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Travesties of Gender and Genre in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousae*

Froma I. Zeitlin

Three of Aristophanes' eleven extant comedies use the typical comic device of role reversal to imagine worlds in which women are "on top."[1] Freed from the social constraints which keep them enclosed within the house and silent in the public realms of discourse and action, women are given a field and context on the comic stage. They issue forth to lay their plans, concoct their plots, and exercise their power over men.

The *Lysistrata* and the *Ecclesiazousae* stage the intrusion of women into the public spaces of Athens—the Acropolis and Agora, respectively—as an intrusion into the political and economic life of the city. The *Thesmophoriazousae,* however, resituates the battle of the sexes in another domain—that of aesthetics and, more precisely, that of the theater itself. Instead of the collective confrontation of men and women, the play directs the women's actions against a single male target—the tragic poet, Euripides. Like the better-known *Lysistrata,* performed in the same year (411 B.C.), the *Thesmophoriazousae* (or the *Women at the Festival of the Thesmophoria)* is set on the Acropolis; this time it is not appropriated by the women as a novel and outrageous strategy but is granted to them in accordance with the rules of their annual festival, which reserved this sacred space for their exclusive use in the fertility rites dedicated to Demeter and Persephone.

1. For this term, see Natalie Davis, "Women on Top," *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, Calif., 1975), pp. 124–51. I am indebted to the members of the Aristophanes seminar at Princeton University, spring 1980, who contributed more to this essay than I can acknowledge here. A longer and more detailed version of this essay appears in *Reflections of Women in Antiquity,* ed. Helene Foley (London, 1981).

Criticism has not been generous to this play. Studies of role inversion, even in recent feminist perspectives, have focused on *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazousae* because of their implications for Athens' political and economic problems.[2] Similarly, with regard to literary questions, the *Frogs* has claimed almost exclusive attention, both because of its formal contest between Aeschylus and Euripides and because of its emphasis on the role of the poet as teacher and "savior" of the city.[3] While the *Thesmophoriazousae* has been admired for its ingenuity and wit, generally it has been dismissed as merely a "parody play," a trifling interlude in the comic poet's more significant and enduring dialogue with the city and its institutions. Some critics look for simplistic equivalences between the play's transvestism, effeminacy, and Euripides' newer forms of tragedy, and all find difficulties with the plot, especially with Euripides' apparently sudden reconciliation with the women at the end.[4]

But the *Thesmophoriazousae* is a far more complex and more inte-

2. See the studies of Michèle Rosellini, Suzanne Saïd, and Danièle Auger in *Les Cahiers de Fontenay* 17 (December 1979): 11–32, 33–70, 71–102, respectively. See also Nicole Loraux, "L'Acropole comique," *Les Enfants d'Athéna: Idées athéniennes sur la citoyenneté et la division des sexes* (Paris, 1981), and Helene Foley, "The Female Intruder Reconsidered: Women in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazousae*" (forthcoming in *Classical Philology*). For a historian's view, see Edmond Lévy, "Les Femmes chez Aristophane," *Ktema* 1 (1976): 99–112.

3. For example, Rosemary Harriott *(Poetry and Criticism before Plato* [London, 1969]) devotes only half a page to one passage from the *Thesmophoriazousae,* while Bruno Snell makes no mention of the play at all in "Aristophanes and Aesthetic Criticism," *The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought,* trans. T. G. Rosenmeyer (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), pp. 113–35.

4. There is virtually no extended treatment of this play as a play. Cedric Whitman comes the closest in *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero* ([Cambridge, Mass., 1964], pp. 216–27), which takes a rather negative view of the play: "The parody here is without venom, and the plot, or fantasy, is without reference to very much beyond its own inconsequential proposition. . . . The art of tragedy is shown to be on the wane, but any deeper implications that might have been involved in that fact are saved for the *Frogs*" (p. 217). For him, the play has "little of the theme of fertility or life"; "somehow," he continues, "femininity, whether real or assumed, is under a somewhat morbid cloud; by contrast, there is something genuinely refreshing about the masculinity of Mnesilochus, however coarse, and of the Scythian archer, whose main male attribute plays an unblushing role in the solution of the play" (pp. 216, 224). Hardy Hansen ("Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousae:* Theme Structure and Production," *Philologus* 120 [1976]: 165–85) follows Whitman's interpretation but concentrates on theatrical problems.

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grated play. It is located at the intersection of a number of relations: between male and female; between tragedy and comedy; between theater (tragedy and comedy) and festival (ritual and myth); between festival (the Thesmophoria) and festival (the Dionysiac, which provides the occasion for its performance and which determines its comic essence); and, finally, between bounded forms (myth, ritual, and drama) and the more fluid "realities" of everyday life. All these relations are unstable and reversible: they cross boundaries and invade each other's territories; they erase and reinstate hierarchical distances to reflect ironically upon each other and themselves.

I intend to take another look at this play from the joint perspectives of the theme of "women on top" and that of the self-reflectiveness of art concerned with the status of its own mimetic representation. However satirically the play may represent Euripides' "unnatural" and "unmanly" concern with *eros* and with women, with female sexuality and with female psyche, it poses a more intrinsic connection between the ambiguities of the feminine and those of art, linked together in various ways in Greek notions of poetics from their earliest formulations. The setting of the play and the progress of the plot are constructed not only to make the most of the perennial comic value of female impersonation but also to use the notions of gender in posing questions of genre and to draw attention to the problematics of imitation and representation which connect transvestism of costume with mimetic parody of texts. Transvestism works on the visual level, parody on the verbal. Together they expose the interrelationship of the crossing of genres and the crossing of genders; together they exemplify the equivalence of intertextuality and intersexuality.

1. Mimesis: Gender and Genre

In this brilliant and ingenious play, the contest between the genders must share the spotlight with the contest between the genres, comedy and tragedy. Along with the parody of other serious forms of discourse within the city (judicial, ritual, political, poetic), *paratragodia,* or the parody of tragedy, is a consistent feature of Aristophanic comedy. The effect of making a tragic poet the comic protagonist in a comic plot and of elevating parody to the dominant discourse of the play shifts the contest between the sexes onto another level, one that not only reflects the tensions between the social roles of men and women but also focuses on their theatrical representation as tragic and comic personae.

In the privacy of their ritual enclosure, the women have determined to exact vengeance from the tragic poet, Euripides, whom they charge with the offenses of misogyny and slander in his dramatic portrayal of women. He has made their lives intolerable, they complain. Their hus-

bands come home from the theater, all fired up with suspicion at their every gesture and movement, and lock them up in the house. Euripides himself appears at the opening of the play to devise his counterplot and to rescue himself from this present danger which will determine this day whether he will live or die. Euripides first tries and fails to persuade the effeminate tragic poet, Agathon, to go in woman's dress to infiltrate the women's rites and argue in his defense. Hence, he must finally send his own kinsman. Dressed as a woman with a costume and accessories from Agathon's own wardrobe, shaved and depilated on stage, the kinsman Mnesilochus makes his way to the Acropolis to mingle unnoticed with the other women and to carry out the mandates of the master plotter. He is ultimately unmasked and his true sex is revealed both by the nature of his defense of Euripides and by the information of Cleisthenes, the effeminate politician and the friend of women, who comes to warn them of the interloper in their midst. While Cleisthenes goes off to bring back the Scythian policeman to remove the malefactor, the poor kinsman has recourse to elaborate parodies of Euripidean drama. He tries one tragic role after another in his efforts to save himself, finally bringing Euripides on stage, not once but twice, to impersonate those of his own characters who might rescue the kinsman. When this strategy fails, Euripides, at last, reconciles himself with the women, and dressed now as an old procuress, he succeeds in diverting the policeman with a comic, not a tragic, ploy—the perennial dancing girl—so that he and the kinsman can make their escape.

The meeting of the poet and the women complicates both the *topos* of "women in charge" and the role and stance of the comic hero himself. The launching of the great comic idea, which is the heart and soul of the comic plot, is divided between the women who have determined to prosecute Euripides before the play actually begins and the poet/hero, who cannot now initiate the action in the service of his own imaginative vision of the world. Instead, as comic protagonist, the wily man of many turns must employ all his professional techniques to extricate himself from a situation in which he is not only hero but also potential victim.

