LANGUAGE OF SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL INVERSION
IN EURIPIDES' HIPPOLYTOS

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ABSTRACT

It is argued that the expression in Hippolytos (especially that of the messenger speech) has a powerful erotic charge, that the presentation of Hippolytos resonates with suggestions of the sexuality he denies, and that this has a definite homosexual slant. This interpretation is seen to make sense of many difficult or rejected passages.

This analysis of the play's language, novel though it may be, leads to conclusions which are not totally at variance with those reached by familiar lines of criticism; but rather add a new dimension to them. It has become orthodox to find 'variations on the ephebic theme' in Greek tragedy. On a structuralist interpretation of this sort, Hippolytos is a quasi-ephebic figure in a liminal phase (and his worship of Artemis, a deity much associated with rites of passage, supports this view). Or, on a social interpretation, marriage is an important institution, not to be flouted (and the aetiology of marriage ritual reinforces this point). Or, on a psychological interpretation, perhaps the old 'orthodoxy', repressed desires are dangerous and Aphrodite is, or epitomises, a powerful internal force, not to be denied (and Hippolytos' fate at the hands of Aphrodite may be seen as similar

1. An earlier version of this paper was read at several universities in South Africa in 1996, and I am indebted to colleagues who took part in discussions then: I shall never forget the warmth of their welcome and the strength of their commitment to scholarship, despite a fluctuating and sometimes difficult academic climate. Among many contributors, Marica Frank must be singled out for special mention. I am grateful also to Douglas Cairns, Katharine Craik, Sir Kenneth Dover, Tetsuo Nakatsukasa, and Kenneth Reckford for helpful comments and constructive criticism. They should not be supposed (all or altogether) to agree with the views expressed here.

Advocates of the ephebic theme, the social significance or the psychological content will recognise elements of their own views in this paper. Here, a close linguistic analysis reveals that particular scenes and particular speeches in *Hippolytos* are charged with highly specific sexual language, germane to the play’s action, situation, and character, and especially to the presentation of Hippolytos himself: the young Hippolytos who fails to mature, to marry, and to take his place in society is presented in language which resonates with suggestions of the sexuality he denies. At first, this is under control and internalised (in the subtle imagery of his own meadow speech) but ultimately it is out of control and in the open (in the more obvious symbolism of the messenger’s description of the bull’s epiphany from a spouting wave). The sexuality of Hippolytos is seen to have a peculiarly Greek and specifically homosexual slant. This interpretation makes sense of many difficult or disputed passages: 663, 667–8, 1180, 1183, 1189, 1204, 1219, 1237, 1377 and, especially, 952–4.

In many plays of Euripides, the theme is sexual, or there are strong sexual undercurrents; and that *Hippolytos* is such a play is evident. It is here presupposed that, in plays where the overall content is erotic, sexually explicit or suggestive language may be used in imagery, symbolism and linguistic innuendo (double-entendre or sous-entendre) to create an impressionistic verbal texture reinforcing the thematic content; and that when a collocation or concatenation of such words occurs this is not coincidental, but is deliberately devised for atmospheric effect. In cases of punning, literal and metaphorical usage are most closely conjoined; other cases show a gradation from instances where suggestive expression is ancillary to a

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4. In an unpublished doctoral thesis, *Psychiatry and the Plays of Euripides* (Department of Classics, University of Natal, Durban 1994) Walter Hift observes: ‘To a modern psychiatrist the homosexuality theory would be the first to come to mind on observing the young man’ (253), but ultimately excludes this diagnosis. Hift’s psychological analysis is insightful and illuminating.

5. There are portraits of marital conflict in *Med.*, *Alec.*, and *Ion*; a fake marriage contract in *IA*; two interlocking eternal triangles (Andromache-Hermione-Neoptolemos and Hermione-Neoptolemos-Orestes) in *Andr.*

6. See my chapter ‘Sexual imagery and innuendo in *Troades*’ in A. Powell (ed.), *Euripides, Women, and Sexuality* (London 1990) 1–15, for the argument that the overt theme of *Troades*, the sack of Troy and the rape of its women, is reinforced by the dominant imagery of ships and oars, with extensive punning on *plate* ‘oar’ and *pelates* ‘bedfellow’.

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clear literal sense to instances where the metaphorical is allowed to become so dominant that the sense is somewhat blurred. In strong support of this supposition, it will be seen that many passages viewed negatively and subjected to emendation or deletion by commentators who demand a rigorously specific literal sense, excluding indirect allusive resonances, not only can stand but can be viewed as making a positive contribution to the play's poetic texture. It is presupposed also that similarities in linguistic register between Euripides and his contemporary Aristophanes are likely to indicate similarities in referential intent; that it is appropriate to adduce usage in contemporary or near-contemporary medical writers as a further linguistic 'control'; that other sources, such as love poets (Theognis and poets of the Palatine Anthology) and lexicographers (Pollux and Hesychios) may provide information on the lost language of sex, much of it technical, colloquial or sub-literary, relevant to our understanding of Euripidean nuances. Euripides may be supposed to write consciously; and audience receptivity to these subsidiary connotations to vary from a conscious to a subliminal level. A liking for punning and wordplay was—and is—generally recognised to be a feature of Euripides' style.

