IPHIGENIA AT AULIS

Translated and with an Introduction by
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I. INTRODUCTION

a wicked pleasure
hangs over war
the voluptuousness of blood
like a red storm-sail over a black man-of-war.
Your feelings blossom in the surging of the blood.
The blood surges through your body
and through their bodies
like torrents tumbling together in a snow-thaw,
like a long-postponed night of love
but this night more passionate
and more furious
the blood bubbling in our hearts like fire
—Charles L. Mee, Jr., The Bacchae

Near the end of Iphigenia at Aulis, Iphigenia has offered herself as a sacrificial victim in order that the Greek expedition against Troy can proceed. The actor playing Iphigenia goes offstage toward the Greek camp, where the sacrifice is to take place, while the Chorus sing her praises. The play seems to be over. Suddenly a messenger arrives from the Greek camp. He describes how, at the moment the knife struck, Iphigenia vanished and a deer lay on the altar. The Greek leaders and the messenger himself interpret this as a sign of divine favor toward Iphigenia, Agamemnon, and the Greek war effort, and the Chorus rejoice at the news. Only Iphigenia's mother, Klytemnestra, remains doubtful, suspecting that this whole story is a lie (1615–18).

The reactions of the characters onstage to the events they have just been through suggest the radically different ways this play can be interpreted. It raises questions
about the value of an individual life, and under what circumstances that life can be taken. Is the play's central event, the sacrifice of Iphigenia, a pointless waste, or a sad necessity? Is the war for which she is willing to die a just cause, or a petty quarrel between individuals? Is her decision to offer herself an act of heroic patriotism? Acceptance of the inevitable? A sign of delusion, even madness?

As Iphigenia announces her decision to sacrifice herself, she invokes several hierarchies of value important to Greek ideology. Human beings must obey the will of the gods (1395–96). The community is more important than the individual (1386). Greeks must prevail over barbarians (1400) as free men do over slaves (1401), and males are more valuable than females (1394). Death in defense of these values is glorious and brings everlasting fame (1398–99). These issues, and the social, political, and religious institutions that underlay them, were being hotly debated in the tense atmosphere in which IA was first produced in 406 or 405 BCE. The Peloponnesian War had been going on for twenty-five years, and was soon to end with the defeat of Athens (above, pp. 8–9). For IA and the other plays produced with it (including Bacchae) the judges awarded Euripides the first prize in the dramatic competition. It was only the fifth first prize of his fifty-year career as a playwright. But he knew nothing about it. Before the play was produced he had died in Macedonia, far from Athens.

I. Iphigenia in Story, Cult, and Ritual

I. The myth of Iphigenia. The events at Aulis are part of a much larger story (mythos in Greek, from which comes the word "myth"), of which there were many accounts. Some of these versions have survived as literary texts (epic and tragedy), others we know only by report, and no doubt there were oral traditions as well. In addition, scenes from this story were painted on Greek pottery, and Iphigenia was an important figure in certain religious cults. The Athenian audience was probably quite familiar with this story, and characters in the play allude to various events in it. But it has many variants, and we cannot know which ones members of the audience would have known.

The principal events of the larger story: At the wedding of the goddess Thetis and the mortal Peleus, the goddess Strife (Eris) threw a golden apple with the words "for the most beautiful" among the wedding guests. Three goddesses reached for it—Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite. Unable to resolve the dispute, they appeared to a handsome young man herding his flocks near Troy, a city near the entrance to the Hellespont in Asia Minor (see map). This was Paris, son of Priam, king of Troy. He was a shepherd because his mother Hekabe, while pregnant with him, had dreamed that she carried a firebrand in her womb. So his father, King Priam, had the newborn infant taken to nearby Mount Ida and left to die. This was a way to avoid the pollution involved in actually killing a blood relative, but like Oedipus, Moses, and other legendary heroes he was saved from premature death. When the goddesses appeared to Paris, each promised him a gift if he chose her as most beautiful. Hera offered political power and Athena wisdom, but Aphrodite promised him the most beautiful woman in the world as his wife—Helen of Sparta, wife of Menelaus. Paris chose Aphrodite, went to Sparta, and Helen and he sailed back to Troy (where he had now been recognized as the king's son). A force from all over Greece was organized under the leadership of Agamemnon, Menelaus' older brother, in order to take revenge on the Trojans. They gathered near Aulis, a town on the shore of Boeotia looking across to Chalkis in Euboea (see map). But the fleet was prevented from sailing by unfavorable weather. A seer named Kalkhas announced that if the expedition were to proceed the goddess Artemis required the sacrifice of Iphigenia, eldest daughter of Agamemnon and Klytemnestra.

Euripides' play begins at the point when Agamemnon has summoned his daughter from home under the pretext that she is to marry Achilles, a prince who is part of the Greek force, famous in the Iliad as the mightiest Greek warrior. After impediments caused by Agamemnon's doubts and the resistance of Klytemnestra, Achilles, and Iphigenia, the sacrifice takes place, and at the end of the play the army is preparing to leave for Troy. The Iliad, Odyssey, and other sources recount how after ten years of war the Greeks captured and destroyed Troy. Meanwhile Klytemnestra took as a lover her cousin Aigisthos, who hated Agamemnon as a result of an ancestral feud. Agamemnon returned home to Argos and was killed by Klytemnestra and Aigisthos. Later Orestes, Agamemnon, and Klytemnestra's only son, avenged his father's death by killing his mother and Aigisthos.

II. War and sacrifice. Sacrifices (above, pp. 12–13) were performed at important transitions both public and private, such as marriages, funerals, the swearing of oaths, and the making of treaties. In warfare, sacrifices were performed before departure, before crossing borders including rivers and the sea, and immediately before battle. Warfare shares many characteristics of the hunt: aggression directed at an Other, the need for bonding and cooperation among the warriors, the danger that death will spread beyond acceptable limits. The sacrifice before battle was sometimes called the "preamble" (proteleia) to combat; the only definite historical example of such a sacrifice was made to Artemis (M. Jameson 1991: 209–12), and may reflect her care for young males making the transition from adolescence to manhood (above, pp. 54–5). As parthenoi become gunai ready for marriage, young
men (neos) become men (andres) when they are ready to engage in warfare (Vernant 1991: 244–57). For all warriors the aggression involved in warfare, like that of the hunt, needs rules, clear distinctions, and calm on the part of the warriors. Otherwise it can easily become disordered, so that warriors fail to discriminate between comrades and enemies, flee in confusion, or engage in wild butchery (Hanson 1989: 185–93). Sacrifice, which provided a calm, ordered form for violence, offered a model for the warriors’ conduct on the battlefield: “men at the threshold of hand-to-hand combat sought unusual ritual remedies in an effort to cope with extraordinary psychological strain, and with the threat to their lives” (Henrichs 1980: 216).

There is virtually no historical evidence for the practice of human sacrifice in Greece (M. Jameson 1991: 213–17). There are a number of Greek stories, however, in which a human maiden dies. This death, almost always associated with warfare, is often voluntary self-sacrifice (Burkert 1983: 65; Larson 1995: 101–10).¹ War requires warriors to leave home, abandoning the claims of the oikos and family life, production and reproduction. They must engage in the destruction of life, which may take their lives as well. The sacrifice of a virgin, then, can symbolize the renunciation of marriage, sexual activity, and reproduction which the warriors are making. As a victim of the proteleia before war, a parthenos represents in a more extreme form the vulnerability of the young warriors, drawing attention to the magnitude of the transition they are making. A marriageable maiden is also a potential source of conflict, as the story about the rivalry between males caused by the desirable maiden Helen shows (IA 51–57). In that case the suitors’ oath turned their rivalry into solidarity (IA 58–65); similarly, a sacrifice that eliminates such a source of conflict can unite the band of warriors.

III. IA as proteleia, initiation, marriage. IA draws upon important elements of the Greek socio-religious system described above. The occasion is the opening of war. The war cannot proceed without the proteleia of a victim to Artemis. The community desires the war. The sacrificial parthenos causes numerous conflicts between members of the army which threaten to undermine the war effort. Once the sacrifice is determined, however, the last man to oppose it, Achilles, takes his place among the warriors, speaking for the army as a whole (1572–76). After the sacrifice Kalkhas urges the army to act as one (1598–1601). The completion of the sacrifice is the beginning of the war (1624).

The process leading up to the sacrifice is depicted as a rite of passage whereby Iphigenia is transformed from child to adult. (On rites of passage and Artemis, see above, pp. 54–5.) She first enters as a shy girl, who has to be urged to play her proper role in public ceremonies (613–16, 627–30), who wants to run inside when

Achilles appears (1340–42). To her Agamemnon is just “Daddy”; all she understands about his public responsibilities as king and leader of the army is that they keep him from her and make him sad (644–63). When she first learns of her father’s plan to sacrifice her, Iphigenia pleads with him to spare her, calling the reason for the expedition a private matter, “the marriage of Helen and Paris” which doesn’t concern her (1236–37). She prefers to live, even as a coward, than to die nobly (1252)—an explicit rejection of the code of conduct established for aristocratic males.² But when she offers herself for sacrifice (1368–1401) she speaks so differently that Aristotle criticized Euripides for the inconsistency of her character (Poetics 1454a). No longer is she a child who belongs to a family, a private individual focused on emotional connections. Now she speaks as an adult, a member of the citizen body, a Greek who shares the concerns of other Greeks. Instead of thinking of herself, she focuses on others—Achilles, other members of the army, all Greeks. Now she sees the cause of the war not as a private matter, but as theft of a Greek woman by a barbarian (1380–82), a public issue, an offense to the fatherland which will be repealed by unless the perpetrators are punished as they deserve (1380–82).

The actual sacrifice includes all the formal requirements for a sacrificial rite. The victim designated by the goddess is unblemished and special. She is garlanded (1477–78, 1512, 1567), accompanied by a procession to the altar (1462–63), sprinkled with water (1479, 1513), honored in song (1510–20), the object of public admiration (1561–62). By both words and actions she shows that she offers herself willingly (1397, 1555, 1559–60). The victim receives the death blow (1582) and blood spills on the altar (1587, 1589). The sacrifice is successful: The Greeks are granted their request to go to Troy (1596–97), while the victim is said to receive divine favor (1596), even apotheosis (1622).

Euripides’ drama emphasizes the similarities between Iphigenia’s sacrifice and marriage. The word proteleia can also mean “the sacrifice before marriage” (433, 718, 1310). Iphigenia is brought to the camp thinking she will be married to Achilles, and the procession that brings her includes her mother in the traditional role of nunphagia ("bringer of the bride," 610), but her father has the right to give her away. Both rites include garlands (436, 905–06), 1477–78, 1512), music (437–39, 1036–48, 1467–68), fire (732, 1470–71, 1601–2), and feasting (720, 722–23, 1049–53). Iphigenia’s bridegroom is not a mortal man, but either the personification of Death (461) or Greece (1396). The marriage will be productive; its “children” will be the destruction of Troy (1399).

Iphigenia seems to fulfill the paradigm of an ideal Greek woman, one who knows what is expected of her and does it. Accepting her lesser importance, she
bows to her father's will, refusing to blame him for her death (1456), rejecting her mother's attempts to save her, to accompany her to the altar, even to mourn for her (1457-47), and attempting to calm her mother's anger at her husband (1454). She depicts herself as "good woman" who chooses to support males and their values, who keeps men alive, against "bad woman" Helen who chooses to undermine male values and gets men killed (1393, 1417-19). Iphigenia's action resolves the crisis in terms of character (Agamemnon changes from anguished, indecisive father to resolute leader), plot (the stalled expedition gets under way), and meaning (individual, domestic needs marked as feminine yield to the masculine requirements of the state). Finally, the story of the miraculous substitution indicates divine favor for Iphigenia and the expedition. The salvation reported by the messenger seems to be Iphigenia's reward for her virtuous action. As members of the Athenian audience would have known, in various locations Iphigenia received cult honors as a heroine, even a goddess (Lyons 1997: 137-57). The miracle is also a reassurance that Iphigenia's death was only symbolic after all: Instead of dying, she only "played the bear" (see above, p. 55). On the narrative level, the possibility of a radical variation (Iphigenia is saved by Agamemnon or Achilles; the war does not take place) yields to the traditional conclusion of the story (she is sacrificed; the war proceeds). Viewed in this way, the ending of this play may suggest that underneath the chaotic surface of events, deep patterns of action are moving towards the proper conclusion, guided by higher powers even without the human participants' participation or understanding.

The ending of this play, then, seems to resolve all tensions—artistic, sociocultural, and religious—in favor of traditional values. This conclusion can be evaluated positively, with Iphigenia a savior who restores the social order and reestablishes proper contact with the gods through a "politics of love" (Foley 1985: 91, 102). The only character onstage at the finale who refuses to accept this resolution, Klytemnestra, may appear to be a woman for whom only domestic affairs matter, whose vision remains narrow (like Iphigenia's at first), who cannot see the issues from a civic or cosmic point of view. Her lack of understanding will result in unnecessary death for Agamemnon and herself, and unnecessary suffering for Orestes. Alternatively, the conclusion of the play can be read negatively, with Iphigenia persuaded into willingly serving the traditional (though "outworn") ideals of a masculine order that keeps her and other women subordinated and manipulated in male struggles for power (Rabinowitz 1993: 38-54). Still another alternative is to see the ending not as resolving but maintaining these tensions, provoking the audience to thought and discussion (see above, pp. 77-80).

II. Euripides' IA as a Text

The kind of structural analysis used in the preceding section considers individual documents in terms of large patterns, focusing particularly on the movement from conflict to resolution. Such a movement has been seen as basic to mythical thought, which "always progresses from the awareness of oppositions towards their resolution..." (Levi-Strauss 1963 [1967]: 221, 226). Such a structural approach is not concerned with particular moments in texts, or with contradictions within the text including discontinuities of various sorts, or with their effect in their immediate (historical, performative) context. Similarly, ritual can be seen as aiming to minimize and to regularize uncertainties, contradictions, and discontinuities, to organize into clear categories, to encourage participants to act without thinking. But tragedy is not ritual (above, p. 33). Tragedy draws on traditional stories (muthos) but presents them to an audience in a particular form, in a special location, at a specific moment in time. And tragedy does not necessarily resolve contradictions. In IA the clear categories invoked by Iphigenia become blurred and their ranking becomes questioned.

1. Gods and human beings: Artemis has not made an absolute demand for Iphigenia's life. Instead, as often with Greek prophecies and oracles, a choice is involved: If the expedition to Troy is abandoned, Iphigenia can be saved. This puts the burden on Agamemnon in his double role as father and leader of the expedition. He must choose between his role as leader of the Greeks and his role as head of his family, between his public responsibilities and the obligations of philia (see above, pp. 20-22). This is the kind of ethical and emotional conflict Aristotle describes as arousing the responses proper to tragedy, pity and fear (Poetics 1453b). In Aeschylus' play Agamemnon, produced in 458 and probably reperformed within ten years of IA, Kalkhas' announcement that Artemis is angry at Agamemnon and Menelaos is quoted at length (126-55). Aeschylus' Agamemnon makes a conscious choice that the sacrifice is the lesser of two evils (211-17, alluded to at IA 1257-58):

Which of these choices is without dreadful consequences?  
How can I become a deserter,  
abandon the alliance?  
Rage for sacrifice to stop the winds,  
for a maiden's blood,
with tremendous rage they desire it... it is right! May this go well.

In *Kypria*, a poem in the "Epic Cycle" composed after the Homeric poems to fill in the gaps left in Homeric accounts of the Trojan War, reasons are given for the goddess's demand. There, after the army had gathered at Aulis, Agamemnon offended Artemis by killing a deer (perhaps a sacred deer) and boasting that he was a better hunter than the goddess. In still another version of the story Agamemnon vowed to sacrifice to Artemis the most beautiful thing born in the year Iphigenia was born, but failed to keep his vow (*Iphigenia Among the Taurians* 20–24).

