

IPHIGENEIA IN TAURIS

Iphigeneia:

To Pisa came the son of Tantalus,
Pelops, to wed the child of Oenomaus,
Riding on swift steeds; of the union
Of these two souls came Atreus, their son;
Next Menelaus and Agamemnon, he
Who wed Tyndareus' child, begetting me,
Iphigeneia; where Euripus whirls
Its darkening waves in frequent rolling swirls,
For Helen's sake (he thought) he slaughtered me
In Aulis' mountain-clefts that I might be 10
A sacrifice to Artemis. Therefore
Lord Agamemnon, with an eye to war,
Dispatched a thousand ships that he might take
The crown of Ilium to Greece and make
Them pay for that foul marriage, honouring
Menelaus; once at sea, encountering
Rough squalls that would not let him carry on,
He thought of sacrifice and thereupon
Calchas said: "Lord of the Greek argosy,
From Aulis you may not set out to sea 20
Until you sacrifice to Artemis
Iphigeneia, for remember this -
You vowed to give the torch-bearing goddess
The creature of the greatest loveliness
Of that one year: then Clytaemnestra bore
One thought to be that creature, and therefore
She must be sacrificed." That child was me.
They took me, through Odysseus' trickery,
From Clytaemnestra that I might be wed
To Achilles (or at least that's what they said). 30
They placed me on the altar and arranged
To run me through, but Artemis exchanged
Me for a deer and spirited me from there,
Conveying me across the cloudless air
To Tauris, a barbarous land ruled by a king
Much speedier than a bird upon the wing
When he is running: his rapidity
Earned him the name of Thoas. He placed me
As priestess in this temple where the rites
In which the goddess Artemis delights 40
I oversee, consisting of a feast
That's noble – well, noble in name at least
(The rest I'll pass in silence, for I fear

The goddess). For if any Greek comes here
 I sacrifice him. It was long ago
 This custom was established here. Although
 I start this rite, it's left to others who
 Will sacrifice, because it is taboo
 To mention it in the temple. In the night
 Strange apparitions come, so, if I might 50
 Bring comfort. I will tell them. I once dreamed
 That I had left this land and, as it seemed,
 I went to Argos where I slept among
 The maidens; but an earthquake, large and strong,
 Shook up the land. I fled and stood outside
 And saw the house's corner-stones subside.
 And then it all came crashing to the ground.
 And yet it seemed that one support was found
 Intact, and from it fluttered yellow hair
 And, like a human being, then and there 60
 It spoke, and in the manner I embrace
 In slaying aliens who sail to this place,
 I sprinkled water on it, just as though
 It then would die, while weeping. Even so
 I diagnosed this vision: Orestes
 Had died and I'd performed his obsequies,
 And boys support the house. Those people die
 Whom my atoning waters purify.
 This dream I could not link to any friend,
 For Strophius, when I had met my end, 70
 Had no son. But now, though he is not here,
 I wish to give libation to my dear
 Brother Orestes (for this ceremony
 I could perform, my maids attending me,
 All Grecian, given to me by the king).
 But why are they not here, I'm wondering?
 I'll check inside my temple.

Orestes:
 Take good care
 That no-one's on the path.

Pylades:
 Yes, everywhere
 I look I'm checking.

Orestes:
 Now then, do we see
 The hall of the goddess Artemis, which we 80

Have sought since leaving Argos?

Pylades:

Yes, we do,
And I suspect that you believe so, too.

Orestes:

The altar, too, with blood that has been shed
From slaughtered Greeks?

Pylades:

The hair at least is red.

Orestes:

You see the spoils upon the walls?

Pylades:

I do.
The trophies of the slaughtered strangers, too.
So we must keep a sharp eye everywhere.

Orestes:

Phoebus, where have you brought me with your snare
Of oracles? I avenged my father by
Slaughtering Clytaemnestra, and then I 90
Was driven by countless Furies as I flew
From home on many seas. I asked of you
How I might end this whirling lunacy
And all my labours. You replied to me
That I must go to the boundaries of Tauris
Where I would find the shrine of Artemis,
Your sister, and then I should take away
Her statue, which once fell, so people say,
From Heaven on the temple. You told me
That by some stroke of luck or craftily 100
I should take it to Greece – the consequence
You would not speak of; if I took it hence,
My labours would be over. Here I stand,
Obeying your instructions, in a land
Both alien and hostile. Since you share,
Pylades, in the burden that I bear,
What shall we do? The walls are high, I see,
That hem the town. How can we stealthily
Climb up the steps? Should be unlock that bar
Of bronze with levers, ignorant though we are 110
Of levers? But if we are apprehended

Once we have got inside, our lives are ended.
No, let's escape that fate and sail from shore.

Pylades:

No, flight must not be tolerated, nor
Are we used to it, for we must not bring
Shame to the oracle. Abandoning
The temple, we must find a cave and hide
Ourselves there, lapped about by the pitch-black tide
Far from the ship: this servants can't declare
Our presence to the king, who'd hurry there 120
And take us forcibly. Then when the eye
Of gloomy night emerges, we must try
To take the polished statue any way
We can. You see a small space where we may
Squeeze through between the triglyphs? Drudgery
Is stomachached by the brave: the cowardly
Are nothing.

Orestes:

Yes, we did not cross the main
So far only to journey home again
Before our work is done. I must obey:
We must go where we can and hide away 130
For on the god no censure will redound
If his prediction tumbles to the ground
Without effect. For young men should not shirk
Any dangerous and formidable work.

Chorus:

Preserve a reverent silence, you who dwell
By the double-clashing rocks upon the swell
Of the Euxine. O Dictynna, progeny
Of Leto, mountain-goddess, witness me
As to your hall and to those walls which shine
With gold, your beauteous pillars round your shrine 140
I turn my maiden steps. Submissively
I serve the holy keeper of the key.
I left horse-breeding Greece, I left the land
Of Europe, notable for many a stand
Of fair trees, Father's birthplace. Here am I.
What news? What's troubling you? Please tell me why
You've brought me this shrine, o progeny
Of him who sailed to Troy across the sea,
Leading a thousand ships and ten times more
Warriors to wage a famous war. 150

Iphigeneia:

O slaves, these mournful dirges bring me pain,
Fit for no lyre, not one melodious strain.
Alas, I'm grieving for my family.
A wretched ruin has come over me.
I'm weeping for my brother's life: last night
I dreamed a dreadful dream. Oh, drastic plight!
My father's house, my family, is no more.
Alas for Argos' troubles! To the shore
Of Hades you, o Fate, carried away
My only brother, and for him this day 160
I'll pour libations from the bowl of the dead
Upon the earth: streams of milk shall be shed
From mountain-milch cows and ,as well as these,
I'll offer up the work of tawny bees
To comfort the departed. So supply
Me with the golden vessel so that I
May sacrifice to Hades. Progeny
Of Agamemnon, accept this from me
Beneath the earth. I'll bring you not one tear,
Not yet my yellow tresses. I live here, 170
Far from my land and yours, where I lie dead,
Wickedly slaughtered – that's what folks have said.

