

HIPPOLYTUS

Prologue:

Aphrodite's speech:

Part 1: (a) declares herself- her power, pride, self-importance.

offers her "moral code" - punishment of enemies, honour for friends, satisfaction for self - ie. the norm for primitive view of gods

(b) reveals her envy of Artemis, and jealousy because of Hippolytus' rejection of herself (in spite of her protestations!) - and her intention to "get her own back".

ie. she reveals a mixture of divine and human "emotions" > revealing the lack of pity in the force of sexual love.

Part 2: She explains factors - how, when/where, Phaedra fell in love with Hippolytus - that have led up to the present situation > Phaedra in SILENT misery.

Part 3: She prophesies the future with menace but half truth; having done that she prepares to go.

Note: has she set things in motion, or have things simply happened by chance (ie. the coincidences of the Athens' visit and the move to Troezen)? Aphrodite is "apart" from her victims: so what decides their downfall - a god or divine force (predestination) or their own decisions and emotions (free will)?

Finally as she goes, she introduces Hippolytus - reaffirming his link with Artemis & imminent death

Enter Hippolytus with "chorus" of huntsmen:

'They sing a hymn of praise to virgin goddess Artemis- a remote and heavenly deity.

Hippolytus' words: (a) bring her down to earth, in an impossibly idyllic idealised "chaste" meadow (the place traditionally and in myth for sexual encounters between gods and mortals)

(b) make his claim as a paragon of virtue; "holiness" here implies "thinking in a wise manner" - the nearest word we have to it is "self-control". But for Hippolytus it means total and permanent abstinence from all that he judges impure - which his puritanism/ background/arrested adolescence equates with sex.

Note: Phaedra too believes that such "control" of emotions and appetites is vital.

Servant/Hippolytus dialogue:

Hippolytus: here appears condescending and smug as the servant warns him of the danger of neglecting one of the goddesses; his brusque action in turning from both goddess and servant reveals how limited his asceticism is - it is directed towards sexual abstinence not activities like riding, hunting and eating!

The prologue ends with a typical "closure" speech:

The servant appeals to the goddess to forgive and forget (no chance - given her opening speech!)

Comment:

The scene is set; we know the outcome; the problem is once again a kind of fanaticism - or blinkered vision - is it a moral or a behavioural problem this time involving sophrosyne - "control"?

Parados

The chorus enters - ordinary women of Thebes - intended as a foil for the other characters?

Their song consists of two balanced pairs of verses - strophe and antistrophe - plus a short closing verse - epode - which "caps" the whole song.

Strophe 1 tells us where and by whom the fact of the queen's illness was revealed- the situation is very human, very indefinite, very gossipy; there is no evidence of the divine in the situation, in the talk, in the occupation of the women.

Antistrophe 1 tells us what the news is - again the details are human and relevant to the plot (three days without food can be mentally disorientating). The only mention of the divine comes in a clichéd metaphor for bread.

Note: the verse ends with a new twist to an old metaphor - life as a voyage ending in death's harbour

Strophe 2 consists of rhetorical questions suggesting reasons for her illness ie. trouble with the gods, starting with the ecstatic and ending with failure to honour Artemis.

Antistrophe 2 consists of rhetorical questions suggesting human, personal reasons for her illness, a unfaithful husband or bad news from home.

Epode: Chorus use personal experience as women to offer own suggestion. Their words are so obscure as to defy explanation - are they referring to lust, pregnancy, fear of childbirth, or the general variability of mood in women?

Note: Artemis is the goddess of childbirth as well as chastity.

Comment: In the prologue we had Aphrodite's and Hippolytus' points of view; the parados gives the view of the "woman in the street" and a preliminary to giving the views of the two women of the play - the Nurse and Phaedra.

Chorus link:

introduces the two women; give stage direction of "weak and wasted" for Phaedra.

Episode 1

Nurse's First Speech:

1. Gives picture of Phaedra - craving for fresh air; fretting; unable to settle to anything; not knowing what she wants.
2. Gives picture of herself - a bit impatient and grumbling, but more in word than deed; feels affection for Phaedra; no great thinker-relies on truisms and accepted wisdom, in which in reality she has no great faith.

