CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

EURIPIDES, HIPPOLYTUS 732–751

The centrally-placed Second Stasimon of *Hippolytus*, following Phaedra’s exit (to die) at 731, is one of the finest features of Euripides’ finest play, with complex imagery. The wish to become a bird and to fly away to a mythical Western paradise is in line with a familiar *topos* as an ‘out-of-this-world escape wish’; here vicarious—echoing (while also transmuting) the desires for concealment, escape and death expressed by Phaedra.¹ ‘Bird-transformation’ and ‘flight to the far West’ are funereal motifs, notably developed (recently?) by Sophocles,² and the image of Phaedra as a ‘vanished bird’ will recur at 828 ὁρνις γὰρ ὡς τις ἕκ χερὸν ἄφωντος εἶ. Then in the second pair of stanzas Phaedra’s fate, with the predicted death by hanging, is integrally linked with the ‘white-winged Cretan ship’ (another ‘bird’ image) that as a doubly bad ὁρνις brought her ‘through beating sea-waves’ from Crete to Athens, with ‘fastening of ropes’ for the ‘going ashore’ at the end of the voyage.

Much has been sufficiently discussed (most recently by Halleran);³ but many points of detail, in both pairs of stanzas, invite further consideration. I give a modified text, after Diggle, with modifications also of his apparatus.

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¹ C.CJ (PCPhS) 53 (2007) 253–62. My article ‘Further notes on Euripides’ *Hippolytus*’ (ch. 21 above) left this important stasimon for separate later consideration; cf. also ch. 46. I again refer especially to the editions of Barrett, Diggle, Kovacs, Stockert and Halleran.

² Cf. 673–4 (πῶς ποτ’ ἔξαλλω τῆς; | πῶς δὲ πήμα κρύψω, φίλαι) and 723 (θανε…). For the συμπάθεια of the Chorus-ladies (Σ on 672), cf. p. 667 above.

³ S. O. T. 174–8 ἄλλων δ’ ἄλλω προσώπων ἔπτερ νεκρῶν ὅρνιν | κρείσσον ἀμαμακτέον πυρὸς ὄρενον | ἀκτάν πρὸς ἐκπέρου θεοῦ (discussed on p. 414 above), of the plague victims at Thebes, very possibly influenced by the plague at Athens, shortly before the date of *Hippolytus* (428). The (chiastic) similarity of ἔπερδεν ... ἀκτάν ... ὅρνιν [rather ὅρνιν ... ἐπερίδεν ... ἀκτάν] with ὅρνιν ... ἀκτάν ... ἐκπέρου θεοῦ is unlikely to be fortuitous. Elysian ‘Isles of the Blest’ and Hades may indeed be quite close together when conceived as in the far West: cf. West on Hes. *Op.* 171. Mortal migration to the former is exceptional, but by no means unthinkable.

732–41 – 742–51

Ηλιβάτοις ύπό κευθμόνι γενοίμαν,

`ίνα με πτερούσσαν ὅρ-

νιν θέακ ἐν ποσα-

ναίς ἀγέλαις θείη· 734a

ἀρθείν δ' ἐπί πόντιον 734b

κύμ' ἐς τὰς Ἀδριηνάς

ἀκτάς Ὁριδάνου θ' ὕδωρ,

ἐνθὰ πορφύρεον σταλάς-

cοιν ἐς οἴδιμα πατρός τάλαιναι

κόραι Φαέθοντος οἰ-

cτοι δακρύων

τὰ ἡλεκτροφαεῖς σταγάς: †

ἲσπερίδων δ' ἐπὶ μηλόσπορον ἀκτάν

ἀνύσαμι τάς ἀοι-

δόν, ἴνα πορφυράς 744a

Ποντομέδων λίμνας 744b

ναύταις οὐκέθ' ὑδόν νέμει,

κειμένο τέρμονα γυρών

ούρανοῦ τὸν Ἀτλας ἔχει,

κρίναι τ' ἀμβρόσια χέον-

cται Ἄηνῶς μελάθρων παρὰ κοίτας,

ὗ' ὀλβιόδωρος αὐ-

ζεῖ ζαθέα

Χθων ἐνδαιμονιάν θεός.


There are several textual issues; but I begin with the metre, my lineation differing from the vulgate in 733–4/743–4 (and to a lesser degree in 740–1/750–1). 5

732/742. D d – (ch 2io). The striking opening verse, symmetrically

− − − − ; − − − − − − , is similar to the catalectic asclepiad

− − − − − − − (West's ph'²) which begins an ode at S. El. 472/489, but

5 For the metrical terms and symbols used, cf. West, GM xi–xii, with the addition of 'diaeresis'. I refer also to Itsumi (1984).