Chorus:

Mistress, I'll sing you songs of harmony
And hymns from Asian lands: this threnody
Hades sings in laments. The Atrean race
Is doomed, for of its sceptre there's no trace.
In Argos it once ruled, not long ago,
Rich kings. However, woe inherits woe.
On whirling, flying steeds Pelops the king
Then made his cast. The sun, a-glittering, 180
Has changed its holy beam. Successively
Troubles rain down upon the family,
Famed for the golden lamb. From earlier times
When the Tantalids were slaughtered, for these crimes
Comes punishment. The house is sore distressed,
By fate's unwelcome pestilence appeared.

Iphigeneia:

I was ever unhappy, since the night
My mother wed my father: my birthright
Was a difficult upbringing. In the land
Of Greece so many suitors sought my hand 190

In marriage. I was borne by Leda's daughter:
 The eldest, I was foreordained for slaughter
 By the king, and then to Aulis was I brought
 Upon a chariot, for Achilles sought
 Me for his wretched bride. Now here I stand,
 By hostile seas and in an unfertile land,
 Childless, unwed, friendless, a deportee,
 Not raising hymns among my family
 To Hera, weaving figures at my loom
 Of Pallas and the Titans. Wretched doom, 200
 Bloody, unfit for lyres. Here I slay
 In bloody sacrifice strangers who stray
 Upon these shores: they weep in their despair
 And cry out piteously. I must take care
 To overlook such things. I must instead
 Lament my brother, who is lying dead,
 Slaughtered in Argos. Just a tiny thing
 He was when I was taken, suckling
 Upon his mother's breast, yet would he hold
 The sceptre when to manhood grown.

Chorus: Behold, 210
 A herdsman's just arriving from the sea
 With further news for you.

Iphigeneia:
 O progeny
 Of Agamemnon and his consort, pay
 Heed to the startling words I have to say.

Iphigeneia:
 Why startling?

Herdsman:
 Upon our boundaries,
 After they'd dodged the dark Symplegades,
 Two youths have docked their ship, a sacrificed
 To gladden Artemis. So in a trice
 Prepare the firstfruits for their ourification.

Iphigeneia:
 Could you discern by how they dressed the nation 220
 From which they come?

Herdsman:

They're Greek. I cannot tell
You more.

Iphigeneia:
Not even what their names are?

Herdsmen:
Well,
One called his friend Pylades.

Iphigeneia:
What was he
Himself called?

Herdsmen:
No-one knows his name, for we
Heard nothing from him.

Iphigeneia:
How, then did you meet
Them both?

Herdsmen:
Just where the Euxine's breakers beat
Against the shore.

Iphigeneia:
What business can here be
Foe herdsmen to transact down by the sea?

Herdsmen:
We went to wash our herd.

Iphigeneia:
Well, go back now
To what I asked before and tell me how 230
You caught them. This what I want to know:
No Greeks have landed here since long ago.
The altar has not recently run red
With Grecian blood.

Herdsmen:
Our cattle, forest-fed,
We drove into the sea, which surges through
The Clashing Rocks, until there came in view
A broken cavern hollowed by the roll

Of constant billowing – a handy hole
 For hunters of the purple fish - and then
 One of our company saw these two young men 240
 And tip-toed back to us and said, “Look there -
 They’re gods.” One pious herdsman said a prayer,
 Hands raised: “O guardian of the ships at sea,
 Palaemon, Leucothea’s progeny,
 Bless us. Are you the sons of Zeus who sit
 Over there? Is each of you a favourite
 Of Nereus’ daughters?’ But another, dim,
 Unruly and audacious, laughed at him
 And called them shipwrecked mariners in fear
 Of what we do to strangers docking here, 250
 And most agreed with him and it was thought
 The customary offerings should be brought
 To gladden Artemis. Then suddenly
 One of the two moved from their sanctuary;
 He stood, head nodding, waved his arms about,
 Just like a lunatic, and gave a shout
 As would a hunter: “Pylades, my friend,
 D’you see Hell’s dragon? What does she intend
 But killing me with her vile snakes? Look there -
 That wingèd creature flying through the air 260
 And breathing from her clothing fire and slaughter
 And holding to her bosom Leda’s daughter,
 My mother, and that rock she hurls at me!
 O God, she’ll kill me. Whither shall I flee?”
 We didn’t see such shapes, but he’d now bleat
 To imitate a sheep and now repeat
 The howling of a dog in parody
 Of the Eumenides, while silently
 We cowered there, amazed. Then with the roar
 Of a lion he drew his sword and headed for 270
 Our herd and struck their flanks as though to head
 Off all the Furies, and the sea grew red
 With gore, and when we saw our cattle fall,
 Butchered, we armed ourselves and blew a call
 To neighbours with our conches, for we thought
 That, faced with fit young strangers, we’d have fought
 Badly. Our numbers grew eventually.
 The stranger fell, his fit of lunacy
 Now over, though his chin was dribbling
 With foam. When we observed this opening, 280
 We set to work, belabouring him. His friend
 Wiped off the foam and started to attend
 To him; a fine-spun robe he threw about

To slay me like a sacrificial beast,
 My very father acting as the priest,
 Another sacrifice would now be set -
 O God, those former woes I can't forget! 330
 I clasped his chin and knees and this I said:
 "Father, you brought me to this place to wed -
 A shameful ploy – but while you're killing me,
 My mother and the Argive company
 Of women sing their wedding hymns, while round
 About the house the joyful sound
 Of flutes. Achilles was not Peleus' son
 But Hell itself: you planned a union
 Between us, in a chariot bringing me
 To bloody nuptials with your trickery." 340
 But through my flimsy veil with modest gaze
 I looked about, unable, though, to raise
 Orestes in my arms – who now is dead -
 Or kiss my sister, for I'd soon be led
 To Peleus' house. So I put on delay
 Many embraces for another day,
 For I'd return to Aulis. Orestes,
 If you are dead, poor man, what dignities
 You've left, and what fine deeds you have not seen
 Of Agamemnon, deeds to make one green 350
 With envy! But I blame the subtlety
 Of Artemis: who turns to butchery
 Or on a woman in childbirth lays a hand
 Or a dead body she has ever banned
 From her altars due to his impurity,
 And yet in human sacrifices she
 Takes great delight. But I cannot believe
 That Leto, Zeus's spouse, would not conceive
 Such folly. I am not so credulous
 As to believe the feast that Tantalus 360
 Gave to the gods, the flesh of his own son.
 The people here are murderers, every one,
 And put the blame for all the wickedness
 That they have carried out on the goddess.

Chorus:

You seaways over which the gadfly flew
 From Argos, seaways hostile and dark blue,
 Exchanging Europe for the continent
 That holds the Asian lands, what pople went
 From lovely, reedy River Eurotas
 Or Dirce's sacred streams that they might pass 370

To this unfriendly, cold and hostile place
 Where for the holy goddess we debase
 With mortal blood each column and each shrine?
 Did they attack the surge with oars of pine,
 Their sails of linen billowing in the air,
 That with possessions more than their fair share
 They might bedeck their halls? Hope gratifies,
 And mortals, for the opulence they prize,
 Are injured by their greed while wandering
 To foreign cities, craving just one thing, 380
 Some out of luck, some snatching modest gain.
 The rocks that clash together on the main
 And Phineus' sleepless shores, the salty coast
 Of Amphitrite's waters, where the host
 Of Nereids dance in a round and sing -
 How did they cross, their sails a-billowing,
 The rudder creaking through the West Wind's screech,
 The southern breezes helping them to reach
 The gleaming strands which form an aviary
 For many birds, across a hostile sea, 390
 Where stands the fine race-track of Achilles.
 O would that by my mistress' litanies
 Leda's dear daughter, Helen, would repair
 Hither from Troy and, crowned above her hair
 With sacrificial water, end her life,
 Her throat cut open by my mistress' knife,
 Requiting her, though pleasing it would be
 If someone sailed from Greece across the sea
 And from the bondage that I undergo
 Unshackle me. And may I, even though 400
 It's merely in my dreams, be back in Greece
 In my ancestral home and live in peace
 And sleep contentedly, a grace that we
 Enjoy in common with prosperity.
 Two youths, their hands bound tightly, come this way,
 Soon to be sacrificed. Be mum, I pray,
 My friends. Our temple gains an offering
 From Greece. The herdsman spoke a truthful thing.
 Queen, if you find these rites are pleasingly
 Performed, although to us this policy 410
 Is sinful, take these victims.

