

**THE HIPPOLYTUS OF
EURIPIDES.
WITH BRIEF NOTES
FOR YOUNG STUDENTS**

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With Brief Notes for Young Students.

BY

F. A. PALEY, M.A.

CLASSICAL EXAMINER TO THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON.



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INTRODUCTION.

This play was entitled *Στεφάριος* or *Στεφανηφόρος*¹, from the incident of Hippolytus offering a chaplet of flowers to the statue of his patron goddess Artemis (v. 73), and to distinguish it from another and earlier² play called *Ἰππολύτος καλυπτόμενος*, in which the body of the youth was covered as it was brought on the stage by attendants. This was rather a second edition or improvement on the other than a new play or another portion of a trilogy. The former play appears, from many passages in Aristophanes³, to have been attacked for the immorality of the characters drawn by the poet, especially that of Phædra. In the present play he corrected what was amiss or deserving of blame in the former⁴, and certainly he has produced a great work of art, not inferior, perhaps, to any extant work of the tragics⁵.

We learn from the *didascalias*, or stage-records preserved in the Argument, that the play was brought out in the archonship of Epameinon, OI. 87. 4, or B.C. 429, the

¹ Similarly the *Ajax* of Sophocles was called *μαστιγοφόρος* from the whip with which the hero beat the cattle in his madness, v. 243.

² Argum. (from the *didascalias*), *ἑμφαιότερος δὲ ἕσπερος γεγραμμένος*, i.e. the *Στεφανηφόρος*.

³ *Thesm.* 153, 497, 517, 550. *Ran.* 850, 1043.

⁴ Argum. *τὸ εὐπερέτε καὶ κατηγορίας ἔχειν ἐν ταύτῃ διαίθετος τῶν ἁράματι.*

⁵ *τὸ δὲ ἄρμα τῶν πρώτων*, Argum. This means, not that the play is one of the poet's earliest, but that it is one of his best,—of the first class, as we say; or possibly, 'one of those which obtained the first prize.' In the *Ἰππολύτους* to the *Andromache* we read *τὸ δὲ ἄρμα τῶν δευτέρων*, and in that to the *Orestes* *τὸ ἄρμα τῶν ἐπὶ σκεπῆς εὐδοκίμοιτων*.

year of Pericles' death. Euripides gained the first prize, Iophon, the son of Sophocles, the second, and Ion (of Chios) the third. The scene is laid at Troezen, which in the time of Theseus was an appanage of Athens¹, and the chorus consists of young married Troezenian ladies².

The play is remarkable, not only as recording a legend or tradition known to us in other narratives³, of the triumph of chastity over temptation, but as containing Orphic doctrines, which appear to have inculcated, among other ascetic exercises⁴, the merit and virtue of absolute continence⁵. The moral of the play tends rather to show the danger of rejecting the natural gifts of the gods, and slighting their prerogatives. It was from his presumptuous disregard of the goddess of love that Hippolytus met with his untimely fate⁶. In order to attain her end, she had inspired Phaedra, the daughter of the Cretan king Minos, and the wife of Theseus, with a secret passion for Hippolytus, who was the illegitimate son of Theseus by an Amazon called Antiope. She pines and abstains from food till her friends are seriously alarmed at her condition. The real cause of her malady, after some hesitation, is avowed to the nurse, who, desirous only of saving her mistress' life, and not much concerned about the morality of the proceeding, endeavours, without the knowledge or concurrence of Phaedra, to bring about a meeting between the two. Hippolytus is shocked at the proposal, and utters indignant reproaches against the whole race of women. Nevertheless, as he is under an oath of secrecy, extorted from him by the nurse, he resists the natural impulse of his honourable mind to reveal the whole affair to his father⁷. Phaedra, little thinking that the nurse had left her in order

¹ See v. 1158. (Of course this is legend and not history.)

² vv. 165-70. 719, καὶ τὴν κόρην τὴν Τροεζένην.

³ E. g. that of Bellerophon and the wife of Proetus, in *IL* vi. 166 seqq., that of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, Gen. xxxix.; and Fielding's character of 'Joseph Andrews.'

⁴ See v. 952.

⁵ See v. 1006, compared with 75 seqq.

⁶ vv. 21, 46, 1400-2. In this sense, the 'Hippolytus' may be compared with the 'Bacchæ.'

⁷ v. 633.

to inform Hippolytus of her love, sees no escape from disgrace but by suicide. Before executing her purpose, she composes a letter to Theseus (then absent from Troezen for the purpose of consulting the oracle), and makes a formal charge against Hippolytus of having had designs for her seduction. Theseus, enraged at the supposed baseness of his son, whose defence he regards as mixed falsehood and hypocrisy, utters against him a curse, one of three which his father Poseidon had promised should be effective against his enemies. Accordingly, as he is leaving Troezen in a car, accompanied by his friends, who escort him to the confines of the land from which he has been banished for ever by Theseus, a sea-monster appears, sent by Poseidon, and so scares the spirited steeds that they overturn the car on the rocky shore, and Hippolytus is fatally hurt. He survives long enough to be reconciled to his father, and to take leave of his devoted friend and companion in the chase, the virgin-goddess Artemis.

