But the older king then said aloud:
'Heavy is my fate, not to obey,
heavy too if I shall kill my daughter,
the glory of my home,
polluting with streams of virgin blood
my hands, her father's hands
beside the altar. Which of these is without evil,
how am I to be a deserter of the fleet,
failing the alliance?
Yes, that they desire with frenzied passion
a sacrifice to calm the winds, even a virgin's blood,
is meet and right. May all be well.'

(*Agamemnon* 205–17)

In the parodos of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, the chorus remembers the sacrifice at Aulis. These events, the gathering at Aulis, the wasting storm and the way out are the facts that the chorus knows from personal experience of a war that has now lasted ten years. These, and the urns of ashes bringing home the dead and the vacuum in the palace. That frightening bloody sacrifice was the ritual to escort the ships on their way (*proteleia naōn*, 227); the flames of sacrifice are now proclaiming victory. All that has gone between is not part of their personal knowledge, though they see its results at home in the mourning and murmurings. What we are shown of the war in the opening play of the *Oresteia* is primarily the effect on those at home, the waiting. The dog-tired body of the watchman on the roof gives us a fleeting glimpse of the wearisome years of waiting. And then it is over, as the beacons flash across the sky from peak to peak, from promontory to promontory.

The waiting is over. Or almost over. Before it can be done with forever, the chorus must go over one more time how it began, the cause of their deep anxiety. *Ailinon, ailinon eipe, to eu nikatō* ('cry sorrow, sorrow; may the good be victorious'): this is their refrain (121, 139, 159): a hope for the best mixed with dread of present disaster that is a constant in the play. Characters glancing over their shoulders, anxiously voicing a hopeless hope, but feeling the doom closing in. 'May all be for the best.' We know as soon as we know whose house this is that it will not be.

What the chorus tells of that time long ago is ambiguous, recalled through flashes of images. Two eagles snatch up a pregnant hare and thwart her giving birth (111-120). These great birds of prey are the sons of Atreus, the leaders of the expedition (122-4). The omen is a mixture of hope and terror at once (145). The Greeks will take Priam's town, but the booty of cattle will first be ravaged (122-130).

What the prophet prays to avert are all the things that happen one by one in rapid succession in the chorus' story: adverse winds (*antipnoous*, 148), inability to sail (*aploias*, 148), the other lawless sacrifice, not fit for feasting (150), the strife at home between husband and wife (151-4), the wrath that

punishes the slaying of a child (155). All these visions the seer sees in the one symbol of the eagles devouring the hare with her unborn brood.

The storm comes (191ff.), withering the flower of the Argives. The waiting at Aulis becomes too destructive. A new way out (*mēkhar*) is proclaimed: a remedy requiring a choice of Agamemnon. We are given a picture of the general weighing the alternatives and their consequences. Both are disastrous for him. There is really no way out of the *aporia*. He decides that the army's demand is right (*themis*). He decides and hopes for the best: *eu gar eiē* ('may it be well', 217).

The cause of this demand for sacrifice is ambiguous at best. Is the omen itself the cause, the eagles seizing the hare? Is Agamemnon made to pay for the Trojan War before it takes place and then punished again in the play for heeding the seer's oracle? To the seer the oracle is one with reality. What is ambiguous to us is whether the oracle predicts or commands or warns. The play shows that it does all three, clearing up the ambiguity by displaying it in action.

In a dozen lines, no more, Agamemnon exits from his *aporia*. He chooses his way out, to go forward: he chooses what is to be his identity within the play. *Anagkas edu lepadnon* ('he put on the harness of necessity', 218; cf. *IA* 443, an echo of this line). We already know from the chorus' quotation of Calchas about the wrath that avenges a child (155). Agamemnon's exit from the literal *aporia*, therefore, through the choice to kill his daughter, is not to be without other effects. Clytemnestra is at home, no longer in awe of her husband (151f.), but waiting eagerly for his return.

The *aporia* of Agamemnon, flashed before our eyes in the lines quoted above, is the subject of Euripides' last (or penultimate) play, the *Iphigenia at Aulis*. The motive for Artemis' demand for sacrifice, treated paradoxically by Aeschylus, is omitted altogether by Euripides. The omen of Calchas becomes a legalistic imageless statement. The literal *aporia*, the inability to sail to Troy, handled with great though brief clarity by Aeschylus, is treated ambiguously by Euripides. Heavy winds and dwindling supplies harass Aeschylus' gathered army. The men are wasted with hunger; even the ships are rotting (190ff.). In Euripides there is no storm, only a strange calm. The men at first are calm too, whiling away their forced leisure with games. The sickness for war is in the minds of the leaders, but as it spreads we hear of growing impatience among the men. Euripides removes the external reasons for the urgency and concentrates on the decision itself. In the earlier version Agamemnon could say that it was right for the men to demand this sacrifice. Euripides' Agamemnon also gives responsibility to the men, but there is no righteousness even in his reporting of their demand which at that time is only in his mind. The physical sickness and starvation of the older playwright has become in the work of his junior a mental and moral plague.

In Aeschylus' description of the actual sacrifice the cause of the war is imbedded, as it is throughout Euripides' play. First when Zeus as protector of the laws of hospitality (61f.) is said by the chorus to send the late-avenging

Fury (58f.) against the transgressors, bringing struggles upon Danaan and Trojan alike, 'for the sake of a many-manned woman' (*poluanoros amphi gunaikos*, 62). And again, the cause is more closely associated with the sacrifice itself when it is placed between the verbal dramatisation of Agamemnon making the decision and the picture of the girl's death:

> ἔτλα δ' οὖν θυτὴρ γενέ-
> σθαι θυγατρός, γυναικοποί-
> νων πολέμων ἀρωγὰν
> καὶ προτέλεια ναῶν.
>
> (*Agamemnon* 224–7)

> He had the heart then to become
> the sacrificer of his daughter,
> to serve wars to avenge a woman
> and as offering for the ships' sailing.

'He had the heart' (*etla*) to do it is to become a kind of refrain in Euripides' play.

Now Aeschylus' chorus describes the sacrifice itself and the unwilling victim: Iphigenia's cries of 'father' (227); the stifled curse on the house (228); the piteous look at each of the killers (240f.), followed by a glimpse of what she had been like at home, lovingly tending her loving father (243-7). Euripides and his characters know this picture of Iphigenia. This is the Iphigenia of art, as Aeschylus acknowledges with the words *hōs en graphais* ('as in paintings', 242), the suppliant Iphigenia, trying but unable to cry out in terror at the deadly blow. This picture is not utterly rejected by Euripides. Iphigenia as loving daughter, as she used to be at home in her father's house, is given a scene (the second episode and part of her scene of supplication). The suppliant Iphigenia too is given a part, begging her father to spare her life (cf. especially *IA* 1220 and *Agamemnon* 228). Even the Iphigenia who would shriek out a curse on her father's house is mentioned in Euripides' play. In both plays indeed that blaspheming Iphigenia is no more than a figment of her father's imagination: her curse (or unpropitious word) is stopped by a gag in the *Agamemnon*; it is never uttered or even thought of in the *Iphigenia at Aulis*, except by Agamemnon in his morbid fear of what he 'has the heart to do' (464f.). But Euripides and his heroine do ultimately reject this picture of Iphigenia's death, the death of a victim under compulsion with the pleading glances, with the bridle in her mouth. Euripides' Iphigenia chooses to speak her last words (in defiance of the artistic and literary tradition), but they are words more shocking than any curse could have been. This Iphigenia chooses not to be predictable. It is more than a little disturbing to see this suppliant victim become a happy martyr (see especially 1446) to the glory of Greece and go off to her death in perfect control of her destiny, boasting no less of her responsibility for future victory in the Trojan War (see especially 1472f., 1475), even denying responsibility to her father (1456)

not only for that success in battle but for the choice he has spent the play making and justifying.

Euripides creates a new Iphigenia, putting her beside the traditional one. He treats the themes of Aeschylus' lyrical vision of the deed in the parodos of the *Agamemnon*: the *aporia* and *aploia* at Aulis, Helen as the cause of the war, the sickness of martial fervour, the trouble at home that is to result from this sacrifice, even the false wedding suggested by Iphigenia's attire. Like Aeschylus', Euripides' treatment mixes clarity and ambiguity. Euripides turns these short passages from the *Agamemnon* into a whole play worthy of its model. Both playwrights saw the tragic situation in the pause before the great war when the decision had to be made. Euripides turns his predecessor's hints of Agamemnon's torment into a focal point of his drama. And Aeschylus' focus on the repercussions of the sacrifice becomes only scattered but affecting hints of the exotragic future in Euripides' tragedy.

Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* survived by chance in the alphabetical group of plays that are found in but two manuscripts. It was not consciously preserved in the canon of Greek tragedy to be studied in the schools. No full ancient commentaries on it are extant. It is ranked among the greatest classical dramas by hardly any critic. And yet our understanding of Greek tragedy would be the poorer without it.

We are presented in this drama with a tragic situation of *aporia*: that impasse at which a choice must be made. Tragic because it is inevitable (at least historically) and yet seems open to choice. Tragic because it means the assumption of a new and fateful identity. Tragic because the one who chooses it becomes wholly absorbed in his or her fate.

What is magnificent about the *Iphigenia at Aulis*, the last surviving, though imperfect, tragedy of the most tragic of the tragic playwrights, is its brilliant commentary on Greek literature and literary reality, and on the nature of tragedy.

Tragedy—whatever its origin—is self-conscious. We might almost say that it is the art form of self-consciousness. Is this not why so many critics see the *Iliad* as the prototype of tragedy? How else can a man stand on a stage alone (an Agamemnon or a Hamlet) and talk about his fate, his motivation, make public his inner thoughts? Masks only add to this self-consciousness of character: this face, this fate belong to me. This character type, represented by the mask of a young man or old, of a matron or virgin or young wife, of a slave or king, is becoming an individual because of the choices being made here and now. The mask and the fate become eternally locked. Thus Euripides works with the *aporia* and tragic choice of Agamemnon as the king of men chooses his known fate, making the choice seem his, and yet undercutting that freedom by constant reference to the earlier tradition where he is already himself. But the man's choice is both highlighted and parodied by another choice, by a choice that is so startling that it makes us shudder with the awesomeness of its implications. This is the untraditional choice

of Iphigenia to be tragic, to stand at that terrible edge of knowing where Oedipus stood (*OT* 1169f.), where Agamemnon had wavered before donning his fate (*Agamemnon* 218), and where Iphigenia now stands for the first time in her literary career and looks at her life and death as an artist sees his creation. And there she makes one of the most wonderful aesthetic decisions in all drama, as she sees the portrait of herself as it would have been had she allowed herself to be the Iphigenia of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, and rejects that piteous spectacle for a heroic portrait of martyrdom. The tragic person looks at his life and makes choices for aesthetic reasons. That is why tragedy so often seems inevitable. And so it is, not because of an external infernal machine of fate, but because of the tragic character's artistic vision of the integrity of life.

In this play, not only do the characters look at themselves, talk about their roles and give their assessment of the situation and how they reached it, but they also judge the story itself. The characters seem to know that they are caught in an inconsistent story and try to find a way out of it. The essential *aporia* presented in the *Iphigenia at Aulis* is the inability to cross from myth to what we recognise as reality. What makes this play so interesting is its presentation of the *aporia*: the near impossibility of reconciling the story of a glorious war with both its sordid cause and with the universally tragic reality of war in general. The reconciliation is made within the ironic structure of the play, but only with tremendous cost to the consistency of character. What is consistent about the *Iphigenia at Aulis* is its theme of *aporia*, the unbridgeable gap that is bridged here and has been bridged in the past only through art. Euripides artfully lets the seam show.

