

Iphigenia as Orpheus in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*

At the end of Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Iphigenia accepts her fate as a sacrificial victim and commands the chorus to join her in a paeon to Artemis, as she goes to her death (*IA* 1467-99). Naomi Weiss has pointed out scholars' neglect of the musical aspects of the play in favor of discussions of textual difficulties, character inconsistency, and themes of sacrifice (Weiss 2018). Weiss's work highlights the self-referential, meta-musical characteristics of the choral odes throughout the play and how they emphasize certain thematic shifts in the drama. She claims that Iphigenia's paeon performance comes "at the climax of a shift in both the focus of the drama and its style of musical performance: a shift from the army to Iphigenia, group to individual, male to female; and from *choreia* to monody" (Weiss 2018, 229). While this interpretation shows the complexity that can be found through examining the role of *mousikê* in the play, more can be said about the significance of Iphigenia's paeon performance, especially with respect to its intertextual interaction with Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. In this paper, I argue that Euripides, in placing the paeon in an emphatic position, subverts the version of Iphigenia's sacrifice that Aeschylus gives in the parodos of the *Agamemnon* and transfers narrative authority from the Aeschylean chorus to the sacrificial victim herself by refashioning Iphigenia into an Orpheus figure.

In the earlier play, the chorus of old men describes the king's killing of his daughter (*Ag.* 184-249) and dwells on the fact that she is gagged lest she utter a curse on the house of Atreus (*Ag.* 235-37). The pathos of the scene is intensified by the chorus's recollection that the girl, now silent, used to sing paeans at her father's banquets (*Ag.* 245-47). In the moment of sacrifice, the

power of music she once possessed is taken away from Iphigenia. In Euripides' drama, Iphigenia reclaims her musical power by performing the paean she could not in the earlier account.

The importance of *mousikê* in this moment is emphasized through language indicating dance choreography as the girl urges the chorus to join her (*IA* 1480). The musical authority Iphigenia attains is also foreshadowed earlier in the play when she wishes for the powers of Orpheus (*IA* 1211). In Euripides' other plays, Orpheus is often invoked because of his superhuman musical abilities and his power to control the world around him (*Bacchae* 561–562, *Medea* 543, *Cyclops* 646). Although, in this case, Iphigenia is lamenting her inability to persuade her father, the association of herself with the semi-divine musician provides her with a new role in the play. Although she is bound to complete the myth of her sacrifice, she gains poetic control of the narrative through her musical performance. In her final monody, she describes the details of her sacrifice, including ritual use of baskets, fire, and barley and her father's walking around the altar (*IA* 1470-72). The messenger-speech at the end of the play is widely agreed to be spurious (Collard and Morwood 2018, 628-29). If this is the case, then Iphigenia is the one who paints the final picture of the sacrifice for the audience, replacing the chorus from the *Oresteia*.

Iphigenia's use of paean, although a submission to her circumstances, is a rebellion against the previous dramatic adaptation. As Iphigenia sheds her fear, she sheds the characteristics of the timorous chorus who told the story of her sacrifice in the *Agamemnon*. In line 1629 of Aeschylus' play, the chorus of old men is described by Aegisthus as being the opposite of Orpheus, who led all things with his voice (ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἦγε πάντ' ἀπὸ φθογγῆς χαρᾶ, *Ag.* 1630). The chorus is helpless and will be led by Aegisthus. In Euripides' play, Iphigenia, as a character with Orpheus' power of *mousikê*, becomes the voice of authority. She directs her own sacrifice through a series of sung commands. Rather than being forced into speechlessness, she

orders that the Greek army observe ritual silence (*IA* 1469), while her words dominate the dramatic scene. Iphigenia thus steps outside of her own story and finishes it from a position of poetic creation.

Bibliography

Collard, C., and Morwood, J. 2017. *Euripides, Iphigenia at Aulis*. Liverpool.

Weiss, N. A. 2018. *The Music of Tragedy: Performance and Imagination in Euripidean Theater*.
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