

The *Opsis* of *Helen*: Performative Intertextuality in Euripides

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THE QUESTION of the *καινότης* of Euripides' *Helen* has been current ever since 411 B.C., the approximate date of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*, the first (extant) response to the Euripidean play's original performance.¹ τὴν καινὴν Ἑλένην μιμήσομαι: this is how Euripides' relative announces his impersonation of Helen (*Thesm.* 850). With *καινήν*² Aristophanes, elsewhere proven an astute reader of tragic technique (alerting us to trademarks of Aeschylean and Euripidean dramaturgy in *Frogs*, for instance),³ marks off the novelty of the Euripidean play, whose wit and playfulness has not escaped modern scholars either. Modern readings invariably detect elements of comedy and satyr play at work at

¹ For the probable date and venue of the comedy (Great Dionysia, 411) see C. Austin and D. Olson, *Thesmophoriazusae* (Oxford 2004) xxxiii–xliv. For a different suggestion (Lenaea, 410) see A. Tsakmakis, "Persians, Oligarchs, and Festivals: The Date of *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae*," in A. Markantonatos and B. Zimmerman (eds.), *Crisis on Stage: Tragedy and Comedy in Late Fifth-Century Athens* (Berlin/Boston 2011) 291–302.

² *καινή* *qua* recent (performed in 412) or as an example of a novel type of tragedy. The novel portrayal of Helen was not Euripides' innovation, as Austin and Olson, *Thesmophoriazusae* 278, rightly remind us. Thus novelty of myth is more probably not the key meaning in the use of the word (see below). For *kainotes* as a critical term in Aristophanes see M. Wright, *The Comedian as Critic: Greek Old Comedy and Poetics* (London 2012) 70–98.

³ *Ar. Ran.* 832–835, 910–926 (Aeschylean silences), 840–843, 1028–1029 (choreography of Aesch. *Pers.*), 1061–1068 (Euripidean rags). For the critical, or better metacritical, function of comedic poetics see Wright, *Comedian as Critic*.

various levels, presented below with examples: plot (the fairytale story type with its happy ending); individual scenes (chiefly Menelaus and Old woman porter and the recognition scene); characterization (Menelaus as amusing replica of Odysseus); and motifs (mainly the recognition, the coastal setting, and the shipwreck motif).⁴ Irony and a sense of amusement are inherent in the multiple paradoxes which Euripides' new, chaste and noble, Helen has to face. I share the ancient and modern consensus regarding Euripides' play. Comicality, however, penetrates Euripides' *Helen* much deeper than has been noticed. The purpose of this paper is to reinforce the traditional view on the peculiar nature of the *Helen*, by focussing on aspects of the play's *opsis*. The analysis suggests that the intergeneric give-and-take in the construction of plot and theme is strikingly replicated in the granularity of the staging technique. *Helen*'s quasi-comedic *skene*-door, its open and fluid Egyptian chronotope, its extremely busy proxemics, and unusual treatment of its characters' *skeue* will be some of the key points for consideration. By focusing on staging technique, this paper rereads the *Helen* through a different lens. Furthermore, by indulging in a *synkrisis* of comedic and tragic performance poetics, it engages in the wider debate on tragedy as genre and its development in the late fifth century.

A few clarifications for the hermeneutic model need to be made before applying it to Euripides' play. My object of study is performance.⁵ Musical codes excluded, I focus on aspects of

⁴ For comedy in scenes see e.g. W. Allan, *Euripides: Helen* (Cambridge 2008) 209–210; P. Burian, *Euripides: Helen* (Oxford 2007) 3; W. G. Arnott, "Euripides' Newfangled *Helen*," *Antichthon* 24 (1990) 1–18, at 14 ff. For comedy in characters, especially Menelaus' characterization, see n.60 below. For comedy in the use of motifs see e.g. N. Austin, *Helen of Troy and her Shameless Phantom* (Ithaca 1994) 139, 183, 188; C. P. Segal, "The Two Worlds of Euripides' *Helen*," *TAPA* 102 (1971) 553–614, at 612.

⁵ For the purposes of my analysis, performance is understood and defined as all systems of codes and signs involved in the non-verbal communication of dramatic meaning. For an overview of the concept see M. Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London/New York 1996).

what Aristotle broadly defined as *opsis*, which is the sum of codes involved in the production of a dramatic play.⁶ Such codes include but are not limited to: the actors' *skeue* (costume, mask), *hypokrisis* (movement, gesture), and dramatic space as configured via scenography, narrative, and action. The referential capacity of non-verbal signs in the theatre, i.e. their capacity to point towards other discourses (other plays, other genres, ideology) is today an uncontested axiom in the study of performance genres.⁷

⁶ I am aware that in using this term I am entering a still controversial area of Aristotelian hermeneutics. See most recently G. M. Sifakis, "The Misunderstanding of *opsis* in Aristotle's *Poetics*," in G. W. M. Harrison and V. Liapis (eds.), *Performance in Greek and Roman Theatre* (Leiden/Boston 2013) 45–62; D. Konstan, "Propping up Greek Tragedy: The Right Use of *opsis*," in *Performance in Greek and Roman Theatre* 63–76. The exact meaning of the term and Aristotle's view on *opsis* in his *Poetics* continue to generate debate. Questions include: does *opsis* denote the actor's scenic paraphernalia (costume and mask) or the entire visual aspect of the play in performance? What is Aristotle's evaluation of that element: does he merely exclude *opsis* from theoretical analysis, undervalue, or completely condemn *opsis*? I follow scholars like O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 1977) 477–479, and S. Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (Chapel Hill 1986) 337–343, in understanding *opsis* as encompassing all visual aspects. That most of Aristotle's references seem to point to actors reflects their dominating role in endowing the visual aspect with meaning (in this, but in any theatrical tradition for that matter). It also attests to their rising dominance in the theatrical tradition of his age. For Aristotle's protest against abusive treatment of *opsis* (1453b8–10) and not general condemnation (of what after all he states as one of the six constituents of tragedy: 1449b31–3) see Konstan. For a general study stressing the centrality of *visuality-opsis* in the Greek theatrical experience from a different perspective (exploring the Greek apprehension of the sense of vision and its impact on the development of their theatre, the relation of the surrounding environment to the viewing place, and the centrality of the mask) see P. W. Meineck, *Opsis: The Visuality of Greek Drama* (diss. Nottingham 2011).

⁷ A. Petrides, *Menander, New Comedy and the Visual* (Cambridge 2014), on what he terms *intervisuality* in Menander is an important contribution towards recognition and inclusion of the performance level in the study of intertextuality in classics. See also M. Troupi, *Menander, Euripides, Aristophanes: Intertextual Transformation of Genre and Gender* (diss. Royal Holloway, Univ.

The emphasis of this particular study is on the ability of patterns of *opsis* to activate theatrical memory, to act as agents of inter-generic dialogue (in this case dialogue primarily between comedy and tragedy),⁸ and more particularly to point to the interaction between genres at the level of staging technique. That is what I term *performative intertextuality*. I use the terms *comedic* and *tragedic* to denote techniques pertaining to comedy and tragedy respectively. *Tragic* and *comic* are reserved for further characterizing the application of either set of techniques with a humorous or distressing effect in a specific instance.⁹ Stagecraft criticism and studies arising from it in classics established the significance of the non-verbal and enabled the contextual reading of theatrical signs, especially as repositories of cultural memory. Nevertheless, the capacity of the visual to function as a marker of inter-generic allusion, the key premise of this study of the *Helen*, still needs to be fully appreciated and systematically applied in the study of classical drama.¹⁰

London 2007), again with reference to Menander.

⁸ This is a play rich in intertextual dialogue with other genres as well (see also n.4 above). Engagement with Homer, especially the Phaeacian episode, is close and multilevel: narrative technique, characterization (Menelaus as Odysseus, Penelopean Helen), incident, motifs. See A. Skouroumouni, *Staging the Female: Studies in Female Space in Euripides* (diss. Univ. London 2011) 49–52, 64–65, 77–78.

⁹ The intention in prescribing the choice of vocabulary is to avoid limiting the variety of the tonal effects that performative intertextuality activates, and to avoid as well reifying notions of tragedy and comedy too strictly. For my anti-essentialist approach to genre see the following paragraph.

