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VI

GÜNTHER ZUNTZ

On Euripides' *Helena*: Theology and Irony



## ON EURIPIDES' HELENA: THEOLOGY AND IRONY

IN the dark years after the first world-war Hofmannsthal quoted to a friend<sup>1</sup> a puzzling aphorism of the German romantic poet Novalis: « After lost wars one must write comedies ». Hofmannsthal added this comment: « Comedies: the most difficult of art-forms, capable of expressing, in a state of perfect balance, everything—even the most grave and the most sinister; expressing it in that perfect balance which derives from immense and concentrated power, yet always gives the impression of playful ease ». It was in these years that he meditated the subject of the return of Helen and Menelaus, « the subject treated by Euripides only among Greek authors »; which he reproduced in his *Aegyptische Helena*. Visualized at first as a « small, light opera », it finally crystallized into something very different . . .

In the winter which followed the greatest disaster of Vth century Athens, Euripides wrote his *Helena*; the play which, more than any other, has puzzled modern criticism. A comedy-like quality has been ascribed to it by many commentators and this quality has recently been traced by one of them, the late A. Y. Campbell, to the « escapist » aim, on the part of the poet, of « providing the Athenian public with light relief ».<sup>2</sup> Hofmannsthal's intimation of what comedy really is—or ought to be—together with Novalis' paradox, point towards profounder implications . . .

The baffling variety of views concerning the *Helena* is evidence how greatly our judgment is conditioned by our individual experiences and capacities. One longs for objective, that is, impersonal methods of approach. One such has of late been envisaged; namely, structural analysis.

<sup>1</sup> C. J. Burckhardt; see H. Fiechter, *H. von Hofmannsthal*, 1949, 126.

<sup>2</sup> A. Y. CAMPBELL, *Euripides' Helena*, 1950, 160.



But one soon finds that the value of this method, too, depends upon the capacity of the person applying it: the mere observation of obvious structural facts results in platitude and error; enlightening results (such as have of late been presented by H. Strohm) require a grasp of essentials—which depends, for better or worse, upon the individuality of the observer. If only we could see a Greek tragedy with Greek eyes!

In the case of the *Helena* we are, for once, given the opportunity to do just this. Aristophanes' parody in the *Thesmophoriazusaë*, presented at the earliest possible occasion after the first performance of the *Helena*, gives invaluable evidence as to what, in the tragedy, had struck the common man. Following Aristophanes' hints we may, with a little imagination, visualize his reactions. That first verse, nay, the very first word — Νείλου — has pleasantly transferred him into a far-away, fabulous land. And lo, it's Helen speaking . . . « Oh, this clever Euripides: last year he showed us one mythical princess in the farthest North: and now Helen at the other end of the world . . . She will have to get home somehow . . . And, fancy, she plays the faithful one, the good wife, longing for her husband; that's a surprise. And she worries about Troy, and she would die rather than be dishonoured: how noble! And there, of course, comes Menelaus: no—who would have thought it: it's another one, Teucer . . . and off he goes, without any idea of rescuing her. » . . . Thus one could easily go on sketching a purely materialistic, yet perfectly justified reaction; with delight in the recognition-scene ( . . . « look, how long it takes them—I knew it all along ») as well as in the passionate speeches before Theonoe and in the thrills of the escape (« in *Iphigenia* it needed cleverness; but here, where they have even to secure a ship! . . . »). We easily imagine our plain man's enjoyment also of many details, such as the prowess of Menelaus' men in carrying the bull on to the

ship and their battling with the Egyptians, or when the island Helene, off Sunion, is nicely brought into the story, joining that foreign, Spartan-Oriental tale on to our dear national myth, at least at one, small point. And when that good servant of Menelaus lashes out against divination, this spectator may well have nodded assent, remembering Syracuse and Nicias. There would be some of those precarious references to the gods; one is used to that kind of thing, from Euripides; he has managed before to upset people's faith with his tirades (*Ar. Th.* 450); but in a play as nice as this, we may overlook these small lapses. In the end, no doubt, our Strepsiades or Euelpides will have welcomed the eternal bliss finally granted this noble couple — oh, it had been a delightful piece of theatre! The heroes, thoroughly good people, were most undeservedly threatened by that barbarian ogre; but they saved themselves by their own, valiant effort, aided by benevolent gods and by that fantastic damsel, Theonoe, the omniscient fairy who so nobly risked her life for their sake . . . True, her intervention had caused the play to be rather on the long side; yet thereafter things did move rapidly, with endless thrill, and the chorus came in, for variety, with lovely songs and highly modern music!

It can hardly be denied, I submit, that the play permits of an acceptance of this kind; the features hinted at are all really there—and Aristophanes confirms that they could be thus received; with a primitive delight quite like that which our children derive from the *Magic Flute*. Thus it would appear that precarious modern phrases like « escapism » or « light relief » are not, after all, wholly inapplicable to the *Helena*. At the same time, it need hardly be said that so direct and primitive an acceptance fails to perceive essentials; that the play offers itself for an understanding which realises the irrational yet essential relation of art and life and hence expects to find, in the mirror of this self-contained and fantastic creation, a suggestive reproduction and interpretation

of that world in which man—the man of 412 B.C. and of all times—is condemned to live.

Any literary work, of course, is open to almost endless modes of acceptance. Many such can be proved to be inadequate by a combination of educated taste, historical imagination, and devout adherence to the text; qualities which alone can secure an ever closer approximation to the object. With Euripides this task is doubly difficult and fascinating, for in his plays the presence of different levels of significance and implication is essential quite apart from, and beyond, the latitude of meaning inherent in every artistic creation. While a welcome foreground-meaning easily appealed to any Strepsiades, a more essential one revealed itself to those able, with cultured sensitivity, to appreciate coherence, necessity and implication where the average spectator was merely delighted or shocked. We cannot ask Socrates or the young Plato how they understood the *Helena*: we have to try, by means of a careful and respectful analysis, to put ourselves in their place.

Since time forbids going through the whole play in detail, we turn immediately to its central and most problematical part, the part centring upon the omniscient Theonoe. She enters (v. 865) with that impressive procession which may possibly have a touch of Egyptian ritual about it; the purifying torches and sulphur though are Greek like the name of the fairy (and of all persons in the play). Anyhow, the one essential point is in the purpose of this rite. It assures her contact with the «ether», so that Theonoe may «receive pure pneuma from heaven»; which is the source of her «wisdom». Through purity she is in contact with some divine reality which is high above those gods of whom she proceeds to give some curious intelligence (v. 878-86: the council on Olympus). There follows the crucial v. 887 which requires some consideration. Professor Pohlenz, who gives the best appreciation of the whole scene that I have

seen, at this point seems, to me, to overshoot the mark. Τέλος δ' ἐφ' ἡμῖν: so Theonoe begins. Pohlenz translates: «but the decision rests with me» and interprets: «the issue of the divine council depends upon whether I side with Hera or Kypris, in giving or not giving you away to my brother». Pohlenz quotes passages from Pindar (e.g. *Ol.* 13.104 ἐν θεῶν γε μὲν τέλος) and Euripides (*Or.* 1545 and fr. 948 πᾶν γὰρ ἐκ θεῶν τέλος) in support of his contention that the reversal of the traditional view («the decision rests with God») was intended to «make the audience start». The passage is indeed significant; but not as crudely as this. How indeed could the mythical scene, on Pohlenz's interpretation, be imagined? Are the gods to wait, looking down from on high, to see how Theonoe is going to decide; then to cast their votes accordingly? Will Aphrodite change her mind on learning that Theonoe has sided with Hera? Regarding the gods of Euripides any kind of scepticism surely is legitimate; just as surely however, if once he devises a mythological scene, he would not develop it in so abstruse and unimaginative a fashion. Pohlenz, the outstanding authority on Stoic philosophy, may here have been misled by the terminological implications which the phrase τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν was later on to acquire; at any rate his interpretation is wrecked on the plain subjunctive διολέσω in the next verse—«indirect deliberative», as Pearson notes in his unpretentious but excellent commentary. The mythological scene ends with v.886 οὐκ ἐπ' ὀνητοῖς γάμοις (Pearson's brilliant conjecture). Τέλος δ' ἐφ' ἡμῖν thereafter looks forward, not backward; it does not refer to the Olympian council but governs the «deliberative subjunctives» διολέσω and σώσω. Theonoe has to decide, and is free to decide, which course she is to take. This fact is, to the thinking listener, anything but irrelevant in evaluating that divine council; but Theonoe does not crudely present her decision as its τέλος. Otherwise, the play would have



been largely reduced to absurdity. If Theonoe had, by her decision, decided the decision of the gods (to put an absurdity into absurd words); if, to use Prof. Kitto's pointed but erroneous phrase (p. 326), she had «announced that she is the arbiter between Hera and Aphrodite»—how could she thereafter so earnestly have advised her protégés (v. 1024ff.) to pray for the goodwill of these very deities? Why should Menelaus and Helen so passionately comply with her advice (v. 1093 ff. and 1441 ff.)? Why indeed should they, so safely supported, still feel the need to struggle and strive?

