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"I Honour Those Who Reverence My Power": Gods, Humans, and the Breaking of Social and Religious Rules In Euripides' *Hippolytus*

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Abstract

It is argued in this article that the gods in Euripides' tragedy *Hippolytus* are equally concerned with testing and breaking their rules of conduct and behaviour as the humans are. The gods in the *Hippolytus* are repeatedly confronted with conflicting divine norms and laws which are essential for the dramatic progress, yet these lead to various inter-divine conflicts. Furthermore, it is demonstrated that the divine descent of Hippolytus adds to the complexity of his character, a character who stands between the world of the humans and the gods.

Keywords

Euripides; *Hippolytus*; gods; humans; Poseidon; Aphrodite; Artemis

Introduction

Euripides' tragedy *Hippolytus* is a play of extremes: a play chiefly about emotional and sexual passion, but also a play about abuse, suppression, rejection, revenge, anger, regret, and misunderstandings. The overarching principle that drives most of these emotions and misunderstandings is the constant compulsion to test and break established social and religious rules. On the level of the mortals and their interpersonal relations in the drama, the urge to do so is obvious: Phaedra threatens to violate the laws of marital fidelity towards her husband Theseus by committing incest with her stepson Hippolytus (although Hippolytus and Phaedra are not consanguineous, they nevertheless become relatives through the marital bond between Phaedra and Theseus in a juridical sense).[1] Phaedra's ἔρως ("desire") and her αἰδώς ("sense of shame") are the two antagonistic forces that penetrate – and eventually destroy – her and her family.[2] *Mutatis mutandis*, Hippolytus and Theseus break the rules in a similar vein: Hippolytus does so by refusing to indulge in the pleasures of love and sex like every other human being, as a result of which he pleases Artemis, the huntress and goddess of chastity, but also insults Aphrodite, the goddess and patroness of love, sex, and passion.[3] Theseus, in turn, breaches the holy customs of paternal love and protection by cursing his son and thus condemning him to death without first examining the accusations made against the latter.

The focus of this article will be on divine action in the drama.[4] How, when, and why are rules and norms abided by, and trespassed, by the gods in Euripides' *Hippolytus*? In essence, it will be demonstrated that the gods in the *Hippolytus* are equally concerned with testing and breaking their rules of conduct and behaviour as the humans are. Furthermore, I will attempt to show that the gods in the *Hippolytus* are repeatedly confronted with conflicting divine norms and laws which are essential for the dramatic progress, yet these lead to various inter-divine conflicts at the same time. Finally, it will be argued that the divine descent of Hippolytus – going back to the paternal as well as the maternal

1 A sexual relationship between stepmother and stepson would in all likelihood have been considered incestuous by the contemporary Athenian audience. On intergenerational incest in classical Athens, see e.g. Thompson (1967); Karabélias (1989: pp. 236–241); Humphreys (1994). On the abomination felt towards incest, see Parker (1983: p. 98): "Incest, particularly that between generations, is [...] one of the supreme horrors of the imagination that define by contrast the norms of ordered existence. It lies in a sense beyond pollution, because it is beyond purification." See further MacDowell (1978: pp. 124–126) on sexual offences in classical Athens.

2 Phaedra reflects the tension between these two forces in her long speech in *Hipp.* 373–430. The nature of, and relation between, ἔρως and αἰδώς as presented there have been subject to heavy scholarly debate; see, in particular, Holzhausen (1995) and Holzhausen (2003) vs Manuwald (1978: pp. 134–148) and Manuwald (2000: pp. 59–79). Further, also see Segal (1970); Köhnken (1980); Cairns (1993: pp. 314–340); Brillante (2006).

3 It has been argued that Hippolytus' rejection of Aphrodite, as well as his fanaticism for Artemis, were inventions by Euripides for dramatic reasons: see Danek (1992: p. 26).

4 On the gods portrayed by Euripides in general, see e.g. Wildberg (2002); Mastronarde (2010: pp. 153–206); Lefkowitz (2016). On the gods and the divine specifically in the *Hippolytus*, see e.g. Köhnken (1972: pp. 179–190); Kullmann (1987: pp. 7–22); Goff (1990: pp. 81–90); Nikolsky (2015: pp. 93–121).

side – is a significant factor which adds to the complexity of the character of Hippolytus, a character who stands between different worlds in several respects.

