

TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN A EURIPIDEAN TRAGEDY *

By W. RITCHIE

BEFORE beginning my lecture I think it appropriate on this occasion that I should acknowledge, however briefly and inadequately, the contribution made to Greek studies in this University by my predecessor, Professor George Shipp, both during his tenure of the Chair of Greek and throughout his long career here. By his work in the fields of Greek language and Homeric studies, which continues to bear fruit, he has done much to enhance the reputation of Sydney as a significant centre of Greek scholarship. To follow him is both an honour and a high responsibility. If I am at all equal to it, it is due in no small part to what I was able to learn from him during the valuable and very happy years that I worked under him.

I am aware that it is common on this kind of occasion to talk about the broader relevance of one's discipline at the present day and even to defend its place in the University. But I am confident that this would be superfluous in the present company, and furthermore the theme was developed with greater eloquence than I can command by a previous Professor of Greek in this University, Enoch Powell, in the Inaugural Lecture which he gave here some thirty years ago.¹ Although one might wish here and there to change the emphasis of his remarks a little, there would be no reason to challenge now the validity of any of the claims he then made for Greek studies in the University. Who indeed would expect that thirty years, or a hundred, would make a difference to these claims?

Instead, then, I have chosen a particular theme, and will discuss one aspect of the dramatic art of Euripides, as we see it in a single play. I hope at the same time to show something of the problems which confront us in dealing with a Greek literary text.

The tragedy of Euripides which I wish to consider here is the *Iphigenia in Aulis*. This play comes at the end of the poet's career and of the period of Greek tragedy from which works survive. We are informed that it was produced after the death of Euripides (which is placed in 406) by his son of the same name. The other plays produced with it were the *Alcmaeon*, now lost, and the *Bacchae*, which is also preserved, a tragedy of a very different character.²

The student of the *Iphigenia in Aulis* is confronted by textual problems of a special kind, to which I must first refer briefly, although it is not my purpose to

* An Inaugural Lecture delivered on 3 August, 1967, by W. Ritchie, M.A., Ph.D. (Cambridge), B.A. (Sydney), Professor of Greek in the University of Sydney.

¹ J. Enoch Powell, *Greek in the University* (Oxford University Press, London, 1938): an Inaugural Lecture delivered in the Great Hall of Sydney University on Saturday, 7 May, 1938.

² Schol. Ar. *Ran.* 67.

discuss them here in detail. No other Greek tragedy has come under suspicion of interpolation to such an extent. Of the 1629 lines in our text of the play almost 1100 have at some time or other been deemed spurious or suspect. The alleged interpolations range in extent from whole scenes down to single lines, but there is scarcely any part of the play that has entirely escaped suspicion. The last full-scale separate edition of the play, that of E. B. England, produced in 1891, printed 453 lines of the text in square brackets and expressed doubt about many others besides.³ The question was last fully reviewed by Denys Page in a work published in 1934.⁴ His conclusion was that passages amounting to less than two-thirds of the play were to be regarded as substantially Euripidean, and even some of these were to be suspected of sporadic interpolation.

Interpolation on a minor scale is not uncommon in our extant Greek tragedies. The works of the fifth-century tragedians enjoyed a continued popularity after their deaths, and we have reason to believe that there was some tampering with the texts by actors and producers in this period, before the works came into the hands of the scholars at Alexandria in the course of the third century B.C. It can also have occurred later.

In the case of the *Iphigenia in Aulis* a further complication is introduced by the fact that its first production was posthumous. We cannot be sure that Euripides finished the play before his death, and if his son had charge of the production, he may have been required to complete parts of the play left unfinished by his father. Some scholars have had recourse to this hypothesis in order to account for some at least of the supposed interpolations, while still regarding other passages as later additions.⁵ In the conditions of ancient dramatic production, as indeed in modern, it is quite plausible that there should be no final text preceding the performance: it may still have been at this date the poet's task as producer (διδάσκαλος) to teach his lines to the actors. On the other hand, *Bacchae*, which was also posthumously produced, shows no signs of having been completed by a second hand.

In theory, then, it appears that our text of the *Iphigenia in Aulis* could contain several strata:

- (i) Euripidean parts, which he may or may not have left in a final form;
- (ii) work of the younger Euripides for the first production;
- (iii) interpolations made by actors in later productions, which might be either (a) additions or (b) substitutions;
- (iv) later scribal interpolations, which might be either (a) additions or (b) attempts at restoring a defective text.

The problem of interpolation in this play may therefore be a very complex one, and with the authorship of large parts of the text in such doubt it may seem presumptuous to talk at all about the play as a specimen of Euripidean drama.

³ Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, ed. E. B. England (London, 1891).

⁴ D. L. Page, *Actors' Interpolations in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford, 1934).

⁵ See, e.g., Page, *op. cit.*, pp. 207 ff.

On the other hand, the position is not necessarily so desperate. It would be fair to say that the only large part of the play which is certainly wholly spurious is the final scene, i.e. the 120 lines following the departure of Iphigenia to her sacrifice (ll. 1510-1629). In this scene, as we have it, a messenger describes to Clytemnestra the scene at the sacrificial altar, with its climax in the miraculous disappearance of Iphigenia and substitution of a doe at the moment of slaughter. It would be widely, but not universally, agreed that this is totally non-Euripidean.⁶ There appears to be in it the work of two separate interpolators, the first half of the speech being written by a careful, but pedestrian, composer, who freely plagiarizes passages in Euripides' *Hecuba* dealing with the sacrifice of Polyxena, the latter half being added or restored by some Byzantine scribe who knows nothing of the usage or metre of Attic tragedy. The existence in antiquity of another form of ending to the play is known from a quotation by Aelian (second century A.D.) of a couple of lines not in our text of the play.⁷ These clearly come from a final scene in which Artemis appeared as *deus ex machina* to console Clytemnestra with the information that the Greeks would sacrifice a doe in the belief that they were sacrificing Iphigenia. This other ending may or may not have been genuine.

