

IV. A Problem in Euripides' *Hippolytus*

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- εἴ τοι δοκεῖ σοι, χρῆν μὲν οὐ σ' ἀμαρτάνειν·
 εἰ δ' οὖν, πιθοῦ μοι· δευτέρα γὰρ ἡ χάρις.
 ἔστιν κατ' οἴκους φίλτρα μοι θελκτήρια
 510 ἔρωτος, ἦλθε δ' ἄρτι μοι γνώμης ἔσω,
 ἃ σ' οὐτ' ἐπ' αἰσχροῖς οὐτ' ἐπὶ βλάβῃ φρενῶν
 παύσει νόσον τῆσδ', ἣν σὺ μὴ γένη κακῇ.
 δεῖ δ' ἐξ ἐκείνου δὴ τι τοῦ ποθουμένου
 σημεῖον, ἢ λόγον τιν' ἢ πέπλων ἄπο
 515 λαβεῖν, συνάψαι τ' ἐκ δυοῖν μίαν χάριν.

(Hippolytus 507–15)

Before considering various interpretations of this passage¹ let us review its immediate context.

At verses 433–81 Phaedra's nurse has embarked on a strenuous attempt to persuade her mistress to yield to her passion for Hippolytus rather than to save her honor by suicide. This speech, though it contains (447–50) one of Euripides' most striking "symbolic" descriptions of Aphrodite, soon descends to anthropomorphic tales of her power over her fellow-gods, and then to that basest perversion of mythology (in Euripides' as in Plato's view), the use of divine example as an excuse for men's wrong-doing.² "What else is this than *hybris*, to seek to better even gods in virtue? Have the courage of your love! A god has willed it!" (474–76). The speech ends with a promise, wheedlingly vague in deference to Phaedra's scruples, of "some remedy (*pharmakon*) for this affliction" by "charms and magic words" (478–79). However, Phaedra's resistance (486 ff.) stings the nurse to express her intentions more brutally: "No fine speeches need

¹ I am indebted to Professors G. M. A. Grube and W. J. N. Rudd for helpful discussions of this passage and related points in my interpretation.

² Cf. Norwood's subtle delineation of how the nurse's language "rises and falls in dignity with the phases of her theme." Gilbert Norwood, *Essays on Euripidean Drama* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1954) 83, and notes 2 and 3.

you but the man!" (490-91). The nurse has prepared for her suggestion by her mythological preamble. Now this statement and others equally specific (493-97) show clearly to Phaedra and to us that, rather than let her mistress die, she is planning to procure Hippolytus for her.

The vehemence with which Phaedra rejects the nurse's "ruinous but too fair-seeming arguments" (486 ff., cf. 498 ff., 503 ff.) shows that she scorns this abdication of human responsibility as do other noble characters in Euripides to whom mythological paradigms for frightful deeds are offered.³ Up to verse 506, the queen, albeit with a struggle, refuses each fresh urging from her devil's advocate. But after the nurse's speech at 507-15, she yields a grudging compliance, at least to the point where the nurse feels free to go indoors and speak with Hippolytus (516-24). What brings about the change? Is Phaedra simply worn out so that she can no longer resist what she so passionately desires? Or, as seems more probable, is the nurse, at least ostensibly, proposing something different in these lines which Phaedra feels she can accept with less loss of honor than the blunt offer to procure Hippolytus, which she has already rejected?

Of the literary commentators, Hartung is one of the few to recognize a definite change in the nurse's approach during this scene. After noting Phaedra's initial rejection of the nurse's arguments, he adds, "Neque tamen desistit nutrix sed aliquid remedii se inventuram esse promittens . . . in domum abiit."⁴ But on the whole the literary critics seem to have been content with indicating, in general terms, their views of the degree, if any, to which Phaedra shares the nurse's guilt in involving Hippolytus.⁵

³ Cf. Heracles' rejection (coupled with his own refutation of such "poets' tales" of divine misdemeanor) of Theseus' consolations, *HF* 1341 ff. and 1311-21, respectively. Cf. also Iphigenia's criticism, *IT* 389-91, of men who project their own evil impulses upon the gods.

