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Character and Action, Representation and Reading
Greek Tragedy and its Critics

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Man is an invention.
(Foucault)

THE CHARACTER OF INDIVIDUALITY

The idea of 'human nature' tends to attract the rhetoric of 'essential truth', and rarely with less critical attention than in the study of characterization in ancient dramatic fiction. The disciplines of philosophy, history, and anthropology have established from their differing viewpoints a need to acknowledge the complex problems involved both in understanding such categorizations as 'the natural' or 'the human' in other cultures, and also in recognizing or repressing the cultural imperialism of the interpreter's own system of categorization in such an enterprise.[1] Yet all too frequently writers on Greek drama have ignored the need for the construction of a critical history of individuality, as if the categories of the person were

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[1] A vast bibliography could be given. Mine would include, for an interesting general introduction, M. Carrithers, S. Collins and S. Lukes, (edd.), *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History* (Cambridge, 1985). In history, I have learnt in particular from the studies of L. Stone, particularly *Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (London, 1977); J. Goody, J. Thirsk and E. P. Thompson (edd.), *Family and Inheritance* (Cambridge, 1976); A. Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man* (Cambridge, 1986); M. Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London, 1970); id., *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London, 1972). On anthropology and cultural studies, apart from many particular case studies, see esp. P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, 1977); E. Saïd, *Orientalism* (London, 1978). On philosophy, B. A. O. Williams, *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge, 1972), and further bibliog. in *The Category of the Person*. On classical material, see the seminal studies of G. E. R. Lloyd, esp. *Science, Folklore and Ideology* (Cambridge, 1983); also e.g. R. Parker, *Miasma* (Oxford, 1983). The French tradition from Gernet through Vernant, Vidal-Naquet, and Loraux has been particularly influential.

cross-cultural *données*. So, to take one example from an influential work, Brian Vickers founds his study of Greek tragedy on 'some simple propositions', including: 'Greek tragedy is about people . . . Human behaviour . . .concerns those fundamental human passions which are reflected to a greater and lesser degree in the literature of all nations at all periods. In Greek Tragedy, people love and hate as we do.'[2] This project begs the question not merely by the repression of the cultural specificity of the fifth-century Athenian construction of 'love' and 'hate'. (How can φιλεῖν or ἔρως be simply translated as 'love', as if the history of courtly love, Romanticism, not to mention Christianity, makes no difference to a modern reader's approach to such a term; as if, indeed, the interrelations of the sexes in the ancient world could simply be mapped onto a modern, post-Freudian emotional topography?[3]) More importantly, perhaps, Vickers also begs the question precisely by ignoring the way in which what he calls 'love' and 'hate', might affect the concept of the person (which he takes for granted in his opening remarks). Vickers imagines a community of humanity both in his blithe assumption 'as we do'—which 'we'? Do 'we' agree on what we all do?—and also in the assertion of the common concerns and attitudes of the ancient and modern world. Such an assumption of community shows how his (humanist) critical approach can only function through the occlusion of crucial cultural differences. In this opening section, I wish to outline some ways in which such an occlusion leads to an inevitable distortion of the discussion of characterization and individuality.

Nothing less than a complete cultural history—an impossible task, even if there were enough space for such a project—could hope to outline adequately what might be called the construction of the self in fifth-century Athenian democracy. Some briefer remarks here, however, may help sketch the difficulty of taking the categories of the person as cross-cultural norms. In my discussion of character in *Reading Greek Tragedy*, I pointed first to the apparent lack of interest in idiosyncrasies of personality in the public, masked personae of Greek drama—which is

[2] B. Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy* (London, 1973), 6.

[3] Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (*La Volonté de savoir* (Paris, 1976); *L'Usage des plaisirs* (Paris, 1984); *Le Souci de soi* (Paris, 1984)) shows one attempt to chart these differences.

so different from, say, the dramas of Ibsen or even Chekhov.[4] The siting of an individual in a community—both the family and the *polis*—also realigns the construction of individuality and the sense of an individual as an agent. Similarly, *ēthos*, as Jones discusses at length, is 'without the ambition of inclusiveness'[5] associated with 'character'; that is, *ēthos* does not attempt, as 'character' often does in modern usage, to express a whole personality or the make-up of a psyche, but rather a particular disposition or set of attitudes that can be seen to be instantiated in a particular course of action. I also attempted in the general discussions in *Reading Greek Tragedy* to suggest some of the ways in which the ideas of, say, masculinity and femininity are deployed in fifth-century Athens, and also what it might mean to be a citizen, a soldier, an Athenian—all of which inform the notion of the self. Rather than recapitulate such analyses here, I wish to look briefly at Vickers's assertion that 'in Greek tragedy, people love and hate as we do', and to follow through some of the implications of such a proposition in his reading of a particular passage which discusses how 'people love'.

In Sophocles' *Antigone*, after the stichomythic exchange between Creon and Haemon, the chorus sing a well-known ode on ἔρως, *erōs*, (*Ant.* 781–801). Vickers comments as follows: 'As he goes off in anger, the chorus make a sublimely irrelevant deduction about Haemon's motives. Love, they say, "twists the minds of the just", love alone has caused this quarrel (781 ff.). They have not really been attending to the play.'[6] The unqualified translation of ἔρως by 'love', as if there were no difference between the externalized and destructive force that the chorus describe, and 'love' as in the Western, Judaeo-Christian tradition (as, for instance, personal fulfilment), is particularly misleading in a play whose conflicts focus on the obligations and duties invoked by the terminology of φιλεῖν and related words.[7] Neither Antigone's commitment to her family ties, nor

[4] *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1986), 168 ff.

[5] J. Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (London, 1962), 32.

[6] Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy*, 537. The emphasis 'love *alone*' is not in the Greek. (It enhances but is perhaps not crucial to Vickers's rhetoric.) Indeed, I am not sure (despite Jebb, Bayfield, *et al.*) that ταράξας (794) must be translated 'stir up' (i.e. Vickers's 'cause') rather than its most common sense of 'throw into confusion'. *Erōs* may be regarded by the chorus as a factor that confuses, rather than starts, the (political, familial) row.

[7] I have discussed this, with bibliog., in *Reading Greek Tragedy*, 79–106.

Creon's argument of obligation to the city finds a place for *erōs*; and that the chorus here turn to explain the young man's actions in terms of *erōs* adds a significant element of motivation to set against the conflicting claims of φιλία. To translate both ἔρως and φιλεῖν as 'love' not only ignores the differences between ancient and modern constructions of affective relations and obligations, but also effaces an important semantic distinction in the dynamics of the play itself.[8] Nor is it by chance that the chorus propose *erōs* as a motivation for Haemon: the ephebe holds a privileged position in the normative narratives of *erōs* as a figure especially open to the force of desire.[9] I wish here, however, to focus on this ode in particular as a prelude to Antigone's *kommos*. For, as Richard Seaford has recently pointed out, the invocation of *erōs* is a typical part of the hymeneal celebrations, and as Antigone processes to her death, she is represented as making a marriage with Hades.[10] The connection of this ode with the following action is important not merely for the recognition of a significant ritual pattern in the play but also, in the context of my argument, because it raises a crucial question of Antigone's status in terms of age and gender. For Antigone is a *parthenos*, and it is precisely with such a category that the overlap of social, psychological, and

[8] For the equally unqualified translation of φιλεῖν as 'love', see e.g. Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy*, 543: 'The central situation is, as Antigone says, the fact that she "cannot share in hatred but in love" (523). Creon is remarkable for his hatred and lack of love: his *philia* is shown as false . . . Antigone is remarkable for her love and lack of hatred.' Vickers nowhere distinguishes adequately between ἔρως and φιλεῖν.

