

THE COMPOSITION OF ISOCRATES' *HELEN*

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Aristotle's dictum that the prooemium of Isocrates' *Helen* is thematically independent of the encomium which it introduces (*Rhetoric* 1414B27–29) was first challenged quite recently by George Kennedy, who sought to establish the unity of the entire speech by interpreting it as a Panhellenic political document.¹ The aim of what follows is to demonstrate the untenability of a political interpretation of the *Helen* and to recover it as a sophistic-rhetorical document. In the first part of this study a scrutiny of the parallels between the *Helen* and the *Panegyricus* of Isocrates, taken by Kennedy as evidence of a convergence in political intent, discloses that the *Helen* is lacking in precisely the Panhellenic and political considerations which are dominant in the *Panegyricus*. The second part considers the prooemium of the *Helen*, which Kennedy understands as holding a promise for a political speech on which the encomium makes good; this reading, it will be argued, fails to take into account salient features of the structure and argument of the prooemium. Only in a very qualified sense can unity be ascribed to the speech.

I

Kennedy's interpretation expands on Werner Jaeger's observation that in the final section of the *Helen* (67–69), Helen becomes "a mythical symbol of the political aspirations which he (Isocrates) expressed more fully soon after in the *Panegyricus*—of the great struggle to unite the Greek states in a national crusade against the barbarians."²

¹ "Isocrates' Encomium of Helen: A Panhellenic Document," *TAPA* 89 (1958) 77–83, hereafter referred to as "Kennedy."

² *Paideia* III (New York 1944) 67. On the date of the *Helen* cf. E. Drerup, *Isocratis opera omnia* I (Leipzig 1960) CXXXI–CXXXIV.

Kennedy extends this symbolic meaning to Helen's every appearance in the oration. Since the Greek suitors vied for Helen (39 f.), Kennedy detects in her an allusion to "the right to leadership in Greece," a right which, according to the *Panegyricus* (18), belongs to Athens.³ This parallel between Helen and Panhellenic leadership, plausible initially for the digression on Theseus (*Helen* 18–38), the only section of the *Helen* in which Athens is mentioned, breaks down as soon as one tests it in other passages. For example, the contenders for leadership in the *Panegyricus* are the Greek states, Athens and Sparta; in the *Helen*, Isocrates, touching lightly on the competition among Greeks for Helen's hand, emphasizes the war Greeks fought with barbarians in order to regain her (40, 48–51). In an equation of Helen with the leadership which is at issue in the *Panegyricus*, barbarians would be vying with Greeks for the command of the Greek expedition against the barbarians. Similarly, Kennedy assimilates the pledge sworn by Helen's suitors "on behalf of the one who won her" to the design of the *Panegyricus* for doing away with strife between the Greek cities through a united expedition against Persia.⁴ However, not only does a reference to unity appear only in the epilogue of the speech (to which Jaeger drew attention), and not in the lines on the pledge (40), but Isocrates' words are at least as open to the contrary interpretation: his suitors are self-centered enough for each to be convinced that as soon as Helen became an "object of contention," he would be the sure beneficiary of the pledge.⁵ Lines which can thus serve equally well for proof of divisiveness and of unity are too elusive to be used as markers of a clear-cut political intention. In any event, the brief allusion to the pledge functions chiefly as a bridge to the elaborate encomium of Paris (41–48)—an object of praise hard to reconcile with the notion of a document devoted to promoting Greek unity against the barbarians. In the section following, Isocrates enthuses over the magnitude of the war incited by Helen.⁶ The beauty of Helen is commended here as much by the ardor of the barbarians to retain her

³ Kennedy 81.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Cf. *Helen* 17 for the programmatic significance of Helen as *περιμαχητός*.

⁶ Isocrates' *καὶ τῷ πλήθει τῶν παρασκευῶν* seems to be borrowed from Thucydides 1.1.1. Cf. G. Mathieu, "Isocrate et Thucydide," *RPh* 42 (1918) 123.

as of the Greeks to carry her back; no preference on Isocrates' part for the Greeks is discernible (49–51). In the *Panegyricus*, on the contrary, Isocrates belittles the fighting ability of the Persians, indulging in sneers at Persian servility and decadence, because he is encouraging the Greeks to view Persia as ripe for an easy conquest (138–54). We may conclude that if a political message lurks in the section of the *Helen* discussed here, it will not be uncovered by appeal to parallels from the *Panegyricus*.