¹⁰ For intertextuality (theory and term) see G. Allen, *Intertextuality* (London/New York 2000). The concept and framework of intertextuality for understanding and studying networks of connectedness between texts of ancient literature is gaining currency over more traditional notions like ‘allusion’, ‘influence’, ‘imitation’, and rightly so. Latinists took the lead in assimilating intertextuality into their reading practices; see D. Fowler, *Roman Constructions: Readings in Postmodern Latin* (Oxford/New York 2000) 115–137 (with an overview of the use of the concept and reading techniques in Latinist studies and bibliography). F. Zeitlin, “The Closet of Masks: Role-playing and Myth-making in the *Orestes* of Euripides,” *Ramus* 9 (1980) 51–

In this context of reflection on issues of methodology, it is important to stress from the outset that I subscribe to the flexible anti-essentialist view of genre. It is a key premise and reaffirmed conclusion of this paper that genres are not stiff entities but discourses; they are best understood not as strict grammars of rules but as communicative shared modes of thinking with an underlying structure reconstituted from occasion to occasion.¹¹ Accordingly, generic boundaries are no strict borderlines. Indeed, they were much more porous in Athens, especially since the last quarter of the fifth century. The institutional nature of ancient drama (generic identity prescribed by festival context) facilitated experimentation with generic convention. Cross-generic responsiveness reached its peak in the latter part of the fifth century.¹² Cross-boundary play on the level of performance—performative intertextuality—is a key feature of inter-generic osmosis in this period.¹³ The

77, on *Orestes*' literariness, treating the play as a "palimpsestic text" (54), is an important early treatment of interconnectedness of Greek drama.

¹¹ See M. Depew and D. Obbink (eds.), *Matrices of Genre: Authors, Canons, and Society* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2000): the whole collection of papers considers how the discussion of genre has moved forward with the useful application of methods and concepts from linguistics, social theory, and anthropology in the study of genre. For the flexible anti-essentialist idea of ancient genres see most recently E. Bakola, L. Prauschello, and M. Telo, *Greek Comedy and the Discourse of Genres* (Cambridge 2013) (as reflected in comedy's poetics); D. J. Mastronarde, "Euripidean Tragedy and Genre: The Terminology and its Problems," in M. Cropp et al. (eds.), *Euripides and Tragic Theatre in the Late Fifth Century* (*ILS* 24–25 [1999/2000]) 23–39 (on tragedy).

¹² For this loosening see most recently H. P. Foley, "Generic Boundaries in Late Fifth-century Athens," in M. Revermann and P. J. Wilson (eds.), *Performance, Iconography, Reception: Studies in Honour of Oliver Taplin* (Oxford 2008) 15–36.

¹³ Mixing of genres as a characteristic of the last phase of tragedy, and of the last phase of Euripides' career, are widely acknowledged. Hints of contraventions of generic boundaries are found much earlier, of course. For example, the business of knocking on the door or the figure of the Nurse in *Cho.* and the shifting of space in *Pers.* or *Cho.* are some of the characteristics

theorization of theatre, the growing professionalism of theatrical agents (actors, musicians), the expanding literacy and book culture increased proficiency in the mechanics of performance.¹⁴ To return to our starting point, Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*, the Kedestes' gradual apprenticeship into the art of watching, acting, and writing theatre reflects the performance transformation phenomena, already depicted culturally in the late fifth century. Producing and watching theatre has become a much more technical experience by the time Euripides' *Helen* is first produced onstage. With creators and receivers alert to the significance and engineering of *opsis*, toying with technique reaches new levels of sophistication. Euripides' bag of tricks for articulating characters and plot in the *Helen* hides more surprises than so far discovered.

A focal point of our consideration is dramatic space, the dynamics of its construction and meaning. Euripides is to be found playing outside his home turf, trespassing into the zones of both comedy and satyr drama, in order to render *Helen's* Egypt. The choice of Egypt as the play's topography, although prescribed to a degree by literary antecedents,¹⁵ can yet be and has been considered as a pointer to satyr drama in two respects: Egypt figures as space in satyr plays, and remote and exotic locations are common in that genre.¹⁶ Nevertheless,

of later comedy already in Aeschylus. On this period see O. Taplin, "Fifth-Century Tragedy and Comedy: A *Synkrisis*," *JHS* 106 (1986) 163–174, at 165, 172.

¹⁴ See Petrides, *Menander*, on the "new performance culture" developing from late fifth century on.

¹⁵ Helen and Menelaus are connected with Egypt in Homer (*Od.* 4.130–132, 228–231), Stesichorus (fr.193 *PMG* = 193 *PMGF*), and Hdt. 2.112.2.

¹⁶ Egypt is most likely the setting of the satyr plays *Proteus* by Aeschylus and *Busiris* by Euripides. It does not appear in extant tragedy. For the satyric quality of geographical context see E. Hall, *Greek Tragedy: Suffering under the Sun* (Oxford/New York 2010) 279–280 (choice of Egypt seen as pointing to satyr play); A. P. Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived: Euripides' Plays of Mixed Reversal* (Oxford/New York 1971) 80–81 (wilderness of Egypt as pointer to satyric treatment of locale).

there are other features of *Helen's* Egypt which set that space beyond the limits of the closed and fixed tragic chronotope. Euripides' arsenal in constructing his dramatic space (visible and invisible, mimetic and diegetic)¹⁷ deserves closer examination.

Helen's Egypt comes across distinctively as a kind of spaceless limbo. The reference to the river Nile in the opening lines (1–3) is the only descriptive detail of the landscape throughout the entire play. Other details contribute to setting the locale as foreign and fabulous, with marked elements of a *locus amoenus*: evocations of the distant journey to Egypt (e.g. 83, 459–461, 694–695), references to the βάρβαρον χθόνα (598; cf. 863, 1042), the picturesque description of the chorus' laundry by the deep-blue river and the green plants (179–183), the bright water of the Nile (462), the impressive rich palace (68–70, 295–296, 430–432, 1260).¹⁸ There is enough geographical detail to establish distance, but no ethnographical material is used to specify surroundings. By the same token, Egyptian culture is similarly unmarked. The brief moment of Theonoe's first entry in the company of slaves cleansing the sky and purifying the earth (865–870) might hint at Egyptian practice.¹⁹ Yet no other

¹⁷ Categories as prescribed by M. Issacharoff, "Space and Reference in Drama," *Poetics Today* 2 (1981) 211–224, who distinguishes dramatic space into space visible to the audience (mimetic) and invisible offstage space (diegetic). The taxonomies of space in theoretical studies abound. For recent refinements of Issacharoff's taxonomies (keeping its core distinction between visible and invisible space) see e.g. M. Revermann, *Comic Business: Theatricality, Dramatic Technique, and Performance Contexts of Aristophanic Comedy* (Oxford 2006) 108–110; L. Edmunds, *Theatrical Space and Historical Place in Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus* (Lanham 1996) 23–38.

¹⁸ Absence of ethnographical detail does not assimilate Egypt to Athens, as in M. Wright, *Euripides' Escape-Tragedies: A Study of Helen, Andromeda, and Iphigenia among the Taurians* (Oxford 2005) 166–168. As noted, Egypt possesses features that mark it as foreign and exotic land.

¹⁹ The rite has no close Greek parallel, but still the use of sulphur for purification appears also in Greek religion. The Herodotean idea of Egyptian obsession with cleanliness could be lurking behind this. But again, Euripides avoids reference to the peculiar purification customs that fascinate

allusion is made to any of the religious curiosities (theriomorphic gods, sacred animals, strange rituals, burial practices) or the paradoxical social practices, which fascinated Herodotus or Sophocles.²⁰ Euripides' Egypt has little to do with the traditional image of the land as a hotbed of cultural otherness and inversion.

