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To cite this article: Michael White (2023) *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, Torquato Tasso, and the Imagery of Character, *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 92:2, 95-111, DOI: 10.1080/09593683.2023.2212442

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09593683.2023.2212442>



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Published online: 14 Jun 2023.



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Iphigenie auf Tauris, Torquato Tasso, and the Imagery of Character

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ABSTRACT

Whether it is in the notion of 'Bildung' or the daemonic, the reflective engagement with the self lies at the heart of what makes Goethe compelling for modern readers. This article traces the language and imagery of one notion of self-realization, moral character, in *Iphigenie auf Tauris* and *Torquato Tasso*. It identifies recurrent metaphors associated with character in eighteenth and nineteenth century theoretical and popular texts, such as stability, independence, influence, and limitation or focus. It demonstrates how this imagery of character informs the inner logic of the plays, structures the relationships between the individual characters, and how, through it, the dramas can be seen as offering literary reflections on character as a concept. Character emerges as a modern ideal, difficult to achieve yet realistic, worthy of admiration, yet universal.

KEYWORDS

Iphigenie auf Tauris; *Torquato Tasso*; character; independence; influence; limitation

Scholarship has long seen *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (1787) and *Torquato Tasso* (1790) as representations of the potential of human autonomy on the one hand, and the difficulties for a particular kind of heightened individual on the other.¹ This article argues that both plays not only represent self-realization or autonomy, but examine a particular form of self-realization, namely character. The notion of character is fundamental to the ideology of the age, it underpins the basic logic of the plays, how the characters in the dramas perceive their circumstances and each other, and also constitutes a major reflective focus of the texts, most significantly in their use of imagery and metaphor. By character here, we mean moral character in the sense Joel Kuppermann describes:

All of us will find ourselves repeatedly placed in situations that we cannot entirely control and acted upon by forces that we cannot control. Character has a vital role in how we act. That is, to have character is to act in such a way that the person

¹Cf. Wolfdietrich Rasch's two studies, *Goethes Torquato Tasso: Die Tragödie des Dichters* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1954) and *Goethes Iphigenie auf Tauris als Drama der Autonomie* (Munich: Beck, 1979).

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one is plays a major role in any explanation of one's behavior. To have no character is to act in such a way that one's behaviour might be viewed as (at least approximatively) the product of forces acting on one.²

Character has undergone a considerable resurgence of interest in philosophy in recent decades,³ and new research posits character as a core ethical concept of the late eighteenth century.⁴ In Germanistik, Monika Sproll's 2020 monograph *Das 'Charakteristische'* traces the development of Enlightenment character discourse and its central place in aesthetics.⁵ It is important to emphasize however that publications on and theoretization of character really come into their own in the nineteenth century, in the development of *Charakterologie* as a discipline from Julius Bahnsen onwards,⁶ in the context of emerging state education,⁷ or in more popular self-help manuals, such as Samuel Smiles's *Character*.⁸ *Iphigenie* and *Tasso* are here thus not presented merely as embodiments of theories peculiar to their age, but as engagements with debates that become decisive in the ensuing age of liberalism, and continue to this day.

German drama of the late Enlightenment has been considered with reference to character both recently, in Joachin Heimerl's reading of *Clavigo* as the creation of a modern literary person,⁹ and in older research: Benno von Wiese's survey of German tragedy sees its emergence in 'die Lehre vom Charakter' in Lessing,¹⁰ while Friedrich Gundolf's *Goethe* identifies, briefly, Iphigenie's 'sittlichen Willen' and 'innerer Charakter'.¹¹ What interests us here, however, is not merely to examine how the plays are rooted in personality or even moral fortitude, but to analyse the discourse of character, recurrent groups of metaphors associated with character which structure the dramas at a deeper level, such as self-regulation and limitation, stability and flexibility, independence and isolation, and which we can explore in Kant, Hegel, and the American essayist, Emerson.

For Immanuel Kant, character represents the self-regulating aspect of human personality, distinct from temperament; having character means essentially having willpower, but also crucially limiting oneself (*binden*) to live according to principles developed by one's own reason: 'einen Charakter [...] schlechthin zu haben, bedeutet diejenige Eigenschaft des Willens, nach welcher das Subjekt

²Joel Kupperman, *Character* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 7.

³Cf. *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology and Theology*, ed. by Christian B. Miller and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁴Notably G. Felicitas Munzel, *Kant's Conception of Moral Character: The 'Critical' Link of Morality, Anthropology and Reflective Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁵Monika Sproll, *Das 'Charakteristische': Studien zu 'Charakter'-Konzeptionen und zur Ästhetik des 'Charakteristischen' von Leibniz bis Hölderlin* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2020).

⁶Julius Bahnsen, *Beiträge zur Charakterologie mit besonderer Berücksichtigung pädagogischer Fragen* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1867).

⁷Cf. C.L.A. Hageman, *Was ist Charakter und wie kann er durch die Erziehung gebildet werden?*, ed. by Paul Hageman, 4th edn (Berlin: Oesterwitz, 1888).

⁸Samuel Smiles, *Character* (London: Murray, 1872).

⁹Joachim Heimerl, 'Der moderne Charakter: Das Trauerspiel *Clavigo* als Schlüsselwerk des jungen Goethe', *Euphorion*, 100 (2006), 11–27.

