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*This Voice Which Is Not One:
Helen's Verbal Guises in Homeric Epic*

The voices of many important female characters in Homeric epic differ from each other in vocabulary choice, tone, and formulaic expression. While occasion dictates these differences to some extent, the style of each female speaker is generally true to her character type. Just as Nestor's measured, honey-sweet tones and use of exempla suit his status as elder statesman, so do Andromache's mournful self-reference and admonishing use of the future tense serve to mark her further as the paradigmatic widow, even when her husband is still alive. If certain characters show a remarkable degree of consistency in their speech types, others speak in a manner that is more changeable, inclusive, and therefore difficult to categorize, the hybrid quality of which arises from their variegated roles in Homeric narrative. Of all the Homeric characters, Odysseus most thoroughly embodies this type of verbal mutability; in this study I focus on the speech patterns of the female figure in Homer who does so—Helen.

It has become standard practice among scholars of gender in Greek literature to emphasize the problem that female characters pose as producers of signs (since they are themselves signs of a sort traded among male agents), and to cite Lévi-Strauss' famous formulation of this conundrum.¹ Helen is in some sense the paradigmatic exchanged sign, in that her figure strikingly encapsulates both the process of objectification inherent in this symbolic

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exchange and its fundamental problems. Simultaneously the archetypal bride and the most illustrious flouter of the marriage bond, Helen embodies the dangerous potential of all women to be unfaithful to their men. She is also the paradigmatic elusive object of male desire, whose semidivine status underscores the impossibility of complete control over the female as a type, and, on a more abstract level, of all that she might symbolize: the generative forces of both plant life and poetry, the destructive powers of both sex and dominion. Helen's cultic associations with the lover Aphrodite and the *parthenos* Artemis indicate her failure to make the transition to a stable marital status, as Claude Calame has argued.² She remains in circulation, the glorious bride gone wrong. From the earliest discernible point in the tradition of stories about Helen, she is this multiple, inclusive, and dangerous figure, whose reputation fluctuates repeatedly between praise and blame. Unlike her sister Clytemnestra, she is not only a figure of abuse; unlike Penelope, her predominate story is not that of the faithful wife. Although versions of Clytemnestra's and Penelope's tales suggest the possibility of defending the one and accusing the other, only the figure of Helen comprises both versions of the wife's story poised in tense competition.

Plato relates an episode about the archaic poet Stesichorus that revolves around Helen's praise and blame, in which the poet, struck blind by the angry goddess, is said to have retracted his tale about her journey to Troy.³ A Hellenistic commentary explains that Stesichorus composed a poem in which a phantasm of Helen went to Troy, while the real Helen was kept safe in Egypt.⁴ The episode highlights the dangerous power of Helen's anger and her control of her own reputation, relating it specifically to poetic production.⁵ Euripides treats the story of the *eidolon* in his play *Helen*, where her doubled figure makes manifest the epistemological problem at the heart of theatrical representation. His *Trojan Women*, in some contrast, uses a seductive Helen to suggest the moral threat of the misapplication of praise, especially when couched in a decorative rhetorical style.⁶ Archaic and classical writers thus consistently treat Helen as signifying the dangerous aspects not only of women but also of poetic and rhetorical effect. The Homeric poet himself seems to respond to a preexisting tradition of conflicting stories, apparent in the tensions between the more forgiving depiction of Helen that he clearly favors and the darker implications that he allows to intrude. Unlike more narrowly delimited characters in epic, Helen represents a complex of forces in human life and a multitude of stories; her biography constitutes a series of public events, each one a pivotal moment in the lives of many.

So what type of voice does such an inclusive figure have? A voice that is not one, it seems; that is multiple and layered; that includes speech types

strongly associated with relatively consistent characters, but transposed into other contexts where standard meanings do not necessarily match particular intentions. Helen's special type of verbal mutability arises at least in part from a difference between the formal locutions she employs and the intended impact of her words, so that a gap repeatedly opens up between the usual meanings of familiar formulae and her singular implications. This gap between meaning and intention is not necessarily unique to Helen (again, cf. Odysseus), but it does take a unique form in her usage. Helen is a mimic, as her first husband is quick to point out (*Od.* 4.279); she takes on the voices of others (including both tone and typical phraseology), most often as a means of deflection. In practical terms, she thereby avoids direct blame, but this verbal mutability is also more profoundly related to her as the embodiment of multiple stories.

The Iliadic Helen is the only character in the Homeric poems to engage in self-abuse; no one else turns such barbs against themselves. Nor does any other Homeric character engage in abusing Helen, even though, as Linda Clader has discussed, she arouses in others the shudder that suggests the chilly gusts of Hades or the presence of Nemesis (Indignation, Retribution), whose child she sometimes is.⁷ In both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* she refers to herself as "dog-faced", which, especially in the *Iliad*, serves as an important signal of her fateful connections. Dogs are linked to Hades; they attend Hecate, and feed voraciously on human carrion.⁸ They are thus bound up with the fated end-point of all human life, which Helen brings about quickly for many Greek heroes. Gregory Nagy has noted the association of blame speech with carrion feeding (specifically the corpses of heroes),⁹ while Margaret Graver has argued more recently that Helen's dog insult is evidence of a defaming tradition.¹⁰ Graver's excellent discussion nevertheless overlooks the tension created by Helen's particular use of such insults, in part because she regards Homer's treatment of Helen as unproblematically gentle. But in Homer, the traces of this blame tradition confound any understanding of Helen as simply good or evil—as simply a goddess or a dog. In every scene in which she appears, her speech is edged threateningly with competing implications, with suggestions of precisely the blame that the Homeric poet's dominant images of her repeatedly counter.¹¹

At least in part as a result of this narrative competition, attempts to find consistency of character in the figure of the Homeric Helen impede rather than promote an understanding of how she functions in the poems. In the *Iliad*, Helen's vocabulary and speech patterns seem to echo the mourner's voice¹² and that of some stricken or angry hero, combining the vocabulary of regret with self-abuse and/or abuse of others, in contexts that suggest a covert seduction of her interlocutors. In the *Odyssey*, she speaks in a manner

that makes her look like an all-knowing and sympathetic poet-goddess, and she is treated by both the external narrator and her internal audience with such respect that her verbal interactions seem powerful and bewitching. Helen combines the coy perspicacity of the goddesses who host Odysseus in their beds with the commanding tones of both the Muses and the poet, representing her role in Odysseus' adventures as a singular mix of authoritative stances.

