cause of the continuing war. As long as the Trojan leaders remain in solidarity with Paris, who refuses to return her, they cannot afford to question her value.[25] Priam's famous words are therefore a way of excusing not just Helen but himself, his son Paris, and the Trojans collectively.

[21] One of the primary cultural functions of abuse is, of course, to contaminate a person's reputation and social prospects. For the argument that Helen is not worth the struggle because of her behavior, cf., e.g., Eur. *Andr.* 605–9.

[22] Even in classical Athens, where male status, as opposed to female subjectivity, was the primary concern of rape law (see Omitowoju 2002a and b), the woman's volition was clearly a significant factor in passing moral judgment (see esp. Sommerstein 2006).

[23] As Schein points out, Priam and the elders hold titular authority, but "the actual power is held by the men who do the fighting" (1984: 172). Thus Priam is needed for the sacrifice before the duel, but it is explained that this is because, as an old man, he is more trustworthy than his sons (3.105–10, 3.116–17, 3.250–52).

[24] Priam abuses Paris only in the context of Hector's death, along with his other remaining sons (24.247–62; the last three lines seem particularly pertinent to Paris).

[25] It is only when Hector is at his most desperate and emasculated, as he considers surrendering to Achilles, that he contemplates giving back Helen along with all the treasures of Troy (22.111–28)—the moment when he abandons his aspirations to heroic glory. Her symbolic value crumbles with his heroic resolve.

The consequences of this become fully clear in Book 7, where Priam leaves the matter of Helen in Paris's hands rather than endorsing Antenor's proposal to return her to Menelaus, despite the fact that the Trojans generally seem to want to give her back (7.345–93). The moment replays his divergence from the elders on the walls (of whom Antenor was one). Yet even those elders view her as a legitimate casus belli whose supreme value trumps any ethical challenge to the war's rationale (3.153–60).[26] The amoral implications of declaring, as they do, that there is no νέμεσις—no cause for indignation—in fighting for Helen becomes clear when we remember the νέμεσις that is, in fact, directed at Paris for taking her in the first place.[27] Her beauty is such that it blinds men to ethical concerns—a typical consequence of the influence of Aphrodite.[28] The men mesmerized by that beauty need to believe in her innocence, even when they are fully aware of the damage such beauty causes. The attribution of blame would both call into question the supremacy of her beauty—its ability to impair men's moral judgment—and make a mockery of the heroic enterprise by undermining the rationale for fighting on both sides.

Priam's words and the reaction of the elders both contribute to a poetic strategy that implies that Helen is worth it to the Trojan leadership by demonstrating the disarming effect she has on them as men. The Trojan elders' desire to be rid of her should not distract us from the fact that they are awestruck by her beauty. She retains her power even over these dried-up old men—though perhaps it is their aged, cicada-like condition that allows them to recommend her removal.[29] Priam, of course, explicitly refuses to blame her. Hector, the other most significant Trojan leader, is sufficiently charmed to breathe not a word of blame and always treat her kindly (24.767–75). And her erotic power over Paris, who seems to have the ultimate say over retain-

[26] Cf. Collins 1988: 43–44.

[27] Helen herself calls him deficient in the sensitivity to shame and νέμεσις that goes along with stable φρένες (6.350–53). On this tension, see Bassi 2008: 206–9.

[28] Aphrodite and Eros are destructive in the first instance to reason, and with it to social and ethical norms (see, e.g., Soph. *Ant.* 791–94, Eur. *Med.* 636–44). Their target is typically the φρένες (see Sullivan 1983).

[29] The φρένες of the old are more stable than those of the young (3.108–10). Note that it is one of these elders, Antenor, who later proposes returning Helen (7.347–51). Tithonus was turned into a cicada by extreme old age (Gantz 1993: 36–37), and according to Plato's *Symposium*, these creatures do not engage in sex (191c). But they are also associated with the heat of summer, the peak time for female lust and male sexual weakness (Hes. *Op.* 582–88, Alc. 347 LP, with Cyrino 1995: 54–55, 93–96). On the ambiguity of the cicada image, see further Roisman 2005. According to Tronquart 1953: 30–31, Eustathius thought that the elders whispered out of embarrassment at still being susceptible to Helen's charms.

ing her, is greater than ever (3.442–46). (There is never any question but that she is "worth it" to any of the men with whom, in sequence, she is sexually involved.) This power that Helen exercises over the men who come face to face with her both explains and justifies the war in masculine terms.[30] It also guarantees her future survival. After the sack of Troy, as soon as the Greeks are back in her presence they lose the desire to stone her, and the sight of her notoriously induces Menelaus to drop his sword.[31] Her beauty is such that it erases moral concerns from men's minds. For this reason, it is not possible for the poet to show Helen blamed face-to-face. Her "face" is, after all, the cause of the trouble—it both captivates and disarms men (sometimes literally). By saving Helen's face, with its dangerous beauty, the poet is saving face for the Greeks and Trojans—and for himself—as well as for Helen.

II

Yet Helen is no *mere* object. Even when she is mentioned alongside the material goods that Paris stole, she is never included among them. The difference is made clear by Paris, when he declares that he is willing to return the latter but not Helen herself (7.362–64). Not coincidentally, it is the man who is most subject to the power of her beauty who draws a significant distinction between Helen and the stolen κτήματα. For that power depends on the fact that she is not merely a lovely object, like a statue, but a living woman. As Deborah Steiner has argued, there are three central faculties—vision, voice, and movement—which distinguish a living person from a statue or a corpse.[32] These are the faculties that both permit any human being to perform her various social roles and construct her as a subject. They are also implicated in the exercise of erotic charm. The seductive power of a woman's beauty lies not only in her physical appearance, but in her glance, her movement, her voice.[33] These three aspects of seductive femininity all lie to a significant extent under a woman's own control, and all three are implicated in Helen's effect on the men who come within range of her beauty. When the Trojan

[30] Contrast the anonymous collective of the Trojans, who approve Antenor's suggestion that they return Helen (7.350–53, 7.392–93), but are not exposed to her personally. An exception is Antimachus, who is in Paris's pay (11.123–25).

[31] The latter scene is very popular in art (see Clement 1958; Hedreen 1996). For the near-stoning, see Stesich. 201 *PMG* with Clement 1958: 47n2.

[32] See Steiner 2001: 145–51. The three faculties correspond closely to Bal's three criteria for identifying an actantial subject (1984: 348).

[33] Innumerable texts present the eyes as the seat of erotic desire in both lover and beloved, viewer and viewed (see, e.g., Halperin 1986: 62–63; H. Parry 1992: 265; MacLachlan 1993: 34–39, 65–67; Calame 1999: 20–23). For seductive female speech, see, e.g., McClure 1999: 62–68. For the eroticism of feet and movement, see Stieber 2004: 117–25.

elders liken her to a goddess they are reacting to her appearance as she moves towards them (3.155), modestly yet seductively veiled,[34] and to the glance of her eye (3.158).[35] Priam and Hector both engage her in conversation and are charmed by her discourse. Her capacity for (erotic) agency, expressed through these three capacities, clearly contributes to her allure.[36] Thus, Paris desires her not merely as an object, but as a participant in mutual pleasure: he does not rape her, but seduces her (see further below).

