

Aphrodite's Wrath: Eros in Euripides's *Hippolytus*

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Love distills desire upon the eyes,
Love brings bewitching grace into the heart
Of those he would destroy.
I pray that love may never come to me
With murderous intent,
In rhythms measureless and wild.
Not fire nor stars have stronger bolts
Than those of Aphrodite sent
By the hand of Eros, Zeus's child (525–32).¹

It is in Hesiod that we find the earliest recorded reference to Eros as limb-loosener.² In Homer limb-loosening is a thing done by sleep and death.³ Sappho, perhaps appreciating its implied comparison between love and death, makes use of this epithet in the very same fragment in which she alludes to love's bitter-sweetness.⁴ Limb-loosening nicely encapsulates one profound dimension of Eros (and death): its simultaneous intimacy and impersonality. A limb-loosener produces its effects on one's connective elements; it is intimate because it makes itself at home within one. At the same time, working as it does to loosen, disengage, dissolve, and disintegrate it exhibits a disconcerting degree of indifference to the one in whom it resides—and so with Eros. As a divinity, he can come and go as he pleases; as the erotic longing of one for another, its ecstatic quality (its ability to extend beyond one person or situation) involves an indifference to singularity which, perhaps paradoxically, supplies a necessary element to the intimacy of the connections that eros establishes. We are left with an enigmatic and fecund formulation: eros is both intimate and impersonal.

This labile and disruptive quality of eros is thematized throughout Greek literature; it serves as a thread that connects genres which in other regards have been taken, rightly or wrongly, to be opposed to one another. Plato's frequent use of liquid metaphors when describing eros,⁵ for instance, resonates with lyric and tragic poets for whom the impersonal and the intimate aspects of eros make it the perfect vehicle for describing the fluidity and destabilizing capacities of desire in general.⁶ Socrates's observation in the *Phaedo* that desire creates a cage in which the prisoner "is the chief accomplice in his bondage" (83a) is one version

of a variety of meditations upon the perplexing logic that connects the ecstasy of eros with human bondage and servitude.

If all of this sounds familiar this is, at least in part, because contemporary Western conceptions of love still labor under the Greek characterization of eros as a curious conjunction of the intimate and the impersonal. From Heidegger's account of the totalizing influence of mood to Proust's reflections on the mortifying plasticity of love, we can hear strains of this conception of eros. In the following pages I would like to focus on one aspect of the characterization of eros that is provided by Euripides's play *Hippolytus*.

We might begin by asking, why is the Chorus of young women cited above so afraid of Eros? The answer is that they are witnessing first hand the destructive power of this god. Their mistress Phaedra, young wife to Theseus, has been stricken with love for her stepson Hippolytus, who has angered Aphrodite by his rejection of her in favor of the goddess Artemis. Phaedra's shameful love is part of Aphrodite's revenge against Hippolytus, and the Chorus utters these lines just after Phaedra's nurse has finally succeeded in drawing out from Phaedra the cause of the mysterious illness that is ravaging her body. The Chorus is right to be afraid. In the events that follow, the nurse will persuade Phaedra to submit to her love, and will go to Hippolytus in the hopes of convincing him to indulge Phaedra's passion. The violence of Hippolytus's rejection of the nurse's proposition will lead Phaedra to kill herself but not before writing a letter in which she accuses Hippolytus of rape. Theseus will discover both corpse and letter, will view the former as proof of the legitimacy of the latter, and will curse and exile Hippolytus. While Hippolytus is riding away into exile, Poseidon will send a bull-shaped wave to terrify Hippolytus's horses; the young man will be thrown from his chariot, entangled in the reins and dragged along the rocks. His nearly-dead body will be brought to Theseus, and it is at this point that Artemis will appear, reveal to Theseus the truth about Phaedra's letter, console Hippolytus that he will be honored by maidens on the night of their wedding, and leave just as Hippolytus, with his dying words, reconciles with his father whom he now recognizes as having been a pawn in Aphrodite's plot against him.

As even this brief summary suggests, the *Hippolytus* addresses itself to the disasters that can attend erotic attachment. Its relevance to a study of eros extends beyond its subject matter—the myth of Phaedra's unhappy love for Hippolytus—to include the historical conditions of its composition. The extant version of Euripides's *Hippolytus* is a second version of the play, written in response to the general condemnation of the first version, *Hippolytus Veiled* [*Kalyptomenos*]. Ancient sources suggest that the cause of this condemnation was Euripides's presentation

of a Phaedra whose sexual aggression culminates in a direct confrontation between her and Hippolytus in which she openly declares her lust for him.⁷ The second version, the version we possess, comprises Euripides's "correction" [*diōrthōta*] to the outrage caused by *Hippolytus Veiled*; it is marked by his audience's erotic palate, or lack thereof. Thus, Euripides's second *Hippolytus* not only delves into eros's labile and destabilizing relationship with the social and political institutions designed to contain it, it is also structured by this relationship. Its treatment of eros is uniquely overdetermined.

The interaction between the play's subject matter and its composition has startling and unprecedented effects on the revised play. The mere fact that Euripides undertook such a revision in the first place is noteworthy. That in this revision Euripides turns what was a tragedy about Phaedra's unfortunate love for Hippolytus into a tragedy about Aphrodite's anger at Hippolytus, in which Phaedra becomes a more or less innocent pawn, is also worthy of attention. Throughout the play a rather sinister theology is at work. This is certainly not new to the realm of tragedy, however the degree of the characters's awareness of and expressed bitterness towards this state of affairs is also unusual, if not unique.

