This passage occurs very at the end of the poem, once Hector’s body has been returned to Troy and contains the last major speech of the work as Helen takes her turn in lamenting Hector. She is the last to do so, after Andromache and Hecuba, and her lament builds on and contrasts with the previous two. The passage is notable for its examples of unusual syntax and meter, and difficult to resolve chronology. The content is both a touching reflection on Hector’s kindness and a reinforcement of Helen’s main character trait, of self-centeredness.

760 ὥς ἔφατο κλαίουσα: This formulaic phrase appears three times in the mourning scene, in lines 746, 760, and 776, following each of the three women’s lamentations. The repetition links the passage together, and may encourage the audience to draw comparisons between the different women.

761 τριτάτη: Helen speaks third, after Andromache and Hecuba.

763-6 These lines appear slightly out of place. After mentioning Hector, Helen switches to the subject of her husband and her abduction, and then returns to Hector. Kirk suggests Helen is comparing Hector to Paris to praise Hector further, since Paris was her husband, but Hector was the one who was kind to her (Kirk 357).
θεοειδής: “godlike,” or handsome. Clearly contrasted with Hector, who instead is ἢπτος and φίλος and speaks gentle words.

ἡδη γὰρ νῦν μοι τόδε εἰκοστὸν ἔτος ἐστίν: An heavily spondaic line; the slowness and heaviness of the meter echoes the weariness and resignation of the content.

eἰκοστὸν: a controversial word, as are most things having to do with the timeline of the Trojan war (the ages of Neoptolemos and Telemachus, for example). There are different opinions on how Helen could have spent twenty years already at Troy. Leaf says that the only explanation is the story that the Greeks first landed in Mysia, wasting ten years. Kirk prefers to read εἰκοστὸν more generally, to mean any large number. It may also parallel Odysseus’s twenty year journey, including the events recounted in the Odyssey; of course, Odysseus was gone twenty years without including a hypothetical detour to Mysia (Kirk 358).

ἀσύφηλον: “insolent.” Should be understood with ἔπος. It only appears one other time in Homer, in II. 9.647, when Achilles describes the shameful way Agamemnon treated him.

ἐνίπτοι: “would rebuke,” iterative optative with εἰ, the only time this construction occurs in Homer, though it is common later (Leaf).

γαλόων ἢ εἰνατέρον both “sister-in-law: the first is the sister of one’s husband, the second is the wife of a brother; presumably that means the wives of Paris’ brothers.

εὐπέπλων: “with beautiful peplos,” or “well-dressed.” It appears five times in the Iliad, three times describing the sisters-in-law, and once describing Greek women.
ἢ ἑκυρή: Hecuba is presumably listening to Helen’s lament, as are the brothers and sisters-in-law that she talks about, but Helen does not seem to take this into account when she complains about their behavior. Or perhaps she is trying to send them a message.

σῇ τ᾽ ἀγανοφροσύνῃ etc.: this line is repetitive when taken with the line before, and is often taken out. Leaf argues for its inclusion, saying “But the repetition of similar words and forms is common enough in Epic poetry...The dwelling on the thought is a most pathetic touch.”

Troίῃ εὑρείῃ and πεφρίκασιν: both double spondees in the fifth and sixth feet of their lines. Although spondaic fifth feet are not uncommon in Homer, an occurrence of two in a row is notable.

ἡπιος: Willcock points out the emotional impact of this description: “It shows the essential humanity of the poet of the Iliad that the final epitaph of ‘manslaughtering Hektor’ is that he was kind, even to Helen” (276).

πεφρίκασιν: “shudder at,” from φρίσσω, “to be rough” or “bristle.” Helen ends her lament with this very strong expression of how friendless she is without Hector, and how much the other Trojans revile her.

ἐπὶ δ᾽ ἔστενε δήμος ἀπείρων: cf. line 76 (γόον δ᾽ ἀλίαστον ὁρινε), Kirk quotes bT as suggesting that “not only the women lament here, for she [Helen] has aroused greater grief” (358). The word choices here are strange: ἀπείρων typically only modifies “sea” or “land,” while δήμος typically refers to the country, rather than to a multitude (Leaf).
With the lamentations over, Priam attends to the necessary business of bringing in wood for the funeral pyre. His speech is direct, with no pauses for emotion. Formal mourning was carried out by women, and Priam, though certainly grieving, must direct his men.

πυκινὸν: here “crafty” though elsewhere it means “close” or “well put-together,” as when it describes Phoenix’s bed (Il. 9.621).

δωδεκάτη μόλη ἡώς: “until the twelfth dawn comes.” Though Priam is reassuring his men, this is a rather ominous ending, since after the twelve days are up, the Greeks will renew their attack, and the Trojans no longer have Hector as their champion to defend them.

μόλη: from βλώσκω, to come or go. 3rd sg. aorist active subjunctive.
Works Consulted


