

EURIPIDES HELEN

**A New Collaborative Translation
by friends, students, and colleagues of
Z. Philip Ambrose**

For a Production at the
Main Street Landing Black Box Theater
Burlington Vermont
March 22–25, 2018

Directed by Aaron Robinson
With Music by John Franklin and Phil Ambrose
Visual Design by Glynnis Fawkes
Costumes by Glynnis Fawkes and Rachel Cosgrove
Choreography by Alexis Kamitses
Production Support and Publicity: Angeline Chiu, Sam Lavertue,
and Students of CLAS 196 Ancient Drama and the Goodrich Classical Club

Base translation by Ambrose developed (and not) by:

Helen, first half: Joanna Oh/Carl Mehrman
Helen, second half: Becky Sahlin
Teukros: Alden Smith (with Hannah Rogers, Jamie Wheeler and Cindy Liu)
Chorus Leader: Erik Kenyon
Menelaos: Page Hudson
Old Woman Doorkeeper: Angeline Chiu
Servant of Menelaos: Tyler Mayo
Theonoe: Barbara Saylor-Rodgers
Theoklymenos: Brian Walsh
Egyptian Messenger: Andrew Siebengartner
Kastor/Dioskouroi: Jacques Bailly
pumice omnia aequata: John Franklin

Metrical translations of choral lyrics:

Parodos, Epiparodos, Reunion Duet: Franklin (music Franklin)
Lyric dialogue (330–385): Ambrose (music Ambrose/Franklin)
First Stasimon: Franklin/James Aglio (music Franklin)
Second Stasimon: Mark Usher/Franklin (music Franklin)
Third Stasimon: Ken Rothwell (music Franklin)

HYPOTHESIS OF HELEN

Herodotus makes an investigation about Helen and says she went to Egypt and that Homer also says this as he makes Helen offer to Telemachus in the *Odyssey* the care-banishing drug which Polydamna, the wife of Thon, gave her—[cf. *Od.* 4. 221-30], not as Euripides says. For some say that she came to Egypt as she traveled with Menelaos after the destruction of Troy and brought the drugs from there, while he (Euripides) says that in fact she did not go to Troy at all, but that an image of her did instead. Having stolen her away at the behest of Hera, Hermes handed her over to Proteus, the King of Egypt, to guard. When the latter died, Theoklymenos attempted to marry her, but as a suppliant she sat upon the tomb of Proteus. There Menelaos appeared to her, after he had wrecked his ships at sea, though bringing to safety a few of his comrades penned up in a cave. After they had begun a conversation and had devised a scheme, they deceived Theoklymenos, and, having boarded a ship as though to make a sacrifice at sea for the dead Menelaos, they reached the safety of their own land.

Produced in 412 BCE (cf. Scholia to Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusa*e 1012, 1040, and *Frogs* 53.)

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

HELEN: The unexpectedly virtuous heroine, trapped in Egypt for 17 years and now threatened with forced marriage to king Theoklymenos.

TEUKROS: Exiled veteran of the Trojan War, en route to a new home in Cyprus.

CHORUS: Captive Greek maidens, who have somehow come with Helen to Egypt. Perhaps they are just the Greek element of the king's harem, variously added over the years.

MENELAOS: Helen's husband, sacker of Troy, who has been travelling for seven years with a phantom-double of the real Helen, which he took from Troy. He is pompous, blustering, self-important, but sometimes a bit slow and even pathetic.

DOORKEEPER/OLD WOMAN: comic character who humiliates Menelaos

SERVANT (OF MENELAOS): delivers first messenger speech about departure of the phantom.

THEONOE: sister of the Egyptian king Theoklymenos. She is prophetic, and helps Helen and Menelaos escape.

THEOKLYMENOS: Egyptian king who, now that his virtuous father Proteus is dead, would force Helen into marriage.

EGYPTIAN MESSENGER: delivers speech about escape of Helen and Menelaos.

DIOSKOUROI (KASTOR AND POLLUX): Helen's twin brothers, who appear *ex machina* to bring the actino to a close (by forbidding Theoklymenos to chase Helen and Menelaos).

THE STAGE

Left

Theoklymenos' palace

Center

Tomb of Proteus

Right

Cave/Sea

PROLOGUE (1–166)

Helen is sitting at the tomb as a suppliant. She begins to describe the Egyptian landscape and the kingdom's history to herself. It is intimate and familiar—as if she were talking to someone close to her. There is some amount of pride in her description of Proteus' noble household. There's a burst of emotion in line 16, when she brings up Sparta; emotions start to crescendo. Zeus' deception of Leda, the beauty contest, and Hera's interventions are all described with some bitterness. By line 49 ("Here I am.."), she has exhausted her anger. There is defeat in her voice.

Helen

These streams, these enchanting maidens of the Nile, look how they run.
 Fed by melt from pure-white snow, the river swells and soaks
 the Egyptian fields in place of Zeus' downward pour.
 King Proteus ruled this country here,¹ at least when he was living.
 He wed Psamathe, one of the maids amid the seaswell—
 but only after she forsook Aiakos' bed.
 Two children she bore in that home of his.
 Theoklymenos, her son; and noble Eido, her mother's delight when but a babe. 10
 But, when Eido bloomed in youth and reached her marriage season,
 they called her Theonoe ("God-minded") since her forefather's gift had passed to her.
 For like Nereus before her, she knew the sacred present and future. She knew it all.

(sighing) And I? My fatherland is not entirely unknown—
Sparta. My father was Tyndareus . . .
(pause) Though, *some* have said that Zeus flew to my mother,
 cloaked in swanskin, feigning a flight from an eagle's pursuit.
 Oh, he made for her a treacherous bed. . . *if* the story is true. 20
 Helen, I was called.

I would tell you of my suffering:
 Three goddesses—Hera, Aphrodite of Cyprus,
 and Athena the Zeus-sprung maid—
 came to Paris, a Trojan prince, in an Idaean vale
 to prove their charm in a tournament of beauty.
 But Aphrodite offered *my* beauty—if ill-omens can be beautiful—ha!—
 for Paris to marry, and thus she won the match.
 So, Paris left behind his oxstalls and came to Sparta to seize my bed. 30

But Hera, stung by her loss to the Cypriot and Athena,
 blew barren winds into my 'marriage'
 and gave not me, but a breathing phantom-double molded from the sky,
 to king Priam's son.
 So, Paris imagines that he has me—an empty apparition!—
 but does not. And Zeus adds further misery to woe: *War*
 he heaved onto the Greeks and woeful Trojans,
 to unburden Mother Earth of her massed multitude of mortals, 40
 and to reveal the bravest man in all of Greece.

¹ Line 5 excised as poetic gloss: [dwelling on the isle Pharos, but Master of Egypt.]

I was offered up, a test of Trojan courage
 and a spearprize for the Greeks.
 Not I myself, that is, just my name.
 But Zeus did not forget me:
 Hermes swept me high into the skycoves and
 concealing me in a cloud, brought me to the house of Proteus—
 whom he judged most righteous of all men—
 to keep my bed unsullied for my husband, Menelaos.

So, here I am.

But my poor husband sailed his levied men 50
 to Troy's citadels to win me back by force.
Oh, so many lives were lost in the flood of Scamander's stream because of me!
 And even after all I've suffered,
 I'm cursed by those who think I've betrayed my husband,
 that I've slung this loathsome war upon the Greeks.

Then why live on? *Hermes' prophecy*. I've heard that I will live again
 in Sparta's splendid plains with my dear husband,
 after he comes to know that I did not go to Troy—
if I don't spread my . . . bedsheets for another man.

Now, when *king Proteus* looked on daylight, I had asylum from all bedroom predators. 60
 But now he's buried, cloaked in the shadows of the earth,
 and the dead king's son is hunting me for his wife.
 So to honor my *old* husband, to preserve my bed for him,
 I have fallen on Proteus' tomb as a suppliant.
 No shame shall touch my body here,
 even if my name is infamous throughout Greece.

Teukros (*entering*)

Who has power over *these* fortified halls?
 The god of Wealth himself, I bet, has a house like this . . . (*looking it over*)
 royal palace walls . . . (*gaze travels over to Proteus' tomb*) . . . nice eaves on this sanctuary too— 70
 (*Suddenly catching sight of Helen.*) Gah! (or *similar scream of fright / hatred*).
 O gods, what do I see? I behold the deadly
 form of a most-hateful woman, she who destroyed me
 and all the Achaeans. May the gods spit you out,
 for all your likeness to Helen. If I were not standing
 on foreign soil, you would have died from this well-trimmed arrow
 as a reward for resembling Zeus' daughter.

Helen

(*Scared, Helen plays it safe by not admitting who she is.*)
 Unlucky stranger, why do you turn away from me?
 Why scorn *me* for the pain *that* woman caused?

Teukros

My mistake. I gave into rage more than I should have:
All of Greece hates the daughter of Zeus.
Forgive me, lady, for the things that were said.

80

Helen

But who are you? From what land are you visiting this one?

Teukros

I am one of the wretched Achaeans, lady.

Helen

Well then! No wonder you hate Helen.
But, again: Who are you and where've you come from? Whom might I call your father?

85

Teukros

The name is Teukros; Telamon is my father,
and Salamis the land that nourished me.

Helen

What brings you to the land of the Nile?

Teukros

I was driven out of my native land, an exile.

90

Helen

Oh, poor man! Who cast you from your fatherland?

Teukros

Telamon, who sired me. Who should have been a better friend?

Helen

(*suspicious*) But why? It sounds a pretty tragic business.

Teukros

My brother, Ajax, ruined me by dying in Troy.

Helen

How? Surely he didn't die by *your* sword, did he?

95

Teukros

Falling onto his *own* sword did *him* in.

Helen

Had he lost his mind? What sane man would do such a thing?

Teukros

Do you know a certain . . . Achilles, Peleus' son? (*The humor is, who would not have heard of Achilles?*)

Helen

(*attempting to conceal melancholy and nostalgia*)

Sure! He came to woo Helen once . . . or so I hear.

Teukros

In dying, he set up a contest for his arms among his comrades.

100

Helen

And this so tormented Ajax? How?

Teukros

When another man took the armor, he took his own life.

Helen

(*suddenly understanding*)

I see—you are afflicted by his anguish.

Teukros

Yes, because I didn't die with him.

Helen

(*She pauses. Trying to change the subject, but also to solicit information*).

Did you truly go to the famed city of Ilium, stranger?

105

Teukros

Yes, and I myself was destroyed along with it.

At this point, Helen starts to shoot rapid-fire questions. I imagine this scene to be quick but also strained—as if Helen were not trying to show too much interest and arouse his suspicion.

Helen

Have flames taken the city? Has Ilium been completely razed?

Teukros

So that not even a trace of the walls can be made out.

Helen

O wretched Helen! The Trojans met their ruin because of you!

Teukros

(*taken aback at her concern for the Trojans*)

And the Achaeans too. Great evils have been done.

110

Helen

How long since the city's ruin?

Teukros

Nearly seven years' harvest cycles.

Helen

And how long were you at Troy before that?

Teukros

Many moons, on and on for ten years.

Helen

This *Spartan woman*, did you take her too?

115

Teukros

Menelaos dragged her off by the hair.

Helen

Did you actually *see* the miserable woman? Or is this hearsay?

Teukros

I saw her with my own eyes, no less than I see you now.

Helen

Are you sure you it wasn't some apparition from the gods?

Teukros

Change the subject, no more of her.

120

Helen

But you're *sure* that her appearance was reliable?

