

# THE TWO WORLDS OF EURIPIDES' *HELEN*

CHARLES SEGAL

*Brown University*

## I

"The most entertaining of all tragedies . . . a play of adventure, full of wonderful happenings and appearances which clearly are much more suitable for comedy."<sup>1</sup> So wrote August von Schlegel of the *Helen* in

<sup>1</sup> I shall cite the following works by author or abbreviated title: Karin **Alt**, "Zur Anagnorisis in der Helena," *Hermes* 90 (1962) 6-24; William **Arrowsmith**, "A Greek Theater of Ideas," *Arion* vol. 2, no. 3 (1963) 32-56; Helen H. **Bacon**, *Barbarians in Greek Tragedy* (New Haven 1961); E. M. **Blaiklock**, *The Male Characters of Euripides* (Wellington, New Zealand 1952); Anne **Pippin** (Burnett), "Euripides' *Helen*: A Comedy of Ideas," *CP* 55 (1960) 151-63, reprinted in Schwinge (see below), but here cited from *CP*; D. J. **Conacher**, *Euripidean Drama: Myth, Theme and Structure* (Toronto 1967); A. M. **Dale**, ed., *Euripides, Helen* (Oxford 1967); Pierre **Gilbert**, "Souvenirs de l'Égypte dans l'Hélène d'Euripide," *AC* 18 (1949) 79-84; Cecil Page **Golann**, "The Third Stasimon of Euripides' *Helena*," *TAPA* 76 (1945) 31-46; John G. **Griffith**, "Some Thoughts on the 'Helena' of Euripides," *JHS* 73 (1953) 36-41; G. M. A. **Grube**, *The Drama of Euripides* (London 1941, reprint 1961); Gottfried **Hermann**, *Euripidis Tragoediae*, vol. 2, part 1, *Helena* (Leipzig 1837); Furio **Iesi**, "L'Egitto infero nell'Elena di Euripide," *Aegyptus* 45 (1965) 56-69; Richard **Kannicht**, ed., *Euripides, Helena* (Heidelberg 1969) 2 vols.; Richmond **Lattimore**, *Story Patterns in Greek Tragedy* (Ann Arbor 1964); Kjeld **Matthiesen**, "Zur Theonoeszene der Euripideischen 'Helena,'" *Hermes* 96 (1968) 685-704; Gilbert **Norwood**, *Greek Tragedy* (Boston 1920); Max **Pohlenz**, *Die griechische Tragödie*<sup>2</sup> (Göttingen 1954); L. A. **Post**, "Menander and the *Helen* of Euripides," *HSCP* 68 (1964) 99-118; Wilhelm **Schmid**, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, 1.3 (Munich 1940); E.-R. **Schwinge**, ed., *Euripides = Wege der Forschung* 89 (Darmstadt 1968); Friedrich **Solmsen**, "Onoma and Pragma in Euripides' *Helen*," *CR* 48 (1934) 119-21 (henceforth cited as **Solmsen**, "Onoma"); *idem*, "Euripides' Ion im Vergleich mit anderen Tragödien," *Hermes* 69 (1934) 390-419, reprinted in Schwinge, pp. 428-68 (henceforth cited as **Solmsen**, "Ion," and from Schwinge's volume); *idem*, "Zur Gestaltung des Intrigenmotivs in den Tragödien des Sophokles und Euripides," *Philologus* 87 (1932) 1-17, reprinted in Schwinge, pp. 326-44 (henceforth cited as **Solmsen**, "Intrigenmotiv," and from Schwinge's volume); Hugo **Steiger**, "Wie Entstand die Helena des Euripides," *Philologus* 67 (1908) 202-37; Hans **Strohm**, *Euripides. Interpretationen zur dramatischen Form = Zetemata* 15 (Munich 1957); A. W. **Verrall**, "Euripides' Apology (*Helen*)," in *Essays on Four Plays of Euripides* (Cambridge 1905) 43-133; Günther **Zuntz**, "Contemporary Politics in the Plays of Euripides," *Actus Congressus Madvigiani = Proceedings of*

1808.<sup>2</sup> Until fairly recently interpreters in one form or another have echoed his judgment. Nearly every one enjoys the *Helen*; but scholars, perhaps wondering, *more Aristotelico*, whether the pleasure it offers is of sort "appropriate" to tragedy, have been much disturbed by its comic or apparently comic elements. Gottfried Hermann granted the play a few moving scenes, but found it lacking the excitement of the *Iphigenia in Tauris* and wanting in the high passions which make a tragedy.<sup>3</sup> Paley, though he admired the *Helen*'s liveliness and variety, adjudged it "a good play, not perhaps great as a tragedy."<sup>4</sup> Decharme, after a brief analysis of the recognition scene, asked, "But where is the tragedy?"<sup>5</sup> Hugo Steiger regarded the whole work as a comic parody of the *Odyssey*, an escapist flight into fairyland amid the bleak years following the Sicilian expedition.<sup>6</sup> Verrall found its "spirit and tone" so "unique" in Attic drama that he developed what has become his most famous eccentricity to account for its singularity.<sup>7</sup> Norwood, writing in 1920, was nonplussed: the play was "in no possible sense a

*the Second International Congress of Classical Studies* 1 (Copenhagen 1958) 155-62 (reprinted in Schwinge, but here cited from the original publication and henceforth referred to as **Zuntz**, "Politics"); *idem*, "On Euripides' *Helena*: Theology and Irony," in *Euripide, Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* 6 (Vandoeuvres-Geneva 1960) 201-41 (cited henceforth simply as **Zuntz**). The text cited is generally that of Gilbert Murray in the Oxford Classical Texts, with a few deviations. A much condensed French version of this paper, with a somewhat different emphasis, was presented at the Sorbonne (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Ve Section) on Feb. 1, 1971; and I wish to thank MM. Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet for helpful suggestions on that occasion. For valuable and friendly criticism I thank also Professor Cedric Whitman.

<sup>2</sup> August Wilhelm von Schlegel, *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur*, Krit. Ausgabe von G. A. Amoretti (Bonn and Leipzig 1923) 1.123.

<sup>3</sup> Hermann, Praefatio, xiv-xv: "Haud sane optima haec tragoedia est, non quod non habet tristem exitum: nam in exitu nec vis tragoediae nec virtus posita est: sed quod nec gravis metus in ea, nec magna miseratio invenitur . . . Sed molles illae amoris inter coniuges testificatones, Helenae potissimum, tam diu viduae . . . ea pars fabulae sunt, quae magis quam caetera tragoediae convenit. Habent etiam orationes, quibus Helena et Menelaus Theonoam flectere student, virtutes suas, credique potest eas valde placuisse Atheniensibus . . . In moribus vero non est, quod magnopere admiremur, quia non magni animorum motus sunt."

<sup>4</sup> F. A. Paley, *Euripides* 2 (London 1874) 120.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Decharme, *Euripides and the Spirit of his Dramas*, transl. James Loeb (New York and London 1906) 248-50.

<sup>6</sup> Steiger, *passim*; see especially 225 and 218: "Man tut ihm Unrecht, wenn man es ernst nimmt."

<sup>7</sup> Verrall 43.

tragedy,"<sup>8</sup> and a passage like 1013-16 could only appear as "startling" in "this farrago of fairy-tale and false sentiment."<sup>9</sup> Age did not much mellow his judgment on the jejuneness of the play: the "pervasive effect of stale confectionery" was his opinion some three decades later.<sup>10</sup> Grube conceded that the play was "definitely tragic and full of pathos"; but, like Schlegel and Steiger, he found the total effect "frankly funny," "a comedy, and as such very amusing."<sup>11</sup> Wilhelm Schmid thought the *Helen* an effective piece of theater, but nothing more.<sup>12</sup> Zuntz, on the other hand, has ventured to call the *Helen* "Euripides' most brilliant play."<sup>13</sup> Faced with such a diverse array of opinions, one will readily agree with the author of the newest, and biggest, commentary on the play: "... Scarcely any Euripidean drama is so difficult to grasp and therefore so controversial as the *Helen*."<sup>14</sup>

The last decade has seen a significant shift in approach and evaluation. The studies of the form and technique of Euripidean drama by a number of German scholars have led to a greater appreciation of the intricacy and intellectual virtuosity of the later plays. Works like the *Ion*, the Taurian *Iphigeneia*, even the much maligned *Orestes* are now vouchsafed more than mere theatricality purchased at the expense of logic, psychology, or verisimilitude. They reveal a mind involved in continual experimentation and in the ingenious elaboration of new forms as the vessels of new ideas, a restless spirit playing incessantly with new combinations of convention and innovation to bring the problems of his time—often, *mutatis mutandis*, those of ours—into sharper focus and starker outline.<sup>15</sup>

The essays of Professors Burnett and Zuntz have been especially

<sup>8</sup> Norwood 260.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 262.

<sup>10</sup> Gilbert Norwood, *Essays on Euripidean Drama* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1954) 39.

<sup>11</sup> Grube 232 and 252 respectively.

<sup>12</sup> Schmid 515-16; see p. 516, note 1: "Der Geist dieser Tragödie ist durchaus theatralisch und ganz unphilosophisch."

<sup>13</sup> Zuntz, "Politics," 158.

<sup>14</sup> Kannicht 1.7. For other critical opinions see Alt, p. 8, note 3.

<sup>15</sup> See Strohm, 86: "Wenn man bedenkt, dass Euripides an die Ausarbeitung einzelner Formen ein geradezu 'wissenschaftliches' Bemühen gesetzt hat, wird man in der Form der *Hel.* das Ende eines langen Weges erkennen müssen. Verfehlt scheint es mir allerdings, ein solches Ergebnis mit Absinken in Routine und Theaterkonvention gleichzusetzen." See also Arrowsmith 37 ff.

important for the reappraisal of the *Helen*. Drawing upon the brief but valuable remarks of Solmsen in 1934, they have given the themes of illusion and deception their rightful place in the seriousness of Euripides' dramatic conception and have brought to deserved prominence the role of Theonoe and the theological and philosophical issues of the play.<sup>16</sup> This approach also informs the recent discussions of the play by Conacher and Kannicht. Indeed, the latter, with his citations of early Stoic epistemology, takes this approach to its logical conclusion.<sup>17</sup> There is, as Matthiessen has recently warned, some danger in going too far and forgetting that the *Helen* (*pace* Verrall) is also a play for the stage. Yet the case for the more serious and philosophical view of the play has been successfully argued from a number of points of view. It is the aim of the present study to explore further and to expand this line of approach.

## II

The philosophical side of the *Helen* as a "comedy of ideas" is only half the story. The *Helen* is also a romance. In addition to its setting in

<sup>16</sup> On the importance of Theonoe and the themes connected with her see also E. Schlessinger, *Gnomon* 37 (1965) 341-2. Matthiessen accepts the essential seriousness of the play, but wisely warns against going too far in extracting a systematic philosophical or "higher" religious conception for all of Euripides' thought (see 703-4). Still, his attempt to limit Theonoe's role to that of a "Nebenfigur" (697) is not fully successful. Her limited appearance on stage is counterbalanced by the fact that she is spoken of from the beginning to the very end of the play, and it does not answer the interpretations of Zuntz and Burnett merely to concede that she is "eine eindrucksvolle Gestalt" (697). Dale seems to waver between both views: "One thing seems clear: it *mattered* to Euripides that this play should be seen to be more than a melodramatic piece of intrigue, rich in paradox and excitement but somewhat blunt morally" (xiv); "There is much play with such antitheses as *soma/onoma*, and flashes of irony from this source point the dialogue; but there is no metaphysical or psychological depth here, nor would anything of the kind be either conceivable or appropriate" (xvi). Lattimore strikes a balance in the introduction to his translation, *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, 3, *Euripides* (Chicago 1959) 486: "Better to take this play neither too seriously nor too lightly. It is romance, but not without recognition of realities, even realities new to tragedy." Anne P. Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived: Euripides' Plays of Mixed Reversal* (Oxford 1971) 76-100, appeared too late to enter into my interpretation of the play. She now takes the play as essentially a parody of tragedy which is, however, saved from utter frivolity by the tragic, Antigone-like figure of Theonoe (pp. 95-96, 99-100). From the comic side of the play see also the recent essay of Bernard Knox, "Euripidean Comedy," in *The Rarer Action: Essays in Honor of Francis Fergusson* (New Brunswick, N.J. 1971) 75-77.

<sup>17</sup> See Kannicht 1.64-65.

the Egyptian never-never land, the play also includes the reunion of long-separated lovers, the loss and recovery of identity, the supernatural knowledge of a magician-like princess, and (like Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* or *Cymbeline*) a calumniated heroine whose virtue will carry her and her beloved through the perils of delusion and restore them to their own kingdom to live happily every after.<sup>18</sup>

Euripides has intertwined these hoary and popular themes of the romantic plot with the sophistic intellectualism of his own day. The combination is extraordinary. The closest parallels are perhaps Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and Aristophanes' *Frogs*. But Euripides has pushed the two sides, romance and intellectualism, to their furthest extremes. He has thus created a Chimaera-like *tour de force* in which amusement and puzzlement follow close upon one another.

The analogies with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Tempest* cited by Schlegel, Verrall, and others were largely pejorative, supportive of their dismissal of the *Helen* because it is not "tragic" and therefore not "serious."<sup>19</sup> The idols of high seriousness and dramatic realism have tended, until recently, to usurp the whole of the domain of criticism, banishing the more conventional and unrealistic forms, like romance, to the remote corners.<sup>20</sup> Northrop Frye's distinction between "Iliadic" and "Odyssean" critics is helpful here. Classicists, like Aristotle and "Longinus," tend to be "Iliadic."<sup>21</sup> Romance, on the other hand, requires a suspension of critical judgment and an acceptance of non-common-sense situations and conventions. Thus an approach to the *Helen* based on psychological realism, like that of Professor Karin Alt recently, while it can elucidate individual scenes, misses the heart of the play because psychological realism, however helpful for the parts, is not an appropriate response to the whole. The play has suffered from a peculiar kind of *reductio ad absurdum* from which it is only slowly beginning to recover. What has long been observed of Shakespeare is equally true here: "It is easy to make a Shakespearean play look ridiculous by refusing to accept its convention."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> On this female figure in romance see Northrop Frye, *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* (New York 1965) 63-65.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Verrall 46; Schlegel (above, note 2) *loc. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> See Frye (above, note 18) 9; also his *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton 1957) 51-52.

<sup>21</sup> Frye, *A Natural Perspective* (above, note 18) 12.

<sup>22</sup> *Loc. cit.*

One of the recurrent devices of romance is the division between two worlds, a "real" world of pain and trouble and an "ideal" world of peace, serenity, simplicity, rustic ease.<sup>23</sup> The plot often centers on the passage between these two worlds and especially on the hero's return from the "ideal" to the "real" world. By the very fact of envisaging a second world superior to the humdrum everyday world in which most of us live, romance operates within a framework of antitheses. Not every romance need develop this potential of an antithetical structure, but the possibility is inherent in the convention, and the *Helen* exploits it very fully.

With this contrast between real and ideal worlds the *Helen* combines the theme of recognition. The romance and the recognition play are distinct forms, but they have affinities which allow happy marriages to occur.<sup>24</sup> Recognition easily fits into the movement in romance between different worlds or different levels of truth. Since the passage between worlds and the recovery of a lost loved one and/or a lost truth also correspond to the awakening from a deluded state and to the re-acquisition of a lost vitality, romance makes frequent use of the archetypes of death and rebirth. The pattern is already established in the *Odyssey* and ingeniously varied in the late Shakespearean romances.<sup>25</sup> But the *Helen* provides the first extant example in Western literature of the full-blown fusion of romance and recognition themes.

The passage between real and ideal worlds, when compounded with the mistaken identities and delusions of the recognition play, invites paradox and irony to a high degree. In the *Helen* the irony and paradox have a bitter tone,<sup>26</sup> especially, as we shall argue, toward the end of

<sup>23</sup> See the discussion of the three realms of late Shakespearean romance in Frye, *A Natural Perspective* (above, note 18) chap. 4, especially 136-59.

<sup>24</sup> See Lattimore (above, note 1) 53: "The theme of the *Helen*, beyond all other extant Greek plays, is illusion. All dramas which are truth-plays: the foundling stories; the stories of lost persons recovered, of mistaken identity; the stories of character defamed and vindicated; all have this in common. A lie has been perpetrated on the dramatic world. However lively the activity, it is all shaped toward the revelation of the truth: which comes, indeed, after the darkest moment."

<sup>25</sup> See Northrop Frye's remarks on the different groups of characters in *The Tempest*: "Each goes through a pursuit of illusions, an ordeal, and a symbolic vision": N. Frye, ed., *William Shakespeare, The Tempest* (Baltimore 1959) Introduction, 15.

<sup>26</sup> For a good appreciation of the bitterness of the *Helen*'s irony see Paul Friedländer, "Die griechische Tragödie und das Tragische," *Die Antike* 2 (1926) 105: "... So bitter, dass von dorthier das Komische überall einen bösen und schneidenden Ton empfängt."

the play. Like comedy, the *Helen* plays upon a contrast between normality and abnormality, the expected and the fantastic. Yet the "normal" world in the background (especially in the lyrics) is not the every-day life of a Dicaeopolis or a Peithetaerus, but the hellish world of Troy, with the grim associations carried by Troy from the *Iliad* and *Agamemnon* to the *Ajax* and *Troades*.

The central irony of the *Helen* lies in its antithesis of appearance and reality.<sup>27</sup> What is the "real" nature of the world? What is "word" (*onoma*) and what "fact" or "deed" (*pragma*)? Helen is herself the symbol of this mysteriousness of reality, a quality which she retains from the *Odyssey* to the adaptation of the Euripidean drama in Hofmannsthal's *Ägyptische Helena*<sup>28</sup> and Seferis' *Ἑλένη*.

Helen has a double existence: she lives in the world of both appearance and reality. Men have treated an empty cloud-image as the "real" Helen and have fought a long and bloody war to possess it—a "real" war in the "real" world, with the ultimate reality as the price, death. The "real," or at least the corporeal, Helen, however, dwells in remote Egypt which, despite its geographical factuality, is closer to the island of an Alcinous or a Prospero than to an actual place. Even this Egyptian fairyland has its divided aspect. It has its "fairy princess," but also its ogre-like, dangerous ruler. Together this royal pair present opposed images of virginal purity and lustful (if vulnerable) desire.

