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Peitho, Dolos, and Bia in Three Late Euripidean Tragedies

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Abstract

The themes of *peitho* (persuasion), *dolos* (trickery), and *bia* (violence or physical force) are central to the action of the three late Euripidean tragedies that I explore: *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, and the *Bacchae*. I examine how these themes influence characters' interpersonal relations, drive plot development, and determine the "mood" of each play in terms of a spectrum from optimism to pessimism.

Summary for Lay Audience

I examine three plays by the Ancient Greek tragedian Euripides (ca. 480-406 BC), each of them written during the later stages of his career: *Iphigenia in Tauris* (ca. 412 BC), *Iphigenia in Aulis*, and the *Bacchae* (both produced posthumously in 405 BC). I explore in particular the themes of persuasion, deception, and violence as means by which characters achieve - or seek to achieve - their goals. I argue that characters' success (or lack thereof) in using these methods offer insight into Euripides' complex and possibly ambiguous views of humanity's goodness in the decade preceding Athens' calamitous defeat in the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC).

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Introduction

οὐκ ἔστι Πειθοῦς ἱερὸν ἄλλο πλὴν λόγος,

καὶ βωμὸς αὐτῆς ἔστ' ἐν ἀνθρώπου φύσει (Euripides fr. 170 Kannicht).

“There is no shrine to Peitho save *logos*, and her altar is in human nature.”¹

These lines, appearing in Euripides’ fragmentary *Antigone*, superbly illustrate the slippery dual nature of Πειθώ/πειθώ: goddess and abstraction, respectively, the boundary between which is seldom if ever entirely clear. Even this fragment betrays the ambiguity: Kannicht uses a capital pi, but here Euripides must mean the abstract power of persuasion – although, it should be remembered, the goddess did in fact have her own shrines.²

The goal of *peitho* is best understood if we first define the verb πείθω and especially its middle form, πείθομαι. This can be translated variously as “to obey”, “to trust”, or “to believe”.³ R.G.A. Buxton explains that:

All three [of the above definitions] have in common the notion of acquiescence in the will or opinions of another. Correspondingly, the active *peitho*, conventionally translated as “persuade”, can perhaps best be understood as a factitive, meaning “get (someone) to acquiesce in (some belief or action)”, or, more explicitly, “get one’s way over someone in such a way that they *peithesthai*”.⁴

¹ All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

² As attested by Pausanias at Megara (1.43.6) and at Athens (1.22.3); the latter was supposedly founded by Theseus himself. Epigraphic evidence for “Peitho” as an epithet of Aphrodite has been found at Pharsalus (*IG* IX.2.236), Cnidus (Bean and Cook 1952, 189-90 with pl. 40(c), and Mytilene (*IG* XII.2.73). See also Buxton 1982, 32.

³ Cf. Chantraine, *DELG* s.v. πείθομαι.

⁴ Buxton 1982, 49.

So, for example, the Athena of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* uses "a veiled threat, promises, argument, and so forth", as Buxton describes it, to get the Erinyes to accept Orestes' acquittal.⁵ Her actions arguably exceed what Anglophones would describe as "persuasion", but they remain consistent with the Greek conception of *peitho*. Hermann Fränkel explains that the sense of the verb *peithein* and, one might extrapolate, the noun *peitho*, is better translated by the German phrase *willig machen* ("to make willing") than by the verb *überreden*, which implies persuasion by speaking – *reden* – alone.⁶ Nevertheless, in democratic Athens, the spoken word was the most obvious means of exercising influence, at least within a public and specifically political-legal context. The Athenian sources abound with examples of individuals who exploit the potential of language in the *ecclesia* and in the law-courts, as even a cursory glance at Thucydides, Demosthenes, or Aristophanes reveals. The teaching of rhetoric, of which *peitho* was the object, was a pillar of the sophistic curriculum so popular among segments of the fifth century Athenian upper class. As W.K.C. Guthrie explains, "All [sophists] included political advancement in their curriculum, and the key to this, in democratic Athens, was the power of persuasive speech".⁷ In Aristophanes' *Clouds*, for example, the chorus fully expects Pheidippides to have absorbed "some *peitho*" (πειθῶ τινα, 1398) as part of his sophistic education. Aristophanes means for us to scoff at the sophists' rhetoric, crafted for political advantage with no regard for the truth of what is being said. Still, the Athenian reverence for *peitho*, so long as it appeared to be used towards praiseworthy ends, was profound. In the *Antidosis*, the orator Isocrates describes *peitho* as one of the qualities distinguishing Greeks from barbarians; whereas Greeks

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Fränkel 1962, 338 n. 15, quoted in Buxton 1982, 49.

⁷ Guthrie 1969, 38, quoted in Buxton 1982, 52.

have it, barbarians, he insists, do not (293-4). Critias, who was to become one of the Thirty Tyrants of 404, frames *peitho* not as a matter of geography but one of chronology: pre-civilized life, he says, was dominated by coercive force or *bia*, while the dawn of civilization was accompanied by the ascendancy of *peitho* for settling disputes. We may compare the monumental development dramatized in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, where the vicious cycle of private vengeance depicted in the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* yields to a formalized judicial and civic process in the *Eumenides*.

Dolos is rather different. It encompasses a number of closely related meanings that can be variously translated as "treachery," "trickery", or "guile". In tragedy, *dolos* is frequently the underdog's tactic of choice for coming out on top. That *dolos* is often associated with women is unsurprising: their subservience to men in tragedy as in Athenian society precludes them from using force, or *bia*, and they must find more subtle ways of achieving their goals. In Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, Deianeira uses a magical "love potion" to regain Heracles' affections, albeit unaware that it is, in fact, a deadly poison. Euripides in the *Hippolytus* has Phaedra dupe Theseus into falsely accusing Hippolytus of rape. Hence, though *dolos* can be incorporated into a strategy of persuasion, it is not synonymous with *peitho*; rather, *peitho* is an end of which *dolos* is only one possible means. Take, for example, the choice that Neoptolemus and Odysseus must make in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*: they can try to honestly persuade Philoctetes to go to Troy or they can deceive him into giving his misinformed consent. In *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *dolos* is the means by which Iphigenia seeks to achieve *peitho* – i.e. the unsuspecting acquiescence of Thoas in her escape plan. Similar to this is Agamemnon's plan in *Iphigenia in Aulis* to summon his wife and

daughter to Aulis on the pretext of marrying the latter off to Achilles, but actually intending to sacrifice her.

Bia falls into a category entirely separate from both *peitho* and *dolos*. It is unconcerned with even the pretense of gaining someone's acquiescence; its only end is the imposition of one's own will by force or the threat of force. Plato in his *Laws* posits both *peitho* and *bia* as means of enforcing the law:

But as regards this, it appears that no legislator has ever yet observed that, while it is in their power to make use in their law-making of two methods,—namely, persuasion and force (πειθοῖ καὶ βίᾳ) —in so far as that is feasible in dealing with the uncultured populace, they actually employ one method only: in their legislation they do not temper compulsion with persuasion, but use untempered force alone (*Laws* 4.722b, Loeb translation).

So, in the *Bacchae*, Dionysus makes every effort to persuade Pentheus of his divinity, only to realize the true extent of his obstinacy relatively late in the play, at which point he settles on *bia*. Likewise Agamemnon, his deception having been uncovered by Clytemnestra, seizes Iphigenia and forces her to accept her impending death.

Peitho, *dolos*, and *bia* masterfully intersect in the three late Euripidean plays that I have chosen for this study. Their convergence is hugely influential on the dramatic action. Though Euripides' relationship to the Sophists has proven immensely controversial, he, like them, explores the themes of right vs. might and the political uses of *peitho*.⁸ These plays undoubtedly belong to the intellectual matrix of late fifth century Athens, a society grappling with the most destructive intra-

⁸ Cf. W. Allan's excellent article, which explores Euripides' engagement with these "sophistic" themes as expressed in the *Heracleidae* and *Suppliant Women*. For a fuller treatment, see Conacher 1998.

Hellenic conflict that the Greek world had ever seen. They are also crucial to understanding the late Euripides, whose themes of deception, coercion, and the achievement of power reflect a *polis* in crisis.

Chapter 1

Iphigenia in Tauris

The first and earliest-written play to be examined in this study is the *Iphigenia in Tauris*. It was written at a unique stage of Euripides' career when the so-called "escape tragedy" predominated. The definition has proven contentious and inexact, but numerous similarities can be found in the two extant plays widely considered to be examples of this genre: the *IT* and *Helen*. Both plays revolve around young Greek heroines whose fates have been misunderstood. Iphigenia and Helen are Greek women who by divine intervention find themselves exiled in a "barbarian" land. Both believe their male counterparts (Orestes and Menelaus, respectively) to be dead. Iphigenia herself is believed dead by Orestes while Menelaus is unaware that the true Helen was never at Troy. Orestes/Menelaus coincidentally show up but initially do not recognize and are not recognized by the heroine. After a decisive recognition scene, hero and heroine plot their escape; the heroine persuades the local barbarian ruler to be allowed to venture to the seashore under the guise of ritual purification and escapes with the man. The furious leader discovers the ruse and prepares for revenge, but is dissuaded by a deity or deities appearing *ex machina*.

If *Iphigenia in Tauris* were produced in the immediate aftermath of the catastrophic failure of the Sicilian Expedition – and metrical evidence suggests that a date of 412 is plausible – we may view it as an attempt on Euripides' part to distract from the sombre mood in Athens, while discouraging a sense of defeatism among the Athenian people. There is an ever-present atmosphere of danger in the *IT* – meaning that the main protagonists come very close to

meeting a tragic fate – but this comes to naught after the intervention of Athena, who appears *ex machina* to save the day. The aetiologies presented in this play constitute a disguised appeal to Athenian patriotism, since they represent Attica as a refuge for those oppressed by foreign barbarism.

In the myth described by Herodotus (8.55) and depicted on the west pediment of the Parthenon, Athena and Poseidon compete for patronage of Athens. Poseidon produces a water spring on the Acropolis but, being salty, it is useless. When it is Athena's turn, she presents an olive tree and thus wins the contest. In the *IT*, Athena again emerges triumphant in a struggle with the sea-god, calming the adverse winds that prevent Iphigenia's party from escaping Tauris. Athena asserts her will in Poseidon's own domain, and Poseidon consents without delay (1442-5). Because of Athena, the escape party can travel in safety to Attica, where both Artemis and eventually Iphigenia will be given their own cult centres. Tauris, a land of human sacrifice, is abandoned in favour of the civilized Attica. Civilization triumphs over barbarism, Athens over Tauris, and Iphigenia over Thoas. Thus the *IT* has a detectably patriotic character, but one that scholars have long neglected to notice. Indeed, no commentator to my knowledge has discussed at length Athena's patriotic role in the *IT*.⁹ Her role is also relevant in the context of *peitho*; this may seem unusual, as neither personified nor abstract *Peitho* are closely associated with Athena in the universe of Greek mythology.¹⁰ But in the *IT*, Athena proves to be an adept

⁹ By "patriotic" I am not implying that Euripides was in favour of an aggressive, imperialistic Athenian foreign policy, but that he takes a generalized pride in his *polis* as a paradigm for polities where, ideally, democratic consensus rather than naked force is relied upon to produce cohesion within the citizen body. It is worth pondering whether Euripides still inclined toward this view after the oligarchic coup of 411.

¹⁰ *Peitho* is associated with Artemis, however, specifically in the shrine of Artemis *Peitho* in Argos described by Pausanias 2.21.1. At 1.22.3, Pausanias also informs us of a possible cultic connection between *Peitho* and Aphrodite in Attica, but his Greek, frustratingly, can translate either as "[the cult of] Aphrodite Pandemos and *Peitho*" (implying separate deities) or the doubly epithetical "Aphrodite Pandemos and of *Peitho*".

practitioner of *peitho*'s powers, not only commanding Poseidon to calm a freak wind but persuading Thoas to release his captives. The Athena of the *IT* hearkens back to the Athena of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, where again as an agent of persuasion she convinces the Erinyes to accept Orestes' acquittal. In the *IT*, she enables Orestes and his party to escape with Artemis' cult image, allowing for the transfer of her cult from Tauris to Halae Araphenides in Attica, where human sacrifice is disallowed. Euripides presents Attica, and by implication the classical Athenian *polis*, as the locus of civilization's triumph over barbarism, animal sacrifice over human.¹¹ Her winning over of Thoas marks her out as a pioneer in the peaceful resolution of conflict by force of persuasion rather than trial of arms, much like the Athena of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*:

ἐμοὶ πίθεσθε μὴ βαρυστόνως φέρειν.

οὐ γὰρ νενίκησθ', ἀλλ' ἰσόψηφος δίκη

ἐξῆλθ' ἀληθῶς, οὐκ ἀτιμία σέθεν (*Eumenides* 794-6).

Heed me (ἐμοὶ πίθεσθε) not to endure it with deep lament. You have not been defeated, but the trial turned out fairly with a tied vote; you have not been disgraced.

Iphigenia herself acknowledges her power to persuade when, asked by Orestes whether her plan to ferry Pylades off to safety is a realistic one, replies, ναί. πείσω σφε, καὺτὴ ναὸς εἰσβήσω σκάφος ("Yes indeed! I will persuade Thoas, and I myself will put Pylades aboard ship," *IT* 742).

¹¹ The Tauropolia or festival of Artemis Tauropolos at Halae Araphenides, instituted by order of Athena at 1452-61 in our play, apparently featured vestiges of human sacrifice, during which a human mock-victim was cut at the throat just to the point of drawing blood. However, Euripides is our only surviving source for this (Parker 2016, xvii); indeed Scullion 2000 goes so far as to suggest that it was all invented by Euripides for the sake of his play. For Halae and Brauron as cult centres in Antiquity, see Deubner 1932 (1966), 207-9; Graf 1985, 413-7; Wolff 1992.

Distilled to its basic elements, her function in the *Eumenides* is similar, since her tie-breaking acquittal of Orestes, followed by her persuasion of the Erinyes to accept the acquittal, puts Athens at the forefront of Greece's transition from retaliatory blood-feuding to organized justice.

