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THE ANTIPHONAL ENDING OF EURIPIDES’
IPHIGENIA IN AULIS (1475–1532)

NAOMI A. WEISS

The problem of “authenticity” has dominated many discussions of Euripides’ Iphigenia in Aulis, a play produced after the tragedian’s death, probably in 405 B.C.E. alongside the Bacchae and Alcmeon in Corinth. ¹ One of the most disputed passages in terms of authorship is the tragedy’s closing sequence (1475–1629), in which Iphigenia’s second monody is followed by a short, astrophic choral song as she departs for her sacrifice; a messenger then enters and recounts how, as the blow was struck, a deer appeared in the maiden’s place. It is generally agreed that the last one hundred lines containing the messenger’s speech are interpolated, perhaps added as late as the seventh century C.E., while even the alternative lines quoted in Aelian implying the appearance of Artemis ex machina contain some problematically postclassical elements. ²

The chorus’ song preceding the messenger’s speech has also been regarded as spurious, but largely on account of the striking degree of repetition between it and Iphigenia’s monody, not because it shows evidence of postclassical language.³ Recently David Kovacs has countered this view by arguing for the authenticity of this song and suggesting that Iphigenia’s monody is interpolated instead, in which case she was originally meant to depart for her sacrifice immediately after giving her instructions to the chorus to sing to Artemis at 1466–74. ⁴ If so, then the choral performance would in fact have been part of the exodos. According to both these readings, either Iphigenia’s monody or the chorus’ song must be interpolated.

This focus on the question of authenticity, however, has neglected the ways in which both Iphigenia’s monody and the chorus’ final song respond musically to each other and together fit within a pattern of choreia (choral song

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1. On textual difficulties in the IA, see especially Page 1934; Meller-Hoffmann 1969; Willink 1971; Knox 1972; Bain 1977; Irigoin 1988; Kovacs 2003; Gurd 2005. The dating of the play’s performance and identification of the other two tragedies within the tetralogy are based on schol. on Ar. Ran. 66–67.

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and dance) and monody through the play as a whole. By “respond musically” I do not mean metrical responsion—the chorus’ song is astrophic—but a form of antiphony in which the chorus echoes Iphigenia’s monody in style and diction, and follows her directions to perform in a particular way. Through exploring this musical interaction here, I hope to show that these two songs need not be mutually exclusive. Both of them could have been in the play at its first performance, and they respond to each other in ways that suggest that they were originally intended by Euripides, even if he himself did not write them—in which case they were probably composed by an early actor or producer trying to reproduce the tragedian’s style. It will, I hope, become clear that we need not see these songs of Iphigenia and of the Chalcidean women as separate performances. Together they form one and the same antiphonal performance that poignantly brings the actor and chorus together for the first time in the closing scene of the tragedy. This combined performance may therefore provide a slight corrective to the prevailing view that actors’ song becomes dominant in Euripides’ later tragedies at the expense of the chorus: not only does choreia take up a remarkably high proportion of this posthumous production, as it also does in the Bacchae, but the full dramatic impact of the chorus’ final performance actually results from its exchange with Iphigenia’s singing, demonstrating that solo song need not mean a decrease in the prominence of the chorus.

During the course of the Iphigenia in Aulis the focal point of the drama gradually contracts, from the immense Greek army gathered at Aulis, waiting for the winds to allow them to continue on to Troy, to Iphigenia, Agamemnon’s young daughter who is to be sacrificed so that the army can depart. The panhellenic view at the start of the play is effected by means of the unusually long parodos, in which the chorus describes the extraordinary sight of the various Greek troops arrayed along the shore. As Froma Zeitlin has noted,
its song gives the impression of “a full skênographia, a painted backdrop to frame the drama of Iphigenia as it unfolds on stage before the eyes of the spectators in the audience.” Such a sight not only is evoked through the chorus’ words, but could also be suggested by means of its own choreographed performance. In the first astrophic epode, the image of Achilles racing in full armor against a four-horse chariot begins with a remarkable stress on speed and feet, even for the famously swift-footed hero: the striking hapax compound λαιψηροδρόμος is particularly marked in the pleonastic description of the hero as “swift-running Achilles, equal to the wind on his feet” (τὸν ἰσάνεμόν τε ποδοῖν / λαιψηροδρόμον Ἀχιλλέα, 206–7). The emphasis on the running of feet could simultaneously point to the chorus’ own movements, which would then merge with those it describes. The image of Achilles “whirling” (ἐἵλισσον, 215) around the track would then strengthen the impression of mimetic interplay between his movements and those of the chorus. Although this verb is used once in Homer to express the swift directing of a carriage around the turning posts, by the late fifth century words of the εἵλισσ- root tend, as Eric Csapo has shown, to have Dionysiac and New Musical connotations, and often occur in choral passages with highly self-referential, performative language, apparently reflecting the circular movement of the chorus in the orchestra (and perhaps also the spinning of individual choreuts).

