

Lucia Athanassaki (athanassaki@uoc.gr)

University of Crete

Euripides' *Hippolytus*: Conflict and Reconciliation on the Athenian stage in the years of the plague

Zoom seminar lecture, Göttingen January 19, 2022

Abstract

Taking as my starting point the identity and status of Theseus, the play's negative portrait of the legendary Athenian king, which is an exception to 5th-cent. positive representations, and its emphasis on disease and madness, I shall explore the political significance of conflict and reconciliation between the exiled Athenian king and his son and read the conciliatory message of the Exodos against the plague that was raging in Athens at the time of its performance.

Bibliographical references (highly selective, pertaining to this topic only)

For the association of *Hippolytus* with the plague see R. Mitchell-Boyask, *Plague and the Athenian Imagination. Drama, History, and the Cult of Asclepius*, Cambridge 2007 (online edition 2009)

For the reception of the play by its Athenian contemporary audience see J. Hesk, *Deception and Democracy in Classical Athens*, Cambridge 2000 (online edition 2009)

For important points of contact with the *Oedipus Tyrannus* see R. M. Newton, 'Hippolytus and the Dating of Oedipus Tyrannus', *GRBS* 21 (2004) 5-22

For the representation of Theseus see Sophie Mills, *Theseus, Tragedy, and the Athenian Empire*, Oxford 1997; in a forthcoming article I study Euripides' representation of Athenian kings in the extant plays and substantial fragments: L. Athanassaki, 'Charms of autocracy, charms of democracy: Euripides' Athenian leaders in the light of civic iconography'. In E. Csapo, J.R. Green, B. Le Guen, E. Paillard, J. Stoop and P. Wilson, edd. *Theatre and Autocracy in the Ancient World*. Choregia. Paris: de Boccard

W. S. Barrett's commentary, *Euripides. Hippolytus*, Oxford 1964 remains indispensable. Text and translation are taken from D. Kovacs' Loeb edition (open access on Perseus)

1. Theseus' impulsive reaction the moment he finishes reading the *deltos* (ll. 884ff). For the three curses see Barrett (1964) *ad loc.*

ὦ πόλις, Ἴππόλυτος εὐνής τῆς ἐμῆς ἔτλη θιγεῖν βίᾱ, τὸ σεμνὸν Ζηνὸς ὄμμ' ἀτιμάσας. ἀλλ', ὦ πάτερ Πόσειδον, ἄς ἐμοί ποτε	Ho! City of Athens ! Hear me! <i>Bystanders enter quickly by Eisodos B and gather around.</i> [885] Hippolytus has dared to put his hand by
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<p>ἀράς ὑπέσχου τρεῖς, μιᾷ κατέργασαι τούτων ἐμὸν παῖδ', ἡμέραν δὲ μὴ φύγοι τήνδ', εἶπερ ἡμῖν ὤπασας σαφεῖς ἀράς.</p>	<p>force to my marriage-bed, dishonoring the holy eye of Zeus.</p> <p>But, father Poseidon, with one of the three curses you once promised me kill my son, and may he not live out [890] this day, if indeed you have granted me curses I may rely on.</p>
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2. The Chorus' reaction to Theseus' impulsive behaviour: change your mind, you are wrong! (ll. 891-92)

<p>ἄναξ, ἀπεύχου ταῦτα πρὸς θεῶν πάλιν, γνώση γὰρ αὐτίς ἀμπλακῶν: ἐμοὶ πιθοῦ.</p>	<p>My lord, I beg you by the gods, take back your prayer! For you will learn in time that you have made a mistake. Be ruled by me!</p>
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3. The Chorus insists: set your anger aside, think what is best for your house, ll. 899-901

<p>καὶ μὴν ὄδ' αὐτὸς παῖς σὸς ἐς καιρὸν πάρα Ἴππόλυτος: ὀργῆς δ' ἐξαιεὶς κακῆς, ἄναξ Θησεῦ, τὸ λῶστος σοῖσι βούλευσαι δόμοις</p>	<p>Look! Your son Hippolytus is here himself, a timely arrival! [900] Abate your harsh anger, my lord Theseus, and think what is best for your house!</p>
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4. Hippolytus on Theseus' lack of good judgment - note the nosological metaphor, ll. 932-35

<p>ἀλλ' ἢ τις ἐς σὸν οὖς με διαβαλὼν ἔχει φίλων, νοσοῦμεν δ' οὐδὲν ὄντες αἴτιοι; ἔκ τοι πέπληγμαι: σοὶ γὰρ ἐκπλήσσοσί με λόγοι παραλλάσσοντες ἐξεδροὶ φρενῶν.</p>	<p>But has one of my kin been slandering me in your ear and are my fortunes diseased though I have done nothing amiss? I am astonished. [935] Your words, cast adrift from all sense, astonish me.</p>
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5. Hippolytus reiterating his point about Theseus' flawed logic, note also the stress on Theseus' anger (ll. 983-85)

