

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS



JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

A Translation into English by

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Published with illustrations by H. Romberg, engraved by C. A. Schwerdgeburth, from the workshop of Gerhard Fleischer (Leipzig, 1827)

POETRY IN TRANSLATION

www.poetryintranslation.com

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Iphigenia In Tauris



TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

I *phigenia in Tauris* is a reworking by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) of the tragedy by the ancient Greek playwright Euripides. It describes the chance encounter between Iphigenia, Agamemnon's daughter - now serving as the priestess of Artemis on the wild coasts of Tauris - and her estranged sibling, Orestes. The story follows the siblings' escape from the local custom of ritual sacrifice.

Goethe was in Italy, and Sicily, from 1786 to 1788, his visit having a profound influence on his poetic and philosophical development. Closer contact with the remains, in Rome, of the Roman Classical world, and, in Sicily, with Classical Greek architecture, deepened his knowledge and understanding of ancient Greek and Roman culture, influenced as it had been by the writings of Winckelmann. Classicism tempered his initial leanings towards Romanticism throughout his later career. *Iphigenia in Tauris* (1787), the *Roman Elegies* (1795) the prose journal *Italian Journey* (1817), and the second part of *Faust* (1832), bear particular witness to this.

CHARACTER LIST

IPHIGENIA - Princess of Mycenae, the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.

THOAS - King of the Taureans.

ORESTES - Prince of Mycenae, the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.

PYLADES - Prince of Phocis, cousin and friend to Orestes.

ARKAS - confidant to King Thoas.



ACT I: SCENE I

(A grove in front of the Temple of Diana)

IPHIGENIA: Shuddering deeply, as at first, I step
Among dark shadows, you waving branches,
Entering your ancient, sacred, leafy grove,
Your silent sanctuary of the goddess;
Nor does my spirit grow accustomed
To this holy place, nor will it ever
While that proud will to which I yield
Keeps me here, concealed, many a year.
For I am always, as at first, an exile.
The sea has parted me from all I love,
So that, day long, I walk upon the strand,
My spirit longing for the shores of Greece,
While only the sombre roar of the waves
Returns an answer to my weary sighs.
Woe to those far from family and parents,
Leading a lonely life, consumed by grief
That snatches the hope of joy from their lips.
Their every thought turns to their homeland,
Where the sun first showed them the heavens,
And they, and their playmates, ever closer
Were bound, by gentle bonds, to one another.
I must not quarrel with the gods; although
A woman's fate proves ever full of sadness.

Iphigenia In Tauris



‘Day long, I walk upon the strand’

Act I: Scene I

In warfare, as at home, men hold the sway,
Well-knowing how to gather foreign spoils.
Possession pleases, conquest crowns them,
And then, a most honourable death awaits!
How constrained is a woman's happiness.
Obedience, even to a brutal husband,
Must be her duty, marriage her consolation;
Wretched if hostile fate drives her afar!
So royal Thoas ever detains me here,
Held in this sacred bondage like a slave!
Goddess, my shame is great, for I confess,
I serve your rites with silent reluctance,
You who protected me! To you, my life
Should, if I were free, be offered freely.
My hopes I now, as ever, place in you,
You, Diana, who in your gentle arms,
Gathered this outcast daughter of a king.
Yes, daughter of Zeus, if you have guided
The man whose daughter you demanded,
The godlike Agamemnon, who delivered
His beloved child to your high altar,
Home from Troy to his kingdom, in glory,
Back from those besieged and ruined walls,
Preserving his wife, and son, and Electra;
Three whom he treasures, return me, now,
To my dear family and, in so doing,
As once before, prevent me from dying,
Release me from this life, this second death!

ACT I: SCENE II

(Iphigenia, Arkas)

ARKAS: King Thoas has sent me to you, his orders
Are that I wish health to Diana's priestess.
On the day when Tauris thanks her goddess
For the army's new and splendid victories,
I've hurried here, ahead of the royal host,
To say that he's arriving, and draws near.

IPHIGENIA: We stand ready to receive them fittingly.
The goddess will, with favourable gaze,
Welcome the sacrifice that Thoas offers.

ARKAS: Of, if I could but see her priestess' gaze,
(Yours, O Holy Virgin, who are most dear
To us, and revered) shine clearer, brighter,
A sign of grace to all! Mysterious grief
Still clouds, it seems, your inmost thoughts;
And we have waited many a long year
For some heartfelt word, in confidence.
This gaze of yours has made me shudder
Ever since I first saw you grace this place,
Your spirit as if bound with iron bands,
Forged in the inmost depths of your being.

IPHIGENIA: As befits the stranger and the exile.

ARKAS: Are you an exile, then, a stranger here?

IPHIGENIA: Can foreign shores replace those of our home?

ARKAS: Your homeland's shores are foreign to you now.

IPHIGENIA: The very reason my wounded heart heals not!

In my first youth, the spirit, newly bound
To father, mother, and to my fair siblings
(Like new tender shoots pressing upwards
From the fair stem of our ancient house)
An unhappy fate seized me, and tore me,
From those I loved, so severing the bond.
Then youth's first joys, and early promise,
Were blighted, vanished, and, though saved,
I have been left but a shadow of myself,
While life has failed to flower in me again.

ARKAS: If you would seek to call yourself ill-fated,
Then I might choose to call you ungrateful.

IPHIGENIA: You'll ever have my thanks.

ARKAS: Not those true thanks,
That gratitude, that prompts our charity,
The joyful glance, the life of contentment
That reveal a gracious heart to one's host.
When some profound, mysterious, destiny,
Brought you, long years ago, to this temple,

Thoas came, with reverence and affection,
To greet you, as a gift sent from the gods,
These shores were friendly to you, benign,
That every foreigner had come to dread,
For none before you had reached our realm,
Without dying, a blood-stained sacrifice,
On Diana's sacred altar, as was the rite.

IPHIGENIA: Simply to breathe, scarcely makes a life.

What life is this, that I must linger here,
And be confined to this sacred place,
Like a shadow haunting her own grave?
Do you call this joy and contentment
Dreaming the hours away, in idleness,
Preparing for the grey and listless days
The mournful swarm of the dead endure
In self-forgetfulness beyond dark Lethe?
A useless life that leads to early death?
That fate, a woman's destiny, is mine.

ARKAS: I pity you, and can, equally, forgive you

For the pride that feeds your discontent.
It robs you, it seems, of all enjoyment.
Have you achieved naught, in coming here?
Have you not lightened the king's dark mind?
Have you not, through gentle persuasion,
Suppressed that ancient and cruel custom
By which strangers were ever sacrificed
On the blood-stained altars of Diana?
Many a captive, doomed to certain death,
Have you not restored to their homeland?

Has not the goddess, quelling her anger
When denied her former offerings, sought
Rather to fulfil your gentle prayer?
Does Victory not hover above our armies,
In joyous flight, or speed on in advance?
Do not all here enjoy a happier fate,
Now that King Thoas (who so long has led
His people here, with wisdom and courage)
Rendered benign, softened by your presence,
Has eased our life of silent submission?
Do you call it valueless, if from yourself
A healing balm flows, that aids the many?
When to those to whom a goddess brought you
You prove an endless source of happiness,
And to the stranger, on this deathly shore,
A saviour, who returns them to their home?

IPHIGENIA: The little we achieve soon fades from view,
We look ahead to what we yet must do.

ARKAS: Should we praise those who scorn their own efforts?

IPHIGENIA: And yet we censure those who sing their worth.

ARKAS: As much as those who overprize their worth
We censure those who disregard their value.
Trust me, pay heed to the counsel of a man
Devoted to you, one both true and honest:
If the king should speak to you today,
Be gracious, and give ear to all he says.

IPHIGENIA: Your words are kind, yet they trouble me.
I've made every effort to evade his offer.

ARKAS: Weigh all, and think of what is best for you.
Ever since our King Thoas lost his son,
He trusts but few, and those less than before.
He looks jealously on every noble's son
As his successor to the throne, and fears
An old age of solitary helplessness,
With some uprising hastening his death.
The Scythians are devoid of eloquence,
Not least their king, accustomed simply
To command, or oversee men's actions,
Unskilled in the art of conversation,
And how to guide it firmly to his goal.
Hinder him not with stubborn refusal,
And wilfully seek to misunderstand him;
Choose rather to meet the man half way.

IPHIGENIA: Should I encourage, then, what threatens me?

ARKAS: Do you call his courtship of you, a threat?

IPHIGENIA: To me, it's the most dreadful threat of all.

ARKAS: Put your trust in his profound affection.

IPHIGENIA: When he seeks first to free my mind from fear.

ARKAS: Why do you hide your lineage from him?

IPHIGENIA: An air of secrecy becomes a priestess.

ARKAS: No secrets should be hidden from a king.

And though he may not demand to know,
He stills feels, deep in his noble spirit,
That you are, endlessly, wary of him.

IPHIGENIA: Is he, then, angry and displeased with me?

ARKAS: It would seem so. True, he speaks not of you,

But the odd word he lets fall has taught me
That in his heart he desires to wed you,
And is possessed by the wish to do so.
Oh, leave him not to his own devices!
Displeasure festering there, in his heart,
May bring you to despair and, with regret,
You may, all too late, recall my counsel.

IPHIGENIA: What! Does this monarch then intend

What no decent man who'd be thought honest,
Or shows reverence for the gods above
Would dare intend? Would he seek, by force,
To drag me from the altar to his bed?
Then I ask the gods, Diana above all,
To aid me; she will grant protection
To her priestess, one virgin to another.

ARKAS: Be calm! No sudden rush of blood will drive

Our monarch to commit, as some youth might,
An act of violence. As to what he'll do,

I fear lest he'll intend some harsh measure
Which he'll seek, steadfastly, to enact,
Being of so immovable a nature.
Trust him, I beg you; show your gratitude,
If you can offer the man nothing more.

IPHIGENIA: Oh, tell me whatever else you might know.

ARKAS: Learn all from him. For here the monarch comes.
He has your respect; your own heart tells you
To greet him in a kind and friendly manner.
A man is often guided by a woman's
Gentle word.

(He departs, and she remains alone.)

IPHIGENIA: Yet, indeed, I see no way
In which to pursue so wise a counsel.
Nonetheless, dutifully, I will show
My gratitude, for all his charity,
Hoping that I may speak truthfully,
And still, in doing so, please the king.

ACT I: SCENE III

(Iphigenia, King Thoas)

IPHIGENIA: May the goddess bless you with royal gifts!
May she grant victory and joy to you,
Wealth, and the well-being of your House,
And every honest wish of yours fulfil!
So that you, concerned for the many,
May enjoy rare happiness amongst them.

THOAS: I'd rest content with my people's praise;
Let others joy in conquests more than I.
Whether king or subject he is happiest
Who gains his well-being from his home.
You shared my deepest sorrows when the sword,
Borne by the enemy, took my son from me.
The last, the finest, torn from my side.
As long as revenge possessed my spirit
I could not feel the emptiness death left,
But now, at home once more, a battle won,
A realm destroyed, and my son avenged,
Nothing of my own House pleases me.
The delight in obeying me that once
I saw in every eye, is now quenched,
And, in its stead, I view disquiet, concern.
All ponder on the state of things to come,
And serve a childless man because they must.

Many a time I've visited this temple,
To ask for victory, now I offer thanks.
And, in my heart, I bear a long-held wish,
One that, I think, is not unknown to you,
Hoping that you, who are a true blessing
To my people and myself, I might see
As my bride, and a blessing to my House.

IPHIGENIA: Your offer is too great for a mere stranger,
Royal sire. I stand ashamed before you,
A fugitive, one who owns nothing here
But the peace and shelter that you grant her.

