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The Double Vision of Greek Tragedy

I. THE DRAMA OF CHARACTER

THE *HIPPOLYTUS* OF EURIPIDES appeared in its first production at Athens in the late spring of 428 B.C. The play has a complex composition. It contains ten speaking parts—an average number for Euripides—including two choruses, one male and one female. The episodes, divided by entrances and exits and distributed between songs and spoken speech, arrange themselves within a system of symmetries which is almost geometric. The speaking parts are apportioned unevenly between two disparate types of speakers, one divine, the other human. The latter, occupying nine tenths of the play, in contrast to the former, appeals directly to the sensibilities of a modern audience. It conforms to that spirit of humanism which has dominated the stage ever since Shakespeare. We can tolerate Shakespearian witches, magicians, sprites and ghosts, but nothing more supernatural. The assumptions of monotheism have made polytheistic representations implausible, since the one god or supreme being is by definition invisible and therefore not a stage personality.

The interesting thing about the *Hippolytus* is that the action conducted at the human level can be isolated and considered within its own boundaries as an autonomous dramatic performance, possessing its own dramatic integrity as to motivation, decision and consequence. Let us present to ourselves this major portion of the play, before considering what in fact follows when the same drama is seen as it is imprisoned within the divine apparatus. The spectators climbing up into their seats in the sunlit amphitheater below the brow of the Acropolis wait for the entrance of the actor who is to play the lead. They see him come in surrounded by a male chorus costumed as huntsmen, singing a brief hymn to the goddess Ar-

temis: "O thou divine, revered, our goddess most holy, seed of Zeus, hail to you, girl, daughter of Leto and Zeus, virginal, fairest of all . . . Hail to you, fairest of all on Olympus." As the singing stops, the hero, as we shall call him, steps forward into his role and addresses a prayer to the same divinity "Mistress divine, take this woven garland from my hands. It came from a meadow inviolate, where the springtime bee flits undisturbed through the waving grass. Chastity is the keeper of the place; she is the gardener, that waters it for those who are born wise forever to enjoy, but never for those who are not. The privilege of wreathing your hair is mine alone. We are companions, you and I, and walk together. Oh, may I end life's race as I have begun it."

Soon after this he leaves the scene, and does not return until nearly five hundred lines have been spoken, covering a third of the entire play. Brief as the episode has been, it has sufficed to project vividly upon the screen of our imagination a character etched in bright uncompromising strokes—a hero perhaps, but judged by the normal standards of Attic drama an unusual one. He has a personal commitment to sexual abstinence—the metaphors of the original Greek leave this in no doubt—reinforced by a preference for the unspoiled beauties of nature in the wild, and validated by an exclusive devotion—not usual in a polytheistic society—to a single divinity, the virgin goddess of the chase, celebrated by his company as supreme among the Olympians—an unusual judgment as applied to her—the object of a cult which excludes those who fail to meet the standard required—again unusual—and in which the speaker holds some kind of monopoly—most unusual. As we watch and listen to what happens next, we keep remembering him, for the new characters which now appear on stage create a situation which offers an explicit challenge—and a threat—to what he has stood for.

The dancing floor fills with a chorus of serving women singing a song of what they have heard about their mistress while washing clothes at the spring. She is in a mysterious and suicidal condition, the secret of which she cannot reveal, and has begun to starve herself. Has she neglected some necessary ritual, and is being punished by divine possession? Has she learned that her husband is unfaithful to her, and so is

pinning away? Has she had bad news brought by sea from her home in Crete? Or is her trouble more simply physical, a problem with the menstrual rhythm? They are women themselves and know from experience what this pain and distraction can mean.

On this cue, the center door of the proscenium opens to reveal the queen, recumbent on a bed, pale and exhausted, but not unattractive, wheeled on stage by her aged nurse and attendant, assisted by other servants. The nurse no more than the chorus knows the real answer to her mistress' trouble, but assumes the cause is physical, as she naturally would, given her professional role. Her charge has been exasperating, a prey to contradictory moods, inconsiderate, discontented and wilful; it is impossible to please her, "I'd rather be ill myself than look after you. Oh, what is life but love's labor lost! One would prefer death to this if one could be sure what death was!" These reflections are interrupted. The queen demands attention: "Lift me up. I feel so faint. I've got such a headache. Oh my slender arms—hold them up for me . . . How is my hair?" These words are spoken to the chorus. The nurse, as quick to sympathize as she has been to complain, tries to soothe her: "Bear up, my little one, don't take it so hard. We all feel ill sometimes. You just need to practice patience and fortitude." The queen responds by propping herself up in bed supported by the servants in order to recite or more probably sing a song of four rather wild stanzas in which she fantasizes: "Oh, if I could lie at peace in a meadow and quench my thirst with pure spring water. No! Send me instead to hunt with the hound, in the woods and the wild, tearing the deer's flesh, spearing their bodies, my hair flying in the wind! No, Artemis, it is you I want to race with, riding the race-horses over the sand. Oh I am mad. What have I said? Don't repeat it. See, I am crying. I take it back. Cover my head up again." The nurse has meanwhile responded antiphonally with stanzas of her own, which only reveal her puzzled bewilderment, until, as the queen exhausted sinks back on her bed, she does what she is asked to do, and replaces the coverlets. For herself, she lives in a different world and can make no sense of these extravagances. In this emotional pause, she mediates upon that traditional wisdom which exhorts us all to avoid extremes of feeling.

The chorus interpose at this point to prompt the next step in the unfolding drama. "Find out from her," they say to the nurse, "what her trouble is." Despite the nurse's protest that she has already tried, they press their request. The queen after all is starving herself to death and the matter is becoming urgent. So the nurse turns towards her charge and tries again: "Is it a woman's trouble you have, too intimate for a male doctor? If it is, the chorus here can help you; or otherwise, why not a doctor? Please answer me if I am saying the wrong thing. Look at me, speak to me. Oh alas (turning to the chorus) it's no good! She is as stubborn as ever."

