

In the second play of the tetralogy, the sons of Aigyptos arrive in Argos with their father to claim their reluctant brides, the daughters of Danaos. Quarrels and deceptions ensue, but after a surprise intervention, peace breaks out, and the marriages finally, yet ominously, take place.

THE EGYPTIANS

A re-imagining of Aeschylus'
lost play

By Andrew Wilson

For Juliet

THE DANAID TETRALOGY

II

THE EGYPTIANS

Characters

DANAOS

LYNKEUS, Leader of the Chorus

CHORUS of the SONS OF AIGYPTOS

CHORUS of the DAUGHTERS OF DANAOS

AIGYPTOS

INACHOS

CHORUS of BOYS and GIRLS

Protagonist: Danaos,

Deuteragonist: Messenger, Aigyptos, Inachos

Text in red is by Aeschylus. Fragments 5 & 373

Scene: The plain of Argos, somewhere between the city and the coast. Distant sounds of battle. Enter the Chorus of Aigyptiads – the fifty sons of Aigyptos

Lynkeus

Danaos's daughters, where shall we find you?
Brides who were promised us, who broke their word
And ran away from Egypt to this place?
We are the fifty sons of Aigyptos -
Wise Aigyptos, descendant of gods.
Zeus was his grandmother's grandfather
And Belus, his father, was Poseidon's son.
A noble pedigree he shares with Danaos
My uncle – his twin, his brother, Danaos.
Though twins, they are as different could be.
Our father's known for wisdom and caution,
He demonstrates reverence to the gods,
And they respect him fully in return.
Danaos, though, since boyhood has been shown
To be deceitful, jealous, devious,
Believing he had rights to own more than
His father left him – was the huge expanse
Of Libya not enough? No, no! He planned
An empire overseas: Boeotia, Apia,
Arcadia – the whole Pelasgian land -
To be its king and rule in Argos, whence
Io, our great-great-great grandmother came.
Her story's possibly well known to you –
Zeus took a fancy to a young priestess,
Seduced her in the temple - of his wife -
In Hera's temple! Here, in Argos, blatantly!
Hera, who never failed to get upset
Each time her husband's interest strayed – punished

Io most brutally – transformed her to
A cow, whose herdsman never slept – with eyes,
A hundred of them, front and back.
Hermes was sent by Zeus to kill her spy;
Then Hera sent a fly to sting and bite
Her, goading her to keep her wandering
Across the world - until, in Egypt, Zeus
Caught up; he touched her, she produced a calf,
Our grandfather's grandfather, Epaphos.
Danaos's obsession grew that **he**
By direct blood descent – not Pelasgos -
Had rightful claim to be Argos's king.
When they were young men, both enjoyed their lives:
Their royal status, wealth, a steady stream
Of women eager to become their wives.
Arabians, Phoenicians, Libyans
Egyptians, Ethiopians –even
Nymphs, like the Naiads, daughters of the Nile.
Their many loves bore offspring for them both –
So many children! But what might seem strange,
Aigyptos' crop of children were all boys,
Danaos's all girls! I and my brothers,
Growing up, enjoyed our cousins'
Company, and they returned our love!
Our fathers planned a joyous wedding day
When our two families would unite as one:
The fifty sons would wed the fifty girls!
All was agreed, and solemn promises
Were made by all, with gods as witnesses.
Then suddenly, all changed. My uncle was
Always a superstitious man. Each time
He had a dream, he would consult his 'bird-watchers,'