Teukros

I *saw* her *myself* with my own two eyes—(*dreamily?*) and I see her still in my mind's eye.

Helen

Does that mean Menelaos is home now with his wife?

Teukros

No, he is neither in Argos nor by the streams of the Eurotas.

Helen

Oh god! (*or other scream* [Grk. *aiai!*]). That's dreadful news—(*realizing that her emotional reaction could seem suspicious, she composes herself*) er, for whomever it would be . . . (*finishes lamely*) dreadful news. 125

Teukros

He is said to have disappeared with his spouse.

Helen

But didn't the Argives take the passage homeward all as one?

Teukros

They did, but a storm separated them in various directions.

Helen

On which backs of the salty sea?

Teukros

As they were crossing mid-sea the Aegean passage.

130

Helen

(She almost cuts him off. Showing impatience.)

—And after this? Does anyone know of Menelaos' arrival?

Teukros

No one; but it is said throughout Greece that he died.

Helen

(to herself) We're done for! *(to Teukros)* What about Thestia's daughter? Does she live?

Teukros

Helen's mother Leda, you mean? Oh, she's dead and gone.

Helen *(Gasps)*

Not slain by Helen's tarnished name!?

135

Teukros

So they say—she fastened her well-born neck to a noose.

Helen *(exasperated, as if worn out by the sheer amount of bad news)*

And the Tyndarian sons—Kastor and Pollux—do they live? Or not?

Teukros

They have died—and not died. There are two accounts.

Helen

But which bodes better? I'm worn out by this misery.

Teukros

They say that the twins have been made like stars and are gods.

140

Helen

That would be good news, at least. But...the other account?

Teukros

Is that they killed themselves because of their sister.
 But enough stories: I do not need to double my tears.
 I came to this royal house because I wanted to see
 Theonoe, chanter of the gods' will. 145
 Help me arrange a visit so I can learn from the oracle
 how I must sail my ship
 to reach the seagirt land of Cyprus. There it is
 that Apollo foretold I should live, calling my settlement
 by the islandy name of Salamis, for the sake of my far-off native land. 150

Helen

The voyage itself will show you, stranger. —Oh, the time! You have to go!
 Flee this land before he catches sight of you—(*venom in her voice*) That son of Proteus,
 this country's king, is away hunting now,
 exulting with his trusty hounds in beast-butcherer bloodshed.
 Oh, he kills every last Greek traveller he gets his hands on. 155
 (*Teukros, astonished, makes as if to question Helen, but she hustles him along.*)
 You don't want to know. So don't bother asking.
 And I'm not talking—because what good would it do you?

Teukros

Very good point, madam. May the gods
 give you full return for your kindness.
 You may have a *body* like Helen's; but your minds 160
 are not the same—they are very different indeed.
 May she be perish utterly and not come to
 Eurotas' streams. But *you* madam—may your fortune always be good.

Exit Teukros.

Helen

(*building into a hypnotic chant*)

— ∪ ∪ | — ∪ ∪ | — ∪ ∪ | — ∪ ∪ | — ∪ ∪ | — —
 As I build | up to a | great lamen | tation for | sorrows so | great, for

 — ∪ ∪ | — ∪ ∪ | — ∪ ∪ | — — | — ∪ ∪ | — —
 what kind of | wailing am | I to con | tend, what | Muse to ap | proach with 165

 — ∪ ∪ | — ∪ ∪ | — ∪ ∪ | — — |
 tear-drops or threnody or public mourning? Aiai! (*or other cry of grief*)

PARODOS (167–252: Choral entry sequence, in dialogue with Helen).**Strophe A (Helen)**

Feathery-winged women young
 maidens of the underworld
 Sirens I pray you might
 come together with Li-
 byan flute or ly-re (v.l. panpipe)
 for all my “Ah Linus!” woes.
 Send me tears to answer my tears,
 pains for my pains, melodies for my melodies
 musics in harmony
 with threnodic droning
 so in her halls of night Persephone
 after these tears from me will welcome a
 murderous, favorless paian for
 all of my friends who are dead and gone!

Antistrophe A (chorus, *enters*)

Going along the water blue,
 Making my way in a tangle of green,
 I happened to be dry-
 ing royal purple robes
 in the sun's golden rays
 on the stalks of bull-rushes;
 then I heard a piteous warbling,
 lyreless elegy, just what a nymph would have
 cried out with many a
 groaning once on a time,
 let's say a naiad fleeing in mountains,
 sobbing a sorrowing song at the bottom of
 rocky gullies she cries out and
 wails the unwanted love of Pan.

Strophe B (Helen)

O captives of barbarian oar,
 O maidens of Hellas!
 Some Achaean sailor
 came to me, came to me, bringing me tears upon tears and tears;
 overthrow of Ilion,
 was the work of blazing fire
 all on account of deadly me,
 thanks to my name of many toils.
 Leda, my mother, too
 took her life in a noose, crushed by
 grief at my apparent shame;
 and my lord in the sea wandering much

Menelaos is now dead and gone;
 Kastor and my other brother—
 double-begotten delight to fatherland—
 vanished vanished have abandoned the
 steed-struck riding ground and gymnasia
 of the bullrushy Euro-
 tas, the labors of young men.

Antistrophe B (Chorus)

Ai! Ai! Fortune worthy of lament!
 Woman—your lot in life!
 Some age of misfortunes
 came to you, came to you, when Zeus begot you in mother's womb
 like the snow-white wing of swan
 blazing through the upper air.
 Is there a trouble you've not had?
 What in your life were you ever spared?
 Your mother is now gone,
 and the beloved twin offspring
 of Zeus are no longer there;
 land of your ancestors out of sight,
 all through the cities is going a
 reputation that betrays you
 to a barbarian's bed, O Potnia,
 and Menelaos in salt and surges has
 now forsaken his life, and never a-
 gain will he bless his fathers'
 halls and famous House of Bronze.

Epode

(Helen and Chorus) Pheu! Pheu! What Phrygian—
 or was it someone from Hellenic land—
 who felled the tree, evergreen tears for
 Ilion to cry?
 Helen solo) Then the son of Priam—Paris—
 assembling a ruinous ship
 went sailing with barbaric oar
 after me in hearth and home
 after my most unfortunate
 beauty, so to take to and wed;
 With him murderous crafty Aphrodite sailed,
 driving on death for sons of Danaos;
 (Helen and Chorus) O wretched in misfortune!
 Then she-of-the-golden-throne, the
 holy embrace of father Zeus, queen
 Hera, sent for the swift-
 foot Hermes, Maia's progeny.
 (Helen solo) Hermes, as I was gathering in my mantle fresh

petals of roses to take them to A-
 thena's great House of Bronze,
 abducted me across the sky
 into this forsaken land de-
 positing me, a wretched quarrel, a
 quarrel of Greece for Priam's sons.
 My name, however, meanwhile along the backs of the Sim-
 ois gathers a false report.

FIRST EPISODE (253–514)

Chorus and/or Chorus Leader

I know you suffer hardships deep, yet mark my word:
 it's best to bear lightly the things in life
 you can't avoid.

Helen

To what fate was I chained, my friends? 255
 Did my mother bear me as a freak among mankind?
 No woman—no Greek, no barbarian—gives birth to
 her baby in an eggshell cask, as
 they say Leda bore me to Zeus.
 I suppose my life and affairs *have been* a freak— 260
 partly because of Hera, but my own beauty is also to blame.
 I wish that I'd been wiped clean like a statue, to be newly painted,
 and instead of beauty had an uglier face!
 And that the Greeks had overlooked my present
 evil fortunes—and were remembering the good 265
 the way they now dwell on the bad.
 (*Sighs*) When someone faces a crisis from the gods, and is distressed,
 it's a burden, yes—but bearable all the same.
 But me, I'm wrapped in many sorrows:
 First, though I've done nothing wrong, my name is loathed. 270
 It's so much worse to be scorned for things you haven't done
 than to suffer honest charges!
 And then the gods have transported me from my homeland
 to these barbarian haunts, and stripped me of my loved ones.
 And what's more—even though I'm free by birth 275
 I'm now a slave . . . for *all* barbarians are slaves except for one.
 (*Pause*) Though one anchor steadied me in hardship: that my husband
 would come one day and deliver me from this grief.
 But he is dead. He is no more.
 And my mother has perished—and I'm her killer. 280
 How unjust!—though injustice is mine to bear.
 And my daughter, my glory, my house's glory,
 grows grey as an unwed maid.
 And the two sons of Zeus, the so-called Dioskouroi,
 live no longer. Since all I have is all ill-starred, 285

I am as good as dead, though actually alive.
 And this is the final blow: if we were to come home,
 we would be shut out, since they'd assume
 that I, the 'Helen' from Troy, was returning without Menelaos.
 Whereas if my husband were alive, we would be recognized 290
 as we arrived, with sureties only known to us
 But now it's impossible, nor will he ever be rescued.

Why then should I live on? What fortune do I have left?
 To choose marriage as an escape from suffering,
 and live with that barbarian husband, 295
 seated at his loaded table? But when a hated husband
 goes with a woman, even her own body becomes hateful!

So it's best to die. How would that not be noble for me?²
 For I have come to such a depth of woe.
 While other women are blessed by beauty,
 this very thing has ruined us. 305

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus

Who is this stranger, Helen, just arrived?
 Do not assume his every word is true.

Helen

But he said it so clearly: my husband is dead.

Chorus and/or Chorus Leader

But many things are 'clearly' said with a deceiving tongue.

Helen

Yes—and the reverse can be true as well. 310

Chorus and/or Chorus Leader

You say this on misfortune's path, not headed into good.

Helen

Yes, for fear besets me, driving me to that dreaded thought.

Chorus and/or Chorus Leader

Do those inside the house hold you in favor and goodwill?

Helen

All are friends—all except the man who hunts my hand in marriage.

² Omitting 299–302 as an interpolation: [It's shameful to hang yourself, hoisted in the air, /and it seems disgraceful even among the slaves. / But death by sword is noble and good, / though slender is that crucial spot to free the flesh from life.]

Chorus and/or Chorus Leader

Then hear what you must do: first leave this tomb-side seat— 315

Helen (*surprised and unnerved by this advice.*)

What're you saying? What kind of command or advice is this?

Chorus and/or Chorus Leader

—go inside, and ask the one who knows all things,
the august maiden, born of Nereus' line, Theonoe—
inquire whether still your husband lives
or if he's left the light; and once you've learned the facts for sure, 320
rejoice or else bewail your fate.
Before you know a thing secure, what use
will come of grieving? Trust me then!³
And I will gladly go inside with you
and gladly hear the virgin's prophecy:
For woman must with woman toil.

LYRIC DIALOGUE BETWEEN HELEN AND THE CHORUS (330–385)

Helen

Dear friends, your words I did give ear. 330
Go in, go into the house
to learn within the palace
what new trials I must face.

Chorus

Most willingly at your command.

Helen

Alas! A dreadful day is this! 335
Wretched woman, what will be the report
evoking tears that I shall hear?

Chorus

As a prophetess of woe
do not, my dear, lament too soon.

Helen

What has my husband, poor man, endured? 340
Does he yet see the light of day, the
sun's four-horse-drawn car and pathway of the stars
or does he with the dead below
have everlasting doom to bear? 345

³ 324–6 omitted as an interpolation: see Allan.

Chorus

For the better end have hope,
whatever it may turn out to be.