[9] See esp. P. Vidal-Naquet, *Le Chasseur noir* (Paris, 1981); E. Schnapp, "Êros en chasse', in *La Cité des images: Religion et société en Grèce antique* (Paris, 1984); A. Brelich, *Paides e parthenoi* (Rome, 1969).

[10] R. Seaford, 'The Tragic Wedding', *JHS* 107 (1987), 106–30, esp. 107–8. Seaford also notes (120–1) that the description of Haemon's and Antigone's death also constitutes a precise corruption of the topoi of the representation of marriage. See also N. Loraux, *Façons tragiques de tuer une femme* (Paris, 1985), 61–82; C. P. Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization* (Cambridge and London, 1981), 152–206; and, for the continuation of this theme in later writing, M. Alexiou and P. Dronke, 'The Lament of Jeptha's Daughter: Themes, Tradition, Originality', *Studi Medievali*, 12/2 (1971), 819–63. On the τέλος of marriage becoming the τέλος of death, see A. Lebeck, *The* Oresteia (Washington, 1971), 68 ff.; S. Goldhill, 'Two Notes on τέλος and Related Words in the *Oresteia*', *JHS* 104 (1984), 169–76. It is worth noting further on this stasimon that whereas for men the possibilities of *erōs* include a pattern of acceptable behaviour (the proprieties of ἐράστης and ἐρώμενος outlined by e.g. K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (London, 1978)), there is no equivalent narrative or norm for females in the fifth century—a narrative of *erōs* that is, that does not presuppose transgression. In what circumstances can a woman's *erōs* be acceptable or desirable?

biological discourses can be seen to affect the very construction of (the categories of) the person. Recent studies have outlined how the *parthenos* is conceptualized as a dangerous wild animal, whose wildness must be tamed by the yoke of marriage; whose body must be opened by marriage to prevent the build-up of blood and resultant 'hysterical' diseases; whose *ēthos* is crucially dependent on such a biological and social position.[11] Such a conceptualization of virginity as a dangerous liminal state to be passed through—far more than a physical categorization—is quite different from the evaluation of permanent virginity in Christianity and even from the figure of the *virgo* in Roman culture. What it is to be a *παρθένος*, *virgo*, virgin, has a (changing) history. The song to *erōs* here, then, cannot be adequately understood separate from the marriage to Hades which is a topos in the representation of the death of *parthenoi*. Similarly, the Hippocratic treatise on the diseases of *parthenoi* talks of a 'love of death' (the verb is *ἐρᾶν*) as a typical symptom of a virgin whose condition is to be treated and cured by immediate marriage;[12] and hanging, the means of Antigone's death, is also a specific element in the (tragic) way to kill a *woman*.[13] The ephebe Haemon and the *parthenos* Antigone are both constructed within narratives of *erōs* that can be seen to be culturally specific. In what sense can either be said simply 'to love as we do'?

Indeed, it is typical that Antigone's status as *parthenos* is ignored by Vickers throughout the play, with a resultant oversimplification of the conflict of Creon and Antigone. He writes: 'The sex of the offender against Creon's *nomos* is entirely irrelevant to the seriousness of the deed.'[14] For him, Creon's explicit remarks about Antigone's gender are only to show how the tyrant bullies those weaker than himself. (Ismene's similar

[11] See in particular G. Sissa, *Le Corps virginal* (Paris, 1986); G. Sissa, 'Une Virginité sans hymen: Le Corps fëminin en Grèce ancienne', *Annales ESC* 6 (1984), 1119–39; A. Rousselle, *Porneia: De la maîtrise du corps à la privation sensuelle* (Paris, 1983); Lloyd, *Science*, 58–111; H. King, 'Bound to Bleed: Artemis and Greek Women', in A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt (edd.), *Images of Women in Antiquity* (London, 1983).

[12] *κελεύω δ' ἔγωγε τὰς παρθένους, ὁκόταν τὸ τοιοῦτον πάσχωσιν, ὡς τάχιστα ξυνοικῆσαι ἀνδράσιν· ἢν γὰρ κυήσωσιν, ὑγιέες γίνονται* (*Virg.* 16).

[13] This phrase is taken from the title of Loraux's study, *Façons tragiques*.

[14] Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy*, 533. So too 527: 'My argument will be that Antigone is presented as an admirable, committed character who is never criticized.'

comments on Antigone's femininity are ignored.) Yet it is specifically as a female that Antigone is to care for the dead of her family,[15] and her specifically female opposition to Creon—within the highly polarized attitudes of fifth-century Athens—is unlikely ever to be a simple corrective to a male error.[16] On the one hand, repressing the difference between his and an ancient culture's narratives of *erōs*/love allows Vickers to see a choral ode as 'sublimely irrelevant'; on the other hand, repressing the importance of gender difference within a culture allows him to see Antigone's status as 'entirely irrelevant' to her conflict with Creon. Differences between cultures and differences within a culture are regarded as irrelevant, as Vickers's argument proceeds from and attempts to demonstrate an all-determining common humanity.

The danger of this humanist ideology, then, is the ignoring of the cultural and historical conditions for the social, biological, and psychological categories of the person. The repression of differences in the name of what is supposed to be self-evident and beyond criticism: what we all do and always have done with regard to what can always be called, simply, 'love'. A first requisite, I suggest, for progress on the topic of characterization and individuality is a recognition that the categories of 'character', 'person', 'individual', as well as 'male', 'female', 'mother', 'father', 'tyrant', 'virgin', etc., cannot be treated adequately as cross-cultural norms but must be seen as elements of a cultural discourse which needs to be opened to critical enquiry.

THE INDIVIDUALITY OF CHARACTER

Although the previous section suggests a need to recognize the cultural determinants in which categories of the person are constructed, it does not follow that the figures of dramatic fiction

[15] This is especially emphasized by M. R. Lefkowitz, 'Influential Women', in Cameron and Kuhrt (edd.), *Images of Women*.

[16] Cf. F. I. Zeitlin, 'Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Drama', *Representations*, 11 (1985), 63–94, who writes (72–3): 'The woman ... typically defends its [the house's] interests in response to some masculine violation of its integrity. As a result, however, of the stand she takes, the woman also represents a subversive threat to male authority as an adversary in a power struggle for control that resonates throughout the entire social and political system.'

can be treated simply as 'real people' (even after the recognition of the different possibilities of the ideas of 'reality' and 'people'). A fundamental difficulty for any psychological approach to character in a literary text—even or especially when the characters are embodied by actors on a stage—is their ineradicable *difference* from an individual patient with a subconscious, a history, a family (with subconsciouses and histories). However much one needs a sense of 'human intelligibility' or models of the self or of the person to understand a drama, it does not follow that the same criteria that we use to evaluate or discuss real human behaviour and real human beings can be used without question for analysing 'character' in a text critically. In this section, I wish to discuss some of the problems that arise when the characters of drama are treated as (real) individuals.

