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*Awry Crowns: Queenship and Its Discontents*

Edited by Rosy Colombo

SKENÈ Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

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ANTON BIERL\*

## **Phaedra: a Tragic Queen in Turmoil Between Violent Love and Its Chaste Suppression. An Interpretation of Euripides' *Hippolytus* in Initiatory Terms**

Abstract

Phaedra is an unusual queen. As the second wife of famous King Theseus, a notorious womanizer and often involved in problematic affairs, she seems to stand entirely aside from power and politics in Athens. She is obviously much younger than her husband and strangely detached from him, basically reduced to live alone in the palace. Aphrodite chooses her as her victim and instrument in her stratagem to bring Phaedra's stepson Hippolytus to fall. When the young man was once visiting the mysteries in Attica, the queen sees him from the Acropolis and falls immediately in love with him. And when Theseus decides to go into a one-year exile to atone for the murder of the sons of Pallas, they move to Trozen into the household where Phaedra's stepson is living. Like a Homeric hero she fights for her honor as queen, vehemently refusing to play the role in Aphrodite's mean drama, though finally becoming a collateral damage in it. The spectators witness a queen in the heroic fight to suppress her love manifesting itself as maniac disease (*nosos*). Her behavior is not only motivated by her will of maintaining her honor in a patriarchic society but also by reason of state. But the Nurse, an alter ego of Aphrodite, will bring Phaedra's erotic frenzy and true feeling to the fore. In their total focus on purity Hippolytus and Phaedra are tragically intertwined with each other. In his poetics of breaches and fissures Euripides models both his protagonists as paradoxical beings full of contradictions. The Id, the suppressed erotic desire, breaks through the surface of the Ego built on the social norms and values fueled by the Super-Ego. And both meet in a specific Artemis constellation: The woman in her extreme emotional state is shown as if in a disease of the womb and pains of menstruation, falling under the domain of Artemis as goddess of midwifery as well. According to ancient medical concepts the female chorus thus envisages Phaedra in a hysterical state, when the uterus wanders to seek watering and impregnation. In these terms Phaedra notionally returns to the status of the maiden in the realm of Artemis. The chorus regards women in their deficient nature as a *dystropos harmonia*, a musical harmony that turns out ill-conditioned. This self-referential comment summarizes Phaedra's paradox between Aphrodite and Artemis, unveiling and veiling, erotic frenzy and chaste purity, *nosos* and sanity, mania and rationality, maenadic and Artemisian huntress and queen full of self-control. Under the circumstances of a shame culture, as soon as her love is revealed to her stepson, her only exit remains suicide. To hide her feelings from the public and maintain the façade of an honorable wife and responsible queen she nits the knot of a complicated intrigue that culminates in binding the knot

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of the rope to hang herself and attaching a written message to her dead body, accusing Hippolytus of a sexual attack on her chaste purity.

KEYWORDS: Phaedra; Euripides; Hippolytus; queen; aristocratic values; shame culture; literacy

Phaedra is an extraordinary woman.<sup>1</sup> As the second wife of Theseus, a notorious ‘womanizer’ and a king often involved in problematic affairs, she seems to stand entirely aside from power and politics in Athens. Theseus had kidnapped Phaedra after abandoning her sister Ariadne in Crete. She is obviously much younger than her husband and appears strangely detached from him, basically reduced to living alone in the palace. Whereas she apparently inherited a comparatively high degree of power in Crete, she cannot exercise it in her new role as wife of a dominant ruler in Athens. Since the notoriously active Attic king is often abroad on political, heroic and ritual missions, the young queen is left alone at home. There she does not carry out even representative functions. At this point, she is reduced to being simply an aristocratic woman full of emotions who develops strong erotic feelings for her stepson Hippolytus, the substitute for her husband. In the gendered and socially ideal seclusion in the house that corresponds to her inner soul, dangerous passions arise (Cairns 1993: 327-8). Accordingly, Aphrodite chooses Phaedra as her victim and instrument in her perfidious stratagem to cause Hippolytus to fall as he refuses to pay tribute to her. Originating from a maniacally erotic royal family in Crete – Pasiphae, her mother, fell madly in love with a bull – and furnished with a strong will for power as well as with aristocratic intelligence and a heroic feeling of honour, she is Aphrodite’s ideal tool. When the young man was once visiting the mysteries in Attica, the queen saw him from the Acropolis and fell immediately in love with him. And when Theseus decided to go into a one-year exile to atone for the murder of the sons of Pallas, the royal couple moved from Athens to Troezen into the household where Phaedra’s stepson, her object of infatuation, was living. In this palace the drama is destined to evolve.

<sup>1</sup> This contribution uses parts of Bierl 2019a, rewriting and developing it further in regard to the topic of this issue. I thank Petra Saner for a draft translation of these parts and Rosy Colombo for encouraging me to compose this contribution, for editing it carefully and improving my English. The Greek text is based on Diggle 1984, the translation on Kovacs 1995. On Phaedra, see Fitzgerald 1973: 23-6; Kovacs 1981; Michelini 1987: 297-304; Kovacs 1987; Goff 1990; Zeitlin 1996; Craik 1998; Roisman 1999: esp. 47-107; Mills 2002: 53-61, 95-101; Susanetti 2007: 60-79; Roth 2015: 56-60; Ebbott 2017: 111-13.



All in all, Euripides' *Hippolytus* is so captivating because everything revolves around erotic passion and sexuality as well as their rejection (Kokkini 2013), and a woman is positioned at the centre of attention, who strives hard to suppress her erotic feeling. Having grown up in a shame culture, the young queen will use her power and feminine nous to defend her female reputation, her *time*.<sup>2</sup> Thus, like a Homeric hero, she will fight with her own female means and will not even shrink from suicide which, moreover, causes the death of the young man who rejects her and is responsible for the loss of her public honour. Only with her death will she assume heroic status. All in all, *Hippolytus* is characterised by a poetics of love while mainly assuming a female perspective.

In the Greek world, love is not associated with romantic ideas of happiness and fulfilment, but rather with malady (*nosos*) and suffering (Calame 1999: esp. 14-38, 51-6). A feminine *eros* in Greek literature before tragedy is predominantly found in the poems of the early Greek poet Sappho. One could argue that Euripides dramatises Sappho's lyric snapshots. Stylised as a Homeric heroine, the female ego's unsuccessful struggle against Aphrodite can best be illustrated with the recently discovered Sapphic Kypris song (P. Sapph. Obbink, lines 1-12) (Bierl 2016):

πῶς κε δὴ τις οὐ θαμέως ἄσαιτο,  
 Κύπρι, δέσποιν', ὄττινα [δ]ῆ φίλ[ησι,]  
 [κωὺ] θέλοι μάλιστα πάθαι χάλ[ασσαι]  
 [ταις] ὀνέχησθα;  
 [σὺν] σάλουσι μ' ἄλεμάτωσ δαίσδ[ης] 5  
 [ιμέ]ρω<ι> λύ[ι]σαντι γόν' ὠμε-[ x  
 [. . .] .α .α . . [ . . ] αμμ' οὐ προ[ο-3] .ερησ[  
 [- ∪] νεερ . [ . ] αι  
 [ c.8 ] . . [ . . ] σέ, θέλω[ ∪ - x  
 [- ∪ - x τοῦ] το πάθη[ν ∪ - x 10  
 [- ∪ - x - ] .αν, ἔγω δ' ἐμ' αὔται  
 τοῦτο σύνοιδα

...

[How could one not be hurt over and over again, Mistress Kypris, by anybody, whomever one really loves, and not, above all, want release from the passions that you sustain? You tear me apart pointlessly with shakes (5) through desire that loosens my knees? . . . not . . . you, I wish . . . to suffer this . . . (10) . . . , but I am conscious of this for my own self. . . (Trans. by Anton Bierl)]

<sup>2</sup> Dodds 1951: 28-63 argues for a development "from shame-culture to guilt-culture". Cairns 1993: 47 and Williams 2008: 91-5 see that shame and guilt overlap, since *aidos* covers both concepts. Phaedra too feels guilt to some extent.

