

# [Comparitive study between euripides’ alcestis and hippolytus](https://assignbuster.com/comparitive-study-between-euripides-alcestis-and-hippolytus/)

Euripides, youngest of the three great Greek tragedians, was born c. 485 BC though he was scarcely a generation younger than Sophocles, his world view better reflects the political, social, and intellectual crises of late 5th-century Athens. Euripides' enormous range ps contradictory tendencies:  He was both a rationalist and a romanticist; he both criticized the traditional gods and celebrated religious phenomena He incorporated the new intellectual and scientific movements into his works but also conveyed the irresistible power of the irrational.

Original and experimental, he parodied the conventions of tragedy and also used new theories about the illusionist and deceptive powers of language. He created tragicomic plots. His Alcestis and Hippolytus are his two great plays. We will notice many similarities in Euripidean plays. There are many similarities in Alcestis and Hippolytus and also have some dissimilarities. Comparative studies between these plays are discussed below. In ancient Greek tragedy there has several parts—Prologue, Parados, Episode. the first Stasimon the second Episode, the second Stasimon, the third Episode, the third Stasimon, the fourth Episode, the fifth Stasimon and Exodos. The plot structures of both plays are same. In both play we find Prologue, Parados, Episode, the first Stasimon the second Episode, the second Stasimon, the third Episode, the third Stasimon, the fourth Episode, the fifth Stasimon and Exodos and also choral ode with strophe and antistrophe. In both play the unity of time, place and action have been maintained. Both plays are written in Iambic Pentameter.

Both Alcestis and Hippolytus open with prologue or monologue which is a common characteristic of Greek plays . In both plays the audience have lost their interest from the very beginning because everything has been told before in the prologue. The play Alcestis begins with the prologue of the god Apollo. Here Apollo stops death from taking the life of Admetus and predicts that Alcestis will die instead of Admetus. He also predicts that Alcestis’ life will be saved by Heracles, the demi god. Similarly the play Hippolytus also begins with the monologue of the goddess Aphrodite.

In the play Aphrodite the goddess of love, is angry with Hippolytus because of his devotion to Artemis, the goddess of chastity and hunting. So she makes a plan to ruin the life of Hippolytus, phadra and Theseus as well. Chorus plays a very significant role in Greek plays. The appearance of chorus is mandatory in Greek plays. In the plays of Sophocles the chorus continually present on the stage. In Euripides the picture is quite different. His plays are relatively complex. He experienced difficulties in retaining chorus.

In Alcestis The entry of the chorus, or the " parodos" sequence, follows: a chorus of fifteen men of Pherae, led by a " coryphaeus" (chorus-leader), enter the orchestra of the theatre. The chorus-leader complains that they are in a state of suspense, ignorant of whether they ought to be performing mourning rituals for their queen. The chorus' lyrical ode, to which they dance as they sing, consists of two paired stanzas of strophe and antistrophe. They sing of the silence that greets their search for signs of mourning, the evidence of Alcestis' death. When goodness dies," they lament, " all good men suffer, too. " The chorus-leader concludes by dismissing the chorus' search for hope in the situation: " The King has exhausted every ritual. " The Chorus is significant here and active. They informed the audience about what is happening inside the palace. Unlike Seneca’s chorus, the chorus is very active and plays a very important role. In Hippolytus the chorus is composed of fifteen women of Troy. In this play the chorus is mostly passive. For in a Sophoclean play the chorus announces new comers.

In Hippolytus the chorus is not as active as Sophoclean tragedy. They inform the audience of the death of his wife. But under no circumstances could they speak of the criminal passion of Phaedra for Hippolytus. That would have been the height of impropriety. That is why Phaedra has to lay bare her heart to the Nurse. It is Artemis who informed Theseus of what actually happened. What mortals fail to do, Dues ex machine can. The choruses in Hippolytus therefore do not serve any important purpose as they do in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles.

Euripides always highlights the role of servant or nurse throughout his plays. He always highlights the salve character. In Alcestis it is the servant who reveals the secret to Heracles that their queen is dead. Heracles gets drunk and begins irritating the servants, who loved their queen and are bitter at not being allowed to mourn her properly. Finally, one of the servants snaps at the guest and tells him what has happened. Heracles is terribly embarrassed at his blunder and his bad behavior, and he decides to ambush and confront Death and save Alcestis from the clutches of Death.