Unusual sexual activity is a brooding background to Hippolytus. Phaidra's Cretan heredity is made to recall Pasiphae's aberrant passion for a bull, resulting in the birth of the Minotaur (337–8). Hippolytus' Amazon origins are a reminder of Theseus' unusual sexual history. The choral lyrics range suggestively over the characters' past, present and future experiences; and over mythical parallels to them. Phaidra's desire for Hippolytus is physically overwhelming, as described by Aphrodite in the prologue (28, ἐρωτα δεινῷ) and the Nurse's blunt response to Phaidra's reluctant revelation (490–1, δεί ... τάνδρος) highlights this aspect. In Euripides' first Hippolytus, Phaidra was a 'bad' lustful woman. The extant play is more subtle in its treatment of Phaidra. However, it is here argued that in characterisation of Hippolytus Euripides moved from portrayal of a female to portrayal of a male sexual stereotype. The interplay of the two characters is, as has often been remarked, intricately managed. In this, the terms ἀδος and σοφροσύνη, true and false—in women, centred primarily on marital

7. On this poetic technique in Hipp. 73–87 (with particular reference to the words δρόος, κρεμνῶν and κλείτος) see my note 'Phaidra's ἁδος again', CQ 47 (1997) 567–9.
9. The sexual content uncovered in Hippolytus of 428—the year before Aristophanes' first production—is a reminder of how imperfectly we know pre-Aristophanic comedy, and in particular the part played in comic plots by mythological burlesque, a plot type shared with tragedy and satyr drama: Euripides may well be drawing on Kratinos and Eupolis. Our knowledge of the diffusion of technical medical writing in his day is equally imperfect.
10. All citations are from the OCT of J. Diggle (Oxford 1984).
fidelity; in young men on premarital propriety—are much deployed, often with powerful associative effects. Long before Phaidra admits her predicament, the audience has heard her ravings (208–11, 215–22, 228–31)—a lyric echo of Hippolytos’ prayer (73–87)—with their expressions of longing for the meadow (τῶς ἄν ... ἐν ... κομήτῃ λειμῶνι κληθεὶς ἀνασωσάμεν;) and for taming of colts (ζώλους Ἐντός δαμαλίζομένα;) directly referring to Hippolytos’ favoured pastimes and haunts but indirectly redolent of the erotic.11 Similarly, Hippolytos’ meadow speech has both an innocuous literal connotation and a suggestive sub-text, in the symbolism of the vernal meadow untouched by the plough. Then, in the iambic dialogue, a rational reprise of emotional lyric outbursts, where Phaidra muses on her own situation and the general problem of marital infidelity (373–430), the language is at times similarly charged.12

The character of Hippolytos, and in particular his devotion to Artemis, has been the subject of much debate.13 It is evident that he and others regard his homage to Artemis as something exceptional: he ‘consorts with’ her in an ‘association’ or ‘relationship’ of a special and exclusive character. Aphrodite describes it as ‘an association beyond the mortal’ (19, μεῖξα βροττάς ... ὀμίλις); Hippolytos sees himself as possessing a privilege


12. See my article, ‘Aidos in Euripides’ Hippolytos: review and reinterpretation,’ JHS 113 (1993) 45–59 for the argument that the double αἰδος is a metonymy for ἐρως, the two forms of sex being on the one hand that which is marital, socialised, acceptable, controlled, private; and on the other that which is extramarital, antisocial, unacceptable, uncontrolled, revealed.

13. For an excellent summary of the state of scholarship, see Douglas L. Cairns, ‘The meadow of Artemis and the character of the Euripidean Hippolytus’, hereafter Cairns, QUCC 57 (1997) 51–75. I am grateful to have seen this work in advance of publication; it reaches conclusions parallel in certain respects to those presented here, but from a quite different perspective. Cairns finds in Hippolytos a ‘strangeness ... violation of cultural norms ... problems of character on both deep and surface, cultural and individual levels’ (75). The standard view, that Hippolytos is blameless and must be understood in terms of Greek religion and society is advanced by D. Kovacs, The Heroic Muse (Baltimore 1987); an extreme expression of this may be seen in A.J. Festugière, Personal Religion among the Greeks (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1994) 10–18: Festugière idealises Hippolytos’ worship of Artemis, finding it akin to the sublimation of sex characteristic of the
unique among mortals (84, μόνω ... βροτῶν) and reproaches Artemis for lightly abandoning their 'long association' (1441, μακράν ... ἄκραν); the same noun denotes the marriage of Phaidra and Theseus (838). According to Aphrodite, Hippolytos is 'forever consorting with the maiden' (17, παρθένῳ ξυνῶν ἥπι); he himself uses the same verb (85, σοὶ καὶ ξύνῃσι); and it is repeated also, contemptuously, by Theseus (948-9, σοὶ δὲ θεοίσιν ... / ξύνῃς). On 17, Barrett notes that συνέταν γυναῖκι is ordinarily used in a sexual sense, but denies—against Wilamowitz—that this is insinuated here; the other passages noted make this view hard to sustain. Hippolytos sees Artemis as his 'partner in the hunt' and, more remarkably, his 'partner in seat' (1093-4, ὁ φίλτατι μοι δαμόνων Λιγοῖς κόρη / σύνθες, συγκόνας). The latter expression is apt to deities enthroned together (as S. OC 1267, Αἰδώς με Ζεὺς; cf. E. Or. 1637). Hippolytos' invocations of Artemis as 'loveliest by far of maidens' (66, καλλίστα πολύ παρθένων), 'loveliest of the Olympians' (70-1, καλλίστα καλ- / λίστα τῶν κατ' Ὀλυμπον) and 'dear mistress' (82, ὃ φίλη δέσποινα) suggest adoration rather than worship: acclamations praising the beloved as 'beautiful' are ubiquitous both in love poetry and in amatory graffiti. And in this context, Hippolytos remark that he has verbal exchange with Artemis, but 'without seeing her eye' (86, δήμα δ' οὖν ὄφεν τὸ σῶν) suggests the cliché of the lover's eye. The garland offered to the image of Artemis (not merely worn or carried by Hippolytos) suggests a lover's gift. Typical actions of the besotted lover, as described in Plutarch, include garlanding the images of the beloved (Plu. Mor. 751d, ἀναδείξω τὰ εἰκόνια). The impression created is that Hippolytos regards Artemis the divine virgin as the one and only female partner acceptable to him. This fantasy is doomed; and his understanding of Artemis' nature is dangerously flawed, as he forgets her role in maturation, marriage and motherhood. At the same time, Hippolytos' rejection of Aphrodite is total, uncompromising and forever. According to Aphrodite in the prologue, he regards her as the 'worst of deities' (13, λέγει καθότινα δαμόνων περικένται) and, specifically, 'despises the bed (sc. marriage bed) and will have nothing to do with marriage' (14, ἀναίνεται δὲ λέχτρα κοὐ ψωεὶ γάμων); he will never change, but wishes to 'end the course of life as I began' (87, τέλος δὲ κάμψαμι ὅσπερ ἤρξάμην βίου); and he dismisses Aphrodite outright (113, τὴν σήν δὲ Κύρην πόλλ' ἔγω χαίρεν λέγω). Hippolytos' negation of marriage is accompanied by