Artemis has spared Iphigenia from the sacrificial knife only to thrust her into the role of sacrificing priestess. Artemis may delight in having Iphigenia sacrifice vagrant Greeks, these being the people who supposedly slew Iphigenia so their Trojan War could go ahead, but this all goes very much against what Iphigenia wants for herself, despite her disingenuous protests to the contrary when speaking to Thoas. Still Iphigenia refuses to blame Artemis for orchestrating this cruel irony.¹² Pindar once said, "It is impossible for me to call any of the blessed gods a glutton" (ἐμοὶ δ' ἄπορα γαστρίμαργον μακάρων τιν' εἰπεῖν, *Olympian* 1.52), incredulous that the gods could have devoured Pelops even unwittingly. Iphigenia feels similarly, concluding that the Taurians project their own barbarism onto the gods:

ἐγὼ μὲν οὔν

τὰ Ταντάλου θεοῖσιν ἐστιάματα

ἄπιστα κρίνω, παιδὸς ἡσθῆναι βορᾶ,

τοὺς δ' ἐνθάδ', αὐτοὺς ὄντας ἀνθρωποκτόνους,

ἐς τὴν θεὸν τὸ φαῦλον ἀναφέρειν δοκῶ·

οὐδένα γὰρ οἶμαι δαιμόνων εἶναι κακόν (386-91).

¹² On the irony of Artemis' intervention on behalf of Iphigenia, cf. Mastronarde 2010, 164.

I, for my part, deem unworthy of belief the tale of Tantalus' feast for the gods, that they enjoyed his son as a meal. I think that the people here, being killers of men themselves, credit their weakness to the goddess. I believe that none of the gods is wicked.

Parker is certainly correct that Artemis will, eventually, acquiesce in her cult's transplantation by Athena to Greece, *sans* human sacrifice, but this need not indicate positive support for Athena's endeavour.¹³ A cruel Artemis is, furthermore, quite in keeping with Euripides' goddesses elsewhere, who are not always known for their clemency: Aphrodite is especially cruel in her persecution of Hippolytus, and the Hera of the *Hercules Furens* (acting through her henchwoman Iris) viciously destroys Heracles for the "crime" of being fathered by Zeus. Nonetheless, whatever Artemis' desires, she is destined to be subordinated, eventually, to Athena. Perhaps this came as a surprise to Euripides' audience: Iphigenia's story had always been closely associated with Artemis rather than Athena, and Euripides will give Athena no place in the *IA*. This is an Artemis myth, not an Athena myth. But in the *IT*, patriotic Athena must take centre stage to assert, however subtly, the exceptionalism of Athens. She is emphatic that Attica is *her land* (εἰς ἐμὴν ... χθόνα, 1441). It is she who enforces the fated (πεπρωμένος, 1438) escape of the protagonists.¹⁴

About halfway through the play, a despairing Orestes breaks ranks with Apollo and accuses him of using *peitho* in a deceptive and destructive way:

ἡμᾶς δ' ὁ Φοῖβος μάντις ὦν ἐψεύσατο·

¹³ Parker 2016, 389-91n.

¹⁴ Thus confirming that the command of Apollo that Orestes must go to Tauris (πεπρωμένος γὰρ θεσφάτοισι Λοχίου / δεῦρ' ἦλθ' Ὀρέστης, 1338-9) was given in good faith, despite the doubts earlier expressed by Orestes, which I discuss below.

τέχνην δὲ θέμενος ὥς προσώταθ' Ἑλλάδος

ἀπήλασ', αἰδοῖ τῶν πάρος μαντευμάτων.

ὦ πάντ' ἐγὼ δοῦς τάμ' αἰ πεισθεὶς λόγοις,

μητέρα κατακτὰς αὐτὸς ἀνταπόλλυμαι (712-16).¹⁵

But Apollo, though a prophet, has deceived us, conceiving a plot to drive us far away from Greece out of shame for his earlier prophecies. Having entrusted everything to him, having trusted in his words [πεισθεὶς λόγοις], and having myself killed my mother, I now perish in turn.¹⁶

The aorist passive form of πείθω (the verb) places Orestes firmly on the receiving end of πειθῶ (the noun), as if by allowing himself to be persuaded by, or rather obey, Apollo's commands he has consequently allowed himself to be victimized by him. His frustration is understandable: he is on the brink of being sacrificed, and by his own sister to boot, though neither he nor she realizes this yet.¹⁷ As Orestes may now realize, to persuade is an act of power, but to be persuaded is an act of trust, one that might be betrayed through treachery, for it necessarily puts the one being persuaded into a vulnerable position. The Erinyes epitomize this dynamic as

¹⁵ At *Ag.* 1080-2, Cassandra plays on Ἀπόλλων and ἀπόλλυμι more explicitly than Orestes does at 716 in our play: Ἀπολλὼν Ἀπολλὼν / ἀγυῖ᾽ ἄτ', ἀπόλλων ἐμός. / ἀπώλεσας γὰρ οὐ μὲν τὸ δεύτερον. Plato (*Cratylus* 404c1 and 405e) discusses the name of Apollo as a source of fear, indicating destruction (φθοράν τινα). Euripides dodges an explicit pun by having Orestes call Apollo "Phoebus", here and at 975. See further Parker's note on 714-15.

¹⁶ Perhaps Orestes ought to have known better. Even Pindar reports that Apollo, "for whom it is not right to embrace a lie" (τὸν οὐ θεμιτὸν ψεύδει θιγεῖν, *Pythian* 9.42) does exactly that in a fit of erotic passion. Homer's Hera denounces him as "a friend of the wicked, always faithless" (κακῶν ἔταρ', αἰὲν ἄπιστε, *Iliad* 24.63), and it is his treachery above all that Plato, quoting Aeschylus (fr. 350 Radt) wishes to denounce at *Republic* 2.383a-b.

¹⁷ Parker's note on 711-13 is especially illuminating here: "Orestes' suspicion is unjustified, as we, the audience, are in a position to guess. But in Euripides' plays of this period, gods do indeed behave in this way. At *Hel.* 884-6, Theonoe reveals that Aphrodite is trying to prevent Menelaus' return, because she does not wish it to come out that she never really delivered Helen to Paris, and so won the prize for beauty dishonestly. In *Ion*, Apollo is less irresponsible, but at 1553-8 Athena explains that he prefers not to appear, because he fears blame for his past conduct, a painfully live issue in the play".

they sacrifice much of their former identity, for an uncertain reward, when they accept Orestes' earlier acquittal on the Areopagus and consent to become Eumenides; only a resolute faction¹⁸ maintains its stubborn independence in refusing to acquiesce:

ὥς δ' εἰς Ἄρειον ὄχθον ἦκον, ἐς δίκην
 ἔστην, ἐγὼ μὲν θάτερον λαβὼν βάθρον,
 τὸ δ' ἄλλο πρέσβειρ' ἦπερ ἦν Ἑρινύων.
 εἰπὼν <δ'> ἀκούσας θ' αἵματος μητρὸς πέρι,
 Φοῖβός μ' ἔσωσε μαρτυρῶν, ἴσας δέ μοι
 ψήφους διηρίθμησε Παλλὰς ὠλένη:
 νικῶν δ' ἀπῆρα φόνια πειρατήρια.
 ὅσαι μὲν οὖν ἔζοντο πεισθεῖσαι δίκη,
 ψῆφον παρ' αὐτὴν ἱερὸν ὠρίσαντ' ἔχειν·
 ὅσαι δ' Ἑρινύων οὐκ ἐπείσθησαν νόμῳ,
 δρόμοις ἀνιδρύτοισιν ἡλάστρουν μ' αἰεί,
 ἕως ἐς ἀγνὸν ἦλθον αὖ Φοίβου πέδον,

¹⁸ Euripides distorts the triumphant resolution of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, where all the Erinyes accept the verdict of the Areopagus, and inserts an unreconciled faction that continues to hound Orestes relentlessly. Kyriakou 2006, 968-9n. remarks that "there is nothing similar to the glorious triumphal procession and the end of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, a celebration of divine and civic harmony bathing the pious Athenian state in its pure light ... the verdict of the august tribunal presided over by Athena is virtually annulled". The remaining Erinyes also serve a more practical function, as their continued persecution of Orestes, and Apollo's promise of release, is a prerequisite for sending Orestes to Tauris in search of Artemis' cult image as per Apollo's command. Like the *Eumenides*, the *IT* will end with Athena asserting Orestes' right to freedom, though here her verdict will apply to Iphigenia and Pylades as well.

καὶ πρόσθεν ἀδύτων ἑκταθείς, νῆστις βορᾶς,

ἐπώμοσ' αὐτοῦ βίον ἀπορρήξειν θανών,

εἰ μή με σώσει Φοῖβος, ὅς μ' ἀπώλεσεν (961-75).¹⁹

When I came to Ares' hill, I stood my trial, I taking one platform, the senior Fury the other. We exchanged speeches about my mother's murder, and Phoebus saved me with his testimony. The arm of Pallas awarded me equal votes, and I left as victor in my murder-trial. Now the Furies who settled there, obeying the judgment (ὅσαι μὲν οὖν ἔζοντο πεισθεῖσαι δίκη), had a sanctuary marked out for their possession right by the court. But those of them who were unconvinced by the legal process (ὅσαι δ' Ἐρινύων οὐκ ἐπείσθησαν νόμῳ) drove me continually in a ceaseless chase, until I came back again to Phoebus' sacred ground and laid myself before his sanctuary, starving myself of food, and swore I would break off my life and die right there if Phoebus, who had ruined me, would not save me.

The Eumenides' submission to Athenian law may have been commendable, but Orestes' submission to Apollo's demands – first matricide,²⁰ now recovering Artemis' cult image from Tauris – seems to have been a grave error, for which he blames himself, the *peistheis*, as much as he blames Apollo.

¹⁹ See further MacDowell 1978, 252, with n. 582. According to Parker 2016, 970-1n., “νόμῳ must mean the new ‘law’ established by Orestes’ own case, that equal votes mean acquittal”. I follow Cropp’s translation “legal process”.

²⁰ At A. *Eum.* 576-80, 609ff., Apollo attests to Orestes' innocence on the grounds that he himself had commanded Clytemnestra's killing, Orestes having merely followed his orders. Cf. E. *El.* 1266-7 and Cropp 2000, 965n.

Both *peitho* and *bia* have sexual aspects: *bia* is of course central to the many mythological rapes of women, while consensual sexual seduction requires *peitho*.²¹ *Peitho*, in tragedy, is especially though not exclusively feminine, as the word's very gender, and its personification as a goddess, reveal; this seems to be simply a reflection of the physical powerlessness of women in the Greek imagination (Aeschylus' Clytemnestra being a case in point), extending beyond the sexual and into the platonic realm. As a woman and subordinate of Thoas, Iphigenia cannot hope to escape by raw force (*bia*); she must resort to "wily *peitho*" (δολία πειθώ) for her plan to succeed.²² Euripides, here as elsewhere, insists that women are not to be underestimated despite their apparent physical frailty. Thoas' own authority, nominally absolute, is subverted and ultimately discredited by Iphigenia's subterfuge. Thematically, Iphigenia is one of those "clever women" that abound in Greek literature; as early as Hesiod, Pandora is given a "cunning nature" (ἐπίκλοπον ἦθος) by Hermes (*W&D* 67 and 78), and Hesiod's assessment here is not a laudatory one. The *Andromache* of Euripides' eponymous play informs her former serving-maid that "You could invent many schemes, for you are a woman" (πολλὰς ἂν εὖροις μηχανάς· γυνὴ γὰρ εἴ, 85).²³ Addressing this line in particular, P.T. Stevens notes that "On the Attic stage, particularly in Euripides, [women] are often represented as equal and indeed superior to men, whether more noble and self-sacrificing or more resourceful and more ruthless."²⁴ The quick-thinking Iphigenia, however devious, falls without question into the former category; she

²¹ On the sexual implications of *peitho*, with a special focus on the goddess Peitho, see my introduction and Buxton 1982, 31-3.

²² As Buxton 1982, 64 explains: "*Dolos* functions as a sort of mirror-image of *bia*: while *bia* is used by one who is superior in power to subdue one who is inferior, *dolos* enables an inferior to subvert the prevailing power of a superior."

²³ On "clever women" in Greek literature see Parker 2016, 1032-3n. The translation of *Andromache* 85 is Parker's.

²⁴ Stevens 1976.

numbers among the “good”, chaste women of Greek myth who employ *peitho* and even *dolos* towards praiseworthy ends. She is thus in the same class as Homer’s Penelope and the Euripidean Helen, both of whom ultimately vindicate and affirm the institution of Greek marriage by orchestrating long-awaited conjugal reunions. But these represent only one side of feminine *peitho*; feminine persuasion frequently represents an insidious threat to male hegemony, since men, though unquestionably superior to women in *bia*, are often depicted as being especially vulnerable to *peitho*. Euripides himself is emphatic about this elsewhere: his Phaedra and Medea, for example, masterfully engineer the destruction of their closest menfolk. Orestes’ acknowledgement that “women are indeed clever at inventing schemes” (δειναὶ γὰρ αἱ γυναῖκες εὐρίσκειν τέχνας, 1032) need not imply that these schemes will always work to his benefit.²⁵

Once Iphigenia and Orestes recognize each other, the deception plan can begin. With his life now dependent on his sister’s quick thinking, Orestes correctly recognizes Iphigenia’s deviousness as an opportunity rather than a threat; he confidently anticipates that her persuasive words (λόγοι πειστήριοι, 1053) will prevail over the chorus of exiled Greek maidens to aid their escape, as when he asserts, “Surely, a woman has power to [arouse] pity” (ἔχει τοι δύναμιν εἰς οἶκτον γυνή, 1054). Iphigenia’s plan is to convince Thoas that Orestes, polluted by matricide, must be bathed on the seashore prior to sacrifice, whence they alongside Pylades

²⁵ Iphigenia herself proclaims (1006) that “woman is a feeble resource” (τὰ δὲ γυναικὸς ἀσθενή, trans. Cropp), but she is not describing a woman’s power to persuade or deceive but her debased status within the patrilineal Greek *oikos*. It could just as well describe women’s inability to resort to *bia*, richly compensated by their skill in *peitho* and *dolos*.

[Parker deletes 1032-3, though Cropp retains them. I follow West 1981, 63 in accepting 1032 at least as genuine, since it follows up logically on 1031, where Iphigenia says, ταῖς σαῖς ἀνίαις χρήσομαι σοφίσματι (“I’ll use your sorrows as a trick”).]

will put out to sea under the unsuspecting Thoas' nose. Echoing her brother's optimism, Iphigenia predicts that πείσασα μύθοις (*IT* 1049: "having persuaded him with words" [i.e. openly and not λάθρᾳ]), she will be able to gain Thoas' unwitting cooperation. *Peitho's* opposite, *bia*, falls under the control of the despotic Thoas, but thanks to Iphigenia, his attempts to exercise it will prove ineffective.