Having described the alternative facing her, Theonoe ends her speech (v. 892 f.) in a highly surprising fashion—if indeed the transmitted text is to be trusted. She does not say which alternative she is going to choose, and why; she has apparently already chosen, for although she had sent her retinue back (v. 872), she seems to be ordering somebody to inform her brother of Menelaus' presence. Plain «structural analysis» may be content here to find a means to «enhance tension», while W. Schmid rises to the observation (p. 511) that «for the sake of a momentary tension, Euripides has here forgotten the psychology». Musgrave was more sensitive: «Sic si locuta est Theonoe, immitis et inhumani ingenii fuerit necesse est»; hence he accepted Reiske's conjecture  $\tau\acute{\iota}$  φήs for  $\tau\acute{\iota}$ s εἰs. Where Reiske proposes a conjecture, there is, always, a real problem; but in the present case the great critic has not solved it. Whom could Theonoe be thus addressing? Menelaus, to whom she has been addressing herself up till now? Clearly not (τόνδε). Helen? It would be an abrupt fit of a playfulness as futile as cruel—on the part of Theonoe, of all persons. The current understanding of the passage of course is open to the same, and even stronger objections. The supposed order (to a non-existent person!) is not only entirely out of character, and uttered with an abruptness which Pearson's stage direction—«she pauses as if to make up her mind»—

cannot conceal; but nothing, absolutely nothing comes from it. No one appears to move, Helen speaks exactly as she would have spoken if it had never been uttered; she does not break out, as she ought to: « Stop him, hear me first! »; the order is never countermanded, nor referred to at all by anybody. Such a thing has never happened on the Greek or on any other stage. It is an entirely different matter when Oedipus, in the course of his impassioned interrogation, threatens the reluctant herdsman with torture (*O.R.* 1154); for this threat is naturally and immediately abandoned in view of the herdsman's speedy submission. One could quote similar instances of threats not carried out from tragedy and comedy (e.g. *Phoen.* 1660, *Men. Samia* 106; *Pl. Most.* 1113); these, too, would serve merely to underline the impossibility of the transmitted wording (with Scaliger's slight alteration) in the *Helena*. Nothing comes from Theonoe's threat—because there never was one. It is therefore understandable that Hartung and again Wilamowitz would cancel the two verses 892 f. But where did they come from? And does not Theonoe's speech thus become rather lop-sided? So many verses about her ritual, about her correct prophecy, about the council on Olympus—and finally a mere five verses on the essential point at issue! V. 891 would make too abrupt an ending of this speech. This is a hint that the next two verses ought not to be cancelled, and a closer look at them confirms their genuineness. The last words: « that I for my part may be safe » bring in a fresh motif; one that admirably fits the context and significantly points forward, right to the end of the play—where her decision to conceal Menelaus' identity results in deadly danger for Theonoe.

The two verses then are genuine; they do not, however, contain a threat, but a reference to the risk which Theonoe faces; they thus complete her exposition of the problem before her. After v. 891 there is a lacuna. « Am I »

—so Theonoe must have said—«to disobey my brother's order and keep silent? Thus I would expose myself to his legitimate and terrible wrath. Or shall I tell him...» etc., with v. 892 f. (I cannot guess how v. 892 began).

This seems to be an essential supplement to Theonoe's argument. Previously she had shown the implications of her choice for Menelaus and Helen; she is now seen to have concluded with showing what is involved for herself. It is, however, likely that more has been lost than the first half only of this final alternative. One easily guesses that she made certain points which afterwards we find Helen rebutting; enlarging upon her obligation towards her brother (contrast v. 910 ff), and on the *χάρις* she could expect from him, if she herself first granted him the *χάρις* owed to him (cf. v. 902, 918-21 [921 *χάριν* for *δίκην* Reiske] and 1000).

I suspect that this small exercise in textual criticism affects the interpretation of the play as a whole. We shall presently return to the problem of the divine agents in it; for the moment, we may note how it adds to the intensity of this central scene and to the substance of its main figure, Theonoe. Her entry has indeed been most carefully prepared—from Helen's detailed and impressive description early in the prologue (v. 10-15) onward, by Teucer's intended consultation (v. 145) and the actual consultation by Helen and the chorus (v. 317 ff., 515 ff.), and finally by the intelligence concerning her which Helen imparts to Menelaus (v. 819 ff.) as well as by Helen's terror at her coming (v. 857 ff.). Up till now, though, she could appear too fantastic to be taken seriously. This heroine, uniquely endowed with divinely imparted omniscience; the arbiter, she, between the gods: she could seem to be facing the suppliant couple with a whimsical, or even absurd, superiority; perfectly at liberty, without any apparent risk, to decide about their fate *ad libitum*; yet so certain to favour them as to turn her (supposed) threat into an irresponsible stage-manoeuvre and

the following impassioned speeches by Helen and Menelaus into superfluous rhetorical display. « So ridiculous a situation cannot move in us any serious emotion »—says Prof. Kitto—« but we shall be ready to enjoy a neat piece of argumentation ».

Once it is perceived that Theonoe is not « arbiter between the gods » and does not use an absurd stage-trick, but rather discloses a serious, or even crucial dilemma, both her person and the situation become concrete and relevant. The *ci-devant* « fairy-godmother » is found indeed to have a uniquely complete grasp of the situation and its implications; but she has no mastery over the future. She leaves the heroes to run the risk of securing their escape, with the hoped-for favour of the gods (v. 1022), and she does not know, if and how she is herself to escape her brother's wrath. She makes the decision which she perceives to be morally right, with a brave disregard for her own fate; but the dilemma which she had put before the two suppliants was not sham but real. Even one who commands that superhuman endowment, a complete grasp of his entire situation, is not therewith exempt from personal risk or certain of success...

Far from being exempt from the risks of decision and action, Theonoe is staking her life for the right. Therewith also the concluding scene is turned, from a stage-trick, into serious drama (as serious, at least, as anything in this superior *παίγνιον*). « In order to make the expected arrival of the *deus ex machina* opportune, the wicked Theoclymenus must threaten to murder his sister », remarks Prof. Kitto. Euripides is found not to be working as casually as that: he showed Theonoe facing this threat ever since she faced her decision between right and convenience. And if, in the end, divine intervention saves the virtuous priestess, the spectator may take this miracle—like that of the rejuvenation of Iolaus in the *Heracleidae*—as a symbol and confirmation of the belief that in the end, God—whoever, whatever he be—helps



the striving righteous. This belief is concisely formulated by the chorus after Theonoe has agreed to the request of the two suppliants (v. 1030): «The unjust never fares well, but in rectitude (how difficult it is to find an equivalent for the simple, basic term τὸ δίκαιον!) there is hope of preservation». Hope, expectation, a prospect — ἐλπίδες; no more—but no less either. The saving intervention, in the end, of the Dioscuri confirms that amid the many forces on which man's life depends, there is indeed, at least, an active tendency towards the welfare of the just.

Helen's and Menelaus' appeal are felt by no means to be a mere rhetorical exercise when it is realised that its success is anything but a foregone conclusion. Even a superior and noble person cannot easily be expected to lay the head on the block for the sake of a complete stranger. Thus Helen's terror at Theonoe's entrance is justified, and the passionate power, which everyone perceives in these speeches, is by no means wasted. In particular, the first point made by Helen, baffling though it sounds, is drawn out of the situation with as much aptitude as ingenuity. Leaving the appeal to sentiment for later, Helen (v. 903 ff.) desires to demonstrate the compelling legitimacy - τὸ δίκαιον - of her excessive claim on Theonoe (who, we remember, had urged her obvious obligation towards her brother). What overruling obligation could possibly be claimed on behalf of that stranger just washed up by the waves? Helen finds the Archimedian point: Menelaus is the holder of a «deposit on trust», a παρακαταθήκη. That deposit is she herself; and how could it—she!—be restored to the owner if he were allowed to die? Hence she argues his claim with the self-effacing abandonment which, in Menander, the slave Syrus displays on behalf of the foundling-babe (the analogy, of course, is not accidental). In the lacuna after v. 923 the case for the preservation of Menelaus was finally put in a manner to which, thereafter, the call for Helen's

own salvation could suitably be joined as a mere πάρεργον τῆς τύχης — merely incidental to the success of the appeal made on his behalf. All this is brilliant—from the pompous beginning with the divine order of property and ownership, step by step onward to the inescapable conclusion. But Helen, Helen of all women, presenting herself as a mere object, an appendage, a piece of property belonging to the only relevant husband: are we allowed a smile and an ironical thought during this plea by the devoutest of wives?

We may turn now to the «theological» implications of the scene—which, in this respect too, forms the nodal point of a web pervading the whole play. I may say at once that I am not referring to the problematical vv. 1013-16 to which Prof. Grégoire would attribute such outstanding importance. I confess that I cannot even make up my mind as to whether they are germane to this passage, for they do not easily connect with the preceding point: «if Proteus were alive»... But even if Euripides wrote them for the present context, this hint at the immortality of the νοῦς (I incline to read ἀθάνατος at the beginning of v. 1016)—of the νοῦς as distinct from physical existence—is not offered here as a momentous «revelation of the immortality of the soul» (the word «soul» does not occur and would indeed be out of place). Theonoe's allusion to a doctrine which Euripides has sketched more explicitly in other places here serves, if anything, as a subsidiary argument for granting Menelaus' request—as Paley's careful exposition makes clear. It would be wrong to concentrate upon this argument outside its context; the «theology»—*sit venia verbo*—of the *Helena* is not in these few verses, but in the whole scene or, rather, in the whole play.