The implication that the Iliadic Helen is more than an object puts the question of her culpability back on the table. Though no man within the epic blames her, she is free, as a subject, to reproach herself, and notoriously does so, castigating herself most memorably as a "chilling, evil-devising (κακομήχανος) bitch" (6.344).[37] These self-reproaches serve not only to fill the vacuum left by the male characters' avoidance of blame, but to trump that avoidance. If Helen avows her guilt, then who are we—or Priam—to disagree? Yet this avowal also frees the poet to present the Achaeans and Trojans as fighting heroically for an object that is uncontaminated by their disparagement. Since she blames herself so stringently, they are freed from the necessity of doing so.[38] It is Helen's self-blame that allows Priam to save face for her by

[34] For the eroticism of Helen's veil, see Llewellyn-Jones 2003: 129, and cf. the effect on the suitors of the veiled Penelope at *Od.* 18.208–13. For the appearance of virginal αἰδώς as a trap for men, cf. Pandora (Hes. *Op.* 71, *Theog.* 572) and Aphrodite (*Hom. Hymn* 5.82; cf. also *Hom. Hymn* 6.1, Hes. *Theog.* 194). The female actress in the erotic mime at Xen. *Symp.* 3–4 is dressed as a bride and looks like a modest woman. For the erotic charm of αἰδώς (real or feigned), cf. also Ath. 564b and see Ferrari 2002: 54; Llewellyn-Jones 2003: 143–44, 283–98; Steiner 2001: 206–7 and cf. 230, 237.

[35] Εἰς ὦπα ("in the face") implies reciprocal eye-contact. See especially *Il.* 9.373; cf. also 15.147, *Od.* 23.107, Hes. *Op.* 62 (where it is used of Pandora), and see further Frontisi-Ducroux 1975: 110, 1995:19–20, 25–26; Prier 1989: 76–77; Worman 1997: 157–58.

[36] The same is true even of women in classical Athens. Despite the severity with which women's sexuality is policed, a wife must engage in sex willingly in order to gratify her husband. Cf. Ar. *Lys.* 162–63, Xen. *Oec.* 10.12, Xen. *Symp.* 9.3–6 (where the sexual responsiveness of the "bride" in the erotic mime seems to be a definite part of its appeal) and see further Halperin 1990: 133–36; Winkler 1990: 98, 210; Cohen 1991: 167–70. On at least some ancient theories, she must also enjoy intercourse in order to conceive a child—the primary purpose of marriage (Halperin 1990: 139; Dean-Jones 1992: 82–85; Stewart 1995: 84 with n79).

[37] For "bitch," cf. 3.180 (to Priam), 6.356 (to Hector), *Od.* 4.145 (to the assembled company). Such self-blame is unique in epic. It probably draws on a parallel tradition of blame that only shadows Helen in the *Iliad* (Graver 1995). According to Monsacré, Helen is the only female in the *Iliad* to express a sense of remorse or culpability (1984: 159).

[38] Cf. Worman 2001: 27–29, 2002: 53–54. As Snell points out (1973: 10), Priam and Helen essentially exchange the expected roles of accuser and defender.

attributing responsibility to the gods (3.164–65).[39] It thus permits the poet to evade the problem of whether a guilty Helen was "really" worth it,[40] by assuring her guilt while allowing her to retain her splendor as an object of supreme value in the eyes of others. She has—conveniently—put herself in her place, so that they do not have to.

Helen's self-blame does more than this, however. It not only allows the male warriors to avoid impairing her value as a woman by reproaching her, but helps restore that value by compensating for her past behavior. As Graver puts it, Helen's character is "ennobled" by her acknowledgment of past misdeeds (1995: 59). I am not sure, however, that "noble" is quite the right word for the effect of such self-reproach, at least on the part of a woman.[41] Certainly, Helen's regrets make her a more sympathetic character. But they also characterize her as "good" in a specifically gendered fashion. Self-deprecation is a form of self-disempowerment characteristic of the Greek male portrayal of "good" women, who often denigrate their sex in general and themselves in particular as inferior to men.[42] Its significance may be seen from the way it is sometimes deployed by powerful, dangerous women in tragedy to deceive and manipulate men. Medea, most notably, not only disparages women generally (Eur. *Med.* 407–9) but manipulates Jason by presenting herself as psychologically weak and inferior on account of her gender (889–91, 922–31). Blame of Helen by men, which would debase her value, is suppressed or eclipsed by the bright light of her beauty, but self-blame enhances her value as a woman, and hence, indirectly, the legitimacy of the heroic struggle to (re)claim her.

[39] The more one is willing to accept responsibility, the more one is entitled to such face-saving. Thus Agamemnon is able to save face in Book 19 only because he takes responsibility by offering Achilles compensation (cf. Dodds 1951, Ch. 1). Helen implies that she would think better of Paris if he took more responsibility (6.350–51), and the perfunctory way in which he does so (cf. Schein 1984: 22) gives him less entitlement to the face-saving gestures he is prone to employ (cf. below). Similarly at *Od.* 11.553–60, Odysseus tries to save face by blaming the gods and Zeus for the trouble between himself and Ajax, but the latter is notoriously unimpressed.

[40] Cf. Collins 1988: 51, 57–58; Ebbott 1999: 19–20.

[41] Contrast Hector's self-reproach for an error of judgment, for which he atones by facing Achilles (22.98–110).

[42] See, e.g., Soph. *Ant.* 61–62, Eur. *Or.* 605–6, *IA* 1393–94, *Andr.* 269–73, Xen. *Oec.* 7.14, 39. At Eur. *Andr.* 837–38, 943–53, Hermione voices self-reproaches that evoke her mother in the *Iliad*, and the nurse says that her husband and father will not punish her (840, 869–75). However, Hermione's status as a "good" woman here is debatable (cf. Kovacs 1980: 71–72). Note too the chorus's view that women should cover for each other (954–56). To be sure, none of these women self-flagellates to the same extent as Helen; but none of them is reproaching herself for such a serious transgression (unless Hermione counts).

Ironically, she achieves this restoration of her value by casting doubt on that value—a reflection of the Catch-22 in which Greek ideology traps every woman, descended as we all are from Pandora, the archetypal καλὸν κακόν (Hes. *Theog.* 585).

Such self-deprecation is particularly appealing to men when voiced in remorse for transgression of the gender roles that undergird the patriarchal power structure. Thus Jason—who should surely know better by now—patronizingly accepts Medea's explanation of her behavior, saying he does not blame her for her womanly weakness (908–10). Few things are as gratifying as remorse to those in authority, since it affirms not only the behavioral norms they prescribe for their inferiors, but their original judgment of the transgressor's weakness, which in turn allows them to claim the subordinate's collusion in her subjugation. It is for this reason that the pattern of (minor) transgression followed by repentance forms part of Xenophon's portrait of a model wife. When Ischomachus's wife is angry at herself for having misplaced something, he graciously explains to her how things should be organized and blames himself for not having done this sooner (Xen. *Oec.* 8.1–2). She is thrilled that he does so (9.1). Similarly, after he rebukes her for wearing make-up she never does such a thing again (10.9). Helen's self-blame for a much more serious transgression seems to suggest that she too has learned her lesson. This makes it a powerful tool for manipulating men. Homer's Helen certainly knows how to use it for such purposes, judging from the fact that it is addressed exclusively to men whose protection is vital to her (Hector and Priam).[43] (When talking to Paris, who will protect her for different kinds of reasons, she blames him, not herself.)

By enhancing her value as a woman, Helen's self-blame contributes to her presentation in the *Iliad* as a good wife who happens to be saddled with a worthless husband (as she puts it herself: 6.350–53). Her transgressive union with Paris is portrayed, in most respects, as a conventional, respectable marriage.[44] She spends most of her time at home weaving,[45] and is properly

[43] In the *Odyssey*, she blames herself before the assembled (male) company (4.145). The closest she comes to such self-blame in other contexts is when she calls herself "loathsome" in her speech to Aphrodite (στυγερήν, *Il.* 3.404).

