

## THE CHORUS IN THE *HERACLES* AND THE *IPHIGENEIA IN TAURIS* OF EURIPIDES

Euripides has presented the chorus of the *HF* and the *IT* in a manner remarkably similar. This is noteworthy not only per se but especially because the two groups have hardly anything in common: the counterpart to the citizen chorus of old men not directly involved in the action of the *HF* is a company of virgin female slaves on whose willingness to collaborate with the protagonists hinges the whole plot of the *IT*<sup>1</sup>. But of all the plays where the chorus is not a protagonist these two groups share the distinction of being among the most clearly drawn in the extant Euripidean corpus. They speak quite extensively about themselves and present a fairly detailed picture of their identity. The same theme comes up repeatedly in their songs. The old men bemoan their age and infirmity, which makes them unable to resist the criminal plans of the tyrant Lycus and assist Heracles' family. The only power left to them is the power of song, which comforts them as they celebrate or lament the fortunes of Heracles. The girls deplore their cruel lot of slavery among savage barbarians and declare their intense longing for Greece. Paradoxically, though this emphasis might be thought to limit the perspective and hence the role of the chorus, Euripides manages to make them both contribute significantly to the development of various themes in the plays. Their main function, though, is to highlight the ambivalent role of the divine in human affairs, which is the central axis of both plays. In this paper I will deal with some issues concerning the choruses' choice of subject-matter that have not been clarified yet. I will focus mainly on one ode from each play, the second of the *HF* and the third of the *IT*, but a review of the other odes is necessary because threads run throughout the plays.

Despite its importance the role of the chorus is quantitatively quite limited

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1. As far as involvement in the development of the plot is concerned the role of the chorus of the *Ion* is even more striking because the women of the chorus reveal Xouthos' secret to Creusa and put in motion the second part of the play (760-762). These women are fiercely loyal to Creusa and the Athenian Erechtheid dynasty to the point of xenophobia but we never learn anything more about them as a group. For the chorus of the *Ion* see K. Hartigan, *Ambiguity and Self-Deception*, Frankfurt 1991, pp. 78-79 and 82. Cf. below n. 12.

in both plays. Especially in the second part of the *HF* the presence of the chorus diminishes considerably but in the first part it is so imposing and unusual that it has generated much discussion. This has centered mainly around the second stasimon (637-700) since it has been believed that there Euripides uses the old men of the chorus as his mouthpiece in one of his few personal utterances in the extant plays. Being old around 415 when the play was probably performed<sup>2</sup>, he has inserted his personal credo in the song, the declaration of his unfailing devotion to the Muses (673-686), whom he served faithfully all his life by «singing» the glories of the great heroes of old. The claim that the second stasimon involves a personal statement by the poet has already been refuted by H. Parry<sup>3</sup> but the main argument of the refutation is not entirely valid. On the other hand, the statement in question has been considered part of a «poetological» reading of the play. I will discuss this before I present my objections to Parry's argument because the poetological reading rests heavily on the role of the chorus and, touching on broader issues, puts this role in a larger perspective.

In her fairly recent discussion of the play Michelini<sup>4</sup> agrees that Euripides cannot have possibly indulged in the kind of thinly veiled personal declaration attributed to him in the literature. She also revives, though, the older suggestion that references to song in the second stasimon have overtones of authorial intention<sup>5</sup>, i.e. they are intended to make the audience reflect on the function of poetry within the play and within the culture. She traces a «poetological» thread from the first stasimon to the end of the play where Heracles declares that poetic tales about divine crimes are false. According to Michelini<sup>6</sup>,

[...] no play, and especially no play by Euripides, exists solely on the plane of its mimetic «reality». At every point this play, of all Euripidean plays, has raised the question of the trustworthiness of poetic fiction. The major odes with their emphasis on the poet's function, and their evocation of encomiastic poetry, have encouraged us to see the gulf between different treatments of mythic tradition, or between fiction and reality. The betrayal of our expectations in the dissonant and mocking plot reversal, which gives threatened disaster, salvation, and a new disaster in the space of three hundred lines, has encouraged us to question not only the apparent wrong done

2. See G. W. Bond, *Euripides. Heracles*, Oxford 1981, xxx-xxxii.

3. See H. Parry, «The Second Stasimon of Euripides' *Heracles* (637-700)», *AJP* 86 (1965) 363-374. (For references to the view he refutes see his note 1 and add Bond (above n. 2), p. 227 to the counterexamples he cites there). Cf. below n. 19.

4. A. N. Michelini, *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition*, Madison 1987, pp. 239-242 and 272-276.

5. See L. Kretz, *Persönliches bei Euripides*, Zurich 1934, p. 8.

6. Michelini (above n. 4), p. 275.

by the gods to Heracles but also the poet himself, who, in wronging his hero in an inappropriate and unexpected manner, has wronged the audience as well. With the overt reference to the possibility that the *logoi* of the poets may be false, we are forced to consider that *Heracles* itself, the play we are watching, is also a mere fiction, a tale told by a poet who may be lying [...]. The mention of lying poets projects outside the frame of the drama, as a self-referential suggestion that our interpretation of this play should not confine itself within the boundary of the fictional «reality».

I suggest that these claims are unfounded with respect to both the function of the chorus and the interpretation of Heracles' statement<sup>7</sup>. I will deal with the former shortly. As far as the latter is concerned, there is no doubt that references to song evoke to modern audiences intriguing questions of self-referentiality and authorial intention and it is plausible that ancient audiences had a similar attitude. But it is hard to see how from this potentiality and this distinctly secondary function one could reach the conclusion that the play dramatizes «the gulf between different treatment of mythic tradition or between fiction and reality». What kind of reality would the author imply? Given the fact that the play's mimetic reality, the only one that can come into question in literature unless one deals with allegory or documentary fiction, has been proclaimed an inadequate or insufficient framework for Euripidean drama, the suggestion remains hanging in the air. Heracles' statement is famous for the enlightened religiosity it has been believed to express. Theseus tried to dissuade his friend from committing suicide with a (traditional) appeal to divine misfortune<sup>8</sup>. As poetic authority attests, gods stoically retained their positions and offices despite serious crimes they committed and indignities they suffered. It follows that a human should all the more reconcile himself with his lot and refrain from suicide since this extreme act would hubristically imply that he deemed his own crimes and misfortunes more serious than the gods' (1313-1339). To this pious argument Heracles retorted that gods cannot have engaged in crimes and «these stories are merely the wretched tales of poets» (1346)<sup>9</sup>.

