Article

'In Her I See/All Beauties Frailty': Mirroring Helen of Troy and Elizabeth I in Thomas Heywood's *The Iron Age* and *The Second Part of The Iron Age* (c.1596/c.1610)

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Abstract: In this article I argue that Helen of Troy in Thomas Heywood's *The Iron Age I* & *II* can be read as a figure for Elizabeth I during her final decade. Heywood appropriates multiple sources to emphasise images of age, decay and death which connect Helen and Elizabeth by evoking concerns that were prevalent as the Queen aged. Whether we date the plays as late Elizabethan or early Jacobean, Heywood was writing at a time when people were thinking (in anticipation or retrospection) about Elizabeth's death and the end of the Tudor line. In *The Iron Age II*, Heywood shows Helen lament the loss of her fabled beauty when she gazes into a mirror and sees an aged face that resembles Elizabeth's. With her despair compounded by her guilt over the Trojan War, Helen turns to suicide and Heywood ends the entire Age pentalogy with a glance to the succession. Ultimately, in his treatment of Helen, Heywood subversively brings to centre stage images that Elizabeth (and her government) had tried to quash and opens up new forums for political commentary at London's popular theatres.

Keywords: drama; early modern; Thomas Heywood; Elizabeth I; Shakespeare; Helen of Troy; adaptation

1. Introduction

The Iron Age I & *II* are the final two plays in Heywood's Ages pentalogy, a series of mythological plays which follow the Ages of Man cycles from Hesiod's *Works and Days* and the opening of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The series offers the most expansive dramatic treatment of the Troy story in the period, beginning in *The Brazen Age* when Hercules first sacks Troy and abducts Hesione; the story continues in *The Iron Age* plays with Helen's departure from Sparta, the Trojan War, the fall of Troy, and the aftermath of the Greeks' homecoming. By the end of the plays, most of the characters have fallen victim to battle, murder, intrigue, or suicide, but there is one character who can be traced throughout Heywood's Troy narrative: Helen of Troy. Heywood's Helen starts out as the beautiful and confident Queen of Sparta, but throughout the plays she becomes an aged and regretful shadow of her young self. Driven by guilt over her role in the war and despair over losing her former self, Helen eventually commits suicide on stage, bringing the whole of the Ages series to a close. I argue that this treatment of Helen is informed by Heywood's fixation upon Elizabeth I. In *The Iron Age I* & *II*, Heywood uses Helen as a mirror for Elizabeth during the final decade of her reign, when—despite her attempts to hide it—her old age became an undeniable truth and a symbol for what many considered to be her tired reign.

Though not published until 1632, *The Iron Age* plays likely arose much earlier, alongside the rest of the pentalogy which was published in 1611 and 1613. However, these dates may be even later than the time of the plays' initial writing and performances, as they are potentially revisions of earlier lost Heywood plays from the 1590s recorded in *Henslowe's Diary*[1]. Whether the plays are Jacobean, Elizabethan, or both, they appear to be written with an eye to the final years of Elizabeth's reign. Indeed, it is in both late Elizabethan and early

Jacobean drama 'that the ag[e]ing and posthumous body of Elizabeth is most fully engaged and problematized in an apprehensive interplay of mourning and misogyny, revisionary desire and aggression, idealization and travesty' (Mullaney 1994, p. 145)[2]. *The Iron Age I & II* are no exception to this analysis, as the plays invite the audience to gaze upon Helen's ageing body while she mourns her lost beauty, mirroring Elizabeth and her own lost youth and power. Helen is caught in the kind of revisionary dynamics Steven Mullaney discusses, as Heywood initially evokes the idealised image of an inviolable Elizabeth through Helen's beauty, but eventually, the play suggests that this is a travesty when Helen loses her beauty and approaches her death.

Throughout his career, Heywood demonstrated his fascination with Elizabeth's iconography and biography as he produced a range of works about the monarch. Just two years after her death, Heywood's immensely popular two-part dramatic biography *If you know not me, You know no bodie: or, The troubles of Queene Elizabeth* (1605) was published. In 1631, Heywood also compiled a prose account of her life named *Englands Elizabeth her life and troubles*. There are two memorials for Elizabeth in Heywood's *Gynaikeion: or, Nine bookes of various history Concerninge women* (1624); and in 1640, just a year before his death, he celebrated Elizabeth as one of the Christian worthies in *The exemplary lives and memorable acts of nine of the most worthy women in the world*. Elizabeth was likely also the inspiration for the character Bess Bridges—known for her 'virtue and chastity' (1.3.86)—in Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West I* and *II* (likely written around 1597–1604)[3]. Clearly, *The Iron Age I & II* are not unusual for their glances at Elizabeth; however, all of these works on Elizabeth are largely celebratory and for more incendiary political reflection, Heywood hid behind the safety of classical adaptation.

From the very beginning of his career, Heywood asserted his political interests with his contributions to *The Book of Sir Thomas More* (1592)[4], but as his career progressed, Heywood increasingly incorporated the classical with the political. Richard Rowland has illustrated that many of Heywood's later works adapted classical material to speak on contemporary issues such as court culture and foreign and social policy[5]. In the 1630s, Heywood explicitly called upon mythology to influence London's political figures in his mayoral pageants; and his translations of Sallust's *The Conspiracy of Catiline* and *The War of Jugurtha* (1608) contributed to contemporary debates over monarchy and republicanism[6]. In the same year, Heywood's *The Rape of Lucrece* (1608) was published and this play is also topical, given its links to Shakespeare's poem of the same name, which Andrew Hadfield has shown—read alongside *Venus and Adonis* (1594)—creates a powerful political statement in response to Elizabeth and the succession (Hadfield 2005, p. 150). Moreover, Heywood himself admits that he was thinking about classical figures in tandem with the political figures of his day in *An Apology for Actors* (1612). He recounts how Achilles had tried to imitate Theseus; Theseus, Hercules; and Hercules, his father Jupiter, and then he questions: 'Why should not the lives of these worthies, presented in these our dayes, effect the like wonders in the Princes of our times' (Heywood 1612, sig.B4v). Not only does this show he was comparing historical and contemporary figures but his words suggest that he (like many of his contemporaries) was more than aware of the shortcomings of the latter.