Apart from this there are only a few quite short passages which are so bad in quality that they can be condemned forthwith. But there remain a substantial number of passages, both short and long, amounting perhaps to some 400 lines, where the possibility of interpolation has to be considered. It must be remembered that the belief in extensive interpolation is wholly a product of nineteenth-century scholarship. I do not mean that it is for that reason to be taken lightly, but that, with the one exception already mentioned, it rests entirely on internal evidence and therefore each case of suspected interpolation is to be treated individually on its merits.

In many cases suspicion is due to the presence of abnormalities of usage, style or metre. Indeed in every case we must look for evidence of this kind, since without it it is hard to establish that a passage is interpolated. But in some suspect passages considerations of a more purely dramatic kind assume either a primary or a secondary importance. It is a question of the relevance of the passage to its context, its suitability to the speaker or its consistency with other things. Such questions are often hard to decide. We look for supporting evidence in language and style; but, even without it, suspicion may remain. An interpolator, especially an early one, may be able to produce a few lines like enough to Euripides. It is also possible to argue, where lines look Euripidean but do not seem to fit their context, that they have been transferred there from some other play.

The problem of interpolation has become a central one in the study of the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, and for that reason I have mentioned it first. In dealing with this problem we are often confronted with the need to consider Euripides' dramatic

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 191-204. For a summary of views on the end of the play see E. Valgiglio, *Riv. stud. class.* V (1957), 70-2.

⁷ Aelian, *Hist. Anim.* VII.39 (=Eur. fr. 857 N²).

purpose in the context and in the play as a whole. One way of approach to the study of the play, which may be fruitful here, is to examine the dramatist's treatment of the myth in relation to the earlier mythological tradition. If we can see what things in the play the poet derives from earlier versions and what he has invented himself, it may help us towards understanding his methods of composition and the artistic design of his work.

The questions to which I now turn may therefore have some bearing on problems of interpolation, although this may appear only intermittently here.

The myth of the sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulis, which is the theme of our play, would have been known to Euripides, and presumably to most of his audience, in its epic version in the *Cypria*, in the *Oresteia* of the choral lyric poet Stesichorus (often an important source for the tragedians), and in older Attic tragedies. There was an *Iphigenia* of Aeschylus: we know virtually nothing about it but the title and cannot be sure of its theme.⁸ Sophocles also wrote an *Iphigenia*, which certainly did treat the events leading up to the sacrifice, but again our knowledge of it is very meagre.⁹ Other tragedies touched on the theme incidentally.

For the *Cypria* version we now depend on the brief prose summary in the *Chrestomathia* of Proclus.¹⁰ The only other substantial treatment of the story we possess is Aeschylus' fine lyric narrative of events at Aulis in the parodos of the *Agamemnon*. We shall have cause to consider this further, since there is little doubt that Euripides in the *Iphigenia in Aulis* had it in mind.

With so little surviving from the earlier tradition it would be rash to claim that we can easily distinguish what Euripides has derived from it and what he has invented himself. Nevertheless, even with so little knowledge we may often be able to guess with some degree of confidence what his own innovations are. Besides this we may be able to see how, quite apart from his direct debt to earlier versions of the same myth, he also draws on a wider range of literary tradition for his incidents and characters.

Proclus' summary of the *Cypria* version is as follows: καὶ τὸ δεύτερον ἠθροισμένου τοῦ στόλου ἐν Αὐλίδι, Ἀγαμέμνων ἐπὶ θήρας βαλὼν ἔλαφον, ὑπερβάλλειν ἔφησε καὶ τὴν Ἄρτεμιν. μῆνισσα δὲ ἡ θεὸς ἐπέσχεν αὐτοῦς τοῦ πλοῦ χειμῶνας ἐπιπέμπουσα. Κάλχαντος δὲ εἰπόντος τὴν τῆς θεοῦ μῆνιν καὶ Ἰφιγένειαν κελεύσαντος θύειν τῇ Ἀρτέμιδι, ὡς ἐπὶ γάμον αὐτὴν Ἀχιλλεῖ μεταπεμφάμενοι, θύειν ἐπιχειροῦσιν. Ἄρτεμις δὲ αὐτὴν ἐξαρπάσασα, εἰς Ταύρους μετακομίζει καὶ ἀθανάτων ποιεῖ· ἔλαφον δὲ ἀντὶ τῆς κόρης παρίστησι τῷ βωμῷ.

When the expedition had assembled for the second time at Aulis, Agamemnon, having shot a deer while hunting, boasted that he was superior

⁸ A. Nauck, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*², p. 31; H. Lloyd-Jones, Appendix to H. Weir Smyth, *Aeschylus* (Loeb Library), vol. II (1957), p. 411; H. J. Mette, *Die Fragmente des Aischylos*, pp. 46-8.

⁹ *The Fragments of Sophocles*, ed. Pearson, vol. I, pp. 218-23.

¹⁰ *Homeri Opera*, ed. Allen (O.C.T.), vol. V, p. 104.

even to Artemis. In wrath at this the goddess sent stormy winds and prevented them from sailing. Calchas then told them of the anger of the goddess and bade them sacrifice Iphigenia to Artemis, and having fetched her there, as though for marriage with Achilles, they attempted to sacrifice her. But Artemis snatching her away carried her off to the land of the Taurians and made her immortal; and in place of the maiden she placed a deer on the altar.

The facts of the story, as we find them in this summary version of the *Cypria*, are taken over by Euripides without essential change as the hypothesis of his drama. But he omits all reference to Agamemnon's boast, offering no explanation of the anger of Artemis. We do not know, either, how he ended the play after the departure of Iphigenia to the sacrifice, as the present ending is spurious.