Or clairvoyants, to find out what it meant.
He rode a camel once for seven days
Far west into the desert to consult
The oracle of Zeus, in Oasis.
He went alone, and came back with this tale:
He claimed that Zeus had told him he would meet
A brutal death, killed by a son-in-law,
A daughter's husband. Father simply laughed -
Preposterous piece of nonsense! It was some
Invented lie to cause his brother pain.
He loved to stir things up and pick a fight.
Danaos, though, insisted it was true.
Their shaky friendship ended on that day.
He cancelled the agreement they had made.
He ordered the betrothals broken off.
Danaos taught his girls their chastity
Was something sacred; men were violent beasts;
That love, and sexual union were unclean.
I don't know how much he believed this lie;
He certainly exploited it, to turn
His girls away from hopes of married joy.
But only now do I see through his plan.
His clever scheme is clear to me at last,
And suddenly it all falls into place.
He put the girls on board a ship and sailed
To Argos – Pelasgos's land, which he,
In his imagination, was destined to rule.
Our cousins thought they were escaping from
A loathsome race of men who wished them dead.
A city must be found to shelter them!
Danaos had his good excuse to land
In Argos: "We are refugees", he claimed.

He managed to persuade the king that they
All needed his protection, that the gods
Would punish him if he rejected them.
My father sent a fleet of ships and brought
The Egyptian army here to thwart his plan.
Our brave Egyptian soldiers tried but failed to seize
The girls last night. They fled to sanctuary
Convinced the gods would make sure they were safe.
If we cannot persuade them peacefully,
Then force, alas, will have to be applied
To bring the girls back home. The Argive king,
That fool, Pelasgos, swallowed all the lies,
Agreed to hide the girls, and even gave
Danaos , as a bodyguard, a troop
Of warriors to have at his command.
I thank Poseidon, ancestor of ours,
For helping speed the fleet across the sea.
Meanwhile, we fear that at this very time
Pelasgos' army may be marching to
Attack, to drive our men back to their ships -
To judge from distant sounds. But what is this?
Our uncle's coming with his Argive guards!

How very civilised to welcome us,
Your brother's children, to this land.
This personal reception honours us!

Danaos

Spare me the feigned politeness. You're here. Why?

Lynkeus

I and my brothers came to claim our wives.

Danaos

Why have you brought your army with you, then?

Lynkeus

Because your girls refused to talk with us.

Danaos

Talk would not change their loathing of this match.

Lynkeus

Loathing the match, or the entire male sex?

Danaos

They fear their cousins, and all men besides.

Lynkeus

Normal women do not despise marriage!

Danaos

You boys have made them hate the thought of it!

Lynkeus

Where are they? Can we not just talk with them?

Danaos

They're safe, in private houses in the town.

Lynkeus

You sentence us to live without a wife?

Danaos

Yes, if my daughters have to be your brides.

Lynkeus

Is marriage not a rite ordained by god?

Danaos

The greatest god is guardian of these girls.

Lynkeus

His role is not just helping suppliants.

Danaos

No role of his is more important, though.

Lynkeus

His role protecting guests in foreign lands?

Danaos

Not those who come armed to destroy that land.

Lynkeus

My brothers come in peace. To fetch our brides.

They honour Zeus, and Themis, Earth goddess,

Who tells us we must all uphold the law.

We are no monsters bent on violence,

But normal men who wish for normal lives.

We simply hope to claim our promised brides,

And take them home with us, where they belong.

The sounds I heard before are louder now –

I fear your interference here may be

Already causing trouble for this land.

I fear Pelasgos may be on the march.

Danaos

Stay close, on guard! You men may need to stop

These dangerous violent rapists should they make

A move towards Argos, where my daughters

Are - for the moment – safe within the walls.

Danaos and his bodyguard withdraw,

PARODOS**Chorus***Strophe*

When Danaos and Aigyptos

Twin brothers born together

Sown of one father's seed, and nourished by

The same maternal breast,

Destined it seemed to share one fate.

When Belus, their respected sire,

Enfeebled by old age

And soon to yield himself to death's
Cold, unwelcoming embrace,
Forced both his sons to swear
That when he'd gone to Hades' halls
That they would together rule
His spacious realm, in peace and harmony.
And Zeus was witness to this pact.

