Ancient Women in Modern Media

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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

KRISHNI BURNS AND WILLIAM DUFFY

It matters how modern authors use the women of ancient Greek and Roman myth because the women themselves matter. Thousands of years later, Helen of Troy, Medea, and their kinswomen are central to the Western understanding of femininity, beauty, and the role of women in society. Not only do they stand as representatives of and metaphors for these concepts, they also exert a powerful control over the later characters that perform these functions. Every Barbie doll furthers the legacy of Helen of Troy, and all the archers serving as the token females in action films recall Artemis in some way shape or form. Therefore, studying the depiction of these ancient women in modern media gives us insight not only into the characters themselves but also the universe of meaning they have created.

The power of the women of myth to speak to modern audiences across a gap of more than two thousand years makes them a useful tool to explore ideas of gender, agency, and emotion. This ability was born out of their original roles in the performative arts of long-ago Classical Greece. In ancient times, the women of Greek myth often appeared as major characters in the early Greek dramas. The authors of this new art form, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, found the women of myth to be useful avatars for exploring social issues. Emotions that would have been dangerous for male characters to articulate, such as grief, rage, insecurity, and desire, found expression in the mouths of these liminal figures. The women of ancient Greece were not subject to the same competitive social pressures as their male counterparts. The women of myth were further removed from the Classical world by their fictionality. As the work of scholars like Helene Foley, Nancy Rabinowitz, Mary-Kay Gamel, and Ruby Blondell shows, women could work through these social anxieties in a safe and productive environment.

Even today, ancient women remain "good to think with." They still help artists to discuss issues that would have been difficult to explore via a male character with the added power of further social displacement. All of Western culture considers itself as descendant from the ancient world, yet

none of us actually are of the ancient world. This dichotomy makes ancient women both accessible and without the exposed nerve of instant identification. This collection of scholarly articles seeks to explore the ways in which representations of classical women continue to allow us to expand our understanding of ourselves and our culture.

This project is part of an ever-growing constellation of scholarly projects that investigate the reception of antiquity in the modern world. Collections like Day and Malamud's *Celluloid Classics: New Perspectives on Classical Antiquity in Modern Cinima* (Johns Hopkins 2008) and Kovacs and Marshall's *Classics and Comics* (Oxford 2011) have proven vital in developing our understanding of classical reception and its implications. While our work is certainly indebted to these predecessors, our reading of those works made clear that each type of modern media appropriates Classics, and the women of Classics, in their own special way. For that reason, the essays found in *Ancient Women in Modern Media* will investigate the appearances of these characters in a variety of contexts, including television, theater, adult literature, and juvenile fiction, along with the familiar popular narratives of film and graphic novels.

These ancient mythic women are thousands of years removed from modern culture, but they act powerfully on our imagination to create universal understanding that is easily accessible across boundaries of culture, generation, and language. *Ancient Women in Modern Media* reflects this universality. Contributors to this collection live on three different continents, and discuss works that originated from Algeria, Germany, Brazil, and Ireland, along with the United States.

This collection of essays is divided conceptually into two sections. **"Mythic Women Revisited"** offers critiques of mythological women in new versions of old stories. These women retold act as a glass through which artists can explore modern values, using ancient narratives to distance the audience from its own cultural constructs and invite objective analysis. The second section, **"Mythic Women Transported,"** discusses traditional characters used in new stories. It explores how the heroines of myth who appear in original stories produced the modern era evolve to match contemporary needs while still remaining true to their traditional selves.

Vassiliki Kotini's **"'Sacrificing' the myth in I. Kadare's *Agamemnon's Daughter*"** offers an in-depth analysis of a man who reaches a deeper understanding of his relationship with his lover, his leader, and his country through the lens of the sacrifice of Iphigenia. Co-editor William Duffy's **"Orpheus loves Inevitability: *Black Orpheus*' Eurydice and the place of originality in Classical Reception"** investigates how Marcel Camus'

version of Eurydice represents the modern artist's struggle between honoring ancient tradition and expressing original ideas. Jenny Krantz's offering, **"*Antigone* in German-Occupied Paris: Anouilh's *Antigone*,"** presents Antigone as the voice of political protest in Vichy France, revealing the means by which an ancient symbol of resistance can be repurposed for a new era, and the reasons why such symbols retain their power. Dawn Saliba shows that each of the women in Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses* represents a step on the emotional journey to becoming a strong, independent woman capable of a meaningful relationship between equals in **"Transmutations of Love in Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses*."**

Co-editor Krishni Burns begins the second section with **"Helen, Warrior Princess: Reimagining Helen as a Feminist Role Model in Young Adult Literature,"** which examines three different incarnations of Helen in Young Adult novels that model how to be an agent in a narrative tradition that denies her control over her own fate. Luis Guilhaume's **"Heroes and Amazons in *Y: The Last Man*"** reveals how the Amazons of Brian K. Vaughn's famed comic book series recall, and sometimes reject, versions of the warrior women from antiquity to the 21st century. Sarah Skelley's **"Mr. Artemis: Masculine Reflections of a Goddess"** investigates the way that the names of ancient goddesses add implicit traits to characters across gender boundaries in modern fiction, impacting characters who are not themselves goddesses or even women. Joel Christensen closes our collection with **"The Hero Herself: From Death-Giver to Storyteller in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,"** moving from goddesses and heroines to the concept of heroism itself, investigating how the traditional concepts of the hero and the hero's story transform when the traditional narrative associations between gender and character are reversed.

For the last three millennia, the ancient women of myth have created a safe space to explore difficult concepts. Authors have pulled them out of the past to give voice to the fears, hopes, and ideas of their time, no matter when that time may be. Our edited volume offers a snap shot of the contribution that the ancient women have made to today's modern media. Our introduction, on the other hand, can only offer them our sincere thanks.

