THE BASIC SERIOUSNESS OF EURIPIDES' *HELEN*

ANTHONY J. PODLECKI
Pennsylvania State University

in memoriam A. M. Dale

A considerable amount of scholarly attention, both critical and textual, has recently been paid to Euripides' *Helen*.[1] This puzzling play, which contains features that have often seemed out of place in the high tone of "true" tragedy, has eluded scholars' attempts to classify it under one of the usual categories of ancient drama, but the emphasis of most recent criticism has fallen heavily on the side of the comic. Kitto believes that "the *Helen* is comedy from beginning to end,"[2] and Webster cautions that it "should not be taken too seriously . . . (Euripides) has simply accepted the *eidolon* story and written a very pretty play on its consequences."[3] The other dominant theme in recent criticism of the *Helen* has been an exposition of the important ideas which, it is alleged, Euripides was primarily interested in conveying. Though I personally believe this approach to be misleading, it has gone some way toward correcting the imbalance created by discussing the play in terms of

[1] Three editions have appeared in the last decade, those of K. Alt (Leipzig 1964), A. M. Dale (Oxford 1967) and R. Kannicht (Heidelberg 1969), the two last with commentary. (The brief commentary by A. C. Pearson [Cambridge 1903] is still valuable.) Among critical studies may be mentioned: E. M. Blaiklock, *The Male Characters of Euripides* (Wellington 1952) 85–93; D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama* (Toronto 1967) 286–302, G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides*[2] (London 1961) 332–53; J. G. Griffith, "Some Thoughts on the 'Helena' of Euripides," *JHS* 73 (1953) 36–41; H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*[3] (London 1961) chapter XI *passim*; A. N. Pippin, "Euripides' *Helen*: a Comedy of Ideas," *CP* 55 (1960) 151–63, T. B. L.Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London 1967) 199–202; G. Zuntz, "On Euripides' Helena: Theology and Irony," *Entretiens VI, Fondation Hardt* (Geneva 1958) 201–27. These all will be cited below by author's name only.

[2] Kitto 310. See also Grube 352, and Conacher 297, 300.

[3] Webster 201–2.

"comedy." Griffith comments that "though there is a lightness of touch in places, I conceive that a serious and at times piquant intellectual exercise is demanded of the audience."[4] And even by these critics it is stated or assumed that the situation, the *vehicle* for the theses which Euripides is supposed to be primarily interested in presenting, is comic in tone. Thus Miss Pippin (now Mrs. Burnett) labels it a "Comedy of Ideas;" she speaks of its "relentless playfulness" and calls it "an experiment in a new sort of comedy in which a romantic plot is used as an excuse for the poetic expression of philosophical ideas."[5] Even Zuntz, whose analysis of the Theonoë scene is provocative and at times enlightening, can write of ". . . Helen's fairyland (whose) brightness, lightness and meaningfulness have their roots in an unbounded and unmitigated perception of the hazard and futility of life. . . ."[6]

This recent emphasis on the "delightful," on "excitements" and "amusement,"[7] seems to me misplaced. No one who reads the play would deny that it shows the playwright to have been a consummate craftsman; he has created characters who are, even in his varied repertoire, extremely memorable (and his Helen is surely one of literature's great heroines); the situation is brilliantly conceived and the possibilities which the plot holds for razor-edge turns and hair's-breadth escapes even more brilliantly realized. For sheer dramatic pyrotechnics the play is one of Euripides' best. But underneath it all there is, I submit, a basic seriousness of situation and tone, a pattern of carefully reiterated serious themes (personal identity and status, paternity, place of origin and, above all, return thereto after detention in a foreign land) which recent critics, preoccupied as they are with the skillful construction of individual scenes or with the basic tenets of the playwright's "philosophy," have almost universally ignored.

To correct at the outset a misconception which continues to plague criticism of the *Helen*: Menelaus is not (so at least it seems to me) in any sense a "comic" figure, "a *miles gloriosus* from the first . . . a bluffing swashbuckler."[8] A comment such that he is "insincere as well as

[4] Griffith 36.

[5] Pippin 154.

[6] Zuntz 225.

[7] Dale applies these terms to individual aspects of the play (*Introduction*, xi–xii), but her discussion is on the whole admirably balanced.

[8] Grube 339, 341.

weak"[9] is not only mistaken but (almost worse) irrelevant; what matters is that he is recognizably, perhaps even at times exaggeratedly, a "Homeric" hero who now finds himself in a desperately serious situation to cope with which he can find no tactics in his military manual. The commander of a large expedition, which has just finished a long and exhausting war, his attempts to return home thwarted as if by some evil fate, he now finds himself in an alien land and, as it will turn out, in mortal danger of his life. Let us re-examine the early scene with the hag doorkeeper to see what some of Menelaus' preoccupations are. His opening lines show us his concern to establish his personal credentials: his descent can be traced from Pelops (387[10]); the family thus has a position to maintain (392 *kleinon*). His expedition to Troy, moreover, had been a great undertaking, one that befitted his station (394; cf. 105, *kleinên polin*[11]). To make matters worse, Menelaus retains a memory of his previous prosperity. He sums up his position thus: "When a high-born man fares ill, his very unfamiliarity with suffering makes it worse than for one who has long been unlucky" (417–19). The lines *could* be delivered in such a way as to elicit an audience's laughter, but the sentiment is not *prima facie* ludicrous.[12] Likewise, his lament "Oh, where is my famous (*kleina*) army now?" (453): any attempt to make out the line as anything but totally serious in import must resort to a theory that the actor delivered it in a mock-heroic tone; which is of course now quite beyond our powers to investigate. The undeservedness of his sufferings (455) and a remembrance of his previously happy lot (457) move Menelaus to Homeric tears, but it is only a crudely modern sensibility which will find this automatically funny; his extended and somewhat showy renunciation of tears in his appeal to Theonoë later (948–53, although he seems to have second thoughts about it at 991–92) is perhaps meant to show us Menelaus getting better control of himself as the play progresses.

