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Colloquium in Legal, Political, and Social Philosophy
Conducted by
Jeremy Waldron and Liam Murphy

Speaker: Bonnie Honig, Brown University
Paper: Fatal Forgiveness: Euripides, Austin, Arendt, Cavell

Colloquium Website: http://www.law.nyu.edu/node/22315
Fatal Forgiveness: Euripides, Austin, Arendt, Cavell
(Chapter 2, Sept 2023 for NYU Law)
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ABSTRACT
Are today’s “Oath Keepers” descendants of Euripides’ Hippolytus, whose titular hero is himself an oath keeper extraordinaire? This paper explores classical and contemporary connections between oath keeping and masculinity, attending to the politics of sex/gender in connection with Hippolytus and Phaedra, and reading the Hippolytus as noir. The Hippolytus is all about words, and it is a veritable treasure trove of performativity, featuring not only oaths, but also vows of silence taken, promises made, and sentencing delivered. The most important is Hippolytus’ final forgiveness of his father, Theseus, for a lifetime of wrongs, which—like the play as a whole—spans “performative utterance,” as theorized by J.L. Austin, and the “passionate utterance” with which Austin’s student Stanley Cavell supplemented the work of his teacher. Might Hannah Arendt’s account of forgiveness in The Human Condition help clarify the status of forgiveness as performative, passionate, both, or neither? The paper turns to Euripides to consider the possible fatality of forgiveness, and its implications for ethics and politics.

**NOTE to readers for NYU Law, Sept 2023:**
This is a draft of a chapter for a book MS called The Force of Words, which returns to J.L. Austin’s classic How To Do Things With Words (1962) in contemporary contexts of queer theory, legal studies, and democratic theory. This particular chapter is focused on Euripides’ Hippolytus, because the play is quoted by Austin on p. 10 of the book and frequently drawn on in the literature too. My reading of the Hippolytus draws on classics, as well as on Austin, Euripides, and Stanley Cavell, all tested in conversation with Hannah Arendt. The focus of these several literatures on Hippolytus tends to the protagonist’s oath-taking and oath-keeping. I find in the play subtle connections between that and the practice of forgiveness in and beyond the play.

For those who have not read or seen it, this paper provides enough details about the play to enable the argument and our discussion. But for those who may be interested, the play is great, short, and readily available. I highly recommend it!

I regret that, as an early draft, the paper is a bit long (the first section, pp. 3-11, situates the paper in the larger project and can be skimmed; the long footnotes mean the paper is not as long as it seems). Some points are repeated, others may be a bit vague, pending the next rewrite. I have no doubt there are other flaws too: it is a work in progress. I look forward to discussing this material with you and thank you in advance for your time and attention.

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for Austin, Hippolytus enacts the claim that a metaphysician – the metaphysician in each of us – will use metaphysics to get out of the moral of the ordinary, out of our ordinary moral obligations. That is what frightens Austin and draws his philosophical ire

Stanley Cavell (PP p. 75)

The femme fatale … forces the spectator to decide… whether we are to conceive of her as an independent figure or merely as a figure of projection for masculine anxiety

Elisabeth Bronfen

1. Why Performativity? On a miracle of language, nearly lost

“Performative” or “performativity,” familiar to many now as a key term in 1990’s political theory and queer theory, originates with J.L. Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words* (henceforth *Words*), a contribution to ordinary language philosophy in the form of lectures given in the 1950’s which were then published, posthumously, as a book in 1962. Austin’s performatives are “speech acts,” utterances that do things, by contrast with constative utterances that describe things. Calling attention to speech action was an important move in ordinary language philosophy’s midcentury critique of reference. If there was a significant class of speech that did not describe the real world referentially but rather performed actions inaugurally, then reference could not be treated as the purpose or function of language as such. It was, said Stanley Cavell who attended Austin’s lectures at Harvard in the 1950’s, a revelation, like a miracle in philosophy.

From the mid- to late-20th century to the turn to the 21st, “performativity” travelled outside of philosophy and beyond Austin’s speech act theory to democratic theory, feminist theory, literary theory, queer theory, and performance studies. Performative speech acts like
those that appear in this book -- I do, I bequeath, I dissent, I bet, I sentence you, but also Shame
on you, and more -- were seen to careen between mandated ritualized utterance, often formulaic,
on the one hand, and powerfully innovative or subversive speech acts of resignification, on the
other. In queer theory in the 1990’s, performativity was a way to describe how the hetero-
sexed/gendered body is produced by way of compelled speech acts that make us legible as
humans by shaping bodies and behaviors in conformity with the formulas of conventional
male/female binarism. Performativity also described queer resistance to such sex/gender
conformism. J.L. Austin does not consider sex/gender as performative but neither does he, in my
view, say anything that would rule it out. In, through, and in adjacency with Austin’s work at
century’s turn, queer theorists (Sedgwick, Butler) and theorists of politics (my own work,
Ahmed), anthropology (Das, Benveniste), and law (Derrida, Constable) wrestled with the powers
of language as potentially inaugural, creative, magnetic, and/or disciplinary.¹

Austin was also much criticized in the 90’s, mostly for assuming and promoting a
sovereignist conception of subjectivity. All those “I’s” doing all that speech-acting seemed
privileged, as if the performative-uttering subject was enthroned, above the fray, always the
subject and never the object of speech acts. And the centrality of wedding in Austin’s archive of
performatives suggested his perspective was too straight and too sober. But this criticism was not
entirely fair, I now think. I have argued for a different reading of Austin, noting that the much
vaunted “I do” is not as prominent in Austin as his critics charged. In fact, it is complemented by
other performatives and even countered by a neglected example: that of a bull that may be about
to charge. The example runs the length of Words and features a man named John (JL Austin’s

¹ Affinities between Austin’s performatives and legal speech acts have been widely noted. Austin’s references in
How to Do Things with Words to HLA Hart add to the sense of performativity’s legalism. On Hart, see Nicola
Lacey’s biography, suggesting Hart and Austin cotaught at least once.
own first name!) repeatedly trying with performatives of law and language to contain the animal without success. When Stanley Cavell criticizes Austin’s performatives for being too regulated or lawlike, he proposes adding “passionate utterance” to Austin’s itinerary of performatives in order to give expression to the “disorders of desire” that he thinks Austin neglects. But the recurring bull suggests that such disorders are already in play in Words, with law already on the line, vexed but maybe also animated by the disorders of desire on behalf of which Cavell supplements Austin’s work.

Cavell is not the only one who seeks to supplement Austin. Almost everyone who uses “performativity: adds to the Austinian repertoire with their own examples or coinages. Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, and Sara Ahmed, respectively, add gender performativity (though Butler draws initially on Derrida, not Austin), deformative and periperformative utterance (Sedgwick), and “nonperformatives” (Ahmed), by which Ahmed means the production of performative sounding statements whose purpose is to do nothing at all. Focused on institutional diversity statements, Ahmed argues that such statements perform a not-doing by way of great public proclamations of doing.

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2 I have written about Austin’s bull in more detail in “Toward a Democratic Theory of Contagion: Virality and Performativity with Eve Sedgwick, J.L. Austin, Hortense Spillers, and Patricia Williams” London Review of International Law (March 2023) and “Performativity,” Political Concepts (under review), and Chapter One of this book: “Bull(y)ing: A Bull in the China Shop of JL Austin’s How To Do Things with Words.”

3 Marianne Constable marks, against Cavell on this point, the coimplication of desire and law, as I note below.

4 I discussed gender performativity in Chapter One here and at the end of the Arendt chapter in Displacement, Chapter 4 (Cornell, 1993/2023). Deformativity, which is key to Chapter One here, is rarely discussed by Sedgwick’s readers, though one essay by XXX in ed vol on Sedgwick starts with that concept. Periperformativity was key to my reading of Sophocles’ Antigone in Antigone, Interrupted (Cambridge, 2013). Michael Lambek is another conjugator of Austin’s performatives – adding the “circumlocutionary” to three locutionary forces that Austin attaches to performatives later in Words (“Toward an Ethic of the Act,” Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action, ed., Michael Lambek, Fordham, 2010).

Today, Ahmed’s “non-” has become almost unnecessary because the word performative has itself come to mean its opposite. In the last 20-30 years, performativity has come to mean hypocrisy or pretense, as in “That’s so performative!” If “performative” now means insincere, then we are well away from Austin who began his lectures in *Words* ruling out considerations of sincerity, motive, or intention in connection with performatives’ meaning or impact. He focused on the grammars of worldly behavior and the behavior of worldly grammar to push back against the pull of metaphysics. He was committed to a studied externalism that I see as importantly resonant with elements of Hannah Arendt’s account of action. Arendt too excludes motivation and intention from consideration in her account of action. The “dark place of each man’s lonely heart” (THC 237) is an interiority unfit for the realm of appearances.

Austin and Arendt share a preference for phenomenology over metaphysics, he on behalf of the “ordinary” and she on behalf of the “political.” Both, in my view, are put under pressure by the replacement in our lexicon of inaugural performativity with a performative that means hypocrisy. That development, I want to suggest, is a symptom of the political problems we face now and it occasions my return to Austin, with Arendt. The “We hold” of the US declaration is a performative utterance. So are the “I dissent,” of today’s Supreme Court minority and the “hands off my body” of the post-Dobbs protestor. None is quite adequate to its moment, but they may yet deliver on what performativity has to offer. Austin’s performatives are, potentially, part of a radical grammar of collective self-authorization. This is what awaits those who return now to read Austin’s work closely, if we think with him in the company of Arendt. Arendt theorized

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6 Attending now to such overlaps in the work of Austin and Arendt, I complement my previous attention to the contrast between them given their respective theorizations of performativity as ordinary (Austin) vs extraordinary (Arendt). See “Declarations of Independence: Arendt and Derrida on the Founding of a Republic” (APSR, 1991) and Chapter 4, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 1993/2023.
“action that appears in words” as uniquely *political* action in the realm of appearances. She rejected efforts to underwrite such human achievements with metaphysical foundations, like God or Nature. Such action that appears in words without foundationalist support is precisely what Austin calls “performative.” But Arendt never uses that term, and there is no indication she read or even knew of JL Austin.

Still, they had a few things in common. In the 30’s, Austin was ensconced at Oxford, soon to become a key part of the British war effort, working in Intelligence. Arendt was a war tossed refugee: part of a German-Jewish war effort to document early outrages of the Nazis, she was forced to flee and landed in Paris, where she worked to save Germany’s and Europe’s Jewish children from destruction. Dispossessed of her native German citizenship in the 1930’s, Arendt was forced to migrate ultimately to the U.S., via stopping points in Europe, including time in a French DP camp. Thus, Arendt, who wrote mostly in her adopted English, had her own pressing reasons for attending to language, specifically its capacity to survive catastrophe. She hoped language might succeed in putting the cart before the horse, as it were, bequeathing a world out of the ruins to those who would come next. Austin, too, likely had extra-philosophical reasons to single out the renovative and inaugural powers of words, or speech acts. Having served in British intelligence during the Second World War, he theorized performatives in the 1950’s postwar context, undoubtedly aware that it was a time of material and juridical rebuilding, engineered by the so-called Great Powers, often by way of new constitutions and courts that were re-languaging the world.7

Writing in the same postwar context and at the very same time as Austin wrote, but in the U.S., Hannah Arendt theorized as quintessentially “political” uniquely inaugural speech acts that

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7 They both also died prematurely, leaving unfinished work for others to take up.
express care for the world and signal a devotion to world-building. After the war, both she and Austin likely were reading Merleau-Ponty and perhaps also Nietzsche and Greek tragedy. The traces of these dovetailed readings show in what follows, with Austin in the 1950’s naming his approach “linguistic phenomenology” (“Other Minds”) and Arendt offering in *The Human Condition* (1958) nothing less than a phenomenology of language in the vita activa. Where Austin wrote about words that are actions, seeking to upset linguistic philosophers’ devotion to constation and reference, Arendt wrote about a kind of action that takes place in words, seeking to specify the uniquely inaugural and political action that cannot be reduced to the concerns of Labor or Work.

