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Characterization in Euripides: *Hippolytus* and *Iphigeneia in Aulis*

JASPER GRIFFIN

The question of characterization in Attic tragedy is a fascination and also a complex one. It has sometimes suffered from the assumption that a playwright always behaves, in this regard, in the same way. That is, I think, untrue, and I hope it will emerge from this discussion that in these two plays—one of them among the earliest which we possess from the poet's pen, the other left unfinished at his death—Euripides can be seen to handle the characterization and the psychology of his people in ways which have a good deal in common, but which also are importantly different.

I

In the *Hippolytus* Euripides did something pretty unusual for an Attic dramatist. He wrote a second play on a myth which he had handled already, and instead of concentrating on a different part of the story, as with the two Oedipus plays of Sophocles or with his own two Alcmaeon or Melanippe plays, he treated again exactly the same events as he had dramatized before. What he changed was the colouring and meaning of events. In his first *Hippolytus* play,[1] as is evident both from ancient reports and also from the extant fragments, Euripides versified the good old sequence of the unchaste wife who offers herself to a personable young man, is rebuffed by him, and denounces him falsely to her husband. In Greek myth we find such incontinent ladies as Stheneboea, also known as Anteia, who went through this routine with the young Bellerophon; she, too, was the sub-

[1] See the discussion of the plays in W. S. Barrett's magisterial edition of the *Hippolytus* (Oxford, 1964), 10–45; and now O. Zwierlein, 'Senecas Phaedra und ihre Vorbilder' (*Ak. der Wiss., Mainz*, 1987. 5).

ject of a play by Euripides, and Aristophanes lets his Aeschylus, in the *Frogs*, roundly call the pair of them, Stheneboea and Phaedra, a couple of whores (πόρναι).[2] The blameless Peleus, too, was the subject of similar advances from the wife of his host Acastus of Iolcus. Some called her Astydameia, others Hippolyte: under either name she was bad news.[3] Both Bellerophon and Peleus, however, did manage to survive the perils into which they were plunged by the credulous and jealous husbands of these naughty wives.

All societies which shut up their women folk at home feel uneasiness about what they may be getting up to when their husbands are away. We see these misogynist fantasies in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, for instance. The presence of a young man is likely to present an irresistible temptation to the essentially passionate and irrational female nature. It will be convenient to use, as paradigm, the Hebrew story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife:

> And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, 'Lie with me.' But he refused . . . and it came to pass that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within. And she caught him by his garment, saying 'Lie with me', and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out. [She denounced him to the men of her household, and when her husband came home] she spoke unto him according to these words, saying, 'The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me; and it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me and fled out.' And . . . his master's wrath was kindled . . .[4]

I quoted that at length because it shows us, with great clarity and economy, the natural shape of this universal story-pattern. The woman makes her attempt at seduction, and then she denounces the recalcitrant young man to the anger of her husband. The first Hippolytus play of Euripides presented this sequence, it appears, in very much the good old way.[5] Phaedra

[2] T. B. L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London, 1967), 109 ff., on Euripides, *Bellerophon*; Aristoph. *Ran.* 1043.

[3] Hes. frs. 208–9 MW; Pind. *Nem.* 4. 54 ff.

[4] Gen. 39. It is fascinating to see how Thomas Mann equips that stark mythical narrative with elaborate psychology in his great novel *Joseph and his Brothers*.

[5] E. frs. 430, 435 N[2]; Zwierlein, 'Senecas Phaedra', 24 ff., thinks the first Phaedra was not really so bad.

made a dead set in person at Hippolytus, he veiled his head in horror, she denounced him to Theseus, perhaps producing faked evidence of violence, and Theseus caused his death with a curse. This play, we are told, shocked the Athenians. It certainly was one of the most notorious productions of its always controversial author, much mentioned by the comic poets. Then (I think this is the order) Sophocles wrote a play on the same myth, calling it *Phaedra*, in which he showed how this eminently Euripidean theme of the passionate love of a woman could be handled in a Sophoclean manner. The contrast of the *Medea* with Sophocles' *Trachiniae* will probably give an idea of the change of atmosphere and ethos. Deianira had always been infamous as the wife who killed her husband with the poisoned robe of Nessus: Sophocles presents her as a patient and long-suffering wife, who has borne without exploding the countless amours of her husband, but who, faced with his actually introducing a younger rival into her house, resorts to the robe in the belief that it is not a deadly poison but a harmless love-charm. A murderous Medea is softened into a womanly and well-meaning character. Something of the same transformation—removal of venom—I guess, took place in Sophocles' *Phaedra*: for he presented her as believing that her husband, who had gone down into the Underworld and not returned, was dead. Clearly her action assumes a very different appearance.[6]

It is generally assumed that Euripides wrote his second *Hippolytus* out of chagrin at the failure of the first, and to correct (in the words of the *Second Hypothesis*) 'what was unseemly and deserving of criticism' in that unfortunate work.[7] 'We may assume', says Mr Barrett, 'that the failure of his earlier play had rankled with him.' Scholars indeed generally seem to share the

[6] I find the acute and ingenious suggestion of Zwierlein (id., 55–62), that in Sophocles' *Phaedra* the heroine attempted to poison Hippolytus, impossible to accept. S. fr. 678 R seems to show that the approach to Hippolytus was not, in Sophicles' play, made on the stage.