[9] Blaiklock 87.

[10] As Pearson (96) remarks, "Pelops is simply referred to as the founder of the race..." Cf. 1242, 1264; the chorus mention the *genos Tantaleion* at 855–56.

[11] The fame of the Trojan undertaking recurs too frequently to be accidental (453, 503, 808, 845, 948–49, 1603 [cf. 1560 ff.] and some irony may be intended in view of the pointlessness of the war; but this does not make the theme in any sense humorous.

[12] In the same vein is the sentiment of the Dioscuri at 1678–79 (1679 is unfortunately corrupt; see Dale 168 for the required sense).

Even the setting is enlisted to bring home to Menelaus the contrast between what he was and what he now is: he cannot help remarking that the "continuous surrounding coping and impressive gates" point to this being "some prosperous man's house" (430–31), a man who will surely, Menelaus mistakenly believes, be unable to turn a deaf ear to the entreaties of one who "kindled the famous fire of Troy" (503).

Another element which has been thought (again wrongly, in my opinion) to contribute a humorous touch is Menelaus' extraordinary attire, to which he self-consciously alludes (415–17, 421[13]), and which an audience can hardly have failed to notice; but, we should ask ourselves, inured to such things since at least the *Telephus* of 438, would they even have thought it worthy of comment? Moreover, Aeschylus' Xerxes (*Pers.* 834–36, 846–48) will serve to suggest the possible symbolic significance of Menelaus' tattered attire. Menelaus' lament for "the robes of time past, the gleaming luxurious clothes which the sea took" (423–24) is not meant to tickle our risibility, but rather to show us how deeply he feels his loss of kingly status.[14]. The detail, besides symbolizing in a persistent and vivid way his temporary loss of identity and position, also contributes to the unfolding action of the play. Helen is immediately repelled by his appearance (554), but it will serve as a useful, indeed, a lifesaving, disguise in approaching Theoclymenus (1079–80); the damage done to his royal robes in the shipwreck, Helen comments, "though it seemed inopportune at the time, has turned out for the best" (1081). The crouching position which Menelaus later adopts at Proteus' tomb, so far from being intended to arouse an audience's laughter,[15] is a necessary part of the camouflage, and the deceit is helped by his ragged appearance which Theoclymenus, like Helen, finds instinctively repulsive (1204). Theoclymenus himself orders new clothes to be brought "so that he can return to his own country" (1282–83); the Prince does not realize

[13] Aristophanes was to pick this up at *Thesm.* 935 *histiorrhaphos*, as Pearson (98–99) notes, but we should not therefore take Menelaus for a Euripidaristophanean hero like Dikaiopolis (*Acharn.* 415, 423, 432 ff.) On the parody of *Helen* at *Thesm.* 849–918, see Pearson, xxvi–xxix, and P. Rau, *Paratragodia* (*Zetemata* 45; Munich 1967) 53–65.

[14] Pippin 153 notes but to my mind misinterprets the detail of Menelaus' clothing.

[15] 1203, *hypoptêxas*; the term has no humorous connotations at the only other place it occurs in Euripides, *Or.* 727.

that he is performing an action which is symbolic of his own part in the deception being perpetrated upon him. "Change your clothes" are among Helen's last words to the "stranger" (1297), and she later reports that she played a wife's part in helping him to bathe and "put on robes in place of the garb snatched from the shipwreck" (1382). The return to his rightful status and, in truth, to his real identity is thus complete.

Menelaus' preoccupations manifested in his opening scene correspond closely to those already voiced by Helen herself, and one of the things that strikes us (as Euripides no doubt intended it should) is how similar, indeed, how perfectly matched, the two protagonists are. Helen too is preoccupied with birth, position and, especially, freedom and return home. At 16–17 she vaunts her "not anonymous homeland," Sparta, and her human father, Tyndareus, although she has some doubts about her alleged descent from Zeus (18 ff., a point she will come back to in the famous, though perhaps spurious, formulation of 256 ff.). To match Menelaus' concern with his royal and heroic status, Helen has her persistent anxieties about her reputation: "For all my suffering I am accursed, am reputed to have betrayed my husband and to have involved Greece in a great war" (53–55). Her name is ill-famed (*dyskleês*) in Greece (66), as Teucer and later the Messenger will confirm (81, 614–16). It is her *aischron kleos* which caused her mother's suicide (135) and may also, in one version, have led to the deaths of her brothers (142). She returns to the theme after the *kommos*: her *dyskleia* is the harder to bear for being undeserved (270–72). At 273–75 she continues her catalogue of ills: she is separated from her native land, among barbarians, bereft of friends, a slave though of free birth; the tone is precisely the same as Menelaus' in the next scene when he complains of being "a man, himself a king, begging bread from other masters" (511–12). Their anxieties about a return to Sparta likewise coincide. "Although I desire to return to my country, I do not think I shall obtain it from the gods," Menelaus says (402–3). Although she had been assured of a return to the "famous land of Sparta" by Hermes (56 ff.), Helen despairs that this will really come about, and her fears are reinforced by Teucer's ill-omened outburst, "May Helen perish and not reach Eurotas' streams" (162–63).