Like the *IA* and the *Bacchae*, the *IT* features an all-female chorus. The chorus consists of Greek maidens, as in the *IA*, but here they are captive and far from home. Iphigenia has them play a crucial role in safeguarding her escape; they exercise agency, and hence Iphigenia must supplicate them for their cooperation. This is a striking departure from the chorus' passive role in the *IA*, though somewhat closely parallel to its role in *Helen*. Here, too, the chorus women are captive Greeks serving the play's heroine while at the mercy of a barbarian king and at dire risk of execution if the heroine's escape plan goes awry. But even here, the chorus' active role is limited thanks to the addition of the character of Theonoe, who largely assumes the "confidante" function of the *IT's* chorus.²⁶ Indeed, in the *IT*, the chorus is invested in the action to a degree not seen even in much earlier tragedies such as Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*;²⁷ there the chorus of slave women are enthusiastic supporters of Electra and Orestes and enemies of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, but never find themselves in personal danger.²⁸ Surprisingly for

²⁶ Cf. Parker 2016, 1056-74n.: "The real moment of tension, the real parallel to Iphigenia's appeal to the chorus, is Helen's supplication of Theonoe (894-943). ... At the end of the play too, whoever may be Theoclymenus' interlocutor at 1627-41, it is Theonoe who is threatened with death, not the chorus. Our attention is focused on her. Nor is there any mention of sending the chorus home."

²⁷ No extant tragic chorus after the *Choephoroi* and before the *IT* can be found actively conspiring with a stage character (the chorus persuades the nurse to lure Aegisthus at *Cho.* 766ff.), and in the earlier Euripides their role is confined to the concealment of unforeseen crimes, as in the *Medea* and *Hippolytus*; they may go as far as to defy a command to silence, as in the roughly contemporaneous *Ion*. See further Cropp's note on 1056-88.

²⁸ Cf. Parker 2016, 1056-74n.

this late stage of fifth-century tragedy, the chorus of the *IT* plays a considerably active role; it enjoys a moral autonomy that forces Iphigenia to appeal to their common interests – an exercise in *peitho* – to gain their co-operation. Female solidarity forms the crux of Iphigenia’s argument; that they are women is significant, for Iphigenia appeals to their common sex in winning them to her side. Her rhetoric in a sense recalls Medea’s more elaborate appeal to the chorus at *Med.* 214-70 – also on the basis of women’s solidarity – but with the far less benign intent of gaining the Chorus’ complicity in her murderous plot. Iphigenia, who unlike Medea fails to do away with her brother, emerges as a kind of “anti-Medea”, a paragon of benevolent deception and foil to Medea’s destructive *peitho*.²⁹ Even more remarkable is that Iphigenia succeeds while offering the chorus little of practical value. As P. Kyriakou explains:

The promise that, if she escapes, she will take the chorus too back to Greece is the only reward Iphigeneia can offer the women in exchange for their help and the potential danger it involves: this is the reason why she keeps it for the end. It is not clear whether Iphigeneia implies that, if she manages to reach the shore, she will devise some plan to take the women along on Orestes’ ship or that she will save them after she returns to Greece with her relatives and the statue. Given the difficulties of the escape of the trio with the statue, it is unlikely that they would not flee immediately, as they will actually try to do. On the other hand, if Iphigeneia promises to return to Greece and send for the chorus afterwards, she makes a virtually impossible promise because of the difficulty of the enterprise and the possibility that the women will be killed by Thoas long before a ship arrives to rescue them. Iphigeneia clearly has no plan in place for the

²⁹ For the sentiment of solidarity between female protagonist and female chorus, cf. also *Med.* 822-3, *Hel.* 329, 830. However, Parker 2016, 1060-2n. cautions against assuming that Iphigenia’s relationship to the chorus is identical to Medea’s; *Med.*’s chorus is on Medea’s side from the beginning: “They readily endorse her wish to punish her husband (267); they do not object when she announces her intention to poison Jason and his bride (384-5). It is only when she turns to the idea of killing her children that they draw away from her (811 ff.)”

rescue of the chorus, although her promise is not necessarily meant to be viewed as insincere.

There is no indication in the play that she would not actually wish to save the chorus if she could or that she would fail to try.³⁰

Her appeal, in full, reads as follows:

ὦ φίλταται γυναῖκες, εἰς ὑμᾶς βλέπω,
καὶ τᾶμ' ἐν ὑμῖν ἐστὶν ἢ καλῶς ἔχειν
ἢ μηδὲν εἶναι καὶ στερηθῆναι πάτρας
φίλου τ' ἀδελφοῦ φιλτάτης τε συγγόνου.
καὶ πρῶτα μὲν μοι τοῦ λόγου τάδ' ἀρχέτω·
γυναῖκές ἐσμεν, φιλόφρον ἀλλήλαις γένος
σώζειν τε κοινὰ πράγματ' ἀσφαλέσταται.
σιγήσαθ' ἡμῖν καὶ συνεκπονήσατε
φυγὰς. καλὸν τοι γλῶσσ' ὅτῳ πιστὴ παρῇ.
ὁρᾶτε δ' ὡς τρεῖς μία τύχη τοὺς φιλτάτους,
ἢ γῆς πατρώας νόστον ἢ θανεῖν ἔχει.
σωθεῖσα δ', ὡς ἂν καὶ σὺ κοινωνῇς τύχης,
σώσω σ' ἐς Ἑλλάδ'. ἀλλὰ πρὸς σε δεξιᾶς
σὲ καὶ σὲ ἰκνοῦμαι, σὲ δὲ φίλης παρηίδος,

³⁰ Kyriakou 2006, 1067-8n.

γονάτων τε καὶ τῶν ἐν δόμοισι φιλτάτων (1056-70).

O dearest women, I look to you; whether I prosper or come to nothing and be deprived of my homeland, my dear brother, and my dearest sister is up to you. First of all, let my speech begin on this basis: we are women, a sex well-disposed to one another and most firm in serving our common interests. Be silent for us and help us work out our escape. A loyal tongue is a fine thing for whoever has one. See how a single fortune binds us three dearest friends: either a return to our native land, or death. And if I am saved I shall convey you safely to Greece, sharing in our common fortune. Alas, I supplicate you by your right hand, and you, and you by your dear cheek, by your knees, and by your dearest ones at home.

In supplicating the chorus by physically touching the cheeks and knees of its members,

Iphigenia succeeds where she had failed with her father, as she recalls early on in the play:

οἴμοι – κακῶν γὰρ τῶν τότε οὐκ ἀμνημονῶ –

ὅσας γενείου χεῖρας ἐξηκόντισα

γονάτων τε τοῦ τεκόντος †ἐξαρτωμένη†

λέγουσα τοιάδ'· ὦ πάτερ, νυμφεύομαι

νυμφεύματ' αἰσχρὰ πρὸς σέθεν (361-5).³¹

Alas, I cannot forget the horrors of that day! How many hands did I hurl at my father's knee and cheeks, [*clinging to them*], saying, "oh father, because of you I am a bride at an ugly wedding".

³¹ Cropp deletes 363 entirely, whereas Parker considers only ἐξαρτωμένη spurious; the image of Iphigenia successfully clinging to her father is incompatible with the futile struggle she wishes to represent (as indicated by ἐξηκόντισα).

The chorus' receptiveness to Iphigenia's supplication, standing as it does in polar contrast to Agamemnon's dismissal of his daughter's pleas – however much it tortures him to ignore them – hints at an agreeable outcome for the *IT*.³² The principle of reciprocity works here as it ought to, the chorus yielding to Iphigenia's supplication and gaining her help in return; things could hardly be more different from the *dolos* so evident in the *IA*.

In contrast to Agamemnon's *dolos*³³ at Aulis, Iphigenia's *dolos* against Thoas is carried out towards benevolent ends; its purpose is to effect a turn of events, in Aristotelian terms, from *dystychia* to *eutychia*, misfortune to prosperity, rather than the other way around.

Consequently, Iphigenia emerges as a genuinely sympathetic character in spite of her barbaric sacerdotal role. We may pity Agamemnon and his impossible choice, but we cannot admire him as we may admire Iphigenia, maintaining a calm dignity amid exile and peril. Before she comes to learn of Orestes' survival, she magnanimously offers to spare the "stranger" so that he can deliver news of her survival back to Argos.³⁴ She may convince Thoas that she hates the Greeks ("I hate all Greece, which has destroyed me", 1187), and she has ample reason to do so; her clemency contradicts her pretending to hate the people who tried to slay her. When she insists that she has come under compulsion (εἰς ἀνάγκην, 620) by the Taurians to sacrifice Greeks, she assures us that her mind and body are not in the same place.³⁵ Her predicament, then,

³² For a general overview of supplication in tragedy, see Gould 1973 and Tzanetou 2012.

³³ Acknowledged as such by Iphigenia at 371: ἐξ αἱματηρὸν γάμον ἐπόρθμευσας δόλῳ ("You conveyed me to a bloody wedding through *dolos*").

³⁴ Orestes, crucially, neglects to read this all-revealing document, nor does Iphigenia yet reveal her precise identity to the prisoners.

³⁵ We would expect the more usual ὑπ' ἀνάγκης or ἐξ' ἀνάγκης here; εἰς ἀνάγκην suggests that Iphigenia has *moved into* a state of compulsion. On this unusual expression, cf. Kühner-Gerth 1.543; Schwyzler 2.434.

resembles her father's, but she will prove more willing to take a risk to save her kinsman once his true identity is unmasked.

One problem in Euripides' characterization of Iphigenia is her docility. Orestes, once revealed to his sister, tells her the news of Agamemnon's murder at Clytemnestra's hands, and Orestes' retaliatory matricide. Orestes is rather tight-lipped about details, and when Iphigenia presses for Clytemnestra's motive, Orestes dodges the question (924-7). Iphigenia refuses to press the question further, and consents to silence (928); her one exception is to add that she feels no resentment towards Agamemnon, her would-be killer:

τὸ μὲν πρόθυμον, πρὶν σε δεῦρ' ἐλθεῖν, ἔχω

Ἄργει γενέσθαι καὶ σέ, σύγγον', εἰσιδεῖν.

θέλω δ' ἄπερ σύ, σέ τε μεταστῆσαι πόνων

νοσοῦντά τ' οἶκον, οὐχὶ τῷ κτανόντι με

θυμουμένη, πατρῶον ὀρθῶσαι †θέλω†.

σφαγῆς τε γὰρ σῆς χεῖρ' ἀπαλλάξαιμεν ἄν

σώσαιμί τ' οἴκους (989-95).

I have been eager since before you came to be able to get to Argos and to look upon you, brother. I want what you do, to release you from your toils, and I have no resentment against the man who tried to kill me. I want to rebuild our ancestral house; thereby would I free my hand from your sacrifice and save our family.

One would at least expect Iphigenia to protest the killing of her mother, who more than anyone advocated for her life at Aulis against Agamemnon, but this Clytemnestra is an invention of the *IA*, not yet extant when Euripides composed the *IT*. Iphigenia's enquiry into Clytemnestra's motive for killing Agamemnon (926) would be otherwise redundant since the answer is made perfectly obvious to her in the *IA*.³⁶ Parker, not necessarily rejecting this explanation, adds:

A wife has killed her husband and a father his daughter, and in both cases both killer and victim are to be pitied. Iphigenia does not think of distributing blame. Indeed, she never blames her father for her own near-death – Helen, Menelaus, Calchas, Odysseus, but never Agamemnon.³⁷

Euripides cannot logically ascribe malevolent treachery to someone as loyal as Iphigenia, so it is necessary for him to put her *dolos* in a positive light. It cannot be fundamentally destructive like Agamemnon's, as this would both demolish Euripides' laudatory depiction of Iphigenia and result in a bleak, classically "tragic" ending, neither of which are tolerable in a Euripidean escape tragedy, and which would arguably defy the constraints of the *lex operis* to which Euripides may have felt himself bound.

As the *IT* is free of extensive interpolations, its ending is far less problematic than the *IA*'s, but it does nevertheless raise some questions, of which perhaps the most pressing is: why does Athena appear so suddenly? While the *IA*'s *deus ex machina* is certainly a convenient way of

³⁶ Orestes' reply to Iphigenia, that it is not "proper" (καλόν, 927) for her to so much as hear of Clytemnestra's motive, seems to infer her affair with Aegisthus, rather than Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia, as the true reason for the murder (Cf. *E. Or.* 26-7, where Electra insists that it is οὐ καλόν for her, as a *parthenos*, to discuss the same affair). The question of Clytemnestra's motive – Iphigenia's sacrifice or the affair with Aegisthus? – is also raised in Pindar *Pyth.* 11.22-5 (the earliest extant source to connect the sacrifice of Iphigenia to the killing of Agamemnon). In *A. Ag.* 1412-21, 1525-9, 1555-9, Clytemnestra herself claims to be acting to avenge Iphigenia. Parker 2016, xxiii-xxvii reviews Clytemnestra's motives for killing Agamemnon as expressed in a number of tragedies.

³⁷ Parker 2016, 565n. See also Jouan, 260-2.

resolving the plot quickly, as a plot device it is integral to escape tragedy. As a case in point, *Helen's* Theoclymenus is kept from murdering his sister Theonoe only by the *ex machina* intervention of Castor and Polydeuces. In both the *IT* and the *Helen*, our protagonists are seriously imperilled but not allowed to come to actual harm. If, as I believe, all of Euripides' escape tragedies were staged at the Dionysia of 412, there would be no risk of his audience being able readily to anticipate the pattern of intrigue, peril, and escape of the *IT*.

The uniquely Euripidean innovation of the escape tragedy may have been the result of the audiences' hunger for lighter fare, epitomized by a happy ending achieved under divine influence – by divine command, even. The *deus ex machina* plot device that enables this offers, at the same time, an ingenious way of bringing Athena into the play. This, in turn, requires an atmosphere of peril: if Iphigenia had gotten away without any complications, there would have been little point in introducing Athena, and hence no chance to include the Attic Artemis aetiology.

In the *IT*, the “escape” in this escape tragedy is very intentionally an escape to Athens, or at least to Attica. For the audience, however, it is in some way an escape *from* Athens; that is, from the upsetting reality of a war gone horribly wrong for the Athenian *polis*. At the same time, the audience is presented with a reassuring, idealized vision of Athens as a shining beacon for those oppressed by tyranny and barbarism. In this sense, the *IT* shares much in common with the *Eumenides*, the *Oedipus at Colonus*,³⁸ and Euripides' own earlier *Suppliant Women*. Since the *Suppliant Women* belongs to Euripides' “patriotic” period early in the Peloponnesian

³⁸ Written ca. 406, near the very end of the Peloponnesian War, and produced posthumously in 401 after the surrender of Athens.

