IPHIGENIA IN AULIS

Translated by Charles R. Walker
INTRODUCTION TO
IPHIGENIA IN AULIS

The Iphigenia in Aulis was produced, together with the Bacchae and the Alcestis, at the Great Dionysia in March, 405 B.C., a few months after Euripides' death. It seems probable that Euripides' son (some say his nephew) produced the play and perhaps filled in parts of the script which Euripides had left incomplete at the time of his death.

The play is full of invention and dramatic reversals. Some classical critics, dubbing it pure melodrama, have felt that it represented a woeful falling-off from the sterner standards of Greek tragedy. Most students of dramatic literature find it an exciting "transition piece," for it is an obvious bridge between classical tragedy and postclassical drama. But whatever else it may be, for the majority of readers, both scholarly and other, it is still tragic, still Greek, and still Euripides.

Euripides here, more than ever, takes liberties with his legendary material. The legend briefly is this: Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon, is sacrificed to the goddess Artemis, to persuade her to grant the Greek ships a favoring wind on their way to conquer Troy. But the great heroes of Homer are cut down to size, or below, to human—almost modern—politicians preparing to fight a war out of ambition or fear.

In Homer, Agamemnon, "king of men," while not as glamorous a hero as Hector or Odysseus, is nevertheless a man of courage, a first-rate commander, a king. In the Iphigenia he has become an ambitious politician, wavering in his motives, and a moral, if not a physical, coward. Menelaus is also of doubtful character. Achilles, to be sure, has something of the hero about him, but it is the heroism of a very human youth, not of an adult Homeric warrior. As to Iphigenia, her character has been transformed from an unwilling victim into a true saint. She does not appear in Homer, but tradition pictures Iphigenia as a gagged, unwilling victim, appealing with her eyes, even at the moment of her death, for pity. This, for example, is the Iphigenia of Aeschylus' Agamemnon. Euripides remodels her character and so the plot he derives from the legend. In this play, she gives her life (much as Joan of Arc did) in accordance with what she regards as the "divine will" and the needs of her country.

I have suggested that the play is more modern than most Greek tragedies; perhaps it is more modern than any of them. But in what sense is it modern? First of all in techniques of the theater: it is full of new dramatic devices as well as a concentration of old ones. Instead of the formal Euripidean prologue giving the audience background for the plot, there is a lively duologue full of dramatic tension between Agamemnon and a servant. (An old-style prologue also exists and in this version is integrated into the dialogue, ll. 49-114.) The chorus is no longer essential to the dramatic action but it often establishes the mood. It consists in this play of women who have crossed over from their native Chalcis to Aulis, apparently as sight-seers to see the heroes and the famous Greek fleet. Their vivid description of the army and the ships in the first chorus seems comparable in function to scenery in the modern theater or to background shots in a motion picture. Part of the role of the normal chorus appears to have been taken over by an increase in the number and significance of solos, or arias. As to the plot, it is tight; the action, rapid and full of surprises. Aristotle found Iphigenia's quick change in attitude toward her destiny hard to believe. Most modern readers, or hearers of the play, do not. Finally, in several scenes there are intimate conversations and expressions of what we would call "sentiment."

The text of Iphigenia is unusually corrupt, and there is by no means agreement among scholars as to what should be attributed to Euripides and what to later interpolators. But on many strategic passages there is general agreement. In this connection the present translator had a revealing experience. Being thoroughly familiar with the play but only slightly familiar with the conclusions of textual commentators, he prepared an acting version in English for the modern stage. This necessitated some cutting from choruses and dialogue of passages which to him seemed padded, irrelevant, or undramatic. In comparing the acting version with what the textual commentators had been saying, he found that he had dropped most of the spurious passages. In short, it is here suggested that there has come to us from...
the hand of Euripides a highly playable script. This translation, it should be said, is based on the whole text. The spurious ending, or exodus, together with a few lines omitted as either spurious or interfering with the dramatic tension, is given in the Appendix.

Here, then, we have a play which in action, mood of disillusioned realism, number of heroic characters "debunked," and in intimate, even domestic, dialogue appears very modern indeed. And yet, the plot is woven around an angry goddess who won’t let the winds blow the Achaean ships to the sack of Troy unless a king’s daughter is slain in human sacrifice! Can such a play be credible to modern readers and theatergoers? How indeed could it have been credible in Euripides’ time to Greeks who had outgrown human sacrifice centuries before? One obvious answer is that, as in all Greek tragedies, the dramatist is skilful enough to make the audience accept the conditions of the tragic dilemma as set forth in the myth. But the second reason—related to the first—is that the play really is not about the institution of human sacrifice at all. It might have been, but it isn’t.

What then is the play about?

One way to approach this question is to start with the characters, especially the two with whom Euripides was obviously deeply involved—the women of the play. There are two of them, in a sense three, though the third never appears. She is Helen of Troy, whom the dramatist never tires of depicting and denouncing both in his dialogue and in his choruses. These characters, all three, sharply contrast with one another. Helen, through selfish love, has "travail and trouble" upon all the Greeks. Iphigenia, by selfless sacrifice, rescues the Greek expedition from futility and becomes, so both she and the other characters believe, a "true savior of Greece." Perhaps there is a hint of the meaning of the play in this contrast of the two women. Again the reader or spectator will inevitably compare Iphigenia, the girl who loves her father in spite of his weakness and his intention to kill her, with Clytemnestra, who hates her husband and will one day kill him (as the legend tells us) when he returns from Troy.

Clytemnestra in her speeches of anger and supplication reveals herself in her full tragic stature. Iphigenia’s scenes with her father are

in a wholly different mood—intimate, affectionate, and pathetic. But they perhaps also point toward what Euripides was saying in the play. She is wholly blind to his weakness. To her—and to her alone in the play—he is a great man, committing her to her death for the sake of Greece. Her attitude toward him is one of love throughout. In an early scene, for example, when father and daughter meet after long absence, she is full of affection and gaiety. But even when she pleads for her life (before she decides to die willingly), her plea is in terms of love and intimacy, not indignation or fear. At the turning point in the play, when she announces her resolve to die, she uses Agamemnon’s own words in defense of the war for which she is to die. Finally, in the last scene with her mother, as the play moves toward its tragic end, she asks Clytemnestra not to hate her husband.

Let me clear up one possible misunderstanding. Did Euripides then condone Agamemnon’s crime and the injury visited upon his wife Clytemnestra by consenting to the sacrifice of his daughter? Certainly not. No student of this or of his other plays could believe that he did. But perhaps he believed that Iphigenia and Clytemnestra were both "right."

These are, of course, only guesses as to what interested Euripides in this version of the Iphigenia story. Perhaps, somewhere in the death and sacrifice of youth that has occurred in all wars from Troy to Korea lies the meaning—and the mystery—of the play. But how can that be? The sacrifice here is to a divinity "delighting in human blood," and the expedition is led by a wavering and ambitious ruler. Certainly the war will be fought from very mixed motives, some patriotic, some ignoble. All of this was without a doubt also a part of what Euripides was saying, but not all of it, I believe. There is also a blaze of devotion in the play and the mystery of young and voluntary dying that has occurred in all periods of human history. Euripides has brought the same theme into other plays but never as the center of dramatic action. As in Shaw’s Saint Joan, it is as much what Iphigenia’s sacrifice does to others as what it does to herself that makes the dramatic moments in the play. This is strikingly true in the scene with Achilles, as well as in the final tragic parting between mother and daughter.
As it has come down to us, the end of the play presents us with a riddle and a challenge. The legendary material contains a variant, probably a later one in mythic history, by which Iphigenia is rescued at the last moment. Miraculously, she is snatched away to live—for a time, at least—in fellowship with the gods, and a hind is slain on the altar instead. In other words, she is not really sacrificed. This "happy ending" has been added by a later interpolator to the text of Euripides' play and appears in all editions. I have followed the practice of most modern translators (Schiller among them) in omitting this happy ending. The whole force of the play collapses if the heroine is hastily caught up to heaven at the last minute. And incidentally, the scene of rescue as reported by the messenger is not only undramatic and unconvincing but spurious. Scholars are unanimous that it is by a later interpolator.

