

# TIMING RECOGNITION: FROM ARISTOTLE'S COMMENTS ON THE *IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS* TO GLUCK'S OPERA

Dana LaCourse Munteanu  
Ohio State University at Newark  
dmuntean@newark.ohio-state.edu

## What Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride* "teaches" us about Aristotle's *Poetics*

"*ORESTE Ainsi tu péris en Aulide, Iphigénie, ô ma sœur.*"

You have also perished in Aulis, oh my sister!

(Gluck, libretto by Guillard, *Iphigénie en Tauride*, 1779)

No doubt Aristotle considered Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* among his favorite plays.<sup>1</sup> He was impressed by its complex recognition scene to such a degree that he offered it several times in the *Poetics* as an example of how playwrights should compose such scenes. Nonetheless, he must have also admired Polyidus' variant of the recognition between Iphigenia and Orestes, since he mentions it as a valid alternative to the Euripidean version:<sup>2</sup>

As an example of what I mean by considering the universal, take the *Iphigenia*: A girl has been sacrificed and has disappeared without those who performed the sacrifice being aware of it. Set down in another country, where it was the custom to sacrifice foreigners to the goddess, she becomes the priestess of this rite. It subsequently happens that the priestess's brother arrives (the fact that the god ordered him to go there is outside the universal; so too the reason); on his arrival he is captured, but when he is on the verge of being sacrificed he discloses his identity (either as Euripides did it or as in Polyidus, by saying – quite probable – that it was his lot, as well as his sister's, to be sacrificed). Escape ensues. (*Po.* 1455b2-15).<sup>3</sup>

We know nothing else about Polyidus or any other detail about his rendition of the myth of Iphigenia.<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere in the *Poetics* (1455a6), Aristotle adds the epithet "the Sophist"

---

<sup>1</sup> For Aristotle's interest in the *Iphigenia* and its recognitions, see especially Belfiore: 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle refers to Polyidus' variant of recognition twice in the *Poetics*, here in chapter 17 (1455b9-12) and in the previous chapter 16 (1455a6-8), which I shall discuss subsequently.

<sup>3</sup> I am using Heath's translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* (1996).

<sup>4</sup> Galavotti: 1982, 158 deplores the lack of details about the dramatic circumstances surrounding the sacrifice of Orestes in Polyidus. Two assumptions seem relatively safe to make: (1) Aristotle supposes that the contemporary audience of the *Poetics* knows

MUNTEANU: TIMING RECOGNITION: FROM ARISTOTLE'S COMMENTS ON  
THE *IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS* TO GLUCK'S OPERA

to the name of Polyidus. The most common interpretation is that Polyidus wrote a tragedy about Iphigenia. Another possibility is that he wrote a piece criticizing Euripides' play.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of the view that we may adopt, it is important to underline that Aristotle does not call Polyidus' recognition better than Euripides but deems it necessary to mention it as a variant. In fact, in the previous chapter, he ranks the recognition in the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, coming from a logical sequence of events, as "the best," together with the scene from the *OT* (*Po.* 1455a16-18), and ahead of the recognition of Polyidus' *Iphigenia*, which is labeled "second-best" and is based on syllogism (*Po.* 1455a4-8). Why does Aristotle need to refer to Polyidus, though he admires Euripides? This remains a legitimate question, to which this essay suggests a possible answer: the timing of Polyidus' recognition is exquisite.

Many centuries later, Guillard, Gluck's librettist, revived Polyidus' variant recognition, apparently because he considered it better able to produce suspense. As Ewans puts it, "Guillard and Gluck adopted Polyidus' suggestion to create the climax of the opera's recognition sequence. Orestes sings 'Iphigénie, dear sister, this is how you died at Aulis' (IV.ii.257ff) at the moment when Iphigénie herself is about to execute him."<sup>6</sup> The myth of Iphigenia as represented particularly in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* fascinated eighteenth century thinkers and artists. The enormous popularity of this tragic myth is reflected by the composition of no less than nineteen plays and opera-librettos inspired by the Euripidean tragedy from the end of the seventeenth century to the last decades of the eighteenth century Europe.<sup>7</sup> Euripides' plot contains several elements that received appreciation during the Enlightenment: friendship (between Orestes and Pylades) surpassing hardships, triumphant fraternal love, and reason replacing violence. Like most of these revivals of the *Iphigenia*, the operatic version of Guillard-Gluck generally follows the plot structure of Euripides' play, but it dramatizes Aristotle's casual

---

Polyidus' version as well as Euripides' play and thus does not consider it necessary to explain the circumstances; (2) there is a certain resemblance between the plots: Orestes is going to be sacrificed by his sister.

