

Will the real Phaidra please... commit suicide?

a reconstruction of Euripides' lost *Hippolytos*, framed by his surviving *Hippolytos*, with scenes from Aristophanes' *Festival of Women* and Seneca's *Phaedra*

INTRODUCTION

Euripides twice took Phaidra's love for her stepson, Hippolytos, as his subject – the only case of a Greek tragedian writing two versions of the same story that we know of. It's plausible that he wrote the second version, *Hippolytos Garlanded* (the play which has survived) in response to the 'scandal' caused by the first version, *Hippolytos Veiled*. That, at least, is the implication of the remark made by Aristophanes of Byzantium in the late third or early second century, referring to one of the plays with which Euripides won first prize in 428 BCE: "This *Hippolytos* was evidently the second, written later, because in this play what was improper and blameworthy [in the first] has been corrected." The date of the first version is not known, but Sommerstein conjectures 436-433 BCE. Certainly, if the second version was a response to the reception of the first, Euripides will have wanted or expected his audience to have the first version in mind and to experience and interpret the second in relation to it. This provides the starting-point for the following performance text: a tentative and speculative reconstruction of *Hippolytos Veiled* (of which only a few fragments remain) is framed by the imagined first performance of *Hippolytos Garlanded*.

Will the Real Phaidra Please... Commit Suicide was performed by students on the College Year in Athens Program in May 2009. At the start of the rehearsal process I presented the students with roughly half the script, which was then completed as we went along, through improvisations and generally by finding out what worked and what didn't. During this, two large sections of the script were written by students, based on their improvisations. These are indicated in the text by different formatting; speakers' names are lower case and italicized in them whereas in the sections of the script written by me they are upper case and not in italics; I footnote the names of students who contributed in this way, but I would like to stress that all students involved contributed significantly to the final shape of the play, since the rehearsal process was also partly a devising process. The cast list is given in an Appendix.

It will be seen that the student-scripted scenes are comic. This, along with the heterogeneous nature of the resulting play, became a focus of debate. How far could we mix genres without losing a sense of the tragic? To some extent the pretext for the inclusion of comic scenes was the earlier interpolation of a scene from Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* (an important source concerning Euripides' 'brazen women'). But it also seemed justified because of the self-conscious way the play came to be *about* the reconstruction, rather than simply being that reconstruction. I like to imagine Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides 'messing around' in rehearsals of the most tragic material, having fun and finding comic potential in it – of course, none of this would appear directly in the finished product, but I believe that in a strange roundabout way this (fantasy) 'rehearsal technique' could even enhance the tragic feeling of that product. But in the case of *Hippolytos Veiled* there can be no 'finished product' – so the 'messing around' can be left in. The question that this gave rise to was, is it still possible to achieve a truly tragic feeling on the return to *Hippolytos Garlanded*? For me, the answer turned out to be Yes – very much so.

As for our title, it refers to the fact that whatever Phaidra's character, she ends up committing suicide – which may even have been Euripides' point.

The CHORUS-TO-BE is seated as an onstage audience, divided as male and female blocks. The action is presented to this audience (except where indicated) until the female block becomes the TRUE-CHORUS.

Male characters emerge from the male block.

An actor places a chair centre stage.

Enter PHAIDRA, supported by her NURSE. She is very weak.

NURSE: The tragic heroine...

PHAIDRA: I can't go on!

PHAIDRA sits.

NURSE: ... who has to sit down. That is how she enters in Racine's play, *Phèdre*. In Euripides' *Hippolytos*...

A second chair is brought on and placed by the first to form a couch for PHAIDRA.

NURSE: ... she is carried on like this, lying down.¹

PHAIDRA: Raise me. Hold up my head. Oh, this head-dress burdens my head.

Remove it. My hair, let it loose, let it free!

NURSE: Be brave, child, and stop wriggling. You'll bear the illness better with a calmer, more noble resolution. We mortals suffer and that's that.

PHAIDRA: Oh, how I'd love to drink from a clear running stream, to lie in a lush meadow, to rest in peace beneath black poplar trees!

NURSE: Child, what on earth are you babbling about? There's no need to advertise your madness with words running wild.

PHAIDRA: Take me to the mountains! I want to go hunting!

NURSE: Hunting!

PHAIDRA: What am I saying? I was not in my right mind. I was overthrown by some god-force. Sweet, kind Nurse, cover my head. I am ashamed.

The NURSE veils PHAIDRA. She freezes in the act. A conversation takes place among the members of the CHORUS-TO-BE. During this, HIPPOLYTOS appears at a distance and covers his head with his cloak.

CHORUS-TO-BE: That's exactly what he did.

- You're right. He veiled himself with his cloak.

¹ The scene that follows drastically condenses a very long and subtle scene from Euripides' *Hippolytos* (ll. 198-524). Hence many of the lines are paraphrased rather than translated.

- Not quite exactly. *She* doesn't want *to be seen*. *He* didn't want *to see her*.
- Still, clearly meant to ring a bell.
- Yes. And *he* didn't want to be seen either, not in that situation. He didn't want to be seen by the light of day.

The freeze breaks. HIPPOLYTOS exits.

NURSE: (*to herself*) Whatever can be wrong with her?

CHORUS-TO-BE: She's trying to suppress it.

- *That's* a variation on a theme!

NURSE: (*unaware of audience comments*) Now she'll be all silent again, lips tight shut, impossible to drag a word out of her.

CHORUS-TO-BE: For a while!

- But *how* will it come out?

NURSE: All right then. Don't say anything to help me help you. But if you die, you'll be betraying your children, letting that bastard, son of the Amazon, grab the lot. That Hippolytos...

PHAIDRA groans loudly.

NURSE: Did I say something wrong?

PHAIDRA: Silence, I beg you, silence... about that man.

NURSE: Tell me why you want to die.

PHAIDRA: Dying will bring me honour.

NURSE: Not if no one knows why.

PHAIDRA: (*removes her veil*) For avoiding what is shameful. O brazen mother, what a love was yours!