The reader may recall another story of divine rescue of a human victim, the moving story of Abraham and Isaac. But why should that story appear serious and convincing to most people, regardless of their religious faith, but the snatching of Iphigenia as fantasy or fake, as it has to most readers of the play? The reason, I believe, is a fairly obvious one. The Abraham story concerns the problem of faith—faith in Jehovah and utter surrender to his will. But this is only superficially true of Euripides' play. Euripides never for a moment suggests that the goddess should be obeyed out of love or piety. All the arguments for the sacrifice are purely practical, when they are not cynical and self-seeking. It is quite clear that to the playwright it was a crime for Agamemnon to accede to the goddess—or her priest's—demands. (It is not even clear whether he believes that Artemis has demanded the sacrifice or whether he regards the whole thing as the invention of Calchas, the priest.) The nobility and worth of Iphigenia's action, therefore, is quite independent of either the worthiness of the cause or the motives of those who send her to her death. Her sacrifice is a kind of absolute good that transcends all the rational cynicism around her.

Unhappily this does not rid us of the whole difficulty. There is good evidence that, although the "messenger ending" is spurious, there was once another authentic ending, or "exodus" as the Greeks called the last scene, in which Euripides brought in Artemis herself to resolve the issues of the play and perhaps to explain why a hind was to be substituted for a girl. But what did Euripides actually tell his audience through the mouth of the goddess? We shall probably never know. I am certain, however, that, whatever Euripides wrote, his exodus did not "explain away," as does the interpolated ending, the poetry, the power, or the mystery of the play.
IPHIGENIA IN AULIS

CHARACTERS
Agamemnon, commander-in-chief of the Greek army
Old Man, servant of Agamemnon
Chorus of women of Chalcis who have come to Aulis to see the Greek fleet
Menelaus, brother of Agamemnon, husband of Helen
Clytemnestra, wife of Agamemnon
Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon
Orestes (silent)
Messenger
Achilles, future hero of the Trojan war
Attendants, armor-bearers

SCENE: In front of the tent of Agamemnon, commander of the Greek armies; on the shore of Aulis' gulf where all the Greek ships lie becalmed. Agamemnon walks in front of his tent.
TIME: Night, just before dawn.

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

Old Man (entering)
I'm coming—
What new plan have you got in your head,
My lord Agamemnon?

Agamemnon
Hurry up!

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

Agamemnon (Continues to pace up and down for several seconds as the Old Man watches him.)

Well, what is that star
That moves across the sky?

Old Man
That's Sirius, next to the seven Pleiades.
It's still the hour when it rides
Right in the middle of heaven.

Agamemnon (Taking his eyes from the sky and listening.)

No voice is there of birds even,
Or of the seas' waves.
The silence of the winds—
Holds hushed the river.

Old Man
Yes, but why have you been rushing
Up and down, my lord Agamemnon,
Outside your tent? There's peace
And quiet still over at Aulis
And the guards are quiet too—
Over on the walls of the fort.
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
Oh, but these have a glory in their lives!

Agamemnon
Ah—a glory that is perilous, and
Will trip them as they walk.
High honors are sweet
To a man's heart, but ever
They stand close to the brink of grief.
Many things can bring calamity.
At one time, it is an enterprise
Of the gods which, failing,
Overturns 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
All good things in your life. No,
It is necessary and it is fated
That you be glad and that you
Be sad too, for you were born
Human, and whether you like it or not,
What the gods will comes true.

But you've lit your lamp and
Been writing a letter, haven't you?
You still have it in your hand—
With those same words you've
Been putting together. You seal
The letter up—and then tear
The seal open. You've been doing it
Over and over again. Then you
Throw the torch 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;
So you can speak. Remember? It was I
Who was in the bridal train—
Long ago in the beginning. I was given
To your wife, part of the wedding dowry,
And Tyndareus picked me for this service
Because I was honest.

Agamemnon
(Explaining the whole situation to the Old Man.)
Three girls were born to Leda, daughter of Thesius: Phoebe,
Clytemnestra, who is my wife, and Helen. The young men, foremost in fortune, from all Greece came as Helen's suitors. And each of them uttered terrible threats against the others, each swearing he would murder his fellow suitors if he himself failed to
win the girl. Here was her father's dilemma, whether he could best escape disaster at fate's hands by giving her or by not giving her in marriage. Then this idea came to him, to bind the suitors by oath to make a treaty one with another—and seal it with a burnt offering—that whoever won as wife Helen, the child of Tyndareus, that man all the others would defend. If any man should drive her husband away and steal her from her house, all must make war upon him and sack his town, whether the town were Greek or barbarian. When they had sworn this, the old man—tricking them with his strategy—gave his daughter permission to choose that suitor to whom the sweet breath of love turned her heart. So she chose Menelaus—would to God she had not chosen him. Then from Phrygia to Sparta came Paris, who was the judge of the goddesses—so the Argives have the story. He came with his garments flowered in gold and his dress blazoned with barbaric gems. He loved Helen and was loved by her. Then, when her husband was out of the country, he stole her and carried her off to the herd lands of Ida. Menelaus, stung into fury, ranged through Greece and invoked that old oath sworn to Tyndareus, the oath claiming help to avenge this wrong. So all the Greeks sprang to arms, and now they have come to the narrows of Aulis with all their armament, their ships, their shields, chariots and horses. And since I am Menelaus' brother, for his sake they chose me as commander-in-chief. Would to God another man had won that honor.

After the army was mustered in here at Aulis, we were delayed by the dead calm. It was then the prophet Calchas spoke to all of us in despair at the weather and urged that my daughter, Iphigenia, be sacrificed to the goddess of this place. He predicted that if she were sacrificed we would sail and take and overthrow utterly the land of Troy. But if she were not sacrificed none of these things would happen. So when I heard this, I ordered our herald, Talthybius, to make a loud proclamation and dismiss the whole army. I would never have the cruel brutality to kill my own daughter! After that my brother bore down upon me with arguments of every kind, urging me to commit this horror. Then I wrote a letter, folded and sealed it, dispatched it to my wife asking her to send our daughter to be married to Achilles. And in the letter I praised his reputation as a hero and said he would not sail unless a bride came from our family here to Phthia. I contrived this deception about the maid's marriage to persuade my wife. Of the Achaeans who know, there are Calchas, Odysseus, and Menelaus, only.

I did this wrong! Now in this letter I rewrite the message and put down the truth. This I was doing when you saw me in the dark unsealing the letter and sealing it again. But take the dispatch at once. You must go to Argos! Of the message folded here I will tell you all, since you are loyal both to my wife and to my house.