Many recent studies have exposed the doubling, fictionalizing aspects of Helen's figure in the *Odyssey*, in some general way supporting the notion that Helen's verbal type is multiple and changeable.¹³ But these discussions analyze Helen from outside of her figure, as it were, tending to consider Helen's doubleness as symbolic of the poet's dilemma and not looking in any detail at how Helen's own speech patterns establish her as both a potentially dissembling speaker and one of consummate suitability, a central oratorical criterion for effective speaking.¹⁴ For the purposes of this discussion, I am less interested in the epistemological problems that the figure of Helen poses than in what makes her speeches in the *Odyssey* seem so appropriate and therefore so persuasive. I argue against the grain of recent assumptions about the characterization of Helen in both poems, examining her speaking style in some detail to show how seductively fractious she is in the *Iliad* and how eerily calming she is in the *Odyssey*.

THE VOICE OF NEMESIS

Helen's character in the *Iliad* has usually been taken at face value by scholars: they describe her rueful responses to Priam and Hector and her angry rejection of Paris and Aphrodite as sympathetic depictions, often without analyzing in any detail the ambiguous quality of these verbal exchanges.¹⁵ I suggest, in contrast, that in these exchanges 1) Helen's apparent tone often does not match her ultimate intention, and 2) the speech types she uses—which range from the mournful widow's to the flying warrior's—are transposed from their usual contexts to form locutions unique to her. Helen is also significantly aware of her centrality to the narratives of others, manifesting a concern for reputation (*kleos*) that connects her to the Muses, the Sirens, and ultimately the poet, as a number of scholars have recognized.¹⁶ In the Teichoskopia (*Il.* 3.141–244), for example, when she is asked by Priam to name a warrior, Helen uses her identification of Agamemnon to frame an elegiac look at her own past, thus substituting her story for his. Her reply is not particularly suited to the context. In fact, it somewhat resembles in content Andromache's mournful speech in book 6, when the latter bewails her widow's fate to her living husband. Andromache's

voice, however, is consistently grief-stricken, and her use of the mourner's *topoi* (e.g., lamenting family ties, dilation on the effect the death will have on one's life) coheres with her role as loyal wife.¹⁷ Helen's rueful self-reference instead mingles regret with an emphatic awareness of her own singular status. When Priam asks Helen to name Ajax, her identification moves quickly from his epithets (e.g., 3.229) to the Cretan leader Idomeneus, who as a guest-friend of Menelaus reminds her again of her own story, and she remarks on the absence of her brothers from the battlefield (3.234–42). She then conjectures that their absence can be explained by their fears of shame and reproach that are rightfully hers (3.242).

Since she views the actions of others as dependent on her error and rues bitterly this damage to her reputation, Helen assigns herself the crucial role in others' stories, thereby giving voice to the blame tradition that the narrator avoids. Her sense of her public reputation is anomalous among the female figures in Homeric epic; *kleos* is rightfully the concern of the warrior, not of the warrior's prize. Like any good warrior (and unlike her paramour), she fears the insults of others (3.242, 3.412, 24.767–68) and recognizes the vulnerability of her public position. Helen, in contrast to the chaste Andromache, treats her story—in part the battles waged essentially for her that she weaves in her second husband's halls (*Il.* 3.125–28)—as if it were the story most central to every warrior's life. And this in some sense is the case: whereas the mourning wife's story would only be properly told in keening over her husband, Helen's story is on the lips of everyone, since it is relevant to all the warriors. As the catalyzing, fateful figure for these heroes, her story is their story; her own *kleos* is inevitably bound up with the *kleos* of each.¹⁸

But the complexity of Helen's figure and voice in this scene does not end there. Before she lapses into self-reflection in response to Priam's first inquiry, she says that he is worthy of veneration and fearsome in her eyes (3.172), using a show of extreme respect that implies an apologetic attitude consistent with her penchant for self-abuse, the primary stylistic tendency unique to her. Helen then declares, in reference to her coming to Troy, "Would that evil death had pleased me" (3.173–74), invoking in a sensuous manner the end point with which she is associated.¹⁹ She makes a similar (though blander) declaration in her mourning speech over the body of Hector in book 24: "Would that I had been destroyed before" (764). Andromache uses a related construction when, as Hector is dragged around the city walls, she regrets that Eetion bore her (22.481).²⁰ In book 21, fearing an unheroic end to his life, Achilles cries out to Zeus in prayer: "Would that Hector had killed me" (279). In the *Odyssey*, the shade of Achilles wishes something similar for Agamemnon: "Would that you had met your death and fate in Troy" (24.30–31). Most famously, in *Odyssey* 5 Odysseus exclaims as

he faces the storm near Scheria, "How I wish I had died and met my fate in Troy" (5.308); he repeats the exclamation in the fictional account of his travails that he gives to Eumaeus (14.274).²¹

The *ophelion* phrase thus seems to be a locution used both by those in mourning and by Homeric heroes caught in threatening or painful situations—or, in the case of Odysseus, when telling about them in guest-friendship situations. The phrase does not, however, only communicate bitter despair (which may be either a *cri du coeur* or a persuasive tactic). When turned on another, it may also be used as an insult in verbal contests, reproaches, and taunts, an important aspect of its usage for analyzing Helen's speeches.²² In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus most frequently utters the phrase, deploying it twice (of four times in the *Odyssey* and once in the *Iliad*) when he is trying to use a painful situation to gain sympathy, a complex deployment similar to Helen's. In the *Iliad*, it is Helen's favorite locution for expressing both despair and scorn, which she usually does with some other end in mind (of all characters she uses the phrase most often, five times in the *Iliad*). As a stranger in Troy, her usage in the *Iliad* resembles that of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, who must make clever use of guest-friendship situations to win his way home. Just as Odysseus, when seeking empathy from the Phaeacians (*Od.* 11.547), regrets that he won Achilles' arms instead of Ajax, Helen, when seeking empathy from Priam and Hector (*Il.* 3 and 6), regrets that she followed Paris. Though each time she employs the phrase Helen's aim is slightly different, never is it simply the direct outpouring of emotion that it sounds. Although its repetition links her tone both to mourning diction and to the hero's emotions and concern for *kleos*, her application of this type of phrase is unique. Rather than actually being a widow or a hero in challenging circumstances, Helen echoes their outbursts by employing an emotional appeal that sounds like self-address, a layered locution whose related aims are deflecting blame and cementing allegiances. In her use of the phrase to cast scorn on Paris, for example, once she seems to be teasing him and once to be flattering his brother.

