

Inter-Kin Intimacy: Sexual and Verbal Intercourse in Euripides' *Hippolytus* and Sophocles'

Oedipus Tyrannus

In Euripides' *Hippolytus*, the title character, after a lengthy denunciation of the race of women, turns to the nurse, upbraiding her, and says: "So you too, evil woman, *you* came to me trafficking my father's inviolable wife (πατρός ... λέκτρων ἀθίκτων)" (Eur. *Hipp.* 651–52). Confronted with the report of Phaedra's lust for him, Hippolytus rebuffs his stepmother's servant and will have nothing to do with her nor Phaedra until Theseus has returned. On the other hand, Oedipus, far beyond hope of escaping his father's wife, reveals his calamitous fate to his daughters: "Your father killed his father; he plowed the womb which bore him, whence indeed he himself was sown, and from that same source he begat you, the very place he himself was begotten (τὴν τεκοῦσαν ἤροσεν, ὅθεν περ αὐτὸς ἐσπάρη, καὶ τῶν ἴσων ἐκτίσασθ' ὑμεῖς, ὥνπερ αὐτὸς ἐξέφυ)" (Soph. *OT* 1496–99). No longer able to suppress the truth, Oedipus tells all to his daughters. Commentators have frequently lumped these two tragedies together as myths dealing with Athenian aversion to incest (Barry, 2005; Mills, 2002; Maitland, 1991; Mitchell, 1991; Clay, 1982; Rudhart, 1982; cf. Bonnard, 2002; Halleran, 1991). Such a hypothesis receives quick confirmation from passing reference to Athenian legal tradition (Andoc. 1.124–27), which prohibited mother-son liaisons, buttressed by the general disgust with which such relationships are treated by Plato and Aristotle (Pl. *Resp.* 5.461b–c; *Leg.* 8.838b; Arist. *Pol.* 2.4.1262a–b; cf. Xen. *Mem.* 4.4.19). However, Phaedra is not Hippolytus' mother.

Phaedra does not share the biological connection to Hippolytus that Sophocles repeatedly stresses ties Jocasta and Oedipus. Instead, Phaedra is related to Hippolytus only by way of Theseus; that is, Phaedra is Hippolytus' stepmother. Or rather, according to Euripides, Phaedra is the wife of Hippolytus' father (e.g., 26, πατρός εὐγενῆς δάμαρ). The distinction between

stepmother and father's wife may appear moot, but analytic kin circumlocutions signal important conceptual difference in Euripides' language. Indeed, not once is Phaedra referred to as Hippolytus' stepmother (μητρυνία), an absence thrown into sharp relief by contrast with Alcestis and Creusa (Eur., *Alc.* 305, 309; *Ion* 1025, 1270, 1330; *Fr.* 824.1). Further, the copulative terminology with which Sophocles emphasizes the kin confusion, the crossed categories of Oedipus' house, are entirely absent from the *Hippolytus*. While both tragedians utilize language of disgust in depicting these sexual dalliances, I argue Euripides' consistently distinguishes the alleged crime as one between father and son—not (step)mother and son. In fact, I will argue that Euripides characterizes Hippolytus' alleged transgression only as adultery. This conclusion is not only supported by evidence from Athenian law (Watson, 1995; Glotz, 1900) but also by internal and external comparanda in the literature of Greek drama which labels the pair's liaison as adultery (Arist. *Thesm.* 549–50; Eur. *Hipp.* 453–54, 1164–65). Therefore, contrary to the general consensus of Euripidean scholarship, the union of Jocasta and Oedipus is not analogous to the supposed union of Phaedra and Hippolytus. In fact, the depiction of Sophocles stands in stark contrast to the language of Euripides. Philological and historical data converge attesting that Hippolytus has affronted not Phaedra but Theseus and his putative crime was not incest but adultery.

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