

## WHERE IS PHAEDRA?

By L. P. E. PARKER

David Kovacs's judicious Loeb edition of Euripides is proving a valuable tool to all students of the poet, and when he departs from current orthodoxy his views demand serious consideration. At *Hippolytus* 600–79 he rejects the *communis opinio* in favour of the view that, instead of 'cowering somewhere at the side',<sup>1</sup> Phaedra leaves the stage before the entrance of Hippolytus and the Nurse.<sup>2</sup> This raises important questions for the interpretation of the play itself, and also for Euripidean dramaturgy and its influence, direct and indirect, on later theatre.

In his note on page 182, Kovacs observes that Phaedra's exit 'is not clearly marked in the text', but that '“to die with all speed” [599] seems to preclude any delay and is a good exit line'. True. But why, if Phaedra leaves the stage intending to kill herself at once, does she not do so? Why, instead, does she reappear for no apparent reason at 682? For Kovacs, her absence 'explains two things, why Hippolytus refers to her only in the third person, and why Phaedra thinks, in spite of his assurances at 657–62, that he will tell Theseus about her.' The first point hardly needs explanation: whether he sees Phaedra or not, it would be completely out of character for the shocked and disgusted Hippolytus to address her, or even acknowledge her presence, unless it were forced on him.<sup>3</sup> The second point involves ignoring one of the most famous lines in Greek tragedy: ἡ γλῶσσ' ὀμώμοχ', ἡ δὲ φρήν ἀνώμοτος ('My tongue swore, but my mind is unsworn', 612). Hippolytus begins by announcing that he considers his oath invalid. He seems to change his mind later in the scene, but why should he not change it again? Having overheard him, Phaedra has excellent reason for her fear.<sup>4</sup>

An immediate and obvious inconvenience of Kovacs's view is that the Nurse is left to sing the short stanza at 669–79, since Phaedra is not there to sing it. Barrett's discussion of these lines can hardly be bettered. One might, however, add that the generalizing plurals at the opening and the reference to γυναικῶν πότμοι ('the fates of women') follow naturally on the denunciation of women in general with which Hippolytus ends his speech.<sup>5</sup> To the vexed problem of the plural σφαλεῖσαι Barrett offers the only plausible solution: the singer conflates the

misfortunes of women in general with her own particular case (*vûn*). Certainly, Phaedra could not use the plural of herself and the Nurse, for they are not accomplices, nor, for the same reason, could the Nurse use it of herself and Phaedra. Once the singer changes from plural to singular, the identification with Phaedra becomes inevitable. The singer's preoccupation with right and wrong (*ἐτύχομεν δίκας . . . ἀδίκων ἔργων*, 'I have met with justice . . . unjust deeds') is altogether inappropriate to the Nurse, who, when she speaks again at 695, remains the amoral pragmatist she was before. The question *πῶς δὲ πῆμα κρύψω, φίλοι;* ('How shall I hide the disaster, my friends?') reflects Phaedra's major preoccupation. Finally, *κακοτυχεστάτα γυναικῶν ἐγώ* ('Most unfortunate of women am I') coming from the Nurse would constitute a claim to prime importance nothing less than preposterous.<sup>6</sup> To the objection that low-life characters in tragedy do not sing, Kovacs replies that 'the Nurse is an important character in our play. There are not many characters of servile status whose importance to their plays approaches hers.'<sup>7</sup> The Nurse is undoubtedly a crucial part of the dramatic machinery, but that is as far as Euripides' egalitarianism goes. She is not a character in the full sense at all, for neither the playwright nor his audience cares what happens to her. Racine takes the trouble to make the confidante, Oenone, drown herself (*Phèdre*, Act 5, sc. 5), but the Nurse has no place in the dénouement of *Hippolytus*.<sup>8</sup>

To return to Kovacs's starting point, 599–600 do indeed constitute a statement of intent to commit suicide at once, and that, no doubt, is Phaedra's intention. But she cannot carry it out at once. Since 565 she has been listening outside the door to Hippolytus' cries within. It must be evident to the audience that she cannot enter the 'palace' without coming face-to-face with him. This is a mere matter of plausible staging. She must wait until he is out of the way. In the event, he bursts out through the door, and she effaces herself.

