

## Verrall on Euripides' *Suppliants* 939ff

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THE following unpublished letter, from the Gilbert Murray papers in the Bodleian Library,<sup>1</sup> offers an excellent example of the insight into theater and the speculative vigor of A. W. Verrall (1851–1912), the incomparable “Splendid Emendax.”<sup>2</sup> It was written 5 January 1904 from an Algerian health establishment where Verrall, seriously incapacitated by arthritis and other ailments, had gone with Mrs Verrall to escape the rigors of a Cambridge winter. He had already been friendly with Murray for some years, their friendship founded on and deepened by their continuing interest in Euripides. Of the two letters from Verrall in the Murray papers, the other concerns arrangements for one of Murray’s visits to Cambridge, where he frequently was a house guest of the Verralls. Reasonably enough, the two men preferred when possible to discuss scholarly questions in person rather than through the mails. This letter, then, is exceptional, brought into being by Verrall’s need to go abroad while Murray was reading proofs of his edition of Euripides for the Oxford Classical Texts series.

Apparently Verrall saw duplicate proofs throughout the OCT project, for along with Wilamowitz<sup>3</sup> he is thanked first in the Preface for his “constanti benevolentia opem consiliumque.” We may infer from the second sentence of the letter that Verrall generally made most of his notes directly on the proof sheets themselves, and only wrote the extended sort of comment we have here when a major point was in question. If he wrote any other long notes such as this one they seem not to have survived. With this sample of Verrallian marginalia—if that is not too deprecatory a word to describe what in

<sup>1</sup> Some of the research for this essay was carried out thanks to a grant from the Columbia University Council on Research in the Humanities; I also wish to thank Dr Alexander Murray, Dr A. S. F. Gow, Professor W. M. Calder III, the Department of Western Manuscripts of the Bodleian Library, and Mrs. Imogen Mollet for permission to publish.

<sup>2</sup> See the memoir by M. A. Bayfield (with contributions by F. M. Cornford and other hands) in Verrall’s posthumous *Literary Essays Classical and Modern* (Cambridge 1913); for “Splendid Emendax” see p.xxi.

<sup>3</sup> See Murray’s “Memories of Wilamowitz,” *AuA* 4 (1954) 9–15.

fact is a brief critical essay—before us, one can only echo (but probably for different reasons) Verrall's student Gilbert Norwood when he says that "We must regret that Verrall published no essay on [*Suppliants*]." <sup>4</sup>

Despite the fact that Murray and Verrall were the closest of friends, and were moreover engaged in the same task of establishing and explicating the text of Euripides, they moved in different scholarly worlds so far as their methods and approaches were concerned. The archetypal rationalist textual critic, Verrall was perfectly prepared to read Euripides as if the latter were a late Victorian anticlerical rationalist like himself, and he was both willing and able to reconstruct and reinterpret the text so as clearly to show Euripides at work subverting the gods.<sup>5</sup> Jane Ellen Harrison, close friend to both Murray and Verrall, in a partially published letter of 4 May 1907 to the former, has left us a fine example of Verrall's famous wit at work:

You know don't you that AWV has discovered that the earthquake and fire in the Bacchae are all Hallucinations—I did not realise how he hated the Bacchus whom I love so. He declares he sympathises with Pentheus. "Any gentleman would be justly annoyed if he found a wild bull in his stables," he said. We got quite stormy over it.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, as Murray and Miss Harrison (along with F. M. Cornford and A. B. Cook) pursued their vitalist and ritualist investigations into Greek social and dramatic *origines*, although friendship remained intact, the gap grew ever wider between them and Verrall. However much Verrall lacked sympathy with their anthropological and archaeological approach (which he called "stuffage"<sup>7</sup>)—and the lack

<sup>4</sup> Gilbert Norwood, "The *Supplices*," in *Essays on Euripidean Drama* (Berkeley 1954) 112 n.1. Norwood himself, who strongly resembled his teacher in tone and technique, has nothing particular to say of 939ff in his own essay, in which he out-Verralls Verrall in radically reworking the text.

