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How to make a goddess angry: making sense of the Demeter ode in Euripides' *Helen*

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Three quarters of the way into *Helen*, we come to a critical moment in the plot. We have just watched the scene where Helen and Menelaus persuade the Egyptian king Theoclymenus to give them a ship: the escape plan has been put into action, but its success is far from guaranteed. The chorus' response to this moment of suspense is strange: they sing an ode telling the story of Demeter's search for Persephone, and furthermore couched in the language of the orgiastic cult of the Great Mother (1301-68).

At first glance, the Demeter ode seems deliberately irrelevant. The ode makes no overt reference to events on-stage; the only link to Helen's story comes in the final stanza. The text is corrupt, but someone (presumably Helen) is said to have incurred Demeter's wrath by not honouring her rites (1355-7).¹ This statement itself is doubly perplexing, as we are given no indication as to how or why, and it does not tie in with anything we know of the Helen myth. The choice of myth is also surprising: there seems no reason to use Demeter's story as a paradigm for Helen's, and no reason to link Demeter's search to Helen's escape.

Scholars have traditionally explained away the ode as a piece of lyric poetry in its own right.² It was seen as typical of Euripides and of the increasing irrelevance of choral lyric to the plots of late fifth century drama.³ Even those who could not accept that Euripides would insert a mere *embolimon* here still rejected the idea that there is any significance to the Demeter myth.⁴ But more recently, other commentators have

read more into the significance of the myth, and have seen Persephone as a model for the structure of the play.⁵ Her story of abduction, separation and return is a template for what happens to Helen, and also to Alcestis and to Iphigeneia in *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*. This pattern led Guépin to coin the term “*anodos* dramas”, to explain Euripides’ use of this story pattern.⁶ So the Demeter ode comes to make sense as an allusion to the model on which Helen’s story is based, and Persephone becomes a mythological prototype rather than a baroque ornament.

In this article, I hope to go a step beyond this. Various scholars have noted parthenaic motifs in *Helen*.⁷ Pulling these together allows us to reassess the meaning of the play and of Helen’s role in it. I will argue that the Demeter ode and the “*anodos* drama” model on which it is based tie into a broader way in which Helen is construed as Persephone: her status as a parthenaic figure. I will examine parthenaic motifs and imagery throughout the play, and reinterpreting the ode in this light, I will suggest an answer to the question which has caused so much confusion: how did Helen anger Demeter?

Helen as a parthenaic figure

We should begin by noting that the way in which Euripides uses Helen to evoke the *partheneia* is surprising.⁸ Helen may have real-life connections with Spartan *partheneia* cult, but in the play she is not a young girl but a wife and mother. The myth the play develops is not that of her abduction by Theseus (which was the one connected with her cult aspect); instead, Euripides chooses a deliberately skewed and paradoxical interpretation of the more famous Troy myth, known to the audience above all through the *Iliad*. Rather than eloping with Paris in the manner of a sexually mature woman, Helen is snatched away like a young girl.⁹ She is treated as a

parthenos by Theoclymenus: sexually ripe and ready to marry, and her previous marriage is not treated as a serious objection. At times she is referred to as though she were a young girl – she is addressed as *παῖ* at 1356 and as *νεῆνι* at 1288.¹⁰

In the play, Helen's move back to Greece is repeatedly presented as a re-run of the means by which she arrived in Egypt (abduction). Thus her return home becomes a cleansing of her reputation, a journey backwards through time, and a second attempt at the transition to sexual maturity which went wrong the first time, transitions which once made cannot normally be undone and tried again. So Euripides' version of Helen is potentially an "Egyptian", deliberately upside-down, take on events. But this also ties in with the play's fantasy element, where wrongs are righted and the suffering and pain of the Trojan War seem to be erased.¹¹

The marriage theme in the play thus operates on two levels. On the literal level, Helen (a mature and married woman) is inappropriately presented with an alternative marriage, but is fortunately saved, and reunited with her real husband. However, the marriage theme also operates on an allegorical level, on which Helen is presented as a *parthenos* figure.¹² If one views the play in these terms, Helen is in a parthenaic state of seclusion and wilderness; as such she fears and rejects marriage, as *parthenoi* frequently do. Theoclymenus represents an inappropriate model of sexual relations (a threat frequently faced by *parthenoi*) in contrast with the healthy model depicted by her union with Menelaus.¹³ Eventually, however, a way is found in which she can enter a marriage joyfully (i.e. with Menelaus), thus enabling her to make the transition to maturity.

Insofar as Helen is presented a *parthenos* figure, this aspect of her is separate from the "literal" Helen in the play, who is not a *parthenos* at all. Euripides presents Helen as a *parthenos* in order to better explore the themes of sexuality and marriage

with which the play engages. This is a technique we find elsewhere: for example, in the *Odyssey*, the married Penelope is portrayed as a *parthenos* and her reunion with Odysseus described through the symbolism of wedding imagery.¹⁴ The audience is under no doubt that Penelope is in fact a middle-aged woman, not a virginal bride, yet the parthenaic imagery adds depth to our interpretation of what is at stake in the reunion between the couple. The figure of Helen thus operates in two interlinked but distinct ways: the difficulty in interpreting the play comes from the degree to which these two facets of Helen become blurred. By applying parthenaic language to the myth more normally associated with Helen's married status, Euripides points to the mismatch between the allegorical and literal presentations of Helen in the play. By using the "wrong" Helen myth for the Trojan War story, he can present the apparently un-parthenaic Helen in terms suitable for a parthenaic figure (innocent, chaste, abducted).

Once we distinguish the two aspects of Helen's presentation, it becomes easier to reconcile "logical" objections to her portrayal as a parthenaic figure. For example, Helen *qua* "real life" character is behaving entirely reasonably by refusing to marry Theoclymenus, and does not merit criticism. However, in terms of the codes and symbols bound up in the play's allegorical level, the *parthenos* must come to realise that her resistance to marriage is inappropriate and must be abandoned. Theoclymenus himself represents an inappropriate form of marriage (akin to abduction), while Menelaus represents a proper union. This contrast between "real" and "symbolic" worlds operates elsewhere in the play. For example, Segal identified a contrast in *Helen* between "real" and "ideal" worlds, which heightens the themes of identity, reality and illusion which are epitomised in the figure of Helen.¹⁵ We should not be surprised at Helen having multiple identities in a play whose main conceit is that the

standard version of the Helen myth is a case of mistaken identity. The question of who Helen really is (mortal or goddess? Chaste or whore? Phantom or flesh?) is of central importance, and is repeatedly explored from a number of angles. Thus, while presenting the middle-aged Helen as a *parthenos* would no doubt be striking, the audience would be unlikely to regard it as bizarre or problematic. Rather, their existing awareness of Helen's links to *partheneia*-cult would assist them in recognising parthenaic Helen as one among many versions of Helen we encounter during the play.

