

Music for Euripides' *Helen*: Three –‘Plus One’– Case Studies on the Quest of the Myth*

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Περίληψη – Μαγδαληνή Καλοπανά | Σκηνική μουσική για την *Ελένη* του Ευριπίδη: Τρεις –συν μία– μελέτες περίπτωσης στην αναζήτηση του μύθου

Στο παρόν άρθρο επιχειρείται η ανάλυση της δυαδικότητας του μύθου της ωραίας Ελένης (θεά ή θνητή, αιτία ή μη του Τρωικού πολέμου) με τη χρήση σημειωτικών εργαλείων («ενεργητικό μοντέλο» και «τετράγωνο» του Greimas). Ειδικότερα, ως σημασιολογικό σημαίνον τίθεται η απόδοση του μύθου από τον Ευριπίδη στην *Ελένη* και ειδικότερα στο εμβληματικό Α' Στάσιμο. Διαφοροποιημένο σημαιόμενο του μύθου διατυπώνεται από τρεις θεατρικές –μαζί με μία επιπλέον, ραδιοφωνική– αντιπροσωπευτικές παραγωγές της ευριπίδειας *Ελένης*, οι οποίες αναλύονται στο παρόν άρθρο ως μελέτες περίπτωσης: Εθνικό Θέατρο (1962) σε σκηνοθεσία του Τάκη Μουζενίδη και μουσική του Αργύρη Κουνάδη· Εθνικό Θέατρο (1977) σε σκηνοθεσία του Αλέξη Σολομού και μουσική του Ιάννη Ξενάκη· Θέατρο του Νότου (1996) σε σκηνοθεσία του Γιάννη Χουβαρδά και μουσική του Γιώργου Κουμεντάκη, και, επιπροσθέτως, Εθνικό Ίδρυμα Ραδιοφωνίας/EIP (1961) σε σκηνοθεσία του Θάνου Κωτσόπουλου και μουσική του Γεωργίου Καζάσογλου. Η ανάλυση εκάστης παράστασης ακολουθεί σύγχρονη πρισματική προσέγγιση: ιστορικά δεδομένα, μουσικολογική ανάλυση (μορφή, οργάνωση τονικού υλικού, ενορχήστρωση) σε συνδυασμό με ανάλυση του κειμένου (μετάφραση και επιλογή στίχων), συνολική αναφορά στις συνιστώσες της παραγωγής, αισθητική ερμηνεία. Ως συμπέρασμα αναδεικνύεται η σταδιακή αποδόμηση του σημαιόμενου του μύθου της Ελένης, ώστε να αντιστοιχισθεί σε μία νέα πραγματικότητα.

Introduction

Myth

Myth, as a literary genre, consists of narratives with a fundamental role in society. As not objectively true, the identification of a narrative as a myth can be highly controversial (Leeming & Leeming 1994). The differentiation between

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myth and logos stands as a synonym for mythology and history respectively. Greek mythology, the central branch of classical mythology, contains various stories initially kept in oral tradition, later formulating Homer’s epic poems (Passas 1980). In fact, ancient Greek mythology belongs to the common cultural heritage of those who migrated to the Western civilization.

A central figure in Greek mythology, the prototype of female beauty, is The Beautiful Helen (Eleni in Greek), known also as Helen of Argos, Helen of Sparta or Helen of Troy. Ioannis Th. Kakridis (1901–1992) studies Helen in three phases (2005, 212): *i.* pre-Homeric Helen (goddess), *ii.* Homeric Helen: Iliadic and Odyssean (a mortal queen who avoids criticism but uses self-condemnation), and *iii.* post-Homeric Helen (contrasting approaches). According to Kakridis (*ibid.*), phases *i* and *ii* were found in early myths, while phase *iii* is generated by Homer. In other words, the contrast between Helen as a demi-goddess (before Homer), and her being an accused mortal queen (Homer and his subsequent poets) creates *Helen’s dilemma*. The contradictory myth of Helen is the reason of considering her as the most ambivalent figure (innocence or guilt) in Greek mythology. To seem and to be is the very core of Helen’s myth.

Semiotic tools

Both language and music, as sounds, determine myth, as sense (Tarasti 2006, 398; Tarasti 2011). In other words, language and/or music formulate the meaning of the *signified* beyond the *signifier* which is the allegory of myths (Hernández 2016). At the edges of this route (language/music–signifier–signified–myth) (Figure 1) there are respectively a *sender* and a *receiver* (sender–language/music–signifier–signified–myth–receiver).

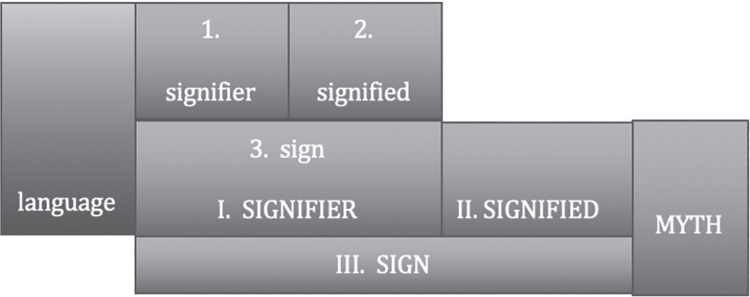


Figure 1 : Structure of the myth (Hernández 2016, 22).

the music set to the Stasimon A by G. Kazasoglou, A. Kounadis, I. Xenakis, G. Koumendakis”). The current publication is a revised and expanded version. I would like to thank the audience as well as the peer reviewers for their interest and key questions. Last, but not least, I would like to express my deepest thanks to Mrs. Maria Theofili, philologist and musicologist, who edited this English text.

Furthermore, *sender/receiver* form one of the three paired oppositions in Greimas mythical actant model (Figure 2), the other two being *subject/object* and *helper/opponent* (Greimas 1966, 174–85, 192–212). An analysis of actions taking place in a story can be realized according to the actant model. In the frame of this text, as *sender* is considered Euripides, as *object* his tragedy *Helen* (*signifier*), and as *receiver* the audience (axis of transmission); moreover, as *subject* (*signified*) is understood the aspect of myth realized in each production of Euripides' *Helen*, and as *helper* or *opponent* the director and/or the composer of stage music (axis of power).