However, there is still one last card to play and turning back to the queen she plays it. "If you persist, you know what will happen. Dying, you will have betrayed your children. They will be ousted from their lawful inheritance by your husband's bastard, Hippolytus." As the name is pronounced, Phaedra utters an exclamation. "Ah," cries the nurse, "so that got home, did it?" Phaedra is forced to break silence. "You are killing me; don't, in the name of heaven, mention that man again!" The nurse naturally concludes that she has found a winning argument. Phaedra will realize the need to survive to protect her children. "Most certainly I love my children," replies the queen, "but it's not that kind of storm that fate has caught me up in." This prompts a teasing interchange of question and answer as the truth gets nearer and nearer. "It's not anything that I have done; if there is guilt, it is in my soul. Let go my hand, nurse, and leave me." So saying, she drifts back in memory to the past and to the dark legends of the Minotaur in the house where she was born. "Oh my mother and her disastrous love! Oh my sister, mated to Dionysus! And, I myself, third in the line of miseries!" The nurse recoils. What dark secret in this, a secret linked to the disastrous loves of her family? Better cease trying to learn the answer. But it is too late for that, for Phaedra now aroused asks the next key question herself: "Nurse, what is this thing that men call . . . love?" The nurse gives the inevitable reply: "It is a thing, of all things, most bitter and most sweet." "I know that now myself." "You mean, you are in love? Who with?" Brought to this point of crisis, the queen tries to pass the matter off. "Oh," she replies, "it's that somebody or other, the Amazon's child." The nurse is dumbfounded: "Hippoly-

tus! Is that the name you pronounce?" and receives the rejoinder, "It is your pronouncement that you are listening to, not mine." So the secret is out, but managed with an affectation of carelessness, which transfers the onus for the revelation from a supposedly reluctant witness to a zealous cross-examiner. It also serves to cloak embarrassment; Phaedra has discovered herself to be in that awkward but familiar situation of the older woman infatuated with a younger man. For she is indeed hopelessly in love, the object being that youth who appeared on stage at the beginning of the play. But not only is he Hippolytus, an attractive youth, he is also her stepson; her passion is adulterous, and perhaps also incestuous. It makes an impossible tangle of her relations with her husband, Theseus. Hippolytus has been a son of Theseus by a previous union and his mother is now dead. Phaedra has since borne to Theseus young children of her own. She is not an autonomous individual, operating in a private world and enjoying relationships which can be freely chosen and freely rearranged. She is at once a queen with dynastic responsibilities, a wife, a mother, and a stepmother. The situation is disastrous, and nurse and chorus at once realize that it is. In turn they voice their passionate despair.

But while they exclaim and sing, the confession once made has time to work a change in Phaedra, returning her to a measure of sanity and self-control. She gets up, comes forward and delivers a set speech of some length formally repudiating, not the existence of an infatuation which she cannot kill, but any thought of indulging in it. She warmly defends the cause of marital fidelity and expands on the theme to attack the current laxity of morals in married women. The drama becomes a vehicle of social commentary in the style of Ibsen and Shaw. To her statement of the case, the nurse delivers a statement of her own in counterpoint arguing the opposite position. Phaedra's address has given her time to think. She admits she had at first recoiled from the revelation. But tenderness for her mistress combines with her worldly commonsense to argue that perhaps second thoughts are best. And second thoughts in this case point to an acceptance of the situation rather than its sublimation or suppression. A passion so profound, she says, must be yielded to, for

sexual passion is a force of nature and she cites for support the common tolerance which society shows towards a degree of sexual freedom. Are not fathers tolerant of their sons when they sow their wild oats? Are not husbands tolerant of their wives' sexual adventures? The play at this point shows signs of turning into a problem play, a drama of ideas, of competing moral philosophies. The chorus acknowledge as much, perceiving a competition between what, all things considered, is expedient, and what is respectable, though in Phaedra's case painful. Phaedra's thought dwells on the issue of respectability. Civilized society can be ruined by such seductive ideas as those put forward. The nurse has no patience with this. "Stop preaching! What you need is not Sunday sermons, but a man! If your feelings were really and truly chaste, I would not have gone so far!" "Oh, stop," cries Phaedra, "of course you're right, but what you say is immoral. Don't go any further. Love has done its work on me. Don't make me give in." "Well," replies the nurse after a pause, "as you say, you musn't make a mistake. There's an alternative way of doing favor." She has at home, she explains, certain love charms—she may mean a drug—which if properly applied can assuage or relieve Phaedra's passion; that is, if she does not prove faint-hearted. But to make these work, she also needs to get from the object of Phaedra's love some sign or token—is it to be a word spoken, or something tangible he is wearing?—"The two conjoined" she says, "can then become a single favor done." What does she mean? That a message of some sort, carried from the loved one to the one who loves, and then said over again as the charm is applied and the two are conjoined, perhaps with the gift of a keepsake added—that this will perform the service of sublimating the fires of Phaedra's passion? or will it rather serve to bring the two lovers together? The ambiguity is deliberate, framed to suggest the covert pursuit of the second intention, while concealing it in the pursuit of the first.

The queen's response, contrary to the view of many commentators perhaps over-ready to protect her virtue (some would go so far as to remove the nurse's proposals from the text of the play) is cautious and reserved, and leaves something to be desired. She shows some curiosity about what the

drug may be, but avoids pursuing the matter further, accepting the nurse's assurance that she will be "helped," whatever this may mean. "But mind you don't tell Hippolytus anything about this." This she says despite what she has learned, namely that some kind of approach to Hippolytus is inevitable.

The nurse replies soothingly, "leave it to me," and retires. The chorus, in tune with Phaedra's real feelings, sing an ode celebrating the power of erotic passion, a power which, however, destroys women who are its victims (a corresponding ode previously composed by Sophocles had celebrated its power to destroy men). What will happen next? The nurse does what she has to do. Whatever it is, it is done offstage. The action swiftly reveals how fatal are its effects. There is an outcry without. Hippolytus is heard denouncing the nurse as a pander who would betray her master's bed. Phaedra, listening, exclaims, "Now I am undone. Death is my only remedy!" Not only is her guilty secret betrayed; the violence of Hippolytus' reaction threatens her with public exposure. Only suicide can save the situation.

