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Contents

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Iphigenia Taurica and the Narrative Artificiality of Euripides' Prologues

Abstract

Taking *Iphigenia Taurica* as a case in point, this article will investigate the narrative artificiality of Euripides' prologues. By creating prologic pieces which defied the dramatic festivals' conventions, the Greek playwright distanced his tragedies from that kind of theatrical rituality, transforming them into a vessel for newly established and independent principles and values. Hence Euripides' prologues set and defined the pre-conditions of his dramas, which may be perceived as a new intellectual construction. This article will explore the relationship between the prologue and the rest of the play, epilogue included and will, therefore, consider the play as a tripartite integrated structure which tests the possibility of conciliating myth, and its divine protagonists, with men's new intellectual and ethical values.

Keywords: Euripides; prologues; *Iphigenia Taurica*; *deus ex machina*; verisimilitude

When approaching the writing of a play, a dramatist must take into consideration the fact that he has to inform the audience about the events related to the pre-dramatic past and the present dramatic situation, both necessary to understand the ensuing action. Among the Greek tragedians, Euripides conveyed this information in a particularly straightforward manner, that is, by entrusting one solitary character (the *prologizon*, as I will often define him in the course of the article) with rather long and detailed narrative speeches. These prologic pieces may easily give the impression of deviating from the norm of verisimilitude, in that they do not sound as plausible dramatic reproductions of real speech acts. In modern dramas, but also, as far as we can tell from their remains, in Greek tragedies other than Euripides', the speeches delivered by a single character on stage are employed (and allowed for) only when psychologically justified. Now, the majority of Euripides' prologues are devoid of this psychological plausibility, since the Euripidean *prologizontes* apparently start speaking with no reason and go

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on delivering a plain narration.[1] Moreover, they usually provide a lot of details which, even when relevant to the comprehension of the play itself, are often irrelevant in the characters' present condition. For instance, there is no point in the long genealogies which open several Euripidean prologues: why should the characters recall remote facts and people which have no connection with the present situation?

This article will focus on the question of *why* Euripides opened his dramas with such undramatic prologues and will consider them as a means to create a distance between the play and the dramatic festivals' rituality. While this rituality required the dramatist to open a space of dramatic illusion from the beginning of the play, Euripides contrarily emphasizes the gap between reality and the counterfactual world of drama.

As a result, the traditional tragic play gives way to a new intellectual construction, which can be considered as a kind of experiment: the prologue sets its initial conditions which will be developed in the course of the tragedy. Thus, the function of the diegetic prologue can be understood only in close connection with the plays' overall design. A detailed consideration of this process in the whole of Euripides' production would exceed the limits of this article, and I will, therefore, concentrate on *Iphigenia Taurica* (henceforth, *IT*) as a case in point of this dramatic practice. The play clearly exemplifies the mechanism through which the prologue becomes an integral part of an overall design. In this respect, the analysis of *IT* will allow us to draw some general conclusions which may apply to a number of Euripidean tragedies, i.e. *Hippolytus*, *Ion*, *Helen*, *Orestes*. These plays share two fundamental characteristics: they all stem from a divine order or intervention and are closed by the agency of a *deus ex machina*. With the exception of *Hippolytus* (428), these plays belong to a relatively mature phase

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[1] There is some approximation in this statement, as in some of his tragedies Euripides does 'disguise' the *prologizon*'s speech in more dramatic forms. This applies especially to his early tragic production: the prologue of *Alcestis* is cast as a farewell to Admetus' house; the prologic speech of *Medea* was already praised in the *scholia* for the verisimilar imitation of how real people would express their feeling (*sch. Med.* 57). The prologues of *Andromache* and the *Suppliant Women*, introduced by an apostrophe to Andromache's homeland and by a prayer to Demeter respectively, may be still perceived as dramatically motivated. But in *Heracles*, the *prologizon*, Amphitryon, starts speaking with no apparent reason; and Euripides' prologues become increasingly artificial with the passing years. In the *Phoenissae*, the eighty-line narration of the premises of the play is in no way justified by the dramatic exordium of Jocasta's speech (an apostrophe to the Sun). These examples seem to show how the 'undramatic' prologue was a later development, gradually introduced in Euripides' dramaturgy.

of Euripides' production, ranging from about 418/13 (*Ion*)[2] to 409 (*Orestes*). *Ion* dramatizes the consequences of Apollo's order, given to Orestes, to kill Clytemnestra, while the plot of *Helen* originates from Hera's order to Hermes to replace Menelaus' wife with a fake and hide the true Helen in Egypt. *Hippolytus*' and *Ion*'s prologues are delivered by a deity, which foregrounds their proleptic orientation. Despite a few differences, all these tragedies open and close with some kind of divine intervention, which is absent from the rest of the action. This entails the presence of a common circular structure which the analysis of *IT* can help identify, especially in order to establish what bearings it has on the issue of the relationship between the human and the divine worlds – which is, as it were, the pivot of Euripides' dramas. In particular, I shall point out the presence of two interacting spheres: traditional religion and cult, on the one hand, and human intellect and ethics, on the other. I will then focus on the crucial question of whether the initial distance between these two spheres, as stated in the prologue, is somehow bridged in the course of the play, and remarkably in the epilogue.

Before moving to the analysis, some preliminary terminological clarification is needed. If the term 'soliloquy' is usually employed to indicate the speech through which a solitary character pathetically expresses his thoughts and feelings, Euripidean prologic speeches' lack of dramatic pathos makes its use not completely appropriate. I will, therefore, employ here the more generic term 'monologue' and will refer to the dramatic implausibility of the Euripidean prologic monologues by labelling them as 'implausible', 'undramatic', or 'artificial'. Moreover, I will use the term 'premises' for the Greek term ὑπόθεσις which in ancient Greek scholarship refers to those pieces of information which must be conveyed in the prologue, and are listed by Meijering as follows (1987: 117): "who is on stage?"; "where is the scene laid?"; "what is the character doing there?"; "what has been going on before this?".[3] I will also use the word 'mimetic' as a synonym for 'dramatic'.

