

## DECOLONIZING THE CLASSICS CURRICULUM IN SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES WITH EURIPIDES' *HIPPOLYTUS*\*

*M Lambert, Research Associate, SOLL (Rhodes University)*

In this article, the author argues that reading Euripides' *Hippolytus* with a class of non-Classics students, during nation-wide student protests at one of South Africa's universities in 2016, contributed more to the decolonization of the Humanities curriculum than the course's focus on how the discipline of Classics was (and is) used to entrench eurocentric cultural hegemony. In tackling the 'rape culture', which infests many of our campuses, and its roots in familial psycho-sexual dynamics, which could result in the kinds of sexual repression, sexual anxiety and rampant misogyny, which seem to characterize campus 'rape culture', the author argues that a return to psychoanalytic interpretations of Euripides' fine play could help classicists refine what 'decolonization' of the Classics curriculum means in practice.

*Keywords:* Decolonization; curriculum; rape; Euripides; psychoanalytic interpretations; family; illegitimacy; repression; misogyny.

In the wake of the protests in 2015 and 2016, which painfully interrogated institutional cultures at our universities, there have been repeated calls for decolonization and transformation of the Humanities curriculum, perceived as eurocentric and thus inimical to the creation of African intellectual and cultural identities.<sup>1</sup> The violent protests at Rhodes University in 2016, against the insidious rape culture on many of our university campuses, foregrounded the various forms of misogyny which rape cultures in patriarchal societies like South Africa deploy

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<sup>1</sup> Langa, in the introduction to the CSVr's analysis of the FeesMustFall movement at a selection of nine South African universities, notes that the meaning of 'decolonized education' has different meanings on different campuses (2016:10). At the University of Limpopo (Turfloup), for instance, 'decolonized education' means receiving the same kind of education received by white students at Wits, whereas on campuses such as Wits, UCT, Rhodes and UKZN, the transformation and decolonization of education usually refers to the 'recentering' of works of African scholarship banished to the periphery of eurocentric curricula.

to commodify and oppress women;<sup>2</sup> the *Fees Must Fall* protests, perceived by many as heralding an intellectual revolution, almost on the scale of Paris '68, certainly had free tertiary education as their main aim, but the nature of the free and 'transformed' education envisaged was a constant preoccupation.

During this period (2015-2017) I was employed in the School of Languages and Literatures at Rhodes University and, in response to the protests and repeated calls for the decolonization of the curriculum, participated in devising an experimental course, *Cultures and Languages in Africa* (CLIA), to which all departments in the School, including Classics, were asked to contribute.<sup>3</sup>

From the titles and objectives of the first semester's Classics lectures, the 'transformed' nature of the course's content and methods, as well as my attempts to arrive at some kind of rational definition of 'decolonization' of a curriculum perceived as so quintessentially eurocentric as a *Classics* curriculum, are apparent.<sup>4</sup>

My attempts to explore 'decolonization' took another direction when we were asked by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Dr Sizwe Mabisela, to suspend our coursework lectures and directly address campus rape culture in our classes. As the majority of students enrolled in the CLIA course were not Classics students and knew little or nothing about the *content* of traditional Classics courses such as Greek Mythology, I decided, with some trepidation, to tackle two rape myths: the rape of Persephone in the *Homeric hymn to Demeter* and the rape and

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<sup>2</sup> See Meth's article '#FeesMust Fall at Rhodes University: Exploring the dynamics of student protests and manifestations of violence', in the CSVr collection (2016:100-101).

<sup>3</sup> Offered initially over two semesters as CLIA 101 and CLIA 102, but conceptualised as a possible 3-year major in the BA and B Soc Sc degrees.

<sup>4</sup> Titles are in bold; objectives in parentheses. **Africa is Latin and Azania is Greek?** (To illustrate the link between colonization, naming and the appropriation of names by the colonised); **The Black Athene project: Language and the Afro-Asiatic roots of classical civilization** (To demonstrate how the historiography of origins can be manipulated by racism (both overt and covert) and what role language plays in this process); **Teaching the Greek and Latin classics in colonial Nigeria.** (To demonstrate the subtle links between British colonialism, imperialism and education in the classical languages, and how these languages were then deployed by Nigerian nationalists in their struggle for their own identities and voices); **Rhodes's classical library at Grootte Schuur** (To demonstrate further the links between British imperialism, education in the classical languages and translations of selected Greek and Roman texts into English); **Comparative studies by classically-trained missionaries: the case of Father Bryant and the amaZulu** (To illustrate the links between education in the classical languages and missionary ethnography, underpinned by comparative methodology, as a feature of British imperialism); **Nomkhubulwane, the Zulu Demeter or Demeter, the Greek Nomkhubulwane?** (To demonstrate how language, cultural studies, power and knowledge are inextricably intertwined in contemporary South Africa).

dismemberment of Philomela in Ovid *Metamorphoses* Book 6.<sup>5</sup> I read most of this text aloud. At the very moment when the rapist, Tereus, hacks Philomela's tongue from her mouth (*Met.* 6. 555-560), in his brutal attempt to silence her, the class gasped audibly. Dead quiet ensued. There was no need for me to tease out the meaning of the myth or its relevance to campus rape culture. Interestingly, the little discussion there was after this focussed on misogyny and it was at this point that I introduced the class to Euripides' *Hippolytus*.

The resultant experience powerfully illustrated that the *content* of a traditional Classics curriculum (in this case Greek mythology) was, in this classroom experience, more effective in 'decolonizing the mind', by identifying and analyzing the strategies deployed by patriarchies to entrench the power of men and dominant heterosexist masculinities, than illustrating *how* imperialism and colonialism used a classical education to entrench white hegemony.

