

THE SACRIFICE-MOTIF IN EURIPIDES' *IT*

DAVID SANSONE

University of Illinois

It has often been recognized that an important feature of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* is the representation of the parallelism between the fate of Orestes and that of Iphigeneia.¹ But the extent to which this relationship is emphasized by Euripides and the importance of it for the understanding of the play have not been sufficiently acknowledged. The parallelism of Orestes' fate in the land of the Taurians and Iphigeneia's at Aulis is especially evident from the juxtaposition of the two speeches which constitute the first episode, that of the herdsman (260–339) and that of Iphigeneia (342–91). The parallelism is brought out in these two speeches primarily by means of verbal echoes. The former describes how Orestes and Pylades were subdued (*χειρούμεθα* 330) and brought for sacrifice, the latter how Iphigeneia was subdued (*χειρούμενοι* 359, in the same position in the line) and led to sacrifice. Indeed she was subdued *ὥστε μόσχον* (359), which phrase might send a chill up the spine of the audience in view of the fact that *μόσχοι* have in fact been slaughtered just sixty lines before.² The subdued Iphigeneia touches her father's knees (*γονάτων* 363) in supplication; the subdued Orestes sinks to his knee (*γόνυ* 332) in defeat. The deceived Iphigeneia, on her way to be sacrificed, peers through her bridal veil (*καλλυμάτων* 372); Pylades veils (*προुकάλυπτειν* 312) the fallen and deluded Orestes with his cloak before the two are captured. Finally, the herdsman's speech ends with a reference to Aulis (339), as it had begun with a reference to the Symplegades (260).³ In Iphigeneia's

¹ Arist. *Poetics* 1455a7. A. P. Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived* (Oxford 1971) 47–48.

² Compare the two similes: Iph. was sacrificed "like a heifer" (359); Orestes rushed into the midst of the herd "like a lion" (297).

³ The land of the Taurians is regularly referred to in this play with reference to the Symplegades: 241, 260, 355, 1389. The conjunction of Aulis and the Symplegades represents a further parallel between Iph. and Orestes. He is to be sacrificed on the shores of the Black Sea just as his sister was "sacrificed" at the seashore (see 6–7). Note that the word *κυάνεος*, used in line 7 to describe the sea at Aulis, is found elsewhere in this play only as an epithet of the Black Sea: 241, 392, 746, 889.

speech the Symplegades and Aulis are found within four lines of each other (355, 358). The implication, expressed by both the herdsman (338–39) and Iphigeneia (358), is that Iphigeneia will re-enact Aulis on the shores of the Black Sea.⁴ She is to be the priestess (ἱερέα 34) just as her father Agamemnon acted as the priest (ἱερεὺς 360) on that awful occasion.

Not only did each of the two children of Agamemnon narrowly escape being sacrificed by a near relative but each also suffered exile and each faced the apparently inescapable fate of being buried far from Argos. This last is particularly well brought out by the close resemblance of two passages. In the recognition scene Orestes, by way of proving his identity, mentions some of the circumstances of Iphigeneia's sacrifice at Aulis. He asks, "Did you not give (δοῦσα) a lock of your hair (κόμας) to be brought back home to mother?", and his sister replies, "Yes, as a memorial (μνημεῖα) at my tomb (τάφῳ), to take the place of my corpse" (820–21). These lines cannot help recall a passage only one hundred lines before, in which Orestes gave instructions to Pylades for the erection of a cenotaph at Argos, when it appeared certain that Orestes would die in the land of the Taurians. "Heap up a tomb," Orestes says, "and place there a memorial (μνημεῖα) for me and let my sister (i.e., Electra) bestow (δότηω) tears and a lock of her hair (κόμας) on my grave (τάφῳ)" (702–03). Several other verbal parallels and similar reminiscences are to be found throughout the first half of the play which indicate that Euripides intends us to have constantly before our eyes the similarity of the fates of brother and sister. Until the recognition scene each thinks the other dead.⁵ The two share a hatred of Helen, who is, they think, the source of all their misfortunes.⁶ And these misfortunes consist of Orestes' having

