

# 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 *Alcmaeon*, 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 remolds her character and so the plot he derives from the legend. In this play, she

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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 brought "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.

## 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*

## IPHIGENIA IN AULIS

*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.

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(Pause.)

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.

35

40

45

*Agamemnon*

(Explaining the whole situation to the Old Man.)

Three girls were born to Leda, daughter of Thestius: Phoebe,  
Clytemnestra, who is my wife, and Helen. The young men, fore-  
most 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

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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*

*(Nods and reads.)*

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.

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*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!

135

*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.

140

*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

145

The Greek ships. And if you  
Meet her and her escort,  
Turn them back! Yes, take the reins  
And shake them, send them back  
To Argos, back to the city of Cyclops.

150

*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?

155

*Agamemnon*

This seal. Keep it. It is  
The same as the seal on the letter.  
Now go! The dawn is here, and  
The sun's chariot already is  
Making the day bright. Go—  
And help me out of my trouble.

160

*(Old Man goes out.)*

No mortal man has happiness  
And fortune to the end. He is  
Born, every man, to his grief!

*(Agamemnon goes out.)  
(Enter Chorus.)*

*Chorus*

I have come to the shore  
And the sea sands of Aulis  
Over Euripus' waters  
And the sea narrows sailing—  
From Chalcis, my city,

165

Chalcis, nurse to the fountain  
 Arethusa, sea surrounded 170  
 And shining—to see this host  
 Of noble Achaeans, with their oar-borne ships  
 Of heroes, whom Menelaus, the yellow-haired 175  
 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 180  
 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 185  
 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, 190  
 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, 195  
 With them Palamedes the sea god's son.  
 Another hurled the discus, Diomedes, 200  
 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. 205

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, 210  
 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 Pheretid  
 Charioteer cried forth in frenzy. 215  
 I saw his handsome horses there,  
 Gold-wrought in bits and harness.  
 Eumelus with his goad struck them, 220  
 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— 225  
 They were bays, with their fetlocks  
 Spotted. And always beside them Peleus' son  
 Hurlled himself onward,  
 Right by the chariot's car rail,  
 Right by the spinning axle. 230  
 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. 235  
 Upon their sterns set high in gold,  
 The divine daughters of the sea lord 240  
 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. 245  
 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 uncloven 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, Salamis 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*

(*Shouting.*)

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.

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*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.*)

*Old Man*

O my king, look how I am wronged!  
He took me by force—and tore your letter  
From my hand. Now, he won't listen to right  
Or to reason.

315

*Agamemnon*

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

*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.

320

*Agamemnon*

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

*Menelaus*

(*Impatiently.*)

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!

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*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.

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*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,

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340

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.  
No—the old ones could not reach you, but,  
Unapproachable, you were seldom found at home.  
Oh, it is vile for a man, if he be noble,  
And when he has won to the heights of power,  
To 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 the good man's  
Character. So I blame you for these things  
Where first I found you ignoble. And then  
You came to Aulis with the army—  
The Panhellenic host! And suddenly—  
From being all, you became nothing,  
Confounded by a fate God-given, lacking  
But this one thing: a favoring wind  
To dispatch the fleet. So the Danaans urged  
That you send back every ship and at Aulis  
Put an end to this toil without meaning.  
I remember your face then, bewildered,  
Unhappy, fearing you would never captain  
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?

345

350

355

Calchas spoke: Sacrifice on the altar  
Your own daughter to Artemis, and the Greek ships

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 foully. 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.

405

*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?

410

*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.

415

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.

420

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?  
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?

425

430

(*He smiles.*)

Shall we prepare barley for sacrifice?  
Let us crown our heads with garlands, and you,  
King Menelaus, start the bridal hymn!

435

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.

*(Stiffly.)*

*(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!

465

*Chorus*

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

470

*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.

450

*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

475

480

460

Fortunate or that your daughter die while  
 All my children live and face the sun.  
 What do I want? Could I not obtain  
 485 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.

These quarrels between brothers spring from  
 Many things, over a woman, for instance,  
 Or out of greed for the inheritance.  
 485 I loathe them all. Such kinships pour bitterness  
 Into both hearts. But we have arrived  
 At a fatal place: A compulsion absolute  
 Now works the slaughter of the child.

510

*Menelaus*

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

*Agamemnon*

The whole concourse of Achaean armies.

*Menelaus*

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

515

*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*

505 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.

520

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

525

530

535

540

545

550

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-uddered 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

555 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.