In both these versions Artemis' blocking of the voyage is presented as punishment for Agamemnon. In *La* there is no mention of any offense against Artemis; this focuses attention directly on the human participants' motives and actions as they respond to the question whether the war is worth this sacrifice. Little attention is paid to the religious dimension of the problem. Agamemnon implies that Kalkhas is manipulating the unfavorable weather conditions to his advantage (88–92). Even the Old Man inserts "so Kalkhas says" when revealing Agamemnon's plans to Klytemnestra (879). Agamemnon frequently refers to the sacrifice not with ritual terms such as *thuein* ("ritually slaughter") but with secular terms for "murder" (364, 396, 463, 512). Even when urging Agamemnon to go through with the sacrifice (334–75) Menelaos makes no reference to obeying the goddess's commands. Artemis and the gods shift in their meanings according to the intention of the speaker. Agamemnon declares the suitors' oath invalid even though it was taken in the gods' name, and even insists that the gods agree with him (394–95). He, Menelaos, and Achilles all express contempt for prophets and their prophecies (520–21, 955–58). The Old Man calls the sacrifice "a dreadful deed" (887), and even after Iphigenia dedicates herself to Artemis the Chorus directly criticize the goddess as "sick" (1403). The first time Agamemnon invokes the decrees of the goddess is when he tells Iphigenia he has no choice (1268). And it is only once she has decided to die that Iphigenia sees herself as selected by Artemis (1395–96), praises the goddess (1480–83), and insists that others join in the praise (1467–68, 1491–92). But no one directly suggests that either the goddess or her demand is a fiction, or dismisses them as unimportant. Nor is the goddess's demand necessarily inexplicable and cruel: "there is a kind of sane justice in making the leaders take one more look at the perversion of public and private that the war demands" (Luschneg 1988: 113).

2. Household and state affairs. *La* draws upon the strong distinction in Athenian usage between *oikos* ("house, what is shared") and *nikeion*, "household affairs" (above, pp. 49–50). Warfare seems especially far from domestic life, since it takes males away from home, women, children, and domestic life, joining nonrelated men in dedication to a common cause. Agamemnon and Klytemnestra both refer to the separation between public and private when he tries to get her out of the army camp (731) and when she insists on her right to rule the home (740–41).

But private, domestic issues have led to this war. It is the result of an individual man's being publicly shamed by his wife (77–79). The army includes warriors from many Greek states, but those warriors are present because they wanted that same woman. Agamemnon leads the expedition as older brother (hence head of the family) of the shamed man (84–85). For the first three-quarters of the play only Menelaos suggests that there is a public issue involved, and he does so by insisting that Greece shares his shame (370–72, 410). So long as Agamemnon puts his concern for his family (*philos*) ahead of his duties as commander of the expedition, he sees his brother's true motive as personal—to get Helen back (386), and calls the Greeks "stupid" for wanting to pursue the war (394). Only much later, when trying to convince Iphigenia, does he declare that the war is in the interest of all of Greece (1273). Private need becomes public cause.

The male head of household moved between the private and public realms, fulfilling his public duties while protecting his property and *philos*. But when Agamemnon uses Iphigenia to advance his military aims, he confuses the two realms. His *oikos* literally arrives onstage when Klytemnestra moves into his tent with their children. Agamemnon still tries to maintain control, saying it's inappropriate for his wife to be mixed up in a crowd of soldiers (735). But he does not behave as a *philos* (family member) toward Iphigenia and Klytemnestra, but as an *ekbistas* (personal enemy), even a *polemios* (military enemy). When she discovers Agamemnon's plan to kill Iphigenia, Klytemnestra turns to a man outside the family for help—just as she will later turn to Aigisthos. The mixing of the two realms in this play suggests their interdependency in Athenian life (see above, p. 53). It also shows that Agamemnon's roles as general and as head of *oikos* and army affect each other, and his performance of these roles is similarly incompetent.

3. Greeks and barbarians. Greeks characterized as "barbarian" a variety of characteristics and behaviors on the margins of what they considered civilized (see above, pp. 22–3 and 153–4). In *La* the "barbarian" Paris is characterized in directly opposite ways. He is introduced as decadent—rich, overdressed, luxury-loving, effeminate, lustful (73–75)—but two lines later he is a country hick going back to his "cowbarns" (77) where he "tunelessly tootsie" on his rustic panpipe (574–79). More striking in this play are the instances in which Greeks behave in ways considered typically barbarian. The Greek army is violent, out of control, lawless...
by lust (808, 1265). Agamemnon is unstable, changes his mind constantly, attempts to deceive Menelaos, Klytemnestra, and Iphigenia, frequently gives in to tears, at times seems on the verge of madness. Scared of the army (1012), he is only nominally its leader, instead is ruled by it (514). Most strikingly, in taking Klytemnestra from her first husband, Agamemnon has done what Paris did—only worse, because he killed the man and their child (1148–52; Luschnig 1988: 117). The oath Helen’s suitors took obliged them to punish anyone who stole her, “Greek or barbarian” (65), so if Paris had been Greek the army would now be preparing to attack a Greek city (Luschnig 1988: 39). Within two lines Agamemnon speaks of barbarians stealing Greek wives (1266), and Greeks invading Argos and killing Iphigenia, Klytemnestra, and his other daughters (1267–68). Neither Menelaos nor Agamemnon can control their wives (383, 739–45). The result of the insistence that Greeks must not have their women taken from them by barbarians (1275) may be that they themselves must kill those women.

Yet the practice of human sacrifice is the ultimate sign of barbarism (Hall 1989: 145–48). In Euripides’ Iphigenia Among the Taurians, produced some ten years before IA, Iphigenia has been rescued from the altar and is living among a barbarian people who practice human sacrifice (to Artemis). This practice is repeatedly denigrated by the Greek characters, and at play’s end an image of the goddess is transferred to Greece, where Artemis will be honored with a rite imitating human sacrifice (JT 1446–61). In IA the chorus sing that the sacrifice of Iphigenia by Greeks means that there is no longer any civilized place on earth where self-restraint, law, and religion rule (1089–97).

4. Free people and slaves. To Iphigenia the most important difference between Greeks and barbarians is that Greeks are free (1400–1). Yet the characters in this play are under various yokes. Some are constrained by accepted standards of behavior, as when Agamemnon says that aristocats are slaves to their public dignity (450) and Achilles worries what others will think (998–1001). Some are subject to others’ authority, as Klytemnestra and Iphigenia are to Agamemnon. Klytemnestra is willing to humiliate herself by supplicating (899), even enslaving herself (1033) to Achilles to get him to help her. Agamemnon especially is enslaved by his own needs, fantasies, and fears; he sees himself without power of choice, as others make demands on him which he thinks he has no power to refuse. In the very process of declaring that Greece must be free Agamemnon calls himself the slave of Greece (1269–75).

Paradoxically, the only actual slave in the play is free enough to tell Agamemnon to stop whining (28–33), to denounce Agamemnon’s plan to murder his daughter both to him and others (133–35, 887), to fight with Menelaos for the letter (302–16), and to take the dangerous action of betraying Agamemnon’s secret to Klytemnestra (855–95). And the one who talks the most about freedom is Iphigenia, who does not get to choose whether to live or to die, but only whether she will die voluntarily or involuntarily.

5. Males and females. These issues coalesce in the contrasting figures of Helen and Iphigenia. Helen is the “bad woman” par excellence. She was free—free to choose first a husband, then a lover. By leaving her home she became a public issue, causing the mobilization of a community of warriors. By choosing a barbarian she impugned the superiority of Greeks. So every effort must be expended to get Helen back where she belongs—at home, under Greek male control. But whether Helen left willingly, out of love for Paris, or was kidnapped by him, remains uncertain; both versions are mentioned by different characters (voluntary departure, lust, 75, 271–72, 585, 1168, 1204, 1253, 1316; Paris responsible: 180, 467, 663, 1382), and Aphrodite’s involvement also makes the lines of responsibility unclear (on “double determination” see above, pp. 16–17). Sometimes supremely desirable (386), often hateful (1169), even pitiable (781–83), Helen is a phantom, a verbal construct, an object of longing or aggression which changes according to the viewer’s perspective (as Euripides’ Helen makes so clear). Helen’s phantom status redirects attention back to the need that drives this war—the lust of the suitors (392), the “strange lust” (808), “some kind of Aphrodite” (1265) propelling the army. The army is the former suitors, driven by lust to violence now as they were before. Significantly, the object of the suitors’ violence is left unnamed: “whoever didn’t get the girl said he would kill” (54)—the successful suitor? Tyndareos? Helen?

The supreme proof that Iphigenia is a “good woman” is her acceptance of her father’s will. Euripides may have been the first author to make Iphigenia a willing victim; Aeschylus and Sophocles both wrote plays called Iphigenia, which do not survive. In Aeschylus’ Agamemnon, Iphigenia’s tears and pleas are ignored, she is gagged so that she cannot curse her father, stripped of her clothes, and lifted over the altar “like a baby goat” as she searches the crowd with her eyes, silently begging for mercy (228–47). This is how Euripides’ Agamemnon too imagines the scene of his daughter’s sacrifice (IA 462–66); instead she acedes to her father’s will. Yet in the process Iphigenia claims a masculine role. Respectable women, especially unmarried girls, were expected to remain inside the house, far from the public gaze (993), and Pericles says “the greatest glory of a woman is to be least talked about by men, whether they are praising you or criticizing you” (Thucydides 2.45.2). Achilles wants to marry Iphigenia and take her to his house (1405–6, 1410–14), but she is now “something shared (koinon) with all the Greeks” (1386). She glories in the attention focused on her (1375–76, 1378), embraces the masculine code of
conduct she previously rejected (1252), seeks a public reputation for heroism (kleos 1375–76, 1383–84) and expects her fame to last far into the future (1398–99). She commands the destruction of Troy (1398) and calls herself the destroyer of the enemy (1475–76). Altogether she is acting like an adult male warrior, claiming the glory that will belong to Agamemnon and Achilles as the sackers of Troy. The contradiction between Iphigenia's previous behavior and her behavior now is striking, as Aristotle noted, and would have been even more so in performance, as the actor wearing the costume and mask of parthenos spoke these bold words. It is as if in this rite of passage Iphigenia has not made the transition from parthenos to gynê, but from female to male.

Iphigenia's decision to offer herself is further highlighted by the contrast with Achilles' behavior. As the central character in the Iliad, Achilles would have been well known to the audience. When he first appears, however, he is very different from the impulsive warrior of the Homeric poem. Despite what he says about his "uncomplicated character" (927), he is concerned about social propriety (821–34), prides himself on his good education (926–27), and checks his impulse to take action so that he can think things through (919–25). He carefully weighs alternatives in terms of his own self-interest, growing indignant at slight to himself (936–41, 962–69), concerned to avoid scandal or blame (944–47, 998–1001) and trying to figure out exactly how much to do (933–34) to enhance his good name and public image (1019–23). What really offends Achilles is Agamemnon's using his name in order to get Iphigenia to Aulis; the larger questions involved are never mentioned.

The result of Achilles' careful thinking is to advise Klytemnestra to beg Agamemnon for Iphigenia's life, while he stays carefully out of the whole thing (1015–18, 1023). Achilles' words (especially 1019–21, 1409, 1415, 1424–30) reflect the vocabulary, reasoning, and rhetoric characteristic of the sophists (above, pp. 14). Although later he does prepare to battle the Greeks to defend Iphigenia, she easily convinces him to let her die (1415–23). He still thinks her decision is "thoughtless," his final advice to her is "keep thinking" (1424–30), but he takes a lead role in her sacrifice (1568–76). Iphigenia is physically more courageous, a more persuasive speaker, better able to act on her intentions, more public-spirited—in sum, more masculine, more like the Achilles of the Iliad—than is this Achilles.

Like Iphigenia, Klytemnestra is portrayed as stronger and braver than the males she deals with. Her goals are traditional female ones, however. Klytemnestra in IA is not an outsider like Medea who has chosen her own way, but a woman whose life resembles that of a typical Greek woman: Her father decided whom she would marry (1155–56); she bore children; she worked to fulfill the expectations of a good wife—chastity, good household management, support of her husband (1157–61). Her first scene with Agamemnon (685–741), which portrays a husband and wife discussing a domestic issue, is very unusual in Athenian drama. Although Agamemnon as head of the oikos has the power to decide the issue of a daughter's marriage, Klytemnestra negotiates carefully to make sure that the bridegroom is appropriate, and defies her husband when he violates custom (740–41). Like Medea (see Medea 13–15), Klytemnestra is portrayed as aresourceful woman who supports the status quo in gender relations until the males in charge change the rules. As she begins to imagine taking revenge on Agamemnon (1171–82), Klytemnestra does not just threaten him, but begs him to keep her from turning from "good woman" into "bad woman" (1183–84). Like Medea, Klytemnestra turns her talents to destruction only when the system she has upheld betrays her.

Euripides' portrait of Klytemnestra, like those of Iphigenia and Achilles, is quite different from other versions that we know. In the Odyssey the story of Klytemnestra's infidelity and Agamemnon's murder serves as an important narrative counterpart to the story of Odysseus' return to his household and his faithful wife Penelope. In Homer's version it is Aigisthos who sets out to murder Agamemnon; he seduces Klytemnestra in order to get her as an ally. There is no mention of Iphigenia. The only motive given for Klytemnestra's betrayal is her own evil nature: "there's nothing more deadly, more shameless, than a woman who conceives acts like this in her mind" (11.427–28). At the end of the poem Agamemnon predicts that there will be different stories about these two women—the faithful Penelope will get a glorious song of praise, but for Klytemnestra "there will be a song full of hatred, and she will bring a bad reputation on women, even the good ones" (24.200–2). In Aeschylus' Agamemnon, Klytemnestra herself murders Agamemnon in revenge for Iphigenia's death, but she is depicted as the agent of the curse which is punishing Agamemnon's family (see Agamemnon 146–55, 1468–88). IA takes us back in mythic time before Aeschylus' version, showing how Klytemnestra's plan to murder her husband develops. Here Klytemnestra's act can be understood as the result neither of her innate wickedness, nor of an ancient curse using her as agent, but as a psychologically comprehensible consequence of her history with Agamemnon, his behavior as head of the oikos, and his violations of philia.

6. "I wish all wars would vanish" (658). Raising questions about the values for which this particular war is fought raises questions about war itself, and about the role of war in Greek culture. What happens at Aulis makes the Iliad—the Greek poem of war—possible, and various aspects of IA—plot, character, language—recall the Homeric poem. The strongest echoes of Homer come in the Chorus' opening song (164–302). This song is so exceptionally long that its last third
(253–302) has been considered inauthentic. But it is based on long descriptions in the *Iliad* of the forces mustered for the war (2.494–877 and 3.161–244), and athletic contests between the Greeks (23.262–897). The Chorus celebrate the warriors and ships they have come to see, ending with a patriotic flourish (296–300). This enthusiasm can be seen as an appropriate response to this impressive sight, especially given the scenes of indecision and division which precede and follow this song: "the epic tone of the ode creates a strong counterpressure for a return to past myth and a more glorious world than that of the *stasis*-ridden army" (Foley 1985: 79).

Yet this celebration of military might is voiced not by male warriors, as in the *Iliad*, but by young women. Given all the stress in *IA* on the army as a force directing the action, it is significant that Euripides created a chorus of female outsiders rather than a chorus of soldiers. Like other female choruses in tragedy, the women from Chalkis seem to have more freedom of movement than respectable Athenian women did. Tourists eager for sightseeing (164–79), they focus only on glittering appearance and dashing movement. References in the song to their gender (174, 187, 234) may suggest that such enthusiasm is naive and emotional, characteristic of those who don't know the reality of war. Also, the warriors are not fighting, but playing at sports and games (197–98).

