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## Terrible Beauty : The many faces of Helen of Troy in painting from antiquity to the nineteenth century

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Terrible Beauty:  
The Many Faces of Helen of Troy in Painting from Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century

by

Lindsay M. Taylor

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with the requirements for the  
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Terrible Beauty:  
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By Lindsay M. Taylor

Helen of Troy is one of the most complex and enigmatic characters from Greek mythology. For nearly two thousand years, her story has consistently been retold, reshaped, and reinterpreted in a rich variety of narratives produced in different contexts for different audiences. In the absence of a canonical version Helen's tale, philosophers, poets, playwrights, novelists, musicians, filmmakers, and artists in every period have interpreted, modified, and embellished her character in disparate and contradictory terms. Consequently, she has played a significant role in Western artistic canon in a way no other figure from Greek mythology has been able to accomplish; she is potentially the best known and most frequently painted woman in the West, aside from the Virgin Mary and Eve.

As the paradigm of absolute beauty, Helen consistently eludes and obstructs all who attempt to depict her. In this way, she constitutes the painter's greatest challenge: that is, how to represent someone who, by her very nature, is unrepresentable. In spite of—or, perhaps, on account of—her virtual incompatibility with visual representation, artists across all generations have attempted to capture Helen's beauty by removing her from the indescribable realm of the absolute and force her into a relative position within the 'real' world. Within these pictorial confines, Helen becomes an object of the male gaze, vulnerable to sexualization and fetishization as well as to slander and blame. Thus, in the world of art, as in literature, Helen emerges as both the epitome of feminine beauty and as a potent symbol of the destruction that irresistible beauty can wield.

Over the last twenty years, there has been increasing scholarly interest in Helen's cultural impact as an object of desire and a symbol of the timeless male obsession with controlling female sexuality. Though several remarkable scholars have brought new and indispensable insight into the study of Helen's reception, they have disproportionately emphasized Helen's representation in literature while largely overlooking Helen's prominent position and varying reception in art history. This thesis seeks to fill a considerable gap in the literature by expanding upon the complex issue of Helen's feminine beauty, sexuality, and power from the perspective of her depiction in painting. Its purpose is not to be a definitive survey of the reception of Helen in art, but rather a critical analysis of a limited number of artworks that exceptionally demonstrate the tensions and contradictions surrounding Helen's legendary beauty and enigmatic persona, as well as the diverse ways in which she has been rediscovered and reassessed by successive generations of artists. Her varied representations in Attic red-figure vase painting, medieval and quattrocento painting and illumination, and the works of the Pre-Raphaelites and Gustave Moreau are the concern of this investigation.

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Introduction:  
Zeuxis' Paintbrush

Acclaimed academician François-André Vincent revealed his most ambitious picture to date at the Salon of 1789: the monumental *Zeuxis Choosing His Models for the Image of Helen from Among the Girls of Croton* (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> His scene tells the story of the legendary fifth-century BC painter Zeuxis of Heraclea, renowned for his depictions of women. According to Cicero, Zeuxis was commissioned by the people of Croton, a town in Magna Graecia, to produce a painting for the temple of Juno, the subject of which was to be chosen by the artist.<sup>2</sup> Zeuxis chose to depict Helen of Troy, the most beautiful woman in the world whose elopement with Paris provoked the Trojan War. Realizing that a single model could never possess Helen's physical perfection, Zeuxis chose the five most beautiful maidens in the region and combined their best features to create a composite portrait of his subject. Thus, only through the sum of their parts could Zeuxis attempt to simulate the ideal of beauty. Vincent depicts Zeuxis and a crowd of male onlookers eagerly examining a group of lovely young models in various states of undressing on the opposite side of the temple. Zeuxis' unfinished canvas, which dominates the center of the composition, displays the faintest outline of an incomplete classicized female figure. The artist's hand reaches out in a gesture of excitement—has he found the last feature needed to create his amalgam of ideal beauty? Will his desperate

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<sup>1</sup> Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. 8453

<sup>2</sup> Conversely, in his *Natural History* Pliny the Elder sets the story of Zeuxis in Agrigentum.

endeavor to paint perfect female beauty be successful? Alas, Vincent leaves the viewer on a pictorial cliffhanger.

If *Zeuxis Choosing His Models* is a commentary on the creative process, it also reflects the artist's grand yet futile endeavor to paint what is too beautiful to picture. It is rare to encounter a comprehensive account of Helen's beauty in literature, though authors have repeatedly tackled the issue with a range of rhetorical tactics. Rather than detailing her physical appearance, Homer conjures Helen's beauty indirectly through conventional tropes and by describing its effect on those around her. Many writers have attempted to describe her beauty through metaphors or similes, but most abandon description altogether, leaving her appearance to the imagination of the reader.<sup>3</sup> While authors can easily convey her beauty without entering the precarious realm of specificity or 'realism,' artists must grapple with a subject whose objective beauty resists subjective representation. As the paradigm of absolute beauty, Helen consistently eludes and obstructs all who attempt to depict her. In essence, she constitutes the painter's greatest challenge: how to represent someone who, by her very nature, is unrepresentable. For this reason, Ruby Blondell asserts, "any 'realistic' portrait of Helen as a specific person, however beautiful to however many, is doomed to failure."<sup>4</sup>

In spite of—or, perhaps, on account of—her virtual incompatibility with visual representation, Helen has persistently mystified and enchanted artists with her inscrutability and irresistibility. Ever since her name was first recorded in Homer's *Iliad*

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<sup>3</sup> For further discussion on the difficulties of describing Helen in text, see Maguire (2009): 39–43.

<sup>4</sup> Ruby Blondell, *Helen of Troy: Beauty, Myth, Devastation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 49.

in the eighth century BC, Helen has played a significant role in Western artistic canon in a way no other figure from Greek mythology has been able to accomplish; she is potentially the best known and most frequently painted woman in the West, aside from the Virgin Mary and Eve. Yet to pictorially represent Helen, artists must remove her from the indescribable realm of the absolute and force her into a relative position within the ‘real’ world.<sup>5</sup> In losing her ability to transcend representation, Helen becomes an object of the male gaze, vulnerable to sexualization and fetishization as well as to slander and blame. In the world of art, as in literature, Helen emerges as both the epitome of feminine beauty and as a potent symbol of the destruction that irresistible beauty can wield. For nearly two thousand years, Helen’s story has consistently been retold, reshaped, and reinterpreted in a rich variety of narratives produced in different contexts for different audiences.

### **Helen and the Trojan War**

According to the *Cypria*, Helen was conceived by Zeus as part of his larger scheme to relieve Earth of its excess population by instigating a series of events precipitating a great war that brings the Age of Heroes to an end.<sup>6</sup> He initiates this plan at the wedding of the mortal Peleus and the sea nymph Thetis, where the festivities are interrupted by Eris, the goddess of strife or discord, who throws a golden apple inscribed ‘to the fairest’ into the midst of three goddesses—Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite.

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<sup>5</sup> Laurie Maguire, *Helen of Troy: From Homer to Hollywood* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 66.

<sup>6</sup> *Cypria*, 1–4.

Unwilling to settle the dispute, Zeus selects the Trojan prince Paris as arbiter instead. At the Judgement of Paris, Aphrodite promises the most beautiful woman in the world—and the second element in Zeus’ plan—Helen, whose exceptional beauty is that of “immortal goddesses”<sup>7</sup> because she herself is the semi-divine daughter of Zeus. In the *Cypria*, Helen’s mother is Nemesis, the goddess of retribution, but in the most popular retelling of her story, her mother is the mortal Leda, wife of the Spartan king Tyndareus. Leda was raped by Zeus in the form of a swan on the banks of the Eurotas; the product of this union were two eggs, from which hatched Helen and Clytemnestra and Castor and Pollux (Polydeuces).<sup>8</sup>

After awarding the golden apple to Aphrodite, Paris sets sail for Sparta from Troy to retrieve his prize—who is already married to Menelaus, formally of Mycenae. Shortly after Paris’ arrival at the Spartan court, Menelaus is called away to Crete, leaving Helen to entertain their guest. Paris seduces Helen with Aphrodite’s help, and couple elopes with all her treasures in the middle of night, ratifying their marriage upon their arrival at Troy. While Helen leaves Sparta on her own volition, this deed makes Paris a violator not only of the marriage bond between Menelaus and Helen, but also of the sacred Greek institution of hospitality (*xenia*). The theft of Menelaus’ most valuable possession, Helen, constitutes grounds for retribution. After the Trojans refuse to return Helen, the Menelaus and the Greeks declare war against the Trojans. The fighting endures for ten years before the Greeks finally conquer Troy’s formally impenetrable walls by entering the city in the

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<sup>7</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 3.158.

<sup>8</sup> Euripides, *Helen*, 116–122.



guise of a massive wooden horse.<sup>9</sup> The city is sacked at night and Helen is finally reunited with Menelaus; though their ship is blown off course for several years, the couple eventually reaches Sparta. Significantly, Helen is the only leading female character in the Troy story who finds a happy ending, while the other Trojan women—Andromache, Hecuba, and Cassandra—are enslaved by the Greek captors.

### **Deconstructing Helen**

Increasing scholarly interest in the roles of transgressive women from classical antiquity coincided with the rise of gender studies and second-wave feminism in the 1970s and 1980s. Medea, Clytemnestra, and Antigone's refusal to assume the submissive roles traditionally reserved for women were frequently cited in feminist scholars' critiques of the patriarchal values embedded in Western culture. As Blondell notes, Helen was widely ignored in these studies, possibly because her power over men, which takes the form of seductive feminine beauty, is less appealing than the 'mainly' and subversive power of the others.<sup>10</sup> Yet over the last twenty years, Helen has become a source of fascination for scholars and the general public alike. Her resurgence in popularity corresponds to a considerable reconsideration of the problematic power of female beauty in in historical study of women and gender, which as a discipline has focused increasingly not just on women's victimization but also on the exercise of agency despite patriarchal constraints.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This scene depicting the Trojan Horse is described in Book 8 of the *Odyssey*.

<sup>10</sup> Blondell, *xi*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Against the backdrop of third-wave feminism, Helen has been revisited from the perspective of her beauty, responsibility, and agency by feminist scholars in the twenty-first century. Bettany Hughes' best-seller, *Helen of Troy* (2005), which attempts to reconstruct the historical Bronze Age Helen, marks the first comprehensive consideration of Helen's cultural impact as an object of desire and a symbol of the timeless male obsession with controlling female sexuality. In the last decade, Bondell has published extensively on Helen's depiction in Greek literature, including the Homeric epics, lyric poetry, drama, and historiography, and her role as the ultimate embodiment of Greek anxieties toward the threat of female sexuality. Laurie Maguire's literary biography of Helen (2009) similarly deals with issues of Helen's beauty and responsibility.

Though these remarkable scholars have brought new and indispensable insight into the study of Helen's reception, they disproportionately emphasize Helen's representation in literature while speaking only briefly about Helen's prominent position and varying reception in art history—in most cases, to emphasize a broader point about her literary depiction. Among the handful of scholars who have examined Helen's visual representations in relative depth, most have limited their studies to her depiction in ancient art.<sup>12</sup> Apart from the brief discussions offered by Margaret Scherer (1967), Jan Haywood and Naoise Mac Sweeney (2018), virtually no scholars have attempted to discuss Helen's depiction in the visual arts from the Middle Ages to the present day. In short, comprehensive scholarly considerations of Helen's reception in painting have been

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<sup>12</sup> The studies of Lilly Ghali-Kahil (1955), Paul A. Clement (1958), and Guy Hedreen (1996) discuss depictions of Helen's elopement and recovery in Greek vase painting.

consistently neglected, despite the fact that she has been portrayed in as many, or more, paintings as in literary works.

This thesis seeks to fill a considerable gap in the literature by expanding upon the complex issue of Helen's feminine beauty, sexuality, and power from the perspective of her depiction in painting. Its purpose is not to be a definitive survey of the reception of Helen in art, but rather a critical analysis of a limited number of artworks from antiquity to the nineteenth century that exceptionally demonstrate the tensions and contradictions surrounding Helen's legendary beauty and enigmatic persona, as well as the diverse ways in which she has been rediscovered and reassessed by successive generations of artists. Chapter one is devoted to Helen's depiction in fifth-century Greek vase painting. A close examination of a *skyphos* by the Attic painter Makron will reveal how the iconography of Helen's elopement with Paris appropriates Helen's threatening beauty and potentially destructive sexuality by transforming her into the archetype of the beautiful nubile bride. Chapter two explores the shift in Helen's artistic reception in medieval and Early Renaissance Europe, focusing on how a series of quattrocento panel paintings depicting the love story of Helen and Paris testifies to a wider trend amongst the European elite of situating and reshaping episodes from the classical past into the contemporary present in order to express aristocratic ideals and cultural identities. Lastly, chapter three examines Helen's reception in European painting in the second half of the nineteenth century. It will be argued that the dominant characterization of Helen as a *femme fatale*, embodied in the works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites, reflects a wider generational preoccupation with the binary nature of womanhood, embodied in the archetypes of the

‘ideal’ and ‘fatal’ woman. Additionally, this chapter will explore the ways in which French history painter and proto-Symbolist Gustave Moreau imparted his own personal and radical conception of Helen, not only subverting her conventional characterization as a seductive and dangerous woman, but ultimately exonerating her. The aim of this investigation is to demonstrate how artists throughout time have repeatedly envisaged Helen through a contemporary lens, shaping and reshaping her to suit current ideologies concerning beauty, sexuality, marriage, and feminine power.

Here Comes the Bride:  
Helen as the Archetypical *Nymphe* in Fifth-Century BC Attic Vase Painting

In the *Iliad*, which marks her grand debut in Greek literature, Homer establishes Helen's complicit abduction by Paris as *casus belli* and references her repeatedly as the woman for whose sake the Trojan War is being fought.<sup>1</sup> Helen is presented as a headstrong, complex, and sympathetic character despite being both a captive and possession. She regrets her choice to leave her childhood home, her family, and her friends and she frequently blames herself for the death and destruction enacted in her name.<sup>2</sup> Helen is also characterized as the supreme embodiment of female attractiveness and her body's irresistible desirability makes her an object of, and for, the male gaze. Though the power of Helen's beauty is commented on through its effect on other characters,<sup>3</sup> her physical appearance is described without any specificity. Her erotic appeal is conveyed through the reiteration of conventional epithets: she is "white armed," "lovely haired," and the "radiance of women," often seen in "glinting silver robes" or "shimmering linen."<sup>4</sup> Homer uses the same generic markers of beauty for other female characters; but Helen is distinguished from the rest by her beauty which is both

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<sup>1</sup> *Iliad* 3.53–57, 61–62, 150–54; 6.343–46; 24.895–901.

<sup>2</sup> *Iliad* 3.208–14; for critical scholarly views on Helen's treatment in the *Iliad*, see Blondell 2013: 53–72; Roisman 2006; Graver 1995; Suzuki 1989: 18–56.

<sup>3</sup> Such as the Trojan elders as Helen arrives atop the Scaean Gate (*Iliad* 3.170–95) and Paris to Helen after his duel with Menelaus (*Iliad* 3.170–95)

<sup>4</sup> *Iliad* 3.146; 3.385; 3. 207; 3.487; 3.170.

transcendent and absolute (and seemingly unrepresentable).<sup>5</sup> As R. Blondell asserts, “her meaning lies less in her beauty than in the idea of her beauty.”<sup>6</sup>

As a highly stylized medium characterized by a lack of specificity, vase painting is particularly well suited to depict the enigmatic Helen. As in epic poetry, conventional signifiers are often employed in vase painting to “represent the unrepresentable” (i.e. absolute beauty) in an objective and generic way.<sup>7</sup> Gesture, position, size, costume, and ritual action are all means by which vase painters can create scenes that convey Greek ideals and values surrounding beauty, femininity, gender, and status.<sup>8</sup> Attic vase painters convey Helen’s unsurpassed beauty and supreme desirability not by endowing her with unique physical attributes but rather by assimilating her into the generic guise of the bride. Redolent of Homer’s Helen, whose autonomy is hindered by her position within a society which views women as mere possessions,<sup>9</sup> the figure of the bride is suspended between objectification and agency,<sup>10</sup> and is repeatedly rendered by artists as a passive object to be led, pursued, captured, or subjugated by their dominant male counterpart. The bride represents not only the transitional stage when a *parthenos* (nubile maiden)

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<sup>5</sup> For a general discussion on Helen’s absolute beauty see Maguire 2009: 35–82.

