Women in War: a reading of H.D.’s *Helen in Egypt*

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Paper submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of “Master in de Taal- en Letterkunde: Engels-Frans” by Laura Desoete

2014-2015
Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Birgit Van Puymbroeck, for giving me the opportunity to write about my subject. I am grateful for her extensive feedback and constructive criticism. She was always available to answer my questions and offered me helpful insights; I could not have written this MA-paper without her. I would also like to thank my parents and sister for their support throughout this long process. Lastly, I am grateful to my boyfriend, Ruben, who believed in me and kept me motivated to reach my goal.
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1. Introduction

*Helen in Egypt* (1961) by Hilda Doolittle is a semi-dramatic lyric narrative which deals with the Trojan War. In the early 20th century, H.D. was the head of the Imagist movement, which initiated the poetic period that would later be called modernism. Although in 1961, the modernist period was nearly over, *Helen in Egypt* can still be considered a modernist work in both topic and form. In the poem, H.D. combines explanatory pieces of prose with verse that “draws heavily from the Imagist tradition of her early career” (Darling 1). The topic of war is typical of modernism as well. Since many modernist writers lived through WWI and WWII, they tried “to bear witness to the trauma of the war and its consequences” (Tate 1). Modernist writers thought of western society as decadent because of the wars and the economic and political instability that accompanied them (McDiarmid xv). Consequently, they tried to escape in the past with their writing (McDiarmid 34), which explains the Ancient Greek setting of H.D.’s poem.

In *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. explores “how femininity is constituted in relation to the war” (Tate 20). She defends the innocence of Helen, who is blamed for the Trojan War in the dominant tradition, namely in Homer’s *Iliad*. H.D. based the poem on Stesichorus’ *Pallinode* and Euripides’ *Helen*, which redefine Helen as a chaste woman, stating that she was transposed by the gods to Egypt at the onset of the Trojan War (Friedman 377). According to H.D., however, Helen’s innocence does not depend on her presence in Troy. Rather, she reconsiders the cause of the Trojan War, blaming the masculine warrior culture (Friedman 377). Helen is presented as “a woman badly shaken by the long battle at Troy” (Edmunds 475); she is traumatized. *Helen in Egypt* describes Helen’s mental journey to prove her innocence, during which she uncovers her trauma and tries to overcome it. In my analysis of the poem, I investigate the causes, symptoms and the healing process of Helen’s trauma and explain these elements in the context of her position of a woman in Greek patriarchal society. I try to answer the following questions: What are the individual characteristics of Helen’s trauma? What makes Helen’s trauma typical of a woman in the Trojan War? In what ways is it non-gender specific? Can Helen’s trauma in some ways be compared to the trauma of women in WWII?

As a theoretical framework, I combine trauma theory with the feminist perspective. Like many female modernist writers, H.D. was excluded from the canon for a long time. In the 1980s however, feminist critics such as Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis
rediscovered H.D.’s writing. Consequently, a lot of the scholarly works on Helen in Egypt are feminist analyses. Helen in Egypt presents the Trojan War in Helen’s unique female voice, justifying the feminist perspective. In “Creating a Woman’s Mythology: H.D.’s Helen in Egypt”, Friedman argues that in H.D.’s version of the Trojan War, Helen is in search of a new womanhood, which she associates with life and love. Although I agree with Friedman, she overlooks the fact that Helen’s search for a new identity as a woman is part of a bigger search for an identity as a human being. In fact, Helen suffers from an identity crisis which was not solely caused by her position as a woman in the Ancient Greek society, but by the trauma resulting from war in that society. Indeed, trauma is an overwhelming event that shatters one’s sense of self and induces existential crisis (Henke 160). In order to overcome her trauma, Helen needs to construct a new womanhood, before she can fully grasp who she is as a person. In sum, the added value of trauma theory resides its ability to identify the non-gender specific characteristics of Helen’s trauma.

Even if the poem deals with a war trauma, there is a lack of analyses from the trauma perspective. A person becomes traumatized when a shocking experience makes him/her feel frightened and powerless. In Helen in Egypt, Helen witnessed the horrors of the Trojan War. During these events, she was powerless. Since modern trauma theory ignores the differences between male and female trauma, this is where the feminist perspective can add value; Helen’s powerlessness is a result of her position as a woman in patriarchal Greek society. Women did not have any influence on politics, while they were the biggest victims; they were seen as prizes to be conquered and were used for political alliances. However, H.D. does not present clear boundaries to the categories of victim/perpetrator. Men are also victims of their own culture, which both empowers them and makes them powerless. Moreover, Helen is not only a victim, but also a defender of the woman’s world. Feminist theory is thus useful in the investigation of the powerlessness of a person’s position, which is an important aspect that instigates trauma.

In the first chapter, I present my theoretical framework. First, I focus on Freud’s psychoanalytic theories. Due to a nervous breakdown instigated by the loss of family and friends to WWI and the prospect of a new war, H.D. attended psychoanalytical sessions with Freud. His theories thus influenced her portrayal of Helen’s trauma. They are also important to my analysis because feminist scholars such as Susan Edmunds often refer to his (misogynous) concepts. I explain Freud’s theories regarding hysteria and war neurosis, because they distinguish between female and male trauma. Next, I turn to contemporary
trauma theories by Dominick LaCapra, Dori Laub and Cathy Caruth, which I use in my analysis of the causes, the symptoms and the healing process of Helen’s trauma. While their theories sprung from Freud’s, they go beyond his gender divide. This enables me to analyze both Achilles’ and Helen’s trauma in the same way.

In the second chapter, I investigate the position of women in Ancient Greece in order to understand the context of Helen’s trauma. How much agency did women, as opposed to men, have? What were their roles in daily life? In what ways did their lives change in wartime? Since H.D.’s experiences in WWII shaped her condemnation of war “as an inevitable effect of patriarchy” (Edmunds 471), and she wrote Helen in Egypt from a post-World War II perspective, I compare Helen’s situation to that of women in WWII in my analysis. Therefore, I first describe the roles and status of women in Britain in WWII.

My analysis of Helen’s trauma as depicted by H.D. in Helen in Egypt starts with the causes of Helen’s trauma. I identify the different events that instigated Helen’s trauma, explain Helen’s position as a woman in these events, and analyze the way in which H.D. conveys their impact in the poem. Next, I investigate the symptoms of trauma that Helen displays by focusing on the different traumatic memories that resurface throughout the poem. I explain how they are connected to Helen’s trauma, to each other and to Helen’s position as a woman. In my discussion of Helen’s healing process, I chronologically explain the different steps Helen goes through in order to regain her agency and reconstruct her identity as a woman and as a person. My attention also goes out to Achilles’ trauma, which is important for Helen’s recovery process. Finally, I investigate the particularities of Helen’s trauma, and the resemblances with other women’s trauma during the Trojan War. Moreover, I examine the relation between Helen’s trauma and that of women in WWII.
2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Sigmund Freud

Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theories are crucial to my analysis of Helen in Egypt. First, Freud played an important role in H.D.’s life. During WWI, H.D. had lost her stillborn child, her brother and her father (Henke 162). At the prospect of a new war, she suffered from a nervous breakdown and was analyzed by Freud between 1933 and 1934. The time she spent with him had a major impact on her personal life, which is apparent in the letters she wrote to Bryher and the book she wrote about her analysis: Tribute to Freud (1956). Freud’s theories also influenced her later poetry. This is not surprising since Freud was mainly concerned with (war) trauma, a subject explored by H.D. in both Trilogy (1946) and Helen in Egypt. In Helen in Egypt, Helen’s symptoms match those of hysteria as described by Freud. Helen manages to overcome her trauma partly through her conversations with Theseus. This method of recovery, which underlines the importance of the relationship between analyst and patient, closely resembles Freud’s ‘talking cure’. What is more, the character of Theseus was based on Freud himself (Edmunds 471).

Second, Freud is important for the feminist angle of my analysis. On the one hand, feminists often focus on Freud’s misogynous theories in their analyses of H.D.’s work. For example, in “‘Woman is Perfect’: H.D.’s Debate with Freud”, Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Susan Stanford Friedman criticise Freud’s belief that women suffer from ‘penis envy’ and a ‘castration complex’. On the other hand, more moderate feminist analyses like Susan Edmunds in “‘I Read the Writing When He Seized My Throat’: Hysteria and Revolution in H.D.’s Helen in Egypt” acknowledge the value of many of Freud’s theories, such as his concept of hysterical identification and the symptoms of hysteria. In my analysis, my attention only goes out to Freud’s acceptable theories. For example, I think Freud’s hysteria theory is valuable because it distinguishes a trauma particularly diagnosed in women. However, I do not agree with his explanation of the causes of hysteria and do not apply this in my analysis (cf. infra).

Third, Freud’s theories are primordial for contemporary trauma studies. For example, in History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory (2004), the most important symptom Dominick LaCapra describes is “acting-out” or the “compulsive repetition” (119) of the traumatic shock; seeking out the danger. This resembles Freud’s concept of the ‘death drive’ or “the instinct of destruction” (Freud 709). In Helen in Egypt, Helen keeps returning to the moment of crisis; the scene in which Achilles grabs her throat is repeated over and over again.
LaCapra states that traumatic symptoms can be overcome by turning bad experiences into narrative form. This method is reminiscent of Freud’s ‘talking cure’, employed as a healing technique in *Helen in Egypt* (cf. supra).

Bringing the trauma and feminist frameworks together, I will particularly focus on Freud’s hysteria theory. It is useful for my analysis because Charcot’s investigation in the late 19th century caused hysteria to be considered a mental illness especially found in traumatized women (Ringel and Brandell 1). Freud identified symptoms of hysterical attacks such as recurring visual disturbances, hallucinations and dreams (Freud 25, 30). The images that come to the surface during these attacks are ideas or memories which are repressed because they are painful or shameful; “one would have liked not to experience and preferred to forget” (Freud 65). In essence, repression is a mechanism that wards off an unbearable idea in order to avoid pain (Freud 65). The traumatic memories are kept in the unconscious part of the mind and when they reappear, they are strange and frightening to the hysteric (Freud 423). The repressed content that resurfaces is not only the traumatic memory itself, but also a “rich mass of other memory material” (Freud 74), organized in layers around the nucleus of the traumatic experience. These memories can be clearly associated to the original moment of crisis or the link between them can be quite vague. The more peripheral the associated content is, the more readily available it is; the closer the content is to the nucleus, “the more difficult it becomes to recognize the emerging reminiscences” (Freud 74).

Freud’s ideas about the causes of hysteria changed throughout his lifetime. At first, he believed that sexual abuse in childhood was the origin of the hysterical symptoms. However, the child did not experience symptoms immediately after the event. Symptoms only surfaced with the occurrence of a second traumatic event, related to the first. This is what Freud calls the latency of trauma (Freud 56). Later, he adjusts his theory, stating that memories of sexual abuse are made up (Edmunds 474). They are phantasies that result from sexual frustration. Freud’s late theories are misogynous because they deny the possibility of actual sexual abuse and represent women as weak irrational beings whose only goal is to be loved in a sexual way. Moreover, they deny that women can also be traumatized by other events, such as war, which he identifies as a male trauma. If in “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death” (1915), Freud writes about “the mental distress felt by non-combatants” (Freud 755), he never identifies this as a trauma or mental illness. However, in *Helen in Egypt*, Helen’s trauma results from the helplessness and distress that comes with being a woman in a war which she is blamed for.
Freud’s theory of traumatic neurosis and more specifically war neurosis is relevant to my analysis because it is associated with male trauma, whereas hysteria is a female trauma. In “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920), Freud identifies a new kind of trauma, which has an exterior cause of “mechanical nature”, such as a train crash or war (Freud 641). This is directly opposed to hysteria, of which the cause is merely a figment of the imagination. The mechanical experience becomes a trauma because it causes fright as opposed to apprehension (Freud 641). Fright is the fearful reaction to an unanticipated danger, whereas apprehension implies preparation for the danger (Freud 641). It is thus the element of surprise which constitutes the difference between trauma and merely a bad experience. Even though Freud distinguishes different causes for hysteria and traumatic neurosis, he admits that their symptoms are similar. The trauma patients relive the moment of disaster in their dreams in order to develop apprehension, thereby gaining control over the situation (Freud 649). As is the case with hysterics, trauma patients are not consciously aware of the original traumatic effect (Freud 641). Freud also proposes the same cure for hysterics and trauma patients; turning the traumatic experience into a story. The traumatic memories “must be reproduced as vividly as possible (…) and then ‘talked out’” (Freud 26). The memories hiding in the unconscious must be made readily accessible by bringing them into consciousness in narrative form (Freud 30).

Some aspects of Freud’s theories have become outdated and may seem absurd by modern standards. Situating the origins of female trauma in the imagination is misogynous and little convincing. Here lies the need to confront Freud’s theories with contemporary trauma theory. The question remains whether the modern theories still identify distinct male and female traumas, on what basis this distinction is made and if this distinction is more credible than Freud’s theories.

2.2 Contemporary trauma theories

In the 1980’s, the term ‘Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder’ (PTSD) was introduced in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Henke 160). Modern trauma theories describe PTSD as a “response (…) to an overwhelming event” (Caruth 4), “a shock to the system” (LaCapra 117), which shatters one’s sense of self and induces an existential crisis (Henke 160).

PTSD covers the symptoms of mental disorders earlier described as hysteria, shell shock, combat stress and traumatic neurosis (Caruth 3). These symptoms can be arranged in two
large groups. First, trauma is often “acted out or compulsively repeated in so-called traumatic memory.” (LaCapra 117-118). Thoughts and images associated with the traumatic event reappear in hallucinations, flashbacks and nightmares (Caruth 151). Traumatic memory cannot be situated in time or place. It exists “outside the parameters of “normal” reality” (Laub 69), continuing in the present and thus making closure impossible. Traumatic memory is paradoxical because the patient cannot consciously recall the traumatic event while it reappears uncontrollably (Caruth 152). The second group of symptoms is paradoxical as well. On the one hand, trauma numbs the emotions of the patient (Henke 160). On the other hand, it causes hypervigilance (Henke 160) and a heightened response to things related to the traumatic event (Caruth 4). LaCapra assigns this paradox to “a dissociation between cognition and affect” (117); “in traumatic experience one typically can represent numbly (…) what one cannot feel, and one feels overwhelmingly what one is unable to represent” (117).

Freud identified distinct types of events that cause hysteria and war neurosis; respectively (imagined) sexual abuse and external catastrophes such as war, a train crash, etc. Nowadays PTSD is no longer defined by the traumatic event itself. Trauma can be triggered by different types of events, such as natural or human catastrophes, as well as rape, child abuse and violence (Caruth 3). What connects these events is the way in which they are processed by the person experiencing or witnessing the event. Freud had already discovered that there is a period of forgetting what happened after the trauma, i.e. latency (cf. 2.1). However, modern trauma theories stress that a traumatic event is never fully experienced at the time it occurs. In fact, “the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out” (Laub 57) during the traumatic event. The temporal delay “carries the individual beyond the shock of the first moment” (Caruth 10). Consequently, the traumatic memory appears to the patient exactly as it occurred in the event (Caruth 5). However, the memory is not a simple record of the event. Rather, it “registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned” (Caruth 151).

Modern trauma theories have adopted and perfected Freud’s talking cure. Dominick LaCapra defines ‘working through’ the trauma as diminishing the posttraumatic symptoms by “generating counterforces to compulsive repetition (or acting-out)” (119). This repetition can be halted by turning the traumatic memory in a logical and completed story of the event (Caruth 153). Narration also restores the balance between cognition and affect, which are dissociated in traumatic memory (LaCapra 119). Dori Laub emphasizes the important role of the listener in this narration process: the hearer is “the blank screen on which the event comes
to be inscribed for the first time” (Laub 57). In fact, the trauma patient needs to transmit the story to the listener to be able to take it back and store it in conscious memory (Laub 69). Through narration, “the ‘knowing’ of the event is given birth to” (Laub 57).

The listener is burdened with a delicate task. First, he/she needs to acquire factual information about the traumatic event and accept what happened, so that the patient can do the same later on (Laub 69). Second, both parties need to feel safe and ready to face the terror of the traumatic event (Laub 69-70). During the testimony, the listener needs to be “unobtrusively present” (Laub 71). He/she needs to respect the wishes of the narrator to be silent or to resume the story. Moreover, the listener has to guide the fragmented account of the story in order to turn it into a logical and intelligible account (Laub 71). Aspects of confusion, injury and bewilderment need to be addressed so that the narrator’s trauma is completely uncovered and the listener does not end up traumatised him/herself (Laub 58). Indeed, LaCapra warns against the dangers of a vicarious experience, in which the listener “unconsciously identifies with the victim, becomes a surrogate victim, and lives the event in an imaginary way that, in extreme cases, may lead to confusion about one's participation in the actual events” (125). A vicarious experience is opposed to a virtual experience (or empathic unsettlement), in which the listener empathizes with the victim, but is still able to distinguish between him/herself and the victim (LaCapra 125). In conclusion, the listener needs to keep a fine balance between being subtle and actively guiding the conversation (Laub 71).

