# AESCHYLUS' PANDORA — HELEN IN THE *AGAMEMNON*

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The myth of Pandora forges the identity of the Bad Wife, the Deathly Bride who brings calamity to the peaceful society of men. The construction of the first Woman who is also the first Bride and therefore the prototype for all Brides, contributes to the ancient Greek conception of Woman as Other. As a manufactured artefact designed as a trap for men, her origins ensure her difference and her purpose as a beautiful but necessary evil. Her myth provides justification for the necessity of female subjugation. This article examines Aeschylus' treatment of Helen in the *Agamemnon*. I will discuss how the playwright uses the Hesiodic Pandora to frame and influence his portrayal of the famous Helen of Troy. Helen is a character in the *Oresteia* in the same way that Iphigenia is — she is a presence evoked by the memory of other characters. One could say that Aeschylus' treatment of her recalls the tradition of the Phantom of Helen.[1] This phantom presence of Helen is a powerful and terrible one that figures her as the Bride of Destruction who renders soldiers into ashes returning in funerary urns to their fatherland, having fought for her release.

> Throughout Greek mythology [Helen] is associated with mimesis, re-presentation, imitation (Wohl 1998:86).

## *Introduction*

The phantom of Helen haunts the first play, *Agamemnon*. She is the most expensive female subject in tragedy, her autonomous transaction in taking charge of her sexuality by abandoning Menelaus for a new lover, Paris, results in a multitude of corpses: Greek and Trojan, male and female. Helen's presence, like that of Iphigenia, haunts the play through evocation, memory and allusion. While she is not a physical protagonist in the drama, her presence is a powerful one redolent with the destruction she is blamed for — the carnage in the fall of Troy.

This article looks at Helen in *Agamemnon* as Aeschylus' own Pandora. First I shall look briefly at the depiction of Pandora in Hesiod. Then I shall discuss Helen as evocative of Pandora focusing in particular on the following aspects: as Harbinger of the end of the Age of Heroes; as Object, Copy and Phantom, as Deathly Bride, and as both Agent and Instrument.

## *Hesiod's Pandora*

> … the origin of all the sufferings by the men of iron — trials, wretchedness, sickness and anxiety. It is Pandora (Vernant 1983:21).

[1] For a full discussion of the tradition of the "Phantom Helen" see Austin 1994. Helen as phantom is also treated by Euripides' in *Helen*.

Pandora is our mythic model of the first bride as Deathly Bride. Pandora's myth explores all the anxieties inherent in the marital process when the male takes an outsider into his home as a wife. Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works & Days* are our earliest literary accounts of the creation of the first woman and the first bride. Let us begin with the following extract from the *Theogony*:

αὐτίκα δ' ἀντὶ πυρὸς τεῦξεν κακὸν ἀνθρώποισι
γαίης γὰρ σύμπλασσε περικλυτὸς Ἀμφιγυήεις
παρθένῳ αἰδοίῃ ἴκελον Κρονίδεω διὰ βουλάς
ζῶσε δὲ καὶ κόσμησε θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη
ἀργυφέῃ ἐσθῆτι κατὰ κρῆθεν δὲ καλύπτρην (575)
δαιδαλέην χείρεσσι κατέσχεθε, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι
ἀμφὶ δέ οἱ στεφάνους νεοθηλέας, ἄνθεα ποίης,
ἱμερτοὺς περίθηκε καρήατι Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη
ἀμφὶ δέ οἱ στεφάνην χρυσέην κεφαλῆφιν ἔθηκε,
τὴν αὐτὸς ποίησε περικλυτὸς Ἀμφιγυήεις (580)
ἀσκήσας παλάμῃσι, χαριζόμενος Διὶ πατρί.
τῇ δ' ἔνι δαίδαλα πολλὰ τετεύχατο, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι,
κνώδαλ' ὅσ' ἤπειρος δεινὰ τρέφει ἠδὲ θάλασσα·
τῶν ὅ γε πόλλ' ἐνέθηκε, χάρις δ' ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἄητο,
θαυμάσια, ζωοῖσιν ἐοικότα φωνήεσσιν. (585)
αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δὴ τεῦξε καλὸν κακὸν ἀντ' ἀγαθοῖο,
ἐξάγαγ' ἔνθά περ ἄλλοι ἔσαν θεοὶ ἠδ' ἄνθρωποι,
κόσμῳ ἀγαλλομένην γλαυκώπιδος Ὀβριμοπάτρης
θαῦμα δ' ἔχ' ἀθανάτους τε θεοὺς θνητούς τ' ἀνθρώπους,
ὡς εἶδον δόλον αἰπύν, ἀμήχανον ἀνθρώποισιν. (590)
ἐκ τῆς γὰρ γένος ἐστὶ γυναικῶν θηλυτεράων,
τῆς γὰρ ὀλοίιόν ἐστι γένος καὶ φῦλα γυναικῶν,
πῆμα μέγα θνητοῖσι, σὺν ἀνδράσι ναιετάουσαι,
οὐλομένης Πενίης οὐ σύμφοροι, ἀλλὰ Κόροιο.
ὡς δ' ὁπότ' ἐν σμήνεσσι κατηρεφέεσσι μέλισσαι (595)
κηφῆνας βόσκωσι, κακῶν ξυνήονας ἔργων·
αἱ μέν τε πρόπαν ἦμαρ ἐς ἠέλιον καταδύντα
ἠμάτιαι σπεύδουσι τιθεῖσί τε κηρία λευκά,
οἱ δ' ἔντοσθε μένοντες ἐπηρεφέας κατὰ σίμβλους
ἀλλότριον κάματον σφετέρην ἐς γαστέρ' ἀμῶνται (600)
ὣς δ' αὔτως ἄνδρεσσι κακὸν θνητοῖσι γυναῖκας
Ζεὺς ὑψιβρεμέτης θῆκε, ξυνήονας ἔργων
ἀργαλέων.[2]

[2] All quotations and citations from the Greek are from *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae Canon of Greek Authors and Works*. Unless otherwise specified, translations from the Greek are my own. In general I have used the Latin spelling for Greek names.