I. MAKING THE DECISION: 'LA GUERRE DE TROIE N'AURA PAS LIEU'

The Prologue

Though we do not know exactly where we are in the story, and are at first led astray on that score, from Agamemnon's opening speech in the prologue we see at once what is the fateful situation that is to be explored in the *Iphigenia at Aulis*.[1] The play opens before dawn, in that proverbial time of contemplation and reconsideration, when men – even kings of men, even leaders of great armies, even men obsessed by ambition – see things much more clearly. Agamemnon is revealed, as it were, in front of his tent, distraught over a message which he is apparently writing and rewriting (34ff.). He recites a long monologue in which – as is typical of the Euripidean prologue – he introduces himself, the scene and the situation.

This speech (49–96) is Agamemnon's interpretation of a series of events which have put him into the unfortunate position of having to make an impossible decision, whether or not to give up the expedition against Troy, whether or not to sacrifice his daughter. We know that he is considering the alternatives. Either choice is a terrible one for him; it is a situation of *aporia*, both literally and figuratively. Without the sacrifice, there is no crossing to Troy: so at least we are led to believe from Agamemnon's words (*aploia*, 88; *aporia*, 89).[2] Lines 94–96 tell us the general's immediate reaction: he ordered the herald Talthybius to dismiss the army, since he would never have the heart to kill his daughter. This was the first choice, the human choice, the reasonable choice; but clearly it is a choice that is an affront to our knowledge of history and to our belief in that glorious (in literary terms at least) battle of Greek and Barbarian, the Trojan War.

Some rearrangement of the received text of the prologue seems to be necessary (*pace* Knox et al.[3]). Murray's edition gives all of Agamemnon's iambic lines (49–114, with 105–114 bracketed) first, followed by the whole dialogue in anapaests (1–48 and 115–163). C. W. Willink[4], however, has argued convincingly for the following arrangement, which is followed here (although not with adamant conviction): 49–96 (monologue in iambics), 1–48 (dialogue in anapaests), 97–114 (iambic reply), 115–163 (anapaestic dialogue). This arrangement allows Agamemnon to pause in his description of the events that have caused the present *aporia*. It further enhances the suspense: Agamemnon's statement at 94–6, that he has already made the decision not to sacrifice Iphigenia, will (as Willink points out) make us believe that the letter he has been fretting over is the one sending for his daughter, since it is a known fact that Agamemnon did sacrifice her. That Agamemnon has, however, already changed his mind once, and is about to do so for a second time now, and is (as he explains, beginning at line 119) in reality sending a second letter to rescind the one asking his wife to send his daughter to Aulis, not only focusses attention on the crucial decision and its consequences, but

also offers another opportunity for suspense. It furthermore establishes the pattern of rapid mind-changes that is to be repeated again and again in the play, until Iphigenia's sudden and startling change of heart at line 1368. It is clear too that Agamemnon sees himself as having a choice, since he is revealed here exercising it for the third time. The complexity of this series of events – confusing and difficult to explain as they are – underlines the complexity of the *aporia* which Agamemnon now sees himself as facing, and which will continue throughout the play, with schemes and counter-schemes, until Iphigenia herself resolves it.

After the statement of the problem in the monologue, the short scene of dialogue presents it in action, continuing the focus on the making of the decision and on *aporia*. 'Old man, old man'—Agamemnon impatiently tries to hurry this relic of the house of Tyndareus out of the tent, after he has reminded himself of that first decision (of 94–6): but even 'lord Agamemnon' (*Agamemnon anax*, 3) cannot speed up the old and slow, however vital the issue: the fact that the only person Agamemnon, the leader of all the Greeks, can trust is a tired old retainer from his wife's house must be significant. And so there is a pause before Agamemnon's next revelation: the slowness of the old man (3–5); the discussion of the time of night (6ff.) in which even the star Sirius is said to be 'rushing' (*aissōn*, 8), as Agamemnon himself is doing (*aisseis*, 12); the calmness of the night (9f., 14f.); all these near irrelevancies are emphatically intermixed with the agitation and urgency that Agamemnon feels. As if we are to feel with him a deliberateness in the movement of the stars, their rush to a fatal daytime which Agamemnon's activity is attempting to postpone.

And another theme is brought into clearer focus in this dialogue, a theme which was treated ambiguously in Agamemnon's monologue: his status as general of the army. *Zēlō se* ('I envy you', 16) is Agamemnon's bitter reaction to the old man's suggestion that they break off the scene. *Because* Agamemnon is king of men and general of the Greeks he is called upon to make a terrible decision. And so he envies the life of an ordinary man who can sleep through the night without fear of what he may or may not do in the morning that would come too quickly were he to sleep, that would come too finally for changes of heart. Desperate decision-making here as at the end of the play is the character's shield against inevitability. *Zēlō . . . zēlō . . . zēlō* – he repeats the word three times (16, 17, 19), so great is his regret *now*: we have yet to be told that it was not always so (we must wait for Menelaus to show us more of the past at lines 337–69). But in this scene Agamemnon has been caught on the terrible edge of decision, before he has decided to sacrifice all else to his role as sacker of Troy. And yet in office, retorts the old servant (who would know from its absence in his own life), is *to kalon biou* ('the good life', 20): but whatever he chooses to do, Agamemnon is certain to lose the good in his life, for he must sacrifice either his personal happiness or his political power. Thus the envy is ironic from both sides: the servant sees the glory and fame in office, but not the danger.

The great man envies the life that is *akindunon* ('free from peril', 17), but has not chosen it and will reject it finally, and even (ironically) will see that it is too dangerous for him.

The old man sees his master in one way, as *anax* ('king', 3, 13; cf. 28), and scolds him for not living up to this role: he disapproves of the scene he is playing (28, cf. 16). Is it possible that our worried, wakeful Agamemnon is meant to remind us ironically of Homer's *anax andrōn* ('king of men') who must be stirred from his slumber by a dream from Zeus (*Iliad* 2.1ff., 23ff., 60ff.), a dream which keeps repeating that a leader is not supposed to sleep all night?[5] Here instead Agamemnon is reproved for fretting outside his tent, when all else is calm. And this at a time when Agamemnon's role is in doubt (94–6).

With the homely, honest wisdom of clichés (29–32), the old and trusted servant gently reminds his master that he has to take the good with the bad. Why is Agamemnon acting so strangely? Why is he weeping (40) and giving evidence of indecisiveness over this letter (35–39)? Madness is suggested (41f.): 'You lack none of the difficulties (*aporōn*) that point to madness.' The servant has hit the mark exactly: is not the present *aporia* in which Agamemnon sees himself a kind of madness?

For all his speaking in proverbs about a man's life as a mixture of joy and sorrow (31), once the old retainer has learned the appalling truth (after line 133) he, like the others in the play, will reverse himself, will understand Agamemnon's *aporia*, will join in an action that would (if successful) make his master less of a king, and in spite of his old age will join in it with all the speed he can muster (140, cf. 3f.). For then it is not only Agamemnon who calls, not the son of Atreus (30), but the family of Tyndareus (cf. 45). This slave, to encourage his master to confide in him, reminds Agamemnon that he came from the household of Tyndareus as part of Clytemnestra's dowry. This fact is given as evidence of his loyalty to the *family*. But the reference is ironic in the light of Agamemnon's speech, where the oath of Tyndareus bears so directly on the proposed sacrifice of Iphigenia, Tyndareus' granddaughter; and where Agamemnon too had introduced himself through his relation to the family of Tyndareus. The servant sees his relation to this house as determining his fidelity, as fixing his role in the life of this family, a family tie which Agamemnon on the contrary sees as putting himself into this confusing and awkward situation.

What Agamemnon does not say in his monologue is significant: he does not say, 'I am Agamemnon'. The reason, we may infer, is that that name, that role, that fate sits ill with him now. Instead, he identifies himself through the daughters of Leda, through his wife, Clytemnestra (50). Unlike the statement of the servant who wants to prove his simple affection toward this family, Agamemnon's words inform us of his entanglement in this house, through the intricate marriage pattern he describes. He is entangled in this impasse through relationships over which he has no control: he chooses here a passive role, as he does throughout the drama; even when he does take

up his role as apologist for the war and the army he leads it is as 'slave' of Hellas. This is what he says: but Menelaus will see another role for Agamemnon.

It is important to note that the element of human choice (despite critical views to the contrary) is stressed by Agamemnon: his pattern of words is as carefully chosen to indicate the responsibility and choice of other human agents, as it is to remove that responsibility from himself, to make himself the passive victim of others' choices:[6]

> Ἐγένοντο Λήδᾳ Θεστιάδι τρεῖς παρθένοι,
> Φοίβη Κλυταιμήστρα τ', ἐμὴ ξυνάορος,
> Ἑλένη τε . . .
>
> (49–51)
>
> Leda, daughter of Thestius, had three daughters,
> Phoebe, Clytemnestra my wife,
> and Helen . . .

In the list of the daughters of Leda, Helen's name is given prominence as the last, and from this Agamemnon launches into the fateful succession of events that has brought him to Aulis and stopped him here. But by having already named Helen's sister as his own wife, he has put himself outside this story.[7] Agamemnon proceeds with the story of Helen's marriage: Tyndareus' cleverness (67) leads to Helen's choice. *Helesthai* (68), *heileth'* (70) emphasise this theme of *choice*: conscious choice, not fate, not luck, certainly not divine intervention, is involved.[8]

She *chose* Menelaus (70f.). Tyndareus and Helen are responsible: Menelaus is passive only. But where is Menelaus, the chosen one, all this time? Paris has caught him out of town (76). Menelaus is named at the beginning and end of the sensuous seduction scene: *Menelaon* (as the object of the verb) is the emphatic first word in lines 71 and 77, both times ending the sentence. Thus his very passivity is made responsible for this section in the chain of events, and, therefore, for what has ensued. He was the victim of Paris, who 'caught him away from home' (*ekdēmon labōn*, 76); but what was he doing away from home, why was he not *at* home protecting his prize? Menelaus is being set up (for lines 84f.): it is his fault even though he did not *do* anything, first because of Helen's choice of him, together with Agamemnon's contrary-to-fact wish that he had never 'taken' her (*labein*, 70), and then through his negligence in being 'caught' away from home (*labōn*, 76). The seduction of Helen is given a subtle irony through Agamemnon's careful arrangement of words. But Menelaus does not remain supine forever. Stung out of his passive role by the loss of his wife, Menelaus tears through Greece to remind his compatriots of their oath (78f.; cf. 58–60).

The armies gather at Aulis. Having narrated the circumstances as external to himself, but affecting him through the double kinship of blood and marriage, and the latter twofold, Agamemnon at last brings himself into the

picture. Throughout, however, as before, he remains on his guard to put the responsibility elsewhere. First, the Greeks chose him as general for Menelaus' sake (84f.): once again Menelaus – or at least the kinship between the two (*suggonon ge*, 85) – is responsible. There is a striking verbal parallel between the two brothers: compare the vocabulary of 70 (*heileth'. . . mēpot' ōphelen labein* – 'she chose him; would that he had not taken her') to that of 84–6 (*heilonto . . . allos tis ōphel' . . . labein* – 'they chose me; would that someone else had taken it'). Agamemnon is scrupulously careful in his choice of words. He declines to mention any active suit on his part for the office: the impression and, no doubt, the intention is, in fact, the opposite. Here lies the difference between the two Atreidae in Agamemnon's assessment: Menelaus implicitly had been one of the suitors for Helen's hand, and therefore must bear a part of the responsibility for the outcome; Agamemnon, on the other hand, having married himself off to Clytemnestra before even mentioning Helen, gives only his relationship to Menelaus – for which he can not, of course, be held responsible – as the reason for his being chosen. Agamemnon does not notice anything illogical in all this: it does not occur to him to ask, 'Why did the army choose me because I was Menelaus' brother, and not my brother because he was Menelaus?' We will learn in the first episode why Agamemnon does not consider the faults in his logic in this careful account of events, when we see that his brother has a version of the story too.