The plot of the *Iphigenia in Aulis* is as follows: Before the action of the play begins Calchas has prophesied that Iphigenia must be sacrificed to Artemis in order to secure favourable winds for the fleet. Agamemnon, having yielded to persuasion by Menelaus, has consented to the sacrifice and has despatched a letter to Clytemnestra in Argos, asking her to send Iphigenia to Aulis on the pretext that she is to marry Achilles. Calchas, Menelaus and Odysseus are the other parties to the scheme; Achilles himself is totally ignorant of it. When the play opens, Agamemnon has repented of his decision and sends an old servant with a second letter to Clytemnestra, telling her now not to send Iphigenia, as the marriage has been postponed. Menelaus, however, intercepts the letter and angrily confronts his brother with it. Agamemnon refuses to sacrifice his daughter for Menelaus and says he will resign his command. But the arrival of Iphigenia, who is unexpectedly accompanied by Clytemnestra, is now announced. The army knows of their presence and has guessed that Iphigenia is to be married. Although Menelaus, seeing Agamemnon's distress, now relents, Agamemnon realises that he cannot now escape from the sacrifice. Odysseus is bound to reveal the secret to the army and their wrath is not to be withstood. He hopes, however, by persuading his wife to go home, to carry out the sacrifice without her knowledge, a somewhat futile aspiration, though a natural one. But Clytemnestra, anxious to play her full part in the wedding ceremony, refuses to return home. She then encounters Achilles, whose ignorance of the marriage is revealed. The Old Man, who has been eavesdropping, intervenes to tell them the truth. Achilles, indignant at having his name so used without his consent, is moved by Clytemnestra's appeals to his sense of honour and promises to help oppose the sacrifice. Clytemnestra and Iphigenia now confront Agamemnon with their knowledge of the truth and plead with him. But he replies that the sacrifice cannot be avoided. The laments of mother and daughter are interrupted by the return of Achilles, who has been stoned by the army in attempting to plead Iphigenia's cause. Seeing how matters stand and accepting the divine will, Iphigenia now offers her life voluntarily for the cause of Greece, and rejecting the pleas of her mother and Achilles departs to be sacrificed. We do not know what, if anything, came after this in the original text.

Euripides enriches the action of his drama with a wealth of incident not known to us from earlier sources. The principal innovations are :

- (i) the device of the letters ;
- (ii) the bringing of Clytemnestra to Aulis ;
- (iii) Achilles' ignorance of the plot and his consequent opposition to it ;
- (iv) Iphigenia's voluntary self-sacrifice.

The last of these is usually regarded as Euripides' own. Although one of the earlier dramatists could conceivably have anticipated him, the motive of voluntary self-sacrifice is a peculiarly Euripidean one in the Greek tragedies which survive, introduced by him into three earlier plays (*Heraclidae*, *Hecuba*, *Phoenissae*).¹¹ The decision of Iphigenia is more elaborately presented, but there are many resemblances of treatment to the other plays.

Of the other innovations the most striking is the bringing of Clytemnestra to Aulis. The *Cypria* summary is silent on this point, but it seems unlikely that it was part of the epic story. It is a device necessary only for drama, resulting from the need for unity of setting. Did Euripides invent it? One of our few fragments of Sophocles' *Iphigenia* is a line which Odysseus is said to have spoken to Clytemnestra. It has been inferred from this that Sophocles anticipated Euripides in taking Clytemnestra to Aulis.¹² But this does not follow. The action of Sophocles' play may not have been set at Aulis. It is perhaps more likely that he dramatized a version of the story (possibly the epic one) found in the prologue of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and in later mythographers, in which Odysseus is sent to Argos to procure Iphigenia from Clytemnestra by means of the deception about the marriage. If so, the action of his play may have taken place at Argos.¹³

Sophocles did not avoid all innovation in his treatment of the myths, but it is not easy to think of him as inventing or adopting an episode alien to the spirit of the heroic age, as was the presence of Clytemnestra in the midst of the Greek army. Nor is there a shred of evidence in support of the view, which has been put forward, that the motive derives from Aeschylus' *Iphigenia*.¹⁴ It is not easy to associate such an innovation with Aeschylus either.

Moreover, there are perhaps signs in Euripides' play that he is the innovator here. The news of Clytemnestra's arrival at Aulis is designed to come as a surprise, and Agamemnon is made to justify it by the reflection that it is reasonable for her to accompany her daughter to the wedding. If Euripides is responsible for this innovation, then all that part of the action in which Clytemnestra is involved (about half of the play) is new.

¹¹ See J. Schmitt, *Freiwilliger Opfertod bei Euripides* (Giessen, 1921).

¹² Pearson, *loc. cit.*

¹³ Eur. *I.T.* 24-5; cf. Apollodorus, *Epit.* III.22, Hyginus, *fab.* 98. For the view that Sophocles set the action at Argos see T. Zielinski, *Tragodumenon libri tres* (Cracow, 1925), p. 272; W. H. Friedrich, *Hermes* LXX (1935), 96.

¹⁴ Zielinski, *op. cit.*, pp. 250-63; F. Jouan, *Euripide et les légendes des chants cypriens* (Paris, 1966), pp. 271, 278.

If this is so, we may probably also attribute the two other major innovations to Euripides, since they hinge upon Clytemnestra's new role. The device of the letters is again essentially a dramatic one, and it replaces the embassy from the army to Clytemnestra in Argos, which Sophocles, probably following earlier tradition, had employed. It therefore goes with Euripides' change of the setting from Argos to Aulis.

Achilles' role in our play is closely linked with that of Clytemnestra, and therefore seems likely also to be entirely Euripidean.