[44] Iris, in the role of sister-in-law, calls her "bride" (νύμφα, 3.130), and Paris is referred to regularly as her "husband" (πόσις, e.g., 3.329, 3.427, 11.369, 13.766, 22.763), on an equal footing with her ex-πόσις Menelaus (3.429). (Πόσις is also used of, e.g., Hector as the husband of Andromache, 6.484.) She is also his ἄκοιτις (3.447, 6.350), a word used for her relationship to either Menelaus or Paris (3.138), and for Andromache's to Hector (6.374). Ἄλοχος is also used of all three relationships (6.337, 6.394, 6.495, 13.626). On the use of the same kinship terms for both sets of in-laws, see Vernant 1990: 66.

[45] On her first appearance she is, notoriously, weaving (3.125–28)—the signature activity of the nubile woman and good wife (see esp. Ferrari 2002). Aphrodite disguises herself

modest in demeanor when she goes out.[46] Though seemingly estranged from the other Trojan women, she cares about what they think of her (3.411–12), as a good woman should.[47] She shows proper αἰδώς towards Priam (3.172), with whom she enjoys the relationship of a daughter-in-law to an affectionate father-in-law (3.162, 3.192, 24.770). She mourns the dead Hector as a beloved brother-in-law (24.762–72; cf. 6.344, 6.355), and although the content of her lament isolates her from the Trojans, its existence and prominent placement situate her as another Trojan woman, a victim of the war of which she is also the cause.[48] With this normalizing of her position at Troy comes the disempowerment of domestication, leaving barely a hint of the threat of erotic transgression.[49] Yet it also gives her a different kind of power over the Trojans. Her integration into Priam's family—over a period of twenty years, as she herself asserts (24.765)—makes it hard for the Trojan royal family to give her up, not despite the length of the war but because of it.[50] She is not only a "good" woman, but a Trojan Woman, so that the honor of Trojan men is at stake. Yet her presentation as a proper Trojan wife also helps to justify the Achaean enterprise. If Helen is a good wife, Menelaus has all the more reason to want her back.

The self-blame that guarantees Helen's guilt thus works to her advantage, neutralizing her transgression and ensuring her protection. It is an exercise of power, albeit within the confines of the extremely limited sphere of action available to women in the *Iliad*. As such it contributes to Helen's use of the persuasive voice, a resource that she employs to the very limits of propriety (though not beyond). In contrast to other women in the *Iliad*, Helen seems to come and go freely from the θάλαμος in a way that hints at her too-mobile sexuality. Whereas Andromache, the model wife, is seen in conversation only

as a favorite wool-working servant (3.386–88), and later we will find Helen supervising her maids in such activity (6.323–24). The scene reflects negatively on Paris (who should be fighting), but not on Helen, who is simply going about a woman's proper work.

[46] She veils herself in enveloping garments and takes with her two maids (3.141–44; cf. 3.419). For the need for maids, cf. esp. *Od.* 18.182–84.

[47] Women's sensitivity to public opinion is a theme of the *Odyssey* (e.g., 6.285–86, 16.75, 19.144–47, 19.527, 23.148–51). On the "politics of reputation," see further Cohen 1991: 54–69 and passim.

[48] Cf. Collins 1988: 48–49; Roisman 2006: 31.

[49] But see below on her attitude towards Hector and her nostalgia for Menelaus, which suggests a persistent marital instability.

[50] The length assigned to the Trojan War is usually ten years. On Helen's claim that it has been twenty, see Richardson 1993 on 24.765. As a loose expression for a very long time, it suits her rhetorical agenda as a fixture at Troy.

with her husband, we repeatedly hear Helen using her voice to gain and sustain the affections of other significant male relatives.[51] Her penchant for self-blame is perhaps the most distinctive aspect of that voice. We first see her in action with Priam on the wall, where self-reproach forms part of a strategy that is clearly effective in maintaining a mutually affectionate relationship (3.162, 3.172).[52] Later she uses "sweet" (μειλιχίοισι) words to Hector,[53] words that turn out to be both subtly flirtatious and full of self-flagellation (6.343–58), and are again effective in conveying φιλότης (6.360).[54] At Hector's funeral the other women lament the consequences of losing his physical might, but Helen dwells on his gentle character, which afforded her a different kind of protection (24.767–75). In so doing, she once more expresses remorse (24.764), while positioning Priam as her continuing protector for the future (24.770). The two people she singles out as *not* blaming her are also the ones we have seen responding to her persuasive power, that is, to her power as a living, speaking agent. The price Helen pays for her success with these men is, ironically, a denial of her responsibility and thus her agency. But the payoff is her safety, and this result—the fact that she is still alive—is something she achieves for herself at least in part through discourse. The speeches with which she disarms the men around her also serve, in collaboration with the poet's narrative voice, to disarm the epic's notionally male external audience (cf. n5 above).

As a source of power for women, the voice is intimately associated with the operations of Aphrodite, serving as the audible complement to a woman's visible charms (cf. n33 above). The poet cannot bring Helen's physical beauty

[51] The only encounter in which she does not speak is with Iris (in the guise of her sister-in-law). The only female to whom she speaks at all is Aphrodite.

[52] For the way Helen's discourse serves to win Priam's sympathy, see Roisman 2006: 11–15.

[53] For the seductive quality of women's "soft" and "sweet" words, cf. *Od.* 1.56–57 (μαλακοῖσι), 18.282–83 (μειλιχίοις) and see Worman 2001: 27–28, 2002: 45–46, 52, 88. Cf. also *Hom. Hymn* 6.19, where Aphrodite is invoked as γλυκυμείλιχε. Helen's speech to Hector may seem less than "gentle," but her self-deprecation contributes to the winning nature of her discourse. (Thus the flirtatiousness of 6.350–51 depends on regret for the past.) There is a different kind of mismatch between her scolding of Paris in Book 3 and his claim that she has been using "soft words" to urge him to fight (6.337; cf. 3.438). In this case, Paris is presumably saving face.

[54] For the way Helen's discourse is tailored to winning over Hector, see Arthur 1981: 29; Collins 1988: 46–47; Mackie 1996: 118–19; Roisman 2006: 27–28. Her purpose is not literal sexual seduction (Paris is still present!), but there is a continuum between erotic and non-erotic φιλότης (cf. 9.340–43, 9.449–51 and see H. Parry 1992: 266; Calame 1999: 39–43).

before our eyes,[55] but he can and does allow us to hear her seductive voice.[56] She even surpasses Aphrodite in this regard. Though the goddess eclipses Helen's visible beauty, her mortal protegée is more adept in the use of persuasive language. In Book 3, she even trumps the goddess's blandishments by obliging her to move from verbal enticement to outright threats. Paris, Aphrodite's other favorite, is also adept at the use of seductive, flattering language. Outside the bedroom, however, Helen is more effective than Paris in winning the affection of her audience. This is partly because her self-blame constitutes self-disempowering, gender-appropriate, and evidently endearing behavior. Her use of persuasive speech lies securely within the boundaries of "good" womanhood. In contrast to the effeminate Paris, she thus lives up to her gender, for better and worse. Yet her skill with words—and particularly her skill in manipulating the very discourse of "good" womanhood—betrays the dangerous power that seductive women exercise over men. Indeed, the very decorum of her self-reproach renders her more dangerous by disarming her audience. It is the verbal counterpart of her modest yet seductive veil.