As well as political commentary, there is another common feature within Heywood's classical works. Janice Valls-Russell and Tania Demetriou explain that 'women are often at the centre of Heywood's traffic with the classics'; and I argue that within *The Iron Age* plays, it is Helen and Elizabeth who are these women (Valls-Russell and Demetriou 2021, p. 4). Using mythology in conjunction with the Queen was, of course, nothing new and a 'monarchical mythology' was well established by the time Heywood was writing (Strong 1977, p. 47). Moreover, outside of the popular theatre, royal representation was one of the few places audiences could encounter mythology, and Heywood's plays could have been reminders of Elizabeth's iconography. After all, mythological figures became shorthand for Elizabeth, elevating the Queen from her mortal body and aligning her with a supernatural divinity and power that helped her follow the figurative tradition of the sovereign's two bodies[7].

Throughout her reign, Elizabeth had, of course, followed the tradition in which her royal authority was embedded within a figurative body politic that was public, immortal, androgynous and free from imperfection. However, in the 1590s, 'the political pressures caused by war, poverty and disease continued to focus critical attention on the queen's decrepit body which came to be regarded as the living symbol of her exhausted government' (Whitelock 2014, p. 220). It had become obvious that Elizabeth was not, in Edmund Plowden's words from 1561, 'utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects' (Plowden 1816, pp. 212a–13). The Queen's natural body was also a stark reminder that she was now too old to produce an heir and secure the succession, for which she faced much criticism. Therefore, to protect the Queen's reputation, the government took great pains to prevent the image of an aged Elizabeth from circulating: in 1596, there was a 'proclamation ordered that any "unseemly and improper" portraits of the queen, in other words, any that showed her age and facial imperfections, were to be destroyed' (Whitelock 2014, p. 216)[8]. Instead, Elizabeth was depicted as an ageless virgin whose 'mask of youth' featured in almost all her later portraits, effacing signs of her mortality to mitigate the reality that Elizabeth faced increasing criticism as the succession neared[9].

Inevitably, Elizabeth's supernatural persona was met with satire and cynicism by outspoken subjects all too aware of the imperfections and contradictions that this glossy exterior sought to obscure. As the gap widened between the reality and representation of the Queen, censorship increased and 'by the end of the century, satire and political history were equally fertile sources of potentially libellous material and both were the subject of keen surveillance' (Clare 1999, p. 82). To avoid criminal charges, writers like John Lyly, Christopher Marlowe and Heywood turned to topical mythology to satirise royal representation and 'open the workings of power and ideology to scrutiny and contest' (Sinfield 1992, p. 92). Mythology, of course, retained a degree of deniability, necessary to protect writers from being accused of treasonous intent. Annabel Patterson describes such writing as a 'sophisticated system of oblique communication, of unwritten rules whereby writers could communicate with readers or audiences [. . .] without producing a direct confrontation' (Patterson 1984, p. 45). In *The Iron Age I* & *II*, Heywood employs this type of 'communication' when Helen describes her appearance and plans her suicide, which obliquely confronts Elizabeth's natural body, her wavering favour, and the looming succession.

The final two Age plays were not the first time Heywood had used mythology to poke fun at the ageing Queen. In *The Golden Age*, Heywood creates a caricature of the natural body that Elizabeth and her government had tried to conceal. While Jupiter sneaks into Princess Danae's bedroom, a Clown distracts a group of beldams with gifts:

> [. . .] heer's a silver bodkin, this is to remove dandriffe, and digge about the roots of your silver-hair'd furre. This is a tooth-picker, but you having no teeth, heere is for you a corrall to rub your gums. This is cal'd a Maske. (64)[10]

A grateful beldam replies: 'Gramarcy for this, this is good to hide my wrinckles' (64). Here, Heywood evokes the measures the Queen herself took to hide her aged appearance, and the Clown's offer of a 'mask' could even mock Elizabeth's own mask of youth. While Elizabeth never revealed her own 'silver-hair' and wore wigs until the end of her life, the most striking allusion is the jest about the beldams' toothlessness. Elizabeth's dental hygiene had cropped up in various accounts of her as she aged, most notably in 1597, when the French ambassador commented on Elizabeth's teeth saying, 'many of them are missing so that one cannot understand her easily when she speaks quickly' (De Maisse 1931, p. 26). Ultimately, the Clown creates an image that chimes against contemporary conceptions of beauty, wherein any physical markers of age such as wrinkles and blemishes were considered ugly and representative of moral failings (Baker 2010, p. 107); and it is a similar image that Helen of Troy eventually comes to recognise in herself[11].

To produce his extensive account of the story of Troy, Heywood combines a number of sources: he likely read the *Iliad* in both the Greek original and George Chapman's recent

translations of it—Books 1, 2, and 7–11 of Chapman were published in 1598—as well as Books 12–13 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; John Lydgate's *Troy Book* (1420) is also closely followed and, of course, William Caxton's *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* (c.1575)[12]. In addition to these texts, Heywood also echoes many of his contemporaries' works, from George Peele's *The Arraignment of Paris* (1584) to Shakespeare's *Richard II* (1597)—which I discuss later. What arises throughout *The Iron Age* plays, then, is a web of intertextuality which can be read in light of Douglas Lanier's idea of a rhizomatic 'arboreal structure' (Lanier 2014, p. 28). The concept reads the relationship between texts as 'a horizontal, decentered multiplicity of subterranean roots' which produce an 'inchoate and complex web of intervening adaptations' (Lanier 2014, pp. 28, 23). Such a conception is appropriate for the mass of texts (classical and contemporary, mythological and otherwise) that permeate Heywood's dramatic treatment of Troy in unstable ways, dipping in and out of the action to amplify topical elements.