Nurse/Phaedra dialogue:

Reveals Nurse as sympathetic, but alarmed, anxious, puzzled.

Reveals Phaedra's suppressed desire for Hippolytus, as she deliriously phantasizes- by her impatience with personal constraints of dress and hair.

by her wish to be free of the confines of the palace

by her yearning to be out in the hills with the hunt and racing horses on the beach

The contradiction here makes the Nurse suggest that Phaedra is herself like a horse driven out of control (ie. into madness) by some god.

The mention of madness brings Phaedra to her senses; once out of her delirium she worries about what she might have said.

Shame and guilt at having overstepped the limits set by shame now predominate in her words.

She can't bear either the reality of the pain of her lust for Hippolytus, nor the thought of the madness which allows her to phantasize in the constant danger of inadvertently admitting her lust. her only option then is to wish for death.

Nurse's second speech:

in which she shows her concern for Phaedra; and her personal resignation towards loss and life's brevity. This attitude leads her to state her creed:

a flexible attitude to value judgement and morality

moderation in all things, ruling out extremes of all kinds.

Nurse/Chorus dialogue:

Establishes truth of rumours mentioned in Parados

Introduces fact of Theseus' absence

Introduces Nurse's attempt to discover reasons for Phaedra's "delusions".

Nurse's Third Speech:

1. emphasises her loyalty ie. a fresh start, putting aside the fractiousness of both of them earlier.

2. takes a practical line this time (not emotional sympathy or anxiety as before) - asks if Phaedra is suffering from some unmentionable (to men) female ailment.

3. notes her refusal to speak as meaning she intends to die, and so turns to emotional blackmail by referring to her sons, who without her to protect them will be usurped when Theseus dies by his bastard son Hippolytus.

At this word Phaedra breaks her self-imposed SILENCE.

Nurse/Phaedra dialogue:

Nurse's questions gradually elicit Phaedra's state of mind:

(a) guilt at spiritual lack of chastity

Note: the belief that purity can be spiritual as well as physical is one she shares with Hippolytus.

(b) wish to maintain silence and bring "honour out of shame".

(c) respect for the pleas of a suppliant, and sense of obligation to accept the appeal

(d) obsession with her family's reputation for lustful behaviour

(is she afraid she will follow it or trying to avoid it?)

The climax to this part of the episode comes via a question from Phaedra when she asks about the meaning of being in love, and the utterance by the Nurse of the fateful name

This section of the episode then ends:

with the Nurse bewailing the effect of Lust on virtuous women

with the Chorus in a short one stanza song - a pause not a "full curtain" - deploring Phaedra's predicament: thanks to Aphrodite, all alternatives are immoral, dishonourable, or unfair.

The second part of the first episode mainly consists of two monologues:

First monologue: spoken by Phaedra.

She sets out the moral issues, explains her intentions to save her reputation, and tries to win the Chorus' sympathy: ie. a typical sophistic speech such as might have been made to jurors in a law-court - except that the issue here is moral not legal.

1. Explains in clear concise statements how she has approached her problem rationally:

Human failure is not the result of human folly or some innate trait, since even the good fail, but the result of not doing what we know to be good. Through their own lack of resolve men are responsible for their own failures.

2. Expresses determination to stand by her thought-out position; and traces via examples the way she has determined to do what she knows to be right:

(a) First resolved to conceal the fact of her love (for talking is dangerous)

(b) Next resolved to overcome her love by self-control

(c) Finally, since (b) did not work, to commit suicide

(she then adds further reasons for this, becoming more discursive as she becomes less sure?)

(i) to let everyone know of her right action

(ii) to prove her nobility/ goodness

(iii) to prove her chastity

(iv) to uphold her family's honour

(v) to avoid exposure by time's mirror of her own illicit desires

ie. she wants "a clear conscience and an upright heart" and not to see the truth of the evil she would do, as the young girl sees her true self in the mirror.