Another point of overlap is important too. Austin, as Cavell notes (*Philosophical Passages*, p.61), “understood skepticism and metaphysics as forms of intellectual tragedy,” which he then sought (wrongly, in Cavell’s view) to avoid. Arendt took much the same view as Austin, singling out the deficiencies of philosophy when she commented on the unreliability of certain friends in the academy as the Nazis rose to power in Germany. She acerbically attributed the moral and political failures of philosophers to a certain deformation professionelle (LOM). The same association is suggested by Austin in *Sense and Sensibilia*, when he says “it is essential here as elsewhere to abandon old habits of Gleichschaltung, the deeply ingrained worship of tidy-looking dichotomies” (quoted in Cavell, *Philosophical Passages*, p. 59). “Is Austin serious in assigning, however rhetorically, philosophy’s organizational requirements to a wish for fascistic mastery?” Cavell asks, rhetorically (p. 59). Arendt was. For both her and Austin, the problems of metaphysics caused problems not just for metaphysics.\(^8\)

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\(^8\) Arendt’s concerns are replayed in our moment by the Claremont Institute’s destructive, anti-democratic dabbling in politics. See The New Republic essay on what happened to certain of Leo Strauss’ heirs.
We, too, must turn hopefully to language, I want to suggest, in response to the contemporary overt and ongoing assault on democracy. Current instrumentalizations of language, weaponizations of words, and digitizations of writing -- the word-harvesting, daily deception, dizzying floods of disinformation, and the robotic reproduction of others’ words – permeate our digital and print universes. They disorient democratic citizens, destabilize democratic institutions, and disseminate new threats of redundancy. They prioritize emotion and manipulate feeling. In the face of all this, the world is de(con)textualized and many are disaffected from it. As for those who are mobilized, they have to act in the near absence of what Thoreau in the last pages of Walden called the “extravagance” of language.

Thoreau’s wished-for linguistic extravagance was to bring into being audiences that could hear his words and grasp his thoughts though he was ahead of them, the anti-slavery cart before their horse. That metaleptic structure is what performativity, as Austin theorized it, has to offer: a view of the subject in language as languaged into being. This looping agency of words carries a democratic hope: that people can come together, bound by word and deed, to unite hopefully in equality and plurality, the two characteristic traits of Arendtian political life. This hope rests on a narrow and shaky plank, however: that words can bridge chasms and not just create them. As we know from Austin’s work on the problem of “other minds,” he thinks we are up to the challenge.

Austin says ordinary language philosophy can guide us. But he also turns to classics, citing Euripides’ Hippolytus in the opening pages of Words. Austin had translated Euripides in school in Scotland and, as an undergraduate at Oxford, he appeared in several Greek tragedies and a comedy, while also studying Greats. He was familiar with the archive of classics and no

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9He cites also Herodotus in “Other Minds.” On his participation in Oxford’s classics theater, see M.M. Rowe’s recent biography of Austin.
doubt understood the value (especially at Oxford) of associating a new upstart approach to the philosophy of language with an old uncontroversial canon that was universally respected in the British system and across Europe. Cavell will inquire into the meaning of this association of ordinary language philosophy with classics, as will I. But let me mark now what I will detail in my reading of the play in section 4: the one tragedy Austin chose to cite in *Words*, Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, happens also to feature a bull, a whole bunch of bulls, that resist enclosure and run like a red thread through that tragic play and the play’s larger mythic context.

In the *Hippolytus*, two protagonists use words falsely and both fail. The truth outs. But the specifics of their failures are instructive: Phaedra and Hippolytus both try to secure their precarious futures, but both then become who they are in ways unexpected. If their words have their way with them, and not vice versa, then this tragedy not only teaches the limits of sovereign selfhood, which all tragedies do. It also illustrates the waywardness of performativity, which we might calls its extravagance, a word rooted after all in vagabondage -- wandering.

Austin is struck by the waywardness of performatives and of speech acts more generally when, late in *Words*, he abandons the constative/performative binary that he has invented (recalling Frankenstein rejecting his monster), casts *all* language as speech action, and proposes moving instead to assess the varieties of linguistic force. One is “perlocutionary force” which is the impact of a speech act on others. Cavell objects to what he sees as Austin’s lack of specification of the perlocutionary and nominates “passionate utterance” as a necessary supplement to Austin’s account. The virtue of passionate utterance, from Cavell’s perspective, is that it re-tethers speech acts to the self (un)made by them. Cavell here wants to specify the place of the subject’s desire in speech, but in so doing he undoes the errancy that Austin’s
perlocutionary force granted to words that are both ours and not ours (as Cavell well knows, given his claims in *Must We Mean What We Say*).

Unlike Cavell and closer, in my view, to Austin, Arendt explores the impact of speech acts in public as a kind of self-*disclosure*, but not a *self*-disclosure. For her, we become who we are (Cavell’s phrase, but the “who” is also her term) through action in the public realm, which reveals who we are but shelters us also, illuminating only what is “fit” to be seen. She writes from the point of view of politics, Cavell from the point of view of ethics. Both confront the irreversibility and contingency of speaking in public but Cavell finds (tragic) redemption in linking the speaker to their speech act, while Arendt, by contrast, finds redemption in delinking them: she lights on the power of forgiveness, also a speech act. Forgiveness is a key performative utterance in the *Hippolytus*, but it is not an example Austin analysed, and this may be why it is not mentioned in the *Hippolytus/Austin* literature. I turn to Arendt’s account of forgiveness because it may supplement Austin in a way more in keeping with his project than Cavell’s “passionate utterance.” Reading Austin with Arendt helps highlight what is lost in Cavell’s appropriation of Austin for ethics and it offers Austin and Arendt the test of each other’s partnership.

2. *Hippolytus*: Austin’s Stumbling Block?

“My tongue swore to, but my heart did not”

Hippolytus to the Nurse in Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, quoted in Greek by JL Austin in *How To Do Things with Words*.

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10 Michael Lambek is the only one I know of so far who notes overlaps between Cavell and Arendt. The point of comparison for Lambek is the irreversibility of speech acts, to which I note later forgiveness is Arendt’s response. Cavell’s is more intra-subjective.
In contemporary theory and criticism on Austinian performativity, it is not uncommon to turn to the ancient Greek tragedy, Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, the play that launched a thousand *Phaedras*, which Austin cites early in *Words*. With one of its two main protagonists famous for swearing oaths (Hippolytus) and the other for bearing false witness (Phaedra), both of them members of a royal family headed by a sovereign (Theseus) who passes premature sentence, Euripides’ *Hippolytus* seems tailor-made for theorizing the politics of performativity in the company of performativity’s first theorist.\(^{11}\)

Accordingly, scholars of law, classics, and the philosophy of language examine the many speech acts in the play. Some use the *Hippolytus* to argue for the centrality of gendered speech or silence to the field of action in the play and in the Athens of its day, as in Barbara Goff’s *The Noose of Words*, or for the promise of performativity for law as speech action, as in Marianne Constable’s *Our Word is Our Bond*, or for the total irrelevance of performative analyses, given Hippolytus himself shows there is no way around the fatal fact that some people will say anything and then renege all the same.\(^{12}\) Hippolytus does not renege, but his apparent consideration of doing so (which we might think of as “the loose of words” or “our word is without bound”) invites comparison to the never-married but much-engaged Don Juan (a focus of Shoshana Felman’s book *The Scandal of the Speaking Body* discussed in Chapter 3) who enjoys using the power of words to seduce women and destroy worlds. Don Juan is thus the

\(^{11}\) I detail the main events of the play in section 4, where I develop my reading of the tragedy. Before doing that, I set out the stakes of the reading here in section 2, vis a vis Austin, and then in section 3, vis a vis Vernant’s account of the development of new forms of subjectivation in the 5th century.

\(^{12}\) Marianne Constable notes that divine performatives come to fruition in the play while those of humans are foiled (116). But James Morwood observes that, contra Aphrodite’s declaration that she will tell all to Theseus, “in fact it is Artemis” who does so (Morwood, 181) (Constable, *Our Word is Our Bond: How Legal Speech Acts* (OUP) 2014 (See also “Our Word is Our Bond,” Austin Sarat ed., “Speech and Silence in American Law” Cambridge University Press, (18-38)). On gender, speech, and silence in *Hippolytus*, see also Froma Zeitlin CITEx. Also see Charles Segal on writing as feminine, with the face to face of verbal communication gendered masculine (Segal 1986: 93-94); picked up on by Tueller, Michael A. “Writing, Women’s Silent Speech.” *The Materiality of Text—Placement, Perception, and Presence of Inscribed Texts in Classical Antiquity*. Brill, 2018. 187-204.
double of Hippolytus, Euripides’ unmarrying man who has sworn an oath to chastity and keeps it. At the same time, Dona Elvira, the tragically betrayed woman of Molière’s Don Juan, doubles Euripides’ Phaedra, the betraying femme fatale of Euripides’ Hippolytus whose words, post mortem, best her step-son and seal his fate.

Calling Phaedra a femme fatale so early in our consideration of her is risky but I hope in so doing to create the distance needed to suspend moral judgment of her calumnious manipulation of her step-son and husband. Re-emplotting this tragedy as noir not only frees us to reckon with what the play has to offer our reconsideration of Austin in Arendtian frame, it also allows Phaedra to emerge, as indeed Aphrodite predicts she will, not only as the goddess’ victim (instrumentalized against Hippolytus), but also as her ally. Aphrodite’s curse of passion propels Phaedra out of the conformism that masquerades as the ordinary and presses her into becoming who she is. Artemis will do the same for Hippolytus but, as in most noir as well as tragedy, it will be too late to save him. When we note these parallels between the two goddesses and their playthings, the Hippolytus’ symmetrical structure asserts itself and justifies those who see this play as the most Sophoclean of Euripides’ oeuvre.

As I hope all this indicates, my aim here is not to add to the several applications of speech act theory to the Hippolytus, nor vice versa (though I will discuss forgiveness in the Hippolytus), but to ask: what might we take Austin to have done in citing the Hippolytus? I have mentioned that he may well have been borrowing the grandeur of classics for ordinary language philosophy. But there is more: my intuition is that Austin, author of an important paper on “Other Minds,” might have been drawn to the Hippolytus’ singularly powerful depiction of inter-

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13 Cavell also notices the link, initially between not Don Juan but Don Giovanni, whom he calls Hippolytus’ anti-type in Philosophical Passages (p. 62) and also mentions in Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow (cite), published after his preface to the republication of Felman’s Scandal of the Speaking Body, where he notes both.
and intra-subjective opacities within and among characters who do not know their own minds nor those of others. Classicist Harry Avery pithily refers to this misalignment as a clash between “inner and outer.” He directs our attention to the Hippolytus’ exploration of the contrast between “inner truth and outward appearance,” between what can be felt (inside) and seen (outside), whether by way of the household versus polis, or the inside versus outside of a person. Where inner and outer do not line up, the polis and the self are both divided. Such rifts may be experienced as cause for moral anguish or as providing (un)welcome opportunities for deception and, either way, as grist for the ethicist’s mill.

This, indeed, is how the Hippolytus comes up in Words. Having introduced the idea of performative utterances, Austin asks whether they should be understood with reference to the intentions of their speakers. To show why not, Austin quotes from Euripides’ Hippolytus (428 B.C.): “My tongue swore to, but my heart (or mind or other backstage artiste) did not.” These are the words of Hippolytus as he may consider, for a moment, breaking a vow he has sworn to the Nurse. Phaedra overhears him and she makes a fateful decision based on her belief that Hippolytus knows, and has decided to tell, the shameful secret of her passion for him. In fact, the words she overhears are him perhaps considering whether to do so. He will not. (Overhearing itself offers an interesting counter to the examples of speech act theory which are not normally indirect.)

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15 Avery’s 1968 essay appeared at roughly the same time as Cavell’s Must We Mean What We Say?, which appeared in 1969. For Avery, the Hippolytus inquires into what we might now think of as Cavellian themes: how or whether characters can find ways to integrate their divided subjectivities. In this sense, the play can also be seen as part of a broader literature in classics, which, Douglas Cairns argues, has interpreted the play “in the context of fifth-century debate on the nature of morality, its relation to self-interest, and the role of internal versus external sanctions in sustaining social norms and underpinning moral behaviour” (2020).
16 Only some of the words are Hippolytus’. The parenthetic comment is Austin’s. In Anne Carson’s translation, the line reads: “My tongue swore the oath. My mind is unsworn” (680).
17 Michel Chion, theorizing acousmatic sound, notes the “causal vagueness” that comes from overhearing, specifically referring to the case of the acousmatic sounds in Hippolytus that come from “behind the door”.


Cavell and others criticize Austin for his failure to recall the play correctly, as if Austin had forgotten that Hippolytus does not in the end renege.18 But what interests Austin is simply Hippolytus’s reference to hidden inner intent, or lack thereof, as a reason to exclude himself from the bond of his word. His words are a “classic expression,” Austin says, of the mistaken idea that performatives like promising must not only be said seriously, but that their “being serious consists in their being uttered as (merely) the outward and visible sign…of an inward and spiritual act” (Words, p. 9).19 On such an account, the words “I promise to” are simply a way to put “on record my spiritual assumption of a spiritual shackle,” Austin says (10). The real action, as it were, is in an inner commitment on which the words only report. But this would make the uttered words constative, not performative, Austin explains, because now the words are no longer an action, but rather “the outward utterance,” indeed, “a description, true or false, of the occurrence of the inward performance.”

