Acting Edition

Iphigenia in Aulis

by Euripides

Transadapted by
Anne Washburn

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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IPHIGENIA IN AULIS was first produced by Classic Stage Company in New York City on August 10, 2015. The performance was directed by Rachel Chavkin, with choreography by Sonya Tayeh, original music by The Bengsons, set design by Arnulfo Maldonado, costume design by Normandy Sherwood, lighting design by Austin R. Smith, and sound design by Stowe Nelson. The production stage manager was Karyn Meek and the production manager was Amber Mathis. The cast was as follows:

AGAMEMNON/ACHILLES. . . . . Rob Campbell

MENELAUS/CLYTEMNESTRA . . . . . Amber Gray

OLD MAN/IPHIGENIA/MESSENGER . . . . . Kristen Sieh

CHORUS . . . . . Colette Alexander, Ato Blankson-Wood, Audrey Elaine Hailes, Geneva Harrison, Mark Jaynes, Níke Kadri, Austin Ku, Jo Lampert

CHARACTERS

Amateur productions may perform the play with an expanded cast. For professional productions the principal roles should be performed by three actors and chorus as follows:

Actor 1

AGAMEMNON – General of the army of the Greeks

ACHILLES – Soldier, son of Thetis and Peleus, leader of the Myrmidons

CLOAKED SLAVE

Actor 2

MENELAUS – Brother of Agamemnon, aggrieved husband

CLYTEMNESTRA – Wife to Agamemnon, mother of Iphigenia

Actor 3

OLD MAN – A slave in Agamemnon's service

IPHIGENIA – Daughter of Agamemnon

MESSENGER – Just that.

CHORUS

SETTING

This play is set outside of Agamemnon's tent in Aulis.

TIME

A quasi-Homeric 8th century BC.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Chorus members are a set of vibrant, young (mid-to-late teens), married ladies on a day trip from the non-Greek nation of Chalcis just over the crick. They should be played as young women by a mixture of actors of any age or gender without camp and only with very precise irony.

The Old Man would be from the same racial and ethnic group as the rest of the characters and would have likely arrived in Clytemnestra's household as a young man or child after his city suffered a military defeat, or as a victim of piracy.

In the final moment of the play, the role of Orestes should be performed by a puppet or some other design element, not an actor.

Asterisks (*) indicate moments where a character makes sense of something and then makes a decision.

NOTE ON MUSIC

The original production included music by The Bengsons. If you are interested in this music, please contact your Concord licensing representative, who will provide information for securing a separate music license.

TRANSADAPTATION

Euripides died before completing *Iphigenia in Aulis*, and the play was finished by his son, or nephew, Euripides the Younger. A century later the play was altered by someone scholars call The Reviser, possibly an Actor-Manager, who reworked the play to increase the level of spectacle and pathos and to conform to the different dramaturgical interests of the time. Through the centuries some lines suffered a certain amount of attrition and morphing from copying and recopying and at some point the last page was lost and a new one was written in what is apparently an atrocious imitation of classical Greek.

I'm calling this a transadaptation because I don't read Ancient Greek and am dependent on the translations and notes of others; there isn't complete agreement on which sections are spurious and so at various points I've made decisions, cutting away the material which, to my playwright brain, feels soggy or unnecessary or unEuripidean; rarely I have allowed myself very brief moments of invention, mainly to help bridge the play for a modern audience that isn't as familiar with the backstory of the play, or the context in which it was written, as the original Athenian audience; and so for all of these reasons it is an adaptation.

This is a translation in spirit, however. I love the play, which is as ferociously complex as it is ferociously simple, and my goal for this version is only to make it as intelligible and felicitous as possible and the vast vast majority of this play is, line by line, thought by thought, a faithful rendering. I've refashioned the choral sections so that they can be sung and danced with contemporary music and contemporary movement, but all the songs closely reflect the content and concerns of the original odes. The Bengsons have created a wonderful score.

Any production is the work of many hands, and no work makes it through two thousand four hundred years of history alone. The play you are reading has been touched by many, including myself, but the mind which shines through it, in all of its terrible and heartbreaking lucidity, is Euripides.

*(**AGAMEMNON** stands before his tent.)*

(It is just before dawn.)

(He is holding a letter and addresses the audience.)

