

IPHIGENIA AMONG THE TAURIANS

Translated by ANNE CARSON

IPHIGENIA AMONG THE TAURIANS: INTRODUCTION

The Play: Date and Composition

There is no external evidence available for determining when Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* was first produced. Scholars date it to 414–13 BCE on the basis of various metrical features. The play is strikingly similar to *Helen*, which is known to have been produced in 412 BCE, and it seems unlikely that Euripides would have staged two such similar plays in the very same year. Presumably Euripides wrote *Iphigenia* for the annual competition at the Great Dionysian Festival in Athens. What the other three plays were in Euripides' tetralogy of that year, and how they fared in the competition, are unknown.

The play is often called *Iphigenia in Tauris*, but there was never any country or physical region called Tauris; the Taurians or Tauri were a primitive, warlike people who lived on the Crimean peninsula on the northern coast of the Black Sea, and the Greek title of the play designates Iphigenia as being “among” these people (as does the Latin title *Iphigenia in Tauris*). Euripides probably originally titled his play simply *Iphigenia*, and the further specification was added when it was included in a complete edition of his works (perhaps around the third century BCE) in order to distinguish it from his *Iphigenia in Aulis*.

The Myth

Iphigenia among the Taurians presents one of the final episodes of the tragic vicissitudes of the house of Atreus, the royal dynasty of Argos (or Mycenae): Agamemnon, his wife Clytemnestra, her lover Aegisthus, and her children Iphigenia, Electra, and Orestes. According to the version of the myth that Euripides presupposes, Iphigenia, who all the Greeks thought had

been sacrificed by her father at Aulis at the beginning of the Trojan War, was in fact rescued by Artemis and transported to the land of the Taurians. There she has become a priestess of Artemis and participates in the local ritual whereby any foreigners who arrive, especially Greeks, are sacrificed to the goddess. Meanwhile, her brother Orestes, who was just a child at the time of the events at Aulis, has grown up and killed his mother to avenge her murder of his father, and is consequently being pursued by Furies (some of whom have continued to torment him even after he was acquitted at a trial in Athens). Now Apollo has prophesied to Orestes that, if he brings back to Greece the cult statue of Artemis from the land of the Taurians, he will finally be cleansed of his guilt and cured of his sufferings.

It is at this point that the action of Euripides' play begins. Orestes and his comrade Pylades arrive by ship in the land of the Taurians but are captured and brought to the temple to be killed. Not knowing who they are, Iphigenia is just about to sacrifice one or both of them—both Orestes and Pylades demonstrate extraordinary nobility and generosity by each offering to die so that the other can be saved—but a complex and suspenseful scene leads surprisingly to the brother's and sister's recognition of each other. In the second half of the play, Iphigenia devises an escape for all three of them: she pretends that the cult statue has been polluted by contact with matricides and must be cleansed in the sea, and the three Greeks manage to flee with it but become embroiled in a battle with the Taurians on the beach. At the end, Athena appears so that she can placate Thoas, the king of the Taurians, and foretell the future: Orestes must bring the statue to Halae in Attica, founding a ritual in which a man's throat will merely be scratched by a sword to draw a little blood; and Iphigenia will become a priestess at the Greek cult center of Artemis at Brauron, also in Attica.

The episode dramatized in Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* belongs to one of the most popular sets of stories in all of Greek tragedy. Euripides himself returned repeatedly to this mythic complex to treat other tales from it, in such plays as *Electra* (written ca. 420 BCE), *Orestes* (408 BCE), and *Iphigenia in Aulis* (produced posthumously after 406 BCE). But while the other episodes of the history of the sons of Atreus were dramatized by many other tragedians, including Aeschylus (in the *Oresteia*) and Sophocles (in his *Electra*), Euripides' selection of this particular story and his treatment of it seem to have been entirely unprecedented.

Euripides drew upon three different kinds of material in creating this play: regional religious cults, poetic narratives, and historiography.

- The cult of the goddess Artemis and her priestess Iphigenia at Brauron celebrated fertility and protected reproduction and the young, especially among women. By contrast, the cult of Artemis Tauropolos at Halae seems to have focused somewhat more upon male coming-of-age. Both cults were well established and certainly familiar to most members of the original audience, but the link between the cults and the legendary stories about the children of Agamemnon was presumably much less clear.
- In Greek legend and early poetry, Iphigenia was either killed at Aulis or else (the usual version) she was rescued by Artemis and made immortal. In this play she is indeed saved and conveyed to the Taurians, but she remains fully mortal, a human counterpart to the goddess Artemis: each of them is out of place among this savage race and needs to be rescued by her brother and brought back to the civilization of Greece. So too, Orestes' pollution from killing his mother and his persecution by the Furies were familiar elements of Greek myth, lyric poetry, and tragedy (most notably in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*), but Euripides has innovated boldly in the myth so as to bring Orestes to the land of the Taurians and have him meet Iphigenia there.
- Besides these religious and mythical dimensions, Euripides' tragedy also makes use of recent ethnographic field reporting. Only a couple of decades before this play was composed, the historian Herodotus had provided a detailed description of the Taurians as a savage and bloodthirsty race who sacrificed Greeks and shipwrecked mariners to a goddess they identified as Iphigenia. The general characteristics and many details of the Taurians described by Herodotus recur emphatically in Euripides' play.

Out of all these disparate elements, with characteristic panache and pathos, Euripides has contrived one of his most brilliant and gripping dramas. In particular, the elements of pathetic misunderstanding, mistaken identities, and last-minute recognition, clever Greeks escaping from stupid

barbarians, miraculous guidance and intervention by the gods, and an unexpected “happy ending” after a seemingly interminable series of disasters for this long-suffering family, mark this play as a perfect example (along with *Ion*, *Helen*, and other plays now lost) of the “romantic” type of tragedy, in contrast to the more common plot structure that ends in disaster and death for the main characters.

Transmission and Reception

Iphigenia among the Taurians seems to have been one of Euripides’ more popular plays in antiquity. Aristophanes parodies it in at least two of his comedies; Aristotle discusses it repeatedly in the *Poetics* to illustrate how a recognition scene should be constructed; and later Greek and Latin authors frequently refer to the play, alluding particularly to its portrayal of the exemplary friendship between Orestes and Pylades. We know from an inscription that the play was performed at the Great Dionysian Festival in 341 BCE and won a prize. Further testimony to its ancient popularity comes from a dozen Attic and south Italic vases of the fourth century BCE (all focus on the first half of the play) and from Pompeian wall frescoes of the first century CE and Roman sarcophagi of the second century CE—these show later scenes as well. Finally, at least four papyri with parts of the play have been discovered; they range from the third century BCE to the fourth century CE.

But for some reason we do not know, *Iphigenia among the Taurians* was not one of the canonical ten plays selected for more intense study and wider diffusion. It survived antiquity only by the accident of being among the so-called alphabetic plays (see “Introduction to Euripides,” p. 3), and it is transmitted by a single manuscript (and its copies) and is not accompanied by the ancient commentaries (scholia) that explain various kinds of interpretative difficulties.

The standard story of Iphigenia’s sacrifice at Aulis has always fascinated authors and artists and has tended to be even more popular than Euripides’ innovative account of her survival and of her and Orestes’ adventures among the Taurians. But in the world of Renaissance colonialism the adventures of brave young Europeans among exotic savages acquired new topicality, while the noble self-sacrifice of the two friends

Orestes and Pylades displayed virtues that were not only pagan. Both themes inspired tragedians as early as Giovanni Rucellai (*L'Oreste*, 1525) and painters as late as Anselm Feuerbach (1862). Jean Racine planned an *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1673–76?) but never wrote it; only an outline of the first act survives. But the high point of the reception of Euripides' play was the eighteenth century, among painters like Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1736), Benjamin West (1766), and Henry Fuseli; tragedians like John Dennis (*Iphigenia*, 1699), Johann Elias Schlegel (*Die Geschwister in Taurien*, 1739; revised as *Orest und Pylades*, 1742), and Claude Guimond de La Touche (*Iphigénie en Tauride*, 1757); and composers of operas like Domenico Scarlatti (*Ifigenia in Tauri*, 1713). The two greatest adaptations both date from 1779: Christoph Willibald Gluck's opera *Iphigénie en Tauride* and Johann Wolfgang Goethe's drama *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (revised 1787). Both these Enlightenment texts humanize and ennoble the Euripidean original, transforming a suspenseful and rather racy stage play into an exploration of universal human emotions and a document of philanthropy. They have also dominated the subsequent reception of the play, even in music (Franz Schubert, "Orest auf Tauris" and "Iphigenia," 1817) and comic opera (Eugène Scribe, *Oreste et Pylade*, 1844). Noteworthy interpretations in the twentieth century include dance dramas by Isadora Duncan (1916) and Pina Bausch (1974), a poem by Randall Jarrell ("Orestes at Tauris," 1936), and a drama by the German author Egon Fritz (*Iphigenie in Amerika*, 1948).

IPHIGENIA AMONG THE TAURIANS

Characters

IPHIGENIA, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra; priestess of Artemis

ORESTES, son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra

PYLADES, friend of Orestes

CHORUS of captive Greek women

TAURIAN HERDSMAN

THOAS, king of the Taurians

MESSENGER, a servant of Thoas

ATHENA

Scene: The entrance to the temple of Artemis in the land of the Taurians, with a large, bloodstained altar in front of it.