Similarly, the device of staging the women's presence on the Acropolis has a double edge. On one level, the women's occupation of civic space maintains the transgression which their presence upon the public stage implies, and the ritual regulations which put women in charge offer rich comic possibilities for women's use and misuse of male language in their imitation of the typical male institutions of tribunal and assembly. Moreover, the *topos* of role inversion gives the women, as always, an opportunity to redress the social imbalances between male and female in an open comic competition with men for superior status, as the parabasis of this play demonstrates best. But on another level, their legitimate presence at their own private ritual also reverses the direction of the transgression; now men are forced to trespass on for-

bidden space, and they penetrate the secret world of women for the purpose of spying upon them and disclosing their secrets.

Another paradox is evident as a result of the confrontation of the poet and the women. The scandal of Euripides' theater lies in his exhibition of erotic heroines upon the tragic stage—women who openly solicit men, like the unhappy Phaedra with her Hippolytus and the wanton Sthenoboia, who, like Potiphar's wife, shamelessly tempted the young Bellerophon. The kinsman's defense, however, claims that Euripides exercised restraint; he could have told other stories worse than these. Penelopes don't exist any more, the kinsman declares, all are Phaedras and Melanippes.[5] His charge of misdoing leveled against all women incurs the women's anger at their supposed betrayal by one of their very own. Yet the anecdotes he tells of adultery and supposititious babies come straight out of the typical male discourse of the comic theater (476–519). The women he depicts as overly fond of wine and sex conform to the portrait of the comic woman, who displays her unruly Dionysiac self, even in this play, in the spirit of carnival and misrule. As the comic male character in the comic play, the kinsman is only playing true to form. And if he defends the tragic poet in the comic way, he makes "unspeakable" what comedy has always claimed as its right to speak. Is tragedy taking the fall for comedy? Is the kinsman's defense, in fact, the defense mounted by comedy against the trespass on its ground by Euripidean tragedy?

The speech in which the kinsman corroborates Euripides' intimate familiarity with women's secrets replicates Euripides' transgression of tragic decorum. This transgression is also spatialized in dramatic form as the violation itself of the sacred enclosure reserved for women at their ritual. Having penetrated earlier into a world he was forbidden to enter, Euripides now penetrates it again through the kinsman's infiltration of the Thesmophoria, an act which therefore profanes the pieties yet again. In comedy, these revelations of women's "nature" cause laughter rather than indignation among the spectators. It is rather in the tragic theater that the mimetic effects of representation work with such realism and persuasiveness that drama overtakes and invades the real world, sending husbands away, wild with anxiety, to look to their womenfolk at home.

At the heart of this repeated violation is the transgression of the distance which normally maintains the fiction of theater's relation to the "real" world. Tragedy, as Aristotle tells us, is "the imitation of a serious action." Designated as the genre which holds up a more heroic and mythic mirror to the society of its spectators, tragedy must depend for its effects upon the integrity of its fictions within its own theatrical con-

5. See Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazousae*, ed. Victor Coulon, vol. 4, Budé text (Paris, 1954), ll. 549–50; all further references to this work will be included with line numbers in the text.

ventions and generic norms. In the *Thesmophoriazousae,* the violation of that integrity is focused on the issue which for the society of men bears the greatest psychological charge—namely, the integrity of their households and, above all, of their women. The violation of women's sexual secrets serves, then, not only as the actual subject for complaint but as the metaphorical representation in social terms of the poet's trespass of aesthetic modes.

At stake in this theatrical tug-of-war between tragedy and comedy is the nature of mimesis itself. The *Thesmophoriazousae* wants it all ways: it dramatizes and exploits to their furthest extremes the confusions which the notion of imitation suggests—whether art is a mimesis of *reality* or a *mimesis* of reality; whether it conceals its art by its verisimilitude or exposes its fictions in the staging and testing of its own illusions. Consider the complications of the mimetic process when character and poet are conflated in the personage of Euripides, when the comic character, the kinsman, is designated as the actor who is to carry out the plot which Euripides has devised within the comic play. Once his "true" identity is revealed, the kinsman must then transform himself into the theatrical actor of the Euripidean parodies whose lines he now self-consciously and incongruously renders with reference to his comic role.

Moreover, the play, as a whole, takes its cue from and sets as the condition of its plot the offense of Euripides in having tilted his dramas too far in the direction of a mimesis which exceeds the boundaries of the theater. For, given the comic stage as the ground of reality in the play, the "real" women, who resent being "characters" in Euripides' drama, put him in a "real" situation in which he must live out for himself the consequences of his own mimetic plots. As others have noticed, Euripides is not a character in a typical comic scenario; rather, he plays the hero/victim in a parodic version of his favorite type of tragic drama—the intrigue-rescue play which often includes a recognition of a lost loved one. The hero/heroine from the beginning faces overwhelming danger and only reaches the desired salvation through a series of ingenious stratagems.[6] What better comic version of tragic justice than to turn the tables on Euripides? Yet, what better stage than this for Euripides, the man of a thousand plots (927), upon which to display all his *méchanai* and to turn, at last, from victim to savior of himself and his kinsman? He plays first in the tragic mode, then in the comic mode,

6. On connections of the plot with Euripidean patterns, see Carlos Ferdinando Russo, *Aristofane, autore di teatro* (Florence, 1962), p. 297, Peter Rau, *Paratragodia: Untersuchung einer komischen Form des Aristophanes* (Munich, 1967), p. 50, and Rau, "Das Tragödienspiel in den 'Thesmophoriazusen,' " in *Aristophanes und die alte Komödie, Wege der Forschung,* ed. Hans Joachim Newiger, vol. 265 (Darmstadt, 1975), p. 349. On the motif of salvation in Euripidean drama, see Antonio Garzya, *Pensiero e technical drammatica in Euripide: Saggio sul motivo della salvazione* (Naples, 1962).

when Aristophanes, cleverer than he, puts him squarely on the "real" ground of the comic play.

From the beginning, Euripides must act the part of the playwright-within-the-play to devise his own plot, to direct the actor to play his appointed part, then to furnish him with the scripts from which to read, and, eventually, to intervene as actor in the parodies of two plays which he has already composed. The comedy can never, therefore, escape the metatheatrical implications of the play within the play within the play and all the variations and permutations of the device. As the comedy progresses, as the kinsman's own improvisations founder and he is "unmasked," the temple and the altar of the Thesmophorion conveniently serve as the "theatrical space" within the play on which to stage those parodies of Euripidean theater.[7] By the last paratragic scene, the comedy draws upon all its theatrical resources, from within and without. The Scythian policeman's fastening of the kinsman to the punishment plank suggests the cast, the setting, and the props for Euripides' poor Andromeda, bound to the rock in far-off Ethiopia, awaiting her fate from the sea monster who is to devour her. But then Euripides himself as Perseus flies by on the "real" theatrical device of the *mēchanē* ("the crane") and cues the kinsman as to the role he intends to play. Thus, as the play moves on to the end, as Euripides, in fact, assumes not only one but two parts in the *Andromeda,* the *Thesmophoriazousae* exposes more and more the obvious inconcinnities between theater and "reality," to the apparent detriment of the former, even as it implicitly conspires, as we shall see, to validate those same dramatic fictions.

2. *Mimesis: Transvestism*

The theme of mimesis is specifically set in the prologue of the play; in fact, this is the first attested techincal use of the word "mimesis" and the first demonstration, albeit ludicrous, of the mimetic theory of art which will later figure so largely in the aesthetic theories of Plato and Aristotle.[8] Agathon, the tragic poet for whom Euripides is searching, is wheeled out of the house on the *ekkyklema,* the stage device used to bring an interior scene outside, singing sensuous hymns that send the kinsman into an erotic swoon (130–33). Androgynous in appearance, Agathon

7. See Russo, *Aristofane, autore di teatro,* p. 297.

8. For a discussion and bibliography of mimesis in antiquity, see Göran Sorböm, *Mimesis and Art* (Uppsala, 1966). See also Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Image et apparence dans la théorie platonicienne de la mimésis," *Journal de Psychologie* 2 (1975): 133–60; rpt. as "Naissances d'images" in his *Religions, histoires, raisons* (Paris, 1979), pp. 103–37. For useful surveys of aesthetic theory and criticism before Plato, see Harriott, *Poetry and Criticism before Plato,* and T. B. L. Webster, "Greek Theories of Art and Literature down to 400 B.C.," *Classical Quarterly* 33 (1939):166–79.

wears women's clothing and carries an incongruous assortment of accessories (134–40). In reply to the kinsman's questions as to his identity and his gender, Agathon now replies:

> I wear my garb according to my thought.
> The poet, you see, must shape his ways
> in accordance with the plays to be composed.
> If someone is composing women's plays,
> his body must needs share in women's ways.
> If plays of men, he has already what it takes.
> Whatever we don't have, we must capture by mimesis.
> [146–52]

So far, so good. The poet is a versatile fellow who must dress the dramatic roles he creates. But Agathon then declares that a beautiful poet wears beautiful clothes and writes beautiful dramas—and vice versa for the ugly poet. One must compose in accordance with one's nature (159–72).