After they are reunited the couple's anxieties blend and are mutually

reinforced. At the close of the stichomythia in which she fails to convince Menelaus of her identity, Helen cries out, "I shall never see Greeks or my homeland again," (595–96) and, in an echoing passage, closes the "Recognition Duo" with the words: "God wrenched me, accursed and ill-starred, from my country, my city and you . . ." (694–95). The thought of her unjustified bad reputation dominates her appeal to Theonoë: "there is no mortal man who does not hate Helen; I am celebrated throughout Greece as a traitress to my husband . . . " (926 ff.); only a safe return, she insists, will give the lie to her detractors (931).[16] The disguised Menelaus, in a line which carries a hidden meaning, promises Helen in the presence of Theoclymenus that, "If I return to Greece . . . I shall put a stop to the censure which has been cast at you" (1293), and he uses a term, *psogos*, which he had earlier applied to himself (846). Helen implores Theonoë to end her wandering exile, *alêteia* (934) and, once again, the two principals are verbally linked, for earlier the Chorus had used the same word of Menelaus (523). Theonoë advises Helen to pray to Aphrodite to be granted a safe return (1025) and this she does (1102).

It is only with the epiphany of the Dioscuri at the close that these themes are finally resolved. Helen's twin brothers appear in their capacity as constellations which assist navigators, a function for which we have been prepared earlier (140[17]); their benevolence thus contrasts with Nauplius' "treacherous star" (1130–31), which wrecked the returning Greeks. Her brothers will escort Helen and Menelaus to their native country "riding horseback over the sea" (1665), in a kind of joyous re-enactment of their earlier escort of the newlyweds, "youths on white horses to the light of torches" (638–39; cf. 723–24). Her reputation will be assured, for she is to receive divine honors along with them (*theos keklêsêi*, 1667). She will be honored with real *xenia* from men (1668) to balance the ironical *xenia* of death which the Portress had promised Menelaus (480). The doubts as to her origin are

[16] Dale, following Goguel, condemns the lines in which the motif of return had been extended to include a fear expressed by Helen that even if she were to get back to Sparta she might find the doors barred to her (287–92); perhaps rightly in view of the incurable syntax, although Helen's fear seems plausible enough.

[17] The theme has perhaps also been suggested by Helen's question whether her husband "still looked upon the sun's bright chariot and the stars' tracks" (341–43). Cf. Helen's prayer to Hera "dwelling among the broidered stars" (1096).

thus resolved and her status assured; she is Zeus' daughter after all. In fact, her transformation from human to divine had already been prefigured by her cloud-image and its mode of transport. "I am going to my father, heaven," the image had said (613–14[18]). Thus, in a blending which is so symbolically appropriate that it borders on literal truth, Helen *is* Aphrodite; it can hardly be accidental that twice in rapid succession the same graphic epithet, *polyktonos*, "murderous," is applied to both of them (198 and 238[19]). The Dioscuri assure the audience that Menelaus "the Wanderer" will arrive at his final destination in the Isle of the Blessed (1676–77), and in the divine plan for which they are the spokesmen (*morsimon*, 1677 [cf. 613], *peprômenon*, 1646, 1660) Theoclymenus acquiesces (1683). His testimony to Helen's outstanding *sôphrosynê* (1684) is the more credible as coming from an unwilling witness, and he comments on her "most nobly-born character" (*eugenestatês gnômês*, 1686–87). This characteristic Helen shares not only with Menelaus (950) but also with Theonoë, whose *eugeneia* Helen herself had vouched for earlier (10; cf. 941–43). In their very last words the Twins resolve this theme of *eugeneia* and provide what may well serve as an epigraph for the play as a whole: "It is not that the gods hate the well-born (*eugeneis*), but they must endure more suffering than ordinary men" (1678–79[20]).

Often in Euripidean drama an early scene has more than its surface importance and "means" more than it contributes to the straightforward development of the play's action. So, here, the scene between Helen and Teucer. Teucer's first words, "One could well guess this was the house of Wealth himself, with its kingly enclosures . . ." (69–70), help to confirm the general air of prosperity at the Egyptian court; in addition, by using the rather rare word *amphiblêmata* he reinforces the contrast which Menelaus in his sorry condition will present when he mentions the "*lampra amphiblêmata* which the sea

[18] *Ouranos* is described as the material (34) and *aithêr* the agent which fashioned the image (584). Even the journey with Hermes is like a star's (*ton kat' ouranon dromon*, 1671; cf. 246).

[19] It occurs only twice elsewhere in Euripides, once of Helen (*Or.* 1142).