[7] 'It is manifest that this play was written later, as what was unseemly and deserved criticism has been put right in this play.' Cf. the ancient *Life* (Schwartz, *Scholia in Euripidem*, 1, 5): 'They say that he married Choerile, daughter of Mnesilochus, and when he realized her lewd behaviour he first wrote the play *Hippolytus*, in which he denounces the shamelessness of women, and then divorced her' (an anecdote follows, with Euripides quoting one of his own plays). All this has alike the look of being invented: even the order of composition of the plays is only an interence ('it is manifest') not a fact derived from the didascalic records. Cf. M. R. Lefkowitz, *Lives of the Greek Poets* (London, 1981), 89–104.

aesthetic and moral attitudes assumed in a fifth-century Attic audience. 'The Athenians were doubtless over-squeamish in their abhorrence of the Phaedra of his first play; but she can have been at best but a distasteful character, and now in her place we have a far nobler and more tragic figure. The economy of the play is improved'—for now we find it natural that Theseus should believe Phaedra and ignore Hippolytus' denials. Above all, 'the greatest advantage lies in the treatment of Hippolytus that is now made possible': in the first play he must simply have been an innocent overwhelmed with unmerited disaster, a spectacle not really tragic, while in the second his chastity is accompanied by 'a narrow unthinking intolerance of common humanity', so that he becomes partly responsible for his own calamity.[8]

I do not myself believe that chagrin at the failure of a play would in itself have motivated Euripides to produce a quite different play on the same theme. He was usually unsuccessful in the competitions—four first prizes only, we are told, in his long career—and he must have been hardened to criticism and even derision long before 428, when we consider what an obviously stock comic subject he already is in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, produced in the spring of 425. In any case, the explanation is suspiciously mechanical: 'They didn't like the first version, so he produced one which they did like.' Nothing else which we know of Euripides suggests that he attached so much weight to meeting the tastes of the *dēmos*.[9]

A much better reason, I think, lies in the genuinely artistic challenge which he set himself in the second *Hippolytus*. Let me remind you of the story of Potiphar's wife. There are two high points in it: the woman making her advance to the young man

[8] Euripides, *Hippolytus*, ed. W. S. Barrett (Oxford, 1964), 13 f. 'Da Euripides Phaidra zu entlasten gedachte und das zweite Stück in dieser Absicht schrieb' (W. H. Friedrich, *Euripides und Diphilos* (Zetemata, 5; Munich, 1953), 138). G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London, 1941), 177, refers to 'the disgust caused to the Athenians' by the first *Hippolytus*.

[9] 'Euripides was not the sort of poet who would change his opinion or his considered judgement to win over or to gratify the public' (C. F. Kumaniecki, *De Consiliis Personarum apud Euripidem Agentium* (Cracow, 1930), 29). Kumaniecki is, however, in my view wrong to draw the conclusion that what Euripides did was to retain culpable features in his second Phaedra 'he did criticize Phaedra a little ... she cannot be said to be wholly innocent and blameless here' (ibid. 30). What follows here is not part of a biography of Euripides but an attempt to bring out the particular character of the extant *Hippolytus* play.

('Lie with me'), and the woman denouncing him to her husband. An actress contemplating the part nowadays would instantly see those as her two big moments, and so would the Athenian actor who played the leading female role. The same is true of the narrative in the sixth book of the *Iliad* of the affair of Anteia and Bellerophon: she could not induce him to make love to her, so she said to her husband: 'May you die, Proetus, if you do not kill Bellerophon, who tried to seduce me against my will' (*Il.* 6. 160–5). We can, I think, characterize this sequence of scenes. It is vigorous, highly coloured, melodramatic, obvious. I imagine Euripides meditating on his first Hippolytus play, recalled (I guess) to his thoughts by the elegant variant upon it by Sophocles, and deciding that after all it really *had* been a rather unworthy production: not so much for ἀπρέπεια as for the artistic reason of obviousness and crudity in its conception.

Was it possible, then, to write a play on that age-old theme which would be better? That would mean getting away from the traditional schema of the tale. Was it, for instance, possible to create a good play in which Phaedra did not attempt his seduction, and in which she did not denounce him to her husband? As Euripides continued to reflect, he came to be seized by the idea of a play on the theme in which Phaedra should actually not come face to face with either of the two male characters vital to the plot. She should not speak to Hippolytus, and she should not speak to Theseus: the two big and striking scenes would be sacrificed to a subtler conception. It had great attractions. It also had great difficulties. There was presumably the practical difficulty of persuading the actor who was to portray Phaedra that the part was a good one, even with its big scenes excised. More important, there was the problem of making the plot work.

Any well-brought-up Greek aristocrat would be bound to repel the amorous advances of his father's wife. To make the traditional plot work, all the poet needed was a Hippolytus who was a decent young man. As for Phaedra, her motivation presented no great problem: all the world knew that women were prone to that sort of behaviour. That is why one had to keep such a sharp eye on them. But the new play would have to differ from the old in precisely this respect. The new Phaedra was not to declare her passion to Hippolytus: that meant, for

one thing, inventing a more elaborate device by which the audience was to learn of it in the first place. An obvious answer was a speech by a god, as no mortal knew the secret, and that in turn suggested the role of Aphrodite and the transformation of the story by placing the blame on the divine rather than on the frailty of woman. But it also set the playwright further problems. Somehow Hippolytus must get the message of Phaedra's passion for him, and also he must react to it in a way which drives her into desperate courses.

The Phaedra of the second play is a respectable matron, not the sort of floozie who traditionally starred in this story-pattern; that is because she is not to be allowed to have the big scene of attempted seduction. Aphrodite decides to destroy her, not for any fault of hers, but in order to strike at Hippolytus. Being respectable, Phaedra suppresses her passion until she reaches the point of collapse and prostration. In the end she allows herself to be forced to reveal her secret: the only way in which she could both declare it and disown her own action in doing so. There is a climax of hints from her sick-bed. First she raves about joining the hunters out on the hills, an area of activity specifically masculine, to which virgin females of myth could aspire but which excluded married women. 'Send me to the mountain: I go to the woods and the fir-trees, where the hounds pursue the dappled deer—O God, I long to whoop on the dogs and fling the javelin', etc. The fit passes, her nurse rebukes her for craziness, Phaedra is overwhelmed with mortification:

> *μαῖα, πάλιν μου κρύψον κεφαλήν,*
> *αἰδούμεθα γὰρ τὰ λελεγμένα μοι.*

Cover my head again, I am ashamed of what I have said. (243–4)

Then the nurse, affectionate and officious, resorts to the device of supplication to extort Phaedra's secret. Phaedra has given a further hint: ὀλῇ. τὸ μέντοι πρᾶγμ' ἐμοὶ τιμὴν φέρει ['My secret will be the death of you; yet it is creditable to me] (329). Finally: δώσω· σέβας γὰρ χειρὸς αἰδοῦμαι τὸ σόν ['I shall give it to you, as I respect the constraining force of your supplication'] (335). But before she can bring herself to utter it, she begins by talking about the destructive passion of her mother Pasiphae for the bull, and of her sister Ariadne for Theseus: τρίτη δ' ἐγὼ

δύστηνος ὡς ἀπόλλυμαι ['And I am the third to come to grief'] (341). In the end she hints at Hippolytus until the nurse utters the name: 'You said it, not me', she cries (σοῦ τάδ', οὐκ ἐμοῦ, κλύεις, 352).

