

Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* and European identity

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Abstract

*The reception of Euripides' Iphigenia among the Taurians from the Renaissance onwards reveals the crucial role which Greek representations of inter-ethnic encounters have played in the historical process of the building of the European, Christian and colonial identity. The play enacts a plot with a transparently 'colonial' agenda that involves Greeks stealing something valuable (a statue of Artemis) from a less advanced, 'barbarian' community and removing it to their homeland. The reception of the play needs to be read in close conjunction with perceptions of the peninsula known as the Crimea, ruled from 1441 to 1783 for the Ottoman Empire through the Crimean Khans. The use of the tragedy to negotiate the emergence of a European identity is clear from Giovanni Rucellai's attempt to turn the ancient Greek play into a tragedy acceptable to contemporary readers and spectators, his *Oreste* of 1525. Rucellai's Greeks behave in the Black Sea as if aware that they are destined to become exemplars of Christian humanism, and his play was the Renaissance bridge over which Iphigenia, Thoas, Orestes and Pylades walked from antiquity and into the modern world. The exceptional appeal of Iphigenia among the Taurians in the late 17th and 18th centuries, during the course of which it was made into very many operas and plays besides those by Goethe and Gluck, is set against a background of the countless abduction plays and operas of the time and indeed the eventual Russian annexation of the Crimea in 1783, leading to the creation of a revived ancient Greece in the Black Sea — the most telling of symbols of European resistance against the Ottoman Empire. It was only in the 20th century that the barbarism of the Taurians became called into question through writers critiquing colonialism and its supremacist ideologies.*

Keywords

Euripides – Iphigenia – Tauris – Europe – Identity.

One of the most significant Euripidean plays in the creation of European identity has been the one which most clearly enacts a conflict of Greek and barbarian cultures in a context far distant from Athens, Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (henceforward *IT*). This is also the sole surviving play by Euripides set in an area whose claim to being European has long been in doubt. Thinking about the history of this play's reception involves thinking about the different constituents of European identity over the centuries, and the criteria — cartographic, ethnic, religious, national, geopolitical, or psychological — which have been used to define it.

The tragedy is set in a coastal city within the Tauric Chersonese, now known as the Crimea, or rather as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, which is part of southern Ukraine. Ukraine, of all the former Soviet republics, is perhaps the most keen to join the European Union and indeed NATO: its definition as European or not, in economic and political terms, could scarcely be more important to world peace and stability. The play *IT* was probably imagined by its ancient audience as being set in a sanctuary in or just outside the actual ancient polis of Chersonesos, near Sevastopol, on the south-western side of the Crimean peninsula. Sevastopol itself is today the subject of contestation between Russia and the Ukraine. It is a municipality independent of the surrounding Autonomous Republic of Crimea; it was only in 1997 that, by an uneasy treaty, Russia gave up territorial claims. It was agreed that both Russian and Ukrainian navies should mutually use the port facilities. The region in which Euripides' play is set is today, therefore, a ticking Eurasian political time bomb.

The ancient city of Chersonesos was founded by Greek Heracliotis from the southern Black Sea, themselves Megarian colonists. The foundation date is now said by archaeologists to be as early as the last years of 6th century BCE, despite the traditional foundation date of 421, found in some (late) ancient authors.¹ Recent excavations have shown that indigenous Taurians and Greeks lived in close intercultural contact, even sharing burial sites. The indigenous maiden goddess, Parthenos, was assimilated to the Greek Artemis, a fusion which is provided with an aetiology at the end of Euripides' narrative: Athena orders the ancient sky-fallen image of Artemis to be removed by the Greek adventurers to Halae Araphrenides in Attica, and Iphigenia to become the priestess of Artemis at nearby Attic Brauron (1347-67). Regardless of whether or the Crimea is to be defined as European, *IT* is a parable of Greek colonisation of the Black Sea, played out on a level of myth and fantasy. It ends, remarkably, on a relatively harmonious note, with Thoas, King of the Taurians, accepting the new theological order and allowing the image to be removed. Unlike Theoclymenus in Euripides' *Helen*, Thoas is not sexually predatory. He is also respectful of Iphigenia and only aggressive when he realises that the Greeks have escaped with the sacred image from the sanctuary. At some level this ambiguous ending must both mediate Greek colonisers' fears about the alien cultures north of the Pontus and reflect the relative harmony in which the Taurians and the Greeks seem for the most part to have co-operated. It is revealing that the people of Tyana in Cappadocia explained the name of their town by claiming that it was originally named Thoana since Thoas, who in their version had pursued Orestes, had died there (Arrian, *Periplus Pont. Eux.* 6).

