**Mrs Robinson Before and After:**

**An Existential Character Analysis of**

**Euripides’ *Hippolytos* in Reception**

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**Declaration of Authorship**

I, Jarrid Keith Looney, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date:

**Abstract**

Throughout this thesis, I will argue that the capacity of Euripides’ *Hippolytos* to survive is due to the exceedingly interesting characters that reside within it, and not because of a variety of moralistic lessons, which may be derived from the text through argument. The Euripidean characters of Phaidra and Hippolytos share a literary essence with each of their received counterparts, but their intertextual existences are as ever-changing as the eras in which they are rewritten. These characters, which are created by backward-glancing playwrights, have a future because of their absurdly believable situations, which may be analysed using various theoretical approaches. I have chosen the unfashionable philosophy of Existentialism for this study because Existentialism is, at its core, a comparative philosophy that pits traditional renderings of humanity (i.e. essence) against exceptional individuals who define themselves outside of the basis of said essence (i.e. existence). These characters, due to their individualized natures, are easily transferred in chronological periods. The fact that this is a tragedy concerned with humanity, sexuality, and individualization is the cause for its frequent restaging today.

In the first chapter, this thesis will begin with a survey of the academic literature that has been written on the reception tradition of this particular tragedy, and will be followed by brief overview of Existentialism and reasons for its implementation in this study. The subsequent chapters will provide a diachronic overview of a number of reimaginings of this story, which was first popularized by Euripides in 428 BCE. This thesis will examine the socio-cultural trends for each drama before analyzing the characters present in the works of Euripides, Seneca, Jean-Baptiste Racine, Mike Nichols, Brian Friel, and Sarah Kane, and will attempt better to understand how each version of Hippolytos and Phaidra are not only influenced by their antecedents, but continue to mould their successors.

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**I**

# Contexts

The Why and How of Analyzing *Hippolytos* in the Twenty-First Century

**Introduction**

This thesis began as an idealistic first-year Ph.D. student’s desire to compile a comprehensive reception history of Euripides’ *Hippolytos* equivalent to those that have been prepared for *Medea*,[[1]](#footnote-1) *Agamemnon*,[[2]](#footnote-2) *Herakles*,[[3]](#footnote-3) and *Antigone*.[[4]](#footnote-4) It quickly became evident, however, that a project of this magnitude could not be given the thoroughness required within the formal requirement of a doctoral thesis. Due to such stipulations, the all-encompassing compilation project has been placed temporarily back on the shelf, and a new one has taken its place for the time being. A smaller spectrum of the total work requires writing before any further proceedings are to be taken. It is my job, as a researcher, to define the margins and boundaries into which this specific thesis will fall.

Before one begins to think about the reception of Attic drama and modernity so that one may scan the stacks of libraries, there is a short list of scholars that must be given priority: Brown, Burian, Easterling, Foley, Goldhill, Hall, Hardwick, Leonard, Macintosh, McDonald, Michelakis, Taplin, and Zeitlin. In my opinion, it would be academic suicide to contemplate modern stagings of Greek tragedy without referencing, at least, some of the works that have been published by these pioneers of the discipline. Of the myriad of publications that have been released in the field, the most impressive have emanated from the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama[[5]](#footnote-5) (henceforth APGRD), which is located in Oxford, and its digital database, which is a continually on-going research project that seeks to catalogue a global production history of ancient drama on the modern stage.

While searching through the APGRD, I found (at the time this research was conducted) records of 312 various productions related to *Hippolytos*, andsome eighty different adaptations, spanning the media of theatre, opera, dance, and film, which tell (at least portions of) the Euripidean variant of the myth in performance. The archetypal Senecan dramatic version of the myth has apparently been utilized with far less frequency at a mere sixty-seven recorded times. Though this tale and its dramatic productions, on the available evidence, only compose approximately four per cent of the entirety of Greco-Roman performances in modernity, its history is not without significance. One noteworthy example follows: the earliest example of any ancient play being done outside of its original chronological period was a 1474 production of Seneca’s *Phaedra* in the Palais de Cardinal Saint Georges, France, of which we know little; for instance, it is not even known if this particular performance was spoken in French or Latin.[[6]](#footnote-6) The earliest modern telling of this myth that may be credited to the Greek archetype, however, was a performance entitled *Hippolytus*, which was staged nearly a century later in either 1552 or 1553 at King’s College, University of Cambridge; other than venue, title, and estimated date of this play, little is able to be said of its importance since (as our impressive, but incomplete database suggests) there is not another Euripidean staging for another 109 years, when a *dramma musicale* called *La Fedra* was staged in Spoleto, Italy. Unlike the work of its Greek predecessor, the play by the tutor of Nero[[7]](#footnote-7) was much more frequently staged until Jean-Baptiste Racine finally merged the two at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in Paris, France on 1 January 1677 in his *Phèdre*. As I have previously suggested, however, the purpose of this thesis is not meant to serve as a comprehensive study in the reception history of *Hippolytos*, and, therefore, it will not be delving into the comparative popularity of Euripides and Seneca in different chronological periods.

Other than the empirical information that is stored within its database, the APGRD and its contributors have published a number of seminal works that are concerned with the history, staging, and interpretation of classical drama in the modern theatre. As previously mentioned, a number of these texts are massive reception studies concerned with one play or playwright, but this is not always the case. *Dionysus Since 69*,[[8]](#footnote-8) for instance,not onlyobserves the phenomenon of Greek tragedy being performed more frequently in the past forty years than in any era in history outside of classical antiquity, but it also addresses why and how this is happening. The contributors argue that Greek tragedy has been utilized not only to address global issues such as gender politics (e.g. *Bacchae*), military involvement (e.g. *Trojan Women*), and ethnic/racial/national identification (e.g. *Persians*), but also to question the very nature of theatre and the human psyche. As the play I am interested in is not exempt from the trend of resurgence, the question ‘Why is *Hippolytos* pertinent today?’ must be addressed.

Upon reading this dramatized myth, one will be hard-pressed to find strategies for governing the state (unless one wishes to find examples of poor deliberation as negative exempla), but one may find policies by which to manage one’s own personal life and interpersonal relationships. By this, I am stating that no modern, democratic government would turn to this particular Euripidean Theseus or his dramatic successors when considering matters of foreign policy because little that he does or says is explicitly pertinent to the political sphere. Husbands and fathers, however, *may* turn to him when trying best to identify and understand their children, wives, and selves. Current, Western women may find it difficult to sympathize with the object of Phaidra’s love, but it is possible that they will see her as a paragon of self-denial who is only brought to destruction when her busy-body ‘friend’ pries her way into circumstances in which she does not belong. Today’s readers, who have been under a constant barrage from Christian ethics, may look at Hippolytos, and see a young man who was destroyed simply because it is the obligation of the righteous to suffer. Freudian psychoanalysts may view the same virginal character as a neurotic and sexually oppressed, homosexual narcissist who is brought to annihilation because of his own inability to cope with both his internal and external environments.[[9]](#footnote-9) Many academics may try to contextualize Hippolytos’ characterization within the social and psychological categories of Euripides’ day, and see him as having been punished for insulting a deity. I argue, however, that when trying to place *Hippolytos* into a category for study, it becomes exceedingly clear that the characters themselves are the driving force behind this play’s cultural longevity and stamina: this is a drama about interactions between members of the *oikos* (Gr. household) with little reference to the *polis* (Gr. city-state). Due to this personalized element of their nature, these characters are easily transposed from one moment in time to any other. The fact that this is a drama concerned with humanity, sexuality, and individual characters is the reason that it is able to be resurrected and staged with frequency 2500 years after its fact.

Though a handful of postgraduate essays have been written, why have no prominent classical receptionists focused on these individuals for the hub of their research? More importantly, why have so few even analysed the dramatic realisation of this myth in the fringes of their work? A perplexing example of this neglect for Phaidra takes place between the covers of *Rebel Women: Staging Ancient Greek Drama Today*,[[10]](#footnote-10) in which a dozen essays concerning the depiction of rebellious women in Greek drama are assembled. The book itself is trisected into groupings of ancient, Irish, and international productions in order to analyse the portrayal of Hellenic heroines, but Phaidra is addressed by name or deed, and never in detail, only a handful of times. I do not think she was consciously excluded; rather, I am concerned with why neither the contributors nor the editors chose to discuss her, since she meets the various criteria which make her appropriate for inclusion in the volume. *Hippolytos* has been adapted by contemporary Irish dramatists and retitled *Living Quarters: After Hippolytus* (Friel, 1977) and *The Oval Machine* (O’Connor, 1986). It has been reimagined on the international stage with famous adaptations including *Phaedra’s Love* (Kane, 1996), *Phaedra in Delirium* (Yankowitz, 1998), *Ippolito o Fedra* (Nenci, 2005), and *Phaedra or Alcestis Love Stories* (Penga, 2007) as well as a multitude of others. It is clear that Phaidra easily fits into the formal categories addressed in this collection of essays, but still she was slighted by the academic contributors and was forced into the background while Klytaimnestra, Iphigenia, Medeia, and Antigone basked, once again, in the limelight.

Maybe Phaidra’s absence from this particular book was due to her not meeting the criterion of being a heroine.[[11]](#footnote-11) This would be an interesting cause for exclusion because the ancient Greeks themselves did not have a feminine form of the word ‘hero’ until the time of Pindar.[[12]](#footnote-12) For the sake of argument, however, I will apply the same criteria of heroic status to women that have been applied to their counterparts (except, of course, for gender). In order to do this, I will be relying heavily on Deborah Lyons, and, therefore, will quote her at length.

Heroes are generally considered to be those who have one or more of the following attributes: heroic or divine parentage (e.g. Herakles and Helen); a close relationship—erotic, hieratic, or antagonistic—with a divinity in myth; ritual connection with a divinity, such as a place in the sanctuary or a role in the cult (e.g. Hyakinthos and Semele); a tradition or evidence of a *heröon* (hero-shrine) or tomb, sacrificial offerings, or other ritual observance (e.g. Hippolytos and Iphigeneia).[[13]](#footnote-13)

If these were the standards that were applied when selections were made for *Rebel Women*, I still see no reason that Phaidra should have been neglected. In consideration to the first element of heroism, there are several ways in which Phaidra counts as eligible since she was not only the wife of an unquestioned hero (i.e. Theseus), but also claimed two divinities (i.e. Zeus and Helios) as her grandsires. As we move to the second criterion – a close relationship with a divinity – we need look no further than the prologue of Euripides’ *Hippolytos*. In these lines, Aphrodite informs us that Phaidra had founded not only a shrine to the goddess out of piety (37-43)[[14]](#footnote-14) (i.e. she has performed a hieratic role in relation to the goddess), but will also be destroyed by her (59-63) (i.e. she has performed an antagonistic role) in order to punish the brazen Amazon’s son for his slights against her divinity. She not only has an established relationship with Aphrodite, but also with Artemis. This is made clear when the Huntress[[15]](#footnote-15) awards her the honour of instituting the ritual tradition of a choral lyric performance in the closing episode (1606-9) of Euripides’ play. Finally, one must consider the hero-cult and *heröons* of Hippolytos himself: had it not been for the actions of Phaidra, Hippolytos would have never been elevated to the status of hero. Overall, I am implying that Phaidra deserves the title of ‘heroine’ not only because of her descent, coupling, and presence in ritual choral performances, but also because she is a catalyst in the promotion of not only Aphrodite, but also of Artemis and the eventual divine ascent of her stepson.

Finally, there is the likely possibility that most of the contributors to works in this discipline have marginalized this myth and the characters who enact its narrative because it does not seem as pertinent politically and societally as other myths of its time because it is so concerned, as I have suggested, with sexuality and individual relationships. This perception may actually hold some truth, but I am convinced that *Hippolytos* has reached further into the societal subconscious than it has been previously given credit. Throughout this thesis, it is not my wish to discredit exemplary texts and scholars in the field of classical reception; rather, it is my desire to encourage others not to slight *Hippolytos* when writing on the modern reception of ancient Greek drama. Perhaps this exercise can also offer some explanation as to why there has been a perceived lack of interest in academic writings about the actual stage characters of Phaidra and her counterparts in contemporary adaptations during the last few decades, which has seen the rise of classical drama performance reception.

## *Hippolytos* in Academia

In the previous section, it may have been inferred by the reader that academic writing on *Hippolytos* is entirely absent: this is, of course, not the case. In fact, the original drama and its Roman successor have been written on considerably; there has just been little attention given to its recent staging and adaptability. Scholars from a number of fields are fascinated with this play for a plethora of reasons. Devereux, Lichtman, and Segal have approached it from a psychoanalytical perspective. Fox, Wheeler, and Rabinowitz have each observed the treatment of women in this play and its survival into modernity. Many philologists including Goff, Swift, and, once again, Segal have repeatedly analysed Euripides’ text and have found varied interpretations contained therein. These publications constitute only a small sample of the work that has been written on the *Hippolytos* dramatic texts and myth. In this section I consider some of the academic writers who seem to me to have addressed the mythological tale with sufficiently complex analytical tools to do its subtlety justice.

My own work has been greatly influenced by those scholars that have come before me. In his 1985 book *The Character of the Euripidean Hippolytos*,Devereux, for instance, psychoanalysed the relationships of Hippolytos throughout the original Hellenic drama in order to diagnose him psychologically; in turn, he evaluated Hippolytos’ familial relationships as results of the psychological portrait that he established from the text. He considered the young Hippolytos to be an individual who was both a product of the world around him as well as one who affected it. Devereux began by determining the gender orientation of Hippolytos: he reached the conclusion that the Amazon’s son was no more masculine than his mother was in the terms of Greek socio-cultural identity. This deduction was based on the following observations: 1) Hippolytos favoured the hunt with Artemis because it required him to maintain his hetero-sexual virginity;[[16]](#footnote-16) 2) Hippolytos’ passion for living by his horses mirrored Amazonian culture; 3) He was referred to as ‘the Amazon’s son’ and not in a patronymic sense; 4) The only woman with whom he willingly associated was the perfected ideal of Artemis, whom he was not able to see. Overall, my reading of Devereux’s analysis can be summarized like this: Hippolytos never evolved beyond the mentality of a schoolyard boy who idolizes his mother, feels resentment toward the father who abandoned him, and finds girls particularly revolting. He has not advanced psychologically from childhood into adulthood.

Devereux’s reading, although unfashionable today, seems to me to contain a valuable insight, and this is where my interest in this particular character finds its origins: Hippolytos is not an archetypal Greek everyman; he may, in fact, not even be viewed as a man, but, rather, as a child. For further support to this idea of overgrown infancy, one only needs to read the lines in which Hippolytos fabricates his ideal world in which women are non-existent and children are supplied by the stork-like temple (683-7). To a modern westerner, it seems obvious that the title character is neither socially mature nor mentally healthy, and his relationships with others, most likely, will follow suit. Though Devereux has established a detailed evaluation of Hippolytos, he has not done so with the other characters in the play; he, therefore, has left me questioning why the other characters are as they are, and has left me challenging some of his ideas about the title character of this drama.

One other scholar that should always be referenced when researching *Hippolytos* is Professor Charles Segal, who wrote substantial amounts not only on this play, but on many Euripidean dramas. In *Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow*,[[17]](#footnote-17) he sought to remind his readership to take care never to forget that Greek tragedies were unique in their placement in literary history because they utilized and blended elements of song with staged narrative of suffering and questioning. For Segal, it was not enough to think of the play in terms of its philology, but, also, in terms of its societal impact, cultural origin, staging spectacle, and evolution. In a section of this book, Segal addresses the issue of language and gender in *Hippolytos* where Phaidra, as the lead female, is given a great deal of focus. He analyses the utilization of language by women and its interpretation: women only speak through men, and, thereby, must be meticulous with their words lest their meaning be lost in transition.[[18]](#footnote-18) The delivery of the secrets of women into the domain of men leads to the destruction not only of the female but, also, of the male; the source and meaning of feminine language (including deities) tends to remain invisible to males. By reading Segal, however, it becomes evident that were it not for the difficulties that men and women have in speaking to and understanding one another, there would be no dramatic action in this play in the first place. As will become apparent, my own interpretation is that it is not poor communication, however, that is the destructive force of this play as much as it is the ‘sound of silence’ and its interplay with speech.

To elaborate further upon that point, I will again refer to the prologue (50-3) where Aphrodite fumes over the fact that Phaidra would not speak the name of her disease, but she was wilting nonetheless. This maintenance of silence was not the will of the goddess; rather, it was the resolve of the mortal to maintain her *eukleia* (Gr. good glory). Though Kypris[[19]](#footnote-19) desired for Phaidra to maintain that reputation, she could not abide the silence since it would not assist her in destroying her Amazonian-bred enemy. Phaidra was required to break the silence before she could die and have her stepson punished. This exact method was reflected throughout the remainder of the play when Hippolytos was being destroyed by his own muteness. The vow that Hippolytos had taken not to reveal the source of Phaidra’s illness thoroughly emasculated him: he was no longer able to speak amongst the realm of men where he may have properly defended himself. The zeal with which the Nurse attempted to aid Phaidra was the same with which Theseus, in turn, destroyed his son. In short, by swearing silence, Hippolytos had not only assured that he would share fates with his stepmother, but that he would also share her gender and rights. Hippolytos only needed to speak earlier to avoid destruction, but he, rather, accepted the unnecessary burden of femininity and lost his life for it.

These interplays are extremely interesting, as the reversal of gender roles becomes a requisite for the advancement of this drama. Segal realized that feminine and masculine uses of language were important to the text, but I do not think that he fully appreciated how definitive they were to the characters themselves. Phaidra remained fully feminine throughout the entire play by refusing to speak to men and by committing suicide in a feminine fashion.[[20]](#footnote-20) Had it not been for the intervention by Artemis, she would have maintained an impeccable public reputation amongst the mortals of her time, but she would have also never have been divinely venerated for it, and, in turn, been memorialized as a victim of Aphrodite for generations to follow. Hippolytos, however, blurred the lines of masculinity and femininity in everything that he did. Thanks to Artemis, however, he was rewarded for doing such by being allowed to maintain his *eukleia* as well as being given a place of honour in her rituals.

Many scholars have been content with reading each character of Attic drama, this play included, as an archetype and not as an individual. Later, we will look harder at scholars’ reluctance, ever since the time of Tycho von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff,[[21]](#footnote-21) a century ago, to talk about tragic characters. Nevertheless, upon a short inspection of *Hippolytos*, it becomes clear that these are extremely complicated and nuanced literary portraits which cannot be dismissed as ‘characterizations’ so lightly. In order to begin this discussion about the character identities of Hippolytos and Phaidra in relation to both the text and the literary tradition of this drama and its later receptions, we must first define what scholars accept character to be in regards to ancient Hellenic tragedy.

Of course, the ontological status of any literary character is debatable because such a status is constituted by numerous components, which are derived both from within and beyond the text. In the next chapter, I will conduct a detailed analysis of the Greek text from the perspective of the characters. But, especially in the case of a myth so famous that it has, to some extent, become detached from its originating text as far as its cultural life is concerned, we need to see the way by which that text has interacted with others, both those which influenced it, and those which it has influenced. Because these characters have identities that were developing centuries before Euripides’ first staging, just as they continued to develop after it, it would be ludicrous to ignore the centuries of mythological discourse, story-telling, choral lyric, and presence in art and ritual (contradictory as the pictures they presented of our characters may be) that have led to this staging. It would equally be absurd to ignore this staging when considering the reimagining of these characters after Euripides. Therefore, in the following chapter, before actually analyzing the Euripidean characters, I will briefly examine their characterizations in epic and mythical sources other than the canonical dramas.

Finally, after having pored over the works that have been written on the *Hippolytos* myth, I must establish where my work belongs on the shelves. In order to do this, I must establish what criteria I will borrow from my predecessors in order to justify my own personal research. What leaps from the page but has not yet been written on? The answer to that question is simple: the evolution and identification of these characters not in antiquity, but in modernity.

Earlier, I established that the majority of stagings and adaptations of plays about Hippolytos during the Renaissance and Neoclassical movement took place in England and the United States, with a few adaptations being used numerous times. According to the APGRD, these two trends survived into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: of all of the performances of *Hippolytos* since 1900, approximately forty per cent of these have been staged, but not necessarily solely, in England and the United States, with only a few adaptations being staged a multitude of times. Due to this interesting pattern of occurrence, I have chosen to examine only plays that could potentially be performed again in both of the previously mentioned countries. Therefore, all of the adaptations that are reviewed in this thesis were written originally in English for audience members who reside in states where English is either one of the official languages (e.g. Canada and India) or the *de facto* dominant tongue(e.g. United Kingdom and United States). I have chosen this linguistic criterion of selection not only because of the play’s recent history in the aforementioned nations, but also because I wanted to concentrate on a particular cluster of possibly inter-related performance events in a specific cultural tradition.

The next criterion that must be established for this work is chronological. I have decided that, in keeping with the academic trends of classical reception, this work will be focused on the period from 1967 through 2007. Typically, it would be wise to follow in the footsteps of Hall, Macintosh, and Wrigley by commencing one’s study with the June 1968 debut of Richard Schechner’s *Dionysus in 69*, but for the treatment of the myth of Phaidra and Hippolytos, I will begin with the December 1967 film debut of Mike Nichols’ box-office hit, *The Graduate*. Though Schechner did wonders for the revival and evolution of Attic drama in its entirety, our classical tale could not have asked for better publicity than this film. *The Graduate*, which premiered in cinemas mere months before Schechner’s seminal adaptation of Euripides’ *Bacchae* and continued to be shown well into 1969, redefined Hippolytos and Phaidra as the now culturally iconic archetypes of the questionable and corrupted purity of Benjamin Braddock and the devilish seductiveness of Mrs Robinson. In fact, after the unveiling of Mrs Robinson as the new face of Phaidra, the archetype’s age shifted significantly; she was no longer closer in age to Hippolytos as she had been for millennia, but was now a generation removed, and that is in no small part to Anne Bancroft’s portrayal of the character, and that is why 1967 is such an important year for our tragic myth.

The last criterion of selection for this study is tricky because it is not applicable to *The Graduate* in its placement on the timeline. All of the other works, however, are *consciously* advancing the public knowledge of the Greek mythological story of Phaidra at the time of the original production. By this, I mean that the authors of all of the other adaptations in this thesis were aware that they are creating variations on the Euripidean *Hippolytos*. This does not require, of course, that they may not borrow from other versions of the myth (e.g. Seneca and Racine) or make their own contributions. This proviso is necessary because otherwise I would be able to look at any development in the life of Mrs Robinson as a development in the life of Phaidra, and this is not always the case, but I do hope to examine how the characters of *The Graduate* have informed those in modern stagings of Euripides’ *Hippolytos*. It must be noted, however, that in April 2012, Mike Nichols revealed that the longevity of his cinematic masterpiece was because it was, indeed, a reimagining of the Hippolytos-Phaidra story.

Therefore, throughout this thesis, I will examine the depictions of Euripides’ characters on the modern stage. In order to do this, however, I must begin by exploring the players of the extant original and its first adaptation; the readership should be aware of my thoughts on Euripides’ *Hippolytos*, Seneca’s *Phaedra*, and Jean-Baptiste Racine’s *Phèdre* before delving deeper into their survival. After these introductory chapters, each subsequent will be concerned with the characters and portrayals that have contributed to their evolution. Ultimately, I plan to reveal that Hippolytos and Phaidra are all still alive and changing under the pen of playwrights today, and will reveal why they may be doing so.

First performed in 428 BCE, Euripides’ play concerns itself deeply with personal relationships. Amongst the variety of interactions explored are male/female, master/slave, and divine/mortal. In its consideration of each of these types of relationships, *Hippolytos* focuses greatly on the individual characters through whom the drama flows rather than on broadly brushed archetypes whose personal and familial histories are of less relevance than their ultimate destinies. I am not arguing that Phaidra *et al.* must perpetually be confined unambiguously to the time and locale of their origin because to do so would be counterproductive to my work. I am, rather, suggesting that it is when these characters are transposed diachronically, physically, and culturally that the adaptor is yoked with the responsibility to not only preserve some integrity of her/his forbearers, but that the new author is also expected to develop manners by which these characters may be altered thorough histories and relationships (both public and private). In order to consider these relationships in adaptation, however, we must first understand who these characters are meant to be in the world for which Euripides has created them. Throughout the following chapters, I plan to analyse the characters of this drama in their correlations to the larger world around them including their interactions with culture, the other, and the self.

## Theoretical Approach – Psychoanalytic Existentialism of Literary Character

**Character**

The very hub of my research pivots around the concept of the character in *this* Attic tragedy, which must therefore be elaborated upon before any further undertaking can be conducted. By turning our attention to the earliest surviving work addressing dramatic theory – Aristotle’s *Poetics* written in the middle of the third century BCE – we find a short discourse on the concept of dramatic character. In this seminal text, Aristotle argues a set of criteria that should be met for literary and dramatic figures: they must be good morally (‘Even a woman may be good’ (1447a 22)); they must conform to conventionally accepted standards of behaviour or morals; the characters must be true to life (i.e. the individuals must be true to their own individual existential natures rather than always attempting to fit into their essential moulds); they must be consistent in their characterisations. What the great philosopher is suggesting is simply that the characters must be consistent and characteristically honest in their responses to the situations that impact them; they may be mad, but there must be a consistency to their madness, and there must be a psychological legitimacy to said affliction.

It must be conceded, however, that in this same seminal text, the tutor of Alexander stated, ‘Without action there cannot be a tragedy; without characters there can…The plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy; the characters are secondary.’ Many academics have taken this to imply that the characters of Hellenic tragedy can easily be reduced to symbols with Kratos always standing for might, Thanatos for death, and Lyssa for madness – safely so – but have furthermore gone to read Clytemnestra as the personification of a familial curse, ‘Phaedra represents baneful love and Alcestis the supreme wifely *arête*.’[[22]](#footnote-22) To read these characters as symbols, however, removes their own individual relevance from the story that they must move along. It is also not enough to read these characters as flat – one- or two-dimensional – because these characters are wont to change their attitudes: for example, ‘Medea loves her children and takes vengeance, but she is not exactly a type of mother-love plus vindictiveness: the emotion and the deed are dramatic stuff to which we might give the name motifs.’[[23]](#footnote-23) Because of the psychological complexity of these characters, Garton has alongside of Walter Zürcher, and I think rightfully, argued that Euripidean personae often require interpretation in terms of a serious psychology.

If, however, as Aristotle suggested in the third century, character should be subservient to the plot, why have scholars continually debated the portraits of personality for these figures for hundreds of years? As former Stanford professor of classics Augustus Taber Murray suggested in 1916, ‘One cannot read the Greek tragedies upon which his judgements were based without being struck by the fact that the plot is, as a rule, almost negligible as an element of tragic interest.’[[24]](#footnote-24) While the skeleton of the plot is requisite to portrayal of character, that is only because these characters are volatile forces waiting to come into collision, and the plot serves as the catalyst for these reactive components. For the most part, we have settled in the translations, although we have argued about them frequently, but the issue of characterisation is one that has waged ever onward. I believe the reason for this is that classical Hellenic character study is no longer the sole realm of the classicist, and that the characters are proven to be more interesting than the plots themselves. Because of this, many scholars have moved toward the science of psychoanalysis in order to better understand these literary icons.

There has always been a debate focused around the role of the individuals in the greater sum of the dramatic piece, but there has been little agreement upon their purpose. For some, the characters are subordinate to the action around them; to others, they are considered of lesser value than the rhetoric and language which they are meant to convey.[[25]](#footnote-25) There have been others, of course, who have turned toward establishing the concepts of ‘character’ in the study of Greek tragedy. John Jones, for example, contrasted two varieties of identified self in the genre: the first, he argued, is a ‘self-in-action’, which is defined as the type of individual who expresses its essence throughout the action of the drama; the second is the ‘real-self, underlying, persisting through action and suffering.’[[26]](#footnote-26) Therefore, the two identities that are established by Jones are not meant to exist in harmony with one another: the self-in-action is how the individual interacts with others, and is, therefore, perceived in correlation to the world; the real-self is one who persists regardless of external forces acting upon the character. Jones identified the hypocritical, dual nature of the individual. Although it is this second nature (i.e. the real-self) with which I am most concerned, I do believe that the first (i.e. the self-in-action) can provide a valuable contribution to understanding the other.

Literary and theatrical critics are often concerned with the interplay between the characters with each other and their environment, but rarely is interest given to the character as an individual simply existing in the world. That is, each of us has an identity partly derived from our subjective sense of self and our apprehension of our material environment. A poet portraying a character will, if he is competent, fill out these aspects of identity as well as those constituted by the character’s relationships with others. I am not implying that one cannot examine the relationships that an individual has in order to gain insights into his or her identity, but that one must also think about the way that these characters relate to their environment and to themselves. Effectively, I am not only interested in the characters as they relate to one another, but also, and more importantly, how they are in their most primal, isolated states. In February 2001, the legendary basketball player and coach John Wooden advised others to ‘Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are,’[[27]](#footnote-27) and I hope that through this analysis, I will be able to surmise the actual Psychoanalytic Existential identities of these literary creations rather than merely a reputation that has been assigned to them by other analysts. In effect, I am hoping to tackle George Steiner’s query about ‘What would have happened if psychoanalysis had taken Antigone rather than Oedipus as its point of departure?’ Though both Judith Butler and Miriam Leonard have discussed more politicized understanding of the psychoanalytic sexual subject in *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship between Life and Death*[[28]](#footnote-28) and ‘Lacan, Irigaray, and Beyond: Antigones and the Politics of Psychoanalysis’[[29]](#footnote-29) respectively, my attention will turn toward the figures of Hippolytos and Phaidra as, yet again, different models within the worlds of their original play and receptions. This understanding will be heightened by paying attention to the words the playwright chooses when conveying a message about a character in order to understand more deeply the inner machinations of his or her mind. I am not implying that one cannot examine the relationships that an individual has to glimpse at his identity, but one must continue to examine the relationships that one has with one’s environment and self in order to attempt to understand who one truly is. In short, I believe that in order to understand these characters, we must understand the marriage of their thoughts, actions, words, and silences. In doing this, we will analyse their existences, and will, ultimately, perceive their identities as set in and against their essences.

**Psychoanalysis**

Before undertaking an analysis of the characters in my chosen plays, we will first explore the theoretical lens through which they will be viewed: Psychoanalytic Existentialism. In order to understand what this term means, we must do two things: the first is to provide historical and contextual understandings of both existentialism and psychoanalysis; the second is to define the parameters of Psychoanalytic Existentialism in relation to literary figures. Let us begin with psychoanalysis - the set of psychological and psychotherapeutic theories and associated techniques[[30]](#footnote-30) that were originally popularized by Austrian physician Sigmund Freud.

In the 1890s, Freud, a practicing neurologist, was trying to find an effective treatment for patients with neurotic and hysterical symptoms when he came to realize that there were mental processes of which his patients were not consciously aware. While working alongside of his mentor Josef Breuer, Freud’s first theory on developmental contended that the roots of hysterical symptoms were repressed memories of distressing occurrences, almost always having direct or indirect sexual associations.[[31]](#footnote-31) Freud further developed his psychoanalytic fixation with sexual conduct when he published his so-called ‘Seduction Theory’ in 1896. In this theory, the psychoanalyst proposed that the preconditions for hysterical symptoms are sexual excitations in infancy; he held by this theory until recanting it in 1906. Though he recanted the claims in his ‘Seduction Theory,’ Freud long stood by an aspect of this theory - the Oedipus complex.

With this psychological complex being so engrained in the societal conscious, I will not elaborate at length upon it, but will provide a short summary because of its relevance to Hippolytos’ psychological development. In Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the Oedipus complex[[32]](#footnote-32) occurs during the phallic stage of psychosexual development,[[33]](#footnote-33) wherein the infant’s libido centres upon his or her genitalia as the erogenous zone. During this stage of psychosexual development, a young boy’s psychosexual experience is one of competition with his own father for the possession of his mother. The boy will want to replace his father, but will pragmatically surrender because his survivalist instinct makes him aware that the elder male is also the physically stronger. After this rationality has taken over, Freud argues that the boy will incorporate the personality characteristics of his father in order to alleviate anxiety, and to establish safety from his father’s wrath because of their similarities; if, however, this pragmatism does not take over, the unresolved son-father competition may lead the boy to become an over-ambitious, vain man. If one examines the life of Hippolytos and his relationships with his various mother-figures (i.e. Hippolyte, Artemis, and Phaidra) as well as that with Theseus, it becomes evident that the prince never resolved his complex. It is not my prerogative, however, to delve too deeply into the Freudian aspects of Hippolytos’ psychology, but, rather, to provide an overview of psychoanalysis.

Having digressed, let us turn our attention back to the contributions of Sigmund Freud upon the nascent field of psychoanalysis. While the Oedipus complex is, arguably, Freud’s most well-known theory and has some impact upon a reading of Hippolytos, it is not the most critical in attempting to understand the characters of Attic tragedy. That honour, rather, belongs to Freud’s structural model of the psyche. In his model of the human mind, the Austrian posited the three theoretical constructs – the id, ego, and superego – in terms of whose activity and interaction mental life is described. According to his model, the id is the set of uncoordinated instinctual trends; the superego plays the critical and moralizing role; the ego is the organized, realistic part that mediates between the desires of the id and the superego. A brief description of these three theoretical constructs follows: the id is one’s baser instincts such as the desire to attain food, water, and a sexual mate; the superego is a reflection of one’s cultural rules such as the punishment of guilt for extramarital affairs; the ego is the mediator that tries to appease the id while not invoking the disappointment of the superego. While we see these three aspects of the psyche attempt a fine balance in many Attic tragedies, in no one character is this more exemplified than in Phaidra attempting to reconcile the urges inherent in her due to Aphrodite against the rules of a civilized society.

Noted in ‘Modern critical approaches to Greek tragedy,’ by Simon Goldhill, ‘Psychoanalytic criticism, which has been so influential in twentieth-century literary study, has had an impact on the criticism of Greek tragedy in an explicit and implicit way…Orthodox Freudian analysis has been particularly evident, with Lacan rarely invoked.’[[34]](#footnote-34) We have seen, however, that Butler and Leonard have since employed the tactics of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan since Goldhill published this piece. Opposed to Freud’s ego psychology, Lacan argued attempted to ‘restore to the notion of the Object Relation…the capital experience that legitimately belongs to it.’[[35]](#footnote-35) In essence, the French psychiatrist was systematically questioning the psychoanalytic developments of his predecessors because they were focused almost exclusively on the child’s early relationships with the mother. Lacan, on the other hand, proposed that the unconscious is not a primitive or archetypal part of the mind separate from the conscious, but, rather, a formation as complex and structurally sophisticated as the conscious mind itself.[[36]](#footnote-36) Lacan retorted traditional Freudian psychoanalysis by contributing his concept called the Mirror stage, which, effectively, describes the formation of the ego via the process of objectification, the ego being the result of a conflict between one’s perceived visual appearance and one’s emotional experience. Once the child is able to recognise itself in a mirror, and is no longer threatened by the reflection as an Other, the child begins to identify with the image before causing the child to compare itself to the seeming omnipotence of the mother who has already mastered her physical movements and interactions with the world. The depression that may rise from this comparison, according to Lacan, is what causes the child to form an integrated sense of self. When Hippolytos continually compares himself to both his physical mother and the goddess with whom he keeps company, he is initially depressed, but employs that negative emotion into forming his own personal identity.

By recognising the mother as an Other being completely rather than just an illusory other created by the mirror as he has done with itself, the child comes to accept itself as a singular entity, and, simultaneously, acknowledges the mother as an Other that designates radical alterity, an other-ness which transcends the imaginary otherness of the reflection because it cannot be assimilated through identification. By placing the mother – our Other – as a locus outside of itself, Lacan suggests, as is explained by Dylan Evans that ‘It is the mother who first occupies the position of the big Other for the child, it is she who receives the child’s primitive cries and retroactively sanctions them as a particular message.’[[37]](#footnote-37) In the House of Theseus where he has not been the most attentive father, and the mother has been removed from the realm of psychological development, it is likely that the child – Hippolytos – would be stunted, and this would give cause for his inattentiveness. In fact, if we marry this psychoanalytic theory together with Freud’s, we can easily come to accept how and why Hippolytos grows up to be vain, distant, and resentful of his father while continually trying to impress an ‘illusory’ mother-figure.

It must be noted, however, that this is not a case study in either Freudian or Lacanian psychoanalysis, but is, rather, a study employing Psychoanalytic Existentialism to better understand Euripides’ *Hippolytos*’ eponymous hero and his stepmother both in the original and in reception. For this study to begin properly, we must now become acquainted with the principles and terms of a philosophical movement that was developing alongside of psychoanalysis in chronology.

**Existentialism**

I am absolutely aware that existentialism is not a fashionable way of looking at classical Greek literature, but I believe that it has the potential to illuminate some of the thornier areas related to character in Greek tragedy, many of which have proven very resistant to interpretation. Although the aspect of this school of philosophy that is relevant to my research is its psychoanalytical implications, I think it is necessary to provide a short account of the principles on which that psychoanalytical model is based.

Though this philosophical branch of thought did not emerge until the middle of the twentieth century, its roots can be traced back to the period from which our play emerged. The more ambivalent that Søren Kierkegaard[[38]](#footnote-38) and Friedrich Nietzsche[[39]](#footnote-39) became towards the philosophical works of Socrates, the more it was apparent that the ancient Athenian philosopher was not simply interested in a type of rationality that moved beyond merely conventional and subjective values towards universal moral norms. They began to understand that the ancient Athenian was also seeking a manner by which to join harmoniously his teachings with his own life.[[40]](#footnote-40) The best examples of this can be found in Plato’s *Laches*, in which the Athenian general after whom the dialogue is named admits that this concord of teaching and practice is more impressive than Socrates’ actual teachings alone. After having posited the immortality of the soul, Socrates risked his life with that possibility in mind when he was commanded by the Athenian court to drink a hemlock brew.[[41]](#footnote-41) This commitment to his own beliefs inspired Kierkegaard to reconsider his perceptions on ‘truth:’[[42]](#footnote-42) many of his thoughts concerning a universal truth gave way to ‘truth as subjectivity.’ By this, he was seeking a personal conviction on which one was willing to risk not only one’s life, but upon which it could be based.[[43]](#footnote-43) The ancient practice of authentically merging one’s life with one’s philosophy would become, in fact, the fifth principle of existentialism. For the modern existentialist, the purpose of this principle is to make possible a choice about way of life, a choice taken with the intention of acting in a way that is revelatory to others and can be noted and emulated by them. The point is to live out one’s philosophy to such a degree of authenticity that there can be no mistaking the philosophical treatises underlying it, because they can easily be related to practice, and can be observed directly in one’s daily mannerisms and choice of actions.[[44]](#footnote-44)

The second tenet of existentialism is the relationship that each individual has with time and space. This philosophy suggests that everything is subjective, and because of this fact, matters such as time and space, which are measured by human standards, surely must be mutable: this is rationalized in that time seems to fly by when one is enjoying oneself, but it seems to crawl infinitely slowly when one is in pain. This rationale examines the subjectivity of time, but does not explain how it is correlated to one’s existence. That matter is derived in that the value and meaning of each temporal dimension of lived time is a function of our attitudes and choices. In simple terms: since life is divided into moments, how we choose to spend our moments dictates how we choose to spend our lives. How we choose to spend our lives is equally as important as where we choose to spend our lives. This matter is colloquially hinted at as a ‘comfort zone,’ and is an extremely important existential idea. Where we choose to live our lives, and the routes with which we become comfortable, identify as much about who we are as how we choose to fill those moments.[[45]](#footnote-45) If one chooses to submerge oneself into the locale and lifestyle of the city, one is cosmopolitan or urbane; when one chooses to place oneself beyond the walls of the city, one typically identifies oneself and is, thereby, identified by others as rural and, sometimes, simple. This is not to suggest that one is superior to the other, but this chrono-environmental factor is, nonetheless, essential to understanding one’s character.

The third theme of existentialism is one that is particularly interesting when examining an extremely religious society like that of the ancient Athenians: humanism.[[46]](#footnote-46) This theme, though neither anti-scientific nor anti-religious,[[47]](#footnote-47) highlights that this philosophy is focused on the human individual’s pursuit of identity and meaning amidst the social and economic pressures of mass society towards superficiality and conformity. existentialism is not irrational in that it rejects science nor is it irreverent in that it rejects the potential for god, but it is concerned with the individual experience of existence: science and religion, by their very natures, both require that individual truths be disregarded, and that an objectively agreed upon idea be the standard. This philosophy, however, requires that one be presented with a variety of options so that the individual may weigh their ideologies against one another before reaching a personal decision of acceptance. Simply put: existentialism requires that the human being seek both intellectually and emotionally/spiritually for a truth that is relevant to him/her before committing to it.[[48]](#footnote-48) For the existentialist, the journeys through faith and society are about the process by which the merits of the approach are inferred from experience and its relevance to one’s own life rather than the moment of conversion. This, however, is where existentialism’s humanism runs into conflict with much modern religious ideology. If god is, as is often understood, the creator of the universe, and all potential actions are known by this deity (i.e. an example of determinism), then humanity, ultimately, has no freedom since all potential actions have already been observed by the omnipotent creator. This evident conflict is a classic example of the argument of determinism versus free will. In the case that man’s will is absolutely pre-determined by god, each action that is made is a matter of fulfilling destiny, and man is reduced to a state of nothingness in that he has no possibility to act upon the world. In matters of free will, in which every action is a choice, man ascends from the idea of nothingness to being a creator himself. In determinism, any idea that springs from man would, in turn, have sprung from god: this leaves the omnipotent creator of the universe responsible for the ignoble atrocities that arise (e.g. genocide), and leave god, therefore, as potentially noble and ignoble itself. If god is rendered both noble and ignoble, then it is, surely, susceptible to the same judgments and identifications as humanity, and is, therefore, no omnipotent being. This dilemma of a potentially humanized creator is dealt with by the existential idea that if there is a creator, he/she/it simply imbued man with infinite potential, and has subsequently retired from manipulations in the mortal realm.[[49]](#footnote-49) Dr Martin Luther King Jr. best summarizes this ideology of a distantly removed god in *Strength to Love* when he states, ‘By endowing us with freedom, God relinquished a measure of his own sovereignty and imposed certain limitations upon himself.’[[50]](#footnote-50) In our play, the Olympians are not omnipotent entities who control all outcomes in the lives of mortals, but are, rather, more similar to this limited deity who has ‘relinquished a measure of sovereignty.’ Aphrodite, as we see in the prologue, is not able directly to affect either Phaidra or Hippolytos, and must continually put forth effort to see her desires come to fruition. In summary, the gods with whom we deal in *Hippolytos* are not omnipotent figures, and may be addressed as the other characters of the drama, albeit with slightly modified standards.

The fourth principle of existentialism arises naturally once the individual has sought his own identity amidst the chaotic universe, but as the human being has come to understand his existence, he then is burdened by a requirement: the reward is freedom, and the hindrance is responsibility. In his essay entitled ‘Cartesian Freedom,’ Jean-Paul Sartre establishes, phenomenologically, that those who have come to understand their existences are, in the place of the universe, held absolutely responsible for the further development of the societal world. This development deviated from Nietzsche’s view that as time is infinite, and choices are finite, that all possible choices are bound to repeat themselves, and that the choice made by an individual is the only choice that could have been made for that particular situation whether it was good/noble or evil/ignoble. This illusion of freedom created by Nietzsche, ultimately, established that we were still without responsibility. Sartre’s key argumentative response was that ‘We are without excuse,’ and that it is those who are existentially enlightened who must attempt, therefore, to make their existences meaningful and noble. The concept that freedom creates values is exemplified in Sartre’s *The Age of Reason* in which Mathieu comes to this striking realisation:

The brake was suddenly slammed down and the bus stopped…Mathieu thought: ‘No, it isn’t heads or tails. Whatever happens, it is *by my agency* that everything must happen.’ Even if he let himself be carried off, in helplessness and in despair, even if he let himself be carried off like a sack of coal, he would have chosen his own damnation: he was free, free in every way, free to behave like a fool or a machine, free to attempt, free to refuse, free to equivocate; to marry, to give up the game, to drag his head weight about with him for years to come. He could do what he liked, no one had the right to advise him, there would be for him no Good nor Evil unless he brought them into being. All around him things were gathering in a circle, expectant, impassive, and indicative of nothing. He was alone, enveloped in this monstrous silence, free and alone, without assistance and without excuse, condemned to decide without support from any quarter, condemned forever to be free.[[51]](#footnote-51)

Only by understanding that one’s actions will, undoubtedly, affect all future actions that are taken by human beings is one responsible for what one does, and it is those who are aware of how wide-spreading their actions are that are truly free to pursue existence.

The final principle that I must discuss is actually usually taken as the prior or underlying principle in the philosophical ‘family’ of existentialism: the matter of existence preceding essence. In order to expound upon this principle, I must first define the terms of existence and essence. In short, essence is what one was born as (i.e. by gender, social class, species, etc.); one’s existence, however, is who one chooses to be with the freedom that one has been granted in the time and space in which one has existed. To simplify these two terms: essence is *what* you are, and existence is *who* you are.[[52]](#footnote-52) Having established what the terms existence and essence carry with them, we must now turn our attention to the idea that the individual into which one grows is far more significant than individual as whom one is born. As one is the sum of one’s choices, the individual who one has chosen to be is more important than the life into which one was born. I chose to save this principle for last because the matter of one’s existence is the amalgamation of how one has chosen to live life. According to Sartre, each individual choice that a person makes is influenced by their preceding choices; this regression can be repeated infinitely until one arrives at an individual’s ‘original choice’ to set him/herself against an established essence. This ‘fundamental choice’ is, ultimately, the key to understanding the development of a person’s life because this definitive moment is one that is perpetually relived by the subject.[[53]](#footnote-53) For example, by many standards, Hippolytos and Theseus, by the criterion of their essences, should have grown to be nearly identical figures, but they are extremely different because of the lives that they have each *chosen* to undertake.

These five principles are the ones that will be kept in mind when performing my analyses of the characters of *Hippolytos* and its adaptations: 1) *Existence precedes essence*; 2) *Time is of the essence*; 3) *Humanism*; 4) *Freedom/responsibility*; 5) *Ethical considerations are paramount*. More often than not, because of their interdependence upon one another, the traits of Humanism, Freedom/Responsibility, and Ethical Considerations will be analysed simultaneously as a collective rather than being divided into smaller, more artificial sections.

**Psychoanalytic Existentialism**

Having given an ample survey both to psychoanalysis and existentialism, I must define my own terms of Psychoanalytic Existentialism for the sake of this thesis. As George R. Schrader commented of Existential Psychoanalysis, as made popular by Jean-Paul Sartre, in in 1959 article ‘Existential Psychoanalysis and Metaphysics:’

Existential Psychoanalysis represents one of the most natural marriages of theory to practice that one could possibly find. It seeks, in the first place, to make psychoanalytic theory philosophically respectable by providing it with a sound metaphysical foundation and, in the second place, to test *empirically* the speculative theories of Existentialist philosophers…Whether or not one is willing to accept without qualification the categories and doctrines of existentialist metaphysics, one cannot help feeling, on reading the case analyses of the existentialist psychotherapists, that he has encountered a new and highly interesting world – a world at once more complex and more profound than he would ever have dreamed of from reading Freud and his disciples. I say this not to belittle Freud, for whom I have the greatest admiration, but to stress the *philosophical maturity* of this new way in psychoanalysis. Several new dimensions in the analysis of human personality have been added, and the resulting picture of man is sufficiently inclusive that if anything important has been left out, its absence is by no means conspicuous. It is empiricism with a difference, and the difference is salutary.[[54]](#footnote-54)

For Sartre, Freud’s concept that the existence of the unconscious element as the deciding factor of human action was an existential fallacy, but he did recognise several key similarities between his philosophy and the Austrian’s psychodynamic psychoanalysis. Both rely on deep structured levels of the psyche in order to give explanation of an act – for Freud, this was the attempt at reconciliation between the conscious and the unconscious; for Sartre, this was being aware of the original choice that led a being to its place in time. For instance, Freud would explain a preference for an activity such as hunting as being a response to a repression of memories, whereas Sartre would relate it to the individual’s fundamental project.[[55]](#footnote-55) The French philosopher himself says that Freud’s psychodynamism – the idea that our choices depend on deeper psychological structures – has to be taken as an inspiration to avoid seeing a person as a ‘horizontal flux of phenomena.’[[56]](#footnote-56) He also advances that we have to focus our search on discovering our ‘fundamental attitudes which cannot be simply logically expressed since [they are] *a priori* to all logic.’[[57]](#footnote-57)

This is where the two ideologies approach differentiation with Sartre’s philosophy focusing on one’s future, and Freud’s psychoanalysis being dominated by one’s past by blaming everything on the influence of repressed memories. The philosophical movement is concerned with the choices that one has made that have led to this moment whereas the Freudian theory is about understanding oneself as a response to the circumstances that have come before. Sartrean psychoanalysis focuses on the notion of the original choice. As we have established, this original choice – the one which serves as the basis of all our other choices, values, moral and emotional responses, aims and decisions – lies at the core of the existential individual. The original choice causes emotional responses to the world around us, but we cannot remember making the choice in comparison to another, but with analysis of our own or other lives, we may alter our own existential core. The original choice, however, lies deeply rooted in the unconscious, and with Psychoanalytic Existentialism we can come to understand the original choice – the thing which has the most influence over us because it needs to be consciously chosen. This conscious choice will allow one to live a completely authentic life.

Being truthful with oneself about what one genuinely believes characterises what it means to be authentic. R.D. Laing, a Scottish psychiatrist who was heavily influenced by Heidegger and other existential philosophers, in his *Self and Others*, characterised Heidegger’s conception of truth as, “literally that which is without secrecy, which discloses itself without a veil. This concept has practical interpersonal implications in terms of telling the truth, lying, pretending, and equivocating.’[[58]](#footnote-58) In other words, for Psychoanalytic Existentialism to occur, the individual must be truthful with itself about what and who it is. This lens is only applicable existentially if we accept that both all human knowledge is rooted in personal experience and that the weight of experience is so exasperating that the characters often seek to escape it through self-deception. In analysing the characters in Greek tragedy, classicists will have no difficulty locating figures who deceive themselves on a regular basis, but the challenge will lie in attempting to understand why they present themselves in certain fashions, and who they are truly are at their existential cores.

**Psychoanalytic Existentialism and Literary Character**

I will analyse each character in the dramas in terms of these psychoanalytical categories in order to understand them better as individuals rather than as products of the societies from which they come. My ultimate goal is to reveal that although these characters are always responding to their literary predecessors and are thus, in a sense, receptions of their own previous manifestations, their individual intertextual existences still vary because of the original choices they make in order to respond to their own expected essences. The purpose of this is to reveal that though the outcome for the individual and collective members of Theseus’ expatriate Troezenian household may be more or less the same for each, that we are intrigued by this tale not because of the opening or the close but because of the journey between these two points in time. As long as these characters can continue to evolve, *Hippolytos* will always have a place.

It must be kept in mind that not only is existentialism a personal philosophy, which requires introspection, but it is also one that requires great familiarity with both one’s actions and thoughts. In order to cope with this fact, I will existentially analyse the characters as if they were real individuals, but will bear well in mind that they are still, in all cases, extensions of the dramatists who have received them and have chosen to revive them for their contemporary audiences. Reference to the works of Sartre and other existential philosophers will be made where appropriate to contribute better to the understanding of these characters. The bulk of this work will revolve around analyzing the characters under the appropriate principles of existentialism, as they apply to each character, by engaging the selected dramatic texts and the works of scholars and critics who have reviewed them.

As I was rereading Jean Anouilh’s *Antigone*, I could not help but consider the Absurdist[[59]](#footnote-59) existence of a dramatic figure within the literary tradition. Just as Sisyphus is damned to push a boulder up a mountain only to have it roll down day after day, so too is Hippolytos meant to die and be forsaken by both his father and goddess at the end of his drama. As Anouilh has his Chorus say of Antigone at the opening of his rendition of her play:

That thin little creature sitting by herself, staring straight ahead, seeing nothing, is Antigone. She is thinking. She is thinking that the instant I finish telling you who’s who and what’s what in this play, she will burst forth as the tense, sallow, wilful girl whose family would never take her seriously, and who is about to rise up alone against Creon, her uncle, the King.

Another thing that she is thinking is this: she is going to die. Antigone is young. She would much rather live than die. But there is no help for it. When your name is Antigone, there is only one part you can play; and she will have to play hers through to the end.

In this, Anouilh best explains what I am coining a ‘literary essence.’ Effectively, a character’s ‘literary essence’ is composed of the characteristics that make a reception recognisable in regards to its previous manifestations. The ‘literary essence’ and what I am calling ‘intertextual essence’ can often be quite varied as we will see in Sarah Kane’s *Phaedra’s Love*. The ‘intertextual essence’ refers to the essential nature of the character within the world of the play. For instance, the intertextual essence of Kane’s Hippolytus is a response to the moral degradation inherent with the celebrity of monarchy; his literary essence, however, is the accumulation of the various incarnations of the Hippolytos-figure that have come before him including but not limited to those imagined by Sophokles, Euripides, Apollodorus, Virgil, Ovid, Hyginus, Seneca, Racine, H.D., O’Neill, Nichols, and Friel.

Literary characters, especially receptions of former incarnations, by virtue of their reiteration are burdened by their former selves. In order for a character to be understood as an echo to a previous personification, some features of said character must remain unchanged. At the time that Seneca was writing his tragedy, the essential nature of this myth was the stringent virginity of Theseus’ son coming into opposition with the essential promiscuity of a Cretan woman. Phaedra does little to circumvent her own literary essence; she, rather, embraces it fully in identifying herself as an existential portrait against her former *tabula rasa*. Hippolytus does very much the same, but in a slightly different manner. Hippolytus who, like his Athenian predecessor, within the world of the dramatic text, stands in opposition to his essential identity as an Athenian prince, he must embrace his literary essence to do so. While shirking away from his intertextual essence in favour of a life free from the constraints and responsibilities of the city, Hippolytus embraces his literary essence as Theseus’ doomed son whose fate will be sealed by his own father’s unreasoning wrath. In short, for us to understand Hippolytus as a reception of Hippolytos, he must bear a resemblance to his literary forbearer in that he must set himself in opposition to the essential nature of his father, be lusted for by a stepmother-figure, be falsely accused of having sexual relations with her, and must be destroyed ultimately by Theseus’ wrath. This is not to suggest that the Roman character must be an identical replica of the Athenian, but that he must share with him similar characteristics. The manner by which these features are gained (i.e. by what manner Hippolytus is a virginal, chauvinistic huntsman) and how he projects them onto the world (i.e. his reactions to Phaedra) can and should be different from his literary predecessors. It is these existential variations within the world of the text that allow Hippolytus to persist in being an interesting character because it is they that identify him as different.