The ultimate irony in Euripides' treatment of these basic antitheses lies in the fact that the play never completely resolves the question of which aspect of reality is the "true" one. We cannot be certain that the potential order and purity conveyed by the figure of Theonoe may

<sup>27</sup> See Burnett, 152: "The language, the plot, and the very form of the *Helen* all have been made to express this tension between what is and what only seems to be." See also Zuntz 223 ff.; Conacher 290-93; Kannicht 1.57 ff., especially 62-68; also Hans Strohm, "Trug und Täuschung in der euripideischen Dramatik," in Schwinge (above, note 1) 367-68; Lattimore (above, note 16) 485: "The dominant theme is paradox, illusion, surprise, all to be summed up in the relation of Helen to that other self, the idol who is not, but in some way is, Helen herself."

<sup>28</sup> See for example the conclusion of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "Ägyptische Helena," *Gesammelte Werke*, 4, *Dramen* (Frankfurt a.M. 1958) 301-2, or the end of Act 3 of Goethe's *Faust*, part 2, e.g., the words of Phorkyas, "Die Göttin ist nicht mehr, die du vorlorst, / Doch göttlich ist's!"

not be an illusion, a pleasant, hopeful, even necessary illusion, but an illusion none the less.<sup>29</sup>

These questions about the nature of reality cut deep into the concerns of the late fifth century. Is there a stable reality? If there is, can we know it? If so, can we communicate it: is its nature reducible to language? These are the questions that Gorgias and his contemporaries were raising (*FVS*<sup>6</sup> 82B3). They are also, at least in part, the questions which the *Helen* raises, for this play, with its recurrent antitheses between appearance and reality, *onoma* and *pragma*, is simultaneously about the nature of reality and the nature of language and art.<sup>30</sup>

Behind these issues lies a deeply felt rift in the late fifth century between man and his world, between the constructs (broadly speaking, *nomos*) with which man orders and organizes the phenomena around him and the alien substance of that realm (*physis*) which he seeks thus to order.<sup>31</sup> One result of this familiar cleavage between *nomos* and *physis* is a loss of confidence in the belief that the traditional forms of thought and action are adequate to grasp and to deal with what is now felt to be the "truth" or the "reality." For men like Protagoras, Gorgias, Antiphon the Sophist, successors to the still (relatively) innocent logic of the Eleatics, "truth" and "reality" (*alêtheia*, *ta onta*, *einai*) are now problematical terms.

In the *Hippolytus* and the *Medea* Euripides had explored this rift in its psychological dimensions: the split between inner and outer worlds.<sup>32</sup> In the *Bacchae* he was to explore radically its social as well as its psychological implications: the division between the order of society and the potential disorder within man, within the very man who, as king, embodies that order.

<sup>29</sup> For further discussion see below, section IX.

<sup>30</sup> See Solmsen, "*Onoma*," *passim*; Griffith 36-37.

<sup>31</sup> See Arrowsmith 38: "What Euripides reported, with great clarity and honesty, was the widening gulf between reality and tradition; between the operative and the professed values of his culture; between fact and myth; between *nomos* and *physis*; between life and art." For these matters with other reference to fifth-century literature and thought see Kannicht 1.57-60; Felix Heinemann, *Nomos und Physis = SchweizBeitrAlt* 1 (Basel 1945) 46-58; W. K. G. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, 3, *The Fifth Century Enlightenment* (Cambridge 1969) 55-134.

<sup>32</sup> For the correlations between inner and outer worlds and appearance and reality see my essay, "Shame and Purity in Euripides' *Hippolytus*," *Hermes* 98 (1970) 278-99.



In the *Helen* the psychological and social implications of these conflicts are marginal. Yet its antitheses between appearance and reality, *onoma* and *pragma*, are deeply akin to these critical rifts between *nomos* and *physis*. If works like the *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, and *Bacchae* ask whether the ultimate reality is reconcilable with human order and human society, the *Helen* asks the anterior question: Is reality perhaps so problematical, so divided against itself, that we cannot even say what "reality" is at all, or cannot even be sure that anything is "real"?<sup>33</sup>

The *Helen* thus has a more epistemological and ontological focus than the above-mentioned plays, with their extreme crises in the realms of action and society. This fact accounts in part for the playfulness and questionable "seriousness" of the drama. The theory of relativity can be taken more lightly than immediate issues of good and evil. But the *Helen's* antitheses between truth and appearance embrace the ethical side of the questions about the nature of reality as well as the epistemological questions about the role of language, myth, and art in communicating that reality. One cannot fully separate the meaning of the play as a criticism of life from its meaning as a criticism of art.

### III

The recently discovered Oxyrrhynchus fragment relating to Stesichorus' *Palinode* makes it certain that Euripides has taken the essential outlines of the *eidolon* motif from Stesichorus.<sup>34</sup> Already in Stesichorus Helen remained with Proteus in Egypt while the *eidolon* went to Troy. But, whereas Stesichorus' *eidolon* seems to have served primarily to exonerate Helen, Euripides' has the philosophical function of asking what reality is. This shift of emphasis may well be Euripides' innovation in the myth. To secure this new emphasis he has combined the *eidolon* with the theme of recognition (*anagnôrisis*).

<sup>33</sup> Compare also the way in which the divided nature of the gods (who embody, in part, the nature of our reality) is related to divisions within the psychological and moral realms in plays like the *Electra*, *H.F.*, and *Ion*. See also Arrowsmith 47 ff.

<sup>34</sup> *P.Oxy.* 2506, frag. 26, col. I, 2-16 (available also in *PMG* frag. 193, Page). For discussion see Kannicht 1.30-33 and 26-48 on the mythical traditions generally; Dale xvii-xxiv. Previous discussions of the myth, however, are still useful, especially Hermann's collection of passages in his *Praefatio*, viii-xi; see also Pohlenz 1.382-83 and 2.159; Schmid 502-4 with the literature there cited; Conacher 286-89.

Symptomatic of this same shift of emphasis is the deliberate gemination of elements in the plot, beginning with the two Helens. There are also two scenes of a Greek warrior landing in Egypt (68 ff. and 386 ff.), two confused meetings with Helen (72 ff., 546 ff.), two barbarian rulers, two scenes of deceiving Theoclymenus (1165 ff., 1390 ff.), two promises of complicity in silence (1017–23, 1387–89), and so on. This doubling of motifs reflects the mirror-like confusion with which “reality” in this play confronts the human participants.<sup>35</sup>

There are also doublings of a different nature in the metaphors and the rhetoric. These are less important as far as the actual movement of the plot is concerned, but in fact they are even more significant for the play’s major antitheses. There is a “living” and “dead” Menelaus, an apparent and actual “justice,” and two tales about the Dioscuri (138–42):

Τε. τεθνᾶσι καὶ οὐ τεθνᾶσι· δύο δ’ ἐστὸν λόγῳ.  
 Ελ. πότερος ὁ κρείσσων; ὦ τάλαιν’ ἐγὼ κακῶν.  
 Τε. ἄστροις σφ’ ὁμοιωθέντε φάσ’ εἶναι θεῶ.  
 Ελ. καλῶς ἔλεξας τοῦτο· θάτερον δὲ τί;  
 Τε. σφαγαῖς ἀδελφῆς οὐνεκ’ ἐκπνεῦσαι βίον.

Everything that touches Helen most intimately—as her brothers here—has this divided quality. Helen’s interlocutor in lines 138–41, the rough and practical-minded warrior Teucer, breaks off abruptly, “Enough of tales” (*ἄλις δὲ μύθων*, 143). But in fact other *mythoi* central to Helen’s identity recur with the same puzzling doubleness. In her opening lines she raises doubts about the tale of her own birth (*εἰ σαφὴς οὗτος λόγος*, 21). Twice again in the early part of the play she returns to the dubieties surrounding her and her brothers’ origins (see 256–59, 284–85, where note *φασίν* in 259 and *λεγομένω* in 284).<sup>36</sup>

In order to emphasize these themes of reality and illusion, Euripides begins the action not immediately with Menelaus, which would be the

<sup>35</sup> On these double elements in the plot and their significance see Strohm 85–86; Zuntz 223; Pohlenz 1.386. Also Burnett 155 with note 6 on p. 162; Norwood 263.

<sup>36</sup> The authenticity of lines 256–59 has been much questioned. See the discussions in Dale and Kannicht, *ad. loc.*, both of whom regard the passage as an interpolation. For a cogent recent defense see Robert Renehan, *Greek Textual Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass. 1969) 35–36, who transposes 256 after 259 to solve the problem of the repeated questions and the repeated *γάρ* in 257 and 260.

obvious course, but with Teucer, a "protatic" character of only peripheral relevance to the plot. Since at least Gottfried Hermann, commentators have objected to Teucer. He is, they allege, a necessary, but clumsy dramatic expedient who serves only to inform Helen of events at Troy and especially of Menelaus' supposed death.<sup>37</sup> Some scholars have found Teucer so disturbing that they have suspected an elaborate political allegory in his presence on the stage.<sup>38</sup> It is true, as Alt and Kannicht have pointed out, that the Teucer scene also serves to reveal the hatred felt toward Helen among the Greeks and thus to deepen her sense of shame and guilt, hence adding new force to the theme of the horror of war.<sup>39</sup> Yet the main purpose of the scene, as Steiger saw in 1908, is to continue and dramatize the dichotomies of appearance and reality broached in the prologue.<sup>40</sup>

The stichomythia between Helen and Teucer, especially in 117-22, provides the first full development of the antitheses between appearance and reality. It also presents those antitheses in a vocabulary which refers unmistakably to current epistemological discussions, as is clear from lines 119 and 122 and the unusual abstraction, *dokêsis* here.<sup>41</sup> The very arbitrariness and superfluity of the exchange between Helen and Teucer and the very looseness of its connection with the action reveal, in fact, how much this play moves on the level of pure intellect as well as that of fictive action, "ideas" as well as plot. Euripides' bold creation spans both philosophic *logos* and dramatic *mythos*.

At the end of the scene with Teucer the antitheses take on a new coloring. "Although you have a body like Helen's," Teucer concludes, "you haven't a mind like hers, but one very different (*ἑλένη*

<sup>37</sup> See Hermann, Praefatio, xi-xii: "... Persona non necessaria ac propemodum inutilis, nisi ut ex eo captam esse Troiam, Menelaumque non esse Argis nec Spartae Helena cognoscat." See also Schmid 507, who regards Teucer as a Job's messenger who, however, serves to create dramatic tension by raising the hope of a happy ending.

<sup>38</sup> See Henri Grégoire's introduction to the Budé edition, *Euripide 5* (Paris 1950) 17 ff.; also D. L. Drew, "The Political Purpose in Euripides' *Helena*," *CP* 25 (1930) 187-89. For salutary criticism of these approaches see Zuntz, "Politics," 156-58.

<sup>39</sup> Alt 12; Kannicht 1. 54.

<sup>40</sup> See Steiger 221-22, who, however, takes the scene, as he does everything in the play, as comic only. See also Kannicht 1.62, for the relation of Teucer to the problem of *doxa* and *alêtheia*.

<sup>41</sup> "A cue word, characteristic of this play only," says Zuntz 223 of *dokêsis*. See also Grube 336, and Conacher 290 ff.

δ' ὅμοιον σῶμ' ἔχουσ' οὐ τὰς φρένας / ἔχεις ὁμοίας, 160–61). He then departs with a curse for the other “Helen” and a blessing for the woman before him (162–63). Here the epistemological antithesis ramifies into another antithesis between outward reality and inward, “body” (*sôma*) and “mind” (*phrenes*). The epistemological and ontological question begins to extend into psychological and ethical dimensions as well.

To achieve this fusion, Euripides interweaves the basic antithesis of appearance and reality with a parallel antithesis of death and life. That combination is already implicit in the scene with Teucer, for the dialogue moves quickly from the questions of “appearance” and the trustworthiness of vision (117–22) to the question of whether Menelaus is alive or dead (123–33). It is a touch of fine pathos on the part of Euripides, always the dramatic poet, that the dialectical caution and subtlety which Helen exhibits in the former passage completely desert her in the latter. Wholly a woman where her emotions are concerned, she accepts Teucer’s report of Menelaus at face value and responds not with the sophistic distinctions of 117–22, but with the emotional language of heart-felt despair: ἀπωλόμεσθα (133).

This interweaving of the two sets of antitheses becomes especially important in the second half of the play. Menelaus will “appear” to be dead, but his fictitious death (λόγῳ) is the means to real (ἐργῶ) life (cf. 1050–52).

It is, however, the *eidolon* which first brings the two antitheses together in the prologue (30–41). Hera, angry because she lostt he competition with the other two goddesses, “turned to empty air” (ἐξηνέμωσε, 32)<sup>42</sup> Helen’s union with Paris and gave him “an image with the breath of life in it” (εἶδωλον ἔμπνουν οὐρανοῦ ξυυθεῖσ’ ἄπο, 34) which she had fashioned from sky. Thus Paris, though “seeming” to have her, had only “empty appearance” (καὶ δοκεῖ μ’ ἔχειν— / κενὴν δόκησιν, οὐκ ἔχων, 35–36). “But the plans of Zeus fall in with these sufferings” (36–37) and bring war upon “the wretched Trojans” (37–41). The important word *dokêsis*, here given the revealing epithet *κενή* (36), contains the antithesis between appearance and reality. The language of the entire passage, with its repeated words of air and wind,

<sup>42</sup> On the verb see Dale *ad loc.* and especially Kannicht *ad loc.* (2.27) for the “ironischen Hintersinn.” Also Conacher 291.

stresses the unreality of the *eidolon*: ἐξηνέμωσε (32), οὐρανοῦ . . . ἄπο (34), ἐν πτυχαῖσιν αἰθέρος / νεφέλη καλύψας (44-45). The *eidolon*, however, has a moral dimension too. It introduces the theme of war, the pettiness of its causes (31), the emptiness of its goals and victories, the suffering of its victims (39).<sup>43</sup> This moral problem has an extension in the divine realm in the relation of Hera and Zeus to the *eidolon*. The goddess, spiteful, jealous, savage—still bearing traces of the fearful deity of the *Heracles Mad*, the embodiment of the most primitive anthropomorphism—uses the *eidolon* only for her personal revenge. Zeus, however, has “counsels” (*bouleumata*) of larger scope. These, though harsh in the present, work toward an ultimate and necessary good (36-41) and mean well for Helen herself (44-45). The *eidolon*, therefore, holds the balance, as throughout the play, not only between appearance and reality, but also between images of cosmic chaos (Hera) and cosmic order (Zeus).<sup>44</sup> Yet even here the nature of the reality of the universe is not entirely clear or unitary, for Zeus’ “counsels” are twofold. On the one hand stands the large, impersonal purpose of lightening earth’s burden (40), but on the other hand stands the honoring of Achilles, with the anthropomorphic echoes of the first book of the *Iliad*. Zeus is the lofty Olympian who protects Mother Earth, but he is also the seductive white-skinned swan who flashes through the air to lie with Leda (215-16). Euripides is aware of both the beauty and bestiality of the gods.

Teucer, an actual participant in the horrors of the war from which Helen, for all her sympathy (39), has been so far removed, raises the moral side of the *eidolon* motif to a high pitch of emotional intensity (72-75):

ὦ θεοί, τίν' εἶδον ὄψιν; ἐχθίστην ὁρῶ  
 γυναικὸς εἰκὼ φόνιον, ἧ μ' ἀπώλεσεν  
 πάντας τ' Ἀχαιοὺς. θεοί σ', ὅσον μίμημ' ἔχεις  
 Ἐλένης, ἀποπτύσειαν.

<sup>43</sup> Kannicht 1.56, calls attention to the theme of τὰ ἀφανῆ and τὰ ἀπόντα in Thucydides' treatment of the deluded hopes of martial success (6.9.3 and 6.13.1).

<sup>44</sup> Note the contrast between Hera's “exnubilating” of Paris' adulterous bed in 31 and Zeus' design which enables Helen to “keep her bed pure for Menelaus” in 47. For the contrasts between Zeus and Hera in connection with the antinomies in the divine world of the play generally see Burnett 161 and Conacher 294-95, 301-2.

The strong language of his curse, *θεοί . . . ἀποπτύσειαν*, in 74–75 crashes the resentment and the bitterness of lived suffering into the remote divine purposes of 31–41 and the distant safety of Helen. Though Teucer does not yet know anything about the *eidolon*, his language (*ὄψιν, ὄρω, εἰκὼ φόνιον, μίμημα*) takes up the *eidolon* theme from 31–41 and binds it tightly into the talk of vision, appearance, reality in the ensuing stichomythia (especially, as noted above, 117–22). The passage begins on an emotive-ethical note and comes only gradually to the cooler, intellectualist and epistemological concerns of *dokêsis*. As it does so, however, it weaves together these two aspects of the appearance-reality dichotomy, the speculative and the ethical.

The fusion becomes stronger as the play proceeds. In the stichomythia between Helen and Menelaus which just precedes their recognition the epistemological themes are again a major concern (575–83). Gradually, however, Helen's account of the *eidolon* expands into the questions of the futility of the war (*αἰθῆρ, ὅθεν σὺ θεοπόνητ' ἔχεις λέχην*, 584) and the nature of the divine order (Hera in 586). The messenger, who enters to confirm Helen's story, brings the two aspects of the antitheses together even more pointedly. His statement of the *pragma-onoma* dichotomy (601) leads at once to a concise recognition of the futility of the war: *λέγω πόνους σε μυρίους τλήναι μάτην* (603). The whole speech of 605–21 repeats the moral questions of the divine order raised in the prologue (31–46).<sup>45</sup> In fact, the words of the departing *eidolon* which the messenger quotes in 608, *ὦ ταλαίπωροι Φρύγες*, echo the "real" Helen's sympathy for the "wretched Trojans" in 39—echo, that is, the moral theme of the suffering inflicted by war. A few lines later, however, we return to the intellectualist atmosphere of the *dokêsis* theme: *δοκοῦντες Ἑλένην οὐκ ἔχοντ' ἔχειν Πάριον* (611).