But perhaps most striking about Euripides's second *Hippolytus* is that, prohibited a direct expression of love between a lascivious Phaedra and a chaste Hippolytus, Euripides diffuses and deflects the expression of Phaedra's love onto a number of characters. The play's fragmentation of focus is such that no one character clearly emerges as the protagonist; four characters could reasonably lay claim to that title.⁸ As Froma Zeitlin observes, "the most striking feature of our drama is that it reaches its expected conclusion only through deviation and detour, and above all, through the acting of each character for an other."⁹

The capacity of the play's characters to act for one another is a function of the exchange of affect between them. Acting as Aphrodite's instrument, Eros manipulates a full range of *pathe* in order to produce the web of mutual implication and destruction with which the tragedy ends. All manner of connective tissue, indeed all emotional ties between characters, are twisted into the service of Eros. He accomplishes this by appealing to the currency of affect, playing on its exchange between public and private realms, relying on the ease with which love gives way to rage and rage to grief, and manipulating the capacity of characters to feel for one another. Throughout the play, the characters not only take on the actions of one another, they also take on the *pathe* of one another, which is to say that the *Hippolytus* stages not only an economy of deed, but an economy of affect.

This economy of affect is particularly evident in the relationship between Phaedra and her nurse. Scholars have long noted that the nurse's position in the second *Hippolytus* was likely a reversal of her position in the first,¹⁰ making the character of the nurse particularly burdened with the weight of Euripides's revision, and have used this reversal of roles to account for the nurse's centrality in the play. Other than to emphasize her good intentions and poor judgment, commentators have had little more to say about the nurse.¹¹ However, the significance of her role suggests that further consideration of Euripides's characterization of her is warranted. As I hope to show, the relationship between Phaedra and her nurse is uniquely revelatory of the meditation upon the fluidity of desire and the dual intimacy and impersonality of eros that Euripides offers with his second *Hippolytus*. More specifically, the efficacy or lack thereof of the nurse's interventions in the play is predicated upon a particular labor she undertakes, namely, the labor of bearing Phaedra's affect. I am interested in drawing out Euripides's presentation of the social triangulation of eros within the dynamic of compelled nurturing. Because the nurse's labor occurs within the context of an inequitable distribution of affect, the play prohibits an uncritical reduction of her adoption of Phaedra's affect to mimesis or sympathy. Instead, by staging the nurse's express lamentation of this burden, Euripides's text opens up for critique the institutionalized conferral of affect onto another.¹²

Euripides's strategy for correcting his first *Hippolytus*, his amelioration of Phaedra's guilt, would have been evident to his audience from the very opening lines of the play. Aphrodite enters the stage and explains her plan to punish Hippolytus by inflicting Phaedra with eros (in fact, she has already done so, and thus her plan is close to culmination at the very start of the play [23–4]). Her prologue also indicates two necessary moments in her revenge. The first is Phaedra's erotic affliction, which has reached a fevered pitch: "Phaedra groans in bitterness of heart and the goads of love prick her cruelly, and she is like to die. But she breathes not a word of her secret and none of the servants know of the sickness that afflicts her" (37–41). It is Phaedra's silence that must be overcome if Aphrodite's plan is to come to fruition; the overcoming of this silence comprises the second moment of revenge: "But her love shall not remain thus aimless and unknown. I will reveal the matter to Theseus and all shall come out" (42–3). The competing demands of secrecy and revelation create the dramatic tension of the play and, as Bernard Knox has eloquently demonstrated, determine the action as fluctuating between silence and speech.¹³ As the instrument of Aphrodite's wrath, Eros has a hand in both moments and the destruction they entail. At the start of the play, those who are destroyed, who provide the material upon which

Eros works, are poised on the brink of their disastrous conflation. However, as can be seen in a sketch of the essential features of Hippolytus and Phaedra, the very qualities that make Phaedra a more sympathetic figure than her Euripidean predecessor also demand her silence and make some intervention by a third party necessary.

After Aphrodite leaves the stage it is Hippolytus's turn to enter. He does so in the full bloom of youth and health, having just returned from a hunt, accompanied by a chorus of young men and bearing a garland of flowers he has plucked for the goddess Artemis. Hippolytus's reverence for Artemis and the chastity she represents is obtrusive from his first lines, as is his desire to be seen and known as a lover of Artemis. As he places the garland he has made around the neck Artemis's statue he states:

Loved Mistress, here I offer you this coronal;
 It is a true worshipper's hand that gives it you
 To crown the golden glory of your hair.
 With no man else I share this privilege
 That I am with you and to your words
 Can answer words. True, I may only hear:
 I may not see God face to face.
 So may I turn the post set at life's end
 Even as I began the race (84–9)

That Hippolytus holds too tightly to his reverence of chastity, and that his love of his own inviolability is excessive, are suggested throughout the play. His desire for perpetual virginity is a desire to escape change, to avoid transition, maturation, age, and time, to persist in a manner impossible for humans. That this is ultimately an impossible desire is reflected in the wish with which he concludes this praise of Artemis: "So may I turn the post set at life's end even as I began the race" (88–9).