Spotting parthenaic motifs in tragedy

The central tenet of this article is that *Helen* manipulates the motifs of parthenaic choral song to encourage its audience to view the play through the filter of parthenaic cult. It is worth clarifying that I am not arguing that the Demeter ode, or any of the other odes in the play, is literally meant to *be a partheneion*. While tragedy frequently alludes to other choral forms, we rarely (if ever) find something which could be an example of a piece from another genre incorporated wholesale into a play. We are not dealing with faithful replications of whole pieces of lyric poetry; rather, tragedy uses motifs from other poetic types to trigger awareness of a genre, and to evoke a mood influenced by that genre.¹⁶ In practice, the tragedians make use of verbal and imagistic cues to create this awareness, selecting devices ranging from specific ritual tags to broader thematic resonances, to signal the relevance of the genre.¹⁷

The interaction between tragedy and other forms of choral song is thus a subtle one, and draws on the mimetic nature of tragedy, which makes it adept at incorporating and referring to other forms. Tragedy's ability to incorporate other forms is enhanced by the fact that tragedy is not as bound by its own performance

function in the way a ritual chorus is. The tragic chorus' role as a chorus performing within the festival context of the Dionysia is blurred by the fact that it simultaneously claims a second identity as a different group in the fictional world of the play.¹⁸ When another choral form is evoked, the chorus claims a third identity: they are no longer just young Athenian men pretending to be Spartan slave-girls, but a dramatic chorus evoking a parthenaic one. We should perhaps see this as interest in mimesis of a different kind: not only are the actors and chorus pretending to belong to groups they do not, the chorus as a body temporarily purports to be a different form of choral institution.

This is possible for the tragic chorus because the requirements made of it are flexible. The “rules” for the tragic chorus *qua* Dionysia festival chorus are no more than that it should perform the relevant sections of the plays. Conversely, a “real life” chorus of *parthenoi* has a set role and function: to perform a particular type of *partheneion*, for a particular occasion. The incorporation of material from other genres into parthenaic song could only be permissible insofar as it is not detrimental to the song achieving its own ritual function. Thus, by its nature tragedy is freer to explore other types of poetry and display them in its own lyrics than non-tragic poetry, which is bound more directly to the needs of a particular occasion.

The use of tragedy as a forum for exploring social ritual and rites of passage has been examined elsewhere. Various scholars have seen tragedy as echoing ephebic transition, while the prevalence of the “marriage to death” motif also suggests an interest in female development.¹⁹ The difference in the approach I outline here is the importance I place on the shared medium of choral song in linking ritual and tragedy.²⁰ Song and dance performed by a chorus formed a key part of Greek ritual life, and we know that performing in a chorus was a significant part of civic training

(and in the case of Alcman's girls, of transition to maturity). Given the importance of choral poetry in daily life, it is therefore not surprising to find the motifs of this poetry echoed in another form of choral poetry: that of tragedy.

In order to develop the argument in the case of *Helen*, we must try to identify what the features of parthenaic performance were. This is a difficult undertaking: our understanding of what constitutes a "*partheneion*" is limited by the paucity of surviving texts; indeed some scholars question the validity of the term *partheneia* as a distinct category of song.²¹ However, if we attempt to sift the accounts and surviving fragments of choral performance by *parthenoi*, certain themes and motifs begin to emerge as characteristic.

Parthenaic singing seems to have been associated with festivals and other ritual occasions.²² A feature of surviving *partheneia* is a focus on the performers' own transition to becoming mature women. For example, Alcman fr. 1 *PMGF* is designed to be performed at some kind of religious function in honour of a goddess, but many commentators agree that a subtext of the poem is that it fulfils an initiatory function: it helps young girls to make the transition to becoming mature women in a safe and appropriate way.²³ A similar presentation of *parthenoi* can be seen in Alcman fr. 3 *PMGF*, and Pindar's *Daphnephorikon Partheneion* (*Parth.* 2 / fr. 94b S-M).

There are also distinct traits in terms of diction, imagery, motifs, which mark a piece out as parthenaic. One such feature is the singling out of a particular girl or girls as special. Much of Alcman fr. 1 *PMGF* is devoted to praising two girls named Hagesichora and Agido. They are described as more desirable than the rest of the chorus, and their significance is conveyed in a series of striking images.²⁴ In particular, comparing the *choragos* to a horse among herds (45-9) draws attention to how different she is from the rest of the girls. The other girls purport to be sexually

attracted to the chorus-leader, and she also seems to have a protective power, which will ward off the dangers involved in performing their ritual (64-77).

The leader also has a special role within the ritual (41-3, where Agido's "summoning" of the sun is best understood as some kind of ritual action).²⁵ Similarly, in Alcman fr. 3 *PMGF*, Astymeloisa is singled out as special, is engaged in some kind of ritual function, and is an object of desire to the chorus. Pindar's *daphnephorikon partheneion* refers to a woman called Damaina, while the testimonia for his *daphnephorikon* for Daïphantos of Thebes mention girls named Protomache and Eumetis, who are said to be Pindar's own daughters.²⁶

Another parthenaic feature is a focus on the *parthenoi* themselves. In particular, we find attention paid to the details of the ritual and the performers: their gestures, appearance, accessories. This makes sense if we understand one of the functions of the *partheneion* to be displaying girls in a safe and appropriate context.²⁷ *Parthenoi* can offer praise of each other's beauty in a way which would be inappropriate in the mouths of men. And drawing the audience's attention to the appearance and actions of the performers allows them to be looked at in a way which is made safe because it is done in the context of ritual.²⁸ Alcman fr. 1 *PMGF* describes the girls' costumes and adornments in some detail (64-77) as well as their ritual activities (60-3) and performance (92-9). Alcman fr. 3 *PMGF* begins with a self-referential description of the singers' actions (1-9) and a substantial chunk of Pindar's *daphnephorikon partheneion* is spent describing what the *parthenoi* are doing (6-41).

This fragment also highlights a third parthenaic feature: a focus on the performers' identity as *parthenoi*. The singers are conscious of their status, and mark out what it is appropriate for them to do:

ἐμὲ δὲ πρέπει

(33-5)

παρθενήϊα μὲν φρονεῖν

γλώσσα τε λέγεσθαι.

“But for me it is appropriate to think maidenly thoughts and speak them with my tongue”

The distinction here is between the divine knowledge of Zeus and the humble abilities of the *parthenoi*. Similarly, Alcman fr. 1 *PMGF* begins with a warning for mortals not to over-shoot the mark (16-17) and finishes with a comparison between the powers of the mortal *parthenoi* and those of the Sirens (96-9). The comparison is partly the contrast between human and divine which is a *topos* of Greek religious thought. Yet the contrast is emphasised by putting it into the mouths of *parthenoi*. In giving their moral message, Pindar’s *parthenoi* stress that they are female: the implication of the passage is that the *parthenoi* will speak less impressively than men. The normal contrast between mortals and gods is made more emphatic by its gendering, while putting an implicit warning to the audience into the mouths of *parthenoi* makes its message easier to swallow.²⁹

Partheneia are unusual compared to other types of ritual song, since what sets them apart is to do with the status of the performers, rather than the performance occasion. By definition, the chorus must consist of *parthenoi*, but the relevance of the performers goes deeper than this. The song is automatically self-referential: who the performers are and what the performance means for them is central to an understanding of the text. In a *paian* or *hymenaios*, the chorus may be required to be of a particular sex, age or status, but the performance is essentially a response to an

outside event. For *partheneia*, the performers, and the ritual of transition they are experiencing, *is* (at least partly) the event for which the community is gathered, even if there is a broader religious context which carries other types of importance.

In a tragic context, one question which remains to be addressed is the extent to which such rituals were relevant to an Athenian audience. Compared to other Greek *poleis*, female choruses seem to have played remarkably little part in public life.³⁰ We know of female dancing at the *pannychides* which formed part of many state festivals, but it is unclear what relation this kind of dancing would have to a formal trained chorus. Female choruses certainly did not compete in state festivals, and we find no references to the funding of a women's chorus by the state or by private individuals.