Now, we do sometimes say that someone has sworn falsely, but in so saying we do not treat truth or falsity as a standard by which to judge an oath. If we say the person swore falsely, we are not claiming that we know what was in their heart. We only mark the distance between what was said and what was done. The word false has various uses; it is not, Austin says, “used of statements only.” The phrase “false move” shows that to be the case (11). We are, in any case, more often likely to say when someone violates an oath that they have broken or violated their oath, not that it was false. In the play, the solution will come from the gods, who are omniscient

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18 Austin, Cavell says, “overlooks the fairly blatant fact that on Hippolytus’ view of promising, the saying that our word is our bond proves a fatal curse” and an illustration not of an excuse but rather of the “knowledge that most causal utterances may be irretrievable” (PP p. 62)
19 Since his interest here is in the words -- as a “classic expression” -- and not in the character nor the plot of the play, it is puzzling that many commentators, including Cavell, Constable, and more, express surprise that Austin seems not to know that Hippolytus in the end kept his word. That seems obviously not a matter of concern for Austin in this context, with no bearing on Austin’s study, as far as I can see. That said, Cavell makes something else of the phrase that Austin can be claimed to have missed, and it is interesting: words uttered casually may be “irretrievable” and this itself can be a source of anguish.
and can reveal truths, both inner and outer. But in Austin, the Hippolytus problem is solved by way of ordinary language or grammatical reasoning which underscores the “plain saying” that, as Austin puts it, “our word is our bond.” The plainness neutralizes the “let-out” made possible by the metaphysical magics of intent.

But then Austin adds a separate consideration, a uniquely moral one. “It is gratifying to observe,” he says, that morality and grammaticality line up, as it were, on the same side of the ledger, both opposing an appeal to the inner against the outer, soul against the body, the heart against the lips. The very move to seriousness or sincerity, which courts the metaphysical and may initially appear moral, in fact profits no one more than the immoralist, Austin charges. At first, we may be fooled, he observes, by claims that promising is more than “‘uttering words!’” and that “‘It is an inward and spiritual act!’” Such claims make the one making them seem “a solid moralist standing out against a generation of superficial theorizers.” (Here one gets the sense Austin is responding to a Senior Common Room objection.) We may be shaken by this. “We see him [initially, recall] as he sees himself, surveying the invisible depths of ethical space.” Surely it is he who is profound and we who are shallow?20 But this is mistaken, for this would-be moralist “provides Hippolytus with a let-out, the bigamist with an excuse for his ‘I do’, and the welsher with a defence for his ‘I bet,’” Austin reasons triumphantly, neutralizing the “But I didn’t mean it” of self-exculpation.21 “Accuracy and morality alike are on the side of the plain

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20 One thinks here of Nietzsche who would have found no insult in being affiliated with the shallows of non-profundity.
21 Arendt’s critique of sincerity in politics in On Revolution arguably complements Austin’s claim that the move to sincerity provides a “let out” for immoral promisers who want to weaken their word, saying they promised but they didn’t mean it. So, too, in politics the demand for sincerity provides a “let-out” but in this instance it also licenses terror in politics. In an Arendtian frame, I would argue, absolution or forgiveness address the problem of insincerity. Notably, absolution and forgiveness are both performative speech acts and neither is the sort of “let out” rejected by Austin. Indeed, Arendt’s critique of motive and intention in the domain of politics (which is modelled on promising and forgiveness) resonates usefully with Austin’s similar position in the domain of promising, though for Austin promising is a moral act and for Arendt it is uniquely political.
saying that "our word is our bond," Austin concludes (italics original, p. 10). But the agreement of the grammatical and the moral is serendipitous: like the inner/outer division that the Hippolytus explores, nothing guarantees their meshing.

Austin enjoys entertaining rogues and misfits in the pages of his book, mocking them, as indeed he does here with a parenthetic comment that puts the true heart of the would-be moralist alongside the “mind or other backstage artiste.” But, beyond the mockery, readers of Chapter One will recognize the parallel here to queer theory’s rejection of the idea that some inner sexual truth anchors the outer’s gendered appearances or gender performances, which merely express it. Specifically rejected was the idea that sex/gender is a prior constative trait (eg like intention) that is then expressed, referentially, as it were, in language or speech acts (as in a kind of expressivism). For Judith Butler, such supposed sexual “referents” are not the anchors of gender performances that express them, but rather themselves the performative products of sex/gender acts or speech acts, repeated (un)ceremonially in time. Insistences to the contrary, Butler all but says, are being fooled by some “backstage artiste.” Exposing the workings and impacts of sex-gender performatives requires trading in Austin’s “backstage artiste” for today’s increasingly targeted drag artist on stage. Gendered grammars – a framework through which all subjectivation occurs -- create through compelled repetition and ritual a sexed interiority that is then experienced as cause; even though, as Nietzsche argued, the subject thus created is no more and no less than a grammatical fiction. Here we see, further, how sex/gender, when assumed to

\[22\] Butler presents sex/gender as a performative practice that produces the (misleading) experience of sex/gender as inner cause of outer sex/gender performance, when the correct understanding is the reverse. My own preference for the externalism of Wittgenstein, Austin, and Flathman (also to be found in Arendt, as I have argued), is on behalf of such a view. As I argue in Displacement (Cornell, 1993/2023), what is conventionally taken to be inner or natural sex/gender is a pile of performatives concretized into seemingly irresistible constation which is, however, available, if we are lucky or powerful or brave, for contestation, even on Arendtian grounds.

\[23\] As with Nietzsche, so too for Derrida, the grammatical subject is not only a fiction, it is an ontotheological fiction. The question is, can we enlist anagrammaticality (I borrow the term from Christina Sharpe, whose work I discuss in Chapter 6) to live with and against the grammars of the ordinary, performatively reinventing the words we live by?
be natural or essential, work in the same mystifying way as metaphysical mystifications that betray the ordinary, abstracting from the multiplicity and plurality of everyday life.

As we have seen, Austin’s critics accuse him of missing the point, since Hippolytus keeps his word in the end. To this, it is fair to respond that Austin passes no judgment on Hippolytus, but merely takes his words as the “classic expression” of a position taken by so-called moralists, of which Hippolytus is definitely one24 But to say, in Austin’s defense, that he is talking about an utterance, not a character, is to rely on a premise that Cavell disputes: the independence of utterance and character. More important, such corrections also miss a point upon which Cavell will nearly stumble. Hippolytus’s words are less an utterance than an outburst, an expression of anguish that shows he is on the brink of something. But what is it?

3. Intimations of the Will in the Hippolytus: Inner/Outer in Democratic Athens

[T]he time of the gods invades the stage and becomes manifest within the time of men.

Vernant p. 48

“we see Phaedra in a bad state, but no sign of the disease”

Chorus in Euripides’ Hippolytus (trans. Carson)

Citing Euripides, Austin puts performativity in the neighborhood of an emergent form of subjectivity in which inner or psychic disturbances (as we would now think of them) were attributed to outer forces like the gods, but also experienced, at the same time, as inner (as if the calls are coming from ‘inside the house!’ we would say, colloquially, now). This “intimation of

24 One reader even calls him “priggish.” Notably, in focusing on the expression, apart from the play, Austin participates in the citationality that Jacques Derrida charges Austin is unable to address within the terms of his theory. I have elsewhere discussed Derrida’s critical appreciation of Austin and will not revisit it here, though I suspect my new readings of Austin would not fit well with my early assessments.
willing,” as Jean-Pierre Vernant calls it, is explored throughout the *Hippolytus* and it is the experience of it that occasions Hippolytus’ outcry.25

In *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, Vernant argues that conflicts between inner and outer were caused by changes in practices of subjectivity and responsibility in democratic Athens in the 5th century. The still-new experience of political participation was having an effect: “through his participation in political life in which decisions were taken following open, positivist, and secular debate, each citizen began to be aware of himself as an agent responsible for the conduct of affairs, more or less master, more or less in a position to direct the uncertain course of events.” Of course, mastery had already been learned by these men in the household, but the claim here is that mastery took a new course by way of lived experiences of collective, political responsibility. “The individual, with his own particular character, emerged as subject to the law. The intention of the agent was recognized as a fundamental element in responsibility.” But the law was ahead of its subjects: “neither the individual nor his internal life had acquired enough consistency and autonomy to make the subject the center of the decision from which his actions were believed to emanate” (82) and yet he would be held responsible all the same.26

25 Austin reads it as the classic expression of the immoralist’s “let-out” but he might have asked if there was another way to theorize willing. Hannah Arendt might have theorized this experience as a fully interior one when she described willing as a split capacity, forever willing and nilling with no decision-making power and no way to halt its own (I now want to say “anxious” following Vernant’s mention of “anxious inquiry into the relationship between man and his own actions” [79], noted below) whirring/warring, except by eventually and simply relenting in the face of worldly events (LOM, vol. II). Here Arendt goes against the Cartesian legacy described by Vernant in strikingly performative terms: “For modern man, the category of the will presupposes that the person is oriented toward action and that this and practical accomplishments in their diverse forms are highly valued. But much more than this: In action the agent is recognized as preeminent; the human subject is assumed to be the origin and efficient cause of all the actions that stem from him. In his relations with others and with nature, the agent apprehends himself.as a kind of center of decision, holding a power that springs neither from the emotions nor from pure intelligence: It is a power sui generis... By committing himself by making a choice, by coming to a decision, whatever its context, an individual makes himself an agent, that is to say a responsible and autonomous subject who manifests himself in and through actions that are imputable to him” (“Intimations of the Will,” *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, 1972, 49-50). I return to Arendt below, and reserve for another occasion a fuller comparison of her history of the will in LOM II and Vernant’s in *Myth and Tragedy*

26 Vernant: “the mythical past and [legal-political] the present of the city-state” were conjoined, bringing “into question the position of man as an agent” alongside “an anxious inquiry into the relationship between man and his own actions” (79). Indeed, tragedy “bears witness to the relative inconsistency of the Greek category of the agent
What is important about tragedy in the 5th century is it charts not a transition between two kinds of subjectivity, but an opacity or impasse created by their rough overlap. The old ordinary of the ancient world’s god-driven heroes still has sway, but a new powerful alternative to it emerges during tragedy’s heyday. Tragedy explores and stages the result. The responsibilization of the individual is not depicted as progress. The tug of war between conflicting modes of subjectivation is depicted as painful.

Vernant finds in the plays of Euripides, the last of the tragedians, salient expression of the new distance between responsible men and their (ir)responsible gods. “In the plays of Euripides, the divine background is toned down or, at any rate, distanced from the vicissitudes of human life. Here in the last of the great tragic writers, the spotlight is in preference directed onto the individual characters of the protagonists and their mutual relationships.” But the point about Euripides seems to apply least of all to the Hippolytus, in which the two main protagonists never meet or talk to each other directly and the gods play direct, and key, roles. Might it perhaps be for this reason, too, and not just because of its symmetrical structure, that the Hippolytus has been called the most Sophoclean of Euripides’ works?27

The Hippolytus opens and closes with long speeches from Aphrodite and Artemis, respectively, and its denouement is attributed to Poseidon, so the gods do drive events. (Aphrodite, both most and least of all: she opens the play saying she has set everything in place – she might be speaking for Euripides -- and can now watch, with us, presumably, as events simply unfold.) More important, however, its two main protagonists experience internal torture, one as a result of a seemingly alien erotic passion that she hides lest it dishonor her, the other as a result

and its lack of internal organization” (83), which is to say, tragedy shows the newly formed idea of responsibility had yet fully to take shape, while also showing that it was already taking hold.

27 CITE the classicist who says it’s the symmetry and calls it “Sophoclean.”
of being bound by words uttered, and at a later moment regretted. The words are Hippolytus’ promise to the Nurse not to tell her mistress’s secret. When he finds out the secret is about Phaedra’s passion for him, though, he cries out, as we have seen, that his lips swore to but his heart did not. Most commentators on the play, and on Austin, see this utterance as a calculation of a possible unbinding. But, Harry Avery argues perceptively that Hippolytus’ “statement is meant to be a cry of anguish at the recognition of his dilemma” (21). The dilemma is that he must keep his word even though, had he known then what he knows now, he would not have sworn to secrecy. His anguish is at the ensuing mismatch of inner and outer, an especially profound pain for Hippolytus given his deep commitment to making himself a unified whole through oaths of chastity sworn to Artemis.

