

Phaedra's Body as Evidence in Euripides' *Hippolytus* (811–1080)

In a paper presented at the 4th International Congress of the *Fédération internationale des associations d'études classiques* (FIEC), Gerardo Ramírez Vidal (2022) emphasized the prominence of the body for Greco-Latin culture, social thought, and rhetoric. More specifically, Nancy Worman (1997) has traced the argumentative trajectory of Helen's live and beautiful body throughout the "narrative space" (155) of the *Iliad*'s third book, Sappho's fragment 16 (L-P.), Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*, and Euripides' *Troades*. As demonstrated by Worman, classical rhetorical examples portray Helen's desired body "as a *structuring device* that organizes arguments around the emblematic positioning of her body and its movement in a visual field" (189, emphasis mine). Sheila Murnaghan (1988), by acknowledging that "Greek tragic drama is a genre that captures with particular clarity literature's always ambiguous relation to the exposure of the human body" (23), has indicated also that the body's suffering is often displaced by messengers' speech. What each of these scholars agree on is that the body is an issue featured persuasively across generic categories, especially rhetoric and tragedy.

In this paper, I wish to consider another figure's bodily significance for tragedy and rhetorical persuasion, that of Phaedra in Euripides' extant *Hippolytus*. Thus far, the presence of Phaedra's dead body from when she is brought out to the agonistic scene between Theseus and Hippolytus, from 811 to 1080, has yet to be fully fleshed out. While Barrett (1964/2001) noted that her "body is essential to the whole scene" (318, 811 n.), there is still a dearth in the discussion as to *how* her body is key. I believe that the scene would seem fundamentally different if Phaedra's corporeal presence were not on stage, and I argue that her body functions as evidence (an ἀπόδειξις) to Theseus' accusatory claims against his son. Both speakers are

given lines with reference to her. Theseus repeatedly points to her, her body (νεκρός), and the γράμματα attached to her body using *deictic* demonstratives and pronouns: ἦδε “*she*,” (958), τῆσδ’ “than *she*,” (961), ἐν τῷιδ’ “in *this*,” (959), τάδ’ “*these*” (976). When Hippolytus arrives, he says outright that he sees Theseus’ lady, a corpse: σὴν δάμαρθ’ ὄρω, πάτερ, | νεκρόν, “and I see your lady, father, a corpse,” (905–906). Theseus precludes the possibility of his bastard son’s rebuttal by a rhetorical question, τί ταῦτα σοῖς ἀμιλλῶμαι λόγοις | νεκροῦ παρόντος μάρτυρος καφεστάτου; “Why should I exert myself with your accounts, when her dead body [νεκροῦ] present here is a most reliable witness?” (971–972). Finally, Hippolytus himself exclaims that it’s only because Phaedra’s dead body is there on stage that his father’s position holds weight: εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἦν μοι μάρτυς οἷός εἰμ’ ἐγὼ | καὶ τῆσδ’ ὀρώσης φέγγος ἠφωνιζόμεν | ἔργοις ἂν εἶδες τοὺς κακοὺς διεξιῶν “If I had a witness of my worth, if I were pleading my case with [Phaedra] here alive, then the facts as you reviewed them would have shown you who was base” (trans. Barrett: 355, 1022–4 n.).

I argue that we can see clearly in these passages how Phaedra’s body not only serves as evidence for Theseus and works against Hippolytus, but also rhetorically structures the entire scene. Only one other major classical Hellenic tragedy has such a dramatic dead bodily presence: Sophocles’ *Ajax*. As regards scholarship on the body in Greco-Roman antiquity and literature, Phaedra is a critical case. Concerning studies about “materiality in literature” (see Bremer 2020), the presence of Phaedra’s dead body on stage is a thing which “speaks” for her self.

Bibliography

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