The discourse of self-blame also empowers Helen in a different way, by providing her with a space in which she can assert her own subjectivity and reclaim the agency that is denied to her by men. She could, of course, have protected her own κλέος by representing herself as a plundered object, as the men do, thus saving her face—not to mention her neck—by collaborating in her own objectification. Instead, she chooses to blame herself. Besides serving her as a rhetorical strategy, this self-deprecation is also an assertion of past agency. As such, it forms part of a coherent Helenic perspective on the original elopement. Where others blame only Paris, Helen links them as jointly responsible for their transgression, implicitly placing their agency on an equal footing (6.356–58). Her repeated wishes that she had died before all the trouble started (3.173–75, 6.344–51, 24.764) echo Hector's wishes, and her own, regarding Paris (3.40, 3.428–29; cf. also 6.280–85), and serve similarly as a way of assigning responsibility for shameful behavior.[57] She is the only person to use active verbs for her part in the elopement, saying that she

[55] Zeuxis's inscription of *Il.* 3.156–57 on his painting of Helen (discussed by Elmer 2005: 29–31) caused a scandal, since it implied that he could do just that. The inscription looks like a salvo in the rivalry between verbal and visual artistry.

[56] It is not, of course, *her* voice, but the voice given to her by the poet who constructs her (see further below).

[57] She also declares that Paris will reap the rewards of his shamelessness and unstable φρένες (6.351–53), but at the end of Book 3 we see both the instability of her own φρένες and her acquiescence in behavior that she acknowledges to be shameful (see further below). For the close connection between shame and responsibility, cf. Konstan 2006: 100–4.

"followed" Paris (ἑπόμην), "leaving" her former family (λιποῦσα, 3.174), and "went" to Troy (ἔβην, ἀπελήλυθα, 24.766).[58] Though these verbs do not prove willing agency—one may "go" under duress—in Book 3, the context makes it clear that she was impelled by her own desire. "If only I had taken pleasure in death" (3.173) implies, "if only I had *desired* to die instead of *desiring* what I did *desire*." The diction of her self-blame reinforces this sense of herself as a (destructive) agent. The dog metaphor suggests active misbehavior,[59] and the word κακομήχανος (6.344) implies powerfully destructive agency.[60]

Such abusive language reinforces the impression that Helen has a self-conscious awareness of her own role in her elopement and its disastrous consequences. Her diction conjures her as a menacing, destructive figure, magnifying her significance by associating her with strife, fear, war, and death (Clader 1976: 17–23). At the same time, her language engages with the discourse of Greek misogyny, evoking, in particular, Pandora, the archetype of beautiful, destructive womanhood, who has the mind of a bitch and "devises painful cares" for men (Hes. *Op.* 67, 95).[61] Such blame is, in its way, an acknowledgment of power. It is because Thersites voices ideas too close to those of Achilles that he must be verbally and physically chastised. Similarly, the discourse of Greek misogyny is a transparent expression of male anxiety about female subjectivity. By engaging in that discourse, then, Helen is acknowledging her own power. She is outing herself as a Pandora, a beautiful woman with an evil interior, who uses her power of agency in ways that cause misery to men. Helen thus retrojects her own subjectivity into the

[58] At *Od.* 4.145–46 she says the Achaeans "went" (ἤλθετε) to Troy on account of her. The only other character to use ἕπομαι for Helen's departure is Athena (5.423), who is alluding to the elopement in a way that clearly implies Helen's agency (albeit under divine influence; see further below). This verb nicely captures the quality of female agency in Homer. It is correlative with "leading," and typically (but not always: see, e.g., *Od.* 15.81) denotes some degree of subordination; it normally (but not always) implies agency on the part of the follower, which may or may not be reluctant. It is used for a woman (Penelope) choosing to marry a man at *Od.* 19.528–29. See further Nagler 1974: 86–89, 99–110.

[59] It implies uncontrolled appetite, especially for food or sex (Graver 1995); excessive seducibility, and thus sexual betrayal (Franco 2003: 195–205); and agency, specifically the transgressive agency of the culturally constituted object who yet remains a subject (Franco 2003: 203–4; cf. also 91–93, and 197–201 on Helen as the mobile, seducible dog-woman). As Kirk points out, Semonides' bitch-woman is "noisy and unmanageable" (1990: 205).

[60] Cf. esp. *Od.* 16.418, where Penelope uses it in a tirade against Antinous.

[61] Both are also called a μέγα πῆμα by others (cf. above). For the close connections between Helen and Pandora, see Collins 1988: 45–46; Bassi 1993: 60–65; Saintillan 1996: 337; Cassin 2000: 125–26; Worman 2002: 85–89; Vernant 1983: 419n40. Brown points out that Paris is an Epimetheus figure (1997: 40).

originary transgression that caused the war, despite the efforts of others to deny it. Her acceptance of responsibility is, in its way, an act of defiance. As such it enables the poet to have his cake and eat it, making Helen a "good" woman and thus worth fighting for, but also blameworthy, presenting her as a precious but passive object of men's desires, while also allowing her a measure of subjectivity and (retrospective) agency. Once installed at Troy, she is redomesticated as a good wife who weaves and serves her husband's bed. But through her self-blame she retains a trace of the self-assertion that she exercised in her original elopement.

In the *Iliad* this kind of overt blame of Helen is unique to Helen herself. It is supplemented, however, by her reports of shame and reproach directed against her by speakers who remain off-stage. In the Teichoskopia she speaks of the "many reproaches that are upon me" (3.239–42), and at Hector's funeral she declares that all the rest of the Trojans "shudder" at her (24.775).[62] The speaker of the reproaches in the first passage is indeterminate, and the shuddering of the second, like that of Achilles, implies horror, but not necessarily blame. Elsewhere, however, Helen is more specific. She fears what she considers to be justified reproaches from the Trojan women if she sleeps with Paris (3.410–12), her tone suggesting a pattern of past blame.[63] And at Hector's funeral she mentions Paris's brothers and the two varieties of sister-in-law (Paris's sisters, and his brothers' wives). The brothers in this line are far outweighed rhetorically by the female relatives, who lead up to the climactic hostility of Hecuba, as contrasted with the kindness of dear old Priam and, of course, of Hector himself (24.768–75). There is a sharply gendered contrast between the two friendly men, both of whom we have seen charmed by Helen's presence, and the scolding of the rest of the extended family, represented predominantly by women.

These reports suggest that if we look beyond Homer's cast of speaking characters, Helen is indeed held responsible by the Trojans, but more specifically by the Trojan women. Her affectionate interactions with the men of Troy are not matched by any contact at all with women.[64] When the rest of the women are participating in a communal female act of worship to Athena, led

[62] For an awareness that she and Paris may be subject to general reproach, cf. also 6.351, 6.357–58.

[63] The future indicative in 3.412 suggests a confidence based on past experience.

