VII.—Agamemnon in the *Iphigeneia at Aulis:* A Man in an Age of Crisis

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The Agamemnon in the *Iphigeneia at Aulis* is one of the great achievements in the later work of Euripides in combining mythology and psychology. Agamemnon as the leader of the expedition against Troy has to make the choice of either sacrificing his honor and position or his child. In this extreme situation he is presented as a man with a "modern" late fifth century mind, like a contemporary Athenian office-holder, essentially decent, but not quite up to the supreme test, wavering between the ambition of public office and the longing for an untroubled private existence. In his ἀμηχανία he resorts to deceit against his better nature and his conscience; but the only result is the implacable hatred of his wife and her turn from a paragon of virtue to the potential murderess. At the end Agamemnon overcomes, like Iphigeneia, his personal and private concerns by dedication to the greater cause of the Panhellenic ideal. Behind Agamemnon's character and situation stands the sceptical and sad philosophy of an age of crisis and transition, with man as agent and victim of τύχη, ἀνάγκη and ἄτη.

Agamemnon's character and role in the *Iphigeneia at Aulis* has been judged and misjudged from different points of view.[1] It deserves a new consideration as one of Euripides' most masterly creations in combining mythology and psychology. The drama presents three major and two minor characters, but it is on Aga-

[1] In addition to the introductions and notes of the editions by Paley, Headlam, England, and Weil (*Sept Tragédies d'Euripide*), see G. Murray, *Euripides and his Age* (London, 1913) 173–81; E. Petersen, *Die Attische Tragoedie als Bild-und Buehnenkunst* (Bonn, 1915) 486–89; L. Parmentier, "L'Iphigénie à Aulis d'Euripide," *Bull. Acad. Belg.*, classe lettres, 5.12 (1926) 262–73; B. Snell, "Aischylos und das Handeln im Drama," *Philologus*, suppl. 20 (1928) 148–60; G. Norwood, *Greek Tragedy* (Boston, 1928) 285–89; M. Pohlenz, *Die Griechische Tragoedie* (Leipzig, 1930) 495–505; E. Howald, *Die Griechische Tragoedie* (Muenchen, 1930) 174–76; W. N. Bates, *Euripides. A Student of Human Nature* (Philadelphia, 1930) 146–54; D. L. Page, *Actors' Interpolations in Greek Tragedy, studied with special reference to Euripides' Iphigeneia in Aulis* (Oxford, 1934) 122–216; W. H. Friedrich, "Zur Aulischen Iphigenie," *Hermes* 70 (1935) 73–100; D. F. W. van Lennep, *Euripides ποιητὴς σοφός* (Amsterdam, 1935) 224–41; A. Lesky, *Die Griechische Tragoedie* (Stuttgart-Leipzig, 1938) 212–16; H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (London, 1939) 366–71; W. Schmid-O. Staehlin, *Geschichte d. gr. Lit.* 1.3 (München, 1940) 631–57; G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London, 1941); W. C. Greene, *Moira* (Cambridge, Mass., 1944) 208–10; A. Rivier, *Essai sur le Tragique d'Euripide* (Lausanne, 1944) 76–86; A. Bonnard, "Iphigénie à Aulide, Tragique et Poésie," *Mus. Helv.* 2 (1945) 87–107; F. Martinazzoli, *Euripide* (Roma, 1946) 361–86; V. Frey, "Betrachtungen zu Euripides' Aulischer Iphigenie," *Mus. Helv.* 4 (1947) 39–51.

memnon that the poet has concentrated much of his mature art and philosophy of life.

Agamemnon is the representative of an age of political and moral crisis[2] whose manifestations are ever present in the poetry, literature, and philosophy of the time. In one of the most striking passages (1136), when he has to face his wife and his daughter after the vain attempt to deceive them about the impending sacrifice, he sums up his plight:

ὦ πότνια μοῖρα καὶ τύχη δαίμων τ' ἐμός.