The emotional life of the characters receives its due in the lyric *kommos* in which Menelaus and Helen can express their joy in rediscovering one another (625–97), a passage which also provides some necessary relief from the confusion of identities and antitheses. But the moral themes of the war and the divine order return, interwoven with the questions about reality and illusion and extended to Menelaus. The gods deceive us, he says, (*πρὸς θεῶν δ' ἤμεν ἡπατημένοι*, 704), and

<sup>45</sup> Note the verbal echoes between lines 44 and 605 and lines 45 and 606.

then he echoes the messenger's words about the emptiness of the cloud-image over which they have toiled so long (705-6; cf. 603). The divine realm itself is full of strife (θεῶν τρισσῶν ἔρις, 708). God is a baffling and many-faceted thing, the messenger replies (ὁ θεὸς ὡς ἔφν τι ποικίλον / καὶ δυστέκμαρτον, 711-12). At this point in the play, when the two main protagonists are brought together on the stage, the fusion between the epistemological and moral-theological sides of the antitheses is complete.

The vanity of dying for a cloud-image recurs in the messenger's denunciation of prophets. Calchas failed to tell the army the truth though "he saw his friends dying over a cloud" (749-50). This speech has bothered critics,<sup>46</sup> but the theme of prophecy is relevant to the play's close interweaving of the intellectualist and ethical strands of appearance and reality. Prophecy, like the sense of sight in the scenes with Teucer and Menelaus earlier, is both a way of ascertaining the nature of reality and (for the Greeks) a practical means toward decision and action. The inward and forward-looking vision of the warriors at Troy (prophecy in Egypt is a different matter)<sup>47</sup> proves as faulty as the simpler vision of the organs of sight and as fraught with moral consequences of disastrous scope. The important word μάτην, "in vain," recurs here in 751 to mark the affinity with the ethical and emotional coloring of war's vanity in 603 and 705-7.<sup>48</sup>

The *eidolon* thus brings together a cluster of closely related themes: man's illusions about reality, the emptiness of war, the problem of the nature of the gods and of a simple anthropomorphic conception of the gods.

All of these themes come together once more in the first stasimon (1107-64). It proceeds from the "sacred *eidolon* of Hera" (εἶδωλον ἱερὸν *Hpas*, 1136) to the question of the nature of God (1137 ff.). The latter meditation brings in its train the intellectualist vocabulary of vision (1140) and "clarity" (*to saphes*, 1149; note also *antilogos*, 1142).

<sup>46</sup> For example Grégoire (above, note 38) 12.

<sup>47</sup> For the contrast between the prophets of 744-57 and the true "vision" of Theonoe see Burnett 158 and Matthiessen 696.

<sup>48</sup> Note too Theoclymenus' failure to grasp the veracity of his sister's prophecy in his threat at 1626: τοίγαρ οὔ ποτ' ἄλλον ἄνδρα γεύσεται μαντεύμασιν. For the emphasis and pathos that ἄλλως can carry see the remarks on its significance in the *Hippolytus* by B. M. W. Knox, "The *Hippolytus* of Euripides," YCS 13 (1952) 27.

The chorus then continues with the play's most outspoken and most famous piece of moralism, the powerful denunciation of war in 1151-57.<sup>49</sup>

This fusion of the epistemological and ethical sides of the *eidolon* motif—the problems of truth and of the emptiness of war—continues to the very end of the play. There, however, it shifts to the figure of Theoclymenus. Unphilosophical and unreflective though he is, he exclaims on the emptiness of war when Helen tells how the cloud-image vanished into the aether (1219-20):

Ελ. νεφέλης λέγεις ἄγαλμα; ἐς αἰθέρ' οἴχεται.  
Θε. ὦ Πρίαμε καὶ γῇ Τρῳάς, <ὤς> ἔρρεις μάτην.

Theoclymenus' echo in 1220 of the messenger in 603 and Menelaus in 706-7 is an intentional and subtle piece of irony. The delusiveness and futility of war expressed through the *eidolon* cling to Theoclymenus even after every one else has been enlightened. Near the end of the play, when the flesh-and-blood Helen has departed on an all too solid ship cajoled from Theoclymenus' own navy, the king speaks of her as if she were the cloud-image which flew off into the empty aether (1515-16):

Αγ. Ἐλένη γὰρ βέβηκ' ἔξω χθονός.  
Θε. πετροῖσιν ἀρθεῖς ἢ πεδοστιβεῖ ποδί;

Theoclymenus' "lifted on wings" in 1516 is "an ironical *adynaton*," as Kannicht points out;<sup>50</sup> but it also echoes the messenger's words of nascent illumination in 605-6:

βέβηκεν ἄλοχος σὴ πρὸς αἰθέρος πτυχὰς  
ἀρθεῖς ἄφαντος . . .

Thus it contrasts the recognition of Helen and Menelaus in that earlier scene (605-710) with the frustration and delusion of the empty-handed

<sup>49</sup> See Grube 347: "... It may not be too fanciful to feel that the poet, serious for the length of this ode, is making us feel that all wars are fought for phantoms." Steiger 230 says that this passage "war dann jedem Publikum aus der Seele gesprochen." See also Grégoire 23; Kannicht 1.55-57; Post 102; Zuntz, "Politics," 156-58. One may compare also frag. 369 from the *Erechtheus*, frag. 453 from the *Cresphontes*, and Aristophanes frag. 109K from the *Georgoi*. On the last two see also Luigi Alfonsi, "Dal teatro greco alla poesia romana," *Dioniso* 42 (1968) 5-8. Seferis' *Ἐλένη* is perhaps the most eloquent testimony to the moving force of this passage.

<sup>50</sup> Kannicht *ad loc.* (2.401).



Theoclymenus here. Simultaneously it brings up again the whole atmosphere of confusion and the uncertainty of human knowledge developed in the first half of the play. Up to the intervention of the *deus ex machina* Theoclymenus reenacts the delusions of Menelaus. In so doing, he keeps alive to the end the questions of reality and illusion focused by the *eidolon* theme.

## IV

Helen's beauty too mediates between the epistemological and the ethical themes, illusion and war. It signifies, as it did for Goethe and Hofmannsthal, a promise of happiness in a strange and violent world. Yet this beauty is also an object to be coveted and possessed. Hence, as Helen says again and again, it is also a curse (see 27, 235-36, 261-63, 304-5, 383-84). It carries with it the hint of the *eidolon*'s vacuity (see 262)<sup>51</sup> and memories of irremediable loss and fearful suffering. This ambiguous status of Helen's beauty—and of beauty, *kallos*, generally in the play—is another aspect of the question of the nature of reality. Is even the supreme beauty of a Helen, object of long and hard wars, not only illusory, but even destructive?

It is natural that the "real" Helen, whose "image" has destroyed Troy, should feel more keenly than any other character the horror of its fall and pity for its victims (see 39, 109, 196-202, 229-40, etc.). Yet as the embodiment of a purer kind of "beauty" Helen also appears against the background of a quasi-pastoral "green world" of Pans, echoing flutes, Nymphs and Naiads (179-90, 349-50). Even here, however, the peacefulness of these settings is tinged by suggestions of violence and specifically the violence of the rape of Persephone to which Helen's rape is closely parallel. When Hermes carried Helen away (*ἀναρπάσας δι' αἰθέρος*, 246), she was plucking flowers by the Eurotas, as Persephone, in the Homeric Hymn, was plucking flowers in "that fair field of Enna."<sup>52</sup> In a later lyrical passage, shortly after another reference to her homeland (349-50), Helen again speaks of a

<sup>51</sup> The wish in 262 that she could wash her beauty away like a painting (or like a painted statue) uses the same word (*agalma*) as that used for the empty phantom in 705 and 1219 (*νεφέλης ἄγαλμα*).

<sup>52</sup> See *h. Cer.* 6-18; Ovid, *Met.* 5.390-401; in general my *Landscape in Ovid's Metamorphoses* = *Hermes Einzelschriften* 23 (Wiesbaden 1969) 34 with note 65.

myth of rape and addresses the "maiden Callisto" (375).<sup>53</sup> Though rape is probably not involved in the story of Kos to which she next alludes (381–83), Kos too has suffered violence "because of beauty" (*καλλοσύνας ἔνεκεν*, 383).<sup>54</sup>

Hermes' "snatching up" of Helen in 246 ff. is the obverse of the *eidolon* theme and involves the same antitheses of appearance and reality, "name" and "body." Hermes, says Helen, carried her off "through the aether" (*δι' αἰθέρος*, 246), and we recall the aether-theme of the prologue (cf. 36 and 44–45). Immediately after these words Helen explains that her "name" (*onoma*) was a subject of "empty talk" at Troy (*μαψίδιον ἔχει φάτιν*, 251).<sup>55</sup>

The "rape" theme also raises the related questions of the nature of the gods and their connection with human morality. Hermes' "snatching up" (*ἀναρπάσας*, 246) replaces the actual "rape" of Helen by Paris (cf. *ἀναρπαγὰς*, 50).<sup>56</sup> In the prologue Helen described her removal to Egypt as part of the plans of Zeus (46–50). There it reflected the larger order of a directing divine power. In the parode, however, the chief agent is Hera, representative of the chaos of anthropomorphic gods. It is she, says Helen in 241–43, who has sent Hermes. Thus the removal of Helen to Egypt appears under two different aspects. In the prologue it appears as a benign protection; in the parode it appears as the disruptive act of a jealous goddess with accompanying images of rape in the background. One recalls also Apollo's seduction of Creusa—also as she was plucking flowers (*Ion* 888–96)—an act equally ambiguous in its implications about the gods' relation to morality.

The two aspects under which Hermes' "snatching up" of Helen appears restate the prologue's antithesis between Zeus and Hera in a new form and carries to another level the divisions within the fabric of reality. This division corresponds also to the two sides of the Persephone myth which lies in the background: death *versus* rebirth, joy

<sup>53</sup> Verrall 122 strongly objected to this passage as "Alexandrian poetry, not Attic, learned, frigid, and hollow at the heart"—a judgment which the interpretation here offered should mitigate.

<sup>54</sup> For the myth of Kos see Dale and Kannicht *ad loc.*

<sup>55</sup> For the problem of the interpretation of this passage see Kannicht *ad loc.* (2.85).

<sup>56</sup> The noun is a *hapax legomenon*, as Dale *ad loc.* observes.

*versus* sorrow, the beauty of Helen's song (183–91) or the flowers she plucks (243–45) *versus* the horror of Troy. Yet in raising the question of these divisions within the divine order, the parade also places the sufferings of Helen against the background of a universal archetype of rape and restoration, loss and recovery, and hints at a large rhythmic pattern to be reenacted in her sufferings. At the same time the violence of Paris' act (see 50) looms even larger against the mythical background of the rape of Persephone.

The two sides of Helen's beauty appear especially strongly in this section of the parade. Her compassion and the grace of her lyrics present its positive value. Yet, as she says, her beauty excites violence and strife among the men who would possess her: Paris sailed *ἐπὶ τὸ δυστυχέστατον / κάλλος, ὥς ἔλοι, γάμων / ἁμῶν* (236–38).<sup>57</sup>

This disastrous possessiveness toward beauty has its analogue in the divine world too. The origins of the catastrophe lie in the three goddesses' contest "about beauty" (*κάλλους πέρι*, 23). The repetition of *kallos* a few lines later, but now referring to *Helen's* beauty (*τοῦμὸν δὲ κάλλος*, 27), makes the parallel unmistakable. Later, Theonoe traces Aphrodite's enmity to a desire to avoid the appearance of "having bought (the prize of) beauty" (*μηδὲ πριαμένη φανῇ / τὸ κάλλος*, 885–86). The goddesses are as covetous of "beauty" as the human characters, and the two levels are complementary manifestations of the same disruptive forces working both within the human soul and within the world-order.

The antithesis between the two aspects of beauty involves that same rift in the nature of reality which we have already discussed: Zeus on the one side, the petty goddesses on the other. That antithesis is expressed on another level in a contrast between Egypt and Troy. "Beauty" appears in the very first line of the play, with Egypt's *καλλιπάρθενι ῥοαί*. Helen's beauty, felt as a positive quality, can rest innocently in Egypt, while its destructive force operates through the *eidolon* at Troy. The play's very first word, *Νείλου*, creates, as Zuntz remarked, the setting of "a far away, fabulous land."<sup>58</sup> The paradox

<sup>57</sup> The text is uncertain here, though *ἔλοι*, important for the present interpretation, seems sound: see Dale and Kannicht, *ad loc.* Kannicht reads Wilamowitz' emendation *γάμῳ*, which does not substantially alter the sense.

<sup>58</sup> Zuntz 202: "That first verse, nay, the very first word—*Νείλου*—has pleasantly transferred him into a far-away, fabulous land."

of the "white melting snows" which feed the "maiden-lovely streams of Egypt's warm fertile fields" in the third line evokes the atmosphere of wonder and fascination with which the Greeks were wont to regard the sources of the Nile.<sup>59</sup> The marine setting of lines 5-15, the suggestive names of Psamathe and Nereus, the mysterious power of Theonoe with her double name (reminiscent perhaps of the double names of Homeric epic) all conduce to the same effect.

Verrall, giving, as often, the wrong answers to the right questions, asks why Proteus should be the king of Egypt.<sup>60</sup> The answer may be simply Euripides' desire to recreate something of the fairy-tale mood of *Odyssey* 4 and of the *Odyssey* generally. Like the Odyssean Phaeacia, Egypt is a mysterious point of transition between worlds, a point where the past can be relived and in some sense transformed. Helen and Theonoe, like the mysterious and helpful goddesses and knowing women of the *Odyssey*—Leucothea, Circe, Calypso, Nausicaa, Arete, even the Helen of *Odyssey* 4.219-64 and 15.125-30—hold the keys to life and death, loss or recovery of the past from which the hero is separated.

The removed beauty of Egypt where Helen laments like a Nymph or Naiad among echoing mountains (184-90) bears a strong similarity to the gentle, serene setting of Helen's Sparta in 243-45 and 349-50. There are other verbal associations between Egypt and Sparta. The "streams of the Eurotas" (*Εὐρώτα ρόας*) in 124 and 162 recall the "streams of Nile" in line 1. The echo of that first line is even stronger in the expression *ροαὶ / τοῦ καλλιδόνακος . . . Εὐρώτα* in 492-93, especially as *Νείλου παρ' ὄχθας* immediately precedes (491). Egypt's tranquillity, like the Spartan home of Helen before Paris' intrusion, has associations of a happiness and an innocence either outside of or anterior to the complexities of passion and war. Both places have traits of an Eden-like world of youth and sheltered maidenhood. They exemplify a *locus amoenus*, like Ibycus' "grove of the Maidens" or Hippolytus' meadow, where a fragile and virginal beauty takes refuge

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Hdt. 2.20-28; Eurip. *Archelaus*, frag. 228. See also Bacon 159; Dale *ad vs.* 3.

<sup>60</sup> Verrall 73. Steiger 202-8 has fully demonstrated and illustrated Euripides' indebtedness to the *Odyssey*, but his interpretation of the data (Euripides' parody of the epic) is not necessarily to be accepted.

from a harsher world.<sup>61</sup> Here too the associations of the Persephone myth behind 243–45 are again relevant.

That aspect of the figure of Helen which is innocent and faithful has a natural kinship with the serenity of this Egyptian-Spartan setting. Egypt's recent king was "the most chaste of mortals" (πάντων . . . σωφρονέστατον βροτῶν, 47). His *sôphrosynê* stands at the opposite pole from the evil reputation of the Trojan "Helen" which torments the "real" Helen. Here, in his kingdom, she can "preserve her bed pure (ἀκέραιον) for Menelaus" (48); and one is again reminded of those virginal *loci amoeni* cited above.

There is, however, a difference between the Eurotas and the Nile. The former has a concreteness and a local familiarity which set it apart from the make-believe atmosphere of distant Egypt. Egypt, therefore, is the ideal symbol for the exploration of the tensions between reality and appearance. It lies between Troy and Sparta, between mortals and gods, between a fabulous and an actual geography. Herodotus had impressed the stamp of his incomparable charm upon the remote and fanciful qualities, the *πλεῖστα θωμάσια*, which so delighted him in Egypt (2.35.1); and Euripides has exploited the imaginative and symbolical possibilities.

The contrast between Egypt and Troy is also the contrast between *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. Indeed, Egypt's "lovely-maidened streams" of line 1 contrast sharply with the death-filled "streams of the Scamander" in lines 52–53:

ψυχαὶ δὲ πολλαὶ δι' ἔμ' ἐπὶ Σκαμανδρίους  
ῥοαῖσιν ἔθανον . . .

The contrast is even more pointed for line 53, with its opening *psychai pollai* is surely meant to recall the proem of the *Iliad* and the "many strong souls of heroes" (*pollas . . . psychas*) sent down to Hades by the war (*Iliad* 1.3–4).<sup>62</sup>

This contrast between Troy and Egypt becomes a matter of visual and scenic effect when Teucer steps upon the stage. The worn,

<sup>61</sup> Ibycus, frag. 5 Page = 6 Diehl; *Hippol.* 73 ff. For other parallels see my *Landscape* (above, note 52) 24, 46, 68–70.

<sup>62</sup> Unhomerically, however, is the notion of these *psychai* "dying," as Kannicht notes *ad loc.* (2.32).

ravaged warrior is astounded by the lushness of Egypt and the richness of the palace (see 69). Helen's allusion to "the fields of Nile" (*Νείλου* . . . *γῡας*, 89) both echoes the description of the prologue (3) and contrasts with Teucer's description of the deaths at Troy (94 ff.). These antitheses between the romance-like Egyptian setting and the Trojan realities of exile and death are, in turn, another facet of the contrast between the "real" Helen and the "death-dealing image" (*εἰκὼ φόνιον*, 73) of the Trojan Helen whom Teucer fancies that he sees before him (73-75), or, differently put, between *sôma* and *phrenes* (160-61).

