'As Meeke as Medea, as honest as Hellen': English literary representations of two troublesome classical women, c.1160-1650

Katherine Heavey

Chapter Six: Early Modern Helen

Translating Helen in the Sixteenth Century

Ovid and Virgil's works continued to circulate throughout the sixteenth century, as did the important vernacular renderings of Helen and Medea to be found in Benoît and Guido, and in their medieval English redactors. However, the sixteenth century's increased interest in the classics, as well as in these vernacular renderings, was reflected by their translation into English. Gawyn Douglas' Scots translation of the *Aeneid*, in the first decades of the sixteenth century, was followed by the Earl of Surrey's rendering of Books Two and Four, and Richard Stanyhurst's translation of the first four books in 1582.[1] Despite modern critical uncertainty as to the veracity of Helen's appearance in Book Two, Stanyhurst and Surrey both reproduce it. Indeed, in his introduction Stanyhurst underlines his strict adherence to Virgil's text, and how this has meant he has often been driven to ignore the earlier translation of Thomas Phaer.[2] Surrey's translation is similarly faithful, although the refusal to identify Helen as *communis Erinys*, but rather as merely a "common bane of Troy, and eke of Grece" (2.753) arguably reduces her power somewhat (though it may just reflect Surrey's reluctance to use pagan terminology).[3] Meanwhile Aeneas' desire for revenge is not implicitly criticised. Rather than recalling his desire to mete out a "wicked punishment", Surrey's Aeneas simply desires "With

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[1] See Richard Stanyhurst, *Translation of the First Four Books of the 'Aeneis' of P. Virgilius Maro*, ed. Edward Arber (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1895); Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, *The 'Aeneid' of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey,* ed. Florence H. Ridley (Berkeley: U of California P, 1963); Gawin Douglas (Gawyn Douglas), *The xiii bukes of the famose poete Virgill translatet out of Latyne verses into Scottish metir* (London: William Copland, 1553).
[2] In G. G. Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. 1, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1904) 138.
[3] Lines 749-754 read

For she in dred, least that the Troians shold
Revenge on her the ruine of their walles,
And of the Grekes the cruel wrekes also,
The furie eke of her forsaken make,
The common bane of Troy, and eke of Grece,
Hateful she sate beside the altars hid. (749-54).

Thus Surrey does use the word "furie", but in such a way that it may refer either to Helen herself, or to the anger she fears from Menelaus. By contrast, Stanyhurst preserves the Virgilian "Erinnys" to describe Helen (p.62).

worthy peines on her to work my will" (2.757). Victor Scholderer dismisses Surrey's translation and that of his model, Douglas:

> Both Douglas and the Earl of Surrey are far more interesting from the point of view of our own national literature than from that of the Virgilian scholar. Surrey's blank verse is monotonous and dull, like that of his fellow pioneers. [4]

However, though to the modern eye these translations may seem creatively lacking, and also, often, troublingly inattentive to the Latin text, sixteenth century scholars praised these efforts to translate Virgil: in his *Arte of English Poesie*, Puttenham finds Phaer's attempt "excellently well translated"[5] and also praises Thomas Twine, who completed Phaer's translation after his death. The continuing influence of the other most important Latin renderings of Helen's story is also apparent: for example, T. W. Baldwin points to the significant influence of the *Heroides* on school curricula in the sixteenth century. [6] Douglas Bush notes an English rendering of the Ovidian epistle of Helen to Paris (which he describes as a "close translation"), completed by Thomas Chaloner (who died in 1565) as "the first complete [English] version of any of the epistles of the *Heroides*", [7] and George Turberville produced a close rendering of the whole collection in 1567. Moreover, Elizabeth Story Donno notes the 1513 appearance of *The flores of Ovide de arte amandi with theyr englysshe afore them:* the *Ars Amatoria*, a work peppered with brief references to Paris and Helen.[8] During the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, other classical works began to resurface, and to provide new ways of considering the figures of Helen and Medea made so familiar to English readers by Guido, Chaucer, Lydgate and Caxton. Though Fantham points to the *Troades*' "relatively scant posterity in English drama" (49) due to inconsistencies of time and place which made Senecan tragedy difficult to stage, Seneca's *Trojan*

[4] In Palmer, *List of English Editions*, xxx.
[5] George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Gladys Doidge Wilcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1936) 60.
[6] T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakspere's Small Latine and Less Greeke*, 2 vols (Urbana, ILL: U of Illinois P, 1944) 2.419.
[7] Douglas Bush, "Classic Myths in English Verse (1557-89)", *Modern Philology* 25.1 (1927): 37-47, n.2. p. 37. For Chaloner's epistle, see Christopher Martin, ed., *Ovid in English* (London: Penguin, 1998) 31-41.
[8] Elizabeth Story Donno, ed., *Elizabethan Minor Epics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963) 1. Bush sounds a note of caution, describing this translation as "Ovid – or something like him". Bush, "Classic Myths", n.2. p.37.

Women was rendered into English by Jasper Heywood, "with divers and sundry addicions", in 1559 [9] (although in his version of Seneca, published alongside nine of the dramatist's other tragedies in 1581, these additions do not impact particularly on Helen's representation).

As far as the Greek texts were concerned, Libanius' *Declamations* by Medea and Menelaus were translated into Latin by Erasmus, and appear alongside Dictys' and Dares' accounts of the Trojan War in editions dating from 1529, 1552 and 1569. An English translation of Menelaus' complaint about the theft of his wife also resurfaces alongside Thomas Paynell's 1553 English translation of Dares, which was produced using the French version of Mathurin Heret. Throughout Menelaus' oration, Helen is described as a possession rather than a person, and the focus is very much on male codes of honour, and on Paris' wrongdoing. Menelaus complains "It is not sufficie[n]t for a man to lai his hand upon a thing, but he muste of necessite have some right unto it" (Iiii^{r}), and appears to have little personal interest in his wife, maintaining of Paris "be it so that he had taken the towne, & the men, then Helen shoulde have chaunsed unto him as a part of his bou[n]ty, let him hold her, let her serve him" (Iiiii^{v}).[10] In its focus on male feelings of slighted honour, and of codes broken, the translation thus looks back to the medieval Troy-narratives, but also forward, to Elizabethan and Jacobean texts such as Robert Greene's *Euphues His Censure to Philautus*, or Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, which also foreground male conduct in war, and which, through their homosocial focus, render Helen as an object or abstract concept, rather than as an individual woman.

In 1588, an anonymous English translation of Theocritus' *Idyll 18* appeared, a close rendering bar a few apparently judicious alterations (the mention of the suitors Menelaus competed against is elided, and the Spartan girls confess they will think of Helen "not with a little woe").[11] Helen's first rape, mentioned in Plutarch's *Life of Theseus*, was rendered into English by Sir

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[9] Jasper Heywood, *The Sixt Tragedie of the Most Graue and Prudent Author Lucius, Anneus, Seneca, Entituled Troas With Diuers and Sundrye Addicions to the Same* (London: Richard Tottyll, 1559).

[10] Thomas Paynell, *The Faithfull and True Storye of the Destruction of Troye, compyled by Dares Phrigius* (London: John Cawood, 1553).

[11] In A. H. Bullen, ed., *Some Longer Elizabethan Poems* (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co., 1903) p. 141.

Thomas North in 1579, and in 1581, almost a century after the *Iliad* was first printed in 1488, the first ten books appeared in English, translated from the French of Hugues Salel by Arthur Hall.[12] Scholderer notes that "the first two books of Herodotus were translated (probably by Barnaby Rich) in 1584",[13] and Maguire points out that George Buchanan seems to have been acquainted with Euripides' *Helen*.[14]

English renderings of continental texts also remained important in the sixteenth century, as Lydgate's and Caxton's English renderings of Latin or French originals had been in the fifteenth century. In his brief account of the Trojan War in *The Voyage of the Wandering Knight*, William Goodyear, translating from the French of Jean de Carthenay, renders several Greek and Latin tales about Helen into English (though they are garbled somewhat along the way). As the tale opens, the Knight invokes Diodorus' *History* and Justin's *Epitome*, specifically in reference to the Argonautic voyage: as the reference to Justin would suggest, though, there is no mention of Medea's role. In Chapter Five, Folly tells the Knight that to prevent Paris from returning to Oenone, Helen "bewitched him with certain drinks, wherein she was her craft's mistress; which trick when one doth use, he is in such a case that he forgets all things past and all sorrows present" (21).[15] After a brief allusion to the Ovidian episode of Helen marvelling at her fading beauty, Goodyear and de Carthenay tell the story of Helen's being hanged by the Rhodians.[16] In his introduction to the tale, published in Evans' edition, Robert Norman notes the popularity of Goodyear's version, and records seven editions up to 1650.[17] Accordingly, Goodyear's Englishing of some of the lesser-known episodes of Helen's story may have had an impact on those of his successors who tackled Helen's story. In particular, in his *Iron Age* Thomas Heywood has Helen rejecting a reunion

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[12] Tatlock also notes an unpublished English translation of the *Iliad*, produced by Thomas Drant "before 1580". Tatlock, "The Siege of Troy", n. 43. p.742.
[13] In Palmer, *List of English Editions*, x.
[14] Maguire, *Shakespeare's Names*, 101.
[15] Jean de Carthenay, *The Voyage of the Wandering Knight*, trans. William Goodyear, ed. Dorothy Atkinson Evans (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1961).
[16] Though, as Evans notes, de Carthenay, and following him Goodyear, do not give an accurate rendering of Pausanias' story – here the Queen ("Polypo" rather than "Polyxo") is friendly to Helen, but Helen is killed by her servingwomen. Evans, n.60 p.148, notes that in his misspelling and in his alteration of the story, de Carthenay is following another important continental Troy-narrative, Lemaire's *'Les Illustrations de Gaule et singularitez de Troye'*.
[17] In de Carthenay, *The Wandering Knight*, trans. Goodyear, ed. Evans, xi, xxi-xxii.

with Menelaus, bemoaning her fading beauty, and finally strangling herself: the first and last of these additions to his story may well have sprung from a familiarity with Goodyear's work.

This wealth of newly available classical material had predictable effects on the English literature of the period. Just as Chaucer, Lydgate and Caxton had been keen to show their knowledge of Guido, Dares, Virgil or Ovid (even when they disagreed with the classical author's version of events, as Lydgate does in his *Troy Book*), so sixteenth-century writers including Douglas, Skelton and Puttenham refer to classical authors including Valerius Flaccus, Isocrates, Theocritus, Homer, Euripides and even Hesiod and Stesichorus. However, just as many late antique writers (Libanius, Dracontius, Servius) were reluctant to deviate too alarmingly from the models they found in Homer, Euripides, Virgil and Ovid, and just as medieval authors augmented their reading of Guido with details from Ovid, Virgil or the scholia, while following the uncomplimentary rendering of Helen they found in their principal source, sixteenth-century rewriters of Helen very obviously work with their classical (and medieval) sources in mind. Sometimes, this gives rise to a degree of re-creation, to didactic or humorous rewriting of Helen's story. Typically, however, sixteenth-century authors aim to communicate their knowledge of a literary archetype, while attempting, like their thirteenth- and fourteenth-century predecessors, to impose some of their own values upon her.

"Plesand Helena": "New" English Helens in the sixteenth century

Gawyn (or Gawin) Douglas was born and educated in the late fifteenth century, and his use of Helen (and Medea) in *The Palice of Honour* (1501)[18] owes much to the references found in works of the Middle Ages, such as Lydgate's *Temple of Glass* or Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*. The influence of such sources (particularly, perhaps, the *Legend of Good Women*) is obvious. The poem takes the form of a dream vision, during which the dreamer observes a procession of Venus, Mars and Cupid, accompanied by various classical

[18] Gawyn Douglas, *The Palice of Honour*, ed. John Gardiner Kinnear (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1827) v. This is a facsimile of the 1579 edition of the poem. All quotations from *The Palice* are from this edition.

figures, "The fair Paris, and plesand Helena" (Ciiii^{v}) and also "Subtell Medea, and hir Knicht Jason" (Ciiii^{v}). Douglas is keen to present classical figures his readers would recognise, and for the most part they are characterised precisely as a sixteenth-century reader would expect – so Deianira is wicked, Cressida is faithless, and Penelope and Lucrece are "Constant [...] and traist" (Ciiii^{v}). Nevertheless, it is interesting that Helen's adultery is not referenced (particularly as Cressida appears in the line above). Rather, as she was in medieval dream visions, she is representative of beauty and pleasing allure, and it is up to the reader to connect these qualities with the tragic consequences that followed her abduction (a device that was to become hugely popular in Elizabethan miscellanies).

A similarly close reliance on earlier models (both classical and medieval) can be discerned in sixteenth-century mythographies, and reference works. In the 1535 edition of his dictionary, Ambrogio Calepino defines the plant Helenius, *qui ex Helenae lachrymae fingitur* (p.235) ("Which was said to have been formed from the tears of Helen").[19] The same work mentions Helen's first abduction by Theseus, and describes two versions of her ravishment (one in which Paris takes her because of her beauty, and another in which he sacks the city, and seizes her, because of the Greek refusal to return Hesione). Calepino also includes the story (given by Dictys and Dares) that Helen changed sides as the war turned against the Trojans, and includes the Virgilian detail that she raised a signal to the Greeks. In his dictionary Thomas Elyot recounts the story of her adding drugs to the Greeks' drinks, and also the Odyssean story that she attempted to betray them by mimicking their wives' voices as she approached the Trojan Horse. Interesting too is his refusal to countenance the theory that Britain was named after Brutus, and that therefore Britons must count the Trojans among their ancestors: he objects to this specifically because of the threat to the British national character posed by the immorality of Paris and Helen, "of whom never proceded any other notable monumente, but that they were also breakers of theyr oth and promyse".[20]

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[19] Ambrogio Calepino, *Ambrosii Calepini Bergomatis Lexicon, ex optimis quibusq[ue] autoribus collectum, post omnes omniu[m] editiones accuratissime, diligentissimeq[ue] excussum* (Venice: Aurelius Pincius, 1535).

[20] Thomas Elyot, "Britania", in *Bibliotheca Eliotae: Eliotis Librarie* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1542). No signature or pagination. Later in the sixteenth century, in his *Fennes*

Helen's story also appears in Lilio Gregorio Giraldi's *De Deis Gentium*, published in 1548, which Don Cameron Allen notes as "a milestone on the road of classical scholarship",[21] and in Natalis Comes' *Mythologiae.* Since, like their medieval forebears, the Renaissance mythographers were keen to state their allegiance to, and use of, earlier sources, Helen is not used adventurously in these texts – most follow the model of Boccaccio, presenting the myths surrounding her birth and life but not making her a sustained focus. However, Helen's appearance indicates the period's sustained interest in classical culture, and such popular reference works would have familiarised authors with many different aspects of her story, and furnished them with the viewpoints of many classical authors beyond Ovid and Virgil.

The 1557 publication of *Tottel's Miscellany* demonstrates the way that the literary establishment continued to find Helen's story worthy of interest, and concurrently the collection itself paved the way for more ambitious literary reworkings of her story later in the century. While the *Carmina Burana* and twelfth-century Troy poems held Helen up as an example of destructive beauty, and the brief references to Helen in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century works of authors such as Chaucer and Lydgate may seem to slyly reference the consequences of her infidelity even as they represent her as demonstrative of love, beauty or suffering, sixteenth-century poets made their negative assessment of Helen (and specifically of her beauty) far more apparent. In the 1560s, 70s and 80s authors such as Turberville and Whetstone praise their lovers in comparison to Helen, judging them to enjoy all of her beauty but to combine it, crucially, with virtue. This trend is particularly obvious in Tottel's hugely popular *Miscellany* (Rollins notes it had "reached a fourth edition by 1565"),[22] a collection of the poetry of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, and others. For example, in one of the pieces attributed to Howard, "The Lover comforteth himself with the worthinesse of his love", the speaker compares his suffering for love to the suffering at Troy, reflecting

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Frutes (1590), Thomas Fenne reaches the same conclusion (and repeats the story of Helen's attempt to betray the Greeks) although his account is not noticeably interested in attacking Helen in particular.

[21] Don Cameron Allen, *Mysteriously Meant: The Rediscovery of Pagan Symbolism and Allegorical Interpretation in the Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1970) 225.

[22] Hyder E. Rollins, ed., *A Handful of Pleasant Delights (1584) by Clement Robinson and Divers Others* (New York: Dover Publications, 1965) xv.

[...] how that in those ten yeres warre,
Full many a bloudye dede was done, [...]
And many a good knight overrone,
Before the Grekes had Helene wonne. (Biii^{v})[23]

Here, the speaker's homosocial focus is obvious, and just as he sees the men at Troy proving themselves by their willingness to fight for Helen (an idea that stretches back to the *Iliad*) he sees himself as proved by his commitment to his own lady. Crucially, however, the worth that seems to validate the Trojan War is, finally, undermined:

Then think I thus: sithe suche repayre,
So longe time warre of valiant men,
Was all to winne a ladye fayre:
Shall I not learne to suffer then,
And thinke my life not spent to be,
Servyng a worthier wight then she? (Biii^{v})

Though a sense of Helen's beauty is implied, her power is undermined as she quite clearly fails to live up to the dying heroes Surrey has described. In his rendering of Book Two of the *Aeneid*, he undermined Helen by refusing to describe her as the semi-divine and malignantly divisive force Virgil suggests. Here, he appears to link Helen's failing to her sexual inconstancy. An anonymous poem in the collection, "Against women either good or bad", underlines how Helen's sexuality is not a power, but rather a target for criticism, even more obviously. The poet takes Penelope as an example of a good wife, and Helen as a bad, to argue that since both incite men to bloodshed, both good and bad women should be shunned. The poet cautions young men specifically, warning that though "A Man may live thrise Nestors life" (Cci^{r}) without finding a Penelope, "Lesse age will serve than Paris had, / Small peyn (if none be small inough) / To find good store of Helenes trade" (Cci^{v}). Here, the author obviously responds to the idea (popular among

[23] In Richard Tottel, comp., *Songes and Sonettes (Tottel's Miscellany) 1557* (Leeds: Scolar P, 1966).

medieval moralisers) that Paris' desire for Helen represents the folly of youth.[24] Moreover, the reference to "Helenes trade", with its connotations of prostitution, may recall early Christian configurations of Helen as a fallen woman associated with Simon Magus. Interestingly, in "An answere", another male speaker responds to the poem, but makes no effort to clear Helen of this charge: he assures his readers "Ladyes now live in other trades / Farre other Helenes now we see" (Cci^{v}), and though he defends Helen from the charge of causing the war, blaming "Not Helenes face, / But Paris eye" (Cci^{v}), the charge of sexual immorality appears to stick. Indeed, Elizabeth Heale sees the popularity of such male-authored miscellanies as forcing the female voice out of Tudor verse, and reinscribing misogyny. She points out that

> Instead of instigators, readers, singers, and answerers of courtly verse, women appear in the almost exclusively male-voiced verse of the printed miscellanies as the silent objects of male desire or the vilified subjects of male intrigue and renunciation. Their lively participation is reduced to the role of the glamorous and dangerous other against which aspiring male gentleman poets define their ambitious but well-framed masculinity as they rush to appropriate for self-promotion the fashionable gestures and voices marketed by Tottel.[25]

As such a masculine and misogynist focus would suggest, brief critical references to Helen abound in the period, as they did in the romances or the moralising literature of the Middle Ages. Thus in *A Handful of Pleasant Delights*, "by Clement Robinson and Divers Others" (dated by Hyder E. Rollins to 1566),[26] Helen is a similarly noticeable presence, despite Rollins' observation that these "broadside ballads" were "collected by a ballad-writer and published by a ballad-printer for the delectation, not of a literary reader, but of the vulgar" (ix). This popular interest in texts which mention Helen is highly significant, and a trend which kept her, and her story, ingrained in the

[24] See Ehrhart, *The Judgement of the Trojan Prince*. In Goodyear's *The Voyage of the Wandering Knight*, Folly boasts that she controlled both Paris and Helen during the abduction.
[25] Elizabeth Heale,"Misogyny and the Complete Gentleman in Early Elizabethan Printed Miscellanies", *The Yearbook of English Studies* 33, Medieval and Early Modern Miscellanies and Anthologies (2003): 233-47, 247.
[26] Previously, the *Handful* was dated to 1584, meaning that it would postdate the *Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions* and the *Paradise of Dainty Devices*, both of which date from the 1570s. However, the 1584 edition has been proved to be an expansion of an earlier edition from 1566. All poems referenced here appeared in the 1566 edition of the *Handful* as well as the 1584 reissue. See Rollins, ed., *A Handful of Pleasant Delights*, xii-xiii.

period's imagination at least as effectively as the efforts of the mythographers or the translators of the classics. That said, there is little innovation in the *Handful*'s use of Helen. In "The Lover Complaineth the Losse of his Ladie" (tentatively attributed to John Tomson by Rollins)[27] the speaker tells himself "thou shalt embrace thy ladie deer with joy. / In these thy armes so lovingly, / As Paris did faire Helenie" (865-6). Again, Paris and Helen seem a peculiar (and perhaps deliberately ironic) couple to hold up as a model of love. The speaker uses another problematic (and possibly tongue-in-cheek) classical reference, swearing to be more faithful than Cressid (a frequent companion to Helen in this kind of self-consciously allusive work). A similarly weighted reference to Helen may be discerned in the popular Elizabethan prose miscellanies, for example William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*. In a story taken from the Italian of Matteo Bandello, Adelasia uses the examples of Helen and Medea to encourage herself to elope with Alerane. She observes "I shal not be alone amongst princesses, that have forsaken parents and countries, to folow their love into straunge Regions" (Bbbi^{v}).[28] Her use of such inauspicious models (she also uses Phaedra and Ariadne to strengthen her resolve) means that while the story ends happily, with her marriage to Alerane, the potentially devastating consequences of a daughter defying her father and leaving her country with a stranger are implied through Painter's deliberate use of Helen and Medea.

If such weighted and knowing references to Helen were circulating in verse in the 1560s and 70s, it is perhaps inevitable that they came to inform one of the period's most important classical translations, Turberville's 1567 English *Heroides*. Frederick S. Boas notes that this "went through five editions between 1567 and 1600".[29] He finds that "With a conscientious zeal, far from common in Elizabethan translations, Turberville set himself to give a faithful rendering of the Latin text" (xvii), and sees any changes as comparatively

[27] Rollins, ed., *A Handful*, 97. He cautions, however, that it is "too common a name to be confidently identified".
[28] William Painter, *The Palace of Pleasure* (London: John Kingston and Henry Denham for Richard Tottell and William Jones, 1566).
[29] George Turberville, *The 'Heroicall Epistles' of the Learned Poet Publius Ovidius Naso, Translated into English Verse by George Turberville*, ed. Frederick Boas (London: Cresset, 1928) xv-xvi.

minor.[30] For Deborah S. Greenhut, by contrast, this translation "affirms a longstanding misogynist tradition",[31] and she notes Turberville's subtle determination to reduce the Ovidian Helen's alarming power. For example, as Caxton did in his *Metamorphoses*, and as many later translators were to do, Turberville adds an *Argument* to each epistle, which in Helen's case seems at once a disapproving summary of her coquettish behviour, and a comforting reinscribing of the fundamentally greater power that Paris enjoys. Turberville tells his readers:

> She fawnes, she frownes, she frets, she speakes him faire,
> She offred hope, but fed him with dispayre,
> As women wont, devising manie a toie,
> But Paris her in fine convaide to Troy. (p.210)

Greenhut finds Turberville's Helen merely a "tease", and argues that Ovid's version is more complex: "Because she refuses to deceive her husband, Helen retains power over language and the implications of praise" (133-4). However, I would argue that the Ovidian Helen is, as early as the first century AD, already stymied by her previous incarnations, that she is unable to resist Paris, and also that she is more than willing to deceive Menelaus: after all, Ovid returns to her again and again in his works as an example of an unfaithful woman. As Turberville's moralising argument would suggest, however, he certainly seems to have found her transgression more alarming than Ovid, and despite Boas' assessment, does seem to suggest this by subtly altering his classical model. For example, Paris' closing assurance that Helen will win fame becomes

> And thou if all the world
> for thee shall seem to strive:
> Shall stand assured in after time
> for aye to be alive. (p.208)

[30] Turberville, *The 'Heroicall Epistles'*, ed. Boas, xvii, xx.
[31] Deborah S. Greenhut, *Feminine Rhetorical Culture: Tudor Adaptations of Ovid's "Heroides"* (NY: P. Lang, 1988) 190.

Here, Turberville excises the irony contained in Ovid's use of *fama*, suggesting that Helen will continue to be well-known after her death, but without the implication that she might be remembered positively. Greenhut suggests that caution should be exercised whenever a female character is given speech in the period, since "Tudor feminine literary speech does not resemble a truly independent voice, for feminine rhetorical culture remains bound by a duty to moral consequences" (139). She points out that Turberville's Helen strays from her classical model only so that she may more firmly underscore her unspotted reputation,[32] and thus Turberville's rewriting of Helen seems at once conservative, and thoroughly reflective of Tudor concerns, of their anxiety over giving such a woman the power of a free linguistic reign.

A highly ironic and didactic Elizabethan use of Helen, that makes more playful use of male anxiety over her reputation, can be discerned in the works of George Gascoigne. In his collection *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowers*, Helen can be used conventionally, but it is Gascoigne's knowledge of her story which allows him to twist it to his own comic ends. Though he protests "I list not brute hir bale, let others spread it foorth" (p.352),[33] in "Gascoignes praise of his Mystres", Gascoigne criticises Paris as one who merely "marks the outward shewe" (p.352), and the implicit criticism of Helen is made more explicit as he exclaims "How happie then am I? Whose happe hath bin to finde / A mistresse first that doth excell in vertues of the minde" (p.352). Here, the speaker reveals that his mistress is Favor, who stood by him where other women would have deserted him. The poem's final vision, of Favor and her maid Fortune, implies a certain tension, as the two could presumably abandon the speaker as quickly as they raised him up. This tension, coupled with the typical trope of a lover comparing his lady favourably to Helen, is extended in two of Gascoigne's longer pieces, *Daun Bartholomew* and *The Adventures of Master F.J.* In the former, Daun Bartholomew delights to have fallen in love with a much younger woman, and belittles Paris' prize in comparison, asking what possessed him "To choose of all the flowres in *Greece*, foule Helene for thy love?" (Ff[r]) He finds Helen's sexuality repellent, exclaiming "Needes must I coumpt hir foule, whose first frutes wer forlorne / Although she solde hir

[32] Greenhut, *Feminine Rhetorical Culture*, 73.
[33] Gascoigne, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*. No signature.

second chaffe, above the price of corne" (Ff^{r}). Though Paris, he notes, seems to regard Helen's worth as proved by the Greeks' willingness to fight for her (an important theme in the longer medieval Troy-narratives such as Lydgate's *Troy Book*), he cautions the Trojan:

> No no, thou art deceivde, the drugs of foule despite
> Did worke in *Menelaus* will, not losse of such delighte,
> Not love but loathsome hate, not dolour but disdayne,
> Did make him seeke a sharpe reve[n]ge, til both his foes wer slain. (Ff^{v})

Though the puzzling reference to "the drugs of foule despite" that bewitched Menelaus may refer to Helen's Odyssean drug-concocting power (mentioned in several Renaissance dictionaries and reference works), here she seems paradoxically both central and incidental. Daun Bartholomew is keen to stress that it is Menelaus' anger and desire for revenge that motivates him (as it was in Euripides' *Trojan Women*), and Helen's worth as a lover is lessened accordingly. Indeed, in his third *Triumph* he exclaims "My derling is more faire tha[n] she, for whome proud Troy was solde" (Ff^{v}). However, "The Printer to the Reader" cites *Daun Bartholomew* and *Master F. J.* as examples of "the unlawfull affections of a lover bestowed uppon an unconstant dame" ($A2^{v}$).[34] Bartholomew very quickly begins to fear his love is untrue, and thus his scathing condemnation of Helen is ironised, and appears a tragic-comic foreshadowing of his own plight.

Master F. J., Gascoigne's other misguided lover, sees in Helen a similarly fruitful avenue of comparison. He writes to Elinor, his married lover (in a clear parody of the letters exchanged by Paris and Helen in the *Heroides*), and exclaims

> 'Let Theseus come with clubbe, or Paris bragge with brand,
> To prove how fayre their Hellen was, that skourg'd the Grecian land:
> Let mighty Mars him selfe, come armed to the field:
> And vaunt dame Venus to defend, with helmet speare and shield
> This hand that had good hap, my Hellen to embrace,

[34] G. W. Pigman asserts that this was probably written by Gascoigne himself. George Gascoigne, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, ed. G. W. Pigman (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000) lvi.

Shal have like lucke to foyl hir foes, & dau[n]t them with disgrace.
And cause them to confesse by verdict and by othe,
How farre hir lovely lookes so steyne the beauties of them both.
And that my Hellen is more fayre than Paris wife,
And doth deserve more famous praise, then Venus for hir life'. ($F2^{r-v}$)[35]

Here, like so many authors before him, Gascoigne is drawing on Helen's previous incarnations to ironise what appears to be a perfect love affair, to foreshadow its unhappy outcome for his readers. Helen is thus twice used: belittled by F. J., as by so many ardent suitors before him, to make his lady appear better, and used by Gascoigne to make F. J. appear foolish. Gascoigne's use of Helen works on still another level, though. When Helen and her involvement in the Trojan War are mentioned by male lovers, or when a dreamer sees her story depicted in carvings or paintings, the implication seems to be that they should appreciate the potential unhappiness and tragedy that can result from love, due to their knowledge of Virgil, Ovid and Guido in the Middle Ages, and of Homer, Seneca and Colluthus in the sixteenth century. Here, it is the woman who is expected to make the relevant classical connections. The poets of the miscellanies often write about unnamed and characterless women, whose only merit seems to be beauty (and virtue) that surpasses Helen's: in such cases, the classical references can often seem more for the benefit or approval of other (male and classically-educated) readers. Here, Elinor is expected to recognise and appreciate the (extraordinarily back-handed) compliment that the comparison to Helen implies. She fails this test utterly however: the narrator notes that the verses are mislaid and passed around the court, and that Elinor "grew in jeolosie, that the same were not written by hir, because hir name was *Elynor* and not *Hellen*" ($F2^{v}$). Pigman notes that "Elinor's inability to read 'my Hellen' figuratively classes her with the 'blockheaded reader' " (580). It is an inability shared by other courtiers, both male and female, by the fictional F. J.'s friends, and even, apparently, by G. T., the narrator of the 1573 version of the story. The situation is complicated by the revelation that, some years later, F. J. became similarly infatuated with a woman who really was named Helen. The narrator argues

[35] Throughout, the text referred to is the 1573 version of the *Adventures*, which includes the interpolations of G. T. These are excised from Gascoigne's 1575 revision.

> [...] But that other *Hellen*, bycause she was and is of so base condicion, as may deserve no maner commendacion in any honest judgement, therefore I will excuse my friend *F. J.* and adventure my penne in his behalf, that he would never bestow verse of so meane a subject. ($F2^{v}$)

He goes on, however, to undermine his own avowal of F. J.'s faithfulness, admitting

> [...] paradventure if there were any acquayntance betwene *F. J.* and that *Hellene* afterwardes, (the which I dare not confesse) he might adapt it to hir name, and so make it serve both their turnes, as elder lovers have done before and still do and will do worlde without end. *Amen.* ($F3^{r}$)

Here, Gascoigne uses his disingenuous narrator to mock the passionate but fleeting desires of F. J. and those like him. Attractive too, particularly in view of the letter-writing motif, is the suggestion that F. J. becomes a Paris, using the same techniques to woo a Helen that had previously worked on another woman. Certainly, if F. J. is a Paris, who escapes the husband's wrath but is fated not to enjoy his love, Elinor becomes a Helen: despite her angry rejection of F. J.'s attempt at a romantic gesture, she becomes as promiscuous as F. J.'s naming of her implies, and he leaves her in disappointment. As Rowe notes, Gascoigne intends far more than simply to invoke Helen as a classical lover and famously beautiful woman. Rowe finds that

> Because he includes interpretation as a central concern in his story, Gascoigne makes his readers especially aware of what is involved in the process of reading, of their own activities as they experience and attempt to comprehend the narrative before them.[36]

Leicester Bradner notes that Gascoigne seems to have drawn on the work of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (later Pope Pius II).[37] His fifteenth-century *Historia de Duobus Amantibus* features lovers illicitly communicating by letter, and in some ways the parallels with the classical story of Paris and Helen

[36] Rowe, "Interpretation", 277-8.
[37] Leicester Bradner, "The First English Novel: A Study of George Gascoigne's *Adventures of Master F. J.*", *PMLA* 45.2 (1930): 543-52, 547-8. Bradner notes the tale was translated into English three times before the appearance of the *Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*.

seem even more pronounced: the faithless wife Lucretia's husband is named Menelaus, and his brother is Agamemnon. The fifteenth-century text seems ahead of its time in its use of Helen: Lucretia invokes Helen (and Medea) precisely as her sixteenth-century counterparts are to do, for example in the works of William Painter. She exclaims "nor am I alone in this kinde of love; *Helen, Medea,* and *Ariadne* are my precedents, and crimes passe unnoted in the universalitie of the offenders". ($B2^{r}$)[38] Like her sixteenth-century successors, however, she finds that following such models can have tragic consequences: unlike Gascoigne's Elinor, she pines and dies waiting for Euryalus to return from his travels. Gascoigne seems to have drawn inspiration from the tale's epistolary basis, and from the idea of manipulating a character's use of their classical sources. His use of Helen and Paris' story, however, seems more complex, not least because F. J.'s allusions to Helen represent a challenge of interpretation, for Elinor and for the sixteenth-century reader, that Lucretia's do not.

As it does in the works of some of his Elizabethan predecessors, then, Gascoigne's inclusion of Helen constitutes a test, a challenge of interpretation that his readers may pass, though Daun Bartholomew, F. J. and Elinor have all failed. In the works of Gascoigne's predecessors and successors, comparing Helen with a specific woman to be praised was a common trope, but Gascoigne wittily demonstrates how, whether she is being praised or denigrated, Helen is a dangerous symbol for a lover to use, one which seems to foreshadow and to inscribe eventual romantic disappointment or tragedy. Robert P. Adams calls *The Adventures of Master F. J.* "incomparably the most entertaining comic narrative of the Elizabethan age",[39] but it may also be termed one of the period's most original and rewarding treatments of Helen, presenting her simultaneously as a paragon of beauty and a woman to be wary of.

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[38] Quotations are from the seventeenth-century English translation of Silvius' work by Charles Allen. Pope Pius II, *The Historie of Eurialus and Lucretia. Written in Latine by Eneas Sylvius; and Translated into English by Charles Allen, Gent* (London : Tho. Cotes, for William Cooke, 1639).

[39] Robert P. Adams, "Gascoigne's *Master F. J.* as Original Fiction", *PMLA* 73.4 (1958): 315-26, 326.

"Take heede least you be overthrowne": Helen As Exemplar in the Late Sixteenth Century

Richard Robinson's *Rewarde of Wickednesse*, published in 1574, taps similarly into the stock images of Helen that came so readily to the period's imagination. However, in his didactic work he experiments more adventurously with Helen's own character, while adhering to the tenets of her story and turning this story to his own moralising purpose, as earlier authors such as Boccaccio were so quick to do. In the text, a didactic exposition of the woes faced in Hell by some of the most notorious sinners of history and literature, Helen is given a compelling voice, and yet it is one that continually undermines and belittles her previous high status and power. She asks

> You Gods that sit in seates of passing blisse,
> whose Joyes my endles paines, surmounteth farre:
> Doo you consent for to rewarde mée this,
> that whylome was in *Grece,* the *Lampe,* and *Starre.*
> [...] No brute nor fame, of Earthly woman harre,
> woo worth my fate, full sore it mée repentes. (C^{r}) [40]

It quickly becomes apparent, as the last lines of this quotation would suggest, that Helen's purpose in the poem is particularly to act as an example to women, to encourage them to avoid her errors and fate. She tells them "Hyde your painted faces, that settes mens heartes on fire / learne this of mée, your bewtie soone is spent" (C^{r}). She stresses her former glory and apparent power, but does so only to emphasise the distance she had to fall:

> A thing immortall séemed I to bée,
> but yet corrupt with maners that were naught·
> As painted Tombes , with bones be inwarde filthy:
> so outward I, but inwarde vices wrought. (C^{v})

This image, of Helen as a monument - beautiful without, but corrupt and rotting within, may have been chosen as a result of the popular classical belief

[40] Richard Robinson, *The Rewarde of Wickednesse* (London: William Williamson, 1574).

(advanced by Fulgentius and the Vatican Mythographers) that Helen was born of an egg, perfect in appearance but foul within. She is certainly aware of her own failings, exclaiming

> O worthye Troye, happye had thou binne,·
> if sleepie Nurse had strangled mée in bed:
> Then bloodye mischiefe had scaped all my kinne,
> and noble Hector had never lost his head. ($C2^{v}$)

In pointing out the devastation that could have been saved with her early death, Helen is underlining her influence – and yet in having her wish for death, having her, in effect, wish she could sacrifice herself for the men who died, Robinson is deliberately undermining her threatening power and agency, while preserving the sense that she is to blame. She takes on the burden of responsibility, absolving Paris and ascribing their woes to her beauty (which is, as it has been throughout the classical and medieval periods, artificially enhanced). She argues that Paris cannot be blamed, detailing her pursuit of him and giving herself a seductive and threatening agency that is not typically stressed, even in the most critical accounts of her story (she is typically portrayed as captivatingly beautiful, but does not pursue Paris). Here, however, she recalls

> I caste him sugred baites, I catche on bitter hookes,
> or els the suite had Paris never take:
> I layde him letters, in secréete holes and noukes,
> for to attempte the venture for my sake. (D^{r})[41]

She is featured to warn and chastise other women, to advise them to regulate their behaviour in relation to men and male codes of behaviour:

> The gods above all sleightie secreates shoe,
> to every eare and eye, be straight revaylde:
> You heare it read in Scripture long agoe,
> that naughtye actes were never yet consaylde. (D^{r})[42]

[41] Mispagination: should be $C3^{r}$.
[42] Mispagination: should be $C3^{r}$.

Robinson's specifically Christian agenda, and his efforts to use society's religious beliefs to suppress or correct transgressive or troublesome behaviour, are obvious here, and Helen sees her horrible punishment as the judgement of the gods, and the Christian God. At the same time, society's censure exerts a powerful pull on Helen's psyche, as she outlines the consequences transgressive women will face in their lifetimes:

> And then when fame hath so unded up hir trumps,
> and puplished all your deedes and filthye life:
> Then shall confusion put you to your Jumpes,
> your husbande shall disdaine to call you wife.
> Your friendes shall blushe to heare you namde,
> your foes rejoyce in every coast about:
> To call you mothers, children are ashamde,
> loe this besure, it ever falleth out. (D^{v})[43]

In *The Bookes verdite upon Hellen,* Robinson continues this concern. He compares Helen to other notorious women, including Medea (a telling comparison that seems to invest her with a malign agency she does not typically possess). Helen is "In bewtie *Venus* matche, *Arcynos* worse by mutche: / *Medeas* sleyghtes shee had to catch, whome pleased me to towche" (D^{r}). However, Robinson moves on to warning similarly vain and deceptive women, cautioning them

> Loe these are they and such, that ought with shamefaste looke,
> To be abasht when they shall touche, or vew this simple booke.
> Sith *Hellens* faultes are knowne, and yours in secret hyd:
> Take heede least you be overthrowne, as *Hellen* hath be teed. (D^{r})

Robinson's graphic portrayal of Helen's punishment seems to have been well-received: in *A Poore Knight His Pallace of Private Pleasures*, the anonymous writer points his readers approvingly in Robinson's direction to read of her terrible, and fitting, comeuppance.[44] In Robinson's highly didactic text, Helen is not included simply for her own sake, but rather to reflect on the women

[43] Mispagination: should be $C3^{v}$.
[44] A Student at Cambridge, *A Poore Knight His Pallace of Private Pleasures* (London: [W. How for] Richarde Jones, 1579).