His anguish is caused by the new riven subjectivity that may land on Hippolytus here with particular force, but rains on all caught in the perfect storm of democratic innovations in 5th century Athenian law and politics documented by Vernant. Hippolytus here confronts the emergence of a new moralized inner self that is not necessarily compatible with the outer of a person.28 Again, as Avery puts it, “Stated simply,” the focus of the Hippolytus “is the contrast and conflict between inner truth and outer appearances” (24-5).29 About the play’s famous line, 612, the one Austin quotes, and which belongs to Hippolytus, Avery says, “The clash between inner truth and outward appearance is not limited to this line,” says Avery, “nor is it an isolated aspect of the play; rather it is a pervasive element in the whole fabric of the play [and]… has

28 Segal says in “Magic, signs and letters” that "My tongue has sworn, but unsworn is my mind" (612) “reflects, as Goldhill remarks, ‘a disjunction between a person’s words as external signs and his mind as the inward site of intention and desire’ (258f.),” which is another way to put it (p. 428).

29 Relevant context for the clash between inner and outer is this bit of context, from Segal: “Euripides composed the Hippolytus in a period of intense reexamination of the relations between language and truth. For some twenty or thirty years before the production of the play (in 428 B.C.), Sophists like Protagoras had been professionalizing the study of language, analyzing its grammar, vocabulary, and expressive resources in order to make it a useful tool for those engaged in public life (and rich enough to afford the fees they charged for their training)” (“Magic, Signs, and Letters,” op cit., p. 421).
particular significance for the characters of Hippolytus and Phaedra” (25). Not only Hippolytus, after all, but also Phaedra is caught in the grip of feelings that are both hers (in her body) and not hers (they feel alien to her respectable self), at the same time.

Vernant highlights “The development of subjective responsibility, the distinction made between an action carried out of one’s own volition and one performed despite oneself” in law, politics, and tragedy, which “had a profound effect upon the Greek concept of the agent and also altered the individual's relation to his own actions” (Vernant, Intimations of the Will, Myth and Tragedy 69). The Hippolytus traces the consequences by way of its protagonists’ journeys, following each one’s experience of the pain of division and each one’s ultimate arrival at an elusive integration. What remains to be explored in the Hippolytus, however, is the significance of Phaedra’s and Hippolytus’s divergent trajectories. Although Avery comments on both characters, he does not, in his otherwise excellent reading of the play, treat them symmetrically. He allows to Hippolytus a completed journey and denies resolution to Phaedra. I want to suggest, on the contrary, that we see the play anew, as a kind of parable of remarriage to self for each character as well as a tragedy of (re)marriage of each to the other, too. And I will argue, contra Avery, that Hippolytus begins as he began, in strife with his father, and not a tone with the world. Phaedra, however, again contra Avery, does achieve integration.

4. Split Subjects: The Anguish of Hippolytus is Phaedra’s Too

“Twofold is the sorrow”
Chorus, Hippolytus

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30 Hence, too, the many mentions of twoness, mapped as inner/outer, in the play. Toward the end, for example, Theseus wishes men had two voices, one that could be known to tell the truth, thus making all men reliable reporters on their inner states. And Hippolytus in response expresses an incredibly poignant wish, as he suffers late in the play, wishing he could be two, and step “out of himself so he could shed tears at what he is enduring” (Avery, 29).
In no other Greek tragedy do so many people change their minds about so many important matters. Knox, “The Hippolytus of Euripides,” 311-331: 312

For Charles Segal, the “Hippolytus is typical of Greek tragedy in its implicit claim to an integrated vision of the world order, embracing cosmic coherence and the emotional coherence of the individual.” The emotional coherence of the individual is elusive, however. Indeed, the play, as I read it, stages in extreme form the clash of inner/outer in both the intra- and inter-subjective fields. The human realm is depicted as both internally riven -- Phaedra, torn by the division of inner/outer -- and externally so: Hippolytus is so tightly bound to Artemis and to himself that he is deaf to other humans, incapable of meaningful engagement with them. It is as if both protagonists live in the isolating, anguished world of Cavell’s skepticism, with limited knowledge of self and other, blind to possibilities of connection. Connections that are made come courtesy of the divine agencies that have a necessary role to play in the resolutions to come. But if the protagonists’ integrations come by way of forces more cosmic than human, they are nonetheless parables for us, for in this play the protagonists triumph over what we might call skeptical doubt to become what/who they are. This is Cavell’s phrase, of course, as skepticism is his problematic, which indicates the debt of my reading of the Hippolytus to time spent with his work.

Cavell does not read the Hippolytus in any detail. The closest reading to what might be called a Cavellian one is given by Harry Avery who, as we just saw, centers questions of inner/outer conflicts, such as those detailed by Vernant in the historical context, but which could also be approached as markers of modern skepticism. In what follows, I depart from Avery on one key point. Avery will argue that the unjustly accused Hippolytus ends “fully integrated with himself and his world” (p.34) while suggesting that Phaedra does not. I want to push against this
gendered division. What if in Phaedra’s case, too, inner and outer are reconciled? In my reading of the play, I take Phaedra and Hippolytus to each respond to the splits in subjectivity that are the subject matter of tragedy (intra and inter-subjective, respectively) and I see both becoming who they are, Phaedra by rejecting the human, Hippolytus by embracing it. She embraces animality as her (Cavellian) “next self,” and he tolerates a vulnerability that will bring him the paternal recognition he (unknowingly?) craves.

The *Hippolytus* presents itself as the tragic story of passion, too-contained and too-uncontained, between a stepson and a stepmother in the absence of the city’s ruler, Theseus. The father/husband of the two, Theseus, has left Troezen, gone to Delphi to consult the oracle about his options to return to Athens after incurring blood guilt for killing his cousins, the sons of Pallas who rebelled against his rightful rule.31 While Theseus is away, his illegitimate son, Hippolytus, raised in Troezen and now for the first time proximate to his father’s new household, becomes aware that his stepmother, Theseus’s wife, Phaedra, is possessed by a decidedly not maternal passion for him. Hippolytus is concerned to protect his chaste purity to which he has sworn an oath, and to maintain his father’s favor, which is precarious, given Hippolytus’ illegitimacy. Phaedra is concerned to protect her reputation as member of a noble line, specifically to secure the royal futures of her three sons with Theseus. The Nurse moves between step-mother and -son, part telephone, part sieve, winning neither’s salvation in the end. (Morwood says “her belief that there is no problem that cannot be solved leads to disaster” [183].)

Overhearing a conversation between Hippolytus and the Nurse, the one in which he utters his fateful line, Phaedra fears he is about to break his vow and expose her, so she takes matters

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31 This is one proposed explanation, but Morwood says “We do not know why he visited the oracle.” This was “simply” how “the dramatist got him out of the way for the first half of the tragedy, as was necessary” (187).
into her own hands. Theseus returns in time to pass sentence on what remains for him to decide. He seems certain about the decision, siding with the now-dead Phaedra who has affixed to her wrists a written sworn statement that falsely accuses Hippolytus of sexual wrongdoing. Theseus is asked to take more time to consider the evidence with care, but he does not. Perhaps to compensate for his hurriedness, Theseus’s sentencing of Hippolytus is somehow indecisive: calling for his son’s death and/or exile, he leaves it to the gods to choose. Hippolytus will die but it is a slow death, which allows time for a father-son reconciliation that somehow preserves Phaedra’s reputation and aligns her sons with their father. Hippolytus’ death clears the line of legitimate succession and fulfils tragically his stated desire to see his “finish-line match [his] start” (line 119), by which he means to live a life so unified by fidelity to his sworn oath of chastity that it is undisturbed/undeterred by experience. This he manages to do, but there is surely tragic irony in the fact that the temporal mise en scene of the play is just one day.

Much of the attention in the late 20th century Classics literature to this play is informed by (neo-) Austinian and deconstructive accounts of performative utterances. This is a play in which sworn oaths definitely matter and words, often self-consciously uttered, have the power to commit, accuse, sentence, and forgive. Hippolytus swears an oath of celibacy, and also swears

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32 False accusation is both constatively false and a performative with effects that are independent of its truth or falsity. Notably this accusation stands out for being made in writing which, for Jacques Derrida, is particularly associated with “dissemination” and “iteration.” See Barbara Goff (The Noose of Words, 1990) on the relevance of the writtenness of Phaedra’s accusation in the context of the Derridian critique of logocentrism and presence. Melissa Mueller, usefully compares Phaedra’s stone-tabled “J’accuse” to the defixios of popular cursing in connection with legal trials in the period of Euripides’ writing. The latter postulate a dead body, since they were put into grave sites. No defixio without a corpse (Mueller, Melissa. “Phaedra’s Defixio: Scripting Sophrosune in Euripides’ Hippolytus.” Classical Antiquity, vol. 30, no. 1, 2011, pp. 148–77).

33 The sentence is for death or exile, leaving it to the gods to decide, recalling Creon’s decision in Sophocles’ Antigone to leave 3 days’ worth of food in the cave with Antigone so that her death, should it occur, would be on the gods’ hands, not his. Perhaps both are keen to avoid (more) blood-guilt.

34 His slow death mirrors hers. Phaedra might also be said to suffer a slow death, if we see her self-starvation as part of her mortal fate and not as a separate, prior effort to escape it.

35 For a longer list of performatives in the play, see Constable, op cit: 26. Gestures operate performatively too, as in lines 325-6: “clasping my hand…and your knees too,” which called by Morwood “a potent gesture, difficult to
to the Nurse to keep a secret which he then threatens to disclose; Phaedra requests the Chorus
swear its own silence (which it tragically does keep: “this is all we know” [804]), and her suicide
is accompanied by a tablet of writing on which she swears Hippolytus is guilty of wrongdoing;
Theseus will pass royal sentence on his son; and his dying son will forgive him. Theseus’
sentence is a perfect performative; its uptake is divinely secured. As Knox reports, Theseus has
“a power that is reserved for the gods alone – his wish…becomes fact” (319). Other
readers/viewers of the play find its tragedy in: the casual cruelty of omnipotent gods; Hippolytus’
rather high estimation of himself (a favorite of Artemis); Phaedra’s low self-estimation, being so
deply overtaken by seemingly foreign feelings (Aphrodite takes credit for it); the awareness of
all the characters and the Chorus that words have a noose-like quality that may be used to shape
the self into a work of (stoic) art but can also cause its downfall in a polis constituted by
gendered divisions of speech and silence.36

But, reading the play in connection with the bull-thread in Austin’s Words, something
else jumps out. It will be a bull that will bring Hippolytus to his tragic end. Since that bull rises
from the sea in response to Theseus’ request, it is assumed by commentators to be sent by
Poseidon, or perhaps to be Poseidon in animal guise. This makes sense, since Poseidon is
Theseus’ father, and Theseus has called on him directly to punish Hippolytus, his bastard son.37

36 In the play, words are shown to have the power to bind beyond any subject’s intention and notwithstanding any
contingency. Hence the title of Barbara Goff’s book on the play, quoting one of its lines: The Noose of Words. In
Cavellian terms, we might say that here words remove their utterers from experience rather than, as ordinary
language philosophy would have it, reattaching them to it. In the contemporary world of American politics, the knot
of words is one tied frequently by Trump, who routinely pins others to their utterances, while always loosening the
knot of words for himself. He alone is unbound, a motif of strongman performativity (Strongman, cite). On Trump’s
word-harvesting and lying, see Honig, Shell Shocked: Feminist Criticism After Trump, (Fordham, 2021).
37 The conventional reading sees the bull as Poseidon: “the bull is quintessentially Poseidon’s animal manifestation
and it is appropriate that the god should fulfil his pledge to Theseus in this way,” says Morwood, citing, however,
also “C. Collard (Euripides (Oxford, 1981), 11) who notes Euripides’ “unique precocious ability to project
personality and its workings in ways which anticipate modern psychoanalysis,” in order to suggest “Hippolytus is
being destroyed by the very forces he has so determinedly repressed,” which is to say, the bull symbolizes “rampant
But this bull who rises from the sea is not the only bull in the play. Phaedra is descended from a line of bulls and bull-adjacent gods and humans, which she mentions during her “Great Speech.”\(^\text{35}\) Focusing on these details, I want to suggest that Phaedra’s tortured experience of an inner/outer tension that she cannot abide is mapped (by her but also by Aphrodite) in the play onto her lineage, which is itself internally riven – she is part bull, part human – which becomes ever more undeniable and less tolerable after Aphrodite afflicts her with an unceasing passion for her step-son. Torn aside is Phaedra’s surface of conformity or respectability; the way is opened for her next self to appear. Phaedra will become who she is by narrating herself into authentic existence, in connection with her mother, just as Hippolytus will later become who he is by connecting with his father. The play, too, will become what it is. There are in fact two Hippolytus plays by Euripides, the earlier one is mostly lost, but it survives in the later one, which is more respectable, just as the bull line that precedes Phaedra survives in her respectable human form.