THOAS: That veiled in mystery, as when you came,
You yet hide from me, as from my people,
Would not seem right, or just, in any land.
Strangers hold this shore in dread; the law
And necessity demand it. From you alone,
Who possess every sacred privilege,
You, a welcome guest, that every day
Enjoy the free exercise of your will,
From you, I hoped to win the show of trust
That every decent host might well expect.

IPHIGENIA: If I hid my parents' names and my house,
It was from embarrassment, not mistrust.
A shudder of horror would seize your heart
If you but knew who stands before you,
And what accursed head you now protect.
Rather than see me there beside your throne,
You'd drive me swiftly from your realm,

To seek the fated end to my wandering,
Before I might return to seek my own,
Doomed to the misery every exile finds
Awaiting them with cold and alien hand,
Once they're evicted from their house and home.

THOAS: Whatever the counsel of the gods may be,
Whatever the fate of you and your house,
Heaven has only blessed me since you
Came to live here among us and enjoy
The sacred hospitality shown to guests.
It would prove difficult to persuade me
That, in you, I chose to shelter the guilty.

IPHIGENIA: It is the gift and not the guest that blesses.

THOAS: What's granted to the guilty cannot bless.
Put an end to your silence and refusal.
He that asks it will never prove unjust.
The goddess entrusted you to my hands;
Sacred to her, so are you sacred to me.
Let her approval act as if it were law,
And if you once see a way to win home,
I'll forego every thought of marriage.
But if the homeward path is closed forever,
Your House expelled and extinguished,
By some monstrous and cruel destiny,
Then, I'll have every right to wed you.
Speak openly! You know I'll keep my word.

IPHIGENIA: My tongue reluctantly must break its bonds,
And so, divulge a long-concealed secret,
That once unloosed can never more be hid,
Nor enshrined again in the heart's depths,
But, as the gods will, and as they decree,
Must work its harm, all safety foregone.
Attend to me! I am of Tantalus' line.

THOAS: You speak that momentous name so calmly!
Do you name that Titan as your ancestor,
The world thought favoured by the gods on high?
That Tantalus whom Zeus himself admitted
To his council and table, one whose wisdom,
Whose experience, could engage the gods
In that oracular speech that brought delight?

IPHIGENIA: Such was he; yet the gods should not converse
With mortals as they do with one another.
Human beings are far too weak not to find
Unaccustomed heights may induce vertigo.
He was noble in himself, and no traitor,
Far too great to be a slave to the mighty,
Yet, while the Thunderer's friend, a mere man.
Even his crime was human; his punishment
Severe; the poets say treachery and pride
Hurled him from the heights of Zeus' table,
To the shameful depths of ancient Tartarus,
Divine hatred then pursuing all his line!

THOAS: Was that their ancestor's fault or their own?

IPHIGENIA: Although his heirs inherited his stature,
And the strength within that he possessed,
Yet Zeus bound a bronze band round their foreheads.
Patience and wisdom, sense and moderation,
He hid from their reticent, gloomy eyes.
Every desire in them was turned to anger,
And the rage within spread beyond bounds.
Even Pelops, Tantalus' beloved son,
Though strong of will, won his lovely bride,
Fair Hippodamia, by murderous treason,
She the daughter of King Oenomaus.
Two sons she bore, Atreus and Thyestes.
Envyng their father's love for Chrysippus,
His first-born son by another woman,
Joined in hate, they slew their half-brother.
The father deemed his wife the murderess,
And grimly demanding his son from her,
She, Hippodamia, then...destroyed herself.

THOAS: You fall silent? Speak out as you will!
Do not repent of your trust, but speak!

IPHIGENIA: Those who recall their ancestors with warmth
Are blessed; those who can joy at their deeds,
Can celebrate their greatness, see themselves
As one more link at the end of a lovely chain.
For it seems that one House will seldom bear
Both the demi-god and the vicious monster.
A line that first shows itself as good or evil,
Will, in the end, bring joy or bring terror
To the world. After their father Pelops' death,

Thyestes and Atreus ruled their state together.
But that first show of unity could not last.
Thyestes dishonoured his brother's wife.
In revenge, Atreus drove him from Mycenae.
Thyestes, planning treachery, long before
Had drawn a son of Atreus to his side,
And secretly had raised him as his own.
Urging him on to anger and revenge,
Thyestes sent him to the royal city,
To kill, in this 'uncle', his own father.
The plot though was discovered, Atreus
Cruelly punishing the would-be assassin,
Thinking him his brother's son. Too late,
He learnt whom he had tortured and killed
In his drunken state. Desiring vengeance,
To expunge the deed from his mind, he planned
Unheard-of horrors. With a show of calm
Indifference, he then enticed his brother
With his two sons to join him in the city.
These two children he murdered, secretly,
And served them, a vile and dreadful dish,
At the next meal, to the unknowing father.
When Thyestes had sated his hunger
On his own children's flesh, moodily,
He sought for his sons, thinking that he heard
Their footsteps, and their voices, at the door.
Then Atreus, smiling with malicious glee,
Hurled in their severed heads, and their feet!
You turn your face away and shudder, Sire;
Just so the Sun turned its face from them,
And its great chariot from the endless round.

These are the ancestors of your poor priestess.
Many are the men doomed to evil fate,
Many the deeds of the misguided mind,
That night conceals beneath shadowy wings,
And of which we view the dreadful twilight.

THOAS: Hide them in silence, then. Enough of these
Abominations! By what miracle
Did you spring from so savage a tribe?

IPHIGENIA: Atreus' eldest son was Agamemnon.
He is my father, and, to tell the truth,
I saw in him, from my earliest days,
The very pattern of the perfect man.
Clytemnestra bore me, the first fruit
Of their love, then my sister, Electra.
As king he ruled Mycenae in peace,
And the House of Tantalus, long known
For its troubled fate, was granted rest.
My parents now only lacked a son,
And scarcely had their wish been fulfilled,
And Orestes, the darling of the House,
Joined his sisters, when fresh misfortunes,
Came to disturb our safe and quiet city.
News of that war will have reached you,
Whereby all the powerful lords of Greece,
Laid siege to the mighty walls of Troy
To avenge the abduction of fair Helen.
Whether they took the city, in revenge,
I have not heard. My father led that host.
At Aulis they sought a favourable breeze,

All in vain, for Diana, angered by him,
Delayed their passage, and demanded,
By Calchas' prophecy, his eldest daughter.
My mother and I were lured to the camp.
I was dragged to the altar, consecrated
As a sacrifice to the goddess, so that she
Might be appeased; granting me my life,
She then cloaked me in a mist to save me.
Awakening from dreams of death, I found
Myself in this same temple. I am, indeed,
The grandchild of Atreus, and daughter
To that king, Agamemnon; and am hers
That speak with you; beholden to Diana.

THOAS: And I shall honour and respect the princess
No more nor less than I did my unknown
Guest. I shall now repeat my first request.
Come join with me, and share all that I have.

IPHIGENIA: How should I dare to venture such a step?
Has not the goddess, alone, who saved me,
The right to dispose of a life now hers?
She chose to grant me sanctuary here.
Here she perhaps preserves me for my father,
Punished enough by my apparent death,
To prove the dearest joy of his old age.
Perhaps a sweet return is drawing near.
Should I, inattentive to her design,
Commit myself to stay against her will?
I've sought a sign as to what I should do.

Act I: Scene III



'She then cloaked me in a mist to save me'

THOAS: The sign she gives is that you still remain.

Why try so anxiously to seek evasions?

Far fewer words are needed to refuse:

The listener only hears the one word 'No!'

IPHIGENIA: These are not words said merely to deceive.

I have revealed my heart's depths to you.

Do you not see yourself how I must yearn

To see my parents, my sister, my brother,

There in that ancient hall, where in mourning

Sorrow still murmurs my name; where joy

Would entwine the pillars with fair garlands

As if she welcomed a new-born infant?

O, send me to that place, aboard some ship,

And you will grant new life, to me and mine!

THOAS: Go then! Choose to do as your heart dictates.

Ignore the voice of reason and good sense.

Play the woman who yields to every impulse,

Driven to and fro by unrestrained emotion,

Whenever some passion burns in her heart.

No sacred bond can keep such from a traitor,

No tie that binds her to husband or father,

Once lured from their trusted and faithful arms.

Swiftly the glow of those affections fades.

In vain the golden tongue of persuasion

Loses its truth and power, and is stilled.

IPHIGENIA: Remember your royal and noble word!

Is this the way you would repay my trust?

Yet you seemed prepared to hear the truth.

THOAS: Though unprepared for what was not expected;
Yet should have been, indeed; did I not know
That it was such a woman I must deal with?

IPHIGENIA: Why slander our sex, for seeming weaker?
A woman's weapons are not glorious
Like to yours, yet not ignoble either.
Believe me, I surpass your powers in this:
That I know what will grant you happiness
More than yourself; in ignorance of us two,
You think the marriage bond will unite us.
Filled with good intentions and goodwill,
You urge me to yield, and be satisfied,
Yet I must thank the goddess who grants me
The firmness not to contract a marriage,
Of which she, as I think, does not approve.

THOAS: Not the goddess but your own heart speaks.

IPHIGENIA: So, deities speak to us, through the heart.

THOAS: Have I not then an equal right to hear them?

IPHIGENIA: A violent storm drowns out the gentle voice.

THOAS: Is it heard then, by her priestess alone?

IPHIGENIA: A prince should hear it above all others.

THOAS: Your ancestral right and sacred office
Place you, with the gods, far nearer to
Zeus' high table than an earthbound savage.

IPHIGENIA: And now, I must atone for the confidences
You've extorted, and so forced me to share.

THOAS: I am but a man; it's better to end here.
Hear my word then; remain the priestess
Of the goddess, of Diana, who chose you.
But may she forgive me, that unjustly
Though with self-reproach, I have withheld
The sacrificial victims she once received.
No stranger wilfully approached our shores,
A death from old age was here denied them.
You, with a kind affection that seemed,
At times, to show a daughter's tender love,
At times, an inclination towards marriage,
Bound me tight, as with some bond of magic,
So tightly, in truth, that I forgot my duty.
You had lulled my senses so completely,
I failed to hear the murmurs of the crowd,
Who cry out that my son's untimely death,
Through this error, must be laid at my door.
I'll no longer suspend, then, for your sake,
Those sacrificial rites that they demand.

IPHIGENIA: I never asked it of you for my sake.
Those who think the gods want human blood
Misunderstand their nature, and simply
See, in those on high, their own cruel desires.

Did not the goddess snatch me from her altar,
Seeking my service rather than my death?

THOAS: It's not for us, by some deft use of reason,
To interpret the Celestial Ones' actions,
Or direct them according to our wishes.
Do your duty, as you see it; I'll do mine.
We have found two strangers sheltering
In a cavern on the shore, who'll bring us
Nothing good; that pair are in my power.
With them we may resume Diana's rites;
I'll send them here; serve her as you know how.

(Thoas departs)

IPHIGENIA: Gracious goddess, in your veiling mist
You cloak the innocent, the persecuted,
And, snatching them from Fate's cruel grasp,
You bear them far away across the waves,
To wherever seems to you a safer place.
You are wise; you foresee what is to come.
The past, for you, is never done and ended.
Your gaze rests on all those who are yours,
As your bright moon, enlivening the night,
Rests, and reigns supreme upon the Earth.
O goddess, let hot blood not stain my hands!
For such can never bring rest and blessing;
While the shade of one murdered by ill-chance,
Will haunt the sad unwilling murderer,
In many an evil hour, and terrify.
You yet show your love for human beings,

Iphigenia In Tauris

Scattered so widely, and of every gender,
And, willingly, you extend our brief lives,
So that, for a while, we may gladly gaze
On the sight of your everlasting heavens.