Robinson wishes to address and censure. Accordingly, though she is given a voice, and confesses to far more of an agency over her ravishment than she is sometimes given, the threat of this agency, and her influence over Paris, are deliberately undermined, by the severity of her punishment and by her new-found desire to persuade other women away from the path she has chosen.

In his 1576 poem *The Rocke of Regard*, George Whetstone returns frequently to Helen, but rather than developing her place within his poem, he uses her typically, as a shorthand for inestimable beauty. In "The Lover in Praise of his Lady", the speaker exclaims

> Noe marvell though, the Graecian king,
> Did shape his course, through fishfull floud,
> From hatefull *Troy*, his wife to bring,
> Or els in *Phrygia* leave his bloud,
> If halfe such beautie, in *Hellen* were,
> As is in this my Ladie faire. (G2^{r})[45]

"In Praise of Mistress A. C." makes a similar point, as the lover exclaims

> If *Troyians* stoute, that fought in *Hellens*· band,
> Small wayd their lives, their Lady to preserve,
> What doubt, what death, what hell should mée withstand,
> To worke *C.* will the captaine that I serve,
> Who doth in déede, as farre fayre *Hellen* passe,
> As good, doth bad, or gold the corsest brasse. (I3^{r-v})

Here, however, the criticism of Helen is obvious, and the lover goes on to enumerate virtues that his beloved possesses, and that by implication Helen lacks:

> For first shée hath in feauture, forme and face,
> What *Hellen* had, or beautie could devise,
> And therewithall, she hath so chast a grace,
> To hold them backe, with fancies fonde that fries ,
> That (loe) they choose to pine in secrete paine,

[45] Whetstone, *The Rocke of Regard.*

Before their sutes, should move her to disdaine. (I3^{v})

Here Whetstone is invoking the timeless image of Helen as vain, immoral, overly keen on male attention and regard. In the first story of *The Arbor of Virtue*, the general Ulrico fears going away to fight and leaving his beautiful young wife Barbara, telling her "I call to mynd fayre *Helens* moode, who trudg'd with *Troian* knight, / When as her Lord was forst from home, with forreine foes to fight" (p. 109).[46] However, unlike F. J.'s naming of Elinor as Helen, Ulrico's equating his wife with the classical woman does not herald disaster, and she remains faithful. By contrast, Whetstone's P. Plasmos seems very closely allied to another of Gascoigne's misguided heroes, the hapless Daun Bartholomew: like F. J., he imagines himself challenging Paris to defend Helen's worth, like Daun Bartholomew he scathingly attacks Paris' "mungrell choice in such a flurte" (p. 80), and like both Gascoigne's heroes, he is inevitably cuckolded. At some points, Whetstone's use of Helen is utterly conventional, but here he seems to be playing with his audience's perception of her reputation, suggesting but not always representing infidelity, and once more referencing the ungovernable beauty and desire that made the classical Helen so alarming to successive generations of male writers.

This interest in playing with Helen's reputation as the Elizabethans had inherited it is also evident in George Pettie's *A Petite Palace of Pettie his Pleasure* (1576). This collection of tales, which like the *Rocke of Regard* presents itself as a kind of miscellany (this time of prose), references both Medea and Helen, and the latter is often used ironically. For example, in "Sinorix and Camma", the married Camma wonders whether to submit to Sinorix's advances, and reflects:

> What dishonour was it I pray you to Helen when she left her husba[n]d Menelaus & went with Paris to Troy? Did not [the] the whole glory of *Greece* to her great glory go in armes to fetch her again And if she had not been counted a peece of price, or if by [the] facte she had defaced her honour, is it to be thought [the] Grecians would have continued ten yeeres in war continually to win her againe? (Ciii^{v})[47]

[46] Where signatures are missing, I have supplied the page numbers given in the 1576 edition.
[47] George Pettie, *A Petite Pallace of Pettie his Pleasure* (London: R. W[atkins], 1576).

Soon afterwards, though, she uses Helen to demonstrate that a woman is shamed by adultery, and to argue that the Greeks' pursuit of her does not indicate her value: "Why, was Helen for all her heavenly hew, any other accounted then a common harlot, and was it not only to bee revened on her and her champion Paris, that the Grecians continued their siege so long?" (p.15).[48] Camma has already compared herself to Medea (another eloping woman), and though the dichotomy (presumably unnoticed by Camma) may seem comical, here the carefully chosen classical references seem to foreshadow the unhappy consequences of Sinorix's love for Camma. Specifically, the references to Helen seem to foretell the destruction of male community, the tragic ends of Sinorix, of Camma and of Camma's husband Sinnatus, as a result of male fascination with her "glitteryng bewtie".[49]

Although the Renaissance enthusiasm for translation continued to gather force in the first decades of Elizabeth's reign, these relatively brief erotic, didactic, or comical uses of Helen, which owe as much to the authors' own inventiveness as to their debt to the classics, can often be more interesting than translations, and use of Helen in the sixteenth-century miscellany survives to *The Phoenix Nest* (1593). Produced by "R. S.", it is identified by Rollins a "a purely literary work",[50] but despite this apparent move away from the earlier miscellanies, which Rollins calls "strictly commercial" (ix), the compiler retains a fondness for mentions of Troy and of Helen, including "The Praise of Chastitie, Wherein is Set Foorth by Way of Comparison, How Great is the Conquest over our Achievement" (which Rollins suggests should probably be ascribed to George Peele).[51] In a typically male-focused reference, the poet details the fame and achievements of the Trojans and Greeks, before acknowledging how "Helens rape, hurt Paris progenie" (p. 20).[52] Here the poet manages to blame Helen while effectively excluding her from the poem, inscribing in Paris choice and power (albeit the wrong choice).

Ironically, however, the Elizabethan miscellany that uses Helen most originally and extensively appears to have been the least popular and

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[48] No signature.
[49] No signature – should be Aiii^{v}.
[50] R. S., comp., *The Phoenix Nest*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1936) ix.
[51] *Ibid.*, 86.
[52] *Ibid.*

influential in the period. *A Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions*, compiled by Thomas Proctor, appeared in 1578. Rollins, in his edition, notes that "The *Gallery* did not, apparently, reach a second edition; it has no traceable effect on Elizabethan writers, nor is it referred to more than once or twice by them".[53] This relative lack of popularity may have been the result of the *Gallery*'s essentially derivative nature: the concept of the miscellany was inspired by *Tottel's Miscellany* and the *Handful*, and Rollins suggests that Owen Roydon's "To a Gentil woman that sayd: All men be false, They thinke not what they say" (p. 5) is an imitation of a poem from the *Handful*.[54] At certain points, the influence of the earlier miscellanies is apparent, whether the similarity is in language or merely in theme. In "The Lover in praise of his beloved and comparison of her beauty" (p. 56), the point of comparison is, inevitably, "shee for whom prowde Troy did fall and burne" (p. 56 line 4) as well as Venus, Diana, Polyxena and Criseyde. Likewise, in "Narsetus a wofull youth, in his exile writeth to *Rosana* his beloved mistresse, to assure her of his faithful constance, requiring the like of her" (p. 13), Rosana's beauty is compared favourably to "shee, the price of ten yeres war, whom yet the Grekes do rew" (p. 14 line 37), although, crucially, Rosana is virtuous. Helen's impropriety is similarly referenced when a poet aims to slight his lover, rather than praise her: in "The Lover to his beloved, by the name of fayre, and false" (p. 59), the poet tells his lady "Well Fayre and False, I can no more, thou art of *Helens* lyne" (p. 59 line 17). This idea of a faithless woman being of "Helens lyne" echoes the dismissal, in *Tottell's Miscellany*, of "Helenes trade". Similarly, though, as Rollins argues, it may take the *Handful*'s poem as its inspiration, "To a Gentil woman" obviously adopts a very different stance, taking the male voice and defending Paris' bravery by blaming Helen (and specifically Helen's sexual inconstancy): "If (*Hellen*) had not bin so light, / Sir *Paris* had not died in fight" (p. 6 line 17).

This theme in the *Gorgeous Gallery* reaches its peak with "The Reward of Whoredome by the fall of Helen" (p. 81-3).[55] Helen herself articulates

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[53] Thomas Proctor, comp. *A Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions (1578),* ed. Hyder E. Rollins (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1926) xxii.
[54] *Ibid.*, 146.
[55] The piece is signed T. P., and Rollins (xx) attributes it to Proctor.

disgust at her sexual desire as early as the *Iliad*, and it has been frequently attacked by medieval authors including Joseph of Exeter, Boccaccio, Clerk and Lydgate. The last decades of the sixteenth century, however, seem to betray a new desire in English writers, to connect the wrongdoing of Helen (and of Medea) to its terrible consequences. Thus the author of "The Reward" apparently follows Robinson, representing Helen as once again rowing across a hellish lake and lamenting her sins. She undermines her own beauty more comprehensively than other speakers do elsewhere in the miscellanies, exclaiming "But what prevayles, to vaunt of beauties glose, / Or brag of pride, wheron dishonour growes" (p. 81 lines 33-4). Her complaint is not overtly targeted at women in the same way as *The Rewarde of Wickednesse*, but she highlights her moral shortcomings, exclaiming

> If I had usde my gifts in vertues lore,
> And modest livd, my prayse had bin the more.
> Where now too late, I lothe my life lewd spent,
> And wish I had, with vertue bin content. (pp. 81-2, lines 35-6 and 2-3)

Helen's own voice, often strikingly absent from medieval accounts of her story, is here used with clear didactic intent, betraying authorial determination that women should appreciate the limits of her seemingly marvellous beauty, and learn chastity from her example. Similarly, Proctor's *The Triumph of Trueth* (not included in the miscellany) contains another complaint by Helen. Once more in Hell, and eager to encourage others to avoid her example, she exclaims

> My beautie what prevoileth mee,
> Or state of Honors seat;
> The vain desire of lawlesse lust,
> My fal may wel repeat.
>
> [...] Loe, thus beholde the fall of sinne,
> The ruine and the shame:—
> Of such as look not in their lives,

To live in honest fame. (pp. 23-4)[56]

In his summary of the conflict, Proctor alters the traditional story, claiming that Helen was killed at Troy, and explaining how her influence over the war meant that this was fitting:

For who but Helin bare the sway,
In Troy while Troy did reign:
And did against the Gretians force,
The Troyans war maintain. (p. 23)

This sense, of Helen's centrality and continuing influence over the war once she has been taken to Troy, is alarming. However, as it is in "The Reward of Whoredome" and the works of Robinson and Whetstone, this threat is neutralised as the author turns it to didactic ends, and encourages his readers to take an edifying lesson from Helen's suffering and regret.

Proctor's use of Helen thus reflects Elizabethan interest in turning classical stories into moral instruction, in making these ancient characters into cautionary examples, as Gower had done in his *Confessio Amantis*. Also popular was the attempt to draw together diverse classical and medieval sources, in the pursuit of an authoritative Troy-narrative, and one that reimagines the story and its characters, rather than simply translating. Such a work is *The Tale of Troy*, by George Peele, a work that makes its multiple classical and medieval sources apparent throughout, not least in its representation of Helen. David H. Horne, who dates the poem to "between 1579 and 1581"[57] notes that "Peele referred to all the accounts of the Troy story he could find, including the *Iliad*, Ovid's *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses*, the *Aeneid*, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and Caxton's *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*" (149). However, he finds that "his chief debt is to Caxton for narrative material and Chaucer and Spenser for style" (149). At first, Peele's debt to the *Iliad* seems apparent in his willingness to acknowledge the

[56] In J. P. Collier, ed., *Illustrations of Old English Literature*, Vol. 2 No. 8, 3 vols (London: priv.pr. 1886, rpt 1966).
[57] George Peele, *The Life and Works of George Peele*, Vol 3, ed. David H. Horne, General Editor Charles Tyler Prouty, 3 vols (New Haven: Yale UP, 1952) 149.

role of the gods in the fall of the city, something which the medieval authors who draw on Dares and Guido tend to ignore. Helen appears powerless, and the effect is heightened as Venus assists Paris by sending Menelaus away. Like his fourteenth- and fifteenth-century predecessors, Peele records Helen's distress at leaving Troy, and includes a sense of Helen as powerless to resist that was particularly noticeable at the same point in Lydgate's *Troy Book*: "And thus hath Paris with his cunning caught, / The daintie Byrd that all so farre he sought" (*Tale of Troy* 179-80). Even an echo of Guido's condemnation seems to survive (albeit in a softened and not specifically misogynist form) as he exclaims: "Ah that this love will not be oreruled. / Ah that these Lovers nill be better schoold" (169-70). As keen as his medieval predecessors to recount the whole "Matter of Troy" (and with the benefit of access to Greek texts) Peele touches briefly on Helen and Menelaus' homecoming: "Loe now at last the Greekes have home againe, / With losse of manie a Greeke and Troyans life / Their wither'd flower, King Menelaus' wife" (475-7). This remarkably unsympathetic last line is tempered by the 1604 reviser of the work (whom Horne suggests is probably Peele himself),[58] becoming "Unhappy Helen, Menelaus wife" (n. p. 202). The change is possibly a result of Peele's desire to model his work more closely on Caxton's (which, though unsympathetic, does not condemn Helen as roundly as the earlier Troy-narratives of Guido or Lydgate). At the poem's close Peele notes

> My author sayes, in favour of her name,
> That through the worlde hath beene belide by fame:
> Howe when the King her pheere was absent thence,
> A tale that well may lessen her offence.
> Sir Paris tooke the Towne by Armes and skill,
> And carried Helen thence against her will.
> Whom whether afterwards she lov'd or no,
> I cannot tell, but may imagine so. (486-93)

Horne suggests "My Author" as "probably Caxton" (n. p.276). Caxton says no such thing, however – in the *Recuyell* he owes far more to Guido than does Peele, and includes the misogynist criticism of her transgressive desires that

[58] Peele, *The Life and Works*, Vol. 3, ed. Horne, 152.

Peele elides. In his *Metamorphoses*, meanwhile, he makes explicitly clear that she desired Paris, and was actively involved in her own abduction. Nevertheless, Caxton does not condemn Helen on her return to Greece, and thus Peele's reliance on his English predecessor may have motivated the softening of his final criticism of Helen as a "wither'd flower". Equally, Peele's reading of more sympathetic accounts (particularly the *Iliad*) may have encouraged him to make this change. Either way, his final refusal to commit to a decision on Helen's feelings has the effect of rendering her even more silent (and somehow inconsequential to the "Tale of Troy") than she has been throughout this poem, and in Caxton's translations. Horne points to Elizabethan interest in the story of the war, and notes that it also inspired Peele's 1584 play *The Arraignment of Paris*,[59] which centres around Paris' judgement and his abandonment of Oenone, and which sidelines Helen even more than the *Tale* does. Peele must join Turberville, Gascoigne and Proctor in the ranks of Elizabethan writers apparently fascinated by the Troy story, compelled to reference it repeatedly like their fifteenth-century predecessors Caxton and Lydgate. However, it is difficult to accuse him of innovation in his treatment of Helen and her threat. Absent is the knowing friction engendered in Gascoigne's work or in the miscellanies, friction between classical representation and Elizabethan rewriting that problematises Helen even as she is apparently held up as representative of the ideal woman. Equally, there is none of the sustained effort seen in Robinson and Whetstone to exert a strongly moral (and specifically Christian) judgement on Helen for her transgression, as a way of containing her.

In an unnamed poem, tentatively dated by R. W. Bond to before 1580,[60] John Lyly uses the power dynamic between Helen and Paris as Peele does, to suggest that Helen enjoys little power, and accordingly constitutes less of an alarming threat than she does in the works of some of his Elizabethan contemporaries. In the work, which seems deliberately reminiscent of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, he offers advice to men on how to ensnare a series of different women, before using Helen to illustrate his argument that women automatically desire the more powerful man:

[59] *Ibid.*, 150-51.
[60] John Lyly, *Works*, Vol. 3, ed. R. Warwick Bond, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902) 459.

faire Helen may example be
howe Menelaus she hated still
His softnes made him woo in vaine
she did his humblenes disdaine.
Enforcinge Paris she did love
and like for forcinge hir so well
That greatest dangers she would prove
With him for to remaine & dwell.
yet she confest as it was righte
the Gretian was the better knighte.[61]

In this poem, Helen is supremely predictable and thus easily contained by the masculine community, though the desire she excites is alarming. In *Faunus and Melliflora* (1600) John Weever does something very similar, having the nymph Deiopeia advise Faunus "Soft Menelaus Helen could not brooke, / Yet what inforcing Paris gave, she tooke" (333-4).[62] In these works Helen is not only herself easily contained, but seems to be used as an encouragement to other men, evidence that women can be easily gained since, if men occupy their expected gender roles as commanding and demanding lovers, women will do likewise, and submit willingly. (The implication that Lyly chooses to ignore, but that other writers seize on enthusiastically, is that a less than ideal woman will be too much like Helen). Elsewhere, in his *Euphues. The Anatomy of Wyt*, Lyly makes conscious use of Helen's multiple associations. She first appears in the first lines of his dedicatory letter to William West, and immediately it is her shortcomings, rather than her beauty, that are emphasised: Lyly notes that "Paratius drawing the counterfaite of Helen, [right honourable] made the attier of hi[r] head loose, who being demanded why he dyd so, he aunswered, she was loose" (Aii^{r}).[63] Soon afterwards, at the beginning of the narrative, Euphues' failings are illustrated with a series of comparisons to classical and historical figures who are flawed in some way. Helen is included in this list not due to her intemperate desire, but because of "hir scarre on hir chinne which *Paris* called *Cos amoris*" (B^{r}). This detail demonstrates Lyly's

[61] *Ibid.*, p.461.
[62] John Weever, *Faunus and Melliflora*, in Donno, ed., *Elizabethan Minor Epics*.
[63] John Lyly, *Euphues. The Anatomy of Wyt* (London: T. East for Gabriel Cawood, 1578).

playful attitude towards Helen's reputation: the scar on her chin (which he suggests only makes her more attractive) might seem to be the only flaw of hers he can recall, but later in the narrative he relies on his readers' close acquaintance with Helen's wickedness. For example, when Lucilla is criticised by Euphues for transferring her affections to another, she retorts that Helen has set a precedent: "As for chaunging, did not *Helen* y^{e} pearle of *Greece* thy countriwoman first take *Menelaus*, then *Theseus*, and last of all *Paris*?" (F^{v}). For his part, Euphues invokes similarly familiar comparisons as he tells Philautus that though he thought Lucilla as beautiful as Helen, she proved immoral, and he writes to his friend Livia, characterising Helen as representative of vice that is to be avoided: "It is better to spinne with *Penelope* all night then to sing with *Helen* all daye" (Tiii^{r}).

Lyly's work exerted a considerable influence on many of his Elizabethan successors, and this influence (and specifically the fashionable literary style that came to be known as Euphuism) can be seen in Robert Greene's work.[64] Greene was, like Lyly, well-versed in the classics, and Helen recurs throughout his works – in Greene's *Card of Fancie*, his *Opharion* and his *Mamilla*, Helen is invoked to demonstrate the harmful effects of love on men.[65] More interestingly, in *Greenes Never Too Late*, the temptress Infida is frequently compared to Helen for her beauty and untrustworthiness: she is "as faire as *Helena* and as faithlesse" (F4^{r}). By contrast, in another story in the same collection, Mirmida, like the heroines of the poetic miscellanies before her, receives the ultimate authorial accolade, being described as fair as Helen, but finally proving more chaste, as she rejects her numerous suitors.[66] Here, as Gascoigne, Painter and Pettie have all done before him, Greene experiments with the implications of naming a character Helen, or of invoking her. In *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, Margaret is repeatedly compared to Helen, and is fought over by two noblemen, Prince Edward and Earl Lacy. Indeed, Daniel Seltzer suggests that early on, Edward's intentions towards Margaret "amount

[64] See G. K. Hunter, ed., *English Drama, 1586-1642: The Age of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 26.

[65] Robert Greene, *Greenes Carde of Fancie* (London: William Ponsonby, 1587); *Greenes Opharion* (London: J. Roberts for Edward White, 1599); *Mamillia A Mirrour or looking-glasse for the ladies of Englande* (London: T. Dawson for Thomas Woodcocke, 1583).

[66] Robert Greene, *Greenes neuer too late. Or, A powder of experience: sent to all youthfull gentlemen to roote out the infectious follies, that ouer-reaching conceits foster in the spring time of their youth* (London: Thomas Orwin for N[icholas] L[ing] and John Busbie, 1590).

to nothing less than rape".[67] He notes that because of this, "[Edward's] early comparison of himself to Tarquin and of Margaret to Lucrece is apt" (xv). Predictably, given his desire for Margaret, Helen becomes an important point of reference in the play. However, despite Margaret's worrying "Shall I be Hellen in my forward fates, / As I am Hellen in my matchles h[u]e?"[68] her story does not end in tragedy, and instead Margaret and Lacy are married along with Edward and Elinor of Castile, who is also described as one "Whose heat puts Hellen and faire Daphne downe" ($G3^{v}$).[69] H. W. Herrington suggests that Marlowe's *Faustus* may have influenced this play,[70] but here Helen is obviously used differently, and is invoked (rather than appearing) in order to stress female beauty, and to confound the readerly expectations of disaster and infidelity that were excited by a mention of her name. Elsewhere in Greene's works, though, a mention of Helen does foretell tragedy, and tragedy that results from feminine transgression. In *Alcida Greenes Metamorphosis*, Alcida tells the story of her three daughters' loves, each time referencing Helen as she does so. Floredespine was as fair as Helen, and impressed her suitor Telegonus by not submitting to him immediately, as Helen initially resisted Paris. However, she rejects him cruelly, and on his suicide she is turned to marble by Mercury. Eriphila is described as wise, rather than beautiful, but her suitor Meribates once again invokes Helen, telling her that if he had had Paris' role in the Judgement, he would have awarded the prize to wit, rather than beauty. Though the two are married, Eriphilia soon begins to pursue other men, and frets that she will be held "as inconstant as *Helena,* whose heart had more

[67] Robert Greene, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, ed. Daniel Seltzer (London: Edward Arnold, 1964) xv.
[68] No signature – page directly precedes G^{r}.
[69] Robert Greene, *The Honorable Historie of Frier Bacon, and Frier Bongay* (London: Adam Islip for Edward White, 1594).
[70] H. W. Herrington, "Witchcraft and Magic in the Elizabethan Drama" *The Journal of American Folklore* 32.126 (1919): 447-85, 462. However, Seltzer suggests that Greene's play appeared first, and that "If any indebtedness exists between the two playwrights, it is in fact much more likely that Marlowe [...] borrowed here and there from Greene" (xi). On the probable date of composition for Marlowe's *Faustus*, see Christopher Marlowe, *'Doctor Faustus' and Other Plays*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995, rep. 1998) xii, and Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, ed. David Scott Kastan (New York: Norton, 2005) ix. Bevington and Rasmussen suggest the last years of the 1580s, while Kastan suggests 1590. Marlowe's and Greene's plays were thus composed very close to one another, but there is little correspondence in their uses of Helen.

lovers, than the Camelion colours".[71] However, she continues to ignore her husband, and at Meribates' death she is transformed into a chameleon as acknowledgement of her changeability. Alcida's third daughter, Marpesia, loves Eurimachus, though he uses Helen's affection towards Menelaus as evidence of feminine unpredictability. She uses Helen's encouraging words to Paris in the *Heroides* to spur her lover on, and though their story once more ends tragically with Eurimachus' execution, Marpesia is not held accountable, and is transformed into a rose.

Here, Greene experiments with the effect such a famous name and narrative may have on his own story: in each case, as soon as Helen is invoked, the reader knows the love affair will end tragically. The fact that the final tale does not involve feminine infidelity, but all the stories end with the deaths of the male suitors, suggest that Greene's focus is continually on the male, and that even if a woman does not betray her husband as Helen does, her surpassing beauty is in its own way a threat to be resisted. In *Euphues His Censure to Philautus*, meanwhile, Euphues describes a debate between the Greeks and Trojans about the qualities of perfect knighthood. Taking his inspiration from Homer (and probably from the medieval Troy-narratives as well) Greene once more rewrites a classical text, and shows how such classical references may reflect on the story he tells. The Greeks and Trojans, both men and women, debate fiercely over Helen's worth, and Greene voices the opinions of classical figures who are not traditionally included in such debates. Particularly noticeable is Greene's insistence on having the story's female characters – Andromache, Cressida, Briseis, even Iphigenia – weigh in with their anger at Helen. The anger of these so often silenced women can be deliberately ironic: Cressida, for example, tells Ulysses that the Trojan women cannot understand why their men "should beare armes in her defence, whose dishonesty ruinates both theyr fame and theyr countrey" (166),[72] though her own notoriety was just as popular with Renaissance writers (Greene's Eriphile chastises herself with the examples of both women). Elsewhere in *Euphues*,

[71] No signature – should be G4[r]. Robert Greene, *Alcida Greenes Metamorphosis* (London: George Purslowe, 1617).
[72] Robert Greene, *The Life and Complete Works in Prose and Verse,* Vol 6, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, 12 vols (London: priv. pr.,1881-6).

Greene rewrites the good relationship enjoyed by Helen and Hector in the *Iliad*, having Hector acknowledge that though Helen is not worth the war, the Trojans feel compelled to continue. In so doing, he arguably foreshadows the sense of futility that is to powerfully colour Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. Though objectively worthless, Helen retains a power because of the male codes of honour that dictate the war must continue, while troublingly sidelining her. After Ulysses' story of Polymestor's betrayal by his beautiful wife Moedina, which is clearly intended to reference Ovid's Helen in its suggestion that beauty and virtue are essentially incompatible, Agamemnon intercedes and pleads that Paris and Menelaus' conflict is not brought up again, "sith the rehersall of their actions were but an alarum to further quarrell" (199-200). Nevertheless, the spectre of the war they are fighting haunts the stories told by Helenus, Hector and Achilles, and at times Helen's own role is inescapably recalled: Achilles' Athenian protagonists go to war with Thebes "about the deflowering of a maide of Athens" (275). Greene's *Euphues* very obviously betrays his desire to engage robustly with the story of the war, and with human attitudes towards it, and at the same time his particular use of Helen reveals not only an interest in classical mythology that is discernible in the accounts of Peele and Lyly, but also a sensitivity to the impact Helen and her story may have on a new narrative, and on its male and female characters.

"This Second Hellene": Rewriting the Classical Helen in the 1590s

If Peele attempts to write an extended English reconsideration of the Troy story, and of Helen's role in it, and if Gascoigne, Greene, Lyly and the poets of the miscellanies all make briefer references to Helen, but ones that demand (and reward) a close acquaintance with her story, English works of the 1590s often have similar aims. In their uses of Helen, Spenser, Marlowe and Ogle all write with a degree of didactic intent (though this is not as pronounced as it was in the works of Whetstone and Robinson). Marlowe and Spenser in particular seem to echo Gascoigne as they experiment with how and why classical texts are rewritten (by their characters as well as by the authors

themselves) and specifically, as they question what it means for a male character to invoke Helen, to make the infamous story of her ravishment into a kind of *ur*-narrative.

In Spenser's work, as in the works of his Tudor and Elizabethan predecessors, the influence of both classical and medieval models is plain, but so too is a determination to do something different with a well-established tale. Having already briefly referenced Helen in *The Shepherds' Calendar* (1579), he ends Book Three of the *Faerie Queene* with a lengthy account of Hellenore, "This second Hellene" (3.10.13),[73] and her immoral and ill-fated dalliance with Paridell. However, before he draws such obvious parallels with the classical story, Spenser makes more oblique references to it, and clearly seeks to demonstrate his affinity with the classics. In his introduction he says he writes of chastity, "That fairest vertue, farre above the rest" (p. 343). Accordingly, although Spenser does not use Paris and Helen to illustrate sin as obviously as Gower does, for example, it is clear from this statement of his intent that he will have little sympathy for their Renaissance counterparts when they do appear. Britomart is Spenser's heroine in this book because she is resistant to such self-indulgent and destructive emotions, since her "constant mind, / Would not so lightly follow beauties chace" (3.1.19). Over and over again throughout the classical to Renaissance period the point is made that Helen's beauty, such a threat to men, is not worth the sacrifice it seems to require from them, and this point is clearly illustrated when the knights come to a castle inhabited by Malecasta, who is just as fair as Florimell but far from virtuous. However, while Florimell seems in many ways Malecasta's opposite, "The bountiest virgin, and most debonaire, / That ever living eye I weene did see" (3.5.8-9), echoes of other classical Helens may be found, intriguingly, in her story in Book 3. Most notably, Florimell inspires in men a fascination bordering on compulsion (though unlike Malecasta she does nothing to encourage this). Searching for Marinell, she seeks refuge at one point with a witch, whose son is so captivated by her that his mother contrives to make

Another Florimell, in shape and looke

[73] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton. 2nd ed. Text edited by Hiroshi Yamashita and Toshiyuki Suzuki (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007).

So lively and so like, that many it mistooke [...]
Instead of yellow lockes she did devise,
With golden wyre to weave her curled head
[...] and in the stead
Of life, she put a Spright to rule the carkasse dead. (3.8.5-7)

This sinister image dramatically recalls the false Helen created by Euripides and mentioned by the augmenter of the Servian commentary on the *Aeneid*, and the effect is similarly calculated – Spenser attempts to show the power but also the ridiculous nature of male lust, as various men fight over this "carkasse".[74] Later, the parallels between Helen, Florimell and the false Florimell become more apparent as, in Book Five, the false Florimell is initially judged the most beautiful lady present, before the real Florimell appears, and she loses her prize. Here, the allusion is to Paris' judgement of the goddesses (and perhaps specifically to his flattery in *Heroides 16.*139-40, his declaration that if Helen had been present at the judgement, Venus' victory would have been doubtful). More than this, however, Spenser appears to engage, as Gascoigne, Turberville and countless others have done before him, with what it means for a woman to be desirable. Fashioned by a witch and partnered by a succession of men, the false Florimell may appear beautiful, but will always be surpassed by her chaste counterpart, just as the Elizabethan poets could praise a woman who equalled Helen's beauty, but far surpassed her virtue.

This engagement with both Helen's beauty, and her unchastity, becomes even more obvious as Spenser's protagonists meet Paridell and Hellenore. As soon as Hellenore, Spenser's "seconde Hellen", sees Paridell, she plots to betray her husband. As in the *Heroides* and in medieval versions of the story, the two communicate

[74] Hamilton (p.362) notes that A. B. Gough and Thomas P. Roche point to Euripides' rendering as Spenser's source. In *De Copia* Erasmus specifically suggests Euripides for use in schools, recommending that "themes be selected from Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, Virgil" to train boys in rhetorical composition. (Quoted in Baldwin, *Shakspere's Small Latine*, I.89). It thus seems possible that Spenser's education may have familiarised him with the dramatist's work. At any rate, the correlation between the Greek play and Spenser's poem over this point seems too close to be comfortably ignored.

> With speaking lookes, that close embassage bore,
> He rov'd at her, and told his secret care:
> For all that art he learned had of yore.
> Nor was she ignoraunt of that lewd lore.
> But in his eye his meaning wisely red,
> And with the like him answerd evermore. (3.9.28)

Like Ovid's Paris, Paridell even writes a message to her in the wine that has spilled on the table. Ironically, Hellenore and Paridell have little thought for the consequences of their actions, even though Paridell tells the story of Troy and his ancestor Paris

> [...] by whome
> That warre was kindled, which did Troy inflame,
> And stately towers of Ilion whilome
> Brought unto balefull ruine. (3.9.34)

Here, Paridell uses the tragic tale of the fall of Troy not as cautionary example, but as flirtation, much as his Ovidian ancestor invoked the tale of Jason and Medea to reassure Helen that no dreadful consequences will follow their elopement.

The focus on Paridell's seduction means that in some ways, Hellenore is portrayed as lacking control over her actions, and therefore perhaps as deserving of pity rather than condemnation. Here again she echoes her Ovidian ancestor, who is unaware that the end of her story is a foregone conclusion, the issue of her future fame as good as decided. Suzuki comments on Hellenore's disappointing failure to distance herself in some way from the tale she has heard, so that she is not doomed to repeat it:

> If Paridell is the figure for the reductive poet, Hellenore represents the reductive reader [...] As the modern Helen [...] and Dido, she appears determined, in both senses of the word, to repeat her literary models without any interesting differences; hence she trivializes them. (167)

Here, Hellenore echoes the "new" Helens of Gascoigne, of Turberville, of Painter and of Pettie: female characters who are either compared to Helen by their ardent lovers, or invoke her themselves as they prepare to elope with their

lovers. However, while in these rewritings of Helen the women or their lovers often suffer for their failure to read the classical Helen correctly, and while Suzuki sees her as reduced by her determination to mimic her notorious ancestor, here Hellenore is able to escape her tyrannical husband, apparently because of her reading, and re-enacting, of a classical story – it is Malbecco who suffers for his inability to halt the story's inevitable conclusion. Hellenore is taken in by a band of satyrs, and it is here that Malbecco eventually finds his wife,

> Embraced of a Satyre rough and rude,
> Who all the night did minde his joyous play:
> Nine times he heard him come aloft ere day,
> That all his hart with gealosie ded swell;
> But yet that nights ensample did bewray,
> That not for nought his wife them loved so well,
> When one so oft a night did ring his matins bell. (3.10.28)

Hellenore is quite crudely sexualised here, but it is interesting that she is not victimised as such, or denied agency, as Helen so often is once she has made her choice - when Malbecco offers to take her back, "As if no trespasse ever had beene donne" (3.10.51), she turns him down, and the satyrs chase him away. Hellenore seems content, and her new rustic life is as far removed from the sheltered, imprisoned life she led in Malbecco's castle as it is from the conventions of male, and courtly, community that governed her previous existence.

Significantly, then, Spenser rewrites Helen for the 1590s. Most noticeably, he rewrites the end of her story, and though she loses Paris/Paridell, she is not compelled to return to the court with Menelaus/Malbecco, where she would presumably be greeted by the same appalled fascination or outright condemnation that so many classical and medieval Helens faced, in texts such as Euripides' *Orestes* or John Clerk's alliterative *Destruction of Troy*. At the same time, though, Spenser has made clear that she symbolises the vice that Book 3 seeks to attack – and here, specifically, she is used to highlight how women's sexuality may undermine male dynastic and marital plans, and challenge the male sexual power Malbecco should, in the eyes of Spenser's

Renaissance readers, enjoy over his wife. Indeed, his focus had shifted since he composed *The Shepherds' Calendar*: there, in the reference to Helen's abduction in "July", it is Paris who is condemned for pride and "lewd lust" (151), and for failing to demonstrate the humble nature that befits a shepherd.[75] In the *Faerie Queene*, condemnation of adulterous desire becomes focused on the female figure, despite Spenser's obvious lack of sympathy for the cuckolded husband Malbecco. Spenser's use of Helen's story clearly extends beyond his portrayal of Paridell and Hellenore. Ultimately, though he draws on many different classical sources (and accordingly many different classical Helens), she is valuable to him principally as a symbol, around which the book's other characters can be arranged in accordance with their chastity, just as other Elizabethan writers arrange their perception of ideal, chaste womanhood around her.

This sense of Helen as a sexually threatening woman, and one whose literary and historical past feeds into her later representation, is apparent in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. Baldwin suggests Lucian and Mantuan as possible classical sources for Marlowe's Helen, and for Faustus' most famous description of her as "the face that launched a thousand ships".[76] Though Marlowe's representation of Helen is in many ways one of the period's most powerfully original, paradoxically the influence of earlier versions, classical, medieval and Renaissance, is apparent. Douglas Bush notes that Marlowe may also have translated Colluthus' *Rape of Helen* in 1587,[77] the year after Thomas Watson produced his rendering of the Greek poem. If so, his familiarity with Colluthus' deceptive Helen, who appears to her daughter Hermione in a vision and mounts a dishonest defence of her conduct, may well have informed the mysterious Helen he dramatises in *Faustus*. The motif of the phantom-Helen is also central to Euripides' *Helen,* and in Marlowe's allusions to the wounding of Achilles and Paris' duel with Menelaus, the influence of medieval intermediaries such as Caxton's *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troy* or Lydgate's *Troy Book* may be discerned.

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[75] Edmund Spenser, *Selected Shorter Poems,* ed. Douglas Brooks-Davies (London: Longman, 1995).

[76] Baldwin, *Shakspere's Small Latine*, 1.169. For Marlowe's sources, and his use of the Faust legend, see Herrington, "Witchcraft and Magic", 461.

[77] Douglas Bush, *Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1932) 307.

Faustus certainly stresses Helen's classical origins and famous beauty as he produces her to impress the scholars, telling them

> You shall behold that peerless dame of Greece,
> No otherways for pomp and majesty
> Than when Sir Paris crossed the seas with her
> And brought the spoils to rich Dardania. (5.1.19-23)[78]

He sees his ability to produce Helen (and, the implication is, to possess her) as indicative of his own worth. His friends are similarly impressed by Faustus' prize, with the Third Scholar exclaiming "No marvel though the angry Greeks pursued / With ten years' war the rape of such a queen, / Whose heavenly beauty passeth all compare" (5.1.27-9).[79] Such sentiments are familiar to readers of the Elizabethan miscellanies. To the audience of *Faustus*, however, as to the readers of such miscellanies, Helen's attractiveness is here a threat, not the comfort or badge of merit it is to Faustus. Like the drug-concocting Helen of the *Odyssey*, Marlowe's silent and seductive Helen induces Faustus to forget, not painful memories of the Trojan War, but his doubts about keeping his bargain with the Devil. Faustus, like Marlowe (and apparently unlike some of his predecessors given a voice in the miscellany poems), knows full well the tragic consequences of another man's fascination with Helen, famously asking "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships / And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?" (5.1.90-91).[80] Nevertheless, he succumbs to a similarly real and dangerous infatuation, seeking a marriage, a legitimate outlet for the lust he feels, but one that can never satisfy him, since Helen is nothing but a ghostly construct. He tells her:

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[78] Unless otherwise stated, quotations from *Doctor Faustus* are taken from the 'A' text of the play, first published in 1604. Christopher Marlowe, *'Doctor Faustus' and Other Plays,* ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995, rep. 1998).

[79] Interestingly, in the 'B' text these lines are altered to mute the sense of Helen's beauty, and the concurrent threat it holds – the Scholar wonders instead "Was this fair Helen, whose admirèd worth / Made Greece with ten years' war afflict poor Troy?" (5.1.26-7). Marlowe, *'Doctor Faustus' and Other Plays,* ed. Bevington and Rasmussen.