<sup>6</sup> Ruby Blondell, *Helen of Troy: Beauty, Myth, Devastation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 49.

<sup>7</sup> Blondell, 49–51.

<sup>8</sup> The absence of visual particularities can also make it difficult to distinguish Helen from other female figures, such as Aphrodite, unless her name is inscribed on the vessel.

<sup>9</sup> See Roisman 2006: 1–8. She notes that the manner of the depiction of women as possessions in the *Iliad* does not necessarily indicate that Homer viewed women as such nor that he was criticizing that societal viewpoint.

<sup>10</sup> Blondell, 14.

becomes a woman (*gyne*) but also the importance of the institution of marriage in maintaining the *status quo* of Greek society.

This chapter seeks to explore the ways in which Attic vase painters utilized nuptial imagery to transform the adulterous Helen into the ultimate embodiment of the beautiful virginal bride in scenes depicting her persuasion and abduction/elopement, with particular attention given to the abduction scene on Makron's red-figure *skyphos* (drinking cup) in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (c. 490–480 BC) (Fig. 2).<sup>11</sup> After a consideration of why Helen, of all mythological heroines, was recognized as the bride *par excellence*, it will be argued that she embodies Greek male anxiety surrounding the insurmountable threat of female beauty and sexuality.

### **Transforming the Abduction Into a Wedding Procession**

From the emergence of nuptial themes in the early sixth century into the fourth century BC, Attic vase painters presented Helen as a bridal figure and linked her iconography to that of the wedding. However it is in the Early Classical period that Helen fully emerges as the paradigmatic bride, particularly in scenes of her abduction/elopement where she is often depicted as the eroticized object of Paris' desire. Helen's increasing popularity as a nuptial figure in the fifth century BC coincided with a new, romantic image of the wedding visible in the adoption of a nuptial pedestrian procession (*chamaipous*) scheme by red-figure painters. By adapting older conventions of erotic seduction to a nuptial setting, employing touch and glance, utilizing the language of

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<sup>11</sup> Museum of Fine Arts, Boston 13.186

personification, and blurring the line between contemporary life and myth, “the physical, emotional, and spiritual bond of husband and wife” could be conveyed more effectively than the conservative and impersonal chariot procession scheme favored by earlier Archaic black-figure painters.<sup>12</sup> Though Helen’s adulterous union with Paris has long been associated with nuptial imagery, the romantic and emotional transformation of the wedding genre provided artists with a new visual vocabulary to explore themes of erotic desire, beauty, and agency in scenes of her persuasion and abduction.

The romantic and emotional iconography of the pedestrian procession scheme is employed by Makron in his red-figure *skyphos*. By co-opting the gestures, clothing, and personnel typically reserved for the *chamaipous*, the artist effectively and deliberately transforms Helen’s abduction into a legitimate *gamos* (wedding). Paris is depicted to the right of Aeneas in a short *chiton* (a lightweight tunic), full-length *himation* (a large garment draped over the shoulders and around the body), sandals, and a Corinthian helmet on top of his head. He strides forward while looking back as he grips Helen’s wrist firmly—perhaps even aggressively—with his left hand, an action which clearly distinguishes him as a bridegroom (Fig. 3). Known as the *cheir’epi karpo*,<sup>13</sup> “(placing) the hand on the wrist,” this gesture most likely signaled the ceremonial transfer of legal guardianship over the bride from her father to her new husband during the wedding

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<sup>12</sup> Robert F. Sutton Jr., “Nuptial Eros: The Visual Discourse of Marriage in Classical Athens,” *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* Vol. 55/56 (1997/1998), 28–29.

<sup>13</sup> Though never in a wedding context, this phrase is used in the *Iliad* to describe a choral dance (18.589), a violent seizure (21.534), and a legal transaction or agreement (24.789).



ceremony.<sup>14</sup> The *cheir'epi karmo* was regularly used in Classical red-figure vase painting, such as Polygnotos' *loutrophoros* (wedding bathwater jar) (c. 430 BC) (Fig. 4),<sup>15</sup> to signify the marriage bond in *chamaipous* scenes and additionally in contexts where a strong grip was needed (*i.e.* escort scenes). From as early as the eighth century, however, it also served as a forceful gesture in abduction scenes,<sup>16</sup> as evidenced by a Late Geometric *krater* (mixing bowl) in the British Museum (c. 740–730 BC) (Fig. 5).<sup>17</sup>

Scenes of abduction and rape frequently serve as a major nuptial motif in Greek art. It has been suggested that the *cheir'epi karmo*, like the bridegroom's act of lifting the bride into the chariot, may have belonged to a mock abduction ritual.<sup>18</sup> The gesture is appropriate to the ideology of both subjects, since it could signify the new bond between husband and wife as well as the taming and controlling of the woman by her abductor/husband.<sup>19</sup> Paris' grip on Helen may have functioned as “a kind of visual *double entendre*,” as S. Masters has proposed,<sup>20</sup> given that the abduction, which began in Sparta, would culminate in a legitimate marriage at Troy. The gesture similarly evokes a parallel

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<sup>14</sup> Ian Jenkins, “Is There Life After Marriage? A Study of the Abduction Motif in Vase Paintings of the Athenian Wedding Ceremony,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* No. 30 (1983), 140.

<sup>15</sup> Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, 929.22.3.

<sup>16</sup> Robert F. Sutton, *The Interaction Between Men and Women Portrayed on Attic Red-Figure Pottery*, PhD diss., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (1981), 181.

<sup>17</sup> British Museum 1899,0219.1.

<sup>18</sup> Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, “The Young Abductor of the Locrian Pinakes,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* No. 20 (1973), 18.

<sup>19</sup> John H. Oakley and Rebecca H. Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 32.

<sup>20</sup> Samantha Masters, *The Abduction and Recovery of Helen*, Phd. diss., The University of Exeter (2012), 157.

between Helen's journey from her childhood home (Sparta) to Paris' home (Troy) and the ceremonial transfer of the bride from her father's house to her new husband's house. Reflecting the combination of male 'taking' and female complicity popular in abduction and wedding scenes alike,<sup>21</sup> Helen does not appear to resist Paris though she is undoubtedly under his control.

Makron further enforces the nuptial associations of the scene by presenting Helen as the paradigm of the Greek bride (Fig. 6). This is most conspicuously evoked by the typical bridal vestments she wears: a diaphanous *chiton* tied with a girdle and a *himation* draped over the back of her head as a veil, held in place by a *stephane* (crown). Helen does not hold her veil with the formulaic gesture used by brides in vase painting (referencing the *anakalypteria*, or ritual unveiling of the bride) but both its presence and her lowered head indicate the *aidōs* (modesty) and *sōphrosunē* (self-control) expected of a respectable *nymphē* (bride).<sup>22</sup> It was important for brides to exhibit the behavior and demeanor of a respectable woman: she should be silent, modest, submissive, passive, and virtuous—qualities that Helen displays in Makron's scene.<sup>23</sup>

Paris' seductive gaze at his beautiful 'bride' confirms Helen's status as an object of his erotic desire while the presence of Eros between the couple, adorning Helen's *stephane* with a round object (possibly a jewel),<sup>24</sup> suggests the feeling is mutual (Fig.

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<sup>21</sup> Blondell, *Helen of Troy*, 36.

<sup>22</sup> Masters, *The Abduction and Recovery of Helen*, 158; Sutton, "Nuptial Eros," 30.

<sup>23</sup> Ellen D. Reeder, *Pandora: Women in Classical Greece* (Baltimore, MD: Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery in association with Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1995), 123.

<sup>24</sup> This is Caskey and Beazley's interpretation but it has also been suggested that Eros could simply be adjusting Helen's *stephane*.

7).<sup>25</sup> Although the deity appears as a nuptial personification in Makron's *skyphos*, Eros is almost completely absent from the proper wedding procession until the second half of the fifth century BC.<sup>26</sup> In the following decades, Eros typically appears as an attendant in bridal preparation scenes, bringing caskets of jewelry and makeup, ribbons, and other adornments to beautify the bride.<sup>27</sup> By 430 BC Eros is depicted helping assimilate Helen into a bride at her toilette; a *hydria* by the Washing Painter (c. 430–420 BC)<sup>28</sup> shows Eros crouching at Helen's feet to tie her *nymphides* (wedding sandals) in the presence of Paris, emphasizing the decisive role *erōs* (erotic desire) played in her departure (Fig. 8).<sup>29</sup>

The pseudo-procession is completed with the figures of Aphrodite, Helen's patron goddess, and Peitho, personification of persuasion (Fig. 9). Aphrodite stands behind Helen, leaning slightly forward to adjust the bridal veil. This generic gesture is often enacted in procession scenes by the *nymphetria* (a female attendant enlisted by the bride's parents to aid in the dressing of the bride and the supervising of the wedding as a whole), a role which Aphrodite occasionally serves as in heroic nuptial scenes.<sup>30</sup> Peitho, the goddess' frequent companion in wedding scenes, follows directly behind holding a flower as a participant in the bridal entourage.<sup>31</sup> Like Aphrodite, Peitho is an important divinity for brides as she is the erotic force that persuades two lovers to marry. Both

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<sup>25</sup> See Frontisi-Ducroux 1996: 81–100 for the role of the gaze in erotic scenes.

<sup>26</sup> Sutton, "Nuptial Eros," 30.

<sup>27</sup> Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 18.

<sup>28</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 19.192.86.

<sup>29</sup> Sutton "Nuptial Eros," 31, 40.

<sup>30</sup> Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 18.

<sup>31</sup> Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 17.

goddesses commonly appear throughout the late Archaic and Classical periods as manifestations of the erotic desire at play in Helen's persuasion, abduction, and recovery and Helen is often depicted as the target of their erotic persuasion, especially in the latter half of the fifth century BC.<sup>32</sup> This is particularly discernible in a red-figure *amphoriskos* by the Heimarmene Painter (c. 430–420 BC) (Fig. 10).<sup>33</sup> Helen, dressed as a bride at her toilette, sits pensively on the lap of Aphrodite who gives encouragement. Likewise, the groom-like Paris receives some coaxing from the winged-figure Himeros, personification of desire (Fig. 11). With a lowered head Helen brings a finger to her mouth in contemplation: should she leave with Paris for Troy or stay with Menelaus in Sparta? Her hesitation and ambivalence toward the situation mirror the emotional experience of a young *nymphe* preparing to make the frightening departure from her family home to join the stranger that will soon be her husband (Fig. 12). Peitho's presence, however, assures the viewer that Helen will ultimately be persuaded and seduced; like a *nympheutria* the deity holds a small jewelry box, perhaps as a further inducement.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile Nemesis, goddess of retribution, points to the future consequences of Helen and Paris' union while Tyche, goddess of fate, looks on (Fig. 13). Makron indicates that Helen has been persuaded and seduced through the divine intercession of Aphrodite and Peitho but he equally acknowledges the erotic susceptibility of Helen and Paris. The elopement was initiated by Zeus and set in motion by Aphrodite at the Judgement of Paris but ultimately

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<sup>32</sup> Amy C. Smith, "The Politics of Weddings at Athens: An Iconographic Assessment," *Leeds International Classical Studies* 4 no. 1 (2005), 13–14.

<sup>33</sup> Antikenmuseen, Berlin, 30036.

<sup>34</sup> Smith, "The Politics of Weddings at Athens," 14.

it was the couple's choice to submit to erotic desire which sealed their fate. The disastrous outcome of their actions is perhaps indicated by Makron's unusual decision to move the procession to the left rather than the right as is typical for wedding processions.<sup>35</sup>

The orderliness and tranquility of the pseudo-wedding procession is juxtaposed on the reverse with an apprehensive and emotionally-charged rendering of the recovery of Helen by Menelaus (Fig. 14).<sup>36</sup> Makron depicts the moment that Helen is violently confronted by her first husband during the sack of Troy, seconds before he intends to kill her,<sup>37</sup> as she flees to the safety of Aphrodite's arms; just as Helen is transformed from bride to victim, the deity's role shifts from *nymphetria* to protectress and rescuer. As is the abduction/elopement scene, gesture and stance are crucial signifiers of the uneven gender and power dynamics between Helen and her stronger, domineering husband. In both scenes Helen lacks control and power over the situation; yet where the *cheir'epi karmo*, in addition to the couple's body language, subtly suggest Helen's own feelings of desire and complicity, her gesture of supplication (her arms stretched away from her body in alarm) to Menelaus on the reverse clearly testifies to her vulnerability and fearfulness.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Sutton, "Nuptial Eros," 29–30.

<sup>36</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of this scene, and the iconography of Helen's recovery more generally, see Hedreen 1996: 152–184.

<sup>37</sup> Though the viewer of the vessel would know that Menelaus ultimately cannot bring himself to commit the act.

<sup>38</sup> Guy Hedreen, "Image, Text, and Story in the Recovery of Helen," *Classical Antiquity*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Apr., 1996): 173.

## Helen as the Archetypical *Parthenos*

At first glance, it may seem contradictory that Helen is perceived by vase painters as “the mythological bride *par excellence*.”<sup>39</sup> Helen was hardly a *parthenos* at the time of her elopement as she was already Menelaus’ wife and Hermione’s mother. Succumbing to erotic desire, she clearly demonstrated a lack of *aidōs* and *sōphrosunē* when she committed adultery (*moicheia*) with Paris. Her transgressive behavior, while perhaps being divinely influenced, nonetheless sparked a decade-long war between the Achaeans and Trojans. Ultimately these facts did not dissuade artists from representing her as the ideal bride since they constantly bestow upon her the bridal qualities expected of a respectable *parthenos* such as virginity, beauty, and nubility.<sup>40</sup> Makron’s abduction scene, for instance, employs the subtle yet effective motif of Helen’s bowed, veiled head to encourage the viewer to recall the bridal virtues of modesty and self-restraint. The artist makes no allusion to the transgressive nature of their union.

Helen’s visual integration with maidenhood is made even more explicit by the end of the fifth century BC. Corresponding with the romantic transformation of the wedding as well as the introduction of nudity in nuptial contexts, an unattributed *pyxis* (c. 420–400 BC)<sup>41</sup> is a remarkable example of Helen’s ultimate metamorphosis into the ideal *parthenos* (Fig. 15). The box depicts different stages of wedding preparations, beginning

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<sup>39</sup> John H. Oakley, “Nuptial Nuances: Wedding Images in Non-Wedding Scenes of Myth,” in *Pandora: Women in Classical Greece*, ed. Ellen D. Reeder (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 66.

<sup>40</sup> Victoria Sabetai, “Aspects of Nuptial and Genre Imagery in Fifth-Century Athens: Issues of Interpretation and Methodology,” in *Athenian Potters and Painters: The Conference Proceedings*, eds. John H. Oakley, William D.E. Coulson, Olga Palagia (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1997), 323.

<sup>41</sup> Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1972.118.148a, b.

with the nuptial bath and ending with the final words of advice given to the bride. Helen has been confidently identified as the kneeling bather who receives the nuptial bath from Eros, a ritual marking the first step in the *parthenos*' transformation into a *nymphē*.<sup>42</sup> An exemplar of the revolutionary Classical kneeling bather type introduced in the late-fifth and fourth centuries BC, this nude Helen exhibits the cultural ideals of virginal purity and absolute beauty while at the same time remaining strikingly erotic. R. F. Sutton contends<sup>43</sup> that the nude Helen on the New York *pyxis*, and the kneeling female bather type more generally, probably derived from Zeuxis of Herakleia's famed panel painting of the nude Helen (now lost) which was created by combining the best features of five *parthenoi* from Croton.<sup>44</sup> Like Zeuxis' painting, the nakedness of Helen on the *pyxis* conveys not "a sense of violation and transgression, but rather a noble display of female beauty."<sup>45</sup> In other words, Helen is recognized not as a shamelessly unfaithful wife but rather as the embodiment of a respectable, beautiful, and tastefully erotic bride-to-be.

The question remains: why do vase painters consistently assimilate Helen, an unlikely role model, into the paradigmatic nubile bride? A likely determinant is the irresistible allure and extraordinary value of her famed beauty. For the Greeks, beauty (*kalon*) was not only a highly prized female attribute but also a symbol of complete

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<sup>42</sup> The bather is acknowledged to be Helen in Sabetai 1997: 320; Sutton 1997/1998: 41; and Sutton 2009: 272.