Although Lanier's concept discourages giving primacy to one text in particular, my analysis focuses on Heywood's innovative treatment of Helen. Lanier explains that

> in some places, rhizomatic roots collect into temporary tangles of connection or nodes that then themselves break apart and reassemble into other nodes, some playing out in dead ends, others taking what [Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari] call "lines of flight," that is, altogether new directions of thought. (Lanier 2014, p. 29; Deleuze and Guattari 1987)

In *The Iron Age I & II*, Heywood's treatment of Helen can be viewed as these 'lines of flight'; and, moreover, may be the result of 'heartfelt political commitment standing behind acts of literary appropriation' (Sanders 2016, p. 10). Because Heywood adapts sources and invents details that tie Helen closer to Elizabeth through images of age and lost beauty, his lines of flight are subversive, as they encourage the audience to reflect on the reliability of royal representation and its relation to the truth.

2. Royal Reflections: Queens of England and Troy

It is not surprising that the infamous adulteress Helen—despite being reputed the most beautiful woman in all of Greece—had not been readily adopted into Elizabethan iconography. Instead, another notable woman from the Troy story, Hecuba, Queen of Troy, had been aligned with Elizabeth. Jasper Heywood's 1559 translation of Seneca's *Troas* was dedicated to Elizabeth and it used Hecuba as 'A mirror [. . .] to teach you [Elizabeth] what you are' (J. Heywood 2012, p. 85). Throughout the period, Hecuba was an exemplar of the grieving mother and a renowned tragic figure, linked to what Tanya Pollard describes as 'affective transmission'—her ability to connote intense emotion whenever she is evoked (Pollard 2017, p. 9)[13]. In *The Iron Age I & II*, though, Heywood minimises the role of Hecuba; she barely makes an appearance besides when she encourages Paris to murder Achilles and is transformed into a villain. Instead, Heywood transfers the usual treatment of Hecuba onto his Helen who gazes upon herself in despair, her anguish leading to suicide. Furthermore, Helen's role in *The Iron Age I & II* is quite unusual as she is not just the phantom cause of the war, as in so many treatments of her—including Shakespeare's in *Troilus and Cressida* (1602?). Rather, Heywood's Helen frequently takes centre stage and is the one character (aside from Ulysses) who survives long enough to follow throughout the two plays. And while the Troy story in the period was typically 'a privileged topos for nationalistic endeavours,' Heywood's focus is often on the figure and person of Elizabeth, not just her country at large (James 1997, p. 13).

By the time Heywood wrote his plays, connections between royalty and the Troy story were well established. In 1591, Elizabeth arrived at Elvetham and was even greeted with a song that celebrated her as 'beauteous Queene of second Troy', with ties to both Hecuba and Helen (Goldring et al. 2014, p. 579). London had long been given the name 'Troynovant' ('New Troy'), in accordance with the European tradition whereby rulers claimed mythical links to Troy. In the sixteenth century, Geoffrey of Monmouth's apocryphal account of Britain's history was increasingly circulated, and the idea that England's royalty descended

from Aeneas's grandson, Brutus—who founded Britain—became an important, and widely contested, part of Tudor propaganda[14]. Nonetheless, in 1609, Heywood used the myth to legitimise James I/VI's genealogy in *Troia Britanica: or, Great Britaines Troy* (1609). However, in contrast to its laudatory appearances, Troy was also used to encourage more subversive reflections, as when Heywood commented upon London's 'moral quality' in his mayoral pageants (Robinson 2011, p. 226). In *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare also used Troy to speak on the state of England 'following the spectacular fall of the earl of Essex' (James 1997, p. 91)[15]. And even earlier in the 1590s, the matter of Troy had 'spoke with particular urgency to early modern dramatists', due in part to rising tensions over what would happen when Elizabeth died (Hopkins 2020, p. 7).

When Heywood opens *The Iron Age I* he almost immediately connects the play to Elizabeth, as Paris recounts a dream containing the myth of the Judgement of Paris, which had political uses for both Elizabeth and her mother, Anne Boleyn. Paris explains:

> Celestiall *Juno*, *Venus* and the Goddesse
>
> Borne from the braine of mighty *Jupiter*.
>
> These three present me with a golden Ball,
>
> On which was writ, *Detur pulcherrimae*,
>
> Give't to the fairest: *Juno* proffers wealth,
>
> Scepters and Crownes: faith, she will make me rich.
>
> Next steps forth *Pallas* with a golden Booke,
>
> Saith, reach it me, I'le teach thee Litterature,
>
> Knowledge and Arts, make thee of all most wise.
>
> Next smiling *Venus* came, with such a looke
>
> Able to ravish mankinde: thus bespake mee,
>
> Make that Ball mine? the fairest Queene that breathes,
>
> I'le in requitall, cast into thine armes.
>
> How can I stand against her golden smiles,
>
> When beautie promist beauty? shee prevail'd
>
> To her I gave the prise, with which shee mounted
>
> Like to a Starre from earth shott up to Heaven. (pp. 268–69)

The myth had been present in various representations of Elizabeth in which she became Paris's choice and possessed all the qualities of the three rival goddesses (beauty, wisdom and power). The moment is captured in two paintings, Hans Eworth's in 1569 and a piece attributed to Isaac Oliver from c.1590, and it is also dramatised in George Peele's pastoral play, *The Arraignment of Paris* (1584), which was performed at court before the Queen throughout the 1580s[16]. Indeed, when Heywood's Paris describes the engraving on the golden ball as '*Detur pulcherrimae* (give to the glorious)', Heywood borrows directly from Peele's *Arraignment* and its adaptation of the line from the *Aeneid* (See Gilbert 1926, p. 39). But the myth was not only a positive one; it potentially evoked more negative responses to Elizabeth as it emphasised the link to her adulterous mother, given that Anne's coronation progress had also incorporated the myth[17]. For both Elizabeth and Anne, the story was intended to indicate that they brought peace, as they had resolved the contest between the goddesses; however, Paris's decision obviously heralds destruction because it leads to the affair that causes the Trojan War.