John Gould concludes his influential discussion of characterization with a restatement of the difficulty of separating a character from the 'pervasive metaphorical colouring of the whole language of the play'—from 'the world of metaphor' which is the play's text.[17] The implications of this conclusion for the sense of the boundaries of an individual and the boundaries between individuals in dramatic narrative can be further analysed. I shall begin with a moment of self-description from Aeschylus:

> ἰδοῦ δὲ γένναν εὖνιν αἰετοῦ πατρὸς
> θανόντος ἐν πλεκταῖσι καὶ σπειράμασιν
> δεινῆς ἐχίδνης· τοὺς δ' ἀπωρφανισμένους
> νῆστις πιέζει λιμός· οὐ γὰρ ἐντελεῖς
> θήραν πατρῴαν προσφέρειν σκηνήμασιν.
>
> See the offspring bereft of an eagle father,
> Who died in the coils and skeins
> Of the dreadful viper. Starving hunger
> Oppresses the orphans. For they have not the power
> To bring the prey to the dwelling of the father.
>
> (*Cho.* 247–51)

As part of an appeal to the gods, Orestes' language stresses the weakness and need of the children. The conflict between

[17] J. P. Gould, 'Dramatic Character and "Human Intelligibility" in Greek Tragedy', *PCPS*, NS 24 (1978), 43–67, at 60.

eagle and snake is a common motif since Homer in poetry and scientific enquiry,[18] and certain associations of the viper—that the female destroys the male in copulation and that the children eat their way out of the womb in revenge[19]—are strikingly appropriate to Clytemnestra and Orestes as he approaches the matricide. Yet it would be quite insufficient to regard this utterance merely as indicative of Orestes' *ēthos* or even of Orestes' rhetoric (as part of an emotional scene of recognition). For the image of Electra and Orestes as children bereft of an eagle father is deeply intertwined with the earlier—and later—language of the trilogy. Agamemnon and Menelaus embarked on the expedition 'like vultures' (*Ag.* 49 ff) and it is an omen of eagles—the 'winged dogs of the father' (*Ag.* 135)—that promises victory to and delays the expedition at Aulis. The sacrifice of Iphigeneia, the association of Agamemnon and Zeus, the very problems of motivation and decision at Aulis are invoked in Orestes' appeal to Zeus (as Agamemnon's son recognizes his sister in the shared aim of regaining control over the *oikos*). The significance of Orestes' remarks is in part determined by the earlier language of the play, and has significance for the development of the discourse of the drama. Similarly, the image of Clytemnestra as snake harks back not merely to the language of monstrosity associated with the queen throughout the trilogy,[20] but also, in the term πλεκταῖσι, ['woven things', 'coils'] to the woven coils of the net in which Agamemnon died and the woven tapestries over which he processed to his death. Thus, in the next scene of the *Choephoroi* when Orestes, in response to Clytemnestra's dream of a snake, claims ἐκδρακοντωθεὶς ἐγὼ κτείνω νιν ['I, turned snake, shall kill her'] (549–50), it is an incarnation which indicates his double and problematic position precisely by the incorporation of the representation of Clytemnestra in his self-description. So, finally, the language of

[18] See e.g. *Il.* 12. 200 ff; S. *Ant.* 110 ff; Arist. *HA* 9. 1. 609ª; Aelian, *NA* 17. 37.

[19] First mentioned in Hdt. 3. 109. See A. Y. Campbell, 'Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 1223–38 and Treacherous Monsters', *CQ* 29 (1935), 25–36, esp. 31–3; E. T. Borthwick, 'A "Femme Fatale" in Asclepiades', *CR* 17 (1967), 250–4 (who has extensive refs. and bibliog.). See also the good note of A. F. Garvie, in Aeschylus, *Choephoroi* (Oxford, 1986), ad loc. Aelian, *NA* 1. 24 pertinently comments on the story of the viper: τί οὖν οἱ Ὀρέσται καὶ Ἀλκμαίωνες πρὸς ταῦτα, ὦ τραγῳδοὶ φίλοι;

[20] See esp. F. I. Zeitlin, 'Dynamic of Misogyny in the *Oresteia*', *Arethusa*, 11 (1978), 149–84, esp. 164–5.

the hunt,[21] the capabilities and fulfilment implied by the term ἐντελεῖς ['fully empowered'],[22] and indeed the context of the paternal dwelling,[23] all help link Orestes' self-image significantly and specifically into the thematic texture of the play's narrative.

What is recognized here (as Orestes recognizes and is recognized by Electra) is not merely a bounded, unique, and autonomous individual. Rather, the language in and through which the figure of Orestes is formulated is part of the (figural) language of the trilogy, part of its specific textual dynamics, part of its *narrative*. The language does not merely express (his) 'character', nor does it merely offer access to an indi vidual 'character'. The representation of a fictional figure is (over)determined by the fictional narrative in which the figure plays a part.

If the figures of drama cannot be separated—as bounded individuals—from the (figural) language of the narrative, neither can they be separated from the literary tradition in which they also inevitably play a part. Thomas Docherty outlines three functions of the name in the process of characterization. First, 'the name indicates authority of some kind',[24] that is, it sites a figure within a social or cultural history and context (Agamemnon (as) king, father, husband, etc.—located also in the 'heroic world' of the past). Secondly, 'the name is a *locus* around which characterization actually takes place',[25] that is, traits and qualities are associated by an audience and by other characters in the fiction with a proper name. (So 'Agamemnon' is formed both in the conflicting descriptions attached to the name by characters throughout the trilogy and in the audience's (conflicting) attribution of qualities as evinced in such scenes as the Carpet Scene.) Thirdly, 'the name gives the reader a point of view on the fiction as a whole—it offers a position for the reader to inhabit and from which to see the world of the fiction and the other characters. Clearly this "position" is inherently relativistic'.[26] (Here, the consideration of Orestes, for example, as paradigmatic model is fundamental.) Docherty is concerned primarily with modern prose fiction and the challenge to secure characterization that such experimental fiction so often strives self-consciously to maintain. (Docherty also sees such a challenge as articulated through the reader's continual return to different modes of authority and identity; hence in part the formulation of his title, *Reading (Absent) Character*.) One aspect of naming which Docherty does not consider, however, is the effect of names—figures—repeated from text to text within a literary tradition. This is crucial to Greek drama. When Agamemnon's name is mentioned in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, it comes always with a collection of associations in particular from Homer but also from other poetic traditions. If the qualities of a literary narrative make it difficult to see a character as simply an individual, so too the relations between texts are also crucial to the development of characterization.

Let me give one brief example from Sophocles' *Ajax*, which shows well how a single remark can open a whole vista of allusion. Ajax is a figure who has been much discussed precisely in terms of the disjunctions and overlap between the Homeric and Sophoclean representations.[27] In particular, his scene with Tecmessa and Eurysaces, his son, has been shown significantly to echo and distort the Homeric scene of Hector, Andromache, and Astyanax in book 6 of the *Iliad*.[28] The famous suicide speech ends as follow: τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ἐν Ἄιδου τοῖς κάτω μυθήσομαι [The rest I will narrate to those below in Hades] (*Ajax* 865). In the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus attempts in Hades to talk to those below, it is Ajax who in unchanging enmity turns his back and walks away in silence. Change, specifically with regard to *philein* and *echthairein*, is a key issue of the play, brought into

[21] On hunting imagery, see esp. P. Vidal-Naquet, 'Chasse et sacrifice dans l'*Orestie*', in J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Mythe et tragédie on Grèce ancienne* (Paris, 1972).

