



## Euripides's Helen a Post Modern Educational Proposal

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### Abstract

The modern teaching / pedagogy requires techniques and proposals which correspond to the needs of students, who will be educated and prepare themselves for their future life. This procedure takes place through the teaching of intellectual, social, moral, and sentimental values that will form active citizens, who will shape a better society. The utilization of the current educational materials which our education employs, in connection to the Drama in Education can play a crucial role towards this direction. Additionally, the students' works of the semiotics analysis help us pinpoint the extent to which they correspond to the educational goals as far as the teaching of values is concerned. The aim of this study is to highlight the social values through the educational drama technique using ancient dramatic texts from pedagogical resources that have already been used in the Secondary Education.

**Keywords:** Theatre in education; Drama in education; Values; Secondary education; Ancient greek theater; Innovative teaching.



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### 1. Introduction

Euripides is identified with theatrical innovations that have profoundly influenced drama down to modern times, especially in the representation of traditional, mythical heroes as ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. He also became "the most tragic of poets", focusing on the inner lives and motives of his characters in a way previously unknown. He was "the creator of...that cage which is the theatre of Shakespeare's Othello, Racine's Phèdre, of Ibsen and Strindberg," in which "...imprisoned men and women destroy each other by the intensity of their loves and hates", and yet he was also the literary ancestor of comic dramatists as diverse as Menander and George Bernard Shaw (Hadas, 2006; Knox, 1985).

Euripides's Helen was probably written in 412 B.C. and it is a text of adventure and intrigue with a happy end (Euripidis, 1993). It belongs to a group of texts that included "Andromeda", a work that was really appreciated in antiquity, but it has been lost (Walton, 2009).

Euripides was the first who saw tragedy from a different prospective in relation to Aeschylus and Sophocles. The last two according to Kosta Topouzis believed that "the tragic" was a conception / meaning that enlightened and explained the awe and wonder and the inexplicable things in life and offered to people convictions and beliefs so that they could either endure or be crushed in life (Euripidis, 1993). Scholars studying "Helen" consider that the text doesn't totally belong to the works of Euripides as it includes ironic elements and roles with comic characteristics, for example the moment that Menelaus appears as a shipwrecked sailor and is forced to be dressed with rags in order to face the "old lady" that opens the door for him in front of the palace. Also, the continuous reference in dressing and asylum as well as the definition of social roles which people continually surpass. Even more a pseudo heroism is spotted. Some scholars characterized the work as tragicomedy based on the above elements (Despiris *et al.*, 2016).

Many characterized his text as a romantic drama focusing on the meeting of husband and wife after many years and on the oaths they are taking (Despiris *et al.*, 2016).

Methodologically the technique of "theater in education" as an area of study is applied. The applications of Drama and theatre to facilitate learning in schools, enhance therapy in psychiatry, provide clinics for linguistic and psycho-social disorders, and foster community relations and social organization. The foregoing and more constitute aspects of the extended purpose and functions of this largely pragmatic area of study. Jackson and Vine (1993), Omoera (2011), and Komolafe (2011), have at different times observed the definitive dynamism of Theatre in Education. They pay critical attention to its multi-disciplinary disposition and the peculiar methodological interactions in Education, as concerns theatre and more specifically Drama. In fact, Jackson and Vine (1993) holds authoritatively that "no simple water tight definition of TIE is possible or desirable" (Asodionye Ejiolor and Ibarakumo Ken Aminikpo, 2016).

For the definition of "theater in education" or "drama in education", there are many definitions have been attributed in recent years to the Greek area. They've got some common features. First of all the pedagogical character of the theater because it employs experiential, collaborative, communicative and student participation, empathic empowerment through role plays that pupils are called upon to undertake in a fantasy world where everything functions symbolically. Thus, participants based on improvisation and other theatrical techniques face dilemmas, make decisions, reflect on and acquire knowledge and social skills (Prendergast and Saxton, 2009).

For the definition of "Theater in education" or else "drama in education" many definitions have been given in Greece during the last years and they are constructed on common characteristics. A basic prerequisite is the pedagogical character of the theater, because it uses co-orporation, communication, livability, and participation of students, the cultivation of consciousness through games – roles that students are called to take in the framework of a

fantastic world, where everything has a symbolic function. Thus, the participants, using self – improvisation and other theatrical techniques, face dilemmas, take decisions, reconsider and obtain knowledge and social skills. The thematic analysis, as an easy to use method, is chosen and used widely in poetic research (Clarke *et al.*, 2015). Especially, it is a method of spotting, description, reference and “thematization” of repeatable motives, namely “themes” that come up from the research data and consist the basic tool for all the researchers that deal with the poetic research (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

## 2. The Researching Material

The goddesses Hera, Athena and Aphrodite had a row as to who is the most beautiful of all. The judge was Paris, the son of Priam, king of Troy. Paris before making his decision was bribed by the three of them. Aphrodite offered him Helen as a bride. But Helen was married to Menelaus, king of Sparta, and her abduction was the cause of the Trojan war. After ten years of war, the Greeks conquered Troy and Menelaus began his journey to his homeland. Hera having lost the contest of Beauty was still angry. In order to defy Aphrodite, she created the idol of Helen to accompany Paris while the real Helen was fled to Egypt, where she lived unhappily being the example of the faithful wife having to resist the moods and desires of Theoclymenis, the Egyptian king (Walton, 2009).