Since Freud, trauma theory has evolved considerably. Some aspects, however have stayed largely the same. Even though the name of the mental illness has changed, the so-called symptoms of PTSD are largely the same as those Freud recognized in hysteria and war neurosis. While Freud’s talking cure has been integrated into trauma theory, the current emphasis is on the listener’s role. The most striking difference with Freud’s theories is that modern theories no longer distinguish different disorders based on their causes. Consequently, the grounds for distinct sex-based disorders have been erased. The question remains whether men and women experience PTSD in a different way. This possibility has long been ignored, lest trauma theory should again become as prejudiced as Freud’s theories. However, recent studies, such as Dorte Christiansen and Ask Elklit in “Sex Differences in PTSD” (2012) have analyzed and attempted to explain the differences between male and female experiences of PTSD.
Regarding the symptoms of PTSD, men tend to experience more anger than women. Consequently, they are easier isolated from their environment, pushing their loved ones away. Women, on the other hand, report more health issues and tend to ask people for help (Christiansen et al. 131). This difference is manifest in Helen in Egypt. When Achilles sees Helen for the first time again, he tries to strangle her, while Helen asks Thetis for help. Men also tend to have more comorbid disorders, such as substance abuse or Antisocial Personality Disorder (Christiansen et al. 131). Women, in turn, experience more dissociative symptoms. They often feel numb and are less responsive to stimuli (Christiansen et al. 130). Despite these differences, male and female symptoms of PTSD are largely the same. The differences in the symptomatology are not significant enough to distinguish between two separate disorders.

Nevertheless, there are some other significant differences. Women are twice as likely to suffer from PTSD throughout their lifetime. Moreover, women tend to suffer from PTSD four times longer than men (Christiansen et al. 114). On the one hand, this can be explained by biological factors. Studies show that women have a higher degree of negative affectivity and neuroticism, which have an influence on the development of PTSD (Christiansen et al. 116). When a potentially traumatic event occurs, women tend to experience more fear, horror and helplessness than men. These feelings cause an event to become traumatic (Christiansen et al. 117). Once the trauma is acquired, women’s coping strategies are more emotionally-based than men’s, which are more often problem-focused. Emotion-focused strategies are linked to a higher severity of PTSD, which possibly explains the longer duration of female PTSD (Christiansen et al. 118). In addition, women more often blame themselves for the trauma (Christiansen et al. 118), and guilt is “positively and significantly related to the severity of PTSD” (Follette and Ruzek 258).

Apart from these sex-based differences, gender differences also play an important role for trauma. In fact, the biggest male-female differences in PTSD are found in “communities that emphasise traditional gender roles” (Christiansen et al. 114). Even though men are exposed to more potentially traumatic situations, more women than men develop PTSD. One possible explanation for this is that women tend to feel more powerless in those situations. Powerlessness, or the loss of control in a threatening situation is an essential requirement for trauma (Busfield 211). This powerlessness can be biological, as when a woman does not have enough physical strength to defend herself against a man who tries to rape her. However, often this powerlessness has social origins. This is where feminism can contribute to trauma
theory. For example, in the misogynous society of India rape is very common. Most women do not report rape due to feelings of shame and humiliation. Moreover, less than 26% of the perpetrators are condemned (Engels). When women are silenced, it is harder for them to overcome PTSD. However, even in oppressive societies women may be able to secretly talk to other victims. It is thus necessary to examine the position of women in Ancient Greece in order to thoroughly analyze the causes and methods of overcoming of Helen’s trauma in *Helen in Egypt*. How much freedom/power did women have? How were they treated in a context of war? In the next chapter, I will answer these questions, while also comparing the situation of women in Ancient Greece to the position of women during WWI/WWII.
3. Historical framework

3.1 Women in Ancient Greece

3.1.1 Daily lives of women in the Bronze Age and the Archaic Age

The legend of the Trojan War, ending in 1184 B.C. with the fall of Troy, is set in the late Bronze Age\(^1\). The story was first recorded by Homer around 800 B.C., in the beginning of the Archaic Age. Later versions of the story have their own specificities and add elements of their own time. H.D.’s *Helen in Egypt* is based on Stesichorus’ *Pallinode*, written in the late Archaic Age. In his *Pallinode*, Stesichorus defends Helen’s innocence after blaming her for the Trojan War in his earlier poetry (Doolittle 1). If we are to examine the position of women in *Helen in Egypt*, what period exactly do we have to look at? I have chosen to analyze the period described in Homer’s version. First, it is the story on which Stesichorus’ based his version. Second, Stesichorus and Homer, although not exactly contemporaries, still lived in the same age. We can expect some parallels in the societies represented in their stories. Homer’s version contains elements of both the Bronze Age and his own time, especially regarding social structures (Blundell 65). I shall thus discuss both ages. Luckily, there is a great continuity in the position of women in these two periods, with some minor developments in the Archaic Age and some places, like Sparta, that were more progressive than the rest of Greece. It has to be noted that the evidence of this time is limited to literature, art and archeological remains (Fantham 10). Although we can never be entirely sure, we can form an idea of what it might have been like to be a woman in those times. In this chapter, I will investigate the position of women in Ancient Greece by distinguishing their different tasks in society. How much control did these women have over their own lives? How were they treated by the male population, which was in power at that time?

In the Bronze and the Archaic Age, the roles of men and women were clearly defined. In adolescence, boys had to be “prepared for war, leadership, and diplomacy” (Fantham 13) while girls “were prepared through dancing, singing and other religious events” (Fantham 13) to become mothers, housewives and prophetesses.

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\(^1\) The Bronze Age or the heroic Age began around 3000 B.C. and ended in 1200 B.C. Because these dates are approximate, the Trojan War, which is traditionally said to have ended in 1184, is still classified as the late Bronze Age. The Archaic Age began in 800 B.C. and ended in 500 B.C. Homer, who lived in the 8th century B.C., and Stesichorus, who lived in the 7th and 6th centuries B.C., can both be situated in the Archaic Age (Pomeroy vi).
Marriage was of vital importance particularly to women in Greek society of the Bronze Age, which “demanded that all mature women be married, and destined all young women for that end” (Pomeroy 18). This was still the case in Archaic Greece. Unmarried women and widows were not to be envied. Without the (financial) protection of men, they were often poor because paid employment was hard to find for a woman, even more so if she had children (Pomeroy 44). Marriage was particularly important to aristocrats, for whom it served as a link between powerful families from different places in Greece (Fantham 11). These arranged marriages created complex networks of kin relations with specific social obligations (Fantham 11).

In the Bronze Age, two kinds of marriages were possible, either following the matrilocal or the patrilocal pattern. A matrilocal marriage meant a warrior married a princess or aristocratic woman and settled down in her kingdom (Pomeroy 19). Sometimes the father married his daughter to a warrior in order to obtain the man as ally (Pomeroy 19). More often, the father held a contest for the daughter’s hand, choosing the best possible match according to a number of criteria such as strength and wisdom (Pomeroy 19). When the marriage was settled, the groom had to give money and goods, i.e. bridewealth, to his father-in-law (Blundell 67). A matrilocal marriage was also matrilineal: the groom inherited (the throne) from the bride’s father, even if he had sons (Pomeroy 20). This was the case for Helen and Menelaus. Even though Helen had two brothers, Menelaus inherited the throne (Pomeroy 20). The Trojan War was thus not only the result of Menelaus’ jealousy. In fact, his marriage gave him the right to the throne of Sparta, and when Helen took off, he had to fight for her in order to stay on as king (Pomeroy 20-21). Matrilocal marriages offered a big advantage to the bride. She could stay in her birthplace, surrounded by family and friends (Pomeroy 20). However, the woman was quite powerless in the matter, having no say in the choice of a husband and in her own future (Blundell 67). Everything was arranged by the men according to their own interests and those of their kingdom.

While the matrilocal pattern disappeared by the end of the Bronze Age (Pomeroy 23), the patrilocal pattern survived and became the standard form of marriage in the Archaic Age. In a patrilocal marriage, the groom took the bride home and an alliance between the two houses was established. Both families exchanged gifts on the wedding (Pomeroy 19). In the course of the Archaic Age, the patriarchal system intensified due to the emergence of the polis as opposed to the kingdom (Blundell 75-76). In these new city-states, political institutions took care of relations between communities (Blundell 76). Consequently, women were no longer
exchanged for political alliances, which caused their value to diminish (Blundell 76). As a result, the dowry system, in which the bride’s family gives money to the groom’s family, gradually developed (Blundell 76). A patrilocal marriage was not very beneficial to the bride. She had to leave “her natal home for a new, often distant environment and an unknown husband chosen for her by her father” (Fantham 22). However, it is likely that most fathers chose a like-minded husband with “a set of shared social goals” (Fantham 26) for their daughters, because “above all, husband and wife should share in benefiting friends and harming enemies” (Fantham 26).

In both the Bronze and the Archaic Age, there was a sexual double standard in marriage (Pomeroy 26). Men were allowed to have slave concubines, while women did not have the same liberties (Pomeroy 26-27). Their virginity and good reputation were highly valued qualities (Pomeroy 27). The same was true for the Trojan society. Whereas men were polygamous, women were monogamous (Pomeroy 27). Spartan women in the Archaic Age enjoyed more sexual liberties as female adultery was tolerated. Sometimes, a husband would lend “his wife to another man when that man needed an heir to his estate” (Pomeroy 37). Women could also start liaisons for their own pleasure (Pomeroy 37).

Spartan society was so open about adultery because it could lead to pregnancy which was considered a good thing because the state needed as many warriors as possible (Pomeroy 37). Indeed, motherhood was the second big challenge in the life of a Greek woman in the Bronze and Archaic Ages. Procreation was so important that the Spartans even had secret ‘trial marriages’ to determine if the woman was fertile (Pomeroy 38). If not, the couple could separate and have a clean start with somebody else, hopefully resulting in children (Pomeroy 38). Having children, particularly boys, was also essential to pass on the property (Fantham 33). Inheritance was most often patrilineal, especially in Archaic Greece. When the head of the family died, sons got an equal share of the inheritance, while daughters were left with nothing (Blundell 66). What is more, if the father had no sons, the property would sooner go to distant family than to his daughters (Blundell 66). Motherhood in Ancient Greece can thus be considered oppressive. Society demanded that women had sons to pass on the inheritance, but women could never own anything themselves.

In daily life, Greek women had to take care of the household (Fantham 34). Their tasks consisted of watching over the children, the slaves and the goods (Fantham 33). Food was prepared by slave women, and men were given two and a half times the food ration of women
Clothes were made both by free women and by slave women. Spinning and weaving were sometimes even considered magic qualities of women (Pomeroy 30). Women were expected to fetch water and bathe and anoint the men (Pomeroy 30). In case of the death of a family member, they were responsible for preparing the corpse for burial, i.e. washing, anointing and dressing it (Pomeroy 43). Taking care of other people took up a large part of women’s lives. In fact, it was an extension of their primary task as mothers (Pomeroy 44). Spartan women in the Archaic Age were exempted from many of the traditional household tasks. Sparta’s emphasis on childbearing meant physical fitness of the women was highly valued (Pomeroy 36). Contrary to women of other city-states, aristocratic Spartan women were well-nourished and did not have to fabricate clothing (Pomeroy 36). They concerned themselves with music, gymnastics, household management and looking after the children (Pomeroy 36). Although women in Greek society spent most of their time indoors, it should be noted that they were “modest, but were not secluded” (Pomeroy 30). Women were allowed to walk through the streets, be it with an escort (Pomeroy 31). They could talk with guests and even offer them gifts if they were in the presence of their husband (Fantham 34).

A minor task of women in Archaic Greece had to do with religion. The founding of city-states caused population pressure (Pomeroy 33). As a result, the Greeks started to colonize unclaimed land (Pomeroy 33). When a new expedition was undertaken, some women received the task of consulting the oracle of Apollo at Delphi as prophetesses (Pomeroy 33). On the one hand, this empowered women, giving them an opportunity to appear in public and “serve (...) society by performing rites for the gods” (Fantham 34). On the other hand, their power was only an illusion. In reality, the messages of the prophetesses were interpreted by male priests, preventing the women from having any real influence on political decisions (Pomeroy 33). Young women of marriageable age also appeared in religious sanctuaries on public festivals (Fantham 22). Paradoxically, they were adorned to gain the attention of future husbands, but had to stay modest and reserved at the same time (Fantham 22). In this case, women’s religious role perfectly harmonizes with their duty to get married.

In conclusion, it is true that women in the Bronze and the Archaic Age were limited by society’s gender roles, which were sometimes even encoded in law, e.g. the rules concerning inheritance. Women were powerless concerning many aspects of their lives, which were controlled by their fathers, husbands, brothers, uncles, etc. Although women were undeniably oppressed in patriarchal Greece, they were still respected by men, who recognized their importance to obtain heirs, make political alliances and keep the house in order. However, the
rise of city-states throughout the Archaic Age caused women’s social value to diminish. Women were no longer useful for political exchanges via marriage, because the state took over this task (Blundell 76). In addition, overpopulation in the city-states meant that women’s function as child bearers diminished (Blundell 76). Moreover, in the peasant class there was a switch from pastoral farming, producing livestock, to more labor-intensive agrarian farming, producing crops (Blundell 76). As a result, the contrast between women’s housework and men’s arduous work on the farm was accentuated (Blundell 76). Consequently, to some men, “it may have appeared that women were not doing their share” (Blundell 76). This explains the increasing misogyny in the ages following the Archaic Age.

3.1.2 Women in wartime in the Bronze Age and the Archaic Age
Having analyzed women’s roles in Greek society in daily life, I now turn to a discussion of their status and treatment in wartime. Women are often seen as pacifists opposing war, but this view, derived from contemporary women’s movements, cannot be generalized (Friedman 389). In Ancient Greece, “the men and women of a city were partners in war” (Schaps 212). Women supported their husbands, brothers, sons, etc. in war and shared joy and agony at times of victory and defeat (Schaps 196). Women had every reason to be interested in their men’s warfare; defeat brought along dire consequences for them (cf. infra). Men were protective of their women and waged war to defend them (Schaps 197). The threat of the enemy abusing or kidnapping their wives certainly caused combativeness. Indeed, the Trojan War was incited by the abduction of Helen (Schaps 197). When defeat was near, men usually evacuated women and children, provided there was enough time (Schaps 198).

Women were not always completely powerless and sometimes took active part in war, especially when it came close to home. If the soldiers were near, they could offer support that was impossible in a foreign war. Sometimes, the women even refused to be evacuated in order to help the soldiers as long as possible (Schaps 194). Women “brought the men their armor, and throughout the battle they provided ammunition, food, and drink, and cared for the wounded” (Schaps 194). There are records of women throwing tiles at the enemy entering the gates (Schaps 211). Even though these were only minor contributions, they helped to keep the spirits up. Women could make themselves useful in war, and their moral support encouraged the men to keep on fighting.

War, however, also disempowered women. It was an event that was completely out of their hands (Schaps 210), since women had no political power (Schaps 211). They could do
nothing more than wishing and praying for a good outcome (Schaps 210). Even though women were not in immediate danger – they did not risk their lives in battle like the soldiers - the consequences of war were just as bad for them. If the war was fought on foreign grounds, women had to deal with the solitude and constant fear of losing their (future) husbands and sons (Schaps 206). Even if victory might bring prosperity, “the worry, as the absence wore on, occupied more of a woman’s thoughts than the hope of riches” (Schaps 206). Their worry was not unfounded; the loss of a father or husband often meant a life of poverty for the women, since they could not inherit. In addition to this emotional burden, women had to struggle with privation in a neglected city; “fields were not worked, goods not imported, (…) and possessions plundered and destroyed” (Schaps 206-207).

When defeat was near, women were “in the very depths of powerlessness, a defenseless group in a hopeless situation” (Schaps 211). They were not always evacuated, and sometimes a group of women had to stay behind to cook for the defenders (Schaps 199). In a sacked city, the only thing women could do was fight, flee or choose death (Schaps 202). If women chose to flee, the life of exile that awaited them was not an easy one. If they were allowed to settle in a foreign city, they never got the status of citizens and were permanent strangers in their new home (Schaps 206). If women chose to surrender, they had to suffer the dire consequences. Whereas men were either ransomed by relatives or killed, women were enslaved (Pomeroy 26). This treatment of women was typical of a society with patriarchal values, where there was a lot of competition among the men (Pomeroy 25). Women were seen as property and prizes to be conquered by men to increase prestige (Pomeroy 25). The enslavement of women by kidnapping them was also a consequence of their low political status. In a society where the exchange of women was used to establish friendly networks between aristocratic families, anyone outside these networks was seen as an enemy (Blundell 74). On the enemy’s territory, women “could easily become a valuable form of booty” (Blundell 74). It was a big change for an aristocratic woman to become a slave woman. Often slaves were treated with brutality, although this was dependent on the temperament of the owner and the status of the slave (Blundell 74). Older slave women led a life of drudgery while young women often served as concubines, being raped and degraded (Schaps 205).