(Enter Iphigenia from the temple.)

IPHIGENIA

Pelops son of Tantalus came to Pisa on swift horses
and married Oenomaus' daughter
who begot Atreus.

Atreus begot Menelaus and Agamemnon.

Agamemnon begot me.

5 I am Iphigenia, daughter of the daughter of Tyndareus.

My father killed me—

at Euripus where stiff breezes
spin the salt-blue sea in spirals,
for Helen's sake

a sacrifice to Artemis in famous Aulis—
or so people think.

10 For at Aulis Agamemnon
had assembled a thousand ships,
a Greek expedition to take the crown of Troy.
He wanted the Greeks to avenge Helen's rape
and gratify Menelaus.
What befell him was the disaster of windlessness.
He resorted to divination

15 and Calchas said this:
"Agamemnon, commander of this Greek army,
not one ship will cast off from this shore
until Artemis receives your own girl
Iphigenia
as a sacrifice.

20 You made a vow once
to Artemis Lightbringer to offer up
the finest fruit of that year
and that year
your wife bore a child in the house—"

that "finest fruit" was me!
"Her you must kill."

 So Odysseus planned it:

25 they got me from my mother on pretext of marrying Achilles.
And I came to Aulis—sad day for me!
Lifted high above the altar I was right on the verge of death
when Artemis snatched me,
put a deer in my place.

30 Sent me clear through the air to the land of the Taurians: here!

The land is barbarian, so is the king—Thoas
(his name means “swift” and he is).
The goddess put me here in her temple as priestess.
35 And there’s a ritual^o
beautiful in name only,
that Artemis finds pleasing—well,
I won’t say more. She terrifies me.
The fact is, by a law of the city older than me
I sacrifice any Greek man who comes here.
40 That is, I start things off. Others do the killing.
Inside the temple.
We don’t talk about this.

New strange dreams came in the night.
I shall tell them—it might bring relief.
45 In my dream it seemed I’d gone from this land to live in Argos.
I was lying asleep in a room of girls
when the earth gave a jolt.
I fled, stood outside, saw the cornice falling
and the whole roof collapse to the ground in a heap.
50 One pillar remained of our ancestral home:
I saw it grow blonde hair and speak a human voice.
Then putting my stranger-killing skills to use
I began sprinkling water
as on one about to die.
And I was weeping.
55 Here’s how I read this dream:
Orestes is dead, it was him I sprinkled with water.
Boys are the pillars of a house, are they not,
and anyone I consecrate does die.^o
60 So I want to offer libations to my brother.

He and I are far apart
but this at least I can do.
I'll go with my women—Greeks given me by the king.
For some reason they're not here yet.
65 I shall go into the temple—that's where I live.

*(Exit Iphigenia into the temple.
Enter Orestes and Pylades from the side.)*

ORESTES

Look, be careful. Might be someone on the path.

PYLADES

Yes, I'm peering in every direction.

ORESTES

Pylades, does this look to you like the goddess' temple,
70 the one we sailed here from Argos to find?

PYLADES

Yes it does, Orestes.

ORESTES

And this is the altar, wet with Greek blood?

PYLADES

The top of it anyway is bloodstained red.

ORESTES

And do you see spoils hanging from the top?

PYLADES

75 Spoils from foreigners who died here.

But I think I should take a good look around.

ORESTES

O Phoebus, what is this net you have led me into?
Your oracle bid me avenge my father's blood
by killing my mother
but relays of Furies
80 came hounding me from my land
and after I'd run lap after lap on their turning track
I came to you, asked how to find my way out
of wheeling madness and pain.°
85 You told me to go to the Taurian land
where your sister Artemis has her altars
and steal a statue of the goddess
that (people say) fell from the sky to this temple here.
90 Take it by cunning or take it by luck, no matter the risk,
and give it to Athens.
That's all you said.
If I do this, I breathe free.
So
I obeyed you, I came here.
To a land unknown and inhospitable.
95 But, Pylades, tell me, what should we do?
You're my partner in this.
You see those high encircling walls?
Should we mount ladders?
But won't we be seen? Or force the bolts with crowbars?°
But we know of no crowbars.
100 And if we're caught opening the gates
or devising a way in, we're dead.
Let's just run for it, before we get killed—

we can use the same boat we came on.

PYLADES

To run is unacceptable. We're not like that.
105 And the oracle of god must be respected.
Let's quit this temple and go hide in the caves
where the dark seawater washes in.
We'll keep our distance from the ship
in case someone sees it, reports us and has us arrested.
110 And as soon as the eye of night darkens
we must nerve ourselves to steal that statue from the temple
any way we can.°
115 Good men find the nerve for ordeals, cowards are nothing.°

ORESTES

You're right, yes, we should hide out somewhere.
120 It won't be my fault if the god's oracle goes unfulfilled.
We will find the nerve!
Young men have no excuse shirking hard work!

*(Exit Orestes and Pylades to one side. Enter the Chorus
of captive Greek women from the other side.)*

CHORUS° [singing]

Silence!
125 *O you who dwell by the Clashing Rocks and the Hostile Sea!*
O Dictynna,
child of Leto, wild as mountains,
to your court, to your gold columns I come,
130 *a pure holy girl on pure holy feet,*
serving the one who holds your holy key,
I who have lost the towers and walls of Greece rich in horses,

135 *lost the groves and grasslands of Europe,
lost the halls of my father,
here I am.
Tell me your news, tell me your troubles.
Why have you brought me, brought me to the temple,
O child of the man
who came against the towers of Troy
with a glorious fleet of a thousand ships*
140 *and ten thousand glorious men?*◦

(Enter Iphigenia from the temple.)

IPHIGENIA [*singing in this lyric interchange with the Chorus, who continue to sing in reply*]

My ladies!
145 *I'm oppressed by the pain of lament,
by lyreless unmusical music,
by keening.
Ruin comes at me.
I grieve for my brother—*
150 *such a vision I saw in the night just past.*◦
*I am lost.
Am lost.
Our house is no more.*
155 *Our family gone.
What sorrows swept Argos!
O god, you god,
who rob me of my only brother
by sending him down to death.
For him I pour out these libations*
160 *and a mixing bowl to wet the earth—*

*milk of mountain cows,
wine of Bacchus,
honey of yellow bees,
these I pour.*
165 *They comfort the dead.*

*Now hand me that vessel of gold,
libation for the god of death.*
170 *O child of Agamemnon under the ground,
these are for you.
Receive them.
I'll not be bringing bright locks of hair to crown your tomb,
I'll not be bringing tears.*
175 *I am far far away from our homeland, yours and mine,
and the people there think I am butchered and dead.*

CHORUS

*Mistress,
I'll sing you antiphonies,
180 the rough raw noise of Asian songs,
dirges for the dead—
185 what Hades sings—the opposite of paeans.
Pity the house of Atreus!
Gone is its light, its scepter.
190 Gone is the pomp of all those brilliant kings. °
Trouble rushes on trouble.
One day in a whirl of winged horses
the Sun changed course
and turned his holy face away.
195 Then sorrow upon sorrow came to the house of the golden lamb,*

killing on killing, grief on grief:
200 *from all that ancient Tantalid wrong*
punishment unfolds now.
And the god is zealous against you.

IPHIGENIA

From the beginning my luck was unlucky.°
205 *Right from my mother's womb, that first night,*
the Fates wove an absolute education for me.
210 *I was the firstborn of Leda's poor daughter,*
victim of a father's atrocity,
an offering that brought no joy.°
215 *They rode me in chariots over Aulis' sands—*
a bride!
Pity me—I was no bride! Bride of Achilles,
alas!
Now I live as a stranger in a barren house by the Hostile Sea.
220 *I've no marriage, no children, no city, no loved ones.*
208 *Once the Greeks wooed me.°*
221 *I no longer sing songs for Hera at Argos,*
I no longer weave Athenas and Titans
to the hum of the loom.
225 *No, I work in blood—making death for strangers°*
who cry out for pity, who shed tears for pity.
230 *I give not a thought to them now.*
It's my brother I weep, killed in Argos.
Him I left a mere infant,
a baby, a young thing, a tendril in his mother's hands,
at his mother's breast:
235 *the rightful scepter-bearing king of Argos, Orestes.*

(Enter Herdsman from the side.)

CHORUS LEADER

But look, here comes a herdsman
heading up from the shore with news for you.

HERDSMAN

Child of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra,
listen to my strange report.

IPHIGENIA [*now speaking*]

240 What strange report?

HERDSMAN

New arrivals—two young men—have come to our land.
Their boat escaped the dark-blue Clashing Rocks.
What a welcome contribution to our goddess!
245 Get your holy water ready and your consecrations.

IPHIGENIA

Where are they from? What do they look like?

HERDSMAN

Greeks. That's all I know.

IPHIGENIA

You heard no names?

HERDSMAN

One called the other Pylades.

IPHIGENIA

250 What about his companion?

HERDSMAN

Didn't hear, don't know.