As she says it, the hero so long absent from the action enters or rather erupts on the stage in fury, while the nurse on her knees supplicates him to remain calm. She succeeds in reminding him that she had sworn him to secrecy. This oath she had apparently extracted from him before saying anything to him. And as a solemn oath, it is to prove decisive for the future action of the plot. He reluctantly assents that he has indeed promised to keep his mouth shut but he then launches into an extravagant denunciation not only of women but of the sexual instinct and of the sexual act: would to God we could acquire children artificially, in temples, shall we say, where the gods might deposit them for us; would to God we could be rid of women altogether from our houses; they are the source of fundamental corruption and continual unhappiness. Once again, rhetoric is used to dramatize a social philosophy, gaining some dramatic plausibility from being put in the mouth of a character already delineated (at the play's opening) as something of an extremist, on the extreme right let us say of the moral majority, and now suffering personal shock.

He may have to keep his mouth shut, he adds in conclu-

sion, but just wait till the guilty pair have to confront his father. He will be there too, watching and waiting for them to give themselves away. He then quits the stage as abruptly as he had entered it. The message he has left behind is simple: woman is the enemy. The chorus overwhelmed accept the message on behalf of their sex, and lament it in four short verses of lyric grief. Phaedra, distraught, wildly exclaims: "How can anyone stand by me now, in an enterprise so immoral? Me, most unfortunate of an unfortunate sex? My passion has put an end to my life!" After a short pause, the chorus not very tactfully observe that it is the nurse's plans that have miscarried. On this cue Phaedra turns fiercely upon her would-be helper. It is not a pleasant scene. The nurse pleads that her motive lay in her life-long loving care for her charge; had she succeeded she would have been commended for her skill. As it is mischance has intervened. But there is still time to remedy the matter. Phaedra's sole response is to revile her and heap imprecations upon her. "Get out. You still have yourself to think of. I can manage, and mean to." She has nothing more to say to her. But that is because her thoughts are elsewhere. Confronted with the danger of revelation, as she thinks, her first thought is for reputation, her own, and her children's. She will guarantee both by taking her own life under circumstances which she will be responsible for, but which at this point she refuses to disclose. To this end she in her turn must pledge the chorus to silence. They like the hero are to be rendered powerless to prevent the onrush of events which are to follow Phaedra's suicide. She then adds something else: "This too will happen; my death will also damn him—that other one! He need not think to triumph over my damnation. He will catch his share of the infection I have caught. That will teach him." Precisely what she means by this is only revealed later. In fact her words betray the fantasy she continues to nurse; they are a pair of lovers sharing the infection of a common bed and a common doom.

Death is in the air now, not one death, but perhaps two; death and hatred, and the destruction of the unwary. The colours of the drama are darkening. It is surely that which moves the chorus at this point, occupying the stage in the ab-

sence of all three protagonists, and just before the fatal step is taken, to interpose a song, the first two stanzas of which seek refuge in a different world. Somewhere surely in this complex of passion and fear there must be a haven, a place of security and peace. If only life's journey might end in the fabled garden of the Hesperides. . . . Then they recall a different voyage, the real one, that had brought their mistress from Crete to Athens. It was a journey of ill omen from the start. It has been the means of her enslavement to an impious passion. Yes, she will get free of this infection; she will put reputation before love; but the price will be that she will hang herself.

No sooner does the song end than loud shouting is heard within. Phaedra offstage has done the deed. At the same moment, with great dramatic force, her husband, the king, appears before the palace gates, garlanded, just back from a visit abroad. No one is around to greet him, but he hears great lamentation. Has his aged father died, or one of his young children? No, reply the chorus, is it your wife; she has hanged herself. "Open the doors," he cries, and as this is done, falling before his wife's body, he mourns both her death and his own bereaved condition; like a rare and precious bird she has flown from his hand, he knows not why. But then he spies a tablet attached to her wrist. Opening it he reads what she has written: her chastity has been violated by his own son Hippolytus; so she has taken the only way out. His grief is replaced by rage; scarcely waiting to finish his reading, he strikes at his son, not with a weapon—the son is not even on stage—but with something magical and just as deadly. It is a promise and a power once given to him by Poseidon, his legendary father, a power to curse, and by cursing to kill. So the curse is immediately pronounced. The chorus beseech him to take it back, but he cannot. He replies rather lamely by adding a second sentence of perpetual exile. The boy will be punished, either by one or the other. Is he having any second thoughts about his over-hasty imprecation? Here, as in Phaedra's case, there seems to be a hint that moral decisions are hedged with ambiguity.

His son now makes his third entry on the stage, anxious to know the meaning of his father's cries. The body now lying

between them tells him part of the reason; and he is somewhat bewildered by the spectacle when his father turns on him with a bitterness easily imagined and denounces him. Where the ethos of our culture would expect him to offer immediate comfort to his father, his own reaction is curiosity. Why on earth has this happened? He meets his father's mute gaze and pleads "Please explain."

Once more, a tense dramatic situation is used as the occasion for philosophical commentary, as Theseus, ignoring the immediate question, gives voice to a popular and conservative morality; exclaiming against an age which values the inventive intellect above good sense. If it were otherwise, we would be able to see the difference between the honest sincere characters and deceitful liars. It dawns on Hippolytus that he may be the object of these reflections. Has someone slandered him behind his back? Theseus waxes even more rhetorical and moralistic. The times are degenerate. The gods may have to replace this corrupt world by another. Only now does he come to the point. First turning to the chorus he bids them bear witness against this man who has violated his wife. At these words Hippolytus recoils before his father, who next turns personally and savagely on him, and seizes the occasion to vilify his peculiar monastic asceticism as a hypocritical pose concealing secret and immoral purposes. "Phaedra's dead body is a fact that speaks louder than any protestations from you. Argue if you like that insanity is a woman's problem, not a man's. It's a man's too when he is male and young and lusty. Go. Your banishment from my territories is total."