ACT II: SCENE I

(Orestes, Pylades)

ORESTES: It is the path to death that we now tread.
With every step, my soul grows calmer.
When I asked of Apollo that he remove
The vengeful band of Furies at my back,
He seemed, with his divine words of hope,
To offer me both his aid and safety both,
Here, in the shrine of his beloved sister,
Diana-Artemis, who rules all Tauris.
Yet now the prophecy will be fulfilled:
That only with death will my woes end.
How easy it is for me, my heart crushed
By the hand of the god, my mind numbed,
To renounce the lovely light of the sun!
Atreus' grandson shall not achieve
A glorious end, it seems, in warfare;
But as my ancestors were, as my father,
Must be sacrificed to a sadder fate.
So be it! Rather here, before the altar,
Than in some wretched corner where my kin
May spread the vile nets of the assassin.
Leave me, for now, you infernal Furies,
You that, like unleashed hounds, scent the trail,
The blood-stained track, that marks my path!
To your realm I'll sink down soon enough;
The light of day should not know me or you.

The green and lovely carpet clothing Earth,
Should not provide a stage for evil things.
I'll seek you there; there, where an equal fate
Binds all in gloomy, everlasting night.
Yet I'm reluctant, Pylades, dear friend,
A comrade, guiltless of my every crime,
To drag you downwards to the mournful realm
Before your time! Your life and death alone,
Are things that stir both hope and fear in me.

PYLADES: Orestes, I am not eager, as you seem,
To descend, and greet that shadowy realm.
I still would navigate the tangled ways
Of darkest night that yet appear to lead,
Tortuous though they may be, to life.
I think not of death; I listen within,
Seeking to hear if the gods prepare
Some means for us to evade this fate.
Death is inevitable, feared or not,
Yet, though the priestess, with uplifted hand,
Stood ready to shear our consecrated hair,
My only thought would still be of escape.
Rouse your spirits; quit this melancholy!
Your lack of hope increases our danger.
Apollo has granted us his word: here solace
And help await us at his sister's shrine.
The words of the gods are not ambiguous,
As sufferers think, in the depths of sorrow.

ORESTES: Life's dark coverlet was wrapped around me,
While my mother caressed my tender head.

Then I grew to be the image of my father,
Though my silent look was, ever, a bitter
Reproach to my mother and Aegisthus.
How often, when Electra, my dear sister,
Sat there, silent, in the depths of the hall,
I clung tightly to her, and stared on seeing
How the bitter tears flowed from her eyes.
Then I sought to know more of our father.
How I longed to be with him, to see him!
I wished myself at Troy, wished him there.
Then, came a day...

PYLADES: Oh, speak not of that hour,
Let hellish Furies talk of it, by night!
Recount the memories of fairer times,
Such as might spur our hearts to noble deeds.
The gods need many a good man to serve
Their purposes on this wide Earth of ours.
They yet count on you. Their will was not
That you should accompany your father
When he sank down, unwillingly, to Orcus.

ORESTES: Would that I'd seized the border of his robe
And then, in doing so, had followed him!

PYLADES: Those that received you here, have also
Cared for me. What would become of me
Had you not survived, indeed I know not,
Since with you, and for your sake alone,
I've lived since childhood, and wish to live.

ORESTES: Remind me not of those pleasant times,
When your House chose to give me shelter.
Your noble father, both wise and loving,
Nursed the half-blighted tender plant,
While you, ever the most cheerful friend,
Brought fresh delight to my weary spirits,
Like to some brightly-coloured butterfly
Fluttering every day round a dark flower,
Such that I, forgetting all my troubles,
Was filled with the enthusiasm of youth.

PYLADES: So, my own life began, befriending you.

ORESTES: Say that your woes began, and you'd speak true.
The direst aspect of my destiny,
Is that, a plague-ridden exile, I must bear
Both anguish and death hidden in my breast.
That, where I go, the healthiest of faces,
The fairest flowers growing in that spot,
Soon show the dreadful signs of a slow dying.

PYLADES: If ever your breath was poison, Orestes,
Then I would surely be the first to die?
Am I not still full of the lust for life,
And that courage, which with the former,
Makes us fit to undertake great deeds?

ORESTES: Great deeds? Yes, I recall when we foresaw them.
Those days when we pursued the hunt together,
Chasing wild creatures, among hills and valleys,
Matching our ancestors in skill and daring,

Hoping, with sword and club, to track a robber,
Or perhaps a monster, to some rock-bound den.
And then at twilight, above the open sea,
When sitting quietly, leaning on each other,
The waves appeared to break beneath our feet,
The world seemed so vast, so wide before us,
That, of a sudden, one of us would grip his sword,
While future glories shone above like stars,
From every quarter, innumerable, in the dark.

PYLADES: Unending is the labour that the soul
Would seek to accomplish. We desire
To make our every deed as great indeed
As deeds become when the poets sing them
Throughout every country on this Earth.
What our forefathers did, appears so fair,
When, reclining in the still of evening,
Youth devours it, to the sound of the harp.
Yet what we do, toilsome and incomplete,
Was, as their effort seemed to them, in vain,
Mere patchwork; and so, we chase what flees,
Ignorant of the path on which we tread,
Scarcely heeding our ancestor's footsteps,
Or the very traces of their lives on Earth.
Always hastening after their every shadow,
While godlike they recline, in far distance,
On golden clouds, on some mountain-top.
I put no faith in those who think themselves
Such as the crowd seek to exalt and praise.
Thank the gods alone, that in your youth
They have already wrought so much through you.

ORESTES: When they command a man to do good deeds,
Such that he wards disaster from his own,
Extends his empire, or secures its borders,
When his former enemies are slain, or flee,
Let him be grateful then! A god has granted
To him, the first and last of life's pleasures.
The gods doomed me to play the slaughterer
To be the murderer of my dear mother,
Shamefully avenging a shameful deed.
And ruined me with that command of theirs.
It was their vengeance on Tantalus' House,
That I the last of that line, should not die
Free of guilt, or be crowned with honour.

PYLADES: The gods will not take vengeance on the son
For the father's fault. Each of us, good or bad,
Reaps the due reward for his own actions.
He has his parent's blessing, not their curse.

ORESTES: No blessing from mine, I think, led us here.

PYLADES: It was the will of the gods above, at least.

ORESTES: Then the gods' will it is that destroys us.

PYLADES: Do as they bid; and await the outcome.
Bear his fair sister's statue to Apollo,
That they might be together at Delphi,
Honoured and revered by a noble people.
The celestial pair will, for that deed,

Show mercy to you, and will save you
From the grasp of the infernal Furies,
Who already avoid this sacred ground.

ORESTES: Then, at least, I shall die a peaceful death.

PYLADES: My thoughts are otherwise, and not unskilled
Am I in reading both past and future,
Conjoining them, in silent meditation.
The great event perhaps has been ripening,
Many an hour, in the minds of the gods.
Diana would depart this barbarous shore,
And quit its blood-stained human sacrifice,
And we are chosen for that lovely deed.
It is assigned to us, and most strangely
Have we two been urged on, to its threshold.

ORESTES: With rare skill, you entwine your wishes
With the divine intentions of the gods.

PYLADES: What use is all our foresight if it fails
To pay attention to the will on high?
Some god calls a noble man, who erred,
To perform a dangerous act and achieve
A thing that seems impossible to us.
The hero succeeds and, in atoning,
Serves the god, and an adoring world.

ORESTES: If I am destined to life, and to action,
Would that a deity might quench this fever,
And dispel the heaviness from my brow,

That urges me along that slippery path
Stained with a mother's blood, to my death;
And, in mercy, render dry the fountain
That spurts from my mother's dreadful wounds.
A source of blood that endlessly defiles me!

PYLADES: Wait, patiently! Or you'll advance the evil,
And take the Furies' role upon yourself.
Be still, and let me think on this! And if
Our united powers are needed for action,
Then I will summon you, and cautiously,
Yet boldly, we'll advance towards success.

ORESTES: I hear the voice of Ulysses!

PYLADES: Mock me not.
Every follower must choose their own hero,
Behind whom they might climb to Olympus;
And cunning, and prudence, it seems to me
Never detract from those who do brave deeds.

ORESTES: I honour him that's bold, and straightforward!

PYLADES: And therefore, I'll not seek advice from you!
One step I've already taken. I have gleaned
Much information from those who guard us.
I've learned that a foreign maiden, held sacred,
Prevents them following their blood-stained rite.
Incense, and prayer, and a heart that's pure,
She offers, instead, to the goddess. They praise
Her highly, and the people say that she is born

Act II: Scene I

Of the race of Amazons, and that she fled
From their realm, to avoid some great disaster.

ORESTES: It seems that her powers have lost their sway,
At the coming of the guilty man, whose curse
Pursues him, shrouding him in darkest night!
Their pious thirst for blood renews the custom,
Free now of all constraint, to our ill-fortune.
Their savage king's intent will yet destroy us.
Nor can she save men faced, thus, with his wrath.

PYLADES: Although, it's well a woman plays the role!
The best of men, may yet become so used
To cruelty, become so harsh from habit,
That they lay down as law, or sacred rite,
The very things they formerly abhorred.
A woman may retain the frame of mind
She first embraced. It is far safer to depend
On such a woman, whether for good or ill.
Quiet now, here she is! Leave us alone.
I dare not speak our names or purpose yet,
Nor fully place my trust in her. Go now!
Before you talk with her, we'll meet again.

ACT II: SCENE II

(Iphigenia, Pylades)

IPHIGENIA: What land do you hail from, Stranger; tell me!
You seem, to me, more Greek than Scythian.

(She unties his bonds)

The freedom I grant will prove dangerous.
May the goddess avert what threatens you!

PYLADES: O sweet voice! Most welcome are the tones
Of one's native tongue in a foreign country!
Though captive, I see, with joy, before my eyes
The azure mountains of my own fair coast.
May this joy convince you that I am Greek!
Viewing that lovely image in my mind,
I nigh forget the aid I long for from you.
Oh, tell me, if some Fate seals not your lips,
From which of our Greek clans do you derive?
And what the source of this, your sacred role?

IPHIGENIA: Her priestess whom the goddess chose herself,
And likewise sanctified, now speaks to you.
Let that suffice. Now tell me who you are,
And what ill-omened fate has brought you,
You and your companion, to these shores.

PYLADES: I'll tell you, readily, what ill pursues us,
What dire company follows at our backs.
Would that you, priestess, could as readily
Grant us, in turn, a ray of hope and joy.
We are from Crete; two sons of Adrastus;
I am his youngest, Cephalus by name;
While he is Laodamas, and the eldest.
The middle brother grew to be a savage,
Whose wildness often troubled our games,
Spoiling the joyful comradeship of play.
Obediently, we heeded our mother,
While our father led his men to Troy.
But when, rich with the spoils, he returned,
And soon thereafter died, a fierce quarrel
Sprang up between my two elder brothers,
Over his vast wealth, and the succession.
I supported Laodamas here, who slew
The other, for which the relentless Furies
Now hound one who committed fratricide.
But to this savage shore, the god of Delphi,
Apollo, sends us, and we are full of hope,
Prophesying that, within his sister's shrine,
We might expect her blessed hand in aid.
We were captured, and were brought here,
Now doomed, as you know, to be sacrificed.

IPHIGENIA: Is Troy fallen then? Come, man; confirm it.

PYLADES: It has. Oh, assure me that you'll save us!
Hasten the help that Apollo promised.
Take pity on my brother. Speak some word

Iphigenia In Tauris

Of kindness, and yet spare him if you would,
I implore you; for the heart within him
Has been gripped tightly, and then shattered
By grief, and joy, and now cruel memory.
A feverish madness comes upon him,
That leaves him, once a beautiful, free soul,
Open to the vengeance of the Furies.