1. Critical Approaches to the Question of the Artificiality of Euripides' Prologues

A first negative (if comic) judgement on Euripides' prologues is contained in the famous underworld *agon* in Aristophanes' *Frogs*. In the competition with

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[2] According to the statistical analysis of the resolutions in the iambic trimeters in Cropp and Fick 1985: 23, table 3.5, the composition date of *Ion* may range between 418 and 413.

[3] This ὑπόθεσις must not be confused with the ὑποθέσεις which Aristophanes of Byzantium intended as an introduction to the play, containing information related both to the play and its *mise en scène*.

Euripides for the throne of the best tragic poet in Hades, Aeschylus ridicules
his rival's prologues by introducing the enigmatic formula "he lost his flask"
(ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν) in seven of them: *Archelaus*,[4] *Hypsipyle*, *Stheneboea*,
Phrixos, *Iphigenia Taurica*, *Meleagros*, *Wise Melanippe* (*Ran.* 1205-48). However
we interpret this phrase,[5] it is clear that Aristophanes is comically pointing out
the prosaicness, monotony, and absence of *pathos* of the Euripidean prologues.

Following Aristophanes, in the ancient tragic *scholia* the prologues are
blamed for their lack of dramatic quality.[6] A *scholion* on *Eumenides* (1a), for
instance, contrasts the effective soliloquy of the Aeschylean Pythia, who
speaks out of fright of the Erinyes, with the unemotional, and therefore un-
dramatic, speech of the Euripidean *prologizontes*:

> *Sch.* Aesch. *Eum.* 1a. . . . ἡ δὲ προφῆτις πρόεισιν ἐπικλήσεις ὡς ἔθος τῶν
> θεῶν ποιησομένη· ἀπροόπτως δὲ ἰδοῦσα τὰς Ἐρινύας κύκλῳ τοῦ Ὀρέστου
> καθευδούσας πάντα μηνύει τοῖς θεαταῖς, οὐχ ὡς διηγουμένη τὰ ὑπὸ τὴν
> σκηνήν – τοῦτο γὰρ νεωτερικὸν <καὶ> Εὐριπίδειον – ὑπὸ δὲ τῆς ἐκπλήξεως
> τὰ θορυβήσαντα αὐτὴν καταμηνύουσα φιλοτέχνως.[7]

> [The Pythia advances in order to perform the ritual invocation to the gods;
> however, having suddenly seen the Erinyes sleeping around Orestes, she re-
> veals everything to the spectators. She does not simply tell what is happen-

[4] See however Dover (1993: 339-40, *ad Ran.* 1206-8) on the double version of this
prologue.
[5] Dover (1993: 337-8, Aristoph. *Ran.* 1200) explains that λήκυθος "is a small pot
with a narrow neck and spout, which we may translate 'flask', usually containing
oil for rubbing on the skin, but also scent and cosmetics". The expression ληκύθιον
ἀπώλεσεν has often been interpreted as a sexual metaphor: ληκύθιον may suggest the
verb ληκᾶν, a slang word indicating sexual intercourse; moreover, one common type
of ληκύθιον had a phallic shape. When at l. 1203 ληκύθιον is combined with κῳδάριον
"little fleece" and θυλάκιον "little sack", the audience may think of "pubic hair, penis
and scrotum" (ibid.). However, the sexual interpretation is not convincing, for, as Bain
1985 has clearly underlined, it is inconsistent with the characters' statements about
the ληκύθιον, or with the imagery attached to it. For the sake of brevity, I refer the
reader to Bain's argumentations. A more convincing reading of this scene is provided
by Navarre 1933, who points out that Aristophanes reproaches Euripides for creating
monotonous and prosaic prologues, characterized by a prosaic tone, the repetition of
the same syntactical structure (name in nominative, participial clause, principal verb),
as well as of the same metric scheme (the end of the participial clause often coincides
with the penthemimeral caesura of the second or the third verse). The prosaicness of
the Euripidean *exordia* is signalled through the reference to humble, everyday objects,
such as the ληκύθιον, accompanied by other analogous objects like κῳδάριον and
θυλάκιον.
[6] On the *scholia*'s criticism regarding Euripides' prologues, see Elsperger 1906: 6-8;
Meijering 1987: 190-200.
[7] The *scholion* is quoted according to Smith 1993.

ing behind the scene – for this will be typical of Euripides and later drama-tists – but it is owing to her fright that she talks of what has confused her: this is an artistically effective choice.]

The modern understanding of Euripides' prologues has been influenced by the negative opinions of the *scholia* and has regarded them for a long time as sclerotized, "template" ("Schablone", Leo 1908: 23) or "rigid" pieces ("starr", Schadewaldt 1966: 24). This supposed lack of artistry derived from their al-leged 'objectivity', that is, their being seemingly dispassionate accounts de-livered by a dramatically isolated narrator, just like the prologue character of Latin comedy (see Leo 1908: 25; Schadewaldt 1966: 10; H. W. Schmidt 1971: 34-5). Towards the end of the twentieth century, though, this notion of objectiv-ity started to be challenged as scholars gradually realized that, far from be-ing objective, these speeches actually reflected their narrators' point of view. Moreover, the *prologizontes* were not viewed as detached from the dramas they introduced, but their words were seen as the expression of their own emotional involvement in the events.[8] The acknowledgment of the subjective quality of the prologic narration has advanced the critical comprehension of Euripides' prologues, but the question of *why* Euripides opens his plays with such undramatic speeches still remains unanswered.