Yet Hippolytus is never "cured" of his excessive and impossible reverence of chastity. The transformation he is to undergo is not one of religious conversion but physical mutilation. Towards the end of the play, when Hippolytus is defending himself against Phaedra's charge of rape, it is his chastity first and foremost that he cites as evidence against the charge: "There is one thing that I have never done, the thing of which you think that you convict me father, I am a virgin to this very day. Save what I have heard or what I have seen in pictures, I'm ignorant of the deed. Nor do I wish to see such things, for I've a maiden soul [*parthenon psuchēn echōn*]" (1003–7). Nor does Hippolytus ever cease in his desire to be known as chaste. The dissonance between the image he has of himself as the chaste and privileged follower of Artemis and the image

his father has of him as the vile rapist of his stepmother, wrings from Hippolytus a tortured wish for a perfect audience of and witness to his suffering: "If I could only find another *me* to look me in the face and see my tears and all that I am suffering" (1077–9). It is only Hippolytus who can judge Hippolytus, who can provide adequate witness to his suffering and adequate testimony to his chastity. Like Narcissus, Hippolytus is his own best audience. Hippolytus's self-regard contains a cruel truth: the very thing that would prove his innocence, his chastity, is something to which only he can testify in certainty. In the end, out of despair for the insufficiency of mortal vision to behold his innocence, it is to a divine eye that Hippolytus appeals: "Zeus, do you see this, see me that worshipped god in piety, me that excelled all men in chastity, see me now go to death which gapes before me" (1363–9).

Hippolytus's reverence for chastity and his desire for recognition are two elements that define his character within the purview of this tragedy; his misogyny is another. "Women! This coin which men find counterfeit," (616) begins his infamous invective. As this rant continues it degrades into a repetitive rebuke: "Curses on you! I'll hate you women, hate and hate and hate you and never have enough of hating.... Some say I talk of this eternally, yes, but eternal too is woman's wickedness. Either let someone teach them to be chaste, or suffer me to trample on them forever" (663–8). His obsessive references to eternity at the end of this speech (*aei* appears three times in nearly as many lines) betray his own excess: never to have enough of hating, to espouse hatred of women eternally, to trample on women forever, these are not given to Hippolytus, as they are not given to any mortal. It is Hippolytus who will be trampled, and the small share in eternity he will be given by Artemis is deeply ambiguous. Euripides goes out of his way to suggest that Hippolytus's hatred of women must be seen in its relation to his similarity to women. As Hippolytus himself has said, he possesses a "maiden soul."¹⁴

Hippolytus's confusion of traditional gender roles is not resolved with his death; it is, in fact, precisely his identification with young women that Artemis preserves in the "gift" she grants to Hippolytus. Says Artemis to the dying Hippolytus:

To you, unfortunate Hippolytus,
 by way of compensation for these ills,
 I will give the greatest honors of Troezen.
 Unwedded maids before the day of marriage
 will cut their hair in your honor. You will reap
 through the long cycle of time, a rich reward in tears.
 And when young girls sing songs, they will not forget you,
 your name will not be left unmentioned,

nor Phaedra's love for you remain unsung (1423–30).

An ambivalent memorial indeed for one who has just recently espoused his eternal hatred of women, and ambivalent too the consolation that is to be found in an abundance of tears. Artemis's promise to punish Aphrodite by killing one of her favorite mortals (1420–2) does little more than remind Hippolytus (and the audience) of the insurmountable distance between the divine economy of justice and his own.¹⁵

Like Hippolytus, we first encounter Phaedra in the grips of resistance. However, whereas Hippolytus's rejection of marriage has yet to leave a mark on him, Phaedra's body is twisted by her resistance to eros; indeed, it is the sign by which all recognize that she is engaged in a bitter struggle. Throughout the play Phaedra's body is a social body, a public body, a watched body.¹⁶ In fact, we hear about Phaedra's body before we ever see it. Her entrance on stage is preceded by a choral ode devoted to the description of Phaedra's condition.¹⁷ Here is what the chorus has to tell the audience about Phaedra:

She lies on her bed within the house,
 within the house, and fever wracks her
 and she hides her golden head in fine-spun robes.
 This is the third day
 she has eaten no bread
 and her body is pure and fasting.
 For she would willingly bring her life to anchor
 at the end of its voyage
 the gloomy harbor of death" (131–41).

As Phaedra enters, supported by her nurse, the chorus observes:

But here is the old woman, the queen's nurse
 here at the door. She is bringing her mistress out.
 There is a gathering cloud upon her face.
 What is the matter? My soul is eager to know.
 What can have made the queen so pale?
 What can have wasted her body so? (169–75)

Clearly, the queen's wasted body is on everyone's mind. When she is brought out on stage her manic and frenzied speech will confirm to the Chorus's ears what the sight of her body suggests to their eyes: something is terribly wrong with Phaedra.¹⁸

Like Aphrodite's prologue, Phaedra's illness serves to ameliorate her responsibility in her own and Hippolytus's fate. Like Hippolytus, Phaedra

enters the stage with a certain resistance displayed. However, Phaedra's illness is uniquely overdetermined in this passage. Her body bears the imprint not only of the love with which she has been stricken but also with the means she has devised for contending with her affliction. As the Chorus explains, she is both wracked by fever and wasting away by starvation (131–40). Phaedra herself eventually explains to the Chorus that her refusal of food is part of her strategy to resist eros:

At first when love had stuck me, I reflected
 how best to bear it. Silence was my first plan.
 Silence and concealment. For the tongue
 is not to be trusted: it can criticize
 another's faults, but on its own possessor
 it brings a thousand troubles.
 Then I believed that I could conquer love,
 conquer it with discretion and good sense.
 And when that too failed me, I resolved to die.
 And death is the best plan of them all (393–401).

