

Role-Playing and Self-Actualization in *Iphigenia at Aulis*

The climactic change of mind in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* (extensively discussed by Gibert 1995: 222-54) is notorious both for representing such an absolute reversal of Iphigenia's views and for being considerably delayed: her final speech "contains a series of points, virtually all of which could equally well have been made by Iphigeneia fifty lines earlier" (Sansone 1991: 164). This paper addresses both issues by analyzing her reversal as an example of role-playing that is meant to impose one's own vision on reality; Zeitlin's important article on Orestes' role-playing as an attempt to escape from his own myth provides a starting point (cf. Siegel 1980, Luschnig 1988, who speaks of roles in *IA*, though without much definition). This brand of role-playing appears first in *IA* in the figures of Clytemnestra and Achilles, who continue to play the roles of mother of the bride and prospective husband even after Iphigenia's engagement to Achilles has been revealed as a fabrication. When Iphigenia agrees to the sacrifice, she assumes a new role as active heroine of her own story and, like Clytemnestra and Achilles, forces that fiction to become a reality. Her reversal is delayed because her monody and the stichomythic exchange between Clytemnestra and Achilles are needed to illustrate why other possible roles are unsatisfying or untenable.

Throughout the play, Iphigenia's dilemma is framed as a question of whom she should marry: Hades or Achilles. Helene Foley (1985: 68-78) has argued that on the level of ritual marriage is at least as important as sacrifice for negotiating the social tensions explored in the play. The same can be said on the level of narrative. In the prologue, Agamemnon's "revision" (μεταγράφω: line 108; see esp. Torrance 2013: 158-65) of his earlier epistolary instructions attempts to cancel the sacrifice and hints at an alternative plot based on marriage (122-3). The

story is refocused further by Clytemnestra's and Achilles' persistent acceptance of Iphigenia's fictitious betrothal to Achilles.

So, due to other characters' role-playing, Iphigenia is effectively presented with a choice between playing the bride of Hades and the bride of Achilles. Both are essentially passive roles created by other people for their own ends. Iphigenia's plea with Agamemnon (1211-52) stresses her dissatisfaction at being a passive (and even untragic) victim in someone else's story, while Agamemnon's response, which first suggests to her a Panhellenic martyrdom, still puts him in the starring role with a tragic decision to make (esp. 1257-8). Next, Iphigenia's monody focuses on her frustration at dying because of Paris and Helen, who are not even a part of her story, and she is immediately sidelined once more in favor of Achilles during the stichomythia at 1348-68. But her monody, which focuses on the exposure of the infant Paris and his later judgment of the goddesses, not only highlights the unfairness of Iphigenia's situation but also provides a model for her to develop a new role for herself: Paris is able to escape premature death, become the hero of his own story, and make his own marriage. Similarly, Iphigenia's final speech casts her as a more central and active heroine: she claims credit in advance for the victory at Troy and enjoys revenge on Helen, and, like Paris, she resolves an internecine quarrel by choosing her own marriage. When Iphigenia finally assents to the sacrifice, she does so as a bride of Greece (1397-9), rejecting her other suitors and detaching herself from their stories.

Thus Iphigenia again plays a role in order to turn a fiction into a reality: she becomes a heroine by pretending to be one. But, as with Clytemnestra and Achilles, role-playing as self-actualization does not extend far past the self: the other characters on stage are not entirely willing to accept Iphigenia's new role in a new plot (cf. Sorum 1992: 541-2), and her victory, such as it is, remains a personal one.

Bibliography

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