A good starting point for unravelling this issue can be the association of the prologue with the final *deus ex machina*, which a few scholars intro-

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[8] Paola Albini noticed that in *Medea* and *Helen* the prologic narrators orientate their narration in order to emphasize specific elements; Medea's nurse wavers between compassion for her mistress and fear of her possible future actions, whereas Helen strives to redeem her reputation from the shame of adultery, insisting on her conjugal fidelity (1987: 33-8). It would therefore be rather simplistic – Albini remarked – to define Euripides' prologues as mere narrative additions to the play, and their dramaturgical function should be reconsidered. Much on the same line, in the early 1990s, Charles Segal argued that "in the tragic prologue this voice [the speaker's] is neither impersonal nor objective. Euripides in particular often begins with what looks like epic objectivity; but this soon dissolves because the speaker is not an impersonal narrator and because the scene must also set up the crisis of the moment" (1992: 87). More recently, this narrative subjectivity has been investigated from a narratological point of view by Goward 1999 and Lowe 2000 (see esp. 157-87). Lowe has also provided a concise treatment of the Euripidean prologic narration (2004: 270-3), pointing out that "the prologues still leave gaps and ambiguities, and their narrators are anything but objective, impersonal authorities" (271). The narratological method has also been applied to the analysis of single dramas, as in Andreas Markantonatos' study on Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* (2002) or Anna Lamari's on Euripides' *Phoenician Women* (2010). These two studies provide an interesting scrutiny of these two play's prologues, which focus on how the narrators communicate off-stage events through analepsis, thus conveying their own vision of the events (see (Markantonatos 2002: 29-44 and Lamari 2010: 23-40).

duced at the beginning of the twentieth century. Both have been considered as stereotypical and manneristic dramatic devices aiming at the construction of a conventional religious and cultic frame, which was supposed to enclose a play that actually defies tradition through the introduction of new philosophical, religious and ethical stances. Verrall's opinion well represents this critical approach:

> In each case the body of the work, the story acted by the real *dramatis personae*, is strictly realistic in tone and fact, and in purport contradictory to 'religion' (that is to say, to certain decadent superstitions); while the prologue and the epilogue, in sharp opposition with the drama proper and therefore with manifest irony, assert *pro forma* the miraculous explanation which the facts tend visibly to invalidate and deny. . . . The use of this method . . . is characteristic of Euripides, and is the true cause of a phenomenon, which candid and reasonable judges have always admitted to be perplexing, the singular stiffness, formality, frigidity and general artlessness which often appears in his openings and conclusions. (1895: 166)

Verrall's view is shared by other critics, such as Décharme (1893: 397-401), Terzaghi (1938), Pohlenz (1930: 467-9), and W. Schmidt (1963: 212-13). This critical approach is still interesting in that it takes into account the interaction between the beginning and the end of the tragedy. However, as we shall see, the excessive emphasis on the disconnectedness of these two parts from the rest of the play, as if they were three independent sections, prevents us from understanding the overall project of the play itself. Although acknowledging that both prologue and epilogue are formally distinct from the rest of the play, we must conceive them as closely *integrated* with it.[9]

2. The Question of Euripides' 'Undramatic' Prologue

Before examining the relationship of the prologue and epilogue with the rest of the play, I wish further to underline the peculiarity of Euripides' prologues by comparing them with the Aeschylean and the Sophoclean models. I will do this by exploring their verisimilitude, that is, by investigating to which extent the speech acts performed on stage can be considered as plausible, if approximate, reproductions of real-life ones.

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[9] In chapter 15 of *Poetics* (1454a37-b6), Aristotle condemns the use of the machine to solve the tragic predicament; in his view, this device should only be used to reveal what had happened either before or after the dramatic action. Aristotle's critique, however, does not concern us here, as we are not considering the *deus ex machina* with regard to its integration into the dramatic action, but from a *thematic* point of view only.

Aeschylus did not open all his tragedies with a prologue:[10] two of them, the *Persians* and the *Suppliant Women*, started directly with the *parodos*. The initial scene of *Persians* may be perceived as slightly implausible as the chorus first introduce themselves and then dwell on the narration of past events, thus speaking longer than seems required by the dramatic situation. This has to do with the peculiar status of the tragic chorus that, as Guido Avezzù remarked, is "a character endowed with peculiar performative features" (2015: 12-13). On the one hand, the tragic chorus may be perceived as "an alien partition in respect to the dramatic action" (8) due to its mythological digressions and self-referential comments. On the other hand, the tragic *choreutae* do not break the 'fourth wall' by addressing the spectators (as instead happens with the comic chorus, especially in the *parabasis*). Despite this 'narrative licence', in the *Persians* the opening choral speech finds its psychological justification in the Chorus' anguished anticipation of news coming from the Persian army in Greece. The *Suppliant Women*'s prologue is even less 'implausible', as the Danaids are praying to Zeus, the protector of the suppliants (l. 1), while also invoking the city and the land of Argos (l. 23). Thus, their speech sounds as the verisimilar reproduction of a real-life speech act.

More clearly than his choral openings, Aeschylus' prologues are well rooted in a plausible dramatic situation. The *Seven Against Thebes* begins with Eteocles' speaking to his citizens. The watchman's speech in *Agamemnon* has often been mentioned as a typical example of a psychologically justified soliloquy (see, for instance, Schadewaldt 1966: 7). Walter Nestle, however, argued that the watchman's speech is artificial, in that he describes his actions instead of performing them: "the watchman only narrates that he is addressing the gods, he is trying not to fall asleep, that he spends his time singing and whistling etc., but he does not act all this".[11] Nestle drew the same conclusion about the Pythia's speech in the *Eumenides*. Yet, the idea that these Aeschylean prologues are formally artificial is unacceptable since the psychological plausibility of the Watchman's and the Pythia's words, their emotional colouring, as well as their integration in a verisimilar dramatic situation ensure that the prologues could not be perceived as an undramatic premise to the play. Moreover, as we have seen, the *scholion* on *Eumenides* did understand this crucial difference in comparison with Euripides' prologues.

As regards the second play of the *Oresteia* trilogy, i.e. the *Libation Bearers*, the fragmentary status of its prologue does not prevent us from under-

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[10] Aristotle defines the prologue as the entire part of the tragedy preceding the entrance of the chorus (*Poetics*, ch. 12, 1452b19-20).

[11] "Der Wächter erzählt nur, daß er die Götter anrufe, gegen den Schlaf kämpfe, sich die Zeit mit Singen und Pfeifen vertreibe usw., aber er agiert dies alles nicht", 1967: 21).

standing that Orestes introduces his prologic speech through a prayer to Hermes (see on this Brown 2015). As in the case of the *Suppliant Women*, this speech also sounds verisimilar.