Furthermore, no sense of a strong Egyptian identity marks the collective or the individuals. The Egyptian people and royal family are presented in ethnically neutral terms. Their traditions adhere to values admirable by Greek standards: hospitality, piety to gods, justice. The king Proteus, his daughter Theonoe, the Egyptian people, all friendly and supportive to Helen's cause, share those qualities.²¹ Only Theoclymenus threatens to violate that inheritance. Motivated by his personal lust for Helen, he kills Greeks arriving in Egypt (155). Again, however, his propensity to violence and his potential impiety are not presented as ethno-cultural characteristics. Cruelty to strangers is not attributed to Egyptian xenophobia but pre-

the historian (Hdt. 2.37). On the opposing views regarding the relation of the scene to Egyptian custom see Allan, *Helen* 243; J. H. K. O. Chong-Gossard, *Gender and Communication in Euripides' Plays: Between Song and Silence* (Leiden 2008) 18–19; R. Kannicht, *Euripides Helena II* (Heidelberg 1969) 232 n.9.

²⁰ Hdt. 2; Soph. *OC* 337–341. Burial practices could easily have been treated in this play, in relation to Proteus' tomb or the Greek funeral customs described (1235–1277). For the extensive influence of Herodotus' Egyptian *logos* on all literary genres see E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-definition through Tragedy* (Oxford 1989) 134. It is probable that Euripides was familiar with Herodotus' work. The date of the *Histories* is uncertain, but the most probable hypothesis is that the terminus ante quem is 425 B.C. Even if this is inaccurate, it has been plausibly suggested that pre-publication versions were widely known from oral performances in Athens and other cities; see e.g. C. Dewald, "Introduction," in R. Waterfield, *Herodotus: The Histories* (Oxford/New York 1998) x–xi.

²¹ See e.g. 47 (Proteus as the "most virtuous man on earth"), 10–14, 145, 515, 819, 859 (Theonoe's nobility and justice), 477–482, 1035–1042 (Old Woman porter and chariot keepers friendly to Helen).

sented as an idiosyncratic feature of a specific character.²²

Extending Theoclymenus' characteristic attributes to the portrait of Egypt as a whole, scholars often assimilate Egypt with Hades, a place of death and danger. An Egypt identified with the underworld is invariably seen as a kind of prerequisite for the establishment of the connection between Helen and Persephone.²³ The parallelism between the two women is in itself plausible. But even so, the pattern of abduction by death is transformed in the play so far beyond the simple archetype that the underworld motif cannot be taken as the whole model of the *Helen*.²⁴ Egypt as space does develop elements of menace: it confines Greeks, it poses danger to their life, and it becomes the site of strife and death near the end (1589–1617).²⁵ Hades is

²² Contrast e.g. Allan, *Helen* 58–59; Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian* 112–113; A. J. Podlecki, “The Basic Seriousness of Euripides’ *Helen*,” *TAPA* 101 (1970) 401–418, at 413–414, all arguing for Theoclymenus as typical barbarian. For my line of reading of Theoclymenus cf. Wright, *Euripides’ Escape-Tragedies* 194. He overstates his case for downplaying barbarism in Theoclymenus’ presentation, however, when applying the same argument to Thoas (198 ff.). For my reading of the barbarian in the *IT* see below.

²³ E.g. Allan, *Helen* 158; Burian, *Helen* 13; R. D. Friedman, “Old Stories in Euripides’ New *Helen*: παλαιότης γὰρ τῷ λόγῳ γ’ ἔνεστί τις (*Hel.* 1056),” *Phoenix* 61 (2007) 195–211, at 201, 204; D. M. Juffras, “Helen and Other Victims in Euripides’ *Helen*,” *Hermes* 121 (1993) 45–57, at 46–47; H. P. Foley, “*Anodos* Drama: Euripides’ *Alcestis* and *Helen*,” in R. Hexter and D. Selden (eds.), *Innovations of Antiquity* (New York 1992) 133–160, at 136; Segal, *TAPA* 102 (1971) 597–598; J. P. Guépin, *The Tragic Paradox: Myth and Ritual in Greek Tragedy* (Amsterdam 1968) 128.

²⁴ Helen’s salvation is not compromised; she breaks the mould by escaping from confinement, not partially (like Persephone) but totally. Abduction itself, to begin with, functions in the plot as a mechanism of salvation. The archetype of abduction by death serves the dramatist well as one (though not the only) pattern on which to base his novel plot (other paradigms of abduction are mentioned in the play: 375–385).

²⁵ Some of the elements offered as pointers of the Egypt-Hades identification (chiefly by Guépin, *Tragic Paradox*) are rather forced: e.g. the similarity of the geographical situation of Egypt with the underworld, elements of the setting (the tomb) or elements of plot (Teucer reporting deaths at Troy, Helen singing a dirge) seen as echoes of death, Proteus as possibly invoking

not entirely irrelevant. But the status of dramatic Egypt is ultimately defined by the plot as a place of safety rather than danger and death. The haziness in the representation of Euripides' Egypt perhaps maps onto the larger ambiguity inherent in the historical picture of Egypt in the fifth century, in which Egypt figures both as a major source of food and support but also as a realm of loss and death. Historical Egypt is one of Athens' key suppliers of grain (along with the Black sea and Thrace), but also the place where 200 Athenian triremes and crews are lost in the 450s (the Persians' suppression of the Egyptian revolt, in which Athenians were involved from perhaps 459 B.C.).²⁶ To argue for Egypt as Hades is to introduce a degree of rigidity into Euripides' conception of his space which the play does not invite. It is clear that Busiris' Egypt or the Aeschylean Egypt of the sons of Aegyptus has little connection with this version of Egyptian rulers and country.²⁷

One merely has to turn to the example of barbaric Tauris in *Iphigenia in Tauris*, to catch a glimpse of the volume of the exotic effect of which *Helen's* foreign land has been stripped. In both cases (Taurians and Egyptians) language, costume, and physical appearance are not verbally marked as exotic. This con-

an underworld deity, Theoclymenus and Proteus' characterization as reflecting the ambiguity of Hades' hospitality. For my detailed refutation of other Egypt-Hades pointers see Skouroumouni, *Staging the Female* 39–42.

²⁶ As S. Hornblower notes, *A Commentary on Thucydides I* (Oxford 1991) 176–177, Thucydides' account of the event is expressed in terms of a major catastrophe comparable to the Sicilian one: ὀλίγοι ἀπὸ πολλῶν ἐσώθησαν, οἱ δὲ πλείστοι ἀπώλοντο (Thuc.1.110.1).

²⁷ Allan, *Helen* 29, wrongly, I think, assumes an assimilation of the presentation of Egypt “through the terrified eyes of the Danaids” of Aeschylus (*Supp.*) and *Helen's* Egypt. A sense of danger and entrapment is at play here as well, but it derives rather from Theoclymenus' characterization as a menacing force rather than a depiction of whole land as a place of danger. The readings of e.g. Segal, *TAPA* 102 (1971) 559, 573, 607–608, and R. Eisner, “Euripides' Use of Myth,” *Arethusa* 12 (1979) 153–174, at 168, both writing of Egypt as a dualistic world, are in my view closer to the Egyptian ethos as presented in this play.

forms to the larger Euripidean tendency to avoid exploitation of authentic ethnographical material to differentiate geography and people.²⁸ But in other ways, the depiction of both land and inhabitants differs significantly in *IT*. A strong sense of an ingrained perversion permeates mimetic space: visible βωμοί and ναοί are both described as drenched in αἶμα βρότειον (405–406).²⁹ The physical appearance of the shrine (in stains of blood, decorated with the spoils of human victims) attests to the horror of the rituals enacted within it. Thoas and his herdsmen are emphatically marked as alien and barbaric through reference to their culture and ways: their naïve superstitions (264–274), their man-killing customs (389, 243, 280, 329, 337), their primitive methods (shell horns, stones for defence: 303, 318–319, 326–332, 1365–1373).

Accordingly, the Greek chorus' sense of alienation from their surroundings is strong and increasing in *IT*.³⁰ Expressions of

²⁸ On those tendencies of Euripidean technique see S. Said, "Greeks and Barbarians in Euripides' Tragedies: The End of Differences?" in T. Harrison (ed.), *Greeks and Barbarians* (Edinburgh 2002) 62–100, at 64–67; H. H. Bacon, *Barbarians in Greek Tragedy* (New Haven 1961) 139–140, 155–167.

