

EURIPIDES, *HIPPOLYTOS* 790–855

I

Theseus, on entering, immediately demands of the Chorus an explanation of the *βοή* in the house and of the lack of proper welcome for the returning master. His first thought (794) is that something may have happened to the aged Pittheus. No, say the Chorus, the *τύχη* (that which has happened) has nothing to do with the old: it is the *young* whose death causes pain (798). Naturally, Theseus now leaps to the conclusion that it is his children whose ‘life is pillaged’ (799): no, he is told, it is his wife.

From this point on Theseus is at pains to elicit information about his wife’s *τύχη*: *τί φής; ὄλωλεν ἄλοχος; ἐκ τίνος τύχης;* (801). But to his repeated questions the Chorus avoid a direct answer: ‘she hanged herself’, they tell him (802), indicating *how*, but not *why*, she effected the suicide. ‘But’, continues Theseus, ‘was it because she was chilled with grief, or *ἀπό συμφορᾶς τίνος?*’ And now the Chorus are forced into a lie, in order to preserve their oath; ‘that’s all we know: we’ve only just arrived too.’

At 811 the Chorus break into lament, while Theseus stands in silence, emotion welling up within him. At 817 he picks up the lament, alternating calmer pairs of iambic trimeters with the more emotional dochmiacs. The picture is of a man attempting to control violent grief.

Theseus deplores this *τύχα* (818), which has come upon his house so hard, and which he goes on to equate with a *κηλὶς ἀφραστός ἐξ ἀλαστόρων τινός*, ‘an unobserved¹ taint which has been sent by some avenging spirit’. Here he first grasps at the possibility that his misery is due to some ancestral curse, some crime committed long ago by someone in his family. He repeats the idea at 831–3: he feels that he must be ‘recovering a *τύχα* sent by the gods from some far-off time, because of the sins of someone in the past’.

At 836 he passes to a wish for death. And in the corrupt 840–1 he again poses the question: what is the source (*πόθεν*) of the *θανάσιμος τύχα* which has overtaken his wife? Barrett² attempts to remedy the text by suggesting *τίς ἄρα καὶ* as a stop-gap for *τίνος κλύω*. This gives adequate sense and metre, but Barrett confesses that in fact he is beaten: the words are ‘corrupt beyond remedy’.

In the calmer iambics at 842 Theseus considers *how* to find the truth. Still the Chorus do not reply to his question. His emotion rises (844), and he laments the calamity in his house, the *ἄλγος* which is neither *τλητόν* nor *ρητόν*.

II

Thus the development of the drama is straightforward. The text, however, is vitiated by corruption. I have analysed the scene in some detail because I believe that, seen properly in this context, solutions to two of the corruptions are not difficult to find:

- (i) 826–7 *τίνα λόγον, τάλας, τίνα τύχαν σέθεν
βαρύποτμον, γύναι, προσαιδῶν τύχω;*

Theseus, as we have seen, tries hard to discover just what has taken place during his absence. At 826 there can be no doubt that he is posing the same question

¹ Or, perhaps, ‘indescribable’: see below.

² *Euripides Hippolytos* (Oxford, 1964), ad loc.

(τίνα τύχαν). With the text as it stands, however, he appears to be asking two questions in one: what must he call the τύχα and what is the τύχα? This in itself is a somewhat complex utterance, and when one attempts further to complicate the syntax with an internal accusative (τίνα λόγον), one will hardly hesitate to agree with Barrett that the lines are corrupt.³

The structure τίνα λόγον . . . τίνα τύχαν is, of course, *superficially* attractive, and this, no doubt, aided the corruption. But by a simple redivision of the *textus receptus* we have a remedy to hand: read τίν' ἄλογον: 'calling what τύχα of yours unspeakable, what τύχα of yours calamitous, am I to hit the mark?' The resultant hyperbaton is indicative of the speaker's emotion⁴—an emotion clearly pointed up by the shift to dochmiacs and further stressed by the double parenthesis of τάλας and γύναι⁵—and serves to emphasize the unspeakableness of the τύχα, which remains uppermost in Theseus' mind. For he returns to the theme at 846, where he describes the ἄλγος δόμων as οὐ τλητόν οὐδὲ ῥητόν. And for the same reason we may feel tempted, as I foreshadowed above, to interpret κηλὶς ἄφραστος (820) as a 'taint indescribable': cf. Aeschylus, *Persae* 165, μέριμν' ἄφραστος and Sophocles, *Trach.* 694, φάτις ἄφραστος.

Although ἄλογος would thus appear to be a Euripidean *hapax*, we do have an entry in Hesychius: ἄλογα ἄρρητα. Σοφοκλῆς Θυέστη (Pearson, fr. 262), which indicates that this meaning is by no means unparalleled. Furthermore, in a context with οὐδὲ ῥητόν (846) and οὐδὲ λεκτόν (875), it is clear that Theseus has no doubt that the disaster is 'unspeakable'.

In the light of this reasoning I plead for the retention of 875

οὐ τλητόν οὐδὲ λεκτόν • ὦ τάλας ἐγώ,

a line deleted by Wilamowitz on the unsatisfactory ground that the Coryphaeus can hardly ask Theseus to describe (λέξον) something immediately after he (Theseus) has called it οὐδὲ λεκτόν. This is hyper-logic: as Lloyd-Jones pointed out in his review article on Barrett,⁶ 'expressions like ἄφατος, ἄρρητος, οὐ λεκτός are not descriptive but *emotive*' (my italics). So here at 846 Theseus can contemplate describing (προσαυδῶν) something as indescribable (ἄλογος).

(ii) 840–1 † τίνος κλύω † πόθεν θανάσιμος τύχα,
γύναι, σὰν ἔβα, τάλαινα, κραδίαν;

Theseus' preoccupations throughout the scene are with (a) information to explain the τύχα, and (b) speculation that he may be suffering as the result of an ancestral curse. Applying these preoccupations to 840, for τίνος κλύω we should read τί λύω; 'what <sin> am I atoning for?'⁷ Whence the deadly τύχα, wife, that came, unhappy one, upon your heart?' This is both intrinsically probable and palaeographically straightforward. τι written carelessly as τε, could well produce κ, τί κλύω then being 'corrected' to τίνος, as one would only expect. Metrical requirements are also met, a dochmius (∪ – – ∪ – : τί λύω; πόθεν) corresponding to ∪ ∪ ∪ – ∪ – (821).

³ Op. cit., p.322: 'the result is not such as to convince me that the text is genuine.'

⁴ For a similar 'Sperrung' of τίς from its noun by a predicative adjective cf., e.g., Aeschylus *Persae* 438: καὶ τίς γένοιτ' ἂν τῆσδ' ἔτ' ἐχθίων τύχη. For hyperbaton in general see K-G.II, § 607.1 and Fraenkel on *Agamemnon* 1448ff.

⁵ Cf. the disruption of the similarly emotionally charged 840-1: πόθεν θανάσιμος τύχα, γύναι, σὰν ἔβα, τάλαινα, κραδίαν;

⁶ *JHS* 85 (1965), 169.

⁷ For λύω = 'atone for' cf. Euripides *Or.* 510-11: φόνω φόνον λύσει; Sophocles *OT* 100-1: φόνω φόνον πάλιν λύοντας.

Sense and metre are thus restored at a stroke, and the resulting brief, staccato, unconnected utterance may be seen as reflecting the agitation⁸ of the speaker.⁹

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⁸ Cf. 801, 803, and, similarly, *Hippolytos* at 905-6 and 909-15.

⁹ I wish to thank my colleague Mr. G.G. Betts for helpful criticism of this paper.