La Guerre de Troie n'a pas eu lieu: Heroism and the Glory of Troy in Euripides' *Helen*

Drawing upon Jean Baudrillard's treatment of simulacra and war, this presentation will explore some of the instances in which Euripides' *Helen* constructs the signs and actions associated with martial heroism as surface effects, and thereby draws their conceptual stability into question. In particular, I wish to explore this dramatic strategy in Helen's configuration of Menelaus' rags as a "disguise" and in the simulated Trojan War fought by the Greek sailors against their Egyptian escort.

In the case of Menelaus' *dusmorphia*, the manner of Helen's deception complicates the ostensibly straightforward relationship between identity and its visible signs. When he arrives in Egypt, Menelaus does not just appear to be a beggar and vagrant; he is one (Wright 2005, 332-34), as attested by the Portress' summary dismissal of him (454) and by his explicit self-characterization as a *ptôchos* (790). In her escape plan, Helen strategically reconfigures Menelaus' condition as a "disguise" that no longer refers to his actual state of being (shipwrecked beggar), but instead acts as a theatrical prop that now operates within Helen's game of visual signification (1081-82). By suddenly making the signs of Menelaus' poverty a disguise, Helen opens the possibility that all such outward indicators of an inner quality bear "no relation to any reality whatsoever," as Jean Baudrillard (1994, 5-6) has described the images of divinity destroyed by Eastern Orthodox iconoclasts of the eighth and ninth centuries CE. The implications of this new possibility necessarily reach beyond Menelaus' rags to his armor. Now, one can be a hero who begs, and, conversely, a beggar can become a hero by donning a hero's armor.

Having formulated a plan to reinstate Menelaus' former luster, Helen proposes that he apply his newly gained armor and heroic visage "to setting up with his hand trophies from

countless barbarians, when we board the oared vessel" (1380-81). The stage is now set for a second rendition of the Trojan conflict in miniature, from which Menelaus may (again) emerge victorious with his estranged wife. However, as numerous critics (e.g., Verrall 1905, 85-86; Papi 1987, 39-40; Segal 1986, 259-61; Juffras 1993, 56; Pucci 1997, 68; Meltzer 2006, 194) have observed, what occurs aboard the Phoenician vessel hardly qualifies as a meaningful reenactment of war. The Messenger observes that, when the conflict began, "everyone stood straight up, with the one side holding oars in their hands, and the other swords" (1600-1) – an alarming antithesis that renders the battle a simulacrum of martial conflict whose outcome is already assured. In this way, *Helen* presents the confrontation as a "dead war" that simulates and seeks to redeem an earlier, Trojan campaign whose stakes have been nullified by Helen's phantom. It is a staged event, an execution of men who are effectively prisoners in a *guerre manquée* that follows what Jean Baudrillard (1995, 27) has called a "hyperrealist logic of the deterrence of the real by the virtual." In other words, Menelaus' virtual war for a Helen already in his possession deters its spectators and participants from the emptiness of the earlier conflict, thereby subsuming the truth of the Trojan War's conditions beneath the virtual. Within this re-visitation of martial conflict, it is nostalgia for a "real" but unrecoverable past that leads Menelaus to urge his crew – now "flowers of the land of Hellas" – to "slaughter and murder barbarians" (1593-94), and nostalgia for a "real" and meaningful war that leads Helen to invoke the "glory of Troy" (1603) from the ship's prow. That war, however, "did not take place."

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