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EURIPIDES

Stories, texts & stagecraft

Edited by Mattia De Poli

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7.

***Hippolytus*' Songs and Musical Innovations
in the Attic Tragedy.**

Mattia De Poli

A general survey.

Many features of the songs in Euripides' *Hippolytus* (428 BC)¹ are unusual or actually original, as far as we can guess.

First, in the prologue (61-71) a group of attendants following the protagonist plays the role of a secondary chorus, which is also in two earlier Attic tragedies – in Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women* (463 BC) 1034-1061 and *Eumenides* (458 BC) 1032-1047 – but always right at the end of the exodus, so it appears after the main chorus.² The Danaids and their maidservants or the Argive guards³ sing in a dialogue form and the Athena's women cult-personnel perform the processional song while the Erynies-Semnai are leaving. In both these Aeschylean cases the secondary chorus has some interaction with the main chorus, but in Euripides' *Hippolytus* the attendants have neither dialogue nor involvement with the women of Trozen: when they start singing at 121, the secondary chorus has already gone away (113).⁴

¹ For the chronology, see AVEZZÙ 2003.

² Maybe, another secondary chorus is again in Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women* 825-865, in the middle of the play, but it is very uncertain: see FRIIS JOHANSEN, WHITTLE 1980, 3: 171-174, 306-308. Euripides employed a secondary chorus also in later tragedies, like *Antiope* (427-423 BC), *Phaeton* (420 BC or later), *Alexander* (415 BC).

³ On the identity of this secondary chorus, see TAPLIN 1977: 230-238; MIRALLES 2011; NARDIELLO 2007.

⁴ If we suppose that the secondary chorus shares the space with the main chorus, probably the seven lines prayer to Aphrodite (114-120) uttered by one of the *Hippolytus*' servants is necessary even to let the attendants exit and the women of Trozen enter.

Then, the main chorus sings a quite rare infraepisodic song (362-372)⁵ in the first episode, but the most relevant is that it is in responson with a monody (669-679) sung by Phaedra in the second episode: it has no real parallel in tragedy.⁶ Moreover, monody is a feature of Euripides' poetry and, although the first solo song we can list is probably Heracles' one in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* (later than 438 BC) 993-1042, Euripides exploits it more largely and originally: in this play three different characters sing a monody for each one⁷ and in the exodus Hippolytus' solo (1347-1388) is the first instance of an astrophic actor's song in Attic drama.

Finally, Theseus' monody (817-851) has a peculiar internal structure: it consists of a traditional strophic pair and strophe and antistrophe are separated by two lines spoken by the chorus (834-835), just like Eumelus' monody in *Alcestis* (438 BC) 393-415 and many other ones in later tragedies, but in each stanza four dochmiacs alternate with a couple of iambic trimeters three times before a final sequence of seven dochmiacs. Such alternation is usual in epirrhematic amoibaion, that was performed by two characters or a character and the chorus, so it seems that in Euripides' *Hippolytus* Theseus plays both roles just singing his monody. Usually «the contrast in metre ... serves to bring out a contrast of emotion: the dochmiac character excited or distraught, the iambic character calm».⁸ One would expect a male character, a hero and a king like Theseus to be calmer even in sufferings, but he feels completely upset and disrupted after his wife's death: so the original metrical structure of that monody mirrors his internal conflict between violent grief and self-control.⁹

This general survey shows that in *Hippolytus* Euripides uses some innovative or rare solutions in choral songs (an independent secondary chorus, infraepisodic choral song) and explores different possibilities also for actor's songs: every single monody in this play has a singular form (in correspondence at distance with the infraepisodic choral song or astrophic structure), even the more traditional one (strophic but "epirrhematic" structure).

⁵ In earlier tragedies we find other choral songs like this just in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* 152-163 and Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* 205-224. See CENTANNI 1991.

⁶ According to BARRETT 1964: 224-225, «this correspondence at a distance, though not uncommon in comedy, is remarkable in tragedy: *Orestes* 1353-1365 ~ 1537-1548, two stanzas from the Chorus sandwiching the scene with the Phrygian, is not real parallel». Anyway, the attribution of the infraepisodic song to the Chorus Leader is unnecessary, since chorus' lines are in responson with actors' lines also elsewhere: see DE POLI 2011: 27-31. Cf. Euripides, *Orestes* 140-165, and see DI BENEDETTO 1961.