Antistrophe

They quarrelled soon, as brothers who
in their brief lives had never
Shared affection each with each, so each withdrew
Bitter, without regret,
From sharing their command and rule.
Instead came savage rivalry.
The realm was split in two:
It seemed quite fair, that Aigyptos
Took on the Melampodes' land,
To which he gave the name
'Egypt' – he named it for himself.
Danaos' s allotted share
was fertile Libya, its name
To celebrate their grandmother.

Strophe

Though he received the larger share by far,
Danaos in his twisted mind believed
Somehow his portion was too small,
And so began
To formulate a plan to leave his brother far behind.
So hence the long-gestated scheme
We see unfolding here and now

In Argos.

Antistrophe

In happier times, before they ever fought
Together, they had made a pact, agreed,
With Zeus the guarantor of oaths
As their witness
That when their infant sons and daughters came of age
They would be linked in marriage bond
Ensuring future prospects for
Their nation.

Strophe

To Aigyptos, the brothers' split
Should have no bearing on
The childrens' happiness.
Danaos fiercely disagreed. He thought he could
Annul the solemn, binding oath he'd sworn,
And bar his daughters from Aigyptos' sons.
Keep them secure and locked away
And never see a man
Except their father, no one else.

Antistrophe

Great Zeus ensures that soon or late
The price for breaking oaths
Cannot remain unpaid.
Danaos heaped up lie on lie to spite his brother,
The while fomenting his ambitions of
External conquest, to secure his realm.
In Europe, green, well-watered land.
Earth rich in corn and vines,

Sweet to sow, and sweet to reap.

Strophe

The power of Aphrodite drives us on
She has two helpers, children both of hers:
Sweet soft Persuasion who cajoles
And tempts, enticing men
Towards the rich rewards of Love.
Persuasion with seductive wings
Has had the door shut in her face,
Not welcome there.

Antistrophe

Desire, her brother, bullies us.
He urges action, sturdy violence,
He tell us we should take by force
That which has been denied
Counter to Aphrodite's law.
We pray to Zeus, to give us strength
Knowing that Justice is aware
And on our side.

Epode

We know that he who swears
By Zeus and breaks his oath
Has sinned and must find punishment.
The girls we see are innocent
Sad victims of their father's lies
And jealousy, ambition unrestrained.
We pray to Aphrodite that she may
Bring it about somehow
That balance

Can be found
Between Persuasion
And Desire.
So harmony, Love's other child
May unroll peaceful unity
Between the eager sons of Aigyptos
And Danaos' reluctant girls.

Enter a messenger, a local Pelasgian.

Messenger

Rejoice you children of the Nile! All praise
To your victorious troops. The Egyptian
Invaders have emerged supreme: The Argives
Are now in full retreat. Their king, Pelasgos,
Is king no more. The Egyptian cavalry
In hot pursuit hunts down the fleeing horde.
The city soon will fall into their hands.

Lynkeus

Tell me the details. This is splendid news!
How was it that our army won the day?
What happened to their king? Is he alive?

Messenger

Inform me who it is I'm speaking to?
Your dress suggests you are Egyptian,
Though you are tall and fair, with face and limbs
That seem not to be browned by desert sun.

Lynkeus

My name is Lynkeus, eldest son of King
Aigyptos. Though he gave Egypt its name,
I'm no Egyptian, but our family
Has ruled the land of Pyramids for three

Generations, since Zeus released Io,
The daughter of Inachos, Argos' king,
From her confinement in a heifer's form.
We're Argives through the female line, who come
With some reluctance to the land from where
Our ancestress once came. My father came
To repossess by force the girls we lost –
Robbed, stolen, spirited away,
Our brides, our promised partners, led astray
By their own father's evil, crooked schemes.
Our father told my brothers, and myself,
To keep our distance from the ships, in case
There might be fighting, where we could get hurt.
How did the battle go? How did we win?
I long to know the details of the fight.

Messenger

Then let me help you catch up with the news:
As Helios reined in his chariot
To close his daily drive across the sky,
The Egyptian army landed on the coast;
They drew their ships up on a sandy beach
Between the mouth of Inachos, who once
Was king here, but is now a river-god,
And Erasinus' stream, famous because
It disappears, to sink beneath the earth,
And then gush forth once more. No mortal man
Has ever traced its course below the ground.