Further proof of Phaedra's presence during 601–68 is the echo of 667, *σωφρονεῖν διδαξάτω* ('let [someone] teach them to be pure in heart') in Phaedra's final words at 731, *σωφρονεῖν μαθήσεται* ('He shall learn *sophrosyne*').<sup>9</sup> Barrett and Kovacs ignore this because they are inclined to follow Valckenaer in regarding 664–8 as spurious, although neither actually brackets the lines.<sup>10</sup> M. R. Halleran does notice, but stops short of drawing the conclusion that 665 and 667–8 at least must be genuine.<sup>11</sup> To modern taste, 662 may seem a good exit line, but it is much too abrupt for Euripides, who, as Barrett admits, 'likes to let his characters leave the stage with a good sententious peroration', or at least

a generalization, as here.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Hippolytus' reaction to the Nurse's proposal took the form of a general condemnation of women; it is natural that he should round off his speech with a return to that theme. The question of whether or not Hippolytus regards *sophrosyne* as teachable is irrelevant: teaching it to *women* is to him *adynaton*, on a par with teaching pigs to fly. The figure is more familiar in contexts of love than of hate.<sup>13</sup>

The ultimate proof of Phaedra's presence during Hippolytus' scene with the Nurse lies in the whole logic of the play. In choosing to depict Phaedra as a woman who is not 'bad' in any ordinary, banal sense, Euripides set himself the problem of providing a motive for her murderous anger against Hippolytus. In the common versions of the story,<sup>14</sup> the woman's anger is simply provoked by the man's rejection, but that will not do for Phaedra. Nor will it do to treat the destruction of Hippolytus as a mere side-effect of Phaedra's plan to save her own and her children's reputation, for that is not how Euripides presents it. His Phaedra deliberately seeks vengeance on Hippolytus for his all-too-overt moral superiority, and that is made emphatically clear. At 715–31 she reveals her motives in two speeches, each of seven lines, divided by a brief dialogue with the chorus (722–4). At 715–21 she declares her intention to save her children, herself, and her family from disgrace, with just a hint of menace in her last words. At 725–31 she turns openly to thoughts of vengeance, first on Aphrodite, then, last and in the climactic position, on Hippolytus. With that she leaves the stage for good.<sup>15</sup> To suppose that Phaedra deliberately plans the destruction of an innocent man merely because of the initial cries she heard at 565–600 (and which the audience did not hear) means attributing to her a level of irresponsible malice wholly out of keeping with her character as so far revealed. Hippolytus' explosive denunciation of women in general and his depiction in imagination of Phaedra in exactly the role that horrifies her (compare 661–2 with 413–18) are necessary if we are to understand her vengeful rage. It is neither strictly rational nor admirable, but emotionally it is perfectly comprehensible.

In fifth-century tragedy the eavesdropping-scene is a brilliant stroke of dramatic audacity;<sup>16</sup> in Menandrian comedy it becomes a cliché. Above all, it is very common for a new character on entering to overhear a few lines of dialogue or soliloquy from the character or characters already on stage. Thus, the first act of *Dyscolus* features a whole sequence of such overhearings. At 152–70 Sostratus withdraws and listens to Cnemon's enraged monologue before addressing him. At

188–99 he overhears the daughter's expressions of distress. At 206–11 the daughter withdraws during Daus' monologue. At 212–17 Daus overhears the exchange between Sostratus and the daughter. At 259–68 Daus and Gorgias overhear Sostratus' monologue. These minor overhearings lubricate the action in a variety of ways: both the eavesdropping character and the audience gain some advance insight into the state of mind of the character or characters at centre-stage. Thus, Sostratus is made aware of the predicament of Cnemon's daughter without the need for her to commit the impropriety of talking to a strange man. Daus' suspicions are aroused by what he hears and sees of the exchange between the daughter and Sostratus, which leads to the involvement of Gorgias. Later in the play, Gorgias' overhearing from off-stage of Sostratus and Callipides permits a considerable economy in dramatic exposition.