<sup>5</sup> See Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley 1971) 206 n.69: "Its [G. Murray, *Euripides and His Age*] worst features were due to the influence of A. W. Verrall, a scholar whose fertility in ingenious speculation was fatally combined with an utter inability to sympathise with the mental attitudes of the past. Regrettably, this influence is not yet quite extinct, partly owing to the work of Verrall's disciple, G. Norwood."

<sup>6</sup> The first part of the letter, in slightly different form, appears in J. G. Stewart, *Jane Ellen Harrison: A Portrait from Letters* (London 1959) 57. The original is on deposit in the Newnham College Library, where I consulted it, and is printed with the kind permission of Miss M. E. Lane.

<sup>7</sup> Stewart, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 56–57.

of sympathy was near total—he had, besides his brilliance and daring in establishing and interpreting a text,

a lively idea of the conditions of dramatic poetry. No English scholar before Verrall, and no earlier scholar at all save Otfried Müller . . . was possessed of a similar capacity of visualizing a Greek tragedy as a play to be performed on the stage. Consequently one vital aspect of this poetry was more adequately brought out in Verrall's commentaries than in those of his forerunners.<sup>8</sup>

In the letter below we certainly see Verrall's theatrical sense at work, for his entire textual argument concerning the retention of the manuscript reading *αὐτὸς* in 939 derives from his having envisaged the action on the stage. What is perhaps more noteworthy, because less expected in the light of his determined 'antiprimitivism', is his convincing and assured use of ethnographic evidence in his citation of *The Golden Bough* and the anthropological cast of his argument in general. On the basis of this one letter it would be premature indeed to call Verrall a convert to the anthropological point of view, but to a reader of the rather Voltairean *Euripides the Rationalist* (1895) the tone of the letter comes as a distinct surprise.

Beyond this, one notices that the entire comment is in fact an extended argument for the reading *αὐτὸς* in 939, which has the support of both manuscripts **L** and **P**. J. J. Reiske (1716–74), however, had emended to *οὐτὸς*,<sup>9</sup> and Murray finally adopted this reading.<sup>10</sup> It seems, however, not without something of a struggle, for Murray's apparatus gives: "οὐτὸς Reiske; αὐτὸς **L P** (recte: 'nemine iubente', Verrall)." This is the only time Verrall's name occurs in Murray's apparatus to *Suppliants*. This letter tells us the reason why. The punctuation and paragraphs of the original have been preserved.

Jan. 5. 1904  
Etablissement Thermal,  
Hammam R'Hiva,  
Algérie<sup>11</sup>

My dear Murray,—

Yours enclosing corrections of first proof duly received. I hope you

<sup>8</sup> Eduard Fraenkel, *Aeschylus' Agamemnon* I (Oxford 1950) 57.

<sup>9</sup> I presume in *Animadversiones in Euripidem et Aristophanem* (Leipzig 1753), which I have not seen.

<sup>10</sup> Wilamowitz apparently had convinced him: see *Analecta Euripidea* (Berlin 1875) 118 and *Griechische Tragoedien* I<sup>4</sup> (Berlin 1904) 268, 283.

<sup>11</sup> For more on the Algerian trip, see Stewart, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 57–59.

