

STUDY GUIDE



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GREEK CYCLE: year ONE of THREE

IPHIGENIA in Aulis

by EURIPIDES

translated by

NICHOLAS RUDALL

directed by

CHARLES NEWELL

Nov 6 - Dec 7, 2014

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COURT THEATRE **CELEBRATE 60**

Iphigenia in Aulis

by Euripides Translated by Nicholas Rudall
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SETTING

The action takes place in east-central Greece at the port of Aulis, on the Euripus Strait. The time is approximately 1200 BCE.

CHARACTERS

Agamemnon

father of Iphigenia, husband of Clytemnestra and King of Mycenae

Menelaus

brother of Agamemnon

Clytemnestra

mother of Iphigenia, wife of Agamemnon

Iphigenia

daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra

Achilles

son of Peleus

Chorus

women of Chalcis who came to Aulis to see the Greek army

Old Man

servant of Agamemnon, was given as part of Clytemnestra's dowry

Messenger

ABOUT THE PLAY

Iphigenia in Aulis is the last existing work of the playwright Euripides. Written between 408 and 406 BCE, the year of Euripides' death, the play was first produced the following year in a trilogy with *The Bacchae* and *Alcmaeon in Corinth* by his son, Euripides the Younger, and won the first place at the Athenian City Dionysia festival.



Agamemnon
Costume rendering by Jacqueline Firkins.



SYNOPSIS

At the start of the play, Agamemnon reveals to the Old Man that his army and warships are stranded in Aulis due to a lack of sailing winds. The winds have died because Agamemnon is being punished by the goddess Artemis, whom he offended. The only way to remedy this situation is for Agamemnon to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia, to the goddess Artemis. Agamemnon then admits that he has sent for Iphigenia to be brought to Aulis but he has changed his mind. He decides to send a second message through the Old Man, telling Iphigenia not to come to Aulis. The message never gets to her, however, since the Old Man, soon after leaving with the message, is caught by Menelaus.

Menelaus comes to Agamemnon upset, since this means Agamemnon (his brother) is going back on his word to help him fight Troy for his wife, Helen. Menelaus also expressed his concern that Agamemnon's attempt to save his daughter may lead to mutiny and the downfall of Greece since Agamemnon's actions may be interpreted by the soldiers as Agamemnon placing his family above the soldiers. The brothers debate the matter and, eventually, they manage to change the other's mind: Menelaus is convinced that it would be better to disband the Greek army than to have his niece killed and Agamemnon is now ready to carry out the sacrifice, believing that the army will storm his palace and kill his entire family if he does not go through with the sacrifice of Iphigenia. By the time they come to these conclusions, Clytemnestra is already on her way to Aulis with Iphigenia and her baby brother Orestes, believing that she is bringing Iphigenia to Aulis to marry the great warrior Achilles.

It is not long before Clytemnestra, Iphigenia and Achilles discover that they are part of an elaborate ruse crafted by Agamemnon to trick Iphigenia into coming to Aulis. Achilles, initially, vows to defend Iphigenia. However, when he tries to rally the Greeks against the sacrifice, he discovers that the entirety of the Greek soldiers demand that Agamemnon's wishes be carried out. Clytemnestra and Iphigenia try to persuade Agamemnon to change his mind, but the General believes that he has no choice. As Achilles prepares to defend Iphigenia by force, Iphigenia, realizing that she has no hope of escape, begs Achilles not to throw his life away in a lost cause. Over her mother's protests and to Achilles's admiration, she consents to the sacrifice, declaring that she would rather die heroically than be dragged to the altar. Leading the chorus in a hymn to Artemis, she goes to her death.



THEMES

1) PRIDE

Agamemnon would rather sacrifice his daughter than suffer a blow to his pride. He prizes his position as general of the Greek armies, which makes him a king of kings, and knows that refusing to follow the advice of Calchas would lower his standing in the eyes of his men.

2) COURAGE AND COWARDICE

Agamemnon yields to the will of Calchas and sacrifices his daughter to appease his army and preserve his ego. His cowardice contrasts sharply with the courage of his daughter, who willingly sacrifices herself for the good of Greece.

