

Horse Girl Son or Masculine κλέος Daughter? An Exploration of Achilles' Gender Performance
in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*

As scholars have previously argued, the Achilles present in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* is one much unlike his Homeric counterpart (King 1987, Michelakis 2002). What scholarship has not yet explored is the role of Achilles' gender presentation in distinguishing the *Iphigenia at Aulis* Achilles. In this paper I argue that the characterization of Achilles in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* is a feminine one, with Achilles inhabiting the role of a maiden rife with sexual desire and in need of subjugation. Achilles proves his femininity throughout the play in his failure to perform the socially sanctioned roles of adult men in both the play's Homeric setting and in the Classical Greek world of its author. Achilles' gender failures are magnified by Iphigenia's masculinity, dying gloriously for the greater good of Greece.

I argue that Achilles cements his feminine status by repeatedly failing to attain masculine status as the opportunity arises for him throughout the play to act as the ideal bridegroom (νυμφίος), patriarch (κύριος), and warrior. Both Michelakis (2002) and Wasdin (2018) characterize Achilles in *Iphigenia at Aulis* as the perfect bridegroom. I posit that Achilles' perfection is the result of his performance - Achilles in *Iphigenia at Aulis* is playing a part, performing masculinity that is expected and laudable, but ultimately fails to see the performance through to the end: marriage. Achilles' performance fails due to his inability to achieve its designated end, but also because Achilles acts the part of the passive bride, as noted by his fellow warriors (1354). Achilles also takes on the role of *kyrios* in the absence of Agamemnon, positioning himself as patriarchal guardian of Iphigenia and her mother Clytemnestra (821-840, 998-1001, 921-974, 1014-1032, 1358-1368). Because this too is an act, Achilles fails to protect his family in the manner of a *kyrios*, allowing Iphigenia to be sacrificed. Finally, the warrior

Achilles is notably absent from *Iphigenia at Aulis* (King 1987). Present, however, is an Achilles who is at odds with his army and with fighting at all, notably in proximity to, but not clothed in, his armor at the critical moment of Iphigenia's sacrifice (1426-1427). Michelakis (2002) points to the symbolism on stage of Achilles' placing of his armor as a physical representation of the role Achilles espouses for himself but ultimately is unable to fulfill. With Homeric arming scenes indicative of masculinity, to be unarmed is reflective of the state of Achilles' masculinity.

Three intertwined pieces of evidence support Achilles' portrayal in *Iphigenia at Aulis* as uniquely feminine: the voyeuristic nature of the first choral epode (206-230), occurrences of the Greek verb ἐλίσσω (215, 1055, 1480), and horse imagery throughout the play (215-230, 420-423, 613-614, 619-620, 1146-1154). In the first choral epode, not only is Achilles being observed unwittingly by this group of young women, but their description of Achilles running against yoked horses driven by Eumelos on the shore is rife with feminine sexual symbolism (Calame 1997, Levaniouk 2008). Achilles is described as ἐλίσσων, a verb used twice elsewhere in the play and only in the context of young women dancing (1055, 480). Finally, horses and horse-related imagery, in this context and elsewhere throughout the play (cf. 420-423, 613-614, 619-620, 1146-1154) is symbolic of both femininity and sexuality, particularly the sexuality of young unmarried women (cf. Calame 1997, Levaniouk 2008).

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