HERA AND HELEN REIMAGINED: MIRRORING IN EURIPIDES' *HELEN**

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to cast light on the mirroring between Hera and Helen in Euripides' *Helen*. While incorporating intertextual analysis, traditional myths and religious data, the research focuses primarily on the dramatic text to determine how these reflections harmonize with the central themes of the play, serve the plot, and highlight the poet's innovations.

KEYWORDS: Hera, Helen, mirror, virgin, *eidōlon*.

HERA Y HELENA REIMAGINADAS: EL ESPEJO EN LA *HELENA* DE EURÍPIDES

RESUMEN

Este estudio intenta arrojar luz sobre el reflejo (*mirroring*) entre Hera y Helena en la obra *Helena* de Eurípides. Al tiempo que incorpora el análisis intertextual, los mitos tradicionales y los datos religiosos, la investigación se centra principalmente en el texto dramático para determinar cómo estos reflejos armonizan con los temas centrales de la obra, sirven a la trama y resaltan las innovaciones del poeta.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Hera, Helena, reflejo, virgen, *eidōlon*.

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O midday thought, the Trojan war is being fought far from the battlefields! Once more the dreadful walls of the modern city will fall to deliver up–"soul serene as the ocean's calm"–the beauty of Helen (Albert Camus, *Helen's exile,* 1955: 138; translated by Justin O'Brien).

1. REFLECTIONS BETWEEN HERA AND HELEN

In *Helen*, Euripides reserves a leading role for Zeus' wife, albeit – once more – from the backstage[1]. Hera is the one who created the famous illusory double of Helen (*eidōlon*), the innovative mythical version that drives the action of the play[2]. Therefore, Austin (2008: 165) rightly emphasizes that Hera in this play «is the mastermind of the whole plot». Our study does not aim so much to highlight the role of Hera in the plot of the play, as to identify and interpret the instances where Hera and Helen mirror each other[3].

[1] The same was also the case in Euripides' *Heracles*. On Hera's role as one of the driving forces in many myths (e.g. of the Argonauts), see Pirenne-Delforge - Pironti - Graf (2022: 307-317). See also Bernabé (2017); San Cristóbal (2017) etc.

[2] According to Segal (1971: 567), the *eidōlon* «brings together a cluster of closely related themes: man's illusions about reality, the emptiness of war, the problem of the nature of the gods and of a simple anthropomorphic conception of the gods». For the various meanings of the term *eidōlon* in Euripides, see Zeitlin (1994: 188-195). For the connection of the Homeric *eidōla* of Heracles and Aeneas with other characteristic instances of this motif, such as the *eidōlon* of Iphigenia, see Constandinidou (2004: 173, n. 2).

[3] The crucial role played by reflections in ancient Greek myths has been highlighted by various scholars. See e.g. Vernant (1990); Frontisi-Ducroux - Vernant (1997). Zeitlin (2010: 263), noting that Helen appears to have two fathers (Zeus and Tyndareus), two mothers (Leda and Nemesis), the twin brothers Dioscuri, and two husbands (Menelaus and Paris), underlines: «her mode of being in the world is predicated on multiplicity and proliferation. More precisely, in her person she is susceptible to doubling and division, in her stories to endless repetitions and replications». On Helen's «doubled speech», see Lord (2010). Segal (1971: 562, 566) uses the terms «mirror-like confusion» and «confusion of identities» for *Helen*. On mirror scenes in tragedy, see e.g. Taplin (1978: 122-139). For the idea of mirroring in *Bacchae* as a metatragic aspect, see e.g. Segal (1982: 223): «Dionysus' mask is a mirror for Pentheus». On the allusion of *Bacchae* to the use of mirrors in Dionysiac ritual, see Seaford (1998). Yossi (2015: 71) uses the term «mirroring scene» for the point «where Pentheus puts on the garments of a *bacche* under the (stage) directions (or under the spell) of Dionysus». The art of mirroring is already traced in the *Iliad*, where μῆνις characterizes both Achilles (Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος; «The wrath sing, goddess, of Peleus' son, Achilles», *Il.* 1, 1) and Apollo (μῆνιν Ἀπόλλωνος ἑκατηβελέταο ἄνακτος; «the wrath of Apollo, the lord who strikes from afar», *Il.* 1, 75). See Rabel (1990). See also the study of Mitsis (2010) with the title «Achilles *Polytropos* and Odysseus as Suitor: *Iliad* 9.307-429». On Penelope as the mirror of Odysseus, see Frontisi-Ducroux - Vernant (1997: 265-304). The issue of reflection between different roles is examined in detail by Damen (1989). For role reversal as a crucial experimentation in *Orestes* and *Andromache*, see Burnett (1971: 130). Wilson (1992) argues that Euripides, drawing his material from the epic tradition, as he creates his characters, utilizes the model of Proteus' transformations. For example (Ibid., 129), he shapes the character of Medea so that she reflects both the bravery of Achilles and the cunning of Odysseus.

Hera's presence in *Helen* is indicated, among other things, by references to her love rivalries[4]. In the Prologue, Helen recounts that Zeus, transformed into a swan, made love to her mother, Leda: λόγος τις ὡς Ζεὺς μητέρ' ἔπτατ' εἰς ἐμὴν / Λήδαν κύκνου μορφώματ' ὄρνιθος λαβών («but there is indeed a story that Zeus flew to my mother Leda, taking the form of a bird, a swan», *Hel.* 18-19)[5]. In this particular legend, Leda and Hera mirror each other, because Zeus seduced both of them, taking the form of a bird. In the case of Hera, Zeus was transformed into a cuckoo[6]. In both cases Hera and Leda were deceived because Zeus did not appear before them as Zeus, but as a winged image of either a cuckoo or a swan. This divine metamorphosis can be compared with the *eidōlon* of Helen; both serve as instruments of deception.

On the complexity of the reflection of the various roles in *Orestes*, see Zeitlin (1980). In ancient Greek tragedies, the various heroes not only reflect each other, but also reflect heroes from other works (see, for example, the comparison made by Constantinidou (2004) between Aeschylean and Euripidean Helen with Hesiod's Pandora), as well as the spectators. Even the scenery plays this role. Yossi (2015: 78) points out about *Bacchae* that Thebes functions as Athens' mirror image. On the «double mirror» that «reflects the ambiguity of the tragic world» in Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Electra*, see Fongoni (2025). According to Yossi (2015: 71, n. 1), «Euripides uses the word κάτοπτρον four times (*Med.* 1156-1162, *Hipp.* 426-429, *El.* 1061-1067, *Danae*, fr. 322), six times the word εἴδωλον, four times εἰκώ or εἰκών, and seventeen times the word φάσμα. Κάτοπτρον and φάσμα are found in Aeschylus, although Sophocles has only εἴδωλον and φάσμα». Due to the distortion created by the multiple reflections technique, the questions multiply. Something similar is pointed out by Jan Kott about *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In this play too, the heroes reflect each other, and thus «everything has become ambivalent» (Kott, 1965: 176). McCarty (1989: 190) who explores the metaphor of mirroring in classical literature, emphasizes: «If mirroring is, as many of our sources suggest, an intrinsic property of mind, then it can hardly be surprising that its resonances in literature are impossible to delimit. In authors such as Euripides and Ovid, who are preoccupied with the discovery of inner secrets, the metaphor is especially important, and through Ovid's story of Narcissus it has gained an influential personality and a name». It is worth noting that Hera, in a Lucanian *krater* kept in the National Library of France (BN 422), is depicted with a mirror, while preparing to appear to Paris. Helen often appears in ancient art either with a mirror or in a mirror (see, for example, the mirror depicting Helen, Paris and the Dioscuri in Copenhagen's Thorvaldsens Museum H2162).

[4] The reference to Dionysus (*Hel.* 1364-1365) could also be taken as an allusion to Zeus' extramarital affairs, since his mother was Semele and not Hera.

[5] A reference to the myth of Zeus' transformation into a swan, in order to seduce Leda, is also made below in the Parodos (*Hel.* 212-216). Translations of all extant passages from *Helen* are from E. P. Coleridge: see Oates - O'Neil (1938). Translation by Way (1912) is used only for the first verse of *Helen*. Passages from *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are translated by Murray (1924) and Murray (1919) respectively; Eur. *Hipp.* by Murray (1902); Eur. *El.*, *HF*, *Or.* by E. P. Coleridge: see Oates - O'Neil (1938); Thuc. *Hist.* by Crawley (1910); Arist. *Poet.* by L. Golden (Golden - Hardison, 1968); Pind. *Pyth.* by Sandys (1930); Hes., *HH* 5 by Evelyn-White (1914); Hdt. by Godley (1920); Aesch. [*PV*] by Smyth (1926, I); Paus. by Jones - Litt - Ormerod (1918); Apollod. [*Epit.*] by Frazer (1921); Ar. *Thesm.* by anonymous translator; see Oates - O'Neil (1938). If no translator's name is stated, the translation is my own. All citations of Euripides' *Helen* follow the text of J. Diggle (*Oxford Classical Texts*, 1994). For other ancient texts, the standard *OCT* editions have been used.

[6] As Ρούσσος (1986a: 94) notes, «the story of Hera with the cuckoo is modeled on the better-known myth of Leda with the swan. The transformation of Zeus into a cuckoo, as well as into a swan,

Helen's reference to this mythical version so early in the play is not only significant for the skepticism expressed about the myth (εἰ σαφὴς οὗτος λόγος; «if this story is true», *Hel.* 21)[7], setting up the pattern of opposition between truth and illusion, between reality and appearance, but also because it functions as an implication for the connection between Helen and Hera. The myth of Helen's birth not only recalls the common experience of Hera and Leda, but also that Hera hated Helen because Paris chose her. Besides, Helen was another illegitimate child of Zeus.

I propose that the mention of Callisto should also be examined in a similar context (ὦ μάκαρ Ἀρκαδίᾳ ποτὲ παρθένε Καλλιστοῖ; «O maiden Kallisto, blessed once in Arcadia», *Hel.* 375). The mention of Callisto not only alludes to Helen, who also suffered because she was gorgeous (καλλίστη)[8], but also to Hera. Just as Callisto was transformed into the constellation Ursa Major, so Hera in *Helen* is shown dwelling in the stars (οἰκεῖς ἀστέρων ποικίλματα; «you have your home in an embroidery of stars», *Hel.* 1096). Besides, the Milky Way, according to myth, owes its name to Hera's milk[9]. Furthermore, Callisto's transformations (into a bear and a constellation) were consequences of Hera's wrath against another beautiful woman who made love with Zeus (see Paus. 8,3,6-7).

However, in the play, it is not only Hera or Callisto or the *dei ex machina* Dioscuri, but also Helen, who is associated with the stars. This is emphasized by the Messenger (ὦ χαῖρε, Λήδας θύγατερ· ἐνθάδ' ἦσθ' ἄρα. / ἐγὼ δέ σ' ἄστρων ὡς βεβηκυῖαν μυχοὺς / ἤγγελλον εἰδὼς οὐδὲν ὡς ὑπόπτερον / δέμας φοροίης; «Welcome, daughter of

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goes back to the bird-like representation of the gods, which for the chapter on zoomorphism of the divinity is especially characteristic when it comes to deities of the air, such as Zeus». In the *Cypria*, Zeus transformed into a goose to mate with Nemesis, who in another mythical version was the mother of Helen.

[7] The myth of Helen's birth is also questioned in *IA* 795-800. Torrance (2010: 237) points out that the questioning of the myth of the union of Zeus with Leda in *IA* 795-800 refers to the *eidōlon* of *Helen*. The motif of questioning myths is often exploited by Euripides (e.g. μύθοις δ' ἄλλως φερόμεσθα; «and we drift on legends for ever», *Hipp.* 197; φοβεροὶ δὲ βροτοῖσι μῦθοι / κέρδος πρὸς θεῶν θεραπείαν; «but tales that frighten men are profitable for service to the gods», *El.* 743-744). On the "lies" of poetry, see e.g. Solon fr. 29 West: πολλά ψεύδονται ἀοιδοί («the poets tell many lies»); Thuc. 1, 10, 3 τῇ Ὁμήρου αὖ ποιήσει εἴ τι χρὴ κἀνταῦθα πιστεύειν; «if we can here also accept the testimony of Homer's poems»; Arist. *Poet.* 1460a 19 δεδίδαχεν δὲ μάλιστα Ὅμηρος καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ψευδῆ λέγειν ὡς δεῖ; «Homer has especially taught others how it is necessary to lie»; Eur. *HF* 1315 ἀοιδῶν εἴπερ οὐ ψευδεῖς λόγοι; «if what poets sing is true»; *HF* 1346 ἀοιδῶν οἵδε δύστηνοι λόγοι; «these are miserable tales of the poets» etc. This pattern is particularly characteristic in *HF* 1340-1346. See e.g. Brown (1978), as well as Chatzikosta (2024).