The earlier scene in book 3 involving Paris alone is plotted by Aphrodite, whose machinations irk her protégée and who inspires in her a passion that seems suspended between desire (for the beautiful Paris whom Aphrodite describes, 3.391–94) and anger at the very goddess with whom she is so closely associated.²³ Note that Helen herself calls her painful feelings ἄκριτα (3.412), the most common meaning of which is "confused, indeterminate," a word that thus underscores both the complexity of Helen's passion and (what comes to the same thing) the merging of roles in this scene, so that Helen's abuse of Aphrodite comes close to self-abuse.²⁴ Helen has been referred to as a "faded Aphrodite";²⁵ their conversation resembles

an internal dialogue—a debate not only between Helen and her *daimon* but also between two of the facets that make up her many-sided figure, with its multiple motivations and opposing traditions. Moreover, her scornful responses to her intimates resemble each other: she exhorts both Aphrodite and Paris with dismissive imperatives (3.406, 432) and pictures each in a compromised position (3.407–9, 434–36); correlatively, she uses the *ophelion* phrases of both herself and Paris. Her reproach of Aphrodite for using seductive talk (3.399) also recalls Hector's insulting of his brother for being a seducer (3.49). Helen engages in this derogatory language only with those closest to her;²⁶ a significant variation on the normal context of such blame speech, her usage parallels as well Hector's treatment of Paris.

The scornful abuse of one so intimate can sound similar to the dueling speech of warriors (e.g., the use of negative epithets and goading imperatives). Coupled with Helen's self-abusive epithets, this speech and that in which she reproaches Paris mimic the aggressive challenge of the hero on the battlefield.²⁷ When Helen returns to the bedroom as ordered by Aphrodite, her expression and tone suggest pique,²⁸ while her taunting phrases recall the flying warrior: "Would that you had died there," she says, "subdued by the better man, who was once my husband" (3.428–29). At the beginning of book 3 Hector similarly chastises his brother on the battlefield, declaring that he wishes Paris had never been born or had died unmarried (3.40). In the bedroom Helen changes her tack with brusque abruptness, first telling Paris to go and challenge Menelaus for a second time, then remarking that he had better not, since Menelaus would probably kill him (3.432–36).²⁹ Compare first Achilles, who goads Aeneas with a parallel insult in a famous flying scene, when he urges him to retreat into the mass of soldiers lest he be harmed (20.197). And compare again Hector, who challenges his brother in similar terms ("Couldn't you stand up to Ares-loving Menelaus?" 3.51), and then predicts that if he did he would end up "mingling with the dust" (3.55). Both Helen and Hector contrast Paris unfavorably with Menelaus, and point up the superiority of the Greek by giving Paris' defeat sexual overtones (e.g., "mingling" 3.48, 55], "subduing" [3.429, 436]). For Paris the lover, even encounters on the battlefield have a tincture of the bedroom.³⁰ These two scornful acknowledgments of his unwarlike attitude serve to frame book 3, so that it begins and ends with Paris' sensual presence and the bellicose types who reproach him: Hector and Helen. Helen's use of this stance is not nearly so straightforward as her brother-in-law's, of course. She imports a verbal style that belongs on the battlefield, and that here in the intimate context of the bedroom takes on an additional layer of meaning—offering a sexual as well as a military challenge.

Indeed, Paris (lover that he is) responds to this goading by treating it as a kind of bitter foreplay. And it appears that Helen's amorous husband has interpreted her taunts in some sense rightly, for Helen follows him to bed. By invoking her war-loving first husband in order to prick her bed-loving second, she employs the militaristic attitude of the one in order to denigrate qualities that she herself shares with the other, and her physical acquiescence reiterates her reluctant bond with him. That is, when she turns the emotional phrasing of the angry wish against her too-tender husband, she links herself to him and both of them to Aphrodite (since she and the goddess are the other recipients of such reproach). The hero's despair as well as his scorn thus take on a singular usage in Helen's mouth: in challenging those who share her affinities, she implicates herself in the abuse that she levels at them, while also preempting the criticism of others. In this way she stands poised against the gentle judgments of those who would forgive her, her character operating as a window on this defamatory tradition.

Something similar occurs in book 6, although Helen's tone has changed somewhat since her interaction with Paris in book 3, and now she speaks with a post-coital combination of enticement and gentle abuse. When Hector comes to rouse Paris from his sensuous reverie in the bedroom, Helen tries to get her manly brother-in-law to sit down by scorning her soft and lovely husband.³¹ She engages in a delicate seduction of Hector, addressing him with "honey-sweet words" (6.343). Both Nestor and the Sirens also speak in a honeyed manner, so that the term delimits a range of speech types from the authoritatively but gently persuasive to the dangerously seductive,³² a mesmerizing quality that marks Helen's speaking style in this passage. When Hector first enters and reproaches his brother, the mild Paris responds that Helen had just been urging him to return to battle with "soft words" (6.337)—unusual content for such beguiling tones. The enticing associations that attend *malakos* ("soft") thus contrast strangely with the stringency of her message, while those that attend *meilichios* ("honey-sweet") lend her words a potentially threatening quality. Thus Hector's refusal to sit with her becomes a refusal to play the victim role to her Siren, a role that his brother willingly takes on. While the Homeric poet may counter this ominous seductive quality at the surface level of the scene, it nonetheless resonates there as a disturbing subtext.