In conclusion, if women had few liberties and little influence in Greek society in daily life, their impotence was complete in the context of war. Even though they tried to contribute and make themselves useful, there was not much they could do as they had no political voice. In many ways, they were the biggest victims of war, which often diminished their status to the
property and prizes of men. In addition, they had to deal with the constant fear of losing their husband and safety net, while struggling with daily life in a war-ridden city.

3.2 Women in Great-Britain in World War II

Having discussed women’s wartime position in Ancient Greece, I now analyze their roles and status in a more recent war. More specifically, I focus on British women during World War II. Although H.D. lived through both world wars, I want to discuss the Second World War because *Helen in Egypt* was written in the first decade after World War II, still fresh in H.D.’s memory. Moreover, in *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. calls the ruin of the Trojan War “the ‘holocaust of the Greeks’” (5). Even if in this context ‘holocaust’ has a more general meaning of “a thorough destruction involving extensive loss of life especially through fire” (“Holocaust”), the association with the Second World War is usually made. My focus on Great-Britain is explained by the fact that H.D. spent the duration of World War II there. However, I chose to focus on the lives of the non-persecuted British people, because the Nazis were “indiscriminate in terms of gender” when it came to the persecuted people (Summerfield, “Gender and War” 3). In Ancient Greek warfare, by contrast, there were clear differences in the roles and status of men and women (cf. supra).

3.2.1 Women’s roles

During World War II, traditional gender roles altered: “old prejudices about what females could and should do were cast aside in the name of patriotism” (Johnes). Women were urged to contribute to the war effort (Johnes). Housewives or women who were previously “shop assistants, waitresses, labourers, domestic servants or clerical workers” (Summerfield, “Research on Women” 211) now switched to male occupations such as factory work, farm work or the army. Others took unpaid jobs in women’s organisations. However, there were still a lot of women who stayed in their traditional female roles as mothers, housewives and volunteers doing typically feminine work (Johnes).

Women were often employed in munitions factories or in the engineering industry as machine and assembly workers (Summerfield, “Research on Women” 211). In fact, women generally did “routine, monotonous, low status factory work” (Summerfield, *Reconstructing* 2) so that the men who previously occupied this work could move on to more skilled jobs or join the army (Summerfield, *Reconstructing* 80). Even if factory work offered women a considerable wage, it brought along a lot of disadvantages as well. Women often had to leave for the cities in order to work in these factories (Johnes). If they chose not to leave home, they had to deal
with tedious commuting on top of long hours of factory work (Johnes). In addition to the factory work, most women still had domestic commitments, making the combination a difficult task (Johnes). Besides factory work, women could also work on farms in the countryside. This was not an ideal situation either. The women on the farms were isolated from society and they had to endure long hours of hard physical labour (Johnes).

Women who joined the women’s section of the British army, the Auxiliary Territorial Service, probably “travelled the greatest distance from the traditional female role” (Sheridan, “Ambivalent Memories” 33). What these women did was considered essential war work. Therefore, the military organisation relieved them of any domestic commitments, cooking meals for them and offering them support in many other ways (Sheridan, “Ambivalent Memories” 33). These women witnessed the violence of the war from up close (Sheridan, “Ambivalent Memories” 33). However, they were still non-combatants, assisting the men by “supplying them with the goods and services they needed” (Summerfield, Reconstructing 80) in order to fight and destroy. A job in the army offered women “escape, excitement, opportunity to learn new skills, make friends, travel, be financially independent” (Sheridan, “Ambivalent Memories” 34). However, joining the ATS meant being away from home all the time. Moreover, these women were in immediate danger and although they learned skills to handle weapons, they were not allowed to use them (Summerfield, Reconstructing 88).

Besides the women with paid jobs, there were also a lot of women volunteering. These volunteers were often part of women’s organisations. They were driven by their detestation of another war that originated in “a man-monopolised society” (Sheridan, Wartime Women 74) – most of them had lived through World War I - and “their desire for improved conditions of life” (Sheridan, Wartime Women 78). The most important women’s organisation in Britain was the Women’s Voluntary Services for Civil Defence (Sheridan, Wartime Women 76). Some of the services provided by this organisation were previously classified as typically masculine work. Their members were active in transport, hospital services, canteens, evacuation and the Auxiliary Fire Service (Sheridan, Wartime Women 77).

During World War II, more women were working than ever before. However, the majority were still mothers and housewives, stuck in the traditional ideal of femininity (Smith, War 210). They were “the embodiment of the national ‘hearth’” (Sheridan, “Ambivalent Memories” 37); what men were fighting for. On the home front, young mothers were struggling to hold the family together and to protect life while they were surrounded by chaos
and destruction (Sheridan, “Ambivalent Memories” 37). Even if they could not help the country as much as the working women, they made small contributions to keep up morale like the women in Ancient Greece. Some women took in evacuees, others served meals to the troops (Sheridan, “Ambivalent Memories” 37). Housewives did not have “the direct leadership and discipline” (Sheridan, Wartime Women 111) of the soldier, but they had “to undergo more danger and put up with more inconveniences” (Sheridan, Wartime Women 111). At home they had to deal with high prices and food shortages and try to keep the family fed (Johnes). Moreover, World War II erased the distinctions between combatants and non-combatants (Smith, War 209). German bombers targeted civilians, placing women in a life-threatening situation (Smith, War 209). Blackouts and air raids meant women had to make quick decisions about shelters and the protection of children, putting them under constant pressure (Sheridan, Wartime Women 118). What is more, air raids destroyed a lot of houses (Smith, War 210), scattering families as they were forced to live with acquaintances or even complete strangers. In addition, there was the constant worry about husband and sons fighting abroad. While dealing with all of this, housewives had to endure the guilt of “not contributing to the war effort in a more direct and obvious way” (Johnes)

In conclusion, World War II allowed women to step away from their traditional roles. They could contribute more to the war effort than had been the case in previous wars, but war work brought along a lot of inconveniences for these women. However, housewives were not better off than working women, having the responsibility to keep the house running while facing the hardships of daily life in a war-ridden environment.

### 3.2.2 Women’s status

Opinions about the status of women in World War II are divided. Some (feminist) scholars, such as Juliet Mitchell, claim that the war brought along more sex differences than had been the case before the war (Summerfield, “Research” 210-211). Others, such as the social historian Arthur Marwick, think wartime conditions offered opportunities for equality between men and women (Summerfield, “Research” 208). I believe the truth lies in between these two views. On some levels, the war initiated social change and elevated the status of women. However, the changes were often neither lasting nor very significant. In order to determine the status of women in Britain in World War II, I will investigate three aspects.

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First, I will examine what was expected of women and how their roles were perceived by the British society. Second, I will focus on the ways in which the war changed traditional gender roles, and how permanent the changes were. Finally, I will compare the roles of men and women in wartime in order to determine the status of women in Britain in World War II.

In World War II, “contradictory demands were placed on women” (Summerfield, Reconstructing 14). On the one hand, they were expected to stay home to keep the household running so that the men could go and fight to protect the home front (Summerfield, Reconstructing 14). On the other hand, society wanted them to contribute to the war effort; “to ‘do their bit’” (Summerfield, Reconstructing 14). There was a tension between the need for their workforce and the fear of women deviating too far from their traditional roles as mothers and housewives (Sheridan, “Ambivalent Memories” 38).

Housewives were expected to take in evacuees from destructed areas of the country (Smith, War 210). Women’s traditional roles as carers were thus reinforced; they were rewarded “with praise rather than pay” (Smith, War 210). However, housewives were not entirely shielded from criticism. They were often reproached for not serving their country. This is why a lot of women wanted to contribute to the war effort by doing factory or voluntary work or by joining the army (Summerfield, Reconstructing 83).

Even if working women were essential for wartime economy, their position was not regarded as ideal. The ‘heroism’ of the single woman, her freedom to serve the country was merely a consequence of her not being what a woman was expected to be: a mother and a housewife (Summerfield, Reconstructing 80). Indeed, working women were accused of not having enough children (Summerfield, “Gender and War” 10). As was the case in Ancient Sparta, pro-natalism was promoted in a society that lost many lives everyday (Summerfield, “Gender and War” 11).

Women in the army had to face the biggest obstacles and endure the most criticism. At first, women were not allowed to join the voluntary resistance army in case of invasion, i.e. the Home Guard (Summerfield, “Gender and War” 6). Later, they were admitted, but their aspirations “to share with men the work of killing in battle” (Summerfield, “Gender and War” 6) were never gratified; the use of guns was prohibited for women. The same goes for women in the Auxiliary Territorial Service. They had to assist the men in whatever they needed to do the fighting, but could never fight themselves (Summerfield, “Gender and War” 6). “Women could make lethal weapons, prepare them for use, aim them and service them” but “they were
not allowed to use them for their intended purpose” (Summerfield, *Reconstructing* 88). Even when there was a shortage of soldiers and women were perfectly trained to fight, politicians opposed it, stating that women were life-givers, not life-takers (Summerfield, “Gender and War” 6). This shows the tension between the need to recruit women and the desire to keep them in their traditional roles; maintaining “hearth and home as ‘the cornerstone’ of the nation” (Summerfield, “Gender and War” 6). Even though women managed to assume typically masculine roles in the army, the opposition between masculine warriors and feminine non-combatants was maintained (Summerfield, “Gender and War” 4).

If army women were praised for doing essential war work, they were also stigmatized as sexually suspect (Summerfield, “Research on Women” 221). The uniform these women wore was regarded as an “apparent claim to be equal to a man”, challenging “men to prove their superior masculinity (...) physically and sexually” (Summerfield, “Gender and War” 7). Indeed, the manly appearance of these women was associated with typically masculine behaviour which included making sexual advances (Summerfield, “Gender and War” 7). Army women were labelled promiscuous as a product of “anxiety about the apparent alignment of women with men” (Summerfield, “Gender and War” 7).

In short, the contradictory demands on women in World War II were translated in the way in which their roles were judged by society. Housewives did not contribute enough; army women almost contributed too much, threatening the essential position of men in defending the country.

In order to examine the status of women in World War II, it is also important to compare their roles during the war with those before and after the war. In what ways have women’s tasks in society evolved and were the changes lasting ones? First, the way in which women spent their leisure time changed considerably. During the war, people adopted “a philosophy of living for today” (Johnes). Women started to spend more time outside the home, going to the dancehall and the cinema (Johnes). More and more women attended pubs, drinking and smoking in public, which was considered typically masculine behaviour (Sheridan, *Wartime Women* 196). The attitudes towards women in pubs were generally accepting, but some people found it indecent for a woman to go to a pub by herself (Sheridan, *Wartime Women* 196). Most people did not tolerate drunk women, thinking “that female drunks are much worse than males” (Sheridan, *Wartime Women* 201). Overall, women had more freedom to go out and do as they
pleased than before the war. However, there were limits to the tolerance of typically masculine activities that women could engage in.

If during the war sex differences were levelled in leisure activities, the workplace was a different story. Some sociologists like Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein, believe the war diminished sex discrimination in the workplace and initiated a reorganisation of working conditions for women, but this view is too optimistic according to Summerfield (Summerfield, “Research on Women” 207-208). When investigating the types of jobs women had, the amount they were being paid, and the classification of work by sex, it will become clear that sex discrimination did not disappear. During World War II, many women were able to escape their traditional gender roles and do men’s jobs (Sheridan, “Ambivalent Memories” 32). However, male trade unionists wanted women removed from the workplace after the war to protect men’s jobs (Summerfield, “Research on Women” 211). Indeed, after the war, a lot of women returned to their traditional roles as housewives and mothers (Sheridan, “Ambivalent Memories” 32). The trade unionists also protested against the classification of men’s jobs as women’s work for fear that these jobs “would be paid at women’s rates and lost to men thereafter” (Summerfield, “Research on Women” 211). However, their objective of equal payment was countered by capitalists who saw in women the possibility of cheap labour (Summerfield, “Research on Women” 211). They argued that women’s innate capacities were lower than men’s, which justified the classification of the jobs as women’s work and subsequently the low wages that these women received (Summerfield, “Research on Women” 211). As a result, industries which previously employed only a small number of women, such as assembly lines in engineering and clerical work, were redefined as women’s work (Summerfield, “Research on Women” 212) and “only a minority of women workers achieved equal pay” (Smith, “The Womanpower Problem” 935). In conclusion, World War II did not diminish sex discrimination in the workplace, but redistributed women within new “gender-stereotyped sectors of work” (Summerfield, “Research on Women” 212).

Nonetheless, World War II did bring along improvements regarding women’s working conditions. It initiated permanent “changes in the composition of the female workforce” (Summerfield, “Research on Women” 212). Before the war, only young single women were allowed to work. However, marriage bars were removed because of “the pressure of wartime labour shortage” (Summerfield, “Research on Women” 213). Furthermore, during the war women could combine domestic obligations with work thanks to the introduction of part-time work (Summerfield, “Research on Women” 213). These were all lasting changes that women
made use of after the war as well. The state also provided childcare so that even more women could join the wartime labour force, but this “was never intended to be anything but temporary” (Summerfield, “Research on Women” 215). In short, there “was no social revolution in the organisation of women’s work and domestic conditions as a result of the war” (Summerfield, “Research on Women” 215), but the war did bring along some changes that opened up new pathways for women.

Finally, the relationship between gender roles in wartime is also essential to determine the status of women. If “women took on work previously reserved to men, the wartime roles into which men moved were military ones, at the front or just behind it, and were more highly valued than those which they left for women” (Summerfield, “Research on Women” 216). Women moved into new areas of work, but men moved on to “‘higher things’” (Sheridan, “Ambivalent Memories” 33). Some women felt ‘let out of the cage’, but they continued to be subordinated to men, be it at work or at home (Summerfield, “Research on Women” 222).

In conclusion, if the content of women’s work changed during the war, the status was not fundamentally improved (Sheridan, “Ambivalent Memories” 33). Both housewives and working women were essential in war, but neither of them escaped criticism and deviating too far from the traditional gender roles was seen as a threat. The workplace was still discriminating against women and although the working conditions were improved to meet women’s needs, this was only done to compensate for the wartime labour shortage. Men were still valued more highly than women, but some steps towards equality were made during the war.
4. Analysis

4.1 Causes of the trauma

In this chapter, I analyze the events that led to Helen’s trauma and their effects on Helen’s identity as depicted in H.D.’s Helen in Egypt. Contrary to Freud, modern trauma theories do not distinguish different traumas on the basis of causes anymore (cf. 2.2). In fact, the causes of a trauma can be very diverse. An event becomes traumatic by the way it is perceived by the potential trauma patient. It is never fully experienced when it occurs (Laub 57), a mechanism which allows the individual to get through the overwhelming moment (Caruth 10). Indeed, for an event to turn into a trauma, it needs to be so shocking that it shatters the patient’s identity (Henke 160). Therefore, the element of surprise, fright (Freud 641) or helplessness is essential (Christiansen et al. 116). On the basis of this general definition, I have identified five events that potentially instigated Helen’s trauma and/or have a clear impact on Helen’s identity.