[8] For the connection of the καλλοσύνας ἕνεκεν (*Hel.* 183) referring to Helen's beauty with Καλλιστοῖ (*Hel.* 376), see Allan (2008: 194).

[9] The Milky Way, according to the tradition, took its name from Hera's milk, which was ejected into the universe when she realized that the infant she was breastfeeding was Heracles. See e.g. John Philoponus *On Aristotle Meteorology* 1, 98; Eratosthenes *Catasterismi* 3,44.

Leda, were you here after all? I was just announcing your departure up to the hidden starry realms, not knowing that you had a winged body», *Hel.* 616-619). In addition to the Dioscuri who announce at the end of the play that Helen will be a goddess, Apollo also announces her apotheosis at the end of *Orestes*. According to Apollo, Helen will dwell in the stars, cohabiting with Hera (*Or.* 1684-1687).

The point in the play where it is emphatically implied that Helen reflects Hera is found in the Prologue, where the heroine reveals that Hera created her *eidōlon* (ἀλλ᾽ ὁμοιώσασ᾽ ἐμοὶ / εἴδωλον ἔμπνουν οὐρανοῦ ξυνθεῖσ᾽ ἄπο; «but an image, alive and breathing, that she fashioned out of the sky and made to look like me», *Hel.* 33-34)[10]. This is because Helen's *eidōlon* reflects the *eidōlon* of Hera. As Allan (2008: 151-152) notes, the word *eidōlon* «has connotations of deception, being used for images that are misleading or unreal…», while «the closest parallel to Hera's substitution of Helen in an erotic context is the replacement of Hera herself when Ixion tries to rape her, so that Ixion lay instead with a cloud fashioned by Zeus». Allan refers to a passage of Pindar (*Pyth.* 2, 36-37), where the *eidōlon* of Hera is called a 'sweet lie' (ψεῦδος γλυκύ)[11]. After all, Hera in the *Iliad* plays a leading part in a crucial erotic deception. Thanks to her, *Iliad* 14 is called *Dios Apatē* ('Deception of Zeus').

In this rhapsody, Zeus who gathers the clouds (νεφεληγερέτα Ζεύς) is trapped by the feigned amorous seduction of Hera in a beautiful golden cloud (νεφέλην καλὴν χρυσείην). *Helen* seems to allude several times to this motif of deception in the *Iliad*, which has a cloud as its wrapping (e.g. νεφέλης ἄρ᾽ ἄλλως εἴχομεν πόνους πέρι;; «We suffered in vain for the sake of a cloud?» *Hel.* 707; νεφέλης λέγεις ἄγαλμ᾽; ἐς αἰθέρ᾽ οἴχεται; «You mean the cloud image? It has gone into the air», *Hel.* 1219)[12].

[10] Segal (1971: 564-565) suggests that in the Prologue the repeated words denoting air and accompanying the *eidōlon* emphasize its unreal dimension. I would like to add that these words also fit with the celestial nature of Hera, whose name was derived, according to some views in antiquity, from air. See, e.g., the ancient *Scholia* in the *Iliad* (3,1,46): Ἥρα γὰρ ὁ ἀήρ. Cf. Plat. *Crat.* 404b-c, where Hera's name is etymologically linked to ἐρατή ('desirable'), a common characteristic with Helen.

[11] Allan is also mentioning Aeschylus fr. 89 R. Just as the *eidōlon* of Helen in Euripides is made out of *aithēr*, the *eidōlon* of Hera in Pindar is made out of «air» (ἐπεὶ νεφέλᾳ παρελέξατο / ψεῦδος γλυκὺ μεθέπων ἄϊδρις ἀνήρ / εἶδος γὰρ ὑπεροχωτάτᾳ πρέπεν Οὐρανιᾶν / θυγατέρι Κρόνου· ἄντε δόλον αὐτῷ θέσαν / Ζηνὸς παλάμαι, καλὸν πῆμα; «since it was a cloud that, all unwitting, he embraced in the bliss of his delusive dream, for, in semblance, that cloud was like unto the Queen of the Celestials, the daughter of Cronus. It was the hands of Zeus that had set that cloud as a snare for him, a beautiful bane», *Pyth.* 2, 36-40). Constantinidou (2004: 221, n. 165) associates the καλὸν πῆμα ('a beautiful misery') with the καλὸν κακόν ('beautiful evil'), with which Hesiod characterizes Pandora (*Th.* 585). A similar experience to Ixion seems to have been had by Endymion, who also lusted after Hera and was also deceived by an *eidōlon* that resembled her (λέγεται τὸν Ἐνδυμίωνα ἀνενεχθῆναι ὑπὸ τοῦ Διὸς εἰς οὐρανόν, ἐρασθέντα δὲ Ἥρας εἰδώλῳ παραλογισθῆναι [τὸν ἔρωτα] νεφέλης καὶ ἐκβληθέντα κατελθεῖν εἰς Ἅιδου; «it is said that Endymion was transported by Zeus into heaven, but when he fell in love with Hera, was befooled with a shape of cloud, and was cast out and went into Hades», Hes. fr. 260 M-W). See Zeitlin (2010: 265).

[12] See also *Hel.* 45 (νεφέλη), 705 (νεφέλης), 750 (νεφέλης). Furthermore, Zeus had once deceived Hera by making a simulacrum of his supposed mistress, Plataea (Paus. 9, 3,1-8).

Hera's δόλος ('wile') is repeatedly emphasized in *Iliad* 14 (197, 300, 329) with the type δολοφρονέουσα ('wily-minded'). This quality of Hera is also expressed in *Helen*, especially with the noun μηχανή ('trickery'): πάντες τ' Ἀχαιοί, δι' ἔμ' ἐπὶ Σκαμανδρίοις / ἀκταῖσιν Ἥρας μηχαναῖς ἐθνήσκετε; «and all the Achaeans! On my account you were dying by the banks of Skamandros, through Hera's contrivance», *Hel.* 609-610). However, Hera is not the only one skilled in machination. Helen, her mirror image, also possesses this gift, since she urges Menelaus to resort to tricks to save themselves (δεῖ δὲ μηχανῆς τινος; «we need some contrivance», *Hel.* 813; κοινὴν ξυνάπτειν μηχανὴν σωτηρίας; «frame a device to save ourselves», *Hel.* 1034)[13].

Euripides in various ways in this play presents a «new» Helen who reflects not only Hera (goddess of marriage and family ties)[14], but also Penelope (the symbol of the faithful wife)[15]. Constantinidou[16] points out that Helen is associated with the theme of marriage in both the *Iliad* and the Parthenon sculptures, where the theme of Hera's marriage to Zeus is also depicted. In Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*, a comedy that targets the «new» Helen, Euripides is accused in a passage of presenting many immoral women in his plays, such as Phaedra and Melanippe, but never a virtuous Penelope (*Thesm.* 547-548).

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[13] Downing (1990: 8) points out: «Most importantly, the *apatê* and *dolos* of Hera, and her *technai* and *mêchanai* which are responsible for the tragedy of the Trojan War (930; 610), are answered by the *technai* and *mêchanai* of Helen (1091, 1621; 813, 1034), which are responsible for the 'comedy' of their escape, or rather for the *dolos* by which they win their *agôn* (1589; cf. 1542; there are of course other parallels and other possible configurations as well)». The adjective δόλιος ('deceitful') appears frequently in *Helen*. See e.g. ἔρωτας ἀπάτας δόλιά τ' ἐξευρήματα; «arts of love, deceits, and treacherous schemes», *Hel.* 1103; δόλιος ἡ ναυκληρία, «There is treachery in this voyage», *Hel.* 1589; ὃς δόλιον εὐνὴν ἐξέπραξ' ὑπ' αἰετοῦ, «which accomplished the deceitful union, fleeing the pursuit of an eagle» *Hel.* 20 etc. On the issue of deceit in *Helen*, see Ibid. 1990. Constantinidou (2004: 201, n. 106) referring to the charm of Helen and Pandora that functions as a trap, suggests that this is how the adornment of Hera in the *Iliad* (14,170-186) also functioned. It is not only Hera who seduces Zeus with deceit in *Iliad* (14). The element of erotic deceit is also found in rhapsody 3, where Aphrodite, as deceitful (δολοφρονέουσα, *Il.* 3 405), violently persuades Helen to seduce Paris.

[14] For Hera as goddess of marriage, see e.g. Elderkin (1937); Clark (1998: 13-26).

[15] On the common elements of Helen in the homonymous tragedy with Penelope in the *Odyssey*, see e.g. Holmberg (1995); Weiberg (2020). The parallelism of Helen with Penelope is also strengthened by the fact that Euripides makes it clear from the first verses of the Prologue that he is alluding to the *Odyssey*. Typical examples are the references to Theoclymenus, Eido, Proteus and Nereus. In many passages of *Helen* it is pointed out that this is a story of *nostos* (see e.g. μόνος δὲ νοστῶ, «alone I come», *Hel.* 428; Κύπρις δὲ νόστον σὸν διαφθεῖραι θέλει, «but Cypris fain would wreek thine home-return», *Hel.* 884 etc.). The shipwrecked Menelaus is reminiscent of the shipwrecked Odysseus, while Helen is shown waiting for her husband for years like a faithful Penelope (e.g. πόσιν ἐμὸν ‹ἐμὸν› ἔχομεν ἔχομεν ὃν ἔμενον / ἔμενον ἐκ Τροίας πολυετῆ μολεῖν, «I have my husband, for whom I have been waiting to come from Troy for many years», *Hel.* 650-651). According to Steiger (1908: 202-237), *Helen* is a parody of the *Odyssey*.

[16] Constantinidou (2004: 220) notes that Helen «is veiling herself, βῆ δὲ κατασχομένη ἑανῷ ἀργῆτι φαεινῷ; «and she went, wrapping herself in her bright shining mantle» (*Iliad* 3.419), and in silence (σιγῇ: line 420) she went to his *domos* where their erotic union took place. This scene has been

Aristophanes's sideswipe is particularly apt, especially with the type of σώφρων ('prudent'), because the adjective that characterizes Penelope in the *Odyssey* is περίφρων ('very thoughtful')[17], while the «new» Helen, represented by Euripides as a faithful Penelope, is characterized by the superlative form of σώφρων (ἀρίστης σωφρονεστάτης θ' ἅμα; «the best and also most self-controlled», *Hel.* 1684). It may seem reasonable that the faithful and prudent wife Penelope should be associated with Hera as Τελεία (goddess-protector of legal marriage), while Helen, who Euripides presents as the prudent Penelope, should be considered a bold reversal of tradition, since there she had been established as an adulteress[18]. Moreover, in *Helen*, the heroine is supposed to lose the favor of Aphrodite, who traditionally protected her, and prays to Hera who changed her mind and became favorable towards her.

Before we proceed with our analysis, we have to mention that Hera's impressive change of mind (Ἥρα μέν, ἥ σοι δυσμενὴς πάροιθεν ἦν, / νῦν ἐστιν εὔνους κἀς πάτραν σῷσαι θέλει; «Hera, who was hostile to you before, is now friendly and wants to bring you safely home», *Hel.* 880-881) reflects the equally impressive reversal of Helen, who ultimately prefers life to death (φίλαι, λόγους ἐδεξάμαν; «Dear friends, I welcome your advice», *Hel.* 330). Just as the audience's expectations regarding Helen are subverted, so are those regarding Hera. From the beginning, Euripides creates the illusion that in this play, Hera will play the role of the ruthless goddess she had in the *Iliad*[19]. Hera's inexplicable behavior in *Helen* operates within a motif that is

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interpreted as one of the stages of a wedding ritual, of Helen's wedding which is re-enacted in the end of *Iliad* 3. Pandora too is married to Epimetheus, and as has been pointed out her presence on the base of Athena's statue could be related to the marriage theme too, as did other parts of the Parthenon sculptures like the Centauromachy, or the scene on the north metopes related to Helen's and Menelaos' broken marriage, and the unveiling wedding ritual of Hera before Zeus on the east frieze».