At the end of his monologue, Agamemnon tells us that he has made his decision: and it is indeed a decision that is consonant with the passive role he has given himself heretofore: the girl's life is too high a price for his brother's wife. But after his brief anapaestic dialogue with the old man, Agamemnon resumes the narrative of events. It does not seem dramatically reasonable that the whole exposition of the facts (as Agamemnon sees them) should have been recited in the presence of the servant, since as far as they are factual, they are well known to him already. On the other hand, a consideration of timing, always an important factor in Agamemnon's thought, may suggest an explanation of sorts. The old man had left the house of Tyndareus before the suit for Helen's hand; he may, therefore, be assumed not to know all the goings-on in the house of Tyndareus after he followed Clytemnestra to Argos. Now in any case Agamemnon informs the old man of things of which he is certainly ignorant (since nearly all the Hellenes are ignorant of the intended sacrifice and possibly all but the two sons of Atreus are unaware of the ruse of the marriage contract): consider his apparent stupidity (in Agamemnon's eyes) about the false marriage proposal (124ff.). The explanation here, as before, seeks to put responsibility on other shoulders: his brother, he asserts, persuaded him to 'dare terrible things' (97f., a phrase which the servant picks up at 133–5). Shortly we will see Menelaus in the very act of trying to persuade Agamemnon, and we will see what argument he uses (cf. *panta prospherōn logon*, 'bringing forward every argument', 97).

The prologue has introduced the major interrelated themes of human

decision, *aporia*, and inconsistency, as well as others that will be taken up in later chapters: the motivation of the war and the gathering of the army; persuasion and deception and self-delusion; marriage and family and their relationship to the war; *onoma* and *ergon* ('word/name' and 'deed', 128); and the ironic relationship of Iphigenia to Helen, the past and present *parthenoi* ('maidens'). We have seen that Agamemnon has already made a decision about the life of his daughter three times, so that we should not be surprised to see this same decision made several more times in the play, but with additional motives added to balance the scale in favour of the sacrifice. How are such matters decided? Not once and for all, we have seen, though Agamemnon thought so even the first time (*oupot'*, 'never', 96). No, they are not ever decided until the deed is done – as in the *Libation Bearers*, just minutes before driving his mother inside to her death, Orestes begs his friend for help, for deliverance, 'Pylades, what shall I do?' (889), but gets only the cold comfort of Loxias' oracles: Orestes is not offered any way out of the dilemma. The decision had been made; the *atē* ('doom') of the house had been 'glued' to Orestes in the *kommos*, but this last plea is needed so that we will concentrate one last time on the physical nature of the act at the time that Orestes is facing his mother and the deed is no longer an abstract plan.

And we have seen Agamemnon trying to talk his way out of this tragedy, by denying that he had any part to play in its development, just as his old servant and confidant invited him to exit from a scene unbecoming his grandeur and station (16). But Agamemnon has told us the past as he wants to see it and wants it seen: Menelaus, Clytemnestra and Iphigenia will revise this interpretation of history, and will move Agamemnon from the fringes to the centre of the tragedy.

The First Episode

> *It is morning. A pair of men break on to the scene. They are squabbling over something and abusing each other. We recognise both of them at once, the old servant of the prologue – we knew he would have to return – and Menelaus (the man most immediately responsible for the present* aporia*) who is called by name (303). The letter is between them. They are fighting over the letter (307). This tug-of-war – accusations, threats, 'let go', 'I won't', 'I'll smash your head in if you don't' – is a scene appropriate to low comedy.*

But on this letter a girl's life depends.

In the long parodos, the chorus had sung of the army gathered at Aulis, giving us a catalogue of ships and men. Juxtaposed to this heroic splendour we are asked to pause over a scene of internal bickering, of repugnant brutishness. This great army is being held up. We are shown in this scene

the kind of thing that is holding it up. The tension which the letter excited in the prologue because its purpose contradicted historical reality is replaced by the tension between the two brothers, co-generals of the purportedly united Greek army, but working at cross-purposes.

Menelaus, acting treacherously, has caught his brother in an act of treachery: naturally he overlooks his own culpability. As we will soon find out, these two brothers share more than a patronymic (their common bond of ancestry being pushed to the forefront by Agamemnon at line 321); both are extraordinarily good at self-justification which verges now and then on self-delusion. Menelaus may fail to justify himself fully (we are rooting for Agamemnon and Iphigenia); but Euripides has another purpose in mind for him. This is a scene of revelation. Character and theme and plain *fact* are revealed.

Menelaus threatens to expose his brother and the things he has written in this private letter before all the Greeks (324). What Menelaus does in fact do is expose the Agamemnon of the prologue in a different light from that in which he had presented himself. The man who had so carefully cleansed himself of culpability, who had, in effect, laundered his persona by giving the responsibility to a whole series of people, not the least of them Menelaus, will have to stand by to see that image seriously undermined. Agamemnon is revealed as a masterful and ambitious politician who eagerly sought power via election to the generalship. And that power was sought apparently for its own sake (342).[9] But once elected he had changed his ways and is no longer accessible to his constituency (343–5). He is, furthermore, a master of public deception: we have, as we now know upon reflection, already had a taste of his skilful persuasion. Agamemnon's ambition, a trait omitted in his own speech, is now seen to be his motivating force (342, 357).

Throughout this vicious denunciation, Menelaus stresses his brother's inconsistency: in general, as unjust and perhaps even hypocritical (334, cf. 366ff.); in regard to his about-face after the election (345–8); and finally in the matter at hand, the sacrifice of Iphigenia (358ff.). This is the most damning evidence of all. Agamemnon, we are told, gladly undertook to sacrifice his daughter: *hēstheis phrenas/asmenos . . . hekōn, ou biāi* ('glad in your heart/readily . . . willingly, not by force', 359–61): it would be hard to miss this redundancy. Now, he is balking. Inconsistency is made much of in this play. Why, even Menelaus will be seen practising it in a few minutes.[10] Whether it is Aristotle's consistent inconsistency or not remains to be seen. At least it suits these two characters well enough. If we compare Menelaus' present revelation with Agamemnon's earlier apology for how a decent man like himself got into such a tragic or, at least, aporetic situation, we can hardly miss the theme of inconsistency linked with persuasion and self-justification. Menelaus ruthlessly destroys the sympathy which Agamemnon had so painstakingly won for himself. Agamemnon's presentation of his case in the prologue was, as it were, a second campaign for popular favour, parallel to his campaign for the generalship. We have already met the man that Menelaus describes.

Now Menelaus is a persuasive man, too. Agamemnon had said so (97f.). At 371f., we see him in the very act of *panta prospherōn logon* ('bringing forward every pretext/argument', 97f.). But for him this simple statement of the 'glory of Greece' theme is not a pretext: it is the necessary reality for his present role. Agamemnon had not mentioned it: he did not want to balance the scales against his daughter any more than was necessary. Who is lying? Is either brother really *lying*? This cannot be the right question. Both are desperately trying to believe what they say. Does Menelaus reveal the same man who presented himself as an innocent bystander? The answer has to be *no*. The man described by Menelaus as out glad-handing for votes is not the same man we earlier saw regretting not just his success at the polls, but the whole series of events from his brother's marriage to his brother's out-of-town trips. This is not the same man: what we see here, what we have to come to terms with is a man choosing his reality. But he will be the man described by Menelaus again, and he will weep for the other. Agamemnon is portrayed as a man trying to escape what is.[11]

Menelaus finishes his revelation. He has added a new motive for the war. There can be no doubt that Menelaus believes what he is saying. Agamemnon begins to speak; we expect a rebuttal, point for point, of his brother's argument. But we are deceived in part, if we have expected the retort to be in kind. Even the chorus notices it (402f.) when they comment on the differences in the two arguments. Agamemnon ignores *in toto* the political argument his brother had put forward and speaks only on the personal level of their two families. He has balanced, not the glory of Greece, but a bad wife whom Menelaus managed badly (cf. *kakon lekhos*, 389) against the life of his innocent daughter (396–9). The charge of ambition he does answer with a counter-charge of uxoriousness (385ff.), punctuating his statement with a cliché, one of many that the brothers Atreidae have a penchant for using as ammunition: the quarrel-scene is overflowing with proverbial expressions. If Aeschylus made his *Seven against Thebes* a battle of shields, Euripides seems to have made the first episode of his *Iphigenia at Aulis* a battle of clichés, each man trying to top his brother's truism with one of his own (note, for example: 333, 334, 345–7, 374f., 380, 387, 408; and cf. 330, 331, 332). The charge of inconsistency is answered too: it is perfectly in order to be inconsistent when it means a change from bad to good judgment (388f.). But if the present reconsideration means such a change, what are we to make of Agamemnon's next decision, when he decides not to spare the child, and later when he takes Menelaus' line of argument as his own? But for now he will have none of it. Greece, he says, is sick (411). *Greece is sick*. These are hard words to forget, especially for a Greek audience, whom we may imagine rising to acclaim some of the more rousing chauvinistic statements. Agamemnon may forget, when he has to, his words about the good kind of inconsistency and his line about the medical condition of his country, but we will not.

O panellēnōn anax, Agamemnon: these words cut short the clash of the brothers Atreidae, just as Menelaus is threatening to go to other friends (414) – as, in fact, his brother had advised him to do (394). Another ironic juxtaposition. The messenger's salutation follows immediately – in the same line even – that point when Agamemnon has most emphatically rejected the role of 'king of all the Greeks'. Menelaus will have to find other champions for his cause, now that he and it have been betrayed by his brother (412): Greece is sick and the Greeks are fools. It looks as if Agamemnon has renounced the expedition and the title.

The messenger does not know any of this. The ignorance of messengers is one of their charms and the very trait, in fact, that gives them their dramatic effectiveness: how else could anyone say to Oedipus of all people, oh, well, Polybus and Merope were not your parents anyway; or announce to Medea that her troubles are over, that her little boys can stay in Corinth? But our messenger believes that Agamemnon is still his general, and he believes – like his abovementioned counterparts – that he is bringing good news. But Agamemnon has put himself into the paradoxical situation of having to deny the natural instinct to greet his family with joy (cf. *terphtheiēs*, 'you'll be delighted', 418), just at the time when, for once, he has put their interests above his own ambition.

The *nuntiandum* is that Iphigenia has arrived. The rest is irony. The messenger's description of her arrival puts the girl in an idyllic setting (420–2), where such a lovely, loving daughter belongs; quite other from that in which she will soon find herself. This is our first visual reference to Iphigenia: her name has been brought before our consciousness before, but only impersonally, in her relationship to Agamemnon and his problem, as one of his possessions, as one of the contributing factors to his feeling of *aporia*. The messenger breaks off this happy scene with the fact that the army knows that she is here (425). This knowledge, we will soon learn, – or, at least, Agamemnon's knowledge of it – is fatal. Capping this particular example of angelic irony is the maxim of lines 428f., on the happiness and fame and admiration of people like Agamemnon and his family. The irony continues in the ambiguous mixture of marriage and sacrifice (432–9), a coincidence of terminology that Agamemnon misappropriates in his scene with his wife in which he talks about sacrifice, but she hears about marriage (707ff.).[12]

Agamemnon reacts not, as the messenger expects, to the happy announcement, but as we expect, to the new turn of events. He continues to put the responsibility elsewhere (444): *hupēlthe daimōn* – the same verb that he had used of Tyndareus' dealings with the suitors (67) – : 'some god has insinuated himself' into my life. *Noblesse oblige*: Agamemnon's status as king prevents his shedding tears (446–8, 451–3). But he recognises the irony of his position: *tōi t'okhlōi douleuomen* ('we are slave to the mob', 450). Even the king of all Greeks is their slave.

The irony of this scene into which the messenger has broken with his greeting to the king is that he has caught Agamemnon at a time before he

chose to sacrifice all else to his role as leader of the Greek forces – at a time when, in fact, he had all but chosen to give up that identity to be just a man. So he had answered Menelaus by talking about their families. Now his family is here, not just his daughter, but Clytemnestra and Orestes, too. Euripides had to trot out the whole family in order to make it clear exactly what Agamemnon is deciding here. He realises now that he must choose to be one thing and not another. He must either be king and general, the one thing which he wants to be, or the other, which every sane man is, protector of his family. That he must choose, that he cannot be both of these two most natural things is his *aporia*.

