

Aesthetics and Death: Idealization, Horror and the Tragic Tetrad in *Hippolytus*

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“...confirm how Cypris is when she comes. Giving the mother of twice-born Bacchus in marriage to a flaming thunderbolt, she brought her to sleep in bloody doom. For she is terrible, she blows on all there is, and like a bee she flits.”

* * *

“Cypris the wicked one planned it this way.”¹

The most striking feature of *Hippolytus* is the opposition of Aphrodite and Artemis, but the antithesis is not simple. As erotic love, Aphrodite is an invincible archer (525-42); so is the virgin “ruler of arrows, Artemis” (166-7) who cherishes wild things and childbirth. They are at two ends of the generative process. Between them stands Hippolytus, an “un-yoked horse” who has inherited the name and, in his allegiance, the problematic nature of his mother, an Amazon, Antiope or Hippolyta who either was killed in battle by Theseus or married him. The confusion of the mythic material reflects the status of the Amazons as wild figures on the outer edges of the Greek world and on Hippolytus’ attempt at purity by rejecting “gods who are worshipped at night” (106). Amazons go without men except for service; he without women except for adoration. The tales of Theseus link the Amazons to Dionysos, Daedalus and the cannibalistic aspect of art, the turbulent id in identity, a pulsating unbridled force or ‘site’ where the self splits into a source body and an image ideal, idol or eidolon that eventually consumes its host as the paired goddesses do to Hippolytus.

Goethe portrayed this process in “the Witch’s Kitchen.” When Faust cannot avert his admiring gaze from the magic mirror in which he sees his ideal self, his “Helen” reflected, and sees her later as his “pale” Gretchen, Mephistopheles warns him, “Let that be... it is a magic image, lifeless, an eidolon... the fixed stare freezes human blood and one is turned almost to stone. You’ve heard of the Medusa...” When Faust protests it is his beloved, Mephisto adds, “that’s magic art... you crave for illusion still.”² So does Hippolytus, a representative not only of sexual confusion and strife but of Western poesis and its transfigurative drive. Nietzsche saw aesthetics as primarily a matter of

“erotic frenzy” and the discharge of Dionysian energy from the will. I will adjust the forms of his image-energy dialectic and offer an aesthetic model for interpreting culture. The idealizing tendencies in the West, a cult of aesthetics Chateaubriand praised and many seek to analyze are vividly embedded in Hippolytus’ suicidal, impossible dream.

In essays on the literature of the 19th century and Classical Antiquity I have described the process and stages of image-work, the formulation and projection from the self or culture of an image ideal cleansed of traumatic or hybrid material. This process is similar to “the demand for beauty” whose origin may have been in the “melancholy, lack and pain,” in the tragic awareness of ancient Greece.³ Unlike Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, or Freud with his theory of sublimation, I do not see the projection and power of an eidolon as an act of clarifying order or relief from passion for the image contains the hunger of the “Will,” an erotic energy that dominates and consumes its host: the ideal cannot abide the ‘flawed’ original no more than Artemis can accept Hippolytus or Semele live with Zeus. Thus image-work is an act of possession and displacement, a rape of reality or the self that, like the rape by Poseidon of Medusa transfigures and leads to transfigurative art. This is similar to Nietzsche’s postulate that all art and aesthetics derive from frenzy at the core of idealizing and “ease of metamorphosis.” The role of Aphrodite – Eros in this culture-forming aesthetic complements that of Dionysus.

Both the metamorphic impulse and the irritant of a hybrid or otherwise ‘polluted’ substrate that involves boundary transgression or “matter out of place”⁴; an intercultural mix or imperial colonization prompts *magike tekne* (image-weaving of new life). Nietzsche writes similarly that “the Greeks’ ever more powerful *demand for beauty* grew from a lack, from melancholy... from pain.” Beginning in an idyllic view of a purified persona, heritage or culture, say, the purifying attachment of Hippolytus to Artemis or the vision of Kurtz as a civilizing, clarifying and redemptive voice, image-work’s “ease of metamorphosis” is a “discharge” of erotic energy from “primal pain” into an image ideal, a “mysterious marriage” in which the individual is shattered, transfigured, dissolved and transformed.⁵ But “release and redemption through semblance” leads to a conquest of life by images, in the case of the Greeks, by gods who are like the beasts (hydra, centaur, sphinx, bulls) that embody their wills: the gods, quintessential images, in erotic dialectic conflict with their human substrate break the individual who sought transfiguration. This shattering of the individual is the Dionysian work.⁶ Thus, image-work, the projection of self or culture into images that represent and displace its erotic power is tragic and has an elegiac terminus for cultures and individuals: the idealizations of art, the transformative god-work destroys individuals and cultures in a triumph of the image which is a triumph of shadow over substance, of illusion and eidolon over life, of spectacle over literacy. These are the “false characters” embodied doubly in the last letters of Phaedra and, more comprehensively, the false characters given to everyone and to every culture committed to the process of projecting self into an eidolon: the lament and horror that follow the transfigurative thrill, the defeat of nature that results from transferring identity to an image. This process may be a figure of meiosis, a splitting that on the individual and cultural level is alienating and tragic, part of a petrifying process hinted by Goethe’s link

of an eidolon to Medusa and akin to Spengler’s remarks on the trajectory from Culture to Civilization, the end of vitality and organic growth in ossified sensibility, megalopolis and imperialism, the latter being “civilization unadulterated.”⁷

My study of image-work is textual analysis leading to a textual theory of culture. I use the term theurgic poesis literally: the god-work that structures and transforms identity and relations. It is the mode and result, perhaps the purpose of ancient Greek image-weaving implicit in the Greek verb *idein*, “to see”: to deify the id (“it,” “that one”) or transformative impulse that prompts generation and erotic trauma (as in *the Women of Trachis*) and is intensified by them: this transfigurative nexus, this id of primal pain is the beast-god. The de facto union of Aphrodite and hydra, for example “that drives the power of representation, imitation” and, at social levels, “every kind of mimicking and acting” whose core is “ease of metamorphosis.”⁸ Image-making is magic (*magike tekne*); the doublings, reflections and representations at its core, rooted in seeing, real and imagined, center on the marital bed, a site where god, beast, human and all relationships enter a transformative whirl where boundaries and norms dissolve as the identical or double consumes individual identity. Thus Jokasta curses “the infamous double bond” and marital “bed in which she brought forth husband by her husband, children by her own child,” a paradigm of doubling’s promiscuous magic, the “doubleness at the core of tragedy.”⁹

Reflecting the Dionysian fury where cells combine and in idealizing poesis when creator draws from himself an idol, an embodied reflection, image work in literature repeatedly shows a turbulent, eroticized monad splitting into a dyad that is unstable for the image is voracious and a source of fascinated worship like that of Hippolytus for Artemis who colonizes his thought and draws his adoration. The Representation has the magnetic and aggressive power of the Will, to adjust Schopenhauer. In image work, each member of a human pair will have its shadow, an object of desire and/horror (Mr. Hyde) establishing a tragic tetrad several forms of which appear in *Hippolytus* and most great Western Literature; it is part of the ‘brand’ or identity of the culture that with its idemptitas or clone grows from the id where the spitting image splits from the self desiring transformation to escape from the mismatched hybrid quality of the cultural substrate. In Greek tragedy, this idealization and its nemesis is god-work by a god-beast, Dionysus at basis, lord of drama and the rites of spring; the ancient form of the id that discharges its energy into images that refract it as Shelley, at his most optimistic made imagination, also an archer, refract love.¹⁰ Examples and explication of this hermeneutic follow...

Theurgic poesis inheres in the idealizing metamorphoses and transpositions of identity essential to aesthetics and hints at its roots in initiation rites when, “face to face” identity is mirrored in an identical, “an incarnate visual double.”¹¹ The “secret rites” (*orgia*) of the god, the image-ideal arise from the impulse (*orge*) of sex and its multiple doublings which also mark a collapse of identity, for example, as Oedipus finds “this wife, no wife, this field of double sowing whence I sprang and whence I sowed my children.”¹² This process of transformation, dissolution of boundaries and fracturing of

self imbues the ancient Greek sensibility and ensuing trajectory of the West from its 4th century declaration to its 12th century establishment as an “epoch of the Holy Ghost,”¹³ an image cult, to its 19th century loss of faith (“this strange disease of modern life” in which “each strives, nor knows for what he strives”) and change from a Culture into a Civilization.¹⁴ The era’s blend of beauty and horror, Symbolist clarity of representation serving exposure of horrific mythic materials, its lust for “entertainments and festivals” (the germ of professional sports and the renewed Olympics) now are mediated in processes that magnify the power of the semblance and degree of idealization, arise from “deprivation, from melancholy [and] from pain,”¹⁵ from an awareness of essential contradiction (“god is dead,” “the Sea of Faith” withdrawn) and resurgence in civilization of the primitive. As in the two classical tragedies about Heracles¹⁶ the structure and quality of this process of tragic recognition and self-negation is displayed vividly in Euripides’ *Hippolytus*.