AGAMEMNON. To the lovely Leda, wife of Tyndareus –
and much beloved of Zeus – was born two daughters: the
one my wife, Clytemnestra, the other – Helen
of whom, I suspect, you will have heard…mention.
It is for Helen, a remarkable beauty
and the daughter of a king, that the thrivingest
best born fiercest most spirited young men in Greece
vie with alacrity – issuing horrible
and specific threats against the one who wins
her should that one not be his own heroic self.
Tyndareus, her father, is at a loss; in
this tense swirl of romantic ambition to give
her or refuse her alike can only lead to
violence, luckily – or it seemed, at any rate,
like luck – he has an inspiration: the suitors
make a pact and swear a holy oath
right hands joined: all will defend
the man who wins her if any seize her from him:
be he Greek – eyes narrowed, flicking round the circle –

or Barbarian – an army will be raised an
expedition mounted any citadel stormed
– well it all made a kind of sense at the time.

This done, Tyndareus, in another bold stroke,
allows Helen to make her own choice: to select
the man towards whom she is wafted by the sweet breath
of Eros. That intoxicating breeze wafts her –
would it had not – to my brother, Menelaus,
the marriage and the one daughter, Hermione.
Enter Paris. That gaudy barbarian. Gowns
like meadows in bloom gold tinkling at his wrist
his eye on Helen, and her eyes upon him and
Menelaus away and after a flurry
of songs and sighs they skulk into the night, his ship,
emerging finally in Troy's golden citadel.

Menelaus returns to an echoing house
no guest, no wife, tears through Greece in mad hysterics
loins wracked, recalling every suitor to his oath.
And thereupon Greece, with a roar, pulls its
weapons down from the wall, bids families adieu,
and ship after ship, shields, horses, chariots all
are assembled here, in the harbor at Aulis.

It is myself, by common consent, selected
General of the army. An honor I sorely
wish had fallen to another man. For as soon

as we are mustered, and ready to sail, the wind
shifts and steadily perplexes any thought of
departure and so we wait, on this barren shore.
Into the mystery speaks Calchas the priest who
declares to all we have offended the goddess
Artemis, holy in this place; she demands a
sacrifice – the offering which will suffice is
my daughter, Iphigenia. That accomplished,
we will have leave to sail and take the city Troy
otherwise we founder here, bobbing uselessly,
martial fervor fading into restless discontent;

Hearing this I told the herald, Talthybius,
to proclaim in his klaxon voice the disbanding
of the entire army; know that I am not
a man who has the heart to kill his own child
It was my brother, plying every kind of
argument, who swayed me to commit a horror:
I wrote a letter to my wife; I told her: pack
our daughter's things and send her here, to the Greek camp
I am going to marry her to Achilles
I described him as a man above all men, I
said he will not sail until our houses are joined
until my daughter is his wife and nestled in
his home in Pythia, awaiting his return
Send the girl, my wife, send her – I am waiting.

It was a terrible decision. This letter

reverses it old man, come out from the tent. I

have an errand for you, come! What is that baleful

star still bright in the heavens? Near the Pleiades?

The birds, the sea, silent: night: not a breath of wind.

There is still time, there is time enough, Old Man, hurry!

OLD MAN. I am hurrying! The old sleep but restlessly

I am up in a moment alert and ready.

AGAMEMNON. Come now, take this letter, and bear it to Argos

run as fast as you can, don't let your age slow you

OLD MAN. This letter you have written through the night, by the

light of a lamp written and erased sealed unsealed

AGAMEMNON. Don't yield to temptation, to a cool patch of soft

turf by a spring on the dusty road – press onward!

OLD MAN. Folded and unfolded flung to the earth weeping

tell me, General Agamemnon, what have you done?

AGAMEMNON. If you come to a crossroads look both ways don't let

her escort speed past unnoticed if you meet them

seize the horses shake the reins and send them flying

back to Argos back, to the ancient thick walled keep

what I have done? Nevermind what I have done. Be

only thankful for your low state be thankful that

it has never been, and never will be in your

power to do the things that I have done – now go

the dawn kindles the first light catches the shore and
flares across the sand you have your task old man – run!

(The **OLD MAN** *runs off.)*

*(***AGAMEMNON** *returns to his tent.)*

(There is a moment.)

(The **CHORUS** *appears.)*

CHORUS. *(Sung.)*

Here I am here I am here
I am here I am look at me
Giddy on the sandy shore
of Aulis by the sea
dancing laughing picnicking
we've tumbled merrily
fashionable young wives
on a jaunty springtime spree

We've dashed over from Chalcis
It's just across the way
Delightful delightful Chalcis
We're going to make a day
of it (I'm sure you've heard of Chalcis)
(It's very famous!) (Locally!)

our husbands told us all about it
every fact that we could wring
a thousand mighty ships
and Agamemnon a great king

are going to get that Helen
I wish that I could see the whooooooole thing!