All in all, we can conclude that Aeschylus' prologues were not as artificial and psychologically unjustified as most Euripidean prologues. In his turn, Sophocles' dialogical prologues are even more distant from Euripidean practice. In his plays the dramatic premises are revealed in a dialogue between two characters, in which one informs the other about what has gone by.[12] The spectators are smoothly introduced into the fictional world of the drama; such device is specifically commented upon in the tragic *scholia*, which often praise the "plausibility" (πιθανότης, see Meijering 1987: 193) of Sophocles' prologues. In this regard, Euripides' prologues stand in striking contrast with Sophocles', in that they actually expose the gap between reality and the mimetic world of the plays. The Euripidean *prologizon* remains on the threshold, as it were, of the drama, as his/her speech is in fact neither a dialogue nor a psychologically justified soliloquy. Thus, the spectators experience the paradox of a figure who is still in an in-between not yet dramatic position, and describes the mimetic world before it becomes really mimetic. He or she can even deictically allude to other characters who may be present on stage, if only as mute presences.[13] Indeed, one could even expect that, being independent and detached from the dramatic action and therefore having no apparent reason to interrupt or wind up his or her speech, the *prologizon* may go on indefinitely.

The dramatic implausibility of these speeches is further underlined by the *prologizontes*' motionlessness. Unlike the Sophoclean ones, who move around the stage realistically describing the play's imagined space,[14] Euripidean *prologizontes* are often provided with a reason to remain still: for example, they can be presented as suppliants sitting beside an altar (see *Andromache*, *Heracleidae*, *Heracles*, *Helen*). Nevertheless, we normally understand such reason only

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[12] Contrariwise, the *Trachiniae*'s prologue may be considered as a soliloquy, since it is not clear whether the Nurse, who speaks from l. 49, is present right from the start (see on this Schmidt 1971: 27-34).

[13] In *HF* 14 Amphitryon points to Megara (Μεγάραν τε τήνδε); in *Tro.* 36 Poseidon points to Hecuba (τὴν δ' ἀθλίαν τήνδ(ε)).

[14] In *Aiax*, Odysseus looks for and examines Ajax's footprints in order to understand whether he is in his tent; in *Electra*, the pedagogue describes the topography of Argos to Orestes (see Avezzù 2004: 157-9). An interesting combination between words and action can be found in *Philoctetes*; in its prologue, Odysseus describes Philoctetes' cave as he remembers it, asking Neoptolemus to tell him if it is still inhabited; Neoptolemus, who can actually see the cave, confirms Odysseus' memories by describing the objects it contains. Finally, in *Oedipus at Colonus* Antigone describes to her blind father the place they are in, even though she does not know exactly where they are until she is told by a passer-by.

at the end of the prologue itself, after the *prologizon* has expounded the mythic background of the action that will ensue. This "retarded motivation", as Schadewaldt aptly defined it,[15] does not eliminate the impression of artificiality: for most of the prologic monologue the lack of motion of the *prologizon* is not motivated by an apparent dramatic situation but is the reflection of an undramatic speech act. Furthermore, even when the spectators eventually comprehend the cause of this motionlessness, the long monologue to which they have been listening still sounds dramatically groundless. In *IT* 42-3, for instance, Iphigenia claims that she will tell a dream which she had in the previous night "to the air" (πρὸς αἰθέρ[α]), hoping that the ominous message that she read in it (i.e. Orestes' death) is false.[16] This may explain why she indulges in narrating the dream (43-62), and yet does not justify the previous forty-two lines, in which the princess painstakingly described her origins, the Aulis sacrifice, her arrival in the land of the Taurians, and her present duty as a priestess in Artemis' temple. Her tale is simply too long and detailed to fit in the dramatic situation, nor is it adequately justified from a psychological point of view. While Aeschylus' initial monologues were emotionally coloured, Iphigenia, like the majority of the Euripidean *prologizontes*, is not sufficiently agitated or emotionally stirred to make a case for such a detailed account.

Against this backdrop, it is easy to understand that the end of the prologic speech and the beginning of the canonical dramatic action are signalled by either a fully 'dramatic' speech act or by a movement or gesture. The former is generally an apostrophe that the *prologizon* addresses to another character – which can nevertheless go unheard or unheeded;[17] also, one character who was already present on stage from the beginning may

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[15] "Nachgetragene Motivierung" (1966: 8-9n4). Schadewaldt points out that, while Euripides always provides a practical reason for the presence of the *prologizon* on stage, he does not provide an "interior" ("innerlich", 10), that is, psychologically plausible, reason why he or she should speak. In this he corrects Leo, according to whom Euripides did not provide "exterior", nor interior motivations (1908: 23).

[16] "Narrating an ominous dream to the sun and the sky was believed to prevent the omens of doom from coming true" (Kyriakou 2006: 64, *ad IT* 42-3).

[17] In *Hcld.* 48 Iolaos tells Heracles' children to come close to him in order to protect them from the Argive herald sent by Eurystheus; he then addresses the herald himself (l. 52). In *Hec.* 55 Polydorus' ghost addresses his mother, who cannot hear him. In *Ba.* 55 Dionysus calls the chorus of Asian maenads. In *Tro.* 45-7 Poseidon greets the city of Troy before leaving (even though he will not actually leave, being prevented by Athena's entrance). Finally, in *Pho.* 84 the apostrophe takes the form of a prayer to Zeus. As regards *Hec.*, it is interesting to note that Polydorus feels pity for his mother and pronounces the interjection φεῦ, an expression of pathos which the prologue character cannot use until he/she becomes fully dramatic.

start speaking or a new one may enter and start a dialogue.[18] A movement towards the extra-scenic space is rarer, and mainly concerns the supernatural *prologizontes*, who exit in order to leave room to the human characters.[19]

In order to fully understand this Euripidean gradual disclosure of the dramatic world, we should not forget that Attic tragedies dramatized portions of mythical stories that were to be mounted during a festive celebration. Through a long narrative introduction rooted in the distant mythical past and terminating in the character's own present, Euripides exposes how the dramatist operates a selection of myth material and transforms it into a dramatic representation. In other words, he brings to light the making of the drama itself, that is, a process that would normally be regarded as an implicit premise of the play's own staging. Moreover, by shaping this narration in a way which is not compatible with the requirements of dramatic plausibility, Euripides distances himself from the dramatic festivals' normal practice, according to which the dramatist created a counterfactual world that should unfold and come 'alive' before the spectators right from the beginning of the play. Thus, Euripides dissociates his plays from the festivals' cultic rituality, implying that his tragedies must be considered as autonomous works of art, regardless of the cultic frame in which they are staged. If tragedies were normally supposed to be rooted in the Athenian community's socio-political mind-set and practices because of their connections with rite[20], Euripides makes clear that his dramas possess aesthetical,

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[18] In *HF* 59 Alcmena, who has hitherto stood silently on stage, even when she has been called into cause by Iolaos at l. 14, 'comes alive' and starts to speak. In *Suppl.* 42, it is the chorus who begin to speak and start off the action. A new character, unannounced by the *prologizon*, enters in *Med.* 49, *Andr.* 56, *El.* 54, *Hel.* 67, *Or.* 71, whereas in *Alc.* 24, Apollo announces the entrance of Thanatos.