War, it is fascinating that the *IT* – and indeed the other escape tragedies – seem to have more in common with it than with the plays that immediately followed and preceded the escape tragedies.

Excursus: the date of IT

Scholars have been attempting to date the *IT* for almost a century with impressive results. T. Zieliński's well-known study of 1925 posits a date of 414-413 on the basis of metrical analysis,³⁹ while K. Matthiessen's careful stylistic study narrows the date down to 414, and the *Ion* to 413.⁴⁰ More recently, M. Cropp and G. Fick have built upon Zieliński's work with complex statistical techniques but arrive at a wider possible range of 416-412.⁴¹ 415 must be rejected since each of Euripides' entries from that year (most notably the *Troades*), including the satyr play, have extant titles at least. 416 presents difficulties as we would be obliged to conclude that Euripides moved suddenly from the so-called escape genre back to high tragedy in 415, then back again to escape drama by 412 at the latest – not an impossible prospect, but not one that commands much confidence either. I propose a date of 412; the patriotic role of Athena near the play's end would have been especially fitting in helping to shore up continued Athenian support for the war effort at the Dionysia of 412, the first since news of the Sicilian disaster reached Athens.⁴² M. Wright's proposal that *IT* ought to be dated to 412 with the *Helen*

³⁹ Zieliński 1925, 133-240.

⁴⁰ Matthiessen 1964.

⁴¹ Cropp and Fick 1985. For an overview of the mathematical basis of their study, see Craik 1989.

⁴² Though it may seem counterintuitive, one can accept *Troades* as a condemnation of the incipient Sicilian Expedition (cf. Delebecque 1951, 245-62, Maxwell-Stuart 1973) and at the same time acknowledge pro-Athenian elements in *IT*. While the Sicilian Expedition even in the beginning was regarded in some quarters as an

and the fragmentary *Andromeda* is highly plausible: all three plays include an escape-theme not known to occur at any other stage of Euripides' career,⁴³ while Euripides' brief immersion in escape themes may plausibly be explained as an effort to distract from the gloomy mood at Athens following the destruction of the Sicilian Expedition.⁴⁴

unnecessary and wasteful venture (cf. Nicias' speech before the *Ecclesia* at Thuc. 6.8-26), by 412 Athens' very political survival was at stake and so the question was no longer one of the justice of Athenian imperialism. It has been proposed that *Troades* was not written with Sicily in mind anyway, but the Melian incident of 416 (cf. Goossens 1962, 527-34; Delebecque raises this possibility in addition to rather than against the Sicilian theory).

⁴³ While *Ion*, close in date to the so-called escape tragedies, is concerned like *IT* with the recognition of long-lost relatives and, also like *IT*, ends with Athena *ex machina*, it does not contain the escape-theme of Euripides' putative trilogy of 412.

⁴⁴ Wright 2005, 47.

Chapter 2

*Iphigenia in Aulis*⁴⁵

The present chapter is placed appropriately at the middle of my study; it is closely linked with both the *IT* and the *Bacchae*. Iphigenia, the central character of the *IT*, is also crucial to the plot of the *IA*. Furthermore, this play was produced simultaneously, and posthumously, with the *Bacchae* on the occasion of the Dionysia of 405. This is confirmed by a scholium on Aristophanes' *Frogs*:

οὕτω γὰρ καὶ αἱ Διδασκαλῖαι φέρουσι, τελευτήσαντος Εὐριπίδου τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ δεδιδασχέναι ὁμώνυμον ἐν ᾧσται Ἰφιγένειαν τὴν ἐν Αὐλίδι, Ἀλκμαίωνα, Βάκχας (Σ Ar. Ra. 66-7 (=DID C 22 TrGF 1)).

The play-lists therefore assert that, since Euripides had died, his son of the same name presented in the city *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Alcmaeon*, and the *Bacchae*.⁴⁶

Although it is hardly clear whether these works were intended by the elder Euripides to be produced together – “His kinsman may have just put together what he found lying about in the dead poet’s workshop,” cautions Christiaan L. Caspers – the centrality of *peitho*, or persuasion, and deception, its distorted half-sibling, to both surviving plays is indeed striking.⁴⁷ Where they

⁴⁵ The *Iphigenia in Aulis* (henceforth *IA*) is easily the most heavily interpolated of Euripides’ surviving plays, and significant parts thereof (esp. 1578ff) are almost certainly inauthentic (for a discussion of these, see Page 1934, 196-9 and West 1981, 73-7). Diggle 1994’s edition makes use of a four-tiered classification system for the entire play in descending order of authenticity: *fortasse Euripidei*, *fortasse non Euripidei*, *vix Euripidei*, and *non Euripidei*. For a broader overview of textual scholarship on the play, see Gurd 2005, 63-127 and Michelakis 2002, 128-43.

⁴⁶ Suda s.v. Εὐριπίδης, however, makes the younger Euripides the playwright’s nephew, and says also that this final trilogy was awarded first prize; whether this was at the City Dionysia or the Lenaea is uncertain: Caspers 2012 128 n. 4 insists that “The scholiast’s phrase ἐν ᾧσται does not necessarily imply a Dionysia production; and although during his lifetime Euripides does not seem to have favoured competition in the Lenaea festival (see Russo [1960]), there is no telling where Euripides *minor* may have offered the plays to the public.”

⁴⁷ Quote: Caspers (2012) 129.

part company is in the dominance, or conspicuous lack thereof, of a visible, divine agent.⁴⁸

Artemis, though apparently instrumental in orchestrating the central dilemma of the *IA*, never appears in-person, nor does any other deity. There is no Dionysus pulling the strings to execute his master plan, but a collection of mortals who persuade, deceive, and cajole each other, often clumsily and without success, to advance their own agendas. Whereas the *Bacchae* occupies a sort of middle ground between persuasion-play and revenge-play, the *IA* is more resistant to classification. The possible directions in which the plot can veer are many, the outcome far from certain until the very end. Even its climax was long a matter of dispute, though scholars are now virtually unanimous in rejecting Iphigenia's final deliverance as a later interpolation. But the *IA* remains an intricately complex, deeply challenging play, even by the standards of its deeply challenging creator.

Metanoiai, or changes of mind, dominate the narrative landscape of the *IA*. As John Gibert observes, "There is no play in which changes of mind occur more often or in more pivotal situations than *Iphigenia in Aulis*."⁴⁹ So frequent and jarring are its *metanoiai* that its very literary merit has been suspect, for example by H.D.F. Kitto who condemned it as "thoroughly second-rate"⁵⁰, and by C. Garton, who remarked scathingly:

⁴⁸ Cf. Caspers 2012, 130: "While *IA*'s action is as crucially predicated on the need to sacrifice to Artemis as *Bacchae*'s is on Dionysus' epiphanic aspirations, Artemis' role in the action is reduced to a distant foil for the political machinations of the human characters." It is noteworthy that Artemis' own motivations for demanding sacrifice are never discussed, as opposed to the Dionysus of the *Bacchae* whose reasons for coming to Thebes are crystal-clear, and spoken from his own mouth to boot.

⁴⁹ Gibert 1995, 202.

⁵⁰ Kitto 1961, 362.

The later Iphigenia is what she is by reason of two peculiarities: first, a dramatic action cheapened below the tragic level towards mere theatricality, and second, an inadequate overlaying of the character-frame which belonged to that cheapened action.⁵¹

But to accept Kitto and Garton's criticisms at face value is to overlook the dramatic power and suspense of the *metanoiai*. One of these occurs even before the play begins: Agamemnon, faced with the choice to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia so that the Achaean army can sail to Troy (according to the oracle of Artemis relayed by the seer Calchas), or to call off the adventure and possibly incur the army's wrath, had initially chosen the former. But as the play begins he is having second thoughts and takes steps to abort the operation, namely with a written countermand to keep Iphigenia from Aulis. His initial plan had been to lure her there, together with his wife Clytemnestra, on the pretense of marrying the former off to Achilles. Agamemnon may be justly faulted for his treachery, but it magnifies the impossible dilemma that faces him: to betray the army in order to remain loyal to his family, or betray his daughter to remain loyal to the army. There is no possibility of harmony between his role as general and his role as father.⁵²

Menelaus, a decidedly unsavoury character in the world of Greek tragedy, is furious when he intercepts Agamemnon's countermands.⁵³ Although he is Agamemnon's brother, he is also the

⁵¹ Garton 1957, 251-2.

⁵² It is only much later, at 1395-6, that Iphigenia will claim that Agamemnon has no choice but to end her life, a contention seconded by Achilles (1408-9) (according to the interpretation of these lines by Stockert 1992, 30 n. 128). I find the veil of Iphigenia's rhetoric, woven to exonerate her tortured father and assuage Clytemnestra's wrath, to be utterly transparent. Cf. how Sophocles' *Electra* similarly propounds the necessity of Iphigenia's sacrifice: "for the army had no other solution, whether going homeward or towards Troy" (οὐ γὰρ ἦν λύσις | ἄλλη στρατῷ πρὸς οἶκον οὐδ' εἰς Ἴλιον, *Electra* 573-4).

⁵³ Aristotle in *Poetics* 1454a28-9 uses the Menelaus of Euripides' *Orestes* as a paradigm of unnecessary wickedness (πονηρίας μὲν ἥθους μὴ ἀναγκαίας). His portrayal in tragedy represents a development, in sharpened form, of his depiction in the Homeric epics, especially the *Iliad*. See further Stelow 2020.

cuckolded husband of Helen, and it is for her sake that he wants the expedition to go ahead; on this he is quite insistent, the requisite sacrifice of his niece notwithstanding. His earlier badgering is described indignantly by Agamemnon:

οὔ δὴ μ' ἀδελφὸς πάντα προσφέρων λόγον

ἔπεισε τλῆναι δεινὰ (97-8, *vix Euripidei*).

Yet my brother, bringing every argument to bear, persuaded me to enact a terrible deed.

Euripides is not unaware of the political uses of *peitho*, so reflective of the democracy at Athens and reflected in the political situation of the play. Political advancement through the power of persuasion was a keystone of the Sophists' curriculum, as W.K.C. Guthrie notes.⁵⁴ Its immense power did not go unnoticed by Plato, who in his *Philebus* has Protarchus declare:

ἤκουον μὲν ἔγωγε, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἐκάστοτε Γοργίου πολλάκις ὡς ἡ τοῦ πείθειν πολὺ διαφέρει πασῶν τεχνῶν—πάντα γὰρ ὑφ' αὐτῇ δοῦλα δι' ἐκόντων ἀλλ' οὐ διὰ βίας ποιοῖτο, καὶ μακρῶ ἀρίστη πασῶν εἴη τῶν τεχνῶν (58a-b).

Socrates, I have often heard from Gorgias that persuasion much exceeds all other skills, for it enslaves everything under its spell by voluntary submission and not by force, and it is by far the best of all arts.⁵⁵

If anything, Plato's observations should deter us from taking at face value Menelaus' taunt that Agamemnon "Summoned [his] wife and daughter here willingly, and not by force – don't say that – holding up the pretense of marriage to Achilles" (καὶ πέμπεις ἐκὼν, | οὐ βίᾳ - μὴ τοῦτο

⁵⁴ Guthrie 1969, 38; see also ch. VIII, "Rhetoric and philosophy," 176ff.

⁵⁵ A similar statement, ostensibly from Gorgias' own mouth, is to be found at *Gorgias* 452d ff. See also Morrow 1953, 238ff.

λέξης - σὴ δάμαρτι παῖδα σὴν | δεῦρ' ἀποστέλλειν, Ἀχιλλεῖ πρόφασιν ὡς γαμουμένην, 360-2, *fortasse Euripidei*).⁵⁶ Menelaus' implicit contrast between *peitho* and *bia* betrays an irony of which he remains blithely unaware, but which, I believe, is quite intentional on Euripides' part. In the *Funeral Oration*, attributed to Lysias but of dubious authorship, the speaker records how the earlier Athenians, aware that it was the way of wild beasts to be ruled by *bia* (ἡγησάμενοι θηρίων μὲν ἔργον εἶναι ὑπ' ἀλλήλων βίᾳ κρατεῖσθαι), resolved to settle disputes by persuasion and to be guided by the power of *logos* (λόγῳ δὲ πεῖσαι ... ὑπὸ λόγου δὲ διδασκομένους).⁵⁷ Much earlier, Hesiod had likewise condemned *bia* as bestial, though he contrasts it with *dike* rather than *peitho*.⁵⁸ The irony is that Menelaus employs *peitho* – or claims to do so – in the service of one of the most egregious instances of *bia* in the corpus of Greek mythology: the ruthless slaughter of an innocent maiden, and a brutal ten-year war of conquest. Indeed, the tragedians were far from oblivious to the more sinister uses of *peitho*: Aeschylus remarks that when used for good it deserves “holy reverence” (ἁγνόν ἐστὶ σοὶ Πειθοῦς σέβας, *Eumenides* 885); with wicked intentions, however, it becomes “wretched *peitho*, insufferable child of deliberate ruin” (τάλαινα πειθῶ, | προβούλου παῖς ἄφερτος ἄτας, *Agamemnon* 385-6).⁵⁹ Thus R.G.A. Buxton lays the darker *peitho* alongside *dolos* (treachery, plotting), itself integral to the action of the *IA*, saying, “So far from being opposed to *dolos*, this *peitho* may become virtually indistinguishable from it.”⁶⁰

⁵⁶ But one might ask, Why was Agamemnon able to resist Menelaus' demands the first time? To which I respond that Agamemnon did, in fact, succumb (hence his initial decision to sacrifice), and only later, presumably in Menelaus' absence, changed his mind.

⁵⁷ Both excerpts are taken from Lysias *Funeral Oration* 19.

⁵⁸ *Works and Days* 276ff.

⁵⁹ For a modern analysis of *peitho*'s ambivalence, see Kahn 1978, 145.

⁶⁰ Buxton 1982, 65.