The clue to this apparent confusion between mimesis as impersonation, as investiture, and mimesis as a harmony of body, soul, and poetry lies in the comic fact that Agathon is indeed by nature an effeminate man, just the type whom Aristophanes always loves to mock.[9] Hence, what Agathon imitates (female appearance) is indeed harmonious with his nature and his ways. And this is precisely the reason why he must refuse to go as a spy among the women—because he fits the role too well. As a poet, he is second only to Euripides (187); as a "woman," he claims he would be unfair competition for the other women at the Thesmophoria (204–5); the sample of his poesy, the choral hymns he sings, involving female deities, are all too much in tune. In short, he is the unnatural "natural" for the part, the pathic well adapted for tragic pathos, as the kinsman wryly observes (199–201). How could Agathon defend Euripides against the charges which are leveled against his fellow poet? He is as much or more a friend to women, their kindred spirit, as the effeminate Cleisthenes declares of himself when he enters the women's festival to denounce the male imposter in their midst (574–76). No, Mnesilochus, the hirsute kinsman, all male, must go instead; he must be dressed on stage in a woman's costume; he must be shaved of his beard

9. Critics miss the point of this confusion, especially Raffaele Cantarella ("Agatone e il prologo della 'Tesmoforiazuse,' " *Komoidotragemata* [Amsterdam, 1967], pp. 7–15), who is most often cited on this prologue and who imagines that, since Agathon is effeminate, he is somehow no longer a male.

It should be noted that poets, beginning with Thespis, did, in fact, act in their own plays in the earlier years of the Greek theater before acting became a more professional specialty. Aeschylus most probably did so and Sophocles too in the beginning of his career. See Sir Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens,* 2d ed., rev. J. Gould and D. M. Lewis (Oxford, 1968), pp. 93–94.

and raise his rump in full view of the audience to have it singed with a flame, as women do when they depilate their genitals in accordance with Greek standards of female beauty.

With the interchange between Agathon and Mnesilochus in this prologue scene, Aristophanes has accomplished a real *coup de théâtre.* He has managed with artful economy to introduce his *topos* of "women on top" in a way which exposes its implications to the naked eye. Making Mnesilochus into a woman exactly reproduces in advance the inevitable result of the inversion of gender roles—when women are in a position to rule men, men must become women. In the miniature reversal played out between Agathon and Mnesilochus, Mnesilochus, as the comic character, first indulges in all the witty obscenities to which he is entitled at the expense of the effeminate poet. But the transfer of Agathon's persona to him returns against the kinsman the full measure of that social shame which the breach of gender norms poses to identity, manhood, and power. Comedy's scandalous privilege to expose those parts and functions of the body which decorum keeps hidden—physically, in the padded leather phallus which the comic actor wears, verbally, in the obscenities and sexual jokes which are licensed by the Dionysiac festival—takes on a double twist here. For in exposing the lusty comic male only in the process of becoming a woman, the comedy is playing with the extreme limit of its own promiscuous premises where all can now converge in the ambiguities of intersexuality.

But transvestism in the theater and especially in this scene has yet another function in addition to exposing the natural facts of the body which the social conventions normally keep offstage; that is, to expose the secret artifices which theatrical conventions keep offstage to maintain its mimetic fictions. Mnesilochus is, after all, dressing as a woman because he is to play the part of a woman, carrying out the clever stratagem of Euripides.

In this theatrical perspective, taking the role of the opposite sex invests the wearer with the power of appropriation, of supplement, not only loss. Androgynous myths and transvestite rites speak to this increased charge in symbolic terms, even as androgyny and transvestism incur the shame of deviance within the social code. Thus the depilation of Mnesilochus is balanced by the putting on of women's clothing, for in this ambivalent game of genders, the female is not only a "not" but also an "other."[10] When the women in the parabasis examine the comic contradictions of misogyny and put the superiority of men to the test, they joke in terms of attributes common to each: we women have still kept safe at home our weaving rod *(kanōn)* and our sunshade *(skiadeion),* while

10. See the excellent distinctions made by Sandra M. Gilbert, "Costumes of the Mind: Transvestism as Metaphor in Modern Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (Winter 1980): 391–417.

you men have lost your spear shaft *(kanōn)* and your shield *(skiadeion)* (824–27). The play with castration is appropriate enough to the inversion of roles, but the ambiguities of role playing involve both this loss and gain, even for Mnesilochus who plays so ill, and by his misplaying exposes, when the women expose him, the limits of mimesis.

Since all female roles in the Greek theater were played by men, the exhibitionist donning of female costume focuses the problem of mimesis at its most ambiguous and most sensitive spot, where social and artistic rules are in greatest conflict with each other. Impersonation affects the whole creative process—from the poet to the actor—and determines its aesthetic success. But feminization attracts all the scorn and abuse which the culture—and comedy—can muster. Just so in this play, Aristophanes mocks Euripides at the end by finally putting a female dress on him but yet grants him the stage on which to display, with ultimate impunity, the repertory of his mimetic range.

The contradictions inherent in the mimetic process, as adumbrated by Agathon, between what you play and what you are, are tested again and again from within the play itself, as it uncovers the dissonances between the fictive theatrical device and the comic ground of "reality." Twice Mnesilochus is put up against a "true" effeminate, once with Agathon and once with Cleisthenes, as if to pose a theatrical distance between one actor in women's clothes and another (and let us not forget that the women of the Thesmophoria are, of course, played by men). Mnesilochus himself, in the instability of his dual roles, in his male discomfort with his female parts, is best suited to reflect ironically upon his position during the course of the play. Still disguised, he indignantly asks Cleisthenes, "What man would be such a fool as to allow himself to be depilated?" (592–94). Yet when his first two theatrical parodies of Euripides fail, parodies in which he plays male roles in female costume (another inversion), he has a new and happy idea: "Why, I'll play Helen, the new version—I've got the female dress I need" (850–51). Still, in the next stage, when the magistrate whom Cleisthenes has summoned comes and orders the poor Mnesilochus to be bound to the punishment plank for breaking the city's laws and invading the secret rites of women, he begs: "At least, undress me and bind me naked to the plank. Please don't leave me dressed up in feminine fripperies. I don't want to give the crows a good laugh as well as a good dinner" (939–42). Now that the masculine world of authority has intruded into the play, Mnesilochus expresses well the full reversal from mastery to subjugation his position as a male has taken. When the magistrate reports the council's decree that it is precisely in woman's costume that he is to be bound to the plank, in order to exhibit his villainy to all as an imposter, this is the point where the helpless kinsman most fits the role of the pitiful Andromeda which he now will play. Yet, at the same time, he offers the last and best

incongruity between himself, an ugly old man, and his theatrical persona of the beautiful maiden.

3. Mimesis: Parody

Just as the comic actor's discrepancies between character and costume threaten his mimetic integrity, so does parody address the questions of mimesis in the service of a fictive reality. The transvestite actor might succeed in concealing the telltale sign that marks him as an imitation with a difference, but parody is the literary device that openly declares its status as imitation with a difference. In the rhetorical logic of the play, the exposure of the kinsman's intersexual game appropriately brings parody fully out of hiding to play its intertextual game with comedy and tragedy. In the thematic logic of the piece, the first defense of Euripides, misconducted by the kinsman in the comic mode, is properly transferred to the parodies of the plays themselves, which will eventually bring Euripides on stage to play the tragic roles he has composed. It is also consonant with the narrative logic of the plot that the kinsman now have recourse to Euripidean parodies. For with the peripeteia in his comic situation, he is now truly imitating the typical Euripidean plot of danger-recognition-intrigue-rescue.

The parodies function as the new intrigues of the kinsman (and later of Euripides), which he invokes each time in response to each new exigency of his plight. But these are also intrigues on the aesthetic plane, whose comic success depends upon their ability as specimens of tragic art to deceive their comic audience within the play with their mimetic credibility. Read as successive intrusions into the text, the parodies function like metatheatrical variants of the series of different imposters who come to threaten the comic hero's imaginative world and which, like those figures, must be deflated and driven out. If we read the parodies as a sequence, however, we see that the kinsman must move further and further into the high art of mimesis with increasing complications and confusions; at the same time, the comic spectators within the play whom he would entice into performing his dramas move further and further down the scale of comprehension, ending with the barbarian policeman, who speaks only a pidgin Greek. In the course of their development, the parodies play again with notions of gender and genre, with costume and character, with comic and tragic, and orchestrate a medley of variations on the theme of mimesis itself.