What is going on here? What we see is an unusually careful and detailed depiction of a piece of rather subtle human psychology.[10] Phaedra is resolved not to speak, yet her weakness is breaking her down. And as we all know, those in love always have a strong desire to talk about it.[11] Phaedra first reveals her repressed desire for the hunter Hippolytus in the form of a wish to join the hunters: the nurse is baffled, but Phaedra has the relief of having expressed her real desire in a coded form. Then she encourages enquiry by hinting that her secret is, after all, creditable. Thus she gets into a position in which she can act as though forced to speak, although there is sophistry in this, as life would be impossible if anybody could make anybody do anything they chose simply by going through the forms of supplication, a privileged gesture which existed as a recourse for the desperate to save their lives when on the run or menaced with death. Even when she has got into that position, Phaedra still finds it difficult to utter her secret. She works her way round to it by way of the amorous misadvantures of her mother and sister: that is to say 'I am not the only one', and also 'It isn't surprising that it's happening to me'—a device which has the effect of minimizing the shockingness of her own case and her own unique responsibility for it.[12] Finally she cannot utter

[10] See the perceptive account of R. P. Winnington-Ingram, 'Hippolytus: A Study in Causation', in *Entr. Hardt*, vi: *Euripide* (Geneva, 1958), 179 f., 193. He says: 'Why does Phaedra yield [to the Nurse]? There can be no doubt that the fundamental reason is the deep longing that she has to make the revelation' (179). Malcolm Heath, in his acute but perhaps at times too hard-headed book *The Poetics of Greek Tragedy* (London, 1987), 146 n. 46, comments: 'I note in passing that Winnington-Ingram's interpretation of Phaedra's submission . . . has not a scrap of support in the text.' I hope to show what sort of support it has in reality. Good too is B. M. W. Knox, *Word and Action* (Baltimore and London, 1979), 210–11.

[11] e.g. Callimachus fr. 714 Pf.; Asclepiades fr. 847 Gow-Page = Anth. Pal. 5. 7; 'Dicere quo pereas saepe in amore iuvat', Prop. 1. 9. 34. Perhaps after these explicit parallels one may also refer to universal human experience. Who has not been the recipient, now and then, of confessions from the lovelorn?

[12] On the first point, see Gow on [Theocritus] 8. 59: ὦ πάτερ, ὦ Ζεῦ, | οὐ μόνος ἠράσθην ['O father Zeus, I am not the only one who has been in love']; on the second, Agamemnon's apology: ἐγὼ δ' οὐκ αἴτιός εἰμι, | ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς καὶ Μοῖρα καὶ ἠεροφοῖτις Ἐρινύς ['I am not responsible; no, it was Zeus and Moira and the Erinys who walks in

the name, and she ensures that it is the nurse who utters it: another sophistry of the heart for avoiding responsibility.

I have been explaining all this in terms of psychology. A proud and self-respecting person is driven into a corner and eventually finds herself unable to go on keeping her secret. If we were eavesdropping on such a scene in real life, the emotions of Phaedra would be transparent to us, and so would the devices, human and familiar ones, by which she attempts to cope with them. We have all used similar sophistries in such contexts ourselves. Are we right to interpret a scene of Attic tragedy in this naturalistic and psychological way? I shall attempt to support the kind of analysis here offered by looking in turn at Hippolytus.

Euripides, I suggested, was impelled towards the introduction of Aphrodite into his play by the decision that Phaedra should not herself declare her passion to Hippolytus. If Phaedra is a respectable person, not at all a fighter against a god, a θεόμαχος like Pentheus, why has the goddess done this to her? Answer: because of Hippolytus. This young man, with his outdoor name and his noble birth, is very naturally imagined as a hunter. Hunting goes with the outdoor world and with chastity:[13] its goddess is the virgin Artemis. In his devotion to that life and that goddess, Hippolytus has gone too far. He embodies the distaste for the feminine world which is sometimes found in such young men. From the point of view of the shape of the play, a prologue by Aphrodite could be elegantly balanced by the appearance of her divine opposite at the end. Now Hippolytus was Theseus' son by the Amazon queen: he is repeatedly referred to as 'the Amazon's child' (10, 308, 351, 581). In addition he is illegitimate, νόθος, although the usual version seems to have been that Theseus did marry her.[14] A bastard with the

darkness'] (*Il.* 19. 86–7); and the extensive literature on it since E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and The Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951), ch. 1—esp. A. Lesky, 'Zur Problematik des Psychologischen bei Euripides', *Gymn.* 67 (1970), 10–26 = *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berne, 1966), 247–63; O. Taplin, above, pp. 75–6.

[13] On the connection see W. Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1979), 11 ff.; id., *Homo Necans* (Berlin, 1972), 95 (= Engl. trans. (Berkeley, 1983), 81).

[14] Cf. *RE* Suppl. 13, 1153. 22 ff. νόθοι appear sometimes in the *Iliad*, where their position seems to be equivocal. *Il.* 11. 102: υἷε δύω Πριάμοιο, νόθον καὶ γνήσιον ἄμφω | εἰν ἑνὶ δίφρῳ ἐόντας ['a legitimate and a bastard son of Priam, in the same chariot']. The bastard is significantly called Isos, Equal. At *Il.* 8. 284 we have a splendidly characteristic

pride of a legitimate heir, the nurse calls him (νόθον φρονοῦντα γνήσια, 309). His father alludes to it to his face (962). He himself, at the end of the scene of confrontation in which his father sends him into exile, cries:

> ὦ δυστάλαινα μῆτερ, ὦ πικραὶ γοναί.
> μηδείς ποτ' εἴη τῶν ἐμῶν φίλων νόθος.