Greek aesthetics is powered by eros and sited in the bed and its erotic trauma which include possession, displacement and transposition of identity, establishing an emphasis, indeed insistence on metamorphosis as the dominant form of reality and knowledge. Nietzsche wrote that “ease of metamorphosis” distinguished the Dionysian and that the essence of art and the aesthetic, of all idealizing required “erotic frenzy” that resulted in “mysterious union” of opposing drives and sexes.¹⁷ The transformative doublings of identity from the “it” of eros create a tragic tetrad of personae (masks) or characters that enact processes of erotic transformation in which the essence of the *idea*, the “pattern” or “image” that is seen (*idein*) is elaborated from the ‘bed’ in a lethal transfiguration of identity and relationship mixing joy and primal pain, redemption and horror. The theurgic aspect of this poesis (“as he raved, some god showed him the way”),¹⁸ the labile erotic ambiguities and god/image-prompted dissolution and transformation of identity are marked in *Hippolytus* with great clarity. His pain is encoded in his parentage and name, both the effluent of a “mysterious marriage” which, as Nietzsche argued is a figure of poesis, of erotic possession, transformation and displacement. The trauma in the bed and his name may be indicated in a schema that marks the shift of life into artifice, ultimately into a liminal rite for maidens approaching the nuptial bed via the transformative site that embeds the hero’s dead body.

Phaedra = Theseus = Amazon
 Aphrodite > | | < Artemis
 _____ Hippolytus

The two marriages of Theseus, a friend of Heracles¹⁹ and legendary hero-founder of Athens anchor this doubling and provide not only the social, family and dramatic conflict but the entry points for the demonic, that is, the play’s divinities, Aphrodite and Artemis most prominently, in mirrored opposition. They become one and “the same” (*idem*) in their shattering effect on the humans through whom they work and whose passionate confusions they represent. “The tearing apart of the individual becomes an

artistic event,” indeed, the essence of image-work, and from “the highest joy” of the laughing goddess “there comes a cry of horror or a yearning lament at some irredeemable loss,” the tragic result of the “yearning for release and redemption in semblance” or image ideals.²⁰ In Hippolytus as in many Greek tragedies, “the tearing apart of the individual” is literal, bearing an “added horror,” — that the measured forms of art, the ‘Apollonian’ reveals the raw transfigurative power of god-work.²¹ Diversely related to eros and wildness, Artemis and Aphrodite are agents of possession and displacement and thus carry the essence of image-work: destruction of the individual and generation of horror.

On the ninth labor of Herakles, Theseus joins him to steal the girdle of the Amazon Queen.²² Euripides simplifies the various stories of the love or abduction and subsequent Amazon attacks on Athens in which Antiope fights either for or against (the ambiguity veils trauma) Theseus who weds either her or Hippolyta, daughters of Ares. This is an archetype from “the deepest abyss of being” and the “mysterious marriage” where individuality fractures into rapturous oneness that matters in the “divine order of terror;”²³ an “artistic phenomenon.” This is the “release and redemption” of poesis or aesthetics; the “frenzy” of aesthetics and triumph of “the semblance,” a “reflection of the eternal contradiction”²⁴ as the human or cultural host projects an ideal which stands over it as a god, like an Empire to a colony. The attendant ambiguities, themselves types of refraction connoting the source of aesthetics in erotic trauma, may be why the play refers to Theseus’ first wife simply as “the Amazon.” More significantly, they suggest the erotic confusion, rage and terror that inhere in this mythic material. (Herodotus referred to the Amazons as *androktones*, “killers of men”). Hippolyta (“unbridled mare”) and Antiope are a doubling of one idea or impulse. Hippolytus is thus named either after his aunt or mother (one thinks of Perceval’s ambiguous relation to the Fisher King) and like her is an “unbridled horse” not in his lust but in desire’s deflection to chaste love for the virgin huntress Artemis; this is yet another mysterious marriage and “eternal contradiction” sprung from “the primal pain” of erotic transformations and trauma. The adoration of Hippolytus for Artemis can never be consummated: it is pure image worship. The other side of his violent hatred of sex and Aphrodite is an image that transforms the violent, perverse eros of his maternal descent and the power that rules humans and gods: whose honey “blows on all that is.” The Amazons’ hostile stance toward men, whom they ‘borrow’ or own for sex, murdering most of their male offspring is reflected (an image of male sacrifice in coition), reversed as in a mirror in Hippolytus who is ruled by an image of a woman rather than enter a role of legal and social power. The discomfort with generative sex is in the very name: *a-mazos* = “breast-less” from the legend that they would cut off their right breast to facilitate drawing a bow.

The Amazons are fictions that idealize and represent aspects of Hellenic gender conflicts. Their appropriation of masculinity is part of an anti-male ferocity also embodied in Athena, Artemis, the maenads and Dionysus, god of frenzied possession, ecstatic

dissolution and sparagmos. Artemis cares for wild creatures with which the maenads have affinity: Actaeon and Pentheus are cousins. Hippolytus inherits his mother’s defining skill, character and possibly her name (see above, Hippolyta) which will lead to his death by ironic mirroring as he gets entangled (‘bridled’) in his horses’ harness and they drag him to death. What Nietzsche terms “the eternal contradiction” is the tragic “release...the highest symbolism of art” that splits the semblance from the self.²⁵ That is, his mother’s ambiguous relation to Athens, to men and families destroys him through his counter-dedication to Artemis and the Amazonian blending of forces represented by her and Aphrodite, the gods that frame the conflict. The “philosophic eroticism”²⁶ noted in dialectic by Nietzsche is expressed in Hippolytus, the character and the play: the wrestling destroys him and exposes the Saturnalia and “Titanic disorder,” in short the Dionysian impulse within the “demand for beauty” of the chaste, unbalanced youth and in the complementary agon of his step-mother.²⁷ The demand for beauty and image-work we inherit from the Greeks was accentuated by the friction between Greco-Roman and Hebraic matter in the West to generate “the terrors and horrors”²⁸ and subsequent elegiac lament inherent in the commitment to idealization; the triumph of the image-ideal is human tragedy and cultural collapse, the petrification figured by Medusa: it is not the idols but the human that shatters. Adapting Spengler’s idiom, one might say it is the threshold at which a culture and its idols ossify into civilization whose directing cadres endlessly recycle images that come to have only a mnemonic effect. In this sense, civilization is the death of the human whose ‘after-life’ is that of a clone, a shadow.

The mythic material connotes additional sexual confusion embodied in hybrid creatures, figures of pollution. Centaurs are the male-equine composite that embodies sexual and instructive power. They were engendered by Ixion’s embrace of Nephele, the cloud substance - image by which Zeus deceived him. Nephele derives from the Hebrew for “fallen ones,” the “giants...men of destruction” in pre-deluge times (Genesis 6:4) who fell by erotic predation. Seeking to reject the erotic aspect of his nature Hippolytus projects it into a cloud-like form in his worship of the untouchable Artemis; a worship of a shadow that destroys him indirectly when Aphrodite punishes him through a step-mother who confirms his ‘false character.’ The deflection of his eros is tragic in its attempted swerve from the nature and name he inherits from his mother. Since centaurs are “bull piercers” (*ken-tauros*) this affiliation with the anti-male or aggressive female unbridled horse rather than magical male fiction, this rejection of promiscuous but also marital erotic power returns in his defeat and death by the bull sent by Poseidon.²⁹

In fiction perhaps more than life, naming is destiny, the creation of a persona or mask which charts a mortal’s path. Indeed, naming may be the primal representation, a literal impressing of character. In theurgic poesis, names represent a site in the structure of erotic transfiguration: the mask/name is a portal for divine intervention. Hippolytus is a precarious liminal figure not mainly because the Amazons are barbarians thus making him by classical era Athenian law a bastard but because his descent complicates his own sexuality and heightens the traumatic components of boundary dissolution, splitting

and re-presentation. The Amazons figure gender conflict and Hippolytus both counters and expresses this inheritance by associating 'purity' with chastity and rejecting the bed of eros. His mixed nature makes him an exemplary site for divine conflict as represented in his adoration of the virgin huntress: "I like none of the gods who are worshipped at night" he asserts. When counseled by a servant to give all gods their due he rebuffs her, saying, "to that Cypris [Aphrodite] of yours I say 'good riddance.'"³⁰

The implicit bond between the virgin warrior Athena, the Amazons and the protector of chastity and mistress of wild things, Artemis is built into many references to the names of Athens, site of the liberator-king Theseus, son of Poseidon³¹ and slayer of the Minotaur, Phaedra's bestial in-law; one might say, the labyrinth in which the cannibalism of the id dwells is the hidden portal for possession in her inheritance. Spengler writes that the Greeks conceived Athena "as an Amazon";³² expected to be a usurping son, the virgin warrior defeats, absorbs the war prowess and takes the name of the Titan, Pallas. "A temple to Cypris is set up beside Pallas' rock" an analog of how Aphrodite embodies Ouranos.³³ The ambiguities, violence and transfiguration that inhere in these relationships are the essence of magike-tekne, the image-weaving in idealization. They develop its pastoral orientation (liberation by an image), apocalyptic transformation (separation of the image from its 'body') and final, elegiac laments as the image dominates the host before its own petrification.³⁴ Idyll returns as elegy as the Hellenistic age emerged from the immolation of the classical era or as the new Christian idyll emerged from the ruins of Classical Antiquity and then took apocalyptic form in the twelfth century with crusades, gothic cathedrals and slaughter of Jews, the original host. As for the hero's death, "Cypris the wicked one planned it this way," states Artemis, denoting the transformative power of Aphrodite in her destruction of the protagonist and of Phaedra who was "stung by the goads of the goddess...and trying to overcome Cypris with reason... was destroyed" although not before her false characters gave a new kind of false character to Hippolytus whose intrinsically false nature and position emerges as the apocalypse of the play, the shattering of the image of purity, of the mortal attempt to embrace Artemis³⁵ which is like Oedipus running to his name and destiny by fleeing from it.