Iphigeneia:

I'll take care
 Of Artemis's sacrifice. You there,
 Unbind their hands! They're holy victims, so

They must no longer be in fetters. Go
Prepare the customary rites. Tell me,
Who were your parents? In your family
Was there a sister? What a double blow
She must now undergo! Oh, who can know
What fate will bring! For, creeping stealthily,
The gods' affairs are murky: therefore we 420
Don't know what ills may come. Poor man, what land
Have you come from? For many seas you've spanned,
And you'll be long from home in the world below.

Orestes:
Why do you grieve such things? Why sorrow so,
Whoever you are? I don't believe he's wise
Who'd wish to crush the fear of his demise
With lamentation when about to die,
Nor he who, out of hope when Hell is nigh,
Laments his lack of safety: he's united
To ills as one – of folly he's indicted 430
But then he dies as well. So let fate go;
Don't grieve for us – this sacrifice we know
And understand.

Iphigeneia:
Which is the one they call
Pylades?

Orestes:
He is.

Iphigeneia:
In which Greek city did you dwell?

Orestes:
Lady, why ask me that?

Iphigeneia:
That I may tell
If you are brothers.

Orestes:
We are friends, that's all.

Iphigeneia:
What is your name?

Orestes:
Well, you might fairly call
Me Miserable.

Iphigeneia:
That's not what I ask:
Your statues in this life is Fortune's task. 440

Orestes:
Unnamed, I'd not be mocked.

Iphigeneia:
But why deny
Me this? Are you so proud?

Orestes:
I'll tell you why;
You'll sacrifice my body, not my name.

Iphigeneia:
Won't you reveal the city whence you came?

Orestes:
Since I'm to die, there's nothing you can gain
From asking this.

Iphigeneia:
Yet why do you refrain
From telling me?

Orestes:
I am a citizen
Of famous Argos.

Iphigeneia:
Heavens! Tell me, then,
O foreigner, were you born there as well?

Orestes:
I was, and in Mycenae did I dwell, 450
Which once was rich.

Iphigeneia:
Were you a deportee?

Orestes: I left both willing and unwillingly.

Iphigeneia:
Will you tell me something I yearn to know?

Orestes:
As long as it does not affect my woe.

Iphigeneia:
I'm glad that you're from Argos.

Orestes:
As for me,
I am not, but if you are glad, feel free
To relish it.

Iphigeneia:
Do you perhaps know Troy?
We hear it everywhere.

Orestes:
I feel no joy
To know of it if only in my dreams.

Iphigeneia:
It has been wiped out by the war, it seems. 460

Orestes:
That's true.

Iphigeneia:
And Helen? Is she back once more
With Menelaus?

Orestes:
Yes - a fetid sore
To someone whom I love.

Iphigeneia:
Ans where is she?
From long ago she's earned my enmity.

Orestes:
With her first spouse in Sparta.

Iphigeneia:
Hated by

The whole of Greece, not just myself.

Orestes:

And I

Once tasted of her evil after she
Had wed the Trojan.

Iphigeneia:

As was told to me,
Have all the Greeks returned?

Orestes:

In just one breath

You ask me everything.

Iphigeneia:

Before your death, 470
I wish to benefit from what you say.

Orestes:

Since you would learn my tidings, ask away.

Iphigeneia:

Is Calchas back from Troy?

Orestes:

No, he is dead:
At least by Mycenaeans that is said.

Iphigeneia:

O Goddess Artemis! That's good to hear.
What of Odysseus?

Orestes:

He has not, I fear,
Returned, it's said.

Iphigeneia:

And may he never see
His home again!

Orestes:

Don't curse him: misery
Has dogged him everywhere.

Iphigeneia:

And can you tell
Of Thetis' son?

Orestes:
Ythe plans did not go well 480
In Aulis, for he died unwed.

Iphigeneia:
Yes, he
Participated in that trickery,
And those who saw it know that that was true.

Orestes:
You ask such pertinent questions. *Who are* you?

Iphigeneia:
I am from Argos, and I was undone
While yet a child.

Orestes:
The more than anyone
You need to learn what happened there.

Iphigeneia:
Tell, pray,
What happened to the general who, they say,
Was happy?

Orestes:
Who? The general that I knew
Did not know happiness.

Iphigeneia:
I'll tell you who: 490
There was one Aganmemnon, Atreus' son,
A lord.

Orestes:
I do not know. Lady, have done!

Iphigeneia:
Humour me, man.

Orestes;
The wretch is dead, and he
Killed someone.

Iphigeneia:
Dead? But how? O misery!

Orestes:
Why sorrow? Were you close?

Iphigeneia:
I grieve the state
He once enjoyed.

Orestes:
Indeed his dreadful fate
Was death at his wife's hands.

Iphigeneia:
O wretched woe
For both of them!

Orestes:
O cease your questions! Go
No further!

Iphigeneia:
One more! Is the wretch's wife,
Still living?

Orestes:
No she is bereft of life, 500
Killed by the son she bore.

Iphigeneia:
O shattered house!
What was his purpose, then?

Orestes:
To kill his spouse
In vengeance.

Iphigeneia:
Cruel vengeance!

Orestes:
Although he
Is righteous, he is treated miserably
By the gods.

Iphigeneia:
And did the lord leave anyone
Of all his brood behind?

Orestes:
He left but one,
The virgin girl, Electra.

Iphigeneia:
Do they tell
Of a daughter who was sacrificed as well?

Orestes:
They don't: they merely say she sees daylight
No more.

Iphigeneia:
The girl endured a tragic plight,
Her father, too.

Orestes:
A thankless favour paid,
And why? Because of that outrageous jade.

Iphigeneia:
Is the lord's son in Argos still?

Orestes:
He lives, though everywhere beset by ill, 510
Yet nowhere, too.

Iphigeneia:
Mendacious fancies, you
Have proved to be quite useless. So, adieu!

Orestes:
The so-called prudent gods are nothing less
Mendacious that they are. O what a mess
Are gods' and men's affairs! This is the thing
That saddens him: though wise, he yet would cling
To prophecies – then died, and they know ell
Who were acquainted with him how he fell.