Helen

You have I summoned here, to you also I swear
by the wat'ry reeds that make green the
Eurotas, if true be
rumors that my husband's perished, 350
—is there ought of this not understood?—
This lethal noose I will put
around my neck and raise aloft
or with sword's insistent slaying,
slaughter that tears the throat, 355
my very sword as a foe will I drive through my flesh, as an offering
to the three-yoked goddesses and
him inside Ida's caves
Priam's son, once a mere shepherd
keeping watch about his stalls.

Chorus

May misfortune be turned away, 360
and may the outcome for you be fair.

Helen

Alas, O wretched Troy,
through evil unknown deeds you were forced to fall.
And yet the gifts that I received from Cypriot Aphrodite
bore so much blood, and also so much weeping, 365
sorrow upon sorrow, suffering on suffering:
Mothers came to lose their dear children,
and the young girls cut off their tresses,
sisters of the dead beside Scamander's stream
flooding the land of Phrygia.
A cry, a cry did Greece, <ah>, 370
raise high as well, into wailing breaking.
Upon her head her hands she laid, pounding,
with her nails she tore her cheek's tender flesh
and made it wet with blows blood-staining.
O blessed maiden of yore in Arcadia 375
Callisto, who from Zeus' embrace rose up
walking on four-footed members.
Better by far than my mother's the lot you re-
ceived, in form of shaggy-limbed creatures,
[though your eye softened fear of that creature (Dale text)],
you with that form put away sorrow. 380
Artemis did once dismiss from her chorus the
deer with gilt horns, her of Titan Merops the daughter

only because of her beauty, but my beauty
wasted, yea wasted, the citadel Dardanus built
and the accursed Achaeans.

385

SECOND PROLOGUE⁴

Menelaos (*entering*)

Ah, Pelops, charioteer, contender
once with Oinomaos in the Pisan Games,
how I wish your offering to the gods
had been complete, that you died among them,
left this life before your son, Atreus,
whom you sired, begot upon Aerope
Agamemnon—and me, Menelaos!—a famous team.

390

It was the greatest of all expeditions, I believe—
and I say this without boasting—
that I carried across against the walls of Troy,
leading young men of Greece, not as a tyrant,
but freely followed.

395

We may call the roll of those who are not still in life,
and number those who escaped the sea
to bring home the names of the dead.
Yet *I* have been wandering fruitlessly
upon the grey back of the salty sea,
struggling homeward, while ignored by the gods.
When I neared my country, the vexed and jealous winds
thwarted me, sent me off to this friendless land,
by desolate, rock-strewn shores of Libya,
where I was shipwrecked and all my friends were lost.
From the wreckage I gained the ship's keel,
on which, against all odds, I reached land—
myself and Helen, whom I dragged from Troy.
I do not know this kingdom nor its folk,
and I was too embarrassed to be seen,
ragged, improvident and unlucky.

400

405

A man of my prominence finds ill-luck
more taxing than those used to misfortune.
Need is too much for me. We have no food,
no appropriate clothing to my skin,
as you may surmise, seeing this wretched stuff—
flotsam from the ship I now must wear.
All my treasure, all my resplendent robes
the sea has stolen, and in a cavern's

415⁵

420

⁴ Following Toph Marshall.

⁵ Line number is correct: Page Hudson compressed a bunch in the foregoing lines.

depth I stowed the woman who caused these ills, 425
 along with my surviving friends, kept safe.

Now I am here to scrounge what I can,
 provisions to take to those I left behind.

I saw this mansion with shining gables, 430
 the massive gates of some commanding man,

And I am now come as do sailors, importunate,
 seeking charity from rich, not poor abodes.
 Impoverished men cannot help even if they would.
 Hail, doorman! Will you announce my visit? 435

Doorkeeper (aka Old Woman)

Who's at the gate? Get away from this house!
 Don't loiter around the courtyard and bother my master!
 If you do, you'll be executed. You're a Greek,
 and Greeks have no business here! 440

Menelaos

(*taken aback*) Sure, sure!—since you put it so nicely, Old Woman.
 I guess I'll have to obey—but ease up on the anger!⁶

Doorkeeper (aka Old Woman)

Go away! It's my job, stranger,
 to make sure no Greek gets anywhere near this house.

Menelaos

Hey! Keep your hands off and don't push me. 445

Doorkeeper (aka Old Woman)

This is on you. You aren't listening to me!

Menelaos

Go within. Announce me to your master.

Doorkeeper (aka Old Woman)

I think you'll be sorry if I do take your message inside!

Menelaos

I come a shipwrecked stranger, requiring aid.

Doorkeeper (aka Old Woman)

Then go to some other house, not this one. 450

Menelaos

⁶ Or: You could have said these same words in another tone! / For I shall obey—just go easy on the anger! (Text corrupt here.)

No! I shall go in and you will obey me.

Doorkeeper (aka Old Woman)

You're being a real pain! Soon you'll be forced to leave.

Menelaos

Ah, where is the army that won me great fame?

Doorkeeper (aka Old Woman)

So it seems you're a big shot somewhere . . . but not here.

Menelaos

O destiny, you have brought me low, all undeserved.

455

Doorkeeper (aka Old Woman)

Are you *crying*? You think someone should feel sorry for you?

Menelaos

I recall happiness from the dead past.

Doorkeeper (aka Old Woman)

So beat it and go cry to your friends!

Menelaos

Whose estate is this? Who rules the great house?

Doorkeeper (aka Old Woman)

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

460

Menelaos

Egypt!? What cursed fortune sailed me here?

Doorkeeper (aka Old Woman)

Why complain? What's the Nile's gleaming beauty ever done to you?

Menelaos

It's not the Nile's fault . . . just a sad soliloquy.

Doorkeeper (aka Old Woman)

Plenty of people have problems. You're not the only one.

Menelaos

Will you name the master of the kingdom?

465

Doorkeeper (aka Old Woman)

He's buried here. His son is now king.

Menelaos

Where is he, inside or traveling abroad?

Doorkeeper (aka Old Woman)

He's not home—and he *hates* Greeks!

Menelaos

What have I done that I should suffer this?

Doorkeeper (aka Old Woman)

(*Looking around, then discreetly; whispering?*)

Helen, Zeus's daughter, is inside the palace.

470

Menelaos

(*shouts*) What!? (*aside*: This makes no sense!) What was that again?

Doorkeeper (aka Old Woman)

Tyndareus' daughter. She was in Sparta once.

Menelaos

Where did she come from? Can you explain that?

Doorkeeper (aka Old Woman)

She came here from there—Sparta, the Lakedaimonian land.

Menelaos

When!? (*aside*: Was my wife stolen from the cave?)

475

Doorkeeper (aka Old Woman)

Stranger, before the Greeks ever sailed to Troy she came here.

But get away from this house! Something's happened,
and everything's a chaotic mess.

You've come at a bad time. If my master
catches you, the only hospitality you'll get is death.

480

(*Suddenly intimate and confiding, perhaps whispering*)

I'm actually well-disposed to Greeks, by the way—
for all the harsh words I spoke in fear of my master.

Exit, slamming door.

Menelaos (*thinking outloud, short on the uptake*)

What the . . . ? What am I to think:

My miseries continue on and on

since she tells me my once-abducted wife,

485

brought from Troy and well-guarded in a cave, is *here*.

Is it some strange woman with the same name,
who lives in this house?

She surely said it was a child of Zeus. . .

Perhaps some *man* named "Zeus" lives by the Nile?

490

The only Zeus I know lives in heaven,
 and there is no Sparta except where streams
 combine to make Eurotas' reedy bed.
 The name "Tyndareus" is known around the world: there is only one;
 and only one land resounding with the name "Lacedaimonia." 495
 Only one land called "Troy," surely?
 I don't know what to think! In this great world
 perhaps are *many* lands with the same name,
 and many men called the same as others—
 cities like cities, women like women . . .
 It's nothing wonderful . . . nothing odd at all.
 I won't flee just because the servant threatens: 500
 there can be no man so barbarous
 as to hear my name and refuse me food!
 Famous is the burned citadel of Troy!
 And I, Menelaos, set it all ablaze!
 There is no place where my name is unknown!
 I'll await the lord. I've got two 505
 lines of defense. If he be savage
 I shall hide and strike backward to the wreck.
 But if he be kind, I'll requisition
 what these dire circumstances made me crave.
 This is the worst of all my problems: 510
 being a king myself and looking to another
 king for help. Still, 'necessity offers us no choice'.
 I didn't make that up, but it sounds smart.

EPIPARODOS (515–527)

I heard from the maiden of godly song
 the answer I needed in the tyrant's palace—
 how Menelaos is not yet gone through the glimmering
 gloom underground, hidden away.
 But, still in the salt-swelling sea,
 worn away he's not yet reached the havens of his fatherland.
 He's wandering hand-to-mouth,
 sore-of-heart, not a friend, alone,
 putting ashore every where he goes
 throughout the world, rowing the
 sea after setting out from Troy.

SECOND EPISODE (528–1106)

Helen (*entering from palace*)

(*plopping down?*) There, now I'm back to my seat at the tomb—
 What good news from Theonoe!
 She *really* knows everything! She says my husband's

530

living and looks upon the splendor of the day.
 But this too: that he's roaming on the boundless sea,
 here and there, and that he'll arrive when he
 hits the limit of his woes, battered by his wandering.
 But one thing she didn't say: whether or not he'll *survive* once he gets here. 535
 I couldn't bring myself to ask—

I was so overjoyed by the news he was safe.
 She said he was near this land,
 cast up and shipwrecked, with just a few companions.
 Ah, when will you come? How sweet would your arrival be! 540
(right on cue Menelaos enters; she spots him)

Oh! *(or other gasp)* Who is this man? Am I being ambushed
 by that scheming, godless son of Proteus?
 Quick now, to the tomb—like a nimble colt
 or a holy Bacchant! Oh, he's got a wild look—
 this man who hunts me down! 545

Menelaos

You! Reaching now in such a fearful way
 Toward the piled grave and burn-stones of the pyre,
 Stay! What do you flee? Your body has shocked me . . . *(he grabs for Helen)*

Helen

Oh the abuse! *(calling for help)* Women!
(frenzied) This man—he's keeping me from the tomb! 550
 He wants to seize me, turn me over to the king I refuse to marry!

Menelaos

(Indignant) I am no *thief* or *servant* to bad men!

Helen *(looks him up and down)*

Well, you *have* got a pretty shabby outfit on.

Menelaos

Hold up, stay your hasty foot. 555

Helen

(reaching the tomb)
 I have—now that I've reached this tomb *(meaningfully, so Menelaos will know she is inviolable here)*.

Menelaos

Who *are* you, Lady? On whose face do I gaze?

Helen

Well, who are *you*? We both have the same question.

Menelaos

I've never seen a form so like a form. . . .

Helen

Oh gods! For recognizing one's loved ones is also divine.

560

<**Menelaos**

Are you Greek, or a native of this land? >

Helen

A Greek. But I want to know about you too. . . .

Menelaos

You are more like Helen than anyone I ever saw.

Helen

And you're so much like Menelaos . . . I don't know what to say.

Menelaos

Then you have rightly recognized a man of cursed fortune.

565

Helen (*running to embrace him*)

At long last! You've come to the arms of your wife!

Menelaos

Wife? What wife? And hands off my shirt (or: the threads)!

Helen

The wife my father Tyndareus gave you.

Menelaos

O torch-bearing Hecate, send me *kindly* visions!

Helen (*indignant, slightly insulted*)

You're seeing *me*, not some nocturnal specter of the crossroads-goddess!

570

Menelaos

I'm one husband. I can't have two wives.

Helen (*horrified*)

But what *other* wife are you master of?!

Menelaos

The one I left inside the cave—the one I'm bringing back from Troy.

