

HPAH4005 Cauldron of Democracy and Tragedy: Classical Greek History and Literature

Euripides' 'Hippolytus': Prologue of Aphrodite (Lines 1-57)

Hippolytus, a non-believer in Love, the bastard son of Theseus and Queen of the Amazons Hippolyta, adored by Artemis daughter of Zeus and sister to Apollo¹. The play is set in Trozen, where Hippolytus and Artemis hunt together, and this bond with Artemis, and his blatant disregard in the worship of the goddess Aphrodite becomes the root of Hippolytus' troubles, in Euripides' play, and will ultimately lead to his death².

Aphrodite's monologue begins with how her power stretches from one side of the Greek World to the other. Aphrodite favours those who are devout, and actively seeks to ruin those who are not. The cause of Aphrodite's present frustration, is one man, Hippolytus, who pays Aphrodite no attention or devotion³. Hippolytus actively shuns the goddess Aphrodite, adding to her fury, and so, Aphrodite sets out a plan of revenge⁴. The plan involves Hippolytus' father's wife, Phaedra, on whom Aphrodite inflicts the disease of Love, love for Hippolytus⁵.

It would be easy to use Euripides' Hippolytus, and also his Medea, as his damning view of women scorned, a view of a misogynistic man (Euripides). The devious, conniving nature of women coming to the fore of his plays, Hippolytus and Medea. Evidence for this particular outlook of Euripides' is, perhaps, the destruction of the relationships of those connected with Hippolytus, Aphrodite sees this harming of the innocent as collateral damage and perfectly acceptable as long as she gets her revenge on Hippolytus⁶. There are parallels to be made here with the lengths that Medea is willing to go to punish Jason, by murdering her own children⁷.

However, Man's duty, or oath (to pray and offer sacrifice to the gods), with regards to Aphrodite has been broken by Hippolytus. In religious terms the upholding of oaths is vital, and religion to the Greeks is first and foremost when it comes to everyday life⁸. Rarely, when the gods are slighted, does it end well and neither will it just effect the guilty⁹. With this said, perhaps, Euripides is outlining the dangers of breaking oaths, and religious disobedience rather than his play 'Hippolytus' (and Medea) being a view of women in general.

Word count 402

¹ Kovacs, 1995, p.117; Graves, 2017, p.83-86

² Kovacs, 1995, p.117; Graves, 2017, p.83-86; Halleran, 2004, p. 145

³ Eur. Hip. 1-57

⁴ Eur. Hip. 1-57

⁵ Eur. Hip. 1-57

⁶ Eur. Hip. 1-57

⁷ Eur. Med.

⁸ Burkert, 1987, p.250-254

⁹ Hom. Il. 1.1-25

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