Chorus:
And what of me? Do my dear parents see

Daylight or not? Come, who can tell it me? 520

Iphigeneia:

Listen to me: I've had a thought whereby
We three will benefit, should we but try.
Good actions will succeed especially
If all involved contentedly agree.
If I should save you, would you circulate
To all my friends back home news of my state
And take a tablet that was written by
A pitying captive who was sure that I
Was murderous, but that the victims die
Through Artemis's cruel word. For I 530
Have had no-one who has escaped my hand
And thus could travel to my native land
And notify my friends. It seems to me,
However, that you hold no enmity
Against me, know Mycenae, even know
My friends, and therefore save your self and go,
With a substantial fee which will defend
Your life with these few words. As for your friend,
Due to the rules he has to pay the price
That aliens pay and be a sacrifice. 540

Orestes:

Stranger, you've spoken well except for this:
To sacrifice my friend to Artemis
Would grieve me much. My bark of misery
I piloted myself; he sailed with me
To share my woes. Therefore it is not right
That, helping you, I would escape my plight
And he be sacrificed. So let him sail
To Argos with the letter to avail
Yourself, and in his stead let me be slain
By him who wishes it. O what a stain 550
It leaves to cause a dire catastrophe
For friends and save oneself from harm. For he
Is a true friend, and I wish that he may,
No less than I myself, see the light of day.

Iphigeneia:

Brave spirit! Noble man! Such loyalty!
If there is someone in my family
Yet living, I would have him be like you.
Strangers, though I mayn't see him, yet I do
Have a brother. If this what you prefer,

I'll have Pylades be my messenger, 560
And you shall die; you have a great desire
For this, it seems.

Orestes:
Who'll do a deed so dire
As slaying me?

Iphigeneia:
I will, for I must do
The goddess' tasks.

Orestes:
I do not envy you,
Lady: the task is vile.

Iphigeneia:
Necessity
Demands that I perform this butchery.

Orestes:
A woman slaying a man?

Iphigeneia:
No; all I do
Is spray your hair with water.

Orestes:
Well, then, who
Will do the deed, if I may know?

Iphigeneia:
Someone
Within the temple.

Orestes:
When it has been done, 570
What tomb shall then be mine eternally?

Iphigeneia:
Our sacred flame and a rocky cavity.

Orestes:
Oh! Oh! I would my sister could be here
To lay me out.

Iphigeneia:

A fruitless prayer, I fear.
Sad youth, whoever you are, for she lives far
From this barbaric land. But since you are
A Greek, I'll leave no favour out which I
May do. Indeed, the tomb in which you lie
With jewels I'll embellish lavishly
And gleaming honey from the mountain-bee, 580
That flows from flowers, on your tomb I'll throw,
Anointing you with yellow oil. I'll go
And fetch the tablet from the shrine. I pray,
Bear me no ill-will. You attendants, stay
And guard him but...no chains! Perhaps I'll send
An unexpected message to a friend
In Argos whom I love especially,
Telling him that the man he thought to be
Deceased lives yet, to cause him much delight.

Chorus:

I raise up lamentation for your plight 590
Because the drops of water in your hair,
Mixed with your blood, will take you to their care.

Orestes:

Strangers, don't pity me, and yet adieu.

Chorus:

Youth, for your happiness we honour you,
For you will see your Argos by and by.

Pylades:

O fate unwished for when a friend must die.

Chorus:

O wretched journey! You are gone indeed!
Of two dilemmas which one should I heed?
Mourn you? Or you?

Orestes:

Pylades, is your thought
Like mine?

Pylades:

I do not know, for there is nought 600
That I can answer.

Orestes:

Who is she? For she,
Greek-like, asked me about the misery
Of Troy, the Greeks' return, Calchas the seer,
And of Odysseus she was keen to hear;
She wept for Agamemnon, asking me
Of Clytaemnestra and his progeny.
The stranger is from Argos: otherwise
She would not send a letter or apprise
Herself of all these things: its as if she
Shared somehow in Argos' prosperity. 610

Pylades:

We think alike: I was about to say
The same, and yet men of the world who stray
Abroad know how kings fare. I, nonetheless,
Have thought of something else.

Orestes:

Don't make me guess.
Share it with me that we may work it out.

Pylades:

It would be base for me to live without
Your presence in this world. We crossed the sea
Together and therefore it's tight for me
To die with you. In every mountain-glen
Of Phocis and in Argos, too, all men 620
Will call me coward. All base men will say
(And there are many) that I sailed away
Betraying you, or that I profited
Because your house was troubled since I wed
Electra, slaying you. All this I fear,
Feeling such shame. I must be slaughtered here,
Consumed by flame upon the pyre, for we
Are friends and I shrink from indignity.

Orestes:

Hush! For my own misfortunes I must bear:
When grief is single, then I have no care 630
To suffer a double one What you call base
And scandalous for you would fit *my* case;
For dying here is no calamity
For me, god-slain. But you are prosperous;
Your house is clean, while mine is impious.
You'll father children, too, if you should live,

When married to my sister, whom I give
 To you as wife – my name will then remain
 And my whole house will circumvent the stain 640
 Of childlessness. To Hellas go: there dwell.
 When you reach horse-rich Argos – hear me well -
 By this right hand I charge you by decree:
 Raise up a tomb and, in my memory,
 Build me a plaque, and let my sister weep
 And leave a lock of her hair upon that heap.
 Say that an Argive woman sacrificed me
 Upon the shrine. Maintain your loyalty
 To Electra once that she's become your wife
 And you have found that it's a lonely life 650
 Within my father's house. Well then, goodbye,
 For you have been the dearest friend that I
 could ever have, who hunted beasts with me
 And with me, too, grew to maturity
 And suffered much with me. Although a seer,
 Phoebus has fooled me, sending me out here,
 So far from Greece, with cunning trickery,
 Ashamed of every earlier prophecy
 He'd made. I trusted him and gave him all,
 Killing my mother, and in turn – I fall! 660

Pylades:

You'll have a tomb; I'll keep my loyalty
 To Electra, since you'll be more dear to me
 When dead, poor man, than living. Though your death
 Is very near, yet you still have your breath,
 The prophecy unfulfilled. Yet destiny
 Can turn great mishaps to their contrary.

Orestes:

Apollo's words won't help me now. Keep mum,
 For from the shrine I see the priestess come.

Iphigeneia:

Go to the shrine, attendants, and prepare
 The sacrifice! You strangers, here I bear 670
 The letter, which is long. Let me append
 Yet further words beneath it. Pray attend.
 No man's the same when in adversity
 And when he shifts from fear to bravery.
 My messenger, once he has sailed from here
 En route to Argos, will assume, I fear,
 My written words are worthless.

Orestes:

What's to do
In that case? What is it that's troubling you?

Iphigeneia:

I want you to persuade your friend to swear
An oath that he will take my letter there 680
For all my friends to see.

Orestes:

And in return
Will you swear, too?

Iphigeneia:

That...what?

Orestes:

That he'll not burn
Here in an alien land.

Iphigeneia:

Your words are wise:
How could he take the letter otherwise?

Orestes;

But will your king agree?

Iphigeneia:

He'll listen to me.
And I'll embark Pylades personally.

Orestes:

Now swear a solemn oath.

Iphigeneia:

First he must say
"To all you friends this letter I'll convey."

Pylades:

I swear I'll take these words across the sea
To all your friends in Argos.

Iphigeneia:

And I'll be 690
Your guard against the dark rocks.

Orestes:

Witnessed by

Which god?