14. καλῆ, without name, of Artemis in Α. Αγ. 140 (on which see Fraenkel ad loc.) seems very different in kind.
15. On the place of the image of Artemis in the staging of the play, see Barrett (note 8) 154.
an avoidance of ‘touch’, a verb used in a literal and metaphorical sense. Hippolytos does not ‘touch’ marriage (14) and he did not ‘touch’ Theseus’ marriage (1026; cf. 652, 885–6). He shrinks also from the Nurse’s ‘touch’ as she entreats him (606). He claims he is sexually ‘untouched’ (1002, ἀνέκφρατος, cf. 652 for this sense) and ‘unsullied’ (73, 76, 949, ἀνέκφρατος); only his attendants are asked to ‘touch’ him gently (1358, ... ἀνέκφρατος ... ἔλκωδως ἔπεσε ξέροιν). He is ‘physically pure with regard to the bed’ (1003, λέγοις ... εἰς τόδ’ ἡμέρας ἰγνών δέμας).

Yet in his tirade against women there is a prurient slant. He revels in his loathing: he dwells on his wish that asexual procreation were possible (618, σπείρα γένος and 622, παιδὸν ... σπείρα); he detests the licentiousness of women (642, μορφαν and cf. 664, μοσάν, a verb of detestation often used of male attitudes to female sexuality, so that μοσάν comes to signify ‘sexually immoderate’; see Pollux 6. 189 and cf. Barrett on 405–7). And he seems to derive a certain satisfaction from verbal flagellation of women: his extravagant diatribe culminates in words suggestive of orgasmic release. He will ‘know, after tasting’ the Nurse’s effrontery (663, τὴς σῆς δὲ τόλμης εἴσομαι γεγευμένος): both verbs suggest the carnal; and τόλμα is often associated with shamelessness. As Barrett notes, the object of his ‘knowledge’ is not evident. But εἴδεναι can have the sense ‘experience’ (cf. II. 11. 243, object χάριν, ‘sex’). And in the case of γένος this is a metaphorical use of a verb literally applied to food; for the sexual sense cf. E. Cy. 559 and A. fr 243, ἀνδρὸς γεγευμένη). The line is deleted by Barrett, following Herwerden, and disregarding the fact that the metaphor is sustained in the next line: ‘I will never have my fill of loathing women’ (664–5, μοσάν δ’ οὖντ’ ἐμπληθήσμοι / γυναῖκας). The verb ‘have one’s fill’ is used of physical satiety, particularly with regard to food (especially in Homeric usage, as Od. 17. 503) but also of sexual desire (as AR 4. 429, ἱμερὸν and cf. also Pl. Phdr. 255, τὴν ψυχὴν ἐρωτος). The concluding lines, ‘Either someone must teach them sophrosyne’—not regarded by Hippolytos as a real possibility—‘or let me go on trampling them down’ (668, ἢ καθ’ ἐάτω ταῦτα ἐπεμβαίνειν αἶτι) is coarsely suggestive of physical attack, even rape, not mere verbal abuse. The verb βαινειν and compounds, like the similar πατειν, are common in a sexual sense.17 Barrett, following Valckenaer, suspects this final couplet. The repeated ‘always’, emphatic first word of 666 and emphatic last word of 668, indicates the intransigence of Hippolytos. Lines 663, 667, and 668, all dismissed by Barrett, are integral to the depiction of Hippolytos as a fanatical devotee of a virginal Artemis whom he fancifully regards as his partner. This creates a consistent impression of a recognizable type: a man who puts women on a pedestal, who fantasises about the idealised and unattainable, who cannot relate to real women, and who in extreme

cases may attack, or even kill, women perceived by him as falling short of his ideal (in modern crimes, prostitutes).

With his exaggerated protestations of sophrosyne, Hippolytos might seem to approximate to the Platonic image of the ideal young man, the eromenos modestly rejecting erotic advances. But perhaps, when these protestations are stripped away, and we examine further the language in which his appearance, actions and experiences are presented he is more like another Greek type. Aspects of the visual presentation of Hippolytos, so important—and so obvious—in the theatre, are indicated in the text. He is a 'man' (994, 1031, ἄνδρος) and must be of marriageable age, as he refuses to marry (stressed, 14; cf. 87, 113), but young (43, νεανίς, cf. 114, 798, 967, 1098 and also hypothesis 8, 14, νεανίσκος); he is strikingly good looking (implied by the onset of Phaidra's passion at the mere sight of him, 27–8, and cf. assumption of hypothesis 3, κάλλει ... διασφέροντα). His 'flesh' is 'youthful' (1343, σάρκας νεανίς) and there is some emotive mention of both 'flesh' (1031, 1239) and 'skin' (1359). (For sensual perception of children's skin texture, cf. Med. 1075, 1404.) Hippolytos' hair is blond or auburn (1343, ξανθόν τε κάρα). That of other men is sometimes so described—notably, in a persistent tradition from Homer onwards, that of Menelaos, not the most masculine of heroes (Hom. Od. 15. 133 etc.; E. IA 175, Or. 1532; also Herakles, HF 362 and Orestes, El. 515). However, fair hair is an attribute more commonly of women, usually mentioned in contexts of youth and beauty, or meretricious display: of Phaidra (Hipp. 134, 220), Klytaimnestra (El. 1071), Helen (Hel. 1224), Iphigeneia (IA 1366, IT 173), Kreousa (Med. 980), Harmonia (Med. 832); it is also an attribute of children, especially in contexts of pathos (HF 993).