It remains possible that the Theseus digression is the repository for such a message. "In the *Helen*," writes Kennedy, "Theseus is worthy of Helen whom he took from Lacedaemon, just as in the *Panegyricus* (21 ff.) Athens is worthy of the hegemony which it should take from Sparta."⁷ Two considerations militate against acceptance of this analogy. The first has to do with Kennedy's equivocal use of the term "hegemony" to denote either leadership within Greece or command of a Panhellenic expedition outside of Greece. Which sense he intends is not clear. The usage of Isocrates by contrast is precise. In the *Panegyricus*, Buchner has shown, *ἡγεμονία* and *ἡγεῖσθαι* occur not as synonyms for *ἀρχή* or *ἄρχειν* but solely in the restricted sense of command of the war against Persia.⁸ For the speech aims not at a revival of the fifth-century *ἀρχή* but rather at a reconstruction, on the model of the Persian war alliance, of a joint Athenian-Spartan *ἡγεμονία* to direct the invasion and colonization of the East. While it is true that the central section of the *Panegyricus* (23–128) develops a defense of the *ἀρχή* and shows that Athens by itself deserves the hegemony, this exposition is subordinate to the main thesis of a joint command.⁹ The rhetorical strategy is to persuade Sparta to share command with Athens by assembling enough mythical and historical precedents to prove conclusively the right of Athens to the whole of it

⁷ Kennedy 81.

⁸ E. Buchner, *Der Panegyrikos des Isokrates* (Wiesbaden 1960) 128, 139, 150. On hegemony in Isocrates cf. H. Triepel, *Die Hegemonie* (Stuttgart 1938) 352; F. Wehrli, "Zur politischen Theorie der Griechen: Gewaltherrschaft und Hegemonie," in *Theorie und Humanitas* (Zurich 1972) 154 f.

⁹ Buchner 6–10, 151. *Panegyricus* 20 puts the relation succinctly: *καὶ πρότερον ἡ πόλις ἡμῶν δικαίως τῆς θαλάσσης ἥρξεν καὶ νῦν οὐκ ἀδίκως ἀμφισβητεῖ τῆς ἡγεμονίας*. The problems arising from the juxtaposition of hegemonial and imperial pretensions were pinpointed by W. Oncken, *Isokrates und Athen* (Heidelberg 1862) 24.

(18). The fact that Athens is nowhere envisaged as the sole or the dominating hegemon of the proposed expedition makes unlikely an analogy between the *Helen* and the *Panegyricus* of the kind Kennedy suggests. More important, Isocrates could not be advising Athens to "take" hegemony from Sparta, since by hegemony he understands leadership not in the sense of an ἀρχή, undoubtedly exercised by Sparta, but rather the direction of an expeditionary force which does not yet exist, and so cannot be taken away.

Second, the way in which Isocrates describes the abduction of Helen by Theseus should put us on our guard against a political reading. At first glance, to be sure, the orator might seem to be evoking Athenian defiance of Spartan power when he has Theseus (i.e., Athens) take Helen

ὑπεριδὼν τὴν ἀρχὴν τὴν Τυνδάρεω καὶ καταφρονήσας τῆς ῥώμης τῆς Καστορος καὶ Πολυδεύκους καὶ πάντων τῶν ἐν Λακεδαίμονι δεινῶν ὀλιγωρήσας. (19)

When in the mid-380's the *Helen* was published, Sparta was the dominant power in the Aegean; these lines could have suggested to a reader who resented Spartan imperialism the mythical wish-picture of a resurgent Athens which could flout Spartan power and go on to replace it.¹⁰ Still, this reader could not have pressed the parallel without falling into absurdity: Theseus' hold over Helen must be brief, since the story demands that she be restored to her home in time to marry Menelaus (39). Was Athenian predominance to be a brief interlude before a renewal of Spartan domination? More important, the abduction story itself suggests that Isocrates is retelling the traditional legend for straightforwardly rhetorical purposes. Theseus' act is portrayed as a violation of custom and propriety. Helen's "guardians" (κύριοι) refuse Theseus' advances for the plausible reason that the girl is not of age, and they are waiting for an oracular response at the moment he resorts to violence (19). Far from censoring the discreditable features of the tradition about Theseus, Isocrates exploits them as grist for his encomiastic mill. The fact that the mighty ruler succumbed to the charms of even the young Helen and, for once, acted with reckless

¹⁰ Cf. the interpretation of Lysias' *Epitaphios* on these lines by N. Loraux, "Marathon ou l'histoire idéologique (Lys. 2.20-26)," *REA* 75 (1973) 13-42.

abandon, is made to furnish tribute to her beauty. But this also makes the story unlikely as a model for an Athenian seizure of leadership in Greece.