[19] With the exception of Dionysus in *Ba.*, the other supernatural prologue characters (Aphrodite in *Hipp.*, Polydorus' ghost in *Hec.*, and Hermes in *Ion*) never reappear on stage after the prologic monologue. Only twice do human characters exit after the prologic monologue: in *IT* and *Pho.* In *IT*, the dramatist needs Iphigenia to leave the stage, so that she will not meet her brother, while in *Pho.*, Iocasta abandons the stage thus allowing for Antigone and the pedagogue to appear in the the *teichoskopia* scene (88-201).

[20] A long tradition of studies underlines the link between the tragedies and the socio-political context in which they were staged. On the one hand, Longo 1990: 14, Seaford 2000, Croally 2005: 67 maintain that tragedy was supposed to confirm the civic values. On the other hand, Vernant and Vidal-Naquet argue that "although tragedy, more than any other genre of literature, thus appears rooted in social reality, that does not mean that it is a reflection of it. It does not reflect this reality but calls it into question" (1990: 33; see also Goldhill 1990: 127). Contrary to both positions, Jasper Griffin contends that tragedy had no political function, and its main aim was to give pleasure (1998: 60-1; 1999). In my opinion, tragedy was probably supposed to revive old mythological stories, and to show their enduring relevance for Athenian contemporary society. However, the tragedians could not but express in their works the growing distance between the mythical values and the ones of contemporary Athens. My contention is that, through the diegetic prologue, Euripides marks his distance not only from myth, but also from the *polis*.

ethical, and intellectual values which should be regarded as independent from or even inconsistent with those same thoughts and practices. This understanding of the prologue as an isolating device which actually separates the play from the ritual context contradicts conclusions like those of Verrall, which saw the prologic monologue as a link to that same context.

Thus, while tragedies were normally meant to re-actualize myth in the *polis*, Euripides aimed at testing whether myth was in agreement not only with acknowledged and collective values, but also with the new intellectual, religious, and ethical concepts which were developing in his times. His *prologizontes* have a special role in this and while they voice the mythical premises of the play, they also act as mediators between the audience and myth itself; by doing this, then, they have the 'opportunity' to orient the audience's response to the mythical past, as well as to the ensuing tragic plot, which builds on this past. In this regard, *IT* is a case in point in the investigation of the reasons that led the dramatist to assign the introduction of his play to an individual character who delivers the initial monologue from a specific perspective.

3. *Iphigenia Taurica* as a Dramatic Experiment

We may now focus on *IT* as an example of how Euripides constructs his dramatic experiments. In the first place, we should examine the above-mentioned correspondence between prologue and epilogue, that is, the two parts of the play in which the deities intervene. The prologue contains two forms of supernatural intervention, though narrated by Iphigenia. Firstly, the heroine explains that Artemis saved her by sweeping her off to the Taurian land, thus creating the initial conditions of the play (28-30). Secondly, she recounts a prophetic dream, which she has had in the previous night (42-55): it should act as a warning against the possibility that she kills her brother Orestes, but the heroine refers instead its content to the past, interpreting it as a revelation that Orestes is already dead.[21]

In the end, it is Athena who intervenes in order to prevent Thoas, king of the Taurians, from capturing Orestes and Pylades, on the run after the

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[21] In her dream, Iphigenia was sleeping in her paternal palace in Argos, when suddenly an earthquake forced her to flee outside, where she saw the house collapsing apart from a single pillar. This pillar took then human form and voice, and Iphigenia sprinkled it with water as she is used to do in order to prepare the victims for sacrifice. Iphigenia interprets the dream as follows (55-8): "Orestes is dead – he was the victim that I sprinkled in preparation for sacrifice. The pillars of a house are its male children, and those on whom my holy water falls are killed" (trans. by J. Morwood).

Prince has killed his mother, and to entrust Orestes and Iphigenia with the task of founding new cults in Attica (1435-89).

Thus, prologue and epilogue create a supernatural frame for a play acted only by mortal characters. Yet, the fact that the divine intervention we find in the prologue is indirect, that is, mediated through the narration of a mortal should not be overlooked. The meaning of this Euripidean choice can be better understood by comparing it with what happens in a play like *Hippolytus*, whose prologue is delivered by Aphrodite. There the deities' usual foreknowledge takes the form of a proleptic design, resulting in the entire tragedy being shaped as the fulfilment of that prologic project. The goddess announces that she will prove her power by punishing Hippolytus for refusing to honour her as he should (1-22), and then describes her plan to chastise him, even though she does not go into detail (23-50). As Francis Dunn aptly pointed out, "*Hippolytus* begins at the end. As the play gets underway, it seems that the action is already finished, and the hero of the drama is as good as dead" (1996: 88). Indeed, this tragedy does not look like an open experiment, but like a demonstration of a theorem: the theorem of divine power. In *IT* we do not find the same circularity since the play is not introduced by a deity, but by its protagonist. In principle, Euripides could have followed the same pattern and could have brought Artemis on stage, but this choice would have forced him to make the goddess at least partially justify the ambiguities and the contradictions of her behaviour. She would have had to clarify if she had actually asked for Iphigenia's sacrifice, or if Calchas, the seer, had falsely interpreted her will.[22] Moreover, she would have been urged to explain why she moved Iphigenia to a country where she must perform human sacrifices: does the goddess relish in human blood? On the contrary, since Artemis appears neither at the beginning, nor at the end of the play, she is exempted from vindicating her own actions, and indeed, as we shall see, the play leaves these questions largely unanswered. Nevertheless, the choice of avoiding a divine *prologizon* also prevents the drama from being nothing more than the fulfilment of a divine plan, as happened in *Hippolytus.* In fact, this allows us to define *IT* is not as a demonstration of divine power, but as an open experiment on the relationship between men and gods.