7. The idea of a malevolent Euripides who wrongs his character and the audience is totally obscure to me.

8. See Bond (above n. 2), p. 393.

9. The most ambitious effort to deal with this thorny passage has been made by H. Yunis, *A New Creed. Fundamental Religious Beliefs in the Athenian Polis and Euripidean Drama*, Göttingen 1987, pp. 157-169, who rejects the view that Heracles' statement is Euripides' authorial intrusion and suggests that the passage should be explained from within the play. His answer to the problem of reconciling the passage with Heracles' situation and his other pronouncements about the gods in the play is that the hero does not deny that the traditional gods have committed crimes but that such beings meet the strict criteria for divinity he posits; hence poets do not narrate false tales about true gods but true tales about false gods. Unfortunately, this ingenious suggestion solves nothing and saddles Heracles and Euripides with two categories of divine agents

It is of course the last claim that has proven of interest to Michelini and others before her<sup>10</sup> who discuss its in their view serious poetological implications. She subscribes to the view that Heracles' denunciation of poetic tales delivers an inside blow to the whole play, removing its supporting structure and «erasing the fiction». It is highly unlikely, as far as one can judge today, that Euripides would not consciously insert a poetological version of the «liar paradox» in his play and some at least members of the audience probably understood and appreciated such references. The crucial question is what one can build on such admittedly meager pronouncements that can be paralleled in other plays. The theme of poetic false tales or truth and falsehood in poetry is as old as Hesiod and had serious educational and theological/moral implications since most false tales involved gods and heroes and this poetic material was expected and used to educate the young.

Euripides' characters tackle the intriguing question of poetic authority by disputing the veracity of poetic tales or even attributing ulterior motives to the poets who fashioned and propagated false tales. The most explicit denouncement of poetic tales occur in the *Ion* (1090-1098) and the *Medea* (418-430)<sup>11</sup>. In both plays the female chorus attack male poets as biased against women and contemplate a reversal that would redress the grave injustice done to their much maligned race<sup>12</sup>. Relevant is also the invocation of

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whose ontological status and relationship remain completely vague. Since Yunis suggests that Hera exists and she has destroyed Heracles, and the hero does not deny that, what does this reading make Heracles? Literally the child of a lesser god? Besides, Yunis' suggestion is of little consequence for Heracles' judgment of poets. I do not see how even by Yunis' lights the poets could be absolved from the serious accusation of falsehood. Yunis seems to suggest that to accuse poets of narrating false tales is much more serious than what he calls «the common impropriety of naming those responsible for the wretchedness "gods"» (p. 163 n. 45). Common or not, it is beyond doubt that a false awarding of the title of god to the wrong beings, whatever they might be, is one of the most serious crimes the adherent of any religion may commit.

10. For references see Michelini (above n. 4), p. 275 n. 194. See also M. R. Halleran, «Rhetoric, Irony and the End of Euripides' *Heracles*», *CA* 5 (1986) 171-181; B. E. Goff, *The Noose of Words*, Cambridge 1990, pp. 92-93, and F. M. Dunn, *Tragedy's End*, Oxford 1996, pp. 128-129.

11. Traditional, though not explicitly poetic, tales are rejected also in the *Electra* (737-746) and the *IT* (380-391). For the former see V. J. Rosivach, «The "Golden Lamb" Ode in Euripides' *Electra*», *CP* 73 (1978) 196-198; J. W. Halporn, «The Sceptical *Electra*», *HSCP* 87 (1983) 108-110, and S. Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge 1986, pp. 256-257. For the latter see below n. 44.

12. For good discussions of the *Medea* ode see B. M. W. Knox, «The *Medea* of Euripides», *YCS* 25 (1977) 221; P. Pucci, *The Violence of Pity in Euripides' Medea*, Ithaca 1980, pp. 97 and 121-122, and N. S. Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled*, Ithaca 1993, p. 129. See also the interesting comments of J. Gould, «Tragedy and collective experience», in M. S. Silk (ed.), *Tragedy and the Tragic*, Oxford 1996, pp. 229-231, who analyzes the shift in the chorus' attitude from unqualified support to Medea to horrified distance from her crime. For the *Ion* (in comparison with the

poetic authority, of the writings of the ancients, by the nurse in *Hippolytus* who tries to corroborate her argument that Phaedra should not commit suicide but tolerate her love for her stepson because several gods have suffered similar predicaments (451-461). Ostensibly this reference to the poets of old has nothing to do with a denunciation of their authority and appears to be identical with Theseus' argument in the *HF*<sup>13</sup>. But as Goff suggests,

The Nurse seems to invoke writing as a sign of authority [... But] myths cannot be considered as autonomous and univocal entities, for the same myth can be invoked to different ends by different speakers. The Nurse cannot make the myths mean what she wants them to, for they are susceptible of varying interpretations [...]. The appeal to the writings of the ancients is an appeal to an authority that proves to be spurious and deceitful; the *graphai* are just another weapon in the Nurse's arsenal of persuasion. As with Aphrodite as irresistible force, so with *graphai* as authority<sup>14</sup>.

This ambiguous reference to poetic authority is inscribed into the much more complex context of the importance attached to writing, language and communication in the play<sup>15</sup>. Similarly, the pronouncements about male poets in the *Ion* and the *Medea* are part of a much more extensive show of support of the chorus to the female protagonists in distress. The women of the chorus explicitly condemn the real or supposed wrongs Creusa and Medea suffer at the hands of Apollo and Jason respectively.

There is no denying that the poet establishes a self-conscious, if not self-critical, distance between himself and his fiction but it is clear that he never strains or otherwise seriously challenges the limits of these scenes or plays with his references to song. Concerning Heracles' speech Bond's comments are particularly apposite<sup>16</sup>: it cannot be extracted from its immediate context to which it is squarely inscribed as an efficient rhetorical, point by point,

*Medea*) chorus see N. Loraux, «Creusa the Autochthon: A Study of Euripides' *Ion*», in J. J. Winkler and F. Zeitlin, *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?*, Princeton 1990, pp. 174-175; see also F. M. Dunn, «The Battle of the Sexes in Euripides' *Ion*», *Ramus* 19 (1990) 136.

13. There is even the possibility that the nurse is not referring to poetry at all but to painting. See the objections of W. S. Barrett, *Euripides. Hippolytos*, Oxford 1964, pp. 241-242, and cf. M. R. Halleran, *Euripides. Hippolytus*, Warminster 1995, pp. 88-89, who cites previous literature in favor of both interpretations.

14. Goff (above n. 10), p. 98.

15. See the analysis of B. M. W. Knox, «The *Hippolytus* of Euripides», *YCS* 13 (1952) 3-31; Goff (above n. 10), pp. 95-102, and C. Segal, «Signs, Magic and Letters in Euripides' *Hippolytus*», in R. Hexter and D. Selden, *Innovations of Antiquity*, Routledge 1992, pp. 420-456.

16. See Bond (above n. 2), pp. 399-400; D. J. Mastronarde, «The Optimistic Rationalist in Euripides: Theseus, Jocasta, Teiresias», in M. Cropp et al. (eds.), *Greek Tragedy and Its Legacy*, Calgary 1986, pp. 202 and 208, is right, though, to claim that the views expressed in this passage cannot be taken as Euripides' own, as Bond has suggested, but that the whole play, which dramatizes confusion and uncertainty, should claim this designation.

refutation of Theseus' argument<sup>17</sup>. Is it credible or different to claim that Euripides does not make the chorus of the second stasimon his mouthpiece but that the scanty references of the chorus to their song and especially the isolated remark of a sorely depressed, suicidal hero constitute the key that unlocks the «secret» of the play? There is hardly any insight to be gained from a statement of a poet that poets are liars and, even if there were, it could not be said to imply Euripides' own position or to reflect on the play as a whole. Why, for instance, would Heracles' pronouncement be considered more authoritative than Theseus', given that Heracles' is not consonant with the mimetic reality of the play? The fact that Euripides touched on questions of poetics and the use of myth was by no means unparalleled in Greek literature though the depth of his «incisions» may be rare and occasionally unsettling. But critical admiration for his insights should not blur the appreciation of the fact that this is a poet who chose to integrate them completely in the very specific framework of his plays and in a long venerable tradition<sup>18</sup>.