<sup>5</sup> For this second possibility, see Else: 1957, 509-10, and Belfiore: 1992, 368.

<sup>6</sup> Ewans 2007: 48. Schwartz: 1869, 14, notes that Guillard generally follows Euripides' plot, but he prefers the recognition of Polyidus, which is described only briefly in the *Poetics*.

<sup>7</sup> Heitner 1964, 308-09 lists all nineteen. Among the dramatic versions, worth mentioning are, for example, Racine, *Iphigénie en Tauride* (around 1670); Dennis, *Iphigenia. A Tragedy* (1700); Schlegel, *Orest und Pylades* (1737); De la Touche, *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1757); Goethe, *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (1779). Operatic versions of the tragedy were composed in Italian, German, and French. Here are a few examples: Minato (librettist and composer), *Il Tempio di Diana in Taurica* (Italian, 1678); Capeci (librettist) and Scarlatti (composer), *Iphigenia in Tauride* (Italian, 1713); Coltellini (librettist) and Traetta (composer), *Iphigenia in Tauride* (Italian, 1763); Verazzi (librettist) and Maio (composer), *Iphigenia in Tauris* (German, 1764); Guillard (librettist) and Gluck (composer), *Iphigénie en Tauride* (French, 1779).

MUNTEANU: TIMING RECOGNITION: FROM ARISTOTLE'S COMMENTS ON  
THE *IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS* TO GLUCK'S OPERA

remarks on Polyidus' recognition.<sup>8</sup> This integration of the two plots offers material for an assessment of the probable theatrical effects of the recognition scene in Euripides' play and the parallel scene in Polyidus, which is adopted in the opera.

**"As Euripides Did"**

The recognition scene from Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* receives special attention in Aristotle's *Poetics*: five direct references.<sup>9</sup> To understand this preference, we need to remember that, overall, Aristotle defines plot (*mythos*) as the "principle" and "soul" (*arche* and *psyche*) of tragedy in the treatise (*Po.* 1450a35-36) and that "recognition" (*anagnorisis*) represents one of the main components of the plot.<sup>10</sup> The scene from the *Iphigenia* serves as an example of reciprocal recognition (*Po.* 1452b3-8). First, Orestes realizes that the priestess of Artemis, who lives in a remote place by the Black Sea, is his sister, Iphigenia, whom he believed dead (sacrificed by his father Agamemnon at Aulis). Second, Iphigenia realizes that one of the men from Greece, whom she is about to sacrifice, is in fact her brother Orestes. This twofold process through which brother and sister reveal their true identities culminates in a reversal of fortune (from adversity to prosperity in this case), since Orestes averts death.<sup>11</sup>

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle comments on each step of the reunion between the siblings according to the criterion of probability. The first stage, the recognition of Iphigenia by Orestes, is, as I have noted, regarded as the best kind of recognition because it derives from a logical chain of events. More specifically, in Aristotle's view, it seems likely that Iphigenia should want to send a letter home (*Po.* 1455a 18-20). Indeed, Iphigenia instructs Pylades, one of the two strangers from Greece, to deliver to her

---

<sup>8</sup> Others before Guillard tried to dramatize Polyidus as well, such as De la Touche and Verazzi. Ewans 2007: 31-53 offers the most detailed analysis of the dramatic models for Gluck's opera, from Euripides' play to other contemporary versions of the tragedy, particularly Goethe and De la Touche.