Helen

You have no wife but me!

Menelaos

Am I crazy? Perhaps my vision's blurred.

575

Helen

Don't you believe your eyes? Don't you see your wife?

Menelaos

You look like her, but facts don't lie.

Helen

Look at me! What better proof do you need?

Menelaos

You *are* just like her—I can't deny it.

Helen

Who will be your teacher, if not your eyes?

580

Menelaos

They must be diseased, since I *have* another wife.

Helen

That was a phantom-double: *I* did not go to Troy.

Menelaos

What force can make a body live and breathe?

Helen

The aether: from there you have a god-assembled wife.

Menelaos

Which god made her? I cannot understand.

585

Helen

Hera did, as a forgery—so Paris could not get me.

Menelaos

How then were you *here*, yet at Troy too?

Helen

A name could be many places, but a body, no.

Menelaos

Release me—I've had enough despair!

Helen

You mean you'll *abandon* me, and go off with the *phantom* bride?

590

Menelaos

With sweet farewell, since you are so alike to Helen.

Helen

I'm ruined! After getting you I will not keep my husband!

Menelaos

The magnitude of my toils at Troy persuades me—you do not.

Helen (*visibly devastated*)

Oi moi! (or: Oy vey!) Who's been through more than I?

My beloved husband is leaving me, and I shall not come to Greece
nor ever to my native land.

595

Servant of Menelaos (*enters running and out of breath*)

Menelaos! I've just come, searching after you,
wandering all over this barbarian land,
sent by your companions left behind.

Menelaos

What now? The barbarians haven't robbed the crew, have they?

600

Servant of Menelaos

It's a *miracle*—though that word doesn't do it justice!

Menelaos

Speak: your haste foretells strange tidings.

Servant of Menelaos

I mean that you have suffered countless troubles in vain!

Menelaos

That's crying over old news. Anything else?

Servant of Menelaos

Your wife has gone up to the folds of air,
lifted out of sight. She is hidden in the sky,
abandoning the holy cave where we were guarding her,
with these parting words:

605

“O wretched Phrygians
and all you Achaeans, on my account you went on dying
on Scamander's banks—as Hera plotted—
thinking that Paris had Helen when he did not.
But I—since I remained here till the time was right
and have fulfilled my destined role—
to my native heaven I return.

610

Tyndareus' poor daughter has suffered a bad reputation
through no fault of her own.”

615

(He now sees Helen)

Oh! Hello, daughter of Leda! So *this* is where you've been?!

I was just reporting how you had gone into the starry nooks—

(ironically, sarcastically) I had no idea you had a winged body!

I won't let you pull this trick again: you caused enough trouble
at Troy for your husband and his fellow-warriors!

620

Menelaos

I see! I understand! Her story is true.

(To Helen) O long-desired day

that gives you to my arms to hold!

REUNION DUET (625–97)

Helen

O dearest of men Menelaos, how very long
 I've waited, but at last delight is now at hand.
 I'm overjoyed my friends to hold him once again
 and spread my loving arms around his body after so
 many, many a morning star.

Menelaos

And I've got you—(*aside?*) but so much still to say that I
 don't know the best way to begin, now that we're here.

Helen

I'm overjoyed and on my head all my hair
 is standing up on end! My tears are falling!
 Around your body—see!—I throw my arms to seize
 pleasure O Husband mine!

Menelaos

O most beloved sight, I can not complain:
 I've got a hold of Zeus and Leda's daughter!

Helen

Me whom beneath the torches my white horse blood
 brothers gave me their blessing their blessing gave . . .

Menelaos

So long ago! But after taking you from home
 some god's leading you to
 a fortune that's better than this one.

Helen

Misfortune's fortunate, if it brings us together again, my lord.
 Took long enough! But still—may I enjoy my luck!

Menelaos

May you enjoy indeed; I pray the same myself.
 With couples it's not "one is wretched, one is not".

Helen (with Chorus?):

My friends, my friends!
 Let's put the past behind—let us no longer whine!
 My husband, mine all mine! I've got him I've got him! I've waited and
 waited for many years for him to come from Troy!

Menelaos

You've got me, and I've got you too. Those countless days

I toiled through! I now see Hera's hand at work.
Because of such great joy, the tears I'm crying have more
of gratitude than grief.

Helen (solo):

What should I say? What mortal ever would have thought?
Unexpected I hold you to my heart!

Menelaos

And I've got you—whom I had thought went to Mt I-
da's city and towers of wretched Ilion . . .

(Menelaos suddenly gets suspicious.)

Say—by the gods, how *did* you get out of my house?

Helen (and Chorus?)

Hey! Hey!—a bitter path you start down!

Hey! Hey!—a bitter story you seek!

Menelaos

Go on—for all the gifts of gods are worth a hear.

Helen (and Chorus?)

I spit, yes I spit—what a tale to
tell, what a thing to bring up!

Menelaos

But tell me still: it's sweet to hear of troubles past.

Helen (and Chorus?)

Not to the youthful bed of a barbarian
riding his wingèd oar, and with his wingèd lust
illicit acts of love . . .

Menelaos

What power then, what fate did strip you from our land?

Helen (and Chorus?)

Zeus's son Zeus's son, Husband, Maia's son, Hermes,
brought me here to the Nile.

Menelaos

Astonishing! At whose behest? O frightful tale!

Helen (and Chorus?)

I pour forth many tears and irrigate my eyes
with teardrops: Zeus's wife it was who ruined me.

Menelaos

Hera? But why'd she want to go and do *us* harm?

Helen (solo)

O wretched me for those bathing pools and springs
where goddesses refreshed their beauty before
the Judgment of Paris.

Menelaos

But why did Hera hold the Judgment against you?

Helen

So that she could rob Paris—

Menelaos

What do you mean?

Helen

Aphrodite promised him me—

Menelaos

(speaking of himself) Oh poor wretch!

Helen

Wretched *me*, wretched, thus she brought me to Egypt.

Menelaos

And then she swapped the phantom, as I heard from you.

Helen

And then at my mother's palace, suffering, suffering—mother, Ah me!

Menelaos

What's that?

Helen

My mother is gone. She strung herself up a strangling noose on account of my home-wrecking shamelessness.

Menelaos

Oh geez! And daughter Hermione—is there some news?

Helen

Unmarried, childless, O Husband, she weeps for this unwedded wedding of mine.

Menelaos

O Paris, you destroyed my house from top on down!

Helen

You yourself this affair ruined, and myriads of Greeks with their weapons of bronze.

And me, so far from my country, me, evil-fated, accursed,
 a god expelled from our city, a god expelled me from *you*
 when palace and wedding chamber I left, though leaving not
 for shameful "I do"!

(END OF REUNION DUET)

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus

If hereafter you enjoy a happy fate,
 let this make up for what has gone before.

Servant

Menelaos, could you two share this joy with me? 700
 I'm learning about it myself, but I don't grasp it clearly.

Menelaos

All right, old man, share in the story yourself.

Servant

Isn't this woman responsible for our toils at Troy?

Menelaos

Not *this* one. We were cheated by the gods.
 We held a bit of cloud within our hands. 705

Servant

What do you mean?! (Or: Say what!?)
 So we had all that trouble for nothing but a *cloud*!?

Menelaos

This was Hera's doing—and the strife of three goddesses.

Servant

What? This woman here is truly your wife?

Menelaos

The very one. You may take my word on it. 710

Servant

O daughter, what a complex thing is god,
 and hard to fathom. He manages to twist things up thoroughly,
 arranging them this way and that. One man suffers;
 another does not but finally meets with a bad end,
 with nothing sure in his fortune. 715

You and your husband certainly had your share of troubles—
 you from people's blameful words, he from eagerness for the spear.
 Though zealous when he strove to rescue you, he got nothing.
 But now he has spontaneous blessings, and has fared very well.
 I see that you did *not* bring shame upon your old father
 and brothers, and you did *not* do those things people say. 720

Now I renew your wedding hymn,
 and recall the torches that I carried,
 running with the four-horsed team.
 And you, the bride upon the chariot's seat, 725
 with this man here, left your blessed home.
 Base is he who does not honor his master's affairs,
 nor rejoice beside him and share in his distress.
 Even though I was born a slave, I'd hope to be reckoned a noble one,
 not having a free man's name, perhaps, 730
 but at least a free man's mind. For that is better
 than for a single man to suffer *two* evils—
 having a base mind *and* obeying those around me as a slave.

Menelaos

Come on then, old fellow, you have shared my tasks,
 stood beside my shield and supported me 735
 in hard times. Share now in my good fortune
 and take the news back to the companions we have left:
 how our luck has changed.
 Tell them to await me at the sea-shore, and look to
 the trials of strength that await me, as I expect— 740
 if somehow we can win my wife away from here—
 and to be on guard for some way that, by combining our fortunes,
 we may be rescued from barbarians, if we can.

Servant

It will be done, my lord. But I've got to tell you, I see now
 how foolish and full of lies prophecy is. 745
 Apparently there is nothing sound in the sacrificial flame,
 nor the cries of birds. It's really pretty silly
 in the first place—expecting birds to help mortals!
 Kalchas, anyway, didn't say or indicate to the army
 that he foresaw his friends dying for a cloud. 750
 Neither did Helenos. Instead the city was ravaged for nothing!
 You could say "it's because the god did not *want* to give a sign".
 But why then do we consult oracles? Those who sacrifice
 to the gods should ask for good things, and leave prophecy alone—
 it was invented as a trick to make a living, 755
 and nobody ever got rich by sitting back at the sacrifices:
 common sense is the best prophet, and good counsel.

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus

The old man's thoughts on oracles
 and mine come to the same. He who has the gods as friends
 would have the finest oracle at home. 760

Helen

(*with satisfaction*) Well, up to now things are looking pretty good.
 But how you were saved from Troy, poor one—
 it'll do no good to know, but somehow friends long
 to hear the troubles of their friends.

Menelaos

You've asked too much for a single question, all in one go. 765
 Why should I recall the harsh Aegean,
 the ship-wrecking fires set by Nauplios
 on Euboean shores, and what cities of Crete
 and Libya I was driven past,
 and the look-out promontories of Perseus? If I should fill you up with stories, 770
 my tale of woe would burden me again:
 I should suffer twice the voyage's pain.

Helen

You've said more than I asked for.
 But tell me one thing, leaving the rest aside: how long
 were you consumed in salty wandering on the ocean's back?

Menelaos

We were ten years upon Trojan land; 775
 on ship I passed through another seven yearly circuits.

Helen

Oh, oh! So many years, you poor man—
 but you've made a safe escape only to come to slaughter *here*!

Menelaos

How's that? What do you mean? How you have ruined me, woman!

Helen

Get out of this land! Run as fast as you can!
 It's the lord of this house—you'll die at his hands. 780

Menelaos

What on earth did I do to deserve this predicament?

Helen

You come as an unexpected impediment—to my wedding!

Menelaos

(*Wearily, fed up*) What? Someone *here* wants to marry my wife?

Helen

Yes, committing an outrage against me (or: you), which I would have (to have) endured.⁷ 785

⁷ Text and meaning of this line disputed. Alternatives: which I endured.

Menelaos

A private strongman, or one with ruling power?

Helen

The ruler of this land, the son of Proteus.

Menelaos

Now I understand the gatekeeper's riddles.

Helen

Which barbarian gates did you stand at?

Menelaos

These right here. (*huffily*) They drove me off like a *beggar*. 790

Helen

Oh! Tell me you weren't asking for *handouts*! I'm mortified!