These events can be assigned to three categories: events that occurred before the Trojan War, those that occurred during the Trojan War (or that were a direct consequence of it), and an extra element that aggravated the trauma. Before the Trojan War, Helen abandoned her child Hermione, thereby losing her identity as a mother, and left with Paris for Troy, losing her identity as the wife of Menelaus and as a Spartan. Indeed, Helen had already lost herself before she lost her loved ones in the war. During the Trojan War, the death of Achilles and the death of Clytaemnestra had the largest impact on Helen. She sees Achilles, the best warrior, as the embodiment of all the heroes that died in the war. Clytaemnestra’s death was significant in two ways. First, the fate of Clytaemnestra represents that of a lot of other women in the Trojan War, who are considered worthless if they are not useful for politics. Clytaemnestra murdered her husband Agamemnon, because he had attempted to kill their daughter, Iphigenia, for the sake of war. She was killed by her son Orestes, who wanted revenge for the death of his father. Second, Clytaemnestra is Helen’s twin sister. Losing her means losing a piece of herself. If Helen is traumatized by the events of the Trojan War, her trauma is intensified by the fact that she is blamed for the war. Her identity as a victim is not recognized by the Greeks. Instead, the identity of perpetrator is projected onto her, making it even harder to rediscover her sense of self. In the following sections, I profoundly analyze the different events that caused Helen’s trauma, rendering her powerless and shattering her identity, whilst paying attention to her position as a woman in Ancient Greece.
4.1.1 Before the Trojan War

As I mentioned, Helen had already lost her identity before the start of the Trojan War. The first event that had a big impact on her life was her desertion of her young child Hermione. As H.D. writes in Helen in Egypt:

I had all that, everything,

my lord’s devotion, my child

prattling of a bird-nest,

playing with my work-basket;

the reels rolled to the floor

and she did not stoop to pick up

the scattered spools but stared

with wide eyes in a white face,

at a stranger – and stared at her mother,

a stranger – that was all,

I placed my foot on the last step

of the marble water-stair

and never looked back;

(Doolittle 228)

When Helen leaves her daughter, she abandons her traditional maternal role (Edmunds 489), symbolized by Hermione’s upsetting of “her mother’s nestlike “work-basket”” (Edmunds 489). In doing so, she both reaffirms and rebels against society’s attitude towards motherhood. In Ancient Greece, motherhood was an important aspect of a woman’s identity
Sons had a much higher status than daughters, since they were the heirs of the father (Fantham 33). On the one hand, by cold-bloodedly walking away from her daughter, Helen confirms the fact that girls are not important; she “never looked back” (Doolittle 228). On the other hand, Helen shows her disagreement with society’s perception of girls by refusing to raise another child that is considered an object solely useful for politics. The fact that she never looks back then proves that she struggles to leave her child behind, since traumatic memories are repressed (Freud 65). As she walks away, she sees herself through the eyes of her child. Hermione no longer recognizes her loving mother in this emotionally detached person, and considers her a stranger. This strategy is typical of trauma; by pretending Helen is just a stranger leaving, Hermione avoids the pain of the shattering experience. At the same time, by perceiving the event from Hermione’s point of view, Helen avoids her own pain. She does not recognize herself anymore, which proves that motherhood is a very important part of her identity. Moreover, as I will explain in 4.1.3, Helen probably had no say in the decision of leaving Sparta for Troy. This powerlessness made her more susceptible to trauma. In any case, both mother and child are traumatized by Helen’s abandonment. In order for Helen to overcome her trauma, she will need to realize this (cf.4.3.3).

Not only does Helen leave Hermione, she also leaves Sparta and her husband Menelaus to go to Troy with Paris. By doing so, Helen loses her identity as a wife and as a Spartan. In Ancient Greece, marriage served to establish political alliances and had nothing to do with love (Fantham 11) (cf. 3.1.1). Indeed, Menelaus married Helen to become king of Sparta (Pomeroy 21). When Helen leaves with Paris, Menelaus only wants her back because she legitimizes his claim to the throne (Pomeroy 21). Throughout the poem, there are no romantic references to Menelaus. Helen calls Paris “my first lover” (Doolittle 185). The “devotion” (Doolittle 228) of Menelaus to Helen referred to in the text is general respect towards her role as a wife, mother, and queen of Sparta, rather than real affection. If Menelaus needed Helen for political purposes, Helen married Menelaus for social and financial security. Since paid jobs were hard to find for women and they could not inherit, marriage was essential to survive (Pomeroy 44) (cf. 3.1.1). Moreover, women were expected to have children. If Sparta was open to extramarital relations for the sake of creating new warriors, these liberties did not apply to Helen. Her political status as a queen only allowed her to have children within marriage. Remaining single and childless would thus place Helen on the fringes of society. In any case, she had no say in her marriage; it was arranged between Menelaus and her father.
Leaving with Paris, “her first lover”, offers Helen a way out of “the potential invisibility and hollowness (...) within the satin cage of a ‘happy marriage’ as wife and mother” (Friedman 391). However, it also means that Helen does not fulfil the social obligations that Greek patriarchal society demands of her anymore; she loses her status of wife, queen and mother. Consequently, Menelaus, the Greeks and even the Trojans no longer respect Helen, who is labelled as an adulteress: “for a shout rose from the banquet-hall,/ “return the wanton to Greece”” (Doolittle 126); “‘adultress and witch,/ such prowl through the city streets’” (Doolittle 124). What is more, without the protection of marriage, she loses her basic human rights. The Greek leaders promise Helen to Achilles as a prize to satisfy his needs (Friedman 383): “the Towers will fall;/ Helen will be your share/ of the spoils of war” (Doolittle 52).

The reduction of Helen’s social status is also a consequence of the fact that she is considered neither a real Trojan nor a Spartan anymore. In Ancient Greece, foreigners that settled in a new city were not given citizenship (Schaps 206) (cf. 3.1.2). In addition, anyone who was outside the political networks of the city-states was considered an enemy (Blundell 74). Therefore, Helen is a permanent stranger in Troy:

the servants were richer than Helen,

counting the links in a chain,

the pearls on a string,

that the merchants should not cheat

a suspect stranger from Greece,

is she a slave or a queen?

(Doolittle 233)

Helen considers herself poorer than her servants, a reference to the fact that she has no identity and security anymore. In Troy, Helen is no longer a queen. In fact, she is more like a slave, her only possession being the chain that binds her there. Indeed, she is not welcome in Troy, since people consider her the cause of the war. She cannot return to Sparta either; she knows she has lost all her rights. She already has the feeling of not belonging anywhere as soon as she leaves her daughter. Indeed, the fact that she calls herself a “stranger” in the abandonment scene also refers to this.
4.1.2 The Trojan War

Upon arriving in Troy, Helen has lost every aspect of her life that previously defined her: being a mother, a wife and a Spartan. Subsequently, her already fragile personality had to cope with the traumatic events of the Trojan War. During the Trojan War, Helen saw many people dying. However, the two events that impacted her most were the deaths of Achilles and Clytaemnestra. Of course, Helen suffered personally from their losses, but they also symbolize a larger group of people who died in the war. Achilles embodies the Greek warriors while Clytaemnestra represents the position of women in war.

A direct consequence of Helen being neither entirely Spartan nor Trojan is that she suffered the losses of both sides, thus understanding that war never has a good outcome: “you may win a thousand wars/ and not one Victory” (Doolittle 80). Having been in Troy for a long time, she has bonded with the Trojans and is affected by their casualties. The death of Hector, considered to be the greatest warrior of the Trojans, symbolizes the Trojan losses and directly leads to the defeat of Troy. Helen, who watched this event from the ramparts, is so traumatized that she wants to commit suicide: “Hecuba’s lordly son/ has been slain by Achilles;/ could I join the confusion below,// I would leap from the Walls” (Doolittle 234). Achilles’ death, however, has an even larger impact on her. It is the straw that breaks the camel’s back:

I stood at the stair-head,

the famous spiral-stair,

and heard their shouting

but I did not care,

for Achilles was dead;

(Doolittle 236).

Achilles’ death coincides with Helen’s emotional death. Helen states that she was already ‘gone’ before Paris was killed: “and Paris swerved, but I was gone/ before Paris fell;” (Doolittle 236). When a traumatic event occurs, it is not consciously experienced by the patient, nor is it simply recorded (cf. 2.2). Instead, it is the force of the experience that is registered in the patient’s brain (Caruth 151). Indeed, when Achilles is dead, Helen is
completely shut off from the world. Everything that is going on around Helen and everything that previously happened fades into insignificance next to this shattering event:

So it was nothing, nothing at all,
the loss, the gain; it was nothing,
the victory, the shouting

and Hector slain; it was nothing,
the days of waiting were over;
perhaps his death was bitter,

I do not know

(Doolittle 255)

What is more, Helen’s cognition and affect are completely dissociated (LaCapra 117). She can easily talk about the things she did not feel, but she dedicates only one line to the overwhelming event of Achilles’ death.

Achilles’ death is so significant because he is the superior warrior amongst the Greek soldiers; he represents all of them. Achilles is their father as it were. He even calls the Greek army “my children” (Doolittle 17). Helen compares the relationship between herself, Achilles and the Greek army to the Egyptian myth of Isis, Osiris and Horus. She equates herself with Isis, the mother, Achilles with Osiris, the father, and the Greek soldiers with Horus, the child: “I became// what his accusation made me,/ Isis, forever with that Child,/ the Hawk Horus.” (Doolittle 23). The analogy between all the Greek soldiers and Horus is apparent through the symbol of Horus, the lotus flower (Edmunds 480):

the thousand-petalled lily;
they are not many, but one,

---

4 According to the myth, Osiris, the king of Egypt, was slain by his jealous brother Seth. His body parts were spread all over Egypt. Isis, Osiris’ sister and wife, travelled across Egypt to reassemble the body parts. She conjured Osiris back to life and they begot Horus. Later, Horus avenged his father by killing Seth (Pinch 78-85).
enfolded in sleep,
as the furled lotus-bud,
or with great wings unfurled,
sailing in ecstasy,
the western sea,
climbing sea-mountains,
 dividing the deep valleys of the sea;

(Doolittle 21)

Like the lotus flower that is made up of many petals, the Greek soldiers are one; the child Horus. Through the loss of Osiris-Achilles and Horus-the Greek host, Helen relives her initial trauma; she loses her identity as a wife and mother again. Although modern trauma theories emphasize the “surprising literality and nonsymbolic nature” (Caruth 5) of traumatic memories, Helen’s trauma is presented in a different form here. This is where H.D.’s representation deviates from contemporary trauma theories.

Helen’s second traumatic experience associated with the war is the death of her sister Clytaemnestra. Although this does not happen during the Trojan War, it is the result of a chain of events which started in the war. Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia to appease Artemis, who becalmed the winds so that the Greek ships were unable to leave for Troy\(^5\). The war lords lured Iphigenia to the Greek port-town Aulis under the pretext that she would marry Achilles. However, the altar of marriage was turned into an altar of sacrifice (Friedman 384). The fact that Agamemnon is prepared to murder his own daughter for the sake of war proves that in patriarchal Greek society girls were not treated humanely (Friedman 384). Indeed, the context of war exposed the true nature of the status of women in

\(^5\) Artemis, goddess of the hunt, was angry with Agamemnon for an event that happened fourteen years before. Agamemnon, who had shot a deer, promised to thank Artemis by sacrificing the first thing born that day. He thought this was a lamb, but it was his daughter Iphigenia (Pfeijffer 191).
Ancient Greece, i.e. that of mere objects used for politics. Despite the fact that Iphigenia was rescued by Artemis in the end, Clytaemnestra is traumatized by this experience. Her reaction resembles that of Helen when Achilles dies; everything is insignificant next to what happened to her daughter:

\[
\text{what did she care for the trumpet,} \\
\text{the herald’s cry at the gate,} \\
\text{\textit{war is over;}}
\]

\[
\text{it is true she lay with her lover,} \\
\text{but she could never forget} \\
\text{the glint of steel at the throat} \\
\text{of her child on the altar;} \\
\text{Artemis snatched away} \\
\text{the proffered sacrifice,} \\
\text{but not even Artemis could veil} \\
\text{that terrible moment,} \\
\text{could make Clytaemnestra forget} \\
\text{the lure, the deception, the lie} \\
\text{(Doolittle 72-73)}
\]

Clytaemnestra does not even care that the war has ended. She can only think about the picture of her husband ready to kill her child. Her anger at the warlords for their unforgivable deceit prompts her to cheat on Agamemnon, before killing him when he returns from war with a
concubine. Eventually, she is murdered by her son, Orestes, who seeks revenge for the death of his father.

The death of Clytaemnestra affects Helen in two ways. On the one hand, it is a personal loss over which she has no control. Clytaemnestra was Helen’s twin sister and an important part of her life. Helen compares herself and her sister to Isis and Nephthys, who are “inseparable/ as substance and shadow” (Doolittle 68). With Clytaemnestra’s death, Helen loses a part of her identity. What is more, Helen empathizes with Clytaemnestra’s loss of Iphigenia. She has a virtual experience, whereby “one may imaginatively put oneself in the victim’s position while respecting the difference between self and other” (LaCapra 125). Although still able to distinguish between herself and her sister, she experiences Iphigenia’s disappearance as if it concerned her own child: “Hermione, my child/ and Iphigenia, her child, are one” (Doolittle 69). In fact, Clytaemnestra’s trauma is a painful reminder of Helen’s abandonment of Hermione. Helen justifies Clytaemnestra’s murder of Agamemnon by comparing her to a swan, whose aggression is only a natural consequence of her maternal instinct:

Have you ever seen a swan,

when you threaten its nest –

two swans, but she was alone,

who was never alone;

the wings of an angry swan
can compass the earth,

can drive the demons
back to Tartarus,

can measure heaven in their span;

---

6 In Egyptian mythology, Nephthys was Isis’ sister. She was married to her brother Seth, Osiris’ killer. She helped Isis in the search of Osiris’ body parts and in the upbringing of Horus, her nephew (Pinch 171-172).
one swan and one cygnet
were stronger than all the host,
assembled upon the slopes

and the hills of Aulis;

(Doolittle 76)

It is clear that Helen believes Clytaemnestra did not deserve to die, making it even harder for her to come to terms with this loss.

On the other hand, Clytaemnestra’s death had such a big impact on Helen because it represents a “common pattern underlying the fates of other women” (Friedman 383). In war, women are often a “sacrifice to the masculine “warrior cult”” (Friedman 383) (e.g. Iphigenia) or “possessions prized for their beauty” (Friedman 383) (e.g. Cassandra, the Trojan princess abducted by Agamemnon and Helen herself). Theseus recognizes this pattern as well, namely in Achilles’ treatment of women in the Trojan War:

but could you know of the sacrifice

of Polyxena, Hecuba’s daughter,

the sister of Paris? could you know

that Achilles desired her,

and the ghost of Achilles

demanded her sacrifice?

his son slew her;

---

7 Theseus is king of Athens (Pfeijffer 162). He is also the hero who killed the Minotaur (Pfeijffer 169). In Helen in Egypt, he takes up the role of psychoanalyst who listens to Helen’s traumatic story (cf. 4.3)
there was Chryseis, Apollo’s priestess,

and his own wife, Deidamia,

the mother of Pyrrhus,

and Briseis – and what other?

they were all sacrificed in one way or another;

(Doolittle 173)

In short, the death of Clytaemnestra symbolizes the powerlessness of the Greek women in the masculine warrior cult (Friedman 385). Indeed, both Clytaemnestra and Helen were powerless against the actions of the warlords, a condition which generates trauma (Christiansen et al. 116). However, powerless is not synonymous with passive. Even if Clytaemnestra was defeated by the masculine warrior cult, she did try to defend her child, and by extension women treated badly in the war (Friedman 385). If Helen and her sister had no agency, they still had a strong will, which is necessary to create a new identity and to overcome trauma (cf. 4.3).

In conclusion, the deaths of Achilles and Clytaemnestra traumatize Helen. They remind her of her initial trauma; the loss of her child. What is more, they demonstrate the destructiveness of the Greek patriarchal culture of war which oppresses women.

4.1.3 Guilt

Helen’s trauma was caused by a combination of events. First, she lost her traditional identity as a wife and a mother. During the war, she witnessed the shocking deaths of the Greek and the Trojan soldiers, as well as those of Achilles and Clytaemnestra. Added to these traumatizing events is another factor which is associated with a higher degree of PTSD: guilt (Follette and Ruzek 258) (cf. 2.2). In order to recover from PTSD, the trauma patient needs to re-establish his identity, which was shattered by the traumatic event. However, if the patient feels guilty and/or is blamed for the trauma, his/her identity as a victim is not even recognized. Instead, he/she receives the false identity of perpetrator, making it even harder to overcome the trauma.

At first glance, the question of Helen’s guilt seems to depend on whether or not she was ever in Troy. In fact, there are two versions of the story. Traditionally, Helen is said to have come
to Troy with Paris. In this version, Helen is blamed for the war. However, alternative versions, such as Stesichorus’ *Pallinode* and Euripides’ *Helen*, defend Helen’s innocence by stating that the real Helen was “transposed or translated from Greece into Egypt” (Doolittle 1) and a phantom Helen was placed in Troy by Aphrodite (Edmunds 471). The title of the poem, *Helen in Egypt*, suggests that H.D. based it on these alternative versions. First, Helen denies she has ever been in Troy, claiming that it was a phantom of herself they saw upon the ramparts:

> Alas, my brothers,
> Helen did not walk
> upon the ramparts,

> she whom you cursed
> was but a phantom and the shadow thrown
> of a reflection;

> (Doolittle 5)

Nevertheless, Paris states that he witnessed Helen’s death in Troy (Doolittle 141). Since a phantom would be hard to kill, this suggests that it was the real Helen. Later on, Helen remembers being in Troy when Hector and Achilles were killed (Doolittle 234, 236). In the end, she explicitly admits that she was in Troy: “I only saw him from the ramparts” (Doolittle 288). As is the basic tone of whole poem, several conflicting readings are possible; H.D does never solves the problem of Helen’s presence in Troy (Darling 4).