IPHIGENIA

Where did you catch them?

HERDSMAN

Down by the edge of the Hostile Sea.

IPHIGENIA

What are herdsmen doing down by the sea?

HERDSMAN

255 Bathing our oxen in salt water.

IPHIGENIA

Go back to the question
where you caught them and how.

This I want to know.

It's been a long time since the goddess' altar ran red with Greek
blood.°

HERDSMAN

260 Well, we were driving our oxen into the water that flows
out through the Clashing Rocks.

There was a cleft drilled through by the beat of the sea
where purplefishers shelter.

Here one of us caught sight of two young men.

265 He came back on tiptoe and said

"Look—gods sitting there!"

Another (a pious fellow) lifted his hands to pray:

270 “Son of sea goddess Leucothea, protector of ships,
lord Palaemon, be gracious—
whether those are the twin sons of Zeus there
or some sweet offspring of Nereus
who bore the fifty dancing daughters!”
275 Then a bold skeptical fellow laughed at the prayers
and said it was two shipwrecked sailors
sitting terrified in the cleft—“no doubt they’ve heard we slaughter
strangers.”

This made sense to most of us.

We decided to take them for the goddess to sacrifice
as per usual.

Meanwhile

280 one of the strangers came out of the cave. He stood.
He tossed his head up and down, howling aloud,
trembling to the tips of his fingers
and staggering in fits.

He cried out like a hunter, “See that one, Pylades?

285 And there, that snake of hell—look, she’s itching to kill me,
her horrible snakes are mouthing out at me.

And this one’s belching fire and death and thrashing her wings,^o
she’s got a stone shaped like my mother in her arms—

290 she’s going to hurl it!

Help, she’ll kill me! Where can I run?”

Yet those shapes were not visible.

Only voices of cows and dogs were answering him.^o

And we for our part, expecting him to die any minute,
295 sat crouched in silence.

But he drew his sword, leapt among the cattle like a lion
and began laying about him, his blade striking flank and rib,

fantasizing he was driving off the Furies.°
300 The sea bloomed red with blood.
And now
seeing the slaughter of the cows
everyone began to arm himself
and we blew conches to summon the locals
305 (figuring cowherds were no match for these strong young
foreigners).
We soon had a crowd.
But the stranger let go the pulse of his frenzy
and dropped to the ground.
Foam dripped off his chin.
We all set to work on him, pelting and pounding,
310 while the other man kept trying to wipe off the foam
and shield his friend's body with his cloak,
warding off wounds
and ministering to his friend every way he could.

Now the stranger
all of a sudden sane
315 jumped up.
Saw the tide of foes falling on them° and groaned.
But we did not slack off, kept pitching rocks from this side and that.
320 Then we heard this awful exhortation:
“Pylades, we're about to die. Let's die brilliantly!
Draw your sword and follow me!”
At sight of their swords we fled back to the ravines
325 and as each one fled, others pressed forward
bombarding the strangers.
And if these were pressed back
the ones retreating pelted them with stones.

Yet here was the amazing thing:
so many hands throwing—not one hit the victims!
330 Anyway, in the end, however unheroically, we won the day.
Surrounded them and knocked^o the swords from their hands with
rocks.
They sank to their knees exhausted.
We brought them to our king,
who took one look and dispatched them here
335 for you to wash and sacrifice.

Lady, these strangers are exactly the sort of victims
you should pray for.
Execute them and Greece will really be paying you back
for your own murder,
paying the price for that slaughter at Aulis.

CHORUS LEADER

340 Amazing story!—whoever this man is
who's come from Hellas to the Hostile Sea.

IPHIGENIA

Okay, off you go.
Bring the strangers back with you
and we'll attend to sacred duties here.

(Exit Herdsman to the side.)

O my poor breaking heart,
345 once you were kind and compassionate to strangers;
you always spared them a kindred tear when they were Greeks.
But dreams have ensavaged me.
350 Whoever you are, you'll find me ill-disposed.

This is the truth, it's clear to me, ladies:
our own bad luck does not make us benevolent
toward those who are worse off.
And the thing is,
no breeze of Zeus has ever come here,
355 no ship brought Helen through the Clashing Rocks
with her Menelaus
to pay back what they did to me—
they murdered me!—
to make an Aulis here for that Aulis there
where the Danaans laid their hands on me
as if I were a sacrificial calf
360 and my own father was the sacrificing priest!
I cannot forget those evils!
How many times did I fling my hands at his face crying,
“Father, you marry me to degradation!
365 While you're killing me here
my mother and her women in Argos
are singing wedding songs!
Our house fills with music of pipes
as I die at your hands!
Achilles, it seems, was Hades' son, not Peleus'—
370 you gave me him as a husband
and steered me into a wedding of blood.
It was just a filthy trick!”

And I did not lift my little brother in my arms—
who now is dead!
I did not kiss my sister; no, I
kept my face in veils for I was blushing—
375 I believed I was going to Peleus' house

and put off many an embrace till later,
thinking I'd come back to Argos again.
Poor Orestes—
if you are dead, what a fine patrimony you forfeit!
380 As for the sophistry of the goddess, I condemn it.
She who drives from her altar
anyone who touches blood or childbirth or corpses,
who calls them polluted,
this same goddess revels in human sacrifice!
385 Impossible the wife of Zeus is mother to such folly!
Nor do I credit that story of Tantalus' banquet—
how the gods happily digested a meal of his son.
The people here are murderous themselves,
this is my opinion,
390 so they ascribe base behavior to their deity.
No god is evil, I do not believe it.

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*Deep deep blue roads of ocean
where the gadfly out of Argos
395 crossed the Hostile Sea^o
from Asia to Europe,
who are these men who left behind the clear Eurotas
400 green with reeds
or the holy streams of Dirce
to come to this implacable country
405 where the altars and temples of Zeus' daughter
are doused with human blood?*

ANTISTROPHE A

*Did they sail to the double beat of pinewood oars
with ocean billows beneath them^o
410 and an ocean breeze at their back
all for greed, for riches to bring home?
415 Don't fall in love with hope—it can be insatiable.^o
Men lug rich cargo with them
as they roam strange cities and seas,
all suffering the same delusion.
420 Some people understand measure;
others can't think straight about wealth.*

STROPHE B

*How did they pass the Clashing Rocks
or the restless shores of Phineus
425 or the sea-swept coast of Amphitrite
where the fifty daughters of Nereus^o dance in a circle and sing?
How did they go
racing the waves
with swelling sail
430 and hissing oar,
under southerly breeze
or western wind,
435 to the land where birds throng the White Shore
and Achilles
has his fair running ground
by the edge of the Hostile Sea?*

ANTISTROPHE B

*I pray along with my lady's prayers
440 that Helen might leave Troy and come here
to die at my lady's hands*

445 *with her throat cut*
 and a circle of bloody dew on her hair.
 Helen ought to pay!
 And how glad I would be
 to hear some Greek traveler say
450 *my miserable slavery is at an end.*
 Even in dreams
 how I long to go to my homeland
455 *and share in the happiness there.*

(Enter Orestes and Pylades from the side escorted by Taurian guards.)

[chanting]
 But look, here come the two of them with their hands tied,
 fresh victims for the goddess.
 That herdsman wasn't lying.
 Silence, women.
460 *Choice Greek offerings are at hand.*
 Lady, if you are pleased with these civic rituals,
 accept the sacrifice
465 *which our own law calls unholy.*

IPHIGENIA

 So be it.
 First I must take care that all arrangements for the goddess are
 correct.
 Untie the strangers' hands.
 They are sacred and should not be bound.
470 Now go in and prepare what is needed and proper for our task.

(Exit the Taurian guards into the temple.)

Ah pity.

Who is the mother who bore you,
the father, the sister—have you a sister?

Robbed of two young men like you
475 she will be brotherless now.

Who can know if his luck will lead in this direction?

Gods' plans are all invisible,
no one knows anything clear.

And luck seduces us sideways to stupidity.

Where did you come from, you poor strangers?

480 Surely you sailed a long way to get here.
And you'll stay a long time underground,
far from home.

ORESTES

Why do you lament these things and vex yourself
over troubles of ours—woman, whoever you are?

It doesn't make sense to me that someone bent on killing
485 wants to cancel the dread of death with pity.

Nor for a man near death with no hope of escape
to pity himself:

he makes one evil into two—

shows himself foolish and dies anyhow.

Let luck go its way.

490 Sing no dirges for us.

We know about the sacrifices here; we understand this.

IPHIGENIA

My first question is, which of you is Pylades?

ORESTES

If it please you, this man is Pylades.

IPHIGENIA

495 From what city of Greece?

ORESTES

What good will it do you to know this, woman?

IPHIGENIA

Are you two brothers, from one mother?

ORESTES

Brothers in love. We are not related.

IPHIGENIA

What sort of name did your father give you?

ORESTES

500 By rights I should be called Unlucky.

IPHIGENIA

Tell that to Fortune, it wasn't my question.

ORESTES

My body, not my name, is what you plan to sacrifice.

IPHIGENIA

Why begrudge this? You think you're so important?

ORESTES

If I die nameless I am spared mockery.