Euripides' interaction with his tradition has also been the focus of the controversy around the second stasimon of the *HF*. In his influential article mentioned above H. Parry<sup>19</sup> argues against the suggestion that Euripides broke the conventions of the tragic genre by inserting a personal statement in the song and claims that 1. Euripides observes the conventions since the second stasimon is completely integrated into its context and 2. the interpretive difficulties the song posits disappear if one observes how the first two

17. This reading has been considered inadequate by some critics; see e.g. the objections of H. Foley, *Ritual Irony. Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides*, Ithaca 1985, pp. 163-164 n. 31 who also cites others in support of her view: «We cannot avoid the challenging implications of this passage by insisting that Heracles' words are *only* a reply to Theseus [as Bond does]». But we should not disregard the solid fact that this passage *is* above all else, i.e. within the dramatic fiction, a very well constructed reply to Theseus who first mentioned poetic authority, though this tends to be overlooked in discussions of the play. Cf. also above n. 9.

18. It is worth quoting here the very sensible remarks that Mastronarde (above n. 16), p. 207 made in connection with a related question and the tragic tradition but clearly applicable to most aspects of Euripides' work and his position vis-a-vis all previous poetry: «Despite all the modernity of Euripides' language and rhetoric and of the issues of his plays, he remains, in most of his work, a poet of the traditional tragic genre, a genre which carries on the pessimistic emphasis on man's limits and frailties which characterizes much of archaic Greek literature and myth. To whatever extent there was a humanistic «enlightenment» in the late fifth century, Euripides was not its straightforward follower or proponent, but its critic, a sympathetic one perhaps, but one alive to its ironies».

19. Parry (above n. 3), 363-374; see also his *The Lyric Poems of Greek Tragedy*, Toronto 1978, pp. 158-163. Parry's work is cited with approval in almost all subsequent discussions of the second stasimon or the odes of the *HF*. See e.g. Bond (above n. 2), p. 237; Foley (above n. 17), p. 184; M. R. Halleran, *Stagecraft in Euripides*, London 1985, p. 87 n. 20; Michelini (above n. 4), p. 239, and M. Hose, *Studien zum Chor bei Euripides*, Stuttgart 1990, p. 91.

stasima of the play, and especially the second, conform with the traditions of the encomiastic poetry of Pindar and Bacchylides. I will argue that this association is unwarranted, at least to the degree Parry has proposed.

The main problem that confronts critics is that the middle portion of the song, the first antistrophe (655-672) and the second strophe (673-686), seems to be very loosely, if at all, connected with the rest. In particular the perceived minimal relevance of the second strophe to the previous pair of stanzas was the primary reason why this strophe has been considered a personal declaration of the playwright intruding upon the main body of the ode. The song starts unremarkably enough with the chorus' rejection of old age in favor of youth (637-654). This is a motif that runs through the first part of the play as the old Amphitryon (41-42, 228-235) and the chorus (268-272, 312-314, 410-413) lament their inability to help Heracles' children and punish Lycus. The end of the first stasimon underscores the troubles the chorus face because of their infirmity (436-441). The theme is taken up again and expanded in the first strophe of the second stasimon with the usual lyrical embellishments: old age is a huge burden like Aetna that smothers the chorus (637-641); nothing, not even riches or tyranny, is preferable to youth, terrible old age should dwell away from humans (638-654)<sup>20</sup>. The antistrophe introduces the so-called «fantasy»: the chorus wish that the gods granted a double youth to those who deserved it, i.e. the good, who should come back to live rejuvenated whereas the bad should live only once. That would be a clear sign by which one would distinguish the two groups. But now there is no such thing and human life only adduces wealth (655-672).

The next stanza (673-686) appears to bring a complete change in the subject-matter of the song. The old men of the chorus affirm their life-long devotion to song, or their identity as singers, and proceed, in the final stanza (687-700) to sing a paean to Heracles. Parry rightly rejected the notion that there is no connection between the two pairs of stanzas and attempted to show their implicit unity. Investigating the themes of the first antistrophe he suggested that this stanza is not a mere repetition or amplification of the strophe but brings up an important theme, the impossibility of distinguishing moral from immoral people. In his view the disputed second strophe provides the answer to the problem raised in the previous stanza: in the Greek poetic tradition the only safe criterion for marking (and also means to honor)

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20. For a discussion of these topoi in tragedy see S. Byl, «Lamentations sur la vieillesse dans la tragédie grecque», in J. Bingen et al. (eds.), *Le monde grec. Hommages offerts à Claire Préaux*, Brussels 1975, pp. 130-139.

the good, like Heracles, is song. The chorus thus stress their competence in this salutary kind of social commentary and sing a paean to Heracles whom they present as divine, the equivalent of Apollo. Though old and powerless, the chorus possess the all-important gift of song. They have the power not only to recognize but also to single out and memorialize Heracles' moral excellence as well as his formidable exploits in the manner of an epinician chorus.

There is no doubt that the chorus sing a formal lyric encomium to Heracles but this does not mean that they present themselves as excellent and indispensable singers. Nothing in the ode or the play makes it plausible or necessary for this chorus to stress their musical gift. Heracles is in no need of having his importance affirmed or attested<sup>21</sup>. His excellence is unquestionable, especially in the eyes of the chorus and when the second stasimon is intoned. The only thing that the chorus stress throughout is their old age and their devotion to song, which is not *eo ipso* identical with self-praise. By this I do not mean that they present themselves as bad or mediocre singers but that their musical excellence, entirely plausible and even, metatheatrically at least, taken for granted, is also entirely beside the point. Even their authority as divinely or prophetically inspired singers in the manner of the chorus of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* is nowhere relevant in this play. Though the two choruses have been associated<sup>22</sup>, their personae as well as the situation in the two plays are entirely different. Both choruses are old citizens and singers loyal to the previous, now absent, rulers of the city and naturally opposed to the new tyrants but the similarity ends there. The differences between them are much more important.