Meanwhile, Agamemnon's apparent success proves short-lived with the arrival of his wife and daughter. I do not think I am going too far in ascribing paramount importance to this moment.⁶¹ The danger that the army might present, far from being a figment of an overactive or perhaps even paranoid imagination, now becomes far more immediate.⁶² If Agamemnon steps back now, who is to stop them from revealing the oracle, threatening mutiny and endangering his own life and the lives of his family?⁶³ The presence of Clytemnestra in particular effects a paradigm shift in the way Agamemnon envisions his dilemma, as laid out by Gibert:

Suddenly, Agamemnon no longer asks (1) How can I kill my daughter? But how can I desert the expedition? Instead, he frames the issue in terms of a quite different alternative (2) How can I face my wife? But how can I face the mob incited by Odysseus? His decision in terms of this alternative is actually a futile attempt to evade responsibility: he caves in to the mob without ever testing its mood and tries, unsuccessfully of course, to avoid his wife.⁶⁴

Agamemnon panics, and impulsively errs towards the path of least resistance. “We have arrived at a misfortune that compels [me] to enact the bloody murder of my daughter” (ἀλλ' ἤκομεν

⁶¹ Lesky 1983, 356 agrees with this assessment, which is supported by Agamemnon's musing already at 144-8 that Iphigenia's arrival might spur him to reconsider his position. However, Gibert 1995, 219 n. 34, paints this as a motif that moves Agamemnon more by dramatic convention than by genuine, psychologically-grounded conviction. Compare how Medea is spurred to hasten the murder of her children by reports of the Corinthians' imminent arrival, though she had been contemplating the idea beforehand.

⁶² Calchas and Odysseus are especially dangerous because they alone (besides Agamemnon and Menelaus themselves) know of the oracle. Siegel 1981, 258 downplays the danger represented by the army, which still knows nothing, but this ignores Odysseus and Calchas' knowledge, which they could easily share with the whole army. (Interestingly, Agamemnon concentrates his fear on Odysseus: cf. 524 τὸ Σισύφειον σπέρμα πάντ' οἶδεν τάδε). de Romilly 1988 34-5 n. 23 helpfully points out Siegel's error of omission.

⁶³ Cf. 533-5: κἄν πρὸς Ἄργος ἐκφύγω, | ἐλθόντες αὐτοῖς τείχεσιν Κυκλωπίοις | ἀναρπάσουσι καὶ κατασκάψουσι γῆν. This may well be an exaggeration, but then again, it might not be; see. n. 64, below.

⁶⁴ Gibert 1995, 213. Agamemnon may leave the “mob” untested but his earlier remarks on the popular nature, and hence the popular dependency, of his military role suggest a strong presumption on his part that to go against the army's will cannot end well for him (cf. 85-6, 16-9, 25-7, 446-53). It is similarly telling that when Achilles later tries to convince *his own troops* to abandon the whole endeavour, he barely escapes with his life.

γὰρ εἰς ἀναγκαίᾳς τύχας, | θυγατρὸς αἱματηρὸν ἐκπᾶσαι φόνον, 511-2, *fortasse Euripidei*), he bemoans to Menelaus.⁶⁵ This is especially ironic, and tragically so, because now Menelaus in turn changes his own mind in Iphigenia's favour, impressed by his brother's grief. But it is now too late for him to make an impact; the starring role has been usurped by the army/*ochlos* that Agamemnon so fears. Indeed Menelaus now withers into irrelevance, soon dropping entirely out of sight and never to be mentioned or heard from again.⁶⁶ From this point on, Agamemnon will not change course again. If his obvious misgivings, of which plenty more will be heard before the play is over, do not permit us to see in the "new" Agamemnon a man of unshakable conviction, we can at least be certain that he is now a figure of fixed resolve.⁶⁷

It is not long before we meet Achilles in his only appearance in a surviving Greek tragedy. He gives the impression of a man of seemingly irreconcilable contradictions. He seems to accept his role as Iphigenia's bridegroom, however illusory the formal marriage, because she has been "declared mine" (ἐμὴ φατισθεῖσ', 936).⁶⁸ Not that he cares much, at least initially, for Iphigenia *per se*: he is quite willing to admit that, had Agamemnon sought his permission to be his pawn in the deception, he would have consented for the army's sake (961-9). Nor is he burdened by

⁶⁵ Close readers of the play will recall that already at 443, Agamemnon had answered the Messenger's report by bemoaning the ἀνάγκης ζεύγματα, themselves evocative of Aeschylus *Ag.* 218 ἀνάγκας ... λέπαδνον (spoken in this case by the Chorus).

⁶⁶ Owing to which Gibert 1995, 218 relegates his function in the play to the merely paradigmatic. His position will have no bearing on Agamemnon's subsequent actions.

⁶⁷ The Second Messenger's speech, especially at 1547-50, have been taken as evidence that Agamemnon's tortured inner conflict persists until the very end of the play, for example by Gibert 1995, 220 n. 37 (though the lines are highly doubted by Diggle, who relegates them to the rank of *vix Euripidei*.) Certainly he is more unsettled than the eponymous character of the *Agamemnon* 214-7, who makes his peace with his decision to sacrifice Iphigenia from the moment that decision is made.

⁶⁸ We should, however, bear in mind that Achilles and Clytemnestra's exchange (919-1035) bears heavily the hallmarks of later hands, falling under Diggle's *vix Euripidei* classification. Yet portions of it have at times been vigorously defended: 961-9 by Ritchie 1978, 193-5; 965-9 by Caspers 2012, 141 n. 63 *pace* Kovacs 2003, 92; and 968-9 by Stockert 1992, 478-9. On Achilles' acceptance of his "marriage" and consequent new role, see Foley 1985, 162.

anything as fantastical as romantic love, which could well be satisfied by any of the “innumerable women [who] hunt my bed” (μυρίαί κόραι | θηρῶσι λέκτρον τούμὸν, 959-60). But he does have a heroic identity to defend, an identity that he sees as intimately bound up with his *onoma*, his “name” or, more precisely, “fame”.⁶⁹ Without it, he is nothing (οὐδέν, 968), as he so eagerly reminds Clytemnestra. Achilles, like Agamemnon, is in the *IA* a debasement of his heroic, Homeric self.⁷⁰ He later makes what seems like little more than a token effort to rally the troops against the sacrifice, and narrowly escapes stoning, not least from his own Myrmidons. Evidently, this is not an Achilles who commands much authority, nor does he inspire much confidence in the audience. He is a man eager to excise himself from the whole bloody dilemma he finds himself unwillingly trapped in. Following his abortive excursion into the ranks, he reports the incident to Clytemnestra, who demands incredulously, “Who would dare to lay a hand on your person?” to which Achilles responds with deadpan matter-of-factness, “All the Greeks.” Even the Myrmidons? asks the victim’s mother. “They were first in their enmity [to me],” says Achilles. “Then we are lost, child!” Clytemnestra despairs (1351-3, *fortasse Euripidei*).

Clytemnestra meanwhile confronts Agamemnon, who is fearful of being cornered. Euripides has Clytemnestra bring up a dead former husband, Tantalus – we do not know if their union was the playwright’s invention – whom Agamemnon murdered, slaughtering his child with Clytemnestra in the process, before taking his wife for himself. Yet through all this, reminds Clytemnestra, she has remained a blameless wife to Agamemnon who, we can now see, is in no

⁶⁹ Thus 962 χρῆν δ' αὐτὸν αἰτεῖν τούμὸν ὄνομ' ἐμοῦ πάρα (“He ought to have sought [permission to use] my name from me!”).

⁷⁰ Thus de Romilly 1988, 28 n. 6: “That all epic characters are debased in tragedy is well-known.”

position to bemoan the *bia* of the army. Now he is prepared to kill again, not for a blameless wife of his own but for his brother's "worthless" wife, Helen. Agamemnon's own earlier vitriol against Helen is thoroughly suppressed; there is much irony in the fact that Menelaus no longer even wants her back, a point that Clytemnestra surely would have made had she known. What she does know is that it is within her power to make Agamemnon suffer, eventually, for his one as yet uncommitted crime. Thus she foreshadows ominously:

μή δῆτα πρὸς θεῶν μήτ' ἀναγκάσης ἐμέ

κακὴν γενέσθαι περὶ σέ μήτ' αὐτὸς γένη (1183-4, *fortasse Euripidei*).

By the gods, then, do not force me to sin against you, or sin yourself!

With this threat of retribution, Agamemnon is surrounded by the spectre of violence: on one side from the army, and on the other from his wife. Collard and Morwood describe Clytemnestra's relentless rhetorical fusillade thus:

Clyt[emnestra] is adversarial throughout, methodically destroying Ag[amemnon]'s conceivable defences of his disregard for wife and daughter, and exposing his practical and moral failings: she uses the familiar rhetorical technique of anticipating and disarming an opponent's argument.⁷¹

Iphigenia now breaks her silence and appeals directly to her father. She recognizes the inherent absurdity of having to die for a cause – the punishment of Paris, and the return of Helen – in which she has no stake. Actually, whether she intended this or not (but Euripides himself very possibly did), she exposes the irrationality of the whole bloodstained endeavour: the sacrifice of

⁷¹ Collard and Morwood 2017, 525 1146-1208n.

an innocent girl, the bloodlust of the army, and the deaths of thousands soon to come for the sake of one unworthy woman. She closes with an appeal to the preciousness of her life that surely must have resonated with Agamemnon, who will kill his child to save his own life.

Agamemnon responds to this with a forceful appeal to Panhellenic sentiment, beginning at 1255:

οὐ Μενέλεώς με καταδεδούλωται, τέκνον,

οὐδ' ἐπὶ τὸ κείνου βουλόμενον ἐλήλυθα,

ἀλλ' Ἑλλάς, ἣ δεῖ, κἂν θέλω κἂν μὴ θέλω,

θῦσαί σε· τούτου δ' ἥσσονες καθέσταμεν.

ἐλευθέραν γὰρ δεῖ νιν ὅσον ἐν σοί, τέκνον,

κάμοι γενέσθαι, μηδὲ βαρβάρων ὕπο

Ἑλλήνας ὄντας λέκτρα συλᾶσθαι βίᾳ (*fortasse Euripidei*).

Menelaus has not enslaved me, child, nor have I come to do his will. Rather it is Greece, to whom I must sacrifice you whether I want to or not. We yield to this [necessity], for she must be free, child, insofar as you or I can make her so; nor must Greeks be robbed of their wives by barbarian force.

Is Agamemnon sincere? The question has troubled commentators for some time.⁷² It is certainly suspicious that Agamemnon raises the topic of abduction only now, not least because it supposedly excuses him from blame in the gruesome act over which he is both authorizer and

⁷² Conacher 1967, 264, Mellert-Hoffmann 1969, Knox 1979, 246 and 348-9 answer in the affirmative, while Funke 1964, Gibert 1995, 221, and Siegel 1980 deny it.

presider. That said, Agamemnon is no calculating psychopath. He really believes what he is saying, to some extent, if only because he desperately needs to believe it to assuage his own tormented conscience.

But what of Iphigenia? She now does an about-face and embraces her impending death suddenly enough to have earned Aristotle's disapprobation (*Poetics* 1454a32); her "deathbed conversion" is perhaps the most notorious puzzle of the play.⁷³ Three potential solutions are posited, helpfully, by Gibert:

(1) Iphigenia loves her father; (2) Iphigenia loves Achilles; (3) Iphigenia loves marriage and the Greek Way of Life. As far as I can judge, Euripides has given these possibilities more or less thematic support, but no direct textual confirmation.⁷⁴

What a predicament indeed! The first of these possibilities, which smacks heavily of Freudianism, has its champion in A. Green, who contends that Iphigenia agrees to be sacrificed out of oedipal attraction to her father, or more precisely, "identification with the object of paternal desire."⁷⁵ More plausible is the "Iphigenia in love" theory, that is, that Iphigenia sacrifices herself because she loves (romantically, erotically) Achilles, and does not want him to suffer for her sake. This interpretation, formulated by W.D. Smith, certainly has its appeal to modern audiences, and if it does not find direct support in the text of the play, it is at least not

⁷³ τοῦ δὲ ἀνωμάλου ἡ ἐν Αὐλίδι Ἰφιγένεια: οὐδὲν γὰρ ἔοικεν ἡ ἱκετεύουσα τῇ ὑστέρα ("[An example] of inconsistency is Iphigenia in Aulis, for as a suppliant she has no resemblance to her later self.") Among those who concur with Aristotle's criticism are Kitto 1961, 365-6; Else 1957, 465 n. 33; Lucas 1968, 161; Conacher 1967, 250, 263-4; and Luschig 1988, 126-7.

⁷⁴ Gibert 1995, 224-5.

⁷⁵ Green 1979 (1969), 154: "The emotion aroused in Euripides by Iphigenia's acceptance of sacrifice gives her farewell an astonishing verisimilitude, by virtue of its unmotivated, irrational character, moved solely by identification with the object of paternal desire through the ways of the ego-ideal" (154). Cf. also Rabinowitz 1983, 24; 1993, 45: "Euripides also gives Iphigenia a predisposition to desire the father"; and Foley 1985, 101 with n. 67.

readily discredited.⁷⁶ The lattermost of Gibert's three possibilities seems to be evinced by Iphigenia's rousing Panhellenic speech at 1368-1401. H. Siegel introduces his own novel argument that Iphigenia, cracking under the pressure of events, essentially goes mad – a madness that can be mistaken for genuine consent to her sacrifice.⁷⁷ I hesitate to go quite as far as Siegel. Rather, I think, Iphigenia bends her will to the inevitable, aware that resistance to the forces conspiring to enact her slaughter is futile; only then does she cook up a bogus Panhellenic pretense, much like her father, to ennoble her slaughter – and, for that matter, the slaughter at Troy that it enables. But even now, Iphigenia cannot quite bring herself to reconcile completely with her fate. Consider her complaint at 1330-2:

ἦ πολύμοχθον ἄρ' ἦν γένος, ἦ πολύμοχθον

ἀμείρων, <τὸ> χρεῶν δέ τι δύσποτμον

ἀνδράσιν ἀνευρεῖν.⁷⁸

Much-suffering, much-suffering indeed is the ephemeral human race! But it is decreed that man must suffer bad luck.

But Iphigenia's short-lived resentment soon gives way to a flurry of hyperbolic chauvinism. εἴς γ' ἀνὴρ κρείσσων γυναικῶν μυρίων ὀρᾷ φάος, she declares, quite monumentally; "It is better

⁷⁶ Smith 1979: "Iphigenia has an irrational motive well known in Greek literature, well prepared by the play, thoroughly intelligible, but little appreciated in this instance as far as I can see: she is in love, and chooses to sacrifice herself for her intended husband" (174). But Gibert 1995 reminds us that "this is assertion, not argument" (237).

⁷⁷ Siegel 1980, 315.