As the plan to sacrifice Iphigenia develops, however, the Chorus’ enthusiasm for warfare changes to awareness of the suffering that will result, especially for the Trojan women—including Helen—brutalized by the "civilized" Greeks (774–93). They express increasing horror at the prospect of the sacrifice (1080–97) and address Agamemnon directly, urging him to save his daughter (1209–10). Although they praise Iphigenia’s nobility in offering herself for sacrifice, they condemn the circumstances that have brought this about (1402–3). Iphigenia moves from lack of understanding of war to support for it and the hierarchized categories it will defend. By contrast, the Chorus cross the barriers—spatial, intellectual, and emotional—that separate classes, the genders, city-states, even Greeks and barbarians, and end by finding the war horrible, not glorious.

As the Athenian audience knew, Troy did fall, but many of Iphigenia's other desires in her final speeches were not fulfilled, or only in a form she did not intend (Sorum 1992: 540–42). She declares a single man more valuable than a thousand women (1394), but for the sake of a single woman thousands of men will die (1389)—including Achilles, whom she hopes to save by her action (1392–93). Klytemnестra does mourn for her and continues to hate her husband (1437–55). Agamemnon will conquer Troy and come home (1557–58) only to be killed by his wife. Orestes will "come to the aid of kinfolk" (1452) by violating *philia* in killing Klytemnестra. Even though she dies willingly, Iphigenia's words "Make the sacrifice! Eradicate Troy!" (1398) are still a curse. Sacrificial ritual is supposed to contain death, but here death spills and runs over. The Furies were virgins, like Artemis and Athena, and Iphigenia becomes a kind of Fury, spreading violence against children caused by lust and greed—the curse on the house of Atreus—to all of Greece. The eradication of Troy means the sacrifice of the next generation on both sides: Iphigenia's "wedding with Greece" will produce dead children, both Trojan and Greek (1399). Her combination of masculine and feminine qualities in this speech lets her stand for all those involved in the war, male and female, Greek and Trojan, warriors and victims. Ironically, she gives herself an epithet used by Aeschylus (Agamemnon 689–90), who puns on Helen's name by calling her *helepolis*, "destroyer of the city" (1476). Twice the question is asked "What do Iphigenia and Helen have to do with one another?" (494, 1236). One answer that Euripides' ambiguous dramatization of the story allows us to provide is that "good woman" and "bad woman," "barbarian" Troy and "civilized" Greece, free man and slave, private and public have become indistinguishable.

As a "prequel" to the *Iliad* and to *Agamemnon*, *IA* asks the audience to rethink the events of the epic in terms of those of the drama and to reconsider events made to seem inevitable by their canonical status. As a sequel, *Helen* offers a similar change of perspective on the *Iliad*. In *IA* there are many suggestions, on the level of plot, character, and dialogue, that despite the pressure—the massed army, the literary tradition, the ritual patterns—the war is not inevitable. Agamemnon thinks the sacrifice is necessitated by the army's desire to get to Troy (512–37). Yet when Menelaos sees Agamemnon weep he changes his mind about the sacrifice (477–84), and Klytemnестra implies that the army would support her when she calls them "rowdy, ready for crime, but good and useful, whenever they want to be" (914–15). The soldiers respond happily to the idea of a wedding (430–34) and both Menelaos and Achilles report that the men are ready to leave Aulis, to pursue their normal lives as husbands, fathers, and sons (353, 805–18) just as in the *Iliad* Achilles threatens to abandon warfare for domestic life (9.394–429). So the scene between Achilles and Klytemnестra (819–52) is not just momentary comic relief. It suggests an alternative plot, the plot of comedy, which ends in marriage—perhaps even a good marriage, given Achilles' uncustomary "proposal" to Iphigenia (1404–13).

The choral song (1036–97) brings the themes of male lust, female victimization, military values, and prophecy together. Here the Chorus contrast Iphigenia's marriage to Death with the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, where the Centaurs predicted that Thetis would bear a glorious son (1065–75). As usual the Chorus enjoy the idea of a spectacle full of well-dressed celebrities, but there are dark shad-
ows on the edge of this bright scene. Despite Agamemnon’s assertion (703), Thetis was not a willing bride; with Zeus’ help Peleus violently subdued her. The child of this marriage, Achilles, will get his beautiful golden armor (1072) by losing his best friend, and achieve his glory by brutally destroying Troy; in the Iliad, the poem that celebrates him, neither he nor his parents have a single happy moment. The “inspired song of Apollo” (1064) has left out a few details.

However, the possibility of change raised in IA, that possibility gradually vanishes as characters and events become fixed into their usual configuration, and the play ends with the traditional values of Athenian ideology still in place. This return to the familiar can be seen as comforting, at least for those to whom “the return to the familiar is to be expended in protecting Iphigenia from his thought that Achilles’ brilliance is to be expended in protecting Iphigenia from his own army, and not on the battlefield of Troy, is at the very least discomforting” (Foley 1985: 97). Or it can seem “suffocating” (Luschnig 1988: 78). In any case, tradition has worked to close down choices and alternatives in political, social, and artistic terms. IA shows that traditions are not fixed in stone by divine fiat, but created by human need. It suggests that even the Homeric poems, those inspired songs of Apollo, are particular versions concocted and performed by fallible humans for their own reasons. At the exact midpoint of the play the Chorus wonders whether the story of Helen’s divine origin is true, or the result of “stories in poets’ writing tablets” that “have brought to human beings these lies which do us no good” (798–800). Whether traditions are true or false, however, there have consequences in real life.

III. Euripides’ Iphigenia at Aulis in Performance

The preceding section has been a reading of the text of IA, that is, the words of the play printed on paper, a process that makes it possible to identify themes, structural patterns, internal connections, and references to other texts. But the audience in the Theater of Dionysos did not read this play. They experienced it in performance, as a combination of visual, aural, and other sensory stimuli. Performance uses more than words: As Iphigenia says, Orestes can plead even without being able to speak (1244). The meaning of IA in performance would have been affected by a variety of factors.

1. Physicalization. The idea of sacrifice focuses on the body of the actor playing Iphigenia. When there are references to dragging off, knives, a slashed throat, spilling blood, a body is there, available to experience those things. The Athenian audience had seen sacrificial animals die; many had seen violent death in war, and knew how it looked, felt, and smelled (this may have been one reason why playwrights rarely put deaths onstage). Vernant calls the sacrifice before battle “an offering that sums up everything the clash of battle conceals in the way of unjust violence and savage brutality” (Vernant 1991: 256). An actor’s physical vulnerability makes even reported violence more vivid.

2. Set. The sparseness of the playing space in the Theater of Dionysos focused strong attention on the stage-building (skēnē; above, pp. 35–6). In most tragedies, including the other three plays in this volume, that stage-building stands for the solid oikos of some major character. Here it is Agamemnon’s temporary quarters. When Clytemnestra arrives with children and lots of baggage and moves into the “tent,” the combination of public and private is literalized. Another intriguing possibility concerns the thumelē, the stone in the center of the orchestra, used in many plays to represent an altar and/or a tomb (Wiles 1997). This is probably the place where Helen hides at the beginning of Helen. The double nature of this stone can be read as validating Iphigenia’s statement that she will have no tomb, since the altar will be her monument (1444). The offering thumelē cannot serve as the altar where Iphigenia is sacrificed, since this occurs offstage and the actor playing Iphigenia must go offstage to return as the Messenger. But as visually the most powerful spot in the theater it would have been the focus of attention much of the time. If the Messenger’s speech involved miming of the offstage sacrifice, it could have served as the altar in this mini-drama (see below, p. 324).

3. Lighting. IA was apparently the first play of Euripides’ entry in the competition to be performed, and, like a number of other Athenian tragedies, it begins shortly before dawn. The actors playing Agamemnon and the Old Man may have gestured or referred to the actual sky in their discussion of the stars (6–7).

4. Costume. Clytemnestra says she put Iphigenia’s bridal wreath on the girl (905). This may be metaphorical, but if Iphigenia is actually wearing a wreath at her first entrance, the marriage/sacrifice connection would be established visually. The transformation of Agamemnon in the course of the play might also be symbolized by a costume change, from more casual clothes at the beginning to full military gear in his last entrance as he prepares to leave for Troy (1621–26).

5. Music and dance. The loss of these elements creates the greatest difficulty in understanding the effect of Athenian tragedy in performance. (Translating the songs into prose, as in this volume, exacerbates this loss.) Greek poetry was divided into different rhythms, Greek music into different modes and genres, all with specific emotional connotations (above, pp. 42–3). IA is full of opportunities for powerful effects created by poetry, music, and dance, which amplify the play’s themes. The song describing Peleus’ and Thetis’ wedding (1036–79), for example, might be joy-
ful, then turn dark as the Chorus sing of Iphigenia’s sacrifice (1080–97); in that case the tight parallelism of the strophe-antistrophe structure (like that of the parallel marriage/sacrifice) would be maintained rhythmically but disturbed musically. The change in music from Iphigenia’s lament (1283–1335) to the joyful hymn of praise to Artemis (1475–1531) would have been striking.

6. Gesture. Supplication was one of the “type-scenes” that occurred frequently in tragedy (above, pp. 21–22, 42). Supplicants knelt or prostrated themselves, demonstrating their helplessness and utter dependence on the person supplicated. In this play acts of supplication such as Klytemnestra to Achilles and Iphigenia to Agamemnon show the subordination of women to men. “Barbarians” also prostrated themselves, so the connection women/slaves/barbarians was established visually.

7. Gender. It is not known what acting conventions Athenian actors used to convey gender difference. Comparison with other theatrical traditions, such as Japanese Kabuki drama, in which males perform female roles suggests that a complex system of gender signification may have been employed. If it was, Iphigenia’s assumption of masculine characteristics could have been physicalized by a change in the acting from female to male. The implications of cross-gender performance in Athenian drama are much debated; Iphigenia’s masculinization in her speech of dedication can be seen either as demonstrating that only a male (playwright, actor) knows how a woman is supposed to act, as acknowledging that Athenian drama has nothing to do with women (above, p. 61), as critiquing male values—or as all of these. At the very least the same actor’s playing both male and female roles suggests that gender is performative, not natural (see Butler 1990).

8. Role division. The three-actor rule meant that an actor would play several characters in a single performance. There is no direct evidence that the ancient audience paid attention to who was playing which role. But a prize was given for the best actor; in order to determine who this was, judges (and no doubt audience members too) would have noted which actor played which role. In the case of IA, the role division is as follows: One actor played Agamemnon and Achilles, another Menelaos and Klytemnestra, the third the Old Man, the Messenger, and Iphigenia. This arrangement underlines the similarities between Agamemnon and Achilles and their final reconciliation, between Menelaos as a weak opponent of Agamemnon and Klytemnestra as a strong one, between Iphigenia and other marginal characters (Damen 1989).

9. Surprises. Athenian tragedies are usually rather stately in plot development, with carefully prepared exits and entrances. Like other plays by Euripides (above, pp. 72–3), IA contains a number of surprises which not only change the direction of the plot but require characters to “improvise.” For example, even though his letter to Klytemnestra has been intercepted, the Messenger’s sudden appearance announcing the arrival of his wife and daughter catches Agamemnon by surprise. Klytemnestra asks “Did you come to this decision by careful thought?” (1194), and his awkward improvisation indicates that he has not thought through the consequences of his decision. Like Medea with Aigeus, Klytemnestra displays superior skills of improvisation as she supplicates Achilles for help, changing her tactics as she gets a sense of him (977–95).

10. Offstage and onstage. IA is full of references to characters who have a strong influence on the behavior of onstage characters but never appear, among them Helen, Kalkhas, Odysseus, the army, and Artemis. Their nonappearance emphasizes their existence in the characters’ minds as verbal constructs, projections of the needs and fears of those who invoke them. In this play “offstage” is associated with words, the expected, tradition, the past, inevitability, “onstage” with actions, surprise, unpredictability, the present, the possibility of change.

11. Audience as character. The Theater of Dionysos was very different from the prosenium theater of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with its audience in rows in the dark looking at a light stage. The Greek theater’s round playing-space almost surrounded by the audience created quite a different dynamic, one in which the audience would have been very aware of itself. The audience was outside the playing area, yet it had a strong influence on it (especially given the non-passivity of Athenian audiences; above, pp. 29–30). In IA, the audience often seems to be in the position of the army, as when Menelaos asks who is forcing Agamemnon to kill Iphigenia, and the king answers “The whole Greek army gathered together” (514), or when Iphigenia says “All of Greece is looking at me now!” (1378). These lines and others give ample opportunity for metatheatrical gestures toward the audience on the part of the actors, or the parallel may have remained implicit." The audience of tragedy is also comparable to the army in its expectations that the plot will go in the traditional direction, ending in violence and death, and those expectations can close down the comic alternatives. Yet in the actual audience there was undoubtedly a range of responses—perhaps including vocal ones—to the issues raised in IA.

12. Metatheatricality. References within IA to the theater and performance remind the audience that they are watching a constructed artifact. Skênê is the word used for Agamemnon’s tent” (12); it also means “stage building,” so the theatricality of this play is established in the first scene. The letter Agamemnon writes and rewrites (34–41, 98–110) is the script of the play: Will it be a tragedy or a comedy, with a happy ending? Iphigenia’s speech declaring her intention to die (1368–1401) also has a metatheatrical dimension. The actor “upstages” Klytemnestra and Achilles by interrupting their scene and focusing attention on
himself, glorying in the gaze of “all of Greece” in the audience (1378), validating Iphigenia’s role as protagonist of the play.

In their first song, the Chorus looking at the dashing heroes and beautiful ships seem like an audience focusing only on spectacle, not meaning. They begin to question the war and its cost, but then are convinced again by the Messenger’s speech reporting Iphigenia’s salvation (1540–1612). They are easily distracted by spectacle: when Klytemnestra and Iphigenia enter they have just been singing about the disastrous consequences of Paris and Helen’s love (573–89), but immediately become a group of fans applauding the celebrities (590–97). Though the Messenger says he’s rattled (1541–42) he presents the sacrifice in the form of a very tight mini-drama. Like other messenger speeches, it may well have been performed mimetically, with the Messenger acting out what he describes. In this “play within the play” all the participants play their parts correctly and in character: Agamemnon still unable to face the consequences of his action (1547–50), Iphigenia calm and brave 1552–60, Achilles taking over the role of leader (1568–76), the onlookers feeling both admiration and sorrow (1561–62, 1580–81). Then the miracle turns grief to joy, and Kalkhas delivers the “message” (1591–1601), which the Chorus dutifully repeat (1627–29). With its perfect coherence between form and meaning, this mini-drama fulfills Aristotle’s prescriptions for decorum and organic form. But it is not a Euripidean play.

The miraculous salvation was part of the myth of Iphigenia as early as Kypria, and there are foreshadowings of the miracle in Iphigenia at Aulis (1507–9, 1521–22). Yet the messenger speech lacks the confirmation and emotional impact of drama (Zeitlin 1994: 157–71). Its performance by a single character may suggest that the Messenger is performing a script written by Agamemnon. In other Euripidean dramas, a deus ex machina often appears at this point to lay out the meaning of the events from a divine perspective (above, p. 36). But Artemis does not appear in Iphigenia at Aulis. As a result, Klytemnestra’s suggestion that the messenger speech is a trick, or even that the miraculous substitution is a performance arranged to convince the whole army, is never disproved. This does not mean that the messenger speech is clearly a lie. Just like the rest of the play, this is a performed script, one of those “stories in poets’ writing tablets” (798) which may be true or false. The question of belief is handed over to the audience.