The devotion, εὐσέβεια, which the omniscient priestess professes and practises, is in suggestive contrast with the odd information concerning the gods which she is able to impart. A divine council to decide about the fate of

Menelaus would be quite on the lines of tradition from Homer onward; and that Hera and Aphrodite should present opposite views (as did Athena and Poseidon concerning Odysseus) could even, beyond this, entail a perfectly legitimate symbolism, like the opposition of Aphrodite and Artemis in the *Hippolytus*; for the faithful Helen of the play is striving to the utmost to fulfil the demands of the divine protectress of marriage, and rejecting that Kypris to whom the other Helen succumbed. It is significant that throughout the play (which time and again refers to these two goddesses) this rather obvious implication is never even hinted at; that, on the contrary, the actions of these deities are time and again stated to be determined by the meanest motives.

I hesitate to take this fact for a piece of «propaganda against the immoral gods of the popular tradition». He who thus plays with them is beyond the urge of propaganda. The gods appear in Euripides' plays—first to put it primitively—because they are an indispensable part of the myth. And they mean and are something, within the world of the play. What they are to be, depends on the poet's will, and may differ from one of his creations to the next. Artemis, the object of the pure devotion of *Hippolytus*, embodies a different reality from that Apollo whose call for a narrow *ius talionis* causes the destruction of *Electra* and *Orestes*. At any rate, the author of the *Bellerophontes*, he who later could make his *Electra* (*Or.* 28) say, with a shrug of the shoulders: «Apollo: who would still trouble to criticize him?»—he was past atheist fanaticism. To him the traditional figures offered wide and wonderful aesthetic possibilities. *Dikaiopolis*, *Trygaios*, *Strepsiades* were free to put their own interpretation upon his presentation of them; so were *Socrates* and *Critias*. We may try to discern what the gods in the *Helena* could reasonably suggest to a discerning spectator. Such an one was not left to speculate about an isolated saying. In following the interplay of agents

human and divine, he could perceive a coherent and profound interpretation of reality; not in the shape of a doctrine wrapped in allegory but made visible through an enchanting and inexhaustibly meaningful spectacle. We can neither summarize this meaning in a formula nor trace its unfolding in the development of the play; we may at best hope successively to point out a few significant aspects.

To return to Theonoe, she reports, without comment, the attitude and the discreditable motives of the gods; and she makes her own decision independently of them, from better motives. We are invited to understand that her contact with something higher and purer than the sphere of the gods enables and determines her to choose the right. She calls it the ether (v. 866), and perhaps we may infer from v. 1013 ff. that the pneuma which from there reaches her is *nous*—an immortal mind-substance which guides man to the right, if only he will, and can, follow its promptings. And yet Theonoe's choice is one between the opposing dispositions of those questionable deities, and far from deciding the conflict between them, the outcome of Theonoe's noble resolution is felt, by her as well as by Helen and Menelaus, still to depend upon their whim. Is not this a fair image of man's situation who, all the time, is battered by forces beyond his control and grasp; who, with effort and luck, may take his bearings from something higher and purer than these powerful yet absurd forces; and whose highest striving, success or failure, still is at their mercy? And what is left to him but by turns to accuse these forces and to pray for their favour—while putting in the best effort he can command, hoping against hope that it may not be thwarted?

If this is a fair inference from the Theonoe-scene, the brisk buoyancy of the *Helena* would appear to be played out before a background that could well seem to invite tragedy. Add that here—incredibly, most unrealistically—they are all perfectly good people engaged . . . ! The perfect wife,



the perfect husband, the perfect helper . . . Put in their place men as they really are: there emerges—*Orestes*.

We have, so far, examined but one place in Euripides' large canvas. No attentive spectator or reader could overlook the fact that the ideas inherent in the Theonoe-scene are forecast by certain utterances of the so-called first messenger and pursued in the first stasimon. The relevant passages have widely been held to be alien to the organism of the play; one more reason for us to examine them.

The « messenger » who (v. 597 ff) brings the news of the disappearance of the Helena-phantom should, first of all, be freed from the designation which our editions ought no longer to adopt from the manuscripts. He is a « messenger » as little as is, e.g. the herdsman in the *Oedipus*, or the soldier who, in the finale of the *Heraclidae*, brings in the captured Eurystheus, or the old man in Euripides' *Electra*. We may style him « slave » or « servant », as he does himself (v. 728 f.); at any rate, being a person in his own right (and not merely a voice delivering a set speech) he is at liberty, like those just quoted, to give expression to his personal views and reactions. In his words emerge another fine character and a significant clarification of the thought underlying the play. When he has been assured of the paradoxical truth concerning Helen (v. 710), his reflection goes straight to the heart of the matter. He wastes no emotion in lamenting over seventeen years lost in battling for the sake of a phantom or in accusing the gods—as the others concerned so liberally do. « How many-sided, how hard to determine is God. » The vanity of human striving and the incalculability of success and failure are, to him, finally demonstrated by the discovery of the true Helen; on this experience rests the axiom from which he starts. This axiom is not his personal find; he is reformulating a traditional tenet. The mind of Zeus, or of « the gods », is beyond man's grasp: thus Hesiod,

Solon, Pindar had formulated it; and it would appear to be a negligible difference—though actually it is decisive—that he speaks of « God » quite generally and not, like them, of His mind or plans or purpose. Finding himself in a world without an identifiable deity, whence does this plain, old man get his bearings? His live sympathy with his master immediately (v. 722) makes him reveal it: he persists in the faithful observation of his duties, with an honesty unshaken by the obscurity of the « last things ».

It would be unnatural, if an information such as the old servant receives were not to provoke a reaction from him, and the conclusions which he draws are both reasonable and creditable. At the same time, his person and his words contribute towards the solution of that desperate question which is at the heart of all of Euripides' works; the question: how is man to live in a godless world? Thus his speech points forward to the enlightenment which is to come with Theonoe. Where her all-embracing mind seizes the right in spiritual contact with some impersonal, supramundane reality (the « ether »), he finds it safely in his breast.

Not enough with this, before carrying out his master's orders, he embarks upon that « hors-d'œuvre invectif, la tirade contre les devins » (v. 744 ff.) which, according to H. Grégoire, leaves every reader « abasourdi » by its inappropriateness, particularly so « dans un drame dont l'un des personnages principaux est la prophétesse Théonoé ». Hence, so Grégoire and others conclude, this passage was designed as an attack upon the seers (that « worthless class of idlers », as Paley put it) against whom, according to Thucydides VIII. 1. 1, the Athenians were embittered in 412 because of the disastrous influence they had had upon Nicias.

As already noted, the possibility cannot indeed be excluded that the audience in 412 may have been reminded, by this passage, of Nicias and his entourage. If they took this reference for its *raison d'être*, they were mistaken; for

it is a genuine element both of the mind of the speaker and of the thought underlying the play. When you have just learned that you have wasted seventeen years for a phantom, and even if you have managed to fit this fact into your concept of life, would not you go on to wonder, how possibly this disaster could have been avoided? «What is beyond our knowing, the seers disclose for us from sacrificial flames, the flight of birds, and the entrails of victims»: thus Theseus, outlining an optimistic view of the world (*Suppliant Women* v. 211 ff.), reproduced a traditional belief. Our old servant naturally thinks of this time-honoured means of penetrating the obscurity surrounding the «acts of God» and, like many before and after him, he cannot but acknowledge that it has been tried and found invalid. He does not, in fact, «inveigh against the seers» at all (it is significant that the traditional objections against their greed, fraud, and ostentation do not here recur); he observes that their methods are ineffective. Here again the salient point is his reaction to disenchantment. Realistically and dispassionately he resigns what has been found to be illusion and stresses what, to him, remains unquestioned: sound reason and prudence alone can guide man safely (v. 757) — γνώμη δ' ἄριστος μάντις ἢ τ' εὐβουλία. The μάντις here outlined is about to appear in the person of Theonoe. Like her, too, the old servant is not at this point either tempted into revolt against the gods. Theirs is the power and they are inscrutable; he will continue to worship them and pray for their favour, while exerting himself, without illusion, in accordance with the light that is given to him. On different levels, the attitude and the views of the omniscient virgin and the humble slave coincide. Both impersonate the paradoxical ideal of a piety without identifiable gods and of righteousness with no certainty of its reward.

The chorus had echoed the last words of the servant (v. 758): «the best divination is to have the gods for friends»

—but what does this really mean? At the end of the act they enlarge upon the issues raised in it. This first stasimon (v. 1107 ff.) is so organically embedded in the action and thought of the whole play, and in itself proceeds with so lucid a consistency, as to make one wonder how some students could have failed to appreciate its aptness.

It may indeed be felt as a shock that, at the point where the brisk intrigue is about to be put into action, the chorus intones a dirge, lamenting the woes of the Trojans in the first stanza and those of the Greeks in its antistrophe. We are reminded of the background of suffering to the bright yet dangerous venture that has just been planned; even if it succeeds, those woes will not be undone. With conscious art the names of Aphrodite and Hera stand out at the end of the first and second stanza. Who could fail here to remember the many previous references to these two goddesses? Just before this song began, Helen had addressed passionate prayers to them; however dubious their motives were shown to be, by Theonoe, their power is undoubted: they have caused those woes, and the success or failure of Helen's plan lies with them. They have of late begun to reveal themselves as mythological embodiments of the incalculable and unmanageable forces which preside over all man's strivings. The fundamental doubt implied by the words and actions of the slave and of Theonoe is not here forgotten; it becomes explicit in the next stanza; at the same time, this stanza follows logically upon the two which had dwelled upon the suffering caused by the two goddesses. The very last words: « a phantom, created by Hera » (the conjecture ἔργον "Ἡρας seems unavoidable to me, cf. v. 708) were enough to prompt the question: what really is deity?

