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A Creative and Scholarly Exploration of Edna Obrien's Iphigenia

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A Creative and Scholarly Exploration of Edna Obrien’s Iphigenia
(Senior Acting Project/Honors Thesis)

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I. Abstract

In this thesis, I will document the creative work I completed for my Senior Acting Project. I will also explore my Senior Acting Project from a more ‘conventional’ academic standpoint. I will explore various definitions of tragedy and argue my own definition; I will also investigate who Euripides was as a writer and human being. I will then apply my findings to three different versions of Euripides’ tragedy *Iphigenia in Aulis*: a classical translation, a more contemporary translation, and the adaptation I performed for my SAP. I will argue whether or not each meets my criteria for a tragedy, and how truly each conveys Euripides’ spirit.
II. Preface

This is a rather unorthodox thesis, a blend of traditional ‘academic’ work which poses and answers a specific question, and a creative component which focuses on performance studies. To understand the document in its entirety, you must understand the various components, what they mean, and how they were achieved.

During the fall of 2010, I completed a Senior Acting Project under the direction of Professor Peter Wright. Theater majors are not required to complete a thesis, but as a dedicated student of acting who wishes to pursue it in the future, I wanted to complete a capstone to my four years of hard work. The goal of the Senior Acting (or SAP) is to increase the actor’s creative range so that she can bring a new freedom and depth to her work. For my SAP, I performed the title role in the theater department’s first production of the 2010-2011 academic year, *Iphigenia* by Edna O’Brien. As the show’s director, Peter Wright became my project advisor. I met with Peter over the summer of 2010, and worked closely with him during the 1½ month rehearsal process, both in and out of rehearsal.

Before the start of rehearsals, I analyzed my existing skills and the goals I wished to achieve, and recorded them for posterity in a pre-production analysis. During the rehearsal process, I kept a journal to document the creative process. Every time I made an acting discovery, for example, I wrote it down. If a question presented itself, I recorded it. All of my triumphs and tribulations, all the questions I encountered and the answers I found, went into my journal. And after the show closed, I spent time reflecting on my growth as an actor, which I detailed in a post-production analysis. At the end of the process, I also wrote a character analysis. I did the work for the character analysis throughout the production, and all of my character insights can be found within my journal. My decision to include my character analysis after my
journal is arbitrary; I did not complete one before the other, but worked on both simultaneously. Sections XIII-XVI of this thesis cover the SAP.

As a member of the Roger William’s University Honors Program, I was required to complete an Honors Thesis. To fulfill this obligation, I took my SAP and expanded it to fit a more traditional academic model. *Iphigenia* is an adaptation of a Greek tragedy, Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis*. With this as inspiration, I decided to focus on translations vs. adaptations. I was interested to see if the meaning of a work could change when translated and adapted by different people. To answer this question, I read three versions of Euripides’ play: a translation by Charles R. Walker, a translation by Don Taylor (which I used during the rehearsal process), and O’Brien’s adaptation (which I performed). I settled on two elements to compare: whether or not each play is a tragedy, and how accurately each reflects Euripides writing style and beliefs. I researched various definitions of tragedy to form my own definition, as well as various opinions on Euripides, and applied my findings to the plays. My results were both surprising and intriguing. Sections III-XII cover my second semester research. I chose to place them before my SAP sections because I did some of the intellectual research *during* the rehearsal process, to get a better understanding of the play. The two sections are not separate, but interconnected.

Danya Martin
III. Definitions of Tragedy

The Poetics

Definition of Tragedy: An imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions” (Aristotle 61)

Action: Action includes both the motives which drive the action, as well as “the whole working out of a motive to its end in success or failure” (Fergusson 9). Action is dependent on both thought and character, because while a person’s character disposes him to act a certain way, he actually acts in response to changing circumstances and his thoughts show him what to do.
Together, thought and character make action (Fergusson 8).

Imitation of an Action: The events transpiring onstage are representations rather than reality.

Serious: A tragedy should not be comic.

Complete Action: A tragedy must be a complete story with a beginning, middle, and end.
Everything resolves at the end of a tragedy, at which time we see the truth (Fergusson 13).

Magnitude: A tragedy must be a length which the audience can easily remember. If a play is too long, the audience cannot remember all the details.

Embellished Language: A tragedy must use both poetry and prose when appropriate.

Action vs. Narrative: The characters of a tragedy must act out the events of the story.

Purgation of Pity and Fear: Pity is the feeling “aroused by unmerited misfortune” (Aristotle 76) which unites us with the sufferer. When someone suffers unnecessarily, we feel for him in his distress. On the other hand, fear is the emotion aroused by “the misfortune of a man like ourselves” (Aristotle 76). While in the grips of fear we focus on the cause of the suffering and
whether or not it could happen to us, rather than on the person who suffers. Aristotle believes it is important to have both emotions, because pity alone is melodramatic while fear alone simply makes us tense. Why does Aristotle demand that tragedy must purge pity and fear rather than just create them? According to Fergusson, in a good tragedy the emotions are stirred, released and appeased. The result is not just a spiritual cleansing, but an understanding of a universal truth.

**Aristotle’ Six Parts of Tragedy:** Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, and Song

**Plot:** The series of events which transpire during the play.

**Character:** When Aristotle refers to character, he means habitual action formed by nature and nurture. In real life and onstage, a person’s character disposes him to act in a certain way. For example, in *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus continues to search for the truth despite opposition because he is a conscientious and upright ruler, qualities which are part of his character. Aristotle also notes that characters should be true to life but also better than reality. It is the playwright’s job to keep the flaws of the character while also ennobling him.

**Diction:** How well one can speak.

**Thought:** Thought refers to a “wide range of the mind’s activities, from abstract reasoning to the formulation and perception of emotion” (Fergusson 25). Thought is represented by what the characters say about the intended course of the play and reveals their psychological motivations.

**Spectacle:** An impressive performance or display. In Aristotle’s time this meant something like a God swinging onstage from above. Today it means any musical by Andrew Lloyd Webber.

**Song:** In accordance with the theater conventions of the time, Aristotle demanded song/music.

**What Makes a Tragic Hero:** According to Aristotle, a tragic hero is neither all good nor all bad. He is not a virtuous man “brought from prosperity to adversity” (Aristotle 75), which merely shocks us; nor is he a bad man brought from adversity to prosperity, because this “neither
satisfies the moral sense nor calls forth pity and fear” (75); nor is it the downfall of a villain, which we celebrate as right and good. Also, the tragic hero has misfortunes caused by “some error or frailty” (75), is highly renowned and prosperous, and is noble both in status and in character.

Reversal/Recognition: The most powerful elements of emotional interest in a tragedy are the reversal and recognition scenes (63). A tragedy must have a reversal of fortune from good to bad, and the best reversals coincide with, or come from, the recognition; recognition is when the protagonist finally knows or understands that vital link. For example, Oedipus’ moment of recognition comes when he learns that he killed his father and married his mother. From that point his fortunes are reversed and he goes offstage to gouge out his eyes.

Pleasure from Tragedy: A question which has plagued playwrights for centuries is: should tragedy inspire pleasure? For Aristotle the answer is yes, but a distinct kind of pleasure. It is not so much happiness as it is satisfaction or gratification. The audience receives the satisfaction of knowledge and understanding from recognition of things known, like Juliet’s excitement at Romeo’s voice – the audience recognizes the emotion from their own experience, and finds pleasure in this recognition. Aristotle also believes that pleasure can come from recognizing and understanding the universal truth of the play.

According to Orin E. Klapp in his essay “Tragedy and the American Opinion,” an awareness of evil is essential to tragedy. The characters in every tragedy understand that the world is “a vast and largely hostile environment” (Klapp 302) in which we can achieve great things only by defying the gods. In the face of his inevitable demise, the tragic hero refuses to submit, showing a heroic determination in the face of defeat. He commits himself fully to his
course of action, however foolish or wicked it may appear, and refuses to back down. Unlike other men, who base their conduct on what others want, the tragic hero listens to something inside himself and holds a course of rather obstinate individuality. It is this fortitude in the face of “the most appalling catastrophes” (309) which lifts the human spirit. Klapp also asserts that the tragic hero must be a “complex figure, whose self-imposed punishment and conflict within challenge our compassion and understanding” (306). He cannot be a mere victim because “we feel only a melodramatic conflict between him and the villains or forces that have harmed him” (304), nor can he be a villain because we are glad of what he gets.

Richard B. Sewall, author of the analytical essay “The Vision of Tragedy,” asserts that tragedy is primal and recalls the first question of existence: what does it mean to be? It evokes the original terror of the world, the terror of the irrational, and sets up “man as questioner, naked, un-accommodated, alone, facing mysterious, demonic forces in his own nature and outside, and the irreducible facts of suffering and death” (Sewall 37). Greek tragedians understood “the permanence and the mystery of human suffering” (38) which men can learn about only by suffering themselves. Tragedy pushes man to the edge and impels him “to fight against his destiny, kick against the principles, and state his case before God and his fellow man” (37). In the end all tragedy evokes the same universal emotions, as the hero “faces as no man has ever faced it before the existential question . . . ‘what is man?’” (37).

In his essay “The Tragic Fallacy,” Joseph Wood Krutch argues that nobility is vital to tragedy (276). Tragedy, Krutch writes, celebrates the greatness of the human spirit and is an expression of “confidence in the value of human life” (Krutch 274). A tragic writer does not have to believe in God “but he must believe in man” (276). Calamitous events cause the best in man to come out, so that we accept the “outward defeats . . . for the sake of the inward victories”
which they reveal. Krutch also argues that tragedy is based on the idea that the soul of man is great, and that the universe concerns itself with him. Man believes his actions matter, not just to himself but to the universe at large, and that they “reverberate” through the world (279). The tragic hero acts on the assumption that his passions and opinions matter, that his actions are worthwhile and important. Krutch believes that tragedy gives a “rationality, a meaning, and a justification to the universe” (276).

In Chapter VI of her book *The Greek Way*, Edith Hamilton contends that tragedy encompasses the dignity and significance of human life. When we see humanity as “trivial, mean, sunk in dreary hopelessness” she declares, “then the spirit of tragedy departs” (Hamilton “Chapter VI” 210). Hamilton believes that there is no dignity like the “dignity of a soul in agony” (212), and it is by our power to suffer “that we are of more value than the sparrows” (211). The one essential element that makes a sad story a tragedy, she asserts, is a soul that can feel greatly; death is sad, but death felt and suffered greatly is tragedy. By witnessing a great soul in pain we can see a deeper reality than that in which we reside, and so “the greater the suffering depicted . . . the more intense our pleasure” (207). However, tragedy has no “kinship with cruelty or the lust for blood.” Rather, evil and suffering are simply part of the human condition and tragedy focuses on our response to this irreducible fact.

Karl Jaspers, author of the essay “The Basic Characteristics of Tragedy,” maintains that tragedy is connected to the meaning of life. There is a tension in tragedy which warns of doom, that the nature of the universe is to crush the “human greatness which opposes it” (Jaspers 49). Yet in the face of this inevitable failure the tragic hero acts, risking not just his life but “every concrete embodiment of whatever perfection he sought” (44). He knows he will not win, but “in realizing his selfhood even unto death” (44) he finds redemption and deliverance. Through his
“sheer strength to bear the unknown without question, and to endure it with unshakeable
defiance” (44) comes man’s greatness; that “he can carry his human possibilities to their extreme
and can be undone by them with his eyes open” (51). Tragedy, Jaspers declares, requires “a
movement toward man’s proper essence, which he comes to know as his own in the presence of
doom” (43).

In *The Invitation to the Theater*, authors George and Portia Kernodle explain that Greek
tragedy originated as a religious celebration. Tragedies were originally performed at the Festival
of Dionysus to celebrate “the resurrection of living spring out of dead winter,” combining “the
pain and humiliation of sacrificial death with the exaltation of resurrection” (Kernodle 18).
Tragedy, they assert, pushes man to his utmost, but the tragic protagonist rebels, and in this
rebellion finds his identity. He takes a stand against the accepted order, and while the world may
ultimately destroy him, we take pride that he “challenged the universe and measured the human
reach against the infinite” (18). In his failure man is reconciled; he learns that the world is
“moral, meaningful, and ordered” (21). And finally, the Kernodles believe that tragedy raises
meaningful questions about the nature of life, like: what is man’s relation to the world, to
himself, and to God? What is the meaning of evil and suffering? And what is the meaning of
choice and responsibility?

In his work introductory text *The World of Theater*, Robert W. Corrigan argues that we
must resist the “kind of thinking about drama that assumes tragedy of all ages has certain formal
and structural characteristics in common (92). However, he admits that all tragedy shares a
certain “tragic view” which assumes that “to live is to face the absurd contradiction that life is
most fully affirmed by death” (Corrigan 94). Tragedy, Corrigan asserts, is concerned with the
fate of humanity and expresses the tragic nature of the human condition. The tragic hero refuses
to submit to his inevitable failure, and although he cannot overcome the human condition, his struggle “is the source of dramatic significance” (95). It is the struggle, Corrigan states, which makes the protagonist into a hero and a play into tragedy.

To author Susanne Langer, tragedy is about the potentiality and fulfillment of human life. In her essay “The Tragic Rhythm,” Langer maintains that the hero must go through a cycle of growth, maturation, and the final relinquishment of power, giving us a vision of life lived “in its entirety” (89). He spends all of himself on one dramatic action, and his fate is the “complete realization of his individual ‘human nature’” (Langer 86), a visible fulfillment of his destiny. Langer also comments on the structural elements of a tragedy. For example, Langer believes we mustn’t make moral demands of the tragic protagonist. Rather, he must be “imperfect to break the moral law, but fundamentally good, i.e. striving for perfection, in order to achieve his moral salvation” (91). The tragic protagonist must also interest us, because “the more individual and powerful his personality . . . the more extraordinary and overwhelming” the action (86). As for the tragic error, Langer sees it as a structural necessity rather than a moral one. She contends that the tragic flaw indicates the limit of the tragic hero’s powers.
IV. My Definition of Tragedy

Creating a concrete definition of tragedy is an indomitable task for a number of reasons. First, the genre is so complex and so subjective that to reduce it to a simple formula is counterproductive. We must resist the kind of thinking which assumes all tragedy “has certain formal and structural characteristics in common” (Corrigan 92) and that anything which deviates is not tragedy. Tragedy takes many shapes, from Sophocles to Shakespeare, from Racine to Miller, and to demand that they all follow a specific guideline is ludicrous. Every person views tragedy in slightly a different way, and what one person sees as a tragedy another views as a melodrama. With this said, I believe there are a couple of universal characteristics which most tragedies share. They are not as concrete or specific as Aristotle’s original definition from *The Poetics*, but broader and more fluid so as to encompass as many different examples of tragedy as possible.

I believe first and foremost that an inherent sense of doom, an awareness that life is about failure and death, is essential to tragedy. The first tragedies were performed at the Festival of Dionysus to celebrate the cycle of life, “the resurrection of living spring out of dead winter” (Kernodle 18). Unlike other cultures, the Greeks saw human life as “bound up with evil and that injustice was the nature of things” (Hamilton, “Chapter IV” 207). Because of this, tragedy is concerned with the fate of humanity and the tragic nature of the human condition. There is a certain inevitability to tragedy which is absent from other forms of drama. For example, in *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus is a tragic figure before the play even starts. His doom started with his very birth, when the oracle prophesied that he would kill his father and marry his mother. There is no sense in the play that his fate can end any other way than in disaster, that his downfall is inevitable.
Although tragedy focuses on death and failure, it is by no means depressing. To the contrary, through the unflinching struggle of the protagonist against his inevitable demise, tragedy exalts the greatness of the human spirit. The calamitous events of the plot reveal the best in mankind; the protagonist knows that life will crush him and yet he is committed to something inside himself which impels him “to fight against his destiny, kick against the principles, and state his case before God and his fellow man” (Sewall 37). There is no doubt that the protagonist will fail, but his heroic determination to fight uplifts us. The struggle itself “is the source of dramatic significance. It is out of this struggle . . . that heroes are born” (Corrigan 95). In accepting the defeat of the hero we feel pride that someone “challenged the universe and measured the human reach against the infinite” (Kernodle 18). Again, *Oedipus Rex* provides an excellent example. Oedipus struggles with his need to know, to find out the truth. Something inside compels him to keep searching for his identity even when his wife tells him not to and the shepherd warns of the fateful consequences. He is unwilling to settle, to live his life only halfway, to leave questions unanswered and actions untaken. He search *must* end in pain and despair, but his refusal to stop looking and change his course makes him great. We take pleasure in his indistinguishable human spirit.

When speaking of tragedy, I refuse to use the terms “nobility” and “hero” because of their moral connotations. I believe that the moral worth of the tragic protagonist is insignificant to the story. As such, the only moral limitation I place on the protagonist is this: he cannot be all good or all bad. The protagonist must not be a mere victim or a martyr because then he is too innocent to be tragic and “lacks willful fault and inner conflict . . . so we feel only a melodramatic conflict between him and the villains or forces that have harmed him” (Klapp 304). On the other hand, a tragic protagonist mustn’t be a villain, because we are glad when a
villain receives his just desserts. In the end I believe that a tragic protagonist is a “complex
figure, whose self-imposed punishment and conflict within challenge our compassion and
understanding” (Klapp 306). Also, the protagonist must be greater than the average man, but this
does not come from a moral superiority. For example, Macbeth is considered a tragic protagonist
and yet he murders countless people in his quest for the throne. However, we do not write him
off as a villain because he questions his actions, repents, carries on a fight within himself and
with outward forces, and his humanity wins our sympathy. It is his struggle and his willingness
to live life to the fullest which, like Oedipus, make him great.