[17] See e.g. *Od.* 23,10-14, where the epic emphasizes Penelope's prudence with the words περίφρων, ἄφρονα, ἐπίφρονά, χαλιφρονέοντα and σαοφροσύνης.

[18] Helen, from the time of Homer to the present day, is one of the most controversial figures in literature. In the *Iliad*, the heroine is accused on the one hand, but on the other hand, Priam defends her. The *Palinode* of Stesichorus is perhaps one of the most characteristic examples of the ambivalent attitude of poets towards Helen. She is not only presented negatively in other poets, such as Aeschylus (e.g. *Ag.* 681-692) but also in other plays of Euripides himself, such as the *Trojan Women*.

[19] Austin (2008: 194-195) observes: «If Hera in the *Helen* is, as Charles Segal finds her, spiteful and savage, that is a sly trick on the poet's part to have us believe we are still in Homer's world, where Hera is a wild animal licking her lips, ready to devour Priam and his city raw, to satisfy her honor. But the Hera of the *Helen* is as newly minted as Helen herself, for precisely her role in this plot. Homer's Hera might be blamed on the tradition, but the Hera of this play has no such excuse, since the play is a deliberate rewriting of the whole epic tradition». Here I would like to add that both Hera and Helen are ambiguous in both tradition and Euripides. Besides, Hera was negatively depicted not only in *Iliad*, but in Euripides' *Heracles* too, where she is blamed about her envy. Yunis (1988: 166), commenting on the envy that Heracles attributes to Hera in the homonymous tragedy of Euripides (λέκτρων φθονοῦσα Ζηνὶ τοὺς εὐεργέτας / Ἑλλάδος ἀπώλεσ' οὐδὲν ὄντας αἰτίους; «her jealousy of Zeus for his love of a woman has destroyed the benefactors of Hellas, guiltless though they were», *HF.* 1309-1310), makes it clear that this point does not mean questioning the existence of the goddess; in fact, in order

crucial to the play; it is about the unpredictable and incomprehensible behavior of the gods towards mortals.

After Menelaus reveals to the Messenger that the shadow for which blood was unjustly shed in Troy was directed by Hera (Ἥρας τάδ᾽ ἔργα καὶ θεῶν τρισσῶν ἔρις; «It was the work of Hera, and the rivalry of the three goddesses», *Hel.* 708), he immediately places special emphasis on this motif (ὦ θύγατερ, ὁ θεὸς ὡς ἔφυ τι ποικίλον / καὶ δυστέκμαρτον, εὖ δε πως πάντα στρέφει / [ἐκεῖσε κἀκεῖσ᾽ ἀναφέρων]; «O daughter, how intricate and hard to trace out is the nature of the god! In some way that is good, he twists everything about, now up, now down», *Hel.* 711-713). In the First Stasimon, immediately after εἴδωλον ἱερὸν Ἥρας («Hera's holy phantom», *Hel.* 1136), there follows a thought about the nature of the gods (ὅτι θεὸς ἢ μὴ θεὸς ἢ τὸ μέσον / τις φησ᾽ ἐρευνάσας βροτῶν; «What is god, or what is not god, or what is in between – what mortal says he has found it by searching the farthest limit», *Hel.* 1137-1138)[20].

It is not only the gods, like Hera, who are something ποικίλον ('intricate') and δυστέκμαρτον ('hard to trace'), but also Helen with her enigmatic *eidōlon*. Menelaus, upon learning from Helen that his real wife was in Egypt, initially thinks he has lost his mind (οὔ που φρονῶ μὲν εὖ, τὸ δ᾽ ὄμμα μου νοσεῖ;, «Can it be that I am in my right mind, but my sight is failing?», *Hel.* 575) and finds what she tells him unbelievable, using the term ἄελπτα ('unhoped for', *Hel.* 585). Similarly, for the unexpected behavior of the gods, the Chorus at the end of the play uses the adverb ἀέλπτως ('beyond all hope', *Hel.* 1689). Besides, just as Hera unexpectedly transforms from the relentless goddess who pursued the heroine into her protector, so Helen, while in the first part of the play she appeared as a defenseless victim, in the second part she transforms into a kind of victimizer who knows how to hatch deceitful plans.

We should keep in mind that the game of mirroring also existed in tradition. As Euripides persistently alludes to the epic, and especially to the *Odyssey*, he also helps his audience to bring this game back to their memory. In the *Iliad*, the adjective κυνῶπις ('dog-eyed, shameless') is used both for Hera and for Helen[21]. Moreover, in this epic, both Hera and Helen are called λευκώλενος ('white-armed')[22].

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to show that points of this kind are not found exclusively in Euripides, he also quotes a characteristic phrase about the envy of the gods from Herodotus (1, 32, 1): τὸ θεῖον πᾶν ἐὸν φθονερόν τε καὶ ταραχῶδες; « the divine is entirely grudging and troublesome».

[20] On this passage, see Segal (1971: 567). This motif will culminate in the last verses of the play in a conclusion that is stereotypical of other plays by the poet, who does not fail to indicate that not only the gods are unpredictable, but also the plot of his innovative poetry.

[21] For Hera: μητρὸς ἐμῆς ἰότητι κυνώπιδος, ἥ μ᾽ ἐθέλησε / κρύψαι χωλὸν ἐόντα; «through the will of my shameless mother, that was fain to hide me away by reason of my lameness», *Il.* 18, 396-397; for Helen: δαὴρ αὖτ᾽ ἐμὸς ἔσκε κυνώπιδος, εἴ ποτ᾽ ἔην γε; «and he was husband's brother to shameless me», *Il.* 3,180.

[22] See, e.g., for Hera, *Il.* 24, 55, and for Helen, *Il.* 3,121.

Hera and Penelope are called by their husbands with the epithet δαιμονίη[23]. Levine (1983: 178), who points out various commonalities between Hera and Penelope, emphasizes that Penelope's deception of the suitors in the *Odyssey* is reminiscent of Hera's deception of Zeus in the *Iliad*[24]. Just as Penelope deceives the suitors, by charming them (*Od.* 18,158-168), so too Euripides' Helen pretends to have decided to marry Theoclymenus[25]. After all, Helen reflects Penelope already in the Homeric epics[26].

Furthermore, there was a statue of the goddess Hera-Aphrodite in Sparta (ξόανον δὲ ἀρχαῖον καλοῦσιν Ἀφροδίτης Ἥρας; «an old wooden image they call that of Aphrodite Hera», Paus. 3, 13, 9). Δεκάζου-Στεφανοπούλου (2000: 176) underlines: «Hera was identified with the goddess Aphrodite and thus bestowed upon young girls not only wisdom, but also beauty». The complaints that Helen expresses in the homonymous tragedy about Hera, before learning of the goddess's change of mind, recall the confrontation that Helen of the *Iliad* has with Aphrodite[27]. When Euripides' Helen criticizes Aphrodite's deceit (ἔρωτας ἀπάτας δόλιά τ' ἐξευρήματα; «arts of love, deceits, and treacherous schemes», *Hel.* 1103), she alludes not only to this Iliadic confrontation, but also to the Hera of the *Iliad*[28].

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[23] See e.g. for Hera, *Il.* 1, 560-561 (τὴν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη νεφεληγερέτα Ζεύς· / δαιμονίη, αἰεὶ μὲν ὄΐεαι, οὐδέ σε λήθω; «then in answer to her spoke Zeus, the cloud-gatherer: Strange one, you are always suspecting, and I do not escape you»), and for Penelope, *Od.* 23, 263-264 (τὴν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς· / «δαιμονίη, τι τ' ἄρ' αὖ με μάλ' ὀτρύνουσα κελεύεις; «and Odysseus of many wiles answered her, and said: 'Strange lady! why dost thou now so urgently bid me tell thee'?).

[24] As maintained by Levine (1983: 174), Penelope's laughter in the *Odyssey* (18, 163) refers to Hera's smile in the *Iliad* (14, 222). «Penelope's personality is complex: she is on the one hand a confused woman with a divided mind, but, like Hera, she is capable and clever and shows this by her initiation of the μνηστήρων ἀπάτη»: Ibid.: 178.

[25] See also the comparison attempted by Holmberg (1995: 30-38) between Euripides' Helen and the *Odyssey*'s Penelope, regarding the deception of their respective would-be suitors.

[26] Despite their differences, Helen and Penelope reflected each other in the *Odyssey*, and the praise of their glory seems to be perpetuated: Helen's name will be praised by future generations (ὡς καὶ ὀπίσσω / ἀνθρώποισι πελώμεθ' ἀοίδιμοι ἐσσομένοισι; «that even in days to come we may be a song for men that are yet to be», *Il.* 6, 357-358), while Penelope's fame will reach the sky (ἦ γάρ σευ κλέος οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἱκάνει; «for thy fame goes up to the broad heaven», *Od.* 19, 108). Moreover, if we accept that weaving functioned as an allegory of poetic composition, we should not forget that in Homeric poetry both Helen and Penelope weave. In the *Odyssey*, Penelope is not only compared to Clytemnestra, but also to Helen (*Od.* 23, 218-224), while Penelope's voice is one of those that Helen reproduces around the Trojan horse (*Od.* 4, 280). On the other hand, in traditional myths, not only Helen appeared as an unfaithful wife, but also Penelope. In some versions, Pan was the son of Penelope and Apollo (*Scholia* in *Rhesus*, 2, 36).

[27] τοὔνεκα δὴ νῦν δεῦρο δολοφρονέουσα παρέστης; «it is for this cause that thou art now come hither with guileful thought, *Il.* 3, 405.

[28] Ἥρη θῆλυς ἐοῦσα δολοφροσύνῃς ἀπάτησεν; «yet even him Hera, that was but a woman, beguiled in her craftiness», *Il.* 19, 97.

Helen's abundant references to the concept of marriage certainly recall Hera as the goddess of marriage. The poet emphasizes this concept, not only by focusing on the need to restore the bond of Helen and Menelaus' marriage, but even with repetitions that create intense alliterations (*Hel.* 689-690): ἄγαμος ἄτεκνος, ὦ πόσι, καταστένει / γάμον ἄγαμον †αἰσχύνα†; «Ah, my husband! Unmarried, without children, she mourns my fatal marriage».

We notice that here (as elsewhere in *Helen*) Menelaus is called by the Homeric word πόσις ('husband'). In the *Iliad*, πόσις is used repeatedly either for Zeus as the husband of Hera (e.g. *Il.* 7, 411) or for Paris as the husband of Helen (*Il.* 3, 329), but also for Menelaus (*Il.* 3, 429)[29]. Furthermore, the repeated use of the feminine Homeric name δάμαρ ('wife'), which is used for Helen, also emphasizes marriage (e.g. ἀπόδος, ἀπαιτῶ τὴν ἐμὴν δάμαρτά σε; «give her back, I demand of you my wife»; *Hel.* 963). But δάμαρ is also used for Hera[30]. The word ἄλοχος, synonymous with δάμαρ, accompanies in *Helen* both Hera (ἁ Διός μ' ἄλοχος ὤλεσεν; «the wife of Zeus ruined me»; *Hel.* 674), and Helen (βέβηκεν ἄλοχος σὴ πρὸς αἰθέρος πτυχὰς; «Your wife has disappeared, taken up into the folds of the unseen air»; *Hel.* 605).

When Helen is called νύμφη ('bride', *Hel.* 725) she brings to mind Hera who, as the goddess of marriage, bore the titles Νυμφευομένη and Νύμφη[31]. References to the marital bed (being protected by Hera) are frequent in *Helen* (e.g. *Hel.* 584, 1261)[32]. Helen, who prays to the goddess of marriage (ὦ πότνι' Δίοισιν ἐν λέκτροις πίτνεις, / Ἥρα; «Lady Hera, you who lie in the bed of Zeus»; *Hel.* 1093-1094), has assured Menelaus, as if she were a real Penelope, that her own bed had never been tarnished by infidelities (ἄθικτον εὐνὴν ἴσθι σοι σεσωμένην; «Know that I have saved myself untouched for you»; *Hel.* 795).

Furthermore, the adjective σεμνός («revered, holy»), which was used to designate gods or sanctuaries[33], is used in *Hel.* 242 for Hera (ἁ δὲ χρυσέοις θρόνοισι / Διὸς ὑπαγκάλισμα σεμνὸν / Ἥρα; «But Hera, the holy beloved of Zeus on her golden throne»), while in *Hel.* 607 for the cave that housed the *eidōlon* of Helen (λιποῦσα σεμνὸν ἄντρον οὗ σφ' ἐσώιζομεν; «as she left the hallowed cave where we were keeping

[29] According to Allan (2008: 156), Helen «remains faithful, though she has not seen Menelaus for seventeen years (111-114). Such a long separation from her husband, who may well be dead (cf. 131-132), reinforces Helen's presentation as a quasi-parthenaic figure who is (in Theoclymenus' eyes at least) ready once more for marriage».