**Thesis**

As I have argued, the capacity of this particular tragedy to survive is due to the exceedingly interesting characters that reside within it, and not because of a variety of moralistic lessons which may be derived from the text through argument. The Euripidean characters, as I will reveal, share an essence with each of their received counterparts, but their existences are as ever changing as the eras in which they are rewritten. These characters, which are created by backward-glancing playwrights, have a future because of their absurdly believable situations, which may be analysed using various theoretical approaches. I have chosen the unfashionable philosophy of existentialism for this study because existentialism is, at its core, a comparative philosophy that pits traditional renderings of humanity (i.e. essence) against exceptional individuals who define themselves outside of the basis of said essence (i.e. existence). These characters, due to their individualized natures, are easily transferred between chronological periods. The fact that this is a tragedy concerned with humanity, sexuality, and individualization is the cause for its frequent restaging today.

By employing Psychoanalytic Existentialism on other Attic tragedies, classical scholars will be able to better understand not only the characters in the original plays, but also their receptions as individuals rather than symbols or flat entities. Each prevalent figure in Greek drama is filled with psychological depth and philosophical complexity; they deserve to be treated as such. Klytaimnestra has put much thought into slaying Agamemnon, Medeia grapples endlessly with her decision to slay her sons, and even the Titan Prometheus’s nigh eternal suffering for the sake of humanity is the result of a choice rooted in a desire to see humanity prosper. Psychoanalytic Existentialistic analyses of these figures will help us better understand the reasoning of these characters. By conducting analyses on Hippolytos and Phaidra, it is my intention to provide a framework for making character study relevant, and not, as Aristotle suggested, secondary to the plot.

**II**

# ‘We don’t know any other existence’

The Existential World of the Characters in Euripides’ *Hippolytos*

The central topic of this chapter is the dramatic text ultimately underlying all the succeeding dramatizations that will be studied in the remaining chapters of this thesis. In the first part of this chapter, I attempt to locate the text within several different dimensions of the original context in which it was generated in order to throw light on the central characters of Hippolytos and Phaidra.[[60]](#footnote-60) Their strained relationship, as this thesis will show, is the ultimate source of the dramatic energy and, therefore, cultural stamina of the story in performance transhistorically. These contexts are the theatrical conditions of Euripides’ day, the social, political, and religious dimensions of the Athenian performance culture, the living presence of the cults of Aphrodite and Artemis in the classical Greek city, and the mythic forebears of Phaidra and Hippolytos in pre-theatrical Greek literature. The exploration of these contexts is followed by my analysis of the characters of the Euripidean Hippolytos and Phaidra from an existentialist trajectory, which emphasizes what and who they are in relation to these contexts, and how they interact with them.

**The Euripidean Theatre**

In this section, I will discuss one of the most fundamental experiences of Athens’ radical democracy: the institution known as theatre. In order to do this, I will discuss the elaborate Panhellenic festival dedicated to Dionysos – the City or Great Dionysia – in terms of its religious, political, and social practices including the itinerary and schedule of the festival, its constitution in terms of personnel and participants, and the invocation of the divine. Ultimately, I plan to highlight for whom and why Euripides was writing in the fifth century.

The preparations for the dramatic competition held at the Dionysia began with tragic authors submitting to the *archon eponymos* (the chief magistrate of the polis)[[61]](#footnote-61) proposals, of an uncertain length, of the tetralogy (three tragedies and a satyr play) that they would like to enter into the competition at the festival. In a manner unbeknownst to us, the archon would select, most likely in consultation with other officials, the three tragedians who would be staging performances at the Dionysia during the month of Elaphebolion.[[62]](#footnote-62) After selection, each tragedian was appointed principal actors, a chorus, and, most importantly, a *choregos[[63]](#footnote-63)* – a wealthy Athenian who was appointed with the sponsorship of the tragedian’s work.[[64]](#footnote-64)

As we know so little about the rehearsal period for the Dionysia, this discussion will now advance to the festival itself, and will begin with the *Proagon* (Gr. Before the Competition).[[65]](#footnote-65) The day after this event occurred, the religious rituals to Dionysos began with a procession from Athena’s sacred grove – the Academy – called the *Eisagoge* (Gr. Introduction).[[66]](#footnote-66) After the installation of Dionysos, the festival officially commenced with the *Pompe* (Gr. Procession).[[67]](#footnote-67) This procession marched onward toward a sacrifice in honour of the god. Not only did the Athenians sacrifice the one animal, probably an ox, being led by the *ephebes*, but provisions were also made for a public feast in which thousands of devotees were fed: sacrificed meat, bread on spits, wine, and water were offered up, not only to the god, but also to the gullets of his worshippers.

After the sacrifice, the theatre itself was ritualistically prepared for the competition by purification rites, which involved the sacrifice of piglets followed by the pouring of libations of wine to the gods by the *stratēgoi* (Gr. generals). It was at this point that the marriage of the secular and the religious became obvious: a procession was made into the theatre, which revealed the tribute collected by Athens from its allies in the previous year,[[68]](#footnote-68) many of whom had representatives present at the festival. This political element of the Dionysia, therefore, was not merely a boast of Athenian glory to its citizens, but to all who were present.[[69]](#footnote-69)

We know that the war orphans took seats of prominence in the theatre during competition at the Dionysia, but this is only the beginning of mapping out the composition of the entire audience of approximately fifteen thousand that could be housed in the theatre of Dionysos.[[70]](#footnote-70) As was previously suggested, the ten most senior elected officials of the state, the *stratēgoi* were present, and would have been seated, no doubt, in distinction. Certain other dignitaries may have been given seats of preference as well, including the members of the *Boule*, but from the Roman period, at least, we can be sure of one seat that was reserved each year: at the front-centre of the theatre, with elaborate decorations, was a throne to the Dionysian hierophant.[[71]](#footnote-71) As this was a festival in honour of the Olympian, it was crucial to always keep his priest distinct from the masses, and this would have continually reminded the audience that this celebration, though Athenian in practice and display, was in honour of a Panhellenic deity at its core.

With all of the pomp surrounding specific individuals, this was, clearly, not an audience arranged in a way that suggested they were democratically fully equal; some of those present were not even guaranteed the rights of Athenians. Foreign dignitaries from cities that were allied with Athens were present, and were both bombarded with the glory of the Athenian ideal, and were perpetually reminded of their political subservience to this *polis*. Metics (resident aliens who did not have the rights of citizenship) who contributed significantly to the burgeoning trade and commerce of Athens may have been present. The audience even had non-Greeks amongst it; they, most certainly, were not the political equals of Athenian citizens. Even slaves may have accompanied their masters as attendants, but they were not present in any other capacity. Though each of these groups was disenfranchised, to some degree, in Athens, they were still permitted, in varying capacities, to attend the theatrical competition though they were surrounded by those who surpassed them in military, political, and economic might. There is, however, one group upon which this thesis has not so far elaborated: women.

Many famous characters in Athenian drama (e.g. Klytaimnestra, Medeia, Antigone, and, of course, Phaidra) were women, but these roles were neither written for nor performed by members of that gender. In fact, women played no role in creating the drama of the day. All elements of the theatre belonged to the realm of men: the selection and creation of the story, the design of the costumes and, if it existed, scenery, the singing and dancing of actors and choruses, and attendance were all the prerogatives of males. The only one of these to which we have no concrete evidence is the place of women in the audience. As Oliver Taplin points out in *Literature in the Greek World*, there are two schools of thought concerning women in the ancient theatre. The first suggests that as the event was largely political, and was an opportunity for Athens to restate its domination over the area, it would have had only men in attendance. The second school suggests that since the competition was correlated to the rest of the festival, it was a sacral celebration in which women participated.[[72]](#footnote-72) The very fact that women are not mentioned to be in the audience, save in anachronistic anecdotes, is not enough support to prove that they were not because it was Athenian policy to not mention ‘good’ women.[[73]](#footnote-73) The fact that many comedic playwrights have their characters address the men of the audience is not evidence enough that women were not present either: as men were all trained in rhetorical skills by which they could address their peers, it only seems logical that they would continue with these practices when addressing members of the audience.

Ultimately, however, as there is so little evidence regarding the subject, one cannot make a definitive statement that will not be refuted by some. I, however, am of the opinion that women were not in the audience because of the impact that this could have had on the *polis*: had their allies seen and heard Athenian women, it is possible that the patriarchal might that Athens had extended to its allies would have been weakened. Furthermore, and more importantly, with the limited number of seats available at the Theatre of Dionysos, why would Attic males and their guests sacrifice their places in the theatre for women? The answer seems simple: they would not have done this. Though the Dionysia, as a whole, was a religious festival, it was also a political vehicle for praising Athens and the dissemination of Athenian ideology, and in order for that ideology to be supported and spread, it needed the sustenance of those who had created it: men.

The men who were permitted at the festival, however, were neither just those of voting age nor the foreign dignitaries of areas allied with Athens, but also of those who would one day hold positions of power within the *polis* – the legitimate sons of Athenian citizens. This matter of legitimacy is one that must be addressed before further discussion of this play or its time period is pursued. In 451/50 BCE, Pericles introduced a law which made Athenian citizenship available only for a male born from an Attic mother as well as from a citizen father. This was a radical change from the times before when the right to speak at the *Ekklesia* was guaranteed to all citizens by the prerogative of *isegoria* (Gr. right of all citizens to speak on matters of state importance in the Assembly).[[74]](#footnote-74) This Periclean reform gave Athenian women a central, if indirect, role in legitimating *parrhēsia*[[75]](#footnote-75) (a concept that stressed ‘the necessity and validity of individual freedom of thought’, in their male offspring), and, also, made the issue of legitimacy much more difficult to prove thereby seeming to call for a more watchful eye to be placed upon women.[[76]](#footnote-76) Though this argument may be cited when addressing the presence of women in the Dionysia’s audience, I am using it to elaborate upon the difficulty in being labelled ‘legitimate.’ As citizens would go through great obstacles to assure that their sons were, indeed, their own, and were entitled to Athenian citizenship, I would argue that they would have had them join in the attendance of the theatre as a matter of preparation for entering into the adult sphere of politics. Our *Hippolytos* deals greatly with the treatment of legitimate sons compared with illegitimate sons; it would have reminded the audience of the value that was placed upon them by simply being present at the festival.

As the details leading up to the performance and the composition of the audience have both been elaborated upon, it is fitting that this discussion addresses those who decided the outcome of the competition: the judges. All men in Athens had been trained since their youth to serve as judges in some capacity or another. Not only had they been trained in rhetoric, but they had also been groomed in order to listen attentively so that they may debate meticulously before arriving at conclusions. Each Athenian citizen was expected to put this skill to use during meetings of the *Ekklesia*. With a city filled with those qualified to receive the argumentation, who were the Dionysian judges?

Whereas much of the competition up to this point has revolved around those of high standing or special privilege, the selection of the judges was not so restricted. In an attempt to avoid the corruption of the judges by outside sources, they were selected directly before the beginning of the competition from a cross-section of all of the tribes. Furthermore, it made sense that the judges were chosen in this manner. As I have previously stated, each Athenian citizen in the audience was competent to fulfil the needs of the post. Though they were allowed to vote as they thought was appropriate, however, it was expected that their selections would reflect the perspective of the rambunctious audience. The members of the Greek audience felt no shame in showing their approval or disapproval for a piece of work, and upon the decision reached by the audience via the judges, this lively crowd would follow the victor in a procession through the streets which was consummated as it had begun: with wine and celebration.[[77]](#footnote-77)

In conclusion, the Dionysia itself was a spectacular festival whose planning began almost immediately after the previous one had concluded. Its nature was an obvious wedding of Athenian political power and Panhellenic religious custom. The members of the audience were free men who hailed from the entirety of Athens’ allies in the Greek-speaking world sprinkled with both metics and slaves, and who were expected to be vociferous about their opinions regarding the theatrical works that occurred before their eyes. This was not a gathering of political equals; rather, it was an opportunity for one voice, that of the tragedian, to attempt to win over the approval of the masses in a democratic forum.

**The Gods of Athens**

Later in this chapter, I will discuss the contributions of Aphrodite and Artemis within the context of Euripides’ *Hippolytos*. For now, this discussion will address the roles of these two deities in the genuine religious cult of ancient Athens. Before progressing, I must be absolutely clear as to what definition is being applied to the word ‘cult.’ For the sake of this thesis, I am utilizing the traditional and academically accepted definition whereby a cult is the culmination of the external religious experience including some or all of the following: prayer, votive offering, sacrifice, competition, processions, and the construction of temples, monuments, and shrines. This section, therefore, will address the relationships of Kypris and the Huntress with their Athenian worshippers.

In the previous section, I repeatedly mentioned that this discussion would deal with Athenian cult practice toward the Olympians; this is due to the fact that the treatment of the Hellenic pantheon varied by region,[[78]](#footnote-78) because there was no definitive text (e.g. Bible, Qur’an, Tanakh) by which the people were led. Aphrodite and Artemis were worshipped differently in Athens than they were, for instance, in Corinth[[79]](#footnote-79) and Ephesos.[[80]](#footnote-80)

These discrepancies occurred in the various regions because of local alternatives of mythology, acculturation with local non-Greeks deities, cultural perceptions of gender roles, and individual interpretations of oracles by the priests. Unlike in a private religion whereby each individual has a personal relationship with the god(s), priests were essential components of every Greek state[[81]](#footnote-81) because it was their responsibility to interpret divine will. It seems that gender boundaries existed when crossing the mortal/immortal threshold[[82]](#footnote-82) as these priesthoods were rather homologous in that the priests of female deities (including Aphrodite and Artemis) were dominantly women whereas masculine gods (e.g. Zeus and Dionysos) were often served by masculine hierophants.[[83]](#footnote-83) Besides the fact that Aphrodite and Artemis only spoke through women, by the time of Pausanias, both goddesses required that those who served in their temples be consecrated maidens. One would expect to find such a stipulation for the priestess of Artemis, but it seems uncharacteristic for a worshipper of Aphrodite.

Since Aphrodite opens the prologue of *Hippolytos*, it is only fitting that this discussion begins with an examination of her cult. Before discussing the rituals involved in worshipping Aphrodite, we must establish who this goddess was to the fifth-century Athenians by analyzing the variety of her origin stories in the literary traditions that have been passed on, each as viable as the last, prior to this period. According to the Homeric custom, Aphrodite was born to Zeus and a Titaness called Dione,[[84]](#footnote-84) and the Hesiodic convention describes that she was born from the foam that arose from the melding of semen, blood and water when Kronos tossed the castrated genitals of Ouranos into the sea.[[85]](#footnote-85) She arose, interestingly, at exactly the same moment as the Erinyes, or spirits of revenge, her sisters who also arose from Kronos’ body fluids when he was castrated. In the latter, more often accepted tradition, Aphrodite does properly belong to a specific generation of divinity because she was conceived by a vicious coup rather than by sexual intercourse. I am suggesting that Aphrodite was a deity whose origin and, therefore, potential were not within the standard of her divine associates. In order to understand what I mean by this, we shall now examine her sphere of influence as well as the limitations that have been set upon her by the cosmos.

Kypris was, ultimately, the divinity set over the generative powers of nature. Her responsibility, as the goddess of sexual desire, was to continue the existence of gods, men, and beasts alike. In all of creation, there were only three entities that were exempt from her power, and these exceptions existed only because of a decree of eternal virginity by Zeus. The three entities exempt from the influence of Aphrodite were Athena, Artemis, and Hestia.[[86]](#footnote-86) No other Olympian, not even Zeus[[87]](#footnote-87) or even Aphrodite herself,[[88]](#footnote-88) was exempt from the force that was channelled through the Cyprian goddess. What chance would any mortal have? In Book III of the *Iliad* (395-420), Helen attempted to resist Aphrodite’s influence upon her, and even suggested that the immortal goddess should love the mortal Paris herself. Homer’s Aphrodite quickly brought Helen’s mind back under domination by threatening to pile hatred upon the woman’s head. It was prudent that the mortals of Athens, and the remainder of the Greek-speaking world, continue to pay homage to this deity lest they be beset upon by her or, worse, have her forsake them completely. Without the blessings of Aphrodite, life itself would end.

Aphrodite, like her Olympian counterparts, was honoured throughout all of Greece with festivals. The most noted of these occasions took place in Corinth. In Athens, Kypris’ sacred holiday – the Aphrodisia – was celebrated on the fourth day[[89]](#footnote-89) of the Attic month Hekatombaion[[90]](#footnote-90) (named for the Apollonian festival Hekatombaia).[[91]](#footnote-91)

These annual festivals that entailed animal sacrifices at the Aphrodisia, however, were not the only types that were required by the goddess. Before each marriage ceremony in Athens, the parents of the young brides-to-be made a preliminary sacrifice to Aphrodite Ourania[[92]](#footnote-92) at her sanctuary, known in the days of Euripides as the Hippolyteion, which was inscribed with the phrase ‘in Aphrodite’s sanctuary of Hippolytus’ on the north slope of the Acropolis.[[93]](#footnote-93) It was the responsibility of the parents of the bride to sacrifice to the statue of Aphrodite; it was the responsibility of their daughter to sacrifice her childhood (in the form of her dolls, dolls’ dresses, and the net that shielded her hair) to Artemis. The bride-to-be was expected to continue praying that the Huntress will return to her in order to ease her through the process of childbearing when the time comes.

Who was this goddess to whom young girls were dedicated and mothers-to-be sought for protection? According to both the Homeric and Hesiodic traditions, Artemis was the daughter of Zeus and the Titaness Leto,[[94]](#footnote-94) born on the island of Delos the day before her twin brother Apollo. She first aided her mother as a midwife to her own radiant sibling. The portfolio of midwifery appeared to come naturally to the fledgling Olympian, and it was placed upon her. As with her twin’s cult, there were many facets of this deity, which would be revealed in myth and would be applied to her actual Athenian cult.

In terms of her physical representation, Artemis appears much younger than most of her fellow Olympians at all times. In Homer’s *Iliad*, it does not seem that Artemis had grown to be much larger than a child was by the time of the Trojan War. Hera was able to take hold of both of the Huntress’ wrists in her left hand, and pummel her about the ears (just as an adult could do to a child), leaving the younger of the goddesses to flee weeping (21.489-501). Though she was destined to stay young and maidenly for the remainder of her existence, the great goddess was not meant to remain a Homeric child forever. By the sixth century, Artemis had grown to the size of an eternal adolescent, and this vivaciousness is reflected in the many statues, votive offerings, and vase paintings of the deity spanning the entire Greek-speaking world.

Outside of Homer, one would be pressed to find a representation of the goddess being throttled as easily as she had been in her youth by her stepmother. More importantly in understanding her character, however, we must remember why the Homeric Artemis was being beaten. The younger goddess was being punished for treating women like a lioness who killed at her own pleasure and discretion (21.483). It was not only the responsibility of Artemis to protect an infant in childbirth, but it was also her responsibility to end a mother’s life on the childbed. She was the goddess of sudden death for infants, girls, and women.[[95]](#footnote-95)

For many Athenian girls, the process of becoming a woman required the participation in a ritual honouring the Artemis who had protected her in birth and as she grew into adolescence in an Artemisian festival known as the Arkteia. Mythically, a bear had been killed by the Athenian citizenry for harming a young girl, and a Delphic oracle ordered that Athenian girls ‘play the bear’ in order to appease Artemis lest the *polis* be struck with plague. From that point forward, the tradition maintained that every fourth year, girls were chosen to serve as *arktoi* (Gr. bears) in Brauron at the Artemisian sanctuary.[[96]](#footnote-96) In this capacity, the girls spent their time performing sacred dances in saffron robes, running nude races, and making sacrifices of their childhood trinkets to the goddess[[97]](#footnote-97) so that they might experience the ritual, spiritual, and physical metamorphosis into womanhood.

Beyond the charge of overseeing maidenhood, we find the responsibility that, in the modern mind, is more commonly associated with this deity: her role as a goddess of the wilds.[[98]](#footnote-98) It is for her aptitude with ranged weaponry that prayers and sacrifices were dedicated to Artemis Agrotera[[99]](#footnote-99) by Atticans before both the hunt and engaging in battle.[[100]](#footnote-100)

Finally, the overlapping identities of these two seemingly opposed goddesses should be expanded upon briefly in order to deconstruct the artificial antagonism of Aphrodite and Artemis in Euripides’ *Hippolytos*. By this, I am not stating that Euripides alone invented the disassociation of these two deities with one another. I am, rather, suggesting that his polarisation of the goddesses was an aesthetic and intellectual opposition that requires the literary context of a drama to achieve it, rather than a ritual or cultic one. In Homer’s *Iliad*, the gods were divided against one another in deciding whom to assist and grant victory in the Trojan War; Aphrodite and Artemis both fought alongside of the Trojans because they each had an investment in the people of western Anatolia. This eastern centre for worship is not the only similarity shared by these two goddesses.

These two deities share the realm beyond the household. Each of them can be banished to the bedchamber or displaced to the wilds. Artemis, in her roles as the Mistress of Animals and the Huntress, often is depicted as having a great number of wild beasts amongst her congregation either in pursuit of her or vice versa. Surprisingly, Aphrodite shares one-half of this portrayal. As the goddess of procreation for all living things, Kypris is able to trek through forests and subdue faunae with her smile as easily as the daughter of Leto.[[101]](#footnote-101) The only difference in the two is that Aphrodite, while threatening to remove her gifts from men, is never vengeful against beasts.

Since these goddesses shared a number of traits and domains, why was Euripides knowingly forging literary characters for their dramatic presentation which did not directly correspond to the popular conception of them amongst his general audience? An answer to this question arises when one combines the fluidity of broad-spanning polytheistic cults with the creative nature of theatre. Just as all of the gods in the Panhellenic pantheon had different characteristics that were highlighted in the various *demes* (ancient Athenian country districts or villages) by an assortment of epithets, so too did Euripides select and expand upon specific characteristics of the goddesses in his *Hippolytos*. The playwright was not attempting to cause a paradigm shift in the manner by which these gods were received in Athens. Had he been attempting to do this, Euripides’ Artemis would have continually echoed this Troezenian Huntress throughout his other plays in which she appeared. For example, in *Iphigenia Amongst the Taurians*, the Artemis who is crafted (but never staged) rescued Iphigenia from a sacrificial death at the hands of her own father, but now requires that the maiden prepare for sacrifice any Greek who lands upon the shores of the Taurians. She is a bloodthirsty goddess who is radically different from our Huntress and shares little more than a name with the deity portrayed in *Hippolytos*. Euripides was not attempting to rewrite the socio-religious practices or identity of the Athenian Artemis, but, rather, was trying to develop characters from the previously existing myths that would be able to advance the drama of his tragedies. This is not to say that he created the myths of Hippolytos’ relationship with Artemis and demise due to his continual refusal of Aphrodite’s gifts. Rather, Euripides developed polarities in the two goddesses so that they could be mirrored by the mortals of the tragedy. Though the deep distinctions in the two warring factions of the drama were unrealistically exaggerated, they were still plausible. Artemis is a perpetual virgin who, obviously, promotes sexual intercourse for the sake of reproduction. It is not a long imaginative leap to place her in direct opposition to Aphrodite, who only promotes sexual intercourse for its own sake. For the Athenians, there was no game of divine chess being played by Kypris and the Huntress, but they could still suspend their disbelief in order to be convinced that there was one for the duration of this drama. This and other literary and mythological disputes, however, did not hinder the worship of either goddess in Athens because each was still a divinity who deserved proper adoration, and shunning either of them could have caused the events that befell Hippolytos and Phaidra to occur to a member of the audience.

**Ontological Review**

As this chapter has analysed the cult practices associated with the Athenian variants of Aphrodite and Artemis so that we may later contrast them with their Euripidean representatives, it is only fitting that this trend of comparative analysis continues. Throughout this section, I will ontologically review the life of the myth and general themes that are dealt with by Euripides in his *Hippolytos* prior to this award-winning staging of 428 BCE. By reviewing the myth’s history, we will better understand not only the sources from which the tragedian was able to draw for support, but we will also realize the expectations that the audience had for this drama.

When undertaking an ancient Athenian mythographic study, it is customary to begin one’s discussion in the eighth century with Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. As the first of these epics is primarily concerned with the effect of the wrath of Akhilleus upon his allies and enemies alike, and the second is centred on the process and moment of homecoming for Odysseus, one would not suspect the presence of a myth which revolves around a quasi-incestuous attempt at seduction. This assumption would not be far from the truth. The only connections to this myth found in the *Iliad* are a brief mention by Nestor of heroes from the age of Theseus:[[102]](#footnote-102) Idomeneus’ claim to be descended from the Zeus-born Minos of Crete,[[103]](#footnote-103) Zeus’ affirmation that Minos was, indeed, his son by Phoinix’s daughter,[[104]](#footnote-104) and, most importantly, the reference to the attempted seduction of Bellerophon by Proitos’ wife.[[105]](#footnote-105)

In the *Odyssey*, the only book in which this myth appears remotely substantially is the *Nekuia* – Book XI – when Odysseus travels into the underworld. During his journey into the darkness, not only does Odysseus see shades of the past’s great heroes to whom Nestor had referred in the *Iliad*,[[106]](#footnote-106) but he also witnesses Minos serving as the judge of the dead.[[107]](#footnote-107) While recounting the underworld’s population of transgressors, he gives account of two of the infamous Cretan women – Ariadne and Phaidra (321-5) – as we see in translation by A.T. Murray and George Dimock:

And Phaedra and Procris, I saw,

and fair Ariadne, the daughter of Minos of baneful mind,

whom once Theseus was fain to bear from Crete to the hill of sacred Athens,

but he had no joy for her,

for Artemis slew her in sea-grit, because of the witness of Dionysos.

Of the surviving texts from Hellenic antiquity, this instance is the earliest mention of Phaidra.[[108]](#footnote-108) In fact, this is the only mention that she receives until her dramatic treatments by Sophokles and Euripides approximately three hundred years later.

Because this is a study in the Euripidean variant of the myth, we will correlate Phaidra’s life and lineage to the one that the tragedian establishes: she is another daughter of King Minos and Queen Pasiphaë of Crete. Since she does not have a persistent mythological identity until the fifth century, we must examine her lineage in order to establish her character to the Athenian audience. Phaidra is not the first of Minos’ relatives who has been beset by Kypris and her companion Eros.[[109]](#footnote-109) In fact, the backdrops of several Euripidean dramas (i.e. *Hippolytos*, *Cretans*, and *Cretan Women*) consist of events resulting from Aphrodite’s meddling on Crete in mortal affections. We learn from Phaidra in the extant *Hippolytos* that both her mother and sister have previously been destroyed by this goddess, and she is simply the next to be subject to her whims (358-62):

Ph. Poor Mother. What a cruel love you desired.

N. What do you mean? Her desire for the bull?

Ph. And you, poor sister, bride of Dionysos.

N. Why speak ill of family? What’s the matter?

Ph. And I, the third in line, I am destroyed.

In his *Cretans*, produced in the same tetralogy as *Alkestis* in 438 BCE, Euripides relies partially on the fifth-century lyric poetry of Bacchylides for stagingPasiphaë’s afflicted craving for the Cretan bull.[[110]](#footnote-110) In this telling, the queen’s passion is so great that she convinces Daidalos, an architect and prisoner of her husband, to construct a hollow, wooden cow draped in bovine hide so that she may crawl inside and have sexual relations with it.[[111]](#footnote-111) The result of the union between Pasiphaë and the bull was the Minotaur.[[112]](#footnote-112) Though Minos, in this play, never saw his wife’s child himself, the detailed description given by his servants was enough for him to sentence it and its mother to imprisonment. Pasiphaë’s moving appeal to her husband in order to justify the deed that she had committed, which shares an emotive similarity to Hippolytos’ defense to Theseus, was not able to prevent her ghastly incarceration.[[113]](#footnote-113)

If this history of bestiality and imprisonment was not depraved enough, it then turns darker when Minos begins to demand that Athens pay tribute to Crete by sending seven youths and seven maidens to be sacrificed to the Minotaur.[[114]](#footnote-114) Eventually, Aigeas’ son, Theseus,[[115]](#footnote-115) sailed with the youths who were meant to be sacrificed to sate Minos, but the king’s daughter, Ariadne, was smitten by Aphrodite to fall in love with Theseus, and, in turn, helped him navigate the Labyrinth. The Cretan princess supplied him with a ball of thread, which would lead him from the heart of the maze back to its origin.[[116]](#footnote-116) In doing this, Ariadne not only led to the death of her half-brother and undermined the authority of her father, but she also, and more importantly, loosened the grip that Minos held over Athens because he no longer maintained a monstrous enforcer of his will. Having betrayed her family, Ariadne sailed from Crete with her new love in a manner befitting her famous cousin – Medeia. Shortly after their journey began, however, Theseus’ ship docked at Naxos, and his lover was either spirited away by the god Dionysos after Aphrodite swayed him into love for this mortal princess,[[117]](#footnote-117) slain by Artemis for having fallen in love with the god,[[118]](#footnote-118) or simply abandoned by Theseus when he found the love of another woman.[[119]](#footnote-119)

Theseus, the great hero of the *Amazonomachy* (Gr. War against the Amazons), the vanquisher of the Minotaur, the legendary king of Athens, returned to Crete once more before returning to his homeland with his new bride – Phaidra. Theseus’ rule of Athens, however, was not without challenge: the nobles of the land, the *Pallantidai* (Gr. Sons of Pallas), did not accept Theseus’ ascent to the throne, and they unsuccessfully waged war against him. In order to atone for the deaths of the nobles, Theseus took Phaidra and retreated into a voluntary exile in Pittheus’ Troezen (44-47):

And now that Theseus has left the land

of Cecrops, and has come here with his wife,

in exile for a year, to expiate

his blood-guilt for the sons of Pallas.

This is the land and mythological moment where our play takes place, but it is not necessarily the setting of either Euripides’ first attempt or of Sophokles’ variant. The fragmentary evidence is simply too sparse for it to be possible to identify a location. From the surviving evidence of Euripides’ first staging of this myth, *Hippolytos Kalyptomenos*[[120]](#footnote-120) (Gr. Hippolytos Veiled), there is little that we are able to piece together, but one of the greatest tools in helping us reshape the original drama is the surviving tragedy. Aristophanes of Byzantium’s proposal that the characterizations of *HS* were attempts at correcting the characterizations that made the first play a failure has become commonly accepted amongst academics. Therefore, because Phaidra(S) so adamantly attempts to hide her passion – to such a degree that she is willing to die with it – and is intent upon maintaining her *eukleia*, and Hippolytos(S) is sickened by the idea of sex to the point of verbal violence, it is commonly accepted that Phaidra(K) was brazen and forward in her sexual desire for her stepson,[[121]](#footnote-121) and that Hippolytos(K) was so humiliated by her sexual overtures that he covered his head in shame. This act of covering his head is the source of the title of the play.[[122]](#footnote-122) Due to both the extant work and surviving fragmentary evidence of Euripides’ dramas, I am not certain that his dramatic re-forging was due to a desire to make characters that are more sympathetic.

A short number of years before 428 BCE, Euripides staged a performance that was very similar to *Hippolytos* in its mythological content – *Stheneboea*.[[123]](#footnote-123) This fragmented tragedy chronicles the attempted seduction of Bellerophon by the title character – the wife of Proitos – proving that Euripides was not unwilling to stage brazenly sexual women who openly attempt to seduce (f. 661, 1-9):

There is no man who is fortunate in all respects:

either he has noble birth but no livelihood,

or he is of low birth but ploughs rich acres;

and many who pride themselves on wealth and birth

are disgraced by a foolish wife in their house.

Such is the affliction besetting Proitos, this land’s king:

for when I came as a stranger in supplication

on his roof...Stheneboea tried words to persuade me and guile to snare me

into slipping covertly into the intimacy of her bed.

I, therefore, am not convinced that it was the attempt at seduction that displeased the audience. I, rather, am of the belief that it was the quasi-incestuous tone, discredit to the legendary Athenian ruler, and *success* at seduction that cost Euripides the victory. If, as Aristophanes of Byzantium suggested, *HS* was an attempt to correct the characterizations of *HK*, then it is feasible that Hippolytos(K) veiled himself not out of shame of hearing the sexual words, but out of shame of erotic action. By this, I am stating that Hippolytos(K) utilizes the shameful gesture because he has either considered having an affair with Phaidra(K) or he has actually done it. Support for this claim comes from two sources. The first is a convention of Athenian literature and drama: men veil themselves when they are going to commit or have already committed a shameful action.[[124]](#footnote-124) Men do not perform this gesture because of the proposals of another, but, rather, because of actions that they themselves have taken. The second source is a commentary of Phaidra made by one of Euripides’ contemporaries. Aristophanes in *Frogs* refers to Phaidra as a prostitute. In order to be classified as a prostitute, one must do more than solicit another for a sexual relationship, one must consummate it.[[125]](#footnote-125) It appears to me, therefore, that one of the ‘corrections’ made in *HS* was that not only was Phaidra expected to struggle against *eros* (Gr. sexual desire) in order to maintain her purity, but Hippolytos was to as well.

Beyond the aspect of sexuality, with which this myth deals so heavily, T. B. L. Webster, in his *The Tragedies of Euripides*, and W. S. Barrett, in his edition of *Hippolytos* suggest that the playwright truly upset his *HK* audience not by having Phaidra be sexually forthright, but politically interfering. Both scholars suggest that Theseus’ wife offered to assist Hippolytos in supplanting Athens’ ruler.[[126]](#footnote-126) Support for this theory, as well as the previous one concerning sexual blatancy, occurs in *HS* when Hippolytos attempts to defend himself against the accusations of Phaidra to his father in their famous *agôn* (Gr. struggle). The defendant protests to two charges that are not verbally presented against him by his father (1143-6):

Was it because her body and her looks

were so much lovelier than other women’s?

Or maybe I was hoping to usurp

your place by taking possession of your wife.

Here Hippolytos utilizes the rhetorical technique of *antikateogria*, which allows him to defend himself against his father’s claims while turning those same claims back against him. Hippolytos’ justification against accusations that he considered Phaidra beautiful, and that he would have had any interest in appropriating Theseus’ throne, within the microcosm of the drama, is that he is wiser than to want another man’s wife or the power and responsibility that come with ruling. For the audience, however, this may have appeared as Euripides’ apology for having had these things occur in the previous play, but it also appears to be his assurance to the audience that this Hippolytos is different than the last. As the audience of the Dionysia would have surely recalled a play by Euripides just a few years before, they would have recalled why they did not enjoy it. By reminding the audience of what was ‘wrong’ with his first treatment, Euripides would be assuring them that this time the story would be different. The playwright sought to present Hippolytos and Phaidra-figures who would be slightly more virtuous than their predecessors.

The final link in this myth prior to its arrival on the stage in 428 is one of which we know even less than Euripides’ first staging: Sophokles’ *Phaidra*. It is suspected by many that this adaptation occurred between the two attempts of Euripides. This deduction comes from their interpretations of the surviving fragments which include Hippolytos’ scornful rejection of a proposal (f. 678)[[127]](#footnote-127) the dangers of clever speech (f. 683); the importance of children (f. 685); and the expulsion of someone from the city in which the drama occurs (f. 693a). Each of these surviving elements transpires in *HS*, and it is likely that Euripides’ witness of this piece inspired his second treatment of the myth. One derivation that is to be noted, however, revolves around the placement of Theseus in his absence. In Euripides’ *HS*, we know that Theseus is piously living, and is seeking an oracle; in *Phaidra*, however, the Athenian king has descended into the Underworld with his companion Perithoös. Evidence for this adventure comes in the form of one fragment (f. 687) which seems to suggest Theseus’ subduing of the great three-headed hound of Hades,Kerberos: ‘He fawned upon me with his tail, with his ears back.’ This fragment, however, supports the concept that in Sophokles’ treatment, Theseus was still gallivanting with his companions while abandoning his wife. Euripides, upon consideration of this characteristic of Theseus, removed it from *HS* in order to establish him as an exemplary Athenian, but he allowed his king to maintain a flaw, and I will elaborate upon said flaw later in this chapter.

In conclusion, the life of this myth is extensive, but little of that surviving expansion revolves directly around the conflict between Hippolytos and Phaidra. In fact, we have no surviving information upon their relationship until the appearance of this drama. Though our knowledge of the Athenian audience’s expectations of this myth’s first Euripidean staging is lacking, we have a more crystalline view of their expectations of the second because of the fragments and poems in which it does appear prior to 428 BCE. Euripides’ audience desired sympathetic characters who were products of ill-fated decisions rather than sexual deviants who openly sated their own desires, and the tragedian filled their desire in his second attempt.

**The Olympians of *Hippolytos***

In order to understand the universe in which the mortals through whom the drama of this play is conducted reside, it would be wise to understand as much as possible about the gods from whom the very same drama originate.[[128]](#footnote-128) This discussion of *Hippolytos* begins with the gods not only because it is they who create man and to whom festivals such as the Dionysia are dedicated, but because, as Demosthenes suggests in 323 BCE, ‘it is proper for a person who is beginning any serious discourse and task to begin first with the gods.’[[129]](#footnote-129)

The prologue of Aphrodite clearly establishes the reason for all of the tragic events that are to unfold before the audience, the manner by which they will be executed, and the outcome that she desires in her scheme (1-71). The goddess feels, not only, that it is inappropriate for Artemis and Hippolytos to share an exceedingly personal relationship with each other, but, more importantly, she is enraged that the Amazon’s son is the only mortal in all of Greece who is not only unwilling to show her even the slightest reverence and respect, but who goes as far as to despise her (10-23):

Theseus’ child, the son of the Amazon,

the protégé of godly Pittheus,

Hippolytus, alone of the citizens

of Troezen, of this land, claims that I am

the very worst of all divinities.

He renounces sex, recoils from marriage, honours

only Phoebus’ sister, Zeus’s daughter

Artemis, whom he believes to be

the very greatest of divinities.

He is with the virgin goddess constantly;

racing through the woodlands with his dogs

he depletes the wild forest of its game

while he enjoys a camaraderie

greater than what mortals might expect.

In concise existential terms, Aphrodite’s first direct conflict with Hippolytos arises from his existential choice not to revere her even though his essential nature as the Athenian-born son of Theseus demands it. Her second conflict with the Amazon’s son comes from how he is choosing to define his existence. Hippolytos chooses to spend all of his time in the company of a goddess – Artemis – and Aphrodite detests the concept of mortals being comrades to divinities. The very fact that Aphrodite mentions her disgust concerning the camaraderie shared and blatantly exhibited by Phoibos’[[130]](#footnote-130) sister and her human favourite suggests that the Cyprian goddess has never known nor has desired to know such closeness with a mortal. She has been content with receiving direct albeit distant homage from all other mortals, and Hippolytos’ disregard for her has ignited homicidal hatred in her, which shall be quenched when an irrational Theseus calls upon a curse from his Olympian father, Poseidon, to end the life of his own son (52-8). Her elevated position as a deity permits her to transcend mortal expectations of proper action and reaction, and she, in turn, punishes the irreverent Hippolytos as a mortal Greek would punish a slave or a beast.

This divine arrangement, which has been thoroughly devised and explained by Aphrodite, is not a work of passion, as one may suspect; it is, rather, a meticulously calculated scheme that has been concocted for each slight that Hippolytos has made against Kypris (25-8).[[131]](#footnote-131) To add further insult to the horrifically violent death that will befall the Amazon’s son, the goddess has previously manipulated the mind of Phaidra into erecting a temple, the one excavated by Broneer and Parsons in 1932, at the Athenian acropolis in honour of Theseus’ son (37-43):

Before she came to this land, to Troezen,

she founded, right beside Athena’s hill,

a shrine to Kypris, overlooking this land,

because of her desire for one who came

from far away. Future generations

will say that this is the shrine established for

Hippolytus’s sake, to Aphrodite.

By doing this, as well as afflicting Phaidra’s mind with a passion for her stepson, Aphrodite intrinsically links the memory of Hippolytos not only to her domain of erotic love in the form of a tangible monument (which stands high above Athens for all to see), but also degrades him further by binding his name to the despicable taboo of a semi-incestuous relationship. Kypris not only seeks Hippolytos as a blood-sacrifice in order to placate her rage, but she also requires that his *eukleia* be destroyed utterly along with him. The fact that Aphrodite demands the utter destruction of this young man is horrific, but at least he is guilty of the wrongs of which he has been accused, whereas Phaidra is innocent of any wrongs against the goddess, but will still lose her life due to this divine scheme (59-60). In the terms of freedom and responsibility, Phaidra’s greatest crime against Aphrodite was attempting to defy her in order to maintain her own *eukleia* and that of her family whereas her stepson was openly opposing the Olympian even before the drama began.

The previous summary establishes the role of Olympos in this play before the first line is spoken by Aphrodite.[[132]](#footnote-132) Effectively, one should note that there is an implied covenant amongst the deities and mortals of ancient Greece: the role of man is to pay homage to each of the Olympians; if a specific mortal fails to maintain this agreement, as Minos and Hippolytos have both done, the slighted god destroys her/him (27-8). One should note, however, that the affected god is not required to directly punish the irreverent, and s/he may destroy the entire support system of the offender in order to properly punish her/him; this is especially true when the other Olympians ask for Aphrodite’s assistance in fulfilment of castigations (e.g. Poseidon punishing Minos in *Cretans*). Aphrodite’s reckless attitude toward innocent human life reminds the audience that, as a goddess, she is not limited to the laws of man. The gods, as we learn from Artemis, have customs of their own that they are not meant to break (1498), but they are by no means meant to adhere to the same principles that govern men.

Since Aphrodite is jealous, prideful, and indifferent toward human life, one may suspect that her Olympian counterpart in this drama, Artemis, would be her absolute antithesis. One who makes this assumption, however, would be mistaken. Effectively, though Aphrodite and Artemis are meant to be dichotomous to one another, they must, as deities, share standard characteristics by which they are judged lest they not be comparable; these two are not only analogous in that they are Olympian females, but they are further linked in a variety of characteristics. For instance, although Aphrodite is the goddess of sexual desire, the intended outcome of such a union, childbirth, is the prerogative of the virginal Artemis as is noted by the Chorus of this play (180-9):

A mournful dissonance

steals into the temperament

of many a helpless woman

Birthing pangs, delirium—oh child,

that strong wind has darted through my womb.

I called on heavenly

Artemis, easer of labour,

mistress of arrows.

Thank the gods, she always comes to me

just when I need her.

Therefore, without Aphrodite, Artemis would be denied one of her sacred duties, and this is not the only sphere of Artemisian influence which would be hindered without Aphrodite. Each of the following are established in Euripides’ *Hippolytos* as aspects of the Huntress which would not persist without sexual propagation: goddess of the hunt (1635), a nature spirit who cares for fields (87), and the deity who oversees the lives of unmarried girls until they become the province of Aphrodite and, eventually, Hera.[[133]](#footnote-133) Furthermore, as a deity, Artemis continues to share a number of other characteristics with Kypris. She is aloof, vengeful, and understands neither human motivation nor desire. We shall now examine these essential Olympian characteristics in Euripides’ Artemis.

Addressing detachment from the machinations of the mortal realm, the daughter of Leto does not make her appearance in this piece until it has been revealed by the Messenger that Theseus’ curse against his own son has been fulfilled (1437). Though she has made her presence aware to Hippolytos in previous communions, she has never revealed the manifestation of her body to her favourite. In fact, there is nothing in the text indicating that Hippolytos ever sets his eyes upon his chosen goddess, but he does feel of her presence and smell her heavenly fragrance (1562-5):

The fragrance of the goddess. Even now

my shattered body senses the relief

of your sweet exhalation, Artemis—

Artemis is somewhere close at hand.

These appeals to the senses are meant to offer comfort to the dying man. Why, however, does Artemis not go so far as to prove beyond any doubt to Hippolytos that she is there with him at his point near death? I am not suggesting that she should violate the laws of Olympos that forbid her from looking upon the deceased or seeing a mortal as s/he draws her/his final breath (1617-20), but she could, at least, ease his passing by cementing her existence for him. Maintaining this physical distance from Hippolytos seems cruel, but it is not as painful as the connotations that come with it. Because Artemis is not allowed to be in the presence of the dead or dying, she will literally be stripping Hippolytos of the final comfort that he has in her before he enters Hades’ realm.[[134]](#footnote-134) To make matters bleaker, she informs Hippolytos that he shall soon be forgotten by his goddess after his death (1622-3). This mandated aloofness establishes one of the essential differences between mortals and deities. The immortals that dwell on Olympos are not allowed to be moved to emotion when a mortal departs from the earthly world. This is not a matter of Artemis choosing not to care; she, simply, is not able to mourn the loss of the mortal with whom she has chosen to spend so much time.

The process of death, in turn, completely terminates the relationship that has been forged between this goddess and her mortal favourite. Though Kypris’ interference in mortal affairs ends with Hippolytos’ death, Artemis’ intrusion is only beginning. The daughter of Leto takes it upon herself to settle the score with Aphrodite by killing the mortal most dear to her heart (1596-8); for a slight against her by another Olympian, Artemis destroys another human life. This is not uncharacteristic for the callous goddess whose primary emphasis is upon the hunt. In the past, Apollo’s sister has punished (to name a few) Aktaion,[[135]](#footnote-135) Agamemnon,[[136]](#footnote-136) and Niobe[[137]](#footnote-137) for insults against her, her divinity, and her purity. By slaying one of Aphrodite’s favourites in order to avenge Hippolytos, and to reconcile the injustice done against her, Artemis promotes the Olympian ideology that human beings fulfil little more purpose than serving as pawns in cosmic chess. This, however, is not the only ‘gift’ that Artemis bestows upon the dying Hippolytos.

After swearing to rectify Hippolytos’ death by killing another man, Artemis reveals that she has no concept of the mortal desire to maintain *eukleia* (1599-1609):

For you, unhappy man, to compensate

your suffering, I shall establish here

the greatest honour possible: young girls

of Troezen, when their time has come to marry,

will cut their hair in sacrifice to you,

and you will reap the fruit of all their tears

and all their boundless sorrow, through the ages.

For all of time young virgins will compose

and sing their songs for you, and Phaedra’s love

will not be veiled in silence; her desire

for you will be well-known throughout the land.

Hippolytos would have wanted nothing less than to be memorialized posthumously for what must have seemed to him to be Phaidra’s sordid fixation on him and accusation; he would have been more contented in being remembered for his athletic accomplishment (1151-2), but Artemis fails to see this. The Huntress, in an attempt to bind forever the memory of Hippolytos to her own virginal name, forever adjoins Theseus’ son to the sexually perverse myth that travels northward from Crete to Troezen. Artemis has fulfilled, in fact, the will of Aphrodite in memorialising the young huntsman. The truth of the matter, however, is that the goddesses of this play are not solely responsible for the memorialisation of Hippolytos. The Amazon-bred man calls out to be anonymous in the records of human memory *if* he had actually done the actions for which he was being accused by Phaidra and, in turn, Theseus (1168-71). Because he was innocent of pursuing sexual relations with Phaidra, he was damned to be remembered, and, effectively, pleaded with Zeus to fulfil the will of Aphrodite.

In conclusion, Aphrodite and Artemis share a joint will in desiring that Hippolytos and Phaidra’s lives be remembered jointly for successive generations; their means may differ, but their ends are the same. Kypris desires to destroy the reputation of Hippolytos while preserving that of Phaidra in order to promote her own cause whereas the Huntress seeks to preserve the *eukleia* of each mortal while destroying the reputation of the opposing goddess. Artemis defames Aphrodite by revealing that it was an Olympian affliction, which drove Phaidra into desire for her stepson. Apollo’s sister suggests that mortal aspiration for a good name can outweigh the primal, Cyprian force. Phaidra, in an attempt to maintain her status, does not succumb to the instinctual desire placed in her by Aphrodite; this resistance forces the goddess to modify her scheme against the Amazon’s son. Aphrodite’s individual move in the game of cosmic chess has changed, but the outcome is still the same: stalemate.

When compared to their fellow Olympians rather than to human beings, the gods in Euripides’ *Hippolytos* seem to represent drastically different ideologies that cannot coexist with one another. When they are introduced into the lives of mortals, however, Artemis and Aphrodite appear to be little more than opposite sides of the same coin when viewed through mortal eyes. The mortal characters of this drama, ultimately, will be revealed to be highly individualized, but, simultaneously, likened unto each other. Phaidra and Hippolytos are as much mirror images of one another as Aphrodite and Artemis are. Ultimately, due to the desire for Hippolytos and Phaidra to be more likened unto Artemis than Aphrodite (i.e. pure of body), they were destroyed whereas previous pawns (e.g. Pasiphaë and Ariadne) were captured because of their allegiance toward Aphrodite. Had each of these mortals emulated men more closely rather attempting to be like gods, they may have been spared their ghastly fates. This, however, is not the case and the celestial game between Artemis and Aphrodite wages on.

**Euripides’ Hippolytos**

Throughout this and the following section, I will examine Euripides’ focal characters, their respective positions in their chronological and social placement, and will establish my views on their psychologies and personalities under the lens of existentialism. As honour has been paid to the gods, and an analysis of them has been conducted, it seems appropriate that this chapter would now analyse the title character, the faithful companion of Artemis and the target of Aphrodite’s destructive desires: Hippolytos. Throughout this section, I will study Euripides’ text in order to illuminate the history and quirks that have created this figure around which the drama revolves. I will examine his position as a character that rests uneasily between various worlds, and will note how he does not fit properly within any metaphysical location. It is with Hippolytos that I will begin fully applying the categories of Psychoanalytic Existentialism as I have established and modified them in the introductory chapter. I have chosen not to conduct identity analyses for the deities or the non-focal mortals (i.e. Theseus and the Nurse) because neither of those groups lends themselves to analysis by means of Psychoanalytic Existentialism. The gods cannot be evaluated by human standards, and the extrafocal characters are not psychologically developed with enough thoroughness to be analysed existentially.

*Summary*

Throughout this section, I will formulaically determine the key characteristics that define Hippolytos existentially. *Existence Precedes Essence*: Hippolytos’ societal and familial essence is that of the bastard son of Theseus and the Amazon. Because of this predisposition, he has established his own identifiable existence as being the antithetical Athenian male. He hunts rather than wages war, ignores the political sphere entirely, abstains from sexual relationships, identifies with the virginal goddess of young girls, and glorifies his mother rather than his father. In short, he has chosen to be everything that he was not meant to be as a young man.

*Time is of the Essence*: The would-be prince passes his time in the company of attendants of a lower social status and beasts. He spends the majority of his time beyond the confines of the city. His days are filled with leisurely, selfish activities that benefit no one save himself while in the company of none who would dare to speak against the personal choices that define his existence.

*Freedom and Responsibility*: Due to the fact that Hippolytos has cast off most of the bonds of the Athenian society, he is able to create his own existence, which correlates to his essence only in that he strives to oppose it rather than to embrace it. In being free to create his own existence, he automatically accepts the responsibility of setting himself against the machinations of his world, and should accept that freedom will draw negative response. Hippolytos, however, never seems to understand that by establishing his existence so firmly against his intended essence that he presents himself as haughty and arrogant. This young man is so emerged into his own existence that he does not recognize the faults with it when set against the personal choices of others.

*Humanism*: Though Hippolytos is not entirely separated from the Athenian deities under whose jurisdiction he falls, he has, more or less, separated himself from all others save Artemis, Zeus, and, ultimately, Aphrodite. His relationship to Artemis is directly tied to his existential identity as the antithetical Athenian male. He goes as far as to assume that with his death that the Huntress too will be destroyed (1576-9). In short, Hippolytos is convinced that since his existence is so intrinsically tied to the goddess that the reverse is also true. He does not acknowledge her as a being that is superior to him in every manner. To concede to her superiority would be an admission that there may be a greater entity than he. Hippolytos demeans his goddess by establishing that she is, more or less, his equal. While this is the case, he does show a sliver of humility by referring to himself as her servant in the hunt (1570). His ties to Zeus seem to reaffirm that no matter how far removed he is from his essential core, Hippolytos is still societally bound to the King of Olympos and his laws. Not only does he call to Zeus to punish him if he is a criminal by disposition (1334-5), but he also respects the Father of Gods and Men as the fulfiller of oaths (673; 1205-6).

*Ethical Considerations are Paramount*: In the analysis of Hippolytos, this is the point where all of his previous characteristics accumulate. He defines his ethical considerations by the constant vie for purity that he has established as the staple of his existence. In order to maintain this purity, he respects the station of Zeus Horkios[[138]](#footnote-138) by accepting the supplication of the Nurse, and refusing to betray her confidence to Theseus though it could save his mortal life. Hippolytos, therefore, burdens the responsibility of his own ethical considerations regardless of his mortality, and bears the undeserved punishment distributed by his father rather than betraying his established existence.

*Analysis*

Before attempting to understand who Hippolytos is from the time that this play begins to the moment when it ends, we must first analyse his essence and understand who he is in the context of this tragedy. He is the son of the legendary Athenian king Theseus by one of the great mythological enemies of Athens: an Amazon. Hippolytos’ mother comes from a society that places no value on men save for their necessity in procreation. These warrior-women are fearless, horse-loving warriors who are capable of successfully waging combat against men.[[139]](#footnote-139) The Greek victory over this noble enemy – half of the heritage of Hippolytos – is commemorated in the line of sight of Euripides’ audience on the west metopes of the Parthenon alongside of two other great tribulations, the *Gigantomachy* (Gr. War against the Giants) and the *Centauromachy* (Gr. War against the Centaurs). Hippolytos, though not raised by his mother, or by his father for that matter,[[140]](#footnote-140) comes to embody the gender-polarisation that is inherent in his mother’s culture, and grafts this feature on to his existential identity. He bears a deep-seated hatred for all women, but does recognize their necessity for the purpose of bearing legitimate sons.

The very fact that Hippolytos is concerned with the production of legitimate sons is interesting because he himself, as the son of a non-Athenian mother, is illegitimate, and is not, therefore, an Athenian citizen by the standards of Euripides’ audience. This matter of Hippolytos’ legitimacy in Athenian politics is anachronistic in that this Periclean reform took place in 451 BCE (an immeasurable amount of time after the chronological setting of the drama),[[141]](#footnote-141) but it is nonetheless valuable in evaluating the character that was crafted for the Dionysia’s 428 BCE audience. This correlation to reality is why it is relevant to study. Theseus clearly states in his trial of the title character (1078-80), ‘No doubt you will say / she hated you: a bastard is always / at odds with those who are legitimate.’ Who are these with whom Hippolytos is meant to be at odds? They are the ‘legitimate’ sons of Theseus and his wife, Phaidra (457-72).[[142]](#footnote-142) Whereas Hippolytos has remained alienated from his father and his customs, these children have spent their entire lives, as short as they may be, with Theseus, and are the recognized heirs of his house. They will receive all of the glory of the father whom they shared with the Amazon’s son. Hippolytos, however, is meant to fade into anonymity due to the essence of his birthright. What effects has this had upon him and his decisions to pursue life as he has? How has this singular aspect of his essence, which signifies his identity throughout the Euripidean tragedy, moulded the existential character that appears onstage before the audience?