This triple aspect of the superhuman powers which thwart man's planning reflects both a feeling of resignation and the search for escape from an apparently helpless interpenetration of situation and character, of guilt and necessity. Decades of war and civil war have undermined not only the old religious and moral traditions, but also the new standards of man's proud self-assurance as the measure of all things.

In his lack of balance, direction, and decision, Agamemnon is a close relative to other characters in later Euripidean drama.[3] His short but intense monologues[4] read like a confession of their author who while working at this drama sought refuge from the troubles of his strife-torn city at the court of a ruler in a half-civilized country at what was then the end of the world. There is a note of sadness from the very beginning of the drama in the discussion between the apparently powerful king and the old slave. The more the belief in power as a way to happiness was a popular issue of this, as of any, age of moral uncertainty, the more emphatically Euripides presents his Agamemnon as a proof of how "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." It is the sum of Euripides' own life experience which makes the slave say to his royal master (31–33):

δεῖ δέ σε χαίρειν καὶ λυπεῖσθαι·
θνητὸς γὰρ ἔφυς. κἂν μὴ σὺ θέλῃς,
τὰ θεῶν οὕτω βουλόμεν' ἔσται.

[2] Snell, 152–54; Pohlenz, 502; Bonnard, 96. For the spirit of these years in general see W. Jaeger, *Die griech. Staatsethik im Zeitalter d. Platon* (Berlin, 1924).

[3] For the human types in later Euripidean tragedy see F. Solmsen, "Euripides' Ion im Vergleich mit anderen Tragoedien," *Hermes* 69 (1934) 390–419.

[4] Monologues as expression of ἀμηχανία: W. Schadewaldt, *Monolog und Selbstgespraech* (Berlin, 1926) 233 f.

And the king confirms that in words which recall the wisdom of the Herodotean Solon (161 f.): *θνητῶν δ' ὄλβιος εἰς τέλος οὐδεὶς οὐδ' εὐδαίμων.* The reader of the analysis of the prevailing conditions in Thucydides 3.82 and 83 will not need look afar for the background of this melancholy outlook. It is a life under the yoke of *ἀνάγκη* (443), tossed about between the extremes of scepticism and bigotry: the *Bacchae* and the *Iphigeneia* were written by the same man at the same time.

This is the root from which grows the tragic *ἀμηχανία* of a man who, no matter whether or how he decides to act, must commit a wrong (1256 f.): *δεινῶς δ' ἔχει μοι ταῦτα τολμῆσαι . . . δεινῶς δὲ καὶ μή.* He feels forsaken by the gods (536 f.): *ὡς ἠπόρημαι πρὸς θεῶν.* But this experience of defeat (745): *παντα χῇ νικώμενος*, brings Agamemnon close to the audience and makes it easy for the spectator to identify himself with him[5] and to participate in his thoughts and emotions. Agamemnon thus is at the same time the Athenian *στρατηγός* of the Peloponnesian War and the famous king of old. The great effect of this as of other Euripidean dramas consists in the fact that a man with a late fifth century mind has to act in an extreme situation as presented in a mythological tradition grown out of a more primitive moral and social order. We may think of a comparable phenomenon in the historical drama of Shakespeare or Schiller; here too we see "modern" characters, spiritual contemporaries of the author and his audience, under conditions natural in the more or less remote historical past, but at variance with the realities and moral concepts of the present.

Agamemnon has much of the attitude and the manners of an Athenian political leader[6] as we know them from contemporary sources. His ambition for the supreme command, as described in the malicious remarks of his brother (337–45), recalls the way of getting elected for high office in Athens. And his concern with *ἀνθρώπων γνῶμαι πολλαὶ καὶ δυσάρεστοι* (25 f.) and with the mood of his soldiery is more becoming to an Athenian general than to a king. The unruly mob, the fear of which has such a sinister influence on Agamemnon's decisions, was a very familiar sight to Euripides' audience (531–35). In an angry mood Clytemnestra blames her

[5] Norwood, 287; closeness to real life in late Euripidean drama: P. Friedlaender, "Die Griechische Tragoedie und das Tragische," *Antike* 2 (1926) 106.