[20] The second line (1679) is unfortunately, and probably insolubly, corrupt (see above, note 12). In spite of Kannicht *ad loc.*, I believe the fault lies in *anarithmêtôn* which, in the only other place it occurs in Euripides (*Ion* 837), has the meaning "beneath [not 'beyond'] counting."

took" (423–24). Reacting as he does to Helen with instinctive anger, even loathing (71 ff.), Teucer illustrates how low her reputation has fallen among Greeks (81). Teucer mentions his descent and his place of origin (87–88), and he, too, is a wanderer, an outcast.[21] From him Helen learns that her *kleos* has killed her mother (35–36) and possibly also her brothers (142). Theonoë's mantic part in the action is foreshadowed (144 ff.) and—perhaps the most important element in the scene—Helen anticipates the divine role predicted for her at the end of the play by here stepping in and fulfilling the function of prophet properly (and later) held by Theonoë; in response to Teucer's request that she act as *proxenos* with the Egyptian priestess so that he may learn details of his journey to his new home, Helen replies: "The voyage will show you the way of itself" (151). The contrast with the lengthy and disastrous homeward voyages of Menelaus and the other Greeks and with the complicated journey which awaits Helen and Menelaus is clear and doubtless intentional.

Another element which has wrongly been thought to contribute a frivolous, or at least un-serious, tone is the choral odes, which, like songs in other late Euripidean plays, have been criticized as being "irrelevant" to the action, or, worse, completely ignored. But there is more careful composition in them than critics have seen; the songs can be shown to be both tied firmly to certain of the serious themes which dominate the rest of the play and also tightly constructed on principles of verbal and thematic repetition which help to give them internal coherence. The parodos is in fact a *kommos* between Helen and the Chorus which falls into two parts.[22] The first stanza is Helen's. She addresses the "*feathered* Sirens," which is perhaps intended to foreshadow Zeus' feathered appearance to Leda (215[23]). She then descants upon her sufferings and appeals to Persephone in a prayer which is anything but casual, as will appear from the Second Stasimon

[21] Euripides seems to be punning on *tlêmôn/Telamôn* in the identical opening position of successive lines (91, 92). At 109 Helen links her fortunes to his by calling herself *tlêmon*.

[22] Dale (76) is too quick to dismiss it as "an operatic aria whose words must not be expected to bear too close a scrutiny of their meaning."

[23] The motif is picked up by the Messenger's jocose reference to Helen as *hypopteron* (618) and Theoclymenus will later ask facetiously whether Helen flew from Egypt "with wings" (1516; we are reminded of the flying *eidôlon*).

(Menelaus will later appeal to another underworld goddess, Hecate [569]). The Chorus enter in response to a cry as of "some Naiad . . . protesting against marriage with Pan" (187–90); we remember that Theonoë is a *Nêrêis*,[24] that Helen will be pursued by Theoclymenus to force her into a marriage which she finds repugnant. Helen then addresses the Chorus as *thêrama barbarou platas* (192) and it is surely no accident that the image of a hunted animal recurs throughout the play as a kind of *leitmotiv* (51, 64, 314, 545, 981, 1175, 1238; it is anchored somewhat ominously to reality by Theoclymenus' actual hunting expedition at 154). But Helen was herself the "prey of a barbarian oar" (234, 1117; cf. 666–67), and one of the notes—and hardly a frivolous one—which will sound again and again through the play is the contrast between Greek and barbarian.[25] In the second strophe Helen recapitulates the evils which she has caused: her mother's (200 ff.) and brothers' deaths (205 ff.[26]) and her husband's wanderings, all because of her *onoma polyponon* (199[27]). The Chorus respond by alluding to her ill-fated birth (214 ff.) and, besides echoing her own references to her relatives' deaths, remind her again of her evil reputation (223–24) and her separation from her country (222, 227). In the last stanza Helen sings of the "doleful pine boat" which sailed from Troy in pursuit of her, a sister-ship of that which will carry her home.[28]

In addition to these references which reinforce the main concerns of the play's characters, the ode contains as well several motifs whose chief function seems to be to give it internal unity. The Chorus describe themselves in their opening lines as washing their robes and warming them "on the young curling grass (Dale's translation of *helika ana chloan*, 180) . . . near the young bulrushes" (*donakos*, 183); Helen recalls what she had been doing when she was snatched away

[24] 15, 318, 1003, 1647 (Thetis, too, was a Nereid, 847).

[25] Cf. (the more important occurrences in italics) *244*, 568, 600, *666* (Paris), 743, 800, 1042, 1100, *1133*, 1210, 1258, *1380*, *1507*, *1594*, *1604*.

[26] The Dioscuri are described as *agalma patridos* (206): a reminder of the homeland-motif, as well as a link with the *eidôlon*, which is described as an *agalma* at 705 and 1219 (the term is used by Helen of herself in a simile at 262).

[27] *Onoma* is again a dominant motif: 16, *43*, 66, 87, 149, 249, *399*, 414, 465, 487, 490, 494, 498 (these last two rather labored), *502*, *588*, 601, 730, 792, *822*, *1100*, 1193, 1653. Cf. Dale's note on 792: "Eur. seems obsessed with the antithesis *ergon/onoma* in this play," and, in general, F. Solmsen in *CR* 48 (1934) 119–21.

