

# IPHIGENIA IN AULIS

*Translated by* CHARLES R. WALKER

# IPHIGENIA IN AULIS: INTRODUCTION

## *The Play: Date and Composition*

Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* was first produced posthumously by his son (also named Euripides) at the Great Dionysian festival in 405 BCE, together with *The Bacchae* (preserved) and *Alcmaeon in Corinth* (lost). Euripides had died the year before while visiting King Archelaus in Macedonia. His trilogy won the first prize; we do not know the names of the other tragedians competing that year, nor the titles of their plays. Presumably Euripides originally entitled this play simply *Iphigenia*, and the further specification was added later, perhaps by the librarians in Alexandria during the Hellenistic period who collected and catalogued the plays by the three great tragedians, in order to distinguish it from his *Iphigenia among the Taurians*.

The play as transmitted presents a number of anomalous features. Its opening scene contains both a spoken explanatory prologue by Agamemnon of the usual Euripidean type and an unparalleled (but very effective) chanted dialogue between him and his aged servant. Then in the course of the play the dramaturgy and certain aspects of the language are frequently incompatible with Euripides' usual style and the conventions of fifth-century BCE tragedy. Finally, toward the end the lengthy messenger's speech recounting Iphigenia's sacrifice and miraculous rescue makes numerous gross metrical errors that cannot be explained away as mistakes in the transmission of the play but seem instead to reflect Byzantine habits of verse composition. In addition, a Greek author of the Roman Imperial period cites as coming from Euripides' *Iphigenia* two and a half lines of a speech by Artemis *ex machina* that are not transmitted in the play as we have it (and that do not necessarily derive from Euripides either); these lines are included in the textual note to the appendix after line 1531.

Almost all scholars are therefore convinced that in the form in which we have it *Iphigenia in Aulis* cannot possibly be a direct, whole product of Euripides alone. Instead, it seems likely that Euripides left the play unfinished at his death and that some of the apparent oddities are due to his son, who staged it in 405 BCE; it also seems likely that at some point much later (perhaps at the very end of antiquity) the pages containing the ending of the play were lost and replaced—or may have been simply rewritten—by someone else. Whether other oddities are the result of further revision, perhaps for a performance sometime during the course of antiquity, is unknown and controversial.

### *The Myth*

*Iphigenia in Aulis* presents one of the most harrowing episodes in the tragic vicissitudes of the house of the Pelopids, the royal dynasty of Argos (or Mycenae): Agamemnon, his wife Clytemnestra, her lover Aegisthus, and her children Iphigenia, Electra, and Orestes. When the Greek armies under the command of Agamemnon gathered at Aulis in order to sail against Troy, they were held up by adverse winds. The Greek seer Calchas declared that they would be able to sail only if Iphigenia were sacrificed to Artemis; and Agamemnon, after some hesitation, agreed. The maiden was put to death by her father in front of the whole Greek army—though, according to some versions, at the very last moment the goddess miraculously rescued her and substituted a deer. Years later, after the Trojan War had ended, Agamemnon returned home only to be murdered by his wife, whose multiple motives included a strong desire for vengeance for the death of their daughter.

The story of Iphigenia's sacrifice had been narrated in the Homeric *Cypria* (the first component of the epic Trojan Cycle; now lost), and was also mentioned in well-known poems by Hesiod, Stesichorus, Aeschylus, and many others before Euripides came to compose his play. Some of these versions included the detail that Achilles was supposed to marry Iphigenia, thus providing the pretext for summoning her and her mother Clytemnestra to Aulis.

Euripides' play focuses on this single episode, the sacrifice of Iphigenia, dramatizing the events with a distinctive mixture of psychological intensity,

pathos, irony, and astonishing reversals. It begins with Agamemnon trying in vain to rescind his request that Clytemnestra bring Iphigenia to the Greek army at Aulis so that Achilles can marry her. (Achilles has no idea that he has been used as a pretext to lure the girl to her death.) Clytemnestra arrives with the girl (and with Orestes, still a baby), and she and Achilles discover the ruse. When the bloodthirsty Greek army finds out about Calchas' oracle and demands that Iphigenia be killed, Achilles is ready to fight to the death in a noble but futile attempt to rescue her—but then the girl freely decides to let herself be sacrificed in order to guarantee the success of the invasion and protect the honor of Greece. The play, as presented in 405 BCE, probably ended at line 1531 with Iphigenia leaving the stage for her death and the chorus acclaiming her decision. In the manuscript, however, this is followed by a second messenger's speech telling of the preparations for the girl's sacrifice and her miraculous rescue by the substitution of a doe slain on the goddess's altar, and then by a very brief closing scene in which Agamemnon returns to announce his departure for Troy.

The episode dramatized in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* belongs to one of the most popular sets of stories in all of Greek tragedy. In the course of his dramatic career Euripides himself had repeatedly treated other parts of this mythic complex, notably in *Electra* (written ca. 420 BCE), *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (produced ca. 414 BCE), and *Orestes* (produced just three years before, in 408 BCE). Euripides' play also bears an especially close relation to Homer's *Iliad* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, for which it is obviously designed as a kind of "prequel": it gives background information relating to preceding events which helps us understand, often ironically, the subsequent legendary episodes recounted by those earlier works. We cannot help but view Euripides' Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Achilles in the light of their canonical counterparts as presented by Homer and Aeschylus; and we see in their Euripidean versions the seeds of the disastrous personal confrontations and large-scale catastrophes that will develop just a few years later.

### *Transmission and Reception*

*Iphigenia in Aulis* seems not to have been one of Euripides' most popular plays during antiquity. While the sacrifice of Iphigenia is referred to frequently in ancient literature and art, it is seldom possible to decide how much this one play or other versions of the story have inspired a later treatment. It survived antiquity only by being among the so-called "alphabetic plays" (see "Introduction to Euripides," p. 3); it is transmitted only by a single manuscript (and its copies), and it is not accompanied by ancient commentaries (scholia) explaining interpretive difficulties. Further evidence that its popularity in antiquity was limited is that only three papyri bearing parts of its text have been discovered.

But in the modern period *Iphigenia in Aulis* has proven to be one of Euripides' most durable successes. It was translated by Erasmus into Latin (1506) and by Lady Jane Lumley into English (1558, apparently the first English translation of Euripides). Important theatrical versions include ones by Jean Rotrou (1640), Jean Racine (1674), Friedrich Schiller (1790), and more recently by Gerhart Hauptmann (1943) and Kenneth Rexroth (1951); Federico García Lorca sketched out a drama on the subject but never finished it (1936).

Starting in the seventeenth century, portrayals of Iphigenia being sacrificed became a popular subject for painters, doubtless because of their mixture of virtue and eroticism: notable examples include a fresco by Domenichino (1609), numerous paintings by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo and his son Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo, and versions by Jan Steen (1671) and Jacques-Louis David (1819). Even Mark Rothko painted a *Sacrifice of Iphigenia* in 1942, as did the Belgian surrealist Paul Delvaux in 1968. The story was a favorite one for operas in the eighteenth century—indeed, Diderot recommended it in his "Entretiens sur *Le fils naturel*" (1757) as an ideal subject—and it was set to music by Domenico Scarlatti (1713), Christoph Willibald Gluck (a ballet 1765, an opera 1774), Luigi Cherubini (1782), and many others; as late as 1970 P. D. Q. Bach composed a satirical version, *Iphigenia in Brooklyn*. Other notable twentieth-century versions include the dance by Isadora Duncan to the music of Gluck (1905), the adaptations of some of the choral songs by H.D. (Hilda Doolittle, 1915), a poem by Zbigniew Herbert (1957), a widely distributed film by Michael Cacoyannis starring Irene Papas (1977), and Ariane Mnouchkine's use of

this tragedy as the opening play for *Les Atrides*, her adaptation of the *Oresteia* (1990-92).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Barry Unsworth wrote a successful novel based upon Euripides' tragedy, *The Songs of the Kings* (2002). The play's continuing vitality on the American stage is demonstrated not only by increasingly frequent performances of translations but also by such recent productions as Neil LaBute's short play *Iphigenia in Orem* (2000), Caridad Svich's multimedia play *Iphigenia Crash Land Falls on the Neon Shell That Was Once Her Heart (a rave fable)* (2004), and Charles L. Mee's *Iphigenia 2.0* (2007). As long as audiences continue to be fascinated by the violence of men against women, the bloodthirstiness of war, and the conflict between moral nobility and sordid utilitarianism, *Iphigenia in Aulis* will surely remain popular.

# IPHIGENIA IN AULIS

## *Characters*

AGAMEMNON, commander-in-chief of the Greek army

OLD MAN, servant of Agamemnon

CHORUS of women from Chalcis

MENELAUS, brother of Agamemnon

MESSENGER

CLYTEMNESTRA, wife of Agamemnon

IPHIGENIA, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra

ORESTES (nonspeaking character)

ACHILLES, the greatest Greek warrior

SECOND MESSENGER

*Scene: In front of the tent of Agamemnon in the camp of the Greek army at Aulis.*

*(Enter Agamemnon from his tent, carrying a letter.)*

AGAMEMNON [*chanting throughout this opening scene*]

*Old man, come out in front of the tent.*

OLD MAN [*also chanting throughout this scene, at first from within*]

*I'm coming!*

*What strange new plan have you got in your head,  
my lord Agamemnon?*

AGAMEMNON

*Hurry up!*

*(Enter Old Man from the tent.)*

OLD MAN

*I'm hurrying—and I'm not asleep.  
Sleep rests light on these old eyes.  
5 I can look sharp.*

AGAMEMNON

*Well, what is that malignant star  
that moves high across the sky  
next to the seven Pleiades?  
No voice is there of birds even,  
or of the seas' waves.  
10 The silence of the winds  
holds hushed the Euripus strait.*

OLD MAN

*Yes, but why have you been rushing  
up and down, my lord Agamemnon,  
outside your tent? There's peace  
and quiet here at Aulis  
and the guards are quiet too  
over on the walls of the fort.  
15 They don't move at all. Can we  
not go inside now?*

AGAMEMNON

*I envy you, old man,  
I am jealous of men who without peril  
pass through their lives, obscure,*



*unknown; least of all do I envy  
those vested with honors.*

OLD MAN

20     *Oh, but these have a glory in their lives!*

AGAMEMNON

*Ah—a glory that is perilous.  
High honors are sweet, but ever  
they stand close to the brink of grief.  
At one time, the gods  
25     overturn a man's life. At another,  
the wills of men, many and malignant,  
ruin life utterly.*

OLD MAN

*I don't like words  
like these from a king. Agamemnon,  
Atreus begat you, but not to have  
30     all good things in your life. No,  
it is necessary that you be glad  
and sad too, for you were born  
mortal, and whether you like it or not,  
that's what the gods wish.  
But you've lit your lamp and  
35     been writing a letter:  
you still have it in your hand.  
You write words—and then  
you erase them. You seal  
the letter up—and then tear  
the seal open. Then you*

40      *throw the writing tablet on the ground,*  
    *and bulging tears come down out*  
    *of your eyes. My lord, you act*  
    *helpless, and mad! What is the pain,*  
    *what is the new thing of agony,*  
    *O my king? Tell it to me, for I*  
    *am a good man and a loyal servant;*  
45      *so you can speak. I was given*  
    *to your wife, part of the wedding dowry,*  
    *and Tyndareus picked me for this service*  
    *because I was honest.*

AGAMEMNON [*now speaking*]

    To Leda, Thestius' daughter, were born three girls:  
50      Phoebe; Clytemnestra, whom I married;  
    and Helen. To seek her hand, the finest youths  
    of Greece came wooing. But each one threatened murder  
    against the others, if he were unsuccessful.  
55      Her father Tyndareus had a problem:  
    whether he should let her marry one or not,  
    how best escape disaster at fate's hands.  
    Then he had this idea: he'd bind the suitors  
60      by oath and handshake, seal it by sacrifice,  
    that whoever won Helen, the others would defend him.  
    And if any man should steal her from his house,  
    then all must go to war against that man  
65      and sack his town, be it barbarian or Greek.  
    The shrewd old man persuaded them. And once  
    they'd sworn, he let his daughter choose whichever  
    suitor love's honeyed breezes might carry her to.  
70      She chose Menelaus—if only she had not!