Poseidon and the curse of Theseus

There are three divinities in Euripides' *Hippolytus* that have an operative function: Aphrodite, Artemis, and Poseidon, with Aphrodite and Artemis appearing physically on stage. Despite the role of the gods in this drama, there has been a long tradition in scholarship that regards the gods as mere personifications of the inner life of the humans involved, that is, of their emotions and their passions, along with their suppression and rejection of these feelings. For example, Albin Lesky, in his influential *History of Greek Literature*, stated (Lesky [3]1971: pp. 421–422):

> By no means did Euripides believe in the existence of such gods [...]. In the *Hippolytus* [...] Aphrodite and Artemis are symbols derived from popular belief which lead to a quick and immediate understanding of the fundamental forces that advance the play.[5]

Leaving aside the irrelevant question about Euripides' alleged personal beliefs, Lesky's interpretation of Aphrodite and Artemis as mere symbols is, in my opinion, fundamentally flawed. On the contrary, as other scholars have rightly pointed out before, the reality of the two goddesses is manifested throughout the entire play.[6] Aphrodite and Artemis are present as characters in the drama, framing both its beginning and ending;[7] Artemis enters into dialogue at the end of the play with both Theseus (ll. 1283–1342) and Hippolytus (ll. 1389–1439); and, in addition to this, the statues of the two goddesses were present on stage at the original debut performance of the play, as indirect stage directions clearly indicate.[8] Poseidon, in turn, is not present in the play as a character, but he is a predominant divine actor because he implements Theseus' wish to destroy Hippolytus. Theseus curses his son after reading the false suicide note left by Phaedra in

5 My translation. German original: "Keinesfalls hat Euripides an die Existenz solcher Götter geglaubt [...]. [I]m *Hippolytos* [...] sind Aphrodite und Artemis dem Volksglauben entnommene Symbole, die rasch und unmittelbar zum Verständnis der das Spiel bewegenden Grundkräfte führen." Along similar lines, see also e.g. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1891: pp. 52–53) and Webster (1967: p. 295).

6 See e.g. Köhnken (1972); Kovacs (1987: pp. 71–77); Matthiessen (2002: pp. 77–78); Matthiessen (2004: pp. 62–63). Further, see Conacher (1967: pp. 47–53) for an overview and discussion of differing views.

7 On this divine framing, see Köhnken (1972). On Artemis as the play's *dea ex machina*, the discussion by Spira (1960: pp. 85–93) is still relevant; for a more recent discussion, see Goff (1990: pp. 106–113). There are another five tragedies by Euripides which are opened by a prologue spoken by a divinity (*Alcestis*, *Hecuba*, *The Trojan Women*, *Ion*, and *The Bacchae*; see Erbse 1984: pp. 22–100), but only another two display a similar technique of framing the drama with divine appearances at the beginning and at the end (*Ion* and *The Bacchae*; see Matthiessen 2002: pp. 61–65).

8 Hippolytus garlands the statue of Artemis (ll. 82–83) and he bids it farewell when he leaves into exile (l. 1092). The statue of Aphrodite is addressed and greeted on several occasions (ll. 101, 117, 522, 1461). The idea that the divinity was present in his/her statue was common in antiquity; see Steiner (2001).

which she falsely accused her stepson of having violated her. He does so by calling upon Poseidon and asking him to instantly kill Hippolytus (ll. 887–890):

> ἀλλ', ὦ πάτερ Πόσειδον, ἃς ἐμοί ποτε
> ἀρὰς ὑπέσχου τρεῖς, μιᾷ κατέργασαι
> τούτων ἐμὸν παῖδ', ἡμέραν δὲ μὴ φύγοι
> τήνδ', εἴπερ ἡμῖν ὤπασας σαφεῖς ἀράς.
> Father Poseidon! [With] the three curses you once
> promised me: with one [of them] finish off
> my son, and may he not escape this day,
> if indeed you have granted me true curses.[9]

It is not stated in the play and thus not explicit as to why Poseidon ever granted Theseus the fulfilment of the three curses, and there are no parallel sources that can testify to this element of the story. Hence, it has been suggested that Euripides must have invented it (or at least that he must have adjusted it from earlier tradition in order to make it suit his ends).[10] The purpose of this invention is thus of a dramatic nature, because it would be otherwise highly unlikely for Poseidon to grant Theseus his wish to killing his own grandson if he had not been bound by an oath to do so.[11] In this context, two important rules concerning the relationship between mortals and immortals in ancient Greek religion and mythology come to the fore – and into conflict with one another. The first is that the ancient gods are always exceedingly fond of their human offspring (or of other humans with whom they have a special relationship) and do whatever they can to protect and (if necessary) save them. Two classical examples from the *Iliad* are Thetis, who cares so much for her son Achilles that she successfully begs Zeus to make the entire Achaean army suffer for the misbehaviour of one man, Agamemnon (*Il.* 1.495–530); and Zeus, who is devastated because he cannot prevent the death of his son Sarpedon – or, rather, he could technically have prevented it, but is dissuaded from doing so by Hera as such an act would conflict with Sarpedon's allotted μοῖρα ("destiny") and might incite further

9 The Greek text of Eur. *Hipp.* used in this article is that by Stockert (1994); translations are adapted from those by Lawall & Lawall (1986) and Kovacs (1995).