IPHIGENIA

505 You won't tell me your city either?

ORESTES

How will it profit me? I'm about to die.

IPHIGENIA

Then what prevents you granting it as a favor?

ORESTES

Glorious Argos is the home I claim.

IPHIGENIA

By the gods! Stranger, were you really born there?

ORESTES

510 In Mycenae, once a splendid city.

IPHIGENIA

515 You are surely welcome here if you've come from Argos.°

ORESTES

516 Not by my reckoning! Maybe yours.

IPHIGENIA

511 Did you leave your home as an exile, or why?

ORESTES

A kind of exile. Willing and unwilling at once.

IPHIGENIA

Will you tell me something I want to know?

ORESTES

514 Well, it might distract me from my problems.

IPHIGENIA

517 You've heard of Troy, whose fame is everywhere?

ORESTES

How I wish I never had, even in dreams!

IPHIGENIA

They say it is gone, wiped out by war.

ORESTES

520 That is the case, no idle rumor.

IPHIGENIA

And Helen's gone home to Menelaus' house?

ORESTES

She has. And her going brought harm to one of mine.

IPHIGENIA

Where is she now? She owes a debt to me as well.

ORESTES

She lives in Sparta with her former husband.

IPHIGENIA

525 O object of hatred—for the Greeks, not just me!

ORESTES

Yes, I've felt the effect of her marriages too.

IPHIGENIA

And the homecoming of the Achaeans was as reported?

ORESTES

Your questions certainly encompass everything!

IPHIGENIA

I want to make the most of you before you die.

ORESTES

530 Ask away then, I'll answer your pleasure.

IPHIGENIA

Did a prophet named Calchas come back from Troy?

ORESTES

He's dead according to the story at Mycenae.

IPHIGENIA

Excellent! What of Laertes' son, Odysseus?

ORESTES

Not reached home yet, but he lives, they say.

IPHIGENIA

535 May he perish and never reach home!

ORESTES

Don't bother cursing him: his whole life has gone wrong.

IPHIGENIA

And Achilles is alive?

ORESTES

No he is not. A futile marriage he made at Aulis.

IPHIGENIA

A travesty of marriage, so people say who suffered it.

ORESTES

540 Who are you? Your questions about Greece are strangely apt.

IPHIGENIA

I came from there. Was lost as a child.

ORESTES

Naturally you long for news of it, woman.

IPHIGENIA

And what of the general, the one they called “blessedly happy”?

ORESTES

I’m not aware of one I’d call “blessedly happy.”

IPHIGENIA

545 A son of Atreus, King Agamemnon, was so called.

ORESTES

I don’t know. Change the subject.

IPHIGENIA

By the gods, no! Answer my question, stranger!

ORESTES

The poor man is dead. And took another with him.

IPHIGENIA

Dead? How? Oh no! Oh no!

ORESTES

550 Why do you groan? What's he to you?

IPHIGENIA

I groan for the great good fortune he once had.

ORESTES

Hideously he perished, murdered by his wife.

IPHIGENIA

Oh there are tears in this—for the killer and the killed!

ORESTES

Stop now. No more questions.

IPHIGENIA

555 Just this one: is the poor man's wife alive?

ORESTES

No, she is not. Her own son killed her.

IPHIGENIA

O house confounded! What did he want?

ORESTES

To avenge his father dead at her hands.

IPHIGENIA

Pity! He did well then, to carry out so righteous a wrong.

ORESTES

560 Righteous or not, he wins no grace from gods.

IPHIGENIA

And Agamemnon left another child at home?

ORESTES

One daughter, Electra.

IPHIGENIA

Is there not some tale of another daughter, sacrificed?

ORESTES

None except she's dead and looks no more upon the daylight.

IPHIGENIA

565 Pity that girl, pity the father who slew her.

ORESTES

Her death: a thankless gift to an evil woman.

IPHIGENIA

And the dead king's son, he lives in Argos?

ORESTES

He lives in misery, nowhere and everywhere.

IPHIGENIA

False dream, farewell, you were nothing after all!

ORESTES

570 Nor are the so-called wise gods
any more reliable than winged dreams. °

CHORUS LEADER

576 I feel a sudden sorrow! What of my mother and father—
are they alive? Dead? Who can say?

IPHIGENIA

Listen:

I've got a plan, beneficial for you, beneficial for me as
well.
And things tend to succeed, do they not,
580 when one plan is pleasing to all.°
Would you be willing, if I saved your life,
to take a message to my loved ones at Argos—
a writing tablet inscribed for me by a captive
585 who took pity on me once?
(He didn't blame me for his murder,
but rather the law of the gods.)°
590 I've had no one to send the letter with till now.
But you are not ill-disposed to me, it seems,
and you know Mycenae, you know the people I mean.
So keep your life and go there—you'll win no mean reward
—
salvation in return for a little letter.
595 And this man here, since the city requires it,
can be the goddess' victim, apart from you.

ORESTES

Fine plan, strange lady, except one thing.
This man's death would be a terrible weight on me.
I am captain of this ship of catastrophes;
600 he sails with me as friend to my need.
How unjust for me to win favor myself,

to slip out of harm's way and let him die.
So how about this.
Give the letter to him
(he'll take it to Argos, your purpose is served)
605 and let whoever wants to kill me kill me.
It is utterly base to save oneself
by sabotaging one's friends.
This man is my friend and that's that.
No less than myself I want him to look upon the daylight.

IPHIGENIA

O excellent spirit! What nobility you were born from,
610 what a true friend you are.
I wish my one surviving brother were a man such as you—
yes I do have a brother,
though I never see him.
But since it is your wish, we'll send this fellow
off with the letter
615 and you shall die.
A profound desire for this seems to possess you.

ORESTES

Who will sacrifice me and bear the horror?

IPHIGENIA

I have this duty from the goddess.

ORESTES

Not an enviable duty, girl, nor a lucky one.

IPHIGENIA

620 But necessary and I must honor it.

ORESTES

You, a female, kill men with a sword?

IPHIGENIA

No, but I'll sprinkle sacred water around your head.

ORESTES

Who does the actual slaughtering if I may ask?

IPHIGENIA

Inside this temple are men who have that function.

ORESTES

625 And what sort of grave will receive me?

IPHIGENIA

Sacred fire inside then a wide chasm in the rock.

ORESTES

Ah! How I wish my sister's hand could lay me out!

IPHIGENIA

That is a pointless prayer, you poor man, whoever you are.

She lives far from this barbarian country.

630 But still, since you're Argive

I'll not stint from giving you all I can possibly give.

I shall lay much ornament on your grave,

anoint^o your body with yellow oil,

and throw on your fire

635 the flowery brightness of yellow bees.

Well, I go. I shall bring you the letter from the temple.
And so you won't hate me—

(To the servants.)

no fetters.
Guard them here unbound.

I wonder if my news will come as a shock at Argos—
640 whomever I send to—
a shock of incredible joy—
to hear that the one they thought dead is alive!

(Exit into the temple.)

(To Orestes.)

CHORUS [*singing*]

*I cry for you,
for your end marked out,
645 the bloody rain of lustral water.*

ORESTES [*speaking*]

This needs no pity, strangers, be joyful.

(To Pylades.)

CHORUS [*singing*]

*But you, young man blessed in fortune,
we honor you, soon to set foot on your native land.*

PYLADES [*speaking*]

650 There is nothing blessed about friends going to their death.

CHORUS [*singing*]

O grim journey!

O death near at hand!

655 *What sorrow! My heart hesitates
which to lament.*

ORESTES

Pylades, by the gods, do you have the same feeling as I?

PYLADES

I can't say.

ORESTES

Who is this young girl?

660 How very Greek her questions
about the troubles at Troy, the Achaean returns,
wise Calchas and his birds, the name of Achilles!
What pity she showed when she asked after poor Agamemnon,
665 his wife, his children.
She comes from there, this strange woman, she is Argive by birth
or she would not be sending this letter;
she'd not be probing these matters in general
as if she had some share in the fortunes of Argos.

PYLADES

You're a little ahead of me—still, I agree
670 except for one thing:
this royal family's woes are familiar
to any reasonably alert person.
Still I have another worry.

ORESTES

Share it. You'll think better.

PYLADES

It would be shameful for me to go on living
while you do not.

675 I sailed with you and I must die with you.
Coward and criminal they'll call me in Argos
and in the folded hills of Phocis
if I come home alone.

Most men (most men are malicious) will assume
I betrayed you to get home safely.

Or even murdered you,
plotted your death to get your power,
680 now that your kingship is tottering
and I'm married to your sister who stands to inherit it.
I feel both fear and shame.

For me to breathe my last with you is absolutely the right thing.
685 To be killed and set on a pyre with you, yes.
I am your friend. I dread the blame.

ORESTES

Don't say that. My hardships are mine to bear.
Where trouble is single I won't make it double.
You say base and shameful—it's the same for me
690 if I make you share in my suffering and cause your death.
In fact for me personally it's no catastrophe,
faring as I do at the hands of gods,
to cease from life.

But you, you're successful and your house is sound,
not sick. Mine is defiled, unlucky.
695 Now if you live on and get sons from my sister

whom I gave you to wife,
my name will survive,
my ancestral house will not vanish childless.