¹ Sarypkin 1997, 21.

Europe did exist as an idea, more or less, when Euripides' plays were being first performed, as we can see from Herodotus and the fifth-century Hippocratic *Airs Waters Places*. This treatise systematically compares the peoples of Europe and Asia, arguing that the differences it defines in their physiology and psychology can be explained by such environmental causes as climate and type of landscape.² But exactly where Europe stopped and Asia began in the Black Sea area was unsure. No cartographic or macropolitical certainty had ever been established; in literature the boundaries of both continents remained fluid. I am, however, inclined to think that Euripides' original audience thought that the Tauric Chersonesos was European. Early in the play (135) the chorus (according to the manuscript tradition) apparently sing that they have left *Eurōpan*, but this is almost certainly a misreading of 'p' for 't', between which letters, in the Greek alphabet, the difference is tiny. The chorus are actually dreaming, like so many maiden choruses in tragedy, of dancing for Artemis at her Spartan cult centre, by the reedy river *Eurōtan*.³ Doubt whether the cold, northerly Crimean peninsula could actually be described as 'Asiatic' lurks in all the ancient literary sources about Iphigenia's host country, even if in the visual arts, by the fourth century, at any rate, Euripides' Taurians were often seen as vaguely 'oriental', even identifiably Persian, in their costume and accoutrements.⁴

IT was one of the most popular of all plays in antiquity. Iphigenia and Orestes were reputed to have taken the image and the originally savage worship of 'barbarian' Artemis to a substantial number of ancient cult centres as well as those in Attica, including the temples of Diana of Nemi in Italy, Artemis Orthia in Sparta, and Artemis/Anaitis in Lydian Philadelphia.⁵ Euripides' play was famous enough to introduce Tertullian's list of the savageries which (he said) the theatres showed were practised amongst the uncivilised peoples of the Pontus, followed in his list by two of the best known tragedies, *Medea* and *Prometheus Bound* (*Against Marcion* 1.1.3): in the Black Sea, 'the only thing warm is savagery — savagery which has lent to our stages stories about the sacrifices of the Tauri, the love affairs of the Colchians, and crucifixions of the Caucasus'.⁶ Tertullian, a North African Roman, is here attacking another Christian, who came from the southern Pontic city of Sinope. Perhaps Tertullian's rhetorical ploy can therefore suggest why a myth used in antiquity to explain the spread of the pagan cult of Artemis and her

² See Hall 1993.

³ Hall 1987.

⁴ See, for example, Thoas enthroned, wearing a *tiara* and the attendant waving a punkah-fan on the red-figure *IT* vase in the Museo Nazionale di Spina, T1145.

⁵ Hall 2012, ch. 7.

⁶ *Nihil illic nisi feritas calet, illa scilicet quae fabulas scenis dedit de sacrificiis Taurorum et amoribus Colchorum et crucibus Caucasorum.*

congeners became so popular amongst the Christian Europeans of the Renaissance, Early Modern and 18th-century periods. For from the moment of its early 14th-century rediscovery in Demetrius Triclinius' Thessaloniki scriptorium, along with the other 'alphabetic plays' by Euripides, *IT* played a significant role in the construction of the identity of Europeans as global colonisers and as Christians, defined against Muslims.