⁴ J. A. Hartung, *Euripides restitutus* 1 (Hamburg 1843) 407.

⁵ Contrast, for example, the views of Méridier and Pohlenz; the former defends Phaedra on the ground that the nurse hides her true intent behind ambiguities; the latter argues that Phaedra's resistance simply weakens, since she must know from such lines as 490-91 what the nurse's real intentions are. See L. Méridier, *Hippolyte d'Euripide* (Paris n.d.) 111-13, and his edition of the play (Budé edition, Paris 1956) *Notice*, 18; M. Pohlenz, *Die griechische Tragödie*² (Göttingen 1954) 267. Neither of these critics distinguishes a second approach on the nurse's part at 507 ff. Norwood, in *Essays* (above, note 2) 83-84, defends Phaedra along Méridier's lines; in his *Greek Tragedy* (London 1920) 205 he suggests that the nurse "takes refuge in ambiguity"

Several editors, following Valckenaer as well as certain scholastic comments on this passage, have recognized a change in the ostensible plan of the nurse at 507–8. However, since their interpretations have rested mainly on unacceptable renderings of *δευτέρα* . . . *χάρις*, 508 (such as “an zweiter Stelle steht dieser Dienst” and “I have thought of a second plan”)⁶ this view has, not surprisingly, been rejected by recent editors.

Most editors who do not take *δευτέρα* . . . *χάρις* as introducing a second suggestion from the nurse understand *deutera* to mean “second best,” i.e. after remaining virtuous, and *charis* to indicate a “yielding” either to the nurse’s advice or (Wilamowitz) to the demands of love.⁷ One or two examples of this interpretation will suffice to illustrate it: “’Twere best never to err, but, having erred, to take a counsellor is second” (Murray); “Nun, wie du willst. Du hättest allerdings / nicht lieben sollen. Aber nun: sei folgsam, / nun ist das Beste, willig sich ergeben” (Wilamowitz).

All but one of the editors following this interpretation take *εἰ δ' οὖν* as resumptive of *σ' ἀμαρτάνειν* in the preceding clause. As Wilamowitz, in his note *ad loc.*, explains the nurse’s argument, the conclusion which must follow from Phaedra’s principles (referred to in *εἰ τοι δοκεῖ σοι*) is that she should not fall into wrong-doing by falling in love, but once it is assumed that she *has*

only after Phaedra has rejected her more blunt proposal. G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London 1941) 182, suggests inconsistency or at least vacillation on Phaedra’s part: “Although she does not yield to these entreaties, she does half-consciously leave the matter in doubt.”

⁶ See the editions of N. Wecklein (Leipzig 1885) and J. P. Mahaffy–J. B. Bury (London 1889) respectively. Wecklein paraphrases 507–8 thus: “Wenn du meinem ersten Vorschlag nicht folgen, und doch nicht auf deine Wünsche verzichten willst, so habe ich einen zweiten Vorschlag.” L. C. Valckenaer in his edition of the play (Lugduni Batavorum 1768) paraphrases 508: “Sic tamen stat sententia, aliud meum nunc sequere consilium; hoc enim erit secundi beneficii loco.”

The difficulty with all these explanations is surely that *δευτέρα* . . . *χάρις* is far too abrupt an introduction to this alleged “second favor” or “second plan” of the nurse. As W. S. Hadley has pointed out in his edition (Cambridge 1902), some word like *ἤδε* would be needed to make it even possible. H. Weil has attempted to meet the difficulty by an unjustified change in the text of the preceding sentence, so that the “second favor” is already indicated in it:

χρή τέ μ' ἐνὸς ἀμαρτάνειν
τόδ' οὖν πιθοῦ μοι. *δευτέρα* κτλ.