Paris is taken by Venus's promise of 'the fairest Queene that breathes' (268), so he convinces his royal Trojan brothers to journey to Greece and rescue their aunt Hesione, providing him an opportunity to obtain his promised 'Queene'. However, Paris already had a woman in Troy, Oenone, who was a beautiful nymph in the classical tradition but in *The Iron Age I*, is a mortal, neglected wife. Oenone begs her husband not to leave in a scene that Heywood adapts from his epyllion, *Oenone and Paris* (1594), an adaptation of Ovid's

Heroides (V, XVI and XVIII) and an imitation of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1593). While Shakespeare had mocked Venus for her obsession with Adonis, Heywood's poem 'has fun at the expense of a nostalgic Oenone who is coming to terms with the loss of her boy Paris' (Weaver 2012, p. 98)[18]. In his dramatic adaptation of the story, Heywood develops this treatment by humiliating Oenone when her own husband does not even recognise her. Oenone questions 'Know you not mee?' (271) as Paris goes to walk straight past her, and her words not only echo the title of Heywood's dramatic treatment of Elizabeth but establish a focus on appearance and (mis)recognition that remain throughout the Helen narrative.

In the very next scene, Heywood underlines his emphasis on appearances when Helen and her husband, Menelaus, mirror Oenone and Paris. In Sparta, Helen similarly tries to convince Menelaus not to leave her for business in Crete and mimics Oenone when she draws attention to her tears, complaining that Menelaus 'cares not though I weepe my bright eyes blind' (275). In the previous scene, Oenone begged Paris not to leave, crying and reminding her husband of their 'amorous kisses,/ Courtings, imbraces, and ten thousand blisses' (272). Similarly, Helen recalls her own, far darker, sexual past, when she recounts her rape at the hands of Theseus, echoing the more emotive treatments usually associated with Hecuba and establishing a sympathy which makes Helen's eventual fall from grace only more pronounced. But before Helen even enters the scene, Heywood draws attention to appearances when Thersites advises Menelaus to observe his wife closely and to be mindful of her potential to deceive:

> Heaven hath many Starres in't, but no eyes,
>
> And cannot see desert. The Goddesse *Fortune*
>
> Is h[oo]d-winkt [. . .]
>
> Such a bright Lasse as *Hellen*: *Hellen*? oh!
>
> 'Must have an eye to her too, fie, fie, fie,
>
> Poore man how thou'lt bee pusl'd! (272)

The notion of a beautiful woman being deceitful is suggestive of Elizabeth's body politic and its desired effect to mask her true appearance; while Thersites's emphasis on sight encourages the audience to visually scrutinise Helen—which Heywood continues to do himself throughout the plays. But despite Thersites's scepticism over Helen's morals, she has, of course, not yet committed adultery and Menelaus questions: 'Why thinks *Thersites* my bright *Hellens* beauty/Is not with her faire vertues equaliz'd?' (273). At this point, Helen is faithful to her husband and free from the horrors of war; she is 'beautiful', 'faire' (274) and even has 'an Angels shape' (278), a supernatural or divine appearance like Elizabeth's body politic. Clearly, as Menelaus suggests, Helen's beauty does correspond to her virtue. Indeed, it is only after she has committed adultery and contributed to Troy's ruin that Heywood emphasises her decay. Like Elizabeth's body politic, Helen's appearance becomes linked to her world; but while the Queen's forged perfection conveyed England's strength, Helen's fading beauty reflects Troy's destruction and alludes to the realities of 1590s England. For in *The Iron Age II*, Helen comes to resemble the real and imperfect Elizabeth, with the chaos of Troy's destruction echoing the many uprisings of the decade—tensions which the Queen's body politic had attempted to mask.

3. Helen, Cressida and Elizabeth I: Lost Beauty and Destruction

Aside from a banquet scene when she again chooses Paris over her husband, Helen is relegated to the side-lines for the remainder of *The Iron Age I*, forgotten due to the intensifying battle of masculine bravado that is the Trojan War. It is not until Troy begins to fall in *The Iron Age II* that Heywood refocuses the action onto Helen's appearance and glances at Elizabeth's natural body. While Helen attempts to flee the Greeks, she encounters a diseased Cressida who she looks upon as if she were a mirror, with Cressida's loss of beauty reflecting the fragility of Helen's own looks:

HELEN.	Death, in what shape soever hee appears
	To me is welcome, I'le no longer shun him;
	But here with *Cresida* abide him: here,
	Oh, why was *Hellen* at the first so faire,
	To become subject to so foule an end?
	Or how hath *Cresids* beauty sinn'd 'gainst Heaven,
	That it is branded thus with leprosie?
CRESS.	I in conceit thought that I might contend
	Against Heavens splendor, I did once suppose,
	There was no beauty but in *Cresids* lookes,
	But in her eyes no pure divinity:
	But now behold mee *Hellen*.
HELEN.	In her I see
	All beauties frailty, and this object makes
	All fairenesse to show ugly in it selfe:
	But to see breathlesse Virgins pil'd on heape,
	What lesse can *Hellen* doe then curse these Starres
	That shin'd so bright at her nativity,
	And with her nayles teare out these shining balls
	That have set *Troy* on fire? [sic] (386)

In this extract, Heywood interweaves various sources to heighten the focus on death, decay and suffering. Specifically, Heywood evokes two moments of horror from two political plays by Christopher Marlowe. When Helen imagines clawing at her own eyes, Heywood recalls Marlowe's account of the fall of Troy in *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (c.1589), when Aeneas recounts how after Pyrrhus attacked Priam, Hecuba, 'the frantic queen leaped on his face,/And in his eyelids [was] hanging by the nails' (2.1.244–45)[19]. Helen's reference to piles of deceased virgins also echoes the final act of *Tamburlaine I* when Tamburlaine commands the death of four virgins of Damascus, whose bodies are hung on the city walls (5.1.120–131). Heywood's use of Marlowe's violent imagery makes the alignment between the destruction of the city and the women's lost beauty more striking, which in turn amplifies elements that parallel concerns around Elizabeth's demise and the succession.