⁷⁸ In a similar vein, Iphigenia will maintain Helen's responsibility for her present predicament at 1417-8. Regarding the above lines, Gibert 1995 equivocates: "*On the surface*, these words continue the tone of complaint" (247, emphasis mine). I believe, and believe strongly, that Iphigenia's complaint extends far below the surface, and is in fact indicative of a deep-seated and persistent resentment of her fate.

for one man to see the light than ten thousand women!” (1394, *fortasse Euripidei*). “An extreme sentiment, perhaps intended to shock,” remark Collard and Morwood, and I am inclined to agree.⁷⁹ It is scarcely even logical, considering Iphigenia’s own recently-stated desire to “see the light of day” (1218-9, *fortasse Euripidei*; 1250, *fortasse non Euripidei*). Collard and Morwood, again, insist that we ask ourselves:

May the poet be putting these challenging words into the mouth of his heroine in order to point to an element of hysteria in her rhetoric, or to hint how tragically she has misled herself? Then her “change of mind” must be found less than coldly rational.⁸⁰

I think this is a perfectly reasonable question to ask. Iphigenia’s sudden, absolutist statements must be seen as the corollary to Agamemnon’s jingoistic Panhellenic rhetoric, which continues when she says, “It is right for Greeks to rule barbarians, mother, but not for barbarians to rule Greeks; for while the one are slaves, the other are free.” (βαρβάρων δ' Ἑλλήνας ἄρχειν εἰκός, ἀλλ' οὐ βαρβάρους | μήτερ, Ἑλλήνων· τὸ μὲν γὰρ δοῦλον, οἱ δ' ἐλεύθεροι, 1400-1). This is perhaps even more extreme, and equally repugnant to modern ears (but apparently acceptable enough to Aristotle for him to quote it approvingly⁸¹). Yet although, as Collard and Morwood explain, “In the 5th century there was a pervasive belief in the superiority of Greeks over

⁷⁹ Collard and Morwood 2017, 592 1392-7n. For a comprehensive survey with bibliography of Euripides and the “woman question,” see Mastronarde 2010, 246-79.

⁸⁰ Collard and Morwood 2017, 593 1392-7n. See also the introduction to their edition, 25-7 and 36-7.

⁸¹ *Politics* 1.1252b: ἐν δὲ τοῖς βαρβάροις τὸ θῆλυ καὶ τὸ δοῦλον τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχει τάξιν· αἴτιον δ' ὅτι τὸ φύσει ἄρχον οὐκ ἔχουσιν, ἀλλὰ γίνεται ἡ κοινωνία αὐτῶν δούλης καὶ δούλου. διό φασιν οἱ ποιηταὶ

βαρβάρων δ' Ἑλλήνας ἄρχειν εἰκός (“But among the barbarians both woman and slave have the same rank, the reason for this being that they have no class of natural rulers. The union between them is that of male slave and female slave, and it is because of this that the poets say, ‘It is right for Greeks to rule barbarians’). The quote is borrowed directly from *IA* 1400.

barbarians,” this need not mean that Euripides shared in it.⁸² 1400-1 is part and parcel of Iphigenia’s overwhelming psychic need to justify her death.

We do not, ironically, know beyond doubt whether Iphigenia really does perish. She very probably does, since her eleventh hour deliverance and replacement on the altar by a stag is almost entirely interpolated, as Diggle’s edition asserts. Regardless, a lingering confusion muddies the interpretative waters. Overall the *IA* gives the impression of being a very difficult play. Whether or not this is a fair assessment, the extensive interpolations (which, as Diggle illustrates, are detected with varying degrees of certitude) do nothing to dispel this, but this should not deter us from searching for meaning in the play.

⁸² Collard and Morwood 2017, 594 1400-1n. They review some recent scholarship suggesting that a number of apparently chauvinistic utterances in some of Euripides’ plays are meant ironically, essentially as a challenge to the prevailing hierarchical Greek mindset. See for example Hall 1989, 201-23 and “Recasting the Barbarian” in 2005, 185-224; Wright 2005, 179. They are, furthermore, insistent at 593 1392-7n. (though discussing 1400-1) that Euripides “had spent much of his career deconstructing” the “polarity between ‘free’ Greeks and slavish barbarians.”

Chapter 3

Bacchae

Those wishing to approach the *Bacchae* from any number of angles are not starved for choice. Since at least the appearance of A.G. Bather's monograph "The Problem of the *Bacchae*" in 1894, anthropological analyses have formed a significant portion of scholarly work on the play, continuing in the 20th century under Richard Seaford (1981) and Jan M. Bremmer (1984). The mid-to-late-20th century witnessed a great flourishing of psychoanalytical interpretations of the *Bacchae* as with much of the world's literature, with perhaps the most notable contributions by Jene A. LaRue (1968), Georges Devereux (1970), and Michael Parsons (1990). The last century has also produced the excellent English-language commentaries of E.R. Dodds (1953, second edition 1960), with its deep literary and textual criticism, and Seaford's more literary-focused, but still formidable, edition of 1996. Few studies, however, have endeavoured to treat at length what ought to be considered the central intellectual theme of the *Bacchae*: persuasion. This is perhaps a surprising deficit; if one recognizes that we are dealing with what may fairly be classified as a "persuasion play", then the centrality of persuasion to its outcome is evident. Unlike Euripides' so-called "punishment plays" such as the *Hippolytus*, where the protagonist's fate is sealed from the first line of the prologue, the *Bacchae* is more open-ended. Dionysus, the central god of the play, offers the mortal protagonist, Pentheus, a stark choice: accept his divinity, or die. Persuasion, which comes in many guises throughout, is Dionysus' means of attempting to effect a happy outcome. To see the importance of persuasion is to envision the play as Dionysus himself would have envisioned it.

Sometime before the events of the play, Dionysus' mother Semele had begun an affair with Zeus. When Semele insisted on seeing Zeus in his "true" form, he transformed into a thunderbolt and incinerated her. Luckily, the foetal Dionysus (somehow uncharred) was rescued from Semele's womb and sewn up in Zeus' thigh. Years later, Dionysus, now an adult, returns to Thebes, the city of his birth, to establish his cult there. He had previously been proselytizing throughout Asia Minor alongside a chorus of devout Asian maenads, who accompany him to Greece. Thebes remains home to Semele's surviving sisters, the retired king Cadmus, and Cadmus' grandson Pentheus, the reigning monarch.⁸³ Dionysus must overcome the skepticism of the Theban royal family, several members of which reject his claims; these include Pentheus and Cadmus' surviving daughters. They maintain that Semele had gotten pregnant by some mortal and was struck dead by Zeus for falsely alleging his paternity (26-31).⁸⁴ Yet suddenly, with Dionysus' arrival, all the women of Thebes fall into a trance and flock to Mount Cithaeron to worship Dionysus, Cadmus' daughters among them. In fact, Dionysus has seized control of their minds, as they refuse to acknowledge him voluntarily (26-36). He does not shy away from the lexicon of compulsion: he has "driven them raging" out of their homes (αὐτὰς ἐκ δόμων ὥσπρησ' ἐγὼ | μανίαις, 32-3) and "compelled them to don the garb of my ὄργια" (σκευὴν τ' ἔχειν ἡνάγκασ' ὀργίων ἐμῶν, 34). His possession of the women is a dramatic display of his divine power, and Pentheus is meant to take note. Thus Pentheus

⁸³ The sisters are Agave, Ino, and Autonoë. Pentheus is the son of Agave, making him and Dionysus first cousins.

⁸⁴ Commenting on Κάδμου σοφίσμαθ' ("the sophistries of Cadmus") at line 30, Dodds (1953) *ad loc.* proposes that "Semele's sisters uncharitably thought that the story of her mating with Zeus was invented by Cadmus to screen her lapse from virtue". In fact, Σεμέλην ... ἀναφέρειν ("Semele claimed", 28-9) makes clear that Semele herself made this claim; it appears that Cadmus' role is merely to propagate it.

himself remains mentally autonomous, his soul unpossessed, and his free will unmolested.⁸⁵

The women's pilgrimage *en masse* to Cithaeron is a crucial first step in Dionysus' ultimate plan, to "show him [i.e. Pentheus] and all the Thebans that I was born a god" (αὐτῷ θεὸς γεγώς ἐνδείξομαι | πᾶσιν τε Θηβαίοισιν, 47-8). Violence is a merely secondary and inessential theme of his opening address, and its use is merely possible, not inevitable: "If the city of the Thebans seeks in anger to drive the Bacchants from the mountain by force of arms, I will join with the maenads in battle" (ἦν δὲ Θηβαίων πόλις | ὀργῇ σὺν ὅπλοις ἐξ ὄρους βάκχας ἄγειν | ζητῇ, ξυνάψω μαινάσι στρατηλατῶν, 50-52). True, Pentheus is condemned as a θεόμαχος who "excludes me from his libations and makes no mention of me in his prayers" (σπονδῶν ἄπο | ὠθεῖ μ', ἐν εὐχαῖς τ' οὐδαμοῦ μνείαν ἔχει, 45-6), but Dionysus' ambition, as George Grube observed in the 1930s, is to have his divinity recognized at a cost that need not be measured in human lives.⁸⁶

Pentheus first appears onstage at 215. Like Dionysus, he has recently been spending time outside of Thebes, and he is shocked to see what has unfolded in his absence. He has not, however, personally observed the maenads on Mount Cithaeron, and his knowledge is based entirely on hearsay (cf. κλύω, 216). Yet he has already formed a strong opinion on the matter. He rails against "novel ills going on above the city" (νεοχμὰ τήνδ' ἀνὰ πτόλιν κακά, 216) and "fraudulent Bacchic revelries" (πλασταῖσι βακχείαισιν, 218) with undisguised disgust.⁸⁷ His

⁸⁵ Presumably this is true for all the men of Thebes, for as Cadmus and Tiresias complain (195-6), these two are the only men who honour Dionysus.

⁸⁶ Grube (1935) 38. For an overview of the motif of the θεόμαχος in Greek tragedy, see Kamerbeek (1948) 271-83.

⁸⁷ Pentheus' opening words are indicative of the unappealing qualities that will ultimately cost him his life; Dodds (1953) xl accuses this "typical tragedy-tyrant" of "absence of self-control (214, 343ff, 620f, 670f); willingness to believe the worst on hearsay evidence (221ff), or on none (255ff); brutality towards the helpless (231, 241, 511ff, 796f); and a stupid reliance on physical force as a means of settling spiritual problems".

contempt of Dionysus, whom he at one point calls “the parvenu god” (τὸν νεωστὶ δαίμονα, 219), is instantly detectable.⁸⁸ Most luridly of all, Pentheus charges the entire cult with being a front for debauchery:

πλήρεις δὲ θιάσοις ἐν μέσοισιν ἐστάναι
 κρατῆρας, ἄλλην δ' ἄλλοσ' εἰς ἐρημίαν
 πτώσσουσαν εὐναῖς ἀρσένων ὑπηρετεῖν,
 πρόφασιν μὲν ὡς δὴ μαινάδας θυοσκόους,
 τὴν δ' Ἀφροδίτην πρόσθ' ἄγειν τοῦ Βακχίου (221-5).

They set up vessels full of wine amid the *thiasoi*, slinking off one at a time into the wilderness to serve the lusts [lit. “the beds”] of men; while they pretend to be maenads sacrificing, in fact they put Aphrodite before Bacchus.

What could explain Pentheus’ near-hysterical reaction? He has been conditioned to distrust Dionysus and everything to do with him. As Justina Gregory observes, “Everything Pentheus says and does proceeds from his conviction that the new god is no god at all, but a mere charlatan”.⁸⁹ Dionysus is in fact worse than a charlatan, in Pentheus’ eyes: he is a sexually depraved monster who must be wiped out for the good of Thebes. Hence Pentheus vows enthusiastically to have him executed (239-41).⁹⁰ Given the supposed circumstances of Dionysus’ conception, Pentheus associates him inextricably with the (alleged) illicit sex and

⁸⁸ I follow Dodds *ad loc.* in translating 219; he describes τὸν νεωστὶ as being “more contemptuous than τὸν νέον”.

⁸⁹ Gregory (1985) 27.

⁹⁰ Although, strictly speaking, Pentheus is referring here to the “Stranger”, whom he does not know to be the disguised Dionysus. But the Stranger *is* known to be a representative of the god, and therefore a surrogate of sorts for the real thing.

deception of Semele. He has presumably been taught from an early age to accept Agave's version of events, and this pits him against not only Dionysus but his own grandfather, Cadmus, who insists on Dionysus' divinity.

Tiresias and Cadmus soon confront the incredulous king. Tiresias is the first to make his case, and he begins by saying, "Whenever a wise man undertakes a noble basis for his speech, it is no great task to speak well" (ὅταν λάβῃ τις τῶν λόγων ἀνὴρ σοφὸς | καλὰς ἀφορμάς, οὐ μέγ' ἔργον εὖ λέγειν, 266-7). He acknowledges that Pentheus possesses "a fluent tongue, as if having sense" (σὺ δ' εὐτροχὸν μὲν γλῶσσαν ὡς φρονῶν ἔχεις, 268), yet "there is no sense" in his words (ἐν τοῖς λόγοισι δ' οὐκ ἔννευσί σοι φρένες, 269). φρένες (here "wits" or "common sense") is a positive intellectual trait and, as Tiresias sees it, a necessary prerequisite if one wishes to be σοφός ("wise"). This, in turn, enables one to develop a proper δόξα – in this case, belief in the divinity of Dionysus. Thus Tiresias warns, "Do not, if you have a belief, and your belief is sick, think that you have sense" (μηδ', ἣν δοκῇς μὲν, ἡ δὲ δόξα σου νοσῇ, | φρονεῖν δόκει τι, 311-2). As νόσος suggests, Tiresias imagines Pentheus' unbelief in very physical terms. For example, at 326-7 he pontificates, "You are mad, most painfully so, and though you are sick, you would not accept a remedy either with drugs or without them" (μαίνῃ γὰρ ὡς ἄλγιστα, κοῦτε φαρμάκοις | ἄκῃ λάβοις ἂν οὔτ' ἄνευ τούτων νοσεῖς). Tiresias' use of ἄλγος, ἄκος, and φάρμακα suggests a quasi-clinical diagnosis of Pentheus' νόσος. As Pentheus has inadvertently suggested with his earlier hysterics, his problem is not merely theological, but physical – or rather psychological. Tiresias recognizes this, employing the lexicon of medicine for his purposes: namely, to force Pentheus to confront his νόσος of unbelief objectively; only then will he acquire the requisite φρένες, and then σοφία, to accept the correct δόξα.