²⁹ Though the bloodstains (mentioned already at 72–73) are probably verbal, or, if represented, visible to only a small portion of the audience and therefore verbal for the rest, they are an important aspect of the visible space. On the probable physical appearance of altar and temple (especially the debate on whether 74 and the mentioned σκῦλα [weapons or human skulls] hang from the temple or altar) see e.g. I. Torrance, "Euripides' *IT* 72–5 and a *Skene* of Slaughter," *Hermes* 137 (2009) 21–27; P. Kyriakou, *A Commentary on Euripides' Iphigenia in Tauris* (Berlin 2006) 70–71; Wright, *Euripides' Escape-Tragedies* 185–186. Whether 74 refers to temple or altar (I find the latter more probable), the text is I think inconclusive for deciding the practicalities of representation.

³⁰ Contrast Wright, *Euripides' Escape-Tragedies* 175–176, who sees the physical presence of a chorus of Greek women (in both *Hel.* and *IT*) as a vehicle of familiarization of foreign place. Nevertheless, beyond physical presence, the chorus' words, action, and personal story should also be taken into account. Notice as well how in *Helen* the chorus' story receives much less direct attention than in *IT*, their identity established only in the span of six words uttered by Helen (191–192, cf. 234), another hint to their status given

longing, wishes for escape and return, detailed evocations of the Greek landscape are frequent in the mouths of those Greek women (132–136, 447–455, 1089–1152). Through their nostalgia the volume of danger and alienation from Tauris multiplies. In *Helen* such choral nostalgia is missing.³¹ It is perhaps no coincidence that at the end of the *Helen*, the Greek choral women are left behind in the foreign place (no reference to their relocation by the *deus ex machina*). The only passing reference we get to the possibility of their relocation comes from Helen: when asking for their silent complicity to her plans, she notes that their future rescue will be her concern (σωθέντες αὐτοὶ καὶ σὲ συσσωσάσασαί ποτε, 1389). The chorus is given no space to reply.³² The chance to respond to the hope for escape just raised is not exploited in the following *stasimon* (1451–1511) either. At 1478–1486 we do hear the chorus wishing to join the migrating cranes and reach Sparta to announce the good news of Menelaus' return (καρύξασατ' ἀγγελίαν, 1491). The emphasis is on the joy of Helen's rescue, not on their own return to Greece

only at 181–182.

³¹ The chorus' responses to Helen and their comments throughout do not include any reference to their situation or any hint that they imagine themselves as in need of rescue. Cf. 211–228, 253–254, 306–361, 698–699, 855–856 (their prayer for escape from miseries focuses only on Helen and Menelaus), 1107–1164 (in that and all *stasima* [1301–1369, 1451–1511] focus is only on Helen's troubles and on the war), 1627–1641 (if my hypothesis for the Coryphaea as the one obstructing Theoclymenus is correct [see below], their willingness to sacrifice for the Egyptian princess is another hint of how these women are familiarized within Egypt).

³² Combination of request for silence with promise of eventual homecoming is not unusual, cf. Eur. *IT* 1067–1068. Allan, *Helen* 312, and Burian, *Helen* 277, both attribute lack of focus on the chorus' reply and salvation in *Helen* to the need for the focus to be on the salvation of Theonoe, whose silence is the most important for the success of the escape. I agree with the emphasis on the double use of the motif of silent complicity and the obvious centrality of Theonoe. My suggestion is that the non-rescue of the chorus perhaps has an important impact as well on our sense of the wider topography.

in any sense.³³ Unlike the situation in Tauris, there is not the same kind of imperative to move all Greeks out of Egypt. *Helen's* Egypt appears as somewhat exotic and distant (note the aforementioned elements of *locus amoenus*, the stress on the distant journey), but still it does not figure as an alien, inherently barbaric location.³⁴ With its mixed ethical associations (the typically bad barbarian Theoclymenus vs. the good Egyptians) and with its geographical and cultural characteristics receding into the background, this Egypt comes across as a sort of limbo, a vague and malleable space.

The relationship between two physical entities dominating *Helen's* stage, namely the palace and the tomb, demonstrates the point. Dwellers of the house are the siblings Theoclymenus and Theonoe (8–15), of the tomb, the father Proteus (64). The tomb of the father is a place of asylum from the threats of the son; there Helen sits as suppliant from the beginning of the play (60–65). Supplication at a tomb was (as far as we know) an uncommon sight on the tragic stage. Extant tragedy usually places its tombs offstage. Altars, not tombs are invariably the loci of supplication (e.g. Aesch. *Supp.*; Eur. *Andr.*, *HF*, *Supp.*; or in the case of Soph. *OC*, at a sacred grove).³⁵ Aristophanic parody in *Thesmophoriazousae* hints at the peculiarity of the Euripidean choice: “Well, die and go to hell—and you will die for daring to call this altar a tomb!” (887–888).³⁶ Euripides is

³³ Cf. Allan, *Helen* 317, 326; Burian, *Helen* 282.

³⁴ For a familiarized Egypt cf. e.g. M. Wright, “*Cyclops* and the Euripidean Tetralogy”, *PCPhS* 52 (2006) 23–48, 31–32, and *Euripides' Escape-Tragedies* 176–177, 200. For objections to his reading see n.18 above. Contrast e.g. Friedman, *Phoenix* 61 (2007) 199–201; Juffras, *Hermes* 121 (1993) 46; Guépin, *Tragic Paradox* 128 (all, based solely on the traditional image of Egypt as a place of diversity, assume Euripides' total alignment with that image).

³⁵ For other onstage tombs in tragedy see e.g. Aesch. *Cho.*, *Pers.*; Eur. *Bacch.*; not in extant Sophocles.

³⁶ Kritylla's remark (881–884: “you must still be seasick, stranger, if you ask if Proteas is within or out of doors, when you've just heard that he's dead”) and word-play with the name Proteus/Proteas, as Austin and Olson

playing wittily with his stage props. Furthermore, as a short exposition of plot dynamics will indicate, he also teases the spectators' expectations of the spatial dynamics created in cases of supplication.

The nature of the connection of the *skene*-building to the tomb is made a matter of question in the play. Within the dramatic time, the Egyptian family is fragmented. Theoclymenus' wish to marry Helen after the death of Proteus goes against the will of his father. The sister Theonoe is left to decide between the conflicting wishes of brother and father, siding in the end with the father. The crisis of the house turns the building (like the surviving family) into something ambiguous for Helen. Her previous friendly relationship with the household (while Proteus was alive) is interrupted. Only after Theonoe's decision in favour of the couple is spelled out do Helen and Menelaus begin to entertain the idea of using the household to achieve their escape (1039–1041). They are still not quite sure of the unconditional support of the house; to Menelaus' suggestion to kill Theoclymenus, Helen will reply: "His sister would never allow you: she would tell him that you intended to kill him" (1043–1046). Enough tension is maintained until the end to keep the momentum of the play. But gradually the house begins increasingly to re-acquire the unambiguous protecting qualities of the tomb. The Egyptian palace provides the means for the Greeks' escape, while by the end of the play, it denies entry to its Egyptian ruler proper, Theoclymenus (1621 ff.).

Consequently, the relationship between place of supplication and opposing house is more complex than usual on *Helen's* stage. In this play we do not have the clear-cut contrast between a hostile façade versus safe suppliant refuge that we find in other plays, for example *Andromache* or the lost *Dictys*. *Skene*-building and tomb are first set apart and then gradually re-

note, *Thesmophoriazusae* 284, "may contain a subtle dig at the illogic of the tragic exemplar."

united. *Helen's skene*-door, closer to comedic than to tragicomic doors, is marked by an elusiveness in terms of its ownership and semantic identity.³⁷ The split in Egyptian ethos (the bad Theoclymenus, hostile to Greeks, vs. the royal family and people, who are both friendly and supportive of Helen) perplexes the semantic value of space. Euripides' Egypt fluctuates between danger and safety, alienness and familiarization. *Helen's skene*-building does not transform from the house of Trygaeus to the palace of Zeus, as in Aristophanes' *Peace*. We do not glide from Athens to heaven, in the comedic fashion of literal bold 'refocussing',³⁸ i.e. the comedic tendency to change space with ease and swiftness (not however with anarchy, as is manifested by recent studies of the spatial poetics of comedy).³⁹ Aeschylus' *Persians*, *Choephoroi*, *Eumenides*, and Sophocles' *Ajax* are examples of such experimentation with scene changes in early tragedy: from council chamber to tomb and back, from tomb of Agamemnon to palace, from Delphi to Athens, from camp to seashore.⁴⁰ Such experiments fade as we move later. Archi-

³⁷ The exposition of spatial poetics in Aristophanes by N. J. Lowe, "Aristophanic Spacecraft," in L. Kozak and J. Rich (eds.), *Playing around Aristophanes* (Oxford 2006) 48–64, at 63, brings out distinct features of comedic and tragicomic doors: the flexibility in identification of the *skene*-building (and hence of its door) which is sometimes anonymous, the way location and ownership of the door can be uncoupled in comedy, as opposed to tragedy's constant identification of the *skene*-building, intertwining location and ownership of doors.