This stanza (v. 1136-50) calls for a detailed interpretation of which I can here give a summary only. It develops the cue given by the slave: the incomprehensibility of God (which,



by the way, is a very different thing from plain atheism). « Which mortal would be bold to say that, after a search to the farthest limit, he has found out what deity (in the widest sense of the word) is—when he observes the dispensations of the gods (τὰ θεῶν, with Euripides, denotes all happenings whose cause is hidden from us) rapidly moving hither and thither and again backward in ambivalent and incalculable incidents ? » I need not quote to you the passages from Hesiod and Solon, Pindar and the older tragedians which show that this speculation is, from beginning to end, couched in traditional wording; you know that the obscurity of the divine had been a problem and a grief long before these verses were written; you are also aware of the greater, and indeed absolute radicalism which distinguishes this utterance in Euripides (like that by the slave before, and many others elsewhere) from all others. Helen's fate is quoted next in illustration of ἀμφίλογοι τύχαι; the myth of Zeus' parenthood is suitable in this mythical play, for it establishes her direct relation to deity, which renders her undeserved misfortune particularly unsettling. Hence « I cannot grasp what the truth is » — οὐδ' ἔχω τί τὸ σαφές— and then, there follow words which call for careful consideration. They entail the following difficulties:

First, ὅτι ποτ' ἐν βροτοῖς is in all modern texts connected with the words just quoted; I fail to see the possibility of this connection; nor is it made good by the simple conjecture ἔτι for ὅ τι (or for the preceding τί). For the wording, thus altered, implies that only now has the basis of faith been upset, while actually the whole stanza expresses a fundamental impasse; besides, the transmitted combination ὅ τι ποτ' is as idiomatic as the nuance effected by the conjecture ἔτι ποτ' (« at last, for once ») is unsuitable in the present context.

Secondly, the last verse is commonly made into a separate clause, with δ' inserted, and cheerfully rendered: « Doch

Götterwort hab' ich für wahr erfunden »—« je n'ai trouvé la vérité que dans la parole des dieux ». To me this seems entirely incredible. The stanza which elaborates a radical agnosticism concerning the divine—ending on this devout profession of faith? In a play which from beginning to end exposes the fickleness of the gods? Wilamowitz at any rate saw the contradiction. Euripides really meant (so he suggested) to convey Protagorean doubt; the devout words of the chorus are « for the fools »; for it was not safe openly to side with Protagoras (Plat. *Prot.* 412 *b-c*). This, I feel, is a counsel of despair. The works of Euripides indeed abound with contradictory and ironical utterances; but is there an instance to confirm that he ever rounded off an argument by a statement entirely out of tune with it and diametrically opposed to it; intending the sensible listener to replace it, mentally, by the proper, opposite conclusion?

In fact, it seems to me that these words cannot even mean what the translators quoted assume. « Götterwort », « la parole des dieux »: what exactly is this supposed here to denote? Oracular utterance? In this of all plays? After all we have heard about *μαντική*, is the chorus really supposed to proclaim the truth of oracles? Looking at the wording again: τὸ τῶν θεῶν ἔπος — note the articles—: what can be meant by « the word of the gods »? Where is there, in Greek tradition, such a thing as « the word of the gods » (rather than of a god)? I suspect that students have been misled by that Jewish-Christian coinage « the Word of God ». If this concept had existed among Greeks—as it did not—it could not anyhow be expressed by τὸ τῶν θεῶν ἔπος, for ἔπος denotes a particular utterance. Thus, Helen herself recalls one (v. 56): the « word of Hermes » promising her final return; again, Menelaus (v. 513) refers to an ancient « saying of the wise » (σοφῶν ἔπος) concerning necessity. Walter Headlam, that uniquely sensitive critic, was aware of this implication of particularity in the word ἔπος. Accord-

ingly, he sought to supply it with a particular implication by connecting this line with the beginning of the following stanza which thus, he held, would be the « quotation of some word of God (sic!) », introduced by θεῶν δὲ τόδ' ἔπος ἀλαθὲς ἦϋρον: « but this utterance of God (!) I have found true »; namely ἄφρονες ὅσοι κτλ. (*Cl. Rev.* 1902, 251.)

I need not, I suppose, elaborate the reasons by which this ingenious conjecture is excluded. It is, verbally and metrically, violent; it presupposes that incision after βροτοῖς which we regard as inadmissible, and it implies that « the gods » had combined, in a fashion incompatible with Greek religious concepts, to issue an ordinance of which there is no trace anywhere else. The upshot, I suppose, is that the last words of this stanza contain some corruption. They must originally have suitably rounded off the argument, about like this: « What the truth is, I cannot grasp; I have found the action (or, the essence) of the gods among men incomprehensible »; or, couching the concluding thought in a different phraseology: « I have found inadequate whatever men say about the gods ». The reconstruction of the Greek wording is handicapped by the fact that the end of the antistrophe is likewise corrupt. The thought could be expressed, e.g., like this:

V. 1148                   ... οὐδ' ἔχω  
                               τί τὸ σαφές· ὃ τι ποτ' ἐν βροτοῖς  
                               τὸ τῶν θεῶν ἀστάθμητον ἦϋρον —

or, using Kirchhoff's conjecture ἀμφὶ θεῶν for τὸ τῶν θεῶν, the end might read

V. 1149                   ... ὃ τι ποτ' ἐν βροτοῖς  
                               ἀμφὶ θεῶν ἔπος ἀμαθὲς ἦϋρον.

The text of the final stanza, too, is problematical; but happily the trend of thought is clear. It follows upon the preceding like the sequitur upon a proposition; even though

the logical connection is not made explicit. This is in the normal style of lyrical utterance where it bears upon fundamental issues; the preceding stanza set in with similar abruptness while likewise flowing from ideas inherent in the first half of this song. There is no need to quote parallels for this stylistic feature. This has been seen: the forces upon which man's lot depends are unknowable and uncontrollable. The question unavoidably poses itself: how then is he to direct his life? Theonoe and the slave have shown the right way; here, the wrong way is denounced. As for these two, the realization of ἀρετή was indeed the goal also for the fighters at Troy (the song here returns to its beginning; but what had been the object of lament is now open to understanding); for he who considers the outcome must see that fighting is not the way to the good life but to unending destruction. Right thought then can lead to the right life; but the greatest mythical paradigm is evidence that men—ἄφρονες, ἀμαθῶς—to their cost fail to follow this guide. This warning of course is addressed to the poet's contemporaries; but that is true of the whole play. They were called upon to apply its lesson to their situation; we—to ours.

We need not go on paraphrasing words that speak for themselves. We have anyhow spent a, perhaps, disproportionate time in tracing ideas inherent and explicit in the play; I do hope that the fact will not for a moment be obscured that they are not speculative appendages, but immanent, throughout, in action and characters, lyrics and music. The play is not burdened but quickened by them. He who follows it with ready receptivity enjoys the delight of sharing in the freedom and breadth of a mind penetrating and recreating our world from its centre in man's mind to the limits which are beyond the cognition of the wisest. The most primitive spectator is granted a share in this liberating experience; but what he takes on trust, gains in significance for those who perceive that the tragic essence of



Euripides' works, namely, the renunciation of a final truth, serves, in the *Helena*, to irradiate, ironically, the web of inescapable error and limited yet saving understanding which is life. Here is the point of contact or, rather, of coincidence, of the philosophical component so far considered and of the rich development of action and emotion, of search and finding, of danger and rescue at which we may now throw a short glance.

Everyone of the persons of the play is seen on the way from error to truth. The spectator, from his vantage-point, notes with smiling superiority the absurdity in man's behaviour; only to realize the fatal and general power of error, e.g. in the reactions of Teucer, Menelaus and the old servant to the truth personified which is Helen. She herself is not exempted from it: when she laments her husband's death, we recall that Teucer twice had qualified his report by the verb κληίζεται, «it is so said» (v. 126 and 132); yet Helen asserts (v. 308) that he had «distinctly stated» the fact. Again, when she deplores the final loss of her hope of return, we recall that she herself had quoted Hermes' positive promise—which now, in her emotion, she forgets; and yet her desperate «why then do I still live?» in v. 293 could have reminded her, as well as us, of this prediction, for she had prefaced it with the same words in v. 56. There is no need to quote further instances. The situation in which a man finds himself is, to him, the truth, even when it rests on deception, even when it leads him into suffering and crime; and when luck or wisdom present him with the truth, he will go to any length in maintaining his error. So does Menelaus in pursuing *ad absurdum* the possibilities of a duplicity of events (v. 490 ff.) or again, like Teucer, in invoking various theories of sense-perception and knowledge (v. 122 and 575). Thus δόκησις leads men into distortions and exertions amusing in the eyes of the gods—

and of the spectator whom the poet endows with a similar range of vision; but the ruin of Troy will not be undone nor the slain live-up again, even after they have been found to have died for a phantom (not in vain is δόκησις a cue-word, characteristic of this play only).

This interplay of narrower and wider spheres of understanding which reveals error to be truth and truth, however firmly held on to, to be error; this irony gives the play its lightness and verve as well as its profundity; it connects, dissociates, mingles gods and men; it also determines its structure, dominated as it is by the scene in which hero and heroine face knowledge personified, and leading up to and flowing from this central scene with ever new aspects of the basic theme. The ironical coincidence of error and truth is concretely expressed in the structure and even in the phrasing of the play: in the doubling of characteristic incidents (two «prologues», two «recognitions», etc.) and in the many paradoxical verbal coinages, such as ἔργα ἄεργα (363), τὸ κακὸν ἀγαθόν (643), αὐτόματα πράξας (917). For the same reason Helen's first speech abounds in such startling but meaningful contrasts as that between πράγματα and ἔργα (which are identical in common use) in v. 286.