I thus decided to use material from Classics courses in the next set of CLIA lectures, deliberately to illustrate how Classical Greek and Roman literature, religion, ritual, philosophy and social mores could speak directly to post-colonial students in an African university *without* entrenching any of the colonial or imperialist baggage with which Classics as a discipline was encumbered.<sup>6</sup> In short, as a result of this brief but highly educative experience, 'decolonization' of the Classics curriculum seemed to me not to involve trashing the canon and tossing the Classics on to yet another bonfire of euroculture, but about revisioning it, or, to borrow a popular term amongst the protesting students, recentering it,<sup>7</sup> both in the market-place and in the agora of ideas, now dominated on many of our campuses by Afro-fascist rancour.

In the discussion about misogyny and rape culture, which succeeded the introduction of Euripides' *Hippolytus* to the CLIA class, and the connections which were made by some of the more engaged students between family dynamics, religious and sexual repression, misogyny, aggressive South African masculinities and rape culture, I was reminded of the flood of articles in the 1960s and 1970s dominated by psychoanalytic interpretations of Euripides' play.<sup>8</sup> Although there

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<sup>5</sup> Plunging *in medias res* at line 439 (using Mary M Innes' translation in the Penguin Classics series) and, with an eye on reception of the myth, referring the class to Timberlake Wertenbaker's play *The love of the nightingale*.

<sup>6</sup> **The Classics** and the liberation struggle: Mandela and Sophocles' 'Antigone'; **The Classics** and South African protest theatre; **The Classics** and African ritual sacrifice; **The Classics** and African traditional healers; **The Classics** and African ethics; **The Classics**, genders and sexualities.

<sup>7</sup> See note 1. My understanding of 'recentering' is somewhat different to that of the protesting students: I mean 'repositioning' with a specifically South African student audience in mind.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Rankin 1974, Segal 1965, 1970, 1978, Smoot 1976.

has been considerable retreat from overly psychological interpretations of the play today,<sup>9</sup> I thought that a judicious return to this period of Euripidean criticism, without ignoring or demythologizing the role of the two goddesses in the play, and so misreading the play completely,<sup>10</sup> could be a useful way of recentering or repositioning this play for a decolonized Classics curriculum in a South African university, anxious to tackle and dismantle pernicious institutions such as campus rape culture.

Rather than begin with psychoanalytic theories and apply these to characters in the play,<sup>11</sup> using mythological material extraneous to the text, I think it best to focus on those moments in the text where Euripides offers insights into the psychology of his characters by providing us with background information which has nothing to do with the plot as such, but everything to do with providing the audience with some understanding of the possible motivation for the protagonist's attitudes and/or actions.<sup>12</sup> In the light of the class discussion of the Hippolytus myth, misogyny, the nuclear family (or the absence of it) and campus rape culture, the best place to begin is with the family and familial relationships, of paramount importance to Euripides and the 5<sup>th</sup> century polis.<sup>13</sup>

One such moment of psychological insight, perhaps the most striking, occurs towards the end of the *Hippolytus* when the protagonist protests his innocence in the face of his father's pronouncement of banishment for having committed adultery with his stepmother (1048-1065). In response to his father's taunt that Hippolytus cared more for himself than his parents (1080-1081), Hippolytus cries: ὦ δυστάλαινα μήτηρ, ὦ πικραὶ γοναί· /μηδεῖς ποτ' εἶη τῶν ἐμῶν

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<sup>9</sup> But not completely. See e.g. Craik 1998, Roisman 1999. Skinner 2014:163-164 is careful not to commit fully to the psychoanalytic approach.

<sup>10</sup> As Heath 1987:52-53 rightly warns. Some scholars leave out the mythological framework and justify this in versions of Dodds' disclaimer: 'I purposely leave out of account the mythological framework of the play. The artist has wisely made this framework detachable so that we may, if we please, study his human drama in isolation from its traditional setting. Since Verrall, many of us have been inclined to admire the frame almost to the exclusion of the picture' (1925:104, n.1). Particularly good on the 'frame' and its relation to the 'picture' is Knox 1983.

<sup>11</sup> As one of the reviewers of this article warns, the 'use of a psychoanalytic approach may itself be seen to reinforce intellectual colonization through applying western paradigms of thought.' Indeed; hence the focus on the text first.

<sup>12</sup> See Mills 2002:92-94, for a brief survey of the scholarship on *Hippolytus* which uses psychological or psychoanalytical theories to interpret the characters in the play, both human and divine. For an interesting and provocative discussion of psychoanalytic theories and Greek tragedy in general, see Alford 1992.

<sup>13</sup> Alford 1992:98-99,180.

φίλων νόθος (1082-1083). [‘Oh my poor mother! O painful birth!/ Let none of my friends ever be a bastard’].<sup>14</sup>

Once again, shortly before his death, when the remorseful Theseus comments on his son’s nobility of spirit, Hippolytus responds with the words: *τοιῶνδε παίδων γνησίων εὐχου τυχεῖν* (1455). [‘Pray that your legitimate sons treat you in the same way as I’].

Until this point in the play, the only character who has explicitly mentioned Hippolytus’ bastardy is the nurse when she tries to persuade Phaedra, in the presence of the chorus, not to consider starving herself to death: ... *εἰ θανῆι, προδοῦσα σοῦς /παῖδας, πατρῶιων μὴ μεθέξοντας δόμων,/ μὰ τὴν ἄνασσαν ἰππίαν Ἀμαζόνα,/ ἢ σοῖς τέκνοισι δεσπότην ἐγείνατο,/ νόθον φρονοῦντα γνήσι!, οἴσθά νιν καλῶς,/* (305-309). [... if you die, you betray your children, who will have no share in their patrimony, no, by that horse-riding Amazon queen, who gave birth to a master to lord it over your children, a bastard who thinks he’s legitimate ...’].

