

CLSX 148 Fall 2014 Short Writing Assignment #2

Silence permeates Euripides's Hippolytus. Find two characters who fail to verbally respond, intercede on someone's behalf, or relay the truth in a timely manner. (The characters can be humans or deities.) What are the repercussions for these silences in the Hippolytus?

The Chorus of Palace women are present when Phaedra's nurse discovers Phaedra is in love with Hippolytus when Phaedra says "his mother was an Amazon" (*Hippolytus* 351-352), but they swear an oath of silence (*Hippolytus* 710-714). When Theseus arrives at the palace, the Chorus are the first to greet him (*Hippolytus* 798). Although Theseus questions them about his wife's death, the Chorus claim to know nothing (*Hippolytus* 804-805). This was the first time the Chorus could have told Theseus the truth. Though the Chorus tell Theseus he will someday realize he was wrong to believe Hippolytus raped Phaedra, for a second time they still do not tell him the truth (*Hippolytus* 885-893). The silence of the Chorus bodes ill for Hippolytus. Since they choose not to tell Theseus the truth of Phaedra's suffering and suicide, they rob Hippolytus of a witness to his innocence.

Hippolytus does not explicitly tell his father of Phaedra's nurse telling him of Phaedra's love for him. Instead, Hippolytus defends his chastity (*Hippolytus* 993-1004), appeals to Theseus' logic by claiming that only a fool would expect to rape his stepmother and profit from it (*Hippolytus* 1011-1018), and calls for his own death if he had been a villain (*Hippolytus* 1028-1031). Finally, Hippolytus chooses to refrain from telling his father the truth (*Hippolytus* 1032-1035, 1059-1063). Unfortunately, Theseus believes Phaedra's note over his son (*Hippolytus* 1038-1040, 1057-1059). The silence of Hippolytus cements his incorrectly judged guilt. His father's curse (*Hippolytus* 887-890) and banishment (*Hippolytus* 1048-1050) ultimately results in him being fatally wounded by Poseidon's bull (*Hippolytus* 1214-1239).

The Chorus could have gathered Phaedra's nurse and together told Theseus of her love for Hippolytus and her planned suicide; instead they choose to keep their oath to Phaedra, in an attempt to defend her honor. Likewise, Hippolytus could have summoned Phaedra's nurse to tell Theseus what she knew of Phaedra's love and what she relayed to Hippolytus; however, he too refuses to betray his oath of silence. The silence

of both parties sends Hippolytus to his grave. If Phaedra's nurse could have kept Phaedra's secret, then silence would not have been deadly.

Reference

Greek Tragedies Volume 1, D. Grene and S. Lattimore, eds., University of Chicago Press, 2nd Edition (2008).

Grade: 9.75/10

You do an outstanding job concisely and specifically discussing the text as it relates to the question.

I would still start your writing with a sentence that briefly and precisely outlines your ideas. Maybe take a sentence from your conclusion, modify it slightly, and put that first.

Otherwise, great work.