

## Nahuatl Prayer in Alfaro's *Mojada*

Luis Alfaro's *Mojada: A Medea in Los Angeles* (Andujar, 2020) reimagines Euripides' tragedy in the *barrio* Boyle Heights, where Medea and her family live as undocumented immigrants from Zamora, Mexico. Alfaro's Tita shares many similarities with Euripides' Nurse, and both begin the play with a prologue that reflects on the repercussions of Medea's choice to migrate to a new land with a man. The nurse famously begins her monologue by expressing several wishes: she wishes that the Argo carrying Greek heroes had never sailed to Colchis and that Medea had never left her home to follow Jason. Alfaro's Tita begins *Mojada* with a prayer in Nahuatl, and this paper will explore the various implications of this beginning, both within the context of *Mojada* and in relation to Euripides' play.

This paper will consider the effect of beginning *Mojada* with a prayer in Nahuatl. Alfaro's characters speak many languages in *Mojada*—English, Spanish, Spanglish, and Nahuatl—a testament to their Mexican heritage and to the multicultural community where they currently reside in central Los Angeles. Andujar (10) notes that this linguistic code-switching reflects how characters negotiate their “relationship to competing homelands as well as articulating their complex identities.” In this context, Tita's prayer is transcendent, spanning geographic space and time, connecting the *viejita* to history through language and ritual and to the mythical realm of the play as well.

This paper will argue, additionally, that Tita's prayer serves a similar function to the Nurse's prologue in Euripides in that it foreshadows Medea's infanticide. These lines in Euripides (*Med.* 37–45) have long been considered an interpolation (Mastronarde, 170–72), but they are frequently included in editions of the play, nonetheless. Tita performs her own

interpolation in her prayer by selectively choosing five lines from Francisco X. Alarcón's *Traveler's Prayer* (33), a prayer that, in turn, adapts a Nahuatl prayer recorded by Ruiz de Alarcón (II:1) in *Tratado de Las Supersticiones y Costumbres Gentílicas Que Hoy Viven Entre Los Indios Naturales de Esta Nueva España*, 1629 (*Treatise on the Heathen Superstitions That Today Live Among the Indians Native to This New Spain*). Tita's prayer begins with four continuous lines taken from the *Traveler's Prayer*, "from the four directions / I call you / to my grip... / come forth," only to skip the following lines, "One Flint / to be stained / with blood / come forth," before ending her prayer with F. Alarcón's final line "cross my path." These missing lines amount to a suppressed recognition of Medea's infanticide, a connection that is reinforced when she revisits the prayer at the end of the play.

#### Bibliography

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