IPHIGENIA: As great as your misfortune is, I ask you
To neglect it for a while, and speak of Troy.

PYLADES: That mighty city that, for ten long years,
Withstood the siege by the Grecian host,
Lies in the dust, never to rise again.
But many a grave that conceals our finest,
Rouses remembrance on that savage shore.
There lies Achilles, by his noble friend.

IPHIGENIA: Even those godlike men are turned to dust!

PYLADES: Not Palamedes, nor Telamonian Ajax,
Shall ever see the light of home again.

IPHIGENIA: (*To herself*)
He speaks not of my father; names him not
Among the slain. Why, he may yet be living;
And I yet see him. Oh, hope still, my heart!

PYLADES: More blessed were the thousands that died
A bittersweet death at those Trojan hands!

For those who returned, instead of glory,
A hostile and a wrathful god prepared
Sudden wild terror, and a mournful end.
Does the voice of rumour never reach you?
As far as its sound will reach, it carries
The tale of those outrageous happenings.
Are they a secret to you, all the sorrows
That fill the halls of distant Mycenae
With unending sighs? For Clytemnestra,
With Aegisthus' help, bewitched her husband;
On his return they murdered Agamemnon!
Why yes, you reverence that royal House!
I see your troubled breath contends in vain
Against this news, so dire and unexpected.
Are you some ally's daughter, or were you
Born there, within Mycenae's mighty walls?
Conceal it not; nor hold it now against me,
If I am the first to tell you of that crime.

IPHIGENIA: Then, speak! Say how the evil deed was done.

PYLADES: On the day of his return, the monarch bathed,
And rose from his bath, refreshed and calm.
When he asked his wife to hand him his robe,
She threw the tangled garment's artful folds,
Over his noble head, and round his shoulders,
Then, as he tried to free himself once more,
The traitor, Aegisthus, struck with his blade,
And, a mighty prince, thus trapped, joined the dead.

IPHIGENIA: And what reward did her accomplice win?

PYLADES: A realm, a bed, that was already his.

IPHIGENIA: It was lust, then, provoked the shameful deed?

PYLADES: And an old and deep desire for vengeance.

IPHIGENIA: How had the king injured Clytemnestra?

PYLADES: With a most dreadful deed that might excuse

His murder if there were excuse for murder.

He lured her to Aulis, to which the goddess

Had constrained the fleet, the wind adverse.

And there doomed Iphigenia, his daughter,

To be offered at Diana's altar,

A blood-stained sacrifice, to aid the Greeks.

His actions so disgusted her, they say,

And planted such abhorrence in her heart,

She surrendered to Aegisthus' advances,

Then entangled the king in that fatal net.

IPHIGENIA: Enough! You shall meet with me again.

(She departs)

PYLADES: It would seem the fate of the royal House

Touches her deeply. Whoever she may be,

That dynasty must be well known to her;

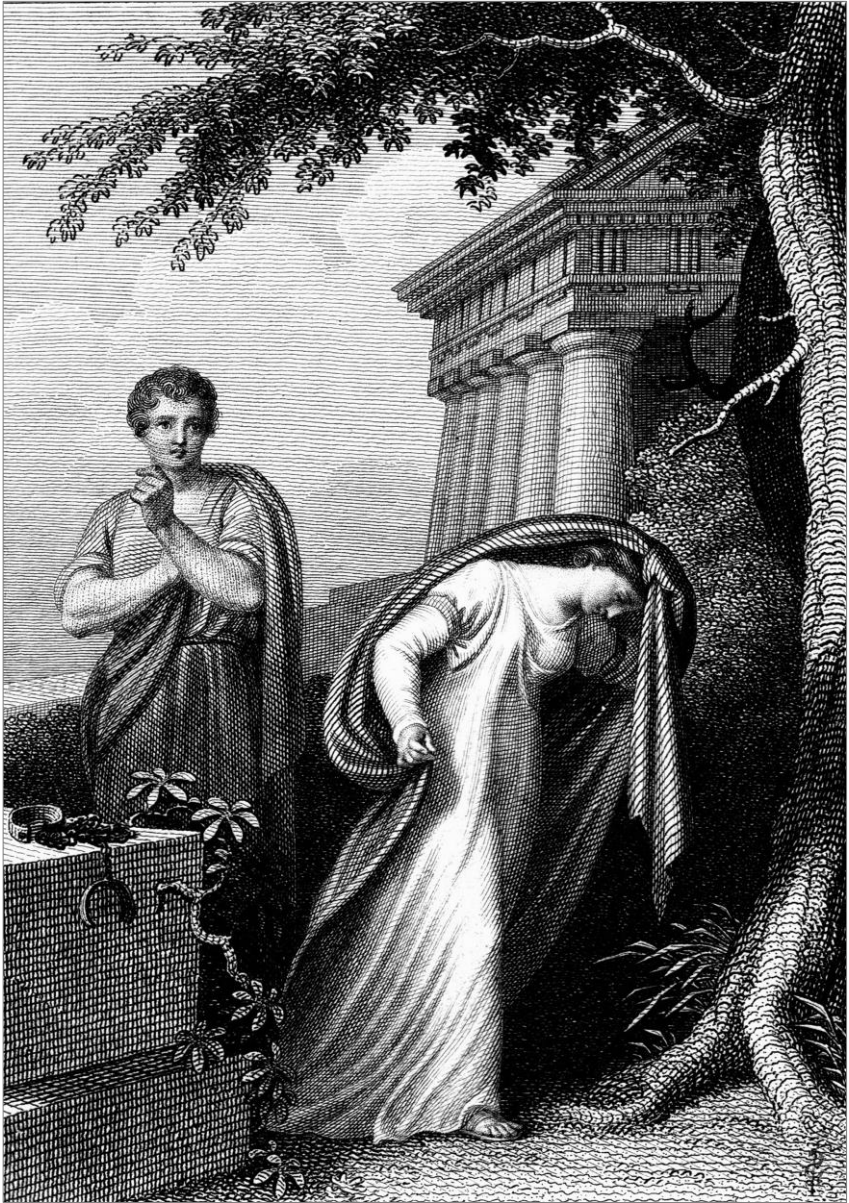
While she, of some noble family, has been

Sold into bondage, to our good fortune.

Be calm my heart, and let hope's shining star,

Still our guide, grant us patience and courage.

Act II: Scene II



'Enough! You shall meet with me again'

PYLADES: It would seem the fate of the royal House
Touches her deeply. Whoever she may be,
That dynasty must be well known to her;
While she, of some noble family, has been
Sold into bondage, to our good fortune.
Be calm my heart, and let hope's shining star,
Still our guide, grant us patience and courage.



ACT III: SCENE I

(Iphigenia, Orestes)

IPHIGENIA: Man of ill-fortune, I unloose your bonds,
Only to send you to a painful fate.
The freedom granted by this sanctuary
Is, like the last flicker of life that lights
Some dying face, a harbinger of death.
And yet I cannot, dare not, tell myself
That you are lost! How could I slay you,
Condemn you to death with murderous hand?
And none whosoever can take your life
As long as I am still Diana's priestess.
Yet if I refuse to perform that office,
As the king, in his anger, will demand,
He'll choose another maiden in my stead
To succeed me, and naught will you have
But my heartfelt sympathy to sustain you.
O, my dear countryman! The humblest slave
That has stood before the gods of our hearth
Would be most welcome in this foreign land;
How can I grant blessing and joy enough,
To one who recalls the image of the heroes
Whom my dear parents taught me to honour;
One who stirs, in the depths of my heart,
A fresh, and most welcome, glow of hope!

ORESTES: Is it your prudent intent, then, to hide
Your name and origin? Or may I know,
Who, like a divine being, greets me thus?

IPHIGENIA: You shall learn of both. But come, tell me,
What I was only half-told by your brother:
The fate of those who sought return from Troy,
And met a harsh and unexpected end,
Unseen, at the threshold of their homeland.
It is true that I was young when brought here.
Yet still I recall the shy glance of wonder
And fear, with which I viewed those heroes,
As if Olympus had opened, and had sent
Mighty forms born of the ancient world
To strike terror, below, in Trojan hearts.
Agamemnon was glorious, above all!
O tell me, is it true then that he died,
Though he had reached his home, at the hands
Of Aegisthus, through Clytemnestra's wiles?

ORESTES: It is.

IPHIGENIA: Woe to you, accursed Mycenae!
Tantalus' scions, thus, with murderous hands,
Like savages, have sown there, curse on curse,
And like the shaken heads of the wild weeds
Have scattered a thousand seeds all about,
And spawned an endless line of murderers,
Committed to everlasting vengeance!
Now tell whatever of your brother's tale
Its dark and dreadful horror veiled from me.

Act III: Scene I

Did then the last descendant of that tribe,
The noble child, destined to be, perhaps,
The avenger of his father, did Orestes,
Escape the blood? Or did a like cunning,
Entwine Avernus' net about the youth?
Is he amongst the living? And Electra?

ORESTES: Both are yet alive.

IPHIGENIA: O, lend me, golden Sun,
Your brightest rays, and shed them richly now,
Before Zeus' throne! For I am poor in thanks.

ORESTES: Are you connected to that royal House?
Are you bound to it by the closest ties,
As your unbounded joy would seem to show?
Then tame your heart, and so restrain it!
For the pain must ever be unbearable,
Of a sudden fall from happiness to woe.
You only know of Agamemnon's fate.

IPHIGENIA: Was that not all the news you have to give?

ORESTES: You have but heard the half of its horror.

IPHIGENIA: What is there to fear? Those two both live.

ORESTES: Have you no fear then for Clytemnestra?

IPHIGENIA: Her, no fear of mine, nor hope can save.

ORESTES: She has departed from the land of hope.

IPHIGENIA: Did she shed her own blood in repentance?

ORESTES: No, and yet her own blood wrought her death.

IPHIGENIA: Speak openly; dispel all speculation.

Uncertainty's dark wings about my head

Strike, a thousand times, at my anxious brow.

ORESTES: Have the gods, on high, chosen me to be

The herald of a deed I'd rather hide

And in the dark and silent realm of night

Conceal forever? Much against my will,

Your gentle request now compels me.

It alone can make me tell that tale of woe.

On the day of her father's death, Electra

Hid Orestes, and so saved her brother.

Strophius, his father's brother-in-law,

Gladly raised him with his son, Pylades,

Who quickly bound the bonds of friendship

About the newcomer, and as they grew

A burning desire rose within their hearts,

To seek vengeance for the death of the king.

Disguised and unnoticed they appeared

In Mycenae, feigning to bear the news

Of Orestes' death and, indeed, his ashes!

Clytemnestra seemed to welcome them.

Orestes soon made contact with Electra,

Who roused the fire of vengeance to flame.

Which in the sacred presence of his mother

Had seemed to fail. Silently, she led him
To the place where their father had been slain,
And where a lasting trace of his spilt blood,
As yet still discoloured the paving stones,
Hinting, despite their cleansing, at revenge.
With fiery eloquence, she then described
Every circumstance of the evil deed;
Her own wretched and oppressive life;
The successful traitor's blatant insolence;
And the danger now threatening their line,
From one who was like to a stepmother.
Into his hand she gave the ancient blade
So often wielded in Tantalus' House,
And, at her son's hand, Clytemnestra died.

