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Review of: Edith Hall, *Adventures With Iphigenia in Tauris: A Cultural History of Euripides' Black Sea Tragedy. Onassis Series in Hellenic Culture*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013

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Edith Hall, *Adventures with Iphigenia in Tauris: A Cultural History of Euripides' Black Sea Tragedy. Onassis Series in Hellenic Culture.* Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xxxii, 378. ISBN 9780195392890. \$65.00.

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Preview

This review is tardy (for which the author apologizes) but also timely, since one of Hall's main points is that interest in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* tends to rise when the Crimean peninsula has been in the news. Her book offers a survey of the afterlife of Euripides' play from antiquity to the present day, identified as a "cultural history." This is the same rubric that Hall uses in her 2008 overview of the *Odyssey's* legacy, *The Return of Ulysses*, which adopts a similar approach to the study of classical reception. In both cases, Hall identifies the work's enduringly salient themes and then shows how those themes intersect with the particular interests of authors working at later periods. *The Return of Ulysses*, which is arranged by themes and covers a vast terrain, is a dazzling tribute to the epic's protean influence and a wonderful starting point for further investigations; *Adventures with Iphigenia in Tauris* is organized chronologically and presents a more detailed and pointed narrative that traces a single play's fortunes over time in relation to its more focused concerns.

This narrative is especially eye-opening for contemporary readers because the *IT* was in a period of relative eclipse during most of the twentieth century. Classicists whose views were formed during that time have tended to dismiss the play as one of Euripides' more outlandish works and to express surprise that Aristotle uses it as a prime example of successful tragedy alongside *Oedipus the King* in the *Poetics*. With its exotic setting and trio of important characters (Orestes and Pylades as well as the eponymous Iphigenia), the play does not fit well with twentieth-century criticism's main preoccupations, such as the isolated heroic individual or the dynamics of the *polis*. And, as Hall notes, the play's Crimean setting was out of view for western critics during a significant stretch of the twentieth century, hidden behind the "Iron Curtain."

Hall detects a surge of renewed interest in the *IT* in recent years, which she hopes her book will further advance. One reason for this, she proposes, is Iphigenia herself, the strong female protagonist who makes the play especially suitable for feminist revision. Hall celebrates Iphigenia as the clearest classical prototype for the modern quest heroine, an exemplary woman who travels great distances and displays courage, resourcefulness, and closeness to superhuman powers, while pursuing some cause other than the traditional female goals of romance, marriage, and motherhood. In antiquity, Iphigenia's

talents especially qualified her as a priestess and devotee of Artemis: she figures in the play as an authoritative conductor of sacrificial ritual, and was otherwise closely identified with Artemis, becoming herself a recipient of cult in Brauron. With its plot focused on the theft and relocation of Artemis' statue, the play looks ahead to the establishment of an important cult of Artemis in Attica, and its myth was widely adapted to explain Artemis cults across the classical world from Italy to Cappadocia. For modern feminists who have revived or adapted the play, such as JoAnne Akalaitis, Ellen McLaughlin, and Michi Barall, Iphigenia's associations with exile and sacrifice take on more metaphoric significance as these writers retell her story in order to ask questions about the demands and limitations imposed on women.

Iphigenia has not always been at the center of the play's ongoing significance, as Hall shows in her extended account of its wide-ranging legacy within antiquity. In the Roman world, the close friendship of Orestes and Pylades was the most compelling feature of the myth, especially the eagerness of each to die in place of the other, a plot detail that may have been introduced in Pacuvius' *Orestes*. The mutual devotion of the two friends is invoked by Cicero, Ovid, and Martial; in Lucian's dialogue *Toxaris*, it earns them the status of legendary heroes among the Scythians, who honor them with sacrifices and a temple and require small children to memorize their story. In the *Erotes* attributed to Lucian – and possibly in Augustine's *Confessions* – Orestes and Pylades become prototypes of same-sex male lovers; in Dante, they resurface as idealized exemplars of Christian love. These examples record not only a shift in focus among the characters but also the myth's migration into new genres, such as oratory, elegy, and the philosophical dialogue. It made its way as well into ancient material culture, especially in funerary contexts. Scenes from the *IT*, notably the recognition scene involving Iphigenia's letter to Orestes (especially admired by Aristotle), are common on fourth century Greek vases found in burials in Italy, perhaps, Hall speculates, because the bereaved drew comfort from a story set in sacred space in which grief and danger are overcome. A series of later sarcophagi testifies that the events of the myth also resonated with the concerns of Roman mourners of the second century CE.