<sup>43</sup> Robert F. Sutton, "The Invention of the Female Nude: Zeuxis, Vase-Painting, and the Kneeling Bather," in *Athenian Potters and Painters*, Vol. II, eds. John H. Oakley and Olga Palagia (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2009), 276.

<sup>44</sup> This version of the story is recalled by Cicero in *De inventione* (2.1.1). Pliny (*Naturalis Historia* 35.64–6) and Dionysios of Halikarnassos (*De Imitatione* 6.31) present alternative versions.

<sup>45</sup> Sutton, "Nuptial Eros," 41.

womanly excellence; intimately connected with the domain of sex and reproduction, it signaled a *nymphē*'s desirability as a wife and her capacity to bear children.<sup>46</sup> All Greek heroines are endowed with considerable beauty and for this reason they occasionally take on the guise of a bride-to-be, e.g. Iphigenia, Briseis, Persephone, and Thetis.<sup>47</sup> However, only Helen is defined by her supremacy in this regard.<sup>48</sup>

The interrelationship between Helen's beauty and her desirability as a bride is made apparent in the *Catalogue of Women* (fr. 196–204), attributed to Hesiod. According to the poem, when Helen reached a marriageable age suitors from all over Greece flocked to Sparta to offer her father Tyndareus many gifts and partake in a marriage contest for her hand. All the suitors (except for one, Idomeneus) were drawn to Helen despite never having set eyes on her because of the *kleos* (renown or fame) of her beauty.<sup>49</sup> Likewise in Theocritus (18) Helen is praised as the ideal *nymphē* not only because her beauty surpasses 240 other Spartan *parthenoi* but also because she is the best at running, weaving, singing, and playing the lyre.<sup>50</sup> Further enforcing the idea that Helen's legendary beauty endowed her with exquisite marital value, there is evidence that she was worshipped as a supremely beautiful bride in Sparta by *parthenoi*.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Blondell, *Helen of Troy*, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Oakley, "Nuptial Nuances," 65.

<sup>48</sup> Blondell, *Helen of Troy*, 26.

<sup>49</sup> Ioannis Ziogas, "Helen," in *Ovid and Hesiod: The Metamorphosis of the Catalogue of Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 27.

<sup>50</sup> Theocritus *Idylls* 18.22–25; 18.34–36.

<sup>51</sup> Blondell, *Helen of Troy*, 44.



## The Danger of Female Beauty and Sexuality

If Helen's beauty signals her preciousness and desirability as a bride, however, it also makes her potentially dangerous and destructive. Though considered the highest form of female excellence, the Greeks believed beauty had the capacity to arouse the calamitous power of erotic desire in women. Likewise, the qualities that constituted the ideal woman—self-control, modesty, submissiveness—were thought to be “almost diametrically opposed to the perception of her true nature.”<sup>52</sup> Often likened to feral animals, women were believed to be incapable of controlling themselves, their emotions, and especially their insatiable sexual appetites. There was pervasive anxiety in Greek thought that, should woman's true nature remain uncontrollable and unleashed, she would cause immense damage and disorder on society.<sup>53</sup> The more beautiful she is, the greater the threat she is to herself and the male desire she attracts.<sup>54</sup>

In order to thwart the dangerous implications of female nature women must be restrained, tamed, and controlled by men through sex and marriage.<sup>55</sup> A woman is thought to be the most beautiful—and the most dangerous—when she is a *parthenos*, one who has just reached puberty (about fourteen years old) and is ripe for marriage.<sup>56</sup> As a result, the figure of the nubile bride came to embody the feminine wildness that must be tamed by the institution of marriage and controlled by her new husband and sexual partner.

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<sup>52</sup> Reeder, *Pandora*, 20.

<sup>53</sup> Reeder, *Pandora*, 26.

<sup>54</sup> Blondell, *Helen of Troy*, 11.

<sup>55</sup> Blondell, *Helen of Troy*, 12.

<sup>56</sup> Reeder, 32.

Indeed, the verb for marriage, *damazo*, literally means “to subjugate” and “to tame.”<sup>57</sup> Male control over female unpredictability is evident in marriage and abduction scenes alike, most noticeably in the leading of the young woman by the man. The *cheir’epi karpō* makes clear that the bride is taking on a submissive role which is further emphasized by her lowered head and occasionally downcast eyes. The bride is ultimately rendered a passive yet erotic object, something to be at once desired and contained by her husband.

## Conclusion

Helen and the figure of the bride are unequivocally and inextricably linked by their desirability and potential lethality. As the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen is both man’s greatest desire and his greatest threat, for unbridled passion and erotic transgression are at the heart of her very nature. Defined by unparalleled pulchritude and excessive sexual desire, she embodies the seductiveness and precariousness of a *parthenos* which threaten to dismantle the *status quo* of Greek society. The erotic, emotional transformation of the wedding in Attic red-figure vase painting during the fifth century BC provided artists with a new visual vocabulary to explore the mythic union of Helen and Paris, and particularly Helen’s status as the iconic bride. Gesture, glance, and costume are all means by which vase painters ‘tame’ the bridal Helen, thereby ridding of her lecherous nature and conferring the behavior and demeanor expected of a respectable *parthenos* on her. Makron’s *skyphos* exemplifies the pictorial subjugation of Helen’s

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<sup>57</sup> Reeder, *Pandora*, 127.

destructive sexuality. The calm, orderly wedding procession of the eloping couple functions as a model for marriage, which affirms the bride's status as a passive object to be led and confirms the groom's total control over her. The reverse scene depicting the recovery of Helen shows the consequences of an untamed woman consumed with lust—she must be physically seized and contained by her rightful husband to reinstate law and order. Whether intentionally or not, Makron's *skyphos* reinforces the misogynistic Greek contention that nubile maidens—especially beautiful ones—are to be desired but never trusted; and if Helen is the bride *par excellence*, then any bride has the potential to be just as destructive.

All is Fair in Love and War:  
Helen and Self-Representation in Medieval and Early Renaissance Europe

An extraordinary series of three quattrocento panel paintings are held in the collection of the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, comprising *The Departure of Queen Helen and Her Entourage for Cythera*, *The Abduction of Helen from Cythera*, and *The Reception of Helen at Troy* (Figs. 16, 17, 18).<sup>1</sup> The historical significance of these ambitious works is indubitable, for they constitute the only series of monumental quattrocento panels concerning ancient history still extant. In spite of this, the series has rarely been on public display (residing, for the most part, in the museum's storage) and a thorough consideration of its rich subject matter has largely been ignored by scholarship save for a 1939 essay by E. S. King for *The Journal of the Walters Art Museum*. Recently, however, a multi-year interdisciplinary investigation of the series conducted by the Walters has shed new light on the paintings. In her comprehensive study, published in the Museum's *Journal* in 2019, Dr. Joaneath Spicer, a curator of Renaissance and Baroque Art at the Walters, attributes the series to Paduan-trained Dario di Giovanni (c. 1420–before 1498) as part of a larger commission of five or six paintings carried out in Venice around 1468 to 1469 in celebration of the proxy marriage between the young Venetian noblewoman Caterina Corner and Jacques II Lusignan, king of Cyprus, in July 1468.<sup>2</sup> Spicer proposes that the *Abduction* series, as an *istoria*,<sup>3</sup> seeks “to bring an exemplary

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<sup>1</sup> Walters 37.1178; 37.1179; 37.1178.

<sup>2</sup> Joaneath Spicer, “*The Abduction of Helen: A Monumental Series Celebrating the Wedding of Caterina Corner in 1468*,” *The Journal of the Walters Art Museum*, Vol. 74 (2019): 1–2.

<sup>3</sup> See Patricia Fortini Brown (1988) for a comprehensive survey of Venetian narrative painting.

moment in the distant past to life in order to shape an understanding of contemporary events.”<sup>4</sup> As a result, the abduction of Helen and her marriage to Paris at Troy should be interpreted as a direct evocation of the wedding of Caterina and the King of Cyprus.<sup>5</sup> This chapter seeks to explore in greater depth Spicer’s proposition that Dario’s Helen is a vital means of self-representation for Caterina and thus functions as the bride’s “avatar” by conforming to the bride’s own likeness (and, by consequence, to contemporary standards of beauty). That Helen’s depiction in the Walters’ *Abduction* series corresponds directly to the longstanding medieval tradition of presenting Helen as a romanticized and refined yet irresistibly beautiful contemporary noblewoman (a queen, no less) will be the focus of this chapter. It will be argued that Helen’s overwhelmingly positive and sympathetic reception in the visual and literary arts from the twelfth to the fifteenth century is due to the European appropriation of the Troy story in the form of genealogies, as it was widely believed that the great cities of Europe, including Venice, descended from the Trojan heroes.

## **The Transmission of Helen’s Story from the Classical World to the Early**

### **Renaissance**

The oral and literary disseminations of Homer’s *Iliad* have yielded innumerable variations of the Trojan War and, in many cases, the story of Troy has been heavily revised and liberally adapted to reflect the values and needs of successive generations.

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<sup>4</sup> Spicer, “*The Abduction of Helen*,” 73.

<sup>5</sup> As Spicer notes, there are overt parallels between the island of Cythera, where Paris and Helen met, and Cyprus, where Caterina and her new husband would meet, as both islands were dedicated to Venus.

The primary motivation for the war, however, has remained strikingly consistent across time and space; bards, chroniclers, novelists, and playwrights overwhelmingly concur that the passionate love affair between Helen and Paris was the proverbial flame that ignited the ten-year conflict and resulted in the destruction of Troy. For the Greeks, the affair of Helen and Paris was known through the (now lost) poems the Epic Cycle. In Proclus' summary of the *Cypria*, attributed to Stasinus of Cyprus, after the Judgement, “[Paris] is entertained as a *xenos* [guest] by the sons of Tyndareus [Caster and Pollox], and afterwards by Menelaus at Sparta,” where he gives Helen gifts during the feast. When Menelaus sails off to Crete, “telling Helen to provide proper hospitality for their *xenoi* while he is away,” Aphrodite brings Helen and Paris together. They consummate their love and sail away in the night along with Helen's treasure. After making several stops, they arrive at Troy and marry.

As Christianity gradually superseded the classical pagan civilizations of Greece and Rome, the love story of Helen and Paris—and the story of Troy more broadly—radically transformed to reflect a changing cultural landscape. The poems of Homer<sup>6</sup> and the Epic Cycle were supplanted as principal authorities of the Trojan War by the works of two purported eye-witnesses: Dictys of Crete's *Ephemeridos Belli Troiani* and Dares of Phrygia's *de Excidio Troiae Historia* (writing from the Greek and Trojan points of view respectively), whose accounts were originally written in Greek in the first or second century and translated into Latin the fourth and sixth centuries.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to the ancient

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<sup>6</sup> In the Middle Ages, Homer was considered an unreliable source because he did not claim to have witnessed the events of Trojan War himself.

<sup>7</sup> Diane P. Thompson, *The Trojan War: Literature and Legends from the Bronze Age to the Present*, 2nd ed. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2013), 105.

Greek texts, Dares and Dictys' accounts were widely read by a Latin-speaking audience and regarded as authentic historical documents; both removed major elements of the *Iliad* and dramatically altered the narrative to reflect the tastes and beliefs of an increasingly Christian Europe.<sup>8</sup> Dares' narrative was especially popular and amenable to the cultural milieu of the medieval period, as the sympathies of much of Europe had shifted to the Trojan side. Naturally, the abduction of Helen had to be radically changed, for "the Trojans were so emphatically the heroes that it was unthinkable for a Trojan to steal his host's wife from a home where he had been entertained."<sup>9</sup> In this new retelling, Helen is abducted by Paris in retaliation for the Greek refusal to return Priam's sister, Hesione, who had been taken hostage after the first burning of Troy. As Paris and his fleet sail for Greece on orders of Priam to retrieve Hesione, they stop at the island of Cythera where a festival at the temple of Venus is taking place. Helen arrives on the island and enters the temple under the pretext of fulfilling her vows to Venus, but in fact she had heard rumors of Paris' beauty and wishes to see him. Here, Helen and Paris catch sight of one another and mutual desire inflames their hearts. Later that night, Paris and his men seize Helen in the temple with her consent and, after a battle with the Cythereans, the couple sail for Troy where they are married.

This version of events was disseminated and expanded upon in countless literary imitations and translations for over a millennium, most notably in Benoît de Sainte-

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<sup>8</sup> To a great degree Dares and Dictys removed the pagan gods from their accounts, thereby justifying the events of the war in terms of human motivations. Consequently, the Judgement of Paris becomes a dream.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret R. Scherer, "Helen of Troy," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Vol. 25, No. 10 (Jun. 1967), 371.

Maure's Old French verse, *Le Roman de Troie* (c. 1165–1170 CE) which established the *matière de Troie* as one of the major literary themes of the medieval period<sup>10</sup> and became the source for numerous adaptations and translations.<sup>11</sup> The primary means by which the medieval Troy story was transmitted to the early Renaissance, however, was not Benoît's *Roman* but rather Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae*, written in Latin prose in 1287 CE. While the *Historia* represents itself as an authentic history of the Trojan War based directly upon the accounts of Dares and Dictys,<sup>12</sup> it was in fact a close prose adaptation of Benoît's earlier romance. Nonetheless, by the fifteenth century CE the *Historia* emerged as the new standard version of the Troy story, was widely copied and translated,<sup>13</sup> and was generally accepted as an accurate chronicle of a historical event for several hundred years.<sup>14</sup>

## **The Walters *Abduction* Series: Transforming Ancient History into Present-Day**

### **Venice**

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<sup>10</sup> Naoise Mac Sweeney, *Troy: Myth, City, Icon* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 128.

<sup>11</sup> Gothic romances based on the *Roman* include Herbort von Fritzlar's Middle High German *Das Lied von Troya* (c.1200), Segghar Diengotgaf's Dutch *Trojerman* (c. 1250), 8 Jacob van Maerlant's Flemish *Historie van Troyen* (c. 1263), and Konrad von Würzburg's *Der Trojanerkrieg* (c. 1287). See J. Solomon (2007) for a fuller discussion of the transmission of the Dictys/Dares/Benoît tradition.

<sup>12</sup> Guido delle Colonne, *Historia destructionis Troiae*, edited and translated by Mary Elizabeth Meek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974), 2 ln. 35–46.

<sup>13</sup> Guido's Latin *Historia* was translated into Italian by Filippo Ceffi (1324) and into Spanish by Pero López de Ayala which was adapted by Jacques Milet into the drama *Lystoire de la destruction de Troye* (1498) which in turn influenced John Lydgate's English *Troye Book* (1420), and through Boccaccio's *Il filostrato* (1335–40) inspired Chaucer's *Troilus and Cresseyde* (c. 1385) and later William Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (c. 1602), as well as Raoul Lefèvre's *Le recueil des histories de Troyes* (1464).

<sup>14</sup> Thompson, *The Trojan War*, 123.



The Walters *Abduction* series remains largely faithful to the events recounted in Book VII of the *Historia*. The narrative begins with the departure of Helen and her entourage from the gates of the Spartan palace to the ship that will take them to Cythera—an image that directly recalls a certain moralizing interjection from Guido:

But you, Helen, loveliest of women, what spirit seized you so that in the absence of your husband you left your palace on such a frivolous account, and went through its gates to look at an unknown man when you could easily have restrained the bridle so that you would have preserved your modest abstinence within the palace of your kingdom?<sup>15</sup>

The second panel illustrates the chaos that arises in the temple of Venus following the erotically charged moment between Helen and Paris “through reciprocal and pleasing glances they revealed to each other that they agreed together in the violence of their mutual love...”.<sup>16</sup> Though Dario sets his *Abduction* in the daytime rather than at night as recorded by Guido,<sup>17</sup> the action of Paris leading a composed Helen by her wrist during the looting of the temple precisely parallels Guido’s account, in which “Paris captured Queen Helen and all her companions with his own hand; he found no resistance or objection in her, since she was animated by consent rather than dissent.”<sup>18</sup> The third panel concludes the story with the reception of the new couple at Troy where “King Priam in a retinue of many nobles came out to meet them, and after he had greeted them and

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<sup>15</sup> Colonne, *Historia*, 69, ln. 129–134.

