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Euripides' Iphigenia: Ancient Victim, Modern Greek Heroine?¹

Ifigênia de Eurípides: vítima antiga, heroína grega moderna?²

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ABSTRACT: In his *Poetics* Aristotle dismisses Iphigenia's characterisation as inconsistent. Why does the eponymous heroine of *Iphigenia at Aulis* change her mind and decide to die willingly? This central question has preoccupied not only classical scholars, but receiving artists, too. How Iphigenia's change of heart in portrayed on stage and screen affects the audience's response to the character. Is Iphigenia a victim or a heroine (or a mixture of both)? The Greek-Cypriot filmmaker Michael Cacoyannis believed he enjoyed a special relationship with Euripides, but his interpretation was shaped by political events in Modern Greece and Cyprus in the 1960s and 70s. In his film *Iphigenia* (1977) the ancient tragic heroine was recast as a young girl who sacrifices herself for Greece. In Cacoyannis' anti-war interpretation of Iphigenia's choice she is both heroic, and the victim of male power games and irredentist ambition. Cacoyannis' Iphigenia is a heroine of her time, as much as she is a refraction of her ancient predecessor.

KEYWORDS: Classical Reception; Iphigenia, tragic heroines; Modern Greece; Michael Cacoyannis

RESUMO: Em sua *Poética*, Aristóteles descarta a caracterização de Ifigênia como inconsistente. Por que a heroína homônima de *Ifigênia em Áulis* muda de ideia e decide morrer espontaneamente? Essa questão central preocupou não apenas estudiosos clássicos, mas também artistas de recepção. Como a mudança da atitude de Ifigênia, retratada no palco e na tela, afeta a resposta do público à personagem? Ifigênia é uma vítima ou uma heroína (ou uma mistura de ambas)? O cineasta greco-cipriota Michael Cocoyannis acreditava ter um relacionamento especial com Eurípides, mas sua interpretação foi moldada por eventos políticos na Grécia moderna e em Chipre nas décadas de 1960 e 1970. Em seu filme *Ifigênia* (1977), a antiga heroína trágica foi reformulada como uma jovem menina que se sacrifica pela Grécia. Na interpretação anti-guerra de Cacoyannis sobre a escolha de Ifigênia, ela é tanto heroica quanto vítima dos jogos de poder masculinos e da ambição irredentista. A Ifigênia de Cacoyannis é uma heroína de seu tempo, tanto quanto ela é um reflexo de sua antiga antecessora.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Recepção dos Clássicos; Ifigênia; heroínas trágicas; Grécia Moderna; Michael Cacoyannis

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Euripidean heroines have captured the imagination of audiences ever since their first appearance on stage in the fifth century BCE. Euripides, the youngest of the ancient Greek tragedians, became famous for his bold reconfigurations of mythical heroines for the Athenian stage. Medea,⁴ the witch who kills her own sons; Hecuba,⁵ the former queen of Troy lamenting all she has lost; Phaedra,⁶ in love with her stepson, to name but a few well-known female protagonists from the tragedian's oeuvre. Euripides' dramatic versions of women's stories have continued to vow audiences and act as loadstones for heated academic debate. One of the key questions to consider is whether we view their actions as 'heroic', or condemn them for breaking the rules governing the behaviour of women in ancient Greece. After all Medea is a murderer, Hecuba a Trojan barbarian and Phaedra a suicide.

On the contemporary stage these complex female characters tend to be sympathetically portrayed, but in antiquity such transgressive female behaviour is less likely to have found favour with ancient spectators. This dramatic change in audience expectations and modern responses to these ancient female protagonists has preoccupied scholars of classical reception, which examines the long and rich afterlife of ancient Greece and Rome. In particular, this shift has been investigated by researchers working in performance reception, which focuses on the re-staging and adaptation of classical drama in the performative arts. Reception draws attention to the layers of interpretation that have accrued over the centuries and that have shaped our views about how a tragic hero or heroine is supposed to act. This process helps us

⁴ Euripides' *Medea* has proven a particular favourite with modern audiences. Modern productions tend to portray the tragic heroine sympathetically as a woman driven by circumstances to her fatal decision to kill her sons. Feminist readings of the Medea story thus dominate the ancient drama's performance history and tend to be the theme around which new creative versions are created, as in Kelly Harris' 2016 adaptation, titled *The Book Club*. In this New Zealand production, the role is shared by all eight members of the book club as they read and respond to the ancient tragedy. For more information about this production see: <http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/learning/departments/school-of-humanities/classical-world-new-zealand/theatre/kelly-harris.cfm> (accessed 5/8/2019).