This takes us back to the geographical specifics of the play. The reception of *IT* needs to be read in conjunction with the perceptions of the Crimean peninsula that were circulating at the time of each response to the ancient text. When Demetrius Triclinius discovered that manuscript, the Crimea was partly under the control of the Genoese and the Venetians, but from 1441, all the way until 1783, it was ruled for the Ottoman Empire through the Crimean Khans. When Euripides' *IT* was first printed in the early 16th century, the man on the imperial throne of the Crimea was Mengli I Giray. In an era when Western readers filtered their perceptions of Xerxes in Aeschylus' *Persians* through a lens constituted by their popular stereotypes of Ottoman emperors,⁷ Thoas *inevitably* became associated with the Crimean Khan on the throne at the time. The use of the tragedy to negotiate the emergence of a European identity which fused Christianity with a particular reading of Greek mythology is clear from the first published adaptation of *IT*, Giovanni Rucellai's attempt to turn the ancient Greek play into a tragedy acceptable to contemporary readers and spectators, his *Oreste* of 1525.⁸ Rucellai was a Florentine priest in the circle of the Medici. His Greeks behave in the Black Sea as if aware that they are destined to become exemplars of Christian humanism, and his play was the Renaissance bridge over which Iphigenia, Thoas, Orestes and Pylades walked from antiquity and into the modern world. Although it was not performed, as far as we know, until 1712 (followed by a revival in 1726)⁹ Rucellai's *Oreste* circulated widely at a time when modern-language *translations* of the tragedy remained curiously unavailable: *IT* could not be read in Italian or English until the mid-18th century,¹⁰ nor in French and German for several further decades.¹¹

In Rucellai's version, the description of the statue of Artemis's revulsion at Orestes' pollution shows the influence of the miracle tradition, while Iphigenia conducts herself with the emphatic chastity of a Roman Catholic nun devoted to the Virgin Mary. Like his close friend Gian Giorgio Trissino, often regarded as

⁷ See Hall 2007.

⁸ Using the text in Rucellai 1726.

⁹ Rucellai's play was certainly performed at the Collegio Clementino during the Roman carnival (where plays were traditionally performed before the cardinals). The subtitle of the 1726 edition reads 'tragedia... rappresentata nel Collegio Clementino nelle vacanze del Carnovale dell'anno 1726'.

¹⁰ Carmeli 1743-54, vol. x; West 1753.

¹¹ Prévost 1782-97; *IT* is included (along with *Medea* and *Hippolytus*) in Mähly 1800.

the founder of neoclassical drama, Rucellai wanted to create a new literary play that utilised the best the ancient world had to offer in the service of Christian humanism. His play's ultimate importance lies, however, in its circulation as an example of a modern tragedy closely based on an ancient one. As soon as *IT* was discovered as literature worthy of imitation it was interpreted in the way that fitted a culture defining itself in opposition to the Ottoman Empire, and it was as a statement of Christian belief in the face of barbarous false religion that it was subsequently to develop its reputation — and eventually its stage presence — in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Since we have lost Coqueteau de La Clairière's *Pylade et Oreste*, performed by Molière's company, *en route* to Rouen, in 1659,¹² the earliest surviving staged adaptation of *IT* was one by Charles Davenant, performed in London in 1677. It was called *Circe* because it imported the famous Odyssean enchantress into the tragic plot by marrying her to Thoas. The outlandish setting is associated with the Ottoman Empire, for example through the name of Thoas' daughter, Osmida. The equation of the Turks with the barbarian opponents of Greeks to be found in ancient tragedy was facilitated by the growing awareness, in the later part of the seventeenth century, of the continued existence of the Greek nation. This awareness was fostered by Milton's interest in Greece and by the cultural prominence of Greek visitors to England, who were sponsored by Charles II himself. Davenant's play was adapted into a much lighter, spectacular musical comedy, revived repeatedly until the 1720s, and was an outstanding commercial success. In this entertainment, the barbarous Ottoman King Thoas was invariably humiliated and vanquished, and usually actually killed. The same is true of almost all of the ensuing flood of operas, dramas (and later ballets) on the *IT* theme from the Minato/ Draghi *Il tempio di Diana in Taurica* (which premiered in Vienna in 1678, just five years before the Ottoman siege of the city) onwards. Librettists persistently adapted the Euripidean story so as to remove all its ethical complexity, and exacerbate the conflict between Greek and Taurian, with an Ottomanised, cruel and licentious Thoas, a far less interesting character. *IT* became a violent and often sexualised escape fantasy that bolstered their European and Christian self-image.