¹⁰Benno von Wiese, *Die deutsche Tragödie von Lessing bis Hebbel* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1967), p. 33.

¹¹Friedrich Gundolf, *Goethe* (Berlin: Bondi, 1918), pp. 317–18.

sich selbst an bestimmte praktische Principien bindet, die er sich durch seine eigene Vernunft unabänderlich vorgeschrieben hat.’¹² Being right in those principles matters less than the ability to live by them, something which makes character, and those who possess it, admirable:

Ob nun zwar diese Grundsätze auch bisweilen falsch und fehlerhaft sein dürfen, so hat doch das Formelle des Wollens überhaupt, nach festen Grundsätzen zu handeln (nicht wie in einem Mückenschwarm bald hinein und bald dahin abzuspringen), etwas Schätzbares und Bewunderungswürdiges in sich; wie es denn auch etwas Seltenes ist. (IV, 292)

Besides the ideas of limitation, consistency, and stability, the word *Bewunderung* is important here because it points to the social nature of character. Character, for Kant, is not the same as exaggerated individuality, being a ‘Sonderling’, because someone truly applying reason will adopt for himself principles valid for all (IV, 293). Character in Kant’s conception thus rests on independence of mind and promotes self-realization, but only in as far as this is in accordance with man’s social life, taking due account of the needs of others. Finally, Kant clearly sees character as a product of maturity. He defines strikingly the final acquisition of character as a moment of confession and resolution, a rebirth akin to an explosion or revolution, one which rests on a solemn vow made to oneself in a moment of awareness (IV, 294). There can be few, he argues who have attempted it before 30, few who have succeeded before 40.

Hegel too sees character primarily in terms of the will, but the language of stability is more pronounced: through character, man comes to ‘feste Bestimmtheit’.¹³ Like Kant, Hegel sees character as a balance between firmness and flexibility, between the ‘Festigkeit des Naturells mit der Veränderlichkeit der Temperamentsstimmung’ (x, p. 93). Character here too is impressive and influential: ‘der charaktervolle Mensch imponiert Anderen’ (x, p. 93). Significantly, character is a modern ideal for Hegel: it emerges through education, and describes the kind of freedom that distinguishes modern consciousness from that of the ancients: ‘Es ist diß Wollen der Freiheit nicht mehr ein Trieb, der seine Befriedigung fodert, sondern der Charakter, — das zum trieblosen Seyn gewordene geistige Bewußtsein.’¹⁴ Character is for him part of an holistic view of man’s being and ethical life, a desire to unite the sensory and the rational, in a way that parallels other writers of the late eighteenth-century: ‘Die Lehre von den Tugenden’, he writes, ‘insofern sie nicht bloß Pflichtenlehre

¹²Kants *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by die Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Akademie Ausgabe) (Berlin: 1910–), IV, 292.

¹³Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Hermann Glockner and others, 20 vols (Stuttgart: Fromann, 1927–30), x: *System der Philosophie III: Die Philosophie des Geistes* (1929), p. 91.

¹⁴*Hegels Philosophie des subjektiven Geistes; Hegel’s Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, ed. and trans. by M. J. Petry, 3 vols (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1977–79), III: *Phenomenology and Psychology* (1979), p. 268 (§481).

ist, somit das Besondere, auf Naturbestimmtheit Gegründete des Charakters umfaßt, wird hiermit eine geistige Naturgeschichte sein.¹⁵

While admiration is a by-product of will in Kant and Hegel, the ability to influence others is definitive for Emerson: ‘This is that which we call Character, — a reserved force which acts directly by presence, and without means.’¹⁶ Indeed, it becomes personal charisma: ‘What others effect by talent or eloquence, this man accomplishes by some magnetism’ (p. 265). He develops the metaphorical language of firmness in Kant and Hegel (‘fest’ and ‘Festigkeit’ above) into one of stable weightiness: ‘Character is centrality, the impossibility of being displaced or overset. A man should give us a sense of mass’ (p. 270). This stability is what enables ‘resistance’, ‘self-sufficingness’ and a sense of distance from ‘frivolous’ society, preventing ‘acquiescence in the establishment’ (pp. 270–71).

In his ‘Self-Reliance’, the difficult balance between resolution, stability, and flexibility is memorably explored in his criticism of the false idol of consistency: ‘A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds’ (p. 35). In these more metaphorical reflections, independence acquires a spatial dimension, as personal distance: ‘I like the silent church before the preaching begins [...] how far off, how cool, how chaste the persons look’; and while there was little of limitation or binding oneself in ‘Character’, that is the key-note in ‘Self-Reliance’ as concentrating on nearness, as home: ‘Thus all concentrates: let us not rove, let us sit at home, with the cause’ (p. 42).

Goethe’s use of the word ‘character’ is, against this backdrop, typical but not unreflecting. For him the word means more than merely personality, and is used:

gewöhnlich in einem höhern Sinne: wenn nämlich eine Persönlichkeit von bedeutenden Eigenschaften auf ihre Weise verharret und sich durch nichts davon abwendig machen läßt.¹⁷

The qualities of independence and steadfastness identified here recur in the memorable recollections of F. M. Klinger in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*,

Er empfahl sich durch eine reine Gemütlichkeit und ein unverkennbar entschiedener Charakter erwarb ihm Zutrauen. [...] Alles, was an ihm war, hatte er sich selbst verschafft und geschaffen, so daß man ihm einen Zug von stolzer Unabhängigkeit, der durch sein Betragen durchging, nicht verargte. Entschiedene natürliche Anlagen, welche allen wohlbegabten Menschen gemein sind, leichte Fassungskraft, vortreffliches Gedächtnis, Sprachengabe besaß er in hohem Grade; aber alles schien

¹⁵Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Werke in Zwanzig Bänden*, ed. by Eva Moldenhausser and Karl Markus Michel, 14 vols (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1969–), vii: *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1970), p. 299 (§150, addition).