[22] On τέλος, see, for discussion and bibliog., Goldhill, 'Two Notes'.

[23] On the house, see Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy*, 83 ff. I have discussed the importance of the paternal house in detail in *Language, Sexuality, Narrative: The* Oresteia (Cambridge, 1984), 99–207.

[24] T. Docherty, *Reading (Absent) Character: Towards a Theory of Characterization in Fiction* (Oxford, 1983), 73.

[25] Ibid. 74.

[26] Ibid. For further discussion of naming, see Goldhill, *The* Oresteia, s.v. 'naming'.

[27] See esp., for discussion and bibliog., R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles: An Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1980), 11–72.

[28] See S. M. Adams, 'The *Ajax* of Sophocles', *Phoenix*, 9 (1955), 93–110; W. E. Brown, 'Sophocles' Ajax and Homer's Hector', *CJ* 61 (1965–6), 118–21; G. M. Kirkwood, 'Homer and Sophocles' Ajax', in M. Anderson (ed.), *Classical Drama and its Influence: Essays Presented to H. D. F. Kitto* (London, 1965); and esp. P. E. Easterling, 'The Tragic Homer', *BICS* 31 (1984), 1–8.

focus not only by such explicit remarks as Ajax's reflections in the Deception Speech (646–92), but also by the shifting of position shown by Odysseus—Ajax's most bitter ἐχθρός. Ajax's assertion in Sophocles' play that he will speak in Hades, through its reminder of the Homeric Ajax's famous silence in Hades, not only offers an ironic pointer to Ajax's continuing hatred but also raises the question both of the role of change in the discourse of the play and of the importance of the different construction of heroic behaviour in the Homeric poems and a drama of fifth-century democratic Athens. The silent Homeric Ajax echoes in the Sophoclean Ajax's promise to speak. The characters of Greek tragedy are predominantly, though not exclusively, figures who also appear in earlier poetic traditions. Ajax, like Agamemnon, Orestes, Clytemnestra, *et al.*, must be approached through the reading of other representations of the (named) character. There is always, as Euripides puts it, a 'present and absent Orestes'[29] on stage, and such an awareness of conflicting representations, conflicting traditions, challenges—fragments—the sense of a dramatic figure as a unique and bounded individual.

Already in Homer, moreover, there is an awareness that the heroic figures the poet describes are 'not like men of today'. So too in Greek tragedy, unlike, say, O'Neill or Chekhov, it is important that the figures on stage are not contemporary nor from the city of the audience nor of a similar status to the members of the audience. Greek tragedy focuses on figures from the heroic past, generally in cities other than Athens and of a type other than the adult male citizens who make up at least the vast majority of the audience. What difference does this make to characterization and individuality, specifically with regard to cultural norms? To what degree is the disjunction between the audience and figures on stage manipulated? Jason accuses Media of doing what no Greek woman could have done. The Danaïds claim to be Greek by descent but are scarcely Greek in appearance and dress. Are they so in their behaviour? It is extremely hard to decide in general or in specific cases to what degree the placing of Athenian tragedy in other cities, other times, allows for other modes of representation.

[29] E. *El.* 391–2.

Gould writes apropos of poetry—and characterization in poetry—'it resembles and it does not resemble our experience'.[30] When the characters of fiction are set in an other place and other time, it is especially hard to articulate securely these differences and similarities.

The construction of character in a literary narrative, in a literary tradition, and in a designedly different world, creates, then, in different ways considerable barriers to treating dramatic figures simply as 'individuals' or 'real people'. The complex dynamics of *representation* cannot be removed from the recognition of character and individuality in narrative fiction.

FIGURE AND DISCOURSE

Despite the difficulties of talking about literary representations as if they were 'real people' or 'individuals', it does not follow that a notion of character can be dispensed with. It is out of a desire both to do justice to the workings of the literary text as narrative representation and to maintain the importance of characterization in drama that I have turned to Roland Barthes's terms 'figure' and 'discourse'—which, it seems, have been regularly misunderstood.[31] I return to Barthes here again, however, not so much to put the critical record straight as to stress the advantages and strengths of Barthes's thesis.

Now in the study of character and Greek drama, particularly in the twentieth century, an *opposition* of character and discourse has been regularly developed by critics. An extreme form of the opposition is defended by Tycho von Wilamowitz and his followers for whom any demonstration of character is absolutely subordinate to 'dramatic effect',[32] and a weaker form of the position is seen in numerous critics especially of Euripides, the dramatist who is most often accused of (at least

[30] 'Dramatic Character', 62.

[31] See e.g. J. Moles, 'Review Discussion', *LCM* 11/4 (1986), 55–64; *contra*, S. Goldhill, 'Goldhill on Molehills', *LCM* 11/10 (1986), 163–7. See now also D. Wiles, 'Reading Greek Performance', *G & R* 34 (1987), 136–51.

[32] T. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Die dramatische Technik des Sophokles* (Zurich, 1969), on which see H. Lloyd-Jones, 'Tycho von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf on the Dramatic Technique of Sophocles', *CQ* 22 (1972), 214–28; E. Howald, *Die griechische Tragödie* (Munich, 1930) is perhaps the most extreme version of 'Tychoism'. See also R. D. Dawe, 'Inconsistency of Plot and Character in Aeschylus', *PCPS* 9 (1963), 21–62.

occasionally) sacrificing consistency or credibility of characterization to a desire for good plots or even just good rhetorical arguments. Barthes, however, questions the validity of this opposition of character and discourse. Discourse and character, he writes, can be seen in 'good narrative writing' as mutually and inextricably implicative: 'from a critical point of view . . . it is as wrong to suppress a character as it is to take him off the page in order to turn him into a psychological character (endowed with possible motives): *the character and the discourse are each other's accomplices*'[33] (Barthes's emphasis). There are two related extreme positions, then, that Barthes eschews. First, the idea that character can be wholly suppressed in a narrative, as if (in drama, for example) it makes no difference to which figure different utterances are ascribed. Secondly, the idea that a character can be removed from the page, and treated as a real person, a full, psychologically endowed individual. Barthes develops his criticism of this second position in a positive direction by outlining a distinction between 'figure' and 'person'. He writes:

> We occasionally speak of [a character] as though he existed, as though he had a future, an unconscious, a soul; however, what we are talking about is his *figure* (an impersonal network of symbols, combined under the proper name . . .), not his *person* (a moral freedom endowed with motives and an overdetermination of meanings); we are developing connotations, not pursuing investigations; we are not searching for the truth of [a character] but for the systematics of a (transitory) site of the text.[34]

It is important that Barthes is not denying that possible psychological motivation plays a significant role in fiction. What he is questioning first is the validity of treating characters as if they were real people off the page, *really* and *absolutely* endowed with motivations, which, if only we could discover them, would give us 'the truth' of a character. In innumerable places in Greek drama, characters raise questions about other characters' possible motivations, or suggest reasons for their own behaviour. In innumerable places, too, critics have raised further questions of characters' motivations. These questions,

[33] R. Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. R. Miller (London, 1975), 178.
[34] Ibid. 94.

these possibilities of motivation, are a crucial part of what I shall be calling the 'discourse of character' in Greek drama, that is, the consideration of human behaviour and its causes that plays such an important role in fifth-century tragedy. Indeed, the question of possible motivations functions as a key element in the discourse of the tragic texts ('the character and the discourse are each other's accomplices'). But what a critic cannot hope to discover, Barthes argues, is a *certain* answer—the truth—to the questions of possible motivation. It is because a character is a 'figure' and not a 'person' that there can be no sure and fixed answer to what a character is 'really feeling', 'really thinking', 'really wanting'—his/her (real) motivation—at any particular moment in a text.[35]

Yet it remains necessary to be able to develop the different connotations of, say, the representations of Electra and Clytemnestra in the *Oresteia*—where the name functions as the node of such connotations. It also remains necessary to be able to discuss, say, the role of Clytemnestra's powerful manipulation of language within the narrative, or Orestes' hesitation before killing his mother—what Barthes terms 'the systematics of a (transitory) site of the text'.