Unlike many other scholars, I do not believe that the protagonist needs a “tragic flaw.” Of
course some tragic characters have distinct flaws, such as Creon’s hubris in Antigone or
Oedipus’ belief that he can outwit the gods in Oedipus Rex. However, other tragic protagonists
are more complex. In Death of a Salesman, for example, Willy Lowman has numerous “flaws”
or “faults.” He wants success, money, and the American dream, but is that bad? Doesn’t
everyone want that? He is happiest when he is in his garden working, and yet he thinks he should
be a businessman. Is following the wrong dream a fault? He doesn’t even know he is on the
wrong path. I believe that boiling a tragic character down to a single fault, which can be
identified as the cause of all his troubles, is too simplistic. I think that there is more tragic irony
when a character is partly to blame for his downfall, but it isn’t necessary. The forces the
protagonist struggles against are not important; what is important is how he handles those forces.
For example, in Iphigenia Agamemnon struggles against his own ambition, the gods, and the
machinations of his fellow man. It is not necessary to decide which one of these forces is the
most important or to say Agamemnon brought his troubles wholly upon himself. What matters is
his fight against his destiny.
V. Euripides

Of all the Greek playwrights, Euripides was the most confrontational. While Sophocles was content with the established doctrines of his time and Aeschylus didn’t like to cause trouble, Euripides obstinately held a mirror up to society to reveal its flaws. A product of the Athenian Enlightenment, he was likely a Sophist, free thinkers who promoted empirical inquiry. According to Aristophanes, Euripides taught the Athenians to “think, see, understand, suspect, question, everything” (Hamilton, “Chapter XIV” 261), and even his characters debate their choices. Unlike his contemporaries, Euripides refused to accept myth and doctrine without first analyzing and questioning it. Author Edith Hamilton asserts that he was, and continues to be, a modern mind “who will not leave us to walk undisturbed in the way of our fathers” (253). Yet for all his questioning, Euripides never moralized about the injustices he saw, preferring to inspire debates rather than lectures.

It is impossible to offer definite conclusions about Euripides’ religious beliefs, but at the very least one can say that he was conflicted and more than a little skeptical. For example, Euripides used popular religious myths as sources of inspiration, but reduced them to human scale and allowed the characters to form their own judgments (Barlow 21). As Robert Meagher explains, “once myth has become just another story, one version among many, its authority is broken irreparably. It must stand or fall . . . as any other account of reality” (76). Euripides’ search for religious answers is noticeable in other ways, as well. For instance, when Hecuba prays to Zeus in The Trojan Women, she questions whether the god is “the necessity imposed by nature, or by human intelligence” (Euripides, lines 885-886). Hecuba directs her prayer to Zeus, indicating a belief in his existence, but she wonders whether humans created the deity to serve
their own needs. The product of a culture steeped in faith, Euripides refused to dismiss religion entirely. Instead, he questions the most deeply entrenched beliefs to test their validity.

Although Euripides refused to preach in his plays, he did have clear opinions on war. Though scholars may diverge on many aspects of Euripides and his work, most agree that the playwright was fervently anti-war. Euripides spent his entire life in the shadow of the Peloponnesian War, and he left Athens at an advanced age to escape the fighting. Because of his experience, Hamilton argues, he could see through “all the sham glory” of war “to the awful evil beneath” (“Chapter XIV” 256). For instance, the Greek victory over Troy was a source of pride for the Greeks, yet Euripides chose to focus on the victims of the conflict. In *The Trojan Women*, for example, he details in excruciating agony the death of an innocent child, the imposed marriage of a temple virgin, and the forced slavery of the captive women of Troy. Euripides presents war from the eyes of the enemy, from the women who lost not only their loved ones, but their homes and their dignity. The keening loss of Hecuba as she mourns the death of her innocent grandson says it all. It didn’t matter to Euripides why wars started, only that they are never the solution.

One of most prominent characteristics of Euripides’ work is his ability to capture grief and suffering. His belief that everyone has the power to suffer, and suffer greatly, earned him the title “world’s most tragic poet” from fellow scholar Aristotle. In her anguish over the loss of her son in *The Trojan Women*, for example, Andromache describes the “sweet fragrance” of his skin (Euripides, line 758). This line, so specific and so human, holds intensity because every parent can remember marveling at the beautiful scent of his or her child. It is a universal gesture of love, and Euripides understands its emotional power. With this one tiny statement he adds force to Andromache’s emotions. There is no denying that Euripides understands grief, but that
does not mean he was cynical or wallowed in despair. To the contrary, Euripides believes that every human being has value. According to Hamilton, he never saw humanity as chiefly pitiably; rather, he believed that “human beings are capable of grandeur, and that calamity met greatly is justified” (“Chapter XIV” 260). Yes, Euripides tackles the cruelties of human kind, but he wouldn’t have bothered writing about them at all if he didn’t believe his work could affect change. There is a feeling of hope and faith in humanity which many modern readers and critics fail to see, and which makes Euripides’ work so special.

Euripides held certain opinions on power and its influence. While some believe that absolute power corrupts absolutely, Euripides took a more nuanced approach. He seemed to believe that power is neither automatically all good nor all corrupting, but that it depends on the individual. If you want to find out what someone is made of, he seems to say, put them in a position of power and watch the result. For an example of man corrupted by power, look no further than The Trojan Women. In this play, the Greek military leaders attack the weakest characters, the captive women and their children. Agamemnon chooses Cassandra for his bride although she is a religious virgin, for instance, and the military leaders throw a child off a tower so he cannot avenge the Trojan defeat. The effect of power on women is not as apparent in this work, but it is interesting to note that Euripides was willing to put women front and center. Over and over he focused on women: who they are, what they are, what they are capable of. By no means does he completely overthrow every gender assumption of his society, but he treats women with more humanity than anyone else from his time. Euripides simply wanted audiences to take women seriously and respect them.
VI. A Note

Before you can understand my analysis of *Iphigenia in Aulis*, you must first understand something about the play. Euripides wrote the piece between 408 B.C. and his death in 406 B.C., and it is unclear whether he finished the play before he died. As Lattimore and Grene explain in their “Introduction to *Iphigenia in Aulis,*” the text of the play is “unusually corrupt, and there is by no means agreement among scholars as to what should be attributed to Euripides and what to later interpolators” (207). One of the most contentious parts of the play is the ending. The text which has come down to us ends with the arrival of a messenger, who describes Artemis replacing Iphigenia with a deer and whisking her away to live with the gods. However, many scholars believe that this ending was added posthumously by another hand, possibly Euripides’ son, Euripides III. These scholars maintain that the play truly ends right before the messenger arrives, with Iphigenia exiting to her death and the chorus performing a final ode. Unfortunately, there is no correct answer, and every translator must make a personal decision about which ending to use.
VII. Walker and Tragedy

After much consideration, I feel that Charles R. Walker’s translation of *Iphigenia in Aulis* is a tragedy. Not only does it display the sense of doom so essential to tragedy, but the tragic protagonist is morally complex and we take pride in his struggle. Because of this, Walker’s version fits my criteria for a tragedy.

Firstly, Walker’s translation possesses the sense of death and failure which characterizes all tragedy. The inevitability which typifies other tragic protagonists, for instance, clearly haunts Agamemnon. Much like Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex*, Agamemnon is a tragic figure from the very beginning. Calchas reveals Artemis’ demand, for example, well before the play even starts, meaning Agamemnon’s fate is sealed by the time we meet him. This moves the focus, then, from the destination (Iphigenia’s death) to the journey. The play also reveals a belief in the general doom of humanity. For example, Agamemnon laments that “many things can bring calamity. At one time it is an enterprise of the gods . . . at another, the wills of men, many and malignant, ruin life utterly” (*Iphigenia in* lines 22-23). In reply, the Old Man philosophizes that “it is necessary and fated that you be glad and that you be sad too, for you were born human, and whether you like it or not, what the gods will comes true” (lines 31-33). Agamemnon also asserts that “no mortal man has happiness and fortune to the end. He is born, every man, to his grief” (lines 162-163).

While Walker maintains the doom of tragedy through precise translation of Euripides’ words, he also does so through his choice of ending. The version of the play which has been handed down to us has a happy ending, but there is debate as to the true author of this section. In this translation, Walker chose not to include the disputed ending, and instead ends with Iphigenia exiting to her death and a final choral ode. By using what I believe is Euripides’ original ending,
Walker maintains the tragic sense of doom. In the entire play there is never a doubt that Iphigenia will die, and yet at the last second she is magically saved? Not only does this contradict the Greek tragic idea that failure is inevitable, but it steals Agamemnon’s greatness.

Although Agamemnon’s demise is inevitable, we still take pride in his struggle. Many critics strain to view Agamemnon as a tragic protagonist when compared to that paragon of tragic heroes, Oedipus. However, we must remember that Oedipus is just one example of tragedy among a myriad different options ranging from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* to Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. In *The Invitation to Theater*, George and Portia Kernodle assert that the tragic protagonist is not unflinchingly sure of his course, as Oedipus is, but questions and struggles. For example, Willy Lowman tries, fails, and tries again; he struggles with himself and with societal demands; he questions and suffers; and yet he is a tragic figure. In his own, very human way, he stakes himself against the universe, refusing to submit to his fate until he has tried every avenue and left no part of his life unlived. It doesn’t matter whether his decisions are right or wrong – what is important is that *he made them*. When viewed in this light, Agamemnon is definitely a tragic protagonist.

According to author Susanne Langer, the tragic protagonist brings his “potentiality: his mental, moral, and even physical powers, his powers to act and suffer” (86), and I can think of no better phrase to describe Agamemnon. Throughout the play, Agamemnon makes different decisions, tries different avenues, and exhausts every possibility until he has realized his entire potentiality. He takes his destiny into his own hands, and will not accept the outcome until *he has had his say*. Although Agamemnon could remain passive in the face of the oracle, letting Artemis and his fellow men control his destiny, he refuses to play the victim. He actively decides to sacrifice Iphigenia, for example, when he could remain silent and let fate take its course. *He*
concocts the sham marriage and sends the initial letter to Clytemnestra, telling her to bring Iphigenia. He decides to send the missive urging her not to come. He makes the choice to face his fate when he could simply live in denial. After he learns of Iphigenia’s arrival, for instance, he laments to his brother “I now face the ordeal of my defeat” (*Iphigenia in* line 473). He orders Menelaus to keep Clytemnestra away so he can “do this evil . . . with fewest tears” (lines 541-542) and he continues to lie about the marriage. He decides to consult Calchas once the truth is out. And finally, in a moment of recognition, *he truly accepts the situation*. With nowhere left to turn, and all of his “mental, moral, and physical powers” exhausted, he admits to Iphigenia that “We are weak and of no account before this fated thing” (line 1271). In the words of the Kernodles, “The reconciliation of tragedy is with the self” (21).

Another characteristic of tragedy which Walker’s *Iphigenia in Aulis* displays is the moral complexity of the protagonist. As I explained in my analysis, the tragic protagonist must neither be all good nor all bad but somewhere in between. According to Orrin E. Klapp, a tragic hero is a “complex figure, whose self-imposed punishment and conflict within challenge our compassion and understanding” (306). Obviously Agamemnon is no saint, but he is no villain either. If he were a complete scoundrel, devoid of compassion and remorse, he would sacrifice his daughter without a second thought. However, Agamemnon realizes his mistake and tries to rectify the situation, explaining to his servant “I did this wrong! Now in this letter I rewrite the message and put down the truth” (*Iphigenia in* 106-107). He has a conscience, he knows right from wrong, and he tries to do the right thing. Then, when his efforts fail, he suffers inwardly for what he must do. When reunited with Iphigenia, for example, she notes that “the tears – a libation of tears – are there ready to pour from your eyes” (lines 650-651), to which Agamemnon replies “this willing and not doing will crack my heart” (line 657). Unlike a villain, he struggles inwardly
with his fate; in response to Clytemnestra’s arguments, Agamemnon lashes back “I love my children! Did I not I would be mad indeed. Terrible it is to me, my wife, to dare this thing. Terrible not to dare it” (lines 1256-1258). He does not see Iphigenia’s death as the beginning of his rise to fame and glory, but as his downfall, telling the Old Man his “mind is crazed. I fall in ruin!” (line 143). Agamemnon’s inner struggle, his humanity, allows us to sympathize with his pain and suffering. That is the mark of a true tragic protagonist.
VIII. Walker and Euripides

I believe that Walker’s translation of *Iphigenia in Aulis* upholds Euripides’ original intentions for the play, and generally stays true to his spirit. From his hatred of war to his refusal to preach, Walker maintains all of Euripides essential characteristics.

First of all, Walker maintains the religious skepticism inherent in all of Euripides’ works. For example, the chorus, usually the most pious characters in Greek drama, wonders about the validity of Helen’s mythic origins. After explaining the myth of her birth, they ask whether the story is merely “a fable from the book of Muses, borne to me out of season, a senseless tale” (*Iphigenia in Aulis* lines 796-800). Agamemnon shares their misgivings, but confines his attacks to the race of prophets, calling them “arrogant” and “a curse upon the earth” (lines 520-521). Clytemnestra shows the most extreme doubt of all the characters, daring to question the very existence of the gods. Before setting off to save Iphigenia, for example, Clytemnestra encourages Achilles one last time by telling him “if there are gods, you, being righteous, will win reward in heaven; if there are none, our toil is without meaning” (lines 1034-1036). In translation, Walker neither omits nor dilutes Euripides’ religious uncertainty.

Walker also preserves the human scale of the play, which Euripides achieves by emphasizing the human forces and deemphasizing the gods. In searching for a way out of his predicament, for instance, Agamemnon admits that Odysseus and Calchas would “arouse and seize the very soul of the army, order them to kill you and me – and sacrifice the girl” (lines 530-533). Notice that Agamemnon does not fear the retribution of the gods, but of other men. Later, Clytemnestra tells Achilles that Agamemnon is filled with “terror of the army” (line 1012), as opposed to terror of the gods. And when Achilles tries to save Iphigenia, the troops are so eager to perform the sacrifice that they try to stone him to death. The only time we ever actually here
of Artemis is when Agamemnon relates her prophecy to the Old Man early in the play. Walker could have chosen to give the gods more prominence by using the alternate ending, but he chose not to, and in so doing maintains the human scale of the play. For Euripides and Walker, Agamemnon is trapped on all sides by the wills of men, not deities.

I feel that Walker’s translation also maintains Euripides’ opinions on power. Euripides believed that the corrupting influence of power depended upon the individual wielding it, which Walker conveys. For example, the great Achilles is immoral, self-centered and vain. When Clytemnestra explains Agamemnon’s trickery, the young demi-god refuses to “endure the insult and injury which the Lord Agamemnon has heaped upon me” (lines 961-962) and is outraged not for the unjust death of an innocent girl, but at the use of his name without his permission. He even admits he might have consented to Agamemnon’s plan, had the King asked him first! In contrast to Achilles is Agamemnon, who overcomes the corrupting influence of power. The king has ambition but he is not overwhelmed by it. He makes a bad choice when he agrees to sacrifice Iphigenia, but he sees the error of his ways and tries to rectify the situation. He is not a villain but a human being, who suffers and struggles like anyone else. To Euripides, the effect of power depends on the individual, and Walker upholds this view.

Just as he retained Euripides’ religious skepticism, Walker also retains his intense hatred of war. Instead of using terms like glory and valor to depict war, Euripides describes the bloodshed and ruin which follow it. Nowhere is this more evident than in the chorus’ description of the upcoming sack of Troy, singing:

“He will encircle in bloody battle,
Cutting the defenders throats,
To drag their bodies headless away . . .
He will sack all the dwellings in Troy city
So every maiden will wail loudly . . .

‘Who will pluck me a flower
Out of my country’s ruin?’”

(lines 775-778, 793-794)

Euripides envisions the battle from the view of the Trojan women, imagining the loss of their beloved city, the death of their loved ones, the carnage, and their overwhelming grief. Their lament is just a brief taste of his full play *The Trojan Women*, but it is enough to communicate his aversion to the useless and bloody enterprise. By maintaining the emotion and power of Euripides words, Walker communicates the author’s true feelings on war.

Euripides very obviously hates violent conflict, but this is the only issue in the play on which he takes a definitive stand. For the other issues, like power and religion, he merely raises questions. He is very confrontational, as in all his works, questioning the validity of myths or the corrupting influence of power. However, Euripides does not dismiss the gods outright, deconstruct the entire religious institution, or make all politicians one-dimensional scumbags. Euripides doesn’t preach, and this translation honors that characteristic.

Euripides final, and most well-known characteristic, is his ability to capture grief and suffering. The previous section of choral poetry not only invalidates war, but captures the grief of these women. Euripides also does an excellent job capturing Agamemnon’s suffering, which Walker translates well. When Iphigenia asks her father to stay at home, he responds “O that I might! This willing and not doing will crack my heart” (lines 657-657). The phrase “crack my heart” causes us to imagine, literally, Agamemnon’s heart cracking down the middle, and Walker’s decision to use crack instead of the traditional “break” adds even more emotional punch to the image. Walker’s translation also captures the grief of other characters, including Clytemnestra. The chorus describes the queen in her distress over Iphigenia, lamenting “Oh,
what a power is motherhood, possessing a potent spell. All women alike fight fiercely for a child” (lines 918-920). Their words communicate the wrath and anguish of a mother protecting her young, and we experience the depth and magnitude of Clytemnestra’s feelings.

Finally, Walker’s translation of *Iphigenia at Aulis* stays true to Euripides’ spirit in that it excludes the fraudulent ending. I personally think the second ending is absurd, a capitulation to audiences who were uncomfortable with the truth. For instance, Euripides clearly attacks religion in the play and yet the alternate ending exalts the goddess’ compassion. It also sweeps away his questions, since all that matters is Iphigenia’s survival: if things turn out the way we want them too, then we don’t have to think about anything bad. I feel that Walker’s ending makes much more sense: Iphigenia is sacrificed, Agamemnon leaves for Troy, and Clytemnestra remains to simmer in anger and grief. The final chorus is heavy and sorrowful, describing Iphigenia sacrificed to a deity who takes “joy in human blood” (line 1523). The women describe the “streams of flowing blood . . . her lovely bodies neck slashed with a sword of death” (lines 1512-1518), and in a final act of irony, ask “For the King Agamemnon, O touch his head with a glory everlasting” (lines 1529-1531). This is the true ending for Euripides’ play – straightforward, critical, and unflinching.
IX. Taylor and Tragedy

Unlike Walker’s version, Don Taylor’s translation entitled *Iphigenia at Aulis* is not a tragedy. There is no tragic awareness of evil, the protagonist is morally simplistic to the point of caricature, and Taylor’s lack of faith in humanity leaves no room to celebrate man’s greatness.