Note: the high moral tone; the regard for her own image; her regard for her reputation and that of her family. She gives the impression of wanting to avoid disgrace and the appearance of being dishonourable - for the sake of everyone involved.

The Chorus is impressed and says so in a complimentary couplet.

The second monologue spoken by the Nurse:

Addressed to Phaedra not the Chorus; opens by explaining change of mind - second thought best (and we have already heard evidence of the Nurse's veering thinking)

1. Then proceeds by ignoring illicit nature of Phaedra's desire; treats it as normal ie. to the Nurse this is not a moral but a practical issue.

2. Practical comments based on Love in general:

(i) falling in love should not mean death

(ii) rejecting or suppressing desire brings trouble

(iii) desire is the source of all life

(iv) gods have fallen in love with mortals (ie. unusual unions) - and they all seem happy.

3. And comments on Phaedra's particular situation:

(i) she is an ordinary mortal, so she should accept the laws of desire

(ii) her situation is not uncommon - people shut eyes to it or encourage it.

(iii) to hide one's faults is common sense (a contradiction of Phaedra's earlier point)

(iv) human beings should not aim at perfection (another contradiction)

(v) problem unavoidable; resistance would be blasphemous.

ie. Nurse argues Phaedra's virtuous "control" is really wicked thinking -> hubris; she turns the logical argument upside down, after the manner of some Sophists, making "the worse cause the better"

3. Finally offers some practical suggestions:

(i) "Be bold, and love"

(ii) suggests magic charms to "fix things" - exactly what is left ambiguous.

Chorus admires practical sense of the Nurse while admitting the moral force of Phaedra's argument (and implies that Phaedra is weakening?)

Nurse/Phaedra dialogue:

Culminates in Phaedra's wish to keep her honour safe.

in Nurse's determination to save her life and make the best of things.

Note: the ambiguous words of the Nurse leave Phaedra with fear of Hippolytus finding out the truth.

Chorus Song 1

This hymn to Eros marks the interval between Nurse's departure to carry out her (unrevealed) plan and the discovery of what she actually does.

The hymn consists of alarm notes about the force of sexual attraction - "animal magnetism" - which Eros typifies.

There are two pairs of matching verses:

Strophe 1 starts with gentle apostrophe of the god, and the joy of desire - but it quickly turns to a prayer against the violence that Eros can bring; and as the child of Zeus ->

Antistrophe 1 Eros brings inevitable violence; he is all-powerful, a god who cannot be appeased by sacrifices at the two great shrines of Greece; he is the bringer of calamity ->

Strophe 2 So the Chorus goes on to examples of Eros' destructive power; and at this point the link with Aphrodite is firmly established:

example (i) Iole - promised as bride to whoever could beat her expert archer father at archery - Hercules won, but Father backed out; so Hercules sacked city and carried Iole off.

Antistrophe 2 example (ii) Semele - Hera in disguise visits her and persuades her to make Zeus reveal himself when he visits her in his full glory - as a result Semele is incinerated; and Zeus hastily constructs a make-shift womb for the baby Dionysus in his thigh (the first surrogate father?)

the song ends with a reference to the haphazard flight of a bee - the same bee that is found in Hippolytus' chaste meadow?

Comment:

What has happened in the previous episode to arouse the feelings of alarm in the Chorus of women? Or is this a generalised cry of alarm at the disastrous consequences of the haphazard "attacks" of Eros?

Episode 2

Chorus/Phaedra dialogue:

An ingenious use of the Chorus here as recipient of information which Phaedra overhears and passes on - thus Chorus is involved in the drama but not in the action (like the audience).

Hippolytus and Phaedra never exchange a word in the entire play.

1. starts with Phaedra's increasing distress at what she hears; Chorus becomes agitated.

Note: Phaedra calmly reports in iambics; Chorus agitates in lyric metre.

2. she reports Hippolytus' shouted abuse; quotes his actual words - which give away Nurse's whole scheme.