[80] Tatlock notes that Shakespeare and Heywood both adopt Marlowe's line, Shakespeare in 2.2.81 of *Troilus and Cressida*, and Heywood in Helen's final appearance in *The Iron Age*, Part Two. Tatlock, "The Siege of Troy", p. 712 and n.37. In the *Norton* edition of *Troilus*, Walter Cohen notes that it was "a well-worn phrase even when Marlowe used it". William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare* , ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (NY: Norton, 1997) n.4, p.1858.

I will be Paris, and for love of thee
Instead of Troy shall Wittenberg be sacked,
And I will combat with weak Menelaus,
And wear thy colours on my plumèd crest. (5.1.97-100)

With these lines, Marlowe connects his original creations explicitly with the characters of the Trojan narratives, intending to show how they repeat the same mistakes, and for similar reasons. Fully aware of Helen's classical past, Faustus nevertheless imagines that she may once more be won and kept with violence, but this time a self-defeating, self-destructive attack on his own city. Kay Stockholder notes the irony of a lust-filled Faustus promising to destroy his beloved Wittenberg for Helen,[81] and what is equally apparent is that Faustus should be attempting to save himself rather than pursue Helen and prove himself to her. His seemingly boundless power finds itself concentrated on the figure of the silent Spartan woman, and like Paris, while he may imagine his association with Helen proves his worth, in fact it is a tragic example of quite the opposite, indicative of his willingness to destroy himself as a result of what is quite clearly a physical infatuation with what John D. Cox terms "a demonic illusion, the ultimate image of his ironic enslavement to what he vainly thinks he dominates".[82]

It is important to note that, despite his impassioned protestations, Faustus is enslaved not to Helen herself, but to what Cox terms a "demonic illusion", to what he imagines her appearance represents, and, ultimately, to the demonic powers that control them both. Helen never speaks in the play and does not feature for long, but such is the power of her beauty and her story that she becomes a focal point for Faustus' mental degeneration, symptom rather than cause of his loosening grasp on reality. Faustus' most damning proclamation with regards to Helen, and the point at which the sinister agency he invests her beauty with is most apparent, comes when he rejects a chance for salvation and acceptance into Christian heaven, exclaiming, "Here I will dwell, for heaven be in these lips, / And all is dross that is not Helena" (5.1.95-96). In

[81] Kay Stockholder, " 'Within the Massy Entrailes of the Earth': Faustus' Relation to Women", in Kevin Friedenreich, Roma Gill, and Constance B. Kuriyama, eds., *'A Poet and a Filthy-Playmaker': New Essays on Christopher Marlowe* (New York: A.M.S., 1988): 203-219, 215.
[82] John D. Cox, "Devils and Power in Marlowe and Shakespeare", *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 23, Early Shakespeare Special Number (1993): 46-64, 56.

Doctor Faustus Helen is a shadowy, mysterious figure, far removed from the sometimes flirtatious, sometimes regretful but always vocal Helen of other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century renderings, such as those of Turberville, Robinson, John Trussell or Thomas Heywood. As a mythical character self-consciously reused by Marlowe, and as a seductive apparition conjured by Mephistopheles, she is twice a construct,[83] doubly indicative of Faustus' new and perhaps irreversible distance from humanity. Roy Eriksen finds that in *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe uses repetition of the Actaeon myth "to dramatise the inherent contradiction between free will and predestination", [84] and here, having identified himself with Paris, Faustus seems fated to be destroyed by his desire for Helen, just as so many Renaissance heroines are fated to follow Helen's example once their authors have invoked her. Faustus' identification of Helen's lips with Heaven (as well as his praise of her as "heavenly Helen" in 5.1.84) paradoxically evokes in the reader's mind the well-worn play on Helen's name in Euripides' *Trojan Women*. Heavenly or hellish, she becomes in some way an elemental force, a physical manifestation of Faustus' damnation, while his pronouncement "Her lips suck forth my soul. See where it flies!" (5.1.93) becomes particularly disturbing, demonstrative of a destructive and active power far beyond that which she is usually credited with.

It is worth noting, however, that despite Faustus' obsessive focus on her lips, deeply evocative themselves as a typical symbol of feminine sexuality and beauty, Helen never opens them to speak, is never condemned by her own arrogant or foolish words as are the Helens of Shakespeare and Heywood.

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[83] In fact, on the Renaissance stage the figure of Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, is three times a construct. Specifically, the powerful sexuality she embodies in this play and in *Troilus and Cressida* and *The Iron Age* becomes more illusory and intentionally confusing as she would still have been played by a young male actor. From antiquity to the Renaissance, dramatic convention saw the character of Helen divorced from "her" gender, a trend which paradoxically emphasised her threatening difference even as it seemed to assimilate her more into the masculine community.

[84] Roy Eriksen, "Falstaff at Midnight: The Comic Metamorphosis of Myth", in Janet Clare and Roy Eriksen, eds. *Contexts of Renaissance Comedy* (Oslo: Novus, 1997): 114-34, 117. Maguire notes Marlowe's use of Helen in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, pointing out that Dido is scornful of Helen, and repeatedly refuses to be characterised as a "second Helena" (76). However, despite her determination to resist the model of Helen, "that ticing strumpet" (2.1.300) Dido is unable to avoid her own classical fate (though she avoids Helen's infamy). Christopher Marlowe, *The Complete Works*, Vol. 1, ed. Fredson Bowers, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1973).

Rather she is dangerous as a symbolic beauty, and in turn as a symbol of Faustus' lack of perspective, and because of the influence he chooses to invest her with. Helen is a threat to men because of her status as the ultimate prize, a status that is rooted in her reputation as a beauty and a sexual being, and in using her Marlowe is able deliberately and immediately to evoke associations in his audience's minds about the fatal consequences of lust, and the danger of seemingly perfect beauty. Indeed, Sara Munson Deats notes that in *Edward II*, Gaveston is described as the "Greekish strumpet",[85] and though the comparison to Helen is intended as an insult to Gaveston's masculinity, it also suggests the extent to which his sexual involvement with the King, a man ostensibly in control, is alarming and destabilising. Helen is a threat to male communities past and present, but she is also a symbol on which Faustus' and Edward's own weaknesses become focussed, and thus it is these men who make her sexual presence so disturbing, whether it is represented onstage or merely hinted at through comparison.

Elkin Calhoun Wilson suggests contrasting Faustus' famous description of Helen as "the face that launched a thousand ships" with that of John Ogle, widely assumed to be the author of *The Lamentation of Troy for the Death of Hector, Whereunto is Annexed an Old Woman's Tale in Hir Solitarie Cell* (1594).[86] Douglas Bush, meanwhile, suggests Lydgate's *Troy Book* as one of Ogle's sources[87] (and by this point in the sixteenth century, he could have augmented this medieval source with a reading of one of the widely available Latin versions of the *Iliad* being published on the continent).[88] Ogle's rendering of Helen, however, is subtly different from both. Lydgate, unlike his source Guido, declares himself unequal to the challenge of describing Helen's beauty. The Marlovian Helen, meanwhile, represents beauty as a threat: not described by any objective narrator, it is Faustus and the seemingly-infatuated

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[85] Sara Munson Deats, *Sex, Gender, and Desire in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1997) 177, 199. See Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*, in *The Complete Works* ,Vol. 2, ed. Bowers, 2.5.15.

[86] John Ogle, *The Lamentation of Troy for the Death of Hector*, ed. Elkin Calhoun Wilson (Chicago: Institute of Elizabethan Studies, 1959) p.65. For Wilson's discussion of the poem's authorship, see xviii-xxii.

[87] Bush, *Mythology*, 309. He also suggests Seneca's *Troades* and the *Iliad*, Books 22-24, for "the initial idea" (309).

[88] See Tatlock, "The Siege of Troy", 742 for a list of French and Latin translations of the *Iliad* that appeared between 1474 and 1582.

scholars who comment on her loveliness. However just as Helen becomes silently threatening when Gascoigne, Turberville and others use her as an example of an "ideal" lover, here her beauty seems to have the alarming power to utterly distort Faustus' already corrupted world view, and lead him further astray. By contrast, the beauty of Ogle's Helen seems less supernatural, more grounded in the recognisable tropes of romance: for example, her tear-stained cheeks are compared to "the Rose and Lilly fields" (770).[89] Most significantly, however, Ogle returns to an account of her beauty again and again in an attempt to prove her virtue and innocence, while the Marlovian Helen's beauty implies something very different.

Ogle's poem takes as its subject the mourning that follows Hector's death, recounted in the *Iliad* but also in Benoît, Guido and their medieval redactors. Ogle makes some significant alterations, however. Most interestingly, Paris (who dies before his brother in the *Iliad*) joins the mourners, a change that allows Ogle to describe Helen's abduction through him. Here again, the influence of medieval Troy-narratives is apparent: Paris points to Hesione's abduction, and argues that he abducted Helen through necessity, rather than for selfish reasons. Later, Helen is to protest that Venus compelled her to go with Paris, and that Juno spread the rumour that she was to blame for the fall of Troy. Ogle extends her Iliadic role considerably, giving Helen a voice (which Marlowe does not), but allowing her to speak only in a conventionally acceptable way for a woman.[90] Thus, as in the *Iliad*, she finds herself unable to stand up to Paris, but here, significantly, appears even more helpless, and yet at the same time, and ironically, more of a pernicious influence on the male community. Loving Paris still, she attempts to keep him out of the war, trying to dissuade him from avenging his brother and even going so far as to beg him to send Deiphobus and "The sweet yong Troilus" (913) in his stead. Ogle clearly has the *Heroides* in mind here, in which a flirtatious Helen knowingly tells Paris to send Hector to fight instead of him, as well as medieval and later Elizabethan works that underscore the numbers of men who died for her. Here then, the threat that Helen continues to pose to men

[89] Ogle, *The Lamentation of Troy,* ed. Wilson.
[90] Though Wilson sees in Helen's speeches "something of Homer's sense of the lofty mystery of human fate" (xvii).

is underlined (Hector is dead because of his willingness to fight for Paris' cause, and Ogle's knowledge of *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Aeneid* presumably informs his use of Troilus and Deiphobus here). At the same time, though, Helen is powerless: unlike her counterpart in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, she cannot keep Paris back from battle, and can only continue to mourn in dramatic fashion: "Renting hir garments, throwing forth hir brests: / She profered violence to hir tender flesh" (812-3).

Helen's physicality, evident in her beauty and violent and emotional reactions to grief, is clearly central to her characterisation here. However, though her reactions are far more violent and vocal than those of her classical and medieval predecessors, Helen lacks power, even over her own reputation. She attempts to refute the charges that have been brought against her, and in doing so acknowledges the truth of the Iliadic Helen's fear that history will render her notorious. She exclaims "if the Gods decreed it thus before, / It was their wils, and *Helen* is no whore" (1055-6). It is interesting that, unlike the penitent Helen of Whetstone or of the anonymous "Reward of Whoredom", Ogle's Helen is allowed to grieve, but also maintain her innocence, rather than being written as admitting her guilt and damning her own weakness. Götz Schmitz notes that in Ogle's effort, and in the later renderings of Thomas Heywood (*Oenone to Paris*) and John Trussell, "One of the prerequisites for a softer treatment of heroines like the Trojan women is a slackening of their ties with the heroic actions of which they cannot be but lookers-on or victims".[91] Helen's grief serves to contain her, comfortingly, to a prescribed gender role, and she is not held to be guilty (since guilt implies an agency) but rather is represented as another helpless victim of the gods, fate and male action and reaction. Wilson finds that in its subject matter, style and interests, the poem "looks around and backwards, never forward" (xvii) – and something similar may be said of its characterisation of Helen.

Helen's power is also neglible in Richard Barnfield's bizarre attempt at a moralising reflection on Helen's story (and one that, like Robinson's *Rewarde of Wickednesse*, appears to address itself specifically to women). "Hellens Rape. Or a Light Lanthorne for Light Ladies" (1594) gives a brief

[91] Götz Schmitz, *The Fall of Women in Early English Narrative Verse* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 71.

account of Helen's degeneration, "From a wise woman to a witles wanton abandoned" (5).[92] However, despite what his title would suggest, Barnfield has little interest in providing instruction or warning for women, and thus does not make Helen particularly blameworthy. He notes

> Lovely a Lasse, so loved a Lasse, and (alas) such a loving
> Lasse, for a while (but a while) was none such a sweet bonny Love-Lasse
> As *Helen, Maenelaus* loving, lov'd, lovlie a love-lasse,
> Till spightfull Fortune from a love-lasse made her a love-lesse
> Wife. (1-5)

Barnfield's insistent alliteration and bizarre metrical decisions make the text a trial, and Bullen goes so far as to suggest that he may be deliberately sending up his chosen metre.[93] Certainly, Barnfield does not seem interested either in composing a serious caution to women, or a faithful rerendering of his classical reading. His mythology can be bizarre (he explains that Paris forges a letter from Jupiter that authorises him to go and seize Helen) and the poem ends abruptly after an account of their first night together that could (but probably does not) owe something to the more censorious accounts of Guido and Joseph of Exeter, which also detail this episode. Barnfield tells his readers

> Well to their worke they goe, and both they jumble in one Bed:
> Worke so well they like, that they still like to be working:
> For *Aurora* mounts before he leaves to be mounting:
> And *Astraea* fades before she faints to be falling:
> (Helen a light Huswife, now a lightsome starre in Olympus). (71-5)

Klawitter suggests that the reference to Olympus "should be interpreted as a metaphor for the good times Helen and Paris are enjoying in Troy" (n.p.225). However, it is probably also intended to reference Helen's divine status, mentioned by Fulgentius, the Vatican Mythographers, Boccaccio and others. Here, the deliberate juxtaposition of Helen's adulterous sexuality and her final ascent to the heavens does seem to suggest that Barnfield's use of her is not

[92] Richard Barnfield, *The Complete Poems*, ed. George Klawitter (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna UP, 1990).
[93] Bullen, ed., *Some Longer Elizabethan Poems*, xv.

entirely serious: rather, his use of classical mythology seems self-consciously tongue-in-cheek, intended to raise a smile as well as granting him license to describe a salacious episode of famous adultery. These works of Barnfield, Marlowe, Ogle and Spenser demonstrate some remarkably diverse treatments of Helen, which invoke her different classical incarnations (Virgilian, Ovidian, perhaps Euripidean) as well as their late antique and medieval predecessors (Dares, Lydgate, Chaucer) in a very short historical period. Helen is thus very obviously an iconic figure in Elizabethan literature, as her frequent appearances in collections of prose and poetry also suggest, and yet she is an icon whose representation may be manipulated, who continually places demands on her readers, and on their classical knowledge. More than this, all four authors engage to one extent or another with Helen's power, be it supernatural, sexual or merely vocal power. While Ogle absolves her from blame by limiting her power, and Marlowe imagines her as a threat that is constructed by Faustus' own desire for power, Spenser and Barnfield both imagine Helen (or the Helen-figure) celebrating a potent sexual attractiveness, and in the case of Spenser's Hellenore, using this to escape, to a certain extent, from the strictures of her classical incarnations, which see her assigned to either Paris or Menelaus.

A similarly knowing use of Helen, and engagement with earlier Helens, may be discerned in Shakespeare's early treatments of her. Maguire sees echoes of Helen in Shakespeare's Helenas, the heroines of *All's Well That Ends Wells* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*[94] In the latter play, Shakespeare's self-conscious and comic use of the characters of classical mythology (Pyramus and Thisbe, Hippolita and Theseus) certainly seems to suggest that he expects his audience to discern in Helena at least echoes of Helen. However, if Helena is intended as a reflection of Helen, Shakespeare uses her, and her story, ironically.[95] Maguire points out that while Helen is desired and pursued by men, both Shakespeare's Helenas, in this play and *All's Well*, frantically pursue their intended lovers. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,

[94] She terms the latter "Shakespeare's most classically complex Helen play" (78).
[95] See Douglas H. Parker, " 'Limander' and 'Helen' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" *SQ* 33.1 (1982) 99-101, 100. He suggests that when Bottom/Pyramus and Quince/Thisby swear faithfulness by "Limander" and "Helen", Shakespeare may be intending his audience to recall Helen, and Lysander and Helena, as well as Leander and Hero.

finally, she notes that "Puck's mistake with the magic love juice restores Helen to her rightful mythic position: adored, worshipped as a goddess, and fought over by two men" (83). In her discussion of *All's Well*, meanwhile, Maguire acknowledges the notoriety of the classical Helen, but argues that in his use of her, Shakespeare attempts to rewrite her myth, suggesting that

> [...] when your name is Helen (in the sixteenth century at least) there is only one part you can play. It is this associative onomastic straitjacket from which Shakespeare tries to liberate his Helens. (119)

While this attempt to see something radically different in Shakespeare's use of Helen, to exonerate him from the charge of using her in a way that is somehow "lazy", too close to that of his less admired Elizabethan predecessors, becomes particularly problematic when Maguire attempts it in relation to *Troilus and Cressida*, it is also on shaky ground with these two plays. Shakespeare certainly plays with his audience's perception of the classical Helen, but I would argue that, like his predecessors (Gascoigne, Painter, Pettie) he is using Helen with an ironic humour that does not, in fact, reflect a desire to redeem her, or her name. Shakespeare's conventional, critical attitude to Helen (of Troy) is arguably contained in Lavatch's song in 1.3 of *All's Well*. Picking up on the Countess' reference to Helen, he sings

> 'Was this fair face the cause', quoth she,
> 'Why the Grecians sackèd Troy?
> Fond done, done fond. Was this King Priam's joy?'
> With that she sighèd as she stood,
> With that she sighèd as she stood,
> And gave this sentence then:
> 'Among nine bad if one be good,
> Among nine bad if one be good,
> There's yet one good in ten'. (1.3.62-70)[96]

[96] William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: Norton, 1997). Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Shakespeare's works are from this edition.

In her notes to the play, Katharine Eisaman Maus points out that "she" is "probably Hecuba" (n.9 p. 2191). Lavatch makes clear that his reference to "one good in ten" refers to women. Here then, Lavatch corrupts the famous maxim in defence of women, that for every bad woman there were a hundred good.[97] Hecuba seems to imply that Helen (whose beauty, typically, is weighed against the destruction it causes) corrupts other women, and her optimistic conclusion "There's yet one good in ten" becomes a misogynist attack delivered in a woman's voice, a clear suggestion that a good woman is now the exception rather than the rule.

Meanwhile in the play itself, Helena does not engender war, but Shakespeare makes no effort to exonerate her from other charges levelled against the classical Helen, those of sexual aggression and deception (seen as she deceives Bertram in order to conceive). Equally, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Helena is a sympathetic character (though it is noticeable that, like Helen, she is sympathetic only when she occupies a weakened position in relation to the play's male characters). Though her story ends happily and she is united with Demetrius, he has fallen in love with her again as a result of Puck's love potion, and the implication seems to be that, if Helena is Helen, she retains some of her namesake's threatening qualities, most notably the power to inspire desire that not only engenders male conflict, but that seems out of her own control, and beyond the control of her suitors. Accordingly, it seems that while Shakespeare may experiment with the effects of naming a woman Helen, his aim is not to utterly redeem either the name (if it was, he would have chosen less complex female wooers) or the classical character. Shakespeare's most famous characterisation of Helen is probably Lucrece's reference to her as "the strumpet that began this stir" (1471) in *The Rape of Lucrece*, and a few years later his Orlando can praise Rosalind, in *As You Like It*, for possessing "Helen's cheek, but not her heart" (3.2.133). Both references, to Helen as a reckless wanton, and a beautiful woman far exceeded by the speaker's lover, are utterly conventional, and in both cases she compares unfavourably to Shakespeare's heroine, specifically because of her lack of virtue. (Sonnet 53, meanwhile, praises a lover whose beauty exceeds even

[97] See Alcuin Blamires, *The Case For Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 36.

Helen's, a usage that would seem utterly familiar to the Tudor or Elizabethan reader). Similar pronouncements are to be found in the works of many of Shakespeare's sixteenth-century predecessors, and the nature of classical references on stage (rather than in works written to be read) is often that they are conventional, straightforward rhetorical illustrations that need not be puzzled over.[98] Occasionally, in his earlier works, he does play with the sixteenth century's image of Helen as a surpassing classical beauty: in *3 Henry VI*, Edward Duke of York attacks Queen Margaret, telling her "Helen of Greece was fairer far than thou, [...] / And ne'er was Agamemnon's brother wronged / By that false woman, as this king by thee" (2.2.146-9). Here, unlike her sixteenth-century predecessors, who are more fair than Helen and less wicked, Margaret is less fair, and even more threatening to men. Generally, though, Shakespeare's early uses of Helen are predictable, but like those of Gascoigne, Spenser and others before him, are effective, suggesting the essential unpredictability of love, the foolishness of men, and the problematic nature of women and their desires, in relation to the masculine establishment. These are all themes that will resurface in his seventeenth-century consideration of Helen, in *Troilus and Cressida*, a text whose presentation of Helen is further complicated by its relationship to the English *Iliad* of George Chapman. In *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare has no interest in redeeming Helen, and utterly rejects the Iliadic models offered by Homer and Chapman, and the regretful Helens of Ogle and "The Reward of Whoredom".

This sixteenth-century willingness to experiment with classical mythology, and with Helen's story, is reflected in two other extended treatments of her story from the mid-1590s, Thomas Heywood's *Oenone and Paris* (1594) and John Trussell's *The First Rape of Faire Hellen* (1595). As their titles make clear, these accounts engage with aspects of Helen's story less frequently addressed by classical, medieval and Renaissance authors: Paris' abandonment of Oenone, and Theseus' kidnap of the young Helen. Heywood's familiarity with Ovid is obvious, here and elsewhere (in the *Iron Age* One and Two and the *Brazen Age*, his presentations of Helen and Medea owe much to

[98] Maguire draws attention to Agnes Latham's assertion, in the Arden edition of *As You Like It*, that Shakespeare's audience would not have understood the significance of Orlando's reference to Helen, before rightly dismissing this as an "anachronistically twentieth-century sensibility" (p. 197 n. 5).

the *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses,* and he renders the Ovidian epistles of Paris and Helen into English in his seventeenth-century history *Troia Britannica*). Another source for his epyllion may be the angry confrontation between Oenone and Paris included in Quintus of Smyrna's *Fall of Troy*, in which Oenone condemns him to death by refusing to cure his wounds. Heywood's Oenone certainly attacks Helen more savagely than she does in the *Heroides*: Helen is a "forreine hecfar" (12),[99] (an insult thrown by Cassandra in the *Heroides* and in Dictys and Dares, and passed into the Middle Ages by Guido) but also "That guile-full Curtisan" (11), "that painted Idoll" (13). In Oenone's address, Heywood incorporates warnings and motifs from the other Ovidian epistles, Paris to Helen and Helen to Paris, including Hecuba's dream of the burning brand, and Paris' judgement of the goddesses, which he recounts at length. As in Peele's *Arraignement of Paris*, however, the Trojan cannot be swayed from his desire for Helen. He defends her, specifically refuting the charge of immorality:

> She is no Bawde, no base and filthie woman,
> But one whome heaven and earth have both admired:
> She is not whoorish, toyish, foolish, common,
> But whom heavens king, & loves queene have conspired
> To grace mee with: yea, and so much the rather,
> For Venus is her Planet, Jove her father. (107)

Oenone's dire pronouncements, and Paris' confident rebuttals (particularly his boast that Helen is ruled by Venus) build on Ovid's text in their ironising of Paris' unwise desire for this new woman. Meanwhile, the exclusion of Helen from the debate means she cannot defend or redeem herself (despite Paris' attempts), and becomes unflatteringly sexualised. Thus, *Oenone and Paris* becomes another example of a male author's manipulation of his classical sources to make sly sport of a hapless male speaker, too willing to believe the best of an unreliable woman.

These stereotypes, of naïve man easily swayed by desire, and dissembling woman, recur in John Trussell's *The First Rape of Faire Hellen.*

[99] Thomas Heywood, *Oenone and Paris*, in Donno, ed., *Elizabethan Minor Epics*. No line numbers given – numbers in brackets refer to verse numbers in Donno's edition.

However, though she is absent from *Oenone and Paris*, and silenced in other accounts (either because the author wishes to reduce her power, or because she is present only as an exemplar of beauty or desire), here Helen's voice dominates the poem, an authorial decision that may seem ironic given how utterly Helen is sidelined in earlier accounts of her first abduction. M. A. Shaaber gives Hallett Darius Smith's opinion that Trussell wrote "using the material of Colluthus" (qtd. 409),[100] but himself rejects the suggestion that Colluthus was Trussell's source, noting that the abduction is referenced not only by Ovid and Plutarch, but by Pausanias, Diodorus, Apollodorus, as well as by medieval and sixteenth-century reference works such as Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*, Natalis Comes' *Mythologiae* and Calepino's dictionary.[101] Nevertheless, Shaaber is happy to credit Trussell with some innovation, pointing out that

> Theseus' courtship, the violation by stealth and force, the flight of Theseus, Helen's despair, her furtive return to her father's house, the accidental betrayal of her secret, the shrewd counsels of the nurse and her mother, and the role of the nurse itself are all peculiar to this poem. (420)

However, as Shaaber points out "The greatest novelty of the poem is its happy ending: instead of suffering eternally for her lapse Helen conceals it and is triumphantly married to Menelaus" (414). This happy ending is utterly destabilising for the male community, implying that Menelaus never enjoyed any real security or happiness with Helen, and was always the victim of a deceit cooked up by her and her mother and nurses. This said, any poem that deals with Theseus' abduction of Helen (and makes specifically clear, as most do not, that he rapes her) cannot be said to represent a powerful Helen. After the rape, Helen reflects on the distance that the attack has created between her appearance and reality: she returns to her father's court "A Virgin but in show and none in deed" (322). Here, Trussell takes a common charge laid against Helen, that the purity of her beauty is an unreliable indicator of her character,

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[100] M. A. Shaaber, ed., "*The First Rape of Faire Hellen* by John Trussell", *SQ* 8.4 (1957): 407-48, 409. Shaaber's article reprints Trussell's text in full. See also Hallett Darius Smith, *Elizabethan Poetry: A Study in Conventions, Meaning, and Expression* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1952) 125.

[101] Shaaber, ed., "*The First Rape*", 418-9.

and turns it to demonstrating how Helen is blameless, because powerless.[102] She complains to her parents: "shame had seald my lips with soules disgrace, / so that I could not use the gift of nature" (465-6). Helen is only able to articulate her experience to herself, and so it is that the story is overheard by the two nurses. In her discussion of Turberville's *Heroides*, Greenhut points to "the Tudors' appreciation of a connection between sexuality and speech, or loss of chastity and feminine speech" (40), and here, Helen is allowed to remain silent, and thus sympathetic, in acknowledgement that she was forced into sexual transgression by Theseus.

Shaaber suggests the appeal that this episode might have held for Trussell:

> It is as if, casting about for a wronged heroine not already treated in a complaint poem, Trussell happily lighted on the first rape of Helen, and once he had done so, the requirements of the complaint type dictated his manipulation of his meager materials. (420)

Helen certainly fulfils the role expected of her in the poem, repeatedly stressing her own shame and helplessness, and briefly, at the poem's opening and closing, referring to the torments she now suffers in the afterlife (torments described more graphically in Robinson's *Rewarde of Wickednesse*). As she was in Ogle's piece, however, Helen is problematic as a tragic or sympathetic subject. As authors as early as Euripides and Homer had discovered, Helen can only be sympathetic if she is utterly impotent. However, Trussell's Helen is unusual (and alarming) in that with the help of a community of women, she can control her reputation, and specifically male beliefs about her virtue. This control is only temporary, however, and approaching inexorably is the day when Helen will not be able to escape censure. The nurse reassures her that she has not been shamed by Theseus' actions:

> Hadst thou consented to his villanie,
> Or willinglie subjected to his will:
> Thou mightest then have feard thy obloquie,

[102] In *Heroides 16*.289-90, Paris tells Helen that for women, beauty and virtue are mutually exclusive, and that she cannot hope to enjoy both.

But since by force he did performe thy ill:
Blamelesse thou art although thou blotted be. (565-9)

Though in many ways less alarming than more familiar Helens, because she does not choose premarital sex with Theseus, at other points Trussell's Helen is more troubling, due to her collusion with other women and her willingness to deceive Menelaus (and her father) in order to achieve an honourable marriage. Catty suggests "This emphasis on concealment [...] signals an anxiety about the visibility or readability of rape as a crime" (69), but in fact what is alarming for Trussell's male readers is not the rape, but rather the idea that a woman may conceal the loss of her virginity from her husband. This threat is managed even as it is represented, however, firstly by Trussell's repeated references to Helen's guilt and shame, his extended representation of her helplessness, and secondly by his brief but pointed references to Helen's second liaison, one that once more undermines Menelaus and Tyndareus, but is at least made public, earning her the notoriety the nurse references, and that Elizabethan male writers clearly saw as her due.

Brief references to Helen can also be discerned in the closing years of the sixteenth century: in Richard Lynche's *The Love of Dom Diego & Gynevra* (1596), the lovers' one night apart seems longer than the "tedious ten yeres siedge for Spartaes Queen" (69).[103] In Robert Parry's *Sinetes Passions Uppon his Fortunes* (1597), Helen is used predictably: in Sonnet 16 Helen is less fair than the lady the poet takes as his subject, in "The Lamentation of a Malcontent", meanwhile, the speaker attempts to divorce Helen's beauty from her troubling reputation, exclaiming "Paris a sheaphard I a homely swayne, / He wanton, I chast Helen would possesse".[104] Maguire points to the rise in discussion and legislation concerning the matter of rape in the 1590s, and suggests that the period's interest in the issue of consent, the shift from seeing rape as an offence against men to one against women, meant that "It was a highly appropriate time to re-examine the myth of Helen" (118). Though these re-examinations were particularly common in the 1590s, however, it does not

[103] Richard Lynche, *The Love of Dom Diego & Gynevra*, in Paul W. Miller, ed., *Seven Minor Epics of the English Renaissance, 1596-1624. Facsimile Reprints With An Introduction* (Gainsville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1967).
[104] No signature. Robert Parry, *Sinetes Passions uppon his Fortunes* (London: T[homas] P[urfoot] for William Holme, 1597).

follow that they aimed at a newly sympathetic rendering of Helen's story and her suffering. Though the popularity of the complaint genre meant that writers such as Ogle and Trussell did present Helen in passive and regretful ways that might be attractive to their male readers, they did so by experimenting with a character and a story that retained predominantly negative connotations into the seventeenth century, both in translations and in more original works.

Translating Helen in the Seventeenth Century

The abiding medieval and Renaissance interest in the Ovidian Helen is evidenced not only by the success of Turberville's *Heroides*, but by the fact that, despite their success, so many seventeenth-century translators also rendered the letters into English. *Davison's Poetical Rhapsody* (1602) records in its list of contents a rendering of Helen's Ovidian epistle to Paris by A.W., though the poem does not survive.[105] The seventeenth-century popularity of the *Heroides* was attested to by close English translations by Wye Saltonstall (1636, and reprinted frequently throughout the seventeenth century) and by John Sherburne (1639).[106] An edition of Shakespeare's poems published in 1640 contains several works composed by others but credited erroneously to Shakespeare, including Thomas Heywood's translations of Paris and Helen's Ovidian epistles.[107] Seventeenth-century playwrights such as Heywood and James Shirley also make extended use of Ovid's Helen, while in Thomas Adams' *The Blacke Devil, or the Apostate*, the author uses the Ovidian Helen's complaint about her fading beauty (in *Metamorphoses* 15), which had been adapted by Whetstone and Robinson as a caution to women, as an example of the inevitability of worldly decay.[108] The continued interest in Virgilian epic was also reflected, by John Harington's translation of Book Six of the *Aeneid*,

[105] Francis Davison, comp, *Davison's Poetical Rhapsody*, ed. A. H. Bullen, 2 vols (1890-1891), 1.ixxi.

[106] Both noted by Garth Tissol in Stuart Gillespie and David Hopkins, eds, *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, Vol. 3, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) 205. See also John Sherburne, *Ovids heroical epistles* (London: E[dward] G[riffin] for William Cooke, 1639). W. S. (Wye Saltonstall), *Ovids Heroical Epistles Englished* (London: W. Gilbertson, 1663).

[107] William Shakespeare, *Poems: written by Wil. Shake-speare. Gent* (London: Tho. Cotes for John Benson, 1640). See David Baker, "Cavalier Shakespeare: The 1640 *Poems* of John Benson", *Studies in Philology* 95.2 (1998): 152-173, 158.

[108] Thomas Adams, *The Blacke Devil or the Apostate* (London: William Jaggard, 1615).

which appeared in 1604 and was accompanied by extensive notes,[109] and by translations of the complete epic by John Vicars (1632) and of Book Two by Thomas Wrothe (1620). However, this does not always extend to an interest in Helen, in her crimes or in the anger she inspires in Aeneas. Like Surrey, Wrothe includes but does not translate the emotive phrase *communis Erinnys*, and *The Destruction of Troy*, John Denham's 1636 verse redaction of Book Two of Virgil's epic, finishes before Aeneas' unheroic desire to punish Helen is recounted.[110]

In 1632, Thomas Goffe rewrote Euripides' *Orestes*, excising Helen as a character but referencing her in a way that seems to recall *Hamlet*, and possibly the Ovidian Helen's complaint in *Metamorphoses* Book 15, as well as Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*. Pylades rebukes the Greek cuckold, pointing both to the transience of Helen's beauty, and the innumerable men who have died for her:

> Looke here thou King of Greece, fond *Menelaus*,
> Thou which didst bring so many goodly shapes,
>
> *Tak[e]s up the scull.*
>
> Into such things as these, and all for *Helen*,
> Which when the worms bred of her dainty flesh,
> Shall have knaw'd off her tender rubie lips,
> And left her gumlesse, looke upon her then;
> And thou wouldst even disgorge thy selfe to see,
> Such putride vermin to lye kissing her. ($E2^r$)[111]

Though Euripides' *Helen* was not translated into English in the period, his tragedies were all circulating in Latin or Greek by this time, and Maguire lists William Vaughan's *The Golden Grove Moralized* (1600) and Thomas Gataker's *The Joy of the Just* (1619) and *The Spiritual Watch* (1623) as

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[109] John Harington, trans., *The Sixth Book of Virgil's 'Aeneid', Translated and Commented on By Sir John Harington (1604)*, ed. Simon Cauchi (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991).
[110] Thomas Wrothe, *The Destruction of Troy, or The Acts of Aeneas* (London: T[homas] D[awson] for Nicholas Bourne, 1620). John Denham, *The Destruction of Troy, an Essay upon the Second Book of Virgils 'Aeneis'* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1656).
[111] Thomas Goffe, *The Tragedy of Orestes* (London : Printed by J[ohn] B[eale] for Richard Meighen, 1633).

English texts which reference the play.[112] Before his *Trojan Women*, Edward Sherburne also produced an English rendering of Colluthus' *Rape of Helen* in 1651, though this was preceded by the sixteenth-century versions of Thomas Watson (1586) and, possibly, of Christopher Marlowe. However, the most important example of seventeenth-century English translation of Greek was George Chapman's hugely influential translation of the *Iliad*, published in part in 1598 and completed in 1611.

Homer's Helen in the Seventeenth Century: Chapman's *Iliad* and Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*

Homer's epic had been popular among European printers since its first edition in 1488, and with translators throughout the sixteenth century. Meanwhile, Chapman's own interest in Helen (and the classics) had been hinted at in *Ovid's Banquet of Sence* (1595) and in his continuation of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* (1598). The former poem sees Ovid, its speaker, using the fall of Troy, and Helen, as examples of Beauty's destructive power, which he is determined to resist. The latter, meanwhile, sees Leander holding Hero up as an example of all-surpassing beauty by comparing her, predictably, to Helen: he claims he has visited Sparta and Lacedemon, but "A woman yet, so wise, and delicate / I never saw" (115-6).[113] However, Chapman's translation of the *Iliad* was a far more ambitious project. Robert S. Miola notes that he encountered Homer's epic "through the sometimes unfortunate intermediaries of Spondanus' bilingual edition, Divus' Latin translation, Stephanus' redactions, and Scapula's Latin translation".[114] As Lydgate and the other medieval authors and translators who worked from Benoît and Guido had done, Chapman makes alterations that do not corrupt the particulars of his source text, but nevertheless reflect the concerns of the age in which he wrote. However, despite his adherence to a free method of translation,[115] and despite Elizabethan and Jacobean alarm at the sexual power Helen seems to wield,

[112] Maguire, *Shakespeare's Names*, 101.
[113] George Chapman, *The Divine Poem of Musaeus: Hero and Leander*, in Donno, ed., *Elizabethan Minor Epics*.
[114] Robert S. Miola, "Reading the Classics", in David Scott Kastan, ed., *A Companion to Shakespeare* (Oxford : Blackwell, 1999): 172-85, 175 .
[115] See Spingarn's observation at pp. 163-4 above.

Chapman's text, like Homer's, presents Helen far more sympathetically than many classical, medieval and Renaissance authors. At the same time, like Homer's, the text neutralises her threat, to some extent, by presenting her feelings to the reader (if not to the men in the poem) and making these feelings genuinely heart-felt, as adapters like Dictys and Dares do not. Accordingly, Chapman presents Helen more sympathetically than many other authors, and perhaps more sympathetically even than Homer. Thus as she does in the *Iliad*, in Book Three Helen angrily rejects Aphrodite's instruction to receive Paris. However, Chapman makes his own addition to the Homeric speech, having Helen reiterate her Iliadic self-loathing, and also voice her resistance to the traditional image of her as sexual object. She tells Aphrodite: "He leaves a woman's love so sham'd, and showes so base a mind, / To feele nor my shame nor his owne. Griefes of a greater kind / Wound me than such as can admit such kind delights so soone'" (3.435-37).[116] At the same time, Chapman builds on Homer's suggestion that Helen was "frightened" by the goddess (*Il.*3.418): Chapman's Helen "durst not choose / But sit" (3.455-6) when Aphrodite compels her to, and seems to lack even the most basic control over her situation.

Chapman's determination to render Helen more sympathetic is also evidenced by his translation of the *Odyssey*: here, one of his most interesting additions is his insistence that the drugs (here "medcines" – 4.301) that Helen administers to the Greeks are "onely borne in grace, / Of what was good" (4.301-2).[117] Thus, he neutralises the problematic ambiguity of this scene in Homer, in which Helen's drugs are deliberately left unexplained. In both cases, Chapman echoes those of his classical and medieval predecessors who were interested in portraying Helen sympathetically. However, as is often the case with Medea, he may only do so by underscoring her powerlessness, even when this seems to conflict with the Homeric version of events. In his *Preface to the Reader*, published in 1611 with his completed translation of the *Iliad*, Chapman responds indignantly to criticism of his translation:

[116] George Chapman, *Chapman's Homer,* Vol. 1, ed. Allardyce Nicoll, with a new preface by Gary Wills, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998-2000).
[117] Chapman, *Chapman's Homer,* Vol. 2, ed. Nicoll, with a new preface by Gary Wills.