The crowning irony is in the very person of Helen. I have been told that modern higher mathematics reaches results otherwise unattainable by basing itself upon paradoxical axioms. Euripides seems to have triumphed in a comparable way by making the faithful, the suffering, the innocent Helen the subject of this play. Stories of Helen's phantom being sent to Troy while she herself was staying with Proteus in Egypt were indeed current in Athens, and sufficiently well-known for Euripides to allude to them in his *Electra*, some ten years before he produced the play centred on her. In its prologue however, for the first time, this progeny of theological apologetics stood out, alive, in the light of the Attic sun; and so perplexing must the

Καινὴ Ἑλένη have seemed (Aristophanes, I think, and a careful interpretation of the prologue itself would bear out this inference) that many a spectator may have felt about as much difficulty in accepting her for what she claimed to be as, soon afterwards, Teucer and Menelaus were to show on the stage. However, her distress about Teucer's news, and the intense sentiment of her exchange with the chorus, could not but rapidly make her appear real; so much so that soon the spectator sides with her in deploring the inability of outsiders to recognise her. Real, and lifelike, I at least feel, she is as much as any figure on the Attic stage; and I would agree with A. Y. Campbell who described her as «a firm and convincing portrait; goodtempered, affectionate, gracious and gay—and clever; the one woman in Attic tragedy who combines virtue with charm». In following her actions and experiences we see a baffling situation gradually mastered; in the end, when the true Helen, reunited with her husband, speeded by the gods, is sailing back to her long-lost home, error has given way to truth, ignorance to understanding, and false standards to just ones.

And when the absorbing spell of the play is over: there still is Homer; there still is—the other Helen; and, unavoidably, the protest asserts itself that she, Helen of Troy, was no phantom but a vision infinitely deeper and truer than that charming creation in whom the magic of art had for a time made us believe. This protest does not annihilate the play but perfects its inexhaustible irony. In fact, the poet has embodied in it some significant touches which prevent the real Helen of Troy from being totally eclipsed, in the mind of the spectator, by her innocent double. The first stasimon (which we discussed) describes her impact on Trojans and Greeks in terms which, almost throughout, apply to the former at least as naturally as to the latter; and the crucial words οὐδ' ἔχω τί τὸ σαφές,

following immediately upon the allusion to her mythical birthstory, could for a moment stir some doubt as to the reality of the Helen whom all the time we have been seeing with our own eyes. Again, when Helen concludes her prayer to Aphrodite (1102 ff.), after a damning characterisation in the Hesiodic vein, by a limited appreciation of the goddess, « if only she were temperate », this personal version of a traditional prayer indeed casts a perfectly charming light upon this Helen; but is not this charm inevitably enhanced by the dim presence of her less temperate namesake? We have similarly felt it before in Helen's appeal to Theonoe. The same twilight seems to be playing about her earlier on when, in addressing the chorus, she riddles about her own lot: was she begotten to be, for men, a portent (τέρας, v. 255 ff.)? Thus the mirage of the other Helen, faintly present, adds another ironical light to deepen the reflection of our world in this fantastic mirror. In all of its reflections, though, the insight gained and the delight derived from the play are confirmed. However unfathomable truth may be and God and the world, here was an image of what man may aspire to—and may achieve—« if the gods are his friends ».

They may turn against him. Even wider than the widest ironical sphere encompassing this radiant creation was the mind of its creator, who so often was to represent the cruel and absolute negation of the hopes and efforts realised in Helen's fairyland. Its brightness, lightness and meaningfulness have their roots in an unbounded and unmitigated perception of the hazard and futility of life and of the impenetrability of the forces determining it. Only the perfect play—using the word in the sense of the Platonic παιδιά—could balance the resultant temptation to nihilism and despair.

It would seem then that the *Helena* satisfies Hofmannsthal's exacting definition of comedy. Even so, we should



hesitate to apply to it this designation, which would have been meaningless to Greeks and might be misleading today in view of the current, debased connotation of this term. If, however, we associate it with *The Tempest*, *The Magic Flute*, or *Ariadne auf Naxos*, its use would place the *Helena* in a fitting and suggestive company.

I am tempted, in conclusion, to invoke Euripides himself in support of my attempt at interpreting his work. I submit that the second stasimon (v. 1301-68) may hint at something like the implications which I have been trying to unfold. This hymn to the Mountain-Mother is described as an inorganic ἐμβόλιμον even by many who incline, generally, to uphold the relevance to the context of Euripidean choruses. They may be right . . . but the evident, symbolical relevance of the analogous hymn to Apollo in the *Iphigenia in Tauris* prompts one to reconsider the question.

Here again, the interpretation has to reckon with more than one level of significance. We have to acknowledge, first, that the spectators were familiar with the subject of this hymn. This «Mother of the Gods», whose person, legend and cult combined elements Attic, Cretan and Phrygian, had long since been accepted into popular and official worship. We recover, with an effort, from archaeological evidence and from literary parallels in Pindar, the *Bacchae*, and the Epidaurian hymn, that atmosphere of Dionysiac rapture and mystical delight which the wording, music and dance must have conveyed to the original audience with direct and impressive force. Therewith the contrast of this hymn with all the rest of the play must have stood out all the more strikingly; evoking, for a short moment, a whole, wide domain which has no counterpart in the play. Thus it serves to define, ironically, the world in which Helen moves. This relation, *per negationem*, is in fact made explicit in the last stanza. However corrupt its wording, it seems clear that the chorus asked if Helen had failed to

worship the Great Mother. The endeavour to trace suffering to the wrath of some neglected deity is known to be a traditional motif from Homer onward and also in tragedy (Soph. *Ai.* 172; Eur. *Hipp.* 141); in the present case it is much to the point—if not in a literal sense. For, the appeal of enthusiastic abandonment indeed is, emphatically, rejected by Helen—by this Helen. To find this hint conclusive, note the outstanding role allotted to Kypris among the Mother's retinue, immediately before the chorus addresses Helen; Kypris, the deity whom the other Helen obeyed . . .

One may attach much or little importance to this explicit connection between the chorus and the subject of the play; one has, at any rate, reason not to regard it as exhausting the significance of the hymn. The futility of pinning political innuendos on to the doubtful interpretation of isolated verses calls for no refutation; one may try, rather, to assimilate with comprehensive sympathy the essence of the myth told. What is it? An impassioned search, stirred by an unaccountable act of the highest god; fruitless exertion, ending in exhaustion and despair; resentment, draining the springs of life—and reconciliation, by the will of the same god; reconciliation and joyfulness with the coming of Charites, Muses and Kypris. Not Baubo but the Muses; not a surrender but reconciliation; music redeeming life; art recompensing the endless search. Perhaps the symbolism of this myth—so significantly reshaped—is a clue to Euripides' mind, and to the full meaning of the *Helena*. The play stands out, a *παίγνιον* as light as it is profound; an ethereal dance above the abyss.

## DISCUSSION

*M. Martin:* Je pense exprimer l'opinion générale de notre réunion en disant que nous avons été fortement saisis par l'exposé de M. Zuntz. C'est un spécimen d'interprétation particulièrement pénétrant d'une œuvre d'art difficile et, à première vue, déconcertante. Peut-être ne serons-nous pas tous d'accord avec certaines de ses conclusions; elles sont en tout cas extrêmement dignes d'être prises en considération. L'*Hélène* d'Euripide présente sans doute un côté de fantaisie, mais M. Zuntz nous a bien montré qu'il s'y cache aussi une signification profonde. C'est le voisinage et l'association de ces éléments un peu disparates qui donnent à cette œuvre quelque chose de chatoyant et en rendent l'interprétation malaisée. Il semble bien que Théonoé soit l'un des personnages essentiels de la pièce; elle incarne une certaine conception de la conduite de l'homme, dans ce monde où il est exposé à toute sorte de forces, tant extérieures qu'intérieures à sa personne. Et M. Zuntz nous a dit, d'autre part, qu'une certaine forme de piété s'exprimait dans *Hélène* sans référence à aucune divinité. Ce point m'a particulièrement intéressé. Mais mon intention n'est pas de garder la parole plus longtemps, et je prie ceux d'entre vous qui désirent s'exprimer de bien vouloir s'annoncer.

*M. Zuntz:* May I make one remark beforehand? Since one cannot say everything in one hour, I had to make a selection. I would not describe Theonoe as the main person of the play, but the appreciation of her part seemed to me essential for the understanding of the whole play. Even so, in focusing our attention on Theonoe we have left aside much that is equally or even more significant. For, obviously, the main interest is centred upon Helen, and on the development of the plot.