At once he made an affliction for mankind to set against the fire. The renowned Ambidexter moulded from earth the likeness of a modest maiden, by Kronos' son's design. The pale-eyed goddess Athena dressed and adorned her in a gleaming white garment; down over her head she drew an embroidered veil, a wonder to behold; and about her head she placed a golden diadem, which the renowned Ambidexter made with his own hands to please Zeus the father. On it were many designs fashioned, a wonder to behold, all the formidable creatures that the land and sea foster: many of them he put in, charm breathing over them all, wonderful designs, like living creatures with a voice of their own. When he had made the pretty bane to set against a blessing, he led her out where the other gods and men were, resplendent in the finery of the pale-eyed one whose father is stern. Both immortal gods and mortal men were seized with wonder when they saw that precipitous trap, more than mankind can manage. For from her is descended the female sex, a great affliction to mortals as they dwell with their husbands — no fit partners for accursed Poverty, but only for Plenty. As the bees in their sheltered nests feed the drones, those conspirators in badness, and while they busy themselves all day and every day till sundown making the white honeycomb, the drones stay inside in the sheltered cells and pile the toil of others into their own bellies, even so as a bane for mortal men has high-thundering Zeus created women, conspirators in causing difficulty.[3]

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δόλον αἰπὺν ἀμήχανον ἐξετέλεσσεν,
εἰς Ἐπιμηθέα πέμπε πατὴρ κλυτὸν Ἀργεϊφόντην
*δῶρον* ἄγοντα, θεῶν ταχὺν ἄγγελον οὐδ' Ἐπιμηθεὺς
ἐφράσαθ' ὥς οἱ ἔειπε Προμηθεὺς μή ποτε δῶρον
δέξασθαι πὰρ Ζηνὸς Ὀλυμπίου, ἀλλ' ἀποπέμπειν
ἐξοπίσω, μή πού τι κακὸν θνητοῖσι γένηται
αὐτὰρ ὃ δεξάμενος, ὅτε δὴ κακὸν εἶχ', ἐνόησε.
Πρὶν μὲν γὰρ ζώεσκον ἐπὶ χθονὶ φῦλ' ἀνθρώπων
νόσφιν ἄτερ τε κακῶν καὶ ἄτερ χαλεποῖο πόνοιο
νούσων τ' ἀργαλέων, αἵ τ' ἀνδράσι κῆρας ἔδωκαν.
αἶψα γὰρ ἐν κακότητι βροτοὶ καταγηράσκουσιν.
ἀλλὰ γυνὴ χείρεσσι πίθου μέγα πῶμ' ἀφελοῦσα
ἐσκέδασ', ἀνθρώποισι δ' ἐμήσατο κήδεα λυγρά.
μούνη δ' αὐτόθι Ἐλπὶς ἐν ἀρρήκτοισι δόμοισιν
ἔνδον ἔμεινε πίθου ὑπὸ χείλεσιν οὐδὲ θύραζε
ἐξέπτη· πρόσθεν γὰρ ἐπέμβαλε πῶμα πίθοιο
αἰγιόχου βουλῇσι Διὸς νεφεληγερέταο.
ἄλλα δὲ μυρία λυγρὰ κατ' ἀνθρώπους ἀλάληται·
πλείη μὲν γὰρ γαῖα κακῶν, πλείη δὲ θάλασσα·
νοῦσοι δ' ἀνθρώποισιν ἐφ' ἡμέρῃ, αἳ δ' ἐπὶ νυκτὶ
αὐτόματοι φοιτῶσι κακὰ θνητοῖσι φέρουσαι
σιγῇ, ἐπεὶ φωνὴν ἐξείλετο μητίετα Ζεύς.

[3] *Theogony* 571–603. All translations of Hesiod are by West 1988 unless otherwise specified.

> When he had completed the precipitous, unmanageable trap, the father sent the renowned dog-killer to Epimetheus taking the gift, swift messenger of the gods. Epimetheus gave no thought to what Prometheus had told him, never to accept a gift from Olympian Zeus but to send it back lest some affliction befall mortals: he accepted, and had the bane before he realised it. For formerly the tribes of men on earth lived remote from ills, without harsh toil and the grievous sicknesses that are deadly to men. But the woman unstopped the jar and let it all out, and brought grim cares upon mankind. Only Hope remained there inside in her secure dwelling, under the lip of the jar, and did not fly out, because the woman put the lid back in time by providence of Zeus the cloud-gatherer who bears the aegis. But for the rest, countless troubles roam among men: full of ills is the earth, and full the sea. Sicknesses visit men by day, and others by night, uninvited, bringing ill to mortals, silently, because Zeus is the resourceful deprived them of voice. Thus there is no way to evade the purpose of Zeus (*Works & Days* 83–104).

*Theogony* 571–602 emphasises that woman or specifically, her prototype, is an unnatural being; she is not named in this text but rather defined by the roles the text assigns her. Thus she is first an image (ἴκελον, 572), then a trap (δόλον, 589), and finally, a curse (πήμα, 592).

This aetiological myth provides the ancient Greeks with the reason for the human condition, that is, one afflicted with sorrow, hardship, labour and illness and death. Pandora is fashioned as a revenge gift. She is Zeus' way of getting even with Prometheus and ensuring the continued and unbridgeable separation between the world of men and the world of gods. Prometheus' gift of the Fire of Enlightenment threatened to allow men to breach the status of divinity or at any rate an approximation too close for the comfort of Zeus. Pandora, the ingenious retaliation, ensures the downfall of man as he is forevermore occupied with the evils she launches on the world:

> αὐτίκα δ' ἀντὶ πυρὸς τεῦξεν κακὸν ἀνθρώποισι
>
> in retaliation for the fire he made her an evil to mankind
> (*Theog.* 570, trans. mine).