No, you go. Live your life. Keep my father's house.
700 And when you reach Greece and horse-breeding Argos,
by your right hand I lay this charge upon you:
build me a burial mound and set a monument on it.
Have my sister give tears to the tomb and locks of her hair.
Report how I perished by the hand of some Argive woman
705 at an altar, consecrated to death.
Do not forsake my sister ever,
though you see the marriage, the house, desolate.

And now, farewell. You are the dearest friend I found.
You hunted with me, you shared my upbringing,
710 you bore with my pains and despairs.
Prophetic Apollo betrayed me and lied to me.
He used a trick to drive me as far away from Greece as I could go
because he was ashamed of his own former prophecies.
I gave myself to him—trusting his words
715 I murdered my mother. Now I die in turn!

PYLADES

Yes, you will have your burial.
And your sister's bed I'll not betray, O my poor comrade,
for I shall hold you a more beloved friend
dead than living.
Still, the oracle of god has not yet destroyed you
720 though you stand right next to death.
And it is the case, you know it is the case,

that extraordinary misfortune
can call forth extraordinary reversals:
all it takes is luck.

(Enter Iphigenia from the temple.)

ORESTES

Silence! The word of Phoebus is no help to me at all.
And here comes the woman from the house.

(To servants.)

IPHIGENIA

725 Go, go in, get everything ready
for the men in charge of the sacrifice.

(To Orestes and Pylades.)

Here is the letter, strangers, folded up tight.
And here's what I want in addition:
no man is the same when he's under stress
730 as when he regains confidence.
My fear is, no sooner he quits this land—
the one who takes my news to Argos—
than he consigns the letter to oblivion.

ORESTES

So what do you want?

IPHIGENIA

735 Let him swear an oath he will carry this letter
to my people in Argos, the ones I choose.

ORESTES

And you'll give such an oath in return?

IPHIGENIA

To do or say what?

ORESTES

To let him go alive from this barbarous land.

IPHIGENIA

740 That sounds fair. How else could he carry the message?

ORESTES

And the king will go along with this?

IPHIGENIA

Yes, I'll persuade him. And put the man on board a boat myself.

(To Pylades.)

ORESTES

Go ahead, swear.

(To Iphigenia.)

And you dictate an oath that's properly pious.

IPHIGENIA

Say "I will give this letter to your loved ones."

PYLADES

745 I will give this letter to your loved ones.

IPHIGENIA

And I will send you safe past the dark-blue rocks.

PYLADES

To which god will you swear this oath?

IPHIGENIA

Artemis, in whose house I hold office.

PYLADES

And I by the king of heaven, sublime Zeus.

IPHIGENIA

750 And if you forsake your oath and do me wrong?

PYLADES

May I never reach home. And you, if you do not save me?

IPHIGENIA

May I never set foot in Argos so long as I live.

PYLADES

Oh but listen, here's a point we've overlooked.

IPHIGENIA

Share it.

PYLADES

755 Grant me this exception: should something happen to the ship
so the letter is lost in the waves along with the cargo
and I can save only my skin,
the oath is off.

IPHIGENIA

Here's what I'll do (let's maximize our options):
760 I'll tell you everything written in the folds of the letter.
You can repeat it to my loved ones.
That way we're safe. If you get the letter there intact
it can tell its own tale silently.
But if the writing disappears in the sea
765 you'll save my words by saving yourself.

PYLADES

A good plan for both of us.
Tell me who is to receive the letter
and what to say from you.

IPHIGENIA

Give the message to Orestes, son of Agamemnon:
770 "The one slaughtered at Aulis sends you word—
Iphigenia, who is alive
although at Argos they think otherwise."

ORESTES

Where is she? Come back from the dead?

(To Orestes.)

IPHIGENIA

You're looking at her.
Now stop interrupting.

(To Pylades.)

Say "Bring me to Argos before I die, brother,
775 out of this barbarous land!"

Free me from my official task
of slaughtering strangers for a goddess!”

ORESTES

What shall I say, Pylades? Where in the world are we?

IPHIGENIA

“Or I’ll become a curse on your house, Orestes!”
(That name you’ll learn from hearing it twice.)

ORESTES°

O gods!

IPHIGENIA

780 Why are you invoking gods amid my instructions?

ORESTES

No reason. Go on. My mind wandered.
I’m on the verge of some miracle—no more questions.

IPHIGENIA

Tell them Artemis rescued me
by putting a deer in my place,
which my father sacrificed
785 thinking his sharp knife was slicing into me.
The goddess settled me in this land.
That is my message
as written in the letter.

PYLADES

Oh these oaths are easy to swear
and what you swore was beautiful too!

I won't take long to fulfill my vow.

(To Orestes.)

790 Behold, I bring you this letter from your sister,
your sister, Orestes, right here.

ORESTES

And I do welcome it!
But I shall lay the writing aside
and take hold of a joy that is not just words!
795 O dearest beloved sister, I am stunned
but I embrace you with my disbelieving arms
in open joy! This news astounds me!

IPHIGENIA^o

Stranger, you transgress! It defiles the servant of a goddess
to touch her inviolable robes.

ORESTES

800 O my sister, born like me from Agamemnon,
don't turn away! You're holding the brother you never thought to
hold again.

IPHIGENIA

You my brother? Stop this talk! Argos is his territory, and Nauplia.

ORESTES

805 Poor woman, that's not where your brother is.

IPHIGENIA

But who is your mother—Tyndareus' daughter from Sparta?

ORESTES

Yes, and my father is grandson of Pelops.

IPHIGENIA

What are you saying? Have you any proof?

ORESTES

Yes. Ask me anything about our father's house.

IPHIGENIA

810 Shouldn't you go first?

ORESTES

Yes. First this, I heard it from Electra:
you know there was strife between Atreus and Thyestes?

IPHIGENIA

Yes, some quarrel about a golden lamb.

ORESTES

So you know you wove it into a fine piece of cloth?

IPHIGENIA

815 Oh dear one, you come very close to my own heart.

ORESTES

And you also wove one showing the sun turned back in its course?

IPHIGENIA

I did, I wove this too, into a fine, fine cloth.

ORESTES

And the ritual bath you got from your mother at Aulis?

IPHIGENIA

Yes! There was no happy marriage to cancel that memory.

ORESTES

820 And what about sending your mother locks of your hair?

IPHIGENIA

They belonged on my grave, not my body.

ORESTES

Now I'll give you the proofs I've seen myself:
that ancient spear in our father's house—
the one Pelops wielded
the day he won Hippodameia at Pisa
825 and killed Oenomaus—
it's hidden in your old bedroom.

IPHIGENIA [*singing in this interchange with Orestes, who speaks in reply*]

O most beloved! Nothing else—you are my most beloved!
Far from our fatherland, far from Argos, °
830 *but I have you, O my love.*

ORESTES

And I have you,
though you were dead. So people thought.

IPHIGENIA

Tears and lamentation mixed with joy,
make your eyes wet, and mine.
That day I left you, left you behind, just an infant,
835 *just a babe in the house.*

O happiness greater than words!
O my soul, what can I say?
These things have gone far beyond amazement,
840 *beyond language.*

ORESTES

From now on I pray we are happy side by side.

IPHIGENIA

I cannot place the joy I feel, O my friends, O ladies,
yet I fear it'll take wing and fly from my hands to the sky!
845 *O Cyclopean hearth, O fatherland,*
O dear Mycenae,
I thank you for his life,
I thank you for his cherishing:
you've raised a light of salvation for our house,
this brother of mine.

ORESTES

We are blest in our birth
850 but not in our contingencies, O my sister.
Ours is no lucky life.

IPHIGENIA

I realized that
the day my poor father laid his sword on my throat.

ORESTES

855 O poor love, I was not there but I can see it.

IPHIGENIA

There was no wedding song, brother,

when I was so treacherously led to the bed of Achilles.
860 *By the altar instead were tears and lamentations.*
Alas! I say alas, for the ritual waters poured out there.

ORESTES

Alas! I say it too, for the deed my father dared.

IPHIGENIA

He was no father to me.
865 *Still, things do look different now*
867 *through some godsent stroke of luck.* ◦

ORESTES

866 *Pitiful woman, suppose you had murdered your brother!*

IPHIGENIA

Pitiful indeed, and I did have it in me
to do that!
870 *Dread things I dared, dread*
things, brother.
You barely escaped an unholy death
at my hands.
875 *And how will it end?* ◦
What chance will arise?
What means will I find to send you
away
from violent death in a foreign land
to our home in Argos
880 *before the bloody sword descends on*
you?
O my soul, this is your task: find the
way.

885 *Should it be on land, not by sea but
 on foot?
But death is nearby in the form of
 savage tribes
and impassable roads.
Yet surely that narrow passage
 through the dark-blue rocks*
890 *makes a long journey.
Ah, I feel desperate.*
895 *What god or mortal or miracle^o
 will find a way where there is no way
and show two lone offspring of Atreus
 their exit from evils?*

CHORUS LEADER

900 This is all quite astounding, beyond words—
 and I saw it with my own eyes!

PYLADES

 When loved ones meet, Orestes, it's natural for them
 to fall into one another's arms
 but now you must leave off emotion and confront the issue:
905 how shall we win the glorious name of salvation
 and escape this barbaric land?
 It's the mark of a wise man to accept his luck for what it is,^o
 seize the moment, maximize his happiness.