Menelaos

(*on his dignity*) I wouldn't call it *that* . . . (*suddenly meek*) though yes, that was the fact of the matter.

Helen

So . . . you know all about my marriage it seems . . .

Menelaos

(*coldly*) I do—but not whether you escaped his bed. . .

Helen

Please believe me! I've kept my bed untouched and saved for you! 795

Menelaos

Can you *prove* it? Most welcome if you do.

Helen (*pointing down*)

Look at my wretched seat: don't you see this tomb?

Menelaos

I see a miserable straw pallet—what's it got to do with you?

Helen

I sit here as a suppliant, a fugitive from marriage.

Menelaos

No altar though? Or is this some strange, foreign custom? 800

Helen

This tomb's protected me—like the gods' temples.

Menelaos

Can we not leave together, sail back home?

Helen

A sword awaits you sooner than my bed.

Menelaos

If so, I should be the most miserable of men.

Helen

Don't be ashamed now—flee this land!

805

Menelaos

Leave you?! I sacked *Troy* for your sake!

Helen

Better that than for my marriage to kill you.

Menelaos

Craven counsel, unworthy of Troy!

Helen

You couldn't kill this king, if that's what you're after.

Menelaos

Is his skin so impervious to steel?

810

Helen

You'll see. But no wise man attempts the impossible.

Menelaos

Should I offer my hands quietly to the shackles?

Helen

You're in dire straits. (*musings*) You need some scheme . . .

Menelaos

Better to die fighting, than by inaction.

Helen (*with realization dawning*)

There is . . . some hope. Yes! Our one salvation would be—

815

Menelaos

Bribe him? Fight him? Or clever politics?

Helen

—if the king doesn't find out you've come.

Menelaos

(*gesturing at his own clothes*) He won't know who I am, I'm positive. And who will tell him?

Helen

He lives with an ally. She's as mighty as the gods.

Menelaos

Has he an oracle in the depths of his house?

820

Helen

No—his sister. They call her Theonoe ('God-minded').

Menelaos

A prophetic name, yes. What can she do?

Helen

She knows everything and she'll tell her brother you're here.

Menelaos

(*comically ready to give up hope*) 'Then she will find me out and we shall die!

Helen

But perhaps we could persuade her by supplication . . .

825

Menelaos

To do what? You lead me toward some hope.

Helen

. . . not to tell her brother you're in the land.

Menelaos

If she agrees, could we set foot off this soil?

Helen

With her help, yes—readily. Without her knowing, though—impossible.

Menelaos

This sounds like a job for a woman.

830

Helen

Right. You can be sure I'll touch her knees in supplication.

Menelaos

Okay, but what if she won't listen to us?

Helen

You die. And I, poor thing, will be taken by force in marriage.

Menelaos

You traitor!—force is just an excuse!

Helen

No! I swear a sacred oath on your life—

835

She starts to swear that a forced remarriage would not be faithless, but Menelaos misinterprets.

Menelaos

You mean you'll die? And never swap beds?

Helen

Sees that Menelaos has misunderstood, then goes with it.

Uh . . . yes, by the very same sword! Then I shall lie beside you.

Menelaos

I accept your pledge. Take my hand on it.

Helen (*takes his hand*)

There: if you are killed, I shall leave the light of day.

Menelaos

If I lose you, then I shall take my life.

840

Helen

Now: how shall we die to get some glory out of it?

Menelaos

(*melodramtically*) Upon this high tomb I shall kill us both . . .

(*thinks better of it*) But first let's wage a most heroic fight with your bed as the prize. Let me at him!

I shall not dim the honor won at Troy,

845

Nor gain great blame by getting home to Greece.

I—who stripped Achilles from his mother;

I—who looked upon the slaughter of Telemonian Ajax, and Nestor shorn of every son—

shall I not deem it right to die for my *wife*?

850

Yes, indeed—if there are gods and they have sense, a brave man who dies in war wears the soil lightly in his tomb.

The coward is thrown out upon a barren ridge of rock.

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus

Good fortune give at last, O gods, this House of Tantalos,

855

and let them change these ills for good!

Helen (*before the palace doors; meekly, perhaps voice lowered*)

O poor me—such is my fate.

Menelaos, we're done for! (*pauses to hear*) The seer Theonoe
is coming out of the house . . . The bar's being lifted.

The whole house is resounding!

Run! But what's the point of running?

860

She knows you've come whether she's here or not.

Misery me—how I'm ruined!

Saved from Troy, from that barbarian land,

you've come again to fall upon barbarian swords.

Theonoe (*entering with servants*)

You, go out first with torches and purify every pocket of air
with sulfur and flame as the divine rule says to do,

865

so we can take pure breaths of heaven's air.

Now you, if someone has violated the path, treading

with profane step, pass the torch over it closely

to clean it up so I can pass through.

870

When you have finished the tasks that the gods demand,
carry the hearth's flame back to the house.

Helen! What do you think? How have my predictions turned out?

Your husband Menelaos is here, plain as day;

but he has lost both his ships and your phantom-double.

875

Poor man! You have arrived after escaping how many dangers,
but you don't yet know if you'll get home or stay here—

The gods are still arguing about your situation, and today

Zeus has called an assembly to decide what to do.

Hera, once your enemy, is now on your side

880

and wants to save you and send you home with your wife,

so the Greeks will learn that Paris's⁸ wedding

—Aphrodite's bribe—was a pretend marriage.

But Aphrodite doesn't want you to get home,

so that she won't be found out and shown to have bought

885

her prize for beauty by a fake marriage to Helen.

In the end it's up to me. Either I destroy you,

as Aphrodite wishes, by telling my brother you're here.

Or, standing with Hera, I save your life,

keeping my brother in the dark. He ordered me to tell him

890

if you ever happened to show up here.

Who will go and tell my brother the man is here?

⁸ Text has Alexandros.

Telling him the news will keep me safe.

Helen

(In her attempts to win over Theonoe, Helen begins in a tone of showy humility, full-on Greek prayer-mode. She begins to shift, attempting to further her case with aphorisms, laying the framework for her claim in global truths (Helen may very well be the true heir of Proteus). Around line 910 she fully implements her legal approach; her tone has grown more authoritative throughout, and she is now an assertive lawyer acting in her own defense. This is her Inherit the Wind moment!)

Maiden, I fall around your knees, a suppliant,
and I sink down, wretched, for my sake and for this man. 895
After finding him at long last, I am on the verge of seeing him die.
Do not, I beg you, tell your brother that my husband here (*points*) has come,
wholly beloved, to my arms. Keep us safe, I beg you!

Don't ever betray your pious duty, just for your brother's sake,
by dealing in favors that are vile and unjust. 900
The god hates violence, and ordains that all men
get their worthy possessions by their own power—
not by forceful plunder.⁹

You see, common to all men is the sky; 905
the earth too, in which we must live,
filling our houses full, but not taking by force
another's possessions and holding onto them.

For me, it was at the right time—though hard— 910
that Hermes gave me to your father
to keep safe for my husband,
who is here and wants to retrieve me.
So how could he take me back if he were dead?
And how could your father (*points at tomb*) ever give the living back to the dead?

Now consider the wishes of the Gods and your father: 915
would the divinity and the dead man want you to return
your neighbor's possessions, or would they not?
I think they would. So, your reckless brother mustn't hold more sway
than your honorable father.

And if you, who are a seer and leading believer in godly affairs, 920
corrupt the lawful conduct of your father
to grant a favor for your lawless brother,
then *shameful* it is to know all about powers divine—
shameful to know what is and what will be,
but not what is *right*.

⁹ 905 omitted as an interpolation: ["The wealthy man, though he be unrighteous, must be suffered."]

Save me, wretch that I am, from the evils I am buried in,
and grant this as a fringe benefit to justice.

925

The mask slips a bit here, maybe, as Helen considers the false impression that all have of her, and dreams of her ascent out of infamy and her restoration to a peaceful life. Perhaps she is speaking more to herself and the audience at this point, before turning back to Menelaos and Theonoe at the end of her speech. In her last appeal to Theonoe, she returns again to performative mode, closing with another aphorism.

For there's no man alive who doesn't hate Helen,
I who am infamous throughout Greece
for betraying my husband
to go live in the gilded halls of Phrygian Troy.

But if I return to Hellas and set foot again in Sparta,
and if they hear—and *see*—how it was, by tricks of the *gods*,
that they were destroyed,
and that I did not betray my loved ones after all,
they will restore me once more to my good name.

930

And my daughter—whom no one will marry now—
I shall give her in marriage;
and after this life of bitter wandering
I shall take delight in the wealth still in my house.

935

If this man (*indicates Menelaos*) had died and were consumed on the pyre,
even if he were far away,
I would go on loving him with my tears...
But as it is he was saved, and here he is—
shall I be robbed of him?!

940

Please, no, maiden! Instead I beseech you this:
Grant me this favor, and emulate the ways
of your decent father; for the noblest glory
a child can have, when born from a good family,
is to attain the same high character as her parents.

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus

(*Addressing Helen*) Now half-way done, your words call forth lament.
And so do you! (*turning to Menelaos*) But now we wish to hear
the words your lord will say to save his life.

945

Menelaos

I cannot force myself to kiss your feet,
Nor water my pathetic eyes with tears.
Such degraded behavior disrespects
the heroic stature I achieved at Troy.
True, I've heard that well-born men

950

have found relief when tears burst from their eyes.
 But this I don't accept: it lends no privilege,
 no honor at all. I choose courage instead.
 But if you think it right to save a foreign man,
 who justly seeks to have his wife returned, 955
 give her up—and save *me* while you're at it.
 If you disagree, that's no new evil—
 the same old wretchedness would carry on;
 but you will be revealed a wicked woman.
 But true justice, which is mine—ours—will surely touch your heart 960
 as I declaim before your father's tomb.

(*Falls to ground and addresses tomb*) Venerable sir, you beneath the stone,
 I plead you, give me back my faithful wife,
 Whom Zeus sent here for you to keep safe for me.
 I know that you yourself cannot return her, now you're dead; 965
 but *she* (*indicates Theonoe*) will never deign to hear her father—
 whom now we summon from below—
 spoken ill, when once he was so glorious. For that is in her power.

Lord Hades of the dismal underworld,
 you have taken many bodies, fallen 970
 to my blade for Helen's sake.
 You have been paid, so either send these brave men
 back to us alive, or force this maiden (*points to Theonoe*)
 to appear as pious as her father.
 Restore to me the bride of all my love. 975

(*Rises and addresses Theonoe*) And let me tell you something Helen didn't say:
 If you two strip me of my wife, we are bound by oath:
 first, Maiden, I battle with your brother
 and he will die—or I. That says it all.
 But if his bravery fails to match with mine, 980
 and he tries to starve two suppliants at his door,
 then I shall kill my woman and myself—it is decided—
 driving this two-edged sword into my heart's core.
 Then here upon this grave the blood will splash and drip
 and we will lie, two corpses, side by side— 985
 the shame to you and your father both
 will cause eternal pain, a life's reproach.
 Your brother *won't* marry her: no one shall,
 but we shall be together with the dead,
 if I am not alive to take her home. 990

Why say this? If I cry weak woman's tears,
 I might win pity—but would get nothing done.
 Kill me if you will: you cannot kill your shame.
 Yet better, be persuaded by my words.
 Give in to justice—and give me back my wife!

995

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus

To judge these words, young woman, falls to you:
 Decide in such a way that you please everyone.