Pandora is cleverly designed and attractively packaged, masterminded by the great patriarch himself. She is also the product of a joint venture by the other divinities who all assist in her cosmetic augmentation. The world's first bride is created as visually irresistible while concealing the sorrows of the world within. Zeus gives Pandora to Epimetheus for a wife in a parody of gift-giving and bridal custom and its implications. The giving of gifts was a homosocial institution designed to establish and solidify bonds of kinship between giver and receiver as was the giving of brides. Pandora as a καλὸν κακὸν (beautiful evil, *Theog.* 585) is a gift that is negated and corrupted.

In essence the Pandora myth collapses marriage and the birth of woman making it synchronous with the expulsion of man from the world of gods. Paradise is lost due to the punishing by Zeus with his instrument — woman. She arises from the

authorship of Zeus, conceived for a particular purpose. The description of Pandora on the advent of her exchange is replete with wedding imagery. The world's first bride is veiled:

> ἀργυφέῃ ἐσθῆτι κατὰ κρῆθεν δὲ καλύπτρην /δαιδαλέην χείρεσσι
> κατέσχεθε, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι
>
> [Athena dressed her] in silvery robes and a veil shot with silver,
> wondrous to behold (*Theog*. 574–575 trans. mine).

Pandora is also virginal: παρθένῳ αἰδοίῃ ἴκελον (the image of a chaste virgin, *Theog*. 572). Yet she seems to be a copy that does not have an original (Loraux 1993:82)[4], she is a creature made up of exterior with no interior. The sum of her adornments, veiled and crowned she goes to her husband as the misrepresentation, albeit a beautiful one, of a "real" woman. The following lines from *Theogony* 513–514 combine most strikingly the concept of Pandora as bride and as ornament:

> πρῶτος γάρ ῥα Διὸς **πλαστὴν**[5] ὑπέδεκτο **γυναῖκα** / **παρθένον**.
>
> He [Epimetheus] was the first one to receive from Zeus the **artificial virgin**
> as a **wife** (*Theog*. 513–514 emphasis & trans. mine).

Hephaestus is the one who fashions her alluding to her artifice from the first. His role as master craftsman further serves to emphasise Pandora as a skillfully fashioned object rather than an autonomous being. Athena is the one who "decorates" the object by clothing her and veiling her as a bride. Athena's contribution to Zeus' project is fitting, not only because, as goddess of weaving it is appropriate she clothe Pandora but more subtly because of her reputation as the goddess consummate in the art of disguise and dissimulation.

*Works & Days* tells of the creation of the first woman in greater detail than the *Theogony*. In this text, Aphrodite and Hermes make contributions to the project that is Pandora while the roles of Hephaestus and Athena are elaborated upon. Hephaestus moulds Pandora from the substance potters use to make utensils and works of art: the earth she is made of is clay rather than the fertile soil from which the autochthonous Athenians are born: γαῖαν ὕδει φύρειν, (earth mixed with water *Works & Days* 61).[6]

*Works & Days* also gives us an account of the jar — or "Pandora's box" as it has come to be known. Given to her by her father she brings the jar with her as her dowry. Her first act on arrival in her new home is to open the jar, an act which releases the evils that will evermore characterise the human condition: pain, hardship, toil, disease and death. All that remains of the jar, contained by the will of Zeus is Hope (*Works & Days* 83–104). Pandora's jar contains death for all mortals, while simultaneously functioning as the literal foreshadowing of their post-mortem existence as ashes in urns.

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4 See p. 81 and note 54 for Pandora's questionable corporeality.

5 πλαστὴν has several useful meanings with the connotations of artificiality, among them, *plastic*, *counterfeit*, *forged*.

6 See Loraux 1993:78.

Pandora as a *beautiful evil* (καλὸν κακὸν), embodies, in addition the problematic transactions between male figures in the myth — the modes of giving and its ensuing corruptions that manifest in the stealing and giving of gifts that are not what they seem or given through concealment and trickery. Pandora personifies the corrupted chain of exchanges that establishes the enmity between Prometheus and Zeus. Thus our first mythical instance of bridal exchange is motivated by agonistic homosocial relations and is aimed at ensuring the continuing disharmony between the giver and recipient. Although marital exchange is intended to solidify homosocial relations or establish those relations for purposes of co-operation, our mythical prototype is fraught with enmity and unforeseen calamities notably for the part of the recipient (Zeitlin 1996:56).

As an intruder into the male hegemony, a separate creation, alien and artificial, Pandora as bride brings to the patriarchal house the threat of impoverishment and ruin by means of her vampire-like appetite for food and sex and by the possibility of a multitude of dependents. What is more, as Zeitlin points out, Pandora "seems to retain an intrinsic power over man … Man has no effective means of retaliation, no sure way of exercising his authority" (1996:71).[7]

We might expect that as Bride and Wife, Pandora also embodies the role of Mother but curiously, there is no hint of her fertility or nurturing, life-giving qualities. Hesiod seems determined not to detract in any way from her unnaturalness or artifice. All that comes from Pandora is the race of women (γένος … γυναικῶν) — the perpetuation of that artifice, eternally separate from the race of men. The use of the words γένος (race) and φῦλα (tribe) in lines 590–591 (ἐκ τῆς γὰρ γένος ἐστὶ γυναικῶν θηλυτεράων, / τῆς γὰρ ὀλοίιόν ἐστι γένος καὶ φῦλα γυναικῶν,) seems to indicate that Hesiod uses both terms to enforce the idea of the "separateness" of women from the groups of men. Loraux (1993:77) discusses these as being at one and the same time complementary to the world of men and isolated from that world as they are termed both γένος (a race) and φῦλα (a tribe), that is, a social unit not incorporated or ever integrated with the race of men.[8] Not only is woman created after man, she is created in the second category, one that, according to Loraux, is continuously implicitly and explicitly described as being outside and separate from the world of men.