ORESTES

 Well said. And I think we have luck on our side here.
910 If someone acts resolute, the divine force is more effective too.

IPHIGENIA

You'll not restrain or silence me until I learn
what fate befell Electra.
This matters a great deal to me.°

ORESTES

915 She is happily married to Pylades here.

IPHIGENIA

And where is he from? Whose son is he?

ORESTES

Strophius of Phocis is his father.

IPHIGENIA

So he's born of a daughter of Atreus—he is my kinsman?

ORESTES

Yes, cousin to you and sole true friend to me.

IPHIGENIA

920 He was not yet born when my father killed me?

ORESTES

No, Strophius was childless a long time.

IPHIGENIA

I greet you, husband of my sister.

ORESTES

And my savior too, not just our kinsman.

IPHIGENIA

But how did you nerve yourself for those horrific deeds against our

mother?

ORESTES

925 Let's not talk of it. I was avenging my father.

IPHIGENIA

What cause had she to kill her husband?

ORESTES

Let our mother be! It's an evil thing for you to hear.

IPHIGENIA

I am silent. But does Argos look to you now as its leader?

ORESTES

Menelaus rules there. I am exiled from my land.

IPHIGENIA

930 Surely our uncle did not take advantage of our faltering house?°

ORESTES

931 No, fear of the Furies drove me away.

IPHIGENIA

934 I understand: the goddesses haunted you for our mother's sake.

ORESTES

935 To force their bloody bit onto my mouth.

IPHIGENIA

932 Your fit of madness on the shore—was that their doing?

ORESTES

933 Not the first time I've been a spectacle of suffering.

IPHIGENIA

936 But why did you make your way here?

ORESTES

On orders from Phoebus.

IPHIGENIA

To do what? Are you permitted to say?

ORESTES

Yes, I can say. Here's how my troubles began:
after I undertook those dread deeds against our mother,
940 which I pass over in silence,
I was driven into exile with the Furies at my heels,
first Delphi,
then Athens, where Apollo sent me^o
to render justice to the goddesses whose names we do not name.
945 For there is a holy court there established once by Zeus
to cleanse Ares' hands of blood pollution.
At first when I arrived
none of my guest-friends was willing to receive me,
a man despised by gods as I am.
But some felt ashamed and gave me a table off by myself
950 although under the same roof.
They addressed no word to me so that
I might enjoy my food and drink apart from them.
Each filled his own jug with equal measure of wine
and took his pleasure.
955 Pretending not to notice, I challenged no one,

suffering in silence
and groaning deep in myself that I was a mother-killer.
(I hear the Athenians made a ritual of my misfortune
960 and still keep the custom of the Three-Quart Jug.)

Then I came to the Hill of Ares and stood trial,
I on one platform, the eldest Fury on the other.
We each said our piece about my mother's murder
965 and Phoebus saved me with his testimony.
Athena counted out the votes: half for me.
I left my own murder trial a victor.
So all the Furies who acceded to the judgment
settled in a holy shrine right near the court.
970 But the Furies who dissented from the law
began to drive me in an endless restless chase
until I came again to Phoebus' holy ground
and laid myself before his sanctuary.
I was starving myself
and I swore I would cut my life off and die there on the spot
975 if Phoebus did not save me—he had ruined me!
Then Phoebus shrieked out from his golden tripod
and sent me here to get the statue that fell from the sky.
I am to set it up in Athens.
Come,
help me accomplish the salvation set out for us.
If we can seize the statue of the goddess
my mad fits will end
980 and I'll sail you back to Mycenae on our well-oared boat.
O dearest beloved, O dear sister's head,
save your father's house, save me!
All is lost for me,

985 all is lost for the race of Pelops,
 unless we get our hands on that heaven-dropped statue.

CHORUS LEADER

 Some dread wrath of a god has boiled up
 against the seed of Tantalus and drives it on through woes.

IPHIGENIA

 Since before you came here, brother, I've had an intense desire
990 to be in Argos and set my eyes on you.
 I want what you want: to release you from troubles
 and restore our ailing ancestral home—
 for I've no anger left for my killer.
 That way I could withdraw my hand from your slaughter
 and save our house.
995 But how to elude the goddess
 and also the king (when he finds that empty base robbed of its
 statue)
 this gives me pause.
 How shall I escape death? What story can I come up with?
 On the other hand, if our plan works,
1000 you'll take the statue and me on board your fine ship
 and the risk dissolves.
 Apart from this, I perish,
 though you may accomplish your task and get away home.
 Well, I do not shrink. Not even if I die to save you.
1005 Because you know, when a man is lost from home
 they long for him. But a woman doesn't signify.

ORESTES

 I will not be the murderer of you as

well as my mother!

Her blood is enough. I'm
your partner—I want

to share life and death with you
equally.

1010 I shall bring you home, provided I
get there,

or stay here and die by your side.

But listen—I wonder, if this were
displeasing to Artemis

why would Loxias give me an
oracle

to take her statue away to Athena's
city

1015 and look upon your face?

On that calculation, I'm hopeful of
achieving our return.

IPHIGENIA

Yes, how can we both avoid death and get what we want?

This is the weak point in our homecoming plan,
though the will is there.

ORESTES

1020 Could we kill the king?

IPHIGENIA

Horrific suggestion, for strangers to murder their host.

ORESTES

But if it will save you and me, worth risking.

IPHIGENIA

I couldn't do it, but I admire your energy.

ORESTES

What if you hid me in the temple here?

IPHIGENIA

1025 Thinking to escape under cover of darkness?

ORESTES

Yes—night belongs to thieves, daylight to truth.

IPHIGENIA

There are guards in the temple, we could not elude them.

ORESTES

Oh I give up, we're ruined. What way out is there?

IPHIGENIA

I think I have a new idea.

ORESTES

1030 What? Share it, teach me.

IPHIGENIA

I'll turn your troubles to use in a cunning way.

ORESTES

Women are awfully good at scheming.

IPHIGENIA

I'll declare you came from Argos a murderer of your mother.

ORESTES

Use my misery, if it profits you.

IPHIGENIA

1035 We'll say it isn't permitted to sacrifice you to the goddess.

ORESTES

On what grounds? Or can I guess?

IPHIGENIA

On the grounds you're impure. I'll be keeping the sacrifice holy.

ORESTES

So how is this better for capturing the statue?

IPHIGENIA

I shall propose to purify you in seawater.

ORESTES

1040 But the statue we need is still in the temple.

IPHIGENIA

And to wash that too. Because you touched it, I'll say.

ORESTES

Where will you go on the sea's wet shore?

IPHIGENIA

To where your ship is moored by its flaxen ropes.

ORESTES

Will you or someone else bring the statue in your hands?

IPHIGENIA

1045 I myself. To touch it is holy for me alone.

ORESTES

And Pylades here, what task will he have?

IPHIGENIA

He'll be said to share the same pollution as you.

ORESTES

You'll do this in secret from the king or not?

IPHIGENIA

1049 I'll win him with words—no way to prevent him noticing.

1051 So you must take care, take very great care, of everything else.

ORESTES

1050 Well, our fine-oared ship is standing ready.°

IPHIGENIA

1052 And one last thing: these women must join in our deception.°

ORESTES

Exhort them, then; find convincing arguments.

A woman has the power to stir pity.

1055 And everything else might just work out perfectly!

(To the Chorus.)

IPHIGENIA

Dearest friends, I look to you.

My fate is in your hands, whether it turn out well

or come to naught with me bereft of my homeland,

my beloved brother, my own dear sister.

1060 Let this be the substance of my appeal:
we are women, as a species devoted to one another,
staunch in defending our common interests.
Keep silence for us and support our attempt to escape.
A loyal tongue is a fine thing.

1065 Look how one turn of fate encircles the three of us
joined in love—to reach home or die.
And besides, if I survive you'll share my good luck,
I'll get you back safe to Greece. Come, I entreat you,
1070 and you, by your right hand, your dear cheek,
your loved ones at home,
by your mother, your father, your child if you have one^o—
what do you say? Who says yes, who says no?
Speak out:
if you reject me I perish and my poor brother too.

CHORUS LEADER

1075 Take heart, dear lady. Do but save yourself.
All is silence on my side, as you request,
let great Zeus be witness!

IPHIGENIA

Bless your words and bless your fortunes!

(To Orestes and Pylades.)

Your task now is to enter the
temple.

1080 The king will be here any
minute

to investigate whether the
strangers' sacrifice is done.

O goddess who saved me in
the folds of Aulis
from a terrible murdering
father's hand,
save me now too along with
these men—
1085 or else by your fault is the
word of Loxias
discredited among mortals.
Be gracious, depart this
barbarous land,
go to Athens.
It is not right for you to dwell
here
when you could have a city
blessed and happy.

(Exit Iphigenia, Orestes, and Pylades into the temple.)