NURSE: Pasiphaï's love for the bull?

PHAIDRA: From that my misery!

NURSE: I'm none the wiser.

PHAIDRA: Ah, if only *you* could say what must be said!

NURSE: For that I'd need to know your mind.

PHAIDRA: Those that love... are happy... or most miserable.

NURSE: You mean that *you* are in love? With what man?

PHAIDRA: The one who... he that... son... of the Amazon...

NURSE: Hippolytos!

PHAIDRA: From yourself – not from me – you learn of this. It is you that named him.²

Freeze.

CHORUS-TO-BE: Clever!

- This Phaidra is even more cunning!
- No, it's clear – she really wanted to conceal it.
- *And to reveal it!*
- Next, she'll tell her Nurse never to reveal it to *him*, you'll see.
- And her Nurse will understand what she really means by that!
- No – she's meant to be a truly virtuous woman. Euripides is setting up a great irony.
- What?
- That even with a good Phaidra it all...

Freeze breaks; the NURSE interrupts.

NURSE: Oh, no! No! No! Child, what are you saying? Now *I* have to die too!

Goodbye this life! When the good desire what's bad, unwilling, Aphrodite must be more than god.

Pause. For the first time, the NURSE turns to and addresses the real audience.

NURSE: At this point in the play, Phaidra makes a long, complex speech to the chorus of women of Trozen, to explain herself. Basically...

PHAIDRA: (*rises. Not to the real audience*) it is not easy to be good.

NURSE: She has tried.

PHAIDRA: First, through silence.

NURSE: But she could not subdue the desire in her. Therefore...

PHAIDRA: I decided to die.

NURSE: Never would she seek to indulge her passion.

PHAIDRA: I detest unfaithful women.

NURSE: (*To Phaidra*) You decided to die! My lady, I overreacted. You're in love.

That's natural enough, nothing to die for. It happens all the time. That's why many husbands turn a blind eye, fathers cover up for their sons. Evil's not what evil does, evil is what others see. And it's pure hubris to set yourself up above gods, for it's god-given, your passion, that's sure. And men are gullible enough,

² σοῦ τάδ, οὐκ ἐμοῦ, κλύεις (l. 351) – *C'est toi qui l'as nommé* in Racine.

so long as we women don't point them the way. No, what you need is something to cure your sickness, not to die for it. Some kind of... medicine.

CHORUS-TO-BE: Exactly. Hippolytos!

PHAIDRA: Oh, horrors in speech! Shut your mouth! No more disgraceful words!

NURSE: Disgraceful maybe, but better than your lofty nonsense; better to do the deed, if that'll save you, than cultivate your fine image and die.

PHAIDRA: Stop! You speak too well of vicious things. By the gods, no more! Desire has tilled my soul, prepared the ground for words like yours to make me be consumed by what I'm running from.

NURSE: Alright, alright. I'm only talking about some medicine. It's in the house. I'll get it.

PHAIDRA: *He* is in the house. You must say nothing to him.

NURSE: Child, you just leave it to me.

Exit NURSE. During the following, PHAIDRA goes slowly over to the 'palace door' to listen.

CHORUS-TO-BE: She must have understood.

- She's tacitly agreeing.
- She's just mixed up.
- She's pulling the strings.
- She's determined to be faithful.
- Look! She's going over to the palace door, to listen. Why?
- You see. She understood.
- She's just suspicious.
- Frightened that she'll be betrayed.
- Good for Euripides! A Phaidra who's nothing like Phaidra!
- No trace of the old whore!
- That's one in the eye for Aristophanes!³

Musical cue. Enter WOMAN (best played by a man). She addresses the real audience.

WOMAN: Any men in the audience, lay low. This is an all-girls party – oh, and a scene from a completely different play. By Aristophanes. Setting: the

³ This is anachronistic. Aristophanes main 'attacks' on Euripides for his depiction of 'evil women' were made much later than the second *Hippolytos* (428); *Themophoriazusae* was ca. 410 and *Frogs* 405.

Thesmophoria, a festival in honour of Demeter and Persephone, guardians of home and wedlock. And strictly women only. Don't say you weren't warned. (She clears her throat elaborately.)

Ladies, I do not stand before you from vain love of the limelight. No, I'm all fired up, I'm riled, I'm enraged. Mad. And long have been. Why? – Euripides! Because of the way he insults us. Just give him spectators and a chorus, straightaway he's back at his endless abuse, his cruel calumnies and vile slanders. We women, he implies, are all treacherous, lecherous, drunken, two-faced, back-biting windbags! An unwholesome sex, the bane of men! And the result? Our husbands come back from the theatre, give us a dirty look and then search every cubby hole in the house for some male stranger with his pants still round his ankles. We can't do anything we used to, because Euripides has taught the men such rubbish. Suppose I put some flowers in a vase. *She's in love – who with?* A young girl feels unwell. *I don't like her 'blooming' complexion* – that's the concerned brother. And a childless woman needs a baby? No chance now, the whole street wants to attend the 'delivery'. And another thing, the rich old men who used to take a pretty young wife – now they run a mile. Why? Because Euripides wrote the line, *An old man always marries his boss!* He's the reason we're followed by snoops, or kept under lock and key. We're not even allowed to control the wheat store any more, or the oil pots, let alone the wine cellar! Therefore I move that this Euripides be done to death, immediately, by poison or in any way that boils down to the same thing.⁴

CHORUS-TO-BE: I have never listened to a more learned and eloquent woman. She speaks the truth and nothing but the truth. She examines and deftly dismisses every possible counter-argument, and she follows all implications to their logical conclusions. Her examples are chosen to convince the listener of her expert and detailed knowledge of the topic. I believe that Barack Obama himself, if placed beside her, would appear to be talking utter drivel.⁵ For!

- I vote against! Euripides does not portray women as *entirely* evil. Listen: "The play... was produced... in the fourth year of the eighty-seventh Olympiad. Euripides won first prize.... This *Hippolytos* was evidently the

⁴ Based on *Thesmophoriazusae*, ll. 383-432.