Lynkeus

This information tells me things that I
Already know – please expedite your tale!

Messenger

After the soldiers disembarked last night,

Your father sent them to secure the girls
You told me of, and make them board the ships
To take them home. But they ran off, and hid
Somewhere they hoped the gods would keep them safe.
Now they've been taken in and sheltered by
The citizens of Argos who believed
The gods demanded it. They're lodged,
Dispersed among the peoples' homes, inside
The well-built ring of Argos city walls.
Pelasgos, fearing that the army might
Attempt to break into his citadel
Or sit themselves around it for a siege,
Determined to march forth to face his foes.

Lynkeus

This too is news that I already knew.
Tell me about the battle. Blow by blow!

Messenger

His bravest warriors all volunteered
To fight. He led them out along the bank
Of Inachos's stream. The Egyptians
Had posted archers to protect the route
from Argos, fearing such a likely move.
Your father's troops were standing by, to march
On Argos, sack the town and drag the girls
Out from their refuges they'd thought were safe.
The archers spied Pelasgos standing proud
In his war-chariot as they neared the ships.
A single shot was all it took. One shot.
One lucky arrow pierced Pelasgos through
The throat. He dropped just like a wounded stag.
His charioteer knelt down to save his life -
In vain, he lived just moments more.

The Egyptians, armed and set to go, advanced
At running pace. The Argives, totally
Confused and with their leader dead, were caught
Off guard. A trumpet sounded the retreat
And they began to run in panic back
The way they'd come so recently in hope.
There was no battle, just chaotic rout.
Most of the Argives are now safe inside
Their walls. Some were cut down and killed, if they
Tripped up or fell in haste to get away.
But though defeated, by escaping they
Preserve their strength to fight another day.
The Egyptians now are on their way to camp
Around the walls, the siege Pelasgos feared.
The Argives have an army still, that's true,
But can an army fight without a king? *[Exit]*

During the speech, Danaos and his bodyguard have quietly slipped away, along the road to Argos.

Lynkeus

Danaos and his men have slipped away.
Why are they not still guarding us? I fear
What may be in my uncle's evil mind.
I fear he may be heading back to Argos,
No doubt to fill his daughters' minds with hate,
And stop the wedding victory now demands.
The Argives forces have retreated, and
Their king is dead. All still may turn out well.
We'll not move from here yet. We'll wait
Until our father comes with certain news.
Perhaps we'll soon be able to proceed

To Argos and, at last, there join our brides!

Chorus

Strophe

We celebrate our kinship with
Our Argive foes. They fought to drive
Our army back into the sea,
And thwart our mission forcibly.
Our army was correct to help
Enforce the law and punish those
Who gave aid to the guilty man,
And helped him with his desperate plan.

Antistrophe

But in some way the Argives too
Were right: Zeus is a god who's hard
For mortal men to comprehend.
For Zeus defends all refugees,
Asylum seekers, suppliants,
But equally defends the rights
Of visitors who come in peace
To gain their property's release.

Strophe

We pray our army in its victory
Will show restraint. The gods abhor
Winners who overstep the mark,
Humiliating beaten foes.
Ares the war-god loves to play
With scales. Not to find balance. but
To randomly weigh down one side.
Victorious today, tomorrow

Cruelly beaten. A time will come **you** may
Suffer the fate that I endure today.

Antistrophe

So let us pray that no insult is felt
By Argos' gods and goddesses.
If so, their vengeance may be swift
And we'd be forced to swallow pride
Return to Egypt empty-handed to
Endure a lonely, loveless, sad old age;
Confront extinction of a noble line,
Disgracing Zeus who founded it
Deprived of wives, deprived of sons.
Deprived of families: to face
Extermination of our race.