The motif of over-hearing can, however, be used to much more powerful dramatic effect. It can, as in *Hippolytus*, propel the plot in a new direction. This happens twice in *Epitrepontes*: first, at 445–63, where Habrotonum is motivated to hatch her plot; second, at 878 ff., where the audience learns that Charisius' eavesdropping on the dialogue between Smicrines and Pamphile at the beginning of the act has resulted in his sudden change of heart. Unlike the two episodes in *Epitrepontes*, Demeas' reported eavesdropping at *Samia* 208 ff. is potentially tragic. T. B. L. Webster<sup>17</sup> brushed aside the idea of a direct connection between this episode and the overhearing scene in *Hippolytus*, because 'there are so many scenes of overhearing of different types in Menander's plays that it seems necessary to assume their existence already as part of the comic poet's stock in trade'. I am not sure that I see the force of this argument, but in any case Euripides' scene came first, and Menander was free to choose those parts of 'the comic poet's stock in trade' that particularly appealed to him. Webster may, however, have been right to reject the over-simple idea that Menander 'was thinking' of the scene in *Hippolytus* when devising Demeas' eavesdropping. Literary influence does not necessarily work through precise allusion: one must allow for the gradual and covert shaping of the poet's imagination by well-known and well-loved texts from the past.

Menander's debt to tragedy in general and to Euripides in particular is a well-worn subject, but it is important to distinguish between the use of devices which are common to tragedy in general (such as messenger's speeches and recognition scenes) and motifs which are distinctively Euripidean, and which seem, almost disconcertingly, to foreshadow

comedy.<sup>18</sup> *Hippolytus*, an unambiguously tragic play, might not seem an obvious place to look for such foreshadowing, yet several studies have shown it to be a key work for such Menandrian intertextuality. In 1912, A. Sehr, tracing Euripidean references in the works of Menander then available, found more echoes of *Hippolytus* than of any other play.<sup>19</sup> In 1918, Pasquali, in a shrewd and sensitive study, identified Phaedra as the forerunner of a distinctively Menandrian type of character.<sup>20</sup> The Nurse too could have deployed her talents as scheming servant and go-between to much happier effect in New Comedy. Misapprehension, which so often drives Menander's plots, is also crucial in *Hippolytus*. Not only is Theseus misled when he curses his son, but Hippolytus also delivers the tirade which will prove his destruction in the mistaken belief that the Nurse is acting as Phaedra's emissary. The affinities of *Samia* with *Hippolytus* are particularly clear. The father's unjustified suspicion of his (adopted, instead of illegitimate) son and the resulting confrontation have been remarked more than once.<sup>21</sup> Taking a more comprehensive view, S. R. West<sup>22</sup> has highlighted the generally domestic, even bourgeois, atmosphere of Euripides' treatment of the myth. In the context of such affinities, the parallelism between Phaedra's and Demeas' eavesdropping (in the one case actually disastrous, in the other potentially so) becomes hard to dismiss.