3. Phaedra and Chorus realise the consequences:

Nurse's good intentions have ruined everything.

Phaedra's only option now is death - her shame is revealed, her reputation (honour) ruined.

Nurse/Hippolytus dialogue:

1. he is beside himself with rage (justifiably?) - and vocal in the extreme.

2. Nurse NOW wants everything kept quiet, having seen her plan fail (she has misjudged the characters of both Hippolytus and Phaedra)

3. He rejects the oath (presumably of silence?) - saying in effect that words in themselves are not binding unless the heart really means them; he will have no mercy on any who do wrong.

4. the Nurse's pleas that he should remember human frailty produces:

Hippolytus' anti-women speech: centre piece of this episode:

1. opens by criticising Zeus:

(i) why create women? what a way to ensure continuance of human life!

(ii) better plan would be market economy system - so men could enjoy women-free life.

2. takes example of a woman (not Phaedra but could be):

(i) before marriage upbringing and dowry = cost and trouble for her father

(ii) after marriage keeping her in gee-gaws = cost and trouble for husband

Note: the neat monetary and business-like evaluation of women; if women have to exist, they have to be regarded almost as "models" or idols, except that animated idols spell economic ruin for the idolators.

3. suggests a cipher would make for an easy life

Note: he wants clear-cut black and white life, no grey areas with all the complications introduced by relationships with others.

4. takes another tack (perhaps prompted by sight of other women on stage ?) - refers to dangers of clever women, women with servants to aid and abet their wickedness.

5. then homes in on them referring to the wife who "broods on unchastity" and the servant who "broadcasts the lewdness"

6. Brings his perversely logical speech to an end with an emotional outburst:

a ferocious attack on the Nurse

expressions of horror at her suggestions

a promise to keep silent because of his oath and fear of the gods

declaration of intention to leave until his father returns and watchfulness thereafter

a final tirade against women - as evil and unchaste (ie. lacking in self-control)

Note: he never mentions Phaedra's name - even when she is his target.

his final tirade reveals his loathing of women is an obsession, not merely applied to Phaedra.

Phaedra's lament:

This balances the chorus song of p.94 "Did you hear . . ." Like that song this marks a pause in the action, as Hippolytus' words sink in and Phaedra ponders on the consequences of events.

Note: 1. there is a new problem - not concealing her desire, but concealing the evil the Nurse has revealed.

2. her sense of shame and abandonment.

3. "the knot a word has tied" - her words, the Nurse's words, Hippolytus' words.

Chorus: makes simple comment - sums up situation in nutshell!

Phaedra/Nurse dialogue:

In the course of this exchange:

Phaedra: 1. denounces and curses the Nurse for destroying her reputation (honour) by her disobedience and loose tongue - Phaedra is now a strong and decisive character.

2. anticipates that Hippolytus will tell Theseus all (he had only sworn oath of silence to the Nurse).

3. utters final curse on "helpful" busybodies.

Nurse: 1. attempts to defend herself before being ordered from stage.

2. only did her best out of love for Phaedra

3. points out that, if things had gone well, she would have been called wise not wicked.

4. ends with final platitude "while there's life, there's hope" - ironic as it turns out.

Phaedra/Chorus dialogue:

The Chorus promises to say nothing about what they have heard.

Phaedra declares she has found a way to save her own and family reputation;

It will involve: death for her

victory for Aphrodite

a hard learning process, ominously threatened, for the unnamed Hippolytus who will discover what self-control really is - something more than physical chastity; a state of mind - restraint in word and deed towards both men and gods - the opposite of hubris in fact.

Comment: Both Hippolytus and Phaedra display different characteristics in this episode from their earlier appearances. Do you find this inconsistent, irritating, or immaterial? Do they have any real personality of their own or are they merely "types" to act as mouthpieces for Euripides' argument? At this point in the play, is the real issue about chastity, reputation, or keeping up appearances?

From the very start of the play Phaedra has been determined to choose death rather than dishonour. She will very soon, as she has declared, kill herself. Do you think the words of Hippolytus have done more to carry out this intention than the actions of the Nurse?

