



Helen of Troy: Beauty, Myth, Devastation

By Ruby Blondell

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Ancient Greek culture is pervaded by a profound ambivalence regarding female beauty. It is an awe-inspiring, supremely desirable gift from the gods, essential to the perpetuation of a man's name through reproduction; yet it also grants women terrifying power over men, posing a threat inseparable from its allure. The myth of Helen is the central site in which the ancient Greeks expressed and reworked their culture's anxieties about erotic desire. Despite the passage of three millennia, contemporary culture remains almost obsessively preoccupied with all the power and danger of female beauty and sexuality that Helen still represents. Yet Helen, the embodiment of these concerns for our purported cultural ancestors, has been little studied from this perspective. Such issues are also central to contemporary feminist thought.

Helen of Troy engages with the ancient origins of the persistent anxiety about female beauty, focusing on this key figure from ancient Greek culture in a way that both extends our understanding of that culture and provides a useful perspective for reconsidering aspects of our own. Moving from Homer and Hesiod to Sappho, Aeschylus, and Euripides, Ruby Blondell offers a fresh examination of the paradoxes and ambiguities that Helen embodies. In addition to literary sources, Blondell considers the archaeological record, which contains evidence of Helen's role as a cult figure, worshipped by maidens and newlyweds. The result is a compelling new interpretation of this alluring figure.



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Editorial Review

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The mythic Helen of Troy, who, 2,500 years ago, set off a war that “launched a thousand ships,” need not be real, but the obsession with female beauty as blessing and curse surely is. Scholar Blondell studies the details behind the myth: Was Helen taken by the Trojan prince Paris or did she elope on purpose? Was she the scourge of ancient Greek myth or the object of worship? Was Helen a victim of her beauty or a free agent in full command of her power? As a stand-in for female beauty and sexual power, the myth of Helen and ancient texts written about the Trojan War are suggestive of male attitudes on control of women and what constitutes heroism. Blondell explores Helen’s relationship to other figures of Greek myth and her treatment by philosophers and historians, from Homer to Herodotus and Euripides to Gorgias, and examines the broader issue of perspectives on femininity represented by the myth of Helen. Readers need not be scholars of Greek poetry and culture to appreciate this engaging look at an epic tale with modern resonance. --
Vanessa Bush

Review

"This excellent volume takes the reader on a tour with Helen of Troy, as she journeys from the Archetype (Pandora) through her complex identities in the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Oresteia*, the lyric poets, Herodotus' *Histories*, Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*, Euripides' *Trojan Women and Helen*, and finally Isocrates' *Encomium of Helen*. The book is descriptive in its focus, and shows that Helen, 'who is a concept, not a person' (p. xi), occupied roles that are important both in themselves and also for understanding the works in question. ... [Blondell] has achieved a miracle of lucid, useful and responsible accessibility. This jargon and footnote free volume will benefit scholars and students in classics, the humanities and beyond."

--*The Classical Review*

"Blondell's stimulating and provocative book demonstrates how Helen is 'an ever-refreshing screen for the projection of ideas and ideals about beauty, women, sex and power.' Demonized, idolized, allegorized, or humanized, Helen of Troy remains no woman and every woman." --*BooksLut*

"A compelling new portrait of the most famous femme fatale in history as she appears in Greek myth and literature." --*Publishers Weekly*

"Readers need not be scholars of Greek poetry and culture to appreciate this engaging look at an epic tale with modern resonance." --*Booklist*

"If you have an appreciation for the classics or even just strong feminine roles, you will want to pick this book up. It will easily become a favorite amongst the rest of your library for years to come."

--*citybookreview.com*

"An entertaining and lively narrative...." --*Library Journal*

"An insightful book, filled with salacious tales of morality that the ancient Greeks did better than anyone since, Blondell's *Helen of Troy* is a real beauty." --Clifford Cunningham, *Sun News Miami*

"A marvelously comprehensive look at Helen of Troy and her interpretations--literary, dramatic, and historical--through the ages. Every dimension of the myth of Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world and immortal in memory, is explored and analyzed. It leaves you awed and enlightened." --Margaret George, author of *Helen of Troy and The Memoirs of Cleopatra*

"Helen's face launched not only a thousand ships but also thousands of texts and artworks: Blondell's lucid, learned, but light-handed study shows why." --Glenn Most, University of Chicago

"A broad, subtle, and beautifully-written study that deserves a large and varied readership. Combining shrewd analysis with lightly-worn expertise, Blondell shows how Greek culture turned again and again to the myth of Helen to confront the disquieting power of female beauty." --Sheila Murnaghan, University of Pennsylvania

"Blondell has written a rich and penetrating study of the Helen myth in the Greek world."
--*New Republic*

"This book is a fine demonstration of the way in which textual accounts of a Greek legendary icon can be probed in depth to reveal nuances of cultural history that could easily be overlooked. While it is no surprise that a study of Helen should uncover ways in which the masculine agenda of patriarchal Greece was confirmed, Blondell has also exposed the often self-serving and illogical measures taken by Greek writers to accomplish this. She does this with a freshness often quickened by humour" --*Phoenix*

About the Author

Ruby Blondell is Professor of Classics at the University of Washington. She has published widely on Greek literature, philosophy, and the use of myth in popular films. She is the author of books on Sophocles and Plato, co-editor and translator of *Women on the Edge: Four Plays by Euripides*, and editor and translator of *Sophocles: The Theban Plays*.

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Emma O'Neill:

The reason why? Because this Helen of Troy: Beauty, Myth, Devastation is an unordinary book that the inside of the publication waiting for you to snap that but latter it will surprise you with the secret the idea inside. Reading this book close to it was fantastic author who have write the book in such amazing way makes the content inside of easier to understand, entertaining approach but still convey the meaning completely. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this any longer or you going to regret it. This amazing book will give you a lot of rewards than the other book get such as help improving your skill and your critical thinking technique. So , still want to hold up having that book? If I were being you I will go to the book store hurriedly.

Marvin Murphy:

Helen of Troy: Beauty, Myth, Devastation can be one of your basic books that are good idea. We all recommend that straight away because this publication has good vocabulary that may increase your knowledge in language, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nevertheless delivering the information. The writer giving his/her effort to place every word into enjoyment arrangement in writing Helen of Troy: Beauty, Myth, Devastation however doesn't forget the main stage, giving the reader the hottest and based confirm resource details that maybe you can be among it. This great information may drawn you into brand new stage of crucial imagining.

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