



Writ in the Margins Podcast

Created by the students in REN670: Dramaturgy in the Shakespeare and Performance graduate program at Mary Baldwin University

Produced by Prof. Molly E. Seremet (she/her/hers)

Episode Guide

Season 3, Episode 1

Iphigenia at Aulis: Translations, Transformations, and Tyranny

Hosts: Katy Shinas and Anna Taylor

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A note on content: This episode includes a brief mentions of suicide, human sacrifice, homicide, and coerced marriage. It also includes discussions and usages of misogynistic language in the episode's dramatized scenework.

Episode Resources

Demers, Patricia. "On First Looking into Lumley's Euripides." *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance Et Réforme*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1999, pp. 25–42. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43445228>. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

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Episode Transcript

Anna: I'm Anna Taylor,

Katy: And I'm Katy Shinas, and we are going to be talking about

Both: Lady Lumley's *Iphigenia at Aulis*.

Katy: The goddess rages. The winds still. The armies wait.

If Agamemnon hopes to restore the winds and wage war on Troy, he must sacrifice his eldest daughter, Iphigenia, to the goddess Artemis. Feigning a betrothal to Achilles, Agamemnon lures his wife and daughter to Aulis, where they soon uncover the truth. Eventually resigned to her fate, Iphigenia walks to the altar without a struggle. But no one agrees on what happens next.

This is the basic story of Iphigenia, which people have retold time and time again. What keeps us coming back to this devastating tragedy?

Anna: While being sacrificed to the gods to get a breeze going is not the average female experience, being made

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scapegoats to uphold the patriarchy in society is, unfortunately, all too familiar. In this podcast, we hope to engage with the storytelling patterns we find across different reimaginations of this ancient story and highlight why it holds value in revisiting it.

Katy: Today, we will explore three different retellings of Iphigenia. We will compare and contrast the linguistic and structural differences of each adaptation to explore how each play reinterprets this tragedy for its own time. First, we will be looking at Euripides' play from 407 BCE, *Ἰφιγένεια ἐν Αὐλίδι*.

Anna: Well that's all Greek to me. But Regardless, Euripides wrote *Iphigenia at Aulis* for the City Dionysia, a playwriting contest in ancient Athens.

Katy: We will also be looking at Lady Jane Lumley's 1557 tradaptation, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, which potentially draws from Erasmus' Latin translation of Euripides and adapts the play for the closet drama format.

Anna: In case you need some clarification on some of those words, the term tradaptation (sometimes referred to as transadaptation) is defined as "The process of adapting text that has been written in one language into another language. [Tradaptation] goes beyond a simple word-for-word translation, yet the output still has the potential to remain artificial, in contrast to authentic text." And that definition comes from *Renaissance.com*.

Katy: And secondly the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a closet drama as "plays intended to be read rather than performed". Put a pin in that definition, because we will be getting into closet dramas a little bit later on! Finally, we'll also be bringing in Jean Racine's 1674 French *Iphigénie* into conversation with Euripides and Lumley's Iphigenia! Oh, and here's an interesting point: though Lumley translated *Iphigenia* more than one hundred years earlier, her manuscript was not printed until 1909. So other than Erasmus' Latin translation published in 1506, it is feasible to think that Racine thought he was the first one tradapting Euripides' play.

Anna: So our three versions – Euripides Lumley's and Racine's– are three of the five earliest dramatic versions of this story, which span from more than 2000 years. While not being the focus of this episode I want to acknowledge the play versions we are omitting, which are Erasmus' translation from Greek to Latin and Samuel Coster's 1617 Dutch translation.

Katy: Some people mistakenly think about translation as a purely regurgitative form, but comparing a translated text to its "original" can reveal some very interesting creative liberties. Lumley takes some very clear liberties with Iphigenia at Aulis. Her version is notably shorter, streamlining the action in very interesting ways. She also significantly reduces the role of the chorus, a very important device in classical Greek theatre. These differences offer a very clear insight into Lumley's personal storytelling priorities. However, many of these interpretive changes are more subtle. For example, Euripides' original Greek reads "εἷς γ' ἀνὴρ κρείσσειν γυναικῶν μυρίων ὀρᾷ φῶς". Lumley translates this as "For one man is better than a thousand women." A more literal translation would be "For one man exceeds countless women seeing the light." μυρίων is a Greek word that can mean either infinite or ten thousand depending on the context, so while it's dealer's choice for selecting which translation to put to paper, Lumley still somewhat softens the Greek translation by choosing "a thousand". She also entirely ignores the last couple words of the sentence, "ὀρᾷ φῶς". Φῶς directly translates to "light" but occurs frequently in poetry to mean life, glory, victory, and even deliverance. While we can't speculate on the intention of both writers in choosing

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their particular verbiage, Lumley's choice feels far blunter despite her less intense choice of the word "thousand".