In the second half of this epode the chorus concentrates on the horses racing alongside the hero, although at the end it returns to Achilles with another strongly choreographic verb, παρεπάλλετο (“was leaping alongside”) in line 228. Equine imagery often appears in descriptions of dancing female choruses in Euripides, and Alcman’s first Partheneion, in which Agido and Hagesichora are likened to different breeds of horses in their dancing and beauty, indicates that the association of horses and choreia was a traditional one. Given the self-referential, choreographic language preceding the chorus’ description of the two sets of horses in the parodos of the Iphigenia in Aulis, it is likely that the running of feet and the circular motion of the chorus are combined in the performance of this song.
Aulis, then, the audience here too might be encouraged to overlay their vision of the dancing chorus with that of the horses that it describes in such visual and attractive terms: they are “embellished with gold” (χρυσοδαιδάλτοις, 219); the center pair have “white-flecked hair” (λευκοστίκτωι τριχί, 222); the trace horses are flame-colored with dappled skin (πυρσότριχας, 225; ποικιλοδέρμονας, 227). As the individual runner/dancer against the team of horses, Achilles stands out almost as a chorēgos is distinguished from the rest of a chorus. As a result of such mimetic interaction between the chorus’ own dancing and the movements it describes in its song, the audience would virtually be able to share in the sight of this scene, not just hear about it.

In the last third of the play, however, the gaze of both the audience and the characters within the play is increasingly directed away from the great army and instead toward the solitary figure of Iphigenia. Just before Iphigenia changes her mind and submits to sacrifice, Agamemnon tells her and Clytemnestra to look at the same scene that the chorus describes (and enacts) in the parodos (1259–60):

ὁρᾶθ’ ὅσον στράτευμα ναύφαρκτον τόδε,  
χαλκέων θ’ ὅπλων ἅπας Ἑλλήνων ὅσοι. . . .

Behold how great this army of ships here is, and how many leaders of bronze-clad Greek warriors there are. . . .

Yet it is Iphigenia to whom the gaze of the army, chorus, and audience turns exclusively toward the end of the tragedy: as she changes her mind, she repositions herself as the viewed instead of the viewer, stating that “the whole of mighty Greece now looks upon me” (εἰς ἔμ’ Ἑλλὰς ἡ μεγίστη πᾶσα νῦν ἀποβλέπει, 1378). The chorus reinforces this transition in its final song, as it directs everyone—Clytemnestra onstage, the army in the (imagined) background, and the audience—to look at Iphigenia, who through her sacrifice replaces the army as the sacker of Troy (1510–12):

ἰὼ ἰὼ·  
ἴδεσθε τὰν Ἰλίου καὶ Φρυγῶν ἑλέπτολιν  
στείχουσαν. . . .

Iō iō! Behold the city-sacker of Ilium and the Phrygians as she goes on her way. . . .

Even though the messenger speech that follows is most probably spurious, it is notable that this too emphasizes the act of viewing, this time with a poignant echo of Iphigenia’s earlier statement as Agamemnon, Menelaus, and the army avert their gaze from the girl herself: “The sons of Atreus and the whole army stood, looking to the ground” (ἐς γῆν δ’ Ἀτρεῖδαι πᾶς στρατός τ’ ἐστη βλέπων, 1577).