For to Sparta came from Phrygia the man who judged  
the goddesses—at least, so runs men's story.  
He came with flowery clothing and bright gold,  
barbarian opulence. So Helen loved him,  
75 and he loved her. Her husband was away,  
so he carried her off to the pasturelands of Ida.  
But Menelaus, furious with desire,  
invoked throughout all Greece Tyndareus' oath,  
that the suitors must now help him in his plight.  
80 So all the Greeks sprang to their arms, and now  
they've all come here to the narrow straits of Aulis  
with many ships and shields and horses and chariots.  
85 And since I am the brother of Menelaus,  
to please him they chose me as their commander.  
If only someone else had won that honor!  
For once the army was mustered here at Aulis,  
a dead calm kept us sitting. We were baffled.  
And then the seer Calchas prophesied:  
90 Iphigenia, my own daughter, must be slaughtered  
for Artemis, the goddess of this place.  
If she were sacrificed then we would sail  
and overthrow the Phrygians; otherwise  
this would not be. When I heard this, I told  
Talthybius, our herald, to proclaim  
95 that I dismissed the army—I would never  
be cruel enough to murder my own daughter!  
But then my brother argued and convinced me  
to commit this horror. So I wrote a letter,  
I sealed it and I sent it to my wife,  
telling her to send our daughter here  
100 to marry Achilles. I praised his reputation

and said he would not sail unless a bride  
came from our family to his home in Phthia.  
This lie about her marriage I contrived  
105 to persuade my wife. The only Greeks who know  
are Calchas, and Odysseus, and Menelaus.

I did this wrong! Now I'm setting things right  
by writing this new letter which you saw  
110 me sealing and unsealing in the dark.  
But take this letter now, and quick, to Argos!  
The message folded here, all that is written,  
I'll tell you now myself, since you are loyal,  
faithful both to my wife and to my house.

OLD MAN [*chanting throughout this interchange with Agamemnon, who  
chants in response*]

115 *Tell me then and show me—so that<sup>o</sup>  
the words I speak with my tongue  
will say the same as the letter.*

AGAMEMNON

*“Child of Leda, Clytemnestra:  
this letter will bring you  
a new message. Do not send your daughter  
120 to the calm beach of Aulis, here  
in the harbor facing Euboea.  
Let us wait another season before  
we celebrate our child's marriage.”*

OLD MAN

*But when Achilles loses his bride—  
125 won't his heart blow up in fierce*

*anger against you and against  
your wife? Oh, this is  
a dangerous thing! Tell me  
what you say.*

AGAMEMNON

*I'll tell you—  
not in fact but in name only  
is there a marriage with Achilles.  
He knows nothing of it or of our plan  
130 or that I have said I would give him  
my daughter as his bride.*

OLD MAN

*To bring her here a victim then—  
135 a death offering—though you promised  
her to the son of the goddess!  
Oh, you have dared a dreadful deed,  
my lord Agamemnon!*

AGAMEMNON

*My mind was crazed, I fell into madness!  
No—you must get on your way and run.  
Forget that your legs are old.*

OLD MAN

*140 I will hurry, my lord.*

AGAMEMNON

*Don't rest by the forest springs  
or give in to sleep.*

OLD MAN

*No, no!*

AGAMEMNON

*When you come to any fork in the road*  
145 *look keenly both ways and be sure*  
*their carriage doesn't pass quickly—*  
*when you are not looking—and so*  
*bring my daughter right to*  
*the Greek ships.*

OLD MAN

*I will!*

AGAMEMNON

*And if you*  
*meet her and her escort,*<sup>o</sup>  
150 *turn them back! Yes, take the reins*  
*and shake them, send them back*  
*to Argos, back to the city built by the Cyclopes.*

OLD MAN

*Wait. When I say these things,*  
*tell me, what will make your wife*  
155 *and your daughter trust me?*

AGAMEMNON

*This seal on the letter*  
*you're carrying—do not break it!*  
*Now go! The dawn is here, and*  
*the sun's chariot already is*

160

*making the day bright. Go do this task!*  
*No mortal man has happiness*  
*and fortune in all ways. He is*  
*born, every man, to his grief!*

*(Exit Old Man to the side, Agamemnon into his tent. Enter Chorus from the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*I have come to the shore*  
165 *and the sea sands of Aulis*  
*over Euripus' waters*  
*and the sea narrows, sailing*  
*from Chalcis, my city,*  
*Chalcis, nurse to the fountain*  
170 *Arethusa, sea-surrounded*  
*and famous—to see this host*  
*of noble Achaeans, with their oar-borne ships*  
175 *of heroes, whom Menelaus, the yellow-haired,*  
*and Agamemnon, nobly born—our husbands tell us—*  
*sent in a thousand galleys*  
*to seek out Helen and seize her;*  
180 *Helen, whom Paris the herdsman*  
*took from the banks of the river,*  
*reedy Eurotas—Aphrodite bestowed her—*  
*on the day when the Cyprian held—*  
*near a dewy spring—*  
*a battle of beauty*  
*with Hera and Pallas Athena.*

ANTISTROPHE A

185    *Through the sacrificial grove,  
Artemis' grove, I came swift running;  
in my eagerness, my cheeks  
blushing with young modesty—in my yearning to see  
the Danaans' wall of shields,*  
190    *the war gear by each tent,  
and the great host of their horses.  
And now those two whose names are Ajax  
I looked upon, sitting together,  
the son of Oileus, and Telamon's child  
who is the crown and pride  
of Salamis. And playing at draughts,  
delighting in its trickery,*  
195    *was Protesilaus,  
with him Palamedes the sea god's son.*  
200    *Another hurled the discus, Diomedes,  
and took great joy in it.  
And next to Meriones, Ares' kin,  
at whom all mortals marvel,  
was Laertes' son from his mountainous island  
and Nireus, handsomest seeming*  
205    *of all the Achaeans.*

EPODE

*Swift-footed Achilles I saw—  
his feet like the stormwind—running,  
Achilles whom Thetis bore, and  
Chiron trained into manhood.*  
210    *I saw him on the seashore,*



*in full armor over the sands racing.  
He strove, his legs in contest  
with a chariot and four,  
toward victory racing and rounding  
the course. And Eumelus, Pheres' grandson,  
215 the charioteer, cried forth in frenzy.  
I saw his handsome horses there,  
gold-wrought in bits and harness.  
220 Eumelus with his goad struck them,  
the yoke horses' manes dappled gray,  
and the trace horses that flanked them  
225 and grazed the post at the end of the race course—  
they were fiery-haired, with their fetlocks  
spotted. And always beside them Peleus' son  
hurled himself onward in his armor,  
right by the chariot's car rail,  
230 right by the spinning axle.*

STROPHE B

*And then I came upon the fleet,  
an indescribable wonder, so that  
with joy my woman's eyes were  
filled.  
The armament of Myrmidons from  
Phthia  
235 were there on the right, swift ships,  
fifty of them.  
Upon their sterns set high in gold,  
240 the divine daughters of the sea  
lord Nereus  
carved as symbols of Achilles'*

*host.*

ANTISTROPHE B

*Keel by keel beside them  
lay as many Argive ships  
commanded by Mecisteus' son—  
245 his grandfather Talaus fostered him to manhood  
and Sthenelus, Capaneus' son.  
And leader of the Attic ships in number sixty,  
the son of Theseus, who had anchored them  
in an even line, and with insignia,  
250 Pallas Athena in her chariot  
drawn by winged horses,  
a clear sign to his mariners.*

STROPHE C

*In Boeotia's naval squadron  
I counted fifty ships  
255 fitted with blazonry;  
Cadmus on each of them  
with his golden dragon  
high on their sterns lifted.  
It was Leitus the earth-born  
260 who commanded the squadron.  
Next from the land of Phocis ...  
... captain of Locrian ships  
of equal number was the son of Oileus,  
265 who had embarked from Thronium,  
illustrious city.*

ANTISTROPHE C

From Mycenae, walled by the Cyclopes,  
 the son of Atreus brought his ships,  
 a hundred galleys in order;  
 with him his brother,  
 commander and kinsman,  
 sailing to wreak revenge on her  
 270 who had fled his hearth  
 to accomplish a barbarian marriage.  
 From Pylos, Gerenian Nestor's  
 ships I beheld;°  
 ... on their sterns emblazoned  
 275 bull-bodied Alpheus,  
 Alpheus, the river that runs by his home.

EPODE

Twelve Aenianian ships were there  
 with Gouneus the king as captain.  
 280 Hard by, the lords of Elis  
 whom they all called Epeians;  
 their ships Eurytus  
 led,  
 and the Taphian squadron—  
 oars gleaming white in the sunlight—  
 285 was led by Meges, ° Phyleus' son.  
 He had set sail from the Echinae isles,  
 a rocky terror to mariners.  
 Ajax, Salamis born,  
 290 linked the right wing of the navy to the left,  
 °  
 knitting together the nearest and farthest  
 galleys. And for that linkage

*he moved his own twelve ships, easy to  
pilot.*

295 *So I heard, and saw his crew.*

*No home-going will there be  
for any barbarian craft  
which grapples with these—*

300 *such a navy setting forth*

*I've seen on this day,  
and what I heard at home and remember;  
the marshaled army.*

*(Enter Menelaus and the Old Man from the side.)*

OLD MAN

Menelaus! You have dared a fearful thing  
that goes against all conscience.

MENELAUS

Stand back!

You're a slave—too loyal to your master!

OLD MAN

305 The reproach you've given me—it is an honor.

MENELAUS

Keep your place—or you'll pay for it in pain.

OLD MAN

You had no right to open the letter I carried!

MENELAUS

Nor had you the right to carry a message

that brings evil and disaster to all Greece.

OLD MAN

I'll argue that with others—give me the letter.

MENELAUS

310 I will not give it.

OLD MAN

And I won't let it go!

MENELAUS

This scepter will beat your head into a bloody pulp.

OLD MAN

To die for my lord would be a glorious death.

MENELAUS

Hands off—you talk too much for a slave.

*(Shouting toward the tent.)*

OLD MAN

O my king, look how we're being wronged!

315 He took your letter—tore it from my hand  
by force. And now, he won't listen to right  
or to reason. °

*(Enter Agamemnon from his tent.)*

AGAMEMNON

What is this—a brawl  
and argument right at my own door?

MENELAUS

More than this man I have the right to speak.

AGAMEMNON

What brought you into dispute with him, and why  
such violence?

*(The Old Man goes out.)*

MENELAUS

320     Look at me, Agamemnon;  
          then I will begin to speak my piece.

AGAMEMNON

I am the son of Atreus. Do you think  
I shrink from your eye, Menelaus?

MENELAUS

Do you see this tablet, bearer of shameful writing?

AGAMEMNON

I see the letter. First, give it to me.

MENELAUS

Not till I've shown its message to all the Greeks.

AGAMEMNON

325     So now you know what you have no right  
          to know. You broke the seal!

MENELAUS

Yes, I broke it  
and to your sorrow. You'll suffer now

for the evil you secretly plotted!

AGAMEMNON

Where did you find it? Oh, you have no shame!

MENELAUS

I was watching to see if your daughter  
had arrived at the camp out of Argos.

AGAMEMNON

It's true—you have no shame. What reason  
have you for spying on my affairs?

MENELAUS

My own desire  
330 urged me. I am not one of your slaves.

AGAMEMNON

Can there be any outrage like this?  
You won't allow me to rule in my own house!

MENELAUS

No, for your mind is shifty: yesterday  
one thing, today another, another tomorrow.

AGAMEMNON

You frame  
wickedness neatly. Oh, I hate a smooth tongue!

MENELAUS

Agamemnon,  
a disloyal heart is false to friends and

335 a thing of evil. Now I want to question you;  
so don't, because you are angry, turn your face  
from the truth—I shall not rack you too hard.

