

HELEN

Translated by RICHMOND LATTIMORE

HELEN: INTRODUCTION

The Play: Date and Composition

We know from external evidence that Euripides' *Helen* was first produced in 412 BCE. Presumably Euripides wrote it for the annual competition at the Great Dionysian Festival in Athens. One of the other tragedies staged together with it was *Andromeda*, which is known only from fragments and later references; what the other two plays were in Euripides' tetralogy of that year, and how they fared in the dramatic competition, are unknown.

The Myth

How was it possible that for the sake of one woman, Helen, a whole Greek army could wage war against Troy for ten long years and at the end completely destroy the city? And how could Helen's notorious marital infidelity (she abandoned her husband Menelaus and her daughter Hermione to elope with the Trojan prince Paris) be reconciled with the fact that she was worshipped as a goddess in Sparta? Already within the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* Homer, our earliest source, hints at some perplexity about these questions, and, while retaining the terms of the traditional story, he pointedly allows Helen's reputation and the degree to which she is to be blamed for the war to remain disputed and unresolved.

Some later authors felt freer to change the story itself. About a century before Euripides, the lyric poet Stesichorus claimed that Helen had blinded him for telling the traditional version and that his sight had been restored when he went on to compose a "Palinode" that asserted, "This story is not true, / You did not go in the well-benched ships / And you did not arrive at the towers of Troy." Stesichorus' famous lyric poem apparently said that it was a phantom likeness of Helen that went with Paris to Troy in her stead while she herself stayed in Egypt under the protection of King Proteus; but

this poem has been almost completely lost, and we can only guess at its details. A couple of decades before Euripides' *Helen*, the historian Herodotus told his own version: Paris abducted Helen from Sparta, but on their way back to Troy they were blown off course to Egypt; when the Egyptian king Proteus found out what Paris was up to, he kept Helen safe with him and sent Paris back to Troy without her: for ten years the Greeks fought the Trojans under the mistaken belief that Helen was in Troy (when the Trojans told them the truth, the Greeks did not believe them); the Greeks found out when they won the war and sacked the city, and afterward Menelaus, sailing back to Greece, stopped in Egypt, picked Helen up, and took her home.

Euripides' *Helen* develops further Stesichorus' two crucial innovations, Helen's phantom likeness and her stay in Egypt. According to Euripides' version, Hera, furious that Aphrodite won the Judgment of Paris by promising him Helen, has substituted for her a phantom likeness over which the Greeks and Trojans have combated at Troy for ten years under the mistaken impression that it was the real thing. In the meantime the real Helen has been kept safe by the virtuous Proteus in Egypt. Now the Trojan War is over, and Menelaus, returning home with the phantom Helen, is shipwrecked off the coast of Egypt—where Proteus has died and his unvirtuous son Theoclymenus is trying to marry Helen and threatens to kill any Greek he finds. The play begins with Helen as a suppliant at Proteus' tomb desperately seeking protection against Theoclymenus' advances. Menelaus arrives at the palace, dressed in rags, and after considerable confusion husband and wife joyously recognize one another (meanwhile the phantom Helen has flown back to heaven). Helen devises a clever stratagem to allow the Greeks to escape from Theoclymenus' clutches, with the help of his prophetic sister Theonoë. At the end Helen's divine brothers Castor and Polydeuces manifest themselves to calm the angry Theoclymenus and to predict the future.

Helen of Troy is almost always an extremely negative character in Greek tragedy, which generally presupposes the Homeric version of events. The story Euripides dramatizes in this play seems not to have featured in any earlier tragedy, though it is possible that Aeschylus included a version of it in his *Proteus*, the satyr-play that was produced fourth in the *Oresteia* tetralogy. Euripides' *Helen* does bear obvious similarities to his *Iphigenia*

among the Taurians, which he probably staged a couple of years earlier. In both plays, a virtuous Greek woman is held captive among barbarians, is surprisingly reunited with a beloved male family member, and by devising an ingenious plan manages to escape by sea and return home with him; she outwits her barbarian captor and at the end a *deus ex machina* appears so as to put matters in order. But whereas *Iphigenia* tended to focus more on an exciting plot, the mechanics of the recognition, and the psychology of its main characters, *Helen* raises intriguing questions concerning morality, religion, and cultural difference. In particular, it uses the bizarre situation of Helen's phantom likeness in order to explore general problems of human knowledge that had been posed by recent philosophers and sophists like Gorgias and Protagoras. Can we really believe what we see or be sure that we know what we think we know? Can we trust our senses? If not, what guarantees of truth or reality, divine or human, do exist in the world? These are problems with which contemporary intellectuals were wrestling; and Euripides' version of the story of Helen provides a witty and ingenious test case in order to scrutinize them. *Helen* also presents an example of happy and successful conjugal love, rare in Greek tragedy. Helen's fidelity, the restitution of her good name, and Menelaus' joyous reunion with her are central themes in the play.

Transmission and Reception

Helen seems to have had a considerable impact when it was first produced, at least to judge by the extensive (and hilarious) parody of the play in Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria*, produced the very next year, in 411 BCE. But thereafter the traces of its influence on ancient literature are very few indeed—perhaps some allusions by the New Comedy playwright Menander, and certainly the fourth-century BCE Alexandrian poet Lycophron's enigmatic *Alexandra*, a dramatic lyric about Cassandra and the Trojan War. And it does not seem to have influenced ancient art at all—by contrast, *Andromeda*, another of the tragedies that was produced by Euripides together with *Helen* at the same year's dramatic festival and that also dealt with exotic adventures and requited love, made a considerable impact on subsequent Greek and Roman visual culture. In general it was

Homer's canonical version of Helen that dominated in antiquity over Stesichorus', Herodotus', and Euripides' eccentric ones. *Helen* survived antiquity as one of the so-called "alphabetic plays" (see "Introduction to Euripides," p. 3) in only a single manuscript (and its copies), and it is not accompanied by the ancient commentaries (scholia) that explain various kinds of interpretive difficulties. But evidence that it achieved at least a small degree of popularity in antiquity is provided by the fact that at least one papyrus bearing parts of its text has been discovered.

In the modern world too, *Helen* has not been as popular as it deserves to be: the dominance of Homer's canonical version, together with Euripides' disconcerting and sometimes comic representation of divine manipulation of human affairs, seems until recently to have discouraged both readers and stage producers. But all of the few authors who have engaged with Euripides' play have produced remarkably interesting versions of the story. In his *Sonnets pour Hélène* (1578), Pierre de Ronsard exploits both versions of Helen in order to work through his contradictory feelings for his beloved, Hélène de Surgères. Jacques Offenbach's comic opera *La Belle Hélène* (1864) followed the Homeric story line; but Richard Strauss' extraordinary opera *Die ägyptische Helena* (*The Egyptian Helen*, 1928), from a libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, adapts and reverses crucial aspects of Euripides' plot (here the Homeric version is the true one, but the Egyptian tale is invented in order to persuade Menelaus to take Helen back) in order to explore, with complex music and profound psychology, the fundamental themes of love, trust, and memory. In contrast, George Seferis' brief lyric poem "Helen" (1953) uses the Euripidean story to point out the futile butchery involved in all wars; and *Helen in Egypt* (1961), a lengthy prose poem by H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), criticizes war, epic, and traditional male values from a feminist standpoint. In modern times the play has been produced relatively rarely except on college campuses and at Greek festivals. But recent years have seen a growing interest in it, and an adaptation by Frank McGuinness, directed by Deborah Bruce, had a successful run in London (2009).

HELEN

Characters

HELEN, wife of Menelaus

TEUCER, Greek chieftain, brother of Ajax

CHORUS of Greek captive women

MENELAUS, husband of Helen

DOORKEEPER, an old woman, slave of Theoclymenus

SERVANT of Menelaus

THEONOË, sister of Theoclymenus

THEOCLYMENUS, king of Egypt

MESSENGER, servant of Theoclymenus

SERVANT of Theonoë

CASTOR, divine brother of Helen

POLYDEUCES, twin brother of Castor (nonspeaking)

Scene: The palace of Theoclymenus in Egypt. In front is the tomb of King Proteus, the father of Theoclymenus. Helen is discovered sitting against the tomb as a suppliant.

HELEN

These are the waters of the Nile,
stream of sweet nymphs.

The river, fed with melting of
pale snows, and not
with rain, rises to flood the flats
of Egypt. Here

Proteus, while yet he lived, was
lord over the land,

5 at home in Pharos, king in Egypt;
 ◦ and his bride
was Psamathe, one of the
 daughters of the deep,
wife once to Aeacus, later
 sundered from him,
who bore two children to him in
 the house, a boy
called Theoclymenus (because
 his father showed
10 the gods love in his lifetime)◦
 and a fine girl they named
Eido, her mother's glory when
 she was a child;
but when she came to nubile age
 they changed her name
to Theonoë, for she understood
 the gods' concerns,
all things that are and will be, by
 means of divination.
15 Nereus, her forefather, granted
 her this privilege.

Nor is my own country obscure.
 It is a place
called Sparta, and my father was
 Tyndareus: though
they tell a story about how Zeus
 took on himself
the shape of a flying swan, with
 eagle in pursuit,
20 and came on wings to Leda my
 mother, and so won

the act of love by treachery. Or so
they say.

They called me Helen. Let me
tell you all the evils,
all that has happened to me. The
three goddesses came
to remote Ida, and to Paris, for
him to judge
25 their loveliness, and beauty was
the cause. These were
Hera, Cypris, and Zeus' daughter
Athena.

But Aphrodite, promising my
loveliness
(if what is cursed is ever lovely)
to the arms
of Paris, won her way. Idaean
Paris left
30 his herds for Sparta, thinking I
was to be his.

But Hera, angry that she was not
given the prize,
made void as wind the love that
might have been for Paris
and gave him, not me, but in my
likeness fashioning
a breathing image out of the
sky's air, bestowed
35 this on King Priam's son, who
thinks he holds me now
but holds a vanity which is not I.
See, next,

how further counsels of Zeus add

to my misery.
He loaded war upon the Hellenic
land and on
the unhappy Phrygians, thus to
ease our mother earth
40 of the burden and the multitude
of humankind,
and also to advertise the greatest
Hellene prince.
The Phrygians fought for me
(except it was not I
but my name only) held against
the spears of Greece.
I myself was caught up by
Hermes into the sky,
45 hidden in a cloud, for Zeus had
not forgotten me,
and set down by him where you
see me, in the house
of Proteus, chosen because, most
temperate of men,
he could guard my honor safe for
Menelaus. So
here am I; but meanwhile my ill-
adventured lord
50 assembled an armament to track
me down the trail
of my abduction, and assaulted
Ilium's towers.
Because of me, beside the waters
of Scamander, lives
were lost in numbers; and I
who've endured so much—

I'm cursed by all and thought to
have betrayed my lord
55 and for the Hellenes lit the flame
of a great war.

Why do I go on living, then? Yet
I have heard
from the god Hermes that I yet
shall remake my home
in the famous plain of Sparta
with my lord, and he
shall know I never went to Ilium
—if I've not shared
60 my bed with any other man.

While Proteus still looked
upon this sun we see, I was safe
from marriage. Now
that he is dead and hidden in the
dark, his son
pursues me for my hand, but I,
remembering
my first husband, cling a
suppliant here upon

65 the grave of Proteus, for help to
keep my marriage safe.

Thus, though I wear the name of
guilt in Greece, yet here
I'll keep my body
uncontaminated by disgrace.

(Enter Teucer from the side.)

TEUCER

What master holds dominion in these lowering halls?
The scope of wall is royal, and the massive pile
70 bespeaks possession by the Lord of Gold and Death.