The *Agamemnon* is full of dark premonitions. For dramatic purposes it is important for the chorus of this play to stress their knowledge and express

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21. Actually the issue of testimony and the need thereof is touched upon in the first part of the play, when the hero is believed to be dead. Amphitryon invokes divine witnesses to defend his son's valor against the invective of Lycus (174-176); a little later Megara implicitly rejects this practice by declaring that her husband's glory needs no witnesses [290; see Bond (above n. 2), p. 136, and Michelini (above n. 4), p. 249 n. 82]. In the first ode the chorus inform the audience that spoils from the Amazonomachy can be seen in Hera's temple at Mycenae (416-418). Foley (above n. 17), p. 183 claims that «this detail, this need to verify the labors ... implicitly confirms Lycus' argument that Heracles is irrelevant to the world of the play. Heracles and his *arete* are vulnerable to circumstance». But celebrated relics preserved at temples are hardly the appropriate material for this sort of undercutting. This chorus never doubt Heracles' achievements or imply that he would benefit from the testimony of witnesses or even from their own praise. For the relics in this ode see Bond, p. 173.

22. See e.g. Parry (above n. 3), 374 n. 12; Foley (above n. 17), p. 184 n. 62, and Michelini (above n. 4), p. 238. Cf. also R. Aéliou, *Euripide, Héritier d'Eschyle*, Paris 1983, v. 2, pp. 106-109.



their forebodings. Fairly early on they mention their power to make authoritative pronouncements sanctioned by the gods (104-106)<sup>23</sup>. The *HF* chorus have no similar need and, after Heracles' return, they have nothing to fear. Unlike the constant apprehension and fear of the Aeschylean chorus, which deepen as the play develops and further information about the imminent disaster accumulates, the *HF* chorus show no understanding that anything extraordinary is afoot or that the situation can rapidly change, either before or after the appearance of Heracles. At the beginning they believe along with everybody else that the hero is dead but they do not entertain the slightest doubt that he is unique and deserves praise even when dead and unable to help his family. When he appears and kills Lycus they seem convinced that his triumph will be complete and lasting. In the Aeschylean play, moreover, Agamemnon, though generally supported by the chorus, is burdened by the terrible weight of his past which will mar his triumphal return and ultimately destroy him. There is nothing in his, or his family's, past that could inspire a chorus to sing a paean to the hero. The difference with the Euripidean Heracles could not be more acute. There is no black or gray spot in Heracles' story: he is the valiant super-hero, the benefactor of his fellow-citizens, Greeks and humankind in general, the son of the supreme god who managed even to visit, and return from, Hades having performed a major labor at that.

The luster of Heracles' achievements is further enhanced by the absolute baseness of his enemy, the usurper Lycus. As has been noted by several critics, Lycus is a villain who lacks all depth and background<sup>24</sup>. With no secure moorings in traditional Theban sagas he is presented as completely one-dimensional, a character defined and consumed by his villainy<sup>25</sup>. This

23. For the authority and fears of the chorus of the *Agamemnon* see S. Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative. The Oresteia*, Cambridge 1984, pp. 18 and 78-81. See also the interesting remarks of A. P. Burnett, «Signals from the Unconscious in Early Greek Poetry», *CP* 86 (1991) 288-294, who discusses the constant struggle between the chorus' rational mind and their mantic heart, which virtually blunts their perception of the present and paralyzes them. For this chorus see also P. Vellacott, *The Logic of Tragedy*, Durham 1984, pp. 97-106, and B. Court, *Die dramatische Technik des Aischylos*, Stuttgart 1994, pp. 181-206. The fact that they present themselves as authoritative witnesses does not of course imply that they actually enjoy any special authority over other characters or, much less, that their authority extends beyond the boundaries of the fiction. See the discussion of T. Gantz, «The Chorus of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*», *HSCP* 87 (1983) 65-86, who argues persuasively both for the chorus' importance and their limitations within the play and the trilogy. For the authority of the tragic chorus in general see below n. 55.

24. For references see Michelini (above n. 4), pp. 240-241.

25. See, though, the interesting discussion of G. J. Bandy, «Die Herrschaft des Wolfes. Das Thema der "Verkehrten Welt" in Euripides' *Heracles*», *Hermes* 121 (1993) 159-80, esp. 168-80, who detects common patterns in Heracles' killing of Lycus and his own children and in the traditional stories of the hero's catabasis, the old Lycus and Amphion and Zethus.

weakens even more Parry's suggestion that the chorus find it necessary to look for a touchstone that could be used to distinguish good from bad people and locate it in music. At least for the chorus and the rest of Heracles' friends in the play the distinction is obvious. It would indeed be out of place for this chorus to start reflecting on the difficulty of distinguishing between good and bad when Heracles has just arrived and is on his way to punish the despised usurper. Since for this chorus Heracles' virtue has become conspicuous for all the world to see, his immortality does not depend on their assistance. Their only mission, undertaken with particular joy and devotion, is to praise the remarkable feats of this extraordinary hero. The subtle but unmistakable shift in language and imagery between the first and the second stasimon is illuminating in this respect. At the beginning of the first stasimon the chorus announce that they wish to sing the praises of the dead hero, whether he is the son of Zeus or Amphitryon, i.e. that they will intone an encomium-cum-dirge, because the noble feats he performed in life are his shining monument (*agalma*) now that he is dead (352-358). As has been observed, the language of this opening as well as the whole ode are firmly embedded in the encomiastic tradition<sup>26</sup>. The second stasimon is couched in different, though also traditional, terms. The song is now called a *paean* and emphatically associated with the paeans sung at Delos in honor of Apollo (687-695). Heracles is now called the son of Zeus and he is said to have generously assisted mankind with his prowess (696-700). Thus by virtue of his birth and achievements Heracles is the equal of Apollo. A chorus who sings the praises of a god or a demigod does not of course contribute to the immortality of his fame or the elucidation of his feats. The chorus' praise to Heracles is an act of devotion akin to worship and totally unlike a commissioned or even spontaneous encomium to a mortal laudandus.

As mentioned above, the chorus do not praise themselves or insist on their *power* to sing and thus advertise the excellence or guarantee the fame of their laudandus. The chorus insist on their infirmity and their loyalty to Heracles and his family. They use their only remaining power, their musical gift, to sing the praises of their divine hero and through that to find some comfort that compensates for the depredations of old age. It is not Heracles but the

26. See the collection of parallel passages in Bond (above n. 2), p. 153 and cf. U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Euripides. Heracles*, Berlin 1895, pp. 88-89; Michelini (above n. 4), p. 238 and Foley (above n. 17), p. 178. *Agalma* is an especially loaded term since in Pindar and Bacchylides it denotes not only the monument of victory but also the laudator's beautiful song offered to the victor as a gift that celebrates and immortalizes the victory; see the comments of H. Maehler, *Die Lieder des Bakchylides*, Leiden 1982, p. 87, and L. Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise*, Ithaca 1991, pp. 104-105. In the context of the ode it is very plausible that Euripides capitalizes on this association.

chorus who need the help and rewards offered by the Muses. Parry suggested that the power of song compensates for the human inability to distinguish between good and evil and for the burden of old age. Only the second suggestion is true. Concerning the first, the ode's first antistrophe does not deal with this problem the way Parry has suggested. It is definitely a fantasy inspired by the previous strophe and the general disposition of this chorus. After having lamented loudly the disadvantages of old age and the great blessings of youth the chorus resort to this fantasy, taking their cue from Heracles' recent adventure. The good, like themselves, whose virtue is obvious, should enjoy a double youth by coming back from the dead; on the contrary the scoundrels should have a single shot at life. Only then, as an afterthought, does the reference to the advantage discussed by Parry come in. To paraphrase, «besides (καί) this distinction would serve as a means of easily marking off the good from the bad» (665-666). This is not only a great reward for the meritorious good but also a sign that would immediately reveal who is good and who is not beyond any doubt. At present there is nothing like a moral touchstone and in his lifetime a man can only accumulate wealth which this chorus disparages (643-648). It should be emphasized that it is not time *per se*, as Parry has suggested, that is said not to provide the requisite criterion but the course of a man's lifetime. The next song, which comes a mere thirty five lines after the end of this one, makes it clear that time is not seen as a potential enemy by this chorus since it is said to have made conspicuous to all the valor of Heracles (805-806)<sup>27</sup>. Time itself incurs no blame, it is the span of one's lifetime with the transience of youth and the intolerable burden of old age that dominates the chorus' thoughts: while they cannot be rewarded for their honest toils others, who are unworthy, thrive.

