CHAPTER TEN

THE PARODOS OF EURIPIDES’ HELEN (164–90)\(^1\)

The friendly expatriate ladies of the chorus in Helen enter having heard loud lamentation issuing from the palace, while engaged, like the φίλα of the chorus in Hippolytus 125 ff., in spreading laundered crimson textiles to dry in the sun. The central theme of ‘hearing cries’, with the verb ἐκλαυν and nouns of utterance (185–6), is reminiscent also of Medea 131 ff., where the opening words of the Parodos ἐκλαυν φωνάν, ἐκλαυν δὲ βοάν … allude to Medea’s loud utterances ἐκσώθεν in 96 ff. (ἰῶ ...) and 111 ff. (αἰαῖ ...): here, as there, the Parodos exploits the familiar motif of βοηδροµία.\(^2\)

Less orthodox, and unique in extant tragedy, is the treatment of the choral entry-song here as an antistrophe, metrically corresponding with monody sung by the prologist;\(^3\) a highly artificial and very probably novel procedure, with an element of ‘surprise’ and a pleasantly whimsical piquancy in keeping with the overall tone and character of the play.\(^4\)

\(^1\) CQ 40 (1990), 77–99; cf. my previous article (ch. 9 above) on Hel. 625–97. This article owes something to correspondence, many years ago, with Sir Denys Page, and much more to helpful comments from Dr J. Diggle. I am grateful also for the constructive comments of the CQ reader, whom I am permitted to identify as Professor M. L. West.

\(^2\) The most explicit choral βοηδροµία is in Hdd. 73 ff. [ch. 14 below] (with 121 βοηδροµηςε); cf. Taplin 218–20, who shows that the ‘shout’ motivating an entry is often a lament. Note that here, unlike Med. 131 ἐκλαυν … βοάν, the root βοα- appears only in the simile at the very end of the antistrophe (190 ἄναβοαι), if with Badham (and as argued below) we excise ἄνεβοαςεν in 184. The dramatic technique is much more sophisticated.

\(^3\) Compare, e.g. El. and Or., in both of which the Parodos has exchanges with a soloist (Electra) in its first pair of stanzas, but is initiated as usual by the chorus; I. T., where Iphigenia goes to fetch the chorus before taking the lead in strophic lamentation; and Andr. and Ion, where the monody preceding the Entry is in a different metre. Hypsipyle (later than Hel.) is the nearest parallel, if the chorus enters there in the middle of the first strophe, see further in nn. 7 and 11 below.

\(^4\) The probability of innovation is enhanced by metrical novelty (n. 22 below). ‘Unexpected entry’, cf. comm. on Or. 71–125, 380–4, and Taplin 11–12. In effect, this chorus of φιλαὶ arrives just in time to provide the proper ‘antiphonal’ element in the dirge (cf. I. T. 179 ff., etc.; comm. on Or. 960–1012) in place of the wished-for otherworldly chorus. For the timing and stagecraft of their entry, see further in nn. 7 and 11 below.
Unhappily our text is marred by grave faults of responsion and other anomalies. The familiar problems in the solo strophe (167–78) and choral antistrophe (179–90) still merit further discussion, despite the detailed treatment in R. Kannicht’s indispensable edition and commentary; and there are several other points of interest, both there and in the brief προοιμίο (164–6a) preceding the strophe:

\[\text{Ελ.} \; \omega \; \text{μεγάλον} \; \text{ἄχέων} \; \text{καταβαλλομένα} \; \mu\gamma\alphaν \; \text{oïkton} \]
\[\text{ποίον} \; \text{άμμαλαθώ} \; \gammaόν \; \mu\tau\alpha \; \text{μοῦσαν} \; \text{ἔπέλῳ}; \]
\[\text{[δάκρυον} \; \text{θρήνος} \; \text{πένθες} \text{]} \]
\[\varepsilon \; \varepsilon; \]
\[\text{πτεροφόροι} \; \text{νεάνιδες} \ldots \]

164 oïktov supra lin. γρ. Tr:\ oïkow L 166 versum delendum censeo 167 strophae initium notavit Triclinius

The ‘pro-ode’ has a double function: $\dagger$

(a) Dramatic. Helen’s long-standing and recent griefs naturally prompt the question ‘Oh, how can I do justice to the magnitude of my sorrows?’ and a further cry or cries of woe, as a preface to ‘If only my lament might have the assistance of the Sirens …!’; an exotic wish very possibly, though not necessarily, prompted by a visible representation of sirens on the Tomb of Proteus. The ‘woe-cry’ must be loudly articulated, like other utterances heard at a distance, since this is the βοή ‘cue’, preceding the strophe during which the Chorus enter, to which they will allude in 186 (αἰἀγμαςι στένουσαι).$^7$

(b) Formal. The whole of 164–79 is patterned threnody, beginning with a προοιμίον. μεγάλον ἄχευν ... μέγαν oïkton announces the theme,$^8$ and the big participle καταβαλλομένα adds a flavour of solemn ‘song-inception’ to the opening hexameter.$^9$ then comes a

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$^5$ Heidelberg, 1969; text: i. 139–40; commentary: ii. 59–74.

$^6$ Dale’s plausible suggestion. Sirens, a fortiori Sirens with instruments, may have been a new theme in tragedy. For the new sepulchral motif of ‘Grabsirenen’, variously portraying these otherworldly creatures as musicians and/or mourners (foreshadowing Baroque putti and angels), see G. Weicker, Der Seelenvogel in der alten Litteratur und Kunst (Leipzig, 1902), 171 ff., and further below.

$^7$ To avoid too long a hiatus before the Chorus start singing, they must at least come into view during the strophe (see further in n. 11 below). Helen, however, only becomes aware of their entry during the antistrophe (her attention having been focused on the Tomb of Proteus?); and they do not see her (they continue to speculate about what they have heard) until she addresses them at 191.

$^8$ For the stylish paregmenon, see Breitenbach 221 ff.; for the correction oïkton, see Zuntz 42, and further below.

$^9$ Kannicht compares the epic and Pindaric ἀναβάλλεθαι, but see also LSJ s. v. καταβάλλω II. 7 ‘lay down as a foundation’. The sense ‘begin (a song)’, perhaps