

EURIPIDES, HIPPOLYTUS

Euripides - some differences of approach to tragedy.

1. Main character - focus on divided mind; psychological drama rather than moral.
2. The prologue - tells us the story so there is no surprise at how things work out.
3. Long speeches - the equivalent of the soliloquy sometimes sound like the law-courts, and pleading a special case.

But often do come in pairs and suggest an argument.

The true soliloquy is thinking out loud and reveal the character of the speaker, rather than revealing the plot as in Sophocles.

4. The messenger's speech for revelation of the truth of the action - brought to a deliberate art form - dramatic in itself; prepared for and built up to by what has gone before (unlike for example in the Oedipus where the messenger's speech is of very abrupt appearance).
5. The 'deus ex machina' - the intervention of the god or goddess in the exodus to tie up the loose ends - the ending is a dying fall not high drama.
6. The treatment of women and minor characters is far more realistic human or even 'common'.
7. The chorus
 1. relieves tension - eg Phaedra rushes off to kill herself, and the chorus talks of escape - this is either irrelevant or a deliberate and natural way of escaping tension (like jokes at a funeral).
 2. anticipates the action; or initiates the giving of information.
 3. the leader in dialogue - the sounding board of other characters, gives no really personal viewpoint, no action; simply echoes response and decisions of the characters (at times therefore seems more intimately involved in the emotional impact than in Sophocles).

HIPPOLYTUS

THE PROLOGUE

Spoken by Aphrodite - uncompromising introduction to play:

1. Goddess states a) her identity and her power
 b) her use of Phaedra as her tool of vengeance.
2. The entire plot of the play is revealed.

NOTE:

1. a) Does Euripides show goddess as vindictive because he considers her - and whole Homeric pantheon - unworthy of worship?
 b) Is he criticising not gods but the myths as being too human?
 c) Is he treating her as a symbol of an abstract force?
2. The play is important not for the plot, but the way the writer presented the theme and the action.

CONTENT OF PROLOGUE

- I
 1. Aphrodite's universal power: her demand for worship.
 2. The background - Hippolytus, son of Theseus, brought up in Troezen by his grandfather: rejects Aphrodite and only worships Artemis - he is not only chaste but is besotted by his worship of Artemis - thus insulted Aphrodite.
 3. Aphrodite has plotted vengeance: Hippolytus visited Athens for initiation rites - his father's new wife Phaedra fell in love with him - thanks to Aphrodite's scheme - and later, while Theseus and she are in exile, finds herself in Troezen. Determined not to give in to, or reveal, her lust for her stepson, she is starving herself to death.
 4. Aphrodite declares (1) Theseus will learn the truth, curse and kill his son; Phaedra will die too, but without losing her honour.
 (2) Aphrodite will have her vengeance.
 5. Introduction of the prologue's second half - the introductory prologue (such as would be found in Sophocles) - the 'hero' and his companions.

II ENTER HIPPOLYTUS WITH HUNTSMEN

1. A hymn of praise to Artemis.
2. A solo hymn of praise to Artemis - by Hippolytus.

Note: (a) stress on virginity - even the meadow is 'untouched'.
(b) his assumption of close companionship with the goddess.

3. Dialogue with servant and Hippolytus:

Brings out Hippolytus' pompousness, easy charm, arrogance (he twice equates mortals with the gods), casual lack of responsibility, his last speech in the scene contrasts his material sporting interests and total indifference to Aphrodite - he has a one track mind. The servant charitably puts it down to the folly of youth - the goddess will be less forgiving.

THE PARADOS

Entry of main chorus - women of Troezen.

First pair of verses introduces Phaedra.

Strophe 1 - natural gossip centre described - the washing pool - the ancient Greek equivalent of the laundrette: very human and natural base for

Antistrophe 1 - the illness of the queen - refusing to eat, refusing to say what is wrong - just waiting to die.

Second pair of verses - the chorus suggest reasons for this "death-wish".

Strophe 2 - It is not due to some wild frenzy of religious ecstasy but could it be neglect of some offering involving Artemis? And arousing her wrath - for the anger of the gods is terrible.

Antistrophe 2 - or have some personal, not religious matters upset her? eg Theseus having an affair with some slave-girl or bad news from the family in Crete.

(Postscript verse - the chorus' general comment on women - a mixture of fears and desires - lustful desire - and fear of the consequences of it. The Chorus finds an appeal to the goddess of chastity helps.
(Epcde

Finally the Chorus introduces the next scene - with Nurse and Phaedra.