[6] Pohlenz, 502; W. Nestle, *Euripides* (Stuttgart, 1901) 297; P. Masqueray, *Euripide et ses Idées* (Paris, 1908) 215; Schmid-Staehlin, 642.

husband (1012) as one who κακός τίς ἐστι καὶ λίαν ταρβεῖ στρατόν. But the reader of Thucydides and Xenophon realizes the plight of anyone in a responsible position in those years of the Hermocopidae and the Arginusae trials. When Thucydides wrote his praise of Pericles, he knew why he stressed as a proof of exceptional leadership: οὐκ ἤγετο μᾶλλον ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἢ αὐτὸς ἦγε, and the ability to stand up against the displeasure of the mob.

But Agamemnon is no Pericles. However, he has some of the sympathetic features as well as the shortcomings of the average Athenian office-holder. The mutual love between him and Iphigeneia brings a touch of personal kindness[7] not unlike the family scenes on Attic grave reliefs. Under ordinary conditions he would be a good citizen and even a tolerable general. The drama makes it clear that, the present crisis being settled, he will be the successful leader of the expedition known from history. Compared with such contemporary types as the crafty politicians, Odysseus and Calchas, and the sentimental and fickle egoist, Menelaus, he gives a fairly good account of himself. Agamemnon's φιλοτιμία stands against Menelaus' φιλογυνία, and, no matter what his other shortcomings, in the argument with Menelaus (378–401) he shows dignity and self-control. Even Achilles ought not to be overrated as a foil to Agamemnon; he represents the type of the dashing young Athenian knight[8] as against the older man who suffers under the pressure of the decisions he has made, and of those he is compelled to make, and in the end this youthful ebullience does not have any effect in preventing Iphigeneia's sacrifice.

In contrast to this extravert, Agamemnon appears as an introvert, a character torn asunder and divided against himself,[9] an apparent reflection of the poet's own mind, with a secret envy for those who just can act and those who, in their simplicity, are not haunted by "the pale cast of thought" (677):

ζηλῶ σὲ μᾶλλον ἢ 'μὲ τοῦ μηδὲν φρονεῖν.

[7] M. Croiset, *Histoire de la Littérature Grecque* 3[3] (Paris, 1935) 348 f.

[8] Bonnard, 94.

[9] Howald, 175; Friedrich, 84–86; Grube, 426; Bonnard, 90 f.: "cet homme tout en velléités et sans volonté." Sometimes Euripides' intention in creating this Agamemnon is misunderstood as 'debunking': e.g. Kitto, 371; England, introd. 15: "A poor creature in a desperate situation"; Pohlenz, 496, in the untranslatable style of professorial moralizing: "statt des eisernen Heldenkoenigs ein haltloser unheldischer Schwaechling." No wonder that under the Nazi regime Agamemnon became "der Koenig ohne Fuehrereigenschaften" (W. Nauhardt, "Das Bild des Herrschers in der Griechischen Dichtung," *Neue Deutsche Forschungen* [Berlin, 1940] 81 f.).

He is aware of the insoluble problem of responsibility and choice in an age which has lost self-confidence (1034 f.). His own distress is a symptom of the general moral catastrophe (411): Ἕλλὰς . . . κατὰ θεὸν νοσεῖ τινα. His question (356): τί δράσω; τίνα δὲ πόρον εὕρω πόθεν; was meant to meet with a response in the hearts of the audience. This uncertainty, however, reflects not only the breakdown of traditional standards, but also the dawn of a new inwardness. As Agamemnon thinks not only about what is useful to do, but what he ought to do and what he ought to have done, his reflection becomes conscience. It is a thrilling thought to imagine Socrates and Plato among the spectators, as man's awareness of his conscience is an important point of Socratic-Platonic philosophy.[10]