10 It has been speculated that there must have existed a traditional motif according to which Theseus had three wishes from his father Poseidon, but that Euripides changed the wishes to curses because Theseus could otherwise have used his next wish to undo the first – whereas a curse cannot be used in order to eradicate the previous one (see Barrett 1964: pp. 334–335 and Roth 2015: p. 245). A counterargument against this assumption is that the Greek word ἀρά does, in fact, not only mean "curse", but also "wish" (see Halleran 1995: pp. 224–225 and Pulleyn 2008: pp. 70–76); hence, Euripides' word choice is ambiguous. Furthermore, Kohn (2008: p. 379, n.1) points to the fact that "the irreversibility of a wish" was part of the fairy tale-like motif of "the three futile wishes." For more on the motif, see also Gregory (2009).

11 See Kohn (2008: p. 387): "If Theseus had simply invoked his past services to Poseidon, the god would likely have refused the request. And it is doubtful that he would have answered the prayer of one member of his family to kill another. But by using one of the wishes, Theseus has trapped Poseidon in a bind as tight as that with which Phaethon bound Hyperion."

rescue missions by other gods (*Il.* 16.431–461).[12] The classical example of a goddess being fond of a non-related human is that of Athena and Odysseus; in the *Hippolytus*, Artemis is exceedingly fond of Hippolytus, and Adonis is "the dearest of mortals" (φίλτατος [...] βροτῶν, l. 1421) to Aphrodite.[13] By killing his own grandson, Poseidon transgresses this (unwritten but important) rule. He does so because he must obey a second – more important – law: gods are equally bound by their oaths as humans are. Indeed, the effect of an oath can go so far as it does here, namely, that a god is bound by an oath sworn to a human.[14] Consequently, the death of Hippolytus is, essentially, the result of a conflict between two divine rules of conduct; one rule (viz., the divine love for mortal offspring) is superseded by another, superior rule (viz., the binding character of oaths).

At the same time, Poseidon also becomes the agent by whom Aphrodite's wishes are carried out, since it is Aphrodite who intends to destroy Hippolytus from the start, not Poseidon. All Aphrodite does is make Phaedra fall in love with her stepson; everything else unfolds by and of itself, without any further active intervention by Aphrodite. Therefore, by introducing the motif of Poseidon being bound by an oath to execute Theseus' wish, Euripides implicitly also introduces an inter-divine conflict. Poseidon does not wish to kill his grandson, but he must do so because his son asks him to – a wish resultant of Aphrodite's vengeance, and thus an implementation of her desired course of action. While Aphrodite is the one who pulls the strings, she does not actively take action: others are made to do the dirty work for her.

Aphrodite, Artemis, and the law of non-interference

The next question that comes to the fore is why Aphrodite is able to have her will enacted without any obstacle – and, in particular, why Artemis, who is venerated by Hippolytus and therefore cares for him, does not interfere. Again, an essential divine rule of conduct is decisive here: gods do not interfere with another's domains and do not trespass into one another's areas of responsibility. Aphrodite is the goddess of love and passion, and if she wants to punish Hippolytus because he does not follow her or obey her rules, this is not something Artemis can successfully oppose. Artemis notes this rule of conduct in an unmistakably clear manner in her dialogue with Theseus towards the end of the play (ll. 1329–1335):

12 On the wrath of Thetis resulting from the mistreatment of her son Achilles, see Slatkin (1986). On the conflict of interest between Zeus' wish to save his son and the *lex superior* of the μοῖρα, see e.g. Erbse (1986: pp. 201–202, 287–288) and Graziosi & Haubold (2005: pp. 90–92). On the cosmic order in Homer, see Allan (2006).

13 Otherwise, the gods are normally not particularly fond of humans in general and do not show particular compassion for them, as is obvious in the case of Aphrodite in the *Hippolytus*, who has no scruples in destroying Hippolytus simply to set an example.

14 See e.g. Hes. *Theog.* 793–804. On oaths sworn by gods to humans, see Torrance (2014: pp. 202–203).

[...] θεοῖσι δ᾽ ὧδ᾽ ἔχει νόμος·
οὐδεὶς ἀπαντᾶν βούλεται προθυμίᾳ
τῇ τοῦ θέλοντος, ἀλλ᾽ ἀφιστάμεσθ᾽ ἀεί.
ἐπεί, σάφ᾽ ἴσθι, Ζῆνα μὴ φοβουμένη
οὐκ ἄν ποτ᾽ ἦλθον ἐς τόδ᾽ αἰσχύνης ἐγὼ
ὥστ᾽ ἄνδρα πάντων φίλτατον βροτῶν ἐμοὶ
θανεῖν ἐᾶσαι. [...]
[...] Among the gods the law is this:
None [of us] is willing to oppose the will of [another one
who] wants [to do something], but we always step aside.
For, be assured, if I did not fear Zeus,
I would never have come to this degree of disgrace
to allow the man who is dearest to me of all mortals
to die. [...]