⁴ Other verbal parallels abound in addition to those mentioned above (* indicates that the words are found in the same position in the line in both Iph.'s and the herdsman's speeches): κόμιζε 342 / κομίζομεν 334; *δοκοῦσ' (of Iph.) 349 / δοκῶν (of Orestes) 299; πνεῦμα 354 / πνέουσα 288; γενείου 362 / γένειον 308; μήτηρ 365 / μητέρα 289 (both of Clytaimestra); *Ἄιδης 369 / Ἄιδου 286; *αἵματηρόν 371 / 300; *ἐπὶ ῥοθιμύσας 371 / πορθιμύων 266; *ἔχουσ' 373 / ἔχουσα 290; *φόνου 381 / φόνον 338; *ἡγουμένη 383 / ἡγούμεθα 305; ἔτικτεν 385 / ἔτικτε 274; ἄπιστα 388 / ἄπιστον 328; φαῦλον 390 / φαύλους 305.

⁵ Iph.: δοκοῦσ' Ὁρέστην μηκέθ' ἥλιον βλέπειν (349); Orestes: θανοῦσαν οὐχ ὄραν φάος (564, referring to Iph.).

⁶ From the start Iph. represents her awkward situation as arising Ἐλένης οὐνεκα (8).

killed his mother and Iphigeneia's having been (virtually) killed by her father.⁷ Both are sacrificial victims to the goddess Artemis.⁸ Orestes was sent to the land of the Taurians by Apollo (*Φοῖβός μ' ἔπεμψε δεῦρο* 977; cf. 85) and Iphigeneia by Artemis (*Ἄρτεμις . . . πέμψασά μ' ἐς τήνδ' ὥκισεν Ταύρων χθόνα* 29-30), who are themselves brother and sister.⁹

But these parallels are not confined to the first half of the play, nor are they merely superficial—to a certain degree they are what the play is about. The sacrifice of Iphigeneia years ago involved (i.e., the purpose of it was) the sailing of ships from Europe to Asia (18). Now Orestes and Iphigeneia, along with the wooden image of Artemis, cannot sail from Asia to Europe until a (mock-) sacrifice of Orestes has been staged. The most significant parallels between Orestes and Iphigeneia, however, are those which are revealed in Orestes' long speech (939-86) relating the often-neglected first *aition*.¹⁰ Rather than being an intrusion into this play, the first *aition* is of great significance and is especially relevant. For it further underlines the spiritual kinship between Iphigeneia and Orestes. After he killed his mother¹¹ at the instigation of Apollo, he was sent by that god to Athens. There he was shunned as one hated by the gods, as a pollution, but eventually some took pity on him and offered him hospitality. Yet none addressed

Similarly Orestes: 526 and perhaps 522 (where *τινι* may refer to Orestes himself, but see Platnauer *ad loc.*).

⁷ Orestes refers to himself as *μητέρα κατακτᾶς* (79); Iph. says of herself *ἔσφαξεν . . . πατήρ* (8, cf. *ἐκαινόμην* 27). Of course, Orestes' parents and Iph.'s are the same, although they are not yet aware of it. And indeed Iph. uses the same phrase to refer to her own father (360) and to the father (499) of the Greek stranger who turns out to be her brother: *ὁ γεννήσας πατήρ*.

⁸ Iph. speaks of herself as *σφάγιον . . . καὶ θῦμα* (211-12). Only a few lines later the two Greek strangers are introduced as *πρόσφαγμα καὶ θυτήριον* (243, cf. *τὰ τῆς θεοῦ θύματα* 329).

⁹ 86. See Burnett (above, note 1) 48.

¹⁰ Neglected, that is, by most scholars, who find it something of an embarrassment. E.g., G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London 1941) 326 note 1: "This aetiological explanation of an Athenian custom, so common at the end, is rather unusual in the middle, of a play." According to G. Norwood, *Greek Tragedy* (London 1948⁴) 252, Orestes' speech is even an embarrassment to Iph.: "He has forgotten half the facts, and bungles the rest. This speech, full of obscurity, irrelevancy, and disconnected thought, is practically ignored by his sister, who realizes his condition both from the report of the herdsman and from the occasional lunacy he manifests in conversation."