Iphigeneia:

The goddess Artemis, for I

Serve her.

Pylades:

I by great Zeus, our heavenly king.

Iphigeneia:

And if you wrong me by abandoning
Your oath?

Pylades:

Then may I not come back again.
And you, if you should break your promise?

Iphigeneia:

Then

May I not reach Argos alive.

Pylades:

But hold!

We've left out something that I must unfold.

Iphigeneia:

To be of use, it must be something new.

Pylades:

An exception to our oaths I offer you - 700
Should we be shipwrecked and the letter fall
Beneath the foaming waves, cargo and all,
But I survive, the oath we must reverse.

Iphigeneia:

You know what I will do (because the worse
Often becomes the worst)? I will recite
To you what I have written that you might
Recount it to my friends, and therefore we
Will be assured of this security:
The letter saved, it silently will tell
Its contents; if it sinks beneath the swell 710
Of waves and you will save yourself you'll save for me

My letter.

Pylades:

You have spoken splendidly

For both the gods and me. Now you must say
Those written words and what I must convey
To all your friends.

Iphigeneia:

Tell Agamemnon's son,
Orestes; tell him this comes from the one
In Argos slain: she lives but to those there
She lives no longer.

Orestes:

But where is she? Where?
Is she back from the dead?

Iphigeneia:

You see her stand
Before you. Not a word! From this vile land 720
Where I must slaughter foreigners, take me
To Argos now before I cease to be.
Is she back from the dead?

Iphigeneia:

You see here stand
Before you. Not a word! From this vile land 720
Where I must slaughter foreigners take me
To Argos now before I cease to be...

Orestes:

Pylades, where *are* we? What can I say?

Iphigeneia:

...or I'll be cursed until my dying day
Within our house.

Pylades:

Orestes -

Iphigeneia:

That you may
Remember it. My name again I'll say.

Pylades:
O gods!

Iphigeneia:
Why trouble them in this affair?

Pylades:
No reason. Go on. My mind was elsewhere.
Perhaps by asking questions, I shall find
What I may credit.

Iphigeneia:
Tell him that a hind 730
Was switched in place of me to save my life
By Artemis; my father with his knife
Dispatched it, thinking it was I. Then she
Consigned me here. What you just heard from me
Is written there.

Pylades:
The oath you had me swear
Was easy; your oath, too, was very fair,
And I will undertake it presently.
Orestes, take your sister's letter from me.

Orestes:
I do. But first of all I'll set apart
The words and revel in my joyful heart. 740
My darling sister, in my sheer delight,
I hold you in my arms, although I quite
Yet only half-believe it.

Chorus:
Stranger, you
Defile the priestess, for it is taboo
To touch her robe.

Orestes:
My sister, progeny
Of Agamemnon, do not turn from me,
Whom you believed you'd never hold again,
Your brother.

Iphigeneia:
You're my brother? Hah! Refrain
From talking! He's well-known in Nauplion

And Argos

Orestes:
Poor, sad girl! Your brother's gone 750
From there.

Iphigeneia:
Was Tyndareus's child the one
Who bore you?

Orestes:
Yes, she was. Pelops' grandson
Begot me.

Iphigeneia:
You have proof?

Orestes:
I surely do.
Now hear my background.

Iphigeneia:
I will. It's for you
To speak and me to learn.

Orestes:
Then let me share
My news of our Electra. You're aware
Of atreus' and Thyestes' strife?

Iphigeneia:
I am.
It was, I think, about a golden ram.

Orestes:
Did you not weave in fine embroidery
Its tale?

Iphigeneia:
What you have uttered touches me, 760
Dearest.

Orestes:
The various changes of the sun
You also wove?

Iphigeneia:

I did, and every one
Was knit upon the finest tapestry.

Orestes:

Your mother bathed you ceremonially
For Aulis.

Iphigeneia:

Yes, I know: I don't recall
A single happy memory at all
Of what occurred there.

Orestes:

What about this, too -
Your mother had some locks of hair from you?

Iphigeneia:

To place upon my tomb that I might be
Memorialized.

Orestes:

As further proof from me, 770
I've seen Pelops's ancient spear within
The palace, which, when he was soon to win
Hippodamia, he brandished, after he slew
Oenomaus: there in the rooms where you
Once slept it hangs.

Iphigeneia:

My darling, dearest one,
Come all the way from Argos: there is none
More precious.

Orestes:

Recently thought to be dead,
You're here – alive! That tears that now you shed
Mix grief with joy, as mine.

Iphigeneia:

My family 780
I left when you were in your infancy,
Still in your nurses's arms. I cannot speak
The joy I feel, for it is at its peak,
Past wonder.

Orestes:

May we live unceasingly
In happiness.

Iphigeneia:

Friends, I'm in ecstasy!
But I'm afraid that you will disappear
And fly into the air away from here.
My dear Mycenae, hear me now confess
To you, my native home, my thankfulness
For his dear life, for raising him, for he
Is my own brother.

Orestes:

Though our family
Is fortunate, we're joyless, you and I. 790

Iphigeneia:

That was I when I seemed about to die
At my own father's hands.

Orestes:

Though I was then
At home, I see you there.

Iphigeneia:

Oh! that was when
They brought me to Achilles' treacherous bed,
Though I was not a bride, where tears were shed
And groans were heard around the altar there.
O the libations!

Orestes:

I, too, had my share
Of woe for Agamemnon's wickedness.

Iphigeneia:

The fate that I received was fatherless. 800
The gods decide that woe will follow woe.

Orestes:

If you ha slaughtered me, it would be so,
Unhappy one.

Iphigeneia:

My deeds were full of dread,

My brother. How so nearly were you dead
By my unholy deed! How will this end?
What fortune is there that will be my friend?
How may I find a method to convey
You back to Argos, taking you away
From slaughter here? [to herself] It's your concern, dear heart,
To find a way. [to Orestes] But how may you depart? 810
By land, by sea? But if by walking, through
Barbaric tribes and pathless trails, then you
Will dice with death. But if you ply the seas
And test the dark, narrow Symplegades,
The journey's long. What god, what mortal man,
What circumstance that's unexpected can
Work out this hopeless task across the sea
And save us both, the only progeny
Of Atreus's house?

Chorus:

O marvellous,
Surpassing words, is what's been seen by us, 820
Not merely hearsay!

Pylades:

[to Orestes] When one greets a friend,
It's meet that they embrace, but we must tend
To other matters, letting go of woe:
How can we gain security and go
From this barbaric land? One prudently
Should take in hand an opportunity,
Not overstepping fate, and then secure
One's happiness.

Orestes:

Well said: for I am sure
That fortune will take care of us. With zeal,
On finds divine assistance will reveal 830
A greater strength.

Iphigeneia:

Let nothing hinder me;
But first I must find out what destiny
Has served Electra, for you all are dear
To me.

Orestes:

She lives in joy with this man here.

Iphigeneia:
Who fathered him and where?

Orestes:
Of Phocis. One Strophius

Iphigeneia:
Is he consanguineous
With me through Atreus' daughter?

Orestes:
Yes, for he
Is a cousin and a loyal friend to me,
My only one.

Iphigeneia:
When I has almost been
Slain by my father, he had not yet seen 840
The light of day.

Orestes:
Indeed: his father's house
Was childless for some time.