⁵ In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Euripides' Hecuba, as she is portrayed in *Troades*, came to embody the voices of resistance and protest against violence, war, and oppression in the performative arts. For a discussion of Michael Cacoyannis' cinematic reception of this Euripidean play which promotes this anti-war reading of the play see Bakogianni 2009 and 2015. Euripides' *Hecuba*, on the other hand, in which the former queen actually manages to avenge the death of her son Polydorus has divided modern audiences. Perhaps this can be explained, at least in part, by the popularity of her representation as a *mater dolorosa*, which makes modern audiences uneasy with the play's revenge plot in which Hecuba blinds Polymestor and murders his two sons with the help of the chorus.

⁶ *Phèdre*, Jean Racine's version of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, has proven popular with theatre practitioners. Audiences are more likely to be familiar with Racine's reception rather than Euripides' source text.

interrogate how the very concept of heroism and all that it entails has changed down the centuries.

The question of ancient heroism and our modern understanding and adaptation of the concept will be addressed in this paper with reference to the less well-known Euripidean drama, *Iphigenia at Aulis* (circa 405 BCE),⁷ and its cinematic reception by the Greek-Cypriot director Michael Cacoyannis (1922–2011).⁸ This comparative perspective is designed to provide a dual lens through which to examine the question of whether Iphigenia's actions in the play can be considered heroic or not. The play dramatizes the myth of the sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulis that appeased the gods and allowed the Greeks to sail to Troy. One of the key questions of *Iphigenia at Aulis* is why Iphigenia changes her mind and decides to die willingly. There is strong evidence to suggest that Iphigenia's voluntary sacrifice in Euripides' play is a departure from myth and previous literature where she was portrayed as an unwilling victim.⁹ Not everyone liked Euripides' innovative approach in his dramatic version of the events at the Greek camp at Aulis. Aristotle's judgement in his *Poetics* (1454a 31–33) was that Iphigenia's character is inconsistent. His interpretation had a negative impact on the subsequent reception of the play in antiquity as well as in modern times. How a spectator and/or reader understand Iphigenia's change of heart determines whether he/she see her character as a helpless victim or a tragic heroine whose self-sacrifice is the female equivalent to warfare.

Cacoyannis' Iphigenia: A Modern Heroine

Cacoyannis' portrayal of Euripides' tragic heroine in *Iphigenia* (1976–77) explicitly encourages viewers to empathise with her plight and to admire her heroism. In the film she is played by Tatiana Papamoskou, who was only 12 when the film was made. Cacoyannis thus offers spectators a young and innocent heroine, which is particularly effective in the medium of cinema, which privileges realism. Ancient women tended to marry at an early age, so Cacoyannis' casting also fits in with what we know of ancient Greek marriage customs. To cement this view of his ancient source the director added a lengthy prologue that actively encourages spectators to identify with Iphigenia. The audience first sees her in Argos with her mother reading her father's letter containing the false news of her impending marriage to

⁷ The play was performed posthumously and many scholars believe that the text, as it has reached us, includes additions by later dramatists. *Iphigenia at Aulis*'s place in the oeuvre of Euripides has been re-evaluated in the closing decades of the twentieth century and this process continues into the twenty first. The following studies proved particularly helpful while working on this paper: Luschnig (1988), Holmberg Lübeck (1993), Zeitlin (1995), Michelini (1999–2000), Kovacs (2003), Gurd (2005) and Michelakis (2006).

⁸ Cacoyannis also directed two other films modelled on Euripidean dramas: *Electra* (1962) and *The Trojan Women* (1971).

⁹ For a discussion of the play's appropriation of myth and its relationship with previous literature see: Holmberg Lübeck (1993).