The first, and most obvious, trait that rises from a psychological profile of Hippolytos is his constant quest for purity in all matters. Throughout the entirety of this tragedy, from his second speech beginning at line 86 until his final statement at line 1639, Hippolytos reminds not only the external viewers, but also his audience within the world of the drama that he is chaste, pure, and dedicated to Artemis in all things. Simply put into terms of existentialism, Hippolytos defines his own existence – and those of others – by a responsibility to pursue that which he has defined as noble: sexual purity. I believe that his reason for being the antithetical Athenian male and expecting this quality to be shared by others is trifold. The first of these reasons, interestingly, arises from his attempt to benefit the *polis* in the manner best suited to him: by not propagating a continued lineage of illegitimate children who may not benefit Athens either politically or militaristically. Devereux argues, ‘Were he not a bastard, he would be Theseus’ heir. Were he able to accept his exclusion from the succession, he could still be a good citizen. He could be what Teukros is to Aias in the *Iliad* and in Sophokles *Aias*: the strong right hand and protector of his legitimate brother.’[[143]](#footnote-143) Though Devereux is correct in stating that Hippolytos could have served, in his time period, as the protector of his legitimate brother, he would still not have been accepted as a citizen to the Athenians viewing the performance. By the standards of the fifth century, neither Hippolytos nor his descendants would have been Athenians, and, therefore, would have not been eligible to participate in the politics or defense of the *polis*. Not only is Hippolytos supporting the *polis* by not introducing those who would be of little or no use to it, but he is also sparing those who are close (and potentially close) to him the pain of being born bastards (1228-9).

The second reason for the purity of the Amazon’s son deals directly with his conception: had his father not been, in his younger days, sexually promiscuous, Hippolytos would not have been born into the life and essential role of a bastard. The eponymous character is constantly at odds with his father, and is painted as the antithesis of Theseus in this dramatic piece. While Theseus is actively engaged in politics, reverent toward the entire Panhellenic pantheon, a lover of many women, and a mythological slayer of monsters, his illegitimate son is entirely absent from the political sphere, reverent only toward Artemis, a lover of no living woman, and a mere stalker of lowly beasts. In summary, there is very little that these two men share save their genetics and rash judgements of others. Bagg comments that Hippolytos’ desire for purity stems from his longing ‘to be a worthy son of his father’, which ‘was made frantic by the knowledge of his illegitimacy. He wants to be a perfect son.’[[144]](#footnote-144) Though I agree that Hippolytos would indeed like to be a perfect son, I am not convinced that he desires to be the perfect son of Theseus; this is a matter that I will address shortly. Hippolytos is very unforgiving of his father. Devereux points this out by stating that, ‘Hippolytos – who savagely resents his bastardy and the one who made him a bastard – is not the person to forgive his father’s former amours, though Theseus is now the faithful husband of the woman who *replaced* the Amazon.’[[145]](#footnote-145) It seems to me that Hippolytos, to some degree, strives to reveal to his father the error of his ways by revealing how a young man can live without burdening others. By that, I mean that, the son is attempting to reveal to the father, by example, how his life could have been better lived. Hippolytos’ constant reminder to his father of his own practice of *sophrosyne* (Gr. wise-restraint) in the field of sexuality (1131-8) serves not only as testament to his character, but it also attacks the lack of restraint shown, in the past, by Theseus in his couplings with the Amazon, Ariadne, and Phaidra. In short, Hippolytos has no place in his life for sexual escapades whereas many of the early myths surrounding his father are so replete with them. Externally, the title character may adamantly repudiate sex to reassure his audience that he shall not fall into the same trap as he did in the first treatment of this tale by Euripides.[[146]](#footnote-146) Internally, however, this measure is taken to assure both himself and his father that they share little in common when the younger man is on trial for the rape of Phaidra. This, however, does not affect Theseus (1139-40), and Hippolytos must move to a different statement by which he hopes to convey his lifestyle to his father. He then comments upon his lack for a desire of political power, and goes as far as to state that those who long for it have taken leave of their common sense (1145-50); Hippolytos claims that he would, rather, take first place in the Panhellenic games, and serve in a secondary role in the city.[[147]](#footnote-147) As neither of these arguments, however, is enough to convince Theseus that he and his son are not alike; Hippolytos makes his final attempt by calling upon Zeus Horkios, and offers willingly to die, utterly unknown and unremembered, if he has unlawfully lain with Phaidra (1168-71). Hippolytos’ case to his father began with a logical argument, which claimed that the two men are so different that any action that may have been taken by Theseus in the past would not be taken by his son. As this tactic was not persuasive enough, the latter was forced into invoking the name and witness of the patriarch of Olympos as many before him, including his father, have done.

The final reason that I believe Hippolytos avoids sexual impurity and constantly seeks companionship with Artemis is tied directly to his epithet as ‘the Amazon’s son.’ Previously, I had suggested that Hippolytos was driven by a desire to serve as the perfect son for one of his parents, and as he serves as a foil to Theseus, he must be attempting to be the perfect son of his mother. Many of the characteristics and epithets that describe Hippolytos are ones that are intrinsically linked to the society from which his mother came: horsemanship, hunting, and his reverence toward and close relationship with Artemis. His name is even matronymic rather than patronymic. In fact, it appears that Hippolytos is concerned, almost entirely, with clearing the reputation of his mother in the manner most suited to him: by emulating and ‘correcting’ her society. The Amazons are a people who live with – and by – their horses.[[148]](#footnote-148) While Greek men were capable of riding horses, they were not *riders* who lived by them and rode them into war, as their Amazonian counterparts were known to do.[[149]](#footnote-149) Though Hippolytos was not a warrior, he was in constant companionship with his fillies through the end of his life: he reared them (1386), trained them (1529), and was, ultimately, destroyed by them (1305-1403). Though not a warrior, he rode his equestrian companions against the only lives that he would take: those of harmless beasts. Members of his mother’s society were skilled hunters, as were a number of women in Greek mythology including the goddess Artemis. With the exceptions of Herakles and Hippolytos, however, men are not spoken of as hunters in Greek myth. They are usually referred to as warriors. The key distinction between a warrior and a hunter is that hunters slay harmless beasts; warriors slay men. The subject of this study, compared to Zeus’ famous son, had no accomplishments to his name, and, instead, chased game alongside the Huntress with little regard to anything else.

Hippolytos’ relationship with this goddess is strange because, as has been previously stated, she was, primarily, a goddess of unmarried girls, and she rested on the outskirts of society. She was, therefore, an ideal Olympian representative of the Amazons, but not of any self-respecting male. Hippolytos’ excessive dedication to the Immortal Virgin, rather than with a deity more suited to his gender and age, according to Devereux, suggests that the Amazon’s son is seeking to craft the mother for him that he has never had. He seeks to improve upon the memory of his mother, childishly. The goddess, his idealised mother, is eternally chaste because his physical mother ceased to be pure and admirable when she copulated with Theseus in order to create him. Now, she is merely simply pitiable (1228).[[150]](#footnote-150) Though I believe that this argument is compelling, I would suggest that it must be taken one step further. We must agree that that Hippolytos is not attempting to replace his mother with Artemis, but is attempting to prove that were it not for the influences of individuals such as Theseus that human beings, his mother especially, can successfully emulate the gods.

In summary, therefore, I posit these to be the authentic psychological forces that spur Hippolytos onward, even to his death, in his pursuit of physical purity: he has no interest in sullying either the *polis* or the *oikos* by introducing more bastards into the world; he is absolutely driven to be the antithesis of his father in order to reveal the mistakes made by Theseus in his lifetime; the young man desires to clear the reputation of his mother and her people by revealing that without external interference, human beings can emulate the gods so successfully that they become more similar to them. There are, however, issues when mortals attempt to emulate the gods because man is the host to parasitic hubris, and will, eventually, become so enthralled with himself that he will, inevitably, cause his own destruction. This lifestyle of his, in which *sophrosyne* is the commanding principle, is not typical for an adult of either gender since both sexes are meant to procreate.[[151]](#footnote-151) Though Hippolytos may be benefiting the *polis*, punishing his father, and giving glory to his mother in his choices, he is directly opposing nature and the whims of Aphrodite. By these actions, he offends not only the mortal world around him, but the supernatural as well. As I have established the causes for Hippolytos’ quest for purity, I will now highlight how this inhuman attempt makes him just that – inhuman – and how it affects his relationships with others.

Directly after the presentation of the prologue by Aphrodite, we see the first interaction that the Amazon’s son has with others: Hippolytos enters the stage followed by, what appears to be, a chorus composed of servants (c. 72). Directly before they enter the stage, Kypris refers to a set of *prospoloi*[[152]](#footnote-152) (Gr. attendants) accompanying Hippolytos back from his hunt. The configuration of this chorus shines light immediately onto the psyche of this Euripidean character. Hippolytos has neither chosen to be in the presence of Athenian citizens nor of non-Athenian freedmen, but has chosen, rather, to be accompanied by those who are of a noticeably lower social ranking than he is. I believe that Hippolytos has made the choice to surround himself with servants for the same reason that he usually chooses to spend time in solitude: he considers himself superior to others in *sophrosyne*, and, therefore, views everyone else as inferior to him. This is not to suggest that Hippolytos has chosen to surround himself solely with the indentured: he does have friends, we are told. Though Hippolytos and the Messenger make multiple references to the would-be-prince’s friends (1108; 1123; 1321), we never bear witness to these in the entire tragedy. It has been claimed that the references made by Hippolytos to his friends are little more than defense apparatuses which are intended to humanize him in some manner.[[153]](#footnote-153) Though this may be true in the incidents where Hippolytos calls them to mind himself, what about when the Messenger, who is delivering the horrific fate that befalls him, mentions them (1314-23)?

We were there by the shore, where ocean waves

come rolling in to shelter on the sand.

And as we groomed the horses, we were weeping.

For we had been informed that by your order

Hippolytus was exiled from this land,

poor man. Then he himself came down to meet us

there at the shore, with all his followers,

friends his own age, an enormous crowd.

He confirmed the words to this lament,

this song awash in tears.

In this passage, one notes that the Messenger labels two distinct groups that form the large crowd that has assembled for Hippolytos’ farewell: his *servants* and his *followers*. When the Messenger refers to the Amazon’s son’s ‘friends’ as his ‘followers’, he reveals something about Hippolytos’ psychology. This reveals that Hippolytos and those with whom he surrounds himself are, by no means, equals. From the very beginning of the play when Hippolytos *leads* them and his servants onstage until the demise of the protagonist, these silent figures loom in the background contributing nothing to the drama (save one choral ode). They do illuminate, however, the psychology of Hippolytos’ character. Upon his grandiose entrance praising himself and Artemis, no one but one of his most faithful servants attempts to address the narcissism inherent in Hippolytos’ comments. This slave is reprimanded by being told, ‘Be careful, now—watch what you say,’ (117) lest he offend the sensibilities of the young prince. Upon the events leading up to his death, Hippolytos goes into exile alone, and only his servants chase after him keeping pace beside the chariot (1339-40) because it is their responsibility to see their master off properly. These followers of his are little more than lemmings who nod politely at each comment that pours from Hippolytos’ royal mouth, and they do such, I would wager, precisely because he is the son of Theseus. Though I believe that these young men are drawn to Hippolytos because of his father, they must still be reasonably virtuous by Hippolytos’ standards, as he will not surround himself with company that is not (1123-8). Since these young men have come into the good graces of the son of Theseus by their own virtue, they silently bask in his glory for fear that if they open their mouths, they will be removed from his presence. In short, Hippolytos surrounds himself with those who are meant to be silent so that his narcissistic ego will not come into conflict with others.

For the Amazon’s son, it is not enough that others not openly disagree with him; he also has little patience for lifestyles that are not in perfect harmony with his worldview. The greatest example of this intolerance occurs in his famous diatribe against all women (671-733), in which Hippolytos’ speech borrows from Semonides’ notorious satire against women in its sardonic view of their positions in society. The young prince’s utilization of this tool, however, does not occur within satire or comedy, but in tragedy. His words quickly turn from near-farcical impossibilities about reproduction toward hyper-misogynistic solutions in which women are imprisoned within the household being given no companions save speechless beasts. E. M. Blaiklock once, and I think appropriately, argued that this discourse was not simply a piece of Euripidean sophistry, but was, rather, an attempt by the tragedian to reveal the darker side of Hippolytos’ soul.[[154]](#footnote-154) I, however, do not think that this was an artificial device implemented in order simply to evoke sympathy toward Phaidra throughout the following scenes. I, rather, see this diatribe as a naturally occurring defense mechanism meant to disassociate his mother, and thereby himself, from the society of Theseus and Phaidra. Just as the Amazons had no need for keeping males save for sexual reproduction, Hippolytos argues that patriarchal societies have no other need for females save the same as their counterparts. Effectively, the young prince is arguing for two distinct types of society in which males and females rarely interact, and I believe that is connected, once again, directly to his self-identification. Had these two societies not intermingled, his mother’s indicative purity would not have been compromised, and he would not exist; if he did not exist, he would not be dangling between Amazonian and Athenian societies. As this is not the case, however, he fantasizes about a ‘perfect’ universe in which sexual creatures are kept for just that, and systems function, otherwise, flawlessly leaving none save the sexual creatures in a position whereby their identities are in constant struggle. As noble as Hippolytos’ desire to redeem the spirit of his mother is, the problem with his logic lies in the fact that his existence compromises the purity of his mother, and her people’s attempt at being likened unto Artemis. Furthermore, his attempt to prove that one can emulate the gods without outside interference requires that his attempt be witnessed by the very external force from which he attempts to disassociate himself.

My textual analysis could now appeal to Freudian theory in order to suggest that Hippolytos longs for a sexual relationship with his mother, does so by transposing her with Artemis, and is successful by entering her virgin meadow where none save him are permitted (86-97) as others before me have done,[[155]](#footnote-155) but I do not feel that this actually fits with his existential psychology. If Hippolytos is attempting, as I have suggested, to rectify the faults of the past and to create a utopian fantasy, I do not believe that it would be within his character to debase the purity of Artemis. I will concede that, as a mortal, the Amazon’s son is susceptible to following into the footsteps of his father, but, if that were the case, this Hippolytos would be no different than Euripides’ first, and there would be no reason for this character to have been re-forged; more importantly, however, this would violate the authenticity of Hippolytos. This Amazon-bred prince truly is that pure, and has little, if any, sexual desire: he is truly unnatural. In fact, this aspect of not belonging in the world is what sets him apart from all other characters in Greek drama. Hippolytos is not driven by sexual, financial, or political desires: he, as best I can tell, has no drive whatsoever. Consider how poorly he thinks of his own status as a bastard. He would rather people would not be born than be born illegitimate. He has no desire to be remembered after his death, and, indeed, will be forgotten by the one whose opinion mattered most to him – Artemis. Recall that rather going into exile with another, as so many heroes of the period have done, he chooses to embrace his punishment as his own. My analysis of him, thus, suggests that his existence is characterized by the desire not to exist, but as he does, he chooses to exist in direct opposition to his essence.

*Conclusion*

Though there are many other characteristics of this young man that can be drawn from the text, this is the Hippolytos with whom I am most concerned. He is a young, disenfranchised prince dangling precariously between two worlds, but belonging in neither, and has chosen, therefore, to remove himself physically and ideologically from both. Hippolytos’ essence is as a bastard, with no future in the society in which he has been raised, who guides his own existence by attempting to remove all knowledge of his life from it when he dies. The Amazon’s son is excessively dedicated to his mother, and desires to right the perceived wrongs, which were done to his mother by invaders such as his father, by emulating her culture’s values. Finally, he is a human being with absolutely no internal force driving his own existence except for escapist fantasies, which childishly attempt to exonerate the aforementioned mother and persecute his father for the bastard’s essence into which he was born. Euripides’ Hippolytos is a young pseudo-male who has set himself in such opposition against his essence that his existence is both solipsistic and fatalistic.

**Euripides’ Phaidra**

The next character to whom our eyes immediately fall, as we have identified who the gods and title character are as individuals, is Phaidra. Our detailed history of her lineage has identified her societally as the Cretan princess descended from the line of Minos and Pasiphaë; she is the sister of the late Ariadne; at the beginning of our play, she is the loyal wife of the Athenian king, Theseus. If we are to understand who she is, we must examine what she is, and how she chooses to exist in those capacities and beyond.

As we have previously established, Phaidra has little history from which we are able to draw her place in society before the debut of this drama in 428 BCE. In fact, even in this tragedy, there are only four points where her direct Cretan history is suggested (176-9; 402; 796-8; 832-7), and there is only on exchange that establishes her as the daughter of Pasiphaë and Minos (358-9). From a mythographical position, this character is difficult to pinpoint because of her elusiveness, but from an existential view, she is a wonderful study because she is *almost* a character with no history, and is, therefore, an individual who was *tabula rasa* – nearly free from the constraints of her past. Unlike with Hippolytos, whose identification rests almost entirely in his own history, our Phaidra is a woman whose existence is tied to the present with glimpses of foresight, and minimal hindsight.

*Summary*

At this point, I will summarize, again, my work in order to establish the existential highlights of the Cretan Queen, as I did with her antithetical Athenian stepson. *Existence Precedes Essence*: In establishing the essence of a character as *tabula rasa* as Phaidra, we turn to the myths that surround those who are similar to her: namely her mother, Pasiphaë, and sister, Ariadne. As both a Cretan and a woman, mythology almost dictates that Theseus’ wife have a perverted sexual taboo associated with her. Her mother, of course, mated remorselessly with the Cretan Bull to conceive the Minotaur.[[156]](#footnote-156) Her sister sought both a king of Athens and a god for her bed regardless of the effects that it could have on her mortal family.[[157]](#footnote-157) Phaidra, unable to escape to her familial essence, is associated with the taboo of a semi-incestuous relationship. Like her stepson, however, she battles against this essence in order to attain her own existence, and to establish herself as a notable character in Attic drama. The existence by which Phaidra chooses to identify herself is as the mother of her sons, and as Theseus’ loyal wife. Rather than attempting to besmirch Theseus or any other, save Hippolytos, Phaidra is concerned exclusively with *aidos* (Gr. modesty),[[158]](#footnote-158) and how she may utilize it to maintain *eukleia*. In short, like Hippolytos, she has chosen an existence that is antithetical to her essence.

*Time is of the Essence*: Whereas we can safely conjecture that Hippolytos’ manner and location of passing time are similar, if not identical, during the course of the play and before it, it is highly unlikely that Phaidra’s utilization of time before the action of the tragedy is the same as when our eyes are turned to her. Throughout the course of the play, she is surrounded, like Hippolytos, by attendants while she passively cringes from her essence and awaits an imminent death. Before the onset of her miasma, we have no method by which we can determine her daily activities, but we can establish that once her essence pressures her too greatly, she begins to isolate herself from her immediate family. Much of her time is spent in quiet contemplation, and the rest of it is spent fighting against the machinations of Aphrodite, and subtly suggesting that her disease is associated with Hippolytos.

*Freedom and Responsibility*: When Hippolytos chose to be free of his basic essence, he became responsible for his own hubristic actions. Phaidra, on the other hand, is not able to escape her essence entirely because Aphrodite still forces taboo sexual desires upon her. The only thing that Phaidra becomes responsible for is how she deals with the desire for her stepson. By initially choosing to remain silent on the matter, she is choosing to torment herself, and, simultaneously, to maintain *eukleia* for herself and her children. By choosing to verbalize the cause of her disease, she becomes responsible for drawing further attention from the Nurse. By finally choosing to share with the Nurse the cause of her wasting, she becomes responsible, ultimately, for the deaths of herself and Hippolytos. Through her choices, she, ultimately, succumbs to the scheme of Kypris.

*Humanism*: In this tragedy, Phaidra is tied to the very same deities to whom Hippolytos is – Artemis, Zeus, and Aphrodite. Though she founded a shrine in Athens to Aphrodite (37-43), the rest of her relationship with this malevolent goddess is, like Hippolytos’, a protest. She does not want to submit to the will of the Olympian any more than the Amazon’s son does. Throughout the remainder of the piece, she calls to Artemis to free her from her god-sent miasma. Only through her Nurse does Phaidra acknowledge Kypris as her destroyer, and something greater than a god (382-3). This acknowledgement, however, does not stop the battle that the queen wages against her.

*Ethical Considerations are Paramount*: When considering the final principle of existentialism, Phaidra is an interesting study because of her ethical considerations. Her entire ethical structure revolves around being a good Greek wife and mother. Phaidra is more concerned with how her actions will affect her family. The Cretan Queen is a paragon of motherly and wifely virtue. She is willing to lose her own life rather than to allow negative consequences befall the *oikos* that she currently oversees, and she curses any good woman who would not do the same (443-9).

*Analysis*

Phaidra, like many women in ancient Greek literature, is acknowledged primarily as *gyne* (Gr. woman/wife), and that is one of her key identifiers. She is the wife, and a loyal one at that, of Theseus. In the exchange between the Nurse and Phaidra upon the nature of the latter’s illness (221-373), when asked if Theseus has wronged her in any manner, Phaidra retorts that she hopes never to cause harm to him (342). This line, and what it implies, is of great significance in regards to insight into her character. Phaidra, at least in this regard, is an altruistic human being who wishes nothing ill upon the man to whom she has chosen to dedicate her life. This is not to say, as with any human being, that Phaidra is not capable of malicious actions, but her malevolence will never be directed at Theseus or the extensions of him – their children. In fact, one of the key reasons for her secretive wasting away, the revelation of her miasma, and her eventual suicide is the protection of the futures of her children (334-5; 793-5). Phaidra realizes that, in her society, affirmation of not only the fulfilment of her god-sent passion, but of the very desire itself will destroy her own reputation which will, in turn, ruin those of her sons,[[159]](#footnote-159) and will place them in the same societal position as Hippolytos (457-64). Phaidra’s longing to protect those around her drives her deeper into the confines of her home where she begins to turn her thoughts toward manners by which she may admirably bear the burden of Aphrodite. She first renders herself mute in an effort to conceal the nature of her disease; she then attempts to overcome it employing *sophrosyne*; ultimately, decides to waste away the days and her body waiting for death to approach and wrap her in its eternal embrace (424-35).

The text itself does not reveal precisely how Phaidra plans on taking her own life, but due to her choice to not eat, the Chorus seems convinced that Phaidra denies the gifts of Demeter in order ‘to reach her haven, / Death’s mournful boundary’ (147-57). If Phaidra is attempting starvation, then this signifies a woman who is extremely strong of will. Not only is her originally planned suicide one that requires a conscious decision, but it is one that requires that decision to be reaffirmed each time that food is placed before her. Phaidra’s consciousness must wage war with her natural instinct of self-preservation in order to take an action that she identifies as noble in order to protect her reputation and, in turn, those of the ones that she loves. The question of her authentic dedication to the preservation of her offspring must be given attention because she, eventually, decides to break the chains of silence, and to impart to the Nurse the nature of her disease. Why does Phaidra choose to take this action? Like Hippolytos, Phaidra here succumbs to a societal covenant – she is susceptible to the central tenets of the Olympian theodicy – lest she offend Zeus Horkios. She accepts the Nurse’s supplication, and begins to share information surrounding the nature of her illness. No matter how dedicated Phaidra is to her own cause, she is still a human living under the jurisdiction of the Olympian pantheon. In order not to offend her society or its gods, she must choose to act in accordance with the established customs and traditions of her culture. By choosing to conform to a Hellenic principle rather than to act as an entirely alienated individual, Phaidra makes the initial choice, which will lead to the alteration of her plans, and the fulfilment of those by Aphrodite. It is at this moment that Fred Alford would argue that Phaidra the bystander (who is not actually innocent because she made the original choice to give herself over to the passion thrust upon her by Kypris) takes responsibility for her actions and feelings, but surrenders her freedom to the cosmic forces present in the play. [[160]](#footnote-160) My position differs from his in that I believe that although Phaidra accepts her human heritage, which, ultimately, will destroy her, and does fulfil the will of the Olympian, she is also taking control of her own situation. By finally sharing her torment with the Nurse, Phaidra chooses to pass some of her personal burden to another in order to alleviate the pressure from her own shoulders. She has no ability by which to know exactly what consequences her choice will bring.

Upon submitting to a societal pressure, Phaidra’s character begins to change. In existential terms, instantaneously an individual is recreated in each moment. This perpetual metamorphosis allows an individual to alter itself in order to protect its ever-threatened essence.[[161]](#footnote-161) This is precisely what Phaidra does. Once the Nurse breaks a promise to Phaidra, and chooses to approach Hippolytos with the cause of the queen’s illness (627-733), Phaidra’s essence – the preservation of her reputation and, vicariously, those of her husband and children – is threatened. The queen must act in response to the external catalyst. For this woman, the most acceptable path by which to empower her word against that of Hippolytos is to sacrifice her own life. Interestingly, Phaidra, who has spoken repeatedly of her own *sophrosyne*, adds one desire to the core of her essence in her last moment: she wishes to destroy the unnatural hubris that she perceives in her stepson (808-11):

But I shall do great evil to that man

by dying—he will share in my disease,

not place himself above me; he will learn

to practice wise restraint, when all is done.

Having heard how horribly the Amazon’s son has spoken of women, it seems that since Phaidra has already chosen to end her own life, she has decided that Hippolytos will be affiliated with her death. This false accusation of rape, which she makes against him in her suicide note (987-9), seems to be drawn from her logical brain, which means to protect her biological family’s collective *eukleia*. She imagines that it would be most beneficial to instil humility into Hippolytos, and by doing such, she, according to Joseph P. Fell, is guaranteeing her own existential freedom by producing an act of thought which no prior state can actually determine or motivate.[[162]](#footnote-162) She perceives a possibility, and sets it into motion without ultimate knowledge of its outcome. Just as the Nurse persuaded Phaidra to change her plans, Hippolytos’ overheard words have done the same for the Cretan. Before hearing his responsive tirade to the Nurse’s message, Phaidra was set upon only killing herself in order to cease her passion; now, she has decided to destroy her stepson’s boastful *eukleia* in order to end his arrogance. These two persuasions prove that Phaidra, like all human beings, is susceptible to change in her emotions, and this characteristic, which seems to be derived from Aphrodite, is her undoing.[[163]](#footnote-163) Though her emotional response is a consequence of meddling by Kypris, it must be noted that Phaidra, nonetheless, has taken this course of action by herself. She is aware of what she is doing, and has fought against the pressures of the Olympian in the past, but this choice comes entirely from within, and, unlike Medeia or Alkestis,[[164]](#footnote-164) there is no great deliberation on what course of action she must take. Phaidra understands that she is already destroyed by the joint machinations of Aphrodite (acting upon her unconscious desires) and her own Nurse (meddling in her personal affairs), and chooses to delay no longer. She will end her life, protect the core of her existence even after death, and will fulfil, unknowingly, the will of Kypris in punishing Hippolytos’ excessive hubris.

The previous section has analysed the actions of Phaidra within this drama; now the discussion must turn toward Phaidra in her time and space within the tragedy. Where, with whom, and how does the Cretan choose to spend her time? Addressing where Phaidra chooses to spend her time throughout the course of the play is simple: since she has not eaten in three days, her body is growing weary, and she spends most of her time confined to the inner walls of her home (147-54). There are instances, which we do not see, where she is or wishes to be taken to streams, the mountains, and forests (234-9), but these are more appropriately discussed when addressing *how* she chooses to spend her time. Let us briefly try to analyse with whom she chooses to exist. Just as Hippolytos surrounds himself with *prospoloi*, Phaidra is constantly surrounded by those of a lower status than herself: she passes time with the Chorus of Troezenian women and her Nurse. She issues commands to these women (221-4), but her speech suggests that she is neither cruel nor haughty toward them; she makes appeals of them as one would make requests, albeit unreasonable ones, to friends (234-46). Though she treats her slaves quite well, the closest semblance to a true friendship that Phaidra has is with her Nurse. Throughout much of the tragedy, the Nurse and her mistress speak on nearly equal terms to one another (198-282); at some points, such as the supplication (344-586), the Nurse has the upper-hand of the relationship, and at others, such as when the queen exposes the cause of her illness, Phaidra is dominant (403-72). This fluctuation persists, as it should, until the Nurse betrays the confidence of her mistress when she reveals the cause of the latter’s miasma to Hippolytos. Once this occurs, the Cretan realizes that her life must end immediately, and she severs the last close bond that she has with anyone outside of her immediate family (753-85).

It is at this point that the discussion of Phaidra becomes extremely interesting because we begin to examine how she chooses to spend her brief moments in the context of the play. In this regard, Phaidra is very similar to her stepson in that she spends her time longing for the impossible. E. R. Dodds first suggested that all of Phaidra’s fluctuating desires were little more than externalizations of her inner craving for Hippolytos:

Like most victims of psychological conflict, she began, as she tells us, by attempting to repress one of the conflicting emotions (393-4). We have seen the results of this policy in 198-238. Euripides did not need a Freud to tell him that the expelled ‘complex’ lives on, vainly seeking in symbolic acts the satisfaction denied it in literal reality, and sometimes destroying in the process the personality which has expelled it. Phaedra’s hidden love translates itself into a succession of cravings; and it is no accident that these cravings are for scenes intimately associated with Hippolytus….[[165]](#footnote-165)

After Dodd’s preliminary suggestion that each of these fantasies is directly correlated to an activity of Hippolytos, a number of other scholars took to various psychoanalyses of her unrealities. Bernard Knox examined her ‘longing to ride in [Artemis’] precinct, to master the drumbeat of hooves where the horses go running’ (245-6) as an expression of her desire to tame Hippolytos;[[166]](#footnote-166) Charles Segal contributed a list of erotic imagery and symbolism which is recurrent through the tragedy.[[167]](#footnote-167) Justin Glenn expanded the analyses of his predecessors into the realm of better understanding the character of Phaidra through her fantasies of the ‘Water, Tree, and Meadow’, ‘Hunting’, and ‘Taming Horses.’[[168]](#footnote-168) In each of these studies, the scholars are, and rightly I think, obsessed with the sexual innuendo latent in Phaidra’s fantasies, but I am intrigued as to why this character, who claims to want no one to know of her ailment, repeatedly verbalizes imagery which belongs strictly to the realm of her beloved and his virgin goddess. Though I have established that Phaidra is a strong character in that she is able to fight against both *eros* and hunger, she is, nonetheless, human, and is susceptible to weakness. When she does begin to verbalize the cause of her ailment, she attempts to disguise her words as madness (228-46) in hopes that she will alleviate the internal pressure from herself, but will not burden another with her shame. The queen’s *aidos* is in constant conflict with *eros*, and her time is spent trying to balance the two within herself.[[169]](#footnote-169) She is attempting to preserve the principle of *sophrosyne* within herself, but, like Hippolytos, is giving more credence to *aidos* than to *eros*. In short, both Phaidra’s time onstage as well as the time that we hear about her wasting away toward nothingness is spent fantasizing about a sexual fulfilment that she refuses to let herself have because of the shame that it would cause her and her nuclear family. In turn, she verbalizes these desires so that she may pay homage to *eros* without fully allowing herself to be lost to passion in an attempt to alleviate the tension that builds within.

*Conclusion*

This is the essence of the character of Euripides’ Phaidra with which I am most concerned, and will continue to examine in her alternate incarnations: her connection to her family and its place in her personal identity; the struggle that wages within her between *eros* and *aidos*; the moment of conversion from longing for Hippolytos to desiring to see him humanized and, if need be, destroyed; her relationship with a confidante, and how it is manifested. Ultimately, I will see how minor changes in any of these identifiers from this Phaidra will alter not only her character, but also the greater story in its whole. Neither Euripides nor his audience was pleased with the first incarnation of this character, where she shamelessly sought to seduce her stepson. Though he was awarded first prize for this piece, I would wager that his audience were still not fully satisfied with this one. If Phaidra is meant to teach us, like she sought to teach Hippolytos, of *sophrosyne*, we must see it arise from her first, and through her varying reincarnations. I hope to reveal an utterly human character that is simply placed into a bad situation, and to analyse how she, as an individual, copes with it.

**Conclusion**

This Euripidean drama is centred on an *agôn* between one man – Hippolytos – and his society. By choosing to identify his existence in direct opposition to his Greek essence, Hippolytos draws the attention and ire not only of inhabitants of the physical realm (e.g. Phaidra and Theseus) but also of the metaphysical (e.g. Artemis and Aphrodite). The young prince’s essential similarities to his heroic father are what captivated a host of mortal followers, but it was his self-defined existential characteristics to be unlike his father’s culture that drew the attention of the key Olympians of this tragedy. He invoked the gaze of two goddesses who share a cycle, but who cannot coexist in the same host simultaneously with any form of zeal. In fully embracing Artemisian practices, Hippolytos’ existence offended Kypris, and she, in turn, spurned Phaidra with obsession. This god-sent mania was fought against by the earthly queen, and though the Cretan never submitted fully to the whims of Aphrodite, she still saw the Olympian’s will fulfilled. In order to both punish Hippolytos for his arrogance, and to preserve her own family, Phaidra accused Hippolytos of rape, and punctuated the document with the end of her life. Theseus, upon finding the corpse of his wife, unleashed a torrent of spite against his son, and revealed how Hippolytos’ existence had not only upset Olympos, but also Troezen. Even without the interference of a deity, this tale of one man against his society was bound to eventually meet a similar end. Euripides’ Hippolytos defined himself against his world, and his world ultimately fought back.

**III**

# ‘Examine closely what my life has been.’

The Existential World of Phaedra after Euripides

Throughout the course of this chapter, it is my aim to explore some of the most significant changes to the character portraits of Hippolytos and Phaidra from the time of Euripides in 428 BCE until the premiere of Mike Nichols’s *The Graduate* in 1967. In order to do this, we will explore not only dramatic texts such as Seneca’s *Phaedra*, Jean-Baptiste Racine’s *Phèdre*, H.D.’s ‘Hippolytus Temporizes,’ and Eugene O’Neill’s *Desire Under the Elms*, but will also engage with the alterations to the canon made in antiquity by the likes of Apollodorus, Virgil, Ovid, and others, and will examine further the changes made to these literary figures in a number of non-dramatic modern reinterpretations. This chapter will be concerned with tracking the continually evolving identities of our focal characters so that we may better understand and appreciate how the chaste, would-be prince of Troezen and his love-struck stepmother have progressed over the course of the centuries. In the first part of this chapter, I attempt to locate the text within several different dimensions of the changes in the literary context which have occurred between 428 BCE and the first century CE in order, once again, to illuminate the central characters of Hippolytus and Phaedra[[170]](#footnote-170) in terms of existentialism. In the following section, I will analyse Jean-Baptiste Racine’s contribution to the mythological tradition of this doomed family, and will analyse his character portraits in terms of this merger of science and philosophy. Finally, I will briefly analyse a number of American contributions to the ‘Mrs Robinson’ myth prior to 1967.

**Pre-Senecan Ontological Shifts**

In the previous chapter regarding the surviving Euripidean approach to this myth, I compiled an ontological review of the Phaidra/Hippolytos tradition in order to better understand the expectations that the tragedian was both receiving from and dispensing to his fifth-century audience. For the sake of the first surviving major adaptation – Seneca’s *Phaedra* – I will not have to recall the myth’s history before 428 BCE, but will need to examine the shifts of the tradition between the times of Euripides and the Imperial Stoic. During the five-hundred years between these two tragedians and thereafter, Phaedra and her cohorts were not isolated and confined to a vacuum in their Euripidean guises, but were, rather, developing alongside of the various cultures in which they continually remerged. The Senecan characters are wholly different from the Euripidean as the Racinean differ from the Senecan, and this examination will reveal that this effect is not merely a preference of the Roman and French dramatists, but, rather, is the result of an on-going evolutionary process which resulted from mythographic alterations that had been occurring over generations.

For starters, according to Roland Mayer, the greater Roman audience was much less familiar with the multitude of mythographic trends than their Greek forbearers. Seneca, due to presenting characteristics for an audience who were less familiar with mythological archetypes, had a great luxury in choosing which characteristics to highlight from the multitude of preceding poets and prose authors to present his characters and their relationships as dynamic and fresh.[[171]](#footnote-171) As time progressed and civilizations plodded forward, the general population became less versed in Hellenic culture, and were familiar with our two characters in their Senecan guises; eventually, as the Renaissance came to a close and the Enlightenment and Romanticism took hold across Europe, Racinean reinterpretations (and attempts at translations of said reinterpretations) of these literary figures became the most widely known in the Anglophonic world. Ultimately, however, there was a cultural shift in which the figures of Hippolytos and Phaidra were staged most regularly – according to the APGRD – in reimaginings created by English-speaking writers.

We will first turn toward the prose *Bibliotheca* by a pseudo-Apollodorus, which probably post-dates Cicero but pre-dates Seneca,[[172]](#footnote-172) in looking for changes to the literary portraits of the focal characters of this study. In any case, the collected work of Apollodorus shows us how rich was the mythographic tradition on Phaidra’s family as it had developed through the Hellenistic era. In three books and an epitome, the *Bibliotheca* attempts to provide a comprehensive examination of traditional Greek mythology as it was being received. Information regarding the Cretan tradition of Minos, Pasiphaë, Daedalos, Ariadne, the Minotaur,[[173]](#footnote-173) and, of course, Theseus, Phaidra, and Hippolytos monopolizes a large portion of both the final book and epitome.

Apollodorus additionally tells us that Theseus then joined Hercules in an expedition against the Amazons; one result of this journey was the abduction of Antiope, who is called Hippolyte by Simonides,[[174]](#footnote-174) and the resulting siege of Athens by the barbaric, horse-riding women, which was quelled by Theseus’ Athenians. The abductee and the Athenian king then had a son called Hippolytos. After an unmeasured amount of time, Deucalion, another son of Minos, presented his sister, Phaidra, as a bride to Theseus unknowing that Theseus had already claimed a different bride in conquest. This act caused tumult in the lands of the Amazons, and the women – led by Hippolytos’ mother – once again, invaded the *polis*. Antiope claimed her coupling with Theseus to be a legitimate marriage, and threatened to kill the guests assembled at the wedding of Phaidra. Theseus, in response, had the doors hastily barred, set his men against the horse-riding women in combat once again, and killed his Amazonian concubine himself. The partially orphaned Hippolytos was then raised alongside of Phaidra’s two sons, Acamas and Demophon, until the queen desired him for her own bed. Once the Amazon’s son grew into adulthood, Phaidra became smitten with him. Hippolytos fled from the situation; Phaidra, fearing that she would be revealed, rent her garments, and accused Hippolytos of assault. Afterward Theseus beseeched his Olympian father – Poseidon – to end the life of his son, and a great bull arose from the sea, and frightened Hippolytos’ chariot team, which caused the Amazon’s son to be dragged to his death by his own stampeding steeds. It was only after the death of her stepson that Phaidra revealed her passion, and took her own life by the noose.[[175]](#footnote-175)

Many of the traditions compiled by Apollodorus are echoed without change by the mythographers and poets of the late-Republic and early-Empire of Rome. Virgil, one of the most famous Roman poets, made brief mention of our mythological characters in his epic *Aeneid*. Similarly to Homer’s *Odyssey*, Phaedra is mentioned fleetingly in Book VI when Aeneas travels into the Underworld. There, she is coupled in a line with Procris, and is separated from her mother by only two lines (VI.440-9):

Not far from here can be seen, extending in all directions,

The vale of mourning—such is the name it bears: a region

Where those consumed by the wasting torments of merciless love

Haunt the sequestered alleys and myrtle groves that give them

Cover; death itself cannot cure them of love’s disease.

Here Aeneas described Phaedra and Procris, sad

Eriphyle showing the wounds her heartless son once dealt her,

Evadne and Pasiphae; with them goes Laodamia;

Here too is Caeneus, once a young man, but next a woman

And now changed back by fate to his original sex.

Though we have grown accustomed to this positioning of Phaedra in the afterlife, alongside of others who were tormented by unnatural love, we are not yet familiar with the placement of Hippolytus after his mortal demise. Virgil, however, in Book VII of his epic poem describes in great detail a myth discussing the continued existence of Hippolytus after his gruesome death which is quite common for writers of this time. I have yet to isolate this tale’s origin because Virgil, Ovid, and Hyginus, all of whom are writing at approximately the same time in the same region, utilize it (VII.759-82):

All limpid lakes lamented him.

The son of Hippolytus, too, most beautiful, went to the wars—

Virbius, a fine young man, sent by his mother, Aricia,[[176]](#footnote-176)

Who’d brought him up near the shore of the lake in Egeria’s wood

Where stands an altar to Diana, rich and reverenced.

The legend is that Hippolytus, after he’d been laid low

By his stepmother’s plotting and, torn to bits by bolting horses,

Had slaked with blood his father’s vengeance, rose to the starry

Firmament and breathed the air of heaven, brought back

To life by Diana’s love and the herbs of Aesculapius.

But then the Father almighty, wroth that a mortal being

Should rise to light and life from the shades of the underground,

Hurled down to hell with a levin-stroke from his hand this son

Of Phoebus, who had discovered so potent an art of healing.

But Diana was kind and hid Hippolytus in a secret

Place, removing him to the grove of the nymph Egeria,

Where he should live out his days a solitary unknown

In Italian woods, having changed his name and become Virbius.

Wherefore to this day horses are not allowed near Diana’s

Temple or sacred wood, because horses, scared by a sea beast,

Had split Hippolytus once and his chariot on the shore.

His son, for all that, was now driving fiery horses

Upon the level plain and racing to war in a chariot.

The revivification of Hippolytus and renaming of him Virbius is, perhaps, the greatest alteration to this myth in its history though it is never staged dramatically. In Book XV of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Virbius himself has a conversation with the nymph mentioned in *Aeneid*, Egeria. In this exchange, he explains his horrible mortal fate, the time that he spent in Phlegethon (the flaming river of the underworld), his resurrection by Aesculapius (the god of medicine and healing), and his apotheosis by his doyenne – Diana. In this sacred grove of the Huntress, where horses may not tread, Hippolytus, in the guise of Virbius, was hidden away and awarded with divinity while his stepmother continued to reside in the Underworld with no hope of escape.[[177]](#footnote-177)

Though this addendum of apotheosis is the most notable in respect of the myth’s reception, there is one other addition made by Ovid that cannot go without mention if we are fully to appreciate the subsequent treatment of the narrative by Seneca. In his *Heroides*, the Roman poet writes a letter in the voice of the stepmother, which is meant to be read by her stepson. Rather than relying on the dramatic technique of a messenger (e.g. Nurse) to reveal her passion, Ovid allows Phaedra to do this herself, and brings her into the realm of the elegiac mistress who shies away from direct interaction, but still operates on her own behalf without an external agent.[[178]](#footnote-178) In her message, Phaedra confesses that she has never been able to verbalize her love to Hippolytus due to modesty, but Love itself has obligated her to finally do so (1-16).[[179]](#footnote-179) The stepmother assures her stepson that this semi-incestuous coupling would pose neither a moral quandary (because the gods themselves are an incestuous lot) nor a social one (because their affair could easily be hidden in the home that they already share) (129-150). It is at this point in the letter when Phaedra realizes how enraptured she is by this fantasy, and begins to conclude with a recollection of the curse which beset all other women in her line, and accepts that she may be the first to have her desire not be reciprocated (165-174).

**Seneca’s Ontological Shifts**

The focal matter of this section is the earliest surviving reception of Euripides’ *Hippolytos*. Throughout the section, we will examine some of the manners by which the Roman Imperial Stoic interpreted and redistributed this myth and its eponymous heroine. Having located the text within several different dimensions of the changes in the literary context which had occurred between 428 BCE and the first century CE, the following section will review Seneca’s Imperial Neo-Stoicism in regards to the social, political, and philosophic dimensions which shaped the Roman’s dramaturgical style. The exploration of these contexts is followed by my analysis of the characters of the Senecan Phaedra and Hippolytus from an existentialist trajectory which accentuates what and who she is in relation to these contexts and how she interacts with them.

As well as drawing from the Greek dramatic tradition of Euripides and Sophocles, Seneca was relying upon a rich and diverse Roman poetic culture when crafting the characters of his *Phaedra*. Each character portrait of a literary figure is an amalgamation of chosen aspects of the individual preceding works combined with the agendas and philosophies of the current adaptor. The characters fashioned by Seneca are enlivened with a lengthy cultural history that is relevant to his audience because of their relationship to his brand of Stoicism.[[180]](#footnote-180) They are not merely homunculi harkening back to the works of his predecessors, but are figures who are responding to a major philosophical doctrine at the height of its relevance.

One of the most fundamental aspects of Stoic philosophy is a concept known as the ‘Stoic god,’ and I believe that this notion merits brief address. In Seneca’s *De Beneficiis*, the philosopher is engaging in a dialogue in which his opponent suggests that all he possesses has been gifted to him by nature rather than by a divinity; Seneca retorts, ‘Do you not perceive when you say this that you merely speak of god under another name? For what is nature but God and divine reason, which pervades the universe and all its parts?’ (7.1). Seneca clearly subscribes, in principle, to the monistic conception of Stoicism: his universe, in keeping with the traditions of Zeno, is unitary with no distinction between material and spiritual realities.[[181]](#footnote-181) This playwright equates the realm of nature (Gr. *physis*; Lat. *natura*) to that of theology because the Stoics regarded theology ‘as that part of the natural world which does not focus on the details and the purely physical aspects of cosmic processes, but rather on their overall coherence, teleology, and providential design, as well as on the question of how this cosmic theology relates to popular forms of belief and worship.’[[182]](#footnote-182) Man’s relationship with the divine, a key element in understanding the character of Hippolytus, is tremendously important to understand when addressing Seneca’s *Phaedra* in any context, but specifically so when analyzing it through a humanist philosophical lens such as existentialism in which the world is now bereft of a god upon whom we can model our actions.

In this drama, though the gods are often referenced by name, and Phaedra accuses Venus solely for her semi-incestuous passion (124-8); divinities carry no actual responsibility for the machinations of the mortal realm neither in this play nor this philosophy. The reason that the Stoic god, sometimes called Jupiter, and his extensions cannot be responsible for the unnatural desires in Phaedra’s heart is that the Stoic god, similar to the Stoic man, has striven for and attained goodness. This goodness is a harmonious balance of the self in regards to the *natura*, and, therefore, Jupiter and his agents – both those engendered by him at the moment of creation[[183]](#footnote-183) as well as the *sapientes* (Lat. Those who have attained goodness) – cannot be responsible for something unnatural (e.g. semi-incestuous desires). In our play, this argument is made when Seneca has his Nurse utilize logic to defend the attained goodness of the Stoic *sapientes* – the Olympians – by strictly blaming mortal shortcomings for the lust in Phaedra’s heart. Sartre and his existentialist cohort would have agreed with the Nurse’s logic that Phaedra is solely responsible for her shortcomings because these ‘gods’ are not forcing her hand; she is, rather, making a choice to love her stepson.

The most convincing evidence from *Phaedra* to support the idea that Seneca holds *natura* in the same or greater esteem than he does Jupiter is derived from line 959 when the Chorus calls to ‘Great Nature, mother of the gods!’ before invoking the ‘lord of fire-spangled Olympus’ (960). This anthropomorphized *Natura* is not only the entity from which the gods and man have descended, but is also the driving force for most of the drama. Hippolytus refuses to accede to the compelling *natura* of a sexual drive; Phaedra objects a societal *natura* in choosing to sexually love her stepson; Theseus overrides his paternal *natura* to preserve the life of both his former wife and their child; and Phaedra finally rejects the most fierce *natura* of all, that of self-preservation.[[184]](#footnote-184) Effectively, these acts of defiance against *natura* are all personal, existential choices made against universal, essential natures.

In order to better understand why the characters of this drama so vehemently stand against *natura* without actual divine interference, we must understand causality in the Stoic universe by examining it through tragedy. The theatrical culmination of disturbing events that follow one another in logical sequence is how we best define tragedy due to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, in which he regards the best plot as owing ‘its supremacy to the cogent force of its causal structure, to the compelling ligatures that, under the aegis of the probable and the necessary, make of every turn in the action a consequence or a result.’[[185]](#footnote-185) The Stoics were the first to develop a penetrating analysis of causality;[[186]](#footnote-186) Seneca himself offers a discussion of the Stoic view of causality in *Epistles* 65. All Stoic thought on causality is underlined by the hypothesis of *pneuma* (Lat. the all-pervading stuff of divine coherence), and Thomas Rosenmeyer explains it at length in *Senecan Drama and the Stoic Cosmology*:

The *pneuma*, the all-pervading stuff of divine coherence, came to be the material coefficient of the causal chain. Continuity or, with some allowance for our experience of discrete events, contiguity was recognized as the essence of causation; causes are bodies in motion, making contact and affecting other bodies. Of the Aristotelian causes, the efficient comes to absorb the rest. The material cause turns *arche*, originating principle, and virtually disappears from explanations of empirical experience. But that does not mean that the Stoics subscribed to the axioms of traditional mechanics. Their concept of body does not primarily turn upon dimensions or solidity. Rather, it is talked about in terms of acting and being acted upon; it is action that authenticates body.[[187]](#footnote-187)

In short, the Stoics held that all changes required a stimulus. Each incident that occurs, no matter how minute it may seem, is caused by a previous incident, and that new occurrence will, in turn, affect future events though its effect may not always be apparent. The Stoics holding that a stimulus is requisite for change is paralleled by the existentialist concept that we are constantly reformed cosmically by our choices. Turning back toward *Phaedra*, the tragic chain of events against *natura* that occurs is a response to layers upon layers of minute individual choices that take place both on the stage and before the beginning of the play. The tragedy, ultimately, can be traced back to a singular cause – an existential original choice – which, when isolated, often contributes to the shattering impact of the tragic exposition, especially where the singular cause is different than the tracked or suspected cause of tragedy.[[188]](#footnote-188)

This brief analysis of Senecan Stoicism has been conducted in order to better understand the philosophy which heavily affected the works of Seneca – both his dramas and treatises – not to engage deeply in the debate about how far his dramas deviate from Stoicism in principle. It must be understood that Seneca was writing for Romans who were no longer as adamantly connected to the Olympian pantheon as were Euripides’ audience. In Athenian drama, the causes of catastrophe were explained as a force of evil which permeated into respectable characters; for Seneca, the tragedy was inherent in the individuals themselves, and was analysed as a deterioration of character.[[189]](#footnote-189) These were individuals who were complex, and cannot be read solely as archetypes of any philosophy or idea: many characters, including, as we have seen, ours, portrayed elements of Stoicism, but none of them can truly be seen as Stoic apexes. In short, none of our characters are yet good as are their divinities. But how have these ontological and philosophical trends influenced Seneca’s *Phaedra*? In order to explore this, a short Psychoanalytic Existentialistic analysis of the titular character follows.

**Seneca’s Phaedra**

In the previous chapter, the first character to merit an existential analysis was Hippolytos because he was the focal point of Euripides’ work in 428 BCE. Seneca’s adaptation, however, pivots around our understanding of the character of Phaedra, and our study will, therefore, begin with her. We must bear in mind that this Senecan figure, while having emerged from many of the same inspirations as her predecessor, is not the same one with whom we are already acquainted via Euripides. Throughout this section (and the one following), my work will examine the Senecan character portraits within this now familiar mythical scenario under the lens of existentialism, and while trying to best understand the characters as existential individuals will also draw the necessary distinctions between the Greek and Roman models.

*Summary*

At this point, I will summarize my work as to establish the highlights of Seneca’s Cretan Queen as was done in the previous chapter. *Existence Precedes Essence*: Whereas her Athenian counterpart was nearly *tabula rasa*, Phaedra is an amalgamation of several elements in her literary tradition. At her core, however, she is still the Cretan daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë; she is still the sister of Ariadne; she is, however, the psychologically *unchaste* wife of Theseus. Our examination will reveal that her potential unfaithfulness may be warranted due to the individual choices made by her husband. Unable to escape fully from her taboo-ridden family, Phaedra’s extramarital thoughts turn to her stepson. Constantly, she battles with her essence, which dictates that she succumbs to this forbidden passion, but she does not do so as fully as did her Attic counterpart. This Phaedra, as we shall see, embraces her essence in identifying her own existence. The one definitive choice that she makes is not to be a good mother and wife. She, rather, simply chooses to die without having her passions aired to the world. As she is not a strong enough a character to do such a thing, she, like her predecessor falsely accuses Hippolytus of rape, and sees him die for this. It is only after his death, inadvertently at her hands, that Phaedra chooses to take her own life over her lover’s lifeless corpse. In short, whereas Phaidra fought against her prescribed essence, Phaedra embraces hers, and utilizes it in identifying her existence.

*Time is of the Essence*: Prior to the development of her amorous feelings for her stepson, the text reveals that Phaedra worked frequently on her loom, and spent much time performing in the choral odes at the temple; for the sake of this tragedy, however, neither of these actions occurs onstage. Phaedra spends her time trying to understand why her mind has shifted toward hunting scenes in the forests, and she has lost much sleep over this contemplation. Whereas Phaidra was perpetually surrounded by escorts and confidants, Phaedra is isolated save for her interactions with her Nurse. The analysis that follows will reveal that this interpersonal relationship is one of near equality rather than that of mistress and slave, and that both Phaedra and her Nurse care deeply for one another.

*Freedom and Responsibility*: There are only two manners in which our Phaedra acknowledges her own freedom from *furor* (Lat. madness): 1) when she chooses to accuse Hippolytus of rape; 2) when she chooses to end her own life. These two acts are mutually inclusive of one another. Phaedra contemplated suicide a great deal, but never acted upon this desire until her own actions ended the life of her lover; she then, in turn, finally ended her own life to expiate herself of guilt.

*Humanism*: In regards to her relationship with the divine, Phaedra, like her antecedent, has recently ignored her responsibilities to the religious practices of her time in favour of pursuing her stepson through the forests of her mind. Whereas both Phaidra and Aphrodite detail the mortal’s relationship with the goddess, there is little discussion of Phaedra’s responsibilities within the religious sect. As best as we can tell, she actively worships the local gods, but, as the Nurse suggests, this may be little more than a means by which to validate her own sordid appetites. Contrary to the Nurse’s insistence that Phaedra is choosing to be enamoured with Hippolytus, and to the fact that gods are not physically present in this tragedy, Phaedra contends that her will is not her own, but that she is, rather, being controlled by external forces.

*Ethical Considerations are Paramount*: Unlike her Euripidean antecedent, Phaedra is interesting not because of her ethical considerations, but rather because of her lack of them. She chooses to sacrifice her stepson in order to save her slave, but, in turn, ends her own life because of the guilt that weighs upon her for destroying him.