O my poor mother, my unhappy birth. May no friend of mine be illegitimate. (1082–3)

Mr Barrett comments on this speech:

> Hippolytus fancies, I suppose, that he has had shorter shrift as νόθος than he would have had as γνήσιος; though from no word that Theseus has said could this be deduced . Dramatically, in fact, the outburst is unmotivated—the νοθεία is wholly irrelevant to the action of the play; presumably therefore Eur.'s purpose is to throw subtle light on Hipp.'s psychology for its own sake, to suggest this feeling of inferiority, of otherness, as what lies behind his urge to establish himself in compensation as a paragon of virtues that common man cannot share.

That note is unusual in Mr Barrett's great commentary in its psychological speculativeness. Certainly the speech is striking and invites us to read meaning into it. Hippolytus refers to his birth again at the very end of the play: five lines before his death he tells his father τοιῶνδε παίδων γνησίων εὔχου τυχεῖν ['Pray that your legitimate sons may be like me'] (1455). Like his ambiguous farewell to his patron goddess, 'Easily do you leave our long companionship',[15] that line maintains an exquisite balance between acceptance and bitterness. Neither quality is to be emphasized to the exclusion of the other.

I suggest that while it is true that psychology is to be read into these utterances, they are to be taken with the emphasis on Hippolytus' mother the Amazon: together they create a rather

utterance by Agamemnon to Teucer: 'Be a glory to your father,' ὅ σ' ἔτρεφε τυτθὸν ἐόντα | καί σε νόθον περ ἐόντα κομίσσατο ᾧ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ ['he brought you up in his house, bastard though you are']. Some ancient scholars deleted in the line for its tactlessness (ἀκαιρία); another scholiast points out that bastardy was no reproach in the heroic period (ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ὄνειδος ἦν ἡ νοθεία παρὰ τοῖς παλαιοῖς (ΣΘT); so too the D-scholium and also Eustathius ad loc.))

[15] Cf. J. Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford, 1980). Knox, *Word and Action*, 221, 228, is, I think, one-sided to say that the line 'shows Hippolytus' disillusion' and is 'a reproach'.

different pattern of meaning, and one that is not unmotivated dramatically. The son of such an eminently virginal and outdoor mother (in this play she has not even a name, she is only 'the Amazon'), born out of wedlock to a notorious womanizer like Theseus,[16] and living in a household with his father's subsequent wife and children, it is surely not surprising that Hippolytus should have had an attitude of aversion from sexual matters. He tells us himself that he is quite inexperienced, and that he knows 'no more of this business than what I hear and pictures I have seen; and I am not eager to look at them, since my soul is virgin' (1004–6). That is very unusual for a Greek man, living in a society in which nobody would have thanked you, as a man, for retaining your virginity.[17] Euripides needs his Hippolytus to have not simply the seemly reluctance of a good young man towards an indecent proposition from his stepmother, all that was needed in the first play. Now that Phaedra is a more virtuous character, Hippolytus needs a more marked hostility to sex: the approach which the nurse makes to him evokes a vehement outburst of disgust and also threats of denunciation to Theseus. Although in fact he will not carry out those threats, they suffice to impel the respectable Phaedra of this play, concerned as she is with her good reputation, her κλέος, to suicide and to slander in a new and apparently unanswerable form:

> ἵν' εἰδῇ μὴ 'πὶ τοῖς ἐμοῖς κακοῖς
> ὑψηλὸς εἶναι· τῆς νόσου δὲ τῆσδέ μοι
> κοινῇ μετασχὼν σωφρονεῖν μαθήσεται.

That will teach him not to be superior to my unhappiness. Taking a share with me in this sickness he shall learn modesty. (729–31)

[16] Barrett, comm., 18 n. 3. Theseus' extensive list of infidelities was made a justification for adulterous thoughts by Phaedra in the first *Hippolytus*, fr. 491 N.

[17] B. Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy* (London, 1973), 146, tries to deny any morbidity at all in this: the chastity of Hippolytus 'is not that of a puritan ... but a perfectly normal consequence of the cult to which he has dedicated himself'. That seems to me strange as a statement about normal Greeks and at odds with various points in the play which I mention in this chapter. On the other hand, little seems to me to be gained by strongly worded statements that Hippolytus appears 'priggish and odious' (Webster, *Tragedies of Euripides*, 74). Kamerbeek, too, thinks Hippolytus exhibits 'des traits d'un *priggishness* désagréable' ('Mythe et réalité dans l'œuvre d'Euripide', *Entr. Hardt*, vi. 23). Similarly, H. P. Foley speaks of 'the pompus and self-centred Achilles' of the *IA* (*Ritual Irony* (Ithaca, NY, 1985), 98): that, too, seems to me not only too hostile but also beside the point. These virtuous young men of Euripides seem to rile modern scholars.

The mixture of motives expressed here is, I think, subtly characterized and worthy of comment. Phaedra has her more presentable and calculated motive, that of protecting the position of her children. She also reveals, in her last words, a more passionate one, which draws its force from her rejected love. He *shall* share her suffering, at least, and *that* will teach him to be so virtuous.

Hippolytus has acquired a particular character, a rather morbid aversion from sex; the poet has gone out of his way to suggest that it is connected with his peculiar parentage and his own awareness of it. That is to be seen as having impelled him towards the devotion to the chaste goddess Artemis, which in turn forms part of the striking and significant structure of the play, the hostile goddesses standing irreconcilable at either end. Hippolytus might have been more understanding, or even healthily sceptical, of the nurse's message, but instead he produced a response as violent as the more justified response to a cruder approach in the first play, That particular Phaedra needed this particular Hippolytus if the subtler conception of the second play was to work.[18] Because they both were rather unusual types, or (more exactly) because Hippolytus was an unusual type of person, while Phaedra was placed by the plot in a position which made it very hard for the vital secret to be produced, the poet found himself rounding out their psychologies with a fullness and a suggestiveness quite unusual in Attic tragedy.