(Seeing Helen.)

Ah!
O gods, what do I see before me. Do I see
the deadly likeness of that woman who destroyed
all the Achaeans and me? May the gods spurn you for
75 looking so much like Helen's copy. Were I not
footfast on alien ground, with my true-winged shaft
I would have killed you, for looking like the child of Zeus.

HELEN

Poor wretch, whoever you are, whatever cause has driven
you here, why must her sorrows turn your hate on me?

TEUCER

80 I was wrong so to give way to anger more
than it became me. All Greece hates the child of Zeus.
Therefore forgive me, lady, for what I have said.

HELEN

But who are you? From what country have you journeyed here?

TEUCER

Lady, I am one of those unfortunate Greeks.

HELEN

85 It is no wonder you hate Helen then. But tell^o
me who you are. Where from? Whose son should you be called?

TEUCER

My name is Teucer, and the father who gave me life
is Telamon. The land of Salamis nursed my youth.

HELEN

And what has brought you to this valley of the Nile?

TEUCER

90 I am an exile, driven from my father's land.

HELEN

You must be unhappy Who was it who forced you out?

TEUCER

Telamon, my father. Who should be nearer to my love?

HELEN

But why? Such action means catastrophe for you.

TEUCER

Ajax my brother died at Troy. This meant my doom.

HELEN

95 Surely it was not by your sword he lost his life?

TEUCER

His death came when he hurled himself on his own blade.

HELEN

In frenzy? Could a sane man see such an act through?

TEUCER

You have heard of one they call Achilles, Peleus' son.

HELEN

Yes.

He came once to ask for Helen's hand; so we are told.

TEUCER

100 He was killed. His armor caused a quarrel among his friends.

HELEN

But how could all this have brought Ajax any harm?

TEUCER

Someone else won the armor, and he killed himself.

HELEN

But has this suffering of his damaged your life?

TEUCER

Yes, if only because I did not die with him.

HELEN

105 I see. Tell me, were you at famous Ilium, then?

TEUCER

I helped sack it. That act has been my own ruin.

HELEN

And the city has been set afire? It is all gone?

TEUCER

You could no longer tell for sure where the walls stood.

HELEN

Helen, poor wretch! The Phrygians have perished for your sake.

TEUCER

110 The Achaeans also; for great evil has been done.

HELEN

How long is it now since the city was destroyed?

TEUCER

Seven years have almost circled with their crops since then.

HELEN

How much time in addition did you spend at Troy?

TEUCER

Moon after moon, until it came to ten full years.

HELEN

And then you got the woman of Sparta?

TEUCER

115 Yes we did.

Menelaus seized her by the hair and dragged her off.

HELEN

Did you see the poor woman, or have you only heard?

TEUCER

I saw her with my own eyes, as I see you now.

HELEN

Think. Could this be only an impression, caused by god?

TEUCER

120 Speak of some other matter, please. No more of her.

HELEN

 You do believe your impression is infallible.°

TEUCER

 These eyes saw her. When the eyes see, the mind sees too.

HELEN

 So. Then by now Menelaus and his wife are home.

TEUCER

 They are not in Argos, nor where the Eurotas runs.

HELEN

125 You speak them ill, and, ah, you tell of ills for them.

TEUCER

 The rumor is that he has vanished with his wife.

HELEN

 Then all the Argives did not sail for home together?

TEUCER

 They did, but a storm split them and drove them variously.

HELEN

 Among what waves, where on the open sea?

TEUCER

 Just as

they cut across the middle of the Aegean main.

HELEN

And after this, none knows of Menelaus' return?

TEUCER

No one does; and in Greece he is reported dead.

HELEN

Then I am undone.

Is Thestius' daughter still alive?

TEUCER

You mean by this Leda? No, she is dead and gone.

HELEN

135 It could not have been the shame of Helen that caused her death?

TEUCER

They say so; that she fastened the noose on her fair throat.

HELEN

Tyndareus' sons, then; are they alive, or are they not?

TEUCER

Dead, not dead. There are two interpretations here.

HELEN

Which one prevails? How much sorrow must I endure?

TEUCER

140 Men say that they have been made stars and are divine.

HELEN

Fair told when thus told; but what is the other account?

TEUCER

That for their sister's shame they died by their own hands.
Enough words now. I should not have to suffer twice.
But for the matter of my errand to this house
145 of kings, it was my wish to see Theonoë
the prophetess. Be you my representative
and help me learn from her how I should steer the wings
of my ship with best wind for the sea-girt land
of Cyprus, where Apollo prophesied that I
150 should found and name New Salamis from my island home.

HELEN

Sail, friend. Your course will show itself; but you must leave
this country and escape before you have been seen
by the son of Proteus, ruler of this land. He now
has gone with hounds, hopeful of killing beasts of chase.
155 He slaughters every Greek he lays his hands upon,
but why he does this, you must not try to find out,
as I am silent. For how could my speech help you?

TEUCER

All you have said was good, my lady, and may the gods
grant you the grace your kindness has deserved. You wear
160 the bodily shape of Helen, but you have a heart
that is not hers. Wide is the difference. May she
die miserably, never see Eurotas' stream
again.

But may you, lady, always prosper well.

(Exit to the side.)

HELEN [*singing*]

Here, beginning a song of deep wretchedness for the depth of my sorrows,
165 *what shall be the strain of my threnody, what singing spirit supplicate in tears, in mourning, in sorrow? Oh, oh!*

STROPHE A

*You who go winged women in form
young and maiden, daughters of Earth,*
170 *O Sirens, if you would only come^o
to attend my mourning
with Libyan reed, with Van-pipes,
with lyres, with tears of your own to give
the singing of all my unhappiness.
With sufferings for sufferings, sorrows for sorrows,
melody matching
my dirges, given*
175 *by Persephone
of the dead,^o she in turn shall be given
in her halls of night the sweet of my sorrow
in consecration
of those who are dead and gone from us.*

(Enter the Chorus from the side.)

CHORUS [*singing in this lyric interchange with Helen, who sings in reply*]

ANTISTROPHE A

I was down by the shining blue
180 *water, and on the curl of the grass*

*there in the golden glare of the sun^o
laid out the colored laundry
in the bed of the young rushes
to dry. There I heard my lady
and the pitiful sound as she cried out,
185 the voice of sorrow,^o lament without lyres,
a sharp voice of pain, of mourning
as cries aloud for grief some nymph,
a Naiad, caught
in the hills for all her flight,^o gives voice
to pain, as under the rock hollows
she cries out
190 on Pan and his violent union with her.*

HELEN

STROPHE B

*Hear me,
spoil of the barbarian oar blade,
daughters of Greece, hear:
from Achaea a mariner
195 came, yes came, and tears on my tears he loaded.
The wrecked city of Ilium
is given up to the teeth of fire,
all through me and the deaths I caused,
all for my name of affliction. So
200 Leda has taken her life within
the strangling noose, for the thought of shame
in those sorrows that has been mine.
My lord is lost, he is gone, far driven
over the sea. And the twin-born glory*

205 *of the land of my father, Castor
and Polydeuces his brother, vanished,
vanished away; the plain where their horses
trampled, their wrestling ground, desolate*
210 *down by the reeds of Eurotas
where the young men rode and trained.*

CHORUS

ANTISTROPHE B

*Ah me,
so sorrowful was that destiny,
lady mine, that befell you,
a life better unlived
given to you, yes given, when Zeus blazed in the bright*
215 *air, in the snowflash of the swan's
wing to beget you upon your mother.
What grief is there you have not known?
What in life have you not lived through?
Your mother is lost and gone;*
220 *the twins, beloved children of Zeus,
are blessed in fortune no longer. Your eyes
are kept from the sight of your country,
while through the cities of men there goes
the rumor, divine lady, that gives*
225 *you up to barbarian lusts. And now
your husband, lost on the tossing sea,
is gone from life. He will come no more
to bless the halls of his father, bless
the brazen house of Athena.*

HELEN

EPODE

*What man of the Phrygians was it
230 or was it one from Hellenic soil
who cut down the dripping pine timbers
fatal to Ilium?
This was the timber that Priam's son
shaped into that accursed ship
which, driven by barbarian oars, brought him
235 to the hearth where I lived; he came^o
for my ill-starred beauty,
to capture my love.
And she, the treacherous goddess,
the murderous queen of Cyprus,
drew death down on the Danaid men,^o
240 cruel in all her working.
Then Hera, goddess of grandeur,
queen of the golden throne, who lies
in the arms of Zeus, sent down to me
Hermes, fleet son of Maia.
I was picking fresh flowers,
gathering them into my robe, to take
245 to Athena there in her brazen house
when he caught me away through the bright
air to this unprofitable
country, poor me, made a prize of war
for Priam's sons and the Hellenes;
while upon my name
250 where Simois runs has descended
a false fame and a vanity.*

CHORUS LEADER

You have your sorrows, I know it well. But it were best
to bear your life's constraints as lightly as you may.

HELEN [*now speaking*]

255 Women and friends, what is this destiny on which
I am fastened? Was I born a monster among mankind?
No woman, neither in Greece nor yet in Barbary,^o
is hatched from the white envelope that contains young birds,
yet thus Leda bore me to Zeus, or so they say.
260 And so my life is monstrous, and so are the things that happen
to me, through Hera, or my beauty is to blame.
I wish that like a picture I had been rubbed out
and done again, made plain, without this loveliness,
for so the Greeks would never have been aware of all
265 those misfortunes that now are mine. So I would keep
what was not bad, as now they keep the bad of me.
He who sees from the gods a single strain of luck,
all bad, has a sad lot, but can endure it still.
More complex is the sorrow in which I am involved.
270 I have done nothing wrong and yet my reputation
is bad, and worse than a true evil is it to bear
the burden of faults that aren't truly one's own. Again,
the gods have torn me from my father's land and made
me live among barbarians. I have no kin
275 here and I live a slave although my birth was free.
All Barbary is slave except a single man.
There was one anchor to my hope: the thought of how
my husband might come some day and deliver me,
but gone is that hope now, for he is dead and gone.
280 My mother is dead—I am her murderer. I know

that is unfair, but such unfairness I must accept.
My daughter, pride of the household and my own pride,
is growing to gray years unmarried. And the sons
of Zeus, or so men call them, the Dioscuri,
285 no longer live. So all my luck is turned to grief
and for all purposes I'm dead, though I live in fact.
But worst of all is, if I ever should win home^o
the gates would shut me out, for all men think that I
am that Helen whom Menelaus went to Troy
290 to get. If my husband were alive, I could be known
by him through signs which no one else could know about.
But this fails now. It cannot be that he lives still.
Why do I go on living then? What fate is left?
Shall I choose marriage as my means to get away
295 from hardship? Live with a barbarian husband? Sit
at a rich table? No, for when a woman hates
the husband she lives with, she hates her body too.
Death is best. But to die in some unseemly way?^o
When one hangs by the neck, it is ugly
300 and is thought a bad sight even when slaves die so.
Death by the knife is noble and has dignity,
but it's hard to find the mortal spot to end one's life.
Such is the depth of my unhappiness, that while
for other women beauty means their happiness
305 it is my very beauty that has ruined me.

CHORUS LEADER

Helen, you should not be so sure that that stranger
who came, whoever he is, has spoken all the truth.

HELEN

But he said plainly that my husband had been lost.

CHORUS LEADER

Many things are said plainly, yet prove to be false.

HELEN

310 Yes, but on the other side, they may be true.

CHORUS LEADER

You push yourself to believe the worst and not the best.

HELEN

Yes, I am frightened, and so led by fright to terror.

CHORUS LEADER

How does your favor stand with those inside the house?