There is a certain irony in Menander's indebtedness to Euripides. Euripides in his surviving plays (more than a fifth of his known output) uses the eavesdropping motif only once. Menander, with his art of formulaic variation, uses it again and again. Nor, of course, does it end with him. To see how the device is used by a dramatist as bold, inventive, and unpredictable as Euripides, one might turn to the second scene of *The Winter's Tale*, where Shakespeare depicts the terrifying development of Leontes' paranoid jealousy. There, the audience first hears the conversation between Hermione and Polixenes, while Leontes, apart, watches, returning within hearing for 83–6, lines ambiguous out of context. Then the audience's perspective is reversed: Leontes, with Mamillius, takes centre-stage, and we hear his anguished and obsessive reflections as he watches the other pair, now out of our hearing, as well as of his. The over-heard lines are, as it were, the hinge on which the scene turns. Shakespeare can have had little direct knowledge of Euripides,<sup>23</sup> but Menander's dramatic techniques of eavesdropping and misapprehension will have been familiar to him from those favourite school textbooks of his time, Plautus and, above all, Terence. In *The Winter's Tale* he uses other motifs which go back to

New Comedy, and through New Comedy to Euripides: recognition and the lost child.<sup>24</sup> For a purely comic use of the device, it would be hard to surpass the neatness and wit of Act 4, Scene 3 of *A School for Scandal*, where, through a double eavesdropping, a villain is unmasked, and, as in *Épîtrepontes*, a marriage is restored.

## NOTES

1. W. S. Barrett, *Euripides, Hippolytus* (Oxford, 1964), 272 (on 601–15).
2. *Euripides* II (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1995). As Kovacs remarks, the same view, supported by similar arguments, was put forward by W. D. Smith, ‘Staging in the central scene of the *Hippolytus*’, *TAPA* 91 (1960), 162–70.
3. ἤν ἀρτίως ἔλειπον (‘whom I left lately’) at 907 might seem to suggest that Hippolytus is aware of her presence, but is too vague to prove it. For an extended discussion, see D. J. Mastronarde, *Contact and Discontinuity*, *UCPS* 21 (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1979), 81 n. 14.
4. S. R. Slings (reviewing Kovacs in *Mnemosyne* 4.51 [1998], 469) asserts that ‘if Phaedra’s suicide is to make any sense at all, she must hear 612, but she must not hear his subsequent promise to keep silent’. This is wrong on two counts. Phaedra had determined long ago (as she says at 401) that suicide was her only option. Her resolution fades momentarily in the face of the Nurse’s assurance (509–12) that her love can be cured without dishonour. Once that hope turns out to have been illusory, her resolution returns (509–600). For the second point, it is natural for a person who has heard two contradictory statements to be in doubt which to believe.
5. Barrett, *op. cit.*, 287–90. On the authenticity of 665–8, see n. 10 below.
6. C. W. Willink (‘Further critical notes on Euripides’ *Hippolytus*’, *CQ* 49 [1999], 408–27) now argues (416–17) in favour of assigning 669–79 to the chorus. This is a courageous defence of a highly unpopular view, but it does not convince. For Willink, the over-riding consideration is the oddity of a monody in correspondence with a choral strophe. As far as the text of the stanza is concerned, his strongest argument is the difficult plural, *σφαλείσαι*. Otherwise, he offers only two observations on the appropriateness of the sentiments expressed to the chorus. He finds τὸ παρ’ ἡμῖν πάθος ‘apter on the lips of sympathetic φίλοι than of Phaedra herself’. To me that is far from obvious. On ἐτύχομεν δίκας (‘We [I] have met with justice’) he comments: ‘presumably as having tacitly acquiesced in the Nurse’s disastrous approach to Hippolytus.’ But neither the chorus nor Phaedra (see line 520) ‘acquiesced in’ what the Nurse was going to do. She concealed her intention by ambiguity (521). Moreover, unlike Phaedra, the chorus had not divulged anything that should have remained secret. Willink adds: ‘but throughout the chorus strongly “identify” with the predicaments and sentiments of the principals.’ This amounts to an admission that the words suit Phaedra, not the chorus. In fact, sympathetic as the chorus may be to Phaedra, they show no sign of ‘identifying’ with her. For proof of that, one need only look at the strophe 362–8. To Willink’s main argument, that the correspondence of monody to choral song is, if not unique, highly exceptional, one can only answer: here it is.
7. *The Heroic Muse* (Baltimore and London, 1987), 134 n. 80. On the question of low-life characters (with the exception of the Phrygian at *Or.* 1369 ff.) singing, see P. Maas, *Greek Metre* (Oxford, 1962), §76. On the linguistic improbability that the Nurse could use the plural of herself and her mistress, see V. Bers, *Greek Poetic Syntax in the Classical Age* (New Haven and London, 1984), 49.
8. Bernard Knox (*Word and Action* [Baltimore and London, 1979], 205) points out that the Nurse delivers more lines than either Phaedra or Theseus, and goes on to describe the action of the play as ‘equally divided among four characters’. But Knox is here illustrating the impossibility of identifying a single, central figure in the play. By one criterion at least the Nurse could, arguably, be that figure, a patently absurd conclusion.
9. Phaedra’s words are not evidence of any lack of *sophrosyne* in Hippolytus. She uses the ordinary rhetoric of anger: ‘I’ll teach him to such-and-such.’
10. L. C. Valckenaer, *Euripidis Hippolytus* (Leyden, 1768), ad loc. Before adopting Valckenaer as an authority on stylistic matters it is worth noting that he thought it appropriate for Hippolytus to