<sup>16</sup> Colonne, *Historia*, 72, ln. 245–247.

<sup>17</sup> Colonne, *Historia*, 73, ln. 310–311.

<sup>18</sup> Colonne, *Historia*, 73–74, ln. 317–319. In keeping with the underlying decorum of a wedding, the Trojans are not depicted in the *Abduction* as actively looting the temple.

received them with a happy face, he went to Helen, welcoming her with deep affection and a joyous expression, and he humbly pledged himself to her in gentle words.”<sup>19</sup>

In keeping with the popular consciousness of fifteenth-century Europe, both the painter and his audience would have viewed the subject matter of the *Abduction* series as a real event of considerable importance to civic history.<sup>20</sup> Yet the figures of this pictorial narrative are decidedly situated within an environment primarily resembling that of contemporary Venice rather than the antique past of Greece and Asia Minor.<sup>21</sup> The *Departure* panel is particularly fraught with such anachronisms; exhibiting swallowtail merlons, pointed turrets, and a semi-circular arch through which Helen and her entourage exit the city, the architectural construction of the fortified buildings of Sparta is unequivocally indebted to the Middle Ages, not to classical antiquity.<sup>22</sup> While no known monuments are visible over the rooftops, the setting is clearly meant to evoke the Venetian cityscape, as indicated by the characteristic Venetian inverted cone chimney as well as the docked ship in the harbor, which has been identified as a type of Venetian three-masted merchantman with a rounded hull for transporting goods—one that has no counterpart in antiquity.<sup>23</sup> To a certain extent, Dario combines architectural idioms to

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<sup>19</sup> Colonne, *Historia*, 77, ln. 445–449.

<sup>20</sup> According to Spicer, the Walters *Abduction* series would have been installed at eye level in the *portego*, the large gallery running from front to back on the main living floor, of the Ca’Corner and would have been seen by the family as well as by important visitors.

<sup>21</sup> While Dario most likely did not have access to drawings of ancient Greek monuments and statues, several Italians journeyed to Greece in the medieval period for the purpose of studying such ruins. See Patricia Fortini-Brown (1996): 149–150.

<sup>22</sup> The architecture may be compared with the well-preserved thirteenth-century *Castello Scaligero* (Scaligero Castle) in the commune of *Sirmione* on Lake Garda.

<sup>23</sup> Spicer, “*The Abduction of Helen*,” 51–52.

convey a sense of historical distance. In the *Abduction* panel, the temple of Venus derives from an amalgamation of architectural sources combining the vocabulary of the Roman triumphal arch with gilded Corinthian capitals.<sup>24</sup> However, the temple interior's barrel-vaulted ceiling and tiled floor are strikingly reminiscent of any number of late-medieval chapels in the Veneto. The narrative is further distanced from the ancient past by the figures themselves: the women wear fashionable yet modest gowns (*gamurre*), in accordance with Venetian sumptuary laws, with fur-lined cloaks with hanging sleeves (*pelande*) while the men wear fur-lined open-sided tunics (*giornea*) with hanging sleeves (*gonnella* or *cioppa*) over their doublets which they laced colorful hose (*calze*).<sup>25</sup> These costumes are made of highly-valued Italian silk, worn by the nobility and wealthy merchant class of contemporary Venice.<sup>26</sup>

### **Helen as the Ideal European Queen**

For what reasons would Dario would choose to situate Helen's story from ancient history within a Venetian pictorial idiom? Spicer argues that the artist's aim was not historical accuracy, "but a dignified staging point for the *istoria*," whereby key elements, such as the fortified wall, the massive outcrop, and the ship that make up the *Departure* panel, support the overarching narrative.<sup>27</sup> Yet aside from confronting the great challenge

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<sup>24</sup> Spicer, "The Abduction of Helen," 59.

<sup>25</sup> Spicer, "The Abduction of Helen," 47–48.

<sup>26</sup> Pamela Betts and Glenn Gates, "Dressed in Tin: Analysis of the Textiles in the *Abduction of Helen* Series," *The Journal of the Walters Art Museum*, Vol. 74 (2019): 1–12.

<sup>27</sup> Spicer, "The Abduction of Helen," 51.

of the *istoria*, that is, depicting significant human actions “in such a persuasive, varied, and pleasing way that the viewer fully engaged with the intended meaning,”<sup>28</sup> Dario directly engages with a long-established pictorial tradition of rendering episodes from the Trojan legend in terms of contemporary reality; for in virtually all illustrations of the Troy story dating from the medieval period to the early Renaissance, from which innumerable extant miniatures, woodcuts, tapestries, and wall paintings originate, the Trojan heroes and heroines appear as valiant knights and fair maidens in scenes that, while deriving from a classical story, wholly conform to contemporary notions of courtship, marriage, battle, and mourning.<sup>29</sup>

As Trojan legend became the most influential and appealing themes in royal and aristocratic circles of Europe, aside from those in the Bible, the manuscript illuminations of two integral *romans d'antique* of the thirteenth century, the *Roman de Troie* and *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César* (c. 1208–13), proved to be extremely consequential in the pictorial development of *la Matière de Troie*.<sup>30</sup> In the face of inaccessible antique representations of the Trojan legend, these first secular illustrators were entrusted with bridging the gap between the ancient past and medieval present by formulating episodes of the Trojan War in terms of the visual model available to them. The results, as

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<sup>28</sup> Spicer, “*The Abduction of Helen*,” 34. See also Book II of Florentine humanist Leon Battista Alberti’s seminal treatise *De pittura* (1435) in which he describes the *istoria* as a “wholly praiseworthy undertaking” marking the “very great achievement” of the painter.

<sup>29</sup> Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, “Classical Mythology in Mediaeval Art,” *Metropolitan Museum Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Mar., 1933): 262–263.

<sup>30</sup> Rosa Maria Rodríguez Porto, “Beyond the Two Doors of Memory: Intertextualities and Intervisualities in Thirteenth-Century Illuminated Manuscripts of the *Roman de Troie* and the *Histoire Ancienne*,” *Memory and Commemoration in Medieval Culture*, ed. by Elma Brenner and others (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013): 57.

demonstrated by Christopher Baswell, are “intriguing shifts in narrative emphasis [...], and a radical transposition of classical event, either into a contemporary visual world or into terms of established biblical illumination.”<sup>31</sup> Hugo Buchthal, commenting on the earliest surviving sequence of *Roman* illustrations (c. 1264), similarly remarks on the conspicuous absence of any sense of historical distance in miniatures which, “just like Benoît’s text, transform the Trojan War into an entirely medieval *ambiente*” without any visual correspondence with the classical past.<sup>32</sup>

A series of illustrations in the earliest surviving copy of the second redaction of the *Histoire ancienne* (c. 1330–40) at the British Library reveals the lengths to which artists medievalized, Christianized, and reformulated Helen’s abduction and marriage in accordance with chivalric and courtly customs.<sup>33</sup> In the temple scene,<sup>34</sup> Helen and Paris are transformed into the archetype of star-crossed lovers whose actions play out in the fairytale-like interior of a stately crenelated castle accented by thin striped pillars with sculptured capitals (Fig. 19). A bearded Paris, dressed in glorious armor fit for a crusader, approaches a serene Helen, marvelously depicted as a contemporaneous queen in a purple gown, red cape, and crown, with the *courtoisie* of the ideal medieval suitor. Similar to Dario’s *Abduction* panel, this intimate and, importantly, consensual moment between Helen and Paris is juxtaposed with the chaos and violence that breaks out following their

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<sup>31</sup> Christopher Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England: Figuring The Aeneid from the Twelfth Century to Chaucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 22.

<sup>32</sup> Hugo Buchthal, *Historia Troiana: Studies in the History of Mediaeval Secular Illustration, Vol. 32* (London: Warburg Institute/E.J. Brill, 1971), 9.

<sup>33</sup> Porto, “Beyond the Two Doors of Memory,” 58.

<sup>34</sup> British Library, Royal MS 20 D I f. 49v

meeting, but rather than illustrating the capture of Helen's female entourage, the artist depicts the valorous Trojan knights slaughtering the Cythereans guards. The following scene, the marriage of Helen and Paris at Troy,<sup>35</sup> takes place within a massive crenelated castle, featuring a gothic tower with an ornamented pinnacle, where the noble lovers recite their vows in the presence of King Priam, Queen Hecuba, and four Trojan priests dressed as Christian bishops (Fig 20).

Clearly medieval and Renaissance artists alike found in Helen's story an exquisite opportunity for showing the pageantries and gentilities of the royal courts of Europe, as a series of four Flemish tapestries dating c.1500 (notable for being the only hangings devoted to the story of Helen) at the Norton Simon Museum sumptuously illustrate.<sup>36</sup> Like the Walters *Reception* panel, the first tapestry in the sequence presents in rich detail the arrival of Helen and Paris at Troy<sup>37</sup> in an entirely contemporized court setting that could easily be mistaken for any number of noble European residences (Fig. 21). Ushered in by the merry fanfare of trumpeters standing on a balcony draped with richly woven fabrics, a blonde Helen dressed in a resplendent gold-toned patterned silk robe (reminiscent of Italian and oriental design) kneels in the same manner as the Walters Helen in the presence of Priam as Paris stands triumphantly beside her. To the right, Priam presents Helen to his family within the interior of the Trojan palace, containing a type of flattened arch developed in the late Gothic period resting on jeweled piers, where,

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<sup>35</sup> British Library, Royal MS 20 D I f. 53r

<sup>36</sup> See Scherer (1967): 367–383 for a full examination of the Norton Simon tapestries.

<sup>37</sup> Norton Simon Museum, F.1965.1.129.1.T.

once again, Helen is treated with all the dignity and respect of a beautiful, refined European queen.<sup>38</sup>

It is significant that artists from the medieval to early Renaissance period consistently legitimize and idealize Helen and Paris by assimilating them into the courtly realm of European nobility despite the tragic consequences of their affair. This strikingly refined and respectful portrayal of the lovers, untainted by the scandal of adultery, extends back to the *Roman*, which conveys no sense of immorality or wrongdoing on their part.<sup>39</sup> T. O’Callaghan and B. Hughes have both suggested that this overwhelmingly positive and sympathetic depiction of a regal Helen may have been an attempt to appease one specific royal patron of the Angevin court, Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122–1204), whose life closely paralleled Helen’s story.<sup>40</sup> Like Helen, Eleanor was a renowned beauty who had left an unhappy marriage with Louis VII, King of France, to marry her first husband’s greatest political rival, Henry II, King of England. As an expected reader of Benoît’s poem, which was composed for a court audience, Eleanor would have easily recognized herself and her new husband in this romanticized literary iteration of Helen and Paris. While there lacks evidence to indicate that pictorial depictions of Helen throughout this period are explicitly modeled on Eleanor, there are certainly visual linkages to be made; the richness and refinement of the Christianized marriage scene

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<sup>38</sup> Scherer, “Helen of Troy,” 374.

<sup>39</sup> In fact, Benoît’s vehement accusation of female faithlessness is directed not towards Helen but rather towards Briseida, who is caught in a love-triangle between Troilus and Diomedes; Tamara F. O’Callaghan, “Tempering Scandal: Eleanor of Aquitaine and Benoît de Sainte-Maure’s *Roman de Troie*,” in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady*, eds. B. Wheeler and John C. Parsons (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 305.

<sup>40</sup> O’Callaghan, “Tempering Scandal,” 303; Hughes, Bettany, *Helen of Troy: The Story Behind the Most Beautiful Woman in the World* (New York: Vantage Books, 2005), 289–297.

between Helen and Paris in the *Histoire ancienne* closely mirrors a miniature of the wedding of Eleanor and Louis VII in an early fifteenth-century illuminated copy of *Grandes chroniques de France*, attributed to the Master of Virgil (Fig. 22).<sup>41</sup> Whether or not these artists consciously created Helen in Eleanor's own image, they nevertheless assimilate her into the realm of regality and sophistication, where she assumes the role of a European queen.

As in the case of Eleanor, there are comparisons to be made between Helen and Caterina Corner. Caterina's irresistible beauty made her an immensely desirable royal bride by prevailing beauty standards of Quattrocento Venice. Indeed, her beauty was so great, Colbertaldo alleges, that her dowry portrait (presumed lost) was enough to secure her engagement to Jacques—a tale that echoes Hesiod's account of the suitors willing to marry Helen sight unseen.<sup>42</sup> According to her earliest biographer, Antonio Colbertaldo (1556–1602), at the time of her betrothal, Caterina was:

a young girl of about age fourteen whose face resembled the clear sky, the cheeks had no reason to envy vermilion roses, lips in the likeness of coral with teeth like little pearls, milk-white breasts, black eyelashes, eyes shining like two burning stars, and golden hair.<sup>43</sup>

Although Colbertaldo's conventional description very likely speaks more to the Petrarchan poetic tradition than to a tangible account of Caterina's true appearance, it is nevertheless significant that Helen's intense beauty is characterized by Guido in nearly identical epithets with "thick golden hair which shone in radiant splendor," a complexion

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<sup>41</sup> Condé Museum, MS 867/324.

<sup>42</sup> Holly Hurlburt, "Body of Empire: Caterina Corner in Venetian History and Iconography," *Early Modern Women*, Vol. 4 (Fall 2009): 71.

<sup>43</sup> Colbertaldo quoted in Spicer, "*The Abduction of Helen*," 17.



whitened “by the radiance of snowy splendor,” cheeks of “roses mixed with roses,” “reigns” of eyelashes, eyes like “two stars, whose orbs, as if they were formed by a skillful setting of jewels,” lips that seemed to form a “rosy dawn arising,” “ivory teeth,” and a “broad bosom, on whose surface two breasts like two apples, rising lightly as air, culminated in twin nipples.”<sup>44</sup> Not only is the Walters Helen portrayed with all the attributes mentioned by Guido (most notably the covetable combination of golden hair and snowy white skin) but she possesses all the qualities and trappings in a desirable Venetian bride. Her fair hair, plucked ostentatiously back at the hairline to increase the expanse of her forehead, is fashionably crimped and bound into two elaborate chignons on the sides of her head and decorated with strings of pearls that culminate in a ruby head brooch. This hairstyle, in addition to the string of pearls and ruby, are overt attributes of the Northern Italian bride of the Quattrocento, as testified by a contemporaneous dowry portrait of a young lady from Milan (c. 1460–65) attributed variously to Piero del Pollaiuolo and his brother Antonio (Fig. 23).<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Helen’s hairstyle, dress, and facial features share similarities with a purported allegorical portrait of *Caterina as Chastity* (c. 1467–68) attributed to Dario,<sup>46</sup> which Spicer proposes may have been commissioned as a gift for a family member or tutor prior to the commission of the *Abduction* series (Fig. 24).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Colonne, *Historia*, 70–72, ln. 171–230.

<sup>45</sup> Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan, inv. 442.

<sup>46</sup> Keresztény Múzeum, Esztergom, no. 13-18, 55.212.

<sup>47</sup> Spicer, “*The Abduction of Helen*,” 17–18.

The choice of the abduction of Helen as a means of celebrating and commemorating the marriage of Caterina also serves as an important vehicle for asserting and legitimizing the political and dynastic claims of the Corner family and the Republic of Venice. Like many of the ruling families of Europe, the Corners would have recognized and understood the abduction as the “big bang of European history,”<sup>48</sup> an assertion that goes back to the seventh-century scholar Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologies*, a work immensely influential in medieval thought, who credits Helen’s abduction as one of the 132 moments that shocked and shaped the Western world.<sup>49</sup> In the popular medieval and early modern imagination, this momentous event single-handedly caused the ten-year conflict between the Greeks and Trojans which, in turn, resulted in the dispersal of the surviving Trojan heroes across Europe following the city’s tragic downfall. To a great degree, the ruling elites of Europe considered the ancient and noble lineage offered by origins in Troy to be at once immensely desirable and useful in constructions of familial dynasties and national identities.<sup>50</sup> The Romans famously claimed to be direct descendants of the Trojan Aeneas, who escaped Troy with his father Anchises draped across his back, and whose exploits eventually led him to settle in Latinum, the region where his own descendants, Romulus and Remus, would found Rome. As dozens of versions of the Troy legend began to be circulated across Europe from as early as the seventh century to the eleventh century, claims of Trojan heritage

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<sup>48</sup> Spicer, “*The Abduction of Helen*,” 36.