The play's prologue determines a profound gap between the human and the divine realms. Not only do the gods' decisions have dire effects on men's lives, but they also appear unintelligible to men; on the one hand,

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[22] Parker (2016: xxxix) writes that "in *IT* there is no suggestion whatever that Artemis demanded the sacrifice"; however, there is no evidence, apart from the subjective belief expressed by Iphigenia in her long soliloquy (380-91, see below), that she did not.

human beings are hardly ever able to interpret the divine messages correctly, as is the case of Iphigenia's dream.[23] And yet those orders are often incompatible with the human moral sense, as in the case of the matricide imposed to Orestes[24] or the human sacrifices. Significantly enough, these issues are filtered through the perspective of Iphigenia, the mortal who has most suffered and suffers because of the obscurity and contradictoriness of celestial will. At ll. 35-41, she explains her obligations as a priestess in the goddess' temple and clearly condemns Artemis' lust for human sacrifices as morally revolting.[25] The princess is incensed against the goddess who relishes an event – a 'festival', as she sarcastically defines it – based on human sacrifices. Only the name of Artemis' festival is indeed καλόν, "beautiful" (36),[26] while the ceremonies there performed are hideous. In fact, in Iphigenia's monologue, καλόν is the only adjective which reveals the narrator's own judgement, together with τάλαιν(α), "wretched", of l. 26, as Iphigenia calls herself for having being cheated into coming to Aulis under the false promise of marriage with Achilles. These two adjectives point out the girl's double source of suffering and rancour, not only against her father – as well as the other Greeks – but also against Artemis.

After Iphigenia's monologue, the same atmosphere of indignation and resentment against the gods re-emerges in the second scene, when Orestes and Pylades enter the stage. The two friends have sailed to the Taurian land in order to steal the image of Artemis from the goddess's temple and bring it to Attica; it is a mission with which Apollo has entrusted Orestes, so that he can be freed from the Erinyes, who have been persecuting him after the matricide. In an apostrophe to Apollo, Orestes – who should be Phoebus' protégé – calls into doubt the intentions of the god who, after obliging him to kill his mother, may lay another trap for him (77-9). In fact, the relationship of Orestes with Apollo appears to be here as deteriorated as the one between Iphigenia and Artemis. The prince's pessimism about Apollo's real purposes degenerates when, after being captured by the Tau-

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[23] With respect to Iphigenia's dream, Caroline P. Trieschnigg justly remarked that "[i]ts complexity and obscurity make the audience experience the difficulties of interpretation, which relates to one of the main themes of the play, namely the human limitations in understanding the divine" (2008: 463).

[24] Cf. the strong condemnation of the matricide in Dioscuri's speech at the end of Euripides' *Electra* (1244-6): δίκαια μέν νυν ἥδ᾽ ἔχει, σὺ δ᾽ οὐχὶ δρᾷς. / Φοῖβος δέ, Φοῖβος—ἀλλ᾽ ἄναξ γάρ ἐστ᾽ ἐμός, / σιγῶ· σοφὸς δ᾽ ὢν οὐκ ἔχρησέ σοι σοφά. "Her [i.e. Clitemnestra's] punishment is just – but not your deed. And Phoebus, Phoebus – but he is my lord, I keep silent. Wise though he is, he gave you unwise bidding" (quoted according to Diggle 1981, trans. by M. J. Cropp).

[25] This passage is well known for being syntactically intricate as well as philologically problematic. I intend to analyse it in a separate contribution.

[26] *IT* is quoted according to Diggle 1981.

rians, he and his friend Pylades are about to be sacrificed to Artemis. Orestes accuses Apollo of having condemned him to die far away from Greece, out of shame for his first oracle which ordered the murder of Clytemnestra (711-15).[27]

However, albeit in the play human beings must face the puzzling obscurity and the apparent meaninglessness of the divine decisions, they are still able to develop a new, purer conception of the divinity by attributing to the gods an ethical prominence which has no mythic correspondence. It is Iphigenia who asserts her belief in divine moral perfection declaring that she "believe[s] that no god is bad" (οὐδένα γὰρ οἶμαι δαιμόνων εἶναι κακόν, 391). She rejects the idea that Artemis truly enjoys being honoured with human sacrifices, and argues that in fact it is the Taurians who, being bloodthirsty themselves, ascribe their ethic faults to the goddess (379-80). Criticism against the immorality of myth is not unprecedented in Greek literature (see, for instance, Xenophanes' rationalistic views or the Pindaric rejection of the myth of Tantalus' human banquet in *Ol.* 36-63). Yet, what is peculiar about this passage is the fact that it is a dramatic character who denounces it. Paradoxically enough, Iphigenia surprisingly denies Artemis' approval of the Taurian sacrifices, even though it was Artemis herself who moved her to the Taurian land to attend those same rites. The mythical bases of the play are therefore called into doubt by the very character who has been directly involved in those events and who has expounded them in the prologic monologue. This is indeed the paradox of myth which, after turning into drama, denies itself by means of its own creatures.[28]

The characters' refusal of the mythical image of the gods is also conveyed by the emphasis they lay on the value of familiar love which men believe the gods should also share. Maria Serena Mirto (1994: 80-1, 93) has

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[27] Orestes, however, changes his mind after the recognition scene, when he acquires new confidence in his ability to accomplish the mission prescribed by Apollo. Indeed, he argues, if men are brave, the gods will be more eager to help them (909-11). Even though this opinion comes from his partial understanding of the events, it is not enough to dismiss it as irrelevant. In fact, such statements demonstrate the extent of human ignorance and man's inability to understand reality as well as the suffering caused by unintelligible divine decisions.

