

# Blaming Helen: Vergil's Deiphobus and the Tradition of Dead Men Talking

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Homer's Helen is the first and most prominent in a series of epic women who are simultaneously valorized as prizes to be won through masculine competition and demonized as agents of male death and conflict. Within the *Iliad*, Helen blames herself for the Trojan War in a series of statements that highlight her agency in abandoning Menelaus and her responsibility for the subsequent loss of life (*Il.* 3.171-180, 6.344-358, 24.762-775)<sup>1</sup>. Within the *Odyssey*, male narrators go even further

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1 — Specifically, Helen wishes that she had died before “following” Paris to Troy (ἐπόμην, *Il.* 3.174) and “leaving” her native land (ἔβην, 24.766); these formulations suggest her subjectivity and activity, as does her self-characterization as an “evil-contriving bitch” (κυνὸς κακομηχάνου, *Il.* 6.344; cf. κυνώπιδος, 3.180). On these statements as (paradoxically) a form of self-aggrandizement by means of self-deprecation – establishing Helen as repentant and therefore “good” – see Graver (1995: 59), Worman (2001), Roisman (2006: 8-32), Blondell (2010; 2013: 53-73), Fulkerson (2011). On the other hand, O’Gorman (2008: 204) reads Helen’s self-blame as a “critical interpretation” of the male strategy of describing her (and other women) as *casus belli* – “the simultaneous and contradictory elevation of women to the status of glittering prizes, and debasement of women as the cause of all suffering”.

The texts of Homer and Vergil are the most recent Oxford editions (Allen 1920 [1963] and Mynors 1969, respectively). All translations are my own.

in blaming Helen for wartime suffering and death<sup>2</sup>. Odysseus complains that “many of us died for Helen’s sake” (Ἑλένης μὲν ἀπωλόμεθ’ εἴνεκα πολλοί, *Od.* 11.438), while Eumaeus portrays Helen as the active agent of death on the battlefield when he concludes “she undid the knees of many men” (ἐπεὶ πολλῶν ἀνδρῶν ὑπὸ γούνατ’ ἔλυσε, 14.69). Yet this insistence on Helen’s agency in and responsibility for epic warfare is complicated by the genre’s equally persistent gendering of combat and conflict as an arena only for men. Both Homeric epics dramatize the exclusion of women from the epic sphere with almost-identical admonitions: Hector decrees to Andromache that “war will be men’s business” (*Il.* 6.492) while Telemachus banishes Penelope from the competition to decide her future husband with the rebuke that “the bow will be men’s business” (*Od.* 21.352)<sup>3</sup>. War and conflict are the province of men, but women are nonetheless inscribed at the center of these narratives as the instigators of deadly and destructive male competition.

Despite this apparent paradox, I will argue in this paper that the ancient narrators had it right all along. War *is* men’s business, and the representation of women as instigators and even agents of epic conflict turns out to be primarily a rhetorical strategy on the part of male characters, who regularly blame women for disputes about status, dominance, and access to resources. I make this point by comparing two closely related scenes in the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*: the underworld encounters in which two dead men – Penelope’s suitor Amphimedon and Helen’s third husband Deiphobus – describe the causes and circumstances of their deaths in detail. As I will show, both men attempt to displace blame from the male rivals who actually killed them to an ancillary woman. Amphimedon believes Penelope collaborated with Odysseus in arranging his death, yet his version is undermined by the primary narrator of the *Odyssey*, who shows in Books 16-22 that Odysseus murdered the suitors without Penelope’s active involvement. Vergil’s Deiphobus similarly blames Helen for his death, but goes even further than his Homeric predecessor by eliding his male murderers and portraying her as the real killer. The Homeric intertext, however, casts doubt on Deiphobus’ version of events and raises important questions about how women are represented by male narrators and by the epic tradition more broadly. I conclude that Vergil uses Deiphobus’ tendentious presentation of Helen

2 — Male narrators in the *Iliad*, on the other hand, generally refrain from criticizing Helen – a strategy that, as Blondell (2010: 4-8; 2013: 60-62) argues, allows both sides to sidestep awkward questions about the legitimacy of the war as a heroic enterprise: how could the cost, in years and in lives, be justified if Helen were “damaged goods” (2010: 6)?

3 — Telemachus therefore echoes, but modifies, his earlier dismissal of Penelope from the sphere of public discourse: “speech will be men’s business” (μῦθος δ’ ἀνδρεσσιν μελήσει | πάσι, 1.358-359). See Clayton (2004: 36-37) on the interconnection of *muthos* and *toxos*.

as a subtle commentary on the epic pattern of scapegoating women for male death and conflict.

### 1. *The Odyssey: Amphimedon and Penelope*

The encounter between Aeneas and Deiphobus in *Aeneid* 6 is most often compared to the encounter between Odysseus and Agamemnon in the *Odyssey*'s first *nekuia* (*Od.* 11.385-466)<sup>4</sup> and indeed there are clear relationships between the two passages: a living traveler (Odysseus, Aeneas) encounters a dead comrade (Agamemnon, Deiphobus) and questions him about the cause of his death. The dead man replies with a grim description of his murder that features his wife (Clytemnestra, Helen) as the guilty party. Bleisch (1999: 209-210) argues that the episodes are also linked by their shared didactic purpose: they remind the living heroes of the dangers posed by cunning and destructive women<sup>5</sup>. According to this argument, Agamemnon's warning looks forward to Odysseus' return home and the potential danger posed by Penelope, while Deiphobus' looks backward to Aeneas' departure from Carthage and the danger posed by Dido, which he has successfully evaded. I will argue, however, that there is another way of reading Vergil's representation of Deiphobus' death-narrative: as a critique of the epic practice of blaming women for male death and conflict. Read in this light, the "didactic reminder" (Bleisch 1999: 210) presented by Deiphobus is addressed not to Aeneas but to the reader, and looks not backward to Carthage and Dido but forward to Italy and Lavinia<sup>6</sup>.

The encounter between Agamemnon and Amphimedon in the second *nekuia* (24.98-204)<sup>7</sup> provides a second parallel for the meeting of Aeneas

4 — See e.g. Knauer (1964: 114-117), Otis (1963: 292), Reckford (1981: 93-95), Bleisch (1999: 209-211), Scafoglio (2004: 178-179), Quint (2018: 61).

5 — In the *Odyssey*, this didactic element is made explicit by Agamemnon, who concludes his story about Clytemnestra with a warning not to be "gentle" (ἥπιος, 11.445) with Penelope and with the adage that "there is no longer trust in women" (οὐκέτι πιστὰ γυναῖκες, 11.456). Bleisch finds a more latent parallel in the Deiphobus episode: "Deiphobus, submerged by fate and the wiles of his foreign wife, provides a counterpoint to Aeneas, buoyed up by destiny, having abandoned his foreign consort in Carthage (and just parted from her again in the Underworld)" (1999: 210; cf. Suzuki 1989: 109).

6 — Prince (2014: 203) similarly reads Deiphobus' narrative as a commentary on Lavinia rather than Dido but, in my view, she uncritically reiterates Deiphobus' misogynistic perspective when she writes that he "alludes to the bloodshed that will happen in Italy *because of* Lavinia" (emphasis mine). As I argue below, attributing the bloodshed of the Italian war to Lavinia rather than to Juno, its true architect, reflects the epic tendency to scapegoat women for male death and conflict.

7 — Analyst criticism has followed Hellenistic scholars in suspecting the authenticity of this passage and, indeed, the entire ending of the *Odyssey* from 23.296 through Book 24. For an overview of the objections to the authenticity of the *Odyssey*'s conclusion, see Rutherford (1996: 74-78). I am interested here in interpretive rather than textual issues, but I agree with de Jong (2001: 565) in considering the concluding section of the *Odyssey* "indispensable". See de Jong (2001: 565-566; cf.

and Deiphobus in *Aeneid* 6 and clarifies its intertextual message. This *comparandum* has generally been neglected (despite Vergil's well-known practice of conflating two or more Homeric models in a single episode), but in many respects Deiphobus more closely resembles Homer's Amphimedon than his Agamemnon<sup>8</sup>. In Book 24 of the *Odyssey*, the dead suitors arrive in the Underworld, where they encounter the souls of Agamemnon and Achilles. Agamemnon recognizes Amphimedon and questions him, expressing his surprise that so many men of equal status and age have descended to Hades at the same time. Amphimedon replies with an account of his death at the hands of Odysseus and Telemachus that also features Penelope in a surprising supporting role.