Barthes' use of the term 'figure', then, makes possible the discussion of such necessary elements of characterization as Clytemnestra's hypocrisy, Orestes' hesitation, *but* without requiring or leading to the uncritical position of treating a character as a person 'with a future, an unconscious, a soul'. It enables us to see the questions of motivation as part of the narrative discourse of the play (and not simply as problems to be solved by ever-increasing critical sensitivity).

The terms 'figure' and 'discourse', then, and Barthes's analysis of their interrelation, help avoid two typical and unproductive critical arguments. First, Barthes's position aims to circumvent the rigid opposition of character and discourse—the opposition that sees, for example, Orestes' hesitation before matricide either as only a clue to his character or as only a moment of dramatic effect (to allow the development of the play's discourse). Secondly, Barthes aims in the distinction

[35] This is not to suggest that in 'real life' motivations can be absolutely and certainly determined—as Prof. Easterling points out in ch. 4.

between 'figure' and 'person' to avoid arguing endlessly over what Orestes is 'really feeling', 'thinking', as he hesitates and then completes the matricide. If the question of motivation or causation is raised at that point in the *Oresteia*—as I believe it is—it is a question which functions in the discourse of the play *as a question*, and it is not open to a true and certain answer, however close the reading of the text.

Barthes offers important criticisms, then, of particular arguments which have been common in the analysis of Greek tragedy and also offers some indications of possible ways to pursue the necessary discussion of characterization and individuality in narrative fiction. In the following section, I wish further to follow these indications by investigating the idea raised in this section of the 'question of motivation' and its role in the discourse of a play.

THE DISCOURSE OF CHARACTER, THE CHARACTER OF DISCOURSE

In the Greek tragic texts, there are extensive and complex vocabularies for the explanation of behaviour in terms of humans' attitudes—e.g. *φρήν*, *φρονεῖν*, *σωφρονεῖν*, *νοῦς* ['mind'; 'to have sense', 'to think'; 'to be sensible'; 'mind', 'thought'] (and such terms of transgression as *ἄφρων*, *τολμᾶν* ['senseless'; 'to dare']).[36] That *σωφρονεῖν*, for example, is a common term for political behaviour,[37] and that *τολμᾶν* can also be used to express the performance of 'deeds of derring-do', suggest that, as with the modern discourse of 'sense' and 'madness', the boundaries between (mental) attitudes and the actions in which such attitudes are seen to be instantiated are far from rigid. None the less, the public, masked personae of Athenian tragedy are regularly said to act and claim to act because of their attitudes and states of mind.

[36] On the variety of this vocabulary in Aeschylus, see e.g., for bibliog. and discussion, D. Sansone, *Aeschylean Metaphors for Intellectual Activity* (Wiesbaden, 1975). On Sophocles, see e.g. A. A. Long, *Language and Thought in Sophocles* (London, 1968), esp. 51 ff. For recent discussion and bibliog., consult F. Solmsen, '*φρήν*, *καρδία*, *ψυχή*, in Greek Tragedy', in D. E. Gerber (ed.), *Greek Poetry and Philosophy: Studies in Honour of Leonard Woodbury* (Chico, 1984).

[37] See H. North, *Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature* (New York, 1966), 32 ff.

In *Reading Greek Tragedy* I analysed the use of such vocabulary in three plays. In Euripides' *Hippolytus*, I discuss how the various figures of the play—including the divinities—utilize the language of 'sense' and in particular the language of *σωφρονεῖν*.[38] The complex and varied usage of this term not only is crucial to the play's concern with the relation between human language, morality, and behaviour, but also cannot be viewed separately from the play's thematic interest in the relation between speech and thought, silence and utterance—that is, between the inward life and outward expression of a figure. The evaluation of Hippolytus as a figure both by the characters of the drama and by the critics of the play in part depends on analysing the relation between what he says and what that might indicate about his *ēthos*. In *Antigone*, the political debate is also formulated in mutual accusations of corrupt mental attitudes, as assertions of madness, senselessness, and failures of understanding clash.[39] Creon's first speech (163–210) establishes his own story as the narrative of a man's disposition (*φρόνημα*) being tested in the circumstances of power. In *Ajax*, much of the play up to Ajax's suicide is taken up with various characters' reflections on and doubts about the mental state of the hero—and in the great Deception Speech, the audience too is faced with a marked problem of relating the hero's words to his intended course of behaviour and to his true beliefs.[40] After the death of Ajax, the debate about his burial revolves around conflicting evaluations of the hero. In both the *Ajax* and the *Hippolytus*, the explicit external influence of divine figures on the emotional or mental state of the figures of the drama adds a further element to the dynamics of the relation between external and internal aspects of characterization. In each of these three plays, it is important to investigate how the 'discourse of character'—the focus on (the norms and transgressions of) human attitudes; on the relation between expression, belief, and behaviour; on the necessity and problems of evaluating a figure's attitudes—is affected by the character of the discourse of the play in which it plays a part. Here, I intend to consider briefly one much discussed moment in Euripidean drama,

[38] *Reading Greek Tragedy*, 107–37, esp. 132–7.

[39] Ibid. 168–79.

[40] See for discussion and bibliog., ibid. 189–92.

where the implications for the study of characterization and individuality have been inadequately appreciated.

Πε. ἐκφέρετέ μοι δεῦρ' ὅπλα, σὺ δὲ παῦσαι λέγων.
Δι. ἆ.
βούλῃ σφ' ἐν ὄρεσι συγκαθημένας ἰδεῖν;
Πε. μάλιστα, μυρίον γε δοὺς χρυσοῦ σταθμόν.

Pe. Bring me here my armour. You! Stop speaking.
Di. Ah.
Do you want to see the women assembled on the mountain?
Pe. Yes! I would give a great weight of gold to do so.

(*Ba.* 809–12.)