³⁸ Coined by A. M. Dale, *Collected Papers* (Cambridge 1969) 119, *refocussing* is the practice of change of scene evoked by subtle re-identification of the setting in dialogue and action rather than by any visible alteration of background. This phenomenon is key in the way Old Comedy treats its construction of dramatic space.

³⁹ Lowe, in his 2006 palinode (*Spacecraft* 48–64) to previous ideas on spatial ground rules of the two genres (N. J. Lowe, "Greek Stagecraft and Aristophanes," in J. Redmond [ed.], *Farce* [Cambridge 1988] 33–52), successfully challenges this perception of anarchic fluidity of comedic space. Cf. Revermann, *Comic Business* 108–129.

⁴⁰ Taplin, *JHS* 106 (1986) 163–174, takes scene changes as evidence supporting the claim that there was more open intercommunication between

tectural changes and most importantly the existence of a *skene*-building at the back, fully exploited dramatically from at least 458 B.C. (the *Oresteia*), certainly play a role. No scene change appears in Euripides. But in semiotic terms *Helen's* tragicomic space, flexible and elusive as it is, fluctuates in its symbolic identification in a remarkable way. A perplexing comedic 'refocussing' of qualities of Egypt is at play.

Like *Helen's* space, blocking (i.e. positioning and movement) within that space is distinctive in certain respects. Proxemics in both genres is an important signifier of interpersonal relations, an index of identity, status, and power.⁴¹ In the busy and less dignified realm of comedy, physical contact is frequent. Subversions of status and power are most commonly rendered via physical violence, one of the trademarks of comedy's busy proxemics.⁴² Scenes of beating, hitting, kicking, pushing and pulling, even transvestism (another form of violence inflicted upon comic heroes ridiculed via clothing) abound in Aristophanes.⁴³ By contrast, in tragedy movement is more dignified and the boundaries between performer bodies are firmer. Physical contact of bodies in tragedy is rather the exception that underpins climactic moments, such as moments of *hiketeia* (itself

the two genres before comedy marked its territory in Athens (dated in the 430s with the rise of Cratinus and Crates).

⁴¹ For attention to proxemics in studies of classical drama see A. K. Petrides, "Proxemics and Structural Symmetry in Euripides' *Medea*," *Logeion* 2 (2012) 60–73; Revermann, *Comic Business* 129–145 (on genre-specific proxemics); V. Kampourelli, *Space in Greek Tragedy* (diss. Kings College London 2002) 71–73 (her category "proxemic space"). On theatrical proxemics generally see e.g. G. McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor 1999) 103–112; E. Aston and G. Savona, *Theatre as Sign-System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* (London 1991) 111–129.

⁴² The other being what Revermann, *Comic Business* 138, called "carrier entries": quick exits into the *skene*-building in order to fetch props.

⁴³ Most recently studied by M. Kaimio *et alii*, "Comic Violence in Aristophanes," *Arctos* 24 (1990) 47–72. This should be seen in conjunction with M. Kaimio, *Physical Contact in Greek Tragedy: A Study of Stage Convention* (Helsinki 1988).

governed by its own gestural vocabulary) and moments of embrace that round off recognition scenes.⁴⁴ While comedy focusses on confrontations on the horizontal axis, tragedy, on the other side, employs the dialectics of the vertical axis to bespeak interrelations of power and status.⁴⁵ Bodies of tragic actors are positioned on different levels (with the roof kept for supernatural appearances), gestures are used to create a sense of height difference between bodies (*hiketeia* being the key gesture of deliberate subordination of the weak to the powerful). Violent touching is not absent in tragedy. Violence, however, takes different shapes in relation to comedy: scenes of entries or exits of characters under arrest (mute attendants holding a character), threat of violence rather than actual execution of it.⁴⁶ Physical contact, not only even if most exceptionally in Euripidean tragedy, becomes more frequent and varied as we move later in the fifth century (for example in plays like Soph. *Phil.*, *OC*, Eur. *Hec.*).⁴⁷ This was a corollary of the greater naturalism of both acting style and diction (exemplified in the increase of the number of resolved iambic feet in Euripides) in the late fifth century.⁴⁸ *Helen*'s proxemics attest to that increasing performance 'realism'.⁴⁹ But they may, as well, be

⁴⁴ Again more frequent and prolonged in Euripides: see Kaimio, *Physical Contact* 35–39. Aristophanes mocks Euripides' fondness for such scenes of physical contact, *Thesm.* 913 ff.

⁴⁵ For analyses on the importance of the vertical axis in specific tragedies see Petrides, *Logeion* 2 (2012) 60–73; D. Wiles, *Tragedy in Athens: Performance Space and Theatrical Meaning* (Cambridge 1997) 175–186.

⁴⁶ See Kaimio, *Physical Contact* 62–78.

⁴⁷ For physical contact as freer in these plays see Kaimio, *Physical Contact* 79–86.

⁴⁸ For the tendency towards freer gesticulation in tragedy under the potential influence of comedy see E. Hall, "Greek Tragedy 430–380 BC," in R. Osborne (ed.), *Debating the Athenian Cultural Revolution: Art, Literature, Philosophy and Politics 430–380 BC* (Cambridge 2007) 264–287, at 275–276; Kaimio, *Physical Contact* 79.

⁴⁹ On realism of late-fifth-century performance practice (costume, acting style, esp. vocal mimicry) see E. Csapo, "Kallipides on the Floor-sweepings:

winking, tongue in cheek, at comedic spatial tropes in more than one case. Close analysis of word and stage action of two specific instances corroborates the point. I focus on the two scenes of confrontation between ruler and subordinate in the play: Menelaus vs. Old Woman (435–482), Theoclymenus vs. obstructing servant (1621–1641).

There is no unambiguous textual evidence on the proxemics and blocking of the two scenes in question, but reasonable inferences can be made. Menelaus vs. Old Woman: Menelaus enters from the *eisodos* (leading to the shore) and moves towards the *skene*-door. He stands outside the closed palace door (431–432 πύλας ... προσήλθον, 437 πρὸς αὐλείοισιν ἔστηκὼς πύλαις). Knocking at the door (most probably) and shouting follow (435–436).⁵⁰ The man and the woman interact on the same level, the slightly raised speaking platform before the *skene*-building.⁵¹ Threats of physical violence are heard: ἄ· μὴ προσεῖλει χεῖρα μηδ' ὄθει βία (445), ὄχληρός ἴσθ' ὦν· καὶ τάχ'

The Limits of Realism in Classical Acting and Performance Styles,” in P. Easterling and E. Hall (eds.), *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession* (Cambridge 2002) 127–147.

⁵⁰ There is no explicit reference to knocking at the door in the words ὦ· τίς ἄν πυλωρὸς ἐκ δόμων μόλοι, ὅστις διαγγείλειε τᾶμ' ἔσω κακά; But I follow P. G. Brown, “Knocking at the Door in Fifth-century Greek Tragedy,” in S. Gödde and T. Heinze (eds.), *Skenika: Beiträge zum antiken Theater und seiner Rezeption* (Darmstadt 2000) 1–16, at 6, in supposing that it does occur. Cf. *IT* 1304–1308: there is no reference to knocking in the incomer's exclamations (1284–1286, 1304–1306), but Thoas' reply shows that it occurs (1308 πύλας ἀράξας).

