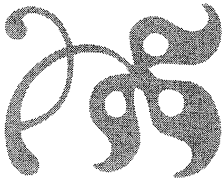


Translator's Note



*Girls are not meant to know
about such things . . .
It's better for young girls
not to be seen . . .*

– EURIPIDES, *Iphigenia at Aulis*

Iphigenia takes the form of a long letter and a journal written by an adolescent girl, María Eugenia Alonso, born in Venezuela but reared by her father in France. When her father suddenly dies, María Eugenia returns to Caracas to live with her grandmother and aunt, and there she is plunged into a culture that is totally foreign to her. She must observe years of strict mourning and suffer isolation and loneliness locked up in her grandmother's home. The novel is a tender and sensitive account of a girl growing up in the austere seclusion demanded by the moral code in South America during the first quarter of the twentieth century.

The novel created a sensation. The author, Teresa de la Parra, became the darling of the so-called Generation of '98 in Spain, and her work was especially praised by the great author and philosopher Miguel de Unamuno. The book won the annual prize of ten thousand francs given by the Casa Editora Franco-Ibero-Americana in Paris in 1924 and two translations in French appeared very soon thereafter. Because of the book's instant popularity, dealers had difficulty obtaining enough copies for their customers. But the general reaction in Spanish America was public outrage because of *Iphigenia's* stinging feminist viewpoint. It had the effect of a bomb hurled by a revolutionary and created shock waves in patriarchal Venezuelan society. The author was accused of undermining the morals of young women,

and the majority of critics dismissed this important novel as “strident.” However, the reading public has kept *Iphigenia* alive over seven decades. New editions have appeared regularly, some perhaps pirated. One book copies another, following even the typographical errors, scrambled lines of text, and omissions. The novel’s continued popularity tells us that María Eugenia has lost none of her appeal for readers today.

Although María Eugenia claimed to be bored, we will never find her story dull. Her intimate confessions follow the inner drama of an immature child with no experience of the world as she gradually discovers herself and forges her own identity, coming to terms with the injustices that confront her. She is an inimitable character, in her own way as unique as Madame Bovary or Don Quixote, with whom some critics have compared her. Not only is the novel a psychological study of great depth and universality, it is often funny, frivolous, and philosophical. Yet it is above all a powerful tragedy. Despite feeling alone, the heroine is very much a part of a society that determines the course of her life, and *Iphigenia*, like Euripides’s classic play, paints a world that makes women its sacrificial victims.

We know from her correspondence that Teresa de la Parra was eager to have *Iphigenia* translated into English. She discussed its publication with several people, expressing her concern that the novel was too long or might need revision, and she gave her translators and publishers broad discretion to cut and adapt both her novels. Unfortunately, the original manuscript of *Iphigenia* was lost in Paris during the occupation, according to information which Teresa’s niece, Elia Pérez Luna, very kindly offered me. In the second edition Teresa de la Parra made corrections, additions, and deletions, and this version was made available by Velia Bosch in 1982, when Biblioteca Ayacucho published her collection of Parra’s works. (Biblioteca Ayacucho will soon republish *Teresa de la Parra, Obra*.) Unaware of this version, I compared six editions of the novel in making this translation and found that in some, passages appear that do not exist in others. I also found some strange discrepancies whose origin can only be surmised. At first, every effort was made to include everything, even when the material seemed out of character. Finally, I have opted to omit a few lines that seem foreign to the text as a whole, especially if they were not a part of the second edition. There was also the problem of how to deal with the discrepancies. In one text, for example, a lady wears a diamond solitaire ring, in another she wears an opal, and in another she wears no ring at all. I tried to choose the most logical alternative wherever such differences appear.

The Caracas of 1924 has vanished and society everywhere has undergone radical changes, but we can enter that lost time and place where María Eugenia, in the pages of *Iphigenia*, is still young, vibrant, and rebellious. I find it an honor to introduce her and her world to English readers. In spite of the inevitable shortcomings of this translation, María Eugenia is sure to win the hearts of those who peek into her diary!

BERTIE ACKER

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