But as the scene develops, his sadness soon changes to fear. How will he greet his wife? How will he compose his facial expression (454f.)?[13] He turns to thoughts of deception, his consistent habit of mind. His near-panic, juxtaposed to the peaceful verbal introduction of his wife, is the result of the honest feeling that the sacrifice of Iphigenia for Helen, of an innocent girl for a guilty woman, is unjust, unreasonable and unnatural. Presently this discomposure will leave him when he latches on to the cause suggested to him by his brother. But now fear is his motivation, fear of the army, fear of his wife, even fear of the children. Agamemnon thinks of the girl with pity (462), but she is still impersonal to him, still just the *parthenos* (460) as Helen had been to Tyndareus. And Agamemnon pities himself more: for his words are an expression of anxiety over what she will say when she supplicates him, of fear that she will curse him – and whoever is a friend to him – with such a marriage as he is giving her (463f.). He sees only his daughter's bitterness, not her love, and not her surprise at his cruelty in violating that love. He projects to her his own emotion, his fear of the consequences of his act. This is present even in his most touching formulation (398f.), that he will spend his days and nights in tears if he kills his child. Even then he is thinking of himself. At last, most grotesque of all the things he says, the infant Orestes, imagined as condemning his father in baby-talk, is an object of dread to this unnatural parent (465f.).

'Brother, give me your hand.' Softened by self-pity, Agamemnon quickly yields to Menelaus' offer (471f.). Menelaus is a changed man. Now he stresses their closeness, calling upon their mutual ancestors (473f.), and avowing his sincerity (475f.). Having put his wife and Iphigenia into the balance, he now sees that Helen's bed is not worth the girl's life (485–93). Does this sound familiar? Now it is his turn to suggest disbanding the army since there is now no longer any reason for the expedition. It is true that Menelaus' sincerity in this speech has been called into question by certain sceptical critics who will not take his word for it that he is speaking 'from the heart . . . and just as I think' (475f.). It has been suggested that Menelaus, by suggesting that the expedition be cancelled, is only pointing out the unrealistic alternative to the sacrifice for the purpose of persuading Agamemnon to go ahead with it.[14] Now although Menelaus' speech does have the effect of reminding Agamemnon of what he perceives as the war-maddened army, it seems best

to take his words at face value: he really has put himself in Agamemnon's shoes (*eimi d'houper ei su nun*, 'I am where you are now', 480). Menelaus retracts his former argument for the war, virtually admitting that the recovery of his wife was his real motive. A dramatic turning point has been reached: for this moment, until Agamemnon opens his mouth, there is no one, not one of the characters in the play, who favours the sacrifice. Iphigenia need not be killed. Known facts are in suspense. The Trojan War need not take place. Menelaus can remarry.

Thank you, Menelaus, but no thanks. 'We have reached a point in time when it is necessary to carry out the bloody murder of my daughter' (511f.). The baldness of this statement demands a reason. Why this sudden change? The stichomythia dramatically slows down the continued revelation of Agamemnon's reasoning. But little by little the information is drawn out. The whole gathering of the army compels the sacrifice. Agamemnon fears the multitude. The ambition of other prominent Greeks makes it necessary. Characteristically, Agamemnon has managed to shift responsibility for the girl's death to the absent Odysseus, now that he and Menelaus have made up and he can no longer blame his brother for his predicament. Much of what Agamemnon said in the prologue becomes inoperable by the end of the first episode. The talk of ambition (520, 527) is in ironic juxtaposition to the revelations about Agamemnon's campaign for office, and forces the charge back upon the general (who is trying so hard not to blame himself) and upon his brother whose *philoi* these were before his change of heart. Even the silly exchange over whether Menelaus can read Agamemnon's mind (522f.) builds up the reference to Odysseus and his ambition (524–7). Both brothers are adept at projecting their own emotions and ethics on to others: Menelaus had threatened to expose Agamemnon before the assembled Greeks (324); now Agamemnon fears that first Calchas (518) and then Odysseus (528) will actually do it.

Agamemnon has chosen his reality. The decision is made now. The girl will die. This does not change in the rest of the play. There will be some delays. False hopes will be offered. But we know now that the reasonable alternative – not to sacrifice the girl, not to go to war – has failed: the Trojan War will take place, but at this point it has no external cause nor purpose, since even Menelaus has suggested calling it off.

But Agamemnon still sees himself in a state of *aporia* (*ēporēmai pros theōn*, 'I am placed in an impasse by the gods', 537) Now, however, the problem is secrecy: how he can keep the matter from Clytemnestra until the deed is done. As usual, he is thinking of himself: how with the least tears he can do badly (541). Agamemnon will spend the rest of his time on stage either trying to cover up his final and decisive choice, or trying to justify it. This is what *aporia* does to a man. Now that he has made this decision, he must justify it and the war. He is not lying, he has changed roles. He must no longer see himself as the innocent onlooker, but as the chief apologist for the war, its active leader. The weight of circumstance has shifted Agamemnon's perception of himself. The old servant had reminded him that he was a king; Menelaus had thrown this fact in his teeth; the messenger had called him king of the Panhellenic forces; finally the situation – the arrival of the girl, the army just beyond his door – tells him who he is. We may indeed find the motives for Agamemnon's decisions (first ambition, later fear) unkingly (to say the least), but his new role will teach him finer arguments rhetorically, even if he denies himself the sincerity of these earlier desperate reasons.

The brothers agree at last on war and deceit, and the chorus sings of Love (first stasimon, 543–606). But effectively juxtaposed to *Erōs* ('love') in their song (548, 585) is *eris* ('strife', 587). They begin with praise of moderate love, but work in the madness of immoderate love (547) with the words *maniadōn oistrōn* ('frenzied goads'), reminding us of the word Agamemnon had used of his brother's reaction to the loss of Helen, *oistrēsas* ('stung by a gadfly', 77). Love, sings the chorus, has two kinds of arrows, one for a happy lot (550), but the other 'for the confusion of life' (*epi sugkhusei biotas,* 551); and it is the latter that describes the love surrounding Helen, and its effect on the life of Iphigenia.

In the strophe, the chorus wishes for *metria . . . kharis* ('moderate grace', 554f.), a theme which is taken up in the antistrophe, where they sing of education to virtue (561f.), and what it means to them: *to te gar aideisthai sophia* ('for to feel shame is wisdom', 563). And it has this charis, a *metria kharis*: *hupo gnōmas esoran/to deon* ('to see what is right with the mind', 565f.). Clearly Helen did not learn to know her duty. From this idea, the chorus thinks of Paris in the epode, seeing him in an idyllic setting, as a shepherd among his flocks, piping *barbara* ('foreign tunes', 576). But before they have described this peaceful scene, they have already disrupted it, with the first word of the stanza, *emoles* ('you went'): Paris has left his flocks. Into the gentle bucolic world had entered the judgment of the goddesses (579), which maddened him: again the theme of moderate and immoderate love of the strophe and antistrophe. And this sends him – the chorus relives the fateful incident in the present tense – to Greece (581). Close by the repeated words *erōta . . . erōti* (585) are *eris erin* (587), for the love of Paris and Helen is not the moderate desirable kind described in the strophe: so we know from the outcome of this love (*sun dori nausi*, 'with spear, with ships', 588). Love and strife are thus mixed together by the chorus as they had been in the previous scene between the two brothers, and as they had been from the very first reference to Helen (51), bringing on the confusion of life (551) that is the present *aporia*.

The chorus has given us a glimpse of the love of Paris and Helen, and hinted at the confusion caused by immoderate love. They have shown what happens when strife intrudes itself into a warm setting of rustic quiet. Now the opposite happens. Clytemnestra and her children arrive, introduced in tones of joy and good fortune (amid tragic ironies), and welcomed by the chorus with gentle words that are their only substitute for the sympathy they

were ordered to stifle (542; see 590–7, 598–606). The character-drawing in this scene is very fine: we see the bustling Clytemnestra in normal, happy circumstances, busily organising the disembarkation and greeting (607ff.). It is as if we are given a fleeting picture of the interior of Agamemnon's house, of the wife of Agamemnon as she is at home, ordering her house and family. But she is not at home. The home life has been disrupted, the household has been brought into a military encampment. The incongruity of this situation is striking indeed. The sacrifice that Agamemnon makes to be king of all the Greeks is not just implied; it is dramatised fully.

The family is complete, intact now for the last time.[15] We need not ask why it is here, though Agamemnon does, complaining about the presence of his wife as a new stumbling block. The family is brought to the camp, brought on stage so that we can see what Agamemnon left behind at Argos. When this drama is ended his family is no longer whole: neither he nor his wife will ever be the same again.

In the prologue, Agamemnon had blamed his brother for the negligence that had permitted the theft of his wife with the word *ekdēmon* ('out of town', 76). *Ekdēmos* is used again at line 419, in the messenger's speech. This time it refers to Agamemnon's long absence from home and hearth. The irony is that Agamemnon has left his family behind and will do so again in the course of the play, in order to prosecute a war for the sake of Menelaus' home and family which had been disrupted by the latter's absence. Agamemnon had introduced himself through his wife (50): we knew who he was, because we know who she is. Can there be a hint even there in his opening words of his fate at her hands? We meet Clytemnestra as a happy housewife, stubborn perhaps over the proprieties due to family affairs, but no killer. But she does not yet know what her husband has decided to be. Tragedy, it is said, does not have a future: it ends, it is complete. The sacrificed Iphigenia may not have a future. But Agamemnon has a future. So does his wife. Agamemnon had uttered, as from the lips of his daughter, a curse on his marriage (463f.). A new and future reality threatens Agamemnon after Clytemnestra has learned the truth and wonders about her own reaction to this loss. 'Do not, by the gods, force me to be evil towards you' (1183f.). Agamemnon has chosen his historical, Homeric reality. Clytemnestra now begins to choose her Aeschylean role (see especially 1187). Agamemnon's exotragic fate is beginning to seem very real.

If there are two Agamemnons, two Clytemnestras, two Menelauses, and as we shall see in the next chapter, two Achilleses offered in the play as alternate choices, the one in normal conditions, the other squeezed by the pressures of tragic *aporia*, then Iphigenia's sudden and drastic change of heart is part of a pattern in the play. Agamemnon takes his cue from his title as king and from his failure as father and husband, from his failure to warn his family in time. Iphigenia is pushed too by her failure as a suppliant to persuade her father, and by a title which she will give herself. She too changes roles: there are two Iphigenias. But this change is harder to accept; it forces

into doubt all the changes of role that had gone before it. Iphigenia solves the *aporia* of how to justify her sacrifice and the war that will follow it. But ironically it creates another insoluble question: how can this be?

NOTES

1. See Cameron (1968), 145: 'Or is tragedy there too the exploration of the fateful situation and the character or characters that fit it?'

2. Vellacott (1975), 42–4, argues credibly that even the *aploia* is treated ironically, that the purpose of the sacrifice is rather to embolden the men than to affect the winds.

3. Knox (1972). As his title suggests, Knox argues that no changes are necessary in the order of lines in the prologue; see also Foley (1985), 102–5, who argues that 'the shift to anapaests here serves primarily to mark a formal and clear transition to Agamemnon's antimythical plot' (105). Jones (1962), 250, suggests that the purpose of the anapaestic exchange is 'to establish the perspective in which we are to see the whole man'. Cf. Mizen (1980), 35.

4. Willink (1971). Both Knox and Willink argue convincingly for the authenticity of the iambic as well as the anapaestic parts of the prologue. Willink's order, however, is more convincing in that it makes Agamemnon's speech more suspenseful, emphasises the making of the decision and presents most dramatically the first in the pattern of reversals that is so conspicuous in the play.