PART I:

MYTHIC WOMEN REVISITED

CHAPTER ONE

"SACRIFICING" THE MYTH IN I. KADARE'S *AGAMEMNON'S DAUGHTER*

VASSILIKI KOTINI

In a title that borders on cryptic, Albanian contemporary novelist Ismail Kadare introduces the dominant idea and thematic background of his novella, *Agamemnon's Daughter*. Iphigenia, the Mycenaean princess, whose name is strikingly absent from the title, is lurking behind her father's presence. Identified with Agamemnon's story to which she is inextricably linked, the Classical figure of Iphigenia lends her myth to Kadare's novella and the account of her sacrifice becomes the guide for his hero. The mythological story of Agamemnon's young daughter constitutes, among other things, a civic narrative, which, like a large number of ancient Greek myths, discusses the relationship between the individual and the city-state, their mutual duties, roles, and responsibilities. As such, the Classical myth provides an apt setting for Kadare's novella which focuses on interpersonal relationships and politics in Albania in the 1980s, criticizing its communist regime and its autocratic leadership.

The undoubtedly horrific story of the young virgin who is sacrificed under divine command by her father, the leader of the Greek army, prior to the Trojan expedition, exists in various versions in the ancient sources. While Homer does not mention the sacrifice of Iphigenia at all,[1] the story is already known in Aeschylus' time and features in the tragedian's trilogy, *Oresteia*, setting the tone of the first play (*Agamemnon*).[2] Half a century after Aeschylus, Euripides stages a rather controversial adaptation of the story:[3] in *Iphigenia at Aulis*, the Euripidean heroine initially hesitates to consent to her own death and even attempts to change her father's mind and pleads for her life. In doing so, not only does she underline the inhuman nature of the requested sacrifice, her hesitance also defies the divine origin of such an order and questions the credibility of her own—well established—myth; a myth which promotes the image of a

young girl willingly endorsing her tragic fate while exchanging marriage for sacrifice.

It is this tragic version of the myth of Iphigenia that Kadare's hero embraces as his guide in his desperate attempt to make sense of the world around him and the sudden change in his life. Building on Euripides' criticism of the mythical story,[4] Kadare's novella unfolds and gradually transforms from a discussion of a personal predicament to a political treatise of civic identity and individual responsibility, personal choices, and social roles. The plot of the novella is rather uncomplicated with minimal action: the hero, who is unexpectedly invited to attend the Grand Parade of the ruling party from a distinguished stand, reluctantly makes his way to the parade. Earlier on the same day, his girlfriend, Suzana, appeared determined to end their relationship; on his way now to the parade, he plays in his mind their last meeting as he attempts to assess Suzana's unexpected decision.

The narrative is delivered in the past tense; the hero, however, makes no use of hindsight and therefore does not anticipate the development of the story. The consistent first person narrative, the limited and dispersed dialogues, and the focus on the hero's agony at the imminent break-up suggest an esoteric journey during which everything, including the mythical story, is carefully scrutinized. Although the actual account of events is a linear one, the constant flashbacks create the impression that the story starts *in medias res,*[5] conferring an illusion of continuity and literary perspective upon Kadare's characters.

Unlike epic and tragic tradition, which rarely allows for unidentified characters,[6] Kadare's hero, who is also the narrator, key character and main participant in the story, maintains his undisclosed identity. His anonymity transcends time and place parameters, blurring the character's traits and encouraging flexible interpretations of the story. At the same time, anonymity does not allow Kadare's heroes to reach a grand status, similar to that of the tragic characters, each of whom has a unique story to tell. Unlike the carefully planned Greek story which clarifies the place and time of action as well as the identity of its characters, in Kadare's novella no character is properly named, and the dramatic place is not revealed until the very end. As only initials or titles are used to identify the characters of the story, the latter resemble puppets with a collective experience rather than individual literary characters, whether they are direct agents or simply witnesses of action. In stark contrast, Suzana is the only named character in a nameless crowd, and her distinct presence becomes almost symbolic, like Iphigenia herself.

When announcing the radical change to her life that her father has asked for, Suzana forgoes a straightforward explanation and utters the words "in shreds, with only half their meaning."[7] Her readiness to end their relationship, renouncing, in effect, her freedom to control her private life in order to facilitate her father's career, shocks the hero. With a laconic statement, Suzana defines her consent to her father's request as "sacrifice;"[8] the term strikes the hero when he looks into a collection of ancient Greek myths and serendipitously comes across the myth of the sacrifice of Iphigenia.[9] Almost forcing the analogy, he quickly draws a parallel between Suzana and Iphigenia, and automatically ascribes the role of Agamemnon to Suzana's father. In direct analogy to the Mycenaean king and chief commander of the Greek army who faced the threat of anarchy and rebellion from the troops unless he sacrificed his young daughter, the stability and progression of the career of the high-rank Albanian official seems to depend upon the (personal) life of his daughter. Although Suzana admits that she also suffers at the prospect of the loss, she quickly converts to her father's cause,[10] and, by defining her decision as sacrifice, she opens the door to the semantics of the Mycenaean myth.

