Euripides

- Euripides’ Life and Career in the Theatre
- The Hippolytus Myth
- Hippolytus and Phaedra on Stage
  - Euripides’ *Hippolytus Veiled*
  - Sophocles’ *Phaedra*
- Euripides’ *Hippolytus Garlanded*
- The Structure of Greek Tragedy
Euripides
Life and Career

• Euripides was born ca. 485 BCE and died in 406 BCE
  • a younger contemporary of Sophocles
  • from a reasonably well-off family
  • no record of public service
  • “surly and unconvivial,” i.e. uninterested in gaining popularity
  • a fiercely independent thinker
Euripides
Life and Career

- the earliest record of his producing a play is in 455 BCE
- but he did not win a first prize at the Dionysia until 441 BCE
- nineteen of his plays survive, which is more than the total extant from Aeschylus and Sophocles put together!
- Euripides was *very* popular after the Classical Age
but he was not as popular as Sophocles during their lifetime

won only five times total at the Dionysia

and one victory was posthumous, which is an insult really

all evidence points to a rocky and tempestuous love-hate relationship with the Athenian public
• in the day, his plays were compelling but sometimes too controversial

• especially his portrayal of women, e.g.
  – Medea who murders her own children to spite her husband

• and the gods as vicious, arbitrary superbeings who worry less about their human devotees than their own personal standing in heaven
Euripides
Life and Career

- Euripides is the master of the *agon*
- every surviving play of his contains some sort of formal, legalistic debate
- in many ways, he is the “public defender” of Greek myth
- capable of arguing equally well any side of an issue
- cf. Pasiphae in *The Women of Crete*
Euripides
The Hippolytus Myth

• part of the cycle of myths about the pre-eminent Athenian hero **Theseus**
• set near the end of Theseus’ life, after most of his daring adventures are past
• Theseus was the son of Aegeus and Aithra
• but his real father was Poseidon
Euripides
The Hippolytus Myth

• Poseidon impregnated Aethra at Troezen, a small city across the Saronic Gulf from Athens
• she abandoned her child there but left him a sword and sandals under a rock
• when Theseus grew up, he lifted up the rock and recovered these items
• Theseus then made his way to Athens, performing “Herculean” labors along the way
• when he arrived in Athens, he was recognized as Aethra’s child by his sword and sandals
• Aegeus eventually accepted Theseus as his son and grew to love him very much
Euripides
The Hippolytus Myth

• in this day, Athens was part of a great naval empire based in Crete
• the King of Crete, Minos, ruled this empire and imposed on the Athenians a fine levied in children who were sent to Crete and fed to the monstrous Minotaur
• the Minotaur was the half-bull half-human offspring of Minos’ wife Pasiphae
Euripides
The Hippolytus Myth

• to keep the Minotaur from ravaging the Cretan public, a Greek engineer named Daedalus who was at the time living in Crete constructed a maze-like building called the Labyrinth

• Daedalus also invented wax wings which he used to fly away off of Crete and away from Minos’ tyrannical control
Euripides
The Hippolytus Myth

- Daedalus also made wax wings for his son Icarus
- but being young and over-eager, Icarus flew too high and the sun melted the wax in his wings
- as his father watched, he fell to his death in the “Icarian” sea off the coast of Italy
- Daedalus built a temple to Apollo there in Icarus’ memory
• meanwhile back in Greece, Theseus volunteered to go as one of the child-hostages to Crete
• upon his arrival, Ariadne, the older daughter of Minos, saw the handsome Theseus and fell in love with him
• she gave him a dagger with which to kill the Minotaur and a spool of thread to find his way out of the Labyrinth
The Hippolytus Myth

- Theseus killed the Minotaur and escaped Crete by stealing a ship, again with Ariadne’s help.
- The pair ran off together but Theseus abandoned her on the island of Naxos.
- Ariadne either died on Naxos or became the bride of the god Dionysus.
• Theseus proceeded on to Athens but forgot to change the color of his sails to indicate that he had survived

• when Aegeus saw the wrong color of sail, he believed Theseus was dead and threw himself into the sea off Athens

• this sea is still called the “Aegean Sea”
Euripides
The Hippolytus Myth

• now the indisputed King of Athens, Theseus was attacked by a tribe of warrior-maidens called Amazons
• he defeated them in battle and took as his “spear-prize” their Queen Hippolyta and impregnated her
• she died soon thereafter in childbirth to a baby boy who was named Hippolytus
• Theseus then returned to Crete (!) and married Ariadne’s little sister Phaedra
• he brought Phaedra back to Athens where they lived together happily
• they had two sons
• thus, Theseus ended up having two young legitimate sons and one older illegitimate child (Hippolytus) by his Amazon spear-prize
Euripides
The Hippolytus Myth

• as an adult, Hippolytus renounced all claim to the throne of Athens and became a priest of the goddess Artemis

• Artemis’ priests are chaste and spend most of their time out in the woods hunting

• this choice reflects an odd predilection in the young man: love of his mother over his father