While many of the particulars differ from play to play, all tragedy possesses an ineffable atmosphere of disaster. Karl Jaspers describes it as “tension that warns of doom” (46) while others call it a “tragic vision” or a “tragic worldview.” Whatever name it takes, the awareness that life is finite has been at the heart of tragedy since the Greeks. Unfortunately, Taylor strips the play of this dark lesson, reducing Euripides’ tragedy to a melodrama. Taylor takes great pains to emphasize Agamemnon’s personal and inevitable downfall, referring to his predicament over and over throughout the play. In one page alone, for example, Agamemnon describes himself as “a slave under the yoke, chained and shackled” and bemoans that “nothing could be worse than being caught in a trap as appalling as this” (*Iphigenia at* 18). Two pages later he whines to Menelaus that he is “boxed in by circumstance” (20), and one page after that he laments the “appalling situation I’m in, how utterly I am trapped” (21). In the space of four pages, Agamemnon makes four references to his fate, yet there is only one mention of the fate of mankind in the entire play, when Agamemnon laments that “No man lives happy to the end of his life or avoids his share of bad luck. We inherit grief merely by being born” (8). Tragedy is concerned with the fate of humanity and expresses the tragic nature of the human condition, but Taylor’s translation is only concerned with the fate of Agamemnon. Because Taylor’s *Iphigenia at Aulis* does not remind us of “the permanence and the mystery of human suffering” (Sewall 38) it cannot be considered a tragedy.
Next, in a proper tragedy the protagonist must have enough moral complexity to excite our interest and pity, but Taylor reduces Agamemnon to a mere villain. In his introduction to the play, for example, Taylor calls Agamemnon “a third rate politician, with no moral sense at all, prepared to lie to his wife, manipulate his colleagues and murder his daughter in order to keep command” (xi). Agamemnon is as self-centered as Achilles, telling Menelaus he won’t get revenge “at the expense of my sense of justice, leaving me years of misery and a guilty conscience for an unforgivable crime committed on a child of my own flesh” (*Iphigenia at 16*) (italics not original). Notice that Agamemnon thinks only of how the sacrifice will affect him, that Iphigenia’s death will cause him “years of misery and a guilty conscience.” Later, when Menelaus offers a way for Iphigenia to escape, instead of jumping at the idea, Agamemnon refuses on the grounds that “she might escape in secret. I can’t” (20). A truly loving father would sacrifice himself if it meant his daughter could live, but Agamemnon thinks only of his own safety.

In Taylor’s translation, Agamemnon is especially callous and cruel. For example, when Clytemnestra asks Agamemnon to answer her question “like a man” he shouts back “Don’t give orders!” (43). In Walker’s translation, on the other hand, he replies mildly “go on- I am willing. There is no need to command an answer from me” (*Iphigenia in lines* 1130-1131). Taylor’s Agamemnon also targets his anger on the chorus, threatening them with death should they reveal his plan and exhorting them to “Keep silent! If you value your lives” (*Iphigenia at 22*). Finally, Taylor’s Agamemnon uses politics to achieve his own filthy ends. To achieve his daughter’s willing consent for the sacrifice, Agamemnon manipulates her patriotism, couching his actions in terms of Greek pride. “It’s for Greece . . . you must be sacrificed” he tells her, “Greece must be free . . . We are all Greeks. We must not allow the wives of Greece to be ravished from their
beds by Barbarians” (48). Taylor depicts Agamemnon as a duplicitous brute, and as Orinn E. Klapp asserts, “Those who weaken the hero until he is only a victim or a fool . . . rob him of dignity” (308-309). By making Agamemnon a scoundrel, Taylor violates one of the basic rules of tragedy.

Lastly, Taylor’s *Iphigenia at Aulis* is not a tragedy because it does not uplift us with a vision of man’s greatness. According to Joseph Wood Krutch, “tragedy is essentially an expression, not of despair, but of the triumph over despair and confidence in the value of human life” (274). Taylor’s translation, however, is an expression of despair. He seems to view humans as utterly deplorable and beyond redemption, that we are in a world in which “people have no values beyond the exploitation of the moment, and will do anything for short-term advantage” (Taylor xxvii). Agamemnon, the tragic protagonist, is too villainous to inspire pride. Taylor shows complete contempt for the king, whom he describes as “the worst kind of greasy political compromiser, utterly without moral feelings, utterly determined to stay on top of the pile no matter what it costs him, or his family, or his country” (xi). We do not rejoice at Agamemnon’s struggle, merely his downfall.

Unfortunately, the rest of the characters are just as despicable. For example, Iphigenia, the one character who exemplifies everything good in the world, becomes akin to a Nazi youth. Even the ending plays into Taylor’s bleak outlook. He uses the posthumous second ending because it maintains the “dry-mouthed cynicism” (Taylor xvii) which permeates the play. According to Taylor, the messenger’s speech is “a pack of lies, a public relations man’s gloss on a scene too horrific to contemplate” (xvii). He describes the ending as “rancidly satisfying” (xvii), and no tragedy should ever evoke such a response. Tragedy should inspire elation at the greatness of man, but instead of showing us how high we can ascend, Taylor shows instead the
depths to which we can plummet. As Edith Hamilton so wisely asserts, “when humanity is seen as devoid of dignity and significance, trivial, mean, sunk in dreary hopelessness, then the spirit of tragedy departs” (“Chapter VI” 210).
X. Taylor and Euripides

After careful analysis, I feel that Taylor’s translation of *Iphigenia at Aulis* does not stay true to Euripides’ spirit. Taylor does maintain Euripides’ feelings about war and religion, but he misunderstands Euripides’ feelings on power and the state of humankind.

In keeping with Euripides’ vision, Taylor preserves the anti-war sentiments and religious skepticism of the play. In a particular choral ode, for example, the chorus describes the Greek army as a “terrible war machine on the plains of Troy” and how “the voice of prophecy weeps at the horrors it sees in its visionary frenzy” (*Iphigenia at 29*). The phrase “war machine,” and words like “terrible” and “horror,” convey a sense of anguish and fear about war, rather than triumph and glory. Later, the chorus describes the sack of Troy in gruesome and horrific detail, crying:

“The vengeful Greek Army will draw
A circle of blood round the stone towers
. . . their naked throats severed, or slashed to the ear,
As the columns totter, and the rafters crash
And the whole great city is flattened. The screaming
Of womenfolk, young girls’ sobbing, gasps for pity
Even from Priam’s queen, will be drowned in a flood of weeping” (Taylor 30).

As for religious uncertainty, several of Taylor’s characters question the established tenets of their faith. For example, the chorus questions the myth of Helen’s birth, wondering if it is merely the work of poets who “weave their fantasies in vain, hoping with childish dreams to soothe our pain” (31). And Clytemnestra goes even further, questioning the very existence of the gods when
she comments to Achilles that “if the gods exist at all, they must surely reward such a principle stand as yours. If not . . . then everything is meaningless, and nothing worth doing” (41).

While Taylor stays true to Euripides’ feelings on war and religion, he incorrectly interprets the playwright’s feelings about power. In my analysis, I concluded that Euripides held a nuanced view of power, believing that while power can corrupt, it depends on the individual. Taylor’s translation, on the other hand, condemns all power and those who wield it. He attacks power in every sector and at every level, from the lowly soldiers to the very gods. Within religion, for example, Artemis and Hera start a war for no better reason than to salve their “injured pride” (23) and Calchas the prophet is merely “an ambitious political priest” (21). Within the army, Taylor describes Achilles as “a prancing idiot, stupid beyond comprehension” (Taylor xii), while Odysseus uses voter fraud to win his position as head of the troops, and the soldiers become so delirious with their physical power that they stone Achilles for defending Iphigenia. Within the government, Agamemnon is a “third-rate politician with no moral sense” (xi), Menelaus is “fatally stupid” but “thinks himself wonderfully clever” (xi), and innocent Iphigenia becomes “intoxicated by her own role, and the power it gives her to stir the men” (xvi). Taylor’s position on power is clear, and it does not correspond with Euripides’.

I believe that Taylor also misinterprets Euripides’ feelings about the state of man. People often believe that because tragedians depict the most appalling circumstances, they must have little faith in mankind. However, I contend that tragedians have more faith in their fellow man than writers of other genres. Euripides used his writing as a vehicle for change, pointing out the flaws of society so they could be addressed. He did not, as Taylor so boldly claims, despair at “the moral trough his society [had] fallen into” (Taylor xiii) or show “contempt for his ‘heroes’” (x). To understand Taylor’s complete lack of confidence in humankind, look no further than his
treatment of Iphigenia. In Taylor’s world, Iphigenia does not submit to death out of familial love, patriotic duty, or any kind of altruism. Instead she, like all the characters, is motivated by baser urges. She uses the sacrifice as a bid for fame, assuring her mother that she “shall become famous as the woman who set Greece free” (*Iphigenia at 52*) and that her name will be “remembered through the generations” (53). She also becomes “intoxicated with her own role, and the power it gives her” and is possessed by the “brutality and violence of the soldiery” (Taylor xvi). Taylor even compares her to a Nazi “making crudely rabble-rousing speeches . . . reminiscent of the kind of things Hitler said at Nuremberg” (xvi). Taylor takes the most pure character, full of goodness and nobility, and makes her nothing more than a brainwashed puppet of a corrupt nation. If Iphigenia is corrupt, then there is absolutely no hope, and as I have already concluded, Euripides never stopped hoping.
XI. O’Brien and Tragedy

Although Edna O’Brien’s *Iphigenia* is an adaptation of Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis*, she maintains the tragedy of the original. Unlike other modern authors, O’Brien understands the failure inherent to tragedy, the moral needs of the tragic protagonist, and that we can in fact feel pride in his doomed struggle.

Even though she is a contemporary playwright, O’Brien is able to capture the sense of doom essential to tragedy. For example, O’Brien uses blood to symbolize the inevitable doom of the protagonists in a very concrete and literal way. When Iphigenia gets her period onstage, for example, her menstrual blood symbolizes her part in the violence. Also, when Agamemnon asks the Sixth Girl what makes her sure he will send for her, she replies “Because the blood wills it’’ (O’Brien 17). And in the final scene, Clytemnestra stands bathed in bloody rain. O’Brien’s unique ending also emphasizes the family’s doom. Rather than using either the original or alternate endings, O’Brien creates her own. After Iphigenia and Agamemnon leave for the sacrifice, Clytemnestra remains onstage, standing under a bloody rain. With this figure dominating the stage, the chorus assures the queen that she will kill Agamemnon and then, “wiping the blood off your hands, you will return to the feast, unafraid of divine retribution” (44). With these words, O’Brien reminds the audience that the tragedy continues.

Like all tragic protagonists, in *Iphigenia*, Agamemnon struggles against his. Many of the decisions he makes in O’Brien’s adaptation are the same as the original; he sends the second letter Clytemnestra, for instance, and he faces facts when his wife and child arrive at camp. Menelaus tries to offer his brother ways to escape his fate, but Agamemnon dismisses them all and chooses to face the truth, saying “make no mistake, we have come to a point where necessity dictates out misfortune. We must carry out this bestial command” (21). While O’Brien keeps
many elements the same, she introduces some new decisions to Agamemnon’s struggle. For instance, in *Iphigenia*, the King appeals to Clytemnestra, asking her to “Be my companion in this . . . help me” (33). Later, he chooses to tell Iphigenia of the sacrifice himself. When Clytemnestra brings Iphigenia before him and demands that he explain the sacrifice, Agamemnon could storm off and refuse to comply, yet he chooses to confront his daughter; although it is painful to him, Agamemnon tells his little one “I did not bring you here of my own free will, nor are you betrothed to Achilles” (35). The Agamemnon of *Iphigenia* has as much fighting spirit as the original, and although many of his decisions are questionable and end in failure, he still makes them. In the face of his destiny, he stands up and says ‘I will not submit until I have exhausted all my possibilities.’

Like other tragedies, O’Brien’s adaptation displays a morally complex protagonist. Firstly, O’Brien increases Agamemnon’s suffering exponentially, and goes even further than Euripides to temper his bad decisions. For example, Agamemnon agrees to sacrifice Iphigenia before the play even starts, as in the original. However, the first words we hear from Agamemnon in O’Brien’s version are “My daughter, the jewel of my heart . . . no and no and no again” (5). By introducing the king with this phrase, O’Brien establishes him as a character worthy of pity and sympathy. Also, O’Brien changes the origin of the deception and sham marriage. In *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Agamemnon dreams up the marriage to Achilles himself, sending the letter willingly and “not by compulsion” (line 362). In *Iphigenia*, on the other hand, Calchas and Artemis command Agamemnon to deceive Clytemnestra, which Agamemnon vehemently opposes. He asks Calchas, “You think I would deceive my wife and child?” and in refusing, O’Brien makes Agamemnon pitiable rather than cunning. Agamemnon’s suffering does
not mitigate his initial acceptance of the sacrifice, but it does lessen his flaws and make him more human.

Finally, O’Brien depicts Agamemnon as a man caught between love for his family and duty to his country, rather than a seedy politician fueled by personal ambition. Agamemnon wants to be a good general and a good king, which means sacrificing his daughter. However, he also wants to be a good father and husband. Unfortunately, the two cannot coexist, and he must choose one at the expense of the other. Throughout the play, different characters comment on Agamemnon’s split persona. For example, as the Sixth Girl leaves Agamemnon in scene three, she mutters “A king. A King” (O’Brien 17), emphasizing his role as leader, after which the Old Man comments “A Father again . . . you have kindled your heart” (17). However, the best description of the conflict comes from Agamemnon himself, as he tries to explain the situation to Clytemnestra. In a moment of agony he asks his wife to “think how I have suffered, tossed from love to duty and back again, like a flotsam” (32). O’Brien portrays Agamemnon as a man faced with two decisions: sacrifice his daughter and fulfill his duty to his troops, or defy the army and possibly lose his whole family. By emphasizing that Agamemnon is trapped between two unyielding, contradictory, and calamitous forces, O’Brien increases Agamemnon’s complexity and makes his struggle more interesting.
XII. O’Brien and Euripides

After close analysis I have concluded that O’Brien’s *Iphigenia* stays relatively true to Euripides’ spirit. She maintains most of Euripides’ attributes, such as his focus on human problems and his confrontational attitude, but diverges from the playwright by increasing the role of religion.

Throughout his life Euripides consistently displayed an intense hatred of war, which O’Brien captures in her work. In the very first scene, for example, Calchas describes “Troy in ashes, her nobles slaughtered, her women, slave women to bring home to Argos and plentitude of spoils” (O’Brien 5). Words such as “ashes” and “slaughtered” evoke powerful emotions, as does the imagery of the captured women forced into slavery. Later, O’Brien makes the fatalities of war more immediate for both Agamemnon and the audience when the Sixth Woman tells the king that her husband is “dead. Killed in the first strike of the war” (9). With these nine simple words, O’Brien strips away every euphemism and phrase of glory used to describe war to reveal the ugly truth: war means death. Even the witch describes war in vicious and bloody terms, declaring that “when Agamemnon has cut the head of Paris from his neck and has overturned that city there will be gnashing and tears among the maidens and wives” (18). Not only do her words emphasize the violence of war, but they also show sympathy for the enemy by depicting war from their perspective. O’Brien’s condemnations of war do not overpower the play, yet the stark and emotional language supports Euripides view on the subject.

Next, O’Brien maintains the human elements which drive the story forward and which characterize Euripides’ work. Clearly Artemis’ proclamation constricts Agamemnon, but in O’Brien’s adaptation he is also at the mercy of the army. Even if they tried to escape with Iphigenia, for instance, Agamemnon knows Odysseus would “follow us, destroy our city, our
palace with its immemorial walls, our household and our tribe” (22). His prediction seems
dramatic, but soon proves correct; when Achilles tries to save Iphigenia, the soldiers are so
anxious to set sail for Troy that they try to kill him, and Odysseus declares “even if Achilles had
turned coward, the sacrifice would be performed” (39). The Sixth Girl hits the mark when she
remarks to Agamemnon that “These soldiers of yours . . . they’re mad . . . they want to kill kill
kill” (16), and Agamemnon knows he cannot stop them. In the words of the soldier: “The anger
of heaven is nothing to the anger of men” (39), which essentially encapsulates Euripides’
feelings on the subject.

_Iphigenia_ also preserves Euripides confrontational attitude and his refusal to preach.
Sacrifice is the most important topic of the play, and like Euripides, O’Brien does not shy away
from the subject. Over and over, characters describe the sacrifice in gruesome detail. The witch,
for example, shrieks that “Iphigenia, a young heifer undefiled, is for the knife” (26) and the Old
Man tells Clytemnestra not just that Agamemnon will sacrifice Iphigenia, but that “he will slit
the child’s throat with a sword” (29). Later, Clytemnestra asks Agamemnon “who will draw the
sword across the child’s neck . . . who will slit it . . . who will hold the cup for the . . . torrent of
blood?” (32). Like the Old Man, Clytemnestra does not flinch from describing the brutal act.
Even the praying girl, one of Artemis’ acolytes, begs of the goddess “Do not have your alter
stained with human blood” (36). Yet for all this, O’Brien does not preach. There is no clear cut
moral to the story, no warning against sacrifice or a lesson about obedience to the gods. Instead,
she explores human relationships and human problems, offering insight rather than solutions.

Lastly, O’Brien shares Euripides’ opinions on power and its influence on the individual.
Euripides believed that power can corrupt, but that it all depends on the individual, which
O’Brien conveys with two different examples of power and how it is handled. The first example
is Menelaus, who makes the most of the sacrifice. Right after Agamemnon slaughters his
daughter, for instance, Menelaus counsels his brother that “Wise men ride their luck; they seize
the chance to be great, to win fame and honor” (42). The comment, both inappropriate and cruel,
reveals Menelaus’ true colors; his brother just lost his favorite child, and yet Menelaus describes
the situation as lucky. To further illustrate his corrupt nature, the stage directions note that
Menelaus shouts “triumphantly” to the men (42). Achilles, on the other hand, represents the
opposite response to power. In the original, Achilles is vain and self-centered, thinking of
nothing but his own stature as a god, and his change at the end seems insincere given the
enormity of his ego. Yet O’Brien tempers his flaws and makes his change of heart sincere and
believable. As in the original, Achilles smarts “at being used as a foil . . . a mockery of his
standing” (34). However, once Iphigenia decides to sacrifice herself, he swears to die with her,
rather than his original plan to save her at the last moment. His immense power could corrupt
him, but Achilles manages to overcome its perverting influence.