(Turning, they see Queen Clytemnestra  
and Iphigenia in a chariot,  
approaching.)

560 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.  
565 The gods themselves, bestowers of happiness,  
They are not more august  
Than these  
The fortunate amongst mankind.

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

(Enter, riding in a chariot, Clytemnestra, Iphigenia,  
and the young child, Orestes. Attendants  
accompany them.)

580 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  
Maidens 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

605

Blessed I am in you! But here he comes—  
Your most beloved father. Go, give him welcome.

630

*(Enter Agamemnon.)*

*Iphigenia*

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

*(Attendants go out, one of them carrying  
Orestes in her arms.)*

610

*Clytemnestra*

Mightiest and most honored, Lord Agamemnon,  
Obedient to your command, we are here.

*Iphigenia*

Father!  
I long to throw myself before anyone  
Into your arms—it's been so long a time—  
And kiss your cheek! Oh, are you angry, Mother?

615

635

*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.

620

*Iphigenia*

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

640

*Agamemnon*

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

625

*Iphigenia*

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

*(Smiling and laughing.)*

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—

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.

Agamemnon

How hard to curb my tongue!  
(To himself.)

Yes, do.

(Aloud.)

655

Iphigenia

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

Agamemnon

O that I might!  
This willing and not doing will crack my heart.

Iphigenia

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

Agamemnon

He and his wrongs  
Will destroy others first—then ruin me.

Iphigenia

(Still preoccupied with her absence from him.)  
Father, you've been so long in Aulis' gulf!

660

Agamemnon

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

I must

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.

665

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.

Iphigenia

A new home you make for me, Father,  
Where will it be?

670

Agamemnon

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

Iphigenia

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

Agamemnon

*(Driven by an inner compulsion to speak  
what he knows he must conceal.)*

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

Iphigenia

Oh yes, of course,  
With sacrifices we must pay homage to heaven.

Agamemnon

*(Hypnotized by his own thoughts.)*

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

675

Iphigenia

Then round the altar shall I start the dance?

Agamemnon

O for this happy ignorance that is yours!  
Now go into the pavilion and be  
Alone with your maidens. Give me a kiss  
Of pain and your right hand, for soon you go  
To live apart from your father. And this  
Will be too long a parting!

680

(*Holding her in his arms.*)

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!

(*Iphigenia goes out.*)

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*

My lady,  
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?

*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—

735

*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.

740

*(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

Against her. Now I am confounded  
In all things. Yet to the priest Calchas  
I will go, with him to ask the goddess' pleasure  
Though that should spell my doom,  
And for Greece toil and travail.  
A wise man keeps his wife at home  
Virtuous and helpful—or never marries.

745

750

*(Agamemnon goes out.)*

*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.

755

760

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.

765

770

Pergamus with walls of stone, Phrygia's town,  
He will encircle in bloody battle,

775

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.

(*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.

(*Smiling.*)

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?

825

*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—

830

*(He starts to leave.)*

*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.

835

*Achilles*

What!

What marriage do you speak of, my lady?

*(After a moment's pause.)*

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.

840

*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.

845

*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.

850

*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!

855

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.

860

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—

865

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.

870

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.

875

*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.

885

*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?

890

*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.

895

*Clytemnestra*

(*Turning to Achilles.*)

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.

900

905

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!

910

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.<sup>1</sup>  
 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,

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix for omitted passage: lines 920-27.

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.<sup>2</sup> 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—

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix for omitted passage: lines 952-54.

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

You must protect yourself as well as me!  
Again and again you have said this truth  
That if you willed, my daughter would be saved.  
Do you desire that she come to clasp your knees?  
It would transgress a maiden's character,  
But if you wish it she shall come  
And blushing lift her innocent eyes to yours.  
But if I can win you without her coming,  
In maiden pride she shall remain indoors. We  
Should, as far as we may, reverence modesty.

990

995

*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!

1000

1005

*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.

1010

*Achilles*

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

985

*Clytemnestra*

Terror of the army—  
This base fear is in him.

*Achilles*

Reason can wrestle  
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.

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

1035

*(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.

1040

1045

1050

1055

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.

1060

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

1065

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 wreath 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,

And no man—or his neighbor—  
 Fears the jealousy of God?

*Clytemnestra*

*(Entering and speaking to the Chorus.)*

I have come from the pavilion seeking  
 My husband. For he left our tent  
 And has been absent long. My unhappy  
 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  
 Of this unholy crime against his child!

*(Agamemnon enters.)*

*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 this moment?