This exchange is often regarded as a turning-point in the interchanges of Pentheus and Dionysus. After Dionysus' interjection, ἆ,[41] Pentheus gives up his apparent intention to mount a military enterprise against the women and agrees rather to observe them in their Bacchic conclave. For Dodds, this transformation is the key to Pentheus' true nature: 'The question has touched a hidden spring in Pentheus' mind, and his self-mastery vanishes.'[42] Winnington-Ingram, too, sees this as a psychologically revealing reversal of intention: 'An answer comes back pat; and it is the true answer ... This is, as Professor Dodds remarks, the answer of a maniac.'[43] It is a true answer and the answer of a maniac because it truly represents Pentheus' (maniacal?) 'unconscious desire'.[44] Winnington-Ingram, however, also sees this as a demonstration of Dionysus' power: the god 'begins to exert some kind of psychic power over his victim'.[45] Segal also emphasizes a close connection between a demonstration of Dionysiac power and a demonstration of Pentheus' real desires: 'Dionysus' speech probes Pentheus' hidden desires ... Dionysus lays bare and exploits his opponent's repressed, voyeuristic (and thus infantile) sexuality.'[46] For Oranje, however, if this scene represents a 'psychic invasion', it is the god's power alone which is demonstrated as he drives Pentheus mad: 'Pentheus' answer in 812 ... is one in which madness speaks ... There seems no reason to suppose that in Pentheus Euripides has conceived a character who was limited by the repression of his own sexuality.'[47] Roux goes so far as to suppose that Pentheus' response to Dionysus (812) is 'dite sur un ton de persiflage'[48]—a sign of Pentheus' continuing resistance to the god.

Is this scene, then, a demonstration of Dionysus' divine power as he drives Pentheus mad—an external force that destroys the θεομάχος ['one who fights with a god']? Or is Dionysus' question merely a 'probe' which allows the repressed desires of Pentheus to find true expression—the king's internal nature that leads him to destruction? Or is it a demonstration of Dionysiac power by the unloosing of such repressed desires—as the god's force somehow 'springs' the king's internal desires? What is at stake in the very formulation of such questions is the recognition of the nature of Dionysiac possession. When does such influence start in the play—all of which occurs under the aegis of the god's prologue? Is the Dionysiac influence over Teiresias, Cadmus, Pentheus, Agave the same in each case? Are the unwilling Theban women in maenadic costume and the willing χορός of Eastern maenads and the willing χορός of Teiresias and Cadmus similar demonstrations of the god's power of transformation and release? The question which motivates the narrative of the *Bacchae*—What is it for Thebes to recognize Dionysus?—becomes also the question of critical discussion or audience response to the narrative, as the different figures of Dionysus' play dress up to worship Dionysus. If Dionysus' 'Ah', then, represents a turning-point in the narrative, it is a turning-point which necessarily implicates an understanding—a recognition—of Dionysiac influence, and it is the security of that understanding, that recognition, which the *Bacchae* itself seems to make problematic. So the different critics' different constructions of the internal and external aspects of Pentheus' transformation are closely involved with their

[41] The sense of this interjection has been much debated. See e.g. E. R. Dodds's comm. (Oxford, 1944), ad loc.; R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Euripides and Dionysus: An Interpretation of the* Bacchae (Cambridge, 1948), 102; C. P. Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides'* Bacchae (Princeton, 1982), 197; O. Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action* (London, 1978), 120–1.
[42] In his note ad loc.
[43] *Euripides and Dionysus*, 103.
[44] Ibid. 103.
[45] Ibid. 102.
[46] *Dionysiac Poetics*, 197.
[47] H. Oranje, *Euripides'* Bacchae*: The Play and its Audience* (Brill, 1984), 82–3.
[48] J. Roux, *Les Bacchantes* (2 vols., Paris, 1970–2), ad loc.

recognition of Dionysus—a recognition with implications for the very construction of 'human nature'. (Thus Dodds writes, in a way which makes such implications explicit and clear: 'To resist Dionysus is to repress the elemental in one's own nature.')[49] The question of Pentheus' motivation here cannot, therefore, be separated from the question of Dionysus' power and the recognition of Dionysus (in and by each reader amid the play of disguises and shifting boundaries). This turning-point in the narrative of the *Bacchae*, then, turns on the question of character—and the character of the questions asked of it. And these questions are crucially interwoven with the discourse of the play, its concern for the boundaries and normative controls of human nature.

ACTION AND CHARACTER

This discussion of the close involvement of the discourse of character in the tragic texts leads inevitably towards Aristotle, who suggests in the sixth chapter of the *Poetics* that tragedy without character (*ēthos*) is feasible (although it is evidenced, he claims, only by the most modern work, contemporary with himself).[50] Despite regular modern arguments that Aristotle's (normative) description of tragedy has many failings as an account of our extant drama,[51] recent treatments of the *Poetics* and of tragedy in the light of Aristotle make a brief reconsideration relevant here.

Stephen Halliwell's study of the *Poetics* has illuminated the connections between character (*ēthos*) and action in Aristotle's aesthetic theory, and placed in sharper focus the need to relate Aristotle's aesthetics to his other ethical and normative concerns.[52] For Aristotle, writes Halliwell, character (*ēthos*) necessarily involves the depiction of the ethical choice of an agent:

[49] Dodds, comm., xiv.

[50] *αἱ γὰρ τῶν νέων τῶν πλείστων ἀήθεις τραγῳδίαι εἰσίν* (*Poet.* 1450ᵃ24–5).

[51] Arguments well summed up by Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy*, 46: 'Applying Aristotle's *Poetics* to the surviving Greek tragedies . . . has involved commentators in a double process of rejection and re-writing.'

[52] S. Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (London, 1986), esp. 138–67. For further modern discussions, see e.g. G. Held, 'The Meaning of *ἦθος* in the *Poetics*', *Hermes*, 113 (1985), 280–93; E. Schütrumpf, 'The Meaning of *ἦθος* in the *Poetics*: A Reply', *Hermes*, 115 (1987), 175–81.

'Aristotle's understanding of character is essentially ethical, rests on a close relation between character and action, and interprets the behaviour of persons less in terms of individuality than by reference to a set of objective and common standards.'[53] It is practical reasoning, instantiated in action, that indicates a figure's measure against 'things as they might or should be': so, for Aristotle, 'if character is to play a part in tragedy, as it is ideally required to do, there must be no uncertainty or ambiguity about it; we must be able to identify it as a specific dimension of the action, embodied in clear evidence for the ethical disposition of the agents'[54] Despite Aristotle's statement, then, that tragedy can be without character, there remains, Halliwell argues, a place for *ēthos* in (the ideal) tragedy, although Aristotle's emphasis on different formal characteristics of drama also maintains the secondary position of 'character' in his theoretical stance: 'The main tenets of the theory of tragedy, therefore—the stress on unity of action, on pity and fear, and on the nature of the complex plot—confirm that characterization should be integrally involved in the composition of the ideal tragedy, but also show the limit on Aristotle's expectations of it.'[55]

Implicit in this construction of *ēthos* is not merely a privileging of practical reasoning as a sign of disposition, but also a theory of cause and effect. The human agent's ability to evaluate the effects of his possible decisions and the causes of his situation is crucial to the process of practical reasoning. So, too, connections between events—not merely the connections supposed in the process of practical reasoning but also the connections that make possible Aristotle's physical or scientific enquiries—depend on a pattern of 'things as they might or should be', a pattern that instantiates the rationality of *τὸ εἰκος* ['what is likely/probable/generally true']. It is here that Halliwell sees the greatest disjunction between Aristotle's theoretical position and the extant dramas of the tragic corpus: 'It [Aristotle's world] is a world whose causal connections demonstrate "things as they might or should be", not as they simply are, but it is . . . remote from the sense of the hopeless, the mysterious

[53] S. Halliwell, *Aristotle's* Poetics, 164.

[54] Ibid. 152.