Now this king who has our sympathy, if not our respect and admiration, is faced with a situation extreme even for the contemporaries of an age of violence.[11] The demand of the goddess for the sacrifice of his daughter might have been accepted as a matter of course in the mythological past. But a fifth century man such as this Agamemnon does not kill his child at the bidding of an oracle, even though he is not presented as doubting the existence of the gods or their right to make such a demand. Euripides, as Attic tragedy in general, has a predilection for the motive of parents and children killing or nearly killing each other, with a great variety of circumstances; and the interest of both poet and spectator is concerned with the reactions and feelings of a man of their own kind in this terrible dilemma. No matter how much certain features in Agamemnon already point to Menander's middle-class characters,[12] the situation where he has either to sacrifice his daughter or his duty as a ruler gives him his place in the great tragedy of the fifth century. Thus this play reveals Euripides the master of psychology[13] and Euripides the τραγικώτατος: his concern with human φύσις and character under the strain of extreme adversity, and with the impact of this human situation and reaction upon the thoughts

[10] The development from tragedy to philosophy: H. Kuhn, "The True Tragedy. On the Relationship between Greek Tragedy and Plato," *HSPh* 52 (1941) 1–40; 53 (1942) 37–88.

[11] Friedrich, 85–89: "Zusammenstoss eines humanen Menschen mit einer unmenschlichen Forderung."

[12] G. Pasquali, "Menandro ed Euripide," *Atene e Roma* 21 (1918) 57–77; Peterson, 488; Page, 214 f.

[13] W. Jaeger, *Paideia* 1 (Engl. ed., Oxford, 1939) 350; van Lennep, 226; W. Zuercher, *Die Darstellung des Menschen im Drama des Euripides* (Basel, 1947) 147–70.

and emotions of an audience conditioned for this kind of presentation by years of crisis.

The Aristotelian definitions of ἔλεος and φόβος are well suited for Agamemnon's case, ἔλεος being what we feel at a misfortune out of proportion to the faults of a man, and φόβος what we feel when misfortune comes upon one like ourselves.[14] We may also think of the discussion in the *Poetics* (1453A.8 f.) about the tragic hero as a man of high station not exceedingly good, nor one who falls through badness, but through some error in judgment or some shortcoming.

Psychology and philosophy are combined, as often in Greek Tragedy. Agamemnon is not only an interesting contemporary character, but offers an illustration of the problem of leadership which, as a concomitant to the crisis of the polis, was then a favorite theme in Attic drama, philosophy, and historiography. Out of the shortcomings of political reality as appearing in Agamemnon arose the picture of the ideal in Sophocles' and Euripides' Theseus, Thucydides' Pericles, Xenophon's Cyrus, and finally Plato's philosopher king.

The tragedy begins with Agamemnon restless and tormented by his conscience in the deep silence of late night: one of the many great images in Euripides of nature as the mirror of human mood.[15] The unique feature of the double prologue[16] conveys both the factual and the emotional background of the drama. The starlit night quietly looking down upon human grief and disorder (6–8) serves as a grand prelude to this play which embodies the failures and hopes of these years of crisis and transition. The leader of the huge host assembled at Aulis — a distant reminder to the audience of the glorious expedition they had sent to Sicily some years ago never to return — is a lonely and friendless man with no one to trust but the old servant whom he needs not only as a messenger, but as a confidant or even confessor; but even he will later in a critical moment give preference to his older loyalty to Clytemnestra (871).

[14] See Lane Cooper, *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry* (Ithaca, 1947) 39.

[15] Schadewaldt, *op. cit.* (see note 4) 173; Lesky, *op. cit.* (see note 1) 213; Schmid-Staehlin, 639. On man and nature in Euripides in general: L. A. Stella, "Euripide Lirico," *Atene e Roma* 3.7 (1939) 1–39; 3.8 (1940) 1–34, 69–96.

[16] Both parts of the prologue genuine and necessary: Friedrich, *loc. cit.* (see note 1) 93–96.