The only way in which O’Brien deviates from Euripides is in her treatment of religion.
While Euripides tended to diminish the role of religion in his plays and give humans control of
the stories, O’Brien does just the opposite. The author actually increases the presence of religion
through the introduction of the witch, the prophet Calchas, and Artemis. The absence of religious
figures in the original work makes religion an abstract concept, with little bearing on events at
hand, but by including three characters connected to religion, O’Brien amplifies the spiritual
aspects of the plot. O’Brien also increases the religious tenor of the piece through constant
references to Artemis and her sacrificial command. For example, in the very first scene Calchas
explains to Agamemnon that “Iphigenia . . . has been selected by the goddess Artemis to be
offered in sacrifice” (5), while in the original, Agamemnon relays Calchas prediction to a
messenger. Also, Clytemnestra’s skepticism of the gods’ involvement changes to acceptance when she commands Agamemnon to “defy Artemis” (32) and save their child. Through these changes, O’Brien makes Artemis a more dominant force in the play, which contradicts Euripides style.
XIII. Analysis Summation

Walker’s translation of *Iphigenia in Aulis* is both a tragedy, and true to Euripides’ spirit. Walker understands the sense of universal doom inherent to all tragedies, which he communicates consistently throughout the work. He also comprehends the moral requirement of a tragic protagonist, and takes pains to make Agamemnon human. He does not paint him as a villain, as so many scholars do, and he certainly doesn’t make Agamemnon a saint. Instead Walker presents a flawed individual with the capacity for greatness, and because Agamemnon has the potential for nobility, we take pride in his struggle. Walker also understands who Euripides was as a writer and as a person. He maintains Euripides’ religious questioning and his hatred of war, for example, but he also maintains the playwright’s penchant for humanizing his plays. Walker diminishes the presence of the gods, for instance, and emphasizes the human forces impelling Agamemnon to sacrifice Iphigenia. Finally, Walker preserve’s Euripides’ thoughts on the nature of power and his ability to capture human suffering.

Don Taylor’s translation of *Iphigenia at Aulis* is so far from a Greek tragedy as to be almost comical. Instead of exploring the human condition, for example, Taylor interprets the play as an expression of cynicism and hopelessness. There is no sense of doom in his translation, no awareness that life is finite and ends inexorably in death. As for the tragic protagonist, Taylor reduces Agamemnon to a mere villain, a caricature of a human being. The king is too morally simplistic to interest us, and his wickedness means we feel pleasure in his downfall rather than pride in his struggle. Taylor also misunderstands who Euripides was, and what he conveyed in his writing. Like most translators, Taylor maintains Euripides’ religious skepticism and hatred of war. However, he incorrectly interprets the playwright’s feelings on power, creating a world in which absolute power corrupts absolutely. Lastly, in giving us a world devoid of dignity and
characters so utterly base as to be beyond redemption, Taylor deviates from Euripides’ hope for the future and for society’s capacity for change.

O’Brien’s *Iphigenia* is an adaptation of *Iphigenia in Aulis*, yet it is incredibly accurate. I believe, for example, that O’Brien truly grasps the nature of tragedy. Unlike Taylor’s translation, O’Brien explores the inescapable defeat of life, conveying the idea that life ends in death and that failure is simply a necessary part of humanity. O’Brien also gives us a morally complex protagonist rather than a one-dimensional villain or saint. We pity O’Brien’s Agamemnon, and we feel pride when he stands before god and his fellow man. O’Brien stays true to Euripides’ personal beliefs and his style of writing, conveying his hatred of war and his feelings about power, as well as his confrontational attitude and his refusal to lecture. *Iphigenia* raises questions about mankind and what we are capable of doing to one another, but there is no moral lesson. The only way in which O’Brien differs from Euripides is in her treatment of religion. She makes religious figures and the gods very prominent, however she still maintains the human forces which Euripides emphasized.

While each play shares a common inspiration, they are three completely different works. Walker exalts mankind, for example, while Taylor debases it, and Taylor’s protagonist is a villain while both O’Brien and Walker portray a complex human being. Because the biases and personal experiences of the translator/adapter play such a large role in the interpretation a work, it is up to the discerning scholar to approach a translation/adaptation with hesitancy and skepticism before deciding how accurate it really is.
XIV. Pre-Production Analysis

Strengths

Going into this production, I am very aware of my strengths in acting (or at least, what I perceive them to be). I have been acting since I was six, I spent every summer for nine years in a Shakespeare intensive camp, and I participated in a number of high-school productions. I have also seen shows here at Roger Williams, at Trinity Repertory Company in Providence, and various theaters around London. Because of all these experiences, I have many of the basic and necessary skills of an actor. I believe that one of my greatest strengths is my projection. I learned at a young age how to speak from my diaphragm (which is quite different from yelling) so that I can be heard without making myself hoarse. I am also proud of my diction. Having performed in nine different Shakespeare productions (once as the titular character in *Macbeth*) I am very good at navigating the intricacies of the Elizabethan language. Because this language is so unfamiliar to audiences, actors performing Shakespeare must over enunciate so that nothing is lost. Because I can handle such complex dialogue, more realistic dialogue seems easy in comparison. However, one of the few words I pronounce incorrectly is “For”, which I pronounce as “Fer.” For some reason, I cannot rid myself of this habit.

Along with vocal abilities, I also know the fundamentals of stage movement. I know how to plant my feet rather than wander the stage, for instance, or how to refrain from fidgeting. I also know how to work “in the round” because of my participation in the Spring 2010 production of *The Male Animal*. These are all fundamental elements of acting which may seem trivial, yet knowing them allows me to focus on more important elements. And finally, I am fairly strong in my characterizations. I understand that every single character is a unique person, with his/her own way of talking, moving and thinking. I know that I mustn’t be “Danya” for every role I play.
There are certain actors who became famous for essentially playing themselves over and over again; Julia Roberts is one such actress. On the other end of the spectrum are actors who change characters like chameleons, such as Johnny Depp. He portrays a completely different character in every film, and no two are alike. Consequently, I never get bored with his performances. Depp understands and projects every nuance of his character and truly believes in them (or so it seems), so much so that they come to life. I aspire to his kind of acting.

**Weaknesses**

Although in some ways I succeed in acting, I still have much room for improvement. For example, I differentiate my characters physically, but because I don’t I stick to my choices strongly enough my own personality creeps into my performance. I often wonder how a person can subvert herself entirely for two or more hours every night. How does a person forget the way she walks or talks when idiosyncrasies are so ingrained? Perhaps the first step to fixing this problem comes from awareness. For instance, I used to pull my shirt down before every monologue until someone pointed it out and I was able to break the habit. Practicing my onstage focus and attention can also help. I often lapse in my characterization because my focus wanders to my homework or tomorrow’s schedule rather than the scene at hand. Most importantly, I think a strong understanding of the character is essential, especially the information which pertains directly to physicalization. A limp is a very general malady which can manifest in many ways, but a limp caused by a break in the ankle bones comes with very specific characteristics. The story behind the break also helps in characterization, so that I know how the character feels about the limp and can act accordingly.

I know that when I revert back to “Danya,” I tend to stand in a strong stance, with my feet slightly wider than my hips, back erect. However hard I try, I often notice myself standing this way during a performance. This problem then leads directly into another: playing characters
other than the ‘strong woman’ (as I like to think of it). I am very confident in my personality, and this confidence often translates to my characters. Because of this I am often cast in strong roles, like Helen of Troy in *Orestes*. I fall into a trap of my own making, and while I love these kinds of roles, I want to diversify. Iphigenia will stretch me because she is so young and innocent, two characteristics I rarely play.

One of my greatest challenges as an actor is my emotional connection to the material and the character. In real life I am a very emotional person; whenever I am frustrated or having a bad day I cry at the drop of a hat. However, on stage I cannot seem to connect to the emotions of my character. It is not due to lack of effort, because I continually try to achieve a modicum of emotional understanding. It’s just that I can never fully and truly believe in my character and lose myself in him or her. I always feel at a slight remove, understanding the character on an intellectual level but not an emotional one. I cannot bring myself to open up, to feel vulnerable. I always used to laugh when actors used this word, but I think I understand what they mean. One of the reasons I am so excited about playing Iphigenia for my thesis is because I will have to find this vulnerability in order to meet the demands of the role. It is a Greek tragedy, and no matter how one looks at it, tragedy requires an intense level of emotional commitment from the actors. Working on the emotional side of my acting is riskier, and takes a lot of courage. What if I do find that vulnerability and end up looking stupid? Non-theater people don’t always understand how personal a performance can become for an actor. I honestly hope I can do this.

**Goals**

There are a number of things which I hope to achieve through my participation in *Iphigenia*. For one thing, I hope that playing a character so different from myself will force me to change my physicalizations. More than that, however, I hope to elevate my acting to the next
level. Instead of *playing* Iphigenia, I want to *be* her. I want to go onstage every night and lose myself completely in this other person, so much so that every choice I make comes from *her*. I don’t want to think about my performance as it happens, but just *let* it happen. Essentially, I want to shut my brain off. I often get distracted during performances and lose my connection to my character as I scramble to get back on track. In *Iphigenia* I want to be so emotionally involved with the character that distractions won’t affect me. The fact that I am apprehensive about playing this role excites me, because I want to learn. I am a senior, so it is time to start thinking about life after college. I don’t know whether I will go into acting, although right now I sincerely want to. If I do decide to act, I need to know I learned as much as possible during my time here. I want to stretch myself to the limit and see what happens.
XV. Journals

Tuesday, September 7th

Today, the very first day of rehearsal, brought up a number of thoughts, questions, and emotions which I need to investigate. I have met with Peter twice already, and during these sessions we seem to have dipped a toe or two into the water. Tonight, however, we plunged in head first. There were a number of questions from our previous meetings that resurfaced, some new questions of my own which appeared, and Peter gave some questions to the whole cast to explore so we can better understand our characters.

The show is unlike any show I have been in recently (or so it feels) in that it is quite unrealistic. This is not a factual retelling of the sacrifice of Iphigenia to Artemis by her father Agamemnon. It is an exploration – but of what I have no clue. Some of the symbols I understand, such as the menstrual blood symbolizing the cycle of bloodshed brought about by the Curse of the House of Atreus. However I cannot fathom what the feathers from the pillows stand for. There also is no blaringly obvious theme (at least not yet). It doesn’t help that O’Brien has balanced the good and the bad in every character so that there are no villains and heroes and no sides to take. There is no black and white, only shades of grey. I am rather apprehensive about this lack of reality because it is very confusing. I wish I simply knew what O’Brien’s intent was without having to puzzle it out. Anyway, because of the unreality of the script we actors need to believe our parts so wholeheartedly that the audience buys into our belief and thus believes it too. This will make all the unreal elements seems real and organic (or at least believable).

When I first read the play I thought Iphigenia was a rather flat character. I did not realize at the time how unrealistic the show is supposed to be. I know it is an adaptation of a Greek play,
which means there is poetry and a chorus which comments on the action. These elements are
inherently unnatural, but are part of the Greek form. However I felt that the prose sections were
pretty realistic. Yet Iphigenia goes from wanting to run away to deliberately sacrificing herself in
the course of less than a page, which made absolutely no sense to me. Now, having a more
thorough understanding of the play as a whole, I get that this isn’t in real time. The play is short
because everything happens so fast. The challenge with so little time to make such drastic
changes is how to make them believable. I have to switch gears instantly and thoroughly
understand/believe my new position. There is no ‘natural progression’ in this play. Something
happens and BAM! everything changes in the blink of an eye.

I am very apprehensive about my abilities in tackling this show at all. I know that I tend
to play every character as the *strong woman*, because that’s what I’ve done my whole life. I
cannot actually see myself in a role like Iphigenia, who is so sweet and trusting and young. Even
just reading the lines aloud today at rehearsal, I kept noticing a very commanding note in my
voice which is inappropriate to the character. I would catch myself and try to modulate my voice
accordingly, but then I would slip back. If I had simply auditioned for this show I probably
wouldn’t have received this part. I guess that’s good in the sense that it is making me stretch out
of my comfort zone. But there are so many issues with how to portray a character of this age.
Iphigenia is thirteen, very young and naïve, but I don’t want to play her dumb or make her seem
like she’s a six year old. I need to strike a balance between knowledge and naïveté that seems
appropriate for her age and station. I need to make her nuanced from the start, with many
different sides peaking through so that when she does make a shift later in the play it doesn’t
seem out of the blue. Also I am afraid of ‘playing’ at being young rather than actually being
young. It all comes back to believing in the character. I think a lot of my fears will subside once I
know Iphigenia better, and can answer questions about her beliefs at every stage with more confidence. Once I know her, then I can be her.

**Thursday, September 9th**

Today’s table read was both frustrating and enlightening. Maybe it’s because I wasn’t at rehearsal last night but I just felt out of the swing of things. We started out by talking about symbols and themes in the show, and I was at a complete loss. I knew about the blood and feathers, of course, but I hadn’t noticed anything else on my read throughs of the script. Together we figured out that the symbols include: the wall, rocks, blood, stars, feathers, water, wind, and gold. I can’t believe a forty-four page show contains that many symbols! The themes were only slightly less numerous and included: public vs. private responsibility, human suffering, honor, revenge vs. justice, faith, the endless cycle of revenge, and war. I think I had trouble picking these up on my own because I have so many other things to think about with regards to the script. Maybe I’m too close or too far, but I just feel as if I’m drowning in too much information.

I spent all of today studying mythology, Euripides, Greek culture and religion, and various other topics that pertain to the show. However, these are all outward intellectual pursuits and what I really need to do now is focus on the play itself. In my last meeting with Peter he told me that because each scene/vignette is so short, everything in it counts. That means I need to dissect everything Iphigenia says and does for meaning, which will help me understand who she is. I think some of that started to happen tonight.

For instance, when Iphigenia talks about the embroidery she made for her father, she makes up a story about the thread. Instead of just saying she got the thread, she says she “followed the turning of the sun from dawn until sunset.” This implies that she is still very young at heart and likes to make up tales, and that she is trying to impress and engage her father to make him smile. I also noticed that Iphigenia says the phrase “I am so happy” twice. The first
time is when she runs to her mother’s screams and tries to placate her. The second time is after she has decided to sacrifice herself and is trying to explain why to Clytemnestra. I have yet to decide whether she actually is happy, or if she is just saying it to soothe her mother. Also, is she trying to deceive herself into thinking that she actually is happy? A third thing I noticed is how trusting she is, and how very much she believes in her father. When Clytemnestra tells her daughter that Agamemnon is going to sacrifice her to Artemis, her only reply is “what a tall story.” Later on the same page she says that her father will save her. She even gives a long speech trying to convince him to spare her, his firstborn and favorite child whom he loves so dearly. She actually seems to believe what she is saying, and believes too that he will save her. These are only minor insights, but I think it is a good start.

As the night wore on, I improved. I started noticing some particulars about themes and symbolism I had missed before and discovered some new things, such as destiny/fate and the lamb as a symbol for purity. Another good thing that happened which quite surprised me was that, without thinking, I started breaking down my lines into smaller beats of thought. Some are pretty easy, while others I am still puzzling over, but clearly something stuck from Acting II! It felt good to know that I at least have some idea where I am heading and how to get there. And finally I just tried to listen to other people’s comments and ideas, which were often better and more perceptive than my own, and just try to learn from them. I am very much looking forward to discussing all this with Peter tomorrow because it’s all buzzing around my head, and I need his help to organize and understand it all.

**Friday, September 10th**

Today was quite a day. Not only did I have an hour and a half meeting with Peter, but a four hour rehearsal to boot! It has been a roller-coaster of emotion as the full weight of what we
are doing hit me. I am a generally confident person, but when it comes to my acting I get very insecure. The arbitrary way in which I received the role doesn’t help. I applied for a senior project and none of the professors really had a role that would work for me. Instead of giving up I begged Peter to be my Senior Project advisor/director. He agreed and cast me as Iphigenia, but I can’t help but wonder if I would have been cast in the role had I just auditioned like everyone else. I am petrified that people will come to the show, and after seeing my performance wonder why on earth Peter had cast me as Iphigenia. It’s very discomforting to have that thought in the back of your head, eroding your confidence. I just have to try and accept that fact that I am using this as a learning tool, and it’s about my growth as an actor. The audience doesn’t matter so much (although of course I can’t deliver a subpar performance to them).

I am struggling a lot with the analysis of the play from an acting perspective, as well as the role itself. We have only had four days of table reading, and I was absent for one of them, but already we have so many questions to answer about our characters. I know I need to eventually write a character analysis of Iphigenia, but I don’t see when I will be confident enough in my knowledge of her to actually do so. Every time I think I discovered something about her, it isn’t quite right (or just flat out wrong). It’s not like other roles where, generally, you figure it out on your own. Here, Peter has the answers already, so I never know if it’s something I need to just decide for the character because the information isn’t available, and thus the answer is more up to me, or if there is a definitive answer in the text, in which case my response could be wrong. I got quite frustrated and upset in our meeting today, which Peter could sense. He told me to have patience, and to not expect it to be too neat too soon. That helped somewhat. Also he told me that it isn’t about perfection, about knocking people’s socks off, but about making gut choices you
believe in. There are 99 ways to play this role, so I have to commit to my way, and no-one can ask for anything more.

I did have one spectacular moment to brighten my day. During our meeting Peter told me that the best actors are not afraid to make public fools of themselves again and again in the process of creating a great role. I decided to heed this advice and stop worrying so much. I decided to just start trying things out with the role, even if I ended up sounding silly or just being wrong. I tried to imagine how Iphigenia was feeling throughout the play and express it. Her very long speech, right after she listens to Artemis describing her fate, is a last ditch effort to try and stave off the inevitable. She still clings to the safest thing she knows, her father, and tries to get him to save her. I imagined she would be feeling terrified at the prospect that she must die and is desperate to stop it. I really tried to play with emotion in the speech, and I almost made myself cry. It was quite surprising considering I tend to have trouble with emotional parts. Hopefully I can bring that feeling again tomorrow. And not only did I do an excellent job trying new things and playing with emotion, it felt right for the character and the moment. Of course that might change completely in a week’s time, both with new understanding or new experimentation, but right now it feels right.