HELEN

All here are friends, except the man who hunts my love.

CHORUS LEADER

315 Do you know? I think you should leave your place at the tomb ...

HELEN

What advice is it you so hesitantly give?

CHORUS LEADER

Go to the house, and ask the
daughter of the sea's
nymph, ask Theonoë, who
understands all things,

about your husband, whether
he still lives, or if

320 he is lost from daylight. Then, when
you are well informed,
be happy, or be sorry, as your luck
deserves.
Now, when you really know nothing,
where is the use
in hurting yourself as you do now?
Do what I say.
Give up the shelter of this tomb.
Speak with the girl.◦
325 Why look further, when in this very
house you have
a source of knowledge that will tell
you all the truth?
I volunteer to go inside the house
with you
and help you ask the maiden for her
prophecies.
It is right for women to stand by a
woman's cause.

HELEN [*singing in this lyric interchange with the Chorus, who sing in reply*]

330 *Friends, I accept your argument.
Go, then, go inside the house
so that there you may ask
what new trials await me now.*

CHORUS

I will, nor hesitate. Urge not.

HELEN

335 *O pitiful day.*

*Unhappy I, unhappy, oh what
tale of tears shall I be told?*

CHORUS

*Do not be prophetic of grief.
Do not, dear, anticipate sorrow.*

HELEN

340 *My poor husband, what has happened to him?
Do his eyes see the light,
the Sun's chariot and four horses, the stars in course,
or among dead men under ground*
345 *is his fate long-lasting?*

CHORUS

*Whatever the future
will bring, consider best.*

HELEN

*I call upon you by name, I invoke,
river pale by the washed reeds,*
350 *Eurotas; if this tale
of my lord's death that has come to me
is true—and where was the story not clear?—^o
then I will bind my throat
fast in the hanging noose of death,
or with the deadly stroke that cuts*
355 *the throat open and bleeding
drive the iron with my own hand hard into my body,
a sacrifice to the trinity
of goddesses, and to Priam's son*

*who held the hollows of Ida
long ago when he tended his herds.*

CHORUS

360 *From somewhere may defense emerge
against evils: may your fortune turn.*

HELEN

*Ah, Troy, the unhappy,
for things done that were never done
you died, hurt pitifully. The gifts
the Lady of Cyprus gave me brought
365 showers of tears, showers of blood, pain^o
on pain, tears upon tears, suffering.
Mothers who saw their children die,
maidens who cut their long hair
for kinsmen who were killed beside the waters
of Phrygian Scamander.
370 Hellas too has cried, has cried
aloud in lamentation,
beaten her hands against her head
and with the nails' track of blood torn her cheeks' softness.
375 Blessed long ago in Arcadia, maiden Callisto,
you who shared the bed of Zeus and then were made
into a four-foot beast, how happy was your lot beside
my own; for all the bear's shaggy bulk
is made gentle by the soft eyes,^o
380 and the metamorphosis took away
your sorrows. Artemis drove from her dances
the doe of the golden horns, Titanian daughter of Merops,*

*for her loveliness. But my body's beauty
ruined the citadel of the Dardanians, ruined
385 all the perished Achaeans.*

*(Exit all into the palace. Enter Menelaus from
the side, dressed in tattered clothing.)*

MENELAUS

Ah Pelops, racer of chariots and horses long
ago with Oenomaus in the Pisan field,
how I could wish that, when you were constrained to make^o
an offering to the gods, you had then left this life
390 for theirs, before you had sired my father, Atreus;
who by his marriage with Aerope begot
Agamemnon and myself, Menelaus, two renowned
brothers; for here I do not boast, yet I believe
we marshalled the greatest of armadas against Troy
395 although we led them not as tyrants, not by force,
but the young men of Greece willingly served with us.
Those who are no more living can be numbered now,
and those who, gratefully escaping from the sea,
brought home again the names of all the dead. But I,
400 battered and driven over the gray swell of the open
sea, have been wandering ever since I stormed the towers
of Ilium, trying to get back to my own land
whereto the gods debar my right of homecoming.
I have now sailed to all the friendless, desolate
405 approaches of Libya; always, as I make near home,
the wind buffets me back again, nor ever fills
favorably my sail to bring me home again.
And now, hapless and shipwrecked, with my friends all lost,

I am driven upon this shore. My ship shattered against
410 the rocks, and broke up into wreck and flotsam there.
Of all the ship's various parts only the keel held out,
and on it, by some unexpected chance, I managed
to save myself and Helen, whom I seized from Troy.
What this land is I do not know, nor yet the name
415 of its people; I was too embarrassed to be seen
in public, could not ask,^o but tried to hide away
my ragged state in shame for my bad luck. For when
a great man falls upon evil chance, the strangeness of it
makes him feel worse than the man accustomed to hard times.
420 But the need is too much for me, for we have no food
nor any clothing for our skin, as you may guess
by the kind of ship's flotsam in which I wrap myself.
The robes and all the shining wraps I had before
are lost at sea with all my treasures. Deep inside
425 a cave I hid the wife who was the cause of all
my evil fortunes, and constrained those friends who still
are left alive to keep her safe for me. So now
I am here, all by myself, to see if I can raise
some provisions to take to the friends I left behind.
430 I saw this house with its expanse of masonry
and the grand gates as of some fortunate man, and so
came here. Seafarers always hope for charily
from the houses of the rich. Those who themselves are poor
would not be able to help us, though the wish were there.
435 O-ay! Who is the porter here? Will he come out
and take the message of my griefs to those inside?

(Enter Theoclymenus' Doorkeeper, an old woman, from the palace.)

DOORKEEPER

Who is at the gates? Go away, will you, from the house?
Do not keep standing here before the courtyard doors
and bothering the masters. It will mean your death.

440 You are a Greek, and Greeks are not allowed in here.

MENELAUS

Quite so, granny, just as you say, and fair enough.°
Very well, I will do what you say, only let me talk.

DOORKEEPER

Out with you. I have orders, stranger, never to let
anyone who comes from Greece approach near to this house.

MENELAUS

445 Ah! Keep your hands off me, and stop pushing me.

DOORKEEPER

That is your fault. You are not doing what I say.

MENELAUS

Now go inside and take this message to your master ...

DOORKEEPER

There'll be suffering ahead if I take a message from you.°

MENELAUS

I am a shipwrecked guest and so I am protected.

DOORKEEPER

450 Go on then to some other house instead of this.

MENELAUS

No, I am going in; do as I tell you to.

DOORKEEPER

I tell you, you are bothersome. We'll throw you out.

MENELAUS

Ah, where are all my armies now, which won such fame?

DOORKEEPER

You may have been a great man at home. You are not one here.

MENELAUS

455 God, what a loss of station, and how undeserved!

DOORKEEPER

Your eyes are wet with tears. Tell me, why are you sad?

MENELAUS

Thinking of all my happiness in times gone by.

DOORKEEPER

Go then, bestow those tears upon your own people.

MENELAUS

Tell me first, what is this country, what king's house is this?

DOORKEEPER

460 This is the house of Proteus; Egypt is the land.

MENELAUS

Egypt? What an unhappy chance to have sailed here!

DOORKEEPER

What do you find wrong with the glories of the Nile?

MENELAUS

Nothing wrong. It is my own bad luck that makes me sad.

DOORKEEPER

There are many men who have bad luck, not only you.

MENELAUS

465 Is there some ruler in the house you could name to me?

DOORKEEPER

This is his tomb you see here. Now his son is king.

MENELAUS

Where would he be then? In the house, or gone somewhere?

DOORKEEPER

He is not in; and above all else he hates Hellenes.

MENELAUS

What have we done to him that I should suffer for it?

DOORKEEPER

470 It is because Zeus' daughter, Helen, is in this house.

MENELAUS

What? What is this you are telling me? Say it again.

DOORKEEPER

I mean Tyndareus' daughter who lived in Sparta once.

MENELAUS

Where did she come from? What is the explanation of this?

DOORKEEPER

She came from Lacedaemon and made her way here.

MENELAUS

475 When? Has my wife I left in the cave been carried off?

DOORKEEPER

She came, stranger, before the Achaeans sailed for Troy.

But go away from here quietly. The state of things
inside is such that all the great house is upside down.

480 You came at the wrong time, and if my master catches
you, all the hospitality you will find is death.

I myself like the Greeks, in spite of those harsh words
I gave you. I was afraid of what my master might do.

(The Doorkeeper goes back into the palace and closes the door.)

MENELAUS

What am I to think or make of this? She tells me now
of present difficulties after those gone by,

485 since, while I come bringing my wife, lost once by force,
from Troy, and she is guarded for me in the cave,

all the while some other woman with the same name
as my wife has been living in this house. She said

that this one was by birth the child of Zeus. Can it be

490 there is some man who bears the name of Zeus and lives
beside the banks of the Nile? No, there's one Zeus; in heaven.

And where on earth is Sparta except only where
Eurotas' waters ripple by the lovely reeds?

Tyndareus is a famous name. There is only one.
495 And where is there another land called Lacedaemon
or Troy either? I do not know what to make of it.
I suppose it must be that in the wide world a great many
have the same name, men named like other men, cities
like cities, women like women. Nothing to wonder at
in this.
500 I will not run away for the servant's threats.
There is no man whose heart is so uncivilized
that when he has heard my name he will not give me food.
Troy is renowned, and I, who lit the fire of Troy,^o
Menelaus, am not unknown anywhere in all
505 the world. I will await the master of the house. I have
a choice of courses. If he is a savage man
I will hide myself and make for where I left the wreck,
but if he gives way and is gentle, I shall ask
for what the present circumstances make me need.
510 Of all the evils in my distressed plight, this is
the worst, that I, myself a king, should have to ask
other kings for sustenance. But so it has to be.
For the saying is not mine, but it was wisely said,
that nothing has more strength than dire necessity.

(Enter the Chorus and Helen from the palace.)

CHORUS [*singing*]

515 *Before I came back I heard from the maid
prophetic all she divined for the house
of kings: how Menelaus is not
lost yet nor sunk in the dim,
shining cave of the under-earth,*

520 *but still over the sea's surges*
 hard driven he cannot win
 to the harbors of his own land,
 in hardship, wandering
 for want of food, with his friends all gone
525 *all across the wide world he keeps*
 his foot hard for the oarsman's stroke
 since ever he sailed from Troy land.

HELEN [*speaking*]

So, here am I, come back to the shelter of the tomb
once more. I have heard Theonoë's words, and they were good,
530 and she knows everything. She says my husband lives^o
 still in the light and looks upon the day-star; yet
 he is driven sailing back and forth along the sea
 on endless crossings, hardened by the wanderer's life,
 but when his work is ended and over, he will come.
535 One thing she did not tell me, if after he returns
 he will be safe. I carefully did not ask her this,
 I was so happy to hear that he is safe so far.
 She said also that he was in this country, near
 at hand, a shipwrecked castaway with just few friends.
540 When will you come? And if you come, how dear to me!

(She catches sight of Menelaus.)

Who is it, who are you? Does this mean I am waylaid
by the machinations of Proteus' godless son? What shall
I do? Not run like a racing filly, like the god's
Bacchant, up to the tomb with flying feet? This man
545 is savage by his look and hunts me for his prey.

MENELAUS

You, who now race in such an agony of fear
to reach the grave mound and the uprights where the fires
are burned, stay! Why this flight? Know, when I saw your face
it struck me with amazement and with disbelief.

HELEN

550 We are set upon, my women. This man bars my way
to the tomb. His purpose is to catch me, and then give
me over to that tyrant whose embrace I shun.

MENELAUS

I am no thief, nor any servant of bad men.

HELEN

And yet the clothes that cover you are poor and mean.