⁵¹ I subscribe to the view that a low raised stage exists before the *skene*-building in the fifth century, as advocated by e.g. E. Csapo and W. J. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor 2004) 80; N. Hourmouziades, *Όροι και μετασχηματισμοί στην αρχαία Ελληνική τραγωδία*³ (Athens 2003) 58—not hindering intercommunication between chorus and actors. Whether or not actors step down to the orchestra is again a debated issue; for supporters of the view that the orchestra space is shared between actors and chorus see e.g. D. Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance: An Introduction* (Cambridge 2000) 105–106; A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Theatre of Dionysus in Athens* (Oxford 1946) 57.

ὠσθήση βία (452). The Old Woman moves menacingly towards Menelaus either forcing her hand onto him (if we accept the reading προσείλει) or holding out and shaking her hand threateningly towards him (if we accept πρόσσειε).⁵² The next half line, Menelaus' protest "Don't thrust me away by force!" (445), points to some sort of violent touching actually occurring before the eyes of the spectators.⁵³

Pushing and pulling by the door recurs in the second scene under discussion: again a frontal confrontation on the horizontal axis, with physical violence between a male and a female. Theoclymenus tries to unbar the door gates at 1624. His intention is to kill his sister for concealing Menelaus' presence from him. A figure, probably the Coryphaea,⁵⁴ blocks his way: ἀλλ' ἀφίστασ' ἐκποδών (1628). Here the text unambiguously points to enacted physical action: οὐκ ἀφήσομαι πέπλων σῶν (1629). The Coryphaea is pulling the Egyptian ruler by his garments.⁵⁵ The action is unique for a tragic

⁵² Bloomfield's emendation, adopted in the latest edition of the play (Allan, *Helen*).

⁵³ Allan, *Helen* 200, takes 452 ("and soon you will be forced to leave") as evidence that force has not been used before. But I see no contradiction in the two statements. I follow Brown, in *Skenika* 6, in his assumption that pushing occurs in these lines.

⁵⁴ Three solutions have been suggested for this problem: the messenger, a male servant, or the Coryphaea. For the messenger see e.g. N. C. Hourmouziades, *Production and Imagination in Euripides: Form and Function of the Scenic Space* (Athens 1965) 167. For an unidentified male servant of the house see e.g. Burian, *Helen* 288–289; D. P. Stanley-Porter, "Who Opposes Theoclymenus?" *CP* 72 (1977) 45–48. For the Coryphaea, e.g. Allan, *Helen* 338; C. Wolff, "On Euripides' *Helen*," *HSCP* 77 (1973) 61–84, at 83; Kannicht, *Kommentar* II 424–425. Once the linguistic objection for a female obstructor is removed (δοῦλος ὄν: common gender singular with generalizing sense), no further reasons conclusively favour the case of the messenger or a male servant as better solutions. Rather, both practical (see the following note) and dramatic considerations seem to favour the identification with the Coryphaea.

⁵⁵ The nature of the action is another point in favour of a female: as Kaimio, *Physical Contact* 74, notes, "resistance by clinging to the clothes of

stage.⁵⁶ We see other choruses in tragedy trying to prevent the unjust actions of violent rulers (e.g. the elders in *Agamemnon* raising their sticks against Aegisthus), but in all cases it is men of citizen status against a superior authority. Violence is not enacted, only threats. Here the king is denied entry into his own palace by his female subjects.

As close reading of stage action of the two scenes indicates, the conventional characteristics of tragic proxemics hardly correspond to the proxemics of the tragedy in question. On *Helen's* stage, violation of personal space is frequent. Physical violence of the comedic type is employed in order to sketch out interrelations of power, also with marked humorous tone in the case of Menelaus' confrontation with the Old Woman porter. This scene always figures in discussions of the playful tone of the *Helen*.⁵⁷ Scholars note comic elements in aspects of structure and characterization: the door-knocking motif,⁵⁸ the rudeness of the doorkeeper (the signature trait of door-scenes in comedy),⁵⁹ the comic touches in the characterization of Men-

the king is more suitable to female opposers.”

⁵⁶ Note as well how this collapse of a physical barrier between chorus and character is pre-figured in the play. At 360 the female chorus enters along with Helen inside the *skene*-building. This is one of the five instances of the chorus exiting stage in mid-play and the only instance of having them enter along with a character inside the *skene*-building.

⁵⁷ The comic qualities of the scene were first appreciated by Aristophanes: see the parody in *Thesm.* 871 ff.

⁵⁸ As is now emphatically stressed (Revermann, *Comic Business* 183–184; Brown, in *Skenika* 1–3), the type of the scene is genre-neutral. Use of other theatrical codes (verbal and visual) affect colouring. There is not something inherently funny in door knocking and/or shouting at doors and of the dialogue developed between porters and potential intruders. Such scenes occur in both genres. Tragic door scenes make the raw material for paratragedy in more than one Aristophanic play, the most notorious example being *Achamians* (425 ff.). See P. Brown, “Scenes at the Door in Aristophanic Comedy,” in *Performance, Iconography, Reception* 349–373.

⁵⁹ Brown, in *Skenika* 2: “In comedy, it is not always the knocking itself that produces a comic effect, but in many cases the rudeness of the person who

elaus.⁶⁰

Proxemics and kinesics, however, point to comedy in ways not stressed by previous analyses: it is comedy that thrives in ridiculing authority via physical violence (pushing and pulling). What is more, other Euripidean choices in casting not only Menelaus' but also Theoclymenus' door-scene enhance the inter-generic dialogue with comedy—namely the choice of the female gender of the obstructors, which intensifies the absurdity and humour of the situation in both cases. A woman porter occurs nowhere else in extant tragedy.⁶¹ Various reasons have been offered for the gender choice in the case of Menelaus' confrontation. Psychological factors make it more plausible that a woman would refrain from reporting or arresting Menelaus;⁶² the scene thus gains in amusement and irony, as the valiant hero is shown to be outwitted by an old female slave.⁶³ There is certainly more here than humour. But the

answers the door, and also various expressions of surprise and astonishment." He notes as instances of rude doorkpeers in tragedy Aesch. *Cho*, Eur. *Hel*. Obviously in the latter case, the character of the doorkeeper is more developed and the rudeness marked.

⁶⁰ For comedy in characters, especially Menelaus' characterization as an amusing Odysseus, see e.g. Allan, *Helen* 27 (seen in the larger context of Euripides' playful reversal of the Odyssean pattern of rescue); Burian, *Helen* 215, 254. Podlecki, *TAPA* 101 (1970) 402–405, denies the humorous qualities of Menelaus. But I think scholars are right in stressing that aspects of his characterization would figure as amusing. This does not deny his being a serious character, and his plight a serious matter.

⁶¹ Hecuba imagines in terror the possibility of acting as a porter in captivity in Greece (Eur. *Tro*. 492–493); Hypsipyle in the homonymous lost play acts as porter (fr.752d).

⁶² See Kannicht, *Kommentar* II 130; A. M. Dale, *Euripides: Helen* (Oxford 1967) 96.

⁶³ Cf. Allan, *Helen* 198–199; Burian, *Helen* 217; Wright, *Euripides' Escape-Tragedies* 28, 283. Aristophanes, whose doorkeepers in scenes of this type, to the extent that we can confirm, were always male, seems to pick up on the humorous force of the gender choice: his next year's *Lysistrata* is a play built around this spatial opposition of female doorkeepers and men trying to force their way into their space. For the spatial pattern and the penetration

point remains: in this play several theatrical codes work in tandem towards a consistent undermining of the tragic gravitas.

Skeue (costume, mask, props) is the last theatrical code under examination, in order to complete our collection of evidence for playful mixing of generic conventions in the *Helen*. Like blocking, *skeue* in drama is an eloquent visual communicator of plot, theme, and character.⁶⁴ Both tragedy and comedy encode information and symbolism into their *skeue*, each genre in its own way. Ugliness is the hallmark of the comedic *skeue*, with its padded costume, the dangling phallus, the snub nose, and the protruding jaws of the comedic mask. Ugliness is ubiquitous and important to the genre as a means of entertaining and activating schemata of carnivalesque license and inversion.⁶⁵ All (or nearly all) characters entering the comic world, human or divine, kings or slaves, young or old, females or males, appear visually grotesque.⁶⁶ The comedic *skeue* subjects the character to ridicule, extracting entertainment and humour from the visual comedification. Thus comedy claims the character as its own. As with gesture, comedy exploits *skeue* with more wit and freedom than the sister genre. Costume is frequently put on or taken off onstage. Laughter is extracted from the incongruity of the costume and its wearer, which includes incompatibility of

metaphor in *Lys.* see Revermann, *Comic Business* 246–253; Lowe, *Spacecraft* 54–55.