Unlike Agamemnon's account of his murder in the first *nekuia*, Amphimedon's version of his death may be compared with the primary narrative of *Odyssey* 16-22<sup>9</sup>. On these terms, Amphimedon is largely correct, making a number of accurate deductions about the sequence of events and the machinations of Odysseus and Telemachus (de Jong 2001: 571-572). For example, he infers that Odysseus must first have gone to the swineherd's hut (24.150), where he met and made plans with Telemachus (24.151-153), and they then traveled to the palace separately (24.155). He also realizes that Odysseus arranged for the weapons to be removed from the hall, leaving the suitors defenseless (24.165). Yet Amphimedon is wrong about one crucial detail of his death-narrative. As he tells Agamemnon:

αὐτὰρ ὁ ἦν ἄλοχον πολυκερδείησιν ἄνωγε  
τόξον μνηστήρεσσι θέμεν πολίον τε σίδηρον,  
ἡμῖν αἰνομόροισιν ἀέθλια καὶ φόνου ἀρχήν.

Then he [Odysseus], in his great cunning, commanded his wife  
to place before the suitors the bow and the grey iron,  
as a contest and a beginning of death for us ill-fated men.  
(24.167-169)

561-562 ad 23.296) for an overview of the key elements of closure in *Odyssey* 24.

8 — Reckford (1981: 95) mentions Amphimedon in comparison with Deiphobus; however, he seems to view the Amphimedon-parallel as minor and subordinate to the Agamemnon-parallel. Similarly, Bleisch (1999: 211) briefly mentions the suitors, but does not discuss the second *nekuia* or Amphimedon as the narrator of his own death. On Vergil's conflation of multiple intertextual models into a single episode, see e.g. Knauer 1964, Thomas (1986: 193-198), Cairns (1989 [1990]: 202-214); Farrell (1997, esp. 225-229).

9 — Agamemnon's death, on the other hand, is narrated by a number of different speakers throughout Books 1-4 of the *Odyssey*, including Zeus (1.35-43), Athena (1.298-300, 3.234-235), Nestor (3.193-198, 255-312), Menelaus (4.90-92), and Proteus (4.512-537). These different versions have different emphases and perspectives, and it is impossible to distill a singular, unified account to which Agamemnon's report in Book 11 may be compared. On the different variants of the *Oresteia*-story in the *Odyssey*, see most recently Alden (2017: 77-100), with further bibliography.

In other words, Amphimedon imagines that Penelope and Odysseus colluded together in arranging the contest of the bow – yet the reader is aware that they did not. According to the primary narrator, it was Athena who inspired Penelope to propose the contest, as described in Book 21:

τῇ δ' ἄρ' ἐπὶ φρεσὶ θῆκε θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη,  
κούρη Ἰκαρίοιο, περίφρονι Πηνελοπείῃ,  
τόξον μνηστήρεσσι θέμεν πολίων τε σίδηρον  
ἐν μεγάροις Ὀδυσῆος, ἀέθλια καὶ φόνου ἀρχήν.

Then the goddess, grey-eyed Athena, put it in the mind  
of the daughter of Icarius, thoughtful Penelope,  
to place before the suitors the bow and the grey iron  
in the halls of Odysseus, as a contest and beginning of death. (21.1-4)

Amphimedon's words in Book 24 closely echo the narrator's in Book 21, but Amphimedon, unaware of Athena's mediating role, has imagined a version of events in which Odysseus arranged the suitors' deaths with Penelope's active connivance<sup>10</sup>. Penelope, however, was unaware of Odysseus' presence in the house, and had no reason to expect that the contest would lead to the suitors' deaths – the description of the contest as “a beginning of death” (21.4) is focalized through Athena, who is presented as the source of the plan<sup>11</sup>. In fact, as Chaston (2002) emphasizes,

10 — Beginning with Page (1955: 101-136; cf. Kirk 1962, esp. 244-252), analyst scholarship has viewed this “error” as evidence of incomplete redaction and an earlier epic in which Penelope does indeed recognize and aid Odysseus before the slaughter of the suitors. Yet it was acknowledged even in antiquity (see Dindorf, *Sch. Gr. in Hom. Od.* II.725.15) that Amphimedon's inference is perfectly reasonable under the circumstances. For an overview of the problems with the analyst argument as applied to this passage see Goldhill (1988: 1-8, with references); as he points out, Amphimedon's misunderstanding is not only typical of the suitors' “*méconnaissance*”, but also serves important narrative functions. On the other hand, the question of whether Penelope – within the *Odyssey* as we have it – had “already” recognized the disguised Odysseus and was covertly working to advance his interests through the bow contest has been much debated. For a lucid analysis of the different strategies scholars have taken in approaching this issue, see Doherty (1995: 31-63). Whatever one's position on this question, however, it is clear that Penelope does not openly recognize or acknowledge her husband until she has tested him through the trick of the bed (23.206). Moreover, the close verbal echoes between Amphimedon's speech attributing the idea of the bow contest to Odysseus and the narrator's words attributing it to Athena suggest that these two passages should be read as a pair and, in this sense, Amphimedon is incorrect. His mistake here is particularly telling as it is a reversal of the epic pattern known as Jørgensen's Law, according to which “characters, lacking the omniscience of the narrator, often ascribe divine interventions to Ζεύς (in general), to an unspecified god (δαίμων, θεός, θεοί) or to the wrong god” (de Jong 2001: xv). Amphimedon, on the other hand, mistakenly ascribes divine intervention to a mortal character.

11 — Cf. de Jong (2001: 505 *ad* 21.1-4) for the phrase φόνου ἀρχήν as either an embedded focalization of Athena's or an intrusion by the narrator into Penelope's focalization. Even when Odysseus (disguised as the beggar) reassures Penelope that Odysseus will return before the end of the contest, he mentions only that Odysseus will return in time to complete the contest himself – he does not suggest that Odysseus might turn the bow on the suitors (19.583-587). Penelope herself describes the contest as a means of “severing” her from the house of Odysseus (19.572). Athena also intervenes

Penelope's proposal of the bow-contest offers a non-violent alternative to the bloodshed espoused both by Odysseus and by the suitors. Yet her husband and son hijack this plan, and Telemachus dismisses her from the space of the contest with the rebuke quoted above: "the bow is men's business" (τόξον δ' ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει | πᾶσι, *Od.* 21.352-353). As Chaston concludes, "Once the bow has left [Penelope's] hands, there is a progression from contest to combat that excludes her" (2002: 7).

Amphimedon has therefore inferred Penelope's participation in the *mnēsterephonia* without direct evidence and painted a portrait of her complicity that contradicts the version established by the primary narrator. Amphimedon's intuitive leap recalls the discourse of gendered suspicion voiced by Agamemnon in Book 11, that "there is no longer trust in women" (οὐκέτι πιστὰ γυναῖξιν, 11.456)<sup>12</sup>. Amphimedon further works to cast blame on Penelope throughout his narrative: when asked by Agamemnon about the cause of his death, Amphimedon replies by narrating the weaving trick which, he supposes, Penelope used to delay remarriage because she was "plotting death and black fate" for the suitors (φραζομένη θάνατον καὶ κῆρα μέλαιναν, 24.127). Amphimedon thus presents Penelope as planning their deaths from the very beginning and attributes to her an active, intentional malevolence that better describes Odysseus and Telemachus<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, as many scholars have noted, the weaving trick more accurately represents Penelope's ambivalence towards the suitors, and towards remarriage more generally – it reenacts her vacillation between two courses of action, remarriage (promoted by the weaving) and fidelity to Odysseus (promoted by the un-weaving)<sup>14</sup>. Amphimedon also closely associates Penelope's completion of the shroud with Odysseus' return, though it occurred before the beginning of the

to prevent Penelope's recognition of Odysseus (and therefore her informed participation in the plan) in the episode when Eurycleia notices his scar (19.476-479).