<sup>49</sup> Hughes, *Helen of Troy*, 7.

<sup>50</sup> Alexandra Villing et al., *The BP Exhibition ‘Troy: Myth and Reality,’* (London: Thames & Hudson and the British Museum 2019): 187–190; Mac Sweeney, *Troy: Myth, City, Icon*, 113–120.

flourished among the Franks, Britons, and Normans, whose noble houses and ruling dynasties sought to legitimize their rule by appealing to classical history.<sup>51</sup>

Like other major cities, the Republic of Venice sought the associations of authority and continuity “that could be suggested by fashioning its current existence as part of an inheritance of classical values and achievements.”<sup>52</sup> Since Venice was in a unique position of not having an obvious heritage to lend credibility to claims of an ancient Roman foundation, its chroniclers turned directly to the Trojan legend to provide the material necessary for assert a noble Trojan lineage, for with a Trojan pedigree Venice could position itself as heir of Rome. According to the twelfth-century chronicle *Origo civitatum italie seu venetiarum* (also known as the *Chronicon Altinate* and the *Chronicon Gradense*), the founding father of the original inhabitants of Venice (the Venetici) was the illustrious Antenor, ““who had by the shore entered the lagoon with seven galleys, and in that place built the city named Aquilegia, because it was bound by waterways.”<sup>53</sup> This account is corroborated in a segment of Book II the *Historia* which recounts the Trojan origins of Europe:

[Troy’s] destruction was the reason that the city of Rome, which is the chief of cities, came into existence, being built and extended by the Trojan exiles, by Aeneas [...] Afterward certain other provinces received from

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<sup>51</sup> According to Naoise Mac Sweeney (2018): 116–120, these included the Merovingians of France, whose eponymous ancestor, Merovach, succeeded Francio, son of Hector; the Carolingians, who ruled much of what is today France, Germany and Northern Italy; founder of the Plantagenet dynasty, Henry II; the Capetians of France and the Hohenstaufens of Germany.

<sup>52</sup> Sheila Das, “The Disappearance of the Trojan Legend in the Historiography of Venice,” in *Fantasies of Troy: Classical Tales and the Social Imaginary in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Alan Shepard and Stephen D. Powell (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 97.

<sup>53</sup> Patricia Fortini-Brown, *Venice and Antiquity: The Venetian Sense of the Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 13.

among the Trojans an enduring settlement. Such is England, which we read was settled by the Trojan, Brutus, which is why it is called Britain. Likewise such is France, which after the fall of Troy is said to have been settled by King Francus, a companion of Aeneas, who founded near the Rhine a great city which [...] he called France, from his own name. The city of the Venetians was settled by the Trojan Antenor.<sup>54</sup>

Born into one of the most ancient and illustrious families of the Veneto, Caterina could press direct and indirect claims of Trojan heritage. The Corner family (otherwise known as the Cornari) were said to have been descended from the revered *gens Cornelia*, house of the general Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus and his virtuous daughter Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi brothers.<sup>55</sup> Having moved from Rome to Rimini in remote times, the Cornari were among the first families to inhabit Rialto (the region that would become Venice) and were part of the original twelve patrician families of the Republic.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, Caterina's distinguished Trojan roots were evoked in the symbolic and legal title 'Daughter of the Republic,' which she received at her wedding by proxy to Jacques (represented by the Cypriot ambassador Philippe Mistachiel) at the Sala del Maggior Consiglio, with the doge acting the part of her father. By conferring this appellation, the Republic could strategically assert a "paternal authority" over Caterina to secure the stability of its governing body and, most importantly, to solidify ties to Cyprus, a key embarkment in Venetian commerce and defense against the Ottoman Turks, thereby strengthening the Republic's expanding empire.<sup>57</sup> In this way, Helen's arrival at Cythera

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<sup>54</sup> Colonne, *Historia*, 10, ln. 30–35.

<sup>55</sup> Spicer, "The Abduction of Helen," 11, 35.

<sup>56</sup> Luigi Cornaro et al., *The Art of Living Long: a New and Improved English Version of the Treatise by the Celebrated Venetian Centenarian, Louis Cornaro, with Essays* (Milwaukee: W. F. Butler, 1903), 160–161; Fortini-Brown, *Venice and Antiquity*, 232.

<sup>57</sup> Hurlburt, "Empire," 70–71.

serves as a mirror image to Caterina's arrival at Cyprus by acting as transitionary point in both of their personal lives which would ultimately have profound geopolitical and dynastic implications.

## **Conclusion**

In situating and reshaping a moment from the classical past into the contemporary present, the Walters *Abduction* series functions within a codified visual framework that seeks to make explicit and implicit links between the Trojans and the ruling families and dynasties of medieval and early Renaissance Europe. Thus, in accordance with European sympathies toward their blood ancestors, the Trojans, Helen is transformed and reformulated in a remarkably positive light to suit a new archetype of femininity and beauty, the elegant and decorous aristocrat *à la* Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine. Furthermore, her illicit love affair with Paris is treated with all the dignity, chivalry, and *courtoisie* of a medieval fairytale. In this sense, Helen's story ceases to be an exemplar of the latent dangers of unbridled female sexuality and erotic desire, but rather a vital testament to a new kind of love noticeably absent in Homer and other ancient accounts of the Trojan legend, that is, the emotional and spiritual, all-encompassing, idealizing type of *romantic* love. That Helen and Paris' love story plays out again and again in environments not unlike the places of residence of the contemporary European nobility further speaks to the extent to which those with high status turned to the story of Troy to express behavioral ideals and cultural identity. Like countless illuminated manuscripts, castle wall paintings, and tapestries, the Walters *Abduction* series views the abduction of Helen

through a largely contemporary lens, but it distinguishes itself by directly engaging in the geopolitics of its time. On the one hand, Helen remains an object of beauty, the archetype of the irresistibly desirable bride to be seized by an authoritative male figure whose thoughts are consumed with desire. Yet on the other hand, Helen becomes a potent political emblem as well as a vehicle for the self-fashioning of Caterina, a remarkable young woman who, at the tender age of fourteen, would arguably wield more power and political influence than any other Venetian woman of her time. Past the veneer of romantic intrigue and nuptial celebration, however, the theme of abduction of Helen would have served as a powerful yet harsh reminder for Caterina that marriage in fifteenth-century Italy hardly constituted a fairytale.

Fatal Attraction:  
Helen as *Femme Fatale* and Faceless Phantom in Nineteenth-Century Painting

For millennia, Helen's name has been attached to the ambivalent male attitude linking the irresistible pull of female beauty with the equally irresistible pull of death and destruction. Helen's propensity for inspiring *eros* (passionate desire) and *eris* (strife), eternal glory and violent conflict, despair and regeneration, aligns her within the Greek poetic and iconographic tradition with the idea of the *kalon kakon* ('beautiful evil')—a phrase Hesiod utilizes to describe the first woman, Pandora, who was fabricated by Hephaestus at Zeus' orders to ruin men's previously carefree lives in retaliation for Prometheus' theft of fire from the gods. Though endowed with the beauty and erotic charm, Pandora's devious nature is revealed when she opens a sealed jar that unleashes a swarm of sorrows, diseases, and evils into the world, leaving within only the uncertain quality Hope (*Elpis*).<sup>1</sup> There is, Robert Meagher observes, an obvious indisputable bond between Helen and Pandora which lies in the fact that the latter is the progenitor of the female 'race' making Helen her distant, yet most notorious, daughter.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Helen and Pandora are "virtually defined by the contradiction between their outward loveliness and their inward perversity; the disparity between their apparent charm and their essential fatality. Both are misleading and mischievous, not by virtue of anything they say or do

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<sup>1</sup> See Blondell (2013): 15–22 for a detailed analysis of the Pandora myth in relation to the threat of unbridled female sexuality in Greek society.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Emmett Meagher, *The Meaning of Helen: In Search of an Ancient Icon* (New York: Continuum Pub. Co., 1995), 66.

but by virtue of what they are.”<sup>3</sup> In disturbing the natural order by bringing sex, suffering, and death, Helen and Pandora may be seen as the original *femmes fatales*.

It is important to recognize that the chivalric Helen of the Middle Ages did not supplant this notion of Helen the beautiful evil. Though the *romans d'antique* genre rehabilitated Helen's reputation within the confined and rarified atmosphere of the literate elite by associating her with feminine virtue, the intense fear and resentment exhibited towards Helen's erotic power in antiquity nonetheless prevailed throughout the Christian world with equal ardor and ambivalence. Just twenty years after Helen's flattering portrayal in Benoît's *Romans de Troie*, another Angevin court writer, Joseph of Exeter, describes her as a whore who predatorily 'snatches' Paris to satisfy her perverted carnal desires:

Lying on him with her whole body, she opens her legs, presses him with her mouth and robs him of his semen. And as his ardour abates the purple bedlinen that was privy to their sins bears witness to his unseen dew.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, Helen enters the modern age not only as the “strumpet that began this stir,”<sup>5</sup> but as a “deform'd soul”<sup>6</sup> sentenced to the second circle of Hell with other wanton queens of history.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Alan K. Bate, *Joseph of Exeter: Trojan War: I–III* (Warminster: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers; Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Aris & Phillips, 1986), 3.330–8. In the twelfth century, it was considered a carnal sin for a woman to be on top during intercourse, as it gave her physical and sexual superiority over the man. The act of robbing Paris of his semen may be a reference to premature ejaculation, perceived as male punishment for the sin of this perverse sexual position.

<sup>5</sup> Shakespeare, *Rape of Lucrece* 1.471.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Ross, *Mystagogus Poeticus; Or, The Muses Interpreter, Explaining the Historical Mysteries, and Mysticall Histories of the Ancient Greek and Latine Poets* London : Printed for J. Martyn, S. Mearn, and H. Herringman, 1985/1672), 161.

<sup>7</sup> Dante, *Inferno*, 5.1–142.



Expressions of male anxiety concerning unbridled female sexuality have never truly gone out of vogue; yet the most prolific—and vicious—examples may surely be observed throughout the nineteenth century, when the subversive figure of the *femme fatale* emerged as the dominant representation of femininity in literature and the visual arts. At this same time, there appears to have been a particular interest among a number of artists and writers in Helen’s story, coinciding with a renewed and fervent engagement with ancient Greek myth, poetry, art, and architecture across various cultural outputs.<sup>8</sup> Particularly in mid- to late-nineteenth century painting, Helen is overwhelmingly portrayed a passion-inducing figure whose culpability for the destruction of Troy rests on the immense power of her extraordinary sexuality and destructive beauty. This chapter seeks to situate Helen’s resurgence as a *femme fatale* in the context of wider historical, cultural, and artistic preoccupations with the binary nature of womanhood, embodied in the archetypes of the ‘ideal’ and ‘fatal’ woman. It will be argued that depictions of Helen by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, co-founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (formed in 1848), and his associates conform to the movement’s broader infatuation with the *femme fatale* and reflect the prevailing, unsympathetic view of Helen as a dangerous object of desire. Finally, an examination of a series of paintings depicting Helen produced by French history painter and proto-Symbolist Gustave Moreau following his departure from exhibiting at the Salon in 1880 will reveal that his personal and changing conception of Helen not only subverts her conventional characterization as a seductive and dangerous

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<sup>8</sup> Alexandra Villing et al., *The BP Exhibition ‘Troy: Myth and Reality,’* (London: Thames & Hudson and the British Museum 2019): 198.

woman, but ultimately exonerates her by transforming her from *la femme maudite* to *la femme élue*.

### **The *Femme Fatale* in Nineteenth-Century Europe**

Though the term only entered the English language in 1900,<sup>9</sup> the figure of the *femme fatale* has prevailed over an immeasurably longer timespan through the universal paradigm of the Eternal Feminine, expressed as the polarization of spirit and nature, mind and body, one divine and good, the other ‘fallen’ and evil.<sup>10</sup> In *The Romantic Agony* (1933), Mario Praz provides some permanent characteristics of the *femme fatale* archetype, which is “united in itself all forms of seduction, all vices, all delights.”<sup>11</sup> He notes that, in addition to her exoticism and irresistibility, “sexual cannibalism is her monopoly,” for she stands in relation to her inferior lover (typically youthful and inexperienced) as to a female spider or praying mantis.<sup>12</sup> Virginia Allen similarly identifies the predatory instincts of the *femme fatale*: she is not only beautiful and erotic but also self-determined, independent, and tantalizingly unattainable; yet no matter how amorous and lovely, she is a “woman who controlled her own sexuality, who seduced men and drained them of their ‘vital powers.’”<sup>13</sup> Though often not intentionally

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<sup>9</sup> Virginia Allen, *The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon* (Albany, NY: Whitston, 2001): *viii*.

<sup>10</sup> The ‘ideal’ woman, known as the *femme fragile*, is embodied in the characters of the Virgin Mary, Ophelia, Beatrix, and Joan of Arc, whereas the *femme fatale* is personified by Eve, Lilith, Delilah, Semiramis, Herodias, Salomé, Pandora, Circe, Clytemnestra, Medea, Medusa, and Cleopatra. The nature of the feminine is considered at length in Anne Baring and Jules Cashford (1991).

<sup>11</sup> Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 209–210.

<sup>12</sup> Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, 205–206.

<sup>13</sup> Allen, *Femme Fatale*, 4.

destructive or even evil, the fatal woman's sublime beauty and transgressive behavior nevertheless threaten to ruin the established patriarchal order by rendering man helpless and leading him to his fall and degeneration.

The nineteenth century was a period of rapid social and economic change which had profound effects on cultural frameworks.<sup>14</sup> Increasing urbanization and the emergence of a mercantile-industrial middle class transformed work patterns, family life, and gender roles, whereby women were both elevated and constrained by their societal roles as mother, wife and daughter.<sup>15</sup> Primarily regarded as domestic creatures, women were to aspire to passivity and chastity both inside and outside of marriage, a perception Bram Dijkstra describes as the cult of the household nun.<sup>16</sup> The figure of the 'New Woman'—independent, educated, and sexually liberated—threatened traditional femininity, and conservative Victorian critics were quick to denounce women who challenged the patriarchal social structure as destructive, dangerous, and unnatural.<sup>17</sup> This dichotomy between ideal womanhood and unregulated female sexuality manifested itself within the opposing images of the demure, nubile maiden and the sinister, erotic *femme fatale* which permeated the artistic and cultural landscape of Britain, France, and Europe.

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<sup>14</sup> Jan Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Women: Images of Femininity in Pre-Raphaelite Art* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987): 9–10.

<sup>15</sup> Nead, "The Magdalen in Modern Times," 27; Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 64; Nochlin, Linda, "Lost and Found: Once More the Fallen Woman," in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), 61.

<sup>16</sup> Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Linda Dowling, "The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890's," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 33, no. 4 (1979), 435.

## The Dangerously Desirable Pre-Raphaelite Helen

The binary concept of womanhood pervades Pre-Raphaelite painting more than any other theme. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) viewed women not only as the subject and inspiration of art, but as “the representation of the artist’s own soul, the creative impulse of his art.”<sup>18</sup> Their middle-class patrons eagerly consumed pictures of ideal and fatal women, extending from holy virgins and medieval damsels to more salacious subjects such as modern-day prostitutes, mystic enchantresses, and other fallen women of history and legend. As many critics have noted, this division of the ‘good’ and ‘sinful’ woman prevails in the work of PRB co-founder, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882).<sup>19</sup> After 1859, however, the artist conspicuously shifted away from biblical subjects, embodied in *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1849) and *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (1850),<sup>20</sup> to the mystical and sadistic *femme fatale*—an inclination that intensified following the suicide of his wife and muse, Elizabeth Siddal, in 1862.<sup>21</sup> These half-length portraits reveal the artist’s intense focus on a single female figure from literature,

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<sup>18</sup> Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Women*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Virginia Allen, “‘One Strangling Golden Hair’: Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *Lady Lilith*,” *The Art Bulletin*, Volume 66 (1984): 285.

<sup>20</sup> Tate, London, N04872 and N01210 respectively.