Achilles. She joyfully sets out on her journey to Aulis accompanied by her mother Clytemnestra, played by Irene Papa, and the chorus made up of her attendants and friends. In the source play Iphigenia's first entrance corresponds with her arrival at her father's encampment at Aulis. In the film her meeting with her father is a joyful one, at least on her side, fully justifying Clytemnestra's statement that she is her father's daughter. Clytemnestra indulgently remarks that of all his children Iphigenia is the one who has a special bond with her father (see Fig. 1). In Euripides, Clytemnestra only mentions that of all his children Iphigenia loved him the most (*IA*, 638-39). The words she uses to describe the father-daughter relationship in Cacoyannis' film, 'ιδιαιτερη αδυναμία' (a special weakness), are particularly fitting. In the movie it is her father's reasoning that is the first step in the process that culminates in Iphigenia's change of heart. It is because she loves her father so much that his words begin to work a change in her.



Fig. 1: Iphigenia and Agamemnon
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The scene between father and daughter that follows is both moving and ironic; ironic, in the sense that Agamemnon knows what Iphigenia's fate will be, while she innocently worries about the dangers he will face in battle. In this scene Cacoyannis effectively uses Mikis

Theodorakis' theme for Iphigenia to emphasize her childish innocence.¹⁰ This torments Agamemnon who tries to hide his emotions by being gruff and withdrawn, but this only leads Iphigenia to suspect that there is something wrong. She knows her father well. Throughout this scene she keeps calling him 'πατέρα' (father) highlighting their familial relationship.¹¹

When Clytemnestra learns the truth about the real reason why Agamemnon summoned Iphigenia to Aulis she attempts to change her husband's mind using her strongest weapon, the power of her words. In *Iphigenia*, when all else fails she goes as far as to attack him physically. In the film Iphigenia is not present during her parents' violent quarrel, as she is in Euripides, which serves to further underscore her innocence. She runs away (see Fig. 2), but a group of Greek soldiers hunt her down and drag her back to her father's encampment. Her escape attempt is another plot device that Cacoyannis employs to render Iphigenia more sympathetic to the audience, who view events through her eyes during the chase scene. Spectators share in her disorientation and desperation. The camera whirls dizzyingly as the frightened young girl runs through the forest attempting to hide.



Fig. 2: Iphigenia's flight
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¹⁰ Iphigenia's theme is soft and lyrical. It is played smoothly by strings and wood wind instruments. It thus has a number of qualities that have been labeled as stereotypically 'female' in the history of film music. I am indebted to Stella Voskaridou for my discussion of the soundtrack of *Iphigenia* (2013: 268).

¹¹ In Euripides in the scene between father and daughter (631–80) Iphigenia uses the word 'πατήρ' (father) and its derivatives nine times (two contested). Cacoyannis is thus following in the footsteps of the ancient tragedian. For modern audiences, the appeal of the view that a special bond exists between fathers and daughters is particularly strong.

Forcibly returned to her father Iphigenia pleads with him not to kill her. Her words unconsciously mirror those of her mother, but her tone is less aggressive, as befits her age. At first Agamemnon tries to break away from her and escape her words, as he did with Clytemnestra, but eventually maddened by guilt he reacts violently. He grabs Iphigenia and shouts that he has no choice. Iphigenia runs to her mother's embrace, with Agamemnon pursuing her (see Fig. 3), and ends up prostrate on the earth. Agamemnon stretches his hand to his daughter attempting to bridge the gulf that now separates them, but she closes her eyes shutting him out and he leaves defeated, but still determined to proceed with the sacrifice.



Fig. 3: Agamemnon tries to separate mother and daughter
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Cacoyannis' Agamemnon is not motivated by Calchas' prophecy that Artemis demands the sacrifice or any sense of piety. Outside the walls of Agamemnon's compound lurks a potent threat that outweighs any familial considerations; the Greek army headed by Odysseus. In the source text the army is an off-stage presence, but there are references to the *eros* of the

maddened soldiers that long to sail to war (see Fig. 4).¹² In the film they are never long out of view rendering the unseen threat that the army represents in the play visible.¹³ Agamemnon's anguished cry of 'Δε μπορώ, τίποτα δεν μπορώ!' (I can't, I can't do anything!) is rooted in his very real fear of the threat of the agitated mob he can barely control.¹⁴ His ambition to lead the Greek army against Troy renders him powerless to do anything other than to submit to the will of the army, which is manipulated by the wily Odysseus.¹⁵ In Cacoyannis' movie, when the army learns the truth about why Iphigenia was summoned to Aulis they volubly and enthusiastically support the sacrifice. In the film, Agamemnon's fears are therefore fully justified.



