

IPHIGENIA AT AULIS - SYNOPSIS

THE FIRST ACT

Prince Paris of Troy escaped with the beautiful Helen of Sparta. Her husband Menelaus urged his brother Agamemnon to lead the military campaign against Troy. However, king Agamemnon enraged the goddess Artemis by killing a sacred deer belonging to her.

Agamemnon asks for sparing the life of his daughter Iphigenia as the high priest Calchas prophesied that the king must sacrifice her to appease the goddess Artemis, who will, in return, guarantee fair winds for the Greek military ships on their journey to Troy. Agamemnon refuses to pay such a price and tries to send a message to Iphigenia, requesting her not to arrive in Aulis. Calchas encourages the king to fulfil the prophecy in order to appease the enraged crowds that demand Iphigenia's sacrifice. Queen Clytemnestra tells the graceful Iphigenia that, according to Agamemnon, her beloved Achilles fell in love with another young lady. As a result, the queen is full of hatred for Achilles and promises to take revenge on him. However, Iphigenia does not want to believe that the man respected for his bravery would be unfaithful to her. Achilles confesses his love to Iphigenia and is confused by her disdainful and reproachful behaviour. Finally, he proves her accusations were wrong.

THE SECOND ACT

Achilles is insulted by Agamemnon who nearly killed the love between the young hero and Iphigenia. After arriving in Aulis, Clytemnestra is preparing a wedding for the young couple. The wedding procession is stopped by Arcas who claims that instead of the wedding ritual, Agamemnon is preparing a bloody sacrifice of his own daughter in the temple. Achilles is the only one who can save Iphigenia's life. However, he believes that the king aims to humiliate him by murdering his bride. During a meeting with the proud Agamemnon, they fatally offend each other. Agamemnon still hesitates whether to sacrifice his child to the cruel gods for the public welfare of Greece. He commands Arcas to ensure secret escape of both the queen and Iphigenia to Mycenae. He also urges Artemis to take his own life instead of the life of his beloved daughter.

THE THIRD ACT

The Greeks insist on sacrificing Iphigenia's life. Achilles strives to persuade Iphigenia to escape from the city but she is a brave woman reconciled with her fate: she believes she must die for the sake of her people and Achilles can later become a famous warrior. Achilles thinks that Iphigenia has become insane. If she really is to be sacrificed, he is determined to break the altar and kill the king. Clytemnestra protects her daughter from the bloodthirsty Greeks by her own body. If Iphigenia dies, her mother does not want to live anymore. Nevertheless, Iphigenia escapes from her mother's protection and decides to face death. Elegies are sung. The priest Calchas asks Artemis for a reward in exchange for Iphigenia's life. Achilles bursts into the temple and aims to rescue Iphigenia, but he is stopped by the participants of the ritual. Suddenly, the goddess Artemis appears and claims she is not eager for the blood of her victim but for her great spirit.

She intends to make Iphigenia a priestess in a distant country and thus redeem all the crimes that have been done by Agamemnon's family. The goddess is therefore appeased and sanctifies the glorious journey to Troy.