EPISODE 1 Nurse opens - full of concern for Phaedra and her changeable moods
full of homely platitudes:-
about life:
about death:
about illness:

Phaedra's opening words - show she is conscious of her beauty, and her failing strength.

Then - she appears delirious - yearns for the country, the hunt, the chase with Artemis - is she subconsciously dreaming about Hippolytus?

The nurse comments on the contradictory nature of her words - this seems to bring Phaedra to her senses, obviously worried about what she might have said.

NB: One of the themes of the play is what is said - and what is NOT said - and what is meant by words and silence.

Link Passage - Short "soliloquy" by Nurse: (1) veers from "selfless devotion" to "a cruel burden" in her care for Phaedra.
but (2) stresses "a limit to everything"

ie contradictory and confused feelings in herself but advises against extremes of emotion - she is the voice of sanity it seems.

Leads to - Chorus/Nurse dialogue

Establishes (1) Phaedra's refusal to speak or eat - her death wish.

(2) Theseus' ignorance of her condition - and his absence.

Ends with chorus urging discovery of the reason for her illness and delusions.

Link passage - Short "address" by Nurse to Phaedra

- (1) Her own faithfulness "stands by her in hour of need".
- (2) Apology for previous harsh words - a fresh start.
- (3) Asks if women's remedies can help or if a doctor is needed.
- (4) Begs her to speak - no effect - "We're as far off as we were".

Then tries new tactic - Phaedra owes it to her sons to live to protect them from the ambitions of their bastard half-brother - Hippolytus.

ie Instead of self-interest, appeals to her sense of family duty - and inadvertently and in ignorance mentions the fateful name.

Leads to - Nurse/Phaedra dialogue

A An exchange full of undeliberate misunderstandings.

- (1) Nurse assumes the mention of Hippolytus' name means Phaedra fears what he might do to her children.
- (2) Nurse assumes it is Theseus who has done her some wrong.

B Nurse adopts physical attitude of a suppliant.

- (1) Phaedra speaks of honour.
- (2) Nurse speaks of truth.

[In this case are the two incompatible?]

Phaedra yields - as she must - to the pleas of a suppliant.

C Oblique revelation of Phaedra's illicit passion - Phaedra speaks: Nurse reacts.

- (1) Refers to mother's love for the bull (Zeus) and her sister's for Dionysus.
 - This alarms the nurse - it suggests some evil curse.
- (2) Refers to the pain of love
 - Nurse realises that she loves a man.
- (3) Blurts out the truth
 - Nurse supplies the name.

Link passage

The reaction of the listeners:

Nurse - shock - collapse
 disgust - cursing Aphrodite

NB: Phaedra is "a good pure-hearted woman lusting after sin against her own will".

Chorus - Pity for Phaedra
 Despair for her fate.

NB: "Aphrodite sent you an unhappy star" - ie she is the tool of the goddess, just as the prologue has said.

Leads to - Phaedra's soliloquy - her "defence speech"

1. General introduction - men fail to do what is right, not from wickedness always, but from inertia and distraction by other things.
Personal application - her determination to what is right.
Special application to the "love that struck her" (1) To say nothing - to hide suffering "for there's no trusting the tongue".
(2) To master feelings by self control.
(3) To kill herself.
2. The question of honour
 - (1) Her desires were not honourable.
 - (2) A woman's lust is despised, the woman hated and dishonoured - she is equally revolted by the thought of high-born women betraying their husbands and setting a bad example, ie feels disgust at herself.
 - (3) She dies to save her family's honour - her husband's and especially her son's honour.

ie her theme is "Rather death than dishonour". Good reputation is everything - a sentiment reflected by the Chorus!

The Nurse's second reaction follows:

The initial shock over, she offers not the high flown sentiments of Phaedra's speech, but plain "common-sense" - practical, not moral.

1. Phaedra's in love - so what? So are lots of people - a poor lookout for the world if they all have to die!
2. It is dangerous to resist love - it leads to disaster!
3. Love is the source of all life - it is a gift.
4. Consider some other unusual unions - they have worked.

EPISODE 2

Opening section Phaedra/Chorus dialogue:

She is listening at the door and reports what is said within. The truth is out - she remains calm - the chorus is excited. Death (when?) is the only remedy.

Second section Nurse/Hippolytus dialogue:

Hippolytus rants and raves - resists nurse's attempt at supplication.

Nurse pleads for his silence - which in spite of his words he gives.
 his forgiveness of her action - which he refuses.