Iphigeneia:
My sister's spouse,
I welcome you.

Orestes:
He is my saviour, too,
Not just a relative.

Iphigeneia:
But how did you
Dare kill our mother?

Orestes:
Lt that question be:
I avenged my father.

Iphigeneia:
Tell me, though, why she
Killed him.

Orestes:

Leave that alone, for it's not fit
For you to hear about it.

Iphigeneia:

Then I'll quit
The question. So does Argos now foresee
You as its ruler?

Orestes:

No, the sovereignty
Is Menelaus'. We're exiles from yon. 850

Iphigeneia:

But has our uncle, then, battered upon
Our troubled house?

Orestes:

Oh no! A fearful dread
Of the Furies was the reason that I fled
My land.

Iphigeneia:

Was that the madness on the shore
They told us of?

Orestes:

We've been discerned before
In wretched straits.

Iphigeneia:

I know, for when you slew
Our mother the goddesses ousted you.

Orestes:

Reined with a bloody bit.

Iphigeneia:

Why did you make
A journey to this region?

Orestes:

For the sake
Of Phoebus' oracles. 860

Iphigeneia:

May you reveal
Their import or are you forced to conceal
The facts?

Orestes:

I'll tell you. This was the well-spring
Of all my woes: when I'd heard everything
About my mother's evil deeds, about
Which I stay silent, we were driven out,
Chased by the Furies; Phoebus then sent me
To Athens where the goddesses who must Be
Unnamed would try me, for Lord Zeus one set
A court there for Ares, whose hands were wet 870
With tainted blood. When I first reached that place,
None would receive me due to my disgrace
Among the gods, but some thought it not fair
And let me sit apart, for we were all there
Beneath the self-same roof. They silently
Made me stay that I might separately
Take food and drink, while each would fill his cup
With equal shares of wine and drink it up.
To blame my hosts I did not think it fair,
And so I grieved as mutely I sat there, 880
Seeming to think, though passionately I sighed,
I had not earned the name of matricide.
In Athens, I then heard, they had conceived
A rite based on the blows I had received:
It's called The Feast of Jugs, in which they pay
Honour to Pallas on each festival day.
I reached the Hill of Ares to be tried:
I took a chair and on the other side
The eldest Fury sat. Phoebus saved me
By bearing witness; and accordingly 890
The votes were even, and I was therefore
Found innocent of murder by that score.
Some of the Furies who were sitting there,
Persuaded that the judgment had been fair,
Marked for themselves a holy place nearby.
But others disagreed, intent to fly
Against me everywhere; then finally
I reached Apollo's holy sanctuary
Upon the plain; and I stretched out before
His shrine, refusing nourishment, and swore 900
That I'd cut short my life immediately
Unless Apollo came to rescue me -
He who'd destroyed me; he spoke out clear

From his gold tripod, then he sent me here
That I might take the image Zeus had cast
From Heaven and in Athens set it fast.
But as for what for my security
He did I need you now to succour me:
For if we have that goddess's statue,
My mania will disappear, and you 910
And I will hire a large ship to convey
You home again and you may ever stay
In Mycenae. Darling sister, dearest one,
Reclaim our household from oblivion,
And save me, too, for all is gone unless
We may possess the likeness of the goddess.

Chorus:
The gods all seethe with wrath against the race
Of Tantalus and at a deadly pace
Drive them through torment.

Iphigeneia:
O how passionately
I yearned, before you came, to cross the sea 920
To Argos and to you. I wish the same
As you – to staunch your torment and reclaim
Our ailing house, for I do not resent
My father's killing me. That's my intent -
I wish to save our household and to stay
My hands from slaying you. And yet dismay
Afflicts me that the king and Artemis
Will find the statue missing. How will this
Not cause my death? How will it be explained?
But if at once our goal may be attained - 930
Upon your vessel with its lovely prow
To take the statue and myself – o how
Noble a venture! If we don't succeed,
I will be dead, although you may indeed
Successfully reach home. I do not shy
Away from this, though I'd be doomed to die
By saving you. Though men are missed when they
Die far from home, women have lesser sway.

Orestes:
I would not murder you – my mother's death
Was quite enough – for I would wish my breath 940
Of life and my decease would equally
Resemble yours. I'll take you across the sea,

If I escape from here, or stay behind
With you and die. Hear what I have in mind:
If Artemis objected, then why should
Apollo have predicted that I would
Take to Athene's city the statue
Of the goddess? He knew that I'd see you
Once more. All things considered, I can see
That there's a cogent possibility
Of our return. 950

Iphigeneia:
How may we not expire/
How may we yet attain what we desire?
These questions of our voyage make me ill,
Yet I have the desire.

Orestes:
Could we, then, kill
The king?

Iphigeneia:
That is a fearful thing to say:
To think that foreigners would wish to slay
Their host!

Orestes:
And yet, although it's dangerous,
We must do it, if it will rescue us.

Iphigeneia:
Though I approve of your avidity,
I couldn't do it.

Orestes:
How if secretly
You hid me in your shrine? 960

Iphigeneia:
So that we might
Make our escape in darkness?

Orestes:
Yes, for night
Is used by thieves, while those who are free from sin
Prefer the light of day.

Iphigeneia:

And yet within
Are sacred guards, and they are eagle-eyed.

Orestes:

We're done for, then. What have we not yet tried?

Iphigeneia:

I think I have another plan.

Orestes:

Tell me.

Iphigeneia:

I'll use your griefs.

Orestes:

Ah, the facility
You women have for crafty plans!

Iphigeneia:

I'll say 970
You killed your mother and then sailed away
From Argos...

Orestes:

Use my sorrows, then, indeed,
If you may by this artifice succeed.

Iphigeneia:

...and you may not be sacrificed.

Orestes:

Though I
Guess at the reason for it, tell me why.

Iphigeneia:

That you're impure, and that will feed their fear.

Orestes:

How will that help to take away from here
The statue of the goddess

Iphigeneia:

In the sea
I'll wish to cleanse you ceremonially.

If we're to thrive.

Orestes:

One thing is yet to do -
These women must be mum. It's up to you
To press them. For to move the human heart
To pity takes a woman. For the rest -
May all be well.

Iphigeneia:

My dearest friends, I need
Your help, and, whether I am to succeed
Or lose my home and siblings, I must call
On you to save me now. But first of all, 1000
Let me say this: we're women, with a pact
To love each other equally and act
In common safety. Help us in our flight
And hold your tongues, although to speak aright
Is good. We three are held by destiny -
Dear comrades all – to sail across the sea
To Argos or to die. If I get there,
I'll take you to Greece as well that you might share
My fortune. All of you, attend my plea
And sear by your right hand, your family. 1010
Your children (should you have them), by your knees,
Your well-loved faces – which of you agrees?
Which doesn't? For if you will not comply,
My brother and myself will surely die.

Chorus:

Courage, dear mistress. Focus on your flight,
For by great Zeus, I pledge to you my plight,
For all that you have said to me will stay
Unspoken now.