Some have judged these parodies as opportunistic displays of Aristophanic skill which take over the play and consign the conflict of the women and Euripides to the sidelines. Others respond to the shifts from one text to another as signs of the continuing failure of Euripidean

tragedy to maintain the necessary mimetic illusion which would effect the kinsman's rescue. The success, in turn, of Euripides' last ploy, a comic not a tragic strategy, only confirms this opinion. Certainly, Euripides' scandalous innovations lend themselves as targets for the satirist's brush. It is also true that, on the surface, comedy seems to be indulging its license to dispense with strict rules of dramatic coherence. But such judgments overlook the fundamental ambiguities which arise from the "taking in and taking over" of another's text to generate a "poetics of contradiction" (at what price imitation?).[11] And they do not perceive that comedy can exploit its looser structure to work through paratactic arrangements which imply rather than state. The parodies, I would suggest, can serve double and discrepant purposes—as framed disruptions of narrative continuity and as integral and integrating elements of the entire plot. The outer and inner surfaces of the text play off each other, with and against each other, as sequence and/or juxtaposition. Furthermore, each parody has a double allegiance—to its present comic context and to the tragic context of the original. Thus each parodic scene conveys multiple messages, including each time some reflection of its status as a theatrical artifact.

The four parodies are artfully arranged into a significant composition. The first two are parodies of male roles which the kinsman plays (from the *Telephus* and the *Palamedes)* true to his gender but at odds with his female costume. The kinsman first attempts to save himself by playing the role of Telephus, the Mysian king disguised as a beggar at the court of Agamemnon, by taking a baby as a hostage—not the infant Orestes, as in the original, but a baby girl held by one of the women nearby. This ploy fails to produce the desired results—the women will not set him free, and the baby turns out to be a wineskin—and the kinsman then determines to summon Euripides to his aid. This time he imitates Oiax, Palamedes' brother, who, after Palamedes' unjust trial and condemnation for treason in the Greek camp at Troy, sends the news to their father which he writes on an oar and casts into the sea.[12] In the next two parodies, the relation between gender and costume is reversed. The kinsman now takes advantage of his theatrical persona to play female characters, the titular protagonists of their respective plays *(Helen, An-*

11. For the formulation of "taking in and taking over," I am indebted to Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertexuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore, 1979), p. 20. I have profited from her work more than I can indicate in this essay. I have borrowed "poetics of contradiction" from Margaret A. Rose, *Parody/Metafiction* (London, 1979), p. 185. In addition to Rose and Stewart, a very useful treatment of parody can be found in Claude Abastado, "Situation de la parodie," *Cahiers du 20e siècle* 6 (1976): 9–37.

12. On the use of the *Telephus* in this play, see H. W. Miller, "Euripides' *Telephus* and the *Thesmophoriazousae* of Aristophanes," *Classical Philology* 43 (1948): 174–83; Rau, *Paratragodia,* pp. 42–50, and "Tragödienspiel," pp. 344–46. For the parodic treatment of the *Palamedes,* see Rau, *Paratragodia,* pp. 51–53, and "Tragödienspiel," pp. 347–48. Both plays are known to us only through fragments and testimonia.

dromeda). Moreover, these two parodies set the stage for the entrance of Euripides, first to play Menelaus to the kinsman's Helen and then to assume two parts for his Andromeda—the nymph Echo and, finally, the hero Perseus.

These two sets of parodies are formally separated by the parabasis, the convention peculiar to Old Comedy which allows the chorus an opportunity to step forward to address the audience directly. This parabasis not only marks the division between male and female roles but serves as the shifter from one to the other. Here the women defend themselves against the slanders heaped upon them and prove their worth, this time in public and political terms. They speak to the illogic of misogyny: If we are such a bane, why lock us up and not let us out of your sight? If we are such an evil, why do those of you outside always try to get a peek at us (785–89)? And through the etymologies of their names, they comically prove themselves the superiors of men: no man can compete with Nausimache (battle at sea), Aristomache (best in battle), Stratonike (victory of the army), and Euboule (good counsel).

As space does not permit detailed analyses of these texts, I reserve my comments here for the two most elaborate and significant parodies, those of the *Helen* and the *Andromeda,* both produced the year before (412 B.C.), and both demanding from the kinsman that he "live through" female experience to gain his rescue. The *Helen* holds the center of the play; it is carefully framed on one side by the parabasis and, on the other, by the brief removal of the imposter from the stage for the first time in the play, an event which leads the women to reinaugurate their festive dance and song. The parody of the *Helen* is the last direct appeal to the women of the Thesmophoria, for the *Andromeda* is addressed to a new audience—the barbarian Scythian archer.

The new Helen whom the kinsman will play refers not only to the recent production of the play but to the new representation of Helen in a new role as the chaste and virtuous wife. In this version, which has precedents in the mythological tradition, the true Helen never went to Troy but was transported to Egypt, and an *eidolon,* a cloudlike imitation of her, was sent in her stead. She has remained for ten years in isolation, faithful to her husband and her ideals of purity, while the phantom Helen remained at the center of the hostilities at Troy. In Euripides' play, the old king Proteus, who had protected her, has died, and his impious son Theoclymenus is determined to impose a forcible marriage on her. Menelaus is returning home after the war with his crew and the phantom Helen whom he assumes is his real wife. Storm and shipwreck drive him to Egypt where he confronts the "real" Helen. Once their complicated recognition is accomplished, the reunited couple plan their escape with two false stories. The success of their fictions depends upon the cooperation of the prophetess, Theonoe, the virgin sister of the king, whose purity of intellect and spirit makes her the opposite of her violent

brother. No synopsis can do justice to this brilliant romantic play which combines the themes of *eros* and *thanatos* with a philosophical testing of the categories of illusion and reality, name and fact, name and body, mind and body, and truth and falsehood. For our purposes, however, Aristophanes' parody is particularly significant in two respects.

First, the audience in the comic parody is Critylla, the woman guarding Mnesilochus, to whom the part of Theonoe is also assigned. To Critylla, whose comic realism insists on literal readings, there is no Helen, only the scoundrel kinsman: Have you become a woman again, before you have paid the penalty for that other womanization of yours (863–64)? For Critylla, the stranger who has entered the scene is the innocent outsider whom she must enlighten; that is, until she recognizes their Egyptian intrigue for what it is and identifies the stranger/Menelaus as a coconspirator who must be driven off.[13] In this brief and absurd scene, all the issues which characterized the novelty of the original play are present but wonderfully deflected through the comic travesty as a dissonance between the two levels of reference—the comic fiction of the play and the paratragic rendition. In the counterpoint of the text which sets the recognition scene from the *Helen* against Critylla's misrecognition of the identity of the parody, the questions of illusion and reality, of truth and falsehood, and of mimesis and deception are reframed in metatheatrical terms.

From this point of view, the problem of the name as a guide to identity is transposed exactly in reverse to its Euripidean model. In the *Helen,* the epistemological confusion lies in the possibility that the same name may be allotted to more than one (e.g., two Helens). But in the parody, the theatrical confusion lies in the refusal to allow the same character/actor to bear more than one name or, to be sure, more than one gender. The costume can never conceal what the naked truth has revealed and serves here as the focal point at which to test the mimetic premises of the theater in general and the premises of this romantic play in particular. The *eidolon* of Helen, not seen or mentioned in the parody, best personifies illusion itself and, as such, hovers over the scene.[14]

In the split perspective in which the incongruities of the comic and tragic fictions are made most evident, the failure of the tragic parody to persuade lies as much with the comic spectator, who entertains no illusions, as it does with those characters who are trying to create them. And in the relation of the parody to its larger comic matrix, we can note another set of reversals—both thematic and theatrical—which come into

13. On the parody of the *Helen,* see the technical analysis of Rau, *Paratragodia,* pp. 53–65, and "Tragödienspiel," pp. 348–50. See also the useful discussion in Frances Muecke, "Playing with the Play: Theatrical Self-Consciousness in Aristophanes," *Antichthon* 11 (1977): 64–67.