Phaedra's body is not only a sign of her sickness, but also the ground on which she wages her resistance. Her refusal of food suggests a desire for autonomy, for an impossible self-sufficiency, a desire to be freed from desire.¹⁹ It invites comparison with Hippolytus's desire for perpetual virginity. At the same time, the overdetermination of her illness, that it is a function both of eros and of her resistance to eros marks a distance between Hippolytus and Phaedra that will, over the course of the play, be overcome. Another element of Phaedra's character that bears a marked similarity between her and Hippolytus plays a role in this overcoming: her desire for honor and recognition.

Phaedra's desire for honor is evident very early on in the play: "It would always be my choice to have my virtues known and honored. So when I do wrong I could not endure to see a circle of condemning witnesses" (403–4). Phaedra's fear of becoming a spectacle of vice conjoins her desire for honor with her care of her children (l. 419–26 and 715–23) by relying upon the political currency of her name. Her concern with what witnesses will say about her resonates with Hippolytus's desire to find an adequate witness to his chastity. Further, the shame of adultery wrings from Phaedra a statement akin to Hippolytus's misogyny, although with narrowed scope:

I know what I have done: I know the scandal:
 and all too well I know that I am a woman,
 object of hate to all. Destruction light

upon the wife who herself plays tempter
 and strains her loyalty to her husband's bed
 by dalliance with strangers ...
 Truly, too, I hate
 lip-worshippers of chastity who own
 a lecherous daring when they have privacy (404–14).

Phaedra's ambitions have long been noted as not entirely in keeping with the degree of honor allotted to women in classical Athens.²⁰ The "masculine" character of her desire for honor marks yet another point of affinity between her and Hippolytus. Phaedra's desire for honor, much like Hippolytus's desire for chastity, is to be thwarted throughout the play. Increasingly, the honor that is available to Phaedra becomes centered on the fate of Hippolytus in a narrowing process which culminates in her realization that the only honor left to her is to be found in his destruction. It is at this moment that she not only acknowledges but adopts the role of Aphrodite's instrument to which she has been assigned. When she does so, Phaedra does not identify with the love by which she has been stricken, but with the wrath that is this love's source:

No, I'll not speak of it. But on this day
 when I shake off the burden of this life
 I shall delight the Goddess who destroys me,
 the Goddess Cypris.
 Bitter will have been the love that conquers me,
 but in my death I shall at least bring sorrow,
 upon another, too, that his high heart
 may know no arrogant joy at my life's shipwreck;
 he will have his share in this my mortal sickness
 and learn of chastity in moderation (725–32).

In this moment love gives way to rage, and the war Phaedra had been waging with herself is now directed at Hippolytus.

We have thus far traced out a series of similarities between Hippolytus and Phaedra.²¹ Both characters are defined by stances of resistance, Hippolytus to a goddess whom he takes to stand well outside of his realm of being, Phaedra to a god who has infected her with a love that she cannot escape without doing violence to herself. Both also deeply desire honor, and both exhibit a suspicion of women, although in Phaedra's case this requires the demarcation of a kind of women, while Hippolytus extends his hatred to women as such.

However, granted these similarities, we have also noted a double-sided character²² to Phaedra's struggle that distinguishes it from that of

Hippolytus. Phaedra must contend with both internal and external tensions.²³ Her internal battle is not replicated to the same degree in the masculine register. Hippolytus does not engage in a sustained struggle with himself, nor does he submit his own desires to lengthy interrogation. The particular symmetry between Hippolytus and Phaedra with which the play ends must be accomplished; it is not given by merit of their characters. Specifically, the masculine correlate to this double struggle that is meted out to Hippolytus, the sharing of Phaedra's "disease," does not occur primarily by means of an inner struggle but by the breaking of Hippolytus's body. Zeitlin characterizes this economy of compensation as follows: "In short he will have to live through her experience in every respect, sharing the symptoms of her 'disease' in the eyes of the world until the condition of his sick and suffering body as seen at the end of the play symmetrically matches her state at the beginning."²⁴

Because of the peculiarities of Phaedra and Hippolytus, Eros will require more than the two of them to bring this compensation about. Phaedra would keep her secret if she were not convinced to do otherwise. Some other character must intervene; some other set of affects must be twisted in order for Eros to bring about its desired end. This other character and set of affects is provided by the nurse. It is the nurse who turns Phaedra's love of honor and her shame into an instrument of Eros, and accomplishes the second movement of Aphrodite's revenge: the revelation of Phaedra's secret.

Most immediately, the nurse's role with respect to Phaedra is determined by a series of persuasions that employ a range of techniques. The nurse reveals herself to be fluent in a variety of persuasive idioms, from ritual supplication²⁵ to sophistic argumentation.²⁶ The nurse's initial position with respect to Phaedra's mysterious illness is somewhat naively logocentric: nothing is to be gained from silence, "there is no remedy in silence," (302) and all decision should be made on the basis of persuading or being persuaded. Phaedra, with her acute desire for honor, is better suited to recognize the deleterious effects of speech, and so is not persuaded by this first attempt. It is only as an aside, when commenting upon Phaedra's stubborn silence, that the nurse strikes a chord in Phaedra and receives a telling response:

If you die you will be a traitor to your children.
 They will never know their share in a father's palace.
 No by the Amazon Queen, the mighty rider
 who bore a master for your children,
 one bastard in birth true-born son in mind,
 you know him well—Hippolytus ...

So that has touched you (304–11)?