A ray of hope seems to dawn in the gloom of the prologue: his conscience awake during the sleepless night has made Agamemnon decide to save his daughter and to take the consequences of losing name and position and of facing the fury of an undisciplined soldiery. This decision, in line with the feelings of the poet and the audience, is meant to call forth our sympathies for the king. It is very human, and representative of the times, that he reaches this decision only as a result of repeated reconsideration (94–100) and after a struggle with his own ambition (360) and fear of mob violence (514). Euripides as usual combines psychological observation and mythological tradition. Although in theory Agamemnon seems to have the choice whether or not to sacrifice his daughter, the goddess exerts almost irresistible pressure acting through the "modern" medium of mass psychology: The winds sent by her compel the Hellenic army to protracted inactivity in the very moment when it is filled with an urge to action, *οὐκ ἄνευ θεῶν* (809), as pointed out with emphasis. As regards Agamemnon's self-confessed ambition, it is a paramount symptom of these years of wavering between the two opposite ideals of the *τυραννίς* and the unpolitical existence,[17] as recently expounded by Euripides in dramas such as *Ion*, *Antiope*, and *Phoenissae*.

The joy of seeing Agamemnon make the right decision is impaired by the feeling that, as a representative of an unbalanced and unstable society, he may easily again change his direction[18] when influenced by the pressure of conditions or arguments. And then, as often in tragedy, his action is right, but through an intertwining of fault and circumstance, comes too late. His urgent message, with the deceptive advice of the wedding to Achilles, has sent mother and daughter on their way to Aulis at once, Clytemnestra's social ambition and Iphigeneia's love for her absent father being additional factors. And after Agamemnon has reconsidered the matter, the interception of his messenger by Menelaus and the ensuing quarrel between the brothers, although ending in an agreement, prevent the countermand from reaching the royal ladies before their arrival in the camp. This makes the situation more hopeless than before, and there seems to be no way of saving Iphigeneia by secretly sending her back, as the ambitious demagogues, Odysseus and Calchas, are expected to make use of their

[17] Solmsen, *loc. cit.* (see note 3) 410.

[18] Rivier, *op. cit.* (see note 1) 78.

knowledge of the oracle and to leave nothing undone in order to have its condition, Iphigeneia's sacrifice, fulfilled (518–27).

This ἀμηχανία gives a powerful and moving note to the scene when Agamemnon meets his wife and daughter (631–740) and turns it into one of the grand examples of tragic irony in Euripides.[19] Against the joy of his daughter and the pride of his wife stands the king torn by his bad conscience and the futility of his would-be clever schemes, and at a loss how to find a way out without betraying his duties to either his family or his office.[20] Iphigeneia whom he has lured to her apparently inescapable doom is not only his daughter, but his favorite child, and she reciprocates his love: φιλοπάτωρ μάλιστα (638). The closer this mutual attachment is, the more deeply he has to suffer, doomed to deceive and to sacrifice the one who loves him most; and yet he cannot tell her what he did and what he is going to do. The harder he tries to control his emotions, the more they break forth; and when she wants to turn his sorrows into joy about the reunion, he cannot but reply with words of double meaning such as (645): πόλλ' ἀνδρὶ βασιλεῖ καὶ στρατηλάτῃ μέλει. Every word spoken in this stichomythia has a tragic overtone of the *lacrimae rerum* of man as the plaything of the powers and of his own guilt. Meanwhile the spectator sees Clytemnestra and Orestes on the stage as a reminder of the future fate of Agamemnon and his house.

As a "philosophic" poet Euripides makes use of the particular case as an example of the general issue. As natural at a time of unfettered ambition, the drama deals with the pros and cons of high station. For the servant Agamemnon's position is the καλὸν τοῦ βίου (20). But a high price has to be paid for it, too high at times, as it seems to the one most concerned who would prefer the ἀπραγμοσύνη of the common man (17 f.; 85 f.):[21] ζηλῶ δ' ἀνδρῶν ὃς ἀκίνδυνον βίον ἐξεπέρασ' ἀγνὼς ἀκλεής. There is the ὄγκος (449), the unpleasant necessity of saving face even in the most grievous situation, and of covering up the inconsistency between good intentions and weak actions by a show of strength. Being at the top involves uncommon responsibilities, the compulsion of making decisions and sacrifices which will imply guilt and failure. Even the

[19] Grube, 429; see also my remarks in my article "Divine Violence and Providence in Euripides' *Ion*," *TAPhA* 71 (1940) 598. I am preparing a paper on Tragic Irony in Euripides.

