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# Artemis and Constructs of Meaning in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris**

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The purpose of this paper is to explore how the presentation of Artemis in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* (hencefor ward *IT*) guides the construction of meaning and determines audience reception[1]. The aim is not to investigate Artemis' role from an exclusively or predominantly religious perspective, but to examine her multifarious function among Euripidean dramatic strategies and to discuss its contribution to the dynamics of interpretation[2]. In this respect, Artemis' associations and indeterminacies, as well as the appropriations, re-appropriations and re-definitions, which contribute to her shifting portrayal and thereby challenge conclusiveness, are suggestive of the Euripidean technique of questioning closure[3], of implying the instabilities of fixed meaning, and of giving the audience the privilege of a more active and decisive role in the process of interpretation.

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1. For the notion of "constructing" meaning, esp. with regard to characterization, see Easterling 1990 and 1997. It has become an almost technical term to denote that an idea such as that of character or of identity (cf. Miles 1999) is not fixed but open to reevaluation, redefinition, hence open to reconstruction. At the same time, arguing against the almost metaphysical idea of a "fixed" character and shifting the emphasis instead onto the participation of the audience ha ve been particularly influential in critical approaches to Greek tragedy.

2. For an overview of Artemis' associations in myth and religion, see Farnell 1896-1909, vol. 2; Kahil 1984; Burkert 1985, 149-52; Simon 1985, 147-78; Vernant 1991, chs. 11-14; Sourvinou-Inwood 1996a. On Iphigenia and Artemis, the role of sacrifice, Artemis and human sacrifice, ritual elements, see esp. Brelich 1969; Burnett 1971, ch. 3; Whitman 1974, ch. 1; Sansone 1975; Strachan 1978; Lloyd-Jones 1983; Gliksohn 1985; Loraux 1987; Sourvinou-Inwood 1988; Kearns 1989; Dowden 1989, 9-47; Lanza 1989; Hartigan 1991, ch. 5; Synodinou 1996; Sourvinou-Inwood 1997, 171-5 and 2003, 31-40 and 301-8; Aretz 1999; Tzanetou 1999-2000; Scullion 1999-2000, 225-30; Cropp 2000; Ekroth 2003.

3. For closure in Euripidean drama, see Kremer 1971 and esp. Nicolai 1990 and Dunn 1996. For closure in classical literature in general see Fowler 1989 and 1994, and esp. Roberts, Dunn and Fowler (eds.) 1997.

One of the standard characteristics of Greek tragedy is the sense of the ubiquitous presence of the divine and its involvement in human affairs. Without wishing to be too schematic, one might say that divine presence in Greek tragedy may be visible or invisible, concrete and explicit onstage or remote and implicit in words (or hidden "behind" words). Sometimes gods appear themselves as characters visible either only to the audience or both to the audience and to other characters in the play; on other occasions their presence may be conveyed via the religious setting of a scene or more usually via oracles and prophets; what other characters and the Chorus say about gods also offers certain perspectives for an outline of divine presence. The exact status of divine presence is not only multifarious but also typically complex and enigmatic. Divine presence in Greek tragedy is an important element noticed by characters, spectators, and critics, which, however, often denies all attempts to describe it with certainty. There always remains some degree of uncertainty when divine presences and divine workings become the object of human scrutiny in a way which implies the gap that exists between gods and humans.

The nature of divine presence in Greek tragedy is one of the parameters that I would like to consider while thinking about Artemis in Euripides' *IT*. This entails contrasting *IT* with other plays where the goddess appears in order to establish the different types of information offered to the audience and the different authority that this information conveys. To begin with, Artemis in *IT* does not appear in person and as a result we have to reconstruct her nature and role from what we hear about her from other characters in the play. The situation would understandably be different if our reading of her role was facilitated by her personal appearance in a tragedy. Artemis probably appears on stage in Sophocles' *Niobe*[4], only in that case of course there is not even a reading as we have only a few fragments of text. But we may compare Euripides' *Hippolytus*, where our reading of Artemis, based on references to her throughout the play is also determined by Artemis' own epiphany at the end[5]. Her appearance is crucial and necessary (comparable in this sense to Athena's intervention in Euripides' *Ion*) for she explains things (she in fact explains the entire plot of the play to Theseus) and sets things right (if we may say so) in a way which is almost beyond challenge since she possesses divine authority. It is also this authority which puts all previous references to her (in Hippolytus' prayer, the Chorus' speculations, Phaedra's longings) under a new light and thus tests the validity of their reading of Artemis and in turn the audience's own reading of the goddess, which is necessarily based on an evaluation of references to her until she actually appears as well as on the audience's own associations with a goddess so widely worshipped in cult.

In this respect, her intervention to vindicate Hippolytus' memory signals her concern for her devotee but her eventual withdrawal suggests the impossibility of the

4. See Lloyd-Jones 1996, 228.

5. For Artemis in *Hippolytus* see esp. Segal 1986, 212-9; Goff 1990, 106-13; Hartigan 1991, ch. 3; Sourvinou-Inwood 1997, 175-84 and 2003, 326-32.

kind of reciprocity that Hippolytus had envisaged between the goddess and himself. More importantly, Artemis' appearance and her institution of Hippolytus' cult, a cult which will oversee the ritual transition of the Troezenian *parthenoi* into marriageable *gynaikes*, implies that Hippolytus' view of the goddess was itself a polarized or insufficient construct, based on his idiosyncratic sense of *sophrosyne*, for he emphasized exclusively one aspect of the goddess, that of purity, and completely ignored her role as overseeer of the process of maturation or transition into adulthood.

The transition into womanhood in particular was closely linked with childbirth and we know that the protection of childbirth was an important domain of Artemis, expressed for example in her epithet Loch[e]ia (cf. *IT* 1097; *Suppl.* 958) or in her identification with Eileithyia, the goddess of childbirth. Artemis could facilitate birth but also bring death during it, espeacially as she was believed to be responsible for the sudden death of women. Thus, in *Hippolytus*, while the women of the Chorus speculate about the causes of Phaedra's distress, they wonder whether Phaedra is pregnant, and they recall their own prayers to the goddess to help with their labor (161-69). By contrast, the association of womanhood with childbirth and the role of Artemis as the protectress divinity is entirely ignored by Hippolytus, who, not only associates women exclusively with the goddess Kypris, but also expresses, in his famous denunciation-speech on the evils of women (616-68), the wish that there be no women, no procreative sex and thus no childbirth. In this respect, the fact that Hippolytus' view of Artemis is incomplete, a notion which might, momentarily at least, be suggested to the audience by this contrast between Hippolytus' diction and the Chorus' evocations of a different domain of Artemis, is clarified and corroborated at the end of the play by means of Artemis' own epiphany. In other words, it is this epiphany which sets all previously expressed views or constructs of Artemis into a different perspective and provides the audience with a means to test and to estimate their validity.