16. The army in the IA is presented synecdochically as “the whole of mighty Greece”: cf. 1352, when Achilles says “all Greeks” (πάντες Ἕλληνες) threatened him.
17. Iphigenia thus also assumes Helen’s role but in more positive terms: cf. Aesch. Ag. 689–90, where she too is described as as ἑλέπτολις.
This shift of visual focus toward Iphigenia and away from the army is complemented by a musical change, from the relatively high proportion of choral song in the first two thirds of the play (in which over a quarter of the lines are sung by the chorus in the parodos and three stasima) to its absence for most of the last third. After the third stasimon, which for the first time dwells on the image of Iphigenia being led to sacrifice (1080–97), the next song is performed by Iphigenia, not the chorus: at a break in action that would naturally be marked by another choral ode, between the exit of Agamemnon and entrance of Achilles, she sings a monody that develops the motif of the Judgment of Paris that the chorus mentioned in the first stasimon.18 Previously she has only appeared in the exchange between her, Clytemnestra, and Agamemnon upon her arrival (631–750), but from the moment when she wishes she had Orpheus’ power of speech (1211) she becomes the dominant voice of the tragedy: almost half of all the lines from this point onward are hers; over half if, as is very likely, the play ended with the chorus’ song at 1510–32 and did not include the following messenger speech. The style of her first monody also suggests that it involved complex and impressive music of the sort that required the talents of a star actor rather than an amateur chorus.19 The loose syntactical structure, enjambment, variety of meter (trochees, anapaests, dactyls, and paeans), repetition of individual words (such as Ἰδαῖος Ἰ-/δαῖος ἐλέγετ’ ἐλέγετ’ in lines 1289–90), and assonant and alliterative wordplay (as in ὁ δὲ τεκών με τὰν τάλαιναν, 1312) are all indicative of the musical and verbal complexity typical of monodies in Euripides’ work at the end of the fifth century.20

The focus of musical performance thus shifts from chorus to individual actor in the last section of the play, just as the focus of the play as a whole is increasingly directed toward Iphigenia alone—and toward her crucial change of mind as she decides to die voluntarily so that the army can leave Aulis for Troy.21 This narrower focal point is in sharp contrast to the chorus’ panhellenic perspective in the parodos as it reports on the sight of the vast Greek army. The transition from choreia to monody therefore seems to mirror the increasing importance of Iphigenia as a character in the play over that of the collective (Greece, the army, and the chorus).

Before her second and final song, however, Iphigenia calls the chorus back to perform a paean to Artemis before preparing for her sacrifice: “But you,
O maidens, sing a paean over my misfortune in praise of the daughter of Zeus, Artemis (ὑμεῖς δ’ ἐπευφημήσατ’, ὦ νεάνιδες, / παιάνα τήμηρ συμφορᾶι Διὸς κόρην / Ἀρτέμιν, 1467–69). Despite her order to the chorus, it is Iphigenia herself who then begins this celebratory song, marking her changed resolve to be sacrificed by transforming her previous performance of lament: the repeated refrain of ἰὼ ἰὼ now becomes part of the paean to Artemis, to whom she bids the chorus sing with her in celebration (ἰὼ ἰὼ νεάνιδες, / συνεπαείδετ’ Ἀρτέμιν, 1491–92).22 Her song then turns into a brief, lyric iambic exchange with the chorus before she departs (1500–1509). As she makes her way offstage, the chorus takes up her song, watching her as she goes to be sacrificed and celebrating Artemis at her request (1510–32).

