

Subjectivity and the Pattern of Reversal in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*

In response to Aristotle's well known criticism of Iphigenia's *anômalia* (*Poetics* 1454a32-33), a number of scholars have situated Iphigenia's sudden *volte-face* in the context of a broader pattern of reversals in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* (henceforth *IA*) (Mellert-Hoffman 1969: 80-89; Knox 1979: 243-46; Chant 1986; Luschnig 1988: 21-36 and 105-9; Griffin 1990: 148; Sorum 1992: 528; Gibert 1995: 250-52; Schenker 1999: 648-49; Burgess 2004). Thus, it is now generally acknowledged that, although Iphigenia's willing self-immolation occurs quickly and unexpectedly, her change of mind is nevertheless of a piece with other characters' alterations over the course of the play. However, the specific pattern of these reversals has gone relatively unexplored, as have the political questions raised by Iphigenia's active adoption of the Achaean army's demand for her sacrifice. The aim of this presentation, then, will be to illuminate the pattern that governs change of mind in *IA*, and then to read Iphigenia's departure from this pattern in a politically meaningful way. Iphigenia, I will argue, provides a crucial but troubling model of political subjectivity in response to the malicious popular authority wielded by the Achaean force at Aulis.

It has, to my knowledge, gone unnoticed that each of *IA*'s speaking elites experiences two changes of mind in response to the army's sacrificial imperative. Agamemnon, Menelaus, Clytemnestra, Achilles and Iphigenia all make an initial move to outright opposition to the sacrifice, and all subsequently acquiesce to Iphigenia's death and the pursuit of the Trojan expedition. This sequential pattern of opposition and acquiescence occurs as a consistent response to the political authority of the Achaean army and its elite representatives (Odysseus and Calchas). However, in contrast to the other characters' grudging resignation to parthenic sacrifice, Iphigenia's exuberant *Opfertod* (Schreiber 1968) both aligns her with the army's

inevitable demands and locates her as the only active political subject among the play's speaking elites. That is, during her spirited *rhesis* at lines 1368-1401, Iphigenia comes to experience the army's expectant gaze (*apoblepei*, 1378) as an interpellation or "hailing" to a political subjectivity (Althusser 2008: 44-51) distinct from the forced agreement of other elite figures in the play. In this way, I will argue, she occupies an ethical middle ground that enables her both to yield to the army's imposition of sacrifice and to situate herself as a political agent (*Hellados t' euergetis*, 1446), upon whom depend the Trojan expedition and Greece's domestic stability and freedom (1379-84). At the moment of Iphigenia's reversal, then, her identity is embedded in popular authority, in contrast to its prior orientation toward relations of kinship or elite social status.

I will conclude my discussion by addressing the issues that Iphigenia's unique subjectivity raises about popularly organized political authority. Produced near the end of a devastating, protracted and democratically approved war, *IA* dramatizes the imposition by the Achaean army of troubling ritual violence. Iphigenia's active adoption of and complicity in the army's authoritative position, I will suggest, raises the possibility that, within this model of political authority and collective decision making, the only available subjectivity is that of uncritical and even ecstatic embodiment of the impulses and ambitions of an unaccountable *ochlos* (450, 517, 526, 735, 1030, 1338).

Works Cited:

- Althusser, Louis. 2008. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)." Rpt. in *On Ideology*, 1-60. London: Verso.
- Burgess, Dana L. 2004. "Lies and Convictions at Aulis." *Hermes* 132: 37-55.

- Chant, Dale. 1986. "Role Inversion and its Function in the *Iphigeneia at Aulis*." *Ramus* 15: 83-92.
- Gibert, John. 1995. *Change of Mind in Greek Tragedy*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht.
- Griffin, Jasper. 1990. "Characterization in Euripides: *Hippolytus* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*." In *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, ed. Christopher Pelling, 128-49. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Knox, Bernard M. W. 1979. "Second Thoughts in Greek Tragedy." Rpt. in *Word and Action: Essays on the Ancient Theater*, 231-49.
- Luschnig, Celia A. E. 1988. *Tragic Aporia: A Study of Euripides' Iphigenia at Aulis*. Victoria: Aureal Publications.
- Mellert-Hoffmann, Gudrun. 1969. *Untersuchungen zur "Iphigenia in Aulis" des Euripides*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag.
- Schenker, David J. 1999. "Dissolving Differences: Character Overlap and Audience Response." *Mnemosyne* 52: 641-57.
- Schreiber, H. M. 1968. *Iphigenies Opfertod. Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Tragikers Euripides*. Frankfurt am Mein: Diss J. W. Goethe-Universität.
- Sorum, Christina Elliott. 1992. "Myth, Choice, and Meaning in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*." *AJP* 113: 527-42.