14. Rau, in both his analyses, assumes that all these significant motifs have dropped out of the parody and concludes that Aristophanes is just playing for laughs.

play through the silent juxtaposition of different texts. We may remember that the original basis of the women's complaint was the hyperrealism of Euripidean drama, its failure to create the proper distance between fiction and life. Now we see the opposite—a play whose plot places it directly in the mode of the fabulous and exotic, in short, a mimesis in the service of theater itself. And instead of the "bad" woman whom Euripides has put upon the stage, he has portrayed a woman who, against all odds (and credence), has never betrayed her husband but has waited long and faithfully for him. When the women earlier asked the kinsman why Euripides had never put any Penelopes on the stage, he replied that Penelopes no longer existed (547–50). Yet here he stages the myth of another Penelope, who like her is besieged with importunate suitor(s). Best of all, Helen is not Penelope but, in the normative tradition, her exact opposite, the adulterous woman who ran off with another man. Helen, in fact, is the "baddest" of women who, through the poet's art, is re-created as the best of them. By reversing the myth of Helen, Euripides has reversed the terms. In playing the part of Menelaus in the parody, he has turned from the maligner of women to their potential redeemer, a role which he will play once again, in even better form, as Perseus to the kinsman's Andromeda.

The *Helen* and the *Andromeda* are doublets of each other. Both imagine similar situations—an exotic locale (Egypt/Ethiopia), a woman in captivity and in danger, a dramatic rescue. But in the *Andromeda,* the situation is more extreme. No reunions or recognitions for her but rather a handsome stranger, Perseus, who, flying by with the Gorgon's head tucked into his pouch, falls in love with the beautiful maiden at first sight. This play, unfortunately lost to us except for fragments, was famous in antiquity for the seductiveness of its erotic fantasy.[15] In the *Frogs,* Dionysus, who is in the Underworld to bring Euripides back to Athens, claims as the reason for his mission the sudden desire, the overwhelming passion, which struck at his heart while he was reading the *Andromeda,* a passion not for a woman but for the clever poet, Euripides (51–56, 59). Euripides' Helen, then, rehabilitated and "revirginized," stands as the middle term between the "whores," who were his Phaedras and his Sthenoboias, and this purest of all virgins, Andromeda. If the *Thesmophoriazousae,* in a sense, traces out the career of Euripides as it progresses from one extreme to the other, from hyperrealism to seductive fantasy, the women in Helen's two faces (i.e., carnal sexuality and romantic eroticism) serve not only as the subject of his dramas but also as the essential metaphor for the art of mimesis as it is represented in its two modes.

The parody of the *Andromeda* is addressed to two different audi-

15. On the parody of the *Andromeda,* see Rau, *Paratragodia,* pp. 66–89, and "Tragödienspiel," pp. 353–56. Rau finds this parody redundant of the *Helen,* motivated solely by comic opportunism, not by dramaturgical necessity.

ences and provokes two different reactions. On the theatrical level, the *Andromeda* is not a critical success, for the policeman/spectator can hardly understand a word of what is going on. But the parody might well have been a thematic success with the women. The ensuing choral song that begins with the invocation to Pallas Athena, the unyoked virgin maiden (1139), and ends with the two goddesses of the Thesmophoria (1148–59) might only refer to the chorus' joy at the triumph of the policeman over the violator of their ritual. But it cannot only be a coincidence that, immediately after, Euripides offers terms of peace to the women in return for the rescue of the kinsman, that never again will he slander women (1162). The women willingly accept the offer, but the male world has taken matters out of their hands. Euripides must persuade the barbarian too and meet him on his terms (1170–71).

The Scythian archer, like all barbarians and others with outlandish language, gestures, and costumes, belongs fully to the conventions of the comic theater. In the *Helen,* the comic already intrudes more directly in the intervention of Critylla, but in the *Andromeda,* the parody takes on a double focus by playing to the tragic as well as the comic; the parody exploits the props and scenery for its tragic setting and the intrinsic properties of the comic barbarian.

"Double exposure" rules this last and grandest finale where the perplexities of gender and genre reach their furthest extremes. Once Euripides, flying by, has given the cue, the kinsman plays two roles (himself and Andromeda) and in two modes (solo and duet). His opening monody of lament is a wonderful mixture of the details of his own comic situation with those tragic ones of Andromeda (1015–55). Euripides himself plays two roles—the female Echo and the male Perseus. What is more, as Echo, Euripides plays a double role, first tormenting the kinsman with his abusive repetitions and then the Scythian policeman.

Echo itself is the doubling of another's voice; it is also the purest representation of mimesis as an imitation of another's words. Retrospectively, the two preceding parodies each bear this metatheatrical charge—the *Palamedes,* in the art of writing which imitates speech (Palamedes himself is the inventor of this skill), and the *Helen,* in its intimations of the *eidolon* which imitates the human form and now Echo as the mimesis of the voice. Even the parabasis, with its comic etymologies of women's names, contributes to the same theme, for in reduced and absurd form it adumbrates the theory of imitation which Cratylus will make famous in Plato's dialogue, according to which names mimetically represent the natures of those who bear them.

What distinguishes Echo from the others is its paradoxical status as both nature and artifice. As the one example of mimesis in nature itself, Echo's mimetic representation on stage translates the imitation of nature into an artificial theatrical effect. In turning his parodic skills on Echo,

Aristophanes, in fact, singles out the most radical innovation in Euripidean art and succeeds in exposing it as the highest example of mimetic illusion. But it is also significant for the theme of mimesis in general that Echo, its mythic figuration, is not an "it" but a "she." She is the voice that imitates in both her myths, one that relates her to Narcissus (Ovid *Metamorphoses* 3. 356–40) and the other to Pan (e.g., Longus *Daphnis and Chloe* 3. 23). Echo, as the embodiment (or, better, the disembodied voice) of mimesis, is also the focal point for the concept of the feminine as the one who can never be grasped as primary and original but can only be the one who is imitated or the one who imitates; yet as such, she is therefore empowered as the mistress of mimesis.

Although I will return to this point later, it is important to note here that the exposure of Echo, as played by Euripides who brings her out from behind the scene, turns the tragic to comic, that is, mixes the tragic with the comic. Echo, in fact, might stand as the mediating figure between tragedy and comedy; she is divided between them and yet brings the genres together, as the artful device of the original and as the slapstick cliché of the comic theater. If this is no longer a true contest between the women and Euripides, it is now at last one between the comic poet and his rival whom the comic poet imitates.[16] Imitation retains to the end its ambiguous status, its "poetics of contradictions," as to who is imitating whom. For in his last theatrical act, Euripides turns finally and fully to the comic stage. Dressed as an old procuress, he offers the Scythian policeman a dancing girl to distract him while he hustles the kinsman and himself off the stage. The play began with one tragic poet in drag (Agathon) and ends with another (Euripides); or does it? Is Euripides brought down to the comic level, or is he, with this ploy, the expert ending to a comic play, led to imitate his imitator but, by that imitation, allowed to take over the comic stage? Yet on the grounds of the comic plot, the end, abbreviated as it is, also means that the play of "women on top" has brought the female back to her normal place.

Yet this motif of "women on top" has not altogether disappeared; it is distilled and defused in the name Euripides adopts as the old procuress—Artemisia, the Carian queen, who "manned" a ship during the Persian Wars and put up a brilliant fight, to the Greeks' undying shame that they had to do battle with a woman who was the equal of a man. In his accommodation to a comic ending, one that saves him and his kinsman, Euripides has reverted back to the purely sexual mode. But he has kept his promise to the women—displacing as far as possible from

16. This rivalry is, in fact, attested in ancient texts. A fragment of Aristophanes' older contemporary, Cratinos, reads: "And who are you? some clever theater-goer may ask: some subtle quibbler, an idea-chaser, a euripidaristophanizer?" (Theodorus Kock, *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta,* 3 vols. [Leipzig, 1880], 1:307); and the scholiast who quotes these lines observes: "Aristophanes was satirized for imitating Euripides through his mockery of him."

the world of the married women of the Thesmophoria the open sexuality which the dancing girl represents and which the comic world of sexual exuberance demands as its program. Yet the Thesmophoria too is a festival and it too has as its program a renewal of fertility. Thus when the play draws to a close, comedy, tragedy, and festival have all converged for a common purpose.

Euripides, by his inventiveness, has rescued the kinsman and has redeemed himself of his impiety more directly than we have recognized. For Euripides, despite his innovations on this stage and his own, has not invented everything himself. He has perhaps reinvented, realigned his plots with more traditional paradigms. There are two "secrets" embedded in the text which integrate the ritual and aesthetic elements of the play and which explain still more cogently the women's willingness to accept Euripides' tender of peace. If, on one level, the parodies display their status as "mere" fictions which pretend to represent reality and to cause an effect in the real world, on another level these fictions are essential to the revitalizing properties of myth and poetry and to the effects of comic and tragic alike. The sottish Scythian policeman mistakes the name of the Gorgon, which Perseus/Euripides carries, as that of Gorgias, the fifth century Sophist,[17] whose statement on the theater might best express this paradox: "Tragedy deceives by myths and the display of various passions; and whereas the tragic poet who deceives is juster than he who does not, the deceived is also wiser than the one who is not deceived." The figure of Helen is the clue to both "secrets"; due to limitations of space, I must omit the discussion of the first, which pertains to the festivals and myths of Dionysus and Demeter, and pass to the second, which belongs to the domain of art and the literary tradition.