Have you forgotten when you were eager  
and anxious to lead the Greek army to Troy,  
wanting to appear unambitious but in your  
heart  
eager for command? Do you remember how  
humble  
you were to all the people, grasping the hand,  
340 keeping open the doors of your house, yes,  
open to all, granting to every man, even the  
lowly,

the right to address and to hail you by name?  
These ways and tricks you tried, to buy  
in the market advancement, but when at last  
you won power, then you turned these habits  
of your heart inside out. Now were you  
no longer loving to your friends of yesterday.  
Unapproachable, you were seldom found at  
345 home.

When a good man has won to the heights of  
power,  
he shouldn't put on new manners for old and  
change  
his countenance. Far more when he's in  
fortune  
and able truly to succor, must he hold  
firmly to old friends.

This is my first point  
against you. First I blame you for these things  
where I have found you ignoble. Then when



350 you came to Aulis with the army—  
from being all, you became nothing,  
confounded by a fate god-given, lacking  
a favoring wind. So the Danaans urged  
that you send back all the ships and at Aulis  
put an end to this toil without meaning.  
I remember your face then, bewildered,  
unhappy, fearing you would never captain  
355 your thousand ships or fill up with spears  
the fields of Priam's Troy. Then you called me  
into council. "What shall I do?" you asked me.  
"What scheme, what strategy can I devise  
that will prevent the stripping-off  
of my command and the loss of my glorious  
name?"

Calchas spoke: "Sacrifice on the altar  
your own daughter to Artemis, and the Greek  
ships  
will sail." At that instant your heart filled up  
360 with gladness and happily, in sacrifice,  
you promised to slay the child. So you  
sent willingly to your wife, not by compulsion

—  
you cannot deny that—that she send the girl  
here, and for pretext, that she come to marry  
Achilles. And yet now you have been caught  
changing your mind; in secret you recast  
the message. So now your story?—you will  
never be your daughter's murderer! This is  
365 the very same heaven which heard you say  
these words.

Thousands have done what you have done  
—willingly

struggled and  
striven, and  
then they fail

and fall in ignominy. Now in some instances  
the populace is responsible out of stupidity,  
but with other men the failure is their own  
as they can't protect their city. Oh, how I groan  
370 now on behalf of Greece in her affliction;  
for she was ready to perform a noble deed,  
but on account of your daughter and you,  
she's letting those worthless barbarians slip  
away  
and mock her name! O may I never make  
any man ruler of my country or  
commander of her armies just because  
of his bravery. No, a good commander  
375 must have sense. Any smart man will do.

CHORUS LEADER

Terrible are these fighting words that lead  
brothers into strife with one another.

AGAMEMNON

Now will I give you briefly my reproach.  
Nor will my looks grow haughty with contempt,  
but looking and speaking I'll be temperate,  
380 as it befits a brother, and as a good man  
to another shows decency and respect.  
You're breathing hard and red-faced—why? Tell me,  
who wrongs you, what do you want? Are you

burning to possess a virtuous wife? Well,  
I can't procure her for you. The one you had  
you governed poorly. Should I pay the price  
for your mistakes, when I am innocent?

385 It is not my advancement that bites your heart.  
No, you've thrown to the winds all reason  
and honor, and lust only to hold a lovely woman  
in your arms. Oh, the pleasures of the base  
are always vile. And now—if yesterday  
I was without wit or wisdom, but today  
I've counseled with myself well and wisely—  
does that make me mad? Rather are you crazed,  
for the gods, being generous, rid you of

390 a wicked wife, yet now you want her back!  
As to the suitors, marriage-mad, with folly  
in their hearts, they swore an oath to Tyndareus.  
Yes, I grant that; but Hope is a god, and she,  
not any power of yours, put it into effect.  
Make war with their help—they'll join you in their folly!  
But in heaven there is intelligence—it can<sup>o</sup>

395 perceive oaths bonded in evil, under compulsion  
sworn. So I will not kill my children!  
Nor will your enterprise of vengeance upon  
an evil wife prosper against all justice.  
If I were to commit this act, against law, right,  
and the child I fathered, each day, each night,  
while I yet lived would wear me out in grief  
and tears.

400       So these are my few words, clear  
and easily understood. You may choose madness,

but I will order my affairs in decency and honor.

CHORUS LEADER

How different are these words from those you spoke  
before! How good it is to save one's children.

MENELAUS

O gods—so now I have no friends. Poor me!

AGAMEMNON

405     You do, but not if you're wishing to destroy them.

MENELAUS

How will you prove you are our father's son,  
my brother?

AGAMEMNON

I am brother to you  
when you are sane, not mad.

MENELAUS

Should not  
a friend share with friends his grief?

AGAMEMNON

Speak when you have befriended me,  
not done me injury.

MENELAUS

410             Isn't it right that you  
should bear a part of Greece's hardship?

AGAMEMNON

This is what I think—Greece, like yourself,  
some god has driven mad.

MENELAUS

You have a king's  
scepter—boast of it and puff yourself up!  
To me you are a traitor, so I'll turn  
to other means and other friends.

*(Enter Messenger from the side.)*

MESSENGER

O commander of all the armies of Greece,  
415 King Agamemnon, I have come to bring  
to you your daughter, Iphigenia,  
and her mother who is with her,  
the queen, Clytemnestra.

And the boy Orestes is here—you've been  
so long from home that, seeing him, delight  
will fill your heart.

420 Now after weary travel, beside a fountain  
free flowing, the ladies rest and bathe  
their feet. So do the horses—on the green  
meadow we've turned them loose to browse.

I have come, running ahead of the others  
to prepare you with this information:  
425 rumor travels fast and by now the army  
knows that your daughter has arrived in Aulis.  
In fact, crowds from the camp already have come  
on the run for a sight of the maiden.  
For the fortunate are glorious and all men

gaze at them. Now they are saying: "Is it  
430 a marriage, or what happens now?  
Has King Agamemnon so yearned in love  
for his daughter that now he has brought her  
to Aulis?" This too you could hear them say:  
"They're making the marriage offering to Artemis,  
Aulis' queen, but who will be the bridegroom?"

435 So let's prepare barley for sacrifice,  
let us crown our heads with garlands, and you,  
King Menelaus, start the bridal hymn!  
Oh, let the pipes be played, and there should be  
dancing within the pavilion, since for  
the maid this day should dawn in happiness.

AGAMEMNON

440 You are thanked for your news. Now you may go  
inside the pavilion. As to the rest—  
it will go well, as the fates will it.

*(Exit the Messenger into the tent.)*

O god, how can I find words or begin  
to speak in the face of this, my disaster?  
I've fallen under the yoke of fate.  
445 I forged a clever scheme, but cleverer far  
was a deity. O fortunate men of mean,  
ignoble birth, freely you may weep and  
empty out your hearts, but the highborn—  
we suffer, decorum rules our lives and we,  
450 by service to the mob, become its slaves.  
I am ashamed of these tears. And yet

at this extremity of my misfortune  
I am ashamed not to shed them. What words  
can I utter to my wife or with what countenance  
455 receive and welcome her? Her appearance here,  
unsummoned, means disaster for me now.  
Yet coming she only obeys nature,  
following a daughter here to do love's service,  
and give the bride away. So doing, she  
shall find me out as the author of this evil.  
460 And the unhappy maiden! Maiden, no—  
soon, it seems, Hades will marry her.  
Oh, piteous fate! I hear her cry to me:  
“O Father, why do you kill me? May you too  
have such a marriage, and all your friends as well!”  
465 Beside her, Orestes the infant will cry out  
meaningless words, but full of meaning  
to my heart!  
O Paris, it is your marriage to Helen  
that has wrought these things and my destruction!

CHORUS LEADER

And I too grieve, so far as a stranger may,  
470 over a king's misfortune.

MENELAUS

My brother, grant me this, to grasp your hand.

AGAMEMNON

Here it is. You have won the mastery.  
I now face the ordeal of my defeat.

MENELAUS

No! I swear by Pelops, father of our  
father, and by Atreus, who begot us both,  
475 that truly now I do not speak toward  
any end but inwardly and from my heart.  
When I saw tears bursting from your eyes  
tears started in mine and a great pity  
480 seized me. I am no longer terrible  
to you, or any more your enemy.  
I retract my words. I stand now in your place  
and beseech you, do not slay your child  
and do not prefer my interests to your own.  
It is against all justice that you should  
groan while my life is happy—that your children  
should die while mine look on the bright sun's light.  
485 What do I want? Could I not obtain  
a perfect marriage elsewhere, if I longed for  
marrying? But a brother, whom I should  
most cherish, I was about to forfeit  
to gain a Helen, so bartering excellence  
for evil. I was witless and adolescent  
until, crowding upon the deed, I saw and knew  
490 all that it meant to kill a child.  
Besides this, thinking upon our kinship,  
pity for the girl in her harsh agony  
swept over me: she would be killed  
on account of my marriage. But what has Helen  
to do with this girl of yours? Disband  
495 the host, I say, let it go from Aulis,  
and so cease drowning your eyes in tears



and summoning me to grieve and weep for you.  
As to your share in the dire oracle  
concerning your daughter's destiny, I  
want no part in it; my share I give to you.  
500 And so I've turned my threatening words  
into their opposites? But it is fitting;  
I have changed because I love a brother.  
A good man always tries to act for the best.

CHORUS LEADER

505 O King, you honor your forefathers—  
a speech worthy of Tantalus, Zeus' son.

AGAMEMNON

I thank you, Menelaus, that now  
beyond my hopes you have spoken justly,  
with right reason, worthy of yourself.  
These quarrels between brothers spring from  
many things, over a woman, for instance,  
or out of greed for an inheritance.  
510 I loathe the kind of kinship that pours pain  
into both hearts. But we have arrived  
at a fatal place: a compulsion absolute  
forces the slaughter of my child.

MENELAUS

What do you mean? Who will force you to kill her?

AGAMEMNON

The whole concourse of the Achaean army.

MENELAUS

515      No—not if you send her back to Argos.

AGAMEMNON

I might do that secretly—but from the army  
there's something else I could not keep secret.

MENELAUS

What? You're wrong to fear the mob so desperately.

AGAMEMNON

Listen to me. To the whole Greek army  
Calchas will report the prophecy.

MENELAUS

Not if he dies first—that's an easy matter.

AGAMEMNON

520      The whole race of prophets is an ambitious evil.

MENELAUS

They're useless when you really need their help;  
and when they're useful, all they cause is pain.

AGAMEMNON

Menelaus, do you feel none of the terror  
which creeps into my heart?

MENELAUS

How can I know  
Your fear if you do not name it?

AGAMEMNON

Odysseus,  
son of Sisyphus, knows all these things.

MENELAUS

525 Odysseus is not the man to cause us pain.

AGAMEMNON

He's cunning and he always backs the mob.

MENELAUS

Ambition rules his soul—a dreadful evil!

AGAMEMNON

So won't he stand amongst the soldiers and  
tell the prophecy which Calchas spoke  
530 and how I promised to sacrifice  
a victim to Artemis—and how I then  
annulled my promises? Oh, with these words  
won't he arouse and seize the very soul  
of the army, order them to kill you  
and me—and sacrifice the girl?

If I should escape to Argos they then  
would follow me there, and even to  
the Cyclopean walls to raze them  
535 to the earth and utterly destroy the land.  
Such is the terrible circumstance in which  
I find myself. Now in my despair I am  
quite helpless, and it is the gods' will.  
Do this one thing for me, Menelaus,  
go through the army, take all precaution

that Clytemnestra learn nothing of this  
540 till after I have seized my child and  
sent her to her death. So I may do  
this evil thing with fewest tears.  
You foreign ladies, see that you guard your lips.