12 — With this statement, Agamemnon is endorsing mistrust toward Penelope in particular, as well as women in general: the maxim is put in the context of his advice not to be "gentle" (ἥπιος, 11.445) with Penelope and to enter Ithaca in secret (κρύβδην, 11.455). Athena also applies a more general lack of trust in women to Penelope specifically when she warns Telemachus to hurry home because "you know the sort of spirit women have in their hearts" (οἶσθα γὰρ οἷος θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι γυναικός, 15.20).

13 — Cf. of Odysseus and Telemachus: φραζέσθην μνηστήρσιν ὑπερφιάλοισιν ὄλεθρον, 13.373; μνηστήρσιν θάνατον καὶ κῆρ' ἀπαρόντε, 16.169.

14 — See e.g. Felson-Rubin (1994: 27, 1996: 177-178); Lowenstam (2000: 337-338); similarly, Clayton (2004: 40) suggests that the weaving trick characterizes Penelope as both faithful wife and bride-to-be, and so allows her to occupy "a realm of pure potentiality". Zerba (2009: 313) discusses the contest of the bow in a similar way: it encodes the options both of remarriage (if one of the suitors should manage to string the bow) but also of fidelity to Odysseus (if none of them can, as Penelope may well suspect will be the case). Papadopoulou-Belmehdi (1994: 40), on the other hand, suggests that Amphimedon's understanding of Penelope's motives is correct: "après le dénouement du poème, les prétendants ne peuvent plus avoir de doute sur les desseins de la reine, sa toile est inséparable de leur sorte funeste".

poem (cf. 2.93-110), and thus at least several weeks before Odysseus' arrival on Ithaca. As de Jong (2001: 571) puts it, Amphimedon is "telescoping" events; he therefore implies a conspiracy between Penelope and Odysseus of which the suitors are victims<sup>15</sup>.

These accusations against Penelope are part of Amphimedon's larger project to exculpate the suitors and cast them as the victims of the tale. He opens by assuring Agamemnon that he will tell him their "evil end" (κακὸν τέλος, 24.124), and repeats the adjective throughout his narrative: an "evil spirit" (κακός... δαίμων, 24.149) brought Odysseus home, and Odysseus and Telemachus planned an "evil death" (θάνατον κακόν, 24.153) for the suitors<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand, he fails to mention the suitors' misdeeds, including their misuse of Odysseus' property and their failed plot to ambush and kill Telemachus<sup>17</sup>. Amphimedon attempts to excuse the suitors' mistreatment of the disguised Odysseus by emphasizing his low-status appearance: he describes the beggar's clothing as ugly (κακά, 24.156) and disgraceful (λυγρά, 24.158). As Amphimedon concludes, "Nor could any of us have recognized who he was, when he appeared so suddenly, not even those who were older" (οὐδέ τις ἡμείων δύνατο γνῶναι τὸν ἐόντα | ἐξαπίνης προφάνεντ', οὐδ' οἱ προγενέστεροι ἦσαν, 24.159-60). This formulation both attempts to justify the suitors' inhospitable behavior and also suggests that they have been victimized by deceitful opponents. Amphimedon closes his tale with the pathetic image of the suitors' bodies lying uncared-for (ἀκηδέα, 24.187) in Odysseus' halls and the righteous-sounding conclusion that they have been denied "the due of the dead" (γέρας... θανόντων, 24.190).

The condemnation of Penelope thus serves to buttress Amphimedon's representation of the suitors as victims and of their deaths as "evil" and unjust. Yet his version of Penelope's character is not supported by the primary narrative, and is immediately reframed by Agamemnon, Amphimedon's addressee, who responds to his speech with enthusiastic praise of Odysseus and Penelope:

15 — On this mischaracterization of the timing, see also Russo, Fernández-Galliano, and Heubeck (1992: 376-377 *ad* 24.147-190); Danek (1998: 484-485); Alden (2017: 93 n. 61). On the other hand, Papadopoulou-Belmehdi (1994: 38) believes that Amphimedon, in death, has finally perceived the true significance of the web: it is "la traduction en terms humains du génie divin qui a coordonné le temps du tissu avec celui du retour".

16 — On Amphimedon's rhetoric here, see de Jong (2001 *ad* 24.121-190); Felson-Rubin (1994: 105).

17 — As Alden (2017: 93) points out, Amphimedon also fails to mention that the suitors were able to obtain weapons from the store-room, despite their removal from the hall by Odysseus and Telemachus (cf. 22.142-146). Though she does not comment on the significance of this omission, it plays into Amphimedon's rhetoric presenting the suitors as helpless victims.



ὄλβιε Λαέρταο πάϊ, πολυμήχαν' Ὀδυσσεῦ,  
 ἦ ἄρα σὺν μεγάλῃ ἀρετῇ ἐκτήσω ἄκοιτιν.  
 ὡς ἀγαθαὶ φρένες ἦσαν ἀμύμονι Πηνελοπείῃ,  
 κόρῃ Ἰκαρίου: ὡς εὖ μέμνητ' Ὀδυσῆος,  
 ἀνδρὸς κουριδίου: τῷ οἱ κλέος οὐ ποτ' ὀλεῖται  
 ἥς ἀρετῆς, τεύξουσι δ' ἐπιχθονίοισιν αἰοιδὴν  
 ἀθάνατοι χαρίεσσαν ἐχέφρονι Πηνελοπείῃ.  
 οὐχ ὡς Τυνδαρέου κόρῃ κακὰ μήσατο ἔργα,  
 κουρίδιον κτείνασα πόσιν.

"Fortunate son of Laertes, Odysseus of many devices,  
 truly indeed you won yourself a wife with great virtue<sup>18</sup>.  
 How noble was the mind of blameless Penelope,  
 the daughter of Icarius, how well she remembered Odysseus,  
 her wedded husband: therefore, the fame of her virtue  
 will never die, but the immortals will make  
 a graceful song for men on earth about constant-hearted Penelope.  
 Not so the daughter of Tyndareus: she plotted evil deeds  
 and killed her wedded husband<sup>19</sup>. (24.192-200)

Agamemnon's revision of Amphimedon's Penelope shows that her actions may be considered helpful or harmful, loyal or disloyal, depending on the perspective of the narrator. The dead Amphimedon, Penelope's ostensible victim, paints her in terms that recall Clytemnestra, but Agamemnon responds by praising Penelope in contrast to his own wife, who plotted "evil deeds" (κακά... ἔργα, 24.199). Yet, in Amphimedon's view, it is his own death that is "evil" (θάνατον κακόν, 24.153) and Penelope – like Clytemnestra – is the female conspirator who helped bring it about. Penelope's very "evildoing", in Amphimedon's version, has, in turn, inspired Agamemnon's praise of Penelope's "virtue" (24.193, 197) and "excellent mind" (24.194)<sup>20</sup>. Agamemnon's speech suggests a clear dichotomy between Penelope and Clytemnestra, yet Penelope appears rather like Clytemnestra in Amphimedon's account<sup>21</sup>. The final

18 — Critics are divided on whose *aretē* is meant here; I follow what seems to me the most reasonable interpretation within context – and the one best supported by the scholarship – in viewing the *aretē* as Penelope's, rather than Odysseus' (cf. Shipp 1972: 360; Thalmann 1984: 233 n. 20; West 1989: 124; Russo, Fernández-Galliano, and Heubeck 1992: 381 *ad* 24.192). See Katz (1991: 20-29) and Tsagalis (2003 [2008]: 49-54) for an overview of this passage, including discussion of the interpretive and textual issues.

19 — This passage in particular – along with the second *nekuia* more generally (cf. note 7 above) – has been suspected since antiquity. For an overview of the issues involved and compelling arguments for the authenticity of these lines, see Tsagalis 2003 (= 2008: 30-43).

20 — Further, as is often noted, these contradictory evaluations of Penelope are inspired by the same incorrect information: Agamemnon's praise of her unbroken fidelity is founded on Amphimedon's mistaken portrait of her collaboration with Odysseus (cf. Katz 1991: 27-29; Felson-Rubin 1996: 163-164).

21 — Clytemnestra may also appear somewhat Penelope-like in other versions of her story.



commentary on Penelope in the poem seems to endorse one version of her *kleos*, but Agamemnon's praise of her *aretē* stands forever beside Amphimedon's condemnation of her wickedness.