Heywood also draws from Robert Henryson's *The testament of Cresseid*—a fifteenth century continuation of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*—reprinted in 1593, which includes the story of Cressida being stricken with disease as punishment for cursing Venus after she was abandoned by her Greek lover, Diomedes. In *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare also glanced at Cressida's affliction through recurrent references to diseases throughout the play and, most pointedly, he did so during Troilus's farewell speech to Cressida (4.4.33–48), which emphasises her 'frail and corruptible nature'—qualities that Heywood's Helen has come to recognise in herself (Forsyth 2019, p. 93)[20]. Here, Heywood's Cressida is 'branded' with leprosy, which conjures images of weeping sores in line with Mikhail Bakhtin's diseased, grotesque body; a body which, like Helen's, is not contained within itself but interconnected with its world[21]. The image of Cressida's diseased body is compounded by the violent imagery recounted by Helen and soon Pyrrhus, who bursts in and threatens to tear the women 'limbe from limbe' (387). The horror of all this imagery is only intensified by Heywood's emphasis on encroaching death.

Cressida wonders whether 'To shun the Greekes to run into the fire,/Or flying fire, perish by Greekish steele:/Which hadst thou rather chuse?' (386); while Helen admits that she welcomes any demise she can take. Death is closing in upon them from the street it is intrenched in their words, and seemingly sealed in their fate. Naomi Baker points out that 'the Bakhtinian grotesque straddles life and death' (Baker 2010, p. 99), because, as Bakhtin explains, it is 'a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis' (Bakhtin 1984, p. 24); in other words, it is close to death but not finalised by it. Helen and Cressida occupy such a liminal position as Heywood suggests they will soon perish with Troy; however, they are, in fact, eventually spared by the Greeks which only prolongs their lack of finality. Nonetheless, Helen and Cressida have also metamorphosed through the loss of their beauty and their former identities: Cressida is no longer Troilus's love and

Helen is no longer Menelaus's Queen; furthermore, both women have become, essentially, stateless, after deserting their homelands and being trapped in a city facing destruction. Their identities have become so muddled that Helen even loses herself within Cressida who reflects the truth of Helen's own 'foule' appearance.

It was not uncommon for the two women to be intertwined in the period, and they were even 'interchangeable onomastic shorthand for the type of the sexually wanton woman' (Maguire 2009, p. 92)[22]. Moreover, Helen and Cressida can be connected through their likeness to Elizabeth, as in *Troilus and Cressida*, where they appear as 'caricatural antitypes of the queen' (Mallin 1995, p. 59). Furthermore, Christopher Paris recognises how in Shakespeare's play, the sexually active Cressida evokes 'the Elizabeth of her intimates', in other words, the natural and private body of the Queen; while Helen represents 'the Elizabeth of the public domain', her beautiful image present in propaganda (Paris 2009, p. 134). In *The Iron Age* plays, too, we can see the distinction between the private and public Elizabeth as Heywood evokes both her politic and natural body. When Helen and Cressida's beauty falls victim to decay and disease, realities that Elizabeth had attempted to mask, Heywood alludes to how Elizabeth's natural body challenged her idealised body politic. Helen and Cressida, then, illustrate how 'grotesque images with their relation to changing time and their ambivalence become the means for the artistic and ideological expression of a mighty awareness of history and of historic change' (Bakhtin 1984, p. 25). For Heywood, that historic change was, of course, the inevitable end of Elizabeth's life and the succession; and the final image of the entire Ages series overtly captures these concerns when Helen gazes at her reflection before she commits suicide.

4. Time, Decay and Death: Helen's Demise and Elizabeth's Decline

Heywood departs significantly from his sources to end the Ages pentalogy with Helen's suicide, an event that is rarely mentioned in the classical tradition—only the Greek geographer Pausanias had claimed that she hanged herself, Judas-like, from a tree[23]. We see Helen in the underworld in Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante's *Inferno* and in *A Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions* (1578), in which the poem 'The reward of Whoredome by the fall of Helen' has Helen speak 'From Limbo Lake'; but none of these sources clarify how she got there (Proctor 1578, sig.L1r). Thomas Proctor's *The Triumph of Truth* (c.1580s) is the first example of 'a poet [who] manages to kill off Helen' but the details of Helen's death are still unclear (Maguire 2009, p. 17). In contrast, Heywood's Helen receives the most attention in her final moments and the scene echoes Richard Robinson's *The Rewarde of Wickednesse* (1574), in which Helen 'is given a voice only on the condition that she uses it to condemn herself' (Heavey 2012, p. 471). Aping Robinson's tract, Heywood's Helen blames herself for the Trojan War while she laments the loss of her youthful looks and the damage she has caused.

After her daughter brings her a mirror, Helen begins her final speech by drawing attention to her aged appearance before directly addressing the audience:

[. . .] Was this wrinkled forehead

When 'twas at best, worth halfe so many lives?

Where is that beauty? lives it in this face

Which hath set two parts of the World at warre,

Beene ruine of the *Asian* Monarchy,

And almost this of *Europe*? this the beauty,

That launch'd a thousand ships from *Aulis* gulfe?

In such a poore repurchase, now decayde?

See faire ones, what a little Time can doe;

Who that considers when a seede is sowne,

How long it is ere it appeare from th'earth,

Then ere it stalke, and after ere it blade,

Next ere it spread in leaves, then bud, then flower:

What care in watring, and in weeding tooke,

Yet crop it to our use: the beauties done,

And smel: they scarse last betwixt Sunne and Sunne.

Then why should these my blastings still survive,

Such royall ruines: or I longer live,

Then to be termed *Hellen* the beautifull.

I am growne old, and Death is ages due,

When Courtiers sooth, our glasses will tell true.

My beauty made me pittied, and still lov'd,

But that decay'd, the worlds assured hate

Is all my dowre, then *Hellen* yeeld to fate,

Here's that, my soule and body must divide,

The guerdon of Adultery, Lust, and Pride.