[20] Frey, 43.

[21] Greene, 209.

demand by the goddess of Iphigeneia's sacrifice is based rather on Agamemnon's position than on the atonement of any guilt on his part. Artemis' claim which might have been a subject for discussion at an earlier stage of Euripidean tragedy, is accepted as a matter of course (1395). At variance with the tradition there is no mention at all of anything Agamemnon might have done to bring about the divine wrath.[22] It is just assumed that his daughter's life is the price he has to pay for leadership in a successful expedition; he cannot have both the glory of kingship and the happiness of private life. But it is human and meant to call forth our sympathy that if he could he would discard glory bought at such a price. He is, after all, a spiritual contemporary of those Athenians who, suffering under the increasing hardships of years of war, had enough of politics,[23] and even of the polis, and whom Thucydides warned through the last words spoken by his Pericles (2.63.1): *μὴ φεύγειν τοὺς πόνους ἢ μηδὲ τὰς τιμὰς διώκειν.*

Further, Agamemnon's *δόλος*, presented as a key motive, reveals one of the main issues of contemporary life and thought. In a world in which the gods and the moral order sanctioned by them had given way to the haphazard realm of impersonal powers and to an anarchy of values, human cleverness as a substitute for real *σοφία*, and often using its increasingly discredited name, tries to counteract all-powerful and everpresent *τύχη*.[24] It is the world in which, as the third stasimon complains (1089–97), *αἰδώς* and *ἀρετή* have disappeared: *ὁπότε τὸ μὲν ἄσεπτον ἔχει δύνασιν, ἃ δ' ἀρετὰ κατόπισθεν θνατοῖς ἀμελεῖται, ἀνομία δὲ νόμων κρατεῖ καὶ μὴ κοινὸς ἀγὼν βροτοῖς, μή τις θεῶν φθόνος ἔλθῃ.* The constantly recurrent concepts of *ἀνάγκη* and *τύχη*, sometimes combined (511), reflect a feeling of forlornness in a world devoid of order, sense, and reason. More or less shrewd scheming occurs in several of Euripides' later dramas as a subject of interest to him and his audience,[25] and this contest between traditional *ἀρετή* and "modern" *σοφία* was presented at the same

[22] Friedrich, 82.

[23] Solmsen, *loc. cit.* (see note 3) 408.

[24] Schadewaldt, *op. cit.* (see note 4) 234 f., 256–59; Zuercher, *op. cit.* (see note 13) 152 f.; Wassermann, *loc. cit.* (see note 19) 599; W. Nestle, *Die Struktur des Eingangs in der attischen Tragoedie* (Stuttgart, 1930) 127. About Tyche in Euripides in general see G. Busch, *Untersuchungen zum Wesen der Tyche in der Tragoedie des Euripides* (diss. Heidelberg, 1940) esp. 24–28, 31–37.

[25] For the underlying mentality see F. Solmsen, "Zur Gestaltung d. Intriguenmotivs i.d. Tragoedien d. Sophokles u. Euripides," *Philologus* 87 (1932) 1–17.

time by Sophocles in his *Philoctetes*. It should be noted that cleverness in all its aspects had a strong appeal for a nation setting such high store upon intelligence as did the Greeks, and Greek literature from its very beginnings reflects concern with this topic.