Moreover, Agamemnon's exoneration of Penelope is balanced, and even eclipsed, by the condemnation of Clytemnestra that immediately follows: "not so the daughter of Tyndareus..." (οὐχ ὥς Τυνδαρέου κόρη, 24.199). Agamemnon continues by blaming Clytemnestra for his own death, with no mention of Aegisthus: "*she* killed her wedded husband" (κουρίδιον κτείνασα πόσιν, *Od.* 24.200)<sup>22</sup>. He concludes by replacing Penelope's "graceful song" (ᾠοιδήν... χαρίεσσιν, *Od.* 24.197-198) with the "hateful song" (στρυγερὴ δέ τ' ᾠοιδή, *Od.* 24.200) Clytemnestra will receive, and by replacing Penelope's *kleos* with the "grievous reputation" (χαλεπήν δέ τε φῆμιν, *Od.* 24.201) earned by Clytemnestra – a reputation he extends to women in general, "even the virtuous" (θηλυτέρησι γυναιξί, καὶ ἥ κ' εὐεργὸς ἔησιν, *Od.* 24.202). As Murnaghan (1987 [2011]: 92) puts it, Agamemnon does not merely present his own story as a contrast to Odysseus' fate, "but as a norm from which the story of the *Odyssey* departs" – Penelope is the exception, while Clytemnestra is the rule. Thus Agamemnon, though he corrects Amphimedon's negative portrait of Penelope, uses the correction merely to advance a narrative of blame and hostility towards a different woman.

## 2. *The Aeneid: Deiphobus and Helen*

This pattern of blaming a woman for the narrator's murder at the hands of other men resurfaces in Vergil's underworld and Aeneas' encounter with his long-lost cousin Deiphobus. Their meeting follows a pattern familiar from the *nekuiai* of the *Odyssey*: the dead hero's friend is surprised to see him and questions him about the cause of his death<sup>23</sup>. In this case, however, Aeneas is surprised not by the fact that Deiphobus is dead – which he already knows – but by his gruesome appearance: his face and body are cruelly mutilated (*laniatum corpore toto... et lacerum*

For example, according to Nestor, she had an "excellent mind" (φρεσὶ... ἀγαθῇσι, 3.266); this same formula is used by Agamemnon to describe Penelope (ἀγαθαὶ φρένες, 24.194).

22 — Compare Agamemnon's description of his murder in the first *nekuia*: "but Aegisthus plotted death and black fate for me and killed me with the help of my destructive wife (ἀλλὰ μοι Αἰγισθος τεύξας θανάτον τε μόρον τε | ἔκτα σὺν οὐλομένη ἀλόχῳ, 11.409-410). Here, Aegisthus is the active plotter and killer, while Clytemnestra's participation in the murder is subordinate.

23 — Odysseus to Agamemnon: "What fate of mournful death has now overpowered you?" (τίς νύ σε κῆρ ἐδάμασσε τανηλεγέος θανάτοιο, *Od.* 11.398); Agamemnon to Amphimedon: "What did you suffer that has brought you beneath the shadowy earth, all picked men and alike in age?" (τί παθόντες ἐρεμνὴν γαίαν ἔδυτε | πάντες κεκριμένοι καὶ ὁμήλικες, *Od.* 24.106-107); Aeneas to Deiphobus: "Who desired to exact penalties so cruel?" (*quis tam crudelis optavis sumere poenas, Aen.* 6.501-502).

*crudeliter ora*, *Aen.* 6.494-495). Aeneas has heard a story of Deiphobus' death (*fama... tulit*, 6.502-503) that described it in terms of a huge battle (*vasta... caede*, 6.503) and masses of enemy dead (*confusae stragis acervum*, 6.504). Aeneas' question, therefore, is more emotive and specific: "Who desired to exact penalties so cruel?" (*quis tam crudelis optavit sumere poenas?*, 6.501). This particular aspect of the encounter evokes Agamemnon's meeting with Amphimedon in *Odyssey* 24, where the dead man's interlocutor expressed surprise at a curious or unexpected facet of his presence – in the case of Amphimedon, the sheer number of simultaneous arrivals. In both cases, the interlocutor's response suggests a distance between expectation and reality that raises the stakes of the encounter. Yet Vergil's version "ups the ante" in his engagement with the Homeric precedent, since the reader of the *Aeneid* – unlike the reader of the *Odyssey* – has not already heard the story of Deiphobus' death and so is unprepared for the dead man's answer<sup>24</sup>.

Moreover, Vergil explicitly signals his own innovation in Deiphobus' death-narrative. As Bleisch (1999: 204) has noted, the phrase *fama tulit* activates a metaliterary reference to the epic tradition, which has gotten the story of Deiphobus' death wrong and so must be "corrected" by Vergil<sup>25</sup>. Bleisch argues that the *fama* Aeneas has heard refers to the version of the fall of Troy presented by Demodocus in *Odyssey* 8, where the fight at Deiphobus' house is described as Odysseus' "most dreadful battle" (αἰνότατον πόλεμον, *Od.* 8.519). On the other hand, Deiphobus must confess that, far from collapsing after a "vast slaughter" of the enemy (*vasta... caede Pelasgum*, 6.503), he was murdered in his bedroom, unarmed, without the opportunity to defend himself<sup>26</sup>. As Bleisch puts it, the contrast "reveals the distance between the world of Homeric heroism and the world of [Deiphobus'] experience" (1999: 204)<sup>27</sup>.

24 — The reader's prior knowledge of the dead man's history is reflected not only in the second *nekuia*, where the reader can compare Amphimedon's version with the narrator's account in earlier books, but also in the first *nekuia*, where the reader has already heard several variant versions of Agamemnon's death-narrative from a range of speakers including Zeus, Athena, Nestor, and Menelaus (cf. note 9 above).

25 — On Vergil's use of the word *fama* to evoke the epic tradition, cf. Horsfall 1990; Barchiesi 1994: 117-118; 1995: 51-54; Clément-Tarantino 2006, 2016: 56-61; Hardie 2012 (esp. 106-112). Barchiesi and Horsfall are divided on whether *fama* refers to specific intertextual references (Barchiesi) or traditional material more generally (Horsfall). Cf. Hinds 1998: 1-5 on the "Alexandrian footnote", a term borrowed from Ross (1975: 78), and referring to "the signaling of specific allusion by a poet through seemingly general appeals to tradition and report" (Hinds 1998: 1-2), e.g. *fama est, ferunt, dicitur, ut perhibent*, etc.

26 — The ironic contrast is emphasized by Aeneas' address to Deiphobus as *armipotens* ("mighty in arms"). As Paschalis (1997: 232) points out, the reversal also occurs at the level of Deiphobus' name, which means "battle-fear" (δῆιος + φόβος), suggesting "one who puts the enemy to flight". Deiphobus' mutilation suggests an alternative etymology, from δηιώω ("cut down" or "rend") and implies that the fear is his, not his enemies'.

27 — The distance between heroic possibility and inglorious reality is also found in the under-

I argue that Vergil further revises the Homeric pattern by expanding upon the male victim's gendered discourse of blame: he represents Deiphobus as attributing almost all the responsibility for his death not to Menelaus, his sexual rival, but to Helen, his wife and betrayer. Amphimedon gives Penelope a supporting role in his murder, describing Odysseus as the instigator: "*he commanded his wife*" to set the contest of the bow (ὁ ἦν ἄλοχον... ἄνωγε, *Od.* 24.167)<sup>28</sup>. Yet Deiphobus' reply to Aeneas identifies only Helen as the (human) source of his misfortunes:

sed me fata mea et scelus exitiale Lacaenae  
his mersere malis; illa haec monimenta reliquit.

But my fate, and the deadly crime of the Spartan woman,  
sank me in these evils; she left behind these relics. (*Aen.* 6.511-512)

In Deiphobus' version, Helen eclipses the Greek warriors as his killer to such an extent that they become afterthoughts, unmentioned until the very end of his death-narrative. Instead, Helen – unnamed – is the active agent of Deiphobus' misfortunes and of the *monimenta* of his mutilations<sup>29</sup>. Yet those wounds were not, of course, inflicted by Helen, but by Menelaus and his fellow Greeks. In attributing them to Helen alone, Deiphobus elides and even erases his male murderers from the equation.