And because I was feeling so vulnerable today, I will include one of my favorite quotes, from the esteemed politician Winston Churchill:

Never
Never
Never
Give UP
Saturday, September 11th

Today’s rehearsal was quite a lesson in the differences between directors and how they work. It was the first day of blocking, and Peter is methodical to say the least. The most recent experience with a play that I have to compare Iphigenia to was The Male Animal last semester, directed by my dad. When we started blocking in that show, he let us just try things out on our feet for a while before dictating any moves to us. That initial freedom allowed us to experiment with where to move and how to move, which then helped us figure out our lines (how to say them, etc.). Then later on, as we got closer to the end of rehearsals, he got down to the nitty gritty and worked out whatever had not fallen into place through the rehearsal process. Peter works much differently. As I said, this was only the first day of blocking after our week of table reads, and already we are being given very specific instructions. He didn’t allow us to wander around because he already has it all worked out in his head. In some ways it is constraining, but in other ways it is very helpful. For one, some of the movement dictates how your character is feeling in a very broad way. When I stand stage left, staring out over the audience, I am clearly dreaming. Now what the specific emotions are within that dreaming is up to me. However, now I have a starting point to work off of.

Peter’s process is somewhat comforting, and definitely helped calm my fears from yesterday. I think I was getting too caught up in trying to intellectualize the character, which Peter had warned me about in the beginning. There were just too many questions to be answered, and for many of them you could go in a number of different directions. It seemed impossible to make a concrete choice. With the blocking, however, the minuteness of the details has provided a framework within which to work. It’s also helpful to have other people’s blocking, and their character choices. Some of the infinite character choices I have to make become obsolete when
faced with how another character acts. I could have done A, B, C, or D in this specific instance, but because of so-and-so’s choice I can eliminate C. That is not to say I still don’t have difficult choices to make; rather it is becoming more concrete and more about action rather than intellect. I am excited to see what tomorrow brings.

Sunday, September 12

I have never actually seen a need for journals and journaling for classes. Of course I know why they are supposedly ‘important’ to my education: they let you review your work and make discoveries you might not normally have made without the time for self reflection. Now, however, I understand what all the fuss was about. I thought keeping a journal for this entire process, writing an entry after every rehearsal, would be tedious and pointless, but I have made the most remarkable discoveries! Things happen during rehearsal that I immediately want to write down so I can understand them better and so I don’t forget. The very act of recording it cements it more into my memory. I think it also helps how much I have a vested interest in my Senior project. While yes, this is a thesis, the whole project is so much more. I actively want to be a good actress, and this will help me get there. This might even become my profession after college (the jury’s still out on that one), and I want to learn as much as I can. It doesn’t become so urgent until you realize it’s your senior year and that soon your undergraduate education will be over. So now, while simply blocking I am actively striving to make discoveries with my character. Surprisingly, a lot of them feel good or right to me (at least for now). Even just through this past week I have brought more to my craft than all three previous years combined.

Now to the rehearsal itself. We went over the blocking we did yesterday, which was all of scene 2. The lines were pretty easy to memorize, as was the blocking. I like the idea of learning the lines as we go so it’s in smaller chunks that are easier to remember, and by the end of
blocking you have the whole show memorized. It also helps with starting to work on character when you don’t have a script in your hand. Of course Peter told us just to work on the blocking today and making sure it was right, but I decided to go beyond that. We only have three weeks left, and I want to be able to put on the absolute best performance possible. Something I worked on over the summer which is helping me now was to study crying. Every time I cried I would try to note what I was physically doing. I know that crying and being emotional onstage is hard for me, because it never feels real. And if it doesn’t feel real it certainly isn’t going to look real. So whenever I was sad and crying, I would note how my body moved, what my breathing pattern became, if I held my breath, how my lips moved, if I scrunched up my eyes, if I held my face still, etc. I realized it’s a lot about trying to hold back emotion as opposed to trying to let it out. Whenever I try to cry in my real life I never do, but when I do cry I invariably don’t want to and try very hard to make it stop. So I hold my face as still as possible and press my lips together, I scrunch my eyes to hold in the tears, and I hold my breath. When the tears do come, I tend to look upward to keep them from succumbing to gravity and actually falling. It’s a very personal sensation to realize this is the way you cry, and no one else on earth does it the exact same way. So now I am trying to bring these experiences into my acting, and so far it feels right. I am not thinking about how I look, or how funny my face must seem. Instead I am focusing on how to make it feel real to me, and I know the rest will follow. It is early stages yet, and we haven’t progressed to any grand crying fits. But I am pleased with myself and my work nonetheless.

**Tuesday, September 14th**

Another day of blocking. First of all, I can’t believe we are almost done blocking the entire show. I believe we will be finished by the end of the week, and then we run the whole show for blocking purposes on Sunday night. As I mentioned before, it is quite an experience
working with Peter and coming to understand his methods. Every time we block a new scene, his very detailed blocking notes give me more to work with – I like to think of them as a framework within which to explore rather than an impediment to my creative process. I am sure he feels that way, too. However it has gotten to the point where I have more blocking notes in my script than actual lines! I may even need to get a second script to record my intellectual thoughts and ideas about the script, and keep it separate from my blocking script. And maybe even a third script for character work. I have so much to write down for blocking that I have to erase my previous notes and hope I remember them at the end. Every time I am involved in a show, the messiness of the creative process is always hard for me. I am such an organized person, and everything I do is neat and rational. A show, on the other hand, is messy and ever changing. I think working in a way that is so different from my own is a good way for me to step outside of myself and just accept that this is the way things work in the theater. Sometimes it all gets overwhelming, and it seems like I’ll never have a fully formed character at the end. But I need to keep thinking of Peter’s words of wisdom “just let it be messy and don’t try to make it all work perfectly right now.” Easier said than done!

**Wednesday, September 15th**

I don’t have a whole heck of a lot to say about tonight’s rehearsal. We did much the same as yesterday, and my thoughts about the new scene are very similar to yesterday’s as well. The blocking helps me with character, and when we block new things are revealed that help me understand the scene and how Iphigenia feels.

**Thursday, September 16th**

I have been stewing things over in my head, but I am still having some trouble answering the questions we have been asking since the start of the rehearsal process. As I have said in
multiple entries already, the process of blocking is helping enormously because I have concrete
movements which dictate some of the answers for me. However I still have a lot of work to do
on my own. I am choosing to focus more of my energies on understanding my blocking,
memorizing it, and memorizing my lines right now. I would rather have all that comfortable and
out of the way so that I can really focus on character work, giving it the attention it deserves. I
don’t want to slack on anything. I am also striving to set a good example for the other cast
members, especially the freshman, by coming as prepared as possible to every rehearsal. I don’t
want to waste anyone’s time or give the appearance that I am not one hundred percent committed
to the show.

Today we worked hard to block the rest of my scenes. All we had left was the ending of
the play, when I finally learn of and accept my fate. I will not be in rehearsal tomorrow because
of Yom Kippur, and we have no rehearsal Saturday. The next time Peter will work with me is on
Sunday night, when we run the whole show for blocking. Because of this I think Peter worked
extra hard to make sure all my blocking was done today. There weren’t a whole lot of important
notes aside from my movement cues, so I won’t go on long tonight. Hopefully as we get into
character work next week I will have more insights to share.

Sunday, September 19th

It was really amazing to see the whole show put together for the first time. It is one thing
to listen to the show read through, as we did at the initial table reads, but another thing to see it in
action. It was thrilling! There was also a heightened sense in that I memorized all my lines and
blocking for tonight, and did the run off book. I have to say I am rather pleased with my work. I
only called line three times, two of them in the same monologue which I memorized today. I also
knew most of my blocking, or at least to such an extent that any mess-ups didn’t affect the run.
After we finished we went over areas of confusion, and a couple of my spots came up. However
the movements I had messed up were small, such as the turning of a head, as opposed to large
ones like crosses or exits. The night was also successful because I started to see Peter’s vision for
the show. I can already tell that the wall is going to be an amazing device for enhancing the play,
and will not simply be a point of spectacle for the audience. That’s the point of every aspect of a
play, isn’t it – all good elements must move the play forward or enhance it in some way.

Again I didn’t focus too much on character because I wanted to get my lines and blocking
right. The run was also meant to help Peter see his work, and for Trevor and Dorisa to get a sense
of the show. Trevor is doing set and Dorisa is the lighting designer. They both have tough jobs;
for one thing Trevor must build a starry sky and Dorisa must light the set through it. But they
know what they are doing. I did focus a little on body movement tonight as I played the scenes. I
didn’t do anything huge or crazy. I just noticed simple things like how it feels to tense the body
at a particular moment in regards to emotions, or how Iphigenia stands and holds herself while
with different people. I have a tendency to slump just a little bit when I stand so I am focusing on
standing very straight, but also making sure I don’t come across as stiff. She is only thirteen,
after all. Overall a good night.

Monday, September 20

Stream of Consciousness/ Character Ideas

1) Where did I just come from before this scene? My bedroom, where we were having a
slumber party

2) Who are the girls? Two are my sisters, Electra and Chrysothemis, and the others are Anne
and Sarah, my two oldest friends and pretty much the only children I am allowed to play with.
Young, carefree, having a pillow fight with sisters and friends. Doesn’t take advantage of the fact
that she’s the eldest. She could blame the pillow fight on her little sisters, but instead she takes responsibility for it.

3) **Relationship to nurse?** Doesn’t treat the nurse like a servant. The nurse is like another mother, one that actually shows affection. Asks the nurse “will you miss me” and she replies “more than I would my own children.” Very close bond. If I skinned my knee, I would go to the nurse. I went to her when I lost my first tooth, when I fought with my sisters, and when Clytemnestra made me cry.

4) **Relationship to Mother?** Not very close relationship with my mother. When I ask “why has he chosen me” it is because I am a princess and not because I am pretty or charming, or anything else nice. She does not show affection. Make a quick change after the pillow fight from laughing and free to a princess because I am scared of Clytemnestra’s displeasure at the letter from Agamemnon, think it is over the pillow fight instead.

5) **Relationship to Wedding/Achilles?** Not interested in how many people Achilles has killed or how many battles he has won. At the end of the nurse’s monologue she says “Achilles was recruited into the Greek army, given noble rank, and a vast host to command.” This statement reminds me how powerful and great he is, and maybe I am not worthy. Makes me second guess myself, leads me to look at my attire and appearance and wonder if “he might change his mind when he sees me.” The one leads to the other. I know the *exact* elements of a wedding, and have imagined my own wedding day. The more I learn about Achilles the more real it becomes – I will have to share my life with a man who is: ½ a god, Son of a Nereid, Almost indestructible, Has feet like the wind and races against 4 horse chariots, Is aloof, solitary. He goes from a name to a real person. Am excited to put on the veil – not fully real yet, more like playing dress up.
6) **Reaction to Period?** Getting my period makes it really real. Mostly scared about getting my period. If it were any other day it would be terribly exciting, but today I have just become betrothed to a demi-god and this last step means I am really an adult now. I don’t feel like an adult, I am only 13. I am the apple of my father’s eye. I love to play games with him like hide and go seek. Still an innocent little girl and suddenly all at once I am a woman. Need the nurse’s comfort – not mom’s

7) **Relationship to Dad?** When I talk to the brightest star I am literally talking to it, rather than to anyone else in the room. The same star looks over my father at his camp, and when I talk to it I believe he can hear me. Which star is it specifically? Are the stars something dad and I share? Did he teach me all about the constellations? Yes, as I was growing up he would teach me all the different constellations and the stories behind them. We would go out to the courtyard and he would sit on a bench. He would put me on his knee and point them all out one by one. He didn’t do this with the other children, just me.

8) **Mom’s Reaction?** What does mom think about his teaching me these things? Jealous of the bond we share. She doesn’t see why it is necessary for me to know these things. Thinks Agamemnon indulges me too much. Do I sense that mom is jealous of our bond? Yes, I have sensed it from when I was very little. It makes me uncomfortable, and makes my bond with Dad even stronger and more special. I know I can turn to him and not to her. But I don’t ever confront mom’s feelings. I just try my best to please her and hope that she won’t be angry. It never works. If I ever tried to include her in my play or with a piece of artwork I made she would brush me off and tell me to go away.

9) **What specifically am I thinking when I stand dreaming about Achilles?** We are going to get married/ my life will be enchanted / he will fall madly in love with me/ I want at least four
children / at least one boy, not only to carry on the lineage but to give my father a grandson /
where will we live / will it be a palace / how will I furnish it / can the nurse come with me / I’ll
need a whole new wardrobe / how far is it to Aulis/ I’ll miss my sisters and baby Orestes very
much / they can come visit us / how often will Achilles be away at war / what will it be like to
meet him for the first time / what color is his hair / is it long or short / is he muscular / what will
our wedding night be like.

10) Do I know about sex? I know it is something that happens between a married man and
woman, but beyond that I am clueless. It’s not something we ever talk about. Good princesses
don’t think about men. I have never really had contact with other boys except for Orestes.
Always inside the palace walls with my sisters and our female friends.

11) Where do we go when the nurse leads me offstage? Going to the bathroom to clean up -
the nurse will wash me down with a towel and get the blood off my legs. Then on to my
bedroom to get out of the bloody dress and into a clean one, put the final touches on my
appearance and pack my things

12) What special things do I want to take with me? A silver hand mirror given to me by my
father for my 11th birthday. A small stuffed swan. A purple necklace, because purple is my
favorite color and it’s the first piece of grown up jewelry I ever had. A gold hair comb I’ve had
since I was a baby.

Tuesday, September 21st

Today had be one of the most frustrating rehearsals yet. We focused on my second scene
of the show in which I attempt to pull Agamemnon out of his foul mood. The scene includes
Iphigenia, Agamemnon, and Clytemnestra, but Clytemnestra only has two lines in the beginning
and then leaves. Because of this it was basically just Peter and me, and Peter didn’t really seem
to receive that many notes. I was the one messing up and not getting it right. It’s just a hard scene for me. Peter worked on each of the separate bits of the scene to get the tempo right. In this scene I go through a series of hope and disappointment as I try to cheer my father up and he keeps pushing me away. Each time he does this it is harder to cope, and by the end I am almost near tears. Then at the very end he yells at me and it is the tipping point. Peter’s exact words were “you should feel like you’ve been punched in the solar plexus.” The whole evening felt like a wash. I tried my hardest and it just wasn’t good enough. We went over so much information because we worked on the entire scene, and by the end I was expected to be able to just up and do it. I need more time to absorb what we worked on, work it out intellectually, and then move on to the emotional aspect of it. I mean, Peter only really gave me one chance, at the end of rehearsal, to go through the entire scene with everything we’d worked on. And then, of course, I had trouble building the emotion (or even finding it) and he flat out told me as much.

I was pleased with a couple of improvements I had made, such as adding more youthful enthusiasm to my portrayal of Iphigenia. I know I tend to slip into a more mature persona, a stronger woman, and that is not the character. She is young and vibrant, and loves to have pillow fights. She picks flowers for her father, and makes up fantastic stories about how she followed the sun. She is not hardened. I have to see with her eyes, experience her excitement at things which seem blasé to me at the ripe old age of twenty. With this I think I am doing a fairly good job, and improving daily. I just have to take the setbacks in stride and not let them define my whole performance.

Some thoughts at large:

1) Where did I just come from? - The baths, where I washed off all the dust from travelling, and then put on one of my father’s favorite dresses.
2) What flowers am I holding? - white daisies because they are my father’s favorite and when I was little he would tell me I was his little daisy.

3) Has Agamemnon ever yelled at me before? – definitely not.

4) What can I use for this moment? What can I substitute? - when I didn’t get cast for a show I was completely sure I would get cast in. It was a complete shock and it literally knocked the wind out of me.

**Wednesday, September 22**

As awful as yesterday was, today completely made up for it. I was on fire! I took time to regroup from last night, reassess, and start fresh on a completely new scene. It also helped that tonight more of the focus was on the other characters in the scenes with me, like the chorus of girls, which then left me free to work things out on my own. I experimented to see what worked, and boy did I have fun discovering things about Iphigenia and about myself. I really pinpointed how Iphigenia feels at different moments in the scenes. Let me take Artemis’ speech as an example. First of all, I was so emotionally invested in what was happening that I almost made myself cry. I have just been told my father is a murderer and that I am going to be sacrificed for Helen. I am in shock and feeling utter disbelief. Then the praying girl starts talking about Artemis as “the protector of dewy youth, and tender nursling” which seems like a complete mockery of my situation. This makes me angry, which turns to fear when the girl mentions the altar “stained with human blood” and I involuntarily flinch. I tried out different ways to manifest these emotions physically and hit on some good material. We didn’t get into the speech itself so I could not extend my mission further, but I was definitely pleased and surprised at I what I achieved.
I also had an excellent time going back to scene two, specifically once the nurse starts to
dress me. Peter worked a lot with the other girls and the nurse during this scene so I was free to
try things. I didn’t have anyone saying “this is exactly what she is thinking right now” – I could
ty something out and decide it didn’t feel right and simply move on to something new. It’s
interesting to discover things about your own creative process, and what works best for you.
Apparently I work best when I think no one really cares what I am doing. It’s like “since no one
is paying any attention to me I can go all out and not be afraid of looking stupid.” That helped
me really feel Iphigenia’s fear and surprise when her period starts, and all the emotions mixed up
in her as the nurse sings. Peter did make some comments there about what she is feeling, but just
a few, and these comments helped rather than limited me. I honestly don’t even know if Peter
saw any of my work tonight, or if he did what he thought. He didn’t say anything. I hope the
rehearsals can continue more like this, and by the end I will have worked through everything on
my own and arrived at an epic performance. I have already far surpassed any acting I have done
previous to this point, so the Senior Project has already done its work.

**Thursday, September 23**

Man, this is a hard scene for me. It’s surprising how some scenes come so easily and
others seem remote, no matter how hard you try. The scene I am having trouble with is pgs. 37-
39, the scene right after Artemis speaks through the witch. There is a rather large monologue and
I have not gotten to a point where it feels comfortable yet. I am just having so much trouble
understanding what Iphigenia is thinking and feeling in this instance. Peter gave me some of the
information, which helped a little. For example when I say “do not dispatch me down to the
nether world . . . hell is dark and I have no friends there” it is with a slightly ironic edge because
I know he cannot help me. And when I moved into the next section, starting with “I am your
child” it isn’t pleading, but more wistful for what was. I found that difficult to play. I am just afraid of having everything together, rather than a number of separate thoughts. And at the end when I demand “look at me . . . give me a kiss . . . at least let me have that as a memory of you . . . if I am to . . . if I am to die.” I simply cannot find the right emotions for this moment. Have I switched over desperation, is it sweet and gentle, is it full of steely resolve. Basically I need to discuss this entire section with Peter at our next meeting. I shall not say anything else about it tonight. Rather I need to speak with Peter and analyze it some more myself. Hopefully the next time we go over this scene my journal entry shall be much more positive.