### 2.1. The Plot of the Work

Helen appears on the prelude of the play. She seems to doubt her divine origin and is unhappy for the death of Proteas, who protected her in contrast to the son of Theoclymenis who tried to make her his wife. Helen, at the moment, is being at the grave of Proteas, where Tefcros is also there. Tefcros has been exiled because he didn't die at war as his brother Ajax. Helen is informed by Tefcros about the outcome of the war, as well as about her idol which was found somewhere else. The chorus, which is consisted of Helen's followers, laments and at the same time advises Helen not to make any hasty decisions not even think of committing suicide before she consults Theonoe the prophet. Helen listens to the advice of the chorus and leaves the scene. As Helen leaves, Menelaus rag – dressed, appears on the scene knocking on the doors of the palace. The old lady \_the door – keeper\_ refuses to open because her king is not only hostile to strangers but is also about to marry Helen. Menelaus is speechless. One of his companions arrives at that moment from the beach and informs Menelaus that this woman \_the old lady\_ is his own wife. Thus, the couple recognize each other and they both decide to escape. The couple asks Theonoe to help them, giving her word that she won't reveal anything to Theoclymenis. Helen persuades Theoclymenis that Menelaus died at war and that now they have to make a special ceremony to bury him with honors. The ceremony must take place in the sea. She also tells him that after the ceremony she will be free to marry him. Theoclymenis is convinced by Helen's story and decides to give a ship with cloths and food for Menelaus who is standing beside Helen in a miserable situation. The procession begins and everything takes place as it was planned. During the trip a messenger appears in front of Theoclymenis and informs him about Helen's real plan. He himself decides to revenge Theonoe who helped them escape. In the end nothing happens (Chatzikyriakos, 2017; Despiris *et al.*, 2016; Walton, 2009).

### 2.2. The Narration in the School Book

The schoolmanual was re-edited by the institute of Technology, computer science and “Diaphados” editions in a digital model. This model was made with the funding of ESPA/ΕΠ “Education and life knowledge” / Action “STIRIZO” (support). The text was funded seventy five per cent by European Social cash and twenty – five per cent by national resources. The authors of the first edition of the book were: Nicolaos Sesypris, Dimitris Papageorgakis, Konstantina Tsene\_ philologists and educators of secondary education, Christos Rammos a philologist and a teacher of secondary education and finally Vassilios Tsaphos president of the pedagogic institute who took part only in the writing of the first part of the book. Despoina Baliame\_ a philologist, was responsible for the literary diligence of book. Kyriaki Gouderi, a teacher assistant of the University of Patra, Aimilia Vlachogianni, \_a school advisor and Alexandra Mylona, a philologist and educator of secondary education\_ were the evaluator and critics of the text. Chrysoula Veikou, an advisor of the pedagogic Institute was a course – responsible during the writing of the book. Finally, Despoina Moraiti - a philologist and educator of secondary education was responsible for the sub-text. The management of ITYE editions - “Diaphados” was founded in the summer of 2011, after the voting of the law 3966/2011 and undertook the responsibility of editing the book. Its mission was the organization, function, management, the evaluation of the infrastructures, the resources and the rights of intellectuals property relevant to the production, distribution and disposal of editions to the market and educational community either in printed or electronic form (ITYE) “Diaphados”- Institute of technology, computers and editions n.d.. This institute overtook the responsibility to continue the text of ΟΕΔΒ which for decades produced and distributed the school-books to Greece.

### 2.3. The Researching Aim

We aim to mark out the social values of educational drama through its technique. The values that have been defined as the most basic are relevant to spiritual values which are separated into mental, moral, aesthetic, economical as well as values of behavior (Christodoulou, 2012).

The values that are considered primary are relevant to spiritual, social, moral and emotional values. We also focus on five values as Peace, Love, Honor, Beauty, and Equality. Even more, we are interested in finding which values are considered by our students as primary ones and thus decide the teatro-pedagogical approach.