*(Exit Agamemnon into the tent, and Menelaus to the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*O blest are those who share*  
545 *in Aphrodite's gifts*  
*with modesty and measure,*  
*blest who escape the frenzied passion.*  
*For Eros of the golden hair*  
*shoots two arrows of desire,*  
550 *and the one brings happiness*  
*to man's life, the other ruin.*  
*O Cypris, loveliest of goddesses*  
*in heaven, keep the frenzied arrow*  
*from my bedroom.*  
*Keep modest my delights,*  
555 *all my desires lawful,*  
*so may I have my part in love*  
*but not in passion's madness.*

ANTISTROPHE

*Various are the natures*  
*of mortals, diverse their ways,*  
560 *yet a straight path is always the right one;*  
*and lessons deeply taught*

lead man to paths of righteousness;  
restraint, I say, is wisdom  
and by its grace we see virtue<sup>o</sup>  
565 with a right judgment.  
From all of this springs honor  
bringing ageless glory into  
man's life. Oh, a mighty quest  
is the hunting out of virtue—  
which for womankind  
must be a love kept hidden,  
570 but, for men, if good order is fully there,<sup>o</sup>  
it augments the state.

EPODE

O Paris, you returned to<sup>o</sup>  
the land which reared you,  
herdsman of white heifers  
575 upon Ida's mountains; where  
barbarian melodies you played  
upon a shepherd's reeds  
and echoed there once more  
Olympus' Phrygian pipe.  
Full-uddered cattle browsed  
580 when the goddesses summoned you  
for their trial of beauty—  
the trial that sent you  
to Greece, to stand before  
an ivory throne; it was there  
looking into Helen's eyes  
585 you gave and took the ecstasies of love.  
So from this quarrel comes

*the assault by Greeks  
with ship and spear  
upon Troy's citadel.◦*

*(Enter Clytemnestra, Iphigenia, and baby Orestes from the side in a  
carriage.)*

CHORUS [*now chanting*]

590 *Hail, hail!◦*

*The good fortune of the mighty  
is mighty! Behold  
Iphigenia, the king's daughter,  
my queen, and Clytemnestra,  
daughter of Tyndareus.  
They, sprung from the mighty  
ones,*

595 *ride on to highest destiny.  
The gods themselves, bestowers of  
happiness,  
seem not more august  
than these  
to the less fortunate amongst  
mankind.*

*Now let us stand here, children  
of Chalcis,*

*let us receive the queen  
out of her chariot  
600 and keep her step from stumbling  
to the earth.  
Gently, with good will,  
with our hands*

*we will help you down.  
O noble daughter of Agamemnon,  
newly come to Aulis, have no  
fear!*

605 *For to you, stranger from Argos—  
gently and without clamor  
we who are strangers too  
let us give you our welcome.*

CLYTEMNESTRA [*speaking*]

I shall think of this as a good omen—  
your kindness and good words—for I am here,  
610 hopefully, to lead this young girl  
into a noble and a happy marriage.  
Now, will you take the dowry from the wagon—  
all of her bridal gifts which I have brought.  
Carry them into the pavilion carefully.  
And you, daughter, set down your pretty feet  
from the carriage onto the ground. All of you  
615 maidens take her into your arms and help  
her down.

And now, will someone lend me  
the support of an arm, that with greater  
dignity I may dismount—stand in front  
620 of the horses' yoke—see, the colt's eyes are  
wild with terror!

Now, this is Agamemnon's son.  
Take him—his name is Orestes—he's  
still quite a helpless baby.

*(The Chorus does as instructed.)*

My baby,  
are you still asleep from the rolling wheels?  
Wake up and be happy. This is your sister's  
wedding day! You are noble, and so  
625 you will have a nobleman as kin,  
the godlike child of the Nereid.  
My child, Iphigenia, come stand next to  
your mother. Stay close beside me and show  
all these strangers here how happy and how  
blessed I am in you! But here he comes—  
630 your most beloved father. Give him welcome.

*(Enter Agamemnon from his tent.)*

IPHIGENIA

O Mother, don't be angry if I run  
ahead and throw myself into his arms.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Mightiest and most honored, Lord Agamemnon,<sup>o</sup>  
obedient to your command, we are here.

IPHIGENIA

Father!  
635 I long to throw myself before anyone  
into your arms—it's been so long a time—  
and see your face! Oh, are you angry, Mother?

CLYTEMNESTRA

No my child, this is rightful, and it is  
as it has always been. Of all the children



I have borne your father, you love him most.

IPHIGENIA

640     Father, what a desperate age since I  
          saw you last! But now, seeing you again,  
          I am happy.

AGAMEMNON

          And I, seeing you,  
          am happy. You speak for both of us, Iphigenia.

IPHIGENIA

          Hail! O Father, it is a good and  
          wonderful thing you have done—bringing me here!

AGAMEMNON

          I do not know how to answer what you say,  
          my child.

IPHIGENIA

          Oh? Before you were glad to see me,  
          but now your eyes have no quiet in them.

AGAMEMNON

645     I have cares—the many cares of a general  
          and a king.

IPHIGENIA

          Oh, turn away from all of them,  
          my father—be here and mine only, now!

AGAMEMNON

I am. Now I am nowhere but in this place,  
and with you utterly, my darling.

IPHIGENIA

Oh then,  
unknit your brow, and smooth your face for love.

AGAMEMNON

Now see, my joy at seeing you—what joy it is.

IPHIGENIA

650 But tears—a libation of tears—are there  
ready to pour from your eyes.

AGAMEMNON

Well,  
there is a long parting about to come  
for both of us.

IPHIGENIA

I don't understand,  
dear Father, I don't understand.°

AGAMEMNON

And yet  
you do seem to speak with understanding,  
and I am the more grieved.

IPHIGENIA

I'll speak foolishly  
if that will please you more.

*(To himself.)*

AGAMEMNON

655     How hard to curb my tongue!

*(To Iphigenia.)*

Yes, do.

IPHIGENIA

Now for a time, Father dear, won't you stay  
at home with your children?

AGAMEMNON

O that I might!  
I want to and I can't—it cracks my heart.

IPHIGENIA

Menelaus' wrongs and his spearmen—O  
that they'd disappear!

AGAMEMNON

He and his wrongs  
will destroy others first—they've ruined me.

IPHIGENIA

660     Father, you've been so long in Aulis' gulf!

AGAMEMNON

I must  
dispatch the armies, but there's something still  
hindering me.

IPHIGENIA

Where is it they say<sup>o</sup>  
these Phrygians live, my father?

AGAMEMNON

In the country  
where Paris, the son of Priam, dwells, and  
would to heaven he had never lived at all!

IPHIGENIA

You're going on a long voyage, leaving me!

AGAMEMNON

665 But your situation is like mine, my daughter.

IPHIGENIA

Oh—on this voyage of yours I only wish<sup>o</sup>  
it were right for you to take me with you!

AGAMEMNON

It is ordained that you too take a long  
sailing, my daughter, to a land where—where  
you must remember me!<sup>o</sup>

IPHIGENIA

Shall I go  
on this voyage with my mother, or alone?

AGAMEMNON

Alone—cut off and quite separated  
from both your father and your mother.

IPHIGENIA

670     A new home you make for me, Father,  
          do you mean this?

AGAMEMNON

          Now stop—it's not right  
          for a girl to know any of these things.

IPHIGENIA

          Father, over there when you have done  
          all things well, hurry back to me from Troy!

AGAMEMNON

          I will, but first, right here, in Aulis  
          I must offer a sacrifice.

IPHIGENIA

          What kind of rites,  
          to try to find what piety requires?

AGAMEMNON

675     You shall see this one, for you are to stand  
          by the basin of holy water.

IPHIGENIA

          Then round the altar shall we start the dance?

AGAMEMNON

          O for this happy ignorance that is yours!  
          Now go into the pavilion—to be seen  
          embarrasses maidens. But first give me  
          a kiss and your right hand, for soon you go

680 to live apart from your father for too long.  
O breast and cheeks! O golden hair!  
What bitter burden Helen and her Troy city  
have laid upon us!° I must stop, for as I  
touch you my eyes are water springs—the tears  
685 start their escape. Go into the pavilion!

*(Exit Iphigenia into the tent.)*

Oh, forgive me, child of Leda, for this  
self-pity! Here am I giving in marriage  
my daughter to Achilles! Such partings  
bring happiness but prick the heart of a father  
who, after all his fostering care, must give  
690 away a daughter to another's home.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I am not unfeeling, nor do I reproach  
your grief. For I, too, shall sorrow  
as I lead her and as the marriage hymn is sung.  
But time and custom will soften sadness.  
695 His name to whom you have betrothed  
our child I know. Now tell me  
his home and lineage.

AGAMEMNON

Asopus had a daughter, Aegina.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Yes. Who married her, god or a mortal?

AGAMEMNON

Zeus married her. Aeacus was their son,  
and he became Oenone's ruler.

CLYTEMNESTRA

                    Tell me,  
700     which child of Aeacus received the inheritance?

AGAMEMNON

          Peleus—he married Nereus' daughter.

CLYTEMNESTRA

          Did the gods bless their marriage  
          or did he take her against their will?

AGAMEMNON

          Zeus betrothed her; he approved  
          and gave her away in marriage.

CLYTEMNESTRA

                    Tell me—where  
          did Peleus marry her? Under the sea's waves?

AGAMEMNON

705     No, on the holy foothills of Pelion,  
          where Chiron lives.

CLYTEMNESTRA

                    Where they say the tribes  
          of Centaurs make their home?

AGAMEMNON

          Yes, and it was there

the gods gave Peleus a marriage feast.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Will you tell me this—did Thetis rear  
Achilles or his father?

AGAMEMNON

Chiron taught him,  
that he might never learn the customs of  
evil men.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I would say a wise teacher, but  
710 Peleus giving him that teacher was wiser still.

AGAMEMNON

So, such a man is your daughter's husband.

CLYTEMNESTRA

A perfect choice! Where is his city in Greece?

AGAMEMNON

It is within Phthia, and beside  
the river Apidanus.

CLYTEMNESTRA

And it's there  
715 that you will bring your child and mine?

AGAMEMNON

That should be her husband's care.

CLYTEMNESTRA



Well, I ask heaven's blessings upon  
them!

What is the day set for the  
marriage?

AGAMEMNON

When the full moon comes, to bring them good luck.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Now I ask this, have you slain the victims  
to Artemis, the goddess, for our child?

AGAMEMNON

I'm about to; I have made all preparations.

CLYTEMNESTRA

720 And later you will hold the marriage feast?

AGAMEMNON

When I've sacrificed to the gods their due.

CLYTEMNESTRA

And where do I make the women's feast?

AGAMEMNON

Here, by these proud sterns of our ships.

CLYTEMNESTRA

That's sordid and unworthy! Well,  
may good fortune come of it!

AGAMEMNON

My lady,

725     This you must do—obey!

CLYTEMNESTRA

                  That is no revelation—  
I am accustomed to it.

AGAMEMNON

  So here  
where the bridegroom is I will ...

CLYTEMNESTRA

  Do what?  
You'll take what office that is mine as mother?

AGAMEMNON

                  ... give the child away—among the sons of Danaus.

CLYTEMNESTRA

730     And meantime, where must I be staying?

AGAMEMNON

                  Return to Argos, where you must take care  
of our younger daughters.

CLYTEMNESTRA

                  Leaving my child?  
Who then will lift the marriage torch?

AGAMEMNON

                  Whatever torch is fitting, I will raise it.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Against all custom! And you see  
nothing wrong in that?

AGAMEMNON

I see that it is  
735 wrong for you to stay, mingling with the host  
of the army.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I think it right  
a mother give away her daughter.

AGAMEMNON

But wrong, I tell you, to leave the maidens  
alone in our halls.

CLYTEMNESTRA

In maiden chambers  
they are safe and well guarded.

AGAMEMNON

Obey me!

CLYTEMNESTRA

No, by the Argives' goddess queen!  
740 You go outside and do your part, I indoors  
will do what's proper for the maid's marrying.

*(Exit Clytemnestra into the tent.)*

AGAMEMNON

Oh, I have rushed madly into this and failed

in every hope, desiring to send my wife  
out of my sight—I a conspirator  
against my best beloved and weaving plots  
745 against them. Now I am confounded  
in all things. Yet to the priest Calchas  
I will go, with him to do the goddess' pleasure  
though that should spell my doom,  
and for Greece toil and travail.  
A wise man keeps his wife at home  
750 virtuous and helpful—or never marries.