IPHIGENIA: Immortal one, you who spend your pure days,
Happy, and blessed, amidst clouds ever-new,
Have you, then, kept me here, these many years,
Parted from my people, yet close to you,
Involved in this mere childish occupation,
Nurturing your flames, as you intended,
So that my spirit might be drawn above,
As is your sacred flame, forever bright,
Only to feel, this deeper pain, on hearing
Of the vile abominations of my House?
Speak on, of my poor, wretched Orestes!

ORESTES: Oh, if I could but tell you of his death!
As if fermenting from the victim's blood,
The mother's shade arose, and cried aloud
To Night's ancient daughters, the dread Furies:

Iphigenia In Tauris

‘Let not his mother’s murderer escape!
Pursue the criminal, who now is yours!’
They heard her, and gazed from cavernous eyes,
With an eagle-like intent, on all around.



‘They heard her, and gazed from cavernous eyes’

Act III: Scene I

They stirred, then, from their pit of darkness,
And from its corners crept their companions,
Remorse and Dread, while there, before them,
Rose up a mist from Acheron's dark stream,



'...from its corners crept their companions, Remorse and Dread'

The inerasable account of what was done
That veiled the murderer's brow, recalling,
To one now doomed to endless perdition,
Polluting the earth, the gods made fruitful,
From which the ancient curse banished them.
So, their swift feet pursue the fugitive.
And, if they pause, it troubles him the more.

IPHIGENIA: Unhappy man, your fate resembles his!
You feel as he, poor fugitive, must feel.

ORESTES: What's this, you say? Think you his fate is mine?

IPHIGENIA: A brother's murder weighs as heavily
On you; your younger brother told the tale.

ORESTES: It would be wrong of me to thus allow
Lying words to deceive your noble spirit.
A stranger, full of caution and cunning,
May well deceive another with his lies,
But let there be only truth between us!
I – am Orestes! And this guilty head
Sinks downwards, to the tomb, and longs for death,
And, in whatever form, would give it welcome!
Whoever you may be, I wish deliverance
For you and for my friend, I need it not.
It seems you linger here against your will.
Leave me, and find some manner of escape.
My lifeless body hurled from the headland,
Let my blood mingle with the seething waves,
And bring a curse upon this barbarous shore.

May you two, as friends, return to Greece,
And start a fresh life there, in that fair land.

(He moves away)

IPHIGENIA: At last, you grant my request, Fulfilment,
Fairest daughter of mighty Zeus on high!
How vast your noble form! My eyes, straining,
Can barely see your hands, which are filled
With things of dread, or garlands that bless,
Which are, the latter, treasures of Olympus.
As we know a king for the fine excess
Of gifts he can muster, though naught to him
Riches to thousands, so you, the gods above,
Are known for your gifts, wisely withheld
Though long-prepared, because you alone
Are aware of those things of use to us.
You view the wide realm of the future,
While some mist or other veils from us
The starry evening sky. Calmly, you hear
Our every childish plea for greater haste,
Nor offer heaven's golden fruit too soon;
And woe to those defiantly impatient,
Who enjoy but sour fruit before they die.
Let not this scarcely dreamed of happiness,
So long awaited, glide vainly by me,
Like to the shade of some departed friend,
Three times more painful in its vanishing!

(Orestes draws near once more)

ORESTES: Pray to the gods for yourself and Pylades;
But forego joining your own name to mine.
You will not save the guilty man, I say,
By sharing his accursed misery.

IPHIGENIA: And yet my destiny is linked to yours.

ORESTES: No! Let me go alone, unaccompanied
To death. Were you to cover the guilty
With your veil, you would yet fail to hide him
From the fierce gaze of the Eternal Ones,
And even your sacred presence would serve
But to deflect them, not drive them away.
They with impious feet, dare not tread boldly,
Over the sacred ground within this grove,
Yet in the distance, on every side, I hear
Their hideous laughter. As, beneath the tree
That some traveller climbs to save himself,
The wolves yet lie in wait, likewise, out there,
Were I to leave this grove, the three would rise,
Shaking their serpent locks, to hunt their prey,
Raising great clouds of dust about his head.

IPHIGENIA: Orestes, will you hear a friendly word?

ORESTES: Save it for him that's favoured by the gods.

IPHIGENIA: They offer the light of new hope to you.

ORESTES: Through mist and smoke, I see the murky glow
Of that dire stream that lights the way to Hell.

IPHIGENIA: Have you but the one sister, Electra?

ORESTES: I had another. A kind fate, that yet
Seemed terrible to us, saved the eldest
From the misery that pursues our House.
Cease to ask; league yourself not with them,
The Furies, the Erinyes, that take delight
In rousing the living ashes of my soul,
Lest the last embers of the dreadful fire
That torched and ruined my ancient House,
Should fail to smoulder, here within me.
So, shall the flames, deliberately fed
With hellish sulphur, never cease to scorch
And torment the very depths of my soul.

IPHIGENIA: I bring sweet incense that will calm those flames.

Oh, let the pure breath of love, its gentle breeze,
Cool the dark fire that burns within your breast.
Can you not hear, Orestes, my dear one?
Have the dread band of Furies that hound you,
Dried up the very life-blood in your veins?
Has some enchantment turned your limbs to stone,
Like to the gaze of the Gorgon's severed head?
If a hollow voice, born of a mother's blood,
Can summon you, in its dark tones, to Hell,
Shall not a pure sister's words of blessing
Bring all the gods of Olympus to your aid?

ORESTES: She cries! She calls! Do you wish my ruin?

Does some vengeful goddess live within you?
Who are you whose voice so disturbs me,
A voice that penetrates my inner depths?

IPHIGENIA: Your heart's depths, indeed, reveal the answer.

It is I, Iphigenia, Orestes!

I yet live.

ORESTES: You!

IPHIGENIA: My brother!

ORESTES: Avoid me!

Touch not these locks of mine, I caution you.

From them an inextinguishable fire,

Flames forth as from Creusa's bridal dress!

Away! An ignoble death, it is, I'll die,

Burning within myself, like Hercules.

IPHIGENIA: You shall not perish so! Oh, if only I

Might hear a single tranquil word from you!

Dispel my doubts! Oh, let me be certain

At last of long-awaited happiness.

A wheel of joy and sorrow, endlessly,

Turns, and turns again, within my soul.

I recoil from the stranger with a shudder,

But my heart yet draws me to my brother.

ORESTES: Is this some temple of Dionysus?

Does a sacred madness grip its priestess?

IPHIGENIA: Oh, hear me! Oh, but see how my poor heart,

After so long a time, finds bliss again;

And you, the dearest thing in all the world,

Suffer me to kiss your brow, and to enfold
You in these arms, that met but empty air
When they stretched out to clasp you so before!
Let me but do so! Joy bursts from my heart
More brightly than that spring, on Parnassus,
Flows, from cliff to cliff, to the golden vale,
And like to some blissful sea surrounds me.
Orestes! Orestes! Oh, my brother!

ORESTES: Lovely nymph, I trust not your words, nor you!
Diana commands far harsher servants.
And would avenge her shrine's desecration.
Take your hand from my chest, and if some youth
You would seek to save, and love tenderly,
To whom you'd sweetly offer happiness,
Turn your thoughts to my far worthier friend.
He wanders there, along that stony path.
Seek him, guide him, pay no heed to me.

IPHIGENIA: Brother, control yourself, and recognise
The sister you once lost; do not ascribe
To some wild and sinful surge of desire,
The pure and heavenly joy that she feels.
Goddess, remove the madness from his gaze,
So that this moment, born of supreme joy,
Is not rendered three times more wretched yet!
She's here, your long-lost sister. Diana,
Saved her from the sacrificial altar,
And placed her here, in her sanctuary.
A captive, and doomed likewise to be slain,
You find here, in the priestess, a sister.

ORESTES: Wretched are we! Now may the sun behold

The final horror of our accursed House!
Is not Electra here, that we might perish
All three together, and her life not lead
To yet more woe, and greater suffering?
Come priestess, I will follow: to the altar,
Since fratricide is an accustomed rite
In our ancient House. I thank the gods,
That, childless, I go to my destruction,
As they intended. And you, take counsel
Not to hold the sun and stars too dear.
Come follow me, down to the gloomy realm!
As dragons, spawned in the sulphurous pit,
In savage war devour their kindred brood.
So does our maddened race destroy itself.
Childless and innocent, descend with me!
Do you gaze in pity! Cease to do so.
With such a gaze, did Clytemnestra seek
To find a way to move her son's fierce heart,
And yet his upraised blade still pierced her breast.
The mother fell. Appear, unwilling spirit!
Stand within the circle you dire Furies,
And so, attend the welcome spectacle
The last and greatest horror you prepare!
Neither hatred nor vengeance whet the blade.
A loving sister is constrained to act.
Weep not! For yours is not the fault, indeed
Since my earliest years I have not loved
Any that I might love as I could you.
Yes, raise the knife, and spare not this breast,
Tearing it apart, that you might open,
A pathway for the seething blood within.

Act III: Scene I

(He sinks down, exhausted)

IPHIGENIA: I cannot bear this joy and misery
Alone. Where are you Pylades, dear friend?
Where are you now, for now I need your aid?

(She goes to look for him)



ACT III: SCENE II

(Orestes, waking from his stupor, and rising)



'Grant me from Lethe's stream One last refreshing draught'

Act III: Scene II

Again! Again! Grant me from Lethe's stream
One last refreshing draught of forgetfulness.
The pain of life will soon be washed away.
Upon its course, my spirit will flow quietly,
Surrendering to oblivion's passage,
To you, you Shades. In your eternal mist.
A weary son of earth may cleanse his soul
Lapped tranquilly in such peaceful waters!
What murmurs are these among the branches;
What whispers resound within the twilight?
They gather now to welcome their new guest!
What noble company is this, now met,
This princely House rejoicing together?
They gather, peacefully, both young and old,
Women and men, clothed in godlike forms.
Yes, they are the ancestors of my House!
Atreus converses quietly with Thyestes
Whose sons sport playfully around them.
Is there no enmity between you now?
Vengeance dying with the light of the sun?
So am I welcome too, and fit to join
All of you, in your solemn procession.
Greetings fair ancestors! Orestes greets you,
The last male heir of your ancient tribe.
What you sowed, he has reaped and, laden
With curses, has descended among you.
Yet every burden here is easier to bear.
Accept him, receive him to your circle!
I honour you, Atreus, you, Thyestes,
And here we are all free of enmity.
Show me the father I saw but the once

While still alive! My father, is that you?
And is that my mother at your side?
Dares Clytemnestra now to take your hand?
Why then, Orestes too may approach her,
And thus declare to her: 'Behold, your son!
Come all, behold your son! Bid him greeting.
Murder was the watchword of our House,
On earth above, and the race of Tantalus
Delights to hear it yet, beyond the grave.
You cry: 'Welcome!' and, indeed, receive me.
Oh, lead me to that honoured ancestor!
Where is the old man, that I may greet him,
That dear, much-venerated head, that met
In council with the gods of Olympus?
You seem to hesitate, and turn away.
What's this? Do even the godlike suffer?
Alas it seems the powers above have bound
That hero's chest with strong iron chains,
And so subject him, even here, to torment!

ACT III: SCENE III

(Orestes, Iphigenia, Pylades)

ORESTES: Have you descended to this place, already?
Welcome, sister! Yet Electra's missing.
May some beneficent god slay her now,
And swiftly, with a not ungentle arrow.
And you, my dear friend, I must pity you.
Come, come with me, to the throne of Dis,
So, as his new guests, we may greet our host.

IPHIGENIA: You siblings there, in the heavens above,
That shed your fair light, by night and day,
Upon all folk, yet not the dear departed,
Bring salvation to us, siblings, below!
Artemis, you love your brother dearly,
Beyond what heaven and earth may offer,
And turn your virgin face towards him,
Longing, ever, for his eternal light.
Let not my brother, one so lately found,
Be left to rage in blind insanity!
And as your will, intent on saving me,
Was once accomplished, now extend to me
And so, through me to him, your blessed aid,
Liberate him from the bonds of that curse,
Before the time to free him passes by.