Strophe

The huntress Artemis protects
The innocent who can't defend
Themselves. She will not tolerate
A massacre of citizens
Inside the ancient city walls
Of Argos. Hera, Zeus' wife
And sister, is the goddess who
Has special love for Argos, so
Beware, Egyptians, don't make her your foe!

Antistrophe

And Aphrodite, goddess we
Do most revere, we call on you
To lead the Danaids away
From sinful loveless abstinence.

For Aphrodite longs to bring
All men and women, every male
And every female creature on
The land or in the sea, to copulate
Sharing contentment with their mate.

Aigyptos *[returning from the battle scene]*

My sons, the battle's done. Our army's won.
Without a fight. No blood of ours was spilt.
The sudden death of Pelasgos, their king,
Seemed to demoralise the Argive force.
Without their leader they just scurried back,
Towards the city in disordered rout.
I've told our army to withhold pursuit:
No point in slaughter for the sake of it.
We do not hate them, they're not enemies.
We merely want them to release your brides.
That done we'll go back to our ships, set sail
With all aboard, full speed for Egypt's shores.
But first negotiations must be held.
We'll not attack, but send a spokesman in:
Persuasion will ensure the girls' release.
Though threat of force will concentrate their minds!
Now they no longer have the king who urged
Them to accept the refugees as guests,
There'll be no reason not to let them go.
My brother made Pelasgos think they were
Asylum-seekers, safeguarded by Zeus.
This was pure nonsense as he knew full well:
Zeus does not love absconders, runaways.
It won't be hard to prove his claim was false.
But what is this? A cloud of dust, a group

Of men approaching us in urgent haste.
What mission brings them here? Who can they be?

As the dust clears. Danaos and his bodyguard are revealed, heading fast towards the Egyptians.

Danaos

How strange for us to meet so far from home!
How wonderful to meet you face to face!
We now, dear brother, talk on equal terms.
In token of my friendship with the king
They've lost, the citizens of Argos have
Elected me to sit upon his throne!
The people flocked into the square to greet
And welcome home their warriors.
The crowd was asking how they'd lost the fight
And how their noble king had been struck down.
Fathers and brothers, uncles, nephews, sons
were all embracing, glad so few had died.
When I and my fine Argive bodyguard
Approached the gates, the sentries let us in
At once. They cleared a pathway through the crowd
And led us to the centre of the throng.
A citizen appearing on the steps
Of Hera's temple shouted "That's the man!
Brave Danaos is here! He'll rescue us!
Since wise Pelasgos honoured him, I say
Let's make him king – he's Argive by descent,
He is the man to turn our fortunes round!"
The crowd all wildly cheered. A vote was called:
And every single man there raised his hand.
Then someone said "We are Pelasgians
No more! Henceforth we'll all be Danaans!"

I was delighted by their trust in me.
As king, immediately, I gave my word
I'd undertake to meet with you out here
And broker peace with you Egyptians.
They trust me to arrange a solemn truce,
Which Argives and Egyptians will deem fair.

Agyptos

Welcome, your majesty! So glad your dream
Of kingship here in Argos has come true,
Your plan fulfilled without the need to fight!
But we will not negotiate with you.
Your daughters are inside the walls
Imprisoned there in houses round the town.
Unless you let them go, to be the wives
Of these my gallant sons, then we cannot
Even begin negotiating, This
Remains a line that we refuse to cross.

Danaos

Then, brother, we're agreed, no more ado!
My daughters shall come forth, immediately,
To meet their cousins, fall in love, who knows?
I'm keen for sons and daughters to pair up,
So we can celebrate a wedding feast,
And peace between our realms and families!
O such excitement! Now the youngsters all
Can mix together and find joy at last!

Agyptos

This is indeed most wonderful. But please,
Explain why all this time you've been opposed
Not just to marriage, but to all contact
Between our boys and girls? Why did
They loathe the thought of love, and guard

Their chastity more than they did their lives?

Have they in truth forsaken spinsterhood?

Danaos

My daughters love me. They're obedient.

Whatever they are told to do, they do.