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Iphigenia is Agamemnon's young daughter who is sacrificed prior to and for the Argive fleet's departure to Troy. Euripides' tragedy, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, remains our best surviving Classical source of Iphigenia's story of sacrifice and is the one which Kadare's hero consults—albeit indirectly—through Graves' interpretation of the story.[11] In Euripides' tragic play, Agamemnon, under the pretext that Iphigenia is to marry Achilles, the young leader of the Myrmidons and his most valuable ally, tricks his wife and daughter to come to Aulis where he actually plans to sacrifice Iphigenia to the goddess Artemis. Unaware of Agamemnon's scheme, Achilles becomes the bait, but, when he finds out the truth, he refuses to play the role that the king has assigned to him and commits himself to protecting Iphigenia. Nonetheless, the girl, after her initial unwillingness, consents to her sacrifice. Although requested human sacrifice is a rarity in Greek myth, Iphigenia's fate is not unprecedented. Euripides seems to have been keen on the subject of self-sacrifice:[12] most notably in his *Children of Heracles* and his now lost *Erechtheus*, he deals with similar mythical stories of young maidens who volunteer for their own sacrifice in order for their families and/or states to win a war or withstand an attack and save their cities. Contrary to these plays where the sacrifice is secondary to the plotline, in *Iphigenia at Aulis,* the theme of

sacrifice dominates the play and defines all its characters. Iphigenia's case, however, is unique in Euripides' corpus in two more aspects: the scope of her sacrifice is not for the benefit of a family or a single state, but for all of Greece, which is about to launch an attack on another country. In addition, unlike the other tragic figures who offer themselves to sacrifice, Iphigenia is initially tricked into it and displays a full array of emotions, moving from initial unwillingness to total compliance.

It is the Euripidean version of the myth as rendered in Graves' book that the hero ponders throughout the day; nonetheless, he notes early enough that "[he] didn't even bother to sit down to reread all the pages about the legendary sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter" (pp.10-11). This confession is important not only because the academic merit of Graves' work has been highly disputed and his poetic readings of the Greek mythical stories hardly offer a reliable interpretation of the myth,[13] but because, by admittedly pulling away from the details of the mythological story, the narrator feels free to introduce new readings of the myth based on his own reception of the tragic story. With a compilation of sources that lack clear reference[14] and with the help of memory as well as imagination,[15] he revisits myth and, by blending it with folkloric stories, treats it as part of his own intellectual heritage, the kind of knowledge he has had for years and which has resurfaced again only now.

The Classical myth resonating in his mind, the hero associates Suzana's decision with Iphigenia's tragic fate and endeavors to understand the former, following Euripides' tragic play as his compass. The similarities between his girlfriend and the mythical figure are easily registered: the setting of ancient Aulis and Kadare's modern day country is a military regime; both Agamemnon and Suzana's father are high-ranking officials; and finally, and more importantly, both Suzana and Iphigenia succumb to their fathers' respective commands of "sacrifice." Nonetheless, deviating from her tragic counterpart who initially hesitates and attempts to resist her father's decision, Suzana appears to have no doubts about the necessity of her own sacrifice, consents readily to it, and even announces the decision herself in the opening of the story. Subversively, it is her lover, the hero and narrator, who resists her decision. Like Euripides' Achilles, Kadare's hero feels almost manipulated and betrayed, reduced to a passive witness of a sacrifice which directly involves him. However, willing as he is to renounce the need for sacrifice and political success for the sake of love, the hero moves beyond Achilles' model; he now resembles another Homeric figure, Paris, who is intoxicated with Helen, and like Kadare's hero, he gets involved in a problematic love affair to which social hierarchy objects.

Oscillating between Achilles and Paris, the hero lacks a concrete mythological role-model. He is not the only one: as it becomes clear from the beginning, Suzana uncomfortably plays the role of Iphigenia which the hero has ascribed to her: the narrative does not eschew details of Suzana's sexual life, making her identification with Iphigenia controversial. In the Classical world, lack of maidenhood is a serious disruption of the mythological formula of female sacrifice, where a pure and virginal sacrificial victim is required. Despite her willingness to "sacrifice," Suzana radically differs from Iphigenia; with a lover in what seems to be an illicit love affair and with an active sexual life,[16] she seems to follow in the steps of Helen rather than of the Mycenaean princess. In addition, early in the novella, Suzana's eroticism inspires the hero, who thinks of her as the personification of Paris, the French capital.[17] The city of Paris brings in mind the homonymous Trojan prince, whose love affair with Helen set off the Trojan War and subsequently caused Iphigenia's sacrifice. With a description that becomes Helen's epic beauty, Suzana's body and sexuality are compared to the Champs Elysée and Arc de Triomphe. In a simile of Homeric color, the girl is transformed into the battlefield and the trophy, reflecting the cause of war and its prize. While Suzana is seen as the sacrificial victim and the one worth sacrificing for, she once more embodies both Iphigenia and Helen. The roles, thus, are shuffled and a "magic picture" develops: with an ironic twist the mythical figure of Iphigenia merges with that of Helen at the same time as Achilles' figure alternates with Paris, the Trojan prince. As the characters share roles, desires and responsibilities, the lines between the victims and the victimizers are blurred, while the notion of sacrifice appears to be an indispensable component of their lives.

As Kadare's characters alternate between mythological roles, the notion of sacrifice is not exclusively associated with Suzana anymore. As the hero is invited "to sit in the grandstand at the May Day parade,"[18] he unexpectedly becomes the recipient of an honorary invitation. The inexplicable honor becomes the source of anxiety as well as guilt for its holder and is experienced as a shameful burden further underlining the alienation of the hero from the festive spirit around him.[19] At the same time, as he is still trying to comprehend Suzana's decision, he assumes responsibility for consenting to—or at least not resisting—Suzana's sacrifice; he thus claims a role similar to Suzana's father and ultimately he acts like Agamemnon, who allows his military and political duty to take priority over his role as a father. Wondering who the performer of the sacrifice really is,[20] Kadare's hero eventually puts himself in the place of Iphigenia *and* Agamemnon, who, in effect, appear locked in similar

dilemmas. Sharing in their turmoil and alternately performing both roles, the hero becomes the victim and the perpetrator: he sacrifices and is sacrificed alike.