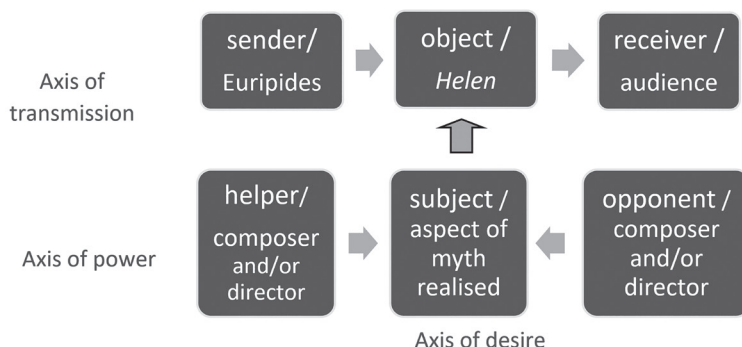


Figure 2 : Greimas actant model (adapted from Greimas 1966).

“The myths of antiquity provide us with many illustrations of semiotic acts in which a subject retains for him/herself the power of self-determination [...]” (Tarasti 2000, 34). This statement by Tarasti puts the *subject*, i.e. the aspect of myth realized each time, at the very core of this discussion (*signified*). Therefore, we can understand the *subject* itself (aspect of myth realized/*signified*) on a deeper level by applying the Greimas square (Greimas 1983) (Figure 3). Thus, the crucial contrary modalities¹ of “believe” and “know” and of “don’t believe” and “don’t know” (Tarasti 2000, 196) coincide with the ‘seeming’ and the ‘being’ of the *signified/subject* (Helen’s myth realized). In other words, the balance of the Greimas square can be used as a means of understanding deeper the very core of the actant model, and, as a whole, the route: sender–language/music–signifier–signified–myth–receiver.

¹ “Perhaps, the most important and original of these levels [phases chosen from Greimas’s generative course] is the one dealing with musical modalities: ‘will, know, must, can, and believe.’ These modalities, which originated in linguistic-semiotic theories, can be defined in purely musical terms as well.” (TARASTI 2006, 401).

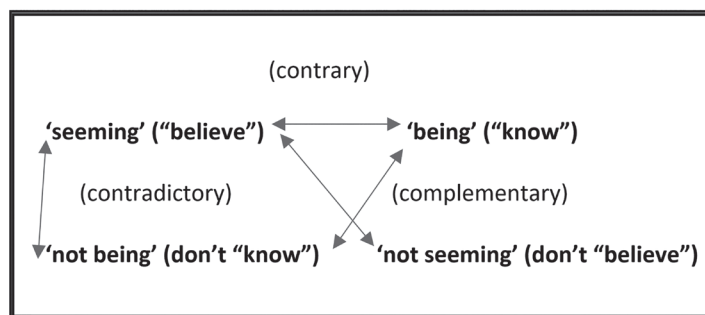


Figure 3 : Greimas semiotic square (adapted by the writer for Helen's myth).

Euripides' Helen

In the very same context, the classic tragedian Euripides (480–406 BCE) approaches ancient Greek myths in accordance with the historiography, philosophy and lyric poetry of his era (Sumler 2021, 145). The rationalization he applies in his tragedy *Helen* may be summarized as Helen questioning her own myth (Sumler 2021, 161).

Helen was first performed in 412 BCE. Written just after the disastrous Sicilian Expedition during the Peloponnesian War, it deems war to be the root of all evil. Euripides offers an alternate myth of Helen's abduction, in which she is taken by Hera to hide away in Egypt, while her phantom goes to Troy with Paris. Menelaus, returning from the Trojan war, is shipwrecked in Egypt, where Helen tries to avoid a marriage with the King Theoklymenos. Following the recognition between the two spouses, Helen organizes their escape to Sparta by deceiving the King.

In fact, Euripides follows the version of Helen's myth originated from *The Palinode* (Helen's praise) of the Greek Lyric poet Stesichorus (c. 630–555 BCE), which is preserved in Plato's *Phaedrus*. Stesichorus' version is also reflected by Herodotus (c. 484–c. 425 BCE), in his Second Book of *The Histories*. In the same line, Gorgias (483–375 BCE) in his *Encomium for Helen* confronts the accusations against her with logical propositions. This version reappears in the Second Book of Virgil's *Aeneid* and most recently in the poem *Helen (Ele-ni)* of the Nobel Greek poet Giorgos Seferis (1900–1971). Richard Strauss (1864–1949) in his two acts opera *Die ägyptische Helena* op. 75, premiered in 1928 on a German libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874–1929), applies a combination of Euripides' and Herodotus' versions of Helen's story.

In Euripides' *Helen*, the characteristics of *tragedy* (foreign place, arrival of a stranger, recognition, escape, Deus ex machina) are combined with those of the *satirical drama* (defeat of "evil", violation of "hospitality," deception).

So, while certain scholars emphasize *Helen's* tragic and controversial features (Kannicht 1969, 7), others express their skepticism about *Helen* as tragedy – as at the end it arouses neither “fear nor pity” [φόβον καὶ ἔλεον] (Hermann 1831, xiv–xv) – and others present *Helen* as a romantic story (Segal 1971, 557).

Focus on Stasimon A: Justification

The structure of Euripides' *Helen* is as follows (Diggle 1994):

Prologue (verses 1–163)

Parodos (164–385)

Episode A (386–514)

Epiparodos – Episode B (515–1106)

Stasimon A (1107–1164): strophe *a*, antistrophe *a*, strophe *b*, antistrophe *b*

Episode C (1165–1300)

Stasimon B (1301–1368): strophe *a*, antistrophe *a*, strophe *b*, antistrophe *b*

Episode D (1369–1450)

Stasimon C (1451–1511): strophe *a*, antistrophe *a*, strophe *b*, antistrophe *b*

Exodos (1512–1692)

In Stasimon A (1107–1164) and Stasimon B (1301–1368) a crescendo takes place: Stasimon A combines a dismissive description with a profound critique of the war, and Stasimon B gives a pessimistic variation on the myth of Persephone (Sebo 2014, 145). In fact, Stasimon A and Stasimon B are correlated to each other through the idea of the “heroine's literal or symbolic death” (Foley 2001, 305).

