

Spatializing the Other:

Home and the City in Euripides' *Medea* and Luis Alfaro's *Mojada* (2017)

The tragic story of Euripides' *Medea* is probably the one myth from classical antiquity that is always current and reflective of the contemporary world. The numerous adaptations and reworkings of her Euripidean story reveal that Medea has never ceased to express marginalized social and racial groups and stand as a women's symbol that calls into question traditional socio-gender ideals and values. This paper discusses Euripides' *Medea* in parallel with Luis Alfaro's *Mojada*, a contemporary theatrical adaptation of the fifth-century drama, which casts Medea as a Mexican immigrant in modern-day Los Angeles. Euripides' Medea is a barbarian, an outsider in the city of Corinth, just like Alfaro's Medea is an immigrant who struggles to find her place in an American city after crossing the borders of her homeland, following Hason (Jason), in their pursuit of escaping the ghosts of the past and building a stable future in the United States. Foreignness lies at the core of *Medea* and *Mojada*. In this paper, I argue that the foreign status and self-identification as such of both Euripides' and Alfaro's Medea is expressed and confirmed by the onstage spatial discourse of the protagonists with their home and hosting city.

In the beginning of Euripides' tragedy, Medea is in a state of utter isolation, epitomized by her exile decreed by Creon (Hopman 2008). Her seclusion in the imagined space of her home/*oikos* (the area behind the *skene*) in the opening scene, and her physical separation from the Corinthian society from which she is eventually ordered to flee, spatially mediates her alienated status. Medea's "otherness" is also evident in her dissonant movement from the world of the *oikos* to the world of the city into which she steps to confront her enemies (Gredley 1987). Here, I contend that Alfaro's Medea emerges as the "other" and a symbol of the hardship of

immigrant-assimilation through a similar spatial dialogue between the home-space and the city-space. Living already for a year in Los Angeles, Alfaro's Medea finds it hard to engage with the city-life being undocumented and traumatized by their agonizing border-crossing. She stays at home sewing whereas Hason is eager to become a member of their new world. Her voluntary confinement in the liminal space of her house-yard in Boyle Heights visually communicates her foreignness and distance from the Californian society. The "city" enters her home-space in the decisions of her husband, the stories of her neighbors, and the presence of Armida, Hason's boss, but she never steps outside spatially delineating her alienation. Finally, I conclude that just like Euripides' emphasis on Medea's foreignness aims at challenging his audience's preoccupation with civilization and barbarism (Easterling 1977), Alfaro's explicit spatial visualization of his Medea's "otherness" invites the audience to gaze at and reflect on the mindset of our modern societies and the unbalanced relationship between the "us" and the "other."

Bibliography

- Easterling, P. E. 1977 "The Infanticide in Euripides' Medea." In T. F. Gould and C. J. Herington *Greek Tragedy, Yale Classical Studies* 25. Cambridge. 77-92
- Gredley, B. 1987. "The Place and Time of Victory: Euripides' Medea." *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, no. 34, 27-39.
- Hopman, M. 2008. "Revenge and Mythopoesis in Euripides Medea." *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 138, no. 1, 155-83.