Hidden in this powerful material which lays waste to the life and family of Theseus and perhaps comments on Athenian ambition is the bond of Athena to both Artemis and Aphrodite, a variant of the triune archetype. Athena also is associated with weaving and, as such, a mistress of war, wisdom and imagery which we have seen is integral to the Hellenic notion of identity as a *seen* and *woven* pattern. The gods into whose family Theseus has married via the Amazon and then Phaedra, mortal daughter of Zeus, are the dimensions of poeisis with its pastoral, apocalyptic and elegiac trajectory: his story is a figure of the keen orientation of Athens to transfiguration. This is the identity and destiny of Hippolytus who may be seen as attempting to flee the erotic "sickness" in this pattern, this tapestry woven by his identification with a virgin goddess and other female virgins, as Theseus later, angrily but insightfully suggests. He can no more flee the pattern than his name. His willed transformation from man-husband to virgin-hunter,

roughly akin to that of Pentheus' enchanted cross-dressing and Orpheus' preference for boys³⁶ is an idyll ("phantom") that enmeshes him in the inexorable logic of fiction for Greek drama and the id "have no place for the individual." This is the process enacted at the "spectacle place" (*theatron*) of Dionysus in Athens, the city of Theseus. It is noteworthy that the three goddesses invested in Theseus are joined by Dionysus through the turbulent changes in Amazonian war, a divine tetrad of over-determined traumatic transfiguration, the essence, Nietzsche wrote, and erotic frenzy in all art. The drama's enchantments, transformations and sickness are the god-work, impulses (*orgein*), the characters *organes* (instruments) of music that transfigure by seen image-patterns reflecting the erotic mystery (*orgion*) and tragedy of Hellenic poeisis representing, perhaps, the physiology of reproduction.

Hippolytus' rejection of Aphrodite, rooted in his mixed, inherently polluted origins³⁷ is mirrored in his adoration of Artemis, pure in intent but laden with diffused erotic force. He brings the virgin huntress a "plaited wreath" gathered "from an untouched meadow" where "the scythe has not yet come." As a translator suggests, Hippolytus is "juxtaposing images of religious observance and purity with suggestions of sexual violation."³⁸ He states his special attentions to Artemis by addressing her as "most beautiful by far of maidens" and "most beautiful of those on Olympus." This is fine romantic praise but he can't see much less touch her and Hellenic divinities are famously jealous of their place in the worship of all mortals as the "hateful battle of beauty" between Hera, Athena and Aphrodite showed.³⁹ The imbalance in the relationship consumes Hippolytus as Herakles is consumed by his passions, the "poison" he fights in other forms in the hydra and Centaur, Nessus. The hydra, "nourished by Hera" shares descent, fertilization by bloody death, from Medusa, figure of erotic trauma leading to art's transpositions of identity, with the Sphinx, the challenger of identity, the symbol of magical mixtures and pollution that also reveals and punishes them,⁴⁰ hence its prominence in Symbolist art when the faith of the West broke and it confronted what it believed to be man's bestial, hybrid identity, — the id of poeisis re-formulated by the Symbolist mythographer, Freud whose ideas on sublimation and 'counter-formation' derive from Nietzsche and Schopenhauer.

As noted, Hippolytus inherits imbalance in his relations to gods, eros and art; descended from an Amazon, through his stepmother he is by family ties related to the cannibalistic Minotaur, the monster that represents those hybrid passions that, idealized as fictions, consume life. Hippolytus, trying to opt out, negates or sublimates the erotic material and, through figures and characters, eros kills him for it. His stepmother, Phaedra, like her sister-in-law Pasiphae is overwhelmed by a polluting passion that stimulates his misogyny, mirror-image of the Amazons' misandry: in part his tragedy figures gender conflict. Through his mother's sister, Ariadne he also has a family tie to Dionysus, the master of transfiguring energies, indeed the symbol and force of dissolution and transfiguration, of identity challenged, consumed and transformed.⁴¹ Euripides has Phaedra stress her role as a transgressor of boundaries, driven by Aphrodite into a liminal and "polluted" figure: "*for my trouble goes across the boundary of life – a*

difficult crossing” (647-8). The allusion includes the role and erotic morbidity of Nessus the ferryman whose “treacherous words” prompt the immolation of Herakles just as Phaedra is “consumed” and her “soul tilled by passion” (503-05). Indeed, two strophes after this allusion, Euripides cites Iole “the filly in Oechalia...Cypris yoked like a running Naiad or a Bacchant...in a bloody wedding” (545-53): the “unyoked” is “yoked in a bloody wedding,” the primal pain. More than invoking the Iole-Herakles-Dejanira-Nessus tetrad, with Aphrodite pouring her “sickness” through all the characters like the poison of the hydra, Euripides implicitly parallels the horse Hippolytus, “a bastard who thinks he’s legitimate” (309) with Iole, emphasizing his role as a breaker of boundaries via sexual confusion, misjudgment and entrapment. Dionysus also was a ‘bastard’ by nature & reason who insisted on his legitimacy in art; while his paternity was august, being born both from a female and male ‘womb’ is an epitome of theurgic liminality, magic and confusion, of the stormy vortex of the id, the beast-god of art’s transformations of the world of into semblance. Stressing the ambiguities of their link to possession, Theseus later will suggest that Hippolytus’ chastity is like that of a maenad. Demonic transfigurations abound in the tetrad and into all of them “drips desire” from “the shaft [of] Aphrodite which Eros, the son of Zeus, sends forth from his hands” (525-32).

The drama alludes to another key feature of *the Bacchae*, that erotic possession, social disintegration, confusion of gender and of animal and human is a working out in poeisis of cultural matter imported from the east. Phaedra, like Minos and Ariadne, is a child of Zeus and Europa the Canaanite (in Greek, “Phoenician”) princess from Sidon.⁴² Like Kadmos and Dionysus himself, Phaedra bridges Asia and Europe, human and god-beast expressed in an incestuous lust that feeds on humans as do the maenads and the Minotaur the fruit of her sister-in-law, Pasiphae’s god-sent lust. The labyrinth of art embeds and seems to contain the cannibalistic drive of the image with which Theseus struggles.

The cultural tapestry or ground-text mediating all these transformative, apocalyptic passions and idylls of impossible consummations is Daedalus, “the cunning worker,” a figure of poeisis itself. His name is from *daidallein*, “to work artfully.” The result of his work is symbolized by the fall of his son, Icarus that exemplifies the “cry of horror or yearning lament at irredeemable loss” intrinsic to image work.⁴³ Daedalus fashions the artificial cow in which Pasiphae hides to conceive the Minotaur from a bull, mediating a cycle of transgression and punishment in which eros becomes cannibalism, the trend of image-work (as Geraldine displaces Christabel). The lust of Pasiphae for the bull shows the erotic aspect of the metamorphic urge; the resulting beast and its cannibalism represent the horror in art’s joy and in the fantasies it unleashes into the cognitive world.⁴⁴ Daedalus makes the labyrinth in which the monster is contained, consuming humans every nine years (a figure, perhaps, for the nine-month gestation that follows intercourse and conception). Art liberates rather than constrains the Dionysian impulse. So Daedalus complements Dionysus, born bull-horned from the genitals (‘thigh’) of the high god,⁴⁵ Zeus, who overpowers consciousness and identity, creating a world in which the cloning

aspect of cult initiation looses identity’s exciting and terrifying fusion and violent transformation into the identical or reflection-image. In the postmodern orgy of digital imagery, shadows live everywhere and Dionysus rules.