Shortly after this exchange, Euripides makes Phaedra refer to her mother. When the desperate nurse clasps her knees, then her hand, trying to extract her secret from her, Phaedra cries: *ὦ τλῆμμον, οἶον, μήτηρ, ἠράσθης ἔρον* (337). [‘Oh my poor mother! What kind of passion did you feel!’].

To the nurse’s enquiry about the bull, Phaedra mentions her sister, Ariadne (339), and then attempts to clarify her riddling with the statement that she is the third member of her family to be so ruined by desire (341). With the nurse, we may well also ask ‘where will this line of thinking lead us?’ (342). Phaedra’s grim response attests not to a chain of blood guilt reaching over generations, but to a chain of tragic desire binding the women of one family : *ἐκεῖθεν ἡμεῖς, οὐ νεωστί, δυστυχεῖς* (343). [‘our woes originate there — they are not recent’].

Pasiphae, Ariadne, Phaedra: as some commentators have noted, Euripides may well have known a variant of this myth told by Sosikrates and accepted by Seneca that Aphrodite ‘revenged herself on all of the Sun’s female descendants (Pasiphae was his daughter) for his betrayal of her adultery with Ares’,<sup>15</sup> but what is important for the purposes of this article is the fact that Euripides presents us with a Phaedra who inserts herself into her family history, as if she believes that this is a significant determinant of her behaviour. Lust for the illicit with a tragic outcome is in our blood, she seems to be saying: clear in the case of Pasiphae and Phaedra, but not so clear in the case of Ariadne,<sup>16</sup> whose former lover is now Phaedra’s husband, whose name she studiously avoids (339). In short, Phaedra,

<sup>14</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, I have used the text of Barrett (1964). The translations are my own, unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>15</sup> Barrett 1964:223.

<sup>16</sup> See Barrett *ad loc.*

whom the white-winged ship has brought from Crete to glorious Athens, has brought her mother's baggage with her.

Similarly, Hippolytus. As we have noticed, before he mentions his νοθεία, he cries: ὦ δυστάλαινα μήτηρ, ὦ πικραὶ γοναί (1082). ['Oh my poor mother! Oh painful birth!']. He has not referred to his mother before this, but we know from Aphrodite's prologue and from exchanges between the nurse and Phaidra that he is the son of the horse-riding (307) or horse-loving Amazon queen (580) and that he was brought up in Troezen, not by his mother, but by his great-grandfather, Pittheus, the father of Theseus' mother (Aithra) (11-12). It is Aphrodite who informs us that Pittheus was ἀγνός (11): we can thus deduce that some of Hippolytus' ἀγνεία was due, in part, to the moral probity of his great-grandfather.<sup>17</sup>

As he does in the *Andromache* a couple of years later,<sup>18</sup> Euripides, in drawing our attention to the role of family history and background as a determinant of character, seems to be outlining for his audience the contours, at least, of an important fifth-century philosophical debate, that of nature-nurture, or genes versus environment.<sup>19</sup> The bastard, with the captive mother, has extraordinary ἀγνεία; the royal queen, who swears by Zeus, her grandfather, has dodgy genes.<sup>20</sup>

But what of Hippolytus' ὦ πικραὶ γοναί (1082) [oh painful birth!]? Commentators are not especially helpful: the most magisterial, Barrett, ignores it. Halleran thinks that it is simply a tragic commonplace: lamenting a motherhood that was in vain.<sup>21</sup> Surely here Hippolytus alludes to the circumstances of his birth? His mother, whether Antiope or Hippolyta, was captured by Theseus and presumably raped, then killed. Euripides' Hippolytus, we suspect, must know that his mother never wanted him. Besides 'child-birth', γονή can also mean 'womb' and the very act of child-birth itself; πικρός is also used by Euripides of shrill

<sup>17</sup> Line 11 is cited with approval by Plutarch (*Theseus* 3). For a discussion of the significance of Hippolytus' 'purity' in the play, see Segal 1970:278-279; for Phaidra's 'purity', shame (inner and outer), and the links between Hippolytus and Phaidra, *ibid.* 280-294. For further elaboration of the similarities between Hippolytus and his step-mother, see Larmour 1988:26-29.

<sup>18</sup> c. 426-425 BCE (Stevens 1971:15-19). For bastardy, nature and nurture, see *Andr.* 636-638.

<sup>19</sup> For a clear and useful outline of this debate, see Dover 1974:83-95. See too Gill 1990:92-97.

<sup>20</sup> See Roisman 1999:178-182 for an analysis of this nature-nurture debate relating to Hippolytus' σοφροσύνη and whether this can be acquired by νόμος or φύσις-Hippolytus claims that his is innate, but can be taught, and Theseus argues that it can be acquired only through nature. Roisman discusses how the implications of these claims are linked to Hippolytus' νοθεία and Pericles' citizenship laws. Cf. Gregory 1991:61-64.

<sup>21</sup> 1995:242; he cites the chorus' echo of Hippolytus' words (1144-1145) in support.

lamentation, the substantive *πικρότης* of ‘cruelty’.<sup>22</sup> Conceived in violence, Hippolytus’ birth (*γονή*) is truly *πικρή*: lamentable, cruel, painful. This yoked to the mention of his *νοθεία* in the very next line (1083), in the context of his peer-group, suggests his keen awareness of his identity: he is different; he has never belonged.<sup>23</sup> His mother, from a race of women not exactly known for their partiality to men, was brutally subjugated by a man, as the visual arts of the late fifth century depict: she did not maim her son physically, but, by being absent, she could have maimed him emotionally and psychologically. How does Euripides suggest this?