4. *Mimesis: Art and the Literary Tradition*

The kinsman's impersonation of the "new" Helen, as I have suggested, introduces a new role for women in Euripides' plays which serves implicitly to counteract the charges of slander which the women have brought against the poet. A new positive version of the feminine is offered in place of the old, and its representation forecasts the renunciation Euripides is to make of his earlier errant ways. In this respect, the *Helen* functions within the thematic terms of the comedy as Euripides' palinode, the song that "takes everything back." More precisely, that reversal is located within the *Helen* itself, since Euripides' play offers a revised version of the traditional Helen. In this Euripides is not

17. "Gorgo the Scribe" may refer to another contemporary and not to the famous Sophist. But Aristophanes mentions Gorgias several times in his comedies, and Plato contains a word-play between Gorgias and Gorgon (*Symposium* 198c). See B. B. Rogers, *The Thesmophoriazousae of Aristophanes* (London, 1904), p. 119.

the inventor of the "new" plot of the *Helen* but follows another earlier poet of the sixth century, Stesichorus, who was the first to compose a palinode. The subject of that palinode was Helen herself, and it introduced the original motif of the *eidolon*. The story goes that Stesichorus, having slandered Helen, was blinded for his blasphemy, but he composed another song which denied that Helen went to Troy, and thus regained his sight (Plato *Phaedrus* 243b).

The story has been interpreted as a reflection of the double and contradictory role of Helen—as goddess, daughter of Zeus, and as woman, the adulterous wife. The case of Stesichorus has been referred to the violation of the cultic norms of Sparta where Helen was indeed worshipped as a goddess. The palinode, in its creation of the *eidolon,* therefore unequivocally confirmed her divine status. Generally, in the mythic tradition, the *eidolon,* the cloud image, is appropriately the creation of Zeus, the cloud gatherer, and is most often used as a substitute for a goddess whom a mortal man has attempted to ravish, as in the myth of Ixion who grasped at Hera but found Nephele (cloud) instead.[18]

The *Thesmophoriazousae* suggests a model of the female which oscillates between the profane ("bad" woman) and the sacred ("pure virgin"), but Stesichorus' diptych of ode and palinode seems to propose a more radical division between the two categories of the female, separated by the fine but firm line which divides mortal and immortal. But if we look back at Stesichorus, now in the light of the *Thesmophoriazousae,* the question of the two Helens might be posed differently. The fault for Stesichorus may not lie with the received myth of Helen itself (i.e., that Helen went to Troy) but rather in its mode of poetic representation which violated Helen by violating the norms of poetic decorum.

Having revealed too much of the mortal Helen, that is, her sexuality, Stesichorus turns in repentance to the other extreme—untainted erotic beauty, which is preserved through the figure of the pure Helen, who never went to Troy, and her imitation, who played her traditional part.[19] With his palinode, Stesichorus now avoids altogether the problem

18. On Stesichorus (and esp. in relation to Euripides' *Helen*), see Richard Kannicht's introduction to *Euripides: Helena,* 2 vols. (Heidelberg, 1969): 1:26–41. Some recently discovered papyri suggest the possibility of a second palinode, but Kannicht persuasively argues for one.

19. We learn from ancient testimony that in Stesichorus' version, Tyndareus, the father of Helen and Clytemnestra, had forgotten to sacrifice to Aphrodite while giving worship to other gods. The goddess, angered by his neglect, predicted that his daughters would be twice wedded (*digamoi*) and thrice wedded (*trigamoi*); that is, they would experience an excess of Aphrodite to compensate for their father's underestimation of the goddess and her power. The slander of Helen, then, perhaps, lay in the lubricious sexuality attributed to her, a trait which now belonged to her by "nature," as it were, rather than to the circumstantial facts of the myth itself. See also Kannicht, ibid., 1:39–41.

Euripides himself may be said to have composed a palinode when he offered a second version of the *Hippolytus* in circumstances which resembled those of Stesichorus. The first *Hippolytus* (known to us from fragments and other evidence) caused a scandal in Athens

of the woman as morally "good" (respectable) or "bad" (shameless) but rather raises another question with regard to the feminine. This new *eros* that Helen incarnates divides itself from within to establish another set of opposites—the false illusory *eidolon* and the true figure of the divine—opposites which, however, are now both equally unattainable. One is a false imitation of the other, which itself (as divine) can never be grasped by mortals in a "real" state but only in the empty form which is inevitably substituted for the original. Helen, as the darling of Aphrodite, always embodies in herself the irresistible principle of the erotic. But Stesichorus' story also suggests that *eros* is not divided from poetics. The poet slandered Helen, and to atone he fabricated a fictive *eidolon* in her place and openly declared the original version as a fiction. Helen, whose "true," that is, traditional, myth may be denied as a fiction, may also therefore personify poetics even as she embodies *eros*. For as fictive *eidolon*, Stesichorus' Helen acquires the capacity to impersonate herself and to draw attention to the notion of imitation as a conscious poetic creation.

Stesichorus uses Helen, as it were, to assert his role as a poet. Working within a received tradition which he alters in two different ways (the "blasphemy" in the first version and the recantation in the second), he raises the notion of fictionality as a possible attribute of mythic texts in order to account for his own innovations, and in the process, he invents a new generic form—the palinode. As a result, he inaugurates a new tradition, establishes a new paradigm upon which Aristophanes can draw in constructing his own piece in which the Helen of Euripides can serve to exonerate that poet from the charge of blaspheming against women. And this paradigm, reproduced in the Euripidean play itself, can serve at the same time to raise these questions of fictionality and imitation. Others have noted that Euripides' play itself shows a consciousness of its status as a piece for the theater, that Helen and Menelaus, when they contrive their fictions for escape, also strive *not* to imitate the clichés of other tragic plots. In satirizing Euripides' theatrical innovations in the *Helen* and in presenting a parody with metatheatrical dimensions, Aristophanes reaffirms, as it were, through the tradition that goes back go Stesichorus, the perennial utility of Helen as the figure upon whom can be focused the poetic problems of imitation itself.

One might call Stesichorus' *eidolon* a prototheatrical and protomimetic representation insofar as the poet precedes the fifth-century

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because of its shameless Phaedra, to whom Aristophanes, in fact, refers in the *Thesmophoriazousae* and in the *Frogs*, where she is called a *pornē*, a whore (1043). In response, Euripides changed his representation of Phaedra to that of a noble woman who struggles heroically to suppress the fatal passion with which Aphrodite has afflicted her.

Stesichorus' blindness may be a "sacralized" version of Euripides' violation of literary decorum. Blindness is a punishment for mortal men who mingle with goddesses or who view them naked at their bath, but blindness is also an attribute of poets and prophets.

developments of the theater and of theories of mimesis. Yet although Stesichorus invented the *eidolon* of Helen, he is not the first to associate Helen with questions of imitation. A longer tradition stands behind her; it begins with her first appearance in Greek epic and is worth exploring briefly in order to understand better the paradigmatic value of Helen for the particular aesthetic problems which are posed in the time of Aristophanes and Euripides. I turn, then, to my final area of concern—the categories of Greek thought which connect the feminine with mimesis.

5. *Mimesis: Eros and Art*

Already in the *Iliad,* Helen, as the erotic center of the poem, is connected with the art of poetry when she weaves a tapestry depicting the contests of Greeks and Trojans which they suffered on account of her, as if she was "weaving the very fabric of heroic epic."[20] Better still, in the fourth book of the *Odyssey,* when Telemachus visits Sparta and finds Helen and Menelaus at home, they each tell a tale of Helen and Odysseus from the days when she was still at Troy. In her story, Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, comes secretly into the city as a spy. She alone recognizes him and does not betray him but cares for him and rejoices that her homecoming will soon be at hand (4. 240–64). Menelaus, on the other hand, tells another story of Helen: on the night in which the Trojan horse stood within the gates of the city, Helen, now the wife of Paris' brother, came down, and, by imitating all the different voices of their wives, tempted the Greeks who were hidden inside to betray their presence, a ruse which would have succeeded had it not been for Odysseus' discerning prudence (4. 266–89). Two stories are juxtaposed; each offers the same characterization of Odysseus but a different version of Helen. She is the mistress of many voices, linked in both stories to secrecy, disguise, and deception. She is the mistress of mimesis, like the nymph Echo, even more, like the Delian maidens in the Homeric hymn to Appolo (156–64), who can imitate the tongues of all humankind (*anthropoi*) and their chattering speech.