Theurgic poeisis is art as mystery religion that includes martyrdom and transformation to an image-ideal: the human dreams himself into his own idol, worshipping an idealization and attenuation of the self. One is possessed and transposed from identity to identification and the id of communion by a mirroring that is the essence of Hellenic poeisis (“the doubleness in the origin and essence of Greek tragedy”),⁴⁶ a dissolution or immolation and transformation of self. As Pentheus, enchanted and cross-dressed becomes a mirror image of his cousin and of his maenads, so “the Stranger” from Asia describes the transformative initiation of poeisis: “...face to face. He looked at me, I at him. And he gave me his sacred rites.”⁴⁷ This is the process in which Hippolytus is enmeshed by trying to escape it: like Iole, he is in “the net” of erotic frenzy, of art. There is no escape for humans in Hellenic theurgy; life is tragic and repetitive, not comedic and purposeful: the perceived self-negation and primal pain at the nexus of being is pitilessly exposed. The multiplying fictions of poeisis do not liberate but entrap: the marriages of Theseus gives Hippolytus a ‘false’ or ambiguous and tormented character (turns him into a fiction that destroys his life) as Aphrodite gives a false, tormented character to Phaedra who herself results from the mating of Zeus and Europa (the Asian princess from whom the West, a false collective⁴⁸ eventually took its name, commemorating the appropriation and displacement of poeisis): art and generation collaborate. For the Greeks this meant an endless series of false characters, an engraving that deforms. The erotic component of Hellenic poeisis elaborates labyrinths of voracious images. There is no escaping the power of the fiction and its image-weaving of transposed identity, of passions embodied in images, like Medusa, that consume lives.

The worship of Artemis is a paradox, — an aesthetic denial of sex that ensures traumatic transformation even before Aphrodite speaks the play’s proem, beginning, “I am powerful.” She emphasizes her identity and names (e.g. Cypris), noting that “I trip up those who are proud towards me,” those who resist me. So do all the Greek divinities but none more so than she (older than Zeus, as Eros she pervades creation)⁴⁹ whose distinctive attribute “breaks the limbs’ strength” and “overpowers the intelligence...in all gods, in all human beings.”⁵⁰ Just so, she seizes the heart of Phaedra “with a terrible passion” through which, “moaning and overwhelmed by the goads of passion” and its “sickness” she dies desiring her step-son and thus, via an ironic chain of fictions steers the youth to “the gates of Hades.”⁵¹ The Amazon is thus expunged and the attempt to negate her wild influence undone. The Greeks perceived no escape from eros or its figurations in poeisis. After its various apocalypses, their culture weakened into the elegiac idylls of the Hellenistic age; then, under color of Rome possessed, transformed and displaced Hebraic culture, shattering it like the “individual principle,” taking the resulting synthesis for its identity in a crowning “mysterious union,” erotic trauma, rape, returning on a trans-cultural scale: the image or ‘holy ghost’ consumes the man.

The power to break down, destroy or dissolve the individual that Aphrodite shares with Dionysus resembles the cultural dynamics exerted by tragedy as discussed by Nietzsche. It is notable that Marcuse ascribes a similar power to psychology that “dissolves” and de-constructs the individual into his “archaic” cultural components.⁵² Probably without so intending, Marcuse identifies psychology as a resurgence of the Dionysian in the Modern West. What he does not understand, at least in *Eros & Civilization* is that “self-consciousness and reason” serve both the will and the image ideal projected by the will and dominating the individual culture or self that worships it. Shakespeare demonstrated this in many tragedies; Melville knew this in his portrayal of John Claggart, the Master of Arms whose “reason was but a lawyer to his will that made ogres of trifles,” monsters from daily events and a frustrated will fascinated with its image-ideal, Billy Budd, the “cheerful sea-Hyperion” whom he represents as “a man-trap under the ruddy-tipped daisies.” As he looks at Billy, Claggart’s feelings and features express idyllic longing as it prepares to engender and already contains, apocalypse and elegy. As he watches Billy, his ideal, his face has “a melancholy expression... suffused with incipient feverish tears.” And “sometimes, the “expression would have in it a touch of soft yearning, as if Claggart would have loved Billy but for fate and ban.” But at other times, “a red light would flash from his eye like a spark from an anvil in a dusky smithy.” Melville emphasizes the erotic – demonic, that is Dionysian substrate of the will⁵³ that worships and hates the image-ideal that contrasts with it in a hostile complementarity. So he gives it a false character. This aligns with Melville’s contemporary Nietzsche’s comments on the Dionysian “erotic frenzy” essential to idealizing art and its destruction of the individual which Marcuse attributed to psychology nearly a century later. The logic of ancient Hellas working within Western culture, in the social sciences exalts in order to de-construct the individual. On the macrocosm, it subsumes the human in rapturous fusion with the image, ‘globalism’ (a fictional “world community”). The Dionysian drive of image-work emerged, via reason driven by will, in the deconstructive analyses of psychology and in the geopolitics of a financial-diplomatic oligarchy acting itself like an image detached from and in predatory relation to national and individual bodies.

“Strong is the victory the Cyprian goddess always wins,” chants Sophocles’ chorus, “Cypris, goddess of love’s bed,” even Zeus, Hades and Poseidon are conquered by her.⁵⁴ All fall beneath the arrows of the primal energy of the cosmos later sanitized by Schiller as Joy. “How foolish one would be to climb into the ring with Love and try to trade blows with him, like a boxer. For he rules even the gods as he pleases, and he rules me,” says Deianeira, reasonably, given the inherited mythic matter. Then “why not another woman like me,” she adds referring to Iole’s assumed passion for Heracles.⁵⁵ Her understanding does not save her; still less can a mixture of pragmatism, defiance and rectitude stave off her might in *Hippolytus*. Aphrodite exerts her power through Phaedra whose death note works like the “treacherous words” of Nessus, the centaur, whose lust and revenge bring the action in *WT* to “murderous confusion”⁵⁶ much as do the “lies like truth” and “equivocations of the fiend” in *Macbeth*. The startling functional conjunction

between the Cyprian’s inexorable power and that of Dionysus leads, when Hippolytus rejects it to the ‘rape’ of horse by bull. Aphrodite, embodiment of transfigured eros as described in Hesiod, will prove on him that she is “powerful” by a complex deceit using his own family’s divine ties as the agents of destruction, the gods or fictions returning as beasts to destroy the human. Aphrodite’s indirect approach is like that of Nessus, the ferryman who “brings across” the id of primal pain and eros. His liminal character, half horse, half man suggests the attributes and talents that Hippolytus inherits from his mother and that destroy him;⁵⁷ they suggest also intriguing congruities between Amazons and centaurs. In any case, murderous transfigurations effected by the passion acting through the highest gods are multiplied in a meta-poeisis as Phaedra’s dying ‘characters’ make an enraged fool of Theseus and doom Hippolytus with the divinely powered curses Theseus received as a ‘gift’ from Poseidon, his own father.⁵⁸ It is like the gift of Daedalus to Icarus; of the envenomed robe Nessus gives Herakles via Deianeira, returning to him the venom of desire; like Oedipus untangling the Sphinx’s figure and thus returning to the primal scene, its joy and pain. The gifts of the gods are image-work suffused with eros, the tragic process of theurgic poeisis that shaped the West.

An enraged Theseus condemns what he sees as malicious hypocrisy and deceit based in the sexual and moral extremism of his son’s devotion to Artemis and virginity. “You are virtuous and pure,” Theseus exclaims, “a huckster...” But the key point is his linking Hippolytus to Orpheus and telling him to “play the bacchant” that confounds victim with his murderers for the youth has attracted his own doom:⁵⁹ his idealization is suicidal. Like Pentheus in his cross-dressed disguise and Orpheus, after the death of Eurydice, in his determined pederasty, Hippolytus refuses his erotic passion which is as destructive as misplacing it: the poeisis of dissolution, working through the gods will enforce itself and demonstrate its power in the Theatre (spectacle-place) of Dionysus at the annual Dionysia. He becomes a site of erotic trauma that carries forward the results of trauma in the nature of his Amazon mother, a fiction made ‘real,’ an eidolon like the ‘Helen’ Faust sees in the mirror of the “Witches’ Kitchen,” the “form divine” that shines back at an individual or culture through the “magic mirror” of image-work. Hippolytus is a skewed but plausible youth: his mother a plausible fiction of gender hostility, whose nature, by paths described above, destroys him. She, after all, makes him an “illegitimate” figure, “matter out of place” that must be expelled by the social body whose continuance he rejects. He becomes, in his martyrdom to divine polarities a site of liminal holiness, the tributes of maiden hair an inverted insemination recalling and reversing his early weaving for Artemis of a “plaited wreath” from “an untouched meadow.” His story is a paradigm of Aphrodite’s “secret bed,” the transfigurative weaver and the erotic trauma that energizes theurgic poeisis.

The transformations do not cease with the death and glorification of Hippolytus into a site of generative liminality. Artemis assures him, as he lies dying, that the elegiac phase of his own role, a pawn in the fictions of the gods, will insert an apocalyptic edge into the pastoral affair of Aphrodite and Adonis. “I will take vengeance with these, my

inescapable arrows,” Artemis vows, “on one of hers, whatever mortal is her very dearest.” Thus, the eidellion of ‘Venus and Adonis’ ends with the castration (gored ‘thigh’) of Adonis and his transfiguration into beds of anemones “sprinkled with sweet-smelling ambrosia.” Aphrodite/Venus says, “Adonis, for my sorrow, will have a lasting monument; each year your death will be my sorrow but your blood will be a flower.”⁶⁰ The elegiac phase of image-work leads to an eternal pastoral, a monument (art that transfigures past to present, death to life) to the apocalypse of martyred, transformative passion. Adonis and Hippolytus are mirror images as are the goddesses that destroy them: all four are tropes of reflection and auto-erotic completion, a dead-end for mortals, a glory for the beast-gods of art that mediate them as Herakles is the “glory of Hera.”