The semiotic ideas of ‘seeming’ and ‘being’ are central in Stasimon A. In strophe *a* (v. 1107–1121) the nightingale is called to narrate the story of Helen, while the antistrophe *a* (v. 1122–1136) ends with the cruelty of the Trojan War, presenting as a whole the classic version of Helen's myth (ii. Homeric Helen: an accused mortal queen). Strophe *b* (v. 1137–1150) raises the crucial question of the divine (i. pre-Homeric Helen: goddess) or mortal nature of Helen (ii. Homeric Helen), while antistrophe *b* (v. 1151–1164) concludes with the futility of war and the crucial role of logic (iii. post-Homeric Helen: contrasting approaches).

As Sebo (2014, 150) indicates, the chorus in strophe *b* states that if a human being was ever to catch a glimpse of divinity, it would be in the “contradictory” [ἀμφιλόγοις] (1141)² and “unexpected” [ἀνελπίστοις] (1142) reversals of fate, advocating for the divine origin of Helen. In antistrophe *b* (Sebo 2014, 151), the chorus unhesitatingly describes those who seek to prove their excellence through warrior prowess as “fools” [ἄφρονες] (1151) and “senselessly putting an end to mortal troubles” [ἀμαθῶς θανάτῳ πόνους καταλυόμενοι] (1154); turning to Helen, the chorus sings that Trojan war could have been avoided

² The English translation of Euripides' *Helen* in this article is the one of Coleridge (OATES & O'NEILL 1938).

“when they could have set right by discussion, the strife over you, O Helen” [ἐξὸν διορθῶσαι λόγοις σὰν ἔριν, ὧ Ἑλένα] (1159–60) (Sebo 2014, 150–51), emphasizing the critical role of reason in any conflict.

What Euripides suggests is that just as Helen’s divine and human existence are intertwined, so are the two faces of war: victory and defeat, glory and destruction. Furthermore, Helen’s dual nature set in strophe *b* underlines the contrary categories of ‘seeming’ and ‘being’ of the Greimas square. The category of ‘seeming’ is strengthened by the modality of “believe” in Helen’s divine nature. On the other hand, the category of ‘being’ is enhanced by the modality of “know”, which is strongly projected through the invocation of logic as a solution to problems. Thus, the poet’s anti-war position (logical problem solving) also corresponds as an answer to *Helen’s dilemma* (rational mortal). This way, “know” is favored instead of “believe” and consequently ‘being’ instead of ‘seeming’ is promoted.

In conclusion, ‘seeming’ and ‘being’ of Helen along with “know” and “believe” about the Trojan war, corresponding exactly to the Greimas given square, set up the core of our research question regarding the three ‘plus one’ case studies on music set to Euripides’ *Helen* Stasimon A that follow.

General remarks on music written for the ancient drama by Greek composers

Ancient drama occupies a prominent and commanding place in the history of Greek theatre. The first music written for the modern revival of ancient drama dates back to the end of 19th century (G. Pachtikos, I. Sakellaridis, Th. Polycratis, L. Spinellis, I. Kaisaris, etc.). Typical in this case were the attempts to utilize and regenerate all the elements providing a connection with antiquity (Romanou 2006, 120–21). This was achieved not only by digging in the scarce fragments of ancient Greek music, but also by using elements of Byzantine and traditional Greek music, as the descendants of the ancient Greek music (Romanou 2009, 190). Elements like modes (scales), rhythms and timbre have been exploited, while the approach of the Greek modes according to their structure in tetrachords and pentachords had been at the very core of this discussion.

After the end of World War II (1939–1944) and the Greek Civil War (1944/46–1949), the dramatic performances in indoor and –mostly– open-air ancient theatres (The Odeon of Herodes Atticus, The Ancient Theatres of Epidauros, Thassos, Dodoni, etc.) rapidly increased, contributing to the revitalization of theatre life, both in Athens, and the rest of the country (Bakopoulou-Halls 2007). In addition, a new means of communication was established including theatre and music transmissions. The State Radio Station of Athens (1938) included a Department of Music Programs as well as a Department of Theatre Broadcasts; after WWII, and under the name “Hellenic Radio,” it reaches its peak (1955–1966), while the radio theatre performances capture the glimpse of the Athenian theatrical and musical life (Kalopana 2021).

Although the preoccupation of most Greek composers of the second half of the 20th century with music for the theatre is a sure livelihood, a significant number of productions stand out as a worthy approach, escaping from the framework of mere background music (Soulele 2009). Greek composers such as Dimitris Dragatakis (1914–2001), Stefanos Vasileiadis (1933–2004), and Theodore Antoniou (1935–2018) kept declaring in their oral communications that music written for the ancient tragedy had been of a real workshop within Greek Art music (Kalopana 2009; Zachou 2023).

The three case studies on stage music³ for Euripides' *Helen*

The direction of a theatre production is considered as a comprehensive expression of the rest of the performance's features (translation of the original text, acting, choreography, scenography, music), meaning that the director has the overall curation. Nevertheless, as Zachou (2018, 501) indicates –quoted in the writer's own translation– “The manifestations of the musical dimension in modern Greek performances [of ancient drama] is the catalytic morphological element that gives its mark ‘Greek interpretation’ perhaps more than any other stage factor.” Thus, even considering both the director and the composer as *helpers* or *opponents* of the *signified subject* (aspect of Helen's myth realized), we are justified –in this study– in shedding more light on the musical parameters.

This historical, analytical and aesthetic study of Euripides' *Helen* Stasimon A focuses on three cases that span the entire second half of the 20th century highlighting various approaches to both the music and the rest of the performance (Giannakopoulos 2021, 7), according means (state and private theatres, orchestral and chamber music ensembles), style (revival and modernism), and social frame (political situation in Greece). The selected performances were all given in open ancient theatres. One additional case study regarding a solo state radio production is presented at the end.