¹¹ *ταῦθ' ἃ σιγῶμεν κακά* 940. Cf. Iph.'s *τὰ δ' ἄλλα σιγῶ* 37. Both are constrained by the gods to murder, a fact which both would rather forget.

him and, in place of the usual communal wine bowl, the banqueters drank each from his own cup. This is the origin of the celebration of the *Choes* at the festival of the Anthesteria. The trial at the Areopagus, as in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, takes place but the issue, and Orestes' fate, are still in doubt. In order for him to escape those of the Erinyes who voted for his condemnation Orestes must remove the *xoanon* of Artemis from the land of the Taurians and deposit it in Athens. This bizarre narrative brings to the fore two significant facts about Orestes' situation: his extreme isolation from his fellow men and the ambivalence of his fate. Like his sister, Orestes is alive and not alive.¹² The judgment of the Areopagus was indecisive; he is neither convicted nor acquitted. Also like his sister, he is denied any intercourse with his fellow Greeks. This isolation, almost like that of a Sophoclean hero, is of the utmost importance for the play. For it is the prelude to the purification of the house of Atreus, which is central to the meaning of the *Iphigenia*. The isolation is the ordeal which Orestes and Iphigeneia are required to endure and which makes them eligible for purification and ultimate salvation.

It is the parallelism of the fates of brother and sister, and in general the motif of human sacrifice, which hold together the play and give it its meaning. What Orestes undergoes in the land of the Taurians is, in effect, a *ritual re-enactment* of his sister's fate at Aulis. This re-enactment has two important results: it has a profound psychological effect on each of the two children of Agamemnon. In the first place it puts an end to Iphigeneia's bitterness about Aulis, purging it from her mind. (She had wanted to re-enact Aulis on the shores of the Black Sea in order to make Greece pay for her "sacrifice" (357-58; cf. 336-39) and she very nearly *did* re-enact Aulis in a way much more terrible than she could have imagined. For instead of merely sacrificing a Greek stranger she would have performed the barbaric ritual on her own flesh and blood, the very thing which made the sacrifice at Aulis so repugnant. But fortunately the re-enactment was faithful in every detail, so that the victim was miraculously saved at the last moment.) In the second place this ritual re-enactment has put an end

¹² Cf. 568. This theme is more fully developed, and more explicit, in the *Helen*: 138 *τεθνᾶσι κοῦ τεθνᾶσι* (of Helen's brothers); 286 *τοῖς πράγμασιν τέθνηκα, τοῖς δ' ἔργοισιν οὐ* (of Helen herself).

to Orestes' punishment for the murder of Clytaimestra. The ritual has purified him (92, 705, 981).

Euripides has already shown himself to be very sensitive to ritual and symbolic action.¹³ In the scene in which Iphigeneia deceives Thoas, she describes the preliminaries to the rites which she pretends she will perform in order to purify the strangers and the image of Artemis. The strangers will be bound (1204), their heads will be veiled (1207), they will be led to the seashore (1193) to be washed (1191). Iphigeneia in fact is the priestess of Artemis and we must assume that these are the very actions she would take if she were to purify someone of the pollution caused by matricide. But all of these actions have been performed earlier in the play, especially as reported in the herdsman's speech in the first episode. Orestes (along with Pylades) had been bound (468-69) when he was brought to the temple for sacrifice. During the battle with the herdsman and the other Taurians Orestes' head had been veiled (312) by Pylades, who was protecting his fallen friend from the missiles thrown by the barbarians. And all this took place at the seashore (253), where oxen, the proper objects of sacrifice, were washed (255, 260-61)¹⁴ and slaughtered (296-98). This entire sequence of events represents a re-enactment of what had happened years before, at Aulis, when Iphigeneia had been prepared for sacrifice and, by divine dispensation and intervention, a deer was substituted and slaughtered.