Dominated by bleak and despondent thoughts that permeate his understanding of the myth, the hero ponders the cause that can call for sacrifice. His conclusion aligns with a popular interpretation of female sacrifice in Greek myth according to which the sacrifice of a young virgin is a patriotic act before a war breaks out. The sacrifice is meant to symbolically balance the forthcoming loss of youth at the imminent war and underlines the interdependence of the city-state (*polis*) and the family (*oikos*) at a time of war.[21] However, the sacred Classical twofold of family and homeland is dismantled in Kadare's novel. Whilst mythical Agamemnon concurs on the sacrifice of his daughter in order to safeguard his fatherland, his people, and the common interest, Suzana's sacrifice is requested as a necessary step for the clear benefit of an individual,[22] i.e. her father, in a state that is hostile to its people. Agamemnon's dilemma and tragic decision to offer his daughter for a greater cause is replaced by an opportunist's greed for profit.[23] The hero, though, projects his own experience on the Classical myth while he also takes advantage of the Euripidean criticism of the mythical story.[24] He therefore questions the request of Suzana's father through challenging Agamemnon's actual drive behind Iphigenia's sacrifice; by turning the tables around, he doubts not only Agamemnon's patriotic motives but also the myth's ultimate symbolism.

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As the hero reluctantly concedes his role in the forthcoming sacrifice, he opens the door to proceed to the grandstand and consequently signs off on the end of his affair with Suzana. With the hero stepping out of the house, the readers are introduced to the outer world of the novella: a police state which terrorizes its citizens, leaving them unable to voice their thoughts or reveal their emotions. In the dictatorial regime of modern-day Albania, the importance of appearances is continuously emphasized as the state expects—rather, demands—its people to appear happy and emotionally coordinated with the festive atmosphere.[25] The forced happiness relegates people, or actually, the anonymous crowd, to marionettes whose constantly smiling faces resemble masks, a par excellence component of the world of Greek tragedy. Echoing the Euripidean use of the mask in particular, these frozen, mask-like smiles subtly signify false appearances

and reflect deception, an organic theme in the myth of Iphigenia on which the story of her sacrifice is based.

In spite of his discomfort, deriving largely from his anti-communist ideology and his difficulty in pretending happiness, the hero is obliged to proceed to the grandstand. Acutely aware of the contradiction between his beliefs and the honor bestowed upon him and afraid to express his disagreement to the authoritarian state, he castigates himself and aggressively apologizes for his invitation. Still in denial of the prestigious invitation that, he feels, ethically aligns him with the regime,[26] he hopes that the police checkpoint will prevent him from entering the grandstand, thus, indicating that he is not one of the tyrants. Constantly questioning his own presence on the grandstand and puzzled by the presence of the others, the hero doubts the innocence of the attendees (including himself), and, by comparison, he criticizes the presence of the Achaeans at Aulis and their silence, which he reads as consent to the regime.[27] As no adequate and convincing explanation is provided regarding the criteria according to which the invitations have been granted, the hero sees that the acceptance of the invitation bestows collective responsibility to all the people in the grandstand, since all are equally accountable for their lack of resistance and compliance to the regime.

"Ashamed to be part of this idyllic and peaceful holiday tableau" (p.22), but lacking the courage to react and resist lest he suffer any consequences from the autocratic regime, he despises himself for his obedience, which leads to Suzana's "sacrifice" for which he now feels equally responsible. Like the tragic chorus, the hero is more of a witness, standing at the margins, rather than a dynamic participant in the action. He deems his attendance to be a cowardly cooperation with the communist party, and, projecting his own feelings onto the myth, he questions Iphigenia's heroism and, by drawing a parallel between her lack of choice and his choice to accept the invitation and attend the parade as a distinguished guest, he identifies her sacrifice as a compromise.[28] Having cast doubts on Iphigenia's actual motive, he is suspicious of the ancient myth and thinks of the sacrifice as a sham. Ascribing his political reality to Agamemnon's myth, he interprets the sacrifice as a stratagem of the Mycenaean king to terrorize and control his subjects. As for the guests, by passively watching the sacrifice, they turn into guilty allies to the crime committed in front of their eyes.

In what he perceives to be a homogenous and equally guilty crowd, he feels relief—until he notices G.Z., an opportunist who once won the disfavor of the regime but eventually managed "to climb out of the hole he was in" (p.38). The description of G.Z. blends with the story of the Bald

Man who attempts to escape the netherworld flying on an eagle and feeding it with his own flesh. When the eagle finally reaches the upper world, it carries only the Bald Man's bones.[29] Although no one has ever found out the price that G.Z. had to pay to regain the favor of the regime, the hero notices that both G.Z. and the Bald Man perform a sacrifice that dehumanizes them and deprives them of the basic elements of human existence. The narrator hints that while the Bald Man gives his own flesh, G.Z. sacrificed someone dear to him, just as Agamemnon and Suzana's father offer their daughters, or as he concedes to give up Suzana. By ascribing the role of Agamemnon to G.Z., the Bald Man, to Suzana's father, and finally to himself, the hero rearranges the mythological roles to fit the innocent and the villain at the same time. His approach challenges the traditional distribution of roles in myths and adds depth to Agamemnon's act; meanwhile, it sheds new light on the persona of Suzana's father. The mythical hero's tragic end can only anticipate an infelicitous finale for the father of Suzana, as well as for G.Z. and the hero himself.