Pertinent to the transfigurative and transgressive role of Aphrodite, Adonis, her mortal favorite and vector of pastoral and elegy, beginning and end of theurgic poesis, stems from the incestuous passion of Myrrha for her father, Cinyras, king at Aphrodite’s cult center in Paphos, Cyprus. Myrrha consummates her passion by disguise, modality of transfiguration, at the festival of Ceres, grain or seed.⁶¹ Refracting these transformations further into the web of erotic image-weaving, Cinyras is the son of Paphos, the daughter born to Pygmalion and his female statue that softens into life as he fondles her in the temple and on the island of Aphrodite (site of Othello’s destruction by sexual jealousy). As Pygmalion loves his statue, Myrrha desires her father, figures of auto-eroticism that produce Adonis, Aphrodite’s human toy whose castration reflects her own substance, formed from male members.⁶² His very death attests and mirrors the horror within the “sweetnesses” of her identity. One could say that in Ovid’s tale, Artemis interrupts Aphrodite’s masturbation, itself a trope of idealizing art. The trope extends to the other myth of Aphrodite’s parentage from Zeus and Dione, the latter name being the genitive of Zeus and guardian of his oak. Thus, in this variant, used by Homer, Aphrodite results from the self-insemination of Zeus (a thematic and morphological tie to Dionysus) rather than the dismemberment of Ouranos. Again one sees transfigurations of aesthetics and religion rooted in eros and its trauma. On a lighter, pastoral level of transposition, as Zeus brought Europa to Crete, Ovid transposes the fictional incest from Cyprus to “Panchaia,” the land of “cinnamon and balsam, frankincense and myrrh” (that is, the Middle East)⁶³ and then brings it fictionally back into his Europe, the continent of the “expansive gaze,” the ‘wide-eyed’ cult of *idein* and festivals of *theatron*, the culture for which redemption has a cutting erotic and imperial edge by the dynamics of its images.⁶⁴ The erotic poesis of metamorphosis weaves and works its impulse and mystery throughout the play of its passion, mingling and appropriating cultures, transmuting and subordinating life to fiction, the ‘Helen’ or Medusa in the magic mirror.⁶⁵ Pygmalion’s idyllic art, via Aphrodite results in the elegiac pastoral of Aphrodite’s transforming the dead castrated Adonis into a bed of anemones: apocalypse prettified. It is the tapestry of theurgic poesis, a meta-figure of image-work’s last stage: burial of a human.

A similar pattern informs *Hippolytus* which shows how the power and rage of the bull figures in the cyclic, self-perpetuating aspect of theurgic poesis. The abduction of

Europa by Zeus to Crete begins the cycle. Their son, Minos refuses to sacrifice to his father, perhaps refusing the figurative abductions of poesis. His wife, Pasiphae pursues what might be called an inherited passion, the aesthetics of erotic frenzy, and conceives the Minotaur who eats humans. As noted above, the monster’s cannibalism is a type of the intricate mind and imaginings⁶⁶ of Daedalus, the artist who fashions the artificial cow for Pasiphae’s transfigurative passion and then makes the labyrinth to contain its issue: the image reveals and conceals as the child does its parents. With the help of Ariadne, his wife Phaedra’s sister, Theseus slays the Minotaur but does not escape the transfigurative eros centered on bestiality, bulls and cows. To avenge his wife, a daughter of Zeus and Europa, through his curse – gift (though he only threatens rather than explicitly invoking it) he raises up his father Poseidon in the form of a bull to destroy his son, the unbridled horse who enmeshed in his own horses’ reins is dragged and battered to death, as he is enmeshed in his Amazon mother’s ambiguous identity and in the passion sent by Aphrodite through Phaedra (as Theseus was enmeshed in wrestling with Amazons). The *id* in the identity of these warring, loving and related characters appears in the same (*idem*) forms of the god-beast which traps them in a maze. Their identity is identical and the idealizing of art brings them together in the logic of poesis as the image and legend destroy the humans from which they derive and whose passions they represent. Symbol of power, the bull was a primary sacrifice to Zeus and embodiment of the “it” of fertile physical might expressed in sex, the force which for the Greeks generates and transforms all things, human and divine. Poesis is the *orgia* (“secret rites”) of the *orge* “which works” *organon* the changes that fuse identity and its reflection or “identical,” the pool in which the human, essentially narcissistic in their view, is mirrored and drowns in the genetic pool and pulse of life.

The conjunctions of Hellenic sensibility and the myths it evolves are figured in the bull, the maze (“breast”), bestiality and the monstrous hybrids and cannibalism in this and other (the line of Tantalus-Pelops-Atreus) transfiguring tales. The collapse of the imagery (the pattern or idea that is “seen” and flowers into identity) is expressed in a few lines about Minos, sacrifice (which for the Greeks ultimately must be a human sacrifice), Daedalus and the famous maze which reticulate curiously with the tragedy of Hippolytus:

*And Minos duly paid his vows to Jove, a hundred bulls...and in the palace hung up the spoils of war. But in his household, shame had grown big and the hybrid monster-offspring revealed the Queen’s adultery, and Minos contrived to hide this specimen in a maze, a labyrinth built by Daedalus, an artist famous in building, who could set confusion and conflict in stone and deceive the eye with devious aisles and passages.*⁶⁷

Like Medusa, the archetypal artist (the horror of the process petrifies), Daedalus sets confusion and conflict in stone, ‘fixing’ it and fooling the eye that sees patterns of images. Then, seeking to escape Minos, Daedalus fashions a gift-curse of wings for himself and his son who is destroyed in a thinly veiled murder-suicide that parallels the conflict between Theseus and Hippolytus (or Deianeira – Herakles). As noted above, a “hybrid monster” is embedded in his name suggesting he is the male image of his mother,

as a more explicit beast is embedded by Daedalus in the maze. In the name and myths of Hippolytus and Daedalus bulls and horses, bestiality, human and animal sacrifice mediated through the transfiguring power of Aphrodite converge in the primal poesis. Picasso tapped it in his Minotauromachy series which may figure his own masterful erotic aesthetics as well as for erotic conflict and confusion generally.⁶⁸ The harlequin, Picasso's self-representation or 'double' like a servant in Milesian comedy or the Nurse in *Hippolytus* often serves as go-between or liminal vector to effect transformative erotic consummation and tragedy. The essential conflict of bull and horse, diverse emblems of masculine erotic power (the silens originally were horses)⁶⁹ are embedded also in the material of this play and the myth of Ixion, his lust for Hera; the deflecting of lust by imagery (a conflict of 'will' and representation) and the resulting race of "bull-piercers" that embody the triumphant power of the horse. Here, however, the horse is a victim whose "body is pure of sex," who has "a virgin soul" like the goddess he adores.

Given the role of the harlequin-Nurse, the play's tragic tetrad may be re-configured as a doubling of the marital bed:

Poseidon >	< Theseus	=	Phaedra
	Amazon —		< Aphrodite ⁷⁰
Artemis >	< Hippolytus	——	Nurse

There are four humans and four images. The figure collapses into the dyad of Theseus and the Amazon and the monad of their coitus. The myth centers on the transfiguring erotic adventures of Theseus: the Amazon's girdle and descent through the labyrinth to the Minotaur and cannibalism. Its mystery and primal pain are in the alternate accounts that he killed her in battle or married her, archetypes that are two sides of a coin. The Amazon and her 'bastard' are matter out of place; so is Artemis outside the circle of eros where the wild emerges like a Dionysian discharge. Her divine opponents both side with the Trojans who host Aphrodite's supremacy. To contain disorder for the Greeks, even during their classical period requires transfiguring human sacrifice. In the counter tradition of the Hebrews, disorder (*Erev*, "evening") becomes a complementary source of order (*Boker*, "morning") to which its recurrence is assimilated. The etymology proclaims that "order" and "control" are natural and, indeed, akin to a bull (*bakar*), not undone by it. But in *Hippolytus*, as discussed and as abbreviated in the above schema, Phaedra, her nurse and the unnatural purity of Hippolytus provide entry for Aphrodite; then Phaedra's vengeful fiction prompts Theseus to invoke Poseidon as a bull to destroy the unbridled horse and fulfill the work of Aphrodite. For the Greeks, earth, sea and humans bring forth their kind only through human sacrifice.