We have, therefore, in this play, not merely an *aition* but a paradigm. Not only do we have, as we have for instance in the *Hippolytus*, a representation of the event from which the ritual is derived; we have, in a sense, a representation of the first ritual celebration of the event.¹⁵

The motif of human sacrifice is of importance as bearing on the whole question of the relationship between mortals and gods. Nor is this

¹³ See also C. Segal, *TAPA* 102 (1971) 581-82. In addition to Segal, other commentators have recently become aware of the importance of ritual purity as a theme in the *IT*, *Helen* and *Ion*, most notably Burnett (above, note 1) and C. H. Whitman (*Euripides and the Full Circle of Myth* [Cambridge, Mass., 1974]). But the deception of Thoas is only one part of the "ritual purification" (Whitman 28) which begins with the slaughter of the oxen earlier in the drama.

¹⁴ Compare especially 254-55 with 1191-93.

¹⁵ In a perhaps analogous way, the Parthenon frieze represents, not a mythological event (as we see in, e.g., the earlier frieze of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi), but a ritual celebration.

question avoided by Euripides in this play, despite the comments of Albin Lesky. In his *Greek Tragedy*¹⁶ Lesky compares the *IT* unfavorably with Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. In the earlier play, says Lesky,

the road from Delphi to Athens, which Orestes treads, symbolised a profound religious concept. But such probing into the divinely intended significance of events plays no part in the Euripidean treatment of the subject. Here again we find the contradiction mentioned earlier.¹⁷ The fetching of the Taurian Artemis by Orestes gives the poet a link with the Attic cult of Artemis Tauropolos at Halae—the type of link with an actual cult which he so often seeks to establish. On the other hand these innovations [i.e. vis-à-vis the *Eumenides*] enable him to write a lively play in which recognition and intrigue . . . have a purely human interest and lack all religious connotations.

Of importance in this connection are Iphigeneia's comments which close the first episode. There Iphigeneia reproaches Artemis for forbidding anyone who is polluted from touching her altar and at the same time requiring human sacrifice. Indeed Iphigeneia will not believe that this is the case. She refuses to believe the story about the feast which Tantalus (her great-great-grandfather) provided for the gods and she thinks that the Taurians, being homicidal, attribute their wickedness to the gods (380-91).

The reference to Tantalus is of great interest. It recalls the very beginning of the play:

*Πέλοψ ὁ Ταντάλειος ἐς Πῖσαν μολὼν
θοαῖσιν ἵπποις . . .*

It reminds us that human sacrifice runs in the family, since Pelops was, essentially, offered up as a sacrifice to the gods. Yet it is difficult to see exactly what it is that Iphigeneia does not believe; that is, what version of the story does Euripides have in mind? Does she mean that Tantalus *did* serve up Pelops but that the gods refused to partake? Or does she mean that Tantalus did nothing at all wrong and that the whole story is a fabrication? This latter is what we see in Pindar's First Olympian Ode: the banquet of Tantalus is most proper (τὸν

¹⁶ A. Lesky, *Greek Tragedy*, transl. H. A. Frankfort (London and New York 1967²) 176.

¹⁷ The "contradiction" Lesky speaks of refers to an earlier comment (page 175) to the effect that "the *Helen* reveals the gradual secularisation of the tragic play that was rooted in religious cult."

εὐνομώτατον . . . ἔρανον 37) and Poseidon snatches away Pelops to be his lover. The line of Iphigeneia's argument ("Men attribute their wickedness to the gods") and the parallel with her own situation, however, favor the former interpretation. According to this version,¹⁸ Tantalus (for some reason) served up his son to the gods who forbore from eating, all except Demeter, who consumed part of Pelops' shoulder. The gods then punished Tantalus and put Pelops back together, substituting ivory for the lost shoulder. The train of Iphigeneia's thought is: it is possible that men may be guilty of cannibalism¹⁹ but the gods are capable of nothing evil.²⁰ Therefore I think, says Iphigeneia (389-90), "that the Taurians, themselves having murderous tendencies, attribute²¹ their own wickedness to the gods (when they claim that Artemis requires human sacrifice)."

