

A *Homeric Hymn* in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*

Due to the highly fragmentary state of ancient Greek hymns, choral odes in tragedy with hymnic elements are often our best preserved specimens of the genre. While the exact relationship between dramatic hymns and their cultic counterparts is impossible to determine, it seems clear that hymns in tragedy both reflect and deviate from cultic realities in terms of content, theme, and performance (cf. Furley 2000, 187; Sourvinou-Inwood 1997, 161-2; Swift 2010, 27). When the namesake of Euripides' *Hekabe* presides over a burial, for example, Sourvinou-Inwood argues that this reflects the world depicted within her tragedy, rather than the reality of funerary ritual in fifth-century Athens (1997, 162). Instead of letting the imperfect mimesis of cult activity deter us from using these hymns as evidence, however, we can view the contrast between life and fiction as meaningful, pursuing the questions of how and why these hymns diverge from their original cultic setting and how that might change our perception of hymns in Greek tragedy and hymns in general.

This paper focuses on the choral ode in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* lines 1234-82, which occurs at the play's climax as part of the ruse by which Iphigenia and Orestes escape. This ode, sung by the chorus of captured Greek women, comes in the form of a narrative hymn to Apollo. Although the performance is choral, the ode's narrative form and epic style make it similar in form to the *Homeric Hymns*. Scholars have successfully tied this ode thematically to the action of the play (Furley 2000, Sourvinou-Inwood 1997), but the question of its form remains. Why is a chorus of women singing a narrative hymn to Apollo in a ritual procession on their way to perform a rite for Artemis?

To consider this question, I examine the ode's generic form, arguing that it is a narrative hymn in the style of a *Homeric Hymn*, rather than a dithyrambic stasimon (Cropp 2000, Panagl

1971). I follow Clay's definition of the genre (1989), i.e., the hymns' framework consists of a mythological narrative in which the natural order of the gods is threatened and then set in order by the establishment or redivision of divine honors. Here, after killing the Delphic snake, Apollo usurps the oracle of Themis and Gaia. Gaia takes revenge by sending out a deluge of false prophecies until Zeus intervenes on Apollo's behalf, restoring Apollo's *timē* (1280). I argue that the epic style of the ode (Cropp 2000, 249) is deliberate archaism solidifying this link to the *Homeric Hymns*.

Once the ode is viewed as a narrative, Homeric-type hymn, a discrepancy emerges between its form and performance. Within the action of the play, the ode is a prosodion, a processional choral song which a chorus of worshippers sings on their way to perform a purification ritual and sacrifice (cf. Furley 1995). In contrast, the *Homeric Hymns* would have been most familiar to a fifth-century Athenian audience as part of rhapsodic competitions held at festivals like the Panathenaia. It is the competitive nature of *Homeric Hymns*, I argue, that is highlighted here. The current dramatic competition taking place in Athens in the theatre of Dionysus is alluded to through the medium of a rhapsodic hymn.

While choral performance is necessary due to the action in the play, the form of a *Homeric Hymn* serves to remind the audience of rhapsodic competition and from there, the current dramatic competition. This also adds meaning to the reference to Dionysus in line 1243, whose presence in the ode has never been satisfactorily explained. The ode's narrative form allows it to reflect on the actual circumstances of the dramatic competition, while its choral performance blends with the dramatic role of a prosodion required by the plot. By recognizing the discrepancy between performance and form as significant, we can better "read" this hymn, and better understand the function of hymns in tragedy.

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