We ran through the grove of Artemis
Past the altar there
hung round with beasts of sacrifice
we did not stop to stare
but with cheeks so pink from blushing
(Pink? Try scarlet!) (Don't worry
you just look healthy!) (Fire! Engine! Red!)

blushing or no we want to see
the golden host of ships and men
before they launch so splendidly

the shields and the armor and the horses and…
the Greeks! *(Laughter.)*

Here we are here we are here
we are here we are look at us
on the sandy shores of Aulis
dancing like Bacchus!

I saw both of the Ajaxes
chatting side by side
Protesilaus and Palamedes
by checkers totally beguiled
Diomedes with a discus
Meriones *and* Nireus

(so handsome!) and…

Odyessus…we saw…

Odysseus…

(They're trying to think of something nice to say about Odysseus but give up.)

And I saw Achilles (Yes I did!)

swifter than the wind

The Tremendous Achilles

(Son of a water nymph!)

(Raised by a centaur!)

I think he saw me and he grinned!

(Noooo!)

(They all cover their faces and/or fall over from embarrassment)

Racing in his armor across the sandy shore

Racing *barefooted* against a chariot with four

Horses (a chariot!) (*four* horses!)

Each of them with bridles

Made from purest gold

Magnificent dappled horses

Strong so lovely bold

And delightful, incredible, astonishing to see

Achilles thunders forward and he takes the victory

I came to see with my own eyes

And to count with my own lips

These wondrous men

And their wonderful ships

(Spoken:)

and when I am an old woman

sitting by the fire

They will tell the story of this army

They will tell the story of this day

And I will say I was there

And I remember

Yes I will say that I remember

*(***MENELAUS** *enters, holding the letter, dogged by the* **OLD MAN**.*)*

OLD MAN. Menelaus this is outrageous, shame!

MENELAUS. Back! You are too faithful to your master!

OLD MAN. Your reproach only brings me great honor!

MENELAUS. Keep this up old man and you'll regret it!

OLD MAN. You had no right to open that letter!

MENELAUS. You had no right to abet treachery!

OLD MAN. Argue that with the general. The letter!

MENELAUS. I'm not letting go of this!

OLD MAN. Nor am I!

MENELAUS. I *will* bash your skull with my scepter!

OLD MAN. To die for loyalty is glorious!

MENELAUS. Flowery talk for a slave now let go!

*(***MENELAUS** *has the letter.)*

OLD MAN. I am misused, master Agamemnon, I am

wronged, this man takes your letter from my hand by force!

AGAMEMNON. Eya. What is this unholy commotion *(To the* **OLD MAN**.*)* Tell me

MENELAUS. I'll be the one to tell you what is going on.

AGAMEMNON. Will you tell me why you have detained my servant?

MENELAUS. Look me in the face before I do so

AGAMEMNON. You think, Menelaus, that I can't meet your eye?

MENELAUS. Let your eye fall upon this treacherous object.

AGAMEMNON. I see it. And you will now give it back to me.

MENELAUS. When I proclaim its contents to the army

AGAMEMNON. You broke the seal of a private letter

MENELAUS. And your grotesque betrayal is exposed.

AGAMEMNON. This is appalling. How did you get hold of it?

MENELAUS. Waiting on the road for your daughter's arrival.

AGAMEMNON. For *my* daughter – you can explain this presumption!

MENELAUS. I took a notion – oh and yes: I'm not your slave.

AGAMEMNON. Outrageous. Shall I not manage my own household?

MENELAUS. When you can't even manage your capricious mind?

AGAMEMNON. Clever but unjust: yours is a coward's nimble tongue.

MENELAUS. An unreliable man is the worst of friends
I'm going to show you to yourself; you don't deny
the truth and I won't make it any *bitterer*
than it has to be – you can remember, should you
choose to, how humble you were when you were eager –
in your heart, despite an elaborate show of
reluctance – to command the army. You clasped each
and every hand, opened your house to everyone,
high or low, and took strangers by surprise with warm
attentions. Office won, however, you were a
different man: haughty, and remote, your door closed
shut.
A good man won't swap character when he succeeds
in fact it's then he cleaves the closest to his friends
now that he can assist them with his good fortune.
It was then I first questioned your character but
it was here at Aulis that I truly came to
know your base irresolution – there you were, head
of an army, and all your grand ambitions were
dashed by a change in the wind a general cry went
up: let's waste no more time here, disband the ships, men
began to pack the camp away, and set for home –
The look on your face then: piteous confusion:
a thousand ships, slipping from your fingers the plains
of Troy empty of your spearmen, your Victory
your honors, your glorious command, just melting

away like snow – you sought my advice – what will I
do? Is there no way forward? You were desperate.
And when Calchas prophesied that your daughter could
appease the Goddess you *leapt* to send the letter
never deny that and yet here you are, weak as
always, as always torn by whims, fits, frights – a change
of heart and another letter – the Gods see it!
So many men have trod this road: they struggle for
power for success only to find they don't have
the guts for it, and in the end they lose it all –
it's Greece I mourn for, above everything, a Greece
longing to avenge her honor thwarted by your
cowardice taunted by barbarians mocking
barbarians who flout us without consequence.