¹⁶Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays: First and Second Series* (New York: Library of America Paperback Classics, 1991), p. 265.

¹⁷FA, xxiii/1, p. 845

er weniger zu achten als die Festigkeit und Beharrlichkeit, die sich ihm, gleichfalls angeboren, durch Umstände völlig bestätigt hatten. (FA, XIV, pp. 656–57)

Stability, independence, and the trust of others that is won through these qualities, here we find the familiar language of character recognizable in the theoretical texts cited above. But Goethe also reflects on the distinction between characterfulness as consistency, and stubbornness. Here his discussion of Newton is relevant. It is not that Newton was wrong about some of his conclusions and stuck to them as a man of character that is worthy of criticism, Goethe comments, rather it is his inflexibility and inability to move from a position taken that becomes a danger:

Ängstlich aber ist es anzusehen, wenn ein starker Charakter, um sich selbst getreu zu bleiben, treulos gegen die Welt wird und, um innerlich wahr zu sein, das Wirkliche für eine Lüge erklärt und sich dabei ganz gleichgültig erzeigt, ob man ihn für halsstarrig, verstockt, eigensinnig, oder für lächerlich halte. (FA, XXIII/1, p. 846)

And we note here further how Goethe relates *Eigensinnigkeit* to a loss of reality, a loss of truth and the grasp of reality, making, again, character a mediating force between ideals and principles, and reality and social life.

For Goethe, contemporary theorists, and later writers ‘character’ is thus both understood as distinct from personality, and expressed with recourse to a range of associated concepts and images, often involving a sense of balance: stability, coupled with flexibility; independence, but which makes a person influential; a concentration on the self and the near, but of a kind that makes one useful to society. Character forms, as we will see, the implicit connection between these images, their literary development and exploration constituting, in turn, a reflection on the notion of character itself.

Turning to address now *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, we can make two brief observations as a point of departure. First, the drama creates the potential for the principal characters to show moral character: it foregrounds the mature individual, placed in a position of decision-making. Throughout the play, individual action and consideration triumph and are structurally contrasted with group concerns: saved by Diana, Iphigenie stands in contrast to her family and its heritage, and she appears to change the fated course of its history. The action involves her ‘Selbstbewahrung’,¹⁸ preserving her independence by refusing to marry Thoas, and then extricating herself from the Greek plot to steal the temple statue, trusting instead the autocrat, Thoas, to be generous and liberate her and the Greeks. The events in the action are decisions: Iphigenie’s decision about whether to marry, the decision about whether to reveal her

¹⁸FA, v, p. 1310. Subsequent references to the dramas will be made parenthetically and refer to this edition.

past, her decision to assist in, and then free herself from the plot, and Thoas's final decision to allow the Greeks to leave. And the play thematizes the authority of human beings to make decisions *tout court*, notably in discussions surrounding religious practice and sacrifice which contrast Thoas's position — that custom should determine individual action — and Iphigenie's — that the individual heart can interpret the will of the gods. The principal individuals are, finally, mature: Thoas is the obvious example, he is motivated by concerns of being an aging sovereign, and his actions are moderated by his age, as Arkas assures Iphigenie in Act I (ll. 201–03). But Iphigenie too is no longer young, especially in her own understanding. However long she may have been among the Taureans,¹⁹ her feeling is that her youth and her 'best' joys are behind her; she is aged through the experiences of being 'vertrieben und verwaist' (l. 75). In short, the play enshrines moral authority in the mature sovereign individual.

Second, the play is based on a 'genealogy of morality', contrasting old world values of martial heroism, promoting instead character as the ideal of modernity.²⁰ The evocation of Iphigenie's bloodline is double-edged: her family is cursed, but also populated by heroic figures, notably Agamemnon. This heritage compounds her feelings of impotency, primarily expressed in the distinctions she draws between men and women at several points in the drama, and which create a contrast between the heroic, and the more limited sphere of life. By the end, however, she recasts her own actions as a bold deed (l. 1913), inverting the scheme of values in which only violent actions are considered brave and glorious. Iphigenie is unable to act in what she sees as an heroic way, instead she uses the influence produced by her own character to effect change. Orest, for his part, embodies the impotency of heroism: a shattered figure when we meet him, his challenge to Thoas in the final scene, though well received by the latter, appears unmotivated and desperate. Crucially, it is Orest himself who casts aside that way of thinking, and accepts that Iphigenie's sense of truthfulness and trust are more worthy of glory (ll. 2140–45).