Hippolytus soliloquy

A Expresses his pathological hatred of women - "noxious pest".

1. Suggests buying embryo sons in temples - therefore no need for women.

2. Describes expense of women - dowry, dress etc.

3. Stupid women are useless, clever ones dangerous.

4. Women's place is among the animals - dumb among the dumb - where their lack of chastity is not a source of corruption or talk.

B Turns on the nurse whose suggestion has provoked the outburst.

Note: (a) his disgust
 (b) the reason he will keep his oath
 (c) his departure.

C A departing curse on women in general - he never speaks to Phaedra - because they are not chaste therefore loathsome.

NOTE: Compare Phaedra's and Hippolytus' attitude to the unchaste: she feels shame, he revulsion.

Link Phaedra's lament (a) for the lot of women
 (b) for the damage done by words
 (c) for her justly deserved fate
 (d) for the impossibility of mortal or immortal help
 (e) for her imminent death.

- because, as the Chorus comments, things have gone wrong.

Third section Phaedra/Nurse dialogue

Phaedra rounds on Nurse - curses her for speaking

 for bringing dishonour on her death
 for giving Hippolytus his chance to denounce her.

Nurse offers excuses - wrong remedy - wrong guess - so she's wrong!

Both then dismiss words - Nurse's platitudes her final shot
 Phaedra pleads for silence about what has happened.

Fourth section Phaedra/Chorus dialogue

Phaedra declares (1) She has found a way to save her family from dishonour.

 (2) She will die - Aphrodite has won.

BUT the unnamed Hippolytus will suffer too - to learn that chastity is "moderation" - not excess.

NB: As with the end of Episode 1 her departure marks a climax - a major one this time.

CHORAL ODE

Starts with wish for escape and ends with prophecy.

(Strophe 1 The chorus wishes it was a bird, far away,
(Antistrophe 1 at the ends of the earth.

Note: through imagery of sorrow to paradise in this pair of verses.

(Strophe 2 Picks up the idea of "across the sea" - Phaedra from Crete in a white-wing'd ship

(Antistrophe 2 Traces Phaedra's doom, and death and deliverance.

Note: through threat of sorrow to escape from grief in this pair of verses.
Phaedra will be free of lust and free of dishonour.

EPISODE 3

Opening - the announcement of Phaedra's death.

Note: the chorus' reluctance to do anything - typically in this play.

PART 1 Theseus enters - and is the dominant character now.

(a) He learns the fact of Phaedra's death - this leads to:

(b) His lament for her death - with the chorus acting as 'obligato'

Compare the chorus' trite comments with Theseus' heartfelt grief

(eg the touching "bird" simile) - harmonics - or echo.

Almost hidden in his lament are two vital points:

(i) Theseus regards her death as the "harvest from sin".

(ii) His bewilderment that she should commit suicide - Why? he asks.

(c) The discovery of the letter - with the chorus adding foreboding, advice, and announcing the entry of Hippolytus to start Part II of this scene.

Theseus has three main short speeches first

(i) Hope - that the letter contains a last loving farewell.

(ii) Horror - at the contents - Hippolytus has raped Phaedra.

(iii) Instant reaction - to curse his son with death and/or exile.

Note: shock and further shock makes Theseus incapable of reason - in the circumstances he is behaving as any distressed and loving husband might.

PART 2 Basically this is like a court-room drama:

Hippolytus versus Theseus: emotional but on a different plane from Part I.

Phase (i) Dialogue:

Hippolytus has no idea what has happened - and is hurt by his father's silence, and confused by his philosophical generalities.

Theseus speaks obliquely to Hippolytus of human folly, human treachery, and slander.

Hippolytus realises that he is accused of something - what, he doesn't know, but he is "guiltless".

Phase (ii) Two "Soliloquies":

Theseus:

- (1) General opening - the wickedness of man.
- (2) Direct accusation - his own son's guilt.
- (3) Expansion of accusation:
 - (i) incest
 - (ii) the claim to chastity a nonsense.
- (4) Rhetorical points
 - (i) Orphism - contemptuously referred to a "purification sect".
 - (ii) Her death is proof of guilt, not escape from guilt.
Therefore, no use him pleading her hatred of him.
 - (iii) Would she kill herself out of spite?
 - (iv) Anticipates his defence - it was her fault - she drove me to it.
- (5) The sentence - exile.
His determination to stand by the sentence emphasised by reference to two youthful bandit-killing episodes as he travelled to Athens from Troezen

[Chorus offers a platitude about prosperity!]