*(Exit Agamemnon to the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*Now will they come to Simois  
and the silvery swirl of her waters—  
the Greeks mighty in assembly  
with their ships and their armor;  
755 to Ilium, to the plains of Troy  
sacred to Phoebus Apollo,  
where Cassandra is prophet, I hear,  
crowned with the green laurel—  
and wildly she flings her golden hair  
760 as the god breathes into her soul  
the frenzy of foresight.*

ANTISTROPHE

*Upon the battle towers of Troy,  
around her walls, Trojans will stand  
when Ares in harness of bronze*

765    *on these stately ships over the sea*  
         *approaches the runnels of Simois.*  
         *Yes, he'll come desiring to seize Helen*  
770    *to hale her from Priam's palace—*  
         *she whose brothers are the Dioscuri in heaven—*  
         *back to the land of Greece*  
         *by toil of battle*  
         *and the shields and spears of Achaeans.*

EPODE

*Pergamum with walls of stone,*  
         *Phrygia's town,*  
775    *he will encircle in bloody battle,*  
         *to drag their bodies headless away;<sup>o</sup>*  
         *then from the citadel's top peak to*  
         *earth*  
         *he will sack all the dwellings in Troy*  
         *city.*  
         *So every maiden will wail loudly,*  
780    *and with them Priam's queen.*  
         *And Helen too, who is daughter of*  
         *Zeus,*  
         *she will cry aloud*

*for having forsaken her*  
*husband.*

785    *May this worry never be ours*  
         *or that of our children's children!*  
         *To be as the golden Lydian ladies,*  
         *or the Phrygian wives—*  
         *to stand before their looms*  
         *and wail to one another:*

790

“Who will lay hands on my shining  
hair,  
when tears flood my eyes,  
and who will pluck me like a flower<sup>o</sup>  
out of my country’s ruin?”  
Oh, it is on account of you,  
child of the arch-necked swan,  
if the story is to be believed,  
the story that Leda bore you to a  
795 winged bird,  
to Zeus himself transformed!  
But perhaps this is a fable  
from the book of the Muses  
800 borne to me out of season,  
a senseless tale.

*(Enter Achilles from the side.)*

ACHILLES

Where is the commander-in-chief?  
Will one of his aides give him this message—  
that Achilles, the son of Peleus, is here  
at the door of his pavilion.  
This delay by the river Euripus  
is not alike for all, let me tell you.  
805 Some of us are unmarried. We’ve simply  
abandoned our halls and sit here idly  
on the beaches. Others have left at home  
their wives and children, all because  
a terrible passion has seized all Greece  
to make this expedition—not without

heaven's contrivance.

Whatever others

810 may argue, I'll tell my righteous grievance!

I left Pharsalia and my father Peleus,  
and here by the gentle Euripus I must wait  
and curb my own troops, my Myrmidons.

They are forever urging me and saying:

815 "Why do we wait? How many weeks must we  
drag out before we head for Troy? Act, if  
you're going to act! If not, then wait no longer  
on Atreus' sons and on their dallyings,  
but lead the army home."

*(Enter Clytemnestra from the tent.)*

CLYTEMNESTRA

Son of the Nereid, I come to greet you—

820 I heard your voice inside the tent.

ACHILLES

O queenly modesty—whom do I see,  
a woman peerless in her loveliness?

CLYTEMNESTRA

It is not surprising that you do not know me  
since into my presence you never came before.  
But I praise your respect for modesty.

ACHILLES

825 Who are you? And why, lady, have you come  
to the mustering-in of the Greek army—  
you, a woman, into a camp of armed men?

CLYTEMNESTRA

I am the daughter of Leda, Clytemnestra.  
Agamemnon is my husband.

ACHILLES

My lady,  
you have said well and briefly what was fitting.  
830 But I may not rightly hold converse here  
with you or any woman.

*(He starts to exit to the side.)*

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh wait! Why rush away? With your  
right hand clasp mine and let this be  
the beginning of a blest betrothal.

ACHILLES

What are you saying? I take your hand in mine?  
That's wrong—I'd be ashamed before the king.

CLYTEMNESTRA

835 It is wholly right, child of the Nereid,  
since soon you will marry my daughter.

ACHILLES

What!  
What marriage do you speak of, my lady?  
I have no word to put into my answer,  
unless this I say—from some strange frenzy  
of your mind you have conceived this story.



CLYTEMNESTRA

By nature all men are shy, seeing new  
840 kinsmen, or hearing talk of marriage.

ACHILLES

My lady, never have I courted your daughter,  
or from the sons of Atreus either  
has ever word of this marriage come to me.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I do not understand—I am amazed at your words.

ACHILLES

845 Let's search this out together, for there may  
be error in what we both have said.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Have I been horribly abused?  
The betrothal which I came here to find,  
at Aulis, never existed here or anywhere  
but is a lie—oh, I am crushed with shame!

ACHILLES

My lady, perhaps it is only this:  
someone is laughing at us both.  
But I beg of you: take any mockery  
850 without concern, and bear it lightly.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Farewell! Deceived as I am, humiliated,  
I can no longer lift my eyes to yours.

ACHILLES

I too bid you farewell, my lady,  
and go now into the tent to seek your husband.

*(The Old Man appears at the door of the tent.)*

OLD MAN

855 Sir, wait! I'm calling to you there—O  
grandson of Aeacus, child of the goddess,  
and you, my lady, daughter of Leda!

ACHILLES

Who shouts through the open door—and in terror?

OLD MAN

I am a slave. I cannot boast to you  
of my position—that is my fate.

ACHILLES

Whose slave? Not mine; he would not be here  
in Agamemnon's retinue.

OLD MAN

I belong  
860 to the lady who stands before this tent—  
a gift to her from her father, Tyndareus.

ACHILLES

I wait. Now say why you stop me here.

OLD MAN

Are both of you alone before the doors?

ACHILLES

We are. Speak and come out from the royal tent.

*(The Old Man now completes his entrance from the door of the tent.)*

OLD MAN

May Fate and my good foresight rescue you!

ACHILLES

865      Your story's for the future.° But you're so slow!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Speak, old man, don't wait to kiss my hand.

OLD MAN

You know who I am, my lady, loyal  
to you and to your children?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Yes, I know,  
you are an old house servant in the palace.

OLD MAN

King Agamemnon took me as a portion  
in your dowry.

CLYTEMNESTRA

870              Yes, yes, and coming to Argos  
with us, you have been mine ever since.

OLD MAN

That is the truth, and I am more loyal

to you than to your husband.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Now the mystery  
you have been guarding, out with it!

OLD MAN

I'll tell you quickly. Her father plans  
with his own hand to kill your child ...

CLYTEMNESTRA

What words of a crazed mind  
have come out of your mouth, old man!

OLD MAN

875 ... with a bloody knife at her white throat.  
He will kill her.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, how miserable am I!  
He has been stricken, then, with madness?

OLD MAN

No. In all other things, my queen,  
your lord is sane except in this regard,  
toward you and toward the child.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Why? Why? What is the demon of vengeance  
which drives him to this horror?

OLD MAN

The oracle of Calchas: that the fleet may sail ...

CLYTEMNESTRA

880 Her father will kill her! O poor me, poor child!  
You say the fleet? Where will it sail?

OLD MAN

... to the lords of Troy and to their halls,  
so that Menelaus may bring Helen back.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, fate then has bound Helen's homecoming  
to my daughter and to her death.

OLD MAN

You know all of the mystery now, and that  
it is to Artemis that her father  
will sacrifice the child.

CLYTEMNESTRA

And the marriage,  
was that a pretext which he invented  
to bring me from Argos?

OLD MAN

Yes, for the king  
885 calculated that you would bring her gladly  
to be the bride of Achilles.

CLYTEMNESTRA

O daughter,  
we have been brought here, you and with you

your mother, to death and to destruction.

OLD MAN

The fate of the child is pitiable  
and yours too, my queen. The king  
has dared a deed of horror.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Now, I cannot  
hold them back, these streams of tears. I am lost,  
utterly.

OLD MAN

What greater cause, my lady,  
for grieving than a child taken away?  
Weep, weep.

CLYTEMNESTRA

890

These plans—how do  
you know them

for the truth? Where did you find  
out these things,  
old man?

OLD MAN

I'll tell you. I was on my way, running  
to bring you a letter, a second to  
follow the first from my lord Agamemnon.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Forbidding me to bring the girl to death—  
or confirming?

OLD MAN

No. He said not to bring her,  
for this second time he wrote sanely and  
in his right mind.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then why didn't you deliver that letter?

OLD MAN

895 Because Menelaus tore it out of my hand,  
and he is the cause of all our ruin.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Child of the Nereid, Peleus' son, do you hear?

ACHILLES

I hear the story of your fate and misery  
and I cannot bear my part in it.

CLYTEMNESTRA

They use this trick of your marriage  
to slaughter my child!

ACHILLES

Now lady, let me  
add my own reproach upon your husband.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, you were born of a goddess, I—  
900 I am mortal so I am not ashamed  
to clasp your knees. Why should I put on airs?  
Or what should matter more to me

than my own daughter? Please, oh goddess-born,  
protect us both—me from my evil fate,  
and her who is called your wife, even if she's not.  
It was for your sake that I led her here,  
905 to be your wife, and crowned her head  
with a bride's wreath.

Oh, I have brought her here,  
I now discover, not for marrying,  
but to be killed! A shameful reproach  
will be yours if you do not shield her!  
Although no marriage yokes you  
to the unhappy girl, yet in name at least  
you were called her lord and her dear husband.  
910 Listen to me—since through your name  
you have brought my undoing and my end,  
I beg you, by your chin, your right hand, and  
by your mother—O cleanse your name of this reproach!

Child of the goddess, I have no altar  
to which I can flee for safety except  
to your knees, and I have no friend near by.  
You've heard the savage and shameless plans  
of Agamemnon the king, and you see  
how I have come, a woman and helpless,  
into a camp of men, sailors of the fleet,  
eager for any violence and yet  
strong to save and help if it come  
915 into their hearts. Oh—if you have the courage,  
now stretch out your hand and surely I am  
saved, but if you do not dare it—I am lost!

CHORUS LEADER



Oh, what a power is motherhood, possessing  
a potent spell. All people alike  
fight fiercely for their children.

ACHILLES

At your words in pride and in anger  
920 my soul is aroused. And yet I've learned to curb  
my vaunting spirit, when I face disaster,  
just as I don't immoderately rejoice  
when triumphs come. Certainly a man schooled  
well in reason may have hope to live  
his life successfully. At times, of course,  
it's pleasant not to be overwise; but too,  
925 other times there are when intelligence is useful.  
I was educated by the most god-fearing  
of all, by Chiron, and it was from him  
I've learned to act in singleness of heart.  
Our generals, the Atreidae, I obey  
when their command is righteous, but  
when evil, I shall not obey, and here  
930 as in Troy I shall show my nature free  
to fight my enemy with honor.

But you, lady, suffer things savage  
and cruel  
from those you love, and so with my  
compassion  
I shall protect you all around like a  
shield  
as far as a young man may.  
935 I tell you—never will your daughter  
who is my betrothed die murdered by

her father's hand. Nor to this conspiracy  
of your husband will I offer myself.

For though my sword remains undrawn,  
my name

will kill your child—and all your  
husband's fault.

940 Then I would be defiled if through me

and through my marriage  
the maiden dies!

Then in dishonor, undeserved,  
incredible,  
she'd suffer intolerable wrongs.

It will seem I've been the basest of  
all Greeks,

945 no more a man than Menelaus,  
no son of Peleus but a fiend's child,  
if for your husband's sake my name  
does murder.

No! By Nereus, fostered by ocean's  
waves, by the father of Thetis who bore  
me,

by him I swear, never will King  
Agamemnon

950 lay hands upon your daughter—no, nor  
even

touch with his fingertips her robe. For  
otherwise

Mount Sipylus, that bastion of  
barbarians,

from which our generals' lineage  
derives,

will be famed, while my Phthia is

unknown.