[55] Ibid. 164.

and the opaque which colours much of the tragic myth we know.'[56]

Aeschylus' *Oresteia* has proved a particularly difficult text to fit into an Aristotelian model, not merely because its view of human action, with its tragic logic of the double bind, seems to offer a paradigm of 'the hopeless, the mysterious and the opaque', but also specifically because its view of a causal pattern of events is marked by an uncertainty that may seem to set at risk an Aristotelian principle of τὸ εἰκος and the practical reasoning that depends on it. I wish to continue this section by investigating briefly one aspect of Aeschylean causality which is germane to the disjunction between Aristotle and the tragic corpus.

If the action of the *Oresteia* involves its figures in a particularly bleak world of compulsion, uncertainty, and grief, the *Oresteia* is also a trilogy which ends, if not with an unqualified resolution of such forces, at least with what many critics have seen as a lauding of the potential of the just city to make sense of man's existence—a view not wholly alien to Aristotle's construction of man as πολιτικὸν ζῷον, a 'political animal'. It is within the context of the praise of the potential of the *polis* that Athene delivers the following lines, which are rarely given their due weight in readings of the final scene of the trilogy:

> ὅ γε μὴν κύρσας βαρεῶν τούτων
> οὐκ οἶδεν ὅθεν πληγαὶ βιότου·
> τὰ γὰρ ἐκ προτέρων ἀμπλακήματά νιν
> πρὸς τάσδ' ἀπάγει, σιγῶν ⟨δ'⟩ ὄλεθρος
> καὶ μέγα φωνοῦντ'
> ἐχθραῖς ὀργαῖς ἀμαθύνει.
>
> The man who meets these heavy ones [the Furies]
> Does not know from where the blows of life come.
> For his predecessors' errors
> Lead him away to them, and silent doom,
> Even as he shouts loudly,
> Wastes him in hateful rages.
>
> (*Eum.* 932–7)

Contact with the Erinyes, according to Athene, necessarily implies humans' ignorance. The expression 'blows of life'

[56] Ibid. 234.

echoes the description of Zeus' destruction of Troy (*Ag.* 367), Agamemnon's death at the hands of Clytemnestra (*Ag.* 1343–6), and Orestes' action of revenge (*Cho.* 312–13); and it is precisely the origin (ὅθεν) of such disasters that humans cannot know. The reason (γάρ) for this is continuing influence of the past on the present. 'Predecessors' errors' have a determining effect on a man's life. Thomson explains this by reference to the oath against perjury taken in the Areopagus which promised the destruction of the perjurer's race, family, and children by the Σέμναι θεαί, the divinities whose powers Athene here is describing.[57] Throughout the narrative of the *Oresteia*, however, particularly in the choruses' views of past events and in, say, Cassandra's prophetic analysis of the interweaving of past and present, the direct but obscure effect of the past on the present action is invoked. An ignorance of the past leads to an inevitable ignorance of the pattern of cause and effect in which man's narratives of error and punishment are constructed.

The doom that destroys is silent—which is in opposition to the man who shouts loudly, or boasts. This image of the inscrutability of the misfortune in which a man is set also recalls the Erinyes' own description of their destruction of a sinner against justice:

> καλεῖ δ' ἀκούοντας οὐδὲν ⟨ἐν⟩ μέσᾳ
> δυσπαλεῖ τε δίνᾳ·
> γελᾷ δὲ δαίμων ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ θερμῷ,
> τὸν οὔποτ' αὐχοῦντ' ἰδὼν ἀμηχάνοις
> δύαις λαπαδνὸν οὐδ' ὑπερθέοντ' ἄκραν.
>
> He will call on those who hear nothing, as he struggles
> Vainly in the midst of whirling seas.
> God laughs at the heated man,
> As he sees him who boasted this would never happen,
> Weakened by hopeless griefs, and failing to round the headland.
>
> (*Eum.* 558–62)

So Athene's description of the Erinyes' powers echoes their self-description in the common image of man's vain shouting, lack of control, misplaced certainty, and inability to understand his misfortune. Despite Lebeck's claim that in the *Oresteia* there is

[57] G. Thomson, *The* Oresteia (Amsterdam, 1966), ad loc. See Dem. 23. 67; Lycurg, *Leocr.* 79.

movement from obscurity to clarity,[58] and despite the trilogy's final lauding of the city's powers and blessings, the goddess of Athens authorizes man's continuing ignorance and uncertainty precisely in the causal pattern of things, precisely in the narratives crucial to practical reasoning and moral agency.

The view of human action represented here seems, then, to suppose man's necessary ignorance and uncertainty, specifically with regard to the continuing but obscure influence of the past. It is the way that humans in the *Oresteia* seem to be inevitably written into a narrative over which they have insecure control or understanding that obscures a pattern of cause and effect in action. It is this very obscurity of causal connection which stands against the Aristotelian requirements of tragedy's action and the embodiment of *ēthos* in tragedy.

MORAL ACTION AND MORAL CHARACTER

The representation of moral choice in tragedy and the expression of *ēthos* through such choice has been articulated against Aristotle's aesthetic and ethical arguments most recently by Martha Nussbaum.[59] Nussbaum argues that tragedy's depiction of moral dilemma and choice corresponds more closely to 'the intuitive position' of 'how it *feels* to be in that situation'[60] than either the Kantian or the Aristotelian approach. Her argument is complex and wide-ranging, and here, where I shall treat one small section of her long work, I am aware that I shall be doing some violence to its place in her overall argument. None the less, Nussbaum's treatment of Aeschylus raises some crucial issues for the discussion of characterization and individuality.

Aeschylus, Nussbaum argues, 'shows us not so much a "solution" to the "problem of practical conflict" as the richness and depth of the problem itself'.[61] She describes 'the conflict situation as a test of character', which also gives 'us new information about what the agent's character has been all along'.[62] Agamemnon at Aulis is a paradigmatic 'agent'. He is placed in a position of mutually exclusive, conflicting possibilities, where one course of action must be chosen. He is not responsible for the situation in which he finds himself. It is a double bind, where 'there is open to him no guilt-free course'[63] (on which Nussbaum comments: 'Such situations may be repellent to practical logic; they are also familiar from the experience of life').[64] Furthermore, 'his attitude towards the decision itself seems to have changed with the making of it'[65]—a change for the worse in his apparent enthusiasm for a repellent sacrifice. The 'proper response'[66] of practical wisdom does not stop at a decision, but also involves what is to be learnt in and from a decision, and also an acknowledgement or recognition of what is at stake in the chosen action. Tragedy emphasizes how practical wisdom and practical reasoning should involve a continuing process of 'pain and remorse bound up with ... a seriousness about value, a constancy in commitment, and a sympathetic responsiveness that we wish to maintain and develop in others and ourselves'.[67]

In her search for a coherent moral argument, however, Nussbaum's depiction of Agamemnon as agent also runs the risk of underestimating the complexity of the narrative in which Agamemnon is represented. First of all, the chorus tell of Iphigeneia's sacrifice as part of an extended lyric which has an argument of its own. Nussbaum distinguishes 'the report of Agamemnon's commands' from 'the chorus's own memory', which 'brings with it the only note of compassionate humanity in this terrible scene'.[68] Yet the very nature of the depiction of Agamemnon's command is part of the choral rhetoric which invests their further comments with the power to move through its contrary expression of compassion. So the chorus's representation of Agamemnon's choice is to be set against their unwillingness or inability to see beyond 'things as they are'

[58] Lebeck, *The* Oresteia, 3.
[59] M. C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1986). For a critique from a perspective different from mine, see S. Botros, 'Precarious Virtue', *Phronesis*, 32 (1987), 101–31.
[60] Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 32.
[61] Ibid. 49.
[62] Ibid. 44.
[63] Ibid. 34.
[64] Ibid. 34.
[65] Ibid. 35.
[66] Ibid. 42.
[67] Ibid. 50.
[68] Ibid. 37.