3) DECEIT

Agamemnon lies about why he wants Iphigenia to come to Aulis. After she arrives with her mother and brother, Agamemnon continues to lie about his intentions.

4) REVENGE

Revenge against the Trojans motivates the Greek soldiers. They wish to visit retribution upon the Trojans for an outrageous offense committed against the Greeks by Paris.

5) UNGODLY GOD

The author sympathizes with Iphigenia. She is a young, innocent, noble girl who must be sacrificed to the goddess Artemis so that the latter will send favorable winds to fill the sails of the Greek fleet. Euripides appears to frown on a culture that places faith in such a goddess.

Summarized from www.cummingsstudyguides.net/Guides9/Iphigenia.html

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

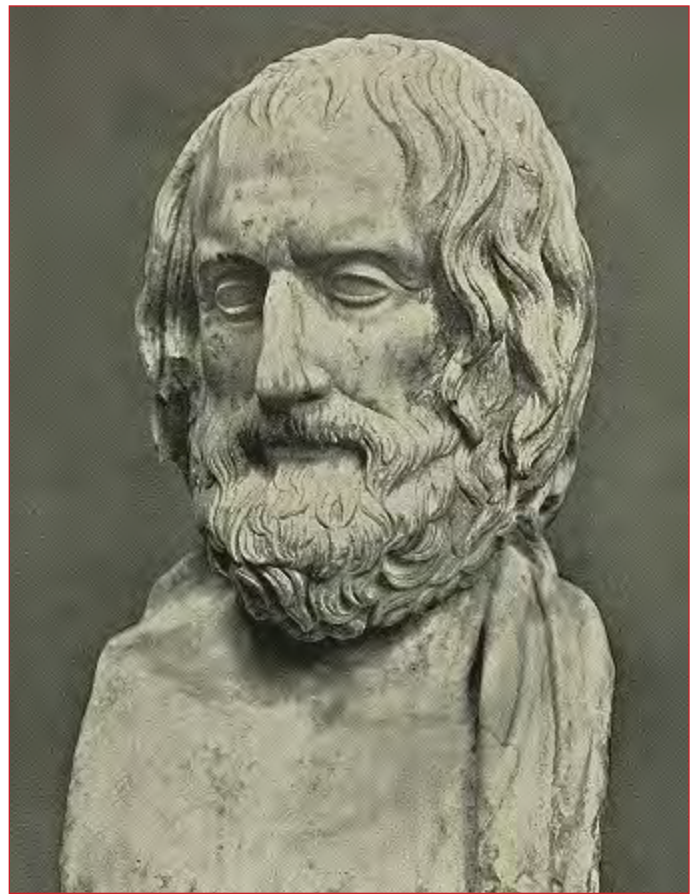
Born in 480 BCE on Salamis Island to a merchant family, Euripides spent his life studying a vast array of disciplines including arts, religion, science, and philosophy. Recognized as the youngest of the three renowned Greek tragedy writers (the other two being Aeschylus and Sophocles), Euripides is thought to have composed 92 plays, with 17 still in existence. He first received the honor to compete in a dramatic festival of Dionysus in 455 and won his first of four, first prize awards in 441. Some defining qualities of his work include his sympathetic portrayal of women, focus on the individual human, realism and skepticism towards the gods and heroes. Euripides died in Macedonia in 406 BCE, and *Iphigenia in Aulis* was produced posthumously.

WRITING *IPHIGENIA IN AULIS*

It is important to note that though the three-year cycle of Greek plays including *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Agamemnon*, and *Electra* discuss events during the mythological Trojan war (see the “Trojan War” section for more information), Euripides was writing in the midst of the all too real Peloponnesian war waged between Athens and Sparta. Because of the danger of the war, it is rumored Euripides left Athens in favor of Macedonia to finish his life, however his final plays reflect the violence and ethical dilemmas presented by the war surrounding him. Below is an excerpt of the article “The Peloponnesian War and its Connection to *Iphigenia in Aulis*” written by Court dramaturg, Martine Kei Green-Rogers:

So, why was the Peloponnesian war waged between Athens and Sparta? Athens and Sparta previously sparred during the First Peloponnesian War and had managed to maintain a tenuous truce, the Thirty Years Peace agreement. However in 433 BCE, the tensions between the two (re-opened due to some other smaller conflicts) came to a head when Athens allied with Corcyra, a strategically important colony of Corinth (which at the time was mostly controlled by Sparta). From this action, Sparta accused Athens of aggression and threatened to wage war. Pericles (a prominent Greek general) urged Athens not to back down and, resultantly, diplomatic measures failed. This opened the door for Thebes, a Spartan ally, to attack Plataea, an Athenian ally, and an all-out war raged from this moment (with a 6-year truce) until 404 B.C.