IV. Iphigenia in Athens

Like almost all extant Athenian tragedies, Iphigenia at Aulis was performed in the context of war—not a war between Greeks and non-Greeks, like the Persian Wars of 490 and 480–78, but a war between the two most powerful Greek states and their allies (above, pp. 8–9). Since we do not know the exact date when Iphigenia at Aulis was produced at Athens, it is impossible to determine the precise historical situation at that moment. That members of the audience would have seen connections between the situation depicted in the play and their own, however, seems more than likely. The references to different city-states involved in both sides of the Peloponnesian War, and “anachronisms” reflecting contemporary Athenian life, such as Agamemnon’s “campaign” for the generalship (337–45) and Achilles’ sophistic arguments, invite these connections.

Many passages in Thucydides’ history of the war read like footnotes to Iphigenia at Aulis. As the war begins, he writes

Zeal is always at its height at the commencement of an undertaking; and on this particular occasion the Peloponnesians and Athens were both full of young men whose inexperience made them eager to take up arms, while the rest of Hellas stood toiling with the energy of the conflict and the leading cities. Everywhere predictions were being recited and oracles being chanted. (2.8)

As tensions increase within a polis under the pressure of war, he says

Family relations became a weaker connection than party membership, since party members were ready to go to the extreme. . . . Revenge was more important than self-preservation. . . . The cause of all these evils was the lust for power arising from greed and ambition. . . . Neither side had any use for conscientious motives; more interest was shown in those who could produce attractive arguments to justify some disgraceful action. (3.82)

At the funeral of the Athenians who died in the first year of war he has Perikles say

They gave Athens their lives, and won praises that never grow old, the most splendid of graves—not that in which their bodies are laid, but the one where their glory remains eternal in men’s minds, always there on appropriate occasions to arouse others to speech or to action. . . . For heroes have the whole earth for their memorial. . . . Make up your minds that happiness depends on being free, and freedom depends on being courageous. (2.43)

Parents who have lost their children are encouraged by Perikles to produce more, since
they will be a help to the city, filling the empty places and assuring her security. 
And it is impossible for a man to put forward fair and honest views about our 
affairs if he does not have children whose lives may be at stake. (2.44)

Perikles’ policies had led to this war. Like Agamemnon, his policies cost him one of 
his children: His son (also named Perikles) was one of the generals executed after 
the battle of Arginousai.

Setting IA in its historical context does not resolve the question of how the play 
should be interpreted. It can be read as encouraging the Athenians to make peace 
and end the bloodshed:

Euripides was saying to the Athenians . . . “What slavery could be so terrible as 
the things this war is forcing you to do? . . . Like Iphigenia you are willing to sac-
ifice yourselves, or like Agamemnon to sacrifice your children, in order to fight a 
war you cannot win.” (Dimock 1978: 20)

But it can also be construed as encouraging the Athenians to make any sacrifice in 
order to win the war: “a stirring trumpet-call . . . ‘Defence of freedom . . . of the home 
. . . of the Greek way of life . . . ’ so eloquently do Agamemnon and Iphigenia plead 
this theme, so enthusiastically does the Chorus develop it, that the spectators too . . .
must surely have responded to it” (Conacher 1967: 264). Moreover, the Greeks in IA 
are not necessarily to be identified only with the Athenians. In Thucydides, repres-
sentatives of Corinth urge the allies of Sparta to declare war on Athens:

Defeat will mean nothing but total slavery. . . . Some of us are already suffering 
from aggression, and the rest are certain to suffer in the same way. . . . That dicta-
tor city has been set up in Greece to dominate all alike. . . . Let us therefore go 
forward against it and destroy it, and let us win future security for ourselves and 
freedom for the Greeks who are now enslaved! (Thucydides 1.124)

Finally, all the references to decadent/uncivilized “barbarians” can be read as refer-
ing to the Persian Empire, which was very much a player in the Peloponnesian 
War, mostly on the side of Sparta. Agamemnon’s attacks on “barbarians” can be 
understood not as an appeal to the Athenians to renew their efforts to defeat the 
Spartans and their allies, but as a call to Greek states to forget their differences and 
join in a Panhellenic crusade against the Persians, as they had done many years 
before. At the Olympic Games of 408, Gorgias, a prominent sophist, gave a speech 
urging the Greeks to do just that. The power that gained most from the 
Peloponnesian War was in fact the Persian Empire.

The many discontinuities in IA, the variety of perspectives it offers, and the 
questions it raises about perception, judgment, values, and traditions in individual, 
ideological, and artistic terms, make any definitive judgment of its meaning (either 
in its original context or later) impossible. IA gives ample support for regarding 
Iphigenia’s sacrifice as a noble action, as an absurd waste, or as a noble action wast-
ed on an absurd cause. But the play’s discontinuities do not encourage audiences to 
abandon all hope of meaning. IA fits Aristophanes’ description of Euripides’ drama 
as encouraging the audience to ask basic questions not only about the issues it raises 
but about the process of interpretation itself. “The play insists that we cannot 
interpret it without our own desire entering in. The play makes us aware, in a way 
meant to be disturbing, of the intrusiveness of our wants into our interpretation” 
(Mathews 1994: 13). To use Iphigenia to satisfy desire for definitive meaning, for 
closure, is to sacrifice her again for another cause.

V. Note on the Translation

The text of this play has been the subject of considerable controversy for more than 
two hundred years. Problems in meter, citations of this play by other authors which 
do not appear in existing manuscripts, and apparent illogicalities and inconsisten-
ties have prompted editors to make extensive revisions and rearrangements. The 
beginning (lines 1–163) and especially the ending (lines 1510–1629) have been 
especially suspected and subject to revision." My policy has been to make no exci-
sions, but to assume that the whole script is Euripidean, even the finale, and to 
stick as closely as possible to the manuscripts. I have used primarily Diggle's and 
Günther's editions, but have also consulted those of England, Murray, Jouan, and 
Stockert, as well as Page 1934. This is a prose translation, fairly literal, not intended 
for the stage; it follows the diction and word order of the original closely, with little 
attempt to evoke the poetic effects of the original. The stage directions are my addi-
tions, based on my own experience in the modern production of Athenian drama.

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innocuous lessons from Christopher Grabowski, Tim Earle, George Chastain, Dale
II. THE PLAY

Characters

AGAMEMNON, king of Argos, leader of the Greek expedition against Troy
OLD MAN, slave in Agamemnon's and Klytemnestra's household
CHORUS of women from Chalkis
MENELAOS, king of Sparta, Agamemnon's younger brother, husband of Helen
MESSANGER, slave of Klytemnestra
KLYTEMNESTRA, wife of Agamemnon
IPHIGENIA, eldest daughter of Agamemnon and Klytemnestra
ACHILLES, prince of Thessia, member of the Trojan expedition

Scene: The scene-building represents Agamemnon's temporary dwelling (called both "tent" and "house") in the Greek army encampment at Aulis. One of the side entrances (eisodos) leads to the Greek army camp, the other toward Argos. The opening interchange informs the audience of the location, the time of day, and the season of the year, as well as the identity of the speakers.

[Enter Agamemnon from his tent, holding a writing-tablet.]

AGAMEMNON: Old man, come out here in front of the house.

OLD MAN: I'm coming. What new plan are you working on, Lord Agamemnon?

AGAMEMNON: Hurry!

OLD MAN: I am hurrying.

My old age doesn't sleep.
My eyes are sharp.

AGAMEMNON: What's that star sailing along there?

OLD MAN: That's Sirius, near the seven Pleiades, still sparkling in mid-heaven.

AGAMEMNON: Well, anyway there's no sound of either birds or sea. Silence, without wind, encloses this place near the straits of Euripos.

OLD MAN: Why are you dashing around outside your tent, Lord Agamemnon? It's still quiet here at Aulis. The guards of the camp aren't stirring. Let's go inside.


AGAMEMNON: That "glory" is slippery. And ambition's sweet, but on closer inspection, painful. Sometimes something sent by the gods goes astray and turns your life upside down. Other times men's ideas—various, hard to satisfy—tear you to pieces.

OLD MAN: I don't like to hear this from a nobleman. Atreus didn't breed you for nothing but pleasure, Agamemnon. You have to have both happiness and pain: you were born mortal, and even if you don't like it, that's what the gods decided, and it stands. You light your lamp, and write a letter—the one you're holding in your hand right now. You write some words, then scratch them out. You seal it, then unseal it again,
and throw the tablet on the ground,
pouring out great tears.
You give every sign of going mad.
What are you struggling with?
What's going on with you, my king?
Bring out the story and share it with me.
You'll be telling a good trustworthy man.
Back then Tyndareos gave me to your wife—
part of the dowry,
a faithful attendant to the bride.9

AGAMEMNON:10 Leda gave birth to three daughters:
Phoebe, Klytemnestra (my wife), and Helen—
she was the one the richest
young men in Greece came seeking in marriage.11
Terrible threats were arising, and envy of one another;
whoever didn't get the girl said he would kill.
For Helen's father Tyndareos, whether he gave away his
daughter or not
there seemed no way out of the situation—
no good way for him to grasp what he'd been handed.12
Then this idea came to him:
join the suitors' hands, make them swear
an oath with one another,
and with libations and burnt offerings13
solemnly vow to join in defending whatever man should
get Tyndareos' daughter:
if someone should take her out
of her home and deprive the legal husband of his wife,
they'd make war on him and dig his city up by the roots,
whether it were Greek or foreign, by force of arms.14
Once they'd taken the oath, and somehow old man
Tyndareos had caught them in his tight plan,
he gives his daughter the choice: take one of the suitors,
go wherever the winds of Aphrodite might take her.
She chose—how I wish she'd never gotten him!—
Menelaos.15
And then, from the East, he came,

the one who judged the goddesses (or so the story has it16)
to Sparta, blooming in his fancy getup,
sparkling with gold—Oriental pansy!17
He lusted after Helen, she after him.
Since Menelaos was away, he snatched her up,
went back to the cowbarns of his native land.18

Stung by his lot,
Menelaos gallops around Greece, reminding everyone of
Tyndareos' ancient oath:
"now is the time for all good men
to come to the aid of the wronged!"
At once the Greeks seized their armor,
and raced, spear in hand, decked out in their ships,
and shields, and many horses and chariots, here
to the city of Aulis beside the narrow straits.
And they chose me as leader, because of Menelaos,
as his brother.19 If only some other man
had gotten this honor instead of me!
The army's gathered and ready, and here we sit
at Aulis, without wind. And Kalkhas the seer,
making use of the standstill, said
to sacrifice my daughter Iphigenia to Artemis,
the local goddess, and the launch would happen,
and the Trojans' destruction—if we sacrificed her.
If we didn't, none of this would happen.20
When I heard this oracle, I ordered Talathybios the herald
to make a loud, clear announcement
and send the whole army away.
I had no intention of murdering my own daughter.21
But my brother, utilizing every argument,
convinced me to do
this terrible thing. In the folds of a tablet I wrote,22
I sent my wife instructions to send my daughter here,
in order (I said) that she might marry Achilles.23
I magnified Achilles' virtues,
and said that he refused to sail
unless he'd sent a wife from our house
to his home in Phthia.24
I used these lies on my wife, concocting a fake marriage 
in exchange for my daughter. The only Greeks who know the truth 
are Kalkhas, Odysseus, and Menelaos. But then I realized 
how wrong this was! I made it right, 
took back my word, wrote it over again, in this tablet, 
the one, old man, you saw me tying and untying 
in the darkness of the night. 
Now go, get going! Take this letter to Argos. 
I'll tell you what the tablet hides in its folds, 
every word I wrote.25 
You're faithful to my wife and to my house. 
"Offspring of Leda, I send to you, 
in addition to my previous letter..."26

OLD MAN: Go on! Tell me, so the words I say 
can confirm what you write!

AGAMEMNON: "Do not send your offspring 
to the wing-shaped bay of Euboa, 
to peaceful Aulis. 
We will celebrate the child's 
wedding feast another time."

OLD MAN: But what about Achilles, deprived of his wedding? 
Won't he be furious at you and your wife? 
That's dangerous. Tell me what you're saying.

AGAMEMNON: Only Achilles' name is involved, not the man himself.27 
He knows nothing about this marriage— 
not what we're going to do, or that I promised 
to deliver my child into his arms, in the marriage-bed.

OLD MAN: You've dared to do something terrible, 
Lord Agamemnon. 
By calling your daughter the bride of the goddess's son 
you've brought her to the Greeks 
to be slaughtered.28

AGAMEMNON: Oh God! I was out of my mind! Aaaah!

Now I'm falling into disaster! 
Go! Row with your feet! 
Don't give in to old age!

OLD MAN: I'm hurrying, my lord.

AGAMEMNON: Don't sit down by a spring in the woods! 
Don't be enchanted by sleep!

OLD MAN: Don't say such a thing!29 
AGAMEMNON: Whenever you come to a fork in the road, 
look carefully. Make sure it doesn't get by you, 
rolling on swift wheels, 
the carriage bringing my child here to the Greek ships.

OLD MAN: I'll make sure.

AGAMEMNON: Even if you meet her with her escort en route 
just outside the gates,46 turn her, 
grab the horses' bridles, send them back 
to the sacred city built by the Cyclopes.31

OLD MAN: If I give this message, how can your daughter 
possibly believe me? or your wife?

AGAMEMNON: Take good care of the seal 
which is on the letter you carry. Now go! 
The shining dawn, 
the horse-drawn chariot 
of Helios, is already brightening.

[hands him the letter]

Here's your task.

[Exit the Old Man by the side entrance going toward Argos.] 

No one among human beings is fortunate 
or blessed right to the end. 
No one yet born has avoided pain.32

[Enter Chorus from the side entrance leading toward the army camp.33]
Chorus: I've left my own city,  
    Chalkis, home of that famous spring  
    close to the sea—Arethusa!  
    I rowed across the narrow Euripus,  
    landed and walked  
    along the sandy shore of Aulis,  
    close to the sea,  
    so I might see the army of the Greeks,  
    and the seafaring ships  
    of the famous, godlike heroes  
    (the ones, our husbands say,  
    highborn Agamemnon  
    and red-haired Menelaos  
    are taking to Troy  
    on those thousand swift ships  
    after Helen).  
    Paris the cowherd took her  
    from the lush banks of the Eurotas  
    as Aphrodite's gift to him, after  
    she held the beauty contest  
    with Hera and Athena.  

I ran through the grove of Artemis  
    where many sacrifices are held,  
    blushing like a girl,  
    because I'm embarrassed  
    by how much I want to see the shields,  
    the tents full of armor,  
    the throng of horses.  
    I saw the two Ajaxes sitting together,  
    one Oileus' son, the other Telamon's,  
    the star of Salamis,  
    and Proteus,  
    with Palamedes (Poseidon's grandson!)  
    playing checkers, enjoying the many  
    intricate shapes of the game,  
    and Diomedes, happily involved  
    in throwing the discus  

Strophe A  

with Meriones—  
Ares' descendant, no ordinary man,  
also the son of Laertes, Odysseus,  
who's left his island's mountains,  
and with him Nireus, handsomest of the Greeks.  

The one whose lightly running feet—Non-Strophic Interlude  
go fast as wind—Achilles,  
son of Thetis,  
Chiron's pupil—I saw him,  
running along the sand,  
fully armed,  
competing on foot  
against a four-horse chariot,  
pushing, really trying to win!  
The chariot driver, Eumelos,  
Phereas' grandson, shouted,  
and I saw him lash  
his beautiful horses;  
their bridles were all worked with gold!  
The two center horses—dapple greys 
with white manes—were yoked to the chariot,  
while those on the outside (pintos with reddish 
manes),  
harnessed with only a trace-line,  
confronted the turns in the course.  

Right beside them  
the son of Peleus ran,  
ar bor and all,  
keeping even with the chariot rail,  
close to the whistling wheels.  