⁷ See DE POLI 2011: 6; DE POLI 2005.

⁸ BARRETT 1964: 319.

⁹ According to BARNER 1971: 292, Theseus sings an epirrhematic amoibaion by his own. See DE POLI 2011: 35-38.

The epirrhematic amoibaion (569-595).

At the end of the first episode a self-confident Nurse enter the palace in order to inform Hippolytus about Phaedra's erotic passion and persuade him to return it. Then the chorus sings the first stasimon, that looks like a hymn to Eros: not a real celebration, but a pray with some apotropaic formulas. Suddenly Phaedra interrupts the choral song and asks for silence (565), because she is listening to the voices coming from inside the palace. The women of Trozen can't hear anything, but they finally obey (568). Now Euripides inserts an epirrhematic amoibaion (569-595):¹⁰

Φα. ἰὼ μοι, αἰαῖ· ὦ δυστάλαινα τῶν ἐμῶν παθημάτων.	570
Χο. τίνα θροεῖς αὐδάν; τίνα βοᾷς λόγον; ἔνεπε, τίς φοβεῖ σε φήμα, γύναι, φρένας ἐπίσσυτος;	
Φα. ἀπωλόμεσθα· ταῖσδ' ἐπιστᾶσαι πύλαις ἀκούσαθ' οἷος κέλαδος ἐν δόμοις πίτνει.	575
Χο. σὺ παρὰ κληῖθρα, σοὶ μέλει πομπίμα Φάτις δωμάτων· ἔνεπε δ' ἔνεπέ μοι, τί ποτ' ἔβα κακόν;	580
Φα. ὁ τῆς φιλίππου παῖς Ἀμαζόνος βοᾷ Ἴππόλυτος, αὐδῶν δεινὰ πρόσπολον κακά.	
Χο. ἰὰν μὲν κλύω, σαφὲς δ' οὐκ ἔχω· γεγώνει δ' οἶα διὰ πύλας ἔμολεν ἔμολέ σοι βοά.	585
Φα. καὶ μὴν σαφῶς γε τὴν κακῶν προμνήστριαν, τὴν δεσπότην προδοῦσαν ἔξαιδαι λέχος.	590
ὦμοι ἐγὼ κακῶν. Χο. προδέδοσαι, φίλα. τί σοι μήσομαι; τὰ κρυπτά γὰρ πέφηνε, διὰ δ' ὄλλυσαι,	(Φα. αἰαῖ ἔ ἔ)
πρόδοτος ἐκ φίλων.	595

Ph. Oh, alas, alas! Oh, what suffering is mine!

Ch. What is the word you uttered, the message you cry out? Tell us, lady: what report is it that affrights you, rushing upon your heart?

Ph. I am destroyed! Stand next to this door and hear what kind of turmoil is falling on the house.

Ch. You are by the door. Tidings transmitted from the house are for you to tell. Tell me, tell me, what disaster has come upon you?

Ph. It is Hippolytus, son of the horse-loving Amazon, who shouts, calling my servant dreadful names!

Ch. I hear a voice, but I do not hear its message clearly. Utter aloud to me what kind of cry it is that comes to you through the door.

¹⁰ This is my personal arrangement of the text. For a discussion of textual matters, see DE POLI 2013: 172-174.

Ph. It's clear enough. He calls her pander for the wicked, one who has betrayed her master's marriage bed! Oh, disaster!

Ch. You are betrayed, my friend! What can I do for you? What was hidden is now revealed and you are ruined – (*Ph.* Oh! ah!) – betrayed by one close to you!¹¹

Scholars often compare this amoibaion to other duets in the Euripidean tragedies, where usually one of the principal characters sings the lyric lines (mainly dochmiacs), while another character or the chorus leader uttered the spoken ones (often iambic trimeters) and the difference in delivery mirrors the contrast between the former's excitement and the other's calm. So William Barrett can conclude that «here the situation is reversed», since Phaedra mostly uses spoken trimeters expressing her «quietude of resolved despair» and the Chorus «breaks into the agitation of dochmiacs».¹² But this statements are grounded on later Euripidean tragedies, like *Andromache* (426-421 BC), *Trojan Women* (415 BC), *Ion* (414? BC) and *Helen* (412 BC)

Formally the situation is not reversed, if we just consider the earlier Aeschylean tragedies: both in *Seven Against Thebes* (467 BC) at 203-244 and in *Suppliant Women* (463 BC) at 348-454 the Chorus sings lyric lines and a character speaks in iambic trimeters and, if the young women of Thebes and the Danaus' daughters are really excited, Eteocles and the Argive king Pelasgus are quite calm and firm in their own decisions.¹³ So, accepting that «there is no wild outburst» in Phaedra's voice,¹⁴ we should admit that Aeschylus' poetry had an influence on this amoibaion, that is not innovative at all.