Now at this point, psychoanalytic or psychological interpretations of *Hippolytus* often resort to mythological material extraneous to the text, so as to construct some sort of psychological profile, as they ‘put him on the couch’ so to speak.<sup>24</sup> One could imagine a psychiatrist’s or psychologist’s notes as follows: distant, violent, macho father with a bad amatory track record;—a history of abusing or intending to abuse women;<sup>25</sup> he abandons his sister-in-law after using her, then marries her sister after the death of the Amazon;<sup>26</sup> he palms off the Amazon’s bastard child on his maternal grandfather in Troezen. Despite this, the birth mother’s influence on her son is obvious; Hippolytus loves horses and hunting, like his mother. Like his mother, who, as an Amazon, presumably preferred her own sex to the opposite sex, Hippolytus shuns women; as a proudly celibate man, he

<sup>22</sup> See Liddell & Scott, s.v. *γονή* II. 2; III; *Phoen.* 883, *El.* 1014.

<sup>23</sup> Barrett 1964:363 remarks that, as Hippolytus’ outburst about his *νοθεία* is ‘unmotivated’ and ‘wholly irrelevant’, Euripides presumably intends ‘to throw subtle light on Hippolytus’ psychology for its own sake, to suggest this feeling of inferiority, of otherness, as what lies behind his urge to establish himself in compensation as a paragon of virtues that common man cannot share’; Ferguson 1984:90 echoes Barrett and notes that Hippolytus’ ‘tangential’ response here is ‘meant to suggest that he suffers from an underlying sense of inferiority because of his bastardy’. Cf. Reckford 1972:423.

<sup>24</sup> The phrase is borrowed from Segal’s article 1978, which develops ideas raised by both Rankin 1974 and Smoot 1976, and reminds the reader of one of the salient criticisms of the psychoanalytic approach (in contrast to the structuralist): ‘psychoanalysis ... has been accused of paying too little attention to cultural context and levelling out cultural differences in its assumption of universally valid subconscious processes’ (1978:129). Hence Kovacs’ objection to terms such as ‘puritanism’ used of Hippolytus.

<sup>25</sup> Both Plutarch and Pseudo-Apollodorus provide a list of victims. Plutarch *Theseus* 8 (Perigune); 19-20 (Ariadne); 26 (Antiope); 27 (Hippolyta); 29 (Anaxo and the daughters of Sinis and Cercyon) and, most notoriously, the pre-pubescent Helen (29, 31-32). Cf. Pseudo-Apollodorus *Epitome* 1.16 (Antiope aka Melanippe and Hippolyta); 1.17 (Hippolyta gatecrashes Theseus’ wedding to Phaidra and is killed by Theseus); 1.23 (Helen and Persephone).

<sup>26</sup> *Theseus* 28. Plutarch finds unanimity in his sources (the tragic poets and the historians) regarding the *δυστυχία* of Phaidra and Hippolytus.

devotes himself to a virgin goddess, the goddess of hunting who is also associated with childbirth, young women's rites of passage and the ἐφηβεία;<sup>27</sup> Aphrodite informs us in Euripides' *Hippolytus* that he goes to Athens for the celebration of the mysteries of Demeter and Persephone and there his stepmother sees him and falls madly in lust with him (24-28). In a reversal of the gaze at religious festivals, he is a young man objectified by the female gaze.<sup>28</sup>

Be that as it may, how has the knowledge that his mother was an Amazon, who was not present during his formative years, maimed him? Let us return to the text. What does he say about his own psyche? In the agonistic confrontation with his father after Phaedra's suicide, Hippolytus defends himself against his father's accusations by protesting his innocence and his virginity: οὐκ οἶδα πρᾶξιν τήνδε πλὴν λόγῳ κλύων/ γραφῆι τε λεύσσω· οὐδὲ ταῦτα γὰρ σκοπεῖν/πρόθυμός εἰμι, παρθένον ψυχὴν ἔχων (1004-1006). ['I know nothing of the deed (sex) except what I have heard in stories or seen depicted: I am not even keen to see these, as I have a virgin soul'].<sup>29</sup>

παρθένος ψυχῆ? A virgin soul? An unusual phrase indeed, as Halleran dubs it.<sup>30</sup> Imagine its effect on a fifth century male audience with the 'temenos' of the eponymous goddess of the city behind and above — a goddess one of whose cult titles was Athena Parthenos.<sup>31</sup> What is more the words are spoken by a man whose masculinity has just been impugned by his father. In his rage, Theseus accuses Hippolytus of being a religious hypocrite and impostor, a vegetarian Orphic, engaging, presumably like a maenad, in Bacchic revels (952-954).<sup>32</sup> He even manages to remind his son of his bastardy as he wonders whether Hippolytus will claim that Phaedra hated him because τὸ δὴ νόθον ... πεφουκέναι ['being naturally a bastard'] is in conflict with legitimacy (962-963).

Furthermore, doubtless based on his own experience, he believes that, as young men are as randy as women (967-970), Hippolytus' protestations of purity are as fake as his religious devotion. In reply the butch young huntsman, who

<sup>27</sup> Goldhill 1986:119-120, 122; Burnett 1986:167-185; Craik 1998:29.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Theocritus *Id.* 2.66-80.

<sup>29</sup> Presumably the 'painting' refers to vase paintings (Barrett 1964:351).

<sup>30</sup> 1995:236. Ferguson 1984:86 oddly notes that 'H is a little like the husband who said 'I have an utterly virtuous wife: I keep her locked up.' H keeps his sexuality under lock and key'.