Where does Euripides' interest lie in the *Iphigenia in Aulis*? We may note first of all that he pays little attention to the religious aspect of the myth. No explanation is given of the cause of Artemis' wrath. At first we are allowed to see the demand for the sacrifice as no more than the prophecy of Calchas, which there is room to doubt; but at the end of the play it is acknowledged to be the divine will.¹⁵ This shift of attitude is achieved simply by a deliberate refusal to bring the question sharply into focus at all.

Nor is it Euripides' purpose to extract a moral lesson from the events of the story. No blame is apportioned within the drama for the predicament in which the characters find themselves. The demand for the sacrifice is not occasioned by an offence of Agamemnon. The circumstances in which the characters find themselves are externally determined by the wrath of the goddess, and we are not told how this came about. Responsibility for what happens in the play tends to be attached neither to the characters nor to the goddess, but the origin of woes (*ἀρχὴ κακῶν*) is traced to some event in the past, notably the Judgement of Paris.¹⁶ This is a common motif in Euripides' Trojan plays.¹⁷

It is certainly true that an important part of Euripides' interest in the *Iphigenia* lies in the persons of the story as providing material for the realistic observation of human behaviour. There is much truth in the well-known remark which Aristotle in the *Poetics* attributes to Sophocles: that he depicted men as they ought to be, while Euripides depicted them as they are.¹⁸ Taking as his data the events supplied by tradition and also certain traditional traits of his characters, Euripides explores their conduct in terms of actual life. To this end he contrives to present his characters in situations which are like those of the everyday world.

The presentation of the characters in realistic terms is not always easily reconciled with the indispensable supernatural elements in the story. In these circumstances we simply have to accept the essential data of the myth, whatever incongruity there may be between them and the familiar situations in which the poet places his characters. Thus in this play the human sacrifice and the reason for it are essential parts of the myth. We must accept that the fleet is detained by adverse weather at the

¹⁵ Cf. ll. 89-93, 498-9, 520-1, 746-8, 879, 955-8, 1262, 1268, 1310-11, 1395-6, 1408-9, 1462-3, 1467-1508.

¹⁶ Ll. 573-89, 1284-1312; cf. ll. 71-7, 177-84, 467-8, 1253-4.

¹⁷ T. C. W. Stinton, *Euripides and the Judgement of Paris* (London, 1965).

¹⁸ Arist. *Poet.* 24.

will of the goddess and that only the sacrifice of Iphigenia can appease her. Moreover, if the necessary climax of the story is not to be simply revolting, we must in the end be brought to recognize that the sacrifice is not only unavoidable but also justified. And so finally we have to accept first that the bad weather is godsent and can be ended only by the sacrifice and secondly that the expedition to Troy is an object worthy of such sacrifice. For the time being, however, the characters, and the audience too, may be allowed to think otherwise. It is important for our understanding of the structure of the play, and the treatment of the characters, to realize that Euripides is not rejecting the traditional elements of the myth but is merely reserving them for a later stage of the action. The voluntary self-sacrifice of Iphigenia is his one attempt to break free of the bonds of tradition in what might be called the essentials of the myth.

I should like to conclude this study with a few remarks on Euripides' attitude to literary tradition in the portrayal of the characters of the *Iphigenia in Aulis*. We shall look especially at Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and Achilles.

The first stage of the action centres upon the feelings of Agamemnon when confronted by the prophet's demand for the sacrifice of his daughter. Something of the awful emotional stress suffered by Agamemnon is suggested by Aeschylus in the parodos of the *Agamemnon*. Whatever other model for these events Euripides may have had in mind, he has certainly made use of the Aeschylean narrative and indeed seems to be concerned that his audience should recall it. This is shown by two apparent verbal reminiscences.

The Aeschylean version compresses into one speech both the dilemma and the decision of Agamemnon :

ἄναξ δ' ὁ πρέσβυς τόδ' εἶπε φωνῶν·
 'βαρεῖα μὲν κῆρ τὸ μὴ πιθέσθαι,
 βαρεῖα δ', εἰ τέκνον δαί-
 ξω, δόμων ἄγαλμα,
 μαιίνων παρθενοσφάγοισιν
 ῥείθροις πατρῶους χέρας πέλας βω-
 μοῦ. τί τῶνδ' ἄνευ κακῶν;
 πῶς λιπόναις γένωμαι
 ξυμμαχίας ἀμαρτῶν;
 παυσανέμου γὰρ θυσίας
 παρθενίου θ' αἵματος ὀρ-
 γᾶ περόργως ἐπιθυ-
 μεῖν θέμις. εὖ γὰρ εἴη.'

(Aesch. *Agam.* 205-17)

Then it was that the elder chief spake thus and said : " A heavy doom indeed is disobedience, but heavy, too, if I rend my child, the delight of my house, defiling a father's hands with streams from the slaughtering of a virgin at the altar's side. Which of these courses is without evil? How can I fail

in my duty to the alliance and thus become a deserter of the fleet? (I cannot,) for it is right and lawful that one should with over-impassioned passion crave the sacrifice to stay the winds, the blood of the virgin. (It shall be done;) for (my hope is :) may all be well."

(trans. Fraenkel)

The Aeschylean Agamemnon is torn between his natural feelings as a father and his awareness of his responsibilities as commander-in-chief, but accepting the necessity imposed upon him by the will of god he consents to the sacrifice. Euripides' Agamemnon will in the end make the same choice, and will do so both acknowledging the will of Artemis (l. 1268) and having reached an exalted view of his national duty (ll. 1259-75), but this is kept until later in the play. For the present Euripides wants to explore Agamemnon's feelings before the final decision and especially to isolate that stage of his mental process, implicit in Aeschylus, at which the father's natural human feelings prevail.