Let us stop at this point and reflect. First, it is notable that some persons in the *Hippolytus* did not need to be equipped with particularly interesting or unusual psychology. Theseus needs only to be the typical angry and credulous husband: a little less credulous, indeed, than the general run of such husbands, because his wife's suicide does seem to place her accusation beyond doubt. And in fact that is all the characterization he is given. A typical husband, he believes his wife; a typical father, he feels remorse on learning that he has destroyed his son by mistake. Theseus is more or less interchangeable, allowing for the different stylistic level, with the ordinary chap who killed

[18] Cf. R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Studies in Aeschylus* (Cambridge, 1983), 96: a similar point about Aeschylus.

his wife's lover and in his own defence delivers the first speech of Lysias. Euripides, that suggests, has not been suddenly converted to the idea of psychological drama for its own sake. Rather, he has used the observations of human nature which he made in life and in literature with more than usual accuracy and subtlety, because on this occasion the logic of a very particular plot made it more than usually necessary.[19] The implication of that for the general study of Euripides' work is that such sensitive psychology may indeed be present in other plays, and it is not in principle a mistake to seek or to find it; but that we need to consider carefully in each case how far the sort of psychology we are discussing has a real and discernible function beyond itself, as making some necessary contribution to the plot or the form of the whole.[20]

Secondly, it is worth suggesting that Euripides derived this, like so many other things, from Homer. It has been pointed out that the *Iliad* needs, for its plot to work, an Achilles of a very special sort. The Achilles of the *Iliad* is not an ordinary hero with an ordinary fit of anger: such a hero would have been satisfied, as we are told by Odysseus, Phoenix, and Ajax, with the compensation offered in book 9. He needs to have a depth of mind and feeling which is unintelligible to the other characters, and which will on the one hand make it impossible for him to cope with his own anger, and on the other enable him to talk to Priam in a tone and with a power which are alike beyond the range of anybody else in the poem. His Iliadic opponent Agamemnon also is a particular character, though to a lesser extent and in a less interesting way. He wavers between arrogant bluster and impotent despair; and that instability, that tendency to both of a pair of opposite extremes, is well tailored to his role in the poem, since he must both insult

[19] Thus I disagree with the view of B. Seidensticker, in W. Jens (ed.), *Bauformen der griechischen Tragödie* (Munich, 1971), 215, that in the play character is wholly subordinate to the clash of ideas on the superhuman level. Nor does the emphasis seem rightly placed by W. Zürcher, *Personendarstellung bei Euripides* (Basle, 1947), 87 (Phaedra not an individual but defined by the conflict of ἔρως and αἰδώς).

[20] This has some resemblance to, but is not meant to be identical with, the statement of Friedrich, *Euripides und Diphilos*, 86, that in such plays as *Andromache* and *Electra*, 'Hier wie dort sind die psychologischen Besonderheiten ein Mittel, ausgebeuteten Stoffen neue Möglichkeiten abzugewinnen, und sind insofern Symptome, die das Ende der Kunstform ankünden.'

Achilles and abase himself in vain before him.[21] It may well be that the carefully tailored persons of the *Hippolytus* owe something to meditation on that aspect of the technique of the *Iliad*.

II

Mention of Achilles and Agamemnon forms a natural transition to the second of my Euripidean plays, the *Iphigeneia in Aulis*. The *Iliad* is, as it happens, a long epic which is particularly interested in depicting a wide range of characters: we have only to reflect how well we know, by the time we reach book 23, that large cast of heroes who behave in ways so characteristic of themselves at the funeral games of Patroclus. I say 'as it happens', because we need look no further than the *Aeneid* to find an epic with hardly any interest in that aim, while even the *Odyssey* has much less of it than the *Iliad*.

Agamemnon appears on stage in several extant plays, but this is the only extant tragedy to give a speaking part to Achilles. It may perhaps be doubted whether Euripides derived important elements of his characterization in the *Hippolytus* from the *Iliad*, but the presence of the Homeric epic cannot be questioned in the *Iphigeneia in Aulis*. The Achaeans are assembled at Aulis; that is mentioned in *Iliad* 2, which also includes the Catalogue of Ships, the very visible model of the *parodos* of the play,[22] as the chorus describe visiting the army and seeing the great heroes who are listed in the Catalogue. The indecisiveness of Agamemnon in the *Iliad*, at one moment bullying and over-confident but at others passive and despairing, underlies the volatile Agamemnon of the tragedy—but those qualities, in *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, spread far beyond him to most of the other important persons of the play.

The person, of course, who is not Homeric is Iphigeneia herself. She was a great figure in tragedy: both Aeschylus and Sophocles had written plays with the title *Iphigeneia*, and her fate is an important motif in the *Oresteia* and, to a lesser extent, in the *Electra* plays; Euripides had also dramatized a later stage of her legend in the *Iphigeneia in Tauris*. The first question, then,

[21] See J. Griffin, 'Words and Speakers in Homer', *JHS* 106 (1986), 50 ff.
[22] However much of it is genuine.

was: What remains to be done with this myth, at so late a stage in the history of tragedy? Already in the *Cypria*, the most important of the Cyclic epics, Artemis demanded the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, and so the Achaeans summoned her to Aulis *ὡς ἐπὶ γάμον Ἀχιλλεῖ*, saying that she was to be married to Achilles. Sophocles developed that hint: Odysseus, the handy man for tricks and lies, went off to Mycenae and induced Clytemnestra to send her daughter to Aulis for the marriage.[23] One development remained: Clytemnestra, in the *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, insists on coming with Iphigeneia—like any good mother planning to be present at her daughter's wedding. Her presence among the tents and ships is strange, as is repeatedly emphasized in the play (825 f., 913 f.)—a way of insisting on the novelty of the idea. That it is an innovation emerges also from 457, where Agamemnon says: *εἰκότως ἅμ' ἕσπετο | θυγατρὶ νυμφεύσουσα* ['it is not surprising that she came with her daughter for her wedding']. Evidently it *was* surprising, and the poet emphasizes and justifies his innovation.