Reviewing the ancient story through its contemporary lens,[30] the narrator rearranges the roles and offers a narrative which features a rigid political frame that differentiates the novella from the traditional story of Agamemnon, whether in its epic or tragic form. Undoubtedly the mythic Mycenaean regime was a strict monarchy and Agamemnon had absolute power as the king and leader of all—a setting reflected in the austerity of the communist regime that the narrator describes. Nonetheless, the story of Iphigenia in the ancient Greek myth runs deeper than politics and is not limited to the assessment of Agamemnon's autocratic rule. The myth is part of the quintessentially tragic matrix of human versus divine will as well as civic role and responsibility. The final conclusion comes as a revelation to the hero, albeit not to the Classical scholar: before a king and military leader demands obedience and self-sacrifice from his people, he first needs to sacrifice what he holds most dear and precious: hence the sacrifice of the young virgin daughter of Agamemnon is only a symbolic contribution performed to balance the forthcoming loss of the youth in the imminent war.[31]

Restaging the ancient sacrificial ritual in his mind, the hero ascribes the role of Calchas, the seer, to Suzana's father's top adviser, a current Albanian politician, and he blames him for having advised Suzana's "sacrifice." Identifying a major religious figure of Greek myth with the Albanian politician, the hero opts to exclude the presence of the divine from his retelling of the myth; already put aside in Euripides' tragic play, the role of the goddess Artemis is conspicuously ignored in Kadare's

narrative. By leaving out the religious parameter that dominates the traditional story and which is of paramount importance in order to understand it, Kadare almost annuls the meaning of sacrifice[32] as he focuses exclusively on human nature and accountability, stripping the characters of any divine causes as well as alibis for their decisions and their actions. In his contemporary communist society where religion and acts of worship are banned, Kadare assimilates the mythological setting to his milieu and selects only those mythical components that match current Albanian politics. With its spiritual dimension strikingly absent, the sacrifice of Iphigenia is presented as an act of political expediency; Calchas appears to be a political figure per se, while his religious authority and role are entirely rendered void.[33] Since the divine element is removed from the modern retelling of the story, Suzana's father does not face any sublime dilemma and the hero is then right to question the term "sacrifice" that has been used so far for the interpretation of the events.[34] Kadare's approach has rationalized myth and emphasized the role and responsibility of both Agamemnon and his daughter. However, the hero's verdict that the decision for the sacrifice weighs exclusively upon humans constitutes a selective reading of the myth that disregards the importance of divine order and the power of fate, thus excluding two fundamental parameters of Greek world and culture.

The final glimpse of Suzana in the grandstand strongly evokes the act of sacrifice: the description of her head "swaying between the shoulders of two others" (p.71) gives the impression that it is already separated from her body; In a flashback, the hero recalls the memory of their first erotic experience, which reinforces the sacrificial image, and concludes his affair with Suzana. Like the perfect sacrificial victim, Suzana appeared precious and unique. She removed her clothes[35] and stood in front of him naked. In an unconventional "*rite de passage*," Suzana acted upon her sexuality and entered adulthood by offering her virginity to the man of her choice. Her decisiveness then and now leaves the hero with no choice but to respond at her behest. His desperate thought full of agony ("Don't be my downfall," p.73) reveals that the roles have reversed: Suzana is the powerful one and, by comparison, Iphigenia, who consents to her sacrifice, is seen as responsible for Agamemnon's downfall, having become the agent of his ruin.[36]

With Suzana in control of their relationship, the hero assumes the role of the powerless victim and holds Suzana responsible for leaving him. Upon arrival at the grandstand, his discomfort and feelings of hopelessness reach their peak: belief becomes knowledge in the end that he is invited and destined to be the sacrificial victim. Inspired by the Classical myth,

the hero deciphers the mystery of the invitation and realizes that it is not Suzana—or at least, it is not only Suzana—who is to be "sacrificed:" it is actually each and every anonymous citizen, including himself and even Suzana's father, who, "in long dresses, like vestal virgins" (p.102), are having their rights forfeited and their freedom falling prey to an oppressive regime.[37] "Simultaneously privileged and persecuted" (p.59), these modern day Iphigenias experience a worse fate than the Classical heroine's as there is no higher cause to fight for, nor will they receive honor for their sacrifice.

The end of the parade signals the official end of the hero's relationship with Suzana. The loss of Suzana is silent, almost a secret act, radically different from Iphigenia's public sacrifice. Whereas in the traditional myth, her sacrifice brings the long anticipated favorable winds and empowers Agamemnon's soldiers for the upcoming war by instilling courage and solidarity in them, the hero fears that the regime aims at instilling terror and dehumanizing them. The Trojan War has begun; so has the "final shriveling of [their] lives" (109). The epic war that united and glorified the Greeks has here transformed into a civil war and is anticipated with horror. Having dismantled the myth and focused exclusively on the perspective of the tyrant-ruler, while largely ignoring significant aspects of the mythical story, the hero reaches his final conclusion, and the myth of the sacrifice of Iphigenia becomes a solid manifestation of human greed for control and power.[38]

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From the very beginning, Kadare's hero has been moving around the pieces of the ancient "puzzle," constantly questioning his own conclusions and opening new areas for the exploration of the mythical story. In his attempt to decrypt Suzana's behavior, he has introduced fresh meanings and offered alternative interpretations of the story of Iphigenia. In his contemporary adaptation of the Classical myth, Kadare's reading opts to unilaterally emphasize an opportunist Agamemnon, aligning him with the despotic leaders of the Albanian communist regime while it keeps the role of Iphigenia for Suzana, the Albanian people, and the hero himself. It is through the myth that is kept under scrutiny that the hero realizes his irreversible loss, which is not limited to the "death" of Suzana,[39] but involves the unmistakable sacrifice of his freedom at the altar of authority.

The modern approach could certainly raise multiple questions regarding the rendering of the mythical story in general and the sketching of Iphigenia in particular. Kadare does not simply build on the tragic play

that stages the decline of Athens in the end of the Peloponnesian war, a time of civil strife, discord, and ruthless political ambition. He, in fact, reflects Euripides' groundbreaking treatment of the myth and offers his own original reading of the sacrifice of Iphigenia.