In the mythological version of her story, Phaedra’s mother, Pasiphaë was gripped by a forbidden passion for a bull (said to be inflicted on Pasiphaë by Poseidon), the white Cretan bull

male fertility” (Morwood 190-91). Mitchell, who focuses on mimetic desire in and around the play, also references the bull, appearing “after the collapse of the boundaries of the self” and representing the wrath, anger, sexuality, latent in all the characters, including Aphrodite, Phaedra, and Hippolytus (Mitchell, Robin N. "Miasma, Mimesis, and Scapegoating in Euripides' "Hippolytus")." Classical Antiquity, vol. 10, no. 1, 1991, 97-122
https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/miasma-mimesis-scapegoating-euripides-hippolytus/docview/1297910984/se-2

with whom Pasiphaë conceived the Minotaur which she later birthed (Morwood says, “the Minotaur, half man, half bull, was the result of her monstrous union” [183]), making the Minotaur and Phaedra half-siblings by virtue of a shared mother. Both belonged also to the same paternal house, the house of Minos, and Minos, Phaedra’s father, is himself the progeny of a bull union, that between Zeus and Europa in which Zeus appeared to her as a bull. When Phaedra is caught in the grip of an uncontrollable passion, it feels alien and Aphrodite’s claim to have inflicted it on her (to avenge Hippolytus’ neglect of the goddess, in favor of his devotion to Artemis), seems to confirm that sense. But forbidden passions that violate the proper lines of humanizing kinship are also the stock in trade of Phaedra’s line, which suggests it is not only the bastard Hippolytus who must wrestle with his origins in this Euripidean tragedy; this is Phaedra’s lot, too.

These themes of the play, the inescapable origins that we try to evade through false conformities, and the nearly undeniable need to become who we are, when set alongside the play’s many bull references, invite a reading of Phaedra’s passion as a kind of becoming-bull.39 This interpretative path has not been explored, though the bull details of Phaedra’s lineage are widely known, noted by Charles Segal, Melissa Mueller, Froma Zeitlin, Michael Paschalis, and many others. Phaedra’s becoming-bull would motivate the bull references in the play, and it would fit with Phaedra’s self-narration, which I want to think of, drawing on cinema scholar Karen Hollinger, as Phaedra’s “voice-over.”40 So why has this interpretative line not been

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40 What Karen Hollinger says about women’s voice overs in cinema, narrating themselves into or out of existence, in this case in the Love Story sub-genre of women’s films, might apply also to Phaedra’s Great Speech: “The use of female first person voice-over narration...accentuates the love story's difficulties in eliminating all the complicating aspects of woman's positioning as merely an object of male desire rather than a subject of her own desires. Thus, it
entertained? Two reasons stand out. It is not licensed explicitly by the play. And Phaedra’s shame, which is so central to the drama, is a uniquely woman’s experience, while the bull codes masculine. But as Brooke Holmes points out, Phaedra “appropriates” a masculine “language of power and honor for herself” and thus “inhabits the heroic masculine position on pleasure…” (Holmes, *Symptom and the Subject* p. 281; ital original). In other words, there could be here a kind of “gender trouble.”

Some signs in the text offer not explicit license but some support, nonetheless, for a reading of Phaedra as becoming-bull. They include the following: the chorus’s mention that “she hides her body in the house” (Carson translation 165), which suggests there is something about her body that will betray her (as if she were Jekyll hiding from Hyde). When the chorus reaches beyond the realm of appearances, seeking an inner sign behind the symptom, it will first ask, “Is it a god inside you girl? Deranged by Pan?” (178). Pan, the most famed of half-human half-animal creatures, and known for his randiness, lives the human/animal existence with which Phaedra arguably struggles and, with his bellied and behooved body, he exhibits it, too, as she does not -- yet. When the Nurse reports that Phaedra cannot bear to be inside the house:

“‘Outside!’ you said. ‘Take me outside!’ – but any minute you’ll rush back in” (211-212), she conjures the inner’s division that we now call ambivalence but also, to the contemporary reader, Austin’s bull, in and out of enclosure. And then there is Phaedra’s plaint: “How I long for a

calls into question its heroine’s inevitable progression toward a ‘proper’ female role” (p. 41). With reference to the film *Mildred Pierce*, Hollinger says: “The film's use of first person voice-over narration as a part of its attempt to deal with the issue of its female protagonist's role in patriarchal society…complicates what appears on the surface to be a simple trajectory toward resolution of conflict and unification of point of view” (Karen Hollinger, “Listening to The Female Voice in the Woman's Film,” *Film Criticism*, Spring, 1992, Vol. 16, No. 3, Spring, 1992: 34-52).

See, for example, Segal: “The bull monster that Theseus’ prayer calls forth from the sea places bestiality on the male side of the equation” (“Magic, Signs and Letters”, 433) but Phaedra has already placed herself there, too. In the world of Greek tragedy, Tiresias, Pentheus, and Dionysus are all non-binary figures. Victoria Wohl’s excellent work on Euripides highlights the gendered and Deleuzean aspects of Euripidean tragedy, but Wohl, who locates themes of becoming-animal and becoming-woman in the *Bacchae*, does not discuss the *Hippolytus*. 
dewcold spring and pure running water! To lie back beneath the black poplars, to sink deep in the long grass of a field!” (238-241). Is there a desire more bullish than “to sink deep in the long grass of a field”?  

More expressly, Phaedra herself turns to her bull lineage to account for her suffering. “Caught in the storm of a different fate” (352) than to be human queen to human sons who will inherit their father’s patrimony, Phaedra finally turns to confess the truth of her situation to the Nurse and she starts with this: “Oh, my poor mother, what a love you fell into!” The Nurse gets the point but may miss the message: “You mean her lust for the bull?” The question goes unanswered as Phaedra moves on to Ariadne: “O my sad sister! Wife of Dionysos,” thus naming as her brother-in-law the god also known for appearing as a bull. The Nurse then asks: “Why talk old family scandal?” Answer: because Phaedra is next in line. Hence her response: -- “And third—me” (374-378). She is in line to be the next Bull Queen. The family scandal is not old,

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42 Morwood persuasively reads this line as part of a triptych that parallels Hippolytus’ pastimes, noting Phaedra’s “desire to join Hippolytus’ outdoor life in the wood relaxing (208) [which I am calling bullish], hunting (215-22) and racing (228-31)” (Morwood, 182). But we could both be right. It is even arguable that her bull nature is above all what drives Phaedra’s passion for Hippolytus and his naturalism. Another argument in favor the Bull-Queen reading is provided by Hanna Roisman, who builds on the play’s use of the phrase “in the house” (in the Chorus’s speculations about Theseus’ possible infidelity) to recall the link between Theseus and the Minotaur. Roisman notes: “There is only one case where Theseus was involved with two women of the same house …He sought Ariadne’s help in overtaking the Minotaur” and only later married Phaedra, so this is not a case of infidelity, exactly, as Roisman concedes. Still, Roisman goes on, this is “an instance in Phaedra’s family where a spouse fell in love with someone else inside the house [italics added]. Pasiphaë, Phaedra’s mother, developed an unusual passion for a beautiful white bull that was in her husband Minos’s sties. Could the Chorus be maliciously alluding to the painful erotic history of Phaedra’s family?... This reading is supported by the mention of Crete [recalling the Cretan Bull] which follows immediately afterward” (Roisman, Nothing Is As It Seems: The Tragedy of the Implicit in Euripides’ Hippolytus, Rowman and Littlefield, 1999: 40). Nonetheless, drawing on ancient poetry of the field (warranted by Hippolytus, 73-81), Roisman argues for identifying Phaedra as a Bee Woman not a Bull Queen.

43 Similarly in Seneca’s Phaedra, as Paschalis points out, “in the course of her soliloquy (112-123) Phaedra identifies herself and her love for Hippolytus with Pasiphaë’s love for the Cretan bull, continues with references to Daedalus and the labyrinth, and concludes by relating again her love to Pasiphaë’s as well as to Ariadne’s” (Paschalis, “Minoan Thalassocracy: The Senecan Version,” pp. 141-146: 143).

44 One could also read Phaedra’s animalization as a trait of her royal sovereignty. On the “King’s Two Bodies” thesis’ implicit postulation of a third, animal, body, see my response to Eric Santner, The Weight of all Flesh, Tanner Lectures, 201x?. and Diego Rossello on the wolf-man.
nor over. "Where is this going?" asks the Nurse. And Phaedra replies: “to where our sorrows began long ago” (379-80). They will finish as they began; full circle, but different this time.

This reading both vindicates and is vindicated by Aphrodite’s confidence, noted by Froma Zeitlin “in the prologue (40-41) that the queen [Phaedra], as Pasiphaë’s daughter…will eventually become her ally as well as her victim.” Later on, when contemplating “that hardest of crossings” that is “beyond the end of life” (678-80), might Phaedra not be (contra Morwood) focused simply on death but also on the crossing from human to animal? If so, then what she experiences is the threat of inner to become outer: as her body shows its possession by bull desires, appearance and reality threaten to join into one. But not yet in a way she can tolerate.

In Avery’s framing of the play as depicting the clash between inner and outer, Phaedra tries to repress an inner passion that she keeps secret in order to maintain an outward appearance of propriety. “My hands are pure,” she says at 317, “my mind is polluted.” But her efforts boomerang on her when, wanting to preserve her good reputation (outer), she is driven to a secret act (inner) that is, Avery says, “evil and harmful” (false accusation). Before that final fateful act

45 Indeed, the scandal goes back even further: in some versions of the myth of Helios, he is Phaedra’s divine grandfather, known for his association with bulls/cattle which were known as the “Oxen of the Sun.” His marriage to the sea nymph Perse join together the symbol of the bull with that of the ocean — a connection also potentially cited in Euripides’ Hippolytus.

46 If Phaedra becomes-bull, then her passion may well be seen to be activated but not instigated by Aphrodite, the goddess, who claims credit for bringing down Hippolytus by way of the very human desires he in his sworn chasteness abjures. On this reading, Phaedra is used, yes, destroyed, yes, but also, arguably, fulfilled (tragically) by Aphrodite’s machination which presses Phaedra to confront what she is. Here, as elsewhere in Euripides, the gods do not inflict on their human playthings a truly alien emotion; they make things happen by intensifying what marks or makes a person who they are. See Tiresias’ line explaining this in Euripides’ Bacchae (with specific reference to Dionysus and his powers of mesmerism) and my discussion of it in A Feminist Theory of Refusal. Here, with Vernant, we can see this as part of the exploration of emergent responsibility in the 5th century. If divine affliction forces us to do things that are not entirely against our will, as it were, then the domain of complicity is murkier and a road to responsibility is opened.

47 Zeitlin, p. 54. The ellipses above exclude a parenthetic comment of Zeitlin’s, that universalizes Phaedra’s situation “(as perhaps any woman)” which preclude singularizing it, as I think I do here.

48 She also tries to externalize her inner torment without sharing her awful secret. Her not eating makes plain on her body that something is wrong inside. Through self-starvation, she creates a symptom for that which is unsayable, a sign on the surface that something is wrong inside. But her body, now emaciated, already tells part of the truth of the inner.
of false accusation, though, and after her secret is fully out, she says to the Chorus that she knows that people who know what is right do not always do right. This shows her awareness of a distance between “inner consciousness and outer behavior,” Avery says, citing lines 403-4, where she herself sees the conflict as between inner and outer. She has just described her efforts to defeat the inner: first silence, then sophrosyne, now that which is left: death. Avery sees here an “inability to stay with one course,” and he accuses Phaedra of a “vacillation” that “is her basic weakness.” (Avery, p. 30, see also p. 432 n.27). But I see her, rather, as coming to understand that, having tried a variety of ways to avoid or secrete the bull in her, she must cede to it as her next self. Perhaps death will put inner and outer into alignment by way of the transmogrification she fought so hard to resist in life.49

According to Avery, Hippolytus and Phaedra both founder “on the often terrifying distance between internal truth and outward appearance.” Avery grants only to Artemis the power “to narrow the gap between internal truth and outward appearance and even to make them one” (Avery, p. 32). But it is Aphrodite who set in motion the events that will release Phaedra from the demands of patriarchal respectability (events so perfectly planned that Aphrodite will not be needed for further intervention). It is Aphrodite who releases the inner passion that will confront Phaedra with her bull nature onto, thus forcing her off her false or merely conventional path.