It is now clear that the play's central antithesis between appearance and reality has a number of different ramifications. The meaning of the *Helen* reveals itself in terms of this basic structure or core of antithesis, to which more and more elements are seen to cohere as analysis probes deeper. Those which have so far emerged can be presented in the following diagram:

| <i>Reality</i>                            | <i>Appearance</i>   |
|---|---|
| Real Helen                                | <i>Eidolon</i>  |
| Zeus                                      | Hera  |
| Beauty as positive good                   | Beauty as a curse and source of strife<br>(the three goddesses) |
| Helen's removal to Egypt as<br>protection | Helen's removal to Egypt as rape                                |
| <i>phrenes</i>                            | <i>sôma</i> (160-61)  |
| Innocence                                 | Guilt   |
| Egypt                                     | Troy  |
| <i>Odyssey</i>                            | <i>Iliad</i>  |
| Life ← Persephone →                       | Death   |
| Myth (173 ff., 243-45)                    |   |

This simplification should not suggest that the themes here presented in sequence are subordinate one to another. They are not so much logical deductions from a single antithesis as simultaneous aspects and expressions of that antithesis at other levels and in other areas.

## V

Generally speaking, the male characters of the play stand on the negative side of these antitheses, the female on the positive. The division is

reminiscent of the *Odyssey* with the prominence which that poem gives to clever and mysterious women. But they are also related to the exotic flavor of the Egyptian setting. In this strange world the male, heroic values of mainland Greece, perpetually kept before us in the theme of the Trojan war, prove ineffectual and even encumbering. Hence Menelaus' discomfiture by the Portress is not just a bit of humorous stage-play, but dramatizes the alienness and inappropriateness of those martial, Trojan values which Menelaus embodies. The incongruity of the king in rags reflects not only a loss of personal identity, but a questioning of cultural identity.

The opposition to war which this rejection of heroic values implies is part of a larger issue important in late fifth-century thought, an increasing movement away from the public toward the private realm.<sup>63</sup> Within the public world of the *polis* action is the exclusive prerogative of men. Women have no place. In Euripides' fictional Egypt—as in Herodotus' "real" Egypt—the situation is just the reverse.<sup>64</sup> The men may bluster and threaten, but the real power lies with the women. In the *Lysistrata* of the following year Aristophanes exploits a similar inversion and makes some of the same criticisms of traditional Greek values. In both these plays masculine aggressiveness has to yield place to the life-fostering, private, mysterious ways of women. In Euripides' play the hero whose pride lies in the open challenge and the man-to-man conflict on the field of battle or (in fifth-century terms) in the straightforward shock and clash of matched lines of hoplites can be saved only by one woman's guile and another's complicity. Thus at the point when Menelaus is dissuaded from his initial impulse to violence, he hands the job of persuasion over to Helen as "woman's work" (*σὸν ἔργον, ὡς γυναικὶ πρόσφορον γυνή*, 830).

Menelaus is not, therefore, "merely a character of comedy throughout," as some have considered him.<sup>65</sup> He has an essential function

<sup>63</sup> For this subject in relation to Euripides see the useful remarks of Solmsen, "*Ion*," 453–56.

<sup>64</sup> Hdt. 2.35; Soph. O.C. 337–41.

<sup>65</sup> See especially Blaiklock 87–93; also Steiger 212–14, Grube 339–40. Griffith 37 allows him a certain measure of heroism beyond the role of the *miles gloriosus*: "... He is somewhat limited intellectually, but an excellent man to do the right thing in a crisis. . ." Hermann, Praefatio, xv, is somewhat less flattering: "Menelaus magnificentius quam pro rebus gestis virtutem suam laudans, sed fortis moriendi consilio, in quo tamen nihil

within the antithetical structure of the play. Just before his entrance Helen, in an extended lyrical passage (362–85), dwells on the horrors of Troy's fall. Menelaus enters in lines ringing with heroic names, as he boasts of his generalship and his forces at Troy (392–99). Almost casually he alludes to his destruction of the city (. . . χρόνον ὅσον περ Ἰλίου / πύργους ἔπερσα, 401–2). His very first lines, with the reference to the victory of Pelops at Olympia and the bed of Aerope calls up the darker side of heroic legends and the sins and violence in the great heroic families like the Tantalids. The “contests” which he mentions in his first two lines (especially the phrase ἀμίλλας ἐξαμιλληθείς, 387) express that confident masculine pride in action which is soon to receive so rude a shock. The first words he addresses to Helen allude to “contests” too; with his martial mentality he sees her movement toward the tomb as a kind of “contest” or “struggle” (ἡμιλλημένην, 546).

Menelaus' monologue (483–514) after the fiasco with the Portress proves this blunt and simple warrior no match for the problems of “name” and “act” raised in the Egyptian world (see *onoma* at 487, 490, 498).<sup>66</sup> He falls back on the “simple name” of the heroic past (see ἀπλοῦν δὲ Τυνδάρειον ὄνομα κλήζεται, 494) and the renown of his “name” (502) as the one who “lit the glorious flames of Troy” (503–4):

κλεινὸν τὸ Τροίας πῦρ ἐγὼ θ' ὅς τ' ἤψά νιν,  
Μενέλαος, οὐκ ἄγνωστος ἐν πάσῃ χθονί.

In a setting where war and Troy are called into question, an identity defined by Troy's fall is highly problematical. “Glorious armies” (453), brilliant cloaks (423–24), the pomp of generalships (392–96, 503–4) have all been lost on the seas which separate Troy from Egypt (see 400, 423–24).<sup>67</sup>

admiratione dignum, non praesente periculo.” See also Verrall 89–90. On the serious side and the pathos of his situation see Alt 15–16, who calls attention to the unhappy associations of shipwreck for Athenians after the Sicilian disaster; Wolfgang Schade-waltdt, *Monolog und Selbstgespräch = Neue philologische Untersuchungen* 2 (Berlin 1926) 231–32 provides a formal analysis of the elements of pathos in Menelaus' speech of 483 ff.

<sup>66</sup> See Alt 20; Burnett 153; Griffith 38.

<sup>67</sup> Verrall characteristically considers Menelaus' loss of his garment merely as a “joke” (p. 97). For a different view see Burnett 152.



Helen's beauty and Menelaus' warlike prowess are in some ways complementary; and the pair is destined, after all, to be reunited. Yet the mysteriousness of Egypt brings out all the latent oppositions and places them, at least part of the time, on opposite sides of the central dichotomies. The contrast between Helen's lament over the war and Menelaus' entrance (363-402) dramatizes differences to be richly developed in other ways.<sup>68</sup>

These differences appear especially sharply in the ways in which they use the words "glory," "disgrace," "shame" (*kleos*, *aischynê*, *aidôs*, and related words). For Menelaus, confused in an unfamiliar world, the certainty of his "Trojan glory" becomes virtually an obsession.<sup>69</sup> The adjective *kleinos* appears in his opening lines and recurs frequently in his first scene (453, 502; cf. 494). His *aischynê* or *aidôs* lie in having lost his army, regal trappings, the external insignia of rank, for a beggar's rags (see 414-17). For Helen the case is exactly the reverse. Her *kleos* is *aischron* (135), and she laments its effects on her mother and daughter. She feels her *aischynê* bitterly (66-67, 201-2, 687, 697). She is *δυσκλής* (270). Her *onoma* is a source of grief and pain (199), not pride and comfort (cf. Menelaus at 502). Troy is the center of her *aischynê* and *dyskleia*, as it is of Menelaus' confident *kleos* and "boasting" (*κόμπος*, 393).

Helen is not, to be sure, entirely free of the theatrical heroics of Menelaus. She too wants to die "nobly" and gain *doxa* (see 298 and 841).<sup>70</sup> But this concern with her fame in the public world plays a much smaller role in her characterization than in her husband's. Behind it stands always an intense consciousness of shame. Euripides has built upon the self-consciousness and guilt of the Iliadic Helen,<sup>71</sup> even though, in a typically Euripidean paradox, he is following the anti-Homeric version of her story.

These contrasts cut below the surface of the two characters' situations to larger, representative attitudes behind them. Menelaus' orientation

<sup>68</sup> See Matthiessen 691-92. For a good analysis of Menelaus' entrance here along other lines see Alt 14-15.

<sup>69</sup> Blaiklock 91. See also Burnett 153.

<sup>70</sup> On the passages see Steiger 211-12. Compare the parody in Aristoph., *Thesm.* 868. Lines 299-302 may be interpolated, but 298 is probably genuine: see Kannicht, *ad loc.*; but *contra* Dale, *ad vs.* 297.

<sup>71</sup> See Alt 10-11.

is all toward the outer world of action. The "contests" he mentions in his opening lines (386–87) are emblematic of his whole vision of the world. Helen's world-view has an inward dimension. This contrast is, in turn, an aspect of that between appearance and reality, "body" and "spirit" (see 160–61).

The central section of the play defines the differences in a context of new urgency. Confronted with the problem of escaping from Egypt, Menelaus resorts to the rhetoric of Troy (*ἄνανδρά γ' εἶπας Ἰλίου τ' οὐκ ἄξια* (808). He rejects any "shaming" of his *kleos* (845) or any "blame" (*ψόγος*, 846) he might incur (also 948–49, 993). Helen, however, feels "shame" in a more deeply moral and inward sense (922), and speaks of the moral bases of her *kleos* (926–28):

*Ἐλένην γὰρ οὐδεὶς ὅστις οὐ στυγεῖ βροτῶν  
ἢ κλήζομαι καθ' Ἑλλάδ' ὥς προδοῦσ' ἐμὸν  
πόσιν Φρυγῶν ᾤκησα πολυχρύσους δόμους.*

One may contrast Menelaus' *ἀπλοῦν . . . ὄνομα κλήζεται* at 494 (cf. also the messenger at 720–21). A little later Helen even defines the "noblest fame" (*kleos . . . kalliston*) as lying in ethical character (*tropoi*, 941–43).

The couple's response to Theonoe follows the same pattern. Menelaus threatens to stain Proteus' tomb "with streams of blood" (*αἵματος ῥοαί*, 984). The phrase suggests the violation of the sheltered serenity of Egypt's *kalliparthenoi rhoai* (line 1). Helen, on the other hand, appeals to the memory and the goodness of Proteus (909–16, 940–43) and invokes justice and morality throughout her speech (cf. 894–943, especially 919–23). Menelaus also calls on Proteus before he utters his threat (961–68); but, characteristically, he stresses Proteus' *kleos*, his reputation, rather than his moral character (*εὐκλεέστατον*, 967; *κακῶς ἀκοῦσαι*, 968).

Menelaus' solution to the problem of escape is violent and, as Helen calmly points out, wildly unrealistic.<sup>72</sup> He will "act" (cf. *δρῶντας*, 814) even if it means his death.

<sup>72</sup> It is mistaken to regard this scene merely as "quite delightful comedy," as does Blaiklock 90; so also Grube 344–45. The high pathos of the scene was enthusiastically appreciated by Wieland, who considered its "Ausdruck stiller Grösse, Gefühl und Energie" moving "wie vielleicht keine andere Stelle in irgend einer Tragödie, die ich kenne" (1808): cited by Steiger 211, who has a good discussion of the interplay of life and death in the passage (210–11).

To this death-bent desperation Helen opposes the resiliency of Odyssean guile and adaptability. She plays Odysseus to Menelaus' Achilles. "Hope" (*elpis*, 815, 826), "device" (*méchanê*, 813), and "persuasion" (*peithein*, 825, 828) are the key words. The contrast of her "hope" and "persuasion" to Menelaus' "death" is especially marked in the stichomythies of 814-15 and 824-26. Though Helen agrees readily enough to the death-pact of 835-54, it is Menelaus who pronounces the decisive word, *θανέσθαι* (836) and expounds the idea at length and with enthusiasm (842-54). Later, in a striking passage, Menelaus invokes Hades as an "ally": so many men has he sent there with his sword (969-71).<sup>73</sup> In the deliberations which follow upon Theonoe's conversion to their cause, Menelaus again proposes violent and murderous expedients (1039-46). He finally acquiesces in Helen's *sophia* (1049-52), though his heart again warms to thoughts of an eventual combat (1072). In both of these scenes of plotting Helen appears as the saving female figure of superior guile which Euripides had exploited in the *Iphigeneia in Tauris*.<sup>74</sup> Ironically, Euripides' innocent Helen has a model in her mythic opposite, the chaste Penelope.

We can hardly expect that Menelaus, having sacked Troy for Helen's sake, will give her up easily (cf. 806). Even so, his possessiveness has a distinctly negative significance. His determination to keep the "real" Helen reenacts his earlier possessiveness toward the false: he clings to the real Helen with the same desperation and delusion with which he clings to the *eidolon* in the early part of the play. In the first case his possessiveness affirms a choice of appearance over reality. In the second it accompanies a choice of death over life. When Helen urges, "It is better to leave me than have my marriage bed kill you" (807), Menelaus adduces the honor of his Trojan success (808).<sup>75</sup> His relation to both the real and false Helens brings together illusion, death, war,

<sup>73</sup> The striking quality of Menelaus' rhetoric was warmly admired by Verrall 104: "Here is a grand bold handling of big ideas! Here is something to humble Aeschylus' Clytaemnestra and her cry to the fiends of Hell . . .," citing *Eumen.* 106.

<sup>74</sup> See *I. T.* 1017 ff., especially 1032 on the *technai* of women. Theoclymenus at 1621 complains that he has been "caught by women's *technai*." See also *Danae*, frag. 321, and in general Solmsen, "Intrigenmotiv," 332-33; Walter Zürcher, *Die Darstellung des Menschen im Drama des Euripides* = *SchweizBeitrAlt* 2 (Basel 1947) 158-59.

<sup>75</sup> On the life-giving side of Helen's reaction to the situation in 805 ff. see Steiger 210: "In ihrer sorgenden Liebe will sie ihn lieber wieder verlieren, als ihn der Gefahr des Todes ansetzen."

Troy, and male aggressive values on the same side of the play's basic dichotomies. The Menelauses of this world in a sense always cling to phantoms: life is full of prizes to be possessed, enemies to be killed, glory to be won. Yet after all their slaughter what they have in their hands may turn out to be an empty "cloud's image" (705)—unless a saving figure like Helen recalls them through her *sophia* to "hope" and the gentler remedies of "persuasion" and "device."

This division between husband and wife who so passionately desire reunion is another of the paradoxes created by the "two worlds" of the play. It is latent in the couple's very first scene together. In the other recognition plays of about this time, the *Ion* and the *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, the lost pair feels an instinctive affinity, a spontaneous communication between one another before they actually know who they are.<sup>76</sup> This is a common feature of romance and is exploited, for example, by Shakespeare frequently in the late romances. In the *Helen* this feature of the recognition theme is lacking. Helen's first response is to flee in fear (541 ff.). Menelaus in turn indignantly rejects her advances when she realizes who he is (564 ff., especially 567). To some extent Euripides is simply varying the formula of *anagnôrisis*. But the lack of the instinctive, subconscious recognition may also indicate a gulf separating the two characters. Despite their emotional ties, conceptually they belong on different sides of the play's antithetical camps.

Menelaus' recognition of Helen is, in fact, a double *anagnôrisis*.<sup>77</sup> The joyful discovery of his real wife is balanced by the grim, mocking discovery of the emptiness of the prize of war. All in vain, all for a phantom (704-10).

Winning Helen back from the dangers of Egypt has a similar double aspect. The recognition of Helen and the challenge posed by her rescue revive the hero's lost identity. But this Trojan identity is in itself one of the problems framed by the play's antithetical structure. Menelaus holds to a potentially destructive, as well as to a saving aspect of his lost heroism. To regain Sparta, the heroic martial self which

<sup>76</sup> See Alt 25 and in general 17-20 on the recognition scene. On the parallels and differences between the techniques of recognition in the *Helen* and the other plays of *anagnôrisis* see also Solmsen, "Ion," 428 ff.; Schadewaldt (above, note 65) 23-24; and most recently Peter Rau, *Paratragodia. Untersuchung einer komischen Form des Aristophanes* = "Zetemata" 45 (Munich 1967) 53-56, with the literature there cited.

<sup>77</sup> See Kannicht 1.54-55; Post 104.

possessed the false Helen dies, to be reborn in a battle for the real Helen. The first stage of the process is the loss of the false Helen and with this the loss of the accoutrements of his Trojan identity. The *eidolon* of the false Helen leaves of its own accord. The real Helen, in the second stage of the process, becomes the active figure. She will lead through a symbolical ordeal of death and rebirth (1049-52) the warrior who brings death and fire to cities and calls upon Hades (969 ff.).

In the parade Helen is likened to the divinities of nature, Nymphs and Naiads who sing of Pan's marriage (186-90). She offers tears of grief to Persephone (173-78), but she herself is like the Maiden carried to the Underworld (see 243-51) who, as a later ode assures us, returns to the upper world amid the rejoicing of all nature (130 ff.). The figure of Helen is itself a survival of a Mycenaean (or earlier) vegetation goddess and was so worshipped at Sparta.<sup>78</sup> On one level her Egyptian confinement preserves her purity (see 48); but on another it is a kind of living death for her, as she in fact says (τοῖς πράγμασιν τέθηκα, τοῖς δ' ἔργοισιν οὐ, 286). Euripides, with his repeated references to Persephone here and his interest in primitive cults in the later years of his life (especially in the *I.T.* and *Bacchae*), may have known of this aspect of Helen and incorporated it into the structure of his play.

Helen appears both as the grieving, bereft Mother who mourns her dead consort and as the Daughter or Maiden whose restoration re-vivifies in its train the sources of life hidden under the earth. Menelaus, she laments, was "among the corpses under the ground" (344). When he finally casts off the spell of the phantom Helen, his life is "renewed," as the messenger's joyful words imply (722-25):

νῦν ἀνανεοῦμαι τὸν σὸν ὑμέναιον πάλιν  
καὶ λαμπάδων μεμνήμεθ' ἄς τετραόροις  
ἵπποις τροχάζων παρέφερον· σὺ δ' ἐν δίφροις  
ξὺν τῷδε νύμφῃ δῶμ' ἔλειπες ὄλβιον.