Chorus Song 2

An escapist theme - via idealism, back to reality, and so to death, the ultimate escape.
Centrally placed in the play, with contrasting images of the destinies of gods and men.

Strophe 1 starts with expression of wish to escape reality - to fly like a bird - to the world of the unreal, myth and imagination, where the human pain of grief is transformed by the gods into natural beauty.

Antistrophe 1 and then passes beyond that barrier - to the ends of the earth (and so by implication to the borders of heaven) where all is natural bliss and heavenly marriage - for the gods.

Strophe 2 still the theme of escape, but the bird is now a white-winged ship and the setting is geographical - it seems a happy move, but it is doomed from the start of the stormy voyage - the myth has become reality - the victim is brought down to earth in Athens - and to a disastrous human marriage.

Antistrophe 2 Aphrodite does not bring bliss but "cruel mischance" - and harsh details of the death that follows (the fate of Iole and Semele are thus recalled)

BUT Phaedra's choice of her fate makes things different:

(i) she is losing her life to save her reputation (or so the Chorus thinks)

(ii) she solves (she thinks) the problem of her shame by ending her mortal existence

So the choice when confronted by "hateful destiny" is to be divine or dead?

Comment:

The Chorus here presents in lyric form the basic themes of the play:

the wish to escape the reality of the world and human emotions

the power of Aphrodite - destructive for mortals

the ongoing consequences of men's actions

the importance of reputation i.e. a good name or "what people say about you"

Or is this reading too much into a song remarkable for the beauty of its poetic and evocative imagery, and the incidental comparisons drawn between the divine world and earthly reality?

Episode 3

Voice within/Chorus dialogue:

The Voice within appeals for help - a disembodied voice that gets no real response

The Chorus comments but cannot/does not help - it is apart from the action

Phaedra is dead - she has no further physical role - but her part is not over yet.

Note: the recurrent imagery of bonds and entanglement - and of release and escape. Phaedra, Hippolytus and Theseus are caught up in each other's lives - each has to choose, or is forced to find, their way of escape.

Enter Theseus unannounced:

Theseus/Chorus dialogue:

Theseus is concerned about the cry he has heard from within the palace - and the lack of welcome.
- assumes some trouble in the family.

The Chorus bluntly reports his wife's death - but not the reason for it

(they are sworn to silence; the chorus by tradition kept overheard or entrusted secrets - this one goes further and tells a lie - to prevent interrogation which would detract dramatically from the revelation to come?).

At Theseus' command, the doors are opened, and Phaedra's corpse revealed - on a wheeled platform (ekkyklema) - her presence is vital for the discovery of her "suicide note".

Theseus/Chorus lament:

Part 1: Chorus bewails her death in general terms; again conceals knowledge of reason for it; sympathy is the present role of the Chorus.

Theseus is emotional, struggling for understanding and for control of emotion:

i. despair at malignity of fate; sense of loss - "as a bird from my hand you have vanished"; sense of guilt, grief; the imagery of shipwreck recurs here.

ii. queries reason for the suicide - with a flash of anger at his servants.

iii. broken hearted for himself - his children - this is a personal grief.

Part 2: Chorus (noticing the letter?) - turns from sympathy to alarm for what is about to happen (they know the reason for her death, her threat about Hippolytus but not the letter's contents)

Theseus makes wrong assumption about its contents (yet another misunderstanding/assumption in the play)

describes contents - the accusation of rape against Hippolytus.

instantly curses son, recalling Aphrodite's words of prologue, refuses to listen to Chorus' warning - concludes with "sentence" of death or exile.

Note: the three curses are merely a dramatic device to link with the role of the gods before and after.

The Chorus gives cue for Hippolytus' entrance:

Hippolytus/Theseus dialogue:

(compare this confrontation with the Creon/Oedipus confrontation in the contemporary "Oedipus")

Hippolytus is little more than an emotional sounding board at this stage:

he is anxious - with a stilted manner (things not happy at home? eg. harps on "father".)

he is astonished at the death of Phaedra

he is bewildered by Theseus' comments and accusation.