5. This is by no means the only Homeric reference in the play: there is, for example, the catalogue of ships and men (*IA* 185–302, cf. *Iliad* 2.494ff.). Perhaps the 'teichoscopia' (*Iliad* 3.161–242) is referred to in the second stasimon (762–72). And the armour of Achilles, made by Hephaestus, the armour which portends Achilles' death and takes up much of *Iliad* 18, has a prominent place in the third stasimon (1071ff.). The relationship between Agamemnon and Achilles in the play somewhat parallels their Homeric counterparts: Agamemnon is guilty once again of a prior wife-stealing, when Achilles in the play decided that, yes, he really does want to marry Iphigenia. These references are not by the way. The drama throughout presents the Trojan War with irony: the sacrifice of Iphigenia and the war are treated as acts of madmen, and yet the war must take place because it is of such cultural and literary importance that Greek literature could barely exist without it. See also chapters IV and V below.

6. Agamemnon has a surfeit of choices. He creates his *aporia* by making one choice and then reversing it for the other. But the servant – nice as he is – seems to miss the mark when he suggests that the inability to make the decision is the sign of madness, but then again he does not yet know the facts. See Masaracchia (1983) 55–57; Siegel (1981), *passim*; Lattimore (1969), 28–35; and, for a more general view, Snell (1928), 396 and 405.

7. See Luschnig (1982) and chapter V below.

8. I can not agree with Ferguson (1968), 159, when he says that the play 'shows us characters in the grip of *tychē*' (cf. also id. 162f.). Wassermann (1949), 174, seems to come closer to the mark in saying that in the play man is shown as both 'agent and victim of *tukhē*, *anagkē*, and *atē*'. It is true, on the other hand, that Agamemnon presents himself as in the grip of *tukhē* in the monologue and throughout, but we learn that he has been, if not lying, at least shaping the truth to clear himself of his share of the responsibility: what he leaves out of his opening statement (e.g. his campaign for office, his treatment of Clytemnestra's first husband) is as important as what he puts in. That is, he leaves out matters that are important to our understanding of his character and which Euripides is careful to introduce at dramatic points in the play, when it is necessary for us to reconsider what we have heard and seen.

9. Jones (1962), 251f., has interesting things to say about Agamemnon's relation to his office; see also chapter VII below.

10. See Siegel (1980); Rabinowitz (1983), *passim*; Knox (1972), 245; Bogaert (1965), 10, who calls the play 'la tragédie des revirements'; Rossi (1944), xiii.

11. 'In whatever age,' writes Cameron (1968), 146, 'is it not just this point that tragedy makes to us – the ancient point that we cannot escape what is?'

12. On marriage and sacrifice see Foley (1985), esp. 68–78 and 84–92; Masaracchia (1983), *passim*.

13. On the comments within the play on facial expressions 'which threaten to destroy the masking convention', see Jones (1962), 249f. and 260.

14. By, for example, England (1891), xvi. See also Vellacott (1975), 174.
15. Daughters (referred to at lines 731, 737f., 1447–50) are left at home, one in particular, whose absence is noteworthy. Because Electra was not there, her feelings will not be affected (as ours are) by what happens in this drama, by the pain and tragedy of her mother and sister. Instead she is kept in the maidens' quarters, locked in as it were on herself, even forbidden to mourn her sister (1448, 1450). Part of the chaos of war is the chaos at home and – in the intricacies of this play – that, in turn, contributes to the war.

II. DELAYING TACTICS: EURIPIDES CUNCTATOR

A carriage has drawn up, carrying a rich and handsome woman with her two children. She is greeted by what seems to be a welcoming committee of local women. She is happy and bustling with the excitement of the trip and the wedding that is soon to take place. The wedding gifts and the baby boy are handed down from the carriage. The boy is asleep, worn out from the long journey. The woman is careful to see that everything is going well, that no accident mar this day of joy. She seems so proud of her children and of her husband, and she wants the strangers to know how prosperous and happy she is. The girl cannot wait any longer and runs to embrace her father. Everything is progressing perfectly.

But the father is Agamemnon: he is going to kill the girl today.

We know what is going to happen to Iphigenia. Euripides asks us to pause now in the second episode, to get to know who she is before she is slaughtered on the altar of her father's ambition, her uncle's bed, the army's incipient madness for war. Throughout the play, the action and the pathos are delayed so that we can know the doers and sufferers; so that we can see them choosing their roles and realities. Delay is the action of the play; delay is also one of its themes and a striking dramatic device.

In the second episode, the girl – whose death has been a centre of attention for debate and quarrelling, and for changes of heart – is now presented as a living reality, as she had not been in either her father's or her uncle's rhetorical phrase-making. Now we see her as an obedient (cf. the repeated *mē orgistheis*, 'do not be cross with me', 631, 637) and loving girl (*philopatōr*, 'father-loving', 638): she is (*pace* Electra[1]), of all Clytemnestra's children, the one who has always been most loving of her father. She cannot contain the joy she feels at seeing her father again. Her sweet playfulness makes the knowledge which we share with her father all the more bitter. Her love and joy are one-sided: locked in her embrace is a brooding Agamemnon who answers her loving questions with ambiguous ironies (cf. 645, 647, 651, 667, 673). It is true that he feels distress that he cannot contain, but even in this heart-breaking scene, Agamemnon's suffering is self-centred. *Zēlo se* ('I envy you'): Agamemnon is apparently wont to envy those worse off than he (cf. 16, 17, 19). He envies Iphigenia for not knowing what he knows (677). He is thinking of himself and the painful knowledge that he cannot share. He cannot be thinking of her unenviable fate.

'Oh father, stay at home with your children.' 'Yes, I wish I could . . .' (656f.). We share the girl's longing to keep her home intact, her family together, as it should be. But we experience the father's agony too: it is an

agony caused by delay, which will soon turn into impatience. Agamemnon is an impatient man: he had tried to hurry the old servant, soon he will send his daughter out of his sight (685), and be beside himself with impatience with his wife, for coming at all and then for not leaving. In the prologue he was impatient to preserve his family, but now it is different. Earlier it was Agamemnon who set up the delay in the progress toward the inevitable; now he wants to speed the sacrifice with as few tears as possible (cf. 541), but circumstances, and three characters whose main purpose within the dramatic action is to delay that action, get in his way: this is the new *aporia*.

The dramatic focus of this and the following episode has moved from making the decision to the knowledge of it and the ignorance of it; in personal terms from Agamemnon to his daughter. This knowledge must spread to those it most concerns. A dramatic tension is created by the question how and when will the women find out. It is relieved at last when the old man lets the cat out of the bag (873). This old man is one of the three characters for delay. He had gotten his cue in the prologue. His purpose at that time had been to delay, to foil the forces that demanded the girl's death. How is he to know that he is supposed to change purposes now? A slave is not made to be as imaginative as his master, nor as fickle. He had furthermore given himself the role – derived from his roots in the household of Tyndareus – of loyalty to the family. To this he remains faithful, but not to Agamemnon, who has, by betrayal of the family (ironically in order to serve one member of it) removed himself from such protection as a feeble old slave can offer. This slave, through his permanent loyalty and by upholding the heroic ideals, underscores the mutable values of his superiors in rank.

After embracing the girl one last time, Agamemnon sends her inside, for his own peace of mind. But he is able to collect himself in short order, to apologise to his wife for carrying on so, and to continue unabashed with his cruel deception, with his postponement of the tears that will have to flow. The necessity for delay in the spread of knowledge makes him good at dissembling, as if his emotion had in truth gushed out at the prospect of betrothing his daughter to Achilles, and not to death (685–7). And Clytemnestra sympathises with his fondness for their daughter (691–4). Her ready acceptance of others' feelings seems meant as an indication of her own genuineness and candour. Here she understands Agamemnon's feelings; earlier she had given the same understanding of her daughter's eagerness to hug her father (638–9) and later she will sympathise with Achilles' bashfulness. It puts her in sharp contrast to her husband and brother-in-law who continually project their fears and deceptions on to others. In contrast to her sympathy is their self-centredness. Menelaus, for example, had been presented as excessively conscious of himself and his position, a psychologically appropriate personality trait for the cuckolded husband in the piece. Having no honour, he invents a dignified role for himself, but it is all bluster. His consciousness of his place is emphasised in his dealings

with the old man at his entrance in the first episode. Menelaus threatens to strike him with the sceptre (311), the symbol of his kingly rank. He reminds the old man of the latter's servitude (313). Menelaus' word is *kuriōteros* ('more lordly', 318) than the slave's. Helen's (first) husband is full of self-importance and insistent upon the righteousness of his own action while overlooking the harm it does his brother (cf. the *dikē-bia* ['justice-force'] contrast in lines 314–16). But even he, when the sacrifice had begun to seem more real to him after the announcement of the girl's presence in the camp, had looked with sympathy on his brother's tears, had offered hope, had briefly delayed the action, had put himself in Agamemnon's place (480). Unfortunately, it is Agamemnon who has instead put himself in Menelaus' place: when he concludes his argument for the girl's death, we will see how closely they resemble one another.

Clytemnestra in her first scene has taken over the role of delayer, which has gone from Agamemnon to the old servant to Menelaus. Now, as the mother interested in her daughter's future, she wants to know all about the new son-in-law and his family. The irony here is that Clytemnestra is asking all the wrong questions: but the natural curiosity and concern for her daughter's future make the deception all the more shameful. A relieved Agamemnon is happy to give her ready answers, including an excessively long genealogy of Achilles. As the conversation gets closer and closer to the marriage, to naming the day (717), the talk of the ritual becomes more ambiguous: marriage and sacrifice are mixed up together (see esp. 721).[2] This dialogue does not move the plot forward: its purpose is delay. It effectively brings the normal world of home and family into the insane world of leaders preparing for war. It makes the wedding seem more real, the wedding that is not to be; but it might have been, it should have been.

For all of Agamemnon's careful planning, he has laid a trap for himself. With an oath, the usually obedient wife (634, 726) emphatically disobeys her husband (739f.). Custom (*nomos*) has the stronger claim (694, 734). Clytemnestra's decision to disobey her husband elicits from him – after her exit – a further complaint (742f.): 'Ah me, I have rushed on in vain; but have failed in my hope, in my desire to send my wife from my sight.' Notice the use of the verb *ēixa*, the same word used of Agamemnon's impatient motion in the prologue (12), and of the Dog-star's rush to morning (8). Even our sharing in his impatience hardly makes us sympathise with this man and his dilemma when he bemoans his failure to get rid of his wife (742ff.). His insensitivity to others' feelings is clear throughout. Here he actually expected (but, to give him credit, only half expected) his wife to deny both nature and *nomos*, to leave her daughter in an army-camp on the eve of her wedding. Agamemnon sees himself the loser all around (*pantakhēi nikōmenos*, 'everywhere defeated', 745), an ironic description of the *panellēnōn anax* ('lord of all Greeks') of 414. Agamemnon ends with a proverb on keeping a good wife or none at all, capping the scene with a cliché that has wide application in the play: referring directly to his own marriage, but ironically so when

his wife has done what is right in following *nomos* even if it means disobeying her spouse. Even Agamemnon, at least the old Agamemnon, knew that his wife was doing the proper thing (cf. 457–9): but characters who change roles should not be expected to be consistent. Indirectly Agamemnon's proverb at 749f. refers to Menelaus' marriage which is the cause of it all, and finally perhaps to Iphigenia's purported marriage to Achilles, which is becoming more and more prominent in the plot.