A denunciation buttressed by general reflection calls for a rebuttal in similar vein. The son feels himself to be on trial in a courtroom of public opinion and uses courtroom idiom to reply. His stance is Socratic: the intelligent are (like himself) an elite, who cannot win popular applause. "My first point is to assert, in spite of what you have said, that I am as virtuous as any man alive, a fact provable by my religious piety, and the moral standard followed by my friends, which requires friendship to be repaid by friendship without backbiting. As to sexual matters, I am a virgin and have a virgin heart. You don't believe me? Is it likely I would have fallen for a woman not particularly attractive? Did I aspire to your throne? Politi-

cal power is not my style; it's not worth competing for, considering its risks. Athletic achievement, and the politics of a private citizen, offer a more satisfying field for ambition."

Only after thus completing what has been essentially a statement of a moral and philosophical position does the beleaguered hero come to immediate matters in hand: "I solemnly swear, by Zeus, by earth, never, never did I touch your wife, nor think of it. As to why she committed suicide, I have no idea." His own moral standards have prevented him from imagining what his total repudiation of what she stood for, not to mention his threats, might have done to her. And in all innocence he further remarks that he cannot understand why his father, if he really believes his own words, does not kill him rather than send him into exile. "Death is too easy a way out for you," is the reply. "Only the life-long misery of a homeless wanderer will be sufficient punishment." Despair seizes Hippolytus; he realizes what his own sworn oath of silence now means; the very gods who guard it safe are also destroying him who swore it. And under such a stigma, where will he find refuge? The thought that this is what his own father thinks of him brings him near tears; he apostrophises the walls of the house, if only they could speak and testify for him. At last in resignation he says a fond last farewell to Athens and leaves, calling to his youthful company to come and salute him and send him on his way. "You will never again see anyone like me" he says to them, "nor anyone more virtuous than I have been." Following his departure, the two choruses, male and female, companions respectively of the male and female protagonists, join in a meditative hymn: "piety may serve to divert grief but the estate of man is unstable, and hard to understand. One can only pray for good luck and good fortune and avoid extremes. But serenity is hard to find when one sees the brightest star of Athens and of Hellas banished by his own father's passionate anger." As they sing, their grief and protest grow more distracted. "O sands of the shore! O mountain track, where he used to race! . . . My tears are inconsolable . . . Why did your mother bear you? . . . The gods infuriate me! O Graces! How can you send him away innocent from his home?"

Their song has afforded an interval of dramatic time long

enough for catastrophe to occur. The fatal curse which Theseus had invoked in the first moment of his anger now takes effect. The subsequent sentence of exile proves to be no substitute. By the seashore, as Hippolytus drives along guiding the horses which had learned to know him so well when he followed the chase, there occurs a kind of earthquake followed by a tidal wave, and out of the tidal wave there comes a mysterious monster which pursues the horses and strikes panic into them. Hippolytus is thrown from his chariot and fatally injured. A messenger brings news of these events, which, by Greek convention, take place off-stage.

The chorus redouble their lamentation; here is disaster heaped upon disaster. As for Theseus, his reaction is ambivalent, his feelings are mixed. He admits that at first the news made him glad, but now—"as I revere the gods, so also I must revere my son." In short, he recollects that he is a father as well as a husband. This disaster, he adds, "affords me no joy, but on the other hand it does not weigh heavily on me either."

But this mood swiftly shifts, as Hippolytus staggers on stage, fatally injured, barely supported by companions who are unable to control his agony. Protests against his fate are commingled with his cries of pain. "Zeus, oh Zeus," he exclaims: "behold my sufferings, mine whose devout piety and virtue are without peer." "And he cries out again that there must be some curse on his family that has done this to him. He knows he has not long to live. "Father," he gasps, "receive my body."

Theseus collapses: his remorse is complete. "Oh my child! And oh my miserable self! What are you doing to me! Can you forgive me?" The dying man has enough breath left to say, "yes, I forgive you freely." The father overcome at once by grief and gratitude commingled exclaims, "oh noble heart and pure! Do not desert me. Hold out and cling to life. I beg you." "No" says Hippolytus, "it is all over. Cover my face. Don't wait." And with this he expires. The father slowly does as he is bid, rises, and turning to face the audience pronounces the last obsequy, "O city and land of Athens, what a hero has been taken from you."

As I have said, this account has truncated the text of the play, in order to isolate its natural dimension from the super-

natural. With the latter removed, the plot obviously makes the kind of psychological sense which appeals to post-classical expectations. What goes on is the result of an interplay between the motives, desires and mistakes of understandable human beings reacting among themselves, and in the course of their reactions pronouncing strong beliefs about the human condition. Even at this level, to be sure, the dramatist does not altogether escape reliance on the supernatural. There is the magic curse (granted by Poseidon) and the magic monster emerging from earthquake and sea (which incidentally are Poseidon's domain) and serving as the curse's instrument. We can, I think, accommodate these within our dramatic imagination as we accommodate the witches, ghosts, and magicians of the Shakespearian stage.

Having said this, one has to ask what kind of meaning lies behind this psychological drama? Or better, what kind of presuppositions about the human condition lie behind its construction? Suppose we grant it the status of a problem play in the style of Ibsen and Shaw. In that case, we expect social critique or commentary, preferably implicit, directed upon current institutions, for example the status of women or war or money in contemporary society. To give this critique dramatic force and meaning requires some assumptions about what is good or bad, right or wrong. The audience need not agree in their judgments but the judgments are formed around the assumption that right and wrong exist. If on the other hand the substance of a play is viewed as a concern with personal matters alone, then what the persons say and do on stage, however cynically or despairingly presented, as we watch invites from us some kind of moral opinion, which we form against the background of certain presuppositions about the nature of vice and virtue in human beings. Our response to the performance—and perhaps still more to the text if we read it—is still colored by what we instinctively feel to be good or bad, right or wrong. Can the *Hippolytus* in its human dimension be made to conform to similar canons of critical judgment?