### 1. *Hippolytus* as Master Drama – A Special Case?

Before going into a detailed analysis of Phaedra, I would like to address some general points. *Hippolytus* belongs to the Euripidean tragedies, which have been considered the best since the Alexandrians and which were then destined for school reading since the Byzantines at the latest. Dated 428 BC, *Hippolytus* in particular is ascribed to the so-called master dramas (alongside *Medea*, *Bacchae*, *Alcestis* and *Heracles*),<sup>3</sup> which have received the most attention throughout the ages and until today due to their artistic composition and captivating drama (Latacz 2003: 280-318, esp. 281, 301-5; Michelini 1987: 277-320). By way of distinction, it has received the epithet *Stephanias* (also *Stephanophoros*), that is ‘the wreath-bearer’, because the title character initially offers a wreath to the goddess Artemis, whom he worships in an excessive and solipsistic manner without venerating the other gods in the polytheistic system. The first *Hippolytus* was called *Kalyptomenos*, ‘he who veils himself’, and is only fragmentally preserved today (*TrGF* 5.428-47) (Barrett 1964: 10-45; see also Lesky 1972: 314-15; Roisman 1999: 1-24; Avezzù 2003: 152-7; Roth 2015: 34-9). Here Hippolytus, Theseus’ son from his first marriage with an Amazon, is the object of sexual advances on the part of Phaedra, his stepmother and Theseus’ second wife. As a consequence, she became the epitome of a whore in comedy (Aristoph. *Ran.* 1043). Ashamed of these advances, her chaste stepson veils his head. It appears that the audience was displeased with the indecent play, so for this reason, and perhaps also for the intellectual pleasure of dialectical variation, Euripides wrote a second version shortly afterwards. In this version, he turns Phaedra into a chaste woman, heroically repressing her forbidden love, and as an expression of her nature she modestly covers her head with a cloth as was customary.

In many ways, its diptych structure and dramaturgical composition call to mind Sophocles’ *Trachiniae* (probably performed after 438 BC), which also broaches the issue of a woman in love, namely Hercules’ wife Deianeira.<sup>4</sup> Because of this, *Hippolytus*, in particular, has been considered an exception by several critics (Latacz 2003: 281, 301; Michelini 1987: 277-320, esp. 277-80), avowing a similarity with Sophoclean tones and features. According to them, the characteristic of an exalted and contradictory poetics by Euripides as a sceptic anti-traditionalist (Kovacs 1987: ix-x and 1-21; Michelini 1987: 38-51 [overview of opinions]; 52-94) does not apply here. In-

<sup>3</sup> Aristophanes of Byzantium counts the *Hippolytus* in the last words of hypothesis II (Diggle 1984) among the best dramas: τὸ δὲ δρᾶμα τῶν πρώτων.

<sup>4</sup> Janka 2004 argues that *Hippolytus* is in dialogue with Sophocles’ *Trachinians*.

deed, in *Hippolytus*, Euripides allegedly adheres to the classic model almost perfectly. This judgement, however, relies on aesthetic presuppositions and does not stand up to closer inspection. For even in this play – especially alongside the intellectual play of contrasts with the first edition – the aesthetics of Heraclitus' *palintropos harmonia*,<sup>5</sup> of the 'harmony turning back, that is changing to the contrary', full of diametrically opposed tensions (fr. 51 DK), harmonious cracks and ruptures as well as fissures and breaches is present, induced by the ups and downs of dualisms, ambivalences and mutual tensions.

## 2. Opening the Scene

Both Phaedra and Hippolytus are excessively chaste, though the sexual drive structure beneath the surface of both soon becomes apparent. Phaedra as an aristocratic young queen is stylised as a Homeric heroine who fights against her sexual desire and for the preservation of her honour. Willing to die for this cause, the queen thus seeks to receive 'undying glory' (*kleos aphthiton*). And yet the myth is designed in order to make her reveal herself to the object of her desire in some way. The Nurse, who represents Aphrodite on earth in many respects, subsequently turns out to be a mediator. Hippolytus has devoted himself completely and one-sidedly to Artemis, the goddess of hunting and virginity. In doing so, he forgets to pay his homage to Aphrodite, the goddess complementary to Artemis in the polytheistic system.

In general, no character stands out as particularly drama-defining. Alongside Hippolytus, to whom the play owes its title, and Phaedra, who undoubtedly leaves the greatest impression, the Nurse shows some analogy to Theseus, who enters the play in the last third. All characters are assigned approximately the same number of lines (Hippolytus 271, Phaedra and Theseus 187 each, the Nurse 216) (Mills 2002: 88). The play is framed by the two appearances of the goddesses, who do not merely symbolise and hypostatise the human world of emotions (Lesky 1971: 421-2; Knox 1985: 325; Kovacs 1987: 32). Rather, since the majority of the audience believes in the Olympians, they are to a certain extent real and they interfere (Mills 2002: 105), as they do in Homer. Tragedians can build whole plays on this anthropological perception that is based on popular belief and literary representation. Despite their nature as dramatic constructs that are 'good to think with', gods in tragedy are not just fictional inventions with-

<sup>5</sup> Frischer 1970 designates the design of the play as *discordia concors*. See also Mills 2002: 48-53.

out any relationship to the cultic reality of the polis (thus Mikalson 1991); their portrayals must be grounded in the experiences of Athens' lived religion, otherwise the audience would not have been able to understand their involvement in the play. Since Aphrodite as well as Artemis appear on the *theologeion*, the spectators associate them with their functions in the polytheistic system and their Athenian cultic presence. In short: Aphrodite is responsible for love and sexuality between adults, while Artemis is the tutelary deity of adolescents, especially young chaste maidens, before and during their status transition to maturity. Hence, in *Hippolytus*, Aphrodite and Artemis become known as goddesses who pursue their own interests – in terms of making humans fall in love or, respectively, of keeping them in their in-between state of puberty, socially experienced in rites of passage – and act according to their sensitivities (Lesky 1972: 323; Köhnken 1972; Luschnig 1980; Mills: 2002: 77-9; Sourvinou-Inwood 2003: 330-1; Roth 2015: 62-6). Despite the clear predetermination of the action, the humans are not mere marionettes of the gods, but do in fact bear the responsibility for their actions which are the result of their own decisions.

Aphrodite is offended by Hippolytus' particularly close and exclusive attachment to Artemis, whereas she herself is censured by the young man. He is opposed to any love relationship, and categorically rejects matrimony even more so. Aphrodite intends to punish her adversary for his hubris with death (10-23), as she states in the prologue. Hippolytus is to perish in an evil web of desire spun by her long since. While growing up in his great-grandfather Pittheus' house in Troezen, Hippolytus once went to Athens to be initiated into the famous Eleusinian Mysteries. Love is always engendered in the eyes; and as Aphrodite had cunningly planned, Theseus' second wife Phaedra caught sight of him and was immediately ensnared (24-8). In his honour, she caused a small temple to be built for Aphrodite. It was situated close to the Acropolis Hill, a position that allowed any arrival to be watched from above. She named this shrine the *Hippolyteion*: where Aphrodite has her temple (29-33) Ἴππολύτῳ δ' ἔπι (32), 'for Hippolytus'. This name may, in anticipation of events, suggest the fact that the tomb was erected as a compensation (*epi*) for the death which Hippolytus is to suffer so that he may rise to the status of the goddess' cult hero (Nagy 2013: 545-53).

Aphrodite does not take revenge on him personally nor does she entrust someone else with the killing, but herself contrives an elaborate plan. In an erotic experimental design, Phaedra, the lonely queen, thus becomes the medium of love. Normally, the one evading love is the one to perish from it directly, as we can see in Sappho or in the Greek love novel, such as for example Habrocomas in Xenophon of Ephesus. In this case, however, Hippolytus only suffers indirectly through Phaedra, who in this sec-

ond version, despite the vehement love for her stepson, does not offer herself to him, but even manages to resist revealing her emotions. Theseus is burdened by blood guilt incurred for the murder of the Pallantidae. He thus goes into a year-long exile in Troezen with his wife, and with her beloved in the same household, she finds herself confronted with him every day. On her own accord and in consideration of her honour, her behaviour does not entirely coincide with Aphrodite's plans at first, which is why Phaedra is to pay with her own life following the logic of Eros – as 'collateral damage', in a sense. Most notably, Aphrodite must ensure Theseus' discovery of the affair for he is to become the perpetrator. By using an open wish granted him by Poseidon, Theseus is to avenge Hippolytus' alleged sexual assault on Phaedra by making him pay with his life (35-40) (Barrett 1964: 39-42).

