

This is Not an Exit: A Reexamination of Euripides' *Hippolytus*

In 2012 possible implications of the ending of Euripides' *Hippolytus* require a reexamination. After Artemis has departed Hippolytus informs his father (... σε τοῦδ' ἐλευθερῶ φόνου) "... I release you from this blood-guilt" (1449). Bernard Knox, in his 1952, *The Hippolytus of Euripides*, contends that Hippolytus forgives Theseus with this closing stichomythia (228). This alleged absolution of wrongdoing does not appear quite clear to Theseus and he asks, (τί φῆς; ἀφίης αἵματός μ' ἐλεύθερον;) "What are you saying? Do you set me free from this blood-guilt?" (1450). Hippolytus does not simply affirm his father's question but rather he asserts that he cannot execute this forgiveness without referencing Artemis: (τὴν τοξόδαμνον Ἄρτεμιν μαρτύρομαι) "I call Artemis, subduing with the bow, as witness" (1451). I argue that Hippolytus' moment of *forgiveness* is, in fact, a bleak instance of human dependence on the gods. In light of recent scholarship, David Konstan's 2010, *Before Forgiveness*, the influential line of analysis begun with Knox appears problematic because it culminates with a profound expression of humanity in the form of Hippolytus' forgiveness of Theseus. Although Konstan does not treat this instance, I believe that his recent assessment of the absence of an ancient Greek equivalent for forgiveness is relevant to this scene which Knox viewed as a "a human act which is at last a free and meaningful choice, a choice made for the first time in full knowledge of the nature of human life and divine government. ... It is an act of forgiveness." (1952: 228).

In my analysis, the machinations of cause and effect that are dependent upon Aphrodite and Artemis' feud throughout the action of the play do not stop with Artemis' departure. The final instructions of Artemis at 1435, (καὶ σοὶ παραινῶ πατέρα μὴ στυγεῖν σέθεν) "and I command you not to hate your father," elicit Hippolytus' actions toward his father after her

departure. Adolf Koehnken in 1978 and recently Kathryn Gutzwiller in 2012 both emphasize the significance of this instruction at 1435 for the following action, cited above, in which Hippolytus cannot *forgive* his father without invoking Artemis. Before Artemis' departure Hippolytus even references her advice at 1442-1444 (λύω δὲ νεῖκος πατρὶ χρηζούσης σέθεν· καὶ γὰρ πάροιθε σοῖς ἐπειθόμην λόγοις/ αἰαῖ) "I put down my quarrel with my father because you want this and because I have always been persuaded by your words."

I believe that Konstan's work demonstrates the inadequacy of this term, forgiveness. He points to a need for a change in perspective on the part of the forgiver and forgiven: "a bilateral process involving a confession of wrongdoing, evidence of sincere repentance, and a change of heart or moral perspective -- one might say moral identity -- on the part of the offender, together with a comparable alteration in the forgiver, by which she or he consents to forego vengeance on the basis precisely of the change in the offender" (2010: 57). In my analysis of the ending there is nothing approaching such a moral progression in either Hippolytus or Theseus.

Therefore, the use of the term "forgiveness" appears faulty on two fronts: Hippolytus is simply not acting of his own accord but is still under Artemis' influence and he does not exhibit the moral progression that Konstan requires for this term to be applied accurately. Although Artemis is quite gone and mortals *appear*, at last, free of the gods' conniving and manipulative efforts, Hippolytus' disposition to his father is still dependent upon Artemis' final instructions and is not representative of human forgiveness. Euripides appears to have crafted this ending not as a supreme and optimistic expression of human forgiveness but as a pessimistic depiction of how dependent humans are upon the divine, be they near or quite far away.

Works Cited

- Gutzwiller, K. 2012. "All in the Family: Forgiveness and Reconciliation in New Comedy"
in C. L. Griswold and D. Konstan, ed., *An Ancient Forgiveness*. 48-78. New York:
Cambridge University Press.
- Koehnken, A. 1972. "Goetterrahmen und Menschliches Handeln in Euripides' Hippolytos."
Hermes. Vol. 100. pp. 179-90.
- Knox, B.M.W. 1952. "The Hippolytus of Euripides." *Yale Classical Studies* 13, 1-31; repr.
in id., *Word and Action: Essays on the Ancient Theater*. 205-230. Baltimore: Johns
Hopkins, 1979.
- Konstan, D. 2010. *Before Forgiveness*. New York: Cambridge University Press.