However, even Helen did go to Troy, it was not by her own will. The question of who caused the war is then more complicated:

> Was it Paris who caused the war?
> or was it Thetis? the goddess
> married a mortal, Peleus;

> the banquet, the wedding-feast
lacked nothing, only one uninvited guest,

Eris; so the apple was cast,

so the immortals woke to petty strife

over the challenge, to the fairest;

(Doolittle 111)

Paris took Helen to Troy, which was the fault of Aphrodite who promised him Helen if he gave her the golden apple. The apple was cast by Eris, who was angry with Thetis for not inviting her to her wedding. Thetis, however, was forced to marry Peleus after he raped her. In the end, the Trojan War was caused by the pride of the gods Zeus and Poseidon. They were in love with Thetis, but too afraid to make love to her because an oracle had predicted that her son would be more powerful than his father. In both cases, Helen was powerless concerning everything that happened to her; she could not have prevented the war if she wanted to. This powerlessness made her more susceptible to the trauma of losing her identity as a mother, wife and Spartan. Helen could not have prevented the war if she wanted to. Again, this does not mean that she is passive. Even if she has lost her agency, she has not lost her will. During her healing process, Helen regains her agency step by step by reconstructing her personality whilst resisting the images projected onto her (cf. 4.3).

Even though Helen is innocent, the Greeks accuse her of causing the war: “so they fought, forgetting women,/ hero to hero, sworn brother and lover,/ and cursing Helen through eternity” (Doolittle 4). At this point, the traumatizing experiences have already confused Helen so much that she accepts the label of perpetrator that society has cast on her (Darling 11). She feels responsible for the deaths of the Greek soldiers, the ‘lotus-flower’, and Achilles’ death:

they were mine, not his,

the unnumbered host;

mine, all the ships,

mine, all the thousand petals of the rose,
mine, all the lily-petals,

mine, the great spread of wings,

the thousand sails,

the thousand feathered darts

that sped them home,

mine, the one dart in the Achilles-heel,

the thousand-and-one, mine.

(Doolittle 25)

The Greeks do not simply consider her a perpetrator; they see her as a symbol of the twin images of women; evil and beauty (Friedman 376). This vision of duality is typical of patriarchal society; women can either be chaste or evil (Friedman 390). Helen is a representation “of the flesh who tempts mankind to evil and death through her sexuality” (Friedman 376) or as Achilles puts it: “a fountain of water// in that desert; we died of thirst” (Doolittle 48).

In conclusion, Helen’s trauma was caused by the fact that she left her familiar and safe environment to be faced with the horrors and destruction of war. During these events, she was completely powerless, which was for the most a part a consequence of being a woman in the patriarchal society of Ancient Greece. Moreover, Helen’s trauma shattered her identity. This made it easy for other people to project a false one onto her; that of perpetrator instead of victim.

4.2 Symptoms

Freud discovered that traumatic material is organized in the patient’s brain as a network of interrelated events (74). Different layers of memories revolve around a core or nucleus (Freud 74). When the memories resurface as flashbacks, hallucinations or dreams, they are strange and frightening to the hysterical (Freud 423). Traumatic memories cannot be situated in time or in place (Laub 69), which makes it hard for the patient to distinguish between fantasy and reality (Edmunds 475). On the one hand, the trauma patient wants to forget the traumatic
events because they are so painful (Freud 65). On the other hand, these memories need to be remembered and expressed in a coherent story to overcome the trauma (Freud 26). Modern trauma theories identify two paradoxes of traumatic memories. First, the trauma patient cannot consciously recall the event while it reappears uncontrollably in traumatic memory (Caruth 152), which is completely true to the event (Caruth 5). Second, the trauma patient often feels numb (Henke 160). At the same time, he/she is hypersensitive to triggers recalling the traumatic events (Caruth 4). In this chapter, I identify the traumatic memories that resurface throughout the poem by analyzing Helen’s symptoms. In addition, I explain in what way H.D. connected these memories to Helen’s trauma (cf. 4.1) and to each other.

In Helen in Egypt, Theseus compares Helen’s psyche to a web of traumatic memories that are all connected in some way: “my Psyche, disappear into the web,/ the shell, re-integrate,/ nor fear to recall” (Doolittle 170). Indeed, Helen understands that the traumatic content in her brain forms a complicated network of (Edmunds 478):

the million personal things,

things remembered, forgotten,

remembered again, assembled

and re-assembled in different order

as thoughts and emotions

(Doolittle 289)

In fact, there is one important traumatic memory which constantly reappears throughout the poem; that of Helen’s meeting with Achilles on a desolate beach in the Egyptian afterlife. When Achilles recognizes Helen, he tries to strangle her (Doolittle 16-17). This memory is the first to resurface and can be linked to all the other traumatic memories that Helen is faced with throughout the poem. It appears to Helen in the form of a hallucination: “I did not know why/ (in dream or in trance)/ God had summoned me hither” (Doolittle 10). Helen has no control over this memory of Achilles: “he comes, he goes” (Doolittle 11, 29), which reappears literally, etched on her mind: “few were the words we said,/ but the words are graven on stone,/ minted on gold, stamped upon lead;” (Doolittle 11). What is more, it cannot be situated in time. As Helen starts to hallucinate, the past tense changes into the present tense:
“but we were not, we are not shadows;/ as we walk, heel and sole/ leave our sandal-prints in
the sand” (Doolittle 6). Helen relives the moment as if it were happening now, continuing into
the present (Laub 69): “still I feel the tightening muscles./ the taut sinews quiver” (Doolittle
8). This makes it hard for her to decide whether it really happened or still needs to happen:

for we stare and stare

over the smouldering embers,

and it is undecided yet,

whether Achilles turn and tear

the Circe, the enchantress

(Doolittle 269).

The memory also demonstrates the conflicting feelings of the trauma patient, who wants to
forget and remember at the same time:

_O Thetis, O sea-mother,_

I prayed, as he clutched my throat

with his fingers’ remorseless steel,

_let me go out, let me forget,_

_let me be lost . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . ._

_O Thetis, O sea-mother_, I prayed under his cloak,

_let me remember, let me remember,_

_forever, this Star in the night._

(Doolittle 17)
Finally, this scene shows the differences in symptomatology between men and women. Men experience more rage while women more often ask people for help (Christiansen et al. 113). Indeed, while Achilles is choking Helen, she prays to Thetis to help her.

The significance of the scene on the beach can be explained in relation to the other memories it provokes. First, the scene excites the memory of the Greek soldiers that died in the war. Helen links Achilles’ anger to the fact that he holds her responsible for the deaths of his legions: “it was they who struck,/ as the flint, the spark/ of his anger, ‘no art is beneath your power’” (Doolittle 20). Indeed, Achilles mentions this in the scene itself as well, again comparing the soldiers to a lotus-flower: “you stole the chosen, the flower/ of all-time, of all-history” (Doolittle 17) (cf. 4.1.3). Moreover, Helen believes that it was the host of spirits of the Greek soldiers that protected her during Achilles’ attack: “it was they, the Holocaust,/ a host, a cloud or a veil// who encircled, who sheltered me,/ when his fingers closed on my throat;” (Doolittle 38). Achilles’ legions are literally resurrected “as phantom agents of love and peace” (Edmunds 483). His anger turns into love when he realizes that they are both “home-sick for what has been” (Doolittle 46), i.e. they both lost their ‘child’, the host (cf. 4.1.2). In fact, Achilles forgives Helen by making love to her, thus creating another child; Euphorion8 (Edmunds 483). This explains Helen’s ambiguity towards the memory of the Greek soldiers:

I do not want to hear of Agamemnon

and the Trojan Walls,

I do not want to recall

shield, helmet, greaves,

though he wore them,

for that, I might recall them,

being part of his first

---

8 According to the myth, Euphorion was the son of Helen and Achilles, conceived in the afterlife (Timmer 232).
unforgettable anger;

I do not want to forget his anger,
not only because it brought Helen
to sleep in his arms,

but because he was, in any case,
defeated; if he strangled her
and flung her to the vultures,

still, he had lost
and they had lost –
the war-Lords of Greece.

(Doolittle 18-19)

On the one hand, Helen does not want to look back at the painful memory of the Greek soldiers who died. On the other hand, she wants to remember them because they brought her redemption (Edmunds 475). This symptom proves that the memory of the host is traumatic. In addition, Helen is unsure if the Trojan War was real (Edmunds 476): “‘it was he, Amen dreamed of all this/ phantasmagoria of Troy” (Doolittle 17). Moreover, Helen is hypersensitive to triggers recalling the memory of the host, e.g. the lotus-flower hieroglyph:
“what power drew them to me?/ a hieroglyph, repeated endlessly,// upon the walls, the pillars,/ the thousand-petalled lily;” (Doolittle 21). In sum, the memory of the host, which is clearly traumatic, is linked to the first scene of Achilles’ anger.

Second, the scene on the beach excites Helen’s memory of Clytaemnestra. In fact, it “is as if Helen wanted to recall her immediate “family,” as protection or balance” (Doolittle 68) against the overwhelming memory of the host. Helen’s memory of her sister is traumatic. Like the memory of the host, it is triggered by a picture, i.e. an image of Isis and Nephthys on a pillar (Doolittle 68), which invokes a hallucination: “I wander alone and entranced”
What is more, Helen’s sense of time is disturbed: “I do not know when or whether in time or in timeless-time/ Orestes married my daughter;” (Doolittle 70). She even doubts that these events ever happened: “do I myself invent// this tale of my sister’s fate?” (Doolittle 69). Once more, Helen has an ambiguous attitude towards this memory, a symptom of trauma. She even personifies her sister as the two conflicting qualities she feels when she thinks of her: “I will call my sister Nepenthe,/ forgetfulness of the past,/ remembrance of childhood together;” (Doolittle 72). Although Helen has happy memories of her childhood with her sister, she wants to forget the bad ones associated with Clytaemnestra’s dark fate. As I have explained in 4.1.2, Helen identifies with Clytaemnestra’s loss of Iphigenia. Moreover, she also empathizes with Clytaemnestra’s killer, Orestes, who after all also suffered from the loss of his mother. Helen wants Orestes and her daughter Hermione to be married, since they both lost their mother. Their unison through marriage shows that love can come out of loss. When Theseus claims that Pyrrhus, Achilles’ son, was married to Hermione, Helen’s reaction is very defensive: “Pyrrhus, his son, married your daughter;/ ‘Hermione? never, it was Orestes loved her,/ the son of Clytaemnestra, my sister’” (Doolittle 173). What is more, Helen wants to fill the hole that Clytaemnestra left:

but what of Orestes,

my sister’s son, my son,

driven by Fate,

pursued by the Furies?

has he found his mother?

will he ever find her?

can I take her place?

(Doolittle 91)

By taking Clytaemnestra’s place, Helen gets a second chance to be a mother. In fact, she is trying to make up for abandoning her own daughter. Here lies the connection with the memory of the Greek soldiers: by creating another child with Achilles, Helen tries to
counterbalance their loss. This shows that traumatic memories form a web with intricate connections.

The initial scene is also associated with Helen’s memory of Paris. It is only when Helen arrives at the island of Leuké that she “reminds us of her “first rebellion” and the so far suppressed memory and unspoken name – Paris” (Doolittle 109). The memory of Paris is triggered by the hallucinated character of Paris who says: “we will hide,\(//\) (…) now it is dark upon Leuké;\(//\) (…) we will hide among the apple-trees . . .” (Doolittle 117). This reminds Helen of the time she ran away with Paris, who told her that they would hide in Troy. The memory is traumatic because this event shattered her identity as a mother, wife and Spartan and faced Helen with the horrors of the Trojan War. When Helen tells Theseus the story of what happened in Troy, she is “half in a trance” (Doolittle 171). Theseus notices that she trembles (Doolittle 170), a bodily symptom of trauma (Edmunds 474). Helen is also feeling numb: “do I care? I am past caring” (Doolittle 176). She is unsure as to whether she was ever in Troy: “did I ever stand on the ramparts?” (Doolittle 224). In addition, she is torn between the need to remember what happened in Troy with Paris, and the need to forget everything: “teach me to remember,/ teach me not to remember” (Doolittle 186). When Helen first mentions Paris, she insists on the fact that he was abandoned by his mother as a child\(^9\): “he was banished, as his mother dreamed/ that he (Paris) would cause war,/ and war came” (Doolittle 110). In a way, Helen also banished Paris from “Pallinode” (Edmunds 487). When he returns in “Leuké”, she appoints herself as his substitute mother, stating that he was “engendered under the cloak/ of the new-mortal Achilles” (Doolittle 185) that night on the beach:

he of the House of the Enemy,

Troy’s last king (this is no easy thing
to explain, this subtle genealogy)

is Achilles’ son, he is incarnate

Helen-Achilles; he, my first lover,

---

\(^9\) Hecuba, Paris’ mother, dreamt that her son would destroy his father’s kingdom. When Paris was still a baby, his parents left him on Mount Ida to die (Dowden and Livingstone 31)
was created by my last

(Doolittle 185)

This proves that Helen’s traumatic memories form a pattern; in each of them, she fulfils the role of mother to an unfortunate child.

The memory of Hecuba’s abandonment of Paris triggers Helen’s memory of her abandonment of Hermione:

now I remember, I remember

Paris before Egypt, Paris after;

I remember all that went before,

Sparta; autumn? Summer?

the fragrant bough? Fruit ripening

on a wall? The ships at anchor?

I had all that, everything,

my Lord’s devotion, my child

(…)

how could I remember all that?

Zeus, our-father was merciful.

(Doolittle 227-228)

When this scene reappears, Helen has no sense of time anymore; she does not know whether she left her daughter in autumn or in summer. She is confused about the setting of the scene as well, hence all the questions. Moreover, Helen is baffled that she finally remembers this. While the memory is painful, she is also grateful that she remembers her daughter again. Once more, this illustrates the ambiguity towards traumatic memories. This memory can be considered the nucleus of Helen’s trauma. Even if there are some other traumatic memories
that resurface later than this one, every layer of traumatic content is in some way connected to the loss of the bond between mother and child.

After the return of the early memories of leaving with Paris for Troy and abandoning Hermione, Helen has a hallucination about her life in Troy during the war:

I am called back to the Walls
to find the answer,
to wander as in a maze
(Theseus’ Labyrinth),
to explore each turn of the street,
for a way to the ships and the wharves
(Doolittle 232)

Just as Theseus explored every corner of the Labyrinth to find the Minotaur, Helen now tries to uncover every detail of her traumatic memories in order to find the ‘hidden beast’ of her trauma. Her hallucination of being in the streets of Troy quickly prompts the memory of Hector’s death, which was a symbol of the Trojan losses (cf. 4.1.2). Instead of calling him Hector, she instinctively empathizes with the mother who lost her son: “Hecuba’s lordly son/has been slain by Achilles” (Doolittle 234). Again, the same theme is repeated. Helen is so consumed with the knowledge of his death that she cannot remember what she did at that moment: “do I run? do I fly?” (Doolittle 234). She mixes up time: “was it seven years, was it a day/? I can not remember . . .” (Doolittle 235). Helen wants to commit suicide, since she cannot live with the blame for all the casualties anymore:

I would leap from the Walls,

---

10 The Minotaur was half bull, half man. The creature was locked up in the Labyrinth of Crete. Every year, seven Athenian girls and boys had to be sacrificed to it. Theseus, son of King Aegeus of Athens, went to Crete, where he fell in love with Ariadne, the daughter of King Minos. She helped him to slay the Minotaur by giving him a ball of thread that enabled him to find his way out of the Labyrinth again. Theseus succeeded at his quest, deserted Ariadne and forgot to replace the ship’s black sails, signifying his death to his father, who then killed himself (Graf 51).
but a sentry snatches my sleeve,

dragging me back – what curse

can equal this curse?

how answer his scorn?