Nearly everything is disclosed in the prologue, but some details concerning the execution of the plan stay hidden. However, it is still unclear how both Hippolytus and Phaedra are drawn into the web of revenge even though they both vehemently resist love. Phaedra's love becomes obvious thanks to the Nurse. With her own honour still in mind, Phaedra devises a stratagem which ensures that Hippolytus is charged with sexual assault upon her. To ensure this accusation, she attaches a written message to her dead body (856-86). By committing suicide, she is able to evade any further accusations herself, which is why Theseus becomes her supposedly rightful avenger. It is only when this innocent young man is almost completely dishonoured and is standing on the brink of death that Artemis, as *dea ex machina*, has to restore justice, at least for Hippolytus' sake. He receives a cult (1423-30) and subsequently forgives his father before he succumbs to his severe wounds. Even at first glance, it becomes obvious how much the cracks, ruptures and frictions between individual positions are played off in a series of diametrical opposites; that is, in particular, purity/impurity, chastity/sexuality. These oppositions are further potentiated even when compared with the first *Hippolytus* located in Athens, perhaps also compared intertextually with Sophocles' *Phaedra* (Barrett 1964: 12; Roth 2015: 31-4), provided that the lost drama is to be dated before 428 BC (Barrett 1964: 10-45; Roth 2015: 31-9).

As we have seen, the play is framed by two cult installations (29-33, 1423-30).<sup>6</sup> The aetiologies are based on cultic incidents in Athens as well as in Troezen (Nagy 2013: 542-71; Roth 2015: 26-9). The glance down from the hill (κατόψιον, 30) that triggers the love in Athens (24-8) matches Aphro-

<sup>6</sup> On the fictional status of the hair-offerings and hymns by Troezenian maidens as premarital rites, see Scullion 1999-2000: 225. On the contrary, Sourvinou-Inwood 2003: 329-31 argues that Euripides uses the actual cult of Troezen for "religious problematization" (330).

dite's epithet Kataskopia, 'she who watches from above', in Troezen. Pausanias gives an account of a stadium in Troezen named after Hippolytus. Looking down from Aphrodite Kataskopia's sanctuary, Phaedra catches sight of the naked young man who is exercising in this stadium, and falls hopelessly in love with him. In her desperation, she pierces the leaves of a myrtle bush (Paus. 1.22.2), which is closely associated with love. The bush is located near Phaedra's grave, as is a remembrance stone for Hippolytus (Paus. 2.32.3-4). The latter also has a sanctuary that hosts an annual ritual: to mourn his death in a chariot, the virgins offer the sacrifice of their hair before their wedding (Paus. 2.32.1-2) (Nagy 2013: 548-51, 557-9).

### 3. Hippolytus' and Phaedra's Stories as Initiation Myths and Cultic Background

Initiatory approaches have been applied to Greek literature since the 1970s. They found particular success in the field of Greek drama (Bierl 2007: 23-7; e.g. Padilla 1999; Bierl 1994; Bierl 2009: esp. 196-244), even though sceptical voices warned against an uncritical and excessive use of the too general model of the rite of passage (Dodd and Faraone 2003). In Greek drama, the model was also widened to include possible distortions of the cultural pattern and failures of complying with it. *Hippolytus* has served as an example of such a reading. However, critics confined their arguments and analytical sophistication in this sense to the figure of Hippolytus. This essay will be an important contribution to this interpretation in initiatory terms in so far as it extends it to Phaedra as well. We will see that Euripides shifts the married wife of Theseus, queen of Athens, back toward her status as a young maiden in her *rite de passage* and thus under the influence of Artemis. This paradoxical and anti-naturalistic characterisation of Phaedra is highlighted in particular by the female chorus who themselves feature a striking instability in age-consistency, oscillating here again between women and girls. The play is thus based on patterns of both male and female initiation paradoxically interweaving Hippolytus and Phaedra. The latter is notionally re-projected back to her own rite of passage. The impression, however, that Phaedra's initiatory component sits uneasily with her totally different ambitions in terms of an almost Homeric heroine and strong woman fighting to fulfil her aristocratic values is actually a deceptive one. Rather, as shown above, it fits well into Euripides' radical poetics of breaches and fissures. Euripides thus aims at displaying both Phaedra and Hippolytus as tragically intertwined with each other in their total focus on purity as paradoxical beings full of contradictions. In this sense, the apparent lack of a political significance, as the play seems to revolve around the pri-

vate sphere and *eros*, is supplemented by a different political commitment, as young men and young aristocratic women have a role in the polis. This applies even more in the case of the son of a king and Theseus' wife, the queen of Athens.

The initiatory basis in its specific interaction of male and female aspects – even the gender identity of both Phaedra and Hippolytus becomes destabilised – is reflected also in the ritual and mythic scenarios and in the cultic realia that are constitutive of the play. Hippolytus is the initiate who misses the rite of passage of a regular *ephebeia* or rather suffers the initiation death to complete his change of status that renders him a man (Mitchell-Boyask 1999; also Nagy 2013: 542-4), which Apollo is responsible for most of all (Bierl 1994). Conversely, close to the shrine of Apollo Epibaterios in Troezen, there is also a temple dedicated to his sister Artemis (Paus. 2.31.4), who carries the epithet Lykeia, 'the wolfish', and who is responsible for young girls' change of status. The epithet 'wolfish' points towards the danger on the Outside, where young people live secluded from society in an in-between state. The exemplary bridegroom dies as an idolised young man who had reached marriageable age. The young man in transition busies himself primarily with physical exercise, chariot racing, and hunting. The young girls' sacrificial hair ritual mentioned by Pausanias (2.32.1) exactly corresponds to the aetiology of the cult that Artemis institutes for her beloved at the end of *Hippolytus* (1423-30):

σοὶ δ', ὃ ταλαίπωρ', ἀντὶ τῶνδε τῶν κακῶν τιμὰς μεγίστας ἐν πόλει Τροζηνίᾳ δώσω· κόραι γὰρ ἄζυγες γάμων πάρος κόμας κεροῦνταὶ σοι, δι' αἰῶνος μακροῦ πένθη μέγιστα δακρῶν καρπουμένῳ· αἰὶ δὲ μουσσοποιὸς ἔς σὲ παρθένων ἔσται μέριμνα, κοῦκ ἀνώνυμος πεσῶν ἔρως ὁ Φαίδρας ἔς σὲ σιγηθήσεται.	1425       1430
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[To you, unhappy man, I shall grant, in recompense for these sorrows, supreme honours (1425) in the land of Troezen. For unmarried girls before their marriage will cut their hair for you, and over the length of ages you will harvest the deep mourning of their tears. The practiced skill of poetry sung by maidens will for ever make you its theme, and Phaedra's love for you (1430) shall not fall nameless and unsung. (Trans. Kovacs 1995)]

In addition to the expression of grief, choral songs are mentioned in this passage, which the girls sing in honour of their exemplary betrothed (1429-30), just as the real chorus sings his praises in the play. Wedding songs and lamentation melodies go hand in hand in many cultures, for in myth, the bridegroom dies in his transition in order to be reborn in a new phase

of life (Nagy 2013: 559-60). According to Pausanias, Asclepius is associated with this resurrection from the dead in nearby Epidaurus (2.27.3-4; cf. Schol. Pi. P. 3.54). All in all, Troezen and Athens, where the first *Hippolytus* is located, independently present a similar mythic-ritual scenario regarding this legend. Moreover, it has become obvious that the play is based on patterns of both male and female initiation, paradoxically interweaving Hippolytus and Phaedra, who is notionally re-projected to her own rite of passage.