That Hippolytos was presented as effeminate in dress and demeanour is confirmed by a small but telling pointer in the exchange with the Nurse. The Nurse entreats Hippolytos by his 'fair right arm' (605, πρός ... τῆς σης δέξιας υψώλενον): it is the arms of women which were conventionally so described and admired. Barrett's translation 'strong right arm' subverts this common usage. The term υψώλενον is less common than λευκώλενος, used in Homer especially of Hera but also of mortal women. (For the former, see Pi. P. 9. 17; Hesiod, ed. Merkelbach and West 204. 81; PMG, lyr. adesp., 100b.1.1; Nonnus, Dionysiaca 113.) Both are conventional expressions describing the beauty of the arm (which, with the ankle, similarly admired in τοσφυρος, was the part of the female body most likely to be glimpsed, revealed by an enveloping style of dress). Other

19. It may be that the v.l. πρός τυάθε arose from a copyist's understanding 'my right arm', supposing that the adjective must refer to the arm of the female speaker.
such epithets are εὐσηχός (as Hipp. 200, εὐσήχεις χείρας, of Phaidra) and λευκόσηχος (Ph. 1351, Ba. 1206; cf. λευκόν ... πέρᾱν, Or. 1466 and λευκός ... χαρπούσιν χείρας, Ion 891; and for ‘whiteness’ cf. Hipp. 771, of Phaidra’s neck). Further, Hippolytos uses the word πέπλος, more common of women’s dress, as at 632, for his own garb (606, 1458). When applied to men’s attire, it generally indicates unusual circumstances: of ceremonial dress, Hec. 468; of Pentheus as transvestite victim, Ba. 833, 938; in contexts of magic, as Hipp. 514, S. Tr. 602 etc.; of the giant Cyclops Cy. 301, 327; of foreigners, IT 1218 and A. Pers. passim.²⁰ Hippolytos, then, seems to be presented as an androgynous figure. Effeminacy was not necessarily admired or desired in good-looking youths, pursued as ερωμένοι. But characteristics such as smooth white skin are standard elements in comic descriptions of pathics (as of Agathon, Ar. Thesm. 191–2, εὐφράσσοσις, λευκός, ἔξωρημένος, γυναικώρων, ἀπαλός, εὐπρεπῆς ὀδείν). In aspect, as described by Euripides, Hippolytos resembles the homosexual Timarchos, as described by Aischines: ‘young and well-fleshed’ (Aischines 1. 41, τύφλωτον ... καὶ νέον), ‘a young lad of outstandingly handsome appearance’ (75, μεσαίον νέον ... τὴν ὅμων ἐτέρων διάφέρον). In addition to these questions of visual presentation, he is aligned with female passivity at an impressionistic level. The words λείμων and κήρος, so prominent in the imagery of the celebrated passage on the untouched meadow, are metaphorically applied to the female body in a sexual sense; not to the male. In more general terms, his attachment to sophrosune, understood exclusively in terms of chastity, a virtue preeminently of women, and his devotion to Artemis, a goddess worshipped mainly by women, suggest a certain lack of masculinity.²¹

Hippolytos is accompanied throughout by large numbers of young male companions, both freeborn friends and slaves. (The old attendant, ὀξύσθης or θεράκτης, of the short scene 88–120 is devoted to him also.) A large group of attendants (54, πολύς ... προσπόλων ... κώμοις) enters from the hunt with him, and join in singing a hymn to Artemis. They are described in the mss as a ‘chorus of huntsmen’ (χορὸς τῶν κυνηγῶν, and cf. scholiast χορὸς νεκυίων τῶν κυνηγῶν ’Ιππολύτου). Editors, including Barrett and Diggle, designate them θεράκτοντες; and they are addressed by Hippolytos as ὀσκαδοί, 108 (cf. Homeric ὀσκαδόν, which denotes ‘the slight subordination in which one hero stood to another’, LSJ). The messenger who brings the news of Hippolytos’ fatal encounter is one of this group (1151, ὀσκαδόν),

²⁰ But it is used also of Herakles, HP 1205—as huge?—and of Agamemnon, IA 1550—as officiant?; also of Menelaos, Hel. 567.