*Agamemnon*

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;  
 Bridal victims are ready—their black blood  
 Soon to flow in honor of Artemis.

*Clytemnestra*

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

*(Calling.)*

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?

*(Iphigenia, 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.

1135

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!

1120

1125

1130

*Agamemnon*

I am destroyed—my secret is betrayed.

(*To himself.*)

1140

*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.

1145

*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.

1150

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

1155

1160

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.

1165

1170

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.

1175

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

1180

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!  
Achaean, 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—

Kill *his* 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—  
She will return to prosper, and bring  
Her daughter home. And now at last answer me  
If in anything I have failed to speak  
Justly, but if my words are fair and  
Truly spoken, be no longer mad, but wise.  
Repent! And do not kill the girl—who is  
Your child and mine.

*Chorus*

Agamemnon, yield to her! It is good  
That you together save the child. No man  
Can rightly speak against this word of mine.

*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  
My magic now. But only with tears can I  
Make arguments and here I offer them.  
O Father,  
My body 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.  
I was first to call you father,  
You to call me child. And of your children  
First to sit upon your knees. We kissed  
Each other in our love. "O child,"

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.

(Turning 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 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—

The shadow world below is nothing.  
Men are mad, I say, who pray for death;  
It is better that we live ever so  
Miserably than die in glory.

*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.

1270

O child,

Greece turns to you, to me, and now,  
As much as in us lies she must be free.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>For omitted passage, lines 1274-75, see Appendix.

*(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,

1280

1285

1290

1295

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.

1300

1305

1310

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.

1315

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!

1320

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*

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—

1345

*Clytemnestra*

Yes, you have said what is true.

I am she.

*Achilles*

*(Pauses for a moment.)*

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?

1350

*Achilles*

Yes, for that.

*Clytemnestra*

*(Incredulous.)*

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

*Achilles*

*(Bitterly.)*

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*

O my child—

Now we are lost.

*Achilles*

*(Bitterly.)*

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.

1355

*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!

*(Almost scornful.)*

(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!

Clytemnestra

(Suddenly hysterical.)

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 reverie.)

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.

(Pause.)

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.

1380

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.

1385

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

1390

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.

1395

1400

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—

1405

Desire for our marriage overcomes  
My spirit.

1410

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!

1415

*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.

1420

*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

1425

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.

1430

(*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.

1435

*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.

1440

*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.

1445

*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*

(Nodding.)  
But have you some last word  
Of love that I may speak to them?

*Iphigenia*

(Slowly.)  
Only this—  
I say goodbye to them now. That is all.

(Thinking.)

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

1450

*Clytemnestra*

Embrace and look at him for the last time.

*Iphigenia*

(Taking him in her arms.)

Dearest—you tried to help as best you could!

*Clytemnestra*

(Speaking with difficulty.)

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

*Iphigenia*

(Turning her eyes slowly upon her mother.)

Yes. Do not hate *him*. Do not hate my father  
Who is your husband.

*Clytemnestra*

Oh! Oh! Your father  
Must run a course of agony and terror  
For your sake.

1455

*Iphigenia*

Running 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*

(No longer listening.)

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*

I'll go—just my hand

On your robe—

*Iphigenia*

Mother, trust me,

1460

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—

1465

*Iphigenia*

Oh, you see how hard—

*Clytemnestra*

Oh, stay.

Don't leave me, child!

*(She bursts into a flood of tears.)*

*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,

1470

1475

1480

1485

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—

1490

*Chorus*

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

1500

*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,

1505

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!  
 Goddess,  
 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;

1510

1515

1520

1525

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.<sup>4</sup>

1530

<sup>4</sup> 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

920

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.

925

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.

1275

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.

1535

*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 Achaeans, then quickly the army  
Of Argives assembled.

1540

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.

1550

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.

1555

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,

I offer my neck to the knife." These words  
She spoke, and every man hearing her wondered  
At the maid's courage and nobility.

1560

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:

"O child of Zeus, O slayer of wild beasts,  
You who turn your disk of shining light

1570

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 a fair girl. And grant  
That ungrieved now the fleet may sail;

1575

And grant this too that we and our spears spoil  
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  
Bowed, and a great anguish smote my heart—

1580

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 vanished from the earth.

Then the priest with a great voice cried aloud  
And the whole army echoed him—this when  
They saw the portent which a god had sent  
But no man had foreknown. Though our eyes saw,  
It was a sight incredible, for a  
Panting hind lay there on the earth, great

1585

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.

(*Enter Agamemnon.*)

*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!