In the following passage (23-28), Isocrates deviates from the traditional legend to make Theseus superior to Heracles.¹¹ Though he grants that Heracles' deeds are "more illustrious and mightier," Theseus, he asserts, deserves greater credit for performing services which were "more beneficial to the Greeks and more helpful to their daily lives" (24). Since, as the *Panegyricus* throughout maintains, Panhellenic services confer hegemonial rights, this judgment might well, as Kennedy holds, be meant to suggest that Athens, not Sparta, deserves hegemony. Isocrates does not openly draw this conclusion, he does not specify the nature of the hegemony, nor does he explicitly link Heracles with Sparta. But these omissions would be less than decisive if the deeds he went on to instance as proof of Theseus' preeminence had a Panhellenic cutting edge. This they do not. Instead, Isocrates makes do with Theseus' triumph over a bull that was ravaging Attica and with his victory over the centaurs; most momentarily Theseus sails to Crete, does away with the Minotaur, and restores the intended victims to grateful parents (25-28). Useful as these deeds may be, they fall far short of the Panhellenic scope required to uphold a claim to hegemony.

Illustrations for this scope abound in the *Panegyricus*. Isocrates opens the catalogue of Athenian benefactions by celebrating Athens as the source of the greatest material and spiritual blessings for the greatest number of men—the cultivation of grain and the Eleusinian mysteries (28-33). In order precisely to match Athenian services with the hegemonial claim, Isocrates constructs (on the model of the Ionian migrations) a mythical paradigm in which the ancient Athenians, appointing themselves as ἡγεμόνες and στρατηγοί for homeless Greeks, pushed back the barbarians and settled the Greeks on the land thus made vacant (35). Athens he eulogizes as the home of philosophy (i.e., rhetorical culture), and more particularly as responsible for the name "Greek" having come to denote a fact of culture rather than of race (51). An Athens, it is implied, which has so transmuted the very

¹¹ On the Heracles-Theseus *synkrisis* cf. E. Skard, "Zwei religios-politische Begriffe, Euergetes-Concordia," *Avhandl. Norske Videnskaps Akad., Hist.-Phil. Kl.* (1931) 42.

sense of what is meant by being Greek deserves the command of the Greek expedition. Measured against the Athenian benefactions of the *Panegyricus*, Theseus' deeds quite clearly do not qualify as proofs for the right to hegemony. We can suppose either that Isocrates tried to use Theseus for this purpose but that the attempt miscarried, or that this was never his aim to begin with. Apart from its intrinsic probability, other details of the Theseus digression show that the latter alternative is correct.

The high point of Theseus' career is the synoecism of Athens, an event duly celebrated in the *Helen* which recurs, but in very different form, in the *Panegyricus*. For the reader's convenience, I set the two versions side by side:

πρῶτον μὲν τὴν πόλιν σποράδην
καὶ κατὰ κώμας οἰκοῦσαν εἰς
ταῦτόν συναγαγὼν τηλικαύτην
ἐποίησε (Θήσευς) ὥστ(ε) . . .
μεγίστην τῶν Ἑλληνίδων εἶναι.

(*Helen* 35)

παραλαβοῦσα (ἡ πόλις) τοὺς
Ἑλλήνας ἀνόμως ζῶντας καὶ
σποράδην οἰκοῦντας . . . καὶ τούτων
τῶν κακῶν αὐτοὺς ἀπήλλαξεν.
(*Panegyricus* 39)

In the *Helen* excerpt on the left, Theseus unites the previously scattered inhabitants of Attica, making Athens the largest city in Greece. A patriotic Athenian note is struck; Greece is the setting merely for Athenian glory and Athens alone the beneficiary. In the *Panegyricus* excerpt, on the other hand, the work of Athens benefits the rest of Greece; the synoecism, recalled in the vestigial phrase *σποράδην οἰκοῦντας*, has turned into an effort undertaken by Athens to purge lawlessness and disorder from Greece (since a unification of Greece was not envisaged), in which Athens itself is unaffected.¹² The reason for the shift is that the exploit now must go to build up the case for Athenian hegemony, an interest absent from the *Helen*.