In this light, Kadare's metamythology presents Iphigenia as a truly Euripidean character whose story transforms, develops, provokes, and differs. In the modern appropriation of the story, the myth of the sacrifice proves to be a powerful, versatile, and polysemous entity whose symbolism knows no time limits and spatial boundaries. And it is precisely because of its symbolic—and often sibyllic—nature that myth contains doubt as an inherent component and allows for a number of interpretations. Consequently, there cannot be a single conclusion or explanation of the myth of the sacrifice, because myth has the potential to raise multiple questions depending on the time and place of its presentation. Kadare's Iphigenia celebrates the power of myth to challenge, stimulate, and enrich our understanding of the world; it mirrors multiple levels of human experience and invites a number of approaches. Arguably, the hero's most vital conclusion could be that the importance of the myth of the sacrifice does not lie with the answers it provides but with the questions it has raised; as long as a contemporary Iphigenia is created in accordance with or against traditional myth, myth will remain the standard denominator which defines our readings.

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Notes

[1] The myth of the sacrifice of Iphigenia does not exist in Homeric epic and even the name of the young princess is absent from the *Iliad*. With reference to Agamemnon's daughters, the epic only mentions Iphianassa, Chrysothemis, and Laodice (*Il.,* 9.145; Agamemnon invites Achilles to choose one of his daughters as his bride in exchange for his return to the battlefield in support of Agamemnon's army).

[2] In Aeschylus' rendering of the story (*Oresteia,* 458 BC), the sacrifice of Iphigenia has taken place prior to the events narrated in the trilogy. According to the tragic poet, the dreadful act becomes Clytemnestra's excuse—rather than justification—for the murder of king Agamemnon upon his return from Troy.

[3] The Euripidean tragedy was produced posthumously between 408-406 BC. The critics have engaged in a long debate regarding the authenticity of a large number of lines of the play but almost unanimously agree that the *exodos* is spurious. Nonetheless, in what seems to be the most established reading of the play and already known from earlier literary tradition (e.g. Stesichorus' *Oresteia, fr.* 215, PMGF*;* Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women, fr.*23a), the human sacrifice is averted in the end by the divinity (Artemis) who requested it in the first place; at the last minute the goddess replaces Iphigenia with a deer which is sacrificed instead of the young princess. On the myth of Iphigenia's sacrifice at Aulis in ancient literature, see P. Kyriakou, *A Commentary in Euripides' Iphigenia in Tauris,* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006, pp.20-21 and P.J. Finglass, *Pindar: 'Pythian Eleven'*, *Volume 45 of Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.95.

[4] Euripides is "notorious" for his anti-conformist approach to Classical myth; on the poet's "provocative and revisionist attitude" towards the myth of Iphigenia in particular, see P. Michelakis, *Euripides. Iphigenia at Aulis. Duckworth*

Companions to Greek and Roman Tragedy, London: Duckworth, 2006, 9ff.; *cf.* also C. Elliott Sorum, "Myth, Choice, and Meaning in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*,' *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 113, No. 4 (Winter, 1992), pp. 527-542.

[5] The flashbacks and thoughts which escort the hero on his way to the grandstand involve a series of embedded narratives—some of them of mythical or folkloric-styled nature—that help illuminate the larger story.

[6] Homeric characters are far from being anonymous; they are named, if not earlier, at least before they die in the battlefield. Since the most honorable death one can achieve in the epic world is while fighting, the poet honours the glorious deed by immortalizing the warrior. Tragedy always names key characters, but minor presences can be left anonymous, e.g. the shepherd (Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*), the nurse (Euripides, *Hippolytus*), as well as the chorus whose participants are not individually named but their collective presence is rendered anonymous instead.

[7] Page 6. The page references follow the 2007 publication of the novella (I. Kadare, *Agamemnon's Daughter – A Novella and Stories,* Canongate Books Ltd, Edinburgh, U.K.).

[8] "But I simply have to make the sacrifice" (Kadare, 9).

[9] Kadare's hero consults Graves' book on ancient Greek myths (R. Graves, 1955, *The Greek Myths,* 2 vols., Penguin, Harmondsworth, UK). Although his choice is presented as a subconscious one ("When she'd gone, I spent hours pacing the floor and ended up in front of the bookcase. Half dreaming, I took out a book I had just read, and flicked through the pages again. It was *The Greek Myths* by Robert Graves" (9-10.)), it justifies the hero's reception of the word "sacrifice" in its mythological context, the "grandiose and blood soaked beginnings" (10). Furthermore, the presence of an English book on Greek myths in the home library of an Albanian journalist indicates a lot more than just a vivid interest in Greek mythology. It places the hero within the cultural sphere and influence of the west which the communist, totalitarian dogma was fundamentally opposed to, and underlines the gap between the hero's broad intellectual orientation and the unmitigated isolation of the despotic regime.

[10] "When he explained it all to me, I saw his point of view" (7).

[11] For a comprehensive presentation of the myth of Iphigenia from Homeric to Hellenistic times and beyond, see T. Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*: *A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*, 2 vols. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, on "Iphigenia."

[12] In his Ph.D. thesis, *Iphigenia at Aulis: Myth, Performance, and Reception*, Kovacs offers a concise, yet inclusive presentation of all Euripidean plays, whether surviving tragedies or fragments, which involve a human—male or female—sacrifice (*Alcestis, Children of Heracles, Phoenician Women, Hecuba, Iphigenia at Aulis,* and the fragments from *Erechtheus, Protesilaus, Phrixus*); see Kovacs G.A., *Iphigenia at Aulis: Myth, Performance and Reception* (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Toronto), 2010. Retrieved from https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/32938/6/Kovacs_George_A_201006_PhD_Thesis.pdf

[13] Graves' book on Greek myths which the hero uses as his mythological bible is a fine source for the layman but leaves a lot to be desired at the academic level. Albeit a popular and well established one, the work does not provide a satisfactory interpretation of Greek mythology. The author's sources and his references have been doubted and his interpretations of myth are often seen as "romantic interpolations and sentimentalities of his own devising, legitimate enough in a work of imagination, but quite out of place in a handbook of mythology" (Review by H.J. Rose, *The Classical Review* (New Series) 5.2 (Jun. 1955). 208-209). For a criticism of Graves' work, see also reviews by K. Herbert (*The Classical Journal* 51.4 (Jan., 1956). 191-192) and J. Macpherson (*Phoenix* 12.1. (Spring, 1958). 15-25); more recently, *cf.* N. Lowe, "Killing the Graves Myth", *Times Online*, December 20, 2005.