Even more, Helen is the mistress of ceremonies, who stages the mood of the tales, when, to counteract the grief which their sad memories of Odysseus had aroused, she casts a drug into their wine, a *pharmakon* (from Egypt), which takes away pain and brings forgetfulness of sorrows. She bids them to delight themselves with stories *(mythoi),* which she herself will begin, narrating a plausible/appropriate tale (4. 220–39). These *pharmaka* belong to the poetics of enchantment, which

20. L. L. Clader, *Helen: The Evolution from Divine to Heroic in Greek Epic Tradition* (Leiden, 1976), p. 8.

seduce the hearer with tales of deception, of impersonation in costume and speech. As tales of Helen, they are told without comment, memories of a past that seems to have been forgiven, transmuted into a play of symmetrical reversals that charm instead of dismay.[21]

Yet the ordering of the two stories also makes clear that the second story is also an implicit comment on the first story, a second version, which, like a protopalinode (but in reverse), revises the first. Menelaus' tale operates on two levels: on the first, it undermines the fidelity of Helen's earlier version which represents her fidelity to the Greeks in favor of a version which shows she can imitate many voices, each time with the intention to seduce and betray; on the second level, the story functions as a self-reflective comment on the nature of fiction and mimesis which Helen embodies. Menelaus' story thus intimates the status of Helen's earlier story as fiction and suggests in the process that Helen and storytelling might be the same thing—the imitation of many voices in the service of seduction and enchantment. Helen is the figure who therefore links *eros* and poetics together under the rubric of mimesis. And this mimesis is appropriately divined as a fiction from within this story of Menelaus by the master storyteller himself, Odysseus—the man of many turns.

Menelaus' story can only hint at the difference between fiction and truth. But the story Menelaus recalls the next day, that of his experience with Proteus after he left Troy and came with Helen to Egypt, is more precise in this regard. Proteus is the master of lies and truth; better still, he is the figure of the shifting nature of truth, which Menelaus can grasp as one and true only if he grasps Proteus himself, who will change his shape from one creature to another until, under Menelaus' unremitting grip, he will return to his single original form. Menelaus' success depends upon the advice of a female, Proteus' daughter, and note how she fulfills her feminine role: she *betrays* the existence of Proteus and the *secrets* of his power and also the means of overcoming him—a *mimetic disguise* and a *secret ambush* among the seals (351–570). The story of the mimesis practiced by Helen can never escape the ambiguities of its telling, but the mimetic repertoire of Proteus has a limit which will end in the revelation of an absolute truth. Here, that truth is the future of Menelaus—his homecoming and his ultimate fate—not death, but eternal sojourn in the Elysian Fields, "because Helen is yours and you are therefore son-in-law to Zeus" (561–70). Helen in the end rules both tales of mimesis—as divinity, connected through her genealogy to truth (and immortality) beyond the reaches of fiction, and earlier, as mortal, skilled in the arts of deception and seduction.

21. For two different treatments of these stories, see Reselyne Dupont-Roc and Alain Le Boulluec, "Le Charme du récit," *Ecriture et théorie poétiques* (Paris, 1976), pp. 30–39, and A. L. T. Bergren, "Helen's 'Good Drug': Odyssey IV 1–305," *University of Ottawa Quarterly* 50 (July and October 1980): 517–30.

For the *Odyssey,* this ultimate "truth," whether the translation of Menelaus to the permanence of the Elysian Fields or the "truth" of the recognition between Odysseus and Penelope, grounded in the fact that Penelope has truly been "true" to him, suggests the alternatives to the ambiguities of poetics and erotics which the two stories of Helen and Menelaus propose. In the light of this future reunion on Ithaca, these ambiguities not only recall a past which belongs to Helen and Menelaus but potentially forecast the future for Penelope. This future depends upon Penelope's choice of one of the two possible roles which the two stories offer her—that of the faithful woman who receives the beggar in disguise and welcomes him or that of the woman who, surrounded by men (read "suitors" for "Greeks"), practices the wiles of seduction, although another man's wife. Penelope is no teller of stories—quite the contrary. She is worn out with hearing the false tales of Odysseus which travelers have brought to her over the years and with meeting the false imposters of Odysseus himself, and she has become skilled at testing the fictions of another's words which have not power to seduce her. Yet she is the mistress of one fiction—and that to preserve her "true" self for Odysseus—one "story" which she tells again and again and never finishes, weaving and unweaving the fabric of Laertes' shroud, until Helen's story of herself, not that of Menelaus, becomes her own.

The *Odyssey,* by virtue of its Penelope, can afford its Circes, Calypsos, Sirens, and Helens, whom Odysseus encounters in various ways. But the *Odyssey,* as the repertory of all fictions, adumbrates even in the ambiguities of Odysseus himself the ambivalence which Greek thought will manifest with increasing articulation toward the mimetic powers of the verbal and visual arts to persuade with the truths of their fictions. This ambivalence is not incongruent, at some level, with the increasing ambivalence with which the city's male ideology views its other gender, an attitude which links the feminine still more closely with art and artifice.[22]

Thus the two Helens, the daughter of Zeus and the fictive *eidolon,* might exemplify in the erotic sphere the hesitation in the aesthetic domain between an art that is divinely inspired and a craft that makes counterfeits of the real.[23] But while the *eidolon* can be separated from the

22. Space does not permit a more detailed discussion of the ambiguities of persuasion and the *logos* in connection with the feminine and *eros.* See further, Pedro Laín Entralgo, *The Therapy of the Word in Classical Antiquity,* ed. and trans. L. J. Rather and J. M. Sharp (New Haven, Conn., 1970), pp. 51–69; Marcel Detienne, *Les Maîtres de vérité dans la Grèce archaïque* (Paris, 1973), pp. 51–80; and Laurence Kahn, *Hermès; ou, Les Ambiguïtés de la communication* (Paris, 1978), pp. 119–64. For art and literature, see also Jesper Svenbro, *La Parole et le marbre: Aux origines de la poétique grecque* (Lund, 1976), and Zoé Petre, "Un âge de la représentation: Artifice et image dans la pensée grecque du VI[e] Av. N.E.," *Revue roumaine d'histoire* 2 (1979): 245–57.

23. The more pejorative notion of art as a counterfeit imitation of the real owes more, of course, to Platonic aesthetic theories. Craft includes and even gives first priority to

real Helen as an insubstantial likeness of herself, a figment of the imagination, the *eidolon* as a seductive *objet d'art* cannot be separated from the generic image of the feminine. The "real" woman, in fact, could be defined as a "real" *eidolon,* created as such from the beginning in the person of the first woman, Pandora.

Fashioned at the orders of Zeus as punishment for Prometheus' deceptive theft of celestial fire for man, the female is the first imitation, who, replying to the first deception, embodies now for all time the principle of deception. She imitates both divine and bestial traits, endowed by the gods with an exterior of wondrous beauty and adornment that conceals the thievish and greedy nature of her interior. Artifact and artifice herself, Pandora installs the woman as *eidolon* in the frame of human culture, equipped by her "unnatural" nature to delight and deceive. More specifically, as has been argued, the origin of Pandora coincides in the text with the origin of language: "Because of her symbolic function and, literally, because of her ornaments and her flowers, her glamor and her scheming mind, Pandora emblematizes the beginning of rhetoric; but at the same time, she also stands for the rhetoric of the beginning. For she is both the 'figure' of the origin and the origin of the 'figure'—the first being invested with symbolic referential elements."[24] This reading of Pandora can only be suggested by the implicit terms of the text, for rhetoric in Hesiod's time (c. 700 B.C.) had not yet been invented. But his negative view of Pandora, which arises naturally from his peasant's instrumental view of nature and culture, can still serve as a preview of later philosophical thought which, in testing the world of physical appearances, finds it deceptive precisely in the spheres of physical *eros* and of artistic mimesis, specifically, in fact, in the art of rhetoric itself.