It is worth noting that even in a case where both speeches report the identical legend without important changes, they do so for different purposes. At *Helen* 31, Theseus' assistance to the suppliants, Adrastus

¹² To introduce the synoecism Isocrates has Theseus rid Athens of a group of oppressors who serve as a foil for the democracy inaugurated by Theseus. Cf. *Areopagiticus* 64–69 for verbal echoes of the description of this gang, and also *Against Lochites* 10; *On the Team* 42. Perhaps Isocrates had the Thirty in mind in the *Helen* passage, but his style is so repetitive that such verbal parallels prove little.

and the sons of Heracles, serves to validate his piety.¹³ In the *Panegyricus* version of the same legend, Isocrates explains that the suppliants turned to Athens because they counted on the power and willingness of Athens to relieve the plight of Greeks in distress; he adds that the confidence they placed in Athens amounted to an endorsement of the city's hegemonial status: *προεσθάναι τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἀξιοῦντας* (57).

The reference to the synoecism in the *Helen* introduces an account of Theseus as the founder of the Athenian democracy (35-37). Once again, the point of view is Athenian, with no hint that any other Greek communities could imitate the Athenian example. A passage in the *Panathenaicus* (128 f.) illustrates how Isocrates varies the story when he wishes to make it yield a Panhellenic meaning. Here Isocrates is tracing Athens' career of Panhellenic service back to the era of kingship. Whereas in the *Helen* those of Theseus' heroic exploits whose Panhellenic label (if not content) qualified him as a competitor of Heracles (24-28) preceded his crowning act, the political organization of Athens, the sequence is reversed in the *Panathenaicus*. To support the Panhellenic theme, Theseus is made to abdicate from the monarchy in favor of a popular regime, leaving him free to "undertake trials on behalf of Athens and the rest of Greece" (129).¹⁴

To sum up: even in the one section of the *Helen* in which Athens appears, Isocrates neither presses Athenian nor denies Spartan claims to hegemony. After boasting that Theseus outstripped Heracles in performing services useful to the Greeks, Isocrates fails to pursue the thought, and his retelling of Theseus' achievements contains no recognizable allusion to contemporary events. This is not to say that only in 380 B.C. with the *Panegyricus* did Isocrates begin to show interest in politics. In the *Busiris*, roughly contemporary with the *Helen*, Isocrates denounces Spartan imperialism: "having all adopted a military way of life, they think it right to seize by violence the property of others" (19). However, no remedy is proposed. But, to return to Jaeger's observation, the remedy for Spartan violence, the Panhellenic expedition of the *Panegyricus*, is alluded to in the epilogue of the *Helen*.

¹³ Cf. Helen North, "Canons and Hierarchies of the Cardinal Virtues in Greek and Latin Literature," in L. Wallach ed., *The Classical Heritage* (Ithaca 1966) 170 f.

¹⁴ *Panathenaicus* 129 makes clear how deliberately Isocrates is innovating; cf. *Panegyricus* 9.

Here finally a pro-Greek and anti-barbarian bias obtrudes. The war caused by Helen, Isocrates now asserts, produced *ὁμόνοια* among the Greeks, while the ensuing rollback of the barbarians provided them with land to settle (68). This looks forward to the *Panegyricus*, and a reference in the very last sentence of the speech to future "elaboration and longer treatment" of the hints given about the war's profitability has plausibly been taken as a prediction of this oration.¹⁵ Yet this prediction is not the whole story. As Josef Martin recently pointed out, Isocrates' celebration of the Trojan War for bringing about the liberation of Greece serves the rhetorical principle of excluding from the encomium all the apologetic accessories for whose inclusion he had criticized Gorgias in the prooemium (15).¹⁶ Only celebratory matter qualifies for admission. Thus, even in the politically relevant epilogue, the political message goes hand in hand with the technical, rhetorical aim of the encomium.