have before this received sheets 1 and 2, with my notes, such as they are. 3 and 4 are just going off with this. Now for the remarks to which I refer on *Suppl.* 939 etc.—the final scene of the *Suppl.* apparently assumes that the pyre required for burning the recovered dead is already built. Nothing is said about building it. This is natural. There has been ample notice; some time has apparently elapsed even since the arrival of the army at Eleusis, and it would be rather strange and surprising if the pyre were *not* ready. But how comes it that the pyre of Capaneus is also ready? The intention to burn his corpse separately, at the temple, is only announced at 934. Yet his funeral proceeds immediately along with the rest. Apparently this pyre also is already made, *but for some other purpose*. Now v. 939, as given in the mss., with *αὐτότε*, asserts precisely this. Theseus proposes to make a pyre for Capaneus at the temple. Adrastus replies “The servants (of the temple) must *naturally* be engaged in that task *already*”—*αὐτότε* means that the thing will be doing ‘of itself’, and apart from the occasion for it which has now arisen: *μέν* means that *so far* at any rate the intention of Theseus is favoured. I infer that, according to the legend followed by E., Capaneus was burnt on a sacred pyre which happened to be made at the very time for another purpose—a circumstance indicating divine approval of the plan. This purpose, from the nature [of the] case, must have been connected with the ritual. This is confirmed by v. 1010, where this pyre is called *Διὸς θησαυρός*, ‘the repository of Zeus’, a designation not at all accounted for by the story of Capaneus. [The conj. *δρῦός* is futile].<sup>12</sup>—What then was the *Διὸς θησαυρός* made for? What was to be burnt on it according to common practice? E. does not say; all his allusions to the story of Capaneus assume it as known, and are in themselves not intelligible. The facts are (1) the name *Διὸς θησαυρός* (2) that the rite, whatever it was, obviously produced, as an explanation, the story of Evadne. Putting this together, I should *guess* that the thing burnt and consecrated to Zeus (probably Zeus Chthonios or Dis) was a *κόρη*, the effigy or representative (in straw?) of a  $\begin{cases} \text{woman} \\ \text{maiden,} \end{cases}$  “the bride of Dis”. Such rites (magical means of fertility) were common; see the *Golden Bough*.<sup>13</sup> They are substitutes for real human sacrifices. If so, the mythological

<sup>12</sup> F. J. A. Wieselers.

<sup>13</sup> J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* II<sup>2</sup> (London 1900) 168–222, esp. 217.

history would be simple. Of this Eleusinian rite there were 2 explanations; (1) the true and honest explanation, that the 'woman' of the rite was burnt for Zeus; (2) the euphemistic explanation, which refused to recognize the presumption of human sacrifice, and said that the 'burning of the woman' commemorated the heroism of a suttee-wife (story of Evadne). Then, as usual, the two explanations are rolled together by well-meaning persons who like to think that all sacred legends are true; and you get the version of the play, that Evadne (and Capaneus) were burnt on the pyre (*Διὸς θησαυρός*) which, by coincidence, happened to be prepared as usual for the 'burning of the woman'.—This, I think, also explains vv.980–81, where *δή* refers to the whole arrangements (980–83), *ἤδη* specially to the words *Καπανέως . . . τύμβον θ' ἱερόν* "now appropriated to Capaneus and converted into a funeral pyre," literally "Capaneus' now and a sacred funeral pyre." It was not a *funeral* pyre, in the ordinary sense, at all, when it was used, in the developed rite, for burning a bride of straw. [Note here by the way *ἀναθήματα νεκροῖς*; this does not say that Theseus has built his pyre, which was already done, but correctly that he has now completed the preparation by the last touch, the addition of the *ἀναθήματα* (objects dedicated, memorials, etc.) to the corpses.] It is to be wondered [considered?] whether *θαλάμας* is a proper word for an ordinary pyre. I doubt it but cannot verify. It is perfectly appropriate to the *Διὸς θησαυρός*. The association may add a certain point to v.1022 *Φερσεφ. ἤξω θαλάμους*.—I am not certain about this, but it would certainly prevent me from meddling with *αὐτός* in 939, and *Διός* in 1010. In the former place the error (for *οὔτος*) is surely not probable. Moreover *ἤδη* has no point with *οὔτος*, and the whole turn of the phrase, if meant for an order, seems to me inappropriate.

There is not much to report, I am doing very fairly, and gain; but I shall do much better, when we get more sun. There is no great cold, indeed nothing which in England would count as cold; but the regular rainy season is being prolonged (for our benefit) beyond all precedent, they say. Algeria, it appears, has had 8 months absolute drought in this amazing year, and is now making up for it by extraordinary rains. Rather hard on the English visitor with rheumatism! However I am much better off than I was in Cambridge, and look forward hopefully to the expected fine weather. The moment the sun shines I find this place perfectly delightful. We had a glorious day yesterday, which raised hopes of a permanence, not fulfilled unfortunately, for today is

bad—*Do say frankly* if my so-called notes are useless. I make what I can of them, but find it almost impossible to explain myself properly. Be assured that, if you say they do not serve, I shall not take it the least ill. If we could but talk!—I hope you are all well, or at least no worse.

AWV

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