<sup>9</sup> Five references concern specifically the recognition scene, which I will briefly discuss subsequently; a sixth, which I quoted already, concerns the universality of the tragic plot. For a detailed analysis of each of these quotations, see Belfiore 1992, 367-68.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle signals the importance of recognitions and reversals (*Po.* 1450a 33-34) and gives details about these two components of the plot (*Po.* 1452a-b; 1454b). Generally, for recognition scenes in Greek literature, see Perrin: 1909. Recognition in Aristotle's *Poetics* could be of persons or situations and includes various types, grouped according to the criterion of the probability from worst to best: (1) through tokens, (2) contrived by the poet, (3) through memory, (4) from inference, (5) from false inference, and (5) from the course of events. See Whalley: 1997, 87-91, for an accessible discussion of Aristotle's classification of the tragic recognitions.

<sup>11</sup> As Lowe 2000: 184 and note 51 has pointed out, only three extant tragedies (all Euripidean) display the type of tragic action highly-praised in the *Poetics* (1454a4-9), in which kin narrowly avoids killing kin, because recognition prevents the murder: *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Orestes*, and *Ion*.

MUNTEANU: TIMING RECOGNITION: FROM ARISTOTLE'S COMMENTS ON  
THE *IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS* TO GLUCK'S OPERA

brother in Argos (or so she believes) a letter which explains her fate (*IT* 782 -87). Pylades simply hands the letter over to Orestes. Deeply "shocked" (*ekplepegmenos*, *IT* 795), Orestes expresses his joy in having found his sister.<sup>12</sup> This element of "surprise" (*ekplexis*) certainly added to Aristotle's admiration for the scene.<sup>13</sup> The second stage, the recognition of Orestes by Iphigenia, receives the label of "second worst" from Aristotle (*Po.* 1454b30-36) because Orestes says what the poet wants him to say (not what the plot requires) in order to prove his identity. Iphigenia infers that the stranger whom she is about to sacrifice must be her brother. Nevertheless, she does not believe immediately that the stranger is her brother — and rightly so.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, she tests Orestes by asking for some kind "proof" (*tekmerion*, *IT* 808). He displays knowledge of the history of the family and remembers the design of a nicely woven cloth that Iphigenia embroidered when she was a child (*IT* 816-19), which convinces his sister in the play but seems contrived to Aristotle. The least artistic kind of recognition occurs "through tokens" (*Po.* 1454b20-21), which are objects used to prove people's identity, such as a necklace (for example, an object of this sort given to a baby at birth can be recognized later when the baby has grown to adulthood). Second worst are the recognitions "made up by the poet" (*pepoiemenai hypo tou poietou*, *Po.* 1454b30-32), such as this recognition of Orestes by Iphigenia. The point is that Orestes refers to a token verbally here, but he might as well have displayed tokens; this, artistically speaking, is not much better than the "worst kind" of recognition.<sup>15</sup>

Although the *Poetics* does not place the two stages of the reunion on the same level of artistry, Aristotle's fascination with the *Iphigenia* certainly depends much on this elaborate, twofold recognition scene, an essential part of the tragic plot, which he deems to be of "the best kind" for this play (*Po.* 1454a4-7).<sup>16</sup> While this statement has often puzzled modern scholars, the careful reader of the *Poetics* can find reasons for this

---

<sup>12</sup> The chorus members similarly express amazement after brother and sister fully recognize each other, for seeing such "marvelous" (*thaumastoisi*, *IT* 900) happenings and not merely hearing them.

<sup>13</sup> *Po.* 1455a 16-19: best recognitions (such as the one from *IT*) arouse emotion in the audience through surprise (*ekplexis*), which is produced through probable sequence (*dia eikoton*). See Belfiore: 1992, 372, for specific details on how the *IT* leads to surprise (*ekplexis*) and amazement (*thaumasta*). Davies: 1992, 139-41 generally examines the significance of the wondrous element in the *Poetics*.

<sup>14</sup> The stranger who was going to go to Argos may have cleverly fabricated the identity of his friend (i.e. pretend that he is Orestes) in order to save him from being sacrificed. Thus, it seems reasonable that Iphigenia acts with caution instead of accepting immediately that the stranger is her brother.

<sup>15</sup> Lucas: 1968, 169 writes on this type of recognition: Orestes "might as well have produced a token"; further in this note, Lucas considers Aristotle's criticism unfair by our modern standards: "it is assumed [by Aristotle] that in all contexts a higher grade *anagnorisis* is preferred to one of a lower grade. In fact, Orestes' method of showing his identity is the natural one in the circumstances, and anything more elaborate would probably have seemed out of place."