**Saturday, September 25th**

This was a very frustrating rehearsal. I seemed unable to focus enough on what we were doing to make any really significant discoveries. Every time I tried something out and it didn’t work I got frustrated, which retarded my development of the scene even more. And as much as I tried I could not get emotionally invested in the scene, partly because we stopped and started a number of times which disrupted the scene’s normal flow and rhythm. I also got a lot of attention from Peter; he basically had to tell me how to do *everything* in the scene. This then made me anxious and nervous because it made me wonder “am I not doing a good enough job on my own?” I would love to be able to go back over some of the scenes, such as this last one, with no extraneous people watching and no comments from Peter. I want to just repeat them over and over with the other actors so I can try out different things. I need a different atmosphere to really put myself out there. I try to do some of this at home but I can never get the feel right because I am by myself. It is easier when I am physically with the other people in the show.

I met with Peter yesterday for one of our weekly class periods, and we discussed my progress. I mentioned that I feel confident in my first scene (scene 2) but that I have trouble later
on in the play when I have to find an inner strength. I feel as if I am playing it too *strong*, and not showing enough emotion. Every time I turn around Peter and Jenna are sobbing onstage, and in contrast I feel like a block of wood. But then Peter said something which mentally unbound me. He said “this road to maturity is not a straight shot. She has ups and downs as she gets there.” I have had this notion that once Iphigenia finds her maturity she is suddenly all grown up and doesn’t show any of her emotions. But that was making things difficult for me, because her lines often indicate a certain flip-flop between being able to handle the whole situation and being a scared thirteen year old girl. For instance when I find out I am to be sacrificed I turn to Clytemnestra and suggest running away. However, two lines later I refuse to plead with Achilles because it would shame both him and me. Then a couple of lines after that I cry “My father will save me.” The entire process is very emotional for Iphigenia, a rollercoaster of thoughts and feelings. Sometimes she has this steely resolve, and at other moments she is overwhelmed by everything. It is also complicated by her relationship with her father because she wants to make him proud and to take his pain away.

That last thought ties in to the discovery I made in rehearsal. I realized at the end, when she says “Oh poor father, Oh poor King” that in this moment she is thinking more about her father than about herself. This line shows that she wants to take away her father’s pain. As much as she knows this is going to hurt her, she understands that it will hurt him even more because after I am gone he must go on living and dealing with my death the rest of his life. The realization made me very sad, and when I hugged Agamemnon for the last time I held him very close, as if trying to let some of my courage and resolve flow into him. It probably isn’t something that anyone will notice, but it helped me understand that last bit. I also looked at him one last time before I walked offstage, but I did it when he wasn’t looking at me. Then I
purposefully did not look at him as I left. These things are not to help me as I prepare for death, but to help him. I am trying not to make it harder on him.

**Sunday, September 26th**

A very successful rehearsal, if I do say so myself. We reworked pages 22 to 24, the scene between Iphigenia and Agamemnon when she gives him flowers and tries to cheer him up. We worked on this scene about a week ago and I found it immensely difficult. It is all about a build in emotion and a distinct flow, neither of which I could master. The scene is composed of a number of moments in which Iphigenia tries to engage her father and make him smile, and from her point of view he continually refuses to cooperate. Each time this happens it is harder for Iphigenia to take, and by the end she is so frustrated as to be near tears. When we first went over all this, Peter spent a lot of time explaining the scene to me so by the end of the night I understood it on an intellectual level. However, on an emotional level, not so much. I think one of the problems was that I thought rhythm meant it should all flow together smoothly, and the choppiness of the scene confounded this notion. There are a number of pauses in the lines, and thoughts change very rapidly (sometimes mid-line). Overall my prior experience with this scene was not a happy one.

Tonight’s work with the scene was much different. I spent the time in between going over the scene in my mind, trying to puzzle it out. I did some work with it on my feet in my room, but I made more progress tonight. Rehearsal was running behind schedule, so in the time before I was needed I went into one of the classrooms by myself and did the scene over and over again. I went over the entire scene to figure out the flow, and I went over specific places to get the emotion right. I must have gone over one particular spot six or seven times, delivering the lines slightly differently each time. It is incredible how emphasizing different words can change a
line’s meaning and emotional content. I focused a lot on simply increasing my emotions in the scene. This is still near the beginning of the play, when Iphigenia is still a little girl, and the last time we did the scene I had very little of the youthful enthusiasm I had given Iphigenia in scene one. Being much more animated and a little over the top helped get the creative juices flowing and let other emotions come through. I didn’t necessarily get everything all worked out on my own, but I started making discoveries.

Then I worked on the scene with the two Peters and made even more discoveries. I had anticipated the worst; that everything I had worked on would be wrong and Peter would have to spend the whole rehearsal correcting. However that is not what happened. I transferred my previous work alone into the scene with Peter, and simply working with another person allowed even more possibilities. Actors feed off each other’s energy, and work off the material their scene partner gives them. This is what I did with Peter tonight, and I hope that is what he did with me. Of course Peter had feedback for me in areas where I was still having trouble, but tonight I was able to take his comments and really implement them. Last time I heard them but could not translate them into my work. One comment in particular helped me with the scene. Peter said that throughout the scene Iphigenia is sensing that something is wrong. She knows that her father is bothered, and although she doesn’t know the cause of his unhappiness she can feel it is something big and important. I don’t know what happened, but this comment really resonated with me. I took it and contrasted this confusion and gravitas with her youthful enthusiasm, and I think this is when the scene started to take shape. I took my own work, put it together with Peter’s insight, and made something good. This is what every rehearsal should be like.
Addition:

I think this play has been a challenge for me because it is non-realistic. Iphigenia goes from being a carefree girl to a mature woman ready to sacrifice herself in less than 44 pages! Because it happens in so little time, most of the changes are very rapid. There is sort of linear progression from her beginning naiveté to her ending maturity, but even this isn’t strictly true. She jumps back and forth from adulthood to childhood from one line to the next. All of this makes it hard to get a firm handle on her emotions, because they change so often. They don’t necessarily make sense, so I have to feel them more than intellectually understand them.

**Monday, September 27th**

I really feel like I am coming into my element with the show. By no means am I anywhere near a finished product, but my scene work is starting to feel correct and good (if that makes any sense). I arrived at rehearsal early today and used my time to go over tonight’s scene when Iphigenia learns she is to be sacrificed. I used the same practice room as yesterday and really took my time. I was uninhibited because I was by myself and because in a big enough space I don’t have to be conscious of my movements as much. When I try to do scenework with blocking in my room at home, the tightness of the space makes me very conscious of every move I make, and I am afraid to go all out with my emotions because I know my family can hear me. In the practice room I am in my own world and am free to do whatever it takes to make the scene work. I experimented with everything, saying lines multiple times with different volumes, modulations, pitches, etc. to test out how they sounded. It is one thing to do it in your head, but another thing to actually say the lines aloud. This allows me to decide something doesn’t sound or feel right and move on. I also ran the scene in large chunks to work at the emotional flow. This scene is not as challenging for me as yesterday’s scene, but I still needed to work on it.
After about forty minutes by myself, I worked on the scene with Peter. I must admit it went fairly well. We started the scene and almost immediately Peter stopped me for some notes. Because of this early intervention I assumed the worst for the rest of the scene. However I think I was able to take Peter’s notes and integrate them into my work almost immediately, which meant he didn’t need to comment as often. For instance he told me that Iphigenia has a general unease throughout the whole scene because by this point she has figured out that something is terribly wrong. However, she doesn’t know what. This note helped me see an aspect that had been missing from my previous work on the scene, the missing puzzle piece if you will. Once I knew this I changed some elements and left others which worked well with it. I also played with emotions tonight. I tried out different types and levels of emotions throughout the scene, and really got into the zone as it were. I think in this scene that although it is a major step in her road to maturity, it is still scary for Iphigenia. She finds out she is not going to be married, and instead she will be sacrificed. Who wouldn’t be scared? I tried to find strength in the face of this fear, and I think that made the scene work.

Tuesday, September 28th

As I mentioned in an earlier entry, I have been having a lot of trouble with Iphigenia’s Orpheus speech near the end of the play. I understand where the different sections start and end so that it isn’t just one long story. It is a series of thoughts one right after the other. However, I could never understand what she was feeling or why she was saying these things. So I decided to seek professional help, and asked Peter about it in our meeting today. That was an excellent idea. First he explained who Orpheus was. I had a general idea, but Peter filled me in. He was a musician whose music had an incredible sweetness and sorrow that could charm tears out of a rock (hence “the voice to charm the rocks). He was married to Eurydice, but she is stolen down
into the netherworld. He goes down after her and confronts a series of obstacles which he is able to get through by the sweetness of his music. He charms the god of the netherworld with his song and is allowed to take Eurydice back, but only if he doesn’t look back at her while they leave. He almost succeeds, but looks back just once near the end of the journey and she recedes into the netherworld. He spends the rest of his life in mourning, wandering the earth playing his plaintive songs. In other words, he is the most beautiful expresser of human pain and loss.

This explanation definitely opened up a whole set of doors. Because I didn’t fully understand the remark about Orpheus, I couldn’t give it weight and meaning. They were just words. But now I understand how potent his myth is to the situation. She is invoking a powerful image, the most poetic image of hers in the whole show. In our meeting we also discussed who she is speaking to in this moment and why. I thought she was speaking to her father, but in point of fact she is actually talking to herself. She has just made the discovery that she must do this alone. Now she is verbally trying to process this revelation. She is thinking ‘If it falls to just me, then what do I have to bring to the table?’ What she realizes is that she doesn’t have much. She doesn’t have Orpheus’ eloquence to save her, just herself. And like Orpheus in his battle down to the netherworld, she too is alone. I also think the idea of Orpheus relates to her father. Iphigenia is like Eurydice – she must go down to death. Her father, on the other hand, is like Orpheus left to wander the earth for the rest of his life mourning the loss of his beloved. I think that she does not want this to happen to her father. She doesn’t want him to spend the rest of his life in pain. This discovery shapes the rest of her actions in the play. She wants to be brave not just because it is her fate/destiny, but also to ease the burden carried by her father.

We spoke about a lot more in our meeting but I won’t go over everything. Just know that what we talked about was immediately helpful. Tonight when we went over this scene I was
much more comfortable with it because I understood what I was saying, what I meant, and where I was going with it. Peter didn’t have to stop me all that much. I don’t know if that is because I was doing it right, or he just wanted to give me room to play with it. In either case this lack of interruption was very helpful. When we did stop, he spoke to other actors in the scene, which left me to think about what had just happened and what was coming. It gave me opportunities to reflect on what felt right, what didn’t, and what I needed to change. I could feel her emotions in the scene, which made it much different than previous tries. I have moved past an intellectual understanding to an emotional one, because that is what the audience needs to see. I have to feel the emotions and believe them for the audience to do the same. I even made myself cry, which was surprising. The power of the tears added a new dimension to the scene. This doesn’t necessarily mean I will cry during as much as I did tonight during this scene, but it gave me new understanding. I felt the emotion, and now I have to translate it into Iphigenia’s emotion.

Wednesday, September 29th

Not a particularly illuminating day in terms of rehearsal. Most of what we worked on was blocking and the song at the very end of the show. We finally got to run the pillow fight with actual pillows and I must say getting wacked in the face with a fluffy object is no walk in the park! We also ran the scene for spacing reasons – we are finally in the barn as opposed to North Campus and so the spacing is somewhat different. Also, we need to be mindful of where the lights end at the edges of the stage so we don’t overstep into darkness. It was nice to go over some of the scenes without having to focus on our performance because it allowed me to refresh my memory and reacquaint myself with the material. For instance we blocked the pillow fight scene in the beginning, and then did character work on it a week or more ago. If we had gone
back to it tonight to do actual scene work I probably would have had trouble. But now I have
done it again and it all came back.

Friday, October 1st

I feel like my acting is really coming along. Some scenes are getting easier each day, and
some are still troublesome. But everything is moving forward and I feel confident about the
performance I will put out on Friday. I am anxious to start working with my costume because I
have to get dressed onstage and climb the wall in a dress. I also want to play with the blood, so it
doesn’t happen Thursday night at the last minute. I think having the real blood will add a new
layer to my feelings at that point, because it is a concrete thing. I will literally be able to see and
feel a liquid running down my legs, and I know from experience how traumatizing and
embarrassing that is. I don’t think I have been getting it wrong up until now, but I do think I can
go farther.

I met with Peter today to talk about my flower scene with Agamemnon and his comments
were helpful. He said that I need to watch Agamemnon closely to try and figure out what is
bothering him, and that as the scene progresses I can literally “see” more and more what’s
wrong. I can also see the crown on his head and I don’t want it to be there. He has always been
just my father, but now he cannot remove himself from his duties as ruler. When I notice that
there are tears in his eyes the moment is about his agony at the situation, and my coming to
understand and feel his pain. That agony finally comes out full force when he says “shut up.” He
does not scream this line, so anger is not what causes me to run offstage. Instead he says it in
anguish, and this is too much for me. Throughout the scene I have been sensing that something is
terribly wrong, something beyond my grasp. And now I see my father, my rock and the man who
was never a ruler around me, in pain and misery. I don’t know how to deal with this, it’s too
much to work out all at once. It is all too much. In the entire scene I also need to be aware that this is scary for me: I have probably never been away from home, and now I am at an army camp full of strange sights and sounds. When I enter I am both really excited to see Agamemnon, and I have the expectation that he will calm my fears and love me as he always does. This is a huge expectation, which makes the rest of the scene much more painful than I have been playing it. I need to make the stakes *really big* to get the kind of emotion I am searching for. I think some of that started to come out tonight, but I still have a long way to go.

**Saturday, October 2**

We ran the whole show today, and I made some good discoveries during rehearsal. The first thing I realized is that I am finally getting a sense of Iphigenia’s emotional arch. The format of the play is quite helpful in that respect; the shortness of its duration (44 pages) and the compact timeline (a couple of days) literally allows me to see Iphigenia’s journey over an uninterrupted period. Things do not happen to her offstage or some other time. Instead everything she goes through and feels is written for me to interpret. Because of all this I can see how and when she goes from a little girl to a mature woman. I am also able to see when she regresses and when she pushes forward on her path to adulthood. I don’t know if any of this makes sense, but it does in my head and that is where it counts. The whole experience is quite interesting because I have never been able to see and understood an emotional arc quite so explicitly before. One more first that has come out of my senior project.

The other discovery I made was how Iphigenia feels at various times during her flower scene with Agamemnon. As with above, I don’t know if I can articulate necessarily what I felt onstage. I just know that I started to feel emotions that felt right given the circumstances, and the comments Peter gave me were making more sense. I think it comes down to getting out of my
own way. At our meeting yesterday Peter told me that during this scene, if my little intellectual voice starts talking I need to tell it to SHUT UP and just feel my way through the scene. So today I did just that. I wasn’t thinking about the scene itself, just focusing on how it felt. A lot of what I came up with was fleeting and I don’t understand it all. I just know that things started falling into place. However, this is just the beginning, but at least I am not blocked anymore.

Sunday, October 3rd

Today was the first day I got to really see the show come together, and it was quite exciting! We didn’t have any of the effects today, such as lighting or sound, some people were able to wear their costumes and I wore my wig. I also sat in the audience and just watched the show, instead of doing homework or reading. I was quite surprised and gladdened by what I saw. Jan, for instance, is incredible. She is the Old Woman, and without any makeup or costuming she was really convincing as an older person. She also maintained an air of mystery, which added to the total effect of the show. Jenna was also quite good. As Clytemnestra she is cold and opposing, and I believe that she is a queen. She seems right at home ordering people around. It made me proud to think that I am a part of such an amazing group of people who are putting their all into making a great show.

I had a revelation today before rehearsal while I was running errands. I was pondering my growth as an actor during this show and I realized that I have turned out a higher quality performance than ever before because of my cast mates. In particular Jenna and Peter are doing so well in their roles that I am inspired to make my own performance just as powerful.

Another element of my performance and growth of which I am very proud is my new understanding and use of emotions onstage. For the first time I actually feel the emotions of a character, rather than just understanding and showing them. Because of this it is getting easier
and easier to do my scenes, even the ones that have so far eluded my grasp. The past few days I
have been able to consistently cry onstage, which is exciting not only because I could never do it,
but because it is allows me access to the emotions associated with the physical act. I usually cry
starting with my line “I know nothing of Helen” and continue all the way through the Orpheus
speech, getting really intense during and right after Artemis’ speech. The crying during this area
helps me find the emotions needed, and the emotions needed help me cry (if that makes any
sense). When I am crying I am not thinking about acting, but rather things Iphigenia would think
about like “why me” and “I don’t want to die.” However I do not let the crying control me, and
only use it when appropriate for the character. I cry during the previously mentioned area
because she has just learned she is to be sacrificed and is suddenly being visited by Artemis and
told it is her destiny. That would be a lot for anyone. However by the end of the play she no
longer really cries because she has made the decision to fulfill her destiny and that the time for
tears has ended. She wants to be strong for both her father and mother, and so she goes off to
meet her end with as much strength and dignity as she can muster, and without crying.

**Monday, October 4th**

I really don’t have much to say about rehearsal tonight. It was a lighting cue-to-cue as
opposed to a complete run-through, which meant the acting was minimal. Of course we did try to
do the scenes as truthfully as possible, but when you do the same five lines eight times in a row,
you start to lose interest in fidelity. However it is great fun to see the show coming together the
way it is. I didn’t have much faith in the wall, but after seeing some of the effects achieved with
lighting I totally understand. I can’t wait to see it all come together, and see the finished lights
tomorrow evening. But now I just have to remember how far downstage I am allowed to go,
make sure I don’t knock into anything backstage, and hit my marks for the specials. Just another layer to add, like the wig or makeup.