The reproductive functions of Pandora as wife are not dwelt on by Hesiod in positive terms. Loraux (1993:77) and others have pointed out that unlike the bountiful earth, Pandora's fertility functions are occluded and what is more, there is no hint of sexual union with Epimetheus or engendering of children (Zeitlin 1996:66). Zeitlin equates the image of the jar containing Ἐλπίς (Hope) with the womb of Pandora conceiving a child or the promise of a child (1996:64–66).[9] Hope as it is here, contained within the jar, is an ambiguous quality. For here it is synonymous with the concept of one son being beneficial as a source of wealth to a family while a proliferation of children would merely drain the family resources thus imitating the

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7 Here Zeitlin also discusses the vampire-like qualities of Pandora.

8 "… what we can read in this text are the dreaded effects of woman and the word *gynē*: the woman is no sooner named than the *anthrōpoi* are transformed into *andres*". Cf. also Loraux 1993:85 and note 28.

9 See also du Bois 1988 on the linguistic and imagistic similarities of *pithos* and *gaster* and womb.

earlier image of the wife as drone draining all the husband can produce (*Theog.* 598–600).

Hesiod has used this myth to undermine the power of the female in her role as a nurturer and mother, the personification of the natural cycle — Gaia, Rhea and Demeter. Pandora is the antithesis of nature; she is pure artifice whose role as mother and nurturer of children is dramatically sidelined.

*Helen — bride who brings tears* (νυμφόκλαυτος Ἐρινύς *Ag.* 749)

Just as Pandora brings about the end of the Golden Age, Helen precipitates the end of the Age of Heroes who die fighting for her in the Trojan War. Greeks and Trojans alike are broken by Helen. Undiscriminating she causes the death of all those who fight in her cause. The description that follows uses language of toil and hardship reminiscent of the condition of mortals heralded by her Hesiodic counterpart:

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|---|---|
| οὕτω δ' Ἀτρέως παῖδας ὁ κρείσσων | And so mighty Zeus the Guest God |
| ἐπ' Ἀλεξάνδρῳ πέμπει ξένιος | sends the son of Atreus against Alexandros |
| Ζεὺς πολυάνορος ἀμφὶ γυναικός, | for the sake of a promiscuous woman. |
| πολλὰ παλαίσματα καὶ γυιοβαρῆ, | Struggling multitudes, their limbs like lead |
| γόνατος κονίαισιν ἐρειδομένου | knees staggering in the dust |
| διακναιομένης τ' ἐν προτελείοις | their spears destroyed before beginning, |
| κάμακος, θήσων Δαναοῖσιν | Greeks and Trojans in the same plight.[10] |
| Τρωσί θ' ὁμοίως. | |
| (*Ag.* 60–67) | |

In *Works & Days* Aphrodite endows Pandora with χάρις (charm or grace) and the power to weaken men's limbs with longing and lust (καὶ χάριν ἀμφιχέαι κεφαλῇ χρυσέην Ἀφροδίτην /καὶ πόθον ἀργαλέον καὶ γυιοβόρους μελεδώνας· 65–66). A similar word to γυιοβόρους (consuming obsession or, literally, gnawing the limbs) is used in connection with Helen in the above lines: γυιοβαρῆ (63). Pandora's ability to inflict on men "painful desire and limb-gnawing anxiety" (*Works & Days* 66)[11], resonates in Helen's effect on Paris, Menelaus and those who fight for her.

*Helen as object*

Wohl (1998:84) makes the point that Helen is described predominantly in adjectival terms of possession rather than description:

> She is "a woman of many men" (πολυάνορος … γυναικός 62) and "another man's woman" (ἀλλοτρίας … γυναικός·448–449), "wooed in battle, much-contested Helen" (τὰν δορίγαμβρον ἀμφινεικῆ θ'Ἑλέναν 686–87), a woman whose price is measured by men and in terms of men.

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10 All translations of Aeschylus are my own unless otherwise specified.

11 Loraux 1993 trans.

In the *Iliad,* Helen's object status is emphasised in that she is constantly linked with the other valuables Paris stole from Menelaus. The object of the war is always, Helen and the valuables (Ἑλένη καὶ κτήματα):[12] she is a commodity wrongfully appropriated like the other goods, Paris stole from his host. In *Agamemnon,* the term she is referred by, ἄγαλμα (741) designates a gift or object associated with the κάρις (loveliness)[13] of works of art.

> ἐκ τῶν ἁβροπήνων / προκαλυμμάτων ἔπλευσε
>
> Away from the delicate and costly / veils of seclusion she sailed (690–691).

The bridal imagery in these lines is reminiscent of the bridal imagery associated with Pandora in *Theogony* 574–575, highlighting the parody of a marriage ceremony.