It should therefore not surprise us that Gorgias, the historical figure most closely identified with the development of rhetorical theory in fifth-century Athens, should, in fact, have composed an encomium on Helen which is as much a defense of his art of the *logos* as it is a defense of Helen. I invoke this last example to return to the text and context of Aristophanes, since Gorgias is very much present, I suspect, in the *Thesmophoriazousae,* and not only as the possible garbled reference to him by the barbarian policeman who confuses Gorgon and Gorgias. For the *Palamedes* and the *Helen,* while they serve, of course, as parodies of

artisanal skill. But this is a category which is not without its ambiguities for Greek thought in which the artistic product is far more admired than the artist who produces it. Poetry claimed a higher status than representational art, but greater consciousness of the poet as *poiētēs* ("maker") introduces comparisons with artisanal activity. The *Thesmophoriazousae* itself, in fact, offers the two opposing notions of poetic composition in its comic presentation of Agathon, where the sacred (e.g., the hymn he sings) is juxtaposed with technical terms drawn from the more homely méitiers (52–57).

24. Piero Pucci, *Hesiod and the Language of Poetry* (Baltimore, 1977), pp. 100–101.

Euripides' plays, are also titles of two specimens of Gorgias' epideictic oratory. More broadly, Gorgias' theories owe much to the theater—to the psychological effects it produces in the spectators and in the aesthetic effects which it employs.

Gorgias, having accepted the premise that the phenomenal world cannot be grasped as real, is free to embrace the shifting world of appearances, of *doxa* ("opinion"), in its deceptions and its fictions; hence, he is also in a position to embrace Helen. The mastery of the world can only come about through the installation of the *logos* as its master, which, through the techniques of persuasion, manipulates the sense impressions and emotions of its auditors. For Plato, who is to stand directly on the other side of the divide, Gorgias (as the other Sophists) will, like a painter, "make imitations which have the same names as the real things and which can deceive . . . at a distance." The Sophists can "exhibit spoken images [*eidola*] of all things, so as to make it seem that they are true and that the speaker is the wisest of all men in all things" (Plato *Sophist* 234b–c).

For Gorgias, the *logos* is real, akin to a physical substance and possessing the magico-medical quality of the *pharmakon.* Hence its power *(dynamis),* like that of the incantation, mingles together with the *doxa* ("opinion") of the psyche and charms, persuades, and changes it by enchantment. The force of persuasion, when added to the *psyche,* can make an impression, can put a stamp *(typos)* on the *psyche,* which responds, in turn, to its manipulation with the appropriate emotions. Similarly, sight (*opsis*) affects the *psyche* of the one who sees, "stamping [*typos*] it with its sensations of objects," "engraving in the mind the images of the things one sees," if fearful, causing fear, if beautiful, bringing pleasure, "like the sculpting of statues and production of images which afford the eyes divine delight; thus some things naturally please or pain the sight, and many things produce in many men love and desire for many actions or bodies."[25]

Gorgias' defense of Helen reverses the image of the seductive and deceptive woman by portraying a Helen overmastered by irresistible forces—whether by the gods, by physical violence, by the persuasion of the *logos,* or by the power of *eros.* It is here that *opsis* enters into the discourse in order to propose a theory of *eros,* and Gorgias can therefore query: "If Helen's eye was so entranced by Paris' body, and she delivered up her soul to an eager contest of love, what is so strange in that?" Since

25. Citations from Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* are in Diels-Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker,* vol. 2 (Dublin and Zurich, 1966), pp. 288–94; my translations. Relevant work on Gorgias includes Mario Untersteiner, *The Sophists,* trans. Kathleen Freeman (Oxford, 1954), pp. 101–201; Thomas Rosenmeyer, "Gorgias, Aeschylus, and *Apatē* (Deceit)," *American Journal of Philology* 76 (1955): 225–60; Charles Segal, "Gorgias and the Psychology of the Logos," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 66 (1962): 99–155; and the relevant sections in Entralgo, *Therapy of the Word in Classical Antiquity,* and Detienne, *Les Maîtres de vérité.*

the entire discourse is a *logos* which is meant to persuade, the demonstration within the piece of the persuasive power of the *logos* assures it the dominant position in the piece. As the *megas dynastēs,* the *logos* even proves to overmaster the other categories whose indisputable claims to power it appropriates for itself.

Stesichorus' and Euripides' excuse of the *eidolon* has, of course, no place in Gorgias' argument. But the aesthetics of the image remain, now interiorized within the body as the *psyche* which *logos* or *opsis* molds, as an artist shapes and molds his product. The *psyche,* in turn, responds to the physical body whose visual impressions it receives, as a spectator who gazes upon an object of art. By treating the *psyche* as a corporeal entity and in endowing *opsis* and *logos* with physical properties, Gorgias introduces a set of tactile relations that somatizes psychology as it psychologizes aesthetics. *Opsis* is already invoked in the cause of *eros,* but *logos* behaves like *eros,* which takes possession of another's body to penetrate its interior and to work its effects. The relation between rhetor and auditor, therefore, is not unlike that between a man and a woman, even as the writing tablet, as Artemidorus tells us, signifies a woman to the dreamer, "since it receives the imprints [*typoi*] of all kinds of letters" (*Oneirocritica* 2. 45). Thus if Helen is the subject of the discourse, she is also the object within it. She is the auditor who, seduced and persuaded by the deceptive rhetoric of Paris, is reseduced (and therefore exonerated) by the rhetoric of Gorgias, who claims as the truth of his discourse the demonstration of the power of rhetoric to seduce and deceive. For the outside auditor, the artful beauty of the text, with its persuasive *logos* about persuasion, operates as the rhetorical equivalent of the godlike beauty of Helen, which Gorgias mentions at the beginning of the text, in order to describe its irresistible erotic effect upon the suitors who came to her from all parts of Greece.

Moreover, the seduction of this *logos* works a double pleasure of the text—for the auditors it masters within and without the discourse and for Gorgias himself, which he acknowledges when he concludes that "This speech is a plaything [*paignion*] for me, but an encomium for Helen," who, in his terms, is worthy not only of defense but also of praise. This ending explains best of all, perhaps, the choice of Helen for his discourse, beyond that of an unpopular case which he wishes to win by his rhetorical skill. Helen, as the paradigm of the feminine, is the ideal subject/object of the discourse; first, in sexual terms, as the passive partner to be mastered by masculine rhetorical persuasion, and second, in aesthetic terms. Helen, as the mistress of mimesis and also its object, is a fitting participant in the world of make-believe, the antiworld which reverses the terms in mimetic display and reserves the right under the name of play to take everything back. Seduction, like rhetoric, is a game, a *paignion,* and both *eros* and *logos* are now invested with a new power that is precisely the power of play, a delight in the aesthetic capacity to

seduce and deceive. This point of view, I suggest, must inevitably invoke and rehabilitate the feminine whom Greek thought represents as the subject/object of *eros* (nature) and artifice (culture). In her corporeal essence, she functions both as the psychological subject and as the aesthetic object, and the artist needs her to substantiate his own conception of his art.

Thus, for both Gorgias and Euripides, the woman has a place, a place that the end of the fifth century makes for her more and more to Aristophanes' seeming comic chagrin, and this from two points of view. First, she is in the domain of art itself, which is discovering a sense of its capacities for mimesis as an explicit category of the fictive, the make-believe. This discovery takes place in the various verbal arts which, in turn, are influenced by the earlier advances in illusionist painting and in the other plastic arts. In this development, theater too played no small role, as Aristophanes' play itself attests. Second, she is in the social world. As the war dragged on to its unhappy close, attention began to shift away from masculine values of politics to the private sphere—to the domestic milieu at home, to the internal workings of the psyche, and to a new validation of *eros,* all of which the feminine as a cultural category best exemplifies. This new focus will receive further emphasis in the next century with the emergence in sculpture of the female nude as an art form and in the literary genres of New Comedy, mime, romance, and pastoral. Old Comedy comes to an end with Aristophanes, whose last productions already make the transition to Middle Comedy, while Euripides, who scandalized his Athenian audience again and again, winning only four first prizes in his lifetime, will become the theatrical favorite of the next era and thereafter.

In this "feminization" of Greek culture, Euripides was, above all, a pioneer, and so Aristophanes perhaps correctly perceived that Euripides' place was indeed with the women (as that of Socrates in the *Clouds* was with the men). In a second *Thesmophoriazousae,* which is lost to us except for a few fragments and testimonia, the same cast of characters (more or less) seem to have been involved. This time, our information, which comes from an ancient life of Euripides and which seems to refer to this piece, states explicitly that the women, because of the censures he passed on them in his plays, attacked him at the Thesmophoria with murderous intent; but they spare him, first because of the (his) Muses, and second because he promises never to abuse them again. These Muses are perhaps still to be found in the play we have, hidden behind the noisy laughter of Aristophanic parody.