Then I came to the multitude of ships,  
an indescribable sight! It was  
a greedy pleasure to fill  
my woman's eyes with looking.  
The Myrmidons from Phtia  
were holding the right wing of the fleet  
with fifty speedy ships.
Golden statues, the sea-goddess daughters of Nereus, stood high on their sterns—the badge of Achilles’ war force.

The ships from Argos, equal in number, were anchored nearby; their leaders were the son of Mekisteos, grandson of Talaos, and Sthenelos, son of Kapanes. Leading sixty ships in a row from Attica, the son of Theseus waited, his emblem the goddess Athena in her chariot drawn by winged horses, a symbol of good luck to sailors.41

I saw the sea-going force from Boeotia, fifty ships each adorned with an effigy: theirs was Kadmos, holding a golden dragon on the stern of every one.42 Leitos (a man born from the earth) commanded this army of ships. From the land of Phocias . . . 43 and from Locris, leading an equal number, was the son of Oileus, who’d left the glorious city of Thronion.

From Mycenae, the city built by the Cyclopes, the son of Atreus sent a throng of sailors crowding a hundred ships. With him was the leader Adrastos, a friend at his friend’s side, so Greece could take action because of a woman who left her home to marry a barbarian.44

And from Pylos I saw the son of Gerenian Nestor . . . 45 saw the emblem on his prow, his neighbor the river-god, bull-footed Alpheus. The ships of the Ainians were twelve; Lord Gouneus was their commander. Near them, the leaders of Elis (the whole army called them “Epeians”); Eurytos commanded them. Next came the fleet of the Taphians, with their white oars, led by Meges, Phyleus’ son, who’d left the islands of Echina, which sailors won’t approach.

Ajax, born in Salamis, led the right wing toward those stationed nearest on the left, weaving together the ends of the line with his twelve very agile ships. That’s what they told me, and I saw that army of sailors. If someone brings barbarian scows against a fleet like this, they won’t get home again! So powerful was the naval expedition I saw there, just as I heard at home.46 I keep safe the memory of that army called together.

[Enter Menelaos and the Old Man from the side entrance going toward Argos, arguing. Menelaos holds Agamemnon’s letter.]

OLD MAN: Menelaos, you’re doing something terrible. You should not commit such an outrage!67

MENELAOS: Back off! You’re too faithful to your master.
OLD MAN: This insult you’ve given me is really praise.

MENELAOS: You’d bawl if you do what’s not right for you to do.

OLD MAN: It was wrong for you to open the letter I was carrying.

MENELAOS: It was wrong for you to carry something that would harm all Greeks.

OLD MAN: Debate that with others. Just hand this letter over to me.

MENELAOS: I won’t let it go!

OLD MAN: And I won’t give up!

MENELAOS: Soon I’ll beat your head bloody with my staff!]

OLD MAN: Dying for a master is an honorable death.

MENELAOS: Let go! You talk too much for a slave.

OLD MAN: [calling out] Lord Agamemnon, we are being wronged! This man here has grabbed your letter out of my hands by force, and refuses to deal justly.

[Enter Agamemnon from his tent.]

AGAMEMNON: Hey!

What’s this shouting, these unruly words in front of the door?]

MENELAOS: My words, not his, take precedence.

AGAMEMNON: Why have you come into conflict with this man, Menelaos, and used force?

MENELAOS: Look at me, so I can begin this discussion.

AGAMEMNON: Surely you’re not suggesting that I don’t dare look at you?

I’m the son of Atreus!]

MENELAOS: Do you see this letter, which conveys a coward’s message?

AGAMEMNON: I see it. First of all, let go of it.

MENELAOS: Oh, no! Not till I’ve shown all the Greeks what’s written here.

AGAMEMNON: So you broke the seal? You learned what you have no right to know?

MENELAOS: Yes, I opened up what you were secretly concocting, to cause you pain.

AGAMEMNON: How did you get hold of it? Gods! You have no shame!

MENELAOS: I was watching out to see if your daughter would come from Argos to the army camp.

AGAMEMNON: Why should you spy on my affairs? Isn’t that shameless?

MENELAOS: Because I felt the urge. I’m not your slave.

AGAMEMNON: Is that not an outrage? Aren’t I allowed to be head of my own household?

MENELAOS: No, because your plans are crooked: now one way, now another, soon a third.

AGAMEMNON: That line sounds fine, but it’s a lie. A smart mouth is an attribute all cowards want.

MENELAOS: A fickle heart, one of your friends can’t depend on, is an unworthy thing to have.]

I want to cross-examine you. Don’t you get angry and reject the truth, and I won’t go too far either.]

You know very well, when you were hoping to lead the Greeks against Troy, you avoided any appearance of wanting the command, but in your heart you longed for it.

How humble you were—shaking everyone’s hand, keeping your doors open to any one of the public who wanted in.

You invited everyone to talk to you (even those who weren’t interested), trying by your conduct to buy public honors from the masses.]

Then, once you’d gotten the command, you changed your style.

You were no longer a friend to those you formerly loved;
your door was shut, you made yourself quite scarce.
But it's not right for a good man to change his behavior
once he's achieved success. That's when he should be the
most dependable for his friends—
when he's doing well, so he can do them good. 54
That's the first charge I bring against you, since that's the
first time I found you at fault.
Later, once you and the whole Greek army arrived at Aulis,
you were a nothing, knocked flat by what the gods handed
you: you didn't have a wind that was good for sailing.
The Greeks started talking about disbanding the fleet, so as
not to waste time in Aulis.
What an unhappy face you had then! what confusion!
if you weren't going to be able to lead the thousand ships,
and fill with arms the plain before Priam's city!
You summoned me: "What should I do? How can I find a
way out?"
—so you wouldn't lose your power, be deprived of your
precious fame.
Then when Kalkhas told you to sacrifice your daughter as
an offering
to Artemis, so the Greeks would be able to sail, you were
delighted.
You gladly promised to sacrifice your child.
You sent for her willingly, not under duress—you can't say
that.
You wrote to your wife to send your child here, saying, as
a coverup, she was going to marry Achilles.
And then you did an about-face: you got caught
substituting another letter
saying you weren't willing any longer to be your daughter's
murderer. 55 Oh, right!
This is the same sky that heard you make that promise. 54
Thousands of men have done this exact same thing:
they work so hard to achieve success, then once they've got
it they back off, like cowards.
Sometimes it's the fault of the people's stupid judgment,
other times

the leaders themselves are incapable of ruling the city. 57
It's poor Greece I'm sorry for most of all.
She's trying to do something noble, but she'll have to let
barbarians—those nobodies!—laugh at us on account of
you and your little girl.
I'd never appoint a man my country's leader, or general of
the army, just because there's need.
The commander-in-chief of a state has to have brains.
Any man can lead, if he happens to have good sense.

CHORUS: It’s awful when arguments happen between brothers—
fights, even, once they've fallen into strife. 59

AGAMEMNON: I want to speak harshly to you, but appropriately. I'll be
brief.
I won't go too far and act toward you completely
without respect, but behave moderately,
as a brother should. 60 A good man prefers to maintain
respect.
Tell me, why are you puffing up so terribly? Why are your
eyes all red with blood? 60
Who's doing you wrong? What do you want? Are you
longing for a faithful wife?
I wouldn't be able to provide you with that, since you
couldn't control the wife you had.
Why should I pay the penalty for your mistakes? I didn't
make them.
Or is it my public honors which gnaw at you? No—
discarding all rationality, all morality, you just want
to get that beautiful woman back in your arms. 61 The bad
pleasures of a worthless man!
As for me, if my earlier intention was wrong, and I changed
my mind for a better plan,
am I insane? Aren't you the crazy one? You got rid of a
trashy wife.
The gods granted you that good fortune, but you want
her back!
Helen's suitors swore the oath Tyndareos proposed because
they were out of their minds with lust.
Hope really is a god, I think; hope is what made this expedition happen—not you, or your authority!
Well, you take the men. You lead them. They’re ready—because they’re stupid. But the gods aren’t stupid; they can tell when oaths have been set up deceitfully, and sworn under duress.62
I will not kill my children. It would be unjust for your affairs to turn out well, for you to get revenge for your faithless bedmate, while I’ll be worn out every night, every day, with tears, because I committed unjust crimes against my child. There—my words to you have been brief, clear, and to the point. Even if you persist in your immoral views, I will conduct my own affairs in the right way.

CHORUS: These words are different from those spoken before, but you are right to spare your child.

MENELAOS: God! Poor me! I’ve got no one on my side!63
AGAMEMNON: You would have, if you didn’t want to destroy those on your side.

MENELAOS: How will you prove you are really my brother?
AGAMEMNON: I want to be sensible together with you, not share your sickness.

MENELAOS: Family members ought to share each other’s sufferings.
AGAMEMNON: Call on me when you’re helping me, not when you’re trying to hurt me.

MENELAOS: Isn’t it right for you to share these trials with Greece?
AGAMEMNON: Greece, including you, is sick; some god’s the cause.

MENELAOS: Go on, strut with your sceptre, while betraying your brother. I’ll turn to other methods, other allies—64

[Enter Messenger from the side entrance leading toward Argos.]

MESSENER: Lord of all the Greeks! Agamemnon! I’ve come, bringing your daughter, the one you called Iphigenia when you were home, Her mother’s accompanying her, your Klytemnestra in person, and the child Orestes. You’ll be delighted to see them, since you’ve been away from home for so long.65 They’ve made a long journey, so they’re refreshing themselves beside a bubbling spring, cooling the women’s feet.
The mares too—we turned them loose in a grassy meadow, so they could graze.66 And I’ve come running ahead, so you could get ready. The army knows already—the rumor went through it quickly—that your daughter’s come. The whole crowd is running out to get a look, so they can see your daughter. Those whom fortune blesses are famous, stared at by everyone. They’re saying, “Is it a wedding? What’s going on?” Has Lord Agamemnon been missing his daughter, so he sent for her?” You might have heard this too: “They’re performing the ritual done before marriage, consecrating the girl to Artemis, goddess of Aulis. But who’s the bridegroom?”
Now, come on! Prepare the baskets of sacred barley, put a garland on your head!67 You too, Lord Menelaos, start practicing the wedding song, let the flute resound through the house, and the beat of feet dancing! This turns out to be Iphigenia’s happy day!

AGAMEMNON: Thank you. Enough. Now go inside the house. As for the rest, whatever happens, all will be well.68

[Exit Messenger into Agamemnon’s tent.]
Iphigenia at Aulis

Oh God! Poor me, what shall I say?
Where shall I begin?*
What an unavoidable trap I’ve fallen into!* 
Some god, much smarter than all my smart plans, has
caught me!
Being lowborn has something of value.
They are allowed to shed tears easily,
say anything at all. But for someone who’s nobly born
such things are crude. We have dignity to rule our lives,
so we’re the slaves of the masses.
I’m ashamed to shed tears—
but just as ashamed if I don’t weep,
faced with such a catastrophe.*
Well, then . . . what shall I say to my wife?
How will I receive her? What sort of expression will I
throw together?*

Her coming uninvited, on top of the problems
I have already, has destroyed me! And yet . . .
it’s understandable that she’d come along,
to see her daughter married, to give her all the sweetest
things . . .*
and so she’ll find me out as the criminal I am.
And then the poor girl . . . Girl?
Soon she’ll be a bride—of Death, that is!
How I pity her! I know she’ll plead with me.
“Will you kill me, Daddy? Then I hope you yourself
get a wedding like this one, you and whoever you love!”*
Orestes will be there too. He can’t talk yet.
He’ll cry . . . meaningless cries, but I’ll know what they
mean.
Aaaaah! Paris, son of King Priam, when he married
Helen,*
destroyed me! He’s the one who did all these things to me.

Chorus: I feel very sorry too—as much as is right for a foreign
woman
to grieve for a king’s disaster.

Menelaos: Brother, let me touch your right hand.

Agamemnon: Here. The power is yours. I’m shattered.*

Menelaos: I swear by Pelops, who is called my father’s father,
and yours as well, and by our father Atreus,
that I’m going to speak to you straight, and from my heart,
nothing calculated, but just what I am thinking.*

When I saw those tears falling from your eyes,
I felt sorrow for you, and I too wept for you.
So I take back all my previous arguments.
I’m not your enemy. Now I stand with you.
I urge you not to kill your child, not to put
my interests ahead of your own. It’s not right
for you to be in agony while my life is sweet,
for your children to die while mine are still alive.
What do I want, after all? If it’s a wife I’m eager for,
couldn’t I have any one I choose? But should I choose
Helen,
destroy my brother, the last person in the world I should
hurt,

trade good for bad?* I was impulsive, adolescent.

Looking more closely at the matter, I have seen
what sort of thing it is to kill a child.

Besides, pity for your poor daughter came over me.
I remembered I’m the uncle of the one who’s going
to be sacrificed—because of my marriage.

What do your daughter and Helen have to do with each
other?*

Disband the army! Send them away from Aulis!

My brother, stop bathing your eyes in tears,
which make me weep too.

If you have something to gain from these oracles
about the girl, leave me out of it; I give my share to you.*

I’ve made a move away from my dreadful words.

What’s happened to me makes perfect sense: I’ve changed
out of love for my brother, born
from the same parents as I.

This is the behavior of no wicked man:
always follow the most noble course.
CHORUS: You've spoken noble words, worthy of Tantalos, son of Zeus; you don't disgrace your ancestors.41

AGAMEMNON: Menelaos, I appreciate how you've put forth arguments as I never expected, in a way worthy of you. Discord often arises between brothers over love affairs, or the family estate. I spilt out such family feuding poisonous to both. But I've reached such a point of inevitability I have to shed my daughter's blood—to murder her.

MENELAOS: What? Who will force you to slaughter your own child?

AGAMEMNON: The whole Greek army gathered together.42

MENELAOS: No! Not if you send her back to Argos.

AGAMEMNON: I might get away with it at first, but not later.

MENELAOS: What do you mean? There's no need to fear the masses.

AGAMEMNON: Kalkhas will tell the army about the prophecy.

MENELAOS: No, not if he dies first. That's easily done.

AGAMEMNON: Whole worthless breed of priests, consumed with self-interest!

MENELAOS: Absolutely good for nothing!

AGAMEMNON: Something else just occurred to me. Aren't you afraid?

MENELAOS: Unless you tell me, how can I figure it out?

AGAMEMNON: The spawn of Sisyphos—he knows the whole story.43

MENELAOS: There's nothing Odysseus can do to hurt you and me.

AGAMEMNON: He's innately crafty, and in with the masses.

MENELAOS: Yes, consumed by desire for public honors—an evil and dangerous thing.

AGAMEMNON: Can't you see him standing in the midst of the Greek army?44

He'll tell all the prophecies Kalkhas spelled out, how I promised to make the sacrifice to Artemis, and then went back on my word! Once he has the army in the palm of his hand, won't he order the Greeks to kill you and me, then slaughter the girl? Even if I should escape to Argos, they'll come and grab the land, dig it up by the roots, even the stones of the walls built by the Giants! Those are the sufferings I'm going through. Poor me—thanks to the gods I've got no way out of this situation! Do one thing for me, Menelaos: as you go among the troops make sure that Klytemnstra doesn't learn of this till I get hold of my child and send her to Hades, so I can carry out this ugly deed with as few tears as possible.

As for you, foreign women, you keep quiet.45

[Exit Agamemnon into his tent, Menelaos by the side-entrance leading to the Greek camp.46]

CHORUS: Happy are those who get their share of Aphrodite47 in just the right measure—under control, none of those stings that drive you mad, when that blond boy Eros aims his bow that delivers two gifts: one brings a lifetime of joy, the other complete disaster. That's the one, most beautiful Aphrodite, I try to keep out of the room in which I sleep. I pray for just the right measure of your favor, acceptable pleasure.