²¹ See Cairns (note 13) 55, designating these traits as ‘quasi-feminine’ rather than ‘eccentrically effeminate’; also Burian (note 2) 203 on the ‘feminisation’ of Hippolytos, with his ‘refusal of adult sexuality’ and ‘blurring of distinctions between male and female’.
whom he describes as ‘attendants' (1195, πρόσπολοι) following their master, and later addressed by Hippolytos as ‘servants' (1358, διώκεις). These are presumably the ‘young attendants' mentioned by the chorus at the time of Phaidra’s death (784, πρόσπολοι νεανία). A further large group is associated with Hippolytos: companions and coevals, friends of the same age group and ethical persuasion. He himself describes their common purpose in terms generally regarded as idealistic (997–1001, cf. 78–81); but the expressions, and especially the verbs used, are appropriate to association in a sexual sense (1000, ὅμοιον ὀνόματι) or even specific to the granting of sexual favours, in a common euphemism (997, φίλοις ... χρήσθαι and 999, ἀνθρωποι τοῖς ... τοῖς φιλομένοις). That the young men are of the same age is stressed (947, 987, 1180, ἡλίκιας and 1098, νέοι ... ὑμήλικες, cf. also 1096, ἐγχευθήσαν) and they are close loyal friends (997 and 1001); ‘a company of dear co-evals' (1180, φιλον ... ἡλίκιαν ὑμήλικις, where Barrett needlessly adopts Markland’s addition of τέ, giving ἡλίκιαν θ’ ὑμήλικις, and comments, ‘obviously “his friends and age-mates” not “his dear age-mates”’). All these young men leave with Hippolytos as he faces exile. Their youth is stressed in their terror (1204, φόβος νεανίκος) and their affection for Hippolytos in the reference to his “dear head' (1238, φιλόν κάφη, see further below). Both groups follow Hippolytos closely (54, ἀμ’ αὐτῷ and 1180, ἀμ’ ἑτέρον', cf. 1196 εἰσόμεσθα) and both are described as ‘behind in foot' (54, 1179, ὁσιοθάπεις and 1243, ὅσπερ ... ποδί). At 108–13, after dismissing the old servant’s warning that he should pay attention to Aphrodite, Hippolytos tells the attendants to see to food and to groom the horses. The explicit literal sense is clear and unambiguous in expression, but the words have an implicit and latent force of implication: the language of satiety (overtly food) and of grooming (overtly horses) evokes the metaphorical language of love poetry.

The words ἡλίκιας and ὑμήλικες seem in themselves sometimes to refer to homosexual relationships. (Similarly, the term θεράτων is assumed to imply a special comradeship: Straton, AP 12. 247; and possibly A. Ch. 713, on Pylades as intimate companion of Orestes, is not without nuance; cf. E. IT 709.) This is the implication in the wry comment that husbands who are fed up at home can go out and console themselves: Med. 246, πρὸς φίλον τιν’ ἥ πρὸς ἡλίκιας τραβεῖς.22 (ἡλίκια, the unmetrical singular of the mss, was emended by Porson to the plural, now confirmed by a late ms; see Diggles’s critical apparatus.) And in Theognis, the sense of homosexual association is clear (1017–22, τοῦτος δ’ ἐσφόρας ἄνθυκος ὑμήλικὴς / τερτῖον ὄμως καὶ καλόν) and copulation is also indicated (1063–4, ἐν δ’ ἡπὶ παρὰ μὲν ἔξω

Hesychios glosses ἥλικης with ἄρχας, 'testicles', and this semantic association was possibly inherent. The word chosen to describe the lack of musicality in the song which the group 'barked out' (55, λέλακσεν) may also be suggestive.23 The words 'behind' and 'foot', otiose in the description here, may, as elsewhere, refer to anal penetration of the male body. The usage is particularly common in comedy, but not precluded in serious poetry. This is clear in the expression 'mounting' (LSJ sens. obsc., Meleager 12. 33, ὀποθεβάτης) and in usage of 'behind' in homoerotic poetry (τῷ ὀποθέτῳ in conjunction with φιλόσαξ, AP 5. 49, Gallus; cf. Straton 12.2, 12.210).24

We turn now to the messenger speech, describing the fatal encounter of Hippolytos' horses with a wave from the sea, transmogrified into a monstrous bull. (Here in translation past and present tenses are mingled, as in the Greek narrative.) It may be noted first that both horse-riding (literal content) and seafaring (metaphorically adduced) may symbolise sex; and that the bull may denote prodigious sexual potency. Thus, ἵππον may be a synonym for the male or female genitalia (Hesychios, perhaps drawing on comedy) and ἀταφώρως, lit. 'unbulled', means the same as παρθένος, 'virgin' (A. Ag. 245 and Hesychios, perhaps from a scholion on that passage). Ultimately, the horse-riding activities, firmly established as the concern of Hippolytos' companions (seen to symbolise homosexual activities), are overturned by a new and disruptive force, represented by the bull (seen to symbolise heterosexual acts). As is the regular pattern in messenger speeches, the scene is set initially: by the seashore, Hippolytos' attendants weep as they groom the horses,25 having heard the news of Theseus' sentence of exile on his son. They have heard that Hippolytos will no longer 'go about in that country' (1176, ἀναπτέτοι πόδα, lit. 'turn around his foot': see above on the tautologous noun and below on the verb). The narrative continues with the arrival of Hippolytos, joining in their tearful strain (1178, ἀλέος, with an alternative meaning 'limb', sometimes given an obscene sense in comedy), with comrades closely following (1179-80, discussed above). After some lamentation, Hippolytos gives the order to harness the yoke-horses to his chariot (1183, ἐντύναθ᾽ ἵππος ἄρμας ζυγώρροφος). Barrett is here troubled by a technicality, noting on 1183

23. See Poole (note 22) 113.
24. See Henderson (note 17) 112 n. 26, 117, 126, 129-30, 138, 158; also A.N. Oikonomides, 'The ξος of Aegeus (E. Med. 679) and the ξος of Timesiakles (SEG XXXIV. 43)', a discussion of a graffito accompanied by an illustration which bears more resemblance to a phallus than to a footprint.
25. Already there may just possibly be a suggestive nuance in their 'combing the horses' hair' (1174, ἕκνοικομεν τρίχας), as the word κοικαί, 'comb', is used for the genitals both in medical writing and in love poetry (Hipp. Aph. 7.39, Ruf. Onom. 109, Sor. 2.18; AP 5. 132 etc.).
that ‘only two horses can be harnessed to the yoke’ while Hippolytos’ horses are (1212, 1229) ‘explicitly a team of four’—but there is no problem if Euripides is more concerned with imagery, with the metaphor of the yoke of sexual union, than with equestrian accuracy. Everyone made haste (1185, ἡπιεῖτο, alternative meaning ‘pressed hard’) so that they set the horses, made ready, right by the master himself (1186–7, εξηρτυμένας / πάλλους παρ’ αὐτὸν δεσπότην ἐστίσαμεν). The team are ἴπποι 1183, 1204, 1247 and cf. 1212, 1219, 1229; or πῶλοι 1187, 1195, 1218; the latter term especially is used metaphorically in erotic poetry (and see above on the symbolism of Phaidra’s mad wishes). Hippolytos seizes the reins from the rail, having fitted his feet right into the riding boots (1189, κατεισέλασεν ἥρμοσας πόδας but there is better ms evidence for the v.l. πόδα). Again, πόδα is otiose; shoes of all kinds pervade the obscene double-entendre of Herodas 7; also, the verb ἀρμόζειν is regularly used in sexual contexts.

