

11. ('*Encomium on Helen*': summary)

(1) The glory (*cosmos*) of a city is courage, of a body, beauty, of a soul, wisdom, of action, virtue, of speech, truth; it is right in all circumstances to praise what is praiseworthy and blame what is blameworthy.

(2) It belongs to the same man both to speak the truth and to refute falsehood. Helen is universally condemned and regarded as the symbol of disasters; I wish to subject her story to critical examination, and so rescue her from ignorant calumny.

(3) She was of the highest parentage: her reputed father Tyndareus was the most powerful of men; her real father, Zeus, was king of all.

(4) From these origins she obtained her divine beauty, by the display of which she inspired love in countless men, and caused the assemblage of a great number of ambitious suitors, some endowed with wealth, others with ancestral fame, others with personal prowess, others with accumulated wisdom.

(5) I shall not relate the story of who won Helen or how: to tell an audience what it knows wins belief but gives no pleasure. I shall pass over this period and come to the beginning of my defence, setting out the probable reasons for her journey to Troy.

(6) She acted as she did either through Fate and the will of the gods and the decrees of Necessity, or because she was seized by force, or won over by persuasion (*or captivated by love*). If the first, it is her accuser who deserves blame; for no human foresight can hinder the will of God: the stronger cannot be hindered by the weaker, and God is stronger than man in every way. Therefore if the cause was Fate, Helen cannot be blamed.

(7) If she was carried off by force, clearly her abductor wronged her and she was unfortunate. He, a barbarian, com-

mitted an act of barbarism, and should receive blame, disgrace and punishment; she, being robbed of her country and friends, deserves pity rather than obloquy.

(8) If it was speech that persuaded her and deceived her soul, her defence remains easy. Speech is a great power, which achieves the most divine works by means of the smallest and least visible form; for it can even put a stop to fear, remove grief, create joy, and increase pity. This I shall now prove:

(9) All poetry can be called speech in metre. Its hearers shudder with terror, shed tears of pity, and yearn with sad longing; the soul, affected by the words, feels as its own an emotion aroused by the good and ill fortunes of other people's actions and lives.

(10) The inspired incantations of words can induce pleasure and avert grief; for the power of the incantations, uniting with the feeling in the soul, soothes and persuades and transports by means of its wizardry. Two types of wizardry and magic have been invented, which are errors in the soul and deceptions in the mind.

(11) Their persuasions by means of fictions are innumerable; for if everyone had recollection of the past, knowledge of the present, and foreknowledge of the future, the power of speech would not be so great. But as it is, when men can neither remember the past nor observe the present nor prophesy the future, deception is easy; so that most men offer opinion as advice to the soul. But opinion, being unreliable, involves those who accept it in equally uncertain fortunes.

(12) (*Text corrupt*) Thus, persuasion by speech is equivalent to abduction by force, as she was compelled to agree to what was said, and consent to what was done. It was therefore the persuader, not Helen, who did wrong and should be blamed.

(13) That Persuasion, when added to speech, can also make any impression it wishes on the soul, can be shown, firstly, from the arguments of the meteorologists, who by removing one opinion and implanting another, cause what is incredible and invisible to appear before the eyes of the mind; secondly, from legal contests, in which a speech can sway and persuade a crowd, by the skill of its composition, not by the truth of its statements; thirdly, from the philosophical debates, in which quickness of thought is shown easily altering opinion.

(14) The power of speech over the constitution of the soul can be compared with the effect of drugs on the bodily state: just as drugs by driving out different humours from the body can put an end either to the disease or to life, so with speech: different words can induce grief, pleasure or fear; or again, by means of a harmful kind of persuasion, words can drug and bewitch the soul.

(15) If Helen was persuaded by love, defence is equally easy. What we see has its own nature, not chosen by us; and the soul is impressed through sight.

(16) For instance, in war, the sight of enemy forms wearing hostile array is so disturbing to the soul that often men flee in terror as if the coming danger were already present. The powerful habit induced by custom is displaced by the fear aroused by sight, which causes oblivion of what custom judges honourable and of the advantage derived from victory.

(17) People who have seen a frightful sight have been driven out of their minds, so great is the power of fear; while many have fallen victims to useless toils, dreadful diseases and incurable insanity, so vivid are the images of the things seen which vision engraves on the mind.

(18) Painters, however, when they create one shape from many colours, give pleasure to sight; and the pleasure afforded by sculpture to the eyes is divine; many objects engender in many people a love of many actions and forms.

(19) If therefore Helen's eye, delighted with Paris's form, engendered the passion of love in her soul, this is not remarkable; for if a god is at work with divine power, how can the weaker person resist him? And if the disease is human, due to the soul's ignorance, it must not be condemned as a crime but pitied as a misfortune, for it came about through the snares of Fate, not the choice of the will; by the compulsion of love, not by the plottings of art.

(20) Therefore, whichever of the four reasons caused Helen's action, she is innocent.

(21) I have expunged by my discourse this woman's ill fame, and have fulfilled the object set forth at the outset. I have tried to destroy the unjust blame and the ignorant opinion, and have chosen to write this speech as an Encomium on Helen and an amusement for myself.