Two further possible variants presented themselves. One was to unpack the monolithic unity of 'the Atreidae', who in Aeschylus' account of the sacrifice at Aulis act and suffer as one: *ὥστε χθόνα βάκτροις ἐπικρούσαντας Ἀτρείδας δάκρυ μὴ κατασχεῖν* ['the two Atreidae struck the ground with their staffs and did not restrain their tears'] (*Ag.* 202–4). Following, perhaps, the example rather half-heartedly set in Sophocles' *Ajax*, where the two sons of Atreus are to some extent contrasted with each other though in practice very much the same, Euripides now has Agamemnon and Menelaus reacting quite differently to the position and working against each other. After all, the poet could coolly point out, their interest was by no means identical: one stood to lose a daughter, the other to regain a wife. We may compare the promotion of Pylades, from his traditional subservience to being a more independent character, in Euripides' *Orestes*. The second variant was that of promoting Achilles from the inert position of the man whose name was simply used to lure Iphigeneia, by pressing the question how such behaviour fitted with Achilles' general reputation, in the *Iliad*, in Pindar, and elsewhere, as heroically truthful and

[23] S. fr. 305 Radt.

contemptuous of guile and falsehood. How did Achilles feel about being part of such a subterfuge? So Achilles becomes an important character in events, and with the two sons of Atreus each now playing his own hand the situation becomes highly complex. Finally, the army itself takes on an alarming life and will of its own.

When the play begins, Agamemnon has agreed to sacrifice his daughter Iphigeneia and has sent a message to Mycenae to summon her, on the pretext that she is to be married to Achilles. Why did he do it? We are given two incompatible accounts. According to Agamemnon himself, when he heard the goddess's demand he was for disbanding the army rather than complying, 'but my brother, applying every argument, induced me to commit this crime' (οὐ δή μ' ἀδελφὸς πάντα προσφέρων λόγον | ἔπεισε τλῆναι δεινά, 94–5). Menelaus, however, tells a different story. According to him, Agamemnon was concerned only with retaining his position as Commander-in-Chief. Rather than see the expedition disbanded, he was perfectly happy to surrender Iphigeneia to her death:

> ἡσθεὶς φρένας
> ἄσμενος θύσειν ὑπέστης παῖδα, καὶ πέμπεις ἑκών,
> οὐ βίᾳ—μὴ τοῦτο λέξῃς—σῇ δάμαρτι.

Well pleased and gladly did you promise to sacrifice your daughter, and you sent to your wife of your own free will, not under constraint: don't claim that it was. (359–61)

Some scholars have taken it that one of these accounts is true, the other false. Thus Wecklein, commenting on the constrained and unimpassioned speech in which Agamemnon replies to his daughter's plea for her life, says that it is chilly because we know from the speech of Menelaus that Agamemnon's real motive is φιλοτιμία, desire for position, in comparison with which he does not care about her fate. Wecklein did not like Agamemnon, but I think this line of analysis an unpromising one. The fact is that Euripides has not shown us how and why Agamemnon took his fatal decision, in part no doubt because it would have been hard to prevent him from entirely forfeiting the sympathy of the audience as we saw him do it, in part perhaps because it had been handled by Aeschylus, but mostly because it was a familiar dramatic high point and Euripides is

going to produce a lot more new and exciting ones. He does not explain, either, why Agamemnon did not tell Achilles about the fictitious marriage. Denys Page constructs quite a plausible little history to explain this, based on what Agamemnon might reasonably have expected Achilles to do;[24] but this too, perhaps, is not to the point. As the text of the play stands, indeed, Achilles actually says that if only he had been asked, and not taken for granted, he would have consented to the use of his name to entrap Iphigeneia (962 ff.). Unfortunately that is said in the course of a speech much of which gives grounds for suspecting that it is not by Euripides. The speech is full of unexpected changes of tone and of intention. Now the *Iphigeneia in Aulis* is of all Greek tragedies the one with the largest number of changes of mind,[25] and Euripides clearly was out to exploit them to the utmost in this play. But Page remarks also that the interpolator, too, 'admired emotional inconsistency'.[26] Really life can be very difficult at times.

To return to Agamemnon. Having decided spontaneously, or having been induced, to summon his daughter, he has now thought better of it and written another letter countermanding the first. Too late! His brother Menelaus intercepts the second letter and fiercely denounces him for his change of mind, and meanwhile Iphigeneia actually arrives, with her mother and baby brother. Agamemnon, faced with this new situation, collapses: now that the girl is here, she cannot be saved. Calchas and Odysseus know about the prophecy, and they will denounce any attempt to evade it. Menelaus, meanwhile, has moved in the opposite direction. From demanding that Agamenon keep his word and kill his daughter he passes to sympathy with his brother, pity for the girl, and understanding of the terrible nature of the killing:

> ἄφρων νέος τ' ἦ, πρὶν τὰ πράγματ' ἐγγύθεν
> σκοπῶν ἐσεῖδον οἷον ἦν κτείνειν τέκνα.

I was young and thoughtless, before I saw the position more closely and perceived what it is to kill a child. (489–90)

[24] *Actors' Interpolations in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford, 1934), 179. Further elaboration of the point: Friedrich, *Euripides und Diphilos*, 97 ff.

[25] B. M. W. Knox, 'Second Thoughts in Greek Tragedy', *GRBS* 7 (1966), 229–32 = *Word and Action*, 243–6.

[26] *Actors' Interpolations*, 189.