<sup>31</sup> Assuming that the *Hippolytus* of 428 BCE was first performed in Athens. Euripides won the first prize (Barrett 1964:29-30).

<sup>32</sup> For an interesting analysis of the relationship between father and son, and how this relationship is embedded in the patriarchal ideology which underpins the play, see Rabinowitz 1993:173-188. Influenced by the psychoanalytic approach, Rabinowitz concludes: 'the heterosexual rape of Phaedra is after all a fiction; the truth of the tale is the (dominant-submissive) violence of incest repressed between father and son' (187).



presumably likes a good meat meal after the hunt (110),<sup>33</sup> gives his father the fifth century equivalent of ‘I am a maiden trapped in a man’s body’.<sup>34</sup> If this is so, and if he is as pure as he claims (995), what’s he doing looking at dirty pictures (1005)? Hippolytus claims that he knows nothing of sex (the praxis of it), but he does know about sexuality and, like many voyeurs, his sexuality is deeply repressed.

Let us return to the beginning of the play to explore this repression manifested in his relationship with Artemis. When we first meet Hippolytus, he and his followers are singing a hymn to the goddess: *πόντια πόντια σεμνοτάτα ... καλλίστα πολὺ παρθένων* (66) [‘Mistress, mistress most revered ... the fairest by far of virgins’], Hippolytus’ first use of *παρθένος*. To her he offers a garland of flowers, woven from a virgin meadow (*ἐξ ἀκήρατου λειμῶνος* 73-74), a phrase emphatically repeated shortly afterwards (*ἀκήρατον ... λειμῶν'*, 76-77), a virgin meadow which a bee penetrates in spring. Euripides’ layered intertextual references here to the meadow topos in Greek lyric poetry, redolent of sexual danger, temptation, ‘deflowering’ and rape,<sup>35</sup> as well as the bee, associated with sexual chastity, and with both Artemis and Aphrodite,<sup>36</sup> make Hippolytus’ opening speech a masterful portrayal of intense puritanism, beneath the surface of which sexual passion is bubbling. The vocabulary alone is revealing: *διέρχεται*, in line 77

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<sup>33</sup> Using structuralist methodology, Segal makes much of the polarities and ambiguities in Hippolytus’ characterization: the ‘oscillation’ between vegetarian and carnivore, his worship of the goddess of the hunt and wild places, which positions him in an ambiguous relation to the civilized world, between the city and the wild, the ‘raw’ and the ‘cooked’; from a psychoanalytic standpoint, Segal then relates this polarization to a central point in Hippolytus’ neurosis (1978:134-135). A confrontation with the aggressive male sexuality of the feared father (Theseus) and the embodiment of his own repressed sexuality, symbolized by his death by the bull sent by Poseidon (Theseus’ father) — vengeance for his repressed incestuous desires for his mother, the child’s ‘deepest Oedipal fears’, ventilated in the accusation of sexually assaulting his father’s wife (136). Elaborate and perhaps over-imaginative, but in keeping with Segal’s intention to adopt approaches to tragedy which allow us ‘to appreciate more fully the multifaceted and multivalent nature of Greek tragedy, but also to grasp more clearly the parallelism between all the levels of meaning, the interlocking homologues of all the codes’ (1978:148). For an earlier study of the imagery and sexual symbolism in the play, deeply influenced by Freud and Jung, see Segal 1965:117-169. For a more thoughtful structuralist reading, see Goldhill 1986:107-137.

<sup>34</sup> See Goff 1990:65-67 on the feminization of Hippolytus in the play. Cf. Zeitlin 1990:73.

<sup>35</sup> For instance, Sappho and Archilochus (Bremer 1975:271-276). In addition, *λειμῶν* can refer to female genitalia (Liddell & Scott, s.v. II); for a detailed discussion of the sexual imagery here, see Rankin 1974:84, Rabinowitz 1993:182, Goff 1990:59, Craik 1998:36; Roisman 1999:29.

<sup>36</sup> Ferguson 194:50 (citing Eur. *Hipp.* 564). Cf. Segal 1965:122; Rankin 1974:85; Glenn 1976:438; Knox 1983:329; Roisman 1999:31-32.

is used of sexual penetration;<sup>37</sup> reverence/shame tends the meadow with river waters — δρόσος in 78 can also be used of sperm.<sup>38</sup> Aphrodite has already hinted that Hippolytus has a relationship with the virgin Artemis which borders on the sexual (παρθένοι ξυνών 17)<sup>39</sup> and is more than a mortal man should have (17-19).

What Hippolytus says next would certainly have struck a fifth century audience as very strange indeed (apart that is from the image of the young man frolicking in the meadow picking flowers for a goddess)<sup>40</sup> and that is the claim that it is right only for those who have mastered themselves (presumably their sexual desires) to pick flowers in this meadow; the rest are κακοί (81).<sup>41</sup> This moralization of sexual abstinence, as Barrett rightly claims,<sup>42</sup> would have struck the audience as unnatural, narrow and excessive. To suggest, once more, the extent of his sexual repression, Euripides has Hippolytus use ξύνεμι (the verb Aphrodite used earlier) to characterise his relationship with Artemis: he cannot see her (86), but he has commented on her golden hair (82). The sexually repressed who look at dirty pictures have vivid fantasies, as well as the classical version of telephone sex (86).