*M. Diller:* Darf ich vielleicht gleich zur Theonoe etwas sagen, und zwar direkt an das anknüpfend, was Sie eben bemerken. Ganz richtig, wer das Helena-Menelaos-Spiel verfolgt,

wird nicht Theonoe als die Hauptperson betrachten. Im Gegenteil konnte die Theonoe-Gestalt sogar völlig aus dem Spiel herausgenommen werden, soweit man es als eine dramatisch ablaufende Aktion betrachtet. Und es scheint mir, dass Euripides selbst das auch angedeutet hat; nachdem Theonoe dazu bewogen worden ist, Helena und Menelaos dadurch zu helfen, dass sie die Anwesenheit des Menelaos verschweigt, sagt sie bekanntlich (1022): « Wie Ihr Euch positiv aus der Affäre zieht, das ist Euere Sache ». Und so könnte der Zuschauer denken, ja wenn der Dichter nicht diese Gestalt eingeführt hätte, so hätte er es doch den beiden eigentlich leichter gemacht; denn durch die Einführung dieser Gestalt wird ihre Aufgabe einerseits erschwert, aber ihnen auf der anderen Seite nicht geholfen. Aus dem eigentlich dramatischen Ablauf ist Theonoe völlig herausgenommen. Und wenn Euripides so deutlich zeigt, wie er es hier gemacht hat, wie er Theonoe in das Spiel hineingestellt hat, so haben wir etwas ähnliches in der *Taurischen Iphigenie*, in dem Motiv des Briefes, das ja auch einfach dramatisch überflüssig wird, wenn Pylades (753 ff.) die Möglichkeit einfällt, dass er verunglücken könnte, und ihm deshalb der Inhalt des Briefes mündlich mitgeteilt wird. Wäre das gleich geschehen, so wäre der Gang der Handlung anders gewesen. Das ist nun zweifellos nicht nur eine beliebige Auffüllung; gerade deshalb war es so wertvoll, dass Sie gezeigt haben, was die Theonoe-Szene bedeutet. Sie bedeutet für das innere Verständnis des Stückes ungeheuer viel. Das Pathos im Schicksal von Helena und Menelaos ganz zum Ausdruck zu bringen, ist ohne die Theonoe-Szene gar nicht möglich, und ähnlich ist es in der *Taurischen Iphigenie* auch, dass der Wettstreit der Freunde, wer frei sein oder wer sterben soll, ohne das Briefmotiv gar nicht möglich wäre. Ich glaube wirklich, dass Euripides in der *Taurischen Iphigenie* durch einige Wendungen bewusst zeigen will, dass die Sache dramaturgisch auch ganz anders laufen könnte, und dass das gerade den nachdenklichen Zuschauer auch mitveranlassen soll, das Bedeutsame in der Handlung zu sehen.

*M. Zuntz*: Ja, Strohm sagt an einer Stelle seines Buches (S. 82, A. 1), Theonoe stelle sozusagen das Hindernis dar, das für eine Intrigenhandlung typisch ist; sie wäre denn sozusagen das Person gewordene Hindernis, analog der Schweigebitte an den Chor in der *Taurischen Iphigenie*. Hier haben wir zwei Schweigebitten, wie überhaupt so viele Züge verdoppelt sind (und das hat seine Bedeutung in der *Helena*). Die Schweigebitte an den Chor kommt ganz nebenbei und kurz (1307); denn die entscheidende Schweigebitte richtet sich eben an Theonoe. Strohm betont aber mit vollem Recht, dass ihre Bedeutung damit nicht erschöpft ist, und ich stimme Ihnen darin zu, dass der Zuschauer veranlasst wird zu fragen: « Was bedeutet diese Figur eigentlich ? » Und was sie wirklich bedeutet, darin sind wir uns, glaube ich, einig, das ist gegeben mit dem zentralen Begriff des Wissens, der Erkenntnis, des Lernens, des Verstehens. Da ist am Anfang das absolute Nichtverstehen des Teukros; da sind all die anderen Personen, die versuchen, die Situation zu verstehen, um dann aus diesem Verstehen heraus zu handeln. Und da haben wir also hier diese phantastische Figur, die das Ganze übersieht und versteht, und damit ergibt sich die Szene, in der dieser extreme Fall Realität wird; wir treffen hier einmal eine Person, die der normalen menschlichen Begrenzung des Verstehens der Situation enthoben ist — und wir sehen, dass selbst dann der Mensch immer noch nicht aus der Fragwürdigkeit des Daseins heraus ist.

*M. Kamerbeek*: I entirely agree with you that ironical interrelations constitute the structure of the play; so we have to do our utmost in order to discover these interrelations when we try to understand it. I may be mistaken, but I think that things are still more complicated with Theonoe than you said: she is shown standing before a decision and taking it, but we know she is a prophetess. So she must know the outcome. I should say there is irony also in this.

*M. Zuntz*: I am not sure that I agree. When we use the words « prophet » or « prophetess », we are inclined to think of their knowledge of the future. But that is hardly ever said



with regard to Theonoe. What makes her *θεσπιωδός* (859; cf. 873 ff.) appears to be that she understands what is and what has been, rather than what shall be. She does not know what will happen to herself, she does not say: « My brother will attack me, but I know that the Dioscuri will come and save me ». She is in danger just as much as Menelaus and Helen are.

*M. Winnington-Ingram*: There are in fact two explicit references to her knowledge of the future. First, when she is first mentioned at 13-14: *τὰ θεῖα... τὰ τ' ὄντα καὶ μέλλοντα*; and then the same phrase is repeated at 923. It is perhaps a conventional expression, but the fact remains that Euripides has introduced this notion himself.

*M. Zuntz*: I agree. There is even a third one, at least by implication. When Helen returns from consulting Theonoe, she says (535): « Theonoe told me that Menelaus is alive and about to come here », adding: « But unfortunately I forgot to ask her if he will also get away again ». Thus it is implied that Theonoe could know. Nonetheless, when you look at the whole of her scene, you see that, thanks to her contact with the supra-mundane sphere, she does indeed know and master the present situation. All the more it seems significant to me that there is not one word which could suggest that Theonoe is leaning back in comfort, knowing that everything will come right in the end. She does not say: « You may feel confident that you will get away »; neither does she say: « I know that nothing will happen to me ». On the contrary, she sees herself, as well as the suppliants, exposed to any risk; and she accepts that.

*M. Rivier*: M. Zuntz voudrait-il nous donner encore son avis sur le point suivant ? Afin de s'enfuir avec Ménélas, Hélène a besoin d'un navire. Elle paraît devant Théoclymène avec des habits de deuil, lui annonce que son mari est mort au dire de Théonoé elle-même, et lui fait part de son désir d'accomplir en mer, selon le rite, un simulacre d'ensevelissement. A une question de Théoclymène: « Ces larmes sont-elles sincères ? » (v. 1226), elle répond: « Ta sœur se laisse-t-elle aisément abuser ? »

En fait, c'est Hélène qui abuse le roi en tablant sur le crédit que celui-ci fait à sa sœur en raison de ses qualités de prêtresse et de prophétesse. Théonoé devient l'instrument d'un *μηχάνημα*, et cela pourrait être retenu comme l'indice d'une critique dont ce personnage fait les frais, ou d'une dépréciation de la mantique en général. Or Théonoé a pris le parti d'Hélène et de Ménélas, et dans la scène que vous avez commentée, elle a affirmé que la justice était de leur côté (v. 1010 sq. *ἀδικολήμεν ἄν, εἰ μὴ ἀποδώσω*). Ce motif prend d'autant plus de force que le poète et les personnages accordent plus de poids aux paroles de la prêtresse. Serait-ce aller dans votre sens que de dire que la tromperie dont Théonoé devient l'agent est justifiée par ce *δίκαιον*, par la fin juste à laquelle elle sert d'instrument ?

*M. Zuntz*: Perhaps I have not quite understood you. I see here just a happy use of the data of the situation. Helen is sure that Theonoe has not given her away. Hence she can use for her own ends the brother's conviction that his sister knows all and the fact that she has not revealed the truth to him.

*M. Rivier*: Certainement. Mais ne pensez-vous pas que le vers 1027 contient une allusion directe à la qualité de prêtresse de Théonoé ? Et cette allusion ne contribue-t-elle pas au succès de la ruse d'Hélène ?

*M. Zuntz*: Certainly. Helen is exploiting the situation.

*M. Rivier*: Je pensais à une objection possible: Euripide, loin de maintenir la figure de Théonoé à ce niveau de dignité que vous avez parfaitement décrit, en userait ici au service de l'intrigue, dans une sorte d'abus de confiance. A quoi il est possible de répondre, n'est-il pas vrai, que si le *δίκαιον* est du côté de Ménélas et d'Hélène, et l'*ἄδικον* du côté de Théoclymène, Théonoé ne cède rien de sa dignité à favoriser, même involontairement, une supercherie qui va dans le sens du droit reconnu par elle ?

*M. Zuntz*: Yes. If one is concerned to seek a moral justification for Helen's procedure, it would be on these lines. But need one be so concerned ? Helen is fighting for life; Theoklymenos is the enemy; against him everything is permitted that

will work. By the delight in this battle between wit and dumb force, everyone is carried away into a sphere beyond moral considerations—Helen as well as the Athenian spectator, and perhaps even the modern interpreter. As to Theonoe: she has justified her action in v. 1020 ff.