> [...] how pedanticall and absurd an affectation it is in the interpretation of any Author (much more of Homer) to turn him word for word, when (according to Horace and other best lawgivers to translators) it is the part of every knowing and judiciall interpreter not to follow the number and order of words but the materiall things themselves. (p.17)[118]

Miola points to what he terms two "contradictory impulses" in Renaissance translation, which seem to inform this translation, and many others: "the desire to understand classical authors historically and scientifically on their own terms and in their own contexts and the desire to appropriate them for the rhetorical, civic and moral improvement of the reader".[119] Here Chapman seeks to defend a composition which, although frequently a very close rendering of the Greek text into English, attempts at the same time to add something to Homer's poem, engaging with contemporary concerns in an attempt to clarify and refine Homer's characterisation of Helen. Chapman's comments may, in fact, be applied with equal validity (though with an emphasis more thematic than linguistic) to Shakespeare's interpretation of the *Iliad* (and particularly perhaps Chapman's *Iliad*) in *Troilus and Cressida*. Like Chapman, he follows "the materiall things themselves" in terms of plot. However, what Chapman renders linguistically new, Shakespeare alters radically in terms of tone, emphasis, and often, through addition or elision, event, and this trend can certainly be seen in his presentation of Helen.

Baldwin sees the Greek text itself as having had little impact on *Troilus and Cressida*, despite its use in schools, arguing: "If Shakspere had any contact with Homer in grammar school or elsewhere, that contact was but of the slightest importance" (2.661). The extent of the influence Chapman's translation had over Shakespeare's 1601 play is similarly uncertain, because he had only published his *Seaven Bookes of the Iliades*, comprising Books 1-2 and 7-11, by the time Shakespeare produced *Troilus and Cressida*. Most notably Books Three and Six, the most significant books in the poem as far as Helen is concerned, were not published by Chapman until 1611, though Hall had

[118] In Chapman, *Chapman's Homer*, Vol. 1, ed. Nicoll.
[119] Miola, "Reading the Classics", 175.

published his renderings in 1581.[120] Accordingly, the extent to which Shakespeare knew the full details of the Homeric story remains debated – writing in the first decades of the twentieth century, Baldwin goes so far as to claim that "At present, there is no conclusive evidence that Shakspere knew the *Iliad* directly in any form before the edition of Chapman's translation in 1610" (2.660). However, in his edition of *Troilus and Cressida* Anthony B. Dawson observes:

> There are [...] incidental references scattered throughout the play to events from sections of the *Iliad* not published by Chapman till after the play was written [...] examples include Menelaus' bout with Paris (1.1.103-105), or Ajax's 'coping' of Hector (1.2.29-31) [...] Hence, while relying primarily on Chapman for the Homeric elements in his story, Shakespeare casts his net more widely.[121]

Meanwhile Priscilla Martin suggests that "During the sixteenth century there were several translations into French, Latin and English, any of which Shakespeare might have seen. [...] It is probable that Shakespeare read the *Seaven Bookes* and also knew more of the *Iliad* from one of the earlier translations".[122] What is certain is that Shakespeare knew the particulars of the Homeric story somehow, whether from medieval versions of the story, from earlier Renaissance renderings, from Dares, from Virgil or from Ovid,[123] and that he alters them with regard to Helen to an intriguing extent.

Helen is a constant presence in the play, even though she only appears briefly. In the *Iliad,* the other characters, whose lives are so bound up with the

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[120] For a scathing dismissal of Hall's efforts to translate from the French of Hugues Salel, see C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954) 257-8. He likens Hall's account of Helen preparing herself to see Paris (*Il.*3.141) to "a splash of mud on our page".

[121] William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Anthony B. Dawson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 257.

[122] Priscilla Martin, *Shakespeare: 'Troilus and Cressida', A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1976) 16-17.

[123] In his introduction to *The Works of Shakespear,* published in 1725, Alexander Pope claims of Shakespeare "He appears also to have been conversant in *Plautus*, from whom he has taken the plot of one of his plays: he follows the *Greek* authors and particularly *Dares Phrygius*, in another: (altho' I will not pretend to say in what language he read them". Quoted in Baldwin, *Shakspere's Small Latine*, 1.58. This latter play can only really be *Troilus and Cressida*. As I have attempted to show, Shakespeare's brief, conservative references to Helen in his earlier works could have been inspired by any number of classical or medieval sources, but *Troilus and Cressida* does appear to betray a close familiarity with the Homeric story, if not with the actual Homeric text. Caxton's *Recuyell* and *Metamorphoses* are both possible sources, though Gaselee expresses doubt that the latter was ever printed (xxii).

consequences of her past behaviour, speak of her very little. In contrast in *Troilus and Cressida* she is a constant point of reference for Greek and characters in the play, most notably Pandarus, Cressida and Thersites, and the way she is spoken of make it very clear how different her role is to be here. Typically, Helen is "the mortal Venus, the heart-blood of beauty, love's visible soul" (3.1.30-1), but the Greek queen's wanton nature is stressed, and the sense of disgust at her apparently unbridled sexuality grows as the play progresses, so that Thersites can say that Ajax "Has not so much wit [...] As will stop the eye of Helen's needle, for whom he comes to fight" (2.1.75-78), and even Cressida remarks pointedly to herself

> [...] Women are angels, wooing;
> Things won are done. Joy's soul lies in the doing.
> That she beloved knows naught that knows not this:
> Men price the thing ungained more than it is. (1.2.264-7)

Here Shakespeare's attempts to suggest conflict, or at least contrast, between the two women clarify, in turn, the reason for his unflattering characterisation of Helen. Helen may be vilified by many different characters in the play for her sexuality and the undeserved power connected to it, but it is the men of the play who give her this power. Moreover, despite her determination to resist the model Helen provides, it is Cressida who is fated to make her mistakes again and to repeat her story later in the play. Carol Chillington Rutter notes that "It is as though Helen constitutes the master narrative of women's history, the bedrock layer, that keeps surfacing through the palimpsest of individual women's histories",[124] and here it seems Shakespeare is using her story to reflect on other women, as Chaucer did in *Troilus and Criseyde*, and as authors including Whetstone, Robinson and Proctor did in their didactic treatments.

As Cressida's jibes would suggest, Shakespeare is interested in the dramatic potential of situations hinted at in the *Iliad*, or in the medieval accounts that drew on Dictys and Dares, and one such situation is the tension between the Trojans and Helen, whose new marriage has caused the war.

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[124] Carol Chillington Rutter, "Designs on Shakespeare: Sleeves, Gloves and Helen's Placket" in Grace Ioppolo, ed. *Shakespeare Performed: Essays in Honour of R. A. Foakes* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2000): 216-39, 231.

Homer retains the sympathy of Helen's character by showing her as regretting her decision and actively disliking her husband (though he does not shy away from graphically portraying the consequences of her earlier acquiescence). Meanwhile medieval accounts tend to skip over Paris and Helen's feelings for one another, and their life in Troy, after depicting their powerful mutual attraction. Shakespeare has no interest in making Helen sympathetic, and appreciates the dramatic potential of Helen as a character in a way that many of his medieval predecessors do not. Accordingly, she and Paris have a close and clearly strongly sexual bond - when Pandarus tells her "my niece is horrible in love with a thing you have, sweet Queen" (3.1.90-1), Helen responds "She shall have it, my lord – if it be not my lord Paris" (3.1.92). In this, the only scene in the play in which she actually appears, Helen is strongly sexualised, and a consummate flirt: indeed, the fascination she excites in the men of the play may be a response to Elizabeth's role at court. Speaking of the final years of the Queen's reign, Richard Hillman observes:

> The physical ageing of the queen began to conflict grotesquely with the elaborate fictions of courtly love, centred on Elizabeth as an object of amorous worship, by which she had mediated political power and maintained authority over her courtiers.[125]

Here, then, Shakespeare may be condemning Helen's empty and manipulative flirtation, as the war rages around her, in order to reflect growing discomfort with Elizabeth's unpredictable feminine power over her male court. While in this scene Shakespeare uses Helen's behaviour to confirm Cressida's unfavourable assessment of her as wanton, this does not mean she is weak. Rather, her influence over Paris is as absolute as it is negative, and in illustrating this Shakespeare deviates interestingly from the Homeric version of events. In Book Six of Chapman's *Iliad,* Paris tells Hector that Helen is behind his decision to rejoin the battle. In *Troilus and Cressida*, however, Paris tells Pandarus "I would fain have armed today, but my Nell would not have it so" (3.1.127-128). Here, Shakespeare seems to be underlining the insidiously negative effect she has on the whole camp. Moreover, it is significant that

[125] Richard Hillman, *William Shakespeare: The Problem Plays* (NY: Twayne, 1993) 12-13.

Shakespeare elides the rest of the episode from Book Six of the *Iliad*, in which Helen thanks Hector for his concern but wishes he did not have to fight for her, and certainly not in the place of her cowardly husband. Instead, Shakespeare has Paris ask her to unarm his brother, telling her:

> [...] His stubborn buckles
> With these your white enchanting fingers touched,
> Shall more obey than to the edge of steel
> Or force of Greekish sinews. (3.1.140-3)

In these lines Shakespeare deliberately emphasises Helen's disturbing sexual appeal, and uses it to imply that she may mislead Hector, keeping him from the battlefield as she has kept Paris. However, as always Helen's power is unstable and extends only as far as men are willing to validate it by continuing to fight for her. Accordingly, one of Shakespeare's most significant uses of her comes in 2.2, a scene in which she does not even appear, but which sees the Trojans debating this very point – how far they are still willing to view Helen as an object of worth, in view of the sacrifices this perception of her entails. Shakespeare's Hector argues affectingly that "Since the first sword was drawn about this question, / Every tithe-soul, 'mongst many thousand dimes, / Hath been as dear as Helen" (2.2.17-19). Here it is Troilus (doubtless thinking of Cressida) who argues that they must keep Helen. He points out:

> We turn not back the silks upon the merchant
> When we have spoiled them; nor the remainder viands
> We do not throw in unrespective sewer
> Because we now are full. (2.2.68-71)

Such comparisons seem peculiarly uncomplimentary to Helen, but finally, as Shakespeare's sources dictated they must be, Hector and the Trojans are convinced to keep Helen. However, while to these men Helen retains some value, and they imagine they may prove their worth by fighting for her, to others quite the opposite is true. When Cressida arrives at the Greek camp, the men's attitude to Menelaus seems to be more or less open scorn, as they joke constantly about the loss of his wife. More seriously, in 4.1, Diomede appeals

to Paris to recognise Helen's lack of worth when the Trojan asks whether he or Menelaus most deserves her:

> He merits well to have her that doth seek her,
> Not making any scruple of her soilure,
> With such a hell of pain and world of charge;
> And you as well to keep her that defend her,
> Not palating the taste of her dishonour,
> With such a costly loss of wealth and friends.
> He like a puling cuckold would drink up
> The lees and dregs of a flat tamèd piece,
> You like a lecher out of whorish loins
> Are pleased to breed out your inheritors.
> Both merits poised, each weighs nor less nor more,
> But he as he: which heavier for a whore? (4.1.57-68)

The power of Diomede's words, and the tragic irony of the war, are only made more apparent by Paris' response – convinced that Diomede is dissembling to conceal the Greek desire to keep Helen, he dismisses his words, remarking, "you do as chapmen do: / Dispraise the thing that you desire to buy [...] We'll but commend what we intend to sell" (4.1.77-80). In these lines Shakespeare encapsulates his characterisation of Helen in the play. She is a crudely sexualised "thing", an object that is not the way for men to prove their worth, but that has such power that, it seems, resolution will never be reached and the war will be interminable. Though perceptions of her worth and power differ widely throughout the play, Shakespeare's view of her, and the use to which he puts this view, are unmistakeable, and echo the condemnation of Helen that has been discernible in his earlier works. To him, she is powerful, but her power is inherently precarious, based as it is on her physical charms and the continuing fascination of a dwindling number of men.

Less adventurous renderings of Helen's story abounded in the seventeenth century, as they did in the sixteenth. In *England's Parnassus*, compiled by Robert Albott and published in 1600, John Harington very determinedly invokes various classical legends about Helen, as part of the collection of poems praising female beauty. He praises Olympia thus:

Had shee in vally of *Idea* beene
when Pastor *Paris* hap did so befall
To be a Judge three goddesses betweene,
She should have got, and they forgone the ball:
Had she but once of him beene naked seene,
For *Helena* he had not card at all,
Nor broke the bonds of sacred hospitalitie,
That bred his country wars and great mortalitie.
Had she but then been in *Crotona* towne,
When *Zeuxis* for the Goddesse *Iunos* sake
To paint a picture of most rare renowne
Did many of the fayrest damsels make
To stand before him bare from foote to crowne,
A patterne of theyr perfect parts to take,
No doubt he would have all the rest refused,
And her alone in sted of all have chused. (p.411)[126]

Helen remained popular as a brief reference in epyllions and collections of prose and poetry even after Elizabeth's reign. In John Hind's *The Most Excellent History of Lysimachus and Varrona* (1604),Varrona wonders whether to leave her husband for the wealthy and powerful Maechander. Echoing her forebear, William Painter's Adelasia, she asks herself

> What discredit was it to *Helen*, when she left her husband *Menelaus* and went with *Paris* to *Troy?* did not the whole glorie of *Greece* to her great glorie goe in armes to fetch her againe? [127]

Like Adelasia, however, she then calls to mind Helen's disgrace, and determines to resist her example, and Maechander's advances. A similar use of Helen's story, which is invoked to contrast with the behaviour of the author's female subject, recurs in the anonymous *Philos and Licia*, which Paul Miller notes was entered in the Stationer's Register in 1606 (n. 6 p. ix), and which he calls "a tissue of allusions to classical mythology" (xii). However, Miller points out that the author

[126] No signature. Robert Albott, *Englands Parnassus: or the Choysest Flowers of our Moderne Poets* (London : For N. L[ing,] C. B[urby] and T. H[ayes], 1600).
[127] No signature – page directly precedes K[r]. John Hind, *The Most Excellent Historie of Lysimachus and Varrona* (London: Thomas Creede, 1604).

> [...] constructed in *Philos and Licia* a world in which all goes well provided one follows the rules, and where one of the key rules is that Hymen's rites must precede love's consummation. One of Licia's chief responsibilities, in addition to summing up all feminine perfections, is to enforce this rule. (xxiv)

Thus, the author's use of Helen is calculated. He describes Licia's determination to embroider herself

> [...] a smocke, of greater cost
> Than *Helen* wore that night when as she lost
> Her husbands fame and honour. (p. 26) [128]

Licia is virtuous, but like Adelasia, Varrona and Elinor before her, seems to be ironised by the author through her association with Helen – the author goes beyond simply comparing his heroine to Helen, and specifically allies her to the Helen who brought shame and disgrace on her husband through her sexual desire. Licia, unattached and insisting on marriage to Philos, does not follow Helen's example, but the mention of Helen seems deliberately intended to destabilise the love affair, as the inescapable presence of Helen casts an ominous shadow on the love of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde. In *Hiren the Faire Greeke* (1611) by William Barksted, meanwhile, Mahomet confesses his love to Hiren with a predictable comparison:

> Not half so faire was Hellen, thy pre'cessor,
> On whom the firy brand of Troy did dote,
> For whom so many rivall kings to succour,
> Made many a mountaine pine on Symois floate. (p. 190)[129]

He justifies his love for Hiren in the same way as his predecessors in sixteenth-century accounts:

> *Hector* fell wounded in that warlike stir,
> *Peleus* did faint, *Ajax* that lusty warriour,

[128] *Philos and Licia*, in Miller, ed., *Seven Minor Epics*.
[129] William Barksted, *Hiren the Faire Greeke*, in Miller, ed., *Seven Minor Epics*.

Then blame not me, that love one far 'bove her. (p. 190)

Here (and despite the peculiar inclusion of Peleus, Achilles' father), invoking Helen and the Trojan War foreshadows the story's tragic end. Miller (xiv) notes Barksted's debt to Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, but the reference to Helen is Barksted's addition, possibly suggested to him by the many similar references to her beauty in the late sixteenth century, and underscoring the fatal folly of her involvement with a foreign prince.

Helen was referenced briefly, but frequently, in Jacobean and Caroline drama, in the works of writers including Jonson (*Volpone*) and Philip Massinger (*The Roman Actor*), as well as in the plays of Heywood and Shakespeare. Typically, in these shorter references she is either demonstrative of surpassing beauty, or dangerous and wanton passion (as she is in Massinger's work, when the lascivious Domitia likens herself to Helen).[130] In Jonson's *Volpone*, the trickster Volpone boasts of possessing a powder that was given to Helen by Venus to augment her beauty.[131] Elsewhere, in *Poetaster*, Helen is used more ironically: Cupid describes Philosophie as having been "The HELLEN of the court"(S^r) in her youth, and later, in 4.3, Tuccus demands that Crispinus identify his lover Chloe, asking "Which of these is thy wedlocke, MENELAUS? thy HELLEN? thy LUCRECE?" ($D2^r$).[132] Here, by identifying Crispinus as Menelaus, Jonson makes clear that the allusion to Helen is ironic, is not intended as a straightforward compliment – rather Tuccus is poking fun at the lovers in his use of two such different classical women as comparisons for Chloe.

Clearly, early seventeenth-century use of Helen owed much to her sixteenth-century incarnations: the prose collections of Painter and Pettie, and the poetical miscellanies, *Tottel's Miscellany* and *A Handful of Pleasant Delights*, appear to have been particularly influential. Helen was very frequently referenced briefly, either by minor, anonymous authors, or by such

[130] Philip Massinger, *The Roman Actor* (London: B[ernard] A[lsop] and T[homas] F[awcet] for Robert Allot, 1629).
[131] In Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso* (1654) Lopus the Mountebank makes the same claim. Ben Jonson, *'The Alchemist' and Other Plays*, ed. Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995).
[132] Ben Jonson, *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson* (London: W. Stansby for Rich. Meighen, 1616).

influential figures as Massinger and Jonson. Still popular, however, were more sustained treatments of Helen, which often, like Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida,* are reconsiderations rather than simply English re-renderings, drawing on a wide variety of classical texts, and speaking to contemporary concerns and tastes.

Thomas Heywood's Helens: *Troia Britannica* and *The Iron Age*

One of the seventeenth-century authors most keenly interested in the character of Helen, and (crucially) in her classical incarnations, was the poet and dramatist Thomas Heywood. While Shakespeare's play reveals the growing interest in the Iliadic version of Helen's story, Ovid's influence remained as apparent in the seventeenth century as it had been in the sixteenth. In *Troia Britannica*, which appeared in 1609, Heywood first gives a familiar account of the Argonautic voyage and the Trojans' debate over the loss of Hesione, and then includes an English rendering of Paris and Helen's epistles when Paris goes to claim Helen. Like Turberville's translation, completed more than forty years previously, Heywood does not deviate radically from his Ovid, but he makes some interesting minor changes. For example, Paris reports that Venus described Helen as "The fairest Saint that doth on earth remaine" (Canto 9.3.p.199).[133] Ovid has no such weighted reference to Helen's virtue. Then, in his promise to Helen of the honours that await her in Troy, Heywood's Paris promises her "sacrificed beasts the ground shall beate" (9.3.p.210). He thus loses the irony inherent in the Ovidian pronouncement that she will be greeted by *caesaque [...] victima* (16.336) ("a slain victim"), a promise that is calculated in its ambiguity, its suggestion that Helen's arrival will result in more than just animal victims. Such minor changes could simply be dismissed as authorial embellishment or mere coincidence. However, the most important aspect of the epistles here is arguably Heywood's explanatory preface. Like Turberville, and like authors undertaking similar translations of Ovid in the late seventeenth century, Heywood cannot simply present the classical text to his readers, but rather feels compelled to attach a moral. Here, like so many

[133] Thomas Heywood, *Troia Britanica* (London: W. Jaggard, 1609).

authors before him, Heywood sees Helen's perfidy as reflecting on all women. He compares beautiful women to Lucifer, and exclaims "Women like him (in shape *Angellicall*) / Are *Angels* whilst they stand, Devills when they fall" (9.1.p.194). He connects this moralising to Helen in lines that seem to echo sixteenth-century pronouncements on the terrible consequences of Helen's sexuality, but in fact endow her with even more power, power to construct empires through chastity:

> Had *Spartan Hellen* bin as chast as faire,
> Her Vertue sooner might have raisd a Troy
> Then her loose gestures: great without compare,
> Had power so rich a Citty to destroy. (9.3.p.197)

With this introduction in mind, Heywood's minor changes become more interesting, perhaps attempts to underscore the extent of Paris' folly. Heywood's Helen does have the power to cause his death, and if chaste women are "Angellical", she is very far from a saint. Paris' letter is followed by her reply, and then Heywood takes up the story again: like Caxton, who in his *Book of Methamorphose* also included elements of the pair's Ovidian letters, he makes Helen's desire to be abducted very plain: she is "willingly surpriz'd, seeming agast" (10.1.p.227), and does not call for help until it is too late: "Shee cals on Father, Husband, Brother, Friend, / Naming them most, who could her least defend" (10.2.p.227). Heywood elaborates on classical and medieval accounts of her entrance into Troy, specifically noting that Helen greedily notes the riches of Troy, and "doth despise / The poverty of Sparta" (10.11.p.229). As such unflattering additions would suggest, Heywood draws on Lydgate's *Troy Book*: for example, like Lydgate, he refuses to give an account of Helen's beauty when he describes the other Greeks and Trojans.[134] However, the influence of Ovid remains apparent: noting that some authors

[134] What G. C. Moore-Smith terms Heywood's "very enthusiastic admiration of Lydgate" is further evidenced by his close adaptation of the *Troy Book*, which was published in 1614 under the title *The Life and Death of Hector*. The new version is anonymous, but Franz Albert presents textual evidence that suggests Heywood's authorship. For an account of Albert's findings, see G. C. Moore-Smith, "Review of *Über Thomas Heywoods "The Life and Death of Hector", eine Neubearbeitung von Lydgates "Troy Book"*, von Franz Albert", *MLR* 5.2 (1910): 222-3, 223. Since this is a very close rendering of the *Troy Book*, I have chosen to focus on Heywood's other, more innovative handlings of both women.

dispute Menelaus' entertainment of Paris, he maintains "I imitate Ovid as my approved Author" (p. 228), and goes on to quote extracts from the *Ars Amatoria*, in which Ovid mockingly chastises Menelaus for being so foolish as to leave Helen unattended. Then, and despite his references to Homer and Apollodorus, his account of the war follows the model of the long Middle English Troy-narratives. Notably absent are accounts of Helen's grief for either Paris or Hector, and Heywood also resists the temptation to include Homeric elements such as Helen's disgust with Paris. In keeping with his determination to recount the fullest story possible, however, he ends Canto 15 with a mention of Pausanias, and a brief sketch of Helen's death at the hands of Polyxo. Equally, despite his very obvious debt to Virgil in his account of the fall of Troy, he does not include Aeneas' angry confrontation of Helen, instead telling his readers that she lived to old age, and strangled herself in despair at her fading beauty: an episode he was to dramatise in *The Iron Age*, his more sustained, and more original treatment of Helen (though one that is still steeped in his knowledge of the Greek and Latin classics).

The Iron Age Parts One and Two, published in 1632 (though written and performed much earlier),[135] opens with the author's acknowledgement of the popularity of his play's subject matter. In his dedication to Thomas Hammon, Heywood asks

> [...] what Pen of note, in one page or other hath not remembred *Troy*, and bewayl'd the sacke and subversion of so illustrious a Citty. Which, although it were scituate in *Asia*, yet out of her ashes hath risen two the rarest Phoenixes in *Europe*, namely *London* and *Rom*[*e*]. (A3^{r-v})[136]

As this would suggest, the influence of many texts, dating from antiquity onwards, can be discerned in Heywood's lengthy representation of the Trojan War. Perhaps because of this, his representation of Helen's sexual power is not always consistent. First, as it has done in *Troilus and Cressida*, her sexuality

[135] For a discussion of the relationship between *Troilus and Cressida* and Heywood's *Iron Age* Part One, which argues that Shakespeare's play followed and used Heywood's work, see Tatlock, "The Siege of Troy ", 754. His arguments are refuted by Ernest Schanzer, Heywood's *Ages* and Shakespeare", *RES* 11.41 (1960): 18-28, 24, 27 and Joseph Quincy Adams, "Shakespeare, Heywood, and the Classics", *MLN* 34.6 (1919): 336-39, n.1. p.337.

[136] Thomas Heywood, *The Iron Age* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1632).

leaves her vulnerable to male criticism. Most notably, Heywood's Thersites, like his Shakespearean counterpart, attacks Helen's inconstancy and the men who are willing to fight for her at every opportunity. Menelaus is preparing to leave Sparta temporarily to look after his interests in Crete, but Thersites warns him he cannot look after two kingdoms, and exclaims "Hellen? oh! / 'Must have an eye to her too, fie, fie, fie, / Poore man how thou'lt bee pusl'd!" (C^{r}). Here, then, Helen is characterised from the start as a male possession, but one that cannot be trusted, and must be mastered and controlled.

For her part, Helen is furious at Menelaus' decision to leave her, and tells him "You value me too cheape, and doe not know / The worth and value of the face you owe" (C^{v}). Here the echoes of Shakespeare's language, his vocabulary of value and worth, are obvious. Helen is not merely the flirt of *Troilus and Cressida*, however. She sees herself as enjoying a profound sexual power over Menelaus, but also other men, telling him

> *Theseus*, that in my non-age did assaile mee:
> And being too young for pastime, thence did haile me;
> Hee, to have had the least part of your blisse
> Oft proffered mee a Kingdome for a kisse
> You surfeit in your pleasures, swimme in sport,
> But sir, from henceforth I shall keep you short. (C^{v})

Here, Helen retells the story of her first abduction, making it proof of her own value but also her sexual power. Menelaus dismisses her anger, exclaiming "My sweete Hellen, / Was never King blest with so chaste a wife" ($C2^{r}$). Of course, his trust in Helen, and specifically in her sexual constancy, is deeply ironic, and echoes the Elizabethan fondness for (ironically) comparing a fair lady to Helen.

Once it has become clear that she must abide by her husband's decision, and welcome his Trojan guests into Sparta, Helen resolves to exploit the (limited) power she has already referred to. She regrets

> Oh had I known their Landing one day sooner,
> That *Hellen* might have trim'd up her attire
> Against this meeting, then my radiant beauty

I doubt not, might in *Troy* be tearm'd as faire,
As through all *Greece* I am reputed rare. (C2^{v})

Helen's awareness of her power and her beauty's effect in this text is unequivocal. So, in his account of their meeting Heywood draws very obviously on the *Heroides*, rather than on medieval accounts that give Helen less of a voice. For example, when Paris praises her beauty she takes offence, complaining

[...] thinks *Priams* sonne,
The *Spartan* Queene can be so easily wonne?
Because once Theseus ravisht us from hence,
And did to us a kind of violence:
Followes it therefore wee are of such price,
That stolne hence once, we should be ravish't twice? (C3^{v})

Ovid's Helen draws a similar parallel between Paris and Theseus in *Heroides 17*, pointedly asking *Thesea paenituit, Paris ut succederet illi, / ne quando nomen non sit in ore meum?* (17.33-4) ("Did Theseus repent but for Paris to follow in his steps, lest my name should sometime cease from the lips of men?") Earlier, Helen uses the story of Theseus' abduction to demonstrate her potent sexual allure. Here she very obviously constructs herself, and her sexuality, as owned by men: first her husband, and then Paris, seen as she disingenuously exclaims

Yet if in lieu of my Kings intertaine,
You bid me to a feast aboord your ship,
And when you have me there, unknowne to me
Hoyse sayle, weigh Anchor, and beare out to Sea
I cannot helpe it, tis not in my power
To let fal sayles, or strive with stretching oares
To row me backe againe. (D2^{r})

Here, Heywood appears to take his inspiration from the medieval accounts, for example the French prose *Ovide Moralisé* or the Latin *Excidium Troiae*, or Caxton's translation of the *Metamorphoses*, in which Helen explicitly describes to Paris how he may kidnap her. Though she tells herself she is powerless, and

while she and Paris both seem to regard her as the sexual possession of her husband, nevertheless she acts on her desire, fulfilling her earlier warning to Menelaus as she does so.

Heywood preserves the medieval Helen's distress and fear, which is presented affecting in Lydgate's *Troy Book* and Caxton's *Recuyell*, but is utterly excised from Shakespeare's play. However, he retains too the potent sense of anger felt by many of the male characters at the death and destruction Helen has caused, and continues to cause. Like his Shakespearean counterpart, Heywood's Thersites sees the men as belittled, not ennobled, by their willingness to fight for Helen. Likewise, Achilles considers Helen to be unworthy of the sacrifices made for her, but turns what he sees as her power over the situation (and specifically over Paris and Menelaus) to a more practical use. He suggests

> Fetch *Hellen* hether. Set her in the midst
> Of this brave ring of Princes, *Paris* here,
> And *Menelaus* heere: she betwixt both:
> They court her ore againe, whom she elects,
> before these Kings, let him injoy her still,
> For who would keepe a woman gainst her wil?[137]

This scene, unique to Heywood, would seem to see Helen restored to her power, given free reign both to choose her man and end the war. However, she remains remarkably passive, and seems to reject the decision she is asked to make. She falls silent while the men talk around her, with Menelaus reprimanding her for her faithlessness and reminding her of the family she has left behind, and Paris underscoring the sexual nature of their relationship (such a feature of Shakespeare's play). When Helen does speak, her language shows how far her desires are dictated by the men, despite Achilles' perception of her power. Rather than replying to their suits at length, she simply echoes the ideas they suggest to her. Thus in response to Menelaus' entreaties about her family back in Sparta, she exclaims "Oh I have left my mother" (G^{r}), when he reminds her of her brothers she answers "True, true" (G^{v}), and when he tells her "This way wife, / Thou shalt save many a Greeke and Troians life", she exclaims

[137] No signature – should be $F4^{v}$.

"'Tis true, I know it" (G^v). However, when Paris tells her "This way turne thine head, / This is the path that leads unto our bed", she reflects "And 'tis a sweete smooth path" (G^v). Placed literally between Paris and Menelaus at Achilles' suggestion, and figuratively between Greece and Troy, old life and new, she lacks control, whatever her position might seem to suggest. Choosing Paris for a second time, she is received happily back into Troy, but seems to have cemented her negative reputation. Her sexuality, in some ways the driving force behind the first part of *The Iron Age*, brings with it the notorious reputation Heywood's audience would be expecting, such that as the play draws to a close, Thersites can stand to one side and remark "The Troians are all mad, so are the *Greeks*, / To kill so many thousands for one drabbe" (I^v). As he is in *Troilus and Cressida*, Thersites is beaten for his slighting comments, here by Troilus. Nevertheless, though Paris, Menelaus and (certain) Trojans and Greeks remain satisfied with Helen as a cause to fight, as in Shakespeare, one voice can utterly destabilise the audience's perception of her value.

If the *Heroides* were an important model for Part One of the *Iron Age*, Helen's first appearance in Part Two is very clearly intended to evoke memories of the *Aeneid*, but Heywood is keen to innovate, and build on his classical model. Troy has fallen, and Helen stumbles through the wreckage of the burning city. Rather than meeting Aeneas, however, she encounters first Cressida and then Agamemnon and Menelaus. Cressida has betrayed Troilus, but also, tricked by Thersites, has proved false to Diomede, and been abandoned. In her, Helen perceives the limitations of beauty, and curses her own appearance. Equally, though they believe her to have left Greece under duress, Menelaus and the other Greeks do acknowledge Helen's part in the destruction they have all witnessed, and, as always, her sexuality is to blame: Orestes, preparing to marry Helen's daughter Hermione, makes a point of mentioning that she is "Unspotted with her mothers prostitution" (G^r).[138] One notable effect of this continuing obsession with Helen's sexual transgression is the way in which female faithlessness is once more seen as reflecting on male honour and community. Cethes, angry with the Greeks for the execution of his brother Palamedes, exclaims "Not *Hellen* by her whoredome caus'd more

[138] Parts One and Two of *The Iron Age* are published in the same 1632 volume, but signatures start again from A^r at the beginning of Part Two.

blood / Streaming from Princes brests, then *Cethus* shall / (Brother) for thine untimely funeral" ($I2^{v}$). Here, it is not Helen's beauty that is a mark to be surpassed (as it was in so much Elizabethan poetry): rather, it is her capacity to engender bloodshed. Helen's beauty and its tragic consequences come into final, ironic contact as she surveys the slaughtered Greeks, who have turned on each other as a result of Cethes' machinations. Examining herself in her mirror, she reflects:

> [...] Was this wrinkled fore-head
> When 'twas at best, worth halfe so many lives?
> Where is that beauty? lives it in this face
> Which hath set two parts of the World at warre,
> Beene ruine of the *Asian* Monarchy,
> And almost this of *Europe*? This the beauty,
> That launch'd a thousand ships from *Aulis* gulfe?
> In such a poore repurchase, now decayde?[139]

Here, Heywood's Helen echoes Marlowe's Faustus, but the intention is to belittle her beauty rather than to marvel at it. Thus her lines also recall Ovid's depiction of an aged Helen in the *Metamorphoses*, marvelling at the passion her beauty once inspired. In lines intended as a warning to women (though the didacticism is far less pronounced than it is in, for example, Robinson's *Rewarde of Wickednesse*), Heywood's Helen says to herself "See fayre ones, what a little Time can doe".[140] Having utterly renounced the power she seemed to enjoy at the beginning of the play (and specifically because of her beauty), a despairing Helen strangles herself, and leaves Ulysses, as the last surviving prince, to conclude the play. Heywood's work is undeniably derivative, but fascinating – drawing on Ovid, Virgil and the medieval redactions of Dictys and Dares, as well as on Shakespeare, the playwright portrays a Helen who seems at first sexually confident, almost aggressive, and centrally important, but who seems to become increasingly Homeric, as she is gradually subsumed into a culture of male competition and conflict over which she has little or no control, despite her ownership of her own blame as the play draws to a close.

[139] No signature given.
[140] No signature given.

This shift can be seen as, over the two parts of *The Iron Age*, Helen falls increasingly silent, moving from a woman who assertively declares her own desires to her husband at the beginning of Part One, to one who is disturbed and conflicted when her desire drives her to another man, and finally to one who regrets her beauty and her lustful nature, seeing her only reward as "the worlds assured hate",[141] and her only option as self-destruction.

If, in Heywood's work, Thersites' scathing commentary and the disapproval of Hermione and Cethes underline the tension between Helen as seventeenth-century dramatic character, and the weight of her previous classical incarnations, similar frictions can be discerned in Jacobean and Caroline verse. Very often, seventeenth-century poets echo their Tudor and Elizabethan predecessors in their brief references to Helen, and in so doing make obvious demands on their readers' and characters' classical knowledge. For example, in Ralph Knevet's *Rhodon and Iris* the shepherdess Clematis is mockingly described by Gladiolus as "chaste as *Helen*",[142] and reacts in anger to this insult. More typically, though, Helen is still held up as a serious example of transgression (and specifically of female sexual transgression). Both George Wither, in his *Juvenalia,* and Thomas Randolph, in his *Poems*, echo their Elizabethan predecessors in privileging female virtue over beauty, comparing their ladies to Helen and finding them to be a more valuable prize, because chaste. Randolph describes the kind of modest and virtuous woman he seeks, and exclaims "I'de rather unto such a one be wed, / Then claspe the choicest *Helen* in my bed" ($G2^{r}$).[143] Wither describes the destruction she engenders, and the fact that she was still regarded as a worthy prize by the Greeks and Trojans, before exclaiming "Then if with all that ill, such worth may last, / Oh what is she worth, that's as faire, and chast!" (Hh^{v})[144] Meanwhile, in *Erotomania* Jacques Ferrand uses Helen repeatedly (and predictably). She is an example of how women may be overthrown by love, and how couples may fall in love at first sight. Her ravishment by Theseus demonstrates that even old men may love, while Menelaus' inability to harm

[141] No signature given.
[142] No signature – should be $E4^{r}$. Ralph Knevet, *Rhodon and Iris: A Pastoral* 2nd ed. (London: J. Beale for Michael Sparke, 1631).
[143] Thomas Randolph, *Poems* (Oxford: Leonard Lichfield for Francis Bowman, 1638).
[144] George Wither, *Juvenalia* (London: Thomas Snodham for John Budge, 1622).

her after the fall of Troy demonstrates love's power.[145] In Robert Baron's *Erotopaignion*, Flaminius objects when his lover is tacitly likened to Helen, exclaiming "more absurd is it to accuse *Clorinda* to become *Helena,* whom she excells as well in beauty as in chastitie" (B^v).[146] This protest is particularly noteworthy since earlier Helen has been represented as an example of beauty, but it seems that when she is compared to a specific woman, the overriding implication is of unchastity, and the comparison thus becomes an insult.

In all of these works, Helen is used implicitly as a warning to men (and to women), a caution about what types of feminine qualities, in particular, are desirable. Seventeenth-century lovers are not merely described as more beautiful than Helen, as they were in the sixteenth: rather, the issue of sexual morality comes very clearly to the fore, and women (real or imaginary) are praised for their difference to Helen, rather than their dangerous similarity. An exception is Edmund Waller's "To A Lady in Retirement": in this poem, the speaker points out

> Had Helen, or th'Egyptian queen,
> Been near so thrifty of their graces;
> Those beauties must at length have been
> The spoil of age, which finds out faces
> In the most retired places. (p.54)[147]

Here Waller, like Heywood, draws on the ageing Helen of the *Metamorphoses*, although he does so to encourage his lady to love. However, although he encourages his lady to emulate Helen, rather than shun her example, his use of Helen and Cleopatra is highly self-conscious, intended to raise a smile at Helen's expense. By contrast, in his account of his travels, *The Totall Discourse, of the Rare Adventures, and Painefull Peregrinations of Long Nineteene Yeares Travailes from Scotland,* William Lithgow is so exercised by his visit to the former site of Sparta that he is driven to pen verses condemning

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[145] Jacques Ferrand, *Erotomania* (Oxford: L. Lichfield for Edward Forrest, 1640).
[146] Robert Baron, *Erotopaignion, or, The Cyprian Academy* (London: W.W. for J. Hardesty, T. Huntington, and T. Jackson, 1647).
[147] In Alexander Chalmers, ed, *Works of the English Poets, Works of the English Poets, from Chaucer to Cowper, including the series edited, with prefaces, biographical and critical, by Dr. Samuel Johnson: and the most approved translations. The additional lives, by Alexander Chalmers,* Vol 8, 21 vols (London: for J. Johnson [etc.], 1810).

women who share Helen's name, maintaining that they must retain her sinful character:

> *Helens* are snakes, which breed their lovers paine,
> The maps of malice, murther, and disdaine:
> *Helens* are gulfes, whence streams of blood doe flow,
> Rapine, deceit, treason, and overthrow:
> *Helens* are whores, whiles in a Virgin Maske,
> They sucke from *Pluto* sterne *Proserpines* taske.
> Curst be thou Hell; for hellish *Helens* sakes,
> Still crost, and curst be they that trust such snakes. ($F4^r$)[148]

If an author's or character's naming of a woman as Helen invites disaster, here, it seems, real women who are named Helen are also judged to inherit the worst of her characteristics, so notorious was her reputation.[149]

The influence of specific classical texts (as opposed to the generalised representations of Helen as seductive adulteress) remains apparent in seventeenth-century drama, not only in Shakespeare's reliance on Homer, or Heywood's uses of Ovid, but also, for example, in Milton's clear use of the *Odyssey* in the masque *Comus* (first performed 1634).[150] Comus offers the lady a potion, telling her

> Not that Nepenthes which the wife of Thone,
> In Egypt gave to Jove-born Helena
> Is of such power to stir up joy as this,
> To life so friendly, or so cool to thirst. (675-8)[151]

Barbara K. Lewalski suggests that Comus himself "exhibits the seductive power of false rhetoric, against which is posed the better art displayed in the songs and poetry of the Lady, the Attendant Spirit and Sabrina, and especially

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[148] William Lithgow, *The Totall Discourse, of the Rare Adventures, and Painefull Peregrinations of Long Nineteene Yeares Travailes from Scotland* (London: J. Okes, 1640).
[149] Maguire notes that in the period parents were cautioned against naming their daughters Helen, but finds that according to parish records, the name Helen remained popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (p.98 n.10).
[150] For Milton's "intimate, profound, and extensive knowledge of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*", see George DeForest Lord, *Classical Presences in Seventeenth-Century English Poetry* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987) 37-54, 37.
[151] John Milton, *Works,* ed Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991).

in the masque dances at Ludlow Castle".[152] It is thus fitting that Comus invokes one of Helen's strangest and most threatening classical incarnations, and in so doing sets his lady a test of interpretation, of the kind that George Gascoigne's Elinor had failed in the previous century.