For her part, Artemis offers the knowledge of the inner that will force Hippolytus and Theseus off their conventional trajectories. Artemis makes possible the final scene of reconciliation that Avery reads as follows: “inner truth and outer appearance have melted

49 I note other parallels with King Lear below, but would note here the parallel of these three steps that Avery calls “vacillation” with those listed by Bronfen in her essay on Shakespeare’s play in Cavell and Television: Bronfen notes the opening scene in Lear shows 3 mutually entangled motivations at work: the attempt to avoid recognition, the experience of the shame of exposure, and the threat of self-revelation. All three apply to Phaedra.
together to become identical” and “father and son are fully revealed to each other” (33), and to
themselves: on this reading, we may see Hippolytus’ avowal of his illegitimacy as seeming
acceptance of its implications for the first time, upon which Theseus will declare Hippolytus
“noble” when Hippolytus grants him forgiveness. It is Artemis’ truth-telling about Hippolytus
that enables Theseus, the tragically blind sovereign, to acknowledge his son and Hippolytus to
forgive his father (actually, Artemis has to tell him to do so) and accept his own truth, which is
that even with his oath taking and discipline, he too is riven -- “a bastard,” as the Nurse observed

When Artemis explains Hippolytus to his father, “she quickly tears the veil of appearance
aside to reveal the basic truth to Theseus,” Avery says (p.33), before Hippolytus is brought in.
But she also makes clear that the things she shares were actually knowable by Theseus.50 The
asymmetries of inner and outer do not make the truth entirely elusive. Theseus passed sentence
too quickly, too confident in his reading of what turns out to have been an opaque situation. He
needed only to give things time to make themselves known in the realm of appearances. Avery
does not note it but this seems to offer a kind of reassurance, suggesting that inner and outer are
not incompatible, as such; just asynchronous sometimes and not beyond the reach of human
senses. Indeed, Artemis seems to be the goddess of their division’s collapse. Here it is worth
noting a detail: When Hippolytus is finally brought in, he cannot see Artemis, who is a goddess.
But he can hear her words and smell her aroma: “Breath of fragrance divine!” (1370). Hearing

50 This is important because if they are not knowable by humans then the skeptical problematic is just repeated and
deus ex machinas like Artemis can only enhance, they do not overcome, the skeptical situation that appears in such
high relief in the context of new developments in Athenian law and politics in the 5th century. If there is no inner
self, or an inner self that only the gods know, and we have no access to the gods to inform us of the truth, then how
can we settle our conflicts? The answer is that where we once judged only actions, without recourse to intention, or
looked to the gods for signs of hidden motivations, we now turn instead to procedures and collectivities that test the
truth: in conversation, in courts, in culture, and in public.
and smelling are two of the three senses that take the outside in, obviating the seeming clash between inner and outer.\textsuperscript{51}

In the end (let this be a further nod to Cavell), we might even read Euripides’ play as a kind of tragedy of (re)marriage.\textsuperscript{52} Douglas Cairns notes that Phaedra’s “passion for Hippolytus remains unconsummated; but it also leads to the monstrous birth of a bull from the sea (1205–17)” (Cairns p. 10). We can pursue this intimation further still. What if the bull sent by Poseidon to kill Hippolytus in response to Theseus’ curse, \textit{is} Phaedra? If Phaedra postmortem becomes the bull of Hippolytus’ near-demise, this would mean the ensuing destruction of Hippolytus is a kind of tragic marriage to death, and an eternal rebuke of Hippolytus’ sworn oath of chastity.\textsuperscript{53} On this reading, Hippolytus’ lingering alive after being smashed on the beach not only buys time for reconciling with his father; it also delays the post mortem conjugality he would, in his much-sworn chasteness, want to forestall. Indeed, some of his final words, as he is dying, about how he “excelled all men in chastity,” in effect reiterate his oath. When he swears, yet again, that he has kept his chasteness with a steadfastness matched by no human, is he boasting about the world he leaves behind or girding his loins, as it were, for the afterlife he is about to enter?\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{51} They are also the 2 senses relied on most by prey looking to evade predators, suiting Artemis as goddess of the hunt.

\textsuperscript{52} On the tragic convention of “marriage to death” see Rush Rehm, discussed also in \textit{Antigone, Interrupted}, though here I am considering all marriage as marriage to death.

\textsuperscript{53} In support of a tragedy of remarriage reading, We might note the Nurse saying she needs “some token (sign) from the one who is desired [Hippolytus], either a lock of hair or something from his garments, and thus to join from two a single joy.” As is typical in Greek tragedy, the joining may occur but not as expected.

\textsuperscript{54} This conjugal possibility is further supported by the association of Phaedra with the sea, as one commentator notes, remarking also that of Hippolytus with land, suggesting a coupling of the two Cite article on land and sea. See also Benedick, scene iii, \textit{Much Ado About Nothing}: “men were deceivers ever, One foot in sea, and one on shore, To one thing constant never.” Does Hippolyus’ constancy puts the lie to this claim? Notably “sea” and “shore” are the mis en scene of his demise. Recall that it was Poseidon, god of the sea and Theseus’ father, who caused Phaedra’s mother, Pasiphaë, to fall in love with the Cretan bull. So, the somewhat unlikely association of bull with sea (and with sea change) is established by the myths. The sea also symbolized desire, as in Paschalis’ reading of Seneca’s \textit{Phaedra}, finding in this reception of the 1Hippolytus elements core to Euripides’ play too: “the traditional ‘threat from the sea’ for Hippolytus is to be linked closely with Phaedra’s wave-like erotic furore also threatening to engulf the youth. Minoan thalassocracy is Phaedra’s heredity and is thus ultimately related to the destruction of Hippolytus’ life.” Paschalis argues, stopping just short of a Phaedra who herself becomes-bull. Paschalis, here tracing via Seneca a different “pull backward” than the one traced by Reckford in Euripides, also finds a bull-thread in Seneca by way
For Avery, when Hippolytus, at the end, asks for his face to be covered, he is “now fully integrated with himself and his world” (34). I will suggest in the next section a different reading of the scene. Here I note simply that Avery does not offer the same resolution to Phaedra. But Euripides might. We might consider reading her as becoming-bull in the context of both of the playwright’s Hippolytus plays. Recall there are two Hippolytus plays by Euripides; the first one, called *Hippolytus Unveiled*, is mostly lost but known to us from a surviving fragment and from references to the play by Aristophanes, Seneca, and other ancient sources; the other, called *Hippolytus*, is the one we know. The latter is a rewrite made necessary by public disapproval of Euripides’ prior effort, in which an unapologetically lustful Phaedra was shamelessly filled with erotic longing for her stepson, Hippolytus. In the first play, without the pressures of conformism, inner (desire) and outer (behavior) are aligned. In the second version of the play, a more respectable Phaedra is tortured by her desire and passes rather severe judgment on women (like her former self) who cannot control themselves and freely indulge in infidelity. The later play cannot overcome the prior one, since public memory of the first Phaedra’s shockingly unapologetic lust would have been reignited by the second Phaedra’s moralistic criticism of loose women like her predecessor. In effect Phaedra here voices the audience’s own earlier

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of Phaedra's final monologue, in which “Neptune is addressed as dominator freti exactly as in Phaedra's opening monologue Crete was called for the first and last time dominatrix freti. The only other occurrence of dominator in the play is applied to the monstrum sent by Neptune to destroy Hippolytus and is used to portray his likeness to a bull…(1039). This third application of dominator to the bull conspicuously links Crete with Neptune as well as love and death: Phaedra's love for 'bulllike' Hippolytus and Hippolytus' death by the bull” (Paschalis, “Minoan Thalassocracy: The Senecan Version,” CITE 141-146: 145. The pull backward is also evident in resonances between Seneca’s play, Paschalis says elsewhere, and the rape of Europa, noting “the death of Hippolytus in *Phaedra*” where a “divine bull … ravishes a virgin and then departs by way of the sea (“The Bull and the Horse: Animal Theme and Imagery in Seneca’s *Phaedra*.” The American Journal of Philology, vol. 115, no. 1, 1994, pp. 105–28. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/295352 108).

55 “The Hippolytus of Euripides may be unique in the history of the Greek tragic theater as an example of a second treatment by the same poet of a myth he had earlier represented on stage…. The new Phaedra is now the opposite, we might say, of her former self (Froma I. Zeitlin, “The Power of Aphrodite: Eros and the Boundaries of the Self in the Hippolytus,” Directions in Euripidean Criticism: A Collection of Essays, ed. Peter Burian, Duke, 1985. On the first Hippolytus play and its Victorian reception, see Daniel Orrells’ essay, in *Queer Euripides*, eds. Sarah Olsen and Mario Telò, Bloomsbury, 2022).
judgment of the first Phaedra in *Hippolytus Unveiled*.56 Such ventriloquism insulates the new *Hippolytus* from the same criticism. But even more important than Euripides’ defensive tactics is this: the *Hippolytus stages* (extradiegetically) the impossibility of overcoming one’s inescapable priors or origins (with reference to its predecessor play, its characters and their prior reception) while also thematizing and dramatizing that very problem in the lives of its protagonists: a bastard son with free-born ways, and a foreign, not fully human, wife who lives as a queen but with bullish desires.

Both Phaedra and Hippolytus are challenged to integrate their current selves with the truth of their prior ones. Indeed, Euripides’ Phaedra 2 recalls not only Phaedra 1 (as Kenneth Reckford calls them), but also thereby a Phaedra -1, as it were: Phaedra’s mother Pasiphaë. These intergenerational aspects (dramatic, genetic, mythic) of Phaedra’s struggle in the *Hippolytus* (and later in the *Phaedras* of Seneca, Racine, Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, and more) illustrate what Reckford refers to as the story’s “pull backward,” and links further to a third (lost) play by Euripides, the *Cretans*, which told the story of Pasiphaë’s affair with the bull.57

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56 Reckford suggests Phaedra’s condemnation of other women suggests she holds “an inward fascination with becoming the kind of woman she is denouncing” (Reckford 314), but she was so already, in *Hippolytus Unveiled*. Perhaps the fascination is with an unbecoming. Mueller (Cambridge Companion to Euripides) also notes the reverberations from *Hippolytus Unveiled to Hippolytus*. Zeitlin says that the new Phaedra “reserves her personal hatred …for the type of disgraceful wife the earlier Phaedra had exemplified, as if she were responding directly to and identifying with the audience’s reaction to the previous play” (53).

57 Edith Hall mentions Euripides’ *Cretan* in her introduction to *Euripides: Medea, Hippolytus, Electra, Helen* (OUP 1997 (ix). The bull links between mother and daughter are explored in Reckford, Kenneth J. "Phaedra and Pasiphae: The Pull Backward." *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-) 104 (1974): 307-328: 309. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2936095. Anne Carson has Phaedra say “I hate those women who talk self-control but get all hot inside” and then describe, by disavowing, precisely the behavior of her mother, Pasiphaë: “Aphrodite! How can such a wife look in her husband’s face without fear”? This is precisely what Pasiphaë did, though, refusing to be shamed for her excesses. She claimed her passion for the bull was her husband’s fault, punishment for his failing to sacrifice a bull he owed to Poseidon, triggering divine retaliation. Reckford unpacks Pasiphaë’s confession to Minos, noting that while she regrets the coupling with the bull, she “is simply not interested in feeling guilty,” thus challenging readers to confront “the paradox of ordinary moral assumptions in an amoral, irresponsible cosmos” (320-21). When Phaedra goes on here to say she wants only to secure her good reputation and her children’s future, “I must not shame my husband or my children,” as if such shame would attach to her actions only and not always already to her line, she is expressing a tragic wish (lines 460-470) (Euripides, Carson trans., *Grief Lessons, Four Plays*, p. 194). It is noteworthy that this play, about two types of women, is bookended by two goddesses, Aphrodite and Artemis, each a statue at either ends of the play and a temple, as Zeitlin points out. The
I am suggesting that the third Phaedra of Euripides’ *Hippolytus* -- descended not only from her own same-named lustful self in *Hippolytus Veiled*, but also from the licentious, bull-loving Pasiphaë -- is overtaken by her past become present until she finally becomes-bull. She thus fulfils the fantastic fears of Hippolytus who warns against allowing any women into a household and, if that cannot be avoided, at least “we should make animals with bites but no speech live with them so that they can neither talk to anyone nor get a response from others” (645). The bull-bitten Phaedra is the woman of Hippolytus’ dreams. But also of his nightmares, since, on this reading, her refusal to stay hidden in the house shows that what she really craves is to be known and accepted as the Bull Queen she is. Theseus might have been able to grant this gift, since his own father Poseidon sometimes appeared in bull form, but he is away. And Hippolytus, who takes his place, acting as father-figure to the sons of Phaedra in their father’s absence, is too wrapped up in his orphaned self to extend himself to Phaedra.