PYLADES: Orestes, do you not know us, and this grove,
And this light, that never shines for the dead?
Do you not feel a friend's, a sister's arm,
That clasp you tightly, and as yet still living?
Grip them tight: we are no empty shadows.
Hear my words, gather yourself together!
Every moment is precious, and our return,
To our own homeland, hangs now by a thread,
Which seems as if spun by a friendly Fate.

(Orestes addresses Iphigenia)

ORESTES: Now, for the first time, with a heart set free,
Let me embrace you, sister, in pure joy!
You gods that, with your lightning's power,
Tear apart the heavy clouds, and grant us
Sternly, mercifully, long-awaited rain,
With thunderous voice amid the roaring gale,
Drenching the earth in wild foaming torrents,
Yet soon dissolve our dread presentiments,
We who, doubly-blessed, find our amazement
Transformed to shouts of joy and thankful gaze,
The sunlight a thousand times reflected
In the fresh droplets on the grateful leaves,
While friendly Iris, with a light hand, parts
The grey veil of the last receding clouds;
O let me, here, enjoy, in thankfulness,
The bliss you grant me, while embraced once more
By my friend's arms, and now my dear sister's.
The curse is lifted; my heart tells me so.

Act III: Scene III



'The curse is lifted; my heart tells me so'

The Eumenides depart, and now I hear
The gates of Tartarus close upon them,
The thunderous bronze echoing, far away.
The earth gives off a refreshing odour,
And invites me to seek, within its bounds,
The joy of life and mighty deeds, once more.

PYLADES: Fail not to seize the hour, that rushes by!
The breeze that first fills our sails shall bear
The fullness of our joy to high Olympus.
Swift counsel, and resolve, are needed here.

ACT IV: SCENE I

IPHIGENIA: (*Chanting*)

When the great gods condemn
One of those born on Earth
To pain and confusion so,
Decreeing that he must pass
From joy to sorrow here,
Then from despair to joy,
In heart-felt alternation;
Then they provide for him,
Near to his hearth and home,
Or on some distant shore,
So that true aid might come,
Help in his hour of need,
An unwavering friend.

O gods above, now bless our Pylades,
And whatever he may seek to achieve!
His is the young man's vigour in battle,
His, the wise man's bright eye in council,
His spirit is tranquil, his mind maintains
A sacred, and an inexhaustible calm,
And from its depths he draws sound advice
To aid those who are mired in confusion.
He drew me from my brother's embrace,
At whom I gazed again, and yet again,
Unfit to comprehend such happiness,

Reluctant to release him from my grasp,
Neglecting the looming threat of danger.
Now both have gone to execute their plan,
Hurrying to an inlet on the sea-shore,
Where their comrades lie, aboard a vessel,
Awaiting the signal for our departure.
I have a clever speech upon my lips,
Of their devising, ready for the king,
Should he urge on the hour of sacrifice.
I know I must repeat it, like a child,
Lacking the art to persuade or deceive.
Woe to the lie, which never sets us free,
As does the word of truth when spoken.
It eases not the heart but brings anguish
To whoever concocts the thing, in secret,
And like a shaft, deflected by a god,
Returns the arrow, to strike the archer.
Anxiety brings turmoil to my heart.
Perhaps the Furies pursue my brother,
Race on behind him, to seize him still,
On reaching that un-consecrated shore.
Perhaps our plan has been discovered?
I think I hear armed men, now drawing near!
Here comes the king's confidant in haste,
My heart beats fast, my mind is troubled,
As I view the countenance of this man,
Whom I must welcome with a lying word!

ACT IV: SCENE II

(Iphigenia, Arkas)

ARKAS: Speed on the sacrificial, rite, priestess!

The monarch and his people are waiting.

IPHIGENIA: My duty and your wish might be fulfilled

Were it not for an unexpected obstacle

That stands between me and its fulfilment.

ARKAS: What might it be that thwarts the king's command?

IPHIGENIA: Chance, which is not under our control.

ARKAS: Tell me swiftly, so I may inform him,

For he is resolved upon both their deaths.

IPHIGENIA: As yet, the goddess has not approved them.

The elder of the two men is to blame,

For he has shed the blood of his own kin.

The Furies pursued him, and have seized

The guilty one within the inner shrine,

His presence desecrating that pure place.

I go now, I and my virgin-maidens,

To bathe Diana's statue in the sea,

Wetting her image in the clear salt-water,

And, there, perform the solemn mysteries.

Let none trouble our peaceful procession!

ARKAS: I must report this hindrance to the king,
Do not begin your rite till he confirms it.

IPHIGENIA: That decision's for the priestess alone.

ARKAS: Yet the king should know of this strange event.

IPHIGENIA: Here, his counsel and advice lack force.

ARKAS: Licence is often sought from the powerful.

IPHIGENIA: Do not insist on what I must disclaim.

ARKAS: Do not refuse what is right and proper.

IPHIGENIA: I'll yield the sooner, the sooner you return.

ARKAS: I'll go bear this news, swiftly, to the king,
And be back here, swiftly, with his reply.
Oh, could I but bear a different message,
That would soon resolve all this confusion!
You ignore a friend's most faithful advice.

IPHIGENIA: What I could gladly do, that I have done.

ARKAS: And yet it's not too late to change your mind.

IPHIGENIA: To do so is not within my power.

ARKAS: What costs but little seems impossible.

IPHIGENIA: A false wish makes you think it possible.

ARKAS: Will you risk everything; yet are so calm?

IPHIGENIA: My fate lies in the hands of the goddess.

ARKAS: Often the gods save us by human means.

IPHIGENIA: Yet by their command everything is done.

ARKAS: Though, I think, this lies in your hands alone.

The king, his mind angered, is the one
Who brings bitter death upon these strangers.
The army has been weaned, for some time,
From the concept of so harsh a sacrifice,
And thinks no longer of the blood-stained rite.
Since many, whom an adverse fate has borne
To some foreign shore, themselves, have felt
How godlike a kind human face may seem
To a poor wretch exiled beyond his realm.
Oh, do not turn from doing all you may.
It's easy to complete what you've started.
Nowhere does that gentleness that comes
Down from the heavens, in human form,
More readily command the hour, below,
As when a savage race, full of vigour,
Life, strength and courage, yet lacking counsel,
One oppressed with anxious, vague forebodings,
Bears the weight of our human existence.

IPHIGENIA: Seek not to shake my resolve, for you
Can never bend my spirit to your will.

ARKAS: While there is yet time, I'll not withhold
A single fair word that might yet do so.

IPHIGENIA: You strive to do so, and but give me pain,
Both are in vain, therefore leave me now.

ARKAS: I summon pain to my aid, it proves a friend,
A faithful friend, one that counsels wisely.

IPHIGENIA: The pain may seize upon my soul with force,
And yet in no way alters my reluctance.

ARKAS: Should a gentle soul, then, feel reluctance
When a noble king seeks to benefit her?

IPHIGENIA: Why yes, if instead of what is fitting,
A noble king seeks me, and not my thanks.

ARKAS: She who feels no inclination, never lacks
For some excuse to justify her feelings.
I will tell the king of our conversation.
Oh, if you would but consider deeply
How nobly he's borne himself towards you
From your arrival to this very day.

ACT IV: SCENE III

(Iphigenia, alone)

IPHIGENIA: His ill-timed speech has troubled my poor heart,
And alarms me. For like the rising tide,
That with its swift flow drowns some boulder
Rising from the sand that clothes the shore,
So, a stream of joy overwhelmed my spirit;
I thought the impossible within my reach.
For it seemed that, once more, a gentle cloud
Like to that in which the goddess veiled me,
When her embrace rescued me from danger,
Rose about me, and raised me from the earth,
And lulled me again to refreshing slumber.
My brother's very presence gripped my heart.
I listened solely to his friend's advice.
My whole mind was intent on saving them,
And as the voyager is glad to turn his back
Upon the shoals that ring some desert isle,
So, Tauris lay behind me. Now the voice
Of loyal Arkas wakes me from my dream.
Reminding me that I must leave behind
Another race of people, known to me.
To betray them would prove doubly hateful.
Be calm my mind! Do you begin to doubt?
Must you leave your firmly-settled solitude!
Seized once more, must the tempestuous sea
Bear you, unsure of the world and yourself?

ACT IV: SCENE IV

(Iphigenia, Pylades)

PYLADES: Where is she, that I might swiftly tell her
The joyful news of our recent efforts?

IPHIGENIA: You find me full of anxious expectation.
Yet your presence offers reassurance.

PYLADES: Your brother is himself! We reached the sand
And stones, of these un-consecrated shores,
While plunged deep in cheerful conversation.
The sacred grove, forgotten, lay behind us.
Glorious, and ever more gloriously,
The lovely flame of youth shone round his head,
His gaze was filled with courage and with hope,
His heart freely surrendering to the joy
Of saving his friend, and you, his saviour.

IPHIGENIA: Blessings upon you, Pylades! Never
May the tones of suffering and grief
Sound from those lips, that bear such welcome news.

PYLADES: More than this, I bring! Good Fortune appears,
Like a prince, accompanied by others.
We located our friends and companions,
At anchor, well-hid in a rock-bound cove,

Waiting for us, in troubled expectation.
They saw your brother, and roused themselves,
Full of joy, and begging him, instantly, to
Announce the hour of our swift departure.
Every crewman there longed to grasp an oar.
A breeze even whispered from the land,
Stirring the canvas, seen by one and all.
Let us hasten. Come, lead me to the shrine,
So, entering, I may gain our object here,
By seizing, in sacred awe, the image
Of the goddess, that I can bear, unaided.
How I long to feel that precious burden!

*(With this, he enters the shrine, without seeing
that Iphigenia fails to follow; at length he turns)*

You stop, you hesitate! Speak to me –
You are silent, uncertain, is this some new,
Unforeseen obstacle that thwarts our bliss?
Have you addressed the king with that speech,
Those prudent words that we three agreed on?

IPHIGENIA: I have, dear Pylades, but you will scold me.
Seeing you feels like a rebuke to me.
A messenger arrived from the king,
And the words you placed in my mouth, I spoke.
He seemed amazed and, urgently, demanded
That I announce the unfamiliar rite
To the king, myself, and learn his wishes.
I now await that messenger's return.

PYLADES: Alas, now danger hovers, once again,
About our wretched heads! Why did you not
Veil yourself in the sacred mysteries?

IPHIGENIA: I never would have so concealed myself!

PYLADES: So, you, pure soul, must ruin both yourself
And us. Why did I not foresee the like,
And teach you to evade this same demand!

IPHIGENIA: Blame me alone, for all the fault is mine,
And yet I could give no other answer.
Since he asked for, gravely, and with reason,
What my own heart conceded to be right.

ARKAS: Danger threatens; yet if that's the case,
Let us neither hesitate, nor be rash
And, by rushing on, betray ourselves.
Calmly await this messenger's return,
And be firm whatever request he brings,
For the ordering of such sacred rites,
Belongs to the priestess not the king.
Should he demand to see the captive,
Who 'is strangely burdened with madness',
Refuse him, and say that you keep us both,
Securely, in the temple, and, with that,
Obtain a breathing space for us to flee,
Bearing the sacred treasure from these harsh
Unworthy folk. Apollo now sends us
Auspicious omens, fulfils his promise,
Like a god, before we have delivered.

