

## Home and the Other: The Case of Phaedra in Euripides' *Hippolytus*

Robin Mitchell has stated that “Euripides’ *Hippolytus* enacts a crisis of values, self, and community as its dramatic structure exposes the shaky foundations of the individuality that its characters repeatedly claim” (1991). *Hippolytus* is indeed structured around the definition and redefinition of identity and status in a network of interpersonal and social associations. The Self—mainly understood within the context of the fifth-century BCE Athenian society as the dominant adult male citizen and *kyrios* of the *oikos*—and the Other—gendered, domestic, and social one—in terms of emotional, behavioral, and spatial relations, are in a constant opposition in Euripides’ tragedy. Here, I discuss how the contradictory relationships of the protagonists of the play, Phaedra and Hippolytus, are mediated through the spaces with which they associate themselves—Hippolytus almost lives in the woods and meadows while Phaedra stays in and around the home as she was supposed to—focusing on the interaction with and use of home by Phaedra, the female domestic Other.

The storyworld of *Hippolytus* develops around the fight between the Self and the Other, inside and outside. In this clash of identities and spaces, Phaedra, smitten with a godsent desire for Hippolytus, her stepson, finds herself in a predicament which threatens her socio-domestic identity and her children’s civic status. Here, I contend that, in her struggle to safeguard her reputation and eventually her children’s place in the *oikos*, Phaedra’s only resort is to emerge as an authorial figure who will claim the identity of the chaste wife turning the interior and exterior of the domestic space into a “stage.” The term “stage” I employ denotes the physical or imagined spaces where the characters of plays put on their performances. Thus, a “stage,” as a metadramatic spatial entity, is the space where a storyworld is realized in front of or in the mind of the internal and external spectators and becomes a spectacle itself.

Phaedra struggles between the role that society expects her to perform as the chaste female Other of an *oikos* in a civilized city and the role that the godly forces inside her impel her to assume abiding by the rules of wilderness/unordered spatial entities outside the civic reality. Her shaken and divided inner self is reflected on the home, the spatial entity that defines her identity. As Barbara Goff has noted, “the house, like Phaedra, is divided within itself” (1990). Both Phaedra and the house, her spatial *alter ego*, conceal a secret that will bring their eventual destruction. This secret can shatter Phaedra’s socio-domestic identity by exposing her as a potential adulteress who consequently threatens the existence of the *oikos* itself. Hence, after the Nurse reveals Phaedra’s illicit love to Hippolytus himself, Phaedra is trapped in a situation which challenges her socio-domestic self and exposes behaviors that disrupt the normal societal patterns—at least those that characterized fifth-century BCE Athens and the audience of Euripides’ play—at the center of which lies the domestic space. Thus, I argue that in order to preserve her status and most importantly her children’s role in the society of Athens, Phaedra transforms home into a silent “stage” where she takes on the role of the dedicated wife by turning her body, upon her death, into a performative space which performs the role of the ultimate exhibit of her integrity for her internal audience, Theseus. Finally, I conclude that Euripides’ Phaedra documents an example of a threatened socio-domestic feminine identity that faces the pressure of the patriarchal structures of the society in which she lives.

### Bibliography

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