Old Man
Tell me then and show me—so that
The words I speak with my tongue
Will say these words in the letter.

Agamemnon
Child of Leda, Clytemnestra:
This letter will bring you
A new message, and different
From the other. Do not send your daughter
To the calm beach of Aulis, here
On the Euboean harbor. For we must
Wait another season before we can
Celebrate our child's marriage.

Old Man
But when Achilles loses his bride—
Won't his heart blow up in fierce
Anger against you and against
Your wife? Oh, this is
A threatening thing! Tell me
What you mean by it.
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
    Or that I have said I would give him
    My daughter as his bride.

Old Man
    To bring her here a victim then—
    A death offering—you promised
    Her to the son of the goddess!
    Oh, you have dared a deed of horror,
    My lord Agamemnon!

Agamemnon
    My mind is crazed, I fall in ruin!
    No—you must get on your way and run.
    Forget that your legs are old.

Old Man
    I will hurry, my lord.

Agamemnon
    (Putting his hands on the Old Man's shoulders.)
    Don't rest by those forest springs
    Or give in to sleep.

Old Man
    No, no!

Agamemnon
    When you come to the fork in the road
    Look keenly both ways and be sure
    The carriage doesn't pass quickly—
    When you are not looking—and so
    Bring my daughter right to

Old Man
    I will, my lord!

Agamemnon
    Now, go out from the gates.

Old Man
    Wait. When I say these things,
    Tell me, what will make your wife
    And your daughter trust me?

Agamemnon
    This seal. Keep it. It is
    The same as the seal on the letter.
    No mortal man has happiness
    And fortune to the end. He is
    Born, every man, to his grief!

Chorus
    I have come to the shore
    And the sea sands of Aulis
    Over Euripus' waters
    And the sea narrows sailing—
    From Chalkis, my city,
Chalcis, nurse to the fountain
Arethusa, sea surrounded
And shining—to see this host
Of noble Achaeans, with their oar-borne ships
Of heroes, whom Menelaus, the yellow-haired
And Agamemnon, nobly born—our husbands tell—
Had sent in a thousand galleys
To seek out Helen and seize her;
Helen, whom Paris the herdsman
Took from the banks of the river,
Reedy Eurotas, where Aphrodite bestowed her—
On the day when the Cyprian held—
After her dewy bath—
A battle of beauty
With Hera and Pallas Athene.
Through the grove of the victims
Artemis’ grove I came swift running;
At my eagerness, my cheeks
Reddened with shame—at my yearning to see
The Danaans’ fence of shields,
The war gear by each tent,
And the great host of armored horsemen.
And now those two whose names are Ajax
I looked upon,
The son of Oileus and Telamon’s child
Who is the crown and pride
Of Salamis. Squatting they played at draughts,
Delighting in its trickery.
With them was Protesilaus,
With them Palamedes the sea god’s son.
Another hurled the discus, Diomedes,
And took great joy in it.
Nearby Meriones, Ares’ kin,
At whom all mortals marvel.
And from his mountainous island came
Laertes’ son and Nireus, goodliest seeming
Of all the Achaeans.

Swift-footed Achilles I saw—
His feet like the stormwind—running,
Achilles whom Thetis bore, and
Chiron trained into manhood.
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, the Phoebus’
Charioteer cried forth in frenzy.
I saw his handsome horses there,
Gold-wrought in bits and harness.
Eumelus with his goad struck them,
The yoke horses dappled gray,
Their manes white-flecked, and the
Trace horses which flanked them.
Clearly I saw these as they grazed
The post at the end of the race course—
They were bays, with their fetlocks
Spotted. And always beside them Peleus’ son
Hurled himself onward,
Right by the chariot’s car rail,
Right by the spinning axle.
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
Were there on the right, swift ships, fifty of them.
Upon their sterns set high in gold,
The divine daughters of the sea lord
Carved as symbols of Achilles’ host.
Keel by keel beside them
Lay the Argive ships
Commanded by Mecistes’ son,
Whose father Talaus fostered him to manhood.
And there was 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,
Pallas Athene in her winged car
Drawn by the horses of unclawen hoof,
A blessed sign to mariners.

In Boeotia’s naval squadron
I counted fifty ships
Fitted with blazonry;
Cadmus on each of them
With his golden dragon
High on their poops lifted.
It was Leitus the earth-born
Who commanded the squadron.
Next from the land of Phocis
Captain of Locrian ships,
Equal in number was the son of Oileus,
Who had embarked from Thronium,
Illustrious city.

From Mycenae, walled by the Cyclops,
The son of Atreus sent his ships,
A hundred galleys in order;
With him his brother,
Commander and friend,
Sailing to wreak revenge on her
Who had fled his hearth
To accomplish a foreign marriage.
From Pylus, Gerenian Nestor’s
Ships I beheld;
On their poops emblazoned
Bull-bodied Alpheus,
Alpheus, the river that runs by his home.
Twelve Aenian ships were there
With Gouneus the king as captain.

Hard by the lords of Elis
Whom all men call Epeians;
Their ships Eurytus led,
And led too the Taphian squadron—
Oars gleamed white in the sunlight—
Whose king is Meges, Phyleus’ son.
They had set sail from the Echinad isles
A rocky terror to mariners.

Ajax, Salamin born,
Linked the right wing of the navy to the left,
Knitting together nearest and farthest
Of galleys. And for that linkage
Moved his own twelve ships, easy to pilot.
So the line was unbroken—
Of ships and of shore and of people.
No home-going will there be
For any barbarian craft
Which grapples with him there.

The navy’s setting forth
I’ve seen it on this day,
So when at home I hear men speak of it,
My vision of the marshaled ships
Will live in memory.

(Menelaus and the Old Man enter quarreling.)

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
The insult you’ve given is honorable.
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

I will not give it.

Old Man

And I won't let it go!

Menelaus

This stick will beat your head into a bloody pulp.

Old Man

To die for my lord would be a good death.

Menelaus

Hands off—you talk too much for a slave.

(Enter Agamemnon.)

Menelaus

Before this man is heard I have the right
To speak.

Agamemnon

What brought you into the scuffle—
And why abuse him with such violence?

(The Old Man goes out.)

Menelaus

First, look upon my face, Agamemnon,
Then I will begin to tell my story.

Agamemnon

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

Menelaus

This letter carries a message of treason!

Agamemnon

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

Menelaus

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

Agamemnon

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 him? 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 in my affairs?

Menelaus

My own desire
Urged me. I am not a slave of yours.

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 treacherous. One day
You plan one thing, another day another,
Tomorrow you will shift again.

Agamemnon

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

Menelaus

Agamemnon,
A disloyal heart is false to friends and
A thing of evil. Now you I want to question,
And 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,
Keeping open the doors of your house, yes,
Will sail. At that instant your heart filled up
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. This is the very air which heard
These words from your mouth. But then, turning
Your mind about, in secret you recast
The message. So now your story?—you will
Never be your daughter's murderer! I tell you
Thousands have done what you have done. Willingly
Worked and striven up to the peaks of power,
Then in the flush of attainment, they fail
And fall in ignominy. Now in some instances
The populace is responsible out of stupidity,
But with other men the failure is in them,
Impotent—like you—to lead or protect
The state. Oh, chiefly in this present case
I groan for Greece in her affliction,
For she was ready to act with honor,
But on account of your girl and you,
She lets the barbarians, even the basest
Of them, slip from her grasp and make her name
A mockery! O may I never make
Any man ruler of my country or
Commander of her armies because I am
In debt to him. No, a general
Must have wit; and a ruler, understanding.