Thus the connection between the two stanzas of the second stasimon is not one of explication but of contrast. The chorus do not find the answer to their supposed problem in music because quite simply for this chorus and this hero there is no such pressing problem as might require the assistance of the Muses. The proponents of the opposite view import an unwarranted association from epinician poetry which celebrates ephemeral achievements that have everything to benefit from associations with the mythical heroic past. As a consequence, the epinician poets have every reason to make sure, through their art, and stress in their song that their patrons are the equals of heroes and their victories hardly less significant, in essence if not in form, than the

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27. The traditional idea that time reveals the truth occurs often in Pindar and Bacchylides. For references and literature see D. E. Gerber, *Pindar's Olympian One. A Commentary*, Toronto 1982, p. 68.

glories won by a Heracles or an Achilles<sup>28</sup>. This is not the world of Greek epic and tragic heroes, the great paradigms against whom everyone else is measured. Parry himself points out that the usual epinician warnings to the laudandus to beware of *hybris* and of seeking divine honors or status<sup>29</sup> are absent from the chorus' paean to Heracles. He attributes this fact to the chorus' elevation of Heracles to divine heights «so that his fall becomes almost inevitable»<sup>30</sup>. But the chorus do not need, or even are entitled to, elevate Heracles. The hero's achievements are not subject to this chorus' choices, dangerous or otherwise. The chorus loyally acknowledge and praise the, at least to them, indisputable reality of the hero's divine greatness. Heracles' fall has nothing to do with the chorus' praise<sup>31</sup> and the celebratory song cannot even be said to foreshadow it. Critics who comment on the dangerous transgression of the limits of praise by the chorus<sup>32</sup> disregard the important fact that Heracles is not a mere mortal, by virtue of his birth and his achievements. It is important to note that the second stasimon of the *HF*, especially the first two stanzas, reflects entirely the aged chorus' point of view. The polarity old age-youth is only relevant to them. Heracles is of course young, or in his prime, and his vigor incites the chorus to juxtapose, implicitly at least, his marvelous abilities with their own infirmity<sup>33</sup>. Parry claims that youth is presented as the prerequisite of virtue, a necessary requirement for agonistic success which manifests itself in song. To be able to become Heracles or even to accomplish anything that requires physical exertion one necessarily has to be young but it is inaccurate to claim that the chorus stress Heracles' youth or that they refer to an epinician kind of agonistic

28. See for instance recently D. Steiner, *The Crown of Song*, N. York 1986, p. 80, and Kurke (above n. 26), pp. 158-159.

29. For references see G. Gianotti, *Per una poetica pindarica*, Torino 1975, pp. 129-130, and W. H. Race, *Style and Rhetoric in Pindar's Odes*, Atlanta 1990, pp. 191-195.

30. See Parry (above n. 3), 364, and cf. Parry (above n. 19), pp. 161-162 where he detects ambiguities that supposedly foreshadow the fall of Heracles. Halleran (above n. 19), 88 n. 27 rightly rejects this view and argues that nothing is allowed to disrupt the joyous mood of celebration in this ode.

31. As Yunis (above n. 9), 151 notes, repeated attempts have been made to explain Heracles' madness as the inevitable result of the hero's greatness or of some kind of error or sin on his part. But the only explanation that the play provides for the attack of Lyssa is the jealous anger of Hera. Cf. also M. Cropp, «*Heracles, Electra* and the *Odyssey*» in Cropp (above n. 16), p. 188, and R. G. A. Buxton, «Bafflement in Greek Tragedy», *Metis* 3 (1988) 47-48.

32. See e.g. J. T. Sheppard, «The Formal Beauty of the *Hercules Furens*», *CQ* 10 (1916) 77-78, and Foley (above n. 17), p. 186.

33. According to a tradition Heracles fought with and defeated Old Age. Besides, after his death and apotheosis he became the immortal spouse of Youth; see Bond (above n. 2), p. 226, and Michelini (above n. 4), p. 255. But all references to these stories are suppressed in the *HF* and even the allusions, if any, are extremely veiled.

success. The chorus just comment on their old age. It is not Heracles' youth that is extolled so much as the chorus' old age that is stressed from the point of view of the latest developments in the play.

To sum up, in the first part of the play, before Heracles' fit of madness and his recovery, the audience learns quite a lot about the chorus. They are very old, the age-mates of Amphitryon (512-513). In their youth they fought courageously the city's wars (128-130, 259). Loyal to Heracles and his family, they have enormous respect for the benefactor of Greece and hatred for his enemies. Frail and powerless, unable to be active citizens (268-272), they draw comfort and pleasure from song and dance: music gives them the opportunity to contemplate piously the fortunes of mortals and the attitude of gods as well as to participate in the celebrations (and laments) following important events (761-764, 781-797). Since, then, the old men of the chorus are quite vocal and informative about themselves in the first part of the play, there arises the double-pronged question why they stress so persistently their role and their limitations in this part and why they swiftly withdraw to the background in the second. The answer is connected with the role of the divine in the play and how the characters view this role in the reversal of Heracles' fortunes.

The chorus insist on their loyalty to Heracles' family and their inability to help them, the rightful rulers of the city and the benefactors of Greece, in their hour of greatest need. As Amphitryon had done before (217-235), the chorus condemn the behavior of their fellow-citizens in this regard (252-274, 436-441). As long as the chorus think that something should, and possibly could, be done to save the family and thus indirectly pay back Heracles for his services to Thebes and Greece, they praise him and lament their lot. Even when the family is about to die, the world-view of the chorus does not seem to become seriously disturbed. Though Amphitryon often invokes Zeus and accuses him of neglecting his paternal duty (212, 339-347, 498-502), the chorus do nothing of this sort. Only after Heracles suffers his murderous fit of madness do the chorus make no further reference to their own situation and naturally blame the gods for the sudden misfortune that befell the hero and his family: the last significant utterance of the chorus is an exasperated question to Zeus to that effect (1087-1088). Since the gods have demonstrated abundantly, either explicitly or implicitly, that they are not willing to help or spare Heracles, the chorus stop registering their distress at their own limitations, apparently as a result of their shocked realization that there is nothing they, or any mortal, can do. It is indicative that themes and turns of phrase reminiscent of their previous songs appear in the lament before and

after the messenger speech<sup>34</sup>. The only theme that vanishes completely is the one so prominent in the first part of the play, their old age and infirmity. It is of course true that the development of the drama leaves little room for such references<sup>35</sup>. But *Amphitryon*, for instance, mentions his old age, however briefly, toward the end of the play (1209-1210). Besides, the themes of loyalty, friendship and the offer of help acquire special prominence with the appearance and intervention of Theseus<sup>36</sup>. Since the chorus obviously remain loyal to Heracles<sup>37</sup>, the reason for their failure to mention their old age and inability to help their friend is an eloquent indicator of their changed attitude toward the divine<sup>38</sup>. The playwright follows a similar recipe in the *IT* with a striking difference at the end and to the opposite effect.