Of all the words that come out of the nurse's mouth in the opening sequence, only one has touched Phaedra. Her response simultaneously forbids and invites further inquiry into the matter: "You have killed me, nurse. For God's sake, I entreat you, never again speak that man's name to me" (312–3).

Once the nurse hits upon the name of Hippolytus, she presents herself as one who is able to say what Phaedra cannot, as able to speak Phaedra's desire in a manner from which Phaedra has been forbidden. The nurse is required to continue speaking in order to follow the circuitous route that makes Phaedra's secret known. It is by means of a reversal of the roles of questioner and answerer that Phaedra's wish for the nurse to "say for me what I must say for myself" (345) is fulfilled. Their brief reversal of roles merits our attention:

Phaedra: What is this thing, this love, of which they speak?

Nurse: Sweetest and bitterest, both in one, at once.²⁷

Phaedra: One of the two, the bitterness, I've known.

Nurse: Are you in love, my child? And who is he?

Phaedra: There is a man ... his mother was an Amazon ...

Nurse: You mean Hippolytus?

Phaedra: You have spoken it, not I (322–53).

Phaedra's question to the nurse sets her entire condition in a context that the nurse will easily follow in order to arrive at her second utterance of Phaedra's desire. Initially, the nurse's response is to take Phaedra's admission as a death sentence, and to leave the stage accusing Aphrodite of a strength that exceeds even divinity: "Cypris, you are no god. You are something stronger than god if that may be" (359–60). Initially, that is, because, as we have noted, the nurse will perform the revision Euripides himself has made. She will change her mind, and return with the observation that "in this world second thoughts, it seems, are best" (435). When the nurse returns to the stage her faith in *logos* has been renewed and she embarks upon a lengthy series of arguments designed to normalize Phaedra's love for Hippolytus and to persuade her to submit to it, to which Phaedra responds: "This is the deadly thing which devastates well-ordered cities and homes of men—that's it, this art of oversubtle words. It's not the words ringing delight in the ear that one should speak, but those that have the power to save their hearer's honorable name" (487–90). But that the nurse's words delight Phaedra's ear Phaedra herself has made clear, and it becomes quickly evident that the nurse will win this argument because she continues to speak of what Phaedra cannot; she continues to give voice to Phaedra's desire. In

doing so, she will play her part in bringing about Phaedra's destruction, and it is worth examining the resources Euripides provides to elucidate why the nurse chooses to deceive Phaedra and confront Hippolytus.

Throughout the play, the nurse's role is marked out as oscillating between friendship and servitude. That the nurse loves and cares for Phaedra is attested to by a number of characters. The nurse herself asks Phaedra, "Can I know greater sorrow than losing you" (328)? Even after the nurse's plans have proved disastrous, the *philia* between Phaedra and the nurse is emphasized. States the Chorus: "Lady, you are betrayed! How can I help you? What is hidden is revealed. You are destroyed. Those you love have betrayed you" [*prodotos ek philon*]. Phaedra responds, "She loved me and she told him of my troubles, and so has ruined me. She was my doctor, but her cure has made my illness mortal now" (591–8).

The nurse's *philia* is tempered by a social status that is never far from her mind. To the chorus she states: "You are here and can in person bear me witness that I am loyal to my master always ..." (286–7) and, then again, after her plans have backfired: "Alas, mistress, all is over now, your servant's schemes have failed and you are ruined" (680–1). Again: "I reared you up. I am your loyal servant. I sought a remedy for your love's sickness, and found ... not what I had sought" (697–9). The weariness of this relationship is something to which the nurse gives voice in her opening speech, the speech that marks both her and Phaedra's entrance to the stage: "It's better to be sick than nurse the sick. Sickness is single trouble for the sufferer: but nursing means vexation of the mind, and hard work for the hands besides" (186–8). Throughout her opening speech the nurse fluctuates between her concern for her charge, her concern for herself, and her speculation about the human condition. The nurse's enmeshment with Phaedra is further evinced by her sense of doom as Phaedra's secret first comes to light; the nurse's own well being is not sufficiently distinct from that of Phaedra to afford a lament for Phaedra that is not also a lament for herself. Thus, she accuses Aphrodite of being something stronger than a god because "you have ruined her and me and all this house" (361).

Certainly we have here an early example of the trope of the one who cares too much, the character whose excessive concern proves disastrous. However, what makes the nurse particularly interesting is her own awareness of and bitterness towards her affective attachment to Phaedra. That the nurse's job consists in precisely not allowing a clear boundary to be maintained between herself and Phaedra is a fact that she expressly laments in a passage that merits full citation and close attention:

There, now, you are covered up. But my own body
 when will death cover that? I have learned much
 from my long life. The mixing bowl of friendship,
 the love of one for the other, must be tempered.
 Love must not touch the marrow of the soul.
 Our affections must be breakable chains that we
 can cast them off and tighten them.
 That one soul so for two should be in travail
 as I for her, that is a heavy burden.
 The ways of life that are most fanatical
 trip us up more, they say, than bring us joy.
 They're enemies to health. So I praise less
 the extreme than temperance in everything.
 The wise will bear me out. (250–66)

The nurse's characterization of her labor as bearing the weight of affect for two, as feeling not only for herself but for Phaedra as well, is striking. With these lines, the nurse exhibits an estrangement from her own attachments that suggests she knows something of Phaedra's revulsion towards the love that consumes her. She is right to wonder about her own death, about who will tend to her body, who will memorialize her, when her job has precisely been to tend to and speak for another. Her observation about what life has taught her, namely, that one should be measured in one's friendship, and maintain the ability to loosen or strengthen one's care for another as one sees fit, does not extend to her own life. While she may praise a life of measured affection she does not have the freedom to accomplish this in all of her relationships. In her labor for Phaedra she does not have the luxury of measuring her friendship in precisely the way she here describes.