These *motifs of deception*, rooted in the aesthetics of seeing, image-weaving and the bestial tapestry of possession and transformation also express their convergence in the persona of Pentheus and his fusion with Dionysus as a sacrificial beast-god-man. Pentheus is like Hellas and its visual metamorphic orientation, the "demand for beauty" that absorbs its fictionally abducted Europa into itself; Europe transfigures / transgenders

its identity in a sort of mirror-image of the formation of Aphrodite: it cannot contain the disorder of its hybrid nature wed, as it is to idealization, semblance and veiling so its imagery exfoliates. Like the West, Pentheus is "the one eager to see what [he] ought not to see and seeking things not to be sought." When the veil of art is lifted, the horror of its impulse is bared and the result is a culture of terror. The Hellenic West's commitment to effacing boundaries dooms it via Dionysian 'god-work' to fragmentation and the destruction of life by fiction. The latter appears or reveals the mystery of its monstrous hybrid character, one that makes two and then re-doubles, to the enchanted, cross-dressed Pentheus as a bull representing the "doubling" character of image work; Hellenic theurgy is a kind of meiosis, splitting and re-combining cultures as an artwork: it is a meta-culture that dies to generate other cultures. The total artwork of Symbolist origin is its natural last stage. As for doubling in the source, "the doubleness in [image-work is] the origin and essence of Greek tragedy," in his mystery-initiation, Pentheus sees "two suns and a double Thebes"⁷¹ as he goes forth to his apocalypse, a disguised suicide with long ensuing elegy as he marries, or becomes his cousin, Dionysus-Zagreus. This also is the framework for Hippolytus, Oedipus, Herakles and all heroes of the spectacle. In *Hippolytus* and *the Bacchae*, a bull embodies "the will of the beast" that infuses the transformations and the brutish irony encoded in the pastoral orge and eidolon of poesis; this in the theatron of Dionysos "who has a double nature," working with and through Aphrodite, the glimmer twins of Greek poesis, most mild and most terrible to mortals.

This doubling forced by theurgy is present in *Hippolytus* in the mirroring positions of Aphrodite and Artemis. Aphrodite, "the silent handmaiden" possesses Phaedra, balancing her rejection by Hippolytus. The secrets or fictions by which Aphrodite operates ("the sweetnesses and deceits of love")⁷² are activated by the Nurse. But the 'harlequin's work, as in Minotauromachy is Daedelian: it elicits a trumping counter-deceit or fiction from Phaedra whose suicide, like that of a terrorist-bomber successfully elicits murder via the theurgy of Poseidon as bull loosed by the father on the son. This is the jealous, punitive pattern of father-son conflict that the Greeks transposed onto the "compassionate Father" of the Hebrews who forbids human sacrifice much less *sparagmos* (even of animals) and *omo-phagia*. The Christian formula synthesizes the traditions; the hybrid comes undone.

In her passion for Hippolytus, in an erotic frenzy of idealizing, Phaedra envisions transforming herself to a huntress in the train of Artemis so she may be close, in a maenad-like rapture, to the Amazon's son:

I will go to the woods...where the beast-slaying dogs run at the heels if the dappled deer. Please, by the gods! I desire to shout to dogs, hold a pointed weapon...and hurl a Thessalian spear... Artemis, mistress of the sea's Mere and the hippodrome...I wish I could be on your plain.⁷³

This outburst shows the power of Aphrodite and underscores the relation of Hippolytus and his Amazonian descent to the horse (hippodrome) and Artemis. In the blindness of passion, Phaedra supplicates the wrong goddess: Aphrodite destroys her

and, through her, Hippolytus; Artemis gets the last word, both elegiac-pastoral and the menacing reference to Adonis. Thus the two goddesses, engaged at different stages in the work of generation combine in lethal transfigurations of art, fictions that destroy the humans through whom they work and whose fascinated-worship, as projected image-ideals, they command. Enhancing the complications of the mirroring, “the plain” on which Phaedra wishes to join Hippolytus may be the un-scythed meadow from which he wreathes Artemis a garland, the tumulus on which Hippolytus receives showers of pre-nuptial maiden hair and of Aphrodite lying among the anemones of her cult’s incestuously generated human toy, Adonis. Both are figures of idealized and idyllic coition, forms perhaps of art’s willful self-pleasuring. In both cases the pleasure matches the emotional or physical fracturing of an individual.

Transformed into a monument, liminal site or flower (itself a fiery mediator between light, water and earth), Hippolytus and Adonis, kin via their martyrdom to goddesses at each edge of the erotic spectrum, and fused via Phaedra’s brother-in-law, Dionysus to all forms of boundary transgression epitomize the demonic aesthetics of classical poesis. The humans from which stories and passions arise, as if by the prompting of divine beings are destroyed by these fictions and transposed into them, that is, into symbols or monuments just as those who gaze at the Gorgons turn into sculpture. The god-beasts make art and with its “highest joy comes a cry of horror or lament at something lost.”⁷⁴ My discussion of image-work identifies this paradox as the splitting of the image ideal from the individual or cultural body, a displacement of energy and life into the image that exhilarates and frightens, with the terror increasing over time as the image (god) dominates and drains life from its source or host. “Would that the race of mortals could be a curse on the gods” cries Hippolytus, seemingly to condemn theurgic poesis, and the Hellenic mindset in its foundations; “easily you leave a long companionship.”⁷⁵ But Hellas could not reject its image work; even when its ossified culture shattered it transformed itself by cultural mythopoetics that yoked its military and cultural rivals, the Romans and Jews into a transfiguring tragedy using the Hebraic matter of beneficent and purposeful providence, and an ethic of kindness to mark out a new pastoral (Bethlehem), apocalypse (crucifixion) and elegy (weeping for love) that ostensibly would end the vicious cycle of passion and horror in “a great mystery” which was but a revised form of the old mysteries complete with a triple goddess, eating the divine body and an abstract persona ficta, the “Holy Ghost” (Blake terms it “a vacuum”) which in time hardens into the ‘therapeutic State.’⁷⁶

Guaranteeing cultural dynamism and instability, the new synthesis enshrined Hellenism’s antinomian drive at the core of the West. This facilitated re-modeling and conversion and also served as an ideological and physical bludgeon against the Jews whose delineation of boundaries (the essence of Genesis 1 and the teaching of Moses) and instructions for good living in all aspects of life were reduced to “Law” and berated as punitive⁷⁷ (a transference from the Hellenes’ relation to their own pitiless gods), cold and stern ‘like the Jews’ for whom forgiveness and compassion are primary attributes of the divine and human but which the cult of mercy denied them.⁷⁸ The new syncretism

also encoded at its core the cult of human sacrifice and apotheosis, the familiar theurgic poesis of Greece and its pastoral-apocalyptic-elegiac-new pastoral eschaton: Herakles, Pentheus, Hippolytus or Oedipus must be dismembered, maimed or slain. In the new Hellenized appropriation of Judaism the divine being sacrifices his son in an analogy of Theseus’ exile of Hippolytus, kills and transfigures him into a medium of new life which he chooses as Oedipus chose exile and Herakles the pyre. As for the Queen of heaven, Hera is changed from torturer of a son of god to a sweet embracer of him, that is, to an elegiac pastoral or pieta. All is forgiven, monstrous jealousies and goading goddesses are transformed into serious Niobe’s. Just as the glittering illusions of art in time expose their horror, their vampiric relation to life, so the new lie exposes itself over time as the son and his ‘spirit’ kills the father and his law as made explicit in the works of Blake⁷⁹ and the cult of imagination and imagery (virtual reality, the Holy Ghost) generally. The god is a lamb (the god of Egypt) whose slaughter brings peace in a parody and appropriation of Pesach (the threshold between existential slavery and freedom including birth of a nation) whose people must be degraded or killed as the new fiction displaces life, as illusion displaces history and universalism an ancient nation. This change became the paradigm of postmodern education as conditioning. This magical poesis takes away the sins of the world, if you believe it; everything becomes correctly compassionate by the ministrations of a ‘therapeutic’ world state into whose “general will” every one enter and “in their corporate capacity receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole”: orgy-porgy,⁸⁰ Dionysus returns. Order and controlled vitality become not the chiaroscuro and complementarity of light and darkness but “the cold glare” of the State and its mandated illusions, ultimate Caesarism.

These cross-cultural contrasts, for seventeen centuries the West’s intra-cultural conflict, are starkly revealed in the Hippolytus – Phaedra – Theseus triad (each of whom, as noted, is a vector for demonic divinity) and that of Joseph, Potiphar’s wife and Potiphar, “a courtier of Pharaoh and chamberlain of the butchers” (Genesis 39). To adduce the tetrad of tragedy or its potential, one notes the contrast between the historical human Pharaoh and the mythical Amazon. The Hebrew story contains no aphrodisiacs or divine beings; no commitment of a youth to a virgin goddess; no gods or goddesses at all. The parents, grandparents and ancestors of Joseph all are human: indeed he is deeply concerned to re-unite and save his family. In Hebrew Scriptures, people do not project their passions or motives onto divine beings but act. The adulterous passion is a married woman’s lust for a youth “handsome of form and handsome of appearance” who has skill, intelligence and grace: it is not the indirect punishment of the youth by a jealous goddess. Joseph refuses her overtures, is falsely accused, like Hippolytus but without the hysterics, suicide or curses, and jailed. Absent are the magical interpositions of perverse passions (love for a virgin goddess), divine fictions and their cycle of vengeance and transfiguration. Joseph’s role as Potiphar’s steward is no pastoral; his dramatic dealings with his brothers are not apocalyptic but a reconciling integration in which Judah, among others, plays a key role. He transforms events by insight and intelligence. Compare the plan Joseph skillfully pursues which depends largely on the response of

his brothers to the “artful cunning” of Daedalus and its results. In Genesis, the finale is a beginning, liberating and comedic; reunion of a family, paternal blessings, fraternal reconciliation, a people transformed into a “holy nation” very human, fallible but hopeful. There is no attempt to transform life into a cult of aesthetics; no “demand for beauty” realized in beast-god idols but an attempt to live rightly with a knowledge that includes humility in the face of the Eternal: and an injunction to remember not to dissolve in rapture. But the allure of magic proved stronger...