In such brief references to Helen, as always, the readers or audience members are expected to draw on their knowledge of her story to inform what they are watching, to appreciate that Helen was famously beautiful (even if they do not realise that she is an inauspicious model for a woman) or that she had some knowledge of potions (even if they do not realise how threatening these potions may seem). One Caroline author whose allusions to Helen appear most particularly densely layered, though, was the playwright and classical scholar James Shirley, whose uses of Helen and Medea in his drama are far from straightforward, demanding a high level of classical knowledge and speaking obliquely of gender relations in the period, both on- and off-stage.

Playing Dangerous Games: Helen in the Drama of James Shirley

Shirley's representations of Helen's story are more original than many seventeenth-century treatments because they are comic, although Helen herself does not appear, and Shirley's focus is very obviously, and typically, on the male community. *The Constant Maid* was published in 1640,[153] and in it, Shirley appropriates Helen and Paris' story for his subplot, Playfair's determined pursuit of Hornet's niece. Helped by his uncle Sir Clement, the ironically-named Playfair stages a representation first of Paris' judgement of the goddesses, and then, immediately following, of his marriage to Helen – here Hornet's disguised niece. This play-within-a-play device was as popular on the seventeenth-century stage as it had been on the sixteenth, often because of the opportunities it afforded for subversion and rule-breaking. Here, Hornet believes he is merely watching a show, but in reality, Playfair and the niece take the opportunity to marry (as the niece makes clear in her thanks to Sir

[152] Barbara K. Lewalski, "Literature and the Household", in David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller, eds., *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006): 603-29, 627-8.
[153] Though Gerald Eades Bentley suggests it was written considerably earlier. Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, Vol. 1, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1941-68) 227.

Clement in 5.3). Hornet had been determined to avoid this because of his desire to control her fortune: he asserts "The devil cannot juggle her from my custody" (H^v).[154] Apparently, then, Shirley's appropriation of the myth is simply a clever way of realising that staple of seventeenth-century comedy: the unification of the happy couple, and the thwarting of the girl's tyrannical father figure. Shirley's debt to this comic model seems the more apparent as, having realised the deception, Hornet good-naturedly accepts the marriage and the loss of his niece's fortune. I would suggest, however, that Shirley has chosen his mythology carefully, and that his use of Paris and Helen's story suggests more than first appears. For instance, he does not dramatise what might seem the natural parallel: Paris and Helen's first meeting, their agreement, and his abduction of her from under the nose of her hapless husband, all episodes frequently told and retold in classical, medieval and early modern redactions of the Troy story. More interesting, however, is that what he does choose to bring to the stage is their wedding. Though it may well have sprung to Shirley's mind, and appealed, as one of the most famous stories of subversive desire and female transgression, the story of Helen and Paris is, in anyone's book, a peculiarly inauspicious model for a marriage that apparently constitutes one of the play's happy endings. As Painter, Gascoigne and Hind have done before him, in supplying Paris and Helen's story as a model (and as a means) for the match, he appears to cast doubts both its morality and on its possible repercussions.

Walter Cohen points out that, when pre-Revolutionary tragicomedies end in marriage, "the condition of even this ambiguous accomplishment is almost always the preservation of virginity, an internalized norm of virtuous characters, male and female, and virtuous dramatist alike".[155] Helen is a singularly poor model for such a virginal bride. Not only has she abandoned her first husband, but Dares, and following him Benoît, Joseph of Exeter, Guido and the authors of the English Troy-narratives, makes clear that Helen and Paris sleep together on the voyage back to Troy. Marliss C. Desens considers sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literary use of the traditional bed-

[154] James Shirley, *The Constant Maid* (London: I. Raworth for R. Whitaker, 1640).
[155] Walter Cohen, "Pre-Revolutionary Drama", in Gordon McMullan and Jonathan Hope, eds, *The Politics of Tragicomedy: Shakespeare and After* (London: Routledge, 1992): 122-150, 129.

trick, the substitution of one sexual partner for another, and also points to what she calls "two related conventions of partner substitution", which she terms "the boy bride" and "the exchanged beloved".[156] She notes that usage of these latter two declined as the more sexually-charged bed-trick became popular into Jacobean and Caroline writing, but suggests "When they do appear in the later drama, playwrights have usually introduced modifications that give them an ironic emphasis" (53). Here, Shirley is employing the device of the "exchanged beloved", but his ironic modification is the hint he gives Hornet, his employment of perhaps the most famous deceptive and transgressive love affair in western literature. He seems to imply that Playfair and Sir Clement, as male characters with a vested interest in the match, would do well to consider the equation of Helen and the niece, the consequences implied by making even the most apparently virtuous woman enact such a role. The headstrong young gallant Playfair compares well to the impetuous prince of Troy. However, in making the niece act the part of Helen (both figuratively and literally), Shirley appears to cast doubt on her virtue, and concurrently on the control that the male characters have enjoyed over her both before and after Playfair and Clement's deceptive production.

However, in staging Helen, Shirley has no interest in imitating either the witty and flirtatious Helen of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida,* or the angry, desirous, verbose Helen of *The Iron Age.* The niece (who is noticeably unnamed) scarcely speaks in the play, in contravention of Julie Sanders' assertion that often, "it is women who are Shirley's plain speakers".[157] She is aligned with the silenced and objectified Helen of the medieval Troy-narratives, whose speech is rarely recorded, and who seems merely part of some larger, homosocially oriented plan. Comparing Shirley to Ford, Sandra A. Burner argues that "Both dramatists, perhaps responding to the growing female segment in the audience, portray women similarly, often assigning major roles to them".[158] Moreover, she finds that "Shirley, like Ford, confronts women

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[156] Marliss C. Desens, *The Bed-Trick in English Renaissance Drama: Explorations in Gender, Sexuality, and Power* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1994): 11, 51.

[157] Julie Sanders, *Caroline Drama: The Plays of Massinger, Ford, Shirley and Brome* (Plymouth: Northcote House in Association with the British Council, 1999) 14.
[158] Sandra A. Burner, *James Shirley: A Study of Literary Coteries and Patronage in Seventeenth-Century England* (Lanham: UP of America, 1988) 49.

with choices between love and honor" (49). Hornet's niece obviously does not enjoy a major role in the play (though hers is an important one). Moreover, in figuring her as a classical woman whose transgression was so notorious, Shirley very obviously refuses to allow the niece the kind of choice Burner points to. In the Judgement of Paris as it is recounted by Paris in the *Heroides* (and by Heywood in *The Iron Age*), Venus promises Paris the most beautiful woman in the world, and the account of the abduction (and Helen's eager desire for Paris) follows. Here, Shirley deliberately elides the abduction, but also the suggestion of female desire that Ovid subtly creates in the *Heroides*. Venus brings out Hornet's silent niece as Paris' prize, which Paris/Playfair claims with the bare minimum of effort. Figured as Helen, then, Hornet's niece represents on one level the archetypally transgressive woman, determined to pursue her own desires, and Hornet appears ridiculous as a result of his failure to correctly read her subversion of his control, even as it is enacted in front of him. Shirley's writing of the niece as Helen works on more levels than this, however, and has consequences for the niece as well as for the men, as he deliberately subdues any real personality. The implication seems to be that, in playing along with male fantasy and taking such a dangerously weighted role, the niece runs the risk of finding herself the silent, unhappy and guilt-ridden Helen of the *Iliad*, rather than the self-satisfied Shakespearean Helen of *Troilus and Cressida*, or the desirous Ovidian Helen of the *Heroides*.

Predictably, Shirley's interest in Helen and Paris resurfaces elsewhere, and once more he aims at a comic rendering. In *The Triumph of Beautie*, the shepherds discuss Paris' melancholy, and resolve to cheer him up by re-enacting "The Tragedy of the Golden Fleece". Meanwhile Bottle, the chief shepherd (and obvious descendant of Shakespeare's Bottom) tries to comfort him by commending female beauty, singing of his lover:

> Her cheeks I must commend for gay,
> But then her nose hangs in my way [...]
> Her breast is soft as any Downe,
> Beneath which lies her Maiden-towne,
> So strong and fortifi'd within,

There is no hope to take it in. – And so forth. (pp. 10-11)[159]

Here, Shirley draws on the Shakespearean mechanicals' fulsome praise of Thisbe, and once again the power of female beauty is undermined by a male character's unintentionally ridiculous praise. However, his choice of Paris implies that he may also have been inspired by the many praises of Helen's beauty he might have encountered in the sixteenth century, many of which were also compromised, though seriously rather than comically. The judgement of the goddesses follows, before Paris awards the prize to Venus, and the masque ends: the audience, however, is aware of the tragic and inevitable consequences of beauty's triumph, of Paris' choice of the absent Helen. Interestingly, despite his close links to the court circle of Henrietta Maria, Shirley does not follow Barnfield and Peele, his Elizabethan predecessors, in rewriting the judgement as a compliment to the Queen, in which the goddesses agree she should receive the golden ball. Shirley's use of classical mythology is thus at once conservative (he is reluctant to connect it too closely to court event) and playful (Bottle should use the meta-literary classical knowledge that is implied by his familiarity with the Golden Fleece to understand Paris' melancholy; likewise, Hornet should recognise both the narrative of feminine transgression that is being played out in front of him, and its import). Helen is not present in either play, but *The Constant Maid* in particular demonstrates that seventeenth-century dramatists could use her story briefly and referentially, with a lightness of touch reminiscent of Gascoigne or Painter, and that these brief renderings could be as effective as the longer and more self-consciously classical rewritings of Heywood or Shakespeare.

Helen as Christian Exemplar in the Seventeenth Century

If Shirley in particular demonstrates how the seventeenth-century Helen may be used comically, Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* has demonstrated how Helen, and male attitudes towards her, may be used to communicate the futility of war, and to speak to seventeenth-century concerns such as Elizabeth's sexually-charged but rapidly eroding control over her court. Elsewhere, the

[159] No signature. Shirley, *The Triumph of Beautie.*

seventeenth-century Helen, like Medea, was invoked with moralistic, as well as political intent. As it was in the sixteenth century, Helen's beauty (and her fall) is used to embody a didactic (and often specifically Christian) message. However, apparently having less of a literary or creative agenda than Richard Robinson and his Elizabethan contemporaries, seventeenth-century writers chose not to have Helen voice her own distress: rather, the classical Helen is sternly referenced as a cautionary example. Thus in *Gynaikeion*, Thomas Heywood uses her yet again, this time referencing Pausanias and Martial to show Helen as an example of the consequences of adultery. He also records the more obscure story, recounted by Herodotus, of a mother who takes her baby daughter to Helen's temple, and prays that the child might be made more attractive: predictably, though, the girl's new-found beauty has tragic consequences as she grows, and the story shows the folly of desiring this kind of power.[160] Stephen Jerome, in his *Seaven Helpes to Heaven* (1614) lists Helen as an example of a sinner who was strangled (a use that seems to imply a knowledge of Pausanias' account of Helen's death at the hands of the vengeful Polyxo). Elsewhere, he shows that, so well-known was Helen's story, she could be used as metaphor rather than simply as example: he condemns immoral love of "Gold and Silver· the *Helena* that the world doa[t]es on" (Z^{v}).[161] In *The Theatre of Gods Judgements,* published in a second edition in 1642, Thomas Beard also sees Helen as an archetypal example of wickedness, here a typical adulteress. He quotes Hecuba's condemnation of her in Euripides' *Trojan Women*, and recounts Pausanias' story of her death by hanging as an example of the punishment that adulterers can expect.[162] Joseph Beaumont's *Psyche, or, Loves Mysterie in XX Canto's*, recalls the connection between Simon Magus and Helen, with Helen apparently proving far more active (and threatening) than she does in the writings of the early Church Fathers. Here, Helen governs Simon's followers alongside him, and Beaumont notes

[160] Thomas Heywood, *Gynaikeion* (London: Adam Islip, 1624).
[161] Stephen Jerome, *Seaven Helpes to Heaven* (London : Printed [by T. Snodham] for Roger Jackson, 1614).
[162] Thomas Beard, *The Theatre of Gods Judgements* (London: S. I. and M. H. for Thomas Whitaker, 1642).

He taught his Scholars in Himselfe and Her
To treasure up the hopes of their Salvation;
And heedless Souls the surer to ensnare,
He freely loos'd the Reins to every Passion:
No matter how you live, or die, said He
So long's your Faith builds on my Grace and Me. ($Y2^r$)[163]

The debt to the threatening Helen of *Doctor Faustus* is apparent (though here, perhaps, Helen is less individually threatening as Simon also enjoys control). If Helen is seen as representing an individual threat, a threat to a particular man who submits to desire for her (or to desire for a similarly threatening woman) she is also seen as threatening because she has been, from her earliest classical incarnations, divisive of male community, and creative of discord: Beaumont points out that Helen demonstrates the truth that "*Hell* / Thought *Females* usefull then, and always will" ($Y2^r$). In *XXVIII Sermons Preached at Golden Grove*, the clergyman Jeremy Taylor describes how, according to Homer, the beauty of Helen was such that the Greeks and Trojans were happy to fight for her. However, like his seventeenth-century peers, he goes on to draw on the less popular version of Herodotus, which had been circulating in English since the late sixteenth century:

> Yet it was a more reasonable conjecture of Herodotus, that during the ten years siege of Troy Helena for whom the Greeks fought was in Egypt, not in the city, because it was unimaginable but that the Trojans would have thrown her over the walls rather then for the sake of such a trifle, have endured so great calamities, we are more sottish then the Trojans, if we retain our Helena, any one beloved lust, any painted Devil, any sugar'd temptation with, (not the hazard but) the certainty of having such horrid miseries, such in valuable losses. (p.248) [164]

Perhaps because of the upheaval of the 1640s, Taylor, like other writers in this period, is keen to promote unity and conservatism, an adherence to God's will and a resistance to licentious pleasure-seeking. However, Helen's story is not

[163] Joseph Beaumont, *Psyche, Or, Loves Mysterie in XX Canto's* (London: John Dawson for George Boddington, 1648).
[164] No signature. Jeremy Taylor, *XXVIII Sermons Preached at Golden Grove* (London: R. N. for Richard Royston, 1651).

simply used as an example, both familiar and evocative, because by 1651, any representation of or allusion to the Trojan War was necessarily coloured by the catastrophic English Civil War. Helen does not fit easily into the poetry of the Civil War: the Cavalier poets, despite their fondness for classical mythology, preferred more virtuous suffering classical women, such as Philomela and Lucrece (though some, for example Robert Herrick, still use Helen as a brief illustrative example). When she is used in the period, Helen's threat is typically stressed: she is a temptation to susceptible men, but an unworthy woman, and she and those like her must be resisted. As she has been from the time of the earliest Greek renderings, Helen is envisaged as a threat to individual men, to the body politic and to the strength and integrity of a community. However, Caroline writers in particular represent her threat (whether comic or serious, whether to the state or to one man) while eschewing the voice she was lent in the Elizabethan period, through the writings of Robinson, Whetstone, Trussell and Ogle.

Representation of Helen is, as always, burdened with the weight of her previous literary incarnations (Jacobean and Caroline writers often present a generic Helen, but just as often will quote from a specific classical text in connection with her). Less likely to be individually characterised than she was previously, and not suitable as a symbol of hope or defiance during the Civil War, Helen becomes a didactic example. The idea of her threat is still present, but even as her beauty is represented as troubling, and her flouting of male control alarming, the tendency to use her threat as a brief caution to men demonstrates her story, inevitably, being bent to male ends. Ultimately her threat is represented as reduced, because seventeenth-century authors appreciate her danger in a way that, they imply, their classical ancestors did not. What has consistently made Helen so threatening, her potent and adulterous sexuality, becomes containable, useful as a brief literary example (serious or comic) or as an exemplar of feminine wickedness and the transient nature of beauty.

Chapter Seven: Early Modern Medea

Translating Medea in the Sixteenth Century

The patterns of Medea's representations in the early modern period in some ways mimic Helen's, not least because the two women appear in several of the same influential classical texts, most notably the *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides* of Ovid. In the late fifteenth and throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, editions and translations of Greek and Latin works that featured her (the plays of Euripides and Seneca, the Greek and Latin *Argonautica*s, the works of Hesiod, Palaphaetus, Pindar, Diodorus and Apollodorus) appeared, augmenting the accounts given by Ovid and by the medieval redactors of Guido. For example, Smith notes editions of Diodorus' *History* in 1539 (by Opsopaeus) and 1559 (by H. Stephens), and a Latin translation published by N. Rhodomannus in 1604,[1] while Emrys Jones asserts that "All the extant Greek tragedies were made available in editions and in Latin translations during the sixteenth century".[2] Moreover, like Helen, Medea was a sufficiently important mythological character to merit routine inclusion in sixteenth-century dictionaries and reference works including Comes' *Mythologiae* and Elyot's *Dictionary*.

Indeed, though her bloodthirsty excesses were to prove popular in the period, the use of Medea as a wronged and suffering woman, discernible in Ovid's work but also in the longer medieval renderings of Medea's story, also retained its appeal throughout the sixteenth century. Moreover, presumably due to the efforts of medieval authors such as Gower and Lydgate, Medea's story often remains linked to the story of the Trojan War. Though she and Helen do not share the long narratives they did in the Middle Ages, many texts, such as Douglas' *Palice of Honour*, will contain brief references to both (and references that are very often closely linked, as they are in the works of Gower,

[1] Smith, ed. *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, 1.1017.
[2] Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977) 91.

Chaucer and Lydgate). British authors, following the example set by the continent, also produced translations of the classical texts which told her story, and which had been popular in the Middle Ages, such as Golding's English translation of Justin's *Epitome* (1564) as well as of Ovid. George Buchanan's Latin translation of Euripides' *Medea* was published in 1544. Buchanan's tragedies were praised by Sidney,[3] and McFarlane notes that in addition to this critical admiration, his piece also "found favour in schools" (120). Edith Hall points to Bruce R. Smith's suggestion that "Euripides' *Medea* may have been performed in Latin [...] in the 1540s",[4] and McFarlane (120) notes a performance of Buchanan's translation at his *Collège* in Bordeaux in 1543.

As far as Latin texts are concerned, English versions of texts that had not been known in the Middle Ages also appeared, such as Nicholas White's English translation of the *Argonautica* of Valerius Flaccus (no longer extant, though Palmer dates it to 1565-6).[5] Meanwhile, Arthur Golding's *Metamorphoses* (1567) was a highly influential example of the importance the Renaissance period attached to translation. As Jonathan Bate puts it, "If Shakespeare and his contemporaries owed their intimacy with Ovidian rhetoric to the grammar schools, their easy familiarity with Ovidian narrative was as much due to Golding".[6] In his *Epistle to Leceister*, Golding clearly lays out the lessons the reader can expect to learn from his English rendering of Ovid:

> The good successe of Jason in the land of Colchos, and
> The dooings of Medea since, doo give too understand
> That nothing is so hard but peyne and travell doo it win,
> For fortune ever favoreth such as boldly doo begin:
> That women both in helping and in hurting have no mach
> When they too eyther bend their wits: and how that for too catch
> An honest meener under fayre pretence of freendship, is
> An easie matter. Also there is warning given of this,
> That men should never hastely give eare too fugitives,
> Nor into handes of sorcerers commit their state or lyves.

[3] Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry, or The Defence of Poesy*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1973, rev R. W. Maslen, 2002), p.113.
[4] Edith Hall, "Medea and British Legislation Before the First World War". *Greece and Rome*, Second Series, 46.1 (1999): 42-77, n. 39, p. 74. See also Bruce R. Smith, *Ancient Scripts and Modern Experience on the English Stage 1500-1700* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988) 201, 205.
[5] Palmer, *List of English Editions*, 109.
[6] Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 29.

It shewes in fine of step moothers the deadly hate in part,
And vengeaunce was unnatural that was in moothers hart. (143-54).[7]

These lines emphasise the scope of Medea's story in Ovid's poem, but also its ambiguity. Golding's argument that the story demonstrates "That nothing is so hard but peyne and travel doo it win, / For fortune ever favoreth such as boldly doo begin" (145-6) emphasises Jason's contribution to his own success, thereby downplaying Medea's role. The *Epistle* is calculated in its ambiguity: lines such as "men should never hastely give eare too fugitives" (151) could be a warning to Aeetes, to Pelias or to Creon, or, less probably, to Medea herself. For her part, Medea is characterised as helpful and deceptive, a fugitive, a mother and a sorceress, and thus the *Epistle* represents her uncertain, and unstable, characterisation in the poem as a whole.

In 1564, Golding had produced a faithful English translation of Justin's *Epitome*. This history had very little interest in presenting a transgressive Medea: it does not connect her with the Argonautic voyage, makes no mention of the killing of Pelias or her children, and refers to her enmity towards Theseus and the death of her brother without implicating her in any wrongdoing. The *Metamorphoses* presents a Medea who is highly threatening and ruthlessly violent, but Golding's approach to translation is revealed since, once again, his English rendering is a broadly accurate representation of the original, despite the contradictory attitude to Medea that results. Like other Renaissance translators, Golding makes some effort to elucidate or simplify matters for his readers. Thus he expands Ovid's reference to *strigis infamis* (7.269) ("the uncanny screech-owl") into "a Witch a cursed odious wight / Which in the likenesse of an Owle abrode a nightes did flie, / And Infants in their cradels chaunge or sucke them that they die" (7.350-2). This change is probably intended to appeal to the sixteenth century's fascination with macabre stories of witchcraft and the occult, specifically here with the classical figure of

[7] Arthur Golding, *Shakespeare's Ovid: being Arthur Golding's Translation of the 'Metamorphoses'*, ed. W. H. D. Rouse (London: Centaur Press, 1961).

the child-killing *strix*, a witch that could transform into an owl.[8] Some changes, however, argue an attempt on Golding's part to make the Ovidian Medea more akin to the human figure represented in the *Heroides*. Thus, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the reader is told that Medea was impressed by Jason when he came to plead with her because he was more beautiful than usual: *et casu solito formosior Aesone natus / illa luce fuit: posses ignoscere amanti* (7.84-5) ("It chanced that the son of Aeson was more beautiful than usual that day: you could pardon her for loving him"). In Golding's rendering, this assessment is far more obviously Medea's, and subjective: "And (as it chaunced) farre more faire and beautifull of face / She thought him then than ever erst: but sure it doth behove / Hir judgement should be borne withall bicause she was in love" (7.120-2). Here, the suggestion that Medea may have been wrong, and may have been swayed by the strength of her feelings, compromises her judgement and correspondingly her power. Earlier, subtle additions have betrayed Golding's sense that Medea's desire for Jason is unwise, and may be actively detrimental to her. Golding's Medea describes her love as "this uncouth heat" (7.20) and "an uncouth maladie" (7.23). Ovid has merely *conceptas* [...] *flammas* (7.17) ("these flames that you feel"), and *nova vis* (7.19) ("some strange power").

Similarly, in his *Heroides*, and despite Boas' claim that his alterations are relatively minor, Turberville does make some changes to the sense of the letters dealing with Medea's story, although these changes may not always be intentional. Turberville's Hypsipyle sees Jason and Medea's union as invalid, remarking: "Some furie fell with bloodshot eyes / did frame this cankred spight" (p.72). Ovid's Hypsipyle applies this image to herself, and to her marriage to Jason: *at mihi nec Iuno, nec Hymen, sed tristis Erinys / praetulit. Infaustas sanguinolenta faces* (6.45-6) ("And yet neither Juno nor Hymen, but gloomy Erinys, stained with blood, carried before me the unhallowed torch"). Turberville may here by attempting to construct Hypsipyle as a stronger, more powerfully angry character, or he may be trying to distance his "good" woman from such disturbing and pagan imagery, by applying it instead to the irredeemable Medea. The first possibility, that Turberville is trying to

[8] For an account of Ovid's use of the figure of the *strix*, see P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Witchcraft: A History* (Stroud: Tempus, 2004) 35-6.

underscore the sense of Hypsipyle mounting a personal attack on Medea, seems strengthened by the changes he makes to her letter as it draws to a close. Most interestingly, Turberville's Hypsipyle hopes of Medea

> When sea and land she hath
> Consumde, up to the skye,
> Let her goe rangle like a Rogue
> and by selfe slaughter die. (p.80)

Ovid's *Heroides* has no reference to suicide, and instead Hypsipyle wishes: *cum mare, cum terras consumpserit, aera temptet; / erret inops, expes, caede cruenta sua!* (6.161-2) ("When she shall have no hope more of refuge by the sea or by the land, let her make trial of the air; let her wander, destitute, bereft of hope, stained red with the blood of her murders!"). Here, Turberville may make the addition in an effort to pass a firmer judgement on Medea (perhaps due to Renaissance discomfort with her links to pagan gods and to such terrible crimes), and to portray her as subject to some kind of higher power, even if it is only that of her own guilty conscience. Such a flagrant deviation from his source text, particularly in what has been termed a "pedestrian translation"[9] of Ovid, becomes highly significant, indicative of the threat Renaissance authors saw in Medea, and their desire to contain this threat by somehow punishing her behaviour. Its significance is apparent in the fact that by the last decades of the seventeenth century, over a hundred years after Turberville's translation, English translators of Hypsipyle's epistle, including Elkanah Settle and Matthew Stevenson, continued to include her wish for Medea's suicide.[10]

If Golding and Turberville are generally reluctant to deviate too far from the Latin they are translating, John Studley is fully prepared to, while still regarding his 1566 rendering of Seneca's *Medea,* essentially, as translation. The changes that Studley makes to the Latin text can often be intended to paint Medea as less threatening. The first chorus, which he admits to cutting

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[9] Michael Drayton, *Works,* Vol. 5, ed. J. William Hebel, Kathleen Tillotson and Bernard H. Newdigate, 5 vols (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1931-41) 98.

[10] For Settle's epistle, see John Dryden, comp., *Ovid's Epistles Translated by Several Hands* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1680). For Stevenson's, see Matthew Stevenson, *The Wits Paraphras'd, or, Paraphrase upon Paraphrase in a Burlesque on the Several Late Translations of Ovids Epistles* (London: Will Cademan, 1680). John Sherburne also includes the reference to suicide in his translation of the *Heroides*, but Wye Saltonstall does not.

"because in it I sawe nothing but an heape of prophane storyes, and names of prophane Idoles" (125-6),[11] congratulates Jason for having escaped the wild Medea, and emphasises her unpredictability and dangerous otherness. Studley's new chorus rather pities Medea for her credulous love:

> The shafte that flew from Cupids golden bowe,
> With fethers so hath dimd her daseld Eyes,
> That can not see to shun the waye of woe. (1.365-8).

The accounts of Euripides and Seneca, relying as they do so heavily on Medea's speech and her version of events, make it unclear whether Jason ever really loved Medea. Studley has drawn his own conclusions, and Jason is characterised as a flattering seducer rather than an eager young bridegroom. The chorus exclaims

> woe Jason, woe to thee most wretched man,
> Or rather wretche Medea woe to thee,
> Woe to the one that thus dyssemble can,
> Woe to the other that trayned so myght be. (1.389-92)

Studley's chorus takes on a far more obviously prophetic role than Seneca's, signposting Medea's potential misfortune (if she allows Jason to discard her) and her lack of power over him (as the audience is aware she cannot change his mind). In Act Three, again Studley adds to Seneca by referencing Medea's love for Jason. Jason observes her approach, and notes

> And loe on me when ons she kaste
> the beams of glauncing eie,
> Full blithe she leapes, she jumps for joye,
> in fittes she ginnes to frye.
> Depe deadlie blackish hate she seems in out warde brow to beare,
> And whollye in her frownynge face
> doth glutting grefe appeare. (1350-7)

[11] John Studley, *Translations of Seneca's 'Agamemnon' and 'Medea'*, ed. E. M. Spearing (Louvain: A. Uystpruys, 1913).

Seneca has *atque ecce, viso memet exiluit, furit, / fert odia prae se: totus in vultu est dolor* (3.445-6) ("and look, on seeing me she has leapt forward, she is mad, she parades her hatred: all her anguish shows in her expression"). Here, then, with language that recalls the romance elements in medieval accounts, or the classical texts of Apollonius Rhodius and Valerius Flaccus, Studley emphasises the depth of Medea's feeling. At points, Studley has emphasised Medea's role in Jason's story (he elaborates on her Senecan references to the assistance she gives, for example). In the main, though, he is keen to play up the sense that Medea has lost her power over Jason, and concurrently over her situation.

This sense of Studley negotiating Medea's power, making her appear more helpless in an attempt to neutralise her threat, can be seen too, very obviously, in his treatment of Jason's final lines in the tragedy. In the Preface to his 1581 edition of Seneca's collected works, the *Tenne Tragedies*, which included Studley's *Medea* as well as Jasper Heywood's *Troas*, Thomas Newton defends Seneca against the objections of "squeymish Areopagites" ($A3^{v}$) who complain at his presentation of vice. Newton argues that while Seneca may represent wickedness, "I doubt whether there bee any amonge all the Catalogue of Heathen writers, that with more gravity of Philosophicall sentences [...] beateth down sinne, loose lyfe, dissolute dealinge, and unbridled sensuality: or that more sensibly, pithily, and bytingly layeth downe the guerdon of filthy lust, cloaked dissimulation and odious treachery" ($A3^{v}$-$A4^{r}$).[12] Medea's escape at the end of the Senecan tragedy casts serious doubt on this pronouncement, and accordingly Studley once again steps in, this time to give his expectant Elizabethan readers some sense of the consequences Medea must face. Instead of the Senecan admission of Medea as above and beyond human experience, unable to receive the gods' assistance but also not subject to their will, that is contained in Jason's declaration *testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos* (5.1027) ("bear witness that wherever you go there are no gods"), Studley has him say "Bear wytnesse grace of God is none / In place of thy repayre" (2889-90). Fiona Macintosh sees this change as being in line with

[12] Seneca, *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies,* ed. Thomas Newton (London: T. Marsh, 1581).

Studley's "Christianised world-view",[13] and like Turberville's reference to suicide in his *Heroides*, Studley's insistence that God's power endures, but that Medea is simply excluded from it, demonstrates an Elizabethan author's dissatisfaction with the classical Medea's famous escape. Here, Jason appears to be exercising a moral judgement on Medea, making her seem, if not a weak character, certainly a less powerful one, who must seek a place of "repayre" rather than going wherever she pleases. As Miola puts it,

> Seneca's Medea continues on as living testimony to the disorder of the world, as an embodiment of an evil so potent as to nullify divine power and presence; Studley's Medea is simply a spectacular sinner, one who infects her surroundings and lives without God's grace.[14]

Studley's translation, like other sixteenth-century English translations of the classics into English, has struggled to attract modern admirers.[15] Nevertheless, in her introduction to the play, E. M. Spearing notes "Contemporary references show that these tragedies were highly esteemed" (xiii). Speaking of the influence of Seneca in the Renaissance, Spearing stresses the significance of Studley's translations and those of others: "It is difficult to determine exactly how much of this influence was exerted by the plays in their Latin original, and how much through the medium of the translations of Studley and his companions" (xiii). Studley's *Medea* is obviously not a faithful representation of his Latin original (though importantly, he makes sure his reader is fully aware of this). Accordingly, his Medea is not quite Seneca's, is not the ruthlessly angry woman whose focus is all on what she can achieve in the one day before she escapes in triumph to the heavens. Between Seneca and Studley, medieval versions of the story have intervened, versions that stress Medea's love and suffering, her vulnerability and Jason's betrayal. The Renaissance Medea has become far more humanised than her classical ancestor, and accordingly Studley, like Turberville, strives to

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[13] Fiona Macintosh, "Introduction: The Performer in Performance", in Hall, Macintosh and Taplin, eds, *Medea in Performance*: 1-31, 10.

[14] Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) 105.

[15] For a typical dismissal of Studley's efforts, see Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger's Privilege* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985) 172.

make her accountable, as humans are, to some higher power, or to her own feelings of guilt and regret. Herrington notes that in 1562, a statute "had fixed the death-penalty for those who used conjurations of evil and wicked spirits".[16] This interest in the legal consequences of witchcraft may have informed both Studley's and Turberville's interest in suggesting a punishment for Medea: later drama of the sixteenth and seventeenth century certainly betrays a determination to subject the Medea-like woman (Shakespeare's Tamora and Lady Macbeth, William Alabaster's Atossa) to human, rather than divine justice. Once more, Medea is altered with each new incarnation, and while Golding, Turberville and Studley are all happier than their medieval predecessors to engage with the bloody and violent end of her story, the changes they make, whether large or small, testify to a continuing discomfort with what they found in their readings of Ovid and Seneca.

"Have Medea still in minde": Medea as Examplar in Sixteenth-Century Verse and Prose

If these texts have engaged extensively with Medea's story as it was presented by classical poets and playwrights, other Renaissance authors refer to it more briefly or obliquely. They display the Renaissance propensity to use some, rather than all, of the narrative, and their renderings suggest the extent to which Medea's story, like Helen's, had become part of the fabric of the period's literary imagination. Accounts that refer more briefly to Medea's story may be interested in diverse elements of her story. Her magic, her brutality, and the figure of a dangerously transgressive woman, the effect that she, and/or her powers, may have on a male community, are all themes explored by authors in the Renaissance. At the same time, though, traces of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century tendency to play down her threat are apparent. In Douglas' *Palice of Honour*, the speaker looks into Venus' mirror and sees a depiction of the quest for the Fleece "and all Medea's slichtis" (Hii^{v}). However, though some threat is suggested here, and in the early description of Medea as

[16] Herrington, "Witchcraft and Magic", 474-5.

"Subtell" (Ciiii^{v}), and she is later grouped with transgressive and specifically unfeminine women (Semiramis, Zenobia, Penthesilea), in fact Douglas' interest in Medea only extends as far as making her part of a catalogue, grouped with "lustie Laydis amid thay Lordis syne" (Ki^{v}). Meanwhile, in Skelton's *Phyllyp Sparowe* Jane laments her dead pet, and wishes

> But whoso understode
> Of Medeas arte,
> I wolde I had a parte
> Of her crafty magyke!
> My sparowe than shuld be quycke
> With a charme or twayne,
> And playe with me agayne. (201-7) [17]

Here, the mundane subject matter undermines the reference to Medea, and it seems that despite Jane's apparent knowledge of Medea's magic (and specifically of her rejuvenation of Aeson), Skelton is mocking her misunderstanding of the story. Later, as she attempts to prove her knowledge of classical literature, Jane (wittingly or unwittingly) elides Medea's role in Jason's quest utterly, boasting she can

> tell [...] a great pece
> Of the Golden Flece,
> How Jason it wan,
> Lyke a valyaunt man. (630-3)

Though they lurk inevitably in the background of the text, the problematic elements of Medea's story are utterly excised here, as her potent magic is mocked or undermined.

Sometimes, a specific, rather than a more generalised or generic, Medea can be evoked by English authors (as Gascoigne, for example, evokes the Helen of the *Heroides*). For William Painter's Adelasia, heroine of one of the tales in *The Palace of Pleasure*, she is "Medea the wise furious Lady" (Bbbii^{r}), and in fact Painter quotes from Euripides' tragedy. What he paraphrases is the

[17] In John Skelton, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. John Scattergood (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983).

Messenger's gloomy pronouncement, after he has recounted the deaths of Creon and his daughter:

> Ill luck and chau[n]ce thou must of force endure,
> Fortunes fickle stay needes thou must sustaine
> To grudge thereat it booteth not at all.
> Before it comes the witty wise be sure:
> By wisedomes lore, and counsel not in vaine:
> To shunne and eke avoyd. The whirling ball,
> Of fortunes threates, the sage may wel rebou[n]d
> By good foresight, before it light on ground.[18]

Adelasia has used Medea as she used Helen, as an example of a woman who successfully eloped, leaving her kingdom and family. Painter obviously has her make such comparisons, and wish to emulate such women, to ironise the naïve young girl, who seems to know the names of classical women without appreciating the implications of invoking their stories thus. However, if Painter uses Medea's story to manipulate his representation of Adelasia, he also manipulates his reader's response to the story through the comparison. A mention of Medea as an idealistic young lover, combined with a quotation from Euripides, might seem to foreshadow a tragic end to the story and the love-affair, and the reader might be forgiven for anticipating tragedy, particularly for Adelasia and Alerane's young son William. Finally, though, Painter confounds such expectations, and has Adelasia happily reunited with her father, her marriage blessed, and her son knighted. He dismisses Euripides' belief in "the inconstant and mutable revolucion of fortune", instead attributing the happy ending to "the providence of God" (Gggi^{v}), and counselling his readers to follow the example of the Emperor, Adelasia's father, who humbles himself by giving up on his desire for revenge and welcoming back his errant daughter and son-in-law. Here then, Painter does expect his reader to know the Euripidean Medea (or at least hopes that they will). Often in sixteenth-century verse, writers appear to be poking sly fun at their subjects for not knowing their

[18] No signature – should be Fffiiii^{r-v}). The Euripidean lines Painter seems to be echoing are "I have long thought that man's life is merely a shadow, and I should not fear to say that those who seem to be wise as they anxiously ponder their words of wisdom convict themselves of the greatest folly. For no man is ever truly happy. One may have better luck than another if the wealth pours in – but that is not real happiness" (1223-30).

classical mythology well enough, for invoking Medea (or more usually Helen) simply as an example of a lover. In such cases, the reader is frequently rewarded for their superior knowledge of the source material, as the love affair ends badly. Here though, Painter appears to joke at the expense of his readers who know their Euripides (or at least their Medea) too well, who eagerly anticipate tragedy as soon as her name is invoked.