**Tuesday, October 5**

Tonight we finished working on the lights, which took about two hours, and then did a run-through of the entire show. Although it was not a cue-to-cue but a run, I was still mostly focused on the technical aspects of the show. My wig kept coming undone onstage, for instance, and I realized my gold dress is too constricting on the bottom and needs a slit. I also found out that we really need to work on getting me dressed onstage. Kylie almost took my wig off, once when she helped me put the dress on and again when she put the veil in my hair. And the final annoyance was that my decorative waist-tie-thing is too loose and so kept slipping down my waist every time I took a breath or moved. As things happened I kept a checklist in my head, and so after the show I was running around asking questions and telling people what needed to be done. Because of all this, it was harder to focus on my performance. However, I think I did relatively well. It was not as deep as previous times, and I couldn’t lose myself in the moments. On the other hand I was able to remember and incorporate all the notes Peter gave me, and each night my performance is better than before. I am still discovering my own reactions to events onstage (and by my own I mean me as Iphigenia . . . if that makes sense). One thing I must remember tomorrow night is to stand taller, more erect. I have noticed a tendency to hunch over just a tiny bit while onstage, but I am a princess and would have been taught to stand tall.

**Wednesday, October 6**

Everything is coming together for the show, but I’m not feeling completely satisfied with my performance today. I feel like I have hit a plateau in my growth and exploration of the play. That is not to say that my performance tonight was bad. Rather, I didn’t feel the emotional depth
that I have previously achieved. I have not been able to really cry onstage, which I know isn’t a big deal because that is not what acting’s about. However I think it is a sort of a physical manifestation of what is going on inside. I just did not connect with the scenes today. I did everything right, and technically everything went well. But I know I can do better, which is annoying. I believe I am over thinking it. I was not able to let myself go in the moment. I got wrapped up in thinking about the scene and what I was going to do next. Some of this is unavoidable; every day we get something new to work with, whether it is costumes or sound, etc. Working with something new obviously takes your focus away from the moment. I just need to go over all my notes beforehand, and then put the analysis away for the night. I cannot let myself be sidetracked by my own mind.

**Thursday, October 7th**

Wow. I can’t believe we just finished our final dress rehearsal, and tomorrow the show goes up. I honestly feel like this entire experience just started. I know everyone always says that, but for me it is really true. I felt some insecurity today because of my experience last night. I was afraid I would have trouble connecting with the emotional content of the play. I think what happened tonight was I connected with the emotions, but just in a different, more subtle way. I didn’t have huge waterworks and cry and scream, but instead there were large portions in which I was literally reacting emotionally to what was happening. When Achilles came on with all his bruising I was literally frightened and upset, and my first thought was “he tried to save me and look what happened.” I didn’t think this in terms of Iphigenia the character, as separate entity, but as me. When the soldiers enter to tell about Achilles it felt like someone had punched me in the gut. I think this has been happening all along, but I was so focused on being big and ‘dramatic’ with my emotions that I didn’t notice. Now that I am more comfortable in all the
technical aspects like knowing my lines and blocking, the costumes, my wig, etc. I have time to focus on my performance while it is happening. I will say that I am being fairly consistent in my emotions from night to night, so maybe that just means I found the ones that work and which don’t need to be changed or explored any more.

I am so pleased with the way the entire production has come together. When I am not running around backstage trying to change my costume and readjust my wig like a chicken with its head cut off, I like to sit and watch what is happening through the scrims. And honestly, I find myself mesmerized by everyone’s performance. I actively want to watch them, as opposed to just killing time until my entrance. This is new for me, and seeing the caliber of their work makes me want to do my best. When I am having trouble finding my emotions onstage all I have to do is look into Jenna or Peter’s eyes to see their anguish and I instantly start tapping into my own emotions. I feel really confident with the performance I will give tomorrow night, and I hope I exceed everyone’s expectations.

**Performance Notes**

Rather than write an entry for every performance, I kept note of significant events or discoveries throughout the course of the show. Because they flow as stream of consciousness, with discernable identification of which night I am discussing, I will leave it in bulleted form.

- The first night I had trouble finding emotional depth - thinking about it too much
- I made a new discovery every night
- I felt a new level of emotional at the end of the show, starting when Agamemnon reenters and I say “I will come with you” all the way to the end
The makeup bruises on Jordan’s body helped make his situation real (he got beat up by the army while trying to save me, and failed). I could go up to them, look at them, touch them, and treat them as if they were real bruises and he was in pain.

I tried out different emotions or actions to see what felt right each night. I didn’t change anything dramatically, but the way I played the scenes changed slightly every performance.

I still didn’t get the emotional depth I wanted in the flower scene. Every night I was always thinking about it too hard, both beforehand and onstage. I thought too much.

I’ve realized that the reason I couldn’t get wholly invested in my first scene is because so much could go wrong: hairdo, wig, corset ties, dress, necklace, blood on my legs.

When Agamemnon comes to me as I listen to Artemis’ speech, his touch always initiated the spilling out of all Iphigenia’s emotions. The sadness would wash over me and that is roughly the point where the role became real.

I was able to find and carry a new quality of fear and sadness throughout my performance. I finally realized that Iphigenia is scared until the end and does cries up until her death. However, she is brave because she doesn’t let her fear keep her from doing what must be done.

I noticed that I lick my lips a lot.

I also noticed that I feed off of other’s energy. How my performance went each night rested, somewhat, on the other actors and what they were giving me to play with.

I became really sad at unexpected moments, like when I hug Agamemnon for the last time. It is always surprising when a moment which before had seemed benign, suddenly becomes emotionally charged and quite moving.
I used the sight of Jordan to help me get the line “I do know.” He is a demi-god willing to sacrifice himself for me, he failed, and so it is up to me. Him lying there covered in bruises reinforced this decision.

Trying to hold back emotions was more effective during my “It is the end for me” line than trying to play them. I remember learning this in Acting I and II with Peter, and it was really fun to finally understand it.

I thought it would be hard to get back into the swing of things for the brush (review rehearsal), but I went into it full speed and made some good discoveries.

I did what I needed to, in order to make the dressing scene easier. I held the wig while kylie puts in the veil, I knotted the ends of the corset lacing so they wouldn’t come out, I put my hands in the armholes of the dress so it goes on more easily, and I used a different necklace that is easier to put on. Dressing onstage is very challenging.

I used audience reaction to my advantage during the Thursday performance. The audience was full of students, and I could hear the moment they understood it was my period blood. It made me really embarrassed, but I used that emotion in my performance and carried into the next two nights.

I noticed that I am really unaware of things happening onstage. At times I was so focused on my own emotions, my own performance that I didn’t hear what people were saying. Afterwards fellow actors would say “I can’t believe such and such happened in this scene” and I had no idea! That is not to say I was oblivious. I just focused on those things which directly pertained to me.
Throughout the play I would think things such as “why me” and “no, not dad.” I literally was Iphigenia. I wasn’t thinking, “how is this scene going” or “I need to quick change next.” I was thinking as Iphigenia. I wasn’t trying to act her emotions, but thinking and feeling them.

I became very aware of how much I move my toes during the pillow fight scene. When I stand in silence, thinking about Achilles, I play with my toes.

“For” is a hard word to pronounce. I always say “Fer.”

I don’t think I ever truly stood completely straight while onstage. I felt like I slouched the tiniest bit all the time and I have no idea why.

I think I prepared myself well before my entrances. I would start to focus and find the feelings of the character. For example, for the flower scene I would psych myself up to see Agamemnon. I would smile to make myself happy, and jump around to increase my energy.

**Audience Notes**

One very important element of live performance is the audience. You can rehearse a play as much as you want, but until it gets before an audience it lives in a vacuum. Audience feedback is most vocal and easily identifiable for comedies, because laughter (or lack thereof) shows whether or not you have done a good job. In dramatic work, audience feedback is different. Some audiences are vocal: they will gasp at surprising or dramatic moments. Other audiences are quiet: they are (presumably) watching intently but with no less enthusiasm. A good audience isn’t necessarily a big one, either. One night of Iphigenia we were packed, but felt little reciprocation from the audience, while a much smaller audience the next night was focused and engaged. Sometimes there isn’t a concrete indication of the audience’s engagement, rather it is a feeling. We call some audiences “dead” because their body is there, but perhaps their mind is not.
Having a different audience each night definitely affected my performance. While the opening night audience wasn’t dead by any means, I didn’t feel the kind of energy I was expecting. Because of this I became hyper-aware of my own performance. I kept trying to figure out what was lacking to make them so disconnected. However, in a later performance the audience was very quiet but afterward was the most appreciative and the most vocal with praise. I guess the moral is that you never can tell. Audience reaction also helped me in very concrete ways. It was fun and different to play someone so innocent, and one night the audience made a noise of approval when I presented Agamemnon with the flowers. This recognition of the innocence I was portraying bolstered my confidence and helped me retain this innocence in the rest of the scene.

The moment I realize my period has started was always uncomfortable for me because of the kind of society we live in. In ancient Judaism a menstruating woman was unclean, and while we have progressed past that (thankfully), menstruation is still a somewhat delicate subject. Imagine my horror, then, when I heard the moment the audience (full of my peers) realized what the blood actually was. I was mortified, but fortunately that is exactly the emotion Iphigenia feels in that moment, and it helped with the realism of the scene. I was then able to memorize the feeling and use it on subsequent nights. Every audience affects my performance in some way. When an audience is dead, it can be hard to muster my energy and give a stellar performance. When they are engaged I often find my performance going to new heights. Audience reaction also helps me look at my work from a new perspective, and perhaps realize how important a seemingly fleeting moment really is (or vice versa). A lot of my changes from night to night also had to do with my fellow actors and their changes, which may or may not have been influenced by the audience. Essentially, the audience is the last factor which makes live theater what it is.
XVI. Character Analysis

Who Am I?

My name is Iphigenia and I am thirteen years old. I am a Princess of Mycenae, eldest daughter of King Agamemnon and Queen Clytemnestra. I have two sisters, Electra and Chrysothemis, and a brother Orestes. I live in the palace of Mycenae with my whole family and my nurse. We children live in the woman’s wing with mother, but of course we have our own rooms. Father lives in a separate wing of the house but he visits often.

I am a little on the short side so I hope I keep growing. I have long blond hair which I am not allowed to put up yet because I am too young (I can’t wait!). I have brown eyes like my father, but not quite as deep as his. I think my eyes are my best feature. My smile is nice too, although my front two teeth look kind of bigger than the rest, like some tiny animal. I haven’t really developed physically yet. My chest has started growing, but I still look like a boy. It was so embarrassing the day nurse pointed out my . . . growth. She said it in front of all my siblings – I was mortified. We don’t really talk about such things. The only thing mother said about it was “it will happen in time” and closed the subject. I hope I can look even a little bit like Aunt Helen. I hear she had hundreds of men fighting for her when she was younger, before she married Uncle Menelaus! I don’t think that will ever happen to me. I am good looking enough, but nothing unusual. I don’t really get that many complements. When I have to get dressed up for a royal function mother just looks me up and down, nods, and goes about her business. Nurse tells me I look pretty, but she has to say that!

I am not a very rebellious person by nature and I mostly do what mother tells me to. I can be brave when I need to be, but I usually only speak up for my siblings rather than for myself. I would do anything to protect them because I love them so much. I don’t want anything bad to
happen to them. Usually when Electra and Chrysothemis get into trouble, it is their own fault. They often get into scrapes because they just don’t think! I can usually predict when something will end badly and I warn them against it, but they don’t listen. I don’t think doing crazy or silly things makes you brave, just stupid. Yet even when it is their fault, I still often take the blame. They are not old enough to really know better, and I am.

I am always aware that I am a princess – especially because mother reminds me ten times a day! I believe in all the gods, but I especially like Aphrodite. I daydream about her putting the arrow of love into some handsome young prince (he has to be a prince, considering I am a princess) who will fall madly for me and come sweep me away in his golden chariot! Except if that actually happened I would miss nurse and my sisters, and father and mother. It will happen someday, but I think that time is still far off. I have to get used to the idea of actually getting married – I haven’t even really had contact with men (only the servants in the palace and most of them are women).

Anyway, I know the rituals and prayers for the various festivals and all the stories about the Gods, just like a good Greek princess should. Nurse tells us our favorite stories just before we go to sleep. I love when we go out of the palace to one of the festivals and I get to see all the citizens of Mycenae. Father thinks of them as his children, and it makes me proud to see my people. I know all about our history and a lot of other subjects as well, because we have many tutors. I am not very good at math and mother is always hounding me about it because one day I will have to run a household. However we girls don’t get as much tutoring as Orestes will get, because he will be king.

I am a compassionate person, and I don’t like to see others hurt. We have pets in the palace and I try to teach Orestes to be gentle with them. He is a boy, so he likes to play roughly
with them, but I know they are living things which can feel pain. I also feel bad when we see beggars on the way to the temples. They look so worn and hungry, beaten down by life. Whenever we pass one I want to stop and help him or her, but mother won’t let me. When I am older I will stop for every beggar and give them money. That way they can all live happily, like I do!

**Given Circumstances**

Father has been gone for some time now. Armies from all over Greece have been called together by father and Menelaus, thousands upon thousands of men. They are going to war, leaving from the Straits of Aulis to sail across the Aegean Sea to the city of Troy. I don’t really know much about Troy other than that the men wear dresses - every time I think of that it makes me giggle! Father has been made leader of this giant army, so he is very busy. The rest of us remain here, at home. It is not so very different from other times. Father is often away on official state business. I miss him terribly, and every night I talk to a star and hope father is looking at the same one from Aulis. I hope the war doesn’t take long so father can come home and play with us (and so we don’t have to be alone with mother for much longer).

**Relationships**

**Father: King Agamemnon of Mycenae**

My father is the best man in the world. He is King of all Mycenae, so he is really busy. He is gone most of the time, out doing his duty to our people. He calls the people of Mycenae his children and he treats them like family. I am not allowed to go with him outside the castle when he is on official business, because it is not right for a woman to come in contact with any man other than her husband or father, or for a princess to risk defiling herself. Whenever we do leave the castle it is always in a retinue surrounded by handlers to keep all of us children safe. We go
to the temples to offer prayers and sacrifices, or we go see the plays at the festivals (that doesn’t happen often – it’s a special treat). Because I can’t go with him, father tells me about everything he does. He describes all the experiences, all the places he goes, and all the wise decisions he makes to help our people. There is no man wiser than him, no better king in all of Greece! We also play games when we’re together. When I was little I would sit on his lap and he would tell me stories about faraway lands and magical creatures. When he grew a beard, he let me play with it! And he always brings me little treats from the kitchen, or from outside the castle, like sugarplums and sweet dates. But even though he is soft with me, I know he is really brave too. I see him in his armor sometimes and he looks so handsome in his shining breastplate, holding his shield and sword – just like a picture or a statue! He gives me anything I want, because he loves me so much, and even though I am only one of four children I know he loves me best of all. He has never said so outright, because that would hurt my siblings’ feelings, but it’s true. He is the perfect father, and I would do anything for him!

**Mother: Queen Clytemnestra**

I love my mother very much, but our relationship is strained. I am the eldest, so she pays a lot of attention to me, but it isn’t very loving. According to her I must always act like a princess, never like a normal girl. I must stand up straight, speak only when spoken to, never do anything to embarrass her, and above all *never disobey her*. Not only is she trying to raise a princess, but also a bride. Half the time it’s “A Princess would never . . .” and the other half of the time she reprimands me with “When you get married you won’t be able to . . .” It’s all for my own good, I know, but it’s hard. When I was really little I would always try to get her to play with me, but she never would. She was always getting ready for some royal function or giving orders to the servants (most of them are afraid of her). She always seems to be moving; I have
never seen her just reading a book or looking out at the view. It’s hard to catch someone who is never still. Sometimes I would sneak into her closet and smell the perfume on her dresses, just to feel closer to her. But I have resigned myself to the relationship we have. I get whatever affection she offers, however little it may be, and am thankful for it. And I do so try to make her proud, but I don’t think it happens often. I have tried to teach my little sisters about how to handle my mother, and have also tried to shelter them from her. If we ever do anything wrong, according to her anyway (although how something like a pillow-fight is wrong I have no idea), I always stick up for them and take the blame. I know how hard it was for me, and I want to try and spare them. But having said all this, I know she loves us. It just isn’t her way to show a lot of affection. Thank goodness for nurse!

Nurse

Nurse is my best friend. She has been with our family since I was born and she is like a second mother to me. She was the one who tucked us in at night, who would kiss my knee when I fell and scratched it, who chased away the monsters from under the bed. Other than father, she is my favorite person in the whole world. I can’t imagine life without her. I tell her all my secrets, even the ones I keep from mother and father. She often has to reprimand us for doing naughty things, but then once we have been punished she gives us all hugs and kisses. Whenever mother has made me upset, I can always go to nurse and she will hold me on her lap and sing away my tears. She has such a wonderful voice. She knows everything about me, from the scar on my knee from where a dog once bit me to my favorite drink (pomegranate juice). She is always with us, and the thought of ever being apart from her for long upsets me. I love her so much!
Uncle: King Menelaus of Sparta

Uncle Menelaus is a good man, but I don’t really know him that well. We see him when he comes with Aunt Helen to talk matters of state with father. But once he arrives, the two men go off into one of father’s royal chambers and we don’t see them except for meals. And at meals I am not allowed to speak: the children are supposed to be seen and not heard. Because of this I do an awful lot of listening and day dreaming. I have never been to Sparta, so I often wonder what it is like. I have heard things, though, and pick up clues from Uncle Menelaus. They are all warriors there, so they say, even the women! Not Helen, of course, she’s too pretty for that. But can you imagine women fighting? It’s completely unheard of here. It’s unseemly for a woman to even look a stranger in the eyes lest she be called a whore. Anyway, Uncle Menelaus is big and strong with hard muscles all over (at least on the parts I can see, like his arms and legs) so he must be a really great soldier. I know I would be scared to meet him on a battlefield. He always wears armor, even when at home with us. He is not very affectionate - when he sees me he pats me on the head and sends all the children to go and play in another room. I don’t know if I have ever seen him hug my little cousin Hermione. Their relationship is not at all like the one I have with father, and I pity them for it.