[64] The closest thing to such an interaction is Iris's impersonation of one of her sisters-in-law (3.122–24), which serves merely to enhance her isolation from human women. Note that she misses her female age-mates at Sparta (3.175). Andromache, by contrast, apparently frequents the homes of her sisters-in-law, and normally participates in rituals with the other women (6.377–80).

by Hecuba (6.86–88, 6.269–71), Helen is at home with Paris, her absence from the women's prayers marked by their ominous offering of a "most beautiful" gown that Paris brought home on the same trip on which he abducted her (6.289–92). Even her relationship with Aphrodite implies competitiveness and jealousy on the goddess's part (3.406–9).[65] All these females, like Helen herself, acknowledge Helen's agency by holding her responsible for her actions through blame (for Aphrodite, cf. 3.414). Their willingness to blame her (and threaten her, in Aphrodite's case) implies that she is a subject with the power to make choices and the obligation to take responsibility for those choices, as indeed she does. Women, familiar with the constraints under which women labor as "objects" in men's eyes, are willing to blame other women for the actions they take within the limits of such constraints. They understand the circumscribed world in which Helen operates, and within that world, as women, they hold each other accountable.[66] Paris, by contrast (a man who charms women) is blamed predominantly by men,[67] for whom he is guilty not only as the active cause of the war, but as a failure at masculinity. Like women, men understand the obligations that construct and constrain their gender.

Helen makes no attempt to overcome such female disapproval by exercising her considerable personal charm. That charm is, in its essence, both erotic and heterosexual, so it has no leverage with the women and gives them no incentive to exonerate her by viewing her as a passive object. The Trojan women also lack their men's other major incentive to exculpate Helen, since their gender gives them little stake in the male heroic enterprise. Women are typically victims of the male pursuit of κλέος, not its beneficiaries. When Hector explains to Andromache why he must fight in the front line of battle he speaks of winning κλέος for himself and his father (6.444–46); for her he foresees only suffering and humiliation—the anti-κλέος of being known as another man's slave-concubine instead of Hector's wife (6.450–63). Indeed her very grief will serve, ironically, as "a monument to [Hector's] heroism" (Collins 1988: 26). In this context, the reported hostility of other women towards Helen is scarcely surprising. It suggests that they, unlike the men, are unable to perceive a single woman—even this one—as a transcendent object that justifies the war as a glorious struggle.

[65] Cf. Aphrodite's jealousy of the daughters of Tyndareus (Hes. fr. 176 M-W) and the competitiveness regarding her beauty implied by the Judgment of Paris.

[66] Cf. the story that Helen was killed by a woman in Rhodes in revenge for the death of her husband (Paus. 3.19.10). For women's involvement in policing other women's sexual behavior, cf. Cohen 1991: 160–62. For the social constraints on women's moral autonomy, cf. Foley 1995: 96–97.

[67] The obvious exception is, of course, Helen herself (3.428–36, 6.350–58).

O'Gorman has argued, along similar lines, that Helen's self-blame suggests a questioning, from a female point of view, of the value of the masculine military enterprise (2006: 203–5). If she considers herself loathsome and contemptible, how can she possibly believe that the war fought over her is worthwhile? Yet her relationship to heroic κλέος is different from that of any other woman in the *Iliad*. She is unusually conscious for a woman both of her own potential for κλέος and of her role in the male quest for it (6.357–58; cf. 3.125–28).[68] In so far as her own κλέος, and her identity, depend on her function as an emblem of male κλέος, to question her own value as an object of heroic struggle is to flirt with self-annihilation. She seems aware of this when she expresses a wish that she had been annihilated at birth (6.344–48), her words suggesting a desire not so much to have chosen differently as never to have existed—or at least never to have existed as Helen. For better or worse, however, she lives or dies *as* Helen along with the glory of the heroic enterprise. Her identity—including her guilt—is implicated in that enterprise, as she seems to know all too well (6.355–58). She cannot afford, then, to translate her self-blame into a critique of male heroism or repudiate the war as such. In contrast to Andromache's efforts to keep Hector safe by urging him to eschew the κλέος of conspicuous heroism,[69] Helen merely invites him to rest (6.354). She never suggests that he should desist from labor on her account—labor that will result in poetic immortality for herself and Paris as well as for Hector (6.354–58).[70] Her self-blame serves less to deny her own value as casus belli than to enhance it, in ways we have already seen, while indirectly claiming the (dis)credit and κλέος that are her due.

In reclaiming her subjectivity as a participant in her own elopement, Helen and the women who blame her are also implicitly reclaiming the subjectivity of the Greek wife. One of the paradoxes of Helen is that she serves as an emblem of marriage as well as its transgression. As Menelaus's bride she was worshiped in cult by girls about to be married,[71] yet her elopement with Paris appears on vases as an iconic wedding scene.[72] The problem of assessing her

[68] For Helen's special connection with κλέος in contrast to other heroines, see Lyons 1997: 56.

[69] Cf. also the pleas of his non-combatant parents (22.38–89). On Andromache, see Arthur 1981: 32–33; Pantelia 2002: 24–25. Contrast Helen's conflicted attitude towards Paris in a similar situation (3.428–36).

[70] Cf. 3.130, where Iris urges her outside with the report that the men are performing marvelous/godlike deeds on her account.

[71] On the cult of Helen, see Wide 1893: 340–46 (and passim) and cf. West 1975: 5; Clader 1976, Ch. 4; Larson 1995: 80–81; Calame 1997: 191–202; Lyons 1997: 45–46; Pomeroy 2002: 114–18.

[72] For her appearance on wedding vases, see Oakley and Sinos 1993 passim.

complicity in her own abduction thus mirrors the problem of identifying women's subjectivity in the Greek wedding, and more generally their finely-calibrated position between coercion and consent in marriage.

In the *Iliad*, even the account of the duel in Book 3, where Helen is blatantly objectified by the male actors, implicitly challenges the outright objectification of the bride by showing a divergent female perspective. The men speak of the winner "taking the woman," but Iris addresses Helen as νύμφα—"bride" (3.130)—and rephrases the outcome of the duel from a female point of view. She avoids both the word ἄγω and any mention of stolen property, saying instead, "they will fight over you" (3.137; contrast 3.70) and "you will be called the winner's dear wife" (3.138; contrast 3.72). This alternate perspective avoids making Helen an object, instead making her the subject of the verb (albeit a passive verb). Moreover, it focuses on the status and relationships that are instrumental in constructing a woman's world and hence her subjectivity. Helen herself emphasizes a variety of such relationships in her subsequent conversation with Priam on the walls. She also resists the objectification implicit in the duel by introjecting traces of her own story and point of view, becoming a viewer of men, and one who speaks about men, as well as an object of men's gaze and speech.[73] The scene offers us a hint of women's view of themselves as subjects, if not agents, in their marital relationships. But Helen's perspective on her own elopement goes further, constituting the bride also as an erotic agent. The bride's eroticism and (potential) agency are embedded in the specifically female point of view that sees Helen as complicit in her abduction and thus challenges the uniformly disempowering perspective of the male characters.

III

This female perspective stands in tension with the objectifying strategies of the epic's male characters. Yet it seems to receive the endorsement of the poet himself. As we saw, Helen exercises power over men through speech, and there are well-known indications that the epic poet equates her voice with his own. Though silent when we first meet her, she is engaged in weaving, the quintessential female mode of story telling. Her role as weaver of the Trojan War aligns her both with the poet and with Zeus himself, whose plan is fulfilled through that war.[74] And the kind of language associated with

[73] Cf. A. Parry 1966: 198–200; Lynn-George 1988: 29–30; Worman 1997: 159–60, 2001: 23, 2002: 47–48, 102–3.

[74] On Helen as a weaver/bard, see Clader 1976: 6–12; Homeyer 1977: 10–11; Bergren 1979, 1983: 79; Worman 2002: 89–90; for Zeus as weaver, see Scheid and Svenbro 1996: 63–65.

beautiful women—persuasive, seductive, and potentially deceptive—is also associated from earliest times with poets, whose art is blessed by Aphrodite and her companions, the Graces and Desire.[75] As a speaking subject, Helen constitutes herself as a certain kind of (desirable) object in the eyes of the men who fight over her; the poet simultaneously constitutes her as a subject who is the object of his song.