Again, two norms of divine conduct collide; the above-sketched rule that the gods love, protect, and save their mortal offspring appears to be, through the events, subordinate to the νόμος ("law") of non-interference in the will and the spheres of influence of other gods. As one commentator of the *Hippolytus* aptly states, the "principle of divine non-intervention, sanctioned by Zeus," is "nowhere else so baldly formulated" as here, but it is already "implicit in the divine activities in Homer, where for all their fighting against each other, the gods ultimately respect Zeus' will and/or fate" (Halleran 1995: p. 261).[15] Therefore, there is nothing Artemis would be able to do to prevent the death of her protégé. However, she goes the distance within the limits of what she can do. For one, she promises Hippolytus *post mortem* recompense through the endowment of his cult in Troezen (ll. 1423–1430).[16] In addition, she predicts that she will be responsible for the death of Aphrodite's beloved in revenge (ll. 1420–1422):

ἐγὼ γὰρ αὐτῆς ἄλλον ἐξ ἐμῆς χερὸς
ὅς ἄν μάλιστα φίλτατος κυρῇ βροτῶν
τόξοις ἀφύκτοις τοῖσδε τιμωρήσομαι.
For *I* will take revenge on another one from my own hand,
whoever happens to be the dearest of mortals to her,
with these inescapable arrows.

15 Halleran (1995: p. 261) mentions several other Euripidean passages where the same νόμος is also spelt out. See also Erbse (1984: p. 46). The statement by Lawall & Lawall (1986: p. 142) that "this peculiar law of the gods seems to have been invented by Euripides" is clearly not correct. It is, however, true that Zeus must remind the gods of this rule of conduct occasionally, as he famously does in *Il.* 8.5–27.

16 On the Hippolytus cults in Troezen and Athens, see Burkert (1979: pp. 111–118); Jeny (1989); Papamichael (1993: pp. 117–122); Lefkowitz (2016: pp. 234–235). See also the commentaries by Barrett (1964: pp. 3–6); Halleran (1995: pp. 21–25); Roth (2015: pp. 10–12). The Troezenian Hippolytus cult is described by Pausianias (2.34.1–4).

As seen above, the fact that Poseidon is forced to do the dirty work for Aphrodite insinuates an inter-divine conflict – one that remains implicit. The conflict between Aphrodite and Artemis, on the other hand, is explicitly stated. The law of non-interference does not allow Artemis to curtail Aphrodite's plans to destroy Hippolytus, but it still allows her an avenue to take revenge on Aphrodite's "dearest of mortals," that is, Adonis.[17] In other words, the law of non-interference will indirectly be the source of further inter-divine conflict.

The decisive role of Aphrodite is most apparent in her prologue speech (ll. 1–57) – which is immediately followed by a hymn to Artemis that is voiced by Hippolytus and his comrades (ll. 58–72). Via the juxtaposition of the Aphrodite prologue and the Artemis hymn at the beginning of the drama (before the parodos), the conflict between Aphrodite and Artemis, and their diverging interests and areas of responsibility, are made abundantly clear. The beginning of Aphrodite's speech is as follows (ll. 1–8):

> Πολλὴ μὲν ἐν βροτοῖσι κοὐκ ἀνώνυμος
> θεὰ κέκλημαι Κύπρις οὐρανοῦ τ' ἔσω·
> ὅσοι τε Πόντου τερμόνων τ' Ἀτλαντικῶν
> ναίουσιν εἴσω, φῶς ὁρῶντες ἡλίου,
> τοὺς μὲν σέβοντας τἀμὰ πρεσβεύω κράτη,
> σφάλλω δ' ὅσοι φρονοῦσιν εἰς ἡμᾶς μέγα.
> ἔνεστι γὰρ δὴ κἀν θεῶν γένει τόδε·
> τιμώμενοι χαίρουσιν ἀνθρώπων ὕπο.
> Powerful among the mortals and not without a name
> I am, the goddess called Kypris, and in heaven;
> and those who live between the Pontic Sea and the
> boundaries of Atlas, seeing the light of the sun,
> [of them] I honour those who reverence my power,
> but I overthrow those who think highly against me.
> For, in the species of the gods this [trait] exists too:
> they enjoy being venerated by humans.