⁷ So, with minor variations, J. H. Monk (Cambridge 1813), A. Matthiae (Oxford 1831), J. Thompson and B. J. Hayes (London n.d.), in their editions, and U. von Wilamowitz (Berlin 1891) and G. Murray (London 1904) in their translations and notes.

(*εἰ δ' οὖν*), then "the confirming sentence *δευτέρα γὰρ ἡ χάρις* expresses the *pis aller* which is no longer a matter of doubt since the best route is closed." In support of his interpretation of *εἰ δ' οὖν* in this passage, Wilamowitz cites Sophocles, *Antigone* 720 ff., as indeed have other editors before him, though not always in support of the same conclusion.⁸ But surely all that is required of the idiom is that it should introduce a clause in which, as Denniston puts it, "... a speaker hypothetically grants a supposition which he denies, doubts or reprobates."⁹ If, to suit another interpretation of this passage, we take *εἰ δ' οὖν* here as resumptive of *εἰ τοι δοκεῖ σοι*, this requirement is certainly met, for then the nurse would be understood as granting to a stubborn Phaedra a position which she has, in the circumstances, already derided at 490 ff. and 500.

However, the main difficulty in the interpretation just summarized lies in its general sense in the larger context of the passage. In the present speech the nurse insists, in contrast with her admissions at 493 ff. and 500, that the remedy which she is now proposing—and which has only just come into her mind (510)—will cure Phaedra "on no shameful conditions" (511);¹⁰ and *after* this speech Phaedra, who has hitherto resisted the nurse's persuasions, yields at least a grudging compliance. Hence it seems unlikely that the nurse is here simply repeating the argument which she has already made in her preceding speeches.

Another more recent interpretation of the sentence *δευτέρα . . . χάρις* also fails to meet the requirements of the context and introduces, with singular abruptness, a new idea of dubious relevance. This interpretation has been expressed in English by Hadley as "gratitude is a secondary consideration" and in French by Méridier as "la faveur est peu d'importance".¹¹ But in this

⁸ Wecklein cites the *Antigone* passage in support of the same rendering of *εἰ δ' οὖν* as Wilamowitz advances. Dindorf, however, in his edition of the *Hippolytus* (Oxford 1839) cites the same passage to support the different view that here *εἰ δ' οὖν* means *εἰ δὲ μὴ δοκεῖ σοι ἀμαρτάνειν*. So also Matthiae, whom Dindorf cites.

⁹ For the general "rule" quoted, see J. W. Denniston, *The Greek Particles*² (Oxford 1954) 465. However, Denniston includes the occurrence of *εἰ δ' οὖν* at *Hipp.* 508 among a small group of examples in which "*εἰ δ' οὖν* virtually stands for *εἰ δὲ μὴ*." (*ibid.* 466). Thus Denniston would presumably construe the passage as Dindorf and Matthiae do (above, note 8).

¹⁰ Contrast the admission expressed in *αἴσχρο'* (500) with the present claim *οὐτ' ἐπ' αἰσχροῖς* (511).

¹¹ See the editions of Hadley (above, note 6) and Méridier (above, note 4) *ad loc.*

passionate argument about death or honor, no one, not even the nurse, has been considering the question of gratitude for friendly offices.

We want, then, an interpretation of this speech which will suit the idea that the nurse is, at least ostensibly, changing her plan and which will harmonize with the syntax and language of verse 508—especially with *charis*, which is a favorite Euripidean term. Leaving aside, for a moment verses 513–15, which involve a further problem, I suggest the following translation:

If that is what you think (i.e. if you really have such high principles), then it was not right for you to go astray (i.e. by falling in love); however, if that is really your view of the matter, then listen to what I now have to suggest; *for the actual gratification of your love is a secondary consideration*. I have in the house certain soothing love-charms—indeed they've only just now come into my mind—which, on no shameful terms and with no injury to your mind, will cure you of your disease, if only your courage weakens not (507–12).