How are we to explain these changes? Not, I think, or not primarily, in terms of psychology. Since we do not know why Agamemnon ever agreed to the action, we do not know why he changes his mind for the first time. As for his second change, deciding that now nothing can be done, that is indeed given an explanation; but we observe that both now and later in the play Agamemnon claims that the army is so passionately eager to leave for Troy that if he tries to save his daughter the Achaeans will sack Mycenae and kill him and all his family (528–35, 1264–8);[27] if that is so, then it was futile to cancel the letter summoning her, and the further change of mind when he despairs of keeping her away is something of a charade. What really interests the poet is the contrasting emotions.[28] It is tempting to burlesque Aristotle on the relation of plot and character and say that in such a play the emotions, the πάθη, are the main thing, not the persons; but it is necessary to have persons for there to be πάθη.[29]

Menelaus' change of heart is given an explicit motivation: now that it comes to it, he realises what an awful thing he is doing. That puts him with such obtuse Euripidean persons as Admetus in the *Alcestis*, who only realizes when his wife is actually dead what it is that he has done in letting her die (ἄρτι μανθάνω ['Now I understand'], *Alc.* 940). But the point is evidently the formal, almost geometric, elegance of the way in which both brothers move, as it were in a stately dance—a minuet, perhaps—to take up the opposite positions from that in which they started. The opening scenes of the *Heracles* provide an illuminating parallel. At the beginning of that play the family of Heracles, beset by the villainous usurper Lycus in the absence of the hero, have taken refuge at an altar. Heracles does not appear to rescue them, and their position seems lost. Megara, the wife, wants to cut short the agony of useless delay

[27] I am reminded of the penetrating comment of M. C. Bradbrook about Shakespeare: 'The difficulty in his case arises from the difference between the realism with which he presents his characters and the conventional manner in which he motivates them' (*Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1935), 63–4).

[28] 'In one thing Euripides far excelled Aeschylus and Sophocles, namely in the representation of the mental movements from which decisions arise' (Kumaniecki, *De Consiliis*, 121; he refers also to Euripides' accurate representation of *animus titubans*, a mind indecisive).

[29] Arist. *Poet.* 1450a15 ff.

and surrender to their persecutor; old Amphitryon insists that hope must be kept up until the very end: 'The best man is he who always puts his trust in hope' (105 f.). Four hundred lines pass, and their death has come very close. Now it is Megara who utters a passionate prayer to Heracles to appear and deliver them, while Amphitryon expresses cynicism and despair. Zeus has been invoked so many times to no purpose, and it is idle to bother with prayer; as for hope, time flies away and does not fulfil our hopes (490–507).

Again scholars have looked for significance in all this beyond what it possesses. Professor Burnett enlarges upon the undeserving character of Megara, for instance.[30] But here again the point is the elegant pattern in itself. As in the *Heracles*, so with the changing attitudes of Agamemnon and Menelaus in the *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, enough of a psychological explanation is given to allow us to find the events humanly intelligible. Tragedy would fail of its effect on an audience if the behaviour of the persons in the play ceased to be such that the audience could follow it as recognizably human (the characters must be, at least in outline, 'like us').[31] But these events in the *Iphigeneia in Aulis* differ significantly from those in the *Hippolytus*. Neither Agamemnon nor Menelaus needs to be an extraordinary man for the purposes of the plot, and indeed neither is extraordinary. They are both rather ordinary blends of selfishness, emotion, weakness, and hoping for the best. Their mutability is all that is exceptional about them—less by our standards, that is, than by the standards of tragedy, where we are used to the iron will of Sophoclean heroes and heroines, and to the overmastering passions of Euripidean characters like Medea and Hecuba. No strong and particular motivation is needed to account for their mutability and their inconsistencies: strong emotions simply follow one another. We watch the process of change with keen interest, and the poet rushes us along from crisis to crisis, but we do not gain a clear idea what sort of individuals these are. Rather, we contemplate and experience a kaleidoscopic succession of emotions, only loosely attached to particular persons.

[30] A. P. Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived* (Oxford, 1971), 156–66.

[31] Cf. P. E. Easterling, 'Presentation of Character in Aeschylus', *G & R* 20 (1973), 3–19.

In a play exceptionally full of changes of mind, the characters who are introduced into the Iphigeneia story by Euripides, namely Clytemnestra and Achilles, are made rather more interesting. Everybody in the theatre knew what Clytemnestra was like: the murderous adulteress, paradigm of bad wives. So Euripides, who in the *Supplices* introduced to the world a Capaneus remarkable for his democratic ideals and modest life-style (860 ff.), and in the *Helen* a chaste, monogamous, and home-loving Helen, shows us in the *Iphigeneia in Aulis* a Clytemnestra who was a paragon of a wife. She says so herself: συμμαρτυρήσεις ὡς ἄμεμπτος ἦ γυνή ['You will bear witness that I have been above criticism as a wife'] (1158). In fact, she pushed complaisance so far as to be a good wife to a man who had killed her first husband and snatched her baby from her breast and murdered it (1148–56).[32] This extraordinary story, apparently unknown except from Euripides, has a special point which commentators tend to miss: Clytemnestra actually once put up with the very thing for which she will now become the killer of her husband. In the *Iphigeneia in Aulis* she warns him:

> μὴ δῆτα πρὸς θεῶν μήτ' ἀναγκάσῃς ἐμὲ
> κακὴν γενέσθαι περὶ σέ, μήτ' αὐτὸς γένῃ.

Do not, for God's sake, force me to become wicked to you, and do not be wicked yourself. (1183–4)

We can hardly imagine the nerveless Agamemnon that we see in this play behaving in the brutal way Clytemnestra describes: that is just another of these unexplained changes. Nor do we get a clear view of the reason why Clytemnestra took the killing of one child in good part but turned difficult over the second. She does imply at one moment that it was the deceitful way he did it which made it unacceptable:

> Ιφ. ἄκων μ' ὑπὲρ γῆς Ἑλλάδος διώλεσεν.
> Κλ. δόλῳ δ', ἀγεννῶς Ἀτρέως τ' οὐκ ἀξίως.

IPH. Against his will he has slain me for Hellas.
CL. But by deceit, basely, and unworthily of his father Atreus. (1456–7)

[32] Cf. also 633: ὦ σέβας ἐμοὶ μέγιστον, Ἀγαμέμνων ἄναξ ['You whom I revere above all, my lord Agamemnon']; 726: τί χρῆμα; πείθεσθαι γὰρ εἴθισμαι σέθεν ['What is it? My habit is to obey you'].

But essentially it is just another change, and the purpose of the mention of the first incident of child-killing is not to explain but to emphasize her reaction to the second.