The lines suggest not only the rebirth and renewal (*ἀνανεοῦμαι*) of a *hieros gamos*, but also the movement from Hades to the light of the

<sup>78</sup> See M. P. Nilsson, *The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology* = *Sather Classical Lectures* 8 (Berkeley 1932) 73-76, 170-71 and his *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* 1<sup>2</sup> (Munich 1955) 211; also Golann, 37-38 with the literature there cited. For the significance of the Persephone archetype in the play see Burnett 156; Iesi 57 ff., Lattimore 52-53.

marriage torches. When the messenger again addresses Menelaus it is with a new respect for his authority: he calls him, for the first time by the Homeric title, "lord," *anax* (744), having previously addressed him only as "Menelaus" (599, 700).

Helen is not herself entirely free from delusion. Despite her confident defense of herself against Teucer's inversion of appearance and reality (118-22), she becomes—like Teucer and Menelaus—a victim of this confusion too (576-90). She herself suffers the pain of "seeming to have, not having" (592; cf. 35-36, 611, 705-6). But this state is short-lived for her. It is her power to manipulate illusion and reality, *logos* and *ergon*, that secures true "life" for herself and her husband (1049-52). It is she, for example, who administers to Menelaus the bath and the change of garment (1382-84). Here too the ritually enacted restoration of life is combined with the ancient theme of the renewal of the maimed, weakened, or otherwise impotent king.

Like some of Shakespeare's heroines (one thinks of Portia in the *Merchant of Venice* or Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well*), she is the leader in the game of interchanging appearance and reality. She is herself the principal force in the rhythm which carries the action from sterility to union, sorrow to joy. Her powers are natural and feminine rather than magical; but she stands on the lower rung of a ladder which leads to Shakespeare's Prospero. And behind her, mysteriously enlarging her stature and significance, stands the great archetype of Persephone, whose "doublet" Helen's Mycenaean original was.

With these contrasts between Menelaus and Helen we may extend the diagram of antitheses as follows:

|                           |                  |
|---------------------------|------------------|
| Helen                     | Menelaus         |
| Reality                   | Illusion         |
| Feminine values           | Masculine values |
| <i>Odyssey</i>            | <i>Iliad</i>     |
| Peace                     | War              |
| Egypt                     | Troy             |
| Shame over Troy           | Glory in Troy    |
| Private realm             | Public realm     |
| Inward life (cf. 160-61)  | Outward action   |
| Unselfishness (cf. 805-7) | Possessiveness   |
| Persuasion, hope, device  | Force            |
| Rebirth (Persephone)      | Death            |

## VI

Theoclymenus stands on the same side of these antitheses as Menelaus. His dominant traits are violence and delusion. The first time that he is mentioned Helen describes him as "hunting" for her marriage (*θηρᾷ γαμεῖν* *με*, 63). On his next appearance, that hunting is literal rather than metaphorical, and it is bloody as well: "He's away," says Helen, *ἐν φοναῖς θηροκτόνοις* (154). The bloodthirstiness continues in the next line, which extends the killing (*-ktonos*) to bigger game: "For he kills (*kteinei*) whatever stranger from Greece he lays hands upon" (155). Hunting recurs (*θηρᾷται*, 545) and is combined with an allusion to "savagery" (*ἄγριος*, 544) when Helen spies the rude-appearing Menelaus and takes him for an agent of Theoclymenus (544-45).

These passages prepare our expectations for Theoclymenus' actual appearance on stage. After a brief address to his father's tomb he speaks of "nooses for wild beasts" (1169) and shortly thereafter of punishing wrongdoers with death (1172). The hunting image returns at 981 (*θηρᾷ*), 1169 and 1175 (*θηρώμενον*), with "death" following in the next line (1176).<sup>79</sup> Thinking that Helen has escaped, he calls loudly for horses and chariots (1180-83), only to check himself a moment later: "Hold, for I see those we are pursuing here in the halls and not in flight" (1184-85). There is humor here, of course, but there is a serious thematic relevance too. Like Menelaus (808-54 and 1039-52), Theoclymenus rushes precipitately to violent deeds and then, rather sheepishly, has to retreat. Like Menelaus too, he exemplifies the inadequacy of heroic values even in the kingdom over which he rules.

His opening obeisance to his father's tomb, comic as it may seem,<sup>80</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Theoclymenus has affinities with the figure of the "black hunter" discussed by P. Vidal-Naquet, "Le chasseur noir et l'origine de l'éphébie athénienne," *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* (1968) 947-64; English version in *PCPS* 194 (1968) 49-64.

<sup>80</sup> R. P. Winnington-Ingram, "Euripides, *Poiêtês Sophos*," *Arethusa* 2 (1969) 131, ingeniously suggests that Euripides here intends "a hit at the conventional treatment of locality in the *Choephoroi* . . ." For the lighter view of Theoclymenus in general see Verrall 52 ff., and Steiger 212-16: to the latter the last third of the play is all comic parody, an "Überlistungskomödie." Kannicht 1.69-71 sees the deception of Theoclymenus as the tragicomic inversion of the tragic split between truth and appearance in the first half of the play.

also has a function in the structure of the play. It exhibits that same kind of material possessiveness as Menelaus expressed toward Helen in 806–54. Theoclymenus needs the tangible remains of Proteus at his very doors for his daily salute. The idea is grotesque, and Euripides is doubtless having fun with the figure of the exotic king on the tragic stage. Theoclymenus completely fulfils the possibilities of a bizarre, *outré* idiosyncrasy that one might expect of an Egyptian monarch.<sup>81</sup>

Not only does Theoclymenus' material piety contrast markedly with the piety of his sister (see below), but it also plays directly into Helen's hands. Lacking the inward spirit of piety, he is taken in by its external trappings. The burial of Menelaus, with its ritual overtones of purification and rebirth, holds no mystery for him. Rather, it provides him with an opportunity to show off his wealth and to bind Helen to him (as he thinks) a little more securely. He sees in her pious act only the personal advantage of having a docile and obedient wife. "It's to our interest to bring up a pious wife," he says in 1278. To underline the contrast between his conception of piety and the other dimensions of religion in the play, the *fabula sacra* of the Mountain Mother of the Gods follows almost immediately (1301 ff.).

In one important respect Theoclymenus differs from Menelaus. He is to lose Helen. Losing Helen, he is never quite to emerge from the cloud of delusion, or at least not until the *deus ex machina* intervenes. When the messenger reports Helen's flight, he asks, "Did she go off lifted on wings or with earth-treading foot" (1516). As noted earlier (see above, p. 568), the phrase *πτεροῖσιν ἀρθείσα* recalls the disappearance of the "false" Helen who "disappeared lifted off (*ἀρθείσα*) into the aether's folds" (605–6). The echo suggests that Theoclymenus regresses into the unreality of the *eidolon* theme in the first half of the play. He reenacts Menelaus' earlier confusion between appearance and reality. Though the Dioscuri enlighten him at the end, the last picture we have of him before he rushes off with murderous thoughts is of a man deceived. The chorus, loyal to Helen's request for silence (1387–89), glibly lies, "I never would have thought that Menelaus could have escaped our notice . . ." (1619–20).

The last scene extends Theoclymenus' delusion to the moral realm.

<sup>81</sup> Bacon overlooks this possibility, I think, in her discussion of the tomb and the religious customs of the Egyptians in the *Helen*: pp. 137–38, 148–49, 153–54.



His "justice" and "piety" both belong to "appearance" (1627-38).<sup>82</sup> It is in keeping with his earlier behavior that a flurry of words for "death" and "killing" immediately precedes the entrance of the Dioscuri (1639-41). At the very end he is permitted to recognize the true virtue of Helen (*ἀρίστη, σωφρονεστάτη*, 1684). But even this closing statement contains a wry irony which keeps him, despite divine enlightenment, still in the beclouded and rather comic role approaching that of the *mari cocu*. He congratulates Helen on her *εὐγενεστάτης γνώμης* (1686-87), and adds, *ὁ πολλὰ ἰς ἐν γυναιξὶν οὐκ ἐνὶ* (1687). The remark may be appropriate, but its tone of worldly cynicism is amusingly out of place on the lips of a man who has been deceived and betrayed by practically every female character of the play.<sup>83</sup> One is left a bit uncertain as to whether he is expressing in 1687 some newly discovered truth about the feminine nature or whether he is trying to salvage masculine pride by claiming a knowledge of the ways of the world which he has fancied himself possessing all along.

The foil to Theoclymenus is, of course, Theonoe. She is associated, as Zuntz and Burnett have shown, with a supra-human cosmic wisdom and with a pure, spiritual conception of the gods which contrasts with the delusions of the other characters and with the petty jealousies of the anthropomorphism presented in the prologue and elsewhere.<sup>84</sup> She stands clearly on the side of "reality" and far from the "appearances" in which her brother is enmeshed. Her piety, though "not seeming" so (*οὐ δοκοῦσ' ὅμως*, 1020), is vindicated as truth at the end. The Dioscuri's praise of her just and righteous action (1647-49, 1656-67) cancels Theoclymenus' vilification (*kakistê* (1632)).<sup>85</sup>

Theonoe contrasts not only with Theoclymenus, but also with Menelaus. Her entrance in a blaze of light which signifies both rebirth and purity (865-72) follows closely upon Menelaus' violent resolution

<sup>82</sup> See Burnett 161.

<sup>83</sup> The only possible exception is the Portress; but even she, in a sense, fails Theoclymenus. For all her stern words to Menelaus, she does not in fact betray him to the king. In her exit lines, in fact, she professes good will to the Greeks and apologizes for the "bitter words" which she spoke out of fear for her master (482-83). On Theoclymenus and the role of the deceived husband see also Burnett 154.

<sup>84</sup> See Burnett 157-59; Conacher 294-97 and 301-2; Kannicht 1.71-7; Pohlenz 1.386-89; Post 101-2; Verrall 59; Zuntz 204, 213-16.

<sup>85</sup> Note too Theoclymenus' denial of the servant's *eusebestatê* in 1632-33.

of the death-pact (836–54).<sup>86</sup> Her serenity and the vast scope of her mind, reaching out to the aether and “the pure breath of heaven’s recesses” (866–67), stand out in sharp relief against the death-bent, Hades-invoking anxieties of the Trojan hero (cf. 863–64). The *kleos* sought by her defender, the servant, at the end of the play (1640–41) is very different from the martial, Troy-based *kleos* on which Menelaus stakes his identity. Her celebrated meditation of a “deathless *gnomê*” which dwells in the “immortal aether” (1013–16) is, as Verrall put it, a gentle reproof to “the soulless philosophy of Menelaus.”<sup>87</sup>

Whereas Theoclymenus needs to have his father’s tomb at the very entrance to his palace, Theonoe’s piety soars into the highest reaches of the cosmos (866–67). She, in fact, proves a far more effective protector of this tomb against the threats of Menelaus’ desperate violence (980–90).

In her affinity with the highest and purest “reality” and her distance from the narrow, possessive localism of the two male characters (or three, if Teucer is included), Theonoe deepens the antithesis between male and female, martial prowess and life-giving, feminine gentleness, with a further contrast between materialism and vast philosophical perspective. Her presence embodies an opposition between intellect, abstract thought, mysticism, the eternal creations of the spirit on the one hand and force, bloodshed, war on the other.

Her philosophical nature, as well as her femininity, separates her from the active, competitive, exclusively male functions of the *polis* with which Theoclymenus and Menelaus are associated. Theoclymenus’ conception of justice, for example, is to exact physical and indeed capital punishment like a judge in a real *polis* (cf. *dikazein*, 1637). Theonoe, however, conceives of punishment (*tisis*) in the broad philosophical terms which extend to an afterlife and to a consciousness which cannot die (1013–16).

This antinomy between the two sets of characters foreshadows some aspects of Plato’s struggles between the *bios politikos* and the *bios*

<sup>86</sup> Grube 344, note 1, suggests a parallel with the appearance of the Delphian priestess in the *Ion*.

<sup>87</sup> Verrall 106. Lines 1013–16 have, of course, given rise to a voluminous literature. See the “Discussion” in Zuntz 234 ff.; Burnett 159 ff.; Grégoire 41 ff. and his long note *ad loc.* (91–94); Iesi 64 ff.; Matthiessen 693 ff.

*theorêtikos*.<sup>88</sup> In the period of the *Helen* these tensions are nascent in various criticisms of the narrow, destructive exclusiveness of the *polis*. In Aristophanes' *Birds* the *polis* and the human *nomoi* are full of corruption, informers, and the joyless complexities of *polypragmosynê*, while the imaginary Cloud-city exists in a gentle and benign realm of *physis* where the mythical violence of Tereus becomes the songful reasonableness of the Hoopoe. Similar criticisms of the limited horizons of the *polis* appear around the same time in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, in Hippias, in Democritus, and in the *Truth* of Antiphon the Sophist.<sup>89</sup> In Euripides' own work of this period there is also Ion's famous speech on the evils and dangers of the public life of the *polis* (*Ion* 585-606, 621-47), and reinforcing it the warning example of Creusa's patrician exclusiveness and possessiveness with their nearly disastrous consequences (*Ion* 1291-1305; cf. also 589-93).

As the embodiment of the highest reality ("pure uplift," remarked L. A. Post),<sup>90</sup> Theonoe is also the high point of the contrast between Egypt and Troy. If Theoclymenus leaves the suspended otherworldliness of Egypt somewhat tarnished, Theonoe portrays whatever is best in it. His buffoonish figure suggests the scorn that a decadent kingdom could arouse in the Greek mind, as in the story of Busiris, whereas her Egypt is the repository of the ancient mystical wisdom of the East.<sup>91</sup> The Egypt which surrounds her is a kind of ideal state harking back to the benign monarchy of Proteus, a Prospero's island in which she is Ariel to Theoclymenus' Caliban. Her maidenhood is the badge of her purity. Even before we hear her name, she is called *parthenos* (10), as she is throughout the play.<sup>92</sup> As the "maiden" *par excellence*, she thus

<sup>88</sup> See, for example, Werner Jaeger, "Über Ursprung und Kreislauf des philosophischen Lebensideals," *SB Berlin* (1928) 390-421. Zuntz 215-16 well observes the contrast between the common-sense intelligence of the "man-in-the-street" at 744-57 and the cosmic, mystical wisdom of Theonoe.

<sup>89</sup> See in general H. C. Baldry, *The Unity of Mankind in Greek Thought* (Cambridge 1965) 32-51; Guthrie (above, note 31) 152-63, esp. 161-63.

<sup>90</sup> Post 101.

<sup>91</sup> See Gilbert 79; Iesi 63 ff.

<sup>92</sup> See, e.g., 894, 939, 977, 1032, and note the verb *μαίλω* in 1000. Post 103 suggests an identification between Theonoe and Athena (with dubious relevance to the play, in my judgment); Kannicht 1.74, is more convincing in connecting Theonoe's physical purity with the pure aether and the *noûs* of 1013-16.

embodies the essence of Egypt's "maiden-lovely streams" which introduce the play.

The purity and brilliance which flash forth at her entrance (865-72) unite the two main aspects of the reality-appearance antithesis, the ethical and the epistemological. This brightness signifies a lucid truth in contrast with the murky cloudedness of Troy, but it also signifies the hope of life and rebirth. The recognition scene in which occur the first movements out of delusion begins with Helen's appeal to Theonoe's knowledge ("she who knows everything truly," 530); and Helen's next words show us this knowledge in the service of light, life, and rebirth (530-31):

φησὶ δ' ἐν φάει  
πόσιν τὸν ἄμὸν ζῶντα φέγγος εἰσορᾶν . . .

Correspondingly, Theonoe's "purity" in 865-67 is both moral and intellectual. It combines both freedom from delusion and freedom from passion. It is inward as well as outward, for it involves her body (*parthenos*) as well as her soul. We may contrast Theoclymenus' concern with the "outward" purity of his house when he reflects that Menelaus has not died in Egypt: *καθαρὰ γὰρ ἡμῶν δώματα* (1430). In her the wisdom of the *physiologos* and the justice of the *agathos* are one and the same.

The tension between Theonoe and Theoclymenus, and hence between reality and appearance, also involves the question of which of them truly embodies the spirit of Egypt and which is truly the representative of the pious and good dead king, Proteus. The "higher" reality of Egypt, as Euripides makes clear, belongs to Theonoe. Not only does her maidenhood have a kinship with Egypt's "maiden-lovely streams" in the first line, but she too is associated with the distant, mysterious atmosphere of the sea and its mythical denizens in the opening lines (4-8). It is she who "has honor from her ancestor Nereus" (15) and is called "the maiden descended from the Nereid of the sea" (318; cf. 1647).

Theoclymenus, of course, has an equal title to this marine ancestry (e.g., 8), but he is never described in these mythological terms. He prides himself on being the devoted son of Proteus, as his opening words show (1167-68):

ἀεὶ δέ σ' ἐξιών τε κασιῶν δόμους  
 Θεοκλύμενος παῖς ὅδε προσεinnέπει, πάτερ.

But, as we have seen, it is Theonoe who proves to have the more legitimate claims to filial piety and to the spirit of Proteus (see 1028–29). She is, as Verrall remarked, “essentially his representative.”<sup>93</sup> Her inward “shrine of justice” (1003–4) is a more authentic memorial to Proteus than the ostentatious tomb which Theoclymenus has erected for his daily salute (1165–68).<sup>94</sup> In the speech of the Dioscuri at the end Theonoe shares with Helen the virtue of *saphrosgnê* (1657, 1684); and it was for *saphrosgnê* that Zeus had singled out Proteus beyond all mortals (47).

Although Theonoe's virginity stands at the opposite pole from Helen's experience,<sup>95</sup> the two women are not in all respect opposites. Dramatically Helen is the more complex. Theonoe will remain in her removed and mystical sea-realm. Helen has to return to the complexities of the human world where Menelaus is king.

Yet Helen can also speak Theonoe's language as can no other character in the play. In striking contrast to Menelaus, she appeals to Theonoe's purer conception of justice (920–21, 940–43), the divine (903, 914–23), and piety (900–901, 914–21). She can also rise to a generosity and universalism of thought that match Theonoe's. In 906–7 Helen speaks of the “heavens and earth common to all mortals,” where we are reminded of Theonoe's opening statement (866–67) and her philosophical dictum of 1013–16. To Theoclymenus' casual dismissal of care for the dead as nothing but trouble, Helen answers with a riddling line on the existence of the dead “there as well as here” (1421–22):

Θε. τὰ τῶν θανόντων οὐδέν, ἀλλ' ἄλλως πόνος.  
 Ελ. ἔστιν τι κακὲὶ κἀνθάδ' ὧν ἐγὼ λέγω.