From this perspective, it should not be surprising that Helen begins her conversation with Hector by invoking her threatening qualities, but in the self-debasing mode that she employed with his father. She calls herself an "evil-devising, shudder-inspiring dog" (6.344; cf. 6.356; 3.180). The wish construction that follows is an elaborate expansion of her earlier use of it. Rather than simply desiring to die, she declares that she wishes that on her

day of birth a gust of wind had carried her off to the mountains, or into a wave of the many-voiced sea (6.345–48). Helen purports to desire a type of end that Jean-Pierre Vernant relates to being seized by a god, invoking a connection between erotic love and death that he considers especially relevant to Helen's type.³³ An echo of her wish in book 3 that death had "pleased" her (3.173), Helen's lyrical desire for rapture here in *Iliad* 6 lends sensuous overtones to her speech. While her words explicitly depict regret, her flowery turns of phrase and sweetened tones suggest an attempt to soften Hector's attitude toward herself if not her husband: she sides with Hector in his chastising of his brother, yearns aloud for divine seizure, and notes ruefully her and Paris' future fame. Recall the similarity of Hector's and Helen's reproaches in book 3; here again she mimics his attitude, this time to his face with the goal of cementing her connection to him. Her maneuver is a delicate one. She must acknowledge her alliance with Paris in order to show her awareness of their shame; but she thereby also isolates herself from him, since he assumes no responsibility for his actions. As in book 3, Helen brackets herself with Paris as objects of abuse, highlighting their status here by using the *opheloa* phrase twice in expressions of heroic bitterness to apply to herself and her husband (6.345, 350). Homer thus has Helen transform the typical intentions of the phrase by using it for this anomalous speech act, layering self-abuse, scorn for an intimate, and a seductive allegiance of perspective, all of which ultimately aim at softening the heart of her interlocutor. While Hector does not in the end sit down with Helen, neither does he speak roughly to her, instead responding with a respect that resembles his father's treatment of her. By introducing a defamatory tradition that threatens to reveal her infamous side and yet ultimately serves an apotropaic function, Helen succeeds in deflecting blame: again, no one else abuses her as she abuses herself.

At the end of the *Iliad* (24.760–75), Helen has the final mourning speech over Hector's dead body—a surprising status that supports Graver's argument that the Homeric poet is forcefully asserting an alternate tradition that elevates Helen and questions her blame. But if we look more closely at precisely how she mourns Hector, beyond her use of the mourner's topos of bewailing her fate as vulnerable survivor, we can see that her lament in this case focuses entirely on the threat of blame—the threat, that is, of the other story, the tale of bad-dog Helen. This is not to say that other mourners do not fear ill repute: Andromache certainly does, but mostly for her son Astyanax (e.g., *Il.* 22.494–501).³⁴ Helen's lament, in some contrast, is only about repute; in detailing her fears for the future, she makes no mention of other horrors such as slavery and remarriage, which are often voiced by newly bereft female mourners in both epic and tragedy.³⁵ After expressing

her usual sentiment of regret (24.764), Helen notes that she had never heard a debasing or disrespectful word from her brother-in-law. She adds that if anyone else in his family ever reproached her, Hector would fend them off verbally with his gentle mind and words (24.768–72). She concludes by declaring that everyone else shudders in her presence (24.775).

Helen's final word in the *Iliad* resonates with the dread that she might inspire, as the dog-faced daughter of Nemesis whose self-blame in Homer repeatedly suggests this other story. Hector, like the poet, may be gentle-minded toward Helen, but her description of his protection reveals how tenuous this praise tradition is; here as elsewhere in the poem her words declare one thing but point to another—this time her dangerous qualities, which cause a sensation in those around her like the chilly hand of Hades. At these moments Helen's figure suggests the deadly side of the female, to which Greek poets often attribute the downfall of men in some profound and sweeping manner. These figures are the embodiment of Fate, the Medusa who freezes the bones, the Nemesis who is the end of the hubristic man, even the Aphrodite who (dog-faced) devours the husband's energy and wealth alike.³⁶ The word *nemesis* ("retribution") in fact surfaces repeatedly in Helen's speech and that of those who speak in her presence (e.g., 3.156, 3.410, 6.3 35–36, 6.351). That is, in the scenes where Helen appears, her presence seems to call forth the *nemesis* that is an essential aspect of her story. And her speeches, in their insistence on her infamous associations, serve as constant reminders of the just indignation and deserved retribution that acts of hubris bring down on the heads of those who commit them.

THE PAINLESS STORY

While Helen is a weaving narrator of her own story in the *Iliad* (3.125–28),³⁷ in the *Odyssey* the objects that associate her with weaving signal the context of formal ritual conducted by people of high status. In book 4, she descends from her bedroom accompanied by handmaidens and weaving implements that were gifts from Egyptian royalty—her own gifts, as the narrator points out, not those obtained by her husband (4.130). Moreover, she is accompanied by the handmaiden Adrastea, a name that Clader notes recalls Adrasteia, a cult title of the goddess Nemesis,³⁸ the scene of her descent into the *megaron* in its entirety strongly suggests the entrance of a goddess—if a dangerous one. In book 15 she gives to Telemachus a gown of her own fine weaving as a token of guest-friendship, requesting that he accept it as a memory token of herself and that he give it to his future wife (15.124–29). The gesture should possess a disturbing ritual power, since a wedding gown from Helen would symbolize both the marriage bond and its transgression.

And yet in both scenes Helen plies, without recoil from others, implements of guest-friendship (the condolence drug and the marriage dress) that not only are profoundly associated with her figure, but also suggest and then eerily suppress the problems that she embodies for story-telling on the one hand and gift-giving on the other.