The following passage from *Agamemnon* echoes the legacy of Pandora in this description of Helen and her arrival as Paris' bride at Troy:

| | |
|---|---|
| πάραυτα δ' ἐλθεῖν ἐς Ἰλίου πόλιν | and that which came to the city of Ilium |
| λέγοιμ' ἂν φρόνημα μὲν | let us call it a thought |
| νηνέμου γαλάνας, | of a calm sea bereft of a breath of wind |
| ἀκασκαῖον τ' ἄγαλμα πλούτου, | a gentle, priceless thing of worth, |
| μαλθακὸν ὀμμάτων βέλος | melting glances of the eyes. |
| (738–742) | |

Helen is transitive, elusive and hard to pin down and as such she represents the inherent fears regarding the potential instability of the virgin transfered to become wife. She is the realisation of male anxieties surrounding the female intruder. Like Pandora, who strikes men's limbs with longing thus weakening and destroying them (πόθον ἀργαλέον καὶ γυιοβόρους μελεδώνας — painful yearning and limb-gnawing anxiety, *Works & Days* 66), so Helen's beauty is δηξίθυμον ἔρωτος ἄνθος (the blossom that breaks the heart with longing, Lattimore trans. 743). Yet, like Pandora, her beauty conceals havoc:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| παρακλίνασ' ἐπέκρανεν | | She turned to make bitter the consummation |
| δὲ γάμου πικρὰς τελευτάς, | | of marriage |
| δύσεδρος καὶ δυσόμιλος | | bringing ruin and disaster in her wake |
| συμένα Πριαμίδαισιν, | | to Priam's people, |
| πομπᾷ Διὸς ξενίου, | | Zeus the guest god sent her |
| νυμφόκλαυτος Ἐρινύς. | (744–749) | a Fury, a bride bringing nothing but tears |

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12 συμβάλετ' ἀμφ' Ἑλένῃ καὶ κτήμασι πᾶσι μάχεσθαι· (3.70)
οἷους ἀμφ' Ἑλένῃ καὶ κτήμασι πᾶσι μάχεσθαι (3.91)
αὐτὸς ἔπειθ' Ἑλένην ἐχέτω καὶ κτήματα πάντα (3.282)
Τρῶας ἔπειθ' Ἑλένην καὶ κτήματα πάντ' ἀποδοῦναι (3.285)
ὑμεῖς δ' Ἀργείην Ἑλένην καὶ κτήμαθ' ἅμ' αὐτῇ (3.458)
δεῦτ' ἄγετ' Ἀργείην Ἑλένην καὶ κτήμαθ' ἅμ' αὐτῇ (7.350)
καί οἱ ὑπόσχωμαι Ἑλένην καὶ κτήμαθ' ἅμ' αὐτῇ (22.114).

13 Most often translated as "grace", it is a term almost impossible to translate. Here it is more likely to mean "loveliness" or "visual charm".

Like Pandora, she is sent by Zeus as a Fury (Ἐρινύς) — in Hesiod she is a καλὸν κακὸν (beautiful evil, *Theog.* 585) and a πῆμ' ἀνδράσιν (bane to men, *Works & Days* 82). She is a "Curse" sent to the people of Troy, but it is not only Trojans who die because of her, it is Greeks as well.

*Helen as phantom or "copy"*

In *Odyssey* 4.304–317, Helen's power of mimesis nearly brings an end to the Greek plans of ambush in the Trojan horse. Herodotus (*Histories* 2.112–120) and Euripides in his *Helen* are just some of the writers who refer to the alternative tradition of Helen residing in Egypt while her phantom (εἴδωλον) replaces her. So she who goes to Troy is merely an image, "a copy of an uncertain original" (Wohl 1998:86.), for which so many fall. One can't help but recall Pandora described as the "image of a chaste bride", all artifice and trap, devoid of substance.

Aeschylus' play invites a more subversive reading on the topic of the Trojan War. It is Helen's very illusiveness and transience that defy her objectification. Like a Will - o'- the - Wisp or *Ignis Fatuus*[14] Helen is always receding. As Wohl puts it: "A subject only of departure, even as an object Helen is defined by absence".[15]

| | |
|---|---|
| λιποῦσα[16] δ' ἀστοῖσιν ἀσπίστορας | She left among her people a confusion |
| κλόνους λοχισμούς τε καὶ | of fighters with spears and shields, |
| ναυβάτας ὁπλισμούς, | of sailors and arms, |
| ἄγουσά τ' ἀντίφερνον Ἰλίῳ φθορὰν | taking death to Ilium in place of a dowry. |
| βεβάκει ῥίμφα διὰ | With lightness she had stepped |
| πυλᾶν ἄτλητα τλᾶσα· πολλὰ δ' ἔστενον | through the gates having dared what no one else would dare |
| τόδ' ἐννέποντες δόμων προφῆται· | and the prophets of the house lamented and mourn. |
| 'ἰὼ ἰὼ δῶμα δῶμα καὶ πρόμοι, | Alas, Alas the house, the royal house and its kings |
| ἰὼ λέχος καὶ στίβοι φιλάνορες. | Alas for the bed and the traces of love |
| πάρεστι σιγᾶς ἄτιμος ἀλοίδορος | between man and wife. |
| ἄλιστος ἀφεμένων ἰδεῖν. | To see him there, silent, dishonoured but |
| πόθῳ δ' ὑπερποντίας | not reviling, in such pain and sitting alone |
| φάσμα δόξει δόμων ἀνάσσειν.' | in longing for her who is beyond the waves. |

14 A thing that deludes or misleads by fugitive appearances.

15 Wohl 1998:93 on βεβάκει in 407, "… she is gone before she was ever really possessed: she had already gone" (note the peculiar pluperfect βεβάκει).

16 λιποῦσα, according to Wohl 1998:93, is "Helen's first verb of active agency".

εὐμόρφων δὲ κολοσσῶν
ἔχθεται χάρις ἀνδρί·
ὀμμάτων δ' ἐν ἀχηνίαις
ἔρρει πᾶσ' Ἀφροδίτα.

A phantom Queen will seem to rule
while the grace and beauty of exquisite
sculptures he despises
for in the eyes' hollow gaze
all love is gone to ruin.

ὀνειρόφαντοι δὲ πειθήμονες
πάρεισι δόξαι φέρουσαι χάριν ματαίαν.
μάταν γάρ, εὖτ' ἂν ἐς θιγὰς δοκῶν ὁρᾷ,
παραλλάξασα διὰ χερῶν βέβακεν ὄψις,
οὐ μεθύστερον
πτεροῖς ὀπαδοῦσ' ὕπνου κελεύθοις.