Agamemnon goes off to consult with the seer Calchas, a man whose integrity had been doubted in the previous episode ('the whole profession of seers is an ambitious bane', 550), to find out what the goddess wants (746f.). And the chorus sings of war and its sorrows, acknowledging the decisive step toward war that was accomplished by the arrival of Iphigenia. The progression continues step by step towards the inevitability of the war. It is not the infernal machine of fate at work here, but rather the infernal contrivance of human ambition, and of improvident men who fail to see what war does to human beings, who fail to see the whole in perspective. The chorus gives this broader view.[3]

Achilles enters, unannounced though not entirely unexpected. His is a part that barely advances the forward motion of the main plot, the motion towards the departure of the army. But he does contribute to our understanding of what is going on in the camp outside, and to our feeling of *aporia*: to the process of delay for reconsideration and doubt of the mythical basis of the story that is being dramatised. The chorus had introduced this doubt just before Achilles' arrival (794, 799f.): 'if the story (*phatis*) is true . . . or if tales (*muthoi*) in the tablets of the Muses have transmitted these things untimely (*para kairon*) and in vain.' In this scene there are two haunting expressions of doubt. First, Achilles doubts the validity of seers and prophecy. It is nothing but guesswork (956–8), subject to the success and failure of all human endeavour. Secondly, Clytemnestra expresses at least the shadow of a doubt in the existence of the gods: *ei d'eisi theoi* ('if gods exist', 1034). If the gods exist, a just man will be rewarded, if not men expend themselves in vain (1043–5). It is a hint of perfect justice in a divinely ordered universe, as well as a doubt that there is any value to the struggle; but if the gods do not exist, if seers are wrong most of the time, how can Agamemnon go through with the murder of his daughter? And we remember where he had gone just a few minutes earlier: to make arrangements with Calchas (746ff.).

Long before his entrance at line 801, Achilles' name has been on the lips of the actors. His stemma had been given in what seemed at the time needless detail (697–703). It is as if the *name* of Achilles has conjured up this person, whose relation to the plot is purely illusory: certainly that was Agamemnon's intention. At 128 he had made this clear: 'the name' he had cried impatiently at his old slave, 'not the fact' (*onom' ouk ergon*). And Clytemnestra had caught on (without knowing it): 'I know the name (*onoma*) of the person to whom you have promised the child' (695). Agamemnon has done his

homework and so can give his wife the details of Achilles' birth, education and homeland. Achilles had been something more to the chorus when they described their tour of the camp: he is singled out from the other leaders in the longest section of the parodos (206–30). His activity is different from that of the others, who were enjoying their leisure time at dice (196) or the discus (200). But Achilles is a serious soldier: he is out racing a chariot, training himself for the time when he will be more than a name. Can there be any significance to the fact that whereas Achilles is given only the formulaic adjectives 'windlike' and 'fleet-footed' and a bit of genealogy in the chorus' description of the race, the chariot and team he is competing with are vividly depicted with many visual and colourful compound adjectives (*khrusodaidaltous*, 'finely wrought in gold', 219; *leukostiktoi*, 'white-spotted', 222; *seirophorous*, 'harness-bearing', 223; *pursotrikhas*, 'tawny-maned', 225; *monokhala*, 'solid-hooved', 225; *poikilodermonas*, 'spotted-skinned', 226)? Beside this spectacle, the son of Peleus and Thetis is a colourless character. And so he remains for some time, introducing himself with his father's name, as if he has not yet become a person in his own right but has only his formulaic epithets, which do not yet conjure up a hero as they do in Homer. This is in keeping with one of the major themes of the play: characters becoming themselves. Thus Agamemnon had introduced himself through his entanglement with the daughters of Leda, before he assumed his identifiable literary persona.[4]

Achilles' introductory speech fits him into the play thematically, and into the pseudo-plot, which is almost a play within the play: the fiction of the marriage proposal, intended to be in name only, but fast becoming a reality (cf. 128). Agamemnon had worked out this plot to get himself out of the *aporia*. *Tekhnas porizō* ('I work out schemes', 745): but he realises and lets us know that this clever devising has created a new impasse. To block further Agamemnon's way forward is Achilles' mission in the drama. Achilles explains that he has come as a legate to his chief to complain about the martial inactivity and marital inequality of the men (804ff.). He himself has no wife, but there is, thanks to Agamemnon's contriving, an expectant bride inside the tent waiting to meet him. Circumstances have brought these two children of the great ones together. They are so perfectly matched. It is a pity that it is not to be. But there are other factors at work. Achilles connects the passion for war (*deinos . . . erōs*, 'terrible love', 808) with marriage and family life. War is what unites the citizens more than anything else, but it is also the greatest disrupter of social life. This is surely one of its ambiguities. The war lust to Achilles' mind is unnatural (808, *ouk aneu theōn*, 'not without gods', 809). *Erōs* and its relation to war and strife are the subject of the first stasimon in which the chorus sings of the two kinds of *erōs*, one good, but another that maddens men. So also Agamemnon had spoken of a Greece diseased *kata theon tina* ('thanks to some god', 411); and at line 1264 will say that 'some Aphrodite' has maddened the army of the Greeks. But even that madness for war is not yet pervasive, for despite Agamemnon's earlier

fears (526–35), there seems to be no threat from the army and even a willingness – on the part of the Myrmidons, at least – to give up the expedition. Achilles says plainly (817) that his men are growing restive: either do something or let us go home. Even the fierce Myrmidons have not yet realised their identity. But they will when they find out that Achilles himself is contributing to the delay. Now all they want to know is *ti menomen*, 'what are we waiting for?' (815)[5]

Achilles' monologue has set up a suspenseful scene: we know that Agamemnon is not in his tent, but that Clytemnestra is.[6] Now there will have to be a meeting. It is a tense and embarrassing confrontation. A prudish Achilles is rather a silly figure with his exclamation *o potnia aidōs* ('o lady reverence', 821), but he has been described throughout as a unique young person. His education has given him an old-fashioned modesty (708f.). He is not accustomed to the company of women (830) and is about to make an exit. This action would have frustrated the spectators beyond bearing. We have been waiting expectantly for the marriage (not just marriage in general) to be brought up.

Gradually the embarrassment moves from the modest youth (not any youth, but Achilles, here depicted as any youth) to the mature matron (here depicted as the generalised matron, not yet her tragic self), as Clytemnestra hears that Achilles never wooed her daughter (841f.). Part of the element of suspense in the *Iphigenia at Aulis* is in the movement from the general to the particular: Achilles' general talk about marriage is answered by Clytemnestra's specific overtures to her purported son-in-law. The generalised characters, recognisable types, but nothing else, begin to become the characters that fit their famous names. The suspense of how they will get from one point to the expected next point is kept up.

There is a similar reversal in nearly every episode. It might, therefore, be profitable to pause at this dramatic juncture to review even sketchily the pattern of reversal in the play.[7] In the prologue Agamemnon reverses himself not once, but twice: in the first message to his wife which is a reversal of his statement (96) that he would never kill his daughter, and in the second letter in which he reverses the first. The old servant changes from scolding his master for not being able to make up his mind to sympathising with the second change of mind. In the quarrel between Menelaus and Agamemnon, the two brothers change roles chiastically. In the scene under discussion, Achilles and Clytemnestra exchange roles: 'I am where you are' could equally be said of these two as of the two brothers. This pattern continues: in the first scene between Agamemnon and his wife, Clytemnestra's ignorance of the purpose of the trip to Aulis puts her at a severe disadvantage; but in the second scene the tables are turned and Agamemnon is ignorant of the extent of his wife's knowledge of the proposed sacrifice. Finally in the exodos Iphigenia rejects the role of victim to become heroine: of this change more of course will be said.

The meeting of Achilles and Clytemnestra is about to end with mutual

farewells (851, 853) and without their learning all that is necessary. But, 'my friend, descendant of Aeacus, wait!' (855). The old servant hurries on to give the hoped for delay. We recognise this man as the one person sympathetic to Iphigenia who has all the necessary information. Once again the suspense is kept up, the delicious suspense of watching others find out what we already know. As inane as some of the lines in this episode may appear in the study – for example, Achilles' compliment to Clytemnestra on her two-line introduction of herself (829) – the scene, delicately suspenseful as it is must have been a delight on stage. Here, after the entrance of the old man, we are kept waiting by the somewhat tedious discussion of the slave's ownership, though this does have the added function of making his revelation more credible, of reminding us of the recurrent theme of fidelity, and of spotlighting an important aspect of Achilles' character. Achilles perceives himself as a free agent (928f.) and intends to remain one (930): this Achilles – in that he is the righteous defender of his own honour – has this much at least in common with his Homeric self whom he comes to be more and more like as the play develops. On the other hand his waiting on the sidelines in order to avoid quarrelling with Agamemnon is a bit un-Achillean. Like Agamemnon, Achilles is self-oriented, a Hellenic characteristic no doubt, but stressed in this play beyond the normal. His nicety about what is his and what is not is subtle characterisation – for example, *korē . . . emē phatistheis'* ('called my bride', 935f.); *toumon demas* ('my body', 940); *emous gamous* ('my marriage', 941) – as distinct from what is anyone else's – *soi* (937); *sēn* (939); *sos* (940), to offer but a few examples. He even shows pity commensurate with his view of himself (934). And when he brings the girl into the picture (942f.), it is in relation to the wrong done himself.

This scene may remind us of the bitter debate between Agamemnon and his brother in the first episode, the bitterness of which is in turn reminiscent of the exodos of the *Medea*, where Jason and Medea do verbal battle over the responsibility for the children's death, a battle that seems all the more cynical when it is seen as a piece with the disputes over the ownership of those same children. The two brothers – though the daughter's and niece's life is at stake – seem to be arguing over the ownership of property more than anything else. To Menelaus Iphigenia is always '*your* daughter' (cf. 328, 358, 361, 364, 372) to which Agamemnon opposes various belongings of Menelaus: *sōn kakōn* ('your troubles/evils', 384); *son sthenos* ('your strength', 393); *to son* ('yours', 396). In lines 329–331, the two brothers emphasise their separateness and the separateness of their belongings:

> Αγ. τί δέ σε τἀμὰ δεῖ φυλάσσειν; οὐκ ἀναισχύντου τόδε;
> Με. ὅτι τὸ βούλεσθαί μ' ἔκνιζε· σὸς δὲ δοῦλος οὐκ ἔφυν.
> Αγ. οὐχὶ δεινά; τὸν ἐμὸν οἰκεῖν οἶκον οὐκ ἐάσομαι;
>
> *Aga.* What business have you watching my affairs?
> That shows your shamelessness!

Men. Because I wanted to. I wasn't born your slave.
Aga. Shocking! Am I not to be allowed to run my own household?

It is interesting that Menelaus in this scene and elsewhere is identified through his troubles (384; cf. 658 where Iphigenia wishes away the war and *ta Meneleō kaka*, 'the troubles of Menelaus'). That is, Menelaus' identity is little more than as the husband of Helen and therefore as the owner of *kaka* of a particular kind. It is a characterisation that fits him, not only in this play but throughout his literary career. Achilles too is identified with and through one of his belongings. Achilles has a name. It counts for him as much as *aidōs* does for Hippolytus (compare especially his line 940 with *Hippolytus* 653–5). But Achilles is a youth who grows into his more traditional role as his education continues in the course of the drama.

The premise on which Clytemnestra bases her appeal to Achilles bears out this identification: Achilles was *called* the husband of Iphigenia (908); she was *called* his wife (904); his *name* has therefore brought ruin to Clytemnestra (910). Achilles' responsibility is clear. Nor does he reject it, as another man might have done. Agamemnon, for example, does not expect Achilles ever to become involved in his scheme. He surely does not anticipate Achilles' acceptance of the responsibility to protect the girl. Clytemnestra's plea is accepted in full by Achilles in his speech (919–74). He is a man who has not yet learned to accept the ways of wicked men (709). He therefore refuses to accept the discrepancy between *logos/onoma* ('word'/'name') and *ergon* ('deed'), the hallmark of the hated liar to the Homeric Achilles. His name is virtually equivalent to his reality: he cannot allow it to be taken so lightly (cf. 937–9). His name cannot be taken and used without his permission. He is certain of his proprietorial rights here, just as he himself would not touch another man's wife (834). His possessions and Agamemnon's are distinct (859), a fact which Agamemnon has failed to recognise in usurping Achilles' name. Achilles will not bear it lightly (897), although (at 850) he had advised Clytemnestra to do just that when she first discovered that something was amiss in the marriage plans. It is not at this point the individual girl's life about which Achilles is concerned (959f.); thousands of girls are hunting for marriage with him (are we meant here to think of the masses of men that gathered at the house of Tyndareus years ago?). That Achilles is not yet interested in the girl as an individual is confirmed when he tells Clytemnestra not to bring Iphigenia into his sight (998f.). The principle (indeed, the principle of ownership) is at stake, not the life of an individual. This will change when he actually does see the girl, and is taught by her what *aretē* ('virtue') is. Nor is he offended by the deception *per se* (962–7): he would have lent his name to Greece, had the good of the common endeavour depended on it. No, it is the insult to his integrity, to his very existence, or so he says (perhaps hyperbolically): *nun d'ouden eimi* ('now I am nothing', 968). Without his name and the respect it demands, he *is* nothing. Agamemnon is guilty of *hubris* against him.

