

Ovid, Iphigenia, and Orestes as Exiles in Ovid's Exile Poetry

In his *Tristia* and *Epistulae Ex Ponto*, Ovid laments his fate as an exile in Tomis and desperately appeals for pardon so that he may return to Rome. There are multiple occasions throughout both works where he compares himself and his circumstances to the stories and characters of Iphigenia and Orestes in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*. In this paper, I argue that these comparisons go beyond simple acknowledgement of similar circumstances: Ovid's portrayals of when and why he is Iphigenia or Orestes indicates the hypothetical imminence of his rescue.

While there has been some scholarly attention paid to Ovid's autobiographical use of mythology—including Iphigenia and Orestes separately (e.g. Broege 1972 and Mills 2015)—little has been written about Ovid's use of them together and their larger implications on both works as rhetorical devices. Mills has noted Ovid's assimilation of Tomis and Tauris as "forbidding and hostile places" in Scythia, and Broege and Ingleheart (2010) emphasize the similarities drawn between Augustus and other divine and political figures as aggressors in *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Since Ovid compares himself more frequently and explicitly to Orestes than Iphigenia, more emphasis has been placed on similarities between Ovid and Orestes, especially regarding the letters that Ovid sends seeking allies in Rome to play his "Pylades" and advocate for his return to Rome. Ingleheart (2010) focuses on Ovid as Iphigenia, particularly in their mutual struggle to continue their work in exile while waiting for rescue that does not seem to be coming. My own analysis of these representations seeks to examine not just the ways in which Ovid employs the similarities between himself and these characters but also how that contributes to the overall rhetorical purpose of these works to end his exile, with special consideration given to how Ovid

chooses to present himself before and after his exile and the events that led to his current circumstances.

My paper begins with Ovid's portrayals of himself as Orestes from both the *Tristia* and *Epistulae Ex Ponto*, then moves into portrayals of Ovid as Iphigenia. Like Orestes, who was chased to Tauris by the Furies, Ovid has been forced out of Rome by political and divine powers in punishment, and he begs for someone to aid him. He appeals to potential allies with the example of Orestes and Pylades: in return for unwavering to Orestes, Pylades will be remembered forever. An assistant is necessary for his escape; while Ovid thinks he has the ability to exonerate himself from the charges that led to his exile through his words, without a physical body there to deliver them, they are useless. However, until a Pylades appears, Ovid is stuck in Tomis, which is represented by his identification with Iphigenia. Torn away from his unfinished writings, family, and society as a whole, Ovid relates to a young woman, an unmarried virgin, whose life has been entirely halted and altered against her will, leaving much unaccomplished and her on the outskirts of society with no family, husband, or children. Instead, they both must complete *tristia sacra* (sad rites, *P* 3 2.66) in a foreign land—Iphigenia for Diana and Ovid for Augustus, his family, and other prominent Roman men. When Ovid writes himself as Orestes, he is soon-to-be-rescued, but when he is Iphigenia, he is years away from potential escape—these differences are indications of this motif's rhetorical purpose. Ovid as Orestes serves as a call-to-arms that will result in imminent rescue, while Ovid as Iphigenia encourages pity. Additionally, Ovid's association with both Orestes and Iphigenia offers insight into how Ovid chooses to depict his status as guilty or innocent in regards to the causes of his exile. While Orestes can be seen as guilty and Iphigenia as innocent, Ovid chooses to associate himself with

both, which contributes to the single, absolute purpose of his exile writings: allow him to return to Rome, responsible for wrongdoing or not.

Bibliography

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