Chorus
Terrible are these fighting words which 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,
As it befits a brother and as a good man
To another shows decency and respect.
Your eyes are bloodshot—and what
Dire threats are these? Tell me, who
Has wronged 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 fouly. Should I pay the price
For these your sins, when I am innocent?
Or is it 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
Have counseled with myself well and wisely—
Does that make me mad? Rather are you crazed,
For the gods, being favorable, rid you of
A wicked wife, and now you want her back!
As to the suitors, marriage-mad, with evil
In their hearts, they swore an oath to Tyndareus.
Yes, I grant that, but a crazed hope which
I believe a god inspired effected all,
Not any influence or strength in you.
Make war with them—they'll join you in their folly!
But in heaven there is intelligence—it can
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 did 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. 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

How different are these words from those you spoke
Before—but it is good to save the child.

Menelaus

O gods—so now I have no friends.

Agamemnon

And you'll have none while you try to destroy them.

Menelaus

Where is the proof 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

Greece is in grief
And in trouble. Isn't it right that you
Should bear a part of the 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.)

Messenger

O commander of all the armies of Greece,
King Agamemnon, I am here 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.

Now after weary travel, beside a stream
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:
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 highborn are glorious and all men
Gaze at them. Now they are saying: Is it
A marriage, or what happens now?

(He smiles.)

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:
Men make the marriage offering to Artemis,
Aulis' queen, but who will be the bridegroom?

(He smiles.)

Shall we prepare barley for sacrifice?
Let us crown our heads with garlands, and you,
King Menelaus, start the bridal hymn!
Oh, let the lutes be played, and there should be
Dancing within the pavilion, since for
The maid this day should dawn in happiness.

Agamemnon

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

(The Messenger goes out.)

O God, how can I find words or begin
To speak in the face of this, my disaster?
Fallen into the pit, fate chains me there.
I forged a conspiracy, but shrewder far
A hundred times were the stratagems
Which Fate invented. O fortunate men of mean,
Ignoble birth, freely you may weep and
Empty out your hearts, but the highborn—
Decorum rules our lives and we, by service
To the mob, become its slaves.

Look at me, brother.
I am ashamed of these tears. And yet
At the extremity of my misfortune
I am ashamed not to shed them. What words
Can I utter to my wife or with what countenance
Receive and welcome her when she appears,
Unsummoned, in the midst of my disaster?
Yet coming she only obeys nature,
Following a daughter here to do love’s services,
And give the bride away. So doing, she
Shall find me out the author of this evil.

And the unhappy maiden! Maiden, no—
Soon, it seems, Hades will marry her.
Oh, piteous fate! I hear her cries to me;

O Father, why do you kill me? May Death
Be your bride also and betroth
All of your dear ones as he has plighted me!
Beside her, Orestes the infant will cry out
Meaningless words, but full of meaning
To my heart!
O Paris, Helen, it is your marrying
Which has wrought these things
And my damnation!

Chorus

And I too grieve, so far as a stranger may,
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 begat us both,
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
Seized me. I am no longer terrible
To you, or any more your enemy.
All the words spoken I now withdraw, and
From them I retreat. I stand in your place
And beseech you do not slay the child
To prosper me and to destroy yourself.
It is against all justice that you should
Groan from the same cause that makes me
Fortunate or that your daughter die while
All my children live and face the sun.
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
All that it meant to kill the 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
The host, I say, let it go from Aulis,
And so cease drowning your eyes in tears
Or summoning me to grieve and weep for you.
As to your share and mine in the oracle
Concerning your daughter's destiny, I
Want no part in it; my share I give to you.
And so I've turned my threatening words
Into their opposites! But it is fitting;
I have changed because I love a brother.
To seek, as here I have done, always
For the best action in the case is not
The character of an evil man!

Chorus
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.

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

Agamemnon
The whole concourse of Achaean armies.

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

Agamemnon
I might do it secretly—but from the army
I could not keep the secret.

Menelaus
You are wrong
To fear the mob so desperately.

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

Menelaus
No, not if Calchas, the prophet, is first dead,
And that will be quite simple to accomplish.

Agamemnon
How arrogant they are! The whole race of prophets—
A curse upon this earth.
Menelaus

They're of no value
To man, or use whatever, especially when alive.

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

Odysseus is not such a man or personage
That he can harm you or me.

Agamemnon

He is cunning
In his tactics always and his ear
Is close to the mob.

Menelaus

It's his ambition,
An evil and a cursed thing, piercing
His very soul.

Agamemnon

I agree—so will he not
Stand up in the midst of the army and
Tell the prophecy which Calchas spoke
And how I promised to sacrifice
My victim to Artemis—and how I then
Annulled my promises? Oh, with these words
Will 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
To the earth and the land destroy utterly.
Such is the terrible circumstance in which
I find myself. Now in my despair I am
Quite helpless, and it is God's will.

(He bows his head for a moment
in despair, then looks up.)

Do this one thing for me, Menelaus,
Go to the army, take all precaution
That Clytemnestra learn nothing of this
Till after I have seized the child and
Sent her to her death. So I may do
This evil—which I have to do—
With fewest tears. And you, ladies, who are
Our guests, see that you guard your lips.

(Agamemnon and Menelaus go out.)

Chorus

O blest are those who share
In Aphrodite's gifts
With modesty and measure,
Blest who escape the frenzied passion.
For Eros of the golden hair
Shoots his two arrows of desire,
And the one brings happiness
To man's life, the other ruin.
O Cypris, loveliest of goddesses
In heaven, keep this frenzied arrow
From my heart.
Keep modest my delights
All my desires lawful,
So may I have my part in love
But not in passion's madness.

Many are the natures of men,
Various their manners of living,
Yet a straight path is always the right one;
And lessons deeply taught
Lead man to paths of righteousness;
Reverence, I say, is wisdom
And by its grace transfigures—
So that we seek virtue
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 in quietness,
But, for men, infinite are the ways
To order and augment
The state.
O Paris, you returned to
The land which reared you,
Herdsman of white heifers
Upon Ida's mountains; where
Barbarian melodies you played
Upon a Phrygian flute
And echoed there once more
Olympus' pipe.

Full-udder'd cattle browsed
When the goddesses summoned you
For this trial of beauty—
Trial which sent you
To Greece, to knock at the doors
Of ivory palaces; it was there.

Looking into Helen's eyes
You gave and took the ecstasies of love.
So from this quarrel came
The assault by Greeks
With ship and spear
Upon Troy's citadel.

O august ladies,
Daughters of the mighty of the earth,
How blest you are! Behold
Iphigenia, the king’s daughter,
And Clytemnestra, queen,
Daughter of Tyndareus.
They, sprung from the mighty ones,
Ride on to highest destiny.

The gods themselves, bestowers of happiness,
They are not more august
Than these
The fortunate amongst mankind.

Now let us stand here, children of Chalcis,
Let us receive the queen
Out of her chariot
And keep her step from stumbling
To the earth.

Gently, but with good will,
And with our hands
We will help you down.
O noble daughter of Agamemnon,
Newly come to Aulis, have no fear!
For to you, stranger from Argos—
Gently and without clamor
We who are strangers too
Give you our welcome.