<p>πάτερ, μένος μὲν ξύντασις τε σῶν φρενῶν δεινή: τὸ μέντοι πρᾶγμα', ἔχον καλοὺς λόγους, εἴ τις διαπτύξειεν οὐ καλὸν τόδε.</p>	<p>Father, the anger and vehemence of your heart is dreadful. Yet though the case you argue provides such fine words, [985] it is not fine in fact if one should examine it closely.</p>
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6. Theseus' joy on the grounds that (a) Poseidon is indeed his father and (b) Hippolytus is mortally wounded (ll. 1169-72)

<p>ὦ θεοί. Πόσειδον, ὡς ἄρ' ἦσθ' ἐμὸς πατήρ</p>	<p>Merciful gods! So you were after all truly my</p>
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<p>ὀρθῶς, ἀκούσας τῶν ἐμῶν κατευγμάτων. πῶς καὶ διώλετ'; εἰπέ, τῷ τρόπῳ Δίκης ἐπαισεν αὐτὸν ῥόπτρον αἰσχύναντ' ἐμέ</p>	<p>father, Poseidon, [1170] since you have heard my prayer. How did he perish? Tell me, how did Justice's cudgel strike him for dishonoring me?</p>
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7. Theseus admits his hatred for his son and shows a slight change of heart: no longer joy, but not pain either (1257-60)

<p>μίσει μὲν ἀνδρὸς τοῦ πεπονθότος τάδε λόγοισιν ἤσθην τοῖσδε: νῦν δ' αἰδούμενος θεοῦς τ' ἐκεῖνόν θ', οὐνεκ' ἐστὶν ἐξ ἐμοῦ, οὔθ' ἠδομαι τοῖσδ' οὔτ' ἐπάχθομαι κακοῖς.</p>	<p>For hatred of the man who has suffered these things I took pleasure at your words. But now in respect for the gods and for this man, since he is my son, [1260] I feel neither pleasure nor pain at these misfortunes.</p>
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8. Artemis (ex machina) on Theseus' imminent suffering, his impulsiveness, and his failure to observe proper forensic process (1313-1324), a process that was earlier suggested by Hippolytus too (ll. 1051-56)

<p>δάκνει σε, Θησεῦ, μῦθος; ἀλλ' ἔχ' ἤσυχος, τοῦνθένδ' ἀκούσας ὡς ἂν οἰμώξης πλέον. ἄρ' οἶσθα πατρὸς τρεῖς ἀρὰς ἔχων σαφεῖς; ᾧ τὴν μίαν παρεῖλες, ᾧ κάκιστε σύ, ἐς παῖδα τὸν σόν, ἐξὸν εἰς ἐχθρόν τινα. πατὴρ μὲν οὖν σοι πόντιος φρονῶν καλῶς ἔδωχ' ὄσονπερ χρῆν, ἐπεῖπερ ἦνεσεν: σὺ δ' ἐν τ' ἐκεῖνῳ κὰν ἐμοὶ φαίνῃ κακός, ὃς οὔτε πίστιν οὔτε μάντεων ὄπα ἔμεινας, οὐκ ἤλεγξας, οὐ χρόνῳ μακρῷ σκέψιν παρέσχεες, ἀλλὰ θᾶσσον ἢ σ' ἐχρήν ἀρὰς ἀφήκας παιδὶ καὶ κατέκτανες.</p>	<p>Does this tale sting you, Theseus? Hold your peace so that you may hear the sequel and groan the more. [1315] Do you know that you possess three reliable curses from your father? One of these you took, base man, to use against your son when you could have used it against an enemy. Your father, the sea-lord, kindly disposed as he was towards you, granted what he had to grant seeing that he had made this promise. [1320] But in his sight and in mine you are proved base since you did not wait either for confirmation or for the word of a prophet, you did not put the charge to the proof nor grant to Time the right to investigate it, but more rashly than you ought you let loose the curse upon your son and killed him.</p>
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9. Artemis on Theseus' error of judgement: τὴν δὲ σὴν ἀμαρτίαν (1334)

10. Hippolytus reiterates his innocence and wonders about some ancestral guilt (1379-1381)

<p>ὦ πατρὸς ἐμοῦ δύστανος ἀρά: μιαυφόνον τι σύγγονον παλαιῶν προγεννη- τόρων ἐξορίζεται κακόν, οὐδὲ μένει,</p>	<p>O wretched curse of my father! Some bloodstained calamity within the family, [1380] committed by ancestors long dead, breaks forth and does not stay, and it has come against me. Why when I am guiltless of</p>
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ἔμολέ τ' ἐπ' ἐμέ — τί ποτε τὸν οὐ- δὲν ὄντ' ἐπαίτιον κακῶν;	no wrong?
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11. The path to reconciliation: truth, understanding, justice, recompense, positive feelings (1416-36)