Similarly brief but pointed references to Medea are to be found in Turberville's *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets*, which appeared in 1567. As his alterations to the *Heroides* (produced in the same year) would suggest, Turberville is principally interested in what makes Medea weaker, or more vulnerable to punishment. He includes her alongside Helen in his "Disprayse of Women that allure and love not", cautioning his male readers:

> Have Medea still in minde,
> Let Circe be in thought:
> And Helen that to utter sack
> Both Greece and Troie brought. ($I4^{v}$) [19]

However, though here her beauty contains the potential for danger, elsewhere Turberville's knowledge of his medieval predecessors suggests a more vulnerable Medea, one who is invested with no magical or murderous power, and is unable to influence Jason's actions. In "Cousell returned by Pyndare to Tymetes, of Constancie" Pyndare writes to her lover Tymetes using Jason as an example of an unconstant lover. She asks

> What faythelesse Jason forcde
> A Traytors name to gaine?
> When he to Colchos came, and did
> The golden Fleese attaine? ($D4^{r}$)

Here, as it is in so many brief histories of the quest, Medea's role in his success is ignored. Even when Medea's assistance is acknowledged, Pyndare, like Studley, shows how it weakens her. She groups Jason with Theseus as

[19] George Turbervile (George Turberville), *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets (1567) and Epitaphes and Sonnettes (1576). Facsimiles Reproductions with an Introduction by Richard J. Panofsky* (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1977).

examples of men who fecklessly abandoned the women who so assisted them, exclaiming:

> Cause they their faythfull Friendes
> That savde their doubtfull lyves
> Forsooke at last, and did disdaine
> to take them to their wyves. (D4^{r})

Pyndare tells Tymetes that, though he doubts the constancy of women, men are historically less faithful. Like Chaucer and Studley, then, Turberville makes Medea seem appealing because pitiable. In "The Lover Voweth How So Ever he be Guerdoned to Love Faithfully" and then "The Lover Excuseth Himselfe for Renowncing His Love and Ladie Imputing the Same to his Fate and Constellation", Turberville references Medea's hopeless desire for Jason, and his abandonment of her, with no mention of the revenge she takes. Indeed, in this latter poem Turberville does not even blame Jason (who is frequently portrayed as an archetypally faithless love from antiquity onwards), arguing instead that Medea's unhappiness was "in Cradle hir assignde" (p.237).[20] Likewise (and though it was Helen who really fired his imagination), in *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowers* Gascoigne deliberately plays up the story of the Fleece as an example of masculine success and worth. "In Prayse of a gentlewoman who though she were not very fayre, yet was she as hard-favoured as might be" marvels at Anthony's love for Cleopatra, before concluding "Wherefore he worthy was, to win the golden fleece, / Which scorned the blasting sterres in Rome, to capture such a peece" (p.225). Here, Anthony is Jason, and Cleopatra is both the Fleece and, apparently, a Medea: but a Medea who enjoys no power, and is merely a man's conquest.

A similarly male-oriented view, this time of Jason's quest, can be seen in "An Excellent Song of an Outcast Lover". In this poem, part of the *Handful of Pleasant Delights,* the lover describes his faithfulness in love, exclaiming "No toile, nor labour great, / Could wearie me herein: / For stil I had a *Jasons* heart, / The golden fleece to win" (1335-8).[21] Here, it seems possible that the

[20] No signature.
[21] Rollins points to lines from "The Lover Complayneth of his Ladies Unconstancy" (found in the *Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions*) which suggest its author plagiarised this poem.

poet is mocking his speaker, encouraging his reader to appreciate firstly that Jason did not conquer the Fleece alone, secondly that he was an archetypally faithless lover, and thirdly that he was to pay dearly for his romantic involvement with Medea.

Elsewhere, however, male authors display a determined, almost defiant determination to reinvent the quest for the Fleece as a purely male endeavour (an interest discernible in the fifteenth century in Lefèvre's *Histoire de Jason*). This desire was obvious in a general sense in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in the clear reluctance of authors such as Lydgate, Clerk or even Chaucer to allow Medea too much of a hand in Jason's tasks. By the early modern period, however, writers had enthusiastically adopted the Fleece (and by implication, Jason's acquisition of it) as symbolic of male achievement. In the English literature of the seventeenth century, the image of the Golden Fleece can be found representing the alchemical quest for the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life, English conquest of foreign lands, or even the benefits England will reap from trade with the New World.[22] Stephen Gosson attaches a commendatory verse to "The Pleasant Historie of the Conquest of the Weast Indies, now called new Spayne Atchieved by the worthy Prince Hernando Cortes Marques of the Valley of Huaxacac, most delectable to Reade", which was translated from Spanish by Thomas Nicholas in 1578. In his praise of this translation, Gosson notes it reminds its readers "That labour beares away the golden fleece, / And is rewarded with the flower of Greece" (p. 78).[23] The connection between gold and the conquest of the New World meant that Medea's story probably sprang readily to Gosson's mind: here, however, conquest, poem and translation are all inescapably male, and Medea's tricky involvement is quietly ignored. As the sixteenth century

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Rollins, ed., *A Handful*, 108. The lines in question include the lover's exclamation "Ne will, no wo, or smart / Could minde from purpose set, / But that I had a Jasons harte / The golden fleese to get" (qtd.108).

[22] The quest for the Fleece is connected to alchemical discovery in Jonson's *The Alchemist* and George Sandys' commentary on his *Metamorphoses*, to English triumphs over France and Spain in Heywood's *Troia Britannica*, and to the riches of the New World in William Vaughan's *The Golden Fleece Divided into Three Parts* (London: William Stansby, Miles Flesher, and another] for Francis Williams, 1626). In Jonson's and Vaughan's texts, Medea is absent, in Heywood's text her control over the quest is noticeably reduced, and in Sandys' commentary (discussed below) Jason's success is once again explained with a series of rationalisations that privilege male achievement.

[23] In Stephen Gosson, *The School of Abuse, and A Short Apologie for the Schoole of Abuse*, ed. Edward Arber (Birmingham: English Reprints, 1868).

progressed, however, other authors affirm their interest in Medea (rather than in Jason), seeing her wickedness, and the unhappiness which they felt should follow it, as salutary lessons for women, and for Christians of both sexes. Rewriting Medea in this way, authors including Robinson and Whetstone took substantial liberties with their classical sources, but in so doing they created popular new Medeas, and provide a fascinating insight into Elizabethan attitudes to the classics. *The Rocke of Regard*, by Whetstone, and *The Rewarde of Wickednesse*, by Robinson, portray Medea, like Helen, as a suffering and wronged character, and accordingly once again as a less powerful one. Like their classical ancestors, these sixteenth-century Medeas find that human society is literally unable to sustain the effects of their wickedness once they have overstepped societal boundaries. Accordingly in both poems Medea is utterly alone and an outsider, enjoying none of the ability to escape displayed by her Senecan and Euripidean counterparts.

As they do with Helen, both works take an original approach to Medea's power, locating her in the Underworld where she articulates her own regret, and describes the consequences of her transgressive actions. In *The Rewarde of Wickednesse*, Robinson uses Medea in a highly didactic fashion. Moreover, while the piece is a dream vision (a genre Medea and Helen made repeated, though silent, appearances in during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries), Robinson's use of her is imaginative. The episode she appears in is entitled

> *The rewarde of* Medea *for hir* wicked actes, and false deceyving of hir father, sleying of hir children and hir owne Brother, and working by inchauntment. This historie is merveylous tragicall, and a good example for Women. (F2^{v})

Since he aims to provide a cautionary example against female wickedness, rather than against female credulity, Robinson is predictably keen to represent, rather than skim over, Medea's crimes and her transgressive behaviour. It is significant that Robinson allows her to recount her own crimes, and that she is not doing so (as she is in the *Heroides* or Caxton's *History*) to win Jason's sympathy. At the same time, though, she is not allowed to rejoice in her wickedness as the Senecan and Euripidean Medeas do, and like Studley's

Medea, she is written in accordance with Elizabethan values. Thus she goes on to portray her magical power as less than the greater power of the Christian God, and less than that of the pagan gods she generally feels an affinity for:

> O that witches and Coniurers knew so well as I,
> of Joves mightie doome that doth in heaven sitte,
> Then woulde they mende, if they had grace or witte,
> To serve the Lorde woulde set theyr whole delight:
> And disobedient children woulde their follye flitte,
> assuredly the Lorde at length doth smite. (G^{v})

Medieval authors, often bound by a desire to present Medea's crimes as they were recounted by Guido, shy away from suggesting that punishment awaits her in this way (although they may well have found the idea attractive), preferring instead to add Christian elements to her story by echoing Guido's doubt that she could enjoy power over nature. With this in mind, Robinson's explicit christianising of the myths of Helen and Medea, his determination to see both women as anachronistically subject to an Elizabethan God as well as the pagan gods referred to in Seneca and Euripides, becomes particularly remarkable. As Schmitz puts it, "His is a Protestant Hell, where religious and private misconduct are unpardonable" (61), and Helen and Medea are carefully chosen to speak (specifically to women) about the consequences of challenging male control through sin, whether it be adultery, disobedience or murder.

Speaking of different forms of Renaissance imitation (and drawing on Thomas M. Greene's work as he does so), Bate notes "Most sophisticated is 'dialectical' imitation, in which the later text actively conflicts with and dissociates itself from its classical pretext" (42).[24] Whetstone's and Robinson's treatments of Medea have been seldom admired, and yet if they are viewed in the light of Bate's comment they become more interesting. Like Studley before, both authors engage obviously with Medea's story, and imitate to a certain degree – and yet like Studley, they unashamedly alter what does not suit their purpose. All three authors plainly object to the criminal escaping punishment they would have found in Seneca, Euripides or the *Metamorphoses*, and variously attempt to impose some kind of justice or

[24] See also Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982).

sanction on Medea, and those like her. In *The Bookes verdite upon Medea*, Robinson warns

> You witches all take heede, you see how God rewardes:
> And what appoynted is your meede, that divelish actes regardes.
> Leave of your invocation, your crosings and your charmes:
> (Alas) it is abomination, and doth increase your harmes. (G3^{r})

However, while this discomfort with witchcraft is predictable, Robinson also sees Medea's transgression as speaking to more ordinary women, and sees the Colchian princess as an example to families, and a warning to exercise greater control:

> (Alas) whoe would have thought, that in a womans breast:
> *Dame* nature would have let been wrought, to breede so much unrest:
> [...]You parents it is time, to looke your younglings to:
> Least with this Prince, you say in fine, heartes ease and child adue.
> Keepe in your daughters strayght, best counsell I can geve:
> Least that perhaps shee catch a bayte, that both your harts may greve. (G3^{r})

The *Rewarde* takes its cue from Dante's *Inferno* (which describes numerous classical sinners, including Helen and Jason, languishing in Hell).[25] There, Dante's emphasis is on Jason's wrongdoing, and it is he who is punished for his betrayal of Medea and Hypsipyle: Medea is only mentioned as having taken revenge upon him. Here, she, rather than Jason, is the focus, and her transgressive actions are described. However, while the didactic and specifically Christian nature of Robinson's project means that he describes Medea's evildoing meticulously, this does not mean she has any power remaining. The power she had, and the threat she once posed the male community and to her own immediate and extended family, are referenced only to stress how she has been brought down by God. It is particularly interesting that in his verdict, Robinson advises that parents ensure their daughters read only "godlie bookes" (G3^{r}): the piece itself aims to caution its female readers

[25]Medea is to be found in Canto 18, lines 95-6. Helen, meanwhile, is mentioned in Canto 5, lines 63-5: "Elena vedi, per cui tanto reo / tempo si voles" ("See Helen, for whose sake so many years of ill revolved"). Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, trans. and ed. John D. Sinclair, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1961).

by example, and while he has taken episodes from some of the most alarming accounts of Medea's crimes, Robinson has rewritten his classical models into the kind of edifying, cautionary and god-fearing text he recommends. Thus, while giving Medea her own voice may seem to make her a more poignantly affecting and perhaps sympathetic character, it allows her to more effectively serve Robinson's religious ends, and shows a male author once more bending Medea's story, and her threat, to his own purpose.

In "The Piteous Complaint of Medea, Forsaken of Jason, Lively Bewraying the Slipperie Hold in Sugred Words", part of his *Rocke of Regard*, Whetstone represents Medea as reflecting on, and regretting, the help she gave Jason and the sacrifices she made. She highlights her power specifically to illustrate how she is, paradoxically, unable to help herself:

> What vaileth now my skil, or sight in Magickes lore,
> May charmed hearbs, suffice to help, or cure my festred sore,
> A salve I shapt, for others smart,
> My selfe to ayde, I want the Arte. (p.75)

Medea outlines her powers in by now utterly familiar Ovidian language: "I made the wayward Moone, against the Sunne to Strive, / And gastly ghostes, from burial graves, ful oft I did revive" (p.75).[26] However, unlike her Senecan or Ovidian counterparts, in particular, Whetstone's Medea does not see herself as set apart from other women because of these powers. Rather she sees her story as a cautionary tale, warning

> But lordly lookes full oft, and slippry service eke,
> To harmelesse Ladies have béene vowde, to catch y^{e} suters séeke.
> And then depart, from plighted othe,
> Their sugred woordes, yéelde sealdome trothe. (p.76)

The typical image, seen in the *Metamorphoses*, of Medea as Jason's second (and perhaps secondary) prize, his *spolia altera* (7.157), is present, as Medea exclaims: "The goulden fléece, thou wert to blame, / To beare away, I wonne

[26] See *Met.* 7.198-209.

the same".[27] There is no explicit reference to the help Medea gave Jason (only veiled references to her willingness to assist others, while being unable to help herself), and none at all to her crimes, and yet she portrays herself very obviously as a victim, forsaken by Jason and with none of the Euripidean, Senecan or Ovidian ability to transcend her unfavourable circumstances, which must instead be endured. She complains "My lothed life, should lengthned bée, / To guerdon my iniquitie" (76).[28] If Medea here has no power, and Jason accordingly enjoys more, this theme is repeated in a later poem in Whetstone's collection, *The Complaint of a Gentlewoman Being with Child, Falsely Forsaken.* Jason is used once again as an example of male unpredictability and the power of male whim, as the speaker addresses her lover:

> Thou *Jason* false by perjurde flight,
> Thou *Theseus* thefte, decypherest plaine,
> I *Dido* wretch (thou *Troyan* knight)
> Here equall griefes, in breast sustaine,
> I justly say, which wordes I rue,
> All men be false, and none be true. (p.90)[29]

In these two brief poems, then, Whetstone portrays Medea as a hapless victim, who may acknowledge her power only to stress how it is past, or inadequate in the face of male deception, or can only be bent to the service of others. However, Whetstone is certainly aware of the "other" Medea, the furious reaction to her abandonment that follows the distress he depicts here, and wryly references it in the "Inventions of P. Plasmos touching his hap and hard fortune". The narrative alternates between Plasmos' story of betrayal and loss as he tells it, and the "Reporters admonition" which acts as a kind of gloss. Plasmos speaks fulsomely of his love Laymos, but in following his praise, the Reporter foreshadows the betrayal and disappointment which is to follow:

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[27] Euripides' Medea complains that Jason "carried me as plunder from a foreign land" (258). However, the uncertainty of Euripides' influence in Renaissance England means the image is more likely to come from the *Metamorphoses.*

[28] The Medeas of Euripides and Ovid do see their lives as cruelly lengthened, and do wish for death. However, these admissions of impotence are included to contrast with the growing sense of powerful rage both Medeas then come to demonstrate.

[29] No signature.

> [...] it seemeth his Lady *Laymos* that he so highly commended, was in very déede as fayre as *Flora*, as faithful as *Faustine*, as loving as *Layis*, as meeke as *Medea*, as honest as *Hellen*, as constant as *Cressed*, and as modest as *Maria Bianca*, and therefore worthie of estimation. (P^r)

Here, like Gascoigne's G. T., the narrator of the 1573 edition of *The Adventures of Master F. J.*, Whetstone's reporter is included to provide another point of view on the love affair, and, perhaps, to encourage the reader to think more carefully about the implications of such classical comparisons. The damning alliteration that condemns Laymos to be "as meeke as *Medea*, as honest as *Hellen*, as constant as *Cressed*", clearly signposts Whetstone's intention to reference Medea's frightening power slyly and ironically (and the way a feigned meekness may be used to encourage men to fatally underestimate her) even as he uses her predominantly as a symbol of feminine helplessness. Like Gascoigne and so many of the miscellany authors before him, Whetstone manipulates not just the classical Helen and Medea available to him, but also the medieval versions that had, apparently, led men to esteem them fitting models for women.

Like Helen, Medea was popular among miscellany authors, because, as Whetstone's use of her has made clear, her story did not need explaining, and in fact merely a mention of her name could be used to reflect on an author's more original heroines. The influential continental author Matteo Bandello uses her, as he has used Helen, to signpost particular kinds of feminine transgression. In his *Certaine Tragicall Discourses*, translated by Geoffrey Fenton, the murderous and sexually insatiable Blanche Maria is described as Medea, while in the story of "a young lady of Milan", Pandora is repeatedly termed a "seconde Medea" (Fol. 62^r).[30] Abandoned by her lover Parthonope, she prays for Medea's powers to exact revenge, before deliberately inducing a miscarriage and killing her child, which is born alive, after noting its resemblance to Parthonope (possibly a reference to the Heroidean Medea's observation that her children look uncomfortably like Jason). Here Bandello makes the story even more gory, and has Pandora exceed Medea by performing an even more taboo act (as successive sixteenth-century anti-heroines exclaim

[30] Matteo Bandello, *Certaine Tragicall Discourses*, trans. Geoffrey Fenton (London: Thomas Marshe, 1567).

they will). Bandello thus in some ways fulfils the expectation he aimed to create in his reader's mind with the mention of Medea, and in some ways confounds it by presenting an even worse woman. In so doing, he speaks to sixteenth-century male anxiety about women's child-bearing power, and how they may manipulate this power to the detriment of men.[31]

In 1576, Pettie dedicated his *Petite Pallace* to "the gentle Gentlewomen Readers" (Aii^{r}), and accordingly, like Robinson, presumably uses Medea as a cautionary example to his female (and male) readers. In "Tereus and Progne", Progne, learning of her husband's crimes, uses Medea as an example of a woman wronged by a deceptive man, but in fact, the reference foreshadows Progne's terrible revenge (once again, revenge taken on a young son for a father's crimes). His tale of "Scilla and Minos", meanwhile, follows Robinson in using Medea as a clear warning of the consequences of filial disobedience. Loving Minos, whom her father Nysus is fighting, Scilla is advised by her nurse to win his favour by plucking from her father's head "a golden haire, whereon dependeth the stay of his state and puissance of his power" (Gii^{r}) and presenting it to Minos. The allusion to Medea's theft of her father's Golden Fleece (as well as to Delilah's betrayal of Sampson) is obvious, and Scilla tells her nurse that she realises "they which provide for their fathers peace and preservation as thou wouldest have me to doe, shalt with the Daughters of Pelias kill their Father to make hym younge agayne" (Gii^{v}). However, her love for Minos is stronger than her doubts, and she convinces herself that he will approve of her desperate actions: "He will excuse & beare with my doings by the example of [...] Medea, who betraied her father to Jason" (Giii^{r}). Scilla's other inspirational examples are Ariadne and "Hyppodame", and thus it is unsurprising that her plan to win Minos ends in tragedy. Pettie then proceeds to underline the moral of the story: "I am by this story chiefely to admonish you that you pull not of your fathers haire that is, [that] you pul not their harts out of their bodies, by unadvisedly castinge your selves away in matching in marriage with those who are not meet for you" (Giii^{v}). Medea's power is acknowledged, but like Robinson, Pettie is keen to show that she is not to be

[31] For the precarious balance in classical society between woman's reproductive capabilities as at once comforting and threatening, see Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly-Born Woman,* trans. Betsy Wing (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1986) pp.7-8.

emulated, even in such mundane matters as her refusal to accord to her father's desires with regard to marriage.

This determination to focus on Medea's love for Jason recurs, unsurprisingly, in the *Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions*, a compendium which betrayed a keen interest in Helen as an example of a beautiful but sinful woman. Here, like Pettie, the (frequently anonymous) poets who reference Medea expect their readers to know the story of Jason's betrayal. More than this, they obliquely reference the revenge Medea takes. In "A Lover approving his Lady unkinde. Is forsed unwilling to utter his minde" (pp.83-6), the male speaker, most unusually, characterises his lover as Jason, and thus casts himself in the Medea role, exclaiming "perjurde as *Jason*, you faythlesse I finde" (p.83 line 25). However, he stops short of suggesting any revenge. Similarly, "A Letter written by a yonge gentil-woman and sent to her husband unawares (by a freend of hers) into Italy" (pp.74-6) reproaches an apparently errant husband, and attempts to equate herself to a suitably notorious and powerful woman, warning him "If so, be sure *Medea* I will, shew forth my selfe in deede" (p. 75 line 12). Finally, however, she undermines this dire pronouncement, and her threat, exclaiming "Yet gods defend though death I taste, I should distroy they seede" (p. 75 line 13). Both speakers undermine their use of Medea even as they articulate it, refusing, implicitly or explicitly, to fully occupy the role of vengeful scorned lover that her model suggests. In fact, even by the end of the sixteenth century, Medea's romantic disappointment was still being eagerly invoked by authors, and as they were in the Middle Ages, her own powers are reduced by her helpless desire for Jason.

Elsewhere, Medea's powers were questioned more pointedly. In his *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (first published in 1584), Reginald Scot references Medea only to quote from the *Ars Amatoria*, giving Ovid's opinion that love potions are useless: *Non facient ut vivat amor Meddeides [h]erbae* ("Medeas herbs will not procure / That love shall lasting live") (N^{v}-$N2^{r}$).[32] Patrick Collinson points to Scot's surprising refusal to credit such stories, calling him "one of the most radically sceptical intellects of the whole Renaissance era". He notes "For Scot, the true crime of witchcraft was the belief that such a

[32] Reginald Scot, *Scots Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London: R. C. for Giles Calvert, 1651). The English translation of Ovid is by Abraham Fleming.

nonsense was possible".[33] Here, then, Scot's use of Medea is carefully calculated: she is a forlorn and frustrated lover, but also an example of the limits of magical power, and one designed to allay the fears of his sixteenth-century readers, for whom witchcraft was a real concern (albeit a concern that could frequently translate into entertainment).

Staging Medea in the Sixteenth Century: The Senecan Revenger

In his introduction to *A Most Lamentable and Tragicall Historie of Didaco and Violenta* (1578), Thomas Achelley references Medea's story, only to reject it as a model. He exclaims

> To discourse of the furious tirannie of the boocherly Medea, in dismembring the innocent infante Absyrtus her owne naturall brother, and scattering his martyred limmes in the hie waye where her father shoulde passe, were but a loste labour. (Ai^{r})[34]

Achelley explains that it is hopeless to look to classical writing for edifying stories, since

> Those are but Ethnicke examples, farre sette, and a wonderfull waye distant from our climate both by Sea and Lande: and committed among such barbarous people, that had no knowledge of God nor yet of any sparke of Civilitie. (Ai^{r-v})

He maintains that his fellow Christians cannot learn from such stories, and must draw their teaching from examples closer to home. Nevertheless, he dresses his story (of a forsaken woman who exceeds even Medea in the grisly nature of the punishment she inflicts on her errant lover) in frequent references to classical mythology, using both Medea and Jason in a way that seems utterly conventional. Violenta accuses Didaco of proving himself a Jason in his faithlessness, and she is likened to Medea as she prepares for her revenge. Despite apparently rejecting Medea as a model, Achelley's subject matter

[33] Patrick Collinson, "Literature and the Church", in Loewenstein and Mueller, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern English Literature*: 374-398, 392-3.
[34] Thomas Achelley, *A Most Lamentable and Tragicall Historie of Didaco and Violenta* (London: John Charlewood for Thomas Butter, 1576). Schmitz (204-5) notes that Achelley found the story in Painter, who in turn took it from Bandello.

apparently calls her inevitably to mind, just as Elizabethan poets frequently found a mention of Helen irresistible as they described a lady's beauty. Importantly, though, and despite his clear intention to warn errant women to shun such behaviour, Achelley undermines the threat that a reference to Medea suggests. When Didaco's butchered body is discovered, Violenta admits her crime, but unlike the Euripidean or Senecan Medea, she is not allowed to escape afterwards, and the poem ends, predictably, with her execution. Like Studley before him, Achelley can only engage cautiously with Medea's story, and his use of her underscores the desire to punish Medea that was exemplified by Studley, Turberville, Whetstone and Gascoigne, and that came to define Medea's appearances in early modern English drama.

Despite the sixteenth century's fascination with witchcraft and the occult (two themes which exert considerable influence on drama in the period),[35] and despite the popularity of Golding's and Turberville's translations of Medea, Elizabethan witchcraft plays do not frequently make reference to her, or to witches of her type. Herrington notes the typical characteristics of the wise woman or female conjurer in the literature of the period: "with innumerable tricks up her sleeve, she nevertheless, through her vigorous if coarse humour, her abounding good nature, and her essential kindliness, endears herself to the reader".[36] Such an unthreatening witch-figure could scarcely be further from Medea. Medea appeared on the English stage relatively infrequently,[37] and it is more common to see her story referenced obliquely, through the figure of the murderous and vengeful female. Sometimes, though, playwrights do use her onstage to underscore themes of violence and revenge, just as the authors of the poetical and prose miscellanies could invoke her briefly to provoke specific associations in their readers' minds. She appears, led in by Ate and then shown killing Creusa (and, strangely, Jason) at the beginning of Act Five of *Locrine*, by W. S. (which use, interestingly, appears to connect her once more to some version of the Trojan

[35] In the reigns of Elizabeth and James, Herrington suggests "For the playwrights and the public, witchcraft in general, and known cases thereof, must have been a topic of unceasing conversation". Herrington, "Witchcraft and Magic", 469.
[36] Herrington, "Witchcraft and Magic", 481.
[37] Hall argues that Medea "only exerted a subterranean influence on Renaissance, Jacobean, and Restoration tragedy". Hall, "Medea and British Legislation", 47. See also Herrington, "Witchcraft and Magic", 465.

legend: in the play, the Trojan founders of Britain do battle with foreign invaders).[38] In Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville's *Gorboduc,* Medea is again included as part of a dumbshow, which foreshadows the queen Videna's furious revenge on her son for his murder of his brother. Here, Videna's transgressive and uncontrollable threat is stressed by the contrast between her reaction and her husband's to Porrex's murder of Ferrex. Gorboduc, representative of a kingly, restrained power, acts within the law, but the trial he plans stands in stark contrast to the vengeance that, foreshadowed by the appearance of Medea, is going to catch up with Porrex.[39] The Medea story is used here to highlight gender divide, feminine unpredictability, and revenge. Speaking of the play, Miola notes "Apparently, the spectacle of *Kindermord* had extraordinary power in the Renaissance" (30), and here, in their use of Medea, Norton and Sackville emphasise how the fabric of the state, as well as the family, may be torn apart by such transgressive action. At the same time, however, the fact that Videna is killed by her outraged subjects after her murder of Porrrex (and indeed, that her punishment extends to encompass the husband who could not keep her adequately under control) is a testament to the Renaissance insistence on containing Medea's story. She is punished like the Renaissance Medeas of Robinson or Studley, but this time is shown as very obviously subject to human control and laws, rather than to divine retribution.

Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* betrays a very similar impulse to invoke (though significantly not to name or present) Medea (here the Medea of Ovid and possibly Seneca).[40] Once again, though, Shakespeare steps back from the classical revenger once he has suggested her, and is careful to represent Tamora as somehow containable and subject to punishment. Tamora is very quickly constructed as a threat to male community, even as she appears under

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[38] W. S. *The Lamentable Tragedie of Locrine* (London : Thomas Creede, 1595). Thomas L. Berger, Sidney L. Sondergard and William C. Bradford suggest Peele or Greene as possible authors. Thomas L. Berger, Sidney L. Sondergard and William C. Bradford, *An Index of Characters in Early Modern English Drama: Printed Plays, 1500-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 111.

[39] Thomas Norton [and Thomas Sackville], *The Tragedie of Ferrex and Porrex* (London: John Daye, 1570).

[40] On Shakespeare's knowledge and use of Seneca, see M. L. Stapleton, *Fated Sky: The 'Femina Furens' in Shakespeare* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2000) 27-30, Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy*, esp. 16-20 and 81-90, and Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare*, 269-70, 272. Conversely, Braden sees Seneca as having had little impact on Elizabethan drama. Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy*, 171.

the control first of Rome, and then of her husband Saturninus. In her introduction to the play in *The Norton Shakespeare*, Eisaman Maus notes

> In a world in which women are treated as the sexual property of their male relatives, "good" women like Lavinia seem destined for passivity and victimization. One acquires power in such circumstances by refusing to play by the rules. (376)

In her foreignness and particularly in her ruthless desire for bloody revenge on the male ruling community she sees as having wronged her, by virtue of its greater power, Tamora is akin to Medea. However, for all her monstrous behaviour, she is in essence far less of a transgressive threat than the Colchian. As she relies on Saturninus for her position of power in Rome, so she relies on Demetrius and Chiron to wreak revenge on Lavinia and Bassianus. The difference between Tamora and Medea is brought home forcibly in the play's conclusion. First, Tamora is horrified to hear of her sons' brutal murder. Then, she is quickly killed, and in the play's final scene Lucius commands her rapid expulsion from the city:

> As for that ravenous tiger, Tamora,
> No funeral rite nor man in mourning weed,
> No mournful bell shall ring her burial;
> But throw her forth to beasts and birds to prey.
> Her life was beastly and devoid of pity,
> And being dead, let birds on her take pity. (5.3.194-9)

Miola notes "In his notorious adaptation (1678) of Shakespeare's play, [Edward] Ravenscroft capitalized on the Senecan elements in Tamora's character, portraying her as a Gothic Medea who finally slays her child for revenge on the treacherous father" (24). Shakespeare's Tamora, however, ends the play distanced from Medea. She has left male society here, but rather than ascending, and transcending, triumphantly, she is cast, dead and defeated, from the city, literally and figuratively excluded from the male society which she sought to destroy, but which shall clearly survive in her absence. Nevertheless, the Senecan anti-heroine does seem to have had some impact on the play, although if Shakespeare does use her he certainly rewrites the terrifying figure

he would have found in the Latin tragedy and, to a lesser extent, in Studley's translation.[41] Lisa Jardine argues that in the Renaissance, the spectacle of a Medea-like woman onstage may be intended to titillate the male members of the audience, and may, paradoxically, be comforting. Pointing to Tamora, and to William Alabaster's Atossa, the vicious anti-heroine of his *Roxana*, who explicitly invokes Medea and boasts of her greater wickedness, Jardine suggests "All this is guaranteed to make the hair of a male audience stand on end in pleasurable terror".[42] She argues that male audience members would discern the distance between these women, who echo their horrifying classical forebears so disturbingly, and their own wives: "No woman of *his* will ever get thus out of hand, and hence the representation is equally a source of delight" (97). What is equally pleasurable, however, is the sense that even these alarming, fictionalised women get some form of comeuppance, even as they are (as Jardine argues) implicitly distanced from Elizabethan women.

Shakespeare's *2 Henry VI* is unusual, in that it is a male character, Young Clifford, who invokes Medea. Furious at the murder of his father, he famously exclaims "Meet I an infant of the house of York, / Into as many gobbets will I cut it / As wild Medea young Absyrtus did" (5.3.57-9). In *3 Henry VI* he fulfils this ambition, savagely killing the Duke of York's innocent young son Rutland. John A. Wagner notes that Rutland was actually seventeen at the time of the battle, but that "the slaying of Rutland as such a young age was later much romaticized, especially by the Tudor chronicler Edward Hall".[43] In his chronicle, first published in 1542, Hall notes that Rutland was "scace of y^{e} age of xii yeres" (Ggiii^{r}),[44] and Shakespeare seems to have taken this suggestion as inspiration to identify Rutland with the tragic young Apsyrtus. However, despite realising the threat he makes in *2 Henry VI*, and killing the innocent Rutland, Clifford is quickly and inevitably killed himself, as such a shocking act dictates he must be. Clearly, then, a man who mimicks

[41] Stapleton (41-51) points to the murderous sorceress Joan La Pucelle in *King John* as evidence of Shakespeare's knowledge of Studley's *Medea*: however, Joan, like Tamora and like Lady Macbeth, is punished for her transgressive behaviout as Medea is not.
[42] Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (NY: Columbia UP, 1989) 97.
[43] "Plantagenet, Edmund, Earl of Rutland (1443-1460)", in John A. Wagner, *Encyclopaedia of the Wars of the Roses* (ABC Clio, 2001) 203.
[44] Edward Hall, *The union of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre [and] Yorke* (London: Richard Grafton, 1548).

Medea must expect the same punishment as a woman: however, as Jardine suggests, the spectacle of a woman invoking Medea, swearing brutal revenge on her enemies, seems to have added a particular *frisson* in the minds of the Elizabethan dramatists, and is certainly more popular. In her critical edition of William Alabaster's *Roxana* (which she dates to 1595), Dana F. Sutton publishes the Latin text and an anonymous English translation, which she suggests may have been composed by Alabaster himself (Section 26).[45] Speaking of what she calls the "Christian perspective", which frequently sees sinners in such revenge tragedies held to account, Sutton remarks "*Roxana* is thoroughly devoid of this particular form of moral analysis" (Section 20). Nevertheless, in Atossa's final speech (which Sutton notes was greatly extended in the English translation),[46] Atossa explicitly rejects the kind of escape enjoyed by Medea, exclaiming "What shall I doe? [And] whether shall I flie? / Tis vain to flye where no excuse can serve" (1739-40). She insists on taking the full blame, asks forgiveness of the murdered Roxana and her husband, and exclaims

> I will onely bide those punishments
> Which all my former villanies deserve
> Aye justice will something my torments ease
> But justice still denies all hope of ease. (1745-8)

This may not be an explicitly Christianised punishment, of the kind found in Robinson, but equally it is very far from the Senecan Medea's exultant escape, despite the truth of Sutton's observation that the tragedy has strongly Senecan elements to it (Section 15, n. to 1729f.). Apparently then, however thrilling sixteenth-century male dramatists and audiences may have found Medea's career, inescapably present is the sense that she must be held accountable somehow, if not by the Christian God then by the judgement and condemnation of a patriarchal society. Rewriting their Senecan, Euripidean and Ovidian models in this way, sixteenth-century dramatists thus betray a keen (and

[45] Introduction to William Alabaster, *Roxana*, ed. Dana F. Sutton (Hypertext edition: UC Irvine, 1998). Based on William Alabaster, *Roxana* (London: William Jones, 1632) and a contemporary English translation.
[46] William Alabaster, *Roxana*, ed. Sutton, n. to lines 1737-56 of the English translation.

predictable) desire to reimagine a perennially alarming classical woman in accordance with their own mores and expectations.

Rewriting Ovid's Medea in the Late Sixteenth Century: Drayton and Davies

Although the fashion for the murderous and alarming female revenge figure (who very often, inevitably, held echoes of Medea) continued into the seventeenth century, towards the end of the sixteenth century, prose and poetry also continued to reflect the period's interest in Medea. She does not commonly feature in longer considerations of the type Ogle, Trussell and Barnfield composed about Helen, but the period's interest in the bloody, sensationalist aspects of her story continued to be balanced by an attention to her doomed love for Jason. Samuel Daniel has Rosamond echo an Ovidian Medea in his *Complaint of Rosamond,* as she regrets her involvement with Henry, and exclaims "We see what's good, and thereto we consent us; / But yet we choose the worst, and soone repent us".[47] In Sidney's *Lamon's Tale*, the desire that the shepherds Klaius and Strephon feel for Urania is compared to Medea's "poison" (410) seeping into Creusa's blood.[48] Meanwhile Robert Greene returns to Medea repeatedly, as he returns to Helen. His contemporary Lyly makes repeated references to Medea's power in *Euphues and his England*, but the overriding message is that for all this power, she was unable to hold Jason (a sentiment voiced by Medea herself in *Heroides* 12.163-4). Greene's imagination was obviously captured by this use of Medea as an example to be pitied, rather than feared – in his *Moranda, Alcida* and *Carde of Fancie*, she is used briefly as an example of a woman who loved unwisely. Greene's heroines frequently invoke Medea, not to steel themselves to elope (as Painter's and Pettie's have done), but in fear that their ardent lovers will presently abandon them – examples include Isabel in *Greenes Never Too Late*, and Myrania in *The History of Arbasto, King of Denmark.* As she has been

[47] No signature. Samuel Daniel, *Delia and Rosamond Augmented Cleopatra* (London: Jame Roberts and Edward Allde for Simon Waterson, 1594).
[48] Philip Sidney, *Works,* ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989).

throughout the Middle Ages and sixteenth century, Medea is also invoked in Greene's work to foreshadow the unhappy conclusion of a love affair. Thus in *Mamilia*, the eponymous heroine shows herself to be aware of Jason's desertion of Medea, but decides that Pharicles will be different: in the end, though, he imitates the classical lover she has fearfully invoked, leaving her for another woman.[49] Moreover, like so many of his predecessors, in his use of Medea, Greene manipulates readerly expectation. So in *The History of Arbasto King of Denmarke* the betrayed Myrania swears revenge on Arbasto after he leaves her for Doralicia, but even though she has already referenced Medea, like her counterparts in Elizabethan revenge tragedy she is not able to imitate such an alarming classical figure absolutely, killing herself rather than taking revenge.[50] However, Greene is also responsible for a curious and unpredictable use of Medea: in *The Comicall Historie of Alphonsus, King of Aragon* (1599) she appears onstage, but is not used as the audience might expect. Rather than foreshadowing bloody revenge, she appears at several points to advise the Empress Fausta and Emperor Amurack. Greene appears to build on the powers that Ovid suggests in the *Metamorphoses*, having Medea summon the shade of the prophet Calchas to foretell Amurack's fate. Here, the play appears to foreshadow *Macbeth*, but just as Greene's play is not a tragedy, his Medea seems to have little in common with Shakespeare's Weird Sisters. She helps to engineer the match between Alphonsus and Iphigenia that ends the play, and only at the end is there a wry nod to the famous end of Medea's story, as Alphonsus compares his joy at marrying Iphigenia to Jason's triumph, "when as he had obtained, / the golden fleece by wise *Medeas* art" (I^{v}).[51] Greene's works betray an obvious interest in Helen and Medea (and in the other heroes and heroines of classical mythology) and his use of her here may be intended to satisfy the Elizabethan thirst for onstage magic, while also, as he does in his prose works, playing on his audience's knowledge of her love affair with Jason, to make ironic comment on his own characters.

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[49] Robert Greene, *Mamilia, A Mirour or Looking-Glasse for the Ladies of Englande* (London: T. Dawson for Thomas Woodcocke, 1583).
[50] Robert Greene, *The History of Arbasto* (London: I. B[eale] for Roger Jackson, 1617).
[51] Robert Greene, *The Comicall Historie of Alphonsus, King of Aragon* (London: Thomas Creede, 1599).

Clearly, and perhaps surprisingly, Elizabethan manifestations of Medea are not uniformly negative or critical, and nor does a relatively positive portrayal of her always play down her power (though Greene obviously elides her worst excesses) or rely on her romantic disappointment. In *The Third Part of the Countesse of Pembrokes Yuychurch,* Abraham Fraunce allegorises her positively, echoing some of his medieval predecessors as he explains how Medea should be interpreted as "counsayle and advice" (N^r).[52] Like his predecessors, however, such as Bersuire and the author of the prose *Ovide Moralisé*, Fraunce's efforts run into difficulties due to his desire to recount as many details of the classical story as possible. He includes her betrayal of Aeetes and her murders of her brother and children, but explains that these are examples of Medea's abandoning "all such affections as might be a let unto her" as she "flyeth away with *Jason*, the phisitian and curer of her infirmities" (N^r). Next, Fraunce must explain that Medea leaves Jason when he "gives himselfe over to filthiness" (N^r) – her escape on dragons is said to signify her good judgement. Fraunce's attitude to the legend is confused: he explains the fleece as representing "either great riches and treasure, or fame and immortality" (N^r). However, what is certain is that any attempt to explain Medea's power positively is paradoxically doomed as soon as the author starts describing it, so destructive and horrifying are the effects of her magic and rage.