Iphigeneia:

Bless you for that! I pray
You'll have a happy life. [To Orestes and Pylades] Now you must go
Inside: the king will soon demand to know 1020
If you've been sacrificed. O Artemis,
Who saved me by the crannies of Aulis
From Agamemnon's hands, save me again,
And these men, too, or else all mortal men
Won't trust Apollo's voice. Now cordially
Leave this barbaric land and cross the sea
To Athens. Here's no fitting place to dwell

While there's a city that you love so well.
 O halcyon, who sing along the sea
 Nearby its rocky cliffs your threnody, 1030
 Known by the wise who tell us that you long
 For your own husband in that mournful song,
 I am like you, though wingless, hankering
 For Athens and for Artemis who can bring
 Relief to those in childbirths agony:
 She dwells beside the delicate palm-tree
 And Cynthus' mountain and the well-grown bay,
 Close by the lake whose ripples roll their way
 Upon its face, while swans melodiously
 Warble; she's Leto's darling progeny. 1040
 My city was destroyed: o streams of tears
 I wept! The foe then forced me with their spears
 To sail away; for me a price was paid
 To come to this vile land and serve a maid,
 Agamemnon's daughter, she who has the care
 Of aiding the deer-slaying goddess, where
 No sheep are sacrificed. How jealousy
 Invades me of the man who constantly
 Is wretched, for necessity makes him numb,
 But when men who've had happiness become 1050
 Unhappy, life is hard. The Argive bark
 Will bear you home, my lady, while you hark
 To Pan's wax pipe, and Phoebus, to the sound
 Of the seven-stringed lyre, will sing and guide you, bound
 For gleaming Athens; while upon the sea
 The oars that take you splash, here I will be.
 The forestays of the ship, swelled by the breeze
 Above the prow, will take you home with ease
 To the sunburnt, bright race-course I long to fly:
 Above the chamber of my home, may I 1060
 Flutter my wings and take my stand amid
 The glorious wedding-dances as I did
 When just a maid, as round my comrades I
 Would whirl about, my mother standing by;
 Then in the beauty contests with a veil
 Of many hues I'd hide my cheeks and trail
 My luscious locks about them...

Thoas:

Ho! I seek
 The keeper of the temple gates, that Greek.
 So is the sacrificial ceremony
 Begun, and in the holy sanctuary 1070

Iphigeneia:
Have done vile things.

It was. For they

Iphigeneia:
No, across the sea
In Greece they slew somebody.

Iphigeneia:
 Their mother. With a sword
 They murdered her together.

Iphigeneia:
For this they were went away
From all of Greece.

Iphigeneia:

Beneath the sky
It can be purified.

42

I questioned them.

Thoas:

Ah, you were brought up wise
In Greece, that's clear.

Iphigeneia:

But they before my eyes
Dangled allurements.

Thoas:

Some good news, maybe,
From Argos?

Iphigeneia:

That was it, for they told me 1100
My only brother, Orestes, was content.

Thoas:

And for their happy news you would relent
And stay your hand.

Iphigeneia:

My father, too, they said,
Was well.

Thoas:

Yet rightly you obeyed instead
The goddess.

Iphigeneia:

Yet I hate my native land -
It ruined me.

Thoas:

Let me, then, understand
How we should treat these men.

Iphigeneia:

Just as we do -
According to our law.

Thoas:

Then haven't you
The holy water and the sword all set
To make the sacrifice?

Iphigeneia: I have, and yet 1110
I first must purify them.

Thoas: From a spring
Or from the sea?

Iphigeneia: Sea cleanses everything
Among the sins of men.

Thoas: Then they would be
Purer for sacrifice.

Thoas: it would aid me
As well.

Thoas: The temple stands upon the shore.
Is that not so?

Iphigeneia: Yes. Though I shall do more,
I must have solitude.

Thoas: Well then, proceed
As you desire, because I have no need
To see profanity.

Iphigeneia: The statue, too,
I have to decontaminate.

Thoas: Then do, 1120
In case these maticidal men have brought
A stain upon it.

Iphigeneia: I would not have sought
To move it otherwise.

Thoas:
Your piety
And forethought both are just.

Iphigeneia:
And now for me
You know what you must do?

Thoas:
No, Let me know.

Iphigeneia:
Shackle them both.

Thoas:
Where could they go
To flee you?

Iphigeneia:
Faith is what all Grecians lack.

Thoas:
Men, fetch the chains.

Iphigeneia:
And bring the strangers back.

Thoas:
They will.

Iphigeneia:
But having eith their robes concealed
Their heads.

Thoas:
So that they may not be revealed 1130
To the sun's rays.

Iphigeneia:
And send some of your men
With me.

Thoas:
Of course. These will attend you, then.

Iphigeneia:

And send one to the city that he may
Announce -

Thoas
- what's happened?

Iphigeneia: No. That all must stay
Indoors.

Thoas:
So that they won't sustain the stain
Of murder?

Iphigeneia:
Yes indeed.

Thoas:
Go, say -

Iphigeneia:
- remain
Far out of sight.

Thoas:
You're acting prudently
To aid the city.

Iphigeneia:
And especially
My comrades.

Thoas:
Is it I you mean? Throughout
The town you're marvelled at. Without a doubt 1140
It's well deserved.

Iphigeneia:
But you yourself must wait
Before the shrine of Artemis.

Thoas:
Then state
What I should do.

Iphigeneia:

It must be purified
With flame.

Thoas:
So that when you go back inside
You'll find it pure.

Iphigeneia:
And when those men are seen
Out here -

Thoas:
- what must I do then?

Iphigeneia:
You must screen
Your eyes behind your robe.

Thoas:
So I'll be clear
Of tainted blood.

Iphigeneia:
But if I should appear
To take too long -

Thoas:
- well, how long should that be?

Iphigeneia:
- don't be surprised.

Thoas:
Since you have liberty, 1150
Perform the rituals well.

Iphigeneia:
May all be done
As I desire.

Thoas:
I pray in unison
With you.

Iphigeneia:
Those men are coming out, I see,

With new-born lambs and many an accessory
 Of Artemis do that I may redeem
 Blood-guilt with more blood, and the torches' gleam
 And all the things needed for me to begin
 To decontaminate those men of sin.
 From this pollution, citizens, stay clear -
 If you're a guardian of the temple here 1160
 Who purifies hid hands for the goddess,
 A groom or bride or one in heaviness
 Of pregnancy, stay far away, begone
 Lest this adulteration fall upon
 One soul. O Artemis, young progeny
 Of Zeus and Leto, if successfully
 I cleanse these strangers and perform as well
 A sacrifice, in a pure house you'll dwell
 And we'll be blessed. I do not speak the rest
 But show it all to others who know best, 1170
 The gods and you, goddess.

Chorus:

O passing fair
 Is Leto's son, he of the golden hair,
 Born in the fruitful vales, whose mastery
 Upon the lyre is excellent, and she
 Who revels in her deftness with the bow;
 Far from the famous place of birth, Leto
 Conveyed him from the seat to Parnassus' heights,
 Whose waters gush, where they hold Bacchic rites;
 A dark-faced, multi-coloured snake there lay,
 Its bronze scales in the dark and leafy bay, 1180
 Guarding the earth's prophetic sanctuary,
 A massive beast; still in your infancy,
 Still bouncing in your mother's fond embrace,
 You slew it, Phoebus; to that holy place
 You went; and now on that three-legged seat,
 Your throne of truth, your prophecies you repeat
 From gods to mortals, near Castalia's swell
 Of water; in the earth's nucleus you dwell.
 But when he sent Themis, the child of Earth,
 From Pytho's holy place, Earth then gave birth 1190
 To nightly dreams for all mortality
 Of past, of present and of what's to be
 In future: thus the office of a seer
 She took from Phoebus, favouring her dear
 Daughter. The Lord Apollo swiftly sped
 To Olympos and the throne of Zeus and said,

His baby hands around the throne wrapped tight,
That he desired that Earth's resentment might,
With the nightly dreams, be taken from where he
Was Pytho's prophet. Zeus then laughed to see 1200
How quickly Phoebus wished to gain the gold
That worship pays. He shook his hair and told
The lad that all those nightly voices and
The truth that comes in darkness would be banned,
Restoring Phoebus, giving certainty
To everyone who sought his prophecy.