<p>ἔασον: οὐ γὰρ οὐδὲ γῆς ὑπὸ ζόφον θεᾶς ἄτιμοι Κύπριδος ἐκ προθυμίας ὄργαι κατασκήψουσιν ἐς τὸ σὸν δέμας, σηῆς εὐσεβείας κάγαθῆς φρενὸς χάριν: ἐγὼ γὰρ αὐτῆς ἄλλον ἐξ ἐμῆς χερὸς ὄς ἂν μάλιστα φίλτατος κυρῆ βροτῶν τόξοις ἀφύκτοις τοῖσδε τιμωρήσομαι. σοὶ δ', ὦ ταλαίπωρ', ἀντὶ τῶνδε τῶν κακῶν τιμὰς μεγίστας ἐν πόλει Τροζηνία δώσω: κόραι γὰρ ἄζυγες γάμων πάρος κόμας κερουῦνταί σοι, δι' αἰῶνος μακροῦ πένθη μέγιστα δακρύων καρπουμένῳ. ἀεὶ δὲ μουσοποιὸς ἐς σὲ παρθένων ἔσται μέριμνα, κοῦκ ἀνώνυμος πεσῶν ἔρωσ ὁ Φαίδρας ἐς σὲ σιγηθήσεται.</p>	<p>Let be! For though you are in the gloom under the earth, even so will you get revenge for the wrath that has fallen against you by Aphrodite's design, and this will be the reward of your piety and goodness. [1420] That mortal of hers that she loves the most I shall punish with these ineluctable arrows shot from my hand. To you, unhappy man, I shall grant, in recompense for these sorrows, supreme honors [1425] in the land of Trozen. For unmarried girls before their marriage will cut their hair for you, and over the length of ages you will harvest the deep mourning of their tears. The practised skill of poetry sung by maidens will for ever make you its theme, and Phaedra's love for you [1430] shall not fall nameless and unsung.</p>
<p>σὺ δ', ὦ γεραιοῦ τέκνον Αἰγέως, λαβὲ σὸν παῖδ' ἐν ἀγκάλαισι καὶ προσέκλυσαι: ἄκων γὰρ ὤλεσάς νιν, ἀνθρώποισι δὲ θεῶν διδόντων εἰκὸς ἐξαμαρτάνειν. καὶ σοὶ παραινῶ πατέρα μὴ στυγεῖν σέθεν, Ἴππόλυτ': ἔχει γὰρ μοῖραν ἢ διεφθάρης.</p>	<p>But you, child of old Aegeus, take your son in your arms and embrace him. For you were not responsible for killing him, and when the gods so send, it is understandable that men make fatal errors. [1435] As for you, Hippolytus, I urge you not to hate your father. For the manner of your death has been fated.</p>

12. How seriously should we take the wrath of Artemis? Cp. ll. 1433-34 (above 11) with ll. 1283-1295 below

<p>σὲ τὸν εὐπατρίδην Αἰγέως κέλομαι παῖδ' ἐπακοῦσαι: Λητοῦς δὲ κόρη σ' Ἄρτεμις αὐδῶ. Θησεῦ, τί τάλας τοῖσδε συνήδη, παῖδ' οὐχ ὀσίως σὸν ἀποκτείνας ψευδέσι μύθοις ἀλόχου πεισθεὶς ἀφανῆ; φανερὰν δ' ἔσχεθες ἄτην. πῶς οὐχ ὑπὸ γῆς τάρταρα κρύπτεις</p>	<p>Nobly-born son of Aegeus! Listen, I order you! [1285] It is I, Artemis, Leto's daughter, who address you. Why, unhappy man, do you take joy in these things? You have godlessly killed your son, persuaded of things unseen by the false words of your wife. But all too clearly seen is the ruin you have won for yourself! [1290] Why do you not hide yourself beneath the earth's depths in shame</p>
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δέμας αἰσχυνθείς,
ἢ πτηνὸς ἄνω μεταβάς βίοντον
πήματος ἔξω πόδα τοῦδ' ἀνέχεις;
ὡς ἔν γ' ἀγαθοῖς ἀνδράσιν οὐ σοι
κτητὸν βίοντον μέρος ἐστίν.

or change your life for that of a bird above
and take yourself out of this pain? For among
good men [1295] you possess no share in life.

13. Models of reconciliation in an embattled city: from *Oedipus Tyrannus* to *Hippolytus* or vice versa?