955 When Calchas next makes sacrifice  
he'll find  
bitter the barley and the holy water.  
What sort of man is a prophet? Let me  
tell you.  
When lucky, he guesses a few things  
right;  
but mostly he utters lies, and then like  
smoke  
he disappears.  
Now must I tell you, it is not on account  
of this marriage I have said these things  
—

960 no, there are many girls who'd marry  
me,  
but I cannot endure the insult and injury  
which the lord Agamemnon has heaped  
upon me!  
What would have been fitting, if he had  
wanted  
to snare his daughter, then he should  
have asked of me if he could use my  
name.  
For what convinced Clytemnestra to  
give  
her daughter was that I would be the  
husband.  
965 I would have granted this to him, the  
use  
of my name for the sake of Greece  
if it were the only way that we could

sail.

I wouldn't have denied my help to the  
common cause  
of those with whom I march.

But  
now

I am nothing and nobody in the eyes  
of the army chiefs! At their convenience  
they do me honor or injury. I tell you:  
if anyone tries to rob me of your  
daughter  
then before I go to Troy I'll stain this  
sword

970 with his barbarian blood.

But you, lady,  
be calm now and comforted. I show myself  
to you now as though I were a mighty god;  
and though I am no god, someday I'll be one.

CHORUS LEADER

975 You have spoken, Peleus' son, words worthy  
of yourself and of the dread sea goddess.

CLYTEMNESTRA

How can I praise and yet not overpraise,  
or stint my words and lose your graciousness?  
The noble, when they're praised, to some extent  
980 hate those who laud them—if they laud too much.

I am ashamed to tell my piteous story;  
the affliction is mine, not yours—  
and yet, a good man, though he be far

from the unfortunate, will succor them.  
985 Have pity—my sorrow is worthy of it.  
For first I thought that you would be my son,  
and cherished in my heart an empty dream!  
But now death threatens my child, an ill omen  
for your own future marriage! So  
you must protect yourself as well as me!  
990 Your opening words were fine, the last ones too.  
My daughter will be rescued if you will.  
Do you desire that she come to clasp your knees?  
It would transgress a maiden's character,  
but if you wish it she will put aside  
her modesty and come out from this tent.  
995 But if I can win you without her coming,  
she shall remain indoors. We always should  
reverence modesty, if circumstance permits.

ACHILLES

Oh, do not bring her here for me to see!  
Let us avoid foolish scandal, for the troops  
1000 being crowded, idle, and away from home,  
love filthy gossip and foul talk.  
If your daughter comes a suppliant, or never,  
it is the same. This enterprise is mine—  
1005 believe my words—to rid you of these evils.  
Oh, may I die if I speak false in this  
and only live if I shall save the girl!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Heaven bless you for helping the unfortunate.

ACHILLES

Listen to me and we'll succeed in this.

CLYTEMNESTRA

1010 What do you mean? I must listen to you.

ACHILLES

Then once more let us persuade her father  
to a saner mood.

CLYTEMNESTRA

He is a coward,  
and in terror of the army.

ACHILLES

Reason can wrestle  
and overthrow terror.

CLYTEMNESTRA

My hopes are cold on that.  
What must I do?

ACHILLES

1015 First this, beseech him like a suppliant  
not to kill his daughter. If he resists  
then come to me you must. But if he yields  
to your appeal—why then  
I need not be a party to this affair.  
His very yielding will mean her salvation.  
So, if I act by reason and not violence,  
1020 I'll be a better friend and, too, escape  
the troops' reproach. So without me you and°

those dear to you may succeed in all.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You've spoken wisely. What seems good to you  
1025 I'll do. But if we fail in what I want,  
where can I find and see you once again,  
in desperation seeking your hand and help?

ACHILLES

I'll be on watch just like a sentinel.  
But we'll appoint a place—and so avoid  
1030 your frantic search among the troops for me.  
Do nothing to demean your heritage;  
Tyndareus' house deserves a fair report;  
his is a high name among all Greeks.

CLYTEMNESTRA

These things shall be as you have spoken them.  
Rule me—it is my obligation to obey.  
If there are gods, ° you, being righteous,  
1035 will win reward; if not, why toil in vain?

*(Exit Clytemnestra into the tent and Achilles to the side.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE

*Oh what bridal song with Libyan pipe,  
with lyre dance-loving,  
with reeds pipe-pealing,  
rang forth on the air,  
1040 when to Pelion came lovely-haired*

*the Muses to the feast of the gods—  
gold-sandaled their feet  
stamping the ground  
to the marriage of Peleus,  
over the hills of the Centaurs,  
down through Pelion's woodlands,  
1045 to magnify with music's praise  
Thetis and the son of Aeacus.  
1050 And Phrygian Ganymede, Dardanus' child,  
of Zeus favored and loved,  
from mixing bowls into golden cups  
poured the libation, while  
1055 on the glistening sea sands, circling,  
the fifty daughters of Nereus  
wove the marriage dance.*

ANTISTROPHE

*With lances of pine and leafy crowns  
1060 the reveling band of horse-riding Centaurs came  
to the gods' feast and the bowls brimming  
with Bacchus' gift.  
Wildly they cried, "Hail, Nereus' daughter,  
hail to the son you will bear! He will be a bright light blazing  
for Thessaly—so says the prophet  
1065 of Phoebus' songs, foreknowing,  
Chiron. He will come with an army  
of Myrmidons, spear throwers,  
1070 into famous Troyland to sack  
Priam's glorious city.  
And he will put upon his body  
the golden armor wrought by Hephaestus,*



gift of his goddess mother,  
1075 *Thetis who bore him.*”  
*So the gods blessed the marriage*  
*then of Peleus, noble in birth,*  
*and of the first*  
*of Nereus’ daughters.*

EPODE

1080 *But you, Iphigenia, upon your head*  
*and on your lovely hair*  
*will the Argives wreath a crown*  
*for sacrifice,*  
*as on a heifer; dappled, unblemished,<sup>o</sup>*  
*that has come down from the hill caves—*  
*they will drench your mortal throat with blood.*  
1085 *You were not reared*  
*by the music*  
*of a herdsman’s pipe*  
*but by your mother’s side,*  
*fostered to marry a son of Inachus.*  
*Oh, where now has the countenance*  
1090 *of Modesty or Virtue*  
*any strength,*  
*when the blasphemer rules,*  
*and heedless men*  
*thrust Virtue behind them,*  
1095 *when Lawlessness rules law,*  
*and no man competes with his neighbor*  
*to avoid the ill-will of the gods?*

*(Enter Clytemnestra from the tent.)*

CLYTEMNESTRA

I have come from the pavilion seeking  
my husband. For he left our tent  
and has been absent long. My unhappy  
1100 child now weeps her heart out, first moaning  
soft, then crying aloud, for she has heard  
of the death her father plots against her—  
I speak of Agamemnon, and he comes. Now  
in an instant he will be found guilty  
1105 of this unholy crime against his child!

*(Enter Agamemnon from the side.)*

AGAMEMNON

O daughter of Leda, I am glad  
to find you now outside our tent,  
for at this moment I must speak to you  
of several things not proper for a bride to hear.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What things fit so perfectly for you  
this moment?

AGAMEMNON

1110               Send for the child from the pavilion  
to join her father. But first listen to me:  
the lustral waters have now been prepared  
and the barley to throw on cleansing fire;  
victims—heifers—are ready, their black blood  
soon to flow in honor of Artemis.

CLYTEMNESTRA

1115 As you speak, you give these things fair names.  
But for the deed of your intention—  
I can find no good name for that.

*(Calling into the tent.)*

Come outside, my daughter; the intentions  
of your father you now know fully and well.  
Come and bring your brother Orestes,  
child, and cover him with your robe.

*(Enter Iphigenia from the tent, carrying Orestes.)*

1120 Behold she is here, and in her coming  
to you now she is obedient. But as to the rest  
of this business, on her behalf and mine  
I shall now speak.

AGAMEMNON

Child, why do you cry  
and look at me no longer with delight?  
Why do you look upon the ground and hood  
your eyes from me with your robe?

CLYTEMNESTRA

I do not know  
how I can make a beginning of my story  
1125 to you, since everything can serve me as  
beginning or as middle or as end.

AGAMEMNON

What has happened?

Why do you both look at me with trouble  
and with terror in your eyes?

CLYTEMNESTRA

My husband,  
answer my question with the courage of a man.

AGAMEMNON

1130 Go on—I am willing. There is no need  
to command an answer from me.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Your child and mine—do you intend to kill her?

AGAMEMNON

What?  
What a horrible thing to say! Such suspicions  
are utterly inappropriate!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Calm down! Just give me an answer to that question.

AGAMEMNON

A reasonable question I will answer reasonably.

CLYTEMNESTRA

1135 I ask no other question. Answer this one.

AGAMEMNON

Oh fate! Misfortune! Oh the god that rules me!

CLYTEMNESTRA

You? Me and her! One evil fate  
rules three and brings great misery for us all.

AGAMEMNON

What wrong has been done to you?

CLYTEMNESTRA

You can ask me this?  
That mind of yours seems pretty mindless!

AGAMEMNON

1140 I am destroyed—my secret is betrayed.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Listen, I know exactly what it is  
you mean to do to me. And now your silence  
and these groans of yours show that you admit it.  
So do not labor to speak at length.

AGAMEMNON

Then see,  
1145 I'm silent. For me to lie would only add  
shamelessness to all of my misfortune.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Hear me now—  
for I shall give you open speech and no  
dark sayings or enigmas any more.  
And this reproach I first hurl in your  
teeth,  
that I married you against my will, after  
1150 you murdered Tantalus, my first husband,

and dashed my living babe upon the earth,

o

brutally tearing him from my breasts.

And then, the two sons of Zeus, my  
brothers,

on horseback came and in bright armor  
made

war upon you. Till you got upon your  
knees

1155 to my old father, Tyndareus, and he  
rescued you. So you kept me for your bed.

But after that I became reconciled  
to you and to your house, and you will  
bear

witness that I, as your wife, have been  
blameless, modest in passion, and in honor

1160 seeking to increase your house so that  
your coming-in had gladness and  
your going-out joy. A rare spoil for a man  
is the winning of a good wife; very  
plentiful are the worthless women.  
And so I bore you this son and three  
daughters.

1165 Now one of these you tear away from me.  
If any man should ask you why, why  
do you kill your daughter? What answer  
will  
you make? Or must your words come from  
my mouth?

“So Menelaus can get his Helen back.”

And so you pay our child as the price  
for an evil woman, buying with what you

love  
1170 the most a creature loathed above all  
others.  
But think now. If you leave me and go  
to this war, and if your absence there  
from me is stretched over the years,  
with what heart shall I keep your halls in  
Argos?  
With what heart look at her chair and find  
it  
1175 empty of her; at her maiden chamber  
and it empty always; and when I sit  
alone with tears of loneliness and for  
a mourning that will have no end?  
O child!”  
I shall then cry out. “Who brought you to  
this death?  
It was your father—he and no other,  
and by no other’s hand!”  
This is the hatred,  
Agamemnon, and the retribution  
you leave in your house. ◦ Here am I  
and the children you have left to me.  
1180 But little more do we need of pretext  
and provocation so that upon your  
homecoming we give you the welcome  
that  
is wholly due. No! by the gods, do not  
force me to become a woman of evil!  
And you, do not become evil yourself!  
1185 Well: after the sacrifice of your child,

what prayer  
can your mouth utter? What things of good  
for you  
will you be praying for while you cut her  
throat?  
Perhaps an evil coming home, to match  
this vile departure? Tell me, in all  
conscience, how can I ask the gods to give  
you any blessing? We must think the gods  
1190 fools, if we ask blessing for the killers  
of our children!