It is one thing for Pindar to say that he does not believe the story told about Tantalus' banquet. It is something else entirely for Iphigeneia to say so from the stage. (And this is not an instance of Euripides

¹⁸ Scholiast on Pindar *O.* 1.40; Apollod. *Epit.* 2.3; Hyginus *Fab.* 83; Servius on Virgil *Aen.* 6.603 and on *Georg.* 3.7.

¹⁹ Her grandfather's brother Thyestes is a good example. The Thyestean banquet appears to be referred to in the parodos, 193-95 and 199-200, where the family connection with Tantalus is alluded to. Cf. also 812-816.

²⁰ 391. Cf. fr. 292.7 Nauck (*Bellerophon*), εἰ θεοί τι δρῶσιν αἰσχρόν, οὐκ εἰσὶν θεοί.

²¹ The word I translate here "attribute" (ἀναφέρειν) is of some importance. The same word is used in the prologue of the *Bacchae* (line 29): Dionysus says that his aunts (who ought least) disbelieved Semele's claim that it was Zeus who was responsible for Semele's pregnant condition; rather (they say) some mortal is the father and Semele is attributing the lapse of morality to Zeus (ἐς Ζῆν' ἀναφέρειν τὴν ἀμαρτίαν λέχους). The same verb appears only twice in the *IT*: here, at the end of the first episode, and in the prologue (line 23). These two occurrences, like the references to Pelops and Tantalus, serve to bind together the prologue, parodos and first episode into a unit. (Other grounds for regarding lines 1-391 as a unit are given by K. Matthiessen, *Elektra, Taurische Iphigenie und Helena: Untersuchungen zur Chronologie und zur dramatischen Form im Spätwerk des Euripides* [Göttingen 1964] 22-23.) At line 23 Iph. relates the circumstances of her sacrifice at Aulis. The prophet Calchas had said that no ship will sail for Troy until Agamemnon sacrifices Iph.; for Agamemnon had sworn to sacrifice to Artemis the fairest thing brought forth in a particular year and, Iph. says, Calchas "attributed the title of 'fairest' to me" (τὸ καλλιστεῖον εἰς ἐμ' ἀναφέρων). Thus the word is the *mot juste* for referring to the way in which men cover over their wickedness by blaming it on the gods. And the verbal echo underlines the connection between Calchas and the savage Taurians. In this first section of the drama (i.e., everything before the first stasimon) the idea has very subtly been planted in our minds that perhaps the Greeks (or at the very least *some* of the Greeks) are no better than barbarians, an idea to which we will shortly revert.

abandoning the tragic mask and speaking *in propria persona*. This outburst is fully in keeping with Iphigeneia's character and, indeed, contributes to the characterization of her psychological development.) For one thing, Iphigeneia is much closer in time to the event than is Pindar (indeed, she is Pelops' great-granddaughter). For another, she has a closer kinship with Pelops than even the genealogy would suggest—for she has found herself in precisely the same circumstance as her illustrious ancestor. Everyone believes (including Agamemnon, the sacrificer) that Iphigeneia has been sacrificed, while in fact she is alive and well and living in the land of the Taurians. Similarly Tantalus thought he was offering up his son to the gods, but the gods restored Pelops to life and prosperity. Indeed the parallel between Iphigeneia and Pelops is of great consequence for the understanding of the play. For Pelops seems to have been the only member of the family, from Tantalus to Orestes, to have prospered at all and to have avoided a disastrous fate. This insistence on the parallelism, early in the play, is part of Euripides' technique for preparing us for the satisfactory conclusion of the action. Both Pelops and Iphigeneia are innocent of wrongdoing, and both are saved by the gods.

Further, it is interesting and perhaps significant that, when it comes time for Orestes to identify himself to his sister, he does so in terms of their ancestry. At first Iphigeneia refuses to believe that Orestes is who he claims to be (807: "I was born to the son of the son of Pelops"). Iphigeneia asks for *tekμήria* and Orestes recites the quarrel between Atreus and Thyestes and the sacrifice at Aulis. But Iphigeneia remains incredulous until Orestes reports what he himself had seen: the ancient spear of Pelops hidden away in the women's quarters in Agamemnon's palace.²² The insistence upon Pelops is important: he is, as it were, living proof of the fact that the gods will have nothing to do with human sacrifice. And the recitation of the family tree reflects accurately Orestes' identity.