1. Euripides' *Helen* directed by Takis Mouzenidis, with stage music by Argyris Kounadis (National Theatre of Greece, 1962)

The production of Euripides' *Helen* by the National Theatre of Greece in 1962 has been a modern Greek premiere (June 24th, Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus), as the tragedy had not been reported as performed in Greece since antiquity (412 BCE). The translation into modern Greek was made by Thrasvoulos Stavrou,⁴ the direction by Takis Mouzenidis⁵ and the music by Ar-

³ In this paper, the term “stage music” is used for the music set to a spoken drama, corresponding to the terms “musique de scene”, “musica di scena”, “Bühnenmusik.”

⁴ (1886–1979) Greek philologist, poet and translator.

⁵ (1909–1981) Greek theatre and film director.

gyris Kounadis (14.2.1924, Constantinople – 22.11.2011, Freiburg). Kounadis's ergography consists of numerous works of all kinds, including also a significant amount of stage music. His collaboration with the National Theatre of Greece was particularly intense in the period 1956–1964, concluding to nine productions.⁶ His music for *Helen* dates towards the end of this collaboration, containing much of his acquired experience.

This performance was attended by the top of the Greek leadership as well as a large audience and was considered a success (Marinakis 1962). Concerning music, critics agreed on its discreet presence in the performance (Diamantopoulos 1962; Kalkani 1962; Klaras 1962; Paraschos 1962; Stavrou 1962). In fact, this view is in line with Anghelos Terzakis' –Director of Repertoire to the National Theatre– introduction in the production's programme, in which he underlines the importance of the unity of the components of production (1962a, 31), while he mentions that “A contemporary chorus must thus recite as well as dance, without the melody obscuring the meaning of the lyric, which usually contains the highest flights of the poet's imagination” (1962a, 32), furthermore characterizing Stasimon A as “a beautiful ode, a lament by the chorus for the evils of war” (1962b, 41).

The incidental music invests parts of the tragedy in successive sections marked by numbers 1 to 8 (Introduction, Parodos, Epiparodos, Stasimon A, Stasimon B, Stasimon C, Exodus, bridges). The musical material in the Online Archive of the National Theatre (National Theatre of Greece 2011) includes: the orchestral score (75 p.) with instruments' parts, the spartito for Stasimon A (4 p.), two different spartiti for Stasimon C (1st: 6 p., 2nd: p. 10), as well as a complete spartito for all the choral parts (Epiparodos, Parodos, Epodos, Stasimon A, Stasimon B and Stasimon C, 33 p.). The orchestration expands to a set of twelve (12) instruments (fl, ob, 2 cl B, 2 hn, tpt, trbn, elec gui, perc, timp, pf), Kounadis focusing on the timbres of a flexible chamber ensemble. Unfortunately, no sound archive has been located.

Regarding Stasimon A, Kounadis writes music for strophe *a* and antistrophe *a*, while strophe *b* is absent and antistrophe *b* is set to music partially, regarding just the opening verses (1151–1156): “Ἄμναλοι αὐτοὶ που ζητοῦν να κερδίσουν δόξα και ἀξία μες στους πολέμους, προσπαθώντας ἀνόητα στις συμφορές των θνητῶν ἔτσι να βάλουνε τέρμα. Στο αἷμα τη λύση ἀν ζητάς, θα 'χεις ἀτέλειωτο πόλεμο.” [“You are fools, who try to win a reputation for virtue through war and marshalled lines of spears, senselessly putting an end to mortal troubles; for if a bloody quarrel is to decide it, strife will never leave off in the towns of men;”].

⁶ *Ondine*, J. Giraudoux (1956), *Theofano*, A.D. Terzakis (1956), *Clytemnestra*, A. Matsas (1956), *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Euripides (1957, 1958, 1961), *Cymbeline*, W. Shakespeare (1957), *The Acharnians*, Aristophanes (1961), *Helen*, Euripides (1962), *The Bee*, N. Kazantzakis (1962), *Andromache*, Euripides (1963, 1964). In *Iphigenia at Aulis*, *The Acharnians*, *Helen* and *Andromache* Kounadis had also been the orchestra or choir director.

The study of the autographed spartiti of Stasimon A concludes that chromatic clusters consist of a steady and common element; on the other hand, the passionate Phrygian pentachord of the prior spartito is replaced on the final one by the, rather objectively sad, E and B minor pentatonic (Table 1). In the final version of the music set to Stasimon A, a ternary form –in a relationship of tonic and dominant– is obvious; E minor pentatonic is used as a starting point for Helen's myth (Score 1), B minor pentatonic is connected to the Trojan war and E pentatonic –no major or minor indication– sets the anti-war message, as a balanced and logical solution (Score 2). Elaboration is little, orchestration is plain and frequent meter changes tend to adapt music to the rhythm of the verses. The successful combination of different elements, such as pentatonic scales and chromatic dissonances, demonstrates the composer's fluency.

Regarding the whole of *Helen's* production (direction, scenography, acting) as studied through the historical material of the performance, a rather Doric, and close to the historical evidence, route is followed. This position is

Spartito for Stasimon A (4 p.) [prior]			
		b. 1-9	b. 10-17
		antistrophe <i>a</i>	antistrophe <i>b</i>
		A-B-C-D: frygian pentachord	Tonic centre: F Clusters: F-Gb-G & Db-D-C
Complete spartito for Chorus (p. 12-17/33) [final]			
b. 1-7	b. 7-35	b. 36-54	b. 55-62
Orchestral Introduction	strophe <i>a</i>	antistrophe <i>a</i>	antistrophe <i>b</i> /part (v. 1151-1156)
E minor pentatonic scale	(b.7-12): E minor pentatonic tetrachord (E-G-A-B) (b. 13-35): B minor pentatonic pentachord (B-D-E-F#-A)	(b.36-39): clusters of three successive semitones (b.40-54): B minor pentatonic pentachord	(b. 55)/ Introduction: E pentatonic (b. 56-62): chromatic trichord (E-F-Gb), accompaniment: clusters of three successive semitones

Table 1 : Music structure of Euripides' *Helen*, Stasimon A by Argyris Kounadis.