Theonoe

By inclination and nature I'll do what is right:
 I care about myself and don't want to ruin
 my father's reputation, nor to do my brother a favor
 if it brings me publicly into disgrace. 1000
 My heart's capacity for justice is great, and since
 I inherited this from my ancestor Nereus
 I shall try, Menelaos, to preserve it.
 And if in fact Hera wants to help you, 1005
 I'll cast my vote into the same urn with hers.
 May Aphrodite be favorable, though she has never come to me:
 I shall try to remain a virgin forever.
 As for the complaints you made by my father's tombstone,
 we could not agree more: we would be unjust 1010
 if I don't give her back, for if he were alive
 he would give her back to you to keep, and you to her.

In fact, there is punishment for these things
 among those below and all those above ground.
 Although the minds of the dead do not exactly live, 1015
 their immortal judgment remains throughout
 the immortal upper air.

Not to go on at length, then, I'll keep quiet
 about what you requested so urgently,
 and won't ever become counsel to my brother's madness.
 I'll be helping him even when I don't seem to be, 1020
 if I make him behave honorably rather than dishonorably.
 You two figure out some path yourselves,
 and I'll stay out of the way and keep quiet.

Begin with the gods and beg Aphrodite first
 to let you return home, 1025
 and Hera to keep her intent the way now
 that she has commenced, to save you and your husband.
 And I promise, my dead father, to ensure to the best of my power
 that your name will never be called into dishonor.

Exit Theonoe

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus

Good fortune never falls to men who prove unjust;
in justice sits the hope of rescue. 1030

Helen

Menelaos, we've been saved—as far as the maiden is concerned.
The next thing is, you must come up with some ideas and
frame a plan for our mutual salvation.

Menelaos

Listen then: you have lived long in this house
1035
and know well the attendants of the king.

Helen

What do you mean? You offer hope,
as if you'll do something good for us both.

Menelaos

Could you persuade a chariot master
to give us one the four-horse teams? 1040

Helen

I might . . . but what would be our escape route,
unfamiliar as we are with the plains of this foreign land?

Menelaos

You're right, hopeless, that way. Could I hide in the house,
cut the king down with my sword? That might work.

Helen

His sister wouldn't allow it, nor would she keep quiet,
if you were going to kill her brother. 1045

Menelaos

(Menelaos has become increasingly despondent as Helen shoots down each idea)
And we don't even have a ship to make a safe escape.
The one I had was taken by the sea . . .

Helen

Listen—if a woman may also say something clever—
even though you're not dead, are you willing to be *named* dead? 1050

Menelaos

Bad omen . . . but if you think it will work,
I'll do it. Report me dead, though I'm not.

Helen

Then we (*gestures at chorus*) could mourn as woman do,
with shorn hair and dirges before that unholy man (i.e. *Theoklymenos*).

Menelaos

Where's the part about our rescue? 1055

The plan seems a bit old-fashioned . . .

<optional: actor turns to audience and breaks fourth wall with a hammy "what is this, Sophokles?", "who are you, Sophokles/Elektra", or similar >¹⁰

Helen

I'll ask the king of this land to bury you
in an empty tomb, as if you died at sea.

Menelaos

(*slow on the uptake*) Suppose he agrees? How are we saved by burying me,
when we still haven't got a ship? 1060

Helen

I'll bid him give a vessel, to cast
the finery of your tomb down to 'the sea's embrace'.¹¹

Menelaos

Great idea!—except one thing. If he bids *you*
to bury me on land, the plot is fruitless.

Helen

But we shall claim it's not customary in Greece 1065
to bury on dry land those who die at sea.

Menelaos

(*slightly chagrined at being out-thought?*) You set that straight too—Then I shall sail
along in the same boat and help cast in the burial goods.

Helen

Exactly—you must be there,
and also your sailors who survived the shipwreck. 1070

Menelaos

(*encouraged that he got something right, and now on familiar ground about fighting*)
And once I get the ship at anchor, we'll start to fight,
cut them down man to man, sword to sword!

¹⁰ The original audience would have got the metatheatrical reference; the optional words supply the missing cultural context for original audience.

¹¹ Helen may be quoting an earlier play by Aeschylus, so this line may wind up in an exaggerated tragic manner?

Helen

(*encouraging him*) *You* must direct it all; let's just hope
there's favorable breezes for the sail, and a running ship.

Menelaos

There *will* be! The gods will end my toils! 1075
But wait—who will you say told you that Menelaos died?

Helen

(*patiently*) *You*. Just say that you alone escaped doom
when you were sailing with Atreus' son, and saw him dead.

Menelaos

And these rags around my body
will corroborate your ship-wreck story. 1080

Helen

Great timing now, what was bad timing then.
That misfortune could prove lucky.

Menelaos

So what—should I go with you into the house?
Or sit here quietly beside the tomb?

Helen

Wait right here, so if he should do anything nasty, 1085
this tomb should protect you—and your sword.
As for me, I'll go into the house and cut off my curls,
I'll exchange my white gown for black,
and I'll drive my nails into my cheek, bloodying my skin.
There's a lot at stake here, and I see both sides of the scale— 1090
either I must die, if I'm caught in my cunning;
or I can save your skin and reach my fatherland.

O Lady, who layeth yourself in Zeus' bed,
Hera, relieve us two, man and wife in piteous plight, from our toils.
We beg you, flinging our arms outstretched to the sky,
where you inhabit the starry tapestry. 1095

And *you*, who won a beauty contest
at the cost of my marriage,
CUE Daughter of Dione, Kyprian Aphrodite, may you not finish me off!
Damage enough you damaged me before,
exposing my name—but *not* my body!—to barbarians. 1100
But let me die, if you wish to kill me,
in my ancestral land. Pray why are you insatiable for wicked deeds,
elaborating love affairs, deceptions, crafty inventions,
and charms that bloody houses?

If only you were moderate—yes, in other ways you are
for mankind sweetest of the gods. I don't deny it.

1105

FIRST STASIMON (1137–1164, FIRST STASIMON = CHORAL SONG)

Strophe A

I summon you come from your temple of song
where on a wooden throne you perch, perching in your halls woodgrown
Sweetest singing of all,
songbird, you melodious nightingale and yet so tearful
Come trem-bl-ing through warbling, chirruping throat, joining in
to help with my threnody:
Helen's unhappy toils I sing,
I sing for the women of
Troy and their destiny so tearful
under Achaean spearmen;
when running across the gray surges with his barbaric oar
he came to you, came to you, miseries stealing for Priam's sons—
out of Sparta your royal bed
Helen, O Helen—Paris the fatally-wed
sent forth by Aphrodite

Antistrophe A

Many Achaeans by-y spear and by stones
thrown breathing their last have attained homes in horrible Hades,
And made their wretched wives
crop tresses in mourning, their houses lie marriageless buried
and kind-l-ing a beckoning light on the salt-circled isle,
Euboea, many a Greek
did a lone rower kill that night
by luring them into rocks
on the seaside Aegean headlands
shining a treacherous star.
And then Menelaos was driven from fatherland by storm
Through desperate harborless wilderness in barbaric garb
with a prize that was no prize at all
just a struggle for Greeks stowed away on his ships—
the phantom made by Hera.

Strophe B

What is god or not god, and what lies in between,
What mortal could discover this?
The furthest limit of certainty one has found when she sees
matters divine leaping here and there, back again, chances con-
tradictory, unexpected.
You were born of Zeus, O Helen, his daughter sprung;
Winged your father fathered you
swan-diving in Leda's lap.

And yet you were branded throughout Hellas
treacherous and faithless, immoral, atheist; nor can I find
any explanation by humankind that is clear
or understanding of gods.

Antistrophe B

You are fools who would acquire virtue in war
and sharpened point of mighty spear—
stupidly coming to terms with toil—but your death is the price.
And if a conflict of blood decide, then the strife never will
forsake the cities of mankind.
Strife it was that won them chambers in Priam's soil
They could have straightened out with words,
your quarrel, O Helen, ah!
As things are, Hades below welcomes them
and a deadly fire, like Zeus', swept over the walls of Troy.
and you suffer pains upon wretched pains on and on—
pitiable misfortunes.

THIRD EPISODE (1165–1300)

Theoklymenos (*returning from a hunt*)

Blessings, tomb of my father! Here at the very gates, 1165
Proteus, I laid you down that I might address you daily.
Never once have I passed in or out of the house
without greeting thee—scion to sire—your son Theoklymenos.
Come, slaves, and bring the hunting dogs and traps
into the royal palace. 1170

I have kicked myself often indeed
for not punishing wrong-doers with death.
Even now I've learned that some Greekling—in broad daylight!—
Has strolled into our country, and slipped past the guards—
a spy, for sure, or some stealthy hunter 1175
of Helen. But he will die, if only he is trapped!

Oh no!
Looks like the whole scheme is finished,
I now find. She's left empty the tomb's comfort—
'Tyndareus' daughter is smuggled out of the country!
To arms! Remove the bolts! Open the cavalry 1180
stables, oh grooms, and draw up the chariots!
I will spare no pains to prevent my intended bride
from being kidnapped and carried out of this land!

Hold it! I see the ones we're after,
still here in the palace, and not runaways after all. 1185
(*Addresses Helen*) You! Why have you clad your body in black robes,

swapping them for white? Why have you attacked your noble head
 with iron and shorn away your hair?
 Why do you wet your cheeks and weep
 with fresh tears? Is it by the urging of nocturnal
 Dreams that you groan? Or have you heard
 some report from home and lost your mind in grief?

1190

Helen (*entering*)

Master—for *now* I call you by this name—
 He's *dead*!¹² My everything is *gone*, and I am nothing more.

Theoklymenos

In what crisis are you mired? What's happened?

1195

Helen

My Menelaos—ah, me, how shall I say it?—is dead!

Theoklymenos

(*Trying to hide his excitement*) I don't revel at all in these words, despite my good fortune.
 (*Suddenly wary*) But how do you know? Theonoe told you all this, did she?

Helen

She says it, and a man who was there when he perished.

Theoklymenos

Then someone has come to report clear facts?

1200

Helen

Come he has—may he go where I want him to!

Theoklymenos

Who is he? Where is he? Explain more clearly.

Helen

This man, who sits cowering at the foot of the tomb.

Theoklymenos

(*With distaste*) By Apollo, what a sight he is in those shabby clothes. (*The fourth person to point this out!*)

Helen

Alas! I imagine my husband looked this way, too.

1205

Theoklymenos

Where in the world is *he* from? And from where did he gain this land?

Helen

¹² Ambrose reads third person ὅλωλε for first person ὅλωλα. Better I think.

He's Greek—one of the Achaeans sailing with my husband.

Theoklymenos

What manner of death does he claim Menelaos died?

Helen

The most pitiful—in the salt-sea's running waves.

Theoklymenos

Where in foreign waters was he sailing?

1210

Helen

He was shipwrecked on the harborless rocks of Libya.

Theoklymenos

But how did his companion here not perish?

Helen

Sometimes lesser men have better luck than noble-born.

Theoklymenos

Where did he leave the wreckage before coming here?

Helen

Where I wish it may perish—but not Menelaos!

1215

Theoklymenos

He *did* perish! But in what sort of craft did he come?

Helen

Sailors came upon him, picked him up, is what he says.

Theoklymenos

So where is that evil *thing* that was sent to Troy in your place?

Helen

You mean the cloud-image? Gone off into thin air.

Theoklymenos

O Priam, O Trojan land! You are ruined for nothing!

1220

Helen

I, too, partook in the misfortunes of Priam's people.

Theoklymenos

Did he leave your husband unburied or cover him with earth?

Helen

Unburied—ah, I am wretched in my woes!

Theoklymenos

For this you cut the locks of your golden hair?