Pertinent to these contrasts is the image of Eros dripping the “sickness” of desire “down into [human] eyes” by the shafts of Aphrodite to which “neither fire nor the [light] of the stars is superior.” Relevant to this image, a primary tenet of Judaism is to “guard your eyes” against any stimulation to lust, the essence of art, and against magic, forms of boundary transgression and the distinctions central to Judaism. The prohibition against conjuring, divination or use of puppet-like figures (idols) for fortune-telling is explained as a protection against those people and activities that “capture the eyes and steal the mind.”⁸¹ The wisdom of the warning pertains to the core Hellenic trauma (see the maze of Daedalus and the Minotaur, above, or the beautiful appearance of many personae-stars), its basis in seeing idea/images via erotic frenzy, the specific passage (525-42) cited above from *Hippolytus* and the glories of the culture of aesthetics generally.

It also is interesting, and a possible source of Hellenic borrowing that through his sons, Joseph has an “ox-like sovereignty.” But this symbol of power neither presages nor refers to monstrous beings or bestiality *against which* Judaism defines itself. It simply foretells the fertility of his descendants and their triumphs, led by Joshua.⁸² In short, history and reason ward off myth, image-weaving, cannibalism (figurative or literal) and madness, the transformative poesis that distinguished other cultures from that of the Hebrews. Hebrew Scriptures have abundant drama and tragedies⁸³ but they are natural ones of history, circumstance and error, including passions but there is no fictive projection of these forces into a divine realm that makes fictions real and “wandering shadows” of human beings.⁸⁴ The foundational proscription of idol-worship (reified projections of emotion and an auto-erotic tie to them) by the Hebrews includes acceptance of responsibility for actions and real freedom rather than fate. The Hebrew Scriptures may be seen as a bulwark against the metamorphic, unstable and projective habits of mind and culture that result in punitive beast-gods, “eternal contradiction” and horror; that produce civilization from culture. The sense of clear boundaries and distinctions, perhaps the key cultural concepts in the Hebrew account of creation and entire Books of Moses may be essential for cultural and mental integrity.⁸⁵ Barring metamorphosis and its antinomian impulse, insisting on the Unity and incommensurability of the Creator and the logic of creation, Judaism separates the marital bed and all spheres of life from the passion play by which illusions eventually consume the lives that generate them leaving a Wasteland such as Theseus, Herakles, Arthur or Marlow inhabit at the end of their efforts at cultural reformation as “the realm reels back into the beast...”⁸⁶

Images and profoundly moving theatrics, the West’s fissionable substrate has been re-emerging in increasingly grandiose forms as the imperial transfiguration comes undone. The pastoral - apocalyptic – elegiac trajectory of poesis repeats in ever more diverse and intense ways. The fictions now assert themselves in rhetorical and geopolitical forms as noted throughout this study and “embattled strictures against syncretism”⁸⁷ seem overwhelmed by its latest type: the “world-city” and multi-culturalism, the collapse of moral, national and economic boundaries. The term of art for this is “convergence,” a synthesis of god and beast; the therapeutic totalitarianism of theosophy.⁸⁸ Tragedy and incomprehension have made a great and terrible comeback that Euripides would appreciate and that Nietzsche foretold and foresaw in Europe’s “evening sky, burning now, perhaps burning itself out” in the friction of its Hellenic and Hebraic ground work.⁸⁹ One could denote the imperial ambition of Europe (the “expansive gaze”), of the West and its erotic spectaculars as the work of a culture whose “wits were crushed by a terrible disease of impious passion from Aphrodite” (*Hippolytus* 764-6). “So ends the play...”⁹⁰

Notes and References

- ¹ Euripides, *Hippolytus* 557-63 in *Euripides: Four Plays* (Focus Classical Library 2004, Edited with Notes & Introduction by Stephen Esposito; *Hippolytus* translation by Michael Halleran), 116, 1400, spoken by Artemis. The Esposito edition is used unless otherwise noted.
- ² Goethe, *Faust, Part I* 2430 ff, 4190-4214 (NY 1965, translated by Charles E. Passage), 85-97, 146-7
- ³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (Cambridge University Press 1999, edited by Raymond Geuss & Ronald Speirs, translated by Ronald Speirs), 7 from Nietzsche’s preface to the 2nd (1886) edition
- ⁴ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: A Analysis of the Concept of Pollution & Taboo* (NY 1966)
- ⁵ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy & Other Writings* (Cambridge 1999, edited by Raymond Geuss & Ronald Speirs, translated by Ronald Speirs), 7, 26-8, passim; Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” sections 8-10 in *The Portable Nietzsche* (NY 1978, edited & translated by Walter Kaufmann), 518-21
- ⁶ As opposed to Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* 17, 26 passim who associates order, Apollo, with image
- ⁷ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (NY 1962 [abridged], Charles F. Atkinson translation), 24-40
- ⁸ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* op. cit.
- ⁹ *Oedipus the King* 1241-51, translation David Grene in *Sophocles I*, (University of Chicago Press 1954); compare to the final speech and suicide of Deianeira in her marital bed in *Women of Trachis* 912-31 (Jameson translation), a speech in which she repeatedly invokes her bridal chamber and bed; *The Birth of Tragedy* op. cit. 59
- ¹⁰ *The Birth of Tragedy* 44; Shelley, “Epipsychidion” 160-9

¹¹ Euripides, *the Bacchae* 469-70, Arrowsmith translation; Esposito renders it, “face to face. He looked at me, I at him. And he gave me his sacred rites freely” and notes that the initiate doubles the initiator.

¹² See note 9, above and *Oedipus the King* 1253-60, passim

¹³ Spengler op. cit 15 notes the theory of Joachim de Floris (1145-1202), 15; 24-40, 140-1

¹⁴ Matthew Arnold, “The Scholar Gypsy” (1853), 168, 203; Shelley, “The Triumph of Life” 47-73 passim

¹⁵ Nietzsche, “An Attempt at Self-Criticism” in Guess & Speirs, supra, 7; as I have shown, the effectual fusion of Aphrodite and hydra in *WT*, Nietzsche writes of “the synthesis of goat and god.”

¹⁶ Sophocles, *the Women of Trachis* and Euripides, *Herakles*

¹⁷ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Twilight of the Idols* op. cit

¹⁸ *Oedipus the King* op cit 1258-61; “bellowing terribly, led by an invisible guide” the action suggests the close bond between Dionysus (both as a bull and a dissolver of limits) and Aphrodite, “Cypris the beguiling who crushes with desire,” *Iphigenia in Aulis*” 1301-03. The schema applies well to *Hamlet* inter alia.

¹⁹ *The Birth of Tragedy*, 21, 25

²⁰ ibid. 21, 44, 52, the image “has no place for the individual”

²¹ Euripides, *Herakles* 618-22, Theseus had gone to Hades to abduct Persephone. Herakles, sent there to drag out Kerberos the triple-bodied, “fifty-headed pitiless” dog-beast, rescued Theseus, establishing the friendship of the two great heroes. See Hesiod, *Theogony* 311-12 on Kerberos.

²² Euripides, *Herakles* 408-18, 1169-70, 1221-2 passim; see notes by translator Michael C. Halleran in Esposito, op. cit. page 164.

²³ *Hippolytus* 1173-1248 passim

²⁴ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* in Geuss & Speirs supra, 20-1

²⁵ *Twilight of the Idols* section 23, *TPN* 528; *The Birth of Tragedy* 23, 21, 17 and “An Attempt at Self-Criticism,” the Preface to the second edition of 1886, op. cit. 7

²⁶ *Twilight of the Idols*, ibid & also see it at “The Problem of Socrates” section 8, *TPN* 477

²⁷ Halleran, “the Hippolytus: an Interpretation” in *Euripides*, op. cit. 221 on the law of 450-1 bce

²⁸ *The Birth of Tragedy* 23, 25-30

²⁹ *Hippolytus* 1143-1278

³⁰ Ibid. 106, 113

³¹ Ibid. 24, 30, 35 are the first of many references to Athens. The father of Theseus is Aegeus or, less often cited, Poseidon. The shared inference is his generation by ocean and air (his mother, Aethra).