Anna: You know, Racine simply does not include this sentiment at all in Iphigenia's speech....but hey, let it exist on its own terms. It is essential that as we look at differences, structural or linguistic, we acknowledge the range and varieties of adaptation. In adaptation theory there is the goal to move away from the standard of "fidelity" in adaptation, and embrace an idea that the scholar Linda Hutcheon's discusses that is that there are variations on stories or adaptations and they participate in a continuum of a story. I personally find it helpful to think of this approach as a multiverse or alternate reality. (LOOKING AT YOU, SPIDERVERSE!) What we have found in our research about these versions is that, as Robert S. Miola put it, there is a tendency to [quote] "decontextualize and repurpose the ancient text" [close quote].

Katy: First, what even is the ancient text? While Euripides' *Iphigenia* is one of the first recorded dramatic interpretations of the myth of Iphigenia, it is still just that— an interpretation. Euripides was engaging with a myth that existed long before the Greeks put pen to paper. Or whatever they used. Euripides seems to have invented the idea that Agamemnon had killed Clytemnestra's first husband so that he could marry her, which creates a very particular level of context that informs that story he was telling. Euripides also died before writing the ending of *Iphigenia* wherein Artemis substitutes a deer for Iphigenia on the altar, which completely changes the myth and even calls into question the later myths. Can Aeschylus' *Oresteia* happen in the same universe as *Iphigenia at Aulis*? With this in mind, let's take a look at how Lumley and Racine's versions repurpose and interact with Euripides' *Iphigenia* and how they are interacting with each other.

Anna: That's a great question! I think that to understand this repurposing and participation in this continuum (or multiverse) it is helpful to look at what is included or varied, but also what is omitted. So with that lens let's think about what the "canon events" that are in these versions. Some of the biggest differences are that Lumley's version of Euripides' story she includes a translation of Erasmus' "argument", which offers a synopsis of the play before starting the actual action of the story that starts the play. Lumley's play also stays within the framework of Iphigenia's youth and innocence, and sets her up as a tragic heroine. This corresponds eerily, I think, with Lumley's own marriage at a young age.

Katy: And the execution of her cousin Jane Grey at sixteen or seventeen years old.

Anna: Oof. It's interesting in the scholar Patricia Demers' work, she cites translation as the main genre that many female early modern writers participated in for the main reason of being able to collaborate with a trusted and respected male voice while exercising their own voice (*Women's Writing*, 64) This framework of translation and reinterpretation operated as a kind of safety net.

Katy: Building my former point about linguistic differences, Demers also offers that Lumley's prose is "more paraphrase than translation" ("On First Looking")— this might be indicative of the standard practice of imitatio, but could also be her way of reclamation. Largely Lumley's characterizations of her characters is the difference. Agamemnon is much less noble in Lumley's text, which could correspond to Lumley's own father whose dedication to the state ruled his actions more than his role of father.

Anna: Racine in his *Iphigénie* is uses more structural dramatism, and surprise, and participates in more of a

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romantic rather than tragic genre. Some of the most notable differences that I have found are the invention of the Eriphile from Lesbos character, a new character, who is the foil to the Greek Iphigenie. Eriphile was captured by Achilles and brought to Aulis. She is a similar age to Iphigenie and is of uncertain birth. She becomes the crux of the play as she becomes jealous of Achilles' love for Iphigenie and envies Iphigenie's loving family.

In the end it is revealed that Eriphile's real name is Iphigenie, born of Helen of Troy and Theseus, who is the real claim of the gods request for Iphigenie to be sacrificed. Hearing this she stabs herself, and nature accepts her sacrifice. There is no Stag to save the day, and this story ends with the young girl's dead body, and the Clytemnestra rejoicing at her own family's safety.

Katy: It seems that Racine was much more interested in constructing a story about female jealousy and envy and the sin of wishing for circumstances that are not your own.

Anna: Additionally, this play, through Eriphile, provides a foil to Clytemnestra in their shared experience of being obtained by Greek war heroes, however their endings are radically different. The fact that of course it was a man who thought this was a good way to tell this female-oriented story is unfortunately unsurprising.