Indeed, Deiphobus has very little to say about Menelaus. He prefers to describe Helen's crimes: he tells Aeneas that she feigned Bacchic possession in order to abet the Greek sack of the city (6.517-522)<sup>30</sup>. He then turns to the details of his own death:

tum me confectum curis somnoque gravatum  
infelix habuit thalamus, pressitque iacentem  
dulcis et alta quies placidaeque simillima morti.  
egregia interea coniunx arma omnia tectis  
emovet, et fidum capiti subduxerat ensem:  
intra tecta vocat Menelaum et limina pandit,  
scilicet id magnum sperans fore munus amanti,

world narratives of the *Odyssey*: in both cases, the dead man's interlocutor proposes alternative possibilities for their cause of death, including shipwreck or battle (*Od.* 11.399-403, 24.109-113), and both Agamemnon and Amphimedon must supply a more ignominious account of their own ends.

28 — Similarly, in the first *nekuia*, Agamemnon immediately introduces Aegisthus (ἀλλὰ μοι Αἰγισθος..., *Od.* 11.409) and initially describes Clytemnestra as a secondary figure (σὺν οὐλομένη ἀλόχῳ, *Od.* 11.410); cf. note 22 above.

29 — Indeed, Helen is never named by Deiphobus – a sign of loathing and contempt (cf. Horsfall 2013: 372 *ad* 6.511). As Paschalis (1997: 232) points out, the use of the ethnonym here also closely associates Helen with Deiphobus' mutilations, as *Lacaena* echoes *lacerum* (6.495).

30 — Amata also pretends Bacchic madness in order to enact a betrayal of her husband's household (*Aen.* 7.385-405). On the relationship between these passages and the destructive role of maenadism in the *Aeneid*, see Panoussi (2009: 142-144), Curtis (2017: 211-215).

et famam exstingui veterum sic posse malorum.

Then I was in my unhappy bridal chamber, worn out  
by cares and weighed down by sleep, and a sweet and deep  
rest came upon me as I lay there – very much like peaceful death.  
Meanwhile, my excellent wife took all the weapons from the house,  
and even slipped my trusty sword from beneath my head;  
then she called Menelaus inside the house and opened the threshold,  
hoping, evidently, that it would be a great boon to her lover,  
and thus the *fama* of her former wrongdoing could be wiped out.  
(6.520-527)

As Amphimedon assumed Penelope's collusion with Odysseus, Deiphobus imagines Helen colluding with Menelaus, but gives her an even more active role: *she* removed the arms from the house, *she* summoned Menelaus, and *she* let him inside (*emovet, subduxerat, vocat, pandit*, 6.524-525)<sup>31</sup>. As with *illa haec monimenta reliquit* (6.512), Helen is the subject of a series of active verbs, throwing her agency and activity into relief. By contrast, in Amphimedon's story, Odysseus is the architect of the plan: he is the subject of the verb (ἄνωγε, "he instructed"), while Penelope is the object (ἦν ἄλοχον, *Od.* 24.167)<sup>32</sup>. The detail of removing the arms marks the similarity between Deiphobus' and Amphimedon's accounts, yet in the *Odyssey* this strategy is attributed only to the male plotters, Odysseus and Telemachus (*Od.* 19.1-34; cf. 24.163-165)<sup>33</sup>. In Deiphobus' version, however, Helen appears to have devised the plan to remove his sword on her own, "hoping, evidently, that it would be a great boon to her lover" (*scilicet id magnum sperans fore munus amanti*, 6.526). Further, in the *Aeneid*, the concealing of the arms is not strictly necessary for the Greeks' success, as it is in the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus and his men are heavily outnumbered. In Vergil's narrative, it is Deiphobus who will be outnumbered, and he will also be taken by surprise, in his sleep. This parallel therefore invites the reader to consider the two stories as a pair, but also marks a significant difference: the female conspirator, not the male rival, is responsible.

Further, while the name of Odysseus occurs at the very beginning of Amphimedon's death-narrative and repeatedly thereafter (*Od.* 24.125, 149, 151, 154, 172, 176, 187), Deiphobus mentions Menelaus by name

31 — Keith (2000: 68) and Panoussi (2009: 142) note that Helen – in leaving the house for her Bacchic rite and then inviting an outsider into her husband's home – inverts the conventions of gendered space, where interior, domestic territory is marked as feminine, while exterior, public territory is considered masculine.

32 — Though Amphimedon, as mentioned above, describes Penelope "plotting death and black fate" for the suitors (φραζομένη θάνατον καὶ κῆρα μέλαιναν, *Od.* 24.127), her activity and agency in his death-narrative is confined to the trick of the weaving (*Od.* 24.128-146).

33 — Cf. Reckford 1981: 95; Bleisch 1991: 211.

only in the phrase *vocat Menelaum* (“she calls Menelaus”, 6.525). He thus inverts Amphimedon’s ἄλοχον... ἄνωγε (“he instructed his wife”, *Od.* 24.167): in Deiphobus’ version, Helen is the agent of the plot<sup>34</sup>. When he reaches this point in the story, Deiphobus’ narrative speeds up, and he elides the details of the actual murder, asking “why drag it out?” (*quid moror*, 24.528). Deiphobus therefore deflects attention from the fact that his killers were the male Greeks, not Helen. Amphimedon’s account, on the other hand, includes a fearsome description of Odysseus “glaring terribly” (δεινὸν παπταίνων, *Od.* 24.179) and continues with details of shameful groaning, heads rolling, and the gory conclusion that “the whole floor ran with blood” (τῶν δὲ στόνος ὥρνυτ’ ἀεικῆς | κράτων τυπτομένων, δάπεδον δ’ ἅπαν αἵματι θῦεν, *Od.* 24.184–185). On the other hand, Deiphobus’ final comment on his death is a generalizing plural: “they burst in” (*irrupunt*, 24.528), followed by specific condemnation, not of Menelaus, but of Ulysses: “the descendant of Aeolus came with them as a participant and advocate of wickedness” (*comes additus una | hortator scelerum Aeolides*, 6.528–529)<sup>35</sup>. This elliptical reference to *scelera* picks up on *scelus exitiale Lacaenae* (6.511) and is the only hint that Ulysses, Menelaus, and the other Greeks are the real perpetrators of the violence that has been attributed to Helen. Moreover, the presence of a villainous Ulysses particularly signals the intertext with *Odyssey* 24: in Deiphobus’ narrative, Ulysses plays the role of evildoer that Amphimedon had assigned to Odysseus.

Deiphobus’ account thus diverges from the precedent of *Odyssey* 24 in its focus on the female conspirator at the expense of the male murderers. Both narratives are alike, however, in the speaker’s concern to gloss over his own misconduct and portray himself as a victim. As is often noted, Deiphobus calls Helen his *coniunx* (6.523) and refers to Menelaus as her lover (*amanti*, 6.526) – but of course from the Greek perspective it is Menelaus who is Helen’s legitimate husband<sup>36</sup>. Deiphobus sarcastically

34 — The element of invitation also recalls Agamemnon’s death-narrative in *Odyssey* 11, but there again it is the male plotter who is responsible: Aegisthus killed Agamemnon after inviting him into his home (οἰκόνδε καλέσας, *Od.* 11.410).

35 — On the abuse of Odysseus implied by the patronymic (or papponymic) *Aeolides* – suggesting that Odysseus is not the legitimate son of Laertes but a bastard of Sisyphus – see e.g. Paschalis 1997: 233, Scafoglio 2004: 177; Horsfall 2013: 379 *ad* 6.529. I would add that, like the echo of *scelus... scelera*, the use of the patronym activates a parallel between Helen and Ulysses, since she has been described only by her ethnonym (*Lacaena*, 6.511) or other periphrases (*illa*, 6.512, 517; *egregia... coniunx*, 6.523) that avoid her name; cf. note 29 above.