Fig. 4: The Greek Army demands they sail to war
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In Cacoyannis Achilles' heroism and his willingness to sacrifice his own life becomes the next crucial step in the process that leads inexorably to Iphigenia's change of heart. In a radical departure from Euripides, Cacoyannis' young hero is genuinely committed to helping mother and daughter. The audience witness him try to change the army's mind about the sacrifice. His own troops throw stones at him, however, and refuse to obey him when he declares

¹² Achilles says that the army is driven by a divinely inspired *eros* for the expedition (*IA* 808–09). Agamemnon reinforces this view when he says that the army's longing for the expedition was inspired by Aphrodite (*IA* 1263). See also Michelini, 1999–2000: 52–53.

¹³ In contrast, Euripides leaves room for ambiguity given that the audience never sees the army, as McDonald observes (1983: 144).

¹⁴ McDonald labels him 'a whore' who sells himself to gain his position as the leader of the Greek army (1983: 135). His decision has a larger impact on his daughter, who is the one who pays the price for his ambition.

¹⁵ For an in-depth discussion of the role of the army in Cacoyannis' *Iphigenia* see Bakogianni 2013b.

his intention to defend Iphigenia. This is another scene where Cacoyannis privileges his audience by showing them the off-stage spaces of Greek tragedy and it shapes how they view the events that follow.¹⁶ Achilles is bleeding when he arrives to let Clytemnestra know the outcome of his attempt to alter the course of events.¹⁷ In Iphigenia's eyes he is the fearless protector she had cried out for earlier, without any real hope that one would appear. In Euripides he is less straightforwardly heroic (McDonald 1983: 156). How Cacoyannis portrays what follows is key to understanding his reading of his source text. The young protagonists slowly turn to face each other and a demure Iphigenia shyly raises her gaze and looks deeply into Achilles' eyes. The action pauses for a beat as they stare fixedly at each other. Cacoyannis suggests that Iphigenia and Achilles experience an instant attraction.¹⁸ This coupled with the appearance of a group of soldiers led by Odysseus coming to take Iphigenia to the sacrificial altar works a change of heart in the young protagonist.

Iphigenia's Sacrifice: Dying for Love, Dying for Greece

It is out of love for her father and Achilles that Cacoyannis' Iphigenia concludes that it is better to die well, since she cannot avoid death. Agamemnon's compound is surrounded by soldiers throughout the film, adding further weight to Agamemnon's fears. Their presence reinforces the danger they represent should the Atreidae attempt to prevent Iphigenia's sacrifice.¹⁹ Cacoyannis highlights the strength of the emotional attachments that motivate Iphigenia's change of heart and not her fear of the army, thus rendering her more heroic in the eyes of modern audiences. Ultimately, she changes her mind for love, love of her family and love for Achilles. The strength of her courage is underscored with the noble strains of the music that Theodorakis composed for this scene. She walks towards the soldiers sent to escort her to the altar, while both Clytemnestra and Achilles retreat before her. In that moment she is stronger than both of them and a fitting bride for the greatest Greek warrior, as Achilles will become in Troy. The irony of course is that Iphigenia's sacrifice enables Achilles' pursuit of *kleos* (glory/

¹⁶ For the impact of the off-stage space on the characters in the play see Gamel (1999: 323).

¹⁷ Cacoyannis visualises a scene that is only reported in his ancient source. In Euripides, Achilles informs Clytemnestra of this incident in a rapid exchange of *stichomythia* (1345–68), indicative of his agitation and the urgency of the situation. In the drama there is at least the possibility that Achilles has exaggerated the force of the opposition or that he mishandled the situation. In Cacoyannis' reception there is no such possibility. Michelini believes in the veracity of Achilles' report (1999–2000: 48), as does Kovacs (2003: 97).

¹⁸ Rabinowitz believes that Iphigenia falls in love with Achilles in the source text. Her feelings for him explain, in part at least, her change of heart (1993: 46–47). Foley is also convinced that Achilles is struck by 'a genuine *eros* for his bride' (1985: 75). By making Achilles reciprocate her love Cacoyannis imbues this scene with a romantic sensibility that the ancient source lacks. Bakogianni (2013a: 229).

