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Sample Readers' Guide (p. 197-202)

Eric Shanower's *Sacrifice*

This scene closely follows the plot of Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Euripides final surviving play, produced four years after his death. Although he had won first place at the Dionysia (a festival of tragic plays) only a few times, this play was a winner for the dead playwright. (A full text of *Iphigeneia at Aulis* is available at The Internet Classics Archive, at http://classics.mit.edu/Euripides/iphi_aul.html, and also at the Perseus Project:

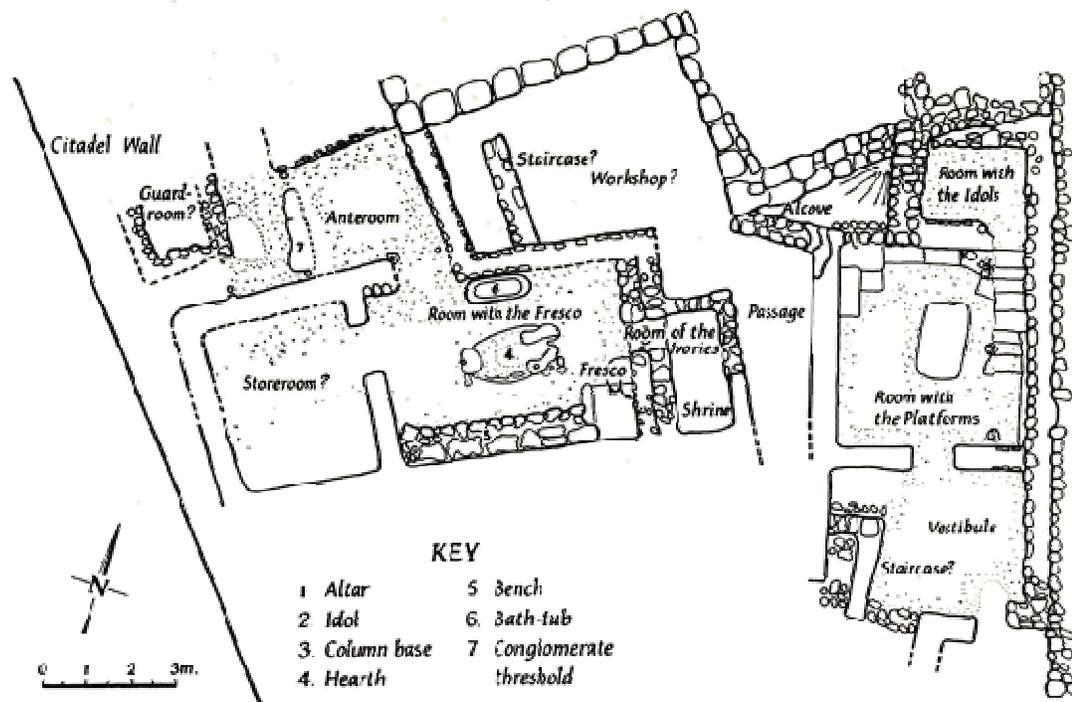
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text;jsessionid=0D5F4C5CD6636F25E3C46676EBE2AD38?doc=Perseus%3atext%3a1999.01.0108>)

Achilles has a personal commitment of honor to rescue Iphigenia. Her mother has begged him for help, and his name has been implicated to entrap her with a false offer of marriage. The girl is moved, both by his reverence for honor and glory, and by his unhesitating willingness to take action, to sacrifice his life for her when he does not even want to marry her.

The scene opens when Achilles rushes in bleeding from stones thrown by his own men, who are as eager as any to go to war. The idea of the beloved "Myrmidon" troops of Achilles throwing stones at their own commander may seem unbelievable, but it is a detail added to the *Iphigenia at Aulis* (1350) to illustrate mob behavior in war, and the many standing against the few. Euripides had lived through the terrible 30 year war of Athens and Sparta, and experienced the warmongering mentality of his democratic city.

Shanower draws Agamemnon's hut and the people within it to resemble Mycenaean artifacts and archeological finds. As the field marshal, Agamemnon would have been entitled to the more durable "megaron" (central hall) hut, whereas common soldiers would have merited only the

tents mentioned so often in the *Iliad*. Similar houses that were found in excavations at the Cult Center of Mycenae show that the hearth Shanower draws here would have vented through a hole in the center of the roof. (See Shear, I. M. (1987). *The Panagia Houses at Mycenae*. Philadelphia: University Museum, University of Pennsylvania), also the following map of the Mycenae Cult center, at http://www.odysseyadventures.ca/articles/mycenae/article_mycenae04-cultcentre.html .