*Analysis*

On account of the Euripidean precedent, in Seneca’s case we already have expectations about Phaedra’s nature and identity (solely by virtue of her name) before the play even begins just as we have expectations in relation to Medea, Clytemnestra, and Antigone.[[190]](#footnote-190) In beginning to understand this Phaedra as an existential exception, we must first determine the essence against which Seneca is placing her. Like her Euripidean predecessor, this character is a Cretan (85) princess born to Minos and Pasiphaë (114; 127-9), and is fully aware of the miasmic sexual desires which seem to plague the women of her family including her mother and sister (112-29). In fact, it is this recollection of her mother’s affair with the bull that leads Phaedra to a personal discovery of how her current existence is matching her intended essence: her loom has gone without use, her body has gone without sleep or nourishment, and she has not attended to her duties in the temple; her mind has been too preoccupied with escaping into the wilds (99-111). The recollection of her mother’s bestial coupling has revealed to Phaedra that she harbours a passion for Hippolytus. She, like her dramatic forbearer, accuses Venus of instilling within her an unquenchable passion for her stepson. Whereas Euripides’ Aphrodite openly admits her intention of destroying Hippolytos via Phaidra, Seneca’s Phaedra relies only on the tradition that Venus detests all descendants of Phoebus Apollo – of which she is one – because he assisted in Vulcan’s revelation of her extramarital affair with Mars. Euripides’ Aphrodite was, in fact, a being of immeasurable power that was able to conquer even Zeus in Hesiodic tradition, but according to Phaedra’s Nurse, this ‘goddess’ is little more than a personified attempt at validating sexual depravity (195-202). There is no evidence in the text to suggest that either woman’s theory on the potential divinity of Venus is more valid than the other, but as we are attempting to better understand the existential identity of Phaedra at present, we will concede that she fully accepts that hers is a god-sent passion. In accepting the premise that Phaedra is, when we first meet her, wholly certain that her desire is a divine curse that cannot be overcome by mortal will, we come to understand that she is embracing her Cretan essence, and is rationalizing it rather than fighting against it as did her Euripidean counterpart.

Preliminarily, our Phaedra is so determined to embrace her Cretan essence, in fact, that she neither shows nor seems to harbour any shame for the lust that stirs within her. Whereas Phaidra fought against speaking the name of her beloved, even in the company of her most faithful companion, Phaedra does not mask her passion or its intended target. She is chastised by her Nurse for this action, in R. Scott Smith’s translation (140-8):[[191]](#footnote-191)

It’s best to have upright desires in the first place

And never to slip from the path,

But the next best thing is discretion,

knowing where to draw the line when you err.

How far will you go, my poor girl?

Why add to the disgrace of your house?

Will you outdo your mother?

Moral failings are worse than monsters.

You can ascribe the latter to fate, but the former to character.

We can safely, therefore, eliminate the preservation of personal and familial *eukleia* from the list of possible motivating factors. Whereas Phaidra was a loving and dedicated wife to a gentle and pious husband, Phaedra is no such thing to no such husband. Firstly, we are made aware in her opening lines that Phaedra did not willingly marry Theseus; she was a prize for the conqueror when he departed from Cretan shores (85-90). Secondly, we learn a distinguishing fact about this Theseus: rather than paying homage to an oracle, as did his surviving Euripidean counterpart, Seneca’s Athenian is gallivanting with Pirithous in the underworld with the expressed intention of abducting Proserpina from Pluto (90-8). Phaedra, with good reason, believes that he will never again see the light of day (219-21), and that she is now safe to succumb to her passions for Hippolytus.

In response to the constantly berating words of the Nurse (129-249), Phaedra is reminded that even if her husband – Pirithous’ companion (244) – never learns of her amorous desires that Minos – Ariadne’s father (245) – would eventually be made aware; given his treatment of his own wife for her depravity, one should expect no less in regards to his daughter. The Nurse realizes that Phaedra would try to hide her relationship from her father, and she, in turn, invokes Phoebus Apollo and Jupiter – the queen’s ‘grandfathers who see everything’ (158) – as witnesses of her potential crimes. Finally, under the assumption that the gods would allow this adulterous affair to occur without repercussion, the Nurse asks Phaedra if she would be able to live with her own guilt. Until this point, Phaedra has been able to repudiate the charges made by any of her accusers with the same psychological passivity, and it is for that reason that her Nurse invokes the potential internal judgment that Phaedra will face.[[192]](#footnote-192) Faced with this multitude of theoretically judgmental witnesses, Phaedra attempts to cling to her Cretan essence, but eventually arrives at an existential crossroads: she must choose if she is to embrace her essence, or forge her own existence. In lines 250-5, Phaedra changes her tone from passive to active: she decides that she will conquer her uncontrollable love:

Not every ounce of shame is gone; my intentions are still honourable.

I’ll comply with your wishes, Nurse.

Love that cannot be controlled must be conquered.

I will not let my reputation be tainted.

There is one plan, one way out of my dilemma:

I will follow in my husband’s footsteps and avert this wickedness with my death.

This moment is when Phaedra stands most heavily against her *natura*, her essence, and makes one of her most definitive existential choices. Due to the prodding of the Nurse, she chooses to alter her destiny in the manner that is most logical to her: by ending her own life.

Though she contemplates a variety of methods by which to commit suicide (258-61), she first attempts to destroy her essential identity as a queen by embracing nearly the exact essence of her predecessor in Theseus’ bedroom – Hippolytus’ mother (387-403). Similarly to her Euripidean counterpart, Phaedra longs to join Hippolytus in the realm of Diana. In doing this, Phaedra is isolating herself from the mantle that she has received from Theseus: a loveless wife. This desire can be analysed in two manners. The first, which is most obvious since we have already encountered it before in Euripides, is to infer that Phaedra hopes to be so likened to Antiope that she will be able to seduce Hippolytus.[[193]](#footnote-193) The second and, I think, more interesting cause for her desire to be disassociated from her essence as an Athenian queen is that Phaedra longs to be reunited with an identity that was stripped from her: her virginal youth. Phaedra was a secondary spoil of conquest, after Ariadne (654), for Theseus, and was forced into crossing the threshold from the realm of Diana into those of Venus and Juno. That is not to say that Phaedra was not once filled with passion for Theseus (645-7), but, rather, that she never had the opportunity to fully explore herself as a young person, and is now seeking to do just that with Hippolytus, who is in the prime of his life (620).

Before she is able to attempt reclamation of either her youth or her own clear conscience, Phaedra chooses to reveal her desires to Hippolytus herself rather than by means of a liaison. In her encounter with him onstage, Phaedra begins by deconstructing her identity as Hippolytus’ legal mother, and, in turn, degrades herself to an emotional status equivalent to being a slave to her semi-incestuous love interest (609-22). She continues by confessing that it is a combination of the traits of a young, idealized Theseus, which she sees in his son, and the otherness of his Scythian heritage that incite passion in her (645-65). Phaedra acknowledges that had Hippolytus trodded Cretan shores before his father that Ariadne would have chosen him, just as she has. Phaedra, however, is not able to understand that her longing for Hippolytus is a choice, and, in fact, argues: ‘*Et ipsa nostrae fata cognosco domus:* / *fugienda petimus;* ***sed mei non sum potens*** (698-9)*.*’ (Lat. ‘Even I recognize my family’s destined fate: we pursue what we should avoid. **But I’m not in control of my actions**.’) The description of her *furor* for her stepson, which would stretch to the ends of the earth (700-2), will later be echoed by Theseus as he condemns his son to death (922-44). It is the detail of her sordid *furor* which causes Hippolytus to draw his sword with the intent of ending Phaedra’s life, and, therefore, giving her the thing she wants second most in this world (c. 704): an escape.

Though she claims to have no control over her own *furor*, Phaedra has already made two existentially identifying choices which reveal her control over her own life: 1) to die; 2) to verbalize her passion herself to her potential lover. After the introduction of Theseus into this play, she must make another choice: does she destroy her own reputation or that of Hippolytus? Until Theseus threatens to torture the Nurse for information (882-4), Phaedra is intent upon dying without revealing the motivation for her demise. Once this threat is made, however, Phaedra claims that she was seduced at sword-point, and identifies her assailant by the royal blade that he left at the scene (888-97). For a woman who claims to have no control over her *furor*, Phaedra reveals that she has masterful control over her own fate where her honour is at stake. She again makes a definitive choice of character, and places her own reputation above the very life of Hippolytus. By that I mean that Phaedra was content with dying as long as only she, the Nurse, and Hippolytus were aware of her passion, but refused to allow Theseus to know the terms which were causing her to destroy herself because his knowledge would have also ruined her reputation in the eyes of her surviving family.

It is not until after the consequences of her accusations (i.e. the death of Hippolytus), that we again see Phaedra onstage. In her final scene, one in which she sets herself against Theseus, a near-hysterical Cretan beseeches the shattered corpse of Hippolytus to forgive her for causing his demise, and gazes upon his lifeless form searching for the beauty that her calculated actions destroyed (1168-83). While Theseus listens to his wife’s confession, he hears that Phaedra identifies her one claim to innocence in this situation: she would not join Theseus’ bed acting blameless (1186-8). Phaedra cannot rejoin Theseus sexually now that her actions have destroyed the Scythian-born prince. As she once again resigns herself to death, Phaedra confesses her love for Hippolytus, admits the false accusation of her rape, and absolves him of her sordid plot as she plunges the sword which she had used to accuse him as a rapist into her body (1191-1200). This is the final action, and an existentially intriguing one, for our central character. Though there have been many potential reasons for Phaedra to end her own existence, she chooses to do so in order to be reunited with her Hippolytus, and to absolve him of any crimes against her while not bearing the wrath of her husband. This action makes it clear that Seneca’s Phaedra was not as obsessed with her own reputation as her Euripidean counterpart; had she been, she would have allowed Hippolytus to bear the brunt of this dreadful situation. She is twice motivated in her choice to end her own life: she feels guilt for the situation (1179), and she hopes to be reunited with Hippolytus in death (1183). The evidence suggests that Phaedra was truly enamoured with her stepson, whereas Phaidra’s passion burned only in her loins. Though Seneca’s character was tossed between her own reputation and her desires, it was, ultimately, her passion that won out.

Having conducted a summary of Phaedra’s time on the stage, and having analysed her prominent existential choices in this drama, we must now turn to reviewing her relationships with others and with time itself. Like Phaidra, Phaedra appears to have very few close relationships; in fact, as we have established, even her relationship with her husband is lacking. Whereas the Euripidean, at least, had a chorus of servants to entertain her, Seneca’s character, within the dramatic timeline, only communicates freely with her Nurse and stepson. This is not to imply that Phaedra does nothing more than pine over her loneliness; in fact, Phaedra often busies herself with her loom, and with choral songs at the temple of Minerva (101-11); in this, she is much like her predecessor. Since Theseus began his most recent escapade, however, these activities and sleep itself have been strangers to our queen. Immediately prior to the action of the drama, this Cretan has done little but ‘yearn to drive game from their lairs, chase them, to hurl rigid javelins from (her) tender hand’ (111). It is when she acknowledges this yearning as an equation for a desire for Hippolytus that we first encounter her closest relationship: one with her Nurse.

The Nurse is a trusted confidante of Phaedra who is treated throughout most of the drama as an equal rather than a subservient figure. In fact, Phaedra acknowledges her as her own logical superior after the Nurse admonishes her that ‘Moral failings are worse than monsters. You can ascribe the latter to fate, but the former to character’ (144-5). For our Phaedra, however, logic is not able to trump *furor*. The Nurse then cautions Phaedra against overindulgence for fear of Theseus’ return (195-217); this advice, however, is also ignored for the sake of passion. This pattern in which the Nurse offers good counsel and Phaedra shuns it continues until Phaedra, at last, confesses, for the first time, that her intentions are firmly set on suicide. With this suicidal threat, the Nurse’s position changes from objecting against into fully embracing Phaedra’s passion (262-4). She clearly loves Phaedra, and attempts to keep her best interest at heart. This is reciprocated much later in the play when Theseus returns from the underworld; when is not able to secure from Phaedra the cause of her misery, he threatens to torture the information from the Nurse. The Cretan cares for her slave just as her slave cares for her, and intervenes to stop this barbaric extraction of information (884-5). The relationship between these two is more than simply one between mistress and slave, and is developed enough to be described as a friendship.

The final relationship that must be analysed in this section is the one between Phaedra and Hippolytus. Her place as the usurper of his mother’s bed will be evaluated in depth in the following section, which analyses Hippolytus, and will not be treated in detail here, but it does warrant mention that Phaedra’s introduction into the household is what stripped Hippolytus of his mother, and, simultaneously, gave him reason to openly hate all living women (578-9). This hatred is not yet deep enough to stop Hippolytus from performing his duties as a son and brother (629-33):

The heavenly gods will be just and return him to us.

But so long as god keeps our prayers in uncertainty,

I will look after my dear brothers with the caring they deserve,

And I will do everything in my power to make sure you do not feel widowed:

I will take my father’s place.

Prior to Phaedra’s confession of sexual desire for her stepson, Hippolytus treated her with the same amicability and respect that a son should show his mother; he even acknowledged Theseus’ children by her as siblings even though he hated her as part of womankind. This is the only detail of their relationship suggested in the text prior to her confession, and there is, therefore, not enough information from which we can fully understand the interactions between the two of them. It is, therefore, safe to say that there may be little more than his chiselled, Scythian features and air of ‘otherness’ which has drawn Phaedra’s love.

This section has established the existential essence of Phaedra. I have chosen to call hers an existential essence because there is little in her intertextual character that separates her from her prescribed actions: Phaedra is not a good wife to a good husband; she is, rather, a Cretan playing the part of a Cretan. She is driven by her own desires, and hides them only for the sake of her own shame; Phaidra hid her shame because hers was equated with that of her family; Phaedra gives little thought to others. The exception in which she thinks of another is when she sacrifices her stepson in place of her Nurse or herself, but not even a character as selfish as Phaedra can live with this guilt. She chooses to absolve Hippolytus of her false accusations, and attempts to recompense him by taking her own life, but even this action is not entirely selfless as one can derive from the text that Theseus punished his good, Amazonian wife with his blade, and what he would potentially do to Phaedra is unimaginable. Whereas Phaidra was making the best of a bad situation, Phaedra is making the worst of a good one.

**Seneca’s Hippolytus**

Having detailed the characteristics which existentially define Seneca’s Cretan queen, this section of the chapter will now do the same for her Scythian-featured stepson. Not only did Seneca shift this character from being the focal point of his tragedy, but he also altered many of the qualities which were unique to Euripides’ 428 BCE characterization. Like his dramatic foil, Hippolytus now has a much richer palette from which he may be painted as is evidenced by some of the alterations detailed in this chapter’s ontological review of Seneca’s influences. It is impossible to discuss Hippolytus without referencing his dramatic antecedent, and throughout this section, therefore, my work will examine the Senecan character portrait of this chaste, misogynistic prince under the lens of existentialism not only as an individual, but also as a response to his previous incarnation. The necessary distinctions will be drawn between the Hellenic and Roman characters, and said variations will be seminal in understanding the character’s identity.

*Summary*

Once again, a formulaic existential summary of Antiope’s son will be provided before this chapter delves deeply into his identity. *Existence Precedes Essence*: Throughout this section, we will be introduced to the concept of the literary and intertextual essences and existences. In the terms of his intertextual existence preceding his intertextual essence, Hippolytus is much more willing to compromise than his Athenian predecessor was. Though Hippolytus desires a life in the company of Diana separated from the yoke of civilisation, he is willing to sacrifice his own personal existence so that his prescribed essence as a good son to his father is not compromised. Though he personally blames women, specifically stepmothers, for all of the wrongs with humanity, Hippolytus is willing to tolerate Phaedra for the sake of his father. It is this undesirable compromise that, ultimately, destroys Hippolytus whereas Hippolytos was destroyed by stern rigidity.

*Time is of the Essence*: Hippolytus passes his time pursuing game through the woods in the company of other pure, young men and hunting dogs. He acts as the leader of this band, and is accepted as such either on merit of his hunting prowess or by virtue of his royal birth. Once again, however, Hippolytus has no meaningful relationships with mortals, and in this incarnation does not have a deep relationship with a divinity either.

*Freedom and Responsibility*: In choosing to separate himself from the city, Hippolytus takes upon himself the responsibility to behave in a heroic manner recollecting the attitudes of those who came before him. In attempting to reconcile this otherness with the essence of mankind in his own day and age, however, Hippolytus becomes responsible for his own downfall. He took upon himself the freedom to act against his society, and paid for said freedom with his own life because he was unable to actually bear his freedom.

*Humanism*: Hippolytus does not have a deep relationship with Diana, but he does consider himself her devotee. Because this dramatic text is so deeply rooted in Stoicism, this Hippolytus suggests that man can be good by emulating those who preceded him in the ancient past rather than by emulating divinities.

*Ethical Considerations are Paramount*: Much like his stepmother, Hippolytus is interesting because of his lack of ethical considerations. Whereas Hippolytos made ethical choices and stood by them in all matters, Hippolytus has half-accepted his own convictions, and dies not as a tragic character, but as a hypocritical man who was not sure what he desired from life.

*Analysis*

Before examining the attempted existential manipulation of Hippolytus by the Nurse, I must expand upon how this existential core, which was analysed thoroughly in Chapter II, is both existential and essential simultaneously for Seneca’s Hippolytus. Literary characters, especially receptions of former incarnations, by virtue of their reiteration are burdened by their former selves. In order for a character to be understood as an echo to a previous personification, some features of said character must remain unchanged. At the time that Seneca was writing his tragedy, the essential nature of this myth was the stringent virginity of Theseus’ son coming into opposition with the essential promiscuity of a Cretan woman. As we have already examined in the previous section, Phaedra does little to circumvent her own essence; she, rather, embraces it fully in identifying herself as an existential portrait against her former *tabula rasa*. Hippolytus does very much the same, but in a slightly different manner. Hippolytus who, like his Athenian predecessor, within the world of the dramatic text, stands in opposition to his essential identity as an Athenian prince, he must embrace his literary essence to do so. While shirking away from his intertextual essence in favour of a life free from the constraints and responsibilities of the city, Hippolytus embraces his literary essence as Theseus’ doomed son whose fate will be sealed by his own father’s unreasoning wrath. In short, for us to understand Hippolytus as a reception of Hippolytos, he must bear a resemblance to his literary forbearer in that he must set himself in opposition to the essential nature of his father, be lusted for by a stepmother-figure, be falsely accused of having sexual relations with her, and must be destroyed ultimately by Theseus’ wrath. This is not to suggest that the Roman character must be an identical replica of the Athenian, but that he must share with him similar characteristics. The manner by which these features are gained (i.e. by what manner Hippolytus is a virginal, chauvinistic huntsman) and how he projects them onto the world (i.e. his reactions to Phaedra) can and should be different from his literary predecessors. It is these existential variations within the world of the text that allow Hippolytus to persist in being an interesting character because it is they that identify him as different.

There are certain essential expectations which we have for the figure of Hippolytus due to his Euripidean, Ovidian, and Virgilian predecessors, and most of our anticipations for this Scythian-bred character will be fulfilled in Seneca’s reiteration of his tragic final day in the sun. These characteristics, with which we have become the most familiar, underlay nearly every rendition of the Amazon’s son, and, therefore, provide him with an essential structure, a prescribed identity. As he was before, Hippolytus is an avid huntsman who spends most of his time stalking game through the Diana’s forests. When we first encounter him, and he is the first character to appear onstage, Hippolytus is issuing orders to his hunting party as how to best utilize their own strengths and weaknesses as well as those of their various hounds in bringing down wild beasts (1-53). Hippolytus, perhaps by virtue of his royal birth or by his own proficiency as an outdoorsman, is the leader of these men, and in emulating a capable military commander in antiquity, he turns to a higher power for guidance and assistance in his exploits. Reminiscent of a Roman general invoking the warrior-goddess Minerva or, more commonly, an Athenian general supplicating Athena, Hippolytus beseeches Diana, a *diva virago* (Lat. man-like goddess), to lend her expertise and blessing to his endeavour (54-84) because he is confident that ‘The hunter that goes into the woods / with (her) goodwill finds prey held fast / inside his nets’ (73-5). It is here in our first encounter with the young prince that we are once again acquainted with two of his most defining features: he is an avid outdoorsman and a loyal devotee to this *diva virago*. In fact, it is interesting to note that Seneca’s reception of this character solely identifies himself as a huntsman at this point in the dramatic action whereas his Euripidean predecessor firmly established himself as an Artemisian cultist from the onset both as an outdoorsman and as a perpetual virgin. This preliminary self-identification may well be because Euripides’ play opens with statues of Artemis and Aphrodite in opposition to one another, and therefore immediately plunges Hippolytos into the depths of sexual tension, whereas we join Seneca’s Hippolytus prior to a hunt in an environment bereft of obvious tones of sexuality.

It is not far within the text, however, that we are made indubitably aware of the young prince’s stances on both women and sexuality entirely. Like his Attic antecedent, Hippolytus is a maternal orphan; his mother was killed by his father so that he could claim Phaedra as his bride. We learn from a conversation between the Nurse and Phaedra that the young prince responded to this wrongful uxoricide by embracing the characteristics of his mother’s barbaric, matriarchal culture (226-32):

Nurse: He (Theseus) was cruel even to a chaste wife,

the barbarian Antiope, who felt his savage hand.

But suppose your husband can be bent from his anger –

who is going to bend Hippolytus’ intractable spirit?

He hates and avoids the whole race of women,

He stubbornly rejects the very idea of marriage;

you would recognize his Amazonian lineage.

Whereas his mother and her people eventually recognized the necessity of the opposite sex for the sake of reproduction, Hippolytus has not, and shuns the concept of coupling. Phaedra’s Nurse, in an attempt to save the life of her mistress from her own hands, seeks the approval and aid of both Diana and Hecate in an endeavour to shatter Hippolytus’ literary existential core as an eternal virgin (406-30). When the Nurse approaches him grimly without revealing the nature of her audience, the prince’s subtext reveals that although he may not approve of the fairer sex in any form, he is, nonetheless, able to remain civil with them. Rather than fleeing immediately from her or ordering her away, Hippolytus, as an admirable yet possibly neurotic young man, upon seeing her grave face enquires into the wellbeing of his father, stepmother, and stepsiblings in a manner reminiscent of his father in Euripides’ tragedy (431-4).

During this conversation with the Nurse, it is also made clear that Hippolytus chooses to pursue a virginal life for reasons beyond reverence to his mother’s memory. In retort to the Nurse’s argument that living in isolation from the human race is a squandering of the gifts of the gods (435-81), Hippolytus states that he follows an isolated path of purity in order to emulate the ancestral Golden Age (482-563). By doing this, Hippolytus intends to free himself from corrupt societal conventions including greed, slavery, crime, treachery, deceit, and laze so that he may be more aligned with the *sapientes*. Hippolytus blames the devolution of humanity on the bloody politics of Mars, but claims that the continuation of this corruption is the fault of women, specifically stepmothers. Until the end of this recollection of the famous diatribe, Hippolytus’ Stoic argument against the vices of modern society has been steeped in logic, but it is here that his logical mind subsides, and his illogical prejudices resurface. The young prince himself acknowledges that his hatred is irrational, but may be part of his ‘nature’ (i.e. existence) (565-7). At the conclusion of his conversation with the Nurse, Hippolytus makes a subconscious acknowledgement of how deeply his mother’s death has affected his psychology when he says, ‘This one comfort I derive from the death of my mother: now I can hate all women’ (578-9). While it is difficult to determine whether or not Hippolytus was a misogynist prior to the death of his mother, it is evident within the text that the only mortal woman whose memory he currently respects is Antiope’s. Hippolytus, in this regard, embraces his literary essence as part of his intertextual existence.

In the terms of intertextual essence, we can establish the essential expectations of Hippolytus as both a prince and a good son because he must adhere to his literary essence as Theseus’ son, but we must also be aware that in terms of intertextual existence, he chooses to distance himself from these and all other societal ties so that he may attempt to lead a life free of corruption. Hippolytus himself has made it clear that he despises women – specifically stepmothers – because he holds them responsible for the degeneration of society citing the crimes of Medea as support for his claim (562-3). Effectively, Hippolytus blames the fairer sex for the degradation of civilisation because he holds stepmothers responsible for the destruction of his family unit. Literarily, Hippolytus is required to be a chauvinist, and Seneca has provided an intertextual reason for this hatred: a childhood trauma which caused an abandonment syndrome.

Because of Phaedra’s intertextual passion for her stepson, the existential and essential identities of Hippolytus come into conflict with one another: he cannot respect his stepmother as is expected of him by his father and society without compromising his existential identity as a cultural separatist. When these two identities come into conflict during Hippolytus’ interaction with his stepmother, the young prince, initially, compromises his own existential core for his essential expectations. Theseus’ son swears by the highest god that in his father’s absence, he will serve as the guardian of the household, its ideologies, and its occupants while doing everything in his own power to make sure that Phaedra does not feel widowed (629-33). It is in swearing these things that Hippolytus opens himself to the verbal pursuit of his stepmother. He goes as far as to demand that she speak plainly in making her requests of him, and upon hearing Phaedra’s plain-spoken profession of her love for him, Hippolytus more fully embraces the essential nature of humanity, which he has fought against so adamantly: he becomes physically violent. When Phaedra seeks to supplicate Hippolytus, he tosses her hands from his, grabs her aggressively, and drags her to the altar of Diana along with his drawn sword (704-9). This act is extremely symbolic of Hippolytus’ full embrace of his intertextual essential nature and, therefore, his downfall. By taking up the sword against another human being, Hippolytus is forsaking his vows against causing harm to other people, and is, therefore, turning away from the Golden Age ideology, which he has attempted to embrace. This action, furthermore, fully identifies Hippolytus as the son of Theseus: not only is he bearing a blade with the royal crest emblazoned upon it, which marks him as Theseus’ son, but he is also preparing himself to strike down Phaedra for her profession of love in an act that would mirror the cause and murder of his own mother. Whereas his father embraces his essentially violent nature, and takes Antiope’s life, Hippolytus continues to find himself in conflict with this same essence and his chosen existence of pacifism. As he is not able to take Phaedra’s life in order to silence her on this matter, Hippolytus diverges from his and his father’s shared essence, and, ultimately, causes his own death. Whereas Hippolytos was tangled in a web of words and deceit, Hippolytus is destroyed by his own moral compromise.

This section has conducted an analysis of the dichotomous nature of the Hippolytus character in Seneca’s 1st-century Roman adaptation of the Phaedra myth. Throughout the section, we have established that when dealing with reception, there are two distinct essences and existences: the first is the literary which is understood by examining how the character portrait is a reception and vehicle of the literary tradition (i.e. Hippolytus as Hippolytos); the second is the intertextual which is understood by examining how the character portrait is crafted within the literary realm as a response to stimuli within the fictitious world. Hippolytus, like his predecessor, has essential intertextual expectations of being a good son, but has essential literary expectations of standing in opposition to his father and stepmother. These two essences are reconciled in Hippolytus in that he attempts to serve as a good son to his father and mother equally, but this is also where the intertextual existential characteristics become clear. Existentially, Hippolytus only acts as a good son to his father in his absence; he would rather embrace the culture not only of his mother, but also of his forbearers in separating himself fully from society and its vices. It is this attempt at reconciliation of his intertextual essence and existence that leads to a violent outbreak by Hippolytus against Phaedra, and, ultimately, causes the fulfilment of his literary essence: the doomed son of Theseus.

Ultimately, this Senecan drama is centred on a conflict between desires: Phaedra’s desire for her stepson, and Hippolytus’ desires to reconcile his own prescribed essence with his chosen existence. The tragedy of this drama is not the death of the Athenian prince under false accusations, but is, rather, the result of non-reconciliation: Phaedra is not able to resolve the conflict between her own suffering and her passion for Hippolytus; Hippolytus is not able to resolve his desired self with his actual. Our characters lose their lives because they cannot obtain the imagined while retaining the actual. Phaedra is too external a character: she blames others for her own faults, and imagines an idealized utopia within another. Hippolytus is too solipsistic a character: he imagines the wrongs of the greater world to be the same as those rooted in his own psychologically traumatic past. In short, these characters are tragic not because of their fates, but how they choose to follow them. Neither Phaedra nor Hippolytus could craft an idealized world, and both lost their lives because of this.

**Racine’s Ontological Shifts**

The principal focus of this section of the chapter is the last piece of secular drama written by Jean-Baptiste Racine:[[194]](#footnote-194) *Phèdre*. This text is exceptional in my study as it is not an Anglophone adaptation of the Hippolytos/Phaidra plotline. This five-act, alexandrine[[195]](#footnote-195) tragedy, rather, was first performed on 1 January 1677 at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, home of the royal troupe of actors in Paris, during the Classicism movement.[[196]](#footnote-196) Because of this cultural movement’s prominence in France, Racine was able to craft the (arguably) most influential and most eloquently written reiteration of the Phaidra myth in the world to date. Not only because of this tragedy’s greater cultural influence, but, more importantly, because of its radical impact upon later treatments of the characters of Phaidra and Hippolytos, it cannot avoid being included in this study. In this section, therefore, I will briefly examine some of the disapprovals that Racine faced from English critics due to the notable alterations that he made to the traditional plotline. After this brief discourse of variation, I will briefly elaborate upon the earliest version of the Hippolytos myth to be performed in English – an adaptation of Racine’s *magnum opus*. Once these matters have been addressed, I will, again, perform a Psychoanalytic Existentialist analysis of the play’s eponymous Athenian queen.

Before 1850, Racine’s work had never been translated into English, and any Englishman with an opinion on the *Phèdre*, or any other of Racine’s works, would have formed it from a perusal of adaptations made during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[[197]](#footnote-197) This is not to suggest that there were no French-speaking Englishmen in Racine’s lifetime, but rather, that the common person was not a Francophone, and that most denizens of Great Britain would have only known Racine through adaptation and commentary, some of which were turned into anti-French propaganda for their English audiences.[[198]](#footnote-198)

There were still fewer people who were writing English commentaries on Racine’s work in the seventeenth century. In fact, the only two of note are John Crowne’s remarks on *Andromaque*,[[199]](#footnote-199) and John Dryden’s criticism of *Phèdre* in the preface to *All for Love*. In his criticism, Dryden raises three charges against Racine: 1) changing the traditional character of Hippolytos (i.e. altering both his intertextual essence and existence); 2) Gallicizing a Hellenic hero; and 3) having Hippolyte show an absurd concern for decency and good manners befitting a Frenchman. Dryden is not alone in the first two accusations. A number of French critics, including Subligny,[[200]](#footnote-200) faulted Racine giving Hippolyte a love interest in the form of Aricie, and for allowing this aspect of his new character to modify greatly his behaviour. Saint-Évremond,[[201]](#footnote-201) in 1666, criticized Racine for Gallicizing Alexandre and other Greek heroes in his dramas. Dryden, however, is alone in his criticism of applying French manners and decency to Hippolyte; this may well be because he himself, as a seventeenth-century Englishman, has no love for French custom.[[202]](#footnote-202)

Having discussed the criticism of Racine’s *Phèdre* in England, our survey will now turn toward the most influential translations and adaptations of this play. We will begin our study thirty years after the Racinean premiere, in 1707, with Edmund Smith’s *Phaedra and Hippolitus*. The current performance history data suggests that this was the first version of the Hippolytos myth to be performed in English,[[203]](#footnote-203) and that its premiere was held in high critical esteem on the night and throughout the remainder of the century.[[204]](#footnote-204) The change of language was not the only revolutionary change to the myth and its previous incarnations by Smith. In *Racine and English Classicism*,[[205]](#footnote-205) Katherine Wheatley outlines the dramatic action of this play, and notes its diversions from the Racine, from which it is mostly derived. Within the text, a number of notable alterations are made. The first change is that the drama’s action takes place in Crete rather than Troezen or Athens. The second change is much more interesting. Phaedra’s nurse, called Oenone by Racine, is replaced by a combination of two figures: Lycon, the Minister of State who hates Hippolitus and fears his possible ascension to the throne, and Ismena, a half-portrait of Aricie, who is the daughter of Theseus’ enemy and Phèdre’s lady-in-waiting. Lycon embodies the negative characteristics traditionally found in the figure of the Nurse: he is cold, calculating, and hates Hippolitus; Ismena, on the other hand, personifies the positive traits found within the same figure: she cares for the queen, and wants to see her protected even though she and Hippolitus are romantically involved. The third and final alteration, though there are many more, to the text that I will mention is the most radical: Hippolitus is ordered by Theseus to kill himself, and he, apparently does so, but it is later revealed that he has outwitted Crantander (the man charged with overseeing Hippolitus’ suicide), and has returned unharmed. This change to the text is without precedent. Even in the Roman mythology of Virbius – the resurrection of Hippolytus as a deity in the grove of Aricia[[206]](#footnote-206) – the physical deaths of both the prince and the queen are required.

It is unlikely that these changes effected the reception of the initial performance because many would not have known the intricacies of Racine’s work, but we do know that the audience did not like the play, whereas many critics gave it wonderful reviews as a script to be read if not as a performance to be viewed. ‘As late as 1752, one critic at least is still willing to give the play unqualified praise. In the prefatory essay of an anonymous poem appears the statement: “*The Distressed Mother* and the *Briton* of Philips, and the *Phaedra and Hippolitus* of Smith, are Tragedys which will pass through all Ages with the Approbation of Men of Taste and Judgement.”’[[207]](#footnote-207) Although this marked the final glowing recommendation of the script, Smith’s *Phaedra and Hippolitus* continued to be read well into the eighteenth century as a ‘regular’ tragedy of some value.[[208]](#footnote-208) Finally, in the nineteenth century, any faults found with the play had their blame shifted from the shoulders of Euripides and Seneca onto those of Racine as Anglophones were given the opportunity finally to hear the words of the Frenchman in actual translation. With this change in theatrical culture, the popularity of Edmund Smith’s play began to fade into the recesses of history regardless of its once shining reputation. The theatre of nineteenth-century England was not the same as it had been in the previous centuries: no longer was there a ‘preference in sentimental tragedy for the central figure to be a suffering female,’ but, rather, there had been a shift of focus aimed at unmarried women and their asexual virtue.[[209]](#footnote-209)

**Jean-Baptiste Racine’s Phèdre**

Having established an historical shift in English acceptance for the suffering heroine, it is at this point that my analysis will turn toward Racine’s Phèdre as a tragic figure deserving of a Psychoanalytic Existentialistic analysis. As has been done previously, this section of the chapter will now turn its attention toward the Athenian queen – Phèdre – in an attempt to provide a clear existential character portrait of her. We will analyse her actions, motives, and relationships in order to understand who she is in 1677 when Jean-Baptiste Racine reimagines her as a, still, haunted soul who is beset by love for her stepson. As we have not seen in the past, however, her motives for pursuing Hippolyte are not entirely motivated by the cosmos: with the reported death of her husband, Phèdre is given just cause to pursue her stepson as a potential lover. With the kingdom of Athens torn between elevating one of three new leaders – Phèdre’s son, Hippolyte, and the last remaining descendant of Pallas – the queen seeks to consolidate her power with that of her stepson in an attempt to assure that her own son becomes a king rather than a slave to the enemies of Thésée. What she does not suspect, however, is that Hippolyte will not side with her, but, rather, will lend his support (and his heart) to the young Aricie – the surviving sister of the fifty Pallantidai slaughtered by Thésée in order to secure the throne of Athens.

*Summary*

As we have done several times now, I will outline the defining features that make Phèdre a believable, humanlike character. *Existence Precedes Essence*: Like all Phaidra archetypes before her, she is meant to be a good woman from a cursed house. Try as she might, her essence is tainted by the familial curse that haunted both her sister and mother. If she were to escape from this routine, she would not be recognizable as a Phaidra, and, therefore, this aspect of her identity remains intact. As a mother and wife, Phèdre is fiercely loyal regardless of the passions that burn within her. The aspect of her existence that makes her so interesting, however, is hinted at throughout the play, but is only firmly established in the fourth act: her fierceness as a lover. Phèdre continually attempts to seduce Hippolyte, and it is not until she learns of his passion for Aricie that she finally commits to ending her life. Phèdre makes the ultimate profession of love, and the grandest existential statement: she chooses no longer to exist because she has no more hope of requited love.

*Time is of the Essence*: There is no Phaidra-figure who is not wasting away under the affliction of her love for her stepson. Just like her predecessors and successors, Phèdre allows her passion to devour her cancerously from the inside until, at last, the oozing pustules on her soul are so rampant that her nurse[[210]](#footnote-210) both perceives and understands the nature of her torment. In fact, Oenone and the queen have a rather developed relationship which, interestingly, sees power lying often in the hands of the slave rather than the mistress. This power – derived from love – keeps Phèdre alive for as long as possible, but, ultimately, her own selfishness takes hold as she casts aside her one friend in order to end her life.

*Freedom and Responsibility*: For a majority of this drama, the queen fights effectively against this amorous passion – to the extent that she previously implored her husband to banish his own son from Troezen. Though she allows her passions to take hold from time to time, Phèdre is quite aware that the choice is hers when she attempts to seduce her stepson. In this, she is fully embracing her existential *Freedoms and Responsibilities*. She tries to suppress her passion, modify it, express it, and coerce it, but, at last, accepts that there is nothing more that she can do in order to bring Hippolyte around to loving her. The only option that Phèdre sees throughout course of the play, but most fully at the end of it, is to take her own life in order to end the cycle of suffering and shame.

*Humanism*: Phèdre rarely blames a higher power for her condition, and when she does, it seems to be in an allegorical sense rather than in any real religious regard. This is the only relationship with religion that is made within the text, and, therefore, we will not be further discussing this existential principle. As a product of this age of Humanism, Phèdre alone is accountable for herself even though she may not hold herself entirely responsible for her desires; she is still liable for how she chooses to pursue them.

*Ethical Considerations are Paramount*: Many could argue that any woman who is willing to subject herself to this silence is a paragon of self-denial, and, in response, others would argue that any woman who would willingly seek every alternative to force a man into loving her is either a hopeless romantic or, as Hippolyte sees it, an exemplar of depravity. While both or either of these may be argued, we are fully aware that Phèdre wrestles with these emotions and how she chooses to cope with them. Continually she considers the long-lasting implications of her actions. If she allows herself to go quietly into the dark, her son will become a slave, and she cannot handle that disgracing of her progeny. With Thésée dead, she cannot take the chance that his kingdom will be lost to a rival family, and she seeks not only to sate her own appetite, but also to conjoin her political authority with that of her stepson. She cannot love Thésée again, knowing that her passion for Hippolyte burns so brightly, and she cannot love Hippolyte because he will not return the courtesy. This is why she chooses to end her own life. Ultimately, my analysis will reveal that this Phaidra portrait is one of the most aware of her own actions and the implications of them.

*Analysis*

Having had her image repainted by Euripides (twice), Seneca, Apollodorus, Ovid, Virgil, and other writers of Classical Greece and Rome, it is only logical that in a new period of French Classicism that Phèdre would remerge from the mind and pen of one of the great playwrights of the period. Again, she has been reimagined, and, again, her essential identity and existential crises have changed. Her literary essential nature is still that of a queen bereft of a husband. She is a woman who fell in love with her stepson, and she will still commit a form of suicide because this knowledge is made public. As with every Phaidra before and after, these traits are unwavering. Neither has her intertextual essence been altered much in Racine’s piece. As with her literary antecedents, she is: a Cretan princess turned Athenian queen; an isolated figure accompanied only by a few attendants; the second abandoned bride of Thésée after her own sister – Ariadne; a mother guarding her son’s best interests while she still lives.

In company with her Senecan and Euripidean predecessors, Phèdre is bearing the heavy burden of love for her stepson, and has not mentioned this to anyone because she is confident that she neither could nor should seduce the young man. In I.iii.116-143, Phèdre reveals, through means of Oenone, that she is in love with her stepson – Hippolyte. Whereas we are not sure for how long her antecedents pined over the young prince, we know that this queen’s ailment is not a sudden onset of madness or delirium. In fact, she has been obsessed with the son of Thésée since very early in her marriage to his father:

My wound is not so recent. Scarcely had I

Been bound to Theseus by the marriage yoke,

And happiness and peace seem’d so well secured,

When Athens show’d me my proud enemy.

To see him, and my soul grew all distraught;

A mist obscured my vision, and my voice

Falter’d, my blood ran cold, then burn’d like fire;

…

Against myself, at last, I raised revolt,

And stirr’d my courage up to persecute

The enemy I loved. To banish him

I wore a step-dame’s harsh and jealous carriage,

With ceaseless cries I clamour’d for his exile,

Till I had torn him from his father’s arms.[[211]](#footnote-211)

This confession, which gives reason to the exile of her stepson, reveals that Phèdre has long been obsessed with the young Hippolyte. At first, she ordered him from Troezen, and now, with her having relocated to Athens, she must encounter her love and her strife once more. She has, in turn, resigned herself to death so that her torment may end, and so that she may not shame herself or her family (I.iii.20). This is an opinion from which she is not swayed until it has been announced by a servant that her husband resides now and forever in the halls of the dead (I.iv). This misguided revelation of the death of Thésée prompts Oenone – Phèdre’s nurse – to convince her mistress to live for the sake of her son, who would rightfully inherit the throne of Athens in lieu of his father’s death, but who would be reduced to slavery under the reign of Hippolyte (I.iv.1-9). In order to guarantee that Phèdre be enticed by this prospect – in case the well-being of her son is not enough to deter her from her suicidal tendencies – Oenone reminds her queen that there is still yet another who may inherit the throne: Aricie – the one surviving member of the Pallantidai dynasty who is kept prisoner in the palace of Thésée. The nurse plants the idea that if Hippolyte and Phèdre are able to unify their claims to power, they will be able to assure that Aricie never rise to lead the nation (I.iv.9-30).

In this aspect of her identity, Phèdre is radically different from her previous incarnations. She claims to be motivated to live not only because of her own familial reputation nor solely because of the opportunity to pursue Hippolyte without concern of semi-incestuousness, as Thésée is believed to be dead, but also because she does not wish to see Aricie claim her husband’s throne. This is interesting in the evolution of her character portrait because this multi-faceted cause for concern suggests that there are deeper levels to Phèdre, and she is, therefore, more psychologically complex than her predecessors. This multiplicity, however, is revealed to be weakly grounded, as Phèdre gives way to her destined archetype once again.

When confronted by the object of her affection, Phèdre, at first, forgets how to speak (II.v.1-3). Only when Oenone reminds her of her plan is the queen able to even verbally acknowledge her stepson. Although she has convinced herself that she must consolidate her power with his in order to protect her son and her husband’s legacy by assuring that Aricie remain disenfranchised, this all gives way to her aspirations to be romantically involved with Hippolyte. Though her conspiracy may be quite developed, her attempts at persuasiveness are quickly overcome by her amorous desire: within thirteen lines of the opening of the scene, Phèdre’s mood shifts from empowered to cowering. She begs Hippolyte for forgiveness for his exile from Troezen (II.v.20-9), asks that he guide her son onto the road to manhood because she is confident that he will soon be bereft of both of his parents (II.v.8-10), and, ultimately, begins to drone on about the features that the father and son share (II.v.55-83). Phèdre herself acknowledges that she herself came with a weak sense of purpose in confronting Hippolyte, and that is why her political appeal gave way to an amorous revelation (II.v.114-7). Though a seemingly deep character psychologically, Phèdre is still an irrational beast when confronted by her desired lover, and she is not able to knowingly escape from either her literary or intertextual essences.

Rather than accepting responsibility for her profession, which may very well destroy her reputation, she accuses Oenone of lending counsel which ‘lent [her] fresh life, and told [her she] might love him’ (III.i.36). It is understood that the nurse is simply attempting to assist her mistress in staying alive, but Phèdre objects to this interference as detrimental. Because of Phèdre’s harsh words to her oldest friend, the nurse attempts to calm the queen by reminding her that it is – as anyone would suspect, rather from within the text or the audience – the nature of Hippolyte to not be moved by love. He is half-barbarian – remembering that his mother was a Scythian, who somehow learned to love – and is thought to bear a hatred for all women. As Phèdre considers that Hippolyte was conceived of an unlikely union, she believes that there still may be a possibility for her romance to succeed as it did between Thésée and his barbarian mistress. In another attempt to lure her stepson into her waiting arms, the queen sends Oenone with an official offer of the kingdom: she will make Hippolyte king – while securing his silence on a potentially shameful situation – if he will sit beside of her on the throne (III.i.52-76). Whereas her Euripidean predecessor would have committed suicide by now, and her Senecan antecedent would have made accusations of rape, Phèdre is not yet willing to end her pursuit of passion for Hippolyte.

Phèdre’s amorous quest only subsides when she is made aware that Thésée, in fact, did escape from the clutches of the underworld, and has returned to Athens (III.iii). With this revelation, her ploy to lure Hippolyte into her bedroom by offering him the keys to the kingdom becomes moot. In fact, the wheel of fortune has come full cycle for this Cretan queen. She has lost not only her potential political stranglehold of the city, but has also besmirched her own reputation not only for herself, but also, and more importantly, for her political and romantic enemy. Phèdre has again decided to embrace suicide: the previous occasion was due to her cancerous silence, this time for her shameful vociferousness. Like her Senecan antecedent, Phèdre suppressed her emotional outpouring until the interference of her most trusted confidante convinced her that there was nothing worth dying for in this life; in keeping true to her literary essence, this *peripeteia* (Gr. reversal of circumstances) has convinced her that she must turn back to her original plan, which existed only in isolation without an external catalyst. Just like the queens that have preceded her, this French reimagining is brought to her knees again because rather than acting on her own, she informs Oenone of her plan. Having seen Phèdre grow from swaddling clothes, the nurse is not yet willing to wrap her in a burial shroud; she argues that there is enough evidence against the wild, half-Amazon to allow him to be punished rather than her (III.iii.61-8). Even though Phèdre claims to look upon Hippolyte and see only ‘a monster frightful to [her] eyes’ (III.iii.60), she battles with the concept of wantonly slandering his innocence just to cover up her misdeeds (III.iii.69). Ultimately, however, Phèdre’s will to die has not yet peaked, and like all of her other existential variants, she succumbs to the web spun by Oenone: she becomes convinced that Thésée will not punish Hippolyte violently because a father ‘how e'ver enraged / will do no more than banish him again. / A father, when he punishes, remains / a father, and his ire is satisfied / with a light sentence’ (III.iv.75-9). Though, as the story goes, Oenone could not be more wrong, Phèdre is willing to accept the lie in favour of losing her life, and continues to leave her fate in the hands of her friend (III.iii.87-8).

Oenone, in attempting to protect her charge, seeks out Thésée, and whispers a lie into his ear: Hippolyte has raped Phèdre repeatedly – both in Athens and Troezen – but the queen has never been able to verbalize the crimes against him. It is only now that his carelessness has caught him, and he has left his sword at the scene of the crime (IV.i), which is an act able to accuse him, as we have seen previously in the work of Seneca, more viciously than words. When Phèdre encounters Thésée toward the end of the fourth act, she is, at first, rather anxious about the implications of her actions: she has destroyed not only an innocent young man, but also, and more importantly, the object of her desires (IV.iv.1-14). The queen becomes inflamed with passion against Hippolyte when Thésée reveals to her that his son claims to love Aricie (IV.iv.20-1). Previously, Phèdre had assumed that Hippolyte did not have amorousness toward her because he, in keeping with cultural and literary tradition, essentially is meant to love no one. When she learns that this is not the case, and that he, in fact, loves a woman who is not her, Phèdre shifts from a cold pillar of indifference into a once again flaming tower of passion (IV.vi.53-5). Now knowing that she can neither have him because of Thésée’s return nor would she because his heart belongs to Aricie, Phèdre is finally reconciled to death. The guilt is too much for her to bear, and the pain of having lost Hippolyte to another wounds her more deeply (IV.vi.56-81). She will die this day, but like when a star dies, she will not go quietly: her passion will be revealed to burn brighter in its final moments than it has in its entire existence. Thésée will learn the passionate truth from her mouth as a poison remaining from the days when Medea lived in the palace takes her life.

Ultimately, upon having analysed Phèdre we have learned that she spends her time mostly in isolation, as is typical of her particular literary essence. Her one friend tries to accomplish much for her, but, at the end of the story, the queen is meant to take her own life. This figure does not escape her literary essence (as she shouldn’t), no matter how much she breaks away from her intertextual essence as a good queen seeking to do what’s right for her son. This Phèdre is set on dying, and though she changes her mind frequently, it is, ultimately, not her shame that destroys her, but her pride. Though she can exist in a world where Hippolyte does not love her, she cannot go on living in one in which he loves another. At her core, her distinct characteristic is simple: jealousy.

**Jean-Baptiste Racine’s Hippolyte**

Throughout this section, I will briefly analyse one of the foils to the Cretan queen: her half-Amazon stepson – Hippolyte. Though there are qualities of the prince’s which have changed greatly (e.g. becoming an exemplar of seventeenth-century French aristocracy), at the core of his literary essence he remains the same: he is a son set upon by his stepmother in the absence of his father, and he will be destroyed by the same ferocity that allowed his father to seduce his barbarian mother. It is a sad fate for Hippolyte, but those are his defining literary features. Unlike his predecessors (and many of his successors), however, this barbarian-bred pseudo-prince is not an utterly deplorable chauvinist and misogynist. Therefore, I will highlight some of the relationships that Hippolyte has, but will reveal, ultimately, the one intertextual existential feature that most wholly separates him from other princes examined in this text: his love.

*Summary*

The intertextual characteristics that define Hippolyte as a unique individual rather than a literary reimagining are interesting. *Existence Precedes Essence*: Not only does he attempt to break his literary essence as the antithesis of his father, and protector of his mother’s reputation, but he also tries to emulate the better characteristics of both. He is attempting to highlight the positive traits of both of his parents in order to establish his own identity; he is neither overly attached to his mother nor is he exceedingly critical of his father. In this merging, he succumbs to love, he wants to rid the world of monstrous atrocities, and he desires to fulfil the wishes of his father. In fact, he desires so greatly to make his father proud that he is willing to flee to the ends of the earth in order not to love Aricie because it would cause shame to Thésée. Though he has long tried to embrace the harshness of his Scythian mother’s people, he too has been subdued by the worldly charms of the king of Athens. In short, though Hippolyte, as a reception of Hippolytos, should be a cruel misogynist with daddy issues, he is, instead, a caring, romantic young man who wishes to please his father at the risk of betraying his own desires.

*Time is of the Essence*: Another manner in which Hippolyte separates drastically from his literary antecedents is covered by this category. Hippolyte is not an avid huntsman, but is, rather, just fulfilling one of the expectations of the court in tracking animals. Whereas for Hippolytos, hunting was a definitive characteristic, which defined his existential nature against his society, Hippolyte is embracing an essential distinction of the aristocracy. Regardless of how the Frenchman views the place of hunting in society, it is not an activity by which he defines himself. In fact, the prince does not seem to know what his own defining feature is. Throughout the course of the drama, Hippolyte spends much of his time attempting to come to terms with his own mutable existence. Whereas his predecessors would have been forced to deal with this existential crisis in isolation, Hippolyte is accompanied by Theramenes and, eventually, Aricie in coming to understand himself. He, in a new invention by Racine, has a support network.

*Freedom and Responsibility*: As we have established throughout this chapter, this tragedy was written during an era of Humanism, and Racine holds his characters responsible for themselves. Because of the freedom allotted them by the cosmos, it can be assumed that all of the actions of this young prince are driven by his own personal code of morals, which are highly motivated by the culture in which he was written and lived (i.e. seventeenth-century France). Hippolyte’s most pressing responsibility is to decide between offending his father by defending his own *eukleia* and allowing himself to be punished unjustly by professing his love for a forbidden captive. Eventually, after a fierce internal struggle, the Amazon’s son defends himself against Phèdre’s accusations by revealing his own love for Aricie. In doing this, not only does he burden himself with more disapproval from his father. All that he has done by taking this path is place more blame on himself. He comes to accept that the accusations made against him by his stepmother are impossible to disprove, and reluctantly embraces his own exile handed down from his father. Although his intention was to leave behind everything in his known world anyway, he chooses to accept this in knowing that his love for Aricie is made public knowledge. To him, the only matters of any importance are his love for his hidden bride, and an attempt at clearing his good name.

*Humanism*: As with Phèdre in this particular play, Hippolyte seems to have no established relationship with divinity. His only references to any god by name are when he mentions that Neptune is the patron of his father – Thésée – and when he invokes ‘chaste Dian, and the Queen / Of Heav’n’ (V.i.77-8). Beyond these mentions of named Olympians (albeit in their Roman guises), this tragedy is located entirely in the mortal realm, and Phèdre’s dramatic foil embodies the characteristics ascribed to a French aristocrat not out of religious piety, but, rather, due to social expectation.

*Ethical Considerations are Paramount*: As an existentially enlightened figure, Thésée’s son is held responsible for his own actions and thoughts, and he does so out of loyalty to himself and the people around him rather than due to a religious creed. Throughout the drama, Hippolyte is assaulted by accusations from society, and he bears them internally in order not to cause emotional or societal suffering to those for whom he cares. With a profession of love for his new bride – Aricie – the prince allows himself to be exiled from his home. He professes that he clings most fiercely to love, and, indeed, he goes to his own death not only because he chooses to validate his philosophies with practice, but also because he wants to remain a good and faithful son.

*Analysis*

With the opening of this play, we do not first encounter Hippolyte either fresh from or preparing for the hunt. Instead, we find him in a condition very reminiscent of the Phaidra-archetypes that have come before: he is preparing to flee from the life that he knows. After having been exiled to this land by order of his stepmother, Hippolyte established an independent and happy life in Troezen. Now, years later, his mind is wracked because his life is no longer bereft of the spectre of his father and his Cretan bride.

Thésée has brought his family to Troezen, and abandoned them six months ago so that he may take on a quest alongside of his friend, and he has yet to return. When he was his son’s age, Thésée would have gallivanted out on his own in pursuit of monsters or women until he met Phèdre. The Cretan woman helped Thésée to mature, and ‘bound him / by better ties’ (I.i.76-95). Now, in the absence of his father, the young prince is struck by the same wanderlust. He has aspirations to trod the globe, to be worthy of the names of both his father and his mother (III.v.12-32), and to prove himself as an individual. In this very speech, Hippolyte reveals, for the only time in this play, that he is a hunter, his ‘youth of idleness / has shown its skill enough o’er paltry foes / that range the woods.’ Very interestingly, this is the only reference to this French character portrait as a huntsman because that is not his defining characteristic. Hippolyte desires to be a good and noble man, not an idle member of society. He desires to leave not only his father’s family but also his home in order to grow.