Similar monochrome politics underpin Handel's *Oreste*, performed in London in 1734, and derived ultimately from Gianguelberto Barlocchi's *L'Oreste*, written for Benedetto Michaeli's opera of that name (Rome in 1723). The premise of such entertainments is the crude, binary contrast between enlightened Europeans and the unenlightened inhabitants of the places to which superior naval technology enabled them to travel. The Handelian Thoas is both wicked tyrant and sexual predator, and is justly killed when the Greeks restore liberty to his rebellious people.

¹² See Gliksohn 1985, 70.

Handel's *Oreste* heralds the fate of *IT* for the next century and a half,¹³ during which it was rediscovered as an elevated text for serious adaptation in opera, in particular Tommaso Traetta's *Iphigenia in Tauride* (1763), and subsequently Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, in which Thoas is irredeemably vicious and thoroughly deserves his violent end. Gluck's opera was an astonishing success, performed more than ninety times between 1779 and 1787 in Paris alone. The Ottoman associations can be heard loudly in it, above all in the *a la Turca* idiom of the savage dance of the Scythians.¹⁴

The geographical setting of the Euripidean play had, by the later 18th century, become a crucially important region once again in the mind of Europe. Many accounts of European travellers to the region stress the luxuriousness and savagery of the infidel inhabitants, and the ancient story of the escape of an intelligent heroine from a backwards and religious barbarian community will have had immediate, contemporary reverberations that we ignore at our peril. Ottoman forces were still attempting to besiege Vienna in 1683; they failed, but between that year and the treaty of Jassy in 1792, Turkey was at war with either Austria or Russia for no fewer than forty-one years. The Turks made notable advances in the years leading up to 1740, and it was not until the 1770s that the Ottoman Empire ceased to look like an immediately pressing threat to Christian civilization at large. The turning-point was the Russian-Turkish war of 1768-74, by the end of which everyone agreed that the Russians were a worse threat to European stability. The appeal of *IT* in the late 17th and 18th centuries, during the course of which it was adapted into numerous operas and plays, needs to be set against the theatrical background of the countless 'abduction' plays and operas of the time. These usually portrayed a Christian woman, abducted and taken prisoner at the court of a Muslim monarch, facing torture and sexual slavery. The best known of these (and actually one of the least xenophobic) is Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, which premiered in Vienna in 1782, and which includes, like Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, 'Turkish' styles of music. In *Die Entführung*, the guard Osmin is one of the greedy, gullible, sadistic and lecherous Muslim stereotypes who regularly walked the Enlightenment stage.¹⁵ It was no accident that the great bass singer Karl Ludwig Fischer was famous in the roles of both Gluck's Thoas (in the first Vienna production of his *IT* opera) and three years later of Osmin, the gullible Ottoman janitor in the premiere of Mozart's *Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782).

¹³ Hall & Macintosh 2005, ch. 2.

¹⁴ On the political ramifications of the fashion for music 'alla Turca', see Perl 2000.

¹⁵ See the brilliant study of German-language plays dealing with relations between Europeans and Turks by Wilson 1985.