Shanower’s drawing of Achilles is true to Homer’s description of the “flowing haired Acheans.” Minoan art of the Mycenaean era show men as well as women with long hair. Like the much later classical statue of the Diadoumenos, or “headband –fastener” of Polykleitos, Achilles keeps his hair out of his eyes with a headband. But a vase depicting warriors found at

Mycenae in the 13th Century shows warriors with their hair cut short, under helmets.



Lily-Prince, painted relief plaster from the palace at Knossos, c. 1425 BCE, Archaeological Museum, Iraklion, Crete. See <http://www.all-art.org/history42.html>)



Roman Copy (1st C. BCE) of the Diadoumenos by Polykleitos (5th C. BCE) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. See: <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/25.78.56>)



Athens, National Archeological Museum: The Warrior Krater: late 13th cent. BC, terracotta. Front view: six warriors, each armed with a small shield and a spear and clad in chiton, short breastplate and helmet. Front view: six warriors, each armed with a small shield and a spear and clad in chiton (tunic), short breastplate and helmet.

Shanower's drawings of women also have archeological inspiration. For instance, the jeweled necklace that Clytemnestra is putting into a coffer resembles the beautiful gold jewelry from Mycenaean tombs now at the National Archeological Museum at Athens:



(Photograph: <http://www.greek-thesaurus.gr/Mycenaean-jewelry-photo-gallery.html>)

Shanower draws women with ringlet hairstyles and dresses with full, flounced skirts and tight bodices, akin to those on Minoan and Mycenaean frescoes and goddess figurines. Here is the famous statuette of the “Snake-Goddess” from the Palace of Knossos in Crete, and a reconstruction of a lady in a Procession from the Mycenaean palace of Tiryns:





“Snake Goddess,” c. 1450 BCE, from Palace at Knossos, Iraklion Archeological Museum and “Processional Lady,” 13th-14th c. BCE, from Palace at Tiryns, National Archeological Museum, Athens. Also see “Two women in a Chariot” from Tiryns Palace: http://www.greek-thesaurus.gr/images/p4/two_women_in_a_chariot.jpG

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Iphigenia, faced with the prospect of almost certain death, and inspired by Achilles’ love of honor, decides to obtain that honor for herself. Her decision to give her life is the central moment of “*peripeteia*,” the turning point of action. This was a very important plot device in Greek tragedy. Aristotle identifies it in his *Poetics* as an essential turning point in the action of the tragedy, without which the plot remains static. (Arist. *Pol.*1450a 32. Full text translation of the *Poetics* by Samuel Butler is

available for download at: <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.html>, also at the Perseus Project: www.perseus.tufts.edu.)

In *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Euripides expands the use of this dramatic device, employing many *peripateias*, not only one. Characters take actions that prevent and then enable the sacrifice several times in succession, raising the emotional pitch until the story arrives at the decision of the sacrificial object herself.

On this page (198), Iphigenia is drawn in the lower left panel as she supplicates Achilles to support her course. Supplication was the formal request of a favor, and it was accompanied by a physical gesture towards the supplicated person, usually grabbing the knees. The person supplicated could not ignore the suppliant or get away, and if he or she agreed to the request, was bound to it by a sacred trust. It is a “typical” action in Homeric poetry, in that it occurs repeatedly and formally. Clytemnestra, a married woman and mother, is within social norms in performing this gesture to Achilles in a previous scene (Shanower, *Sacrifice*, p. 188). Iphigenia, however, as a maiden, makes her request with her arms extended, not immodestly touching a man. Supplication is actually mentioned by Clytemnestra in the *Iphigenia at Aulis*, as not befitting a maiden:

“Will you have her clasp your knees as a suppliant? it is no maid's part; yet if it seems good to you, why, come she shall with the modest look of free-born maid” [992-4]

Greek vase painting has many fine examples of supplication scenes, such as this one of the Trojan Princess Cassandra being dragged away from the Palladium, a sacred statue of the Goddess Athena, by the Greek Ajax “the Lesser.” Even though Athena was against the Trojans, she made sure Ajax was punished for violating her suppliant.