Similarly in Hippolytus it is nurse who reveals the secret of her queen to Hippolytus which hastens the death of Phaedra. Phaedra took her Nurse into her confidence. But the nurse foolishly exposed the truth to Hippolytus. So we can say in both plays. Euripides reveals the truth by a slave character. Aeschylus and Sophocles had implicit faith in the Olympian gods and goddesses. Euripides had refined sensibility and looks at the divinities a little critically disciple of Xenophanes and Anaxagoras, he had a rational outlook on men and things. He was not a skeptic, far less an atheist.

He profusely used the traditional myth and legends. In Alcestis, Admetus forgot to sacrifice to Artemis, and consequently found his marriage chamber full of coiled serpents. Apollo bade King Admetus appease the goddess, and meanwhile he obtained (because Admetus 1 was such a kind master towards him) a special favour of the MOERAE: that when Admetus 1 should be about to die, he might be released from death, if someone should choose voluntarily to die for him. " In Admetus I found a godly man. And so I rescued him from death by tricking the MOERAE.

These goddesses promised me that Admetus could escape an immediate death by giving in exchange another corpse to the powers below. " (Apollo. Euripides, Alcestis 10). Alcestis dies in vicarious death Admetus could not find someone who would die for him. Only because of the role of Apollo, Admetus’ life saves and Alcestis dies instead of him. Euripides makes gods and goddesses questionable. In Alcestis, Alcestis dies because Admetus could not find someone who would die for him. Only because of the role of Apollo, Admetus’ life saves and Alcestis dies instead of him.

Here the justice of Apollo is definitely questionable. In Hippolytus, the Olympian gods and goddesses plays a very important role although they are presented in the play in an unpleasant way. Hippolytus is very much devoted to the goddess Artemis and do not worship Aphrodite which makes the goddess angry and she made a plan which ruins the life of Hippolytus, Phaedra and Theseus as well. The main theme of this play is the conflict between love and chastity, infact it is the conflict between Aphrodite and Artemis. Artemis is not also totally blameless.

She could have save her favorite but didn’t do so. Although the god Poseidon does not appear physically but he plays a very significant role in this play. He too is responsible for the death of Hippolytus. Euripides portrayal of women in his plays has been somewhat bizarre. His female characters kill out of revenge, kill out of jealousy and kill because a god possessed them too. Women occasionally assert dominance in the household; although, even within the home they posses limited influence over their husbands. An interesting theme runs through Euripides theatrical tragedies Alcestis and Hippolytus.

In each play the lead female character forgoes her life for the sake of love. In Alcestis, Alcestis willingly gives her life to prevent her husband Admentus' death. In Hippolytus, Phaedra chooses to commitssuicideas a result of falling in love with her husband’s son and refusing to be deceitful to her husband. Although Alcestis’ love should be considered as moral and virtuous where as Phaedra’s passion for her son was immoral, incestuous and illegal. In these two plays, a major female character challenges the predominately masculine centre pf power and authority and in some way questions the limits of that power.

Alcestis forces her husband to confront the gap between the value that he attaches tofamilyties and affections and the honorific exchange of guest relationship that belong to the outward-facing world of male prerogatives. Phaedra’s erotic passion invades the garden world of idealized purity that Hippolytus would create with his virginal huntress-goddess, Artemis and shatters its defense by opening it up to the power of Aphrodite that he has rejected (both for himself and others) so absolutely.

In the process, Phaedra also releases the suppressedviolenceand hatred that fuel Hippolytus’ total rejection of Aphrodite. . Although Phaedra has passionate desires for her stepson she is thoroughly ashamed of these feelings and as a result of her shame she decides to die by starving herself. She also condemns women who are unfaithful to their husbands as she says ‘ And I despise them, women who preach faithfulness to husbands but dare the worst behind their backs. ’ Euripides, therefore, presents Phaedra as a moral woman who is just an unlucky victim of Aphrodite

In these two cases the women are impelled to their actions by their intense emotional commitment to house and family. Alcestis and Phaedra both try to ensure their children’s future; and each is prepared to sacrifice her life in the process, although in diametrically opposite ways. In the play Hippolytus we notice the growth and development in Phaedra’s character. She is a dynamic or round character. But Alcestis does not have any growth and development throughout the play. She is a static character. Unlike Phaedra she plays a trivial role in the play. There is a question whether Euripides is misogynist or not.