Katy: So what did a woman think?! Let's pivot to Lady Lumley and the context of her play in the participation of the genre of closet drama. We've already defined closet drama, so with that definition already under our belt let's dive in! First of all, Lumley's translation is significantly shorter, which might have better served the format of a private, unstaged reading. Understanding that this play was composed for private consumption and enjoyment, what does Lumley's version say?

Anna: Alison Findlay, who directed a production of Lumley's *Iphigenia* in 2014 with the Rose Company, wrote about the process and offered that this play was likely read in the context of a closet drama reading at Nonsuch Palace in 1556. The performance or process of closet dramas, not only allowed women to perform but to share their own artistic writings. These were for women, and most often written by women. This space of solidarity was one for women's voices. Many dramatic texts composed as closet dramas contain embedded misogyny, such as the passage that Katy unpacked with us, but it is fascinatingly ambiguous and open as to how this misogyny would have been interacted with and interpreted.

Anna: Now let's dive into some more of the text. Scholar Karen Raber claims that Lumley's translation was a, quote, "act of obedience". However, there are some very interesting differences between Euripides' play and Lumley's translation. One moment that we wanted to focus on is the arrival of Iphigenia and Clytemnestra. The different versions all talk about women differently, and their structures explore women's perspectives in some very interesting ways.

You will hear the Euripides Greek with a literal English translation and then you will hear the same moment in Lady Lumley's translation. Enjoy!

Χορός

στῶμεν, Χαλκίδος ἔκγονα θρόνματα,

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τὴν βασιλείαν δεξώμεθ' ὄχων
 ἄπο μὴ σφαλερῶς ἐπὶ γαῖαν,
 ἀγανῶς δὲ χεροῖν μαλακῇ ῥώμῃ,
 μὴ ταρβήσῃ † νεωστὶ μοι μολὼν
 κλεινὸν τέκνον Ἀγαμέμνωνος,
 μηδὲ θόρυβον † μηδ' ἔκπληξιν
 ταῖς Ἀργείαις
 ξεῖναι ξείναις παρέχωμεν.

Anna: [Chorus]

Let us stand here, maidens of Chalcis,
 and lift the queen from her chariot
 to the ground without stumbling,
 supporting her gently in our arms, with kind intent,
 that the renowned daughter of Agamemnon,
 just arrived, may feel no fear; strangers ourselves,
 let us avoid anything that may disturb
 or frighten the strangers from Argos.

Κλυταιμῆστρα
 ὄρνιθα μὲν τόνδ' αἴσιον ποιούμεθα,
 τὸ σὸν τε χρηστὸν καὶ λόγων εὐφημίαν:
 ἐλπίδα δ' ἔχω τιν' ὥς ἐπ' ἐσθλοῖσιν γάμοις
 πάρειμι νυμφαγωγός. ἀλλ' ὀχημάτων
 ἔξω πορεύεθ' ἃς φέρω φερνὰς κόρη,

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καὶ πέμπει· ἐς μέλαθρον εὐλαβούμενοι.

Anna: [Clytemnestra]

I take this as a lucky omen,
your kindness and auspicious greeting,
and have good hope that it is to a happy marriage
I conduct the bride. Take from the chariot
the dowry I am bringing for my daughter
and convey it within with careful heed.

Katy: And now Lumley's translation.

Anna [Cho.] Truly we may see now, that they are most happy, which being neither in to hye estate, nor yet oppressed with too much poverty, may quietly enjoy the company of their friends. But behold here cometh Clytemnestra the queen and Iphigenia her daughter, being adorned with all nobles. Let us therefore mete hir with moche mirth, lest she shulde be abashed at hir cominge into a strange countrye.

Katy: [Cly.] This trulye is a token of good lucke that so manye noble women meate us. Let us therefore come downe from our charet, that they may bringe us to Agamemnon's lodginge.

Anna: So let's break this down. These two passages follow the same general structure and are even quite similar in length, which is not always the case when comparing Lumley's condensed version to Euripides' version. The differences between the two interpretations, however, are quite striking. In the original Greek, the chorus notes that they are women from Calchis serving Clytemnestra, a foreign queen. The differences between them are quite stark. This distinction is missing from Lumley's translation, which instead has Clytemnestra identify the women as noble. This change seems to highlight a stronger sense of community or at least similar status.