ΕΛΕΝΗ — A' Στάσιον — (12)
 — Εὐριπίδου —
 Α. ΚΟΥΝΑΔΗΣ
 (1968)

[♩ = 12]

triangle

ΚΟΡΙΦΑΙΑ: ἢ σὺς φυλλωγίης, κρυμμένο κεραυνὸν καὶ κραυὴ πού σάν ἐξέν' ἄλλοι ποῦρ' ὀτρύνει
 δὲν κεραυνὸν κανένας

2/4

Score 1 : Euripides' *Helen*, Stasimon A by A. Kounadis. Complete spartito for Chorus (Online Archive of the National Theatre of Greece), p. 12: b. 1-7/introduction/E minor pentatonic scale, b. 7-12/ strophe a/ E minor pentatonic tetrachord.

-6-

(16)

ΕΠΙΣΤΑΣΙΣ

ΧΟΡΟΣ: Ἀμύχαροι αὐτοὶ ποὺ ζήτων νὰ κερδίσουν δόξα
 καὶ ἄξια μὲς ἐξῆς παρήμερος,

ΧΟΡΟΣ: Προσπαθῶντας ἀνύστα οἷς ἐμφερὲς **ΧΟΡΟΣ:** Στὸ αἶμα τῆς γύνης αὐ-
 τῶν θυγερῶν ἔτσι νὰ βόρουνε γέφυρα. ζήτω θάχης ἀνέγνωτο ποτέμα-

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a chorus in Euripides' *Helen*. The score is written on multiple staves. At the top, there is a tempo marking of quarter note = 76. The lyrics are in Greek. There are several boxed sections of the score, likely indicating specific musical features discussed in the text. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, key signatures, and various musical symbols like notes, rests, and dynamics (mf, f). The score is handwritten and appears to be a working draft or a personal edition.

Score 2 : Euripides' *Helen*, Stasimon A by A. Kounadis. Complete spartito for Chorus (Online Archive of the National Theatre of Greece), p. 16, antistrophe *b* (v. 1151–1156): b. 55-56/ Introduction/E pentatonic, b. 56-62/chromatic trichord (E-F-Gb).

consistent with the political instability of the Greek conservative government of the time. The general concern to stay close to the historical meaning of the tragedy (Kannicht 1969) renders Euripides' critique of the disastrous Sicilian expedition to be the main parameter for the production's *signified/subject*. In this line, the Stasimon A set to music by Kounadis naturally puts as *subject* the anti-war message, and not *Helen's dilemma*. Consequently, the Greimas square is in favor of "knowing" the futility of war and not "believing" in Helen's divinity as a war factor. So, the *object* sent to the receivers is the futility of war. In this frame, Helen is just a means and is not given a central position in the production.

2. Euripides' *Helen* directed by Alexis Solomos, with stage music by Iannis Xenakis (National Theatre of Greece, 1977)

The production of *Helen* by the Greek National Theatre in 1977 (July 16th & 17th, Ancient Theatre of Epidauros) attracted the interest of audiences and critics, mainly due to the participation of the already at that time internationally renowned Xenakis in composing the stage music, as well as of the acclaimed painter Alekos Fasianos⁷ in designing the costumes. The translation into modern Greek was by Tasos Roussos⁸ and the direction by Alexis Solomos.⁹ Iannis Xenakis (29.[5].1922, Braila Romania – 4.2.2001, Paris) was a Greek avant-garde composer, music theorist, architect, performance director and engineer, with a voluminous, multifaceted and idiosyncratic work.

Critics were not, however, in favour of the production, targeting its stylistic inconsistency¹⁰—including the change of language between the recitation parts and the choruses (in modern Greek and in ancient Greek respectively)—as well as the idiosyncratic characteristics of music.¹¹ Xenakis had to defend himself

⁷ (1935–2022) Greek painter, lithographer and author, who gained recognition for his distinctive style characterized by immediacy, away from standardized painting techniques.

⁸ (1934–2015) Philologist, litterateur and translator. In 2003 he was awarded by the Academy of Athens.

⁹ (1918–2012) Greek theatre director, translator and theatre theorist. He was honored by the Academy of Athens and awarded an honorary doctorate of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

¹⁰ "Although in terms of interpretation Alexis Solomos followed a fairly classic line in his direction, in the individual elements he chose a somewhat modernist tone: especially in the use of music and choruses, even in the choice of costumes." (MIKELIDIS 1977).

¹¹ "I strongly disagree with his [Xenakis's] view of setting the ancient speech to music in the original. I regard the energy as aristocracy and elitism which despises the right of the people to rejoice in the meaning of the ancient tragic speech." (GEORGIOUSOPOULOS 1977).

"[...] The music of Xenakis, a kind of medieval vocal organ for the Choraes, sung in ancient Greek, while the instrumental parts were from an earlier work of the composer [...] was given with a poignant sound intensity, which was clearly at the accuracy of the speech. [...]. Especially the choraes [...] lost for the listener all those sonorous gradations in the pronunciation of vowels and consonants that the composer tried so hard in vain to project.[...]" (ANOGEIANAKIS 1977).

by giving an interview (Pankourelis 1977), and writing twice (both texts are quoted in the writer's own translation): once in an article published in the press (Xenakis 1977a):

"[...] I wrote the choruses based both on long and short vowels and accents that ment: Εγώ=Egoó with melodic ascent of a fourth or fifth of the second "ó" [...] (the fourth is an interval melodically as in "pai-dia san the-te le-vendia kai..." ["guys if you want leventia and"]). [...] The melodic lines I wrote follow faithfully the text, i.e. the melody of the ancient Attic language itself. The second voice has greater freedom of movement and is inspired by ancient theory as well as samples of harmony from folk songs of Epirus, Dodecanese and even Pontus."

and once in a detailed text in the programme of the production (Xenakis 1977b, 38–39):

"[...] And I believe the following: every effort made with talent, finds a direct response to the Greek people, who will always know how to judge in practice any interpretation of this type. Here in "Ele-ni", because there is no such centre yet, certain restoration efforts have been made with the hope and belief that they will be completed in future events. The music of certain choirs is written in the ancient text with the pronunciation that today's phonetic science found (and not Erasmus),¹² studying comparatively the inscriptions of Attica of the 5th century. [...] Finally, the accompanying music of drums, simandron, etc. which accompanies the chorus of Demeter and Persephone is taken from the composition *Persephassa* for six percussionists that I had written before "Helen" for the famous Strasbourg percussion group of six."