Clytemnestra
I shall think of this as a good omen—
Your kindness and good words—for I am here,
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, put down your pretty feet
And get out of the carriage. All of you
Maidsens take her into your arms and help
Her down.

(Smiling and matter of fact.)
And now, will someone lend me
The support of an arm, that with greater
Ease I may dismount—stand in front, please,
Of the horses' yoke—see the colt's eyes are
Wild with terror!

(After the horse has been steadied.)
Now, this is Agamemnon's son.
Take him—his name is Orestes—and he's
Still quite a helpless baby. 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
You will have a nobleman as kin,
The godlike child of the Nereid.
My child, Iphigenia, come sit next to
Your mother. Stay close beside me and show
All these strangers here how happy and how
Agamemnon

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

Iphigenia

Oh? You say you are glad to see me,
But your eyes have no quiet in them.

Agamemnon

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.
(Putting her hand on his forehead.)
And smooth your face for love.

Agamemnon

Now see my joy as I look at you—

Iphigenia

And yet,
The 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—

« 246 »
Agamemnon

Equip and dispatch the armies, I am still
Hindered and held up.

Iphigenia

Where is it they say
These Trojans 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

(Speaking to himself.)

But your situation is like mine, my daughter—
You’re going on a long voyage—leaving your father.

Iphigenia

Oh—on this voyage of yours I only wish
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!

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.
O breast and cheeks! O golden hair!
What bitter burden Helen and her Troy city
Have laid upon you! I must stop, for as I
Touch you my eyes are water springs—the tears
Start their escape. Go into the pavilion!

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
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.
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 husband.

Clytemnestra
Tell me,
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 and the lord Nereus
Gave her away in marriage.

Clytemnestra
Tell me—
Where did he marry her? Under the sea’s waves?

Agamemnon
No, on the holy foothills of Pelion,
Where Chiron lives.

Clytemnestra
It is there 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
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
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 shall, I have made all the preparations.

Clytemnestra
And then 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
By the anchors and hawsers? Well,
May good fortune come of it?

Agamemnon
This you must do—Obey! My lady,
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?

Agamemnon
I shall
Give the child away—with the Danaan's help.

Clytemnestra
And meantime, where must I be staying?

Agamemnon
In Argos, where you must take care
Of your younger daughters.

Clytemnestra
Leaving the 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
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 Argive’s goddess queen!
You go outside and do your part, I indoors
Will do what’s proper for the maid’s marrying.

(Clytemnestra goes out.)

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

Chorus

Now will they come to Simois
And the silvery swirl of her waters—
The Greeks mighty in assembly
With their ships and their armor;
To Ilium, to the plains of Troy
Sacred to Phoebus Apollo,
Where Cassandra is prophet, I hear,
Her head green crowned with the laurel—
And wildly she flings her golden hair
As the god breathes in her soul
The frenzy of foresight.

Upon the battle towers of Troy,
Around her walls, Trojans will stand
When Ares in harness of bronze
On these stately ships over the sea
Moves to the runnels of Simois.
Oh, he’ll come desiring the seizure of Helen
To hale her from Priam’s palace,
She whose brothers are Zeus’ sons—
Dioscuri are their name stars in heaven—
To hale Helen to the land of Greece
By toil of battle
And the shields and spears of Achaeans.

Pergamus with walls of stone, Phrygia’s town,
He will encircle in bloody battle,
<EURIPIDES>

Cutting the defenders’ throats,
To drag their bodies headless away;
Then from the citadel’s top peak to earth
He will sack all the dwellings in Troy city.
So every maiden will wail loudly,
And with them Priam’s queen.
And Helen too, who is daughter of Zeus,
She will cry aloud,
Who in the years gone had forsaken her husband.
Oh, we who are women of Chalcis
May this fate 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:

"Who will lay hands on my shining hair,
When tears flood my eyes,
And who will pluck me a flower
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 winged bird,
To Zeus himself transformed!
But perhaps this is a fable
From the book of the Muses
Borne to me out of season,
A senseless tale."

(Achilles enters.)

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.

<IPHIGENIA IN AULIS>

(After a pause, turns and speaks what is on his mind to the Chorus.)

This delay by the river Euripus
Is not alike for all, let me tell you.
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
May argue, I’ll tell my righteous grievance!
I left Pharsalia and my father Peleus,
And here by the Euripus I must wait—
Wait because here these light winds blow—
And curb my own troops, my Myrmidons.
They are forever urging me and saying:
We are the army for Troy! How many months
Must we drag out here? Act if you are going
To act, if not, wait no longer upon
Atreus’ sons and on their dallyings
But lead the army home.

(Clytemnestra enters from the pavilion.)

Clytemnestra
Son of the Nereid, I come to greet you—
I heard your voice inside the tent.

Achilles
O august lady—Whom do my eyes meet,
A woman peerless in her loveliness!

Clytemnestra
It is not marvelous that you do not know me
Since into my presence you never came before.

But I praise your respect for modesty.
Achilles

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 spoken what was fitting
With brevity and beauty, but for me
I may not rightly hold converse here
With you or any woman—

(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, Queen Clytemnestra?
I take your right hand in mine? That is
Wrongful—I would be ashamed before the king.

 Clytemnestra
 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
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
 (Deeply troubled.)

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

Achilles
 Let's search this out together for there may
Be truth in what we both have said.

Clytemnestra
 Oh, I have 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
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.
Old Man

(Calling from within the tent.)

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
To the lady who stands before this tent
A gift to her from her father, Tyndareus.

Achilles

I wait. Now say why you hold me here.

Old Man

Are both of you alone before the doors?

Achilles

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

Old Man (entering)

May Fate and my good foresight rescue you!

Achilles

(To Clytemnestra.)

The man's story—it tells something
About to happen and I think important—

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 were an old house servant in the palace.

Old Man

King Agamemnon took me as a portion
In your dowry.

Clytemnestra

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

(Trembling as he speaks.)

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

It is true—with a 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 obsession
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 is the demon, the oracle
Which Calchas spoke telling how the fleet may sail—

Clytemnestra

Her father will kill her! O gods, what a fate
And affliction for me and for the 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

(Her voice hard and full of hate.)
And the marriage,

That was the pretext which he invented
To bring me from Argos.

Old Man

Yes, and the king
Calculated that you would bring her gladly
To be the bride of Achilles.

Clytemnestra

O Daughter,
We have been escorted, 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

(Suddenly controlling herself.)

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 the letter, a second to
Follow the first from my lord Agamemnon—

Clytemnestra
And my husband's word to bring the girl—
To bring her to her death—did he confirm
The message?

Old Man
No. He said not to bring her,
For this second time he wrote sanely and
In his right mind.

Clytemnestra
Oh, why didn't you deliver that letter?

Old Man
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
Hurl my reproach upon your husband—

Clytemnestra
(Falling on her knees to him.)
Oh, you were born of a goddess, I—
I am mortal but I am not ashamed
To clasp your knees or to do eagerly
This or anything that will bring succor
For my daughter's sake. Protect us both—
Me from my evil fate, and she, defend her
Who is your betrothed, even though the
Marriage may never be. In name only
Is she your bride, and yet, I led her here
To be your wife and crowned her head
With a bride's wreath.