Helen's weaving is, as an artifact, subordinate to the poet's words, of which it and she are verbal products.[76] But in so far as Helen is equated with the poet himself, the epic discloses to us the contents of her tapestry. In any case, Helen is also, like the poet himself, a mistress of language—one who, like the poet, and the rhapsode who performs her, uses many modes of discourse to manipulate her audience (public utterance, lament, invective).[77] Compared to other female characters, her discourse is both unusually authoritative (Worman 2002: 48–49) and unusually independent of her husband (Monsacré 1984: 120–21). But even when her voice is heard in informal, impermanent, or "feminine" genres (conversation, lament, weaving) (Holmberg 1995: 27–28), the poet renders them part of (his own) authoritative and permanent discourse by inserting them into his epic. She is fully aware that the stories she tells will live on in the future as part of the κλέος bestowed upon her, for better or worse, by the epic poet (cf. 6.357–58). Her account of herself is smuggled into the masculine narrative of the war as a whole, ensuring the survival of her voice as long as the epic itself survives.

The poet's narrative voice likewise vouches for Helen's point of view,[78] and in particular for the veracity of her self-blame, which should therefore be seen

[75] Cf., e.g., *Od.* 1.421–22, 17.518–20, *Hom. Hymn* 6.19–20, Hes. *Theog.* 64–66, 104, Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.1–5. For the intimate connections between the erotic, the verbal, and the deceptive, see, e.g., Walsh 1984, Ch. 1; H. Parry 1992; MacLachlan 1993. On the "femininity" of the poet's role, cf. also Suzuki 1989: 17.

[76] Cf. Atchity 1978: 91; Kennedy 1986; Holmberg 1995: 26–28.

[77] On the variety of genres that Helen appropriates, sometimes in startling ways, see Worman 2001. Elmer cautions against identifying Helen's "poetry" too closely with Homeric epic per se (2005: 22–33), but he does not take into account the versatility of the epic poet and/or rhapsode, which aligns them with Helen (cf. Worman 2002: 46). Holmberg argues that Helen's voice has been "appropriated by the male poet," and that she lacks agency because she is "[powerless] to construct a definitive version of herself" (1995: 28). I would argue, to the contrary, that her voice has been *created* by the poet, who has thereby empowered her. If she is his puppet, the same can be said of all the characters he ventriloquizes.

[78] The narrative also underlines Helen's responsibility in the matter of her elopement by contrasting her with Chryseis and Briseis—both taken against their will (on Helen and Briseis, see Dué 2002, Ch. 2; for the contrast between them, see Arthur 1981: 24–26).

as more than a manipulative strategy on her part. In Book 3, her nostalgic desire for Menelaus and her old home, which gives rise to her self-reproaches, is instilled by Iris (3.139–40), who arrives spontaneously and is consequently often said to be "the messenger of the poet" (Edwards 1987: 192).[79] Helen also calls herself "loathsome" during her confrontation with Aphrodite (3.404)—a context where such self-blame can serve no manipulative purpose. This suggests that her self-loathing, while useful to her and artfully deployed, is not fundamentally deceptive. The veracity of her reports of blame by others is likewise assured by her mention of such reproaches in the Aphrodite scene, where her only witness is an all-knowing divinity (3.411–12).[80]

This famous scene also provides a poetic endorsement of Helen's perspective on her own agency by opening an extraordinary window into her past and present subjectivity. Within the epic present, Helen's agency is severely constrained. There is no sign that she has the power to end the war by leaving Troy,[81] even if she wanted to (something for which there is also no explicit evidence, despite her nostalgia for Greece). This disempowerment frees her from responsibility. Regardless of her role in the original elopement, it is clearly Paris who is to blame for perpetuating the war, which he could end at any time by returning Helen—or at least by participating more enthusiastically in single combat with Menelaus. This continuing responsibility explains in part the extent of the blame that is directed against him. Helen, by contrast, has little room to exercise agency. Yet she is given one significant opportunity to do so, in response to the lure of erotic passion that is held out to her by the goddess in Book 3. This part of the epic is notoriously rich in incidents that reenact or recapitulate earlier stages of the story.[82] Though Helen's opinion of Paris has evidently changed for the worse (cf. 3.430–31), the scene clearly forms part of this retrospective series, serving as a reenactment of the original seduction,[83] in which, according to the *Cypria*, Aphrodite "led" Helen to Paris. Twenty years on, Aphrodite offers Helen the same kind of opportunity for action that greeted her in her prior life as Menelaus's wife when first faced with Paris's seductive charm. The scene thus provides us with our best "evidence"

[79] For similar sentiments, see, e.g., Atchity 1978: 86; Kennedy 1986: 6–8.

[80] Priam's face-saving maneuver also hints that others blame her, especially by the repetition of μοι (3.164).

[81] This is indirectly underlined by the extreme difficulty that Priam has crossing enemy lines in Book 24.

[82] Notably the Catalogue of Ships, the duel and Teichoskopia, and Pandarus's breach of the truce (a reiteration of Trojan guilt).

[83] Cf. Whitman 1958: 268; Lendle 1968: 70–71; Arthur 1981: 23–24; Vivante 1985: 94–95; Edwards 1987: 196.

for Helen's state of mind at that time, her sense of her own agency, and her culpability or lack thereof.

Aphrodite's summons to Helen, on Paris's behalf, corresponds to her earlier role in rewarding Paris for the Judgment by assigning Helen to his bed. Her standard m.o. is to inspire sexual desire, which she does here through a description of Paris's physical charms that makes the cause of Helen's original infidelity palpably obvious (3.395).[84] Helen's reaction replays vividly the internal dynamics of a moment in which ἔρως overpowers good judgment, as it is wont to do. When she recognizes Aphrodite, she accuses the goddess of "deceiving" her (3.399, 3.405). In its immediate context, this presumably refers to the goddess's disguise. But that disguise stands for Aphrodite's deeper association with deception. In keeping with her amoral mission, she is trying to beguile Helen's φρένες, to induce her to act against her better judgment. Hence Helen's anger, as her φρένες resist.

Yet Helen finally follows the goddess to Paris's bed. She is clearly responsible for this action, in her own eyes, just as she was responsible for her part in the original elopement. Even when she tells Aphrodite, "I shall not go" (3.410), she is claiming a subjectivity that is not so much negated as affirmed when she goes after all: it makes it clear that she is making a choice, albeit a choice that is reprehensible in her own eyes and those of the Trojan women (3.410–12).[85] Indeed, her resistance to Aphrodite serves to let *us* know that *she* knows she is transgressing—filled as she is with nostalgia for the "better man," Menelaus (3.139–40, 3.173–76). Helen's poignancy as a character derives in part from the fact that, unlike many of Aphrodite's victims, she remains fully conscious of the conflict between her desires and the resistance of her better judgment. Her φρένες are defeated by the power of desire, but—in contrast to the φρένες of Paris, or even Zeus—they are not shrouded, deceived, or "persuaded" into thinking that this is the right thing to do. In this regard, she is more successful than most male characters in resisting Aphrodite's power. Yet this awareness also enhances the culpability of her choice, in so far as the encounter with the goddess lets us know that she knows what she is doing. Her fear of reproach conveys a clear sense of herself as a responsible agent: she sees herself through the eyes of others as a potential object of blame.