In order to achieve this he finds it necessary to have made Agamemnon agree to the sacrifice before the play begins and now to wish to revoke his decision. This is done for reasons of dramatic economy, so that the process of bringing Iphigenia to Aulis may already have been set in motion when the play begins. At the same time the wavering of Agamemnon is itself thoroughly human.

The reasons for Agamemnon's first consent to the sacrifice lie outside the play and we are not told them. It is said simply that Menelaus persuaded him.¹⁹ To say more would necessarily mean anticipating the arguments which finally prevail with Agamemnon. Euripides does not want us to consider these yet, but rather to share Agamemnon's present feeling that the sacrifice is by every means to be avoided.

The sequence of scenes in which Agamemnon's state of mind is presented to us has probably been invented by Euripides. The sequence comprises the prologue-scene with the old servant, which is built round the device of the letters, the quarrel between Agamemnon and Menelaus, the Messenger's news of the arrival of Iphigenia and Clytemnestra, Menelaus' abrupt change of heart and Agamemnon's realization that he is now at the mercy of the army.

Although the poet apparently draws on his imagination for these events, it is important to observe that his Agamemnon is not a character of his own free creation but one whose essential qualities are firmly rooted in tradition. The incorporation of traditional elements is an important part of Euripides' psychological study. By representing Agamemnon at the beginning of the play as having changed his mind he puts him in a situation reminiscent of Book IX of the *Iliad*, where Agamemnon regrets his insulting treatment of Achilles and wishes to undo what he has done. Euripides exploits this parallel in portraying his Agamemnon. The symptoms of his mental state—insomnia, tears, remorse and despair—all have their counterparts in the *Iliad*, either in Book IX or in other parts of the poem where Agamemnon is

¹⁹ Ll. 97-8. As part of the prologue narrative this is to be accepted as factual. Menelaus later (ll. 358-62) presents a rather different version in his denunciation of Agamemnon, but we are hardly expected to take it at face-value.

shown in a similarly distraught condition.²⁰ The Euripidean Agamemnon is not, as many critics have said,²¹ far removed in stature from the traditional hero, but corresponds closely to the Homeric portrait, at least in some parts of the *Iliad*.

Another traditional element is the *atē* of Agamemnon. Homer's Agamemnon in his remorse seeks to excuse his previous folly by attributing it to *atē*, an infatuation sent by the gods.²² In Aeschylus Agamemnon becomes the victim of *atē* at the moment when he decides to sacrifice his daughter. His *atē* is not, as in Homer, inexplicable, but it comes upon him because he is the victim of hereditary guilt within his family. The gods put him in a position where he must make the choice which results in the derangement of his mind, which is *atē*. These religious associations are excluded by Euripides. His study of human behaviour is not compatible with such a degree of divine control. He nevertheless reminds us again of the tradition by making his Agamemnon refer to the *atē* into which he has fallen, without attributing this to the gods (l. 137).

On hearing the news that Iphigenia and Clytemnestra have reached Aulis and that the army is aware of their presence Agamemnon realizes the hopelessness of his attempts to thwart the sacrifice. He feels himself now under the compulsion of necessity, and we are brought to the situation of the Aeschylean Agamemnon, of which we seem to have a verbal reminder. Although the "yoke of necessity" is a very common image, our Agamemnon's words

εἰς οἷ' ἀνάγκης ζεύγματ' ἐμπεπτώκαμεν

(IA 443)

Beneath what a yoke of necessity I have fallen
necessarily call to mind the line of Aeschylus :

ἐπεὶ δ' ἀνάγκης ἔδω λέπαδνον

(Aesch. *Agam.* 218)

When he had put on the yoke-strap of necessity.

In submitting to *ἀνάγκη* Aeschylus' Agamemnon recognizes both that he must obey the will of Artemis and that he cannot desert his alliance. The Euripidean Agamemnon, however, does not at this point feel constrained either by the divine will or by a sense of duty. For him *ἀνάγκη* now arises out of his fear of the army's hostility if he should renounce the expedition. He believes that, if the army finds out that he has refused the sacrifice, it will unite against him and destroy him, his family and his country.

Many critics have thought this fear to be absurdly exaggerated. A few have been prepared to delete the passage in which it occurs as an interpolation.²³ Others,

²⁰ For the comparison with the Agamemnon of *Iliad* IX see E. Valgiglio, *Riv. stud. class.* IV (1956), 183 ff. Cf. also *Il.* II.1 ff., XIX.74 ff.

²¹ E.g., W. Schmid, *Gesch. d. griech. Lit.* III.1 (1940), p. 635; M. Pohlenz, *Die griech. Tragödie*, 2nd ed., p. 465; H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*, 3rd ed., p. 262; Jouan, *op. cit.*, p. 434. For a less harsh estimate see H. Vretska, *W. Stud.* LXIV (1961), 18-39.

²² Cf. *Il.* II.11, IX.18, XIX.74 ff.

²³ Ll. 528-42 were deleted by Dindorf and England. Cf. Page, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-8.

while not going as far as this, have nevertheless thought that Euripides means us here to see Agamemnon in a very unfavourable light, as a weak and irresolute coward, or even as a hypocritical one who seeks a pretext which will enable him to pursue his personal ambitions.²⁴

Interpretations of this kind do not make sufficient allowance either for the poet's obligations to the traditional form of his myth or to the design of his play. As we have already remarked, Agamemnon is to acknowledge at the end of the play that the sacrifice is necessary for reasons not very different from those of Aeschylus' Agamemnon, namely that it is the divine will and that it is his patriotic duty. But Euripides does not wish to introduce either of these motives here, since awareness of them would tend to destroy our sympathy with attempts to avoid the sacrifice, which are still to be made by others than Agamemnon.