In previous iterations, the literary prince, with whom we have become quite familiar, has always revelled in the chase, and has always been closely associated with the goddess whose realm it is. This is no longer the case. Hippolyte has stalked animals in the woods not out of spite for his father, but because this is what a good nobleman does. His life has become comfortable, and it is not until the reintroduction of his father’s house does a form of wanderlust set upon him. He is no longer content to lead a life of nobility. He, rather, desires to test his mettle as generations before him have: he must physically encounter a monster. This revelation, is made after Phèdre has approached her stepson, professed her love for him, and has drawn his blade for him asking to have her life stripped away because she cannot live with the guilt of perceiving herself as a monster (II.v.91-131). Rather than acting violently, Hippolyte seeks doubly to escape this place, his own home.

Before discussing the dual reason as to why Hippolyte desires to flee from Troezen, we must take a moment to note some inconsistencies in how the French reimagining and his predecessors deal with the amorous aspirations of Phèdre. Whereas his Euripidean antecedent raised his words into high speech about the evils of all women, and the Senecan physically raised his blade against Phaedra to shed her blood on the altar of Diana, the Racinean has elucidated a series of complex thoughts. At first, Hippolyte claims to have no resentment for Phèdre as his stepmother, and goes as far to claim to understand why she would have sent him into isolation: he believes that any husband’s new wife would send away children of previous couplings in order to protect her own investments. While this is not the case, it is a logical inference. Secondly, as has happened in past treatments, upon hearing her doting description of her passion, Hippolyte assumes that she is referencing her Thésée. As she begins to draw similarities between father and son, her words begin to betray her passion, and though the young prince begins to understand, Phèdre dissuades him from strong feeling by assuring him that she has maintained her honour. At last, Hippolyte suggests that he leave the presence of his stepmother, and this is what forces the queen into a full profession of her love. Rather than striking out against her in any manner (either physical or verbal), Hippolyte simply recoils from her, speechless (II.v). This scene illuminates a characteristic unique of its time: the young, half-barbarian prince is not hot-tempered like his father, nor is a hater of the opposite sex like his mother. Rather than having embraced the worse characteristics of both, Hippolyte seems to have inherited some of the better.

In understanding that Hippolyte is not a misogynist, we come to understand the second, and original, reason as to why he is fleeing from Troezen. When Thésée left Phèdre under the custody of his own son, he also left a spoil of war to be guarded: Aricie. In the very first scene of the play, Hippolyte disarms Theramenes, his long-time mentor and servant, who suggests that the prince is fleeing the city to escape the ire of his stepmother. Acting as a mirror both to Phèdre and to her literary antecedents, Hippolyte states that he ‘should not need to fly, if it were hatred’ (I.i.58), and, at once, we and his confidante are made aware that passion has taken hold of him for the child of Pallas. For six months, he has tried to suppress his amorousness, and, at last, he can no longer remain in this world (i.e. his home) if she is to be present, and must find a manner in which to escape (I.i). Rather than committing suicide in the face of love, Hippolyte is fleeing, just as he himself was once sent away.

This is not to suggest that Hippolyte has not tried to embrace his literary and intertextual essences as a hater of womankind, but that, rather, he has not succeeded in doing so. Being born to an Amazon, his essence was to disdain the opposite sex, and as he came ‘to riper age, / Reason approved what Nature had implanted’ (I.i.74-5). In other words, the prince tried to further distance himself from love, but as we have heard time and time again in this myth’s retellings, the heart wants what the heart wants, and there is little that can be done to stand in its potentially destructive path. This time though, that sagacity comes from the friend not of the queen, but of the prince.

Let us consider for a moment that this is the first time in the play’s history that Hippolyte has been provided with a confidante and friend who has known him since he was a young boy. Rather than repainting an isolationist character as has been done previously, Racine further humanises Hippolyte by supplying him with a friend who goes to great lengths to protect the interests of his master. Rather than crossing his boundaries as a confidante, however, Theramenes continually acts only in his master’s best interests in order to see that neither the prince nor his good name are destroyed or tarnished. I will not be able to elaborate in detail about the relationship between these two because the majority of the text is centred on the inner machinations of Phèdre herself, but thought that this and the previously mentioned evolutions warranted mentioning.

When confronted by his father for the multiple rapes of Phèdre, not only does Hippolyte deny them, but also tries to employ logic as a means to defend himself against these accusations.

Justly indignant at a lie so black

I might be pardon’d if I told the truth;

But it concerns your honour to conceal it.

Approve the reverse that shuts my mouth;

And, without wishing to increase your woes,

Examine closely what my life has been.

Great crimes are never single, they are link’d

To former faults. He who has once transgress’d

May violate at last all that men hold

Most sacred; vice, like virtue, has degrees

Of progress, innocence was never seen

To sink at once into the lowest depths

Of guilt. No virtuous man can in a day

Turn traitor, murderer, an incestuous wretch. (IV.ii.54-67).

Though it is true that good men do not fall without deep psychological motivations, Thésée is unwilling to believe his son because he has always viewed him as proud. Currently, fate is set against Hippolyte; Phèdre did see him exiled years before, and now that a false reason has been supplied, these accusations present themselves as legitimate. Ultimately, in order to attempt to save his own reputation, though it may harm his father’s, Hippolyte must confess his love for Thésée’s enemy. His father imagines that this is a perjurious ruse intended to clear his own name, and it is not until after Hippolyte’s tragic death, in which he asked Aricie to be looked after, and the beginnings of the suicide of his wife that Thésée accepts not only the responsibility for his son’s murder, but also of his innocence.

Hippolyte attempted to defend himself against the outrageous claims of his stepmother without offending the sensibilities of his stepfather, but this could not come to pass. Ultimately, the prince was torn between loyalty to his scorned father and his lofty ideals concerning love. Without offending the reputations of either his father or his bride, Hippolyte accepts his punishment while maintaining that the karmic schemes of the cosmos will see not only his reputation cleared, but that the virtuous names of Thésée and Aricie be maintained. As his final undertaking (within the final act of the drama), Hippolyte forms a plan to flee from his homeland and meet his young bride elsewhere. The young aristocrat is sacrificing everything that he has striven for in order to preserve the standing of his father while honouring his love for Aricie. This character is yoking himself knowingly with a figurative death: he will be no more in the eyes of either his family or his society. Unbeknownst to him, however, he is going to face his mortal demise as an existentially honest man.

Although Hippolyte is one of the most drastic reimaginings of the young prince in the history of the Hippolytos mythos, he is still painted with very loose brush strokes. He is humanised in that he is not a rash and stringent misogynist. He has companionship that, while bearing the structure of master and servant, seems genuine. He seeks, after some prodding, to honour the reputations of both his mother and father by attempting to earn glory through the pursuit of monsters, beasts, and criminals. Finally, he is capable of great love. Hippolyte was prepared to send himself to the ends of the earth to run from his love, just as Phèdre was willing to follow him in pursuit of hers, and Thésée was willing to stalk him to see him destroyed. The defining feature of Racine’s Hippolyte is his love: he loves Aricie, his mother, his father, and, in a non-romantic fashion, his stepmother. He is a respectful human being who evokes a great deal of pathos when his life is cut tragically short. Most importantly, however, is the fact that Hippolyte, like his literary predecessors, is true to himself: he would rather see everything that he has worked so diligently for be stripped from him than to witness the destruction of his family.

Jean-Baptiste Racine did not do much to alter some of the essential literary characteristics of his Phaidra and Hippolytos-figures, but the alterations that he has made are very important in understanding how future writers will treat this myth. Whereas Phaidra was previously only concerned with her own reputation and the needs of her family, Phèdre is concerned heavily with all possible manners by which Hippolyte may be seduced – even at the expense of *eukleia*. When she learns of his relationship with Aricie, she decides to allow the exile of her stepson to be executed, and does not confess of her own crimes until after his death, when Thésée begins to regret his hasty actions. She was not only consumed by passion, but also, and more cruelly, by jealousy. Her desired lover, in turn, is not only concerned with maintaining the reputation of both his mother and himself, but also of his father. Ultimately, he is the best son that he is capable of being. The fact that his love is as forbidden as Phèdre’s is an important note because of the treatment of both. Whereas his stepmother had sent the object of her desire into exile selfishly, the prince plans to send himself into exile in order not only not to shame his father, but also, to enhance the glory of his past heroic actions, and to maintain love. In the end, it is these slight changes that will affect our perceptions of this myth in future adaptations.

**American Ontological Shifts**

Throughout the remainder of this chapter, my work will not be focused on providing detailed examinations of the ontological shifts that occur in this myth, but will, rather, be highlighting pieces that do not fit into the guided criteria of my thesis, but which bear mention due to their importance in the Anglophone literary tradition of this plotline. These works are neither from the chronological periods of ancient Greece and Rome, nor are they modern enough to have been influenced by Mike Nichols’ cinematic masterpiece – *The Graduate*. Rather, all of the pieces that I will be examining in this section are Anglophone receptions first written and/or performed prior to 1967 in the United States.

The very first piece that I will address is a short poem by an American writer –‘Hippolytus Temporizes’ by Hilda Doolittle (more commonly known as H.D.). Known for her association with the early 20th-century avant-garde Imagist[[212]](#footnote-212) group of poets such as Ezra Pound and Richard Aldington, H.D., unapologetic about her bisexuality,[[213]](#footnote-213) became an icon for both the gay rights and feminist movements in the 1970s and 1980s. As *The Graduate* was leaving cinemas, and young people all over the United States were coming to terms with the placement of their country in the post-WWII world, H.D.’s writings were further catalysing change in a fledgling generation that was quickly becoming unhindered by traditional roles of gender, race, and sexuality.

This section, however, is not about H.D.’s influence on the Benjamin Braddocks of the world; it is, rather, about her contribution to the development of the Hippolytos/Phaidra mythology in modern Anglophone culture. As is noted by Eileen Gregory,

H.D.’s preoccupation with the myth of Hippolytus spans nearly the whole of her early career, beginning in 1917, when she was translation portions of Euripides’ *Hippolytus* (finally published in 1919), and continuing through the 1920s with the publication in *Hymen* (1921) of four poems on the Hippolytus theme and with the subsequent publication in 1924 through 1926 of other related lyrics as well as portions of the play in progress.[[214]](#footnote-214)

With her investment in this mythological tradition, it is no wonder that this poet provides some of the most profound insight into the character of Hippolytus in the English language using the smallest amount of words next to Martha Graham.[[215]](#footnote-215)

In her poem, H.D. writes a well-crafted, sustained lyric that invokes the imagery of sensuous landscape in which the young Athenian prince is able to bide his time by refusing to make a decision about the goddess that he worships. As her poem opens, the audience are led to believe in the chastity of Hippolytus as has been traditionally ascribed to him in the works of Euripides and Seneca, but as we press onward in this piece, we come to realize that this is not a young man who is repulsed by women; on the contrary, this is a young man who is absolutely enamoured by his stepmother. Upon analysing the second stanza of this poem, we recognize Hippolytus’ adoration for Phaedra.

I worship first, the great –

(ah, sweet, your eyes –

what God, **invoked in Crete**,

gave them the gift to part

as the Sidonian myrtle-flower

suddenly, wide and swart,

then swiftly,

the eye-lids having provoked our hearts –

as suddenly beat and close.)

As the young prince is attempting to pray to his virginal goddess, his mind continues to race toward the forbidden Phaedra ‘between cloth and fleece, so her body lies.’ As each stanza opens, Hippolytus reminds himself, ‘I worship the greatest first,’ but then his thoughts continue to return to Phaedra’s bones under her flesh, her sweet eyes, the golden clasps that lie above her slender beauty, and ‘the sudden heat, / beneath quivering of molten flesh, / of veins, purple as violets.’

While we are not able to conduct a full Psychoanalytic Existentialistic analysis on this reception of the Athenian prince, we do learn a few things about his psyche from the poet. H.D. reveals a passionate side of Hippolytus that, like any mortal man, urges him toward physical embraces. This devotee of Artemis is fighting against the literary essence of his nature and his intertextual essence as a sexual being in order to preserve an existence that he has chosen for himself. Just like Benjamin Braddock must, ultimately, resist joining the world of ‘plastics’ by means of Mrs Robinson, so too must this Hippolytus fight for his own identity against the pressures of nature and society. H.D.’s young hunter fights daily with an existential crisis in which he must choose to remain true to himself rather than succumbing to the expectations of this world.

H.D. is not the only American author to drive forward the literary essence of Hippolytus. In 1924, Eugene O’Neill[[216]](#footnote-216) published his last Naturalistic[[217]](#footnote-217) play – *Desire Under the Elms*, which is a contextual tribute to our myth. By following the accounts of mythical heroes, O’Neill portrays the Cabot family in a similar fashion. The roles of Hippolytos, Phaidra, and Theseus are paralleled to Eben, Abbie, and Ephraim Cabot respectively. Abbie – the stepmother of Eben, Simeon, and Peter – is, like her Greek counterpart, passionate about her stepson, who preliminarily rejects her. Whereas the ancient Athenian prince firmly rejected the advances of his stepmother, Eben actually enjoys the affair to a degree that he and his stepmother conceive an illegitimate child during their passionate adultery. Harkening back to Racine’s rendition of the myth, Abbie attempts to use her newfound power – that of her bastard child – to secure ownership of the Cabot family farm, which originally belonged to Eben’s mother, just as Phèdre attempted a power play in order to gain control of Theseus’ kingdom. O’Neill’s Abbie, however, is more concerned with her love for her stepson than for control of the estate, and - in order to remove any obstacle from their relationship - smothers her infant child in its crib.[[218]](#footnote-218) This attempt at securing the love of her stepson only enrages him, and a distressed Eben turns his lover over to the local sheriff after admitting to himself the depths of his love for her and, thus, confessing his own responsibility in the infanticide. Ultimately, as in the classical canon, Ephraim – the Theseus-figure and stepfather of our Hippolytos-figure – is left bereft of any family at all.

In this drama, there is an external catalyst driving all of the action – the elms. This land not only represents Eben’s mother, but is also, and more importantly, the only non-human remnant of her on this planet. The Hippolytos-figure in this drama is not willing to relinquish his relationship with his mother, and this is why he secures the portions of the property from his half-brothers. Just like with his Greek antecedent, Eben intensely claims, ‘I’m Maw – every drop o’ blood! (I.ii) because he feels an unhealthy similarity with his deceased mother, but unlike his Hellenic forbearer has no biological relationship to Ephraim. This father-son relationship has no more grounding than will the bond between Benjamin Braddock and Mr Robinson in *The Graduate*. Eben’s loyalty, therefore, lies with that virginal grove of elms – the spirit and memory of his dearly departed mother. Wayne Narey even suggests that these elms serve not only as the Artemesian aspect of the mother, but, more importantly, ‘in a modern pantheon, wields the power of a love goddess.’[[219]](#footnote-219)

It is these same trees that drive Abbie into a Phaidra-like delirium. Just as Theseus took two wives before Phaidra, so too has Ephraim claimed wives before Abbie, and ‘The elms assume the role of a mute stage actor, growing in importance as the play progresses. When Cabot and Abbie make their entrance in the second scene, the shapes of “*sinister maternity*” recall the previous wives of Cabot, who were worked to death to serve his passion for the farm.’[[220]](#footnote-220) Abbie, like Phaidra before her, will not be stricken to her husband, but, rather, will be overcome by the loneliness that Ephraim worships (I.iv) and forces upon his household; this subjected isolation will drive Eben and Abbie into one another’s arms, and will grant Ephraim the loneliness that he has sought but never truly understood. Because of the passion instilled in Eben to preserve the memory of his mother, Abbie recognises that this obsession will destroy her lover. She warns him, ‘Nature’ll beat ye, Eben. Ye might’s well own up t’ it fust ‘s last’ (II.i), and while ‘Her words synthesize the tragic essence of the play, the confusion of passionate desire with a nobility in love. Abbie’s coarse nature and suggestive speech anticipate the changed relationship between Eben and herself, but the tenor of her words does not adumbrate a change for the better. Lust fills her spirit and grows with her like the “elums” to which she likens Eben.’[[221]](#footnote-221)

In regards to the evolution of this mythos, *Desire Under the Elms* adds a few distinct characteristics that will become engrained in certain receptions of this dramatic tradition including the distancing in biological relationships between Hippolytos and Theseus. The most notable alteration, however, is one that will resound in *The Graduate*, *Living Quarters*, and *Phaedra’s Love* – the Hippolytos- and Phaidra-figures consummate their relationship. After this point in history, the literary essences of these characters allows for them to pursue a sexual relationship with one another.[[222]](#footnote-222) As Racine gave Hippolyte a love interest, and H.D. made that interest Phaedra herself, so too has O’Neill further developed the psychological tension between Hippolytos and Phaidra. Now, hatred is not requisite between the two; in fact, the prescribed sexual tension allows them to pursue one another without disregarding their entire literary essential natures.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion of this lengthy chapter, I’d like to summarize some of the alterations to the ontological tradition – or literary essence – of these characters made between 428 BCE and 1967 when Mike Nichols released his cinematic blockbuster. One of the earliest alterations that we see to the myth is that in Apollodorus’ rendition. In this late Greek retelling, not only do we establish that Ariadne and Phaidra are siblings that will, inevitably share a husband, but also that Theseus slays his Amazon bride because of her interference in his marriage to Phaidra; this sets the precedent for a violent Theseus potentially to assault his new wife, and to provide her reason for her infidelity. Throughout the Roman period, focus of the myth shifts toward Phaedra, and makes her a semi-respectable character who is responding to horrid circumstances. Once Racine tackles the myth, Hippolyte is altered a great deal by being supplied not only with a libido, but also with a love interest in the form of Aricie – a nominal name to his Roman resurrection as Virbius. In American culture, Hippolytos is shown not only to be capable of love, but to be able to adorn that upon his pursuer. During these crucial periods, the literary essences of our two focal characters shift dynamically, and that is why they have been given attention in this chapter.

**IV**

# ‘You’ve known me nearly all your life.’

The Existential World of the Characters in Mike Nichols’ *The Graduate*

The focus of this chapter is the work whose status as a reception of the Phaidra-Hippolytos myth is less obvious than the others that are reviewed in this study: Mike Nichols’ 1967 cinematic masterpiece *The Graduate*. Originally written as a novel by Charles Webb in 1963, shortly after his own liberal arts graduation from Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts, this familiar story follows a chapter in the life of Benjamin Braddock, a recent university graduate whose educational career suggests a brightly illuminated future.

Upon Braddock’s return to California from a prestigious university on the East Coast of the United States, he finds himself dangling in a state of quasi-purgatory between his previous accomplishments and his uncertain future. Braddock does not want to live the collective life of his parents’ generation because he views it as littered with superficiality and commercialism, but he is not sure what it is that he wants for himself. In this state of confusion, the young man finds himself being seduced by and, eventually, entering into a series of sexual assignations with the wife of his father’s business partner – Mrs Robinson. After a summer of emotionally meaningless sex with this older woman, Braddock finds himself developing amorous feelings for the Robinsons’ daughter Elaine. The mother becomes consumed by jealousy, and attempts to secure a promise of devotion from her young lover. When this fails, her feelings turn from sexual desire toward a desire to destroy him. Mrs Robinson, in an attempt to preserve her own reputation and to assure that her daughter does not claim her lover, attempts to destroy the social life and reputation of this young man. As the summer draws to a close, Elaine moves to Berkeley to attend university, and Benjamin, with no aspirations for his future, other than making sure that Elaine is part of it, follows her. Hearing of this scheme, Mrs Robinson accuses Benjamin of rape, and watches as his life falls into shambles. Benjamin’s bright star begins to burn away; he moves into a room, and continues to stalk the object of his affection even after learning that she has a fiancé. A looming marriage does not deter Benjamin, and, at the film’s conclusion, he does, in fact, get the girl. As the film closes with Benjamin and Elaine sitting on a departing, canary-coloured bus, both we and they are uncertain of their future.

There are some evident correlations between this film and the ancient Euripidean play, but in this chapter, I will highlight why I believe this cinematic masterpiece to be an unconscious reception of *Hippolytos*. Throughout the course of this chapter, I will begin by examining *The Graduate*’s relationship to the Phaidra-Hippolytos mythological tradition. Next, I will provide social and cultural contexts in a historical overview of the 1960s – the decade in which both the novel and film were written and released. My attention will then turn toward understanding the cinematic cultural contexts in which Nichols created and released his famous work. Finally, this chapter will turn toward conducting an analysis of the two central figures of the piece – Benjamin Braddock and Mrs Robinson. Ultimately, I aim to prove that this mythological reimagining of these characters from the Silver Age of Hollywood is not only influenced by its literary antecedents, but is also immensely responsible for altering modern perceptions of these two archetypal figures.

**The Relationship between *The Graduate* and the Hippolytos Mythos**

Throughout this section, I will examine the similarities in plot and character between this mythological tradition on which Euripides put his seminal stamp in 428 BCE, and its re-emergence in Hollywood in 1967. No doubt, many of my readers will recall this cinematic masterpiece, and may not immediately perceive parallels between Phaidra and Mrs Robinson and Hippolytos and Benjamin Braddock. The purpose of this section, therefore, is to illuminate the similarities of character in order to understand the relationship between the two stories.

Let us begin with the most obvious concern. Benjamin and Mrs Robinson are not related to one another. This is a distinctive feature of the Phaidra-Hippolytos tradition, which otherwise does not differ too much from the Biblical account of Potiphar’s wife[[223]](#footnote-223) or from the myth of Bellerophon and Stheneboea.[[224]](#footnote-224) It is one thing for a man to strikeout against trusted slave or a houseguest after false accusations of rape have been made by his wife, but it is quite another to destroy one’s own son. Even though many of the cast and crew of the film (Mike Nichols, Buck Henry, Dustin Hoffman, William Daniels, Dave Grusin, Simon and Garfunkel, et al.) and the Braddocks are of Jewish descent, the Potiphar’s wife myth does not seem to have consciously impacted the film whereas it and its Greek counterpart certainly contributed, albeit unconsciously, to the film’s success. When asked what the reason was that *The Graduate* is so enduring forty-five years after its fact, Nichols responded in a 2012 interview:

I have a shocking answer: It’s because the story is an unintentional retelling of the Hippolytus and Phaedra myth. The whole younger man—older woman thing—that’s where it comes from. It took me decades to realize this, but it’s true. The fucking thing shows up in everything from Stendhal’s *The Red and Black* to O’Neill’s *Desire Under the Elms* to this; and then it gets filed away in our collective brains, because the corrupting aspects make that myth dangerous. Yet there’s something so primal and compelling about it that keeps it coming back. There are a number of basic stories like that, but that younger man—older woman one always seems to get people. You want to make money, remake Cinderella. You want to move people, remake the Hippolytus and Phaedra myth.’[[225]](#footnote-225)

Nichols, born to Jewish parents in Nazi-controlled Poland, acknowledges that this film’s cultural longevity is due to it being developed from a central thematic story about a forbidden romance between a younger man and an older woman. He goes as far to claim that *The Graduate* is a retelling of our myth. Nichols, while seemingly aware of other versions of the ‘younger man – older woman thing,’ does not compare Mrs Robinson to Potiphar’s wife or Stheneboea: to him, she is an unintentional retelling of Phaidra. While I must concede that, unlike Phaidra and Hippolytos, there is no biological connection between the two, there is a societal connection, which, within the world of the film, may be nearly as strong. After all, the Robinsons and the Braddocks not only live in the same neighbourhood, but the two patriarchs are partners in a law firm. They have lived and worked in proximity to one another (at least) since Benjamin and Elaine were children. This is an extended family composed of those who have actively chosen to spend their lives with one another. This is an extended family that share financial, social, and religious backgrounds;[[226]](#footnote-226) these are people who are alike, and have chosen to spend their lives together – they are not a family who have been destined to intermingle.

On the night of Benjamin’s first party, he has escorted Mrs Robinson home, and has made himself out to be a bit of a bumbling fool assuming that she plans to seduce him. After this concept is released into the ether, Mrs Robinson snatches it for herself, and undresses in order to offer herself to this young man, who she has known since he was a very young boy. Just as it is in the Hippolytos-Phaidra myth, after the offer is made, the husband returns, and Benjamin flies from the room seeking an escape. He does not find said escape, but, rather, finds himself face to face with his surrogate father. Shortly after Mr Robinson has returned early from what was expected to be a long night out, he refills Benjamin’s drink with Scotch rather than his preferred Bourbon (an act which he will repeat throughout his relationship with the young man), and invites him to the couch so that he can impart the wisdom of an older generation. In this scene, the nervous Braddock takes his seat while he is reminded to enjoy his own youthfulness because he will never attain it again. During this conversation, both Benjamin and we are also made to appreciate further the concept of Mrs Robinson’s erotic approach to the youth. Not only has it already been suggested that the Robinsons are amongst the good friends of the Braddocks (03:09 – 03:16), but we learn from Mr Robinson himself of the closeness of his relationship to both Mr Braddock and Benjamin (17:44 – 18:22):

Mr Robinson: Ben, can I say something to you?

Ben: What?

Mr Robinson: How long have we known each other now?

*Ben shakes his head*

How long have you and I known each other? How long have your Dad and I been partners?

Ben: Quite a while.

Mr Robinson: I’ve watched you grow up, Ben.

Ben: Yes, sir.

Mr Robinson: In many ways I feel as though you were my own son.

Ben: Thank you.

Though there is little more within either the film or the screenplay to support this relationship being likened unto one between father and son, this revelation has changed the dynamic of Mrs Robinson pursuing Benjamin, or, indeed, of the young man having and verbalising potentially sexual thoughts toward his father’s partner’s wife at all. There is a closeness between these two families that allows for this budding relationship to border on social incest.

The second matter that bears investigation is another massive discrepancy between this film and the surviving canon of receptions of the Phaidra-Hippolytos mythical tradition: the fact that Benjamin and Mrs Robinson do consummate their relationship. The remaining versions of this tale vehemently emphasize that there was no carnal relationship between Hippolytos and his stepmother. In reception studies, however, divergence in detail often can be more illuminating that reproduction of detail. On the other hand, I am not thoroughly convinced that this reimagining has diverged entirely from the whole of the literary tradition. As we observed in the chapter on Euripides and his work, Aristophanes of Byzantium once suggested that the surviving *Hippolytos* was an attempt to correct the characterizations of the individuals in the now lost *Hippolytos Veiled*. One such modified characterization, suggested by the evidence detailed in the aforementioned chapter, seems to suggest that Hippolytos and Phaidra consummated their relationship.[[227]](#footnote-227) This semi-incestuous fornication brought great shame to Hippolytos, and it does so with Benjamin as well.

Hanna M Roisman argued in *Nothing Is As It Seems: The Tragedy Implicit in Euripides’* Hippolytus that for a Greek man to veil himself in tragedy, he would have to feel shame for an action that he has committed.[[228]](#footnote-228) For Hippolytos(K), he draws his cloak around his face in a very literal form of veiling. While this happens too with Benjamin, it is much less obvious. At 36:44, after he has begun his affair with Mrs Robinson, not only does Benjamin’s character begin to change (as we shall later examine), but so does his appearance. It is at this point that Benjamin begins to wear sunglasses with great frequency. During most of the scenes in which he is participating in the affair, Benjamin’s sunglasses not only reflect the world clearly as he sees it, but, also, and more importantly, hide from the world everything about who he really is. Like Hippolytos(K), Benjamin does not want his thoughts or actions concerning the affair to be made aware to those surrounding him, and he, therefore, covers his eyes in shame. While the donning of these sunglasses – this veil – assures that Benjamin is not seen as the person that he is allowing himself to become, this action bears another significance. These lenses guarantee that Benjamin is no longer able to look at the world through the eyes of an untarnished youth, but rather, as an adult like both his biological and figurative parents.

The young graduate is being exposed to the world of his elders. One is able to understand Mrs Robinson as being the manipulated victim of her culture and society, in the same way that Phaidra was a pawn of the primordial Aphrodite in the original Euripidean tragedy. Our anti-heroine, the silver-screen focal point, is the accumulation of her era’s values: she is financially prosperous with a large home and all of the amenities; she has a husband who is able to provide the aforementioned comforts while allowing her the time to care for the household; her daughter is attending one of the most recognized universities in the nation. The adulteress’ desire to be with the younger party arises because he does not belong in this world of ‘plastics.’ This bears a moment of explanation. At his very first party after returning from university, a family friend – Mr McGuire – prompts Ben to consider a future in a society of mass-marketing using only the word ‘plastics.’ All of the adults in this film represent a unified culture – a society steeped in capitalism, artificiality, consumerism, and uniformity. They all come together at parties like this one, and they all have common habits – they drink, they smoke, and they spend. Benjamin, as their opposite, is awkward in social situations, is extremely athletic, drinks little, and does not smoke: he is the antithesis of what he should be upon entering an adult’s sphere of influence in the America of the 1960s. Like his literary antecedent, Benjamin does not share the same generational values of his forefathers: as we know from his opening scene of the film, he wants something ‘different.’ His pursuit of an alternative lifestyle has left him quite virginal in the terms of adult activities (e.g. smoking, drinking, and sex). This adverse behaviour – this existential choice to be opposed to one’s essential nature – is what makes him even more appealing to Mrs Robinson: he is a conquest to be made, just as Hippolytos was before him.

Indeed, before succumbing to his own biological urges, I would argue that Benjamin, like Hippolytos, was an untarnished youth. Not only do we repeatedly hear about his achievements as a ‘Track Star’ and a ‘Frank Helpingham Award Scholar’, but also learn of a number of other accomplishments when his mother begins to read from his ‘college yearbook’ (05:55 – 06:15). In these first twenty years of his life, Benjamin, without argument, has accomplished much due to his own drive to please his elders, but upon return to the land of his parents, these characteristics begin to subside. Ultimately, after his affair with Mrs Robinson begins, the young man that we have heard so much about seems to have vanished. Where did he go? When watching the film, one notices that Benjamin’s awkwardness and drive for success both seem to be fully extinguished when Mrs Robinson emasculates him by asking, ‘Benjamin, is this your first time?’ (35:49). Due to the manner by which he responds in Dustin Hoffman’s famous portrayal of the character, it almost certainly is. Because this is the woman to whom he first gives himself over, she is also, arguably, the one with whom he becomes the most embittered.

Traditionally in the Euripidean *Hippolytos* tradition, we accept that Hippolytos is a misogynist because of the sexual affairs of his father and the cultural hatred of the opposite sex, which characterized his mother. Upon looking at Benjamin, one is hard-pressed to find many signs of a characteristic hatred of women. Like Hippolytos in Euripides’ surviving tragedy (671-733), Benjamin only has one full tirade against women, but his, rather than being a broad-spectrum assault, is focused specifically against Mrs Robinson. After an evening spent entangled in one another, Benjamin begins to inquire into the conception of the Robinsons’ daughter, Elaine, and begins jokingly to suggest that he should take her out on a date (in conformity with the wishes of his biological parents). This proposal upsets Mrs Robinson, and causes Benjamin eventually to go into his own tirade (48:18 – 49:47):

Ben: Well – I guess I’ll have to ask her out on a date to find out what’s –

Mrs Robinson: Benjamin, don’t you ever take that girl out.

Do you understand that?

Ben: Well look. I have no intention of taking her out.

Mrs Robinson: Good.

Ben: I was just kidding around.

Mrs Robinson: Good.

Ben: But why shouldn’t I?

Mrs Robinson: I have my reasons.

Ben: Then let’s hear them.

Mrs Robinson: No.

Ben: Let’s hear them Mrs Robinson. Because I think I know what they are.

I’m not good enough for her to associate with, am I? I’m not good enough to even talk about her, am I?

Mrs Robinson: Let’s drop it.

Ben: We’re not dropping it. I’m good enough for you, but I’m not good enough to associate with your daughter. That’s it, isn’t it?

Mrs Robinson: Benjamin

Ben: Isn’t it?

Mrs Robinson: Yes.

Ben: You go to Hell. You go straight to Hell, Mrs Robinson. You think I’m proud of myself? Do you think I’m proud of this?

Mrs Robinson: I wouldn’t know.

Ben: Well, I am not.

Mrs Robinson: You’re not.

Ben: No, sir. I’m not proud that I spend my time with a broken-down alcoholic.

Mrs Robinson: I see.

Ben: And if you think I come here for any reason besides pure boredom, then you’re all wrong. Because, Mrs Robinson, this is the sickest, most perverted thing that ever happened to me, and you do what you want, but I’m getting the hell out.

Mrs Robinson: Are you?

Ben: You’re goddamned right I am.

Though Benjamin’s rant about the perversity of the situation is not as venomous as his literary antecedent’s, Hoffman’s portrayal of the character suggests that he is on the verge of physical violence. Until this point in the film, this young man has been both physically and emotionally passive. In light of the circumstances surrounding this scene, Anne Bancroft’s portrayal of a woman who is emotionally distraught because of her own failing relationship with her husband and because of the possibility of losing her lover to the youthful version of herself – her daughter – suggests that she is masking her true feelings on the entire situation. Benjamin, however, is not talented in analyzing situations around him, and, in turn, rips away the sheet from her naked body as he raises his voice and begins to assault her verbally.

This scene not only gives great insight into the dormant character of both Benjamin and Mrs Robinson, but also connects this film with Jean-Baptiste Racine’s *Phèdre*. In his tragedy, as we have previously discussed and analysed in Chapter IV, Racine introduced a new character and psychological catalyst, which would come to be utilized repeatedly in newer adaptations: Aricie. Nichols has recast this archetype and has renamed her Elaine. As a character, much like in Racine’s drama, Elaine is flat and does not bear much study; as a concept, however, she is fascinating.[[229]](#footnote-229) This young woman is approximately the same age as Benjamin, and, eventually serves as his love interest replacing her own mother. She has not yet been corrupted by time, and is a constant reminder of what Mrs Robinson has lost: Elaine is allowed to wear her hair down rather than knotting it upon her head as a ritualised symbol of status and maturity (recall Phaidra in Euripides 223-4). She has yet to be tarnished physically by age or emotionally by cynicism, and, most importantly, she does not yet represent anything that is wrong with society or its terms of romantic love. In short, Elaine is meant to be the saviour of Benjamin: she has the opportunity serve as the anticatalyst for Benjamin’s moral degeneration. She is able to offer salvation because she, like Aricie before her, is the product of the ‘sins of the father’, and has still been able to exemplify the purity of Artemis. She not only motivates Benjamin to be better, but also offers him a means by which to do it.

Unfortunately, with the introduction of a saviour, there will be another crisis. Mrs Robinson will be overcome with jealousy, and will, attempt, at all costs, to destroy this budding relationship. Later in this chapter, we analyse how Elaine influences the psychology of both her lover and mother, but for now, we must discuss the reactionary crisis. Knowing that she can no longer have Benjamin, Mrs Robinson begins to spread lies about their affair. She tells her daughter and husband that she has been raped by her young lover (01:17:42 – 01:18:50). Though she will not take her own life, as many before her have, she will destroy herself societally just to see Benjamin brought to his knees. She is willing to sacrifice her own marriage and the stability of her life in order to crush the one who has scorned her.

Her accusation leads to a famous re-envisioning of a scene between father and son: the trial of the Hippolytos-figure by his father-figure. If we recall the works of Euripides, Seneca, and Racine, we remember that in all versions of the myth to date, there is a confrontation between Theseus and Hippolytos in which the latter impotently attempts to defend himself in the face of the accusations of rape. The Theseus-figure is always more willing to believe the words of his wife, and passionately adds another curse upon the already doomed head of his son. This has not been lost in Nichols’ work. During this trial (01:27:00 – 01:29:04), Mr Robinson drives to Berkeley to confront the already distraught Benjamin:

Mr Robinson: Do you want to; do you want to try to tell me why you did it?

Ben: Mr Robinson.

Mr Robinson: Do you have a special grudge against me? Do you feel a particularly strong resentment?

Ben: No.

Mr Robinson: Is there something I said that’s caused this contempt, or is it just the things I stand for that you despise?

Ben: It was nothing to do with you, sir.

Mr Robinson: Well, Ben, it was quite a bit to do with me.

…

Ben: I’m trying to tell you that I have no personal feelings about you, Mr Robinson. I’m trying to tell you I don’t resent you.

Mr Robinson: You don’t respect me terribly much either, do you?

Ben: No, sir.

Mr Robinson: What?

Ben: No, sir.

Mr Robinson: Don’t shout at me, Ben. I may not be as young as you, but I still have pretty good hearing.

Ben: Mr Robinson.

Mr Robinson: Have the decency to wait until I finish. I do think you should know the consequences of what you’ve done. I do think you should know that my wife and I are getting a divorce soon.

…

Ben: The point is, I don’t love your wife, I love your daughter, sir.

Mr Robinson: Alright, now listen to this. I don’t know whether or not I can prosecute, but I think I can. I think I can get you behind bars if you ever look at my daughter again. I’ve seen Elaine, and made damn sure you can’t get to her. Stay away from me, Ben. I don’t want to mix words with you. As far as Elaine is concerned, you’re to get her out of your filthy mind right now. Is that perfectly clear to you? And that’s all, Ben. You’ll pardon me if *I* don’t shake hands with you. I think you are filth. I think you are scum. You are a degenerate!

As one can see from this scene, the words with which Mrs Robinson has destroyed Ben will lead to him being a social pariah. Benjamin’s social life has been handed a death sentence, but this will not stop him from making one last attempt at stealing away Elaine, much like Racine’s Hippolyte did not turn from marrying Aricie.

In the final scenes of the film, Benjamin drives from Berkeley to Santa Barbara where Elaine is being married to ‘Make Out King’ Carl Smith. In one last desperate plea to restore any form of meaning and balance to his own life, Benjamin attempts to interrupt the wedding and intercept the bride. He successfully does so. If one were to compare this scene best to one in the established chronology of this myth’s trajectory, the scene that bears the closest resemblance occurs at the beginning of Act V of Racine’s magnum opus. Though Hippolyte himself has no other fiancé with whom to compete, this is where he and Aricie swear their undying love for one another in a very nonconventional manner. Benjamin and Elaine physically fight off the guests at her wedding before running from the church, barring everyone inside, and boarding a yellow bus, which will drive them into an uncertain future. Just as Hippolytos has been dragged to death by his horses repeatedly, this final scene has Benjamin the romantic being carried off. We do not know what his future holds, but as the smiles slowly drift from the faces of the newly emancipated lovers, one can assume that their ending will not be as fantastical as their beginning.

In conclusion of this section, I posit that this cinematic masterpiece fits far too well into the collective Hippolytos-Phaidra mythos, and, for the reasons outlined before, can no longer be ignored in its reception. As these characters have descended through the generations, they have changed form slightly with each new author who presents them to each audience, but the underlying myth is obviously present.

**The United States and the 1960s**

In this section of the chapter, I will provide an overview of one of the most controversial and significant decades of the twentieth century in relation to the emerging superpower that is the United States. The purpose of this section is to understand the socio-historical contexts in which a fresh-faced Charles Webb was writing a novel that would later be adapted for the silver screen by Buck Henry under the direction of Mike Nichols. In order to appreciate further what has been regarded as one of the greatest American films of all time,[[230]](#footnote-230) I will afford a survey of the economic, political, and entertainment cultures of the Swinging 60s in the United States.

Let us begin by attempting to understand the political environment of the United States during this tense decade only distanced by a decade and a half from the Second World War. With the conclusion of this global conflict – the most widespread war in human history, which involved a vast majority of the world’s nations – a state of political and military tensions between the powers of the Western world due to a massive power vacuum: in 1945, the Cold War began. The Eastern World was dominated by The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (henceforth Soviet Union or USSR), which had established a mutual defense treaty – The Warsaw Pact – along with eight other communist states of Eastern Europe (i.e. Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania) in order to prevent the recurrence of another large scale invasion by hostile Western powers. Mirroring this move in the East, the Western World was being led by the United States and its allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which was intended to serve as a collective defense whereby its members agree to mutual defense by responding to an attack by any external party. Finally, a third faction arose during this turbulent political period, which is mentioned very infrequently in terms of participants of the Cold War: the Non-Aligned Movement. This group of states was established much later than the first to power blocs in 1961 when Yugoslavia’s Josip Broz Tito, Indonesia’s Sukarno, Egypt’s Gamal Abel Nasser, Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah, and India’s Jawaharlal Nehru refused to ally with either the Eastern or the Western Forces, and, rather, advocated a separate course for the Developing World in an attempt to thwart this next budding conflict.[[231]](#footnote-231)

The conservative business culture, against which Benjamin reacts, was a product of the Cold War, a standoff of political and economic ideologies. Joseph Stalin, Premier of the Soviet Union from 6 May 1941 until 5 March 1953, and his successors desired to see that ‘the present capitalist encirclement is replaced by a socialist encirclement.’[[232]](#footnote-232) Even though his nation had allied with the United States and Great Britain to combat the forces of Nazi Germany during the Second World War, Stalin remained extremely distrustful of his allies and believed that they had conspired to ensure that the Soviets bore the impact of the fighting.[[233]](#footnote-233) Stalin and his newly formed Eastern Bloc rejected the Western institutional characteristics of market economies, democratic governance, and the rule of law subduing discretional intervention by the state.[[234]](#footnote-234) Because of the massive burdens that the Red Army had endured during World War II, the Soviet Union gained quite a deal of respect from other nations. Stalin exploited this respect with the intention of creating a communist Europe. His party had already achieved a significant popularity in China, Greece, Iran, and the Republic of Mahabad, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, and Yugoslavia. Both the United States and the United Kingdom were concerned that these electoral changes could lead, inevitably, to sweeping economic and political changes in Western Europe. Benjamin’s parents and social circle are the sort of people who were most concerned.

For the third time since the turn of the century, the global political environment was charged with tension. Both the forces of the East and of the West possessed nuclear weapons, which could have assured mutual destruction, and the ominous risk of nuclear winter loomed in the background threatening to end most, if not all, life on the planet.[[235]](#footnote-235) Because the very existence of all macro-organisms was being threatened by this heated situation, a delicate political balance had to be ensured so that this war did not turn from cold to hot. This political unease lasted until 1991 after Mikhail Gorbachev began to liberalise the political landscape of the USSR via Glasnost,[[236]](#footnote-236) and introduced capitalist elements into the economy via Perestroika.[[237]](#footnote-237) This stifling unease is the ideological backdrop to the film.

Though war itself never broke out between the United States and the Soviet Union, both sides repeatedly engaged in indirect confrontations through proxy warfare. Amongst these proxy wars were the Berlin Blockade (1948-1949), the Korean War (1950-1953), the Suez Crisis (1956), the Berlin Crisis of 1961, the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), the Yom Kippur War (1973), the Soviet war in Afghanistan (1979-1989), and the ‘Able Archer’ NATO military exercises (1983). The most influential conflict during the Cold War for the sake of my research was the Vietnam War (1955-1975). Why is this military conflict, which, by its conclusion, saw 58,220 American soldiers killed,[[238]](#footnote-238) crucial to better understanding not only the film works of Mike Nichols and the literary work of Charles Webb, but also of their character Benjamin Braddock? The American audience who were watching this film were looking at a young man who wanted a different life for himself than that of his parents, and could have interpreted this as a desire not to be living in a constant state of turmoil and conflict. Furthermore, had Benjamin not continued to pursue his education, he himself would have been of the perfect age and physical prowess to have been fighting on the frontlines either through volunteering or via conscription.

The Vietnam War occurred in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia from 1 November 1955 until the fall of Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, on 30 April 1975. For nearly two decades, the armies of North Vietnam, with the support of its communist allies,[[239]](#footnote-239) and South Vietnam, with the support of the United States and other anti-communist countries,[[240]](#footnote-240) fought this war of political ideology. For the United States, involvement in the Vietnam War was an attempt to prevent the spread of communism into the South Vietnam: it was part of their wider strategy for containment. Though US forces had arrived in French Indochina in 1950, the country’s involvement escalated in the early 1960s, with troop levels tripling in 1961 and tripling again in 1962.[[241]](#footnote-241) By the end of US involvement in this conflict, 2.59 million Americans had served their country in this war in order to stop the spread of communism.[[242]](#footnote-242) US involvement peaked in 1968, just as *The* Graduate was reaching its first worldwide audiences, at the time of the Tet Offensive (a military campaign originally launched on 30 January by the Viet Cong against their enemy forces). This Offensive was a series of surprise attacks that were launched against military and civilian command and control centres throughout South Vietnam, during the Tet Lunar New Year when a prior agreement to ‘cease fire’ had been established.[[243]](#footnote-243) Though the American populace (including many young idealists, who would have been Ben and Elaine’s peers) had already opposed US involvement in this war in the orient, the Tet Offensive created a crisis for the cabinet of then President Lyndon B Johnson, which became increasingly unable to convince the American public that it had been a major defeat for the communists.[[244]](#footnote-244) The results of this attack by the Viet Cong signalled the end of US military involvement in Vietnam. According to Herbert Y Schandler, the choices that Chairman of the Joint Chiefs presented to President Johnson were difficult:

Accepting General Wheeler’s request for troops would mean a total US military commitment to South Vietnam, a further Americanization of the war, a large call-up of reserve forces, and a need to put the economy on a war footing to meet vastly increased expenditures…On the other hand, to deny the request of troops or to attempt again to cut it to a size that could be sustained by the thinly stretched active forces would signal that an upper limit to the US military commitment in South Vietnam finally had been reached, that the illusion of military victory had been discarded, and that an end to the war satisfactory to the United States had become remote or even unlikely.[[245]](#footnote-245)

Because of the massive losses not only to the anti-communist, but also to the communist forces, Johnson’s successor as President of the United States, Richard M Nixon, was able to begin to withdraw US soldiers from the Orient through the Nixon Doctrine (a plan which suggested that the United States would maintain all of its treaty commitments), would provide a shield if nuclear power threatens the freedom of an allied nation, and would furnish military and economic assistance only if requested and deemed necessary. Nixon’s ‘Vietnamization’ intended to ‘expand, equip, and train South Vietnam’s forces and assign to them an ever-increasing combat role, at the same time steadily reducing the number of US combat troops.’[[246]](#footnote-246)

The beginning of the end of the Vietnam War had long been awaited in the United States. Starting in 1964, peaceful, protest demonstrations took place across the country, and as the decade carried on, the strength of the opposition grew, and, in some cases, the means of protest shifted from peaceful rallies to radical displays of violence. Originally composed mainly of university students (the focal point of our piece of fiction), the mothers of current and potential soldiers, and anti-establishment hippies, the movement gained the strength and support of educators, clergy, academics, journalists, lawyers, veterans, and, eventually, many laymen. By mid-October 1965, the anti-war movement had considerably expanded to become a national and, even, global occurrence, as anti-war protests drawing 100,000 were held concurrently in as many as 80 major cities around not only in the US, but also in London, Paris, and Rome. As the momentum built, 1966 saw Undisputed Heavyweight Champion of the World Muhammad Ali – formerly known as Cassius Clay[[247]](#footnote-247) – join the movement as a conscientious objector, and on 16 March 1968, Robert Kennedy joined the race for the US Presidency as an anti-war candidate.[[248]](#footnote-248) Though there were countless rallies and famous supporters of this campaign to end United States involvement in Vietnam, the one that has most fully captured our collective imagination was held between 15 and 18 August 1969 in Bethel, New York while *The Graduate* was still being screened in cinemas all over the country.

The Woodstock Music & Art Fair (henceforth Woodstock) was billed as ‘An Antiquarian Exposition in White Lake, NY: 3 Days of Peace & Music.’[[249]](#footnote-249) During this momentous, outdoor festival, thirty-two acts (e.g. Santana, Grateful Dead, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Janis Joplin, The Who, and Jimi Hendrix) performed in front of approximately half-a-million concertgoers with ‘more than half of the 300,000 people who attended the fair [getting] in free because three times the expected number of people turned up and broke down the entire ticket-selling, ticket-taking procedure.’[[250]](#footnote-250) Though originally designed to be a profit-making venture (like most events during this age of consumerism against which our film’s protagonist speaks), due to the aforementioned destruction of barricades and assigned entrances, it famously became a ‘free concert’, and the exact number in attendance is impossible to calculate. Because of the estimated hundreds of thousands of attendees without tickets, not only was Woodstock a massive financial loss for its organisers, but also those who were enjoying some of the most famous musical acts of the 1960s were struggling against bad weather, food shortages, and poor sanitation.[[251]](#footnote-251) These conditions coupled with rampant drug use, led to two recorded fatalities (one believed to have been caused by heroin overdose; the other caused when a tractor ran over a sleeping attendee), four miscarriages, and, interestingly enough, two births.[[252]](#footnote-252) Through all of this, the legacy of the festival is one of peace, love, and rock and roll.

Woodstock was not only the most notable example of military protest of the 1960s, but also exemplified the counterculture of the 1960s in the United States. This overarching movement flowed along generational lines regarding the Vietnam War, race relations, sexual mores, women’s rights, traditional modes of authority, experimentation with psychoactive drugs, and differing interpretations of the American Dream. Throughout the United States, there were millions of people like our fictitious eponymous hero who wanted things to be different. In terms of politics, the most notable elements of this counterculture were entirely bereft in Nichols’ cinematic masterpiece, possibly because it was important for the audience to be shown the hegemony against which so many were standing. Though movements supporting various ideologies including Civil Rights, Free Speech, New Leftism, Second-wave Feminism, Environmentalism, and Gay Liberation were spreading across the country, and specifically on university campuses, *The Graduate* does not highlight them in the slightest. I am not suggesting that Nichols was either attempting to preserve or challenge the hegemonic regime, but, rather, that if were doing either (and I would argue that he was attempting to challenge authority by having us perceive the world through Benjamin’s eyes), he was doing so in very discreet ways because the film’s supporting cast against whom Benjamin is very weakly rebelling are white, middle-class, and, traditionally, masculine.

The decade in which both the novel and film forms of *The Graduate* were released was, therefore, tumultuous and strenuous for all involved. It was a time of great change in the United States. John and Robert Kennedy were both assassinated because as budding world leaders, they saw a potential for change; Malcom X and Martin Luther King, Jr. were killed because they had a dream that the children ‘will one day live in a nation whereby they are judged not by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character;’[[253]](#footnote-253) the American government became engrossed in a war that it, ultimately, could not win. Though violence, oppression, and the threat of global destruction were the undertone of the decade, the 1960s was the dawning of the Age of Aquarius. This fluid decade saw enormous change as the American populace attempted to wash away the sins of their fathers. Both guys and girls wore long hair and the same clothes (although you’d never know that by watching *The Graduate*). The youth of America was fighting against the establishment of consumerism in order to proclaim their freedom and independence. According to Cherry Potter, this was a time period in which ‘surely man’s creativity knew no bounds…but our capacity for destruction on a scale never conceived of before was equally awe-inspiring.’[[254]](#footnote-254) Like the rest of the United States, Benjamin Braddock – our fictional protagonist – knew that he too wanted something different, and that his very soul was on the line: he could change for the better, or he could perpetuate the existence that had been handed to him. Change belonged to the new generation.

**The Early Cinematic Works of Mike Nichols in the Silver Age of Hollywood**

In this section, my attention will shift from the greater culture of the United States in the 1960s toward the directorial work of Mike Nichols up to and including *The Graduate* in the context of the cinematic culture of the time. I will, therefore, be discussing Nichols’ earlier films in order to understand the similarities that his Academy Award® winning piece shares with his other work. We will be reviewing *The Graduate* through the lens not only of Nichols’ previous films, but also through a comparative view of other works that were nominated for an Oscar in 1968. Finally, in this section, I will be discussing the actual screening history of this film and the reviews that it received from critics and, to a minimal degree, scholars.

Before beginning to talk specifically about the life and works of Mike Nichols, I feel that it is important to provide an overview of the Silver Age of Hollywood. During the Golden Age of Hollywood (1927—1960), there was an identifiable cinematic form which emerged. Fundamentally, the classical style of the period built on the principle of continuity editing in which the sound recording and camera should never call attention to themselves unlike modernist and postmodernist film that readily employed and continues to employ these stylistic choices. There was also a narrative form, which was clearly structured with a discernible beginning, middle, and end with a comprehensive resolution.[[255]](#footnote-255) The Silver Age (also called New Hollywood, post-classical Hollywood, or American New Wave) began in the late-1960s, and ended in the early 1980s. This was a period of time in which a new generation of young filmmakers (e.g. Woody Allen, Francis Ford Coppola, Dennis Hopper, Stanley Kubrick, Martin Scorsese, and Mike Nichols) came to prominence, and changed the types of films that were being produced.[[256]](#footnote-256) As with many other young people in the 1960s, these budding artists were counterculture-bred, and, therefore, were able to reach the youth audience that cinema was losing. According to Todd Berliner, the films of New Hollywood differed from Golden Age cinema in five distinct ways:

1: The films show a perverse tendency to integrate, in narratively incidental ways, story information and stylistic devices counterproductive to the films’ overt and essential narrative purpose.

2: Hollywood filmmakers often situate their filmmaking practices in between those of classical Hollywood and those of European and Asian art cinema.

3: These films prompt spectator responses that are more uncertain and discomforting than those of more typical Hollywood cinema. These films are designed to make the audience feel uncomfortable.

4: The films’ narratives place an uncommon emphasis on irresolution, particularly at the moment of climax or in epilogues, when more conventional Hollywood movies busy themselves tying up loose ends.

5: This type of cinema hinders narrative linearity and momentum and scuttles its potential to generate suspense and excitement.[[257]](#footnote-257)

Though these are the primary deviations from classical Hollywood production, they are not the only differences of note. The films of the era attempted to heighten the realism and immersion of their films; the cinema was no longer a place of spectacle, but, rather, a place of reflection. We were meant to empathise with the protagonist. In *The Graduate*, Nichols attempts to have us understand the psychology of Benjamin by applying subjectivity to the shots: because we saw some of the film through his own eyes, we were no longer able to entirely step away from him and observe him as an object.[[258]](#footnote-258)

Not only did New Age Hollywood indicate a shift in production elements of cinema, it also employed thematic changes. Films of this era often featured anti-establishment political themes, the use of rock music, and sexual freedom. Additionally, many of the filmmakers and actors of the time openly admitted to use of drugs including LSD and marijuana.[[259]](#footnote-259) The greater youth movement of the 1960s, which we explored in the previous section, turned the anti-heroes of *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Cool Hand Luke* into pop culture heroes. And though Benjamin Braddock does not come across as a rebel until the end of the film, ultimately, ‘he bars the church doors with a cross, to leave behind all the Mrs Robinsons and Mr Robinsons and Mr Braddocks and Mrs Braddocks, all the over-thirties, who have tried to crucify the love generation.’[[260]](#footnote-260) Though Benjamin begins on the same path as his parents, he ultimately rejects them for freedom, and, therefore, becomes a cinematic hero for New Hollywood and Mike Nichols.