The reason why I have been discussing the role of Artemis' epiphany in *Hippolytus,* and, more specifically, the ways in which this epiphany can be used as a means of re-reading the play, is actually to draw attention to the fact that in *IT,* by contrast, we are left without an authorative voice to help us redefine with more certainty the validity of the views expressed about the goddess throughout the play; there will of course be another divine epiphany, that of Athena as *dea ex machina*, which will give a reading of the events as well as a reading of Artemis, but the important thing is that the lack of Artemis' own appearance and commentary on the dramatic events leaves us, the audience, in a different position than, say, in the case of *Hippolytus.* We may also compare the portrayal of Apollo in Euripides' *Ion*, where although Athena appears in the end and explains some of the things that have happened, yet Apollo's presence and role throughout the tragedy is still notoriously vague[6].

6. On the role of Apollo and Artemis in *Ion* and *IT* respectively, see Hartigan 1991, chs. 4 and 5. On Euripides' *Ion,* see now Zacharia 2003.

Another parameter to bear in mind while thinking about Artemis in *IT* is her primary association with the wild, but also her marginal position as the divinity who is concerned with the demarcation between wildness and civic space. Vernant (1991, 204) aptly summarizes her role in this respect: "The hunt, the care of the young, childbirth, war, and battle — Artemis always operates as a divinity of the margins, with the twofold power of managing the necessary passages between savagery and civilization and of strictly maintaining the boundaries at the very moment they have been crossed"[7]. In *IT*, Euripides problematizes the very portrayal of Artemis and invites his audience to think what savagery and civilization mean, whether there is a clear-cut demarcation between the two or whether this demarcation is subverted so that the drama exploits the dynamics of the subsequent ambiguity and tension. To begin with, the entire plot of the drama is based upon an almost self-contradictory event: Iphigenia was saved from her sacrifice at Aulis by Artemis, who substituted a deer for the human victim, only to be transferred to the land of the barbarian Taurians, where she became the priestess[8] of Artemis and where her religious task was to preside over the human sacrifices offered to the same goddess. How can we reconcile the fact that it was Artemis after all who first demanded but eventually prevented the human sacrifice at Aulis, with the human sacrifices to her in the land of the Taurians?[9] The question could be formulated in terms of the exact relation between the goddess and human sacrifice on the one hand and human motivation and practice on the other.

But before turning to an examination of the relevant passages in our play let us first think about human sacrifice *per se* and its connotations in Greek tragedy, and try to come up with a larger framework within which we can examine the theme with all its divine and human associations more specifically in *IT*. Sacrificial death is a recurrent theme in Euripidean dramas (e.g. *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Electra*, *Heracles*, *IT*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Phoenissae*, *Heracleidae*, *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, *Bacchae*). Indeed, as Hughes notes (1991, 189), human sacrifice "flourished nowhere in Greece so much as in Athens upon the tragic stage"[10]. The sacrifice of Iphigenia is one such case and the substitution of a deer for the human victim by Artemis, not mentioned of course in the *Oresteia* for obvious dramatic purposes, is the prerequisite for the plot in Euripides' *IT*.

The question that I wish to pose with regard to human sacrifice in Greek tragedy in general is whether it is automatically regarded in negative terms, in a way, that is,

7. Cf. Whitman 1974, who begins his discussion of the play saying "Artemis is one of the most self-contradictory divinities in the Olympian pantheon" (1).

8. On women priests, see Dillon 2002, 73-106.

9. For contradictions in the play, see esp. Luschnig 1972, who attributes them to the fantastic, almost dream-like dramatic world of the play, where, as in the Euripidean *Helen*, it is hard to distinguish illusion from reality. For various similarities between *IT*, *Helen* and *Electra*, see Matthiessen 1964. Contradictions in the play are often associated with Iphigenia's liminal role both at Aulis and in the Taurian land, on which cf. Buxton 1992.

10. On human sacrifice in Euripides, see O' Connor-Visser 1987. Cf. O' Bryhim 2000. On human sacrifice in ancient Greece generally, see Henrichs 1981; Hughes 1991; Bonnechère 1994; Georgoudi 1999.

which would make the repulsive character with which the Taurian human sacrifices to Artemis seem to be invested by Euripides, immediately understandable. If we make a survey of human sacrifice in tragedy, and in particular in Euripides, and think of the way it is in each case presented, we will note that emphasis is always given to the ritual or cultic context, and it is this emphasis which helps take away the repulsion from the event of violent human death. On the other hand, closely connected with the ritual context is the eventual presentation of the human sacrifice as a self-sacrifice[11], and we may recall the fundamental importance of the victim's consent in the case of a sacrifice. In this respect, the Taurian human sacrifices to Artemis are an exception, for, whereas the ritual-cultic context is given great emphasis, yet its religious essence seems to be annulled and contaminated by the notion of sacrilege and murder since the victims are strangers who are shipwrecked on the shores of the Taurian land.

The only case in extant Greek tragedy where we seem to have an explicit condemnation of human sacrifice as opposed to animal-sacrifice, is when Hecuba (Eur., *Hec.* 260-61), upon hearing the Greeks' decision to sacrifice her daughter Polyxena, asks whether it was necessity that led them to human sacrifice (260) at a tomb where offering oxen (261) is more appropriate. Although here Hecuba implies that human sacrifice is ritual sacrilege, she goes on to suggest that another human victim, that is, Helen, would have been more fitting (265-70). So, her concern at this point is not so much to condemn the practice of human sacrifice *per se* as to voice her belief that human motivation, in particular the need for revenge, is the true cause hidden behind the request for human sacrifice (262-63). It will be human motivation going hand in hand with the divine role in human sacrifice which is after all also what is emphasized both in the case of Iphigenia's attempted sacrifice at Aulis and in the Taurians' human sacrifices.