If all else fails – as it is bound to do – Achilles gives his word that he will defend the girl (1028ff).[8] He will show Agamemnon that the *name* Achilles defines a force to be reckoned with. He promises to become a *god* to Clytemnestra though not one right now (*ouk ōn all' homōs genēsomai*, 974); for like the *deus ex machina* Achilles will come just in time to save the situation when it seems hopeless.[9] The war may yet be averted. Achilles is present to offer this hope. But can this be the Achilles we know, the one sung of in heroic verse? Surely not, for not only is the character wrong, but it is in war that Achilles wins his fame. The poetic Achilles would not shrink from offending Agamemnon nor the army. He would not in so urgent a matter prefer calculation to the use of strength (1019f., 1021).

The third stasimon, in a song that juxtaposes the marriage of Peleus and Thetis to the mock-marriage of Achilles and Iphigenia, picks up the themes of marriage and of the character and heritage of Achilles. In the previous episode alone reference is made to his ancestry at lines 802, 812, 819, 836, 855f., 896, 901, 903, 909, 946, 948f., 975f. The strophe tells of the famous wedding, offering a scene of festivity, good cheer, music and dancing, with the gods in attendance. The antistrophe moves on to the arrival of the band of Centaurs and the prophecy of Achilles' birth, his going to Troy to burn the land of Priam, and the armour made for him by Hephaestus as a gift to his mother. At this wedding long ago, the expedition to Troy and Achilles' part in it were already predicted. His present action in defending Iphigenia is, therefore, contradictory: for if she does not die, the Trojan war cannot take place and Achilles cannot win his undying glory. It is as if Euripides has moved the choice of Achilles from the death of Patroclus and revenge for him to the sacrifice of Iphigenia. And Achilles' first choice is to defend the girl and give up the expedition for a more ordinary life and at the same time volunteer to risk his life for the unheroic life of marriage and family, another man's family in fact until he sees Iphigenia. The fates of Achilles and Iphigenia are linked in the ode, as they were in the previous scene (especially at lines 1006f.) and will be in the next. The reference to the armour also hints at Achilles' choice and at his death, for the making of this armour and Achilles' wearing it to kill Hector in the *Iliad* seal his doom as he and his mother know. The expedition to Troy will ultimately bring death to both Iphigenia and Achilles. But she must die first to set things in motion, to prepare for the deaths of many.

Then the chorus, singing of the death of Iphigenia, asks where are *aidōs* and *aretē* (1089f.). They conclude that *aretē* is disregarded (1093f.) and that *anomia* ('lawlessness') is stronger than the *nomoi* ('laws'). The word *aidōs* harks back to Achilles' modesty in the previous scene (especially 821) and to Clytemnestra's subsequent embarrassment and forward to Iphigenia's modesty in the exodos (1340–44); and by contrast all around to the shamelessness of the Atreidae and Helen. Reference to *aretē* reminds us of Achilles' education at Chiron's knee (1066; cf. 927) and of the education to

virtue at which Helen failed in another choral song (561ff.), and foreshadows Iphigenia's decision to attain *aretē*, to be successful, not to be a victim, but to make victims (not that she sees her role in that way, but that is the effect of her decision).[10] Thus this choral ode hints at and gives perspective to the changes of role of both Achilles and Iphigenia in the exodos.

In the scene that follows, between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, Agamemnon continues to lose sympathy, as he continues – as long as he is able – to deceive his wife with talk of marriage. But still he juxtaposes marriage and sacrifice, taking advantage of similarities in language and cult between the two,[11] letting slip clues to his mental state of *aporia*. The tables have been turned once more: now we watch Agamemnon learn what we already know, that his wife and daughter are no longer ignorant of his plans. Agamemnon has been *ekdēmos*. While he is planning with Calchas to perform the sacrifice with all speed, his family is planning to thwart his plans. His plans have failed to take into account the existence of others as subjects.[12]

'Are you going to kill your daughter and mine?' (1131). When – after a little preliminary suspenseful stalling – Clytemnestra finally asks her real question, it is clean and to the point and cuts deep. Its simplicity amid all the deceitfulness is startling. It certainly startles Agamemnon into an extrametric exclamation. He laments his fate and tries to put the responsibility outside himself, as when, for example, he comes close to blaming his wife for knowing (1140). 'Here I am silent,' he says (1144f.), 'for there is no use in adding shame to the disaster by speaking falsely.' An ironic couplet: he has been lying to his wife all along and only ceases to do so when he has been found out: only then does lying become shameful. To avoid telling more lies he must be silent, at least until he thinks of more convincing lies. But not yet has he been pushed or pushed himself to the breaking point at which he must find a new truth, a truth that will extricate him from the *aporia*, that tragic balance of Iphigenia and Helen. He will find this new truth when he has to, when it is his last turn to speak.

But for now it is Clytemnestra's turn to speak the truth. New facts come out about her marriage and his, things she has learned to live with, but which this fateful situation has pushed to the fore. We are seeing now a new Clytemnestra: a Clytemnestra for whom the present has given the past a new reality. A new turning point has been reached in her life and there will be no possibility of resolving it within the confines of this tragedy. Tyndareus had saved Agamemnon from vengeance at the hands of Clytemnestra's brothers, the Dioscuri. But Tyndareus belongs to the past. Agamemnon, in repeating his past crime, is treading on very shaky ground. Now Clytemnestra balances the two families, hers and Helen's (1166–70, 1202–5) in a juxtaposition that gives a new side to the whole story, and which shoves Agamemnon into a defensive position. Her revelation, like Menelaus' in the first episode, presents a new Agamemnon. And a different Agamemnon from the one we have been watching throughout will emerge from what is left after her speech. Her threat makes vain Agamemnon's last pretext for killing the

girl, his fear of the army, his fear that the army will destroy Mycenae, going so far as to bring in the tearing down of the Cyclopean walls, and kill him and his household; for in killing Iphigenia he will himself unstabilise his marriage and destroy his family. He must therefore find a new motive. The army of the Greeks had been a weight in the scale, but opposed to it is the overwhelming moral imperative to protect and not to hurt his family. He had used the army as a danger to his family, but now Clytemnestra reminds him that he is and is seen as the only danger. But now at the last he remembers – is not all discovery a kind of remembering? – the argument suggested to him by Menelaus.

The essence of tragedy is change, for all that it juxtaposes change to timelessness. People doing things change what is. Its situation is *aporia*, the stalling place in time and circumstance where a human being is forced to choose, but where both ways are disastrous and where not to decide is not an option. Agamemnon is there now. He had, in fact, been there before and had made the opposite choice. For all his delays, for all his attempts to put the responsibility elsewhere, the choice is his. He has chosen before, changed his mind and chosen again (as Helen did). He has reached that 'nick of time'[13] which Ajax could meet only by dying, but which Agamemnon can face only by living up to the reality of himself that the epic and tragic poets have given him. Clytemnestra has accused him of what we know to be the truth: that only the generalship matters to him now (1194f.). Menelaus has already made that same accusation. Agamemnon must face the choice once again, the kind of choice that no man can face once for all, but that has to be made again and again until the deed is done. He can choose to be the victim of circumstances and change or he can fix his identity as the leader of a great undertaking. The new motive takes care of the personal charge against him, since it is outside himself and bigger than any individual. It must be his motive, his desire, his and not another's, because as leader of all the Greeks, he must be their aspirations. Agamemnon chooses, now for the last time, to be not a man but an identity, to be the leader and, therefore, the apologist for the greatest common event in Greek history.

Unlike other parents of sacrificial victims in Euripides, who try to find alternatives for the deaths of their children, Agamemnon has busied himself with thinking of reasons why the sacrifice must take place, and ways in which he can avoid personal responsibility for it. The tragic poet is after all limited by history, though he can suggest alternatives and keep them alive until the last minute. Clytemnestra, on the other hand, suggests alternatives to the sacrifice of Iphigenia: why not cast lots or sacrifice Helen's child (1196–1202)? She would leave it to chance or to justice – for are they not virtually equivalent in her perception of reality (cf. 1034f.)? But she is powerless to help against the father who insists upon the sacrifice. Agamemnon, because he has accepted this course of action, voluntarily or not (or both), cannot leave the matter to luck. He cannot even let the principle of right take the decision from him: it must be *his* daughter, because his reality depends upon

it. He is, therefore, a most unusual parent. Creon in the *Phoenissae* offered his son a plan of escape, even at the expense of the city over which he ruled. In the *Heraclidae*, the suggestion is made to cast lots rather than let Macaria die, though her death is to be the sacrifice to save the sons of Heracles. In the *Hecabe*, the aged mother begs with all her heart for her daughter's life, and even offers her own in its place. In each of these cases the value of the child's life and love for the child are emphasised. Menoeceus and Macaria are offered an escape, and so have freedom of choice. Polyxena (in the *Hecabe*) has been reduced from princely estate to squalid slavery and is glad to die, for in death she sees her only opportunity for freedom with integrity. But Iphigenia, mercilessly duped by her own father, thought that she had all her life to look forward to in the palace of a royal husband (1228–30) and finds that she is to be sacrificed and not for the salvation of her people, but for Helen. Iphigenia, denied any choice, must invent her freedom of choice. She must invent a new reality to stave off a meaningless death, to give meaning to the life that must be stopped at Aulis, that cannot gain its meaning by the natural means of marriage and continuance. The contrast between her real and pathetic situation and the one promised to her is made most clear by the juxtaposition of her scene of supplication and denial to the third stasimon which sang of the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, whose son Iphigenia expected to marry.[14] Iphigenia, like the other women involved (with the exception of Helen), is to be one of the victims of war. But she becomes aware of her status as victim and is able to reverse it in time. Clytemnestra is one of the victims of war now, as she had been in the past the victim of Agamemnon's private violence against her former husband. This time she will nurse her wrong as she promised (1171–84). She will be evil. One of the great losses in this tragedy is the conversion of Clytemnestra from the perfect wife to her opposite. She could have been another Penelope. Learning comes through suffering, but what it teaches is not always forgiveness or justice. Clytemnestra had forgiven her husband once. But he did not learn from her suffering nor from his own danger and supplication. The tragic poet is, after all, nourished by history.

Iphigenia takes over for her mother and for her father. She assumes her mother's argument for now, but her father's erstwhile position. She is a suppliant at her father's knee (1216), as he had been long ago (1156) in the almost forgotten past. She pleads for her life, reminding her forgetful parent of their former life together, bringing up the sweet endearments exchanged between them. This is a far cry from what Agamemnon expected from her (463f.), a curse on him and his friends; and a far cry too from the bitter memory Clytemnestra has just brought up of an almost forgotten incident, recalled to her mind under the pressure of the present wrong. But Agamemnon has forgotten what passed between them. He looks away (1238; cf. 320). He cannot stand by to be reminded of a past he has rejected. Agamemnon's memory is selective as it had been when he introduced himself and the legend in which he found himself as a minor character moved to the centre.

