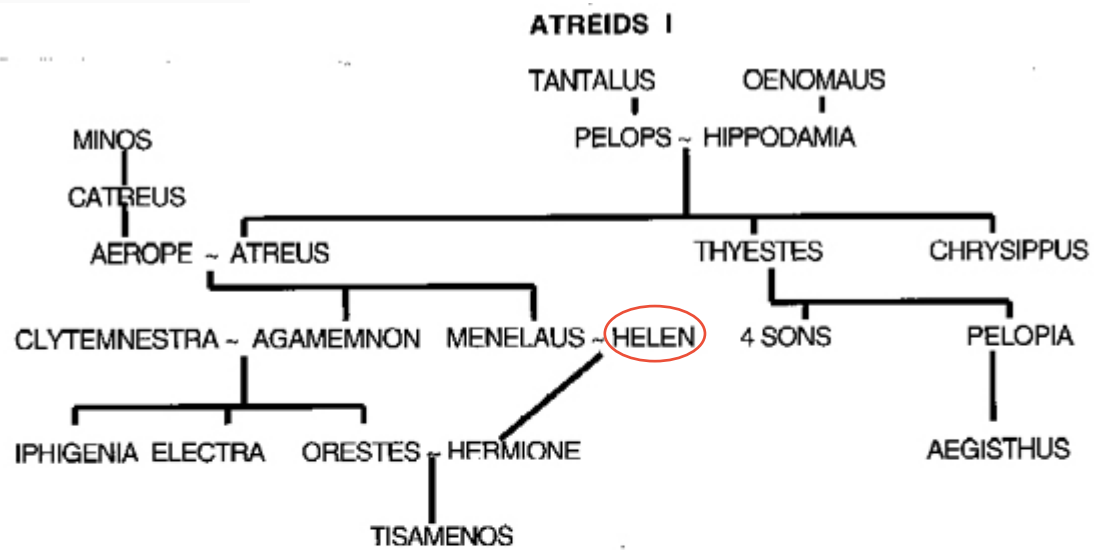




Defining Womanhood: Influences of Ancient Greek Representations in Modern Ideas

Carrie Selwood

Helen of Troy



The Abduction of Helen, Bartolommeo Pinelli (1827)

Helen of Troy in the *Iliad*

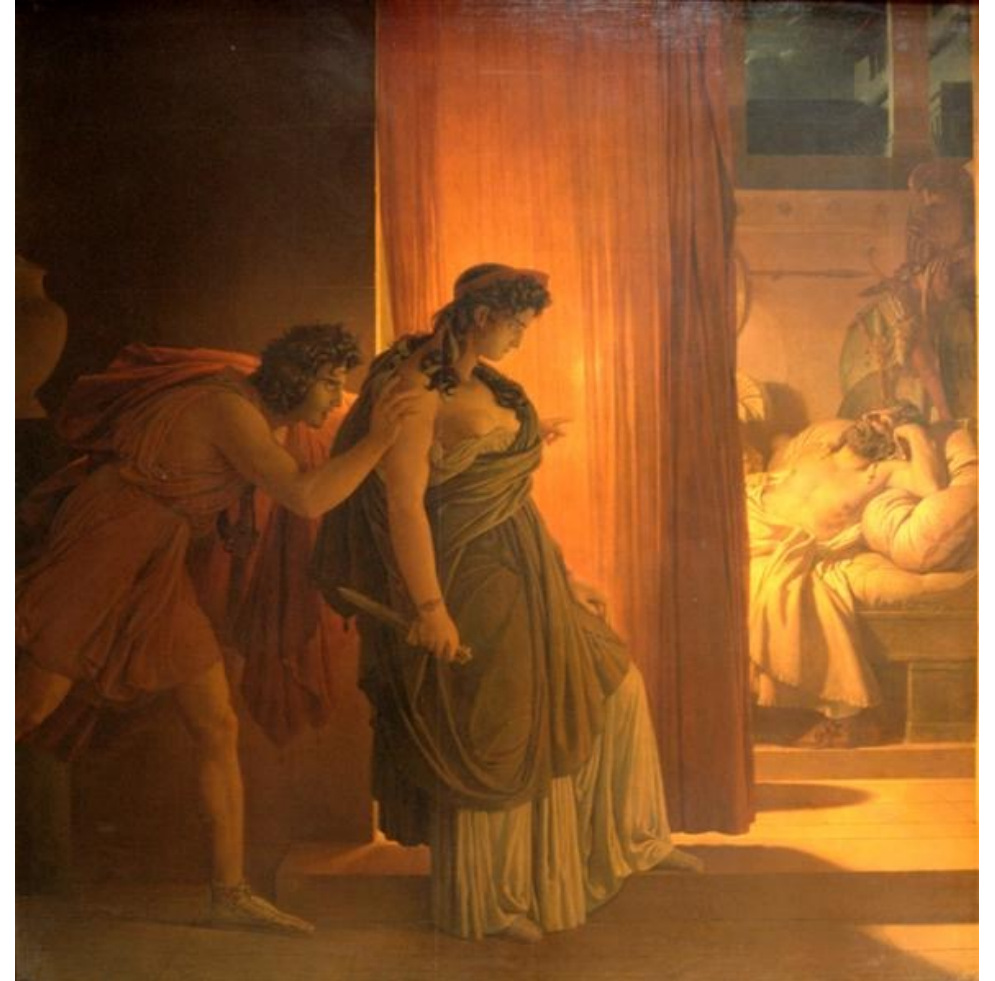
- Helen chooses to leave with Paris, but ten years later that power of choice has left her
- Helen is integral to the Trojan cycle, but she only makes three appearances (Books 3, 6, and 24)
 - Book 3 – Aphrodite's threat
 - Book 6 – Relationships with Priam and Hector
 - Book 24 – Hector's funeral