Pylades is a more complex figure, because he is characterized by his youthful vigour and ability to bring about change. He requires courage of Iphigenie and quick decisiveness, and she appears to describe him as a glorious and heroic figure:

Er ist der Arm des Jünglings in der Schlacht,
Des Greises leuchtend Aug' in der Versammlung:
Denn seine Seel' ist stille; sie bewahrt
Der Ruhe heil'ges unerschöpftes Gut,

¹⁹Denys Dyer considers it to be ten to fifteen years, cf. Denys Dyer, 'Iphigenie — The Role of the Curse', *PEGS*, 50 (1980), 29–54 (p. 30).

²⁰Peter Pfaff, 'Die Stimme des Gewissens: Über Goethes Versuch einer Genealogie der Moral, vor allem in *Iphigenie*', *Euphorion*, 72 (1978), 20–42 (here especially pp. 25, 27, and 34).

Und den Umhergetriebnen reichet er
Aus ihren Tiefen Rat und Hilfe. (ll. 1384–89)

It is important, however, not to misread Iphigenie's military metaphor in line 1384 as a straightforward endorsement of the model of heroism that Pylades, like Orest and Thoas, advocate. Rather, the qualities Iphigenie values in Pylades are ones which are associated with character: he has the ability to maintain peace in a tumult, and on that basis, provide help and advice to others. Iphigenie does not value his deeds, nor his plan, indeed she is deeply unsettled by them; she values instead the quietude of his soul, and the effect that that has on others, including herself. In short, she appreciates the qualities of character he displays.

Having established first that the play presents its characters with the potential to display character, and offers character as an ideal of modern life, we can address the themes and metaphors we identified above in more detail. The most obvious, perhaps, is the recurrent motif of stability, and its opposite, vacillation. At times the play articulates this explicitly, as in Act I, when Iphigenie thanks the gods for giving her the resolve to reject Thoas's proposal:

Und hier dank' ich den Göttern, daß sie mir
Die Festigkeit gegeben, dieses Bündnis
Nicht einzugehen, das sie nicht gebilligt. (ll. 490–92)

But most of the play focuses on how difficult that stability is to achieve, or indeed how dangerous it can be if it is misplaced. If Act I overall presents Iphigenie as resolute in her dealings with Arkas and Thoas, it begins with her expression of her inner turmoil. The landscape, focalized symbolically by her, is the expression of this unrest: the play's first word is one of motion, *heraus*, the treetops are in constant and lively movement ('rege Wipfel'), there is a noise and a latent violence in this sea-shore: to her sighs, the waves reply 'brausend', and this tempestuous landscape mirrors and prepares her lament that her current situation, away from home, is one of distraction (ll. 15–19).

The stability which is sought by many characters in the play more often turns, in fact, into 'foolish consistency', i.e. *Eigensinn*. This is most evidently the case with Thoas. Initially presented as reasonable and fair-minded, he repeats his request for Iphigenie to marry him, something he knows is destined to fail, and wishes to return to the practice of human sacrifice, though most soldiers are now, according to Arkas, unused to it (l. 1468). Note how with Thoas the imagery of stability appears inverted: in Act I, he expresses the need to comply with duty, except that unlike Iphigenie he sees human reason as the element which introduces dangerous motion — reason is 'beweglich' and can be directed easily:

Es ziemt sich nicht für uns, den heiligen
Gebrauch mit leicht *beweglicher* Vernunft
Nach unserm Sinn zu deuten und zu *lenken*. (ll. 528–30; my emphasis)

One of the reasons Thoas becomes entrenched or ‘verhärtet’ (l. 1811) is his reaction to what he sees as his own loss of independent authority as a result of Iphigenie’s influence (ll. 1800–04). Indeed, for as much as the characters seek stability in decision-making, it is the ability to influence others in that process that is crucial to the plot, and which occupies arguably more of the play’s attention.

Iphigenie’s position from the outset of the play is that she is someone with authority and influence, though she has no clear political power and seems to herself to be inactive, complaining of ‘ein unnütz Leben’ (l. 115). To Arkas, however, her influence is clear: she has stopped human sacrifice ‘mit sanfter Überredung’ (l. 126) and the very ‘Milde [ihrer] Gegenwart’ has altered the king’s mood such that his demands as a ruler for obedience have been softened (ll. 133–38). For Orest, even Iphigenie’s touch has a healing quality: ‘von dir berührt | War ich geheilt’ (ll. 2119–20). In this sense, Iphigenie certainly has charisma and influence in the sense that the writers on character we explored above understand it, and indeed one way of understanding the action is that Iphigenie moves from being sceptical about such influence, to eventually trusting in it and investing in her own ability to move, as well as in the capacity of Thoas to be moved.

Interestingly, however, the play shares this quality of influence across several characters, and thus asks a question which is awkward for an ideal associated with the individual and, often, with leadership: can everyone be an influencer? Can everyone have character? This is significant because in theoretical discussions of character today, one criticism of character ethics is that they are elitist or can more productively be replaced by other concepts such as citizenship.²¹

Crucially, it is unclear how much of Iphigenie’s influence is inherent to her, and how much is in the imagination of others. For Orest and Thoas, Iphigenie’s influence on them is in part the result of the relationship she has to them: a sister to Orest, and a potential lover to Thoas. Iphigenie’s influence on Thoas appears not only lost, but temporarily reversed once the prospect of her love is lost, while the effects of a ‘healing’ that Orest describes appear some time after his meeting with Iphigenie, which by no means represented the miraculous and immediate process he describes.