<http://www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/Mythology/AjaxAndCassandraLouvreG458.html>

In the lines that follow her decision, Iphigenia discloses a personal motivation: her sense of her own worthlessness, and the comparative great worth of Achilles and the men of the expedition. The idea that one person does not count against the many was a familiar aspect of Athenian democracy in Euripides' day. Euripides adds to her rhetoric the popular sentiment about the comparative value of women and men: Iphigenia places them in a value ratio of one man for ten thousand women (1395). Aristotle's *Politics* reveals a very similar view of the inferior worth of women, children and slaves: "Again, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled." (Arist. *Pol.* 1254 b13). On this logic, one might argue that the entire Greek mission, the "rescue," for Helen, a single woman, should never take place. (For full text of Aristotle's

Politics, see: <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.html>. Also, for Greek women and their status see Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves. Women in Classical Antiquity*, New York 1975, and *Diotima*, a website on Ancient Greek women by Lefkowitz and Fant at <http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/wlgr/>)

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Iphigenia thinks of Achilles as a husband. In Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Tauris*, she is described as having actually married him (215, Full text translated by Potter at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0112%3Acard%3D203>). The idea of marriage at the age of 13 was not remarkable for the ancient Greeks. Ironically, Sparta, the territory of Agamemnon, later became the only Greek city state that allowed girls to wait until age 17 or 18 to marry and bear children. The Spartans found that this decreased the rate of death in childbirth. (See Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* 1.2-10. and Plutarch, *Life of Lycurgus* 14-16 both at <http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/wlgr/wlgr-greeklegal97.shtml>). The Athenians, on the other hand, found that these slightly older brides were too sassy and would talk back to their husbands, so they stuck with the younger marriage age. Xenophon, the Greek philosopher, considered 14 the best age for a bride, since girls were easily influenced and schooled to their husband's ways at this age. (See Xenophon, *On Household Management [Oeconomicus]* 6.17-10, exc. G at <http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/wlgr/wlgr-privatelife267.shtml>).

Iphigenia certainly bears out his idea in her behavior here, since she considers Achilles as her husband, thinks of his interest before her own, and follows his example in seeking after honor. Some theatrical productions of

this tragedy have played Iphigenia's character as a fanatical glory seeker, making a misguided choice for the cause of war. (See the 2004 National Theater of London production, at <http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/?lid=7783>). Her extreme youth does match up with our modern experience of teens committing terrorism and suicide under the influence of extremist ideas. (For a few examples of bibliography on this issue, see Alcorta, C.S. 2010, Biology, Culture, and Religiously Motivated Suicide Terrorism: An Evolutionary Perspective, Politics and Culture: <http://www.politicsandculture.org/2010/04/29/biology-culture-and-religiously-motivated-suicide-terrorism-an-evolutionary-perspective/>)

The marriage and funeral rituals had certain similarities in Greek religious practice. Brides, as well as corpses, were adorned, washed, and then made a procession. It was not uncommon to refer to young girls who died young as “brides of Hades,” the god of the underworld. Thus the concept of a human execution as a perverted marriage was a popular one in Greek tragedy. In Sophocles' *Antigone*, the heroine goes to her living tomb singing a bridal hymn to death:

“Oh my tomb and bridal chamber—my eternal hollow dwelling place, where I go to join my people...”(Soph. *Ant.* 998-1000. trans. Ian Johnston, 2005: <http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/sophocles/antigone.htm>).

Iphigenia at Aulis shows a similar preoccupation with the “death in marriage” theme; the chorus in particular focuses on marriage as a virtuous institution debased by this human sacrifice demanded by warmongers:

“But the Argives will crown you, wreathing the lovely tresses of your hair, like a pure, dappled heifer brought from some rocky cave, and staining with blood your human throat; though you were never reared

among the piping and whistling of herdsmen, but at your mother's side, to be decked as the bride of a son of Inachus. Where now does the face of modesty or virtue have any strength? seeing that godlessness holds sway, and virtue is neglected by men and thrust behind them, lawlessness over law prevailing, and mortals no longer making common cause to keep the jealousy of gods from reaching them.” [1080-1095]

The Greek film of Euripides *Iphigenia at Aulis* (by Cacoyannis, with Irene Pappas as Clytemnestra, 1977), focuses on this aspect of the play. At the end of this scene, Iphigenia asks for her bridal veil for her procession to the sacrificial altar: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxzvn_Rw_hI.