[30] E.g. Aesch. [*PV*] 834: προσηγορεύθης ἡ Διὸς κλεινὴ δάμαρ; «were saluted as the renowned bride-to-be of Zeus»; Eur. *HF* 1303: χορευέτω δὴ Ζηνὸς ἡ κλεινὴ δάμαρ; «So let that noble wife of Zeus dance».

[31] E.g. Paus. 9.2.7: ἐνταῦθα καὶ ἄλλο Ἥρας ἄγαλμα καθήμενον Καλλίμαχος ἐποίησε· Νυμφευομένην δὲ τὴν θεὸν ἐπὶ λόγῳ τοιῷδε ὀνομάζουσιν; «Here too is another image of Hera; it is seated, and was made by Callimachus. The goddess they call the Bride for the following reason».

[32] On the beds as votive offerings to the sanctuary of Hera at Argos, see Giacco - Marchetti (2017: 339-340).

[33] E.g. σεμνὸς Ποσειδῶν (Soph. *OT* 55); σεμνὰ Δωδώνης βάθρα (Eur. *Phoen.* 982).

her»). Another point that confirms that in this play Helen functions as a reflection of Hera is the fact that Euripides uses for both of them the word πότνια ('mistress, queen, revered'), which mainly designates goddesses[34].

As we can see in verse 1093, Helen calls Hera πότνια. We should emphasize that in Parodos, Chorus had called Helen that way (πότνια; *Hel.* 225). Since Helen prays to the goddess for the success of her escape with Menelaus (and therefore for a safe sea voyage), the impression is created that Helen is praying to Hera, as if she were a goddess who protects navigation. This view is reinforced by the fact that Helen prays to Hera who dwells in the stars (ἵν' οἰκεῖς ἀστέρων ποικίλματα; «where you have your home in an embroidery of stars»; *Hel.* 1096), as do her brothers, the Dioscuri, who shone in the sky as the constellation of Gemini that protected sailors[35].

Πότνια Hera and πότνια Helen: the association that is created between them through the address πότνια indicates the divine nature of Helen. Besides, it seems that Helen was in very ancient times a goddess of vegetation[36]. The Dioscuri announce in *Hel.* 1667-1669 her apotheosis. With this divine attribute, Helen, among other things, reflects – the also goddess – Hera to a greater extent. The fact that, according to *Helen*'s Dioscuri, Menelaus will also acquire the privilege of residing on the island of the Blessed, gives the Helen-Menelaus couple the bliss enjoyed by Zeus and Hera.

In Euripides' *Orestes*, which is considered the sequel of *Helen* (Wright [2006]), Helen is transformed by Apollo into a goddess protector of sailors. Her new home will be the stars alongside her brothers the Dioscuri (Κάστορί τε Πολυδεύκει τ' ἐν αἰθέρος πτυχαῖς / σύνθακος ἔσται, ναυτίλοις σωτήριος; «and take her seat with Castor and Polydeuces in the enfolding air, a savior to mariners»; *Or.* 1636-1637), as well as Hera and Hebe, the mirror image of Ganymedes[37].

One of the reasons why Helen stands next to Hera high in the starry sky is because Zeus' wife was also a goddess who protected seafarers[38]. Furthermore,

[34] For Hera as a πότνια θηρῶν, see Yalouris (1950: 88).

[35] Willink (1986: 360) maintains that Euripides was an authority on the mythography of the stars, an art with ancient roots in Greece. See also Hannah (2002).

[36] In Therapne there was a sanctuary of Helen, who, according to Herodotus (6, 61, 3), bestowed beauty on ugly girls. The inscription that existed on a sacred plane tree dedicated to Helen is mentioned by Theocritus in the *Idylls* (18, 48): σέβου μ'· Ἑλένας φυτὸν εἰμί; «Respect me; I am Helen's plant». For the connection of Helen with vegetation deities, see Skutsch (1987).

[37] *Or.* 1684-1690. Ρούσσος (1986b: 85) observes: «Ganymedes is a figure corresponding to Hebe, the daughter of Zeus». According to Pausanias (2, 13,3), τὴν δὲ θεὸν ἧς ἐστι τὸ ἱερὸν οἱ μὲν ἀρχαιότατοι Φλιασίων Γανυμήδαν, οἱ δὲ ὕστερον Ἥβην ὀνομάζουσιν; «the earliest Phliasians named the goddess to whom the sanctuary belongs Ganymeda; but later authorities call her Hebe».

[38] On Hera as goddess of navigation, see Boedeker (2016: 200-203), who observes that Hera was worshipped as Λιμενία, while also emphasizing the gratitude of sailors towards the goddess, as described by Herodotus (4,152, 1-4). Rozokoki (2011: 58, n. 3) points out that the epithet Λιμενία was also attributed to Aphrodite, as were the following: Γαληναίη, Εὔπλοια, Θαλασσαίη, Πελαγία, Ποντία. For Athena as the patron goddess of sailors, see Paus. 1.5.3: ἐν Ἀθηνᾶς Αἰθυίας καλουμένῳ σκοπέλῳ.

according to the *Scholia* in Pindar's *Nemean Odes* (10, 150), there was also the version that Helen was the daughter of Oceanus. Correspondingly, Hera informs us in the *Iliad* that she was raised by Oceanus and Tethys[39].

I have argued elsewhere that in this context sailors allegorically symbolize poets[40]. Therefore, Hera and Helen, as protectors of sailors from the starry sky, also function as goddesses who protect poetry. After all, Hera, as she creates the *eidōlon*, is the «mastermind of the plot», while Helen is traditionally closely associated with poetry, since she is identified with Homer himself[41]. In *Helen*, the heroine, even in her hour of despair, struggles with the expression of her pain, like a poet struggles with the expression of his art (τίνα μοῦσαν ἐπέλθω; «what Muse shall I approach?», *Hel.* 165)[42].

Apollo also was worshipped as a god who protected sailors; He was called Ἐμβάσιος (god of embarkation) in Pagasae (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1,359-361), and Ἐπιβατήριος in Troizen (τούτου δὲ ἐντὸς τοῦ περιβόλου ναός ἐστιν Ἀπόλλωνος Ἐπιβατηρίου, Διομήδους ἀνάθημα ἐκφυγόντος τὸν χειμῶνα ὃς τοῖς Ἕλλησιν ἐπεγένετο ἀπὸ Ἰλίου κομιζομένοις; «within this enclosure is a temple of Apollo Seafaring, an offering of Diomedes for having weathered the storm that came upon the Greeks as they were returning from Troy», Paus. 2, 32, 2).

[39] Ὠκεανόν τε, θεῶν γένεσιν, καὶ μητέρα Τηθύν, / οἵ με σφοῖσι δόμοισιν ἐὺ τρέφον ἠδ' ἀτίταλλον; «and Oceanus, from whom the gods are sprung, and mother Tethys, even them that lovingly nursed and cherished me in their halls», *Il.* 14. 201-202.

[40] Βυριδής (2023: 121-204), where I argue that in the epilogue of *Orestes* the sailors symbolize the poets, as in other cases in ancient Greek literature. For example, Hesiod metaphorically connects shipping with poetry in *Works and Days*. See Rosen (1990). As maintained by Perysinakis (1998: 122), in Pindar «poetry is meant in the nautical imagery of the ship and the sail». Aristophanes' Chorus of the *Frogs* (1000-1003) advises Aeschylus, in order to successfully face Euripides in the poetry contest, to wait like the captains for a favorable wind. We should have in mind that Odysseus has at the same epic the role of a sailor and of a poet (ἀοιδός). Odysseus skillfully handles the rudder of his ship with the help of the constellations in *Od.* 5, 270-275, while also skillfully handling the narration in his tales to the Phaeacians. See Hopman (2012). According to Detienne - Vernant (1991: 307), μῆτις, resourceful thinking and foresight, should have characterized, among others, doctors, captains and sophists, since the changeable and vast fields of illness, sea and speech require skillful manipulations in order to be tamed. On «Aeschylus' preference for nautical vocabulary», see Benamati (2025: 176).

[41] According to the *Scholia* in the *Iliad* (3, 126-127), ἀξιόχρεων ἀρχέτυπον ἀνέπλασεν ὁ ποιητής τῆς ἰδίας ποιήσεως («the poet fashioned a worthy archetype of his own poetry»; translation by Homar [2024]). This phrase from the *Scholia* refers to Helen weaving her web, much like the poet weaves his own style. Cf. Homar (2024: 616-618). In the *Il.* 6, 358, Helen predicts (with a kind of poetic self-awareness) that future generations will sing about her and Paris (ὡς καὶ ὀπίσσω / ἀνθρώποισι πελώμεθ' ἀοίδιμοι ἐσσομένοισι; «that even in days to come we may be a song for men that are yet to be», *Il.* 6, 357-358. Cf. Eur. *Tro.* 1244-1245).

[42] Lord (2010: 286) contends that this phrase «focuses attention on Helen's forthcoming song, for the proem was an attention-getting moment in the kitharode's art». As claimed by Σωτηροπούλου (2017: 663), the meaning of the ode to the Great Mother in *Helen*'s Second Stasimon is that the salvation of the world «lies in the musical art traditionally associated with poetry and speech».

Perhaps the element that above all associates Hera and Helen with poetry is the element of falsehood that emerges from their simulacra. Just as, through lies, the *eidōlon* of Hera deceived Ixion and the *eidōlon* of Helen deceived the Trojans and the Greeks, inciting an entire war in vain, so too the Muses as goddesses of poetry admit to Hesiod that art is a game between truth and falsehood (Hes. *Th.* 26-28). In the setting of deception set up by poetry, Zeus also participates from the beginning of the play with his transformation into a swan, a transformation that is criticized by Helen's insinuations about the credibility of the poets' verses[43].

As celestial deities, Hera and Helen cannot help but emit light and brilliance. Perhaps even the etymology of their names may suggest something like this. According to one of the etymologies cited by Bardis (1988: 90), Hera owed her name to the Sanskrit *svar* ('the shining sky'), while she was also identified with Rhea, the Great Mother of the East, the goddess of *Helen*'s second Stasimon[44]. On the other hand, there is also the view that Helen's name etymologically means «Lady of Light»[45]. Hera is not only the mother of the god of fire, Hephaestus, but in verse 234 of the *Taking of Ilios*, she also appears as the goddess who herself gives light to mortals, as φαεσίμβροτος[46]. In Plutarch Hera is associated with goddess Selene (personification

[43] Respectively, in *Il.* 14, where Hera orchestrates her deception against Zeus, he also indicates through the infidelities he confesses (*Il.* 14, 315-328) that he is capable of deception.

[44] We could claim that the anger of the Great Mother against Helen in the second Stasimon reflects the anger of Hera against the same person. In both cases, of course, these deities are appeased. According to Kornarou (2020: 290), the Great Mother in the second Stasimon mirrors Hera: «The nameless goddess mentioned in this stasimon is generally considered to be Demeter who, inconsolable at the loss of her daughter, destroys men by imposing barrenness on the earth, as Hera, angry with Paris' judgement, causes the suffering of the Greeks and the Trojans by contriving a cloud-image of Helen. In both cases Zeus finally restores harmony, but it is only after a long period of mortal suffering». Swift (2009: 435) argues that «Persephone forms the mythological prototype for Helen, just as Helen does for real-life women. Thus, the ode mirrors the broader meaning of the play». As [Apollodorus'] *Epitome* (1, 23) shows, the abductions of Helen and Persephone are closely linked: ὅτι Θησεύς, Πειρίθῳ συνθέμενος Διὸς θυγατέρας γαμῆσαι, ἑαυτῷ μὲν ἐκ Σπάρτης μετ᾽ ἐκείνου ἥρπασεν Ἑλένην δωδεκαέτη οὖσαν, Πειρίθῳ δὲ μνηστευόμενος τὸν Περσεφόνης γάμον εἰς Ἅιδου κάτεισι; «Having made a compact with Pirithous that they would marry daughters of Zeus, Theseus, with the help of Pirithous, carried off Helen from Sparta for himself, when she was twelve years old, and in the endeavor to win Persephone as a bride for Pirithous he went down to Hades».