When you return at last  
to Argos, after the war, will you embrace  
your children? That would be a sacrilege!  
What child of yours will look you in the  
face,  
so you can drag one off for sacrifice?  
Speak to me—have you ever taken  
account

of such things in any  
way? Or is your  
thought,

1195 your need, only to brandish scepters and  
lead armies? Well then, here is a righteous  
offer you should make to the Greek army:  
“Achaean, you are eager to sail for Troy  
—  
then cast lots to find whose daughter must  
die!”

This would be justice—rather than offer

1200

your own child, as  
victim to the army.



Or let Menelaus—for this is his affair—  
kill his own daughter for her mother's  
sake.

For look, my girl is torn from me, from me  
who have been faithful to my marriage,  
but she who has sinned against her  
husband's bed—

1205 she will return to prosper, and keep her  
daughter  
safe at home.

And now at last you tell me  
if in anything I have failed to speak  
justly. But if my words are fair and right,  
then do not kill our girl but act with sense.

CHORUS LEADER

Agamemnon, yield to her! It is good to save  
1210 a child's life. No one will contradict that.

IPHIGENIA

O my father—if I had the tongue of Orpheus  
so that I could charm with song the stones to  
leap and follow me, or if my words could  
quite beguile anyone I wished—I'd use  
1215 my magic now. But only with tears can I  
make arguments and here I offer them.  
O Father, my dear mother bore my body,  
and now it is a suppliant's, tight clinging  
to your knees. Do not take away this life  
of mine before its dying time. Nor make me  
go down under the earth to see the world

of darkness, for it is sweet to look on  
the day's light.

1220       I was first to call you father,  
you to call me child. And of your children  
first to sit upon your knees. How happy  
we both were in our love! "O child,"  
you said, "surely one day I shall see you  
happy in your husband's home, and like  
1225 a flower blooming for me and in my honor."  
Then as I clung to you and wove my fingers  
in your beard, I answered, "Father, you,  
old and reverend then, with love shall I  
receive you into my home, and so repay you  
1230 for the years of trouble and your fostering  
care of me." I have in memory all these  
words  
of yours and mine. But you, forgetting,  
have willed it in your heart to kill me.

Oh no—by  
Pelops

and by Atreus, your father, and  
by my mother who suffered travail  
1235 at my birth and now must suffer a second  
time for me! Oh, oh—the marriage  
of Paris and Helen—why must it touch  
my life? Why must Paris be my ruin?  
Father, look at me, and into my eyes;  
1240 kiss me, so that if my words fail,  
and if I die, this thing of love I may  
hold in my heart and remember.

*(To Orestes.)*

My brother, so little can you  
help us  
who love you, but weep with me  
and  
beg our father not to kill your  
sister.  
Oh, the threat of evil is instinct,  
even in an infant's heart. See,  
even  
1245 without speech, he begs you,  
Father,  
so pity and have mercy on my life.  
Yes, both of us beseech you, this  
little child  
and I, your daughter grown. Now  
these words  
will conquer any argument: to see  
the light of day is sweet for  
1250 everyone;  
the shadow world below is  
nothing.

People are mad, I say, who pray  
for death;

it is better that we live ever so  
miserably than die in glory.

CHORUS LEADER

O wicked Helen, through you, and through your  
marriages, this terrible ordeal has come  
to the sons of Atreus and to their children.

AGAMEMNON

1255 I know what calls for pity and I know  
what does not. And I love my children!  
Did I not I would be mad indeed.  
Terrible it is to me, my girl, to dare  
this thing. But terrible also not to dare it.  
For in either case my fate will be the same.  
Behold the armies, girt about by the fleet,  
1260 with all their bronzen armor at their feet—  
none of them can sail to Ilium's towers  
1263 nor sack the famous bastion of Troy<sup>o</sup>  
1262 until, as the prophet Calchas has decreed,  
I make you the victim of this sacrifice.  
O child, a mighty passion seizes  
the Greek soldiers and maddens them to sail  
1265 with utmost speed to that barbarian place  
that they may halt the rape of our Greek women.  
The army, angered, will come to Argos,  
slaughter my daughters, murder you all and me  
if I annul the divine oracle  
of the goddess. It is not Menelaus  
making a slave of me—nor am I here  
1270 at Menelaus' will, but Greece lays upon me  
this sacrifice of you beyond all will  
of mine. It's Greece that rules me.  
O my child,  
Greece turns to you, to me, and now,  
as much as in us lies she must be free;  
and never by the barbarians in their violence  
1275 must Greeks be robbed of their wives.

*(Exit Agamemnon to the side.)*

CLYTEMNESTRA [*chanting*]

*O maidens who are friendly to us—O  
my child,*

*what a terrible dying is  
yours.*

*Your father, betraying you to  
death,  
has fled away.*

IPHIGENIA [*chanting*]

*Oh, pitiable am I, Mother!  
The selfsame grieving song  
1280 is ours, fallen from fate's hands.  
Life is no longer mine,  
nor the dayspring's splendor.*

*[now singing]  
O snow-beaten Phrygian glen and Ida's  
1285 hill: there on a day was the tender  
suckling thrown,  
Priam's child, from his mother torn,  
for the doom of death; it was the  
herdsman  
of Ida, Paris of Ida,  
1290 so named, so named in his Trojan city.*

*Would they had never  
reared him,*

*reared Alexander, herdsman of cattle,  
to dwell by the silvery waters,  
1295 by the nymphs and their fountains,*

*by that meadow green and abundant  
with roses and hyacinths  
gathered for goddesses!*

1300 *There on that day came Pallas  
and Cypris the beguiling,  
Hera, and Hermes, Zeus' messenger<sup>o</sup>—  
Cypris, who dominates with desire,*

1305 *Pallas with her spear,  
and Hera, Zeus' royal wife and queen—  
they came for the judging,  
for the hateful battle of beauty  
which to me brings death, O maidens,*

1310 *but to the Danaan girls glory.  
O my mother, my mother,  
Artemis has seized me, for Ilium  
a first sacrifice!  
He who began my life  
has betrayed me in misery  
to a lonely dying.*

1315 *Oh, my wretchedness,  
I saw her,  
Helen, doom-starred and evil;  
bitter, bitter  
is the death you bring me!  
Murdered by my father—  
accursed butchery,  
for I shall be slain  
by his unholy hands.*

1320 *Oh, if only Aulis had not taken  
to the bosom of her harborage  
these, our ships,*

*with their beaks of bronze!*  
*Oh, if only*  
*the breath of Zeus had not swept them*  
*to the roadstead that faces the narrows.*  
*Zeus' breath—it brings delight*  
1325 *and doom to mortals;*  
*at one time the sails laugh*  
*in a favoring breeze,*  
*at another, Zeus the Almighty*  
*blows down upon mortals*  
*delay and doom.*  
1330 *O toil-bearing race, O toil-bearing*  
*creatures living for a day—*  
*fate finds for every man*  
*his share of misery.*  
*O Tyndareus' daughter,*  
*what burden you have laid*  
1335 *upon the Danaans*  
*of anguish and disaster!*

CHORUS LEADER [*now speaking*]

I pity you for your evil fate. Oh—  
that it had never found you out!

IPHIGENIA

O Mother, there are men—I see them coming here.

CLYTEMNESTRA

It is Achilles, son of the goddess  
for whom your father brought you here.

IPHIGENIA

1340    Servants, open the doors, so that I may  
         hide myself.

CLYTEMNESTRA

         Why do you run away, child?

IPHIGENIA

         I am ashamed to see him—to look  
         On the face of Achilles.

CLYTEMNESTRA

         But why?

IPHIGENIA

         Oh, my unlucky marriage—I am ashamed!

CLYTEMNESTRA

         In this crisis, daughter, you can't afford  
         these delicate feelings. Stay—this is no time  
         for modesty if we can hope for help.

*(Enter Achilles from the side, with armor-bearers.)*

ACHILLES

1345    Woman of misery and misfortune,  
         Leda's daughter ...

CLYTEMNESTRA

         Yes, you have said what is true.  
         I am she.

ACHILLES



... the Argives are shouting  
a thing of terror ...

CLYTEMNESTRA

What are they shouting?  
Tell me!

ACHILLES

... about your daughter ...

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, these words  
Of ill omen!

ACHILLES

... that she must be slaughtered  
in sacrifice.

CLYTEMNESTRA

And was there no one  
on the other side to argue against them?°

ACHILLES

Yes, I spoke to the yelling crowd and so  
was in danger ...

CLYTEMNESTRA

In danger of what?

ACHILLES

... of death by stoning.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh—because you  
1350    tried to save my child?

ACHILLES

Yes, for that.

CLYTEMNESTRA

But who would have dared to lay a hand on you?

ACHILLES

Every Greek soldier.

CLYTEMNESTRA

But your own legion  
of Myrmidons, they were there at your side?

ACHILLES

And the first to threaten my death.

CLYTEMNESTRA

O my child—  
now we are lost.

ACHILLES

They mocked me, they shouted  
that I had become a slave of this marriage.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What did you say?

ACHILLES

I answered that they  
1355 must never slaughter my bride ...

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, a right answer!

ACHILLES

... whom her father had pledged to me for marriage.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Yes, and brought to you from Argos.

ACHILLES

They drowned my voice by their yelling  
and cried me down.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, the mob—what a terror  
and an evil!

ACHILLES

Nonetheless I will defend you!

CLYTEMNESTRA

You—one man fighting a thousand!

ACHILLES

Look!

These men are bringing me armor for that battle.

CLYTEMNESTRA

May the gods bless your courage!

ACHILLES

I shall be blest!

CLYTEMNESTRA

1360 The child then shall not be killed?

ACHILLES

Not if I live!

CLYTEMNESTRA

But tell me now, who will come here and try  
to seize the girl?

ACHILLES

Men by thousands will come—  
Odysseus will lead them.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Sisyphus' son?

ACHILLES

Yes!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Of his own will, or chosen by the army?

ACHILLES

He will be chosen, but glad of his appointment.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Chosen for evil, for bloodshed and murder!

ACHILLES

1365 But I will keep him from the girl!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Will he, if she resists, drag her away?

ACHILLES

There is no doubt—and by her golden hair!

CLYTEMNESTRA

What must I do then?

ACHILLES

Hold fast to the child!

CLYTEMNESTRA

And so save her from murder!

ACHILLES

It comes to this.

IPHIGENIA

Mother, now listen to my words. I see  
your soul in anger against your husband.

This is a foolish and an evil rage.

Oh, I know when we stand before a  
helpless

1370 doom how hard it is to bear.

But hear me now.

It is rightful and good that we thank and  
praise our friend for his eager kindness.

But you must be careful and see that he  
is not blamed by the army. Such a thing

would win us nothing but would bring  
him  
utter ruin.

And now hear me, Mother,  
what thought has seized me and I have  
conceived

1375

in my heart. I shall die—I  
am resolved—

and having fixed my mind I want to die  
well and gloriously, putting away  
from me whatever is weak and ignoble.  
Listen to me, Mother, follow my words  
and tell me if I speak well. All Greece  
turns

her eyes to me, to me only, great Greece  
in her might. Through me alone is  
sailing

for the fleet, through me the sack and  
overthrow

of Troy. Because of me, never more will  
barbarians wrong and ravish Greek  
women,

1380

drag them from happiness and their  
homes

in Hellas. The penalty will be paid  
fully for Paris' rape of Helen.

And  
all

these things, all of them, my death will  
achieve

and accomplish. I, savior of Greece,  
will win honor and my name shall be



These things coming to pass, Mother,  
will be  
a remembrance for you. They will be  
my children, my marriage—through the  
years  
my good name and my glory. It is right  
that Greeks rule the barbarians, not  
1400 barbarians  
the Greeks. For they are slaves, and we  
are free.

CHORUS LEADER

Child, you play your part with nobleness.  
The fault is with the goddess and with fate.

ACHILLES

O child of Agamemnon—  
1405 if I had won you as my bride, if only—  
I would have sworn a god had given me  
happiness. I envy Greece because you  
are hers, not mine. And you too I envy  
for Greece's sake. You've spoken beautifully,  
and worthily of our country. You won't fight  
against god's will. You chose the thing that was  
good and was fated. And all the more I  
see of your nature—for it is noble—  
1410 desire for our marriage overcomes  
my spirit.