Euripides' innovation in his Hippolytus is to cast the woman as a sympathetic character, Aphrodite's helpless victim caught in a divine plan to destroy Hippolytus. His audience expects to see the wicked woman vilified and the virtuous youth exalted; that is the tradition. Instead, Euripides portrays his Phaedra as a highly moral woman struggling against the shame of her passion, while Hippolytus is an intolerant prig. Alcestis’ love is virtual, a sacred love for a husband. But Phaedra’s love for his step son has been considered in the play as sickness. She became love sick.

Since her love is not pure like Alcestis so her love defined as sickness throughout the play. Euripides’ sympathetic tone is toward woman is also expressed in the play Alcestis. Alcestis' fate can be viewed as a reflection of the male- dominated world of fifth- century Athens- her death is decided by her husband, in that he allows her to take his pre-ordained place in Hades; her rescue from Death comes only through Heracles' intervention. Being led silently from the tomb perhaps symbolizes the woman's role in the Athenian household as a subordinate figure, from whom it was preferred to hear little.

In all, the play shows that the rules of the male world, guest-friendshipand hospitality in particular, are more important that the whims of a female, even her dying wish are disregarded. So he can’t be considered as misogynist. Heroes are undistinguished in Euripidean plays. They do not have much heroic qualities. They are very common and simple rather heroines are more focused in Euripidean play. For example in Alcestis, Admetus’ role is not heroic rather he is coward and self centered. He has not any growth and development.

Alcestis sacrifices her own life for her husband, Admetus just laments on her wife’s death. He does not try anything to save her beloved wife’s life. Rather it was Heracles who save the Alcestis life and rescued her. In Hippolytus, we notice the growth and development of Phaedra’s character. Phaedra’s love, her passion, her struggle and her death makes her a round character. But Hippolytus’ remains quite inactive throughout the play. He has no contribution to the action of the play. Phaedra and Aphrodite play the main role in this play.

They are more focused than Theseus or Hippolytus. According to Aristotle a hero should not be too good or too bad. Hippolytus is too good. He is a debatable hero. He has no growth and development. Unlike Phaedra he is a static character. Deus ex machine is a technique where a god or artificial or improbable device introduced into a play to resolve the entanglements of the plot. This technique is frequently used by Euripides. In the play Alcestis, Heracles acted as Dues ex machine. In the play Hippolytus it is the goddess Artemis who is presented as Dues ex machine.

Alcestis is considered as a satyr play. Alcestis is a domestic tragicomedy with a mixture of fairy tale atmosphere and intense personal suffering that in the extant plays reappears again. Although the play begins with a gloomy and tragic mood but the ending of this play is joyous. It has a happy ending though artificial. So this play is considered as a tragicomedy. His play Hippolytus explores the nature of passion, the problem ofcommunicationand language and the emotional and the moral pitfalls of intense aspiration and one-sided devotion to the ideal.

This play is totally a tragedy. In this play Phaedra commit suicide and the play ends with death Hippolytus. Obviously this play does not end with a happy tone. So it has been considered as a pure example of tragedy. Euripides has come to be increasingly appreciated in modern times for his intellectual subtlety, bold and original dramatic power, brilliant psychological insight, and ability to elicit unexpected symbolic meaning from ancient myth and cult. Critics find the Alcestis a richly rewarding play in many areas. D. J.

Conacher explores how Euripides expanded the myth of Admetus and Alcestis, adding comic and folk tale elements to suit the needs of his tragedy. In Hippolytus, he also adapts the myth of Pasiphae the mother of Phaedra and Ariadne, the sister of her. But he relates it to the play by his own way. Throughout his works Euripides struggled to show the human side of his characters and tried to elevate their actions to a status of importance and not just as a consequence of the intervention of the gods. For this reason Euripides stands apart as does his works.