Hippolytus may manage to survive the disaster on the shore for a while by loosening the taut reins of his crashing chariot, but he cannot loosen the ties that bind him to Phaedra. He and

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58 And a typically Euripidean character if we follow Aristotle on this point: as Vernant says, “It is well known that, in his moral philosophy, Aristotle is concerned to refute doctrines according to which the wicked man does not act fully of his own volition but commits his misdeed despite himself. This seems to him, in some respects to be the "tragic" concept, represented in particular, in Aristotle's view, by Euripides whose characters sometimes openly declare that they are not guilty of their crimes since, they claim, they acted despite themselves, under constraint, bia, dominated, violently compelled by the force of passions all the more irresistible in that they are incarnations within the heroes themselves of divine powers, such as Eros or Aphrodite” (Intimations of the Will, p. 55).

59 A point made also by Cavell, as we shall see below: Phaedra, he too argues, craves “intelligibility” or “expressivity.” (PP 62).

60 Both Hippolytus and Phaedra are linked by Michael R. Halleran to marriage – not to each other – but to a marriage that spells death: “Weddings are often yoked to violence and death in Greek poetry,” he observes, and the chorus, he says, describes “Phaedra's wedding … as leading to her death (and her suicide takes place in her bridal chamber, 769-70).” Moreover, “the chorus' final lamentation before Hippolytus' actual death picks up on the play's concern with weddings and marriage by emphasizing his unmarried status. The more common topos of the lamentation of a young woman's death in terms of her unmarried status is transformed and applied to Hippolytus as he goes off to exile and, it turns out, death” (Halleran, “Gamos and Destruction in Euripides’ Hippolytus,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 1991, Vol. 121, 109-121: 119-120).
Phaedra are forever bound in the (re)marriage rites of the maidens that Artemis promises will be celebrated in their names, together, every year, year after year. Here, (re)marriage represents, as always in Cavell, the triumph of experience over hope, and of fate over futurity.

5. Passionate Utterance: Cavell Supplements Austin

No use trying to fit the roofbeams of your house dead straight
Nurse to Phaedra

[T]he tragic message, when understood, is precisely that there are zones of opacity and incommunicability in the words that men exchange
Vernant (43).

I have here developed a reading of the *Hippolytus* in part because of Cavell. He makes much of Austin’s quoted line from the *Hippolytus*, faulting Jacques Derrida for missing it in his deconstructive reading of Austin, especially since the line appears “uniquely there in Greek, as if calling attention to itself,” Cavell says (Philosophical Passages, 1995, 52-53). Cavell will attend to the line in detail, but not so much to the play, whose plot points he summarizes inaccurately in *A Pitch of Philosophy.*61 He does wonder aloud, though, how it could be that “deliberately superficial, witty, mocking Austin would be inscribing the relation of his work on performative utterances to the realm of the tragic.”62 But, since the line uttered by Hippolytus is also quoted by

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61 He claims Thesues dies at the end, and refers to the 3 deaths in the play, which is inaccurate.
62 Cavell, *Philosophical Passages*, p. 53. Austin was familiar enough with ancient Greek and ancient Greek theater that he would have likely known that this one line from the *Hippolytus* appears in both tragic and comic contexts, suggesting he may have perhaps been drawn to a doubling Cavell does not in this context consider. But he does write about this in at least 3 places, which causes some confusion to those who want to sort it all out. Cavell does note the line appears as well in Plato’s *Symposium* and he moves from there to suggest Austin was, with the quote, twinning, as it were, philosophy and theatre. But the other pairing, the pairing of comic and tragic via Aristophanes and Euripides is not thematized by Cavell (though he notes the quotation) and this may trouble Cavell’s effort to establish passionate utterance as iconically Austinian. In *A Pitch of Philosophy* (1994), p. 113. Cavell says: “Austin’s understanding of philosophy’s self-entanglement, or self-mantling, as being bamboozled does not justify his incuriousness about, for example, his invoking of Euripidean tragedy.” Cavell seems here to be referring to Austin, calling him incurious about his own invocation, which is not an implausible sort of charge but it is a bit odd. More plausibly, Cavell could be referring to Derrida, who, as I noted above, is charged by Cavell in *Philosophical Passages* (1995) with having wrongly ignored the quotation in Greek.
Aristophanes in a comedy, and by Plato in the *Symposium*, and by other ancient writers, the inscription, if it is that, is at least, in Vernant’s term, “ambiguous” (*Myth and Tragedy II*) and even multitudinous: the line belongs to tragedy, comedy, and philosophy.\(^63\)

The encounter with the *Hippolytus* is one impetus for Cavell’s proposal to amend Austin in order to respond to “the catastrophe in [Austin’s] theory” (PDT 172), which is Austin supposedly failing to deliver fully on the promise of perlocutionary force, which Cavell then calls perlocutionary utterance, and to which Cavell proposes we should add a subsidiary or transforming speech act called “passionate utterance.”\(^64\) Passionate utterance, Cavell’s supplement to Austin, makes explicit a kind of self-revelatory speech that calls to the other in relationality, which Cavell says J.L. Austin surely valued, but neglected to theorize.\(^65\) In my view, Austin does not neglect passion since it appears in *Words* by way of the bull and by way of the *Hippolytus*’s Phaedra become-bull. This means that when Cavell, by way of “passionate utterance,” counterposes “desire” to “law,” Marianne Constable is right to correct him, noting that law is – whatever else it is – a carrier of desire too (34).

Cavell locates passionate utterance in several dramatic and operatic sources but I turn here to his reading of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* since, as noted, Cavell did not develop a proper

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\(^63\) For the several citations in the period, see Harry C. Avery, “My Tongue Swore, but My Mind is Unsworn,” TAPA, 1968, vol 99, 19-35. In *A Pitch of Philosophy*, p. 124 and in *Philosophical Passages* too, Cavell notes the citation by Aristophanes in *The Frogs*, but invests in a different recirculation of the line, that by Plato in the *Symposium*. Still, working with the *Symposium*, he notes the conclusion’s opening “question of the relation of writing tragedy to writing comedy,” and, deferring to Austin’s expertise in matters ancient Greek, Cavell says he does “not avoid the conclusion that Austin’s reinscription of a legendary line from a tragic and comic classic source calls attention to the comedy, often quite delirious, of Austin’s own prose,” a mark of his signature, Cavell goes on to say (125) as if to defend Austin from implication in the Derridian citationality to which the multiple appearances of this one line lead and to which Cavell throughout objects, embracing the “signature” of sincerity.\(^64\) Stephen Mulhall claims it is unclear whether this is a friendly amendment or a wholesale, even parricidal, revision. Marianne Constable calls it a “friendly amendment-cum-radical critique of Austin” (Mulhall, “Suffering a Sea Change” in *Reading Cavell*. Constable, *Our Word is Our Bond*, p.35)

\(^65\) Cavell thus turns what I admire as Austin’s studied externalism into a flaw. See Norris, *Becoming Who We Are: Politics and Practical Philosophy in the Work of Stanley Cavell* (OUP 2017), Chapter One, for a detailed account of Cavell’s departure from and critique of Austin, which Norris locates in Cavell’s view that Austin lacked a moral attachment to the ordinary and was inattentive to therapies of its recovery.
reading of the *Hippolytus*, and *Lear* tells a similar story. *Lear* even includes a bastard son seeking his father’s recognition over his legitimate rival. The lesson of that play, Cavell says, or the problem it dramatizes, is that skepticism, our supposed incapacity to know each other and to be known by ourselves and others, is an alibi for our refusal to risk it. This Cavell calls an “avoidance of love” which is presented in extremis by the illegitimate or dubious father/offspring relations featured so frequently in Shakespeare’s tragedies. With no prods in *Lear* from Aphrodite and no revelations from Artemis, we are on our own to do the work of acknowledgment. The task, Cavell says, is to return to the ordinary that was betrayed by skepticism (though it is irrecoverable, as such) and to replace skeptical doubt with love.

In *Lear*, as in the *Hippolytus*, a King hides his face from his beloved offspring, comes to believe a treasonous falsehood about her, then pronounces, without due deliberation, sentences of exile and death that he will later rue. If he cuts short the time of deliberation, it is in order to himself avoid the vulnerability that is the experience of being truly seen by others. This is Cavell’s “avoidance of love” and it is party to the crime of skepticism, which worries about the problem of other minds without seeing that the problem houses its own (non-cognitive) solution. Theseus nearly shows it to us when he says to his dying, bastard son, Hippolytus: “Beloved, how noble you are, revealed to your father” (1452), rejecting the social niceties that once left Hippolytus out of the family circle.66 That said, Theseus himself is likely only able reconcile

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66 Compare the similar scene in *Lear*: Edmund the bastard says to Edgar his legitimate brother:

“Well, then, Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.
Our father’s love is to the bastard Edmund
As to the legitimate: fine word, “legitimate”!
Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed
And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
Shall top th’ legitimate. I grow, I prosper:
Now, gods, stand up for bastards!”

And in the second scene, in one of his soliloquies, Edmund says, as Hippolytus might have: “Thou, Nature, art my goddess.” If Edmund plans to avenge his birth, the same might be said of Hippolytus who is said to have undertaken
with Hippolytus because Artemis, a goddess, has told him that Hippolytus is innocent. Her divine assurance removes all doubt. Inner and outer are once again aligned and trust, divinely underwritten, is restored. Maybe.

For Cavell, by contrast, skepticism exists in the stubbornly human realm. The problem of other minds must itself become the solution of other minds, a human acknowledgment of the other, “not as a player in a drama of one’s own making,” as Elisabeth Bronfen puts Cavell’s point (thus describing also the gods’ relationships to humans in tragedy), but as a separate person with their own desire to be seen, acknowledged, known.67 No divine revelations rescue us from this and neither can performativity’s protocols. In this, we are all like Phaedra, for what she really craves, Cavell suggests in passing, is intelligibility: “Phaedra’s inability to keep her passion to herself in the first place,” he says (alluding to the fact that she shares her secret), “may suggest calling this play a tragedy of expressiveness, or of the desire for intelligibility (further links of tragedies with moral necessities)” (Philosophical Passages, 1995, 62). Cavell thus subtly affiliates Phaedra with his film genre, the Hollywood melodrama of the unknown woman (Contesting Tears, 1996), and he plants the seeds of what he will later call “passionate utterance,” a kind of speech act that puts a “relationship, as part of my sense of my identity, or of my existence more radically at stake” (PDAT, 2005, 184).

“Passionate utterance” puts relationality first. But does it not also court the metaphysical in joining an inside (passion) to an outside (relationship or appearance)? We could read Hippolytus’ outcry as a passionate utterance (which it is, in effect, on Avery’s “anguish”

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67 Bronfen essay in Cavell and Television (on iPad, no p. #s). Plurality is a name for the separateness of persons postulated by Arendtian action, which consists of promising and forgiving, two speech acts that, as Arendt points out, cannot be directed at oneself but only at another THC, 237; see also 238: “The moral code…inferred from the faculties of forgiving and of making promise, rests on experiences which no one could ever have with himself, which, on the contrary, are entirely based on the presences of others.”
reading), which makes moot any discussion of rivenness in his self or of his intent (centered in Austin’s reading). The anguish is a part of himself that his passionate utterance allows to show, momentarily. This means that when Hippolytus ends up keeping his promise after all, he is not just honorable (for keeping his word), he is also thereby guarding himself. Unwilling to act on or event to repeat his uttered anguish, he does not show anguish again until he faces his mortal end. He is reluctant to give himself away. That common English expression, “to gives oneself away,” puns beautifully to illustrate the Cavellian idea that, in showing oneself, one also offers oneself to another and risks non-existence. This is precisely what Hippolytus refuses to do when he keeps his oath: in so doing, he relinquishes what is in fact a passionate utterance that gives him away, which means the oath that he so famously keeps is also a going-back on his vulnerability. (Hence surely, today’s Oath Keepers are arguably his descendant defenders of masculinity through oath.) It is from this vulnerability that Hippolytus flees when he keeps his oath, trading in passionate for performative utterance, and in so doing he shows his parallels to Phaedra who also tries to flee her vulnerability before (on my reading) yielding to it. Where classics scholars contrast these two protagonists in terms of their confinement to silence or access to speech, respectively, on this reading we see them both as struggling, Lear-like, with wanting to show themselves and to be loved for their ugly truths.

