

Helen and Her Phantoms

In 412 BCE Euripides dramatizes the tension between Helen as an embodied heroine and the elusive reputation that precedes her in his *Helen*, by introducing a phantom that shares her name but not her substance (Segal:1971). About four years later, the poet presents yet another version of the Spartan queen in the *Orestes*. Scholarship has extensively studied the dynamic between Helen and her phantom in Euripides' homonymous tragedy but the correlation between the different versions of the heroine throughout the Euripidean corpus remains largely unexplored. This paper argues that the Helen of *Orestes* is constructed as the opposite of her 412 counterpart, thus acting as an additional *eidolon*. In a first section, I will be building on previous scholarship that highlights the continuity between the two plays (Wright:2006, Zeitlin:2010), to suggest that *Helen* sets the ground for the continuation of its story in the alternate universe of *Orestes* by exploiting the audience's foreknowledge of Herodotus and the myth of Persephone. In a second section, I will be drawing material from studies in duplicity, doubles, and doppelgängers (Keppler:1971, Vardoulakis:2010, Živković:2000) in order to explore the characterization of the 408 Helen in relation to the 412 heroine and her phantom. Finally, I will proceed to argue that during Helen's deification in *Orestes*, all different versions of the character, innocent and guilty, material and immaterial, are being merged into one in a process during which opposition and likeness become indiscernible. My goal is to show that through this strategy, the Helen of *Orestes* becomes a queer double (Haselswerdt:2022, Brandão & Sousa:2013) that merges her 412 counterpart and her *eidolon* in a manner that clarifies previously posed questions about identity and priority, while also providing commentary on the power of myth and the position of individual tragic figures within it.

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