[14] *Cf.* the stanza "To launch the ancient Trojan Wars / They offered up Iphigenia / For the sake of our great cause / I'll carry my darling to the pyre" (11) which is left intentionally vague regarding the author as well as the voice of the poem.

[15] "Had I invented this verse… fished out from a long sunken memory" (11).

[16] Suzana reveals her complicated relationship with the hero, "who [is] practically engaged to somebody else" (8). Premarital sex is not encouraged in ancient Greek society and does not feature in Greek mythology unless it is a relationship between a mortal and a divinity.

[17] "The Champs-Elysees of her thighs led all the way to her Arc de Triomphe with its immortal flame" (8).

[18] Pages 3-4. Initially, neither he nor the party secretary can understand why a rather insignificant member of the party like him has been invited to attend the parade from such a distinguished stand. He is charged with connivance by his colleague who is convinced that the hero must have been actively involved in the party propaganda in order to receive such an invitation.

[19] The hero admits that his main reason for attending the parade is to see Suzana one last time (13).

[20] "Nor was I up to deciding whether it was I or Suzana's father who was performing the sacrifice. Sometimes it seemed to be me and sometimes him; more likely, it was the two of us in tandem" (11-12).

[21] This theory is best exemplified in the interpretation of the Parthenon frieze which depicts a virgin sacrifice as J.B. Connelly has extensively argued ('Parthenon and Parthenoi: A Mythological Interpretation of the Parthenon Frieze', *American Journal of Archaeology* 100.1 (Jan., 1996). 53-80). According to Connelly, the frieze tells a story similar to that of Agamemnon and Iphigenia, with the King of Athens, Erechtheus, obeying an oracle and offering his young daughter to the gods to secure victory over the enemies of the city.

[22] "Papa's career was on the rise… Their family was more than ever in the limelight… Two weeks before, at the last plenum of the Central Committee, Papa had gone up another rung… So it was obvious she would have to make changes to her way of life, to her wardrobe, to the people she saw. Otherwise she might hurt his career" (6).

[23] Suzana's father is risking his rank and political career; at the same time, the narrator's Vienna scholarship is at stake.

[24] Kadare's criticism of the classical myth is already detected in the tragic play; on Euripides' innovative approach of the classical myth, as noted above. The tragic play renders Agamemnon as a highly problematic figure that has been heavily criticized for his power game, indecisiveness, opportunism, and cowardice. However, regardless of how Euripides portrays the Mycenaean king, the latter is "locked" in his myth and eventually *must* carry out the sacrifice of his daughter. The poet can surprise—or even shock—the audience with the characters he creates, but he cannot change the outcome of the mythical story.

[25] The hero cannot but notice "beaming faces" all around him (15); also *cf.* the hero's self-admonition: "You'd better spend your time thinking about the way you look! I told myself" (14).

[26] "I was one of them" (42).

[27] "Out of the human mass on the street, a line had formed and was making its way in orderly fashion in that direction, and to my great surprise no one betrayed any sign of guilt, shame or hesitation" (34), "Two thousand eight hundred years ago, a large crowd—just like this one, moving towards the grandstand—converged on an altar that was probably similarly draped in red" (63), and "Two thousand eight hundred years before, Greek soldiers had probably left the scene of Iphigenia's sacrifice in a similar state. Their faces had blanched at the sight of blood on the altar, and in their hearts they felt a gaping hole they didn't think would ever leave them. They said not a word, and in any case they had hardly anything to say, except for the same few thoughts that kept on going around in their heads" (103).

[28] "The sacrifice and the compromise are a thread apart as well as the triumph and disaster" (54).

[29] The eagle in Greek myth is one of the emblems of Zeus, the supreme god. The embedded narrative in Kadare's novella noticeably resembles the mythical story of Prometheus who is punished by Zeus and made to feed an eagle with his liver (best portrayed in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*). Prometheus, however, is an immortal Titan whose liver is regenerated at night while the anonymous man, desperate to regain life, gives up his flesh with the impossibility of his act predetermined. Prometheus' release from his punishment—facilitated by Heracles' intervention—contrasts with the anonymous man's tragic death. The story of the Bald Man is Kadare's creation, shaped to resemble a folk tale.

[30] *Cf.* how, applying his own understanding of myth, he considers all Greek soldiers to be deprived of any heroic dimension and unwilling to participate in the Trojan War, before even they set off for Troy.

[31] The explanation of the sacrifice of Iphigenia which Kadare follows is not the only one available; the tragic myth has been variously interpreted in recent scholarship. Most notably, the feminist discourse has offered various readings of the play which discuss the different aspects of controlling the female body. For a review of the most popular interpretations of the play, see Kovacs, pp. 37-46.