Helen's speeches, which accompany her handling of these objects, invoke various models of authoritative speech—the Muses, the poet or choral performer, the speaker of prophecy—and demonstrate her sensitivity to the appropriate locution. Helen's first words to her audience draw purposeful attention to her perceptive abilities and narrative control. When she recognizes Telemachus as the son of Odysseus, she asks, "Should I lie or should I speak the truth?" (4.140), recalling the power that the Muses possess.³⁹ In this scene Helen gives shape and purpose to the conversation and saves the dinner party (albeit in questionable fashion) by doling out to her hearers a condolence drug. The narrator terms this substance "no-pain" (4.221), while emphasizing the grotesque effects of such emotional benumbing. But the ambiguous and powerful drug, in combination with Helen's words, staunches the flow of tears among the diners, which her husband had tended to augment. The *nepeinthe* thus serves as an essential complement to her control of verbal interaction and storytelling. And although the juxtaposition of Helen's and Menelaus' stories also encourages the audience to question her true inclinations, it similarly promotes her narrative authority. She implicitly associates herself with Zeus, the Muses, and the epic poet, while Menelaus approves her story openly and imitates the structure of her narrative frame.

Most readers have focused on the ominous qualities of both Helen and her drug, and seemed to accept that Menelaus' is the true version of events. But Helen's command of verbal interaction is such that the *Odyssey*, unlike the *Iliad*, almost succeeds in suppressing completely the disturbing implications of her hosting strategies. These surface only briefly and cause little reaction in Helen's interlocutors, leaving behind in the external audience an eerie sense that they have been seduced by a rhetorically agile speaker and that all may not be well in Sparta.⁴⁰ As a measure of this near-success, Helen only refers to herself once with the dog epithet (4.145). That is, her defamatory tradition is not nearly so dominant as it is in the *Iliad*, and even her husband's story avoids blaming her directly for her actions. Although, as a metapoetic figure, Helen does seem in this scene to represent the doubling nature of storytelling,⁴¹ as an adept speaker she calms indecision and effectively overshadows her husband's potentially upsetting tale.

Helen first explains that she will not recount all the feats that Odysseus undertook during the war; rather, she says, she will only describe his

achievements within the walls of Troy. The phrase she uses in introducing her narrative resembles her husband's to Peisistratus (4.242, cf. 204–5); later he repeats her phrase almost exactly (4.271).⁴² Her usage calls attention to her sensitivity to conversational context: she signals the suitability of her story by sounding like her husband, who has been speaking with great warmth and familiarity about both Odysseus and Nestor. Helen also establishes her status as a narrator by suggesting that, like Telemachus' father, she possesses one of the primary attributes of the authoritative speaker: great perspicuity. Describing Odysseus' appearance in Troy disguised as a slave, she claims that she alone recognized him and taxed him with her knowledge. She emphasizes the extent of his disguise by repeating phrases that mark his likeness to a man of low status, a rhetorical strategy that underscores both his cleverness at deception and hers at detection (4.244–51). Odysseus, having beaten himself with blows that are unbecoming (4.244) of the hero, is so unlike himself—so like a household slave or a beggar (4.245, 247–49)—that he slips into Troy (4.246, 249) unnoticed, except by Helen herself. Odysseus counters her probing eye by refusing to confirm her identification until she has bathed and anointed him, dressed him well, and sworn a great oath of secrecy to him—that is, until she has treated him as do those other dread goddesses Calypso and Circe, from the care of the hero's body to the swearing of an oath not to harm him.⁴³

Helen then explicitly claims that, after she played the role of ministering goddess, Odysseus told her the “whole plot” (4.256) of the Greeks. Once again she emphasizes her omniscience, or at least the vast extent of her knowledge, leaving open the possibility that she may have even been told then about the Trojan horse (the device that would end the war)—as her probing response to it in Menelaus' story suggests. Helen also describes her heart's rejoicing amid the wail of the Trojan women at Odysseus' subsequent killing of Trojans (4.259–60), which (as she implies) she made possible by being loyal to those with whom she now dines.⁴⁴ Sitting once again with her first husband, she ends her story by implicitly comparing Menelaus favorably to Paris, calling the former “my husband” (4.263), who, she declares, is not inferior to “anyone” (4.264). Helen's self-portrait is carefully calibrated both to support her claims to narrative authority and to gratify her audience; it could not be more delicately balanced or more suitably told.

This elegant story is thrown into some question by Menelaus' depiction of Helen's loyalties in the war (4.265–89), although how well he succeeds in doing so or even how much he desires to has, I think, been exaggerated by recent readers of the scene. He initially responds to his wife's tale by remarking that she has told everything “in a fitting fashion” (4.266),

an interesting characterization for a speech whose pivotal sympathies he seems himself to refute. In rhetorical terms, phrases such as *kata moiran* do not assess the truth of the speech, but rather whether the speaker is behaving appropriately with her words. Gregory Nagy has argued convincingly that in Homer the phrases *kata moiran* and *kata aisan* indicate conformity to epic diction in particular.⁴⁵ Helen's speech would then meet the criteria not only of dinner-table etiquette but also of the poet's genre, further supporting her status both as an authoritative speaker and as a metarhetorical figure whose implications for speech-making help delineate the boundaries of the genre itself.

Menelaus thus implicitly approves Helen's ability to tell a story that highlights Odysseus' ingenuity and his military prowess and that thereby flatters and gratifies his son. He then reaffirms the aptness of her speech by using a similar frame for his own tale. Helen's first words had paid homage to Zeus, father of the Muses and of Helen herself, so that she established her unparalleled authority as a knower and a speaker by implied association with both (a connection aided by the repetition of “all” [*apantia* ... *panta*, 4.237, 240])—in effect collapsing the roles of the Muses and the poet.⁴⁶ And perhaps most important, by underscoring her role as a knowing story-teller, she allied herself with Odysseus. In his introduction Menelaus echoes one phrase of Helen's exactly (4.242 and 4.271); he also employs a similar introductory strategy, pointing up his own status and exclaiming over the endurance of Odysseus in the service of the Achaeans (4.267–73).⁴⁷ Most pointedly, he declares that, although he has encountered the strategies and mental types of many men and traveled far (like Odysseus), he has never seen such a one as Odysseus. Both introductory strategies seek to control the reception of the tale by pointing (either implicitly or explicitly) to the wisdom and experience of the tellers, thereby grounding the authority of both as narrators in their known characters and their fortuitous resemblance to the authoritative type whose story they tell (i.e., Menelaus is a hero-traveler, Helen is an associate of the Muses). In affirming the appropriateness of his wife's speech and echoing her verbal strategy, Menelaus effectively weakens the negative impact of his own story.