I want my share of desire, but more than that let me fend off.

People are different by nature. They behave differently too. But

Stryphne A

Antistrophne A
proper conduct, real nobility, is always obvious.
Education is another important guide
to excellence. Its a wise thing to feel shame
and it gives exquisite pleasure, too, to use one's
intellect
to choose the right course,
since a good reputation
brings undying fame to a mortal's life.
To hunt after excellence is a great thing.
For women excellence means chastity;
for men, a kind of personal harmony
which, multiplied,
makes a great city greater.

Paris, you went back where you grew up
beside the gleaming heifers,
a cowherd on Mount Ida,
tooling tunelessly on your reed-pipe—
a barbarous imitation
of Olympos' Phrygian melodies. The cows were grazing, full of milk,
when the contest between the goddesses waited for
you
and sent you off to Greece.
Before Helen's palace
of ivory you stood,
looking her in the eyes,
and you stirred desire in her,
and with desire were lifted up yourself.
So strife leads Greece to strife, with men and ships,
toward the high towers of Troy.

[Klytemnestra and Iphigenia enter in a horse-drawn wagon from the side entrance leading to Argos.]" Chorus: Hurrah! Hurrah! The great are greatly fortunate! Look at Iphigenia,

the king's daughter,
my mistress, and Klytemnestra, daughter of Tyndareos.
Just as they have flowered from great families,
they have come here for a great destiny. The rich and powerful are gods indeed to those people
who are not so fortunate.
Women born and raised at Chalkis, let's stand here.
Let's welcome the queen down from her carriage
to the ground without slipping,
with gentle hands and concerned spirits,
so that the new arrival,
the famous child of Agamemnon,
feels no fear.
To these foreign women from Argos
let us foreign women offer no fright or uproar.

Klytemnestra: I take this as a good omen,
your warm welcome and kind words.
I too have some hope that I'm coming here
conducting a bride to a good marriage. Now take the things I've brought, a dowry for my
daughter,
out of the wagon, and take them carefully into the
house. You too, child, leave the horse-drawn wagon.
Put down your delicate, faltering foot.
And you, young women, take her in your arms,
bring her out of the wagon. Someone,
give me a hand too, as a support, so I can get down
from the carriage gracefully. Some of you,
stand in front of the yoked horse-team—
horses spook so easily, they don't listen to reason.
Receive this boychild, too, Agamemnon's offspring.
Orestes. He doesn't talk yet. Baby,
are you sleeping? Tired out by the wagon's jolting?
Wake up to a happy day—your sister's wedding!
The son of a noble man, himself a fine fellow,
whose mother's the daughter of the sea-god Nereus,
IPHIGENIA: I don't understand what you're saying, dearest Father. I don't understand.

AGAMEMNON: You speak so sensibly you make me cry even more.

IPHIGENIA: Then I'll talk nonsense, if I can make you happy.

AGAMEMNON: Oh God! I don't have the strength to keep silent! Thank you. 659

IPHIGENIA: Stay at home, Daddy, with your children.

AGAMEMNON: I want to. But I can't have what I want; that's why I'm in pain.

IPHIGENIA: I wish all wars would vanish, Menelaus' troubles too!

AGAMEMNON: They will kill others first, those things that have already killed me.

IPHIGENIA: What a long time you've been away in the bay of Aulis!

AGAMEMNON: Even now it's holding on to me, so the army can't set out.

IPHIGENIA: Where do they say those Trojans live, Daddy?

AGAMEMNON: Where I wish he didn't live, Paris the son of Priam.

IPHIGENIA: You're setting out on a long journey, leaving me behind?

AGAMEMNON: You'll arrive, my daughter, at the same place as your father. 660

IPHIGENIA: Well... I wish it was all right for you to make this journey with me.

AGAMEMNON: You'll have a voyage that will make you remember your father.

IPHIGENIA: Will I set out with Mother, or sail alone?

AGAMEMNON: Alone, left alone by your father and your mother.

IPHIGENIA: You don't mean you're sending me to another home, Father?
AGAMEMNON: That's enough now. It's not proper for young girls to know such things.  

IPHIGENIA: Hurry home from the Trojans, for my sake, Daddy, after you fix up everything over there.

AGAMEMNON: First I have to make a certain sacrifice here.

IPHIGENIA: Of course! It's necessary to keep sacred observance with holy rites.

AGAMEMNON: You will be there. You'll stand near the basins.

IPHIGENIA: Will I lead the dances around the altar, Daddy?

AGAMEMNON: I envy you, more than myself, for your ignorance. Go on inside the house. It's wrong for girls to be seen in public.²⁰³ But give me a kiss, and your right hand, since you're going to live too long apart from your father. [embraces her] Oh, your body, your cheeks, your golden hair.²⁰⁴ what a torment the city of Troy, and Helen too, have turned into for us. I'll say no more! Sudden tears come to my eyes when I touch you. Go into the house.

[Exit Iphigenia into Agamemnon's tent. Agamemnon turns to Klytemnestra.]

As for you, daughter of Leda,²⁰⁵ I beg your pardon for this, if I became too overwhelmed with sorrow, since I am going to give my daughter away to Achilles. Departures are happy, of course, but nevertheless they hurt the parents, when a father, after spending much labor to bring up his daughter carefully, hands her over to another house.²⁰⁶

KLYTEMNESTRA: I'm not so insensitive. These events will make me suffer too—be sure of it—when the time comes when I lead

my daughter forth with the wedding songs. So I don't blame you. But habit, and the passage of time, will soften the pain. Now—I know the name of the man to whom you've promised the child, but I wish to know what family he's from, and his country.²⁰⁷

AGAMEMNON: Aigina was born daughter to Asopos.²⁰⁸

KLYTEMNESTRA: Which god or mortal man married her?

AGAMEMNON: Zeus. She bore Aiakos, king of Oenone.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Which child of Aiakos inherited his house?

AGAMEMNON: Peleus. Peleus married the daughter of Nereus.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Did the god give her? Or did Peleus steal her, in defiance of the gods?²⁰⁸

AGAMEMNON: Zeus made the match, and her guardian gave her up.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Where did he marry her? Amidst the swelling billows?

AGAMEMNON: Where Chiron lives, in the sacred foothills of Mount Pelion.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Where they say the race of Centaurs make their home?

AGAMEMNON: There the gods celebrated Peleus' wedding.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Did Thetis or his father raise Achilles?

AGAMEMNON: Chiron did, so he wouldn't learn the habits of evil men.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Hmmm!²¹⁰ The one who raised him was wise, the one who arranged it even wiser.

AGAMEMNON: That's the sort of man who will be your child's husband.

KLYTEMNESTRA: No faults there. In what Greek city does he live?

AGAMEMNON: Near the river Apidanos, in the mountains of Phthia.
Klytemnestra: That's where he will take your daughter and mine?

Agamemnon: That will be his decision, the one who has acquired her.

Klytemnestra: Well, may they both prosper. On what day will he marry her?

Agamemnon: Whenever comes the full moon bringing good luck.

Klytemnestra: Have you already slaughtered the preliminary sacrifices to the goddess?

Agamemnon: I am about to. That's just what we're involved in now.

Klytemnestra: Then afterwards you'll hold the wedding feast?

Agamemnon: After sacrificing the sacrifices which I must sacrifice to the gods.

Klytemnestra: Where will I hold the party for the women?

Agamemnon: Here, near the Argives' well-sterned oars.

Klytemnestra: Fine—as it has to be. May it turn out well nevertheless!

Agamemnon: You know what to do, woman! Obey me!

Klytemnestra: By doing what? I've become accustomed to obeying you.

Agamemnon: I, right here, where the bridegroom is, will—

Klytemnestra: [interrupting] Without her mother? How will you do the things which I must do?

Agamemnon: I will give away your daughter, together with the Greeks.

Klytemnestra: And where must I be during this time?

Agamemnon: Go back to Argos and take care of your daughters.

Klytemnestra: Leaving the child? Who will hold the wedding torch?

Agamemnon: I will provide the light which is appropriate for the couple.

Klytemnestra: That's not our custom! Do you think these things are so unimportant?
The Trojans will take their stand on the bastions, all around the walls, whenever Ares who carries a bronze shield, by rowing the well-sterned oars, approaches on the sea the channels of the Simois, seeking to convey Helen (sister of the twin sons of Zeus in the sky) away from Priam to Greek land, by means of the spears and shields of the Greeks who endure many blows.

After he encircles the city of the Trojans with bloody war around its stone towers, after he wrenches heads back to cut their throats, after he destroys the city completely, he will drag out the screaming girls and the wife of Priam. Helen too, the daughter of Zeus, has been yanked out, weeping hard after abandoning her husband. Not to me! Not to my children's children may this prospect ever come, such as what will happen to the wealthy Lydian and Phrygian wives. They will stand beside their looms whispering to one another: “Which man will root me out like a flower, seizing me by my beautiful hair? after he has flattened the defenses of my fatherland, wept for, destroyed!” Because of you, daughter of the long-necked swan—whether the story's true that Leda met with a flying bird when Zeus changed his shape—

Iphigenia at Aulis

or if, instead, stories in poets’ writing-tablets have brought to human beings these lies which do us no good.\[\text{Enter Achilles from the side entrance leading to the Greek camp. He approaches Agamemnon's tent. Finding no attendants about, he addresses the Chorus and/or the audience.}\]

ACHILLES: Where's the general of the Greeks gathered here? Which of the servants is going to announce that the son of Peleus, Achilles, is at his door, looking for him? We're not all alike, those waiting here by Euripos. Some of us, not yet yoked into marriage, have left our homes empty, and are sitting around idle here on the beach. Others have bedfellows, but no children. What a strange lust for this expedition has fallen on Greece—not without the gods’ involvement! Well, I must discuss my own situation; if someone else wants to, he can speak for himself about his. After leaving Pharsalia and Peleus, do I wait around, contented with these weak breezes of Euripos, holding my Myrmidons in check? They're always pressing me: “Achilles, why are we waiting? How much more time is it necessary for us to measure out till the expedition against Troy? Do something, if you're going to do anything! Or else lead the army home! Don't wait around for the procrastinations of the two sons of Atreus!”

[Enter Clytemnestra from Agamemnon's tent.]

CLYTEMNESTRA: Child of the goddess daughter of Nereus, from inside I heard your words, and came out in front of the house. Achilles, Goddess of Propriety! Who is this I see, a woman possessing a beautiful appearance?
Klytemnestra: No wonder you don’t recognize me, since you’ve never met me. But I admire your respect for self-restraint. 132

Achilles: Who are you? Why have you come to this gathering of Greeks, a woman among men defended by shields? 133

Klytemnestra: I am the child of Leda, Klytemnestra by name. My husband is Lord Agamemnon.

Achilles: You’ve said well, and concisely, the appropriate things. But it’s shameful for me to be exchanging words with a woman.

[Achilles starts to leave.]

Klytemnestra: Wait! Why are you running away? Join your right hand to mine—the beginning of a happy marriage! 134

Achilles: What are you saying? I—to you—my hand? I’d couldn’t face Agamemnon, if I touched what’s not right for me to touch.

Klytemnestra: It’s completely proper, since you’re going to marry my child, son of the sea-goddess daughter of Nereus!

Achilles: What marriage are you talking about? Speechlessness grips me, woman. Unless you’re out of your mind and making up this amazing speech...

Klytemnestra: It’s completely normal for people to feel embarrassed when they meet their new relatives, especially when discussing marriage.

Achilles: I’ve never asked to marry your daughter, woman, and no proposal of marriage has ever come to me from the sons of Atreus.

Klytemnestra: Then what could have happened? For your part, go ahead, be amazed at my words! What comes from you is also amazing to me.

Achilles: Consider—it’s in both our interests to consider this situation. We can’t both be deceived by words—can we?

Klytemnestra: Has some terrible trick been played on me? I’m trying to arrange a nonexistent marriage, it seems. I’m so ashamed!

Achilles: Perhaps someone has decided to insult both you and me. Forget about this matter. Take it lightly.

Klytemnestra: Goodbye. I can’t even meet your eyes any longer. 135 I’ve been made to seem a liar, though I don’t deserve it.

Achilles: Goodbye to you too from me. I’m going inside this house to try and find your husband.

[The Old Man opens the door of the tent.]

Old Man: Foreigner, descendant of Aiakos, wait! Yes, I’m addressing you, child born from a goddess, and you too, daughter of Leda! 136

Achilles: Who’s that who’s opened the door and is calling out? How panic-stricken he sounds!

Old Man: A slave. I’m not proud of it. My lot doesn’t let me.

Achilles: Whose slave? Not mine. My affairs are quite separate from Agamemnon’s.

Old Man: That woman’s, the one in front of the house. Her father Tyndareos gave me to her.

Achilles: All right, I’ve stopped short. Speak if you must. Tell me why you’ve detained me.

Old Man: Are you two standing all by yourselves out there near the door?

Achilles: Come out of the royal house so you can speak to us alone.
OLD MAN: Fortune, and my forethought, save the ones I want to save!137

ACHILLES: His words will reveal the future, no doubt. He's got some pretensions!138

KLYTEMNESTRA: Don't wait for an oath, if you need to say something to me!139

OLD MAN: You know me, then—that I've always been devoted to you and your children?

KLYTEMNESTRA: I know that you've served my house for a long time.

OLD MAN: And that Lord Agamemnon got me as part of your dowry.

KLYTEMNESTRA: You came to Argos with me. You've always been mine.

OLD MAN: That's right. And I am devoted to you, but less to your husband.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Unveil to me now the words you wish to speak.

OLD MAN: Your child—her father—the one who sowed her—intends to kill her with his own hand—

KLYTEMNESTRA: What?! I spit out your words, old man! You're out of your mind!

OLD MAN: Blooding the poor girl's white neck with a knife!

KLYTEMNESTRA: I'm in torture! Has my husband gone mad, then?

OLD MAN: He's in his right mind, except where you and your child are concerned. There he's not thinking straight.

KLYTEMNESTRA: For what reason? Which of the evil spirits is driving him?240

OLD MAN: A decree from the gods, so Kalkhas says, so the army can set off—

KLYTEMNESTRA: Where? Poor me! Poor girl, whom her father's going to kill! 880

OLD MAN: Toward the city of Dardanos,144 so Menelaos can get Helen back.

KLYTEMNESTRA: So the homecoming of Helen has doomed Iphigenia?

OLD MAN: You've got the whole thing. Her father is going to sacrifice your child to Artemis.

KLYTEMNESTRA: The marriage offered a pretext to get me to come here from home . . .

OLD MAN: So you'd bring your daughter gladly, marrying her to Achilles.

KLYTEMNESTRA: My daughter, you have journeyed to your death—you and your mother both.

OLD MAN: The suffering you're both undergoing deserves pity. Agamemnon has dared to undertake a dreadful deed.

KLYTEMNESTRA: It's all over for me. I'm lost! I can't keep the tears from my eyes any longer.

OLD MAN: Being torn from children is painful. Go ahead and weep.

KLYTEMNESTRA: You—these plans, old man, how do you say you learned them?

OLD MAN: I was on my way bringing you a second letter.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Cancelling the order to send the child to her death? Or repeating it?

OLD MAN: Telling you not to send her. At that moment your husband was in his right mind.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Then if you were carrying this letter, why didn't you deliver it to me?

OLD MAN: Menelaos—the cause of all these disasters—stole it from me.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Child of Nereus' daughter, son of Peleus, do you hear these things?

ACHILLES: I hear that you are in trouble, and I don't take my part in this lightly.
Klytemnestra: They've tricked my child with marriage to you, and they're going to kill her!

Achilles: I too find fault with your husband, and that's no simple matter.