¹⁹ Some classical scholars agree with this assessment of the situation in the source text. The army would not allow Iphigenia to escape their camp now that she is among them: Hose (2008: 225). For the view that Agamemnon's fear of the army is exaggerated see: Luschnig (1988: 119), Arrowsmith (1978: xi) and Conacher (1967: 256).

good reputation) that results in his early death. Iphigenia calls for her veils and crown. Cacoyannis pays tribute to Iphigenia's bravery, but he also undermines the Panhellenic rhetoric she uses: 'Μίως και η Ελλάδα θέλει την ζωή μου της την δίνω' (Since Greece demands my life I give it to her). She is echoing the rhetoric her father used earlier in order to persuade her. Her naïve acceptance of it, however, only serves to highlight her innocence, it does not diminish her heroism.

Cacoyannis viewed Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* through the prism of political events in Modern Greece and his native home island of Cyprus. In the two decades in which he produced his three cinematic receptions of Euripides' dramas Greece experienced political unrest, the breakdown of democracy and a military junta (1967-74), while Cyprus stumbled from one crisis to another until the Turkish invasion that divided the island into two. The unrest in the Greek political arena, and more widely in society, in the period between 1961 and 1975 informs Cacoyannis' film. The director portrays the Greek camp in *Iphigenia* as a place where the power dynamics are constantly shifting and the army is called to play an important role in determining the leadership contest, as indeed it did in real life in Modern Greece. The crisis in Cacoyannis' home island of Cyprus was precipitated by the discovery of oil off the coast of the island of Thassos (1973-74) which prompted a claim by Turkey for the rights to drill in the Aegean Sea. The Greek dictatorship's response was to interfere in the internal affairs of Cyprus. The junta had followed this policy of intervention ever since it had assumed power. This policy alienated Turkey and diplomatic relations between the two countries deteriorated in this period. The Greek dictatorship's aggressively irredentist policies put Archbishop Makarios, head of the Cypriot government, in an untenable position. The junta tried to incite a coup on the island in July of 1974 and an attempt was made on Makarios' life (Koliopoulos and Veremis 2002: 301-5). This was the beginning of the end for the short-lived independent Republic of Cyprus. Turkey invaded on the 20th of July and occupied the northern half of the island. War between Greece and Turkey was only narrowly avoided, but the question of Cyprus remains open to this day.

As a native of Cyprus Cacoyannis was profoundly affected by these events and he decided to return to the island in September of 1974, in order to record events as they unfolded. His documentary *Attila 74* (1975) captured on film the modern tragedy of Cyprus. In his documentary he examined the causes that led to the invasion, but the most powerful and moving scenes arose out of his visits to refugee camps. He recorded eye-witness testimonies of the experience of displacement and exile. Cacoyannis focused in particular on the suffering and pain of mothers and their children, some of whom were missing or dead. In his documentary these became symbolic of the fate of Cyprus itself. The correlations with Iphigenia made less than three years later are striking. Cacoyannis' second portrayal of Clytemnestra as a grieving mother whose child is sacrificed on the altar of the irredentist ambitions of corrupt politicians mirrors the real-life tragedy of his home island. The scenes where Clytemnestra laments the fate of her daughter are reminiscent of Cacoyannis' interviews with bereaved mothers in *Attila 74*. For Cacoyannis Iphigenia had come to symbolize Cyprus. In 1974 Cyprus was a very young

nation, like the young girl sacrificed in the film. Clytemnestra's palpable anguish in the film echoes that of the mothers of Cyprus who lost their children. Cacoyannis reinforced and enhanced the political dimension of Euripides' drama by interpreting it as an indictment of irredentist ambitions and the suffering they cause. This is an aspect of the play that has been receiving increasing attention in classical scholarship. Carter characterised it as 'a political drama in the purest modern sense of that word' (2007: 69). By reinforcing the political dimension of the drama Cacoyannis invites a re-evaluation of these elements in the source text.²⁰