⁶⁴ Ritual experience, in which costuming and masking played a crucial role, representational art, and poetry (especially Homer) all equipped the fifth-century spectator well for the task of deciphering the symbolism of the *skeue*. See R. Wyles, *Costume in Greek Tragedy* (London 2011) 46–60.

⁶⁵ For the ideology underlying the grotesque corporality of comedy see H. Foley, “The Comic Body in Greek Art and Drama,” in D. Cohen (ed.), *Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art* (Leiden 2000) 275–312.

⁶⁶ For a concise account of features and function of ugliness and the possible exceptions to the rule in comedy see Revermann, *Comic Business* 145–159. On the mask see also D. Wiles, “The Poetics of the Mask in Old Comedy,” in *Performance, Iconography, Reception* 374–392.

gender (the comedic strategy of transvestism). Forced dressing-up is employed as a form of ‘mental cruelty’ upon the wearer.⁶⁷ Disguise is manipulated as a meta-theatrical device (for parodying tragedy, for commenting on the nature of acting a role and of artistic illusion).⁶⁸

On the opposite side, tragedy thrives on the dignity and decorum of its agents, and not on their deformity. Accordingly, tragedy pursues different strategies concerning its actors’ *skeue*. Disguise features here as well, but with different characteristics and functions. Tragedic disguise is usually a plot device in dramas of intrigue. Tragic characters re-enter the stage in new or modified costumes (e.g. both Helen and Menelaus in this play), although no complete change of *skeue* happens in front of the audience in tragic theatre. The fixing of Pentheus’ locks and robe by Dionysus in *Bacchae* (913–976) is as close as extant tragedy comes to showing disguising onstage.⁶⁹ Visible physical manipulation of tragedic *skeue* involves rather the rearrangement of costume and/or the removal of its parts. Such actions produce moments of heightened pathos on the tragic stage: Hecuba’s wrapping in her mantle with her head covered in dust in Euripides’ *Hecuba* (438–500), Klytaimnestra’s tearing of her dress to expose her breast in *Choephoroe* (896–898).⁷⁰ As in

⁶⁷ For example the Proboulos in Ar. *Lys.*, the Kinsman in *Thesm.* On this as a variation of comedy’s propensity for violence see Kaimio *et alii*, *Arctos* 24 (1990) 65–66.

⁶⁸ F. Muecke, “‘I know you – by your rags’: Costume and Disguise in Fifth-century Drama,” *Antichthon* 16 (1982) 17–34, comparing comedic and tragedic disguise, stresses meta-theatrical function as a key characteristic of comedic disguise: “disguise is chiefly treated as costume. When an actor playing a part takes on another part from another fiction ... the gap between the actor and his role is collapsed, in order, paradoxically, to foreground the actor’s own ‘deceit’ of the audience” (30).

⁶⁹ Pentheus’ change into the bacchic outfit has already occurred inside the *skene*-building.

⁷⁰ For this way of manipulating costume physically in tragedy, with examples, see Wyles, *Costume* 52–53 (what she classifies as manipulation via “movement”).

comedy, outfits incompatible with their wearer abound in tragedy as well. But the effect differs markedly. In tragic theatre the contradistinction between costume and wearer does not entertain, but rather functions as pellucid visual indicator of emblematic changes of status and as silent extractor of *eleos* for the figures in question, for instance Xerxes in rags in Aeschylus' *Persians* (909 ff.), Sophocles' *Electra* in *Electra* (e.g. 191, 452, 1106–1109, 1181). Euripides' frequent use of ragged protagonists of high status,⁷¹ especially in his later plays, expands the semiotic potential of that device in tragedy. Aristophanes picks up Euripides for those ragged heroes (parodying Menelaus in *Thesmophoriazousae*, Telephus—his favourite—in more than one play).⁷² Old Comedy's fascination with the Euripidean hero in rags exposes the unusual realism in the way the tragedian treats *skeue*, and accuses him also perhaps of overdoing it, turning an effective theatrical device into a cliché.⁷³ In particular, the case of Menelaus' rags and in general the almost explicit treatment of costume as prop in the *Helen* set Euripides once again (as with space and blocking) outside home turf.

Menelaus' costume contributes to his comedification in character. Telephus in the homonymous lost play voluntarily adopts his rags, as a means of deceiving the Greek commanders about his identity. Rags will act as a means of deception in the *Helen* as well. For the dupe Theoclymenus, the rags serve well as ξυμμάρτυρες of the deception (1079–1080) which

⁷¹ The long list includes: Telephus, Oeneus, blind Phoenix, Philoctetes, Bellerophon (named in Ar. *Ach.* 418–428), Orestes in *Or.*, Menelaus in this play.

⁷² *Thesm.* 910 ἐκ τῶν ἰφύων (Kedestes on Euripides'/Menelaus' clothes), 935 ἰστιορράφος; *Ach.* 429 οἶδ' ἄνδρα, Μυσὸν Τήλεφον. Cf. the scene with Dicaeopolis seeking rags from Euripides, *Ach.* 410–479; Aeschylus' accusations against the πτωχοποιεὶ καὶ ῥακιοσυρραπτᾶδῃ of Euripides in *Ran.* 841–843 (cf. 1063–1066); the warning for carefulness lest you became a crippled subject in a Euripidean play, *Pax* 146–148.

⁷³ For Aristophanes' objects of satire in parodying Euripidean ragged heroes see Muecke, *Antichthon* 16 (1982) 21–22.

Menelaus and Helen have in store for him: “Apollo! How ugly is his clothing!” (ἔσθῆτι δυσμόρφω 1204, cf. 1283–1284). But disguise as tragic plot device, as part of an intrigue, comes as a second, fortuitous chance in this case. Menelaus’ rags play an underappreciated role towards creating the widely shared impression of a funny character. References to the wretchedness of Menelaus’ appearance abound in the play: he avoids the throng of the town ashamed of his appearance (ἡσχυνόμην 415), his body is wrapped in sailcloth (ναὸς ἔκβολ’ 422) instead of the former luxurious garments (420–424).⁷⁴ His comrades are in similar state: ἀρχμηροὶ δ’ ὄρων (1540). The Old woman porter detects no nobility in his appearance: “you were evidently a person of importance somewhere, but not here” (454). His own wife, as she catches sight of his ἀγρία μορφή (544–545), takes him for a thief or doer of base services. Foley notices the unusual emphasis: “This particular kind of explicit focus on (ugly) costume may not be generically ‘comic’, but it is not standard in tragedy either, outside of scenes of disguise.” A sophisticated audience might even consider the technique as a Euripidean response to Aristophanic jokes on rags, as she further proposes.⁷⁵ As in comedy, costume in Menelaus’ case humiliates its wearer, subjecting him to ridicule and laughter.

What is more, *Helen* exemplifies a remarkable self-consciousness in the treatment of costume and mask. In that respect, Euripides pushes the envelope of tragedy once again. Explicit use of costume as vehicle for meta-theatrical comment on theatre and treatment of disguise as a metaphor for the actor’s transformation from actor to dramatic character via costuming are more akin to comedy, as we have noted. At 262–263 Helen wishes that her beauty could be wiped off, just like the paint of a statue or a painting, and made afresh. The language is unmistakably alluding to a convention (something that even those

⁷⁴ *δυσχλαινίας* 416, deleted by Bothe, is probably a later interpolation.