Given the narrowing focus on Iphigenia and her solo song over the previous four hundred lines, the reappearance of choreia here at the end of the play may seem surprising. Now, however, the chorus performs with Iphigenia as she exits the stage, not separately from her, and the shared nature of their performance should prompt us to question both the common view that the return of choreia here is interpolated and Kovacs’ suggestion that Iphigenia’s monody should be rejected instead. The main argument for the inauthenticity of either 1475–1509 or 1510–31 rests on the extraordinary degree of repetition between the two passages: as Kovacs states, “[w]here identical or similar expressions occur, we can ask ourselves which is better and probably original and which is worse and probably secondary.”23 Whatever their quality, however, such repetitions are surely deliberate, as both Iphigenia and the chorus, following her instructions, sing together in praise of Artemis. This joint performance is most clearly signaled by Iphigenia’s unusual compound imperative συνεπαείδετε (“join in celebrating/appeasing with song”) in line 1493.24 The chorus, following this command, starts to respond to her song shortly afterward in an antiphonal exchange, in which their lines complement Iphigenia’s own concerning her city and glory in dying (1498–1504). It then takes up her paeanic refrain of ἰὼ ἰὼ at 1510 and sings astrophic lyrics that in diction are initially so similar to her monody that the chorus really does seem to be joining her in song. Like Iphigenia, it begins with a second person plural imperative (ἴδεσθε, 1510; cf. ἄγετε, 1475) that directs our attention to the same accusative object—Iphigenia as the “city-sacker of Ilium and the Phrygians” (τὰν Ἰλίου / καὶ Φρυγῶν ἑλέπτολιν, 1510–11 =
1475–76). It then with similar language refers to her sacrificial garlands and “streams of lustral water” (. . . ἐπὶ κάραι στέφη / βαλουμέναν χερνίβων τε παγάς, 1512–13; cf. 1477–79). The chorus soon turns to celebrating Artemis, just as Iphigenia bade it to (ἄλλα τόν Διός κόραν / κλήσομεν Αρτεμίν, 1521–22), and continues to recall the language of her song with its invocation of ᾠ πότνια (πότναω) in line 1524 (cf. 1487).

The similarities between the songs of Iphigenia and the chorus here thus suggest an antiphonal exchange in the style of a paean, which is the very type of song she has instructed it to perform. Although this paean has a sacrificial context, the militaristic tone with which both songs start, picturing Iphigenia as the ἑλέπτολις of Troy, may also evoke the performance of a battle paean, with the leader (here Iphigenia) beginning the song and being answered by the army (the chorus). The imperative συνεπαείδετε may also suggest such a battle paean. This verb appears only here and in Theophrastus, but, as Ian Rutherford has noted, the communal response in a performance of a paean in Xenophon is twice denoted by another verb with a συνεπ- prefix, συνεπηχέω. The same verb is used similarly (though not in the immediate context of battle) in Thucydides, and verbs with the ἐπι- prefix are commonly used for the singing of a paean. If the performance at the end of the Iphigenia in Aulis is meant to suggest that of a battle paean, the chorus would therefore again appear to merge with the Greek army, just as it did through its choreia when describing the arrayed troops in the parodos.

This evocation of the paeanic genre inverts the gender roles it usually entails: whereas performances of paeaens outside tragedy were almost exclusively male, here a female chorus answers the opening song of a female leader. Its combined performance also seems to confuse this paean with Iphigenia’s previous mode of song, lament, which, when not in its purely solo form, typically involves a lyric exchange between a female leader and a sympathetic female chorus. Such merging of genres is intensified by the refrain of ἰὼ ἰὼ, which is also used in lament in tragedy (as in Iphigenia’s earlier song at 1283

25. Kovacs (2003, 99) finds ἄγετε in line 1475 inappropriate, as Iphigenia is apparently being accompanied by just one servant to sacrifice (cf. 1462), yet this imperative is addressed as much to the chorus as to any servant(s). He also feels that this imperative is awkward since it is combined with ones that can only be carried out at Iphigenia’s destination, but the same combination of real present and vividly imagined future is evident earlier in the play in reference to Iphigenia, particularly in the final stanza of the third stasimon (1080–97).

26. As Kovacs (2003, 99) points out, πότνια μᾶτερ in line 1487 is unparalleled as an address to one’s own mother rather than a goddess or mistress and therefore points to some corruption in this part of Iphigenia’s song. It is possible that Iphigenia is addressing Artemis here, not Clytemnestra, particularly since the rest of her song is so focused on the goddess, whom the chorus then addresses as πότνια at 1524. A description of Artemis as μᾶτερ (Burges’ accepted reading of an obscure set of letters in MS L), however, would also be surprising, even if, as Stockert advises, we consider the goddess’ “Doppelcharakter” (1992, 2: 614). Perhaps the chorus’ similar invocation should instead be understood as a transformation of Iphigenia’s address rather than a precise repetition.