Of the use of *charis* as “gratification” or “delight” there are, of course, many examples.¹² In an erotic context, it is true, *charis* often refers to the charm which evokes love, as in Euripides, *Bacchae* 236 and *Helena* 1397, though in such usages cause and effect are sometimes hard to distinguish. At *Hippolytus* 526–27 (in the chorus following the present episode), we find *charis* used of the delight which love brings, though here the delight comes to the *psychê*.¹³ Pindar also uses *charis* in an erotic connection: *χάριτας τ' Ἀφροδισίων ἐρώτων* (fr. 128.1), but the limitation of the context renders the exact sense of *χάριτας* (“graces”? “joys”? “delights”?) somewhat uncertain.¹⁴ However, Plato

¹² See *LSJ*, s.v., iv.

¹³ One is tempted also to cite *Hec.* 830–32. There Hecuba seeks to secure Agamemnon's cooperation by pointing out that, if he refuses, neither Cassandra nor she will have any reward or thanks (*χάριν*, 830) for her daughter's (forced) embraces. She goes on to say that from such erotic activities comes the greatest *χάρις* for mortals (831–32); in these two uses of *charis*, the gratitude and the delight or satisfaction which causes it are close enough together for us almost to suspect Euripides of a pun. (For the play on the word *charis* throughout this tragedy, see my article, “Euripides' *Hecuba*”, *AJP* (Jan. 1961) 17, note 26 and pages 22–23). However, *Hec.* 831–32 have been rejected by most critics since Matthiae's (unjust?) condemnation of them (1831).

¹⁴ Cf. also Theognis, *El.* 2.1303 and 1331, where *charis* in the sense of “favor” or “gratification” is also used in an erotic context. Wilamowitz (above, note 7) in his note on our passage in the *Hippolytus* compares Plutarch, *Erot.* 5, in which *charis* is said

(*Phaedrus* 254A, 7) provides us with a clear illustration of *charis* used of the physical delights of love. This usage occurs in the passage in which "the ignoble steed in the soul heeds neither goad nor whip . . . but forces the other steed and the charioteer to rush toward the beloved and to recall the delight of love" (. . . *μνείαν ποιεῖσθαι τῆς τῶν ἀφροδισίων χάριτος*).

The significance and relevance of the statement at verse 508 appears, then, to be as follows. In the nurse's earlier suggestion which, bluntly stated, meant procuring Hippolytus for Phaedra as a desperate means of saving her life, *εὐνή* and *ἡδονή* have appeared (495) as an inevitable part of the rescue operation. However, as the nurse herself makes clear in this line, it is not for the sake of this pleasure that she has made her proposal which, as she admits, involves "base things" (*αἴσχρο'*, 500). When Phaedra continues to resist, she thinks, or pretends to think, of another solution: she suddenly remembers a magic charm, involving nothing base (*οὐτ' ἐπ' αἰσχροῖς*, 511), which will simply rid Phaedra of her love. In introducing this new solution, the nurse is now able to refer back to her previous deprecation of *εὐνή* and *ἡδονή* (which were, unfortunately, involved in her earlier plan) with the remark, "After all, your pleasure or gratification in this matter is quite secondary". ("So much the better", the implication is, "that I have now found a solution which does not involve them.")

One final difficulty must at least be mentioned, since it has a bearing on the ambiguity which we have been discussing in connection with verse 508. In verses 513–15, the nurse says that it is necessary to get some token (*σημεῖον*), a fragment either of speech or of clothing, from the beloved and *συνάψαι τ' ἐκ δυοῖν μίαν χάριν* (515). Many editors have deleted these lines. Of those who do translate them, some take *συνάψαι . . . χάριν* as describing, together with *σημεῖον . . . λαβεῖν* a part of the preparation necessary for making the magic work. (So Wilamowitz: ". . . beide müssen der gleichen Neigung willig sich ergeben"; and Thompson and Hayes: ". . . and from you both I must gain and knit fast your heart's consent.") Others, beginning with the scholiast on this line, appear to take the expression as referring either to the purpose or the effect of the magic spell, e.g.

to have been used by the ancients "of the yielding of the female to the male." This is, perhaps, a more specific, technical sense of the term than is wanted here.