The fact is, that it is so constructed as to evade them, whether as drama of ideology or drama of character. Over personalities that we would prefer to assume are morally responsible and over decisions and acts which we would prefer

to judge as either right or wrong, it sheds an aura of ambivalence, of downright ambiguity. Instead of enlisting our emotions to follow a conflict between degrees of vice and virtue and exploiting our sympathy for virtue when it is endangered or overcome, the plot is so constructed as to dramatize the difficulty of knowing what vice and virtue really are. Phaedra, who betrays strong traces of narcissism, behaves in the play as a divided personality, almost schizophrenic. She is possessed by an infatuation which on the one hand she cannot manage to repress, on the other hand cannot afford not to repress. What is she to do? The conflict within her faithfully reproduces itself in her ambivalent responses to the nurse's suggestions. Are we to call her sincere or dishonest? Or are these terms irrelevant to her situation and condition? Her suicide and the message she leaves behind are conceivable as heroic in so far as they are designed to protect the interests of her children. Several statements in the text leave no doubt about this intention. But are they not also designed to deceive, by transferring moral responsibility from herself to the innocent Hippolytus, and also to revenge herself upon the man who has rejected her? Again the text leaves no doubt that this is so. Does she then die with honor unsullied, as the play asserts, or fatally compromised, as our moral sense asserts? For Hippolytus, the ambivalences cluster round the interaction between himself and his father. The plot as designed allows him no personal relationship to Phaedra. His motives are immaculate. The text again leaves no doubt of this. If he asserts his own integrity more than once, the assertion is backed up emphatically by others, and reasserted in the last lines of the play. He is not a prig but an idealist who prefers an ideal friendship with his male peers to any other form of association. There is a note of genuine simplicity, of innocence, in the way he responds to his father's accusations. We catch it when he wonders aloud why his father, if he really believes his own words, does not kill him instead of merely exiling him. This very idealism becomes its own enemy (as the text explicitly asserts). It has provoked his father's unmerited but understandable dislike, and this in turn explains why the father, under the stress and shock of his wife's supposed revelation, is so ready to have his son damned and destroyed. Had

the son been a more ordinary kind of person, would the tragedy of his death ever have occurred?

Theseus is a more understandable character—an average, conventional man with what we would call normal healthy instincts. He has a deep affection for his wife, not unmixed however with affection for himself; his marriage has meant everything to him. It is precisely the strength of this domestic commitment which also assists in provoking the decision to pronounce the fatal curse without pausing for further evidence. He may later express ambivalence about this decision; he may even wish to replace it by a different one; but he cannot. The familial bond uniting him with his wife and his wife's memory has proved disruptive of another and perhaps superior one uniting father and son. This, and not Phaedra's fate, constitutes the tragedy of the play. In the end she is almost forgotten. The one figure that survives, comparatively unscathed, is the nurse—a fact not usually noticed by the play's interpreters. She does not so much survive as fade out. To be sure, she suffers her mistress' rejection, but is given no lines of protest or grief after this takes place. She just retires from the scene. Why is she allowed to do this, if not because she is the one character who remains, we might say, uncommitted to any ardent emotion or fixed belief? True, she too is her own victim, in the sense that the effect she aims at turns into its opposite. Even then, she is able to propose a policy of waiting, as an alternative which would in fact have averted the tragedy. Tides of emotion wash round her but leave her comparatively unscathed.

At its ideological level the drama's effect is equally dispassionate. The play is a problem play precisely because, as the characters mount the public pulpit, they expound social and personal philosophies which while mutually antithetical retain their own respective validities. It can be inferred that each represents an existing current of feeling within Greek contemporary society, as in fact is true in all societies which are monogamous and become urbanized. The *Hippolytus* is a drama of certain dilemmas which have existed in the consciousness of European civilisation ever since Greece founded that civilisation. In Phaedra's set speech we hear the voice of a "moral majority;" in the nurse's reply the voice of liberalism

and permissiveness; in Hippolytus' rhetoric, a call to renounce the flesh in favor of the spirit, allied with a male chauvinist rejection of the female principle; in Theseus' sarcasm, the suspicion and dislike felt by ordinary folk for the extraordinary, the eccentric, the enthusiastic, the extremist.

Does the play, then, taken at the natural level, have any message in the modern sense? Judging from a majority though not all of surviving Greek plays, the Athenian audience of the fifth century appears to have had a developed taste for witnessing the fatal effects of collisions between equally matched antagonists and principles. The *Hippolytus*, viewed as this type of play, could be said to have no message, no moral meaning, or at least no "moralistic" meaning. Yet a meaning is there, satisfying I think to its original audience, expressible, where we might expect it, in what the chorus have to say in their last stasimon. They have been following the action with commentary, question, protest, appeal and mournful resignation; projecting upon the stage the reactions of the audience in their seats. The point has been reached where Hippolytus, lamenting the irreparable breach with his father, has just departed in despair to accept what he thinks will be a life of perpetual exile. The tragedy is not yet completed, but its completion is now felt to be inevitable. Precisely at this critical juncture the chorus step forward to deliver their last formal word, a kind of summing up. Its key note is sounded in the prayer they utter "for thoughts not unswerving nor counterfeit, and a disposition relaxed and always ready to adjust to tomorrow's time, and so with these as company to fare prosperously". This is what they wish for, as also for us who watch and wait.

Phaedra, Hippolytus and Theseus all get their due in these words. There is a middle ground between extremes, and a middle measure of emotion and of will, if we could find it. The means for attainment would seem to be not in heroic purpose, or resolute conviction of certainty, but in an effort of discrimination which pauses long enough to discern ambiguities in apparent conflict and seek their reconciliation. This is an intellectual exercise. The text of the play tells us several times that it is, and exposes what happens when the exercise is defeated.

II. THE DRAMA OF NECESSITY

So far we view an estimate of the *Hippolytus* which depends on an act of dissection, removing the supernatural actors in the plot. One can say that the play, with its strong flavor of psychological and social analysis, is composed in such a way as to encourage this, and so produce a result agreeable to the tastes and expectations of a post-classical audience. Yet measured against the original intentions of Euripides such a dissection surely becomes an artificial exercise. The paradox of the *Hippolytus* lies in its double vision of the human condition, at once autonomous and yet not autonomous, of personalities at once free and yet not free. To appreciate how the play interweaves these two levels of perception, one has to consider first the stage setting.