36 — See Reckford (1981: 94) and Bleisch (1999: 211) on the use of *amans* to activate a parallel between Deiphobus and Agamemnon, in contrast to the parallel between Deiphobus and Penelope’s suitors; the effect, as Bleisch puts it, is to “insure that Deiphobus is morally ambiguous”. Panoussi (2009: 143) argues that the confusion of marital terminology and categories in Deiphobus’ narrative “exposes a more general perversion of marriage at work” within the *Aeneid*, a perversion that will also be reflected in the conflict over Lavinia’s marriage in the second half of the poem.

describes her as an “excellent wife” (*egregia... coniunx*, *Aen.* 6.523), but indeed Helen *is* being an excellent wife – just not to him<sup>37</sup>. The reality of the situation is that Deiphobus has re-enacted the crime of Paris and is therefore being punished for the same offense as Amphimedon and the other suitors in the *Odyssey*: attempted wife-stealing<sup>38</sup>. Deiphobus’ description of Helen as an “excellent wife” also evokes Penelope, the “wife with great virtue” (σὺν μεγάλῃ ἀρετῇ... ἄκοιτιν, *Od.* 24.193) who is condemned by one narrator, but whose actions appear very different from another perspective<sup>39</sup>. Further, as Anderson (1969: 60) has noted, Deiphobus’ mutilation replicates the vengeance exacted on adulterers, and is therefore appropriate to his crime<sup>40</sup>. It is therefore significant that Ulysses is present in this passage: Deiphobus calls him an “advocate of wickedness” (*hortator scelerum*, *Aen.* 6.529)<sup>41</sup> but, from the Greek perspective, he is exacting a legitimate punishment for appropriating another man’s wife – just as he does by slaying the suitors in the *Odyssey*.

Deiphobus follows his reference to Ulysses with a prayer that the Greeks may suffer the same fate (Ulysses with a prayer that the Greeks may suffer the same fate (*talia*, 6.529) if, as he says, “I demand these penalties with a pious mouth” (*pio si poenas ore reposco*, 6.530). It is often assumed that this wish is fulfilled in the murder of Agamemnon, and indeed, as Reckford puts it, Deiphobus’ prayer “anticipates the very story that it reflects, the killing of Agamemnon” (1981: 94)<sup>42</sup>. In my view, however, the juxtaposition of Deiphobus’ final prayer with the reference to Ulysses suggests that divine punishment is meant for him and Menelaus – Agamemnon, on the other hand, has not been mentioned. Yet Deiphobus’ killers have a much happier fate: Odysseus/Ulysses, of course, will turn

37 — *Contra* Scafoglio (2004: 176): “dunque è stata ben diversa da un’*egregia coniunx*, per l’uno e per l’altro”.

38 — Bleisch (1999: 173) suggests that Deiphobus is himself aware of his own guilt, and she concludes, puzzlingly, that he “himself characterizes his wounds as payment for a crime”. Yet two of the instances she cites are not spoken by Deiphobus (*supplicia*, 6.499: spoken by the narrator; *poenas*, 6.501: spoken by Aeneas) and the third (*poenas*, 6.530) expresses Deiphobus’ wish that the Greeks pay the penalty for their crimes against him.

39 — Penelope is never named by Amphimedon, but always described as “wife” (δάμαρτα, *Od.* 24.125; ἄλοχον, *Od.* 24.167). Like Deiphobus’ ironic juxtaposition of *coniunx* and *amans*, Amphimedon’s phrasing betrays the suitors’ misconduct, despite his other attempts to downplay their wrongdoing and present them as victims.

40 — Highet (1972: 175; cf. Reckford 1981: 94, Bleisch 1999: 211) links the mutilation of Deiphobus to the punishment inflicted on Melanthius in the *Odyssey* (22.474–477), yet the circumstances are somewhat different: Melanthius is a slave and has not committed a sexual crime against Odysseus; his misdeeds are instead the transference of loyalty to the suitors and his abuse of the disguised beggar.

41 — Deiphobus’ words recall the description of Ulysses in Book 2: *scelerumque inventor Ulixes* (2.164). This condemnation is voiced by Sinon, another unreliable narrator attempting to portray himself as a victim.

42 — Cf. Horsfall (2013: 380 *ad* 529); Quint (2018: 64). Bleisch (1999: 210) suggests that Deiphobus’ prayer is answered not merely by Agamemnon’s death as presented in the *Odyssey* but by his mutilation, as suggested by the Chorus of Aeschylus’ *Libation Bearers* (ἐμασχάλισθη, *Choe.* 439).



the tables on the suitors and avoid the kind of death suffered by both Agamemnon and by Deiphobus, while Menelaus is shown in the *Odyssey* living comfortably, if somewhat combatively, with Helen in Sparta<sup>43</sup>. If Deiphobus is hoping that the individuals personally responsible for his death and mutilation will suffer in kind, he will be disappointed. His condition (*pio si poenas ore reposco*) is therefore resolved contrary to his expectations, and the unfulfilled prayer emphasizes instead Deiphobus' unreliability as narrator and destabilizes his self-presentation as a victim.

The Deiphobus-episode is particularly concerned with the question of *fama*, as is shown both by Aeneas' reference to an incorrect version of his cousin's *fama* discussed above (6.502-503) and by Deiphobus' remark that, in aiding Menelaus, Helen was hoping to blot out her previous *fama malorum* (6.527)<sup>44</sup>. These references to the changeability and inaccuracy of *fama* work together to suggest the unreliability of the epic tradition, particularly where it concerns Helen. The question of Helen's *fama* returns us to another pair of competing stories in the *Odyssey* where her reputation is, again, at stake: in Book 4, she and Menelaus narrate apparently-contradictory stories about her actions at the fall of Troy<sup>45</sup>. According to Helen's tale (*Od.* 4.239-264), she helped Odysseus escape detection during a reconnaissance mission into the city because, as she puts it, "already my heart had been turned to go back home" (ἐπεὶ ἤδη μοι κραδίη τέτραπτο νέεσθαι | ἄψ οἰκόνδε, *Od.* 4.260-261). She concludes with a compliment to Menelaus, "a man who lacks nothing, either in brains or in beauty" (οὐ τευ δευόμενον, οὐτ' ἄρ φρένας οὐτε τι εἶδος, *Od.* 4.264). On the other hand, Menelaus' version of events offers an implicit contrast and correction to Helen's<sup>46</sup>: he describes her prowling around the Trojan Horse with

43 — We even hear that Menelaus, as Zeus' son-in-law, will be spared death and continue his fortunate existence for eternity on the Isles of the Blessed (*Od.* 4.561-565).

44 — Bleisch (1999: 206) suggests that these two references to *fama* work together to suggest that Helen's good name and Deiphobus' are mutually exclusive: "The account of Deiphobus' death... illustrates the tragic interdependency of *fama* and infamy; the restoration of Helen's glory has resulted in Deiphobus' ignominy." I would add that perspective is important here: Helen attempts to restore her *fama* among the Greeks, but Deiphobus' narrative to Aeneas represents her *fama* from a Trojan perspective, and it is damning. Indeed, Deiphobus' story shows that an act of fidelity to Helen's original husband can be reframed as a sexual crime against her current partner, as Menelaus was transmuted into Helen's "lover". This, again, is an exaggerated version of the same rhetorical stance adopted by Amphimedon in *Odyssey* 24: he manages to imply that Penelope has acted wrongly towards the suitors through her fidelity to Odysseus.

45 — On these two competing tales about Helen, see most recently Alden (2017: 157-168), with further bibliography.

46 — Minchin (2007a: 29-32; 2007b: 276-279) argues that Menelaus' tale should be seen as "a collaborative gesture", not a correction to Helen's story: both narratives make a similar point about Odysseus, praising his cleverness. Yet Helen's tale also (implicitly) praises herself, while Menelaus' also (implicitly) criticizes her. Indeed, Menelaus "corrects" Helen almost point for point: while Helen's tale shows her helping Odysseus when he entered Troy in disguise, Menelaus' tale shows her attempting to expose him; while Helen describes Odysseus confiding his plans to her, Menelaus describes Odysseus



Deiphobus, attempting to provoke the hiding Greeks into giving themselves away (*Od.* 4.274-279)<sup>47</sup>. In this account, Helen is allied with the Trojans and Deiphobus against Menelaus, the Greeks, and the horse – a dynamic that is exactly reversed by Deiphobus' narrative in the *Aeneid*.