“for this is Hector dead,

was Hector born to be conquered

by harlots and thieves,

…

but we will have no decadent lover

for king, none sick of a fever,

a Grecian harlot brings

to weaken the fibre,

to melt the sinews of war

(Doolittle 235)

Helen is again portrayed as a “harlot” who draws men to war and death with her sexuality. She is accused of melting the Trojans’ sinews, used as bowstrings, which dooms them to lose the war. The reference to the “sinews” also connects this memory to the scene on the beach, where Helen felt “the taut sinews quiver” (Doolittle 8), i.e. those of Achilles’ heel. Indeed, because this memory is so painful, Helen is drawn back to the scene on the beach, where she associates the shells on the beach to the battlefields scattered with bones: “I only remember the shells,/ whiter than bone,/ on the ledge of a desolate beach” (Doolittle 235). Since Achilles freed her from blame by making love to her, Helen naturally resorts to this memory when she is accused of Hector’s death.
Immediately after the memory of Hector’s death, Helen remembers Achilles’ death. She experiences complete confusion of time: “[I] had waited the endless years,/ was it seven years?/ was it a day?” (Doolittle 236). What is more, she is entirely numb to everything that is going on around her:

I stood at the stair-head,

the famous spiral-stair,

and heard their shouting

but I did not care,

for Achilles was dead;

how did they force the gate?

how did they fire the Towers?

that was nothing to me

(Doolittle 236)

This is one of the most traumatizing moments to Helen, because the death of Achilles symbolizes the death of the entire Greek host (cf. 4.1.2). Indeed, when the initial scene of Achilles on the beach reappears shortly after the scene of his death, Helen links the host to Achilles: “I think he remembered them all,/ (when he stooped to gather the sticks)” (Doolittle 238).

The flashback of Achilles on the beach also reveals the last layer of the traumatic content, i.e. Achilles’ trauma of his mother’s neglect:

I think he remembered everything

in an instantaneous flash,

as he straightened after he flung

the last faggots down
a host of spirits crowded around the fire

but I did not see them;
he could have named them all,
had he paused to remember,

but he only saw the ships
assembled at Aulis,
he only remembered his own ship

that would lead them all,
he only saw an image, a wooden image,
a mermaid, Thetis upon the prow.

(Doolittle 239-240)

In fact, Thetis’ name was already mentioned in the initial scene. When a bird flies over the beach, Helen associates it with the hieroglyph of Isis or Thetis (Doolittle 14). However, Achilles does not immediately remember that Thetis is his mother. In fact, he is completely confused: “where are we? who are you?/ where is this desolate coast?/ who am I? am I a ghost?” (Doolittle 16). When Helen says he is the “child of Thetis” (Doolittle 16), Achilles is enraged and tries to strangle her. When Helen relives a chain of Achilles' memories with him, she is able to explain his anger. It was not only excited by the loss of his legions, but also by his frustration towards his mother, who forgot to dip his heel in the immortalizing waters of the Styx, which resulted in his death. Again, Helen wants to “love him, as Thetis, his mother” (Doolittle 14) to make up for her own negligence of her child. Even though the memories Helen witnesses are Achilles’, they are traumatic for her as well; she has a virtual experience (cf. 2.2). Like her own memories, Achilles’ memories appear to her in hallucinations; in a “fever, awake or asleep” (Doolittle 258). If Achilles is “numb with a memory” (Doolittle
256), i.e. the memory of Thetis, Helen is indifferent to everything that happened as well: “it was all nothing” (Doolittle 258). Again, she is unsure if the memories are real. After all, she is “a phantom Helen/ and he was Achilles’ ghost” (Doolittle 263).

In conclusion, throughout *Helen in Egypt*, new traumatic memories constantly resurface. Together, they form a complex network with one common theme; the loss of a child. What is more, every memory is connected to the traumatic event that happened last of all; the scene of Achilles and Helen on a beach in the afterlife.

### 4.3 Healing process

Since trauma is devastating to the patient’s sense of self, his/her identity needs to be reconstructed in order to recover from the trauma. Freud believed that uncontrollably recurring memories can be halted by means of a ‘talking cure’; turning them into narrative form (Freud 30). Modern trauma theories still claim the repetition of traumatic memories can be stopped by telling a logical and completed story about the event (Caruth 153). Moreover, they emphasize the important role of the listener in the healing process. The listener needs to create a safe environment for the patient so that they can both face the terror of the traumatic event (Laub 69-70). During the conversation, the listener’s presence needs to be subtle; the patient’s wish to continue the story or remain silent should be respected (Laub 71). However, the listener is required to guide the conversation so that the different fragments of the story can be turned into an intelligible whole (Laub 71). In *Helen in Egypt*, Helen had already lost her identity as a mother, as a wife and as a Spartan before the war. In addition, she was faced with the deaths of thousands of soldiers and of her sister. Moreover, she was blamed for the Trojan War. In this chapter, I analyze Helen’s healing process as portrayed by H.D. by chronologically identifying the different steps she goes through. The poem is divided into three parts, which constitute “a linear journey through space and time and an inner journey into the layers of dreams and memory” (Friedman 377).

#### 4.3.1 “Pallinode”

The first step towards Helen’s recovery is the redefinition of her innocence (Friedman 376). Indeed, “Pallinode” is a “song against” the dominant tradition that puts the blame on Helen (Friedman 376). In the beginning, she finds herself in the temple of Zeus in Egypt, where “there is peace/ for Helena, Helen hated of all Greece” (Doolittle 3). At this moment, Helen is still certain of her innocence, which she explains to imaginary Greek soldiers:

> Alas, my brothers,
Helen did not walk
upon the ramparts,

she whom you cursed
was but the phantom and the shadow thrown
of a reflection;

(Doolittle 5)

Helen believes the gods put a phantom Helen in Troy and transposed the real Helen to Egypt. However, her “peace of certain innocence is shattered by the sudden appearance of Achilles” (Friedman 378), who blames Helen for the deaths of his soldiers (Edmunds 480):

Helena, cursed of Greece,

I have seen you upon the ramparts,

no art is beneath your power,

you stole the chosen, the flower

of all-time, of all-history,

my children, my legions;

for you were the ships burnt

(Doolittle 16-17)

Moreover, he blames her for his own death, stating her seductive glance distracted him from fastening the greave that protected his heel (Friedman 386): “I stooped to fasten a greave/ that was loose at the ankle,// when she turned/ (…) and her eyes met mine;” (Doolittle 54); “was it a trivial thing/ to have bartered the world/ for a glance?” (Doolittle 62). Achilles’ anger makes Helen recognizes that others do not perceive her as innocent: “She knows what the Greeks think of her” (Doolittle 15). Indeed, in order to “construct a new selfhood”, Helen must “come to terms with the identity created by the perceptions and expectations of the dominant
tradition” (Friedman 376). In the eyes of the Greeks, she is evil: “O Helen, Helen, Daemon that thou art,/ we will be done forever/ with this charm, this evil philtre,/this curse of Aphrodite;” (Doolittle 4), a “wanton” (Doolittle 50) who “has lost caste” (Doolittle 15). With Helen’s recognition of this dominant perception comes her desire to prove her innocence and cast off the image projected onto her: “I must fight for Helena” (Doolittle 37). However, her certainty of never having been in Troy has turned into doubt. When Achilles asks her: “Helena, which was the dream,/ which was the veil of Cytheraea?” (Doolittle 36), Helen cannot answer the question (Friedman 378); she does not know if the real Helen was in Egypt or in Troy. As I have explained in 4.1.3, this question will never be resolved. Indeed, for H.D., Helen’s innocence does not depend on whether or not she was in Troy. In any case, Helen goes on a quest to identify the causes of the Trojan War. Her mental journey starts with a contemplation of women’s position in the masculine culture of war (Darling 1):

does he dare remember
the unreality of war,
in this enchanted place?

his fortress and his tower
and his throne
were built for man, alone;

no echo or soft whisper
in those halls,
no iridescent sheen,

no iris-flower,
no sweep of strings,
no answering laughter,
but the trumpet’s call;

(Doolittle 31)

Helen associates women’s values with “love, birth, regeneration, growth, peace, order, joy, and the fertile happiness symbolized by flowers, harvest, light, laughter, music and “shimmering” glances” (Friedman 380). The masculine world is then the “negation of life and love” (Friedman 380), “associated with darkness, disorder, steel, iron, weapons, clanging sounds, fortresses, ice, cold, might-makes-right morality, hate, pride, will, tyranny, rape and above all death and war” (Friedman 380-381). War seems unreal to Helen because it denies the needs of half of the population; women are oppressed. Achilles, as the superior warrior amongst the Greeks, is the embodiment of this masculine world:

I ask not, nor care to know

…

whether he changed, as Circe changed,

men into swine;

whether he flouted his power,

while women fell, as the scythe

of his visored glance swept them over;

whether he laughed as they fell;

whether he found, here and there,

a girl for a change in pleasure,

when weary after the fray

his elect slept in their tents;
whether here and there he stole a child,
here and there, everywhere,
luring youth into battle;
whether he cheated, he lied –
(he was brave? an immortal
to challenge mortality?)
whether he razed a city,
a woman, or wore a crown

unearned by his merit –
he drew as a magnet drew
the ore from the rock?
gold from dross?
dead from life?
was War inevitable?
(Doolittle 34)

Achilles is shown in a very bad light; he causes death all around him as naturally as a magnet that draws ore from a rock. He lies and cheats, abuses women, leads their children to death and turns civilized men into killing machines. Helen suggests that Achilles does not deserve the label of hero. She presents women as victims of the masculine war culture. They are completely objectified; to Achilles, a city and a woman can both be ‘razed’ to the ground. Moreover, he takes pleasure out of their misery.
Even if Helen presents the man’s world as destructive and oppressing the peaceful woman’s world, she is not entirely convinced of her own innocence yet. She is still concerned with the question of her presence in Troy. She wants to “ask Achilles if he recognizes in her the Helen of his first accusation” (Doolittle 47), i.e. if the real Helen in the afterlife is the same he saw on the ramparts. Achilles admits that he blamed her because he “was afraid of evil,/ in an evil place” (Doolittle 48) and is thus uncertain of her guilt. Since Helen left her traditional role, she was considered evil and frightened him. Achilles tells her his version of what happened in Troy. He confirms that the Greeks blamed her, asking themselves: “would an arrow pierce/ a Daemon’s heart? A devil?” (Doolittle 50). He associates masculine values with war and death as well; calling the Greek soldiers “an iron-ring/ whom Death made stronger” (Doolittle 55). Achilles defends his inclination towards destruction and his treatment of women by explaining to Helen that they are “not freak accidents of history; they are part of a patriarchal chain structuring a social system” (Friedman 383):

The Command was bequest from the past,
from father to son,
the Command bound past to the present

and the present to aeons to come,
the Command was my father, my brother,
my lover, my God;

(Doolittle 61).

The clash between the man’s world and the woman’s world is apparent when Achilles tells Helen about his death. At that moment, the masculine iron-ring was absent: “but when the arrow pierced my heel,// they were not there;” (Doolittle 55). In fact, the man’s world was defeated by Helen, who distracted him from tying his boots (Friedman 386):

She is stronger than God, they say,

She is stronger than Fate
and a chaffing greave,
loose at the ankle,

but is She stronger, I asked,

stronger than Hercules?

for I felt Herculean strength

return when I saw Her face;

(Doolittle 62)

Ironically, it is Achilles’ love for Helen that caused his death. Helen had already said this in the very beginning of the poem: “some said a Bowman from the Walls/ let fly the dart, some said it was Apollo,/ but I, Helena, know it was Love’s arrow” (Doolittle 9). She states that “it was God’s plan/ to melt the icy fortress of the soul,/ and free the man” (Doolittle 10). This shows Helen in a completely different way. She is not a helpless victim anymore, but is to blame for Achilles death. However, his death is presented as a victory of the woman’s world over the man’s world. It is a positive change which frees Achilles from the lure of war and destruction (Friedman 386). Although women are powerless victims in the masculine war culture on earth, their culture of love and peace rules in the afterlife. Even if Helen no longer feels bad about Achilles’ death, she still carries the guilt of the deaths of the Greek soldiers. Before Achilles leaves, he asks once more which of the Helen's was the real one: “how are Helen in Egypt/ and Helen upon the ramparts,/ together yet separate?” (Doolittle 63). So Helen explores her memory for traces of her innocence.

The first thing that comes to mind is the story of her sister, Clytaemnestra. Again, she notices the pattern of oppression of women in war. Women need to produce life so that it can be taken away in war. Their sons are led to death while their daughters are (ab)used: “half of our life was given/ to another hierarchy;/ our children were children/ of the Lords of the world and Troy” (Doolittle 71). Indeed, Clytaemnestra’s son Orestes was blinded by hate and killed his own mother, while Clytaemnestra’s daughter Iphigenia was to be killed by Agamemnon, her father, for the purpose of war. In Helen’s eyes, Clytaemnestra symbolizes the woman’s world. Before Agamemnon’s attempted murder, she embodied the female values of peace, love and innocence (Friedman 383): “She was a bride, my sister,/ with a bride’s innocence,/ she was a
lover of flowers” (Doolittle 74). However, “a war-Lord blighted that peace” (Doolittle 74). Clytaemnestra was opposed by the man’s world, bent on death and destruction. Achilles plays an important part in Clytaemnestra’s story. He was the groom promised to Iphigenia. At first, Helen displays anger towards him: “it was Achilles, Achilles/ who sanctioned the sacrifice,/ the gift of his bride to Death” (Doolittle 81). However, she admits that she cannot judge him for this deed. As a woman, she is an outsider: “what did we know of any/ of our Lord’s activities?/ we lived alone and apart.” (Doolittle 84). Eventually, Helen realizes that Achilles had no choice; he would have been killed as well if he had opposed the plan of sacrificing Iphigenia: “the Myrmidons, his own men,/ would have slain him// had he attempted to thwart/ the prophecy and the command” (Doolittle 87). This is a lack in Friedman’s analysis; it does not recognize that women are not the only victims of the warrior cult. Men are at a disadvantage too. Blinded by their desire to kill, they do not realize that they are trapped in their own cycle of death and destruction. Although they have power over women, they are powerless against their own culture. Helen does not blame individual men or hate all men. Rather, she disapproves of the masculine war culture. She wants to replace this patriarchal culture by a more peaceful one, so “that enchantment may find a place// where desolation ruled,/ and a warrior race,/ Agamemnon and Menelaus” (Doolittle 90). The story of Clytaemnestra’s fate is so important for Helen’s recovery because it enables her to visualize “her own fate in terms of that of her twin-sister” (Doolittle 74); they were both victims. Helen rediscovers her innocence by proving that war comes from masculine power structures which oppress women. Free from Greek society’s image of women as either chaste or evil, she has constructed a new womanhood that revolves around life and love. At the end of “Pallinode”, Thetis confirms Helen’s innocence, stating that “The Lords have passed a decree,/ the Lords of the Hierarchy,/ that Helen be worshipped” (Doolittle 95). Helen is the incarnation of love: “they shall honour the name of Love” (Doolittle 95). Since love is directly opposed to war and death, Helen could not have caused the Trojan War. This recognition of Helen’s innocence means that “Helena has withstood/ the rancour of time and of hate” (Doolittle 69), i.e. the false identity of perpetrator and whore given to her by Ancient Greek society. At the beginning of “Leuké”, the second part of the poem, Helen is able to say with certainty: “I am not nor mean to be/ the Daemon they made of me” (Doolittle 109). She is no longer affected by other people’s views: “let them name and re-name Helen,// (…) they will never understand/ how, a second time, I am free;” (Doolittle 110). Indeed, she is free to construct her own identity, and has already regained some power that was taken away from her.
In “Pallinode”, another part of Helen’s trauma is resolved, i.e. that of Clytemnestra’s death. In the beginning of “Pallinode”, Helen is still unsure of her guilt. If she was the cause of the Trojan War, Clytemnestra’s death was an indirect consequence of Helen’s deeds. Subsequently, Helen does not understand why she should “be given/ peace through eternity;/ and Clytemnestra doomed,// and slain by her son, Orestes” (Doolittle 69). She wants to trade places with her sister in order to redeem herself: “I would change my place for hers/ wherever she is, O Father” (Doolittle 68), and to “grant Clytemnestra peace” (Doolittle 86). After Thetis confirmed Helen’s innocence, the goddess explains why Clytemnestra’s fate was a dark one:

Clytemnestra struck with her mind,
with the Will-to-Power,
her Lord returned with Cassandra,

and she had a lover;
does it even the Balance
if a wife repeats a husband’s folly?

never; the law is different;
if a woman fights,
she must fight by stealth,

with invisible gear;
no sword, no dagger, no spear
in a woman’s hands

can make wrong, right;
(Doolittle 97)
According to Thetis, a woman cannot show her power in the same way as a man. When a conflict arises, women do not use violence. Instead, they use their mind. Thetis’ representation of women is the complete opposite of the dominant view. If women were used for politics, they could never participate because they were not valued for their intelligence. In Thetis’ view however, women are the intelligent ones while men behave like animals and kill each other without thinking. Clytaemnestra was killed “because she became her opposite in the defence of the woman’s world” (Friedman 388); she was influenced by the man’s world of violence and death. Just like Helen, she is not only a victim of the war culture, but also a defender of women’s values. Only, where Helen used the power of love to free Achilles, Clytaemnestra used death. However, Clytaemnestra is forgiven. In death, she is absorbed in the woman’s world again, reunited with Astarte, an Egyptian mother goddess who also incarnates war (Remler 21):