'The Ukraine will become a new Greece', predicted Herder in his travel journal in 1769,¹⁶ and once Potemkin had annexed the Crimea in 1783, the creation of a revived ancient Greece in the northern Black Sea — the most telling of symbols of European resistance against the Ottoman Empire — became almost inevitable. Euripides' Black Sea drama then played a crucial role in the reinvention of the Crimean peninsula by Catherine the Great and Potemkin, who was restyled by his imperial lover 'Prince of Tauride', Prince Grigori Alexandrovich Potemkin-Tavricheski, in recognition of his acquisition for Russia of this symbolically crucial space. The stunning neoclassical palace Catherine built for Potemkin in St Petersburg was called the 'Tauride Palace'. Re-Hellenising the Crimea sent Catherine and her acolytes hurrying to rediscover everything they could about this strategically invaluable peninsula in Greco-Roman antiquity. They unearthed the ancient Greek names for towns, bays and mountain ranges, and relived all the stories they could find associated with the territory in the pagan era. Gluck's opera — a favourite across all of Europe — meant that the reinvention of classical 'Tauris' in Euripidean terms became inevitable. It had been, of course, a performance of this opera in Vienna in 1781 with which Joseph II had welcomed Catherine's second grandson to the Habsburg capital. Six years later, in January 1787, Catherine embarked on the notorious tour of her empire, which climaxed in the newly acquired Crimea, eager for an exciting adventure. Over the gate through which she passed into the newly founded city of Kherson (separate from the ancient site at Chersonesos) was the inscription: 'this is the way to Byzantium'. The annexation of the Crimea, as Sara Dickinson has argued,

provided a welcome opportunity for Russia to more assertively claim the status of a Western-style empire. By adopting Western techniques of 'otherization', Russia was able to describe itself as comparatively 'more European' than peoples such as the Ottoman Turks and Crimean Tatars.¹⁷

Along with the defence of the Crimean Greeks against Scythian enemies in the 2nd century BCE by Mithridates VI Eupator, by far the most important ancient narrative in this ideological programme was the encounter between the Greeks and the Taurians as dramatised in Euripides' archetypal Crimean adventure story.

Catherine presented her journey as the mission of an enlightened European princess in a land retarded by oriental despotism, as 'a demonstration of mastery over bears and barbarians'.¹⁸ The party visited what could then be seen of the ruins of ancient Chersonesos, near the fortress of Sevastopol; but according to Catherine and her associates, the actual location of the temple was on a more southerly

¹⁶ Herder 1976 [1769], 78.

¹⁷ Dickinson 2002, 3-4.

¹⁸ Wolff 1994, 129.

tip of the peninsula at a spot known as 'Parthenizza'. In a fantasy clearly informed by the tradition of the escape plot, the Prince de Ligne (who was obsessed with the *Iphigenia in Tauris* and believed that the estate Catherine bestowed on him in the Crimea was the setting of the action in Euripides' play) speculated what 'Europe' would think if the whole party including Catherine herself were to be carried off and delivered as prisoners to the barbaric court of the sultan in Constantinople.¹⁹

Yet the years immediately preceding the French revolution were also to produce the very different politics and metaphysics of Goethe's *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, the most important turning-point in the reception of Euripides' tragedy, the poetic text of which was finalised in 1786. For the first time since antiquity, the story was allowed to end in relative harmony, with the statue of Artemis remaining in Tauris and King Thoas acquiescing in the departure of the captive Greeks. '*Lebt wohl!*' are his final, famous words, which express, amongst many other things, the European romantic fantasy that European colonisation of the planet could be a polite and consensual affair. As Erika Fischer-Lichte has argued, this development in the story is closely linked to the role of Goethe's play in expressing the new manners, sensibility and consciousness of the rising European bourgeoisie in a global market.²⁰ Goethe encouraged translations of his own plays into other languages (which meant, effectively, other European languages), and invented the term *Weltliteratur* to describe works which could succeed in translation and thus be enjoyed on other than national or nationalist levels. But he was no 'multiculturalist', since he warned overtly against showing excessive respect towards either non-European (Chinese) or even 'minor' European literary traditions (Serbian).²¹ The context in which he uses the term *Weltliteratur* also implies that this new transnational medium is somehow being led by German literature.²² The model of the idealized ancient Hellas in Goethe's *IT* remains doggedly Eurocentric, even if it is expressed in Romantic humanist terms rather than Christian ones.