Aunt: Queen Helen of Sparta

Helen is my aunt, but we don’t talk about her much right now. She is my mother’s sister, married to my father’s brother. She is Queen of Sparta and she is beautiful and that’s not just my opinion, everyone says so. I think my mother resents her for being so pretty, which is not to say that my mother isn’t beautiful also. There is just something about Helen that is almost beyond beauty. Sometimes I daydream what it would be like to be that beautiful. I know I certainly am not. I am completely flat-chested, and I’m kind of scrawny. I think my one really redeeming
feature is my hair. It’s a beautiful yellow, and father calls me his golden-haired child. I think I look more like Helen than my mother in that respect, and I pretend that suitors have come from all over the world to woo me because of my beautiful golden locks. That sounds kind of strange, but so it goes. We never really got to see Aunt Helen a lot while growing up. She was off in Sparta with Uncle Menelaus. Every once in a while they come visit, usually when father and uncle have important matters of state to attend to together. Sometimes they bring my cousin Hermione with them. She is nine years old, so she gets along better with my sisters. But she is fun nonetheless and I play with them when I get bored. I guess you could say I don’t have much of a relationship with Helen. She is my aunt and I owe her family obedience, but other than that we don’t really have much contact. She ran off with Paris to Troy, which we don’t discuss. I am not sure what is going on, but something big is happening because of it.

**Siblings: Chrysothemis/Electra/Orestes**

I love my siblings a lot. I am the eldest; Electra is two years younger than me, Chrysothemis is five, and Orestes is twelve years younger. We are all together *all of the time*. Sometimes it can get really frustrating, like when Chrysothemis falls down and we have to comfort her. But overall we have fun together. We three sisters often go to the nursery to play with baby Orestes. I am teaching him how to talk, and I love to bounce him on my knee. When he gets fussy, though, we hand him over to the nurse. Electra, Chrysothemis, and I have the same sense of humor. We often get into trouble over it, like giggling over some private joke at dinner. But I always take the blame because they are younger and need me to defend them. We are always honest with each other, which can often lead to spats. But we always get over them rather quickly, and are back to playing dolls late that day.
Objectives

Long Range: To live a long and happy life, making my father proud.

Short Range: To find out what is bothering father and eradicate the problem. I would do anything to make him happy.

Obstacles/Conflicts

I have two conflicting needs which are at war. My objective is to help my father, to release him from the pain and agony which he feels about my sacrifice. He is my father, I hold him supreme above all others. I would literally do anything to make him happy because I love him so much. And in this case I might give my life for him. My obstacle/conflict is my fear of death: I don’t want to die. I am only thirteen and I thought I was going to marry Achilles. I want to grow up into a beautiful woman, to marry and have lots of bouncing babies, a home to call my own. I want to welcome my aging parents into my own household and lavish on them all the luxuries they gave to me. I want to dance at my daughters’ wedding and rejoice when my son succeeds his father. There is so much more to do and see. I mean, why should I have to die for Helen? I don’t have anything to do with her affair and this war. I don’t know which is greater, my need to help my father or my need to live.

Journey

At the start of the play, I am a naïve young girl who thinks life is as simple as wishing on a star. I think life is beautiful inside the walls of the palace, and all I have to worry about are pillow fights with my sisters. I am changed literally by the arrival of my period. Then I am changed internally by my first meeting with Agamemnon in the camp. When I first greet him he is strange and distant, and I assume he must miss my siblings. However, as the scene progresses I begin to see things more clearly. When he finally yells at me, I am directly and undeniably
confronted by his agony over my sacrifice. I do not know the reason for his pain, but the intensity of it frightens me. I have never seen my father so upset, and he has never yelled at me in my entire life. I have lived in a bubble, a little princess sheltered from the outside world. But his distress starts to open my eyes to reality of life, to suffering and hardship. I start to become aware that Agamemnon is not just my father, but a king with his own immense troubles.

The next jump in the process of maturation is when I learn that I am to be sacrificed. My Orpheus speech reveals that I am a person capable of making a life and death decision about myself. It is the first time I have ever contradicted my father (“it falls to me alone, without you”). This is also a moment when I look inward to my own strengths, and really reflect on myself as a human being. I realize that I am strong and capable, not just some silly child anymore. I see that I am indeed a woman, not just physiologically but mentally. I have the wisdom to understand what needs to be done and the forbearance to do it. Seeing Achilles hurt later is what fully convinces me to sacrifice myself. If the men will attack Achilles, a demi-god, then clearly there is no getting out of this. It also makes me realize that I don’t want others hurt on my account.

Although I accept my death as necessary, I never reconcile the fact. I make the leap of faith that my death will serve some purpose, and while I couch it terms of Greece’s glory, I don’t really believe it. Part of my acceptance is simply pragmatism; I look at the situation, see there is no way out, and resign myself to death. I am also motivated by Artemis, who tells me it is my destiny to be sacrificed. Destiny can be defined as “lot or fortune,” but also as “the inevitable or irresistible course of events.” With the army clamoring for my sacrifice and no way out, my death is inevitable/irresistible. Fighting it will only make it harder, so the best thing to do is accept it. In the end, though, most of my acceptance stems from my love of Agamemnon. I know that he is in an impossible position and that I can ease his burden by accepting my death with
grace and dignity. In the beginning of the play I am all about me; by the end I understand that there are things more important than myself. By the play’s finish I am a fully mature woman able to understand the sacrifice I am making and why I must make it.
XVII. Post-Production Analysis

I remember saying to my mother, about half-way through the rehearsal process for *Iphigenia*, “even if my Senior Acting Project ended right now, I have still learned more than I ever dreamed possible from this experience.” Now, having finished my project and reflected on the outcome, these sentiments remain true. I firmly believe that my Senior Acting Project is one of the most educationally beneficial experiences of my college career. I have, of course, taken other acting classes (Acting I and II - both with my director, Peter Wright) and performed in various school and student productions. I learned something from every experience, and they have all played some part in who I am as an actress today. However, through my participation in *Iphigenia*, I stretched my abilities to the limit and grew in ways I never thought possible.

As I wrote about in my pre-production analysis, I often have trouble playing parts that require emotions other than happiness or anger. I found the role of Patricia in last spring’s production of *The Male Animal* relatively easy to play because, for the most part, the character is either excited or frustrated/angry. It must be noted that the show is a comedy, so the types and levels of emotion are very different from a Greek tragedy. *The Male Animal* did teach me about some technical aspects of staging a show, such as how to perform in the round, and allowed me to work on playing comedy. Yet I do not feel that the show stretched my knowledge or abilities tremendously.

I was apprehensive going into *Iphigenia* because of a particularly frustrating experience. In Acting II with Peter, I chose to perform a duologue from the 1967 play *Lovers* by Brian Friel. In the duologue, sixteen year old Mag talks to her boyfriend, Joe. Earlier in the play Mag discovers she is pregnant with Joe’s child, and without the options women have today, she is forced to marry Joe. Directly before this duologue, the narrator discloses that later in the day the
couple drowns in the loch; whether it was an accident or suicide is left ambiguous. On the surface the duologue is innocuous enough. It just sounds like a young girl prattling on to her boyfriend about anything and everything. I honestly thought it would be easy. But as I started analyzing the character and her words, I realized what an emotional state she is in. Through the course of the speech, Mag starts to understand that she and Joe will be married forever and that she will be a mother. Her flow of thoughts is simply her way of trying to connect with Joe.

By the end of the monologue Mag is so overcome with fear, despair, hope, uncertainty, and desperation that she starts to cry. Looking back at it now, after a remove of quite some time and after having gone through this process, Mag’s plight seems more potent to me and more touching. I just understand it more now, and I would honestly like to try it again. However, at the time I was unable to achieve any breakthroughs in my acting. No matter how hard I tried I could not get in touch with my vulnerability. The dialogue was simply words on a page; I was unable to inhabit the role and remained an outsider looking in. Throughout that semester I often thought back to my Freshman year, when I watched senior Rob Saunders inhabit the role of a rapist on death-row in the show Dead Man Walking. When his character dies, the power of Rob’s performance made me cry every night watching it. I couldn’t help but feel his anguish and fear because he felt them. Ever since that time, I have wanted to achieve his level of commitment, honesty, and raw emotion.

In preparation for Iphigenia over the summer, I decided to pay attention to my own emotions. I realized that one of the roadblocks to crying onstage was that I had never actually thought about what it feels like to cry, both psychologically and physiologically. I had never bothered to find out what kinds of things go through a person’s head, how the body changes and responds, or how one feels during and after crying. To find the answers to these questions, I
scrutinized my own actions. Every time I cried I noted that my face scrunches up (especially my eyes), and that I hold my breath for large chunks of time. Often the emotion is so uncontrollable that I have to open my mouth very wide and try to “bear it.” I do not make the traditional sobbing noises that other people usually do. If I try not to cry my chin quivers, I bite my lip, and the tears trickle down my face. I look up and away to try and keep the tears in and pull myself together. I often double over because the emotion is too much for me to handle, and it comes in waves.

I also paid attention to the types of thoughts running through my head. In general they were negative thoughts, usually questions like: “How can this be happening?” or “What did I just do?” I have a tendency to beat myself up when I start crying, due to a history of emotions at inappropriate times which I cannot stop. These negative thoughts increase my emotional distress, and it just keeps going in a vicious cycle. There is never a moment when my mind is completely blank or empty: it just keeps running like a hamster wheel around and around and around. I cried a number of times during the summer, and every time I noted consistencies in my behavior and thoughts.

Although I did all this in preparation, it did not allay my fears about the part. It is an extremely heavy show, and Iphigenia feels a number of different, overwhelming emotions. However, I stretched myself emotionally to a place I never thought I could reach, and Peter Arsenault’s performance had a lot to do with it. He took Voice and Movement last semester with Professor Stephanie Dean, so he learned how to make himself cry onstage. But more than that, I could see that he truly felt the emotions of his character. When he played opposite me I could literally see the pain and agony in his eyes. I know he actually took these emotions to heart because after rehearsal he needed quite some time to recover his usual joviality. Such
commitment made me want to up my game. The other inspiration was Peter Wright’s advice to just shut my mind up and play it. Having heard him tell me all semester to stop thinking and start feeling, I decided to follow his wisdom.

One day at rehearsal, during the Artemis speech, I tried to make myself cry. I did some physiological tricks which I discovered over the summer, like scrunching up my face and holding my breath. But I also made myself think like the character: what is Artemis saying? Is she really saying I have to do this? I don’t want to leave my family . . . etc. etc. And suddenly, in the midst of doing all this, I forgot that I was trying to make myself cry and just started doing it. I was Iphigenia, facing a Goddess telling me that I have to sacrifice myself to fulfill my destiny. I wasn’t analyzing myself anymore, or thinking analytically about my performance. I was feeling it, opening myself up to the emotions. This was one of the biggest breakthroughs of my entire acting career. It didn’t matter to me whether anyone else noticed what I was doing because I knew what had just happened, and how monumental it was for me!

After this breakthrough I applied what I learned from the experience to the rest of the play. At first I went overboard, getting overwhelmed with emotion at every opportunity. But then in one of our sessions Peter told me the key to feeling emotion onstage is to tailor it to the character. The question is not “how does Danya feel and express emotion” but “how does Iphigenia feel and express emotion?” With this in mind I started editing my actions. I asked myself questions like: How flamboyant or over the top is Iphigenia with her emotions? Does she feel at ease crying in front of her mother? How about in front of her father? Does being a princess make her react differently to displays of emotion? What moments are appropriate for her to cry, and at which moments does she pull herself together. I realized that there are two sides to Iphigenia’s character. She is a young girl of thirteen who feels emotions very strongly,
but she also becomes a mature person who can handle a life and death situation with grace and
courage. With this in mind, when does she mentally say to herself “pull yourself together?”
When she does make it through, who does she do it for? Does she try to show strength for her
father or mother, for herself, or for anyone else? By thinking about these questions I was able to
find the moments when Iphigenia reveals her emotions rather than keeping them hidden.

I am glad that I requested and was allowed to perform in a Mainstage production for my
Senior Acting Project instead of a “stand-alone,” because this afforded six performances instead
of only two. I eschewed the stand-alone because the amount of effort required for a Senior
Acting Project (and in my case, Honors Thesis) seemed wasted on two performances. However,
now I am thankful for the six performances because it allowed me six opportunities to evolve
and grow. My performance changed every night, and I would surprise myself one night by
getting emotional at a moment in which I had felt little the night before. What I felt and thought
at particular moments changed from night to night as well, and how I played certain scenes
changed too.

For example, near the end of the play I have a speech reminding Agamemnon that I am
his little girl. From an intellectual standpoint I understood the emotion I needed in that scene, and
when the show went up the scene was fine. However, as the run progressed I started to
understand the scene on an emotional level. For example, my performance got softer and more
tender as I responded to Peter Arsenault’s performance and my own discoveries. I realized that
although technically I try to plead for my life, there is more to it than that. I get lost in happy
memories, try to make my father feel better about my death, and try to forget my imminent
demise. There is so much beyond the words which I came to understand. I never consciously
thought about doing the scene differently, or made a particular decision to do so. It just happened
organically as I became more comfortable in Iphigenia’s skin, and became more aware of how the moment affects her actions. I could actually think as Iphigenia, and my choices came from her point of view. I always struggled with this in my acting, and the fact that I achieved one of my goals makes me proud and grateful for this experience. It was a joy to make these kinds of discoveries every night.

Having said all this, I still have some trouble putting my brain aside and accessing my emotions. The one scene that was the hardest for me was meeting Agamemnon in the camp. We went over and over this scene but I never got it. Intellectually I understood the events: Agamemnon acts weird and I try (and fail) to cheer him up. As the scene progresses I should get more and more upset, but I just could not access the emotions I needed. I thought about it all too hard. I “played” at the emotions in the scene rather than felt them. It never became like the scene with Agamemnon, pleading for my life. I made every decision from a remove, as “Danya the actress” rather than Iphigenia the real person. The scene felt very much like the struggle with my Acting II duologue. While I failed with this scene in terms of my acting growth, it made me aware of a particular problem. Peter told me I can be too introspective, which can keep me from the openness I need, and in this scene the more I struggled the more introspective I became. I knew I could look to Peter Arsenault’s performance as Agamemnon or a myriad other elements to help me. But because I was thinking about it so hard, I wasn’t open to that help. I have never used the word introspective to describe myself, ever, but when Peter used it in discussing my challenges it really struck a chord. Now that I know about this challenge, I can proceed to overcome it.

I also learned a lot from this process about understanding my character. In both Acting I and II, as well as Musical Theater with Stephanie Dean, I wrote character analyses. A character
analysis is slightly different from teacher to teacher, but in general it covers information like physical characteristics, history, relationships to other characters in the play, etc. In essence a character analysis answers the question “Who Am I” for your character. I always love to do these, because when information isn’t available I make up my own stories. It takes a lot of imagination, and when the stories are useful they help me learn all the nuances of my character.

However, through working with Peter I realize that I do not go far enough with these analyses. Throughout the rehearsal process Peter and I discussed who Iphigenia is in detail; basically, we went much further than any of my previous character analysis. At the beginning I answered the basic questions, but then went beyond them. Every time Iphigenia makes a decision Peter asked me why she chose A instead of B? For the first time, I needed to know the character so well that I innately understood what motivated her every move. This was a monumental task, and often I did not know the answer. I am used to knowing the answer, or if not, then being able to find it, but this lack of experience/knowledge made me acutely aware that I am still a student, and that I still have a lot to learn. I guess that is another positive result of this project!

Waiting two months after the show to write this analysis allowed me to reflect on the experience and analyze some of its effects. For one thing, I can now bring a vulnerability and openness to other acting endeavors. I have been working on the song “I’m Not That Girl” from Wicked since August, before my Senior Acting Project, and from the beginning my acting of the piece was stilted. I encountered the same problem I keep encountering: I cannot feel the character’s emotion. However, when I went back to the piece after Iphigenia, I suddenly understood what the character felt. During the song, Elphaba watches the man she loves go off with her roommate. When I sang the line “Blithe smile/ Lithe limb/ She who’s winsome/ She wins him/ Gold hair with a gentle curl” I was Elphaba, standing on the side of the road as my
heart literally breaks. It felt intense. Every time I perform the song I can summon these same emotions. I literally feel them washing over me like a wave. And I knew the moment it happened, as I still know, that my Senior Acting Project caused this release.

    I know that I spent the larger part of this analysis discussing emotions as they relate to my acting. However I chose to do this because this has been such a monumental struggle. I did well enough with my acting before *Iphigenia*, but I knew my acting lacked something which I could not find. Now I know that I need to open myself to the emotional possibilities of my character. I am really excited for other opportunities to put my knowledge into action!
XVIII. Scholarly Reflections

While I have already reflected on my creative growth as an actor, I would like to assess my growth as a scholar.

When I started expanding my Senior Acting Project into a full honors thesis, I relied heavily on the opinions of my thesis advisor. As a distinguished professor and experienced director, Peter knows much more than I do about theater (which is as it should be), and when he shared his opinions on the nature of tragedy I accepted them as my own. However, during the process of writing my thesis, something changed. I used the definition we came up with together, but once I actually put it to the test, I started having doubts. Things which I had accepted as true came into question, and I started to lose faith in my decisions. However, I continued on with the hope that everything would become clear.

I analyzed all three plays using my definition of tragedy, but I wasn’t satisfied with the result. I struggled to support many of my arguments, and because I was unhappy with my scholarship, I decided to reassess the situation. I went back over my sources, only to realize that I had approached my research with a definite bias. I had discussed tragedy with Peter before I researched the opinions of other scholars, so that I only paid attention to information which supported our conclusions. In rereading my sources, I encountered different theories which I previously missed, and which resonated with me. I also read new texts and held discussions with other professors in the theater department. I then assessed all the different information I had gathered, and decided which elements made sense to me. This is not to say that Peter is incorrect; tragedy is a complex issue, and everyone believes something different about it. I have simply formed an opinion which works for me.
The result of this process is that my scholarship has risen to a whole new level. I am at a point where I need not accept everything I am told as true. Instead, I can research and form my own opinions. I can now approach information with a certain skepticism until I have analyzed and verified it for myself. I have graduated to complex, critical thinking, which is the goal of college. I only hope I can carry these skills with me in the future.
XIX. Bibliography


XX. Works Referenced


XXI. Appendix