27. See Rutherford 2001, 42–47, on pre-battle and victory paeanes.


29. Thuc. 6.32.2.


and 1332)—and indeed this is the type of song the audience might expect to hear at this point in the tragedy above all, when Iphigenia is being led to her sacrifice. The usurpation of the male musical form of the paean, however, complements Iphigenia’s appropriation of the male language of bravery and service to community as she accepts her sacrifice: this is already evident when she explains to Clytemnestra how she is determined to die with _kleos_ through her marriage to Greece (1374–1401); her final exchange with the chorus also resembles male panhellenic rhetoric, as she claims that Mycenae “raised me as a light for Greece” (ἐθρέψαθ’ Ἑλλάδι με φῶς, 1502). By evoking in particular a battle paean, the chorus, though previously characterized as female noncombatants, further complements this change in Iphigenia’s (self-) presentation by performing with her like an army in response to its leader.

This sort of mixing of genders and genres seems rather close to what the Athenian bemoans as New Musical practice in Plato’s _Laws_, both when he argues that the Muses would never make the mistake of assigning feminine styles and tunes to male verses or vice versa (ῥήματα ἀνδρῶν ποιήσασαι τὸ χρῶμα γυναικῶν καὶ μέλος ἀποδοῦναι, 669c), and when he describes the “unlawful” poets who “mixed dirges with hymns and paens with dithyrambs” (κεραννύντες δὲ θρήνους τε ὕμνοις καὶ παίωνας διθυράμβοις, 700d). A similarly hybrid performance by a female chorus also occurs in the parodos of Euripides’ _Helen_: within her opening lament Helen bids Persephone to send a paean from Hades (174–78); the chorus of captive women then enters, singing its antistrophe in response. Nevertheless, such mixing of gender and genre was not necessarily only a recent or a specifically Euripidean phenomenon, since it is also evident in Aeschylus’ _Choephoroi_, when Electra instructs the chorus to sing a paean over Agamemnon’s tomb (149–51), while a female performance of a paean also occurs in Sophocles’ _Trachiniae_ (205–23).

The response of the chorus to Iphigenia’s directions to sing a paean with her may begin before it actually starts singing in their antiphonal exchange. Near the beginning of her monody she bids the chorus to “whirl around” the altar of Artemis (ἑλίσσετ’ ἀμφὶ ναόν / ἀμφὶ βωμὸν Ἄρτεμιν, 1480–84). We have already seen that the verb used here (ἑλίσσω) also appears within a particularly self-referential passage of the parodos, when the chorus describes the running and leaping of Achilles, and that it frequently occurs in other, highly performative choral passages in Euripides’ later plays. Here in Iphigenia’s song the verb may also suggest some sort of simultaneous choreography, particularly as the circular movement that it implies is stressed by the repetition of the preposition ἄμφι. Rather than being merely a reference to the speaker’s own movement, however, this imperative is given as a stage direction by the actor to the chorus. Such circular dance was a common form of paeanic performance, and we can imagine that the chorus might at this point in Iphigenia’s

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32. For a particularly pessimistic view of Iphigenia’s language here, see Siegel 1980, 311–16 (he views her rhetoric of _kleos_ as completely delusional).

33. While the mixing of genders here demonstrates how the tragic paean was, as Swift (2010, 65) argues, “freed from the gender constraints of the real world,” it also indicates that it relied on the audience’s experience of its real-life enactment for its full dramatic effect.

song respond to her directions by moving accordingly. Certainly it is likely to have danced in this way when singing its own paean to Artemis.  