Through the Renaissance Christianizing of Iphigenia, the unapologetic jingoism of Gluck's opera, Catherine the Great's assertion of a new Greece in the Crimea, and Goethe's more progressive model of a world in which Europeans patiently train the rest of the world in good behaviour, Euripides' ancient tragedy therefore underlay a series of models by which Europeans demonstrated the cultural supremacy over the barbarian East, especially the Muslim East. On the stage, Goethe's play remained the canonical dramatic interpretation of the story

¹⁹ Ligne 1902, 210.

²⁰ Fischer-Lichte 1977.

²¹ Damrosch 2003, 12.

²² Damrosch 2003, 9.

internationally, keeping Euripides' text virtually unperformed in any modern language until the extraordinary political, technological and aesthetic upheavals constituted by Modernism which, in the early twentieth century, made the world anew. The seminal Modernist *IT* was the famous production of Gilbert Murray's translation by Harley Granville Barker, much performed in the USA as well as London, between 1912 and 1915.²³ Here the European past was conceptualised in new terms that revealed the barbarian as a Nietzschean, primitive element just beneath the surface — both historically and psychologically — even of the most apparently advanced Western societies. Granville Barker's Greeks were differentiated from his Taurians only in the degree of their savagery and exoticism, as if they had simply advanced two more rungs up the ladder of civilisation. The most remarkable feature of this production was its Primitivist visual design, by the artist Norman Wilkinson. The bright colours, imposing head-dresses, geometric designs, spots, circles, whisk brooms and lines, indeed, looked just a bit too barbaric and savage for the tastes of most of their audiences. Iphigenia's costume was copied directly from one of the late archaic Acropolis *korai*, even to the wig. But the drapery was spotted 'as if with great spots of blood, and the tunic is striped with waves of red'.²⁴ The costume reinforced the conception of Iphigenia as the performer of human sacrifice, and the zigzag lines were particularly associated with both Native American and African Ashanti art. The reviewer of the Harvard production in *The Bookman* for June 1915 was quite clear that the resonances of the Taurian soldiers' costume design were African:

The chorus of *Iphigenia* is costumed in sweeping drapery of black and orange, while the soldiers in the same play are startling enough to please an African savage, for they wear black and white and flaming colours.²⁵

Wilkinson's costumes were relations of those designed by Nicholas Roerich for Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, danced by Nijinsky and produced by Diaghilev in Paris in 1913, the paradigmatic event in Modernist dance that had rocked the international cultural scene. Greek tragedy could, like classical ballet, be re-envisioned from a Primitivist perspective which located its action in a primordial past that was connected with the new interest in Africa. When the topic of the tragedy is human sacrifice, it shows how the intellectual model of ritualism associated with Nietzsche and the Cambridge Ritualists such as Jane Harrison could become linked, through performance, with one of the most foundational narratives of Modernism (the rite of spring is of course centred on a human sacrifice).²⁶

²³ See Hall 2012, ch. 11.

²⁴ Smith 1915, 410.

²⁵ Smith 1915, 410-411.

²⁶ Cousineau 2004.

Once the 'barbarian' other had been revealed by Modernism to be an integral component even of the Western self, *IT* was liberated to play more complex, psychological roles in defining the global as well as the European regional identities of the twentieth century. 'Tauris' even becomes the European motherland Spain in opposition to the violent Greece of Mexico in the autobiographical *Ifigenia Cruel* by the Modernist poet Alfonso Reyes (1924). A refugee from Mexican political unrest which had killed his father, in Spain he found a place where he could liberate himself from his family's painful past. This process is reflected in his Iphigenia's amnesia and her ultimate decision not to return to Greece at all. The land of the Taurians has become completely detached from any Crimean geographical reality, and comes to represent something quite other: the promise that a new start, even if in 'Old' Europe, can offer to a fugitive from the personal and political injuries that have been inflicted upon him and his immediate ancestors who had emigrated to the New World.