More conventional uses of Medea continued to abound in verse and prose, as they did in drama. For example, in the *Faerie Queene*, at 5.8.47, Spenser compares the raging, violent Radigund to Medea. Here, he builds on his earlier mention of Medea's story, at 2.12.44-5, in which he described her love for Jason, and her killing of Creusa and the children, depicted on the gateway to Acrasia's Bower of Bliss. Though he obviously found Helen the more interesting of the two, and though these brief comparisons of a dangerous witch or an an angry, scorned woman to Medea may seem predictable, Spenser's changing authorial agenda makes it interesting, particularly as a counterpoint to his revisioning of Helen in Book Three. Suzuki points to

[52] Abraham Fraunce, *The Third Part of the Countesse of Pembrokes Yuychurch* (London: Thomas Orwyn for Thomas Woodcocke, 1592).

Spenser's increasing "disillusionment with the Elizabethan order" (178) between the publication of Books 1-3 (1590) and Books 4-6 (1596). In Book Three, Hellenore's sexuality is condemned, but she herself enjoys a surprising degree of autonomy, even in comparison to her classical ancestor. By contrast, in Book Five Suzuki reads in Radigund "anxiety concerning what is perceived as the necessary correlation between female ascendancy and male humiliation" (180). Medea will always prove a more threatening classical model than Helen, but if, as Suzuki suggests, Spenser was having doubts about the Elizabethan regime, his brief inclusion of such a threatening woman may be intended to underscore them, just as Shakespeare's provocative rewriting of Helen in *Troilus and Cressida* may be read as speaking to Elizabethan anxiety over the Queen's sexual power.

A similar impulse, to connect Medea somehow to historical event, may be discerned in the works of Michael Drayton. In his *Heroicall Epistles*, published in 1597, Drayton very loosely adapts the structure of Ovid's *Heroides*, composing pairs of letters sent between historical or literary figures. However, while the letters are by no means translations, they are rife with classical allusions. In Samuel Daniel's *Rosamond*, the ill-fated heroine had already compared herself implicitly to Medea, by echoing her Ovidian words. Here, in Henry's letter to Rosamond, Henry describes the rejuvenation of Aeson, before telling Rosamond "One Accent from thy Lips the Bloud more warmes, / Then all her Philters, Exorcismes, and Charmes" (93-4).[53] Medea's magical power is not portrayed as threatening here, but at the same time it is somehow undermined, presented as less valuable or impressive than the hold Rosamond has over him (and it is used by a male character, as well as by a male author, as an example to serve his own ends). Again, Medea seems a strange figure for an ardent lover to invoke: Tillotson and Newdigate note that "the reader's knowledge of subsequent events may be assumed, and the light of irony or of pathos turned upon the ignorance of the correspondents".[54]

Medea's magic is presented as far more alarming in one of the other letters, that of Elinor Cobham to Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. In his

[53] Michael Drayton, *Works,* Vol. 2, ed. J. William Hebel, Kathleen Tillotson and Bernard Newdigate, 5 vols (London: Shakespeare Head Press, 1931-41).
[54] Drayton, *Works*, Vol. 5, ed. Hebel, Tillotson and Newdigate, 98.

Argument, Drayton explains that Cobham "Convicted was, with Sorcerers to conspire" (p.215), and was accused of plotting to kill the young Henry VI. Initially, Elinor seems unlike Medea - she worries that, seeing her name on the letter, Humphrey will discard it, and tells him "Why, if thou wilt, I will my selfe deny, / Nay, I'le affirme and swear, I am not I" (5-6). This submissive attitude stands in stark contrast to the Senecan Medea's *Medea nunc sum*, her determined avowal of her own identity in the face of Jason's rejection. Then, however, Elinor becomes more recognisably akin to Medea. She curses Margaret of Anjou, the queen mother, and in doing so draws attention to the connection between femininity and accusations of witchcraft that was common to the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Although in the poem's opening lines she has admitted practising witchcraft, here she denies it and merely wishes for the power:

> They say, the *Druides* once liv'd in this Ile [...]
> O, that their Spels to me they had resign'd,
> Wherewith they ray'sd and calm'd both Sea and Wind!
> And made the Moon pawse in her paled Sphere,
> Whilst her grim Dragons drew them through the Ayre:
> Their Hellish Power, to kill the Plow-mans Seed,
> Or to fore-speake whole Flocks, as they did feed;
> To nurse a damned Spirit with humane Bloud,
> To carry them through Earth, Ayre, Fire, and Floud:
> Had I this skill, that Time hath almost lost,
> How like a Goblin I would haunt her ghost? (125-38)

However, then she regrets her outburst, and clearly still sees herself as subject to male societal rules and controls, begging the Duke "O pardon, pardon my mis-govern'd Tongue, / A Womans strength cannot endure my Wrong" (139-40). Her detailed account of the power she wishes she could display is couched in the assurance (comforting for the male community) that real women (even those accused of witchcraft) do not possess these alarming powers.

. Interestingly, despite her status as a pagan (and specifically the alarming involvement of magic and the pagan gods in her story) Medea can be used with Christian intent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, just as she

(and Helen) were sometimes invoked by early Christian writers. Thus Robinson and Whetstone use her as an example of a repentant and suffering sinner, and in a 1583 sermon, John Hudson uses the Ovidian Medea's exclamation *video meliora proboque, / deteriora sequor* (7.20-1) ("I see the better course and approve it, I follow the worse") to illustrate the way men may ignore the right path and eventually suffer judgement – a usage of the lines that was to become hugely popular in the seventeenth century.[55] In the 1583 edition of his *Acts and Monuments*, John Foxe includes a mention of Medea in John Hooper's letter to Ann Warcop: Hooper describes Jason winning the fleece, and demands "Jason against the poyson of the dragon, used only the medicine of Medea. What a shame is it for a Christian man against the poyson of the devill, heresie, & sinne, to use any other remedy, then Christ & his word?" (TTTtiii^{v}) [56] Here it is interesting that Medea is somehow equated with Christ, as she was in the fifteenth-century prose *Ovide Moralisé*,[57] and despite the fact that Protestants in particular might have felt more comfortable with the Medea of Robinson, a famous sorceress suffering deserved punishment. Martin Butler notes that "Foxe and his followers dwelt with horror on the King-killing side of Catholicism".[58] Accordingly, Medea seems a particularly strange example to use, but Hooper's appropriation of her story does display the continued tendency to focus on one section of her lengthy story, and moreover to present this section in a way that gives the men of the narrative greater control. Jason succeeds with "only" the help of Medea, and therefore it is he who is the more powerful figure, and the example for Christians to emulate. Meanwhile in *Nosce Teipsum* (1599) John Drayton Davies uses her story to espouse a Christian message, without specifically condemning Medea. Like Hudson and Daniel before him, he adapts the words of the Ovidian Medea, here arguing that Sense is not to be relied upon:

> What power was that, whereby Medea saw,
> And well approved, and praised the better course,

[55] John Hudson, *A Sermon Preached at Paules Crosse the ix. of Februarie.* (London: Thomas Purfoote, 1584).
[56] John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (London: John Day, 1583).
[57] See Ovid, *Ovide Moralisé en Prose, Texte du quinzieme siècle*, ed. C. de Boer (Amsterdam : North Holland Publishing Co., 1954).
[58] Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis, 1632-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 87.

When her rebellious Sense did so withdraw
Her feeble powers, as she pursued the worst? (p.58)[59]

Here, Medea's crimes are ascribed to understandable error, a human lack of judgement. Even more interesting is Davies' use of Medea's myth to explain how the Soul (which is more reliable than Sense) remains vigorous in youth or age:

For, give her organs fit, and objects fair,
Give but the aged man, the young man's sense:
Let but Medea, Aeson's youth repair,
And straight She shews her wonted excellence. (p.98)

Medea was often invoked by Christian writers, who used her either as an example of witchcraft, or as a cautionary model for other would-be sinners (and specifically, female sinners). Davies' work, though, shows that despite the sixteenth century's taste for bloody and sensationalist violence (a trend that would continue in the literature of the seventeenth century), Medea, like Helen, remained popular as a brief and weighted reference. Moreover, it is apparent that use of her story could be intended to reference more than simply her murderous tendencies. She could be used as a signifier of the author's classical learning, but might also be used more adventurously: in his late sixteenth-century praise of James VI, for example, John Burel turns the weakness and distress of the medieval Medea (and Helen) to his own ends, pointing out that though they were treated badly by Jason and by Paris, James treats women with greater respect.[60] On this score Medea's sixteenth-century representation appears more flexible than Helen's: she can be representative of beauty, or the unhappy consequences of love, but also of violence, magic and superstition, or even of male superiority. Meanwhile, Davies' sympathetic use of her shows that, despite the alarm her story continued to evince, Medea could still be held up as an example of a benign or containable power by male writers. All these uses survive into the seventeenth century, and once again, the circulation of

[59]John Drayton Davies, *Nosce Teipsum*, in Bullen, ed., *Some Longer Elizabethan Poems*.
[60] John Burel, *To the richt high, Lodowick Duke of Lennox...* (Edinburgh: R. Waldegrave, ?1596).

new versions of the ancient classics meant that Medea was more accessible than ever, continually rewritten and reimagined while retaining her ancient connotations.

Translating Medea in the Seventeenth Century

Despite the importance of the sixteenth-century translations of Golding, Turberville and Studley, the interest in translating Medea's story (as opposed to creating it anew) did not cease in the seventeenth century. Edward Sherburne's 1648 English rendering of Seneca's *Medea* is more or less a straightforward translation, the only significant alterations being a slightly increased emphasis on Medea's madness, as well as extensive explanatory notes,[61] and within the text itself the occasional elucidation of a confusing reference, or a deviation from Seneca's words to display his own classical knowledge.[62] James Orchard Halliwell-Phillips notes a translation of *Medea* by Thomas Hobbes in 1602, suggesting it was "probably a translation of Seneca".[63] He also notes Sherburne's effort, and a third translation from Seneca that, he notes "Differs from Sherburne's version, but [...] was probably made in the same period" (167). Fantham notes that Senecan tragedy was seldom revived onstage, and the translations of Studley and particularly Sherburne seem to have been produced to be read as much as to be performed (as their prefaces and Sherburne's extensive annotations suggest).[64] Problems of performance

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[61] These are interesting chiefly for their references to other, less well-known classical texts: Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, Hyginus, Euripides' *Helen*, Accius' *Medea*, and Aelian's *Historical Miscellany*. E.S. [Edward Sherburne], *Medea* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1648).

[62] For example, in the 1702 reissue of his translation, Sherburne speaks of "Eumenides" (p.4 n.15) instead of giving a literal translation of *sceleris ultrices deae* (1.13) ("goddesses who avenge crime"). Edward Sherburne, trans., *The tragedies of L. Annæus Seneca the philosopher; viz. Medea, Phædra and Hippolytus, Troades, ... and the rape of Helen, ... of Coluthus; translated into English verse; ... To which is prefixed the life and death of Seneca ... Adorn'd with sculptures* (London: S. Smith and B. Walford, 1702).

[63] James Orchard Halliwell-Phillips, *A Dictionary of Old English Plays, Existing Either in Print or in Manuscript, From the Earliest Times to the Close of the Seventeenth Century. Including Also Notices of Latin Plays Written by English Authors, in the Same Period* (London: John Russell Smith, 1860) 167.

[64] Both are categorised as closet dramas in Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama 975-1700*, rev. S. Schoenbaum, 3rd ed. rev. Sylvia Stoler Wagonheim (London: Routledge, 1989) 40-1, 148-9. However, David Gowen suggests tentatively that Sherburne's *Medea* may have been performed in 1648. David Gowen, "*Medea*s on the Archive Database" in Hall, Macintosh and Taplin, eds., *Medea in Performance*: 232-74, 234.

notwithstanding, Seneca's *Medea* was clearly more popular among English translators than Euripides', either because of the Latin tragedy's heightened sensationalism, or simply because of the success of Studley's sixteenth-century rendering. This said, both plays were frequently referenced and quoted, particularly in seventeenth-century prose, and despite their controversial content. In *The Devills Banket* (1614), Thomas Adams defends gory classical tragedies, including *Medea* (he does not specify which version), arguing that such spectacles will encourage Christians to avoid sin.[65] The Senecan Medea's admonition to Creon was used as a warning against tyrants,[66] and in *The Baiting of the Popes Bull* (1627), Henry Burton mocks the Pope by claiming that a year of his "Popedom" equates to nothing more than the day Medea asked of Creon in Seneca's tragedy.[67] William Prynne quotes Medea's Senecan warning, that a just ruler hears both sides of an argument before making a decision, in his *Healthes Sicknesse*, a treatise against "the drinking and pledging of healthes".[68] Ironically, he quotes the same lines from the tragedy in the preface to his famously incendiary attack on the stage, *Histrio-mastix* (1633), asking that readers peruse the whole work before casting judgement on it.[69]

Justin's *Epitome*, which dealt with Medea as a historical figure rather than a moral example or sensational villain, was rendered into English by "G. W." in 1606 and by Robert Codrington in 1654, and the influence of such historical renderings of Medea's story can be seen in works such as John Cartwright's *The Preachers Travels* (1611), which refers briefly to Medea as Cartwright describes Colchis and Medea, a city he claims was named after her.[70] In *The Painting of the Ancients*, Franciscus Junius similarly plays down the sensational aspects of Medea's story, referring to the ancient authors

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[65] Thomas Adams, *The Devills Banket Described in Foure Sermons* (London: Thomas Snodham for Ralph Mab, 1614).
[66] See, for example, Richard Crakanthorpe, *The Defence of Constantine with a Treatise of the Popes Temporall Monarchie.*(London: Bernard Alsop [and John Legat] for John Teague, 1621).
[67] Henry Burton, *The Baiting of the Popes Bull* (London: W[illiam] J[ones], Augustine Mathewes, John Jaggard? [and others?] for Michaell Sparke, 1627).
[68] William Prynne, *Healthes Sicknesse* (London: Augustine Mathewes, 1628).
[69] William Prynne, *Histrio-mastix, The Players Scourge, or Actors Tragedie* (London: E[dward] A[llde, Augustine Mathewes, Thomas Cotes] and W[illiam] J[ones] for Michael Sparke, 1633).
[70] John Cartwright, *The Preachers Travels* (London: [by William Stansby] for Thomas Thorppe and Walter Burre, 1611).

Diogenes, Stobaeus and Suidas to explain the theory that the Fleece was not a mythical prize, but rather a list of instructions for the alchemical production of gold, which happened to be written on sheep-skin.[71] The continuing popularity of Ovid was also attested to, not only by the English *Heroides* of Saltonstall and John Sherburne,[72] but by the appearance of George Sandys' translation of the *Metamorphoses* in 1626. Sandys does not seem to have been particularly inspired by such a wicked woman: indeed, the brisk Argument of Book Seven focuses only on the different metamorphoses that the reader may expect to find therein, and Medea is not mentioned at all. Meanwhile in his commentary on the text, published alongside it in 1632, he echoes many of his rationalising predecessors, playing down Medea's power by describing Jason's opponents "a garrison of mercenary soldiers of Taurica" ($Ff2^{v}$),[73] and "Draco the priest of Mars, and keeper of the treasure" ($Ff3^{r}$), and his success as representing his ability to take counsel, represented by Medea. Medea's control over nature is likewise attributed to "wicked Angels" ($Ff3^{v}$), and thus Sandys displays the same Christian discomfort with her powers that had been exhibited by Guido in the thirteenth century, and Lydgate in the fifteenth.

Nevertheless, this continued interest in translating Ovid meant that the Ovidian Medea retained and consolidated her place in the literature of the period. Particularly popular, and used in an increasingly politicised or Christianised sense in the period, was the Ovidian Medea's sorrowful pronouncement *video meliora proboque, / deteriora sequor* (7.20-1) ("I see the better course and approve it, I follow the worse"). The lines were adapted by Richard Brathwaite in *The Schollers Medley* (1614) and again in his *Essaies on the Five Senses* (1620) to demonstrate man's depravity.[74] Indeed, despite the notorious consequences of Medea's decision to assist Jason, the lines could be

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[71] Franciscus Junius, *The Painting of the Ancients in Three Books* (London: Richard Hodgkinsonne for Daniel Frere, 1638). For the ancient geographer Strabo's rationalising explanation of the Fleece's origin, which suggests that sheep's fleeces were used to pan for gold in rivers, see John A. Stott, "The Origin of the Myth of the Golden Fleece", *The Classical Journal* 22.7 (1927): 541-541.

[72] The latter of these includes Hypsipyle's wish for Medea's suicide, at $C6^{v}$.

[73] George Sandys, *Ovids Metamorphosis Englished, Mythologiz'd, and Represented in Figures. An Essay to the Translation of Virgil's 'Aeneis'* (Oxford [and London] : John Lichfield [and William Stansby], 1632).

[74] Richard Brathwaite, *The Schollers Medley* (London: N[icholas] O[kes] for George Norton, 1614). Richard Brathwaite, *Essaies Upon the Five Senses* (London: E: G[riffin]: for Richard Whittaker, 1620).

invoked whenever seventeenth-century authors discerned hypocrisy or inner turmoil. For example, in *A Golden Chaine: or The Description of Theologie* (1600) William Perkins uses them to demonstrate how hypocritical men may have knowledge of God, but still choose to follow an evil path.[75] In *A Fresh Suit Against Human Ceremonies in God's Worship*, (1633) it is the Church, rather than the individual sinner, that is attacked, as William Ames demands "Is our Church a Medea, in professing, *she alloweth better thinges, and professedly practiseth worse; meliora video, pro[b]oque; deteriora sequor*?" (Gggg3^{r}).[76] This continued use of the Latin versions of Medea's story is in marked contrast to the increased enthusiasm of seventeenth-century authors for Greek versions of Helen's myth, such as those of Homer, Colluthus and Plutarch. This reliance (perhaps a result of the huge popularity of the sixteenth-century translations of Golding, Turberville and Studley) meant that seventeenth-century Medeas often seem closely and essentially related to their predecessors, not only classical but medieval, Tudor and Elizabethan. If it was the sixteenth-century translators who presented new English Medeas to their eager readers, it was the sixteenth-century poets, playwrights and prose writers – Turberville, Shakespeare, Gascoigne – who reimagined the classical woman in the light of these translations, seeking to temper the generic, romanticised Medea of the Middle Ages with the more transgressive and alarming figure of classical tragedy. In turn, it was these two visions of Medea, distinct but not always separated, that found their way into Jacobean writing, and beyond.

Into the seventeenth century, the Medea who was an abandoned and suffering woman remained popular, particularly in conjunction with the Jason who was a flattering and faithless lover. In Robert Kittowe's *Loves Loadstarre*, Katherina writes to Iacomin begging him not to leave her as Jason left Medea, and reflects to herself that Medea's drugs could not keep Jason. However, even when Katherina warns Iacomin "*Medea* having by powerfull spells, gotten *Jason* free libertie to gaine the *Colchian* golden fleece, beeing by him contemned, sought revenge by his children and fathers murthering" (F^{r}), she

[75] William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine, or The Description of Theologie* (Cambridge: John Legat, 1600).
[76] William Ames, *A Fresh Suit Against Human Ceremonies in God's Worship* (Amsterdam, [the successors of Giles Thorpe], 1633).

cannot bring herself to act.[77] Because she brings Medea to her reader's attention, but only imitates her acceptable female behaviour (her grief), and not her alarming subversion of natural order, the story is allowed to end happily, with the lovers united. Similarly, *Davison's Poetical Rhapsody*, includes "That he is unchangeable", by A.W. (possibly the same A.W. who contributed a lost epistle from Helen to Paris). In the poem, Medea occupies a familiar suffering role, as the male speaker declares:

> Mark Jason's hap, that ever loved to range,
> That lost his children and his princely wife.
> Then change, farewell, thou art no mate for me:
> But as I am, so will I always be. (Vol. 2 p.47)

Here, there is no mention of the tragic consequences of Jason's faithlessness, and Medea's power seems reduced as she becomes nothing more than a woman who can only hope for her husband's fidelity. Such uses have evolved from earlier Elizabethan renderings of Medea as an abandoned lover, which in turn mimicked the renderings of Chaucer and Gower. Similarly, in *The Poore Mans Passions. And Poverties Patience* (1605) Arthur Warren is very obviously imitating his Elizabethan forebears, Robinson and Whetstone: he imagines death as the great leveller, anticipating the Day of Judgement and exclaiming that Helen will regret her lust, and "Medea lothe her Necromantick spell, / For Magicke Art when witches burne in hell" ($I2^{v}$).[78]

Staging Medea in the Seventeenth Century: Magic and Power

Clearly, male interest in playing down Medea's power by portraying her either as a suffering lover or a penitent sinner continued to flourish in the early seventeenth century, as it had done through the Middle Ages and Renaissance. However, as the popularity of Seneca's *Medea* suggests, the sixteenth century's other preoccupation, with Medea's crimes and her transgressive magical power, is also apparent. The revenge that Medea wreaks on her enemies, and

[77] Robert Kittowe, *Loves Loadstarre* (London: Th. Creede, 1600).
[78] Arthur Warren, *The Poore Mans Passions. And Poverties Patience* (London : Printed by I. R[oberts] for R. B[ankworth], 1605).

specifically the threat that her power poses to male dynasties, appears as a theme in Henry Chettle's *The Tragedy of Hoffman or, The Revenge for a Father,* which was first performed in 1603, though not published until 1631. Hoffman thinks on his dead father and reflects

> He was the prologue to a Tragedy,
> That if my destinies deny me not,
> Shall passe those of Thyestes, Tereus,
> Jocasta, or Duke Jasons jealous wife (1.3.407-10).[79]

Here, Medea's story speaks to the seventeenth-century vogue for revenge tragedy, and also with the period's fascination with those capable of upsetting the social order. In the seventeenth century as in the sixteenth, though, a revenger who invokes Medea effectively seals his or her own fate. Like Tamora, Videna and Young Clifford before him, Hoffman suffers a brutal death, and one which ironically seems to echo Creusa's death at the hands of Medea: he is killed by means of a burning crown. Hoffman's death thus underscores the period's continuing discomfort with a Medea-figure escaping punishment. In his *Eliosto Libidinosto* (1606), John Hind has Gatesinea invoke Medea as she furiously stabs her husband Dihonin: inevitably, though, she turns her knife on herself after the murder.[80] In John Mason's *The Turke* (1610) Timoclea desires Mulleasses, and kills her daughter Amada in a fit of jealousy, demanding "Why like *Creusa* hast thou stolne my *Jasen*?"[81] Amada pleads with her "O be not a *Medea*",[82] and her husband Borgias accuses her with the same comparison. Eventually, he comes to her disguised as a ghost and strangles her. Here, even if the characters had not invoked Medea by name, the themes of revenge, of sexual jealousy (Timoclea's child and love-rival are conflated into the figure of Amada) and the supernatural irresistibly call to mind Seneca's tragedy in particular. However, like Studley before him, Mason rewrites his classical model to cater to seventeenth-century taste, and to punish

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[79] Henry Chettle, *The Tragedy of Hoffman, 1631*, ed. Harold Jenkins and Charles Sisson (London: Malone Society, 1951.)
[80] John Hind, *Eliosto Libidinosto* (London: Valentine Simmes for Nathaniel Butter, 1606).
[81] No signature – should be G4^{r}. John Mason, *The Turke a Worthie Tragedie* (London: E[dward] A[llde] for John Busbie, 1610).
[82] No signature – should be G4^{r}.

Timoclea. It seems that while naming a woman as Helen, or comparing her to Helen, invites the supposition that she will prove unfaithful, in the seventeenth century as in the sixteenth, a villain's alluding to Medea, or being named as Medea, seems to foreshadow his or her downfall, despite the triumphant escapes of the Euripdean, Ovidian and Senecan Medeas.

Medea's magic, too, is played up far more in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than it had been previously. It is not always presented seriously, however: just as Chettle appears to undermine his references to Medea in *Hoffman* because of the play's utter lack of interest in strong women, Jonson seems to diminish references to her powers even as he makes them, by putting them in the mouths of tricksters or naïve dupes. In *Volpone*, Nano mocks an old man who "hopes he may / With charms, like Aeson, have his youth restored" (1.4.155-6),[83] and in *Epicene*, when Truewit boasts of his love-potions, Dauphine exclaims "I would say thou hadst the best philtre i'th world, and couldst do more then Madam Medea, or Doctor Forman" (4.1.131-2). This reference to the famous occultist in the same breath as Medea is significant. In his notes to the play, Gordon Campbell points out that "alchemists interpreted classical myths as allegories [...] of the alchemical process" (489)[84] and in *The Alchemist*, Sir Epicure Mammon provides an alchemical reading of Medea's legend. He boasts to Surly

> I have a piece of Jason's fleece, too,
> Which was no other than a book of alchemy,
> Writ in large sheepskin, a good fat ram-vellum.
> Such was Pythagoras' thigh, Pandora's tub,
> And all that fable of Medea's charms,
> The manner of our work: the bulls, our furnace,
> Still breathing fire; our argent-vive, the dragon;
> The dragon's teeth, mercury sublimate,
> That keeps the whiteness, hardness, and the biting;
> And they are gathered into Jason's helm
> (Th'alembic) and then saved in Mars his field,

[83] Ben Jonson, *'The Alchemist' and Other Plays: 'Volpone, or The Fox', 'Epicene, or The Silent Woman', 'The Alchemist', 'Bartholomew Fair'*, ed. Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995). Unless otherwise stated, all references to Jonson's works are to this edition.
[84] *Ibid.*

And thence sublimed so often, till they are fixed. (2.1.89-100)[85]

Throughout the scene, Mammon's misunderstanding of myth is a source of entertainment for Subtle and Face, as well as for the audience: he claims to have "a treatise penn'd by Adam [...] O'the philosopher's stone, and in High Dutch" (2.1.83-5), prompting an amused Surly to ask "Did Adam write, sir, in High Dutch?" (3.1.86). In his story of the Fleece, too, there is comical misunderstanding: Pandora is associated with a "tub", rather than the traditional box, and in his greed, Mammon identifies both this tub, and Pythagoras' fabled golden thigh, as instructions on how to make gold. Mammon is a figure of fun throughout the scene, due to his foolishness and the avarice that is coupled with an insistence that he will use his wealth for good – he promises Subtle

I shall employ it all in pious uses,
Founding of colleges and grammar schools,
Marrying young virgins, building hospitals,
And now and then a church. (2.3.49-52)

However, Medea's power also seems compromised here, not least because of its association with Mammon's unsavoury pursuit of undeserved wealth. In fact, here Medea's power is undermined in several ways, not just by Mammon's greed, but by male ownership of her legend (it is "Jason's fleece"), and by Mammon's determined rationalising of the story, and downplaying of Medea's magic. The obstacles Jason overcomes to obtain the Fleece become part of a new male quest, and his magical adversaries are figured as equipment or ingredients that assist in the alchemical pursuit of gold.[86] Mammon's sincere belief is ironised by Subtle and Face's determination to trick him, and Medea's story becomes at once reasonable science, less threatening because explicable and profitable, and a ridiculous story invoked by a pretentious dupe. Jonson's

[85] For Jonson's use of "Chrysognus Polydorus", a sixteenth-century alchemist who repeats and extends Suidas' classical explanation of the Fleece as an alchemical treatise, see Supriya Chaudhuri, "Jason's Fleece: The Source of Sir Epicure Mammon's Allegory", *RES* New Series, 35.137 (1984): 71-3, 71.

[86] Chaudhuri reprints the section of Chrysognus that Jonson drew on – the dramatist's male focus, however, is emphasised by the fact that his use of the text stops just before a direct mention of Medea, in reference to the rejuvenation of Aeson. Chaudhuri, "Jason's Fleece", 72.

Medea is an enchantress rather than an abandoned and vengeful woman, but like Chettle he is interested only in briefly invoking her story, and in linking it to male endeavour, and particularly to male artifice or foolishness.

In *Macbeth*, seventeenth-century interest in the controversial elements of Medea's story, her magic and her bloodthirsty fury, seems more sustained. Once again, however, her threat is invoked with care: here again, as in *Titus*, Shakespeare appears to draw parallels between Medea and his threatening female characters, but it is significant that he chooses to do this rather than stage Medea herself, as he stages Helen. Miola draws attention to Lady Macbeth's (specifically Senecan) characterisation:

> Like Atreus or Medea, she urges transcendent self-creation through terrible action. The performance of the deed, she argues, will ratify and expand the doer's identity, will enable him to attain that singular and terrible selfhood to which he (like other Senecan protagonists) aspires. (101)

She rejects the femininity that would threaten to make her subject to the male community, demanding

> Come, you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
> And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
> Of direst cruelty. (1.5.38-41)

Medea's traditional crimes threaten the male community specifically because of the deviation from feminine behaviour that they represent. Here, Lady Macbeth makes her rejection of femininity even more overt, seeing her sex, as Seneca's Medea does, as standing directly in the way of the success of her ambitions. She makes clear to Macbeth her willingness to kill her own children, and here the image functions as a shorthand for her ruthless will and her similarity to Medea (though as she has no children, the disturbing similarity is only allowed to extend so far). Purkiss notes Shakespeare's apparent debt to the ancient dramatists:

> This is all Shakespearean in that it does not correspond exactly to any single passage in either Euripides or Seneca. But it is also, in a profound sense, both Euripidean and Senecan. The Greek and Latin Medeas are both characterised as dangers to their own children from very early on in their dramas, and yet most of the action in both their cases passes by before the infanticide actually occurs. Shakespeare is producing a kind of miniature version of that terrible tragic suspense, translating it from plot to metaphor, from action to story. [87]

Lady Macbeth, in her powerful stage presence, her rapidly hardened resolve, and her mention of killing her children, is in many ways Shakespeare's most obviously Medea-like character (and specifically, these qualities appear to evoke the Medea of Seneca as well as of the *Metamorphoses*). However, as Miola observes, "Seneca's Medea provides initially a paradigm of passionate atrocity for Lady Macbeth and then a revealing counterpoint to her deterioration" (107). Lady Macbeth, at the last, is a human character – a terrifyingly transgressive one at times, but one whose threat is first presented, then undermined, then finally destroyed as her suicide is reported in the play's final act. As Purkiss observes of Lady Macbeth, in a comment which may be applied equally to Tamora, "Her Senecan rhetoric beats hopelessly against the limits of her world, which are also her own limits; she can dream of horrors, but she cannot act on them".[88] Shakespeare, like Robinson, Whetstone, Turberville and Norton and Sackville, must account for a Medea-figure's evil power with consequences, the presence of some moral, or spiritual power that is somehow greater than she is, and can accordingly contain her.

Lady Macbeth, then, is not Medea reborn. Some other characteristics of Seneca's heroine, however, are displaced onto other characters in the play: most obviously, the Weird Sisters. In their eerie powers, their bloodthirstiness and their lack of regard for patriarchal government, the witches seem to recall Medea. Important, though, is Hecate's angry assessment of the witches' motives. She exclaims

> [...] all you have done
> Hath been but for a wayward son,

[87] Purkiss, *Medea in the English Renaissance*, in Hall, Macintosh and Taplin, eds., *Medea in Performance*, 45.
[88] *Ibid.*, 46.

Spiteful and wrathful, who, as others do,
Loves for his own ends, not for you. (3.5.10-13).[89]

This idea of a woman's magical power and the assistance she may choose to give a man as undermined because of his faithlessness and ingratitude is key to Medea's story. The association subtly suggests that magic, and feminine power, may have their limitations, even as they appear so centrally important and threatening to men in the world of the play. Indeed, while Golding seems to have altered the *Metamorphoses* to reflect Elizabethan interest in the horrifying extremes of witches' rumoured behaviour, the Weird Sisters boast of petty revenges, such as turning milk sour or killing livestock, that may seem intended to tap into more everyday fears about witchcraft: it was often just such minor occurrences that led to women being put on trial in the seventeenth century. Greenblatt argues that the witches enjoy a peculiar power at the last because they are not subject to the laws and moral code that dictate that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth must be punished.[90] This is clearly a deliberate choice on Shakespeare's part, and yet it is significant that, as Hecate has complained, the witches serve the ambitions of men, and do not act for their own ends in the same way that the classical Medea does. Emma Griffiths notes that Lady Macbeth's power in the play "acts as a counterpoint to the explicit magic of the witches on the heath, who achieve their magic through the power of language and suggestion, rather than the violent action which Lady Macbeth favours".[91] Both have power in the play, and both, as Griffiths' assertion would suggest, are somehow akin to Medea, who enjoys both rhetorical and violent power over the men she encounters. Neither, however, are fully akin to Medea, and neither can transcend what seem to be specifically gender-based strictures to recognise her their full potential for evil.

In *The Tempest*, the influence of Medea's story is discernible both in Shakespeare's depiction of Prospero's and Sycorax's magic, but also, more

[89] In *The Norton Shakespeare,* Stephen Greenblatt points to "the high probability" that the scenes featuring Hecate "were added to the play some time after its first performance" and indeed that they recycled material from Middleton's play *The Witch* (2560). This theory damages the case for Shakespeare's knowledge of Seneca's *Medea*, but if the scenes are indeed additions, they can at least be said to reflect the keen popular interest in witchcraft in the Jacobean period.
[90] Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare* , ed. Greenblatt et al., 2561.
[91] Emma Griffiths, *Medea* (London: Routledge and Taylor, 2006) 105.

subtly, in the play's interest in government and leadership. Prospero is keen to stress the extent to which his downfall has been precipitated, like that of Faustus, by his pursuit of the magic that seems to make him all-powerful. However, it is important to note that while Prospero stresses the earthly power he has lost in the pursuit of magic, he can and will regain this orthodox form of power in the patriarchal society of the play. Prospero rejects the chance to use his magical power for revenge on his enemies, since like Gorboduc, he feels able to make a decision of clemency that is grounded in the innate security he feels as a man. He describes his magic in a speech that is, famously, based on Medea's declaration of her agency in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (and specifically Golding's translation):

> [...] I have bedimmed
> The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds,
> And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault
> Set roaring war; to the dread rattling thunder
> Have I given fore and rifted Jove's stout oak
> With his own bolt: the strong-based promontory
> Have I made shake, and by the spurs plucked up
> The pine and cedar; graves at my command
> Have waked their sleepers, ope'd and let 'em forth
> By my so potent art. (5.1.41-50)[92]

Bate observes that here "The fact of Shakespeare's imitation of Ovid is beyond dispute" (9). However, he goes on to point out "it is much more difficult to be sure of its implications. Were Jacobean audiences of *The Tempest* supposed to recognize the imitation and, if so, were they supposed to reflect upon Prospero's art in relation to that of Ovid's Medea?" (9). In arguing that they were, he disagrees with Michelle and Charles Martindale, who posit in *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity* that "educated members of the audience would recognise the presence of Ovid, but there is no question of any such

[92] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1999). Compare Golding's translation, 7.265-77.

complex interplay between the divergent meanings of the two texts" (qtd 9).[93] For Bate, conversely, "The act of imitation here implies that all invocations of magical power are in some sense the same [...] and therefore that Prospero and Medea are in some sense the same" (9). I agree with Bate that here Shakespeare uses Golding's Ovidian Medea with one eye on his audience's interpretation of this use. However, he is relying on his audience to discern difference as well as similarity, since Prospero is able to renounce his power (which in any case is never as bloodily transgressive as Medea's) and integrate himself back into society in time for the play's typically neat ending. Medea, by contrast, must embrace her magic as the force that has initially distanced her from the Colchian and Corinthian communities, and that now is the means by which she finally severs all ties, ascending to the skies and leaving society behind. In some ways, Medea's power is the greater – it is often intrinsically known, not learnt, she relies on no books or other spirits, and she very seldom abandons it, as Prospero does here. However, Prospero's royal position, and most importantly his masculinity, mean that he can reject his magic while still retaining some authority.[94] Shakespeare suggests that magic is not a secure form of power, but luckily for Prospero he has not imitated Medea too exactly, has not taken murderous revenge on his enemies, or explicitly and irrevocably rejected Christianity, as Faustus has done before him, and accordingly he may step away from his magic unscathed. Indeed, it is surely significant that Prospero echoes Medea's exulting in her powers as he is choosing to reject his. Ultimately, as in *Macbeth* and in *Titus Andronicus*, an oblique reference to the classical sorceress (which might or might not have been picked up by his audience) might seem alarming, but is at the last neutralised by a fundamentally greater system of patriarchal government.

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[93] See Charles Martindale and Michelle Martindale, *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity: An Introductory Essay* (London: Routledge, 1990) 23.

[94] For the appeal of this kind of magician, who is comfortingly human in his dangerous hankering after knowledge, and his fallibility, see Herrington, "Witchcraft and Magic", 459. If Prospero is an example of such a magician, so too is Faustus, though their stories have very different endings.

Heywood's Medea: *Troia Britannica* and *The Brazen Age*

It is clear, then, that Medea's story can be brought to the Renaissance attention through the medium of translation of the classics, and equally that it was enough a part of the literary imagination of the period to be casually referenced in many different texts and contexts. However, as the period progressed, other authors sought a third path. Neither translating nor merely referencing, they give accounts of Medea's life and career that adhere to the basic tenets of their source texts, while presenting her in startlingly original and/or controversial ways. Thomas Heywood's contribution to the seventeenth-century perception of Medea aims to play down the threat she represents in Colchis. In *Gynaikeion*, as in his *Hierarchy of the Blessed Angels*, she appears as a witch and as an example of a murderous woman, but is also described as a victim of abduction, whose ravishment is important for the effect it has on male community. In *Troia Britannica*, like some of his sixteenth-century predecessors (for example Gosson or Gascoigne) he represents the acquisition of the Fleece as very much a male achievement, dwelling at length on details such as the Argonauts' voyage to Colchis, which is often excluded even from the lengthy medieval Troy stories. Heywood connects Jason's success to contemporary events, and specifically to male achievement, seeing the Fleece as representative of English victory on the continent. Presumably because of this determination to link the story to male success, Heywood gives a long account of the Argonautic voyage, which seems to draw on Apollonius' lengthy description. However, Jason's heroic status seems at first to be undermined by Medea's attitude to him. Catching sight of him, she falls in love instantly, as she does in the Ovidian and medieval renderings of her story. She bemoans his tasks, exclaiming "Oh why should one that hath so sweet a face, / (Made to be lov'd and love) seeke acts so bold?" (Canto 7.61 p.154). Though, typically, Medea represents herself as helpless in the face of her desire for Jason, this representation of him as somehow feminised is significant,

particularly since Heywood persists in his comparison of Jason to English heroes. He describes the Colchians gathering to watch the tasks:

> To such prepared joyes the Frenchmen came,
> To see the valiaunt *Mount-morensi* roone,
> Against *Charles Brandon*, who for *Englands* fame
> Vanquisht their Knight, at which their joy was doon,
> The *French*, who to disgrace the English came,
> Saw how bold *Charles* at one incounter woon
> Their Champions armes, the *French* Qu. to his pheer,
> Which chang'd their promist mirth to sadder cheere. (7.70 p. 156)

In his account of the Trojan war, Heywood was keen to connect his classical figures with England's heroes and villains: Arthur, Richard the Lionheart, Edward III, the Earl of Surrey and Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, are all braver than the bravest Greek; later, Anthony Babington and the enemies of Elizabeth and James are more traitorous than Aeneas and Antenor. Here though, in his equation of Jason with Suffolk, Heywood's determination to relate his tale to English history appears less successful. The comparison between the Colchians and the French obviously points up Medea's status as a foreigner, and also the contrast with Jason's status as a civilised man (stressed in the *Metamorphoses*, and significant in Heywood's second rendering of Medea's story in *The Brazen Age*). However, Heywood's comparison, his emphasis on Jason's heroism, seems undermined and problematised by Medea's help, and likening his victory to Suffolk's triumph seems awkward, particularly as Suffolk's royal marriage to Mary Tudor is thus implicitly compared to Jason and Medea's relationship. To the watching men, Jason is "undaunted" and "richly armd" (7.71 p. 156), a significant contrast to the feminised way in which Medea regards him. However, though he triumphs over the bulls, his success is undercut by Heywood's observation "Such power hath Magicke" (7.72 p. 156). As she does in the early sixteenth-century *Sege of Troy*, Medea continues to help him even while he performs his tasks. He does not kill the dragon, instead simply stealing the Fleece as it sleeps, and though Heywood remarks that finally Jason "Injoyes the Fleece that he with danger wonne" (7.77 p.157), Medea's furtive assistance has seen his bravery ironised.