⁵ Based on *Thesmophoriazusae* ll. 433-442. Aristophanes' example of a famous orator is Xenocles.

second, written later, because in this play what was *improper and blameworthy* [in the first] has been corrected.” That was written by a scholar from Byzantium.⁶

- This *Hippolytos* – the play we’re watching? With the ‘good Phaidra’?
- The play we *were* watching.

One by one the CHORUS-TO-BE rises, enters the playing area to become the TRUE CHORUS.

- Till Aristophanes weighed in.
- In fact, we were meant to be the original audience.
- Back in 428 BCE?
- The fourth year of the eighty-seventh Olympiad. Exactly.
- Yes. We kept comparing what happened in *this Hippolytos* with what happened in *that Hippolytos*.

(HIPPOLYTOS appears, covers his head with his cloak.)

- Which *we* could remember! We’d seen it!
- *Could* remember.

(Pause.)

- What did happen in it?

(Pause.)

- What did happen in it?

The two chairs are removed from centre stage, as PHAIDRA walks from the palace door towards the real audience, speaking.⁷

PHAIDRA: O gleaming air and pure light of day, how sweet you are to gaze upon, both for those that thrive and for those who are hapless – as I am.⁸

(To the CHORUS) One of the surviving fragments. Probably from the prologue, probably spoken by me. Hapless. Unfortunate. Star-crossed. Blighted. As I am. Nurse!

CHORUS: The question is, what exactly was “improper and blameworthy” in the first play?

- Improper. Unseemly? Unbecoming?
- Obscene!

⁶ Aristophanes of Byzantium (ca 267-180 BCE).

⁷ The same actor can play both Phaidras, or different actors can be used.

⁸ Fr. 443.

- Blameworthy. Objectionable?
- Reprehensible!

Enter NURSE.

NURSE: (*to CHORUS*) You might be hung up on problems of translation, but not a single surviving fragment is obviously spoken by the Nurse. I don't exist.

PHAIDRA: The prologue *might* be yours. Try.

NURSE: "O brilliant sky and holy light of day, how uplifting it is to look on you, both for them that lie in clover and them that feel the draught – like me." What, I'm in the dumps because I have a mistress like you? No.

HIPPOLYTOS unveils himself.

HIPPOLYTOS: 'What is obscene and reprehensible in the first play?' It's obvious.

CHORUS: "Improper and blameworthy."

PHAIDRA: "Immodest and 'just not done'."

HIPPOLYTOS: Whatever. (*To PHAIDRA*) You approach me. Yourself. No go-betweens. Asclepiades puts it in a nutshell: Phaidra quote chose to persuade the young man to have sex with her unquote.⁹

Brief pause.

PHAIDRA: (*to NURSE*) Phaidra always has a Nurse. It's part of the story.

NURSE: I'm not necessary. As he just explained.

PHAIDRA: No, I need you as my confidante. I have to tell you my plans, share my secret thoughts with you.

NURSE: Look, the basics of the story are these. Phaidra, wife of Theseus, falls in love with her stepson, Hippolytos. He rejects her. She accuses him of rape or attempted rape. Theseus believes her accusation and calls upon Poseidon to kill his son. The god obliges. Phaidra commits suicide. When and why she does so is variable. No Nurse. Granted, he/Hippolytos has to learn of your illicit lust. That's why, a moment ago, I was in there getting the... talking to your medicine. But not if you...

PHAIDRA: I need a confidante.

NURSE: The chorus.

⁹ See Collard and Cropp, p. 467.

HIPPOLYTOS: They have to be women, therefore sympathetic, maybe even similarly predisposed. They won't try to hold you back, if that's your worry. OK, I'm a misogynist, that's given. What survives?

NURSE: One small fragment of one choral ode:

In place of fire		a further fire
forth	we women	sprang
fiercer	harder far	to fight¹⁰

The CHORUS takes up these lines, repeating them phrase by phrase, slowly and 'brokenly' at first (taught by the NURSE), but gradually becoming stronger, more rhythmical.

NURSE: (to PHAIDRA) You see.

PHAIDRA: OK, I relate direct to the chorus. (To CHORUS) Ready?

* * *

PURE FRAGMENT PART 1: PHAIDRA obviously in a state.

CHORUS: Say/Tell/Speak.

PHAIDRA: Hippolytos.

CHORUS: (428)¹¹ Humans who wholly avoid Aphrodite are sick – like those who only chase her.

PHAIDRA: (430) I have a teacher of brazen boldness, most ingenious in intractable situations – Eros, hardest of all gods to resist.

CHORUS: (432) Do something now yourself, then call on divinity; for god helps those that help themselves.

PHAIDRA: (433) I say, when in dire straits do not give the law itself greater respect than necessity. (*She exits*)

* * *

CHORAL ODE, based on SAPPHO'S Call to Aphrodite

Undying Aphrodite mind-altering

¹⁰ Fr 429.

¹¹ In certain sections of the text, fragment numbers are given before the line.

Zeus-child allure
spinner HEAR
me DON'T
love-wrack, Lady, my woman-core
for nothing
but come, come,
if
ever my cry reached you
cross a vastness got to you
RETURN NOW
as-once-when-you from-your-father's-glittering-house
you
yoked your car to vivid sudden sparrows
DOWN the air they pulled you
round all this burden of the earth rushing *till*
as if immediate before me divinity-smiling
rush of radiance
and asking, Who
THIS TIME struck my gaze
Who THIS TIME makes me call you
Who THIS TIME the frantic I
within my senses
WANTS –

[two stanzas cut]

Come, I beg you, now also
Relieve my soul-soreness
Deliver me my desire
Work your work through me.

* * *

EPISODE 1: PHAIDRA + HIPPOLYTOS

NURSE-NARRATOR: OK, we've established that in this 'scandalous' version of the play, Phaidra approaches Hippolytos herself – and onstage! But how? No idea. Or *almost* no idea. It could be that the Roman dramatist Seneca, about 500 years later, was following Euripides.