The Agamemnon who could never kill his child is gone: *aporia* has pushed him out of the play. In the previous scene he had envied his daughter (*zēlō se*, 'I envy you', 677), had envied her ignorance of the plot, of the new state of affairs that her arrival had created. His envy there had underscored the dramatic interest of the scene: the knowledge or ignorance of the several characters as to the facts. It had emphasised, too, the irony of those facts: that once Iphigenia became a participant in the dramatic interest her doom was sealed, but so was Agamemnon's. The marriage was used to bring the girl to Aulis, for without it there could be no plot. But once she arrives, the marriage becomes not only irrelevant but a disruption, a delaying tactic to the central plot. Agamemnon has created the situation through a series of actions that he can no longer change even when he wants to. But now he is also part of another story, with another dramatic focus: his wife's story. In her plot the war itself will be only a long delay, during which she will wait in sorrow all the days that she must see all chairs empty of her daughter.

Tragedy is – is it not? – the statement in no uncertain terms of the inevitability of the unavoidable.[15] We know the stories. The characters may try to avoid them but we know they cannot. What they do instead is make them happen. They do, by trying to avoid the conclusions of their stories, suggest alternatives, others ways of doing, being, and knowing, which highlight their own choices. No doubt Agamemnon's words express a real anguish on his part, just as earlier when he had been agonising over his decision, he had envied the old man for not being in the position to have to make big decisions: he had envied those who do not have to worry, who are not in possession of classified information of state affairs (16, 17, 19). And rightly the old man had chided him for this envy. The choice of a public career was his own: Menelaus has informed against him. Agamemnon is not innocent, no more so, surely, than Menelaus had been made to seem in Agamemnon's monologue. He had wished that he could remain at home with his family (657), but there was a time before that when he wanted more than anything to become general of the Panhellenic forces. This is one of his few successes: he has failed or been thwarted in nearly every plan or scheme after that. Having been made general he must somewhere along the line decide to *be* general, even when too much is demanded of him. Even at the last minute there had been a choice. Menelaus suggests abandoning the expedition, but Agamemnon decides that he must go ahead with it. Rather than risk the consequences that he expects from the army, he will determine its course. The irony is that what he sacrifices, by being general and having power over the men, by being able to embody their aspirations, is his individuality, his right to make personal decisions and put his own concerns and desires above those of the army, whose concerns must be his. He has chosen their function and fate and even their will along with his own. But even before the war begins he sees himself as a victim and as a slave to the multitude. In certain respects, like Iphigenia and Helen, who ultimately become symbols independent of their personalities, Agamemnon is depersonalised by the war

and by the tradition that demands of him that he be one thing (commander-in-chief) and not another (father and protector of all his children). His acceptance of this role is clear when he takes to himself the argument for the war that is depersonalised and which is seen in the play to have no relation to reality.

Iphigenia pleads too late. Earlier Agamemnon had felt the same way as she does now. But remembrance of the past has no relation to Agamemnon's new reality. The decision was made in the first episode. The ignorance of that decision was eliminated as a subject of dramatic interest – without Iphigenia's presence – in the previous episode by the old man when he finally had the opportunity to deliver his message. That had been his purpose from the start, but it had been delayed by the forces who demanded war (namely Menelaus). It is Agamemnon's scene, but Iphigenia does not know it. It is his scene to take up his identity. Iphigenia tries to force him to use reason, if not love, by asking what the marriage of Helen and Paris has to do with her (1236f.). Personally it has nothing to do with her. Agamemnon and Menelaus have both seen this. Agamemnon, for this very reason, must avoid the challenge. Instead he takes up the abstract, patriotic argument which removes all individual motivation from the picture.

But Iphigenia wants to live. She rounds off her plea with those famous lines, those shocking, but beautiful lines that say life should go on, that there is more to living than the heroism of violence, that there is the quiet heroism of endurance. Redemption for our failure to live up to the heroic battle against time and change can be found in living our lives as nature has taught us and as civilisation has taught us in humanity's brilliant pastime, the unheroic struggle to deny death. 'It is better,' she cries out, not in despair but in affirmation, 'to live badly than to die heroically' (1252). How better could she have expressed Achilles' affirmation of life from the depths of Hades?[16] Her statement here is the opposite of all those of other self-sacrificing young people in other plays. But unlike most of them, Iphigenia has no defender. The alternative *kalōs thanein* ('to die with honour') is not really open to her until after this plea has been made. She is forced by her father's betrayal to be her own advocate. She has no freedom of choice. In Agamemnon's comparison of his situation to another in the past, we see that he has left out an element: Tyndareus let his daughter choose. It is only Iphigenia's first reaction, her plea for life, that makes her second possible. Only then is there a choice, not to live or to die, but to die *kalōs* ('well') or *kakōs* ('badly').

Agamemnon must answer this plea. But he does not. He fumbles about for reasons. Finally he is able to generalise. He manages to become eloquent, to use and improve on what Menelaus had claimed as the reason to go to war and to say that Menelaus has nothing to do with it. At the very least Menelaus has supplied an argument, as in fact earlier he had furnished the argument against the expedition. This is a rhetorical argument. But it does not persuade Iphigenia. In her lament she sings of the unholy sacrifice of an unholy father (1317f.). But he is not there to hear her: she is no longer

a force for delay. Nor does Iphigenia accept the generalised cause, but she sings of Paris and Helen (1294–1309, 1334f.) and of the Judgment of Paris which brings death to her.

And suddenly – the last hope, the last possibility for reprieve – Achilles appears with his few attendants and with others off-stage in hot pursuit. Achilles remains true to his word. He will defend the girl in spite of the danger. He is willing to take the risk her father had refused, for a girl he has never seen. And now for the first time he sees her. We see him seeing her and falling in love.[17] He sees her saying with perfect ingenuousness the opposite of what she had said, of what everyone in the play had said. We see her reject the role of victim. We see her turn herself into a symbol under which all the Greeks will fight for freedom and glory.

How could Achilles fail to fall in love with this ideal? The seeds of this love were in him all along and in his ancestry and name. By a cruel irony he realises that he wants to marry her, now that she has given herself to death. 'Death is a terrible thing,' says this young man who is willing to risk death to protect her (1415). Achilles wants what cannot be. He embodies, but is apparently not aware of, the tragic *aporia*. He will be prepared to stand by and save her, just in case. But when he suggests that she might grow faint-hearted at the sight of the knife, he does not seem to realise that he could no longer in that event love her for the ideal of courage she now represents. She has brought him to his identification with his role as that great Achilles who thought nothing of death. And she has ended the delay. She will not blanch at the sight of the steel. She will not let anyone die for her. But for her mother and for Achilles who love her, the idealism, love and bravery have created an unbearable loss.

The army can sail from Aulis. The literal *aporia* and *aploia* are broken. In the prologue Agamemnon had told of the events that brought the army to Aulis. The only barrier to this momentum is 'the narrow strait of Aulis' (*stenopor' Aulidis bathra*, 81). Here the army's inevitable march forward is slowed down. Iphigenia, by her willing sacrifice of life, has opened the passage without further bloodshed. The army will not slow down its progress by fighting within itself. It is united by a common cause. But it was always united in a common cause and that cause was Helen. Iphigenia has taken on a new identity, an identity that the choice of death and only death has pushed upon her. But this identity does not fit her. Because it is Helen's.

NOTES

1. See Eur. *El.* 1102.
2. Foley (1985), esp. 68-78.
3. For further comments on this ode, see chapters III and V below.
4. For details on Achilles' role, see chapter IV below.
5. As Vellacott (1975), 43, points out: 'The Myrmidons with their question, What are we waiting for? are an important part of the play's ironic pattern.' He goes on to suggest that 'if rowing had not been the obvious course, the Myrmidons would have nothing to complain of'. Although I agree that the sacrifice of Iphigenia serves a purpose other than the attaining of

favourable winds, I am not so sure that the ironic pattern of the drama extends to the windlessness. Surely the terms of the oracle, which guarantee total victory over the Trojans beyond just getting there, must be taken into consideration.

6. See Halleran (1985), 41 on 'the entrance of the "wrong" person'.

7. For a fuller investigation of this aspect of the play, see Chant (1986), *passim*.

8. See Vellacott (1975), 45, on the chorus' condemnation of Achilles and their certainty that he will not make good his promise.

9. Achilles offers to be a *deus ex machina*, but he is upstaged by Iphigenia; cf. Foley (1985), 66 and note.

10. See Heilman (1968), 28: 'In disaster, we are victims; in tragedy, we make victims, of others or of ourselves.'

11. See Foley (1985), 71f.

12. Of course he is not alone in this. Menelaus, Achilles, Clytemnestra, all think of themselves first, but for each this selfishness is alleviated at one time or another. Menelaus is moved by his brother's tears not only to *see* his brother as a subject but even to say that he *is* where his brother is (cf. Stahl [1977], 171f. on Menelaus' 'extra-dramatic' communication with his brother). It is too late, but at the moment it is right for him, even though the situation has changed for his brother. Clytemnestra may concentrate on what the loss means to *her* (cf. Vellacott [1975], 46-48), but she has shown a sympathetic understanding of others' feelings (her husband's tears, her daughter's eagerness to embrace her father, Achilles' bashfulness regarding the marriage). Achilles, it is true, blusters about his dignity and his name, but he too has shown an interest in others' feelings (his men's, Clytemnestra's) and *he does come back* when he has failed with the men. And (*pace* Vellacott [1975], 44) he has tried to do something positive as evidenced by his being accused of uxoriousness by his men.

13. See Rosenmeyer (1963), 155-98.

14. On the third stasimon, see Walsh (1974) and Foley (1985), 81-3.

15. Heilman (1968), 30, expresses another opinion: 'Tragedy is concerned with the inevitability of the avoidable.' This is, perhaps, one of the anomalies of the tragic experience.

16. *Odyssey* 11.488-91.

17. This way of seeing tragic characters seeing is owed to Gellie (1972), 3.

III. THE CAUSE OF WAR: POLUANOROS AMPHI GUNAIKOS?

Old Beginnings

> *It is night. A torch on the stage tells us this. Sleep reigns over the set, an army camp. Peace and calm and the restful time hide the bloody, warring realities that day will bring all too soon. An impatient man paces before his hut. We know him. He tells us that he is the husband of Clytemnestra. His sleepless presence, the tension of his actions jar the quiet of the night. He is distressed with fear and queasiness of choices that seem to him to be forced upon him. Like the Nurse in the prologue of* Medea, *he tries to understand the present in terms of the past. In the past, there was a man faced with* aporia *like himself.*

That man could not find a way to avoid bloodshed and grave political problems. He let his daughter choose.

Agamemnon tells us what story we are caught in, why we are in an army camp, why he is in Aulis spending a sleepless night. But his statement is not an account of objective fact, of historical reality. It is a personal and relativistic commentary on the events that have led up to this monumental expedition and this tragic *aporia*. It is a narrative of the facts as he sees them and has deliberately chosen to see them. A situation is not a thing in itself (as Aristotle suggests at *Poetics* 1448a1): drama represents people in action. Agamemnon's speech shows us the pause before the outbreak of war and begins to show us how these things occur, how people choose in the time of crisis. He sets up the pattern that is to be the action of the play.

How does Agamemnon interpret the events that have put him into the situation of *aporia*? He goes back to the daughters of Leda, presented as *parthenoi*, 'maidens', marriageable young women. He starts before it all started, when the much-married Helen was *parthenos*. Then Helen was the *ingénue*, the type that Iphigenia is in this play. Thus he introduces early in his monologue both the marriage theme and the ironic relationship between Helen and Iphigenia that is to become so prominent by the end of the action. Having taken care of himself and his wife and his relationship to this family by the simple means of naming his wife, Agamemnon names Helen, emphatically placing her at the beginning of his third line, the last name in his list. From the name he begins the narrative of events in a complex story of choices that have brought him and a great army to Aulis. The story begins, in his telling of it, with the suit for Helen's hand. This was the cause of it all. Another man – as others do throughout the drama – might have seen another beginning, earlier or later, but we have Agamemnon's account as our only introduction. We must consider the source and we do when we know

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III. TRAGIC APORIA: A STUDY OF EURIPIDES' IPHIGENIA AT AULIS

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