

Troezen and Athens in Euripides' *Hippolytus*: Myth, Politics, and Liminality

This paper focuses on the role of Troezen as the setting of Euripides' *Hippolytus*. Other tragic renditions of the Hippolytus myth—Euripides' earlier *Hippolytus Kalyptomenos* and Sophocles' *Phaedra*—appear to have been set in Athens, and scholarship has considered what Euripides' alternative choice of Troezen may contribute to the extant play. My paper builds upon earlier interpretations of the Troezenian setting by Barrett (1964), Jeny (1989), Wiles (1997), and others, as well as work on the political context of the play's production in 428, principally Kowalzig (2006). Analyzing Troezen's dramatic representation in connection with its real historical and cultural ties with Athens, I show that this setting is thematically linked to the depiction of Hippolytus himself, and that both setting and character underscore the play's larger interest in the theme of liminality.

Commentators have long recognized Hippolytus' liminal status as basic to his characterization. His staunch rejection of sexuality, the tragedy's main plot device, typifies his non-participation in the adult citizen activities of the *oikos* and *polis*. He is thus presented as an ephebe who has failed the transition to manhood (Mitchell-Boyask 1999), and exists at the fringe of social and civic boundaries. Moreover, Hippolytus exists uneasily between the categories of Athenian and barbarian, as son of the preeminent Athenian hero and king Theseus and an Amazon mother; his parentage is further complicated by illegitimacy, placing him on the margins of legal citizenship (Ebbott 2003). The closing aetiology of the maidens' song (1423-30) reinforces the same theme of liminality, rendering Hippolytus' story the focus of a ritual initiation into adult social responsibility.

Hippolytus's liminal status corresponds with the characterization of his Troezenian homeland, which sits on the boundary of Athens' political order. On the one hand, Euripides'

Troezen is demonstrably separate from Athenian civilization. Although Theseus holds sway over the land, his stay there represents an exile, and Hippolytus visualizes his world as a wilderness untouched by corrupting civilization (73-81), a landscape that mirrors his own non-participation in citizen life (Cairns 1997). But even as Troezen is distanced from Athens, the text simultaneously draws the two cities into unison. Athens is a constant presence in the play, from the prologue that locates Troezen within the view of the Acropolis (30-31) to the recurrent geographical linkage of the two lands and conflation of Athens' territory and citizenry with those of Troezen (e.g. 1093-97, 1157-59, 1161).

My paper interprets this dynamic between Troezen and Athens in light of Hippolytus' own liminality, and also contextualizes it within the historical relationship of the two cities. In Theseus, Troezenians and Athenians shared a mythic hero significant to both peoples, and the Troezenians preserved traditions of Ionian ancestry (Mills 1997). Troezen had been a steady ally of Athens against Persia, and had welcomed refugees from Attica following Athens' abandonment in 480. But relations deteriorated: after 458, Athens assumed control of Troezen, but lost it to Sparta in 446, and in 430, two years prior to the *Hippolytus*' production, Pericles had launched raids whose targets included Troezen. I argue that this history reinforces Euripides' characterization of Troezen as poised on the fraught boundary of Athenian integration, and thus accentuates the play's exploration of liminality and civic participation.

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