The possible links between sexual repression, the hunter and the very creation of the great goddess herself, the πότνια θηρῶν, have been imaginatively theorised by Burkert in his provocative *Homo Necans*: the hunter, argues Burkert, sets out to kill for the sake of his wife and mother; as the length of the bush-time increases, so do his feelings of anxiety and guilt and he shifts the responsibility to another, higher will. In Burkert's words, 'when sexual frustration is added to the hunter's aggressivity, it appears to him as though a mysterious female being inhabits the outdoors' and so is born the goddess, 'the giver of life, but the one who demands death'.<sup>43</sup> Hippolytus is the hunter who sexualises the meadow, who has an erotically-charged relationship with the πότνια θηρῶν, whom he hears but cannot

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<sup>37</sup> Roisman 1999:28.

<sup>38</sup> Henderson 1975:145, n. 194. And, as it happens, cunnilingus (*ibid.* 145, 185, n. 130).

<sup>39</sup> Halleran 1995:148 conceding that συνεῖναι + dative is a common euphemism for sexual intercourse, claims that the phrase 'need nor imply' a sexual relationship between hunter and patron, 'but they at least suggest the unnaturalness of the union spelled out more fully below (19)'. See Liddell & Scott, s.v. σύνεμι II, 2 for Victorian frankness (no euphemism!): to have sexual intercourse (of persons), to copulate (of animals). Cf. Craik 1998:33, Roisman 1999:7.

<sup>40</sup> Which reinforces his feminization (Roisman 1999:29). Cf. Craik 1998:35-36.

<sup>41</sup> In his reply to his father he boasts that no-one on earth is more σώφρων than he (994-995). See n.50.

<sup>42</sup> 1964:172. cf. Roisman 1999:30.

<sup>43</sup> 1983:81.

see: could we suggest, as Rankin has done, in neo-Freudian vein, that Artemis is for Hippolytus a divinised and idealised version of his mother?<sup>44</sup>

If Hippolytus, with his virgin soul and feminised consciousness, is psychically an Amazon, why does he hate women so much that his infamous outburst has entered the misogynistic canon?<sup>45</sup> I would like to suggest that Euripides may well be suggesting that Hippolytus, the bastard, hates his origins — the fact that his mother was an Amazon and that his father raped and killed her. However, let us return to the text and examine what triggers his outburst and why it is so excessive.<sup>46</sup>

The nurse's suggestion that he become the lover of his stepmother, his father's wife, is obviously the immediate cause — a suggestion which Hippolytus construes as an affront to his moral standards (651-655). Rankin, in psychoanalytic mode, probes more deeply and argues that this temptation to become the lover of his father's mate recalls his 'pure' mother, 'offering himself to him in a way that corresponded to his unconscious desires': 'Phaedra personified a reunification of the two categories of womankind<sup>47</sup> he had devised to keep his mother free from the

<sup>44</sup> 1974:77-91; Rankin's arguments are complex and technical, but she suggests that from childhood Hippolytus' longing for his wronged and absent mother 'is the unconscious origin of his devotion to Artemis', an Amazon-like goddess (77-78); by taking the goddess as a 'mother-surrogate', Hippolytus can express in his devotions to Artemis 'his longing for reunion with his mother-figure without any concomitant of shame at his illegitimacy' (79). Cf. Skinner 2014:163-164.

<sup>45</sup> Incorrectly referred to by Roisman as an 'anti-feminist tirade', an 'anti-feminist diatribe' and 'anti-feminist railing' (1999:77, 110, 111). The anachronistic 'anti-feminist' is not synonymous with misogynistic. Cf. Goldhill 1986:129-130 for the difficulties interpretations of this speech raise. For his 'pompous and outrageous generalizations', see Luschnig 1988:66.

<sup>46</sup> Not so, argues Kovacs 1987:27, who remarks that 'to explain the vehemence of Hippolytus' reaction, we need indeed invoke nothing more than ordinary moral sensibility'. Kovacs notes that misogyny was a common literary trope and that it is simply not true that 'a puritan and only a puritan could have made this speech'; although misogyny was not universal, it was a common attitude in antiquity and not evidence for 'imbalance' (56). The injustice of generalizations about whole groups of people is a modern preoccupation, not an ancient one, and in Euripides 'such generalizations are a normal and conventional means of expression and not intended as a form of characterization' (*ibid.* 56).

<sup>47</sup> Influenced by Freud's famous essay on 'A special type of choice of object made by men', Rankin suggests that Euripides' Hippolytus is a variant of the type of man whose knowledge of his mother's sexuality and of prostitutes before or during adolescence results in a denial of his mother's sexuality (the 'pure' mother) and a yearning to free her from prostituting herself to his father (the 'impure' mother). In Hippolytus's case, learning that there was something 'shameful' about his birth may have led him to continue believing in his mother's purity, because she was forced to have sex against her

taint of sexuality, and corresponded to what he most feared and desired in himself and his mother' (1974:90). Rankin goes on to suggest that the subsequent conflict between 'temptation and revulsion' resulted in momentary mental imbalance: 'his efforts to regain the "status quo" in this conflict between his conscious and unconscious motivations led him to the excesses of his tirade against women' (*ibid.*).<sup>48</sup>

Whilst such psychoanalytic analyses attempt to articulate the silences behind the text (the subtext, if you like), the text of Hippolytus' tirade, directed at the nurse, and made in the presence of the silent Phaedra, who presumably cowers in a corner of the stage,<sup>49</sup> focuses on the following: women are a κίβδηλον ... κακόν ('a counterfeit evil', 616) and are not what they seem; Zeus should have allowed men to buy children from one of his temples rather than oblige men to mate and then live with them (619-626); the father has to raise a dowry to get rid of the pest who then lives, parasitically off her husband (628-633); clever women (σοφή, 640), whom he loathes, are dangerously susceptible to Aphrodite (640-643); women should not have servants to aid and abet their leisure-induced scheming (645-648). Women are always evil (κακαί, 666) he cries; let someone teach them to control themselves (σωφρονεῖν 667) or allow me to stamp on them forever (667-668).