*M. Lesky*: Ja, Herr Zuntz hat etliche Einzelprobleme mit soviel Klarheit und Kritik angepackt, dass er uns die Zähne lang macht nach einer Ausgabe der Helena von ihm, auf die wir vielleicht einmal hoffen dürfen. Ich möchte mir nun zu zwei Stellen eine Frage erlauben: Sie haben vollkommen recht, dass die Verse 892 ff. geradezu eine zentrale Bedeutung haben, ja ich möchte sagen, nicht nur für das Stück, sondern für den ganzen Euripides. Kann man ihm zutrauen, dass er dem stummen Spiel so viel Raum gibt, dass Theonoe hier, nachdem sie zunächst zweifelt: « Was soll ich tun ? », plötzlich einen Entschluss fasst und fragt: « Also, wer geht zu meinem Bruder ? » Ich muss sagen, dass ich bei Euripides keine Parallele beizubringen wüsste und möchte nun fragen, wie Sie sich die Herrichtung denken. Wollen Sie den Anfang von Vers 892 so formen, dass sich dieser Satz als zweiter Teil der Alternative darstellt, oder denken Sie an den Ausfall von Worten des ungefähren Inhalts: « Doch, es gibt noch eine andere Möglichkeit: ..... ? »

*M. Zuntz*: Mir scheint, Theonoe kann keinesfalls den Befehl gegeben haben, dass jemand ihren Bruder benachrichtigen solle. Ihre letzten zwei Verse scheinen mir keinen Befehl zu enthalten, sondern die zweite Hälfte der Alternative, die vor ihr steht. Also vor Vers 892 eine Lücke, in der gesagt war: « Soll ich dich retten und dabei mich in die grösste Gefahr bringen, oder — nun das Erhaltene — soll ich meinen Bruder informieren und damit mich selbst in Sicherheit bringen ? »

*M. Lesky*: Ich verstehe Sie also recht, dass man die Änderung am Beginn des Verses 892 suchen müsste.

*M. Zuntz*: Gewiss; aber nicht nur das. Die Hauptsache, meiner Meinung nach, ist dass vor Vers 892 eine Lücke besteht. Und ich vermute, dass in dieser Lücke nicht nur die erste Hälfte



jener Alternative verschwunden ist, sondern vorher noch mehrere Argumente der Theonoe, die dann Helena in ihrer Rede zu entkräften sich bestrebt.

*M. Lesky*: Ja, in dem Augenblick, in dem eine Lücke erkannt ist, ist natürlich die Abmessung vollkommen frei. Dann eine zweite Frage: die sehr merkwürdigen Verse 1013 ff., die sicher nicht die Bedeutung haben, die Grégoire ihnen gibt, haben Sie, wenn ich recht verstand, mit der seherischen Eigenschaft der Theonoe in Zusammenhang gebracht.

*M. Zuntz*: Ja — wenn ich den Zweifel, ob sie überhaupt an diese Stelle gehören, als erledigt ansehen könnte. Dass diese Verse von Euripides sind, ist klar und ich würde auch gerne glauben, dass sie wirklich an diese Stelle von Anfang an gehört haben: ich finde aber immer wieder Schwierigkeiten im Gedankenfortschritt. Wenn Sie mich da beraten würden, wäre ich dankbar.

*M. Lesky*: Ich sehe auch noch eine grosse Schwierigkeit vor allen Dingen in den Versen selbst, es heisst doch: « Die Menschen auf der Oberwelt und in der Unterwelt sind einer Strafe für ihr Tun unterworfen, aber die Toten haben keinen νοῦς, wohl aber geht eine γνῶμη in den Äther ein. »

*M. Zuntz*: Ich würde etwas anders übersetzen (aber auch dann bleibt mir das Ganze noch problematisch). Etwa so: « Für diese Verfehlungen » (solche, vermutlich, wie das Zurückbehalten eines anvertrauten Pfandes ?)...

*M. Lesky*: Ja.

*M. Zuntz*: « Für dergleichen gibt es eine Strafe bei den Unterirdischen, wie auch bei allen Menschen hier in der Oberwelt ». Und nun fährt Euripides nicht so fort: « Denn wir gewärtigen in der Unterwelt Höllenstrafen », sondern er sagt: « Der νοῦς derer, die gestorben sind » — nun paraphrasiere ich — der νοῦς hat zwar kein individuelles, persönliches Leben (wie die Seele eines Körpers), aber eine γνῶμη, ein denkendes Bewusstsein hat er; denn er, der νοῦς also ein Unsterbliches, stürzt in den unsterblichen αἰθήρ — der also seine Heimat ist.

*M. Lesky*: Wer ist aber nun das Objekt der τίσις und worin kann die Strafe bestehen?

*M. Zuntz*: Vielleicht so: *Nous* hat eine γνώμη, d. h. ein Bewusstsein. Im vorliegenden Fall lebte dann also das Bewusstsein, etwas Falsches getan zu haben, weiter, und das wäre eben die Strafe.

*M. Lesky*: Das ist gewiss nachvollziehbar, aber dann bleibt noch immer der Widerspruch zwischen den νέρτεροι und dem νοῦς, dessen γνώμη in den Aether eingeht, also sicher nicht in der Unterwelt zu suchen ist. Auf diese Schwierigkeit wollte ich aufmerksam machen.

*M. Zuntz*: Die Schwierigkeit ist da. Sollte man etwa schon hier jene, aus späterer Zeit bekannte, eschatologische Geographie vermuten, welche den Hades vielmehr in den Himmel verlegte? Problematisch ist das gewiss. Andererseits wissen wir, dass es bei Euripides eine Metaphysik gibt, nach der im Menschen ein Ewiges ist, eben der *Nous*, der von der höchsten, äusseren Schale der Welt stammt; er regiert die Sterne oder über den Sternen und der *Nous* im Menschen ist ein Teil davon; das kann man in den *Hiketiden* (531 ff.) lesen und etwa in fr. 971.

*M. Lesky*: Ja. Die Vorstellung, die Sie bezeichnen, ist dann im IV. Jahrhundert recht geläufig.

*M. Zuntz*: Und vielleicht dürfte man οἱ νέρτεροι und οἱ ἄνωθεν dann hier auffassen als verblasste, traditionelle Umschreibungen für «die Verstorbenen» und «die Lebenden»? Leben über der Erde und das unter der Erde bezeichnete dann dieses Leben und das ewige Leben des *Nous*. Gewiss — es ist nicht einfach, dies anzunehmen.

*M. Lesky*: Keine ganz leichte Auskunft, aber die einzige, die ich sehe.

*M. Zuntz*: Wenn man sie annimmt, dann, scheint mir, ist man versucht, das, was hier über den *Nous* gesagt ist, zu verbinden mit den ersten Worten der Theonoe, über die Reinheit, die sie durch ihre Zeremonien sichert (865 ff.). Damit gewinnt sie ein πνεῦμα vom Himmel; das ist ihr νόμος, den sie immer

ausübt. Ist man vielleicht berechtigt anzunehmen, dass dies *Pneuma* eben der *Nous* ist, der vom Himmel zu ihr dringt und dauernd in ihr lebendig ist? Das wäre es denn, was Theonoe ihre Allwissenheit gibt: ihre Verbindung, durch Reinheit, mit dem *Nous*. Denn, wohlgemerkt, νοῦς und γνῶμη sind miteinander verbunden (1013 ff.).

*M. Diller*: Das könnte man versuchen, wenn man sich erst einmal davon überzeugt hat, dass die Verse 1013 ff. überhaupt dahin gehören.

*M. Lesky*: Als primäre Funktion der Verse möchte ich doch auf Grund des γάρ in Vers 1013 die Begründung ansehen, dass der Mensch sittlich handeln muss, dass vor allem das δίκαιον zu seinen Pflichten gehört, weil sonst die τίσις über ihn kommt.

*M. Zuntz*: Ganz recht. Wenn eine Verbindung besteht, dann muss es diese sein; aber die Schwierigkeit bleibt, dass Theonoe gerade vorher sagt: «Auch mein Vater hätte dir Helena wiedergegeben, wenn er noch am Leben wäre». Also ist er nicht mehr am Leben. Ist es nicht sonderbar, dass es dann weiter geht: «Denn auch bei den νέρτεροι gibt es eine Strafe für dergleichen»?

*M. Lesky*: Wenn wir uns über die νέρτεροι in dem besprochenen Sinne beruhigen, so ist der Anschluss klar: «Mein Vater hätte als Lebender so gehandelt», da er natürlich auch wohl um die τίσις wusste, die ihn bei einem Fehltritt bedroht hätte.

*M. Martin*: Une obscurité subsiste. Si le premier hémistiche du vers 1015 exclut l'immortalité personnelle sous une forme quelconque, il ne me paraît pas possible de dire ensuite qu'il persiste une γνῶμη de ce qu'on a fait sur la terre et que, par suite, ce résidu peut être exposé à une punition; dans ce cas, en effet, il y a immortalité personnelle.

*M. Zuntz*: Je vois aussi la difficulté. C'est pourquoi je me demande si ces vers sont bien à leur place ici. Si le νοῦς n'est pas personnel, comment peut-il être puni?

*M. Martin*: Oui, c'est cela.

*M. Zuntz*: It may help if we compare a passage in the *Orestes* (v. 385 ff.). Menelaus, shocked by the sight of Orestes, says:

τίνα δέδορκα νερτέρων; Orestes (386) confirms his impression: οὐ γὰρ ζῶ, φάος δ' ὄρω and again (390) τὸ σῶμα φροῦδον. And when Menelaus asks what so destroys him, he replies (396) ἡ σύνεσις ὅτι σύννοιδά δεῖν' εἰργασμένος. Is not the analogy striking? In both plays we seem to find this idea: the νέρτεροι «do not live»—they are parted from the body—but they have a consciousness (γνώμη or σύνεσις), and the consciousness of the wrong they have done is their punishment.

*M. Martin:* Mais ne veut-il pas dire: «Si l'on envisage les maux qui sont les miens (la situation physique et psychique où je suis), je suis mort, mais je suis quand même vivant». C'est une hyperbole.