Oh, I have brought her
Not for marrying but for death and sacrifice!
Son of the goddess, a shameful reproach
Will be yours if you do not shield her!
Although no marriage yokes you
To the unhappy girl, yet to all men,
You are her lord and her dear husband.
Listen to me—since through your name
You have brought my undoing and my end,
I beg you, by your beard, your right hand, and
By your mother's name—O cleanse your own
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 friends to help me
In this distant place. You have heard
The strategy, which is savage and shameless,
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
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
Oh, what a power is motherhood, possessing
A potent spell. All women alike
Fight fiercely for a child.

Achilles
At your words in pride and in anger
My soul is lifted up.
Our generals, the Atreidae, I obey
When their command is righteous, but
When evil, I shall not obey, and here
As in Troy, I shall show my nature free
To fight my enemy with honor.

But you, lady, suffer things savage and cruel
Even from those you love, so with my compassion
Which I put around you like a shield
I shall make right these wrongs abominable
As far as a young man can.
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 my name or
My person. He has planned it guiltily
In this fashion that though my sword
Is not drawn, my name, my name only
Will kill the child. Oh, then forever
Defiled would be my blood, if through me,
And through my marriage, the maiden die!
Then in dishonor, undeserved, incredible,

\* See Appendix for omitted passage: lines 920-27.

See Appendix for omitted passage: lines 952-54.

She’d suffer intolerable wrongs—
And I would be the basest of all Greeks,
No more a man than Menelaus,
No son of Peleus but a fiend’s child,
If for his sake my name should do this butchery.

No! By Nereus, fostered by ocean’s
Waves, by the father of Thetis who bore me,
By him I swear, never will Agamemnon
Lay hands upon your daughter—nor even
With his finger tips touch the fringe
Of her robe. Calchas, the prophet, when next
He makes sacrifice will find bitter and
Accursed the barley and holy water.
What sort of man is a soothsayer or prophet?
I will tell you: If he is lucky
In his guessings even then he’ll speak
A flock of lies and little truth, but
When his guess is wrong and unlucky,
Poof! like smoke he is nothing.

Now must I tell you, it is not on account
Of this marriage I have said these things—
No—there are many girls for marrying,
But I cannot endure the insult and injury
Which the lord Agamemnon has heaped upon me!

(More calmly.)

What would have been fitting, if he had wanted
This snare and pretext, then he should
Have requested from me the use of my name.
As it was, I knew nothing, and so
To your husband, chiefly through faith in me,
You surrendered your daughter.

(In a lower voice, after thinking the matter over.)

Perhaps—I might have granted him use
Of my name—for the sake of Greece—

* See Appendix for omitted passage: lines 953-54.
If so the ships could sail—Nor would
I have denied help to the common cause
Of those with whom I march.

(Angry again and his voice rising.)

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 tear or separate
Your daughter from me now I will fight him.
Yes—before I go to Troy this sword
Shall know his blood in death.

But you, lady,
Be calm now and comforted. I make myself
Known to you as though I were a god, mighty
And strong to help. Well, I am no god, and yet—
To save the girl—I shall be godlike now!

Chorus
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 to lose your graciousness?
The noble, being praised, in an odd fashion
Hate those who laud them—if too much.
I am ashamed to tell my piteous story;
The affliction is mine, not yours—
And yet, a good man, though he be free
From trouble, succors the unfortunate.
Have mercy—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
Perhaps for your own marriage! so

Achilles
Oh, do not bring her here for me to see!
Let us avoid foolish scandal, for the troops
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—
Believe my words—to rid you of these evils.
Oh may I die if I mock you in this
And only live if I shall save the girl!

Clytemnestra
Heaven bless you for helping the unfortunate.

Achilles
Listen to me and you’ll succeed in this—

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

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

Clytemnestra
Terror of the army—
This base fear is in him.
“EURIPIDES”

Achilles

And overthrow terror.

Clytemnestra

My hopes are cold on that.

What must I do?

Achilles

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 deep wish—why then—
I need not be a party to this affair.
His very yielding will mean salvation.

So, if I act by reason and not violence,
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
I'll do. But if we fail in my great hope,
Where can I find and see you once again,
In desperation seeking your hand and help.

Achilles

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

Clytemnestra

These things shall be as you have spoken them.
Rule me—it is my compulsion to obey.

“IPHIGENIA IN AULIS”

If there are gods, you, being righteous,
Will win reward in heaven; if there are none,
All our toil is without meaning.

(Clytemnestra and Achilles go out.)

Chorus

Oh what bridal song with Libyan flute,
With lyre dance-loving,
With reeds pipe-pealing,
Rang forth on the air,
When to Pelion came lovely haired
The Graces to feast with the gods;
Gold-sandaled their feet
Stamping the ground;
On to the marriage of Peleus and Thetis,
Over the hills of the Centaurs,
Down through Pelion's woodlands,
To magnify with music's praise,
The son of Aeacus.
And Phrygian Ganymede, Dardanus' child,
Of Zeus favored and loved,
Into a golden bowl
Poured the libation, while
Near on the glistening sea sands, circling,
The daughters of Nereus
Wove the marriage dance.

With lances of pine and a leafy crown
The reveling Centaurs and riders came
To the gods' feast, and the bowls brimming
With Bacchus' gift.

Wildly they cried, "Hail Nereus' daughter,
Hail to your son, a bright light blazing
For Thessaly." So sang the prophet
Of Phoebus. And foreknowing,
Chiron proclaimed his birth,
Birth of him who would come with an army
 « EURIPIDES »

Of Myrmidons, spear-throwers, 
Into Troyland for the sacking 
Of Priam's glorious city. 
And he—they sang—will put upon his body 
The armor wrought by Hephaestus, 
Gift of his goddess mother, 
Thetis who bore him. 
So the gods sang this wedding hymn 
Blessing the marriage 
Of Peleus, noble in birth, 
And of the most favored 
Of Nereus' daughters. 

But you, Iphigenia, upon your head 
And on your lovely hair 
Will the Argives wreathe a crown 
For sacrifice. 
You will be brought down from the hill caves 
Like a heifer, red, white, unblemished, 
And like a bloody victim 
They will slash your throat. 

You were not reared 
To be drawn to slaughter 
By the music 
Of a herdsman's pipe 
But by your mother's side 
Fostered to marry kings. 

Oh, where now has the countenance 
Of modesty or virtue 
Any strength, 
When the blasphemer rules, 
And heedless men 
Thrust righteousness behind them, 
When lawlessness rules law,

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Oh, where now has the countenance 
Of modesty or virtue 
Any strength, 
When the blasphemer rules, 
And heedless men 
Thrust righteousness behind them, 
When lawlessness rules law,
Come outside, my daughter; the will
Of your father you now know fully and well:
Come and bring your brother Orestes,
Child, and cover him with your robe.

(Enter Iphigenia with Orestes in her arms
followed by an attendant.)

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 are you crying?
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
To you, since in equal measure the beginning,
The middle, and the end is sorrow.

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
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?

(Aiphigenia, distraught, turns from her father.
Attendant takes the child Orestes
from her arms.)

Agamemnon
What a horrible speech! To hold such
Accusation in the mind is vile—

Clytemnestra
Stop! Give me first an answer to this question.

Agamemnon
A reasonable question I will answer.

Clytemnestra
I ask this only—answer it.

Agamemnon
(After a pause in which he stares at her in growing
fear and agony, finally it bursts from him.)

Oh, my fate,
August and awful! My misfortune.
Oh, what an evil demon is mine

Clytemnestra
Yours? Mine and hers! One evil fate for three
And misery for us all.