[45] See e.g. Rozokoki (2011: 63-64); Walker (2015: 173); Jaszczyński (2018: 12-15). For Helen as daughter of the Sun in late sources, see Ibid.: 16. According to Ibid: 18, «if we believe that Helen's name is indeed very archaic and means 'Lady of Light', then it would fit more that she is the Greek reflection of the Sun-princess, who was thematically so close to Dawn, that with time she started to take over her epithets». In a strange way, Euripides' infamous heroines, the symbolic women who apologize for their love passions and attempt to justify female erotic desire, have glamorous names: Helen's name is related to the light of the stars, Phaedra is φαιδρή ('bright'), and Pasiphae shines for everyone (πᾶσι + φάος). On the role of Pasiphae in Euripides' *Cretans* and her connection with Selene, see Σαμπατάκης (2007).

[46] μήτηρ ἀθανάτοιο πυρός, φαεσίμβροτος Ἥρη; «mother of the immortal fire, Hera who brings light to mortals». This property was also attributed to the Sun: φαεσιμβρότου Ἠελίοιο, *Od.* 10,138.

of the Moon) and is called φωτεινή ('luminous')[47]. Apparently these later references to the connection of a celestial deity, such as Hera, with light derive from a very ancient tradition. Both Hera and Helen are called in the *Iliad* Ἀργείη ('Argive') and, as we said, λευκώλενος[48].

Following Clader's (1976: 56-62) analysis of Helen's «divine» epithets, O'Brien (1993: 119) maintains that *Argos* should be understood as a mythical «realm of light», since «this would explain Hera Argeia's chariot rides bringing the light from east to west». Here I would like to add that ancient myths also associated other words that are etymologically related to Argos with light[49]. Therefore, when Hera and Helen are accompanied in the *Iliad* by the term Ἀργείη, their connection with the heavenly light is strengthened. On the other hand, the adjective λευκώλενος also attributes brightness to Hera and Helen, since λευκός did not meant only 'white', but also 'shining'[50].

Just as Hera in the Homeric epics is called δῖα θεάων, Helen and Penelope are respectively identified as δῖα γυναικῶν. Nagy (2010: 8) emphasizes the connection of the term δῖα with the bright sky[51]. Hera in tradition was not only χρυσόθρονος ('the one with the golden throne'), but also χρυσοπέδιλος ('the one with the golden

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[47] καὶ Ἰουνῶμεν ἐπονομάζουσι τὴν Ἥραν, τὸ νέον ἢ τὸ νεώτερον ἐμφαίνοντος τοῦ ὀνόματος ἀπὸ τῆς σελήνης· καὶ Λουκῖναν Ἥραν καλοῦσιν οἷον φωτεινὴν; «[they] apply the name Juno to our Hera, for the name means 'young' or 'junior', so named from the moon. And they also call her Lucina, that is 'brilliant' or 'light-giving'(Plut. *Quaes. Rom.* 282c).

[48] Ἥρη τ᾽ Ἀργείη καὶ Ἀλαλκομενηὶς Ἀθήνη; «even Argive Hera, and Alalcomenean Athene», *Il.* 4, 8; Ἀργείη δ᾽ Ἑλένη μετ᾽ ἄρα δμῳῆσι γυναιξὶν; «and Argive Helen sat amid her serving-women», *Il.* 6, 323; ὣς ἔφατ᾽, οὐδ᾽ ἀπίθησε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη; «So spake he, and the goddess, white-armed Hera, failed not to hearken», *Il.* 15, 78; Ἶρις δ᾽ αὖθ᾽ Ἑλένῃ λευκωλένῳ ἄγγελος ἦλθεν; «But Iris went as a messenger to white-armed Helen» *Il.* 3, 121.

[49] The mythical *Argo*, which meant the «bright and fast ship», crossed the *Istros* river (modern Danube) thanks to the luminous path that Hera carved in the sky (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4, 294), while it transformed into the constellation *Argo*. *Argos Panoptēs*, guardian of Io, the priestess of Hera with whom Zeus fell in love, was closely associated with light because of his hundred eyes, since, according to the ancient Greeks, vision was often identified with light. The term *panoptēs* is used also for the god Helios: καὶ τὸν πανόπτην κύκλον ἡλίου καλῶ; «and you, all-seeing orb of the sun, to you I call», Aesch. [*PV*] 91. Aristophanes describes Helios as the 'eye of *aithēr*' (ὄμμα αἰθέρος, *Nub.* 285).

[50] See the comments of Rozokoki (2011: 39) on the adjective λευκός (e.g. for the Dioscuri with the white horses). Under the name Λευκοθέα, Ino was worshipped as a beneficent sea deity, while the white scarf that Hera wears on her head, when she attempts to deceive Zeus in the *Iliad*, has the glow of the Sun: κρηδέμνῳ δ᾽ ἐφύπερθε καλύψατο δῖα θεάων / καλῷ νηγατέῳ· λευκὸν δ᾽ ἦν ἠέλιος ὥς; «And with a veil over all did the bright goddess veil herself, a fair veil, all glistering, and white was it as the sun», *Il.* 14,184-185.

[51] Nagy (2010: 8) commenting on West (2007: 193), underlines: «In view of the fact that Greek δῖα stems from the Indo-European root **dyeu-*, which refers to 'the bright sky of day' (W 238) and which is personified as the god Zeus in Greek poetry (as also the god Dyaus in Indic poetry), it is suggested here "that the formulae δῖα θεάων and δῖα γυναικῶν, in extant epic applied freely to any goddess, nymph, or respectable woman, originally designated consorts of Zeus"».

sandals')[52]. Similarly, in *Orestes*, Helen wears golden sandals[53]. Here it is important to highlight that golden is also the color of the god Helios ('the Sun')[54]. Rozokoki (2011: 64) believes that we should have in mind that «Helen was worshipped in Rhodes, where Helios was the patron god»[55]. In *Helen*, I think that another element which connects Hera and Helen with light is the references to *aithēr*, a word related to the verb αἴθω which means 'to light', 'to burn', 'to shine'[56].

In my opinion, even the setting of Egypt, which serves as *Helen*'s backdrop, could evoke associations linking Hera with Helen[57]. Both of them were related to Egypt on a ritual and mythological level. According to Herodotus (2, 178, 3), in the city of Naucratis, which was built in the Nile Delta, Hera was worshipped in a sanctuary founded by the Samians. The same historian (2, 112, 2) confuses the sanctuary of ξείνη ('the foreign') Aphrodite in Egypt with that of Helen (ἔστι δὲ ἐν τῷ τεμένεϊ τοῦ Πρωτέος ἱρὸν τὸ καλέεται ξείνης Ἀφροδίτης. συμβάλλομαι δὲ τοῦτο τὸ ἱρὸν εἶναι Ἑλένης τῆς Τυνδάρεω, καὶ τὸν λόγον ἀκηκοὼς ὡς διαιτήθη Ἑλένη παρὰ Πρωτέϊ, καὶ δὴ καὶ ὅτι ξείνης Ἀφροδίτης ἐπώνυμόν ἐστι; «There is in the precinct of Proteus a temple called the temple of the Stranger Aphrodite; I guess this is a temple of Helen, daughter of Tyndareus, partly because I have heard the story of Helen's abiding with Proteus, and partly because it bears the name of the Foreign Aphrodite»)[58].

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[52] See e.g. *Od*, 11. 604: παῖδα Διὸς μεγάλοιο καὶ Ἥρης χρυσοπεδίλου; «daughter of great Zeus and of Here, of the golden sandals». Golden sandals belong also to Hermes (*Il.* 24, 340-341) and Athena (*Od.* 1, 96-97). Golden are the hair (χρυσοκόμης) of Dionysus (Hes. *Th.* 947), Eros (Anac. 13) and Apollo (Ar. *Av.* 216). Apollo asks Hermes in *Iliad* 8, 342 if he would like to lie down with the 'golden Aphrodite' (χρυσέῃ Ἀφροδίτῃ). I think it is quite interesting that in the *Odyssey* Helen's radiance is likened to the golden arrows of Artemis (ἐκ Ἑλένη θαλάμοιο θυώδεος ὑψορόφοιο / ἤλυθεν Ἀρτέμιδι χρυσηλακάτῳ ἴϊκυῖα; «from her fragrant high-roofed chamber came Helen, like Artemis of the golden arrows», *Od.* 4,121-122), while her daughter, Hermione, is likened to the golden Aphrodite (Ἑρμιόνην, ἣ εἶδος ἔχε χρυσέης Ἀφροδίτης; «Hermione, who had the beauty of golden Aphrodite», *Od.* 4, 14). In *HH* 5, 1 the goddess of beauty is called πολύχρυσος.

[53] φυγᾷ δὲ ποδὶ τὸ χρυσεοσάνδαλον; Eur. *Or.* 1468.

[54] In *HH* 31, 10-15 the helmet and the chariot of the god of light are golden. In Euripides' *Electra* 740 Sun has a golden face (or eyes); in Stesichorus' *Geryoneis* (S 17=185 Page) the cup of the Sun is golden.

[55] Smoot (2016: 14, n. 17) questions the credibility of Ptolemy Chennos's statement that Helen was the daughter of the Sun: Ἡλίου θυγάτηρ καὶ Λήδας Ἑλένη; «Leda's child, Helen, is the daughter of the Sun» (= Photios *Bibliotheke* 149a).

[56] As Allan (2008: 212) notes, αἰθήρ is used in the play interchangeably with the word to denote the material from which Hera fashioned the *eidōlon* of Helen. The Olympian gods belonged to *aithēr*. E.g. Artem. *Onirocr.* 2, 34: αἰθέριοι μὲν οὖν λέγοιντο ἂν εἰκότως Ζεὺς καὶ Ἥρα; «Thus, Zeus and Hera might reasonably be called ethereal».

[57] From the perspective of myths, Egypt has been identified with utopia. See Segal (1971: 557).

[58] For the connection of Helen with Aphrodite, see e.g. Jaszczyński (2018: 16-17). Plutarch (*De Herod. Malign.* 857b) asserts that the Egyptians honored Helen and Menelaus: πολλαὶ μὲν Ἑλένης πολλαὶ δὲ Μενελάου τιμαὶ διαφυλάττονται παρ' αὐτοῖς; «they preserve many honors for Helen and Menelaus».

The magical νηπενθές that Helen had received from the wise magicians of Egypt (*Od.* 4, 221), closely connects her to the magic of literature, to the speech as *pharmakon*[59].

The priestess of Argive Hera, Io, who made love with Zeus, persecuted by the goddess and transformed into a cow, gave birth to Epaphus in Egypt. Hicks (1962: 93), who studied the interaction between Greek and Egyptian mythologies, suggests that Io's transformation into a cow reflects the nature of Hera, who is called βοῶπις ('ox-eyed') in the *Iliad*, concluding that Io may essentially be another name for the goddess[60]. Let us note that Io in Aeschylus' [*Prometheus*] (588) is called βούκερως παρθένος ('a virgin horned like a cow').

Hicks (1962: 93-94) adds that the most prominent Egyptian cow-horned deity, Hathor[61], became the wife of the solar god Ra. The god *Ammōn* (*Ammōn*-Ra was, as it seems, a fusion of two deities) was identified, according to the Greeks, with Zeus[62]. Pausanias (5, 15, 11), referring to the ritual of Olympia, points out that Hera was also worshipped with the invocation *Ammōnia* (καὶ τῷ ἐν Λιβύῃ σπένδουσι καὶ Ἥρᾳ τε Ἀμμωνίᾳ καὶ Παράμμωνι; «They pour libations…also to the god in Libya, to Hera Ammonia and to Parammon»).

2. BEAUTY, VIRGINITY, GLORY, DECEIT AND ILLUSION

The first verse of *Helen* starts with «the Nile» (Νείλου μὲν αἵδε καλλιπάρθενοι ῥοαί; «These be the Nile's fair flowing virgin streams» *Hel.* 1), and raises reasonable questions[63]. Why does the play begin with «the Nile» and with the adjective *kallipárthenos* which means, according to the *LSJ*, «with beautiful nymphs»[64]? Given Helen's

[59] This connection has been recently highlighted by Franzoni (2020: 343): «Thus, it becomes quickly apparent that interpretations of the Homeric *nēpenthes* not as a drug, but rather an allegorical allusion to Helen's ability to assuage the listener's pain through the power of her manner and eloquence were already well established in ancient literature».

[60] For the relationship of Hera and Io with Euboea, see Mitchell (2001); Festa (2020).