*M. Zuntz:* Nous avons sinon le même sens que dans *Hélène*, du moins une expression parallèle.

*M. Martin:* Une image.

*M. Zuntz:* Oui. — Thereafter I am tempted to translate *Hel.* 1015: «The *nous* of the departed has not indeed a life (of the same kind as mine and yours); even so, it has consciousness». Herr Diller, würden Sie empfinden, dass man diesen Vers *Hel.* 1015 unbedingt so verstehen muss: «Es gibt nach dem Tode kein persönliches Leben, sondern nur eine Art genereller Bewusstheit?» Oder können Sie sich vorstellen, dass vielmehr gemeint ist: «Die Toten haben zwar kein physisches Leben, wie man es auf der Erde lebt, aber doch ein persönliches Bewusstsein»? So kämen wir vielleicht aus der Schwierigkeit heraus.

*M. Diller:* Ja, ich würde das für möglich halten.

*M. Zuntz:* After death, the individual *nous* returns to the general *nous* from which it came, and still it remains an individuality. Is this the doctrine here?

*M. Martin:* On pourrait citer ici la célèbre épigramme Kaibel 21.

*M. Zuntz:* Sans doute, mais n'y a-t-il pas l'idée, là, que les âmes des morts se dissolvent et ne persistent pas comme individualités?

*M. Lesky:* In dem Epigramm ist von ψυχή die Rede, nicht vom νοῦς; das mag den Unterschied ausmachen.

*M. Zuntz*: Da wäre denn also νοῦς persönlich und individualisiert, im Gegensatz zu ψυχή? Man erwartet eher das Gegenteil.

*M. Winnington-Ingram*: Returning for a moment to the subject of μαντική —there is perhaps a light comic irony in the way in which Theonoe's prophetic gift is handled. She does after all use it to deceive—with the best possible motives and the best possible results. But, when her brother threatens to kill her, saying: τοιγὰρ οὐποτ' ἄλλον ἄνδρα ψεύσεται μαντεύμασιν (v. 1626), we may perhaps recall the slave's remarks about lying prophets at 744 ff.

*M. Zuntz*: We certainly may; we might find, though, that in so doing we are putting Theonoe on the wrong side. The slave is inveighing against what, to him, is the wrong kind of μαντική; namely, the traditional μαντικὴ ἔντεχνος. Theonoe is essentially not on this side but on the opposite one. She is a representative of the true μαντική which is rooted in good sense, right understanding and right action (v. 757).

*M. Martin*: Cette mantique supérieure, qu'Euripide considère comme admissible, n'a-t-elle pas quelque analogie avec ce qui, dans une autre civilisation, s'appelle le prophétisme? Le prophétisme, en effet, ne révélait pas l'avenir, mais proclamait les vraies valeurs. Une telle connaissance peut, dans une certaine mesure, éclairer l'avenir parce que si telle valeur fondamentale est violée, on peut être sûr qu'il en résultera une conséquence fâcheuse. Peut-être n'est-on pas en état de la décrire d'avance, mais elle se produit inévitablement. Il y a donc un certain rapport entre connaissance des valeurs et connaissance du futur.

*M. Winnington-Ingram*: The whole speech (v. 744ff.) seems to me extraordinarily characteristic of Euripides, in the way that he is doing several things at the same time. For instance, 749-51 is clever—a debating-point which will amuse the σοφοί. But the criticism of prophets has some seriousness—written at a time when, as Thucydides tells us, the Athenian people had been led astray by bogus prophecies. Then there is a deeper and more fundamental contemporary reference. When Euripides



writes about the Trojan war, he cannot fail often to have had the Peloponnesian war in mind. So here there is an ironic analogy. Greek and Trojan have fought a destructive war—about what? A phantom, a cloud. Was any better purpose served by the war which Athenians and Peloponnesians had been fighting?

*M. Zuntz*: I am far from denying this. Whatever Euripides wrote is live because the life of his time went into it. He could not write about war, and the nonsense of war, without himself feeling, and without his audience feeling, that this had its application to what they were just then experiencing. Even so, the speaker is not at this point jumping out of the play in order to make an «allusion» to the present situation. It applies to that situation and to any time, because there is always wrong action and bad consequences of wrong action. I think it is essential to realize that this passage is definitely an element of the plot of the play, and suits the mind of the persons speaking—as I have tried to show.

*M. Rivier*: M. Zuntz s'est arrêté au stasimon qui fait suite à la grande scène entre Hélène, Ménélas et Théonoé; il a analysé notamment la deuxième strophe (v. 1137 sqq.). Ce qui est dit là de la divinité et de ses manifestations, ἀντιλόγοις... ἀνελπίστοις τύχαις (1142 sq.)...

*M. Zuntz*: By the way, I think it necessary to read ἀμφιλόγοις. You would agree?

*M. Rivier*: Le texte me paraît y gagner.

*M. Zuntz*: The conjecture is not mine but Dobree's.

*M. Rivier*: Cette correction va dans le sens de la remarque très simple que je désirais faire. L'expression que le poète place dans la bouche du chœur évoque les derniers vers que celui-ci prononce au terme de la pièce (v. 1688 sqq.):

πολλὰ μορφαὶ τῶν δαιμονίων,  
πολλὰ δ'ἀέλπτως κραινουσι θεοί, κτλ.

Ces vers se lisent à la fin d'autres pièces d'Euripide, et l'on a pensé, pour cette raison, qu'il s'agissait d'une formule générale,

d'une sorte de clause sans signification précise. Votre analyse montre que ces mots s'accordent au thème central d'*Hélène*. Elle nous invite à penser qu'Euripide ne les employait pas indifféremment, et qu'il leur donnait un sens fort et consistant.

*M. Zuntz*: C'est bien mon avis, et j'ajoute que d'un drame à l'autre, le sens de ces mêmes mots est susceptible de varier. Dans *Hélène*, ils expriment une dernière fois l'ironie profonde de cette œuvre; ailleurs, ils ont une portée un peu différente, mais elle est toujours significative.

*M. Rivier*: Sans doute, si l'on songe que ces vers reviennent à la fin d'ouvrages aussi divers et aussi éloignés dans le temps qu'*Alceste*, *Andromaque* et les *Bacchantes*.

*M. Diller*: Wenn ich auch zu der möglichen verschiedenen Bedeutung allgemeiner Grundsätze in verschiedenem Zusammenhang noch etwas sagen darf: Sie hatten an einer Stelle sehr hübsch gesagt, dass die Handlung der *Helena* so verläuft, weil hier die idealen Personen auftreten, ideale Ehefrau, idealer Ehemann, ideale Helferin, und wenn sie nicht ideal wären, sondern wie die Menschen im allgemeinen sind, käme so etwas wie der *Orestes* heraus. Nun, in der Dienerszene haben wir ja das Bekenntnis des alten Mannes, dass der Diener die einzige Freiheit habe, dass er seinem Herrn treu dient. Im *Ion* haben wir dasselbe, da tut der alte Diener das auch, aber Sie wissen ja, er rät nun zum Allerschlimmsten: der Ermordung des Ion (843 ff.). Das war nur ein kleines Beispiel dafür, wie solche allgemeinen Grundsätze und ihre Verwendung von den Umständen abhängig sind und wie Euripides das bewusst hervorhebt. Der Grundsatz, den beide Diener aussprechen, ist praktisch derselbe, aber er kann je nach der Situation zum Guten oder zum Bösen führen.

*M. Kamerbeek*: I should like to make a remark on line 1150. Does not this line refer to 515 and to 873-75?

*M. Zuntz*: I would say that if this line means anything—but I hold that the transmitted wording requires correction—but if it were retained, it would mean, in a general way: « I have found the word of the gods true ». Even so, I would hesitate to refer

this to one particular passage of the play. It is true that Theonoe had said: «My prophecy has proved true» (v. 973). Here however it's the chorus speaking about «the gods» and not about Theonoe.

*M. Kamerbeek*: Of course, this whole stanza being general, the implication of this last line, I think, must also be general, but it may all the same have its connections with 515 and 873-75.

*M. Martin*: Le moment est venu de clore la discussion. Auparavant, je ne peux m'empêcher de remarquer combien cette pièce est actuelle par plus d'un côté; certaines des affirmations que nous y lisons trouveraient aujourd'hui une application immédiate, et, par exemple, dans la dernière strophe du chœur (v. 1151 sqq.), ce texte qu'on pourrait écrire en lettres capitales dans les salles où se tiennent les conciliabules de nos hommes politiques et les assemblées internationales:

Ἄφρονες ὅσοι τὰς ἀρετὰς πολέμῳ  
 λόγχαισί τ' ἀλκαίου δορὸς  
 κτᾶσθε, πόνους ἀμαθῶς θνα-  
 τῶν καταπαύμενοι·  
 εἰ γὰρ ἄμιλλα κρινεῖ νιν  
 αἵματος, οὔ ποτ' ἔρις  
 λείψει κατ' ἀνθρώπων πόλεις.

Y a-t-il meilleur exemple de la permanente actualité d'Euripide que des vers de ce genre ? Peut-être M. Zuntz n'est-il pas venu à bout de toutes les difficultés présentées par l'*Hélène*, mais l'exposé qu'il nous a fait a montré clairement l'extraordinaire richesse et la variété des significations qui font de cette poésie, véritablement, un κτῆμα ἐς αἰεί.