She is playing on the ignorance of her interlocutor, of course; yet her

<sup>93</sup> Verrall 79.

<sup>94</sup> See also 1648–49. For a cautious approach to Theonoe's “shrine of justice” see Matthiessen 702–3. Cf. also lines 1648–49.

<sup>95</sup> Griffith 39 observes that Helen begins and ends with an address to Theonoe as “virgin,” and comments that it is “not perhaps overtactful of her to stress poor Theonoe's spinsterhood.” Theonoe, however, would probably not have been displeased, and Griffith's comment is somewhat in the direction of the “documentary fallacy.”

recognition of an equivalent realm of the "beyond" has affinities with Theonoe's remarks of 1013–6.<sup>96</sup> It may be somewhat amusing to find Helen criticizing Aphrodite for her excesses (1102–6). Yet the scene also shows her capable of a *Götterkritik* not unlike Theonoe's. Helen can also understand "God" in a mysterious, almost allegorical way. "God," she says, "is to know those dear to you" (θεὸς γὰρ καὶ τὸ γινώσκειν φίλους, 560). As Theonoe possesses an inward world of spirituality and piety and has a "shrine of justice" in her nature (1002–3),<sup>97</sup> so Helen too has vindicated her inward being, her *phrenes*, against the crimes attaching to the external image, the εἰκὼ φόνιον (73) of her supposed body (see 160–61). Both women, finally, are united in the last pronouncement of Theoclymenus in the finale (1680–87). In a sense Theonoe is Helen's purer self, the ultimate reality with which Helen is in touch, albeit not as steadily as Theonoe.

If Theonoe points to that higher reality in the realm of morality, theology, and philosophical and religious thought, Helen touches it in the realm of grace, beauty, and art. The two figures are complementary images of man's striving for spiritual strength and unity. Helen's position is naturally the more complex, for she mediates between reality and appearance as Theonoe does not and has to suffer the complication of her identity through the existence of a licentious other self.

The motif of the aether forms another link between the two women. Like Helen herself, the aether occupies a middle position between reality and appearance. The *eidolon*—destructive, deceptive, lustful (cf. εἰκὼ φόνιον, 73)—goes off finally into its kindred aether, leaving Helen free and innocent (see 584, 605, 1219).<sup>98</sup> In this aspect the aether is connected with the emptiness and delusiveness of clouds and wind (cf. Hera's ἐξηνέμωσε, 32, and also 44, 705–6, 1219–20) or with the passion of the gods (216). The aether of which Theonoe speaks,

<sup>96</sup> For the interpretation of 1422 (too easily given up as hopeless by Dale) see Kannicht *ad loc.* See also Helen's somewhat riddling juxtaposition of living and dead in 912–13.

<sup>97</sup> Theonoe's πέφυκα at 998 indicates, I believe, that the *physis* of 1002–3 means "her nature" and not "nature," "human nature," in general.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. also 613, where the *eidolon* goes off πατέρ' εἰς οὐρανόν; and compare the *eidolon's* ἄστρον . . . βεβηκνίαν μυχούς (617) with Theonoe's αἰθέρος μυχούς (866), following the text of Kannicht who accepts (surely correctly) the emendations of Hermann and Wecklein.

however, is "solemn" or a "subject of reverence" (*semnos*, 866) and immortal (see 1013-16). Helen's *eidolon* is composed of "sky" (*οὐρανοῦ ξυνθείσ' ἄπο*, 34) and is a creation of Hera's jealousy and spite (see 31-36). Theonoe's "sky" is associated with the "pure breath" (*pneuma*, 768) of heaven and thus has affinities with bold philosophical concepts like the *nous* of Anaxagoras or Diogenes.<sup>99</sup> The one stands in the mythical tradition of the poets' cloud-images of lust and deception, like that of Pindar in the second *Pythian*, so brilliantly exploited by Aristophanes in the decade before the *Helen*.<sup>100</sup> The other belongs in a speculative tradition reaching back to the philosophers of Ionia.

This positive, philosophical meaning of aether occurs elsewhere in the play in connection with a more benign conception of the gods. In the ode on the Mountain Mother the Dionysian dance which shakes Olympus and announces the joy of nature's life reborn is a *κύκλιος ἔνοσις αἰθερία* (1363). In the third and last stasimon the chorus calls on the Dioscuri "who dwell in the heavens" (*ouranioi*, 1499) to come "rushing through the aether (*di' aitheros*, 1496), thus healing the effects Zeus' rape of Leda and of Hermes' "abduction" of Helen which had been described with the same words in 216 and 246 respectively.

The antitheses focused by the contrasts between Theonoe and the male characters expand the range of the central antithesis even further, and they may be diagrammed as follows:

|  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Theonoe  | Theoclymenus (and Menelaus)          |
| Philosophical conception of God<br>( <i>ta theia</i> ) | Anthropomorphic gods (cf. 708)       |
| Purity and virginity                                   | Lust                                 |
| Inward morality (cf. 1003)                             | External morality (cf. 1626-41)      |
| True respect for Proteus                               | Seeming respect for Proteus          |
| Piety in spirit  | Piety in outward forms               |
| Cosmic and universalistic perspective                  | Narrow possessiveness and localism   |
| Punishment after death and<br>"immortal <i>gnomé</i> " | Corporeal punishment, physical death |

<sup>99</sup> For the relevant fragments and discussion see Matthiessen 699-702; also Burnett 160-61; Post 103; Griffith 40.

<sup>100</sup> For the deceptive cloud-image in early mythology see the useful discussion in Kannicht 1.33-38.

Aether as a permanent and  
divine substance

Aether as transient and deceptive  
cloud-image

## VII

The balance between Theonoe and Helen is a microcosm of the whole play's balance between the intellectualist antitheses of appearance and reality on the one hand and the archetypal themes of romance on the other. Helen has the major role in uniting these two sides of the play, for she is simultaneously the mysterious female ministrant to life and rebirth and the focus of the confusion between appearance and reality. But Theonoe and Proteus also contribute to uniting these two strands.

As the father of Theonoe, Proteus has a natural place on the philosophical or intellectualist side of the play. He is the remoter source of the "real" justice and piety which are finally vindicated in the person of Theonoe. But from the very beginning he also introduces the major archetypal motif, death and rebirth. He is himself an example of a "maimed" king whose authority has now become impotent with the ascension of his successor. Theonoe's decision to aid Helen and reject apparent for real respect for her father restores something of the old king's moral and spiritual vitality (cf. 1020-21 and Theonoe's address thereafter to her "dead father" 1028-29). At the beginning of the action Helen lamented that she was safe as long as Proteus "saw this light of the sun"; but now Proteus is dead, "hidden in the darkness of the earth" (*γῆς σκότῳ κέκρυπται*, 61-62). This last phrase connects Proteus with the imagery of the ensuing Persephone ode (168 ff.) and with the supposed death of Menelaus whom she fears "among the corpses under the earth" (*ἐν νέκυσι κατὰ χθονός*, 344) or "in the darkness hidden under the earth" (*οἷχεται / δι' ἔρεβος χθονὶ κρυφθείς*, 518-19).

Menelaus' situation is, in part, that of Proteus: in both cases a "dead" king's authority has to be restored. In Proteus' case, of course, the restoration is possible only in a metaphorical and spiritual sense, as is appropriate for the father of Theonoe. His moral and figurative rebirth through Theonoe's inward struggle and decision is both a parallel and a foil to the more primitive ritual of rebirth through which Menelaus has, physically, to pass.



Proteus also stands behind the action as a symbol of the possibility of achieving a victory over death. His tomb is a visual reminder of the living power of the dead. It exercises a beneficent effect on the living. Helen observes that it has saved her "like the temples of the gods" (801).

The motif of death and rebirth not only governs the rhythm of the action, but also helps clarify the ethical side of the play's antitheses. When Teucer early in the play says that Troy has been sacked "for seven fruitful circles of years" (*ἑπτὰ σχεδόν τι καρπίμους ἔτων κύκλους*, 112), he is not just indulging in a poetic periphrasis, but setting the theme of Troy and war into the larger archetypal framework of the action (compare the references to the "green shoots" in the parade, 180 and 243, and, of course, the Persephone myth there).

The myth of Persephone and the renewal of the impotent king are the archetypal myths behind the situations of Helen and Menelaus respectively. The movement between life and death and upper and lower worlds runs through the early part of the play (see 61-62, 286, 344, 518-19, 529-30) and culminates in the "renewal" (*ἀνανεοῦμαι*) of Menelaus' marriage amid the torches of the wedding celebration (722-24).

As husband and wife soon realize, this rebirth is only partial. Menelaus' violent threats and especially the death-pact, which comes exactly in the middle of the play (835-54 in a work of 1692 lines), turns the joy of reunion to their deepest immersion in death. The fact that they will execute this pact on the tomb (842, the first line of Menelaus' development of the idea) is a further negation of the hoped for revivification of the powers of the dead king, Proteus. The speech in which the desperate Menelaus threatens to defile the tomb with "streams of blood" (984-85, a passage which, incidentally, echoes his initial exposition of the death-pact: cf. *τύμβου' πὶ νώτῳ / νώτοις* in 984 and 842) begins with the address to Hades as his ally. It is also at this point in the play that Menelaus is most deeply held by the "glory of Troy" and the forces of death which it signifies.

Here Menelaus does, in fact, stand in the realm of death, in a deeper and more "real" sense than Helen realizes when she speaks of his supposed literal "death" earlier (see 344, 518-19). Theonoe, with her light-bringing torches (865-72) and her talk of immortality (1013-16),

swings the balance back to the side of life. She is seconded by Helen, who appeals to the living moral power of Proteus. If Menelaus were dead, how, she asks, would Proteus' charge be fulfilled (910-12)? "How would he give what is living to the dead" (913)?<sup>101</sup> And in her next lines she couples "the god" with the "dead" father (τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὰ τοῦ πατρός, 914-15). Theonoe's decision to help the couple is also an affirmation of Proteus' "life": "If he were alive, he would give her back to you," she tells Menelaus in 1011-12. It is immediately after this statement that she makes her famous pronouncement on the immortal consciousness of the dead in the deathless aether (1013-16). Here Proteus is not only "reborn" as a life-giving force in the world, but his "life" appears as part of a vast process of cosmic renewal far transcending the individual and physical rebirth which Helen and Menelaus seek.<sup>102</sup>

The spiritual and ritual or philosophical and archetypal forms of rebirth reinforce one another in that same balance which Helen and Theonoe hold between them. The two sides of the rebirth theme exemplified in the two women are complementary aspects of Euripides' complex vision of human life, held in an eternal counterpoise between ideality and actuality, abstract thought and primitive energy, mind and nature.

After this midpoint of life and death and this glimpse of rebirth in the boldest, most imaginative terms (1013-16), Helen replaces Theonoe as the play's genius of new life.

The ritual death of Menelaus is also connected with the theme of purification (note the carrying off of the λύματα, 1271). In finally freeing himself of Troy, Menelaus moves a little closer to that "pure" world which Theonoe inhabits, even though his "purification" follows an archaic ritual quite remote from the developed spiritual and philosophical "purity" of Theonoe. As the *eidolon* freed Helen from the burden of past guilt and shame, this purification frees Menelaus, at least in part, from the suffering of his Trojan past. He too can now take a part in the manipulation of appearance and reality, using the

<sup>101</sup> κείνος in 912 should be Hermes, but one wonders whether it may refer to Proteus, as the dead king whose force is still felt in the world of the living.

<sup>102</sup> See Matthiessen 693-94.

terms "living" and "dead" in the riddling way that points toward the escape from these inversions (see 1289-90).

The ode on the Mountain Mother of the Gods (1301-68) is the culminating point of this theme of rebirth.<sup>103</sup> It comes just at the point when the reality and the appearance of life and death have been reversed. Shortly before the ode Theoclymenus, attempting in his rather heavy-handed way to console Helen, assures her that "the husband who is dead would not be able to come alive" (1285-87). Menelaus then takes up this play on his own supposed death and life (1288-89).

This ode is the mirror-image of the parade.<sup>104</sup> It resumes and completes the motif of Persephone there stated and reflects the reversal which has occurred in the interim. In the parade Persephone is in the underworld (173-78). The indirect allusion to her rape in 243-46 suggests that the long desolate period of her sojourn under the earth (corresponding to Helen's long, lonely sojourn in Egypt) is about to begin. The Mountain Mother ode also speaks of Persephone's rape (ἀρπαγὰς δολίους, 1322), using the same word which was used of Helen (50, 246). Its main point, however, is the return of Persephone and the renewed joy of nature.<sup>105</sup> Its movement is not from joy to grief, as is implicit in 243-46, but from grief to joy, from *lypê* (1344) to *terpsis* (1352).<sup>106</sup>

This movement from the parade to the second stasimon crystallizes what has been in effect the movement of the entire plot, which in turn the cyclical movement from Winter to Summer characteristic of

<sup>103</sup> Earlier critics tended to regard the ode as totally irrelevant. Hermann *ad* 1376 considered it an actor's interpolation. Verrall 64 found it "absolutely irrelevant" and saw in it nothing but "a poet's compliment to the poetry and popular features of the legend and the celebration, that and nothing more" (108). Similarly Schmid 506 and 513-14 (with useful bibliography); Grube 349; and now even Dale xiii ("scarcely a pretence of relevance to the events on stage"). Golann provides a useful survey of previous views, but his own interpretation is unsatisfactory. Recent interpretation has had better success: see Burnett 155-56; Conacher 300-301; Lattimore 53; Zuntz 226-27.

<sup>104</sup> Note the echo of the parade's ἔλικά . . . χλόαν (180) and χλοερά (243) in ἄχλοα πεδία γᾶς (1327) and χλόα (1360).

<sup>105</sup> Golann's view (34 ff.) that the ode does not refer to Demeter and Persephone, but rather to the cult of Helen is implausible. By the late fifth century the syncretism of Demeter and Cybele was well advanced: see Soph., *Phil.* 391 ff. and in general Nilsson *Gesch.* (above, note 78) 725-27.

<sup>106</sup> Note also Zeus' help to "mother earth" in the prologue, 40 ff.

romance.<sup>107</sup> Yet here too the rhythm of romance blends with the intellectualist themes of the play. In the early part of the play the inversions of life and death are fused with those of appearance and reality and have a negative significance for the protagonists. Now, however, as Helen and Menelaus themselves manipulate both of these inversions (1049–52, 1287–89), they have a positive significance. “Appearance” and “death” become the main instrument of their achievement of new life.

The life-death themes stated mythically in the ode continue in the action which immediately follows it. Helen explains how Theonoe has kept her promise, acceding to the lie that Menelaus is “dead in the earth and does not see the light” (1372–73).<sup>108</sup> Helen then describes how she changed his castaway’s rags for a new cloak (1382), a change of garment signifying a renewal of identity (see also 1296–97), as Helen’s own change from white to black (1087, 1186–87) accompanies her saving manipulation of life and death, reality and appearance. She washes Menelaus in pure river water (1384), thereby not only effecting the ritual transition from the death-dealing sea to life, but also continuing the cosmic rebirth of the Mountain Mother ode. Helen’s language in 1384, *χρόνια νίπτρα ποταμίας δρόσου*, echoes the language of the ode some fifty lines before (1335–37):

πηγὰς δ’ ἀμπαύει δροσερὰς  
λευκῶν ἐκβάλλειν ὑδάτων  
πένθει παιδὸς ἀλάστωρ.

The “white water” (*λευκῶν* . . . *ὑδάτων*, 1336) also takes up the ultimately life-giving black-white inversion of Helen’s ruse (1087, 1186–87).

In the exchange of garments scenic effect and underlying mythic structure are again at one. Earlier, at the nadir of his fortunes, Menelaus stood in rags before the palace gate and felt a hero’s shame (*aischynḗ*, *aidōs*) for his wretched garb (416–17). His attempt to conceal it (417) was a futile and premature movement out of his reduced state. He is,

<sup>107</sup> See Frye, *Anatomy* (above, note 20) 182–83; *A Natural Perspective* (above, note 18) 57 ff.

<sup>108</sup> The phrase *ἐν χθονί* suggests the chthonic themes connected with death and the underworld at the beginning of the play: see 168, 344, 518–19. Murray and Dale, however, are suspicious of the phrase; but it seems not to trouble Kannicht.

at this point, still preoccupied with "appearances" and still possesses the "false" Helen and all that she symbolizes. Giving up his rags, he also gives up something from the world of heroic vicissitudes (*tyché*, 417) in which he gained them. Ineffectual in this strange realm, somewhat like the shipwrecked sailors of the *Tempest*, he has to relinquish his regal and heroic scruples in matters of clothing (416-17) as of action (cf. 1050-52); and, like a mystic initiate, he must put himself into the hands of a mysterious power to be reborn.

Even here, however, there is still a distinction between Helen as dispenser of life and Menelaus as the violent soldier who has come from the death-filled atmosphere of Troy. While Menelaus "practises" (*ἡσκήσατο*, 1379) with arms, Helen "decks him out" (*ἐξήσκησα*, 1383) with the change of clothing. The two characteristic actions, one feminine and life-giving, the other masculine and martial, are now brought together in the same verb. Though still indicative of opposing attitudes, the two gestures are both working toward the same end. Antithesis has become complementation. The union of contraries here holds out the promise of a fuller union in Sparta.

The third stasimon, sung as Helen and Menelaus exit for the last time, continues the themes of cosmic rebirth from the Mountain Mother ode, but localizes them in a more directly personal situation. The movement from sorrow and death to the joy of a new life now takes place not on remote Olympus, but in the local Laconian festival of the Hyacinthia (1465-75). The death of Hyacinthus becomes the occasion for the "nocturnal joy" of the festal dance (*νύχιον ἐς εὐφροσύναν*, 1468-70).