The only institution we know of which could have provided a structure to train *parthenoi* how to dance was the *arkteia*, a ritual whereby young girls spent time serving at the shrine of Artemis at Brauron. It is possible that this provided a medium for formal choral performance: we know that the *arktoi* took part in various activities, and it is reasonable to suppose that their service to the goddess would have culminated in some kind of public performance.³¹ Even so, this choral training and performance would only have been accessible to a minority of girls, and as a one-off event in their lives.³² It may have been that women were trained in ways and on occasions which are not preserved by our male-orientated sources. But the public and festal *partheneia* choruses of Sparta or Thebes certainly have no Athenian equivalent: if parthenaic choruses occurred in Athens outside the four-yearly *arkteia*, they did so quietly, and without the civic support and recognition that their male equivalents received.

However, it also seems unambiguous that Athenian audiences were not only used to parthenaic performance as a concept, but were also familiar with the details of

the poetic tradition of *partheneia*. This is brought out strongly by the ending of *Lysistrata* (1302-20), which presupposes a surprising level of familiarity with the finer points of Spartan parthenaic cult, including cult titles (*πῶλοι*), cult location, the special status of the *χορηγός* figure, and the self-referential nature of parthenaic song. Aristophanes expects enough of his audience to respond to these details to be worth putting them in. The same argument can be made for parthenaic references in tragedy: even if Athenians do not have access to a local tradition of parthenaic performance, they are nevertheless acclimatised enough to it that they can be expected to notice and respond to a detailed level of allusion.

We could say then, that the presentation of parthenaic choruses in tragedy combines a number of elements: the choral tradition of Attic tragedy, and the Athenian audience's awareness of the parthenaic tradition in other *poleis*, along with the socialising role that this practice played in those communities. When tragic choruses evoke *partheneia*, they do so in a way which presupposes that parthenaic performance is of ritual and civic significance. In fact, while the transitions of young girls were certainly of importance in Athens, their public expression via the medium of song and dance is not a local feature. But any possible strangeness is lessened for the Athenian audience because of the strength of the choral tradition in other forms, combined with the mimetic nature of tragedy, which allows it to incorporate and localise alien features.

Opening Moves

We have seen, therefore, the significance of portraying Helen as a parthenaic figure, and explored some of the devices by which Euripides might be able to evoke

parthenaic song. It remains for us to explore how *Helen* makes use of parthenaic motifs outside of the Demeter ode, and how it encourages its audience to be sensitive to the importance of *partheneia* in the play.

The opening of *Helen* sets the play up as an extended metaphor for *partheneia* cult. Imagery of virginity enters the play in its very first line: *Νείλου μὲν αἰῶδε καλλιπάρθενοι ῥοαί.* The word *καλλιπάρθενοι* is rare, only appearing here and at *Iphigeneia at Aulis* (1574). Both its rarity and its positioning make it extremely emphatic, opening the play with a striking image of female beauty and virginity.³³ Springs and flowing water are part of the imagery associated with female sexuality, and form part of the typical description of the sexualised *locus amoenus* of Greek lyric poetry.³⁴ They are tied in to ritual by the custom that a bride should bathe in water from the sacred spring of her home town on the morning of her wedding day. In this case, the Nile is markedly *not* Helen's home river, and thus emphasises her isolation from her home. However, Egypt is the place from which she is setting out for a reintegration into her married life, and the starting point of the transition. The springs of the Nile are therefore appropriate to invoke at the start of the day which will culminate in Helen's return to her husband and to Greece.

The prologue also contains other material which emphasises the theme of female sexual transition. We are told that the daughter of Proteus had her name changed from Eido to Theonoe when she reached sexual maturity (*ἐπεὶ δ' ἐς ἡβηὴν ἤλθεν ὠραίαν γάμων*, 12). The name change indicates that this time of life represents an important shift in status, but there is further significance in the names chosen. "Eido" suggests the beauty of the unripe *parthenos*, who is conventionally presented as desirable. However, Theonoe is no ordinary woman, but (as her name makes clear) is blessed with divine knowledge; as such, rather than being allowed to make the

normal transition to maturity, she is removed from the ordinary categorisation of women according to their sexual status: as she says at 1006-8, she has nothing to do with sexuality.

Imagery more specifically associated with *partheneia* enters the play at the same time as the entry of the Chorus, an actual group of young women singing and dancing. Helen sings a lyric interchange with the Chorus (164-251), where she takes on a role similar to Hagesichora or Agido in Alcman fr. 1 *PMGF*, or Astymeloisa in fr. 3 *PMGF*. She is part of the chorus but separate from it, and the object of their interest and attention. Helen starts off by addressing the Sirens, whom she describes as *παρθένοι*:

πτεροφόροι νεάνιδες, (167-78)

παρθένοι Χθονὸς κόραι

Σειρήνες, εἴθ' ἐμοῖς

†γόοις μάλοιτ' ἔχουσαι Λίβυν (170)

λωτὸν ἢ σύριγγας ἢ

φόρμιγγας, αἰλίνοις κακοῖς†

τοῖς ἐμοῖσι σύνοχα δάκρυα,

πάθεισι παθεα, μέλεσι μέλεα,

μουσεῖα θρηνήμα-

σι ξυνωιδά, πέμψαιτε

Φερσέφασσα †φόνια χάριτας† (175)

ἴν' ἐπὶ δάκρυσι παρ' ἐμέθεν ὑπὸ

μέλαθρα νύχια παιῖνα

νέκυσιν ὀλομένοις λάβηι.

“Winged maidens, virgin daughters of Earth, Sirens, may you come to my mourning, with Libyan lotus flute or pipes or lyres, send me tears to suit my wretched dirge, suffering for suffering, song for song, music of blood to resound with my lament, so that as well as my tears Persephone in her house of night might receive from me in thanks a paian for the departed dead.”

Helen ponders which Muse to address her song to, and decides on the Sirens. The presence of the Sirens in this passage is normally explained as being related to death, and they are certainly addressed in their chthonic aspect here.³⁵ Helen’s cry to the Sirens is a wish for death, and this is part of what makes them appropriate. But there may be more to them than meets the eye. In a forthcoming paper, Ewen Bowie argues that the Sirens are used in parthenaic song to present a rival form of femininity which threatens the mortal *parthenoi* at the moment of their transition to adult status.³⁶ The Sirens feature at Alcman fr. 1.96-9 *PMGF*. The chorus refer to them in apparently propitiatory manner, in the context of singers with whom they cannot compete (but with whom they are therefore in potential rivalry which they need to defuse). Bowie examines various references to the Sirens in classical literature, and finds a connection with young girls being snatched away: in particular they are the companions of Persephone and were playing with her in the meadow when she was seized by Hades.³⁷ He therefore suggests that a connection would have been recognised between Sirens, female transition song, and myths of young girls being snatched away.