MENELAUS

555 Stay your swift feet from running, put aside your fear.

HELEN

Very well, I will stand, since I have reached the tomb.°

MENELAUS

Who are you? I look, lady, upon your face: whose face?

HELEN

And who are you? The same question for both of us.

MENELAUS

Never have I seen a form so like another form.

HELEN

560 Oh gods!—it is divine to recognize your own.

MENELAUS

Are you a Hellene woman or a native here?°

HELEN

Hellene. But tell me who you are. I would know too.

MENELAUS

You are more like Helen, my lady, than any I know.

HELEN

You are like Menelaus, too. What does it mean?

MENELAUS

565 The truth. You have recognized this most unhappy man.

HELEN

Oh, you are come at long last here to your wife's arms.

MENELAUS

Wife? What wife do you mean? Take your hands off my clothes.

HELEN

The wife Tyndareus, my own father, gave to you.

MENELAUS

O Hecate of the lights, send better dreams than this.

HELEN

570 It's not a phantom-slave of the crossway goddess you see.

MENELAUS

I am only one man and could not have two wives.

HELEN

And who might be the other wife whose lord you are?

MENELAUS

She whom the cave hides, whom I brought from the Phrygian land.

HELEN

I am your wife. There is no other in my place.

MENELAUS

575 Am I in my right mind? Or are my eyes at fault?

HELEN

When you look at me, do you not think you see your wife?

MENELAUS

Your body is like hers. Certainty fails me.

HELEN

Look and see.

What more do you want? And who knows me better than you?

MENELAUS

In very truth you are like her. That I will not deny.

HELEN

580 What better teacher shall you have than your own eyes?

MENELAUS

But here's my problem: that another is my wife.

HELEN

It was an image of me. I never went to Troy.

MENELAUS

And what artificer makes bodies live and breathe?

HELEN

The air: from which the work of gods shaped you a bride.

MENELAUS

585 And which of the gods made her? This is past all wit.

HELEN

It was Hera made the switch, so Paris should not have me.

MENELAUS

How could you be here and in Troy at the same time?

HELEN

A name can be in many places, the body not.

MENELAUS

Let me go. I had pain enough when I came here.

HELEN

590 And will you leave me, for that empty shadow's arms?

MENELAUS

You are like Helen, so, at least, happy farewell.

HELEN

Lost, lost! I won my husband, and must lose him still.

MENELAUS

I trust my memory of great hardships more than you.

HELEN

Ah me, was any woman more wretched ever? They
595 who stand closest forsake me. I shall never find
my way to Greece, my native country, ever again.

(Enter Servant of Menelaus from the side.)

SERVANT

Menelaus, I have been wandering all over this land
of barbarians looking for you and find you now
at last. The friends you left behind sent me for you.

MENELAUS

600 What is it? Have the barbarians robbed or plundered you?

SERVANT

A strange thing, stranger in itself than the telling of it.

MENELAUS

Tell me. You must bring some surprise, for haste like this.

SERVANT

I tell you: all your thousand toils were toiled in vain.

MENELAUS

This is old weeping for old sorrows. What is new?

SERVANT

605 Your wife is gone, swept up and away and out of sight
into the hollows of the high air. Sky veils her now.
She left the secret cave where we were keeping her
with only this said to us: "Wretched men of Troy
and all you Achaeans who, day after day, went on
610 dying for me beside Scamander, by Hera's craft,
you thought Paris had Helen, when he never did.
Now I, having kept the duty of destiny, and stayed
the time I had to stay, go back into the sky,
my father. All for nothing Tyndareus' daughter has
615 heard evil things said of her, who did nothing wrong."
Oh, daughter of Leda, hail! Were you here all this time?
I was in the act of telling him, fool that I was,
how you had left our caverns for the stars and gone
on wings away. I will not let you mock at us
620 like this again. It was enough hardship that you
gave to your husband and his helpers there in Troy.

MENELAUS

I see it, I see it! All the story that she told
has come out true. O day of my desires, that gives
you back into my arms to take and hold again!

HELEN^o

625 Oh, dearest of men to me, Menelaus, time has grown
old, but the joy that now is ours is fresh and new.

*[singing throughout the following interchange while Menelaus
alternates between speaking and singing]*

*I have my husband again, all my delight, sweet friends,
my arms circle him now,*

beloved, light and a flame in dark that has been so long.

MENELAUS [*speaking*]

630 And I hold you. And we have so much to say about
the time between, I do not know where to begin.

HELEN

*I am so happy, all my hair is rising
with shivering pleasure, and the tears burst. Husband
and love, I have your body here close in my arms,
635 happiness, mine again.*

MENELAUS [*singing*]

*O sweetest face, there is nothing left to wish for.
This is my bride, daughter of Zeus and Leda. °*

HELEN

*She whom the boys of white horses, boys of my bloodline
640 brought by torchlight, to bless me, to bless me. . .*

MENELAUS

*... long ago, but it was a god who took you away
from my house, and drove you
away, where your fate was the stronger.*

HELEN

*But evil turned to good brought us together again,
645 my husband, lost so long. Now may my luck be good.*

MENELAUS [*speaking*]

May it be good, surely. All my prayer is as your prayer.
Where there are two, one cannot be wretched, and one not.

HELEN

*My friends, dear friends, I will no longer
weep and grieve for the past.*

650 *I have my husband, I have him. Long I waited for him,
all the years of Troy, waited for him to come.*

MENELAUS

You have me, I have you. But the suns of ten thousand days
were hard to win through to god's gladness here at the end.

HELEN

*My happiness has its tears in it; but there is more
655 sweetness here than the pain.*

MENELAUS

What shall I say? Who ever could hope that this would be?

HELEN

I have you so unhopd-for here against my breasts!.

MENELAUS [*singing*]

*And I hold you, when I thought you had gone away
to Idaeian Troy and to those pitiful towers.*

[*speaking*]

660 In gods' name, tell me how you were taken from my house.

HELEN

*Ah, a bitter cause that you open here,
and ah, a bitter story you waken for me.*

MENELAUS

Speak. The gods gave this; we must even hear it out.

HELEN

I spit away that story, the story that I must tell.

MENELAUS

665 Tell it still. There is pleasure in hardships heard about.

HELEN

*It was not to the bed of a young barbarian man
borne on the beating of oars,
borne on the beating of desire for a lawless love.*

MENELAUS

No, but what spirit, what destiny robbed home of you?°

HELEN

670 *The son of Zeus, of Zeus and of Maia, ° my lord,
brought me here to the Nile.*

MENELAUS

Strange, strange! Who sent him? There is wonder in this tale.

HELEN

*I have wept for this; my eyes are wet
with tears.*

*It was the wife of Zeus
destroyed me.*

MENELAUS

675 Hera? What need had she to give this evil to us?

HELEN

Ah, there was danger for me in the bathing there and the springs

*where the goddesses made bright
their bodies; there the judgment was begun.*

MENELAUS

And Hera made the judgment mean this evil for you?°

HELEN

So she might take away from Paris . . .

MENELAUS [*singing*]

680

How? Speak.

HELEN

... me. Cypris had promised him me.

MENELAUS

Oh, poor woman.

HELEN

Cruel, cruel So I was driven to Egypt.

MENELAUS [*speaking*]

She gave him the image in your place. So you tell me.

HELEN

*But you in your house, my mother, ah, the sorrows of you,
the hurt that happened.*

MENELAUS [*singing*]

685

Tell me.

HELEN

*My mother is gone. Ill-starred in my marriage
and for my shame she caught the noose to her neck.*

MENELAUS [*speaking*]

Ah. But Hermione our daughter, does she live?

HELEN

*Wedless, childless, my dear, she grieves
690 for my marriage that was none.* °

MENELAUS

Oh, Paris, you destroyed my house from top to bottom!

HELEN

*This killed you too, and in their thousands killed
the bronze-armored Danaans.
It was the god who cast me away from my city, from you,
695 out of the land of my fathers, star-crossed and cursed
when I left my house, when I left my bed
—but I left them not for a shameful love!*

CHORUS LEADER

If now for the rest of fortune you are fortunate,
in time to come, it is enough to heal the past.

SERVANT

700 Menelaus, let me into your happiness as well.
I am listening to it too, but still I am not clear.

MENELAUS

Indeed, dear old man. Share in what we have to say.

SERVANT

Did she not cause the sorrows for the men in Troy?

MENELAUS

She did not. We were swindled by the gods. We had^o
our hands upon an idol made of clouds.

SERVANT

705

You mean

it was for a cloud, for nothing, we did all that work?

MENELAUS

The hand of Hera, the strife of the three goddesses.

SERVANT

This woman who stands here with us is your real wife?

MENELAUS

710

Herself. It is I who tell you this. You must believe.

SERVANT

715

My daughter, the way of god is complex; he is hard
for us to predict. He moves the pieces and they come
somehow into a kind of order. Some have bad luck^o
while others, scatheless, meet their evil and go down
in turn. None can hold fortune still and make it last.
You and your husband have had your turn of trouble now.
Yours was a story, but he fought with the spear, and all
his hard fighting was fought for nothing. Now his luck
has turned, and the highest blessings fall into his hands.
720 You never shamed your aged father, never shamed
your divine brothers, nor did what you were rumored to.

It all comes back to me, your marriage long ago,
and I remember the torch I carried as I ran
beside your four-horse chariot, where you, a bride,
725 rode from your noble house beside the master here.
He is a poor thing who does not feel as his masters do,
grieve in their grief, be happy in their happiness.
I, though I wear the name of servant, yet aspire^o
to be counted in the number of the generous
730 slaves, for I do not have the name of liberty
but have the heart. Better this, than for a single man
to have the double evil of an evil spirit
and to be named by those about him as a slave.

MENELAUS

Come then, old friend, you who have had your share of work
735 in the hard toils beneath the shield and at my side,
share now the blessings of my fortune too, and go
to take the news back to those friends I left behind—
how you have found our state here, how our luck holds now;
tell them, too, to wait by the seashore, follow from there
740 the progress of those trials of strength I see in store
for me, and if we can steal my wife out of this place
they must see to it that, joining our fortunes all in one,
we get clear of these barbarians, if we have the strength.

SERVANT

It shall be done, my lord.

Only, now I am sure
745 how rotten this business of prophets is, how full of lies.
There never was any good in burning things on fires^o
nor in the voices of fowl. It is sheer idiocy

even to think that birds do people any good.
Calchas said nothing about this; he never told
750 the army when he saw his friends die for a cloud,
nor Helenus either, and a city was stormed in vain.
You might say: “No, for god did not wish it that way”^o
Then why consult the prophets? We should sacrifice
to the gods, ask them for blessings, and let prophecy go.
755 The art was invented as a bait for making money,
but no lazy man gets rich just by burnt offerings.
The best prophet is common sense and thoughtful planning.

(Exit to the side.)

CHORUS LEADER

My own opinion about
prophets tallies with
that of this old man. If you have the
gods for friends
760 you have a better thing than
prophecy for your house.

HELEN [*now speaking*]

So. All is well now here where I have been. But tell
me, my poor husband, how you survived Troy. I know
there’s no gain in my learning, but when you love you feel
a fascination in even the sorrows of those you love.

MENELAUS

765 Your single question, one approach, asks me so much.
Why must I tell you how the Aegean wore us out,
of the Euboean wrecking-fires Nauplius set,
of Crete, of the Libyan cities we were driven upon,

of Perseus' watchtower? Even could I satisfy
770 you telling of troubles, telling would only burden me
who am so tired already, and be double pain.

HELEN

What you have said was much more than my question. Still,
leave out the rest and tell me only this. How long
have you been wandering battered on the waves of the sea?