We need or word or raiment's hem to twine
Amid the charm, and one spell knit from twain. (Murray)

. . . pour fondre deux êtres dans une même jouissance.
(Mérider)¹⁵

(The syntax of the line seems to support the first of these two main interpretations, since *συνάψαι* depends on *δεῖ* in strictly parallel, not consecutive *or* final, construction with *λαβεῖν*; however, this may be too pedantic a distinction to make in the context.) In any case, most meanings which have been given to this line seem, with the possible exception of Murray's, to suggest a more outspoken intention on the nurse's part of securing Hippolytus' love, or at least his complicity, than we would expect Phaedra to accept. If the lines are retained, Murray's version (if his translation of *charis* by "spell" can be accepted) is the one least prejudicial to my interpretation of the speech as a whole.

However, several editors have followed Kirchhoff and later Nauck in rejecting these lines (513–15). I am inclined to agree with this rejection on the grounds of their inconsistency both with the nurse's present approach and with what Phaedra says at verses 516 and 520. (At 516, Phaedra asks whether this drug consists of a "salve or a potion," and at 520 she abjures the nurse not to mention her troubles to Hippolytus.¹⁶)

Hadley has further suggested that the lines in question (513–15) "may well be an interpolation from the first edition." It is indeed tempting to ascribe not only the present difficulty but indeed much of the ambiguity and possible inconsistency of this scene as a whole to this cause. It is almost certain that in the earlier, lost *Hippolytus* (*Ἰππόλυτος καλυπτόμενος*), Phaedra did

¹⁵ Like the above translations is Matthiae's (above, note 7): " . . . oportet . . . aliquod signum . . . accipere, et conjungere ex duobus unum amorem," and A. S. Way's (Loeb edition, London 1912): " . . . so to knit two loves in one." Cf. also the scholiast on 514–15 who regards the words *συνάψαι* . . . *χάρην* as expressing the physiological result of the magic performed.

¹⁶ Wecklein and Hadley both reject 513–15 as destroying the ambiguity of the nurse's proposal, which they regard as an essential part of the scene; and Wecklein adds that Phaedra's question at 516 accords poorly with these lines. Thompson and Hayes also doubt the lines because of their inconsistency with 516. Mérider rejects the lines still more emphatically: " . . . il ne nous paraît pas douteux que les vers 513–15 ne soient une interpolation, et que Phèdre, abusée par la nourrice, ne voie dans le *φάρμακον* promis qu'un moyen de guérir sa passion, et non de l'assouvir. Autrement, l'attitude qu'elle observe ensuite serait inexplicable, et l'on ne comprendrait pas les vers 518 et 520" (*Notice* [above, note 5] 18).

give in to her passion, and it is at least probable that she herself made a declaration to her step-son.¹⁷ Thus one of the essential differences in the later version must surely lie in the comparatively innocent characterization of Phaedra, for most of the guilt for the involvement of Hippolytus now rests upon the nurse. However, we cannot tell from our fragmentary knowledge of the earlier play just what circumstances surrounded this involvement; hence we cannot say how, if at all, they gave rise to the difficulties in the scene now under discussion. Perhaps the most that can be said on this point is that, since this is a scene in which arose the most crucial differences between the two plays with regard to the treatment of Phaedra, of the nurse and of the manner in which Hippolytus was to be involved, it was a scene which would be particularly liable to ambiguity and uncertainty (including, perhaps, textual uncertainty) arising from confusion between the two editions or possibly even from incomplete revision on the part of the dramatist himself.

¹⁷ The evidence for this view, which is well known, is convincingly presented by Méridier, *Notice* (above, note 5) 13 ff. However, agreement with Méridier on this point does not imply agreement with all details of his reconstruction of Euripides' first *Hippolytus*.