

Euripides' fragmentary *Hypsipyle* thematizes the general ineffectiveness, and the occasional success, of consolation. Greek tragedy dramatizes many of the consolatory gestures which would later form the basis of the genre of the *consolatio*; these include reminders that a griever is not the first to suffer; tears will not change what has happened; the dead are happier, and will be remembered well; time heals all wounds; moderation is best (R. Kassel 1958; M.G. Ciani, *BIFG* 1975, 89-129). That tragedy does this is not surprising, since it is "as much about the experience of surviving others' deaths as it is about dying" (S. Murnaghan, *ICS* 2000: 107). Tragedy explores both the method of consolation (which is offered not only to mourners, but also to those in exile or abandonment), and consolation's effect—often irritating—on the sufferer. Although people in tragedy (usually choruses) are adept at offering sympathy by invoking commonplaces, tragic hero(in)es are equally adept at rejecting consolation by inverting the same commonplaces. This exploration of the response to grief sometimes exposes the vacuousness of commonplace platitudes, which often "are appropriate to normal life, but cannot do justice to exceptional situations" (M. Lloyd, *Phoenix* 1986, 7); at other times this exploration validates the underlying truth of such gestures.

The source of Hypsipyle's constant grief is her abduction by pirates from her home on the island of Lemnos, and her slavery in the city of Nemea, rather than the death of a loved one. In the *parodos*, the chorus women advise her to stop singing her sad memories of her former life on Lemnos. In order to remind her that she is not the first to be kidnapped from her home, they do what most tragic consolers do: they invoke apposite mythical *exempla* of women who have suffered similarly. In this case, the women sing of Io and Europa (lines 75-88 Diggle), both of whom were abducted by the god Zeus. But Hypsipyle is equally adroit at such tactics, and responds with her own *exemplum* (the story of Cephalus and Procris, 104-07 Diggle), implying that not even their misfortune was worse than what she suffers. Cephalus accidentally killed his lover Procris while they were hunting; Cephalus found relief in lamentation, and Procris found death (and is therefore presumably happier for it); but no song can soothe Hypsipyle or distract her from her memories. This pattern of rejection of consolation is familiar in Greek tragedy, e.g., in the *epiparados* of Euripides' *Alcestis* and the *parodos* of Sophocles' *Electra*, where the protagonists also invert traditional consolatory themes. When the chorus men assure Admetus he is not alone in losing a wife, he retorts with a remark usually made by consolers, not mourners: that Alcestis' fate is happier than his, because she is dead (935-38). Electra likens herself to Niobe and the nightingale (147-52): these are the kind of *exempla* that a consoler would usually offer as a reminder that the mourner is not the first to suffer; but Electra—like Hypsipyle—invokes them as paradigmatic for her own desires to prolong her suffering.

Later in the *Hypsipyle*, however, there is a scene of effective consolation, when Amphiaraus begs the Nemean queen, Eurydice, to spare Hypsipyle, whom she has accused of killing her son (233-39 Diggle). Amphiaraus uses the consolatory device of the nature of human life (everyone dies, but we bear it), and apparently wins the queen's immediate approval. Euripides thus forces his audience to re-evaluate critically the circumstances where a consolatory gesture might be appropriate and effective, and where a commonplace might have a kernel of truth. He also invites a moral reflection on the contrast between the felicitous outcome of Eurydice's acceptance of consolation, and the unhappy plots of revenge drama whose protagonists refuse to be consoled (e.g., the *Electra* plays).