For some commentary of the similarity of the rituals, see "Til Death Do Us Part: Marriage and Funeral Rites in Classical Athens by Jana Shopkorn <http://old.perseus.tufts.edu/classes/JSp.html>

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Achilles gives Iphigenia a surprising kiss. The ancient Greeks did kiss, and they had a few different words for different types of kisses (see <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/definitionlookup?type=begin&q=kiss&target=greek>, also

<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=kiss&searchmode=none>).

Kissing was a traditional Greek gesture of honor and supplication. We see this from Homer's reference to kissing in the Iliad, where Priam says he must kiss the hands that murdered his son (Homer, *Iliad*, 24.475-480. See full-text at

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0134%3Abook%3D24%3Acard%3D468>).

Vaughn Bryant, an anthropologist, has theorized that the Greeks did not kiss romantically at first, but learned how when Alexander conquered

India (Cronk, L., & Bryant, V. M. (2000). *Through the looking glass: Readings in general anthropology*. Boston: McGraw-Hill., p. 159-160). This is contradicted by the images of kissing in paederastic vases, where lovers kiss their beloveds. This 5th century BCE vase by the Briseis painter bears witness that kissing was known as part of love:



Tondo from an Attic [kylix](#), 5th c. BC by the Briseis painter. [Louvre](#)

When Clytemnestra first encounters Achilles in *Sacrifice*, he has no wish for marriage. Euripides creates the character on the same lines, in the *Iphigenia at Aulis*, he even states that he actively avoids women, even though thousands of girls seek him in marriage. He is drawn into helping them because of the taint on his honor, not because of any sympathy for the girl herself, or even for horror at her fate:

It is not to secure a bride that I have spoken thus—there are maids unnumbered eager to have my love—no! but king Agamemnon has put an insult on me; he should have asked my leave to use my name as a means to catch the child, for it was I chiefly who induced Clytemnestra to betroth her daughter to me; I would had yielded this to Hellas, if that was where our going to Ilium broke down; I would never have refused to further my fellow soldiers' common interest. But as it is, I am as nothing in the eyes of those chieftains, and little they care of treating me well or ill. [959-970]

Every person or thing had its own particular virtue, or *arete*. The *arete* of women was “loving moderately,” not renown in war, as Euripides’ chorus of women say in the *Iphigenia at Aulis* :

A great thing it is to hunt virtue, for women when they love quietly; while in men, an inborn sense of order, shown in countless ways, adds to a city's greatness.”(569-572)

Thus the glory, or *kleos*, of the Homeric warrior was usually closed off to women. Yet Iphigenia attains it by contributing her feminine obedience to the masculine cause of the warrior. This turns out to be the surefire way to secure Achilles’ heart. Although he did not want to marry her before, Iphigenia has shown herself a worthy wife for him. Her sacrifice for her own *kleos*, and for his as a warrior in Troy appeals to the theme he understands the best: dying young for glory:

Daughter of Agamemnon! some god was bent on blessing me, if I could have won you for my wife. In you I consider Hellas happy, and you in Hellas; for this that you have said is good and worthy of your fatherland; since you, abandoning a strife with heavenly powers, which are too strong for you, have fairly weighed advantages and needs. But now that I have looked into your noble nature, I feel still more a fond desire to win you for my bride. Look to it; for I want to serve you and receive you in my halls; and, Thetis be my witness, how I grieve to think I shall not save your life by doing battle with the Danaids (1405-1415).

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Clytemnestra's reaction: as the one left behind, she is more shattered by the decision than Iphigenia. A mother's loss is bitter: Iphigenia's last request to her mother not to seek vengeance is impossible; the seeds of future tragedy are implanted at this moment, and the cycle of familial violence of the will continue as a the subject matter of the Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, the only Greek trilogy left to us entire.