If we reduce Hippolytus' misogynistic rave to its bare bones — there is no argument as he displays the very lack of σωφροσύνη he accuses women of<sup>50</sup> — he

will, but nevertheless was tainted by the act itself. Artemis becomes his 'pure' mother surrogate, but the sexual language he uses of his relationship with her suggests (to Rankin) Hippolytus' unconscious desire for reunion (and sexual union) with his lost Amazon mother, an incestuous and 'shameful' desire which is repressed, yet 'symptomatically' revealed in his way of life (1974:80-86).

<sup>48</sup> Smoot argues that Rankin's article is incomplete in that she does not comment overtly on, or explore, Hippolytus' narcissism, evident, for instance, in his pride in his own purity as an 'ego-compensatory device' and in his inability 'to love or to interact meaningfully *with anyone*': '... by exulting in his own purity he, in effect, is able to love himself and thereby supply the self-love and self-respect denied him as an illegitimate and abandoned child' 1976:37-43. Craik 1998:30-44, through a careful examination of the sexually-loaded language used by Euripides, explores Hippolytus' homosexuality which she suggests follows not the 'normal trajectory' of the Greek male adolescent (from passive *eromenos* to active *erastes*), but is arrested in the passive *eromenos* stage (43-44).

<sup>49</sup> Or behind the statue of Aphrodite or Artemis in full view of Hippolytus (?), or in the orchestra with the chorus (Roisman 1999:106, n.54).

<sup>50</sup> See Dodds' perceptive analysis of the tragedies of Phaedra and Hippolytus: 'The last link in the chain of disaster is not Hippolytus' self-control, but his lack of it ... as Phaedra does violence to αἰδώς in the name of αἰδώς, so does Hippolytus to σωφροσύνη in the name of σωφροσύνη: each is the victim of his own and the other's submerged desires

objects most to the Athenian institution of marriage and all its panoply, that is, the provision of the dowry, the role of the husband, the role of the woman within her domestic domain, the uses and abuses of her domesticity, and sex within marriage for procreation. All these are markers of legitimacy, especially for the male Athenian citizen, and legitimacy is precisely what Hippolytus lacks, and what Pericles' citizenship law of 451 BCE had clearly defined.<sup>51</sup> Νόθοι were not admitted to the various rites of passage which marked acceptance and registration in the demes and phratries, and so were technically without families, and stateless.<sup>52</sup> I suspect that the Athenian audience in 428 BCE, inured to the inclusivity/exclusivity which the law manufactured, perhaps most recently from the case of Pericles' sole surviving and illegitimate son, would have understood all too keenly the irrational outburst of the νόθος against women, marriage and its sanctioned procreation. But Euripides is too shrewd an analyst of the human psyche for that alone: there is something else at work here.

If one looks carefully at the speech there are a series of words and phrases which keep occurring: ἐν δὲ δώμασιν (623), ἐς δόμους (625), δωμάτων (626), ἀπώικισ' (629), ἐς δόμους (630), δωμάτων (633), κατ' οἶκον (639), ἔν γ' ἐμοῖς δόμοις (640). The home, the house, the cornerstone of the patriarchal family and, as Ogden deems it, the very 'site of legitimacy'.<sup>53</sup> In short, the kind of social and cultural institution grounded in an ideology directly opposed to the nomadic, non-nuclear, decidedly matriarchal concept of the family which, as we know from Herodotus, the Amazons embodied.<sup>54</sup> Hippolytus' misogyny is that of the angry bastard, but he also speaks with the voice of an Amazon, and I suspect that

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masquerading as morality' (1925:103-104). See Gill 1990:76-107 for close analysis of the various meanings of σωφροσύνη in this play. Cf. Gregory 1991:59-70; Skinner 2014:167.

<sup>51</sup> Ogden 1996:58-69, 198-199; cf. Roisman 1999:38, 143. μητρόξενοι in any case, had been regarded as νόθοι by some Athenians long before Pericles' law (Ogden 1996:62).

<sup>52</sup> The second *Hippolytus* was produced a year after Pericles died. As Pericles had lost his legitimate sons to the plague, he begged the Athenians, shortly before he died, to suspend his own law and allow his son by Aspasia (νόθος and μητρόξενος) to be enrolled in the phratries and to bear his name (Plutarch *Pericles* 37). For the prejudices and penalties against bastards in classical Athens, including the exclusion from the state and the 'sacred and holy rites' of the family, see Ogden 1996:126-129; 2002:29, 32. See Goldhill 1986:131-137 for a perceptive analysis of the intertextual relationship between the first and second *Hippolytus*.

<sup>53</sup> 1996:100-101; see Goff 1990:2-12: 'the house in the *Hippolytus* is the site of the transgression and punishment of its female members and the betrayal of its male' (11). Cf. Segal 1978:137.

<sup>54</sup> As the Amazons' speech to their Scythian suitors in Herodotus 4. 114. 10-20 makes clear. Cf. Burnett 1986:167-168.

Euripides meant us to hear the internalised voice of his mother, whose very name he bears.