<sup>21</sup>David Sonstroem, *Rossetti and the Fair Lady* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1970), 111; John Dixon Hunt, *The Pre-Raphaelite Imagination, 1848-1900* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 181; Edwin Berry Burgum, “Rossetti and the Ivory Tower,” *The Sewanee Review* 37, no. 4 (1929): 434–435; Charles Algernon Swinburne, “Essays and Studies,” *Complete Works*, XV, ed. Sir Edmund Gosse, C. B. and Thomas J. Wise (London: William Heinemann, 1926), 40–41.

mythology, and the Bible, whose sensuality and voluptuousness repeatedly evoke the link between sexual passion and man's fall into mortality.<sup>22</sup>

Such approaches to the fatal woman archetype are evident in Rossetti's major work dealing with Helen from 1863, in which she is portrayed as an unwitting yet fundamentally erotic *femme fatale* (Fig. 25).<sup>23</sup> Helen, modeled by Annie Miller, is seated close to the picture plane, emphasizing her semi-divine monumentality as well as the sumptuousness of her richly-ornamented aureate robe, merged seamlessly with her voluminous golden hair. This is not the first time Rossetti rendered Helen with such luscious locks. In an earlier pen and ink drawing, *Cassandra* (1861),<sup>24</sup> a scowling Helen sits on Paris' lap arming him for battle while he, oblivious to his chaotic surroundings, dallies with her long, luxuriant hair—which appears to ensnare as much as enchant him (Fig. 26). In both cases, Helen's hair directly relates to Rossetti's immense and enduring fascination with the image of the seductive woman with a cascade of long hair “swirling down to engulf and imprison her lover.”<sup>25</sup> Both versions of Helen, like Rossetti's other fatal ladies *Bocca Baciata* (1859), *Aurelia (Fazio's Mistress)* (1863), *Monna Vanna*

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<sup>22</sup> David G. Riede, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Limits of Victorian Vision* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 249.

<sup>23</sup> Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, HK-2469.

<sup>24</sup> British Museum, London, 1910,1210.4.

<sup>25</sup> Allen, ““One Strangling Golden Hair,”” 288.

(1866) and *Lady Lilith* (1866–1868) (Fig. 27),<sup>26</sup> possess lasso-like hair which may conceivably attract, trap, and proverbially strangle the susceptible male viewer/voyeur.<sup>27</sup>

Helen further lures the viewer into the epicenter of the composition by forcing the eye to linger on her sinuous hands, releasing her body from stasis. The entrancing movement of Helen's serpentine grasp serves as a vital precursor to a compositional motif that takes shape in Rossetti's paintings of powerful yet dangerous enchantresses in the following decade, as evidenced in *La Donna Fiamma* (1870), *Pandora* (1871), and *Proserpine* (1874),<sup>28</sup> whose castrating grips signify their mystical capabilities and potential lethality.<sup>29</sup> Pandora, for instance, is transformed by Rossetti from ancient *kalon kakon* to modern *femme fatale*; in breaking up the placidity of her body and ushering the eye to her muscular hands curled tightly around the box, he reminds the viewer of her unleashed potential for spreading evil and suffering throughout the world (Fig. 28). In a similar fashion, Rossetti draws attention to Helen's destructive nature by having her finger a pendant on her necklace bearing the image of a flaming torch. As Jan Haywood observes, there are multiple ambiguities surrounding the firebrand pendant which invite

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<sup>26</sup> *Bocca Baciata*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston 1980.261; *Aurelia (Fazio's Mistress)*, Tate, London N03055; *Aurelia (Fazio's Mistress)*, Tate, London N03054; *Lady Lilith*, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, 1935-29.

<sup>27</sup> For discussion on the fetishization of hair in mid- to late nineteenth century images of the feminine evil see Dijkstra (1986): 229–231.

<sup>28</sup> *La Donna Fiamma*, Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester 1900.11; *Pandora*, private collection; *Proserpine*, Tate, London N05064.

<sup>29</sup> For discussion on Rossetti's treatment of hands in paintings of explicitly mythic subjects see Auerbach (1982): 48–52.

several interpretations,<sup>30</sup> but it most certainly references the manifold images of fire that recur throughout the *Iliad* and its poetic significance as an ominous indicator of Troy's destruction.<sup>31</sup> By pointing directly to the flame, Helen indicates her own status and culpability as a dangerous object of desire; in bringing the seeds of Troy's destruction with her, "Helen herself is the firebrand that sets the city alight."<sup>32</sup>

Rossetti makes evident the extreme and mortal repercussions of Helen's actions by including Troy burning in the background as dark-bowed ships sail away into the night, thereby giving visual form not only to Homer but to Marlowe as well. Yet the strongest affirmation of Helen's disastrous nature is present not in the painting itself, but rather a Greek inscription on the *verso* from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* describing Helen as "destroyer of ships, destroyer of men, destroyer of cities."<sup>33</sup> Each of the three Greek words (ἑλέναυς, ἑλανδρος, ἑλέπολις) begins with the syllable 'hel' (meaning 'destroying'), echoing the first syllable of Helen's name.<sup>34</sup> This addition foreshadows the content of a poem Rossetti himself would compose several years later titled 'Troy Town' (1870). With the repeated refrain of 'Oh Troy's dawn, Tall Troy's on fire,' Rossetti vehemently and relentlessly articulates the destructive qualities of Helen's erotic desire

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<sup>30</sup> Haywood argues that the firebrand pendant could represent Paris, and therefore symbolize his responsibility for the fall of Troy, not Helen's, while also considering another theory that suggests Rossetti portrays Helen as a victim of physical abuse due to the purpled shadow on her right cheek. See Jan Haywood and Naoise Mac Sweeney (2018): 65–66.

<sup>31</sup> This motif appears in Book XXII.405–411 when Hector's death elicits wailing and lamentation throughout the city as though "all lowering Ilion had been burning top to bottom in fire."

<sup>32</sup> Haywood, Jan, and Naoise Mac Sweeney, *Homer's Iliad and the Trojan War: Dialogues on Tradition* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 65.

<sup>33</sup> Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 689–90.

<sup>34</sup> Villing, 'Troy: Myth and Reality,' 263.

and its consequences: she alone is responsible for the fall of Troy.<sup>35</sup> Helen's expressionless and indirect gaze in Rossetti's painting further reinforces the idea of her passivity, self-reflectivity, and self-absorption: she remains not only physically unscathed but mentally unperturbed by the tragic and terrible events she has caused—an expression of heartlessness, narcissism, and inscrutability frequently exhibited by his other *femmes fatales*.<sup>36</sup> This Helen is decidedly not the sympathetic figure portrayed in the *Iliad*, but rather the embodiment of how Homer's Helen perceives herself to be: a “chilling, evil-devising bitch.”<sup>37</sup>

Rossetti's *Helen of Troy* conforms in many respects to the voyeuristic and fetishistic characterization of Helen that dominated Pre-Raphaelite and classical revival art at this time. Like Rossetti's earlier painting, Helen's remoteness, culpability, and dangerous desirability are evoked in the bust-length portrait, *Helen of Troy* (1867),<sup>38</sup> by Frederick Sandys (1829–1904) (Fig. 29). However, this depiction is more overtly sexual, as Helen (modeled by Sandys' lover, Mary Emma Jones) appears to be nude save for her necklaces. A mass of undulating red curls pulls the viewer's eye downwards across her pale bosom to where her cleavage begins—yet the artist enticingly leaves her breasts out of the picture frame, encouraging the viewer to use his own imagination. Removed from any narrative context, Helen is presented as a wholly isolated figure whose ambiguous

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Haywood, *Homer's Iliad and the Trojan War*, 63.

<sup>37</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 6.344; on Helen and her self-blame in the *Iliad*, see Graver (1995): 41–61 and Blondell (2010): 1–32.

<sup>38</sup> Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, WAG 2633.



moral character and sexual history must be called into question. Her bowed head, pronounced frown, and upturned, indirect gaze all betray a certain irascibility and haughtiness, suggesting that she feels no remorse for her actions. Helen's eroticism, vanity, and petulance are displayed to an even greater degree in Sandys' earlier wood engraving, *Helen and Cassandra* (1866),<sup>39</sup> in which the Trojan prophetess berates a scowling Helen, tugging at a lock of hair in her mouth, whose *mons pubis* and breast are suggestively accentuated by the diaphanous folds of her tunic (Fig. 30). Cassandra is shown stepping on a mirror, having knocked it from Helen's hands to point out the city burning behind them.

The Pre-Raphaelites undoubtedly perceived Helen and Cassandra as epitomes of the eternal, opposing forces of femininity. Nowhere is this more evident than in Evelyn De Morgan's (1855–1919) pendant paintings, *Cassandra* and *Helen of Troy* (1898),<sup>40</sup> which present a series of allegorical elements underscoring their divergent roles as *femme fragile* and *femme fatale* (Figs. 31 and 32). The virgin seer, cursed by the god Apollo never to be believed, is depicted as an icon of tragedy bordering on madness, tearing at her hair as her warnings to the Trojans about the wooden horse, shown in the background of the burning city, are ultimately futile. Cassandra is portrayed as the quintessential 'pure' woman, her passivity and vestal purity encapsulated by her deep blue tunic, a color associated with spiritual passion and the heavenly realm of the Madonna.<sup>41</sup> The blood-red

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<sup>39</sup> Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, DAM 1935-156. This engraving appeared in *Once a Week*, 28 April, 1866, facing p. 454.

<sup>40</sup> De Morgan Collection, Guildford, P\_EDM\_0022 and P\_EDM\_0023, respectively.

<sup>41</sup> Biedermann, Hans, *Dictionary of Symbolism: Cultural Icons and the Meanings Behind Them*, Trans. James Hulbert (New York: Meridian, 1994): 44.

roses at her feet, together with the Apollonian serpents represented on her tunic and the stylized gold flames at her hem, further situate Cassandra as powerless to save her people from impending doom. Conversely, the peaceful backdrop of the companion painting appears at first to show Helen as innocent of any wrongdoing; but when considered conjointly with *Cassandra's* iconography, it becomes clear that *Helen* reveals the source of Troy's fall, that is, the devastating power of Helen's libido and mesmerizing beauty. Contrasting Cassandra's frantic gesture, Helen gently plays with a lock of her long, golden hair as she stares vacantly and indirectly into her hand mirror in self-absorption—tasks frequently undertaken by Pre-Raphaelite *femmes fatales*.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Helen's association with physical desire is spotlighted by her slinky rose-hued tunic decorated with a wave pattern at the hem, and the flock of white doves surrounding her—both symbols of her patron goddess, Aphrodite, whose nude figure appears on her mirror. Perhaps the only indication of her fatal potential is the inclusion of white roses, a legendary symbol of death.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, Helen is the diametric opposite of Cassandra: an ancient 'pin-up' whose sexual assertiveness, self-absorption, and ruinous capacities clearly distinguish her as a *femme fatale*.

### **Gustave Moreau's Subversive Helen**

At the same time the Pre-Raphaelites were challenging the established view of British art by dismissing the stultifying mores and classicism propagated by the Royal

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<sup>42</sup> E.g. Rossetti's *Lady Lilith* (1866–1868) and *Aurelia (Fazio's Mistress)* (1863).

<sup>43</sup> Hans Biedermann, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 289. Elise Lawton Smith, *Evelyn Pickering De Morgan and the Allegorical Body* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2002), 95.

Academy, French painter Gustave Moreau (1826–1898) sought to reinvigorate the *grand genre* within the institution of the state-sponsored Salon, creating a non-academic form of history painting and rejecting the naturalism, didacticism, and theatricality of academicism in favor of an enigmatic, allegorical, and colorful treatment of biblical and mythological subjects.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, Moreau and the Pre-Raphaelites exhibit kindred fascinations with the opposing forces of dangerous and ideal femininity, in keeping with the *fin de siècle* vision of the Eternal Feminine. Indeed, the pivotal conflict between *l'amour du difforme* (monstrous beauty) and *l'amour du beau* (elevated beauty) reveals itself as Moreau's central artistic inspiration in two major archetypes opposed symbolically to each other: *la femme élue* (the radiant, chaste enchantress) and *la femme maudite* (the fatal, predatory enchantress),<sup>45</sup> though it is undeniably the latter with whom the artist's name has remained synonymous.

While the theme of cruel, feminine beauty reverberated throughout Moreau's *oeuvre* following his first critical success at the 1864 Salon with *Oedipus and the Sphinx*,<sup>46</sup> it was his contributions to the Salon of 1876 that ultimately sealed his reputation as the perverse painter of the *femme fatale*. Based on the biblical story of Salomé, whose sensuous dance before her stepfather was rewarded with Saint John the

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<sup>44</sup> Peter Cooke, "Symbolism, Decadence, and Gustave Moreau," *The Burlington Magazine*, May 2009, Vol. 151, No. 1274, French Art in the Nineteenth Century (May, 2009), 312.

<sup>45</sup> Natasha Grigorian, *European Symbolism: In Search of Myth (1860-1910)* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2009), 51.

<sup>46</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 21.134.1.

Baptist's head, his *Salomé Dancing Before Herod*<sup>47</sup> and *The Apparition*<sup>48</sup> shocked and dazzled critics with their exoticism, macabre imagery and heightened eroticism (Fig. 33 and 34). Yet the artist's bloodthirsty temptress was the true star, as Georges Lafenestre would tell his readers: "Salomé is clearly for Mr Moreau much more than Salomé... she is feminine beauty itself, eternally fatal and cruel."<sup>49</sup> In the ensuing years, the idea of Moreau as a figure obsessed with the destructive allure of female beauty was crystalized in the writings of the Decadents, for whom the daughter of Herodias represented the archetypal fatal woman. A major proponent of this view was Joris-Karl Huysmans, who in his influential novel *Against the Grain* (1884) describes Moreau's Salomé as "the monstrous Beast, indifferent, irresponsible, insensible, baneful, like the Helen of antiquity, fatal to all who approach her, all who behold her, all whom she touches."<sup>50</sup> Further comparisons between the monstrous beauty of Salomé and that of Helen were drawn at the Salon of 1880, when Moreau presented his grisly *Helen of Troy*<sup>51</sup> alongside a radiant rendering of *Galatea* (Fig. 35 and 36).<sup>52</sup> Whereas Moreau's depiction of the recumbent sea nymph was lauded by critics as a celebration of chaste and sublime

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<sup>47</sup> Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, AH 90.48.

<sup>48</sup> Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

<sup>49</sup> Marie-Cécile Forrest and Ted Gott, *Gustave Moreau and the Eternal Feminine* (Southbank, Australia: National Gallery of Victoria, 2011): 69.

<sup>50</sup> Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against the Grain*, trans. John Howard (New York: Lieber & Lewis, 1922): 95.

<sup>51</sup> The current whereabouts of this painting are unknown. It was last seen in 1913 at the estate auction of the collector Jules Beer.

<sup>52</sup> Musée d'Orsay, Paris, R.F. 1997-16.

beauty,<sup>53</sup> his statuesque Helen—depicted on the ramparts of Troy, towering over corpses of young warriors who died in her name—was deemed a “relentless and murderous woman” and “nefarious spirit,” epitomizing “the enchanting and malicious placidity, the moving and the stillness, the indifferent and the promiscuous in art.”<sup>54</sup> For Huysmans, Moreau’s imposing Helen epitomized sadistic and sickly nature of powerful female sexuality, as he likened her to “an evil divinity poisoning, unconsciously, all who approach her and everything at which she looks or touches.”<sup>55</sup>

At first glance, *Helen* seemingly exhibits many qualities that correlate to Moreau’s vision of *la femme maudite*, embodied in *Salomé* and *The Apparition*. In addition to Helen’s menacing posture and size, and her seeming obliviousness—or indifference—to the carnage before her, she also holds a long-stemmed tri-petal lotus flower, an element shared with the artist’s various depictions of Salomé; on the subject of the latter’s omnipresent lotus, Moreau writes: “The woman who represents the eternal woman, light as a bird, and often fatal, goes through life with a flower in hand. Looking for her vague, terrible idea, and still walking on trampling down all, even geniuses and saints.”<sup>56</sup> Though the lotus may signify voluptuousness,<sup>57</sup> Moreau would have doubtlessly been aware of, and appreciated, the flower’s sacred status in Egypt, India, and

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<sup>53</sup> Genevieve Lacambre et al., *Gustave Moreau: Between Epic and Dream* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1999): 189.

<sup>54</sup> Marie-Cécile Forrest and Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux, *Hélène de Troie: Beauté en Majesté* (Paris: Musée Gustave Moreau, 2012), 39.

<sup>55</sup> Joris-Karl Huysmans, *L’Art Moderne* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1883), 154.