CHORUS. It is terrible to see brothers divided
to watch a family tear itself apart in rage

AGAMEMNON. I think I should like, in my own turn, to address
a few words of criticism to yourself; I
shall be brief; I will not allow this argument
to escalate recklessly; you are my brother,
and one prides oneself on restraint, moderation.
I hope you will tell me why you are puffing, eyes
bloodshot, flustered, who has wronged
you? What do you lack? Is it a faithful wife? That,
I am afraid, is more than I can promise you,

after all, you don't seem capable of managing
a woman. Please tell me why it is that I should
pay the penalty for your weakness. It isn't
my *ambition* which disturbs you, *lust* disturbs you,
you want that beautiful body back in your arms
and you're willing to throw aside common sense, and
the last of your dignity for that degraded
pleasure. If I made a bad decision, and I've
rethought it does that make me variable? Or weak?
Look at you, you lose a bad wife which is heaven
doing you a *favor* and you scramble panting
like a dog, tongue lolling, to retrieve her – who here
has proven himself unsound? Take Helen's suitors
and make your expedition, the fools are ready
to go, and they are fools indeed if they think the
Gods hold them to an oath sworn under compulsion.
I am not a man who murders my own daughter.
Shall you joyously satisfy dishonorable
longings while I spend my nights my days worn away
by tears wracked by the horror of what I have done
where is the justice in that, no, it will not be.
Those are my few words: brief, clear, cogent. You may not
wish to be sensible; I will conduct my life rightly.

CHORUS. You have changed your mind – but in the right direction
for it is good to spare the lives of one's children!

MENELAUS. And now in my need my every friend deserts me

AGAMEMNON. A blind loyalty to you would destroy a man

MENELAUS. You claim to be my brother but will not prove it

AGAMEMNON. I am your support in sanity not madness

MENELAUS. We know our kin because they share our griefs

AGAMEMNON. A drowning man drags his savior under

MENELAUS. You won't take on your country's struggle then

AGAMEMNON. A God has made both you, and all Greece, mad

MENELAUS. Let your scepter be your brother then and pray it
is all the brother you will ever need I have
other friends to turn to –

MESSENGER. High Lord Agamemnon
I bring you your daughter, she whom you were pleased to
name Iphigenia. Accompanying her
is her mother your wife Clytemnestra, and the
babe Orestes – you will want to see him for you
have been away for a time. Such a long journey!
The ladies cool their soft feet in a flowing spring;
We have set the mares to graze in a green meadow;
And I am come running ahead to prepare you.
Word of this has spread through the army like a fire;
they throng to see your daughter – those blessed by fortune
Are known to all, and everyone wants just a peek.

(Tiny pause.)

There is some *wonder*, of course, at her arrival;
word is that in the sacred grove of Artemis
preparations are underway…as if for the
offerings customary before a marriage…
there is speculation: who is the lucky groom?

(His hint is not taken.)

(The **MESSENGER** *exits perhaps humming the wedding march in a sprightly and knowing manner to himself.)*

*(***AGAMEMNON***, who has been in a kind of shocked trance, slowly returns to his body.)*

AGAMEMNON. Oieh, my wife, my wife accompanies her
how am I going, to begin, I am bound my
struggles only tangle me the more profoundly
trap me inexorably the God outwits me
if I'd been born nothing, no one that would be bliss
The low man weeps, wails, cries out however he likes
The royal man cannot weep. Dignity rules him
I am ashamed to cry, and ashamed to not cry;
what kind of man would be unmoved by this horror
And there it is. Unbidden. Inexorable.

(A tear has slid down his cheek.)

(Music begins.)

My daughter, my lovely daughter soon a maiden
no more, but the bride only of death how will I
what will I say to her, how can speech encompass

it and she, O Gods, what words will she speak to me…
Paris has destroyed me Paris seducer of
Helen, it is Paris who has done this to me

CHORUS. *(Sung.)*
I am foreign and a woman but I am moved
to pity for the troubles of a royal house

MENELAUS. Brother give me your hand. I will swear you an oath.