The Sirens are often seen as close to the harpies (in art they are represented similarly),³⁸ whom Penelope in the *Odyssey* describes as snatching away girls as they reach the point of marriage (20.61ff).³⁹ Thus, as they approach the age of marriage,

girls conventionally express the need to placate an alternative female power which will try to prevent them from reaching maturity. The Sirens also appear in Pindar's *daphnephorikon partheneion* (*Parth.* 2 / fr. 94b), where they are again a worrying model for female sexuality and female voices, and one which the chorus reject.⁴⁰

The Sirens possess their own links to female sexual transition, then, and their inclusion in *Helen* highlights this theme in the play. In addition, Sirens are associated with death and are companions of Persephone, whom Helen mentions at the end of this stanza. However, their association with Persephone is also an association with female transition. Transition, especially from *parthenos* to *gunē*, is so often described symbolically as death as to be a commonplace.⁴¹ And Persephone is the archetypal figure of the young girl whose initiation into sexual maturity is a death and eventual rebirth. The language that Helen uses of herself, therefore, reflects her portrayal in the play as a *parthenos* figure, and is linked in with cult and ritual which would have triggered these responses for the audience.⁴²

This portrayal is reinforced by the way the Chorus describe Helen's singing of the stanza we have just heard in the stanza that immediately follows:

ἔνθεν οἰκτρὸν ὄμαδον ἔκλυον, (184-90)

ἄλυρον ἔλεγον, ὅ τι ποτ' ἔλακεν (185)

< - - ~ > αἰάγμα-

σι στένουσα νύμφα τις

οἷα Ναῖς ὄρεσι φύγαδα

γάμων† εἶσα γοερόν, ὑπο δὲ

πέτρινα γάλα κλαγγαῖσι

Πανὸς ἀναβοᾷ γάμους. (190)

“From where I heard a noise, an elegy not fit for the lyre, since she screamed out, groaning with her wails, just as a nymph, a Naiad, lets out over the mountains a mournful cry fleeing marriage, and cries out with screams under the rocky hollows at the rape of Pan.”

The Chorus describes Helen’s cry as of a *νύμφα* – a bride on the verge of marriage. They then compare it to an actual nymph: a naiad being raped by Pan in the wilderness. Again, we see the standard imagery of female transition emerging: the *parthenos* in the wilderness, abducted at her moment of sexual flowering.⁴³ *γάμοι* here is used of what is clearly violent rape. This ties into the ambiguous portrayal of marriage from the girl’s point of view which we find so commonly in Greek poetry.⁴⁴

This imagery is picked up again at 245-9, when Helen describes her actual abduction from Sparta, snatched away by Hermes while gathering roses.⁴⁵ Abducting during flower-gathering is a standard *topos*, but it is worth noting Helen’s abduction is specifically as a result of Hera’s anger. In plot terms this is a device to explain Helen’s presence in Egypt, but involving the goddess of marriage in the abduction is also symbolic.

Allusion to sexual transition is scattered through the rest of the *parodos*, for example the reference to the Dioscuri at 205-10. In narrative terms it is natural for Helen to refer to her brothers, as she has just learnt about their death. However, in the context of the parthenaic reference frame which has already been evoked in the mind of the audience, the Dioscuri carry their own particular associations. They are linked to the cult of the Leucippides, and probably mentioned in Alcman fr. 1 (certainly in fr. 2). In particular, the reference to their exercise grounds by the Eurotas, and the *νεανιῶν πόνος* (210) suggests their cult presence on the Dromos, near (and probably

linked to) the cult of Helen, where they performed for young boys the same function of transition and initiation as Helen did for girls, and presided over athletic competitions.⁴⁶

By the end of the opening choral section, we have been alerted to the significance of *partheneia* in understanding the rest of the play. By triggering the audience's awareness of this theme by allusion to ritual, cult and imagery, Euripides encourages us to interpret the rest of the play in the light of this. If we look at the women in the play more generally, the themes and motifs of the *partheneia* become more important.

The Chorus consists of young girls closely connected to the main character, who leaves them at the end of the play.⁴⁷ This is reminiscent of the relationship between Helen and the chorus of girls in Theocritus, where Helen is singled out, but eventually separated for marriage and cannot return to the chorus. Similarly, Hagesichora and Agido or Astymeloisa in Alcman (fr 1, 3 *PMGF*) are singled out by the chorus, and described as special and different, and objects of the chorus' admiration. The sexualised language in which they are praised suggests that they are nearing marriageable age. Calame's interpretation is that these girls are slightly older, and perhaps just about to be married, so that their budding sexual maturity stands out among the group, and is suitable for praise by the younger girls.

At 375-85, Helen herself expresses envy for women who were turned into wild beasts to escape the fulfilment of their sexual maturity. This is another expression of the wildness of the *parthenos*, actualised through transformation into a wild animal when the "taming" strategy of sex and marriage does not work. Helen's own desire to avoid marriage has also led to her removal from civilisation, as she has taken up residence on a bed of leaves by the tomb of Proteus (798-9). Female

transitional periods often involve spending time in what is symbolically a wild or secluded state, removed from the ties of city or family – as actualised in the ritual of the *arkteia* at Brauron.⁴⁸ In Helen’s case, she is physically removed and kept prisoner in a foreign land, along with the chorus of *parthenoi*. At the end of the play, she is able to return to their homeland through the assistance of Menelaus, and her departure may also enable the other *parthenoi* to undergo this symbolic journey to sexual maturity.

The most striking representation of parthenaic motifs comes in the third stasimon. Here, the Chorus imagine Helen’s journey home, and her reintegration into Greece. The scene of her arrival is depicted as the archetypal *partheneia* scene:

ἧ που κόρας ἄν ποταμοῦ (1465-78)

παρ’ οἶδμα Λευκιππίδας ἧ πρὸ ναοῦ

Παλλάδος ἄν λάβοι

χρόνῳ ξυνελθοῦσα χοροῖς

ἧ κόμοις Ὑακίν-

δου νύχιον ἐς εὐφροσύναν, (1470)

ὄν ἐξαμιλλασάμενος

†τροχῶ τέρμονι δίσκου†

ἔκανε Φοῖβος, †τᾶ †λακαί-

ναι γᾶι βούδυτον ἀμέραν

ὁ Διὸς εἶπε σέβειν γόνος· (1475)

μόςχον θ’ ἄν †λίποιτ’ οἴκοις†

< x - x - ~ ~ - >

ἄς οὔπω πεῦκαι πρὸ γάμων ἔλαμψαν.

“She might perhaps find the girls, the Leucippides, beside the swell of the river or in front of the temple of Pallas when at last she joins in the dances and revels for Hyacinthus, in the night-long celebration. Hyacinthus, whom Phoebus killed with the round discus as he competed for the longest throw – a day for sacrificing oxen in the land of Laconia. The son of Zeus ordered that his offspring be honoured. And the calf whom she left at home ... for whom no wedding torches have yet blazed.”

The cult of the Leucippides and dances for Hyacinthus are both stages in the initiation of Spartan girls. Here we find the role and status of the Chorus become blurred, as they sing about choruses singing in honour of Hyacinthus: a tragic chorus representing a group of slave girls becomes symbolically a chorus for Hyacinthus. He is associated with sexual awakening because of his links to doomed youth and lovers. The flower named after him is one of those picked by Persephone at the beginning of the Homeric Hymn.⁴⁹ The Leucippides and their abduction and protection by the Dioscuri are probably the focus of the mythological reference at the beginning of the damaged section of Alcman fr. 1 *PMGF*.⁵⁰ The temple of Athene mentioned in the ode is that of Athene Chalcioikos, the most famous cult of Athene in Sparta. It is also referred to in the Spartan song at the end of *Lysistrata* in conjunction with Helen and *partheneia* cult, and seems to have parthenaic connotations (1314-20). Calame argues that this cult of Athene represents girls at a liminal stage. Insofar as we can assess the symbolic function of Athene Chalcioikos, she seems to represent the civic aspect of a young girl who has successfully passed through adolescence and been admitted to the citizen body.⁵¹

At the end of the stanza we find what most scholars assume is a reference to Hermione, who is described as a *μύσχος*, a typical image to apply to *parthenoi*.⁵²

Helen returns in the capacity of someone present at the transition of other girls, and associated with the ritual surrounding it. As she moves out of her own quasi-*parthenaic* status, she is in a position to help other girls achieve the same thing. This has already been foreshadowed by her promise to the Chorus that if they help her escape she will help them later (1388-9). Helen's own complicated status in the play, as someone who is somehow both a *parthenos* and a *gune* makes her a liminal figure, and therefore suitable to take on these ritual functions.