[28] The Third Stasimon (1451 ff.) is, as will be seen, the thematic antistrophe to 191 ff.

by Hermes: plucking pale (*chloera*) rose petals" (243–44) in the vicinity of the "Brazen House" (245), Athena's temple at Sparta which the Chorus had said she will probably never see again (228). The "reed," or "rush" (*donax*) is picked up in the second part of the song, this time in a much more significant way, when Helen calls upon the "Eurotas pale with water-rushes" (349–50), a phrase which echoes closely her earlier description of the river as *donakoentos* (210) and looks forward to Menelaus' epithet for the same river, *kallidonakos* (493). The Eurotas, in fact, seems to have been intended by the poet to symbolize Sparta and the happier days there to which the principals fear they may never return; Teucer's curse is that Helen "may never come to the streams of Eurotas" (162–63; cf. 124), a curse which will not, luckily, be realized (1492). And if Eurotas seems to elude them, the Nile is very much on their minds: it is Helen's first spoken word, a sure way of identifying the locale (1–3; cf. 89 and 671). The hag is quick to take offense when Menelaus groans "Egypt?! How far off-course I've sailed!"; "What, you have some fault to find with Nile's radiance?" (462; cf. 491). These two rivers provide two points of the geographic triangle within which the action is played out; the third is formed by the rivers of Troy, Simoïs (250, significantly placed at the end of Helen's song) and Scamander, where so many lost their lives (52, 368, 609). If one river is the scene of death, another of current detention, the third of seemingly unsatisfiable longings, it is appropriate that the beginnings of the change in their fortunes should be marked by a physical transformation, Menelaus' new clothes which have already been noted (1382) and a "long-delayed bath in river-dew" (1384).

The First Stasimon proper, when it comes, opens with a note of metamorphosis which echoes one of Helen's earlier lyric themes (375–85, Callisto/bear, daughter of Merops/hind): here, the Nightingale, the "tearful songstress," whom the Chorus call upon to be a *synergos* of their lament (1113), and who also makes a fitting poetic partner of Zeus' swan (19, 215). The subjects have become familiar: the *ponoi* of Helen, the Trojan women, the Achaeans (1113–16); Paris' "barbarian oar" (cf. 233–34 and 192) which brought *melea* to Priam's children (1118). The first antistrophe pictures the sufferings on the Greek side: soldiers dead (1122–23), wives widowed (1124–25), the heart-breaking loss of life during the Returns, when homeland seemed just within

grasp (1126 ff.)—all for an *eidôlon*. In the second strophe the Chorus meditate on the unpredictability of human, the inscrutability of divine, affairs: Zeus' daughter, now "proclaimed traitress, faithless, lawless, godless" (1148); only the gods' word is true (1150). To the all-important second strophe we shall return below.

Even the notoriously difficult Second Stasimon, an extended parable involving the rape of Persephone by Pluto and Demeter's anxious, inconsolable search for her daughter,[29] shows certain thematic connections with the rest of the play. The Mother races down from the mountains *dromadi kôlôi* (1301; cf. *dromaion . . . ponon* later in the song [1319–20]) and thus recalls Helen's earlier comparison of herself with a "running mare" (*dromaia pôlos*, 543) or a Bacchante who "links her leg (*kôlon*)", i.e. runs quickly to, Proteus' tomb (544). As if to remind us of the play's dominant rivers, the object of the Mother's rush is the "flowing stream of river water" (1304). The girl had been snatched from "cyclic maiden choruses" (1312–13), like Callisto before her (381 *exechoreusato*), and in both instances Artemis is involved, now as helper in the girl's recovery, though in Callisto's case she had hounded her out of the dancing-group. This first stanza ends with two divinities who likewise have roles elsewhere in the play, Athena (25; cf. 228 and 245) and Zeus who "decreed another fate" (1318) as he will later do for Helen (1669). The tale of the Mother's wanderings continues in the first antistrophe and new details are added which clarify its pertinence to the present positions of Helen and Menelaus: she "ceased her running labors which-involved-much-wandering" (1319 *dromaiôn . . . polyplanêtôn*); Helen had previously applied the same term to her husband (*polyplanês*, 203; cf. also 533, 774, 1676). The Mother's quest had been caused by the "treacherous (*dolious*) rape of her daughter" (1322); *dolios* is what Helen had called Leda's bedding by Zeus (20) and Aphrodite's agency in Paris' pursuit of herself (238). Nauplius' torch was a "treacherous star" (1130–31). The Mother arrives finally at the "snow-nurturing peaks of the nymphs of Ida" (1323–24) and Ida, of course, was the scene of the Judgement of Paris, where it all began.[30] The nymph perhaps faintly recalls the fleeing nymph of 187 and

[29] The parallel is rightly emphasized by Pippin (156): "the Demeter-Persephone motif offers a promise at the outset that Helen will not be held captive forever."

[30] The epithet "Idaian" had been applied to Paris at 24 and 29.