II

We turn now to an examination of those elements within the *Helen* itself which have seemed to authorize the political interpretation. The motive for seeking a political message in the encomium of the *Helen* is supplied by the prooemium of the speech, where Isocrates inveighs against writers who, to his distress, propound far-fetched conundrums rather than contribute to civic education by working up practical, politically relevant themes (5). Kennedy reads this comment as a statement of the author's intention himself to present a speech on a serious political theme.¹⁷ Having rejected Kennedy's solution of an allegorical encomium, we have still to deal with the problem—the apparent assertion of a promise which is at once betrayed. As Buchheit puts it, "the reader is impressed with all this serious talk, only to be brought up short when he learns that none other than Helen is to be a suitable theme."¹⁸ Nonetheless, this perplexity vanishes once we attend to the movement and structure of the prooemium.

The view of the prooemium as a seamless whole implied in the dis-

¹⁵ This is pointed out by K. Ries, *Isokrates und Platon im Ringen um die Philosophie* (Diss., Munich 1959) 48.

¹⁶ *Antike Rhetorik* (Munich 1974) 187 f.

¹⁷ Kennedy 79.

¹⁸ *Untersuchungen zur Theorie des Genos epideiktikon* (Munich 1960) 59.

cussions of Buchheit and Kennedy was stated explicitly by Jaeger, who writes that "this attack on the 'disputers' occupies the whole of the introduction to the *Helen*, and has nothing to do with the rest of the speech."¹⁹ The first half of this statement is decidedly in error, since the prooemium falls into two distinct sections, 1-7 and 8-15, of which the first only has to do with "disputers."²⁰ In Part I, as we shall call it, Isocrates attacks contemporary teachers who are attracting large audiences to listen to proofs of some *ὑπόθεσιν ἄτοπον καὶ παράδοξον* (1). He lists three classes: (1) persons who deny the possibility of lying or of self-contradiction; (2) those who insist that "courage, wisdom and justice are identical," and who equate virtue with knowledge; (3) "People given to eristic disputes" (2 f.). In a comment on the third class, the eristics, Isocrates lays down the rule that instruction must be useful. A fuller expression of this idea comes soon after.

Isocrates depreciates the "paradox-mongers" by denying to their productions even the lure of novelty, since Protagoras' generation had anticipated them with theses of unsurpassable paradoxicality:

How could anybody outdo Gorgias, who had the hardihood to deny the existence of the things that are, or Zeno, who undertook to demonstrate that the identical things are possible and again impossible, or Melissos, who in spite of the infinitude of things tried to discover proofs for the unity of the whole? (3)

He effects dismay that even though these men long ago had demonstrated "how easy it is to devise a false speech about any proposition that is put forward," his contemporaries persist in the effort. Here, Isocrates seems to be attributing to others his own concern with outstripping all previous practitioners in the genre he happens to be attempting.²¹

In contradistinction to the abstruse disputations he has denounced, Isocrates offers a down-to-earth approach:

to pursue the truth, instruct one's pupils with regard to what we do as citizens, and put them through their paces guided by our everyday

¹⁹ *Paideia* (above, note 2) 305, note 84.

²⁰ Cf. K. Münscher, *Ἰσοκράτους Ἑλένης ἐγκώμιον*, *RhM* 54 (1899) 255. For the rhetorical theory of the prooemium cf. W. Suss, *Ethos* (Leipzig 1910) 64-70; W. Trimpf, "The Ancient Hypothesis of Fiction," *Traditio* 27 (1971) 9-13.

²¹ Cf. *Panegyricus* 8, 10; *Evagoras* 8-11. At *Panathenaisus* 11 Isocrates pits himself against speakers in political assemblies.

understanding of politics, keeping in mind that it is far better to entertain approximate notions about useful matters than to have precise knowledge about useless ones, and to make small progress in large matters than be the front runner in things which lack utility for life (4 f.).