Anger to joy: the Demeter Ode

The Demeter ode comes at the moment where Helen is released from Egypt, and reunited with her husband. It is also the moment in which she is pretending to put aside her quasi-parthenaic objections to sexuality, and consent to marry Theoclymenus. It is therefore a turning point in the play, not only in plot terms, but in terms of Helen's own status as a symbolic *parthenos*. On analysis, parthenaic imagery runs through the Demeter ode. When we reinterpret the ode in the light of the clues we have been given earlier in the play, the Persephone myth does not just reflect the overall story-arc of the play, but is central to the religious and symbolic function of Helen. (I give the ode in full in an appendix.)

This link has already been set up at the start of the play, when Helen appeals to the Sirens as companions of Persephone (167-78). The reference to Persephone here crystallises Helen's own role. Persephone is a model of female transition for Helen to follow, and Helen is herself a model for other women. Within the world of the play, her escape to Greece offers hope that the Chorus may also be able to follow. In the world of the audience, Helen is no longer a mortal woman who needs to manage her own transition, but is a divinity responsible for the transitions of others.

Euripides' telling of the story concentrates on its allegorical function. Persephone's abduction is set up to be symbolic of the ending of virginity. She is taken from a group of other *parthenoi* dancing in a chorus (1312-13), and the goddesses who are with her and who help Demeter in her search are perpetual virgins: Artemis and Athene.⁵³ The ode does not describe what happens to Persephone in the underworld, or her release. Instead it focuses upon Demeter's response to the rape, her grief and eventual reconciliation. This motif can be interpreted as symbolising a reconciliation to sexuality.

Demeter's initial response is to remove herself to the infertile parts of the world: rocky and snow-covered (1323-6). She puts a stop to the natural fertility of the earth, refusing to produce crops for men to eat or animals to graze on (1327-31). Her drying up of the "dewy" springs (1335-6) is part of this destruction of fertility, but also carries symbolic overtones. Flowing water and dew are common motifs in descriptions of the *locus amoenus* which is used to stand for sexuality, and as we have seen above, springs have their own role to play in female transition.⁵⁴

Demeter's release from her rage comes about via the sexually provocative music and dance of the East.⁵⁵ Zeus commands the Graces to console Demeter. These goddesses are associated with marriage.⁵⁶ It is then Aphrodite who begins the music. The combination of *krotala*, drums, and the *alalagmos* suggest the rites of the Great Mother, known elsewhere as Cybele or Rhea, and associated with orgiastic rituals.⁵⁷ However the story is clearly that of Demeter: Cybele never had a daughter who was abducted. Demeter's identity is here blurred with Cybele's, which allows her to take on the same functions of sexuality and procreation.⁵⁸

These functions are to an extent implicit in Demeter's status as goddess of natural fertility and growth, and so on a religious level the shift is an easy one to make.⁵⁹ However, it is significant, as it emphasises the sexual aspect of Demeter in her new state, without needing to stress it explicitly. The musical theme is self-reflexive: in the context of the ode, it highlights the mingling of Demeter and Cybele's identities, and the sexualised nature of the rites. But the fact that the ode itself is also a musical performance also indicates the relevance of its message. The performance of the ode, as we are told at the end, is happening because Demeter has let go her anger at Helen. The music of the ode is not the reason that Demeter is placated, but music is once again used at the time when the goddess is placated.

Although we know from the myth that Persephone is eventually returned to Demeter, her restoration is only partial, and her fate is suggestive of the transition out of girlhood to sexual maturity, which cannot be undone.⁶⁰ Demeter's release from her rage is nothing to do with the return of Persephone – indeed there is no suggestion in the ode itself that Persephone ever will be returned. This is particularly striking given that since Helen *is* being returned to her own daughter, we might expect a focus on the reconciliation. But Helen's return to her daughter is symbolic of the joyous outcome of her reconciliation to sexuality, and her shift in status. Helen has now returned to her rightful status as a *gunē*, and will oversee the transitions of other *parthenoi*, as we will go on to see in the third stasimon. Conversely, Persephone as a *parthenos* figure is lost forever. Deleting the return motif emphasises the permanence of the transition into sexual maturity. The consoling of Demeter is not just a temporary release, to demonstrate the distracting power of the rites even in a time of emotional frenzy.⁶¹ The ode finishes on an up-beat note: there is no suggestion that Demeter will return to her anger when the musical performance stops. In effect,

Demeter is reconciled to sexuality and thus to the loss of her virgin daughter.

Presumably it is this motif that lies behind the blurring of her identity with that of the Mother.

The final stanza provides the only explicit link to the play, though as we have seen, a connection is already implicit in the themes running throughout the ode. Helen is said to have incurred Demeter's wrath by not honouring her rites (1355-7). This is the passage which is usually felt to be confusing. However, it is meant to explain the relevance of the myth and link it to Helen's own status as represented in the play.

Helen in her identity as a *parthenos* is herself refusing to enter sexual maturity and thus rejecting the moral of the Demeter myth. Helen is said to rely on her beauty – a characteristic normally applied to *parthenoi*, and apparently set in contrast with the rites of sexually mature Demeter. Alcman's *parthenoi*, in contrast, explicitly mention that their beauty will not be able to protect them from the divine threat to their transition they face, and instead suggest that the protection offered by their Chorus leader (fr. 1.64-77 *PMGF*). In fact, the Helen we have seen in the play, far from rejoicing in her beauty, wishes it away (260-5). So the claim that Helen exulted in her beauty is not meant to be literally transferable to the characterisation of Helen, any more than we are meant to believe that she is literally a *parthenos*. Rather, it is symbolic of the way Helen is construed as a *parthenos* to highlight the theme of female sexual transition in the play, and it is in this light we are meant to accept the statement.

Helen's return to Greece, paralleling Demeter's release from her grief, suggests her own transition to sexual maturity, and thus her reconciliation with the goddess. Demeter's previous anger came about because of her own rejection of sexuality, and was undone by her transformation into a goddess whose function is to

uphold procreation and sexuality. In her new Cybele-like form, her anger is turned in the other direction – against those who are rejecting the lesson she has learnt, and the religious ritual she has been granted as a compensation for the loss of her daughter. Helen's departure from Egypt marks the end of her quasi-parthenaic status: her apparent acceptance of marriage to Theoclymenus, and her actual resumption of marriage to Menelaus. The Demeter ode comes at the moment of Helen's release, thus aligning Helen's return to Greece and the cleansing of her reputation with the prototype of female transition. It represents an acceptance that the arrival of female sexuality, though problematic, can be managed in a way that is constructive and a source of joy.

Conclusion

Helen can be read as an adventure story with a happy ending, showing the victory of cunning Greeks over Egyptians, and of right over wrong. However, among the more symbolic readings of the play includes that of understanding it as an extended metaphor for female sexuality and the transition to sexual maturity.⁶² The play is packed with references to parthenaic song and ritual, and its relationship to *partheneia* cult is complex. It represents an aetiology for the ritual, through the figure of the heroine who is known to the audience as a divinity responsible for managing similar rituals in their own world. However, Helen appears not as a powerful deity, but as a woman herself faced with a challenging and dangerous transition. The language used of her, particularly in the third stasimon, alludes to the detail of this ritual. There is therefore a blurring of identity in the plays between the tragic chorus (of male Athenians), the characters they represent (the girls marooned with Helen) and

choruses of *parthenoi* performing in a religious context, as their song suggests they are participating in the ritual with which the main character is symbolically linked.