In the *Agamemnon*, the first play of the cycle, the sacrifice of Iphigenia is actually described as one of the roots of the murder of Agamemnon. Agamemnon is not ever truly given a choice in the sacrifice, which is presented as the will of Zeus (Aesch. *Ag.* 205-220). Clytemnestra's revenge, however, will be no less harsh. A fundamental difference in Aeschylus' play is that the chorus sings of Iphigenia as an unwilling victim, shooting "bolts of pity at her father with her eyes"(Aesch. *Ag.* 240). She is only a victim, not the near fanatical heroine of *Iphigenia at Aulis*. (See translation by Herbert Weir Smyth, Ph. D. in two volumes. 2. *Agamemnon*. Harvard University Press. 1926. at the Perseus Project:

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text;jsessionid=0D5F4C5CD6636F25E3C46676EBE2AD38?doc=Perseus%3atext%3a1999.01.0004>).

On the bottom left panel, Clytemnestra's outstretched hand is a posture of formal grief and leave-taking often depicted on funeral cinerary urns. Mourning was a programmed activity and a formal industry in the Classical Greek world.



(Funerary plaque, ca. 520–510 b.c.; Archaic, black-figure Greek, Attic Terracotta H. 10 1/4 in. (26.04 cm) Rogers Fund, 1954 (54.11.5): <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/54.11.5>)

Iphigenia's farewell to Orestes was also performed in Euripides' play (1450): the dramatist often made use of children, who could be used to a very pathetic effect, and who, as silent actors, did not have to be paid. (See G.M. Sifakis, *Children In Greek Tragedy* Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies Volume 26, Issue 1, pages 67–80, December 1979. Online 3/12/2010, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.2041-5370.1979.tb00498.x/abstract>).

After the fatal moment of the summons from the army outside, Clytemnestra makes a well-founded objection that Iphigenia is too young to know what she is doing, and is met with a response familiar to parents of teens throughout history: “Don’t disgrace me!” In this case, the pathos of the young girl’s trance upon hearing the “call” of the goddess also resonates with parents of teens under the influence of powerful enticements. For the ancient Greeks, however, the call of Artemis represented a social ritual that Ancient Greek girls and boys underwent as part of taking their place in adult society. The rites of Artemis varied drastically from place to place, ranging from painful ordeals, to innocent competitions. Little Athenian girls revered her by dressing as bears and dancing in her honor at Brauron, where the cult statue attested in the *Iphigenia in Tauris* resided. (*The Princeton Encyclopedia of Classical Sites, Brauron, at* <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0006:id%3Dbrauron&redirect=true>). There is a tradition that the Spartan cult of Artemis Orthia demanded that a youth on the cusp of manhood be sacrificed, but that the Spartans transformed this into an ordeal of a terrible beating with rods at the sanctuary (Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 6. 20. See <http://www.theoi.com/Cult/ArtemisCult4.html> for primary sources on the cult of Artemis). Many young men did not survive this ordeal. Artemis had a reputation as a jealous and demanding goddess. Although she was protective of wild things and children, she has many ritual and mythic links with human sacrifice.

As Iphigenia steps forth and the sacrificial procession begins, the “shshshshs” in the panel borders that represent the wind die out. Many scholars have interpreted the wind that kept the Greek troops at Aulis as a

legendary adaptation of a real meteorological phenomenon: the annual “Meltemi,” known to the ancient Greeks as the Etesian (yearly) winds. These still blow for about 40 days during the summers from the North/Northwest (<http://www.weatheronline.co.uk/reports/wind/The-Etesian-Winds.htm>, also see E. Greswell, *Origines Kalendariae Hellenikae*, <http://books.google.com/books?id=rp8NAAAAQAAJ&lpg=PA465&ots=PPSo3bSX5U&dq=etesian%20winds%20Aulis&pg=PA465#v=onepage&q=etesian%20winds%20Aulis&f=false>).

The dying of the wind at this point underscores the theme that it is the willingness of Iphigenia that is the most important element of the act, not the bloodshed against her. As Burkert writes in *Homo Necans* (p. 4) the Greeks made the sacrificial animal nod its head on the way to the altar, to indicate its willingness to die. Without acceptance, the sacrifice had no value. (Burkert, Walter: *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*. University of California Press, 1983.)

As she takes the irrevocable walk, Iphigenia offers her girlhood to Artemis, goddess of children, and by stopping the winds, seals the doom of many more in Troy.