Why does the nurse bear this labor? Insofar as this is the labor she is compelled by her station to undertake, the nurse does not have a choice in the matter. Not caring for Phaedra is not an option. But this response makes more pressing the question of why she goes to the lengths she does in order to render her service to Phaedra. What resources has Euripides offered us for understanding why the nurse privileges Phaedra's life over her honor, when Phaedra appears to be so committed to protecting the latter? Perhaps the nurse has decided that keeping Phaedra alive is tantamount to nurturing the one testament to the labor of her own life. Support for this reading can be found in a profound statement the nurse offers just after she has lamented the two-fold pain of nursing the sick:

The life of man entire is misery:
 He finds no resting place, no haven from calamity.
 But something other dearer still than life
 The darkness hides and mist encompasses;
 We are proved luckless lovers of this thing
 That glitters in the underworld: no man
 Can tell us of the stuff of it, expounding
 What is and what was not: we know nothing of it.
 Idly we drift, on idle stories carried (189–97).²⁸

The nurse's speculation about the lot of humans seems to be something like this: While we find life dear, we are also luckless in our love and made servile to myth in our ignorance of what might be after death. Thus, even though life is misery we have found nothing else that is certain to be dearer still than life. Perhaps the nurse's concern to keep Phaedra alive is bound up with her conception of the dearness of life; perhaps she sees in Phaedra's life the one memorial and testament to her own life and work that has been allotted to her.

After all, the nurse's life is bound up with Phaedra's life in a number of ways. Having been forced to nurture Phaedra, she has come to love Phaedra and cannot keep herself separate from the care she gives to Phaedra. The disastrous effects of the nurse's course of action would then provide a critical purchase on the merits of this confusion of servitude and friendship. Of course, the nurse's friendship, with the burden it brings to the nurse, also has deleterious effects for Phaedra. It is in breaking this bond that Phaedra severs her relation to the nurse. Her last command to her nurse is "Away with you! Think of yourself. For me and my concerns I will arrange all well" (708–9). Severing these ties is purely the privilege of Phaedra; the nurse cannot do so. The nurse then exits and of her fate after Phaedra's dismissal Euripides is silent.

From one perspective, Aphrodite's appearance on stage at the opening of the play tells us everything we need to know about the end of the play. However, within the scope of this determined end, the range of decisions made by the characters is remarkable. The one character who does not subject his thought to some scrutiny and who does not do some battle with a decision he has made, namely, Theseus, pays dearly for his intractability.²⁹ Thus, while their actions will tend toward a particular end, Euripides's play goes out of its way to highlight what the characters do identify as their own, that is, those in whom they have invested their care. Even as this care is channeled, turned, or twisted the characters still acutely feel their implication in it. It is precisely this investment of care that is the means by which they are manipulated, and

it is precisely the relationships that are produced by the investment of care that is staged in the play.

I have suggested that Euripides's second *Hippolytus* is a tragedy about the economy of affect, and have offered a reading of the relationship between Phaedra and her nurse as a meditation upon the deleterious effects of institutionalized inequity in the sharing of affect. Euripides emphasizes this inequity in the final lines of the play:

This is a common grief for all the city;
it came unlooked for. There shall be
a storm of multitudinous tears for this,
the lamentable stories of great men
prevail more than humble folk" (1463–6).³⁰

Ultimately, Euripides's *Hippolytus* treats the intimacy and impersonality of Eros as both enabling human community and fostering human bondage.³¹

Concluding Remarks

The time of tragedy is fluid. The material upon which the Greek tragedians worked—value-laden and pliable traditional stories—offer a stock of images and characters, but also a grammar by means of which the poet figures his own time and place within a tradition that will exceed them. The exchange between tragedy and tradition goes in two directions; the Greek tragic poet may use the material of myth as a means to confirm the values of his own time and place, to reassert values he believes have been lost or to critique the values currently in play. The classical tragedies occupy an ambivalent spot between conveying tradition and critiquing it, between indoctrination and social commentary. These tragedies also offer a commentary on this very practice in their presentation of the struggle of noble families to have done with a past that will not have done with them. Its portrayal of the attempt to contend with a traumatic and traumatizing past and its participation in the conveyance, interpretation, and critique of this mythic past, recommend continued engagement with classical tragedy.

Because of the interaction between its subject matter and its composition, Euripides's *Hippolytus* offers a commentary on the social anxiety that accompanies expressions of eros and a critical portrayal of attempts to manage this expression. At the same time, I think it would be a mistake to see this interaction (between one poet's taking up a myth and the control his audience has in this process) as indicating the salutary effects of direct communication of and about eros. After all, the

first play, in which such a direct communication occurs, is still a tragedy. However, the difference between these two tragedies does raise the question of whether a direct expression of eros is ever possible, and if not, how might one negotiate between better and worse mediated expressions.