At this point, our attention will turn from the cinematic culture, and will begin to discuss the life and works of our filmmaker. Michael Igor Peschkowsky was born to Brigitte (née Launder) and Paul Peschkowsky in Berlin on 6 November 1931, and lived there with his parents and younger brother until 1938. In April of that year, when the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (Ger. National Socialist German Worker’s Party) were arresting Jews in Berlin, he and his younger brother were sent to the United States to live with their father who had fled from the persecution months before.[[261]](#footnote-261) This young immigrant’s family changed their surname to Nichols, and started new oppression-free lives in Manhattan.[[262]](#footnote-262) In 1944, the German-born Nichols became a naturalised citizen before attending Walden High School and matriculating into New York University, where he dropped out before enrolling in a pre-med programme at the University of Chicago. It was while studying medicine that Nichols began to skip his lectures in favour of attending and participating in theatrical activities. Eventually, Nichols dropped out of university yet again, and returned to New York where he began studying at Lee Strasberg’s famous Actor’s Studio.[[263]](#footnote-263) After a year of working under Strasberg, Nichols returned to Chicago to join the Compass Players, a cabaret troupe, which was the direct predecessor of the critically acclaimed improvisational comedy enterprise Second City, with the other half of his comedy duo, Elaine May.[[264]](#footnote-264)

After a professional split with May because of personal idiosyncrasies and tensions, Nichols again moved to Vancouver, British Columbia in order to pursue a career as a theatrical director. There, he directed a production of Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and acted in George Bernard Shaw’s *St. Joan*.[[265]](#footnote-265) In 1963, Nichols came into his own as an artist when he was chosen to direct Neil Simon’s *Barefoot in the Park*. It was with this blockbuster performance, which had 1530 performances and earned Nichols a Tony Award® for ‘Best Direction of Play’, that Nichols found his niche as an artist. He went on to direct a series of other works written by Simon, and earned another of the theatre awards for *The Odd Couple* before lending his expertise to the film industry.[[266]](#footnote-266)

Though he had an impressive record as a theatre director, Nichols had never worked in filmmaking. In 1966, Warner Brothers Studios approached the thirty-five-year-old to direct a screen adaptation of Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, which had earned the Tony Award® for Best Play in 1963. This narrative shares a striking similarity to *The Graduate* in that the film follows the hollow life of an unloved woman who turns to drink as a result of a bourgeois marriage. As a Broadway performance, the play opened during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and rather than having an opportunity to use the theatre as a means by which to escape the troubles of the world, the audience was instead assaulted by language and situations that they had not seen before outside of experimental theatre.[[267]](#footnote-267) Three years later, this same searing language[[268]](#footnote-268) was transferred from the stage to the screen, and the critical acclaim could not have been more glowing. To date, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is the only film to have been nominated for an Academy Award® in every eligible category – a total of thirteen – and secured five of them (Best Actress – Elizabeth Taylor, Best Supporting Actress – Sandy Dennis, Best Art Direction – Richard Sylbert and George Hopkins, Best Cinematography – Haskell Wexler, and Best Costume Design – Irene Sharaff). Though he directed an astonishingly successful film, Nichols was not able to secure the award for Best Director, which went to Fred Zinnemann for his work on *A Man for All Seasons*. Still, for a virgin filmmaker, he won very considerable recognition.

An interesting matter to note, however, is that *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was not the first film that Nichols was approached to direct. *The Graduate* was meant to be Mike Nichols’ debut as a film director, but due to funding coming so slowly, he was given the opportunity to establish himself with his award-winning Albee adaptation.[[269]](#footnote-269) It seems that Nichols learned something from his work directing Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor because in 1968, *The Graduate* was nominated for Academy Awards® in five categories, and received only one – Best Director. Though this is the only award that the film was able to secure, and it was the only award for Best Director to ever be given to Nichols, that does not end the critical acclaim that the film received.

In spite of the fact that Dustin Hoffman was a neophyte actor and Nichols a fledgling filmmaker, this film was reviewed highly by critics, and was ‘recognized with that most treasured of all industry honors: big box office. Robert L. Carringer cites a *Variety* report that, three decades after its initial release, *The Graduate*’s inflation-adjusted earnings placed it among the top twenty-five in the history of Hollywood – “quite simply, a phenomenon, almost of the magnitude of the *Star Wars* cycle.”[[270]](#footnote-270)’[[271]](#footnote-271) Today, forty years removed from its creation and release, there is still a certain relevance to the film because according to JW Whitehead, ‘The archetypal story *The Graduate* tells, of coming of age and coming to terms with one’s familial and cultural inheritance (however empty), transcends a particular time and place. Its satire, directed at all its characters, including eventually the protagonist and his pretty girlfriend, weighs material against spiritual values in ways that remain relevant to affluent societies, where great material resources tend to mask injustices both beyond and within their borders.’[[272]](#footnote-272) For us as people interested in classical reception studies, this is what makes this 1967 blockbuster important: not only does it retell the ancient Hippolytos-Phaidra myth, but it proves that both the over-arching themes and media of performance can transcend chronological periods.

**Mike Nichols’ Benjamin Braddock**

Throughout this section, I will provide an overview of the existential characteristics of this film’s eponymous hero. We will examine the traits that make Benjamin Braddock a believable individual, and which define him within the world of the play. I have already established how Braddock fits into the literary lineage of Hippolytos, and some reference to that relationship will be called back in this section. We will attempt to understand the person that Benjamin is throughout the course of the film as he shifts from being an idealistic youth who expects more from his life than that of his parents until he has effectively the same mediocre future lying before him. In my previous analyses, I have only been able to examine the author’s relevant text, but because this reception is a motion picture, I have an opportunity to see the figures in action, and may be able to lift deeper psychological motivations from the slightest shifts of their eyes and bodies. Therefore, throughout this and the following section, I will occasionally reference the performances of Hoffman and Bancroft. In previous chapters, I have provided an overview of the existential traits of these characters, but due to the very limited understanding and changes of these two characters, I have chosen not to do that for this, and have only provided an analysis of their character portraits along with a conclusion.

*Analysis*

In many of the other dramas examined in this thesis, there is an ‘Aristotelian’ unity of time, which allows us to analyse our two focal characters during the final day of their lives. This is not the case in Mike Nichols’ film. The film follows the lives of Benjamin, Mrs Robinson, and Elaine over the course of, at least, an entire summer, and there are some considerable surface alterations to the characters during this lapse of time. Let us begin by attempting to understand who Benjamin is at the onset of the film.

In a scene that was not included in the final cut, Benjamin is seen delivering the commencement address to his East Coast, Ivy League classmates, and in this scene, we begin to glimpse at a feature of Benjamin which comes to define him throughout the course of the film that we are able to view: uncertainty.

—and today it is right that we should ask ourselves the one most important question: What is the purpose of these years, the purpose for all the demanding work, the purpose for the sacrifices made by those who love us? Were there NOT a purpose, then all of the past years of struggle, of fierce competition and of uncompromising ambition would be meaningless. But, of course, there is a purpose and I must tell it to you. I ask you to remember this purpose always and I pledge that I shall endeavour to carry it with me forever. The purpose, my fellow graduates – the purpose is – there is a reason, my friends, and the reason is – the reason is – the purpose is –[[273]](#footnote-273)

This is an address that Benjamin will never be able to complete because it is at this moment that the film that we have come to know opens. Benjamin is sitting on the airplane returning home recalling the commencement address that his parents did not attend, and of which he, himself, had no real understanding. In reviewing this memory (an aspect of the film which the editors felt was unnecessary), we realize that Benjamin Braddock no longer understands what all of his hard work in university was for. He is uncertain as to why he has done so well in school, and now has no real aspirations for his educated mind or for his promising life. When he is encountered by his biological father in his childhood bedroom, Benjamin is avoiding his parents’ party, which is meant to celebrate his accomplishments with their friends.[[274]](#footnote-274) The young man is isolating himself so that he has a moment to reflect on all of this time, and attempt to come to some understanding of his own life. In an over-the-shoulder conversation with his father, Benjamin reveals his own concerns with his future and how he wants it to be ‘different’, but seems to confess with a crooked, half-smile that he is not yet sure by what manner he can make his own life ‘different’ (2:51 – 03:47). Much like Hippolytos did not want to fully embrace the characteristics of his mother’s society (and wanted to be nothing like his father), Benjamin is attempting to identify himself in opposition to the established lifestyle of his parents, which is best characterized by Mr McQuire with ‘just one word…plastics’ (05:24 – 05:35).

Effectively, Benjamin is hoping that his life can have some substance to it. Until this point, he has spent his life pursuing the dreams of his parents. He has gone to university; pursued not only academics but also athletics and social clubs; he has made something of himself that a capitalistic society appreciates. His parents’ ‘good friends’ are exceedingly proud of him because he is becoming a lot like them; he has the potential to perpetuate their agreed upon lifestyle of earning and spending. Benjamin, however, is not content to allow himself to fall into this same trap, and has only come to this realisation after he has been accepted into a postgraduate programme, which has the potential for defining the rest of his adult life. Bob Geller provides an interesting overview of Benjamin and his desire for change as stemming from the corked pressures that have built up inside of him:

And even though Ben is mutely without the rhetorical gifts of irony and implication of a Seymour or Buddy or Sergeant X or Franny, his myopic (at times hallucinatory) stares, frozen by close-ups as he confronts the monochromatic uptight adult world, seems to say it all to his audiences. There is in his flap-jawed look helplessness, bottled-up anger, terror, and in the latter part of the film a mystical tranquillity.[[275]](#footnote-275)

There is little rationalisation given as to why Benjamin desires a ‘different’ lifestyle for himself, but it is clear from the outset of the film that he does want something else, and Geller’s reflection that our eponymous hero may simply be exhausted with the uptight world of his parents fits with the themes of the decade very aptly. Though his prescribed essence seems to suggest that he follow in the All-American footsteps of his parents, he is beginning to subscribe to a new essence – that of the 1960s counterculture.

In a film utterly bereft of drugs, rock and roll, sex, and flower children, how does Benjamin Braddock propose to pursue a life different from his parents? How does he plan to embrace an existential identity rather than an essential one? At the beginning of the film, he is just as lost on this plan as he is on any other. Until he begins his affair with Mrs Robinson, Benjamin is forced to be on display for his parents; he has no visible means of an escape from the materialism and mediocrity that their lives represent, but then he finds an escape route embodied by a woman who strolls into his bedroom, and asks for a lift home.

Being utterly clueless, when in the Robinsons’ home, Benjamin makes a bold statement that Mrs Robinson is attempting to seduce him. He seems to be drawing his conclusion from the fact that she is offering him a lesson in social etiquette – she is treating him like an adult rather than a child. Having never been approached in the manner befitting an adult (though his father often corrects himself by promoting Benjamin from ‘boy’ to ‘man’), the bumbling Benjamin does not know how to respond. Clearly, he has rarely been approached by girls, and never by a woman; he does not know how to handle himself in the realm of adults. Because of this, Benjamin regresses into a childlike state of submissiveness, and, continually, attempts to flee from the home until he is cornered by his father-figure – Mr Robinson. The young graduate finds himself precariously placed between the two worlds that are vying for him: Mrs Robinson promises to usher him into a new era of adulthood with previously unfathomable freedoms while her husband continually tries to lure him back onto the path of normalcy, which his generation embodies. After some consideration (and more humiliation by his parents), the young Benjamin makes the existential choice that will alter the course of the rest of his life. In our terms, this is his original choice, and the outcome of his decision will drastically change the course of his life. That choice, of course, is to pursue a sexual relationship with not only an adult, but, more importantly, a married woman who likewise detests the structures and strictures of adult society.

From here, Benjamin’s character and outlook change until he is introduced to the virginal Elaine. He morphs from being a babbling buffoon, who is driven by the ambitions of his parents, into an aimless wanderer who finds it very nice simply to ‘drift’ as he does so frequently in the family pool. He becomes aimless, but he gains a new level of confidence in himself. This self-reliance is best highlighted in his previously described diatribe. Before he places himself firmly against Mrs Robinson in the bedroom, he rarely makes eye-contact, and he never speaks with any form of conviction, but after he has established himself as an adult, he, if for nothing more than a moment, speaks clearly and says what he wants. This, however, is a façade, and that is made clear in how quickly he recants his statements against her, and continues with his still unfulfilling life.

Because Benjamin is not contented with his own life, he is not able to follow through with changing his own existential identity. He attempts to become the cold, passionless adult whom Mrs Robinson is grooming him to be, but there’s a fire inside of him that burns; he is still a breath of fresh air from the monotony of adult society. Though he maintains this demeanour for a substantial enough portion of the film, his attitude changes when he realizes that the person he has allowed himself to become hurts other people. This is made most clear when he begins his relationship with Elaine (55:00—1:10:30), and his attitude again shifts from being cool and distant to being an idealistic young man yet again. Though this relatively carefree attitude remains with him for the remainder of the film, this New Hollywood masterpiece sticks true to its genre and leaves us questioning what will become of this young man and his stolen bride. Benjamin abducts Elaine, and drags her into his inane drifting after his previous life has been stolen away from him. He decides to forge a new path, but it is a meandering one without direction. Due to this lack of direction in life, Nichols believes that Ben and Elaine will fall back into familiar patterns, and will become their parents.[[276]](#footnote-276)

*Conclusion*

In conclusion on the topic of Benjamin Braddock, the data seems to suggest that he is lacking one characteristic that all of his literary predecessors had: strength of character. Benjamin is a meandering man-child torn between two worlds like Hippolytos before him, but unlike his antecedent, he does not know how to define himself either in or against these paradoxical communities. He begins as a lost soul wanting something different, but because he does not know what that changed form of existence is, he falls into the same trap of prescribed essence repeatedly. By choosing to have an affair with Mrs Robinson, he finds himself thrown into a river of rebellion, but when Elaine outstretches her hand to ‘save’ him and pull him back onto the essential course, he takes it, and does not look back. For Benjamin, this seems to represent an opportunity to runaway into a magical new beginning, but, in reality, he’s only setting himself up to repeat the mistakes of his fathers.

**Mrs Nichols’ Mrs Robinson**

Once again, I will use this section to explore existentially one of the most famous iconic film personalities of Hollywood’s Silver Age: Mrs Robinson. I will analyse not only Buck Henry and Calder Willingham’s screenplay, but also Bancroft’s performance in order to understand who this character was and has become within her microcosm. We will try to understand what motivates Mrs Robinson into seducing Benjamin and, ultimately, destroying the young man’s reputation and social life.

*Analysis*

Let us begin by attempting to understand who this ‘broken down alcoholic’ is, and how she came to be such. Whereas her literary antecedents were all princesses who were descended from the gods, Mrs Robinson is a woman of our modern age who has no lofty claims to divinity. In fact, there is little that we know of her history, but what we do know is strikingly revealing. During the scene in which Benjamin has his tirade against her, we learn of Elaine’s conception in the back of Mr Robinson’s car, which led to this previously promising young art student marrying a man whom she did not love. Throughout these years of forced marriage, she has never developed feelings of love for him, but has only stayed with him for the sake of her daughter and the social stigma attached with divorcees.

Mr and Mrs Robinson do not share a bedroom, and this has allowed the unhappy wife to leave the house nightly when her husband ingests his ritualistic sleeping pills. Besides not sharing the same bedroom, the couple rarely pursue an amorous relationship with one another. According to Henry’s screenplay (but not the released version of the film), for approximately five years the couple have been divided within their own house. Bancroft reveals that the two of them engage in sex extremely rarely, often when the husband is drunk. When asked how this makes her feel about her husband, the now cold Mrs Robinson simply responds, ‘I don’t.’ She no longer has any form of feelings toward her husband: she neither loves nor hates him. She feels nothing.

This emptiness is not solely directed toward her husband, but is, rather, a reflection of the hollowness that has consumed her entirely. We learn in the scene beginning at 43:42 that throughout the course of their affair, Benjamin and Mrs Robinson have divulged very little about themselves because the latter ‘[Doesn’t] think [they] have much to say to each other.’ Mrs Robinson has been rendered cold because of years of a passionless life.

Although she is outwardly beautiful, her eyes remain strikingly dead, her lips turn down at the corners and she smiles sardonically on occasion but never laughs. It is as if her spirit is dead, her inner light has gone out. She wants Benjamin like an alcoholic wants a fix; he’s a bodily need, nothing more…She’s not interested in getting to know him and she doesn’t want him knowing her.[[277]](#footnote-277)

She has no interest in getting to know this or any other man any longer, and is only using the recent university graduate to satisfy her primal needs, which her husband has neglected for years. This does not stop the curious young man from pursuing his inquiry. Eventually, he pries from her the only slivers of her past, which are revealed in the film. In order to engage in a forced conversation and sate Benjamin’s curiosity, Mrs Robinson proposes the topic of art, but claims to have no knowledge of the subject. When Benjamin presses the issue to ask as to whether or not she has an interest in art, her response is a simple and flat ‘No.’

This, of course, is not the truth. When discussing the topic of Elaine’s conception while she and Mr Robinson were enrolled in university, Mrs Robinson is finally coerced into revealing what her major subject of study was while she was attending university. Bancroft turns from her young lover, swallows back her emotions, sets her eyes forward, and vociferates weakly and with a hint of sadness, ‘Art.’ Her eyebrows are raised when she acknowledges that she has lost her interest in the subject over the years, but it is quite clear that this was a forced loss of interest, assuming that the passion never truly died. Simply put, even if her passion for this subject still burns deep within her, it has been cooled and repressed by two decades of obligatory marriage and child-rearing. Mrs Robinson lost her identity entirely when she was forced into a loveless marriage because of a passionate night gone awry. Now, after years of alcoholism and isolated nights, she has lured Benjamin into her arms as a sexual partner, and she is not willing to let him go easily into the clutches of her daughter.

This jealousy seems to be the primary concern that Mrs Robinson has with Benjamin taking Elaine on a date. Whereas the patriarchs of each household have urged this union forward, the film’s primary antagonist does not want to lose the man to whom she has given herself to her daughter yet again. This is not to suggest that there has been some form of incestuous relationship going on between Mr Robinson and his daughter, but that, rather, all of his attention in this relationship has been devoted to his career as an attorney and Elaine. Mrs Robinson once had a promising future as an art student, but that was lost when her terribly uninteresting daughter entered this world.

She does not want to lose what she may be rediscovering in herself because of this girl. Though she claims (in order to sate her scorned lover) that Benjamin is too degenerate to associate with her daughter, her true motivation for mentally attacking him is that she herself does not want to lose her lover. She has control over a situation, something that she lost twenty years ago when Elaine was born. Although Benjamin strikes out against her, and does wound her psyche, Mrs Robinson quickly regains control over the situation. She realizes that if Benjamin pursues Elaine, she will lose him, and her own reputation could easily be destroyed by this young man leaking information about their sordid affair. She, like Phaidra before her, secures from her love-interest a stifling promise of silence on the matter. This is the final scene in which Benjamin and Mrs Robinson seem to trust one another. The older woman, in order to protect herself, begins to formulate deeper, more substantial means by which to silence him. This is the only situation that she has had control of in her recent life, and she is willing to sacrifice herself in order to assure that this power is not lost.

I am not arguing that Mrs Robinson is a power-driven figure, but, rather, that she has someone and some aspect of her own life over whom she finally has influence, and people in general are not known to relinquish control easily. Most of her time these past twenty years has been spent sitting alone at home drinking or in social situations where she isolates herself from the remainder of the crowd. If we recall the first scene in which we see her, the one at Benjamin’s first party, we note that she sits amongst the crowd, but is engaging in conversation with none of them. She has not been pleased with her life, but actually enjoys the company of her young lover. If she loses Benjamin, she loses control of the one thing that matters to her currently in the world. When the patriarchs of the respective houses force Benjamin into taking Elaine out on a date, Mrs Robinson not only feels that she has been betrayed again by her neglectful husband, but also by her young lover. In order to strike out against the both of them, Mrs Robinson commits social suicide: she claims to have been raped by Benjamin, and files for divorce with her husband.

Whereas her literary counterparts attempt to protect the familial reputation by not succumbing to base desires, this is not the case with Mrs Robinson. This cinematic figure desires only to sate herself. She does not care that Benjamin and Elaine may be a better match for one another, nor does she care that she and her husband have been married for over twenty years; she is not satisfied with her own life, and continually attempts to escape from it within the course of the film. By claiming to have been raped by this ‘degenerate’, Mrs Robinson has freed herself of the social shackles which have held her in stasis for such a long time. Ultimately, Mrs Robinson does indeed free herself, but, simultaneously, brings upon herself an uncertain future. Just as her Greek antecedent has done, this middle-aged woman has secured the noose around her neck in order to escape the purgatory that her life has become.

*Conclusion*

Though Mrs Robinson has very limited screen-time, the time that she does have reveals a few characteristics about her, which are quite substantial. Not only is she revealed to be a successor to the literarily essential lineage of Phaidra, but her own distinct personality’s intertextual existence shines through. We know little about the prescribed essence of this middle-aged woman, but we do know that because of a sordid fling with the man that she now calls husband, which led to her pregnancy with Elaine, Mrs Robinson was forced to forfeit her own personal aspirations and ambitions. For decades, she has suppressed any aspect of her own authenticity in order to pursue a life fitted to her station as the trophy wife of an attorney. Finally, she has been given an opportunity to explore herself via Benjamin, and she is not willing to relinquish her newfound freedoms. In order to guarantee that this flame of authenticity is not smothered, she destroys Benjamin’s social life when he attempts to leave her, and, simultaneously, allows her freedom to burn bright. The purpose both of this affair and the accusation of rape has been freedom from emotional stagnation, and she has achieved that by ending her familial life.

**Conclusion**

This film, like all other Hippolytos-Phaidra receptions, is centred on a conflict between two opposing ideologies. There is an obvious struggle of interests for both Benjamin and Mrs Robinson who are set against the materialistic desires of Mrs Robinson’s social coevals. Both of these people are wanting to change their lives, and they mutually use one another as means to fulfil that end. Mrs Robinson uses Benjamin to escape from her passionless life in an attempt to regain something that she lost because of the conception of Elaine; the young lover, in turn, uses the older partner as a means by which better to understand himself, and to be driven into adulthood. *The Graduate* is the quintessential 1960s film. It’s filled with a clash between the young and the old, a new movement and the hegemonic establishment, change and stagnation. Though many may see Mrs Robinson and Benjamin as the opposition for each other to overcome, they are really on the same team, but I am not sure if either of them knows it. In the end though, only Mrs Robinson is able to escape because she has been on the inside of the establishment looking out whereas Benjamin has no idea as to what he is up against. He will be dragged in, and in twenty years or so, he will realize that his life has been reduced to nothing more than ‘plastics.’

**IV**

# ‘Because it’s the essence of it all, isn’t it?’

The Existential World of the Characters in Brian Friel’s *Living Quarters*

Throughout the course of this chapter, it is my goal to examine the characters present in Irish dramatist Brian Friel’s *Living Quarters*. As has been done throughout this thesis, I will begin this chapter by providing contextual support for the play in terms of evaluating the development of the Republic of Ireland alongside of the early career of Brian Friel in order to better understand the national culture that was receiving this play. In the following section, I will briefly examine the overarching themes of existentialism prevalent in Friel’s piece. This action must be taken because this tragedy revolves solely around the most valuable aspect of existential philosophy: choice. After this context has been provided, and we have come to understand the historical contexts which impacted this playwright and his work, I will, once again, conduct a Psychoanalytic Existentialistic analysis of the two characters around whom this chapter revolves: the Commandant’s son Ben and his young second wife Anna.[[278]](#footnote-278)

**Brian Friel’s Early Career**

In order to understand the projected lives of these characters, which are undeniably Irish, we must first understand the society from which their author originates. Born in 1929 in Omagh, part of Great Britain, Brian Patrick Friel was the son of a primary school teacher and postmistress. He attended university at St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth in 1948 before becoming a teacher in Belfast for just a year. During Friel’s early life, his nation was undergoing a series of radical changes. Friel was born just a few years after the Irish War of Independence[[279]](#footnote-279) in a part of the United Kingdom that had long been divided by fighting. This warring had culminated with the Republic of Ireland winning its independence from the crown of Great Britain.

While Friel was still a schoolboy in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland adopted its new Constitution of Ireland,[[280]](#footnote-280) which established the office of President of Ireland, who gave assent to new laws with his own authority without reference to King George VI. As our dramatist was attending university in this newly separated Ireland, World War II waged on, and his nation of residence remained neutral in the conflict.[[281]](#footnote-281) As Friel was completing his studies at St. Patrick’s College in 1948, Ireland’s link with the monarchy ceased entirely with the passage of the Republic of Ireland Act 1948. By the time Friel began publishing his first short stories in *The New Yorker* in 1959, the recently independent Ireland had even been granted membership into the United Nations. This was a period of radical government change in a very short time, and Friel had the opportunity to live through it, and was shaped alongside of his newly divided nation.

As the 1970s rolled in, Friel’s work shifted toward serving as explicit commentaries on politic, including satires against internment, ‘Bloody Sunday,’[[282]](#footnote-282) and The Troubles[[283]](#footnote-283) as a greater civil conflict. During this decade, Friel released *The Mundy Scheme* (1969) and *Volunteers* (1975), both of which were pointed satires of the fledgling Irish government. In 1973, Friel published *The Freedom of the City*, which illustrated the final hours, failed escape, and the tribunal to their deaths of three protestors who mistakenly found themselves in the mayor’s parlour in the Guildhall. Though he had gained a level of prominence with his earlier works, *The Freedom of the City* came to stand alongside such plays as John Boyd’s *The Flats*, Stewart Love’s *Me Oul Segocia*, and Martin Lynch’s *The Interrogation of Ambrose Fogarty* as one of the quintessential political dramas.

By the mid-1970s, when *Living Quarters: After Hippolytus[[284]](#footnote-284)* was being debuted, Friel had moved away from the overtly political plays to examine family dynamics in a manner that has attracted many comparisons to the work of Anton Chekhov.[[285]](#footnote-285) He has moved from overtly political plays to one in which ‘we are conscious of the Irish Republic’s problems, since the hero of the play, Commandant Frank Butler, is in the Irish Army.’[[286]](#footnote-286) Written in 1977 and first performed at the Abbey Theatre in the Irish capital of Dublin, this memory play[[287]](#footnote-287) set in Donegal[[288]](#footnote-288) tells the story of the fateful day that Commandant Frank Butler returns a hero from a successful UN mission in the Middle East on 24 May. As a war hero, he is welcomed home by his four children from his previous marriage and his young wife, Anna. It will, however, conclude with the Commandant learning of an affair between his wife and son, and, in a twist of the essential tradition of this play, the suicide of the war hero.[[289]](#footnote-289)

**Existential Themes in *Living Quarters***

Rather unique in the way in which the story is told, our play opens with a sole figure called Sir setting the stage and the exposition for the dramatic action. According to Friel’s stage directions, this figure, who acts as arbiter and director, is ‘Always in full control of the situation, of the other characters, of himself. His calm is never ruffled. He is endlessly patient and tolerant, but never superior. Always carries his ledger with him.’ Omnipresent on the stage, the character stands apart from the action, and only occasionally does he interact with it. From his ledger, however, he dictates the events of 24 May as they always have and always will occur. Much as the Chorus in Anouilh’s *Antigone* foreshadows the drama’s final conclusion, our dramatist’s Sir knows how the play will end. In fact, he is merely an entity who has been conceived by the Butler family in order to serve as ‘the ultimate arbiter, the powerful and impartial referee, the final adjudicator, a kind of human Hansard who knows those tiny little details and interprets them accurately’ (10). His entire purpose in existence is to assure that all of the choices that were made in reality are present in the retelling of the fateful events that surround the Commandant’s homecoming. Compared to the Chorus, in the French play, however, which only comments on and observes the action, this Irish device actively enforces the string of events even when the family ‘begin flirting with the idea of circumventing [him], of foxing [him], of outwitting [him]’ (10).

The roles of each character are clearly set, and it is Sir’s responsibility to assure that they carry on their lives without interruption or tangent. As the action comes to its conclusion, this ominous figure reveals that while the characters themselves are intended to have lives after the curtain falls, theirs are little more than ‘Blank pages.’ In terms of Psychoanalytic Existentialism, these are characters who have prescribed literary essences not only because of their relationships to their predecessors, but also because they are, in an Absurdist fashion, doomed to live only for the moment that they are on stage. Unlike any other characters in this particular case study, they are absolutely aware of their intertextual fates.[[290]](#footnote-290)

This Irish drama is littered with the French theme of existentialism. In the first interaction between characters, Sir discusses with Father Tom Carty the importance of being authentic with himself. Our arbiter does not grant the priest the illusions with which he has long blinded himself, and reminds Father Tom that the family do not approach him for advice because they love him, ‘but because he is the outsider who represents the society they’ll begin to feel alienated from, slipping away from them…And what he says won’t make the slightest difference because at that point – the point of no return – they’ll be past listening to anybody’ (13). In fact, this impartial being will not grant comforting illusions to any member of the ensemble. Sir strives to makes sure the characters of this drama are ‘always being true to themselves’ (69).

In a play whose ultimate end is the suicide of a Theseus-figure, the impartial referee acknowledges that there is no time to waste. For this grisly series of events, time and space are of the utmost importance. First of all, Sir will not allow any character to take the stage unless they were there for the actual events, and ushers away the likes of Charlie Donnelly – Miriam’s husband – from the stage stating clearly that ‘there are no spectators, Charlie. Only participants’ (14). In this regard as a chronological gatekeeper, Sir accurately protects both the historical and emotional records as they actually occurred rather than how they were remembered.[[291]](#footnote-291) At one point in the first act, Helen, the oldest daughter of Frank Butler, attempts to project upon the literary atmosphere her epimethean knowledge when she argues, ‘The whole atmosphere – three sisters, relaxed, happy, chatting in their father’s garden on a sunny afternoon. There was unease – I *remember* – there were shadows – we’ve got to acknowledge them’ (23), but because these foreboding feelings were not actually present in the timeline, this existential judge does not allow them to alter history. Simultaneously, however, he is not a sadist, and allows the family to revel in delight when they have ‘taken a few liberties’ because ‘even if they’ve juggled the time a bit, they’re doing no harm’ (69) due to the fact that the most that the family can hope for is to have ‘shuffled the pages a bit – that’s all. But nothing’s changed’ (41). This director will allow them momentary gaiety and incidental, insignificant psychological slips until ‘the point of no return.’ At the point of confession, he will stringently enforce history without deviation.

The greatest responsibility of this cosmic director is to assure that decisions are reached within the play not out of irrationality, but, rather, by the same neural processes and existential choices that led to them in the actual timeline. Anna – the Phaidra-figure – attempts, unsuccessfully, to rush the dramatic action to the confession of her affair with her stepson in order to reach the conclusion of this ghastly ordeal, but she is reminded that the choices that led to Frank Butler’s suicide could have been avoided.

Well, of course we can do that. But if we do, then we’re bypassing all that period when different decisions *might* have been made. Because at the point we’ve arrived at now, many different conclusions would have been possible if certain things had been said or done or left unsaid and undone. And at this point it did occur to many of you to say certain things or to omit saying certain things. And it is the memory of those lost possibilities that has exercised you endlessly since and has kept bringing you back here, isn’t that so? For example, Helen, you did think of spending the night with Charlie and Miriam…And Ben, at this point you still had time to join your friends on the salmon boat…As for yourself, Anna, you could have resolved – sitting up at that top table in the mess – bored by the talk around you – you could still have resolved to live with your secret – Be fair, Anna. You did think of it. In which case Frank’s life would have stayed reasonably intact. Oh, there were many, many options still open at this stage (45-6).

The choices of each of these individuals led to the events playing out as they did. Intertextually, Anna could have chosen to rebel against her literary essence by not revealing her passion for Ben, and then the dramatic action of this piece would have been severely altered. She, however, made the choice to fall in the footsteps of her forbearers, and, as a result, her husband took his own life. For that reason, it is she who bears the greatest amount of guilt, and continually attempts to drive the dramatic action onward toward the end of her husband’s life (39-41, 70-1).

This drama addresses the impact that individual choices have on a greater society. Just as the existentialists argue that in reshaping oneself, one sets the standards by which all others should act, so too does this tragedy warn against hasty decisions due to their greater repercussions. Father Tom makes a religious plea for free will that Sartre would have suggested was inherent in the human condition when he says, ‘grace is available to each and every one of us if we just ask God for it…Which is really the Christian way of saying that our options are *always* open. Because that is the enormous gift that Christ purchased for us – the availability of choice and our freedom to choose’ (47). Tom Carty’s optimism would be promising were it not for the fact that these individuals have already chosen, and ‘nothing can be changed now – not a thing’ (87). Now, they are stuck in a perpetual state of existential flux in which they must continually re-examine their choices from one particular evening so that they may better understand who they were as well as who they have come to be. In short, like in Sartre’s *No Exit*, this family are now each other’s personal tormentors in a private hell.

**Brian Friel’s Benedict Butler**

In order to best understand the place of Brian Friel’s Ben Butler in the reception tradition of the Phaidra/Hippolytos mythology, we must seek to identify the characteristics that existentially establish this ‘wastrel – a spoiled mother’s boy’ (21). Indeed, he shares a number of similarities to his literary antecedents, but we must establish his traits as a unique individual existing within the world of this famous 1977 text. If he is damned to repeat the fateful events of his father’s suicide, we must understand his relationship to the world around him, his father, and, of course, the stepmother with whom – in the tradition of Eugene O’Neill – he has an affair.

*Analysis*

Before attempting to understand who Ben is from the time that this dream play opens to the moment when it closes, we must first analyse his characterization and understand who he is in the context of this dark dream play. Let us begin by briefly examining his name. His name is interesting because he is not the first ‘Ben’ with whom we’ve become acquainted in this study. A decade before the premiere of this play, we were, obviously, introduced to Benjamin Braddock in *The Graduate*, but in 1924, Eugene O’Neill gave us Eben (using the root Ben) in his *Desire Under the Elms*. Why has this name been applied to three different Hippolytos-figures? The answer is simple. As Marianne McDonald points out, ‘Ben itself means “son” in Hebrew, and often forms a part of a name, functioning as Mac- or Mc- in an Irish name: for example, David Ben Gurion, meaning David son of Gurion. We see the emphasis on family and relationship.’[[292]](#footnote-292) This is very important to understanding Ben because while Frank and Louise Butler had three daughters – Helen, Miriam, and Tina – they had only one son – Ben. Although he is the third born child, he is the only male heir to this family in name and reputation.[[293]](#footnote-293)

As has been common in the literary tradition of this figure, Ben’s intertextual essence is that of the only male heir of his mother. We learn throughout the course of the drama that Louise Butler was a domineering woman, but, by the end of her life, was also a very sickly one hobbling about on a cane. Toward the end of the dramatic action, Commandant Butler recounts, in great detail, the agonising deterioration of his lovely bride:[[294]](#footnote-294)

You know, when I think about it – my God, how she must have suffered. Not that I was insensitive to it – far from it; I used to try to imagine what it was like. I would close my eyes and attempt to invest my body with pain, willing it into my joints, deliberately desiring the experience. But it’s not the same thing – not the same thing at all – how could it be? Because it cannot be assumed like that – it has got to be organic, generated within. And the statistics are fascinating too – well, no, not fascinating – how could they be fascinating; but interesting, interesting. It starts around forty; it’s estimated that five to six per cent of the population is affected; and women are three times more susceptible than men. But there you are – she was outside the general pattern. What age was she? Helen was what? - three? – four? – so she can’t have been more than twenty-eight or twenty-nine. And she had a very brief introductory period, as they call it. Within six months the hands and feet were swollen and within twelve months the spine was affected. So that within no time at all the fibrous tissues had replaced the normal tissues and when that happens you have at least a partial disorganisation of the joints and sometimes complete ankylosis – yes, you’d think I was an authority – and of course we attempted everything that was available – physiotherapy, teeth, tonsils, surgery, gold injections, aspirin courses, codeine courses. We event went to a quack in Kerry who promised us that before we’d be halfway home every swelling would have disappeared. And the cortisone era – my God, the miracle era – the cure for everything. And she responded so wonderfully to it at first – absolutely no pain. She was even able to throw away the stick for a couple of weeks. But it was an illusion – an illusion. Back came the pain, worse than ever. Much, much worse. My God, how she suffered. My God, how she suffered (85-6).

I have detailed her symptoms and suffering because of the psychological impact they would have had on Ben. If Butler is recalling correctly that Helen was approximately three or four in age, then their son would have been in his infancy. The only mother that he would have ever known would have been the one who been deteriorated before his very eyes. As Freud suggested, a young boy first grows attachment to his mother, and this is echoed by his older sister Miriam when she refers to Ben as ‘a wastrel – a spoiled mother’s boy’ (21). This is a young man who never lost connection with his mother; the family recall a picnic where Ben accidentally became drunk, and his mother rushed to his side for fear that her ‘twelve-year-old baby’ had epilepsy (67). Because of her degenerative condition, Louise had hopes that her son would become a medical doctor whereas his father insisted that he go for a commission. Ben was a first-year medical student at University College, Dublin, when his mother died six years before the events of this fateful evening.

Shortly after her passing, Benedict’s health broke, and he never returned to university. He has settled down in Culhame, and lives away in a hermitage (50), remains unmarried, and has no proper job.[[295]](#footnote-295) He, for all intents and purposes, has isolated himself from society. Though Sir refers to a set of friends that he could have joined on a salmon boat rather than being present at his father’s suicide (45), Ben, like other receptions of Hippolytos, spends most of his life in seclusion except when he comes back to visit his childhood home. After the fateful event that ended his father’s life, ‘Ben went to Scotland. He came back after seven months. He has been jailed twice for drunk and disorderly behaviour’ (93). Like Kane’s Hippolytus, Friel’s Benedict does not abstain from physical pleasures, but, rather, embraces them to a fault.

What pressured Ben to return to Ballybeg after the passing of his mother? He, certainly, did not return to be in close proximity with his father. Butler is described by Miriam as ‘set in his ways and damned selfish and bossy’ (24), and one could imagine how difficult this man would be to have as a father, but he’s aware of his own paternal inadequacies. In a conversation with Helen, Frank ponders, ‘What has a lifetime in the army done to me? Wondering have I carried over into this life the too rigid military discipline that – that the domestic life *must* have been bruised…I suppose what I’m saying is that I’m not unaware of certain shortcomings in my relationships with your mother and Ben’ (29-30).

Frequently, Benedict recalls the negativity that he has harboured against his father, and only once does he recall a moment of interrupted compassion shown by this man. After that same Portnoo picnic in which Ben became intoxicated, his father was driving his son, and Ben recalls with adoration a moment of intimacy between the two: ‘My head was on your knees – and you had one hand on the driving wheel – With your other hand, your free hand, all the way home you kept stroking my face, my cheeks, my forehead’ (72). Above all moments in Ben’s life, this is the only one that he recalls where he and his father showed each other affection.

That moment, however, is dwarfed in Benedict’s psyche by the events surrounding the death of his mother. To a child, the responsibility of a male in the household is to protect the family. When Frank Butler was not able to protect his dying Louise from the biological war that was waging on within her body, Ben and Miriam likewise held him responsible. The daughter blamed Butler for keeping his wife in a ‘bloody wet hole’ that ‘ruined her health’ because ‘he wouldn’t accept a transfer – always waiting for the big promotion that would be worthy of him and that never came’ (24). On the day Louise left this world, the son called his father a murderer, and was struck in the face for his words; ‘years, years of hostility’ (52) had been building in both of them, and finally Benedict assaulted his father with words, and his father retaliated with force. Until his father’s death, Ben does not release any form of resentment that he has against his father, he, instead, ‘embalm[s] it consciously, deliberately in acts of terrible perfidy which [he does] in a state of confusion, out of some vague residual passion that no longer fires [him]’ (53). Like his antecedents, this is a young man who has never forgiven his father for the death of his mother, but unlike those Theseus-figures that have come before, the Commandant could not have kept his bride alive.

Though the details of Benedict’s affair with Anna (who, like in the Greek tradition, is roughly the same age as her stepson) are silent, due to the emotional distance between father and son, we are not able to surmise Ben’s reason for entering into the relationship. Historically, he would have been contented just to leave and never see his father again without mentioning the affair, but Anna would have had to have lived with the guilt of their relationship, and she was not willing to bear this alone. Ben, in other words, did not seek to punish his father for past transgressions; like Benjamin Braddock, the cause of Benedict Butler’s affair is a mystery.[[296]](#footnote-296)

While he harbours emotional resentment toward his father, Ben does not seek purposefully to hurt him. Since the day of Louise’s funeral, Benedict has been emotionally numb,[[297]](#footnote-297) and now he doesn’t ‘give a damn about anyone or anything’ (58). As ‘the point of no return’ approaches, however, Ben shifts from being emotionally dead to feeling euphoric at the coming suicide. Elation begins to wash over this boy, but as the revolver sounds, he is overcome by ‘some imitation of a moment being missed forever’ when he wants ‘to say to him that ever since [he] was a child [he] always loved [his father] and always hated [his mother] – [his father] was always [his] hero. And even though it wouldn’t have been the truth, it wouldn’t have been a lie either: no, no; no lie’ (93). The intertextual essence of being a Butler, however, would neither have allowed his father to receive that kind of directness, nor for the son to have expressed it.

Due to his choice to commit an extramarital affair with his stepmother, Benedict Butler is, in part, responsible for the actions that led to the suicide of his father. When he goes to bear the weight of this responsibility, Ben collapses under himself. He gave no consideration to how his actions would affect his father and, subsequently, all other members of his family. In response, this Hippolytos-figure reveals his weakness by slowly committing a chemical lobotomy on himself through alcoholism.

*Conclusion*

In conclusion, we have come to understand the existential identity of Benedict Butler in Brian Friel’s *Living Quarters*. Like his literary antecedents, Ben is obsessed with honouring the memory of his mother. Unlike those that have come before him, however, he is not a strong enough character to do so: he failed medical school, which was the one thing that his mother wanted of him. By leaving university, he failed his mother; by failing his mother, he failed his original existential identity.

While his mother doted love upon him, his father, like Theseus-figures before him, was stern and, often, emotionally absent. Because of this, Benedict chose to resent his father. In fact, he wanted nothing more than to hold onto this negativity at all costs. This is the core of intertextual existential identity: he is obsessed with placating the memory of his mother, and in turn chooses to lash out at his father because of perceived shortcomings as a masculine protector, but who still failed his mother in her dying wishes. He now numbs himself emotionally through repression and alcohol so that he is not forced to face his own inadequacies.

**Brian Friel’s Anna Butler**

Having conducted an analysis of the biological relation to our main character – Commandant Frank Butler – it is only fitting that our study now turn toward his young wife. This twenty-something stepmother was abandoned by her husband for months on end after just ten days of marriage, and, out of loneliness, like Mrs Robinson, Abbie Cabot, Phèdre, and Phaedra before her, she turns towards another for compassion and human interaction. In continually searching for reminders of what she loved about her husband, she finds them in the striking physical similarities of his son. The literary kernel of Anna requires that she share a number of similarities with her antecedents, but now we must examine her traits as a unique individual existing in the Republic of Ireland. This ‘child bride’ (24) will be an interesting study because, like only Mrs Robinson and Abbie Cabot before her, her fate is not to commit physical suicide.

*Analysis*

Before Anna, most receptions of the Phaidra literary tradition are responding to passionate obsessions with the stepson-figure: Phaidra wrestles with Aphrodite; in a non-Stoic reading Phaedra fights against Venus; Phèdre contends with the passion in her own body; the elms themselves and their representation as a fallen mother drive Abbie Cabot into Eben’s arms. Like Mrs Robinson, however, Anna is not plagued by an external catalyst driving her into Benedict’s arms. After having only been married to the Commandant for ten days, he set out on a five month mission in the Middle East; he indicated to her with his prioritisation just how much time he was ready to devote to his new family.[[298]](#footnote-298)

I am not implying at all that Anna set out to be, as Ben calls her, ‘a heartless bitch’ (81), but, rather, that she is a victim of her rather poor circumstances. Whereas the Butlers, due to Frank’s military background and career, are an indirect family in terms of their affection, the character description[[299]](#footnote-299) details this very young woman as ‘mature, intelligent, passionate, direct in speech and manner.’ She does not belong in this family that is so ‘measured, watching, circling one another, peeping out, shying back’ (33). In fact, her only purpose in the family seems to be to serve as the Commandant’s ‘mascot’ (33). For the purpose of Butler’s success in his mission and for his promotion, I am not downplaying her importance, but in terms of a romantic relationship, they have been, since day one, destined to fail. When describing his young bride to his daughter, he can only muster, ‘Isn’t she beautiful? Yes, and warm and open and refreshing. And so direct – so direct – so uncomplicated. Anything she thinks – whatever comes into her head – straight out…And from the moment I met her – I am profoundly happy’ (33). To recap, the only details upon which he can elaborate about his young bride are the most superficial. Because of his infatuation with the newness of his relationship, he will be driven to see her again, and uses her elevated image to lift the spirits of the injured men that he saves.

In terms of her relationship to this Theseus-figure, our Anna is nothing more than a morale boost to his fractured ego. She serves, granted, as the agent for change in the drama, but that is all. Throughout the majority of our tragedy, she remains isolated. Having been brought into a family of strangers - presumably lifted from the only home that she has ever known - Anna hearkens back to Phaidra being taken from Cretan shores to land at Athens. She spends her time in her room, simply waiting to play her part in her husband’s suicide.

The most developed relationship that we see her have, and to call it developed, may be a stretch, is with her stepson/lover. In all of the scenes that they are seen together, the most excitement that they seem to have with one another is when Ben *does a few extravagant leaps around the stage, singing a few lines of “I’m singing in the rain” at the same time*’ (59). Other than this outburst, their only conversations are about how they reveal their attempt at an affair to the Commandant, and what each will do independently of one another after the evening concludes. Whereas Phaidra-figures in the past have been so enamoured with the various Hippolytos-figures that they are willing to follow their young lovers to the ends of the earth, Anna, without fear of the future, plans to travel to America. Much like the fate of Nichols’ reiterations of these Greco-Roman archetypes, ‘In Friel’s play Phaedra and Hippolytus do not die; they just fade away…Friel gives us an Hippolytus and a Phaedra with impotent futures…Anna, the young wife, goes to California where she finds a roommate and travels, leading an anesthetized life.’[[300]](#footnote-300)

Like Mrs Robinson, we know little about the past of Anna Butler, and, as we have established, she does not have much of a future. In order to grapple with her existentially, however, we may review her choices and the acceptance of the responsibility that comes with said selections on the night that her husband took his own life. Quite early in the play (39-41), Anna tries to alter the events of the night by confessing her affair before Benedict is present at his father’s house. She comes from her isolation (and presumed evening of guilt-ridden crying) to find the family ‘tight – tight – tight – arms around one another – smiling’ (39), but due to the intervention of Sir no one hears her confession about ‘An affair out of loneliness, out of despair, out of hate’ (40). Throughout the course of the evening, she must bear the knowledge of what is to come: the confession never leaves her mind.

Anna pursued her stepson, as others before have done, because he reminded her of the husband that had gone away.

And I tried to keep you, to maintain you in my mind – I tried, frank, I tried. But you kept slipping away from me. I searched Tina for you, and Miriam, but you weren’t in them. And then I could remember nothing – only your uniform, the colour of your hair, your footsteps in the hall – that’s all I could remember – a handsome, courteous, considerate man who had once been kind to me and who wrote me all those simple, passionate letters – too simple, too passionate. And then Ben came. And I found you in him, Frank (84).

She felt betrayed by the husband who had gone away, and sought to replace him with a newer version. Out of loneliness and desperation, Anna made the choice to be with her stepson. Guilt washed over her, and seeped into her very soul, and the only manner by which she could be alleviated of the guilt was to finally reveal her transgression to her husband before leaving him forever. Much like her stepson, Anna Butler was not a strong character in existential terms. She had difficulty bearing the weight of her own responsibilities.

*Conclusion*

Although Anna warrants the shortest Psychoanalytic Existentialistic analysis of any of the characters in this case study, that is because of her limited time on stage. Her character portrait is less developed than even Mrs Robinson, but she does, nonetheless, make contributions to the ongoing evolutions of this literary tradition. Her major addendum is the fact that she is the least interested in pursuing her stepson, but is, nonetheless, concerned with fulfilling her own intimate desires. The intertextual existential core of this character is her own selfishness: she has no interest in anyone besides herself, and in unashamed by this fact.

**Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter, I have examined a unique version of the Phaidra/Hippolytos story in that this drama revolves around the injustices done to the Theseus-figure rather than either of the other two prominent characters. Benedict, like many who have come before him, only wants to make his mother proud, but he fails in this regard, and is swept up in a downward spiral of his own shame and regrets. His stepmother, on the other hand, swears no allegiance to anyone, and, instead, seeks to see the family destroyed: she succeeds in this as a great diaspora sweeps the Butlers away from one another. Just as Kane’s Phaedra will seek to destroy the monarchy – and succeed – so too has Friel’s Anna wiped away all memory of Commandant Frank Butler.

**VII**

# ‘I’ve lived by honesty, let me die by it.’

The Existential World of the Characters in Sarah Kane’s *Phaedra’s Love*

The central focus of this chapter is a text that was first commissioned by and staged at a small theatre in Notting Hill, London called The Gate Theatre in May 1996: Sarah Kane’s *Phaedra’s Love*.[[301]](#footnote-301) I will begin this chapter by conducting a survey of the socio-political climate of the United Kingdom leading up to the mid-1990s in order to understand this play and its author historically. In the following section, we will briefly evaluate the In-Yer-Face theatrical movement to which Kane and many of her contemporaries belonged because their literary genre was a direct response to the socio-political environment under which they had been raised as children and young adults. Finally, after we understand the historical contexts which impacted this playwright and her work, I will, once again, conduct an existential analysis of the two characters around whom this thesis revolves: Hippolytus and Phaedra.

**Thatcherian England**

Discussing the works of Sarah Kane, or of any other playwright of the In-Yer-Face theatre movement, demands a degree of knowledge about the socio-political culture from which these young, seemingly angry playwrights emerged. Kane and her dramatic coevals were products of the United Kingdom’s longest and, arguably, most radically transformative Premiership: that of Margaret Thatcher, which lasted from 4 May 1979 until 27 November 1990. Throughout the following section, we will come to be familiarized with the national politics which moulded the life, mind, dramatic career, and radical response to the myth of Hippolytos and Phaidra by Sarah Kane.

During the 1979 Conservative Party General Election, Thatcher’s manifesto addressed five key aspects of British politics that she planned on altering in order to establish a ‘broad framework for the recovery of [the] country, based not on dogma, but on reason, on common sense, above all on the liberty of the people under law.’[[302]](#footnote-302) The first of these five tasks was: ‘to restore the health of [the] economic and social life, by controlling inflation and striking a fair balance between the rights and duties of the trade union movement.’[[303]](#footnote-303) In common speech, economic reform was Mrs Thatcher’s primary objective; she set about to tame inflation, and to displace high employment.[[304]](#footnote-304) This was the promise made in her manifesto, but was not the reality because many Tories, including Mrs Thatcher, had converted to monetarist economics popularized by Milton Friedman, an economic philosophy which argues that excessive expansion of the monetary supply is inherently inflationary, and that monetary authorities should focus solely on maintaining price stability.[[305]](#footnote-305) Therefore, rather than increasing the direct income tax, which was lowered from thirty-three per cent (33%) to thirty per cent (30%), Sir Geoffrey Howe, Thatcher’s first Chancellor of the Exchequer, increased the value added tax[[306]](#footnote-306) from twelve and a half per cent (12.5%) on ‘luxury’ items and eight per cent (8%) on most other goods to a single rate of fifteen per cent (15%). As the VAT did not fall on a wide range of necessities, Howe’s proposed intention was to benefit people in lower income brackets assuming that those with limited financial means would not be purchasing luxuries including, but not limited to, alcohol and tobacco.[[307]](#footnote-307) These, and all other taxes, would be raised as the recession of the early 1980s deepened.[[308]](#footnote-308)

When Mrs Thatcher took office, there were approximately five people pursuing each job vacancy; there were nearly one million people in the United Kingdom without work. Mrs Thatcher and her cabinet sought to end this crisis and ‘to restore incentives so that hard work pays, success is rewarded, and genuine new jobs are created in an expanding economy.’[[309]](#footnote-309) In an effort to make this vision a reality, Howe’s budget proposed lower taxes on business profits so that new jobs may be made with excess funds. This was the limit of the government’s attempt at providing jobs as it was cutting expenditure on industrial support by £210 million; with the manufacturing sector being especially dependent on subsidies and state ownership, unemployment in the industrial cities of the country’s Midlands rose drastically. By 1982, when Sarah Kane was moving into secondary education, the number of people without work in Britain rose above three million for the first time since the 1930s. While this was a national phenomenon, some areas were devastated whereas others were marginally impinged upon: Northern Ireland’s unemployment rate increased to nearly twenty per cent (20%), and Scotland and northern England showed rates of sixteen per cent (16%), but the southeast of England, where London is located, boasted unemployment rates of just below ten per cent (10%).[[310]](#footnote-310) Clearly, while the entire country was in calamity, the rural, industrial areas were much more affected.

Mrs Thatcher did not hold trade unions, strongly related to the Labour Party in industrial areas, in high regard; she was vehemently opposed to them, and accused their leadership of undermining parliamentary democracy and economic performance through strike action.[[311]](#footnote-311) In fact, one of the largest and most covered confrontations had by the Prime Minister occurred with the National Union of Mineworkers.[[312]](#footnote-312) In March 1984, when Sarah Kane was in her early teens, the National Coal Board proposed to close twenty unprofitable state-owned mines and to cut 20,000 jobs, and two-thirds of the country’s miners downed their tools in protest.[[313]](#footnote-313) Ultimately, the Iron Lady, staying true to her moniker, refused to submit to the union’s demands, and after a year out on strike, the NUM leadership conceded without a deal. In response, Mrs Thatcher’s government closed twenty-five unprofitable coal mines in 1985, the eventual closure of all but ninety-seven in 1992, and the privatisation of those remaining by 1994. [[314]](#footnote-314) This rigidity cost the United Kingdom’s economy at least £1.5 billion, and plunged Britain deeper into recession as unemployment rates steadily increased.[[315]](#footnote-315) Though the evidence suggests that Mrs Thatcher’s economic policies deeply impacted the face of the United Kingdom in a negative manner, the economic pendulum was on an upswing by the end of 1982. This brief period of positive monetary growth coupled with victory in the Falklands War allowed the Prime Minister and a Conservative majority of Members of Parliament to be re-elected in 1983.