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Po.* 1455b2-15.

MUNTEANU: TIMING RECOGNITION: FROM ARISTOTLE'S COMMENTS ON  
THE *IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS* TO GLUCK'S OPERA

preference. Aristotle expresses particular admiration for a plot that consists of murder between close kin, an unintended fratricide in this particular case.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the *Iphigenia* may be singled out because its plot relies on a terrible deed which is about to happen but is barely avoided.<sup>18</sup> Yet, if Euripides' composition of this tragedy is so exquisite, why the need to mention twice Polyidus' alternative recognition? The concept of timing, I suggest, offers a possible explanation.

**"As in Polyidus," dramatized by Gluck- Guillard**

Despite his deep admiration for Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, Aristotle does not seem to like the end of the play. After discussing the recognition so extensively, he ends his summary of the play with the following remark: "escape ensues" (*Po.* 1455b12).<sup>19</sup> At this point Aristotle loses interest in the rest of Euripides' plot (from around line 900 to 1496), although it contains many interesting adventures, such as a plan to escape from the land of Thoas and the final intervention of Athena as *dea ex machina*. Why? In addition to admiring the probability of dramatic events, Aristotle praises plots in their ability to produce *pathos*, particularly pity and fear. After defining two essential components of the plot, recognition (*anagnorisis*) and reversal (*peripeteia*) (*Po.* 1452a22-33), he states that the "best kind of recognition" (*kallistê anagnorisis*) "occurs together with a reversal," as in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (*Po.* 1452a38). This combination best arouses the tragic emotions in the spectators. Interestingly, while ranking recognitions according to probability Aristotle labels both the recognition in *Oedipus the King* and the recognition in *Iphigenia in Tauris* as "the best" (*beltistê*, *Po.* 1455a16). However, when he uses the criterion of emotional arousal, ideally produced by the concurrence of recognition and

---

<sup>17</sup> Belfiore: 1992 argues that Aristotle likes the plot of *Iphigenia in Tauris* so much because it concentrates on a possibility of a horrific killing among kin. Yet, modern scholars do not understand this Aristotelian preference, she notes, because they often favor characters over plot and see this Euripidean play as dull and not tragic. Furthermore modern critics compare this play to the *Helen*, for example, which seems to have a similar story line, but does not deal with siblings and presents no interest to Aristotle. See also Belfiore: 2000, 21-38, for more details on the significance of "averting fratricide" for Aristotle's dramatic theory and ethics.

<sup>18</sup> As Halliwell: 1998, 180-81, remarks, Aristotle places other plots of catastrophe averted in the last moment in the same category with *IT*, which he deems excellent — and perhaps above those in which suffering is irreversible — , such as *Cresphontes* (in which a mother is about to kill her unrecognized son) and *Helle*, probably because they arouse fear in the audience.

<sup>19</sup> Belfiore: 1992, 373, notes that for Aristotle the end of the play appears to be more an episode than part of the plot, so he disregards it, whereas modern scholars consider the end very important. My suggestion is that Aristotle does not give any consideration to the rest of the plot after the major scene of recognition because for him the play *culminates* with this recognition between brother and sister and the reversal of Orestes' fate.

MUNTEANU: TIMING RECOGNITION: FROM ARISTOTLE'S COMMENTS ON  
THE *IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS* TO GLUCK'S OPERA