Helen on the Athenian Stage

Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*

- ♦ “[Agamemnon] endured so much for a woman; now a woman has obliterated him. You were out of your mind Helen, Helen, annihilating great numbers, terrible numbers of lives beneath Troy’s walls. Now you’ve won the consummate, the immortal prize: the blood that will not wash away. It was some spirit of unassailable discord in the house, a husband’s anguish.” (1454-1461)



Clytemnestra, Pierre-Narcisse Guerin (c. 1817)

Helen on the Athenian Stage



Menelaus (left) startles at Helen's (right) beauty, (5th century BCE)

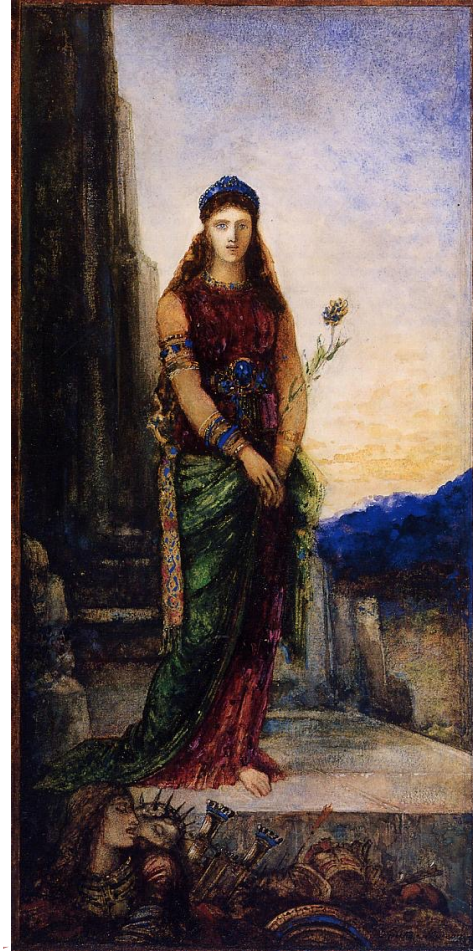
Euripides' *Helen*

- ♦ “Your body is like Helen’s, but your heart is very different, not at all alike. May she die, and never reach the banks of the Eurotas. But to you, good luck!” (160-163)
- ♦ This Helen eliminates her beauty in order to escape Egypt with Menelaus
 - ♦ Possesses the moral virtue to do so without risk

Helen of Troy: Modern Context

Middle Ages and the Renaissance

- Influenced by Eve and the Virgin Mary
- Point of comparison for writers to laud their more virtuous paramours
- Easy metaphor for beauty



Helen on the Walls of Troy,
Gustave Moreau (c. 1885)



Paris and Helen, Maso Finiguerra (c. 1470)

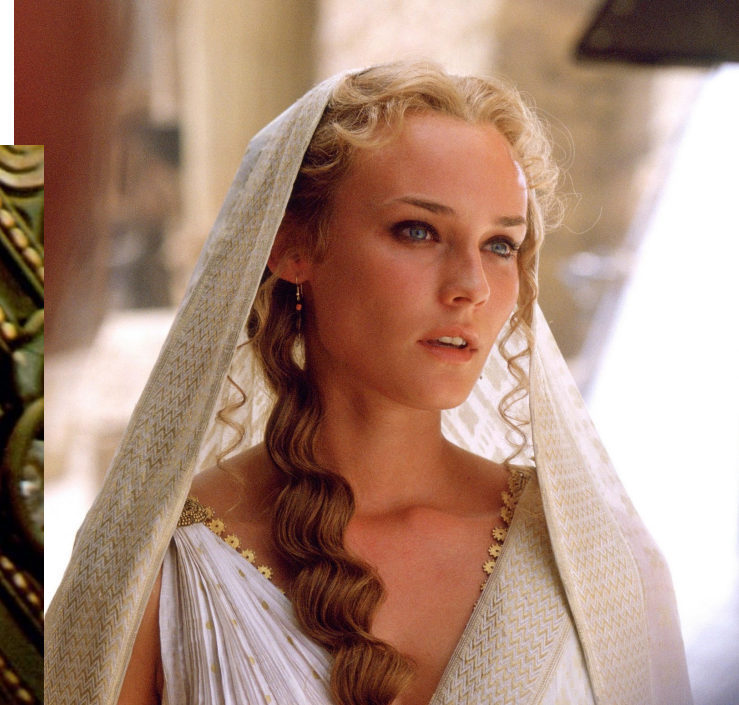
Helen of Troy: Modern Context

Modern Media – Television and Film

- Almost purely a side character to Paris with no internal struggle
- Must be palatable to modern audiences
 - Victim of patriarchal suppression
 - Following her heart as a romantic heroine
 - Erases any moral ambiguity



Rossana Podestà as Helen in *Helen of Troy* (1956)



Diane Kruger as Helen in *Troy* (2004)

Helen as a Model for Womanhood

- Because of her superhuman beauty, Helen is treated as subhuman
 - In antiquity – spoil of war, trophy, symbol of glory
 - In modernity – romantic, secondary to men, subject to capitalist Hollywood producers
- The representation in which she has the most agency is Homer
 - Claiming subjectivity through self-blame and narrative insistence