<sup>56</sup> Moreau quoted in Forrest, *Gustave Moreau and the Eternal Feminine*, 83.

<sup>57</sup> Lacambre, *Gustave Moreau*, 160.

China as a symbol of creation, rebirth, divinity, purity, and fertility.<sup>58</sup> If Moreau did, in fact, subscribe to the latter, then any consideration of his Helen (and, by consequence, Salomé) as a *femme fatale* would be misconceived. Allison Holland proposes that rather than denoting her ‘evil’ and ‘poisonous’ capacity, the lotus may indicate Helen’s embodiment of divine feminine energy “which motivates the creative powers of a universal masculine force.”<sup>59</sup> In this interpretation, Helen’s tranquil beauty and austerity is reflected in her “inspirational figure [which] contrasts with a lack of vitality in the masculine entity” personified by the bodies of dead soldiers beneath her. Helen is endowed not with undertones of sickness and depravity, but creative power and purity that rises above earthly existence.<sup>60</sup>

This reading is even more convincing when viewed in light of Moreau’s deep reverence and advocacy of the traditional and moral ideals of history painting, coupled with his strong misgivings over the enthusiastic literary attention his *oeuvre* received from the Decadent and Symbolist generation.<sup>61</sup> Despite the artist’s insistence that everything in his art was “high, powerful, moral, beneficial, and educational,”<sup>62</sup> the Decadent vision of Moreau as a man haunted by the devastating cruelties of “Salomé, Helen, the Ennoia fatal to races, the Sirens disastrous to humanity,” prevailed.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Biedermann, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 212–213.

<sup>59</sup> Forrest, *Gustave Moreau and the Eternal Feminine*, 85–86.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Moreau quoted in Cooke, “Symbolism, Decadence, and Gustave Moreau,” 315.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Jean Lorrain, *Monsieur de Phocas* (Paris: Édition Du Boucher, 2002), 212.

Ultimately, Moreau's disdain for those whom he believed misunderstood the complexities and transcendent qualities of his subjects reached the apogee following the critical reception of *Helen* at the 1880 Salon—in despair, he withdrew from all future state exhibitions, choosing instead to work only with his closest students, friends, and patrons in the privacy of his Paris studio-residence.<sup>64</sup> Moreau remained devoted to the subject of Helen and promptly set out to conjure a patently more benevolent and innocent vision of his heroine. From 1880 until 1898, the year of his death, Moreau produced an impressive ensemble of paintings and studies that progressively absolved Helen from the onerous stereotype of *la femme maudite/femme fatale* by refashioning her character and myth to correspond to the eternal beauty and sublime sensuality of *la femme élue*.

Produced shortly after the Salon of 1880, the loosely executed and remarkably abstract *Helen at the Scaean Gate*<sup>65</sup> marks the earliest example of Moreau's rapidly evolving and less incriminating vision of Helen (Fig. 37). According to Homer, the Trojan leaders and royal family typically gather on walls of the Scaean Gate to watch the fighting. It is also the setting of Helen's first public appearance in the *Iliad* and the first indication of her extraordinary value and spellbinding impact on men. The elders, catching sight of Helen on the walls, declare that her radiant beauty—so 'terribly' like that of a goddess—is still worth fighting for despite the pain and suffering they have endured on her account.<sup>66</sup> When Priam invites Helen to sit with him, he reassures her that

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<sup>64</sup> Forrest, *Gustave Moreau and the Eternal Feminine*, 47.

<sup>65</sup> Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris, Cat. 42.

<sup>66</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 3.156–160

the gods are to blame, not her.<sup>67</sup> This Iliadic scene was popular from the mid-nineteenth century onwards among academic painters such as Frederic Leighton, who in his *Helen on the Walls of Troy* (1865) depicts Helen in a voyeuristic manner as an isolated and passive object of desire. Yet where Leighton's figure displays the same indirect, vacant expression as the Pre-Raphaelite Helen that suggests her culpability, Moreau leaves his Helen's face blank (or, more precisely, white) with no discernible features at all. Her body is similarly wispy and insubstantial, more akin the smoke rising from the battlefield than to a living, breathing person while the brown and red hues of her robe echo the colors of the battle. Interpreting these elements as an indication of Helen's direct link to violence and calamity, however, would be misguided. Helen's literal blankness is most certainly an allusion to an alternate version of Helen's story recounted by Stesichorus, Herodotus, and Euripides. According to these authors, Helen never went to Troy—she was replaced with an *eidōlon*, a body double or phantom, while the real Helen resided in Egypt for the war's duration. Thus, in choosing to paint Helen the *eidōlon* rather than Homer's Helen, Moreau ventures even further to absolve her of all blame.

Moreau returned to the theme of his Salon painting in 1885 with his watercolor *Helen on the Walls of Troy* (Fig. 38).<sup>68</sup> While this work is perhaps the closest in its composition and style to the Salon *Helen*, the tone is altogether more gentle and Moreau makes several crucial changes that indicate her role not as a destructive temptress but as a muse of poetic inspiration and eternal glory. The artist reveals a resplendently dressed

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<sup>67</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 3.164–165.

<sup>68</sup> Musée d'Orsay, Paris, RF 32135.



and bejeweled Helen, who looks directly at the viewer with a soft but kind smile—in stark contrast with the restrained and introspective gaze of the Salon Helen. Moreau also accords less space to the pile of victims at her feet, whose role has become less macabre and outwardly more symbolic. The attributes of warriors (a shield and helmet), poets (a lyre), and kings (a crown) found amongst the bodies embody the supreme qualities necessary for man to achieve immortality: heroism, poetic inspiration, and upholding the law.<sup>69</sup> In this way, Helen is no longer an icon of strife and suffering but a figure of hope and peace, a transcendent beauty capable of transforming this terrible war into a glorious struggle.

If Moreau's various works have revealed thus far a destructive but ultimately innocent Helen who straddles the line between *l'amour du difforme* and *l'amour du beau*, then his final iteration of the Helen theme, *Helen Glorified* (c. 1896),<sup>70</sup> unequivocally moves her from the cursed domain of *la femme maudite* to the ethereal realm of *la femme élue* (Fig. 39). Moreau abandons her dark locks—a common signifier of *beautés maudites* such as Salomé, Messalina, and Cleopatra—and endows her instead with the long, flowing blond hair typically associated with his chaste beauties. Like his fair-haired Galatea, Helen is depicted as a classicized nude figure whose eyes are serenely closed as if in deep contemplation and meditation. Along with her lotus flower, Helen's halo-like gold diadem and her translucent blue and green veil (or robe), wrapped gracefully around her body, testify to her spiritual purity and incorruptible beauty. These heavenly elements,

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<sup>69</sup> Lacambre, *Gustave Moreau*, 208; Forrest, *Gustave Moreau and the Eternal Feminine*, 82.

<sup>70</sup> Sold at Christie's London for 409,250 GBP Premium on 21 November, 2012.

together with the intense blue background and gold stars that decorate the bottom of the canvas, visually recall scenes of the Virgin's Assumption and Botticelli's Venus.

Diminutive saint-like figures surround Helen to form a pyramidal structure, equally intensifying her Marian qualities. This symbolic triumvirate—warrior, prince, and poet—representing combat, power, and art was previously utilized in Moreau's *Helen* of 1885, although the figures shown here are not victims of war but rather devoted worshippers of an idealized and divine Helen. The winged child at the bottom further reveals that this is not Homer's Helen but the Helen of Goethe's *Faust* (1882), with whom the titular protagonist falls in love with and fathers a beautiful child named Euphorion. The play concludes when Euphorion tragically dies and calls his mother back to Hades. As in Goethe's tragedy, Moreau immortalizes Helen as the sublime female incarnation of triumphant beauty. At last, she has untainted herself to become the ultimate embodiment of *la femme élue*—the universal ideal of womanhood.

## **Conclusion**

The handful of painters this chapter has sought to highlight, all of whom worked in a cultural and artistic climate fraught with ambivalent fantasies and fears about the threatening power of female sexuality, have revealed their deep and enthusiastic interest (bordering on infatuation) in depicting Helen, her ambiguous reputation as both a highly desirable and destructive force, and her role and potential culpability (or innocence) in precipitating the Trojan War. Emerging from these various and manifold representations are two discrete visions of Helen which reflect the dualistic contradictions at the heart of

nineteenth-century male perceptions of ideal and depraved womanhood. For the Pre-Raphaelites, Helen clearly becomes the ultimate manifestation of an endlessly unfulfilled desire to simultaneously restrain and elevate the female form. Rossetti and his associates insistently and disparagingly assert through pictorial means her physical desirability, destructive capacities, and narcissistic self-concern—poisonous qualities that link her with other fallen women and *femmes fatales* of myth and legend with whom the Pre-Raphaelites similarly fetishized and objectified with great fervor. This dangerous and subversive Helen overwhelmingly conforms to the dominant viewpoint held by male purveyors of culture since antiquity: that Helen, at once irresistible and terrifying, is the uncontested icon of feminine ill repute. Given her long history of censure and the intense misogyny of *fin de siècle* culture, that Helen finds her most devoted (and unexpected) advocate in Moreau—a figure whose own reputation casts him as the fanatical progenitor of the period’s most macabre and perverse visions of monstrous beauty—is rather extraordinary. Far from producing purely formal reiterations of the same narrative, themes, and iconography, Moreau’s *Helen* series reflects the artist’s complex and evolving perceptions of a single subject as he ventures beyond the traditional Homeric characterization of Helen to consider alternative myths in which she is treated with empathy and respect. In showing a Helen who is neither angelic nor demonic, whose beauty—no matter how destructive—is neither inherently erotic nor evil, Moreau demonstrates that she is far more than merely a sex object or *femme fatale*; she embodies all aspects, good and bad, of the Eternal Feminine.

Conclusion:  
The Face That Launched a Thousand Ships

In every period and genre, Helen's enduring appeal has been defined by the contradiction between her disarming beauty and essential fatality, which renders her at once a passive prize for glory-seeking heroes and a potential agent of destructive erotic power while moving her effortlessly from being an object of desire to being an object of loathing. Yet perhaps the extraordinary impact and deadly implications of her beauty are best summarized in the iconic apostrophe spoken by the eponymous character in Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* (composed between 1588 and 1592):

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?  
– Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss:  
Her lips suck forth my soul, see where it flies!  
Come Helen, come, give me my soul again.  
Here will I dwell, for heaven be in these lips  
And all is dross that is not Helena.<sup>1</sup>

This first line—"the face that launched a thousand ships"—is undoubtedly the most famous ever written about Helen. It appears practically impossible to speak of her without invoking Marlowe's hyperbolic measurement, as it has permeated popular culture to such an extent that it has become the paradigmatic, albeit hackneyed, way of referring to Helen in modernity.<sup>2</sup> Yet as Blondell and Maguire both note, these lines are frequently quoted out of context as if they constitute Faustus' unequivocally awed reaction to

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<sup>1</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* V.i.96–102.

<sup>2</sup> Konstantinos P. Nikoloutsos, "Helen's Semiotic Body: Ancient and Modern Representations," *Nuntius Antiquus*, Belo Horizonte, v. 12, n. 1 (2016), 191–192.

Helen's beauty. In actuality, the lines are addressed not to the real Helen but to a devil impersonating Helen, and so "Faustus is responding to, at best, a clever illusion, at worst, a cheap trick; that is, he is deceived or self-deceiving."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Marlowe's lines speak to the enduring and paradoxical problems with Helen: she is irresistible and deleterious, ethereal and demonic, "promise of bliss and the assurance of doom."<sup>4</sup> As the supreme embodiment of absolute beauty, Helen is extratemporal—detached, separate, and independent. She appears to dwell in a sphere that is beyond our world, which brings her closer to divinity than mortality.<sup>5</sup> She contradicts herself in her multitudes, and so, as the embodiment of the beautiful and the monstrous, the absence and presence, "she cannot be killed because she was never alive in any normal way."<sup>6</sup>

For nearly twenty-eight centuries, countless artists have desperately sought to fill the impenetrable void at the center of Zeuxis' canvas with the likeness of the face that launched a thousand ships. But the reluctance of Homer, and many other authors since, to describe Helen's physiognomy in detail has contributed significantly to the painter's challenge of visualizing her. This is because Helen's beauty is absolute and thus unspeakable. It cannot be defined or narrated in terms of representation. When the Trojan elders see Helen approaching along the ramparts, they emphasize her likeness to a

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<sup>3</sup> Laurie Maguire, *Helen of Troy: From Homer to Hollywood* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 160; Ruby Blondell, *Helen of Troy: Beauty, Myth, Devastation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 248.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Emmet Meagher, *The Meaning of Helen: In Search of an Ancient Icon* (New York: Continuum Pub. Co., 1995), 23.

<sup>5</sup> Norman Austin, *Helen of Troy and Her Shameless Phantom* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Maguire, *Helen of Troy*, 68, 135.

goddess but conspicuously fail to convey *how*. In freeing her beauty from the constraints of specificity, Homer allows his audience to envision Helen according to each reader's own unique vision of how the most beautiful woman in the world should look. Artists, on the other hand, are fundamentally bound to specification. They can represent a beautiful woman, but not the *most* beautiful, since absolute beauty transcends any particular individual. Zeuxis attempted to circumvent this issue by amalgamating the best features from his five models into a composite portrait, but no matter what the finished work looked like, "if it accurately portrayed the specific charms of those five women it must have still left his Helen's beauty open to critical judgement by those who might have chosen a different five."<sup>7</sup> Painting Helen, it would seem, is a task doomed to fail from the very beginning.

Since Helen's poetic and textual body largely constitute a blank space of non-representation, painters must give her material form by converting her elusive absolute beauty into identifiable, objective attributes. How these features are interpreted, and thus the form her beauty takes, however, is deeply and inextricably linked to the time and place in which they are conceived. The generic and highly stylized characterization of Helen in Makron's *skyphos* not only echoes Homer's use of conventional tropes to convey Helen's appearance, but also conveys Greek ideals of beauty, which call for simple forms and conventionality rather than detail and individuality. Conversely, the golden-haired, rosy-cheeked Helen portrayed in Dario's panel paintings directly recalls the particularities of Helen in the *Historia* of Guido delle Colonne, who spares no details

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<sup>7</sup> Blondell, 49.

when describing her lovely features. As Caterina Corner's avatar, Dario's Helen also exhibits all the essential attractions of the irresistibly beautiful bride in Quattrocento Italy, including snow-white skin, blonde locks (an important signifier of female virtue and erotic intrigue), and an intricate coiffure that displays her expansive forehead. The vast array of Pre-Raphaelite Helens of the second half of the nineteenth century equally betray the movement's particular conception of the dangerous yet alluring woman, most often depicted with pale skin, large eyes that eschew direct contact, and of course long, flowing hair can be used to enchant and entrap the unsuspecting man, leading him to his downfall. In the end, the closest pictorial interpretation of the poetic Helen is most certainly to be found in the work of Gustave Moreau, whose faceless *eidolon* of 1880, rather than attempting to fill the void of representation, fully embraces the blankness of unknowability that shapes Helen's tantalizing inaccessibility and perpetual allure.

Transferring Helen from the page onto the canvas far from resolves the problematic ambivalences and contradictions that continuously inform her character and story. In fact, the medium of painting seems to exacerbate these complexities while simultaneously presenting new ones. Like Helen's *eidolon*, the painted Helen is a fabrication in that she represents not a real woman but an *idea*. Beyond serving as an index of the prevailing ideals of beauty and femininity of each generation, Helen's liminality allows painters to appropriate her story and its meaning and project onto her pervasive male anxieties and fears surrounding the threatening power of female beauty and sexuality. In the absence of a canonical version Helen's tale, painters in every period have interpreted, modified, and embellished her character in disparate and contradictory

terms. Besides confronting her irresistible beauty, artists and authors must come to terms with Helen's culpability in precipitating the Trojan War, and attempt to resolve the inextricable tension between personal responsibility and fate that lies at the heart of her story. Is she an innocent pawn of the gods, cursed by the very beauty that makes her so desirable? Or is she a shameless temptress, whose erotic desire makes her an agent of destruction? These bipolar facets of Helen have yet to be reconciled. She endures in the written and visual record as a living contradiction, at once a queen, whore, scapegoat, and villainess, fated to be idealized, slandered, celebrated, and condemned. Though the guises Helen takes on vary widely depending on the cultural context in which she is created, her function has and will remain largely the same: to incarnate femininity at its most desirable and most destructive.