MENELAUS

775 The years at Troy were ten, and to this add the time
I was at sea, where I filled the circles of seven years.

HELEN

Too long, unhappy husband, all too long a time
to live through, and survive it, and come here to die.

MENELAUS

To die! What will you tell me now? You have broken me.

HELEN

780 Make your escape, get clear of this place with speed, or else^o
you will be killed by the man who is the master here.

MENELAUS

What have I done to deserve treatment such as this?

HELEN

You have come unlooked-for to prevent my marrying.

MENELAUS

You mean someone here is trying to marry my wife?

HELEN

785 He meant to force my favors; and I must endure.

MENELAUS

 In his own private strength, or by some lordship here?

HELEN

 The man is Proteus' son and master of the land.

MENELAUS

 Now this then was the puzzle of what the doorkeeper said.

HELEN

 At what barbarian doors have you been standing now?

MENELAUS

790 These. And like any beggar I was driven away.

HELEN

 You were not asking for charity? Oh, my shame.

MENELAUS

 The action was that, but I did not call it so.

HELEN

 It seems, then, you know all about his courting me.

MENELAUS

 I know; what I do not know is whether you held him off.

HELEN

795 Hear it then: all my love is kept untouched for you.

MENELAUS

What will make me sure of this? But how sweet, if true!

HELEN

Do you see where I sat in suffering beside this tomb?

MENELAUS

I see your wretched pallet. What was your plan?

HELEN

I took a suppliant's place here to escape his bed.

MENELAUS

800 For lack of an altar, or is it the barbarians' custom here?

HELEN

It saved me, as well as the gods' temples could have done.

MENELAUS

Is there no way for me and my ship to take you home?

HELEN

A sword waits for you, rather than a love-bed with me.

MENELAUS

Thus I would be the most unhappy man alive.

HELEN

805 Take flight, and do not be ashamed. Escape from here.

MENELAUS

And leave you? It was for your sake I captured Troy.

HELEN

But better so than that my love should mean your death.

MENELAUS

Cowardly counsel, unworthy of the siege of Troy.

HELEN

You would kill the king, I suspect. It cannot be done.

MENELAUS

810 You mean he has a body that no steel can pierce?

HELEN

You will see. A wise man doesn't attempt what can't be done.

MENELAUS

Shall I then quietly give him my hands to tie?

HELEN

You are desperate. What we need now is strategy.

MENELAUS

I would rather die in action than die in doing nothing.

HELEN

815 There is a single hope for escape, a single way.

MENELAUS

What way? Bribery? Daring and force? Or argument?

HELEN

What if the tyrant never learns that you are here?

MENELAUS

Who will tell him? He will not know me by himself.

HELEN

He has an ally, strong as a god, inside the house.

MENELAUS

820 Some voice has come and taken a secret place inside?

HELEN

No, it is his sister, whom they call Theonoë.

MENELAUS

The name is prophetic, surely. Tell me what she does.

HELEN

She knows everything. She will tell her brother you are here.

MENELAUS

That would be death. I have no way to stay concealed.

HELEN

825 But if we threw ourselves on her mercy, worked on her ...

MENELAUS

To do what? What is the hope you lead me gently to?

HELEN

... so she won't tell her brother you are in the land.

MENELAUS

If we won her over, could we get ourselves out of here?

HELEN

With her help, easily. Without her knowledge, no.

MENELAUS

830 Best for woman to approach woman. You do this.

HELEN

She will not leave until my arms have embraced her knees.

MENELAUS

But look now. What if she will not listen to us?

HELEN

You must die, and I be married by force, and sorrowful.

MENELAUS

But betraying me still. By force, you say. Just an excuse.

HELEN

835 No, then. I have sworn a sacred oath, by your own head.

MENELAUS

You mean that you will die and never change your husband?

HELEN

Die by the sword that kills you, and be laid to rest
beside you.

MENELAUS

I accept it. Take my hand on this.

HELEN

I take it, and swear to forsake the daylight if you die.

MENELAUS

840 And I swear, if I lose you I shall take my life.

HELEN

How, in such death, shall we make men know how we died?

MENELAUS

I will kill you on this grave mound, then kill myself.

But come, first I shall dare a great action for your sake
and for our marriage. Whoever wants you, let him come.

845 I will not shame my glories from the Trojan War
nor take the common blame of Hellas when I come home,
I who made Thetis lose Achilles, I who looked
on Telamonian Ajax in his suicide
and saw Nestor made childless. Shall I then not dare
850 count death as worth the dying for my lady's sake?
Oh, I must. If there are gods and if they are wise,
when a man falls high-hearted at the hands of enemies
they make the earth lie light upon him in the grave,
but fling the cowards out on the hard stones of earth.

CHORUS LEADER

855 Oh gods, I pray you, let the race of Tantalus
turn fortunate at last, and let their troubles end.

HELEN

Unhappy me! My destiny is luckless still.

Menelaus, we have no chance left. Theonoë
the diviner is coming out now, for the house sounds

860 to the unbarring of the doors. Run! Only where

to run? What use? Whether or not she is here, she knows
that you are here. Poor me, it is surely ruin now.
And you, saved from barbarian Troy, you have come here
once again to be slain by a barbarian sword.

(Enter Theonoë from the palace, attended by two servants.)

THEONOË

865 You, lead the way. Bear gleaming torches, and fumigate
the furthest reach of heaven, following holy law,
so we may take and breathe the purity of this air.
And you: if anyone with unhallowed foot has stepped
and fouled the way, treat it with purifying flame,
870 strike with the torch so I can make my way through. Then
when we have rendered our devotion to the gods
take the fire back inside to burn upon the hearth.

(The servants do as instructed, then exit into the palace.)

Helen, what of my prophecies? Are they not true?
Here is your husband Menelaus, plain before
875 my eyes, with his ships lost, and with your image gone.
Poor man, with what dangers escaped you have come here,
nor even yet know whether you shall go home or must
stay here. This very day before the seat of Zeus
there shall be quarreling among the gods about
880 your case. Hera, who was your enemy before
but is now your friend, desires that you go home with Helen
here, so that Greece may learn how Aphrodite's gift
to Alexander of a bride was a false gift.
Cypris would wreck your homecoming, so none shall know
885 the truth of how she bought the name of beauty for
false payment, Helen's marriage—which was no real thing.
The decision rests with me, to do as Cypris wills
and tell my brother you are here, destroy you so,

or take the side of Hera, save your life, and hide
890 your coming from my brother, though his orders were
to tell him, when your journey home brought you this way.

Which of you will go tell my brother that this man^o
is here? Thus will my welfare be made safe for me.

(Helen kneels at the feet of Theonoë.)

HELEN

Maiden, I throw myself as
suppliant upon
895 your knees, and kneel in a forlorn
posture, for the sake
of my own self and for this man. I
have found him
at last, and finding him am like to
see him die.

Do not then tell your brother that
my husband here
has come to my most loving and
beloved arms,
900 but save him, I implore you. You
must not betray
your duty and your good name for
your brother's sake
to buy him wicked pleasures he
does not deserve.

God hates violence. He has
ordained that all men
905 wealth obtained unjustly must be

fairly acquire their property,
not seize it. So

left alone.°

There is the sky, which is all men's
together; there
is the world to live in, fill with
houses of our own
nor hold another's, nor tear it from
his hands by force.

For me it was hard, and yet it was a
timely thing,

910 that Hermes gave me to your father
to keep safe
for my husband, who is here and
who would have me back.

How can he take me back when he
is dead? And how°

could your brother duly give the
living to the dead?

Consider now your father's case,
consider god's.

915 Would the divine power, and would
the dead man, wish to see
what belongs to another given
back, or would they not?

I think they would. You must not
give a greater weight
to a wild brother than to an
honorable father.

If you, who are a prophetess and
understand

920 the gods' concerns, will spoil the
just actions of your father
and uphold the right of an
unrighteous brother, then

to know the gods' concerns is a
disgraceful thing.

Shame to know past and future, not
know right and wrong!

And me, surrounded as I am by
miseries—

925 save me and add that bonus to your
act of justice.

There is no man living but Helen is
his hate,

notorious through all Hellas as
having betrayed

my husband, to live in the
Phrygians' golden houses.

But if I go to Greece and reach
Sparta again

930 and they hear, and see, how it was
by the arts of gods

that they were ruined, that I never
betrayed my loves,

they will restore me to my
reputation once

again. My daughter—nobody will
take her now—

will be betrothed by me. I'll
escape the homeless life

935 I lead here, and live on my own
money in my own house.

If Menelaus lay dead and
murdered^o on the pyre,

I should have loved him from a
distance, with my tears.

But he is here, alive. Must he be

taken from me?

No, maiden, no. I kneel here as
your suppliant.

940 Give me your grace in this, and let
your ways be like
your upright father's ways, for it is
the brightest fame
of children, when they have a
father who was good,
if they can match the character that
gave them birth.

CHORUS LEADER

The words you have spoken now are truly pitiful
945 and you are pitiable too. Yet still, I long to hear
what Menelaus has to argue for his life.

MENELAUS

I cannot bring myself to fall before your
feet
nor to make my eyes wet with tears. Such
abjectness
would be the greatest shame upon the tale
of Troy.
950 Yet some assert, or so I've heard, that
noble men
in times of woe will let the tears pour from
their eyes.
I waive this privilege of honor—if
privilege
of honor it is. Courage is better.

Rather,
thus:

955 if you think best to save a man, a visitor,
who asks with right to have his wife given
back to him,
give her, and save me too. If you do not
think it best,
it does not mean new misery for me but the
old
continued; and it means you are an evil
woman.
But what I think is worthy and right for me
to say,
960 and what will touch your heart beyond all
else, I shall
say kneeling here before your father's
tomb, in grief.

Aged sir, who dwell here in the stony
tomb,
give her back to me. What I ask is my own
wife
whom Zeus had brought here, so you could
keep her safe for me.
965 I understand now you will never give her
back
since you are dead. But this lady here must
not approve
that her invoked and famous father
underground shall hear
despiteful speech against him. All is in her
hands.

Hades of the underworld, I invoke your aid
as well.

970 You have taken many dead men, fallen
before my sword,
because of this woman. You are paid your
price in full.

Now bring these bodies to life again and
yield them back,
or force this maiden now to match her
father's fame
for pious dealing, and give back my bride
to me.

975 If you Egyptians take my wife away from
me,
I will tell you what will happen then, as
she did not.

For your attention, maiden: we are bound
by oath.

First I shall find your brother and we two
shall fight.

He will be killed, or I. There is no more to
say.

980 But if he lacks the courage to stand up to
me,

and tries to starve and
snare two
suppliants at the
tomb,

I have decided to kill her, then thrust the
blade
of this two-edged sword into my own
heart, upon
the back of this grave mound before us,

where the blood
985 will splash and drip upon the grave. There
we shall lie
two corpses, side by side, upon the marble
tomb,
to shame your father, to pain you, for
evermore.
Your brother will not marry her. Nobody
else
will marry her. I shall take her away with
me,
990 away to the dead, if I cannot bring her
home.

Why do I say this? Turning to woman and
to tears^o
I should be pitied, but I should get nothing
done.
Kill me, if you think best. You will not kill
your shame.
But better, be persuaded by my arguments;
995 for so you would be just, and I should have
my wife.

CHORUS LEADER

It is yours to pass judgment on their arguments,
maiden. Judge then, and judge so all will be well pleased.

THEONOË

My nature is to be pious; so is my wish.
I have myself to think of, and my father's name
1000 is not to be defiled. I must not give my brother
such pleasures as will leave me with my honor gone.