There is much that is touching as well as instructive in this beautiful story. Hippolytus, if not devoid of a kind of pedantry, is a pure-minded youth, brought up with a religious horror of sin, and with so tender a conscience that he had rather bear the false charge against him than violate an oath which, under the circumstances, he feels is hardly of moral obligation¹. This drama therefore is a eulogy of *σωφροσύνη* and *εὐσέβεια*. The Orphic and Pythagorean philosophy inculcated the doctrine of a future judgment², and the reward of virtue and self-denial in this life. There is a strong sentiment in man that such is really his destiny³; and to the pagan mind heroic honours after death⁴ and a happy abode in Elysium were the fulfilment of this aspiration.

¹ v. 612.

² Pind. Ol. ii. 53, *ταῖς δ' ἐν τῆσδε Διὸς ἀρχῇ ἄλιτρον κατὰ γὰρ δικάζει τις*. Aesch. Suppl. 226, *κακοὶ δικάζει τὰ τελευτήμαθ' ὡς λόγος Ζεὺς ἄλλος ἐν κορυφαίῳ θανάτου δικασ*. Compare the beautiful character of young Jason, brought up in innocence with Chiron's daughters, Pind. Pyth. iv. 168.

³ Hor. Od. iii. 17, 21, 'Quanto quisque sibi plura nocaverit, a dis plura feret.'

⁴ See v. 1422.—Pausan. ii. 32. 1, 'Ἰσκολόγη γὰρ Θησείας τέμενος τε ἔπει-

The legend of Hippolytus' death is perhaps adapted to the name, which seems to have come from the Amazonian Queen Hippolyte¹. He is the *Virtus* of Roman myth², the spectral hunter who frequents the darksome woods with the Cretan Artemis Dietyinna³. It was said that as a reward for his virtue he was restored to life by Aesculapins, who was blasted for his presumption by a thunder-bolt from Zeus⁴.

A contrast seems intended by the poet between the violence of Phaedra's passion which she was unable to resist⁵, and the strong self-control of Hippolytus. The following elegant epigram⁶ expresses this fact, which ought not to escape the reader's attention in estimating the character of Phaedra :

Σωφροσύνη καὶ Ἔρωι καταρτίων ἀλλήλοισιν
 ἐλθόντες ψυχὰς ὤλεσαν ἀμφοτέροι.
 Φαίδρην μὲν κταῖεν τυρβίαι πόθος Ἰππολύτῳ,
 Ἰππολύτῳ δ' ἀγῆ πέφρε σωφροσύνη.

With the Roman poets Hippolytus was the typical hero of self-restraint. Thus Propertius describes a *lena* as so seductive that she could make even an Hippolytus go astray⁷.

We must bear in mind moreover that the Greeks thought suicide,—in a good cause, at least,—highly honourable⁸, and that of falsehood they took a very lenient view. The fault often brought against Phaedra, of wrongly accusing Hippolytus, was due to the natural resentment of

φανέστατον δούτιαι, καὶ τοῦτ' ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ θρασύει ἔστιν ἀρχαίων. *Ibid.* *ibid.* 12, 2.

¹ *vv.* 561, 561.

² *Virg. Aen.* vii. 762. *Ovid. Fast.* iii. 235, vi. 756.

³ This story, like that of Endymion, arose from the apparent contact of the moon with the earth at the horizon. See the note on v. 745.

⁴ *Aloest.* 5. *Aesch. Ag.* 992. *Virg. Aen.* vii. 770. *Pausan.* ii. 27. 4.

⁵ v. 1034, *σωφροσύνην οὐκ ἔχουσα σωφροεῖν*, 'she was wise in dying when she could no longer control her love.'

⁶ *Anthol. Gr.* ix. 132.

⁷ *Propert.* v. 5, 5. *Docta vel Hippolytum Veneri mollire negantem.*

⁸ Especially that by the sword; see *Eur. Hel.* 296. *Troad.* 1612.

a woman who thought herself both slighted and disgraced¹. She had feared to face Theseus, and she had sought for a plea which would excuse her in his eyes. She had resolved that, if they could not live together, they should die together.

It is really difficult to estimate too highly the merits of this fine play. All the characters, rightly understood, are true to nature: and it is only because motives are superficially viewed that the adverse criticisms of Aristophanes have found any favour². Phaedra prefers death to dishonour, the nurse prefers her mistress' life to her morals, and so counsels the indulgence of a passion which she thinks may remain concealed³; Hippolytus prefers virtue to sensual pleasures placed within his grasp. Not less natural is the hasty anger of Theseus, which was pardonable under his terrible mistake, and which is amply atoned for by his remorse in the touching scene of mutual forgiveness and reconciliation at the close of a play, which deserves, if any play ever did, the name of a genuine Tragedy.

¹ Juvenal well understood this, Sat. x. 323,
Mulier aevissima tunc est,

Quum stimulos odio pudor admovet.

A poet has to deal with a legend, which he is not at liberty to alter, but can only treat in the most natural manner that the circumstances allow of.

² He may indeed have referred to the former play, the *Isr. xa-Asvriacov*. But he parodies a line from the present play (345) in *Equit.* 16, which was brought out only five years later.

³ v. 462—465.