Hippolytus:

- (1) General opening - your case doesn't hold water.
- (2) His skill in meeting the charge - note the touch of arrogance.
- (3) He meets the charge
 - (i) I revere the gods, and those who are near and dear to me
 - (ii) I am a virgin - in body and mind.
- (4) He argues he had no reason to commit the crime:
 - (a) Phaedra not that beautiful
 - (b) To aim at the throne madness
(Hardly tactful points to make!)
He is in fact sports-mad.
- (5) Conclusion
 - (1) Phaedra could clear me if she lived
 - (2) Swears his innocence
 - (3) Hints at "cherchez la femme"
but keeps his oath of silence to the Nurse:

Chorus closes this section with comment on weight of oath.

The speech of the messenger

1. Establishes circumstances - and Hippolytus' popularity, and piety.
2. The journey to exile begins.
3. The thunder and the bull from the sea.
4. The horses bolt.
5. The crash - the victim.

PLUS the personal testimony of the messenger - a slave - to Hippolytus' goodness.

Chorus comments on the "wheel" of fate.

Closing dialogue - Theseus agrees to see his son - for final proof of his guilt.

CHORAL INTERLUDE

Hymn to Aphrodite - queen of all creation.

(Whereas the parados ends with praise of Artemis).

Note: the theme of enchantment as a metaphor in this song.

EPILOGUE (Scene 5)

Enter the 'deus ex machina' to bring about the reconciliation between Theseus and Hippolytus.

PART 1 Artemis speech:-

[not really dialogue - Theseus merely groans and sighs]

- (a) Accuses Theseus of murder
injustice (via wrong belief)
- (b) Discloses to Theseus what audience already know plus her comments on the moral worth of Phaedra and Hippolytus.
- (c) Accuses Theseus of sin against Poseidon with his misuse of the curse.
- (d) Offers some hope of pardon
 - (i) because it was the will of Aphrodite, therefore other gods don't interfere.
 - (ii) because she fears Zeus (and therefore will not retaliate).
 - (iii) because Theseus was ignorant of the facts.
 - (iv) because Phaedra's death made any test of truth impossible.
- (e) Points out that she suffers as Theseus does.

PART 2

Hippolytus' lament

(introduced by Chorus)

The cries of a man suffering physical and mental agony - he is more "human" here than anywhere else in the play.

PART 3

Dialogue in which Hippolytus learns who caused his ruin, and Theseus' ruin, and Phaedra's.

Father and son grieve for each other, and blame the gods.

- Closure by Artemis
- (1) Rebuke for blaming gods.
 - (2) Promise of vengeance on Aphrodite
honour of Phaedra and Hippolytus
 - (3) Final comments - be reconciled to each other.
 - (a) Theseus: take your son to yourself
again (His sin was unavoidable)
 - (b) Hippolytus: don't hate your father
(His fate was unavoidable)

Hippolytus "sees her off" - with words of praise and obedience.

PART 4

The final reconciliation - the dying Hippolytus absolves his father of wilful murder.

Theseus refers to the wrong done by Aphrodite, and the honest innocence of Hippolytus.

The final words of the Chorus: mourning for a great man.

Note: Is Hippolytus a "great" man?

The ending is the "dying fall" - "mortal emotion breaks against the cliffs of immortal calm".

Hippolytus

Some lines of enquiry.

1. Nothing is quite what it seems - 'the shifting wheel of fate'.

eg Hippolytus is more honourable, Phaedra less so than on first appearances.

Theseus is deceived by the letter, the written word, Phaedra by the Nurse's word.

2. The themes of the play hinge on the obvious conflict between chastity and lust. This leads to the more philosophical themes of:

Truth and falsehood - the value of evidence; the meaning of words; revelation.

Moderation and excess - and self-control, which outside the sexual area is possessed by Hippolytus but not by Phaedra.

3. The role of the goddesses: revenge for sins committed against them - using the human characters as tools - an on-going tit-for-tat seems unavoidable.

stating the truth about events - the more confusing half-truths of the psychological effects of their action are less clearly stated; naturally, as emotion enters in the all-pervading presence of Aphrodite - even though dismissed early on by the sound of Artemis' horn. The last word goes to Artemis since the hero is Hippolytus her follower.

The prologue and the epilogue are theirs - they are matter-of-fact, but commanding - and ruthless. Though these scenes are artificial, they provide a kind of balance of 'shell' to the play.