[61] According to Wallensten (2014: 11, n. 1), «a dedication to Hera Aphrodite found in Akoris, Egypt, has been interpreted as an *interpretatio Graeca* of Hathor».

[62] Regarding the worship of Ammon in Greece and his identification with Zeus, see Classen (1959).

[63] Translation of the first verse of Helen is by Way (1912). Downing (1990: 1) points out that «*kallipárthenoi* (beautiful-virgin) has often puzzled critics». As Kopestonsky (2016: 715) notes, the term *nymphe* refers «to a nubile mortal maiden, usually the bride … and the female water/landscape deity». Certain nymphs, daughters of river-gods, fought to preserve their virginity, such as Daphne, daughter of the river Ladon, and Sinope, daughter of the river Asopos. On Ovid's myth of the nymph Arethusa, who attempts to protect her virginity from the river-god Alpheus, see Ntanou (2020).

[64] As stated by Allan (2008: 144), «though a rare word, καλλιπάρθενος is entirely apposite here, since both beauty and virginity will be important themes of the play, as Helen's sexual allure and quasi-parthenaic status (cf. 68-70, 184-190nn.)».

bad reputation, a compound word incorporating the term *parthenos* ('virgin') does not seem to fit in a play that took its title from her name.

However, Euripides tends to be ambiguous and polysemous in his meanings. The Nile is not irrelevant to Hera and Helen, because he is also the son of Oceanus and Tethys, according to Hesiod[65]. In ancient Greece, rivers were often depicted as bulls, while Hera, as we said, is called in Homer by the name of βοῶπις. Perhaps the main reason why Euripides begins this play with the Nile is because this river, as an aquatic god, was characterized by transformations. The names of Proteus and Nereus that Helen mentions a few verses later (4, 15), as well as the transformation of Zeus into a swan, rather confirm this view[66]. Euripides, with the Nile, but also with Proteus (the god of transformations in the *Odyssey*), will emphasize the fact that he transforms the myth, presenting a new version, a «new» Helen, but also a «new» Hera who transforms into the protector of the protagonist of the play.

One of the Euripides' bold innovations is the association of Helen with virtuous wives, such as Penelope, or with pure virgins, such as Theonoe. After the impressive word καλλιπάρθενοι in the first line of *Helen*, the theme of virginity is emphasized by the repetitions in the immediately following verses (ὃς τῶν κατ' οἶδμα παρθένων μίαν γαμεῖ; «and he married one of the daughters of the sea», *Hel.* 6; εὐγενῆ τε παρθένον; «a noble daughter», *Hel.* 10; διογενής τε παρθένος; «and the virgin daughter of Zeus», *Hel.* 25, but also in the rest of the play (e.g. θυγάτηρ ἄνανδρος πολιὰ παρθενεύεται; «my daughter, is growing gray as a virgin, without a husband»; *Hel.* 283; Μενέλαε, πρὸς μὲν παρθένου σεσῴσμεθα; «Menelaos, as far as the maiden is concerned, we are safe», *Hel.* 1032 etc.).

Theonoe declares that she will try never to lose her virginity (πειράσομαι δὲ παρθένος μένειν ἀεί; «and I will try to remain a virgin always», *Hel.* 1008), while Helen herself, with her claims, alludes to virginal purity (ἄθικτον εὐνὴν ἴσθι σοι σεσῳσμένην; «Know that I have saved myself untouched for you», *Hel.* 795)[67]. Through the language

[65] Τηθὺς δ' Ὠκεανῷ ποταμοὺς τέκε δινήεντας, / Νεῖλόν τ' Ἀλφειόν τε καὶ Ἠριδανὸν βαθυδίνην; «And Tethys bore to Ocean eddying rivers, Nilus, and Alpheus, and deep-swirling Eridanus», Hes. *Th.* 337-338.

[66] For the protean character and the bipolarities of *Helen*, see, e.g. Downing (1990).

[67] Regarding the connection of virginity with the «new» Helen that Euripides wanted to present, but also other figures, such as Athena, Persephone, Theonoe, etc., see Ibid., 2. Allan (2008: 173) observes that the parallelism of Helen with a nymph being raped by Pan (*Hel.* 184-190) «reinforces the depiction of Helen as a *parthenos* whose sexual integrity is under threat from Theoclymenus». For verses 68-70 of *Helen*, where again the eponymous heroine is attempted to be associated with a virgin, since Pluto reflects Theoclymenus and Helen reflects Persephone, see Ibid.: 157-158 (it should be noted here that Persephone also mirrored Hera, since both of them had the pomegranate as their sacred symbol). After all, Egypt in *Helen*, according to Valtadorou (2020: 110), reflects the Underworld. On the parallelism of the transfer of Helen to Egypt by Hermes with the abduction of Persephone by Pluto, see Ibid.: 112-113. For Helen's close relationship with the kidnapping motif, see Jaszczyński (2018: 18-20). Segal (1971: 590) claims that Theonoe is «Helen's purer self». Downing (1990: 5) observes that, just as Helen in the play has a double identity, so too Theoclymenus' sister has two names

of ambiguities, Helen even reflects Athena, the virgin goddess who was born to Zeus (διογενής τε παρθένος, *Hel.* 25), since she herself, as she says, is his child. In the *Thesmophoriazusae*, Aristophanes's target is not only *Helen*'s *aithēr* (διὰ μέσου γὰρ αἰθέρος; «through the *aithēr*», *Thesm.* 1099), but also Euripides' insistence on virginity in the same play[68].

However, the *kallipárthenoi* of the first verse of *Helen* is not only associated with the eponymous heroine or Theonoe, but also with Hera who was worshipped, according to Pausanias as a *parthenos*[69]. As Pausanias informs us again, Hera, despite having had love affairs with Zeus and having given birth to children, was magically transforming back into a virgin every year by bathing in a spring[70]. Callisto, whom we previously associated with Hera and Helen, and her name means 'very beautiful', is accompanied by the term *parthenos* (ὦ μάκαρ Ἀρκαδίαι ποτὲ παρθένε Καλλιστοῖ, *Hel.* 375)[71]. The phrase παρθένε Καλλιστοῖ sounds like a slightly modified repetition of the word καλλιπάρθενοι!

Beauty cannot have, especially in Euripides, only a positive or a negative side. In his play both Hera and Helen seem to possess both a destructive and a beneficial

(Eido and Theonoe), emphasizing: «The parallel to Helen's double identity is particularly striking in her first name, Eido, which in the context of the play almost immediately evokes the *eidōlon*».

[68] ἔα· τίν' ὄχθον τόνδ' ὁρῶ καὶ παρθένον; «But what do I behold? A young maiden», Ar. *Thesm.* 1105; οὐ παρτέν' ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ἁμαρτωλὴ γέρων / καὶ κλέπτο καὶ πανοῦργο; «But this is no virgin; he's an old rogue, a cheat and a thief», Ar. *Thesm.* 1111-1112.

[69] Paus. 8, 22, 2: ἐν δὲ τῇ Στυμφάλῳ τῇ ἀρχαίᾳ Τήμενόν φασιν οἰκῆσαι τὸν Πελασγοῦ καὶ Ἥραν ὑπὸ τοῦ Τημένου τραφῆναι τούτου καὶ αὐτὸν ἱερὰ τῇ θεῷ τρία ἱδρύσασθαι καὶ ἐπικλήσεις τρεῖς ἐπ' αὐτῇ θέσθαι· παρθένῳ μὲν ἔτι οὔσῃ Παιδί, γημαμένην δὲ ἔτι τῷ Διὶ ἐκάλεσεν αὐτὴν Τελείαν, διενεχθεῖσαν δὲ ἐφ' ὅτῳ δὴ ἐς τὸν Δία καὶ ἐπανήκουσαν ἐς τὴν Στύμφαλον ὠνόμασεν ὁ Τήμενος Χήραν; «The story has it that in the old Stymphalus dwelt Temenus, the son of Pelasgus, and that Hera was reared by this Temenus, who himself established three sanctuaries for the goddess, and gave her three surnames when she was still a maiden, Girl; when married to Zeus he called her Grown-up; when for some cause or other she quarrelled with Zeus and came back to Stymphalus, Temenus named her Widow». Ξενίδου-Schild (1998: 16) underlines: «Various indications lead to the conclusion that Hera, before being attributed the characteristics of the wife *par excellence*, was worshipped as a virgin and represented young girls. In Nafplion and Hermione she is worshipped as a *Parthenos*; the river Imbrasos in Samos (where, according to the tradition of the Samians, she was born under an osier – Paus. 7, 4, 4) was originally called *Parthenios*, while the island itself – a particularly important center of her worship, like Argolis, bore the name *Parthenia*; the *Heraia*, the great festival of Elis in Olympia, was celebrated on the first day of the year, in the month of *Parthenion*». On Hera as a *parthenos*, see also e.g. Blundell (1995: 32-35); Valtadorou (2020: 118-120).

[70] Paus. 2, 38, 2: λείπεται δὲ καὶ τειχῶν ἔτι ἐρείπια, καὶ Ποσειδῶνος ἱερὸν καὶ λιμένες εἰσὶν ἐν Ναυπλίᾳ καὶ πηγὴ Κάναθος καλουμένη· ἐνταῦθα τὴν Ἥραν φασὶν Ἀργεῖοι κατὰ ἔτος λουμένην παρθένον γίνεσθαι; «Of the walls, too, ruins still remain and in Nauplia are a sanctuary of Poseidon, harbors, and a spring called Canathus. Here, say the Argives, Hera bathes every year and recovers her maidenhood».

[71] Furthermore, as Voelke (1996: 285) points out, alongside Callisto, who is identified as a virgin, Euripides places the daughter of Merops, who is presented as a maiden dancing in honor of Artemis. Ibid.: 284-287 focuses on the connection between beauty and virginity in *Helen*.

side. On the one hand, both are associated with the verb ὄλλυμι ('destroy'). Helen complains that Hera destroyed her (ἁ Διός μ' ἄλοχος ὤλεσεν; «the wife of Zeus ruined me», *Hel.* 674), but she herself admits that she acquired the reputation of a destroyer (τὸ δ' ἐμὸν δέμας / ὤλεσεν ὤλεσε πέργαμα Δαρδανίας / ὀλομένους τ' Ἀχαιούς; «but the beauty of my body has destroyed the Dardanian towers, it has destroyed them and the lost Achaeans», *Hel.* 383-385). Of course, Hera also contributed to the destruction of Troy (not only by deceiving Zeus), but here we should underline that Euripides emphasizes the fact that the war was disastrous for both opposing camps[72]. On the other hand, the poet uses the verb εὐεργετῶ ('to be a benefactor') for both Hera and Helen[73].

Helen wonders near the end of the play, as she tries to urge the Greeks to exterminate the barbarians: «Where is the fame you won in Troy?» (Ποῦ τὸ Τρωϊκὸν κλέος;, *Hel.* 1603). The concept of *kleos* plays a central role in the play, as shown by Meltzer (1994), who emphasizes the ambiguity inherent in this word, as well as in the concept of the *eidōlon*[74]. From this point of view, Euripides' irony culminates when Menelaus appears in rags, like a comic caricature[75].

Helen in the Prologue (41) implied that all the bloodshed of the Trojan War was done to glorify Achilles[76]. As Euripides then makes it clear that the war was fought in vain for a phantom, we can conclude that the glory of Achilles, who met a tragic end on the soil of Troy, was also in vain. Euripides' irony is intense when he has Helen in the Prologue underscore that the war was fought to free Earth from the burden of mortals (and thus Achilles would be glorified), although in the *Iliad* 18, 104 he himself felt to be such a burden (ἄχθος ἀρούρης). Helen is associated with Achilles not only because she was also strict with herself in the *Iliad* (on the one

[72] As ambiguous as almost everything in the *Iliad* is (the gods, the humans, the war), we must not forget that this epic ends with an extremely moving scene of reconciliation between Achilles and Priam, who were each other's most bitter enemies. In the *Iliad*, the message in favor of peace prevails. See e.g. Κακριδής (1985). On Achilles as an instrument of «*Iliad*'s internal criticism of military ideals», see Marren (2023).

[73] For Hera: Ἥραι δ', ἐπείπερ βούλεταί σ' εὐεργετεῖν, *Hel.* 1005; for Helen: εὐεργετήσω σ', *Hel.* 1298.