He therefore invents a new motive which forces his Agamemnon now to abandon resistance. To us this fear of the army may not seem sufficiently compelling. Euripides, however, means the danger to be real enough, as we see later, when Achilles' attempted intervention on Iphigenia's behalf is greeted by actual violence from his own men and the rest of the army (ll. 1349 ff.). Throughout the play, in fact, from the prologue onwards, we are given constant reminders of the presence in the background of a great army, eager for action and impatient at its enforced idleness. The parodos, which is devoted to a description of the warriors and the armament (if the whole is genuine), serves this function, as do other hints of the army's restlessness scattered throughout the play.²⁵

The army, then, is intended to be a potent factor in the dramatic situation. Euripides invites us here to make some comparison with contemporary experience. In his attack on Agamemnon Menelaus depicts him as the typical ambitious politician who ingratiates himself by every means while campaigning for office, but after attaining it becomes resentful when he finds his ambitions thwarted. This has happened, Menelaus goes on to say, to many men in public life: they strive hard while they have control of affairs, but then fail ignominiously, sometimes through the ignorant vote of the citizens, sometimes through their own incapacity (ll. 366-9). This last passage has sometimes been regarded as an interpolation on the grounds that it is not strictly applicable to Agamemnon's situation.²⁶ This misses the point. The parallel between Agamemnon and an unsuccessful politician is not exact, but Euripides does not mean it to be. He in fact discourages us from taking Menelaus' rhetoric too seriously by putting stress on his unscrupulousness early in this scene. But this passage does serve a purpose: it invites us to look at Agamemnon's situation in contemporary terms. The Athenians of the late fifth century were familiar enough

²⁴ See, e.g., Pohlenz, *op. cit.*, p. 462; J. C. Kamerbeek, in *Euripide*, Entretiens de la Fondation Hardt, Tome VI (Geneva, 1960), pp. 21-2.

²⁵ Parodos: ll. 164-302 (the genuineness of ll. 231-302 remains in doubt: see Page, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-7). Cf. also ll. 324, 352-3, 391-3, 425-34, 751 ff., 801-18, 825-6, 913-15, 1000-1, 1012, 1259 ff., 1338, 1345-68, 1372, 1414-15, 1458.

²⁶ Ll. 368-9 were deleted by Hermann and Hennig. Page, *op. cit.*, p. 149, is inclined to agree with them.

with the impotence of the individual statesman in the face of the fickleness of the masses. The *History* of Thucydides, a contemporary of Euripides, provides a sufficient commentary on this aspect of Athenian democracy. What Euripides is suggesting to us here is that we should regard Agamemnon's relations with the army in such terms as these.

In the heroic world commanding officers are not thus at the mercy of their armies. In Homer the rank and file of the army are normally very much in the background, and our interest is concentrated on the exploits of the heroes.²⁷ But the idea of a dangerously restive army does not originate entirely with Euripides. Aeschylus, in the parodos of the *Agamemnon*, has suggested the damaging effects of delay upon the army :

πνοαὶ δ' ἀπὸ Στρώμονος μολοῦσαι
κακόσχολοι νήστιδες δύσορμοι,
βροτῶν ἄλαι, ναῶν <τε> καὶ
πεισμάτων ἀφειδεῖς,
παλιμμήκη χρόνον τιθεῖσαι
τρίβω κατέξαινον ἄνθος Ἀργείων

(*Agam.* 192-8)

and gales coming from the Strymon,
with harmful leisure, starvation,
bad lingering in port,
wandering of the men . . .
were wasting and wearing away
the flower of the Argives.

(trans. Fraenkel)

Aeschylus depicts here the physical deterioration of the forces rather than the moral effects of idleness, but the epithet *κακόσχολοι* at least provides the germ of the latter idea, which Euripides was to develop. A surviving line of Sophocles' *Iphigenia* shows that he too introduced the damaging effect of delay on the army's morale :

τίκτει γὰρ οὐδὲν ἐσθλὸν εἰκαῖα σχολή.

(fr. 308 P)

No good is bred of aimless leisure.

In both Aeschylus and Sophocles the uneasy state of the army is evidently a factor which makes the need for the sacrifice more pressing. It was only a small step for Euripides to make the threat of mob violence a compelling factor in his play.

We may, if we wish, still regard Agamemnon's action in yielding to the will of the mob as cowardly. Euripides, who does not invite us here to pass moral judgement on him, presents it rather as realistic prudence. It is of course in strong contrast with the idealistic heroism of a Sophoclean hero. We may compare here Neoptolemus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, who will not consent to what he regards as a shameful act, the

²⁷ In *Il.* XVI.200-9, however, Achilles speaks of discontent among the Myrmidones. I owe this reference to Professor G. P. Shipp.

taking away of Philoctetes' bow, even when Odysseus threatens him with the reprisals of the entire Greek army.²⁸

The second stage of the action brings Iphigenia and Clytemnestra on the scene and reaches its climax in Clytemnestra's discovery of the facts and her appeal for Achilles' aid. For the encounter between Agamemnon and his family Euripides is at pains to create a domestic atmosphere within the setting of the Greek camp. It is perhaps as part of this purpose that we are to see the gratuitous inclusion of the infant Orestes in the family party which arrives from Argos. The action does not require his presence, and some scholars have suggested that eight passages which introduce him in several scenes are all interpolated.²⁹ In a few places the quality of the style lends some support to this view, but we may nevertheless be prepared to regard the presence of Orestes as within the spirit of this Euripidean drama. He helps to fill out the family group and to enhance the pathos of the appeals made by mother and daughter to Agamemnon.