leave the stage with 663, a line now almost universally regarded as spurious, or at least misplaced. The case against the lines is further argued by Barrett, ad loc. and by Kovacs ('Coniectanea Euripidea', *GRBS* 29 [1988], 125). The latter seeks linguistic infelicities, but the case against the lines rests essentially on literary taste. They are condemned as anti-climactic and as adding nothing to what has already been said (Valckenaer's original objection). An economical and highly effective defence of the lines has now been put forward by Willink in the paper cited in n. 6 above, 414–15. It is just worth stressing that in 666 δέϊ is emphatic: 'For indeed (γάρ οὖν) they are *always* bad in some way.' The variant echo at 919–20 is also evidence of authenticity. There, however, the effect is ironic, since Theseus, unlike Phaedra, has not heard Hippolytus' words.

11. *Euripides, Hippolytus* (Warminster, 1995), ad loc.

12. Barrett, ad loc. See H. Friis Johansen, *General Reflection in Tragic Rhesis* (Copenhagen, 1959), Chapter 7 and, on *Hippolytus* 616 ff., 124–5, 168. More recently, Friis Johansen is reported as subscribing to the view that 664–8 are interpolated (see W. Stockert, *Euripides, Hippolytus* [Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1994], ad loc.).

13. *Certe ex Hippolyti sententia* (79 seqq.) σωφροσύνη non discendo capitur, Diggle, ad loc. But Hippolytus is not concerned at 79 ff. with the general teachability of σωφροσύνη, but with the fact that his own is untaught. His is the typical pre-sophistic and pre-Socratic conviction of the superiority of the natural virtue or talent (compare Pindar, *Ol.* 2.86–8, 9.100–2).

14. Anteia (Stheneboea) and Bellerophon (*Il.* 6.152 ff.), Astydama and Peleus (Apollodoros 3.13.3), Joseph and Potiphar's wife (*Genesis* 39.7–20), and, it is generally supposed, Phaedra and Hippolytus in Euripides' earlier version of the play (although it is hard to believe that Euripides could ever have produced anything as banal as scholarly reconstructions of that play).

15. The double motivation is typically Euripidean. Compare Hippolytus' reasons for not breaking his oath at 1060–3: the first is moral, the second prudential and self-consolatory: πάντως οὐ πίθοιμ' ἄν οὓς με δεῖ ('I could not possibly convince those I must convince').