⁷⁵ H. Foley, review of Wright, *Euripides’ Escape-Tragedies*, *AJP* 127 (2006) 468; cf. Foley, in *Performance, Iconography, Reception* 28.

purists reluctant to allow any such ‘transgressions’ to the tragic genre recognise):⁷⁶ Euripides alludes to the false face of the actor and to the theatrical convention of the mask. What is more, the whole process of Helen’s unmasking and change of costume will receive repeated verbal attention later in the text: blond locks cut out, cheeks bloodied, white dress changed to black (1053–1054, 1087–1092, 1186–1190, 1224);⁷⁷ so too the transformation of her spouse, his change from rags to heroic panoply and armour (1283–1284, 1269–1300, 1375–1384, 1606–1611). Costuming is repeatedly alluded to as process, and costume itself is marked as a defining element of a character’s personality (Menelaus turns heroic when in heroic outfit).⁷⁸

This conscious handling of costume meshes with self-conscious treatment of intrigue, staged as a play within a play, with Helen directing Menelaus on his posture and whereabouts (1079–1092). A distinctive degree of self-consciousness in treatment of disguise may have inspired Aristophanes to stage Euripides in the role of the intriguer and stage director (executing the Relative’s transformation into a woman) in *Thesmophoriazousae*, according to Muecke. The *Bacchae* dressing scene is, in return, Euripides’ reply to the Aristophanic one of *Thesmophoriazousae*, in her line of argument.⁷⁹ Even if one does not go this far in assuming such direct allusiveness between these plays, it is clear that comedic practice impacts on tragedic both

⁷⁶ Wright, *Euripides’ Escape-Tragedies* 327, denies tragedy the chance for meta-theatrical play, but has to relent when coming to the specific point of *Helen*. Still, like Muecke, *Antichthon* 16 (1982) 29, he distinguishes that meta-theatricality from the comedic one: the meaning relates to the theme of the play and is not intended as reflection on the nature of theatrical illusion. Cf. Taplin, *JHS* 106 (1986) 170.

⁷⁷ At 1087–1092 Helen announces her exit into the *skene*-building in order to change into her mourning outfit: βοστρύχους τεμῶ, πέπλων τε λευκῶν μέλανας ἀνταλλάξομαι, παρῆδι ὄνυχα φόνιον ἐμβάλῳ χροός, μέγας γὰρ ἀγὼν καὶ βλέπω δύο ῥοπᾶς· ἢ γὰρ θανεῖν δεῖ μ’, ἦν ἄλῳ τεχνώμενη.

⁷⁸ The effect of Menelaus’ new clothes is noted explicitly at 1374–1384.

⁷⁹ Muecke, *Antichthon* 16 (1982) 30, 32–34.

in the *Helen* and subsequently in the *Bacchae*. That later tragedy, with which *Helen* shares thematic links as argued below, manifests Euripides' increasing boldness in this kind of inter-generic game.⁸⁰

All in all, *Helen* reveals a dramatist who repeatedly utilizes *opsis* as means of instilling puzzlement and wonder in the spectators. His novel plot and characters often force him to stretch a long arm towards comedy for performance devices. Changes in taste and level of sophistication of his audience and developments in the wider cultural context, as noted at the outset, form a new performance culture from the late fifth century onwards. Euripides responds to both challenges, by exploring the powers and limitations of his medium not only at the level of plot and theme, but also, as this paper aimed to show, at the level of staging technique.

Is Euripides' *Helen* untragic, however? Inevitably, the comedic element in *Helen* has raised questions about its generic status.⁸¹ The tone of the play varies and at points approaches farce. Nevertheless, tragicness is not defined at the level of gesture and movement. Helen's myth and dramatic world constructed out of it are fully tragic.⁸² The messages the play has to

⁸⁰ The *Bacchae* is the first tragedy that triggered discussions of the comic in Euripides. See B. Seidensticker, "Comic Elements in Euripides' *Bacchae*," *AJP* 99 (1978) 303–320 (with bibliography), discussing arguments for a comic reading and staging of two controversial scenes (Teiresias-Kadmos; Pentheus-Dionysus dressing-scene).

⁸¹ Various generic labels have been attached to the *Helen*. Cf. e.g. Austin, *Helen* 188, "first New Comedy"; C. H. Whitman, *Euripides and the Full Circle of Myth* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1974) 68, "half-lyrical, half-philosophical romance"; D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama: Myth, Theme and Structure* (Toronto 1967), tragicomedy; A. P. Burnett (as A. N. Pippin), "Euripides' *Helen*: A Comedy of Ideas," *CP* 55 (1960) 151–163, new sort of comedy, comedy of ideas (Wright, *Euripides' Escape-Tragedies* 226–235, engages in a critique of her arguments).

⁸² For the most recent defence of *Helen* as tragedy see Allan, *Helen* 66–72. For the history of the semantic value of the 'tragic' see G. W. Most, "Generating Genres: The Idea of the Tragic," in *Matrices of Genre* 15–36.

transmit are serious and grim: on the fallibility of human knowledge, human vulnerability, the mischief in illogical persistence in unnecessary violence and bloodshed. Polytonality reinforces themes, stimulates active engagement of the audience, elicits a more reflective response to what is taking place before their eyes; it is (to use Zacharia's phrase on the polytonality of Euripides' *Ion*) "an enriching device."⁸³ The twists in mood and tone of the play do not reduce the seriousness of those messages. But for an audience which has experienced the grimness of these realities in the recent past (the Sicilian disaster), one strategic effect is to make those messages more easily digestible. They were already alert; this is deftly triggering that knowledge.⁸⁴ *Helen's* playfulness, that mixture of seriousness and buffoonery, has a thought-provoking function. Performative intertextuality more particularly, the continuous teasing with the audience's expectations in the creation of aspects of the play's *opsis*, further reinforces the appeal of Euripides' play. Inter-generic allusiveness becomes an integral component of the dramaturgic texture of the play, a way to showcase Euripides' wit, to perform his genre's dynamism and variety on the stage, to heighten the emotional effects of his novel story.

To conclude, sheer performative intertextuality, the playful treatment of convention and genre, is, I suggest, the answer to the question of *Helen's*, of Euripides', *kainotes*, and also a key feature of the inter-generic osmosis in the new performance culture of the late fifth century. In *Helen's* case experimental

⁸³ K. Zacharia, *Converging Truths: Euripides' Ion and the Athenian Quest for Self-Definition* (Leiden 2003) 152.

⁸⁴ The attempt to tie play and historical context can be overdone. See e.g. M. Vickers, "Alcibiades on Stage: *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Helen*," *Historia* 38 (1989) 41–65; D. L. Drew, "The Political Purpose in Euripides' *Helena*," *CP* 25 (1930) 187–189 (for readings of the play as a sustained political allegory); e.g. Friedman, *Phoenix* 61 (2007) 196–198 (for the play as a direct and intended comment on the causes or the result of the Sicilian disaster); e.g. R. Lattimore, *The Poetry of Greek Tragedy* (London 1958) 110 ff. (for the play as 'escapist' literature). For *Helen* as not an antiwar play see Allan, *Helen* 4–9.

performative intertextuality seems furthermore to arise naturally from the theatricality of a play whose myth centers on the tragic sense of undependability of human knowledge and existence, on the gap between illusion and reality. As in *Bacchae*, where Euripides expands his experimentation with aspects of *opsis*, the nature of the content/ideas prompts the nature of the technique.⁸⁵ This basic tenet should inform our understanding of the play, and our understanding and approach to the study of genre more generally. Markers of intertextuality are no less visual than textual in performative genres. *Opsis* has the capacity to energize associations with other paradigms (plays or genres). To Mastronarde's affirmation of the currency and value of asking questions about genre,⁸⁶ I would add the following: it is indeed still worthwhile asking questions about genre, and if we are talking of drama, study of performative intertextuality can take us a step further in answering those questions.⁸⁷

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⁸⁵ The blending of genres in *Bacchae* is an expression of the enigmatic nature of Dionysus, his cult, and theatrical art; see Seidenstücker, *AJP* 99 (1978) 319–320; C. P. Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics in Euripides' Bacchae* (Cambridge 1997) 254–259.

⁸⁶ Mastronarde, in *Euripides and Tragic Theatre* 24: “It is still worth while asking questions about genre.”

⁸⁷ I would like to warmly thank Antonis Petrides, Styliani Papastamati, Cressida Ryan, the anonymous reviewer, and the editor Kent Rigsby for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.