This pronouncement on educational practice cannot be meant to prepare the reader for an encomium. The key phrase in it, *περὶ τὰς πράξεις ἐν αἷς πολιτευόμεθα*, is at odds with the choice of Helen as theme, even on Kennedy's supposition that Helen stands for the right of leadership of a Greek expedition against Persia. "Experience of everyday matters" is as little suited to the grandiose scheme of eastern conquest propagated by the *Panegyricus* as it is to Theseus' adventures, the praise of Paris (43-48) or to the excursus on beauty (54-58) in the *Helen* taken at face value as rhetorical display.²²

The function of the passage quoted comes to light through a glance at the lengthier exposition of the same material in the *Antidosis*. There also Isocrates berates the sophists of Protagoras' era for theoretical excesses and an attendant failure to teach useful subjects (268 f.). In contrast to "people who admire the absurd speculations of the sophists of old" he approves of persons who "learn and practice things which will enable them properly to administer their own households and the affairs of the city" (285). With this, Isocrates gives us to understand what his "useful" subjects are. He is doing little more than to restate the well-known *ἐπάγγελμα* of Protagoras, who promised that his pupils would learn from him *εὐβουλία περὶ τῶν οἰκείων . . . καὶ περὶ τῶν τῆς πόλεως*.²³ The pronouncement of the *Helen* echoes the claim of Protagoras in function as well as in content. Just as Protagoras was distinguishing the political subjects he taught from the scientific curriculum of Hippias, so Isocrates emphasizes the practical nature of his instruction as over against the impractical theorizing of his competitors.²⁴ Isocrates' boast is as old-fashioned as according to his own assertion are the paradoxical displays of these competitors!

Again, near the end of Part I, Isocrates takes the eristics to task for "finding pleasure in speeches which are altogether lacking in utility."

²² Paris' choice, approved of by Isocrates (*Helen* 43), depreciates political activity.

²³ Plato, *Prot.* 318e; cf. Arist. *Frogs* 959 f., 974-79; W. Steidle, "Redekunst und Bildung bei Isokrates," *Hermes* 80 (1952) 259.

²⁴ Cf. W. Nestle, "Spuren der Sophistik bei Isokrates," in *Griechische Studien* (Stuttgart 1948) 469.

Persons who "set up as educators," and yet "do harm to their pupils" merit, he says, "unsparing criticism" (7). This does not look to the encomium. Rather, Isocrates is presenting his instruction as an exception to that of the crowd of fraudulent practitioners, in the hope of attracting pupils. Part I, like the sharply polemical *Against the Sophists* which it resembles, is best seen as an entry in the rough and tumble competition for students in which the sophists (in this case their heir) engaged. Aristotle was correct in noting that it has no relevance to the encomium.

However, the polemic against the "disputers" is far from making up the whole of the proemium. Introducing the encomium are the words: "so that I may not be thought to be taking the easy way, castigating others without having anything of my own to display, I will try to speak about this very person (Helen)" (15). The castigation he speaks of is not of the eristics, but, rather, the criticism of Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* (the model Isocrates hopes to surpass), and more generally of other authors of encomia, which comprises Part II of the proemium (8-15).²⁵ Isocrates finds wanting in the encomiasts not utility, but rather, appropriately dignified subjects, and Gorgias he censures for confounding the genres of "defense" and "encomium."²⁶ A link between Parts I and II is supplied by the assertion that the pecuniary success of the eristics encouraged others to enter the market with encomia on paradoxical themes, such as the life of beggars or exiles (8). Nonetheless, though Isocrates indiscriminately taxes them all with a perverse, if profitable, pandering to popular tastes for the paradoxical, the polemic takes a distinct turn for the different sets of opponents in Parts I and II.

In Part II, style of writing rather than, as in Part I, educational practice, is the focus of concern. Isocrates does not contend, as Part I would lead us to expect, that encomiasts ought to edify their readers with treatments of useful subjects, but rather that they should choose noble and illustrious themes. His demand that persons marked out for praise be "distinguished in point of *aretê*" (12) is not a plea for a rhetoric that is morally uplifting; in his view, one should praise celebrities because this is more difficult than throwing off clever conceits on

²⁵ Buchheit (above, note 18) 54-61 has demonstrated that Isocrates' *Helen* is indeed directed against Gorgias' encomium.

²⁶ Cf. Martin (above, note 16) 182-88.

items like salt or bumble-bees (11). He agrees with the writers on bumble-bees that merit is proportionate to the difficulty of the theme; he disagrees in holding that it is far more difficult to work up the well worn in novel ways than to invent paradoxes on outlandish subjects. His preoccupations in this matter are wholly literary.