## Illustrations



Fig. 1

François-André Vincent, *Zeuxis Choosing His Models for the Image of Helen from Among the Girls of Croton*, 1789, oil on canvas, 3.23 m by 4.15 m, Musée du Louvre, inv. 8453



Fig. 2

Red-figure drinking cup (*skyphos*) with the departure and recovery of Helen, Greek, c. 490 BC, Late Archaic Period, Makron, 21.5 cm (8 7/16 in) height, 39 cm (15 3/8 in.) diameter, 27.8 cm (10 15/16 in) diameter of mouth, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 13.186



Fig. 3

Detail of Makron's *skyphos* depicting the *cheir' epi karpo* gesture



Fig. 4

Attic red-figure *loutrophoros* showing wedding rituals, Greek, c. 450–440 BC, Classical Period, attributed to Polygnotos, 78.5 cm, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, 929.22.3





Fig. 5

An unattributed Attic spouted *krater* (mixing jar), Greek, c. 735 BC, Late Geometric Period, 38 cm diameter of rim; 30.5 cm height, British Museum, London, 929.22.3 © The Trustees of the British Museum

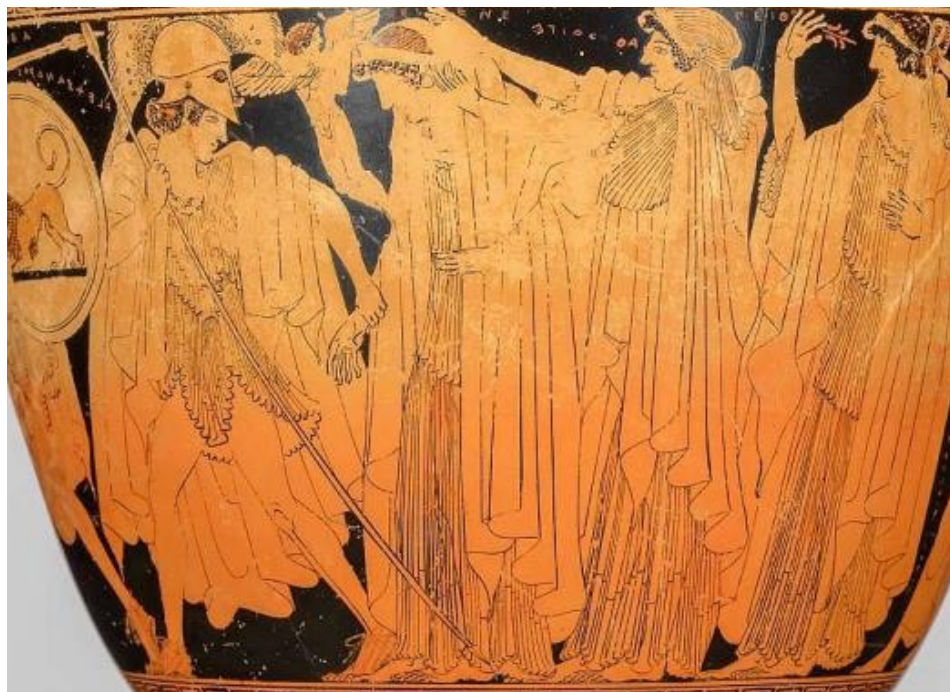


Fig. 6

Detail of Makron's *skyphos* depicting Helen as the archetypal bride



Fig. 7

Detail of Makron's *skyphos* depicting Paris' seductive gaze and Eros fluttering between the two lovers



Fig. 8

Red-figure *hydria/kalpis* (water jar) showing Eros tying Helen's wedding sandals, Greek, c. 430–420 BC, Classical Period, attributed to the Washing Painter, . 12 in (30.5 cm) height; 11 1/8 in (28.2 cm) diameter, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 19.192.86



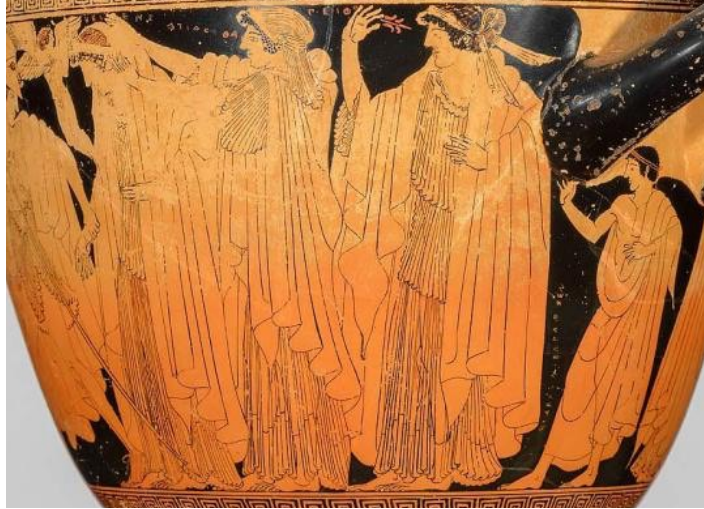


Fig. 9

Detail of Makron's *skyphos* depicting Aphrodite and Peitho as Helen's bridal entourage



Fig. 10

Red-figure *amphoriskos* (perfume jar) depicting Paris and Helen with Aphrodite and other goddesses, Greek, c. 430 BC, Classical Period, attributed to the Heimarmene Painter, 18.0 cm, Antikensmuseen, Berlin, inv. 30036



Fig. 11  
Detail of Heimarmene Painter's *Amphoriskos* depicting Paris and Himeros



Fig. 12  
Detail of Heimarmene Painter's *Amphoriskos* depicting Peitho holding a jewelry box



Fig. 13  
Detail of Heimarmene Painter's *Amphoriskos* depicting Nemesis and Helen



Fig. 14  
Detail of Makron's *skyphos* depicting the confrontation between Helen and Menelaus





Fig. 15

An unattributed red-figure *pyxis* (cosmetics jar) depicting a nude Helen in the guise of a bride, Greek, c. 420–400 BC, Classical Period, 6 7/8 in (17.5 cm) height, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1972.118.148a, b



Fig. 16

Dario di Giovanni, *The Departure of Helen and Her Entourage for Cythera*, c. 1468–1469, tempera on wood (spruce) panel, 60 in (152.4 cm) by 94 3/16 in (239.2 cm), The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, 37.1178



Fig. 17

Dario di Giovanni, *The Abduction of Helen from Cythera*, c. 1468–1469, tempera on wood (spruce) panel, 60 3/8 in (153.4 cm) by 116 1/4 in (295.3 cm), The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, 37.1179





Fig.18

Dario di Giovanni, *The Reception of Helen at Troy*, c. 1468–1469, tempera on wood (spruce) panel, 60 1/16 in (152.6 cm) by 96 1/8 in (244.2 cm), The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, 37.1180



Fig. 19

Bas-de-page miniature of the meeting of Paris and Helen and the fight in the temple, *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*, second redaction, 2nd quarter of the 14th century, Naples, Italy, British Library, Royal MS 20 D I f. 49v



Fig. 20

Bas-de-page miniature of the marriage of Helen and Paris at Troy with Hecuba and Priam, *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*, second redaction, 2nd quarter of the 14th century, Naples, Italy, British Library, Royal MS 20 D I f. 53r



Fig. 21

*Arrival of Paris and Helen at the Court of Priam, King of Troy*, Flanders, c. 1500, wool and silk threads, 157 in (398.7 cm) height by 164 in (416.6 cm) width, The Norton Simon Museum, F.1965.1.129.1.T © The Norton Simon Foundation





Fig. 22

Manuscript illumination depicting the marriage of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Louis VII of France and Louis departing on a Crusade, *Grandes Chroniques de France/Chronique de Saint Denis*, France, c. 14th century, Chantilly, Musée Condé MS 867/324



Fig. 23

Piero or Antonio del Pollaiuolo, *Portrait of a Young Woman*, c. 1470–1472, Mixed medium on panel, 17.9 in (45.5 cm) by 12.9 in (32.7 cm), Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan, inv. 442



Fig. 24

Dario di Giovanni, *Caterina Corner as Chastity*, c. 1467–1468, tempera and Pressbrokat on spruce, 39.4 (100 cm) by 35.4 in (90 cm), Keresztény Múzeum, Esztrgom, no. 13-18, 55.212





Fig. 25

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Helen of Troy*, 1863, oil on panel, 12.9 in (32.8 cm) by 10.9 in (27.7 cm), Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, HK-2469



Fig. 26

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Cassandra*, 1861 (reworked in 1867), pen and black ink touched with white, 13 in (33 cm) by 18.2 in (46.2 cm), British Museum, London, 1910,1210.4 © The Trustees of the British Museum





Fig. 27

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Lady Lilith*, 1866–1868 (altered 1872–1873), oil on canvas, 39 in (99.1 cm) by 34 in (86.4 cm), Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, 1935-29

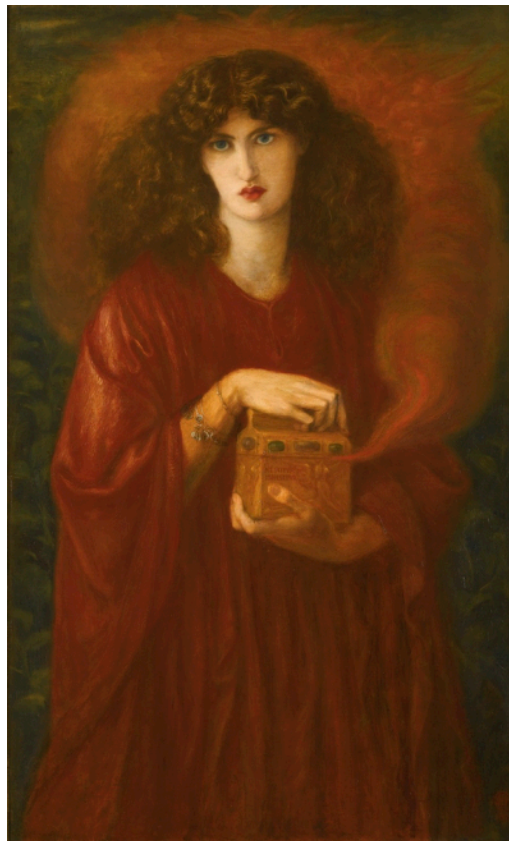


Fig. 28

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Pandora*, 1871, oil on canvas, 51.5 in (131 cm) by 31.1 in (79 cm), private collection



Fig. 29

Frederick Sandys, *Helen of Troy*, 1867, oil on canvas, 15 in (38.4 cm) by 12 in (30.5 cm),  
Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, WAG 2633



Fig. 30

Frederick Sandys, *Helen and Cassandra*, 1866, engraving on wood, 6.9 in (17.6 cm) by 4.8 in (12.3 cm), Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, DAM 1935-156





Fig. 31

Evelyn De Morgan, *Cassandra*, 1898, oil on canvas, 48.8 in (124 cm) by 29.1 in (74 cm), De Morgan Foundation, Guildford, P\_EDM\_0022

Fig. 32

Evelyn De Morgan, *Helen of Troy*, 1898, oil on canvas, 48.8 in (124 cm) by 29.1 in (74 cm), De Morgan Foundation, Guildford, P\_EDM\_0023

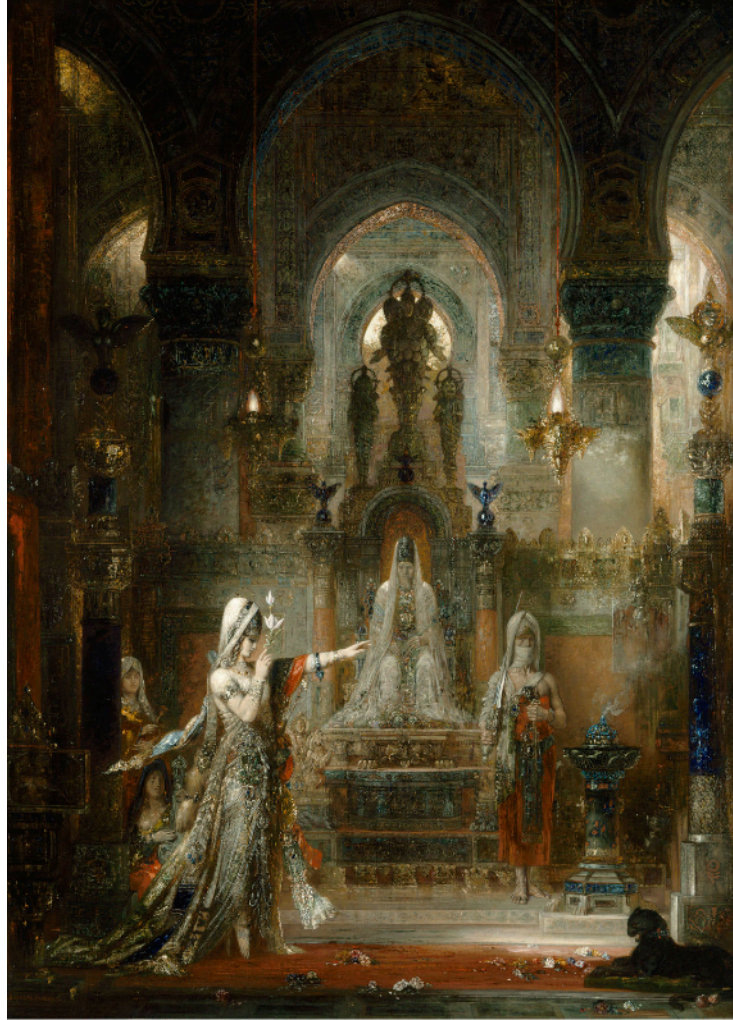


Fig. 33

Gustave Moreau, *Salomé Dancing Before Herod*, Salon of 1876, oil on canvas, 56.5 in (143.5 cm) by 41.1 in (104.3 cm), Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, AH 90.48





Fig. 34

Gustave Moreau, *The Apparition*, Salon of 1876, watercolor, 28.3 in (72 cm) by 41.3 in (105 cm), Musée d'Orsay, Paris © RMN-Grand Palais



Fig. 35

Photograph after Gustave Moreau's *Helen* exhibited at the Salon of 1880 (oil on canvas, 147 cm by 90 cm, whereabouts unknown), in *Catalogue de la vente Jules Beer*, Galerie Georges Petit, 29th May 1913 (n° 17) Paris, collection of Pierre-Louis Mathieu

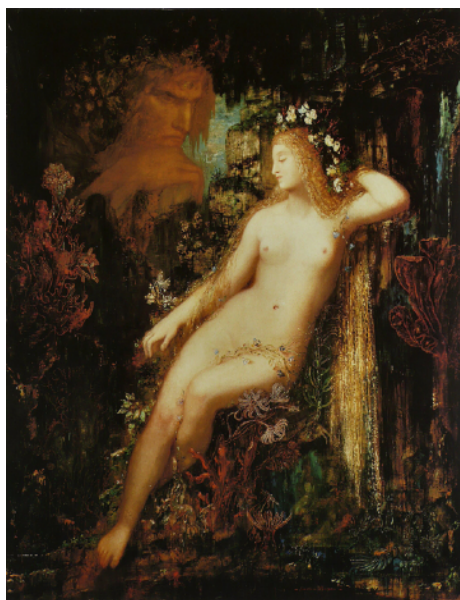


Fig. 36

Gustave Moreau, *Galatea*, Salon of 1880, oil on wood, 33.7 in (85.5 cm) by 26 in (66 cm), Musée d'Orsay, Paris, R.F. 1997-16 © RMN-Grand Palais



Fig. 37

Gustave Moreau, *Helen at the Scaean Gate*, 1880, oil on canvas, 28.3 in (72 cm) by 39.3 in (100 cm), Musée Gustave-Moreau, Paris, Cat. 42





Fig. 38

Gustave Moreau, *Helen on the Walls of Troy*, 1885, watercolor, 15.8 in (40 cm) by 9.1 in (23 cm), Musée d'Orsay, Paris © RMN-Grand Palais



Fig. 39  
Gustave Moreau, *Helen Glorified*, c. 1896, watercolor, gouache and shell gold on paper,  
12 in (30.5 cm) by 9 1/8 (23.2 cm), private collection

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