reversal, he names only the scene from the *Oedipus* as "the best" (*kallistê*, *Po.* 1452a32).<sup>20</sup> In addition to Sophocles' *Oedipus*, nevertheless, recognitions occur with reversal in other tragedies (e.g. Euripides' *Ion*). Moreover, in *Iphigenia in Tauris*, recognition also causes a reversal of fortune: Orestes is no longer in immediate danger of being executed after the reunion with his sister. Thus, this recognition ought to produce a strong emotional effect as well. Nevertheless, there is a difference between the dramatic effect of the recognition scene in the *Oedipus* and in the *Iphigenia*. In Sophocles' *Oedipus*, all the events that occur after the recognition and reversal, such as the suicide of Iocasta and the self-blinding of Oedipus, relate directly to this moment of recognition. More exactly, the scene combining the recognition and reversal causes all the subsequent dramatic events in the *Oedipus*. Conversely, in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, the events occurring after the recognition between brother and sister do not directly relate to it.<sup>21</sup> The *Oedipus* culminates with the recognition, whereas the *Iphigenia* does not, and this difference probably made the Sophoclean scene Aristotle's absolute favorite. Therefore, the notion that the best type of recognition occurs together with a reversal as a temporal climax of a tragedy is strongly suggested by the example offered (Sophocles' *Oedipus*), although this point about timing is only implicit in the *Poetics*.

What happened in Polyidus' version after the recognition? Polyidus' alternative may have appeared intriguing to Aristotle — although he never says this directly — because it delayed the moment of recognition until before the moment of sacrifice and, perhaps, until the very end of the play. Indeed, it does so in Guillard's libretto for Gluck's opera, in which Orestes exclaims right at the moment of being sacrificed directly by Iphigenia,

"ORESTE *Ainsi tu péris en Aulide, Iphigénie, ô ma sœur.*

*IPHIGÉNIE* *Mon frère! Oreste!"*

(Orestes: You also have perished in Aulis, oh, my sister

Iphigenie: Oh, my brother! Orestes!)

Guillard imitates Polyidus' recognition scene (as transmitted through the *Poetics*) by transferring a passage from indirect speech to direct speech in the libretto. Aristotle observes: "there is also the recognition which Polyidus the Sophist suggested for

---

<sup>20</sup> Remarkably, Aristotle uses different forms of the superlative to classify the most satisfying type of recognition *emotionally* (occurring together with the reversal) and the most satisfying type of recognition *intellectually* (from the probable sequence of events): only the scene from the *Oedipus* is given as an example of both.

<sup>21</sup> Both Iphigenia and Orestes could have tried to escape independently, even if they did not recognize each other.

MUNTEANU: TIMING RECOGNITION: FROM ARISTOTLE'S COMMENTS ON  
THE *IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS* TO GLUCK'S OPERA

Iphigenia: he said that it was probable for Orestes to infer that *his sister had been sacrificed and so it was now his turn to be sacrificed*" (Po. 1455a6-8). In the operatic version Orestes says before the moment of sacrifice: "you also have perished in Aulis, my sister" (*ainsi tu péris en Aulide, Iphigénie, ô ma sœur*). While we do not know exactly the dramatic context in which Polyidus' recognition may have occurred, Guillard provides an interesting possibility. Gluck's opera is resolved very quickly, with a rapid succession of events: the killing of Thoas and the brief appearance of Diana who condemns the human sacrifice.<sup>22</sup> It is impossible to refashion an entire "plot" for Polyidus' version of *Iphigenia*. Whether or not Aristotle's mysterious author, Polyidus, would have placed the recognition toward the end of a play, as in Gluck's opera, remains uncertain. It is certain, nevertheless, that Polyidus' recognition increases the dramatic tension because it occurs *right before* the sacrifice. And while Aristotle in the *Poetics* insists on the criterion of the "probability" of events in ranking the recognitions, he intuitively understands the importance of the timing of the events without formally classifying it as a criterion.

Aristotle shows an awareness of the importance of dramatic timing in the *Poetics*, so much so that he emphasizes that the plot should deal with terrible things that are *about to (mellein)* happen, because those elicit the strongest emotions.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, he does not emphasize specifically the importance of the time frame of the recognition scenes, which he ranks chiefly in accordance with the probability of events. After seeing Gluck's opera, one may guess why the *Poetics* keeps referring to Polyidus' version of the recognition. The scene conforms to the criterion of the probable, if a little less skillfully than the corresponding scene in Euripides' tragedy.<sup>24</sup> But Polyidus' staging of the events, by placing the recognition closer to the moment of the sacrifice, which likely compels Aristotle to refer to it, makes the fratricide seem more imminent than Euripides' version.