"snowy" will be picked up in 1326, *polyniphea*. The Mother, in her angry despair, withholds fruitfulness from the land, herds, men,[31] and the last detail in this bleak picture, "she makes the dewy springs of white water stop flowing" (1335–36), contrasts with the fruitfully overflowing Nile (3) as well as, perhaps, faintly suggesting the parched and sterile plain of Troy once the invaders have finished with it. The second strophe brings a rising rhythm. Zeus, to mollify the Mother's sorrow, sends the Graces, Muses and Aphrodite (1349), whose powers here are beneficial and constructive, unlike her influence upon Helen's fate (25, 28, 238, 363, 680, 883–84, 887,[32] probably 1006, 1121; but she will relent: 1029, 1098). The second antistrophe has generally, and perhaps rightly, been treated as an extended *locus desperatus*, but no emendation should be admitted which introduces, merely for the sake of "relevance," an otherwise unattested failure *by Helen* to sacrifice to some unnamed goddess (1356–57). The suggestion of Pearson's is worth reviving that the stanza "is addressed not to Helen but to Persephone, and that there is a reference to the legend that she was hindered from returning to the upper world permanently by having tasted a pomegranate seed in Hades."[33] For all the difficulties which the text presents (especially 1366 ff.), which are perhaps ultimately insoluble, this antistrophe, too, contains minor echoes which help to link it with the rest of the play.[34]

The Third Stasimon is, in contrast with the complexities and occasional obscurities of the Second, relatively easy to comprehend. The first strophe is addressed to the Sidonian ship (cf. 1272) which is carrying Helen and Menelaus home. In a pleasing conceit, the ship is called "chorus-leader of the dolphins" (1454–55), a phrase which both recalls such earlier choruses as Callisto's (381) and the Muses' (1345), and also looks forward to the choruses in honor of Hyacinth in the antistrophe (1468). The Sea's daughter, Calm, (we should remember that Theonoë is a maritime divinity on her mother's side) is conceived as addressing the sailors to "grasp the pine oars," which replace the

[31] *achloan* 1327, *euphyllôn helikôn* 1331 ~ *helika t'ana chloan* 180.

[32] Pearson (170) remarks on this line: ". . . by inspiring Pluto's passion [Aphrodite] had been the ultimate source of Demeter's grief and owing to her rivalry with Hera the cause of Helen's misfortunes."

[33] Pearson 170.

[34] E.g. *chloa* 1360 ~ 180, *kyklios* 1363 ~ 1312, *bakcheuousa* 1364 ~ 543.

"barbarian oars" of which we have heard before (192, 234, 667, 1117[35]), and it is fitting that the instrument of salvation should be a boat, akin to those earlier destructive pine vessels which sailed from Troy, both before its fall in quest of Helen (232) and after the war, when the Greek heroes sailed—not home, but to their doom. The first antistrophe presents a preview of Helen back home, at the banks of the river (again, clearly the Eurotas) and in the company of the Leukippidai, her brothers' wives; or before the temple of Athena (cf. 228, 245); or joining in the choral festival in honor of Hyacinth whom (significantly) "the son of Zeus said to reverence" (1475). The stanza closes with a scene of Helen reunited with her daughter Hermione, lighting pine torches for her as she had had them lighted for her own marriage (638), but as she thought she would never do for the girl (282–83, 688 ff.). Strophe II is an "escapist" fantasy: the Chorus wish to fly with the migrating cranes who will announce Menelaus' return. What may seem at first to be merely decorative but irrelevant touches also turn out on closer examination to have thematic echoes elsewhere. Besides being a standard epithet for birds, *potanoi* (1478; *ptanai* 1487) recalls Zeus' winged onslaught upon Leda (18 ff., 216); both fly *di'aeros* (1478 = 216). The birds respond to a shepherd's call, or perhaps their leader is somewhat extravagantly compared to a shepherd (1485); in either case we are reminded of the shepherd Paris and his flocks on Ida (29). The birds are "partners in the racing of the clouds" (Dale's translation of 1488), related, that is, to Helen's cloud-image (45, 705, 707, 1219). They will skirt the constellations of the Pleiades and Orion (1489–90); the Dioscuri will be addressed as stars in the next stanza (1498; cf. 140), and will actually appear in this form at the end of the play (1664–65). Finally, the birds are to alight at the Eurotas (1492) and announce that "Menelaus, taker of Troy, is coming home." The second antistrophe is a prayer to Helen's brothers to bring fair breezes from Zeus (1505) which may speed the ship on its way.[36] The song closes with a rapid recapitulation of some of the

[35] Nauplius' characterization as *monokôpos* (1128) associates him with this image-pattern.

[36] *Rhothia* in 1503 echoes *rhothioisi* at the beginning, 1452; cf. 1269, 1575 and, by contrast, 1118. *Kyanochroa* (1502; compare the similarly euphonious *chiônochrôs*, 215) ~ *kyanoeides . . . hydôr* (179).

play's dominant motifs: the Twins are to dispel their sister's *dyskleia* for having contracted marriage with a barbarian, which was the retribution for "quarrels on Ida" (1506–8).

The choral odes, then, are seen to be carefully wrought, intricately interwoven with images and themes which highlight the action of the intervening episodes. There are, in addition, a number of themes subsidiary to the main plot which one would hardly wish to call 'comic.' The contrast, for example, between slave and master, free citizen and tyrant, is constantly reiterated and with too much insistence to be anything but seriously intended. Early in his opening speech Menelaus boasts that he led the Greeks to Troy, "not as a *tyrannos* leading the army by force, but as a leader of young Greek volunteers" (395–96); in this he represents a complete contrast to Theoclymenus. Teucer and Menelaus both make the natural mistake of referring to the "kingly" halls before them (144, 459), but the crone-doorkeeper disabuses them: it is a *tyrannos domos* (478), a phrase which Theoclymenus himself will later use about his establishment (1170). At the end of his opening scene Menelaus has this to add to his miseries, that, though a *basileus*, he must beg bread from *allous tyrannous* (511). Theoclymenus, then, shares the tyrant's status, which he had himself inherited from his father, with another *barbaros*, Priam (35); the legitimacy of Menelaus' own kingship stands in sharp contrast to these two. In addition, Theoclymenus behaves as the Greeks of this period expected a *tyrannos* would,[37] applying *hybris* to unwilling females like Helen (785); it is significant that in the next line Menelaus asks Helen who is trying to force her into marriage, "a private man of power, or one who rules tyrannically over the land?" (786). The same note is sounded twice more in succession (809, 817; cf. 1058). At the end, when he bows to a higher necessity and is, in effect, on his way to becoming civilized, Theoclymenus is dignified by the Dioscuri with the more respectable Homeric title *anax* (1643[38]). The difference between