On the other hand, Phaedra shows her final determination to suicide only at 599-600, after the end of this amoibaion, and the women of Trozen are very clear in stating that she is crying (571-572; cf. 569 and later 591, 594) and she is frightened (573). The Chorus is actually worried about her situation and tries to express its sympathy through many interrogative sentences, but we can't imagine Phaedra as an indifferent and well-determined woman at that moment. A better parallel is Tecmessa in Sophocles' *Ajax* (450? or 440? BC) at 879-973, after discovering Ajax' suicide: both the female characters seem to become conscious of their own situations (Euripides, *Hippolytus* 575; Sophocles, *Ajax* 896 οἴχωκ', ὄλωλα, διαπεπόρημαι) and interweave iambic trimeters with *extra metrum* cries (Euripides, *Hippolytus* 569, 594 and cf. 591 probably *in metro*; Sophocles, *Ajax* 891, 893, 937, 939).¹⁵ They are in absolute loneliness and the choruses can't really support them, but Tecmessa's inability to find a remedy

¹¹ Translation adapted from KOVACS 1995: 179-181.

¹² BARRETT 1964: 266-267. See also HALLERAN 1995: 199; KANNICHT 1969, 2: 175-176.

¹³ See DI MARCO 2009: 257, 265-266.

¹⁴ BARRETT 1964: 267.

¹⁵ For a deeper analysis, see DE POLI 2013: 159-177, also comparing Euripides, *Alcestis* (438 BC) 861-934, *Medea* (431 BC) 96-213 and 1270a-1281, *The Children of Heracles* (430-425 BC) 73-110.

(Sophocles, *Ajax* 920 τί δράσω;)¹⁶ moves to the chorus' inadequacy to make any suggestion (Euripides, *Hippolytus* 592 τί σοι μήσομαι;): Phaedra will later find a solution by herself in suicide. So iambic trimeters don't imply determination and strength of mind of a character but, set against lyric metres, they mark the distance between him and the chorus, his solitude and maybe his shock.

Finally, the choral song is monostrophic and consists of four short stanzas: as far as we know, it is a structure quite usual in comedy¹⁷ and we find it also in the Euripidean satyr-play, *Cyclops* 483-518, but it has no parallel in tragedy. Again a traditional pattern like the strophic song is forced.

Conclusion.

Hippolytus' songs show that, even when taking from Aeschylus or Sophocles, Euripides is always attempting innovative solutions. This play belongs to an initial stage of the Euripidean work,¹⁸ but it probably marks the starting point in the evolution of his poetry within the framework of the so-called "New music".

¹⁶ Cf. Euripides, *Alcestis* 1271.

¹⁷ Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 836-841 ~ 842-846 ~ 847-852 ~ 853-859 (x4); *Knights* 973-976 ~ 977-980 ~ 981-984 ~ 985-988 ~ 989-992 ~ 993-996 (x6), 1111-1120 ~ 1121-1130 ~ 1131-1140 ~ 1141-1150 (x4); *Thesmophoriazousae* 959-962 ~ 963-965 ~ 966-968 (x3); *Frogs* 397-402 ~ 403-408 ~ 409-413 (x3); 416-418 ~ 419-421 ~ 422-424 ~ 425-427 ~ 428-430 ~ 431-433 (x6); 814-817 ~ 818-821 ~ 822-825 ~ 826-829 (x4). See PRATO 1962.

¹⁸ For similarities in the amoibaia, POPP 1971 groups *Hippolytus*, *Andromache*, *Suppliant Women* and *Electra*, but I would prefer to group *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Hippolytus* and maybe *The Children of Heracles*. Popp's selection works well for the monody.

10.

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