Enter PHAEDRA to HIPPOLYTUS.¹² She faints (perhaps 'theatrically') into HIPPOLYTUS' arms. He fans her.

PHAEDRA: (*coming to*) Who brings me back to pain, these surges in my soul? How good it was to leave myself behind!

HIPPOLYTUS: Why shun the lovely gift of restored light?

PHAEDRA: (*breaks free from HIPPOLYTUS, then aside to audience*) Courage, spirit! Try it, fearlessly! The time for shame is past, I have already set the shameless game in play. (*To HIPPOLYTUS*) A word with you in private, sir?

CHORUS: In private? You want us to leave?

NURSE-NARRATOR: Seneca always has a chorus, but it's not treated as a constant presence, always onstage, not like in the Greek plays.¹³ And this scene is in the woods, Hippolytus' domain.¹⁴ The chorus is presumed left behind, still in the city. She means Hippolytus should dismiss his attendants.

HIPPOLYTUS: (*to PHAEDRA*) The place is clear. We are unobserved.

CHORUS: What do we do? Pretend not to be here? Look the other way?

PHAEDRA: The words start up in me, my lips refuse them at their gate. I call on all the gods to witness, that what I want I do not want!

HIPPOLYTUS: Something is hard for you to say?

PHAEDRA: Minor troubles speak, great ones are struck dumb.

HIPPOLYTUS: Share your troubles with me, mother.

PHAEDRA: The name of mother is too... grand. I could relate to something humbler. Sister. Or servant – yes. You should be king, and I beneath you. Take your father's place, me as your slave.

CHORUS: Where is Theseus?

¹² Latin forms of names are used here only for extracts Seneca's play.

¹³ In fact the chorus exits and reenters in five of the extant Greek tragedies. Nonetheless in Seneca, very differently, the chorus has very little role in the episodes and its presence or absence is treated in an ad hoc fashion.

¹⁴ The scene change seems to involve an onstage journey (ll.406-422), unlike anything in Greek tragedy.

NURSE: On some crazy adventure in Hades, with a friend. Phaedra has good reason not to expect him back.

CHORUS: Still, offering him the throne's a step too far.

- Imagine if she did that and Theseus was merely away some ordinary place else! Like on a business trip!
- That might be her *second* approach in Euripides' lost play.
- Hippolytos wouldn't buy in, anyway.

HIPPOLYTUS: My father will return.

PHAEDRA: You are not listening to what I... do not... say.

HIPPOLYTUS: Be open with me.

PHAEDRA: I burn with insane love, a forest fire within.

HIPPOLYTUS: Can a wife's love be... so strong?

PHAEDRA: Hippolytus, it is like this....

NURSE-NARRATOR: *Hippolyte, sic est.* You can tell from her tone that he's not going to be allowed to misunderstand any longer.

PHAEDRA: It is true, Theseus is not dead¹⁵.... He breathes in you. I see him now, I speak to him now, as if he were both here and... young again. He had... your bearing, your eyes, your speech, your strength. If you had come to Crete with your father, my sister, Ariadne, would have spun her thread for you. No, I would have done so first, and I – I – would have done much more. I would have gone into the labyrinth with you.

HIPPOLYTUS: (*breaking away, to audience*) If we stayed with Seneca, Hippolytus would burst out, "Great king of gods! Do you hear and see such crimes so coolly? *When* will you hurl your thunderbolt, if now the sky stays clear? Let the upper world collapse and cover day in pitch-black cloud, let the stars reverse their tracks and take their little light away!" And much more. But you don't make a speech like that and *then* cover your head in shame. Nor do you cover your head in shame and then make a speech like that. Look. (*He does so to demonstrate – the voice is too muffled. He removes the veil again.*) So what now?

¹⁵ Phaedra's speech here incorporates some things from Seneca ll. 646-71 and some from Racine's *Phèdre*, II, v. Phèdre's declaration of love is a dramatic tour de force and Racine must have taken his inspiration for it from Seneca.

NURSE-NARRATOR: One of the few surviving fragments is perfect as the last thing you say before you veil your head. You're not in your lovely, lonely, wild woods now. Still in the city, a public place, in front of them [i.e. *the CHORUS*]. Civilization. She comes.

* * *

PHAIDRA approaches HIPPOLYTOS, speaks to him throughout. Through this, the CHORUS amplifies the 'immodesty' of PHAIDRA'S lines by their 'big' reactions.
PURE FRAGMENT PART 2.

PHAIDRA: (430 *first part*) I have a teacher of brazen boldness, most ingenious in intractable situations....

PHAIDRA: (428) Humans who wholly avoid Aphrodite are sick – like those who only chase her....

PHAIDRA: (434) For mortals, fortune follows not from piety, but everything is hunted down and seized by daring deeds and... superior power....

PHAIDRA: (433) I say, when in dire straits do not give the law itself greater respect than necessity....

PHAIDRA: (430 *second part*) [My teacher] – Eros, hardest of all gods to resist.

HIPPOLYTOS: (436) O Shame, revered goddess, if only you were close to all, removing shamelessness from their hearts!

The veiling

PHAIDRA: Now I really have a problem. What if he tells his father, Theseus?
Theseus, my husband?

HIPPOLYTOS: (*unveiling*) Why shouldn't I?

NURSE-NARRATOR: (*to PHAIDRA*) In the 'good Phaidra' play, I get him to swear an oath before I reveal your secret. It's a bit late now.

PHAIDRA: Not necessarily. Can we go back to Seneca's version for a minute?

HIPPOLYTOS: "Great king of gods! Do you hear and see such crimes so coolly?"
From there?

PHAIDRA: Yes.

HIPPOLYTUS: *When* will you hurl your thunderbolt, if now the sky stays clear? Let the upper world collapse and cover day in pitch-black cloud, let the stars reverse their tracks and take their little light away! Strike me with your thunderbolt! It's

my fault, I deserve to die: I've aroused my stepmother. Oh, you beat the lot, all women, you've even gone one-up on your monster-dropping mother!