Although Iphigenia and the chorus respond musically to each other through their shared paeanic celebration, there is also a more unsettling undercurrent to their performance as a result of the unusual nature of their antiphony. Antiphonal 

mousikē tends to stress the solidarity of a leader and chorus, and in tragedy it especially does so in the form of lament, as in, for example, the shared parodos of Euripides’ Helen and the extended performance of non-Greek mourning sung by Xerxes and the chorus at the end of Aeschylus’ Persians.  

In the Iphigenia in Aulis, however, the chorus’ response to Iphigenia’s song ironically brings them together with her as their chorēgos just when she is exiting the stage to go to her sacrifice. The poignancy of this performance is thus comparable to that at the end of Euripides’ Troades, when the long, antiphonal lament of Hecuba and chorus as she is about to be led away from them to Odysseus’ ship marks the end of their choreia—and so too the complete breakdown of any remaining social bonds or institutions in the aftermath of Troy’s fall. The metrical disjointedness of the antiphony in the later play, with both Iphigenia and the chorus singing astrophic songs, further underscores her separation from it at the same time as their joint performance highlights their communality. Such distorted antiphony reflects the paradoxical nature of Iphigenia’s final action, through which she both withdraws herself from the Greek community by leaving for her sacrifice and simultaneously acts as its savior, ensuring the army’s departure and subsequent victory at Troy. So though the mousikē of Iphigenia and the chorus here gives the impression of a celebratory, antiphonal paean, this type of performance is also disturbingly flawed.  

The usual categorization of Iphigenia’s song at 1475–99 as a monody is therefore misleading, since it ignores the ways in which it is related to the chorus’ own performance. If we take all aspects of performance into account (dance as well as song), some sort of responsive exchange between her and the chorus seems to occur even before the chorus starts singing at line 1510. Iphigenia’s instructions at 1467–69 that the chorus sing a paean are not therefore made redundant because they are not immediately followed by the chorus’ own song: they are followed by a choral performance, as the Chalcidean women dance in accompaniment to her song, which begins the paean that they then take over. When the chorus does begin to sing as well as dance, its response seems not just to complement Iphigenia’s performance but also to

35. See Rutherford 2001, 65, on this passage (although he states that the chorus is merely imagined to be moving around the altar, when in fact it could actually be dancing in a circle while Iphigenia sings). Cf. Calame 1997, 76–77.  
37. As the text stands, Iphigenia must leave the stage after she finishes singing at 1508, so that there can be an interval between her exit and the arrival of the messenger at 1532 to report her death. But with the more likely ending at 1531, we can imagine that Iphigenia might have left the stage gradually during the chorus’ song, thereby emphasizing their separation just as they perform in response to her. The moment of Clytemnestra’s exit is unclear: she could depart into the house at 1509 or stay on stage through the chorus’ song until the end of the play.  
replace it, marking the end of both her singing and her voice in the tragedy as a whole: *choreia* returns with Iphigenia’s departure and death.

It has recently been argued that the performance of this paean is a sign of the chorus’ marginalized position in the play. 39 But, on the contrary, we can see that it presents the final coalescing of chorus and actor as the Chalcidean women become intimately involved in her story, carrying out her instructions to celebrate and appease Artemis in her memory, just at the moment when she leaves them to be sacrificed. To deem the repetitions between the songs of Iphigenia and the chorus in the closing scene of the *Iphigenia in Aulis* as evidence for one or the other being spurious is to miss how the merging of their singing in an antiphonal performance concludes the interplay of *choreia* and monody in the drama as a whole. It is above all through the performance of *mousikē* (both music and dance) that the audience’s attention is increasingly directed toward Iphigenia through the course of the tragedy, away from the panhellenic *choreia* of the parodos. In the Chalcidean women’s last song, they function as both audience and chorus, beholding Iphigenia as she goes to her sacrifice and finally joining her in song, transforming her death into a paeanic celebration while also reminding us of the poignancy of her sacrifice.

Rather than rejecting either the song of Iphigenia or that of the chorus, then, we should accept the strong possibility that both are Euripidean.

*University of California, Berkeley*

39. Chong-Gossard 2008, 181. He claims that the chorus would rather sing a lament, but that “in the end they cannot sing the song they might want, but only what another person tells them to.”

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