The Demeter ode, far from being irrelevant, is crucial to understanding this metaphorical function of the play. Persephone forms the mythological prototype for Helen, just as Helen does for real-life women. Thus, the ode mirrors the broader meaning of the play. Demeter's own reaction in the play is a paradigm for accepting the arrival of female sexuality. And her reconciliation to this comes at the moment she accepts the paraphernalia associated with Cybele, a goddess whose connotations are to do with sex and fertility.

Understanding the ode in this way, we can make more sense of Demeter's anger with Helen, which is also parallel to her anger in the earlier part of the ode. Helen is behaving like a *parthenos* and rejecting sexual maturity (so far offered to her in the form of Theoclymenus' advances). At the moment of the ode, she is about to set out on a journey towards married life and motherhood. Thus the mention of Demeter's anger comes at the moment of its release, as suggested by the focus on the release of her previous anger. After rejecting marriage to Theoclymenus, Helen now responds with joy to resuming her marriage to Menelaus. She, like Demeter, has become reconciled to female sexuality, and now regards marriage as a positive experience instead of one that causes grief. Like Persephone she is about to undergo her own transition to sexual maturity (symbolised by her return to Greece). And like Persephone, her reward will be a divine role in the transitions of young girls in the future.

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Appendix: The Demeter Ode (1301-68)

ὄρεϊά ποτὲ δρομάδι κώ-

λωι Μάττηρ ἐσύθη θεῶν

ἀν' ὑλᾶντα νάπη

ποτάμιόν τε χεῦμ' ὑδάτων

βαρύβρομόν τε κῦμ' ἄλιον (1305)

πόθωι τᾶς ἀποιχομένης

ἀρρήτου κούρας.

κρόταλα δὲ βρόμια διαπρύσιον

ἰέντα κέλαδον ἀνεβόα,

θηρῶν ὅτε ζυγίους (1310)

ζεύξασα θεὰ σατίνας

τὰν ἀρπασθεῖσαν κυκλίων

χορῶν ἔξω παρθενίων

ἦμετὰ κουρᾶν δ' ἦ (1314a)

⟨ ~ ~ ~ ⟩ ἀελλόποδες, (1314b)

ἀ μὲν τόξοις Ἄρτεμις, ἀ δ' (1315)

ἔγχει Γοργῶπις πάνοπλος. (1314c)

αὐγάζων δ' ἐξ οὐρανίων

⟨ - x - x ~ ~ - ⟩

ἄλλαν μοῖραν ἔκραινεν.

δρομαῖον δ' ὅτε πολυπλάνη-

τον μάττηρ ἔπαυσε πόνον (1320)

ματεύουσα ἦπόνους†

δυγατρὸς ἀρπαγὰς δολίους,

χιονοθρέμμονάς τ' ἐπέρασ'

Ἰδαιᾶν Νυμφᾶν σκοπιάς

ρίπτει τ' ἐν πένθει (1325)

πέτρινα κατὰ δρία πολυνηφέα.

βροτοῖσι δ' ἄγλοα πεδία γᾶς

⟨ x - x ~ ~ - ⟩

οὐ καρπίζουσ' ἀρότοις, (1328)

λαῶν δὲ φθείρει γενεάν,

ποιμναις δ' οὐχ ἴει θαλερὰς (1330)

βοσκὰς εὐφύλλων ἐλίκων·

πόλεων δ' ἀπέλειπε βίος,

οὐδ' ἦσαν θεῶν θυσῖαι,

βωμοῖς δ' ἄφλεκτοι πελανοί·

παγὰς δ' ἀμπαύει δροσερὰς (1335)

λευκῶν ἐκβάλλειν ὑδάτων (1336a)

πένθει παιδὸς ἀλάστωι. (1336b)

ἐπεὶ δ' ἔπανσ' εἰλαπίνας (1337)

θεοῖς βροτείωι τε γένει,

Ζεὺς μειλίσσων στυγίους

Ματρὸς ὀργὰς ἐνέπει· (1340)

Βᾶτε, σεμναὶ Χάριτες,

ἴτε, τὰν περὶ παρθένωι

Δηὼ θυμωσαμέναν

ἦλύπαν ἐξαλλάξατ' ἄλαλαῖ

Μοῦσαί θ' ἕμνοισι χορῶν. (I345)

χαλκοῦ δ' αὐδὰν χθονίαν

τύπανά τ' ἔλαβε βυρσοτενῆ

καλλίστα τότε πρῶτα μακά-

ρων Κύπρις· γέλασεν δὲ θεὰ

δέξατό τ' ἐς χέρας (I350)

βαρύβρομον αὐλὸν

τερφθεῖσ' ἀλαλαγμῶι.

ῥῶν οὐ θέμις οὔθ' ὅσια

ἐπύρωσας ἐν θαλάμοις, †

μῆνιν δ' ἔχεις μεγάλας (I355)

Ματρός, ὦ παῖ, θυσίας

οὐ σεβίζουσα θεῶς.

μέγα τοι δύναιται νεβρῶν

παμποίκιλοι στολίδες

κισσοῦ τε στεφθεῖσα χλόα (I360)

νάθηθας εἰς ἱερούς

ῥόμβου θ' εἰλισσομένα

κύκλιος ἔνοσις αἰθερία

βακχεύουσά τ' ἔθειρα Βρομί-

ωι καὶ παννυχίδες θεῶς. (I365)

ῥεῦ δέ νιν ἄμασιν

ὑπέρβαλε σελάνα

μορφᾶ μόνον ἠύχεις. †

“Once the mountain mother of the gods rushed on speeding foot through the wooded glades, the flowing river waters, the roaring wave of the sea in longing for her stolen daughter whose name may not be spoken. The noisy castanets let out a piercing cry, when, with the goddess in her chariot yoked to wild beasts, there followed as swift as storm winds † after the girl † <...> who was snatched away from the circular choruses of maidens, Artemis with her bow, and the fierce-eyed goddess in full armour, with her spear. But [Zeus] seeing clearly from his seat in heaven, <...>brought to pass a different fate.

When the mother stopped her swift wandering † toil†, searching for the treacherous abduction of her daughter, she went over the snow-clad crags of the nymphs of Ida. In

grief she hurled herself among the rocky thickets covered in snow, and by not making the barren fields of the earth fertile with crops for mortals <...>, she destroyed the race of men. She did not send forth the fresh pasture of leafy tendrils for the herd, and life began to leave the cities. There were no sacrifices for the gods. The offerings were unburnt on the altars. She made the dewy streams of pale water stop flowing, an avenger in grief for her child.

When she put a stop to feasts for gods and for the race of mortals, Zeus spoke and appeased the Mother's gloomy anger. "Go, holy Graces, go, with a cry ♪ change the grief ♪ for the girl from Demeter's angry heart, and you, Muses, with choral songs." Kypris, most beautiful of the blessed gods, was the first to take the earthy voice of bronze and the drum with its stretched skin. The goddess smiled, and took the resounding *aulos* into her hands, delighted at its sound.

♪ In the chambers, you burned offerings which were not right or holy ♪, and you incurred the anger of the great mother, child, by not honouring the sacrifices of the goddess. Great is the power of the dappled fawn-skin robe, and the greenery of ivy that crowns the holy thyrsus. The circular curling shake of the bull-roarer on high, the hair streaming out for Bromios, the all night festivals of the goddess ♪ when the moon overshoots the days. You gloried in your beauty alone. ♪"

Notes

I would like to thank William Allan, Armand D'Angour, Patrick Finglass, and Oliver Taplin for much helpful feedback. An expanded version of the article will be published in my forthcoming book, *The Hidden Chorus: Echoes of Genre in Tragic Lyric* (Oxford, OUP). The text used is that of J. Diggle's *OCT* (Oxford, 1994). All translations are mine.