Agamemnon
(Turning on her suddenly.)

Whom have I wronged?

Clytemnestra
You ask me this—your mind has lost its reason!
Agamemnon

I am destroyed—my secret is betrayed.

Clytemnestra

Listen, I know every part of this history
For I have sought it out and I know fully
Your intention. Even now your silence
Makes confession and this great groan of yours,
So with few words speak out.

Agamemnon

Then I would give you
A lie and lying would add shame
To my misfortune. I will be silent.

Clytemnestra

Hear me now—
For I shall give you open speech and no
Dark saying or parable any more.
And this reproach I first hurl in your teeth,
That I married you against my will, after
You murdered Tantalus, my first husband,
And dashed my living babe upon the earth,
Brutally tearing him from my breasts.
And then, the two sons of Zeus, my brothers,
On horseback came and in white armor made
War upon you. Till you got upon your knees
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
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.
Now one of these you would tear 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?
I kill her, you must answer, that Menelaus
May win Helen back. And so our child,
In her beauty, you pay as price for a woman
Of evil. So you buy with our best beloved
A creature most loathed and hated.

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 each chair and find it
Empty of her; at her maiden chamber
And it empty always; or when I sit
Down 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 shame,
Agamemnon, and the retribution
You leave in your house.

Here am I
And the children you have left me. Oh, only
A 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!
Or to betray you! And you, against me
Do not commit this sin! Tell me now,
After the sacrifice of your child, what prayer
Can your mouth utter? What things of good
Can you ever pray for when you have
Slain the girl?

Now you go from your home,
And if this going-out be shameful, will not
The return be evil? Tell me, in all
Conscience, how can I ask heaven to give
You any blessing? We must think the gods
Fools, if we ask blessing for the killers
Of our children!

When you return at last
To Argos, after the war, will you embrace
And kiss your daughters and your son? God forbid!
It would be sacrilege. For do you suppose
Any child of yours, when you have sent
A sister to her death, would ever look
Upon your face again, or in your eyes?

Speak to me—have you ever taken account
Of such things in any wise? Or is your thought
And need only to brandish scepters and
Lead armies? Well then, here is a righteous
Offer you should have made to the army!
Achaeans, you are eager to sail for Troy—
Then cast lots to find whose daughter must die!
This would be justice—rather than slay
Your own child, a victim to the army.
Or—let Menelaus—for this is his affair—

**278**
You said, "surely one day—I shall see you Happy in your husband’s home. And like
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 reverent then, with love I shall
Receive into my home, and so repay you
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
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;
Kiss me, so that if my words fail,
And if I die, this thing of love I may
Hold in my heart and remember.

(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 a child’s heart. See, even
Without speech, he begs you, Father,
Pity and have mercy on my sister’s life.
Yes, both of us beseech you, this little child
And I, your daughter grown. So these words
Are all my argument. Let me win life
From you. I must. To look upon the world
Of light is for all men their greatest joy—

Chorus
O wicked Helen, through you, and through your
Marriage, this terrible ordeal has come
To the sons of Atreus and to the child.

Agamemnon
My daughter and my wife, I know what calls
To me for pity and compassion, and
What does not. I love my children!
Did I not I would be mad indeed.
Terrible it is to me, my wife, to dare
This thing. Terrible not to dare it.

Here is my compulsion absolute:
Behold the armies, girt about by the fleet,
And with them over there, the kings of Greece
With all their bronzen armor at their feet—
None of them can sail to Ilium’s towers
Nor sack the famous bastion of Troy
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
With utmost speed to that barbarian place
That they may halt the plunder of marriage beds
And the rape and seizure of Greek women.
The army, angered, will come to Argos,
Slaughter my daughters, murder you and me
If the divine will of the goddess
I annul. It is not Menelaus
Making a slave of me—Nor am I here:
At Menelaus' will, but Greece lays upon me
This sacrifice of you beyond all will
Of mine. We are weak and of no account
Before this fated thing.

O child,
Greece turns to you, to me, and now,
As much as in us lies she must be free.  

(Agamemnon goes out. Attendant who holds Orestes leaves the stage. Iphigenia turns to her mother.)

Clytemnestra
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
Oh, pitiable am I, Mother!
The selfsame grieving song
Is ours, fallen from fate's hands.
Life is no longer mine,
Nor the dayspring's splendor.
O snow-beaten Phrygian glen and Ida's 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,
So named, so named in his Trojan city.
Would God they had never reared him,
Reared Alexander, herdsman of cattle,
To dwell by the silvery waters,
By the nymphs and their fountains,

By that meadow green and abundant
With roses and hyacinths
Gathered for goddesses.

There on that day came Pallas
And Cypris the beguiling,
Hera, and Hermes, God's messenger—
Cypris, who crushes with desire,
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,
But to the Danaans 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.
Oh, my wretchedness,
As I see 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.

Oh, if only Aulis had not taken
To the bosom of her harborage
These, our ships—
With their wings of pine,
Their beaks of bronze!
"EURIPIDES"

Oh, if only
The breath of Zeus had not swept them
To the roadstead that faces the river.
Zeus' breath—it brings delight—
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.
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
Upon the Danaans
Of anguish and disaster!

Chorus
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
Maidens, open the doors, so that I may
Hide myself.

Clytemnestra
Why do you run away, child?

"IPHIGENIA IN AULIS"

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—
(Covering her face with her hands.)

Clytemnestra
In this crisis, daughter, you can't afford
These delicate feelings. So stay—this
Is no time for modesty—if we can—
(Threatening shouts of the army are heard
off stage. Enter Achilles.)

Achilles
Woman of misery and misfortune,
Leda's daughter—

Clytemnestra
Yes, you have said what is true.

Iphigenia
I am she.

Achilles
The Argives are shouting
A thing of terror.

Clytemnestra
What are they shouting?

Achilles
It is about your daughter.

Clytemnestra
Oh, the words
Of ill omen—you have said them now.
Achilles

Yes, they are shouting 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—and because you
Tried to save my child?

Achilles

Yes, for that.

Clytemnestra

(Increduous.)

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

Achilles

Every Greek soldier.

Clytemnestra

(Still not believing him.)

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

Achilles

And the first to threaten my death.

Clytemnestra

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
Would never slaughter my bride.

Clytemnestra

Oh, a right answer!

Achilles

My bride, whom her father had pledged to me.

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 thing!

Achilles

But I will defend you!

Clytemnestra

You—one man fighting a thousand!
<EURIPIDES>

(Enter two armor-bearers.)

Achilles

Look!

These men are bringing me armor for that battle.

Clytemnestra

May the gods bless your courage—

Achilles

I shall be blest!

Clytemnestra

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

But I will keep him from the girl!

<IPHIGENIA IN AULIS>

Clytemnestra

Will he, if she resists, drag her away?

Achilles

There is no doubt—and by her golden hair!

Clytemnestra

What then must I do?

Achilles

Hold fast to the child—

Clytemnestra

And so save her from murder—

Achilles

It comes to this—

Iphigenia

(Who for some minutes has not heard them, breaks from her revery.)

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
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 thing has seized me and I have conceived
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.
Come close 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—for through me is the sailing
Of the fleet, through me the sack and overthrow
Of Troy. Because of me, never more will
Barbarians wrong and ravish Greek women,
Drag them from happiness and their homes
In Hellas. The penalty will be paid
Fully for the shame and seizure 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 blessed.
It is wrong for me to love life too deeply.
I am the possessed of my country
And you, Mother, bore me for all Greece,
Not for yourself alone.