³² Spengler op. cit. 140, “The Arts of Form”; *Theogony* 924-9 on birth of Athena

³³ *Hippolytus* 30-1, *Theogony* 159-210

³⁴ *Hippolytus* 1423-30

³⁵ Ibid. 1400, 1301-04

³⁶ Euripides *the Bacchae* 810-46, 912-72 passim, Esposito translation; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Indiana University Press, R. Humphries translation 1955), Book 10, tale 1: “his love was given to young boys only...‘enjoy that springtime, take those first flowers,’” Orpheus retorts to the Thracian women.

³⁷ I use the word “polluted” here as defined by Mary Douglas, “matter out of place,” ambiguous in relation to its culture.

³⁸ Ibid. page 96 note to verses 61-87; cf. Robert Frost’s poem, “Mowing” or Roethke’s “I Knew a Woman”

³⁹ Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis* 1284-1310, cf. “The audience in the shepherd’s hut” (hut of Paris) cited in *the Iliad* Book 24. Paris/Alexander had a doom like Oedipus and also destroyed his city; Aphrodite has a key role in each process, complementing that of “the dark singer, the Sphinx” 391-2 whose counterpart is doubled in Calchas and Cassandra.

⁴⁰ Hesiod, *Theogony* 280-329 (University of Michigan Press 1973, Lattimore translation), pages 140-42; both the Sphinx and Hydra are descended from Echidna, “half a nymph, half a monstrous serpent” like other hybrid beasts, tropes of transfiguration and image-work.

⁴¹ *Hippolytus* op cit, 337-9 and see introduction by Esposito, 19-22; Hesiod, *Theogony* 947-9 on Ariadne and Dionysus.

⁴² *Hippolytus* op. cit. and Ovid, *Metamorphoses* Book II, last tale and III, continued in tale of Kadmos.

⁴³ *The Birth of Tragedy* 21

⁴⁴ *The Birth of Tragedy* 17-21, Nietzsche commenting on Schopenhauer

⁴⁵ *The Bacchae* 100-01, 618, 920-22, 1017, 1159 inter alia, Esposito translation

⁴⁶ *The Birth of Tragedy* 59

⁴⁷ *The Bacchae* 470

⁴⁸ See Spengler op. cit. 12, note 5 on Europe as embodied fiction

⁴⁹ *Theogony*, 120-2, 188-206, 933-7, inter alia

⁵⁰ *Hippolytus* 26-57, 131 passim; for erotic passion as “sickness” see *the Women of Trachis* 446, 553 etc

⁵¹ Sophocles, *the Women of Trachis* 498-516 (University of Chicago 1957, 1969, Jameson translation); *Hippolytus* 1268-81

⁵² Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston, Beacon Press 1955), 56-7; on the fracturing effects of psycho-analysis via analogy to “Biblical Criticism” see Israel Eldad, *The First Tithite* (Tel Aviv 2008, translated by Zev Golan; initial Hebrew edition 1950), 242-3.

⁵³ Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor* chapters 17-18, 11-12; Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 17-46, 54 inter alia; see also *Twilight of the Idols* “Peoples and Fatherlands” sections 8-10, inter alia.

⁵⁴ Sophocles op. cit. 498-516

⁵⁵ Ibid. 440-8, 458-67

⁵⁶ Ibid. 831-40

⁵⁷ *Hippolytus* 1173-1248, 1355-60, the horses destroy him as Actaeon is torn apart by his own hounds and Pentheus by his mother, Agave, aunts and subjects. This is the Dionysian-psychoanalytical tearing, the splitting and then the dissolution of the individual engaged in elaboration and worship of an idolon which may be the self as projected in coordination with a “psycho-analyst,” the modern, ‘rational’ Dionysus

⁵⁸ *Hippolytus* 885-98 946-55

⁵⁹ *Metamorphoses* X, tales 7-10, quoting the end of the last tale, Humphries translation, 257-8; *Hippolytus* 1416-31 for the death and transfiguration of Hippolytus into a cultic site for the passage from maidenhood to marriage. cf. *Metamorphoses* X, 1 and XI, 1

⁶⁰ Ibid. Book X, 251-52, 257-8

61 Ibid. 241-53 “The Story of Pygmalion,” “Cinyras and Myrrha” and “the Story of Adonis”
62 Hesiod, *Theogony* 158-210
63 Panchaia may be a bi-lingual contraction of “all life” or “all living beings,” see Genesis 2:7
64 *Poly-pragmosyne*, Esposito, op cit, 8-11, cf. Spengler 28, 82-3, cf. Pericles’ “we have
forced an entry into every sea and every land...” *The Peloponnesian War*, II. 41 (NY 1954,
Rex Warner translation)
65 Shelley, “Lines on the Medusa” represents this in the “unending involutions” of the viper-
hair of the Medusa who has the power of engraving her character into the heart of any
viewer, including God as she “gazes in death on heaven...”
66 *Metamorphoses* Book VII, tales 1-2, Humphries pages 181-90
67 Ibid.
68 Mark Harris, 1994 <http://web.org.uk/picasso/harlequin.html> and a more extended piece in
1995-6, http://web.org.uk/picasso/secret_guernica.html
69 Geuss & Speirs 22, note 37;
70 The schema shows that the human tetrad of trauma contains two triangles, basic stuff of
erotic pollution and also, as its image or reflection, a trio of gods that contain the opposed
doublings of Aphrodite-Artemis and of the bull and horse.
71 *The Bacchae* 912-22, passim, another murder-suicide of the host’s image of the host; *The*
Birth of Tragedy 59, 52 and note 76
72 *Theogony* 206
73 *Hippolytus* 215-30; emphasis added
74 *Birth of Tragedy*, op. cit. 21
75 *Hippolytus* 1415, 1441
76 Rousseau, *The Social Contract* chapter 7, “The Sovereign”; William Blake, *The Marriage of*
Heaven & Hell (1790), plate 6
77 The mockery appears in Symbolist and world-socialism advocate H.G. Wells, *The Island of*
Dr. Moreau where the “Sayer of the Law” is a hybrid orangutan, chapter 12 passim
78 Exodus 34:5-7; mercy is emphatically denied to Jews in the “Perceval” section of Chretien’s
Sangreal: “the wicked Jews whom we should kill like dogs...damned themselves and saved
us” Chretien wrote in the formative decades of Christian Europe. *Arthurian Romances* (NY
1991, William Kibler translation), 458
79 Blake, *Milton, a Poem*, plate 15 in which the imagination, “the eternal divine humanity”
strangles Urizen (“your reason”) or Nobodaddy (nobody’s daddy) who clutches his tablets
of law.
80 Rousseau, op. cit. Part VI, “The Social Compact” & Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* the
Dionysian rite celebrated, aptly enough, at the “Aphroditaeum.”
81 Maimonides, *Sefer HaMitzvoth* – “Book of the Commandments” — (Moznaim 1993,
translation Shraga Silverstein), negative commandment # 32
82 Deuteronomy 33:17
83 For example, the initial fearful refusal to enter the Land (Numbers 13-14 ff) and its
consequences
84 Sophocles, *Ajax* 126 (University of Chicago Press 1957, John Moore translation)
85 Douglas, *Purity & Danger* on Leviticus; *In the Wilderness* (Sheffield 1993) and *Leviticus as*
Literature (Oxford 1999); this became a leitmotif of her work. Also see Gerald Schroeder,

The Science of God: the Convergence of Modern Science & Biblical Wisdom (NY 1997)
86 Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*, “the Last Tournament” 125; “the Passing of Arthur” 25-6; on
the absolute Unity of the ineffable Creator (source of the ‘big-bang’) see Maimonides,
“Foundations of Torah” 1: 1-12
87 John F. A. Sawyer, editor, *Reading Leviticus: Conversations with Mary Douglas* (Sheffield
Academic Press 1996), 162-3; the link between idol worship and goddess cults brought in
by foreign wives is exemplified in the parentage and fate of Hippolytus and his self-
castrating affiliation with Artemis. His denunciations of women (616-78), prompted by the
frenzied passion of his step-mother and inherent in his maternal heritage and ambiguous tie
to Artemis, if extreme includes an awareness of this form of unsettling a house, a realization
also dramatized in *the Bacchae*, *the Agamemnon* and *the Women of Trachis* and many other
tales. But the Hellenic orientation to the ‘spectacular’ that *to see* is a process of image-
weaving presided over by Dionysus, the breaker of all boundaries and source of tragedy
trumped all efforts, — or desires — to contain the passion play and the tragic transfigurations
in which Aphrodite, Athena and Artemis play so seminal a part.
88 Alice Bailey, “Seed Groups in the New Age,” July 1937 inter alia, a process of group-
thought and “coordination” of the group mind by psychologists and “helpers.”
89 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good & Evil*, Part 8, “Peoples & Fatherlands” sections 248-50 (NY
1966, translation and commentary by Walter Kaufmann), 187-8, cf. *The Gay Science*, Book
V section 343
90 *The Bacchae*, last line, William Arrowsmith translation (University of Chicago Press 1959,
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