It is explicitly noted here that no one is immune to the infliction of sexual and emotional passion; everyone falls in love, and everyone feels sexual lust and physical attraction towards others. Aphrodite could therefore be surmised to be the most powerful of all divinities because her sphere of influence reaches everywhere and affects both humans and gods, including Zeus. Euripides resorts to this topos elsewhere: at *Troad.* 949–950, he has Helen excuse her submission to Aphrodite by making her argue that "[Zeus] holds sway over all the other divinities / but is a slave to her" (ὃς τῶν μὲν ἄλλων

17 According to Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.183 (Dräger 2005), Adonis was killed because of Artemis' anger. See the commentaries by Barrett (1964: p. 412); Lawall & Lawall (1986: p. 147); Halleran (1995: 265); Roth (2015: p. 343).

δαιμόνων ἔχει κράτος, / κείνης δὲ δοῦλος ἐστι).[18] Here at *Hipp.* 1–4, Aphrodite expresses the universality of her sphere of influence in terms of geography, both horizontally and vertically: she is able to affect both the gods in heaven and humans on earth; and she reaches out onto the uttermost corners of the known world, from the "Pontic Sea" (viz., the Black Sea) in the East to the "boundaries of Atlas" (viz., the straits of Gibraltar) in the West.[19] Literally everyone is affected by the powers of Aphrodite – except for Hippolytus, which is the reason why Aphrodite reacts so harshly against Hippolytus' rejection. For, by rejecting Aphrodite and ignoring her influence, Hippolytus does not simply insult the goddess, but he also indirectly threatens to overturn the natural order of things by not submitting himself to the most fundamental emotions and driving forces. With his attitude, he puts the fundamentals of human existence into danger, since Aphrodite is "the goddess not only of sexual union, but of the continuation of life, of family relationship," as Luschnig (1988: p. 21) aptly phrases it. Furthermore, like nothing else, the powers of Aphrodite also form an important bond between the world of the humans and the world of the gods. Consequently, questioning the powers of Aphrodite would also mean a severing of this bond and could ultimately alienate gods and humans from one another.[20]

Indeed, Hippolytus is not simply content with being chaste and sexually abstinent on a private basis – rather, in a prayer to Zeus, he explicitly expresses his wish that there should be no women and no procreation in the world at all (ll. 616–619):

> ὦ Ζεῦ, τί δὴ κίβδηλον ἀνθρώποις κακὸν
> γυναῖκας ἐς φῶς ἡλίου κατῴκισας;
> εἰ γὰρ βρότειον ἤθελες σπεῖραι γένος,
> οὐκ ἐκ γυναικῶν χρῆν παρασχέσθαι τόδε.
> Zeus, why did you settle this counterfeit evil,
> women, into the light of the sun?
> For, if you wanted to propagate the human race,
> it was not from women that you should have provided this.

Hippolytus' statement in this prayer to Zeus is the beginning of a lengthy misogynistic speech about the supposed evils of women. The speech echoes stereotypes that can

18 Greek text and English translation by Kovacs (1999). – See also the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 36–39: καί τε πάρεκ Ζηνὸς νόον ἤγαγε τερπικεραύνου, / ὅς τε μέγιστός τ' ἐστὶ μεγίστης τ' ἔμμορε τιμῆς· / καί τε τοῦ εὖτ' ἐθέλῃ πυκινὰς φρένας ἐξαπαφοῦσα / ῥηϊδίως συνέμειξε καταθνητῇσι γυναιξίν. "She even leads astray the mind of Zeus who delights in lightning, / although he is the most important and gets the most important share of honour; / whenever she wants, she deceives his subtle mind / and easily involves him with mortal women." (Greek text and English translation by Olson 2012; see also his commentary on the passage at pp. 154–157.)

19 These were the traditional geographical landmarks in the East and the West; see Barrett (1964: p. 156); Halleran (1995: p. 146); Roth (2015: p. 67).

20 Along a different line of thought (but with similarly devastating consequences for the world order), to "refuse the bonds of eros also means to refuse the bonds of dependence, to attempt to remain alone and aloof from an other" (Zeitlin 1985: p. 62). Furher, see also Mikalson (1991: p. 144): "To Athenians of the classical period any such pecularity or unconventionality in religion would appear dangerous, but far more dangerous if it also involved rejection of traditional deities and practices."

be found in archaic Greek epic and poetry.[21] What is most decisive here, however, are the consequences of Hippolytus' attitude: with his "quasi-feminine concern for sexual purity" (as Cairns 1993: p. 316 puts it), Hippolytus puts Zeus into a precarious position with his daughter by asking him to bring about a world in which her domain is no longer necessary. Thus he potentially drives a wedge between the two deities, and he commits a severe violation of what could be deemed as the most important social and religious rule in the universe – and therefore he must be destroyed.[22]