According to the criterion of probability in the *Poetics*, the first stage of Euripides' recognition scene (Iphigenia by Orestes) ensues from the events themselves, which is classified as the best (Po. 1455a16-20). The second best form of recognition, which comes from inference, is attributed to Polyidus (Orestes by Iphigenia): when Orestes mentions his sister being sacrificed at Aulis, Iphigenia deduces that he is her

---

<sup>22</sup> The presence of Athena at the end of Euripides' tragedy must have been easily understood by the ancient audience in connection with the myth of Orestes; furthermore Iphigenia refuses to kill Thoas, who in turn spares her and her brother. In an effort to simplify the opera for his audience and to eliminate "unnecessary" supernatural intervention, Guillard brings Diana-Artemis on stage, the goddess linked to Iphigenia's priesthood, thus more relevant to this specific story, and the goddess blames Thoas for the human sacrifice.

<sup>23</sup> This observation occurs six times in the treatise: 1453b18, 21, 34, 38; 1454a 6, 8, and 1455b9 (the last reference concerning specifically the *IT*). For more on this idea, see Halliwell: 1998, 225 and footnote 33.

<sup>24</sup> In the tragedy the first part of the double recognition (Iphigenia by Orestes) comes from the events themselves, which is the best, whereas in the opera this first step of the recognition (Orestes by Iphigenia) occurs through inference (Orestes mentions his sister's sacrifice at Aulis, therefore Iphigenia deduces his identity), which is the second best way.

MUNTEANU: TIMING RECOGNITION: FROM ARISTOTLE'S COMMENTS ON  
THE *IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS* TO GLUCK'S OPERA

brother (*Po.* 1455a7-10). Alternatively, judged by the criterion of timing, the recognition proposed by Polyidus, which inspired Guillard's libretto for the opera, appears to be better timed than that of Euripides because the recognition occurs only seconds before the moment of the sacrifice, as it does in *Cresphontes*, leading to a last-second salvation. Polyidus' recognition *immediately* causes the reversal *right before* a horrible misfortune would have taken place between close relatives, whereas Euripides does not place his recognition so close to the imminent sacrifice.<sup>25</sup>

Guillard, following Polyidus, reverses the order of the reciprocal recognition used by Euripides, since he places first the identification of Orestes by Iphigenia. What happens next? We do not know how Polyidus designed the other half of the recognition, that of Iphigenia by Orestes, because the *Poetics* only mentions the first stage of the scene. Yet, Orestes also needs to be convinced of his sister's identity somehow because he believes she has died in Aulis. Perhaps it ought to be so, but it is not so in the opera. In Gluck's *Iphigénie*, the second recognition takes place immediately and without any complication or test. Orestes acknowledges his sister without much ado:

"ORESTE Ô ma sœur! Oui c'est vous, oui, tout mon cœur me l'atteste!"

(Orestes, "Oh, my sister! Yes, all my heart testifies that it is you!")

This immediate acceptance emphasizes the affinity between sister and brother: Orestes inexplicably feels a connection with the young woman and confesses that he likes the strange priestess throughout the opera.<sup>26</sup> However, something can be said in defense of Guillard, who imagines Orestes' acknowledging his sister without hesitation. It is "probable" that Orestes, relieved that he does not have to die, readily believes that the woman who has been so reluctant to sacrifice him and whom he liked despite the

---

<sup>25</sup> In Gluck's opera Orestes utters the words at very moment when Iphigenia is about to stab him. Certainly, in Euripides' tragedy the bloodshed is also barely avoided, as the characters observe (*IT* 863 ff.), but the recognition precedes the moment of sacrifice itself. One of the anonymous readers of the *Animus* has made an interesting suggestion: the "sheer duration of the *anagnorisis*" is different. Euripides' recognition scene is about 120 lines long, while Polyidus uses dramatic compression. Aristotle may want to acknowledge that the two accomplish the same effect through different means. Although this is an intriguing possibility, the problem is that we do not know precisely how Polyidus may have built the entire recognition scene from the Aristotelian observation. Orestes' exclamation, which the *Poetics* mentions twice in passing, could be the final point after a long interaction with his unrecognized sister. Overall, Aristotle seems to admire elaborate recognition scenes (*IT* and *OT*).