The same holds true for the criticism of Gorgias. The substance of this criticism, that Gorgias wrote a defense speech instead of the encomium he claimed to have written has already been mentioned. The novel feature of Isocrates' treatment is that it admits no fault in Helen that requires palliation, a procedure that is extended to Paris. Gorgias, we recall, had been cited in Part I (3). Symptomatic of the discontinuity between the sections is that in Part I Gorgias is assailed for propounding a *useless* thesis about Being, while in Part II Isocrates approves his choice of Helen—clearly a useless theme in the terms of Part I—as the theme of an encomium. Part II is relevant to the encomium and introduces it appropriately. In it Isocrates explains the choice of Helen as his theme and the novelty of his approach.²⁷ He does not find it necessary to justify the writing of an encomium in terms of utility or for any other reason; the encomium is simply a given. Though the repeated charges of willful paradoxicality provide an overall coherence, the irrelevance of the polemic in Part I to both Part II of the prooemium as well as to the encomium is apparent. Part I has all the appearance of being an ἐπάγγελμα superadded to an introduction and encomium complete without it.

But this "advertisement" has a history. As was noticed above, the polemic of *Helen* 1–5 extends the assault on the "eristics" in *Against the Sophists* (2–8). There Isocrates draws similar distinctions between useless verbal quibbling and training which lead to practical results, and expresses the same preference for opinion over knowledge as in *Helen* 5. *Against the Sophists* has correctly been identified as Isocrates' retort to Plato's denigration of rhetoric in the *Gorgias*.²⁸ Isocrates is unscrupulous in distorting Plato's position and lumps him together with the eristic disputers Plato condemned.²⁹ In *Helen* 2, on the other hand, Isocrates is careful to mark the distinction between Socratic paradoxes, that is Plato's position, and the eristic disputations. The

²⁷ On the importance of novelty for Isocrates cf. *Against the Sophists* 13.

²⁸ G. Rudberg, "Isokrates und Platon," *SO* 2 (1924) 4 f.

²⁹ *Against the Sophists* 2–8.

distinction suggests that he has learned something. The lesson, as Ries has acutely argued, is to be ascribed to Plato's *Euthydemus*.³⁰ Near the close of the *Euthydemus* (304d–305b) Crito recounts to Socrates unfriendly comments made to him by a witness to the conversation between Socrates and the eristic disputers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, which Socrates had just repeated to Crito. Crito's account elicits from Socrates a condemnation of this critic, whom he characterizes as straddling the border between philosophy and politics, competent in neither (305c).

Not only, as has often been noted, does Socrates' description fit Isocrates aptly, but it is given at the close of a dialogue in which the crucial differences between eristic disputation and Socratic protreptic—precisely the differences which had been effaced in *Against the Sophists*—are sharply brought out.³¹ Confronted with the *Euthydemus*, Isocrates, though constrained to accept Plato's correction, is intent on reasserting the superiority of his own educational theory and practice. The basic reason, then, for the discontinuity in the prooemium is that in Part I Isocrates is locked in conflict with Plato over the value of rhetorical education, while in Part II he is introducing his encomium with a polemic against fellow writers of encomia and against Gorgias. It is possible that Isocrates had ready for publication the encomium with Part II of the prooemium as it now stands when receipt of the *Euthydemus* prompted him to indite the polemic against Plato and the eristics, showing that though he might be willing to make the correction in detail, he had not changed his fundamental position. Such a view of the composition of the *Helen* is not inconsistent with our belief that Part I is an ἐπάγγελμα. In *Against the Sophists* too Isocrates had presented his own qualifications by way of a blistering attack on competing teachers. It should be evident now that in Part I he is not promising a political speech, not to say one disguised as an encomium. He is promoting his school. The display, then, of rhetorical and literary virtuosity in the encomium fulfills the promises made in Part II of the prooemium, but has no relation to the talk about usefulness in Part I.

³⁰ Ries (above, note 15) 40–46.

³¹ *Euthydemus* 275a1, 278c5–d3, 282d4–8. For the identification of the unnamed critic as Isocrates cf. E. H. Gifford, *The Euthydemus of Plato* (Oxford 1905) 17–20. Doubts about the attribution voiced by H. von Arnim, *Platos Jugenddialoge* (Leipzig 1914) 129, have been countered by Ries 42 f.