The bringing of Clytemnestra to Aulis was Euripides' boldest innovation in the story, one rich in dramatic possibilities. As we have seen, Sophocles had at least introduced her into his treatment of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, without, it would seem, bringing her to Aulis. We do not know how far the older versions had concerned themselves with her feelings at the time. In the epic tradition Clytemnestra was, of course, celebrated mainly for her later career: her adultery with Aegisthus and the murder of her husband in revenge for the slaying of Iphigenia. An Athenian audience would naturally think first of the shameless adulteress and cold, scheming murderess so magnificently portrayed by Aeschylus in the *Oresteia*. The Clytemnestra of Sophocles' *Electra* is cast in the same mould, and so is Euripides' portrayal of her in his *Electra*, even if he allows her one or two redeeming features.

In our play Euripides depicts Clytemnestra at an earlier stage of her career, as he had done previously in the lost *Telephus*. Critics have commented on the metamorphosis she undergoes from a criminal adulteress to an irreproachable wife and mother, elated at the prospect of getting a good husband for her daughter (and who more eligible than the son of a goddess?).³⁰ It is a thoroughly homely portrait, but the transformation is not so complete that we cannot recognize some resemblance to the Clytemnestra of Aeschylus; and herein lies the dramatist's point.

Effective use is made of Clytemnestra's traditional qualities in several ways. First, as soon as she arrives on the scene, we are made aware of her dominant personality as she gives orders to the servants to do this and that.³¹ It is also possible for the poet to suggest a certain aloofness between Clytemnestra and her husband, merely by giving her opening address to him an Aeschylean formality:

ὦ σέβας ἐμοὶ μέγιστον, Ἀγαμέμνων ἄναξ.

(l. 633)

²⁸ Soph. *Phil.* 1257-8.

²⁹ This was the view of Wecklein and of England; for details see Page, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

³⁰ See, e.g., Jouan, *op. cit.*, p. 434; Schmid, *op. cit.*, p. 759.

³¹ Ll. 607-30: this passage, however, is under suspicion of interpolation.

Remembering how easily Clytemnestra triumphs over Agamemnon in the celebrated purple-carpet scene of the *Agamemnon*, we are not at all surprised when his will here proves unequal to hers, and he fails to persuade her to return home. Her outright disobedience would perhaps have shocked a fifth-century Athenian audience more than it does us, for they normally expected more deference from a wife to a husband.

In the subsequent scenes with Achilles Clytemnestra's lack of conventional feminine modesty is cleverly exploited in order to contrive situations which would hardly be possible if strict proprieties were observed. In the first place, when Achilles comes looking for Agamemnon in his tent, she is a little forward, although pardonably so, in rushing out to greet the man she thinks to be her future son-in-law (ll. 819 ff.). The unintentional impropriety of the encounter which ensues is developed for comical effect. But on finding out her mistake Clytemnestra, instead of modestly withdrawing, boldly presses her appeal to Achilles, although he cannot be held to be under any obligation to her. The opening words of her appeal expressly cast shame aside :

οὐκ ἐπαιδεσθήσομαί γε προσπεσεῖν τὸ σὸν γόνυ

(l. 900)

I shall not let shame prevent me from falling at your knees.

It cannot be accidental that this reminds us of two notorious speeches in the *Agamemnon* where Clytemnestra begins by frankly admitting her lack of shame :

(i) *Ag.* 855-7 (her unsolicited defence of her loyalty in Agamemnon's absence) :

ἄνδρες πολῖται, πρέσβος Ἀργείων τόδε,
οὐκ αἰσχυνοῦμαι τοὺς φιλόνορας τρόπους
λέξαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς . . .

Men of the city, noble elders of Argos present here, I shall not be ashamed to describe to you my love for my husband . . .

(trans. Fraenkel)

(ii) *Ag.* 1372-3 (boasting of the treachery by which she has ensnared Agamemnon) :

πολλῶν πάροιθεν καιρίως εἰρημένων
τάναντί' εἶπεῖν οὐκ ἐπαισχυνοθήσομαι.

Much have I said before to suit the moment : in saying the contrary now I shall feel no shame.

(trans. Fraenkel)

Euripides has simply transferred the shamelessness of Clytemnestra to rather different, and more readily forgivable, circumstances. Further use is made of this trait later in order to contrive a meeting between Achilles and Iphigenia, which is naturally embarrassing for both in the circumstances. As Achilles approaches, Iphigenia hastens to depart, but Clytemnestra detains her in the hope of making a further appeal to Achilles (ll. 1343-4). Euripides thus uses the traditional ἀναίδεια of

Clytemnestra in order to make possible scenes not strictly in keeping with the standards of behaviour observed by respectable Athenian women of the time.³²

As a third example of Euripides' methods we may glance briefly at his portrayal of Achilles, a character in whom he invites us to take a particular interest. Although we do not see him until the middle of the play, we are carefully prepared for his appearance from the beginning.

Once again we find widely divergent estimates among the critics. At one extreme Achilles is seen as perfectly embodying the virtues prized in a young man by the best Athenian society of the time.³³ At the other he has been called "a spoilt and braggart boy" and "an egoist".³⁴ It has also been held by many scholars that this part of the play has suffered heavy interpolation.³⁵ Achilles' speeches, in particular, have aroused suspicion, being prolix and at times apparently inconsistent. Yet the style for the most part is not of poor quality.

Here too, I think, a study of the Euripidean character in relation to earlier tradition may throw some light on the dramatist's intentions and may, to a limited extent, help with the problem of interpolation, into the detail of which there is not time to enter.

Our knowledge of the Achilles of tradition is confined mainly to the *Iliad*, which must in any case here have been the model for later poets. It is a pity that we do not have any of the other Attic tragedies in which Achilles appeared, particularly the Achilles-trilogy of Aeschylus, the plot of which was based on the *Iliad*. There is a small papyrus fragment, in which Achilles appears, and which, if it is rightly ascribed to Aeschylus, suggests that his drama might have thrown some light on the Euripidean Achilles.³⁶ We find in it, for example, the motive of the stoning of Achilles, which occurs in our play, but is not Homeric and not otherwise known in our tradition.