It is on this culturally real and psychosocial as well as socio-anthropological basis, which the Athenian audience understood as a matter of course, that the play's sense is revealed. In myth, there is a tendency to create negative scenarios and catastrophes for the hero; as "anti-ephebe" (Mitchell-Boyask 1999: 59), Hippolytus is Aphrodite's antagonist, whereas in the world of the counterbalancing ritual, he is profoundly connected with the goddess. If Hippolytus were to take the side of Artemis in the drama and did not want anything to do with Aphrodite, love and marriage, this would necessarily entail the refusal to attain manhood on the part of a youth who does not want to grow up (Mitchell-Boyask 1999: esp. 59-61). Aphrodite cannot allow this, since every young man is destined to procreate through sexual intercourse with the female sex, thus guaranteeing the community's continued existence. From being a hunter on the Outside, operating on the margins (Vidal-Naquet 1986), he has to become a full member of the warrior community. As Jean-Pierre Vernant (1990: 29-77) among others rightly points out, war on the part of men complements giving birth to offspring on the part of women: "Marriage is for the girl what war is for the boy" (Vernant 1990: 34). Artemis is not only responsible for young girls' transition to womanhood, but she also assists women as a midwife; on the male side, she is the tutelary deity of hunting, war and battle (Vernant 1991: 198-204). According to the logic of natural maturation, Aphrodite must triumph, and Artemis must submit. An insistence on an exclusive and particularly intimate relationship with Artemis must necessarily entail Hippolytus' premature death. The desire he expresses before her to reach his life's end like a charioteer, just as he began it (87), implies the circularity of an eternal run around the marker instead of a straight track leading directly towards the finishing line (Nagy 2013: 543-4; Zeitlin 1996: 233). Simultaneously, the sentence poetically conveys his own death wish with tragic irony. Both fixating on purity, Phaedra and Hippolytus appear entangled. Furthermore, both main characters appear highly contradictory, because underneath the surface of the ego, which is formed by social norms and the superego's values, the repressed id, that is erotic desire, is pushing for a breakthrough. Ultimately, Phaedra and Hippolytus meet in a specific Artemis constellation: according to the ancient conception, the woman is de-



picted in a state of hysteria in her suffering of the uterus and in menstrual pain (121-372, esp. 161-9), which also fall within the competence of Artemis. As was stated above, Phaedra, in a certain sense, returns to the status of a girl. And even the young man, who remains in the intermediate state of the *rite de passage* also assumes the traits of a virgin (Goff 1990; Mitchell-Boyask 1999), just as ephebes occasionally put on female clothing in cult (Bierl 2009: 196-244).

In the following close reading, we will trace the development of the interaction of male and female initiatory motifs and the mutual entanglements of sexual desire induced by Aphrodite, and the bitter resistance to it, whereby concealment and exposure as well as veiling and unveiling will be key motifs (Segal 1988; Zeitlin 1996: 243-57, 264-78; Goff 1990: 12-20; Holmes 2010: 254-6). The goddess stages a tragedy where a young man and the male spectators are confronted with the feminine while the play is heavily focused on the female body (Zeitlin 1996: 234-57). As Froma Zeitlin (1996: 224) aptly says:

Aphrodite's power will prove to be consonant with the power of theater itself: as regards, for example, the structure and functions of the plot, the representation of the body and its sensory faculties, relations between inside and outside and between seen and unseen, types and modes of communication, role playing and reversal of roles, the interaction of actors and spectators, and the general mimetic properties of dramatic art.

Although Phaedra is a high-born queen she becomes both the victim of a theatrical experiment on the part of Aphrodite and its instrument, too, and during this experiment she will be turned inside out. Her female body and psychic state will be revealed while the spectators observe her in her vehement struggle against this invasion following the male-induced, patriarchal values of the polis. This conflict is precisely what first binds then loosens the knot of the tragic plot – see Aristotle's *desis* and *lysis* in his analysis as given in his *Poetics* (1455b24-9) – that is, visually concentrated in the theatrical objects, the noose and the letter, through which the concatenation of deaths is put in practice (Zeitlin 1996: 225-34).

#### 4. The Ups and Downs in Aphrodite's Web of Desire

After Aphrodite's prologue (1-57), Hippolytus appears with his hunting companions, who form a side-chorus and sing a brief hymn to Artemis, the fairest of the Olympian virgins (58-72, esp. 61-72) (Calame 2017: 152-4). Hippolytus then brings his plaited garland from the virgin meadow. This *locus amoenus* in the Outside is a place of purity, of the unmixed. At the same time, just as in Sappho's fr. 2 V., it is an erotically charged site, where

young girls in segregation who are just about to reach sexual maturation are prepared for marriage (Bierl 2019b; cf. Calame 1999: 165-70). In myth, they are ideally snatched away by a man while picking flowers. Kore, the mythic representation of all girls, experiences this when she is kidnapped by Hades in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. The abduction simultaneously marks the girl's initiation death while the act of picking is itself often associated with defloration. The bee as a sacred animal of chastity which flies from one flower to another on the meadow (77) is later on infused with a more aggressive sexuality owing to its sting (563-4) (Frischer 1970: 89). The consecration of a plaited garland as a headband boldly stands for circular binding. The object symbolises the exclusive attachment to Artemis; this worship has some really sexual undertones (73-87) (Zeitlin 1996: 234-5; Hunter 2009; Calame 2017: 153-4). At the same time, Hippolytus brusquely rejects the admonition of a servant to include Aphrodite in his worship. Nonetheless, the horses are prepared for hunting and chariot races (88-120).

At this point, the chorus of women from Troezen appears (121-69). As the drama takes its course, it becomes evident that the chorus' identity is just as unstable as Phaedra's. Accordingly, the chorus of women is interchangeable with one consisting of young girls. While doing the washing, the women hear of their mistress's suffering on the sickbed; she then chastely covers her blonde head to signify her affliction (133-4). In contrast with Hippolytus, who veiled his head in the first version because he was ashamed of Phaedra's advances, Phaedra is now the one who covers herself. And yet, she is to unveil herself soon (201-2). She refuses to eat intending to starve herself to death. The chorus already addresses Phaedra as a girl (κούρα, 141). They ask if Pan, Hecate, the Corybants and the mountain mother Rhea, who is often attended by them with wild Dionysian music and dancing, are responsible for her irrational behaviour (141-4). Alternatively, the chorus assumes that an omitted sacrifice to Dictynna, the Cretan goddess of the wild beasts, who is equated with Artemis, is to blame (145-7), especially since she is also powerful in Troezen (148-50). This would correspond with Hippolytus' disregard for Aphrodite, but in a mirror-inverted manner. And indeed, it is a possible motive: in a sense, Phaedra is all Aphrodite, since the young queen is destined to play her erotic role and simultaneously becomes Aphrodite's victim in the plot. At the same time, in her suppression of love and her consequent chastity, in her madness she paradoxically moves towards the role of both a young girl and Artemis. Some possible reasons for Phaedra's lingering illness such as her husband's infidelity or news from her home island Crete are briefly taken into consideration (151-60). Finally, the chorus touches upon one more condition associated with Artemis (161-9).

φιλεῖ δὲ τᾶ δυστρόπῳ γυναικῶν  
 ἄρμονία κακὰ  
 δύστανος ἀμηχανία συνοικεῖν  
 ὠδίνων τε καὶ ἀφροσύνας.  
 δι' ἐμᾶς ἦξέν ποτε νηδύος ἄδ' 165  
 αὔρα· τὰν δ' εὖλοχον οὐρανιαν  
 τόξων μεδέουσαν ἄτευν  
 Ἄρτεμιν, καὶ μοι πολυζήλωτος αἰεὶ  
 σὺν θεοῖσι φοιτᾶ.