As 406 BCE approached and a war continued on, the Athenian navy was at a crossroads. After the Battle of Arginusae in 406 B.C.E (a battle the Athenians won but



Euripides

because of weather conditions the Athenian generals thought it was best to leave rather than finish off the weakened Spartan army) the Athenians executed their best commanders leaving the Athenian navy struggling. Amongst this backdrop, Euripides chose to write about a turning point in a war that reflected very similar circumstances. Agamemnon is at a crossroads because a prophesy from Calchas states that he must sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia, to the goddess Artemis in order to obtain the winds in Aulis to sail towards their battle against Troy. Agamemnon worries that if his soldiers discover his struggle with committing the sacrifice, mutiny will ensue. In this play, Agamemnon must weigh the sacrifice of his daughter against the honor of Greece and his brother, Menelaus, the King of Sparta. This play, and the events occurring as Euripides wrote the play, question the cost (economically and in personage) of war waged for the sake of honor. Luckily, in Euripides’ play, the gods “save the day,” which is not a luxury for those embroiled in the Peloponnesian War.

See “Further Reading” for the full text of this article.



Marine with the Trojans Burning their Boats - Claude Lorrain, 1642

THE STRUCTURE OF GREEK TRAGEDIES

All three tragedy playwrights wrote their plays in a specific conventional style. The structural elements of the plays are listed below:

- a. Prologue: Spoken by one or two characters before the chorus appears. The prologue usually gives the mythological background necessary for understanding the events of the play.
- b. Parodos: This is the song sung by the chorus as it first enters the orchestra and dances.
- c. First Episode: This is the first of many “episodes,” when the characters and chorus talk.
- d. First Stasimon: At the end of each episode, the other characters usually leave the stage and the chorus dances and sings a stasimon, or choral ode. The ode usually reflects on the things said and done in the episodes, and puts it into some kind of larger mythological framework. For the rest of the play, there is alternation between episodes and stasima, until the final scene, called the...
- e. Exodos: At the end of play, the chorus exits singing a processional song which usually offers words of wisdom related to the actions and outcome of the play

(From <http://english.tjc.edu/engl2332nbyr/Greekdramastructure.htm>)

THE TROJAN WAR

The Trojan War was a legendary conflict between the early Greeks and the people of Troy in western Anatolia, dated by later Greek authors to the 12th or 13th century BCE. The war stirred the imagination of the ancient Greeks more than any other event in their history, and was celebrated in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer, as well as a number of other early works now lost, and frequently provided material for the great dramatists of the Classical Age. It also figures in the literature of the Romans (e.g., Virgil's *Aeneid*) and of later European peoples down to the 20th century.

In the traditional accounts, Paris, son of the Trojan king, ran off with Helen, wife of Menelaus of Sparta, whose brother Agamemnon then led a Greek expedition against Troy. The ensuing war lasted 10 years, finally ending when the Greeks pretended to withdraw, leaving behind them a large wooden horse with a raiding party concealed inside. When the Trojans brought the horse into their city, the hidden Greeks opened the gates to their comrades, who then sacked Troy, massacred its men, and carried off its women. This version was recorded centuries later; the extent to which it reflects actual historical events is not known.