Helen

Yes, for he is still as beloved to me here, as he once was.

1225

Theoklymenos

Is it really right to mourn this calamity? (*implying that Menelaos' death is not entirely certain*)

Helen

(*wryly*) You think it's *easy* to fool your sister?

Theoklymenos

No way! So what—will you keep living at this tomb?

Helen

I have been loyal to my husband in fleeing you—

1230

Theoklymenos

Why do you taunt me, and not let the dead man go?

Helen

—(*reassuring him*) but no longer. Now start making wedding arrangements.

Theoklymenos

Took long enough! (*Composes himself.*) All the same, I praise your actions.

Helen

Here's what to do—let's forget the past.

Theoklymenos

What's in it for me? Let one favor repay another.

Helen

Let's make a truce; be reconciled to me.

1235

Theoklymenos

I give up the quarrel; let it fly away!

Helen

Now, I implore you by your knees—seeing that you are a friend—

Theoklymenos

What are you after, that you reach out to me in supplication?

Helen

My dead husband—I wish to bury him.

Theoklymenos

What!? A tomb for the lost? Will you bury a shade, or what?

1240

Helen

The Hellenes have a custom for whoever dies at sea—

Theoklymenos

To do what? Pelops' people *are* clever in such things.

Helen

—they hold burial rites for empty woven robes.

Theoklymenos

Bury away—raise a tomb wherever you like! (*gestures to the lands around*)

Helen

Not so do we bury our dead sailors.

1245

Theoklymenos

How then? We are not up on Greek customs here.

Helen

We take out to sea all the items necessary for the spirits of the dead.

Theoklymenos

What shall I offer you then for your dead?

Helen

This man knows. I'm inexperienced—fortunate up till now.

Theoklymenos

(*Aside so that Helen cannot hear?*) Stranger, you have brought me pleasant tidings.

1250

Menelaos

Not for me—nor for the man himself, I think.

Theoklymenos

How do you bury the dead who have perished at sea?

Menelaos

With what magnificence a man can afford.

Theoklymenos

As for wealth, tell me what you want, for the sake of this woman.

Menelaos

First there is a blood sacrifice to Earth.

1255

Theoklymenos

Of which beast? You tell me and I'll comply.

Menelaos

Decide for yourself. Every gift satisfies.

Theoklymenos

With us foreigners a horse or bull is the custom.

Menelaos

Offer such then—but none that are malformed.

Theoklymenos

We have not a few of these in our fertile herds.

1260

Menelaos

Funeral cloths are laid, despite an absent corpse.

Theoklymenos

So be it. What else is it customary to provide?

Menelaos

Bronze weapons: I—he—loved the spear.

Theoklymenos

We shall offer something worthy of Pelops' children.

Menelaos

We need ripe grain and fruits of earth also.

1265

Theoklymenos

What then? How do you sink all this into the swells?

Menelaos

A ship with rowers at the splashing oars.

Theoklymenos

How great a distance must one keep the ship from land?

Menelaos

Just past the sight of the breaking waves.

Theoklymenos

But why? For what reason does Greece observe this law?

1270

Menelaos

So the waves won't cast the sacrifice ashore.

Theoklymenos

You will have a swift-running Phoenician ship with oars.

Menelaos

That is good. Menelaos would approve.

Theoklymenos

Will you not be able to do all this without *her*? (*indicates Helen*)

Menelaos

This is a job for mother, wife or child.

1275

Theoklymenos

Hers is the hard duty, you say, of burying her husband?

Menelaos

Yes, a final piety given the dead.

Theoklymenos

Let her go! It's my advantage to foster a dutiful wife.

Come into the palace and select adornments for the dead!

And I shall not send *you* off empty-handed from this land,
after you have gratified her. And since you've brought reports
favorable to me, you will get, in place of these rags,
clothes and food enough to reach home,
as now I see you in such wretched state.

1280

And you, my poor dear, do not wear yourself away
on futilities, <grieving for Menelaos.

1285

Life is for the living,¹³ and Menelaos has met his fate.

Not even with your lamentations could the dead live again.

Menelaos

(*Laden with irony and innuendo*)

You see your task young woman: to cherish

and love the husband that you have. Others. . .

you may discard. That's the best you can do in this situation.

1290

And if I get back to Greece in safety,

I will put an end to the slanders

spoken in the past—if you be the kind of wife

you should for your husband.

¹³ Following Diggle's supplement.

Helen*(Also laden with irony and innuendo)*

I shall; my husband will never *find* fault with me;
 you yourself, since close at hand, will see it all. 1295
 But, poor fellow, come inside and (*distastefully*) have a bath,
 and get out of these clothes; without delay
 I'll do you well. For you would be more amenable
 to doing what is right for dearest Menelaos,
 if you get from me all that you should. 1300

*Exeunt all but chorus.***SECOND STASIMON (1301–1368, Chorus)****Strophe A**

The Mountain Mother of the Gods once
 raced swift-footed along her course
 throughout all the wooded glens
 over the rivers and water streams
 and the deep-roaring sea's salty swell
 yearning for the lost maiden whose
 name is not spoken.
 Piercing tintinnabulations of castanets
 cried out, rattling roaring resounding
 as the Goddess yoked her team
 of creatures to chariot
 and set off in hope she could save
 her daughter who was snatched away
 from a swirling chorus of girls.
 With her darted the whirlwind-footed
 archer-goddess, Artemis; and
 the Gorgon-eyed in panoply.
 But Zeus, shining forth from his seat
 in the sky, the ruler of all,
 a different fate did determine.

Antistrophe A

The Mountain Mother ended her toil
 then, of running, of wandering,
 of seeking her lov-e-ly
 daughter, deceitfully snatched away.
 She had arrived at snow-ow-blanketed
 look-out haunts of Mount Ida's nymphs
 and hurled/thrown herself down,
 grieving in rocky and snow-littered thickets, for
 mortals making the Fields of Earth barren (blighted/ungreen?),
 <she sat and wasted away>
 giving no grain to the fields

Thus she destroyed the human race.
 Nor for livestock does she send up
 pastures leafy and vigorous.
 Cities lost all their means of living
 Now ceased all divine sacrifice,
 offerings left on altars unburnt.
 And she put a stop to (terminated) the flow
 of cool springs and sparkling wells—
 endless grief for her child.

Strophe B

But after she'd ended the feast(s)
 for humankind and all the gods,
 Zeus, soothing her Stygian
 mother's-anger, did command
 "Go-o forth, august Gra-aces!
 Go and with ululation ban-
 -ish Demeter from her pain
 grieving for virginity
 go, Muses, with choral hymns!"
 Then first was the chthonic sound
 of bronze and tympani-skin taken up
 by the fairest of blessed ones, the
 Cyp—ri-ot. And the goddess laughed.
 Taking into her hands
 the deep-roaring aulos
 she thrilled as it wailed out.

Antistrophe B

Unholy sacrilegious things
 you burned in the chambers of Earth,
 You won the wrath of the Great
 Mother, O Child, failing to
 honor the goddess's(uu) ritual.
 Very great is the power of
 dappled cloak, fawn-skin shawl,
 ivy branches twisted around
 fennel's holy thy-yrsus;
 bull-roarer's whirling around
 circling, twirling up in the air;
 long hair shaking with joy for Bacchus
 on the goddess's all-night watch;
 But when the Moon was in
 her chariot above
 you praised your own beauty!

FOURTH EPISODE (1369–1450)

Helen (*Entering*)

All goes well inside the house, my friends!
 The daughter of Proteus, helping hide 1370
 my husband being here, said nothing
 to her brother when questioned. He's dead
 and doesn't see the sunlight. So she said as a favor to me.

(*Still pushing the innuendo, perhaps; addresses chorus and perhaps audience*)

My husband seized his chance very skillfully indeed:
 the weapons he was supposed to cast into the sea, 1375
 he carries them himself, his noble arm through the shield-strap,
 and holding a spear in his right hand—
 as though joining in service to the dead man.
 Handily indeed he decked himself with weapons for battle,
 preparing to rout a foreign host by hand, 1380
 when once we get onto the oared ship.
 Fine robes instead of shipwrecked clothes—
 I decked him out myself, and gave his body to the bath—
 a long-awaited washing with pure river water.

But he's coming out of the house— 1385
 the one who thinks "I do" with me is ready to hand;
 (*to chorus*) be silent, for my sake! (*falls forward?*) I beg you remain
 loyal and hold your tongue, in case we can
 save *you*, someday, too, if we are saved.

Theoklymenos

Go, servants, in orderly fashion, as the stranger ordered, 1390
 and bring along the funeral gifts of the sea.
 But you, Helen, unless I seem mistaken in what I say,
 be persuaded and wait here! You'll achieve the same
 things for your husband whether you are present or not.
 I fear some passion will crash over you and 1395
 urge you to hurl your body into the salty swell,
 stung by the ecstatic joys of your former husband.
 Far too much do you groan for him who is no more!

Helen

My new husband, it's absolutely necessary to honor
 my first marriage bed and my bridal companion. 1400
 For love of my husband, I would have even died with him.
 But what gratification would he have,
 if I died along with him, already dead? Let me
 go and give funeral gifts to the dead man myself.
 May the gods give you all I wish them to, 1405
 and also to the stranger here, for helping work this matter out!
 And you will have in me the kind of wife you ought to have at home,
 since you have done well by Menelaus and me.

For this affair is coming to some happy end.
But someone who will give a ship for us to haul this stuff—
appoint him now, so I may fully be in grateful debt.

1410

Theoklymenos

Go, you, and give them a fifty-oared ship,
a Sidonian one, and provide rowing-masters.

Helen

Won't this man command the ship, who runs the funeral rites?

Theoklymenos

Certainly . . . My sailors must obey him.

1415

Helen

Repeat the command, so they can clearly understand you.

Theoklymenos

I command it again—a third time too, if you like!

Helen

May you be rewarded—(*aside*) as may I, for my plans!

Theoklymenos

Now don't ruin your complexion with too many tears!

Helen

This day will show you how grateful I am.

1420

Theoklymenos

The affairs of the dead are nothing but a useless pain.

Helen

Those of whom I speak have some power both in this world and the next.

Theoklymenos

You will have in me a husband no worse than Menelaos.

Helen

You are not to blame. I need only good luck.

Theoklymenos

It's yours—if you show me a kind spirit.

1425

Helen

There's no need *now* to teach me to love my loved ones.

Theoklymenos

Do you want that I myself should help you launch the mission?

Helen

(*surge of panic*) No, no!—don't be a slave to your slaves, (*honey sweet*) *my lord*.

Theoklymenos

Very well . . . I'll let Greeks customs be.
 My house is pollution-free, as Menelaos 1430
 did not die here. Let someone go
 and bid my servants bring the
 wedding decorations to my house. All the land must
 cry aloud with blessed wedding hymns,
 so that our wedding—mine and Helen's—will be envied. 1435
 And you, stranger, go to the arms of the sea
 and give these things to her one-time husband.
 Then hurry home again—with my wife!—
 so you may celebrate with me the marriage of this woman,
 and head off home. Or stay *here* and be happy! 1440

Menelaos

O Zeus, father and wisest of the gods,
 look upon us and bring an end to pain.
 when fate shipwrecks us upon life's harsh rocks,
 assist us! Reach with but your fingertips
 and we are raised to a triumphant plain. 1445
 O gods, I've cursed you—but I've praised you too.
 I do not deserve bad luck forever,
 but to walk with stride *erect* (*optional: thumb-up wink at audience*).¹⁴
 One little favor grant, and you will make
 me happy for what's left of life. 1450

Exeunt all but chorus (and Theoklymenos?)