The mediated expressions of eros that occur in the *Hippolytus* prove disastrous. In the case of the nurse, this mediation is at least in part a function of the institutionalized inequitable distribution of affect and so provides a critical image of one kind of feeling for another. Euripides's portrayal of the nurse in his second *Hippolytus* calls attention to the political capitalization upon the labile quality of desire.³²

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Notes

1. Unless otherwise noted, all citations in English are taken from the translation of David Grene as it appears in *Euripides I: Alcestis, Medea, Heracleidae, Hippolytus*, eds. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955). All Greek citations are taken from the text edited by W. S. Barrett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

2. *Iusimelēs*, Theogony, 120–2.

3. Od. 20.57, 23.343, and Il. 4.469, 22.335, 5.17 for example.

4. Frag. 130. See also the references in Froma Zeitlin, "The Power of Aphrodite," in *Directions in Euripidean Criticism*, ed. Peter Burian (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 59.

5. See in particular *Republic* 485d and *Phaedrus* 255b–e.

6. Such a characterization of desire in general, as well as love in particular, is evident in the Platonic dialogues as well. For instance, it is to desire's intimacy that Socrates attests when, in the *Cratylus*, he asserts that Hades uses desire to bring all souls to him because the bonds of desire are stronger than the bonds of compulsion since they are bonds in which the prisoner is complicit (403c). Yet it is the indifference of love to one's well being that Socrates emphasizes when, in the *Republic*, he offers an example of how he and Glaucon should comport themselves towards poetry: "just like the men who have once fallen in love with someone, and don't believe the love is beneficial, keep away from it even if they have to do violence to themselves" (607e).

7. These begin with the hypothesis the ancient editor of the play attached to it, and includes also Aristophanes's *Frogs*, in which Phaedra is listed as one of the several bad and lascivious women who Euripides is fond of presenting. For a good general summary of the evidence for this assessment, see Emily McDermott, "Euripides' Second Thoughts," *TAPA* 130 (2000).

8. Bernard Knox drives this point home when he observes that the allocation of lines is such that Hippolytus, the nurse, Phaedra, and Theseus share a nearly equal number of lines. Knox concludes that "when the action is so equably divided between four characters, the unity of the work cannot depend on any one, but must lie in the relationship between all four." Bernard Knox, "The Hippolytus of Euripides," *Yale Classical Studies* 13 (1952), 4.

9. Zeitlin, 54.

10. Euripides displays this very act of revision with the nurse's crucial change of mind halfway through the play. About the sophistic argument that follows this change of mind, in which the nurse convinces Phaedra to submit to her love, Zeitlin notes: "In this earlier drama, it is generally agreed that Phaedra and the nurse exchanged roles so that, like the nurse in our play, it is Phaedra who would have invoked Aphrodite with sophistic arguments to justify her outrageous actions" [Zeitlin, 108].

11. Barrett, for instance, commenting upon the speech the nurse gives as she and Phaedra enter the stage for the first time (l. 170–266, Barrett *ad loc*) describes her as a "miscreant" and characterizes her as a devoted but impatient servant whose primary function is to misunderstand the situation sufficiently to betray her mistress unwittingly.

12. The secondary literature on the *Hippolytus* is vast, and even with this narrowed scope I cannot give exhaustive treatment to all the relevant sources within the limits of this paper. Nor would it be possible to offer here an analysis of the complexities of institutionalized slavery in fifth-century Athens. Accordingly, I intend this solely as a sketch of some of the significant features of Euripides's characterization of the nurse and their broader implications.

13. Knox gives a full development of the themes of speech and silence in the play. See also Barbra Goff's excellent study, *The Noose of Words: Readings of Desire, Violence and Language in Euripides' Hippolytus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

14. On the customary predication of *parthenon* to young women, see Goff (65). That Hippolytus's reverence represents something of a reversal of roles is attested also by the chorus of women who, in lamenting his banishment, observe: "You are banished: there's an end to the rivalry of maids for your love" (1140–1). Such gender-bending and role-reversal is familiar ground for Euripides.

15. On the operation of these lines as a monument both to Hippolytos and to Euripides himself, see Pietro Pucci, "Euripides: The Monument and the Sacrifice," *Arethusa* 10 (1977), 184–6.

16. Perhaps even more chilling, her body has become a spectacle to herself: "Lift me up! Lift my head up! All the muscles are slack and useless. Here, you, take my hands. They're beautiful, my hands and arms!" (199–201).

17. So entrenched is the association between Phaedra's body and transmittable information that the ode begins with an account of the one from whom the chorus first heard about Phaedra's condition:

There is a rock streaming with water,
 whose source, man say, is Ocean,
 and it pours from the heart of its stone a spring
 where pitchers may dip and be filled.
 My friend was there and in the river water
 she dipped and washed the royal purple robes,
 and spread them on the rock's warm back
 where the sunbeams played.
 It was from her I heard at first
 of the news of my mistress' sorrow (121–30)

A number of themes addressed in the play emerge from this strophe. The fluid environment in which water streams and pours, in which things can be dipped (and thus circulated among others) and cleansed serves as a physical representative of a series of themes. That it is from a friend, and one engaged in labor, that the queen's condition was heard is also not without significance. The roles of friendship and of work undertaken for another are also prominent in the play.

18. Phaedra's desire to be elsewhere (208–31) should be connected to the Chorus's desire to be otherwise (732–51).

19. This is not to say that all refusal of food corresponds to a refusal of desire. Very often such refusals are more a defiance of the giver of food

than the food itself. But in Phaedra's instance I believe we have an example of an impossible desire to be freed from desire, this striving towards an impossible autonomy.

20. For instance, David Grene opens his translation of the *Hippolytus* by citing the infamous passage from Pericles's funeral oration in which Pericles states that women's sole honor is in not being mentioned in the public realm at all.