In *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Iphigenia's use of Panhellenic rhetoric is much more ambiguous. The rhetorical construction of the barbarians in the east as a threat dates back to the Persian Wars.²¹ The Panhellenic rhetoric of Agamemnon and Menelaus, that Iphigenia also espouses, plays on these ideological constructions of barbarians as the natural enemies of Greece. During the Peloponnesian War Persia enhanced its sphere of influence by encouraging the continuation of the conflict between the two premier city-states of Greece. As the war drew to its close Panhellenic ideas resurfaced. In the fifth century BCE the concept of Panhellenism was understood as the unification of the many city-states of Greece against an external enemy such as the Persian Empire (Michelini 1999–2000: 55). At the Olympic Games of 408 BCE the sophist Gorgias gave a rousing Panhellenic speech urging the Greeks to forget their differences and to unite against their common enemy, the barbarian Persians (Gamel 1999: 326). The war against Troy provided the perfect model for such a Panhellenic expedition, so Euripides' exploration of this concept within its mythical framework is certainly topical. In the century that followed, Alexander the Great came to see himself as a second Achilles and co-opted the myth of the Trojan War to gather support for his expedition against the Persian Empire. Locating Cacoyannis in his own historical and political context,²² highlights how the director undermined the validity of his mythical exemplar by depicting the pro-war speeches as nothing more than empty rhetoric designed to deceive an innocent young girl and to justify her murder.²³

In the play Iphigenia's plea comes in lines 1211–52, but by lines 1368–1401 she has changed her mind. This change of heart is central to any interpretation of the play. By focusing

²⁰ The political interpretation of the play also dominates its recent performance history.

²¹ For an in-depth discussion of this phenomenon, see Bridges, Hall and Rhodes (2007).

²² Cacoyannis chose not to return to Greece, while the military dictatorship remained in power (1967–74). The second part of his Euripidean trilogy *The Trojan Women* was filmed in Spain, at a time when its ancient source text was banned in Greece because it did not fit in with the glorious version of Greek history that the Colonels wanted to promote. Bakogianni (2015: 294).

²³ The proposed union of Cyprus with Greece was expressed in terms of Panhellenic rhetoric, while Turkey was represented as the barbarian East (its territory used to be part of the Persian empire that had threatened the city-states of fifth-century Greece). Cacoyannis reveals the dangers inherent in this rhetoric in *Iphigenia*. In *Attila 74* Cacoyannis argues that the price of such rhetoric, aggressively pursued by the junta, was a divided Cyprus. In the film, the price of war is the sacrifice of an innocent girl motivated by the Greeks' greed for Trojan gold (Cacoyannis in Siafkos 2009: 213–15). In Cacoyannis' cinematic reception the Greek leaders are ruled by ambition and Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice his daughter is motivated by his desire to lead the army against Troy. Zeitlin argues that Euripides undercuts this type of Panhellenic rhetoric in the source text (1995: 190).

on the political aspects of the play Cacoyannis explains Iphigenia's change of heart as being motivated by her love and compassion for her father who is being pressurized by Calchas, Odysseus and the Greek army to sacrifice her on the altar of male ambition and the Greeks' lust for war. The visible presence of the army and of the demagogue Odysseus in the film adds tangible weight to Agamemnon's fear of repercussions. He believes that if he dares refuse, he and his family will be killed by the Greek army eager to sail to Troy and to get their hands on the fabled gold of that city. Rabinowitz argues that Iphigenia has 'no meaningful alternative' (1993: 47) in the source play, and that her sacrifice reinforces the status quo thus making her less transgressive than other Euripidean heroines.²⁴ Cacoyannis' emphasis on her heroism, however, serves to highlight another strand in the ancient drama in which Iphigenia's preoccupation with a good death lead her to emulate aspects of male heroic behaviour, mirroring Achilles' obsession with *kleos* in the *Iliad*.²⁵ Even this partial assumption of male characteristics would have troubled ancient audiences, but it also serves to destabilise a black and white view of Iphigenia as simply a victim of circumstances.



Cacoyannis' Iphigenia embraces the Panhellenic rhetoric that her father uses to persuade her that her sacrifice will benefit all of Greece. In her innocence she is unaware of the darker motives that underpin this rhetoric: her father's and Odysseus' lust for power, the army's lust for gold and Calchas' lust for revenge against Agamemnon for his involvement in the killing of the sacred deer. She has also fallen in love with the young Achilles and does not wish to keep him from winning glory on the battlefield. She comforts her mother and bravely sets out for the altar, but Clytemnestra refuses to be consoled; for her Iphigenia's sacrifice is nothing more than an underhanded act of murder. Cacoyannis thus rationalises his source text making Iphigenia's choice more comprehensible to a modern audience and turning her into a female martyr (see Fig. 5).