As for Achilles, he is a problem for us because his big speech (919–74) is so vulnerable to suspicions that it is heavily interpolated. He is made to open it with a passage in praise of his own moderation:

> ἐπίσταμαι δὲ τοῖς κακοῖσί τ' ἀσχαλᾶν
> μετρίως τε χαίρειν τοῖσιν ἐξωγκωμένοις.

I know how to grieve in measure at reverses and to take delight in measure in full-sailed prosperity. (919–20)

A surprise, on the lips of Achilles; but less so on those of an Achilles created by Euripides.[33] The speech goes on to become violently angry: Agamemnon has abused him, and he shall not lay a finger on his daughter. But after all, he adds, if only he'd told me—I'd have allowed the use of my name in a fraud to serve the common good. Not a very coherent oration; it seems that later hands have been at work, exaggerating the unstable purposes which they saw to be characteristic of the play. Achilles finally comes down on the side of saying that he will fight to protect Iphigeneia, even if it means killing Achaean soldiers (1356 f). The plot exaggerates motifs from the *Iliad*: the hero exposes his own side to disaster for the sake of a quarrel over a girl (1354), having suffered ὕβρις at the hands of Agamemnon (cf. *Il.* 1. 203, 214), and his Myrmidons resent being kept back by him from battle (1352–3; cf. *Il.* 16. 200–7). Finally he expresses love for her, once she has expressed her heroic resolution to die for Greece (1406 ff). Page refers to 'the sentimental inconsistency of an Achilleus who is more like a New Comic lover than an Old Tragic warrior'.[34]

It is vital for the plot that Achilles should take the stand that he does, but in this play of shifting resolves he reaches it only by an oblique route. Iphigeneia takes her resolution at a moment when the Achaean cause is menaced, because of Achilles, not

[33] Knox comments on *IA* 1024, where Clytemnestra says to Achilles ὡς σώφρον' εἶπας ['How prudently you speak!']: 'Nobody ever had occasion to speak like that to Achilles before' (*Word and Action*, 245). The point is a nice one, even though the epigrammatic formulation should not entirely make us forget Achilles' great speech, full of wisdom, to Priam in *Il.* 24.

[34] *Actors' Interpolations*, 216.

only by frustration but by imminent self-destruction. It is at that heightened moment of crisis, not just in the fourteenth week of a long delay, that she finds the spiritual strength to accept immolation. That change in her, from a frightened girl begging for life to a heroine who looks down on death, is exceedingly abrupt: only fifty lines separate the two sides. Aristotle notoriously says that this is a classic example of inconsistency, and of a bad kind: οὐδὲν γὰρ ἔοικεν ἡ ἱκετεύουσα τῇ ὑστέρᾳ ['The girl who begs for her life has nothing in common with the girl in the later scene'] (*Poet.* 1454^{a}33). Scholars attempt to smooth over the transition in one way or another.[35] It is notable, though, that Achilles, impressed as he is by her resolve, quite expects her to retract it. 'You may well change your mind', says he, 'when you see the steel at your throat': so he will be there, with his armour on, to rescue her if need be (1424 ff). I think that gives us a hint on the right way to go about this question.

The sudden resolution of Iphigeneia is not utterly incapable of being understood in psychological terms. The moment is emotional and extraordinary, the young girl finding herself suddenly the focus of attention and the fulcrum of events; and the impulse to self-sacrifice is one which exists in the real world. But Euripides is not primarily interested in making it psychologically convincing, except in a more general sense. The world of the *Iphigeneia in Aulis* is one in which everybody changes his or her mind, and does so abruptly and from one extreme to the opposite. Iphigeneia's behaviour is at home in that world: a place which has enough resemblance to ours for us to understand it, but which also has enough differentness to make us aware of a distance. Sometimes it is a a *deus ex machina* who imposes abrupt changes. The end of the *Orestes* is a supreme instance.[36] Apollo tells Orestes:

ἐφ' ἧς δ' ἔχεις, 'Ορέστα, φάσγανον δέρῃ,
γῆμαι πέπρωταί σ' 'Ερμιόνην.

The girl at whose throat you are holding your sword, Orestes, yes, Hermione—your destiny is to marry her. (1653–4)

[35] e.g. Kamerbeek, in *Entr. Hardt*, vi. 22; Knox, *Word and Action*, 243–4; Foley, *Ritual Irony*, 77.

[36] Though *Ion* 1400 ff. runs it close.

I allow myself the luxury of a verse from W. H. Auden, 'Five Songs', II:

But—Music Ho!—at last it comes,
The Transformation Scene:
A rather scruffy-looking god
Descends in a machine
And, gabbling off his rustic rhymes,
Misplacing one or two,
Commands the prisoners to walk,
The enemies to screw.

But especially in his late plays Euripides goes beyond that hoary device, and the characters are capable of equally abrupt changes without any divine impulsion. Events rain in upon the characters faster and faster; unexpectednesses and complications multiply, extreme situations suceed each other, men and women are at their mercy. We never quite lose touch with human possibility—even the marriage of Orestes and Hermione might be a success, if one thinks of the love conceived by the kidnapped victim for her brutal captor in *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*—but we are not really meant to follow up such lines of thought. In the *Iphigeneia in Aulis* a dazzling series of exciting and emotional scenes reaches its climax with a change by the heroine which reflects the world she inhabits, and which is in harmony with the way people behave there. We are carried away on a tidal wave of pathos, sentiment, and patriotism, not fretting about strict psychological plausibility.

The poet of the *Hippolytus* shows us that he knows a great deal about the workings of the human heart. That knowledge is one of the weapons in his armoury, along with his rhetorical brilliance, his lyrical gifts, his philosophical interests, his concern for shape and form. Every play must show some of it, or we shall be as unmoved as we should be by a tragedy set among ants. Some plays, for particular reasons, will exploit it particularly; it is not impossible for us to see how and why this happens. Others will subordinate it, some or all of the time, to different aims and interests. That is the lesson which seems to emerge from our consideration of these two strongly contrasting tragedies, *Hippolytus* and *Iphigeneia in Aulis*.

Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature

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CHRISTOPHER PELLING

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