The sanctity of justice is a powerful thing
in my own nature. This is Nereus' heritage.
I have it, Menelaus; I will try to keep
1005 it always. And, since Hera wishes to help you,
my vote shall be as Hera votes. And as for Cypris
(may she not be offended!), that means nothing here.
My aim is to remain a virgin all my life.°
As for reproaches on my father and this tomb,
1010 the same tale must apply to me. I would do wrong
not to restore her. For my father, had he lived,
would have given her back to you, and you to her.
For all men, in the world below and in the world
above, must pay for acts committed here. The mind
1015 of those who have died, blown into the immortal air,
immortally keeps knowledge, though all life is gone.
I must not strain this matter to great length. I shall
be quiet about your supplication, and shall not
let my good counsels help my brother toward his lust.
1020 Really, I serve him so, though he might not think so,
if I can make him good, not dissolute any more.
Now it will rest upon yourselves to find a way.
I shall have nothing to do with it, but shall withdraw
and be silent. Begin by praying to the gods, and ask
1025 the Lady of Cyprus to let Helen now come home,
and ask Hera to hold steadfastly that good will
toward you, and toward your husband, which shall save you both.

My father, you are dead, but while I have the strength
your name of piety shall not change to an impious name.

(Exit into the palace.)

CHORUS LEADER

1030 The unrighteous are never really fortunate.
Our hopes for safety depend upon our doing right.

HELEN

We are safe, Menelaus, as far as the maiden is concerned.
Now it's up to us to propose measures, so that we
can make a plan between us to escape from here.

MENELAUS

1035 Listen then: you have lived some time in this house
and have been familiar with the attendants of the king.

HELEN

Yes, but why did you mention it? Does it mean you hope
to accomplish something that will help the two of us?

MENELAUS

Would you be able to persuade those who have charge
1040 of the chariots? Would they perhaps give us one?

HELEN

I could persuade them. But what use? How shall we flee
the plains of this strange land where we do not know our way?

MENELAUS

Hopeless, as you say ... Come, then, hide me in the house
and I'll kill the king with my own blade. Shall we do this?

HELEN

1045 No. His sister could no longer keep the secret
of your presence here, if it were to mean her brother's death.

MENELAUS

But we have no ship in which to make a safe escape.
The ship we had is at the bottom of the sea.

HELEN

Listen! Even a woman can have a clever thought.
1050 Are you willing, though not dead, to be reported dead?

MENELAUS

Unlucky omen. But if it does us any good
I consent. You may say that I am dead, though I am not.

HELEN

Then we shall use the pitiful customs of women,
the dirges and cutting of hair, against that impious man.

MENELAUS

1055 Where is there any help toward our escape in this?
I think that what you say is rather obsolete.

HELEN

Well, then I'll say that you have died at sea, and ask
the king to let me bury you in effigy.

MENELAUS

Suppose he grants it? Even so, without a ship,
1060 how shall we save our bodies by this cenotaph?

HELEN

I shall ask him for a boat, so that your burial
fineries may be submerged and gathered in the sea's arms.

MENELAUS

Well spoken, except for one thing. He will merely say
you must bury him on land. Where, then, is your excuse?

HELEN

1065 But I shall tell him that in Greece it is not allowed
to bury ashore those who have met their death at sea.

MENELAUS

Right again; so you correct things. Then I too shall sail
in the same boat, and with you cast the offerings down.

HELEN

By all means, yes, you are to be there. Bring with you
1070 those mariners of yours who escaped from the shipwreck.

MENELAUS

Thus once I get possession of the anchored ship
they will be ready, man by man, their swords in hand.

HELEN

You shall be in charge of all thenceforward. Only let
the wind blow fair in our sails. Let the ship run!

MENELAUS

1075 It shall. The gods will end my troubles now at last.
Who will you say has told you the story of my death?

HELEN

You. And you tell him you sailed with Atreus' son, and that
you were the sole survivor, and you saw him die.

MENELAUS

1080 This fishing net of rags I wear upon my body
will be convincing proof of my shipwrecked condition.

HELEN

Yes, this is timely now, though then it seemed untimely.
The misery of that moment might now turn into good.

MENELAUS

Should I then go inside the house with you, or sit
here and wait quietly for you beside the tomb?

HELEN

1085 Stay here. So, if he uses violence
 on you
this tomb, and then your own
 sword, will be your defense.
I shall go in the house and cut my
 curls and change
the white clothing that I wear for
 black, and drag
my nails across my cheek leaving
 a red furrow there.
1090 I must. Great hazard. I see two
 ways the scales can tip.
I may be caught in trickery, then I
 must die.
Or I shall save your life, and we
 shall both go home.
O queen and goddess, given to the
 arms of Zeus,
Hera! We are two pitiful people.

Grant us release
1095 from toils. We ask, and lift our
arms straight toward that sky

where your home is, among
the splendors of the stars.

And you, who won that beauty
contest by my marriage,
you, Dione's daughter, Cypris,
destroy me not.
It is enough, that filth you rolled
me in before
1100 when you gave barbarians not my
body but my name.
But if you wish to kill me, let me
only die
in my own country. Why this thirst
for evil things?
Why do you work in passions, lies,
devices full
of treachery, love magics, murder
in the home?
1105 Were you only temperate, in all
else you are found sweet
to us beyond all other gods. This I
confess.

(Exit into the palace.)

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*To you, who deep forested, choired in the growth
of singing wood hide nested,*

to you I utter my outcry,
to you, beyond all other birds sweet in your singing,
1110 O nightingale of the sorrows,
come, with brown beak trilling,
to the beat of your melody, come
with song to my sad singing
as I mourn for the hard sorrows
of Helen, for all the suffering,
1115 all the tears of the daughters of Troy
from spears held by Achaeans,
all from the time when with barbarian oar he swept over
the water-flats, came, came, and his coming was sorrow
in marriage for Priam's people, moving
1120 from Lacedaemon, from you, Helen: Paris, dark lover
brought there by Aphrodite.

ANTTSTROPHE A

And there were many Achaeans who by the spear
and by the stone's smash have died
and are given grimly to Hades.
For these, unhappy wives have cut their long hair.
1125 The chambers of their love are left forsaken.
Many others besides were drowned
by an Achaean, that man of the single oar,
off waterswept Euboea
when he lit his wreck fires, blazed
the false flares, and crashed them to death
1130 on Aegean rocks at Caphereus.
And for Menelaus, the harborless mountains in the storm wind^o
were death, when he was driven far from his homeland,
carrying the prize of his barbarian glory;

prize, no prize, but war,
1135 *the Greek cloud shape his ship carried off,*
the sacred image Hera made.

STROPHE B

What is god, what is not god, what is between man
and god, who shall say? I'd say he has found
the remote way to the absolute,
1140 *he who sees the gods' concerns coming*
here to us, then returning there, and coming
back again, leaping
to unexpected fortunes.
Yourself were born, Helen, daughter to Zeus.
1145 *Winged in the curves of Leda there*
as bird he fathered you.
Yet even you are denounced through Greece
as traitress, faithless, rightless, godless. No man's
thought I can speak of is ever clear,
1150 *no word about gods have I found unbroken.*

ANTISTROPHE B

Mindless, all of you, who in the strength of spears
and the tearing edge win your valors
by war, thus stupidly gaining
freedom from pains in death.
1155 *For if bloody debate shall settle*
the issue, never again
shall hate be gone out of the cities of men.
By hate they won the chambers of Priam's city;
they could have resolved by reason and words
1160 *the quarrel, Helen, for you.*

*Now these are given to the Death God below.
On the walls the flame, as of Zeus, lightened and fell.°
And you, Helen, upon your sorrows bear
more hardships still, and more matter for grieving.*

(Enter Theoclymenus from the side, attended by hunters.)

THEOCLYMENUS

1165 Tomb of my father, greeting! It was even for such
addresses, Proteus, I caused you to be buried here
at the entrance, and in passing in and out of doors
I, Theoclymenus your son, greet you, Father.
You, my serving men, take the dogs and the hunting nets
inside the king's palace; put them away.

(The servants do as instructed.)

1170 Now I
have found many hard things to say against myself.
Do we not chastise evildoers with death? And yet
even now they tell me there has been a Greek man seen
who has openly come here but has escaped the guards,
1175 to spy on us, or watching for the chance to steal
Helen away. Let him be caught, and he is dead.
Ah,
I have come too late, it seems. The whole thing has been done
and the daughter of Tyndareus, leaving empty her place
in the tomb's shelter, is carried away out of the land.
1180 Hallo! Unbar all bolts and let the horses out
from their mangers, men, and get the chariots out and ready.
Let it not be for lack of effort that the bride

I would win is stolen secretly from my domain.

(Enter Helen from the palace.)

No, wait. I see the ones that I am
after, here
1185 beside the palace still, they have
not yet escaped.

Why have you changed from your
white clothes, and put on black
and wear them? Why have you
put the iron blade to your head
and shorn away the glory of your
lovely hair?

And why are your cheeks wet
with the fresh tears? For
whom

1190 do you weep? Is it compulsion of
dreams in the night
that makes you sorrow so, or have
you heard from home
some rumor, and the grief of it has
wrecked your heart?

HELEN

My lord—for now at last I name you in such terms—
my life is ruined. There is nothing left for me.

THEOCLYMENUS

1195 What has happened? What is the disaster that has struck you down?

HELEN

My Menelaus—how shall I say it? He is dead.

THEOCLYMENUS

I cannot take pleasure in what you tell me, though it is my fortune.° How do you know? Did Theonoë tell you?

HELEN

She says so. Also, one who was with him when he died.

THEOCLYMENUS

1200 There is someone here then, with an authentic report?

HELEN

Yes, here. May he go to where I wish him to go!

THEOCLYMENUS

Who is he? Where is he? Tell me, let me get this clear.

HELEN

That man you see there, sitting abject under the tomb.

THEOCLYMENUS

By Apollo! The rags of clothing he is in!

HELEN

1205 I think my husband has looked thus. I pity both.

THEOCLYMENUS

Who is this man? Where from? Where did he come ashore?

HELEN

He is a Greek, an Achaean who sailed with my husband.

THEOCLYMENUS

What manner of death does he say that Menelaus died?

HELEN

The most pitiful; washed down in the running sea.

THEOCLYMENUS

1210 Where in barbarian waters was he sailing then?

HELEN

He was driven against Libya's harborless cliffs.

THEOCLYMENUS

How was this man his oarsmate, and yet did not die?

HELEN

Sometimes the baser have more fortune than their betters.

THEOCLYMENUS

He is here, a castaway. Where did he leave his ship?

HELEN

1215 Where I wish he had perished, and Menelaus had not.

THEOCLYMENUS

But Menelaus is dead. In what boat did this man come?

HELEN

Sailors came on him and picked him up, or so he says.

THEOCLYMENUS

Where is that evil that was brought to Troy instead of you?

HELEN

The cloud image? You mean that? Gone into the sky.

THEOCLYMENUS

1220 O Priam, O Troy, how you were brought down in vain!

HELEN

I too, with Priam's children, shared this luckless chance.

THEOCLYMENUS

Did he leave your husband unburied? Is he beneath ground?

HELEN

Not buried yet. And oh, my grief!

THEOCLYMENUS

Was it for this
you cut away the long curls of your yellow hair?

HELEN

1225 He is dear to me even now just as he was before.°

THEOCLYMENUS

This is real. Sorrow has distracted her to tears.°

HELEN

It could easily happen that your sister might be fooled.°

THEOCLYMENUS

Oh, no. How?

Will you go on making this tomb your home?

HELEN

Why do you make fun of me? Let the dead man be.

THEOCLYMENUS

1230 Yet you show faith to him when you keep far from me.

HELEN

That is all past. You may make the wedding arrangements now.