God willed that Helena
be joined to Achilles,
that Clytaemnestra
be called to another Star,
Ashtoreth, Ishtar,
Astarte . . .
(Doolittle 102)

This helps Helen to overcome the death of her sister. Moreover, Thetis teaches her to accept fate. Just as Achilles had an honourable death and Agamemnon did not, fate is sometimes arbitrary:

*when they reach a certain degree,*

*they are one, alike utterly,*

though Achilles woke from the dark,

and her Lord was cast
into the lowest depth
of Cimmerian night;
yet even Cimmerian embers,
burnt out, extinguished and lost,
will flame anew if God
wills to re-kindled the spark;

(Doolittle 102)

In any case, Helen “can not return to the past// nor stay the sun in his course” (Doolittle 103). Thetis advises her to stop trying to look for reasons because fate cannot be changed and Clytaemnestra has found peace:

the painted script,
the scroll, the hieroglyph
is written clear,

the sail is set,
the ship waits in the harbour;
grieve not for Clytaemnestra,

for the Fates
have woven royal purple for her bed,
have un-crowned her unhappy head;

she sleeps, call not, awake
no soul to doom

of old remembered hates;

(Doolittle 105)

Finally, Helen also overcomes the trauma of the loss of the host of Greek soldiers in “Pallinode”. As I have explained in 4.2, when Achilles first strangled her on the beach and blamed her for this loss, she denied that the Trojan War had ever happened, stating that “it was dream and a phantasy” (Doolittle 17). Later, she acknowledges their deaths, without addressing the question of her guilt: “he had lost/ and they had lost --/ the war-Lords of Greece” (Doolittle 19). When Helen accepts the dominant view of her guilt, she takes responsibility for the host: “they were mine, not his,/ the unnumbered host” (Doolittle 25), which results in her identification as Isis, the mother of the host, Horus (cf. 4.1.2). She then states that it was the host who protected her from Achilles’ attack: “did he feel the invisible host/ surrounding and helping me?” (Doolittle 40). The Greek soldiers, who hated Helen during the war, have come to love their mother-figure in death. This is why Helen is “never unmindful of the Child,/ Aphrodite sent,// Love begotten of War” (Doolittle 43). Indeed, as a mother, Helen again defends the woman’s world, who in death frees the soldiers from their own destructive nature. The host’s forgiveness resulted in Achilles’ forgiveness, which was an important step for Helen to overcome their loss. In the end, Thetis reassures Helen that the host has found peace: “the incomparable host/ with Helen and Achilles// are not dead, not lost” (Doolittle 107). Even if they are killed, they are reunited with the life-affirming woman’s world in the afterlife. This results in Helen’s acceptance of this traumatic event.

In conclusion, in “Pallinode”, Helen is able to overcome three important parts of her trauma. First, she casts off society’s dual vision of women as either chaste or evil and reconstructs a new womanhood centred on life and love. This enables her to see both Clytaemnestra and herself as victims of the masculine warrior cult, as well as defenders of woman’s values. This allows Helen to overcome her sister’s death. In addition, she recognizes that men are victims of their own culture as well. Helen accepts their deaths, which free them and unite them with the woman’s world of love.
4.3.2 “Leuké”

As soon as Helen casts off the image of perpetrator/whore projected onto her and realizes her dual identity as victim/defender, she is able to remember that she left Sparta with Paris. In fact, this was her “first rebellion” (Doolittle 109) against the patriarchal views of the man’s world that had resulted in her marriage with Menelaus (Friedman 391). On Leuké, Helen “would reconstruct her Greek past” (Doolittle 112) and reconcile her fragmented personality. In the beginning of “Leuké”, just as in “Pallinode”, Helen is at peace with herself: “the horns of rancour and hatred/ were gone – Troy? Greece?/ they were one and I was one” (Doolittle 116). However, that peace quickly dissolves when Paris suddenly appears and “in his delirium sees Helen as he saw her for the last time” (Doolittle 123). Paris states that she died in Troy: “I am the first in all history/ to say, she died, died, died/ when the Walls fell” (Doolittle 131). On the one hand, this confirms Helen’s presence in Troy. Even if it no longer affects Helen’s conviction of her innocence, it confuses her about her identity as a Spartan or Trojan. On the other hand, Helen is now associated with death, which contradicts the fact that she is the goddess of love (Friedman 392) (cf. 4.3.1). In addition, Paris claims that the young Helen in Troy “is a vibrant, violent Helen” (Doolittle 125): “so you raged;/ even Oenone’s later,/ was a lesser anger” (Doolittle 126). This connects Helen to the values of the man’s world, which is hard to reconcile with the peacefulness she displayed in “Pallinode”. Moreover, Paris reminds her of the time she promised him to stay in Troy:

where you swore

never, never to return

(“return the wanton to Greece”),

where we swore together

defiance of Achilles

and the thousand spears

(Doolittle 142)

In fact, with this vow of loyalty to Paris, Helen renounced her identity as a Spartan. Paris hated the Greeks: “you feel in me even now, the shadow, the prescience,/ envy, hatred, fear of
the Greeks” (Doolittle 143). In addition, Paris tells Helen that Achilles never loved her (Doolittle 144), thus denying that the love of the woman’s world prevails in the afterlife, that her innocence was recognized by Achilles and the Greek soldiers, and that they accepted her as a Spartan again (cf. 4.3.1). Helen is now completely confused about who she is and leaves Paris.

She arrives at Theseus’ place, “baffled and buffeted and very tired” (Doolittle 151). Being older than Helen, Theseus is a kind of father figure, modelled after Freud (Edmunds 471). Indeed, Theseus serves the role of psychoanalyst in Helen’s healing process; he is the listener to which Helen talks about her fragmented traumatic past. When Helen arrives, he assures her he will do her no harm: “do not fear, I will not immolate you/ on an altar” (Doolittle 151). Even though Theseus has long ago kidnapped Helen to be his child bride (Doolittle 147), this statement shows that he no longer agrees with the treatment of women in Greek patriarchal society. In fact, Theseus has an outspoken feminine side, mothering Helen: “there – there – let the fire cheer you; // will you choose from the cedar-chest there,/ your own fleece-lined shoes?/ or shall I choose for you?” (Doolittle 152). As a psychoanalyst, he is trying to create a safe environment for Helen so that she can tell her traumatic story. Helen’s suppressed emotions finally come to the surface: “all, all the flowers/ of Enna are in your tears;/ why do you weep, Helen?” (Doolittle 151). She can now start to talk: “together they will forget and together they will remember” (Doolittle 153). She remembers how she longed to go back to Sparta when she was kidnapped by Theseus. Indeed, it is “the child Helen who says, ‘I wanted to come home.’” (Doolittle 153). Theseus remembers how this young Helen wanted to free the birds from the nets of his huntsman. As a child, she was already defending life, the woman’s world: “—that is Love” (Doolittle 154). However, instead of ‘coming home’ again to the peaceful Greece of her childhood, she has “found Paris” (Doolittle 153), who confused her about her identity, associating her with death. Helen is confronted with “the paradox of the years” (Doolittle 155). She is confused about her identity as a person: is she Trojan or Spartan, does she personify love or death, is she “the kidnapped child bride of Theseus; Helen, the wife and mother in Sparta; Helen Dendritis in springtime love with Paris in Troy; (…) Helen, the older (perhaps even dead) lover of Achilles” (Friedman 390)? Theseus advises Helen to try to recall every little detail of the events, in order to reconstruct a completed and logical story. He compares the scattered fragments of memory that are left after a traumatic event to the objects washed ashore after a shipwreck:

    remember these small reliques,
as on a beach, you search
for a pearl, a bead,
a comb, a cup, a bowl
half-filled with sand,
after a wreck.
(Doolittle 164)

When Helen starts to talk about the Greek host and Achilles, Theseus notices that her emotional intensity is too high in order to present an objective story of the traumatic events. It is “too great a suspense to endure, too high the arrow, too taut the bow” (Doolittle 161). As is required of a good listener, he addresses this aspect of bewilderment and “as if to reassure, (…) Theseus tells her his own story, and to allay her fears of “the Towers and the blackened Walls,” recalls his own primeval terror” (Doolittle 167), i.e. the Minotaur. By exposing his own trauma to Helen, Theseus becomes the patient for a while. In fact, when H.D. underwent psychoanalysis with Freud, she “perceived herself being a peer or an equal” (Darling 9). Therefore, she “depicts Helen in similarly egalitarian manner” (Darling 9). This proves the fact that Theseus no longer agrees with the values of the man’s world, but respects women and views them as equals. Theseus assures Helen that “there is nothing to fear” (Doolittle 166), since the events are not happening right now: “you are neither there nor here” (Doolittle 166). Indeed, trauma patients relive the traumatic events as if they were continuing in the present, which is frightening. Theseus emphasizes that she is free to do as she pleases: “remember if you wish to remember, or forget . . .” (Doolittle 171). However, when Helen resumes her story to talk about Achilles, he immediately interrupts her, which does not suit his role as a listener. He does not understand why she idolizes Achilles so much when he treated women so badly. For example, Achilles’ ghost demanded the sacrifice of Polyxena, a Trojan princess. He left his pregnant wife Deidamia in Scyros to fight in the Trojan War. However, Helen states that she is “past caring” (Doolittle 176). Indeed, she had already discovered that Achilles was another victim of the masculine warrior cult (cf. 4.3.1). Paris’ arrow had released him by uniting him with Helen, goddess of love.
The fact that death can bring love makes Helen wonder:

O, the rage of the sea,

the thunder of battle,

shouting and the Walls

and the arrows; O, the beauty of arrows,

each bringing surcease, release:

do I love War?

is this Helena?

(Doolittle 177)

As Paris had already indicated, the youthful Helen of Troy was associated with violence and death. Does Helen represent love or death? Is she Spartan or Trojan? Achilles’ lover or Paris’? Helen asks Theseus: “Paris was my youth – don’t you see?/ must youth and maturity quarrel”? (Doolittle 181). She solves the “riddle” (Doolittle 192) of the opposed lovers with “an act of ‘subtle genealogy’” (Edmunds 486), whereby Paris becomes the son of Achilles and Helen:

he of the House of the Enemy,

Troy’s last king (this is no easy thing
to explain, this subtle genealogy)

is Achilles’ son, he is incarnate

Helen-Achilles; he, my first lover,

was created by my last;

(Doolittle 185)
Helen thus reconciles Achilles and Paris, the Trojan and Greek part of her identity. Moreover, Helen associates Achilles with Osiris, god of the underworld, and Paris with Eros, god of love (Doolittle 159). Their reconciliation means that Helen recognizes she does not only represent the woman’s world, but also fits into the man’s world. She sees Achilles as Dis-Hades and herself as Persephone: “I am Koré, Persephone; you said, / did you too seek Persephone’s / drear icy way to Death?/ I found or was found by Dis” (Doolittle 195). Just as Theseus is both the hero that slayed the Minotaur and the nurturer that takes care of Helen, Helen has an androgynous personality (Friedman 399). She has now found the answer to Achilles’ question: “Achilles said, which was the veil,/ which was the dream?/ they were one” (Doolittle 238). Indeed, Helen carries within herself both love and death. However, she does not identify with the useless violence of the man’s world. Rather, she believes that death can lead to the rebirth of love. Her violent part will always be a smaller one, over which she has control; love is her substance, death is her shadow. This is why she also calls Clytaemnestra the “shadow of us all” (Doolittle 2). Her sister represents the dark side that everyone has inside themselves. In addition, Paris and Achilles are symbolized as seasons, each representing a stage in Helen’s life: “can spring forget winter? never;/ spring may come after” (Doolittle 196). Their reconciliation is also a unison of the different contrasting parts of Helen as a person: child, lover, wife (Friedman 390). Even if Helen links these parts with men, she is “not dependent on those lovers for self-definition” (Friedman 391). Indeed, she could have gone through these stages with a different father, husband, lover, etc. As Theseus explains, Helen’s seemingly opposing characteristics are actually complementary. They meet in Helen as day, night,
as wrong, right,
as dark, light,
as water, fire,
as earth, air,
as storm, calm,
as fruit, flower,
as life, death,

as death, life;
the rose deflowered,
the rose re-born;

Helen in Egypt,
Helen at home,
Helen in Hellas forever.

(Doolittle 190)

Helen, like the sea-god Proteus, “can change her shape” (Doolittle 193) (Friedman 392). She compares her identity to a “crystal”, an “ice-star” (Doolittle 196) with many aspects:

Paris will come back
but as the rose-light,

one segment, separate
from the prismatic seven
of the white crystal;

yes, he will come back,
the crystal will reflect the past
and that present-in-the-past

(Doolittle 204)

Just like her traumatic memories, which continue in the present, Helen considers her past identities to be present; forever a part of herself. Having redefined her identity as Spartan-
Trojan, androgynous goddess of love and of death, and child-wife-lover, Helen is now finally “at peace, she has found the answer, she will rest” (Doolittle 193).

In sum, in “Leuké”, Helen reconstructs her identity as a person, which was shattered because of her trauma. When she left for Troy, everything that previously defined her was gone: she was no longer a Spartan, a wife and a mother. Having cast off the false image that society projected onto her, she is completely confused about who she is. With the help of Theseus, and her own willpower, she recognizes that she does not depend on rigid definitions that dictate one is either X or Y. Instead, she is both Trojan and Spartan, both Theseus’ child bride, Menelaus’ wife, Paris’ and Achilles’ lover, and she identifies both with men’s and women’s values of death and life. Moreover, she recognizes that men are not only cruel killing machines, since Theseus has a loving side that respects women.

4.3.3 “Eidolon”

Helen’s healing process has now almost come to an end. First, she has overcome her guilt together with the loss of the Greek soldiers and her sister by redefining womanhood. Second, she has reconstructed her identity which was completely shattered because she lost all security when she left Sparta. In the last part of the poem, “Eidolon”, there is one more piece of Helen’s trauma that needs to be healed: the loss of her child Hermione. Helen is “called back to Egypt” (Doolittle 208) by “the image or eidolon of Achilles” (Doolittle 208). In fact, it was “Thetis in her guise of mother” (Doolittle 210) who commanded him to bring her to “Formalhaut’s temple” (Doolittle 212), dedicated to Thetis. Indeed, Thetis is a very important link in the chain of Helen’s traumatic recovery; she is the mother goddess with whom Helen identifies. The eidolon of Achilles is soon replaced by the image of Paris, who denigrates Achilles by reminding Helen of the time Thetis decked him “in women’s robe and ornament”, in Scyros11. Paris is trying to protect Helen from Achilles’ death cult, stating that Achilles wanted to sacrifice her as he did with Paris’ sister Polyxena12: “Pluto-Achilles – his is a death-cult/ to drag you further and further underground,/ underneath vault and tomb” (Doolittle 217):

Achilles spoke, Theseus commands me,

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11 According to the myth, an oracle had predicted he would either die young and famous or live a long and unknown life. Thetis hid Achilles on the island of Scyros, disguised as a woman, to protect him from death (Pfeijffer 190).

12 Polyxena was sacrificed by Pyrrhus/Neoptolemus, to appease the ghost of Achilles (Doolittle 218).
but where is he?
do he and I stand over

a new victim?
...
remember my golden sister,
you saw her, you loved her

(Doolittle 219)

What is more, Paris accepts Helen’s reconciliatory family construction, under one condition:

if Achilles is my father
in this new spirit-order,
I will accept the Hero

if you are my mother,
for I, I was left by Hecuba,
like Oedipus to die;

(Doolittle 217)

When Hecuba was pregnant of Paris, she dreamt her son would destroy his father’s kingdom and decided to leave Paris on Mount Ida to die (Dowden and Livingstone 31). Oedipus’ story is very similar. An oracle had declared to his father, Laios, that his son would murder him and marry his mother. One day, Laios was drunk and had intercourse with his wife, Jocasta. When the baby was born, they pierced its ankles and exposed it on Mount Cithairon to die (Apollodorus 105). Paris’ allusion is quite accurate; he was Helen’s lover and killed Achilles. It also implies that Helen left her child that was in need of its mother’s love, which later triggers Helen’s memory of Hermione (cf. infra). When Helen suddenly awakes from this dream of Paris and Achilles, she is completely confused again. Every element of her journey so far resurfaces. She remembers the Amen-temple, her talk with Paris, the scene on the
beach, the “flame over Troy” (Doolittle 221) and her visit to Theseus. Helen starts to wonder: “Why do I call him my son and Achilles’?” (Doolittle 222). In fact, throughout the poem, she has made herself a substitute mother of many abandoned ‘children’, i.e. the host, Orestes, Paris and Achilles (cf. 4.2). She is now determined to “review all the past/ in the new light of a new day” (Doolittle 226).