The Premiership of Margaret Thatcher, however, was not only a time of economic change in the United Kingdom, it was also a period defined by the Prime Minister’s own personal value system. Having been raised in a home structured around traditional Victorian principles, Mrs Thatcher was traditionally conservative in her morality, and allowed this to saturate her politics. In a 1983 article in *The Standard*, Mrs Thatcher went on the record stating that the values that were instilled in her are perennial:

I was brought up by a Victorian grandmother. We were taught to work jolly hard. We were taught to prove yourself; we were taught self-reliance; we were taught to live within our income. You were taught that cleanliness is next to Godliness. You were taught self-respect. You were taught always to give a hand to your neighbour. You were taught a tremendous pride in your country. All of these things are Victorian values. They are also perennial values. You don’t hear much about these things these days, but they were good values, and they led to tremendous improvements in the standard of living.[[316]](#footnote-316)

In keeping with the ‘Victorian-inspired values’ of its namesake, Thatcherism took upon itself the responsibility of creating a new moral order for the state. The newly instated Conservative government clearly established its belief that personal morals directly influence one’s relationship with the government when, on 20 April 1979, David Howell, the Secretary of State for Energy, communicated on BBC Television’s *Campaign Report* that a person with ‘a background—a philosophy, let’s say—which on the whole treats private effort and private property with some contempt and does not place the upholding of the law absolutely as the highest priority then this creates an atmosphere in which you get vandalism.’[[317]](#footnote-317) The government, with seemingly noble intentions, was attempting to shepherd its citizens into a unified decency by propagandising that it was this specific moralistic shortcoming which led to high rates in vandalism, assault, and the particularly barbaric crime of rape.

Though Mrs Thatcher desired to decrease British crime rates with her reintroduction of Victorian morality, this was not the key ideological aspect to which she was hearkening back ‘when [the] country became great.’[[318]](#footnote-318) The Prime Minister, rather, often referred to Victorian values when suggesting that Britain needed to return to a time period before it was altered by socialist ideas such as the welfare state. Not only did the Thatcherite government, as can be found in Howe’s 1979 budget, increase the cost of prescriptions for its citizens, but it also ensured that the stipend for pensioners would no longer be ‘uprated on the basis of the movement in prices or earnings, whichever is greater,’ but would rather uprated solely ‘based on price movements.’ While this proposal was heralded as ‘treasonable’ by Birmingham’s Labour MP, Jeffery Rooker, Howe refuted that until the economy was stable and striving that the government would be able to assist those who had earned their pensions any more than those who had not.[[319]](#footnote-319) This government cut billions of pounds of funding to its welfare programmes, and expected each member of its society to be competitively contributory in order to succeed and promote capitalistic materialism while millions of people who legitimately required assistance were thrust to the bottom of the social economy.

Though volumes have been written about the eleven years during which Margaret Thatcher held the post of Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the previously outlined aspects were the most crucial in providing the ideological context of deprivation, conflict, and reactionary morality which shaped the young people who would go onto collectively be known as In-Yer-Face playwrights. As taxes were increasing throughout Britain and jobs were becoming scarcer, the present was grim. As pensioners were not being rewarded for the quality of their work when they were able to contribute, but were, rather, all being lumped into a single category, the future was darker still. These young people were being told their values to society were only relevant as long as they were earning a profit, and after that period, they would be thrown into a gutter. They were being assaulted with a unified moral sense which to oppose was to be equated with violence and near treason. These were Thatcher’s children, and, as we will learn in the following section, the arts, a manner by which to express one’s concern with the present state of affairs, were suffering along with the rest of the country.

**In-Yer-Face Theatre and Sarah Kane**

Sarah Kane was born 3 February 1971, a mere eight years before Margaret Thatcher was elected Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, in Brentwood, Essex to evangelical parents. Being raised in a Christian household moulded this playwright’s mind in her formative years; Kane herself accepted her parents’ teachings of politics and religion until 1988 when at the age of seventeen she made a conscious choice to reject their ideologies.[[320]](#footnote-320) This was not the only significant change to occur in Kane’s young life: in 1990, while she was studying drama at Bristol University, both the Berlin Wall was dismantled, symbolising the fall of Communism in eastern Europe, and Margaret Thatcher was replaced as Prime Minister and Leader of the Conservative Party by Chancellor John Major. These changes, as summarized by Aleks Sierz, affected the entire generation of playwrights to which Kane belonged by encouraging them to challenge the previously established social protocols:

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the exit of Margaret Thatcher showed those under twenty-five that, despite the evidence of political ossification, change was possible; the end of Cold War ideological partisanship freed young imaginations. Youth could be critical of capitalism without writing state-of-the-nation plays; it could be sceptical of male power without being dogmatically feminine; it could express outrage without being politically correct.[[321]](#footnote-321)

Kane and her coevals were raised with the moral, social, and political values of the 1980s; this was a generation that had been exposed to ‘Thatcherism, materialism, and the belief that profit was the ultimate test of anything’s worth.’ Much like Kane’s refutation of her parents’ religious beliefs, she and her fellow writers, including Mark Ravenhill, Patrick Marber, Judy Upton, and Joe Penhall, repudiated the force-fed morality of the nation when they came into their twenties.[[322]](#footnote-322)

These young playwrights had every intention of contesting the materialistic morality under which they had been raised, but without proper venues in which to stage these dramatic texts, their words seemed doomed to be restricted to the page. Though a golden age of the staging of new writing had preceded the lives of these dramatists, by the time that they were entering their professional careers, only seven per cent (7%) of the repertoire of the main houses of the regional and London repertory theatres was new writing.[[323]](#footnote-323) This trend was a result of the implementation of Mrs Thatcher’s economic belief that most arts programmes should be funded privately in order to promote competitive production. Her first Arts Minister, Norman St John-Stevas, went on the record a fortnight after the Prime Minister’s election in May 1979 stating that private funding not only provided ‘an alternative source of finance’, but also had the benefit of ‘avoiding or neutralising some of the dangers of stage patronage, such as censorship and conformity and the promotion of what I might venture to call “establishment art.”’[[324]](#footnote-324) As public funding for new dramatic pieces became scarcer, the box office performance of new work declined simultaneously, whether as a cause or consequence; in British main houses, new work was attracting barely over half capacity: sixty-one per cent capacity in 1981-2, fifty-four per cent in 1982-3, and fifty-one per cent in 1983-4.[[325]](#footnote-325) Producers began to take fewer financial risks in their staging, and it was rare that new work was produced in favour of established classics. For example, during the 1970s, the Royal Court, a theatre which ultimately impacts and is impacted by the In-Yer-Face moment, presented eighty-four new productions on its main stage and 132 productions in its Theatre Upstairs; in the 1980s, the number of productions plummeted to fifty-seven and ninety-eight respectively, and less than six of these mainstage performances annually were showcases of non-established writing.[[326]](#footnote-326) Mrs Thatcher’s regime had not only stifled the creative outlet of theatre, but had also crippled the industry itself. In an address to the Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, Honorary Professor David Edgar, went on the record stating: ‘I believe then that the deadline in innovatory stage drama was the intended result of consciously provoked changes in the cultural economy. Like population relocation in the Bosnian war, it was not an unfortunate by-product of hostilities, but the whole point of the exercise.’[[327]](#footnote-327)

Though new theatre was virtually non-existent, a handful of artistic directors emerged who were willing to engage with young writers, and to give them a chance to stage their texts. The most prominent of these was Stephen Daldry who took over the Royal Court as Artistic Director in 1993 and attempted to end this trend of theatrical atrophy. Michael Billington summarizes the importance of Daldry’s contribution to not only the In-Yer-Face genre, but to modern British theatre very effectively in an interview with Mireia Argay and Pilar Zozaya:

…he decided that the best way forward was to do as many plays as possible. He says that looking at the Royal Court’s history of the 1950s he discovered that George Devine’s philosophy was always to put on as much new writing as possible, so he just tumbled us with new plays. He was also very skilful at raising sponsorship—for instance, the Jerwood Foundation put a lot of money into two seasons of plays, in 1993 and 1994, at the Royal Court Upstairs. The third factor, a very important one, was the National Theatre Studio creating a bank of plays. In other words, what they did was offer writers the facilities to write—an office for about eight weeks, a typewriter and a bit of money. A lot of plays resulted from this, but the National Theatre couldn’t present them all because they didn’t even have the space. What they did was to farm them out to other theatres—a lot of the plays put on by the Royal Court in the mid-1990s originated from the National Theatre Studio.[[328]](#footnote-328)

It was in this chronological period, thanks to the reforms that were coming about from within the theatrical community, that new writing was becoming viable once more. On 12 January 1995, Kane’s *Blasted*, her first fully realized dramatic staging, premiered in the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs directed by James MacDonald, and was bombarded by the media with lurid adjectives such as ‘disgusting’, ‘disturbing’, ‘degrading’, and ‘depressing’. *Blasted* also attracted labels such as ‘prurient psycho-fantasies’, ‘unadulterated brutalism’, and ‘degradation in the raw.’[[329]](#footnote-329) This brutally witty play, released only two years after Daldry assumed leadership of the Court, was a taste of the In-Yer-Face movement that was taking Britain by the throat.

We have come to understand who were writing plays which belonged to the In-Yer-Face movement, and why they were writing such drama in the early- and mid-1990s, but we have yet to actually discuss any of the characteristics of such dramatic works. The genre’s name was first coined by Aleks Sierz in his book *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*, in which he provides a detailed survey of the movement’s history, and the common characteristics which plays of this movement were catalogued. In his opening chapter, Sierz outlines what it is to be In-Yer-Face:

How can you tell if a play is in-yer-face? It really isn’t difficult: the language is usually filthy, the characters talk about unmentionable subjects, take their clothes off, have sex, humiliate each other, experience unpleasant emotions, become suddenly violent. At its best, this kind of theatre is so powerful, so visceral, that it forces audiences to react: either they feel like fleeing the building or they are suddenly convinced that it is the best thing they have ever seen, and want all their friends to see it too. It is the kind of theatre that inspires us to use superlatives, whether in praise or condemnation.[[330]](#footnote-330)

This was a new aesthetic, a theatrical shock-fest which intended to jolt its audiences with simulated sexual acts (*Phaedra’s Love*), physical assaults (Judy Upton’s *Ashes and Sand*), rapes (Anthony Neilson’s *Penetrator*), self-mutilation (Peter Rose’s *Snatch*), rampant drug abuse (Mark Ravenhill’s *Shopping and Fucking*), homosexuality and transgendering (*Cleansed*), and even cannibalism (*Blasted*). The characters who committed these atrocities before our eyes were, with notable exceptions such as those in *Phaedra’s Love*, working-class British people, usually written with thick northern England or Scottish accents. These characters belonged to Marx’s *Lumpenproletariat* (Ger. Rogue Proletariat) as they were unlikely to ever achieve class consciousness or contribute anything useful to society;[[331]](#footnote-331) they were the bottom rungs of the social ladder, and protested their lots in life either by extreme, passionate violence, or chillingly cool indifference. In-Yer-Face characters, ultimately, however, were products of their time and place. While many of these characters are still frequently staged in mainland Europe, including Kane’s which are heavily produced in Germany, they are rarely seen in the country of their origin.[[332]](#footnote-332) Sierz argues that works by Kane and her contemporaries are staged with less frequency today in Britain because of a side-effect of their contribution to the theatre industry: the new writing that emerged in the early- and mid-1990s led to funding authorities realising that new work was desired by the general populace, and these institutions began to host new writing competitions and festivals with diverse funding opportunities.[[333]](#footnote-333) In short, this In-Yer-Face movement awakened Britain, and changed the face, if not of its country, then certainly of its theatre.

Though a multitude of playwrights belonged to this movement, few made the same impact upon it as Kane did in the five years between the 1995 premiere of *Blasted* and the first staging of *4.48 Psychosis* in June 2000, one and a half years after her suicide. Her works not only encouraged other playwrights, but also inspired animosity in the form of ‘a vendetta to keep bums off rather than on seats, a reviewing tactic was not to sell the show but to sell it short: to engineer an anti-Kane campaign that also brought into question the wisdom and taste of the Royal Court and its then artistic director Stephen Daldry for selecting the play for performance.’[[334]](#footnote-334) While most critics railed against her debut piece, many of her supporters, including Harold Pinter, became enthralled with this young woman because she ‘chose to talk about the political through the personal’ rather than following the model of the 1970s and 1980s which was ‘driven by a clear political agenda, kitted out with signposts indicating meaning, and generally featuring a hefty state-of-the-nation speech somewhere near the end. More than anyone, she knew that this template is no use to us now.’[[335]](#footnote-335)

Not only did Kane attempt to change the reason and way that we write theatre, she also, and I think more importantly, sought to change how we, as human beings, view life. Having been commissioned by the Gate for a new work influenced by a play from the past, Kane found herself venturing into the territory of the ancient Greco-Roman canon. Claiming to have had no interest in these texts because of the convention for most of the action occurring offstage, her attitude shifted when the young playwright encountered Seneca’s *Phaedra*. While maintaining the literary essence of the drama—the stepmother’s love for her purist stepson—Kane deviated heavily from the original sources in drafting her own independent text. Hers is a play that analyses truth, honesty, and choice: it is about the depression that is inherent in truly understanding one’s place in the cosmic scheme.

**Sarah Kane’s Hippolytus**

In order to best understand the place of Sarah Kane’s Hippolytus in the reception tradition of the Phaidra/Hippolytos mythology, we must seek to identify the characteristics that existentially characterize this, certainly, non-traditional character portrait of the, conventionally, virginal, outdoorsy son of Theseus and his Amazonian concubine, whose place in the wedding chamber was usurped by Phaidra. Though this dark-comedy is titled *Phaedra’s Love*, she, unlike her Racinean, Senecan, Euripidean predecessors, is not the focal point of the action: this honour belongs to her stepson, Hippolytus, who ‘dominates the play with his violent detachment.’[[336]](#footnote-336) Throughout this section, therefore, I will first existentially summarize the Hippolytus with whom we become familiar through the action of the text, and will continue by detailing from where these characteristics may be ascertained.

*Summary*

Throughout this section, I will formulaically determine the key characteristics that existentially define Sarah Kane’s Hippolytus. *Existence Precedes Essence*: The essence of Hippolytus is that of a modern royal, a man who seeks only to have his own desires filled regardless of whether he has any reciprocal relationship to the individual who has sated him. While embracing this essence in identifying himself, Kane’s heir to the throne pursues one trait above all others in setting himself apart: honesty. While the majority of his family follow avarice and lust without regard to others, they often rely on their press agents and others to ‘cover their arses’ when they find themselves in a bind, but Hippolytus refuses to be protected by any other. He is an honest man to the point of hurting others with his words, but he refuses to be a hypocrite and to recant for the actions which he has and will continue to do knowingly.

*Time is of the Essence*: Our prince passes his time waiting for something genuine to happen. He surrounds himself with mindless television, non-nutritious food, and casual, meaningless sex. He knowingly swims in trite artificialities, and is now drowning in them. There are few people who become close with Hippolytus, and because of his frankness, there are few who wish to do just that.

*Freedom and Responsibility*: Hippolytus is quite aware that his actions have a deep and lasting effect upon those whom he encounters, but he has little regard for those who perpetually falsify their own lives in order to conjure an illusion about themselves. When Phaedra takes her own life under the pretence of love, her stepson first swats away her death with the concern one would award a gnat, but as he comes to realize that she has punctuated her love for him with her own death, he understands that she has shared with him a chance at honest excitement.

*Humanism*: Quite frankly, Hippolytus has no relationship with God. He strongly abhors the idea of the Church for the inherent hypocrisy of confession, and is sickened by sinners who embrace this rite only to continue sinning. Hippolytus places his faith and love in himself, and expects others to do the same.

*Ethical Considerations are Paramount*: Kane’s character is very self-aware, and, as we have established, pursues honesty as an absolute. For him, there is nothing more lowly than a hypocrite, and nothing nobler than an honest man. Though his ethics vary greatly from those of mainstream society, he has them clearly established, and holds them in the upmost of regard. He, unlike many in his cynical world, is willing to martyr himself for his beliefs; like Socrates, he places his ideology above his breath.

*Analysis*

Before attempting to understand who Hippolytus is from the time that this play opens to the moment when it closes, we must first analyse his essence and understand who he is in the context of this dark comedy. As he is a character who is rather, but not wholly, independent of his ontology, time will not be spent comparing his essence to those of his predecessors who were drafted by the likes of Euripides, Seneca, and Racine. Instead, we will work with the information of which we are certain concerning this young, legitimate, and thoroughly modern British prince. Indeed, in the previous sentence a great many characteristics were identified which set this Hippolytus completely against his predecessors: he is 1) the legitimate son of Theseus and his mother; 2) someone with whose culture we may immediately relate as it is chronologically and anthropologically parallel with ours (i.e. he was produced in our lifetimes and in this country); and 3) meant to succeed his father as king, whereas none of his predecessors were destined to take up this mantle in their respective kingdoms. Effectively, these three characteristics summarize the prescribed essence of Hippolytus: he is a modern royal; he is ‘A prince. God on earth. But not god. Fortunate for all concerned’ (VI.88);[[337]](#footnote-337) he is meant to be kept in the eye of the media, as is evidenced by the national coverage of his royal birthday (IV.8), he is meant to return the affection of those who show it to him by posing in photographs at the palace gates (IV.10), and he is meant to have an ideal relationship with his family, both those by blood and those by marriage (IV.57, VI.39-42). Zina Giannopoulou in *Sarah Kane in Context* effectively deduces the essential behaviour of royalty from the sexual exploits of Hippolytus:

All that matters is the performance of sex, which, for Hippolytus, involves solely the expenditure of minimal physical energy. Most often sex is depicted as a gift whose ungrateful and hostile recipient, namely Hippolytus, takes for granted (74). His sexual behaviour captures a key component of the political behaviour of royalty, its preoccupation with the satisfaction of their own interests, which may result in indifference to the individual needs of those with whom they come into contact. Emotional aloofness inevitably attends this sort of attitude toward both sex and politics. Kane’s play emphasizes this by having a brutal and unemotional Theseus rape Strophe in the midst of a jeering crowd of equally unaffected onlookers.[[338]](#footnote-338)

Hippolytus and his father are exemplars of impassive modern royalty who seek only to have their own desires satisfied regardless of the impacts that these escapades will have on others, and even though each member of royalty is intrinsically tied to the next and to the nation as a whole. This marriage of public representation and national morale is best exemplified in Scene VI during a dialogue between Hippolytus and a priest in prison shortly after the suicide of Phaedra (VI.48-55):

Priest: Do you know what the unforgiveable sin is?

Hipp.: Of course.

Priest: You are in danger of committing it. It’s not just your soul at stake, it’s the future of your family —

Hipp.: Ah.

Priest: Your country.

Hipp.: Why do I always forget this?

Priest: Your sexual indiscretions are of no interest to anyone. But the stability of the nation’s morals is. You are a guardian of those morals. You will answer to God for the collapse of the country you and your family lead.

Hipp.: I’m not responsible.

As rapidly as we have established the prescribed essence of Hippolytus and, indeed, every member of the royal family, save, perhaps, Strophe, ‘who has no claim to (the family’s) history (but) is the most sickening loyal’ (V.68), we have begun to catch a glimpse of Hippolytus’ existential identity. Whereas his Euripidean and Senecan counterparts were forced from the royal condition due to illegitimacy, Kane’s Hippolytus freely chooses to disassociate himself from it. While throwing away the shackles of responsibility for the nation’s well-being which are meant to weigh on both himself and his father, Hippolytus readily bears the passivity of sexual satisfaction that comes with his station. In short, the modern royals of this play in general, but Hippolytus specifically, are painfully aware of their positions in society, but only seem to acknowledge their impacts so far as in they will benefit them; they have very little concern for the citizenry of Britain, and far more concern for their own sexual appetites.

Who then is Kane’s Hippolytus? In an ontological review, one would expect him to reject all forms of sexual exploits, and to be extremely misogynistic; a surface reading of the text, however, will reveal that neither of these identifiers is necessarily applicable.[[339]](#footnote-339) Hippolytus identifies himself through sex: it’s his ‘main interest’ (VI.48) as a ‘fat boy who fucks’ (V.76). The creation of a romantic aspect (a phrase which I use loosely to describe Kane’s character) of Hippolytus is not entirely unheard of as both Racine in his *Phèdre* and Nichols in *The Graduate* have each attributed one to their respective Hippolytos-figures. To have him primarily identify himself through the pursuit of sexual intercourse, however, is unique to Kane’s character. Whereas many scholars including George Devereux have hinted at a latent homosexuality which define previous characterizations of Hippolytos, Kane’s character, contrary to the belief of Phaedra (II.14), openly has something gay about him, but sexual orientation is not an identifier which actively plays on Hippolytus’ mind. This British prince will have sexual intercourse with almost anyone including a ‘fat bird’, ‘a man in the garden’ (IV.29), his stepsister (IV.171, V.36), and his father’s wife (c. IV.102), and ‘think(s) about having sex with everyone’ (IV.71). None of these flings entails any gravity for Hippolytus; they are simply occurring while he is ‘Filling up time. Waiting...(for) Something to happen’ (IV.81-3). These sexual endeavours occur because Hippolytus has grown bored with life. At no point in the play, as we join the story *in media res*, does he reference a time when he was not uninterested in life, but it can safely be surmised from the text that this is his current perspective on the mundaneness of existence: ‘Life’s too long’ (IV.77). Due to this tediousness, he fills his time with ‘tat, Bric-a-brac, bits and bobs, getting by’ (IV.87) not only sexually, but also intellectually and physically as he watches mindless film and television while consuming food which supplies only minor sustenance.[[340]](#footnote-340)

Kane’s Hippolytus, like his antecedents, is emotionally passive, and also, quite unlike them, is physically immobile.[[341]](#footnote-341) When Phaedra is asked by the Doctor in Scene II what Hippolytus does all day, her response is that he sleeps, watches films, and has sex, all the while never leaving the comfort of his home (II.8-12). Hippolytus is a character who is so spoiled by his essence, that of monarchy, that he no longer has the drive to actively pursue anything, he allows everything to come to him, and once he no longer has a use for that which he has taken, he leaves it discarded beside him on the floor. The space in which he dwells is cluttered with ‘expensive electronic toys, empty crisp and sweet packets, and a scattering of used socks and underwear’, and, for an instance in Scene IV, the dishevelled form of his stepmother after a passionately delivered act of fellatio by her which was received with a characteristically blasé attitude by him.

Previously, I had mentioned that a surface reading of the play would suggest that Hippolytus is unlike his predecessors in that he is neither chaste, which I am confident that I have done in the previous paragraphs, nor misogynistic, which I will now do. The first point that must be made in defense of this argument is that Hippolytus rarely, as evidenced earlier, differentiates between the sexes when he has intercourse with them. He neither targets women nor men for his exploits, nor does he seek the company of either. Hippolytus, both Kane’s and his predecessors, holds only himself in any esteem; Kane’s, unlike the others, however, holds no particular malice or any other form of emotion toward anyone. Hippolytus is the source of his own joy (VI.28), and, logically, his own despair. To him, as is evidenced by his treatment of sexual partners after the satiation of his own desires, people, regardless of gender, are little more than tools to an end. A misogynist must actively hate women. Since his relationship with Lena, Hippolytus has faced everything, especially human interaction with a cold passivity that denotes indifference rather than hate.

The events that took place during the prince’s relationship with Lena are not clearly established in the text, but one safely knows that this woman had a deep impact on the psychology of Hippolytus. Moments after the chilling semi-incestuous fellatio, Phaedra and Hippolytus attempt to reconcile how best to proceed with their lives; the queen still burns for her stepson, and the prince remains unmoved by what has just occurred. Hippolytus suggests that his stepmother find a new lover, but Phaedra will not resign herself to another because Hippolytus has hurt her as Lena once hurt him (IV.136-47):[[342]](#footnote-342)

Ph.: I want you—

Hipp.: This isn’t about me.

Ph.: I do.

Hipp.: Fuck someone else imagine it’s me.

Shouldn’t be difficult, everyone looks the same when they come.

Ph.: Not when they burn you.

Hipp.: No one burns me.

Ph.: What about that woman?

*Silence.*

*Hippolytus looks at her.*

Hipp.: What?

Ph.: Lena, weren’t you—

Hipp.: (*Grabs Phaedra by the throat?*)

Don’t ever mention her again.

Don’t say her name to me, don’t refer to her, don’t even think about her, understand? Understand?

Ph.: (Nods.)

Hipp.: No one burns me, no one fucking touches me. So don’t try.

Recalling Act II of Seneca’s *Phaedra* (704-10), Hippolytus assaults Phaedra when she mentions love: Seneca’s Amazonian-bred prince learned of the unnatural love of his stepmother, and Kane’s pure-bred reprobate is reminded of his failed relationship with Lena. The recollection of this relationship, which obviously hurt Hippolytus deeply, sends him into a fleeting fit of passion, an instant where he hinges between passivity and activity. As he acquires a promise of silence on the matter from his stepmother under threat of physical violence, Hippolytus once again resumes the cold, aloof demeanour with which we are accustomed.

In the wake of a failed romance which burned Hippolytus, he has extinguished the flame within himself. Robert Lublin best describes this switching off in his essay *‘I love you now’: time and desire in the plays of Sarah Kane*:[[343]](#footnote-343)

Hippolytus’ love for Lena perverts into his attempt to suppress all desire and avoid further pain. But desire constitutes human subjectivity. Attempts to quash it are akin to killing oneself while still breathing. He eats, he has sex, but he cannot feel anything at all.

Though this liaison had an effect on the prince, it still does not lie at the core of his existence as his cold emotional detachment is able to be changed, and does shortly after the suicide of Phaedra. Alex Sierz states that ‘Phaedra’s suicide and her accusation of rape galvanize him (Hippolytus) into life – he’s suddenly in touch with his emotions.’[[344]](#footnote-344) Though, existentially speaking, a person is re-forged in every choice that they make, it is exceptionally interesting to study how Hippolytus chooses to react to an accusation which will ultimately leave him ‘Absolutely fucking doomed’ (V.119). Phaedra’s act is not only immensely significant to the dramatic action itself, as noted by Graham Saunders,[[345]](#footnote-345) but it is also momentous in shaping the dramatic world and its characters. As noted by Kane, ‘her (Phaedra’s) accusation and later suicide liberate Hippolytus and set off the most extraordinary chain of events leading to the collapse of the monarchy.’[[346]](#footnote-346) The change is noted both within the stage directions of the text and within specific performances including the Arcola Theatre’s October 2011 production. In both of these, Hippolytus commences by restraining a violent Strophe who ‘batters him about the head’ when he will neither confess nor deny raping Phaedra, and concludes by having his ‘hold turn into an embrace’ in an attempt to console his grieving stepsister. Upon recognizing the consequences of Phaedra’s suicide through the tears of Strophe, Hippolytus at last understands that, as noted by Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier, ‘Phaedra’s slander is not a betrayal, it is a sign of love.’[[347]](#footnote-347)

After this ultimate profession of love by Phaedra, one aspect of Hippolytus’ character remains firmly intact: his staunch pursuit of honesty. Whereas both Seneca and Euripides had their Amazonian-incarnations strive for physical purity in all things, Kane designed her Hippolytus to seek purity in his actions. By that, his actions are not necessarily ethically good, nor are they morally evil, but they are accurate reflections of his beliefs and sentiments. In an interview with Nils Tabert, Kane best ‘describes her conception of Hippolytus as a puritan who desires brutal truth over flattery and empty rhetoric, even when that truth can be harmful to others:’[[348]](#footnote-348)

The other interesting thing about [Seneca’s] *Phaedra* was that I thought Hippolytus was so unattractive for someone supposed to be so pure and puritanical, and I thought actually the way to make him attractive is to make him unattractive but with the puritanism inverted – because I wanted to write about an attitude of life – not a lifestyle. So I made him pursue honesty rather than sexual purity which I hadn’t cared for anyway.[[349]](#footnote-349)

Hippolytus, as he is in the original story, is deeply unattractive. Though he’s physically beautiful, he’s chaste, a puritan, a hater of mankind. For me, puritanism isn’t about lifestyle, but attitude. Instead of pursuing what is traditionally seen as pure, my Hippolytus pursues honesty, both physically and morally – even when that means he has to destroy himself and everyone else. The purity of his self-hatred makes him much more attractive as a character than the virginal original.[[350]](#footnote-350)

This utilization of honesty and pursuit of self-fulfilment is further developed in the dramatic text each time that Hippolytus speaks and acts. In fact, the only time that Hippolytus seems to break character is when it comes to the preservation of his psyche. As referenced earlier, the prince diverts all conversation from the topic of Lena even through threats of physical violence, but he does not only utilize near-action in order to protect himself, he also betrays his own existential core in order to preserve his emotional disinterest when he protests, ‘No one burns me, no one fucking touches me’ (IV.710). It is quite intriguing that Hippolytus inadvertently betrays his staple in order to protect his mind, considering that he is not willing to do so in order to preserve his own life.

Though Scene VI of *Phaedra’s Love* was originally written for Kane’s adaptation of Bertolt Brecht’s *Baal*, which she intended to stage at the Gate Theatre,[[351]](#footnote-351) it provides much illumination for Hippolytus’ existence. After having turned himself in for his stepmother’s suicide upon interpreting her rape accusation as a birthday gift to him, Hippolytus is joined by a priest in a prison cell. During this scene, we learn that Theseus’ son finds his own joy within because he never lets himself down (VI.27-33); this comment echoes the reason for his purchasing a remote-controlled car for himself: ‘Only way of making sure I get what I want’ (IV.24). In short, Hippolytus does not feel the need for other beings to be in his life, so he either avoids them or digests them like junk food. Few people or ideas (e.g. deities) are able to shake his foundation, the only two of note being Lena and Phaedra, but his brutal honesty often reveals the fault-lines in others. During his discourse with this man of god, Hippolytus refuses to forsake his perception of the universe, with specific focus on the divine, even at the potential cost of eternal damnation (VI.68-89):

Priest: Lord, look own on this man you chose, forgive his sin which comes from the intelligence you blessed him with.

Hipp.: I can’t sin against a God I don’t believe in.

Priest: No.

Hipp.: A non-existent God can’t forgive.

Priest: No. You must forgive yourself.

Hipp.: I’ve lived by honesty let me die by it.

Priest: If truth is your absolute you will die. If life is your absolute—

Hipp.: I’ve chosen my path. I’m fucking doomed.

Priest: No.

Hipp.: Let me die.

Priest: No. Forgive yourself.

Hipp.: (*Thinks hard.*) I can’t.

Priest: Why not?

Hipp.: Do you believe in God?

Priest: (Looks at him).

Hipp.: I know what I am. And always will be. But you. You sin knowing you’ll confess. Then you’re forgiven. And then you start all over again. How dare you mock a God so powerful? Unless you don’t really believe.

Priest. This is your confession, not mine.

Hipp.: Then why are you on your knees? God certainly is merciful. If I were him I’d despise you. I’d wipe you off the face of earth for your dishonesty.

Priest: You’re not God.

Hipp.: No. A prince. God on earth. But not God. Fortunate for all concerned. I’d not allow you to sin knowing you’d confess and get away with it.

Priest: Heaven would be empty.

Hipp.: A kingdom of honest men, honestly sinning. And death for those who try to cover their arse.

I have quoted this segment at length because not only is it Hippolytus’ own active decision to revere his philosophical existence over his physical as both his and Phaedra’s antecedents have done in previous incarnations, but also because we gain the perspective of his relationship with God. From the text we ascertain that while Hippolytus, like Kane, is a self-proclaimed atheist, his qualms with religion seem to stem from the human interpretation of the divine and the hypocrisy of those who knowingly sin against omnipotence with the safeguard of confession rather than honestly pursuing either a commitment to divine restraint or mortal debauchery.

Hippolytus embodies many of the characteristics frowned upon by the Catholic Church including lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, acedia, wrath, envy, and pride,[[352]](#footnote-352) but he does so reliably and follows truth as his absolute. Hippolytus recognizes that his actions are self-destructive, and after the death of his stepmother, he realizes that his choices bear consequence for those around him. This is not to suggest that Hippolytus is willing to diverge from his path in order to preserve the lies of hypocrites, but only to acknowledge that he is aware of the potential effects that he may have on others. This is a man who accepts his own freedom and only respects his responsibilities toward those who have likewise freed themselves from the bonds of societal servitude.

*Conclusion*

In conclusion, this is the Hippolytus of Kane’s piece: a thoroughly modern, cynical British prince who wholly embraces his royal essence of self-fulfilment while disregarding the needs and desires of those who sate him. He treats people as consumables, and requires that anything he intakes be unsatisfying. At his core, Hippolytus strives for and seeks honesty regardless of its impact upon others. This Amazonian-reception is self-reliant, and accepts the responsibilities that come with this autonomy in regards to those who do likewise.

**Sarah Kane’s Phaedra**

As we have conducted an analysis of the most prominent character in Kane’s reception of the Senecan classic, we must now turn our focus from her thoroughly honest prince toward her queen who is nearly bereft of a sense of self. By this point in the Anglophone reception tradition of the Hippolytos/Phaidra mythology, this royal stepmother is no longer *tabula rasa*; in fact, her character portrait has been thoroughly coloured not only by her Classical, Renaissance, and Neoclassical literary antecedents, but also by their other incarnations, which have been realized not only on the stage, but also in poetry, dance, and cinema. For instance, Phaedra is no longer roughly the same age as her stepson; she has, rather, been impacted by *The Graduate*’s Mrs Robinson in regards to her age. Throughout this section, therefore, I will again existentially condense the Phaedra of Kane’s manuscript, and will continue by specifying from where these characteristics may be discovered.

*Summary*

Throughout this segment, I will outline the existential characteristics of Phaedra which we are able to lift from Kane’s text. *Existence Precedes Essence*: Phaedra is a character of two essences: she is, first and foremost, a commoner, and is, secondly, a member of the royal family. These two are entwined with one another in that she was brought into the monarchy in order to revitalize it. Whereas Kane’s Hippolytus pursues honesty to a fault, her Phaedra pursues her own sexual appetites without regard for anyone or anything else. In doing this, the queen, ultimately, betrays both of her essential natures, and greatly alters the political landscape of the text.

*Time is of the Essence*: Our queen passes her time in the company of her desired lover. She forsakes her own daughter and her political responsibilities so that she may surround herself with Hippolytus. Though she may have once had many friends and acquaintances, these relationships have been weakened by her sordid desires.

*Freedom and Responsibility*: Phaedra is very mindful of the potential outcomes of her actions, and is for that reason that she is cautious in everything that she has done up to the point where we join the cast *in media res*. Though she is originally very careful not to allow her desires for her stepson to be aired publicly, after being scorned, she chooses to destroy not only him, but also everything that he comes to represent with a few very carefully placed words and one definitive action.

*Humanism*: Very simply, we have no idea what Phaedra’s relationship with the divine is. Whereas her stepson openly abhors God and the concept of sanctioned religion, we are left agnostic on the queen’s stance on spirituality. This theme is rarely dealt with in Kane’s work.

*Ethical Considerations are Paramount*: Phaedra’s absolute is her passion. The play is titled *Phaedra’s Love* not only because the object of Phaedra’s desire is her stepson, Hippolytus, but also because her love is the motivating force of the play. As she identifies herself by her own appetites, she allows them to rule her and, ultimately, the country over which she had been placed. Due to this selfishness, she is an abhorrent character existentially, but is one with whom we can identify in human psychology.

*Analysis*

In endeavouring to appreciate the existential qualities of Kane’s Phaedra, we will need to understand her intertextual prescribed essence. Whereas we are made absolutely aware via the dialogue of the dramatic text that her stepson was born to be a thoroughly modern British prince, Hippolytus reminds Phaedra that he ‘was born into this shit, [she] married it’ (IV.49). This alteration to the myth is one that greatly deviates Kane’s Phaedra from most of her predecessors: in the canonical versions of this tale, though Phaidra was not born into the royal house of Athens, she was, nevertheless, a native of Cretan royalty. For her literary antecedents, therefore, acting in accordance with royal standards would have been relatively simple due to a lifetime of exposure to them; for Phaedra, however, behaving royally would have been a recently learned behaviour. It is because of this later introduction into the monarchy that Phaedra and, to a greater extent, her daughter, Strophe better understand the expectations and desires of the general populace. In this regard, Kane’s Phaedra shares a quality with the literary predecessors of her stepson: she is the perpetual outsider, and, if all goes well, nothing that she does can change that alienation because, as Saunders argues, Phaedra and Strophe were ‘brought in by the old order in an attempt to refresh and restore its mystique.’[[353]](#footnote-353) Within the action of the drama, Phaedra’s new essence is that of a revitalizer: her prescribed objective is to allow the monarchy to be viewed as approachable and trusting. In short, the intertextual essence of Kane’s Phaedra is to serve as the complete foil to her antisocial, laze-about stepson.

Having determined the dual-essence of Phaedra, both as a commoner and as a revitalising catalyst for the deteriorating monarchy, our attention must turn toward her relationship with these identities. In Scene II, the very first in which encounter Phaedra, she is making every effort possible to have Hippolytus physically restored by the Royal Doctor. Not only is the queen attempting to perform a refurbishment on the prince, but also, in the absence of her husband, she and her daughter are responsible for the renovation of the country (II.48). Clearly, Phaedra fully accepts her responsibility to see the monarchy returned to its former glory as she is not only handling the affairs of the country, but is also personally addressing the physical and mental wellbeing of its figureheads. During this tête-a-tête with a character traditionally performed by the same actor who later plays Theseus, however, there are numerous observations by the Doctor about Phaedra’s ulterior motive for caring for Hippolytus: she’s in love with him (II.21-23, 31, 67). Not only does the Doctor observe this attraction that the queen has to her stepson, but her daughter recognizes it as well, and addresses the issue early and has it confirmed in the following scene (III.13-6). It is here that Phaedra’s existence begins to deviate from her essence: her semi-incestuous passion for her stepson, if made public knowledge, would destroy the monarchy’s public image, and have it be viewed as a corrupting influence (III.81-5).

Let us turn now toward with whom and how Phaedra chooses to spend her time. In keeping with her royal essence, most of the queen’s time is spent with her family in their very large house. Though she takes it upon herself to fulfil her essential role by allocating a portion of her time to serving as the liaison to commoners for the sake of public relations, the majority of Phaedra’s time is monopolized by the eponymous title of this dark comedy: her passion for her stepson. In order to maintain her dark secret, Theseus’ wife rarely speaks of her stepson to other people, but, quite often, is preoccupied both physically and mentally with Hippolytus (III.69-71). Much like her Euripidean and Senecan predecessors, Phaedra has become more lax in her duties, and she is slowing down because she is being consumed with a passion stoked through her conversations with Hippolytus. This coupling of heated desire and continual exposure has led to Phaedra lying near catatonic as she rambles to herself about how she ‘Can’t switch this off. Can’t crush it. Can’t. Wake up with it, burning [her]. Think[s she’ll] crack open [she] wants him so much. [She talks] to him. He talks to [her], you know, [they, they] know each other very well, he tells [her] things, [they’re very close]’ (III.60). Whereas her antecedents had sent their respective objects of desire away, Kane’s Phaedra has never let hers move from the reach of her grasp.

In freely choosing to replace her ‘useless’ husband with his omnipresent son, Phaedra takes on the responsibilities of potential lover rather than those of concerned stepmother for her deteriorating stepson. Not only is Phaedra attempting to free herself from the bondage to which she willingly submitted, but she is trying to rescue Hippolytus from what she views as a sea of depression while remaining ignorant of the fact that her stepson is merely coping, as she is, with unrequited love. The queen is attempting to break her nuptial bonds, but is only burdening herself with a passion for her stepson through which she identifies herself. Lublin argues that it is unrequited love which serves as a major motivating force for both of these dramatic characters:

Based on Phaedra’s drive to submit herself to the impossibility of her desire, to lose herself within it, Greig has suggested that she is the opposite of Hippolytus.[[354]](#footnote-354) Phaedra’s passion spills on to the stage in dialogue motivated by desperate need…Conversely, Hippolytus demonstrates a stoic unwillingness to feel anything at all. He states that he is not even living his life…On further examination, however, the two characters are more alike than not…Phaedra is already in the thrall of desire and Hippolytus seems impervious to its demands. However, Hippolytus is not entirely indifferent to desire. Rather, he is suffering from unrequited love…Hippolytus seems to have experienced the very same desire for Lena that compels Phaedra to seduce her stepson. For both characters, the consequences of unrequited love is shattering.[[355]](#footnote-355)

Whereas Hippolytus adopts a seemingly Stoic demeanour in the wake of his failed relationship, Phaedra is able to find no manner by which to independently define herself after giving Hippolytus fellatio as a birthday present, and hangs herself leaving a note accusing him of a rape which shattered her psyche (V.15, 83).

This is where the story of Phaedra ends in this piece, but her prematurely ended life informs the rest of the dramatic action. Phaedra’s suicide is immensely significant, Kane claimed that, ‘Phaedra is the first person to become active in the play – her accusation and later suicide liberate Hippolytus and set off the most extraordinary chain of events leading to the collapse of the monarchy.’[[356]](#footnote-356) After having had conversations with Strophe, Phaedra was assuredly aware that her rape accusation was ‘just the excuse they’re all looking for’ so that the monarchy could be ‘torn apart on the streets’ (III.95). In taking her own life, Phaedra knew that she was changing the world of the play: Hippolytus would die, and the monarchy along with him. The queen, after having felt betrayed by the one to whom she gave her heart, committed revolutionary treason with the stroke of a pen.

*Conclusion*

In conclusion, this is the Phaedra of Kane’s piece: a thoroughly selfish woman motivated by her own amorous desires. She was brought into the monarchy in order to see it revitalized, but, instead, led to its destruction out of spite. She was unable to separate her own identity from Hippolytus, and could not function in life without him. If was for this inauthenticity that her stepson drove her away. Her sexual appetite forced her to drive away everyone in her life except the object of her affection, and when her love was unrequited, Phaedra decided to single-handedly end a centuries-old institution.

**Conclusion**

This drama is centred on a conflict between ideologies: Phaedra’s need to define herself through her lover, and Hippolytus’ abhorrence of people who are not able to live authentically. Though the final scene of this play is littered with corpses, the tone is not tragic: with the fall of these people, change was destined to occur in the socio-political environment of the play. For Sarah Kane, this play was her comedy, and it ended with a glimmer of hope: as vultures descended to devour the carrion left in the wake of these two ideologically opposed people, Hippolytus raised his eyes and smiled stating, ‘If there could have been more moments like this.’ This brief flash of optimism ends a dreadfully violent scenario, and the world continues to spin with the possibility of another Berlin Wall falling or another Margaret Thatcher resigning. Phaedra took her own life so that the world may change, and Hippolytus surrendered his in an act of selflessness to see that her vision was fulfilled.

**VII**

# Conclusion

The More They Change, The More They Stay the Same

Throughout the course of this thesis, it has been my goal to analyse the surviving and continually mutable character portraits of two characters from the classical canon – Hippolytos and Phaidra. We have studied them under the unfashionable lens of Psychoanalytic Existentialism because these two were not, originally, broadly-brushed archetypes, but were, rather, unique dramatic individuals who seem to have been crafted with care.[[357]](#footnote-357) They have survived throughout the centuries not because of a political or social message, but, instead, because they themselves are interesting and have lent themselves to continuous evolution. The capacity of this particular tragedy to survive has been these exceedingly interesting characters, not a variety of moralistic lessons, which may be derived from the text through argument. These characters have been created by backward-glancing playwrights who have been able to maintain the brunt of the myth while recreating specific individuals, and giving them an opportunity to experience a similar situation.

Although Hippolytos and Phaidra are connected to a dark social taboo (that of semi-incest), and they are aware of what they are doing, their story has not been as popular as the more primal yet unaware tale of Oidipous and Iokaste. The Oidipous myth warns us against blinding ourselves with pride, and simultaneously, adds the sexual taboo popularised by Sigmund Freud;[[358]](#footnote-358) it, therefore, resonates with us both individually and communally. While Hippolytos himself is excessively proud, he clings to that characteristic even as he lies dying; he makes no effort to redeem himself – a trait that echoes in nearly all of his reimaginings. Iokaste takes her own life because she has brought genetic abominations into this world; Phaidra, on the other hand, commits suicide because she cannot have that which she desires, and fears that her reputation as well as those of her family will be called into question. At the conclusion of this Sophoklean tragedy, the city of Thebes and, indeed, the greater world are warned against making the same mistakes that Oidipous, Iokaste, and Laios did; our Euripidean play ends with the tragedy of a single family, which is, more or less, swept under the rug by the *dea ex machine* leaving only one man to suffer.

In the introduction to this thesis, we were reminded that character studies became unfashionable over 100 years ago because of Tycho von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff’s suggestion that character portraiture had no place in Greek tragedy.[[359]](#footnote-359) While the German scholar seemed to have the support of Aristotle, modern academics including Devereux, Lichtman, and Segal began to challenge this intellectual mentality by psychoanalysing various characters, including Hippolytos, and I have followed in their pioneering footsteps. Throughout the course of my work, I have applied the principles of existentialism to Hippolytos and Phaidra in order to better understand these literary figures and their receptions as unique intertextual individuals, and have reviewed context and ontology to better trace the evolution of their literary essences. While Phaedra, Phèdre, Mrs Robinson, Anna Butler, and Kane’s Phaedra are creative responses to their literary forbearers, and the plots in which they participate are nearly identical, each of these women is unique in how they choose to respond to their circumstances. Their stepsons share this characteristic: each reacts to his environment with a uniqueness that is derived from a conception, lifestyle, and events that are inimitable. In short, these are individuals who have been forged by and for events that are relevant only to their lives in their respective dramatic pieces. Throughout this thesis, we have analysed the marriage of their thoughts, actions, words, and silences. By doing this, we have come to understand their existences, and have glimpsed at their identities both as inherent in, and as set against, their essences.

On 26 December 1967, the most powerful pundit in America until his death on 4 April 2013 – Roger Ebert – reviewed Mike Nichols’ retelling of the Hippolytos/Phaidra myth (i.e. *The Graduate*). In this criticism, he analysed the portrayals of Mrs Robinson and Benjamin Braddock with his own socio-political views that had been heavily influenced by his own life, which began in 1942, making him a near generational peer of Benjamin and Elaine. In his evaluation, he harshly judged Mrs Robinson as ‘self-possessed enough to make the seduction convincing’ while he praised Benjamin as ‘so painfully awkward and ethical that we are forced to admit we would act pretty much as he does, even in his most extreme moments.’ However, in his 28 March 1997 review, Ebert’s tune changes to one of praise for Mrs Robinson (now that he’s roughly her age), and utter condemnation of Benjamin. Why did his loyalties shift? I would argue that his own coming of age coupled with the national shift in gender politics, due to the protests of Second Wave Feminism, affected his viewing of the very same film. Thirty years after he had judged Mrs Robinson so harshly and had waxed poetic about her young lover, Ebert’s entire perception of the film and its world shifted from one extreme to another. The two reviews are as follows:

**26 December 1967**

*The Graduate,* the funniest American comedy of the year, is inspired by the free spirit which the young British directors have brought into their movies. It is funny, not because of sight gags and punch lines and other tired rubbish, but because it has a point of view. That is to say, it is against something. Comedy is naturally subversive no matter what Doris Day thinks.

Most Hollywood comedies have non-movie assumptions built into them. One of the most persistent is that movie characters have to react to funny events in the same way that stage actors do. So we get Jerry Lewis mugging. But in the direct style of new British directors, the audience is the target of the joke, and the funny events do not happen in the movie – they are the movie.

This theory is based upon a belief that audiences, having seen hundreds of movies, come into the theatre with an instinctive knowledge of film shorthand. So the new British comedies (‘The Knack’, ‘Morgan’, ‘Alfie’, ‘Tom Jones’, ‘A Hard Day’s Night’) go against standard practice, and their use of film itself is part of the comedy. When something funny happens, the actors don’t react; the movie itself reacts by what it shows next.

This is the case with *The Graduate* in which Mike Nichols announces himself as a major new director.

He introduces us to a young college graduate (Dustin Hoffman) who returns to a ferociously stupid upper-middle-class California suburb. He would like the chance to sit around and think about his future for several months. You know – think?

His family and their social circle demand that he perform in the role of Successful Young Upward-Venturing Clean-Cut All-American College Grad. At the end of two weeks Benjamin is driven to such a pitch of desperation that he demonstrates a new scuba outfit (birthday present from proud dad) by standing on the bottom of the family pool: Alone at last.

One of his parents’ contemporaries (Anne Bancroft) seduces Benjamin, who succumbs mostly out of weariness and disbelief. Then he falls in love with her daughter (Katharine Ross), and sets in motion a fantastic chain of events that ends with Miss ross (just married to a handsome blond Nordic pipe-smoking fraternity boy) being kidnapped from the altar by Benjamin. He jams a cross into the church door to prevent pursuit, and they escape on a bus.

This is outrageous material, but it works in *The Graduate* because it is handled in a straightforward manner. Dustin Hoffman is so painfully awkward and ethical that we are forced to admit we would act pretty much as he does even in his most extreme moments. Anne Bancroft, in a tricky role, is magnificently sexy, shrewish, and self-possessed enough to make the seduction convincing.

Miss Ross, a newcomer previously seen in *Games*, not only creates a character with depth and honesty, but is so attractive that now we know how Ann-Margaret would have looked if she turned out better.

Nichols stays on top of his material. He never pauses to make sure that we’re getting the point. He never explains for the slow-witted. He never apologizes. His only flaw, I believe, is the introduction of limp, wordy Simon and Garfunkel songs and arty camera work to suggest the passage of time between major scenes. Otherwise, *The Graduate* is a success and Benjamin’s acute honesty and embarrassment are so accurately drawn that we hardly know whether to laugh or to look inside ourselves.[[360]](#footnote-360)

**28 March 1997**

Well, here **is** to you, Mrs Robinson: You've survived your defeat at the hands of that insufferable creep, Benjamin, and emerged as the most sympathetic and intelligent character in *The Graduate*. How could I ever have thought otherwise? What murky generational politics were distorting my view the first time I saw this film?

Lesser movies are captives of their time. They get dated and lose their original focus and power. *The Graduate* (I can see clearly now) is a lesser movie. It comes out of a specific time in the late 1960s when parents stood for stodgy middle-class values, and “the kids” were joyous rebels at the cutting edge of the sexual and political revolutions. Benjamin Braddock ([Dustin Hoffman](http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/classifieds?category=search1&SearchType=1&q=Dustin%20Hoffman&Class=%25&FromDate=19150101&ToDate=20111231)), the clueless hero of *The Graduate*, was swept in on that wave of feeling, even though it is clear today that he was utterly unaware of his generation and existed outside time and space (he seems most at home at the bottom of a swimming pool).

*The Graduate*, released in 1967, contains no flower children, no hippies, no dope, no rock music, no political manifestos and no danger. It is a movie about a tiresome bore and his well-meaning parents. The only character in the movie who is alive—who can see through situations, understand motives, and dare to seek her own happiness—is Mrs Robinson ([Anne Bancroft](http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/classifieds?category=search1&SearchType=1&q=Anne%20Bancroft&Class=%25&FromDate=19150101&ToDate=20111231)). Seen today, *The Graduate* is a movie about a young man of limited interest, who gets a chance to sleep with the ranking babe in his neighbourhood, and throws it away in order to marry her dorky daughter.

She is so witless that she misunderstands everything Benjamin says to her. When she discovers Benjamin has slept with her mother, she is horrified, but before they have ever had a substantial conversation about the subject, she has forgiven him—apparently because Mrs Robinson is so hateful that it couldn't have been Benjamin's fault. She then escapes from the altar at her own wedding to flee with Benjamin on a bus, where they look at each other nervously, perhaps because they are still to have a meaningful conversation.

Today, looking at *The Graduate*, I see Benjamin not as an admirable rebel, but as a self-centred creep whose put-downs of adults are tiresome. (Anyone with average intelligence should have known, in 1967, that the word “plastics” contained valuable advice—especially valuable for Benjamin, who lacks creative instincts and is destined to become a corporate drudge.) Mrs Robinson is the only person in the movie who is not playing old tapes. She is bored by a drone of a husband, she drinks too much, she seduces Benjamin not out of lust but out of kindness or desperation.[[361]](#footnote-361)

I agree with Ebert that his ‘murky generational politics were distorting his view the first time that [he] saw the film’ because this phenomenon is something that, ultimately, happens with people: just as Hippolytos and Phaidra have changed with the times, so too do our perceptions of the world around us. I am not suggesting that Ebert was right to be so antagonistic toward Mrs Robinson when she first made her way into the cinema, but I will not attack him for having been an idealistic young man who saw the relationship between these two cultural icons as nearly predatory. In fact, a number of recent Anglophone adaptations of this myth (e.g. Matthew Maguire’s *Phaedra*, Susan Yankowitz’s *Phaedra in Delirium*, and Charles Mee’s *True Love*[[362]](#footnote-362)) are built upon the age variance and almost predatory essence of the older woman as established by Mike Nichols, so Ebert’s young opinion must not have been entirely uncommon.

Again, I will agree with his summary of *The Graduate* as a ‘lesser movie.’ I do this not because I think that the central theme of the film (i.e. our mythological kernel) is any less relevant today than it was almost fifty years ago – or, indeed, than it was 2500 years ago – but, rather, because both Mrs Robinson and Benjamin are responses to their own chronological period. These two, like Hippolytos and Phaidra and all of their other receptions, belong in the time in which they were created. Some myths are able to survive due to their morals; ours is relevant because of unique responses to a common situation. The fact that *Hippolytos* is still interesting to us two millennia removed speaks, not necessarily, to the masterful use of language by Euripides (though I agree that this is, in part, responsible), but because this story can still be transferred diachronically and few, if any, alterations to the mythic principle must occur. We have learned that this does not have to be a story about royalty; the common man will suffice. This is one of our primal myths.

At this point, I would like to review briefly some of the shifts that have occurred in the existential psychology of Phaidra throughout the texts that have been reviewed in this thesis. In her 428 BCE version, Phaidra was fiercely loyal to her family, and she defined much of her own personal identity through their collective *eukleia*. Even though she was being assaulted by her passion for her stepson, she never submitted to her baser urges; instead, she fought against them to the point of sacrificing her own life rather than debasing herself. She taught – and continues to teach – her audience the value of *sophrosyne*. Because of her, we appreciate that one should not submit one’s own will, but we also question the relevance of this struggle if it is futile and culminates in losing one’s life. Her lesson itself is a back-biting blade: sometimes, in order to preserve a pure reputation, we must leave this life on a high arc rather than a downswing.[[363]](#footnote-363)

Her earliest reimagining (that of Seneca) is not concerned with the reputation of her family. Theseus has not been a good husband to her, and when he abandons her in order to abduct another’s wife for his friend, she feels relieved. Finally, she is free to pursue an independent life in which she is not a spoil of conquest. The desires that she has are for her stepson, but she never expressed them until she was confident that there was no longer a surviving connection between them. Because of her own shame (and possible fear) at the return of her husband, Phaedra attempts to reseal her expression of desire. Because she cannot do this, and because she learns that Hippolytus does not reciprocate her passion, Phaedra desires to see him destroyed in order to protect herself – not anyone else. Whereas her predecessor was making the best of a bad situation, Phaedra will see another destroyed so that she may be protected.[[364]](#footnote-364)

In seventeenth-century France, Phèdre emerges again under the watchful eye of her stepson. While her husband is away pursuing ignoble actions, this queen is left alone with a young man who bears a striking resemblance to the husband that she once loved. Through exposure to an attractive and decent youth, she has developed emotional feelings toward him, but chooses not to articulate them until she believes her husband to be long gone. Her story is very similar to her Roman forbearer, but it changes drastically in how she chooses to deal with it. Phaedra was turned away because Hippolytus refused to sexually congress with any woman; Phèdre is refused not on the grounds that she is a woman, nor due to the fact that she is his stepmother, but because his heart belongs to another – Aricie. Feeling slighted and of less worth, while simultaneously fearing for the well-being of her own son, the queen attempts to have Hippolyte exiled. When this exile culminates in his death, Phèdre decides that she cannot live in a world bereft of her intended lover. Her pride led to the death of Hippolyte, and his death broke her spirit.