In fact, the problem of the pronunciation of the ancient Greek language, as well as the melodiousness and rhythm of the ancient tragedy, was not new. Under the ideological origins of the Greek philologist Giorgos Mistriotis (1840–1916), a revival of ancient Greek drama in its original language and unity had been tried at the end of the 19th century, together with the musical idiom employed by Greek composers of the time, such as by Ioannis Sakellaridis (1853–1938) and Georgios Pachtikos (1869–1916) (Barbaki 2015, 108; Siopsi 2020). It is not clear whether Xenakis was aware of these attempts; nevertheless, he tried, as usual in his work, to innovate, making his own proposal of a rather "historical" approach to the music of Stasimon A.

¹² Erasmian Pronunciation refers both to the specific ideas proposed mainly by Erasmus (1466–1536) in the 16th century for reforming the pronunciation of Ancient Greek (and Latin), as well as to the later adaptations of his conclusions, which modern linguistics broadly confirms, although modern pronunciation of Ancient Greek differs widely in practice (CONWAY 1907).

In the Online Archive of the National Theatre of Greece (National Theatre of Greece 2011) concerning this performance is included a “music guide” of 4 pages with accompaniments and bridges for various parts of the tragedy. The actual music texts provided, however, in the Archive, include just Stasimon A and C; Stasimon B was performed with spoken voice, accompanied by *Persephassa*, a pre-existing composer’s work for percussion ensemble, as clarified in the production’s Programme (Xenakis 1977b). So, the musical material contains, apart from a complete sound archive, a vocal score of three pages, which correspond to Stasimon A (p. 1 and 3) (Score 3) and Stasimon C (p. 2). Soon after the tragedy’s performance, the music set on Stasimon A formed an independent choral work for female or male chorus, named *À Hélène* (1977).

Xenakis is the only one –among the case studies of this article– to set to music the whole Stasimon A, while using exclusively ancient Greek scales, and yet typically in descending direction. Melodic lines (1st voice) –within the indicated modes– are also consistent with the modern melodiousness of the Greek language, while vertical consonances (2nd voice) point to established intervals of Greek traditional music (perfect fourths, seconds and major sevenths).

In strophe *a* and antistrophe *a* (Table 2), the use of the Lydian mode most eloquently states that the story of Helen and the story of the Trojan war are the two faces of the same idea; a slight differentiation is achieved with the displacement of the base of the Lydian tetrachord a semitone upper for the antistrophe *a*, sharpening the harsh soundscape of war. In strophe *b* and antistrophe *b* the use of the austere, serious and imposing Dorian mode depicts both the divine personality of Helen and the futility of war, promoting a logical

Spartito for Stasimon A (p. 1&3)			
Strophe <i>a</i> (v. 1107-1121)	Antistrophe <i>a</i> (v. 1122-1136)	Strophe <i>b</i> (v. 1137-1150)	Antistrophe <i>b</i> (v. 1151-1164)
Lydian mode (C-C) with displacement of its base note to D flat from v.1128 to v. 1135. Note: reversal of the final phrases of the verses 1132-1133.		Dorian pentachord (E-A)	Dorian tetrachord (A-E)
p. 3		p. 1	p. 1

Table 2 : Music structure of Euripides’ *Helen*, Stasimon A by Iannis Xenakis.

MPA

MPA

ΕΛΕΝΗ

238

ΕΛΕΝΗ

MPA

MPA

ΕΛΕΝΗ

238

ΕΛΕΝΗ

Score 3 : Euripides' Helen, Stasimon A by I. Xenakis. Chorus score (Online Archive of the National Theatre of Greece), p. 1: strophe b (v. 1137-1150)/Dorian pentachord, antistrophe b (v. 1151-1164)/Dorian tetrachord, p. 3: strophe a (v. 1107-1121)/Lydian mode, antistrophe a (v. 1122-1136)/ Lydian mode.

approach. Xenakis's ingenious conception here lies in his use of the naturally graceful Lydian mode for the position of established views in strophe/antistrophe *a* (Helen as cause of the Trojan campaign, horror of war) and the strict Dorian mode for the logical reformulation of these views in strophe/antistrophe *b* (dual nature of Helen, anti-war message).

The study of the rest of the performance archival material demonstrates that its contributors –not belonging to the conservative core of the Greek National Theatre– tried to offer a varied classical approach, i.e. a penetrating look, while always respecting the ancient text. Considering Stasimon A, we see a redefinition of the *subject* so that the myth of Helen and the anti-war message are simultaneously served. The *signified* of the *subject* through the Greimas square is definitely in favour of 'being'/'know" having as contrary the 'seeming'/'believe." Overall, the double *subject* (logical acceptance of Helen's dual nature and of the anti-war message) projects also a double *object* to the receiver. The emphasis given on the work's contrasting features points at Kannicht's dramatic view (1969). Overall, the audience is given a rationalized approach of this tragedy, in line with the restoration of democracy in Greece, in 1974.

3. Euripides' *Helen* directed by Giannis Chouvardas, with incidental music by Giorgos Koumendakis (Notos Theatre, 1996)

Helen by the Notos Theatre [Theatre of the South] in a translation by Dimitris Dimitriadis,¹³ direction by Giannis Chouvardas¹⁴ and music by Giorgos Koumendakis [Koumentakis] (November 29th, 1959, Rethymno, Crete –) has been a much-anticipated production. A crowd had been gathered at the premiere (summer 1996, Ancient Theatre of Epidauros); critics, however, pointed out the incoherence of the show's elements and the relative shallowness of the production (Kolitsidopoulou 1996, 50; Georgousopoulos 1996; Georgiou 1996; Karali 1996). These comments contradict the statutory goal of the Notos Theatre and the long cooperation of the performance's collaborators. Indeed, the Notos Theatre was founded in 1991 by the director Giannis Houvardas, with statutory goal "to create a cell that breaks through the 'traditional' mechanisms, giving the opportunity to young people, actors, writers, choreographers, musicians, directors, to express themselves" (Katsounaki 1991, 47). This statement best supports the focus on music in this case study as well.