“For the first time in our sequence, she is in Sparta” (Doolittle 227); she immediately remembers abandoning Hermione (Doolittle 228). However, Helen’s memory of Sparta is very brief; she is “called back to the Walls” (Doolittle 233). As I explained in 4.2, when Helen remembers Hector’s death, she calls him “Hecuba’s lordly son” (Doolittle 234), thus empathizing with the mother who lost her son. This triggers Helen’s memory of Achilles’ death, which she links to the scene on the beach in the afterlife. She now tries to discover the reasons for Achilles’ anger:

he could name Helena

but the other he could not name;

she spoke of the goddess Isis,

and he answered her “Isis,”

but how did she know that her Thetis

(that followed immediately after

he repeated after her, “Isis”),

would brand on his forehead

that name, that the name

and the flame and the fire

would weld him to her

(Doolittle 277-278)
She understands that it had something to do with Thetis, whose name was so painful to Achilles it felt like a brand on his forehead. In fact, Achilles recognized in Helen “some power other than her legendary beauty” (Doolittle 251), i.e. her motherlove, which he associates with Thetis:

it was not that she was beautiful,
true, she stood on the Walls,
taut and indifferent
as the arrows fell;
it was not that she was beautiful,
there were others,
in spite of the legend,
as gracious, as tall;
it was not that she was beautiful,
but he stared and stared
across the charred wood
and the smouldering flame,
till his eyes cleared
and the smoke drifted away.

(Doolittle 251-252)
The fact that Achilles conflates Helen with Thetis is illustrated in the part that follows: “Did her eyes slant in the old way?/ was she Greek or Egyptian?/ (…) she, Empress and lure of the sea” (Doolittle 253). Although the personal pronoun ‘she’ is used to refer to Thetis here,
new antecedent is mentioned, so that the reader at first thinks Achilles is still talking about Helen.

By identifying with Achilles’ trauma, Helen understands the reasons of his anger towards Thetis, i.e. the fact that she forgot to immerse his heel in the Styx, resulting in his death:

   she had promised him immortality
   but she had forgotten to dip the heel
   of the infant Achilles
   into the bitter water,
   Styx, was it?
   O careless, unspeakable mother,
   O Thetis . . .
   so she failed at last

   (Doolittle 254)

Helen’s identification with Achilles was already apparent in “Leuké”, when Theseus noticed Helen’s wounded feet: “your feet are wounded// with this huntsman’s gear;/ who wore these clumsy boots?” (Doolittle 151-152). This is an appropriation of Achilles’ physical trauma; his pierced heel (Edmunds 478). Freud calls this ‘hysterical identification’, i.e. suffering hysterical symptoms on behalf of someone else (Edmunds 478). His concept resembles LaCapra’s ‘vicarious experience’ (125) or complete identification of the listener with the trauma patient (cf. 2.2). The heel is a symbol of both Thetis’ “literal attachment to her child and (…) the limits of that attachment, her forgetfulness” (Edmunds 488). Moreover, it resembles the wounds of another abandoned child; Oedipus’ pierced feet (Edmunds 487). Through her wounds, Helen physically understands Achilles’ pain of losing his mother. What is more, Helen experiences this pain emotionally when she relives with Achilles a chain of memories connected to Thetis. Achilles was raised by the centaur Chiron, who “had trained most of the Greek heroes” (Doolittle 284). Immersed in the warrior cult of the man’s world,
the child missed the love of the woman’s world, which was an important part of him. In the absence of his mother, he idolized her and made a Thetis-doll:

this thing
that worked magic, always answering,
always granting his wish or whim;
he hid it in moss, in straw,
in a hole in the cave-wall
or in the tree by the cave-door,
and stone by fitted stone,
he built her an altar
(Doolittle 284)

When Achilles was older, his mother hid him in Scyros, “entreat the king to instruct him,/ (…) in the laws and the arts of peace” (Doolittle 286). Although Paris uses this anecdote to ridicule Achilles, it illustrates Thetis’ love for Achilles, and his womanly side. However, this part of Achilles was corrupted by “the lure of war” (Doolittle 287) that made him forget his mother. It is only when he is weary of war after the death of Patroclus\textsuperscript{13}, that he remembers her again and entreats her to end the war:

I will re-join the Greeks
and the battle before the gate,

if you promise a swift return,

\textsuperscript{13} Patroclus was Achilles’ best friend and lover. A priest of Apollo had demanded Agamemnon to give him back his daughter Chryseis, a Trojan girl which the Greeks had stolen and given to Agamemnon as a slave. When Agamemnon refused to give her back, the Greeks were hit by the plague. He then gave the girl back to her father, but took Achilles’ slave Briseis instead. Achilles was so humiliated that he refused to fight. The Greeks then let Patroclus fight in Achilles’ armour to scare the Trojans. However, Patroclus was slain by Hector, after which Achilles went back to the battlefield (Pfeijffer 195-199).
if you promise new sails for the fleet
and a wind to bear us home,

I am sick of the Trojan plain,
I would rise, I would fall again
in a tempest, a hurricane.

(Doolittle 248)

The Greeks often sacrificed “something lost or left over” (Doolittle 281) to Thetis, because of “the simple magic coming” (Doolittle 280) from it. Achilles’ anger comes from losing his precious mother:

and was this his anger,
that something forgotten or lost,

like the flint in his pouch
(“I thought I had lost that”),
was taken from him,

and he only remembered it,
remembered and wanted it back,
when it was gone?

(Doolittle 283)

According to Freud, the trauma patient is healed when he/she is freed from the returning memory pictures (Edmunds 481). Now that all Achilles’ traumatic memories have resurfaced, the ‘pictures’ can dissolve. Indeed, it is only when Helen has lived through every memory layer of Achilles’ trauma that she fully realizes its core:

It was only then,
when the pictures had melted away,
that I saw him stretched on his pallet,
that I seemed to hear him say,
she failed me, my Daemon, my Goddess;
…
it was only, when I felt
with him, lying there,
the bitterness of his loss,
that I knew he loved

(Doolittle 260)

Even if Helen feels Achilles’ loss, it is not a vicarious experience this time; she still distinguishes between ‘I’ and ‘him’. Rather, it is a virtual experience or empathic unsettlement, whereby “one may imaginatively put oneself in the victim’s position while respecting the difference between self and other” (LaCapra 125). In any case, Helen now completely understands Achilles’ trauma and the reasons for his anger. By strangling Helen, Achilles was ventilating his frustration towards his mother. What is more, as Paris mentioned, he was trying to sacrifice Helen, thus uniting the two negligent mothers: “I have promised another/ white throat to a goddess,/ but not to our lady of Aulis” (Doolittle 244). However, Achilles’ anger turned into love when he recognized that they both suffered from the loss of the separation between mother and child. Achilles’ trauma proves that men are victims of the warrior cult, which separates them from their mother, who symbolizes love and life. Just like Helen, Achilles has an androgynous personality, which consists of the many different but complementary aspects of his life: he is the child with the Thetis-doll, the young men dressed as a woman in Scyros, the warrior in Troy and Helen’s lover in the afterlife.

Through Helen’s identification with Achilles, Helen understands “her daughter’s anger and grief at losing her mother” (Edmunds 489). Indeed, Hermione was traumatized as well, staring “with wide eyes in a white face,/ at a stranger” (Doolittle 228), her mother, as she
walked away from her. Helen now understands that she needs the love of her child as much as her child needs her mother’s love. Indeed, motherhood is the most essential part of her identity. Helen’s ultimate redemption for abandoning Hermione is the “treasure beyond a treasure” (Doolittle 282) Achilles gave her: “there is a miraculous birth” (Doolittle 288). However, the “promised Euphorion is not one child but two” (Doolittle 288):

if I think of a child of Achilles,

it is not Pyrrhus, his son,

they called Neoptolemus,

nor any of all the host that claimed as father,

the Myrmidon’s Lord and Leader,

but the child in Chiron’s cave;

and if I remember a child that stared

at a stranger and the child’s name is Hermione,

it is not Hermione

(Doolittle 289-290)

The child is both Achilles, who was separated from his mother, and Helen, who was separated from her parents when Theseus stole her. This suggests that Helen was already traumatized when Theseus kidnapped her, explaining why she is able to empathize with the lost children so well. In any case, the birth of Euphorion is the final stage of Helen’s healing process; it makes up for all the abandoned children in the past. Helen is now not only a goddess of love, but also a mother goddess. Although this fits right into women’s roles that Ancient Greek society dictated, H.D.’s conception of motherhood is different. First, Euphorion is the result of Achilles’ and Helen’s love, rather than society’s demand to have children to pass on the inheritance or to create political alliances. Second, motherhood does not have to be taken literally. Rather, it is a metaphor for the protection of life, which, given the context of war, was essential. The birth of Euphorion, who symbolizes “death-in-life and life-in-death” (Friedman 399), then shows that love and life can come out of war and destruction.
In conclusion, in the final part of the poem, “Eidolon”, Helen uncovers the nucleus of her trauma: the loss of her child. Through her identification with Achilles, she understands that both mother and child are traumatized by their separation, and that Achilles, like all men, had a loving side which was corrupted by war. Moreover, just like Helen, his personality consists of many different complementary aspects. Although in “Leuké”, Helen realized she represents both life and death, she discovers in “Eidolon” that the protection of life, or motherhood, is the most essential part of her identity.
5. A representation of women in war?

In this chapter, I argue that Helen’s trauma is both a unique individual case and a predictable consequence of being a woman in the Trojan War. Moreover, since H.D. wrote the poem after WWII, she offered a “transhistorical view of these gender politics, comparing Helen’s ancient cultural context, her own contemporary one, and the time that has elapsed between the two” (Darling 1). Therefore, I also examine the parallels and differences between Helen’s trauma and the situation of women in WWII.

Helen’s trauma was roughly caused by three factors. First, she witnessed traumatic events that were directly related to wartime destruction. She lost her child, her sister and other loved ones, and witnessed the deaths of thousands of soldiers. During these events, she was completely powerless. On the one hand, she was used for political purposes but did not have any influence on political decisions. Society dictated that she marry Menelaus and have his children, while Aphrodite promised her to Paris. This resulted in her leaving her child behind. She started a war involuntarily, had no power to end it and was even blamed for it. On the other hand, having left/ been forced to leave her traditional role as mother, wife, and queen of Sparta, she lost her identity, her rights and her security, which made her even more vulnerable and powerless. Helen’s trauma was thus the result of the destruction and death that comes from war, her position as a woman in a patriarchal society, and some unique conditions. However, if Helen’s agency was taken away, she still had a lot of willpower. Although Theseus helped her to resolve part of her trauma, she mostly served as her own analyst. Indeed, step by step, Helen managed to overcome her trauma, reconstruct a new identity free from society’s demands, and defend the values of love and life in times of war and destruction.

The fact that Helen involuntarily caused a war and in addition was blamed for it was certainly unique to her case. However, Helen’s situation also had a lot in common with other women in the war. Indeed, they all lost loved ones, and losing their husband resulted in the same destitute state Helen found herself in in Troy (cf. 3.1). Moreover, they witnessed their sons risking their lives in the war, and/or their daughters being taken away from them as a prize or a sacrifice. For example, Hecuba lost both Hector and Paris, and her daughter Polyxena was first enslaved and then sacrificed to Achilles’ ghost. Thetis also witnessed how her loving son transformed into a killing machine, causing the deaths of many people and eventually his own death. None of the women had any influence on politics. Clytaemnestra could not prevent
Agamemnon from killing Iphigenia. She showed her strong willpower and killed Agamemnon, thereby losing her rights, which resulted in Orestes murdering her. Even if Clytemnestra’s case was an exception, most women only supported their husband in the war because they knew the dire consequences of defeat. If at first sight, Helen’s trauma seems to represent that of a lot of other women in war, it should be noted that Helen was an aristocratic woman who lived in Priam’s palace. Consequently, her situation cannot be compared to that of lower-class women. These women had to deal with (food) deprivation in a neglected city, whilst trying to support their family and look after the wounded. They were, however, not used for political alliances, but their low status meant a more brutal treatment when enslaved by the enemy.

Evidently, the situation of women in Britain in WWII was a lot different than that of women in Ancient Greece during the Trojan War (cf. 3.2). There are, however, some parallels that made H.D. write about this topic so soon after WWII. Like Helen, women in WWII lost family and friends. In addition, they feared for their own lives, since WWII was the first western war to erase the distinction between combatants and non-combatants. British women in WWII had more agency than the women in Ancient Greece. They could contribute directly to the war effort, by doing factory work or even joining the army. However, they faced more insecurities as well. Army women were in immediate danger, but were not allowed to fight. Like Helen, they were perceived as sexually suspect because men felt threatened by women out of their traditional roles. Women who did factory work had to combine this with family life. Their jobs were still seen as subordinated to those of men, who moved on to more skilful jobs. Women at home had to deal with air raids, blackouts, food shortages and the guilt of not contributing to the war effort more directly. Even if women were given more agency in WWII than in the Trojan War, their power was only superficial and limited by men. Women who broke out of their traditional roles were stigmatized while those who stayed at home were blamed. Both men and women were the victims of another war that originated in a “man-monopolised society” (Sheridan, *Wartime Women* 74). Like Helen, women in WWII realized the useless destruction of war and strived for peace and the protection of life, by uniting themselves in women’s organisations for example.

In conclusion, although every trauma is the result of a unique concurrence of events, Helen’s case is in a lot of ways representative of other women in war. In Ancient Greece and in WWII, women’s influence was limited by patriarchal society. This powerlessness, in
combination with the death and destruction of wartime, made them susceptible to trauma.
However, they still had a strong will to protect life in a world bent on death and destruction.
6. Conclusion

In my analysis of Helen in Egypt by H.D., I combined trauma theory and the feminist perspective to answer the following questions: What are the particularities of Helen’s trauma? Is Helen’s trauma a representation of women in Ancient Greece? Does Helen’s situation resemble that of women in WWII? In what ways is Helen’s trauma non-gender specific? In my analysis, I used trauma theory to examine the causes, the symptoms and the healing process of Helen’s trauma, while the feminist perspective allowed me to identify the specificities of Helen’s position as a woman in war, and explain Helen’s trauma in the Ancient Greek context. Trauma theory enabled me to go beyond the gender divide and compare Helen’s trauma to that of Achilles in the Trojan War.

In Helen in Egypt, Helen’s trauma is caused by the loss of her identity as a mother, a Spartan and a wife, combined with the horrors of the Trojan War and the false image that is projected onto her. In her healing process, Helen constructs a new womanhood, based on life and love, and a new personality, which unites several contrasting but complementary elements of her life. Helen is both a victim and a defender, she represents the woman’s world as well as the man’s world, she is child-mother-lover-wife and Spartan-Trojan in one. The aspect that most defines her is her identity as a mother goddess, protecting life in the context of war.

First, her trauma is the result of a unique concurrence of events, which started with the judgement of Paris at Thetis’ wedding. Admittedly, a lot of women lost their children and husband in the war, and some of them were exiled. However, few of them lost everything that previously defined them before the war even started. In that sense, Helen’s situation is an unfortunate coincidence, or fate, as Thetis explains it. In addition, Helen is blamed for the war, over which she has no control. This is an extra aggravating factor that only applies to Helen’s case.

Second, Helen’s trauma resembles that of a lot of other women, both in the Trojan War and in WWII. On the one hand, women in Ancient Greece were used for political purposes while they had no influence on politics. On the other hand, women in WWII had more agency and occupied roles that were previously reserved for men. However, their influence was limited and they were still subordinated to men. Both cases illustrate how women are victims of the masculine warrior cult and defenders of life and love at the same time. Their powerlessness, combined with the loss of loved ones can result in trauma and shatter one’s identity. Their
strong will to fight for their own identity independent of society’s conceptions can help them overcome their trauma.

Finally, Helen’s trauma was also non-gender specific, i.e. it represents the situation of people in war. War does not only render women powerless; men are victims of their own culture as well. Even if they have power over women, they have no influence on the larger structures of which they are a part. Achilles is a good example of this. His womanly side and his love for his mother were corrupted by the lure of war. In her healing process, Helen discovers that she has an androgynous personality, just like Achilles. She realizes her personality does not depend on the rigid definitions society dictates, but is a reconciliation of all the different aspects of her life. The same goes for Achilles: he is the child that with the Thetis-doll, the young man dressed as a woman in Scyros, the warrior in Troy and Helen’s lover in the afterlife. In short, Helen’s trauma, resulting from the destruction of war and the powerlessness one feels in a patriarchal society, goes beyond the gender divide. Moreover, Helen’s shattered identity as a person is typical of trauma in general, and the personality of men as well as women consists of different complementary aspects representing their past selves as well as their present self.

In conclusion, just as Helen’s identity is the sum of complementary aspects, her trauma is a unique case, a representation of women in war, and a non-gender specific trauma.
7. Works cited