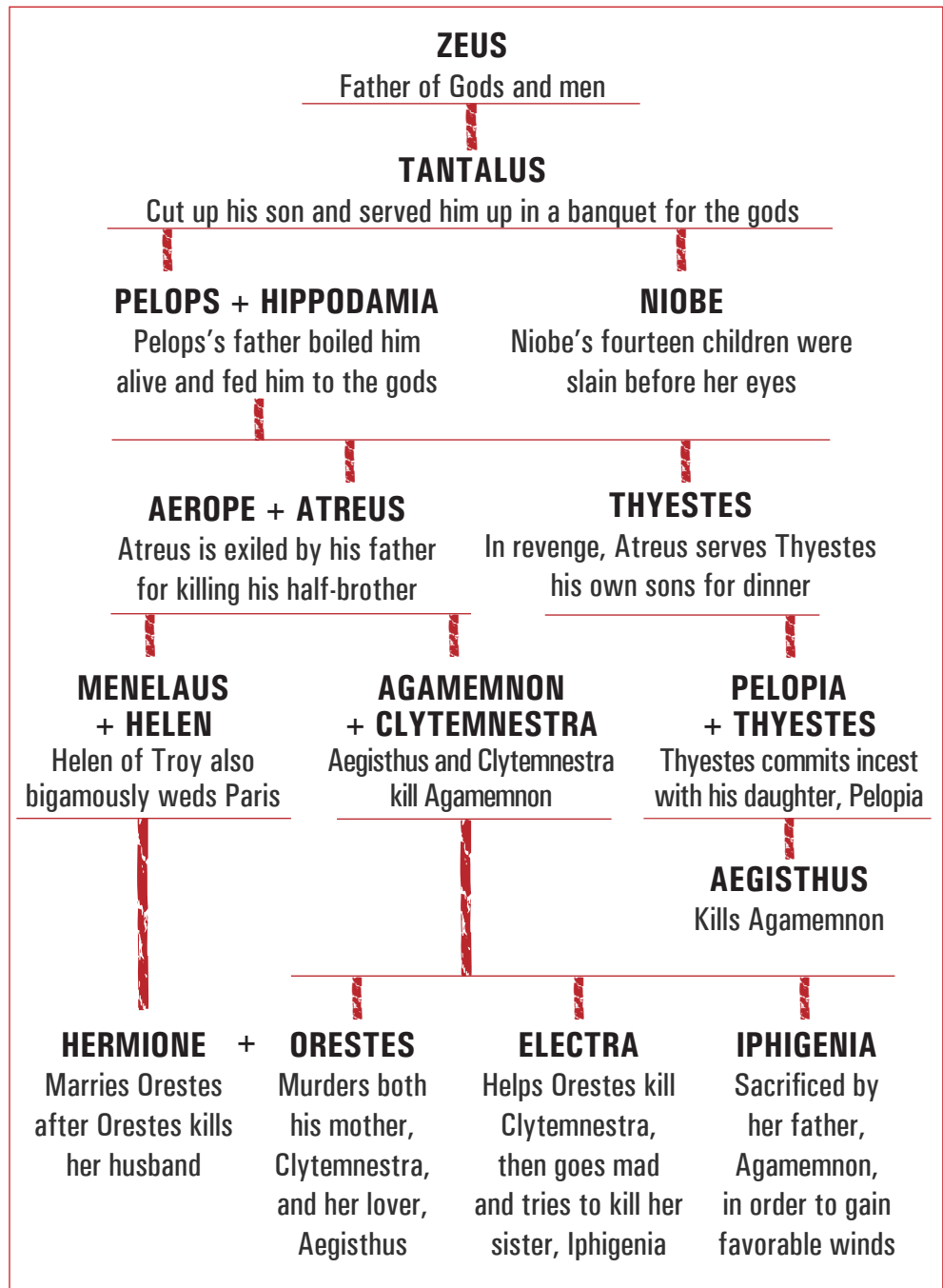
Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s. v. “Trojan War,” accessed October 05, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/606309/Trojan-War>.

THE HOUSE OF ATREUS

Taken together, Court's cycle of tragedies will look at how choices reverberate through a family: violence begets violence in Grecian mythology, perhaps nowhere more clearly than in the House of Atreus. The founder of the House of Atreus was Tantalus of Lydia, son of Zeus and the most highly honored of all of Zeus's mortal children. Despite being so highly honored, he hated the Gods and doubted their omniscience. He invited the Gods to feast at his house, but secretly fed them the flesh of his own son, Pelops, in order to test the extent of their divine knowledge. All of the Gods immediately discovered his deception, except for Demeter, who absentmindedly took a bite while mourning her kidnapped daughter Persephone. Zeus punished him with the eternal torture of having both food and water just out of his reach — thus "tantalizing" him.