The modern phase of this story begins with the rediscovery of Euripides' text by Triclinius early in the fourteenth century and its publication by Aldus Manutius in 1503, and is dominated by a series of theatrical versions designed in one way or another to recreate classical drama. The first of these, Giovanni Rucellai's *Oreste* of about 1520, well exemplifies the mélange of cultural influences that shape such revivals. Euripides' plot is reenacted in Christian terms, with Iphigenia as a thinly-disguised nun and Orestes as an exemplar of saintly self-sacrifice; there's an emphasis on friendship derived from Lucian's *Toxaris* (known through an influential translation into Latin by Erasmus) and a level of violence inspired by Seneca; the Tauric court of King Thoas is colored by contemporary views of the godless Ottomans.

Hall devotes considerable space to extended, nuanced discussions of two late-eighteenth-century milestones in the play's reception, both dating to 1779 (while also charting their own complex legacies): Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, a watershed in opera's development into an organic, formally integrated artform; and Goethe's stage play, *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, which builds to a strikingly reconceived (and now controversial) resolution that reflects Enlightenment values and debates about empire. Goethe's Orestes thinks better of stealing the statue; his Thoas protests the Greeks' habitual plundering of barbarian resources; and his Iphigenia persuades Thoas to give up human sacrifice and let them leave in peace. Another high point in the play's fortunes comes with the modernist movement, in which a fascination with Greek religion and the ritual dimensions of drama animated a dance version by Isadora Duncan and stage performances of Euripides's original script, including a student production at the

University of Pennsylvania in 1903, with Ezra Pound in the chorus and H.D. in the audience, and a sensational London production directed by Harley Granville-Barker in 1912, featuring Gilbert Murray's translation and a primitivist design inspired by Mycenaean and archaic Greek art.

Throughout this long and varied story, geography plays a leading role, as the designation "Euripides' Black Sea Tragedy" in the book's subtitle promises. For the original Greek audience, the play's setting evoked distance from home and the perils of travel, for Ovid a place of exile that could easily be equated with Tomis. When Catherine the Great annexed the Crimean peninsula in 1783, her mission was not only to recover this territory for Christianity from Muslim hands but also to reinstate the culture of the classical Greeks, now conveniently understood as close relatives of the modern Russians. It is no surprise, then, that Catherine's court had its own popular opera based on the *IT*, first performed in 1768, by Baldassare Galuppi. But Iphigenia and her companions could also be invoked in opposition to Russian claims. As they fought to limit Russian expansion during the Crimean War, British soldiers were identified with Orestes, Pylades, and other Greek heroes who had struggled on the same shores. In the "dramatic scene" composed by the Ukrainian poet Lesya Ukrainka starting in 1903, Iphigenia becomes a figure of resistance to the oppressive Tsarist regime. As a counterpoint to these specifically Taurian appropriations, we find a series of versions in which the play's exotic setting stands for other places that have been deemed remote, primitive, or barbaric, especially in post-colonial contexts. The *IT* has been adapted for diverse explorations of liberation and decolonization in twentieth-century Mexico (Alfonso Reyes's *Ifigenia Cruel*), Greece (Yannis Ritsos's *The Fourth Dimension*), and Australia (Lewis Nowra's *The Golden Age*).

In her forthright advocacy for this underrated play, Hall makes big claims for its transcendent significance. It is "a text that has influenced the formation of the western mind." "Iphigenia's brains, piety, clear sense of priorities, and courage made her unique as a female protagonist in ancient theatre . . ." Hall is certainly right that the *IT* deserves to loom larger than it has for most classicists over the past century. But her fascinating account of times and places in which the play has been important reveals, not so much grand universal themes, as a series of distinctive concerns that have struck a chord under particular conditions. The Taurian Iphigenia comes to the fore when there are cultural reasons for dwelling on virgin goddesses, primitive rites of sacrifice, self-denying male friendships, escape from barbarian kings, exile to the Black Sea, and possession of the Crimean peninsula. As that legendary terrain is once again being annexed by the Russians, we can surely look ahead to more adventures for Iphigenia.

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