The proscenium presents the front elevation of a palace, with a central set of doors, or a gateway. On either side stands a shrine containing a statue, one representing the goddess Aphrodite and the other Artemis. Each is costumed and painted (including eyes, hair and complexion) to represent the respective roles assigned to them in the Olympian pantheon. Artemis carries her bow and quiver, and is clad in a short skirt in a posture ready for the chase; conceivably a hound or hounds accompany her. We may imagine Aphrodite to be richly clad, embellished with personal ornament, and probably accompanied by her child, Eros. Each figure gains formal dignity from the architectural setting in which it is emplaced. The text of the opening episode takes care to inform us (following the established convention which supplies verbal scenery and stage directions) that both statues are there: Artemis is presented with a wreath for her hair, and a prayer offered to Aphrodite is addressed "to your statuary." Both chorus and actors from time to time in the course of the play invoke the goddesses in the vocative. The natural pose on such occasions would be to turn towards the appropriate shrine, and there are other occasions when they may gesture towards it. The usual effect gained in a Greek theater would be that of action transacted in theatrical space between and in front of these two divine beings. Their looming presence presides over it. They are there always; the human actors come and go.

This effect is reinforced by the intrusion into the action of utterances by two divine voices, one of Aphrodite at the beginning, one of Artemis at the end, and by two hymns sung by human voices, one addressed to Artemis at the beginning, one to Aphrodite near the end. The responsive symmetry of the composition is comprehensive and unmistakable. The play in short employs language to supplement vision in gaining from the audience an attention, focussed on these two divinities, which is to be sustained throughout the performance. What the audience sees is combined with what it hears, and this can be done convincingly only if it is assumed that the respective utterances emanate from the appropriate shrines. Classical dramatic convention would suggest this, either by allowing the voice to proceed from an unseen actor concealed behind the statue, or, much more likely, by allowing an actor costumed appropriately to appear in front of it to speak for it. The effect produced would be familiar because it was oracular. At Delphi, for example, the god's shrine and image was there to see, and a human voice spoke for him. In the case of Artemis, the text indicates that the speaker in her role performed an exit after addressing Theseus and a re-entry to address Hippolytus. The actor who speaks for Aphrodite is given a line which interrupts what he is saying in order to announce his departure. It reads like an actor's interpolation made in a period when the personalities of professional actors rather than their symbolic roles began to attract the interest of post-classical audiences.

Scholars and critics have been reluctant to accept the full implications I am offering here of the sparse logic of high classical staging. In particular they prefer to imagine the voice of Artemis as disembodied, presumably because it is first addressed by Hippolytus as "a divine breath of fragrance." Prostrate on the ground he asks "Is the goddess Artemis present here?" and she replies "yes" whereupon he lifts his gaze to her and exclaims "You see me, do you?" and she again replies "yes." To render the source of this voice invisible, even though it engages in extensive conversation with both father and son, it has to be transferred to a lofty position "in a cloud" (so Gilbert Murray) or on the palace roof (so W. S. Barrett), so that father and son can discourse with it from a lower position in the manner in which Hebrew proph-

ets or Christian saints are allowed to converse with the deity. It is difficult to avoid seeing in this preference an attempt to interpret classical drama by the light of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. In polytheistic society, idols were a fact of daily life. For monotheism, as already observed, the supreme being is by definition invisible.

The closeness with which these two rival powers engage with the personalities of Hippolytus, Phaedra and Theseus would be felt all the more directly by the audience because the shrines are domestic. The family lives in the house to which they are attached and passes them daily in their comings and goings. Hippolytus has been unwise enough to choose one of them as his favorite, and so can claim a monopoly over the ritual at her shrine, an inexplicable claim if the shrine were in a public place. In his last moments he even reminds her of his role as "guardian of your shrine." Phaedra's last words state that "on this day and hour" she will fulfill the pleasure of Aphrodite, by departing from life and escaping from love. The statement is worded as a ritual acknowledgment of and tribute to the power of an irresistible presence in her own house and at her side.

The play in fact does not open in the accents of Hippolytus, exalted, joyous and serene. The prologue strikes a very different keynote. As the audience gather in their seats and settle in silence to watch and listen, they hear a voice. One of the statues is speaking:

Manifold is my power through all humanity and men have a name they call me by.

My title is divine. It is Kupris. My power stretches from heaven to earth.

All people that do dwell between the Pontic sea and the bounds of Atlas and see the light of the sun must bow before this, my power, and I do then have regard for them.

But if their thought despises me, I bring them down.

For the divine family, like the human, has the following property:

To receive honor at men's hands is what gives us pleasure.

The audience were hearing the voice of a deity whose cult they commonly observed, no doubt with varying degrees of devotion. In modern editions of the play, her name is printed

at the head of the text as Aphrodite, and so she is styled in the handbooks. In four of the mediaeval manuscripts, the name is omitted. Kupris, "the Cyprus-girl," is the only name she gives herself, and the only name by which her shrine is identified or addressed throughout the entire play. The choice of the name has not attracted the attention it deserves. Being so consistent, it must surely be deliberate. By associating her with Cyprus, a chief seat of her cult, it carries the suggestion that though her shrine on stage is local, the power it represents is not. It is pan-Hellenic, indeed cosmic, as her words have stated, and when Phaedra's nurse later suggests she should consider yielding to her passion rather than repressing it, her most compelling argument consists in a restatement of the status of this cosmic power or life force. This is the goddess of popular and essential sex, dominant over all living things, symbol and strength of their universal pursuit of sexual fulfillment. She can bless and protect and she can also overthrow and kill. It depends, she says, on how we react to her and the voice proceeds to describe in factual terms her plans for destroying a youth who has been so rash, so misguided, as to spurn her worship.

We should remember at this point that Greek religion was one of allegiance and cult, not of belief and dogma. To acknowledge the divinity of sex is to accept its existence in your life, not to hold opinions about its theological basis or moral propriety. To reverence Kupris is to serve her, accepting the fact that at times you submit to her influence. In a sense, you become like her. At the very least, her ritual, like all other ritual, involves some reenactment, some symbolization of those pressures and processes in human life which she represents. The crime of Hippolytus in her eyes is not simply the omission of outward ceremony, but also the refusal of emotional empathy. In Phaedra, on the other hand, we view a reverse relationship, one in which the goddess has virtually taken possession of her.