She strangles herselfe.

(430)

Heywood may have adapted this scene from a description in Euripides's *Trojan Women*, when the Chorus recounts that Helen had gazed into a mirror while she sailed back to Greece after the war (See Blondell 2013, pp. 200–1). For classical writers, mirrors were 'a female counterpart to the manly sword' and they could represent 'a self-conscious awareness of one's erotic power' (Blondell 2013, pp. 7, 200). Yet as Helen looks into the mirror, she sees her 'wrinkled forehead' and asks 'Where is that beauty?', recognising she has lost the source of her erotic power. Over time, Elizabeth's refusal to recognise her own age became subject to ridicule following the rumours that the Queen, in the words of Ben Jonson, 'never saw herself after she became old in a true glass' (Jonson [1619] 1985, p. 602)[24]. Despite her age, Elizabeth continued her attempts to assert erotic power in her final years, as evident in the French ambassador's 1597 account of her acts of 'erotic provocation' such as revealing her wrinkled bosom (Montrose 1983, p. 64). However, the ambassador also highlights Elizabeth's fissured power, as he reports that her rule has become 'little pleasing to the great men and nobles' (De Maisse 1931, p. 11), with such an unpopularity echoed by Helen who admits she is no longer 'lov'd'. Indeed, Heywood alludes to a key reason why Elizabeth faced criticism when Helen describes the consequences for her actions as her 'dowre'—a homograph for 'dour' and 'dowry', which evokes the legacy Elizabeth had failed to leave for her subjects[25]. Clearly, the act of Helen gazing into a mirror and lamenting the loss of her beauty can be read as a satirical image with provocative political connotations.

With the prominence of a mirror during the final moments of *The Iron Age II*, Heywood ends the play (and the whole Ages series) with clear resonances of various contemporary political works. The mirror-monarch trope, for instance, points towards *A Mirror for Magistrates*, which went through numerous editions throughout Elizabeth's reign[26]. The final version in 1610 ended with a poetic panegyric, *England's Eliza*, which Heywood seems to have echoed in the title of his biography, *Englands Elizabeth her life and troubles* (1631). *A Mirror* would have certainly appealed to Heywood who eventually himself produced de casibus texts such as *Troia Britanica* (1609) and *The Life of Merlin* (1641). Moreover, both of these works—as well as *Apology for Actors*—share with *A Mirror* an interest in historical figures who function as mirrors to the failings of the modern day and should be read as important lessons for both rulers and subjects. Such a strategy is also at work throughout Heywood's treatment of Helen.

Another political work that is evident in the scene is Shakespeare's *Richard II*. Of course, Elizabeth had famously identified herself with Richard—'I am Richard II, know ye not that?'—in response to the Essex Rebellion's deployment of the play in 1601 (See Orgel 2011, pp. 11–46). Heywood echoes Richard in Shakespeare's play, when he requests a mirror so he can see 'what a face I have,/Since it is bankrupt of his majesty' (4.1.261–2) and he recognises how his 'sorrow hath destroyed my face', leaving him with an aged appearance like Helen's (4.1.286)[27]. Furthermore, while Richard gazes at himself he wonders: 'Was this face that face/That every day under his household roof/Did keep ten thousand men' (4.1.276–278), and Shakespeare adapts Helen's famous line from *Doctor Faustus* (1594?), which Heywood himself explicitly recalls to emphasise the transience of Helen's appearance. As Hanh Bui explains, Richard's 'speech constructs a visual language of old age and suggests how knowledge of one's changing body is intimately linked to—and betrayed by—the function of a mirror' (Bui 2020, p. 66). In particular, 'the mirror simply produces Richard's "banal face"—a body natural now dispossessed of its body politic' (ibid.)[28]. Heywood similarly adopts a language of old age so that Helen can become a mirror held up to Elizabeth, with the political links only strengthened by the scene's parallels to *Richard II*.

When Helen describes her face, Heywood echoes her previous appearance with Cressida and the emphasis on the women's lost beauty and identities. Heywood reiterates that Helen has lost her identity in her final moments, when she admits that she can no longer live up to her title of 'Hellen the beautiful' due to her aged appearance and her role in causing the destructive war. Helen describes her metamorphosis with allusions to fecundity and harvest but Heywood strips these of the glorifying intentions they had in Elizabeth's pastoral iconography. Instead, Helen evokes nature to stress loss and decay, the effects time has had on her body, with Heywood drawing upon the motif of Time as destroyer[29]. This focus on time as a destructive force echoes Shakespeare's Sonnets and their own fixation upon that 'bloody tyrant, Time' (16.2)[30]. Both the Sonnets and Heywood's play use time to respond to the succession but while Shakespeare approaches this through a focus on procreation, Heywood critiques the Queen's body politic through his image of a body more akin to Elizabeth's in the final decade of her life[31]. Indeed, Helen's final words, clearly evoke the concept of the Queen's two bodies when she emphasises a divide between body and soul.

In the Sonnets, the speaker is fixated on 'time's deleterious effects on the human body in caustic and violent terms' and their language frequently surfaces throughout Helen's final speech (Bui 2020, p. 69)[32]. Heywood's most prolonged metaphor for time is the description of a flower being grown and picked in its prime, and his tone shares the cynicism present in Sonnet 94 when the speaker recounts: 'The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,/Though to itself only live and die' (94.9–10), before highlighting that 'sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds' (94.13). The metaphor of the flower invites two controversial topics for Elizabeth's older years: beauty and reproduction; but alongside the countless images of old age in the Sonnets, there are also frequent references to mirrors and their role in revealing the truth. Bui points out that we can

> approach the sonnets as miniature dramas in which the looking glass exteriorizes the conflict between self-recognition and self-alienation, contributing to the period's debates about the nature of identity, the reliability of appearances, and the objectivity of truth itself. (Bui 2020, pp. 67–68)

Heywood's treatment of Helen throughout both of *The Iron Age* plays chimes with these debates: before she even enters the stage, Thersites questions the reliability of Helen's appearance; while the encounter between Cressida and Helen captures their transformed identities. But it is Heywood's glances to Elizabeth that are most informed by debates over truth and reliability. Helen's reflection is a consistent reminder of the realities of Elizabeth's appearance and casts doubt over the truth of the Queen's image in propaganda.