The chorus of the *IT*, whose presence is discreet and sing fairly short uncomplicated songs, perform two important complementary functions. First, they provide a foil for Iphigeneia; being very close to her in their

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34. The old men register their grief at the sudden reversal of fortune that came so soon after Heracles' unexpected appearance (cf. 735-746 and 884-885). The references to the children (1032-1033) and *Amphitryon* (1039-1041) recall the *parodos* (115-118 and 131-134). Heracles' labors are also mentioned (875-878; cf. 1046). But most striking and entirely in character for this chorus is the fact that they conceptualize the disaster in terms of funereal songs and dances (878-879, 889-890, 894-895; cf. 1026-1027). The murder of the children is a theme for song similar to Procne's pedoctony (1021-1024), a notorious «sacrifice to the Muses». Foley (above n. 17), pp. 195-197 has an interesting discussion of the «sacrifice to the Muses» theme although she disregards the distinction between literal and poetical sacrifice (it is for instance irrelevant that Heracles was later associated with the Muses in cult) and she draws some far-fetched parallels between the poet and Heracles (197). Even when *Amphitryon* appears with the sleeping Heracles on stage and urges the chorus to stop singing lest the maddened hero wake up and kill everybody in sight, the chorus find it impossible to suppress their lament. In happiness or despair this chorus are dedicated and almost addicted to song.

35. See Halleran (above n. 19), p. 89 n. 33, who comments on the brevity of the last choral songs of tragedies.

36. Dunn (above n. 10), pp. 118-119 has suggested that Theseus appears as a surrogate *deus ex machina* but lacks a real *deus'* power and authority. Although undeniably Theseus cannot rival gods I disagree with Dunn's harsh view of this character: this is a play that dramatizes divine hatred of and failure to save an innocent mortal. Friends cannot take the place of gods but to the characters Theseus must have appeared a most welcome second best. If this is deemed inadequate in divine terms, the character of Theseus is not affected by this judgment.

37. See the final couplet (1427-1428) with the comments of Bond (above n. 2) *ad loc.*

38. Foley (above n. 17), p. 187 also comments on the chorus' silence in the second part of the play and attributes it to the fact that Heracles has become «an altogether inappropriate subject for praise» after the crime for a chorus who had defined themselves as traditional Theban praise poets. I take exception to the last claim because it is circular: the chorus do not praise Heracles *because* they are traditional praise poets but they function as praise poets because they praise Heracles (in this context it should be noted that they enter lamenting the fate of the children). It is undeniable that the crime does not offer the same opportunities for praise as the hero's labors but music is not foreign to it and the chorus might very well have intoned laments until the end of the play if Euripides did not want them to fall silent for other reasons.

circumstances they are particularly loyal and sympathetic to her<sup>39</sup>. On the other hand, the playwright gives this chorus a quite audible voice of their own. Since they carry nothing like the burden of Iphigeneia's family horrors the chorus are free to stress the exile's intense longing for Greece and her civilized customs and rites (132-136, 399-402, 447-455, 1089-1152), a recurrent theme in all their songs except the last. Furthermore, they do not identify completely with Iphigeneia or the captive Orestes and Pylades<sup>40</sup>, though they never antagonize or oppose them and they even selflessly put their lives at risk to help them escape.

The attitude to the divine is the main area where the chorus have occasion to register their subtle or more substantial difference from their mistress. The *IT* being a play full of gods from the prologue to the end, not only the mythos of the play but also its background revolves around oracles, cult practices, divine interventions and human endeavors to deal with them<sup>41</sup>. The characters have trouble reconciling themselves with the precepts of the divinities, understand them and mold their behavior accordingly. Concerning the delicate issue of the notorious human sacrifices in honor of the Taurian Artemis, the chorus are very cautious not to offend the goddess. Their dislike for the rites and for their role in them is never described in particularly strong or explicit terms but it is rather suggested to the audience through their longing for Greece and her civilized rites as well as through the closeness of the chorus' position to Iphigeneia's. It is she and Orestes who raise the thorny theological questions in the play and express serious doubts about divine behavior and agenda (380-386, 570-575, 711-715)<sup>42</sup>. The chorus take no part in such speculations. Already in the prologue Iphigeneia had hinted at the terrible sacrifices and her unsavory role in them (35-41). Together with

39. Salient examples of their rapport are found in the parodos where Iphigeneia and the girls repeatedly echo each other (132-136 ~ 218-220, 143-147 ~ 179-185, 154-157 ~ 186-188, 201-202 ~ 203-204) and the first stasimon (439-446 ~ 354-580).

40. After Iphigeneia's interrogation of the captive Orestes the chorus make no comment about the long exchange but in one of the most wrenching distichs of the entire Greek tragic corpus they movingly wonder what happened to their families and who might report of their fate. See C. Whitmann, *Euripides and the Full Circle of Myth*, Cambridge, Mass. 1974, p. 30, and especially Vellacott (above n. 23), pp. 171-172. The chorus also express a quiet sadness at their lot at 1132-1133.

41. The most recent relevant discussions are C. Wolff, «Euripides' Iphigenia Among the Taurians. Aetiology, Ritual and Myth», *CA* 11 (1992) 308-334, and M. S. Mirto, «Salvare il γένοϛ e riformare il culto. Divinazione e razionalita nell'*Ifigenia Taurica*», *MD* 32 (1994) 55-98; see also D. Sansone, «The Sacrifice-Motif in Euripides' *IT*», *TAPA* 105 (1975) 283-295; H. Lloyd-Jones, «Artemis and Iphigeneia», *JHS* 103 (1983) 87-102, and E. Kearns, *The Heroes of Attica*, London 1989, pp. 27-35.

42. For Orestes' pronouncements see Mirto (above n. 41), 77-78. For Iphigeneia see below n. 44.

the priestess' recollections of her story (4-34) and the account of her dream (42-64) these allusions create a somber mood; the brief appearance of Orestes and Pylades and their references to the blood-stained altar (72-75) leave no doubt that worse disasters than the one Iphigeneia laments are imminent. The introductory anapaests of the chorus, though, are serene or, at the most, resigned. They greet the goddess and present themselves as the *hosiai* maiden servants of her temple's *hosia* priestess (126-131)<sup>43</sup>. The repetition of the predicate and the mention of their virginity (130) reflects on the goddess. She is celebrated virgin worshipped in her beautiful rich temple. The only sad note is the women's longing for Greece, which is described lovingly (132-136). There is no mention of the sacrifices.