[74] Meltzer (1994) highlights the ambiguous meaning of *kleos* in the anti-war play *Helen*, pointing out that Euripides exploited the ambiguity that this word already had in the Homeric epics. For the various types of ambiguity in *Helen*, see Wright (2016). Kannicht (1969: I.,7) notes: «scarcely any Euripidean drama is so difficult to grasp and therefore so controversial as the *Helen*».

[75] According to Meltzer (1994: 245), «indeed, when compared with Homer's character, Menelaus in Euripides' drama is almost as unrecognizable as Helen: his portrayal as a comically ineffectual figure underscores the sharp discrepancy between his *kleos* and what we see on stage».

[76] Maybe Euripides' mention of Achilles functions as an ironic insinuation against the Athenian warmongering propaganda during the Peloponnesian War. As Michelakis (2002: 8, n. 35) notes, «the fact that in the classical world Achilles was considered more of an epic hero than a hero of cult does not mean that he could not be used for political propaganda at all».

hand he feels to be such a burden, on the other she is calling herself «a bitch» in *Il.* 3, 180), but also because they were both deities who protected sailors[77].

The mention of Achilles in *Helen* not only brings to mind his tragic end, but also recalls Hera, who was always at his side to encourage him and incite his wrath, *Iliad*'s central theme[78]. Hera also directs the plot of Euripides' *Heracles* and *Helen* (in both of them with *eidola*)[79]. Just as in *Helen* Hera fashions the *eidōlon* of the protagonist, which acts as a catalyst for the plot, so too in *Heracles* the goddess sends Iris and Lyssa to Thebes against the homonymous hero; to the eyes of the Chorus, they resemble a *phasma* ('phantom'), a term not far removed from that of the *eidōlon*[80]. Heracles himself, upon his unexpected arrival on the scene, is likened by Megara to a daydream (ὄνειρον ἐν φάει, *HF* 517). The terms *eidōlon*, *phasma*, and *oneiron* are almost identified in *Odyssey*'s *Nekyia*, when Odysseus, among other things, meets Heracles' *eidōlon* in the Underworld (*Od.* 11, 601-602).

Euripides' Heracles accuses Hera of wanting to annihilate him while he was still an infant in swaddling clothes. Yet, he himself was transformed into an infanticide. Through his madness, Heracles looks like a mirror image of Hera, confirming the prevalence of her *kleos* – that is, his very own identity (*Hera* + *kleos* = *Heracles*)[81]. Theseus's remark to the devastated Heracles that, due to his misfortunes, it is as if he has lost his glory (*HF* 1414) could be paralleled with Helen's crucial question («where is the glory of Troy»?), since in both cases the impression is given that Euripides is mocking the glory of the traditional heroes.

Both Theseus in *Heracles* (Ἥρας ὅδ' ἀγών; «This is Hera's work», *HF* 1191) and Helen in the homonymous tragedy (τὰ μὲν δι' Ἥραν, τὰ δὲ τὸ κάλλος αἴτιον; «partly because of Hera, and partly my beauty is to blame», *Hel.* 261) consider Hera to be responsible for the misfortunes. But they are not the only ones who blame her. In the *Iliad*, Artemis complains to her father that it is Hera who causes the conflicts among the gods[82]. So, one common characteristic of Hera and Helen

[77] On the worship of Helen and Achilles by sailors in the Black Sea, see e.g. Hind (1996); Zeitlin (2019).

[78] See O'Brien (1990). On the etymological connection of Hera with the word ἥρως, see O'Brien (1993).

[79] Some commonalities between *Helen* and *Heracles* are highlighted by Allan (2008: 64-65). It is worth noting that both Helen and Heracles in these tragedies unexpectedly change their opinions: while they declared that they no longer wanted their lives, they ultimately choose to live.

[80] See Eur. *HF* 817: οἷον φάσμ' ὑπὲρ δόμων ὁρῶ; «what phantom is this I see hovering over the house?». One of the meanings that *LSJ* gives to the word φάσμα is 'vision in dream'.

[81] In Euripides' *Heracles* both Hera and Heracles are defined by the term κλεινός: *HF* 12, 1303, 1414.

[82] See *Il.* 21. 512-513: σή μ' ἄλοχος στυφέλιξε, πάτερ, λευκώλενος Ἥρη, / ἐξ ἧς ἀθανάτοισιν ἔρις καὶ νεῖκος ἐφῆπται; «Thy wife it was that buffeted me, father, even white-armed Hera, from whom strife and contention have been made fast upon the immortals».

in myths is that both are often accused or slandered. Is this also an element of their glory (*kleos*)? Is it dangerous to accuse them? In any case, when the words of Tiresias and Stesichorus were not pleasing to Hera and Helen respectively, both of them lost their sight[83]! Conflicts among mortals are also provoked by Hera, for whom the verb ὀτρύνω ('encourage, stir up') is used[84]. In *Iliad* 5, Hera, assuming the voice of Stentor, urges the Achaeans to rush into battle, awakening their fury[85]. So when Euripides' Helen urges the Greeks to attack the barbarians (Ποῦ τὸ Τρωϊκὸν κλέος;, *Hel.* 1603), she once again reflects Hera of the *Iliad*.

As Allan (2008: 223) observes, the phrase πάντα δῶρα δαιμόνων («all gifts from the gods should be heard», *Hel.* 663) implies Hera's decisive role in Helen's misfortunes. But Hera is not the only mastermind of the plot. Menelaus observes that it is Helen who leads him to hope (*Hel.* 826). However, Helen not only guides Menelaus, but also the plot of the play (see Holmberg, 1995: 35-36). Just as Hera fashions the *eidōlon* through tricks (Ἥρας μηχαναῖς, *Hel.* 610), so Helen devises the escape plan with ruses (δεῖ δὲ μηχανῆς τινος, *Hel.* 813) that carry a scent of femininity (γυναικείαις τέχναισιν, *Hel.* 1621). Helen's feminine tricks reflect the tricks of Hera, whose name is implied in the phrase τέχναις θεῶν (*Hel.* 930). According to Downing (1990: 11), from the moment the *eidōlon* disappears into the sky, Helen takes the baton from Hera regarding the terms *sophos* ('skilled'), *technē* ('art/skill'), and *mēchanē* ('machination/device')[86]. Thus Euripides alludes to his own tricks and his own art, as he is the one who weaves the plot[87].

Just as Hera and Helen alter the plot in a universe where everything is changeable, so Euripides alters the myth and makes μεταβολή ('change') a basic rule of his unpredictable poetry (καὶ τὰ δοκηθέντ᾽ οὐκ ἐτελέσθη, / τῶν δ᾽ ἀδοκήτων πόρον ηὗρε θεός; «And what was expected has not been fulfilled; for what was not expected,

[83] Stesichorus recovered his sight after writing his *Palinode*, in which he was praising Helen, whereas before he had criticized her. Tiresias was blinded by Hera when he supported Zeus' view regarding their dispute about male and female sexual satisfaction. According to another version of the myth, Hera blinded Tiresias because he laughed at her statue. For more on the variations of this myth, see O'Hara (1996).

[84] For the verb ὀτρύνω in relation to Hera in the *Iliad*, see O'Brien (1990: 106).

[85] ὣς εἰποῦσ᾽ ὄτρυνε μένος καὶ θυμὸν ἑκάστου; «so saying she roused the strength and spirit of every man», *Il.* 5,792.

[86] Downing (1990: 11) also observes: «Even as the terms about *apatê*, etc. which adhered to Hera go through a metamorphosis when associated with Helen, so do the terms about *dolos* which adhered to Zeus (and the other, parallel rapes) when associated with Menelaus. Again, the metamorphosis to a positive value goes hand in hand with a conflation of the two operant orders of *dolia exeurêmata*».

[87] According to Ibid. 9-10, «Euripides seems to exploit these opportunities quite consequently. Not only does he repeatedly refer to the *eidôlon* as an *agalma*, but also as a *mimêma* ('product of artistic representation', 875); the additional emphasis upon its plastic manufacture by the *technai* of Hera (33-34, 583) always keeps in the foreground the status of the *eidôlon* as a mimetic work of art functionally equivalent to the poet's own, similarly foregrounded mimesis».

a god finds a way», *Hel.* 1690-1691)[88]. In the play, Helen does not only reflect Hera, while the changes in her identity allude to the art of the actor, who creates each time a new persona through his own reflections[89]. Meanwhile, Hera prides herself on the glory myths bestow upon her, even if it is fueled by Zeus's infidelities and his illegitimate children, such as Dionysus[90], Heracles, and Helen. According to Callimachus (*Aetia* 4, Fr. 101 Pf.), the statue of Hera on Samos bore the vine of Dionysus on its head and the lion skin of Heracles at its feet. In the starry sky of *Orestes* Hera's throne is next to Helen, another illegitimate child of Zeus, and Hebe, the wife of Heracles (ἔνθα παρ' Ἥρᾳ τῇ θ' Ἡρακλέους / Ἥβη πάρεδρος θεὸς ἀνθρώποις, *Or.* 1685-1686).

Euripides' Helen appears to perpetually oscillate between contrasting realms: Is she a goddess or a mortal? The daughter of Tyndareus, Zeus or perhaps Oceanus? A destroyer or a benefactor? Does she embody amorous deception or purity and marital fidelity? Is she virtuous or deceitful? The parallel between her and the equally ambiguous Hera proves particularly useful for interpreting her character, as the behavior of the queen of Olympus also remains an inexplicable enigma[91].

Helen does not reject the myth. Rather, the opposite is true. The «new» Helen and the «new» Hera, who reflect each other, as was the case in tradition, bow to the myth, opening up a vast new field for it, while at the same time reminding the audience that they were crafted by a poet-maestro of innovations who overturns tradition, but at the same time knows it deeply and can thus revitalize it. Helen in the play is not only a suffering victim, but she shows that she can easily transform into a perpetrator skilled in deception, just like the δολοφρονέουσα Hera of the *Iliad*. The innocence with which the «new» Helen is presented on stage leaves not only Menelaus speechless. The audience's bewilderment is also intense, especially since the heroine is presented as both innocent and deceitful[92].

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[88] According to Knox (1966: 227), μεταβολή «is the key-word of later Euripidean tragedy». Wright (2008: 122) notes that «change might not simply signal a reference to cosmological thought, but also emphasizes Euripides' own inventive approach to myth and narrative, adding a further level of complexity».

[89] Helen also reflects Aphrodite, Persephone, Penelope, etc. For the many faces of Helen, see Pucci (2012). Downing (1990: 10) compares the alternation of masks in *Helen* and *Bacchae*. Furthermore, Foley (1980: 114, n. 12) comments on the role-reversals in *Helen* in relation to the mask of Dionysus in the *Bacchae*. For the connection between *Helen* and the *Bacchae*, especially regarding the disguise of Pentheus in relation to the disguises of Helen, see Skouroumouni-Stavrinou (2015).

[90] In the Prologue of the *Bacchae*, Dionysus uses the word *hubris* to describe Hera's crime against Semele (ἀθάνατον Ἥρας μητέρ' εἰς ἐμὴν ὕβριν; «the everlasting insult of Hera against my mother», *Bacch.* 9), a term that also foreshadows Pentheus's impiety toward the god of wine.

[91] Like Hera, Aphrodite remains a mystery, especially since she is presented so ambiguously. According to Helen, Aphrodite can on the one hand be insatiable for calamities (ἄπληστος εἶ κακῶν, *Hel.* 1102), but on the other hand she can also transform into the most sweet goddess (ἡδίστη θεῶν, *Hel.* 1105).

[92] While the Hera of the *Iliad* was accused by Zeus of thirsting for raw flesh and might even be linked to the Erinyes, Euripides' Helen does not conceal that she is followed by the reputation of a πολυκτόνος ('man-slayer'); Teucer perceives her as a murderous phantom (γυναικὸς εἰκὼ φόνιον,

Insofar as Helen's *eidōlon* was a sheer deception (οὐχ ἥδε, πρὸς θεῶν δ' ἧμεν ἠπατημένοι / νεφέλης ἄγαλμ' ἔχοντες ἐν χεροῖν λυγρόν; «She is not; I was tricked by the gods and had in my arms the baneful image of a cloud», *Hel.* 704-705), it also alluded to Book 14 of the *Iliad*. The arts of persuasion and fiction may also belong to the field of deception[93]. Hera with the *eidōlon* of Helen introduces the game between falsehood and truth, the favorite game of the Muses. Just as the *eidōlon* can travel between the world of truth and the world of illusion, so too can the myths of the poets.