[37] In Herodotus' "Debate on Constitutions," Otanes mentions, as one of the three greatest crimes of the tyrant, that he *biatai gynaikas* (Hdt. 3.80.5).

[38] Perfect consistency of terminology is not, however, maintained. Menelaus had referred to him as "lord of the house" (*domôn anakta*, 505; cf. 787), but that was before he had learned his true nature. In the scene where they are plotting their escape, *domois* in 1043 helps to explain Menelaus' reference to Theoclymenus as *anakta* (1044). Only once is he called *basileus* (1036).

Menelaus and Theoclymenus emerges clearly from the attitudes of their respective slaves. The crone's bad temper softens only long enough for her to imply that it is due to her fear of her master that she is adopting a fierce tone with Menelaus (482). Contrast with this Menelaus' slave-messenger commenting sententiously that "the one who does not have respect for his masters' affairs is base" (726); he then protests that, though of servile birth, he "numbers himself among 'noble' (*gennaioisin*) slaves, whose mind, if not their name, is free" (728–31). This theme, too, is rounded off appropriately at the play's close when Theocylmenus' *therapôn* interferes with his master's attempt to slay his own sister. "What? You, a slave, will rule your masters?", Theoclymenus asks in amazed disbelief (1630); "we have lost our rule and are ruled by others" (1638). But even the threat of death will not deter the servant from doing his duty as he sees it—he is, after all, the sister's servant as well.[39] Like Menelaus' slave, he protests his good intentions (1630, *phronô gar eu*) and his last words echo the earlier slave's *sententia* as well: "for noble (*gennaioisi*) slaves the noblest death is to die for their masters" (1640–41).

An attempt has been made by some critics to absolve Theoclymenus of any guilt by maintaining that Euripides is really in sympathy with him and, by contrast to the barbarian, holds up the Greek to ridicule, if not reproof. But this is misguided critical ingenuity, for the text makes it perfectly clear that justice is on the side of Menelaus and Helen, and not at all with Theoclymenus, who has aptly been described as "a cruel despot, willing to break any law, human or divine."[40] His hatred of Greeks has been alluded to earlier in the play (152 ff., 439–40, 468, 479–80); in this he is paralleled by the sinister and destructive figure of Nauplius (767, 1127 ff.). In addition, his "hunting" of Helen (63, 394, 545) is unlawful, for she had been left in the care of his father, Proteus, as a sacred trust, to be returned to her husband inviolate (*akeraion* 48, *asylos* 61 [applied by Menelaus to himself at 1587; cf. 449 and 975]). Proteus' wishes have thus far been honored, although there is a real danger that Helen may have to yield (833). That justice is entirely on the side of Helen and Menelaus emerges clearly from the

[39] He may have been one of the two attendants to enter with Theonoë; cf. 868 (the other was female, 865).

[40] Pippin 157.

Theonoë scene.[41] Helen reminds the priestess of her father's will that she be returned to her husband (910); she must then not betray her own sanctity and "purchase unjust favors" for her brother (902). The choice between an immoral brother (*mataiôi* 918; cf. *môriai* 1018) and a righteous father is easy: "if you, a prophetess, destroy your father's justice merely to keep 'justice' with your unjust brother—it is a disgrace to be skilled in divine lore but not know what true justice is" (919–32). Helen finally appeals to Theonoë's pride of descent (she had referred to her significantly as *eugenês* in the prologue, 10) and to the family name: "Imitate your just father's character.... The fairest *kleos* is for children nobly born to be at one with their parents' noble characters" (940–43). To this appeal Theonoë responds. She will try to live up to her maternal grandfather's high standard (1003–4), and will not defile her father's *kleos* (999); "there is a great shrine of justice in my nature (1002–3).... We would be acting unjustly if we shall not give her back.... My father would have, if he were alive" (1010–12). Theonoë's last words are to her dead father: "As far as lies in my power, you shall never have a reputation for impiety rather than piety" (1028–29). At the end of the play, Theoclymenus' attendant, in interfering with his master's violent lunge at his sister, does so in the name of these same virtues: piety (1632), justice (1633); Helen was given back, the servant maintains, to the one whom Proteus intended, her real *kyrios* (1634). These claims to justice are confirmed by the divine voices of the Dioscuri (1648–49, 1661, 1669, 1683) and are reinforced by an even higher sanction, *to peprômenon* (1646, 1660).