Moreover, Iphigenie is herself the object of many influencers in the play, and their effects are varied. Arkas is a case in point. At first, he counsels Iphigenie to marry Thoas, arguing that she should try and perceive the reality of her situation. At that stage, Arkas’s pragmatism does little to move Iphigenie. However, similar arguments employed in Act IV, but this time directed more towards her personal indebtedness to Thoas, do manage to move her, if not to marriage, then to the honest confession which is the play’s climax. We

²¹Lee Jerome and Ben Kisby, *The Rise of Character Education in Britain: Heroes, Dragons and Myths of Character* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

note how in her reflection, the influence he has on her leads to a loss of *Festigkeit*, mirroring Thoas's arguments we cited above:

Von dieses Mannes Rede fühl' ich mir
 Zur ungelegnen Zeit das Herz im Busen
 Auf einmal umgewendet. Ich erschrecke! —
 Denn wie die Flut mit schnellen Strömen wachsend
 Die Felsen überspült, die in dem Sand
 Am Ufer liegen: so bedeckte ganz
 Ein Freudenstrom mein Innerstes. [...]
 O bleibe ruhig, meine Seele!
 Beginnst du nun zu schwanken und zu zweifeln?
 Den festen Boden deiner Einsamkeit
 Mußt du verlassen! (ll. 1503–29)

Thus, while Iphigenie certainly has character, this does not make her imperious to influence herself at all times, as the texts discussed in the introduction might suggest. In the drama, outside influence is essential: both from Pylades to awaken Iphigenie from the shock at finding her brother, and here from Arkas as one stage in her realization that she cannot in good conscience carry out the Greeks' plan of deception. Rather, what Iphigenie is able to do, is make good decisions about the influences to which she should submit. The kind of influence Goethe explores here is thus less to do with magnetism or leadership, and is more democratic, being able to be sensitive to others and trusting in them, while still having the independent resolve to make one's own choices.

Central to the discussion of independence and relationship with others is the imagery of home. The famous opening of *Iphigenie* announces the drama's thematic concern with home and homelessness, but a more straightforward starting point is the subsequent discussion between Thoas and Iphigenie, in which the former argues that well-being in the domestic sphere is the seat and guarantor of personal happiness for all:

Der ist am glücklichsten, er sei
 Ein König oder ein Geringer, dem
 In seinem Hause Wohl bereitet ist. (ll. 228–30)

Several other comments in the drama argue that happiness lies close at hand, in part because human life is necessarily circumscribed. Reflecting in Act I on her absence from home, Iphigenie complains that the problem with her homesickness is that it is a source of distraction, preventing her from enjoying the happiness in front of her, 'das nächste Glück' (l. 18). Elsewhere she expresses a similar view that happiness exists, but is restricted because of human mortality, i.e. temporal limitation, something she expresses positively as a divine gift, but which makes her own moral decision all the more urgent:

Denn die Unsterblichen lieben der Menschen
 Weit verbreitete gute Geschlechter,

Und sie fristen und das flüchtige Leben
 Gerne dem Sterblichen, wollen ihm gerne
 Ihres eigenen, ewigen Himmels
 Mitgenießendes fröhliches Anschau'n,
 Eine Weile gönnen und lassen. (ll. 554–60)

What is more, her own family's problems have arisen in part because of straying beyond these limitations, as she reflects: 'Das sterbliche Geschlecht ist viel zu schwach | In ungewohnter Höhe nicht zu schwindeln' (ll. 317–18). *Iphigenie* thus articulates the idea that the close sphere is the necessary seat of a fulfilled and moral life, which corresponds to its presentation of the autonomous individual realized in a character who is not a hero but a restrained articulation of self-sovereignty.

It is, however, one of the complexities of the play that the two principal characters are seeking to escape or avoid the relative loneliness of their situations, a solitude which affords them the ability to make their own decisions but which, in the extreme form of isolation, is portrayed as the most miserable state imaginable. The drama begins with Iphigenie's monologue which contrasts her longing for home, which here is distant, with her sense of isolation, as she moves out of the secluded and protective sphere of the temple into a landscape that accentuates her sense of separation. Later, describing herself as a wanderer, she fears that revealing her past will condemn her to misery (*Elend*), being cast out still further by Thoas, to complete isolation as a 'von seinem Haus Vertriebenen':

Ach wüßtest du,
 Wer vor dir steht, und welch verwünschtes Haupt
 Du nährst und schüttest; ein Entsetzen faßte
 Dein großes Herz mit seltnem Schauer an,
 Und statt die Seite deines Thrones mir
 Zu bieten, triebest du mich vor der Zeit
 Aus deinem Reiche; stießest mich vielleicht,
 Eh' zu den Meinen frohe Rückkehr mir
 Und meiner Wandrung Ende zgedacht ist,
 Dem Elend zu, das jeden Schweifenden,
 Von seinem Haus Vertriebenen überall
 Mit kalter fremder Schreckenshand erwartet. (ll. 267–78)

But, as in that scene, where Iphigenie takes a gamble in revealing her past to Thoas, a foreshadowing of her later confession about the Greek plot, in Act IV, Iphigenie seems reluctant to leave the safety that her relative isolation provided. We note how the verbs 'schwanken' and 'schwindeln' again draw parallels to the opening acts, but this time produced by the fear of encounter, not isolation:

O bleibe ruhig, meine Seele!
 Beginnst du nun zu schwanken und zu zweifeln?