Concerning the music part of Notos' production of *Helen* in 1996, it has to be mentioned that Koumendakis –one of the most remarkable contemporary Greek composers– already had considerable experience in stage music (National Theatre of Greece 1981, 1989; opera *Bacchai*, 1993) –enriched soon after with the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games– as part of his broad ergography. The music score is located at the

¹³ (1944, Thessaloniki) Greek writer, playwright and translator.

¹⁴ (1950, Athens) Greek theatre director.

archival material of the Digital Repository of the Laboratory for the Study of Hellenic Music, Polymnia (2018), of the Department of Music Studies of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, while no sound recording has been found. The work is orchestrated for female chorus and four (4) violins and is divided in twelve (12) numbered parts.

As far as Stasimon A is concerned (part 8), Koumendakis leaves out antistrophe *a* and puts to melody all the rest, building on the structure shown in Table 3.

b. 1-3	b. 4-49	b. 50-55	b. 56-96	b. 97-110	b. 111-117
Orchestral Introduction	Strophe <i>a</i>	Orchestral Bridge	Strophe <i>b</i>	Antistrophe <i>b</i>	Orchestral Coda
Dorian tetrachord/ <u>MOTIVE 1</u>	Dorian tetrachord- Lydian tetrachord / <u>MOTIVES 2-3</u> Lydian tetrachord+ <i>Proslambanomenos</i> <i>tone (PT) /</i> <u>MOTIVE 4</u> Lydian tetrachord + (PT)/ <u>MOTIVE 5</u>	whole tone scale/ <u>MOTIVE 6</u>	b. 56-72: C# melodic scale / <u>MOTIVE 7</u> (solo 1 st voice) b. 73-75: whole tone scale / <u>MOTIVE 6</u> (orchestral bridge) b. 75-93: Lydian tetrachord + (PT), Phrygian tetrachord, Lydian tetrachord + PT / <u>MOTIVE 8</u> , C# melodic scale/ <u>MOTIVE 7</u> (solo 2 nd voice) b. 94-96: instrumental bridge (solo 1 st violin) / <u>MOTIVE 4</u>	A minor harmonic / <u>MOTIVE 9</u>	Lydian tetrachord + (PT) <u>MOTIVE 4</u>

Table 3 : Music structure of Euripides' *Helen*, Stasimon A by Giorgos Koumendakis.

Strophe *a* refers to the nightingale narrating Helen's story, combining graceful Lydian and imposing Dorian tetrachords, as two different aspects of the myth. An orchestral bridge on the whole tone scale prepares for a universal perspective of *Helen's dilemma* posed at the beginning of strophe *b* (1137–1142): Τί 'ναι θεός, τι μη θεός, τι το διάμεσό τους, θνητός ποιος θα 'λεγε πως βρήκε την απάντηση, ολόκληρη ζωή αναζητώντας την, βλέποντας τους θεούς ν' αλλάζουν, χωρίς ειρμό και δίχως έρμα ["What is god, or what is not god, or what is in between; what mortal says he has found it by searching the farthest limit, when he sees divine affairs leaping here and there again and back, in contradictory and unexpected chances?"]. The C sharp melodic minor on this phrase is deafeningly distinct, almost ironic. The repetition of the whole tone passage closes this unit to continue with Helen's myth in the second part of strophe *b* (1143–1150) under the graceful Lydian and the passionate Phrygian tetrachords: Ελένη σ' είσαι κόρη του Διός, σ' έσπειρε φτερωτός μες στην αγκαλιά της Λήδας, μα την Ελλάδα διασχίζει μια ιαχή πως είσαι άθρη, άπιστη, κακή γυναίκα, ως τώρα βέβαιο στους θνητούς τίποτα δεν γνωρίζω, τον λόγο μόνο των θεών αληθινό νομίζω ["You, Helen, are the daughter of Zeus; for a winged father begot you in Leda's womb; and then you were proclaimed throughout Hellas, betrayer, faithless, lawless, godless. I do not know whatever certainty is among mortals"]. This combinatorial succession of different scales describes a multidimensional rather than a simply dual nature of Helen, rhetorically explaining anti-war message raised by strophe *a*. In antistrophe *b*, the anti-war message is simply expressed on the A minor harmonic scale, affirming the self-evident misery and the overall futility of war. This is the reason for the absence of the –evident war misery description in– antistrophe *a*.

Stasimon A in Euripides' *Helen* set to music by Koumendakis stands as a polystylistic approach, compatible with the modern inclusive era. In this case, *Helen's dilemma* is for the first time put as the only *signifier (object)*. To understand the *signified (subject)*, the study of the Greimas square reveals the focus on the contradiction between 'being' and 'not seeming' which form a rationalized as well as an inclusive aspect of Helen's myth. The *signifier/object* transmitted to the receivers is yet the multifaceted, but purely real and logical, Helen's story. In such an approach, the anti-war message is stated as self-evident, without being underlined. The rest of the production elements also serve this fresh, logical and comprehensive approach of the performance, sometimes touching on excess, challenging perhaps *Helen* as a tragedy (Hermann 1831). Visible here is the danger of distancing the public from the familiar characteristics of the ancient tragedy, an element which was pointed out by the critics of the time.

The 'plus one' case study on stage music for Euripides' *Helen*

4. Euripides' *Helen* directed by Thanos Kotsopoulos, with stage music by Giorgos Kazasoglou (Hellenic Radio, 1961)

This production of *Helen* was broadcast on the weekly "The Theatre on Sunday" in 1961. Many years later, the audio recording of the production (The Theatre of Sunday 2006) was distributed together with the periodical *Radio-television* (issue 1896, June 17th–23rd, 2006). Director of this production of *Helen* had been Thanos Kotsopoulos,¹⁵ while the ancient text had been translated and adapted to the radio production by Dora Moatsou.¹⁶ Despite being a modern premiere of the tragedy (*Helen* on music by Kounadis followed in 1962), it was not promoted as one of a kind.