THEOCLYMENUS

It has been long in coming, but I still am glad.

HELEN

Do you know what we should do? Let us forget the past.

THEOCLYMENUS

On what terms? Grace should be given in return for grace.

HELEN

1235 Let us make peace between ourselves. Forgive me all.

THEOCLYMENUS

My quarrel with you is canceled. Let it go with the wind.

HELEN

But by your knees I ask of you, if you are my friend ...

THEOCLYMENUS

What is it that your suppliant arms would wrest from me?

HELEN

I desire your permission to bury my dead lord.

THEOCLYMENUS

1240 How? Are there graves for the lost? Would you bury a shadow?

HELEN

There is a Greek custom for those who die at sea ...

THEOCLYMENUS

What is it? Pelops' people are knowing in such things.

HELEN

... to hold a burial ceremony in empty robes.

THEOCLYMENUS

Do it, then. Raise a mound on my land, where you wish.

HELEN

1245 It is not thus we bury our drowned mariners.

THEOCLYMENUS

How, then? I am not expert in Greek usages.

HELEN

We take all that the dead should be given out to sea.

THEOCLYMENUS

What shall I give you for your dead, then?

HELEN

This man
knows.

I am inexperienced.
All my luck was
good before.

THEOCLYMENUS

1250 So, friend, you have brought me news that I am glad to hear.

MENELAUS

Not good hearing for me, nor for the dead.

THEOCLYMENUS

Tell me,
how do you bury those who have been drowned at sea?

MENELAUS

As lavishly as a man's substance lets him do.

THEOCLYMENUS

For this woman's sake tell me without minding the cost.

MENELAUS

1255 First, there must be a blood victim for the undergods.

THEOCLYMENUS

What beast? Only tell me, and I will do your will.

MENELAUS

Decide yourself. Whatever you give will satisfy.

THEOCLYMENUS

Among us barbarians, it would be a bull or horse.

MENELAUS

Give such then, only give nothing which is malformed.

THEOCLYMENUS

1260 Our herds are rich. We have no lack of good victims.

MENELAUS

Coverings are given too for the body, though none is there.

THEOCLYMENUS

That will be done. Is anything else customary?

MENELAUS

Brazen armor; for Menelaus loved the spear ...

THEOCLYMENUS

What we shall give will be worthy of Pelops' clan.

MENELAUS

1265 ... and we need too other fair produce of the earth.

THEOCLYMENUS

What will you do? How will you sink all this in the sea?

MENELAUS

A ship must be there, also rowers to man the oars.

THEOCLYMENUS

How far distant is the ship to be from the land?

MENELAUS

Out where the breakers can barely be seen on shore.

THEOCLYMENUS

1270 Tell me, why does Greece have this custom? For what cause?

MENELAUS

So the waves cannot wash pollution back ashore.

THEOCLYMENUS

You shall have a fast-running Phoenician ship, with oars.

MENELAUS

That would be excellent. Menelaus would like it so.

THEOCLYMENUS

Do you need her too? Can you not do it by yourself?

MENELAUS

1275 A man's mother must do this, or his wife, or children.

THEOCLYMENUS

You mean it is her duty to bury her husband?

MENELAUS

It is duty's part not to rob the dead of their due.

THEOCLYMENUS

She may go. A wife kept dutiful is to my own
advantage. Go in, and bring the funeral robes of state.°

1280 And if you act so as to please her, I shall send
you from my country with no empty hands, to bear
a good report of me; you shall have clothing, not
this ragged state, and food, enough to bring you home
again; for now I see you are in hard case.

1285 And you, my dear, do not wear yourself away in longing
for the impossible.° Menelaus has met his fate,
and your dead husband shall not come to life again.

MENELAUS

You see your task, young woman; it is to love and serve

the husband you have, and let the other husband go.
1290 In the circumstances, this is the best that you can do.
But if I come through safe to Hellas, I shall put
an end to former scandals that were said of you.
Only be now the wife that you were meant to be.

HELEN

It shall be so. My husband shall
have no complaint
1295 of me. You will be there, and you
will know the truth.
Come in the house, poor wanderer,
you shall have your bath
and a change of clothing.
Kindnesses I have for you

shall not be put off. If I give
all you should have

from me, in all the better spirit you
will do
1300 the things my dearest Menelaus has
deserved.

(Exit Helen, Menelaus, and Theoclymenus into the palace.)

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*Long ago, the Mountain Mother
of all the gods, on flashing feet,
ran down the wooded clefts
of the hills, crossed stream-waters in spate
1305 and the sea's thunderous surf beat
in wild desire for the lost girl*

*not to be named, her daughter,
and the cry of her voice keened high to break
through mutter of drums and rattles.*

1310 *And as the goddess harnessed
wild beasts to draw her chariot
in search of the daughter torn away
from the circling pattern of dance where she
and her maidens moved, storm-footed beside^o
1315 the mother; Artemis with her bow,
stark-eyed, spear-handed Athena
attended. But Zeus, from his high place
in the upper sky shining^o ordained
a different course to follow.*

ANTISTROPHE A

For when the wandering and the swift

1320 *course of the mother was done, the far,
the toilsome, the vain search
for her daughter's treacherous capture,
she crossed the place where the mountain nymphs
keep watch in the snows of Ida,*

1325 *and there cast the blight of her grief
across the stone and snow of the hill forests.^o
Earth, green gone from her fields, would give
food no more in the sown lands,
and generations were wasted.*

1330 *For the flocks she sent out no longer
tender food from the curling leaves.
The cities of men were starving,
the sacrifice to the gods was gone,
no offerings flamed on the altars. She,*

1335 *turned cruel by grief for her daughter, dried
the springs that gush from deep in the ground,
and there were no jets of bright water.*

STROPHE B

*But then, as those festivals the gods
share with the race of men died out,
Zeus spoke, to soften the ruinous*
1340 *rages of the Great Mother:
“Go, stately Graces, and go
Muses, to Deo angered
thus for the sake of the maiden.
Change with wild singing the strain of grief^o
1345 in her, and, Muses, you too with hymns and dancing.”
It was then that the loveliest
of the immortals took the chthonian
voice of bronze and the skin-strung drums:
Aphrodite. The goddess smiled*
1350 *and drew into her hands
the deep-sounding pipe
in delight with its music.*

ANTISTROPHE B

*You had no right in this. The flames you lit^o
in your chambers were without sanction.*
1355 *You showed, child, no due reverence
for this goddess' sacrifice.
You won the Great Mother's anger.
The dappled dress in the deer skin
is a great matter, and the ivy wound*
1360 *green on the sacred hollow reed*

*has power; so also the shaken,
the high, the whirled course of the bull-roarer
in the air; so also the dances,
the wild hair shaken for Bromius,
1365 the goddess' nightlong vigils.
It is well that by daylight^o
the moon obscures her.
All your claim was your beauty.*

(Enter Helen from the palace.)

HELEN

Friends, all that happened in the house was favorable.
1370 The daughter of Proteus keeps our secret. Though she knows
my husband is here, and though her brother questioned her,
she told him nothing, rather she told him he was dead
and buried, out of the sunlight. She did this for me.
My lord has gained a capture, fair and fortunate.^o
1375 He took the armor that is to be sunken in the sea
and fitted the shield handle upon his powerful arm
and wears it so, with the spear held in his right hand,
as if working to help grace the dead man. Yet still
first he practiced, with the armor on him, for a fight
1380 as one who would raise a monument over a whole world
of barbarians once we embark in the oared boat;
then I took off the wreck-stained clothes he wore, and gave
him new, and made him fine again, and bathed his body
at last in fresh water drawn from the stream.
1385 But see,
this prince, who now thinks that he has a marriage with me
in his hands' reach, is coming from the house. So I

must talk no longer. We want you on our side.° Control
your lips, be kind, and some day, if we ever save
ourselves from here, we shall attempt to save you too.

*(Enter Theoclymenus from the palace, followed by Menelaus, and
accompanied by servants who carry the funeral properties.)*

THEOCLYMENUS

1390 Men, go on to your work as the stranger told you to
and take with you the funeral offerings to the sea.
Helen, if what I say to you does not seem wrong,
stay here, as I ask you. Your duty to your husband, whether
you go, or stay, will have been done in any case.
1395 I am afraid longing for him will seize you, make
you fling your body down into the tossing sea
stunned with delights remembered from him before. I know
how much, too much, you mourned for him when he was not here.

HELEN

O my new husband, how can I help holding dear
1400 the memory of my first marriage, all the love
and closeness of it? I have loved him well enough
to die when he died. But what grace would he have known
in death from my death? Only let me go, myself
in person, and give his dead body what it deserves.
1405 So may the gods grant you what I would wish to have
them grant you, and this stranger, who is helping here.
For your kindness now to Menelaus and to me
you shall have me in your house, as wife, to the degree
that you deserve, since all this is in fortune's gift.
1410 Now give your orders to the man who will provide

the ship for our conveyance. This will make me happy.

(To a servant.)

THEOCLYMENUS

Go then, get ready a Sidonian fifty-oar
galley; have master rowers aboard; give it to her.

HELEN

Is not this man to be in charge of the funeral ship?

THEOCLYMENUS

1415 Certainly. My sailors are hereby ordered to obey him.

HELEN

Give the order again so they will hear quite clearly.

THEOCLYMENUS

Again, and still a third time, if you wish me to.

HELEN

For your good, and for my good in the things I plan.

THEOCLYMENUS

Now, do not waste yourself with too much weeping.

HELEN

No.

1420 Today will demonstrate my gratitude to you.

THEOCLYMENUS

Remember, the dead are nothing. This is wasted work.

HELEN

It is matters there of which I speak; and matters here. °

THEOCLYMENUS

You will find me as good a man as Menelaus.

HELEN

I ask no more. I need only the favor of fortune.

THEOCLYMENUS

1425 That is in your power, as long as you are kind to me.

HELEN

I don't need teaching now to love those I ought to love.

THEOCLYMENUS

Shall I go too and see the expedition along?

HELEN

Oh no. My lord, you must not do slave's work for your slaves.

THEOCLYMENUS

Very well. I won't do the rituals of the Pelopidae.

1430 My house needs no lustration, since it was not here
that Menelaus died. Therefore, one of you go
and tell my vassals to take the wedding images
inside my palace. All my country must be loud
with singing of congratulation and with strains
1435 of marriage for Helen and me, to bless our state.

(Exit a servant to the side.)

Go now, my stranger guest, and give all this to the arms
of the sea, in honor of him who was her husband once,
then make haste back to my house again, and bring my wife,
so that you may be my guest at our wedding feast,
1440 and then go home—or stay and prosper here with me.

(Exit into the palace.)

MENELAUS

O Zeus, renowned as father and wise among the gods,
look down upon us. Grant us surcease from our pain,
and as we grate the shoal-rocks of catastrophe
reach us your hand, touch only with your fingertips—
1445 and we are there, triumphant, where we wish to be.
Our past has been our share of troubles, all our share.
I have said, O gods, much bad of you. I have said good,^o
and bad things also. I do not deserve bad luck
forever, but to walk with upright stride. Grant me
1450 this one grace. It will make me happy all my life.

(Helen and Menelaus exit to the side.)

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*Phoenician ship out of Sidon, O^o
oars dear to Nereus' splashing water,
after whose lead in the lovely dance
1455 the dolphins skip, when the open sea
sleeps in windless quiet: and she,
Galaneia, who is called Lady of Calms,
and the Great Sea's green-eyed daughter,*

so speaks: "You'll set wide the sails on the masts,
1460 leave them free to the salt airs,
but now take in your hands the pinewood oars,
mariners, oh mariners,
as you convey Helen home
to kind haven upon the shores of Perseus."