Klytemnestra: I will not be ashamed to fall at your feet, a mortal born of a goddess. Why should I try to look dignified now?
Is there anything I should care about more than my child? Help, child of the goddess!—both my misfortune, and the girl who's called your wife—a lie, certainly, but nevertheless I put on her bridal wreath and brought her here thinking she was to be married, but really I transported her to slaughter. Blame will fall on you, too, because you didn't help her: even if you didn't marry her, you were called the poor girl's very own husband. For the sake of your manly beard, of your right hand, of your mother— I won't say of your name, since that has destroyed me, but because of that name you ought to save me! I have no altar to flee to, other than your knees. No one on my side smiles at me here. You hear what Agamemnon plans, savage, stopping at nothing. I've come, as you see, a woman into an army ready to sail, rowdy, eager for crime, but good and useful, whenever they want to be. If you have the courage to stretch your hand out over me, we're saved. If not, we can't be saved.

Chorus: Having children is strange; it's like a powerful drug. Suffering for their children is something shared by all.

Achilles: My lofty spirit is impelled onward! It knows how to feel distress when things go badly, and also how to be happy when they're swelling high—both within measure, though.

Among human beings such men as this are accounted to live their whole lives through in accord with thought. There are times when it's pleasant not to think too much, others when it's useful to use thought.

Since I was raised by the very righteous Chiron, I learned to have an uncomplicated character. The two sons of Atreus—if they're thinking straight, I'll obey them, but when they're not I won't obey. Both here in Aulis and at Troy I'll demonstrate a free man's spirit, doing my part with my spear to honor Ares the wargod.

As for you, who have endured cruelty from your closest kin, insofar as it's possible for a young man, cloaking you in just the right amount of pity, I will arrange things, and your young girl will not be slaughtered by her father, since she's been called my woman. I will not offer your husband my person to use in weaving his conspiracies! My name—even if it did not wield the knife—will be the murderer of your child. The cause is your husband, but my body will no longer be guiltless if because of me, and "marriage" to me, she dies, that maiden who's experienced awful, unbearable things, dishonored in such an amazingly unworthy way! I'd be the biggest coward among the Greeks! I would be nothing! Menelaos would be ranked among real men, and I as sprung not from Peleus, but from an evil spirit, if my name becomes a murderer for your husband.

In the name of Nereus, nurtured in the wet billows, progenitor of Thetis, who bore me, Agamemnon will not lay a hand on your daughter, not even stretch the tip of his finger toward her robe! Or else Sipylos, that barbarian frontier
from which the family tree of the two generals comes, will be a civilized place, and my own country Phthia will never be mentioned again. Kalkhas the prophet will get busy with his basins and bitter barley-grains—but what kind of man is a prophet? Even when he gets lucky he tells a few true things along with a lot of lies; when he doesn’t get lucky, he leaves. This declaration hasn’t been made so I can marry your daughter (thousands of girls are seeking my bed) but because Agamemnon has shamefully abused me. He should have asked me for my name as a snare for the child. Klytemnestra was convinced to give her daughter to me, rather than anyone else, as a husband. I would have given my name to the Greeks, if the trip to Troy was endangered because of that. I wouldn’t have refused to help the common cause, along with those I set out with. But as things are I’m nothing, and the generals find it easy to treat me well at some times, not at others. My sword will soon find out, the sword which I will anoint with bloodstains even before we go to Troy, if anyone tries to take your daughter away from me! Don’t be upset! I have appeared to you as a god, a very great one. I’m not—but I will be!

CHORUS: Child of Peleus, you have spoken words worthy of yourself and of the sea-divinity, an august goddess.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Well... How am I to praise you correctly, neither going too far nor saying too little, so that I lose your favor? Noble men, hearing themselves praised, sometimes dislike those who praise them, if they praise too much. I’m ashamed to put forth appeals for sympathy when my suffering is mine alone; you are not sick with my disease. Yet it looks good when a worthy man aids a person in trouble despite being outside the family. Take pity on us! What we’ve suffered deserves pity! At first, thinking I’d have you for my son-in-law, I grasped at an empty dream. But still, it might be an omen for your marriage in the future—my daughter, dead, something which you are obliged to prevent. Yet you spoke well at the beginning, well at the end, too, if you have the will, my child will be saved. Do you want her to embrace your knees as a suppliant? An unmarried girl should not do that, but if you like, she’ll come, gazing at you with modesty, yet frankly. If I can achieve the same effect on you without her here—

ACHILLES: Let her stay inside. Respectable things receive respect.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Nevertheless, there are limits to propriety.

ACHILLES: Don’t you bring out your child into my sight, and let’s not leave ourselves open to criticism, woman, from those who don’t understand. An army crowded together, far from home with nothing to do, loves scandal and nasty gossip. Whether you two kneel to me or don’t kneel makes no difference. Only one challenge exists for me now, the greatest: to save you both from disaster! So listen, and believe one thing: that I won’t lie. If I tell lies and trick you, let me die! Let me not die if I save the girl.

KLYTEMNESTRA: May you receive perpetual benefit for helping the unfortunate!

ACHILLES: Now listen, so the matter may turn out well.
Klytemnestra: What have you decided? Of course I must listen to you.

Achilles: Let's appeal to the father again, to reach a better decision.

Klytemnestra: The man's a coward! He's too scared of the army!

Achilles: But arguments can wrestle down arguments.

Klytemnestra: That's a cold hope. But what must I do? Tell me.

Achilles: First, kneel to him and beg him not to kill children.
If he goes contrary to you, you must come back to me.
If the asking persuades him, there would be no need for me to make a move, since this brings your salvation.
And I'll look better in the eyes of my ally, and the army couldn't criticize me, if I work things out by using reasoning instead of force.
So, with everything arranged properly, this situation would turn out with you as well as your family members pleased, with no involvement on my part.

Klytemnestra: With what self-restraint you have spoken! I must do what you think best.
But if I don't accomplish what I hope I will, where will I see you after that? Where can I go, desperate to find your strong arm to protect us from disaster?

Achilles: I'll be on the lookout for you, where I should look out.
Don't let anyone see you going all upset through the throng of Greeks. Don't bring disgrace on your forefathers' house. Tyndareus does not deserve to be spoken of disrespectfully; he's a great man in Greece.

Klytemnestra: Yes. You be the leader. I must be your slave.
If the gods exist, you—a man who behaves justly—will find good fortune. If not, why bother about anything?

Chorus: What an outcry that wedding song set up, accompanied by the Libyan flute, the kithara which loves dancing, and the pipe made of reeds when the Muses with their beautiful hair came up Mount Pelion, stamping their feet shed in golden sandals on the earth at the banquet of the gods for the wedding of Peleus, honoring Thetis and the son of Aiakos with melodious sounds in the mountains of the Centaurs throughout the forests of Pelion. And the Trojan Ganymede, grandson of Dardanos, the darling pride of Zeus' bed, was pouring nectar out of the mixing-bowls into hollow cups of gold. And on the shining white sand twirling in circles the fifty daughters of Nereus were dancing for the wedding. With their pine-tree spears and their heads crowned with grass the troop of Centaurs came riding to the feast of the gods and the mixing-bowls full of Bacchus. And they gave a great shout: "Daughter of Nereus! Chiron the seer, who knows the inspired song of Apollo, has spoken: you will bear a child, a great beacon to Thessaly, who will go with his Myrmidons armed with spears and shields.
to Troy and burn to the ground
the famous land of Priam,
with his body fitted out with golden armor,
the work of Hephaistos—
gifts from his mother, Thetis,
the goddess who gave birth to him!"  
Back then, the gods made
a happy marriage,
the wedding of the eldest of Nereus' daughters
and Peleus.

But on your head, Iphigenia, on the beautiful
locks of your hair,
the Greeks will set a garland
—as they do on a virgin heifer with dappled skin
coming from the rocky mountain caves—
before they bloody your human throat,
you, who were not brought up to the sound
of whistles and the shepherds' reed pipe,
but close by your mother's side,
to be dressed as a bride for the sons of Inachos!  
Where does the mask of propriety
or that of excellence
have any force,
since what is unholy now holds sway,
excellence is disregarded
and left behind by human beings,
lawlessness rules over law,
and humans don't join in trying
to keep the gods from punishing them?  

[Enter Klytemnestra from the tent.]  
Klytemnestra: I've come out of the house anticipating my husband
who went out and left the house a long time ago.
My unhappy child is in tears,
breaking into many different kinds of laments,
since she's heard about the death her father is planning
for her.

But I was mentioning the very one who's now
approaching,
yes, Agamemnon, the one who'll be found guilty at once
of plotting unholy deeds against his own children.

[Enter Agamemnon from the side entrance leading to the Greek camp.]

Agamemnon: Offspring of Leda, howfortunate that I've found you
outside the house, so I can discuss with you, without the
maiden,
matters which are not appropriate for girls about to be
married.  
Klytemnestra: What is it, this matter you're taking the perfect occasion
to discuss?

Agamemnon: Send the child out in front of her father's house.
The basins are all decorated and ready,
the barley's ready for hands to sprinkle on the purifying
fire,
the calves too, which before a marriage must fall for the
goddess,
snorting out streams of black blood for Artemis.

Klytemnestra: You speak well, in words at least, but as for your actions,
I don't know how I could use words to speak well of them.

[calling toward Agamemnon's tent]

Daughter, come outside! You know in detail
what your father plans to do. And bring Orestes too,
your brother; wrap him in your dress, child.

[Enter Iphigenia with Orestes.]

Look, here she is, obedient to your authority.
In everything else I will speak for her and for myself.

Agamemnon: Child, why are you crying? And you're not looking happily
at me anymore,
with your eyes cast down and holding your dress in front
of them.
Klytemnestra: Ughhh! What beginning can I find for your crimes against me? I can start at any point—the latest events, the middle, anywhere!

Agamemnon: What is it? How you've all come together against me, with your distress and upset eyes.

Klytemnestra: Husband, answer like a well-born man what I'm going to ask you.

Agamemnon: There's no need for orders. I want you to ask me.

Klytemnestra: The child, yours and mine—do you intend to kill her?

Agamemnon: Ah! You've said something dreadful! You've got no right to be imagining such things—

Klytemnestra: [interrupting] Shut up! Again—answer that first question for me.

Agamemnon: If you were to ask an appropriate question, you'd get an appropriate answer.

Klytemnestra: I'm not asking anything else. Don't you tell me anything else.

Agamemnon: Goddess of Fate! And Chance! and the spirit which drives me!

Klytemnestra: And me and this girl, too. One spirit, three people cursed.

Agamemnon: What wrong's been done to you?

Klytemnestra: You ask me that? This man seems to have sense, but really he makes no sense.

Agamemnon: I'm done for! My secrets have been betrayed.

Klytemnestra: I know everything. I've learned what you are planning to do to me.

Agamemnon: Look—I'm keeping quiet. Why should I add to this disaster by brazenly attempting to tell lies?

Klytemnestra: Then listen. I'm going to take the veil off my words. No longer will I use hints and double meanings. In the first place (so that I may shame you with this first) you married me against my will and took me by force, after killing my first husband, Tantalos.

My tiny baby you ripped violently from my breasts and you smashed him on the ground.

My brothers, the twin sons of Zeus, glittering on their horses, made war on you, but my aged father Tyndareos saved you, when you begged him for help, and you got your marriage to me back.

Once I had reconciled myself to you, you will admit that concerning you and your household I was a flawless wife, controlled as far as sex was concerned, always trying to increase your estate, so that you were happy when you came home, and seemed a fortunate man when you went out. For a man it's a rare hunt to capture such a consort, not so rare to have a worthless woman.

After three daughters, I bore you a son, this child here, and one of these children you will arrogantly steal from me.

And if someone should ask you for what reason you will kill her, speak! What will you say? Do I have to speak for you? So that Menelaos can have Helen. A fine answer, to give children as payment for a bad woman! We will be buying the most hateful thing in exchange for the very dearest!
Go ahead, but if you go off to war and leave me behind
in the house,
and you are over there, during your long absence
what sort of feelings do you think I will have
in that house,
when I see the chairs she used to sit in empty,
and her bedroom empty, and I sit alone,
in tears, always singing this lament:
“He killed you, my child, the father who sired you,
killed you with his own hand, not someone else, not some
other hand,
leaving behind such a reward to his family.”
When all it takes is a tiny excuse
for the children—the ones that are left—and I
to welcome you with the welcome by which you ought
to be welcomed.
Don’t, in the gods’ name! Don’t make me become
wicked toward you! And don’t you become wicked
yourself!
Well, then... You’ll sacrifice the child. Then what prayers will you offer?
What blessing will you ask for yourself as you slit your
daughter’s throat?
An evil homecoming, since you wickedly set out from
home?
Is it right for me to pray for some blessing on you?
Should we assume that the gods aren’t paying attention,
if we’re going to be friendly toward murderers?
When you come back to Argos, will you fall on your
children?
You have no right. Which of your children will look at you,
if you choose and kill one of them?
Did you come to this decision by careful thought,
or is waving your sceptre and leading the army the only
thing that matters to you?
The right speech to make to the Greeks was this:
“Achaeans, do you wish to sail to the land of the Trojans?
Hold a lottery for whose child must die.”
That would have been the just thing, not to provide your
child
to the Greeks as a chosen victim.
Or let Menelaos kill his daughter Hermione in front
of her mother.
This is his affair. But as things stand,
I, who stayed faithful to my marriage-bed, will lose my
child,
while the one who betrayed hers will take
her coddled little daughter back to Sparta, and live happily.
Reject my claims, if what I’ve said was wrong.
But if I’ve spoken well, don’t kill
your child and mine! Then you’ll be thinking straight.

CHORUS: Be persuaded! It’s a good thing to join together in saving
a child,
Agamemnon. No human being will contradict these
words.

IPHIGENIA: If I had Orpheus’ way with words, Father,
to persuade by singing, so that rocks would come to me,
and by my words I could charm whomever I wanted,
that’s what I would have done. But as things are,
as my wise sayings I will offer only my tears, since I might
have some effect with them.
As the suppliant’s olive-branch, I wrap my body
around your knees, the body which this woman bore to
you.
Don’t kill me before my time! It’s sweet to look upon the
light.
Don’t force me to look at the things beneath the earth.
I first called you “Father,” you first called me “child.”
I was the first who sat upon your knees,
gave you sweet kisses, and got them in return.
This was what you said then: “Will I see you, daughter,
in the house of your fortunate husband,
living and thriving in a way that’s worthy of me?”
This was my answer as I touched your beard
which I’m grasping now with my hand:
"What about me seeing you? Will I welcome you as an old man
with the sweet hospitality of my house, Daddy,
paying back the work of nurturing you gave while raising me?"
I still hold the memory of those conversations,
but you've forgotten them, and you want to kill me.
No! I beg you, in the name of Pelops, and your father Atreus,
and Mother here, who endured pain when giving birth
to me
and is now undergoing this second labor pain. 199
What do I have to do with the marriage of Helen and Paris?
How does that result in my destruction, Daddy?
Look at me, give me a glance and a kiss,
so that if I die I'll have this at least, a memory of you,
if you aren't persuaded by my words.
Brother, you're very small to come to the aid of your dear ones,
but weep with me nevertheless, entreat our father
not to kill your sister. Some sort of understanding of awful things
is inherent even in little babies who don't speak.
Look, he's pleading with you although he's silent,
Father. Value me, take pity on my life!
Yes, by your beard we beg you, two of your kin,
one still a baby bird, the other grown.
Cutting this whole speech short, I will win with one word:
this light is the sweetest thing for humans to see,
the things down below are nothing. Someone who prays
to die
is mad. Living badly is better than dying well. 191

CHORUS: Oh, reckless Helen, because of you and your marriage
a great struggle has come for the sons of Atreus and their children.