Nevertheless, if Jason's achievements are presented ironically, so too are Medea's. Heywood records Medea's killing of Apsyrtus and the couple's flight from Colchis, and exclaims "Oh Magicke, by thy power what cannot they, / To whom the Seas submit, the winds obey?" (7.80 p.158). The Medea of the *Heroides*, however, has already pointed out that the power to assist Jason in his tasks does not equate to the power to hold him, and though he undermines Jason by detailing her assistance, Heywood appears to undermine Medea too, demonstrating only the power that assists the male community, and the assistance Medea will soon come to regret.

This impulse is discernible too in Heywood's dramatic treatment of Medea's story, *The Brazen Age*. In the play, Medea's magic is celebrated by Aeetes – it is not a threat to the community or a secret. Her powers are described (by her father rather than by the narrator) in language very close to Ovid and the medieval accounts that drew on his work, for example in the king's reference to Medea's "Negromanticke exorcismes" ($F2^{v}$).[95] Medea is also endowed with narratorial power herself. In Heywood's stage directions, her brother Apsyrtus is described as "yong" ($F2^{v}$), but he is old enough to ask Medea to describe how the Fleece arrives in Colchis, and she tells him the story of Phrixus and Helle. Heywood wants to be comprehensive, and to give his readers background information in the manner of translators such as Golding and Studley, but putting this description in Medea's mouth also stresses her influence and centrality, as does the fact that she describes the dragon to her brother before she has even met Jason. She is not imparting knowledge to Jason in exchange for his love, as she does in so many medieval renderings, and accordingly appears more in control and powerful. On the other hand, just as the *Iron Age* made extensive use of the *Heroides*, here there are obvious and deliberate echoes of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in Medea's distress at her desire for Jason, as she considers her choices and agonises: "The best I see, the worst I follow still".[96] Thus, Medea's power is represented in conflicting ways, and in some respects Jason seems to have the upper hand. He pursues Medea, not the other way around, thinking

[95] Thomas Heywood, *The Brazen Age* (London: Nicholas Okes for Samuel Rand, 1613).
[96] No signature – should be $F4^{r}$.

[...] I have observ'd *Medea*
Retort upon me many an amorous looke,
Of which I'le studdy to make prosperous use.[97]

Medea acknowledges her helplessness, and admits to herself "His presence without all this Oratory / Did much with us, but where they both conjoyne / To entrap *Medea*, shee must needs bee caught" ($F4^{v}$).[98] Once she has resolved to serve Jason, though, paradoxically she is allowed more control by Heywood. She tells Jason of her father's plan and suggests flight, and he tells her "[...] you are my directresse, / And by your art I'le manage all my actions" ($G3^{v}$). Medea orders him to prepare the ship, and reflects "Now populous Greece, / Thanks us (not Jason) for this conquer'd fleece" ($G3^{v}$). She meets Apsyrtus on her way to the ship, and greets him with a darkly comic turn of phrase: "Oh happy met, though it be late Absyrtus, / You must along with me".[99] If Medea's worst act after leaving Colchis is the murder of her children, her worst act before leaving is its counterpart, her killing of her young brother, whose last words, in response to Medea's command, are "Any where with you sister".[100] Medieval accounts often elected to elide this episode, and as such its inclusion is always significant. Heywood includes it to stress Medea's new-found ruthlessness, as well as to provide more background to the story as it is typically told in the Renaissance. The figure of Homer then appears to defend the story against sceptics, and recounts that Medea did kill Apsyrtus for this reason. There is no further mention of Medea, and Heywood abandons her to follow Jason. Accordingly, though Medea has some power, and seems to be embracing it to serve her own desires as the story progresses, the elision of the end of her story once again undermines the help she gives Jason, and any influence she may seem to have over him.

While Heywood aims to locate Medea historically, to show, as his medieval predecessors have done, how she fits into a greater narrative of male achievement, conquest and success, in *The Golden Fleece* (1611), Richard Brathwaite attempts to transform the story into a Christian example, as

[97] No signature – should be $F4^{r}$.
[98] No signature –should be $F4^{v}$.
[99] No signature – should be $G4^{r}$.
[100] No signature – should be $G4^{r}$.

Robinson has done before him. In his dedication to Robert Bindlosse, and despite his reference in the margin to the *Metamorphoses*, Brathwaite gives a brief epitome of the quest for the Fleece with no mention of Medea. He explains the "use spirituall" of this tale, which demonstrates:

> [...] what felicity they shall obtaine that with resolution and long animitie sustaine the pe[r]illous gusts of afflictions, with a respect had to vertue, without which regard no happy or successive event can attend any intendment. ($A4^{r-v}$)[101]

This determinedly male-focused emphasis on Christian achievement through virtue and perseverance sits unhappily with Jason's legend, with its associations of magic, sexual desire, abandonment and murder. Brathwaite constructs the faithful Christian as a solo adventurer, warning his readers "The Golden Fleece is kept for such as live / To please their God, and not their God to grieve".[102] Unsurprisingly, then, Medea's role is ignored, and Brathwaite instead focuses on the spiritual and moral virtues Christians must display in order to obtain their reward. Medea does appear in the elegy on Aeson's rejuvenation which Brathwaite appends to the poem. However, here Jason is very much in control of his "inchanting wife":

> Medaea wept to heare her Jason aske,
> In such lamenting manner for her father.
> Protesting oft, this was an extreme tast,
> Nothing on earth, but she could do it rather.
> Jason commaunds which she will not withstand,
> But gins to trie hearbs vertues with her hand. (E^{r})

Brathwaite gives a lengthy account of the rejuvenation, though in the least contentious terms possible: Medea gathers mere "flowers" (E^{r}) instead of poisonous herbs and anoints Aeson's hair, rather than boiling him in her cauldron. Unsurprisingly, though Aeson refers to his brother Pelias, there is no mention of Medea's plot to murder Jason's wicked uncle. Instead, Brathwaite simply ends with a caution to his readers not to wish to regain their youth: the

[101] Richard Brathwaite, *The Golden Fleece* (London: W[illiam] S[tansby] for Christopher Pursett, 1611).
[102] No signature – should be $B6^{v}$.

experience of age results in the virtuous rejection of lust (a sin which, though utterly elided here, is often a key element of Jason and Medea's story, and particularly of their love for one another).

Brathwaite's, then, is a deeply conservative rendering of Medea's story. His didactic aim, predictably, makes this a very reductive representation of Medea, and particularly of her magic. Although in many ways her magic, her murders and her status as a barbarian might seem to render Medea utterly outside seventeenth-century English, male experience, her story was obviously popular. Particularly ironic was the way in which her story was frequently connected to contemporary events in the period, far more so than Helen's, despite Helen's connection to the fall of Troy, which was seen by many English writers as a formative event in the history of Western civilization. While seventeenth-century suspicion of witchcraft (and particularly James I's famed personal anxiety about it) may have contributed to such attempts to play down her magic, the period's perverse interest in the occult meant that Medea is a notable inclusion in accounts of witchcraft. Alexander Roberts' *A Treatise of Witchcraft* lists her alongside Circe as an ancient witch. He records her murder of Jason's wife (here Glauce) and notes

> [...] the Divell furnisheth such with powders, oyntments, hearbes, and like receipts, whereby they procure sicknesse, death, health, or worke other supernatural effects. (C^r)[103]

In Thomas Tuke's *A Discourse Against Painting and Tincturing of Women*, a "painted wench" who avails herself of such cosmetics is characterised as Medea, "who by likelihood / Can change old *Aeson* into younger blood" ($B2^r$).[104] She is also included (once again alongside Circe) as an example of an ancient witch in John Cotta's *The Trial of Witch-craft*.[105] Predictably, too, she can be invoked as an example of a classical witch in accounts of seventeenth-century witch-trials, as she is in the anonymous tracts *The Wonderful Discouerie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower* (1619) and *A*

[103]Alexander Roberts, *A Treatise of Witchcraft* (London: N[icholas] O[kes] for Samuel Man, 1616).
[104] Thomas Tuke, *A Discourse Against Painting and Tincturing of Women* (London: Thomas Creede and Bernard Alsop for Edward Marchant, 1616).
[105] John Cotta, *The Triall of Witch-craft* (London: George Purslowe for Samuel Rand, 1616).

Certaine Relation of the Hog-faced Gentlewoman called Mistris Tannakin Skinker (1640).[106] In these accounts of real seventeenth-century witch trials, as in Mason's *The Noble Turke*, or Alabster's *Roxana*, the naming of Medea is intentionally evocative, meant to call to mind her notorious transgressions and so heighten the drama of the author's description.

The same device is perhaps even more effective when the figure being compared to Medea was already notorious in his or her own right. In my introduction, I mentioned the ill-fated attempts of Mary Queen of Scots to characterise herself as an abandoned Medea. This use of the classical princess was popular from the Middle Ages onwards. However, by the sixteenth century a new knowledge of Euripides and Seneca in particular meant that any mention of Medea was coloured by her murderous reputation, and thus, just as she can be used ironically by authors in the Elizabethan miscellanies, so Mary's use of Medea left her vulnerable to scathing criticism. In an account of the Gunpowder Plot, *Mischeefes Mysterie: or, Treasons Master-peece,* written Francis Herring, and translated into English by John Vicars, the author lights on a happier comparison, describing Guy Fawkes as possessing "foule Medeas guile" (E^{v}).[107] Fawkes is not compared to a pining, abandoned Medea, but rather the terrifying Euripidean, Ovidian or Senecan revenger, intent on tearing kingdoms asunder and upsetting natural, patriarchal and conservative hierarchies: indeed, Fawkes' foreignness may have made the comparison doubly attractive. Predictable, too, is male authorial fondness for comparing notorious female figures from history with Medea. In Thomas May's history *The Reigne of King Henry the Second,* Henry's wife Elinor invokes Medea as she vows revenge on Rosamond, the King's mistress, whom she later murders (and it is possible that May could have taken some of his inspiration from Drayton's hugely popular epistles, which had already connected Medea's story to this historical affair).[108] Earlier, in *The History of Great Britaine* (1611) John Speed compared another strong-willed royal woman to Medea: Isabel, wife of

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[106] *A Certaine Relation of the Hog-faced Gentlewoman called Mistris Tannakin Skinker* (London: J[ohn] O[kes] for F. Grove, 1640). *The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower* (London: G. Eld for I. Barnes, 1619).

[107] Francis Herring, *Mischeefes Mysterie: or, Treasons Master-peece,* (London: E. Griffin, 1617).

[108] Thomas May, *The Reigne of King Henry the Second* (London: A. M. for Benjamin Fisher, 1633).

Charles VI of France, whose rumoured hatred of her son and pernicious influence over her husband made Medea a fruitful avenue of comparison.[109] Francis Hubert, meanwhile, focuses not on Medea's murderous proclivities but on her alarming and ungoverned sexual desire for Jason, and on her lack of respect for kingship. In *The Historie of Edward the Second* (1629), the King complains that he has lost his wife Isabel to Mortimer, before correcting himself:

> Shee rather was *Medea,* fierce, and bold,
> And gave away that golden fleece: Twas shee
> That let another griffe upon my Tree
> The fruit of sin, and shame; whence did proceed,
> Matter, that made me both to blush, and bleed. (p.96)[110]

Earlier, Edward has also compared the errant pair to Paris and Helen, and thus Hubert's use of classical mythology is very obviously directive. In all these cases, the comparison is intended to make the historical woman appear worse. At the same time, and paradoxically, however, the use of Medea's story here somehow compromises her threat, since in all these cases, feminine transgressive action is comfortingly unable to triumph over the male establishment. (Even in May's history, Elinor may poison Rosamond, but she specifically declares that she will deviate from her classical model by sparing the lives of her children: accordingly, the cataclysmic effect of her revenge on Henry is lessened).

All these efforts to connect Medea's story to contemporary or historical event, or to the concerns of the day (for example witchcraft) seem predictable. As Heywood and Brathwaite have shown, however, what are harder to interpret are the efforts of male speakers or characters to appropriate the story (and specifically Jason's quest for the Fleece) as examples of male, Christian valour. The composers of the medieval Troy-narratives faced the same problems, and medieval attempts to play down Medea's assistance, and make Jason more of a hero, reach a head in Lefèvre's determined rewriting of the

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[109] John Speed, *The Historie of Great Britain* (London: William Hall and John Beale for John Sudbury & Georg Humble, 1611).
[110] No signature. Francis Hubert, *The Historie of Edward the Second* (London: Printed by B. A. and T. F. for L. Chapman, 1629).

entire legend into a paean of praise for Jason. However, the efforts of Heywood and Brathwaite show that male authors in the seventeenth century are also determined to show how the story may reflect well on men, as well as badly on women. A similar determination may be discerned in Anthony Munday's *Metropolis Coronata, the Triumphes of Ancient Drapery* (1615). The piece, intended to celebrate John Jolles' advancement to Mayor of London, includes a description of a masque-like entertainment wherein Jason and Medea are seated in triumph on the Argo, sprinkling gold from the Fleece on all who pass by. The piece also includes a speech in praise of the mayor by Henry Fitz-Alwine, the first mayor of London,[111] who encourages him to take moral instruction from the story of Jason and Medea:

> By way of Morall application,
> Your Honour may make some relation
> Unto your selfe out of this storie,
> You are our *Jason,* Londons glorie,
> Now going to fetch that fleece of Fame, [...]
> No Monsters dare confront your way.
> Imagine then, as well you may,
> That all this faire and goodly Fleete,
> Do in meere love (on purpose) meete,
> Like to those *Argonautes* of *Greece,*
> That then fetcht home their Golden Fleece,
> To tend the *Argoe* where you ride,
> Behind, before, on every side
> With all applauding melodie,
> That best this day may dignifie. (B^v)[112]

While comparing a notorious woman to Medea is an obvious move, likening a praiseworthy man to Jason may seem a strange decision, or even one that suggests authorial irony. However, while the comparison may sometimes be intended to ironise the man who is apparently praised (just as likening a woman to Helen belittles her rather than exalts her), the emphasis on male

[111] See Thomas N. Corns, "London and Literature", in Loewenstein and Mueller, eds., *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*: 544-64, 552.
[112] Anthony Munday, *Metropolis Coronata, The Triumphes of Ancient Drapery* (London: George Purslowe, 1615).

achievement and acquisition certainly reduces Medea's power. Indeed, Tracey Hill points out

> Although the whole of *Metropolis Coronata* is founded on the myth of Jason and the Argonauts, Munday makes it clear that the immediate pretext for the myth's use – celebrating the traditions of the Draper's Company – is much more significant as well as more historically valid than such pagan narratives.[113]

Like Caxton, Jonson, Heywood and Brathwaite before him, Munday seizes on the Fleece as an evocative image, and Jason's conquest of it as evidence of male success: and here, male success that foreshadows Jolles' mayoral power in London. However, as Hill points out, in this entertainment

> Greek mythology is [...] only valuable to the extent to which it is possible to transfer it as a metaphor to illuminate its London setting, in the process of which, naturally, it loses its original meaning. [...] For Munday, all forms of classical and other ancient mythology are subordinated to the extraordinary and primordial history of the City and its dignatories. (157-8)

Thus, not only Medea's power, but also Jason's, are first bent to Munday's authorial agenda, and then subsumed by his determination to praise Jolles, who will outdo both these mythological figures.

Later in the century, Thomas Heywood returns to Medea once again, and in his 1639 mayoral entertainment, *Londini Status Pacatus*, draws very obviously on this use of Medea to encourage, but not to eclipse, male achievement. She describes the assistance she gave Jason, pointedly ignoring the tragedy which was to follow, and goes on to address Henry Garway, the new mayor and a prominent merchant, explaining how the Fleece represents London's wool trade, while the camels that lead in the show are representative of "The rich Commerce and noblenesse of your Trade" (C^{v}).[114] Like Fraunce and Brathwaite before him, Heywood explains that Medea is representative of advice or counsel, in an attempt to account for her troubling dominance over Jason's success. As always, though, Medea (and specifically her threat) are

[113] Tracey Hill, *Anthony Munday and Civic Culture: Theatre, History and Power in Early Modern London, 1580-1633* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004) 157.
[114] Thomas Heywood, *Londini Status Pacatus* (London: John Okes, 1639).

difficult to reconcile with male achievement, and specifically here with male government. While in Caxton's translation of Lefèvre her wickedness is emphasised to make Jason appear more noble by comparison, in these two entertainments, as in Brathwaite's effort, she is quietly sidelined. Her threat and power are both downplayed by Munday's and Heywood's attempts to read male success and dominance into her story, and to project this male success onto Jolles and Garway.

Playing "in the likeness of a petticoat": Medea in the drama of James Shirley

As such unexpected performative representations of Medea might suggest, although she was increasingly appropriated for Christianised or politicised uses as the period progressed, like Helen she retained a presence in English drama throughout the first half of the seventeenth century. However, as she was in Elizabethan or Jacobean drama, she is more likely to be referenced or represented briefly on the Caroline stage, instead of becoming the focus of a dramatic work. His obvious interest in the stories of Helen and Medea (and Shakespeare's decision not to explicitly represent Medea onstage, despite his knowledge of her story) means that Heywood is perhaps the most important English dramatist to rewrite Medea in the first half of the seventeenth century: she is used variously as sorceress, didactic or cautionary example, or suffering and desirous woman. However, Heywood's obvious debt to the classics results in serious rerenderings of Ovid's heroine, which reflect some contemporary concerns (for example, conflict with France, or Garway's election as Mayor of London). James Shirley, by contrast, demonstrates a similarly sustained interest in Medea, but as they did with Helen, his masques and plays show how a keen knowledge of her story, and a fleeting invocation of her power, can be turned to comic effect.

In the *Triumph of Beautie*, the male shepherds debate who should take each part in their staging of Jason's quest for the fleece, which they are dramatising in an attempt to cheer up Paris. Medea's story is obviously (and unusually) used comically: the men squabble over who gets to play the fleece, and make nonsensical suggestions such as excluding the role of Jason, or

having Medea and the dragon played by the same performer. Shirley's main debt here is to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and he does not seem concerned with evoking a specific classical story (though some details, such as the talking ship, perhaps argue a reliance on the *Argonautica* of Apollonius). It is important, though, that while Shakespeare elected to render a tragic woman (Thisbe) a comic character, Shirley deliberately chooses a far more contentious heroine. If the *Triumph* is compared with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* here, Shirley's representation of gender becomes particularly interesting. There are no female mechanicals in Bottom's production, and the men's earnest attempts to ape femininity appear reductive and ridiculous (Bottom eagerly demonstrates how he can speak in "a monstrous little voice",[115] Flute anxiously argues that his beard means he cannot play Thisbe). These comical touches survive into Shirley's masque: the shepherds squabble childishly over who will have to wear a dress to play "the lady Medea" ($A4^{r}$). Arguably, though, by the time Shirley came to compose the *Triumph* (and certainly by the time it was published) the comic potential of men dressing as women had been confused (and perhaps diffused) by the appearance of the first actresses in England: Sophie Tomlinson finds that by the 1630s, "drama was beginning to register and respond to the topic of female acting in England".[116] Importantly too, Jacobean anxiety over witchcraft continued to inform writing after 1625,[117] and thus in the shepherds' abortive production, women are not just characterised by their high voices and lack of beards, but by their association (in the eyes of men) with monsters, and their troubling affinity for enchantment. Shirley had already experimented with the comic potential of male disguise, in *The Bird In A Cage* (1633), but here, his choice of Medea seems deliberately intended to destabilise the comedy even as it is staged, because of his hints at Medea's magic and threat to men.

As these darker elements would suggest, despite Bottle's determined avowal that the play will entertain Paris, Shirley was aware that his audience

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[115] Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1.2.44.

[116] Sophie Tomlinson, "She That Plays the King: Henrietta Maria and the Threat of the Actress in Caroline Culture", in McMullan and Hope, eds., *The Politics of Tragicomedy*: 189-207, 197.

[117] F. P. Wilson and Bonamy Dobrée, eds., *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century*: 1600-1660, 2nd ed., rev. Douglas Bush (Oxford: Clarendon:1962) 51. The editors note that "the civil war brought a recrudescence of witchcraft or persecution", and that in the later seventeenth century, "there was much less scepticism about witchcraft" (51).

would expect some allusions to the murderous Medea their reading of Ovid and Seneca would have led them to anticipate. However, he attempts to deal with this threat by rendering her violence as comic. Hob worries he is too tall to play Medea's luckless brother Apsyrtus, but Bottle earnestly assures him that his height is irrelevant, since "You must be cut a pieces, and have your limbs thrown about the waves" ($A4^{v}$). This alarming evidence of Medea's lack of regard for both the survival of her father's kingdom, and the accepted norms of feminine behaviour, has been referred to already by Shirley in *The School of Complement.* Here again, horrifying feminine behaviour is sanitised by being rendered comic. The despairing Infortunio tears up a letter that the object of his desire, Selina, has written to her future husband Rufaldo, and exclaims

> This is *Medias* brother torne in pieces,
> And this the way where she with *Jason* flies,
> *Tom Colchos,* come not neere 'em, see, looke,
> That's an arme rent off. (E^{r})[118]

Female transgression (both Medea's murder of Apsyrtus and her flight) is rewritten as a maddened (male) lover's petulant response to rejection. What is crucial, however, is that once again Shirley elects to write Medea's crimes, and the suffering she causes, into a comedy. Infortunio's identification of himself with the abandoned Medea might, in a tragedy or a story from the Elizabethan miscellanies, suggest a bloody and unhappy end to the characters' romantic involvements. Since this is a comedy, though, only Selina's predictable abandonment of the ageing Rufaldo (a kind of rewriting of Medea's abandonment of her father) is dramatised. Shirley's use of Medea here suggests the potential for tragedy, but ultimately her story is subsumed into Shirley's chosen genre. Shirley does not present Medea onstage in either work, but his easy familiarity with her story, and the potential for ironic humour or parody he saw in it, provide an intriguing counterpoint to the terrifying and serious Medea evoked by the writers of Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedy.

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[118] James Shirley, *The Schoole of Complement* (London: E[lizabeth] A[llde] for Francis Constable, 1631).

Medea in the Civil War: Didactic references in the 1640s

Like Helen, Medea was used in particularly innovative ways during the reign of Charles I, and during the turmoil of the 1640s. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the efforts of Studley, Shakespeare, Thomas Heywood and Shirley meant that dramatic incarnations of Helen and Medea were among the most memorable. However, after the closure of the theatres in 1642, both women resurface in didactic literature, most of all in writing with an obvious religious or political message: Medea, in particular, is a popular figure amongst writers who aimed to promote temperance by using her as an example to be shunned. Her notorious crimes (and particularly her disregard for monarchy and government) meant that, like Helen, she was not a favourite of the Cavalier poets, and was not used to exemplify freedom from tyranny (though her subversion of Creon's rule and Pelias' wickedness might seem to invite this). Rather, in "A Defence for Women", part of his 1648 collection *Hesperides*, Robert Herrick recycles a familiar medieval use of her, telling his readers that: "For one *Medea* that was bad, / A good *Penelope* was had" (p.335).[119] Elsewhere, Jason's quest, rather than Medea's wickedness, is also used as example. Alexander Ross, in 1647's *Mystagogus Poeticus*, allegorises Medea as "counsell" (p.125),[120] as Heywood, Sandys and Fraunce had done before him, and follows Jonson's Epicure Mammon by describing the Fleece as a treatise on alchemy. Clearly drawing on Apollonius' *Argonautica*, he describes the Argo advising Jason that he must find Circe, and seek absolution of "the murther of Absyrius" (p.125), before explaining the speaking ship as the Church, that encourages men to repent of their sins. Like Apollonius, Ross ignores the crimes that follow the pair's departure from Colchis. This reluctance to connect Medea with bloody crime is the result of Ross' determination to represent Medea as a beneficial force, and Jason as a positive example of classical man, and a model for princes: "who ought to be *Jason*,

[119] No signature. Robert Herrick, *Hesperides* (London: for John Williams and Francis Eglesfield, 1648).

[120] No signature. Alexander Ross, *Mystagogus Poeticus*, (London: Richard Whitaker, 1647). Richard F. Hardin notes it "was extremely popular and widely used as a reference work in the school-room". Richard F. Hardin, "Ovid in Seventeenth-Century England", *Comparative Literature* 24.1 (1972): 44-62, 49.

that is whole, or sound in body and mind; he should be married to *Medaea*, that is, judgment and counsell" (p.125).

Medea's witchcraft paradoxically meant that English texts depicting her were often explicitly Christian in outlook, and/or were concerned with presenting and condemning examples of witchcraft. Brief details from her story can be used less predictably, however. In a treatise appealing to Charles I to reunite Britain, John Thornborough uses the unfortunate Apsyrtus as a metaphor for a country fatally divided. He maintains

> And now if any factious Tribune of the people interpose himselfe to divide us, and to disturbe the peace of Israel, thinking there is good fishing in troubled waters, and that the honours, and benefits they hunt after, are attained in *Perturbata Republica:* [...] verily such are not unlike *Medea*, who so dispersed her brothers limmes, that they could not be gathered againe. (p.158)[121]

Derek Hirst points to the importance of what he calls "the body politic argument" during the English Civil Wars: the idea that the two opposing sides both claimed "to represent or embody England". He notes that the claim was "Powerfully deployed [...] by the King up to and through his trial", but that finally, after Charles' execution, "the ideal of the body politic that had long sustained and expressed the English polity never fully recovered".[122] For his part, Thomas Hobbes finds Medea's manipulation of Pelias' hapless daughters to be such an effective warning against civil unrest, what Hirst calls "the sundering of that body",[123] that he uses it repeatedly. In *De Cive*, first published in Latin in 1642, and in English in 1651, he warns

> [...] So the common people through their folly (like the daughters of Pelias) desiring to renew the ancient government, being drawne away by the *eloquence* of ambitious men, as it were by the witchcraft of Medea, divided into *faction*, they consume it rather by those flames, than they reforme it. (12.13)[124]

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[121] No signature. John Thornborough, *A Discourse Shewing the Great Happiness that Hath and May Still Accrue to His Majesties Kingdomes of England and Scotland by Re-uniting them into one Great Britain* (London : Printed by R. H. for Charles Duncomb, 1641).
[122] Derek Hirst,"Literature and National Identity", in Loewenstein and Mueller, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern English Literature*: 633-63, 638.
[123] *Ibid.*
[124]Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive* (Kessinger, 2004).

In *Leviathan*, meanwhile, he explicitly connects the misguided desire of Pelias' daughters to the destructive impulse to question government, arguing:

> [...] they that go about by disobedience, to doe no more than reforme the Common-wealth, shall find they do thereby destroy it; like the foolish daughters of *Peleus* (in the fable;) which desiring to renew the youth of their decrepit Father, did by the Counsell of *Medea,* cut him in pieces, and boyle him, together with strange herbs, but made not of him a new man. (234)[125]

It is not a perfect analogy, since Pelias is typically described as being a cruel and tyrannical ruler, and thus his death is a strange choice of example to promote "the Obedience, and Concord of [...] Subjects" (234). It is an arresting one, however, and one that sees Medea's magical power as being transformed once again into the more realistic and explicable power of speech: here the seductive arguments of reformers who seek to sway the common people against their monarchy.[126] These politicised uses of Medea (like the Christianised uses of her) are very male-oriented, but for all their disinterest in giving Medea an individualised voice, they are fascinating. Symbolic of tragic and alarming disturbance (and particularly of threat to male rule), Medea might not seem a natural example for writers arguing for the re-establishment of order and peaceful government. However, like Helen, she is valuable because her undeniable threat becomes didactically useful, though in a very different way. Unlike the seventeenth-century Helen, Medea's threat is not connected with beauty, and can often seem divorced from her femininity (her use in witchcraft treatises notwithstanding). What her threat was connected with was the destruction of kingdoms, the thwarting of tyrants and the bloody consequences of male folly, either Jason's infidelity or his over-reliance on Medea's assistance. As is also the case with Helen, early modern incarnations of Medea very obviously echoed uses of her from the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: she is used as an example of unhappy frustrated love, of terrifying

[125]Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1991).
[126] On Hobbes' use of other threatening classical myths in *Leviathan*, see John Tralau, "Leviathan, the Beast of Myth: Medusa, Dionysos, and the Riddle of Hobbes's Sovereign Monster" in Patricia Springborg, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes' 'Leviathan'* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007): 61-81.

anger, and was invoked to chastise women and to caution men, with conservative and often Christian intent. At the same time, as they have throughout the centuries, uses of Medea evolve as the early modern period progresses, and these evolving uses can speak to the period's peculiar concerns. Specifically, seventeenth-century manipulation of her story demonstrates not only continued authorial interest in the classics, but also an increasing male interest in rewriting her threat as a paradoxical and yet effective way of promoting unity and stability, both political and religious.

Conclusion

Speaking of Nicholas Rowe's 1705 tragedy *Ulysses*, Samuel Johnson accounts for its unpopularity thus:

> We have been too early acquainted with the poetical heroes, to expect any pleasure from their revival; to shew them as they have already been shewn, is to disgust by repetition; to give them new qualities, or new adventures, is to offend by violating received notions. (p. 200)[1]

Such anxiety over how best to treat classical stories (or whether to treat them at all) is nothing new, as repeated Renaissance invocations of Horace's famous advice in the *Ars Poetica* attests. Almost forty years before Johnson's complaint appeared, in his *Essay of Dramatick Poesie* Dryden had expressed similar reservations about the fondness of classical writers for repetition, and in 1680 had used the preface to his collection, *Ovid's Epistles Translated by Several Hands*, to lay out his own theories of classical translation.[2] However, Johnson's assertion that by the early years of the eighteenth century readers had lost their taste for classical stories, and that writers would do well to take note of this change in taste, does not ring true. As far as Helen and Medea are concerned, the Middle Ages and early modern period returned to their stories again and again. As Thomas Heywood had noted in his introduction to *The Iron Age*, it was a rare major writer who did not refer to the story of Troy at some point in his literary career, and equally interesting are the authors – among them Chaucer, Lydgate, Gower, Greene, Shakespeare, Shirley – who return to Helen and Medea again and again. The latter half of the seventeenth century saw no decline in the level of interest their stories evinced (though they

[1] Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; With Critical Observations on Their Works*, Vol. 2, ed. Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006) 485.

[2] John Dryden, *An Essay of Dramatick Poesie,* in *Works*, Vol. 17, ed. Vinton A. Dearing, 20 vols (Berkeley: U of California P, 1956-2000), p.24. John Dryden, *Preface to Ovid's Epistles*, in *Works*, Vol. 1, ed. E. N. Hooker and H. Swedenberg, 20 vols (Berkeley: U of California P, 1956-2000) pp.114-5.

are not necessarily treated with originality). A keen interest in translation of the classical texts that featured both women continued into the Restoration, and is evidenced by, for example, John Ogilby's and Hobbes' *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and Dryden's translation of Theocritus' *Idyll 18*, by frequent translations of the *Heroides*, and by Samuel Garth's edition of the *Metamorphoses*. Also in the seventeenth century, Halliwell-Phillips notes translations of Seneca's *Trojan Women* by Samuel Pordage (1660), by Edward Sherburne (1679) and by "J.T.", whom he identifies as "a person of the name of Talbot" (1686) (p. 256).

However, as in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in particular, rewriting the classics rather than translating them remained a key concern. Authors continued to take considerable liberties with the characters of Helen and Medea, and with the texts they drew on. Two contrastive examples of this are Dryden's decision to leave Helen out of his rewriting of *Troilus and Cressida* (1679), and Edward Ravenscroft's decision to underline the connections (discerned by many modern critics) between Medea and Shakespeare's Tamora: in his adaptation of *Titus Andronicus* (1678), the queen stabs her baby son to death, because of her anger at Aaron, before she herself is killed.[3] More ambitious rewritings were also popular, for instance John Banks' *Destruction of Troy* (1679), or Charles Gildon's rewriting of Seneca and Euripides in *Phaeton, Or The Fatal Divorce* (1698), which retells the story of Medea's revenge on Jason, but renames the principal characters as Althea and Phaeton. Both take considerable liberties with their classical models: Banks rewrites the *Iliad* and dramatises events that take place in Troy to make clear that Helen still loves Paris (perhaps taking his cue from Shakespeare or Heywood, though he makes his Helen far more sympathetic than Shakespeare's).[4] Meanwhile Gildon reintroduces the classical gods (unpopular in medieval and Renaissance English versions of either woman's story) and stresses throughout how Althea/Medea's power is reduced, for example by having the gods give her the clothes to poison Phaeton's new bride.[5] Both playwrights thus follow patterns, of using but carefully altering Helen and Medea's stories, that were set down many centuries earlier by classical and late

[3] Edward Ravenscroft, *Titus Andronicus, or, the Rape of Lavinia* (London: J. B. for J. Hindmarsh, 1687).
[4] John Banks, *The Destruction of Troy* (London: A. G. and J. P. for Charles Blount, 1679).
[5] Charles Gildon, *Phaeton, Or the Fatal Divorce* (London: Abel Roper, 1698).

antique authors (for example, by Baebius Italicus or Pausanias), and which continued through the Middle Ages and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[6] There were even overtly comic rewritings of classical texts, that responded not only to the classics but also to their earlier English models: the burlesqued *Heroides* of Alexander Radcliffe and Matthew Stevenson render the complaints of Ovid's heroines in strikingly sexualised, crude language, and obviously aim to capitalise on Dryden's far more serious project, as well as on seventeenth-century enthusiasm for the classics.[7]

In his *Historical Miscellany*, the classical historian Aelian tells his readers that Medea may be innocent of her most famous crime against the male community, and against that community's expectations of women:

> A tradition has it that the bad reputation of Medea is undeserved. It was not she who killed her children, but some Corinthians. The story about the woman from Colchis and the tragedy are said to be the invention of Euripides, at the request of the Corinthians, and falsehood ousted the truth because of the poet's talent. (5.21)[8]

N. G. Wilson calls this hypothesis "implausible in the extreme" (227), and yet it is key to understanding how Helen and Medea, and their threats, were created and recreated in antiquity, in the English Middle Ages, and beyond. Of course, earlier classical writers had already attempted to clear Medea of this most alarming of crimes. However, Aelian's account, which was translated into English by Abraham Fleming in 1576, is an especially fascinating insight into the longevity of tensions between male authorial agenda and a female character's power, between history and myth, and between a source and its rewritings. These tensions are discernible in English writing in the medieval period (most famously in Chaucer's rewriting of Medea in the *Legend of Good Women*) but become particularly inescapable in the sixteenth and seventeenth

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[6] The trend can also be discerned in poetry, and even in translation, for example in the burlesqued *Heroides* of Matthew Stevenson.

[7] Matthew Stevenson, *The Wits Paraphrased, or, Paraphrase upon paraphrase in a burlesque on the several late translations of Ovids Epistles* (London: Will. Cademan,1680). Alexander Radcliffe, *Ovid travestie a burlesque upon Ovid's epistles. The second edition, enlarged with ten epistles never before printed* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1681). It should be noted that neither burlesquer attempts the epistle of Medea to Jason, perhaps because of the notoriety and seriousness of her crimes, though both collections include parodies of the epistles of Hypsipyle, Paris and Helen.

[8] Aelian, *Historical Miscellany*, ed. and trans. N. G. Wilson (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1997).

centuries. If Medea and Helen are powerless to prevent classical authors from hijacking their stories and rewriting them as the worst of women, they are equally unable to prevent later English authors from appropriating the idea of their power to their own authorial ends (as Euripides allegedly does here) or of playing down their autonomy and threat.

Aelian's mention of the Euripidean drama in his history also demonstrates the transgeneric appeal of both women. Included in histories, mythographies and dictionaries as frequently as they featured in drama, poetry or prose fiction, in the turbulent first decades of the seventeenth century in particular, Helen and especially Medea were also used with didactic intent, for both political and religious ends. Helen and Medea appeal because they embody so many oppositions and vices, and can be used to criticise a multitude of sins (lust, anger, deceit) and to pass judgement on women, foreigners, magic and a disregard for societal codes, both legal and moral. From the Middle Ages to the Civil War, classical women were just as interesting and appealing to male writers as classical men – but in choosing such notorious women, and composing rewritings that were inevitably burdened by the classical sources they drew on, these male writers took on uniquely challenging tasks, because of the threat (violent, sexual, magical) to male order and autonomy represented by Helen and Medea. This threat is paradoxically and often deliberately underscored even as it is downplayed in various ways. Johnson's complaint notwithstanding, English writers from Joseph of Exeter onwards saw no problem in rewriting both women (and the texts they appear in): they do so, however, on the understanding that the attentive reader or audience member will understand and appreciate what is being rewritten, and why.

There is much truth in Robin Sowerby's observation that "It has always been an attraction of pagan myth that it facilitates a freedom of imaginative play uninhibited by the Christian moral censor" (290). Invoking either Helen or Medea gives authors such as Joseph of Exeter, Guido, Spenser and Achelley a way to recount violence and sexual excess with apparent impunity. Almost always, though, there remains a sense of discomfort with such transgressive feminine behaviour and the threat it represents to the status quo. Helen and Medea to an extent give authors license to recount tales of adultery, magic and violence, but these authors very often shy away from representing the

powerful, active classical women given voices by Euripides, Ovid and Seneca. In the classical period the compulsion to alter previous models of these women was already in evidence: the Helen and Medea of Ovid and Seneca are very obviously reactions to their Homeric and Euripidean predecessors. However, medieval and early modern discomfort with the topics of witchcraft, violence and unbridled female sexuality meant that this compulsion to alter became even more pronounced. As the period 1160-1650 progressed, other considerations begin to impact on how the power of both women is represented – not only literary fashion, which often dictated the romanticised portrayals of the Middle Ages and the stern didacticism of the 1570s, but also social and political issues - a preoccupation with female rule during the reigns of Elizabeth and Mary, an anxiety over rifts and conflicts within the Church and within the national government, a new interest in England's relations with its continental allies and enemies. Finally, Helen and Medea present a powerful series of paradoxes to English writers from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries. Attempts to represent them, and simultaneously to negotiate their troubling power, can reveal much about the attitudes of male writers to the classical past, to their literary ancestors, and to women, be they ancient, medieval or early modern.

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