[Women's nature is an uneasy harmony, and with it is wont to dwell the slack unhappy helplessness of birth-pangs and their folly. (165) Through my womb also has this breath darted. But I called on the heavenly easer of travail, Artemis, mistress of arrows, and she is always – the gods be praised – my much-envied visitor. (Trans. Kovacs 1995)]

The women wonder whether all this could be caused by a gynaecological disorder. They obviously consider hysteria as a possible diagnosis. Phaedra's indisposition could be caused by the lack of watering the uterus, which consequently wanders about in the body, longing for sexual fulfilment (Holmes 2010: 185-7). Labour pains, menstrual pain and gynaecological complaints are mentioned as possible links to Artemis' field of competence, that is childbirth (161-9). The women in the chorus know from their own experiences that Artemis protects them against these grievances in her function as midwife. A *dystropos harmonia* (cf. 161-2) is strikingly attributed to women as deficient beings, a chord in musical harmony which is paradoxically and unhappily altered (Zeitlin 1996: 237-41, 247-8; Holmes 2010: 261; Nagy 2013: 564). The chorus unconsciously uses the oxymoron of a 'discordant harmony', which simultaneously refers to the tragic chorus' own musical dimension, that of badly modulated tuning, and to the fatal effects of the whole drama set in aesthetic forms. The women of the chorus thus address the helplessness and lack of orientation of the young queen in love. In her sexual distress, Phaedra identifies with Artemis, the goddess who triggers madness (*mania*), so that the queen may bridge the spatial gap dividing her from the erotic object, at least in her imagination.

In the first *episodion* (170-524), the Nurse enters and performs her caregiving service to Phaedra, who is carried onstage on a daybed. Just like a midwife – one calls to mind the Socratic maieutics – she is to deliver Phaedra's secret. The chorus has already sensed the mania and thus anticipates the next scene. Phaedra asks for her body to be propped up as her limbs are unstrung (198-9), because limb-melting (*lysimeles*, cf. Hes. *Th.* 911, Alcman 3.61 PMG) Eros has taken possession of her. At the same time, she asks for her heavy headdress to be removed so that her tresses can be spread on her shoulders (200-2). This is equivalent to the erotic gesture *par excellence*,

the detachment from the bond of chastity. She calls for clear springs, cool groves, and wants to go hunting and for a walk to the racetrack; essentially, she wants to go to Hippolytus (208-31).

ΦΑ. αἰαῖ·

πῶς ἂν δροσερᾶς ἀπὸ κρηνίδος  
καθαρῶν ὑδάτων πῶμ' ἄρυσαιμαν,  
ὑπὸ τ' αἰγείροις ἔν τε κομήτη  
λειμῶνι κλιθεῖς' ἀναπαυσαίμαν; 210

ΤΡ. ὦ παῖ, τί θροεῖς;

οὐ μὴ παρ' ὄχλω τάδε γηρύση,  
μανίας ἔποχον ρίπτουσα λόγον;

ΦΑ. πέμπετέ μ' εἰς ὄρος· εἴμι πρὸς ὕλαν 215

καὶ παρὰ πεύκας, ἵνα θηροφόνοι  
στεῖβουσι κύνες

βαλιαῖς ἐλάφοις ἐγχιρμπτόμεναι.

πρὸς θεῶν· ἔραμαι κυσὶ θωύξαι

καὶ παρὰ χαίταν ξανθὰν ρίψαι 220

Θεσσαλὸν ὄρπακ', ἐπίλογχον ἔχουσ'  
ἐν χειρὶ βέλος.

ΤΡ. τί ποτ', ὦ τέκνον, τάδε κηραίνεις;

τί κυνηγεσίων καὶ σοὶ μελέτη;

τί δὲ κρηναίων νασμῶν ἔρασαι; 225

πάρα γὰρ δροσερὰ πύργους συνεχῆς.

κλειτύς, ὅθεν σοὶ πῶμα γένοιτ' ἄν.

ΦΑ. δέσποιν' ἄλιας Ἄρτεμι Λίμνας

καὶ γυμνασίων τῶν ἵπποκρότων,

εἶθε γενοίμαν ἐν σοῖς δαπέδοις 230

πῶλους Ἐνετάς δαμαλιζόμενα.

[PHAEDRA Oh, oh! How I long to draw a drink of pure water from a dewy spring (210) and to take my rest lying under the poplar trees and in the uncut meadow! NURSE My child, what are these words of yours? Won't you stop saying such things before the crowd, hurling wild words that are mounted on madness? PHA. (215) Take me to the mountain: I mean to go to the wood, to the pine-wood, where hounds that kill wild beasts tread, running close after the dappled deer! By the gods, how I want to shout to the hounds (220) and to let fly past my golden hair a javelin of Thessaly, to hold in my hand the sharp-pointed weapon! NU. Why, my child, these fevered thoughts? Why concern yourself with hunting? (225) Why do you long for water from a flowing spring? For hard by the city wall is a dewy slope from which you might have a drink. PHA. Mistress of the Salt Lake, Artemis, mistress of the coursing-ground for horses, (230) oh that I might find myself on your ground taming Enetic horses! (Trans. Kovacs 1995)]

Phaedra wishes to be sent to the mountains (215), like the cultic Bacchantes who temporarily leave their homes. The longed-for moisture is correlat-

ed with her being too dry, which the Nurse instinctively interprets as madness. Phaedra desires to tame colts (231) (Glenn 1976). At the same time, as an imaginative girl in transition, she actually sees herself as a foal in transition (cf. 546), eagerly awaiting her yoke (Calame 1997: 238-44, esp. 241). This image corresponds to the female wedding in Greek culture. She calls upon Artemis, the mistress of the Salt Lake, gymnasia and coursing grounds (228-9). Above all, she desires to be close to Hippolytus and imagines herself in the role of a second Artemis who appears on the hunt with golden hair waving in the wind, spear in hand and accompanied by hounds (219-22) (Nagy 2013: 568). In her mad state, this gesture of revealing herself erotically as Artemis simultaneously opens her id. But now the confused questions of the Nurse (232-8) stimulate the ego, which conflicts with her instincts and wants to suppress everything again, prompting Phaedra to ask for her head to be covered again (239-49). Veiling and covering in response to shame are also concentrated in the Nurse's reply. It would be for the best, the servant wishes in her despair, if death were to cover her own body (250-1). At the same time, the Nurse instinctively pinpoints the truth with her shrewd opinion that one should only engage in temperate friendships and that one ought not to be consumed by limb-melting desires like labour pains. Instead, one ought to be one's own master over any binding and releasing. The Nurse recommends the Apollonian maxim of moderation and of 'not-too-much' in an almost philosophical manner (252-66). Subsequently, the Nurse repeatedly attempts to elicit the truth from Phaedra in dialogue, using Socratic midwifery. Finally, with her appeal not to betray her own sons to the bastard and stepson (304-10), she gets to the heart of the matter: only the name causes Phaedra pain. By using ritual *hiketeia* (325-6), the Nurse tries to force her to reveal the cause of her malady. Phaedra resists since she is "plotting to win credit" out of shame (331). Honour in death is her goal.

Following the supplication ritual, Phaedra begins to carefully reveal the true circumstances. First she speaks of her notoriously erotic mother in Crete, Pasiphae, who fell in love with a bull (Reckford 1974). Then she mentions her famous sister Ariadne, who became the wife of Dionysus, he who dissolves all order, and she feels herself to be the third in the series (337-41). The Nurse still fails to understand (342-6), since Phaedra makes only enigmatic allusions to the truth. Now Phaedra finally makes it clear that it is all about love (347), of which the Nurse knows – again based loosely Sappho fr. 130 V. – and that it is bittersweet (*glykypikron*), "at once . . . great pleasure and great pain" (348). The Nurse now enquires about the man of her desire (350). When Phaedra finally reveals that Hippolytus is the object of her love, the Nurse is completely shocked (353-61). The chorus (362-72) mirrors her horror, calling the woman in love "Cretan child" (372), as a young girl

just before her status transition, thus bringing Phaedra closer to the eternal ‘child’ and boy Hippolytus.<sup>7</sup> And even the chorus, generally presented by ephebes in Athens, will re-enact this change of status from woman to girl in its function as emotional amplifier and mediator of empathy.