(*Ag*. 403–426)

Dream phantoms they appear to convince
But only bring a hollow pleasure.
For it is in vain when one seems to see good and noble things
But to have the vision slipping out of ones arms
as one reaches to touch it escapes, never to return
on wings chartering the pathways of sleep.

In the lament beginning in 411, it is not just the identity of the singers of the lament which is occluded,[17] but also that of the *Royal house and its kings* in 411. At first sight, one assumes it is the Trojan royal house referred to, especially considering the line that follows: "Alas for the bed and the traces of love between man and wife", for the chorus seem to be lamenting the destructive union between Paris and Helen. But the next two lines, 413–414 reveal that it is possibly the Spartan royal house and Menelaus' broken marriage meant, for he is sitting alone and longing for Helen "who is beyond the waves". But he is not named and thus confusion creeps in as to which Royal house and which marriage bed is being described. As Wohl notes, it becomes impossible to distinguish Trojans from Greeks and the bed of Paris from that of Menelaus. The phrase στίβοι φιλάνορες in 412 is similarly opaque. στίβοι are "imprints" or "traces". Are they the imprints of their bodies on the bed, and if so, whose bed, Paris' or Menelaus'? "Or are they Helen's footprints, and if so, where is she going? Off to Paris or back to Menelaus? And as for φιλάνορες (literally, "man-loving"), who is the man? Her husband, Menelaus, or her lover, Paris?" (Wohl 1998:94).

Vernant (1991:102), commenting on the above extract, sees Helen as such a powerful object of desire that she takes on almost supernatural status. He seems to imagine her as possessing the uncanny ability to appear as a *fata morgana* intruding upon the minds and dreams of those who desire her — Menelaos, Paris, Greeks and Trojans.

> ... it is the amorous *pothos* for Helen that, reigning supreme over Menelaos' heart, populates the palace deserted by his wife with phantoms (*phasmata*) of the beloved, with her apparitions in dreams (*oneirophantoi*) (406). Radiant with

[17] It is more than likely the chorus of Argive elders who lament Helen's alliance with Paris, but Lattimore puts these laments into the mouths of the *prophets of the house* (409) thereby recalling, with Fraenkel (1950:115) the allusion to *Iliad III*, where the Trojan elders lament the impending disaster brought upon them by the marriage of Paris and Helen. See also Wohl 1998:233 n.43.

> charm, haunting and ungraspable, Helen is like a person from the beyond, doubled in this life and on this earth in herself and her phantom, her eidôlon. A fatal beauty created by Zeus to destroy human beings, to make them kill one another at the walls of Troy, she, more so than her sister Klytemnestra, deserves the appellation, "slayer of men" (749).

*The marriages of Helen*

In 681–749, the chorus sings of Helen's marriage in terms of death but not, as is conventional of tragedy, of the death of Helen, but of the death for those implicated in her marriage — those who fight for possession of her, both Greek and Trojan. The ode also contains the "Lion cub parable" (714–736) which elaborates further on the concept of Helen as a bride bringing death:

| | |
|---|---|
| τίς ποτ' ὠνόμαξεν ὧδ' | A woman did all this. One woman |
| ἐς τὸ πᾶν ἐτητύμως– | They called her Helen – that was a prophecy |
| μή τις ὅντιν' οὐχ ὁρῶμεν | Helen the destroyer. |
| προνοίαισι τοῦ πεπρωμένου | Not a name but a title. |
| γλῶσσαν ἐν τύχᾳ νέμων; | The bride of the spear's broad blade. |
| –τὰν δορίγαμβρον ἀμφινεικῆ | Helen the homicidal |
| θ' Ἑλέναν; ἐπεὶ πρεπόντως | Epidemic fury |
| ἑλένας, ἕλανδρος, ἑλέπτολις, | That would possess nations. |
| ἐκ τῶν ἁβροπήνων | Not a face or name but a poison |
| προκαλυμμάτων ἔπλευσε | To send whole fleets to perdition |
| Ζεφύρου γίγαντος αὔρᾳ, | As if their captains were madmen – |
| πολύανδροί τε φεράσπιδες κυναγοὶ | Chewing and spitting her name – |
| κατ' ἴχνος πλατᾶν ἄφαντον | Helen. The name Helen |
| κελσάντων Σιμόεντος | Not so much a name as an earthquake |
| ἀκτὰς ἐπ' ἀεξιφύλλους | To bounce a city to burning rubble |
| δι' ἔριν αἱματόεσσαν. (681–96) | Not a name but a plague. |
| | Spreading scream by scream from city to city, |
| | As houses become tombs. |

The essence of the lion cub (and Helen, by implication), is its savage nature which cannot be tamed, cannot remain hidden under the ephemeral condition of youth and beauty or the artifice of culture. For despite the fact that the cub is exposed to the nurturing structure of the family and that its needs, both physical and social, are met, its true nature surfaces, unbidden, and lays waste to the house which gave it shelter. In many ways the same is true of the anxieties surrounding the Greek bride as "female intruder", but it is especially true of Pandora. The lion, like our first bride of mortal men is a καλὸν κακὸν (*Theog.* 585): a *beautiful* creature on the outside, brimming with *evil* for men on the inside:

| | |
|---|---|
| ἔθρεψεν δὲ λέοντος ἶνιν | Once a man nurtured a lion cub in his house |
| δόμοις ἀγάλακτον οὕτως | bereft of its mother's breast and still |
| ἀνὴρ φιλόμαστον, | suckling, |
| ἐν βιότου προτελείοις | it was tame in its early years |
| ἄμερον, εὐφιλόπαιδα | it loved children |
| καὶ γεραροῖς ἐπίχαρτον. | and brought joy to the elderly. |
| πολέα δ' ἔσκ' ἐν ἀγκάλαις | It went about cradled in their arms |
| νεοτρόφου τέκνου δίκαν, | like a newborn child, |
| φαιδρωπὸς ποτὶ χεῖρα σαίνων | with bright joyous eyes it fawned |
| τε γαστρὸς ἀνάγκαις. | on the hand to satisfy the pangs of appetite. |
| | |
| χρονισθεὶς δ' ἀπέδειξεν ἦθος | But as time passed, it grew |
| τὸ πρὸς τοκέων· χάριν | and its true nature began to show itself. |
| γὰρ τροφεῦσιν ἀμείβων | To those who had nurtured it, it returned |
| μηλοφόνοισι μάταισιν | the favour with frenzied sheep slaughtering |
| δαῖτ' ἀκέλευστος ἔτευξεν, | it made a feast of the forbidden |
| αἵματι δ' οἶκος ἐφύρθη, | the house was foul with blood, |
| ἄμαχον ἄλγος οἰκέταις, | its people were helpless in the face of the |
| μέγα σίνος πολυκτόνον. | calamity — |
| ἐκ θεοῦ δ' ἱερεύς τις ἄτας | the great ravager and the multiple killings. |
| δόμοις προσεθρέφθη. (716–736) | Sent by God it was raised in the house |
| | as some dread priest of ruin. |

The essence of the lion cub (and Helen, by implication), is that its savage nature which cannot be tamed, cannot remain hidden under the ephemeral condition of youth and beauty or the artifice of culture. For despite the fact that the cub is exposed to the nurturing structure of the family and that its needs both physical and social, are met, its true nature surfaces, unbidden and lays waste to the house which sheltered it. This parable is couched in the story of Helen as the bride of Paris, sung by the chorus who introduce her as a δορίγαμβρον ἀμφινεικῆ (bride of spears and blood, 685):

> θ' Ἑλέναν; ἐπεὶ πρεπόντως / ἑλένας, ἔλανδρος, ἑλέπτολις …
>
> Helen[…] fittingly named / "death to ships", "death to men", "death to cities" (685–688).[18]

The parallels with Pandora are clear and, given Clytemnestra's imminent deeds, one gets a sense that the parable does not apply exclusively to Helen but rather to the "race of women" γένος γυναικῶν (*Theog.* 590) as brides who are essentially "untamable" Wohl sees the parable as applying to any woman entering a new house

[18] Wohl's translation 1998:98 is perhaps the most apt: "Hell for ships, hell for men, hell for cities".

as bride and thus also to Iphigenia in terms of potential violence already lurking in her emergent sexuality which Aeschylus so subtly reveals.[19]

*Pandora's jar, Helen's urns*

Helen differs from Pandora in that she is not given in marriage — she actively chooses both her first husband Menelaus, and her second one Paris. As Helen is the subject in her own exchange (in both her "marriages") she takes on the masculine qualities of circulating in the world beyond the *oikos* making an active choice in the selection of a new husband or sexual partner.[20] As she becomes a subject so the men who were once subjects in her exchange, that is, those who actively sought her hand, become objects — the corpses of the war dead whose bodies are converted into ashes, stored in urns and shipped back to Greece:

| | |
|---|---|
| τὰ μὲν κατ' οἴκους ἐφ' ἑστίας ἄχη | Weep for the sorrows in the house at the |
| τάδ' ἐστὶ καὶ τῶνδ' ὑπερβατώτερα. | hearth |
| τὸ πᾶν δ' ἀπ' αἴας Ἕλλαδος | such as they are, and far worse than these, |
| συνορμένοις | for all of Hellas mourns for those who set |
| πένθεια τλησικάρδιος | forth together |
| δόμῳ 'ν ἑκάστου πρέπει. | The unbearable heartbreak that abounds |
| πολλὰ γοῦν θιγγάνει πρὸς ἦπαρ· | in the house of each. |
| οὓς μὲν γάρ τις ἔπεμψεν | And these touched the hearts of many, |
| οἶδεν, ἀντὶ δὲ φωτῶν | they sent out those they knew |
| τεύχη καὶ σποδὸς εἰς ἑκά- | but now in the place of the men, |
| στου δόμους ἀφικνεῖται. (427–436) | urns filled with the ashes of the dead. |

This passage, with its multiple men reduced to multiple urns evokes Pandora and her jar with chilling effectiveness. In the *Iliad*, it is stressed that heroes are the result of Helen's theft. The bond of guest friendship *xenia* that Paris breaks puts him into an agonistic homosocial relationship with Menelaus which escalates to the war of heroes, Greek versus Trojan, each confrontation allowing for the individual to outshine his "equals" in valour and glory.[21] War is the vehicle whereby heroes are made, a forum where they can achieve the unachievable in times of peace. Aeschylus, however, refuses the heroic aspects of the war in his imagery, concentrating on the

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19 1998:77: "Would it [the parable] hold true for Iphigenia, too, were she to reach maturity? Is Iphigenia doomed to repeat the story of Pandora, to be true to her *genos*, to become Helen?"

20 Although the chorus in 402 imply that she was stolen by Paris: κλοπαῖσι γυναικός, the majority of references in the text strongly assert Helen's active participation in her abduction / seduction, an assertion which is far more damaging to the female implicated.

21 "Thus exchange is simultaneously cooperative and competitive; at one pole lies *xenia*, "guest-friendship", an amicable relation between equals often institutionalised through the reciprocal exchange of gifts; at the other, the *agōn*, competition, be it a wrestling match, a lawsuit, or a war. But these two poles collapse constantly into one another: the *agōn* contains a seed of homoeroticism; *xenia*, a latent hostility. The two especially tend to collapse when the object of exchange is a woman" (Wohl 1998: xxvii).

grim outcome of a multitude of undifferentiated vessels returning in the place of mortal men.