With the exception of Pelops, every generation has been guilty of kin-murder: Tantalus, Atreus, Agamemnon, Orestes. And the youngest generation was very nearly guilty of the same thing for a second

²² 822–26. These are the same terms in which Iph. had identified herself at the very start of the play. Compare lines 1–2, where also we find the proper names Πέλοψ, Πίσα and Ὀινόμαος.

time, only without knowing it. The unique, and almost catastrophic, experience of Iphigeneia and Orestes puts a dramatic and decisive end to the series. We may well see the hand of the gods at work here, manipulating the human characters in order to effect the desired outcome. After all, if Artemis had not spirited Iphigeneia away to the land of the Taurians, a land where human sacrifice takes place, and had not made Iphigeneia her priestess, and if Apollo had not sent Orestes to the land of the Taurians to retrieve the statue of Artemis, none of this would have happened. But these divine activities only made the outcome *possible*. That Iphigeneia avoided sacrificing her brother is due to the actions and characters of Iphigeneia and Orestes themselves. (That she almost sacrifices Orestes rather than Pylades is also due to the character of Orestes,²³ who refused to be saved at Pylades' expense.) We have already seen that Iphigeneia refuses to believe that Artemis accepts human sacrifice, and everything in the play proves her right. Similarly Orestes shows himself to have the proper respect for the gods. He has done everything he could to fulfill the awesome tasks imposed on him by Apollo. He has killed his own mother and now he has gone on a journey to the ends of the earth and has only been prevented by his capture from fulfilling Apollo's order to remove the image of Artemis. In addition, Orestes' piety is well served by his intelligence: he grasps the situation fully when he tells Iphigeneia (1012-14), "If it were repugnant to Artemis, how could Apollo have required me to bring the image of the goddess to Athens?" Two such are eminently deserving of salvation, and it is not accidental that the means to that salvation are provided by the gods: the need for removing the *xoanon*, Iphigeneia's position as priestess, Orestes' pollution.²⁴ Yet it should not be forgotten that it is necessary for these mortals, especially the clever Iphigeneia, to take these elements and weld them into a successful plot for escape. And they are able to do this because they are able to perceive the essential similarity of their individual fates. And their confidence in the aid of the gods is not misplaced because they have

²³ Whitman (above, note 13) 20 f., Orestes breaks the "vicious circle" of human sacrifice with his voluntary sacrifice. This puts the story of the fate of the house of Atreus in much more human terms than does Aeschylus' *Eumenides*.

²⁴ Burnett (above, note 1) 59-61.

purified themselves and the house of Tantalus by a ritual re-enactment of the crime which has been inherited by each successive generation; they have used Iphigeneia's sacrifice and salvation as the model for the sacrifice and salvation of Orestes.

It has been suggested by A. P. Burnett that the *Iphigenia* was written by Euripides as "a sequel to the *Eumenides*," as "an alternate for the Aeschylean *Proteus*" (the satyr-play of the *Oresteia* tetralogy).²⁵ We may well question Burnett's characterization of the *IT* as virtually a satyr-play, but there can be no doubt that Euripides had the *Oresteia* on his mind when he composed this play, just as he had when he composed the *Electra*. The relationship, however, between the *IT* and the *Oresteia* is a good deal more serious and significant than Burnett will allow:

The Argive prince who left the stage almost unnoticed in the middle of the *Eumenides* had gone off like the obscure guest of honor from a party invaded by swells, from which fact Euripides chose to conclude that his release had not been truly procured. His Orestes is still pursued by a splinter group of Erinyes who refused to become Eumenides and remained at large even after the Aeschylean judgment (970-1). Athena suffers, perhaps, by the innovation, but it allows the poet to create a new Apolline salvation, cast in the form of healing prophecy. (Burnett 72)