[84] The immediate effect of Aphrodite's speech is to arouse desire, not anger (see Kirk 1985 ad loc., pace, e.g., MacCary 1982: 170 and Roisman 2006: 18). (Worman 1997: 164 suggests that it is Helen's desire that enables her to recognize the goddess.) The anger is a secondary emotion, as she resists the desire. In Platonic terms, her θυμός comes to the aid of reason (*Rep.* 439e–440e).

[85] Her hostility to the goddess is itself a form of self-blame (and hence a claim to agency), in so far as Aphrodite is an intrinsic aspect of her own identity (see further below).

But why should Helen feel ashamed? Succumbing to desire for one's husband is, presumably, a mode of erotic self-expression proper to a married woman. Why then should the other Trojan women, and Helen herself, consider this act of wifely eroticism reprehensible? Kirk suggests that the reason is "indecent haste" just after the duel, or that "legally [Helen] may now belong to Menelaus" (1985 ad loc.). But this seems overly specific. Surely the women who are suffering the consequences of the war would reproach Helen any time they knew she had slept with Paris, thus reenacting the transgression that initiated the war.[86] She is ashamed of their sexual relationship as such, since it constitutes the essence of their past and present failures—her own as well as Paris's. This resistance to Aphrodite creates for her, in Roisman's words, "an identity as a woman who is capable of restraint" (2006: 19)—an identity that rejects Aphrodite, and hence Helen's own special status as the goddess's protegée.[87] That identity is one of decorum and self-abasement. But this self-presentation, so effective with human males, is bound to fail as a strategy of endearment with Aphrodite (the only female on whom she tries it). This is not how one secures the love of the goddess who embodies gloriously amoral sexual self-assertion. Helen tries on that decorous identity for size, but ends up discarding it, or rather subordinating it to the command of the goddess who makes her who she is. Her φρένες prove after all to be unstable in face of the power of desire—an instability for which she accepts full responsibility.

It is scarcely surprising that erotic desire should win out over shame, given the awesome power of that desire, as presented here in the person of the goddess. Yet the poet says that Helen follows the goddess out of *fear* (3.418–20). What exactly is she afraid of? Aphrodite has threatened her with a loss of favor, the replacement of divine love with a hatred that would lead to her destruction amid both Greek and Trojan forces (3.414–17). Kirk suggests that the armies might stone Helen to death as an adulteress (1985 ad loc.). But how would this result from the loss of Aphrodite's love? The answer is presumably that Helen has been protected thus far by her beauty—the erotic power that is a gift from the goddess (cf. 3.54–55).[88] If she loses her seduc-

[86] Collins rightly attributes their disapproval to "her association with Paris" (1988: 32; cf. 48).

[87] Cf. Collins 1988: 45. In Worman's terms, in resisting Aphrodite Helen is resisting a "style" of which Helen herself is an emblem (2002: 103).

[88] Cf. the way Hera wants to show the gods' love for Achilles by helping him in battle (20.119–27), i.e., by boosting his most characteristic divine gift. For beauty as Aphrodite's gift, cf. Sappho 112 LP. Compare also the goddess Helen's ability to make an ugly baby beautiful (Hdt. 6.61.4–5).

tive charm, neither Greeks nor Trojans will be restrained by its power from killing her. But the gifts of Aphrodite include not only beauty and the arts of seduction, but also the sexual desire that is served by such arts.[89] The goddess has lavished all these "favors" on Helen, and now it is payback time: she must use the goddess's gifts or lose them. Helen's existence—*as* Helen—requires her to keep acting as she acted in the past.[90] When she uses her voice not for the soft and gentle seduction of men but for angry defiance—resisting not only the goddess but her own desire—she is silenced by the equally angry goddess (3.414–20). Helen *is* her beauty and the desire that is inextricable from it. In order to remain who she is—and to remain protected by that fact from hatred and death—she must embrace the shame and transgression that are inseparable from her supreme beauty. Aphrodite is threatening her with identity theft.

The poet's powerful representation of this encounter, the exceptional character of Helen's resistance, and the inner turmoil it provokes (cf. 3.417) have understandably led many readers to see Helen as a victim of divine coercion.[91] But this interpretation depends on a misleading view of the Greek gods that has long been discredited.[92] Aphrodite inspires women to infidelity

[89] Her gifts to Paris include not only his looks (3.54–55) but his lust (24.28). In the *Odyssey*, Helen speaks of Aphrodite "giving" her ἄτη, the dubious "gift" of impaired judgment, i.e., the ἔρως that led her astray (4.261). (In *Hom. Hymn* 5 Aphrodite herself is afflicted with the ἄτη of desire, which grips her φρένες [5.57] and impairs her mind [5.253].) For desire as a gift of Aphrodite, cf. also Thgn. 1331–33, 1381–45, Mimnermus 1.3. On the gifts of Aphrodite, see further H. Parry 1992: 302n12.

[90] As Paris defensively tells Hector, such gifts are not something one chooses, nor are they something one can discard (3.65–66; cf. *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 216–17; Pucci 1977: 2–3). On the way in which the gifts of the gods "define the salient characteristics of the recipient," see Collins 1988: 37n25. On Aphrodite's identity with Helen as "the archetype of which Helen is the human copy" (Austin 1994: 31), see Austin 1994: 49.

[91] E.g., Homeyer 1977: 5–6; Friedrich 1978: 61. Holmberg 1995: 25 treats Paris, the gods, and Helen's own passion as equally objectifying forces. Atchity calls Helen "a passive counter in Aphrodite's effete game" and hence "not personally responsible" (1978: 41, 52).

[92] The classic treatments are Dodds 1951, Ch. 1; Lesky 1961. Cf. also Dover 1974: 144–60; Fenik 1974: 217–27; Redfield 1975: 97–98; Neuburg 1991. For a succinct statement of the case regarding Helen, see Edwards 1987: 318; cf. also Reckford 1964: 14–19; Farron 1979: 17–20; Schein 1984: 23; Taplin 1992: 98–101. For the persistence of "double determination" in ordinary life, see Dover 1974: 136–38, 149–50. From a philosophical perspective Plato's *Laws* provides a good example: the Athenian Stranger—who is, of course, very far from excusing us for the consequences of our own choices—speaks of humans as puppets of the gods, who control us through the "strings" of our emotions (644d–45c).

without excusing them, just as Ares or Athena inspire a warrior to fight without undermining the credit he receives for the resulting success.[93] If divine involvement exculpated Helen, she could not in the same breath blame herself and Paris and attribute the whole mess to the gods (6.356–57; cf. 6.349). The same goes for the self-loathing (3.404) that accompanies her recognition that it was Aphrodite who "took" her to Troy (3.400–1).[94] In blaming Aphrodite, Helen is not excusing but blaming herself, as the parallel with her self-blame makes clear (cf., e.g., Worman 2001: 25, 2002: 50). Rather, her self-blame and her blame of Aphrodite amount to the same thing. The goddess's physical presence in this scene does not make Helen's own erotic impulse irrelevant but, on the contrary, underlines its reality and power. If she is coerced, it is by her own passions, and she is responsible for acquiescing.