Because passionate utterance, on Cavell’s account, involves a quest for love, it differs not only from the studied externalism of Austin but also from Hannah Arendt’s account of political action as performative self-disclosure. In the latter case, this may be a difference between ethics and politics, a distinction whose seriousness Cavell tried not to grant but on which Arendt insists. There is much more to be said about their commonalities or overlaps. For now, I note simply that Arendt talks about love in searing prose that might have moved Cavell or someone with his
sensibility: love, “one of the rarest occurrences in human lives...possesses an unequaled power of self-revelation and an unequaled clarity of vision for the disclosure of who” a person is, “precisely because [love] is unconcerned to the point of total unworldliness with what the loved person may be” (ie with his “qualities and shortcomings [and] achievements, failings and transgressions”). Entirely distinct from what we are, who we are is disclosed by action in the public realm and also (less noticed by Arendt scholars) by way of love for another. Thus love is both a product of the in-between and, potentially, its solvent, for “love, by reason of its passion, destroys the in-between which relates us to and separates us from others” (THC 242). This is why love, for Arendt, has no place in politics. This may be why Austin neglected passion. It may also be why Cavell turned to it…

6. Fatal Forgiving: Performativity With/Without Sovereignty

Because the actor always moves among and in relation to other acting beings, he is never merely a ‘doer’ but always and at the same time a sufferer. To do and to suffer are like opposite sides of the same coin

Arendt, THC 190

Political action in Arendt takes place in “the in-between.” Performative speech acts of promising and forgiveness in the domain of Action create, by way of word and deed, “new relations and realities” (THC). This is the great promise of Austinian and Arendtian performativity with which this chapter began. But Arendt takes us further than Austin did. As if anticipating later criticisms of Austin’s performatives for being sovereigntist installers of a sovereign I, Arendt theorizes political action as non-sovereign. Promising and forgiveness do not install a sovereign I, they can only take hold in contexts of non-sovereign plurality and
mutuality. They help us manage our non-sovereignty by introducing some predictability and slack into the flux and irreversibility of human affairs. But they must be entered into or accepted by others.

Austin does not discuss forgiveness as a performative but “I forgive you” is certainly a speech act, a performative utterance whose words have the power to repair a breach, if they land with the right force and are taken up by others. That said, and in spite of Arendt’s characterization of Action as word and deed, Arendt theorizes forgiveness not only as a performative speech act but also as a process, one of “constant mutual release.” Casting forgiveness as also a process arguably insulates forgiveness from the risk of sovereignty inherent in “I forgive you.” I forgive you is, for Arendt, a non-sovereign speech act, but the “I” of “I forgive you” may slide into sovereignty if no counter forces are provided. Arendt’s characterization of forgiveness as (also) a process sets it as a kind of background condition that has nothing to do with willing or intention. Sovereignty is not a trait of process. By pairing speech action and process in her account of forgiveness, Arendt also releases the speech act of forgiveness from the grip of morality, which is one of her aims, paralleling Austin’s effort to do the same for all performatives.

As process, forgiveness is a kind of forgivingness, an inclination to shrug off trespasses and a disinclination to avenge slights (think: “no problem” as an example, similar to what Nietzsche lionized as the lordly dismissal of indifference). It does not bind us to intentionality

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68 Thus, although it may technically true that Arendt, as Michael Lambeck says, “writes without the benefit of speech act theory” (though it was in the air, as it were, at the time), this does not mean we may not see her as a contributor to speech act theory. See Lambeck “Toward an Ethics of the Act” Fordham University Press, 2010.
69 Arendt characterizes the domain of Labor as one of process and necessity, too. While some think this is a demeaning attitude to Labor, that sense is contradicted, surely, by the analogous analysis of Action. I argue in Public Things (Fordham, 2017) that Labor and Action, in The Human Condition, mirror each other with their process-like qualities and that Work, with its finitude, is their hinge.
and it dispenses with moral and legal responsibility. No “I forgive you” is needed in a context of forgivingness. The fatality of forgiving, its likely slide into buttressing a sovereign subjectivity, is met by realigning it with natality, by way of this melding of speech act and process. ??

Similarly in the *Hippolytus*, forgiveness is a motley mix of seemingly sovereign and non-sovereign elements. As we have seen, it is made possible by Artemis’ divine intervention, but it also is something like mutual release. The combination makes sense in a context in which people are both responsible and not responsible for their actions, given the still only intimated will. We see the confusion of responsibilization as Artemis moves to bring the drama to a close. The goddess lists the wrongs of Theseus. They are his failures as a ruler, marks of blindness in his judgment. Theseus could not see the truth of Hippolytus, since Theseus believed Phaedra’s written message. Artemis now reveals all but, she insists, in effect, you do not need to be a god to seek the truth. Humans manage it and Theseus might have done, too. Here is how:

“You did not stop to consider your son’s oath,  
Or consult the seers’ words; you did not  
Test his case or allow time for investigation,  
Instead, more quickly than you should have,  
You let fly curses at your son and caused his death  
(1299-1304 Cambridge Translations)

Hearing this, confronted with what are now presented to him as choices, echoing as they must have the human practices of deliberation and judgement in Athens at the time, Theseus wants to die. His failings are intolerable. Not so fast, says Artemis, “What you did was terrible, yet you can still Find forgiveness.” How so? Well, “ignorance of your mistake Acquits you of wrongdoing.” His failings were unintentional. It is the absence of intent that acquits Theseus. He is not held to the standard that Hippolytus, his son, set for himself. But recall, that self-binding to intent served as a way for Hippolytus to screen off passion and self-disclosure, to defend against
vulnerability and loss/abandonment. And this may be why it is that, when Hippolytus does rise to performativity’s occasion to forgive his father in the end, he can do so only falsely, which is to say “performatively” -- in the newest, 21st century sense of the term. The reconciliation between father and son takes place but it is not by way of passionate but only as performative utterance, I would argue, something Cavell would have lamented but Arendt would clearly have approved for this political parable. As the following close reading of the scene indicates, Hippolytus ends, contra Avery’s reading discussed above, not at one with the world but as ever at odds with it.

Arendt points out that the point of forgiveness is to end cycles of vengeance (THC 232) and that when it succeeds it re-secures the in-between (in Cavell’s terms, the separateness of persons) that characterizes political life as Arendt accounts for it, phenomenologically. This is why it is not for Artemis to release Theseus from his acts. “To err is human, as Artemis says to Theseus (1434); but to forgive is not divine,” observes Bernard Knox in his commentary on the play. Artemis case shown that she herself is uninclined to forgive. She has said so: “with these inescapable arrows I shall punish another” (quoted in Knox, op cit., p. 331). This is why it falls to Hippolytus to forgive Theseus. But it is also up to him because only he can release Theseus, from another possible charge of blood-guilt. But, contra Knox, Hippolytus is actually a reluctant forgiver. “At your request,” he says to Artemis, “I end my quarrel with my father.” Lest there be any doubt about that reluctance, he adds “Obedient to your commands as always,” making clear that his dialogue here is with Artemis and precisely not with his father. Other readers of the play note that forgiveness is here taken by Artemis, not so freely given by Hippolytus. But it matters also and further that Hippolytus’ reluctance to forgive is also his Cavellian “avoidance of love,” which is to say it is of a piece with his reluctance to engage his father directly.
This has long been a function of Artemis for Hippolytus: to screen him from his unacknowledging father. And yet, here at the end of the play, the utterance of the not-quite-meant words shifts something, nonetheless, which speaks to the power of performativity’s conventions. Hippolytus is dying and he now asks his father to hold him, addressing him directly: “Hold me father, lay my body straight.” As I read this scene, Theseus does not comply right away. Is the directness of the address intolerable to him? Or perhaps, as Cavell says of Hamlet’s father, Theseus “wishes to be remembered in a certain way.” First, he asks (as if setting a condition): “Are you leaving me with hands defiled?” and Hippolytus now responds to him again directly: “No I acquit you of this murder.” But this is not enough. Lear-like, Theseus wants more: “What are you saying? You release me From this blood-guilt?” Hippolytus says yes; but now his utterance is again indirect. He swears to it, calling on Artemis. Why? Because in extracting exculpation from his son, Theseus, has again made his acknowledgment conditional, and has hidden himself and his shame from Hippolytus. Theseus has that other blood-guilt, for killing the sons of Pallas, already on his conscience. It is surely conjured again here by the quest of exculpation for another such violation. He “wishes to be remembered in a certain way.” The wish has effects. When, in response, Hippolytus calls again on Artemis as his witness, he does so to enlist her, as he has always done, to screen himself from his father, insulating himself from paternal abandonment and projective wishes. This avoidant compliance and wish-fulfilment

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70 Cavell says “the father’s dictation of the way he wishes to be remembered—by having his revenge taken for him—exactly deprives the son, with his powers of mourning, of the right to mourn him, to let him pass” (Disowning Knowledge, 188). Here, the father’s asking to be released from the cycle of vengeance has a similar effect, depriving the son of his own feelings in relation to the father and suggesting he himself may go unmourned.

71 The vagaries of Hippolytus’ speech acts are prefigured earlier, suggesting he is not - as some assume – a purely deontic devotee of Artemis. He does calculate consequences hen he says “There is no hope at all that I could convince the man I have to convince.” The only thing that is sure is that in doing so Hippolytus would “violate the oaths I swore – and all for nothing” (1061-3). As Morwood notes: “he could be said to be violating [his oath] by
are, sadly, enough for Theseus, as the speeches of Goneril and Regan were enough for Lear and for the same reasons. Theseus now moves to repay the debt of release, though release exacts no debt. It seems likely that it is only now that Theseus takes up his son’s body. Several lines have passed since he was first asked to do so (1427-1435). In the universe of a young life, it is a yawning gap of time.\textsuperscript{72}

7.(toward a possible conclusion) The Femme Fatale and the Truculent Youth: \textit{Hippolytus} as Noir

My lord, I’m only a slave in your house,  
But I’d never believe your son is wicked,  
Even if every woman in the world hanged herself  
And covered the pines on Ida with writing;  
I know he is an honorable man  

\textbf{Messenger to Theseus} (\textit{Hippolytus}, Cambridge Translations, 1125-30)

Duplicity thus emerges as \[\text{[the femme fatale’s]}\] most seminal value, insofar as she is not simply willing to delude anyone in order to get the money and the freedom she is after, but because she will never show her true intentions to anyone, especially not the hero she has inveigled, even if this entails not only his death but also her own”  


the birthright of all speakers, that of speaking unclearly and untruly  

\textbf{JL Austin, “Other Minds”}

It has been noted that Euripides is the least classically tragic of the tragedians. Some classicists, like Elisabeth Craik, go so far as to describe him as a melodramatist. I have argued elsewhere that melodrama is, in any case, a trait of most tragedy, and that these genres may even be said to be separated by differences of degree, not kind.\textsuperscript{73} This means we may read some tragedies, even canonical ones like the \textit{Antigone}, as melodramas, or at least as having

\textsuperscript{72}The ending, then, is something less than what Knox finds in it: “an act of forgiveness, something possible only for human beings, not for gods but for their tragic victims. It is man’s noblest declaration of independence…an affirmation of purely human values in an inhuman universe” (Knox, p. 331).

\textsuperscript{73}Honig, \textit{Antigone, Interrupted} Chapter 6.
melodramatic elements in them. I recall these debates about genre now in order to introduce another genre for consideration here. Reading the Hippolytus between performative and passionate utterance has pressed me into reading the play as noir, and this may be entirely apt, since what Elisabeth Bronfen says about the femme fatale in film noir, applies to Euripides’ Phaedra and implicates Hippolytus:

To focus on the femme fatale…means introducing question of gender difference into a discussion of tragic sensibility, the sense that, while she comes to acknowledge her responsibility for her fate, the hero she involves in her transgressive plot is characterized by the exact opposite attitude, namely, a desire to stave off knowledge his own fallibility at all costs.

From this noir perspective, we may say, that Phaedra and Hippolytus are asymmetrical after all, but not in the way that Avery argued for: Avery had Hippolytus completing his journey to integration and Phaedra, cast a vacillator, abandoning hers. Instead, reading Phaedra as Bull Queen and Hippolytus as trapped in Theseus’ (non-)embrace, we now see how, in Bronfen’s words about noir, (the genre in which words entangle us in their webs), one takes “responsibility for her fate” and the other staves off his “fallibility at all costs.” For both, in a world lacking a general disposition to Arendtian forgivingness, forgiveness is fatal, the negating mirror of -- rather than the Arendtian partner to -- the promising that builds worlds. But that is the topic of the next chapter.