Agamemnon's attempt to deceive his wife and his daughter before our eyes seems to be an innovation of the *Iphigeneia at Aulis*. In Sophocles' Iphigeneia the trick of deceiving Clytemnestra was left to that professional schemer, Odysseus, and so it is in Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Tauris*.[26] Agamemnon's δόλος is his great guilt, and he knows it (136 f.): γνώμας ἐξέσταν, πίπτω δ' εἰς ἄταν. His inner struggle with his own conscience replaces the traditional "external" offence against the goddess, one more symptom of the increasingly stressed inwardness as a concomitant to the general crisis. Agamemnon's deceit receives a central position also with regard to his and his family's future tragedy: more than Iphigeneia's sacrifice itself it is this δόλος which turns his wife into an agent of vengeance, as she emphatically asserts toward the end of the play (1458). But when he has recourse to lying and deceit he acts against his better nature. The psychologist Euripides was interested in presenting a man compelled, as this king, by circumstances to betray his own φύσις. But being no expert in scheming like Odysseus, he naturally is rather clumsy in deceiving and doomed to failure from the beginning. It is a typical aspect of the tragic blend of freedom and necessity that once he has taken the first step of deceit, he becomes more and more enmeshed. Too late he learns the futility of his would-be cleverness (444): Δαίμων σοφώτερος τῶν ἐμῶν σοφισμάτων. It reveals Euripides' keen psychological observation that he makes Agamemnon ashamed to confess his first deceit to wife and daughter and instead in his embarrassment crowning it with a new subterfuge. Yet all that he achieves is a small delay and a merciless settling of accounts by Clytemnestra after she has learned what kind of wedding is waiting for her daughter (1129–43).

It is psychologically and dramatically significant that Clytemnestra refers (1148–56) to the long-forgotten act of violence by which she had become the wife of Agamemnon, the slayer of her first husband and child, a motive either invented by Euripides or on purpose taken from an otherwise unknown mythological tradition. These unfortunate auspices at the beginning of an otherwise apparently successful marriage are presented to the audience as an

[26] Friedrich, *loc. cit.* (see note 1) 83.

anticipation and a foreboding of its gloomy end. This drama, which shows Agamemnon the man rather than Agamemnon the king, gives also his wife her due insofar as it offers the circumstances which explain her later conduct. Half a century after Aeschylus had introduced Clytemnestra the murderess of her husband on the stage, to be followed by the various Clytemnestras of his successors, Euripides in his posthumous play, which together with the *Bacchae* and the *Oedipus Coloneus* has come to us as the last will of classical Attic tragedy, gives this tormented character final rest and peace by showing her as a human wife and mother, "more sinned against than sinning."

Euripides leaves no doubt of Agamemnon's partly moral, partly psychological responsibility for his wife's transformation from the paragon of dignity and virtue into the one who will commit, and atone for, murder and adultery. His behavior toward her, as most of his actions, appears as a combined resultant of τύχη and ἄτη, of necessities beyond his control and his own free decision. In order to increase his inner difficulties and to have him face the test which he fears most of all (454–459) the drama presents Clytemnestra's appearance in the camp as a surprise to Agamemnon[27] as if he ever could have expected her to send Iphigeneia alone and to have her married without her mother's presence. But Euripides, as he hints himself (457), makes use of the dramatic license to forego the probabilities of real life in order to create a situation which puts the main character into a striking light and through his reactions gives additional thrill to the audience.

The first of the two Agamemnon-Clytemnestra scenes (691–740) is marked by a typically sudden break from the factual discussion about Achilles[28] to Agamemnon's nervously clumsy and expectedly futile attempt to induce her to return home before her daughter's "wedding." But this first meeting is only the prelude to that grand later scene (1106–45), the climax of the tragedy, when she cuts short all his pretexts with the terse words (1131):

τὴν παῖδα τὴν σὴν τὴν δ' ἐμὴν μέλλεις κτανεῖν;

and shatters his confused question: τίν' ἠδίκησα; with scorn and

[27] Page, *op. cit.* (see note 1) 204 f.

[28] The stichomythic form liked by the poet and his audience even when conveying merely factual information, was a stylized reflection of the liveliness of Athenian manners of conversing.

bitter irony: τοῦτ' ἐμοῦ πείθει πάρα; (1138). Now, too late,[29] he gives up any further attempt to aggravate his plight by capping misfortune with lies.