The situation which Euripides contrives between Achilles and Agamemnon is apparently of his own invention, but is obviously designed as a parallel to the situation of the *Iliad*: Achilles is provoked to anger by what he regards as a slight against his honour. Up to a point, and perhaps further than with his other characters, Euripides sets out to portray Achilles along the lines suggested by tradition. First of all, he is careful to impress on us several aspects of the traditional Achilles before he even appears: his good birth (the fact that he is the son of a goddess greatly impresses Clytemnestra); secondly, his temper (*θυμός*) and his independent spirit; thirdly, his education, which he has received from the Centaur Chiron.³⁷

³² The play contains several references to the standards of propriety to be observed by women: cf. ll. 678, 735, 830, 1029-32. Similar sentiments are often found in Euripides: see, e.g., *Electra* 343-4, with Denniston's note.

³³ Jouan, *op. cit.*, pp. 286-7.

³⁴ The verdicts, respectively, of E. M. Blaiklock, *The Male Characters of Euripides*, pp. 117 ff., and E. Valgiglio, *Riv. stud. class.* V (1957), 48 ff.

³⁵ For details see Page, *op. cit.*, pp. 175 ff.

³⁶ *Pap. Soc. It.* 1211 (= Aesch. fr. 286 Lloyd-Jones, 225 Mette). The fragment has recently been discussed by B. Snell, *Scenes from Greek Drama* (Berkeley, 1964), pp. 1 ff.

³⁷ See especially ll. 124 ff., 134, 208, 626, 695-713.

The education of Achilles is particularly stressed, and by it he has been thoroughly imbued with those qualities which were prized in the traditional aristocratic code of ethics. First of all, he has acquired αἰδώς, a modesty or sense of propriety in his conduct towards others, a quality he sometimes lacks in the *Iliad*. Euripides plays on this quality in the scenes with Clytemnestra, making much of the contrast between Achilles' αἰδώς (modesty) and Clytemnestra's lack of it. He wants it to be a mark of Achilles' good upbringing.³⁸

Achilles' aristocratic education has also taught him, like the traditional Achilles, to set great store by his reputation. It is the defence of his own good name, rather than any feeling for Iphigenia, as he makes bluntly clear, that impels him to oppose Agamemnon's attempt to sacrifice her.

Our Achilles' education has also taught him that reason (νοῦς, γνώμη) should control the emotions (θυμός), itself a principle of the traditional code of conduct (which we find, for example, in the gnomic poet Theognis).³⁹ But whereas the Homeric Achilles notoriously lets his θυμός rule his conduct and is deaf to the appeals of reason, Euripides' Achilles is better able to control his emotions.

Achilles has thus been brought up to the old-fashioned virtues. The point Euripides seems anxious to make lies in the contrast between his principles and his actual practice in the world of experience. And so, despite his promises to oppose Agamemnon, when it comes to the point, he tamely advises Clytemnestra that it might be better if she were to try persuasion first. There is no point in his compromising himself in the eyes of the army, if it is not going to be necessary. "The army will not blame me, if I act rationally rather than by force" (ll. 1020-1). Like Agamemnon earlier he is conscious of public opinion.

Later, however, when the first course fails, Achilles does try to intercede on behalf of Iphigenia, but is forced to beat a hasty retreat under the stoning of his own men.

I have suggested earlier that Euripides may have derived the idea of the stoning of Achilles from Aeschylus, if a fragment of a few lines is to be attributed to him. But there is a significant difference. In the Aeschylean fragment Achilles is threatened with stoning, but this does not deter him from the course he regards as honourable. In Euripides Achilles faces actual stoning and gives way. It is an instructive example of the way in which Euripides adapts the tradition in order to point the contrast between the idealism of the heroic world and the expediency of real life.

I have examined here a few aspects of Euripides' treatment of the myth in his *Iphigenia in Aulis* in relation to our knowledge of the mythological tradition in earlier Greek literature. There has not been time to treat the subject in more than a cursory fashion, but I hope that it will have become apparent how this knowledge can sometimes throw light on the dramatist's aims and methods in this play. We have seen that in expanding the bare outline of the received story he is prepared to take great

³⁸ See, e.g., ll. 821, 833-4, 839-40, 848, 900, 1028-32.

³⁹ Ll. 919 ff. Cf. Theognis 631-2, 635-6.

liberties in inventing his own incidents, a procedure which is perhaps especially characteristic of some of Euripides' late plays. Nevertheless, it is possible at the same time to observe a faithful adherence to tradition in certain essentials of the myth, which exercises a control over the construction of the plot and the delineation of the characters.

I hope that this study will also have provided one small illustration of the difficulties which confront us in trying to understand a classical text. The amount of Greek literature which survives is very small in proportion to what is lost, and in our efforts to uncover the mind of an ancient author we must constantly be aware of the handicaps imposed by the fragmentary state of our knowledge. That is abundantly apparent here.

In trying to decide textual problems such as those I outlined at the beginning of this lecture, a study of the present kind may sometimes be useful. It may aid us in deciding what the poet may or may not have written in a particular context or for a particular speaker. I have given only a couple of examples of this, and would not of course claim that they could be decided without also weighing a great many other considerations, especially those of language and style. It may perhaps be appropriate to close by quoting an observation made by Enoch Powell, who was a distinguished textual critic, in his Inaugural Lecture. He said that many textual questions, "especially those where authenticity or interpolation is at issue, are in the last resort questions of taste; and every reader has to form for himself an idea of the standards of the age and author under consideration, and then judge the particular passages in the light of these".