[32] A sacrifice is, per definition, an offer to divinity: the etymology of the word derives from the Latin term *sacrificium* (*sacer*, sacred and *facere*, to make). *Cf.* The Greek term sacrifice (*θυσία* from verb *θύω*, to offer to a deity).
[33] Regarding Calchas' origins, Kadare follows medieval tradition according to which Calchas was Trojan; *cf.* Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* which makes use of the same version of the story. Homer and Classical Antiquity do not consider Calchas anything but Greek.
[34] The hero doubts whether it has really been a sacrifice in the first place: "I'd got hold of the word sacrifice and then used it to contrive an analogy I'd taken further than was warranted. I was no better than a novice poet who manages after much effort to spawn a metaphor, then falls for it entirely and constructs and entire poetic work on a foundation no more solid than sand" (69).
[35] *Cf.* The young naked girl in preparation of her sacrifice on the Parthenon frieze (see note above).
[36] In *Agamemnon* (1674-1678), while addressing the chorus, Clytemnestra names the sacrifice of Iphigenia as the reason for her murdering the king.
[37] A number of accounts of people's sufferings are dispersed in the novella; they all underline the oppression of the totalitarian regime and seemingly support the hero's case but eventually undermine the importance of Suzana's sacrifice as such, as it becomes obvious that Suzana is not the only one who is requested to make a sacrifice and, compared to other people's hardships, hers seem rather trivial.
[38] The narrator's pragmatic evaluation of the Trojan war is further supported by literature; already in Homer, Achilles himself denounces his own heroic death for the sake of a peaceful, yet unmemorable, life (*Od.* 11.487-503). As for the sacrifice of Iphigenia, the chorus in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* disapproves of the king's act by referring to the sacrifice as impious, lawless and abnormal (*Ag.*150). Kadare's narrative, however, is not limited to the myth of Iphigenia to discuss the current regime. The totalitarian practices and the demand for absolute obedience of the contemporary leaders are briefly compared to Circe, the immortal witch, who turns Odysseus' companions into swine. The story of Odysseus' visit at Circe's island acquires clear political tones in Kadare's novella and becomes one more manifestation of the modern dictators.
[39] "Suzana's funeral. I had lost Suzana at the same time as I gained access to this stand" (62).

CHAPTER TWO

ORPHEUS LOVES INEVITABILITY: *BLACK ORPHEUS*' EURYDICE AND THE PLACE OF ORIGINALITY IN CLASSICAL RECEPTION

WILLIAM DUFFY

Marcel Camus' 1959 *Black Orpheus* (*Orfeu Negro*) stands even fifty years later as one of the most famous, and most successful, adaptations of an ancient myth in cinematic history. The film, an often loose adaptation of Vinícius de Moraes' *Orfeu da Conceição*, won the prestigious Palme D'Or at Cannes the year it was released, and remains to this day one of the most famous films set and produced in Brazil.[1] However, in both popular and scholarly circles, the actual steps Camus took to adapt the myth in his film are typically overlooked. Audiences typically focus on the incredible *bossa nova* music, dancing, and the costumes of carnival, with anything coming from the connections to the Orpheus myth a happy bonus.[2] Scholars and critics attending to the relationship between *Black Orpheus* and Orpheus focus on identifying parallels between the film or antiquity, or noting the places where the parallels are seemingly absent, but do not put significant effort into discussing conscious changes that have been made to the story except for its move from ancient Greece to 20th century Brazil. This approach, disappointingly common in Classical Reception studies, has resulted in this oversight in one of the most important and creative aspects of Marcel Camus' film: his creation of an almost entirely original Eurydice figure, whose presence both highlights and challenges the conventions of reception.

While Eurydice is of course famous from mythology, the ancient world provides very little information about her beyond the fact that she was beautiful, the circumstances of her death, and Orpheus' reaction to it. Ovid, for instance, allows Eurydice to say nothing but "goodbye" ("*vale*" *Met.* 10.62) and leaves her out of the *Heroides*, the series of imagined letters from women of myth to their loves. Indeed, the most influential and

complete accounts of Eurydice's character that influenced de Moraes' *Orfeu da Conceição* and Camus' *Black Orpheus*—which was based on the de Moraes play but had an original script, score, and approach to the material—are not ancient texts but accounts of the Orpheus myth by early 20th century writers and artists.[3] Notably, even the *Orfeu da Conceição* begins with Orpheus and Eurydice already involved, making Camus' decision to give Eurydice a life before Orpheus all but unique in depictions of the myth.[4] Notably, the Eurydice that Camus provides us is not, like his Orpheus, largely replaying the ancient story she is derived from, but persistently, if vainly, struggling against it.

The tension between the Eurydice of *Black Orpheus* and the Eurydice of ancient myth begins before the former even appears in the film. When *Black Orpheus*' Orfeu files for marriage with Mira (the film's version of the rejected lover of Orfeu invented by de Moraes), the minister jokes that she could not be marrying Orfeu because "everyone knows that Orpheus loves Eurydice."[5] Mira's belief that the magistrate is referring to a woman that the flirtatious Orfeu is having an affair with leads her to angrily seek out a "Eurydice" whom Orfeu does not yet know the name of. Besides somewhat ironically helping to push Orfeu and Eurydice together, Mira's reaction serves as a mirror of the audience's approach to the film. While most people seeing *Black Orpheus* would know the Orpheus myth better than Mira, they too would "know" that Eurydice and Orfeu have to love each other, solely due to their names.[6] More tragically, the audience would be aware that their tale must end in death. What they would not be prepared for, however, is Eurydice's cognizance of her impending doom, or her efforts to change her fate.

When we meet Eurydice for the first time, she is on a boat entering Rio de Janeiro, wearing a white sundress that sets her off from the rambunctious, brightly colored denizens of the city. Fredricksmayer (2001, 157-9) argues that this marks the beginning of a retelling of a mythic female's traditional "separation-liminality-integration" tale, just like the one he finds in the ancient mythic tradition. However, the version of the story given in *Black Orpheus* differs too greatly from both the general narrative structure and the accounts of Eurydice, specifically to make such an interpretation tenable.[7] While her clothing and lack of makeup do, as Fredricksmayer suggest, make her appear more innocent, she is clearly an adult comfortable with her cousin's overt sexuality, and her sleeping with Orfeu out of wedlock on the day they meet makes seeing her as the young wife problematic at best, even with her attire.[8] An easier explanation is that Eurydice's simple dress simply marks her rural roots, as Lee (1961, 311) stated, albeit somewhat condescendingly. Indeed, Eurydice's attire