However, from this ebb of self-respect and dignity all of a sudden another Agamemnon arises:[30] the leader not of an expedition to recover his brother's voluntarily stolen wife, but of an expedition for the glory of Greece against the Asiatics. Against the human weakness and grief which he has presented so far, he now turns into a more kingly stature, of a man who knows for what he fights and for what he sacrifices his child. This Panhellenic anticipation of Alexander, the descendant of Euripides' royal host, must have struck the imagination of the audience[31] in these last years of the fifth century when Persia seemed to be reaping the harvest of Hellenic civil strife. The idea, first mentioned transitorily by Menelaus in the earlier part of the drama, but overshadowed by his more personal interests (370 f.), is more convincingly brought forth in Agamemnon's last plea to his daughter after his δόλος has been exploded in its futility (1271 f.): Ἑλλάς, ᾗ δεῖ, κἂν θέλω κἂν μὴ θέλω, θῦσαί σε. And the same Iphigeneia for whom κακῶς ζῆν κρεῖσσον ἢ καλῶς θανεῖν (1252), and who decries the σφαγαὶ ἀνόσιοι ἀνοσίου πατρός (1318), will then take up that very idea of dying for the sake of Hellas (1378–90): εἰς ἔμ' Ἑλλὰς ἡ μεγίστη πᾶσα νῦν ἀποβλέπει, in an apparently sudden change already noticed by Aristotle (*Poet.* 1454A.31).

Here we have to consider that Attic tragedy with its strong, though not exclusive, emphasis on the effect of the particular scene as seen and spoken on the stage, is less concerned with the gradual development of a character than the modern drama.[32] To be sure, Euripides has concentrated enough interest on Agamemnon to turn him into a fully rounded character whose behavior in any situation we can easily imagine. But no matter how refined the psychological presentation of the king and of some of the other characters, it is less the unity of the character all through the play than the striking development of the plot[33] which matters to the poet and his audience. Agamemnon's turn to the idea of a Pan-

[29] Murray, 177.

[30] Grube, 435.

[31] Pohlenz, 504; Friedrich, 86.

[32] Zuercher, *op. cit.* (see note 13) 184; Rivier, *op. cit.* (see note 1) 83.

[33] Zuercher, *op. cit.* (see note 13) 181. Sudden reverses of attitude: Greene, *op. cit.* (see note 1) 209.

hellenic mission as a way out from his former lack of decision and direction may be taken as one more aspect of the consistent inconsistency so characteristic of contemporary Greece,[34] and the sudden transition from individual despair to abandonment to the magic of a great new idea is a not uncommon phenomenon in an age of crisis. Even so, Euripides is more interested in presenting two widely divergent sides of Agamemnon's personality in subsequent scenes than in dwelling, as the modern mind likes to do, on the shades of gradual change from one state of mind to the other. If the *Iphigeneia at Aulis* had not been left unfinished, the later part of the drama might have been more fully integrated with the rest. But this integration would have been difficult in any case, as the poet in his usual way tries to combine the mythological, the psychological, and the political-philosophical themes. There is the masterly psychological analysis of Agamemnon seen as a sensitive and unsteady "modern" character; but for poet and public there is also the great political issue of Greece united against Asia, and Agamemnon, the king and leader, as a Panhellenic counterpart to the traditional ideal of Theseus, the ruler of the city-state, which at the same time found its final embodiment in Sophocles' last tragedy.

The final synthesis turns the compulsory human sacrifice to the goddess of a primitive semi-barbarian tradition into the voluntary self-sacrifice for the political ideal of the Greek community in the spirit of the Periclean Funeral Oration which Thucydides wrote against the background of the same contemporary conditions. What had to be done anyhow, as emphasized in the words first of Agamemnon (1271) and then of Iphigeneia (1395 f.), is ennobled by the free and proud acceptance of death for a greater cause. Agamemnon as well as his daughter have changed from the concern with their personal and private existence to the superindividual ideal of the Hellenic commonwealth. The conflict between Agamemnon the father and Agamemnon the ruler is settled. The love of his daughter, temporarily estranged, he has regained (1455–57). But one tragic note remains: The deceit, no matter how futile morally as well as practically, has irrevocably brought forth the hatred and disdain of his wife. Thus, while he departs for his glorious expedition, the audience is left with the foreboding of what will happen after he returns.

[34] Martinazzoli, *op. cit.* (see note 1) 365.