Despite her fixation on time, it is not old age that kills Helen but suicide. Helen's death is unusual as female suicides typically took place offstage, but Heywood has her join

two other mythical women who committed suicide on the early modern stage: Marlowe's Dido and Shakespeare's Cleopatra—both characters recognised as figures for Elizabeth[33]. All three mythical women faced suffering following their desires and they each turned to suicide in one final moment of agency. Dido and Cleopatra both pre-empt their deaths, as Dido constructs her own funeral pyre and Cleopatra carefully costumes herself before being poisoned by asps—a death that allowed her 'to retain her beauty and grace' ([Tronicke 2018](#), pp. 11, 151). In contrast, Helen, who has lost this beauty already, likely hangs herself in a more sudden and visceral act[34]. This method of suicide calls to mind yet another mythical female, Antigone, and understanding Heywood's echoes of this myth further illuminates the political histories evoked by Helen's final moments.

Antigone had appeared in George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh's *Jocasta*, performed at Gray's Inn in 1566, which responded to both anxieties over Elizabeth's virginity as well as the 'affective and political power passed down specifically from mother to daughter' ([Pollard 2017](#), p. 62)[35]. Anne Boleyn's reputation as an incestuous adulterer, executed for high treason, had of course led to major concerns about Elizabeth. Rather than avoid association with her mother, however, Elizabeth had embraced her iconography, nodding to the mythical tropes used in her mother's coronation ceremony and the Boleyn family's avian imagery throughout her reign[36]. In Heywood's play, Helen looks to both mother and daughter: Helen is key to their shared use of the Judgement of Paris; and her final scene in Heywood's play is shared with her own daughter, Hermione, which reinforces echoes of Elizabeth and her mother by mirroring the characters from *Jocasta*. Furthermore, Antigone's suicide features in Sophocles' *Antigone*—translated into Latin by Thomas Watson in 1581—which Heywood may reference through Helen's death.

After going against her sister's wishes and defying King Creon's instruction not to care for her father or bury her dead brother, Antigone is imprisoned in a cave where she hangs herself. The parallel is significant because, to begin with, Antigone was praised by writers for characteristics that had also been commended in Elizabeth: her 'filial and sisterly devotion', 'feminine piety' and 'constancy' ([Pollard 2017](#), p. 66). Like Antigone, Elizabeth asserted her sororal devotion in the face of adversity, when she was imprisoned by her sister. Elizabeth had, at this time, sent Mary many letters insisting her loyalty and innocence in the Wyatt rebellion. We know that Heywood was interested in the predicament Elizabeth found herself in here, because he dramatised her supplication to Mary (emphasising her loyalty and perseverance) in *If you know not me, You know no bodie*, and included it again in *Englands Elizabeth* (1631), where he praised the princess Elizabeth for her 'extraordinary patience' ([Heywood 1982](#), p. 99)[37]. However, this episode also captured and prompted concerns about Elizabeth's constancy because she had converted to Catholicism to convince Mary of her loyalty, casting, for some, permanent doubt on her '*Semper Eadem*' motto.

5. Conclusions

Given Heywood's attention to the truth of Elizabeth's appearance throughout *The Iron Age* plays, it makes sense that he would look back to times when her integrity was called into question. And with this focus on the true image of Elizabeth, Heywood subverts another of Elizabeth's mottoes: *Veritas filia Temporis* ('Truth the daughter of Time'). The phrase had been intended to propose the truth of the Protestant Bible, but through Helen and her wrinkled brow, Heywood suggests the truth revealed by time is that Elizabeth's inviolable and divine image in propaganda is a travesty. With the loss of her divine beauty and her popularity, Helen decides to end her life; but Elizabeth, on the other hand, continued to fabricate her youth and allure only to be mocked by writers such as Heywood. The Queen is not celebrated as Helen the fabled beauty of the ancient world; rather, Helen becomes a mirror for the natural body of Elizabeth, which itself was concealed over fears it would be considered a mirror to a tired and weakened reign.

Heywood utilised a vast web of sources to create his oblique political commentary, with mythological sources intertwined with provocative material on age, time and representation, all set against a background of an elaborate tradition of royal iconography. By

evoking the Troy story, Heywood reasserts (and mocks) England's claims of ancestry that rested upon a heritage of adultery and destruction, looking back at a time when (in the 1590s) English subjects were either anticipating or, (in the early Jacobean years) coming to terms with, change. In bringing much of this material to his audiences of the popular stage, Heywood was opening up classical texts (a traditional reserve of the elite) to the masses in a democratisation of knowledge which seems pointedly aware of its capacity to connect politically astute audiences with a language of satirical critique, through mythology. The once beautiful Queen of Sparta whose adultery caused an infamous war was, of course, never a glorifying figure for Elizabeth, but throughout *The Iron Age I & II*, she certainly provides some redolent political adjacencies.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1] *Henslowe's Diary* contains a number of play titles which correlate to Heywood's subject matter and there are also countless costumes and props recorded by Henslowe in 1598 that also feature in the Ages plays. Henslowe records a play called '*troye*' first performed on 22nd June 1596, which could be a truncated version of both *The Iron Age I* and *II*. For more on the earlier dating of *The Iron Age* plays, see Arrell (2016). On the earlier dating of the other Age plays, see (Arrell 2014, 2018, 2019).

[2] Steven Mullaney's focus is revenge tragedy but Catherine Loomis highlights that a similar interplay is present across all genres (Loomis 2010, p. 119).

[3] References to *The Fair Maid of the West I and II* are from Heywood (1967).

[4] On Heywood and *The Book of Sir Thomas More*, see Merriam (1988).