### 3. Thematic Analysis

#### 3.1. The Identities as Helen's Differentiations

The text Euripides's *Helen* is used as a step to initiate students in the values of the text that we consider important. Helen, as the main role, as well as the rest roles of the text (Menelaus, the chorus, Theonoe, Thoeclymenis and the servant), are used as bearers of values such as peace, freedom, family, equality and beauty. These values according to Christodoulou in her book "Learning, Education, Values- a semiotic approach" are classified in social and spiritual ones. The spiritual values are considered intellectual and based on this we search for truth, for moral values relevant to freedom, equality and justice. At this point an identification with social values is spotted. Also, we have the aesthetic values which are concerned with everything having the meaning of beautiful, the economic values that modify what is beneficial and practical for man, and finally the values or behavior relevant to the behavior of man in his public and private life (Christodoulou, 2012). The values become understandable through the identities / differentialities that emerge from the text itself. These identities refer to Helen as a *Queen, a beautiful woman, the wife, the peacemaker and finally Helen as free*.

The opinion that beauty is a disaster to those who have it, was expressed yet from ancient times. Helen's beauty instead of being a virtue is presented in the text as a chargeable cause of many sufferings. Her beauty was disastrous, even though she didn't take part, because she didn't know that this advantage would change her whole life and it is an identity, she herself didn't choose (Whitman, 1996). Her beauty was divine, because in reality she was not the child of Leda and Tyndareus, but the child of Zeus. Zeus took the form of a white swan, giving birth to two eggs from which the beautiful Helen and her almighty brother Polydeukis were born (Chatzikyriakos, 2017). Homer presents the feminine model to have the main characteristics of spirit and character. The Greek woman was to be irreproachable, virtuous, clever, sensible, modest and she must be governed by the basic values of moderation, prudence and purity.

The praise of feminine beauty is a common motive in Greek literature. The woman according to Homer must be above all beautiful and this beauty is sent by the Gods (Martines, 2000). When Helen arrives at the Tower the Trojan cry out: Isn't unjust for the Achaeans with their beautiful tonsils to endure so many sufferings for a long time for such a woman, who bears in appearance an amazing resemblance with the immortal goddesses? (Despiris et al., 2016). Furthermore, the identity -wife bears an importance by giving a sweet tone in her role. In line 795, she herself assures her husband that their bed has been induced (Despiris et al., 2016). She proposes to her husband to leave her and escape alone as an act of self-sacrifice. In the end they choose to die together in case they won't manage to escape (Despiris et al., 2016). Menelaus, Helene's husband is presented as her inferior, foolish but he has courage, he is honest and straight. He stays on his wife's side which if we take into consideration the rumors, she had cheated on him. Helen's charm makes her seem superior. Euripides makes a strong criticism against war as it brings about many sufferings and much unhappiness to man. The basic aim of the poet is to emphasize the vanity of war trying to make out the importance of peace so that people may not be killed without a cause. It is an everlasting idea which in our days must be the starting point of speculating (Sorovelis, 2014). Helen is presented as a voice against war because after the appearance of the chorus she describes the sufferings that war brings about. The sympathy she feels for the Trojans is quickly turned into rage and lamentations. She herself on the one hand feels guilty for this war but on the other hand she reminds herself that her name and her phantom and not she herself as a physical person, responsible (Whitman, 1996). Even though she never accepted Paris as her husband the rumors that follow her is greater than the action she never committed.

The next differentiation, which is important about Helen, as a queen, gives the class sign. Helen obtained this identity after her marriage to the king of Sparta, Menelaus. She is presented as woman with power allowed to make decisions and give orders. Ancient Greece has a reputation of favoring men. Women were looked at as submissive. Once a woman got married, she was under the control of her husband. Prior to that, her father or a male relative served as her guardian. As a result of this, people automatically assume that women played no role in Ancient Greek society at all. The reality is, how women were treated in Ancient Greece differed from city-state to city-state. Since Sparta was a military society, that means that men was away from home all the time. They quickly realized that the women needed to have more rights. Basically, they were charged with maintaining the households, especially while the men was away. They could also own property. In fact, at one time, Spartan women owned around 40% of the property (GreekBoston.com) Besides it being a practical arrangement, one big reason why Spartan women were given so much prestige was because they were the mothers of Spartan warriors. And, unlike their Athenian cousins, they were given plenty of freedoms. They wore short dresses and could go wherever they pleased. They were also highly educated.

Nikos Zorbalas in the schoolbook "Dramatic poetry-Euripides's *Helen*- 3<sup>rd</sup> class of Junior High school" points out that a serious problem in the era of Euripides was the problem of Slavery. Within slavery people were not only depressed but they also became objects of exploitation and very often lost their personality as human beings. For this reason, Euripides not only did he remain indifferent to the institution of slavery which he many times with courage, condemned as something out-of-date but he also very often expressed his sympathy for the slaves and his admiration for the virtues they managed to preserve intact. He even reaches the limits and puts into the slaves mouths such meanings and concepts that we were used to hear from philosophers (Despiris et al., 2016). Helen states the need to live as a free woman by her husband's side. In her life she never decided on anything not even about her own marriage, because Helen's aspirant suitors were many and all of them exceptional youths, kings or lords. They were powerful men who brought many gifts to win her. Her father's wish was that she would marry Menelaus because he was wealthy and the brother of Agamemnon who was the husband of his elder daughter, Clytemnestra (Mitta, 2012). Euripides uses the character of the servant – messenger wanting to express his own concept about slaves. A slave