As we jet forward 300 years, we meet the first non-royal portrayal of Phaidra – Mrs Robinson. As we discovered in my analysis of the correlations between this film and the mythic tradition, her relationship to Benjamin is not one of biological or legal constraint, but of social tradition. Her desires for him are not the same taboo that has defined the literary essence of this story, but they are equally controversial because of the closeness of the two families. She, like many before her, has been subjected to a loveless marriage, and has found a young man who tickles her fancy, but, more importantly, he is willing to be with her. After a summer of passion, Benjamin’s interests turn toward a younger, more carefree version of this woman in her daughter, Elaine. After attempting stop the two from pursuing a relationship, Mrs Robinson turns to the social destruction of her lover, and, in turn, soothes her own scorned ego. While this bears a similarity to the story of Phèdre, Mrs Robinson is not so attached that she willingly takes her own life after Benjamin is exiled from the only society that he has ever known. In fact, by accusing the eponymous character of rape, she frees herself from the constraints of her marriage. While her life will no longer be as financially comfortable as it once was, it will be one free of repression.[[365]](#footnote-365)

Anna Butler establishes a literary essence from which Kane’s Phaedra may springboard. She is, easily, the most self-centred reimagining of the Phaidra-figure in the modern Anglophone tradition. Whereas Mrs Robinson was willing to isolate herself from society in order to pursue stolen dreams, and Kane’s destroys the monarchy that destroyed her, Anna attacks a family that, while it remained distant, welcomed her into it. Like Kane’s Hippolytus, she holds no passion or regard for her stepson, and, in fact, only uses him to sate her urges. Ultimately, she sends a once noble family into exile, and now is cursed with repeating the long, drawn-out events of that evening indefinitely.

Finally, there is Kane’s Phaedra. She is a thoroughly selfish woman who is motivated only by her own amorous desires. After she has been burned by the emotionally detached Hippolytus, she sets out not only to destroy him, but also his father, and everything that they represent. She chooses to take her own life, falsely accuse Hippolytus of rape, and single-handedly ends the centuries-old institution of English monarchy. She recognizes that this governmental system created both of these unloving men, and she realizes that while she lives, she only helps to perpetuate its appetites. With her death, she knows that she may be able to change the system for the better, and that she may have revenge against father and son.

As we take one final look over these similarly named characters, we see similarities in their literary essences – we have to. Each of these women has sexually pursued a stepson figure, and each has been hurt by his reaction to these advances. All of them have their lives drastically changed by the refusal of their desired mates: they lose the lives that they know when they can no longer have the men that they want. That, however, is where similarities diverge. While one may argue that little change can be made after one dies, that is being blind to how a person lives. Each of these women chose to respond to their situations uniquely because of personal motivations that arose from their own lives and psychologies. That, however, is not to suggest that their stepsons have been omitted from or, even, weakened in the retellings of our drama. Whereas Jacques Lacan, as noted by Nicole Loraux in her introduction to Sophokles’ *Antigone*, was ‘only concerned with Antigone and prefers to exile the all too human Creon from tragedy—from Antigone’s tragedy,’[[366]](#footnote-366) our playwrights have recognized the necessity of the dynamic relationship between Phaidra and Hippolytos within this myth, and have maintained their connected identity in each adaptation. The arc of this myth must be the same for it to be recognizable, but that does not imply that our characters cannot change. If it were not for these noticeable alterations to personality, there would be no point in regurgitating this myth. *Hippolytos* can speak to us about sexual taboo as readily as can *Phaedra’s Love*, but the events of the two plays are vastly different from one another. These changes are why this myth is important today. We choose to retell this story because Hippolytos and Phaidra are able to change with the times.

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1. Oliver Taplin, Fiona Macintosh, and Edith Hall, eds. (2000).  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Fiona Macintosh, Pantelis Michelakis, Edith Hall, and Oliver Taplin, eds. (2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Kathleen Riley (2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Erin B. Mee and Helene P. Foley, eds. (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The physical Archive itself houses performance programmes, photographs, periodical clippings, video performances, and many other artefacts that are reflective of a performance’s life. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. I argue that this performance was produced in its original language. This assessment is made, in part, due to the pan-European Renaissance, beginning in roughly the fourteenth century, having spread to France by the end of the fifteenth century. The second, and more compelling, reason that I believe that the 1474 performance was spoken in Latin is due to a performance trend that took place in the records that are maintained from 1474 until 1486: of the eleven performances the spoken language of seven are known, and six of these seven were performed in the original Latin. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Throughout this thesis, I will not be heavily engaging in the debate as to whether or not Seneca himself actually wrote *Phaedra* or the plays that are credited to him; however, I do believe that this one, if not many others, was actually written by him and will address this issue briefly in a later chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Edith Hall, Fiona Macintosh, and Amanda Wrigley, eds. (2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. George Devereux (1985). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Marianne McDonald, John M. Dillon, and S.E. Wilmer, eds. (2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Though the word ‘heroine’ appears in neither the title nor subtitle of the collection, it is used by Taplin in the product description that lines the back of the dust-cover. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. M.I. Finley (1954): Finley argues that although cults, and thereby the title of hero, were offered prominently to men, women who were related to heroes by either birth (i.e. daughter (e.g. Iphigenia)) or marriage (i.e. wife (e.g. Klytaimnestra)) were often to be regarded in a similar viewing. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Deborah J. Lyons (1997), 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Throughout this thesis, all translations of Euripides belong to Diane Arnson Svarlien. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. An Artemisian epithet. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Socio-culturally speaking, I believe that the hunt is typically the realm of women (especially Amazons) because it allows them to emulate masculinity without actually attaining it: men are expected to serve as defenders against both other men (physical equals) and, more importantly, monsters (physical superiors) whereas these huntresses seek out and slay their mental and, often, physical inferiors in beasts. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Charles Segal (1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. One such example of this is in that Phaidra’s symptoms must be communicated to a male doctor lest she not be made well; as Phaidra is not able to formulate and deliver the message to a man, she is not able to receive treatment. The Nurse, as a woman, is able to understand the cause of Phaidra’s illness and is able to provide relief: Nicole Loraux (1993), 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. An Aphrodisian epithet referencing her being wash up ashore on Cypris after rising from the sea-foam. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Poison, hanging, and leaping were all forms of suicides which were attributed to being feminine; males, in the rare event of suicide, were expected to end their lives by the blade. It was more common for a male to endure an unhappy life, however, than to end it himself: Louraux (1987), 3-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Tycho J Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Ernst Kapp, and Ulrich Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1917). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. C. Garton (1957), 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *Ibid.,* 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Augustus Taber Murray (1916), 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Christopher Gill (1986), 251. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. John Jones (1962), 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. ‘The Difference Between Winning and Succeeding,’ [www.ted.com/talks/john\_wooden\_on\_the\_difference\_between\_winning\_and\_success.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/john_wooden_on_the_difference_between_winning_and_success.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Judith Butler (2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. In Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard (eds.) (2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. There are, at least, twenty-two theoretical orientations regarding human mental development, but all of them address the six basic tenets of psychoanalysis: 1) there are inherited constitutions of personality, but early childhood has an impact upon them; 2) attitude, mannerism, experience, and thought are largely influenced by irrational desires; 3) irrational desires are unconscious; 4) attempting to bring these desires into consciousness is met by psychological resistance; 5) conflicts between the conscious and the unconscious can materialize in emotional disturbances; 6) liberation from these disturbances can be achieved through becoming consciously aware of unconscious material. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Sigmund Freud (1895). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. In Neo-Freudian psychology, Carl G. Jung proposed the Electra complex as the female alternative to Freud’s Oedipus complex. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. The psychosexual stages of development are oral (birth – one year), anal (eighteen months to three years), phallic (three to six years), latency (six years until puberty), and genital (puberty and the entirety of the adult life). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. In P.E. Easterling (ed.) (1997), 340. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Jacques Lacan (1999), 462. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *Ibid*., 413. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. In Jonathan Gottschall and David Sloan Wilson (eds.) (2005), 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Regarded as the first existential philosopher, Kierkegaard wrote extensively on organized religion, Christendom, morality, ethics, psychology, and the philosophy of religion. He was extremely critical of the practice of Christianity as a state religion, and explored the emotions and feelings that individuals faced with life choices (e.g. one’s faith), and believed that spiritual matters should be based on the individual rather than the community: See Søren Kierkegaard (2009), 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Nietzsche, like Kierkegaard, was interested in people’s quiet struggle with the apparent meaninglessness of life and the use of diversion to escape from boredom; he considered the role of making free choices, particularly regarding fundamental values and beliefs, and how such choices change the nature and identity of the chooser: See Steven Luper (2000), 4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Thomas R. Flynn (2006), 1-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche criticizes Socrates and all philosophers after him as decadents, employing dialectical rationality as a tool for self-preservation as the authority of tradition breaks down. In this piece, Nietzsche attacks Socrates’ choice when he says, ‘One chooses logical argument only when one has no other means. One knows that one arouses mistrust with it, that is not very persuasive. Nothing is easier to nullify than a logical argument: the tedium of long speeches proves this. It is a kind of self-defense for those who no longer have other weapons.’ Still, the German philosopher acknowledges that Socrates was very aware of his actions, and carried on regardless, ‘Did he himself understand this, this most brilliant of all self-deceivers? Was this what he said to himself in the end, in the wisdom of his courage to die? Socrates wanted to die: not Athens, but he himself chose the hemlock; he forced Athens to sentence him.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Kierkegaard (2009), 173: ‘The infinite merit of Socrates is precisely to be an *existing* thinker, not a speculator who forgets what it is to exist. For Socrates, therefore, the proposition that all knowing is recollecting has, at the moment of his leave-taking and as the suspended possibility of speculating, a two-fold significance: 1) that the knower is essentially *integer* and that there is no other anomaly concerning knowledge confronting him that he exists, which anomaly, however, is so essential and decisive for him that it means that existing, the inward absorption in and through existing, is truth; 2) that existence in temporality has no decisive importance, since the possibility of taking oneself back into eternity through recollection is always there, even though this possibility is constantly cancelled by the time taken in inner absorption in existing. The unending merit of the Socratic was precisely to accentuate the fact that the knower is someone existing and that existing is what is essential.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Patrick L. Gardiner (1988), 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. See Kierkegaard (2009); Nietzsche (2004); Hegel (1967); Heidegger (1962). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. See Camus (1948) (example of existential ‘lived time’); Lewin (1936) (description of “lived space.’) [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. In Chapter III, we will become familiarized with a popular philosophy in both Greece and Rome that posits a world from which God has, all but, resigned – Stoicism. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. It must be noted that in ‘Existentialism is a Humanism,’ (27-9) Sartre states clearly that a world bereft of a god is not a good one, but it is the one into which we’ve fallen: ‘And when we speak of “abandonment” – one of Heidegger’s favorite expressions – we merely mean to say that God does not exist, and that we must bear the full consequences of that assertion. Existentialists are strongly opposed to a certain type of secular morality that seeks to eliminate God as painlessly as possible. Around 1880, when some French professors attempted to formulate a secular morality, they expressed it more or less in these words: God is a useless and costly hypothesis, so we will do without it. However, if we are to have a morality, a civil society, and a law-abiding world, it is essential that certain values be taken seriously; they must have an *a priori* existence ascribed to them. It must be considered mandatory *a priori* for people to be honest, not to lie, not to beat their wives, to raise children, and so forth. We therefore will need to do a little more thinking on the subject in order to show that such values exist all the same, and that they are inscribed in an intelligible heaven, even though God does not exist…Existentialists, on the other hand, find it extremely disturbing that God no longer exists, for along with his disappearance goes the possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven. There could no longer be any *a priori* good, since there would be no infinite and perfect consciousness to conceive of it. Nowhere is it written that good exists, that we must be honest or must not lie, since we are on a plane shared only by men. Dostoyevsky once wrote: “If God does not exist, everything is permissible.” This is the starting point of existentialism. Indeed, everything is permissible if God does not exist, and man is consequently abandoned, for he cannot find anything to rely on – neither within nor without.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Kierkegaard (2009), 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. René Lafarge (1970) 133-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963), 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Jean-Paul Sartre (1948), 319-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. In *The Second Sex*,Simone de Beauvoir famously stated, ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.’ Generally, for the existentialists, one is not *born* anything: everything we are is the result of our choices, as we build ourselves out of our own resources and those which society gives us. We don’t only create our own values, we create ourselves. De Beauvoir, although an avowed life-long existentialist, posits limits to this central existentialist idea of self-creation and self-definition, qualifying the absolute freedom Jean-Paul Sartre posits in *Being and Nothingness*. Her contrast presents an ambiguous picture of human freedom, in which women struggle against the apparent disadvantages of the female body. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Stuart Charmé (1982), 568-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. George R. Schrader (1959), 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Jean-Paul Sartre (1956), 480. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. *Ibid.*, 480. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. *Ibid*., 590. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. R.D. Laing (1969), 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. This philosophy is closely related to both existentialism and nihilism, and owes most of its origin to Albert Camus. With his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus examined the absurdity that arises of the fundamental disharmony between the individual’s search for meaning and the meaninglessness of the universe. This philosophy proposes three manners by which one can cope with this dilemma: suicide, religious belief, and acceptance of the Absurd. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. In this chapter, I have chosen to transliterate directly the names of literary and religious figures from Greek into English as to distinguish these particular characters from their successors. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Edith Hall (2010), 21: Many of the archon’s responsibilities were secular and political: for example, he presided over meetings of the *Boule* (Gr. Council) and *Ekklesia* (Gr. Assembly) and oversaw the procedure for ostracism. His overseeing of the dramatic selection for the Dionysia reveals the marriage of religion and politics in this event. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Elaphebolion occurred in March/April. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. The *choregos*’ liturgical responsibility was equivocated with those who funded triremes and their crews, and those who managed and financed the gymnasia; this charge, therefore, was not meant to be taken lightly as it was not only related directly to the worship of an Olympian, but it also created opportunities for the *choregos* to develop his political profile. Though not all *choregoi* accepted this position willingly because, as is suggested by a comedic character of Antiphanes, if a man is selected to be *choregos*, he ends up in rags himself while dress his chorus-men in gold: Antiphanes, F. 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Antiphon 6; Lysias 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. From the 440s onwards, this inaugural event occurred in the *Oideion* (Gr. Song Hall), which was located next to the theatre, and was an opportunity for each tragedian, accompanied by his chorus and actors, to present the production that he had taught to his team before its presentation: Aeschines, *Against Ctesiphon* 66-7, with scholia; Plato, *Sym.* 194.  [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. This procession was intended to install the god into his theatre as had happened mythologically when he journeyed from Eleutherae into Attica: Aristophanes, *Ach*. 243, with scholia. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. In order to appreciate the scope of festivals of this nature, but not necessarily of the City Dionysia itself, one need view the Parthenon frieze, which details the pageantry of the Panathenaea. This procession was led by a young, aristocratic maiden who carried a basket, which held prime meat from a sacrifice on her head; she was followed by the *choregoi*, *ephebes* (Gr. younger citizens in military training), who led the principal sacrificial animal, and, eventually, the remainder of the inhabitants of Athens wearing masks and bearing constructed *phalloi* (Gr. penises): Inscription, *IG* I3 46; Demosthenes, *On the False Embassy* 287. Even prisoners were released on bail to attend the festival: Demosthenes, *Against Meidias* 10 and *Against Androtion* 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Aristophanes, *Ach.* 500-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. This glory, and the cost of its preservation, would then be highlighted when heralds would come forward and introduce the presentation of orphans whose fathers had died in war. These young men were then adorned in the panoply: Aeschines 3.154. Then, this new line of Athenian defense would take special seating near the front of the theatre for all to see: see Edith Hall (2010) and Eric Csapo and William J. Slater (2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. The actual population of Attica during this period was about a quarter of a million, and only, approximately, thirty thousand of these were citizens (free, adult, Athenian, males) whereas the remainder were metics, slaves, children, and women. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Evidence for the presence of the hierophant in the fifth century comes from Aristophanes, *Fr*. 296. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Oliver Taplin (2000), 109-111. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Most famously stated in Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* 2.34-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. L. McClure, (1999), 9: see Josiah Ober (1989), 74: Although many scholars believe that Ephialtes was responsible for *isegoria*. Ostwald (1986), 203 and n. 17: This principle may have been a feature of the Athenian *polis* as early as the time of Cleisthenes. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. L. McClure (1999), 9: The law actually states ‘from members of the city (*astu*) on both sides’: see Aristotle, *Ath. Pol*. 26.4; see Nicole Loraux (1987), 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. See David Konstan (1994), 3-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Edith Hall (2010), 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Regions were defined by geographical and tribal division; Greece was divided into seven regions and thirty-seven sub-regions, each with their own dialect, calendar, politic, and cult practices. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. In Corinth, Kypris had a great temple that stood on the summit of Acrocorinth, which swarmed with sacred prostitutes who were not only fulfilling the will of the goddess, but who were, also, bringing others into closer communion with her. This temple was probably the only one to honour the goddess in such a manner in a cult positioned at the heart of civic life and official state religion: Pindar, F. 122; Strabo, C378-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Artemis was, similarly, a member of the pantheon who, while receiving proper reverence and having massive cult followings in many cities (e.g. Athens and Sparta), was never the tutelary deity of a *polis* within mainland Greece; her cult, rather, blossomed in Asia Minor, specifically in Ephesos: Xenophon, *Ana.* 3.7. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Simon Price (2002), 67-73; Walter Burkert (1985), 95-8; Borimir Jordan (1979); Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood in Oswyn, Murray and S.R.F. Price (1990), 320-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. The most notable exception to this pattern was the Delphic oracle: Pausanias 2.33.2. There were also priestesses of Zeus at Dodona: Herodotus 2.55.1-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Price (2002) 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Homer, *Il.* 3.371, 5.370. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Grigson *et al.* suggest that this is the origin of the goddess’ name *aphros* (Gr. sea-foam). [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Homeric Hymn 5.7-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Homer, *Il*. 14.214; Homeric Hymn 5.36-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Homeric Hymn 5.45-290: This hymn details Aphrodite being filled by Zeus with amorous feelings toward Anchises; in doing this, Zeus asserts, without doubt, that *none* save Athena, Artemis, and Hestia are exempt from being overpowered with love. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. The fourth day of each month was sacred to both Aphrodite and Hermes; Menander, *Kol*. F. Athenaeus 659d: James Davidson in Daniel Ogden, (2007), 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Solon’s Attic calendar fluctuated by lunar rather than solar cycles; as best as the Attic calendar can be compared to the Gregorian, Hekatombaion occurred in July/August though this can vary by as much as one month: Burkert (1985), 225-7; Davidson in Ogden (2007), 204-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. The cultists would burn incense of myrtle and sacrifice Kypris’ sacred he-goats, which they would castrate in reverence of the goddess; after the castration, they would toss the genitals into the sea memorialising the Hesiodic creation myth of the deity. As was common with all public sacrifices in ancient Attica, after the blood, life, and a portion of the body of the animal(s) had been offered to satiate the goddess, the celebrants would enjoy a meal of meat: William Burkert (1985), 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Aphrodisian epithet; translates as ‘heavenly.’ During this sacrifice, because the pigeon was specifically sacred to Kypris, it is feasible that these birds, either actual pigeons or votive offerings in their form, were offered to the goddess on this occasion. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. This site was excavated by O. Broneer and A. W. Parsons in 1932. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Homer, *Il.* 1.9, *Od*. 6.100; Hesiod, *Theo.* 918, *WD* 770; Homeric Hymn 27.19. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Homer, *Il.* 6.205, 6.427, 19.55, *Od.* 11.172, 11.324, 15.410, 15.478, 18.202, 20.60. Artemis was a two-fold goddess who could give protection as easily as she could end life. This literary tradition seeped into actual cult practice, and it became customary to take the garments of women who had died in childbirth to Brauron. It was only fitting that as so many females had served Artemis here in their youth that their memories would be preserved here after their adult deaths: Euripides, *IT* 1464-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Aristophanes, *Lys*. 645. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. These artifacts and vase-paintings depicting these activities have been recovered from the site. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Just as Artemis is the goddess charged with protecting infant life as well as ending those of young women, so too is she the simultaneous protector (Homer, *Il.* 21.470; Homeric Hymn 27.1-9; Aeschylus, *Or*. F. 188.) and most acclaimed hunter of wild beasts (Homer, *Il.* 5.51, 21.483, *Od.* 6.102; Homeric Hymn 5.16-20, 27.10-5; Aeschylus, *Ag*. 141-3.). [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Artemisian epithet; translates as ‘the huntress.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. GRBS 7, No 2 (1966), 112 f., 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Homeric Hymn 5.68-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Homer, *Il.* 1.245-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. *Ibid.*, 13.450-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. *Ibid*., 14.321-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. *Ibid*., 6.155-211. The introduction of the story of Bellerophon’s near seduction is of importance because it is extremely similar to our surviving *Hippolytos* myth. Bellerophon is taken in as a house-guest of Proitos; the king’s wife – called Anteia in this tradition – attempts to seduce him; the virtuous hero remains chaste in the face of her sexual pursuits; the scorned woman accuses the innocent man of rape to her husband; Proitos drives Bellerophon from his lands. This very myth, which mirrors ours so similarly, will be treated by Euripides in his *Stheneboea* at the Dionysia prior to his staging of *Hippolytos* in 428 BCE, but will not earn him a victory. I discuss this further below. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Homer, *Od.* 11.627-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. *Ibid*.,*.* 11.567-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. The fact that Odysseus mentions Phaidra at all suggests that the audience to whom the poet was speaking would have had familiarity with her myth. Though it is possible that her presence was a sixth-century Athenian interpolation, but the time period between the Nekuia and such interpolation is not likely to be great. The interpolations may represent older traditions. This theory is supported by Plutarch’s *Theseus*, in which there is claimed to be no discrepancy between the mythographic and historic traditions of the fates of Phaidra and Hippolytos: Timothy Gantz (1993), 286. What is odd about her appearance, however, is that she, unlike nearly all of the others to whom reference has been made in the Nekuia, save her accompanying Prokris, is without a defined parentage or myth. One line after Phaidra is mentioned, Ariadne is called to mind as both the daughter of Minos and the lover of Theseus, but there is no connection drawn between the two who, by the time of Euripides, are sisters who have shared an Athenian lover. Nevertheless, we are made explicitly aware of the fate of Ariadne and its cause according to the Homeric tradition, but the very same custom denies any insight into who this woman is, and what occurred in her mortal life or lineage. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. The protogenos of sexual love formed alongside of Gaia and Tartaros by Khaos at the creation: Hesiod, *Theo*., 116 who later accompanied Aphrodite to the assembly of the Olympians, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. This was a punishment to Minos for his wrongs against the gods: Euripides, *Cr.* 472c, 472e 6-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Bacchylides, F. 26; Euripides, *Cr.* 988. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Euripides, *Cr.* 472b. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. *Ibid*., 472e. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Nowhere in remaining evidence before the fifth century do we learn why Athenians are being sent to Crete, but in vase paintings dating back to 650 BCE, it is an established myth: Gantz (1993), 262. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Theseus was the son of both Theseus and Aigeas, but mythographers such as Bacchylides, Ode 17, usually only mention his divine heritage; Homer, *Il*. 1.265; Sophokles, *OC* 607; Euripides, *Hipp*. 1438 all mention his mortal, albeit legendary, father. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Pherekydes, *FGrHist* 3F148. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Hesiod, *Theo*. 947. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Homer, *Od.* 11.321. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Hesiod F. 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. In order to avoid confusion, *Hippolytos Kalyptomenos* will be referred to as *HK*, and *Hippolytos Stephanephoros* (Gr. Hippolytos the Garland-Bearer) will be *HS* when distinction is to be made. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Phaidra is compared to Stheneboea, the failed seductress of Bellerophon who was dramatized by Euripides in his *Stheneboea*, which predates the surviving *Hippolytos*: Aristophanes, *Fr.* 1230-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Hanna Roisman (1999), 397. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. This tragedy survives only in fragments, which have been translated by C. Collard and Martin Cropp. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Sophokles, *OT* 1265-74; Euripides, *Herakles* 1146-59; Plato *Phaedrus* 237A & 243B. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Roisman (1999), 407-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. T.B.L. Webster (1999), 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. All of these Sophoklean fragments are the Lloyd-Jones 1996 edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Not only is it vital to comprehend the deities of *Hippolytos* within the microcosm of the tragedy itself, but it is equally important to understand how Aphrodite and Artemis were perceived and revered in the actual world of fifth-century Athens. By understanding the relationships of these Olympians with the playwright and the greater audience of the City Dionysia, we will better appreciate their respective roles within the drama, and their developed relationships with Hippolytos and Phaidra. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Demosthenes, *Epistle* 1.1. This authorship of this epistle has been debated, but was ascribed convincingly to Demosthenes in Jonathan A. Goldstein (1968). [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Apollonian epithet; translates as ‘radiant.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Aphrodisian epithet; derived from the legend that she first landed on Cyprus after having risen from the sea: Hesiod, *Theo.* 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Each member of the original audience would have been familiar with these events, and would not have required this explanation, as we have established, in examining the life of this myth prior to this 428 BCE staging. I do not suspect that my audience is entirely unaware of what has happened prior to this point, but I believe that it is vital to reveal how far-stretching Aphrodite’s influence is within the lives of the mortal players in this drama in order to understand how thoroughly she influences both individual existence and Hellenic essence. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. All living things, including plants and animals, reproduce solely because Aphrodite places the desire within them to propagate a biological cycle. These products of Aphrodite’s influence are allowed to remain within the realm of Artemis for a period before they themselves become sexually mature and return to Aphrodite. Aphrodite and Artemis, therefore, cannot be absolutely separated from one another although Euripides attempts to set them apart as opposing polarities. They are connected essentially to one another in an endless cycle of sexual purity, sexual activity, and reproduction. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. By this I mean that, the fading prince who found solace only in the company of the Huntress will be denied that luxury as he leaves this world. It is tragic to consider not only that Artemis was present at the birth of Hippolytos, and that she accompanied him throughout his life, but that she will be absent and remorseless when he dies. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Aeschylus, *Tox.* F. 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Aeschylus, *Aga*. 105-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Homer, *Il.* 24.602-20; Aeschylus, *Niobe*. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Epithet of Zeus; translates as ‘Zeus, keeper of oaths.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Homer, *Il.* 3.189, 6.186. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Hippolytos was raised in Troezen by Pittheus: Euripides, *Hipp.* 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. See: Konstan (1994) for a reading which shows how important Pericles’ 451 legislation is at this time. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. By the Periclean reforms, these sons are not legitimate either, but the script is treating them as such. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Devereux (1985), 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Robert Bagg (1974), 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Devereux (1985), 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. See Chapter II (65-69). [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. This comment is comparable to those made by Creon in *OT* 583-99, and address Devereux’s previous comment about the place of Hippolytos with his half-brother ruling Athens. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. It was claimed that Amazons rode well because of the width of their posteriors making the seating secure: Dictys Cretensis, *De Bell*. *Troi*. Though Dictys is late, the tradition may be ancient. The Greeks had no real saddles, so they favored cavalry horses whose spines formed a holly between the horse’s back muscles: John K. Anderson (1961). [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. The iconography of the *Amazonomachy* and the *Centauromachy* is comparable as both become entwined with their bestial natures while the Greeks stand solely as men in battle. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Devereux (1985), 43-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Douglas Cairns, (1997), 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Svarlien translates this as ‘raucous gang of servants.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Devereux (1985), 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. E. M. Blaiklock (1952), 45-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. See: Charles Segal (1965), 117-69. See: Froma Zeitlin (1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Euripides, *Cr.* 472e. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Homer, *Od.* 11.567-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Douglas Cairns (1993), 1-47: This translation is very simple as Cairns attempts to accurately translate *aidos* in an entire chapter of this book. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Jerker Blomquist (1982), 401. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Fred Alford (1992), 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Helene Peters, (1990), 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Joseph Fell (1965), 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Phaidra’s desire to have Hippolytos punished is, most likely, not a strictly mortal response, but is also derived from the manipulative force of Kypris as outlined in the tragedy’s prologue. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Euripides, *Med.* 1020-80; Euripides, *Alc*. 280-325. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. E. R. Dodds (1925), 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Bernard Knox (1952), 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Charles Segal (1965), 124-5, 130, 144-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Justin Glenn (1976), 435-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. William Bedell Stanford, (1983), 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. In this chapter, I have chosen to directly transliterate the names of literary and religious figures from Roman into English as to distinguish these particular characters from their predecessors. When Phaidra or Hippolytos appear in the text, this is to distinguish between Greek and Roman variants. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Roland Mayer (2002), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. This Apollodorus is often identified as Apollodorus of Athens (born c. 180 BCE) who did leave a similar comprehensive repertory on mythology; the text we possess, however, cites a contemporary of Cicero called Castor the Annalist, and could not, therefore, have been written in the second century BCE: Aubrey Diller, *The Text history of the Bibliotheca* (S.I., 1935), p. 296 and 300. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Apollodorus records the long-standing traditions of how Minos came to be king of Crete, how Pasiphaë, with the help of Daedalos, mated with the Cretan Bull in order to give birth to the Minotaur (called Asterion ‘ruler of the stars’ 3.1.4; this is a name shared with Minos’ foster-father: Hesiod, *Women*, F. 19 with scholia:Homer*, Il. x*ii. 292.) and the incarceration of the half-man beast in the Labyrinth in compliance with certain oracles: Apollodorus, *Bib*., 3.1.3-3.1.4; Diodorus, IV.77.1-4; Hyginus, *Fab.,* 40. These are customs with which we already acquainted, but Apollodorus also goes beyond the familiar actions, and develops cultural reasons as to why Minos is demanding the Athenian tribute of seven youths and seven maidens. Very simply, Minos sought revenge. Androgeus – a rarely mentioned son of Minos – was proving himself superior in the Panathenian festival, and was killed either when Aigeas sent him against the Marathonian Bull, or when he was waylaid and murdered by competitors jealous of his prowess. The Cretan king, in response to learning of the death of his son, waged war against Athens; the city, unable to properly defend itself, submitted to Minos’ demands: Apollodorus, *Bib.*, 3.15.7-3.15.8; Diodorus, IV.60.3-61.3; Hyginus, *Fab*., 41. After an unmeasured amount of time in which Athenian children were being sacrificed to quell both the pain and rage harboured within Minos, the prince of Athens developed a plan which he foresaw would end this barbarous ritual. Theseus – Aigeus and Poseidon’s shared son – departed from Athens in a black-sailed ship, determined to kill Asterion, and free his father’s kingdom from Minos’ grip. The Athenian prince did, in fact, slay the Minotaur and escaped from the Labyrinth with the help of Ariadne, who was then abducted from him on Naxos by Dionysos. This abduction caused a bereaved Theseus to forget to change his sails from black to white, the sign which it had been planned to convey his victory and survival against Minos’ monster to all Athenians. Aigeus, thinking his own son dead, committed suicide by leaping from the walls of the Acropolis. With the death of his mortal father, Theseus was determined to succeed him as Athens’ sovereign, but first had to defeat in mortal combat the fifty Pallantidai who opposed his ascension: Apollodorus, *Bib*., E.1.7-E.1.11; Diodorus, IV.61.4-9, V.51.4; Hyginus, *Fab*., 42-3, 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. In Apollodorus, *Bib*., E. 1.16. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Apollodorus, *Bib*., E.1.16-E.1.19; Diodorus, IV.28.1-4, IV.62.1-4, Hyginus, *Fab*., 47, 243, 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Aricia, near the Lake of Nemi, is also an important site to the cult of Diana in central Italy, and may be the location referenced here as ‘Egeria’s wood’. If this is the case, Aricia, the land, may be seen as an allegorical mother of the god Virbius when the cult of Hippolytus is introduced, and may have been personified for both this work and Jean Racine’s *Phèdre* where a love interest figure for Hippolyte is introduced called Aricia. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Ovid, *Met*., 557-650; Ovid, *Fasti*, 3.265; Hyginus, *Fab*., 49, 251. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Roland Mayer (2002), 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. She goes on to defend her emotions by stating that she is not behaving basely because hers is not the passion of a young girl, but a love that has firmed with age. In defense of this, she claims that she would prefer Hippolytus to even Jupiter (17-36), harkening back to the coupling of her grandmother, Europa, and the King of Olympus. Phaedra is convinced that Europa’s choice to be entwined with Jove in the form of a bull is the cause of the strand of unnatural sexual relationships that Cretan women, herself included, pursue (53-66). Phaedra then turns her confession from an exposition of her familial curse to the precise moment when her passion for Hippolytus ignited (67-84), pleads for Hippolytus’ sexual rigidity to bend (85-104), and attempts to inveigle herself into his affections by clever words that emphasize how both she and he have been wronged by Theseus’ various escapades (105-128). [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Senecan Imperial Neo-Stoicism is derived from a long tradition dating back to the teachings of Zeno of Citium, which is a combination of the teachings of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Polemo, Theophrastus, Crates of Thebes, Stilpo, and Diodorus Cronus. After combining the intellectual traditions of his predecessors with his own ideas on the matters of logic, ethics, and physics, Zeno established a philosophical school that promoted the exploration of the universe not only through individual Rationalism, but also through interactive Sensualism with the world as a whole. By accepting that all individuals have a natural predisposition to act in accordance with goodness, but are, nonetheless, *tabula rasa*, and are, therefore responsible for pursuing their own goodness, this philosophical school encourages individuals to interact with the entirety of the world while considering the implications of one’s actions. See: Brad Inwood (2003); John Rist (1978); Frederick Copleston (1993); Thomas Rosenmeyer, (1989); Berte Marti (1945), 216; Clarence Mendell (1941), 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Aldo Setaioli (2007), 337. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Keimpe Algra (2003), 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Thomas Rosenmeyer (1989), 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Charles Segal (1986), 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Rosenmeyer (1989), 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. AA Long and DN Sedley (1987), 333. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Rosenmeyer (1989), 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Rosenmeyer (1989), 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Norman T. Pratt (1948), 2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. John Fitch and Siobhan McElduff (2002), 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Throughout this thesis, all translations of Seneca belong to R Scott Smith. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Gordon Braden (1970), 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. See Chapter II (100-2). [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Racine was one of the three great playwrights of 17th-century France (he was joined by Jean-Baptiste Poquelin – Molière and Pierre Corneille). [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. A line of poetic metre comprising twelve syllables divided into two equal parts with a caesura – a complete pause in a line of poetry – between the sixth and seventh syllables. As a form of iambic hexameter, Racine’s *Phèdre* was written in the iambic equivalent of the dactylic hexameter metre of Greek and Latin epic including the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. This was a western-European cultural movement in which the decorative and visual arts, philosophy, literature, theatre, music, and architecture drew inspiration from the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome. This renewed artistic appreciation for the themes and perceived styles of antiquity was accompanied by a variety of intellectual and cultural movements across Europe and the American colonies which sought to reform society employing reason rather than religious tradition, and to advance collective knowledge through science rather than to stifle it with superstition: The Age of Enlightenment. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Katherine Wheatley (1956), viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Edith Hall and Fiona Macintosh, (2005), 33-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Jean Racine, Desmond Flower, Fritz Kredel, and John Crown, (1986): In the summer of 1674, a translation of *Andromaque* was staged anonymously at the Duke’s Theatre, and was poorly received; it was later printed in 1675 with a prefatory epistle, signed ‘J.C.’. In disclaiming authorship of this piece, Crowne provided a great deal of critique on the text, and made vicious attacks against Racine and his *Andromaque*, which was esteemed by ‘some *English* who are admirers of French Wit, and think this suffered much in the Translation.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Subligny (1677), 392. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Saint-Évremond(1927), 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Wheatley (1956), 261-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Our records indicate that there have been a total of five performances of this myth in England prior to Smith’s premiere. Euripides’ *Hippolytos* was staged between 1552 and 1553 at King’s College in Cambridge and Seneca’s *Phaedra* had been performed four times, the earliest between 1543 and 1547 at the Westminster School in London. Though the surviving historical documents do not provide us with the spoken language of the performances, we may theorise that all of the performances were conducted in Greek and Latin respectively because they all took place at educational institutions. Smith’s *Phaedra and Hippolitus* was performed at what was then known as The Queen’s Theatre on 21 April 1707. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Hall and Macintosh (2005), 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Katherine Wheatley (1956), 97-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. See Chapter III (109). [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Wheatley (1956), 95 citing Thomas Cooke (1752), 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. W Belsham, (1799), 471: ‘Many of our modern tragedies, it must be acknowledged, are regular and faultless performances; some of them are not only free from material defects, but possess a considerable share of real excellence; for instance, *Cato*, *Irene*, and *Phaedra and Hippolitus*. The diction of these plays is lofty and poetical without being inflated; the sentiments just and noble, the plots regularly conducted, the characters skilfully diversified, and the unities strictly preserved.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Hall and Macintosh (2005), 89-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. In previous chapters, ‘Nurse’ has stood as the proper name for this character. Because Racine has provided this archetype with a name – Oenone – ‘nurse’ is not capitalized in this section. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. All translations of Racine are from Boswell (2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. This early 20th-century Anglo-American movement favored the precision of imagery and clear, sharp language. It has been described as the most influential movement in English poetry since the activity of the Pre-Raphaelites (see Glenn Huges (1960)). This poetic style gave Modernism its start in the early 20th century (see William Pratt (1963)). The Imagists rejected the sentiment and discursiveness typical of much Romantic and Victorian poetry, in contrast to their contemporaries, the Georgian poets, who were generally content to work within that tradition. Imagism also called for a return to what were seen as more Classical values, such as directness of presentation and economy of language, as well as a willingness to experiment with non-traditional verse forms (e.g. free verse). [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. She did, however, undergo treatment with her friend Sigmund Freud during the 1930s in order to understand and express her sexuality: See Vicki Bertram (1997), 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. Eileen Gregory (1990), 134. The other pieces written by H.D. that revolved around this mythology included ‘Phaedra,’ ‘She Contrasts with Herself Hippolyta,’ ‘She Rebukes Hippolyta,’ ‘Leucadian Artemis,’ ‘Songs from Cyprus,’ ‘All Mountains,’ and ‘Calliope.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Martha Graham’s *Phaedra* was a ballet that was first performed in 1962, and caused scandal because of the overtly sexual treatment of the subject. The dancing itself seems almost cartoonish in its illustration of female desire – it’s all about the groin – and even more, in its objectification of the male physique. Phaedra’s suicide is performed by stabbing herself repeatedly in the genitals. See Marina Harss. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. An Irish-American playwright and Nobel laureate who was one of the first American dramatists to introduce the realism associated with the works of Anton Chekhov, Henrik Ibsen, and August Strindberg. As is evident in *Desire Under the Elms*, he often wrote in the American vernacular, and wrote plays that involved characters on the fringe of society (a perfect choice for the Hippolytos/Phaidra myth), where they struggle to maintain their hopes and aspirations, but ultimately slide into disillusionment and despair. Arguably most well-known for *The Iceman Cometh* (1940) and *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (1941), O’Neill twice tackled the Hellenic tradition in this play and *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), his three-play rendition of the *Oresteia*. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. A theatrical movement that refers to theatre that attempts to create a perfect illusion of reality through a range of dramatic and theatrical strategies: detailed, three-dimensional settings, vernacular speech, a secular world-view, an exclusive focus on contemporary and indigenous subjects, an extension of the social range of characters portrayed, and a style of acting that attempts to recreate the impression of reality. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. This action, of course, is reminiscent of another Euripidean classic – *Medea*. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. Wayne Narey (1992), 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. *Ibid*., 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. *Ibid*., 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Nichols, Friel, Kane, Maguire, Mee, and Yankowitz will all have their Hippolytos and Phaidra-figures consummate their relationship. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Recounted in Genesis 39, this episode takes place shortly after Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery out of jealousy (Gen. 37). While in slavery in Egypt, Joseph is sold to Potiphar, the captain of the palace guard, in whose home he rises to a position of trust in which he is trusted with the care of the entire household. Eventually, Potiphar’s unnamed wife attempts to seduce him, and when Joseph repeatedly refuses, she accuses her slave of attempted rape, and uses his cloak as evidence (much like the sword in the Senecan tradition). Joseph was then imprisoned by Potiphar after failing to defend himself. **N.B.** The Tanakh, including this myth, was compiled by the Great Synagogue no later than 450 BCE, just twenty-two years before Euripides’ award-winning premiere. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. See Chapter II (66). [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. In David Fear (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. When approached to play Ben, Hoffman responded, ‘I’m not right for this part, sir. This is a Gentile. This is a WASP. This is Robert Redford’: in Sam Kashner, (2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. See Chapter II (66). [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. See Chapter II (66). [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Aricie and Elaine are such fascinating figures that after 1967, there are few Anglophonic adaptive treatments of this myth that choose not to represent a love interest of approximately the same as the Hippolytos-figure. For instance, Kane and Maguire both make much of her in their scripts. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. The AFI ranked *The Graduate* as the seventh greatest American film of all time. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Suryaprasada Suvedi (1996), 169-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Joseph Stalin, (1 November 1926). [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. John Lewis Gaddis (2005), 151-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. John Pearce Hardt and Richard F Kaufman (1995), 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. This hypothetical climactic effect is theorised to be similar to the catastrophic asteroid impact to which many scientists accredit the K-T extinction event; it would cause cold weather, reduce sunlight for months or years, and, subsequently, destroy vegetation and, ultimately, animal life. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. Edward A Hewett and Victor H. Winston (1991). A policy that called for increased openness and transparency in government institutions and activities in the Soviet Union. This policy introduced freedom of speech and relaxed censorship, which resulted in the Communist Party losing its grip on the media, and allowed Western popular culture to be introduced into the Eastern bloc. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Mikhail Gorbachev (1987).A political movement for reformation within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which allowed for more independent actions from various ministries and introduced some market-like reforms. The goal of Perestroika was to make socialism work more efficiently in the USSR. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. Department of Defense, Statistical Information Analysis Division (SIAD) reports these numbers. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. The forces of North Vietnam, Viet Cong, Khmer Rouge, and Pathet Lao were supported by the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, Czechoslovakia, Cuba, and Bulgaria. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. The forces of South Vietnam, the United States, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, New Zealand, Thailand, Khmer Republic, and the Kingdom of Laos were supported by Spain and Taiwan. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. Howard Jones (2008), 345. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. Lt. General Barry R McCaffrey (31 May 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. Chen Guan Ang (1998), 351. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. Clark M Clifford and Richard C Holbrooke (1991), 47-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. Herbert Y Schandler (2009), 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. ‘Melvin R Laird’, *United States Department of Defense* ([www.defense.gov/specials/secdef\_histories/bios/laird.htm](http://www.defense.gov/specials/secdef_histories/bios/laird.htm)). [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. Ali was named after an emancipationist and pacifist from Madison County, Kentucky. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. Kennedy was assassinated on 5 June 1968, the morning after he won a decisive victory of McCarthy in the Democratic primary in California. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. This slogan can be found on the poster designed by Arnold Skolnick. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. ‘State Investigating Handling of Tickets at Woodstock Fair’ (27 August 1969), 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. James E Perone, (2005), 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Barnard L. Collier (18 August 1969), 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Martin Luther King, Jr. (28 August 1963). [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Cherry Potter (2002), 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. Michael Goldberg, [faculty.washington.edu/mlg/courses/definitions/classicalHollywoodcinema.html](http://www.faculty.washington.edu/mlg/courses/definitions/classicalHollywoodcinema.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Geoff King (2002), 1-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. Todd Berliner (2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. Paul Monaco (2001), 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Thomas Schatz in Jim Collins, Hilary Radner, and Ava Collins (1993), 12-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. Tom S Reck, ‘*The Graduate* Reclassified.’ [web.blomand.net/~dennmac/review4.html](http://www.web.blomand.net/~dennmac/review4.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. ‘Faces of America: Mike Nichols,’ *Faces of America*, with Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., PBS (February 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. ‘Mike Nichols: “Salesman” by Day, Artist Always,” NPR (09 March 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Though not originally founded by Strasberg, the Actor’s Studio came to embrace and teach his acting style – The Method – which was a modified version of Konstantin Stanislavski’s ‘system.’ This acting style focuses on affective memory for the actor to evoke naturalistic emotion for the portrayed character. Strasberg’s Method relies on the actor replacing the emotional circumstances of the play with similar experiences from one’s own life. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. John Wakeman (1987), 704-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. Nick Clooney (2002), 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. This was the first American film to use the expletives ‘goddamn’ and ‘bugger’, and was the first film to be released with a ‘Suggested for Mature Audiences’ warning. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. JW Whitehead (2011), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Robert L Carringer (1998), 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. Whitehead (2011), 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. *Ibid*., 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. The screenplay can be accessed at [www.lc.ncu.edu.tw/learneng/script/TheGraduate.pdf](http://www.lc.ncu.edu.tw/learneng/script/TheGraduate.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. Note that there are no young people in attendance at this party because it is being thrown not for the sake of Benjamin, but for the sake of his parents maintaining their social identities. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. Bob Geller (1969), 423. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. Jacob Brackman (27 July 1968), 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. Potter (2002), 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. In this drama, however, it must be noted that both Anna and Ben are supporting characters rather than the focus of the tragedy, as has been the tradition; this play is about the last day of commandant Frank Butler against whom ‘an injustice *has* been done’ (87). Friel’s tragedy does not centre on the young lovers, but rather is about a man who has been wronged. Butler himself comments on these injustices shortly before taking his life when he states: ‘I don’t claim that I have been blameless. Maybe my faults have been greater than most. But it does seem – well, spiteful that when a point is reached in my life, and late in my life, when certain modest ambitions are about to be realised, when certain happinesses that I never experienced are suddenly about to be attainable, it does seem spiteful that these fulfilments should be snatched away from me – and in a particularly wounding manner. Yes, I think that this is unfair. Yes, that this is unjust. And that is why I make this formal protest, Sir. Against an injustice done to me. Because I have been treated unfairly, Sir – that is all.’ To date, there has not been a rendition of the Hippolytos-Phaidra myth so centred on the treatment of the Theseus-figure. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. This occurred from 21 January 1919 until 11 July 1921; the record shows that 2,014 individuals (750 of whom were civilians) were killed in this bloody conflict. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. Adopted on 29 December 1937, this article that is the fundamental law of Ireland established an independent state based on a system of representative democracy. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. This abstaining from the war was called ‘The Emergency.’ This official euphemism was used by the Irish Government during the 1940s to refer to its position on WWII, but declared a state of emergency on 2 September 1939, and enacted the Emergency Powers Act the following day. This gave sweeping new powers to the government for the duration of the Emergency (until 2 September 1946), such as internment, censorship of the press and correspondence, and the government control of the economy. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. This was an incident on 30 January 1972 in the Bogside area of Derry, Northern Ireland, in which twenty-six civil rights protestors were shot by soldiers of the British Army. The incident occurred during a Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association march, and remains one of the most significant events during the Troubles of Northern Ireland. Friel marched with these crowds. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. The Troubles is the common name for the ethno-nationalist conflict in Northern Ireland that spilled over at various times into the Republic of Ireland and mainland Europe. The Troubles began in the late 1960s and is considered by many to have ended with the Belfast Good Friday Agreement of 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. The Irish are the true heirs of the Greeks. The classics have always been popular in Ireland from the Latin and Greek manuscripts saved by Irish monks, to reworkings in modern Irish literature from William Butler Yeats to Seamus Heaney, both winners of the Nobel prize in poetry. Since 1984 we have seen twelve adaptations of Greek tragedy by eight Irish poets. Many of these reworkings are political. It is noteworthy that three of these plays are based on *Antigone*, two on *Medea*, two on *Trojan Women*, and none on *Oedipus Rex*: they are plays that focus on human rights more than on fate and individual identity, and more on women than on men: McDonald (1998), 37. For further commentary, see Peter McDonald (1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. Ulf Dantanus (1988); Richard Pine (1999); Scott Boltwood (2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. McDonald (1998), 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. A term originally coined by Tennessee Williams to describe *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), ‘memory plays’ focus on the past as narrated by a specific character. In our play ‘Sir,’ who comes to stand for the Greek Chorus, serves in this capacity, and is responsible for establishing the exposition and denouement of this modern tragedy. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. This Irish county is located in the north of Ireland, but is not part of the United Kingdom’s Northern Ireland. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. After learning of the affair, the Commandant will take his own life. At this point in our tragedy’s tradition, this is unique. The Theseus-figure will not again commit suicide until 2001 when Charles Mee has Richard take his own life after killing Polly in *True Love*. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. Greek tragedy operates with these two seemingly contradictory assumptions: there is an overriding notion of fate, and yet man is responsible for his choices: McDonald (1998), 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. Although it may be disconcerting to contemplate, true and false memories arise in the same way. Memories are attributions that we make about our mental experiences based on their subjective qualities, our prior knowledge and beliefs, our motives and goals, and the social context. We have failures in reality monitoring because retrospectively, we may imagine a solution to a problem in the past, which will cause a confusion of the perceptual experience with the products of imagination: Marcia K. Johnson (2006), 760. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. McDonald (1998), 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. During our drama, however, it cannot be disregarded that he is not the only child to maintain the family name. Tina, the youngest, has still neither left home nor married. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. This is a distinction from the literary essence of Theseus. In previous incarnations, he has never been so sympathetic toward any other human being, let alone his previous wife (i.e. the Hippolyte-figure). Butler does, however, comment that with Anna he is ‘Infinitely happier than [he] ever was with [their] mother…It’s the truth. During all those years of illness, she was patient and courageous and admirable. And [he] responded to that as best [he] could. Despite what Ben thinks, [he] did his best” (33-4). [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. As Hippolytos is wont to do because of his devotion to Artemis, Ben is living both on the societal fringe and the borders of adult life. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. Marianne McDonald (1998), 43 argues that Ben’s reason for committing the incestuous adultery is out of an ill-defined revenge, but I must disagree with her on the grounds that if Benedict were set on damaging his father’s psyche, he would not have entrusted the townsfolk with the responsibility of serving as Butler’s downfall. If Ben was expecting the locals to be able to offend the Commandant with their knowledge of the affair, that would only prove how little Ben knows of his father because Frank does not care about how he is received by the people of Donegal. Granted, this family has never been direct, so Ben would not have told his father himself, I do not believe that he would have tried to stop Anna from divulging the information. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. Like the Classical Hippolytos archetypes before him, Ben’s emotional growth is stunted by the death of his mother. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. McDonald (1998), 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. Note that Anna’s is the only character description not delivered by Sir in the action of the drama. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. McDonald (1998), 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. Graham Saunders (2002), 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. Margaret Thatcher (1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. Roger Middleton (1996), 630. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. Milton Friedman (1970), 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. Henceforth, VAT. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. Geoffrey Howe (1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. Earl Aaron Reitan (2003), 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. Thatcher (1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. ‘1982: UK unemployment tops three million’ (26 January 1982). [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. Margaret Thatcher, (1993), 97-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. Henceforth, NUM. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. Robert Glass (1984), 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. ‘Watching the pits disappear’ (5 March 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. Timothy Harper (5 March 1985), 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. Margaret Thatcher (15 April 1983). [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. *Campaign Report* (20 April 1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. Thatcher (1983). [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. Howe (1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. Mark Ravenhill, (23 February 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. Aleks Sierz (2000), 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. Michael Billington via Mireia Argay and Pliar Zozaya (2004), 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. Figures provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Norman St. John-Stevas (15 May 1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. Figures provided by the Royal Court. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. David Edgar (June 1993), 454.   [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. Michael Billington via Argay and Zozaya (2004), 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. Sierz (2000), 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. *Ibid*., 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. Richard Hornby (2004), 690. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. Michael Billington (23 March 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Aleks Sierz (2005), 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. Elaine Aston in Laurens de Vos and Graham Saunders (2010), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. James MacDonald (23 February 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Ken Urban (2001), 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. Note on my line selection: as this play-text does not utilize line numbering, I have artificially assigned line numbers based on stichomythia. Regardless of how long a particular speech is, it is being treated as one line until another character speaks. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. Zina Giannopoulou in de Vos and Saunders (2010), 60-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. Saunders (2002), 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Sierz (2000), 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Giannopoulou in de Vos and Saunders (2010), 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Robert Lublin, in de Vos and Saunders (2010), 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. *Ibid*., 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. Sierz (2000), 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. Saunders (2002), 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. Natasha Langridge and Heidi Stephenson (1997), 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier in Bernhard Reitz and Alyce Rothkirch (2001), 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. Saunders (2002), 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. Nils Tabert, (1998), 8-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. At the request of Castor, Bishop of Apt, of the subsequent Pope Leo I, the monk John Cassian codified and transmitted the ideologies of Evagrius Ponticus and the Desert Fathers of Egypt into *De institutis coenobiorum* *et de octo principalium vitiorum remedies* (Lat. The Institutes of the Cenobia and the Remedies for the Eight Principal Vices). In this text, Cassian detailed a series of eight severe mortal sins including acedia – spiritual apathy and indifferentism often culminating in suicide - which later would be edited by Pope Gregory I and come to be known as the Seven Deadly Sins. [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. Saunders (2002), 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. David Greig in Sarah Kane (2001), xi. [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. Lublin in de Vos and Saunders (2010), 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. Langridge and Stephenson (1997), 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. See Chapter I (21-5); Chapter II (65-9). [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. See Chapter I (26-7). [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. See Chapter I (17, 21-5). [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. The review can be accessed at <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19671226/REVIEWS/712260301/1023>. [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. The review can be accessed at <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19970328/REVIEWS/703280304>. [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. In Mee’s piece, the predation is stressed *ad absurdum* with Polly (Phaidra) being thirty-four years old, and Edward (Hippolytos) being thirteen or fourteen – or the youngest possible legal age for the youngest possible-looking actor to play this role. [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. See Chapter II (92-103). [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. See Chapter III (115-27). [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. See Chapter IV (199-204). [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. Nicole Loraux (1997), 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-366)