This potential conflict is further mitigated by the fact that Menelaus blames his wife's actions on Aphrodite, who intended that Helen be driven to bring ruin to the Trojans (4.274–75). In the end, Odysseus' protector Athena leads Helen away from the horse, so that in Menelaus' story, goddesses compel both her arrival on the scene and her leave-taking. The only event not motivated by the goddesses—and for which Helen may thus be held responsible—is her imitation of the voices of the warriors' wives. In this she is met and matched by Odysseus. As in her own story, here in her husband's

Helen and Odysseus are paired as singularly clever, especially in relation to verbal manipulation. If Helen can don multiple verbal disguises (something the hero does elsewhere in the *Odyssey*), Odysseus can effectively see through her disguise (as she alone saw through his).

Thus while Odysseus sits inside the Trojan horse, alone in his recognition of Helen, she—still a sharp-eyed detector—literally probes its significance, fondling its sides as if touching all the Greek husbands and mouching the voices of their wives (4.277–79). This mimetic ability matches that which the female chorus is said to have (to its great glory) in the *Hymn to Delian Apollo* (162–64).⁴⁸ Like the Muses, Helen can tell the truth or not; like the rhapsode or choral performer, she can imitate the voices of others to the delight and/or danger of her audience. And although as an object of narrative she does signal the doubling, dissimulating nature of mimesis, as a speaking subject she exhibits a formidable facility to detect the identities of others, to assume the roles of various authoritative types, and to suit her tale to the context of its utterance. Helen herself merely claims before she tells her story that she will speak “suitable things” (4.239)—things that, if they are not true, ought to be, by virtue of the extent to which they fit the context in which they are told. *Eoikota* are ethically “true”; they suit character and situation and are thus the mainstay of the rhetorically adept speaker.

Compare the scene in book 15, where Helen’s extraordinary control of signifying objects (e.g., the gown, but also the eagle and the goose in the omen that she deciphers) effects a near-complete suppression of the troubling aspects of her figure, to the extent that she is able to hand over an item that she explicitly labels as a marriage gift without any negative reaction on the part of its recipient. When Helen gives Telemachus the robe, she calls it “a memory token from the hands of Helen for the much-desired wedding time” (15.126), precisely the ritual whose luxurious trappings and illicit transgression she symbolizes. This scene echoes one in *Iliad* 6 where Hecuba chooses a gown to dedicate to Athena, but with emphatically different effect. There the poet states explicitly that Paris took these gowns from Sidon on his way home with Helen (6.289–92), so that Hecuba’s offering—which she makes when the Greeks are effectively at the door—is a precisely matched payment for Helen’s having been brought to Troy with these same items. In this scene Helen’s figure surfaces as a reminder of Paris’ transgression, as another ruinous object, whose return may not bring about the gods’ protection (as the dedication of the gown does not, 6.311). When Helen gives the marriage dress to Telemachus in *Odyssey* 15, it is of her own making (i.e., she is associated with it as a craftsman, rather than as a fellow object). She is its author, in effect, and she assigns to it the label and type of narrative that she desires for it.⁴⁹ While the object, in its connection to marriage and

gift-giving, may still resonate with negative connotations for the external audience, Helen exercises impressive control over its signification for the internal audience, transforming it from a would-be ruinous object into one with happy associations.

This scene also adds another model of authoritative speech to Helen’s repertoire. Her agile reading of the omen that marks the departure of Telemachus and Peisistratus from Sparta (15.160–78) precisely forecasts Odysseus’ interpretation of Penelope’s dream (*Od.* 19.555–58), thereby linking Helen both to the seer’s role and, once again, to Odysseus himself. Helen’s prophecy foreshadows Odysseus’, and like a good seer she foretells what does come to pass. Most interestingly, she relates with striking brevity the plot and conclusion of the *Odyssey* (“Thus Odysseus having suffered many evils and wandered much, will return home and exact retribution”),⁵⁰ again collapsing the roles that mark a special authority: the omniscience of the Muses and the narrative compass of the poet. Compare especially the opening of the *Odyssey* (1.1–5), with its similar repetition of “many/much,” its juxtaposition of wandering and suffering, and its reference to *nostos*, Odysseus’ primary goal.⁵¹ Where the Homeric poet holds off the end of the story, Helen includes it, spanning the entire narrative in a single sentence.⁵²

In *Odyssey* 15, then, Helen seems in possession of an inhuman knowledge, and as usual Menelaus is greatly overshadowed by his more mentally and rhetorically agile wife. Here he “ponders how he might express his thoughts judiciously” (15.169–70), while his wife prophesies with startling alacrity. Note that Menelaus is unsure how to speak in a context that requires a suitable response, precisely the kind of response that Helen is capable of, as her husband himself had acknowledged earlier (4.266). Helen’s mantic capabilities elicit an avowal from Telemachus that he will worship her as a goddess in his own land, pledging the establishment of a cult in Ithaca like that which did exist in the archaic period in Sparta and perhaps elsewhere.⁵³ Thus the scene’s final words on Helen acknowledge her status not merely as prophet or poet but also as herself divine—as one, that is, who might know more than the average human, not just about the details of the story but also about how to tell it in a deeply appropriate manner. In the *Odyssey*, Helen is persuasive enough that she nearly manages to circumvent entirely the obvious problem with her voice in the first place: that it is changeable and multiple, just as her figure is symbolic of the multiplicity of stories to be told.

Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* depict Helen as a subtly appropriate and appropriate speaker. She echoes the typical phrases of the mournful wife and the challenged hero in a unique form of self-abuse, often deploying this emotional tone to draw her audience into sympathy with her. Or she speaks

like a divinely persuasive narrator, while the self-image she projects invokes the inevitable suitability of her words. The changeable quality of Helen's voice reflects her indeterminate and yet authoritative status in Homeric epic: she is half god, half mortal, a forbidding presence even among aristocratic men; she is the wife of too many men, and so the contested possession of everyone and no one; her speaking style is similarly that of everyone and no one. In the *Iliad* Helen's voice is not openly authoritative, but she succeeds in using her despairing, self-abusive tone to maintain a covert control of verbal exchanges. The *Odyssey* represents Helen as being in easy command of the conversation; her voice is authoritative and deeply suitable in manner, if often ambiguous or possibly deceptive in content. In her verbal guises of the mournful wife, the despairing or scornful warrior, the perspicacious poet-goddess, or the gracious host, she shows herself capable of the mimesis with which Menelaus charges her—with all the subtle enticement and potential danger that implies. Helen's variegated speaking style and striking narrative control signal her encompassing role in the Homeric poems as the embodiment of Nemesis. She is the beginning and end of the Trojan War story for both the Greeks and the Trojans, and the figure whose conflicting characterizations and multiple voices repeatedly raise the specter of fateful competition, be it military or poetic.

NOTES

1. Lévi-Strauss [1958] 1963: 61: "For words do not speak, while women do; as producers of signs, women can never be reduced to the status of symbols or tokens." See, e.g., Bergren 1983; du Bois [1978] 1996; Suzuki 1989; Joplin 1991; Katz 1991; Wohl 1998.
2. Calame [1977] 1997: 191–93.
3. Pl. *Phdr.* 243a3–b2.
4. *P. Oxy.* 2506, fr. 26, col. 1.
5. On Stesichorus and Helen's relationship to the construction of an authoritative tradition, see Bassi 1993; and cf. Nagy 1990: 419–23.
6. I argue elsewhere (Worman 1997) that this play shares with Corgias' *Helen* the use of her body to demonstrate the erotic effects of persuasive style.
7. *Cyprica* fr. 7; see Clader 1976: 18–23, esp. nn. 30 and 31. Her detailed discussion—which predates by fifteen years the more recent flurry of attention around Helen—has served as the basis for many studies, often without sufficient recognition of her work. Vernant ([1985] 1991b: 102–3) similarly associates Helen with *Kêr*, Fate, and the Erinyes. Cf. Vermeule 1979: 159.
8. See Redfield [1975] 1991: 193–203; also Clader 1976: 18; Graver 1995: 58.
9. Nagy 1979: 224–31.
10. Graver 1995: esp. 55–59.
11. Clader (1976) is not explicit about this alternate tradition, but she does note a number of times the threatening character of Helen's presence in the *Iliad*.
12. Martin (1995) has suggested this similarity, and pointed to the use of *ophelôn* phrases in Helen's Iliadic speeches. See below.

13. Zeitlin [1981] 1996; also Bergren 1983; Suzuki 1989; Doherty 1995a.
14. *Arist. Rh.* 1405a.
15. See, e.g., Redfield [1975] 1991: 122; Edwards 1987: 195–96; Suzuki 1989; Austin 1994; Graver 1995.
16. See esp. Pucci ([1979] 1998), who associates the Muses' ability with the Sirens, Circe, and Helen; also Crane 1988: 42; Suzuki 1989: 69; Wohl 1993: 33–34; Doherty 1995b, 1995a: 135–38. For broader discussions, see Clader 1976; Bergren 1983; Austin 1975, 1994.
17. See Alexiou 1974; Holst-Warhaft 1992; and Murnaghan 1999. Andromache repeats nearly the same set of fears and regrets three out of the four times she speaks (6.407–39, 22.450–59, 24.725–45).
18. See esp. Clader 1976: 10–12.
19. Again, see Vernant ([1985] 1991b: 102–3), who argues that *erâs* ("love") and *thanatos* ("death") are strongly linked in the Greek social imagination and calls Helen a "fatal beauty"; cf. Vermeule 1979: 159.
20. Cf. Priam of Hector in the same scene (*Il.* 22.426); also Thetis when she wishes that Achilles had just stayed by the ships (1.415–16), Achilles when he wishes that his mother had stayed among the sea nymphs (18.86–87).
21. Cf. Andromache (*Il.* 6.412) to Hector; and Aeneas in Vergil (*Aen.* 1.94–96). Odysseus also wishes he had remained among the Phaeacians when he lands on his own disguised island (13.204–5).
22. Cf. *Il.* 11.380–81 (Paris taunts Diomedes); *Il.* 14.84–85 (Odysseus curses Agamemnon); *Il.* 24.253–54 (Priam curses his living children); *Od.* 2.183–84 (Eurymachos taunts the old seer Halitherses); *Od.* 18.401 (the suitors taunt the beggar Odysseus).
23. On the extreme proximity of type between Aphrodite and Helen, see Boedeker 1974:48, 54–55, 61; Clader 1976: 74; also Suter 1987.
24. See Martin 1989: 111–13 on the interpretation of the epithet ἀσπίροισθε, which Odysseus uses of Thersites (*Il.* 2.246; cf. Iris regarding the μῦρθοι ... ἀσπίροισι of Priam, *Il.* 2.796).
25. See Friedrich 1978: 46–47. Lyons (1997: 72) notes that the "faded god" theory of such figures is no longer popular among scholars, but cites Clader's 1976 treatment of Helen as a convincing exploration of her close connections to Aphrodite and Artemis. See also Calame [1977] 1997: 191–92.
26. Among female characters, only the confrontational and devious Hera uses such a vitriolic response to an intimate, although she fears Zeus when he responds angrily to her (1.568), just as Helen fears Aphrodite (but not Paris; 3.418).
27. Dog epithets are common flying tools (Graver 1995: 49); Helen's self-abuse is thus a technique common in verbal dueling that uniquely boomerangs on the speaker. On the typical contexts of flying in epic, see Parks 1990. Although he is not sanguine about the transference of flying patterns to suit amorous or familial conflict, Parks does admit the similarity between these and warrior conflicts (12–13). I am most interested in shared speech patterns, which Parks does analyze, but not in any great detail and not in relation to what he considers non-dueling verbal exchanges. In contrast, Murnaghan (1999) points out that lament is also an agonistic genre. On the abuse of Paris in particular, see Suter 1993.
28. "Averting her eyes, she reproached her husband" (3.427).
29. Attempts have been made to explain Helen's seeming shift of direction and her ultimate acquiescence to Paris' suggestion as due to her weakness and attraction to him

(e.g., Hooker 1979; Edwards 1987:195–96). Kirk (1985: 327), in some contrast, regards the entire speech as “bitterly sarcastic and hostile.”