Orestes is free, and now seems himself
Propitious gales, now lead us, with the free,
To the stony island that the god inhabits,
And then to Mycenae, to revive that place,
Where from the lifeless ashes of the hearth,
The household gods may joyfully arise.
And its flames, in beauty, light their home.
Your hand shall be the first to strew incense
From golden bowls. You, it is, shall bring
New life, and bless, and purify the threshold,
In atonement for the curse, and so grace
Your kin with lovely, fresh, and living flowers.

IPHIGENIA: As it listens, to you, my spirit turns
Towards the radiance of your words,
As a flower will turn towards the sun.
How dear is the presence of a friend's
Reassuring speech, its powers divine
So longed-for by the anxious and alone,
Whose thoughts and decisions are but slow
To mature, captive there inside the mind,
Which love and friendship quickly realise.

PYLADES: Farewell! I'll go to reassure our friends,
Who await us anxiously, with longing.
Then I'll return swiftly, and will hide
Among the verdant cliffs for your signal.
Why is your brow so suddenly clouded,
As if you watched a silent funeral pass?

IPHIGENIA: Forgive me! As light clouds will veil the sun,
Some slight shadow of fear touched my soul.

PYLADES: Fear not! Fear works in furtive alliance,
With danger, for they combine together.

IPHIGENIA: Yet, I call it a noble fear that warns me
Not, treacherously, to deceive and rob
A king who has seemed a second father.

PYLADES: You flee from one who'd slaughter your brother.

IPHIGENIA: And yet a man who has been good to me.

PYLADES: What need demands, is not ingratitude.

IPHIGENIA: It's still ingratitude, though need demands it.

PYLADES: Need justifies the deed, to gods and men.

IPHIGENIA: And yet my heart is still dissatisfied.

PYLADES: Excessive scruples are but born of pride.

IPHIGENIA: I cannot argue this, but simply feel.

PYLADES: Then you should respect what you feel is right.

IPHIGENIA: Only the pure heart dare respect itself.

PYLADES: So have you kept it, pure, within a shrine.

Life teaches us to be less strict with ourselves

And others: you too have that to learn.

So wonderfully wrought is human nature,

So intricately intertwined and woven,

That none can be so pure in themselves,

Nor among others, as to keep themselves

From confusion, and retain that purity.

Nor are we required to condemn ourselves.

To pursue one's path, with circumspection,

Is the first and last duty that one has.

Seldom can one judge one's own past actions,

And scarcely ever judge what one does next.

IPHIGENIA: You well-nigh persuade me to your opinion.

PYLADES: Is persuasion needed, where there's no choice?

There is but the one way to save yourself,

Your friend, your brother. Should we not take it?

IPHIGENIA: Oh, let me reflect! You yourself would not

Inflict so great an injustice on one

To whom you were deeply obligated.

PYLADES: If we should be discovered, self-reproach,

The herald of deep despair, awaits you.

It seems you know little of suffering,

If you can refuse to speak a single lie

In order to escape far greater evil.

IPHIGENIA: (*Ironically*)

Oh, had I but a man's courageous spirit,
That when it is about some bold project,
Ignores the sound of every other voice!

PYLADES: Refusal is futile. For the noble hand

Of Necessity commands this; to her law
Even the gods themselves must submit.
That unyielding sister of eternal Fate,
Rules in silence; suffer what she insists
You must suffer; do what she decrees
You must do. As for the rest, know this:
I shall soon return, to receive the mark
Of our safe passage from your sacred hand.

ACT IV: SCENE V

(Iphigenia alone)

I must obey, for those who are my own
I see in pressing danger, yet, alas,
My own fate troubles me, more and more!
May I no longer retain that calm hope
That I nurtured so beautifully alone?
Is the curse destined to work forever?
Shall no new generation ever arise
And be blessed? All things are mortal!
Life's deepest happiness, its noblest powers,
Must perish at the last, why not this curse?
For so I hoped, in vain, sequestered here,
Divorced from the destiny of my House,
Hoped, with a pure hand, and pure heart,
To atone for the stain upon its threshold.
No sooner is my brother in my embrace,
Swiftly, wonderfully, free of madness,
No sooner is the vessel in readiness
That might bear me to my native land,
Than Necessity's noble hand decrees
That I must now commit a dual crime:
To steal the sacred, venerated image
Entrusted to me, and betray a man
To whom I owe my life and my safety.
At least let repugnance not grow within!
Nor let the Titan's hatred for you gods

Fix its talons, like a vulture, in my heart!
Save me, and save your image in my soul!
The ancient chant sounds again in my ears!
I had forgotten it, and gladly so.
The song of the Parcae, once sung in horror
When Tantalus fell from his golden chair.
They suffered along with their noble friend,
Grim were their faces, dreadful was that chant.
As a child, our old nurse sang it to me,
And to my siblings, I recall it well.

(Chanting)

Be afraid of the gods
All you mortal children.
In their hands, eternally,
They hold dominion;
And within their realm,
They do as they please.

Let him fear them the most
Whom they have exalted!
On high cliffs, and on clouds,
At the golden tables,
Their seats are prepared.

If discord arises
Swiftly the guest falls,
Reviled and dishonoured,
Far into the darkness,
To await there, in vain,
A kinder judgement.

Yet, the gods, they remain,
At their golden tables,
Endlessly feasting;
Or they go striding,
From mountain to mountain,
While from the deep chasms
The breath of the Titans
Half-smothered, arises
Like clouds of burnt incense,
That lift to the skies.

The gift of their glances
Quite often withholding
From whole generations,
They turn from the offspring
To gaze on the features
Once loved, and still speaking,
Of that ancient sire.

To the Parcae's chanting,
The exiled one listens,
In his night-dark cavern,
The old man, to their song;
And thinks of his scions,
And shakes his grey head.

ACT V: SCENE I

(Thoas, Arkas)

ARKAS: I must admit, surrounded by confusion,
I know not where to direct suspicion.
On the captives, now in furtive flight?
On the priestess, who aids and abets them?
There's a rumour that the vessel of theirs
That brought them here lies hidden in some cove.
The stranger's 'madness', the new lustral rites
Some religious pretext for all this delay,
Call the more for our vigilance and care.

THOAS: Summon the priestess to attend, swiftly!
Then be as swift to search along the shore;
From the headland there, to the sanctuary.
Avoid its sacred depths, but set an ambush,
Then attack them, and seize them, when you can.

(Arkas exits)

ACT V: SCENE II

(Thoas remains alone)

THOAS: The anger in my heart rages fiercely;
First against the one whom I thought blessed,
Then against myself, for fostering treachery,
Through excessive kindness and indulgence.
Human beings soon adapt to servitude,
And even learn to obey more readily,
If they're wholly deprived of liberty.
Fallen into my ancestor's harsh hands,
If their sacred anger had let her live,
She would have been glad of her salvation,
And thankful for the kindness of her fate,
Would have shed a stranger's blood at the altar,
And have called necessity her duty.
But now, lulled by my kindness, a desire,
An audacious longing, has gripped her heart,
I had hoped, in vain, to bind her to me,
Instead, she now shapes her own destiny.
She won my heart through flattery, and now
When I oppose her, seeks to gain her end
Through cunning and deceit; treats my kindness
Like some old expired claim to ownership.

ACT V: SCENE III

(Thoas, Iphigenia)

IPHIGENIA: You summoned me here? What's the reason?

THOAS: You've delayed the sacrifice; tell me why.

IPHIGENIA: Yet I've made the whole thing clear, to Arkas.

THOAS: I wish to hear more details from yourself.

IPHIGENIA: The goddess has granted time for reflection.

THOAS: A delay that seems most opportune for you.

IPHIGENIA: If your heart is set on cruel sacrifice,
Then you should not have come to me, like this!
A king who demands what is inhuman,
Will find servants willing enough to share
Half the guilt, for a reward and pardon,
So, the monarch's hand remains untainted.
Veiled in a cloud, he hides, far from death,
Since it is his hirelings who bring ruin
And destruction, upon some wretch's head,
While he sits unmoved, upon the heights,
Like a god, quite untouched above the storm.

THOAS: A wild song, priestess, issues from your lips.

IPHIGENIA: Not 'priestess'; say Agamemnon's daughter!

You deferred to the words of an unknown;
Do you seek to command the princess? No!
From my childhood I was taught to obey
First my own dear parents, then the gods,
And, in obeying, felt my soul was free,
And fine; only the many harsh decrees
Of men, have I rejected, there and here.

THOAS: An ancient law, not myself, commands you.

IPHIGENIA: Our desires most readily grasp at laws

That can be used as weapons to sate them.
Another rule speaks to me, more ancient,
That tells me to oppose you; its command:
That every stranger we welcome is sacred.

THOAS: These men must be close to your heart, it seems,

Since your emotions and sympathy lead you
To forget the first guiding rule of prudence,
That one should not provoke the powerful.

IPHIGENIA: Whether I'm silent or I speak, you may know

All that is, and ever will be, in my heart.
Does not reflection on our common fate,
Persuade even the hardest heart to pity?
How much more it does mine! I see myself
In them. I once trembled before the altar

And the solemn shadow of an early death
Surrounded me, as I knelt there. The knife,
Was already poised to strike at my breast,
While, in my heart's depths, I felt the terror.
My vision failed – yet the goddess saved me.
Are we not bound to grant those in distress
What, by divine grace, we received ourselves?
You know this, and myself, yet you insist!

THOAS: That you enact the rite, not obey the king.

IPHIGENIA: No, no! Don't try to veil your show of power,
While delighting in a woman's powerlessness!
I am as freely born as any man.
If Agamemnon's son stood before you,
And you demanded what was not your due,
Well, he too has a strong arm, and a blade,
To defend all that's his, and dear to him.
I have only words, yet a noble man
Is obliged to respect a woman's word.

THOAS: So, I do; far more than a brother's sword.

IPHIGENIA: The power of the blade shifts to and fro,
No prudent warrior scorns his enemy;
Nor has Nature left the weaker party
Without aid, against force and harshness.
She granted folk cleverness and cunning,
Delay, evasion, leading to escape.
The powerful deserve to be thwarted so.

THOAS: Prudence is, wisely, opposed to cunning.

IPHIGENIA: Nor should a pure spirit need to use it.

THOAS: Do not, imprudently, condemn yourself.

IPHIGENIA: Oh, do you not see how my soul struggles
Against the evil fate that seeks to seize it,
Hoping to, bravely, foil your next attack?
Do I not stand before you, powerless?
You scorn the fair request, the olive-branch
Mightier than the sword, in a woman's hand.
What have I with which to defend myself?
Must I ask the goddess for some miracle?
Have I not strength in my spirit's depths?

THOAS: It would seem the fate of these two strangers
Concerns you excessively. Who are they,
These two that have so aroused your interest?

IPHIGENIA: They are – or seem – I take them to be – Greeks.

THOAS: Your countrymen? And no doubt they have stirred
The pleasing thought in you of returning home?