The Gods also revived Tantalus's son Pelops, who went on to lead a life of infamy. He decided to seek the hand of the Princess Hippodamia in marriage and agreed to a chariot race against her father. To ensure his success he had his friend Myrtilus rig his opponent's chariot, causing a fatal accident. Afterwards, Pelops killed Myrtilus to prevent gossip that his victory had been unfair. As Myrtilus died he cursed Pelops and his descendants for the betrayal.

Pelops and Hippodamia had two children, Atreus (the namesake of the House of Atreus), and Thyestes. Thyestes, the younger son, challenged Atreus's inheritance and seduced Atreus's wife. Atreus banished Thyestes, but later decided to give him a worse punishment and invited him back under the guise of friendship. When Thyestes returned, eager to make peace, Atreus secretly killed two of Thyestes' sons and served them to him in a banquet. When Thyestes discovered the deception, he fled with his only remaining son, Aegisthus.



Atreus had two sons, Menelaus and Agamemnon, who married two sisters, Helen and Clytemnestra. When the Trojan prince, Paris, abducted Helen, the Greeks banded together to bring her home, and appointed Agamemnon the general of the Greek Army. As the army was gathering at Aulis and preparing to leave, Agamemnon killed one of Artemis' sacred deer and boasted that he was a better hunter than her. This infuriated the Goddess, and she caused all the wind to cease, stranding the Greek ships on the shores of

Aulis. The Greek prophet Calchas told Agamemnon that the Artemis would not release the winds until he sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia, so with a heavy heart, he lied to his wife Clytemnestra, telling her that Iphigenia was to be married to the warrior Achilles, and that they should come to Aulis for the wedding. At the opening of Iphigenia at Aulis, Agamemnon awaits their arrival and questions whether or not he had made a terrible mistake.

by Jaime Weisbach (Dramaturgy Intern)

AUDIO/VISUAL RESOURCES

- 1) A series of videos surrounding the Trojan War by History.com www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/trojan-war/videos
- 2) An Introduction to Greek Theatre from the National Theatre in the U.K. www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/video/an-introduction-to-greek-theatre-0
- 3) Greek Theatre – Tragedy and Comedy <http://youtu.be/RK-dbLiaGvU>
- 4) A series of Greek Mythology Videos from History.com www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/greek-mythology/videos

ACTIVITIES

- 1) Stage a Scene from the Play
- 2) Greek Mythology Photo Collage/6 Degrees of Separation:

Ask the students to bring in a picture of a character from Greek mythology. Using the stories from Greek mythology, connect all of the pictures the students brought in.
- 3) Write a short scene using the conventional elements of tragedy structure.

QUESTIONS

- 1) Do you think Agamemnon had a choice in whether or not to sacrifice Iphigenia? Why or Why not?
- 2) What do you think of Iphigenia sacrificing herself for the good of Greece and the War? Why?
- 3) What do you think are Euripides' opinions on war as reflected in the play? Are they similar or conflicting opinions? Which characters present these opinions?
- 4) Identify 3 specific moments in the play when the Chorus members offer a specific opinion on the action of the play. Based on these moments who or what do you think the Chorus members represent in this play?

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS →

Other Information:

In some adaptations of *Iphigenia in Aulis* the last scene of the play includes a messenger who reveals to the audience that Iphigenia is whisked away by the gods and replaced by a deer. In Court Theatre's adaptation that final scene is omitted.

Further Reading:

“An Ancient New Trilogy” by Drew Dir

http://www.courttheatre.org/plays/iphigenia_in_aulis/?slide=articles&pane=3850

“The Shock Of Recognition” An interview with adaptor Nicholas Rudell and Drew Dir

http://www.courttheatre.org/plays/iphigenia_in_aulis/?slide=articles&pane=3905

“The Greek Cycle: Part One” by Martine Kei Green-Rogers

http://www.courttheatre.org/plays/iphigenia_in_aulis/?slide=articles&pane=3914