¹ Helen herself is not named, and the addressee is simply called ὦ παῖ. Dale (1967) and Kannicht (1969) both take Helen to be the recipient of this piece of advice; in the absence of any other plausible addressee, I follow them. See Kannicht (1969) on these lines for the problems with suggested alternative interpretations (e.g. Persephone, Aphrodite).

² E.g. Dale (1967, on 1301-68) comments on the “complete irrelevance of this motif to all the rest of the play”, and suggests that the linking of the myth to the action of the play in the corrupt section must have been “tenuous”. She concludes that “the ode is in fact introduced for its own sake”. Paley (1872, on 1301) describes it as “liable to the charge of being unconnected with the subject of the play”. Jerram (1882) and Pearson (1903) agree, as does Decharme (1906, 314-5). Michie and Leach (1981) go as far as to suggest that Euripides might have “inserted an ode from his reservoir” (see introduction 12-13 and on 1391). Kannicht (1969) accepts the ode as being relevant to the play, but on exactly how, comments “the problem of interpreting it has still not been completely resolved” (das Problem der Deutung noch nicht restlos gelöst), and suggests that the warning to Helen is not exactly aimed at the Helen of the play, but used to stand in for a general pattern of human behaviour regarding orgiastic

Mysteries. See Kannicht (1969, 327-8) and Allan (2008, 294-5) for an overview of earlier interpretations of the ode.

³ Aristotle (*Poetics* 18.7) discusses the practice of introducing choral interludes which were not connected to the subject of the play any more than to any other tragedy (which he calls *embolima*). He claims that this practice was introduced by Agathon, and that it was common among the later poets. See Golann (1945, 31-3) for an analysis of the passage, and discussion of *Helen* in this context. Decharme (1906, 314-5) regards the Demeter ode as “an *embolimon* in the true sense of the word”.

⁴ Golann (1945) suggests that the myth is not that of Demeter but of Helen and Nemesis, although his emphasis on the significance of the abduction motif nevertheless ties in with my argument here. Less plausibly, Verrall (1905, 43-133) takes the content of the ode to suggest that the play was not composed for the Dionysia but for a private performance at the Thesmophoria (an interpretation which has been generally dismissed).

⁵ The argument is made most fully by Foley (1992), but see also Pippin 1960, 156; Wolff 1973, 63-4; Segal 1971, esp. 569-73; Guépin 1968, 120-2 and 137-42.

⁶ Guépin 1968, 120-2. Foley (1992) also goes into more detail.

⁷ Foley (1992, 145-8) and Zweig (1999, 162-4) note various of the *partheneia* motifs in *Helen*. Rehm (1994 121-7) also notes transition motifs, though conceives of it more as a transition to marriage itself rather than to a marriageable stage of life.

⁸ Calame (1977, 1:336-44) suggests two separate cults for Helen in Sparta, one in her aspect as a married woman, and the other as a *parthenos*, but as Parker (forthcoming, 19-20) notes, we have no evidence to suggest separate cult functions at different ritual centres. For the cult of the Leucippides, with which Helen may also be connected, see Wide 1893, 326-32; Kannicht 1969, 381-3; Calame 1977, 1:323-30.

⁹ Compare *Il.* 3.173-6 where Helen regards herself as complicit in her elopement.

¹⁰ Teucer also calls her *γύναι* at 82, 84, 158 and 163. However this should not be taken as significant, since *γύναι* can be used in tragedy to address women irrespective of their age or marital status. For example, Orestes addresses Iphigeneia as *γύναι* at *I.T.* 483, 546, but *νεᾶνι* at 619. The Chorus in *Pho.* are addressed as *γυναῖκες* at 278 and 991, but *νεάνιδες* at 302. *παῖ* and *νεᾶνι* on the other hand, are used overwhelmingly in tragedy to address young and sexually immature women (Soph. *Ant.* 948; *El.* 121, 251, 827, 1230; *O.C.* 322, 329, 722, 846, 1104 Eur. *El.* 197, 516; *Hel.* 996, 1288 (of Theonoe); *I.A.* 1402; *I.T.* 336, 619; *Med.* 1207; *Hec.* 194, 513; *Heraclid.* 484; *Pho.* 154, 1703). Married women addressed in this manner either tend to be childless, and therefore not fully mature (Hermione at Eur. *Andr.* 191, or to be conceived of as the speaker's child (e.g. Phaedra with her childhood Nurse (Eur. *Hip* 212, 288, 473, 521), Hecuba to her daughter-in-law (Eur. *Tro.* 697).

¹¹ The *locus classicus* for Egypt epitomising the reverse of what is normal is Hdt 2.35. However it seems to be a common *topos*, and is also found at Soph. *O. C.* 337; Athen. 299 (ascribed to Anaxandrides); Diodoros 1.27; Nymphodoros (F. H. G. 2.380). See How and Wells 1912 on Hdt 2.35.

¹² Cf. Allan 2008 on 244-9 “it is a basic feature of such mythical parallels as the one made throughout this play between [Helen] and Persephone that they need only to be *partial* in order to be effective.”

¹³ For example, the myth at the beginning of Alc. fr. 1 *PMGF* seems to provide a moral about inappropriate sexual relationships, contrasting with the controlled viewing of the girls in their choral dance, and the social benefits of an appropriate marriage.

¹⁴ E.g. Penelope's parthenaic wish to be swept away before marriage like other unmarried girls (20.61-90); her desire to flirt with the suitors (18.158-303); the contest of the bow as a contest to win a bride, (cf. the chariot race of Pelops or the running race for the Danaids); the wedding song Odysseus arranges to coincide with the killings (23.133-51). Indeed, since Penelope was a model for Euripides' "new Helen", the similar use of imagery could be understood as deliberate evocation of the *Odyssey* parallels: see Allan 2008, 27-8 and on 1312-14b; Eisner 1980.

¹⁵ Segal 1971. See also Wright (2005, 285-325) and Conacher (1998, 74-83) on the themes of reality and illusion in the play.

¹⁶ Cf. Rutherford 1995, 118-21.

¹⁷ For the effects this can have, see Rutherford 1995; Henrichs 1996; Stehle 2004.

¹⁸ Cf. Henrichs 1995; Henrichs 1996; Foley 2003.

¹⁹ On tragedy and the *ephebeia*, see Vidal-Naquet 1968; Winkler 1990; Mitchell-Boyask 1999; Dodd 2003. For "marriage to death" and the perversion of marriage ritual in tragedy, see Foley 1982; Seaford 1987; Rehm 1994.

²⁰ This kind of approach has been successful in identifying other genres in tragedy, for example *hymenaios* by Seaford 1987.

²¹ See Calame (1977, 1:18-20) on the validity of *partheneia* as a term, and 145-67 on different functions of women's choruses.

²² Cf. Proclus *Chrestomathia* 36: *Εἰς θεοὺς δὲ καὶ ἀνθρώπους παρθένια*

²³ This is now generally agreed, but see in particular Calame 1977 ; Lonsdale 1993, 193-205; Stehle 1997 chs 1 and 2; Ingalls 2000; Cyrino 2004.