Now it is Cadmus' turn to speak. His address is much briefer than Tiresias', but at times he employs similar rhetoric, as at 332: "Now you are fluttering, and you have no sense while thinking" (νῦν γὰρ πέτῃ τε καὶ φρονῶν οὐδὲν φρονεῖς). Like Tiresias, Cadmus envisions φρένες as a desirable, even necessary intellectual trait, but he toys with two different senses of the related verb φρονέω. As part of the phrase φρονῶν οὐδὲν, it conveys the Tiresian meaning of "having sense", but it seems better to translate φρονεῖς at the end of the line simply as "to think".⁹¹ To paraphrase what Cadmus is saying: "You are capable of thought in the literal sense, but you do not have 'common sense', which means accepting the divinity of Dionysus, or at least pretending to". I say "pretending to" because Cadmus reveals himself to be rather opportunistic, to say the least. Consider what he says at lines 333-6:

κεῖ μὴ γὰρ ἔστιν ὁ θεὸς οὗτος, ὥς σὺ φής,

παρὰ σοὶ λεγέσθω· καὶ καταψεύδου καλῶς

ὥς ἔστι, Σεμέλη θ' ἵνα δοκῇ θεὸν τεκεῖν,

ἡμῖν τε τιμὴ παντὶ τῷ γένει προσῆ.

And even if this man is not a god, as you say, say that he is anyway! Lie cleverly, so that Semele may appear to have birthed a god, and so honour will come to us and the whole family!

Pentheus' convictions, however misguided, are at least sincere; thus he is deeply scandalized by his grandfather's cynicism. As Davide Susanetti explains:

⁹¹ Here I build upon Seaford's (1996) translation of 332: "For now you are a-flutter, and your thinking has no sense".

Cadmus' words reveal that tradition is a lie, that myth is a deliberate fabrication and an instrument of power. Exposing the workings of mythology means destroying the mirage of origin and the persuasive charm of ancient tales. The position of Cadmus, who is dressed as a Bacchant and ready to dance for the honour of Dionysus despite his age, is not dissimilar from that of the atheist who claims that the pantheon was invented as a convenient way to keep society in order.⁹²

It would seem that Pentheus' is not as vain as Cadmus expects. The old man's credibility, already compromised in Pentheus' eyes, is now shattered. He tries to salvage his case with an ominous reference to the "miserable fate" (ἄθλιον μόρον, 337) of Pentheus' cousin Actaeon, who was torn to shreds by his own hunting dogs when he foolishly bragged that he was a better hunter than Artemis (338-40). "*You* must not suffer this!" (ὃ μὴ πάθῃς σύ, 341), Cadmus warns.⁹³ But Cadmus has too deeply compromised himself to be of any help, and Pentheus is deaf to his warning. Cadmus, oblivious to the extent to which he has alienated his grandson, must now face Pentheus' wrath as he naively attempts to crown him with an ivy garland:

οὐ μὴ προσοίσῃς χεῖρα, βακχεύσεις δ' ἰών,

μηδ' ἐξομόρξῃ μωρίαν τήν σὴν ἐμοί·

τῆς σῆς δ' ἀνοίας τόνδε τὸν διδάσκαλον

δίκην μέτειμι (343-6).

⁹² Susanetti (2016) 290.

⁹³ Actaeon's death is especially relevant to Pentheus. As Pentheus' cousin (being the son of Autonoë), he is killed atop Cithaeron (see 1291), as Pentheus will be, and in a similar manner, on the orders of an offended deity.

Don't put your hand on me, but going on in Bacchic revelry, you will not wipe your idiocy onto me! I will punish this teacher of your folly.

The verb ἐξομόργνυμι (“to wipe off”) is distinctly tactile; as Dodds observes, Pentheus speaks as though maenadism were a literal disease, and just as literally contagious.⁹⁴ The real νόσος, Pentheus infers, is not his own unbelief but maenadism itself, a “maddening illness of uncontrolled sexual desire”, in Jene LaRue’s definition.⁹⁵ Pentheus describes maenadism as a “newly-discovered disease for women” (νόσον | καινὴν γυναιξί, 353-4), of which μωρία (“idiocy”) and ἀνοία (“ignorance”) are not causes but rather symptoms. Its chief carrier, the “Stranger”, is bitterly condemned by Pentheus as a “feminine-looking foreigner” (θηλύμορφον ξένον, 353) who “violates [women’s] beds” (λέχη λυμαίνεται, 354). Pentheus’ paranoid terror rhetorically degenerates into a bloodthirsty rant. He delights at the prospect of having the Stranger stoned to death (λευσίμου δίκης τυχὼν | θάνῃ, 355-6), part of a quasi-ritual “bitter bacchanal” (πικρὰν βάκχευσιν, 357) that he envisions with glee. Tiresias has just about had enough, but before he departs with Cadmus, he takes a moment to take a few jibes at Pentheus:

Πενθεὺς δ' ὅπως μὴ πένθος εἰσοίσει δόμοις

τοῖς σοῖσι, Κάδμε· μαντικῇ μὲν οὐ λέγω,

τοῖς πράγμασιν δέ· μῶρα γὰρ μῶρος λέγει (367-9).

⁹⁴ Dodds (1953) 343-4n.

⁹⁵ LaRue (1968) 211.

May Pentheus not bring suffering into your household, Cadmus. I speak not prophetically, but as a matter of fact, for a fool often says foolish things.

The pun at 367 plays with the similarity between Πενθεύς and πένθος, the latter indicating suffering or grief. The pun is not, as modern audiences might think, used in jest. As Dodds remarks in his commentary, “To us a pun is trivial and comic because it calls attention to the irrelevant; but the Greek felt that it pointed to something deeply relevant”.⁹⁶ In truth, this is another warning, an opportunity to alert Pentheus to the πένθος that awaits him if he carries on in his unbelief. Whereas Pentheus assumes that Cadmus and Tiresias have been contaminated by Bacchic μωρία (344), Tiresias skillfully deflects this charge back at the stubborn king (cf. μῶρα ... μῶρος, 369).

It is not long before Pentheus manages to track down the “Stranger”. He is ignorant of the fact that he and Dionysus are one and the same, but he has no doubt whose side the Stranger is on.⁹⁷ Despite earlier threatening summary execution, Pentheus is instantly fascinated by the Stranger; he perceives in him a torrent of androgynous, sexual energy:

ἀτὰρ τὸ μὲν σῶμ' οὐκ ἄμορφος εἶ, ξένε,
 ὥς ἐς γυναῖκας, ἐφ' ὅπερ ἐς Θήβας πάρει·
 πλόκαμός τε γάρ σου ταναός, οὐ πάλης ὕπο,
 γένυν παρ' αὐτὴν κεχυμένος, πόθου πλέως·
 λευκὴν δὲ χροιάν ἐκ παρασκευῆς ἔχεις,

⁹⁶ Dodds (1953) 367n.

⁹⁷ The Stranger is, after all, ostensibly one of the few male “maenads”, and an Asian like the women of the chorus.

οὐχ ἡλίου βολαῖσιν, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ σκιᾶς,

τὴν Ἀφροδίτην καλλονῇ θηρώμενος (453-9).

But you are not unshapely in body, stranger, where women are concerned, which is why you are in Thebes. Your hair is long, not from wrestling, flowing down your cheeks, full of desire. You have skin white by contrivance, not by the rays of the sun, but by hunting Aphrodite with beauty in the shade.⁹⁸

The maddening of the Theban women has set off a torrent of frenzied irrationality in Pentheus' own mind, one that defines itself in resolute opposition to the maenads but which feeds directly off of them. For all his hatred, Pentheus is entranced by the Stranger/Dionysus, who is his polar opposite: he is androgynous rather than macho, sensual rather than puritanical. With his ivy crown, fawn-skin cloak, and ivy-tipped thyrsus, he is maenadism incarnate. With the right mix of suggestiveness, charisma, and wit, he keeps his host intrigued for long enough to say what he wants to say. He does this in a cryptic and confusing way because, as Seaford observes in his analysis of this scene, "A riddle stimulates and perplexes by a partial and apparently senseless description, and thereby creates admiration for its eventual solution."⁹⁹ When Pentheus asks about the "form" (ἰδέαν, 471) of the ὄργια, he is told that the uninitiated may not know (ἄρρητ' ἀβακχεύτοισιν εἰδέναι βροτῶν, 472). Again when Pentheus asks whether the rites have any "benefit" (ὄνησιν, 473) for its followers, the Stranger/Dionysus answers temptingly, "It is not right that you should hear of it, but it is well worth knowing" (οὐ

⁹⁸ White skin is a basic identifier of women in some Greek vase-painting, and Pentheus' observation here appears to be suggestive of femininity; cf. Ar. *Eccl.* 64, 387, Pl. *Phdr.* 239c). It was also identified with Asians (Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.19) and womanizers (Ps. Arist. *Physiognomica* 804a34).

⁹⁹ Seaford (1981) 255.

θέμις ἀκοῦσαί σ', ἔστι δ' ἄξι' εἰδέναι, 474). Having aroused Pentheus' interest, the Stranger/Dionysus begins to allude to his divinity in the hope that Pentheus will come to recognize and accept the truth. But when the "Stranger" reveals that Dionysus is "present nearby, [and] sees what I am now suffering" (καὶ νῦν ἃ πάσχω πλησίον παρὼν ὁρᾷ, 500), Pentheus the literalist balks, "And where is he? For he is not visible to *my* eyes" (καὶ ποῦ 'στιν; οὐ γὰρ φανερὸς ὄμμασιν γ' ἐμοῖς, 501). παρ' ἐμοί,¹⁰⁰ answers Dionysus with tantalizing ambiguity, "but you yourself, being impious, cannot see" (σὺ δ' ἀσεβῆς αὐτὸς ὦν οὐκ εἰσορᾷς, 502). The sentiment seems almost biblical; indeed Christ's words to the Pharisees at *Mark* 8.18 could have come from Dionysus' mouth: ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχοντες οὐ βλέπετε καὶ ὥτα ἔχοντες οὐκ ἀκούετε.¹⁰¹ Pentheus is blind, not only to his ἀσέβεια ("impiety"), but to his powerlessness relative to the Stranger/Dionysus; only then can he take smug satisfaction in being κυριώτερος σέθεν (505) as he prepares to have the Stranger/Dionysus hauled off to prison. "You do not know what your life is, nor what you are doing, nor who you are" (οὐκ οἶσθ' ὅ τι ζῆς, οὐδ' ὅ δρᾷς, οὐδ' ὅστις εἶ, 506), warns Dionysus as he is led away. "I am Pentheus, son of Agave", yelps the king defiantly, "and of my father Echion" (Πενθεύς, Ἀγαύης παῖς, πατὴρ δ' Ἐχίονος, 507). It is easy to ridicule Pentheus' literalism, but less so to decipher the Stranger/Dionysus' message. A solution is offered by Sale:

I take the god's words in their simplest meaning: you don't know what your own inner nature is, nor what your words and actions mean. When Pentheus replies, "My name is Pentheus", he

¹⁰⁰ The phrase can be interpreted in two ways: "near me", which, however, would dilute the irony of Dionysus' message, or "where I am", which strongly alludes to his divinity. Pentheus, clearly, fails to appreciate the significance of this *double entendre*.

¹⁰¹ "Having eyes, do you not see, and having ears, do you not hear?" For the influence of the *Bacchae* on the New Testament and on Patristic literature (particularly Clement of Alexandria), see Seaford (1996) 52-3.

only makes Dionysus seem all the more justified. I don't mean merely that there are certain deeply hidden desires that Pentheus is not conscious of; I mean that he has no sense of his identity, of the meaning of his actions, of the purport of his words.¹⁰²

This is perhaps Pentheus' clearest opportunity – though far from his last – to reconsider “what he is doing” and “who he is”. Following Dodds, I take οὐκ οἶσθ' ὅ τι ζῆς to signify that Pentheus fails to grasp his status “as a mere mortal”.¹⁰³ Of course Pentheus understands that he is a mortal in the literal sense; his ignorance concerns the far loftier nature of the so-called Stranger. With οὐδ' ὁ δρᾶς, the Stranger/Dionysus calls attention to Pentheus' θεομαχία, to which he is profoundly oblivious. Dionysus wastes little time in trying to remedy this; having been thrown into prison – actually a stable on the grounds of the royal house – the Stranger/Dionysus shows his power, striking the house with earthquake and fire (585, 594-5), and escapes. The destruction of the palace is deeply symbolic, prefiguring the ruin of Pentheus and the family that inhabits it, though this is not yet an inevitable outcome. The Stranger/Dionysus' escape is a watershed moment, for, as Seth Schein observes, it reveals both Dionysus' omnipotence and Pentheus' impotence.¹⁰⁴ Pentheus is furious, perhaps almost hysterical, when he sees what has happened, and yet he still thinks, absurdly, that he can trap Dionysus by sealing the city walls (653), to which an amused Stranger/Dionysus wittily retorts (654), “Cannot even gods hop over walls?” (τί δ'; οὐχ ὑπερβαίνουσι καὶ τεῖχη θεοί;). Pentheus is outraged: “Wise, wise you are, except wherein you ought to be clever” (σοφὸς σοφὸς σύ, πλὴν

¹⁰² Sale (1972) 68.

¹⁰³ Dodds (1953) 506n.

¹⁰⁴ But it is important to remember that Dionysus and the Stranger are still perceived as separate individuals in Pentheus' eyes (cf. Burnett (1970) 21), as evinced by his continued pursuit of Dionysus (cf. especially 653) even while conversing with the Stranger.

ἃ δεῖ σ' εἶναι σοφόν, 655), he sneers. “Where it is most necessary”, counters the Stranger/Dionysus, “there I am wise by nature” (ἃ δεῖ μάλιστα, ταῦτ' ἔγωγ' ἔφυν σοφός, 656). Both claim to be σοφός, but their definitions of the word are at odds. Pentheus, as Schein observes, naively assumes that to be σοφός is to submit to his royal authority. But as for Dionysus:

He knows that he is clever in the way a god is clever, with real knowledge (that he is a god) and real power over a mere mortal; Pentheus, however, not only has limited understanding as a mortal and limited power as a king, but he is ignorant of his own ignorance (cf. 480, 490).¹⁰⁵

It would seem that in this battle of wits, the Stranger/Dionysus is the better contender. His cleverness and ability to skilfully counter Pentheus’ every conceit both humiliates and aggravates him. It is a cruel tactic, but a necessary one if Pentheus is to see that continued resistance is futile.

The two rivals are now interrupted by the arrival of the Herdsman. He comes with a disturbing first-hand account of the maenads nursing wild animals (699-700) and miraculously extracting springs of wine from the ground (706-7). Although he is quick to deny Pentheus’ accusations of unrestrained debauchery (686-8), his account soon takes an ominous turn. A townsman, explains the Herdsman, encourages the local shepherds to launch an attack against the maenads “to gain the favour of the king” (χάριν τ' ἄνακτι θώμεθα, 721). The herdsmen agree but are detected by Agave as they scout the area. Realizing what is happening, Agave exclaims, “My running hounds, we are being hunted by these men!” (ῶ δρομάδες ἐμαὶ κύνες, |

¹⁰⁵ Schein (2016) 268.