[28] On the characters' criticism of the mythical gods in Euripides' plays, see, among others, Papadopoulou 2005: 85-116. As she writes, focusing on *Heracles*, "Hecuba in *Trojan Women* and Iphigenia in *Iphigenia among the Taurians* also refused to believe that gods are imperfect. Heracles moves one step ahead here because, realizing that gods have indeed proven to be imperfect, he not only criticizes them but refuses to call them gods" (114-15). As regards *IT*, Papadopoulou argues that "Iphigenia's 'idealized' notion of divinity may seem sophisticated and appealing, but its validity is far from certain". In fact, we shall see that the gods eventually fail to fully adapt to Iphigenia's purified image of them.

cleverly underlined the relevance of this theme as a new possible 'communication channel' (the definition is mine) between humans and gods. The two human siblings, Iphigenia and Orestes, believe that the divine ones, Apollo and Artemis, will be united by the same affection they feel for one another, and will consequently favour their attempt of fleeing from the Taurian land. It is Orestes who first applies the idea of familiar harmony to the divine sphere, surmising that Apollo cannot have ordered the theft of Artemis' statue without the consent of his sister (1012-16); on her part, Iphigenia exploits this argument when she prays Artemis to forgive her and her brother for the theft and to let them sail off with it (1082-8; 1398-402).

Thus, the finale of *IT* brings about the implicit question whether the divine world will prove sensible to men's longing for justice and compassion. The answer to this question is passed on to Athena who, in her final *rhesis* (1435-76), invests Orestes and Iphigenia with the task of founding new cults in honour of Artemis in Attica (1446-67). Critics have often held this final focus on religion to be rather unsatisfactory, arguing that the *exodus* fails to provide a credible explanation for the actual reasons behind divine behaviour. Apollo and Artemis, around whom the play's action has been revolving, do not appear in the epilogue and therefore never reveal the reason of the many sufferings they have caused to the mortals, nor, in the case of Artemis, what her position on human sacrifices actually is. Wright refers to a fairly common opinion when he laments the "absence of intellectual or spiritual meaning" in *IT*, also adding that "in the place of theological profundity", the play ends "on a note of emptiness" (2005: 381-2).[29] However, seeing no profundity in this *exodus* means to miss the signs that hint at a possibly positive evolution of the divine world. In order to detect them, we should start noticing that Orestes' mission to the Taurian land is endowed with a twofold (human and divine) purpose. On the one hand, it is aimed at liberating his sister and, on the other, at transferring Artemis' statue and cult to Attica. At the beginning of her speech (1435-1441b), Athena explains to Thoas that Orestes has come not only in order to bring Artemis' statue to Athens, but also to rescue his own sister. Here she first mentions the human element which had not yet been revealed to Orestes in Apollo's oracle. In fact, these two aspects are united by the value of familiar love, which the deities eventually seem to comprehend. It is again Mirto (1994: 93) who observes that, at the end of her speech, Athena specifies that she will escort the Greeks in their return journey "in order to look after my *sister*'s venerable statue" (σῴζουσα ἀδελφῆς τῆς ἐμῆς σεμνὸν βρέτας, 1489, emphasis added). This final remark is no casual addition, but shows how the gods have developed a concern for familial relationships, the same to which Ip-

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[29] Wright refers this statement also to *Helen.*

higenia appealed in her prayer to Artemis. Athena will take care of Artemis as Orestes has done with his own sister. This tinges Apollo's oracular request with a brotherly concern for the spreading of Artemis' cult. As Donald Mastronarde has remarked, "the goddess Artemis is in need of rescue from herself by her brother and in need of the civilizing influence of Athena and Athens" (2010: 165).

This 'humanization' of the divine also affects the nature of Artemis' cult, as the new Attic rites devoted to her will put an end to the human sacrifices, thus becoming attuned with human morality and sensibility.[30] In this regard, we may draw a connection between this ritual improvement and Iphigenia's trust in divine goodness, which she expressed in her soliloquy. If that early act of confidence contradicted the play's mythic background, that is, the play's 'past', it now finds its fulfilment in the prospective cult, that is, in the play's 'future'. In other words, the divine world has evolved from the initial conditions accounted for in the prologue to the final results envisaged by Athena's speech. Yet, far from being self-directed, this transformation has relied on men's shrewd ability to accomplish the mission prescribed by the gods.

However, it would be hasty to define *IT*'s ending as unproblematically happy;[31] indeed, an utterly positive reading clashes with the numerous elements that flaw the ethical evolution of the supernatural world. The newly established Attic cult of Artemis asks for a priest to perform a violent ceremony during which a man's neck is cut in order to gather some blood (1458-61), an act which is 'metonymically' remindful of the Taurian human sacrifices (see Cook 1971: 122) and, as Athena clearly states, compensates Artemis for the loss of those rites. This testifies to the difficulty of converting the primitive gods to a new, purer conception of religion. But more significantly, this finale does not eliminate the impression that human beings may only act like puppets in the hands of the gods. In this regard, Emanuela Masaracchia (1984) has called attention to the fact that Iphigenia's future as a priestess in the Brauron temple counters her desire, to which she has repeatedly alluded throughout the play, to go back to Argos and enjoy the normal life of an aristocratic woman (see, for instance, l. 220, where she expresses her sorrow for having been "deprived of marriage, children, homeland, friends", ἄγαμος ἄτεκνος ἄπολις ἄφιλος). This conflict between

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[30] These new rites could be partially due to Euripides' invention (see Kyriakou 2006: 457, *ad IT* 1458-51).

[31] Gilbert Murray agreed with this kind of interpretation; according to him, *IT* "begins in gloom and rises to a sense of peril, to swift and dangerous adventure, to joyful escape" (1913: 143). Similarly, Spira celebrates the "healing element" ("heilendes Element") contained in Athena's epiphany, which brings about a "restoration of order" ("Widerherstellung der Ordnung", 1960: 120-1).

men's aspirations and fate is not explicitly thematized here (unlike in Euripides' *Electra*, 1308-41, where Orestes and Electra grieve their exile and separation), and yet Iphigenia will be obliged to serve Artemis, regardless of her own will. Human beings must obey divine pronouncements, even though they cannot fully understand them. And yet, the gods themselves are far from being omnipotent, since they are subject to the power of Necessity (τὸ χρεών), which, as Athena states, rules over men and gods alike (1485). Thus, reality is determined by an obscure supernatural power, which lies beyond human understanding.