The impending destruction of Hippolytus is announced by Aphrodite at the beginning of her prologue in gnomic form in line 6: σφάλλω δ' ὅσοι φρονοῦσιν εἰς ἡμᾶς μέγα ("I overthrow those who think highly against me"). Indeed, the idea that the gods punish (and destroy) those who do not obey the rules and behave arrogantly towards the gods is one of the most widespread topoi in ancient Greek thinking. Aphrodite uses the phrase ὅσοι φρονοῦσιν εἰς ἡμᾶς μέγα ("those who think highly against me") to express this thought, an echo of the Homeric verbal construction μέγα φρονέων ("thinking highly") which is used in an ambivalent manner in the Homeric epics: depending on the context, it can designate someone's "high-mindedness," but in most cases, the connotation is negative and denotes someone's "arrogance."[23] Interestingly, Artemis speaks in similar terms towards the end of her speech to Theseus at the end of the play (ll. 1339–1342):

> μάλιστα μέν νυν σοὶ τάδ' ἔρρωγεν κακά,
> λύπη δὲ κἀμοί· τοὺς γὰρ εὐσεβεῖς θεοὶ
> θνήσκοντας οὐ χαίρουσι· τούς γε μὴν κακοὺς
> αὐτοῖς τέκνοισι καὶ δόμοις ἐξόλλυμεν.
> These evils have broken forth upon you most of all,
> but I also have my grief. For gods do not rejoice
> when pious men die; but we destroy wicked men
> entirely – themselves, their children, and their homes.

The gnomic conclusion of Artemis' speech has been interpreted by one of the commentators as one that is "echoing the traditional imprecation against oath-breakers" and thus "invites an implicit contrast with the pious Hipp[olytus], who did not break his oath" (Halleran 1995: p. 261). While noting this, I would go along a different line and argue that Artemis' conclusion in fact reflects Aphrodite's words from the prologue; the end of Artemis' speech is focalized through her opponent, Aphrodite. For Artemis, Hippolytus clearly belongs to the group of the "pious men" (εὐσεβεῖς), but for Aphrodite, he does not. Rather, in her case, Hippolytus is one of the "wicked men" (κακούς), and

21 See especially Hes. *Theog.* 590–612 and Semonides 7.46–56. See the commentators on the passage: Barrett (1964: pp. 274–276); Halleran (1995: pp. 202–203); Roth (2015: p. 185). Barrett (1964: p. 276) rightly points out that "protests against the established order of things, and suggestions (sometimes serious, often fantastic) of what might have been a better order, are a common motif in Eur[ipides]."

22 The objective is definitely more than just "the education of Hippolytus", as Zeitlin (1985: p. 56) puts it.

23 See Kelly (2007: p. 370): "This expression always denotes warriors advancing with an aggressive attitude [...]." On Hippolytus' μέγα φρονεῖν, see also Petrovic & Petrovic (2016: pp. 185–190).

therefore his death is justified. Artemis, in a manner of speaking, can thus be seen to be defending Aphrodite's action between the lines, without saying it explicitly.

In contrast to her announcement to "overthrow those who think highly against [her]," Aphrodite states in the preceding line that she "honours those who reverence [her] power" (τοὺς μὲν σέβοντας τἀμὰ πρεσβεύω κράτη). The verb σέβεσθαι is used to express the σέβας ("awe", "reverence") that humans show towards the gods.[24] The verb πρεσβεύειν means "to place someone first," "to privilege someone" (actually in relation to age, but occasionally also because of rank or merit). It has a wide range of uses and can also be, *inter alia*, employed to designate worship or special honour.[25] In light of this, it can be argued that σέβεσθαι and πρεσβεύειν are partial synonyms here[26] and that Aphrodite thus (partially) reverses the roles between the divine and the human sphere because she makes worship and reverence a matter of reciprocity between gods and humans. The same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for the next two lines where she accounts for her point of view by claiming that the gods too (κἀν θεῶν γένει, "also in the species of the gods") participate in the human pleasure of being venerated through the receiving of τιμή ("honour," "veneration").[27] Indeed, the term and concept of τιμή runs like a leitmotif through the *Hippolytus* with a total of sixteen occurrences of the word and its cognates in the play. As such, it becomes clear that, as Lawall & Lawall (1986: p. 81) aptly put it in their notes, τιμή in the *Hippolytus* is "a key concept as all the characters attempt to assert praiseworthy external appearances and to preserve public recognition of their powers or their virtues." Aphrodite thus ultimately blurs the boundaries between herself and her divine sphere in one regard, while also doing the same with the sphere of her human worshippers. And, in doing so, she amplifies the distance between her and her opponents – which would be, first and foremost, Hippolytus – even more.