Hyacinthus, like Helen and Persephone, is connected with the death and rebirth of vegetation. The Hyacinthia was primarily a fertility festival.<sup>109</sup> Hence this allusion to his cult continues the rhythmic movement of renewal after sterility. There is perhaps the further intimation, as in the *Odyssey*, that the union of the king and queen in their own land, performing the rites which fall to their office, ushers in the fertility of which the land has been doubly deprived while both its kind and its Persephone-like queen have been held in the realm of

<sup>109</sup> See Nilsson, *Myc. Origins* (above, note 78) 76; *Gesch.* (above, note 78) 316-17, 531; see also Golann 39.

death or "under the earth."<sup>110</sup> Despite Proteus and Theonoe, Egypt also functions, in part, as a sort of Hades, a place of death; and Menelaus' return fulfils the folk-tale or initiatory motif of a descent to the underworld.<sup>111</sup> In this respect Menelaus' experiences reflect those of Odysseus and are the male counterpart of the vegetation myth attaching to Helen.

In other ways too the cosmic myth of the return of Persephone echoes the private circumstances of Helen and Menelaus. The marriage of their daughter, previously thwarted by the shame of Helen (see 688-90), is anticipated in the blazing marriage torches of this third stasimon (1476-77). Yet the larger cosmic themes are not forgotten, for the chorus refers to Hermione as the "heifer" (*μόσχου*, 1476), a word which suggests the connection of the human and natural worlds in a large, all-embracing rhythm.

The themes of life and rebirth here remain combined with those of reality and appearance. This real marriage of Hermione contrasts with Theoclymenus' delusion of marriage with Helen (1430-35). When he says shortly before that his house is "clean" (*kathara*) because Menelaus did not die there (1430-31) and that "all the earth should cry out with happy hymnals of Helen's and [his] marriage" (1433-35), he is ironically echoing the couple's real "cleansing" of the past and the reality of the cosmic rebirth that accompanies their union (see 1327-29, 1362-65).

The address to the swift Phoenician ship sailing across the seas (1451 ff.) recalls the other Helen's journey to Troy (e.g., 229-38). The sea which has hitherto signified separation, wandering, and death<sup>112</sup> now becomes the literal means of recovering all that was lost and of passing from death to life. At the end of the ode the chorus calls upon the Dioscuri to cross the grey sea and the dark swell of its waves, sending the favoring breezes which will carry the united couple home (1501-5). They are then to "cast off from their sister the ill-fame (*dyskleia*) of a barbarian couch" (1506-7). The crossing of the sea

<sup>110</sup> See *Od.* 19. 107-14 and my remarks in "Transition and Ritual in Odysseus' Return," *PP*, fasc. 116 (1967) 341.

<sup>111</sup> See Iesi 57-63. There may also be a play on the Hades-like quality of Egypt in 69, where Teucer compares the palace to "the house of Plutus," possibly alluding to the association Ploutos/Ploutōn: see Nilsson, *Gesch.* (above, note 78) 319 and Bacon 137-38.

<sup>112</sup> See 202, 233 ff., 400-1, 408 ff., 423-24, 520 ff., 531 ff., 773 ff., 1126 ff.

thus cancels the "shame" and "evil name" which bulked so large in Helen's speeches early in the play (see above, section V). The sea performs the same restorative function for Menelaus. It receives his arms (1262) and washes off the stains (λύματα, 1271) of the polluted past. Having robbed Menelaus of his heroic identity, as he says at his first appearance in the play (see 424-25), it now renders that identity back to him.

In its restorative function the sea presents the appearance of "death," when in fact it confers new life. When Theoclymenus asks what kind of death Menelaus dies, Helen replies that he perished "most pitifully, in the sea's wet waves" (οἰκτρόταθ', ὑγροῖσιν ἐν κλυδωνίοις ἄλός, 1209; see also 1271).

The two positive functions of the sea, restoring identity and purifying the past, not only repeat the contrasts between appearance and reality and death and life, but also connect these contrasts with those between Troy and Egypt. Its healing and purificatory functions are the cosmic analogue to those of Theonoe (see 866-67) and stand at the opposite pole from Theoclymenus' narrow, limited purity (see 1430-31).

Even more important, the figure of Galaneia in the first strophe of the ode (1456-64) recalls Theonoe's mythical sea-ancestry: Proteus, the Nereids, Psamathe (see 4-15 and above, p. 588). Galaneia is herself "the grey daughter of Pontus" (1457) and like these other sea-deities is a beneficent figure.<sup>113</sup> Theonoe's mythical marine ancestry, especially in its connection with Proteus, has signified the possible existence of justice, piety, and the higher "reality" of a purer moral order. This marine mythology and Proteus, as symbols of that order, accompany the images of a joyful, revived nature, in contrast to the dying nature of the parade. This kindly "Egyptian" mythology, more remote and less familiar than the Olympian, also contrasts with the negative anthropomorphism of Olympus in the early part of the play (e.g., the myths of Callisto and Kos in 375-85). The reborn joy of nature, which is also the joy of Persephone's return from the underworld, is then carried to Sparta in the antistrophe which follows the

<sup>113</sup> Some interesting views on the image of nature and the figure of Galaneia in this ode were presented at the sixty-fourth annual meeting of the Classical Association of New England in April, 1970 by Thomas C. Barry: see the summary in the Association's *Bulletin* 65 (1970) 10.

address to Galaneia (1465–78). The temple of Athena, previously the setting for the Persephone-like abduction of Helen (243–48), now stands alongside the Spartan festival of the Hyacinthia.

The marriage torches of Hermione which end the antistrophe (1476–78) have an important role in defining these antitheses. We spoke above (p. 598) of their role in signifying the private aspect of the protagonists' happy reunion. But Hermione too stands under the large archetype of the Maiden reclaimed. Her marriage torches mark a return to life and light, analogous to the entrance of Theonoe (865–72) and the renewed marriage of Helen and Menelaus (see 637–41, 722–25). Like the Hyacinthia and the Spartan myths of the Leucippidae (1465–1468), Hermione's torches resolve in local and intimate terms the antithesis between life and death. They complete an antithesis between the treacherous fire-beacons of Nauplius at the remote Cephiridean reefs (766–67, 1126–31)<sup>114</sup> and the flames which razed Troy on the one hand and the purifying torches of Theonoe on the other (865–72). Correspondingly, the destructive sea of the Nauplius story in the Trojan realm contrasts with the kindly sea of Galaneia (linked to Egypt's marine mythology) in this ode.

### VIII

Indispensable as Theonoe is, it is Helen who effects the decisive movement from death to life. She activates the life-giving possibilities which stand on one side of the play's polarities and form one side of the Egyptian locale. Her distinctive quality in effecting this movement is summed up in the word *χάρις*, which includes grace, charm, beauty, song, gratitude, love.<sup>115</sup> In its flexibility and range of meanings it is especially appropriate to the iridescent radiance of Helen herself.

*Charis* first occurs at the end of Teucer's speech on the oracle of the foundation of Salamis. Apollo has foretold that he will name his new land "Salamis" "for the sake of (as a sign of favor or gratitude toward) his homeland there" (*τῆς ἐκεῖ χάριν πάτρας*, 150). This *charis* in the new settlement suggests a benign movement from the Trojan world to

<sup>114</sup> Verrall 110 notes how odd it is for the chorus to know of this detail at 767.

<sup>115</sup> Conacher 298–99 has well observed the importance of *charis* in the play, but not, I think, traced its significance far enough.



peace, and thus it serves as a potential paradigm and encouragement for Helen and Menelaus: eventual escape from the grip of Troy, rest from wandering, and the acquisition of a stable home.

The life-giving significance of *charis*, however, is primarily associated with Helen. In the first strophe of the parade she asks Persephone to receive her songs of lamentation accompanied by her tears as a thank offering to the dead (173–78). The phrasing of lines 176–77 is especially suggestive: *χάριτας ἔν' ἐπὶ δάκρυσι / παρ' ἐμέθεν . . . νέκυσιν ὀλομένοις λάβη*. Although *ἐπὶ δάκρυσι* is probably to be construed with *λάβη* (“take in accompaniment to my tears”), the juxtaposition of the phrase with *χάριτας* brings together one of the main antitheses of the play: joy and weeping, the *charis* of song and art and the tears over the dead at Troy. We may compare the movement from *lypē* to *terpsis* in the ode on the Mountain Mother (see above, p. 595). Indeed, much of the meaning and beauty of the play lies in this phrase, *χάριτας . . . ἐπὶ δάκρυσι*: the attainment of joy and beauty in the midst of the lamentations of death and war, a faith in life and creation which can envisage a higher reality of innocence and beauty through the deluded killings at Troy. Hence the related word *χάρμα* in 321 denotes the possibility that Menelaus is alive despite the “lamentations” (*γόους*, 321) of his death. That same antithesis is stamped on the reunion between Menelaus and the real Helen: his tears (*dakrya*, cf. 176) change to “joy” (*χαρμονά*, 654), and there is more “joy” (*charis*) than pain (*lypai*, 654–55).

The association of *charis* with a movement from pain to joy receives its most vivid formulation in the Mountain Mother ode. The Charites sent by Zeus serve as the essential instruments of the rebirth and re-vivification of nature. These joyful and restorative songs which provoke the Goddess' laughter (1349) and pleasure (*terpsis*, 1352) are in direct contrast with the parade. There Helen sang plaintive songs to the dead (176) and called upon the Sirens, “daughters of Earth,” to come with their mournful music (168–73). These Sirens are not the spellbinding singers of the *Odyssey*, but chthonic deities connected with funeral monuments and the grave.<sup>116</sup> Their music is appropriate to this underworld, death-bound half of the Persephone cycle. But the

<sup>116</sup> For these chthonic Sirens and further literature see Kannicht *ad loc.* (2.67).

Charites of the second stasimon like the Muses in the proem of Hesiod's *Theogony* (cf. *Theog.* 64–5), unlike Helen's tearful *charites* of 176, are joyful and life-giving as they celebrate Persephone's return and, by analogy, Helen's release from her death-like imprisonment at Proteus' tomb.

*Charis* as the joy of rebirth continues into the next scene when Helen, as part of her manipulation of death and life, tells Theoclymenus that she would die with Menelaus out of love for him (1401–2). But, she goes on, “What *charis* would there be in dying with the dead?” (1402–3). And she then reiterates her need for a ship “that I may receive full *charis*” (1411). In both of these lines *charis* denotes her abandonment of death for life. Behind this apparent abandonment of the “dead” Menelaus for a living husband lies her “real” abandonment of a death-like state for the “life” and marriage signified by the return to Sparta. Hence the “full *charis*” of 1411 refers, at one level to the “favor” conferred on her by Theoclymenus, but at another level to the joy of life, rebirth, renewal contained in her escape with Menelaus.

*Charis* also means “charm,” and especially sexual charm, a quality which Helen, if any woman, possesses in the highest degree. The play shows her, in contrast to her *eidolon* at Troy, using this aspect of *charis* in the service of life. In the scene with Theonoe she draws upon the multiple meanings of *charis*—gratitude, charm, grace—to persuade one who has renounced the sexual *charis* to aid the cause of love. Euripides must have savored this paradoxical understanding between the figure of Helen and the virginal Theonoe. Helen is careful to adapt her *charis* to Theonoe's moral purity. She warns against the moral failing involved in winning her brother's “thanks” or “favor” for an unjust cause. Do not earn *charites*, she warns, that are evil and unjust (χάριτας πονηρὰς καὶ δίκους, 902).<sup>117</sup> If the probable emendation of Reiske, δώσεις χάριν, can be accepted in 921, she repeats this plea not to give *charis* to an unjust brother.<sup>118</sup> Later she asks Theonoe to grant her this “favor” (*charis*, 940) and imitate the ways of her father. The result is that Theonoe does, in fact, refuse *charis* to her brother (1000).

<sup>117</sup> On the problem of 900–902 see Pohlenz 2.160.

<sup>118</sup> The emendation is accepted by Kannicht *ad loc.*, who provides a full discussion and points out the weakness of the MS authority here. Dale is more hesitant, though she points out, as had Hermann before her (*ad* 937), the echo of 921 in 1000–1001 if the text is emended.

To mark how completely Helen's own *charis*, the spirit of charm and beauty, triumphs here Theonoe seals her promise with an invocation to Charis, the divinity of love and sexuality equivalent to Aphrodite (1006–7):

ἡ Χάρις δ' ἐμοὶ  
ἴλεως μὲν εἴη, ζυμβέβηκε δ' οὐδαμοῦ.

It is true that Theonoe's prayer to the erotic Charis is appropriate in the light of her earlier warning of Aphrodite's opposition to the couple's return (884–86).<sup>119</sup> Yet Euripides is also exploiting to the limits this paradoxical collusion between Helen and the devotee of purity and philosophy, a sort of kindly female Hippolytus. But there is more than dramatic cleverness. To have effected so unwonted a prayer in this austere priestess is also a signal victory for the life-giving *charis* which Helen embodies.

It is with Theoclymenus that Helen most successfully deploys the full range of her *charis*. The credulous and somewhat loutish king is no match for this womanly grace, charm, and wit. Helen need only make a strategic reference to marriage (1231), proffer reconciliation (1233), and Theoclymenus is ensnared. "Let there be *charis* in return for *charis*," he promises (1234): "favor for favor" is what he means, but his words also suggest, ironically, the deeper "joy" of Helen's return for her present show of "charm." The disguised Menelaus adds that the ship would itself be a sign of "favor" (or "gratitude") for Menelaus: *Μενέλεώ τε πρὸς χάριν* (1273). Theoclymenus innocently pays tribute to Helen's "charm" when he promises to heap the ship with gifts, doing this, as he tells the disguised husband, "out of favor for her" (*τῇδε πρὸς χάριν*, 1281).

In Helen's last appearance on stage *charis* occurs no fewer than seven times in some seventy lines. It describes her success in winning over Theonoe (1373), in deceiving Theoclymenus (1378, 1397, 1411), in abandoning death for the joy of life (1402). Her last use of the word brings together its fullest range of associations. Theoclymenus is concerned that Helen may weep too much for her "dead" husband. She reassures him with the words, "This is the day that will reveal to

<sup>119</sup> See Matthiessen 695–96.

you my *charis*” (ἦδ’ ἡμέρα σοι τὴν ἐμὴν δείξει χάριν, 1420). Theoclymenus is probably to understand *charis* to mean “gratitude” here. But to the audience it also signifies that “charm,” “joy,” “beauty” which are part of Helen’s resilient hold on the vitality of existence and her capacity to bring forth life from death. “What *charis* is it to die with the dead,” she had said a few lines before (1402–3). In his last lines on stage Menelaus prays to Zeus for “one favor” (μίαν χάριν, 1449). Helen’s life-giving *charis* has already secured it in advance.

## IX

The *Helen* not only points back to the sophistic dichotomies of *onoma* and *pragma*, but also looks ahead to the Platonic attempt to distinguish appearance from reality in a deeper sense. The young Plato, as a lad of sixteen, may well have been in the audience of the play’s first performance.

Euripides, like Plato, suggests that the ultimate reality may consist in a purity and beauty which we reach through the violence and confusion of the *eidola* which deceive us with their false goals. Theonoe is, as Kannicht suggests, a poetic anticipation of Plato’s concern with freeing the mind from the obscurities of the sense-world in order to attain the purity and clarity of the noumenal realm.<sup>120</sup> Plato too used Stesichorus’ myth of the phantom Helen as a parable of the evils we suffer when we are deceived by the “false” beauty and “false” pleasures of the sense-world (*Rep.* 9.586BC). In Euripides’ play not only Theonoe, but also the true Helen—and perhaps, therefore, the true reality—are in touch with what is life-giving, innocent, and noble. So in Plato the ultimate reality is good, pure, and beautiful. It is our task not to mistake the mists of appearances for this reality, not to take the shadows in the cave for the true shapes of things in the light of the sun or confuse the murky depths in which most men live with the clear atmosphere which the philosopher breathes (*Repub.* 7.514A ff.; *Phaedo* 109A–11C). Menelaus, in more than a literal way, comes to “see” the world differently. The violence of his ten-year effort to

<sup>120</sup> Kannicht 1.76, citing *Phaedo* 67A and *Theat.* 176A–C. See also the interesting remarks of Grégoire 43–46, who notes that aside from Aristophanes’ parody in *Thesm.* the name Theonoe occurs only in Euripides and Plato (*Cratyl.* 407B).

regain the shadow of the real Helen contrasts ironically with the comparative ease with which the real Helen falls into his arms and devises the means for their reunion.

So much similarity there is, perhaps. Yet Euripides is not Plato. Menelaus returns with the real Helen, but he is no philosopher. Euripides remains more interested in the twists and turns of men's delusions than in the grasping of an eternal and ideal reality.

Hence, for all the antitheses between Helen's gentle arts and Menelaus' violence, between Egypt and Troy, feminine and masculine values, the action culminates in a swashbuckling scene of violence in which the veteran of Troy is totally in his element. Menelaus invokes Poseidon next to the "pure daughters of Nereus" (1584-86) and pours "streams of blood" (*αἵματος ἀπορροαί*) into the sea (1587-88). He thus pollutes with bloodshed those "maiden-lovely streams" of the play's first line, with its associations of Egypt's benign marine mythology. The action also recalls the "streams of blood" (*αἵματος ῥοαί*, 984) with which, in his desperation, he threatened to defile Proteus' tomb (984-85). The destructive and divisive significance of the sea in the first half of the play now emerges as a possibility once more, even though life is winning out over death. When Menelaus creeps to the prow sword in hand "having no thought of any corpse" (*νεκρῶν μὲν οὐδενὸς μνήμην ἔχων*, 1583), the victory over death is assured; yet we are also reminded thereby of the ritual death through which he has had to pass.

The ensuing battle is itself one of those "contests of blood" (*ἄμιλλα . . . αἵματος*, 1155-56) which the chorus condemned in the famous anti-war passage in the first stasimon (1151-58). Menelaus calls upon his companions to "bloody" (*καθαιματώσει*) the heads of the Egyptians (1599). "Slaughter, massacre the barbarians," he shouts (*σφάζειν, φονεύειν*, 1594). Indeed, the battle virtually transforms the ship into a "stream of blood" like those of 984 or 1587-88: *φόνῳ δὲ ναῦς ἐρρεῖτο* (1602). Menelaus addresses his men here as "the sackers of Troy" (1560); and Helen calls upon the "Trojan glory" (1604). Throughout the play, however, Troy and the *kleos* of Troy's capture have had a primarily negative significance (see especially 808-54 and above, section V).<sup>121</sup>

<sup>121</sup> With 1560 cf. 806; with 1603 cf. 845.