At this point, everything is laid out in plain sight: Kypris works behind the scenes, as we know from the beginning. And yet it is a perfectly human feeling that Phaedra, now in her role of responsible queen, wants to continue to suppress. In contrast to her emotional outburst and her ritually forced confession, Phaedra subsequently offers an intellectual analysis (373-430) of which I would like to cite the famous beginning (373-90):

Τροζήνιαι γυναῖκες, αἱ τόδ’ ἔσχατον  
οἰκεῖτε χώρας Πελοπίας προνώπιον,  
ἤδη ποτ’ ἄλλως νυκτὸς ἐν μακρῶι χρόνῳ 375  
θνητῶν ἐφρόντισ’ ἢ διέφθαρται βίος.  
καὶ μοι δοκοῦσιν οὐ κατὰ γνώμης φύσιν  
πράσσειν κακίον· ἔστι γὰρ τό γ’ εὖ φρονεῖν  
πολλοῖσιν· ἀλλὰ τῆδ’ ἀθρητέον τόδε·  
τὰ χρῆστ’ ἐπιστάμεσθα καὶ γιγνώσκομεν, 380  
οὐκ ἐκπονοῦμεν δ’, οἱ μὲν ἀργίας ὕπο,  
οἱ δ’ ἡδονὴν προθέντες ἀντὶ τοῦ καλοῦ  
ἄλλην τιν’· εἰσὶ δ’ ἡδοναὶ πολλαὶ βίου,  
μακρὰ τε λέσχει καὶ σχολή, τερπνὸν κακόν,  
αἰδῶς τε· δισσαὶ δ’ εἰσὶν, ἡ μὲν οὐ κακῆ, 385  
ἡ δ’ ἄχθος οἴκων· εἰ δ’ ὁ καιρὸς ἦν σαφῆς,  
οὐκ ἂν δὴ ἦσθην ταῦτ’ ἔχοντε γράμματα.  
ταῦτ’ οὖν ἐπειδὴ τυγχάνω φρονοῦσ’ ἐγώ,  
οὐκ ἔσθ’ ὁποῖω φαρμάκῳ διαφθερεῖν  
ἔμελλον, ὥστε τοῦμπαλιν πεσεῖν φρενῶν. 390

[Women of Troezen, dwellers in this extreme forecourt to the land of Pelops, (375) I have pondered before now in other circumstances in the night’s long watches how it is that the lives of mortals are in ruins. I think that it is not owing to the nature of their wits that they fare worse than they might, since many people possess good sense. Rather, one must look at it this way: (380) we know and understand what is noble but do not bring it to completion. Some fail from laziness, others because they give precedence to some other pleasure than being honourable. Life’s pleasures are many, long leisurely talks – a pleasant evil – (385) and the sense of awe. Yet they are of two sorts, one pleasure being no bad thing, another a burden upon houses. If propriety were always clear, there would not be two things designated by the same letters. Since these are the views I happen to have arrived at beforehand, there is no drug could make me (390) pervert them and reverse my opinion. (Trans. Kovacs 1995)]

<sup>7</sup> On the fluctuating designation of Hippolytus as ἀνήρ (‘man’), παῖς or τέκνον (‘child’), see Mitchell-Boyask 1999: 53-9.

In fully rational clarity, she opposes Socrates' optimism regarding the knowledge of virtue (377-9; see Pl. *Prt.* 352d) (Dodds 1925: 103; Lesky 1972: 420). It is laziness, not lack of good sense, that is responsible for people's giving precedence to indulgence for the beautiful, the noble and the honourable. It is the pleasures that count for the most (380-4). The ambivalence in naming is also partly to blame (385-7):<sup>8</sup> shame, *aidos*, denotes the sense of honour and veneration in a positive context; in a negative context, however, it signifies both shame itself as well as shamelessness in a sexual scandal, which permits the urge to be acted out (Mills 2002: 55-8, 95-101). For this reason, Phaedra has been fighting against it. Considering the disgrace, she is left only with the option of death in order to evade public condemnation in a shame culture. The *aidos* which "ruins houses" (386) is also the feeling of shame that forces Phaedra to kill herself, as Sophie Mills argues, because the rest of the speech provides the explanation of why it is necessary for her to preserve her good reputation (2002: 57-8).<sup>9</sup> As a queen, Phaedra finds herself in a double-bind situation. She knows that her suicide will bring the royal family to the brink of catastrophe. However, she is well aware that, in this case, the disclosure of her defiled name would endanger the reputation of her husband and children to an even greater extent. The fight against her feeling of love is a vain one. All her attempts to conceal it, to bear the madness nobly or to overcome it by self-control (*sophrosyne*) have failed (393-9). Victory in the struggle against Aphrodite or Eros is an illusion (Holmes 2010: 256-7). Therefore, one can only succumb to them (400-1), as we know from Helen in *Iliad* 3.399-420 and Sappho. That is why Phaedra has made the decision to die (401-2). As far as her aristocratic self-conception based on the value of *time*, honour and dignity is concerned, it is most revealing when she states that evil for the female sex originates from aristocratic nobility (409-10). As a queen, she has a special responsibility for *eukleia*. She concludes that suicide is the only way to prevent her from being detected, and thus bringing shame to her husband or to her own children. Only by eliminating herself can they live a glorious life as free citizens with the best reputation (420-3). At the very end of her reasoning, she summarises everything with this accurate image (428-30):

κακοὺς δὲ θνητῶν ἐξέφην' ὅταν τύχη,

<sup>8</sup> On the linguistic problems, see Mills 2002: 98-9. On the problem of a double *aidos*, see Lesky 1972: 324; Barrett 1964: 230-1 ad 385-6, 386-7; Roth 2015: 139, 141 ad 385-7; on *aidos* as pleasure, see Kovacs 1981; on *aidos* as sex, see Craik 1998; Roisman 1999: 79-106.

<sup>9</sup> For other opinions, see Mills 2002: 96-101. Craik 1993 and Roisman 1999: 47-107 argue for ambiguity and the discrepancy between virtue and appearance; Luschnig 1988: 42 believes that Phaedra speaks from the perspective of one who failed; Kovacs 1981: 291, on the contrary, pleads that Phaedra is confident that she will succeed.

προθεῖς κάτοπτρον ὥστε παρθένω νέα,  
 χρόνος· παρ' οἷσι μήποτ' ὀφθείην ἐγώ.

430

[But as for the base among mortals, they are exposed, late or soon, by Time, who holds up to them, as to a young girl, (430) a mirror. In their number may I never be found! (Trans. by Kovacs 1995)]

As though looking in a mirror to perceive her erotic self as well as the way she is erotically perceived by others – full of vanity, she wants to see herself as attractive as possible – she knows that bad character is discovered over time (Barrett 1964: 237-8 *ad* 428-30; Luschnig 1988; Goff 1990: 23-4).<sup>10</sup> Phaedra is the young girl whose infatuation now becomes evident. On stage, she has shown her id due to a decreasing tension on the part of her ego. Before her husband, who is still absent on a ritual mission, finds out everything, only death can preserve her honour as queen, wife and mother, as is dictated by her superego.

The dizzying alternation of opposing emotions and positions in an innovative poetics of fissures and ruptures continues. The Nurse, who has just appeared to be completely horrified, now becomes a mediator of love; in a sense, she is Aphrodite's representative on earth (433-524), whereas in the scene before she represented Artemis in her functions of chastity and midwifery, as well. She stresses that it is perfectly normal to love, even gods do this (437-58). If Phaedra resists it, she ultimately turns against the polytheistic system of belief (459-61). It is only a matter of hiding the ugly, she says; as a human being one has to be modest in one's demands and can consider oneself fortunate if one possesses at least a small surplus of good (462-72). Everything else is hubris. Phaedra ought to take courage for love (τόλμα δ' ἐρῶσα, 473; see 473-5). The Nurse then tries to find a cure for love sickness. Love magic, incantations and spells (εἰσὶν δ' ἐπωδαὶ καὶ λόγοι θελκτήριοι, 478) may aid in attracting the lover and making him compliant (476-9). Ultimately, however, the remedy above all others (as later propagated in romantic novels) is that love can only be cured with love.<sup>11</sup>

Women have their contrivances (*mechanai*, 481) to eliminate their disorientation and helplessness (*a-mechania*; cf. 162). Euripides is known for these kinds of clever solutions. After the Nurse's failure, Phaedra is bound to find a new one (688). Here, the Nurse proves to be a pragmatist (490-512). It is a matter of life and death. Phaedra does not need the noble-sounding words which she utters in her attempt to suppress

<sup>10</sup> See also Zeitlin 1996: 269-78, linking time, the mirror and the virgin; according to her, Phaedra provides the mirror image through which Hippolytus, the other maiden, can recognise the divided self. The view through the mirror corresponds to the theatre itself, in which illusion, deception and mimetic processes are operative.