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

Halcyon bird who
1090 *all along the rocky sea ridges*
sings that song of sorrow
understood by those who know
you always mourn your husband,
how like you I am!—
in my lament
1095 *a bird without wings,*
longing for Greek marketplaces,
for Artemis goddess of childbirth
who dwells on the Cynthian hill,

for the delicate palm
1100 and the flourishing bay
and the sacred silver olive shoot
so dear to Leto in her travail,
for the lake of circling waters
where a melodious swan
1105 pays service to the Muses.

ANTISTROPHE A

O streams of tears
that fell down my cheeks
the day the towers were toppled,
the day I was shipped off
1110 by enemy oar and enemy spear.
I was trafficked for gold
and got a barbarian home.
Here I serve the girl
who serves deer-killer Artemis—
1115 Agamemnon's daughter,
at an altar where no sheep die.
And I envy the man whose life is solid misery—
amid necessity
he does not grow exhausted
because he lives with it every day.
1120 But happiness keeps shifting.
To fall into evils after good fortune
makes a heavy life for a mortal.

STROPHE B

Now you, lady—an Argive ship
will carry you home

1125 *and the waxbound reed of mountain Pan*
will call out to the beat of the oars
while prophetic Apollo
singing along with his seven-stringed lyre
brings you safe
1130 *to the bright shore of Athens.*
But I,^o
I will be left behind here
when you go your way on dashing oars
1135 *and the sails*
of your swift-running ship
are spread to the air.

ANTISTROPHE B

If only I could travel those blazing roads
that fiery Helios travels,
1140 *then right above my own chambers at home*
I would stop
my wings in midair.
If only I could take my place in the dances^o
1145 *where once as a girl at fancy weddings*
I made my feet whirl
alongside my girlfriends—
we were rivals in grace,
in delicate ornaments
and eager to win the contest.
1150 *I decked myself in robes of rich design*
and let my hair hang down to shadow my cheeks.

(Enter Thoas from the side.)

THOAS

Where is the woman who keeps these gates,
the Greek? Has she consecrated the strangers already?

1155 Are their bodies ablaze inside the shrine?

(Enter Iphigenia from the temple bearing a statue.)

CHORUS

Here she is, king, she will answer you plainly.

THOAS

Ho there! daughter of Agamemnon!
Why are you hoisting this statue of the goddess off its base?

IPHIGENIA

Stop right there in the doorway, king.

THOAS

1160 Is there something unusual happening in the temple, Iphigenia?

IPHIGENIA

I spit that away (a word to keep things holy).

THOAS

What are you hinting? Speak out plainly.

IPHIGENIA

The victims you've caught for me are not pure, king.

THOAS

What evidence do you have—or is this your own notion?

IPHIGENIA

1165 The goddess' image turned its back.

THOAS

All on its own or did an earthquake turn it?

IPHIGENIA

All on its own. It closed its own eyes too.

THOAS

For what reason? The pollution of the strangers?

IPHIGENIA

Exactly, yes. Dread deeds were done by them.

THOAS

1170 They murdered some barbarian on the shore?

IPHIGENIA

They were carrying bloodstains from home when they came here.

THOAS

What bloodstains? I'm very curious.

IPHIGENIA

They cut down their mother with a common sword.

THOAS

Apollo! Not even a barbarian would dare that.

IPHIGENIA

1175 They were pursued all through Greece.

THOAS

So that's why you're bringing the statue out?

IPHIGENIA

Yes, out to the holy open air, away from bloodstains.

THOAS

And how did you discover the strangers' pollution?

IPHIGENIA

I interrogated them when the statue turned around.

THOAS

1180 How perceptive! Greece raised you to be clever.

IPHIGENIA

Besides, they set out a sweet bait for me.

THOAS

Tried to charm you with some news from Argos?

IPHIGENIA

That my only brother, Orestes, is faring well.

THOAS

So you would spare them, I guess, in joy at their news.

IPHIGENIA

1185 And that my father is alive and prospering too.

THOAS

Naturally you remained loyal to the goddess.

IPHIGENIA

Oh yes, I hate Greece utterly. Greece ruined me!

THOAS

Then what should we do about the strangers, tell me.

IPHIGENIA

We must honor the existing law.

THOAS

1190 But aren't your lustrations and sword already at work?

IPHIGENIA

I want to cleanse them first with purifying rituals.

THOAS

In fresh-flowing streams or water of the sea?

IPHIGENIA

The sea washes away all human evil.

THOAS

Yes, they'll be purer victims for your goddess surely.

IPHIGENIA

1195 And that might improve my lot too.

THOAS

Doesn't the sea wash up right here by the temple?

IPHIGENIA

We need a deserted spot—we have other tasks to do.

THOAS

Take them wherever you want. I've no desire to see forbidden things.

IPHIGENIA

I must purify the goddess' statue as well.

THOAS

1200 Yes you must, if the matricides' pollution touched her.

IPHIGENIA

Why else would I have lifted her from her pedestal?

THOAS

Your piety and forethought are impeccable.

IPHIGENIA

Do you know what I'd like you to do?

THOAS

Tell me.

IPHIGENIA

Tie the strangers up.

THOAS

But where could they escape to?

IPHIGENIA

You can't trust anything Greek.

THOAS

1205 Servants, fetch ropes.

IPHIGENIA

Let them bring the strangers out here...

THOAS

So be it.

IPHIGENIA

...Covering their heads with robes.

THOAS

To keep off the gaze of the sun.

IPHIGENIA

Send some of your servants with me.

THOAS

These will attend you.

IPHIGENIA

And send someone to announce to the city...

THOAS

What?

IPHIGENIA

...that they should all stay indoors.

THOAS

1210

To avoid contact with blood?

IPHIGENIA

Yes, such things do pollute.

(To servant.)

THOAS

You, go, make the announcement...

IPHIGENIA

...that no one come into their sight.

THOAS

How well you care for our city!

IPHIGENIA

And for the friends I have to protect.

THOAS

You mean me!

IPHIGENIA^o

THOAS

No wonder our whole community admires
you.

IPHIGENIA

You yourself stay here before the temple and...

THOAS

1215

What shall I do?

IPHIGENIA

...cleanse the chamber of the goddess with sulfur.

THOAS

So it's pure for your return.

IPHIGENIA

And when the strangers emerge...

THOAS

What should I do?

IPHIGENIA

...pull your robe in front of your eyes.

THOAS

So as not to look on a guilty man.°

IPHIGENIA

And if I seem to take too long...

THOAS

What limit do I set for this?

IPHIGENIA

...don't be surprised.

THOAS

Take your time, do the work

1220 of the goddess properly.

IPHIGENIA

May this purification go according to plan!

THOAS

I second this prayer!

(Enter Orestes and Pylades from the temple escorted by Taurian guards.)

IPHIGENIA

Here come the strangers now out from the temple.

I see ornaments for the goddess and newborn lambs too—

I shall wash blood with blood to get rid of the defilement—

and blaze of torches and all the other purifications

1225

I ordered for the men and the goddess.

I call upon you citizens to keep your distance from this pollution—

anyone who keeps his hands pure as doorkeeper of a temple,

anyone about to enter a marriage,

anyone heavy with child:

keep back, step away, lest this uncleanness fall upon you.

1230

O virgin queen, child of Zeus and Leto, if I succeed in washing the blood from these men

and performing the requisite sacrifice,

your dwelling will be purified

and we shall prosper.

As for the rest,

I do not say it but I make a sign

to the gods who know more

and to you, goddess.

*(Exit Iphigenia, Orestes, and Pylades to the side,
scorted. Exit Thoas into the temple.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*A fine son is Leto's:
1235 she bore him in the fruitful fields of Delos
a god with golden hair.
He is a master of the lyre and loves
to sight an arrow straight along the bow.
She left the place of her travail and carried
her child
1240 from the sheer sea cliffs
to the mother of rushing waters
who dances for Dionysus
on top of Mount Parnassus
1245 where a wine-dark speckle-backed snake,
monster of earth,
glittered from the shade of a laurel tree,
guarding the oracle. °*

*You were still an
infant*

*1250 bouncing in your mother's arms,
O Phoebus,
when you killed it
and mounted your holy oracle:
now you sit on the golden tripod,
in the place that tells no lies,
dispensing to mortals god-spoken oracles
1255 from your sanctuary
in the middle room of the world*

beside Castalia's streams.

ANTISTROPHE

- 1260 *But when he had removed Themis, child of Gaia,^o*
from her holy oracle,
Earth concocted dream phantoms of night
who revealed things to the cities of men—
1265 *how it all began, what came next, the future—*
as they slept in their beds wrapped in dark.
So Gaia, jealous for her daughter,
robbed Phoebus of his oracular office.
He went straight to Olympus
1270 *on his swift feet,*
wrapped his child hands around Zeus' throne
and begged
that the earth goddess' anger be banished
from his Pythian home.
Zeus laughed
to see his son so quick and greedy
1275 *for solid gold oblations.*
With a shake of his head he stopped the night voices—
stole from mortals those truths that take shape in the night—
1280 *gave back his honors to Loxias*
and upon those mortals
who throng his throne
he bestowed
trust
in the singing of the god's word.

(Enter Messenger from the side.)

MESSENGER

O temple guards and keepers of the altars,
1285 where is Thoas, king of this land, to be found?
Throw open these bolted doors and call him out.

