

Helen, Clytemnestra, and the Proliferation of the Self

In Euripides' *Electra*, the title character states that Helen could have served as a counterexample whose conduct would highlight Clytemnestra's virtue but instead, Clytemnestra chose to replicate her actions, becoming another lustful woman who is the source of death and destruction (*El.* 1080-1085). Later in the play, however, the Dioskouroi announce that Helen never went to Troy! She had been in Egypt the whole time while the Greeks were fighting over a phantom that looked exactly like her (*El.* 1278-1284). In doing so, they provide a summary of Euripides' *Helen*, a tragedy that most likely had yet to be performed (Marshall 2014; Zuntz 1963; contra Wright 2009; Ringer 2016; Eisner 1979). When *Helen* is performed a few years later, the audience watches this narrative being fully actualized. In this paper, I examine this interplay between *Helen* and *Electra*, arguing that they are constructed as interrelated plots and are to be understood in the context of each other.

In the first part, I examine the role of Helen in *Electra* in relation to Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and *Proteus*, arguing that in denying Helen's responsibility in Troy, Euripides destabilizes the mythology of both his own *Electra* and the *Oresteia*, casting doubt on Clytemnestra's character and action (Goldhill 1984; Cunningham 1994; Griffith 2002; Allan 2008; Marshall 2014). In the second part, I trace the parallelism between *Helen* and *Electra* and draw from scholarship on narratology (Ryan 2006; Cabrera Torrecilla and Sáez de Adana Herrero 2025; Thomann 2024) to show that Euripides invites his audience to view the two plays in relation to each other. As a result, once *Helen* is staged, further complicating the identity and role of the *eidolon*, Clytemnestra's role in *Electra* is reconsidered in hindsight. My goal is to show that each play questions and

complements the other, allowing Euripides to mutually interrogate Helen's and Clytemnestra's innocence, myth, and destructive femininity in a way that a single linear narrative could not.

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