Theseus appears to use the situation for a discourse on moral and social wisdom (hence Hippolytus' remarks that the situation is not the place for sophistry - and perhaps for us the reason why the play as a whole is not as gripping as it might be); he takes Hippolytus as his example but then makes remarks of general application.

Thus his three speeches here reveal his concern with social order (ie. the administration of justice - a key issue to the Athenians - and Theseus was after all a "national hero")

Speech 1: Man is clever, but has not yet grasped concept of what makes society tick ie. the "right mind" = recognising what is good.

(rape breaks social contract = danger to interpersonal relationships, and the property ownership laws)

Speech 2: Wishes there was some way of knowing whether the truth was being spoken - it would make administration of justice easier.

(like Hippolytus (and Phaedra?) he wishes life was simpler and more orderly).

Speech 3: sees world as evil and attacks son as embodiment of the evil - calling him corrupt, hypocritical, polluted and polluting:

- i. taunts him with his "virtue" - "consorts with gods, whose life is chaste".
- ii. accuses him of religious hypocrisy - with a mixture of Orphic, Dionysiac, Pythagorean beliefs.
- iii. anticipates possible defence moves and dismisses them (Hippolytus given no chance to speak)
 - a. Phaedra's death makes facts impossible to discover - the body is the proof.
 - b. accusation rises out of hatred - she would hardly kill herself to spite you.
 - c. women are more lustful than men - not in the case of strong young men.
- iv. admits no defence at all - passes instant sentence.

Chorus: offers traditional truism - "call no man happy till he is dead"

Hippolytus' reply:

1. starts with stock defence formulas = "Unaccustomed as I am . . ."

(is he buying time to collect thoughts/ trying to win sympathy/ naively trusting in rhetoric and the truth?)

2. rebuts the charges:

i. he reveres the gods and keeps good company ie. he is virtuous

(note: the allusions to the Nurse's behaviour - lost on Theseus, but not on audience)

ii. he is chaste - ie. mentally and physically a virgin.

(note: he is completely virgin as Phaedra was completely chaste?)

3. Anticipates arguments:

about the beauty of Phaedra - she wasn't that lovely anyway!

about his desire to usurp throne - he prefers the untroubled life (cf. Creon in the "Oedipus")

(note: his ambitions are entirely sporting - he is no Alcibiades!)

4. ends with protestation of innocence, coupled with his oath of innocence

(note: his oaths mean what they say.

here again "chastity" in the text = sophrosyne - self-control, right thinking.)

The Chorus: comments on the power of an oath (as the Chorus does in the "Oedipus"); unlike Oedipus with Creon, Theseus will not let Hippolytus off on the strength of it.

Hippolytus/Theseus dialogue:

Hippolytus reveals in the course of the exchanges his own strict code of behaviour and standards:

eg. his attitude to rape, and the power of an oath; though distraught at the prospect of losing friends and home, he still refuses to break his oath to the Nurse (in spite of what he said to her earlier and because of his "insufferable piety")

Theseus continues to castigate his son; refuses to listen to what he says; his mind is made up; he is as rigid in outlook and refusal to see any side but his own as Hippolytus has been and has as little feeling for others' predicaments. (Is this true of Phaedra also?)

Hippolytus' departing words:

are addressed Artemis as he bids farewell to Troezen where he has been happy (away from father?)
make a last claim to the virtue of sophrosyne - and to being misunderstood.

Comment and question:

Hippolytus' last words here bring out the two key issues of the play:

sophrosyne - self-control - for which chastity/virginity are neat clear-cut examples (though in another sense for all Theseus has to say about right and wrong, he lacks sophrosyne too)
misunderstanding: from the very beginning whenever people talk, they are on the "wrong wavelength", making wrong assumptions and judgements.

Do you think that Hippolytus meets the criteria for the "tragic victim" in the play?

How emotionally effective is this entire episode, if he is in fact the "tragic victim"?