Bearing all these examples in mind we can now turn to a close look of the passages in *IT* which are relevant to Artemis. The play opens with Iphigenia's speech, which starts with a selection of events from the family history of the house of Atreus; any attempt to refer to this family's past is surely problematic since it is burdened with impious or at least disturbing events. Thus the choice of a particular event, that is, Pelops' successful contest with Oenomaus and his marriage to Hippodameia may be significant and form in fact an indirect comment or allusion for the reading of the play as a whole;[12] especially since this event will again be referred to by Orestes during the recognition scene (822-6). The second event is of course the one directly relevant to Iphigenia herself, that is, her sacrifice at Aulis. The sacrifice to Artemis before the war is reminiscent of the special association of Artemis, in particular Artemis Agrotera, to whom sacrifices were offered before war in historical times[13]. To return to *IT*, the long

11. On this, see esp. O' Connor-Visser 1987, who associates self-sacrifice with Euripides' praise of young characters and their ideals. For a discussion of sacrificial virgins, see esp. Loraux 1987; Larson 1995, ch. 5.

12. See esp. O'Brien 1988.

13. On Artemis Agrotera, see Burkert 1985, 151-2; Simon 1985, 149, 155, 161; on Artemis and sacrifices to her before battle, see Vernant 1991, ch. 14.

description of events at Aulis, and later references to what happened, need to be examined closely for hints as to the exact role that Artemis and the human agents are given in this sacrifice; our reading will almost inevitably be informed (this is in any case almost inevitable) by the similar questions posed in the case of the same event in *IA* (for us, that is, who are familiar with both tragedies).

> "from Atreus sprang Menelaus and Agamemnon who begot me, Tyndareus' daughter's child, Iphigenia. (...) my father sacrificed me –so people believe– for Helen's sake, to Artemis in the famous inlets of Aulis. For at that place lord Agamemnon had assembled an Hellenic expedition of a thousand ships, wanting to get the Achaeans the glorious crown of victory over Troy, and win revenge for Helen's outraged marriage, so gratifying Menelaus. But when the voyage was dreadfully delayed, and he could not get the winds he needed, he resorted to burnt offerings, and Calchas made this pronouncement: "O you who hold this high command of Hellas, Agamemnon, never will you launch your ships from land till Artemis receives in sacrifice your daughter Iphigenia. You vowed to offer to the light-bearing goddess the fairest product that the year should bear. Your wife Clytemnestra has in your house a child" (thus he awarded me the prize for beauty!) "whom you must offer". And so through Odysseus' trickery they took me from my mother on the pretext of marriage with Achilles. When I came to Aulis, I was lifted high in my misery over the altar, ready for the knife — but Artemis stole me away and gave the Achaeans a deer in my place. She brought me through the radiant sky and settled me here in the Taurians' country, where the land's ruler, barbarian over barbarians, is Thoas, who runs with wing-swift speed of foot and so has gained a name that answers to his swiftness. She placed me as priestess in her temple here. And so by the festival-laws which please the goddess Artemis, a festival beautiful only in name — but the rest I hold in silence for fear of the goddess; for by the law this community had long before I came, I sacrifice all Hellene men who land on this shore. [I perform the consecration, but the slaughter is a task for others, unspoken of, within the goddess's precincts here.][14] (3-41)

This passage associates Artemis' demand for the sacrifice of Iphigenia with Agamemnon's non-fulfilment of a vow[15]. The emphasis on something which is "the most beautiful", twice mentioned in Iphigenia's words (21, 23) is not accidental, but

14. Translations from *IT* will be quoted from Cropp 2000.

15. For the reasons given in other sources, see Sourvinou-Inwood 1996b, 765. For the relation between *IT* and tradition and for Euripides' innovations, see esp. the introductions to the play by Platnauer 1938; Markantonatos 1996 and Cropp 2000; Burnett 1971, 73-5.

may be said to be alluding to an identification of Iphigenia with Artemis, a standard epithet of whom was in fact Kalliste[16]. The identification between the two was after all attested in myth; in Hesiod (Fr. 23a) we learn that Iphigenia became a goddess, a second Artemis; apart from myth, Herodotus (4.103) also tells us that in historical times the Taurians sacrificed Greeks and shipwrecked sailors to "the Virgin", whom they themselves called the daughter of Agamemnon, Iphigenia. The allusion to an identification between Iphigenia and Artemis seems to draw on the religious context of Attic cult if Iphigenia was also worshipped along with or identified with Artemis in Brauron[17]. The cultic context of Brauron was associated with a rite of passage, that of the *arcteia*[18], which prepared young girls for "taming" by marriage by temporarily stressing their wildness in their becoming bears.

Leaving for a moment this contemporary-cultic persona of Artemis[19], let us comment on Artemis and the realm of Greek myth associated with her; and let us examine how the juxtaposition between the Greek Artemis and the barbarian Artemis takes shape. First of all, Artemis is presented as withdrawing the favourable winds at Aulis because of Agamemnon's neglect of a vow he had made, but the introduction of this cause by Euripides and the way it is described by Iphigenia herself seem to suggest that the association of Artemis with the demand for a human sacrifice is not straightforward. Agamemnon had promised but eventually neglected to offer to the goddess "the loveliest thing the year gave birth to". The interpretation which held that this "loveliest thing" was indeed Iphigenia was nothing more than a human interpretation, made by the prophet Calchas. It is important to note with regard to Artemis' involvement in the attempted sacrifice of Iphigenia here that Euripides deviates from other versions, where it is Artemis who asks for a human victim in recompense for the sacred animal of hers which was killed by Agamemnon. Here it is Agamemnon on his own who had decided what he would offer to the goddess, without of course knowing what the object of his vow would turn to be. I think that there is a subtle difference created by Euripides' deviation from given myth, and it must also be important that what Artemis can unquestionably be credited with, in Iphigenia's eyes, is her salvation; a salvation, which implies in turn the goddess's disapproval of human sacrifice.

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16. See e.g. Simon 1985, 147, 149, 155.

17. Critics usually take for granted that Euripides' reference, in the words of Athena, to the future role of Iphigenia at Brauron (1462-6), confirms the evidence of an ancient cult of Iphigenia there (e.g. Cropp 2000, 50-3; Tzanetou 1999-2000), although the difficulty of reconciling what Euripides says with the archaeological evidence has also been pointed out (see Scullion 1999-2000, 228-30 with bibliography, and esp. Ekroth 2003). On the larger issue of Euripidean aetiology, see Dunn 1996; Scullion 1999-2000.