NURSE-NARRATOR: (*explaining to audience*) Pasipha, Phaidra's mother – who desired a bull, found a way to have him – it – and then gave birth to the Minotaur.

PHAEDRA: I acknowledge it: we long to touch – to know – what we know is not...allowable. It's fate! I have no command over myself. I'd go through fire, through the raging sea, to follow you; wherever you may wander, I'll blunder my blind way there. Scornful man, I throw myself upon your mercy and your knees!

She embraces his knees in supplication.

HIPPOLYTUS: Keep your lascivious hands off my chaste body! What's this? Forcing her embrace upon me? Then out, my sword, impose the proper punishment!

PHAIIDRA: No! No!

HIPPOLYTUS: Don't you deserve to die?

PHAIIDRA: No more Seneca!

HIPPOLYTOS: Alright. (*Pause.*) Then let go of my knees.

PHAIIDRA: No.

HIPPOLYTOS: Why not?

PHAIIDRA: Not until you swear not to tell anyone.

Silence.

PHAIIDRA: I'm not letting go.

HIPPOLYTOS: All right. I swear.

Pause.

HIPPOLYTOS: You're still not letting go.

PHAIIDRA: **And if – released – you slander me, what must you suffer?** That's a fragment from Euripides' play. It seems I've got you around the knees and I'm asking you to specify what should happen to you if you break your oath.

HIPPOLYTOS: Then you'll let go?

PHAIIDRA: As long as it's bad enough. Preferably painful.

HIPPOLYTOS: But we don't know what Hippolytos said.

PHAIIDRA: You can't get out of it like that.

HIPPOLYTOS: OK, OK. If – released – I slander you, I should be 'ambushed' by a group of fifty maenads. Now can I go?

PHAIDRA: (*releasing him*) Sure.

HIPPOLYTOS goes.

PHAIDRA: (*to herself*) But just in case.... And I don't like being rejected.

PHAIDRA goes.

* * *

CHORUS: **THE ‘FIRE’ ODE** (Fragment 429 – see page 10 – repeated with various voice-combinations and rhythms.)

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NURSE-NARRATOR: Now... what next... what next? I guess it's time for Theseus to get involved. (*To Tom and Nick*) Maybe you could improvise something?

TOM/NICK: Sure. Why not? We'll give it a go....

NURSE-NARRATOR: A letter. After her rejection by your son, Phaidra decided to write you a letter – “just in case”. Here.

THESEUS is reading a letter, wandering around the stage...¹⁶

Theseus: (*muttering to himself, but still audible to the audience*) I can't believe what Phaedra has written here. ... It's impossible! How could my son attempt to rape my wife? What the hell has been going on here?

HIPPOLYTOS enters.

Hippolytos: Hey Dad. What's up?

Theseus: (*rolls up the letter in his hands*) Not much. Not much at all. How about you, son? What have you been up to since I left?

Hippolytos: Well, hunting, of course. I was tracking this one great-looking doe, and I almost nailed her with my best arrow. (*Demonstrates with his hands*) So close, but she just got out of the way before I struck home.

Theseus: ...really? You don't say? Almost nailed a doe?

Hippolytos: Yeah, it was going to be great...I've waited my whole life to catch that doe, but she slipped away.

Theseus: Uh-huh. You do anything else?

Hippolytos: Not really. Why?

¹⁶ This scene, through to Hippolytos' exit, was written by Tom Pappas (Theseus), following improvisations with Nick Blench (Hippolytos).

Theseus: I've got a letter here from Phaidra. It's mostly the usual dribble, except there is one tidbit here which caught my eye. It says here that YOU TRIED TO RAPE HER!

Hippolytos: WHAT? I didn't try to rape her! THAT'S GROSS!

Theseus: You didn't?

Hippolytos: Of course not! She's almost my mom! That's just...disgusting (EWWW).

Theseus: Are you sure you didn't try? I mean, it's one hell of a lie to tell. It's not like the time she lied about my missing 500 drachmae, claiming that I must have misplaced it while wearing a new silk dress. This is not a little white lie! Rape is a serious offence, son. Why did you try to rape her? Just tell me the truth and we might be able to move past this...

Hippolytos: Dad! I didn't try to rape her!

Theseus: I wish I could believe you, but no rational person would lie like this...

Hippolytos: Father, you're just not listening to me.

Theseus: You've never had a girlfriend before, have you?

Hippolytos: Of course not! I told you; that's gross! I'm chaste and devoted to Artemis.

Theseus: That's right...that's right. You're chaste. I forgot... (*muttering*) somehow.

Hippolytos: Huh? What are you talking about?

Theseus: Look son. My father, and his father before him, and his father before him, going back for generations, have been extremely virile men who would 'nail does' on a whim. And then *you* came along, giving up all women. Oh. Wait. You didn't give up *all* women, did you?

Hippolytos: Look dad, I didn't try to rape your wife. That's all I'm going to say.

Theseus: Oh really? You're not even going to try and give me an explanation of what happened between you and my wife? I can't really say that I always liked your decision to be chaste, but I thought that you would *remain* chaste.

Hippolytos: I'm *still* chaste.

Theseus: Maybe though...just maybe, you were waiting for me to leave on a trip before trying to nail my very lovely doe with your best arrow. You knew that I was going to be gone on business to Crete –

Hippolytos: You didn't go to Crete –

Theseus: – and then you...wait. It wasn't Crete? Where did I go this time? What about Thebes? Was it Thebes?

Hippolytos: (audible sigh) Temple of Asclepius, dad...to get that boil checked out on your –

Theseus: – ok, ok, ok. Yeah, I forgot. My mind has had more pressing concerns since then. But how could you do it, Hippolytos? Haven't I given you everything you wanted? Didn't I support you in whatever decision you made, even when I didn't approve? Yet you repay me by trying to force yourself on *my* dear Phaidra?