AGAMEMNON: I'm aware of what's worthy of pity and what is not,
and I love my children. Otherwise I'd be mad.
Taking this awful step fills me with horror, wise,
but not to take it is horrifying too. I have to do it.
See, both of you, how huge is this army, fenced in with ships,
how many chiefs of the Greeks in their bronze armor,
for whom there'll be no voyage to Troy's towers,
who won't get to overturn its famous foundations,
if I don't sacrifice you as the seer Kalkhas says.
Some kind of Aphrodite 192 has driven the Greek army mad
to sail as quickly as possible to the barbarians' land,
and put an end to their thefts of Greek wives.
These men will kill my daughters in Argos
and both of you, and me, if I reject the decrees of the goddess. 193
It isn't Menelaos who's enslaved me, child.
I haven't come around to what he wants.
It's Greece for which I must sacrifice you,
whether I want to or not. We are all less important than this.
Greece must be free, and so much as it is in you
and me for her to be free, so much we must do,
and not, since we are Greeks, have our wives
taken from us by force, by barbarians.

[Exit Agamemnon toward the army camp.]

KLYTEMNESTRA: Oh my child, oh foreign women,
I can't bear the pain of your death. 194
Your father hands you over to Hades, and runs away.

IPHIGENIA: I lament for myself, Mother. The same melody
of misfortune
has fallen to both of us.
No more for me the light,
this brightness of the sun.
Iphigenia at Aulis

[She sings] Oh... Snow-whipped grove of the Trojans, mountains of Ida where once Priam cast that tender little baby robbed from his mother and consigned to death— Paris, who was called "the one from Ida" in the city of Troy. I wish he had never settled that herdsman, Alexander, "the Defender," nurtured among the cows, by the shining water where lie the springs of the Nymphs, the meadow blossoming with tender green shoots, with flowers of hyacinth and roses for goddesses to cull. That is where Athena once came, and Hera, and wily Aphrodite, and Zeus' messenger Hermes—Aphrodite proud of the desire she arouses, Athena of her spear, Hera the wife of Zeus of her royal marriage—they came to a hateful conflict, a judgment on their beauty. Artemis has established, maidens, a preliminary sacrifice for the voyage to Troy which brings a famous name to the Greeks, but to me, death. Mother! Mother! The father who sired me has betrayed me in my suffering and gone away. Suffering, I look upon that hateful, hateful Helen and I am slaughtered, I die by the unholy murder-strokes of an unholy father. I wish Aulis had never welcomed

chorus: I pity you for this awful disaster you are going through, something you should never have experienced.

Iphigenia: Mother who gave birth to me, I see a crowd of men near by.

Klytemnestra: It's the son of the goddess, Achilles, for whom you came here.

Iphigenia: Women, open up the house for me, so I can hide myself.

Klytemnestra: Why are you running away, child?

Iphigenia: I'm ashamed to see Achilles.

Klytemnestra: Why?

Iphigenia: This marriage that turned out wrong brings shame upon me.

Klytemnestra: After what's happened, you're not in a position to worry about manners! Stay here! If we have any power, it doesn't come from dignity!
[Enter Achilles.]

Achilles: Unhappy woman, daughter of Leda—

Klytemnestra: You speak no lie.

Achilles: Terrible shouts among the Greeks—

Klytemnestra: Shouting what? Tell me!

Achilles: —about your child—

Klytemnestra: You've spoken bad, ominous words.

Achilles: —that she must be killed!

Klytemnestra: And no-one says no?

Achilles: Into the uproar I myself came close—

Klytemnestra: What, stranger?

Achilles: to being stoned to death!

Klytemnestra: Why, for wanting to save my daughter?

Achilles: Exactly that.

Klytemnestra: Who had the courage to touch your body?

Achilles: All the Greeks!

Klytemnestra: Wasn't the Myrmidon army by your side?

Achilles: As the first rank—of enemies!

Klytemnestra: Then we are lost, child.

Achilles: They called me a slave to my wife!

Klytemnestra: And what did you answer?

Achilles: Not to kill my future bride!

Klytemnestra: That's right!

Achilles: Whose father promised her to me!

Klytemnestra: And brought her here from Argos!

Achilles: But I was defeated by their bellowing.

Klytemnestra: The masses are an evil to be feared.

Achilles: I'll defend you nevertheless!

Klytemnestra: One man fighting many?

Achilles: Do you see these men carrying my armor?

Klytemnestra: May your courage be rewarded!

Achilles: I will be rewarded.

Klytemnestra: My child won't be slaughtered?

Achilles: Not if I can help it.

Klytemnestra: Will someone come to take my daughter?

Achilles: Thousands. Odysseus will lead them.

Klytemnestra: The offspring of Sisyphos! 

Achilles: That very one.

Klytemnestra: On his own initiative? Or commanded by the army?

Achilles: Chosen, but willing!

Klytemnestra: A wicked choice, to commit murder!

Achilles: But I'll hold him back!

Klytemnestra: Won't he seize her and drag her off against her will?

Achilles: Yes, by her golden hair!

Klytemnestra: What should I do then?

Achilles: Hold on to your daughter!

Klytemnestra: For that reason she won't be killed?

Achilles: That's what it will come to.
IPHIGENIA: [interrupting] Listen to my words, Mother! I see you raging against your husband, but it's useless. It's not easy for us to bear what can't be borne.

It is right to thank this stranger for his good intentions. But even you must see this: he must not be attacked by the army.

We would gain nothing, while he'd meet with disaster. Listen, Mother, what sorts of things have come to me as I've been thinking.

Death has been decreed—for me and by me.

I want to carry out this same act in a glorious way, casting all lowborn behavior aside.

Look at it this way with me, Mother, see how well I reason:

All of Greece, great Greece, is looking at me now! In me lies the setting forth of the ships, the ruin of the Trojans, and women, in the future, even if barbarians try something.

never again to allow them to rob those happy women from Greece, once they have paid for the theft of Helen, whom Paris stole. I will fend off all these things by dying, and my glorious fame, as the woman who made Greece free, will become blest.

Also, I should not love my life too much.

You bore me as something shared with all Greeks, not just for yourself.

Now thousands of men have armed themselves with shields, thousands grasp their oars, since our fatherland has been wronged; they will boldly take action against the enemy, and die for Greece.

Will my single life hold back all this?

How is that just? Would I have a single argument to make against it?

Let me move to other points. This man must not go into battle with all the Greeks for a woman's sake, or die.

It's more important for one single man to look upon the light than a thousand women. If Artemis wishes to take my body, will I, a mortal, stand in the way of a goddess? No! Impossible! I give my body to Greece. Make the sacrifice! Eradicate Troy! For a long time to come that will be my monument, my children, my marriage, my fame! It's proper for Greeks to rule barbarians, Mother, not barbarians Greeks, because they are slaves, but Greeks are free!

CHORUS: Your intention, young girl, is noble. But what is happening here, and the goddess, are sick.

ACHILLES: Daughter of Agamemnon, some one of the gods was intending to make me happy, if I were to gain marriage to you.

I compete with you for Greece, and with Greece for you. You have spoken well, worthy of your fatherland, abandoning the idea of fighting with the gods who rule over you, you figured out what was both noble and necessary. So greater desire to marry you comes over me, now that I see your true nature. You are noble. But look: I want to help you out and take you to my house. I am upset—let Thetis know this— if I am not to save you by going to battle the Greeks.

Think carefully. Death is a bad, terrible thing.

IPHIGENIA: I speak these words without fear or hope of anything. Helen, Tyndareos' daughter, because of her body is strong enough to establish war and death for men. Don't you, stranger, die on my behalf, or kill anyone. Let me save Greece, if I am able to.
ACHILLES: Brave spirit! I have nothing more to say in answer, since this course seems right to you. Your thought is noble. Why shouldn't someone speak the truth? Nevertheless, you might still, perhaps, change your mind about this.

So you can understand the things I've said,
I will go now and place my arms near the altar,
so as not to let it happen, but keep you from dying.
You will take me up on my words, perhaps,
when you see the knife close to your throat.
I won't allow you to die because of your own thoughtlessness.
I will go now, with these arms of mine, to the goddess's altar,
and there I'll watch carefully for your arrival.

[Exit Achilles toward the army camp.]

IPHIGENIA: Mother, why are you silent, drenching your eyes with tears?

KLYTEMNESTRA: I have a dreadful reason to feel anguish in my heart.

IPHIGENIA: Stop it! Don't make me a coward. Let me convince you about this.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Speak. You will get whatever you want from me, child.

IPHIGENIA: Don't cut off a lock of your hair.
Don't wrap black garments around your body.208

KLYTEMNESTRA: Why did you say this, child? After I've lost you?

IPHIGENIA: You won't! I have been saved, and you'll be famous because of me.

KLYTEMNESTRA: How's that? I should not mourn for your death?

IPHIGENIA: Not at all, since no burial mound will be heaped over me.


IPHIGENIA: The altar of the goddess, Zeus' daughter, is my monument.209

KLYTEMNESTRA: My child, I will obey you. You speak so well.

IPHIGENIA: As a fortunate woman, one doing service to Greece!

KLYTEMNESTRA: What shall I tell your sisters?

IPHIGENIA: Don't put black clothes on them either.

KLYTEMNESTRA: May I say to the girls some kind word from you?

IPHIGENIA: Just "goodbye." And bring up Orestes here for me, to be a man.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Kiss him. You're looking at him for the last time.

IPHIGENIA: [to Orestes] My dearest, as much as you could you came to the aid of your kinfolk.210

KLYTEMNESTRA: Is there anything you'd like me to do back in Argos?

IPHIGENIA: Don't hate my father, your husband.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Because of you that man deserves to undergo awful trials.

IPHIGENIA: For the sake of the Greek land, unwillingly, he destroyed me.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Yes, by deception, like a lowborn man, unworthy of his father Atreus.

IPHIGENIA: Who will conduct me before I'm dragged off by the hair?211

KLYTEMNESTRA: I, with you—

IPHIGENIA: Not you! What you say is wrong.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Holding onto your robe—

IPHIGENIA: Mother, obey me.
Stay here. That's better for you and me both.
Let one of my father's servants here escort me to the grove of Artemis, where I will be slaughtered.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Oh child, are you really going?
IPHIGENIA AT Aulis

IPHIGENIA: And I will never, never come back again.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Abandoning your mother?

IPHIGENIA: Yes, as you see. It's not what you deserve.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Stop! Don't leave me!

IPHIGENIA: I won't allow you to shed tears.

[to the Chorus] You, young women, because of my fate
sing a hymn of praise to Zeus' daughter Artemis.
Let ritual silence go among the Greeks.212
Let someone provide the baskets, let the flame
be kindled with the sacred barley-grains,
let my father circle the altar to the right.213
I am coming,
the woman who will give the Greeks victory and
salvation.

[sings] Lead me on, the destroyer
of Troy and the Trojans.214
Bring me garlands, place them on my head.
Here is my hair for you to crown.
Bring spring water from basins too.215
Dancing, circle around the temple, around the altar
of Artemis,
powerful Lady Artemis,
the blessed one.
With my own blood, if it must be,
and my sacrifice
I will wash away the prophecies.216
Oh Mother, dear mother,
no tears of ours
will we give you;
it isn't proper at a sacred rite.
Young women,
sing with me to Artemis,
whose temple stands opposite Chalkis,
where the armed force grows mad with waiting
because of my name

[Exit Iphigenia along the side entrance leading to the Greek camp. Klytemnestra and
Orestes into the tent.]

CHORUS: [sings] Oh look
at the destroyer of Troy and the Trojans,
as she goes, putting on garlands
and spring water from basins,
dying at the altar
of the goddess who rules her life,
her beautiful neck slashed and streaming with drops
of blood.
Fountains of lovely dew
and basins held by your father
wait for you, and the Greek army too,
longing to go toward the city of Troy.
But we will call on Artemis, the daughter of Zeus,
a strong goddess, for a fortunate outcome.219
Oh Lady, Lady,
pleased by this human sacrifice,
send the army of the Greeks
to the land of the Trojans
and the treacherous city of Troy
and grant that Agamemnon,
by force of arms, place on Greece the most glorious garland,
and encircle his own head
with fame which will always be remembered. 1530

[Enter Messenger from the side-entrance leading to the army camp.] 1531

MESSENER: Child of Tyndareos! Klytemnestra! Come out of the house, so you can hear my words!

[Enter Klytemnestra, with Orestes, from the tent.]

KLYTEMNESTRA: Hearing your cry, I've come here,
frighted, unhappy, driven mad with fear.
Surely you haven't come bringing some other disaster to add to the present one?

MESSENER: No—about your child I want to tell you marvelous, strange things.

KLYTEMNESTRA: Don't delay then. Speak as quickly as you can.

MESSENER: Dear mistress, you will learn everything clearly.
I'll start from the beginning, unless my mixed-up thoughts
confuse my tongue as I speak.
When we came to the grove of Artemis, daughter of Zeus, and the meadows full of flowers where the Greek army had gathered, leading your child, at once the crowd of Greeks gathered around. When Lord Agamemnon saw the girl walking into the grove toward slaughter he groaned, and turning his head away he shed tears, holding his cloak in front of his eyes.
She took her place next to her father and spoke: "Father, I am here for you, and on behalf of my fatherland and of the whole land of Greece,

I give my body willingly for them to take and sacrifice at the altar of the goddess, if that is the prophecy.
For my part, may you all fare well, may you get victory by arms and come back to your native land. Therefore, let none of the Greeks take hold of me; I will offer my neck silently, and with good cheer." That is what she said. Every one who heard her was struck by the courage and the manliness of the maiden. Standing in their midst, Talithybios (whose function this was) enjoined silence, ritual silence, upon the army. With his hand Kalkhas the seer placed in a golden basket a sharp knife which he had drawn from its sheath, and he put a garland on the girl. The son of Peleus took the basket and the water, circled the altar of the goddess holding them, and spoke: "Child of Zeus, killer of animals, you who turn your lamp as a light during the night, receive this sacrifice which we offer you as a gift, the army of the Greeks together with Lord Agamemnon, the unstained blood from the neck of a beautiful maiden, and grant an easy sailing for the ships, and let us uproar Troy's citadel with our armed force." The sons of Areus and the whole army stood looking at the ground. The priest grasped the knife, spoke a prayer, and looked at the throat to see where he would strike. And pain, no small pain, came into my heart, as I stood with my head bowed. Suddenly there was an incredible sight! Every single person could clearly hear the sound of the blow, but no one saw where the girl fell to the ground. The priest cried out, the whole army echoed him, seeing an unexpected sign from some god which one can't believe even if clearly seen.
A deer lay on the ground, gasping its life out, very large, very beautiful to look at, whose blood was raining all over the goddess's altar. And—what do you think?—at that point Kalkhas said joyfully

"Leaders of this army of Greeks united, do you see this sacrifice, which the goddess has placed on the altar? A deer which ranges the mountains! She prefers this to the girl, so as not to stain her altar with noble blood! She has received this with pleasure, and grants to us a voyage with fair winds, and a landing at Troy! Therefore let every sailor lift up his courage and dash for his ship. This very day we must go, leaving the hollow bay of Aulis to cross the Aegan swells!" Once the sacrifice had been completely consumed by Hephaisos' fire, he prayed for a favorable outcome, that the army might come back safe.

And Agamemnon sent me to say these things to you, and tell what fate from the gods he meets with, and that he's got undying fame throughout Greece. I was there, and I speak as one who saw the event: your child has obviously flown away to the gods. Put away your grief, lay aside your anger at your husband. To human beings, what the gods do is unexpected. They save the ones they love. This day has seen your daughter both dead and alive.

CHORUS: I'm so happy, hearing what the messenger says! He says your daughter is alive and living among the gods!

KLYTEMNESTRA: My child, which of the gods stole you away? How can I speak to you? How can I not say that this story was fabricated to make me leave off my painful grief? But it won't work.

[Enter Agamemnon from the side entrance leading to the army camp.]