Listen to me, listen.  
For I want to serve you and help you. Yes,  
and to carry you home as my bride.  
O Thetis, goddess mother, witness this



is the truth. I am in agony to throw  
myself into battle with all the Greeks  
to save you. Consider again how  
1415 terrible a thing and how evil is death!

IPHIGENIA

I speak this as one past hope and fear,<sup>o</sup>  
so listen to me. It is enough that  
Helen, daughter of Tyndareus, because  
of her body hurls men into war  
and to slaughter. But you, stranger and my friend,  
you must not die for me or kill any man;  
1420 only let me, if I have the strength, save Greece.

ACHILLES

O noble heart! How can I ever add  
words of mine to these of yours, since you  
have fixed your will to die. Your soul is noble—  
who would not speak this truth? But yet—it is  
possible you will repent and alter  
1425 your fixed mind. Then know my proposal  
and offer—I shall go with these arms and  
shall place them by the altar directly  
in order that I can prevent your death.  
Perhaps you'll want to follow my advice  
even at the final second when you  
see the sword thrust at your throat. For this is  
1430 a rash and hasty impulse; I will not  
let you die for it. So, I shall arrive  
with these arms at the goddess' altar,  
and there wait and watch till you come.

*(Exit Achilles to the side.)*

IPHIGENIA

You make no sound, but you are weeping, Mother.  
Why do you weep for me?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Is not this sorrow  
terrible enough to break my heart?

IPHIGENIA

1435 Stop! And trust me in all of this, Mother.  
Do not make a coward of me.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Daughter,  
I do not want to wrong or hurt you.  
Tell me what I must do.

IPHIGENIA

Here is one thing I ask:  
don't shear from your head the lock of hair  
or dress yourself in mourning for my sake.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What are you saying, child? When I have lost  
you forever!

IPHIGENIA

No! I am not lost  
1440 but saved! And you too, through me, will be  
remembered gloriously.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, what do you mean?  
Is it not right that I mourn your death?

IPHIGENIA

No! For I say no funeral mound is  
to be heaped up for me.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What? Isn't it  
ordained and rightful that there be a burying  
for the dead?

IPHIGENIA

The altar of the goddess  
who is Zeus' daughter—that will be  
my grave and my monument.

CLYTEMNESTRA

O my child,  
1445 yours are the good words and the right ones.  
I will obey you.

IPHIGENIA

That will be my memorial  
as one favored by fate because I brought  
help to Greece.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Your sisters—what message  
shall I take them?

IPHIGENIA

O Mother, do not dress  
them in mourning.

CLYTEMNESTRA

But have you some last word  
of love that I may speak to them?

IPHIGENIA

Only this—

I say good-bye to them now. That is all.

1450 Orestes—do this, nurture him and see  
that he comes to strength and manhood for my sake.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Embrace and look at him for the last time.

*(To Orestes.)*

IPHIGENIA

Dearest—you tried to help me as best you could!

CLYTEMNESTRA

O my child, when I go home to Argos  
is there something I can do to bring you joy?

IPHIGENIA

Yes. Do not hate him. Do not hate my father  
who is your husband.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh! Oh! Your father

1455     must run a course of agony and terror  
          for your sake.

IPHIGENIA

          Acting against his will,  
          for the sake of Greece, he has committed me  
          to death.

CLYTEMNESTRA

          By a treacherous plot! Unkingly  
          and unworthy of Atreus!

IPHIGENIA

          Who will lead me  
          to the altar, before they seize me  
          and drag me by my hair?

CLYTEMNESTRA

          I—I will come with you ...

IPHIGENIA

          No, no, that is wrong!

CLYTEMNESTRA

          ... holding with my hand  
          to your robe.

IPHIGENIA

1460

          here you must stay, which will be better  
          for you and for me also. Let it be

Mother, trust  
me,

one of my father's attendants who brings  
me  
to the meadow of Artemis and to the  
place  
where I shall be killed.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, child,  
are you going now?

IPHIGENIA

Yes.  
And not to come back again.

CLYTEMNESTRA

1465            Leaving your mother?

IPHIGENIA

You see how undeserved.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, stay.  
Don't leave me, child!

IPHIGENIA

Stop! I forbid your crying out or any tears!  
O women, lift your voices up to Artemis,  
in honor of my fate and of my dying  
shout a loud paeon of glory to Zeus' daughter.  
And let the host of Danaans be silent,  
1470    let the ritual basket be prepared,  
let the fire blaze with holy barley.

And let my father circle to the right  
around the altar. For it is to bring the Greeks  
salvation and triumph that I now depart.

[*singing*]

*Lead me on*

1475 *for the sack and overthrowing  
of Troy city  
and the Phrygian land.*

*Put on my hair a wreath  
of garlands,  
O drench me with the waters  
of purification.*

*About the altar of Artemis,  
about her temple,  
dance!*

1480 *Let us dance in honor of Artemis,  
goddess, queen and blest.*

*With my own blood  
in sacrifice  
I will wash out  
the fated curse of the gods.*

1485 *O Mother, my lady mother,  
I shall give you no tears  
for when I come to the holy place*

1490 *I must not weep.  
Now, maidens, let us join  
in praise of Artemis,  
Artemis in her temple  
across Chalcis strait,  
where now in Aulis gulf,*

*and by the narrows,  
wooden ships rage fiercely  
1495 in my name.  
O motherland Pelasgia,  
Mycenae, my Mycenae  
who fostered me ...*

CHORUS [*singing*]

1500 *Do you call on Perseus' citadel  
wrought by the hands of the Cyclopes?*

IPHIGENIA

*... fostered me,  
a light to Greece.  
I do not refuse to die for you.*

CHORUS

*Never will your glory pass away.*

IPHIGENIA

1505 *O dayspring  
torch of Zeus  
and glorious light!  
To another world I go  
out of this place  
to dwell.  
And now, and now,  
beloved light,  
farewell!*

*(Exit Iphigenia to the side.)*



CHORUS [*still singing*]

- 1510    *O look at the girl who walks  
to the goddess' altar  
that Troy may be brought low  
and the Phrygians die.  
Her hair in garlands of honor,  
and flung upon her body the lustral waters,  
she will go to the goddess' altar  
which she will stain,  
and her lovely body's neck,*
- 1515    *with streams of flowing blood.  
Oh, your father's waters await you,<sup>o</sup>  
the waters of purification;  
and the Greek army too awaits you*
- 1520    *for their sailing to Troy.  
But now all hail to the daughter of Zeus,  
all hail to Artemis, goddess queen,  
as for a prosperous fate!  
Goddess,  
you who take joy in human blood,  
escort the armies of all the Greeks*
- 1525    *to the land of Phrygia  
and to the citadel of treacherous Troy;<sup>o</sup>  
there give to Greece and to her spearmen  
a crown of victory.  
And for the king,  
Agamemnon,*
- 1530    *O touch his head  
with a glory everlasting.*

*(Exit the Chorus to the side, Clytemnestra into the tent.)*

[For the transmitted ending of the play, which is probably spurious, see the Appendix.]

## APPENDIX TO IPHIGENIA IN AULIS

This appendix provides the transmitted ending of the play, which is probably spurious.°

*(Enter Second Messenger from the side.)*

MESSENGER

O daughter of Tyndareus, Clytemnestra,  
come outside the pavilion and receive  
my message.

*(Enter Clytemnestra from the tent.)*

CLYTEMNESTRA

Hearing your voice calling, I am here,  
1535 wretched, fearful, and in terror that you  
have come to add a new disaster  
to my present grief.

MESSENGER

It is about your child—  
I must recount a thing of awe and wonder.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then don't delay, but tell it as quickly  
as you can.

MESSENGER

1540 I shall, and everything, dear mistress,  
you shall learn clearly from the beginning  
unless my whirling thoughts trip up my tongue.

When we came to Artemis' grove and to  
the flowered meadow of Zeus' daughter,  
leading your child to the mustering ground  
1545 of the Achaeans, then quickly the army  
of Argives assembled.

And when King Agamemnon saw his girl  
walk into the grove for the sacrifice  
he groaned bitterly, and turning his head  
1550 wept, drawing his robe across his eyes.

But she, standing beside her father, spoke:  
"O Father, I am here at your command—  
1555 willingly I give my body to be  
sacrificed for my country, for all Greece.  
If it be the will of heaven, lead me  
to the goddess' altar. May you all prosper:  
win victory in this war and then return  
to your fatherland. But let no Argive  
touch me with his hand. Silent, unflinching,  
1560 I offer my neck to the knife." These words  
she spoke, and every man hearing her wondered  
at the maid's courage and nobility.

Then Talthybius, standing in the midst,  
according to his office spoke, proclaiming  
a holy silence to the army,  
1565 and Calchas, the prophet, unsheathing  
with his hand the sharp knife, laid it  
in the golden basket. Then he crowned

the head of the girl. And the son of Peleus,  
taking the barley and the lustral waters,  
ran round the goddess' altar and cried out:  
1570 "O child of Zeus, O slayer of wild beasts,  
you who turn your disk of shining light  
through the night's shadows, receive this sacrifice  
which we make to you—we the Achaean host  
and the king Agamemnon—unblemished blood  
from the neck of this fair girl. And grant  
1575 that unharmed now the fleet may sail;  
and grant this too, that we and our spears destroy  
the battlements of Troy."

Then Atreus' sons  
and the whole army stood with eyes bent on  
the earth. And the priest, taking the knife,  
uttered his prayer, and scanned her neck to strike  
his blow. Oh, then I stood with my head  
1580 bowed, and a great anguish smote my heart—  
but suddenly a miracle came to pass.  
Clearly all heard the blow strike home—  
but after, with no man knowing where or how,  
the maiden had vanished from the earth.  
Then the priest with a great voice cried aloud  
and the whole army echoed him—this when  
1585 they saw the apparition which a god had sent  
but no man had foreknown. Though our eyes saw,  
it was a sight incredible: a deer  
panting its last lay there on the earth,  
big to behold and fine indeed. The goddess'  
altar freely ran with the creature's blood.

1590

At this Calchas spoke and with joy one can  
believe: "O commanders of the allied  
armies, you see this victim which the goddess  
had laid upon the altar, a mountain hind?  
Rather than the maid, this victim she receives  
1595 with joy. By this no noble blood  
stains her altar. Gladly she accepts  
this offering and grants a fair voyage  
for our attack on Troy. Let every sailor  
then be glad, and go to the galleys,  
1600 for on this day we must leave the hollow  
bays of Aulis, and cross the Aegean sea."

Then when the victim had been burned  
wholly to cinder in Hephaestus' flame,  
he prayed for the army's safe return.  
After all this King Agamemnon sent me  
1605 to report to you and tell what fortune  
had come from heaven and what deathless glory  
she has won for Greece. And I who saw  
this thing, being present, report it now to you.  
Clearly your child was swept away to heaven;  
so give over grief and cease from anger  
1610 against your husband. No mortal can foreknow  
the ways of heaven. Those whom the gods love  
they rescue. For think, this day beheld  
your child die, and come alive again.

CHORUS LEADER

With what gladness I hear the messenger's  
report! Your child he tells us is alive  
and dwelling with the gods in heaven.

CLYTEMNESTRA [*singing*]

1615    *O child! What god has stolen you from me?  
How can I ever call to you? How know  
that this is not a false story merely told  
that I may stop my bitter grieving?*

CHORUS LEADER

Behold King Agamemnon comes to us,  
1620    and the same story he will tell to you.

*(Enter Agamemnon from the side.)*

AGAMEMNON

My lady, we can now be happy  
in our daughter's destiny. Truly she  
dwells now in fellowship with the gods.  
Now must you take this little son of ours  
and journey home. The army's eyes are on  
the voyage. It will be long, long,  
1625    before my greeting comes to you again  
on the return from Troy. Meantime  
may all go well with you!

CHORUS [*chanting*]

*With joy, son of Atreus, sail on  
to the Phrygian land,  
with joy return,  
bringing glorious spoils from Troy!*