The narrative quickens: uttering a prayer, Hippolytos seizes the goad and applies it simultaneously to all the horses (1194–5, ἐπηγεῖ χέντρον ... / πάλλοις ἀμφιρρή). Barrett on 1194–7 takes ἀμφιρρή, v.l. ἀμφιρρή to be ‘another hint of his expertise’; perhaps, rather, it hints at the sense of the verb ἀμφιρρέω or ὀμφιρρέω, ‘attend’, ‘accompany’. The attendants ‘follow’ their master, ‘below the chariot’ and ‘near the bridle’. They take the road to Argos and Epidaurus, and strike into an isolated region with a jutting headland. Then there is a deep rumble, inducing a frisson (1202, φρικόδη κλύτω). The word may connote a shudder of fear or a frisson of passion; for the latter cf. S. Ἁρ. 693, ἀφφιξ’ ἐφωτι, also Pl. Phdr. 251a. The horses rear their heads straight up and ears skywards (1203), while the followers feel a ‘youthful fear’ (1204, φύρος νεφελοχάος) as to the source of the sound. Barrett comments on νεφελοχάο that ‘the use seems oddly undignified for tragedy’. But this word occurs at Ar. Pax 894 in a sequence of patently sexual metaphors; tr. ‘lively’, ‘passionate’. Then looking at the sea-lashed shore, the messenger tells, he saw a wave ‘rising up’ (1207, στυρίζον) to heaven, blocking his view of ‘Skiron’s coastline, the Isthmos and the rock of Asklepios’ (1209).26 The giant wave is ‘tumescent and throbbing out copious foam all around in a sea-gasp’ (1210–11, ἀνοιειν τε καὶ πέριξ ἄφρον / πολύν καυχαλάζον ποντίῳ φωνήματι) as it approaches the shore and

26. Barrett (note 8) on 1198–200, with map 383, notes the difficulty of these expressions (and most ms have σκηύρως). The Isthmos can hardly be the Isthmos of Corinth, invisible from this region, and the rock is unidentifiable. May there be play on proper names, as in Ἱππα. (see n. 2 above), where the isthmus seems to represent the perineum? In σκηύρως, some form of the verb σκιάω, ‘skip’, ‘frisk’, may be lurking; or perhaps a reference to Skiron, a notorious district in Athens. There were strong associations in this region between Asklepios and Hippolytos: according to Pausanias, a dedication of twenty horses by Hippolytos to Asklepios was recorded at Epidaurus; and at Troizen the image of Asklepios was said by the local people to represent not Asklepios but Hippolytos (Paus. 2. 27. 4; 2. 32. 4).
the chariot of Hippolytos. Barrett notes that ναχλάζων is transitive, not onomatopoetic of sound but describing the visible condition of the wave. The verb φωνεύειν, like the simple οἴδειν and sbs. οἴδημα, is regularly used of bodily swelling in both technical and general writing (as Hipp. Acul. 10 etc., Theoc. 1. 43); while in Plato (Phdr. 251 b, ... ὀδηστὲ καὶ ὀμήρῃς φώνεις ... ὅ τοῦ περεός καυλός ...) somewhat similar language is used of the ideal lover. To Diogenes of Apollonia ἄφρος τοῦ ἀματος is σπέρμα (Diels-Kranz 64 A 24 and B 6; cf. also Hes. Th. 180-98); the term ἄφρος, with the adjective ἄφραδης, is used of body fluids in the Hippocratic Corpus, where the verb ἄφρειν describes the formation of sperm (Genit. 1 and cf. Nat. Puc. 22, τὸ σπέρμα φυσάται καὶ οἶδει). With tumescence, erection, gasping and foaming the monstrous wave ejectuates a bull, symbol of aggressive virility. The triple wave may be allied with the popular belief that the ability to copulate three times in succession was a sign of tremendous sexual potency.²⁷ Sophokles uses similar language—also in a messenger speech—to suggest orgasm in Haimon’s union in death with Antigone, S. Ant. 1238-9, φυσάω ... ἐκβάλλει βοῦν (v.l. πνεύμα) / ... φοινίκιος σταλάμπατος.

The apparition causes rumbles with shuddering (1216, φρικώδες, cf. 1202), and a terrible dread assails the horses. 'But Hippolytos is ‘well accustomed to living in horsey ways’ (1219–20, ἵπποικος ἐν ἱθεσιν / πῶλος ξυνοικω). With this translation the regular sexual sense of ξυνοικων and the regular sense of ἱθη, ‘habit’, ‘custom’, are not lost; whereas, with the emendation of Valckenaer, followed by subsequent editors, ἱπποίκοι ἱθεσιν / πῶλος ξυνοικων, the sense of 1219 is watered down to ‘well accustomed to the ways of horses’, a metaphorical use, as LSJ, ‘versed in their ways’. Hippolytos’ response is, according to Barrett’s paraphrase: ‘he leaned right back so that his whole weight was taken by the reins as he held them’; Barrett argues against Heath’s view that Hippolytos tied the reins behind his back, ‘tying his body with the thongs behind him’. The description is unclear and troubles editors; but the main point lies in the metaphors, which continue with stress here on τοξίσθην, contrasted with πρόσθεν, of the bull’s advance (1228). For contrast of active and passive modes, ὅρα and τάσειν with reference to position πρόσθεν and ἐξόπλιθεν respectively, see Straton, AP 12.210; also 12.238 and cf. 12.7. And δήμαξ may in context have an erotic sense (as Alc. 348, 1133; Or. 16; Hel. 383; Supp. 823) or more obscene overtones (as it apparently does Cy. 2).