Chorus Song 3

The Chorus is alone at this point ie. holds the equivalent of "centre stage".

In bafflement it tries to reconcile traditional belief in the divine order of things with Hippolytus' fate, and the injustice of it, as it examines the unhappy lot of mankind.

It sympathises with Hippolytus - and finds no answer to its bewilderment.

Strophe 1 opens with a statement of orthodox religious belief
but hope soon turns to bafflement and despair.

Antistrophe 1 a prayer that adapting to circumstances with secure a contented life - a desire to "go with the flow".
an unheroic attitude - bending before the wind-so unlike Hippolytus' unbending control.

Strophe 2 reverts to shock of what has happened
describes the exiled Hippolytus as the "brightest star".

Antistrophe 2 recounts the reasons for the respect he is held in - a typical well-brought-up Athenian youth - accomplished horseman, musician, heart-throb, and prospective "good catch".

Epeode as in the parados, this short concluding stanza adds the Chorus' personal reactions:
grief for their loss; and anger at the gods.

Comment and question:

Euripides was reputedly a "free-thinker" or sceptic about the gods. Does this Chorus song, in your opinion, express lack of faith in the gods, frustration, or despair; or is it a conventional reaction by a conventional element in tragic drama to the particular immediate circumstances?

Episode 4

Opens with Chorus announcing the arrival of Hippolytus' slave - for the "Messenger's Speech", and of Theseus from the palace.

Messenger/Theseus dialogue:

The slave gives the basic facts - Hippolytus has had an accident, probably fatal; Theseus' curses has been fulfilled.

Theseus is bitter and unforgiving - reminds audience of the crime/sin the now unnamed Hippolytus has been condemned for.

Messenger's speech:

A brilliant piece of sustained and varied narrative:

the opening is quite matter-of-fact: the gathering of friends, preparation of horses, sorrow at enforced exile.

on point of departure, with a telling detail of readiness, Hippolytus prays for the truth to be revealed, whether he lives or dies - a prayer which is granted.

the route is described - known to Athenians by sight, hearsay or experience.

the climax approaches - the noise, the wave heard then visible, the bull from the sea.

Hippolytus' struggle to control panicking horses described - then the contest between human skill and control and the divinely inspired power of the beast.

then the crash - with details of the entanglement; the cries for help; the inability of his friends to keep up and help him.

at last the health bulletin - he is still alive - just.

And the messenger adds a final comment - a testimonial to Hippolytus' goodness and innocence.

The Chorus' comment sums it all up - the whole situation is disaster.

Theseus however is unmoved by the news; wants to see his son whom he still believes to be guilty.

Comment:

This is the beginning of the end; note how Euripides has kept to the convention of violence taking place off stage, but has used it previously to enable the discovery of Phaedra's letter to be acted out, and now to enable Theseus and the dying Hippolytus to resolve matters.

Read pp. 214 ff. of "Euripides and his Age" for a description of the dramatic potential of the Messenger's Speech.

Chorus song 4

This is very short, more an interlude than a full-scale song; it serves to acknowledge the success of the schemes of Aphrodite in the Prologue and to introduce the deus ex machina Artemis of the Exodos.

The whole song is a hymn of praise to Aphrodite and Eros; their power is recognised, not as destructive as previously, but as the controlling influence over land and sea. (the Chorus in fact has moved from despair and puzzlement to acceptance of the divinity of Love), and over all creatures. They have cast a universal spell over all the world.

In the course of the song the Chorus picks up images from throughout the play and the song culminates in giving Aphrodite alone supreme honour as a divinity.

Such extremism cannot go unregarded, and so it serves as the prelude to the appearance of Artemis who will clarify the situation and "tidy up loose ends".

Comment:

The song is in direct contrast to the opening hymn of Hippolytus. Is this deliberate irony, or is Euripides making a statement about the futility of worshipping either goddess?