that remains years with a family is considered as a member of the family, a relative and it is a reality in the life of an ancient Athenians. Even though someone is a slave Euripides presents him as a man that thinks freely. Such a slave is the servant that is presented in the tragedy precisely the way it is stated by the wonderful lines “What if I am not free, I have a free soul” (Sorovelis, 2014). We do recognize these identities in relation to some roles. The social values are shown through the relations below: *Helen – Menelaus, Helee – Tefkros, Old lady – Menelaus, Helen – Theoclymenis, and Servant – Theclymenis.*

## 4. Results and Discussion

Figure-1. Educational material



During the activity the most important was the fact that among the participants there was 16 year old student, a Syrian refugee, living in the hot-spots for youths in the area of Imathia and it was his second week of attendance at the school. Even though he didn't speak Greek, he responded very well to the demands of the course doing his best. His fellow-students helped him and very quickly he became a part of the team without any problem. According to me this is a strong example to make us realize how drama and theater can on the one hand be vital at schools as it can socialize, diminish the discriminations and racism among the students and give them the stimulus to see life from a different perspective, to realize that love, understanding, cooperation and help can make the difference.

The idea of war has been presented in our research as we have mentioned previously because Helen beyond her other identities, was also used with the identity of peace-maker.

More specifically students “played” a lot on the idea of war and peace showing out the many causes of war, its basic characteristics and how important peace is. The students didn't focus at all on the fact mentioned by Euripides, that Helen was the cause of the Trojan war, on the contrary they pointed out economic and political reasons for which wars break out and went even further to connect such an old historical event with today's situation. They indicated that the means may have changed but the causes and effects of the war are common in every era and they are the same for the simple people.

On this base we brought out the class identity among rich and poor kings and slaves pointing out that the upper class have much less to lose than the simple people. A large part of the research elaborated on the idea of fame and specifically on the idea of defamation. In the eyes of the students Helen was seen as a wife who loved her husband and was faithful to him. Her actions were of less importance than the rumors that haunted her as *a woman who left her husband for a younger and more handsome man.*

For the students Helen's beauty wasn't one more cause for her problems.

There was an intensive questioning as if an event reaches our ears exactly as it happened and if we are really in a position to know the truth. The students adored the gossip-game and the game of the broken telephone.

There were many moments of laughter and the students brought onto the surface their comic character and they set themselves free creating model, comic scenes with self-planning as their basic tool. At this point we can refer to material that a group of students made with Helen as their basic character.

They made a sketch of her, within it they wrote down how they imagine that Helen feels and what she believes, while outside the sketch they showed out what the people think about her.

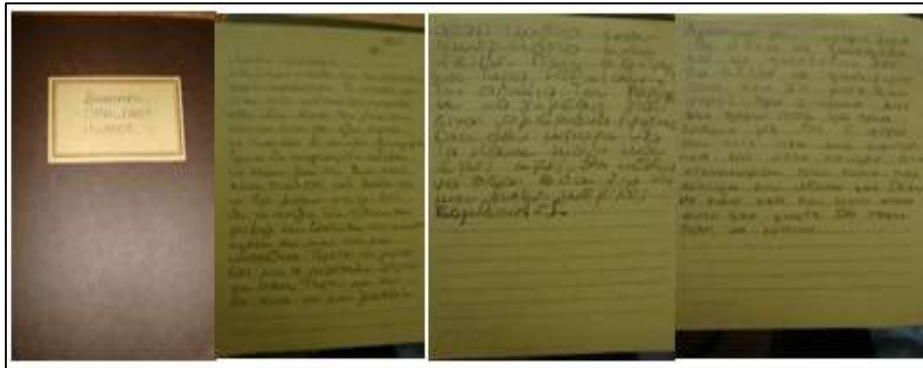
Figure -2. «hero's character script»



Furthermore, the students and especially girls focused on the love and passion that a woman feels for a man, something that hasn't changed through times.

They identified themselves with Helen. The words of love become very distinguishing in the diaries they wrote in the role of Helen, a woman very much in love. This method helps them to set themselves free, to feel secure and to understand that the love – feelings they feel for other people aren't to be blamed.

Figure -3. «hero calendar»



Finally, making an over-all survey of the values that the students considered most important we realized that the values of *love, truth and family stand out*.

This element puts a question as to what values are put into the core by the adults and are considered important to be taught and what values the students of the Greek school give priority to.

The youth's first need seems to be having emotional coverage and everything else is followed.

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