Hippolytos loses control. The horses ‘carry him on ... not altering course for their captain’s hand’ (1224-6, βία φέρουσαν, ὀὔτε ναυκλήρου χερὸς / οὔτ’ ἄποδοσαν ὀὔτε κολλήτων ὄγων / μεταστέφουσα). The seafaring metaphor persists in the ensuing ‘helm’ (1227, οἶκος). For

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²⁷. See Henderson (note 17) 121.
μεταστρέφουσα, here translated ‘altering course’, LSJ give ‘care for’, ‘regard’, an unparalleled use of a verb meaning lit. ‘turn about’. The idea of ‘turning’ is taken up in ‘turn back’ (1228, ἀναστρέφειν). Verbs such as στρέφειν are found in sexual contexts, both in serious verse and in comedy (see e.g. Anakreon 78. 4). And if he tried to steer course to the ‘soft ground’ (1226–7, τὰ μαλακτικὰ γαλακτίς), the bull would head him off. The word μαλακτικός, ‘soft’, here contrasted with the rocks (1230, 1233), is often used for ‘soft’ in the sense of ‘unmanly’ and, specifically, homosexual. The horses are ‘frenzied’ (1230, μαργαρώσαν γέννας): once again, there is a suggestion of sexual excitement, as the adjective μάργαρος has the sense ‘lewd’, ‘lustful’ and the nouns μαργαροσύνη and μαργαρότης commonly signify ‘raging passion’ or ‘wantonness’. The bull’s approach is expressed in a verb regular of approach for sexual relations (1231, πελάκων), and it ‘followed along the curved rail’ (1231, ἑκόπειο ξυστάπτε, cf. ‘following’ verbs of Hippolytos’ entourage) until it caused total overthrow. The wrecking of the chariot is described in terms denoting its parts, but anatomically suggestive: as well as ‘rail’ (1231) there are ‘felloe’, that is the outer rim of the wheel (1233, ἄψαθο); ‘naves’, that is hollow cylinders of wheels revolving round the axle (1234, σφραγίζεις); and ‘linchpins’, that is pins driven into the axle (1235, ἐνδάκτα). And these components ‘leapt’, with a verb commonly used of sexual activity (1235, ἔπηδον, cf. 1352 discussed below).

Hippolytos himself, ‘tangled in the reins is dragged along bound in a bond hard to accomplish’ (1236–7, ἣνίάσαν ἐμπλακείς / δεσμόν δυσεξύνουστον ἑλέσαν δεθείς). The verb ‘drag’ is a semi-technical term in contexts of assault, especially but not exclusively on women (on a boy, Lys. 3. 29). Barrett regards δυσεξύλετον, ‘difficult to disentangle’, which occurs as a gloss, as ‘the right word’. But the ms tradition is unanimous with the unmetrical δυσεξύνουστον, a by-form of δυσεξύνουστον to which Heath emends. If this is retained, the ambiguity is maintained: ἐξανύσαν or ἔνυναν may be readily understood as synonyms for the common euphemism περάτειν, ‘score’ of the sexual act; cf. also LSJ s.v. πράσσειν III. The pathos of Hippolytos’ fate, and the affection of his followers, is stressed in the descriptive ‘dear head’ (1238, φιλὸν κόρα, not, pace Barrett, the Homeric ‘his own’; cf, on 1180 above) and perhaps the phrase ‘shattering his flesh’ (1239, ὑπατὼν . . . σφακιάς) expresses the physical character of their concern. Hippolytos calls on his horses not to destroy him, and on someone to save him. Then many ‘desirous’ (1243, βουληθέντες) following (ὑστέρον ποῖ, tautologous ποῖς again) were left behind. Hippolytos, disentangled from the bonds of the reins, falls: the horses and the bull miraculously

disappear in the rocky terrain (1248, λεπάγας ... χθονός, cf. ‘rocks’ 1230, 1233, 1238; contrasted with μαλακχά 1226). The entire passage is paralleled in an Aristophanic description of sexual activity expressed in terms of a chariot and charioteers overturned with gasping breath (Ar. Pax 894 ff., νεανικῶς ... ἔριμα δ' ἐπ' ἀλλήλουσιν ἀνατετραμμένα φυσώντα καὶ πνεύντα ... ἐνόχοι πεπτώκωτες).  

Horses, then, may be understood as a metaphor for one kind of sex, homosexual, as opposed to another, heterosexual, represented by the bull: the stress on frontal or rear positions is important in this regard. The messenger speech may be interpreted allegorically, as a representation of an attempt to maintain the status quo (passive homosexual activity, or at least receptivity, represented by horsemanship), in the face of overwhelming forces precipitated by Aphrodite and sent by Poseidon (active heterosexual activity, represented by the bull from the sea): a virginal character meets a virile force and is destroyed in imagery of consummation. The ensuing language of his deathbed suggests that little has changed, and that he persists in pathic mode. Euripides skilfully uses words of ambiguity and association to indicate not only that Hippolytos, despite all his protestations of sophrosyne, is preoccupied with sex, but also to identify the nature of his proclivities. This is not to say that we are to envisage off-stage fellatio. The point is that he refuses to marry (stressed in Aphrodite’s initial statement) and the reasons for this are sexual repression (argued often enough from the text) and sexual inversion (here analysed from the sub-text).