CHORUS LEADER

Why, if I may ask?

MESSENGER

The two young men are clean
gone.
1290 By the schemes of Agamemnon's
daughter
they're fleeing this land and
taking
the holy image on board their
Greek ship.

CHORUS LEADER

That's incredible. But the king you want is not here,
he rushed out of the temple.

MESSENGER

1295 Where to? He needs to know what's happening.

CHORUS LEADER

No idea. Run after him, find him
and tell him your news.

MESSENGER

See how treacherous is the female species!
You too have some share in these goings-on, don't you?

CHORUS LEADER

1300 You're mad. What would escaping foreigners have to do with us?
And shouldn't you be hastening off to the palace gates?

MESSENGER

Not until an interpreter tells me
whether the king is inside or not.
Hey, you inside, undo these bolts!
1305 And tell your master I'm here at the door
with a boatload of bad news.

(Enter Thoas from the temple.)

THOAS

Who's making this racket at the house of the goddess,
banging doors, interrupting us inside?

MESSENGER

These women lied to me,° kept trying to drive me away,
1310 said you were out. But you were here all the time!

THOAS

Why? What did they think to gain?

MESSENGER

I'll explain that later. Listen to what's happening right now.
The young girl who was in charge of the altar here, Iphigenia,
1315 has fled the land along with the strangers
and the holy statue. The purification was a trick.

THOAS

What do you mean? What lucky breeze did she catch?

MESSENGER

She is saving Orestes. Surprise for you!

THOAS

Who? You mean the boy who is son of Tyndareus' daughter?

MESSENGER

1320 Yes, and the one who'd been dedicated by the goddess for this altar.

THOAS

That's amazing! What more can I say?

MESSENGER

Don't fuss about it, just hear me out:
when you've thoroughly listened and pondered,
plan a way to track those foreigners down.

THOAS

1325 You're right, go ahead. They have no short voyage
ahead of them if they think to escape my spear.

MESSENGER

Well, when we came to the shore of the sea
where Orestes' ship was secretly anchored,
holding on to those strangers' ropes as you bid us,
1330 Agamemnon's daughter signaled us to stand back
saying she was kindling forbidden fire
and performing special purificatory rites.
Then she took their ropes in her own hands
and walked behind them.
Now this was suspicious
1335 but your servants went along with it, my lord.

After a while, to give the impression she was doing something,
she let out an ululation and started chanting
barbarian songs, as if she were
some kind of priest cleansing blood pollution.

And when we'd been sitting a long time on the ground
1340 it struck us that once they were set free
the strangers might kill her and make their escape.
We sat in silence, afraid to look at things forbidden.
But finally the same conclusion came to us all,
to go where they were, forbidden or not.

1345 There we saw the Greek ship
fitted with oars that spread out like wings
and fifty sailors holding their oars on the pins
and the young men—loose from their bonds—
standing on the stern.

1350 Some sailors were holding the bow with poles,
some were fastening the anchor to its supports,
others hastened to lower ladders from the stern
into the sea for the foreign woman.

Well, we lost restraint now that we'd seen her treachery.
1355 Laying hold of the foreign woman and the stern ropes
we began pulling the steering oars out of their sockets.
Words went back and forth:

“What's your explanation—making off from our land
with statues and priestesses?
1360 Who are you, whose son are you, trafficking this woman away?”
The other replied:
“I am Orestes, for your information,
brother of this woman, son of Agamemnon.

And the woman I'm transporting is my own sister, lost from home."
Still we held on to her,
1365 trying to force her to come along with us to you.
That's how I got these terrible knocks on the jaw!
They had no iron to hand, nor had we,
but fists were pummeling
and kicks were landing from both young men at once
1370 onto our ribs and livers—
the pain was intense, our limbs grew exhausted.
Covered in awful marks we fled to the cliff,
bloody and wounded on heads and faces.
1375 Then taking a stand on the hill we fought more cautiously
and pelted with rocks.
But archers stationed on the ship's stern
were hindering us with arrows and keeping us back.
Meanwhile
a monstrous wave had run the ship aground
1380 and the girl^o was afraid to wet her foot
so Orestes took her on his left shoulder,
stepped into the sea and leapt onto the ladder,
setting his sister down on the well-benched ship
along with that thing that fell from the sky—
the image of Zeus' daughter.
1385 And from midship there came a shout:
"You band of sailors from the land of Greece,
take your oars, make the sea white with foam.
We have the prize for which we sailed through
the hostile passage of the Clashing Rocks."
1390 They roared out a glad shout
and struck the salt sea. And so long as the ship

was within the harbor it kept advancing
but as it crossed the mouth
it went under
the deluge of a violent wave.

For a terrible wind came up suddenly
and was thrusting the ship backward.

1395 They persevered, kicking against the wave,
but a back-rushing surf was driving the ship to land.
Then Agamemnon's daughter stood up and prayed:
"O daughter of Leto,
send me, your priestess, safe
back to Greece from this barbarian land
1400 and forgive my thievery.
You surely love your brother, goddess.
Know that I too love my kin."

The sailors seconded the girl's prayer with a paean
1405 and at a command put their bare shoulders to the oars.
But the boat was coming more and more toward the rocks.
Then one of our men leapt into the sea on foot,
another tried to catch the woven ropes,
and I was sent straight here to you
1410 to let you know what's happening over there, king.
Go then, bring bonds and ropes with you.
For unless the rising sea turns quiet again
there is no hope of salvation for these strangers.
Reverend Poseidon, ruler of the ocean and
1415 watcher over Troy, is hostile to Pelops' family.
And now it seems he will deliver Agamemnon's son
into your hands—yours and your citizens'—
along with his guilty sister—she who forgot

the sacrifice at Aulis and betrayed her own goddess.

CHORUS LEADER

O poor Iphigenia, you will die with your brother
now you've fallen again into the tyrant's hands.

THOAS

I address you all, people of this barbarian land.
Come, throw reins on your horses and race along the shore
1425 to welcome the wreck of the Greek ship,
and while some of you hurry to hunt down these impious men
with the help of the goddess,
others will drag swift vessels into the water
so we can take them by sea and ride them down on land,
1430 then throw them off a steep rock
or skewer their bodies on stakes!
And you women who collaborated in these plots,
I'll punish you later at my leisure.
Right now I'm busy, can't linger.

(Enter Athena above the temple.)

ATHENA

1435 Where oh where are you off to on this hot pursuit, King Thoas?
Hear what I, Athena, have to say!
Stop your hunting; don't launch the full flood of your men.
It was fated by Loxias' oracles for Orestes to come here
fleeing the anger of Furies,
1440 to transport his sister back home to Argos
and bring the holy image to my land,
so to find rest from his toils.
This is the word I have for you.

As for Orestes,
whom you expect to catch and kill on the tossing sea,
Poseidon is even now, as a favor to me,
1445 smoothing the waves for his oar to traverse.
Orestes (you do hear my divine voice
though you are not present),
heed my instructions.
Take the image and your sister and go.
1450 When you reach god-built Athens,
there is a place near the far edge of Attica,
close by the hills of Carystus,
a holy place called Halae by my people.
There build a temple and set down the statue.
Call it “Tauric” after the Taurian land
and the ordeals you survived,
1455 roaming up and down Greece goaded by Furies.
People in future will hymn her as Artemis Tauropolus.
And you must establish this custom:
when they celebrate her festival
1460 let them hold a sword at a man’s throat and draw blood,
in payment for your sacrifice—so to mark its sanctity
and let the goddess keep her honors.
Now you, Iphigenia,
must continue to hold the keys of this goddess
in the holy meadows of Brauron.
There you will die and be buried
and they will make an offering to you
1465 of finewoven robes left behind in their homes
by women who die in childbirth.
As for these women of Greece—I command you

to send them from this country
as reward for their righteousness.°

I rescued you once already, Orestes,
1470 on the Hill of Ares when I judged the votes equal.
This too shall become customary:
whoever gets equal votes will win his case.
Go then, child of Agamemnon,
bring your sister out of this land.
And you, Thoas, calm your rage.

THOAS

1475 Queen Athena, that man is not in his right mind
who hears gods' words and disobeys.
I harbor no rage against Orestes for departing with the image,
nor against his sister.
Is there any good in fighting powerful gods?
1480 Let them go to your land and take the goddess' statue,
let them enshrine it there with all success.
I will also send these women to blessed Greece
as you enjoin me.
And I will no longer raise my spear,
nor my ship's oars,
against the strangers,
1485 since this is your will, goddess.

ATHENA

I commend you.
Necessity governs both you and the gods.
Go, winds, convey the son of Agamemnon to Athens.
I shall accompany the voyage
to keep my sister's sacred image safe.

(Exit Athena.)

THOAS [*chanting*]

1490 *Go on your way rejoicing in good fortune,^o
 blessed by salvation.*

CHORUS [*chanting*]

*O holy among immortals and mortals,
Pallas Athena,
we will do as you bid.*

1495 *Surely delightful and unexpected
 is this utterance I hear.
 O great holy Victory,^o
 may you uphold my life
 and not cease to crown me with crowns.*

(Exit all.)