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Iphigenia as Achilles: Echoing the *Iliad* in *Iphigenia at Aulis*

In this paper I will demonstrate the dictional and thematic parallels between Iphigenia's speech at *IA*.1368-1401 and two speeches of Achilles in the *Iliad* (*Il.* 9.308-429; 18.98-126). I will argue that Euripides deliberately evokes these *Iliad* passages in Iphigenia's announcement to her mother, Achilles, and the chorus that she has decided to sacrifice herself willingly for Greece. With Iphigenia's speech, Euripides reminds his audience of the two famous moments in the *Iliad* when Achilles discusses his own death. Iphigenia echoes the very words that Achilles uses to articulate his own similar choice between life and death. In other words, Iphigenia speaks as the Achilles of the *Iliad*. This parallel on the level of diction is of essential importance, especially when we recall that Achilles' use of words is an integral aspect of his heroic nature [cf. Martin *Language of Heroes* (Ithaca: 1989) 146-205]. In *IA*, Iphigenia uses the same diction as the Homeric Achilles to create a new brand of heroism, one that directly responds to the *Iliad*.

Critics from Aristotle on have found Iphigenia's sudden heroic stance dramatically and psychologically unconvincing [see Gibert, *Change of Mind* (Göttingen: 1995) 202-54]. Yet Iphigenia's speech makes sense if we view the play as a whole as a dialogue with the traditions of the *Iliad* [Cf. Arrowsmith in Dimock and Merwin's translation (New York and Oxford: 1978) ix-xii; see also Zeitlin in *History, Tragedy, Theory* (Austin: 1995); Sorum *AJP* 113(1992) esp. 539-42]. How better to culminate this dramatic commentary on epic tradition than to have a virginal girl speak as the Iliadic Achilles before the Euripidean Achilles? Euripides here does more than dramatize a reversal of gender roles and traditional concepts of heroism (although this too is part of his project) [Cf. Chant *Ramus* 15 (1986); Loraux *Tragic Ways of Killing* (Cambridge, MA: 1987); Rabinowitz *Anxiety Veiled* (Ithaca: 1993) 47-54]. The playwright goes further, and creates a heroine who explicitly engages with two of Achilles' memorable speeches within the *Iliad*.

By evoking at this moment two of Achilles' Iliadic speeches, Euripides highlights the ironic similarities and differences between his play and the world of the *Iliad*. Iphigenia's choice precedes the *Iliad* in mythic time; it foreshadows Achilles' future. The ultimate irony, however, comes when Iphigenia poses her decision to die as a means to protect Achilles (*IA*. 1371-3; 1392-3). Iphigenia uses the words of the Iliadic Achilles to save the life of his Euripidean counterpart. The implications of this contrast for the heroism of his characters may help explain Euripides' creation of this surprising speech.