18. See Kearns 1989, 27-35; Sourvinou-Inwood 1988 and 1996a, 183; Dowden 1989, ch. 2; Tzanetou 1999-2000.

19. As Sourvinou-Inwood has pointed out (1997, 171-2 and 2003, 32), the epithet 'light-bearing' at 21 was also a cultic epithet of Artemis. For Artemis' association with light, see Parisinou 2000, 46-8, 81-3, 151-6. In fact, light is often associated with life and salvation (a key-theme in the play), and Artemis was also known as the "saviour" goddess (*soteira*, cf. Bremmer 1994, 17, Vernant 1991, 203). Cf. Burnett 1971, 47: "The verbal surface of the play is heavy with *soteiria* [sic] words".

Furthermore, the word *eksekleps*e, "stole away", at 28 for what Artemis did to the Achaeans with the salvation of the human victim suggests that she does to them what they did to Iphigenia; I am referring to the use of deception; the Achaeans tricked Iphigenia by telling her that she would marry Achilles, and in the same way Artemis seems to take the side of Iphigenia and trick the Greeks in turn, by making them believe that they indeed sacrificed the human victim[20].

Another point that I wish to raise here is the choice of the vocabulary that Iphigenia employs to describe her sacrifice, which is based primarily on that of *sphazein* (8, 20); this is not without significance, since we know that this term is of course the standard term for the cutting of the throat of a sacrificial victim, but, on the other hand, it can be used outside such a religious context and signify murder[21]. A survey of the sacrificial vocabulary used in Greek tragedy is a helpful guide for our reading of characters' perspectives with regard to sacrificial acts in tragedy. To mention one case from the description of the sacrifice of Iphigenia in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Agamemnon refers to this sacrifice standardly as *thusia*. But other characters, who question the religious validity of this death and see it as murder, refer to it as a *sphagē*. And Agamemnon himself uses the vocabulary of *sphazein* at 533, while imagining what Odysseus will tell him, whereas, when he himself hesitates about the act and rejects it, then he uses the vocabulary of *kteinein*[22]. In this respect, perhaps we should allow for a certain perspective which implies disapprobation or questions the religious context of the act whenever a character, in our case Iphigenia, uses vocabulary based on *sphazein*.

Furthermore, whereas the chorus in *Iphigenia in Aulis* refer to the human sacrifices demanded by Artemis in a way which might (for the audience) also convey a sense of disapproval (1524-5: "taking delight in human victims"), yet this implication, if we read it as such, is suppressed, and in fact, something which can also inform our reading of human sacrifice in *IT*, far from being associated with a barbarian practice (as is constantly the case in *IT*) it is described as anti-barbarian,[23] in the sense of it being the means which will secure the Greek expedition against the barbarian Trojans; this association, made by Agamemnon while trying to persuade his hesitant daughter (1255-75), is what Iphigenia herself stresses when she asserts her decision to be sacrificed; her sacrifice to Artemis will secure Greek victory (1374-401; 1472-3).

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20. Note also the word "trickery" at 24 to refer to Odysseus' trick. The language of *dolos*, trickery or deception dominates the whole tragedy and it is interesting to see in each case how this language is appropriated by different characters. For a reading of the play which focuses on the ideas of deceit and salvation, see Hartigan 1986 and 1991, ch. 5.

21. For the Greek vocabulary about sacrifice, see Casabona 1966.

22. For the range of the vocabulary used to refer to Iphigenia's sacrifice in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, see 91, 93, 96, 358, 360, 364, 396, 493, 531, 532, 533, 673, 721, 873, 880, 883, 935, 1166, 1178, 1185, 1186, 1232, 1262, 1272, 1317, 1318, 1348, 1360, 1367, 1398.

23. On the polarity between the categories "Greek" and "barbarian" and its frequent deconstruction in Greek tragedy, see Hall 1989, esp. 201-23. Cf. Said 2002. For some of its aspects in *IT*, see more recently Stern-Gillett 2001.

At the same time, Agamemnon's decision to carry out the sacrifice of his daughter is coloured by an emphasis on his own ardent wish for military success; the "if/then" and "if not/then not" formulation of Calchas' divination (92-3) with regard to Artemis' wish, that is, if the ships are to sail then Agamemnon must sacrifice Iphigenia, and, if the sacrifice is not carried out then there will be no expedition, seems to put Agamemnon into a position where his own wish for conquest sets all other considerations aside. In *IT* we may recall the phrase *hôs dokei*, "as it seems" or "so people believe", which is placed as early as l. 8, and implies to the audience that things are not the way they seem to be. There is some similarity here with *Iphigenia in Aulis,* at least a dark shadow seems to be cast over Agamemnon's motivation in our passage in *IT* if we may judge from the order in which the motivation behind the sacrifice and the expedition is presented in Iphigenia's words: l.12: "wanting to get the Achaeans the glorious crown of victory over Troy" comes first, and then follow the revenge for Helen and the favour to Menelaus (13-14).

Iphigenia was carried by Artemis (and the idea of salvation from human sacrifice is strong) to the land of the Taurians (note the emphasis on Artemis: ll. 9, 19, 29, 36). That was a rapid succession not only of places but of whole worlds, from Greece and civilization to the Taurian land and barbarism; the harsh combination of the words "barbarian over barbarians" (*barbaroisi barbaros*, 31) rings unpleasantly also to modern ears (at least the Erasmian ones!) for sure. Iphigenia is the priestess who consecrates the festival, while the sacrifices are left to others to perform. Iphigenia's remark at 36-7 that is "a festival beautiful only in name — but the rest I hold in silence for fear of the goddess" makes a strong allusion to barbarian sacrifices.

Line 40, "I perform the concecration, but the slaughter is a task for others"[24], which is necessary because otherwise we wouldn't understand the interpretation of Iphigenia's dream[25] at 55-58, exonerates Iphigenia from the actual killing of the human victims and gives this task to the local Taurians, the barbarians. But, with regard to Artemis, we are left with the rather disturbing "she takes pleasure in these rites". In *Iphigenia in Aulis,* the Chorus make a passing reference (1524-25) which is very similar to what Iphigenia says here, namely, that Artemis takes pleasure in human victims. We should also note the aposiopesis in Iphigenia's words in *IT*, when she wishes to say nothing more, and the reason that she gives: the fear of the goddess (37). We are now in the realm of Artemis in a barbarian land, and the goddess's association with the cult that the barbarian Taurians perform is what comes to the fore; but the direct association of the Greek with the Taurian practice with regard to human sacrifice, along with the almost ambivalent involvement of Artemis in both cases, become the central question that the audience are invited to speculate upon.