THIRD STASIMON (1451–1511, Chorus)

Strophe A

Phoenician Sidonian O
 you swift-running ship, to Ne-re-us's spray
 dear is your pulling oar.
 You lead the graceful choruses
 of dolphins when the wind
 drops off, and the wide surface is calm.
 Then Ocean's daughter, silvery
 Galancia pronounces:
 Luffing the sails, leave them hanging there slack,

¹⁴ This may be a mild sexual double-entendre, looking forward to the final reunion with Helen.

(a)wait no more the mariners' breeze,
 but take in hand now your pinewood oars—
 O Sailors sailors—
 I bid you bring Helen home,
 to the sheltered shores of the house of Perseus.

Antistrophe A

Helen I think beside the swollen river Leukippos's daughters will find
 or at Athena's shrine;
 at last she'll take part in the dance;
 or the revelling bands'
 all-night festival for Hyacinth,
 whom Phoebus Apollo with the
 endless wheel of the discus
 killed in a contest; the Laco-
 ni-an land Zeus's son then told
 observe a day's cattle sacrifice.
 O Helen O Helena!
 Your lovely daughter you'll find
 whose pine wedding torches have yet to blaze out.

Strophe B

I wish we were birds that could fly through
 the air, winging to Libya,
 flying (uu) in form-a-a-tion,
 leaving wintery rain behind,
 heeding the cry of the(ir) leader
 who in old age shepherds them.
 Following his syrinx call
 they fly over the dry desert lands
 and fertile furrows of fruit and grain.
 Wingèd ones with your stretching necks
 you who race alongside the clouds,
 through the Pleiades go now and fly
 and Orion's nocturnal sky.
 Proclaim the news, as you rest
 mid-course on Eurotas's banks:
 Menelaos has now taken Troy,
 soon he will be coming back home.

Antistrophe B

We pray you to come now and ride through
 the air, on a galloping path
 sons of Tyndareus
 under gusts of bright whirling stars—
 you who dwell in heaven above
 twin saviors of Helena.

Over the blue salty swell,
 and the dark colors of billowing
 surging and dashing gray of the sea.
 Send our sailors fresh-blowing wind
 breezes fair from Zeus Father Sky.
 Strike away from your sister now
 infamy of barbarian love,
 that she got as a reward
 for the judge of Mount Ida's quarrel
 though she never made it to Troy
 and towers of Apollo.

EXODOUS (Finale and Exit, 1512–1692)

Egyptian Messenger (*entering*)

Lord, we've found the worst things going!¹⁵
 How startling a disaster you'll shortly hear from me.

Theoklymenos

What is it?!

Egyptian Messenger

You'll have to start courting some other
 woman—Helen has gone from this land!

1515

Theoklymenos

Whisked away on wings, or with earthbound foot?

Egyptian Messenger

Menelaos—the same one who came to tell us he'd died—
 has taken her, a pirate's booty, by ship.

Theoklymenos

How awful what you tell! What ship stole her away
 from this land? What you're saying is unbelievable.

1520

Egyptian Messenger

The same one you handed over to the foreigner.
 And he's gone off taking *your* sailors with him.
 There, you have the story in brief.

Theoklymenos

How? I am eager to know. It never occurred
 to me that one man's hand could overrun
 so many sailors—(*accusingly*) of whom *you yourself* were one!

1525

¹⁵ This line is a non-sequitur interpolation (see Allan). I have deleted "in the house" to make it fit.

Egyptian Messenger

Zeus' daughter Helen, departing this kingly home
and heading for the sea, planting graceful steps,
cunningly mourned her man—*nearly*, not dead!

As we reached the enclosure of your docks, 1530
we were drawing down the Sidonian ship
to its maiden voyage, fifty benches filled with rowers.

There was task after task: one man
putting up the mast, another laying in the oar-blades.
The roll of white sail came into view; 1535
rudders were lowered and yoked.

As we worked, Greeks—*Menelaos*' men,
who'd been looking for their chance—approached
the shore, clad in shipwrecked sailors'
clothes, quite handsome indeed, but rough on the eye. 1540
Menelaos, son of *Atreus*, seeing them ready, addressed
them openly with treacherous pity:

“Miserable men, how and from what ship
have you come? Some shattered Achaean craft?
Are you here to help bury the missing body of *Atreus*' son, 1545
which *Tyndareus*' daughter *Helen* honors with an empty tomb?”

Crocodile tears were shed as they approached the ship,
with offerings for *Menelaos*' burial at sea.
We had our suspicions, and
we worried about the crowd of hangers-on. 1550
But we kept our peace, respecting your orders.
By giving the foreigner the ship's command,
you confused the whole affair.

We got the rest of the offerings on with ease—
the light ones. But the bull 1555
wouldn't go up the plank straight,

bellowing and rolling his eyes around,
arching his back and staring down
his horns—impossible to grasp. *Helen*'s husband
called out: “You sackers of *Troy*, 1560
c'mon, lift this bull on your youthful
shoulders, as you do in *Greece*,

and toss him onto the prow.
Swords in hands, we will sacrifice him to the dead man.”
At his command they approached, grab the bull and, 1565
lifting him, put him on the deck.
And *Menelaos*, stroking the neck and brow
of the unyoked beast, cajoled it aboard.

Finally, when the ship had been loaded,

Helen, climbing the ladder step by graceful step, 1570
 took her seat amidst the rowers' benches,
 hard by Menelaos—the one they said was dead!
 The rest, equal number down port and starboard sides,
 sat man by man, swords clutched secretly
 under cloaks. And the curling waves were filled 1575
 with shouts as we listened to the boatswain's (bosun's) cries.

When we weren't too far from land, nor near to it either,
 the rudder's guard asked this:
 "Shall we sail on still, foreigner, or is this far enough?
 The ship's command is yours." 1580
 And Menelaos said: "Plenty far for me."
 Sword in hand, he moved to the prow. Standing
 over the bull to slaughter it, he made no mention of
 the dead man, but slew the beast and made a prayer:

"Sea-dwelling, briny Poseidon, and you blessed 1585
 daughters of Nereus, bring me and my wife from here
 to Nauplian shores, safe and unharmed."

Streams of blood, auspicious for the foreigner,
 were shooting in the sea, when someone said:
 "This voyage is a scam! Let's sail back. 1590
 You, command the starboard oars! You, turn the rudder!"

But the son of Atreus, standing over the slain bull,
 shouted to his comrades: "Why, picked men, the
 bloom of Hellas, do you delay to slaughter, murder,
 hurl from ship to sea these barbarians?" 1595

The boatswain (bosun) shouts out the opposite
 to your own sailors: "Come on, someone take
 the boom as a spear, someone shatter the benches,
 someone take an oar from its pin, and bloody
 the heads of these foreign enemies!"

All leap up straightaway, some clutching oars, some 1600
 holding swords; blood floods the ship as Helen
 cheers them on from the prow: "Where is that glory
 won in Troy? Show *that* to these barbarians!"

Some fell in the melee, some had success, 1605
 and you would have seen still others lying dead.
 But armor-clad Menelaos, wherever he spotted
 a suffering ally, approached with sword in hand.
 So we slipped from the ship and the rowers' benches
 cleared. And he, making for the helmsman, 1610

commanded a course straight for Hellas. They lifted
the mast and favoring breezes blew.

They've gone from this land. Escaping death,
I descended by the anchor to the sea, from which
some fisherman lifted me, almost completely worn out, 1615
and put me on your shores to report these things to you.
Nothing is more useful to man than thoughtful skepticism.

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus

(*Innocently*) I *never* would have guessed, my Lord, that Menelaos
would slip by you or me. Yet here we are. 1620

Theoklymenos

Oh wretched me, taken down by womanly devices!
My wedding has run off. If the ship could be captured by a chase,
I would spare no pains to swiftly overtake the foreigners.
But now I will exact vengeance on that sister who betrayed me,
Who did not tell me that she saw Menelaos in this house. 1625
Never will she deceive another man with her prophecies!

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus

Hey, you! Where are you headed, Lord? What slaughter do you seek?

Theoklymenos

Wherever justice commands me, I go. So get out of my way!

(*They struggle*)

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus

I'll not let go this cloak of yours; you're rushing into great troubles!

Theoklymenos

And will you, a slave, lord it over a tyrant? 1630

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus

Yes, since I'm the one who's thinking straight.

Theoklymenos

That's not how I see it. Unless you let me—

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus

We will *not* let you go!

Theoklymenos

kill my sister—so wicked!—

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus

—so pious, you mean!

Theoklymenos
who betrayed me—

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus
—through noble treason. Justice served!

Theoklymenos
by handing over my marriage bed to another man—

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus
—with a more proper claim.

Theoklymenos
Master of *my* things?—Who? 1635

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus
The one who took her from her father's arm. 1635

Theoklymenos
But fortune gave her to me!

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus
And fate took her away.

Theoklymenos
You have no right to decide my affairs.

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus
Unless I speak with more sense.

Theoklymenos
So I am ruled over, and hold no power?

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus
You rule to do what's pious. Not to do what's not.

Theoklymenos
You seem desirous of death.

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus
Then kill me! But you won't
kill your sister, not if I'm around. To die defending lords 1640
is fame for high-born slaves!

Kastor (Dioskouroi) (*appearing on high somehow*)
Hold back the misplaced anger which carries you along,

Theoklymenos, lord of this land. We Zeus-born twins,
the Dioskouroi, are calling on you. Leda once
gave us birth along with Helen, who has fled from your house. 1645

You are angry about a marriage, but it is fated not to be;
and at your sister Theonoe, maiden offspring of the sea nymph,
but she does you no wrong by honoring
the just orders of her father and the gods.
For up until this very moment 1650
it was right that Helen stay in your house.
But since the very foundations of Troy have been destroyed
and the name 'Troy' is given up to the gods—
no longer! She must remain in her existing marriage
and go to her husband's house and live with him. 1655

And you, keep your dark blade away from your sister,
and consider how wisely she has acted here.

We would have saved Helen long before now,
since Zeus did make us gods;
but we can't overpower fate or the other gods, 1660
who decided that these things had to be.
That is what I proclaim to you.

To my sister Helen I say,
Sail with your husband and you will have a favorable wind:
we the sailors' saviors—your twin brothers—
will ride our horses through the sea and escort you to your homeland. 1665

But when you reach the turning point and end of life,
you will be called a god and you will share with us the gifts of friendship
which humans offer us. For that is Zeus' will.

What is more, the place where Hermes, son of Maia, brought you
first to safety when he carried you on that journey in the sky
from Sparta, and stole you away that Paris might not marry you—
I mean the island that stretches alongside Akte as a bulwark—
from now on that island shall be called 'Helen' by mortals,
since it received you in secret from your home. 1675

And the god-given fate of wandering Menelaos is to live
on the Island of the Blessed.
For gods do not act hatefully to the noble-born,
though their labors are greater than the uncounted masses'.

Theoklymenos

(*Abasing himself*) Sons of Leda and Zeus, I shall let go of
our previous quarrels, for your sister's sake. 1680

Let her go home, gods willing.
And I would no longer slay my own sister.
Know you both that you were born of the same blood
as a very fine and most prudent sister.
Rejoice for noblest Helen's
intelligence—something lacking in many women!

1685

Chorus Leader and/or Chorus

Divinities take many shapes;
the gods accomplish things surpassing hope.
Expected things don't come to pass;
and God finds ways for unexpected things.
And that's how this affair turned out.

1690

TEΛΟΣ