AGAMEMNON. I can only submit to you. You rule me now.

MENELAUS. I swear to you by our grandfather Pelops, and
I swear to you by our father Atreus, that
what I will say next is plain, and true, and from my
heart, no craft, no guile: my thoughts revealed candidly:
I saw your tears and I felt my heart break open.
All that I said I now renounce, do not fear me
I stand with you now. I cannot ask you to grieve
while my life is joyous to send your daughter to
eternal darkness while mine lives on in the light

What is it I want do I want a wife? I can
make another, better, marriage do I destroy
a brother, the last person in the world I should
injure, for a whore, trading good for evil I
have been a child I see that now careless of the
consequences and she is my *kin*, my own blood
Disband the army abandon this adventure
and let us leave this place and all of our weeping

Whatever you would gain by this oracular
pronouncement – glory, position, wealth – I myself
want no part of it the destruction of a hated
enemy, the admiration of a nation
the spoils of a golden city – I shall have
none of it – take my share. And now you have heard me
speaking finally, I think, from the heart and why not
I've come to my senses and remembered what is
due to a brother born of the same parents and
of course a decent man always behaves rightly.

CHORUS. Nobly said, sentiments worthy of Tantalus
Truly you do your great ancestor all honor

AGAMEMNON. Menelaus, I thank you. Against my every
expectation you speak justly. And worthily.

But she is in the camp now and the deed is all
but done I am compelled to murder my daughter

MENELAUS. Compelled? Who can compel you to kill your own child?

AGAMEMNON. The army of the Greeks demands this sacrifice

MENELAUS. They know nothing; only you, me, Odysseus…

AGAMEMNON. They'll know when Calchas, mad for glory, tells them all.

MENELAUS. The priest is a problem easy enough to solve

(A throat slitting gesture.)

AGAMEMNON. How will you solve the problem of Odysseus

MENELAUS. Ah. Yes. It's true that he is an ambitious man.

AGAMEMNON. He is a man who cannot handle dynamite
without throwing it. He won't keep this secret he
will whip an army thirsty for victory pillage
excitement glory to hysterics do this one
thing for me, Menelaus, keep this from my wife
until the…moment…has passed spare me that.
And you, you foreign women, you'll keep your mouths shut

*(***AGAMEMNON** *withdraws into his tent.)*

*(***MENELAUS** *exits.)*

CHORUS. *(Sung.)*
Eros has two arrows in his quiver
one brings us sweet contentment
(and the other makes us shiver
with delight)

one brings us our fulfillment

(the other sends us slipping past
the palace guard and running through the night)

Eros has two arrows to deploy
one brings us joy
for the whole of our life
the other will only destroy

so sweet is the love which is calm
balm to our souls it uplifts
and consoles

a light for all of our days
is a tender steady heart
and a life lived in praise

I love to love to love
I love to love to love
O I love to love to love
But when it is Enormous
Send it away send it away
send it away

(running with our lover our hearts pounding
through the dark and starry night)

the ship is waiting past the breakers
my heart swirling and your eyes
in the torchlight oh your eyes in the torchlight

Paris and Helen you had
a tremendous love
and it crumbled your foundations
A love all mortals dream of
and the wind whirled and hurled you

I love to love to love
I love to love to love
O I love to love to love
But when it is enormous
Send it away send it away
send it away

Men set their sights on the towers of Troy

Your love has brought you disaster

The sea will fill with a thousand ships

While the wind blows ever faster

The wind will blow ever faster

*(***IPHIGENIA** *runs onstage, followed by* **CLYTEMNESTRA**.*)*

IPHIGENIA. Mother I run ahead of you – don't be angry –

And am the first to throw my arms around father

CLYTEMNESTRA. Oh go ahead go ahead of all the children

I bore him you're the one who's always loved him best

IPHIGENIA. Father! Hello! It's so wonderful you brought me here!

AGAMEMNON. My child, what you have said – what can be said to that.

IPHIGENIA. Daddy you look tense and tired distracted and low

AGAMEMNON. A king and a commander has much on his mind

IPHIGENIA. Oh but it's me! I'm here! Throw your worries aside.

AGAMEMNON. I am thinking, at this moment, only of you.

IPHIGENIA. Unwrinkle that forehead then I love you smiling

AGAMEMNON. There. I am so glad to look on you, you can't know.

IPHIGENIA. Are you but aren't those tears spilling out of your eyes?

AGAMEMNON. I am going to miss you, darling, very much.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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