Exodos

Part 1: Enter Artemis - deus ex machina

If Aphrodite's manner in the Prologue was menacing, Artemis' manner here is distant:

i. formally introduces herself - the same cool aloof language will persist in her explanations.

ii. accuses Theseus of causing his son's death, of accepting lies without proof; and clamly points out there is no escape from his living hell.

iii. reveals the truth - about Hippolytus - he will die but his good name is safe - his honour, pity, and virginity are all preserved.

about Phaedra - exonerated from blame (how responsible for events do you think she was - weak in giving in to Nurse, spiteful in accusing Hippolytus?); her good name is lost because she feared to lose it - appearances were what mattered to her.

about Theseus - rebuked for using curse against own son instead of an enemy, for his impatience, his unjust behaviour.

iv. offers some hope - explains that all happened because of the will of Aphrodite; she herself was obliged to stay aloof (thanks to a conveniently invented divine law!); but Zeus is the overall controller.

The general impression given is:

(a) Theseus (like Phaedra and Hippolytus?) is virtually ignorant pawn in Aphrodite's hands.

(b) Yet gods personally grieve at death of good men, which seeking destruction of the wicked and accepting the idea of the inherited curse/guilt.

Part 2. Enter Hippolytus: a monologue in which he

- i. expresses mental and physical pain in impassioned lyric.
- ii. Appeals to Zeus as final court of appeal (in this play all oaths and appeals are ultimately made to Zeus; he never openly intervenes, but prayers made to him are eventually confirmed)
- iii. cannot understand why he the pious (holy) and pure (virtuous/controlled) suffers so cruelly.

Note: his boast may be a proud one; but he is asking valid moral questions:

- (a) about undeserved suffering
- (b) about inherited guilt.

- iv. pleads for death as the end to his suffering

Part 3 Hippolytus/Artemis dialogue, with some intervention by Theseus

Artemis explains why Aphrodite brought ruin on all three characters -- out of divine pique or because Hippolytus was too selective in his worship of the gods?

Both Theseus and Hippolytus understand, and are moved from anger to pity for each other.

Artemis promises revenge and immortality in legend for Phaedra and Hippolytus, and urges the two men to be reconciled ~ ignorance and the will of the gods was their undoing.

She then departs as coolly as she came.

Part 4. Theseus/Hippolytus dialogue:

Hippolytus forgives his father, and dies.

Theseus recognises the nobility of his son (note that there has been no mention of Phaedra for some time - her would-be nobility is already forgotten) and declares his remembrance of the wrong done by Aphrodite.

The Chorus speaks the epilogue: often thought to be a late addition (because plays usually had a few final words from the Chorus?); the words in fact say little meaningful in terms of the play as a whole, and weaken the effect of Theseus' final cutting comment (perhaps that was the idea behind the addition of these Chorus exit lines?)

Comment/question:

Which are the more dangerous in this play - words or emotions? How far do words express what the characters really think? Or is it by their actions that they reveal their true selves?

Some final points:

1. Aphrodite gets the blame but:

Phaedra chooses: slow death by starvation

to be persuaded to tell nurse her secret
to commit suicide and accuse Hippolytus

Nurse chooses: to pry into Phaedra's emotions

to change her mind and encourage her desires
to go behind her back and tell Hippolytus

Hippolytus chooses: to be a chaste virgin

to be outraged at the thought of women in any role
to keep his word when he had the excuse not to do so

Theseus chooses: to jump to conclusions

to believe evidence without proof
to act precipitately.

2. Images destroyed:

Hippolytus: ideal of absolute purity, reverence, perfection > suffering > restoration to human father.

Phaedra: ideal of noble chaste wife > suicide and disgrace

Theseus: ideal of civilised order and justice > unjust condemnation of son

Nurse: ideal of helping loved mistress > cursed and dismissed by mistress.

Chorus: ideal of gods caring for human race . disillusionment.

3. Circumstances Environment Inheritance shape Decisions

Hippolytus: brought up by elderly grandparents; a bastard so an outsider > search for ideal/perfection

Phaedra: queen, social standing in new country, nymphomaniac family > search for propriety, reputation, keeping up appearances.

Theseus: hero, king, destroyer of monsters > search for clear right and wrong