Hippolytus, his mother the Amazon, and their labelling as outsiders

When Aphrodite boasts at the beginning of her prologue that her power reaches out everywhere and affects mortals as well as immortals, she mentions the Black Sea as a marker of the Eastern boundary of the known world. This region was commonly imagined by the ancient Greeks as the major settlement area of the Amazons.[28] Thus,

24 See LSJ s.v. σέβας and σέβεσθαι; *Brill Dict.* s.v. σέβας and σέβω.

25 See LSJ s.v. πρεσβεύω and *Brill Dict.* s.v. πρεσβεύω. See e.g. Aesch. *Choeph.* 488 (Electra about her father Agamemnon's tomb): πάντων δὲ πρῶτον τόνδε πρεσβεύσω τάφον. "And I will honour this tomb above all else." Aesch. *Eum.* 1–2 (Pythia speaking): πρῶτον μὲν εὐχῇ τῇδε πρεσβεύω θεῶν / τὴν πρωτόμαντιν Γαῖαν. "First among gods, in this prayer, I give pride of place / to the first of prophets, Earth." (Greek text and English translation by Sommerstein 2008.)

26 The scholia on *Hipp.* 5 gloss πρεσβεύω accordingly with τιμῶ, σέβω, ἐν πρώτοις τίθημι (see Cavarzeran 2016: p. 96).

27 In the Homeric and the Hesiodic epics, τιμή is primarily a human concept, but the gods strive for τιμή as well; see e.g. *Il.* 15.189; Pötscher (1960: pp. 35–38); Graziosi & Haubold (2005: pp. 99–101); Du Sablon (2014: pp. 23–56).

28 See Toepffer (1894: pp. 1755–1758); Blok (1995: pp. 83–93); Dowden (1997: pp. 98–116).

Aphrodite makes an indirect statement, namely, that provenance from the tribe of the Amazons is no excuse for being chaste and for not following the passions of love and desire. This indirect remark is evidently directed at Hippolytus, who is the offspring of Theseus and an Amazon. Hippolytus' rejection of love and sex can thus be understood as an inherited trait from his mother's side,[29] as can his devotion to Artemis, who, as the goddess of chastity, has a close relation to the stereotypically misandric Amazons. However, apart from those observations, scholars have paid little attention to the role and significance of Hippolytus' mother in Euripides' tragedy. Hippolytus' mother is not a character in the play, but she is mentioned on four occasions: Aphrodite refers to her in the prologue (l. 10); the nurse and Phaedra mention her once each in their first dialogue in the first epeisodion (ll. 307 and 351); and so does Phaedra once more in her dialogue with the chorus, also in the first epeisodion (l. 581). It is, however, never specified who Hippolytus' mother actually is; each time when she is mentioned, she is simply referred to by the speakers as "the Amazon."[30] Metrical convenience has been suggested as the reason for this practice of leaving her unnamed.[31] However, while this may have been a welcome side effect, it would not suffice as an explanation. Rather, what seems relevant here is the fact that the repeated nameless references to "the Amazon" de-individualize and typologize Hippolytus' mother and thus put the emphasis on her provenance, on the stereotypes associated with the Amazons, and on her role as an outsider. The typologization is further emphasized by two explicit references to the Amazon as an equestrian ("lover of horses," ll. 307 and 581), which evoke one of the most common stereotypes associated with the Amazons. The Amazons were considered to be a race of female warriors who lived at the periphery of the known, civilized world and who thus were constantly oscillating between barbarism and Greekness, between being alien and simultaneously still belonging to the sphere of Greek culture to a certain degree.

What is even more important, however, is the fact that Hippolytus' mother is always mentioned in an explicit connection with her son – indeed, in three of the four cases (ll. 10, 351, and 581), it is actually Hippolytus who is characterized, not his mother, as he is called "the son of the Amazon," once by Aphrodite and twice by Phaedra. Along the same trajectory, on three occasions Hippolytus is characterized as a νόθος ("bastard"), that is, an illegitimate son.[32] In conclusion, Hippolytus' origin from an Amazon does

29 See e.g. Griffin (1990: p. 137): "The son of such an eminently virginal and outdoor mother [...], it is surely not surprising that Hippolytus should have had an attitude of aversion from sexual matters."

30 Eur. *Hipp.* 10 Ἀμαζόνος τόκος (spoken by Aphrodite); 307 τὴν ἄνασσαν ἱππίαν Ἀμαζόνα (spoken by the nurse); 351 ὁ τῆς Ἀμαζόνος (spoken by Phaedra); 581 ὁ τῆς φιλίππου παῖς Ἀμαζόνος (also spoken by Phaedra). The scholia on *Hipp.* 10 mention Antiope and Hippolyte as possible names of Hippolytus' mother (see Cavarzeran 2016: p. 98); other sources mention also Melanippe and Glauke. According to Barrett (1964: pp. 8–9, n.3), "[b]oth Antiope and Hippolyte seem to be traditional Amazon names; Theseus' Amazon perhaps originally Antiope [...], Hippolyte only after she had been made the mother of Hippolytus." See also Klügmann (1875: p. 6–7); Wernicke (1894: p. 2498); Lawall & Lawall (1986: p. 81); Gantz (1993: pp. 282–284); Roth (2015: p. 10).