Fig. 5: Iphigenia's sacrifice
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²⁴ See also Wilkins for his discussion of Iphigenia (1990: 181-04, 186 and 189-90).

²⁵ A number of the 'bad' women of Greek tragedy take on male characteristics, including perhaps most famously Medea and Clytemnestra.

Many scholars believe that the ending of the play as it survives is a later addition to the text. Clytemnestra is told by a messenger sent by her husband that Artemis intervened at the last moment and substituted a deer for their daughter. Agamemnon repeats this story, but Clytemnestra remains sceptical (*IA* 1615–18). Many modern productions opt for a tragic ending in which Iphigenia dies, which makes her the first victim of the Trojan War. This interpretation of the ancient drama is indicative of the radicalisation of Greek tragedy in the twentieth century and its appropriation in support of a liberal, anti-war agenda (Hall, 2004: 18–26). There is no rescue at the end of Cacoyannis' film. Iphigenia dies. Ironically the wind is already blowing as Iphigenia ascends the steps to the altar. She screams and tries to escape, but she is set upon by Calchas and his attendants. Agamemnon rushes up the hill to try and help her but a close-up of his eyes reveals that it is already too late.²⁶ Iphigenia is last seen surrounded by mist. Her last-minute hesitation in the film does not diminish her heroism, instead it makes her appear more human: she is a young girl who wants to live, especially once she realises that her death is not necessary to ensure that the winds will blow. Cacoyannis' alterations bring his reception closer to what modern audiences expect from a Greek tragedy, a self-sacrificing heroine who overcomes her fear and dies heroically. Iphigenia's symbolic role as the first victim of the Trojan War is thus emphasised in the movie. For Cacoyannis the story is both about the tragedy of a family torn apart by political ambition and of a nation plunged into a war that will claim countless more lives. Euripides' dramatic text, on the other hand, continually challenges audience expectations and leaves many questions unresolved.

Conclusion

Cacoyannis believed he enjoyed a special relationship with Euripides, whom he considered the most modern and relevant of the three ancient Greek tragedians. Speaking at the International Symposium at Delphi in 1981 he stated that he felt a special affinity for Euripides, because 'his whole attitude towards war, religion, towards human relationships is just that much closer to us today' (Trypanis et al., 1984: 214).²⁷ In his view Euripides was a pacifist who condemns war in his plays and it is this anti-war interpretation that both informs and shapes Cacoyannis' *Iphigenia*, as it does his earlier *The Trojan Women* (Bakogianni, 2015: 291–93). It should be noted that the Greek-Cypriot director was not alone in holding this view in the 1960s

²⁶ Cf. MacKinnon who argues that Cacoyannis left the ending open-ended (1986: 91). In a 2004 interview with Thodoris Koutsogiannopoulos Cacoyannis categorically stated that in his film Iphigenia dies and that the myth of her miraculous rescue was rooted in the army's guilt over their involvement in her murder. Included among the extras in the DVD (2006).

²⁷ On the modern appeal of Euripides see also Walton (2010).

and 70s.²⁸ It remains a popular interpretation of Euripides' war plays on stage in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.²⁹ It radically transformed the fortunes of Euripides' *Trojan Women*, from a play that was but rarely performed to one that was staged again and again as a protest piece against contemporary conflicts. This has also been the dominant trend in the performance history of *Iphigenia at Aulis*, although this late drama never quite matched the popularity or frequency of the anti-war productions of *The Trojan Women*.

Cacoyannis liked to draw attention to his connections to Euripides and in many interviews throughout his life promoted his films as faithful to the spirit of the ancient tragedian. He openly proclaimed his debt to Euripides in the end credits of all three of his cinematic receptions. Cacoyannis' interpretation of Euripides' oeuvre, however, was shaped by the turbulent history of Modern Greece and his home island of Cyprus in the twentieth century (Bakogianni, 2017a: 178). Out of the many possible possibilities contained in the ancient dramatic texts, he chose particular readings of the three ancient dramas he selected for adaptation in the medium of cinema. In *Iphigenia* he focused on the political aspects of the play and disregarded the divinely inspired causation that plays such an important role in the ancient drama. At the end of his film there is no divine intervention. The film concludes with Irene Papa as Clytemnestra watching as the Greek fleet sails for Troy. Her hate-filled eyes foreshadow her future revenge and the murder of Agamemnon, which takes us full circle back to Cacoyannis' *Electra* (1962) and the prologue he added in which the audience witnesses Clytemnestra's involvement in the murder of her husband.³⁰