<sup>11</sup> See Chariton, *Callirhoe* 6.7.3; Philetas in Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe* 2.7.7.



her feelings: what she needs is simply this man, Hippolytus (οὐ λόγων εὐσχημόνων / δεῖ σ' ἀλλὰ τάνδρός, 490-1). To the objection that all this is vile and disgusting (498-9), she replies that to yield to her feelings and be open to love is, if this saves her, better than to preserve her reputation (500-2), and, in any case, she has already embarked upon the path of sin. Now she ought to simply give way to love (507-8). Once again, the Nurse pretends to have a love philtre (φίλτρα μοι θελκτήρια ἔρωτος, 509-10) in the house in order to impress and seduce Phaedra (509-12) (Holmes 2010: 258-9). The Nurse pretends to need a token from the desired man, a word or a piece of clothing to unite them (512-15). It is another trick. The Nurse is already implicitly prefiguring her true intention. She has never planned on performing love magic with remedies, ointments, or drinks (χριστὸν ἢ ποτὸν τὸ φάρμακον, 516), but as a rational servant she intends to confront Hippolytus with the truth by use of semiotics, that is simply by words (Susanetti 2007: 72).<sup>12</sup> Phaedra is afraid of exactly this, which is why the Nurse adopts the pretext of the magic device and reassures her, saying that she will arrange this business indoors (516-24).

Time is bridged by the first *stasimon* (525-64), a song to Eros, a god who is represented as not being worshipped enough (525-44). The women then sing of two unfortunate status transitions (545-64): the first belongs to Iole, whom we know from Sophocles' *Trachiniae*; in Oechalia, Aphrodite drove the filly, that is the maiden not yet harnessed to the yoke of marriage (πῶλον ἄζυγα λέκτρων, 546), away from the house as though she were a Nymph or a Bacchant, and gave her to Hercules in an unhappy marriage (545-54). Likewise, Phaedra wished to tame even the Venetian fillies and to stay among them in her hysterical fit (230-1, 235) (Calame 1997: 241). In this way she had expressed her perceived return to the state of a girl before the wedding which she wishes to enter with Hippolytus. The *rite de passage* of Semele had ended in a similarly dramatic manner (555-64); as Zeus' lover, she perished in lightning and thunder, and begot Bacchus, the god of tragedy and of total dissolution. Kypris is a mighty power that rushes everywhere, so this includes towards Phaedra, too; Aphrodite flies like a bee (563). As we may recall, the bee of Hippolytus had been mentioned as a sign of chastity in Artemis' field of competence (77). Now it becomes the dangerous insect that can make everyone feel the sting of love. As is well known, Aphrodite uses Phaedra's raging love in order to cause Hippolytus' downfall.

Next we witness an eavesdropped conversation (565-600). Phaedra re-

<sup>12</sup> For this reason, the conjecture πλόκον ('curl') by Reiske in line 514, that was taken up by Diggle 1984 and Roth 2015: 164-5, instead of the transmitted λόγον ('word') should be rejected.

ports to the chorus that Hippolytus has been reviling the Nurse (581-2). Phaedra realises that the Nurse, as she had feared, simply told him everything, and that therein lay the cure. Suicide is now her last resort (596-600). The Nurse and Hippolytus appear from offstage in a *coup de théâtre* (601-15) (Zeitlin 1996: 261). He is aghast; she begs him to remain silent and reminds him of his oath to her (611). The exceedingly righteous young man surprises the spectators with a sophistic differentiation, which Aristophanes (*Ran.* 1471; cf. also 101-2; *Thesm.* 275) likened to parody: “My tongue swore, but my mind is not on oath” (612). The Nurse warns him against the consequences, but he counters her warning with a misogynous tirade against women (616-68). Clever women are the worst of all (640-3). He seeks purification (651-5) and ultimately feels himself bound by oath nonetheless (656-63).

Phaedra’s inner life is revealed. As a clever and powerful woman, she herself searches for a “craft” and the right words to “undo the noose” (τίη ἢ νῦν τέχνην ἔχομεν ἢ λόγον / σφαλεῖσαι κάθαρμα λύειν λόγου, 670-1). Hence, Phaedra herself weaves the complex intrigue and plot, culminating in her tying the noose for her own suicide, and has fastened a tablet with a written message to her body before the act, accusing Hippolytus of attacking her chastity (Zeitlin 1996: 225-32). Beforehand, however, she scolds the Nurse for having divulged everything, against her order (682-94). To die simply to preserve her honour no longer suffices. She requires a “new plan” (ἀλλὰ δεῖ με δὴ καινῶν λόγων, 688), because her imagined glory as ideal woman after death would be lost otherwise. The Nurse defends herself, saying that she had looked for a remedy (*pharmakon*) against the malady but had not found it. Her reasoning had been too simple and not wise enough. Again, she offers her help to save her queen (695-705). However, Phaedra has had enough of her, especially since she has a very clever plan herself (706-9).

To ensure its success, she binds the chorus, which is increasingly assuming the identity of some girls of Troezen, to an oath of silence, typically enough sworn on the name of Artemis (710-14). These various oaths, devised by Phaedra’s intelligence, sworn in opposite tensions, as ritual acts of religiosity, will ultimately ensure the success of Aphrodite’s insidious plan. In order to bridge time and transfer the pathos to the audience, the chorus project themselves to other realms in the second stasimon (732-75). The female dancers would prefer to escape reality as birds and be catapulted to the Adriatic shore, where the Heliades, tellingly enough as though in a second chorus, mourn the death of another young man called Phaethon, who is also a failed charioteer (732-41) (Nagy 2013: 569-71). After some references to the ultimate bounds of the sea (742-51), the chorus revert to the vessel that had once brought Phaedra from Crete to Athens and to the marital

chamber. Already burdened with excessive love for her family, she has become another victim of Aphrodite, and by committing suicide with a noose, she chooses honour (752-75).

### 5. Dead Characters Hanging from a Dead Body Versus Living Orality

At this point, the events in the second *epeisodion* follow in rapid succession (776-1101). Theseus, who has just returned home from a ritual mission as *theoros* (792), discovers his wife's suicide and finds her letter with the false accusation attached to her body (856-65, 874-86). The tablet, called *deltos*, which also denotes the female uterus (Zeitlin 1996: 245-7), contains a written message that tells of a false violence, which Theseus no longer wants to keep hidden (882-4).<sup>13</sup> In his proclamation, the message becomes fact by way of its verbal utterance.<sup>14</sup> Thus, a most chaste worshipper of Artemis, who has never even intended to touch a woman, becomes the rapist of his father's wife. At the same time, the subconsciously present erotic potential apparently emerges as almost true. In turn, the manic erotic woman, who has unceasingly fought against her urges, assumes the status of a victim and, furthermore also in a way loses her purity because of the accusation. That is the reason why her suicide is motivated on a surface level. For the people unaware of the real circumstances, the high-born queen preserves her good reputation. But, at the same time, for the spectators, the letter is also a means to perpetrate a bitter revenge for a woman who had been confronted with erotic rejection. She had suffered emotional distress and was hurt so much in her self-esteem that she felt sanctioned to kill the young man, the source of her pain and fractured ego. With this decision, the aristocratic lady of the royal household re-establishes her honour and name, also in respect of the kingdom. Furthermore, through the utterance of the written message, Hippolytus becomes his own father's sexual rival, which causes Theseus to call on his father Poseidon and appeal to the three curses the god had once promised him (887-90): may the god destroy Hippolytus. Theseus then thinks it is enough to drive his son out of the country. Aphrodite's plan works out since she knew exactly the character and emotional constitution of queen Phaedra.