The juxtaposition between the Greek civilized world and the barbarian Taurian world with its outrageous (always by Greek standards) rituals is further stressed in the dialogue

24. Translation by Cropp 2000. For the text, see Cropp 2000, on *IT* 38-41.

25. On Iphigenia's dream, see esp. Valakas 1993.

between Orestes and Pylades, when they see the altars of the goddess which are drenched with human, indeed Greek, blood and which are adorned with the heads of decapitated victims (69-75); it is this sight that scares Orestes and almost makes him give up the mission which Apollo had sent him to complete in this barbarian land. Euripides here re-writes Aeschylus and gives another version to the end which Aeschylus had given in his *Eumenides*[26]. According to the Euripidean version, some of the Furies were not persuaded by the verdict of Areopagus and thus continued to hound Orestes; Apollo announced to Orestes that he would be safe only if he completed the task of carrying the statue of Artemis, which had fallen from the sky, from the land of the Taurians to the city of Athens.

Now, we are in the same position as Orestes in not being told why this task would put an end to his troubles; why, in other words, it would stop the Furies from further pursuing him. The description of the whole task that Orestes is asked to perform, in particular the difficulty of the task, the marginal area (barbarian land) where it will take place, the potential use of trickery or of some sort of device, and the reward upon completion of the task, all suggest, of course, a rite of passage[27] and ephebic initiation[28]. But as with the reward that Orestes will secure with regard to the Furies' pursuit, this aspect of his task may perhaps be illuminated in this very progression from barbarism into civilization, if we associate the Furies with the former and Athens with the latter[29].

A similar movement from a relatively primitive to an advanced order of things is implied in the third stasimon (1234-83)[30], where the Chorus sing the transition, sanctioned by Zeus, from older forms of power to a new divine order (Apollo and the Delphic shrine). In fact the whole play seems to reflect or to dramatize a progression from barbarism to civilization, and this progression is portrayed in the movement of the statue of Artemis from the Taurian land to Attic soil[31]. This act is actually a theft, indeed a serious religious crime if we think of all the implications of a *hierosylia* in the ancient world; but this particular *hierosylia* is apparently justified in following this transition from savagery to civilization. Even the rescue of Iphigenia by Artemis was described, as we noted, with the vocabulary of stealing (28: "stole away")[32].

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26. On this issue, see esp. Burnett 1971, 70-1; Caldwell 1974-75; Seidensticker 1982, 202-3; Wolff 1992, 328-9; Goff 1999, 116-23.

27. On rites of passage, see esp. van Gennep 1965 (originally published in 1909). Winkler 1990 and Graf 1998 have largely influenced the study of Greek tragedy against the background of rites of passage. See also the collection of essays in Padilla 1999, many of which examine rites of passage in Greek tragedy. For early, influential studies of similar issues in a wide range of texts, cf. Brelich (1969) and Calame (1977).

28. See Belpassi 1988. For Orestes' initiation and the ritual at Halae, cf. Dowden 1989, 20-47; Tzanetou 1999-2000, 209-16. For ephebic initiation, see the pioneering work by Vidal-Naquet (1986).

29. With regard to the association of the Furies with savagery or otherness, cf. the way in which Apollo describes the things the Furies take pleasure in or are associated with, e.g. decapitation of victims etc. in Aesch. *Eum.* 179-97.

30. On this ode, see Cropp 2000, 247-52, with bibliography.

31. On the statue, see Graf (1979).

32. For a discussion of this issue, in relation with stealing as part of initiatory rituals in the Spartan cult

A juxtaposition between the Greek world and the barbarian world with regard to Artemis is also raised by the Chorus, who are Greek female captives, when they invoke the daughter of Leto, Diktynna[33] of the wild mountains (126-7) and then refer to their exile, from their fatherland to the land of the Taurians (132-6). Here the Chorus evoke a Greek world and a Greek (in fact Cretan) Artemis, trapped within a barbarian context. The juxtaposition between the two worlds is brought to the fore again in Iphigenia's words when she says that instead of performing the acts that she would normally perform in her homeland, she is now involved in human sacrifices in the Taurian land:

> I do not sing now for Hera at Argos, nor on the sweet-voiced loom do I pick out with my shuttle the likeness of Attic Pallas and the Titans — no, rather I inflict a bloody fate, unfit for the lyre, on strangers (221-26).

The contrast is sharp, but it becomes sharper especially for the Athenian audience; for whereas it is natural for Iphigenia to recall the cultic practices in honour of Hera, the tutelary goddess of Argos, her homeland, yet the additional reference to the weaving of the peplos by Athenian girls at the Panathenaea highlights for the Athenian audience their own cultic practices. Such references to the weaving of the peplos to be presented at the Panathenaea are used elsewhere in Euripides and serve to evoke an image of Athens as a blessed city[34] or in general a city of propriety and respect for norms[35]. When the Athenian audience hear Iphigenia at this point, the contrast between ritual propriety and barbarian outrage is emphatically stressed, given that the notion of ritual norm is partly exemplified by means of their own familiar rituals.

We may also note the vocabulary used and the contrast made with the word "sweet-voiced" at 222 and the "unfit for the lyre" at 225. At the same time, the victims' cries (227) seem to subvert the sense of ritual norm and almost suggest murder. But, the question is: where does Artemis stand in all these events? After all, the cultic practices performed by the Taurians are in her honour. Iphigenia does not expand, but perhaps we can read between the lines. Or at least we can read between texts. We may compare for example the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite*, where it is said (19) that Artemis loves the lyre and also the dances[36] and the thrilling cries. There seems to be indeed a juxtaposition between the two, which invites us to suspect a contrast not only between what is proper and what is not (this contrast is obvious) but also to suspect where

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of Artemis, see Wolff 1992, 314-6.

33. On Diktynna, see Cropp 2000, on *IT* 127.

34. Cf. *IT* 1088, where Athens is described by Iphigenia as a city that has good fortune. For a reading of an ironic tone here, in the sense that Athens is called fortunate in a play written during the Peloponnesian war, see Sansone 1975, 294; cf. Synodinou 1996, 23.

35. Cf. Eur., *Hec.* 466-74, where the references are made by the captive Chorus.

36. Artemis' association with dances (along with Apollo, the Muses and the Graces) is also mentioned in the Homeric *Hymn to Artemis* (15-18).