I think we can give Euripides more credit than this. He does not contradict his predecessor merely for the purpose of fabricating a novel plot. Euripides' intention is serious and deserves to be taken seriously. The *IT* is, I think, an answer to, and rejection of, the theology of the *Oresteia*. A prominent feature of Aeschylus' monumental creation is the evolution of the Furies who, by the end of the trilogy, have become the Eumenides. (A similar evolution seems to have taken place in the case of Zeus in the *Prometheus* trilogy, although Lloyd-Jones does not believe it.²⁶) Euripides seems to be saying here that

²⁵ Burnett (above, note 1) 71-72. See now R. Caldwell, "Tragedy Romanticized: The *Iphigenia Taurica*," *CJ* 70.2 (1974-75) 23-40. Caldwell's article, which appeared in print only after my own paper had been essentially completed, represents the *IT* as a "non-serious" (34), non-tragic recapitulation of "both the plot elements and the thematic concerns" (24) of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Caldwell offers this as a corrective of Burnett's view of the *IT*, but in fact Caldwell's estimate of the play turns out to be almost indistinguishable from that of Burnett.

²⁶ H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley 1971) 95 ff.

it is not the gods who are subject to change and evolution but mortals. Euripides has looked at the ancient legends and has seen a great difference between the religious experience reflected in those legends and the religious experience of his own day. Rationalist that he is, Euripides has recognized that the difference can only result from a change (or series of changes) in human society.²⁷ Nor is this inconsistent with Euripides' view elsewhere. Throughout his work the gods have the status of a "given" in human affairs. They are often brutal (as in the *Bacchae*, *Hippolytus* and *Heracles*) and sometimes inconsistent (as in the *Electra*). When there is an inconsistency, or a conflict, as in the case of Orestes asked by one god to plunder the temple of another, man has only reason to guide him in his action, as well as an only imperfect conception of what is right and just. That not all Euripides' tragedies end as does the *IT* is due to the fact that reason is not always infallible and justice is rarely an easy goal to attain.

The wisdom which Iphigeneia and Orestes have acquired (and we, the audience, are expected to share) is a recognition of their common inheritance of violence and barbarity. By re-enacting, in ritual fashion, the crime of their ancestors, Iphigeneia and Orestes have gained an insight into the relationship between themselves and the gods. And by reducing that experience to the level of harmless ritual they have, with the help of Athena, made a significant step from the barbarous to the civilized. And it is significant that the re-enactment took place in Asia, the home of the "barbarian" and the site of the original crime in the series, the sacrifice of Pelops by Tantalus. One almost

²⁷ Recognition of this may put us in a better position to interpret the difficult third stasimon (1234-83). The Chorus sing of Apollo's birth and his acquisition of the oracle at Delphi from Gaia and Themis. The account is invariably compared with the opening lines of the *Eumenides*, which present the succession of inhabitants of the Delphic oracle as a prelude to the evolutionary process which is to culminate in the action of the end of that play. ("The purpose of this opening passage is to prepare for the harmonious reconciliation at the close between the Powers of Earth and Darkness and the Powers of Heaven and Light," Headlam-Thomson in their commentary on *Eum.* 1.) But the tone of the song in the *IT* is one of light and joy, dominated by the laughter of Zeus (1274). If the *IT* is, as I have represented it, a rejection of the Aeschylean theology, the third stasimon may be contributing by representing the theology of the *Oresteia* as little more than a pleasant story, by reducing it to the level of the *Theogony* or the Homeric Hymns. Tales about the gods slaying monstrous serpents, Euripides seems to be saying, or about gods overthrowing one another and disputing each other's authority can be tolerated merely as *stories*, but they cannot be taken seriously as theology, they do not represent what the gods are really like.

gets the impression that the point of view presented in this play is that barbaric behavior was imported into Europe (i.e., Greece) in the person of Pelops who, although himself innocent, carried with him the curse of his father's crime; and that, further, the (already) civilized Greeks were purging themselves of this pollution by returning to Asia, re-enacting the crime of kin-murder and memorializing the event in a civilized ritual, symbolically restoring the now-pure image of Artemis to the possession of those (namely the Greeks) who truly know how to worship the gods. It is easy to see in this play, as in the *Helen*, an expression of a smug feeling of Greek superiority over the barbarians, particularly in the way in which the two heroines easily deceive and make fools of the barbarian kings. And indeed it is easy to imagine a large part of Euripides' Greek audience feeling satisfied with themselves, and satisfied that this in fact is Euripides' meaning.