16. See O. Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action* (London, 1978), 70–1, 155, 191 n. 7. For another prolonged eavesdropping scene, see *Aj.* 91–117, where Odysseus, concealed by Athene, watches and listens to the mad Ajax. This scene is not pivotal to the plot, but it is important in preparing the audience for the role Odysseus will play eventually in securing the burial of Ajax. Also, the element of epic-style magic alienates the scene from ordinary reality. A fragment of Tarentine pottery of 375–50 B.C. depicts an old man and a young man flanked by two women obviously listening, one half-concealed behind an open door. Heinrich Bulle (*Eine Skenographie, 94 Berliner Winckelmannsprogramm* [Berlin and Leipzig, 1934]) concluded that the scene was from a tragedy, and represented the first meeting of Jason and Pelias (with two of Pelias' daughters eavesdropping). It is, however, very hard to see how that episode could be incorporated in the plot of a tragedy. At any rate, the events which formed the subject of Euripides' lost *Peliades* belong to a later stage of the legend, after Jason's return from Colchis. Erika Simon (*The Ancient Theatre* [London and New York, 1982], plate 10 and page 23), while in general accepting Bulle's thesis, argues that the building depicted cannot represent real stage scenery of the time. Where Bulle makes much of the distinct characters of the women as displayed in their poses, Simon takes the second woman to be artistic licence. It may be that the whole thesis needs re-examination.

17. *Studies in Menander* (Manchester, <sup>2</sup>1962), 177. It is, of course, hardly possible to produce evidence for over-hearing scenes in Middle and New Comedy before Menander. Webster (177 n. 2) adduces 'a Paestan vase of 380–350 B.C. (Trendall, *Paestan Pottery*, fig. 10)' which he is 'inclined to interpret' as a slave over-hearing two women. Assuming that Webster's reference is correct, I find that interpretation very difficult to accept. The (diminutive) comic actor is standing between the two women (not a good location for eavesdropping notice) and looking up at one of them, while she, apparently, looks straight at him. For a larger and better illustration of the vase in question, see *JHS* 55 (1935), plate VI. Whatever the Tarentine fragment mentioned in n. 16 above represents, it is certainly not a scene from comedy.

18. See, in particular, A. Pertusi, 'Menandro ed Euripide', *Dioniso* 16 (1953), 27–63, A. G. Katsouris, *Tragic Patterns in Menander* (Athens, 1975), A. Hurst, 'Ménandre et la tragédie' in E. Handley and A. Hurst (edd.), *Relire Ménandre* (Geneva, 1990), 93–122. For a study of the phenomenon from a Euripidean, rather than a Menandrian, perspective, see Bernard Knox, 'Euripidean Comedy', op. cit. n. 8, 250–74.

19. *De Menandro Euripidis imitatore* (diss. Giessen, 1912). Sehr lists seven echoes of *Hippolytus*. Next comes *Helen*, with three echoes. Sehr connects *Samia* with the lost play, *Phoenix*. That,

however, is based on the presumed plot of the play, rather than on the surviving fragments. Any suspicions Phoenix' father may have had were, of course, justified.

20. G. Pasquali, 'Studi sul dramma antico II: Menandro ed Euripide', *A&R* 21 (1918), 57–77. On Phaedra, see page 66.

21. For the fullest treatment, see Katsouris, op. cit. n. 18, 131–5; also M. Lamagna, *Menandro, La donna di Samo* (Naples, 1998), 64–7.

22. St. West, 'Notes on the *Samia*', *ZPE* 88 (1991), 11–23. On the parallelism with *Hippolytus*, see 16–22.

23. Emrys Jones (*The Origins of Shakespeare* [Oxford, 1977], 85–118) argues that Shakespeare probably knew *Hecuba* and *Iphigenia at Aulis*, at least in Latin translation. On sixteenth-century translations of Euripides, see F. L. Kucas, *Euripides and his Influence* (New York, 1928), 95–107.

24. The motifs of recognition and the lost child appear in Robert Greene's tale, *Dorastus and Fawnia*, Shakespeare's chief source for *The Winter's Tale*, but Shakespeare did not need to get them from Greene. They had been part of his own stock in trade since his Plautine piece, *The Comedy of Errors*.

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