

*Characters.*

Notwithstanding the elaboration and distinctness of these several scenes the art of the poet never allows us to forget the central figure, and so arranges the supreme crisis in her lot, that her sacrifice serves as the touchstone to reveal the true character of all the personages in the drama. From all consideration of separate incidents and characters we turn again to the heroine, only to find her image more perfectly winning, more wonderfully noble. Each in its way the several characters are a foil to that of Iphigeneia. Even Achilles, who has in him the stuff that makes the manly ideal alike of ancient, mediæval, and modern society, who is the first (*vv.* 1404 ff.) to sympathize with the heroine's noble aspirations, who is high-souled, strong, and generous, seems harsh by the side of her tenderness. The inordinate share which a sense of personal indignity has with Achilles in determining him to act in the heroine's defence (*cf.* *vv.* 935—942), shows a weakness to which there is no counterpart in the heroic self-abandonment of Iphigeneia.

Clytaemnestra has a strong and true love for her daughter, but it is a narrow and self-regarding affection as compared with Iphigeneia's love for her father and her country—a blind passion of a character whose subsequent faithlessness to her husband balances her true-hearted love to her child.

Of Agamemnon, as he appears in this play, it must be allowed that his wife gives a true description when at *v.* 1012 she says *κακός τις ἔστι καὶ λίαν ταρβέει στρατόν*. He is a poor creature in a desperate situation. Whereas Iphigeneia's first impulse to save herself (*vv.* 1211—1252)—which no less a critic than Aristotle<sup>1</sup> has blamed as inconsistent with her later conduct—gives way to an enthusiastic self-devotion, her father's inconsistencies are all between good impulses and base action. He loves his daughter, but is incapable of renouncing his high position to save her. It is not the glory and honour of Greece, but fear of the consequences to himself that induces him to abandon his daughter to her fate. It is a marvellous 'touch of nature' that Iphigeneia, unlike her mother, is blind to Agamemnon's faults. To her he is an ideal father. Her love for him speaks in her intercession for him with Clytaemnestra at *vv.* 1456 and 1458; and her mention of him when she first reveals her determination to die (at *v.* 1369) shows us that love for her father, and a clear perception of his desperate situation, have had their part in forming her decision.

<sup>1</sup> *Poetics* c. 15, p. 1454, 31 a.