But there is at least some hint in the course of the play that should make the more reflective, at least, among the audience question the simplicity of this interpretation. In the first place, at the point in the play at which the children of Agamemnon are at their most confident, just before they are to put their plan for escape into effect, Iphigeneia prays to Artemis to aid them in their escape and to accompany them "from a barbarian land to Athens." "For," she continues, "it is not fitting that you should dwell here when it is possible for you to have a city which is *eudaimôn*." One wonders what Euripides intends by calling Athens *eudaimôn* in a play written at the height (or should one say depths?) of the Peloponnesian War.²⁸ It might almost be understandable if Artemis were to choose to remain in the land of the Taurians rather than allow herself to be transported to the Athens of the time in which the *IT* was produced. It was around this very time (414 B.C.) that that great attempt to escape from Athens was made in the form of the *Birds* of Aristophanes.²⁹ And some years earlier one of Euripides' own characters even expressed the wish that she might

²⁸ It is not known precisely when the *IT* was written, but few scholars suggest a date outside the limits 414-410 B.C.

²⁹ Although, as Euelpides says, "It isn't as though we hated the city itself; it's big enough and naturally happy (*eudaimôn*) all right . . ." (36-37; I would read φύσει τ' εὐδαιμόνα, line 37). But for Euripides the state of εὐδαιμονία is relative and impermanent, as we see most clearly at *IT* 543-44. Aristophanes was very much aware of this characteristic of Euripides' thought: at *Frogs* 1182-88 "Aeschylus" cannot accept the sentiment expressed in the first line of Euripides' *Antigone*, to the effect that Oedipus once was *eudaimôn* (but later ceased to be such).

fly from Greece to the place to which the Argo had sailed—the very waters which are constantly mentioned in the *IT* as washing the shores of the land of the Taurians.³⁰ This is one hint that Euripides, while his play presents one stage in the evolution from barbarism to civilization, does not want us to imagine that that evolution is in any sense complete, that the Greeks have successfully purged themselves of all their former barbarism. The second hint comes shortly thereafter. In the scene in which Iphigeneia is tricking the barbarian king Thoas, she says that one of the Greek strangers must be purified before he can be sacrificed, because he is the murderer of his mother. The barbarian is shocked and exclaims, "Apollo, not even among barbarians would anyone do such a thing!" (1174). This line may have elicited a laugh from Euripides' audience,³¹ but its point is serious. One is easily reminded of two relevant passages from fifth century literature. One is from Herodotus: in the first book, when Herodotus describes the customs of the Persians, he says that the Persians deny that any one of them has ever killed his own mother or father (1.137.2). The second passage is from an earlier play of Euripides: toward the end of the *Medea* Jason reviles Medea for the murder of their children saying, in words almost identical to those used by Thoas in the *Iphigenia*, "No Greek woman would ever have done this thing," a statement which anyone in Euripides' audience could easily have controverted if he were up on his mythology. The point is not that barbarians are civilized and Greeks barbaric, any more than the point of the early part of the *Electra* is that farmers are noble and aristocrats base.

Iphigeneia and Orestes transcend the barbarism which characterizes their family. The story is remarkable and satisfying. But Euripides has insured that his audience, though satisfied, is not self-satisfied, and we come away from the experience of the *IT* with that special kind of enlightenment which particularly tragedy has been able to provide, an enlightenment which proceeds from a confrontation with a work of art which at once challenges us and furnishes an instrument with which that challenge can begin to be met.³²

³⁰ *Andr.* 861–65. The phrase *κυνέας . . . ἀκτάς* refers to the Symplegades (see above, note 3). The date of *Andr.* is not known.

³¹ Whitman (above, note 13) 29 sees intentional humor in this line.

³² This paper was presented in an earlier form at a Departmental Colloquium in Urbana on November 22, 1974 and has benefitted greatly from the comments of my colleagues at the University of Illinois.