The chorus only broach the difficult issue in the first stasimon. The ode comes after Iphigeneia's long monologue which ends with the priestess' famous invective against the double standards of her goddess and the immediate, almost reflexive, rejection of the accusation: Iphigeneia refuses to believe that Artemis is cruel and immoral and transfers the blame to the murderous disposition of the Taurians (380-391)<sup>44</sup>. Though, as mentioned above, the chorus echo very closely the rest of Iphigeneia's pronouncements and even her revenge fantasies at 439-446, they completely refrain from mentioning the personal involvement, as it were, of the goddess in the rites, as if Iphigeneia and they were only concerned with the identity of the strangers and the settling of an old score. Only after the end of the ode, when they announce the entrance of the captives, do they address the issue directly, echoing the messenger speech but modifying it in a subtle and telling way. They call the captives «the new sacrificial victims of the goddess» (457-458) instead of the messenger's «dear sacrificial victims» (243). At the end of the announcement they invoke the goddess softening the categorical certainty of Iphigeneia's statement with a conditional: «If you like this sort of offering (which Greeks find abhorrent), do accept it favorably» (463-466). In the second stasimon, though lamenting their fate loudly and having ample opportunity to blame the goddess or excoriate the Taurian rites, the chorus focus almost exclusively on their longing for Greece (1089-1152) except for a passing, veiled allusion to the sacrifices at 1116.

43. The designation is not chosen at random as it will prove significant later on. The theme of *hosia* will echo throughout the play (343, 465, 1037, 1161, 1194, 1461; cf. 871), always in connection with the sacrifices of the Taurians and at 1461 with the rites that will replace them at Athens, but its first appearance strikes no sinister note. For this important theme see Wolff (above n. 41), 318, and Mirto (above n. 41) 82-83.

44. See recently Burnett (above n. 23) 297-298, and cf. M. Lefkowitz, «"Impiety" and "Atheism" in Euripides' Dramas», *CQ* 39 (1989) 81-82.



The pattern of the chorus' references to the divine changes conclusively with the third stasimon (1234-1282). This is the only ode where the chorus do not mention themselves, the protagonists or Artemis. Coming less than a hundred lines after the highly emotional outburst of the second ode and immediately after Iphigeneia's prayer to the goddess for assistance (1230-1233) the third ode has a rather unexpected content. The chorus do not reflect on the recent developments and they abandon their usual practice of failing to address at any length all things divine. On the other hand, they do not comment on Artemis' rites and behavior but they dedicate the entire ode to the praise of Apollo without even mentioning his oracle to Orestes or his potential role in the rescue plot. The chorus recount the first exploit of the baby god, the killing of Python and the appropriation of the until then oneiromantic Delphic oracle from Themis, the daughter of the first proprietor Gaia. The story is unusual for placing the incident so early in Apollo's career. The tone is light and the ode includes the delightful image of the infant god rushing to Olympus in a manner reminiscent of the Hermes of the Homeric *Hymn*<sup>45</sup>. Being the motive force behind Orestes' mission and all his earlier vicissitudes Apollo is of course no stranger in this play. As Orestes suggests (1012-1015), the escape plan that the siblings and their friends are now putting into effect must enjoy Apollo's favor as well as Artemis'. Thus it is not out of place for the chorus to invoke the god. But why would Euripides choose to present the chorus so involved in the theology of the play now, in the last choral song? What would it mean for this chorus and the issues raised so far and to the end?

Though unconventional, the ode addresses the weighty core themes of the play: divine morality, the role of religion and divination and the guidance mortals might seek from gods and dreams. It is obvious that the ode is connected with Iphigeneia's dream that was of cardinal importance in the first part of the play. Critics have either seen the ode as ironic and light-hearted<sup>46</sup>, satyric in its optimism<sup>47</sup>, or as the product of a pessimistic view of the gods who are subject to greed and engage in sordid and corrupt strife; Euripides rejects this religion even as he echoes in this very ode the traditional stories narrated in the poetry of the past<sup>48</sup>. There is naturally much of value in these

45. See A. P. Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived*, Oxford 1971, pp. 70-71; Wolff (above n. 41), 321; Mirto (above n. 41), 85 with further bibliography.

46. See Whitman (above n. 40), pp. 30-31; Vellacott (above n. 23) p. 172; Burnett (above n. 45), 61. Cf. also Sansone (above n. 41) 292-293, and B. M. W. Knox, *Word and Action*, Baltimore 1979, pp. 256-257.

47. See Burnett (above n. 45), pp. 71-72. For satyric elements in the *IT* see also D. F. Sutton, «Satyric Qualities in Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Tauris* and *Helen*», *RSC* 20 (1972) 321-330.

48. See Mirto (above n. 41), 85-89, and cf. R. Aelion, (above n. 22), p. 152.

discussions. What has not been stressed sufficiently in discussions of the play and especially of the role of the chorus is that the ode is well suited not only to the concerns of the play but also to the attitude of the chorus toward the gods as it has been expressed so far. This group of women who were reluctant to openly blame the gods for the misfortunes that befell them and their mistress embrace wholeheartedly the vision of a guiding, benevolent god and even trace his office to the very beginning of this career. The fact that they now fail to mention their plight to which they had devoted all their previous utterances underscores powerfully the intensity of their conviction.

It is true that confidence in divine assistance is never unproblematic in the *IT*. The protagonists reject their scepticism and become confident that their gods will now help them escape only to find themselves pushed back to the Taurian shore by a demonic wave (1391-1406): the sibling gods do not even appear on stage as a gesture of support to the fugitives<sup>49</sup>. The chorus do indeed show a great amount of optimism and faith in the benevolence of Apollo. Actually the chorus are the first «person» to proclaim this faith loud and clear while Iphigeneia and Orestes are much more reserved. At the most crucial moment of the play before the end the chorus express their complete trust in the god whose first act as a god was to free humans from relying on night visions for the acquisition of truth. Hartigan has objected that, contrary to the chorus' disparaging opinion about dreams, Iphigeneia's dream was actually prophetic and she failed to interpret it correctly. In her view the third ode erroneously suggests that «Olympian goals as revealed in Apolline prophecy are to be victorious over actions inspired by Chthonic Dreams»<sup>50</sup>. But no action whatsoever was inspired by the dream. Although it may well be that humans should not dismiss dreams lightly, from the point of view of the play's dramatic development, the relative importance of the dream and the oracle are clear throughout. Indeed the whole story of the Atreid family has been largely determined by oracles and prophecies: the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, the murder of Clytaemestra and now Orestes' last

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49. The fact that Apollo or Artemis do not appear in person anywhere in the play has been interpreted as a sign of the remoteness of the two deities and of the illusion of the protagonists who believe that they will stand by them literally and metaphorically; see Mirto (above n. 41) 93-144. But gods that are not directly involved or most directly involved appear in other plays too and Athena's intervention does not diminish or alter the importance of the oracle of Apollo; see Halleran (above n. 19), pp. 40 and 43-44. Recently L. Belpassi, «La folia del genos. Un analisi del discorso mitico nella Ifigenia Taurica», *QUCC* 63 (1990) 53-67, has argued that Athena's appearance has a much wider structural significance than commonly assumed. Cf. H. Strohm, «Iphigenie im Taureland», in E. R. Schwinge (ed.), *Euripides*, Darmstadt 1968, pp. 380-381, and Hartigan (above n. 1), pp. 103-104.