IPHIGENIA: (*After a moment's silence*)
Have men the only claim on noble deeds,
Have they the sole unique right to clasp
The impossible to their heroic breasts?
What do we praise as great? What inspires

The soul, roused by some oft-repeated tale;
If not those deeds, unlikely to succeed,
That the brave achieved? Must some man
Who steals into the enemy camp at night,
And, like fire, rages through it, suddenly,
Slaying the folk there, as they sleep or rouse,
Till, driven out by his foes on horseback,
He departs with the spoils – be praised alone?
Or one that, boldly scorning the beaten path,
Roams the forests and the mountain-sides,
Purging the land of its thieves and villains?
Is nothing left for us? Must a woman
Renounce her inborn right to tenderness,
And contend, a savage against savages,
Like an Amazon, to wrest power from you,
In order to avenge, in blood, oppression?
A bold plan of action stirs in my heart,
Yet I shall not escape many a reproach,
Nor a wealth of trouble if it goes awry.
I lay this on you alone! If, indeed,
You truly deserve the praise you win,
Show it by your actions, and, in me,
Honour the truth when spoken! Attend!
A plan was forged in secret. Ask in vain
After the captives, they have gone to seek
Their companions, aboard ship, by the shore.
The elder, who was seized by madness here,
And has now recovered – is Orestes,
My brother; the other his childhood friend
And confidant, who is named Pylades.
Apollo sent them from Delphi to this shore,

The god's divine command requiring them
To steal Diana's image from her shrine,
And so, allow his sister to re-join him,
For which the god promised the guilty man
Freedom from the Furies who pursue him,
He having shed his own mother's blood.
Thus, the last scions of Tantalus' House
I place in your hands; slay, if you're allowed.

THOAS: (*Ironically*)

Think you the savage Scythian will hear,
The voice of truth, and of humanity,
That Atreus the Greek once failed to hear?

IPHIGENIA: All hear it, that are born beneath the sky,

In whose veins the stream of life yet flows
Unconstrained. What now is your intention,
As regards me, in the inner silence
Of your thoughts. Is it death? Then kill me first!
Since I see no hope of escape remains,
Only the dreadful danger into which
I have, incautiously, thrust those I love.
Alas! I shall soon see them tightly bound!
How should I say farewell to the brother
Whom I'm required to murder? Never more
Shall I gaze into those much-beloved eyes!

THOAS: So, do they, such betrayers, weave a net
Of skilfully-composed words about one
That, long secluded, gives ready credence
To their speeches, and wishes to believe.

IPHIGENIA: No, no! I would swear these men are true.

And if, great king, you find them otherwise,
Then let them be slain, and cast me out,
Exiled, in punishment for my folly,
To some rock-bound island's gloomy shore.
But if one proves to be my dear Orestes,
My long-awaited brother, set us free,
Be as kind to the brother as the sister!
My father fell at the hand of his wife,
She at her son's hand, and on him alone
Rest the last hopes of the House of Atreus.
Let me depart, and with pure hand and heart
Make atonement for the errors of our clan.
Keep your word to me! You said: if, ever,
I might safely return then I could do so.
That time is now. A king should never grant
A petition to be free of the suppliant,
Nor promise what he hopes not to pay.
When he brings long-awaited happiness,
Only then does he achieve nobility.

THOAS: Impotently, as fire contends with water,
And seeks, hissing, to consume its foe,
So, in my heart I fight against your words.

IPHIGENIA: Oh, then, let mercy, like the holy light
Of the silent altar's flame, wreath me about
With a blaze of praise, thanksgiving and joy.

THOAS: How often has this voice soothed my spirit!

Act V: Scene III

IPHIGENIA: Oh, join hands with me, as a mark of peace.

THOAS: Great are your demands in so short a time.

IPHIGENIA: Brief thought is needed before doing good.

THOAS: Much thought! For evil often follows good.

IPHIGENIA: Hesitation may make evil out of good.
Cease to think; do what you feel is right.



ACT V: SCENE IV

(Iphigenia, Thoas, Orestes armed)

ORESTES: *(To his followers off-stage)*

Redouble your efforts, men; push them back!
Once more, for a moment; now, don't waver,
Keep a path free to the ship for my sister,
And for myself!

(He addresses Iphigenia, while failing to notice Thoas)

Come now, we are betrayed!
Swiftly, for there's but little time for flight!

(He suddenly perceives the king)

THOAS: *(Reaching for his sword)*

No man bears a naked blade in my presence,
And goes unpunished.

IPHIGENIA: *(To Orestes)*

Profane not the shrine,
The house of the goddess, with violence,
Tell your people to be still. Listen now
To the voice of the priestess, your sister.

ORESTES: Who is this, that threatens?

IPHIGENIA: Respect the king,
Who became a second father to me,
Forgive me brother! My childlike heart
Has placed our fate wholly in his hands.
I revealed our plan of escape to him,
And thereby saved my soul from treachery.

ORESTES: Will he permit us to depart in peace?

IPHIGENIA: Your drawn sword forbids a peaceful reply!

ORESTES: (*Sheathing his blade*)
Speak then. You see, I wait upon your word.



ACT V: SCENE V

(Iphigenia, Thoas, Orestes. Pylades enters followed by Arkas, both with swords drawn)

PYLADES: Delay not! For our friends are at their last;
Gathering their strength for one more effort,
They are yet in slow retreat towards the sea.
Is this a meeting of princes, I find here,
And this the honoured person of the king?

ARKAS: Calmly, sire, you stand amidst your foes,
As befits one who defies all enemies.
Soon their insolence will be punished.
Their forces now give way. The ship is ours,
A word from you, and it sinks in flames.

THOAS: Go! Order my troops to stay their hand.
Spare the enemy while we yet converse.

(Arkas exits)

ORESTES: *(To Pylades)*
I concur. Go now, my faithful friend,
Gather our folk together, and await
Whatever end to our plan, the gods decree.

(Pylades exits)

ACT V: SCENE VI

(Iphigenia, Thoas, Orestes)

IPHIGENIA: Yet free me from concern, before we speak.

I fear more strife if you refuse to hear
The gentle voice of mercy, mighty king,
Or you, my brother, fail to curb your ardour.

THOAS: As the older man, I will contain my wrath.

Tell me what proof you offer that you are
Agamemnon's son, and this one's brother?

ORESTES: This is the very sword with which he slew

Many a valiant warrior at Troy.
I seized it from his murderer, and asked
The gods above to grant me his courage,
Achievements, and strength, yet a nobler death.
Choose a nobleman from your followers,
And I will face the very best of them.
No stranger is denied such proof of honour,
Wherever a hero's son lives on this Earth.

THOAS: The custom here, of old, is not to grant

Such a privilege to random strangers.

ORESTES: So, let you and I, here, forge a new one.

A whole nation will consider it the law,

In imitation of our noble deed.
And let me fight not only for freedom,
But, as a stranger, for every stranger.
If I should fall, then let their fate be mine.
But if good fortune grants me victory,
Let none tread this distant shore and yet fail
To meet with looks of sympathy and love,
Or, once restored, depart again in peace!

THOAS: You seem, to me, young man not unworthy
Of the ancestry you pride yourself upon.
Many are the valiant men who attend me,
But, though advanced in years, I ever stand
Myself against a challenger, and so
Stand ready to chance my arm against you.

IPHIGENIA: No, no! There is no need to prove the thing
In blood! Remove your right hand from the sword!
Think of my fate. Rash combat may render
A man immortal, his death praised in song,
But later generations forget the tears
Some forsaken woman shed endlessly.
The poets neglect the thousand days
And nights that are occupied in weeping,
In which an anguished soul consumes itself,
Seeking to summon one so swiftly lost.
I was ever concerned that some deceit
Might lure me to slavery, from this place.
And so, I questioned every circumstance,
Demanded proof, but here I am certain.
See the mark on his right hand, three stars;

At his birth, indeed, the priest proclaimed
It one destined to act some dreadful deed,
And then this double scar convinced me,
That splits his eyebrow, for, when a child,
Elektra, who was careless by nature,
Let him fall from her arms, and he struck
His forehead against a metal tripod.
He, it is! Shall I offer up his likeness
To his father, as proof? Or this deep joy,
In my heart; a witness to my certainty?

THOAS: Even if your words banished every doubt,
Even though I quench the anger in my heart,
Yet our weapons must decide the outcome.
I see no peace. They seek to steal the image
Of the goddess, as you yourself confessed.
Should I be content for them to do so?
The Greeks ever cast a covetous eye
On the treasures of our 'barbarous' lands,
Fair daughters, fine steeds, a golden fleece;
But violence and cunning are not always
Sufficient to see the thieves safely home.

ORESTES: The sacred image shall not divide us.
We now see the error, like to a veil,
With which Apollo clouded our minds,
In ordering our journey. I had asked
For his counsel and for my deliverance
From the dire attentions of the Furies.
He replied: 'Bring my sister back to Greece,
Who, unwillingly, remains in Tauris,

Return her, and the curse shall be lifted!’
His words applied to Artemis’ statue,
And led us here! The harsh bonds that kept us
From you are severed, sister; you are ours
Once more. Embraced by you, I felt myself
Restored; in your arms, madness touched me
With its claw, next shook me to the marrow,
Then was banished, like a snake to its pit.
Now I see again the broad light of day,
The counsel of the goddess blazes forth
In all its beauty, and its glory.
She bore you, our House’s protectress,
Like a sacred image to which some oracle
Has attached the destiny of a city,
Far off, to preserve you in holy calm,
To bring blessing to your brother, and ours.
When all means of our escape seemed lost,
You inspired every hope in us once more.
Mighty king, let our thoughts turn to peace.
Do not thwart my sister from achieving
The consecration of our royal House.
Return me to those halls, thus purified,
And set the ancient crown on my brow!
Repay the blessings she has brought you;
Let my fraternal right take precedence.
The strength and cunning that men boast of,
Are shamed by the truth of this noble soul,
And her childlike trust, her purity,
Must prove reward enough for any man.

IPHIGENIA: Think of your promise; receive my words

As spoken by a true and faithful tongue,
Behold us, noble king! It is not often
That so fine an opportunity occurs.
You cannot fail to act. Free us swiftly.

THOAS: So be it!

IPHIGENIA: No so! For, noble king, I cannot go

Without your blessing, and against your wish.
Dismiss us not forever, let us claim
The right to warmth and hospitality
From you, and not be parted forever,
Banished and excluded. You are as dear
To me as was my father, Agamemnon;
That feeling is impressed upon my soul.
If the voice of even the humblest man
From this land should recall your voice to me,
Or likewise his style of dress recall Tauris,
I would joyfully receive him like a god.
I would beg him to sit beside the hearth,
While I prepared a bed so he might rest;
And then ask only of your health, and you.
Oh, for your kindness, and your actions,
May the gods grant you a fitting reward!
Farewell! Oh, turn your face on us, and grant
A sweet word of farewell in return!
So shall the breeze fill our sails more gently,
And the tears, on parting, flow less sadly
From these eyes. Farewell! And allow me
To clasp your right hand as a true token
Of our long-held friendship. Thoas, farewell!

Iphigenia In Tauris



'...noble king, I cannot go Without your blessing'

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was born in Frankfurt am Main in 1749. In 1774 he published his first major work, the self-revelatory novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, in which he created the prototype of the Romantic hero, and instigated a European fashion. He consequently became a leading figure in the *Sturm und Drang* movement, which celebrated a Promethean restlessness of spirit as opposed to the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Later, in the service of Duke Karl August at Weimar, Goethe took on a wide variety of social and cultural roles and, with his journey to Italy in 1786-88, turned extensively to Classical art and thought as a means of achieving greater personal balance and perspective. He also developed a range of scientific interests, for example plant biology and the theory of colour. His later literary achievements include the drama of *Faust*, and a wealth of shorter poems and lyrics embodying his mature philosophy. Goethe died in Weimar in 1832.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Anthony Kline lives in England. He graduated in Mathematics from the University of Manchester, and was Chief Information Officer (Systems Director) of a large UK Company, before dedicating himself to his literary work and interests. He was born in 1947. His work consists of translations of poetry; critical works, biographical history with poetry as a central theme; and his own original poetry. He has translated into English from Latin, Ancient Greek, Classical Chinese and the European languages. He also maintains a deep interest in developments in Mathematics and the Sciences.

He continues to write predominantly for the Internet, making all works available in download format, with an added focus on the rapidly developing area of electronic books. His most extensive works are complete translations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*.