4. Conclusions

Taking *Iphigenia Taurica* as a case in point, I have tried to investigate the narrative artificiality of the Euripidean prologues by setting them within the context of the dramas they introduce. Contrary to a tradition of studies which maintained that the prologue is a means to establish a 'mechanic' and conventional connection with the rituality of the Attic dramatic festivals, I have argued that the prologue is aimed at isolating the play from that same context. It can be said that Euripides aims at bringing about in his audience a sense of intellectual detachment from drama. This does not mean that he refuses or bypasses the establishment of an emotional empathy between his plays and the spectators, and yet the overall effect of theatre should not be limited to this. Therefore, while the play itself may be an enthralling piece of work, its two extremities (the prologue and the epilogue) should instead lead the audience to an intellectual perception and understanding of the dramatized action.[32] By looking at Euripides' plays as a sort of investigation, we may notice that the prologues set the initial conditions, whereas the epilogues allow us to evaluate their results. This clarifies how the intellectual message of Euripides' plays can be understood only through a global reading of each play. In fact, although many critics have regarded the diegetic prologue and the *deus ex machina* as two rigid structures separated from the play, by looking at *IT,* as a case in point, I have argued that all parts of drama, though distinct, are strictly combined. Instead

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[32] As Ann Michelini writes, "emotion and reasoning . . . appear concentrated and stylized, in separate areas. The result, as always, of this sort of arrangement is that the audience are enlisted as active rather than passive participants in the dramatic experience, since the synthesis of the parts so severed can occur only in their minds, and since they cannot trust and surrender to a dramatic event that fails to present itself as an acceptable quasi-reality" (1987: 106). In fact, Euripides' tragedies do not present themselves as a "quasi-reality", but as an intellectual construction, aimed at developing specific intellectual and 'philosophical' issues.

of emphasizing the independence of the play from its opening and closing pieces, underlining their exclusive connection with Greek traditional religion, it is more accurate to say that the entire play exhibits the co-existence of two levels: the cultic and the human one. The sacrificial rites which Iphigenia is forced to perform among the Taurians as well as the religious mission which Apollo has assigned to Orestes and Pylades pertain to a religious sphere, while the human level is represented by the experiences, the feelings, and the desires of the mortals. At the beginning of the play, the human and the divine spheres are separated by a profound gap, as the obscure celestial decisions have caused men to go through misery and woe, fostering feelings of resentment against the gods. However, even though in the mythic tradition the ambiguousness of the gods' decrees and their dubious morality – dubious at least for the most 'enlightened' intellectual circles – are a given and the necessary premise of a play dealing with myth, nothing would prevent Euripides from depicting a more sincere and sympathetic relationship between men and gods in his plays.[33] Indeed, if his human characters are able to develop, throughout the drama, a new model of morality, affection, and intellectual capacities, one may legitimately ask whether these human elaborations will be somehow shared by the gods, in other words, whether the gods will become more 'humane', their decisions will come out less opaque, and their behaviour will be more in line with human ethics. The meaning of the final direct intervention of the deity is indeed that of providing an answer to these questions.

The most prominent element in many Euripidean epilogues is the foundation of new cults and new rites. This creates a new connection between the play, and hence myth, and rite, which seems to compensate for the disruption of that same relation, which took place in the diegetic prologue. But how should we judge this ritual finale with regard to human sensibility? The answer can vary from play to play. At the end of *Electra*, the two siblings, Orestes and Electra, are forced to separate from each other and to leave their native country (1308-41), which signifies the impossible conciliation between religion and human aspirations. *IT*'s finale is more problematic since, from a human point of view, its positiveness is rather hard to establish. Unlike in *Electra*, Orestes and Iphigenia are not present when Athena delivers her final speech. Therefore, we cannot know their reactions

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[33] This is true also with respect to the human characters who have acted as the instrument of the divine will; even when they have performed questionable actions, it does not mean that Euripides considers them as morally corrupted individuals since the very beginning of the play. As Martin West writes in the introduction to his edition of *Orestes*, "[t]rue, Orestes has killed his mother, and Electra helped him; but this is a fixed datum of the tradition, it is the very definition of Orestes and Electra, not something Euripides has used to give them a bad character" (1987: 33).

to it. Will Iphigenia, who has repeatedly expressed the desire to lead the normal life of an aristocrat woman, be pleased in continuing to be Artemis' priestess in Greece too? The question remains unanswered. Nevertheless, the overall impression is that, in this tragedy as well as in the others, the sphere of traditional religion and cult cannot fully contain the human longing for a fairer and more understandable world. While seemingly celebrating the Greek rituals, Euripides exposes their inadequacy in coming to terms with a deeply felt religious and ethical sense. Thus, the remote mythical stories and the rites which have allowed incorporating them in contemporary Greece public life are similarly devoid of real significance.[34]

If traditional religion, with regard to both myth and contemporary rituality, fails the mortals' expectations, the play's ending still displays a positive element, that is, the human protagonists' own virtues, which they have demonstrated all along. And this is what Euripides holds as truly significant for his contemporaries. Thus, the contrast between the formal rigidity of prologue and epilogue and the more open structure of the rest of the play may be even better appreciated. While human sensibility can express itself throughout the play, it is curbed and even 'oppressed' in its two extremities by the overwhelming demonstration of a supernatural arbitrary power. This is emblematically expressed, in the prologue, by Iphigenia's repressed condemnation of Artemis' delight in human sacrifices, and in the epilogue, by Athena's statement that both humans and gods must yield to the yoke of Necessity. However, these limitations do not diminish the importance of human values, which have proven ethically superior to the conventionality of myth, and therefore, we may say, will continue to live after myth itself. The mortals have proven their ability to react most honourably in the face of the hardest predicament, and in this, Euripides' experiment has definitely succeeded.

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[34] In this respect, Vincenzo Longo (1963) rightly perceived in Euripides' final scene a flair for the erudite mythological excursus, which reveals his lack of belief in the traditional mythical deities and preludes to the Alexandrine fondness for aetiologies.

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