Hippolytos: Theseus, dear father, I did NOT try to rape her. If you won't believe me, then I think I'll go away for a little bit while you calm down and come to your senses.

Theseus: You know what, son. That is a great idea. You should go away until I calm down.

Hippolytos: See? I thought you'd agree with me. You'll come to your senses in a little while and realize that I didn't try to rape my step-mom and your wife.

Theseus: That's right. *My* wife. *Theseus'* wife. The man who slew the Minotaur and became King of Athens. But you know what? It might take some time for me to calm down...probably about...your lifetime. That ought to do it.

Hippolytos: Whoa, wait, c'mon dad, I'm trying to be serious.

Theseus: Well, I am serious, and that means that you, Hippolytos, my dear son, are exiled from any land which belongs to me.

Hippolytos: DAD! Really? WAIT! Don't make any hasty decisions! Why won't you believe me when I say –

Theseus: THAT IS IT! (Slams the letter onto the table/throw it to the ground) O Poseidon, Lord of the Sea, who gave to me these wishes three, put a curse upon thee (points at his son). May his days be as miserable as he has made me, up until his death for his sins against me. Poseidon, I ask you to *kill* him...

Hippolytos leaves as quickly as possible.

CHORUS: That didn't sound like Euripides.

- Too modern.
- Euripides is very 'modern'.

- Too... comical.
- Euripides can be very 'comical'.

THESEUS: We can try doing it just with what's left of the play.

HIPPOLYTOS: (*returning*) It won't be very long.

CHORUS: OK, so we're onstage for this.

The CHORUS rises.

* * *

PURE FRAGMENT PART 3:

THESEUS: (437) I see that, for many, hubris (transgression/excess)¹⁷ follows hard upon success.

HIPPOLYTOS: (438) Worldly wealth, not [my] austerity, breeds hubris (transgression/excess).

THESEUS: (439) Oh, why, why do *things* not have a voice within men's range, then skilful speaking would be nothing! But as it is, they spin the naked truth away, and what is obvious, is not.

HIPPOLYTOS: (441) Time has a way of passing and revealing all.

(THESEUS: O Poseidon ...)

HIPPOLYTOS: (432) Do something now yourself, then call on divinity; for god helps those that help themselves!

THESEUS: (935f) Leave him... leave him to his arrogance! ... Let him traverse the world... yes, anywhere on earth... riding.... Go off in into the wilds... so friendly! ... and when you turn up... to win.... Or as you wish...nothing!... I'm telling you get out! ... of enemies... and do I seem to you? ... I know!... suffering... as neither [child... begetting... game...]¹⁸

THESEUS and HIPPOLYTOS go.

* * *

CHORAL 'ODE': Use a newspaper. Pass it around. Swap voices.

(Adapted from a CNN report.)

¹⁷ 'Hubris' can even imply rape.

¹⁸ Fragment 935f is very lacunose, which seemed to offer good acting possibilities here.

In a last-minute effort to keep herself out of prison, a 25-year-old middle school teacher pleaded guilty Tuesday to having sex with a 14-year-old.

Phaedra Smith, a former teacher at the Theseus Middle School in Florida, pleaded guilty to two counts of lewd and lascivious behavior, and was sentenced to three years of house arrest followed by seven years probation. She also must register as a sex offender.

She could have faced up to 15 years for each count filed.

"I want to apologize to the court, to the young man involved and to his family for my actions," Smith said.

A 14-year-old boy told investigators he had sex with Smith three times in four days in March 2009, according to court documents. One of those times was in a car while his 15-year-old cousin drove them around, he told authorities.

"We believe that this was a very fair resolution of this case," Defense Attorney Euripides P. Jones said, adding that Smith avoided prison time with the plea and will be allowed to continue her mental health treatment.

Jones had originally planned an insanity defense, saying earlier that Smith had "some profound emotional issues" and that "once anyone reads what the doctors have to say, they will understand a lot more."

It was a change of heart by the boy's parents that made the plea deal possible. At first, they had insisted that Smith serve at least three years in prison, and be killed by Poseidon.

"Because of the media coverage of these cases, I fear that proceeding to trial will negatively affect my son's emotional and psychological well-being," the boy's mother said.

* * *

EPISODE 3: THESEUS + PHAIDRA

NURSE-NARRATOR: To the next phase. Theseus has to discover the truth. But how? There's a very damaged plot summary – just a few scraps of words – that suggests that a servant was involved.

THESEUS: A servant?

NURSE-NARRATOR: Yes.

THESEUS: Say no more.

NURSE-NARRATOR: This time, try to work the fragments into it.

THESEUS: Sure.

THESEUS is in PHAIDRA's chamber.¹⁹ ²⁰

Theseus: (re-reading the letter that he had when he was with Hippolytos) None of this adds up... I need to know if Hippolytos really did try to rape my wife, or if she was just lying to me again. I need help though. Servant! ...

SERVANT!

SERVANT *enters quickly.*

Servant: (bowing) Yes, sire?

Theseus: I need you to spy on my wife. I am having... marital issues... and I need to know more from my wife, but I can't ask her.

Servant: I thought *you* could ask anyone anything, my liege.

Theseus: Look boy, you're dangerously close to meeting my whip.

Servant: I'd rather meet your whip than your mistress. The whip hurts me once, but your mistress hurts me for an eternity! Remember how you sent me to ask her about her random comment to you about the pool attendant? I could not escape her wrath for weeks!

Theseus: Exactly, that's why it's better for you to ask her than for me to. She'll be pissed at you instead of me.

Servant: Please sire! Beat me, maim me, have me clean the stables, anything! Don't make me ask your wife a personal question again!

Theseus: NO! I am master of this house, and *you* are my property. Do as I tell you or you'll not live to see the sunrise tomorrow.

Servant: Very well, my liege; you are always so persuasive.

Theseus: See? I can be a magnanimous master when you simply follow my orders. Now shut up and do as I say.

Servant: Yes, my king.