Georgios Kazasoglou (1.12.1908–2.6.1984, Athens) had had a long career in incidental music: nine works for the National Theatre of Greece (1945–1957)¹⁷ and six for the Hellenic Radio/Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (1957–1961).¹⁸ *Helen* was his last work for the Hellenic Radio, thus containing all his long experience in the field, as a composer and conductor as well. The orchestral score, preserved in the Archive of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (2009), has been kindly provided to the writer for the purpose of this paper. The orchestration includes seventeen (17) instruments (fl, ob, 3 cl B, t sax, bn, 3 tpt, trbn, perc, timp, vn I, vn II, vc, db), oriented towards a symphonic sound. The stage music includes fifteen sections with even more subsections and several repetitions. The part regarding Stasimon A (Lento pastorale) corresponds to number 9 (pages 20–27 of the score).

Considering **Score 4** and **Table 4**, we realize that strophe *a* and antistrophe *a* are set to music in their major part. Strophe *b* is upsent, and concerning the antistrophe *b*, it is set to music fragmentarily (verses 1157 & 1163–1164):

(1157) Τώρα οι Τρωαδίτισσες στον Άδη κατεβήκανε ["by it they won as their lot bed-chambers of Priam's earth"]

(1163–1164) Πάθη πάνω στα πάθη και θρήνοι και θρήνοι μες στη συμφορά ["and you are bringing woe on woe"]

The melody develops over the maqam Hijaz –based here on C– a scale

¹⁵ (1911–1993) Greek actor, writer and director.

¹⁶ (1895–1979) Greek philologist and poet, wife of the poet Kostas Varnalis.

¹⁷ *The Arleziana*, A. Daudet (1945), *The Suitors of the Throne*, H.J. Ibsen (1945), *Redemption*, Th. Kotsopoulos (1946), *As You Like It*, W. Shakespeare (1950), *Nephelai*, Aristophanes (1951), *Erophile*, G. Chortatzis (1952), *The Winter's Tale*, W. Shakespeare (1952), *Encounter in Penteli*, G. Theotokas (1957), *The Lady of the Dawn*, A. Casona (1957). In *Erofil* Kazasoglou has also been the orchestra's conductor.

¹⁸ *The Bee*, N. Kazantzakis (1957), *Koutroulis' Wedding*, A. Rizos-Rankavis (1958), *Erofil*, G. Chortatzis (1959), *Behold the Bridegroom comes*, D. Romas (1960), *Kouros*, N. Kazantzakis (1960), *Helen*, Euripides (1961).

Score 4 : Euripides' *Helen*, Stasimon A by G. Kazasoglou. Orchestral score (Archive of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation), p. 20: b. 1-2/orchestral introduction (Hijaz), b. 2-4/ beginning of strophe *a* (Hijaz-1st tetrachord).

common in Greek folk music, also called plagal of the Second “mixed” *echos* in byzantine music, as it is formed by a conjunct tetrachord of hard colour (C-F) and a pentachord soft diatonic (F-C): C-Db-E-F-G-Ab-Bb-C (Tsiamoulis 2014, 80). The scale is used downwards so that the augmented second (Db-E) is less harsh. In the antistrophe *b* the scale turns to plagal mode, using also notes below the base of the scale (Bb, Ab). Kazasoglou applies a mainly tonal

Bars	1-2	2-25	26-36	37-49
Unit	Orchestral Introduction	Strophe <i>a</i> & antistrophe <i>a</i>	Orchestral Bridge with chorus murmur	b. 37-41: antistrophe <i>b</i> (v. 1157) b. 42-49: antistrophe <i>b</i> (v. 1163-1164)
Scales	Hijaz – 1 st tetrachord and <i>disjunctive tone</i>	Hijaz – 1 st tetrachord and <i>disjunctive tone</i> , the <i>synaphe</i>	Hijaz (complete scale)	Hijaz – 1 st tetrachord Hijaz and <i>Proslambanomenos</i> <i>tone</i> , the adjoined

Table 4 : Music structure of Euripides' *Helen*, Stasimon A by Giorgos Kazasoglou.

language, classified in the wider group of the Greek National School (Romanou 2006, 193). Verse choice focuses on the cruelty of war, while the importance of logic as a solution is omitted. *Helen's dilemma* is not called into question at all. Overall, a passive, despairing approach is employed.

The *subject/signified* is the inevitable misery of war, yet the semiotic square only confirms “believe” and “don't know” as contradictory elements. The *signifier/object* transmitted to the audience is the individual's powerlessness in front of inevitable suffering. The entire production stands close to this approach, exploring Helen's devotion to Agamemnon as the only way out (Segal 1971). This romantic and simplified radio approach to the myth, is maybe also related to the tumultuous political events of 1961 (October elections) in Greece and the search for models of non-negotiable loyalty, and service to state ideals.

Conclusions

Interpreting Tarasti's model of music and myth (2006, 398; 2011), we conclude that the case studies presented offer for the same *signifier* –the myth of Helen– three ‘plus one’ *signifieds*. The metamorphosis of the *subject* is characteristic not only within the timeline (1962, 1975, 1992) but mainly in the context of the socio-political frame of each Euripides' *Helen* production. This context seems to be in conversation with the *signified* that the contributors of each performance project almost coordinately. In particular, the *signified/subject* was studied in this article regarding the choice of the text of Stasimon A and especially on the new music set to it. Furthermore, the semiotic square of Greimas allowed us to reach the very core of each *subject*, recognizing its structural characteristics.

Overall, indicative is the metamorphosis of the aesthetic thought in the axis of desire (from the fatalistic popular radio version) in three stages: a gently conservative approach (Kounadis), a new reading of tradition (Xenakis), and a nominal/inclusive approach (Koumendakis). Another point of interest is the movement from the focus on the evident anti-war message (Kounadis), to a balanced care for *Helen's dilemma* as well (Xenakis), and, eventually, to the introspective concern for *Helen's myth*, as the anti-war message seems too obvious to focus on (Koumendakis).

As a final remark, the present historical, analytical and aesthetic analysis does not claim to have resolved the problem of stage music for the ancient drama (Zachou 2018), but rather to have shed light on its components and their transformation over time and within different contexts, with the assistance of semiotics tools. The field of debate about myth and music remains open and studying it as part of art music can contribute to the understanding of our cultural heritage.

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