In the following direct confrontation between father and son, Hippolytus declares his innocence (903-1101). Shocked and bewildered at the unbelievable accusation, which even evokes shame in his youthful soul, he seems to cover his face at first in a productive reference to *Hippolytus Ka-*

<sup>13</sup> On the *deltos* as a theatrical object endowed with agency, see Mueller 2016: 163-78.

<sup>14</sup> On signs and letters, see Segal 1992: esp. 425-44.

*lyptomenos* (946-7). Theseus, however, becomes increasingly furious, recalling the alleged self-righteousness of the ascetic sectarian who had abused his religion for sexual promiscuity (948-61):

σὺ δὴ θεοῖσιν ὡς περισσὸς ὢν ἀνὴρ  
 ξύνει; σὺ σῶφρων καὶ κακῶν ἀκήρατος;  
 οὐκ ἂν πιθοίμην τοῖσι σοῖς κόμποις ἐγὼ 950  
 θεοῖσι προσθεῖς ἀμαθίαν φρονεῖν κακῶς.  
 ἤδη νυν αὖχει καὶ δι' ἀψύχου βορᾶς  
 σίτοις καπήλευ' Ὀρφέα τ' ἄνακτ' ἔχων  
 βᾶκχευε πολλῶν γραμμάτων τιμῶν καπνούς·  
 ἐπεὶ γ' ἐλήφθης. τοὺς δὲ τοιούτους ἐγὼ 955  
 φεύγειν προφωνῶ πᾶσι· θηρεύουσι γὰρ  
 σεμνοῖς λόγοισιν, αἰσχρὰ μηχανώμενοι.  
 τέθνηκεν ἦδε· τοῦτό σ' ἐκώσωσιν δοκεῖς;  
 ἐν τῷδ' ἀλίσκη πλεῖστον, ὧ κάκιστε σύ·  
 ποῖοι γὰρ ὄρκοι κρείσσονες, τίνες λόγοι 960  
 τῆσδ' ἂν γένοιεντ' ἂν, ὥστε σ' αἰτίαν φυγεῖν;

[Are you, then, the companion of the gods, as a man beyond the common? Are you the chaste one, untouched by evil? (950) I will never be persuaded by your vauntings, never be so unintelligent as to impute folly to the gods. Continue then your confident boasting, take up a diet of greens and play the showman with your food, make Orpheus your lord and engage in mystic rites, holding the vapourings of many books in honour. (955) For you have been found out. To all I give the warning: avoid men like this. For they make you their prey with their high-holy-sounding words while they contrive deeds of shame. She is dead. Do you think this will save you? This is the fact that most serves to convict you, villainous man. (960) For what oaths, what arguments, could be more powerful than she is, to win you acquittal on the charge? (Trans. Kovacs 1995)]

In the poetics of fractions and contrasts, the traditionalist blindly trusts language as recorded in writing, even though he ought to rely on orality. This becomes evident when he accuses his own son of being a follower of the Orphics, who fostered the book culture that was emerging at that time. Much of this calls to mind an inverse image of Plato's famous criticism of literacy in *Phaedrus* (275a-6a), who once again made a plea in favour of orality one generation after Euripides (Szlezák 1985: 7-23). Plato argues that graphic characters are dead, whereas in oral conversation the interlocutor can speak in support of his argument upon request (275d-6a).<sup>15</sup> The dead characters now hang from her dead body, and Theseus takes them at face value. It is owing to these that he decides in haste and in anger to irrev-

<sup>15</sup> See Segal 1992: 436-41; on writing and the written word as "disembodied voice", see Torrance 2013: 146-52; see also Susanetti 2007: 76-7.

ocably take revenge on his son without further trial and despite Hippolytus' oaths and protestations of innocence. In order to put this plan in practice, Theseus recurs to his father Poseidon who has promised to grant him three wishes (1025-31). Apparently, the inhumanity of another god close to the Attic king must be motivated by his being bound by a promise. A web of oaths covers the persons acting. Hippolytus, who at first does not feel bound by the oaths made to the Nurse (603-15), will thus, in exaggerated piety, keep them (cf. 656-8) and therefore go to his death. He even thinks of a disengagement from this vow, as he is now being destroyed by the gods (1060-1). But he realises that his revocation would be without success with Theseus (1062-3), since the latter puts his trust exclusively in the written word. An overly pure man is not to be trusted.

Hippolytus' cruel death, described in a long messenger speech in detail (1173-254) portrays the character of Poseidon, whom Aphrodite has designated to do the job for her. He is the god of horses and brings a giant wave within which the bull sacred to him is concealed (1212-14). We remember that Phaedra's mother had fallen in love with a bull in Crete and that horses symbolise the emotional part of the sexualised soul to be tamed. The horses of the charioteer shy away from the monster that stands for wild sexuality. The chariot is smashed to pieces on the beach and Hippolytus, "entangled in the reins, bound in a bond not easy to untie, was dragged along, smashing his head against the rocks and rending his flesh" (1236-9). His name (*Hippo-lytos*) becomes a program of action, since he is 'unbound, dissolved and destroyed by horses'. The messenger ends his speech by asserting that the young and noble man cannot be guilty, "not even if the whole female sex should hang themselves and fill with writing all the pine-wood that grows upon Mount Ida" (1250-4). At this point Artemis interferes as *dea ex machina* and explains the true circumstances (1283-312). Theseus should have prayed to Poseidon to reverse his former wish. But Aphrodite's will in regard of the young man is stronger, since he must fulfil his function and complete his *rite de passage*. According to this logic, Artemis must yield to Aphrodite.

## 6. Conclusion

Aphrodite has reached her goal. As the goddess of love, she knows everything about the emotional, erotic and social constitution of her victims, Hippolytus and Phaedra. The queen serves as her medium and instrument to take revenge on the young man who is totally attached to Artemis and refuses to pay any attention to Aphrodite. Phaedra as Aphrodite's tool in the plot is a perfect mixture of manic love and social control. In pur-

suit of his highly intellectual program and his dramatic poetics of fissures, ruptures and cracks, Euripides highlights opposing positions and attitudes and plays out their tensions in a *palintropos harmonia*. Therefore, Euripides makes use of this fundamental tension between erotic frenzy and aristocratic self-control in this second version of the myth. He weaves these conflicting elements into a perfect plot in an ingenious concatenation. As a notorious lover, Phaedra simultaneously struggles against revealing her emotions while at the same time counteracting her *sophrosyne* which she implements according to the social norms in terms of class and gender. Thus, in fighting against her emotions, she also longs for the person she loves. It is as if the id broke through the ego-control that is constituted by the norms of the superego. Under the circumstances of a shame culture, as soon as her love is revealed to her stepson, her only exit is suicide. To hide her feelings from the public and maintain the façade of an honourable wife and a responsible queen, she weaves a complicated intrigue that culminates in binding the noose to hang herself and attaching a written message to her dead body, accusing Hippolytus of a sexual attack on her chaste purity. The graphic, 'dead' signs will cause his death, as they obviate a debate and a test. They serve as a new form of proof that destroys true evidence.

In this highly intellectual program, the antithetic oppositions collapse, and the spectators witness a contrived drama into whose eddy of emotions they are sucked. Thus, it becomes evident that a partial avowal of sympathy for either Phaedra as a proto-feminist heroine, or one for Hippolytus as a pure religious devotee are hardly productive. Euripides did not plan to bring naturalistic portraits of characters on stage or to dictate ways of living, but rather to display figures of psychological depth in contrived and highly exaggerated constructions of action with their suffering on stage.

The culturally real and psychosocial as well as socio-anthropological basis of this tragedy is the artful concatenation of two figures who are involved in male and female rites of passage. Under these scenarios of betwixt and between, both Phaedra and Hippolytus are shown as problematic and excessive figures. For a long time, critics have uttered statements in favour or against them, biased by Christian-puritanical or feminist ideas. However, Euripides makes hypersexuality and asexuality, hubris and noble ideas, drive and repression meet and collapse on stage. In this tragedy, all is radically modern and highly innovative. Therefore, Euripides' Phaedra became the model of the modern woman in her constitution of *dystropos harmonia*, torn apart by various constraints, social demands or standards and her own desires as well as her will of self-realisation.

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