

TROY: Sacrifice and Survival

Adapted by Philip Lerman
from the original Greek plays by Euripides

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STORY OF THE PLAY

The terrible waste of war never seemed more contemporary than in these quintessential tragedies by Euripides set before and after the siege of Troy. Far from being “historical dramas,” the two plays speak to any generation embroiled in conflict. We see up close and firsthand that war is the most pitiful—and most poetic—of human activities.

In the first play, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, the Grecian army waits to embark on the conquest of Troy. The army's commander, Agamemnon, has been forced to offer his young daughter, Iphigenia, as a martyr to ensure victory. Valiant efforts by her mother, Clytemnestra, and the Grecian hero, Achilles, to prevent the sacrifice have proven futile. Iphigenia is left to choose between a war she abhors and violent civil unrest in Greece if the war is aborted.

In the second play, *The Trojan Women*, Troy now lies in ruins after its defeat. All the men have been killed, and the women wait to be transported to Greece, as slaves or concubines. Hecuba, Troy's former queen, learns the disposition of her surviving family from the Grecian soldier Talthybius. In parting scenes Hecuba's spirits are lifted by the courage of two young women: her daughter Cassandra, the prophetess, and from Andromache, her son Hector's widow. Then, after a blunt exchange with Helen, whose illicit romance with Hecuba's son Paris led to Troy's destruction, the former queen goes off to her servitude.

With playwright Philip Lerman's modern language and simple settings, actors can easily and successfully bring the unfamiliar yet powerful world of Greek tragedy to any stage.

Performance time: About an hour.

Iphigenia at Aulis

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 5 w)

AGAMEMNON: Commander of Grecian army forced to sacrifice his daughter.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Agamemnon's wife, who tries to save their daughter.

IPHIGENIA: Their daughter. Is the war worth her life?

ACHILLES: Grecian hero who tries to stop the sacrifice.

MENELAUS: Army officer and husband of Helen of Troy.

OFFICER: Serves Agamemnon.

SIGHTSEERS: Three or more, all female. (Although the lines are assigned sequentially, they can be combined or split as desired by the director.)

SCENE: The Greek port city of Aulis, a long time ago.

PROPS: A bench, a large box.

SFX: Military band playing marching music.

Iphigenia at Aulis

(AT RISE: A military band playing marching MUSIC is heard. It subsides as the SIGHTSEERS enter.)

SIGHTSEER #1: More ships! We must have passed five hundred ships on our way here to Aulis.

SIGHTSEER #2: And look out there! Probably five hundred more tied up at the docks.

SIGHTSEER #3: I'll bet there's a thousand ships right now in the harbor.

SIGHTSEER #1: At least a thousand.

SIGHTSEER #2: The harbor at Aulis is lined with Greek ships.

SIGHTSEER #3: And all of them flying red battle pennants.

SIGHTSEER #1: What a thrilling sight!

SIGHTSEER #2: Positively thrilling!

SIGHTSEER #3: Soon thousands of Greek soldiers will be boarding those ships.

SIGHTSEER #1: Fine brave young men.

SIGHTSEER #2: And the fleet will set sail for Troy.

SIGHTSEER #3: Where our Greek army will teach those Trojans a thing or two.

SIGHTSEER #1: All this walking has exhausted me. I've got to sit here on the bench and rest a while.

SIGHTSEER #2: I wonder where all the other people are.

SIGHTSEER #3: Probably at the concert in the park we passed. Don't you remember? The military band was playing there.

SIGHTSEER #2: Oh, yes. What's that book you've been carrying?

SIGHTSEER #1: It's called "A Guide to Greece: Places and People."

SIGHTSEER #3: Why do you need a guidebook to your own country?

SIGHTSEER #1: One rarely knows all the interesting facts, and this book contains a treasure of information. This city for instance.

SIGHTSEER #2: Let me see.

SIGHTSEER #1: I'll read it to you. "Aulis, a fashionable resort on the Aegean Sea. Its sandy white beaches and sapphire blue water make it a popular choice for vacationers."

SIGHTSEER #3: Sounds delightful, but we're not here on vacation.

SIGHTSEER #1: Well then, listen to this. "The small off-shore islands serve as a natural breakwater, allowing the harbor at Aulis to accommodate vast numbers of ships." You didn't know that before.

SIGHTSEER #2: All I need to do is look around. I don't need a book to tell me there's lots of ships here.

SIGHTSEER #1: Oh, you're such a nitpicker.

SIGHTSEER #3: Never mind about the places. What interesting people does your book tell about?

SIGHTSEER #1: What type of people do you have in mind?

SIGHTSEER #3: Well, we're here to see the Greek army sail for Troy, aren't we?

SIGHTSEER #1: Of course we are.

SIGHTSEER #3: So what does that book tell about the Generals in charge of the army?

SIGHTSEER #1: Let me look. All right, here it is. The overall commander-in-chief of the consolidated Greek army is General Agamemnon.

SIGHTSEER #3: General Agamemnon. What else does it say about him?

SIGHTSEER #1: Only that he's from Argos. His wife's name is Clytemnestra. They have a daughter, Iphigenia, and a little boy, Orestes.

SIGHTSEER #3: Is that all it tells you about him?

SIGHTSEER #2: They're not going to put his whole life story in a guidebook.

SIGHTSEER #3: Why not?

SIGHTSEER #2: You're getting real crotchety, you know that?

SIGHTSEER #3: What other Generals do they tell you about?

SIGHTSEER #1: Well, let's see. There's General Odysseus.

SIGHTSEER #2: Who?

SIGHTSEER #1: Odysseus. General Odysseus. He's second-in-command of the Greek army.

SIGHTSEER #3: Fine. Anyone else in the book I should know about?

SIGHTSEER #1: Achilles. General Achilles.

SIGHTSEER #3: Oh, I know who he is. Everyone knows Achilles. He's the most decorated soldier in Greece.

SIGHTSEER #1: And the handsomest man in Greece.

SIGHTSEER #3: And single, too.

SIGHTSEER #2: What a catch for some lucky girl.

SIGHTSEER #3: Yes. Hmmm. Is that all the Generals the book tells about?

SIGHTSEER #1: There's one more. General Menelaus.

SIGHTSEER #2: Menelaus from Sparta? The man whose wife was kidnapped by the Trojans? What a scandal that was.

SIGHTSEER #3: Those Trojans, nothing but troublemakers.

SIGHTSEER #2: Heathens and heretics, every single one of them.

SIGHTSEER #1: Paris, the Trojan king's son, visited Sparta and was a guest in Menelaus' house. Well, Menelaus made the mistake of leaving Paris alone with Helen, his wife.

SIGHTSEER #3: And Paris raped Helen and then carried her off to Troy. Where now she's known as Helen of Troy.

SIGHTSEER #1: That's why our army is sailing this evening. They are going to bring Helen home and punish the Trojans for their wickedness.

SIGHTSEER #2: I can hardly wait to see our brave lads off.

SIGHTSEER #3: What shall we do until then?

SIGHTSEER #1: We could join the other sightseers at the band concert in the park.

SIGHTSEER #2: I've got a better idea.

SIGHTSEER #3: What?

SIGHTSEER #2: On our way here we passed a darling little tea room a few blocks back, with cozy tables, and not too crowded.

End of Freeview

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