Cacoyannis turned the textual instability of *Iphigenia at Aulis* into an advantage.³¹ He filled in the gaps and paved over the cracks by offering his audience a very personal interpretation of the ancient source text, while simultaneously declaring his passionate devotion to Euripides. *Iphigenia* contains the longest added prologue, more than half an hour of added material, before the film portrays the beginning of the dramatic text as it survives. In Cacoyannis' prologue, the viewer witnesses the bored and unruly Greek army, the killing of the sacred deer, the personal animosities and political manoeuvring in the Greek camp, all of which are starkly contrasted to the idyllic domestic life of the women of the royal house of Atreus. Cacoyannis' avowed aim might have been faithfulness, but in Classical Reception terminology what he actually offered contemporary audiences was an 'intervention', defined by Lorna Hardwick as the creative act of 'reworking the source to create a political, social or aesthetic

²⁸ Carter argues that this is an anachronistic view of Euripides' dramas (2007: 134).

²⁹ Katie Mitchell's *Women of Troy* (performed at the National Theatre in London during its 2007–08 season), and the *Trojan Women* (at The Gate in London in 2012) in a version by Caroline Bird, are two examples of this trend in the reception history of the play. For the anachronistic nature of this view of Euripides' tragedy see Mills (2010).

³⁰ This is also the fulfilment of her warning to Agamemnon during their quarrel in *Iphigenia*: 'If you return I will be waiting, my hatred like a venomous snake'.

³¹ According to David Kovacs who produced the 2002 edition of the play for The Loeb Classical Library: 'the number of lines suspected by one scholar or another of being interpolated is far larger here than in any other Greek tragedy' (2002: 157). See also Ribeiro Jr. (2010) 57–91: <https://doaj.org/article/1da941066524415e939eaca1dc925d11>

critique of the receiving society' (2003: 9). His claim to authenticity is a mask behind which hides a very particular interpretation of the source text that turned Iphigenia into a modern Greek- Cypriot heroine.³² Pantelis Michelakis dismisses *Iphigenia* as 'melodrama' (2013: 140),³³ but this does not do justice to Cacoyannis' film, that appeals to audiences precisely because of its modern political resonances. His political re-interpretation of the three ancient dramas he adapted was part of his overall strategy to modernise the ancient stories and to weaponize the power of grief as an act of resistance (Bakogianni, 2015: 310-11).

Michael Cacoyannis recast the highly ambiguous tragic world of Euripides into a clearly defined cinematic universe of heroes/ heroines and villains/villainesses (Bakogianni, 2017a: 172-75). In his *Iphigenia*, the eponymous heroine and her mother are presented sympathetically, while the male world of the Greek camp at Aulis is filled with political intrigue and latent violence. The director and his collaborators manipulate the audience into siding with Clytemnestra and Iphigenia against Agamemnon and his male world of politics and war. Cacoyannis' cinematic adaptation is a powerful indictment of male irredentist ambition and its tragic consequences on women and children. His *Iphigenia* is a highly sympathetic Modern Greek-Cypriot heroine. As Lorna Hardwick has persuasively argued we can utilise reception 'to retrieve aspects of the source which have been marginalised' (2003: 4). Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* is a highly complex play that has had a very chequered reception history. But his *Iphigenia*, too, does not have to be either the victim or the heroine, she can be both. The play allows for a multiplicity of interpretations. It was my work on Cacoyannis' reception that helped me to fully appreciate the complexity of Iphigenia's character in Euripides' play. In this case, all roads lead not to Rome, but to Greek tragedy.

³² MacKinnon argues that the three films' political messages are only partially masked (1986: 74). Cacoyannis publicly acknowledged his debt to Euripides while masking his political reinterpretation of the ancient material in the service of a liberal, anti-war agenda. Other filmmakers have taken a different approach downplaying their debt to ancient Greece, while emphasizing the modern resonances of the classical stories. For a discussion of such creative cinematic responses see Bakogianni 2017b and Bakogianni and Apostol 2018.

³³ Karalis also criticizes *Iphigenia* for being infused with 'the Hollywood aesthetic of the grand spectacle' (2012: 183).

Filmography

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