Describing her plan to destroy him, Kupris likewise describes the course of the plot. Phaedra is to be her instrument. Nay, indeed, she has already become so. But passion for Hippolytus in this case cannot come to fruition. It can issue only in death, for Hippolytus is to die, and so Phaedra

must die too, though her death is incidental to the main purpose. She is to be the means to the end. She will, however, die with her honor unsullied. This much and this only, the voice guarantees. As for Theseus, he is to be the second instrument of this plan, for he happens to command a secret weapon, namely, the magic power to cast upon a person a fatal curse. This magic was once given to him by his own father, Poseidon, and he is going to be put in such a position that he will use it against his own son, Poseidon's grandson.

"But I can see Hippolytus approaching," says the voice. "Little does he know that this day will be his last."

During these words, our eyes have been drawn irresistibly towards the shrine on the left, the shrine of the goddess of sex. As Hippolytus enters, he turns toward the right and our eyes follow him towards the shrine on the right, before which he stands or kneels, to make his simple offering of a floral wreath. As we turn to him and hear him sing his hymn and address her, we confront on the stage, and as it were also in our own hearts, a different allegiance, a devotion to an ideal, of masculine virtue at its most spiritual level, coupled with an obsession with moral purity and a fastidious rejection of sex. Hippolytus prefers men to women—there is no doubt of that. He can even claim a "virgin heart." The ideal is a highly civilized one—perhaps over-civilized. It represents an exaggerated form of what the Greeks called *sophrosyne* and *gennaiotes*, thoughtful self-control and high-mindedness. Both qualities appear as his in the language of the play. But the ideal's existence is not located exclusively in human personality, but externalized as a powerful presence which confronts its rival. Are they to be reconciled in some pantheistic scheme of universal harmony? No! They are, always and forever, enemies. Artemis in her summing-up explicitly so states. How, then, can man live with such warring competitors for his piety and allegiance? Hippolytus has no solution, but he has a humble companion with him who, after the ritual to Artemis is over, invites him to pay brief tribute at the Cyprian's shrine, as well, on the other side of the stage. Hippolytus contemptuously spurns the proposal and leaves; it will come as no surprise when he later attacks and rejects the entire female gender. But his companion who has shared in the ceremony to

Artemis, lingers behind for a moment and pays his own brief tribute to the shrine of Artemis' rival, asking her to forgive the rash young man. Gods can afford to be more intelligent than men. The prayer, as we have already been told, will be unanswered.

The presuppositions behind the play have already begun to emerge. Man's moral universe is not entirely under his control, nor is it really a universe, informed by principles in harmonious relation with each other. Such a formula would be Platonic, but the Greece that preceded Plato was innocent of this kind of philosophic certainty. Rather, what we live in is an area of forces which compete for human allegiance and a man is unwise to choose among them too stringently. Let him propitiate as many as he can, but in due measure, within proper limits, and so keep sane and walk unharmed. In these two opening episodes the speaking voice of Kupris is matched against the presence of her rival who is not less eloquent for being silent. Her votary speaks both to her and for her. In the concluding episodes, this contrapuntal arrangement is reversed: the Cyprian is spoken to and Artemis speaks. Hippolytus has fallen and is dying; a messenger reports the news.

Whereupon the chorus launch into a hymn. But it is not, as we might expect if this were to be treated as a purely personal tragedy, a cry of grief or a dirge for the dying. Instead, it is a hymn of worship to Kupris addressed to her shrine. Her sexual power it is that bends gods and men to her will. It soars over earth and sea. Eros casts his spell over all the animal kingdom and over all human kind. "Yours, oh divine Kupris, is the lordship over all these creatures, and yours alone." For the third time, the theme of her cosmic power is elaborated.

No sooner is this name enunciated, than Artemis enters the stage to play her balancing role. Theseus' repentance does not in fact occur as a personal response to his son's agony. That is how it would have been played if the play had obeyed the restriction which would confine the action within the human and natural dimension. But that is not the play as Euripides wrote it. Theseus is not to be allowed this emotional luxury—a romantic luxury. As the son had to answer to Aphrodite, and be punished, so the father has to answer to Arte-

mis, and be punished. The new voice now heard comes from the shrine on the right. It identifies itself by name to make sure that we now attend on her. Speaking, she says, for all whose pleasure is in virginity, she asks Theseus how he can derive satisfaction from killing his own son as a result of listening to his wife's falsehoods. His conduct damns him utterly and separates him from respectable society. After going on to explain the details of what has happened, she condemns him for misusing the privilege of the curse that his own father had given him: it was not meant to be used to destroy the grandson. However, he can be excused in so far as it was the Cyprian who contrived the plot in which he has become enmeshed, to satisfy her own resentment. She can do this because all gods are autonomous in these matters and have to practice neutrality towards each other. "Otherwise, but for my fear of Zeus, I would not have avoided the reproach of failing to rescue one who has been so loyal to me, so irreproachable; the gods do not enjoy seeing their followers perish." In this way the voice from her shrine confronted as it is by the shrine of her rival, is constrained to offer a kind of rationalization of the relationship between them. Zeus, it is implied, represents some overriding authority under which the spheres and influences of rival powers in the cosmos are parcelled out and preserved, each in its own province. The conception is Homeric.

This is a fact of life, and Hippolytus like his father has learned it the hard way. As Artemis' votary, and at the point of death, he is allowed brief communication with her. "You have made a marriage," she pronounces with fine irony, "but your partner has been calamity. Your own high breeding has destroyed you." When he asks "Can you see me?" she replies "Yes, but it is not proper for me to shed a tear." He reminds her that she is losing her worshipper and acolyte. "Yes," she says, "it was the Cyprian who meant it to turn out this way." "Oh," he exclaims, "I now sense the spirit that has destroyed me!" "Yes, you offended her honour; when you kept your senses, it made her angry." This comment is worded as a pun. "In fact," says Hippolytus, "I now realize that one female (sc. a goddess) has destroyed all three of us." "You are right," replies Artemis, and she itemizes who the three are.