θηρώμεθ' ἀνδρῶν τῶνδ' ὕπ', 731-2), and sets upon the shepherds. These manage to escape, narrowly averting a massacre, but their cattle are literally torn to pieces (734-45). Whether intended as one or not, the Herdsman's story is a warning to Pentheus in a play filled with warnings, foreshadowing the less fortunate fate that awaits him should he choose to confront the maenads. The Herdsman, explains Richard Buxton, undergoes "an Actaeon-like reversal: a hunter attacked by hunting dogs".¹⁰⁶ Echoes of Cadmus, who had earlier raised the topic of Actaeon's fate, resound here. But even now Pentheus does not heed the warning. Instead he doubles down on his fury, appalled by the "outrages of the Bacchants, a great reproach for the Greeks" (ὑβριστα βακχῶν, ψόγος ἐς Ἑλλήνας μέγας, 779), and again gets worked up into a tantrum. Frenziedly he orders his forces to amass against Cithaeron (781-5). The Stranger/Dionysus is now on alert; he warns Pentheus bluntly, "You will all be put to flight. It will be shameful when your bronze shields are repulsed by the Bacchants' thyrsi" (φεύξεσθε πάντες· καὶ τόδ' αἰσχρόν, ἀσπίδας | θύρσοισι βακχῶν ἐκτρέπειν χαλκηλάτους, 798-9). Even now, after Pentheus has transgressed the line laid down by Dionysus in the prologue, the god makes one last effort to change Pentheus' mind. He offers a peaceful solution: "I will lead the women here without weapons" (ἐγὼ γυναῖκας δεῦρ' ὅπλων ἄξω δίχα, 804). Pentheus, remembering his adversary's earlier opaqueness, suspects him of trickery (805).¹⁰⁷ Dodds, Grube and Seaford all agree that Dionysus is sincere when he says (806), "How can that be, if I

¹⁰⁶ Buxton (1991) 43.

¹⁰⁷ It is tempting to sympathize with Pentheus' distrust here in light of Dionysus' rhetorical elusiveness, especially throughout Dionysus' first interrogation. Yet it is important to remember that his goal then was to allure, inciting Pentheus' curiosity to the point of almost unconscious conversion. This tactic having failed, Dionysus now speaks more menacingly and with blunter language, not only at 798-9, above, but also at 787-91, 794-5.

want to save you by my machinations?” (ποῖόν τι, σῶσαί σ' εἰ θέλω τέχναις ἐμαῖς;).¹⁰⁸ But Pentheus is not only incorrigible but incredibly naïve. “Just as Pentheus gave an order to enclose Dionysus despite his miraculous escape (653), so now he orders military action against the maenads despite their miraculous victory”, notes Seaford.¹⁰⁹ Pentheus repeats his violent intentions one last time at 809: “Bring me out my weapons, and *you* stop talking!” (ἐκφέρετέ μοι δεῦρ' ὄπλα, σὺ δὲ παῦσαι λέγων). These are Pentheus’ last words as a (relatively) sane man. Now, at 810-11, Dionysus exclaims, “Ah! Would you like to see [the maenads] gathered together on the mountain?” (ἂ. | βούλη σπ' ἐν ὄρεσι συγκαθημένας ἰδεῖν;). μάλιστα, agrees Pentheus, “and I would give a countless weight of gold for it” (μυρίον γε δούς χρυσοῦ σταθμόν, 812). It is, as Dodds remarks, “the answer of a maniac”.¹¹⁰ This Pentheus is not the same man that we have seen up until now; he has suddenly, as if by magic, been transformed into the subservient pawn of Dionysus. The Stranger/Dionysus now possesses Pentheus, not to convert him, as he once hoped to do, but to hasten his destruction. A twisted irony is detectable at 813, when the Stranger/Dionysus asks his puppet, “How have you fallen into a great desire for this [i.e. spying]?” (τί δ' εἰς ἔρωτα τοῦδε πέπτωκας μέγαν;). Dionysus knows, of course, that the question is redundant: Pentheus has little more active control over himself than a primitive automaton.

¹⁰⁸ Dodds (1953) 804n., Grube (1935) 48, Seaford (1996) 802-9n. Dodds *ad loc.* says, “I take this to be a genuine offer. Pentheus’ earlier ὕβρις has been punished by his humiliation in the stable: if he will make terms now, man and god are quits. But he thinks it is a trick”.

¹⁰⁹ Seaford (1996) 778-86n. To be fair, Pentheus might be given *some* leeway for his confidence in military force, since, unlike his soldiers, the herdsmen are unarmed.

¹¹⁰ Dodds (1953) 810-2n.

The Stranger/Dionysus now prepares in earnest for Pentheus' downfall. He orders the king to dress up in an outfit of linen robes (βυσσίνους πέπλους, 821), long hair (κόμην ... ταναόν, 831), a headband or μίτρα (833), a thyrsus, and a dappled fawn-skin cloak (νεβροῦ στικτὸν δέρας, 835). A brief flash of the old Pentheus reappears at 822 to register his embarrassment at the prospect of crossdressing: "What is this? Am I to turn from a man into a woman?" (τί δὴ τόδ'; ἐς γυναῖκας ἐξ ἀνδρὸς τελῶ;) he balks.¹¹¹ Dionysus quickly disarms him, flatly warning that he will be killed if caught undisguised (823; cf. 837, 839). In fact the disguise will prove useless – Pentheus is to be killed regardless. As Susanetti explains, "It is merely a symbolic transition that leads to his downfall. Dionysus' strategy strips Pentheus of his male identity and forces him to 'become a woman' (822)".¹¹² It is the supreme humiliation, for Pentheus now becomes the very thing that he had so passionately loathed and promised to destroy. But he is blind to the irony of this, and to the divine forces working on him, just as he was blind to the true nature of the Stranger/Dionysus despite all the miracles and self-revelations. Pentheus' "transformation" marks a critical moment in his tragic development. As Christine Kalke says:

The motif of transformation is important in the *Bacchae* and has been viewed variously as transformation from man to beast, from hunter to hunted, from powerful pursuer to powerless victim, from repressed to expressed sexuality, from reality to illusion or illusion to reality.¹¹³

Pentheus, basking in his male aggression moments earlier, becomes as mellow and androgynous as the Stranger. With this transformation, Dionysus' plans for Pentheus are

¹¹¹ Pentheus will repeat this sentiment at 828 (τίνα στολήν; ἢ θῆλυν; ἀλλ' αἰδώς μ' ἔχει) and 836 (οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην θῆλυν ἐνδύναι στολήν).

¹¹² Susanetti (2016) 296.

¹¹³ Kalke (1985) 410.

irreversibly confirmed; he says as much to the chorus, boasting, “Women, the man slips into a trap, and he will approach the Bacchants, for which he will pay the price by dying” (γυναῖκες, ἀνὴρ ἐς βόλον καθίσταται, | ἥξει δὲ βάκχας, οὗ θανῶν δώσει δίκην, 848-847).¹¹⁴ When Pentheus reappears, he is, like his female kin, now a maenad in appearance but a slave in the mind. His slavishness drives him to ask the Stranger/Dionysus (925-6), “How do I look, then? Do I not appear to be standing like Ino, or like my mother Agave?” (τί φαίνομαι δῆτ'; οὐχὶ τὴν Ἰνοῦς στάσιν | ἢ τὴν Ἀγαύης ἐστάναι, μητρόσ γ' ἐμῆς;). His longing to imitate that which he had once persecuted is so ironic as to be almost laughable, but it could more accurately be described as horrifying. The depths of his delusion are revealed when he asks, absurdly, if he is strong enough to hold up Mount Cithaeron on his shoulders, to which Dionysus happily answers in the affirmative (945-8).

Pentheus is stricken with madness as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. That end, of course, is the most final of all ends, death. Yet it is not enough for Pentheus to simply be killed; he must be spurred out of his delusion and come face to face with the reality of his impending death, and the reason for it. Dragged out of the tree from which he has been spying on the maenads, this moment is reached when Pentheus sees the women closing in on him, his mother at their head:

Ἐγὼ τοι, μήτηρ, εἰμί, παῖς σέθεν

Πενθεύς, ὃν ἔτεκες ἐν δόμοις Ἐχίονος·

¹¹⁴ The manuscripts appear to have inverted the proper order of these lines. By Greek tragic convention, Dionysus must refer to Pentheus in the third person only *after* addressing the chorus. See Dodds (1953) 847-8n, Seaford (1996) 847-8n for a more thorough explanation of the textual issues here.

οἴκτιρε δ' ὦ μήτέρ με, μηδὲ ταῖς ἐμαῖς

ἁμαρτίαισι παῖδα σὸν κατακτάνης (1118-21).

It is I, mother, your child Pentheus, whom you bore in Echion's house. Take pity on me, mother!

Do not slay your child because of my mistakes.

Like Faustus as Mephistopheles arrives to claim his due, Pentheus finally realizes – too late – the nature and the enormity of his ἁμαρτία. Yet while Pentheus' death marks the climax of the play, he is not the only character to endure the classic Aristotelian agony of recognition and reversal. Agave, too, is forced to confront her deeds. She has been out of her wits for the entirety of the play up to this point, and remains so for a while longer. Believing, alongside her sisters, that she has felled a lion, she carries Pentheus' head back to Thebes, where she proudly displays it to her father. The lucid Cadmus' revulsion is predictable but no less wrenching because of this. A bout of stichomythic cross-examination, charged with tragic irony, is enough to shake Agave out of her μανία: "Dionysus has ruined us, I now realize!" (Διόνυσος ἡμᾶς ὤλεσ', ἄρτι μανθάνω, 1296), she shrieks as the awful realization dawns upon her. In fact this is only half true: she, like Pentheus, has ruined *herself* by her ἀσέβεια, not least by defiling her sister's posthumous repute. Dionysus is merely the agent of her ruination, and he had been eager to avoid such an outcome. This is sombrely confirmed by Cadmus: "Yes, outraged by your ὕβρις, for you did not acknowledge him as a god" (ὕβριν <γ> ὑβρισθεῖς· θεὸν γὰρ οὐχ ἡγεῖσθαι, 1297). Dionysus now appears suddenly, a *deus ex machina* brought in to bring the play to a swift resolution. Cadmus is not spared Dionysus' wrath, and his fate is to be transformed into a snake alongside his wife Harmonia, condemned to ravage the cities of Greece (1330-6). His punishment, as Grube acknowledges, has puzzled many. He has not spurned Dionysus like his

relatives; he has even gone so far as to dress up *à la Bacchante*. But it will be recalled that he did so cynically, fixated on the aggrandizement of the royal house.¹¹⁵ Dionysus' parting address could well be inscribed as an epitaph onto the tombs of Cadmus, Pentheus, and the rest of the royal clan:

ταῦτ' οὐχὶ θνητοῦ πατρὸς ἐκγεγὼς λέγω

Διόνυσος, ἀλλὰ Ζηνός· εἰ δὲ σωφρονεῖν

ἔγνωθ', ὅτ' οὐκ ἠθέλετε, τὸν Διὸς γόνον

εὐδαιμονεῖτ' ἂν σύμμαχον κεκτημένοι (1340-3).

I, Dionysus, declare that I was begotten not by a mortal, but by Zeus. If you had known to be wise, when you did not want to, you would have been happy with the son of Zeus as an ally.

Dionysus thus reminds us of the primacy of free will in deciding the play's outcome; first and foremost as it applies to Pentheus himself, who was offered the greatest opportunities to reform, and yet chose not only to reject but to mock and belittle Dionysus at every turn.

One cannot help but feel that misfortune arising from free will misused seems both more tragic and more unsettling than a fate that has already been predetermined. Thus Pentheus, the repressive, puritanical king, has a special place in the "pantheon" of Greek tragic protagonists. Unlike the Euripidean Jason, Hippolytus, or the Clytemnestra of the *Orestes*, Pentheus is not immediately marked out for death or ruination by forces either human or divine. He only becomes so gradually, and (albeit unwittingly) by his own choice. Only after the play has run

¹¹⁵ Grube (1935) 52.

approximately two-thirds of its course do we see a drastic change of direction where Dionysus' intentions are concerned, and this only as a last resort, peaceful solutions having utterly failed. The *Bacchae* is arguably the persuasion play *par excellence* of the Euripidean corpus, and it ought to resonate loudly with modern audiences, nurtured on residual Judeo-Christian conceptions of free will. By turning the familiar Greek tragic dynamic of inescapable revenge on its head, Euripides points to the centrality of contingency and choice in the human experience.

Conclusion

In *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, and the *Bacchae*, the themes of *peitho*, *dolos*, and *bia* are of central importance. Iphigenia's *peitho*, though it undeniably integrates a prominent element of *dolos*, is directed towards a goal that we, the audience, are meant to recognize as a praiseworthy one. Not only is Iphigenia's escape to Attica endorsed, even facilitated, by Athena, but it also entails a forthright rejection of human sacrifice.

Conversely, in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *dolos* is associated with those characters we are meant to condemn: Agamemnon, Menelaus, and, lurking in the shadows, Odysseus. Euripides wishes us to see their intentions as less than noble, even if they have the (at least theoretical) backing of Artemis. Interestingly, neither Iphigenia nor Clytemnestra think to counter Agamemnon's plans with *dolos* of their own. They both plead with him to reconsider, but they do not deceive him to their own advantage. It is as if Euripides is insisting, pessimistically, that honesty avails no one.

Likewise, in the *Bacchae*, Euripides depicts the tragic failure of *peitho*. But here, *peitho* and *bia* are employed successively by the same character, Dionysus, with *bia* ultimately triumphant.

Nor is Pentheus an innocent sacrificial victim like Iphigenia. It is entirely within his power to avert the fate that awaits him for his *asebeia*, but his own obstinacy dooms him. Once Dionysus realizes that he is a lost cause, his intention changes from that of converting him through *peitho* to destroying him through *bia*.

Euripides presents us with an interesting paradox: in the *Bacchae* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *peitho* is ultimately powerless against *bia*. The opposite is true of *Iphigenia in Tauris*, where the threat of *bia*, represented by Thoas, is usurped by Iphigenia's *peitho*, achieved by means of a *dolos*. It

would appear that the very late Euripides of the *IA* and *Bacchae* is a good deal more pessimistic than the Euripides of the escape tragedies, perhaps discouraged by the increasingly precarious political situation of Athens as it hurtled headlong towards the disastrous end of the Peloponnesian War which, alas, Euripides did not live to see.

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