Hippolytos’ own cries in his death agonies are marked by ambivalent expressions. In the words ‘a spasm leaps in my brain’ (1352, κατὰ τ’ ἐγκέφαλον πηδάνεος σφάκελος) there is a reminiscence of the verb of 1235; and σφάκελος can also mean the middle finger (Souda s.v. σφακελισμός), used in obscene gestures by the Aristophanic hero, as by the modern motorist. In ‘I long for a two-edged sword’ (1375, ἄφθοτόμου λόγγας ἔρωσι) the verb is strong, and generally connotes sexual passion; and the sword is often phallic; cf. S. Ant. 1233. This is ‘to cleave apart, to lay to rest my life’ (1376–7 διαμοιράσασθαι / δύνα τ’ εὐνάσσασθ’ τὸν ἐμὸν βιότον). The aorist infinitive of the verb διαμοιράω (LSJ ‘divide’, ‘rend asunder’) closely resembles that of διασπερίζω (LSJ femora diducere, mure), as used Ar. Av. 669, 706, 1254,

30. See Henderson (note 17) 169–70 on this ‘wild melange of metaphors’.
31. C.P. Segal, ‘The tragedy of Hippolytus. The waters of Ocean and the untouched meadow’, HSCP 70 (1965) 117–69 notes that both horse and bull are connected with male sexuality and, 146–7, finds the horses in the play ambiguous in their connection both with Hippolytos’ virginal pursuits and with sexual desire; he observes that Hippolytos is destroyed by a projection of his own sexuality.
32. See Henderson (note 17) 213, ‘Holding up the middle finger meant, as it still does, that the recipient of the gesture was a pathic’.

42
with reference to males or females; in context this is a bold pun. The verb διευθήσατο (LSJ ‘lay asleep’) is a hapax legomenon and, according to Barrett ‘a remarkable compound’; but perhaps less remarkable if we relate it to the common use of the simple verbs εὐνάσθαι and εὐνάξεσθαι, ‘have sexual intercourse’. Similarly suggestive are ‘I wish someone would lay me to rest’ (1388–9, εἴθε με κομάσας) where the form κομάσας ‘lie with’ often signifies ‘lie with sexually’; and the phrase ‘in what a disaster are you yoked’ (1389, οίχ γυμφροφυς συνεζύγης) brings imagery of marriage in death.

Theseus’ taunts of Hippolytos as a purported Orphic and a ‘trader in lifeless meat’ (952–4, ἧδη νῦν αὐχεῖ καὶ δὲ ἁφάγου βορᾶς / σίτοις καπέλους / Ὀρφέα τ’ ἄνακτ’ ἐχον / βάρκεις πολλῶν γραμμάτων) have baffled commentators. Retail activity and vegetarianism are not relevant at all, and the Orphic reference is obscure. But in one strand of the myth Orpheus valued homosexual above heterosexual activities and it was for this reason that he died at the hands of the Thracian women, or maenads (see Phanokles fr. 1. 7–10 in Powell, Coll. Alex. 106; also the version of Ov. Met. 10); and the audience of Orpheus, as depicted on vases, was exclusively male. And ‘meat’ is slang for the (especially female, or passive; here amplified by ‘lifeless’) sexual parts. In the extremity of his provocation, Theseus vituperates his son as a homosexual prostitute; that such a person should apparently have made an attempt on Phaidra is insupportable.

It has been argued that, through an associative linguistic penumbra which accompanies and extends the literal sense, Hippolytos is presented as an androgynous figure, pursued by other males of his own age, whose attentions are not unwelcome (and anal attentions are implied), old enough to marry but repudiating marriage. We may recall the ephebic theme, the societal aetiology, and the psychological interpretation noted above. It seems, moreover, that Euripides draws on contemporary social mores, which he describes in contemporary language, adumbrating the homosexual practices which were an integral part of the teenage experience of the Athenian male. The play may provide some evidence for a little-known aspect of these practices. There is good evidence, much of it idealised, for the conventions and behaviour governing the relationship of erastes and eromenos; but there is little evidence for boys’ peer group behaviour in that


34. See B. Sergent, Homosexuality in Greek Myth (London 1987) on initiatory homosexual coitus, commonly anal, and on the existence of different initiatory heroes in different regions.
phase when they—or perhaps only the good-looking ones among them—were courted by men and older youths. (But all parties were peculiarly aware of the proper time: according to Straton, *AP* 12.228, it was twice as bad for an older male to submit when past the proper time as for a younger male to submit before it; and in Plutarch, *Mor.* 749f, there are moral aspects to the tale of a good-looking boy courted by a wealthy widow as well as by two male *erastai*, one being criticised by the other for depriving his *philos* of marriage and property, ὅπως ἄθικτος αὐτῶν καὶ νεαρός ἁπαθός τὸ πλεῖστον χρόνον ἐν ταῖς παλαίστραις.) It is surely probable that mutual sexual contact between boys, or some boys, happened instead of, or as well as, contact with older males, and probable too that the extent of this varied from the superficial caress to mutual masturbation to intercrural sex to full anal intercourse; it is further likely that some of these boys would continue such activities beyond the proper time, and become (exclusively) pathics. Whereas the ‘normal’—i.e. accepted—Greek male progression was from passive (homosexual) *eromenos* to active (homosexual and heterosexual) *erastes*, it seems that Hippolytos is stuck in the former phase, a Peter Pan in an adolescent groove of arrested development. And there was a danger for Greek males of this type. Whereas adolescent passivity was laudable, adult pathics became laughable. But Hippolytos’ fantasies about union with Artemis, divine and unattainable, and his repugnance from contact with real women, show Euripides’ deep understanding of sexual inversion, far beyond a Greek context.
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