Vergil's intervention in the debate thus validates Helen's self-aggrandizing story from the *Odyssey*, portraying her as allied with the Greeks (and Menelaus) against the Trojans (and Deiphobus). Yet the reversal in perspectives, from Greek to Trojan, means that Deiphobus' version also supports Menelaus' implicit evaluation of her character in the *Odyssey*: from a Trojan perspective, Helen's support of the Greeks and her former husband is considered a despicable act of disloyalty toward the Trojans and her current husband – and thus the only “good” *fama* about Helen in the *Odyssey* (her own) is transmuted by Deiphobus into yet another variant of the “bad” Helen motif<sup>48</sup>. According to Bleisch, (1999: 207), Vergil “compounds Homer's dialogue between Menelaus and Helen into a polyphony of voices”, yet Deiphobus' contribution to Helen's *fama* reinforces the near-unanimous condemnation of her character in the *Odyssey*<sup>49</sup>. Despite the variability of *fama*, Helen's Greek husband and her Trojan husband can agree on one thing: she is disloyal – whether disloyal to the Greeks or disloyal to the Trojans – and this disloyalty is universally characterized as threatening and destructive to men<sup>50</sup>. This shared perspective, in which Helen is blamed both by Greeks and Trojans, is summed up in the possibly-Vergilian “Helen episode”, when Aeneas describes her as “a Fury both to Troy and to her homeland” (*Troiae et patriae communis Erinys*, [*Aen.* 2.585]).

Yet the parallel with Amphimedon in *Odyssey* 24 and Vergil's focus on the question of Helen's *fama* invite reconsideration of Deiphobus' portrait

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resisting her charms. Even Helen's praise of Menelaus is matched by and contrasted with the reference to Deiphobus in Menelaus' tale (cf. Alden 2017: 167). These two stories must therefore be seen as competing versions of Helen's *fama*, even if they represent cooperating versions of Odysseus' *fama*.

47 — As Blondell (2013: 84) puts it, the presence of Deiphobus in this scene “associates Helen's betrayal of the Greeks with her career as a serial monogamist.”. The correlation between military and sexual betrayal occurs also in Deiphobus' narrative in the *Aeneid*, where Helen's treachery towards the Trojans more generally – shown by her summoning of the Greeks into the Trojan citadel (*Danaos... vocabat*, 6.519) – is paired with her personal, conjugal treachery towards Deiphobus when she summons Menelaus into their home (*vocat Menelaum*, 6.525).

48 — Cf. Bleisch (1999: 208): “Deiphobus' story critiques Helen even as it agrees with her”.

49 — In addition to the implicit condemnation of Helen voiced by Menelaus, Odysseus (*Od.* 11.437-438) and Eumaeus (14.68-69) criticize her explicitly as a cause of male death and suffering (see above, p. 1). See Suzuki (1989: 60-73) and Blondell (2013: 87-89) on the *Odyssey*'s hostility towards Helen, especially in comparison to the more moderate portrait of the *Iliad*.

50 — Austin (1994: 80) speaks of Helen “mov[ing]... fluidly between the categories of friend and enemy” but in the accounts of male narrators she is consistently portrayed as an enemy or obstacle to the speaker and/or protagonist. Only in her own story in the *Odyssey* does she appear as an ally to the internal audience of the narrative, and this version is immediately destabilized by Menelaus' response.

of Helen. Amphimedon's story reminds us of the difficulties in separating fact from fiction, truth from *fama*, even in eyewitness accounts. Both Amphimedon and Deiphobus narrate events that they experienced personally, but close investigation suggests the neither is completely reliable. Amphimedon assumes that Odysseus and Penelope arranged the contest of the bow together, but he is incorrect. Is Deiphobus also mistaken in assuming a conspiracy between Helen and Menelaus? Indeed, it is worth noting that his narrative includes details of events that occurred while he was asleep, and his confident assertions of Helen's internal hopes and intentions can only be speculative. Like Amphimedon, Deiphobus includes self-aggrandizing rhetoric and elides his own wrongdoing in order to cast himself as a victim. His presentation of Helen as his primary murderer may likewise be viewed as hyperbole designed to present himself in a more sympathetic light – not as an adulterer justly punished for wrongdoing, but as the dupe of a notoriously wicked woman. The parallel with Amphimedon's tale from the *Odyssey* thus highlights Deiphobus' unreliability and raises more questions about Helen's agency than it answers.

Amphimedon's accusations against Penelope are contradicted by the earlier narrative of the *Odyssey*, and Deiphobus' version of the fall of Troy may also be compared with another narrative within the *Aeneid* itself: the so-called "Helen episode", the twenty-odd lines that may or may not belong in *Aeneid* 2. This passage depicts Helen hiding from both sides during the sack of Troy, and ancient editors thus viewed it as suspect in part because it contradicts Deiphobus' account of her active participation in the Trojan defeat (though recent criticism generally focuses on other issues)<sup>51</sup>. Absent new evidence, the issue of the authenticity of the Helen passage will probably never be resolved, but, if genuine, its presence would reinforce the parallelism between Deiphobus' account and that of Amphimedon in *Odyssey* 24, in which the male character's death-narrative

51 — The passage is usually included within brackets at *Aen.* 2.567-588. Servius Auctus says the passage was removed by Vergil's editors for two reasons: first, because it reflected poorly on the character of Aeneas (who was planning to kill a woman), and second because "the idea that Helen was in Priam's house runs contrary to the story, which is told in that sixth book, that she was found in Deiphobus' house, after she had called the Greeks from the citadel" (*et contrarium est Helenam in domo Priami fuisse illi rei, quae in sexto dicitur, quia in domo est inventa Deiphobi, postquam ex summa arce vocaverat Graecos, ad 2.592*). Important arguments in favor of the passage's authenticity include Fairclough 1906, Austin 1961, Harrison 1970: 328-332; Estevez 1981, Reckford 1981, Conte 1978, 2006, 2016; Berres 1992, Gall 1993; Egan 1996, Paschalis 1997: 91-93, Fish 2004, Delvigo 2006, Scafoglio 2011, Fratanuono and Susalla 2012; important arguments against include Heinze 1915, Körte 1916, Goold 1970, Murgia 1971 and 2003, Horsfall 2008, and Casali 2017. I do not take a stance here on the authenticity of the passage, but consider it one of a number of sometimes-contradictory, sometimes-complementary contributions to Helen's epic *fama*. My approach is similar to that of O'Hara (2007; 2010), who argues that inconsistencies in the *Aeneid* ought to be interpreted rather than excised or explained away.

was contrasted with another, earlier version. The Helen episode – which shows Aeneas plotting to murder the cowering Helen – by no means presents her in a positive light, but it does suggest her innocence for the murder of Deiphobus: far from admitting Menelaus into their house, she is hiding in fear of his wrath (*deserti coniugis iras* | *praemetuens*, [2.572-573]).

Yet even without comparison to the Helen episode, Deiphobus' blame of Helen is refuted elsewhere in the *Aeneid*. Venus, in the securely-attested passage immediately following the Helen passage in Book 2, declares to Aeneas that Helen is *not* the cause of the war:

non tibi Tyndaridis facies invisa Lacaenae  
culpatusue Paris, divum inclementia, divum  
has evertit opes sternitque a culmine Troiam.

Let me tell you, it is not the hateful beauty of the Spartan daughter  
of Tyndareus,  
nor disgraceful Paris, but the mercilessness of the gods – the gods – that  
has overturned this kingdom and laid low Troy from its height.  
(*Aen.* 2.601-603)

Venus' insistence on the point that Helen is not at fault is shown by the emphatic *non tibi* at the beginning of this passage and the epanalepsis of *divum inclementia divum* in line 602. Helen and Paris cannot be blamed for Troy's destruction; rather, the gods are its true architects<sup>52</sup>. Venus then strips away the mist shrouding the immortals from human sight in order to show Aeneas the gods – including Neptune, Pallas, and Juno – actively participating in the sack of Troy (2.604-620). The "hateful beauty" (*invisa facies*, *Aen.* 2.601) of Helen is replaced by the "dread visages" (*dirae facies*, *Aen.* 2.622) of the gods, just as Helen herself has been replaced as *casus belli*. While Venus does not explicitly address Deiphobus' version of events, her words provide a corrective to the epic pattern of discourse blaming Helen for male death and conflict that recurs in the possibly-Vergilian Helen episode and in Deiphobus' accusatory narrative in Book 6.