[5] Rowland discusses Heywood's adaptation of Roman comedy in *The Captives; or, The Lost Recovered* (1624), a play which speaks on the 'ethics of trade and international relations and, [. . .] the dynamics of domestic subservience' (Rowland 2010, p. 176). Rowland also explains that *Loves Mistris, or The Queens Masque* (1636) was Heywood's 'funniest but most incisive critique of Caroline court culture' (ibid., p. 234).

[6] On Heywood's pageants see Bergeron (1986) and Rowland (2010, pp. 301–69).

[7] This tradition, of course, saw the Queen frequently 'acknowledge the frailty of her own female body natural, whilst indicating through images of masculinity her role as king in the body politic' (Hopkins and Connolly 2007, p. 4). On the concept, see especially Kantorowicz (1957).

[8] Whitelock quotes the proclamation directly (Dasent 1900, p. 69).

[9] Whitelock explains: '[Federico] Zuccaro's blanched, mask-like face pattern was [. . .] inserted on portraits of every size throughout the 1580s and early 1590s' (Whitelock 2014, p. 214). For more on the 'mask of youth' in Elizabeth's later portraits, see Mirkin (1993).

[10] All quotes from Heywood's Age plays are taken from Heywood (1874, vol. 3) and will be referenced by page number in parenthesis throughout.

[11] For more on contemporary attitudes on beauty see Baker (2010, pp. 1–17, 132–39).

[12] On Heywood and Chapman, see Coffin (2017). Coffin aims to 'reduce the cultural distance between the two authors' and, together with Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (1602?), highlight the similarities in their treatment of Troy (Coffin 2017, p. 55).

[13] Given her Greek heritage and sympathetic portrayals, Pollard explains that Hecuba embodied 'sympathetic transmission of emotion' and could evoke ideas around 'the reciprocal influence of bodies and spirits' (Pollard 2017, p. 9).

[14] Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* (*The History of the Kings of Britain*) (c.1136) begins with Brutus banished from Italy and directed by Diana to the island that became Britain (named after himself). Heywood produced his own chronicle of England's history in his *The Life of Merlin* (1641), a biographical work that recounts all the kings of England—from the legend of Brutus, to Elizabeth, ending with Charles II. For more on Britain and the matter of Troy, see Hadfield (2004, pp. 151–68).

[15] James also recognises that Shakespeare 'exposes lack of authenticity in a legend which exists only to bequeath authoritative origins' (James 1997, pp. 89–90). On the relationship between Shakespeare and Heywood's play see Farley-Hills (1990, pp. 41–71).

[16] Peele later adapted this play into the poem, *A Tale of Troy* (1589). For more on Peele's play, see Montrose (1980). For more on the theme of the three goddesses see Hackett (2014).

[17] John D. Reeves (1954) finds eight works that use the myth to respond to either Elizabeth or her mother. For more on the interplay between Anne and Elizabeth's political representations, see Hackett (2018).

[18] In Shakespeare's play, Venus is (like Heywood's Helen) a figure for the ageing Elizabeth who loses her beauty, and she becomes a way to mock the Queen's marriage negotiations with the younger Duke of Anjou. Hadfield explains that Shakespeare's Venus is

[19] 'spared few indignities in the representation of her aggressive wooing of Adonis' and is a critical 'figure of the ageing queen' (Hadfield 2005, p. 131).

[19] Quotes from *Dido* are taken from Marlowe (2003).

[20] For more on the countless references to sexual infections throughout *Troilus and Cressida*, see Forsyth (2019). All quotes from *Troilus and Cressida* are taken from Shakespeare (2007a).

[21] Bakhtin writes that the body 'is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world' (1984, p. 27).

[22] For more on Helen and Cressida, see Rutter (2001, pp. 104–41) and Maguire (2009, pp. 92–97).

[23] The event is recounted in Pausanias (1918, p. 123).

[24] For more on Elizabeth and accounts of her attitude toward mirrors, see Montrose (2006, pp. 241–47).

[25] For more on attitudes towards the succession and Elizabeth's reputation as she aged, see Montrose (2006, pp. 211–13).

[26] The first edition was published in 1559 and the subsequent editions were in 1563, 1574, 1578, 1587 and 1610.

[27] All quotes from *Richard II* are taken from Shakespeare (2007b).

[28] Bui quotes Kantorowicz (1957, p. 40).

[29] For more on the motif, see Cohen (2000) and Lewis (2020, pp. 23–32).

[30] All references to Shakespeare's Sonnets are from Shakespeare (2007c).

[31] On the Sonnets and the succession see Shrank (2009).

[32] For more on time in the Sonnets see Bui (2020); Charney (2009, pp. 40–48); Callaghan (2007) and Kaula (1963).

[33] On Cleopatra and Elizabeth, see Morris (1969); Rinehart (1972) and Jankowski (1989). On Dido and Elizabeth, see Weber (1999); Williams (2006) and Preedy (2014).

[34] The *OED* defines 'strangles' (v.1) as 'to kill by external compression of the throat, esp. by means of a rope or the like passed round the neck'.

[35] For more on Antigone, see Miola (2014).

[36] Boleyn's 1532 coronation pageant at Leaden Hall featured a white falcon that descended from the roof. See Udall (1903, pp. 15, 21). This memorable entertainment was echoed in Elizabeth's own coronation progress. A white falcon was also present in the royal arms at Boleyn's residences, while a damask tablecloth portrait of Elizabeth was decorated with falcon. See Mitchell (1997, pp. 50–56). The English ambassador to Paris, Edward Stafford reported the existence of an insulting cartoon of Elizabeth which depicted Anjou with a restless falcon. See Montrose (2006, pp. 136–38). For more on Boleyn and Elizabeth, see Hackett (2018).

[37] For the encounter between the sisters, see Heywood (1982, pp. 98–99). For his dramatisation of the event in *If you know not me*, see Heywood (1874, vol. 1, pp. 235–36). Heywood also summarises Elizabeth's troubles in his section on the monarch in *The exemplary lives and memorable acts of nine of the most worthy women in the world* (Heywood 1640, pp. 193–95).

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