ANTISTROPHE A

1465 So, Helen, might you find again
the Daughters of Leucippus there by the river,
or before the temple of Pallas
come back at last to the dances
or the revels for Hyacinthus
1470 and the night-long festival
established by Phoebus after
his whirled throw of the discus^o
in games killed him: for the Laconian land
a day of sacrifices
1475 by ordinance of him, son of Zeus;
come back to the girl you left
in your house, Hermione,
for whose marriage the pine flares have not shone yet.

STROPHE B

Oh, that we might fly in the air
winged high over Libya
1480 where the lines of the migrant
birds, escaping the winter rain,
take their way, following
the authority of their leader's
1485 whistle. And he flying into the rainless, the wheat-burdened flat

places, screams his clear call.
O flying birds with the long throats, who
share the course of the racing clouds,
go to the midmost Pleiades.
1490 *Go to Orion of the night,*
cry like heralds your message
as you light down on Eurotas,
that Menelaus has taken the town
of Dardanus and will come home.

ANTISTROPHE B

1495 *May you riding down through the bright*
air, swift on your horses,
sons of Tyndareus, come
down the stormy courses of your stars' flaring,
oh, dwellers in the sky,
1500 *saviors of Helen, come*
cross close on the green swell and the dark-skinned back of the
rollers
and the gray splash of the breaking sea,
bringing from Zeus those winds that blow
1505 *sweet airs for the mariners:*
and cast away from your sister the shame
spoken of her barbarian loves,
shame that was hers for punishment
out of the quarrel on Ida, though
1510 *she never went to the land of Troy,*
not to the towers of Phoebus.

(Enter Servant of Theoclymenus from the side.)

SERVANT

My lord, the worst of news from our house. We have just learned.°

(Enter Theoclymenus from the palace.)

Fresh news, strange news and bad. Hear it from me at once.

THEOCLYMENUS

What is it?

SERVANT

Your work is wasted for a wife who is not
1515 yours. Helen is gone away, out of our land.

THEOCLYMENUS

How gone? On wings, or do her feet still tread the earth?

SERVANT

Menelaus carried her away. For that was he.
He came himself, and brought the news of his own death.

THEOCLYMENUS

This is disgraceful. But still I cannot quite believe.
1520 What sort of transport carried them away from here?

SERVANT

Precisely what you gave your guest. He took your men
and left you. There you have it in a single word.

THEOCLYMENUS

How? I must understand this, and I cannot yet
credit it that a single arm could overpower

1525 so many sailors, all those who were sent with you.

SERVANT

After Zeus' daughter left the palace here
and you,
and was escorted to the sea, there as she
placed
her tiny feet, she mourned aloud, most
cleverly,
for that husband who was by her side, by
no means dead.

Now as we came to your shipyards and
your arsenal
1530 we hauled down a Sidonian ship of the
first class
with fifty rowing benches to
accommodate
the oars. And now our various duties
were assigned.
One man set up the mast, another set the
oars
1535 in place, while yet another had charge of
the white sails, ^o
the steersman sat to the tiller and the
steering gear.

Now as we were hard at it, there came
down to the shore
certain Greek men who had sailed with
Menelaus once
and who had been watching for just this.
They wore the rags
1540 of shipwreck. Fine-looking men, but in a

filthy state.

The son of Atreus saw them as they
came, and made
a false pretense of pity for our benefit,
with: "Poor castaways, what ship? It
must once have been
Achaean, cracked up now, and so we see
you here.

1545 Will you help bury Atreus' fallen son?
His wife,
Tyndareus' daughter, buries him in
effigy.

This is she." They then let fall some
fictitious tears
and took aboard what was to be sunk in
the depths
for Menelaus. We had our suspicions
here,

1550 and there were words among us, how
these newcomers
were very numerous. Nevertheless we
held our peace.
We had orders from you and kept them.
You had said
your guest was to have full command.
That ruined all.

Now all the cargo was light and easily
picked up
1555 and stowed inside the ship, except the
bull, who stood
and balked at going up on the steep-
slanted plank,
but bellowed aloud, and with arched

back and head low down
rolled his eyes round the circle past his
lowered horns
forbidding all to touch him. Helen's
husband raised
1560 his voice, and cried: "Oh, you who
captured Ilium,
come, do it the Greek way, can you not?
Hoist the bull's
weight on the strength of your young
shoulders, heave him in
over the prow." And saying this he raised
his sword.
"For he shall be our sacrifice to the dead
man."

1565 They at his order went
and laid hands on the
bull

and heaved him up and forced him on
the rowing deck.
And Menelaus rubbed the horse's neck
and forehead,
persuading him, without harness, to go
inside the ship.

At last, when all was got aboard and
stowed away,
1570 Helen, with dainty steps, put her feet
through the rungs
of the ladder, and took possession of the
central bench,
with Menelaus, the supposed dead man,
by her side,

and left and right along the bulkheads all
took place,
man ranked on man in order (but the
Greeks had swords
hidden away beneath their garments).

1575 Then we all

whitened the water at the bosun's shout
of "Row!"

Now when we had reached a point where
we were not remote
from the land, nor near it either, then our
steersman asked:

“Shall we make further out, my friend, or
is this far

1580 enough to suit you? What we do is yours
 to say”

He said: "This will do." Then, with a sword in his right hand,

crept to the prow, and braced himself to
strike the bull,

and where he stood, there were no dead
men in his mind,

but as he cut the throat he prayed: “Lord
of the sea,

1585 Poseidon in the depth, and you, chaste
Nereids,

convey me safe to Nauplia's strand,
convey my wife

who left it, but was chaste.” And as he spoke, the blood

rained on the water, favoring the

stranger's prayer.

One of us said then: "There is
treacherous sailing here.

1590 We must make back. You, give the order
for right oar,

and you, reverse the rudder." But now
Atreus' son

stood from the slaughtered ox and hailed
his company:

"Oh, flower of all the land of Greece,
why longer wait

to smash these barbarians, cut them
down and throw them off

1595 the ship into the water." Then your bosun
called

aloud upon your seamen to resist: "Come
on!

Get anything to fight with. Take the end
of a spar;

break up a bench and use it, or an
unshipped oar,

and smash the heads of these foreigners,
who turned on us."

1600 Both sides sprang to their feet then. We
laid hands upon

whatever ship's lumber we could find.

But they had swords.

The ship ran blood; but there was Helen
cheering them

on from the stern: "Where is the glory of
Troy? Come on,

show it on these barbarians." Then all
fought hard,

1605 and some went down, some kept their
feet, but a man down
was a man dead. Menelaus had his armor
on
and watched where his companions had
the worst of it
and there rallied them, with his sword in
his right hand,
so that men, to escape, dived overboard.
He swept
1610 the rowing benches clean of your
mariners, then went
to the rudder and made the helmsman
steer the ship for Greece,
and they got the mast up, and a wind
came, favoring them.

They are gone from your country. I
myself, escaping death,
let myself into the water where the
anchor hung,
1615 and as I was failing, one of the fishermen
at his lines
pulled me out and set me ashore so I
could bring
this message to you. Man's most
valuable trait
is a judicious sense of what not to
believe.

(Exit to the side.)

CHORUS LEADER

I never would have thought Menelaus could be here
1620 unknown, my lord, to you and us. Yet so it was.

*(As Theoclymenus speaks the next lines, he starts
to rush into the palace, but his way is blocked by
another Servant, an attendant of Theonoë.)*

THEOCLYMENUS

Oh, I have been duped and tricked with women's artful treacheries.
Now my bride has escaped away, and if they could be overtaken
I would make all haste to catch the ship that carries those
foreigners.
But at least I can take vengeance on the sister who betrayed
1625 me, who saw Menelaus in my house and did not tell me so.
She shall never again deceive anyone with her prophecies.

SERVANT

Hallo, you there, master, where are you going? Is it death you
mean?

THEOCLYMENUS

I am going where justice takes me. Out of my way and stand aside.

SERVANT

It is a monstrous thing to rush to. I will not let go my hold.

THEOCLYMENUS

You, a slave, will overpower your master?

SERVANT

1630 Yes. I have good sense.

THEOCLYMENUS

No good to me, unless you let me go ...

SERVANT

But that I will not do.

THEOCLYMENUS

... and kill my hateful sister ...

SERVANT

No, not hateful. Dutiful.

THEOCLYMENUS

... who betrayed me ...

SERVANT

A noble betrayal. What she did was right.

THEOCLYMENUS

... giving my bride away to others.

SERVANT

Others had more right than you.

THEOCLYMENUS

Who has right over what is mine?

SERVANT

1635

The man her father gave her to.

THEOCLYMENUS

Fortune gave her then to me.

SERVANT

And fate took her away again.

THEOCLYMENUS

You are not to judge what I do.

SERVANT

If I am in the right, I must.

THEOCLYMENUS

Then I am no longer ruler, but am ruled.

SERVANT

For right, not wrong.

THEOCLYMENUS

You desire to die, I think.

SERVANT

Then kill me, but you shall not kill

1640 your sister while I have the power to stop you. Slaves, if they are
true,
find no glory greater than to perish for their masters' sake.

(Enter Castor and Polydeuces above the palace.)

CASTOR

Lord of this land, Theoclymenus,
restrain the rage
that carries you off your true course.
We are the twins
called Dioscuri, sons of Zeus, whom

Leda once
1645 gave birth to, with that Helen who
has fled your house.
That marriage over which you rage
was not to be,
nor has the daughter of the divine
Nereid done
you wrong, Theonoë your sister, but
she kept
the righteous orders of her father
and the gods.

1650 It had always been ordained
that for the present time^o

Helen was to be a dweller in your
house. But when
Troy was uptorn from its
foundations, and she lent
the gods her name for it, this was no
more to be,
for now she must be once more
married with her own,
1655 and go home, and live with her
husband. Therefore, hold
your hand, nor darken your sword
with a sister's blood.
Believe it was in thoughtful care
that she did this.
We would have saved our sister long
ago, since Zeus
had made us into gods and we had
power, except
1660 that we were weaker still than
destiny, and less

than the other gods, whose will was
that these things should be.

This is for you. Henceforward, let
my sister hear:

sail with your husband, sail on. You
shall have fair wind.

We, your twin brothers, guardian
divinities,

1665 shall ride the open water and bring
you safely home.

And when your life turns its last
course and makes an end,

you shall be called, with the two
sons of Zeus, divine,

have your libations,^o and with us be
venerated

as honored guests by mortals. Zeus
has willed it so.

1670 And where the son of Maia first
defined your place

when he caught you up from Sparta
on the skyward way,

stealing you so that Paris might not
have you, where

the island stretches to guard Acte,
shall its name

be known as “Helen,” meaning
“Captive,” for mankind

1675 hereafter; because you were stolen
from your house.

For Menelaus, who has wandered
much, the gods

have granted a home upon the
Island of the Blest.
For Heaven never hates the noble in
the end,
though their lives are often harder
than the nameless multitude's.◦

THEOCLYMENUS

1680 O sons of Leda and of Zeus, I will forego
the quarrel I used to have for your sister's sake.
Nor do I wish to kill my sister now. Then let◦
Helen go home, if so the gods would have it. Know
that you are born of the same blood from which was born
1685 the best and the most faithful sister in the world.◦
Go then rejoicing for the great and noble heart
in her. There are not many women such as she.

(Exit with Servant into the palace. Exit the Dioscuri.)

CHORUS [chanting]

*Many are the forms of what is unknown.◦
Much that the gods achieve is surprise.
1690 What we look for does not come to pass;
a god finds a way for what none foresaw.
Such was the end of this story.*