Artemis is implied to stand between the two. But I wish to stress that we are not given a definite or conclusive answer as to where exactly Artemis stands. Also, although this passage immediately follows a reference to the events at Aulis (244, we see again the constant interplay between dramatic past and dramatic present), Artemis is not mentioned there and Iphigenia only refers to her sacrifice in a way which casts a shadow over Agamemnon's honour (211-12: "victim for a father's atrocity, a joyless offering promised by his vow").

Euripides offers his audience another perspective, that is, the Taurian one, on Artemis, by means of the herdsman. I wish to emphasize "perspective" in the sense that, as I stressed at the beginning, we are constantly presented with readings of the goddess and not with the goddess herself. If so far we have heard comments that Artemis may indeed take pleasure in human victims, now the herdsman confirms it; very characteristically he says for example at 243-44 that the captured men (Orestes and Pylades) are a "welcome sacrifice and offering to the goddess Artemis". Here the herdsman introduces his own, that is, the barbarian, perspective on Iphigenia's view of her attempted sacrifice at Aulis. This representative of the barbarian Taurians reverses the distinction 'Greek vs barbarian' as we have had it expressed so far, that is, from the side of the Greeks, and questions the Greeks' very ritual propriety in the case of Iphigenia's attempted sacrifice at Aulis:

> young lady, pray to have strangers like these for victims. If you can execute such strangers as these, Hellas will be making amends for your murder and paying the price for your sacrifice at Aulis (336-9).

From the barbarian perspective, then, Iphigenia's attempted sacrifice by the Greeks was a murder, not a ritual act, and the herdsman implies that this perspective is also shared by Iphigenia. Now, the exact status of Iphigenia's view is not straightforward, and it is indeed this uncertainty that is dramatically exploited by Euripides as the plot develops. But for our discussion, the important thing is that Euripides uses the character of the herdsman to give voice to the barbarian, and thus clearly suggests to the audience what they may have been reading between the lines all along; that the distinction is not a clear-cut demarcation between "Greek" and "barbarian", and that the evaluative attributes of the two poles (civilization and Greek side vs savagery and the Taurian side) are not straightforward. This brings again the matter of perspective into play, for each construct originates from and ultimately reflects a certain perspective. This interplay between Greek and barbarian views tellingly hints at the interplay between self and otherness and alerts us to the possible merging of the two.

The closeness between Greeks and barbarians is again suggested in Iphigenia's speech which starts at 344 and recalls the events at Aulis. The inward focus on her psychology at 344-60 shows how her reaction at the idea that Orestes is dead makes her consider the arrival of the captured strangers as an opportunity to compensate for her

plight at Aulis. With regard to the events at Aulis, we should note that Iphigenia does not mention Artemis but shifts the emphasis (356-60) to the human agents (Helen, Menelaus, Agamemnon). There is an important perspective on Iphigenia's view of the goddess in the passage at the end of this speech (380-91), where she accuses Artemis of duplicity in that she requires ritual purity on the one hand and takes pleasure in human sacrifices on the other. But then she attempts to absolve Artemis by using myth as well as rationalizations. Her use of myth is entirely based upon a belief in divine virtue as such; a divinity, in other words, cannot be charged with *amathia,* a word which conveys both intellectual (e.g. Eur., *HF* 347) and moral associations (e.g. Eur., *Ion* 916). But then her move to another myth is problematic; from the negation of divine pleasure in human killings (the case of Artemis) her thought moves to the alleged divine pleasure in eating human flesh (the case of Tantalus' cannibalistic meal to the gods). But, although she offers a rationalizing[37] explanation of the impure ritual of human sacrifice, by arguing that it is not Artemis' wish but the projection of the human (the Taurians') murderous instinct onto the goddess, the mythical example of cannibalism remains unexplained; we may recall by contrast, how Pindar in his first *Olympian ode* (36-53) actually corrected his predecessors' version of the cannibalistic feast. The audience are left in doubt whether Iphigenia's thoughts are anything more than mere speculations.

The uncertainty regarding Artemis is also suggested by the Chorus on some occasions. For example, at 402-6 they refer to the inhospitable land where the altars and temples of the goddess are stained with human blood, while at 1097-116 the evocation of and longing for the Greek Artemis are followed by a reference to the barbarian human sacrifices in the Taurian land. It is the Chorus also who seems to bring into question the exact association of Artemis with the practice of human sacrifices when they see Orestes and Pylades, the future human victims to Artemis, and invoke the goddess saying (463-6): "O mistress, if to your satisfaction our community offers you this rite, receive these sacrifices which by the law of our land it is unholy to offer".

We have already mentioned that Iphigenia, when referring to the events at Aulis, suppresses Artemis' involvement in the sacrifice and credits the goddess only with her salvation; this is repeated at 783-84, and also at 1082-88, where the reference to this past salvation forms the grounds for another one, as Iphigenia asks Artemis' help in the escape planned:

> O mistress, you who by the dells of Aulis saved me from my father's terrible murdering hand, save me now too, and these — or because of you the word of Loxias will no longer have truth for mortals. Be kind and leave this barbarous land for Athens. It is not proper that you should be living here, when you can possess a city that has good fortune.

37. For this type of approach by Euripidean characters, see esp. Mastronarde 1986.

But in Iphigenia's words, this salvation is reciprocal, for Artemis will also be saved from the barbarian world which is not appropriate for her and transferred to a civilized world, Athens (1086-88). Similarly at 1230-32 she invokes the goddess as follows: "O maiden mistress, child of Zeus and Leto, if I can wash the blood from these men and we can sacrifice where we should, your dwelling will be pure, and we shall enjoy good fortune"; here the place ("where") meant is deliberately left ambiguous, since for Thoas it is the shore of the Taurian land, whereas for Iphigenia herself it is Athens.