Nothing could be more calm, collected and dispassionate than the consolation she affords him.

The son in his last moments turns to commiserate with his father, who laments his own condition as a man lost and destroyed. "That's enough," says Artemis, interrupting their grief. "You can at least have the consolation of knowing that in reprisal I am going to victimize one of the Cyprian's men (she refrains however from giving details), and she brandishes her arrows as she says so. And there will be a second compensation, she adds. Hippolytus dying will himself become a cult, the hero of all maidens who on the eve of marriage, as they say farewell to virginity, will cut off a lock of their hair as an offering to him. He will be Hippolytus of the Bridal Night, recipient of the memorial song sung by the virgin choir as the bride says goodbye to her parents' home: "Phaedra's love for you will not go unremembered." The ceremony described in these words could be interpreted as a symbolic commemoration of an innocence intense and protected while it lasts, which in maturity is laid aside. That, indeed, is why Hippolytus has to die.

Father must still reconcile himself to son, and son to father. Each accordingly receives a mandate from her to do this. The formality completed, she bids her votary goodbye and departs, for he is at the point of death, and her immortality cannot allow itself to be contaminated by proximity to mortality in its death throes. "Goodbye" he replies. "We have had converse together for a long time, you and I. How easy it is for you to end it! But since I have always listened to you, I freely forgive my father."

The remainder of this closing scene, which allows the son to expire in his father's arms, is transacted within the purely human dimension already reviewed. The play in truth, taken as a whole, is bifocal. On the one hand, it deploys a series of intense personalities who as they interact on each other seem to destroy each other. The motives that collide are theirs. The decisions made are theirs. The perceptions of reality are theirs. The words that do the damage are the words they speak or in one case write. Yet, on the other hand, everything they feel and do is continually represented as responsive to two opposing power centers, if that is the best way to describe

them, existing outside them, outside their human personalities, embodied in two supernatural personalities. In the end the protagonists are treated as vehicles through whom these purposes are expressed. What are we to make of this double vision of the human condition?

If the dramatic meat of the play is perceived to consist in its human dimension, the temptation arises to dismiss the divine apparatus as an unwanted intrusion into an otherwise acceptable plot—acceptable, that is, from a modern realistic standpoint. The intrusion, we further assume, occurs only as a concession to certain polytheistic beliefs still popular at the time of production but primitive in character and having only an antiquarian interest now. Second thoughts suggest a different view of the play's composition and intention. At the human level, as we have seen, moral decision is dramatized as complicated, uncertain and difficult, liable to produce results which are self-defeating if carried to extremes. The same decision-making process is then portrayed as taking place within an arena marked out by superior powers who set the rules for what takes place and in effect control the results of the decisions, directly or indirectly. The stage setting with its two shrines and statues visually reinforces this impression. May there be logical connection between these two—between the complexity of human decision on the one hand and the control exercised by the external divine apparatus on the other?

If in the course of human life choices are forced on us which are difficult to make and involve results which are uncertain and possibly disastrous (the nurse and Phaedra) or which are made with righteous moral conviction and resolutely pursued, only to end in moral and physical collapse (Hippolytus and Theseus), then the conclusion follows that influences, causes or forces of some kind, external to our decision-making process, exist and weigh on us in order to produce the said results. We think we are free, but our freedom is conditioned.

The two goddesses speak as persons; they are as we say anthropomorphic. It is being suggested, however, that they do not represent a mere indulgence in superstitious fantasy, still less a veiled protest against superstition voiced on behalf of the dramatist. Greek polytheism performed a functional role

within Greek culture, as a symbolic projection of what we would designate as psychological and social forces operating impersonally upon the lives of men in society. It stood for whatever it is that from time to time seems to take charge of us and produces effects which are unforeseen or beyond our control.

In the *Hippolytus*, Euripides exploits this machinery of projection. In Phaedra's case, Aphrodite can be interpreted in Freudian terms as symbolic of a purely psychological obsession deriving its power from levels of her unconscious which have been stimulated to a degree beyond conscious management. Artemis otherwise could be taken as the projection of a psychological obsession of a different order. This habit of externalizing processes which we would characterize as internal, incorporating them in divine personalities, is as old as Homer. For the Greeks it was a device which had the advantage of recognizing the existence of the unconscious and its power in human life. In the case of Phaedra, Euripides exploits this to the full. But the personalities of the Greek pantheon can also extend themselves into a second level of symbolic representation above the psychological, namely the historical. It is in this external context that Aphrodite and Artemis function to embody the web of circumstance in which Hippolytus and Theseus become entangled. Aphrodite in the prologue becomes the mouthpiece of prospective history tracing an inevitable sequence of events in which the results of any decision which is going to take place at the human level are conditioned by what has already gone before. Artemis, tracing for Theseus what had happened before he arrived on the scene and what he has then contributed himself since his arrival, becomes the voice of retrospective history, laying down the previous sequence of cause and effect within which our immediate decisions have been made, and which helps to settle what the effect of our decisions will be. The Homeric god likewise provides the model for this kind of historical symbolization.

Drama has to deal with personalities, not concepts, and can hint at this view of the human condition only indirectly. It is easier for the novel to do so directly, as in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. To do so directly is dramatically difficult as can

be seen in the example furnished by Hardy's *Dynasts*. But I think the effect is there in all Greek tragedy of the high classic period, in the fateful determination of the plots employed. The *Hippolytus* is exceptional only in the poignancy of its personifications.

It may be that, if in the present generation there is any revival of interest in Greek drama, it is because we discover within ourselves some sympathy with its double vision. A complicated view of the human condition is congenial to the circumstances of the twentieth century. Two world wars and the possibility of a third concluding holocaust appear to reinforce the high classic lesson not only that the course of human affairs is unpredictable and dangerous, but that moral certainty is no sure guide to survival let alone happiness. "We," using the pronoun collectively for the western world as it was about the year 1900, started out so assuredly, so confident of our moral convictions, our ideals, our progressive purposes—only to be shattered, in the generations that have followed, in the course of pursuing these very purposes. Like the Greeks before Plato, we have been forced to see ourselves and our history as in a glass darkly.