This acquiescence does, of course, conflict with her better judgement and moral sense, but not all responsible action is Aristotelian πρᾶξις—purposeful, reasoned, and carefully thought through. In ordinary moral parlance, acratic acts—acts performed against one's better judgement—are still acts, for which one is held accountable even if the force that drives us is divine in origin and overwhelming in its power.[95] Indeed, lack of self-control is among the most reprehensible behaviors in Greek culture, for both women and men. This is clear from the case of Paris. No one denies that he too was instigated by Aphrodite, or excuses him on that account.[96] In fact, no Homeric character ever uses divine involvement to deny male agency or responsibility.[97]

[93] At 5.422–23, Athena implies that Aphrodite induced Helen to "follow" Paris, using the participle ἀνιεῖσα. Forms of this verb are often used when a divinity verbally urges a man (or another god) to act (cf. 5.405, 5.882, 14.362, 21.396), or when his own heart spurs him into action (cf. 2.276, 6.256, 7.152, 12.307, 22.252, 22.346).

[94] Similarly, in the *Odyssey* she calls herself a bitch (4.145) even though it was Aphrodite who "gave" her ἄτη and "took" her to Troy (4.259–65).

[95] Thus in Eur. *Hipp.*, Phaedra is blamed by herself and others for her transgressive desire despite the fact that Aphrodite herself appears in the prologue to tell us that it is her doing.

[96] Aphrodite *gave* him lust (24.28); he is "overcome" by ἔρως (3.442–46); he is afflicted with ἄτη (6.356; cf. also 3.100, though the text here is in dispute). None of this, of course, excuses him. The similar relationship of Paris and Helen to divine influence is nicely illustrated in a vase-painting where Helen sits on Aphrodite's lap, while Paris is badgered by the god Himeros (Ghali-Kahil 1955, plate VIII). For another case where ἄτη clearly does not preclude personal responsibility, see *Od.* 4.503, 509.

[97] Paris is prone to attribute events in general, and this one in particular, to divine agency (3.64–66, 3.439–40, 6.339), but even he fleetingly accepts responsibility in the presence of Hector (3.59, 6.333, 6.518–19). Agamemnon is similarly prone to blaming ἄτη (see Kirk 1985 on *Il.* 2.111), but these are face-saving gestures—he ends up accepting responsibility for his error of judgment in denying Achilles due honor (see Dodds 1951, Ch. 1).

Conversely, the male characters who treat Helen as innocent do it by making her not the victim of Aphrodite—which would imply her continued responsibility—but the object of human male agency. Priam is unique in the *Iliad* in implying that anyone—in this case Helen—is excused by divine causation (3.164–65). As we have seen, he has his reasons for this. But for us to agree with him is to perpetuate the male characters' patronizing masculinist objectification of Helen.[98] Within the limits of the (considerable) constraints on agency imposed by her social roles—in particular, her gender—Helen is as responsible for her erotic choices as Paris is for his.

Helen makes a choice, then, and goes with Aphrodite, the verb (βῆ, 3.419) foreshadowing her own account of "going" to Troy (ἔβην, 24.766). On reaching the bedroom, she begins by turning her eyes away from Paris (3.427)—a sign of anger and an avoidance of eroticism that may replay an original moment of αἰδώς.[99] She recalls Paris's boasting that he was stronger than Menelaus (3.430–31)—a boast that is much more plausibly attributable to the time of the original seduction than to the recent past. She wishes he would fight Menelaus again and die, but then abruptly shifts gears and wishes him to stay safe—a shift that is powerfully expressive of mingled contempt and desire (3.428–36).[100] Paris then invites her to bed, using a dual participle that signifies mutuality (φιλότητι τραπείομεν εὐνηθέντε, 3.441)[101] and explicitly equating this sexual encounter with their first—indeed, he desires her even more now than the first time (3.442–46). The original dynamics of their

[98] Thus Austin accepts Priam's "absolution" on the ground that she is a mere object and "a child in the social order, to be passed from one supervisory male to another as the rules dictate" (1994: 45). But the offense from which she is being supposedly "absolved" is precisely her willful infraction of those "rules." Similarly Roisman 2006 "defends" Helen by making her an object and victim of men and the gods, refusing to blame her despite the fact that she herself and others do so. Suzuki 1989: 56 refuses to take Helen's self-blame as an "answer" to the "unanswered" question of her responsibility. Maronitis thinks that the evidence of other characters regarding Helen's responsibility should be preferred to Helen's own, and that her reports of blame by others are false (1999: 123–24, 128–29). Atchity thinks her self-blame shows only "regret," not "conscious guilt" (1978: 93). Tronquart thinks she is lamenting her misfortune, not her transgression (1953: 29–30).

[99] For the eyes and eroticism, see above and cf. the scholiast cited by Kirk 1985 ad loc. (though Kirk himself rejects the point).

[100] Compare Alcibiades' conflicted feelings about Socrates at Pl. *Symp.* 216b–c. On Helen's shifting attitude, cf. Worman 2002: 50–51; Roisman 2006: 21–22. On the coexistence of ἔρως and hatred, cf. Carson 1986: 3–9.

[101] See Calame 1999: 40; Skinner 2005: 33. Erotic φιλότης (3.441, 3.445) is featured on Aphrodite's sash (14.216), and is often used in contexts where specifically female desire is evident (e.g., *Od.* 5.227, 8.271, 8.313, 10.335, 11.248, 15.421).

desire have not changed, as far as he is concerned, except for an increase in intensity. Helen responds to his flattering speech by "following" him to bed (3.447), just as she once "followed" him to Troy (3.174), and they lie down together, the verbs again in the dual (3.448). Her own desire is not mentioned explicitly at this culminating moment,[102] but the role of Aphrodite makes it clear that this was the impulse that set the encounter in motion, just as it did twenty years ago.

Helen's earlier remorse at abandoning her marriage to Menelaus gave the impression that she was a new woman, who realized what a mistake she had made and would not give way to such weakness in the future. But her willingness, however reluctant, to reenact her original behavior, even now when its horrible consequences are completely clear, may make us wonder whether she has learned her lesson after all. Faced with the terrifying power of Aphrodite, she would do what she did all over again, despite the reproaches of her better judgment. Her continuing inability, after twenty years, to resist her own desire—not to mention her continuing or increased desirability—confirms the inability of marriage to any one man to contain the potential danger not only of female beauty but of female desire. This uneasy sense of erotic instability is exacerbated both by Helen's remorseful longing for Menelaus (would she be on the move again if she could?),[103] and by her subtle flirtation with Hector (if only he were available!). The presentation of Helen as, in other respects, a good wife, and of her marriage to Paris as a legitimate one, makes this all the more unsettling.

In contrast to the men who objectify her, then, Helen takes responsibility for her own role in her original transgression and implies, by its reenactment, that the impulse which led to it has not been quenched. Her acquiescence to Aphrodite is, in the end, an acknowledgment by the poet—and by Helen herself—of her power to engender the enormous destruction of the war and her ultimate culpability for so doing. The reenactment of her sexual transgression with Paris is embedded in an epic of bloodshed, rage, and loss of which these characters and their eroticism were the originating cause. Most blatantly, the fighting continues to rage outside the walls while they make love (cf. esp. 6.448–49). This larger epic context constitutes an implicit judgment of Helen (as well as Paris). By the same token, however, it also embeds

[102] On the elusiveness of Helen's desire, see Worman 1997: 163–64.

[103] The erotic aspect of her first marriage is downplayed, but touched on discreetly among her regrets. She feels ἵμερος for Menelaus, but this is not specifically erotic (she feels it likewise for the city and her parents: 3.139–40). Yet she also misses her former θάλαμος (3.174)—an allusion to the marriage bed (see Kirk 1985 ad loc.).

her in the glory of heroic warfare. It is her transgression that has given men the opportunity for κλέος, while she herself is glorified by their choice to continue suffering for her sake.

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