However, the audience are left in doubt whether this "salvation" of the goddess from an unfitting barbarian world in fact has her own consent, reflecting the overall ambiguity with which Artemis is portrayed throughout the play. In other words, is Artemis a civilized goddess who is almost trapped within a barbarian setting and unwillingly receives human sacrifices, or is she a wild goddess who indeed takes pleasure in human sacrifices but whom now the gods (Apollo and Athena) want to civilize?[38] Iphigenia for example expresses her fear in removing the statue of the goddess at 995-7: "But I fear there is no escaping the goddess's notice, nor the king's when he discovers the stone base stripped of its statue". Whereas the fear for the tyrant is understandable, what about the fear for Artemis? Is the case similar to the fear expressed by Iphigenia at the beginning of the play (37: "but the rest I hold in silence for fear of the goddess"), which would then imply that Artemis is satisfied with the Taurian cultic context and would oppose the divinely inspired plan for the removal of her statue? Again the answer is not conclusive and the role and exact status of Artemis are never clearly stated. For example, Orestes notes that Apollo would not have asked for this removal of the statue of Artemis had this been against the goddess's will (1012-14); but when a strong wave brings the ship back to the shore and thus prevents the escape, Iphigenia invokes Artemis and asks her forgiveness for the stealing of her statue (here we may recall the implications of *hierosylia*) (1398-400); this invocation contrasts with Orestes' belief in Artemis' consent, for here Iphigenia implies that Artemis opposes and tries to prevent the escape.

In the same context, the Taurian Messenger who reports the events of the escape to Thoas gives his own interpretation, according to which it is Poseidon who prevents the escape, and implies that Artemis herself is opposed to it; for Iphigenia, in escaping, betrays her and thus proves her ingratitude to the goddess who had saved her from Aulis (1418-19). Thoas too believes that Artemis is on his side and that she will help (1425: "with help from the goddess") the Taurians capture the Greeks and punish them.

When Athena appears to solve the impasse, she explains to Thoas (1438-41) that it was by destiny and the decrees of Loxias that Orestes came here, fleeing from the Furies' rage, to find his sister and to take her home to Argos, and carry the sacred image

38. The fact that the drama invites the audience to think about this question shows the subtlety in the presentation of Artemis in the play. The complexity with which the Taurian Artemis is portrayed is ignored by Sourvinou-Inwood 1997 and 2003, who assumes a straightforward portrayal of a barbaric Artemis as a foil to the Athenian Artemis' cultic persona (cf. Gliksohn 1985, 48-9).

to Athens. Her main speech consists in orders to Orestes and Iphigenia with regard to cults in Attica; it will be this cultic context which will associate the dramatic present with the cultic reality of the Athenian audience. Orestes is to set up Artemis' statue in a sanctuary which he will found at Halae and where the goddess will then be worshipped as Artemis Tauropolos. The epithet is etymologized from the name of the Taurian land and the wanderings of Orestes (1454-57). At the festival there the ritual practice will be to hold a sword to a man's throat so that some blood is spilled; a practice which will be a compensation for Orestes' evasion of slaughter, and which will make sure that Artemis receives honours (1461). The cultic practice described in *IT* is clearly some sort of initiation ritual for males as part of the Tauropolia[39]. What is important of course is the connection of this Athenian ritual with the ritual (human sacrifice) in the Taurian land, a connection which is made, apart from the etymology, also by the use of the verb *heortazêi*, "keep a festival", at 1458, which is reminiscent of the word *heortês*, "festival" at 36, where Iphigenia refers to the worship of Artemis by the Taurians.

To return to the aetiology at the end of *IT*, of course in Euripides we often find ritual aetiology in the end of his plays but only the endings of *IT*, *Hippolytus* and *Medea* can be said to be closely linked with the dramatic plot itself and thus in a way to perpetuate it in extra-dramatic, cultic terms. At *Medea* 1381-83 for example Medea speaks about a "solemn festival and rites" which will be established "in place of this impious murder". In both *Medea* and *IT* then we have a cultic practice established 'in place of' something which originates in the dramatic plot; more importantly, in both cases, as is suggested in Medea's words and more obviously outlined in Athena's, this replacement is the substitution of a ritual propriety and norm for an outrageous violence. Ritual functions to neutralize uncontrolled violence, to transfer it into a new context and thus to "civilize" it, with all the ambiguities of course that such a process of making something civilized entails. For the Athenian audience there is in the play, as we have already stressed, a gradual progression from savagery towards civilization, from the barbarian land of the Taurians to the civilized Athens; also, the association of Athenian cultic practices with the savage practice of human sacrifice in terms of this progression seems to emphasize the superiority of their rites over the barbarian otherness[40].

But is this Euripides' straightforward and conclusive ending? Does the play

39. See e.g. Tzanetou 1999-2000, 209-16; Cropp 2000, 53-6.

40. Many studies see a straightforward movement from barbarity to civilization, as well as a satisfactory conclusion to the problems raised by the drama, hence they read a positive and optimistic ending; For an overview, see Masaracchia 1984, 111 n. 1; Synodinou 1996, 19 n. 2. See more recently Cropp 2000, esp. 31 and Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, who imply that the play reaches a happy and unproblematic end. For studies which raise some doubts about the "happy ending", see esp. Sansone 1975, 294-5; Masaracchia 1984; Synodinou 1996; Goff 1999. These studies, however, question the 'happy ending' in terms especially of the gloomy future of the doomed family of Iphigenia and Orestes; my approach focuses instead on the ways in which the text problematizes the notion of closure in terms of the ambiguity of interpretation and the instability of meaning throughout the play.

achieve unproblematic closure? The foregoing discussion has demonstrated the constant interplay between different and often contradictory perspectives, the ensuing openness with regard to issues raised throughout the play, as well as the emphasis given to the inherent difficulties in establishing meaning; these factors should have already cautioned us against simplistic conclusions which see a straightforward and positive ending. This is also corroborated by an examination of certain features at the end of the drama.

To begin with, Athena and not Artemis is the divinity who oversees this progression from savagery to civilization[41]. Artemis again seems to withdraw or at least to stand once again in the marginal position between the two realms. For the cult at Halae will be instituted to honour her as if her deprivation of the Taurian cult of human sacrifices needed to be compensated for. Now Artemis will preside over near-human sacrifices as opposed to real human sacrifices, but from the moment of its very establishment this substitution is always reminiscent of the Taurian associations of the goddess. The movement of the statue from the Taurian land to Athens is almost symbolic of the integration of otherness into the self. Also, with regard to Iphigenia's future, she will be the priestess of Artemis Brauronia and when she dies she will receive (in what seems to be the announcement of a future hero-cult) the clothes of women who die at child-birth[42]. Even the phraselogy used here is reminiscent of the Taurian context, for Iphigenia will "serve as key-keeper" (*klêidouchein*) of the sanctuary of Artemis in Brauron (1463), as she was in the Taurian land (131). This time Iphigenia will not of course preside over human sacrifices but she will still be associated with human death and indeed with Artemis; for we hear about the dedications to her of the clothes of women who die in childbirth (1464-67), and we may recall that it was Artemis who was credited with the sudden death of women. The reference to Iphigenia's future death and her association with the death of women seems to imply indeed that Iphigenia will take on some of the dark or harsh aspects of Artemis.