It may be, as some have argued, that we are not to take the death of the Egyptians too seriously.<sup>122</sup> The slaughter of the bull could even appear as a kind of ritual scapegoat for Helen's safe return. The burden of the dead past or the false, "destructive image" (73) must be "sacrificed" to reacquire innocence. Yet a real human "sacrifice," barbarians though the victims are, follows the killing of the animal. Herodotus had included a grisly tale of human sacrifice in his account of Helen and Menelaus' escape from Egypt (2.119.2-3); and Euripides may have that passage, with its grim overtones, in mind here. Sacrifice in general is an ominous theme in the tale of Troy.<sup>123</sup> Euripides does not dwell on it in this play as he had in the Taurian *Iphigeneia*. Yet Helen spoke of her suicide as a "sacrifice" to the goddesses' jealousy (354-57), and Menelaus had alluded to the preliminary shedding of blood with enigmatic relish: *προσφάζεται μὲν αἷμα πρῶτα νεπτέροις* (1255).

On the positive side, the concluding battle reenacts history in a way which wipes out the old guilt. The Trojan war is fought again, in miniature. But Helen is now on the right side, cheering on her husband. Her verb *ἀνήρπασε* at 1374 even recalls the "rape" which began the conflict (50), but now it is her husband (*πόσις*, 1374) who is doing the "carrying off." In allowing Helen to relive as a virtuous wife her sinful Trojan past, Euripides is also availing himself of the imaginative possibilities of romance where the dead past may be relived and second chances are the rule.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>122</sup> So Steiger 217; Grube 350. Verrall remarks that the killing of the Egyptians "would be repulsive if it were not too silly" (54); see also 85: "... Any audience fit for Euripides would feel this to be a hideous thing, a thing intolerable, unless, in some extreme circumstances, it might perhaps be presented as a stern necessity." "Cold-blooded cruelty," he says on the next page (86).

<sup>123</sup> Arrowsmith 39 suggests that the Brauron cult in the *I.T.* serves "to lay bare the immense human 'blood-sacrifice' of the Peloponnesian war." See his further remarks on 44-45. The sacrificial animal is also handled in a way which makes an ostentatious display of physical force (cf. 1561-64). The rather mysterious horse of 1567-68, which Dale finds "superfluous" and "an unwelcome anticlimax" (*ad* 1563-68), may be there as a reminder of the martial character of Menelaus, the heroic identity being reborn: cf. the equine sacrifice in *Il.* 23.171 and also *Hdt.* 4.71-72, *Tac. Germ.* 27. On the rarity of horse sacrifices see L. Ziehen, *RE* 18.1 (1939) 591-92, s.v. "Opfer." At the same time the horse would be an appropriate sacrifice to Poseidon for one who seeks a safe return over the sea to his homeland: cf. Frazer *ad* Pausan. 8.7.2.

<sup>124</sup> Hence the revival of the "dead" in the *Winter's Tale*, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*. There is a good example of this imaginative cancellation of the burdensome past through

It is also possible to regard the battle scene in psychological terms: it is a cathartic, liberating re-experience of a traumatic, guilt-laden past. Dramatically Helen's role in this scene is essential for the completion of her side of the story. As Menelaus recovers his identity as a heroic warrior, so Helen recovers hers as a virtuous wife. This dramatization of her recovery of identity is all the more important as the *eidolon* in the first part of the play has raised the question of that identity. Indeed, Helen feels the shame of the evils perpetrated in her name as a part of herself. As Kannicht observes, "Without the beautiful Helen, then, no *eidolon* of the beautiful Helen either: just this fateful conjunction is the basis of the tragic paradox which alienates her from herself: to be ἀναίτιός θ' ἄμα παναίτιος."<sup>125</sup> The battle-scene heals the split in her identity between *onoma* and *pragma* and is a final overcoming of her "Selbstentfremdung."

There are, of course, other positive features of the ending too. The benign effect of Zeus' purposes stated in the prologue (see 36-37, 44-47) but obscured in the parade (241-43) are now confirmed: "Such is the will of Zeus" (Ζεὺς γὰρ ὧδε βούλεται, 1669).<sup>126</sup> The appearance of the Dioscuri also confirms the immortal (1659), and not the mortal, *logos* of their fate (see 21, 138-42, 284-85) and establishes Helen's virtue forever (1666-70, 1686-87). On the other hand their appearance is made absolutely necessary by the sanguinary fury of Theoclymenus. And, in any case, Euripidean *dexiotês* could have devised a less violent resolution to a play in which the Trojan war and war in general have carried nothing but the most negative associations. A work which has bitterly condemned violence requires violence, finally, for its resolution. The chorus' words at 1151-58 are an ironic, haunting echo as Menelaus, seconded by Helen, pours blood into the sea and invokes the sack of Troy and the "Trojan glory" (1560, 1603).

The point is not that we have to decide between a positive or negative interpretation, but rather that Euripides himself refuses to decide.

reliving it in the section entitled "Alle Mädchen sind dein" in Hesse's *Der Steppenwolf* (*Gesammelte Dichtungen*, Suhrkamp ed. [1952] 4.373 ff.) The descent to the underworld in *Od.* 11 and *Aen.* 6 also provides some analogies.

<sup>125</sup> Kannicht 1.61.

<sup>126</sup> Matthiessen 695 notes the balancing of Theonoe's prayer to Aphrodite (1093-106) by Menelaus' to Zeus near the end of the action (1441-50). See also Conacher 301-2 who notes the absence of "Zeus' plans" from Theonoe's explanation (p. 302).

There is ultimately no total reconciliation between the play's "two worlds." The vision of the Helen is profoundly dualistic, and the dualism may cut too deeply to be bridged.

Parallel to this dualism in the dramatic structure stands the philosophical dualism connected with the aether and Theonoe, the contrast, broadly speaking, between spirit and matter. Professor Burnett's elucidation of this dualism is especially valuable, though the connection with Anaximander is perhaps not to be insisted on:<sup>127</sup>

The materialist, Anaximandrian theory of justice was altered by Euripides not only because of its alienation from the world and its morality, but also because it belonged at last to a monistic system. Anaximander's justice lay in the undifferentiated Boundless from which the Opposites came, just as Anaxagoras' *nous* stood single and sufficient behind the created world. By contrast, the justice which Theonoe serves is the phenomenon of a dualistic universe. In her own person Theonoe unites justice with *aither*, for she, who has an altar of *Dike* within herself, is also the priestess of the divine *aither* . . . But *aither*, the house of Zeus (Nauck<sup>2</sup>, Frag. 491), or Zeus himself (Nauck<sup>2</sup>, Frags. 836, 869, 903, 935, and many others), was not for Euripides the single first substance. Creation occurred only when *aither* was paired with earth (Nauck<sup>2</sup>, Frags. 836, 1012). Reflecting this duality, the *Helen* recognizes a double system of causation and of morality, influenced perhaps by the Opposites of Anaximander, and looking forward to the coexistence of the Wandering Cause and the Mind, in the *Timaeus*.

Thus here at the end Helen's purity, innocence, resilience prove to be not enough. Violence is needed, and the male heroism of Menelaus supplies it. The "streams of blood" which he pours forth (1587) are not only a dark counterstatement to the virginal purity of Egypt's streams (line 1), but also a return to primitive ritual after philosophical mysticism and lofty spirituality. The antithesis between the primitive-archetypal and philosophical-speculative aspects of the play noted earlier is not resolved any more than that between the reality of war and the aspiration toward peace (1151-58). Egypt itself is dualistic: beside Theonoe there stands Theoclymenus, as beside Helen Menelaus. The play contains bold speculations on spiritual immortality (1013-16); yet Helen and Menelaus' rebirth requires a deeply primitive sacrifice of blood.

<sup>127</sup> Burnett 161.



The ending, therefore, gives an ironic turn to the antithesis of reality and appearance in the play and deepens the pervasive dualism with a profounder dualism which reflects basic cleavages in human life: philosophical principles and primitive rituals, abstract thought and vegetation myths, spiritual purity and fertility celebrations, immortal aether and the shedding of blood.<sup>128</sup> The antithetical structure of the play subsumes these final antitheses into those between Troy and Egypt, guilt and innocence, death and life. The mythic "language" of the plot and the intellectualist language of the philosophical problems enrich and expand one another with ever-widening horizons.

The fact that the dualism emerges at the end as a *necessary* part of our world-structure, however, suddenly throws the clarity of those previous antitheses into confusion. The play's final irony in this supposedly "happy ending" is that the previous antitheses are shown to be simplistic. In the last analysis human life cannot be reduced to clear-cut dichotomies. "Reality" is elusive and ambiguous precisely because it is itself a perpetual dialectic between what "seems" and what "is."

For this reason Helen, with her ambiguous status between corporeal and fictive being, is the central figure, and Theonoe and Menelaus remain simpler polarities at either end of the spectrum. We may emerge from the mists long enough to recognize the clarity and beauty of a Theonoe; but, when we return to the realm of action, to "real" Sparta after fairyland Egypt, we find ourselves again in a dualistic world where the boundaries between reality and appearance are not sure, where a Helen needs a Menelaus and joins him in the war-cry and the lust for blood. Once out of range of that suspended world of Theonoe's mysterious wisdom and Proteus' mild justice and *sôphrosynê*, we return to the strife, passions, possessiveness of men and the inevitable bloodshed to which they lead. The reenacted Trojan war at the end darkens the validity of a Theonoe's claims to superior truth and the "reality" of her philosophical realm after all.

Ending with battle and war enables Euripides to keep a certain bitterness of mood. In adapting Euripides' myth to his *Ägyptische Helena*, Hofmannsthal felt that the motif of the *eidolon* introduced the problem of dividing the work into two parts, a ghost-story and an

<sup>128</sup> See Burnett 155.

idyll.<sup>129</sup> One may demur at considering Euripides' *Helen* a ghost story (Hofmannsthal, like Goethe, exploited this facet of the legend), but it is clear that his ending is carefully planned to keep the "idyll" far in the background. As in *The Tempest*, the return to mainland reality brings a relinquishment of the infinite openness and hopefulness of romance. Euripides' ending, like Prospero's last action, figuratively buries the creator's book of spells and abjures the "rough magic" of his "so potent art."<sup>130</sup>

## X

There is still another dimension of meaning in the two worlds of the *Helen*. Helen is a ministrant to life and renewal in both a physical and spiritual sense. Her *charis* is the joy of life and feminine charm. But it also includes the beauty of art. Her role as a manipulator of *technê* and *mêchanê*, of deception and the double vision which confuses the more prosaic every-day mentalities of Menelaus and Theoclymenus, also signifies the restorative force of art itself. Like the poet, Helen rings the changes on illusion and reality and with falsehood achieves truth. Gorgias used the figure of Helen to reflect upon the nature of art,<sup>131</sup> and the Gorgianic elements in the antitheses of Euripides' have long been recognized.<sup>132</sup>

Plutarch reports a remark of Gorgias, à propos of tragedy, as follows (*FVS*<sup>6</sup> 82B23): "The one who deceives is more just than the one who does not deceive, and the one who is deceived is wiser than the one not deceived." Plutarch's context makes it clear that Gorgias is talking about the need for successful fiction ("deception") in representational art, which conveys its truth by exploiting the audience's acceptance of the "appearances" which it in fact knows to be a "lie." Something of this idea, I suggest, underlies certain elements in Euripides' play, especially the fanciful Egyptian setting and the marine mythology of Psamathe, the Nereids, Proteus, Galaneia, and even Theonoe. Given the problematical character of reality itself, Euripides is saying, there

<sup>129</sup> The quotation from Hofmannsthal is given by Alt 24, note 1.

<sup>130</sup> *The Tempest*, 5.1.49-51.

<sup>131</sup> See my essay, "Gorgias and the Psychology of the *Logos*," *HSCP* 66 (1962) 99-155.

<sup>132</sup> Solmsen, "Onoma"; see also Schmid 504, with note 3.

may be a truth which goes deeper than our every-day vision of things, a truth which looks improbable and "deceptive," but yet is "wise" and "just" in Gorgias' sense. This is the visionary truth of art, imagination, and mysticism. By its light the apparent triumphs even of the physical prowess of a Menelaus may prove *eidola*. Theonoe's Egypt, akin to Gorgias' "wiser" deception, may harbor truths about our existence that are usually concealed from us, clouded by our passions and the impurities of our lives and our world.

As the kaleidoscope of the play's antitheses between appearance and reality turns before our eyes, we become aware that the play *qua* play is itself a term in those antitheses: the very fact that we watch with rapt attention a wildly improbable tale of fantastic characters indicates something of our own hesitation between illusion and reality. What Northrop Frye has said of *The Tempest* is in part applicable also to the *Helen*: "The play is an illusion like the dream, and yet a focus of reality more intense than life affords . . . What seems at first illusory, the magic and music, becomes real, and the *Realpolitik* of Antonio and Sebastian becomes illusion."<sup>133</sup> That Euripides was conscious of such possibilities appears substantiated by at least one passage in which he deliberately breaks through the dramatic illusion and reminds us that we are, after all, watching a play, a fiction (see 1056).<sup>134</sup>

This tension between art and reality, like the more general tension between appearance and truth, also remains unresolved. Helen's mental *méchanai* and "wise deceptions" yield place at the end to the hard truth of Menelaus' brawn. Unlike Plato, Euripides has no conviction of an ideal truth. He is content to reveal how problematical is the relation of all human life to what we suppose to be real or illusory. Unique as the *Helen* is, it also shares in what Zuntz has called "the tragic essence of Euripides' works, namely, the renunciation of a final truth [which] serves, in the *Helena*, to irradiate, ironically, the web of inescapable error and limited yet saving understanding which is life."<sup>135</sup>

<sup>133</sup> Frye, *The Tempest* (above, note 25) 21.

<sup>134</sup> See Dale *ad* 1050 ff. (134). The chorus' rather stiff lines, τοὺς δὲ Μενέλεω ποθῶ / λόγους ἀκοῦσαι τίνας ἐρεῖ ψυχῆς πέρι (945-46), if not dismissed as careless and mechanical writing, also look like a self-conscious reflection, almost approaching parody, on the convention of the *hamilla logôn* in tragedy.

<sup>135</sup> Zuntz 221-22.

Thus if the *Helen* explores art's magical power to transform reality and to present facets of it usually hidden to us, it is also willing to prick the bubble. Theonoe remains in the sealed off realm of Egypt; and the threat of violence to her person, parallel with Helen's participation in the reenacted Trojan war, is a final compounding of the ambiguity of art and illusion. Euripides has taken us to magic realms and "faery lands forlorn," but he has also shown us their fragility. And that double vision of art's use of illusion to convey truth, its suspension between *onoma* and *pragma*, cloud-image and solid body, belongs to the special quality of self-reflective romance which the *Helen* shares with *The Tempest*:

These our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and  
Are melted into air, into thin air;  
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind.

#### CONCLUSION

The complexity of the two worlds of the *Helen* takes us back to the inevitable question of whether the play is a tragedy, a comedy, or something in between. Unquestionably there is much in the *Helen* that is comic, or at least amusing. Yet even the most "comic" scenes—Menelaus and the Portress or the appearance of Theoclymenus—have their serious side. While the motifs of *agnoia* and *anagnôrisis* point ahead to New Comedy, they have their fully tragic aspect too: the ignorance and blindness in which so much of human life is lived.<sup>136</sup> Indeed, the confusions and recognitions of New Comedy arose and were (are) appreciated not just because of the titillation of the unexpected, but because they too point to the uncertainty, ignorance, and instability of the human condition.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>136</sup> See Solmsen, "*Ion*," 434 and 452-3.

<sup>137</sup> See Albin Lesky, *A History of Greek Literature*<sup>2</sup>, transl. Willis and de Heer (London 1966) 386-87.

The issue of whether the play is comedy or tragedy is, in the last analysis, irrelevant. Euripides, like many artists in the late stages of their work, has created a form which transcends the precise limits between genres. Shakespeare's late "tragic" romances—notably *Cymbeline* and *Pericles*—are a close analogy. The urge and the encouragement to go beyond the conventional form of tragedy must have come with the conception of the basic material of the plot: the complex interchanges of appearance and reality, the exotic setting, the philosophical mysticism, the ritual death and rebirth, the odes on Persephone and the Mountain Mother, the blend of sophistic epistemology and ancient, Odyssean archetypes. The equally "romantic" and "comic" features of plays like the *Iphigeneia among the Taurians* and the *Ion*—to say nothing of the heroless *Trojan Women* or the tripartite *Heracles Mad*—suffice to show that Euripides was in a period of intense artistic exploration and experimentation.

The *Helen*'s very hesitation between tragedy and comedy is itself one term in the questions and antitheses which it poses: are truth and "reality" something akin to the gentleness, beauty, innocence of Helen or to the mystical purity of Theonoe, or are they rather akin to the "Trojan" violence of Menelaus (and Theoclymenus), for it is the action of these two male characters that stands out most vividly at the end of the play.

If a choice must be made, one can find legitimate grounds for considering the *Helen* a tragedy, albeit a tragedy of a very special form. It depicts, finally, not an escape into a transformed world, as Aristophanic comedy often does, or even the renewal of a disrupted social order, after the fashion of Menander and his successors, but raises disturbing and ironic questions about the place of violence and bloodshed in the "reality" in which men have to live. The necessity of reenacting the Trojan war, cathartic though that may be, and the brutal impulses of Theoclymenus toward the *miasma* of shedding kindred blood in the penultimate scene shatter the simplicity of a "happy ending." The *Helen* is "tragic" if only because it recalls us to the horror of our immersion in a deluded world of passion, war, razed cities, empty goals. It makes us aware, on a multiplicity of levels, of the cost of choosing appearance over reality—a choice for which the play's purest and most idealistic character comes close to paying with her life.

Zuntz has beautifully described the play as “an ethereal dance above the abyss.”<sup>138</sup> The play is a tragedy in so far as Euripides never lets us forget that the abyss is there, and is “real.”

<sup>138</sup> Zuntz 227.