Helen is an example of the destructive, Deathly Bride on a scale almost as grand and universal as Pandora, while her sister functions similarly but on a smaller scale — within that of the *oikos*. Helen destroys nations, citadels, societies. Clytemnestra destroys her husband, family unit, and political structure of Argos. Helen's destructions render as objects the soldiers who fight for her and return home in urns; Clytemnestra turns Agamemnon into an object for display, calling him "the work of my right hand" (νεκρὸς δὲ τῆσδε δεξιᾶς χερός, / ἔργον 1405). The *Agamemnon* ends with this inversion of objectification as the corpse of Agamemnon himself is displayed on the stage. The vessel or bathtub in which he meets his death is described in terms that recall the urns that the soldiers have become: ἐνύδρῳ τεύχει / δολοφόνου λέβητος (a water carrying vessel, a treacherous urn of murder, 1128–29) and, ἀργυροτοίχου /δροίτης (a silver-sided bath, 1539–1540)[22] recalling the τεύχη καὶ σποδὸς (urns filled with the ashes of the dead) of 434.

*Agent or instrument?*

Interestingly enough, just as Pandora is the passive "plastic" instrument of Zeus' destruction, Aeschylus takes care not to attribute agency solely to Helen. The text offers up a number of conflicting judgements on the autonomy and agency of Helen. And so the chorus blames Agamemnon for launching the attack on Troy for the sake of Helen, simultaneously blaming her promiscuity:

> σὺ δέ μοι τότε μὲν στέλλων στρατιὰν / Ἑλένης ἕνεκ'
>
> When you marshalled this armament / for Helen's sake (799–800)

Yet the chorus cannot decide on just how active Helen is, sometimes she is a Fury sent by Zeus, thus reminiscent of Pandora, sometimes she is the very destroyer:

| | |
|---|---|
| ἰὼ ἰὼ παράνους Ἑλένα | Alas, alas, Helen, we mourn |
| ἐφυμν. | For the multitude, for the multitudes |
| μία τὰς πολλάς, τὰς πάνυ πολλὰς | And their demented souls you destroyed |
| ψυχὰς ὀλέσασ' ὑπὸ Τροίᾳ | under the shadow of Troy. |
| (1455–1461) | |

[22] For Wohl 1998:97–98, the mechanism of remembrance mitigates the objectification and commodification of male corpses and in this way a form of subject status is regained. This is not fully successful in the *Agamemnon* as full reparation is impossible, but the *Eumenides* will achieve it once the problem is successfully deflected onto the female subjects and Orestes is reintegrated into the polis and established as legitimate ruler of Argos.

In this passage, however, it is Paris who has stolen Helen:

| | |
|---|---|
| οἶος καὶ Πάρις ἐλθὼν | And Paris came |
| ἐς δόμον τὸν ᾽Ατρειδᾶν | to the house of the Atreidae, |
| ᾔσχυνε ξενίαν τράπεζαν | and shaming the tables of guest friendship, |
| κλοπαῖσι γυναικός. | he stole Helen away. (399–404) |

Agamemnon blames her at 822–828:

> καὶ γυναικὸς οὕνεκα /πόλιν διημάθυνεν ᾽Αργεῖον δάκος
>
> and for the sake of a woman / the fanged beast of Argos ground the city to a powder.

Cassandra indicts Paris at one point:

> ἰὼ γάμοι, γάμοι Πάριδος,/ ὀλέθριοι φίλων.
>
> Oh marriage of Paris / death to the men beloved! (1156–1157),

At the very end of the drama Clytemnestra says:

| | |
|---|---|
| μηδὲν θανάτου μοῖραν ἐπεύχου | You cannot change what has happened. |
| τοῖσδε βαρυνθείς· | Stop whining for death. |
| μηδ᾽ εἰς ῾Ελένην κότον ἐκτρέψῃς, | And stop blaming Helen |
| ὡς ἀνδρολέτειρ᾽, ὡς μία πολλῶν | For the annihilation of armies |
| ἀνδρῶν ψυχὰς Δαναῶν ὀλέσασ᾽ | As if her little flutter, all on its own |
| ἀξύστατον ἄλγος ἔπραξε. | Could have loosed |
| (1462–1467) | All this misery on so many. |

*Conclusion*

The descriptions of Helen in the choral songs (371–454 and 681–781) are reminiscent of the beauty of Pandora and the evil that results from it. Like Pandora who strikes men's limbs with longing thus weakening and destroying them — πόθον ἀργαλέον καὶ γυιοβόρους μελεδώνας (painful yearning and limb-gnawing anxiety, *Works & Days* 66) — so Helen's beauty is δηξίθυμον ἔρωτος ἄνθος (the blossom that breaks the heart with longing 743, trans. Lattimore).

Like Pandora her marriage brings ruin upon men, and, like Pandora, the πῆμ' ἀνδράσιν (*Theog.* 585) and καλὸν κακὸν (*Works & Days* 82) she is sent by Zeus as an ᾽Ερινύς (Fury). It is also worth noting that Helen's role as a mother is severely downplayed while the mythic tradition itself accords her no progeny but Hermione, her only child by Menelaus.

The Helen of Aeschylus resonates with the qualities of Hesiod's Pandora, the archetypal beauty who brings nothing but ruin to mortal men. As if anticipating her phantom status of later mythic treatments, Helen moves through *Agamemnon* as a memory and a curse. Despite the widespread destruction that is attributed to her,

despite her portrayal as a "mass murderess", myth cannot arrange for her destruction as it could for her sister Clytemnestra. This is because Helen is partly divine and as a daughter of Zeus, she must not be harmed. But physical inviolability does not prevent the vilification process Helen undergoes at the hands of the playwright: for all her exquisite beauty she is no less than νυμφόκλαυτος Ἐρινύς (a Fury, a bride bringing nothing but tears, 749).

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