Katy: I also think it's interesting that, the original Greek also focuses more on the marriage and the women's ties to men, with Clytemnestra saying their warm reception bodes well for her daughter's upcoming wedding and ordering the women to bring Iphigenia's dowry to the correct place and the chorus referring to Iphigenia as "the renowned daughter of Agamemnon." In Lumley's version, Clytemnestra asks to be brought to Agamemnon's lodging without mentioning the marriage. Lumley chooses to emphasize the peaceful and joyous arrival of a queen and her daughter into a community of women over class distinctions and relationships with men, which sets up a devastating contrast with the brutal almost-sacrifice by a group entirely made up of male soldiers.

Katy: Now, let's take a look at this same moment in Racine's *Iphigenie*.

Anna: "Iphigenie"... Sacré bleu! Ce passage n'existe pas en français de Racine! You heard me, this exchange does

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not exist in Racine's version! In Racine's version Clytemnestra's arrival is not scripted and instead the story pivots to Eriphile and Doris (her servant) digesting the information that Iphigenie needs to be sacrificed. Racine is reframing this canon event of Iphigenie's realization as something that privileges Eriphile's reaction. She is the titular Iphigenie after all. With that information, let's pivot into unpacking the range of ways this story ends:

Katy: Many scholars believe that Euripides' *Iphigenia* was finished by a third party after his death, making the sparing of Iphigenia an addition from an outside writer. Regardless of where the ending came from, The Euripides ending that we read in the original Greek and literal English translations follows pretty much the same pattern as Lumley's. Lumley's text also ends with the reported safety and excuse of Iphigenia, nature's supplying of a white stag, and Iphigenia being taken up by the gods. And Racine's, as we shared, does not end with the gods supplying an offering, but rather the gods demanding a non-Grecian body.

Anna: OOOooh, You know with an ecocritical context this range of endings offers some interesting insights. So, in Lumley's text, as Katy's just highlighted, the resolution is through the goddess Artemis supplying a natural or kind of supernatural perfectly white stag that has been fortuitously wounded and subsequently sacrificed. And this brings up a couple things for me: It makes me wonder what or who is the nature in this play? And if it is the gods that are nature, or the environment of this world. This ending punctuates that nature provides what nature needs.

Katy: Yeah...and alternatively, Racine's turns this idea of nature supplying for its own needs on its head. In Racine's text, the danger is that the wrong Iphigenie will be sacrificed. In this case, the Grecian Iphigenie rather than the Eriphile/Iphigenie from Lesbos.

Anna: Ooooofff. yeah. This ending brings up troubling ideas of the "othering" of non-Grecian bodies and the sense of conquest, and commodity of other races and overarching xenophobia of it all. Lois Tyson defines "othering" as the practice of judging all who are different as less than fully human. Essentially, othering divides the world between "us" (the "civilized") and "them" (the "others" or "savages").

Katy: The nature that Racine seems to construct is one that is interested in the preservation of the Grecians and Grecians' bodies over those of the Trojan "other" and their allies.

Anna: So in this ending nature uses a kind of natural selection to preserve and privilege a certain demographic. Hmm. That's information. So. It's giving pre-destination to me. Because Eriphile is from Lesbos, she is fated to be the one who is sacrificed. And she chooses to meet that fate on her own terms. Of course a dude writer would think that sacrificing herself is a good way for a woman to take control of her life.

Katy: And while Lumley and Euripides don't express that sentiment in quite the same way, the sacrifice is still predicated on othering. In both versions, Iphigenia tells her mother that it is right she should die because Greece is the best country in the world and must rule over the barbarians. Her death is required to uphold a system of "us" versus "them", and the world of the play deems this bloodshed worth it.

Katy: While these different retellings express some similar sentiments, they are expressing these sentiments for their own times and places. "Us" and "them" meant very different things to Euripides, Jane Lumley, and Jean Racine.

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Anna: When we combine theoretical lenses with historical context, we can begin to explore how different authors are speaking to their own historical moment while connecting to other historical moments.

Anna: So, I'm Anna Taylor

Katy: and I'm Katy Shinas, and thank you for joining us for this wild (windless) ride

Anna: and for exploring the patterns of tradaptation in Euripides *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Lumley's *Iphigenia at Aulis*, and Racine's *Iphigenie*.

Katy: We hope that you've enjoyed this episode and we hope that you will check out our classmates' podcast episodes from this season of *Writ In the Margins*!

Anna: And don't forget: Exist on your own terms!

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