²⁴ There has been much debate as to which of the two is more desirable. I agree with West (1965, 197) that the question is not meaningful: the purpose of the praise is to

set *both* girls apart from the rest of the girls, and Alcman deliberately avoids comparing the two of them.

²⁵ On *μαρτύρεται φαίνην* and the ritual role of Agido, see Puelma 1977, 16-19; Stehle 1997, 37-8. Hutchinson 2001, 86.

²⁶ *Vit. Pind.* P.Oxy. 2438.24. The girls are also mentioned in *vit. Pind. Ambr.* (1.3.3 Drachmann)

²⁷ I agree with Stehle (1997, 87-8) in rejecting Calame's suggestion that the choral group was private and closed (Calame 1977 *passim*). There is no indication that young women's ritual or initiation groups performed in private, and it seems to go against what we know of the public and festal nature of the chorus in Greek life. The Poet at Aristoph. *Birds* 919 suggests *partheneia* as one of the song types appropriate for building up the cultural life of a new community. Whether or not this refers to *partheneia* in my strict sense, or just to any song sung by *parthenoi*, it suggests that choruses of *parthenoi* were strongly associated with community poetry.

²⁸ See Scodel (1996, 111-15) on the importance of ritual contexts as an opportunity to display *parthenoi*.

²⁹ Cf. Stehle (1997, 40-1) on the Rhodian swallow song (Athen. 8, 360cd; *PMG* 848) "children and *parthenoi*, who are powerless, are good bearers of disguised warnings because they cannot act on them in their own persons".

³⁰ See Stehle 1997, 117-18; Wilson 2000, 40-24; Parker 2005, 182-3.

³¹ Cf. Parker 2005, 230-1 on performance at the *arkteia*, 183 and 243 on the *arkteia* as a medium for choral training. Lonsdale (1993, 186-93) describes ceramic evidence for dance-training at the *arkteia*.

³² The scholiast on Ar. *Lys.* 645 suggests that only a small number of girls attended the *arkteia*, and modern scholars have on the whole rejected the idea of universal

participation (suggested at Suda *a* 3958 = i. 361.4 Adler) on the grounds of practicality. See Sourvinou-Inwood 1988; Dowden 1989, 24-31.

³³ Zweig (1999, 165-6) notes that the word evokes *partheneia*, and triggers generic images of beauty and virginity. Earlier scholarly interest in *καλλιπάρθενοι* focussed on the precise meaning of the word, and whether it simply expresses the purity of the water, or evokes river spirits. See Hermann 1831; Paley 1872; Dale 1967; Kannicht 1969.

³⁴ Cf. *Il.* 14.351; Sapph. frs 2.5, 96.11 V; Ibyc. fr. 286.2-3 W.

³⁵ See Dale 1967 on 165. For Sirens and the chthonic, see Roscher, *GRM* iv. 607-8.

³⁶ Bowie forthcoming.

³⁷ Apoll. Rhod. 4.894-7, Ovid, *Met.* 5.552, Claudian *de rapt. Proserpinae* 190.

³⁸ Both are represented as winged female figures. Sirens tend to have the feet and lower bodies of birds even when they have the upper body of a woman, whereas harpies are often represented as women with wings. Compare *LIMC* Suppl. *sv seirenes* fig. 45 and IV.2 *sv harpuiai* fig. 2.

³⁹ By necessity Bowie's argument is somewhat compressed here. He also examines other abduction or transformation myths from Sparta and goes into more detail on the Sirens' song and representations of the Sirens and harpies elsewhere.

⁴⁰ See Stehle 1997, 95-9. In particular, she writes (97): "Marginal figures, eternal virgins, autonomous, enticing speakers, the Sirens are not really auspicious models ... for human *parthenoi*. The threat that erotic young women will escape from the system of exchange among men is submerged but not absent."

⁴¹ See Rehm 1994; Seaford 1987; Jenkins 1983; Redfield 1982, 188-90, who examine the motif in Greek literature and art.

⁴² For a detailed account of the evidence for Helen's cult, see Parker forthcoming, and Calame 1977, 1:336-44.

⁴³ The prototype is Persephone, cf. *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 4-18; For women's flower picking festivals in various parts of the Greek world in honour of the Persephone myth see Strabo 6.1.5.33-8; Pollux 1.37; Paus. 2.35.5, Schol. Aristoph. *Frogs* 344 = Soph. fr. 89. For the motif applied to non-mythological girls, Archil. fr. 196a W.

⁴⁴ E.g. Sapph. frs 105b, 107, 114 V; Soph. *Trach.* 144-52. Catull. 61.3, 61.58-9 draws on Greek *topoi*.

⁴⁵ The motif of abduction and flower-picking is well known and needs no further analysis here. For an analysis of its use in *Helen*, see Guépin 1968, 137-42.

⁴⁶ Calame 1977, 1:336-7.

⁴⁷ *I.T.* also contains a similar relationship between the main character and the Chorus (as well as a similar plot-structure). In addition, Iphigeneia, like Helen, has her own connections with female transition cult. A detailed analysis of the parallels between *Helen* and *I.T.*, and the latter's use of parthenaic themes, is outside the scope of this paper, but I explore this material more fully in Swift forthcoming.

⁴⁸ Burkert (1979, 6-7) argues for leaving home and seclusion or wanderings as one of the central motifs in this type of myth. See also Dowden (1989, 142) and Katz (1999), who argues that the presentation of Io's wanderings in the *Prometheus Bound* is designed to trigger these associations.

⁴⁹ *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 7.

⁵⁰ For the cult of Hyacinthus see Wide 1893, 285-93, Kannicht 1969, 383-5, Calame 1977, 1:309-17. For the cult of the Leucippides with which Helen also may be associated, see Wide 1893, 326-32, Kannicht 1969, 381-3, Calame 1977, 1:323-30.

For the mythological section of Alcman, see Page 1951, 30-3; Hutchinson 2001, 79-80; Robbins 1994, 11-14

⁵¹ Calame 1977, 1:340-1.

⁵² Diggle leaves the line blank. Wilamowitz, Jackson and Kovacs all include some reference to Hermione in what they supply. Iphigeneia in the *I.T.* also describes herself as going to her sacrifice like a *μύσχος* (359), suggesting the parthenaic overtones of the animal: see Mossman (1995, 150-1) for Euripides' use of the word to describe the young and vulnerable.

⁵³ *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 424 describes Persephone being in the company of Artemis and Athene when she was abducted (though the line may be spurious). The same version is found in Claudian *de raptu Proserpinae* 2.205-8. See Dale 1967 on 1314-16.

⁵⁴ For water in the *locus amoenus*, *Il.* 14.351, Sapph. fr. 2.5, 96.11 V, Ibyc. fr. 286.2-3 W.

⁵⁵ Zweig 1999, 169. Also see Guépin 1968, 125-7.

⁵⁶ Cf. schol. Eur. *Hip* 1147. Bushala 1969, p. 25 n.7 gives an extensive list of evidence for the association between the Charites and love and marriage in ancient literature.

⁵⁷ *Hom. Hymn* 14; Nilsson 1967, I.687-8

⁵⁸ Kannicht 1969, 328-33 gives an extensive account of the religious rituals suggested by the ode, and how to reconcile them. Also see Dale 1967, introduction to the ode, and on 1301 and 1341; Maas 1933, 2.3.

⁵⁹ Cf. Detienne 1977, xv.

⁶⁰ See Foley 1994, 118-37.

⁶¹ *pace* Dale 1967, 150.

⁶² As mentioned above, a parallel is *I.T.*, which has a similar story pattern, and whose protagonist is also associated with ‘real life’ female transitions.