Den festen Boden deiner Einsamkeit
 Mußt du verlassen! Wieder eingeschiff
 Ergreifen dich die Wellen schaukelnd, trüb'
 Und bang verkennest du die Welt und dich. (ll. 1526–31)

If isolation is a curse or a punishment, thus, human engagement is also a risk, albeit one with significant rewards. Here there is an important parallel to be drawn with the notions of independence and influence discussed above. Towards the end of the play, Thoas complains that he has allowed Iphigenie to influence him and thus to move beyond a state of subservient obedience (ll. 1785–1804), something Arkas had earlier presented as a positive development (ll. 131–36); but Arkas complains to Iphigenie that her relationship to Thoas is merely dutiful, rather than one of gratitude or real emotional attachment, or *Neigung* (ll. 93–96). In short, while Thoas gains by being open to influence and thus less authoritarian in the eyes of Arkas, it by no means follows that gratitude or emotional attachment is something that can be guaranteed or required as a result. What emerges, both in the dramatic action surrounding Iphigenie and Thoas, and Iphigenie and the Greeks, is a situation in which individuals learn to have emotional connections with each other as the basis of a full society and life, but that attachment cannot be a requirement. It is the basis of all meaningful social engagement but also entirely in the gift of the emotionally independent individual. Character involves the ability to endear that attachment in others, through influence, but also the presence of mind and feeling to manage one's own independence. It is a balance between *Freundlichkeit* and *Unverbindlichkeit*.

The character discourse in *Torquato Tasso* is at once clearer, because it is more explicit, but complex because this play about judgement balances the contingent views of its characters.²² In the exposition, Tasso is described in terms that align him closely with Wieland's characterization of a *Dichterseele*: he is marked out as different and distant 'er scheint sich uns zu nahn, und bleibt uns fern' (l. 170), he is a 'wunderbare[r] Mann' (l. 168), closer to nature than the world of ordinary people (l. 160), with a tendency to prefer isolation to society (l. 244). And while his work provides him with freedom, it is a burden: he is unable to finish or leave his work and changes it constantly (l. 265).

However, the first scenes function not only to depict Tasso as an individual cursed with the *malheur d'être poète*, but specifically to outline that what he lacks is character, and that character education is required as a remedy to his tendency towards suspicion (*Argwohn*) that colours his attitude towards others. Alphons speaks of Tasso as a youngster who needs to enter into the world to complete his education, and to be made a man:

²²Mark Boulby, 'Judgement by Epithet in Goethe's *Torquato Tasso*', *PMLA*, 87 (1972), 167–81.

Ein edler Mensch kann einem engen Kreise
 Nicht seine Bildung danken. Vaterland
 Und Welt muß auf ihn wirken. Ruhm und Tadel
 Muß er ertragen lernen. Sich und andere
 Wird er gezwungen recht zu kennen. Ihn
 Wiegt nicht die Einsamkeit mehr schmeichelnd ein.
 Es will der Feind — es *darf* der Freund nicht schonen:
 Dann übt der Jüngling streitend seine Kräfte
 Fühlt was er ist und fühlt sich bald ein Mann. (ll. 293–301)

Tasso needs to develop into a man and do this by being exposed to criticism, to have to assert himself, and thus come to know himself and others. Leonore rephrases this then specifically with reference to character:

Es bildet ein Talent sich in der Stille,
 Sich ein Charakter in dem Strom der Welt. (l. 304-05)

Thus the first scenes show us that Tasso's society understands his behaviour with regard to an ideal, not solely of the court, but also an ideal of character. One key question of the drama is whether they are right: whether it is simply a given that Tasso is condemned to behave in the way he does and pays this price for being a visionary and creative artist, or whether in fact some of his imbalance could be overcome with greater self-control and self-awareness.

The latter is clearly the view of Antonio, who embodies the moral continence Tasso lacks: he argues that Tasso fails even in the 'erste Pflicht des Menschen', namely to regulate his appetite; Tasso's 'feurig Blut' and 'allzuheftig Wesen' are more the product of spice and gluttony than inescapable fate in his eyes (ll. 2884–94). But Tasso too analyses his situation with recourse to a logic of character: in his praise of Antonio, he lauds above all his steadfastness, his uniting of moral conduct with stability in the midst of turbulent life:

Ich weiß daß du das Gute willst und schaffst.
 Dein eigen Schicksal läßt dich unbesorgt,
 An Andere denkst du, Andern stehst du bei,
 Und auf des Lebens leicht bewegter Woge
 Bleibt dir ein stetes Herz. (ll. 1252–56)

Tasso certainly feels that he lacks specifically this quality of inner strength which proves itself by opposing external turbulence:

Wer sich rüsten will, muß eine Kraft
 Im Busen fühlen die ihm nie versagt.
 Verläßt sie mich, die angeborene Kraft
 Die standhaft mich dem Unglück, stolz dem Unrecht
 Begegnen lehrte. Hat die Freude mir
 Hat das Entzücken dieses Augenblicks
 Das Mark in meinen Gliedern aufgelöst? (ll. 508–15)

And his behaviour more than justifies these assessments: he displays an exaggerated subservience to Alphons, hesitating to hand over his 'incomplete' poem and praising Alphons as an inspiration for its values of heroism, and rather than constancy he throughout displays unpredictable volatility.