30. Cf. Hector’s disparaging reference to Paris’ “gifts of Aphrodite” (3.54) and Paris’ own affirmation of the same (3.64).

31. Mackie (1995: 118–19) remarks that Helen’s phrases seem carefully chosen to suit Hector’s outlook.

32. See Dickson 1995: 38.

33. Vernant [1985] 1991b: 102–3; cf. above, note 19. Penelope makes a similar despairing wish to be borne away by a gust of wind (*Od.* 20.61–65); see Johnston 1994 for comparable connections to the Erinyes, etc.

34. When alive, Hector seeks to cheer his weeping wife with grim praise for himself (*Il.* 460–61); see above regarding Helen’s fear of ill repute, which is a hero’s fear rather than a hero’s wife’s fear.

35. Holst-Warhaft 1992: 112–13.

36. See Graver 1995: 51.

37. Clader 1976: 6–11; Austin 1975: 127–28; 1994: 37–42; Bergren 1980; Zeitlin [1981] 1996: 409–11; Kennedy 1986; Suzuki 1989: 40–43.

38. Clader 1976: 62.

39. Hes. *Theog.* 27; Homer’s Muses “know all things” (*Il.* 2.485), which implies both truth and lies.

40. See Austin 1975: 187–89; he “corrects” his reading in his later analysis of the same scene (1994: 81–82).

41. Zeitlin [1981] 1996) has suggested that the scene depicts Helen as the embodiment of the double story and thus of the dissimulating potential of mimesis itself, see also Bergren 1983. Bergren (1981) argues that Helen’s use of the drug, in combination with her tale, effects a seduction of her audience that recoils on the epic poet, hinting at his own narrative seduction. (Homer’s epithets associate the drug with epic, as a number of scholars have noted.) Cf. Olson 1989; Doherty 1995a: 130–35.

42. See further discussion below and in note 47.

43. Cf. *Od.* 5.177–79, 5.263–64, 10.342–44, 358–65.

44. Zeitlin [1981] 1996; Bergren 1983; Suzuki 1989: 42–43.

45. Nagy 1979: 40 and n. 2, 82n., 134; cf. the related phrase “beyond measure”, which denotes the opposite—that is, a hubristic inattention to fitting measure, an excess that is anathema to epic.

46. Cf. *Il.* 2.484–93 (Catalogue of Ships), and see Ford 1992: 72–74 (*Il.* 2.488 = *Od.* 4.240); on this collapse of roles by Hesiod, see Lardinois 1995: 201. Helen’s use of the phrase makes it sound as if she might be able to tell all, while the poet emphasizes his incapability (*Il.* 2.489–90). See note 47 below for details.

47. Helen:

ἀπάρ θεός ἄλλοτε ἄλλω
 Ζεὺς ἀγαθὸν τε κακὸν τε διδοῖ δύνανται γὰρ ἅπαντα: } narrator’s status
 ἧ τοι νῦν δαίνυθε καθήμενοι ἐν μεγάροισι ↓
 καὶ μύθοις τέρπειθε· εἰκόστα γὰρ καταλέξω. ↓
 πάντα μὲν οὐκ ἂν ἐγὼ μυθήσομαι οὐδ’ ὀνομήνω } narrator’s status (cf. *Il.* 2.488)
 ἄσπαι· Ὀδυσσεύης· παλασσιφρονος εἰσιν ἄεθλοι. } subject + epithet
 ἄλλ’ οἶον τὰδ’ ἔφεξε· καὶ ἔζηλ· καρπερός· ἀνήρ } deed + subject
 δῆμψ· ἐνὶ Τρωάδι, ὄθι πάσχετε πῆματ’ Ἀχαιοί. } site of deed; reference to
 (4.242–43) pain (Trojan → Greek)

Menelaus:

ῆδη μὲν πολέων ἐδάσπν βουλήν τε νόον τε
 ἀνδρῶν ἠρώων, πολλὰν δ’ ἐπελήλυθα γαῖαν·
 ἄλλ’ οὐ πω τοιοῦτον ἐγὼν ἶδον ὀφθαλμοῖσιν
 οἶον· Ὀδυσσεύς· παλασσιφρονος ἔστε φίλον κῆρ.
 οἶον καὶ τὰδ’ ἔφεξε· καὶ ἔζηλ· καρπερός· ἀνήρ.
 ἴππῳ ἐνὶ ἔσσιπῳ ἴν’ ἐνημεθα πάστες ἄριστοι
 Ἀργείων Τρώεσσι φόνον καὶ κῆρα φέροντες.

} narrator’s status
 } (cf. *Od.* 1.3)
 } subject + epithet
 } deed + subject
 } site of deed;
 } reference to pain
 (Trojan → Greek)
 (4.242–73)

48. In the *Hymn. Hom. Ap.*, the poet calls this feat a “wondrous thing” (156), and his praise of the Delian maidens is covert praise for himself, just as Helen’s narrative seduction suggests the poet’s own. See further on this passage in the *Hymn. Hom. Ap.* in Richard Martin’s contribution to this volume.

49. Note that Helen uses the word μνήρα, a word that designates some sort of ritual marker—like a monument, or tombstone—something often *inscribed*, which is analogous to what Helen effects with her speech.

50. 15.176–77.

51.

Ἄνδρα μοι ἔνευε Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὅς· μάλα πολλὰ
 πλάσσει, εἴπει Τροίης ἱερὸν προλήθερον ἔπερσε
 πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων ἵδεν ἄσπετα καὶ νόον ἔγνω
 πολλὰ δ’ ἦ ἐν πόντῳ πάθειν ἄλγεα ὄν κατὰ θυμόν,
 ἀρνύμενος ἦε τε ψυχὴν καὶ λάσπαι ἐταίρων.

52. Contrast Helen’s imperfect knowledge of events in the Teichoscopia (*Lynn-* George 1988: 33).

53. See Clader 1976: 63–64, 69, 72–78; Skutsch 1987: 189, 190–91.

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