21. As Richmond Lattimore has stressed, the compatibility between Phaedra and Hippolytus is a major source of the tragedy's irony. ("Euripides' Phaedra and Hippolytus," in *Phaedra and Hippolytus: Myth and Dramatic Form*, eds. James Sanderson and Irwin Gopnik (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), 294. David Kovacs calls attention to their compatibility as well, in "Shame, Honor and Pleasure in Phaedra's Great Speech." *AJP* 101, no. 3, (1980), 302–3.

22. This dimension is in keeping with the lament made in the epode to the first choral ode, which begins: "Unhappy is the compound of woman's nature ..." (161).

23. This is to say, her eros for Hippolytus is a problem both for herself and for the city. Her interior struggle is done with and not against the city. As Kovacs (300) has argued, Phaedra adopts the aristocratic mode of values to which she has been exposed; her struggle resides in realizing these values both in the face of the desire with which she has been stricken and within the limitations toward seeking honor imposed upon women by that very culture. On Phaedra's internalization of the model of civic virtue with which she is surrounded, see also Nancy Rabinowitz, "Female Speech and Female Sexuality: Euripides' Hippolytos as Model," *Helios* 13 (1987).

24. Zeitlin, 65.

25. Euripides calls attention to the nurse's supplication by having Phaedra and the nurse describe her performance of essential features of the act: the suppliant's clasping of hand and knee. Ritual supplication operates on the basis of a simple series of gestures that evoke a complex structure of power, shame, and obligation. It supplies a means for the powerless to persuade the powerful by their very physical performance of their powerlessness. In both archaic and classical eras, it was revered as highly as *xenia*, the relationship between guest and host. The nurse's performance of supplication bring into play not only the power differential the separates Phaedra from her nurse but also the mutually affecting sense of shame and in this case love that binds them together. Phaedra does not disappoint her

suppliant nurse: "I yield. Your suppliant hand compels my reverence" (335). "I will say no more," the Nurse replies, "Yours is the word from now on" (336).

26. Knox has noted that the nurse's second speech, in which she persuades Phaedra to give up her decision to kill herself and to put herself in the "care" of the nurse, bears a striking resemblance to sophistic rhetoric. Knox, 19. On the character of this entire scene of persuasion as a kind of *pharmakon* designed to bewitch Phaedra, see Goff, 48–54.

27. It is hard to miss the reference to Sappho's famous formulation of love as bittersweet. The nurse's addition of "both at once" flies in the face of the unequal emphasis in the play on bitterness.

28. Barrett is reluctant to concede the authenticity of these lines on the grounds of their superfluity and ambiguity with respect to whether the nurse affirms or protests against the luckless love (*duserôtes*) of life. Solmsen reminds us that the lines are in keeping with a tendency to philosophize that the nurse exhibits throughout the play, and points out that it is not unreasonable to read death as what is more loved in this passage. (Freidrich Solmsen, Review of Barrett's Euripides Hippolytos, *AJP* 88, no. 1 [1967], 90). Grene's translation, which emphasizes the obsession of mortals with what comes after death, fruitfully plays with the ambiguity of love object here, life or death; nevertheless I am persuaded by Barrett's argument that the nurse is advocating a somewhat sober love for life (even as, to read with Grene, she gestures towards a human fixation with death). Kovacs's translation places emphasis on the ignorance of mortals for anything they might love more than life (Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). For the sake of consistency, I have chosen to cite Grene's translation in the text, but it is worthwhile to compare his translation of these lines with that of Anne Carson (*Grief Lessons: Four Plays by Euripides*. New York: New York Review of Books, 2006):

Now every mortal life has pain
 And sweat is constant,
 Bu if there is anything dearer than being alive
 It's dark to me.
 We humans seem disastrously in love with this thing
 (whatever it is) that glitters on the earth—
 we call it life. We know no other.
 The underworld's a blank
 And all the rest just fantasy.

29. Knox's discussion is particularly helpful here. See pages 4–6.

30. Barrett again expresses concern about the authenticity of these lines, partially on the grounds of their attribution of *meḡas* to Hippolytus. But Segal has persuasively argued for an intended and fruitful ambiguity in this attribution. See chapter 7 of his *Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow: Art, Gender and Commemoration in Alcestis, Hippolytus, and Hecuba* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

31. Segal effectively problematizes the sense in which the death of Hippolytus is an event capable of bringing about the political unity of common grief (Ch. 7).

32. Teresa Brennan's work on the transmission of affect is relevant to this reading of the *Hippolytus*; see *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004). While I have some concerns about the ease with which she asserts that "affects are material, physiological things" (6), her emphasis on the social character of affect, on the manner in which this character challenges the conception that one's feelings are entirely one's own property, and on the pernicious and persistent unjust allocation of negative affects on to another (frequently the mother) are all germane to issues raised by this play. So too is Nicole Loraux's work on the gendering of grieving in Greek tragedy; I have in mind in particular *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), *The Mourning Voice: An Essay on Greek Tragedy*, trans. Elizabeth Trapnell (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), and *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens*, trans. Corinne Pache and Jeff Forte (New York: Zone Books, 2006), and Judith Butler's recent discussion of some contemporary examples of this gendering in the second chapter of her *Precarious Life* (London: Verso, 2004). Both Loraux and Butler emphasize the political significance of prescriptions on public mourning and the effects of the inequitable distribution of affect with respect to grieving.