So far we have demonstrated that *Tasso* explicitly addresses the issue of character and that the principal characters in the drama share a common logic in understanding the play's central problematic (Tasso's behaviour and future), although there are differences between, say, the perspective of the Princess and Antonio. Highlighting the thematic centrality of moral character is important because the predominant tradition in *Tasso* scholarship focuses on Tasso's special status as an artist. From the point of view of character in the text, that is essentially a secondary issue. But, as with *Iphigenie*, investigating the significance of character for *Tasso* involves not only attending to its explicit discussion, but also analysing a range of themes which are associated with it and through which the play offers a more nuanced reflection than an initial reading might suggest.

First, in a negative sense, Tasso embodies the concept of exaggerated individuality in a range of ways. When Tasso asks Antonio to go to Alphons and request his permission to leave, Antonio replies that even when his heart tells him he should go back, his 'Eigensinn' or stubbornness will make him continue on a path he knows to be wrong: 'So wird dein Herz zurück verlangen, wird | Dein Eigensinn dich vorwärts treiben' (ll. 2733–34). Tasso's exaggerated individualism is perhaps more notably expressed in his love of isolation. This is first introduced in terms that seem to excuse Tasso as necessarily *weltfern* (ll. 170–73); but Alphons criticizes the poet's excessive love of solitude, especially from friends, and not least this solitude is itself exaggerated in a suspicion of others that prevents him from recognizing the good intentions of those who wish him well (l. 307). Later in Act II, when Tasso is attempting, clumsily, to persuade Antonio they should become friends quickly, Antonio responds to Tasso's remarks about his sense of conscience that there are real limits to how far one can improve oneself and achieve self-knowledge in the absence of society:

Inwendig lernt kein Mensch sein Innerstes
Erkennen. Denn er mißt nach eigenem Maß
Sich bald zu klein und leider oft zu groß. (ll. 1239–41)

This foreshadows his more compressed expression at the end of the drama 'Vergleiche dich! Erkenne was du bist!' (l. 3420). Tasso's suspicion renders this path to knowledge through others almost impossible, as he conceives of social life as a life of appearances, undermining, not fostering, our true natures and sense of values:

So zwingt das Leben uns zu scheinen, ja
 Zu sein wie jene die wir kühn und stolz
 Verachten konnten. (ll. 2746-08)

It is, however, important to note that the drama emphatically does not contrast isolation and socialization in a straightforward way. On the one hand, the Princess offers Tasso advice which tempers Antonio's position: Tasso need not be a *Weltmann* like Antonio, nor turn his back on the wider world; he can observe it from within a restricted sphere:

Begnüge dich aus einem kleinen Staate,
 Der dich beschützt, dem wilden Lauf der Welt,
 Wie von dem Ufer ruhig zu zusehn. (ll. 808-10)

On the other, Antonio suggests that being out in the world too long, precisely testing oneself against others and controlling oneself is dangerous: 'Es ist gefährlich wenn man allzulang | Sich klug und mäßig zeigen muß (ll. 1975-76). Being among strangers makes a person 'pull himself together', be too closed and attentive to one's goals; keen to influence, relationships become purposeful, rather than free:

Da liegt, geliebte Freundin, die Gefahr!
 Mit fremden Menschen nimmt man sich zusammen,
 Da merkt man auf, da sucht man seinen Zweck
 In ihrer Gunst, damit sie nutzen sollen.
 Allein bei Freunden läßt man sich frei gehn. (ll. 1985-89)

What seems to be important thus is the correct management of one's relationship with different spheres of life and with others. Testing engagement with the wider world and with others creates character because success requires it, but staying out in the world too long is damaging to our relationships with those people who are close to us.

The discourse around isolation is mirrored in the range of related ideas and motifs associated with the greats and heroes of the past who are constantly evoked throughout the play: it is not only exaggerated isolation that is ultimately the object of the play's critique, but the notion of the heightened and unique individual. The idea of the great individual, or genius, is constantly present, from the first scenes in which the Princess and Leonore decorate the busts of Virgil and Ariosto. Tasso's position here is typically unresolved: he is crowned but rejects it, and his own relationship with the greats of the past is one of anxiety, influence, and expectation. And although that initial crowning scene appears insignificant and playful, it establishes the fundamental question of the drama: should Tasso have special status as a poet of historic rank and uniqueness?

Antonio issues a clear repudiation of any sense that Tasso himself might have to genius status:

Die letzten Enden aller Dinge will
 Sein Geist zusammen fassen; das gelingt
 Kaum Einem unter Millionen Menschen
 Und er ist nicht der Mann. (ll. 2135–38)

Tasso clearly believes in the exemplary individual, indeed in the idea of characters as role models. We observe this in the negative, when he asks: ‘Hilft denn kein Beispiel der Geschichte mehr?’ (l. 3422) unable to find a comparison in history to help him in his suffering. As that example shows, however, Tasso’s relationship with past greats is generally difficult: recalling the greatness of the court at Ferrara when he arrived emphasizes his own ‘Unwert’ (l. 838) and overall his tendency is to elevate others to an extent that negates his own self-worth, given clearest expression perhaps in his adulation of the ‘goldne Zeit’ (l. 979) but also in his confession about the effect that Antonio’s success had on him. He imagines a world in which restless figures are compelled by a singular individual:

Es waren die Gestalten jener Welt,
 Die sich lebendig, rastlos, ungeheur
 Um Einen großen, einzig klugen Mann
 Gemessen dreht und ihren Lauf vollendet. (ll. 790–93)

Tasso’s focus on singularity recurs in his poetry in that it is heroic, and celebrates greatness, but the problem he has finishing it is that his is a process of incorporating much into a single organic whole (ll. 272–78). And although the comparison with contemporary views of the artist, and with Tasso’s striving for perfection may explain his inability to complete his work, the problem may also lie with his belief in unique and unchangeable individuality (ll. 2770–71), which is contrasted with the view that several characters in the play espouse, which is that human beings, and art works, are essentially composite and developing, and that traits are not solely rooted in the individual, a feeling which inherently promotes realism and modesty, rather than idolatry. It is the Princess who makes this point when discussing her talents: ‘wenn ich bedenke wie man wenig ist | Und was man ist das blieb man andern schuldig’ (ll. 105–06), and it informs Antonio’s criticism in lines 2135–38 cited above. In short, Tasso is obsessed with greatness, a kind that is inaccessible and concentrated in a false idealization of individuals, an ideal of singularity. As a whole, however, the play exposes his beliefs as, at the very least, unhelpful ones to live by, partly because they make him unhappy with his place in history and in the world, but fundamentally because they are based on mistaken apprehensions.

It is one of the play’s many twists and ironies that, for all Tasso’s idealization of the great individual is ultimately repudiated in the play’s inner logic, the idea of personal influence he associates with Antonio in lines 790–93 is not, and indeed Tasso himself is urged by others, if not to see himself as unique, then certainly to develop his character and his influence, or *Wirkung*. The idea of

personal influence as a force for positive good is expressed plainly in the expository scenes, when Alphons invites his sister to join him in helping Tasso: ‘Laß uns zusammen, liebe Schwester, wirken, | Wie wir zu beider Vorteil oft getan’ (ll. 283–84). Furthermore, the court of Ferrara is seen as a product of personal attraction: ‘Ein edler Mensch zieht edle Menschen an | Und weiß sie fest zu halten’ (ll. 59–60). As both these passages indicate, there is a sense in the play that *attrativa* or magnetism is an inherent quality of a noble person, but not that it is unique, nor the personal charisma of leadership.

Antonio clearly has symbolic value in this context as a career diplomat, but with regard to influence he is, as so often, the voice of restrained realism. He emerges as someone who is knowledgeable about the process of gaining favour with others. As he explains to Tasso, being present and thus able to influence the moment is crucial to personal success at court, fearful that if Tasso isolates himself, he will lose the moment of opportunity afforded by the production of his poem:

Ein Tag der Gunst ist wie ein Tag der Ernte,
 Man muß geschäftig sein sobald sie reift. [...]
 Die Gegenwart ist eine mächtige Göttin;
 Lern’ ihren Einfluß kennen, bleibe hier! (ll. 2606–14)

This language of presence had been used by Tasso earlier: in Act I, Scene 3, evoking the ‘goldene Zeit’ of antiquity he wishes to be present, ‘gegenwärtig’ (l. 556), in order to observe the connection between the great heroes and poets of the past, bound in common purpose as a magnet binds iron to iron, as he explains. Yet not only is Tasso disconnected from his own world, and thus entirely different from the past he imagines, but his own view of influence is also problematical: he suffers, as we have suggested above, from the anxiety of influence throughout. This is apparent in his vision, again imagined, of Antonio at court, which we cited above: there is a gulf between the puppeteer and those in his orbit, such that the world appears ‘rastlos’ (l. 791), an idea that makes Tasso aware of his own smallness. But while in his eyes that gulf between the greats and the moderns, or the influencer and the influenced, is vast and singular, for many others in the play influence is something more collective, as Alphons suggests, or more focused on the here and now, more practical, in the case of Antonio.

Thus here too, as in *Iphigenie*, the play seems to respond to the question: who can be influential? How universal is the idea of character if it is associated with individual influence and success? In *Tasso*, personal influence is acknowledged and accepted, but balanced by the recognition that it is best conceived of as complementary, and balanced by a sense of individual self-worth, ‘sich selbst genießen’ (ll. 2112–3), not a sense of ‘Unwert’ in the face of unique charismatic unapproachability.

It has not been our purpose here to suggest that the dramas be read as philosophical apologies, nor to suggest that there is a checklist of character writing: as our discussion has shown, it is often difficult to disentangle 'stability' from the idea of influence, for example. Nevertheless, while at the levels of dramatic action and explicit discussion of character these dramas might be seen as straightforwardly endorsing an idea of character as willpower, or even a path to achievement, attending to the imagery of character reveals more critical reflections. While it is usually conceived of as a form of individualism, there is no sense of character as dominance here. Rather character in Goethe's conception is flexible, open to the influence of others, if also requiring the maintenance of distance. Both dramas suggest that character is something to which all should aspire, but they also demonstrate how difficult it is to achieve. The dramas are, despite their settings, profoundly realist, and advocate 'presence' in the here and now. Throughout, character emerges as the mature recognition that self-realization and self-preservation are best achieved through the managed engagement with the real world.

Notes on Contributor

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