Theseus: I want you to cover your head with this cloak (*hands a cloak over*). Then I want you to pretend to be my son, Hippolytos, and apologize for what happened earlier.

Servant: ...what happened earlier?

Theseus: (*nonchalantly*) I think that he tried to rape her.

¹⁹ If something like the following scene was part of the story of *Hippolytos Veiled*, it would not have been represented onstage.

²⁰ This scene, through to the Messenger's appearance, was written by Tom Pappas following improvisations with Andrew Pavlakos (Servant) and Summer Tucker (Phaidra).

Servant: (441) Time has a way of passing and revealing all.

(The fragments are marked in some way – by the chorus, percussion, or just spoken differently?)

Theseus: What did you say, slave?!?

Servant: (panicking) Nothing, sire. Nothing at all, my benevolent master.

Theseus: Damn straight nothing. Now look, just apologize for what happened and adlib the rest of the conversation. I need to know what truly happened between my wife and my son. If she refuses your apology and claims that you have nothing to apologize for, then Hippolytus was telling the truth. If she claims that an apology is not good enough for trying to rape her earlier, then Phaidra was telling the truth.

Servant: (440) Theseus, I advise you for the best: if you have good sense, never believe a woman, even if she speaks the truth.

Theseus: (defensively) I have always had good sense!

Servant: You are truly wise, King Theseus.

Theseus: Don't you ever forget it either.

Servant: (under his breath) How could I?

THESEUS moves threateningly towards him

Servant: SIRE! (bracing himself for the beating) I hear her coming!

Theseus: (444) O power divine, how mortals have no escape from innate or god-given troubles! (He hides in the corner and listens carefully)

SERVANT covers his head and starts to straighten up the room. PHAIDRA enters.

Phaidra: What are you doing here, slave?

Servant: I'm no slave. I'm Hippolytos.

Phaidra: HIPPOLYTOS? REALLY? I remember you spurning me...why are you here?

Servant: I had to come back to apologize for what happened earlier. I was being foolish...

Phaidra: (rushing over to him) Speak no more of it. I'm just glad that you have changed your mind! We can finally be together! No more must I live with only this burning desire for you, but now I can attempt to satiate my lust for you...(lustfully makes eyes at him)*...if that's possible. Let's start now!*

(433) I say, when in dire straits do not give the law itself greater respect than necessity.

Servant: True, true. (434) **For mortals, fortune follows not from piety, but everything is hunted down and seized by daring deeds and superior power.**

Phaidra: You took the words right out of my mouth. I haven't wanted to do anything else but take you to my bed...

THESEUS *emerges from his hiding spot*.

Theseus: (436) **O Shame, revered goddess, if only you were close to all, removing shamelessness from their hearts!**

Phaidra: THESEUS? What are you doing here?!?

Theseus: (441) **Time has a way of passing and revealing all.**

Phaidra: (445) **But as the gods are not judging this correctly...**

Theseus: Don't bring them into this. This is between you and me!

Phaidra: Hippolytos! Save me from this madman!

Theseus: (*laughs heartily*) You think this simple slave will save you?

SERVANT *unveils himself*.

Phaidra: YOU AGAIN?!? I'LL KILL YOU MYSELF FOR THIS!

Servant: It wasn't my idea, my lady! It was your husband's!

Theseus: Leave, slave. I have to speak to my wife.

Phaidra: I should have known that such a bastard move would come from my husband. (*To THESEUS*) And what do you have to say for yourself?

Theseus: **WHAT DO I HAVE TO SAY FOR MYSELF?** Do you really think that I'm the one at fault? You were about to screw my son!

Phaidra: You tricked me into it!

Theseus: Tricked you? **TRICKED YOU?** You willingly just said here and now that you had been "burning" for him! That you wanted to "take you to my bed." Yet you seem to think that I'M the one at fault?!?

Phaidra: It's not my fault that my genetic lineage makes me unfaithful. Look at my mother. It wasn't her idea to have sex with a bull, but a god forced that upon her.

Theseus: You're telling me that you're genetically programmed to be a whore?!?

Phaidra: Well, you're always gone on business and sleeping around with other women! Do you expect me to wait forever for you to want to visit my bed? Maybe if you were a little more attentive to my needs, I wouldn't have to resort to your son...

Theseus: I was gone for a week! I had been here god knows how long before that though! Whenever I wanted sex before then, your toga was closed with legs crossed, but when I leave town, you spread your legs for *my son*?!

Phaidra: And I would do it all over again if I could! You've been unfaithful, boorish, and completely useless as a lover and a man!

Theseus: Why do you treat me like this? What have I done to deserve this? I have given you everything that you have asked for or wanted...isn't that enough for you?

Phaidra: The only thing I want is Hippolytos, and you aren't him.

Theseus: BUT I AM KING, NOT HIPPOLYTOS! I HAVE PROVIDED YOU WITH ANY COMFORT YOU COULD WANT, NOT HIPPOLYTOS!

Phaidra: Yet you can't provide me with the one thing I *do* want, Hippolytos himself!

The MESSENGER begins to slowly enter from the side. At first, THESEUS does not notice him, but he catches sight of him out of the corner of his eye. Upon seeing the MESSENGER, THESEUS slowly backs away from PHAIDRA and the MESSENGER, guessing the truth. THESEUS slowly retires until he collapses in a chair off to the side. PHAIDRA looks confused...

Phaidra: What's going on here?

Messenger: (442) ...immediately setting out towards the stables...²¹

Phaidra: Stables?

Messenger: Nothing else remains of the messenger's speech, but we know what the messenger would've said: Hippolytos... (442) immediately setting out towards the stables... took his horses and men with him, storming in turbulent passion for the city boundaries, immediately obeying the terms of his banishment—

Phaidra: —banishment...?

Messenger: ...his banishment as ordered by the king. And as fate would have it, Poseidon too obeyed each and every word of the king's curse—

Phaidra: —curse...?