31 See Barrett (1964: p. 157) and Halleran (1995: p. 147).

32 Eur. *Hipp.* 309 νόθον φρονοῦντα γνήσι' (spoken by the nurse); 962 νόθον (spoken by Theseus); 1083 μηδείς ποτ' εἴη τῶν ἐμῶν φίλων νόθος (spoken by Hippolytus). The word νόθος is not derogatory, but for Euripides' audience it implied the exclusion from Athenian citizenship (see Gierke 2017: pp. 182–183).

not only serve as a (partial) explanation for his special interests (or disinterests, for that matter), but it also serves to label him as well as his mother as (partial) outsiders. The same holds true for Theseus: by having procreated a son with an Amazon, he broke social norms and has thus also marked himself as a potential outsider.[33] In this context, it may be helpful to apply a concept called the "labelling theory" in social psychology. This concept (developed in the 1960s and subsequently popular in criminology during the 1970s) "argues that self-identity and behaviour of individuals may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them," and it "holds that deviance is not inherent in an act, but instead focuses on the tendency of majorities to label minorities negatively of those seen as deviant from standard cultural norms" (Gottschalk 2015: p. 69).[34] And indeed, this is what happens in Euripides' *Hippolytus*: Hippolytus' self-identity and his behaviour is not solely shaped by his descent, but also by the way he is perceived, and labelled, by others.

To conclude, another look at the family tree is required. The Amazons were considered to be the daughters of the war god Ares, the god with whom Aphrodite famously had an affair (see *Od.* 8.266–366). Furthermore, according to some sources the mother of the Amazons was the nymph Harmonia, who was often thought to be a daughter of Ares and Aphrodite.[35] Consequently, Hippolytus would be the grandson of Ares. With this potential genealogy in mind, Hippolytus' relationship to Aphrodite becomes more complex and more convoluted, since it is the grandson of her former lover who is her worst enemy and whom she seeks to destroy. Hippolytus does, very obviously, not share the sexual appetite of his grandfather, but he is a grandson of the warrior god and has inherited the strength and the willpower to fight and to be independent. What is most important to note, however, is that Hippolytus is a far more complex figure when his heritage both from his parental and his maternal side is taken into consideration: as the son of an Amazon, he stands between the worlds of the Greeks and the barbarians (and is labelled accordingly by the others, as noted); and as a grandson of both Poseidon and Ares, he also stands between the spheres of the humans and the gods.[36]

Conclusion

Euripides' *Hippolytus* is a drama in which social and religious norms and rules are tested and broken by both mortals and the gods, as well as on the interactional level between the two. The gods involved in the play follow the divine laws in parts, but they also violate divine rules of conduct in other parts. Poseidon is confronted with a conflict between his love for his grandson Hippolytus and the commitment to answer Theseus' request to destroy him due to the binding character of his oath. Hippolytus' destruction is the

33 See Gierke (2017: pp. 182–188).

34 See also Gay (2000).

35 See Pherekydes *FGrHist* 3 F 15, 151, 152; *Schol. vet. Il.* 3.189.

36 See also Kovacs (1980) and Petrovic & Petrovic (2016: pp. 213–216), on the quasi-divine characterization of Hippolytus.

result of Aphrodite's anger. Her anger is presented as justified since Hippolytus, with his asexual behaviour and his sense of mission, violates the most important rule in the universe: that of unquestioned engagement in love and procreation. Artemis, in turn, is unable to save her protégé because of the law of non-intervention that exists regarding the different divine spheres of influence. The result is a complicated relation between the gods and the inter-divine conflicts between Poseidon and Aphrodite (Poseidon is forced to do the bidding of Aphrodite), Aphrodite and Artemis (Artemis cannot prevent Aphrodite from killing Hippolytus, but instead swears revenge by announcing the future death of one of Aphrodite's favourites), and Aphrodite and Zeus (Hippolytus puts Zeus into a precarious position towards Aphrodite by protesting against carnal procreation). Furthermore, Hippolytus is repeatedly labelled as "the son of the Amazon" throughout the play, which marks him as an outsider who oscillates between the worlds of the Greeks and the barbarians. At the same time, the emphasis on his maternal descent also labels him (indirectly) as a grandson of Ares (who, ironically, was the lover of Hippolytus' sworn enemy, Aphrodite). Consequently, being the grandson of two gods means that Hippolytus is a complex in-between-figure who stands between the worlds of mortals and the divine. Ultimately, the very existence of Hippolytus is the result of a violation of social norms, since he is the illegitimate son of Theseus with an Amazon. Aphrodite's statement to "honour those who reverence [her] power" blurs the boundaries between herself and her human disciples and can thus be viewed as emblematic of the complexity of the relations between the mortals and the divine in this drama.

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