In the light of the above, those interested in constructing some sort of psychological profile of Hippolytus, which does not put too much strain on the text, could perhaps consult DSM-IV (the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) and discuss this alongside Hippolytus' misogynistic outburst. There listed under 'Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders' is the 'Sexual Aversion Disorder' characterised by 'aversion to and active avoidance of genital sexual contact with a sexual partner'.<sup>55</sup> The manual reports that such individuals, 'when confronted by a sexual opportunity with a sexual partner', experience panic attacks with extreme anxiety, feelings of terror, faintness, nausea, palpitations, dizziness and breathing difficulties. 'There may be markedly impaired interpersonal relations ... Individuals may avoid sexual situations or potential sexual partners by covert strategies' (such as 'being over-involved in work, social or family activities') (1994:499). Or religion and hunting, one could add. Before we get over-excited at pigeon-holing Hippolytus, we must, of course, remember that we are reading a great work of dramatic literature,<sup>56</sup> and not a file on a patient (a bastard with an absent mother and an absent father); however, there are some interesting issues raised by this classification.

Euripides' Hippolytus' 'interpersonal relations' could be described as 'markedly impaired'. Shortly after the interesting meadow speech at the beginning of the play, when a servant approaches him to offer some sage religious advice, he prefaces the stichomythic exchange with: ἄρ' ἄν τι μου δέξαιο βουλεύσαντος εὔ; (89) ['if I gave you some good advice, would you take it from me?']. Quite clearly, Hippolytus' relationship with his slaves is 'impaired' by the kind of intolerance and arrogance the slave comments on in the conversation (93), and by the abrupt way he dismisses both the slave and his advice at the end of this revealing scene.<sup>57</sup>

οὐδεὶς μ' ἀρέσκει νυκτὶ θαυμαστὸς θεῶν (106) ['None of the gods honoured at night pleases/satisfies me?']: having earlier conceded that it is mortal νόμος to shun arrogance and 'not loving all' (93), having admitted that there is χάρις (95-96) in being good at talking to people, having conceded that this applies to relations between the mortals and gods (98), Hippolytus negates all this by rejecting the worship of Aphrodite (113) by focussing, like an obsessed puritan, on the 'aphrodisia' by night. In addition, 'none of them pleases me' suggests that narcissism could also feature in this character analysis (rather than 'diagnosis').

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<sup>55</sup> A disorder delisted in *DSM V* (2013)!

<sup>56</sup> Here it is salutary to remind ourselves of Dodds' oft-cited comment that Euripides 'observed, and utilised for dramatic purposes, some of the facts of behaviour which the theory [modern psychological theory] endeavours to explain' (1925:102, n.3).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Luschnig 1988:20.

Apart from his ‘markedly impaired’ interpersonal relations, there is also a hint in the text of a panic attack before his misogynistic outburst. As the distressed nurse begs him not to reveal what she has suggested and reaches out, in traditional Greek style to touch him, he shrieks: οὐ μὴ προσοίσεις χεῖρα μηδ’ ἄψηι πέπλων; (606) [‘Don’t bring your hand near me, don’t touch my clothes!’. This ‘noli me tangere’ moment is directly linked by Euripides to the metaphor of being ‘untouched’ by sex or marriage elsewhere in the play.<sup>58</sup> this ‘sexual panic’ may well be one of the psychological triggers for his misogynistic outburst.

To conclude. We know, in South Africa, of our appalling statistics, of abuse of women and rape, which we encounter daily.<sup>59</sup> We know that many of our students are the products of families in which either an absent father or an absent mother is not the exception, but the norm. We know that we are, by and large, an extremely religious society, in which cultural attitudes towards women have little to do with the ideology of our constitution.<sup>60</sup> We know too of a strong tradition of puritanism which runs through all of our religious communities. We have in Euripides’ *Hippolytus* an ideal text to explore, removed from the unbearable pain of ‘real life’, the possible links between family background, sexual repression, patriarchy, intolerance, misogyny and abuse of women. How can one not be moved by Phaidra’s heart-rending lament after *Hippolytus*’ ‘Let someone teach women to control their desires or let me trample them underfoot for ever’. She sings and, perhaps tellingly, this would have been sung in a male voice — τάλανες ὦ/κακοτυχεῖς/ γυναικῶν πότμοι (669) [how wretched, ill-fated, is the lot of women!].<sup>61</sup> Once we women have been thrown down (σφαλεῖσαι 671), what devices or words do we have now to loosen the knot (κάθαρμα λύειν λόγου 671) of words?<sup>62</sup> One of the devices we have to untie the knot of misogynistic discourse,

<sup>58</sup> Craik 1998:34.

<sup>59</sup> As I write this last paragraph, the local newspaper headline is ‘**Campus rapes spark fear: Student, lecturer accused in two rapes**’. *The Witness* March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> For an example of this conflict between the ideologies underpinning the South African constitution (especially feminist ones) and entrenched cultural attitudes, see Lambert 2008:545-553.

<sup>61</sup> Barrett 1964:121 and Halleran 1995:206-207 assign this song to Phaidra. Kovacs 1995:189, however, as the manuscript tradition is unstable, assigns them to the Nurse arguing that ‘much in the lines is contrary to Phaidra’s character’. Phaidra has not been a ‘proponent of craftiness’, she does not believe that she deserves her fate and she does not ‘wish for a god to help her unjust deeds’. Kovacs cites lines 480-481, 522-523, 607 in support of assigning the song to the Nurse, but as Halleran sensibly observes, this distribution is necessary only for those who place Phaidra off-stage for lines 601-608 (207). Cf. Kovacs 1987:58.

<sup>62</sup> Those interested in the role of speech and silence in the play are referred especially to Knox 1983, originally published in 1952, and free from the jargon of poststructuralism; more theoretically nuanced is Goff 1990 and Meltzer 2006:71-103, especially good on

in which the lives of so many women in our country are bound, and which underpins rape culture on our campuses, is Euripides' play.

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'doublespeak' in the play and its philosophical and political context. Cf. Zeitlin 1985:84-85.



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