50. Hartigan (above n. 1), p. 103.

adventure. The dream does not initiate or influence any events in the play. When the third stasimon is sung, it is not strange or short-sighted of the chorus to extol the oracle and downplay the dream and oneiromancy in general. The dream caused a small ripple in the story but no major delays or complications in the execution of the divine plan.

Plunged in sorrow by the dream's purported message Iphigeneia declares that, changing her previous compassionate ways, she will henceforth show no mercy to her victims (344-350)<sup>51</sup>. Euripides has presented elsewhere characters who, based on flimsy or misleading evidence, draw serious conclusions or make more portentous and lasting decisions than the one Iphigeneia makes when she hears of the capture of the two Greeks. The development of the plot in these plays is thus complicated but no significant change in the story occurs as it is known either from tradition or delineated, for instance, in the prologue of the drama<sup>52</sup>. These innovations, although not important from a «mythological» point of view, provide the playwright with the opportunity to investigate the often murky or unsettling background of his characters' actions, attitudes and relationships. Iphigeneia's dream belongs to this very broad category. It is crucial because it posits early on and with particular acuteness the problem of communication between humans and gods. It contributes significantly to the characterization of Iphigeneia and appears to create exciting possibilities for spectacular dramatic developments. Since the priestess does not know that her brother has arrived and she is convinced that it is utterly impossible for him to arrive, the dramatist could, for instance, have devoted the whole play to the protagonists' inability to communicate. The terrible sacrifice would be about to take place and the *deus ex machina* would intervene the moment the executor would raise his knife. But Euripides chose to give the dream a much more limited role in the development of the plot. In the third ode the chorus recall this now long-forgotten dream, praise the oracle and point to the solution of the drama. It is important to stress that the chorus are presented as neither extremely naive

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51. The priestess' resolve of course melts away almost instantly when she meets Orestes and Pylades. See the comments of Burnett (above n. 23) 297-299.

52. The *Ion* is unique in that the prologue leaves some loose ends and Apollo has to change plans in order to deal with the human reactions to his original ones. See R. Hamilton, «Prologues, Prophecy and Plot in Four Plays of Euripides», *AJP* 99 (1978) 279-283. For prologues in general see H. Erbse, *Studien zum Prolog der euripideischen Tragödie*, Berlin 1984, and C. Segal, «Tragic Beginnings. Narration, Voice and Authority in the Prologues of Greek Drama», *YCS* 29 (1992) 85-112. From another point of view the most pronounced example of an innovation in the mythic plot that leads nowhere is found in the *Orestes*. See e.g. F. I. Zeitlin, «The Closet of Masks: Role-Playing and Myth-Making in the *Orestes* of Euripides», *Ramus* 9 (1980) 25-51, and more recently J. R. Porter, *Studies in Euripides' Orestes*, Leiden 1994.

nor enlightened on account of their attitude towards the divine and the same is true of course of the chorus of the *HF*. Hardly has Euripides ever presented a character that holds the key to the issues he raises in the plays, especially with respect to the gods. The chorus of the *IT* interpret the events of the play and the role of the gods consistently and often correctly even if their view is to an extent compromised by their optimism and consequent one-sided approach. If they do not tell the whole story about the gods in the play, neither Iphigeneia nor Orestes nor anybody else does<sup>53</sup>. What is unusual is that Euripides chose to present this group, whose role might very well have been colorless and unremarkable, as persons with, if not individuality, their own concerns and attitude.

Euripides' experiment with the presentation of the chorus and their position as collective commentators in the *HF* and the *IT* is not repeated in the extant plays, at least not to the extent of the two plays studied here. This innovation is a significant, though almost completely overlooked, aspect of the complexity of these intriguing works, which have often been thought to fall short of the standards of «true» tragedy, either generically or qualitatively<sup>54</sup>. The role of the tragic chorus has been the subject of extensive discussion recently. In one of the most recent and germane to my own approach contributions Gould<sup>55</sup> argues that the chorus' utterances are not endowed with special authority and least of all with civic authority. According to Gould the chorus exist within the fiction and react to the events of each play as a group but they cannot stand outside the fiction or above it in the sense that they have special or superior knowledge; being a crucial, determining component of the fiction the chorus represent the community, the collectivity whose attitudes and wishes are a foil to the personality and actions of the individual protagonist; the chorus contribute their own insights but do not identify either with the poet or with the so-called «ideal» audience. The chorus of the *HF* and the *IT* fit this description but they are also exceptional in that the poet has managed to make them maintain delicate balances. Both groups are rather restrained in comparison with other choruses but their presence and even their silences make them indispensable to the articulation

53. The process of interpretation is a major theme of the play. See the perceptive remarks of Wolff (above n. 41) 332-334. The characters proceed by trial and error and even sometimes guided by chance until the end. Cf. Burnett (above n. 45), pp. 64-69, and Mirto (above n. 41), 96.

54. The *IT* has been labelled a melodrama or a satyr-play; for references see E. Belfiore, «Aristotle and Iphigenia», in A. O. Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics*, Princeton 1992, p. 359. The *HF* supposedly shows a serious lack of unity; see Michelini (above n. 4), pp. 231-236, esp. 233 n. 6.

55. Gould (above n. 12), pp. 217-243, with previous bibliography.

of the plays. Without them there would be no one to point to the enormity of the gods' crime against Heracles except the shattered victim. Without them we would hardly know what a girl from Greece missed in barbarous Tauris and that every salvation leaves some people behind, unless gods, to whom one should trust, intervene.

If then, as is clearly indicated by these two plays, toward the end of his career Euripides explored to the full the possibilities the presentation of the chorus offered a playwright, then one might legitimately reexamine the question of the treatment of the chorus in fourth-century tragedy and its supposed debts to late Euripides. This intriguing question far exceeds the scope of this paper but this much it seems safe to say: if the role of the chorus became secondary in the fourth century<sup>56</sup> this development can hardly be detected in Euripides' late work.

Demokritus University  
of Thrace

P. KYRIAKOU

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56. For the treatment of the chorus in the fourth century see G. Xanthakis-Karamanos, *Studies in Fourth-Century Tragedy*, Athens 1980, pp. 9-11. Cf. more generally P. E. Easterling, «The End of an Era? Tragedy in the Early Fourth Century», in A. Sommerstein et al. (eds.), *Tragedy, Comedy and the Polis*, Bari 1993, pp. 559-570, who rightly stresses that tragedy changed but did not necessarily degenerate in the fourth century.