It seems, then, that the very association of the barbarian Taurian context with the Attic cultic reality does not fully neutralize otherness; integration does not automatically entail annihilation or assimilation. We are still presented with a sense of alterity at the very heart of the Attic self, as we were presented with an evocation of the Attic ritual self at the heart of alterity. In a similar manner, Orestes' speech (951-60) where he explains, actually foretells, how his reception in Athens will lead to the Athenian festival of Choes[43], is very unusual, not so much because it gives an aetiology spoken by a mortal (cf. also Medea, Polymestor, Eurystheus), but because it is a rare[44]

41. Athena's epiphany is related to the Athenocentric focus at the end of the play (on Athena's appearances in Greek tragedy, cf. Papadopoulou 2001), but what is left obscure is Artemis' own view regarding what Athena says and foretells.

42. For the dedication of clothes to Artemis, see Dillon 2002, 19-23. For the association with Iphigenia, see Cropp 2000 on *IT* 1464-67.

43. On the Choes festival, see esp. Hamilton 1992; Robertson 1993. On Choes in the context of Athenian rites of passage, see Hamm 1999. On the reference to Choes in the play, see Wolff 1992, 325-8.

44. For other examples, see Aesch., *Eum.* 681-710 (Athena founding the Areopagus); Aesch. *Eum.* 767-

example from Greek tragedy where an aetiology occurs not in the end of a drama, as usual, but in the middle. It may be said that this serves not only to foreshadow (by the parallel between Orestes and Artemis) the Athenian acceptance of Artemis and the overall Athenocentric focus at the end[45], but also perhaps to interrupt the focus on otherness with a sudden glimpse at Attic cult; this is also in accord with the technique of shifting the focus from the barbarian land to the Greek Aulis, a shift which, as we saw, eventually subverts the contrast between the categories Greek and barbarian and alludes to their underlying similarities.

The reading of *IT* offered in this paper has employed Artemis as a guide for audience reception. It has drawn on a number of parameters which may seem heterogeneous at first, yet contribute to illuminating the various associations of Artemis and their corresponding effects on the audience. These parameters have included real-life functions of Artemis, with specific reference to cult, the association between contemporary ritual and the remote world of myth, the opposition between wildness and civic space, and the problem of human sacrifice. Artemis' associations have been the starting point for an examination of her function as a dramaturgical device, by means of which Euripides explores the inherent indeterminacies of divine presences in Greek tragedy and invites his audience to think about Artemis as a mediating factor which questions distinctions such as that between Greeks and barbarians, or which problematizes the issue of human agency and divine intervention. The elusiveness of Artemis, which has come to the fore also through an intertextual examination of her function, turns out to be an important aspect of Euripides' dramatic technique, which reveals the instability of meaning, denies closure and gives privilege to the audience for "constructing" meaning. This active role given to the audience by Euripides may account for the divergent views that this play, especially its end, invites, and is one important aspect of its everlasting appeal.

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74 (cf. 289-90, Orestes foretelling his cult at Argos). Cf. Eur., *Hipp.* 29-33 (Aphrodite foretelling a name-aetion for herself in relation to Hippolytus); Eur., *HF* 1325-33 (Theseus promising honours and cult for Heracles).

45. Cf. Cropp 2000, 231.

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# Άρτεμη και παραγωγή νοήματος στην *Ιφιγένεια εν Ταύροις* του Ευριπίδη

**ΘΑΛΕΙΑ ΠΑΠΑΔΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ**

Η εργασία αυτή εξετάζει πώς η παρουσίαση της Άρτεμης στην *Ιφιγένεια εν Ταύροις* του Ευριπίδη συμβάλλει στην πρόσληψη του δράματος από το κοινό στο οποίο απευθύνεται. Η εξέταση αξιοποιεί ορισμένες παραμέτρους, οι οποίες ίσως φαίνονται εκ πρώτης όψεως ετερογενείς, ωστόσο συντελούν αποφασιστικά στο να αναδείξουν με τρόπο συνειρμικό διάφορα χαρακτηριστικά και συσχετισμούς της Άρτεμης και τον αντίκτυπό τους στο κοινό. Μερικές από τις παραμέτρους αυτές είναι οι λειτουργίες της θεάς στην καθημερινή ζωή, κυρίως σε λατρευτικό πλαίσιο, η σχέση ανάμεσα στα τελετουργικά στοιχεία και στον μακρινό κόσμο του μύθου, η αντίθεση ανάμεσα στην αγριότητα και τον πολιτισμό, καθώς και η προβληματική σχετικά με την ανθρωποθυσία.

Οι συνδηλώσεις της Άρτεμης αποτελούν αφετηρία για την εξέταση και αξιολόγηση της λειτουργίας της ως δραματουργικού μέσου με το οποίο ο Ευριπίδης αξιοποιεί τις ενυπάρχουσες ασάφειες οι οποίες χαρακτηρίζουν εν γένει τις θεϊκές παρουσίες στην τραγωδία και καλεί το κοινό να προβληματιστεί σχετικά με τη συμβολή της Άρτεμης σε θέματα όπως η αντιπαράθεση Ελλήνων και βαρβάρων ή τα όρια της ατομικής ευθύνης και της θεϊκής παρέμβασης. Η έννοια της απροσδιοριστίας της Άρτεμης, η οποία ενισχύεται και από μία διακειμενική ανίχνευση της παρουσίασής της, αναδεικνύεται σε ένα σημαντικό στοιχείο της Ευριπίδειας δραματικής τέχνης, το οποίο αποκαλύπτει την αστάθεια του νοήματος και δίνει προβάδισμα στο κοινό για τη δημιουργία σημασίας. Ο ενεργός ρόλος τον οποίο δίνει ο Ευριπίδης στο κοινό εξηγεί σε ένα βαθμό τις πολλές και συχνά διιστάμενες ερμηνείες που έχει δεχτεί κατά καιρούς το έργο, και αποτελεί ένα σημαντικό παράγοντα του ενδιαφέροντος που προκαλεί στο κοινό κάθε εποχής.