Further, the situation described by Venus, in which the gods are the causes of a war blamed on a woman, is reenacted in the final books of the *Aeneid*, when Lavinia – presented as a second Helen (6.93-94, 7.321, 7.363-364, 9.136-142) – is blamed for the war between Trojans and Italians and specifically described as its *causa* (6.93, 11.480). Yet Juno's speech in Book 7, when she decides to provoke war between the Trojans and Italians in order to exterminate (*excindere*, 7.314) both peoples,

52 — Prince (2014: 189) views Venus' defense of Helen here as an implicit defense of herself, suggesting that "Augustus' own ancestress... diverts blame from the adulterous Helen and from herself as well". Yet Venus also alludes to the larger divine plan, involving both herself and Jupiter (and later, Juno), that requires the fall of Troy in order to allow the rise of Rome (cf. 1.254-296, 12.808-840).

demonstrates that Lavinia has not “caused the war” through any actions or choices of her own, but is a pawn in Juno’s revenge plot<sup>53</sup>. Indeed, the royal bride (*regia coniunx*, 2.783) is often conflated with the Latin kingdom (*regna*; cf. *Laviniaque... litora*, 1.1-2; *Lavinia... arva*, 4.236) she represents: she is less a person than a political symbol, the ultimate signifier of status in the competition between Aeneas and Turnus for rule in Italy<sup>54</sup>. Venus’ words in *Aeneid* 2 therefore link Helen and Lavinia, the two great *causae belli* of the *Aeneid*, and look backward to the Trojan War and forward to the war in Italy: Helen was not the cause of the Trojan War, any more than Lavinia will be the cause of the Italian war.

Venus’ speech also comments on epic versions of Helen more generally, and on the epic tradition of placing her – and other women – at the center of male conflict. Venus’ perspective on Helen resists and rejects the discourses of blame voiced by Menelaus in the *Odyssey* and by Deiphobus and (perhaps) Aeneas in the *Aeneid*, and undermines a simplistic and reductionist view of Helen as *casus belli*. The complexities and contradictions in the representations of Penelope discussed above also destabilize the traditional narrative of women’s complicity in epic conflict, since they suggest that even a famous heroine, as much as a famous villainess, may be read in different ways by different observers<sup>55</sup>. Amphimedon attempts to paint a unitary – and unitarily negative – portrait of Penelope, but his death-narrative includes gaps, inconsistencies, and self-aggrandizing *apologiae*, and is contradicted elsewhere in the poem. With Deiphobus, Vergil inflates this tradition to show a male narrator attributing an excessive and unrealistic degree of blame to an ancillary woman. Yet Vergil also includes an explicit corrective to Deiphobus’ perspective within the *Aeneid* itself, contrasting his guilty Helen in Book 6 with Venus’ guiltless Helen in Book 2. These contradictory versions of Helen subtly problematize the tradition of “dead men talking”.

### III. Conclusion

I have argued that the underworld rhetoric of Vergil’s Deiphobus draws on that of Homer’s Amphimedon as well as his Agamemnon, and

53 — On Juno and other female figures as instigators of war in the *Aeneid*, see Keith 2000: 67-81.

54 — As is often noted, Aeneas never meets Lavinia, and she herself never speaks in the poem. On Lavinia as metonym for Lavinium, see Suzuki 1989: 124; Mack 1999: 139; Keith 2000: 49-50; McAuley 2016: 72.

55 — Critics often refer to the “doubleness” of Helen (e.g. Bergren 1983 [2008]: 80; Suzuki 1989: 102; Austin 1994: 83-84; Worman 2001: 22; cf. Gumpert 2001: 30 on the “dizzying multiplications of Helen”). The same word is sometimes used of Penelope (Murnaghan 1987 [= 2011]: 128, cf. Zerba 2009: 313) and, I argue, suggests the gaps and inconsistencies between the versions of their characters supplied by different (and usually male) narrators.

that this intertext highlights a pattern of gendered blame within the epic genre. The death-narratives of Deiphobus and Amphimedon are linked by the male character's attempt to blame a woman for his death while downplaying the responsibility of the men who actually killed him: both narrators recast male-on-male conflict as male victimization at the hands of a woman. This blaming of Penelope and Helen is part of a persistent pattern in heroic epic in which women are portrayed as the causes of epic conflict and are implicitly or explicitly blamed for disputes that are really about something else. Thus Agamemnon says to Achilles that he will take Briseis "so that you may know well how much stronger I am than you" (ὄφρ' εὖ εἰδῆς | ὅσσον φέρτερός εἰμι σέθεν, *Il.* 1.185-186) – in other words, to exert his prestige and dominance. Yet when they reconcile, Achilles declares that he wishes Briseis had died before they could quarrel over her (*Il.* 19.59-60) – as if her death would have prevented their conflict<sup>56</sup>. Helen's role as a status symbol is similarly unmasked by the words of both Hera and Agamemnon, who complain that if the Greeks sail home prematurely, they will leave her behind "as an object of boasting" (εὐχολήν, *Il.* 2.160, 175 = 4.174) for Priam and the Trojans. Like the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles, the Trojan War is really about dominance, and Helen's superhuman beauty and parentage make her an extraordinarily valuable signifier of prestige<sup>57</sup>. Finally, the suitors' desire for Penelope is also a desire for Odysseus' property and status, as is shown repeatedly throughout the *Odyssey*: Telemachus conflates Eurymachus' eagerness to marry Penelope with his desire "to possess the prerogative of Odysseus" (Ὀδυσσῆος γέρας ἔξειν, 15.522), while Eurymachus himself claims that Antinous was courting Penelope "not so much out of desire or need for marriage" (οὐ τι γάμου τόσσον κεχρημένος οὐδὲ χατίζων, 22.50) but "so that he himself might be king over the people of well-built Ithaca" (ὄφρ' Ἰθάκης κατὰ δῆμον ἐκτιμένης βασιλεύοι | αὐτός, 22.52-53)<sup>58</sup>. Penelope is, like Helen, "an object of boasting" – a woman who,

56 — See Suzuki (1989: 21-28) on the *Iliad's* scapegoating of Briseis.

57 — As Suzuki puts it (1989: 24), "The fluctuating value of a woman such as Helen or Briseis serves as a mere pretext for divisions between nations as well as between men such as Achilles and Agamemnon, who regard having such women as signs of prestige". Cf. Blondell (2010: 5-6).

58 — Critics have often puzzled over the exact nature of the relationship between marriage to Penelope and the kingship on Ithaca. Important recent treatments include the arguments that Penelope herself – like Helen and Briseis – functions as a signifier of male status and therefore her appeal as an erotic object and as a means of achieving political power are not separable (Thalmann 1998: 181-189), that Odysseus' wealth is the attraction and could be transferred to Penelope's next husband via an uxorial marriage (Scodel 2001), and that the kingship of Ithaca represents Penelope's dowry from her father Icarius (Westbrook 2015; *contra* Cantarella 2005). Whatever the exact nature of the relationship between Penelope and the kingship of Ithaca, it is clear from the remarks of several different characters that there is *some* relationship and that by aspiring to marry Penelope the suitors are also aspiring to become *basileus*.

because of her beauty, nobility, or cleverness, is considered a marker of status within the male community.

Yet Venus' words in the *Aeneid* suggest that the tradition of implicating Helen – and other women – in male conflict masks the reality that they are more often the pawns of forces beyond their control. Re-reading the Homeric narratives in light of Vergil's commentary highlights an epic pattern of male narrators who displace blame onto the women they covet, transforming women from the *praedae* to the *causae* of war. Further, comparison of Amphimedon's and Deiphobus' rhetoric suggests the motive behind their narrative strategy: blaming women for their deaths allows both men to downplay their losses in a male homosocial conflict over status and dominance. Both speakers use their tendentious portraits of villainous women as an implicit excuse for their failures – they were not justly beaten in a fair fight by worthy opponents, but were undeservedly murdered through womanly tactics of trickery and guile. On the other hand, Vergil's contradictory versions of Helen and Lavinia offer a subtle critique of this scapegoating and imply that women are more often the victims of male conflict than its instigators<sup>59</sup>.

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