Messenger:
O temple-guardians and you who stand
At the altar, where's the ruler of the land,
Thoas? Unbar the well-built gates and call
Him from the shrine.

Chorus:
What's wrong, if I at all 1210
May ask unbidden?

Messenger:
By some trickery
Devised by Agamemnon's progeny
Those two young men have gone and stowed away
The statue in their ship's hold.

Chorus:
What you say
Is hard to fathom. He of whom you'd know,
Our king, has left the shrine.

Messenger:
Where did he go?
For I must tell him what has taken place.

Chorus:
We do not know, but after him! Give chase
And tell him when you find him.

Messenger:
Now you see
How you females reek of inconstancy. 1220
You have some share in what occurred today.

Chorus:

You're mad: because those strangers stole away,
What's it to do with us? With all speed go
Up to the ruler's door.

Messenger:

I will not so
Until I'm told whether he's in or out.
Unloose the locks, you in there! Hear me shout.
Tell him who rules here that I, with the weight
Of heavy news oppressed, stand at your gate.

Thoas:

Who at our shrine is making such a din
And calling at the gate to those within? 1230

Messenger:

I see! How could these women tell me you
Had left the shrine and give me orders, too,
To go when you're right here?

Thoas:

Was it to reap
Some gain, do you suppose?

Messenger:

Such news can keep:
But listen to what's happened close at hand:
She who presided here has fled the land
With those two men. The statue, too, has gone
With her. The purification was a con.

Thoas:

What! What ill wind is this?

Messenger:

To steal away
Orestes. Such a shock!

Thoas:

What's that you say? 1240
The son of Clytaemnestra?

Messenger:

It was he,
The man she planned in all solemnity
To sacrifice?

Thoas:

A shocking thing indeed!
What else to call it?

Messenger:

Do not stay to feed
Your heart with this. Hear me, and think it through
That you might find a method to pursue
The strangers. Well said: give your news. For they
Have not so short a journey that I may
Not reach them with my weapon.

Messenger:

When the sea
We reached, where Orestes' ship had secretly 1250
Been anchored, we who by you were assigned
To undertake your wishes that we bind
The strangers were then told to stand apart
By Agamemnon's child so she could start
The secret rite of flame. The shackles she
Held in her hands, and it was strange to see
Her walk behind the strangers. Nonetheless
We had our orders. Them that we might guess
That something, after all, was happening,
She chanted strange spells, as though summoning 1260
Some purifying spirits. Endlessly,
It seemed to me, we sat there. Suddenly
The thought occurred to us the strangers might
Undo their fetters, kill her and take flight,
Yet still we sat there mum, afraid to see
Things that we should not. But then, finally,
We all agreed to join them, though we'd been
Forbidden. There we witnessed such a scene -
Their wingèd ship, its blades all set to race
Across the sea, each oarsman in his place, 1270
Fifty of them, while the strangers, who by now
Were free of their restraints, stood by the prow.
Some men used poles to keep the prow in place,
Others obeyed the orders that they brace
The anchor to the cat-heads, others yet
Made ladders from the cables which they set
To board the strangers. Now this trickery
Was clear to us, we worked unstintingly:
We seized the cables and the maid, and through
Its aperture the tiller then we drew. 1280

"What is the reason," we were moved to say,
 "That statue and priestess you bore away?
 What is your name, you smuggler? And who
 Begat you?" He said, "To enlighten you,
 My name's Orestes, of the family
 Of Agamemnon, and I came to free
 My long-lost sister here." But nonetheless,
 We held her still, attempting with duress
 To bring her back to you, for which I got
 These bruises on my cheeks, though they did not 1290
 Have weapons; nor did we. The youths lashed out
 Such rattling blows, delivering many a clout
 Upon our sides and guts till we were spent.
 The, wounded dreadfully, in flight we went
 Up to the cliff, some wounded in the head,
 Some in the eyes. But now that we had fled
 Thither, engaging them more cautiously,
 We threw rocks at them. But, still on the sea,
 Upon the prow their archers' arrows rained
 Upon us, and kin this way they restrained 1300
 Our onslaught; suddenly a mighty swell
 Smashed down upon the ship so that it fell
 Onto the shore. The maiden was afraid
 To wet her feet, and so Orestes laid
 Her on his shoulder, starting instantly
 To scale the ladder from the angry sea;
 He set her on the trim ship's deck, along
 With the goddess' statue that had dropped headlong
 From Heaven; from its midst a voice rang out:
 "Greek sailors, grab your oars and with them clout 1310
 The sea and make it foam, for we possess
 What through the Clashing Rocks' unfriendliness
 We came for. " Then they gave a cheerful shout
 And beat the waves. The ship was heading out
 But then was overwhelmed with a violent swell
 Which turned the craft around; they met it well
 And beat the water, but it forcefully
 Drove them towards the shore. The progeny
 Of Agamemnon stood and prayed: "O you
 Daughter of Leto, bring me safely through 1320
 To Greece from this vile land and pardon me
 My theft. You love your brother; equally
 Know that I love mine, too." And then, at this,
 Iphigeneia's prayer to Artemis,
 The sailors sang a paean, then they set
 About to row, but nearer and nearer yet

They closed upon the rocks. Some of us then
 Ran straight into the sea, while other men
 Took hold of the ropes, and I immediately
 Came to tell you what happened out at sea, 1330
 My lord. Get chains and ropes, for if this swell
 Does not grow calm, there's no way I can tell
 That we can save the strangers, and he who
 Rules all the seas, protecting Ilium, too
 Detests the house of Pelops; therefore he
 Will offer to Tauris the progeny
 Of Agamemnon, both Orestes and
 His sister, as is right, for she must stand
 Convicted of betraying at Aulis
 the ritual sacrifice to Artemis. 1340

Chorus:
 Sad lady! For a second perishing
 Will now be yours if you're caught by the king.

Thoas:
 All you who dwell in this barbaric land,
 Put reins upon your steeds! Quick, to the strand
 And commandeer the ship! Hunt down those men
 Of sin with Artemis's help, and then
 Drag down our speedy barks so that by sea
 And on the land with Taurian cavalry
 We might arrest the two of them and cast
 Them from the flinty cliff or nail them fast 1350
 Upon a stake. You women, too, who knew
 About these intrigues I will punish you
 When I'm at leisure, but for now I'll see
 To other things in this emergency.

Athena:
 Why this pursuit, Lord Thoas? Pause to lend
 An ear to Queen Athena" put an end
 To it. Call back your army. Orestes
 Was destined by Apollo's prophecies;
 He fled the Furies' wrath and hither flew
 To take his sister and the statue, too,