<sup>26</sup> As Ewans: 2007, 51, suggests, the strange affinity between brother and sister before their recognition in the opera may be explained as the call of the blood, a favorite idea in the eighteen-century Europe.

MUNTEANU: TIMING RECOGNITION: FROM ARISTOTLE'S COMMENTS ON  
THE *IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS* TO GLUCK'S OPERA

circumstances turns out to be his sister. The operatic device suggests that there might be some kind of probability that is not based on the kind of strict logic admired by Aristotle.

Furthermore, in both the Euripidean tragedy and in Guillard's libretto, the twofold recognition contains a first phase, which reveals the identity of one of the siblings, and then a second stage, which reveals the identity of the other. The first recognition, that of Iphigenia by Orestes in Euripides' play or that of Orestes by Iphigenia in the opera, stands out as the most impressive for any audience. The second half of the recognition in both cases (tragedy and opera) seems to be more compressed and less important from a dramatic standpoint, since it results rather predictably from the first discovery. Aristotle criticizes Euripides for saying what he wanted to say instead of what the plot requires in handling of the sequence in which Orestes proves his identity to Iphigenia (*Po.* 1454b30-36). In Gluck's opera, Iphigenia does need to try to demonstrate who she is because her brother readily accepts her claim. Again, timing seems to be of crucial dramatic importance in our perception of the two halves of the recognition scene in the tragedy as well as in the opera. Once one of the siblings reveals his or her identity, it seems difficult to create a second recognition that could produce surprise for the audience to the same degree to which the first one did.<sup>27</sup> In these examples of reciprocal recognition taking place in rapid sequence, the first revelation of identity always carries more dramatic weight than the second, which, in its turn, becomes predictable.

The skillfulness of the "recognition" depends not only on the much-emphasized criterion of probability in the *Poetics* but also on timing, a subject whose importance Aristotle intuits without fully exploring. Therefore, to use a biological metaphor, which Aristotle would have endorsed doubtlessly, recognition scenes resemble DNA sequences: the slightest change at a crucial moment will affect the entire dramatic offspring.

## Bibliography

- Belfiore, E. 1992. "Aristotle and Iphigenia," in *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics*, A. O. Rorty ed., Princeton. 359-77.
- Belfiore, E. 2000. *Murder among Friends. Violation of Philia in Greek Tragedy*. New York.
- Davies, M. D. 1992. *Aristotle's Poetics. The Poetry of Philosophy*. Lanham.
- Else, G. F. 1957. *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument*. Cambridge.
- Ewans, M. 2007. *Opera from the Greeks: Studies in the Poetics of Appropriation*. Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT.
- Gallavoti, C. (ed.) 1982. *Aristotele dell' Arte Poetics*. Milano.
- Halliwel, S. 1998. *Aristotle's Poetics. With a New Introduction*. Chicago.

---

<sup>27</sup> Unless there is something that might prevent the second recognition from taking place. So for example, it would be interesting in Euripides' tragedy if Iphigenia did *not* believe that the stranger is Orestes after he recognized her up to the point that she would be ready to sacrifice him (and only then he could prove his identity).

MUNTEANU: TIMING RECOGNITION: FROM ARISTOTLE'S COMMENTS ON  
THE *IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS* TO GLUCK'S OPERA

- Heath, M. 1996. *Aristotle Poetics. Translated with and introduction and notes*. London.
- Heitner, R. R. 1964. "The Iphigenia in Tauris Theme in Drama of the Eighteenth Century." *CL* 16: 289-309.
- Lowe, N. J. 2000. *Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative*. Cambridge.
- Lucas, D. W. (Ed.) 1968. *Aristotle. Poetics. Introduction, Commentary, and Appendixes*. Oxford.
- McDonald, M. 2001. *Sing Sorrow. Classics, History, and the Heroines in Opera*. Wesport.
- Perrin, B. 1909. "Recognition Scenes in Greek Literature." *AJP* 30, 371-404.
- Schwartz, C. 1869. *Die Iphigenien-Sage und ihre dramatischen Bearbeitungen*. Leiptzig.
- Whalley, G. 1997. *Aristotle's Poetics. Translated and with a Commentary. Edited by J. Baxter and P. Atherton*. Montreal and Kingston.