Perhaps the most striking 20th-century shift in perspective on the Taurians, however, is a postwar novel which reinvests them with the tyrannical and outrageous violence of the Taurians in so many 17th and 18th-century operas. Yet these new barbarians, far from being thinly disguised Ottomans, are thoroughly European. They are the Germans exterminating Jews in Imre Kertész's novel *A Nyomkereső* (1977), published in English as *The Pathseeker* (2008). An unnamed 'Commissioner' visits a concentration camp. It turns out that he has been there before, although it is never made explicit whether he was present as a victim of the Holocaust, a perpetrator, or bystander (Kertész himself, a Hungarian Jew, was as a teenager indeed interned at both Auschwitz and Tröglitz, near Zeitz, a subcamp of Buchenwald).²⁷

The Commissioner has realised, after visiting Buchenwald and talking to a survivor, that he must bear witness to everything he has seen. He rejoins his wife in the town (a thinly disguised Weimar, which is close to Buchenwald), where she has found a copy of Goethe's *Iphigenie auf Tauris* in a bookshop. The discussion which results extends beyond the particular German adaptation. By setting the discussion in Weimar, the cultural centre where Goethe's play was first written and performed, the reader's mind becomes focussed on what German romantic classicism had done with the much older tragedy; the Commissioner's wife, who had enjoyed the Goethe play at school, admires its presentation of Thoas and the anodyne ending where bloodshed is avoided. But the Commissioner tells her that Goethe's version is 'what they want us to believe'. What had 'really' happened when the king of Tauris sent a squadron of soldiers to arrest Pylades and Orestes was this (p. 86):

²⁷ See further Hall 2009.

Briefly, the troops in the squad surrounded the men, then they attacked them, disarmed them, and shackled them. Next, before the eyes of the menfolk, the troops violated the priestess, after which, before the eyes of the priestess, the men were hacked to pieces. Then they looked to the king, and he waited until he spotted on the priestess's face the indifference of misery that cannot be exacerbated any further. He then gave the signal of mercy to be exercised, and his troops finally gave her too the coup de grace... oh, and not to forget! That evening they all went to the theatre to watch the barbarian king exercising clemency on the stage as they, snug in the dress circle, sniggered up their sleeves.

The history of Nazi atrocities is told through the Commissioner's rewriting of the German neoclassical rewriting of the original Euripidean whitewashing (it is implied) of a far more atrocious history. The Commissioner therefore only succeeds in bearing witness through refutation of the canonical version of an incident first articulated in Euripidean tragedy.

In recent times, since the invasion of Iraq in 2002, the land of the Taurians has been re-identified with new savageries at completely new sites, most of them neither in Crimea nor even in Europe at all: one controversial Berlin production of Gluck's opera, directed by the Australian Barrie Kosky at the Komische Oper (2006), set the action unambiguously in a detention centres run by Western powers in the Caribbean or Baghdad for the confinement of Muslim Prisoners of War. It remains to be seen what will be the precise setting of Michi Barall's anti-war *iphigenia@tauris*, which opens in New York at the Ma-Yi Theater Company on June 19th 2010, although its overarching geopolitical context is undoubtedly the present war being waged by the West, led by the USA, in Iraq and Afghanistan. This means that once again, although in a radically different, intercontinental, critical and above all postcolonial spirit, the play is speaking to a world conceptually divided into a Christian West and a Muslim East, a division which made the Crimean setting of Euripides' play so suggestive to Europeans during the centuries of Ottoman power.

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