Wrong and injury
Our country suffers, and so thousands
Of men arm themselves, thousands more in these ships
Pick up their oars. They will dare very greatly
Against the enemy and die for Greece.
These are thousands, but I with my one life
To save, am I to prevent all? Where is
The judgment of justice here? To the soldiers
Who die is there a word we can answer?
None. But consider further, is it right
For this man to make war upon all the Greeks
For one woman’s sake and surely die?
Rather in war is it far better that
Many women go to their death, if this

Keep one man only facing the light
And alive.

O Mother, if Artemis
Wishes to take the life of my body,
Shall I, who am mortal, oppose
The divine will? No—that is unthinkable!
To Greece I give this body of mine.
Slay it in sacrifice and conquer Troy.
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
A right thing that Greeks rule barbarians,
Not barbarians Greeks.

It is right,
And why? They are bondsmen and slaves, and we,
Mother, are Greeks and are free.

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

Achilles
O child of Agamemnon—
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
Because Greece has chosen you, not me,
To die. Of our country with honor too
You have spoken. You gave up the fight
Against God’s will and chose the thing that was
Good and was fated. And yet the more I
See of your nature—for it is noble—
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
Terrible a thing and how evil is death!

Iphigenia
I speak this as one past hope and fear,
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;
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
Your fixed mind. Then know my proposal
And offer—for I come with these arms and
Shall place them by the altar directly.
I shall come, but not like the others
To suffer, but to prevent your death
And sacrifice. Oh, in a flash you can
Turn to me and prove my promises! Yes,
Even at the final second when you
See the sword thrust at your throat. For this is

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.

(Achilles goes out, Iphigenia turns to her mother.)

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

 Clytemnestra
Is not this sorrow
Terrible enough to break my heart?

Iphigenia
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
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,
Mother, who is Zeus’ daughter, will be
My grave and my monument.

Clytemnestra

O my child,
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 goodbye to them now. That is all.

\[< 294 >\]
Clytemnestra
I—I will come with you.

Iphigenia
No, no, that is wrong!

Clytemnestra
I'll go—just my hand

Iphigenia
Mother, trust me,
Here you must stay, which will be better
For you and for me also. Let it be
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,
You are going now—

Iphigenia
Yes.
And not to come back again.

Clytemnestra
Leaving your mother—

Iphigenia
Oh, you see how hard—

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

Iphigenia
Stop! I forbid your crying out or any tears!

O lift up your voices,
Lift them to Artemis
In honor of my fate
And of my dying;
Shout a paean of glory
To the daughter of Zeus.
And let the host of Danaans be silent,
As the priest takes
From the basket the barley;
So may the fire blaze
With the meal of purification,
And my father will turn to the right
And encircle the altar.
Then I will come
And bring to Greece
Her salvation
And a crown of victory!
Lead me on
For the sack and overthrowing
Of Troy city
And the Phrygian land.
Put on my hair a wreath
Of garlands
And on my head a crown.
O drench me with the waters,
The waters of purification.
About the altar of Artemis,
About her temple,
Dance!
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 God.
O Mother, my lady mother,
« EURIPIDES »

Now I give you my tears
For when I come to the holy place
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,
Spears are flung fiercely
In my name.
O motherland Pelasgia,
Mycenae, my Mycenae
Who fostered me—

Chorus
Do you call on Perseus’ citadel
Wrought by the hands of the Cyclops?

Iphigenia
You fostered me
A light to Greece
I do not refuse to die for you.

Chorus
Never will your glory pass away.

Iphigenia
O dayspring
Torch of God
And glorious light!
To another world I go
Out of this place
Out of time
To dwell.
And now, and now,

« IPHIGENIA IN AULIS »

Beloved light
Farewell!

(IPhigenia goes out.)

FINAL CHORUS

O look at the girl who walks
To the goddess’ altar
That Troy may be brought low
And the Phrygian die.
Behold, she walks
With her hair in garlands of honor,
And flung upon her body the lustral waters.
To the altar she goes
Of the goddess of bloody mind
Where she shall drip
With streams of flowing blood
And die,
Her body’s lovely neck
Slashed with a sword to death.
Oh, the waters await you,
The waters of purification;
Your father will pour them.
And the army too awaits you,
The mighty host of the Greeks
Awaits eagerly your death
For their sailing to Troy.
But now all hail to the daughter of Zeus,
All hail to Artemis, goddess queen,
For from this maiden’s death
You bring a prosperous thing!
Godess,
You who joy in human blood,
Now be our guide and send
The armies of all the Greeks
To the land of Phrygia
And to the citadel of treacherous Troy;

« 298 »
There give to Greece and to her spearmen
A crown of victory.
And for the king,
Agamemnon,
O touch his head
With a glory everlasting. ⁴

⁴ See Appendix for omitted passage, lines 1532–1629.
A P P E N D I X

Lines 920–27

_Achilles_

—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 live out his life
Calling his soul his own. At times, of course,
It’s pleasant not to be overwise. Yet when
One can hold firm the will—that’s profitable.
I was educated by the most god-fearing
Amongst all men, Chiron, and it was from him
I’ve learned to act in singleness of heart.

Lines 952–54

_Achilles_

That would reverse all values—you could then
Persuade me that Sipylus, the barbarian
Border town, is a Greek city and besides
Birthplace of all our chieftains! Or,
The opposite absurdity, that Phthia is
A name unknown to the world of men.

Lines 1274–75

_Agamemnon_

No longer by the barbarians in their violence
Must Greeks be robbed of their wives.

Lines 1532–1629

_Messenger (entering)_

O daughter of Tyndareus, Clytemnestra,
Come outside the pavilion and receive
My message.
Clytemnestra (entering)
Hearing your voice calling, I am here,
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
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
Of the Achaean army,

And when King Agamemnon saw his girl
Walk into the grove for the sacrifice
He groaned bitterly, and turning his head
Wept, drawing his robe across his eyes.

But she, standing beside her father, spoke:
"O Father, I am here at your command—
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. Prosper, I say;
Win victory in this war and then return
To our fatherland. But let no Argive
Touch me with his hand. Silent, unflinching,
To behold and fair indeed; the goddess'
Altar freely ran with the creature's blood.
At this Calchas spoke and with joy you must
Believe: "O commanders of the allied
Armies, behold this victim which the goddess
Has laid upon the altar, a mountain hind
Rather than the maid; this victim she receives
With joy. By this no noble blood
Stains her altar. Gladly she accepts
This offering and grants a fair voyage
For the attack on Troy. Let every sailor
Then be glad, and go to the galleys,
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
To report to you and tell what fortune
Had come from heaven and what deathless glory
He had 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
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
With what gladness I hear the messenger's
Report! Your child he tells us is alive
And with the gods in heaven.

Clytemnestra
O child! what god has stolen you from me?
How can I ever call to you? How know

That this is not a story merely told
That I may have relief from bitter pain?

Chorus
Behold King Agamemnon comes to us,
And the same story he will tell to you.

Agamemnon
My lady, may we 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 fleet. It will be long, long,
Before my greeting comes to you again
On the return from Troy. Meantime
May all go well with you!

Chorus
With joy, son of Atreus, sail on
To the Phrygian land,
With joy return,
Bringing glorious spoil from Troy!