Messenger: ...the king's curse upon poor Hippolytus. Riding along the sea's cliff, the prince and his men spotted, swelling in the distance, a monstrous wave of divine origins. At first the riders could do nothing but stare upon the earthshaking approach of the tumbling water bull. At last, my master made a vain whip of the

²¹ The Messenger speech, following fragment 442, was written by Ronny Kerr.

reins, to which the colts instantly responded. But ever the bull bore down on us, till the wave came crashing upon the horses, carts, and men like an axe upon so many downy pillows, scattering most upon the cliff side, except for the cursed Hippolytus, chosen from among the rest to be sucked down onto the unforgiving rock bed of the shore line below.

Exit MESSENGER.

Theseus: (439) **Oh why, why do things not have a voice within men's range, then skillful speaking would be nothing! But as it is, they spin the naked truth away, and what is obvious, is not.**

Phaidra: (443) **O gleaming air and pure light of day, how sweet you are to gaze upon, both for those that thrive and for those who are hapless—as I am.**

PHAIDRA exits – to kill herself.

* * *

*THE CHORUS becomes CHORUS-THAT-WAS (= onstage audience again).
(RETURN TO THE LATER HIPPOLYTOS.)*

PHAIDRA is listening at the palace door:

PHAIDRA: Silence! Silence! I am betrayed! Listen, the child of the horse-loving Amazon, Hippolytos, how loudly he abuses her! “Matchmaker of perversity!” Yes, and “Traitor to your master’s bed!” She, in trying to help me, scandalously, she has destroyed me! Now I must die, no other cure!

PHAIDRA backs away from the palace door, her eyes fixed on it.

Enter HIPPOLYTOS followed by NURSE.

HIPPOLYTOS: O mother earth and clear light of day, what unspeakable things I have heard!

NURSE: Quiet! Our talk was not for broadcasting to all. Don’t break your oath!

HIPPOLYTOS: I swore it with my tongue, not binding on my mind.

(General shock at this line, including among the CHORUS-THAT-WAS.)

O Zeus, why did you place that counterfeit, woman, in the sun’s light, that evil for mankind? If you wanted humans to breed, you should have avoided women as the means but instead got men to offer a certain weight of bronze or iron or gold in your temples to buy offspring, each to order and each at a fair price,

letting us live at home free of females. But the way you've arranged it, we first have to bring an evil into the house, one which costs us much more!

And brainless women are best, those with no more thoughts than a woman should have. And women should have no servants, only dumb beasts that are unable to help them cook up and carry out their evil schemes!

Like you, you vile creature, you came to do business with me concerning my father's undefiled bed! I must wash my ears in the river! How could *I* stoop so low, *I*, who feel so dirtied even by your words! Even so, woman, it is this, my piety, saves you. I shall not break the oath you tricked me into. I shall leave and keep silent.

(Even more obviously for PHAIDRA, whose presence he is fully aware of and 'playing to' even in the way he 'ignores' her.) But I'll come back when my father comes, and I shall be watching how you look him in the eye, both you and that mistress of yours!

Exit HIPPOLYTOS.

PHAIDRA: O wretched lot of women! What trick or word is left us now, now that we fall, to undo the knot that speech has tied? *(To the NURSE)* May Zeus destroy you! Didn't I tell you not to speak of things that now disgrace me? But no, you couldn't stop yourself, and now no longer shall I die well spoken of!

I NEED NEW WORDS!

Yes, for this man, in his outrage, *will* denounce me, for *your* transgression, to his father. He will fill the land with shameful words!

NURSE: Yes, Madam, you may criticize, yes, in the heat of the moment. But it was your welfare I sought, and if I had succeeded, I would now be called wise.

PHAIDRA: What? Are you still debating, after wounding me?

NURSE: No point in that. Yes, I overstepped the mark, but there's a way out, child, even now.

PHAIDRA: AN END TO YOUR SPEECH! Go. You are dismissed. Look after yourself. I shall take care of my own affairs.

Exit NURSE.

PHAIDRA: Phaidra then turns to the chorus, the women of Trozen, and asks them not to speak of what they have heard. They swear not to do so. This will cost Hippolytos his life. Next, she tells the chorus what she intends to do. She will kill herself.

And she says something else, less directly. “Dying,” she says, “I shall harm *that other* – that he will not crow at my demise, that he will share this sickness with me, and learn, this way, *true* high-mindedness.”

And thus Phaidra goes inside to her death – after she has written a letter. To Theseus. About Hippolytos.

As I said: I need new words.

Exit PHAIDRA.

CHORUS-THAT-WAS: (*rising one by one*) Well, we might as well all go home.

- Why?
- From here on, it’s obviously the same old story. Theseus comes, believes Phaidra’s accusation, curses Hippolytos...
- The plot isn’t everything.
- True. But Euripides has already made his point.
- Oh? What?
- That even with a good Phaidra, it all...

A cry within. The CHORUS turns, freezes.

Enter THESEUS.

THESEUS: What cry was that?

Then enter HIPPOLYTOS.

HIPPOLYTOS: Dad. You’re back.

They look at each other.

END

APPENDIX: Cast List and Credits for the May 2009 Production

CHORUS:	ELAINA BOYTOR ROBIN DEMARCO KATE KINASZ WHITNEY LEWIS OLIVIA MERRICK KAT PENNINGTON MELISSA ROCHE KATHLEEN ZINK
CHOREOGRAPHY	KATHRYN WILKINSON
PHAIDRA (<i>Hippolytos Garlanded</i>)	AMALIA NELSON-CRONER
PHAIDRA (<i>Hippolytos Veiled</i>)	MARISA PASKA
PHAIDRA (<i>Hippolytos Veiled</i>)	SUMMER TUCKER
NURSE	KATHRYN WILKINSON
HIPPOLYTOS	NICK BLENCH
WOMAN	ZACK OLESON
THESEUS	TOM PAPPAS
SERVANT	ANDREW PAVLAKOS
MESSENGER	ANITA SEKAR
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	RONNY KERR
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	LISA WEINSTEIN
DIRECTOR	ANTHONY STEVENS