Finally, a theme which we are meant to take utterly seriously is the repeated outcries which the play makes against the evils of war. For all the surface brilliance of the action, the often witty dialogue and the hair's-breadth escapes, we are never for an instant allowed to forget that this is all being played out to a counterpoint of the tremendous destruction and human carnage of war. The poet's cry in the second antistrophe of the First Stasimon, "Fools, you who acquire a reputation for courage through war and with points of mighty spear... If it takes a contest of blood to settle disputes, strife will never depart from the cities of men..." (1151–57), has generally been

[41] For discussion of the Theonoë scene, see Zuntz 204 ff., and K. Matthiessen, "Zur Theonoeszene der euripideischen 'Helena'," *Hermes* 96 (1968–69) 685–704.

acknowledged as being wholly in earnest and not at all in jest, but there are other significant passages as well. Euripides not only joins the other dramatists in painting the horrors of war in vivid tones (365–74), he puts his finger on an even more horrible aspect of it: it is destructive of both "victor" and "vanquished." This "equality" or "impartiality," that is, futility and fatuity of war, the poet insists upon (109–10, 384–85, 608–9). The audience is not allowed to lose sight of the fact that the Trojan War involved immense suffering (55, 603, 621, 703, 716, 735, 876, 1013–16, 1446) and enormous loss of life, both at Troy (39–40, 52–53, 73–74, 109–10, 198, 248, 364 ff., 385, 610, 692–93, 750, 848–49, 970, 1122 ff., 1161) and during the Returns (128, 398–99, 539, 766 ff., 1126 ff.); that it all started as some gilded youth's amorous exploit (666–68); that, even so, the prize for which so much was risked and so much lost was a mere *phantom*, a cloud (33, 44–45, 582, 683, 705–7, 750, 1135–36, 1219–20).

Surely, too (and this recent commentators have almost totally ignored), the audience would have felt the deep relevance of this theme to their own situation in 412 B.C.[42] Given the futile, long-drawn hostilities of the Peloponnesian War and the recent débâcle in Sicily, it is difficult to read the play's numerous allusions to the Trojan War and its disastrous consequences in any but the most somber tone of voice. When Menelaus spoke of the "greatest army . . . not a horde driven forcibly by a tyrant but willing young men of Greece . . ." (393–96), who in the audience will not have thought of the thousands who set out from Peiraeus in the spring of 415? And how many will have associated with Helen's and Menelaus' plight, Greeks held captive in a foreign country, forced to devise a means of returning home, the loss of such of their kinsmen as may still have been alive in the quarries of Syracuse? "Though descended from free men I am now a slave,"

[42] A welcome exception is Conacher's remark: "There can be little doubt, here [lines 1151–64], of the solemn, even emotional tone of the old poet as he writes, in the bitter years of 413–12, of the mindless cruelty of settling differences by war" (Conacher 298). I agree completely with Alt's comment, "Man wird auch heir nicht vergessen dürfen, dass die Hel. ein Jahr nach dem Scheitern der sizilischen Expedition aufgeführt wurde, als man in Athen vielleicht über schiffbrüchige Generäle nicht nur lachen mochte" ("Zur Anagnorisis in der Helena," *Hermes* 90 [1962] 15–16). On the other hand, the search for topical allusions to the Peloponnesian War is carried to extreme lengths by H. Grégoire in his introduction to the Budé edition (*Euripide*, tome V[2] [Paris 1961] 11 ff.).

Helen had said (275); the phrase now takes on a new and more pathetic significance. Menelaus complains bitterly of having to beg sustenance from others, though he is a king: *all'anankaiôs echei* (512). There must have been many in the theatre who heard his next words, "nothing is stronger than dread necessity" (514), with a shudder of remorse for the fate of their fellow-citizens and allies who would not, unlike Helen and Menelaus, be returning home.

Additional Note on "Iphigeneia Taurica."

The parallels between *Helen* and *I.T.* have often been noted and, indeed, are too obvious to miss. Platnauer in his Oxford commentary on the latter play (1938) notes certain similarities of structure which, he says, "cannot be accidental" (p. xv). Besides, characters and situation find their mirror-images: Iphigeneia is an unwilling resident of a foreign land, Thoas a barbarian prince who slaughters Greeks; the two principals are unexpectedly re-united and escape—also by ship. The "moral" of both stories is the same: *deinai . . . hai gynaikes heuriskein technas* (*I.T.* 1032). There are, too, some surprisingly close verbal echoes: Iphigeneia had been whisked to her temporary home *dia lampron aithera* (29); the sea-nymph Leucothoë, the Dioscuri, Nereus and his daughters are all addressed together within the space of four lines (270–74); there even are passing references to "reedy Eurotas" (399–400), a "pine oar" (407–8) and Troy's universal fame (517, cf. *Hel.* 503–4). But what one misses is the insistent reiteration of theme that *Helen* exhibits and *I.T.* seems to be without the unity which its dominant themes give to *Helen*. Arguments for priority admittedly are dangerous, but it may be possible to suggest that the dominant motifs of *Helen*, like the basic situation, are adumbrated already in *I.T.* in a tentative and even unsure way; are then left to work their wonder in the poet's mind until they blossom more perfectly in *Helen*; in other words, that *Helen* succeeds *I.T.*, a conclusion which in fact seems to be reinforced by statistics for certain metrical phenomena (see Dale's introduction to *Helen*, xxiv–xxviii). How long was the interval between them remains uncertain; on the basis of her metrical analyses Dale suggested "414 as the most likely date" for *I.T.* (*ibid.*, xxviii), which may well be correct.