In the second Stasimon, the Mother of the Gods is appeased thanks to the beauty of art (Aphrodite began to play the drum) and thus she smiles (γέλασεν δὲ θεὰ, *Hel.* 1349). Art is related to deception here as well, since it changes the goddess's emotions, according to Zeus's plan (*Hel.* 1339-1340). Just as Hera smiles when she borrows Aphrodite's magic girdle to deceive Zeus (*Il.* 14, 222) and Penelope laughed while deceiving the suitors (*Od.* 18, 163), so too the Great Mother's smile is placed exactly before the deception that Helen is preparing against Theoclymenus. During this deceit, Helen will wear the mask of the grieving woman, hiding her boisterous laughter[94]. On the other hand, the light emitted by Hera and Helen as celestial deities – the dazzling *aithēr* – is also linked to the light of truth: the revelation that the war was a well-staged deception, much like the variations of the myths. If some Athenian spectators were laughing at the naivety of the deceived Theoclymenus, perhaps their laughter turned bitter upon realizing that they too had been deceived and led into a futile war (see Jordan, 2006: 22-23).

As Euripides describes the *eidōlon* by repeating the concepts of air and wind, he emphasizes its unreal dimension (see Segal, 1971: 564-565). This gives the impression that myths too belong to the realm of imagination, just like Hera and Helen. If poets deceive with their myths, then Hera also deceives with this *eidōlon* that imitates the truth, but belongs to the lie (μίμημ', *Hel.* 74). The *eidōlon* that comes to the fore as a dream or image of the imagination or a reflection or a ghost inconceivable to human reason, also reflects the incredible myths of the poets, which also function as dreams or ghosts or visions or images that fade. But myth is based on miracle and the unreal[95].

Hel. 73), whereas Aeschylus' Helen appeared as an Erinys (νυμφόκλαυτος Ἐρινύς, *Ag.* 749). For the connection of Hera with the Erinyes in the *Iliad* (19, 400-418), see Johnston (1992); Kölligan - Macedo (2015: 136, n. 23). On Helen as an Erinys in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, see Doyle (2009). By the epithet πολυκτόνος, Helen mirrors Aphrodite too, as both figures are characterized as such within the play (*Hel.* 198, 238).

[93] Downing (1990: 6) observes: «That the *morphôma* is here produced for the sake of a *dolos* («deceit, deception») brings out a dimension of fiction-making, of *apatê*, central to much of Greek epic and tragedy, but especially to Euripides: fiction as trap, trick, stratagem». Then Ibid. 9, also utilizing the findings of Rosenmeyer (1955), emphasizes «if we follow Rosenmeyer's lead, we can see that by calling attention to the 'process of composition', the poet is calling attention to his own *apatê* and *technai*, to 'the tricks and stratagems of his craft'».

[94] On the ambiguous smile of Dionysus' mask in *Bacchae*, see Billings (2017).

[95] Vernant (1984: 11) describes the myth as an «omnipresent ghost».

3. CONCLUSIONS: METAMORPHOSIS, PERPETUAL RENEWAL, AND THE NILE

Euripides, through the reflections between Hera and Helen, emphasizes both the art of poetry and his innovations. Helen, by constructing the false mask that will deceive Theoclymenus, on the one hand reflects Hera who created the *eidōlon* as an instrument of deception, while on the other hand borrows from the goddess the role of director and mastermind of the plot. Perhaps one of the most difficult roles an actor is called upon to play is to pretend to be pretending.

Helen, who functions as a μίμημα in *Helen*, knew how to imitate female voices in the *Odyssey* (4, 279), deceiving like the Muses[96]. Thus, as Euripides' Helen imitates Hera's creation of the *eidōlon* through the illusory mask she devises, she manages to turn the spotlight on the art of theater, performing a play within a play. Hera and Helen are not only the ladies of light (though not without a dark side), but also the ladies of fiction – of myths that are as unbelievable and questionable as the ladies themselves are as poetic figures within the complexity of the Euripidean mirrors.

At first glance, the contrast Euripides presents from the very beginning of the play seems somewhat strange: on the one hand, Helen and Hera are depicted as «modern», but on the other, the setting is Egypt, the cradle of a very ancient civilization. Does this contrast also serve as an allusion to Euripides' game between tradition and innovation[97]? In Euripides' *Ion*, it seems that the poet's self-referential mood is also expressed by the protagonist's phrase αἰεὶ καινὸς ('forever new')[98]. Euripides' *Helen* reflects the pursuit of innovation by the poets of the era (see D'Angour, 1998), for the sake of which a «new» Hera and a «new» Helen are recruited (against the backdrop of the ancient Nile!). This pursuit is also expressed in a different context by the Hellenistic poet Callimachus. Despite being a profound connoisseur of tradition, he indicates at the beginning of the *Aetia* a desire to cast off its burden and compose with the spirit of a child (παῖς ἅτε, Call. *Aet.* fr. 1.6 Pf), rejecting long-winded poems in favor of works on a small scale. Could the verse Νείλου μὲν ἄῖδε καλλιπάρθενοι ῥοαί similarly function as a self-referential allusion to an ancient tradition that is constantly renewed thanks to the skill of poetic art[99]?

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[96] For the parallelism of Helen in the *Odyssey*'s fourth rhapsody with the Muses, see Worman (2001).

[97] The title of Webster's (1968) study is characteristic: «Euripides: Traditionalist and Innovator». See also Scullion (1999); Wright (2010).

[98] See Torrance (2013: 222-237). For the self-referential use of the term καινός in the plays of Euripides, see also McDermott (1991); Bakola (2008: 10).

[99] Self-referentiality, an element that is intense in Hellenistic poets, was not absent – in a different form, of course – from earlier poetry, since the Homeric epics begin with an invocation to the Muse. Chatzikosta (2024: 273) maintains that line 1346 of Euripides' *Heracles* creates the impression of self-sarcasm in an almost Hellenistic manner. For self-referentiality in Euripides in general, see e.g. Torrance (2013).

Complementing Downing's (1990: 1-2) remarks on the importance of the first verse of *Helen* (Νείλου μὲν αἵδε καλλιπάρθενοι ῥοαί), I would like to add that Euripides from the very beginning seeks to emphasize that he is transforming the myth by referring to the Nile, the ancient god who flows every time with new water, while at the same time allusively connecting Helen with Hera through the word καλλιπάρθενος. Κάλλος ('beauty') is characteristic of Helen (and of Hera, not only because she was attractive to Zeus, Ixion or Endymion, but also because she claimed the prize of beauty along with the other two goddesses, while, as we have seen – Paus. 3.13.9 –, in Sparta she was identified with Aphrodite).

Hera, who will create the deception of the *eidōlon* and the plot, was also worshipped as a παρθένος ('virgin'), a concept that is attempted to be connected in the play to Helen. After all, Helen, as a virgin, danced, according to the myth (Plut. *Thes*. 31, 2) in honor of Artemis Orthia, the goddess who was *par excellence* the protector of virgins. Besides, Helen, as a deity, protected virgins, as did Artemis or Hera[100]. Euripides' insistence on Helen's allusive connection with virginity, purity, marital fidelity, Hera *parthenos* and Penelope as the perfect wife, underscores Helen's exoneration from culpability regarding the war's destruction, which was in fact a result of deceit, madness and illusions[101]. From this point of view, the connection between Helen and Hera functions as a compelling defense, similar to Gorgias's argument that the will of the gods (θεῶν βουλεύμασι, Gorg. *Hel*. 6) is responsible for the war, and not Helen. Although Euripides presents the purity of Helen as his

[100] In Therapne she was worshipped by virgins. See e.g. Parker [s.d.]; Hesychius κ 675 (κάνναθρα· ἀστράβη ἢ ἅμαξα, πλέγματα ἔχουσα, ὑφ' ὧν πομπεύουσιν αἱ παρθένοι, ὅταν εἰς τὸ τῆς Ἑλένης ἀπίωσιν. ἔνιοι δὲ ἔχειν εἴδωλα ἐλάφων ἢ γυπῶν; κάνναθρα: «saddle or carriage, having plaited works, with which the maidens take part in a procession when they go to the temple of Helen. Some [say] that they feature figures of deer or griffins»). According to Dillon (2002: 212), Helen «– an adulterer – seems an unusual figure for a cult of *parthenoi*, but the myth of Paris and Helen is secondary here. What matters is that Helen was once beautiful, young and virgin, a princess of Spartan birth, and then wife of the hero Menelaos, and so is an object of cult for the choruses of adolescent girls who seek her assistance in attracting a husband». Scanlon (1988: 187), commenting on Theocritus' «Epithalamy of Helen», mentions that her beauty «served as a role model for younger girls». As Bierl (2020: 452) notes, «Helen in her double identity has a cultic function for girls at the transition and for women in marriage, reflecting the tension between women and virgins in the case of the *Thesmophoriazousae*». For the connection of Helen with Artemis and Iphigenia, see Lyons (1997: 137-168). On the parallels between the *eidōlon* of Helen with the *Palladion*, and the theft of the statue of the goddess Artemis in *IT*, see Zeitlin (2010: 278). Valtadorou (2020: 106) observes regarding Helen: «Her influence on coming-of-age girlhood is equally discernible in her role in Spartan religious cults and practices. We know that Helen was worshipped both as a girl at Platanistas and as a goddess and wife of Menelaus in the cult of Therapne».

[101] Perhaps, the most characteristic phrase of Agamemnon in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, when he faces pressure from Menelaus and the army to proceed with the war, is that both his brother and Greece have gone mad: Ἑλλὰς δὲ σὺν σοὶ κατὰ θεὸν νοσεῖ τινα; «Both you and Greece have been driven mad by some god», *IA* 411.

own bold innovation, in tradition, Helen was not unrelated to the concept of virginity. If this reasoning holds true, it reveals the manner in which Euripides himself – a poet with a profound knowledge of tradition – deceives his audience.

The «new» Hera not only reflects the «new» Helen, as they both invent the plot and the masks, but also helps her to constantly renew herself, by giving her new roles. This seems to be indicated by the presence of Hebe, the goddess of youth and renewal, alongside the goddess Hera and the goddess Helen at the end of *Orestes*. Renewal is also emphasized by the association of Helen with Persephone, since the daughter of Demeter is a deity who is constantly reborn. Even renewal is connected with the unbelievable element of the myths, since almost everything seems to be illusory in *Helen*. Zeus is not a swan, Hera is not an enemy, Helen is not a cloud or a phantom, Menelaus is not an epic hero, myths and oracles are not true; war is not innocent! However, the deception of Hera and Helen is too strong. Why not another lie? That the myth of Helen is brand new?

Behold, then, yet another deception devised by poetry! Helen seems to be a mythical figure more ancient than the *Iliad*. However, Euripides can present his mythical version as brand new, like a «parthenogenesis», and his Helen as modern and innovative as if she were being presented to the public for the very first time! Like a virgin[102]! Like the waters of the ancient Nile that are constantly renewed! Like the immortal Hera who with her magic bath could renew her virginity eternally over the course of time[103]!

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[102] Valtadorou (2020: 107-120), alluding to Madonna's first big hit, gives a chapter related to Helen the title: «Euripides' Helen: Like a Virgin Touched for the Very First Time?».

[103] Furthermore, not only was Hera associated with bathing and virginity, but also Helen. Edmunds (2016: 177) underscores that «the woman who takes 'Helen's bath' will be known as both reputable and desirable and thus well-prepared for the passage to marriage»; Ibid. 177 refers to Ferrari (2002: 48-52). On the close relationship between Helen and the maiden-choruses of Sparta, see Swift (2010, 186-187). Despite the fact that Aristophanes in *Thesmophoriazousae* satirizes Euripides' presentation of Helen as a virgin, in *Lysistrata* 1314-1315 he himself characterizes her as ἀγνή (ἀ Λήδας παῖς / ἁγνὰ χοραγὸς εὐπρεπής; «Leda's child, holy leader of the chorus»). Moreover, virginity is one of the main themes of the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, not only because of the references to goddesses who maintained their virginity, but also because the goddess of love herself appears to Anchises as a virgin (ἀδμήτην μ' ἀγαγὼν καὶ ἀπειρήτην φιλότητος; «take me now, stainless and unproved in love», *HH* 5, 133). MacLachlan (2007: 4) underlines: «Similar ritual or mythical accounts from ancient Greece suggest that not only Hera, but Athena, Aphrodite, Artemis, and even Demeter participated in a process which they shared with other Indo-European goddesses and heroines, replenishing the reservoir of their power because they possessed the ability to return to the state of being sexually intact – to revisit virginity».

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