(66–7) and their final expresssive refusals to comment on the implications of actions (248–57). Thus the description of Agamemnon's change of mind, on which Nussbaum bases much of her argument, needs to be read in the light of the Hymn to Zeus, whose maxims, the chorus implies, Agamemnon is instantiating. The Hymn to Zeus promises *σωφρονεῖν* ['good sense'] for even the unwilling (180–1), and straightness of mind (175–6) for the supporters of Zeus. Yet Agamemnon, in putting on the yoke-strap of necessity with an 'unholy, impious, irreligious changing-wind of the mind'[69] changes to 'thinking the all-daring'—the very antithesis of *σωφρονεῖν*. Are the chorus talking of Agamemnon here only as agent, that is, offering comment on the psychological process of an individual's choice? Are they not also constructing an argument about divine influence—an attempt to explain Agamemnon's action in terms wider than 'practical reasoning'? The chorus's representation of Agamemnon's choice is not merely an (unmediated) exemplum of moral agency, but part of a narrative (which affects—constitutes—the representation). The *parodos* is not simply a story of Agamemnon, but a story of a chorus's narrating of a story of Agamemnon.

If there is a danger of ignoring the narrative of the drama in Nussbaum's discussion of Agamemnon as moral agent, there is also a danger of ignoring the literary tradition in which Agamemnon plays a part. 'Agamemnon is allowed to choose', writes Nussbaum,[70] as if Homer had no influence on the understanding of such a choice, as if there were simply two symmetrical alternative courses of action for the autonomous individual to choose between. So the chorus's comment *μάντιν οὔτινα ψέγων* ['blaming no seer'] (186) becomes for Nussbaum only another psychological insight into the decision-making process: 'Voicing no blame of the prophet or his terrible message, Agamemnon now begins to co-operate inwardly with necessity, arranging his feelings to accord with his fortune.'[71]

[69] It is noticeable that Nussbaum (ibid. 36), unaccountably translates only one of the three adjectives qualifying *τροπαίαν*; together they place a very strong emphasis on the corrupted state of mind of Agamemnon *as* he puts on the yoke strap. He then changes from this impiety to utter recklessness. Does this qualify Nussbaum's assertion of the guiltlessness of Agamemnon before the decision?

[70] Ibid. 34. [71] Ibid. 35.

Yet the chorus's remark also recalls the opening scene of the *Iliad*, where Agamemnon indeed turns on the *μάντις* ['seer'], Calchas, with insults and aggression (*Il.* 1. 106–20.). Over the matter of another young girl, Chryseis, and the incipient wrath of another divinity, Agamemnon in the *Iliad* is all too ready to blame a seer—which leads to a disastrous turn in the war for the Achaeans. Over his own daughter, Agamemnon in the *Agamemnon* has no reproach for Calchas—and gives up the girl to start the war. There is an ironic paradox of behaviour here that depends not so much on Agamemnon turning 'himself into a collaborator, a willing victim',[72] as on the juxtaposition and difference of literary representations.

The involvement of the past and the present which I discussed in the previous section is also crucial to a sense of moral agency. Nussbaum mentions 'a background guilt in the situation',[73] but emphasizes 'the contingent and external origin of Agamemnon's dreadful dilemma. It simply comes on him as he is piously executing Zeus' commands.'[74] The guilt of the family is seen by Nussbaum in the circumstances which place Agamemnon, 'a previously guiltless man, in a situation in which there is open to him no guilt-free course'.[75] This opposition of an individual to his family is crucial to maintain the sense of Agamemnon as 'moral agent'. Calchas, however, explains the situation thus:

> *μίμνει γὰρ φοβερὰ παλίνορτος*
> *οἰκονόμος δολία, μνάμων μῆνις τεκνόποινος.*
>
> For there remains, rising up again, a fearful
> Deceitful keeper of the house, wrath that recalls, child-avenging.
>
> (154–5)

This remark is an explanation of Artemis' requirement of 'another sacrifice'.[76] It explains the significance of the omen of

[72] Ibid. 35.

[73] Ibid. 34.

[74] Ibid. 34.

[75] Ibid. Here Nussbaum is following H. Lloyd-Jones, 'The Guilt of Agamemnon', *CQ* 12 (1962), 187–99, an argument followed up in id., *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley, 1971).

[76] On the interconnections between the members of the house of Atreus and their actions that the language of sacrifice forms, see F. I. Zeitlin, 'The Motif of the Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*', *TAPA* 96 (1965), 463–505.

the eagles in a way which looks back to the earlier narrative of the house of Atreus and forward to the future events of the trilogy. μίμνει ['there remains'], μνάμων ['remembering'], and παλίνορτος ['rising up again' (from the past)] each express the continuing pattern of events within the narrative of revenge and transgression—a pattern which is established certainly if not immediately. φοβερά ['fearful'] is a leitmotiv of this narrative from the watchman's fear (14) to Athene's recognition of a need for fear in a just society (*Eum.* 691). The 'deceitful keeper of the house' both anticipates Clytemnestra's deceitful claims precisely of faithfully keeping the household (*Ag.* 606–14), and also implies the quarrel and dreadful feasting of Thyestes and Atreus. The final word τεκνόποινος suggests the coming revenge for a child enacted by Clytemnestra, but also the revenge enacted by a child, namely Orestes, and also the earlier punishments of Atreus and Thyestes with their reciprocal acts of violence against generational continuity. Iphigeneia's sacrifice is one of a series of intergenerational crimes of violence. The μῆνις, then, the 'wrath' of gods or god-like humans (which leads to destruction), is qualified by a series of terms and instantiated in a series of ways which interconnect the members of the household. And such an interconnection is Calchas' explanation of why Agamemnon suffers. The determining force which Calchas describes so ominously and even obscurely depends on a view of action within a household that makes it hard to see Agamemnon as an autonomous, moral agent. The belief that 'no personal guilt of Agamemnon's has led him into this tragic predicament'[77] relies, then, on a view of the person as moral agent which may not be capable of doing justice to the representation of Agamemnon—as a figure always already inscribed in the determining narrative of his household.

Yet it would be wrong to conclude this part of the discussion on a critical note. For Nussbaum raises a fundamental issue in her explicit connection of the normative and characterization. Greek tragedians as οἱ σοφοί[78] are placed in a didactic role in the city; the great humanist traditions of education, too, have produced and continue to produce paradigms of behaviour and

[77] Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 33.
[78] See my *Reading Greek Tragedy*, 222–3, for the sense of this phrase.

attitude from a reading of the texts of the ancient world. Nussbaum makes it plain both how the discourse of character is part of the normative discourse of Athenian tragedy, and also how the very discussion of such issues cannot but involve the normative system of the interpreters themselves. It is precisely in relating the problems of representation to the analysis of the normative categories of the person in (the study of) Greek tragedy that the discussion of characterization and individuality is to advance.

Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature

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