From love. Respect. When I revealed my fear

That one of them would marry and produce

A son destined to take my life, they vowed

That none of them would look upon a man.

They would not dare to risk their father's life.

That day they took a vow of chastity

Which none of them has wavered from. I was

So very touched how keen they were to keep

Their maidenhood intact. How much they loved me!

To make the case still stronger, that they should

Avoid all contact with their cousins, I

Persuaded them – it was not true –

To wed a cousin was against the law.

They urged me to do more to keep them safe:

They pestered me till I agreed to help

Them go abroad to some place far away

From all your sons, in case some trick of fate

Unite a pair of them and cause my death.

But yesternight as I lay safely housed

Secure within the city walls – a guest

In Pelasgos's fine palace, I dreamed a dream.

I was a boy in Egypt. I'd been sent

Down to the Nile to tend my father's cows.

When I approached them as they grazed – heifers

They were who'd never known the bull -

One of them broke away from pasture, and

Came up to me. I stretched to stroke her horns.

Then as she nuzzled me, she seemed to speak!
“I am Io, daughter of Inachus. I was
A virgin priestess once in Hera’s shrine.
One day a sweet young man accosted me;
He teased me, made me laugh, and said
He was out of his mind with love for me.
He wanted me to go with him – in fear,
I prayed for Hera’s help resisting him.
She knew – of course. She knew just who he was.
It was her husband, and her brother: Zeus.
How much I wish I had just slept with him!
It wasn’t him she punished; it was me!
I can’t begin to tell the tale of all
I’ve suffered since she forced me from my home.
I was wrong to flee from love – I see it now.
Queen Aphrodite is a goddess with
More power than Hera, that’s now clear.
I know now she would have protected me,
Instead, for spurning her, she punished me
By letting Hera do her worst, because
I had refused to give myself to love.
Hera was angry; but my punishment
Befell me, as I realise today,
Since I’d offended Aphrodite more.”
She trotted back to join the herd. I woke.
I knew exactly what I had to do.
The meaning of my vision left no choice:
I’d make my daughters understand this dream.
Io their ancestress found out how great
A sin rejecting love turned out to be.
They were reluctant to accept at first,
But loyalty and my persuasive powers

Quite soon convinced them of this truth:
That women all must honour Aphrodite,
The goddess whom the female sex reveres
The most; and risk the anger of the rest.

Agyptos

You have achieved a miracle, it seems.
I trust that Aphrodite will forgive
The long neglect your daughters gave to her.
In Egypt Aphrodite **has** respect.
My sons never forgot to worship her.
Your dream must cancel out our former grief.
Now all has changed, let's waste no time.
Arrange your daughters' meeting with our sons.

Danaos

I'll send a message to the town and have
Them meet the boys without delay. I know
They will not disobey their father's words -
They never do. They showed their love for me
By fleeing you, and now they'll show it by
Submitting to the marriage they once feared.
Let's do this quickly. Let's do it today!
The sooner wed, the sooner you may all
Return to Egypt. But which son will have
Which daughter? – that will not be hard. My girls
Will be the prizes in the Games which I

Shall organise. There is a level space
Not far from here – Nemea it is called.
All fifty boys will leave the starting line
At once. The order that they finish in
Will be the order that they choose their brides!
And so the best shall have first choice, and then

So on, in order due! Thus, all your sons
Shall win a bride! It shall be done today!
There'll be a daughter fit for every son!
This afternoon the wedding feast, and then
Tonight, with torches, every groom will take
His chosen one, and light her way to bed.

Aigyptos

I do commend you, brother, on your change
Of heart. My soldiers will set out the feast,
To celebrate this unique night of love!

Danaos

I shall send chefs, and slaves to wait and serve.
I shall make sure there's all the food and wine
They need – and tables, cups, and dancing-girls!

Aigyptos

My sons shall go forthwith to Nemea:
They will be eager to compete! Though all

Will win a prize – a wife to call his own!

Danaos

The girls will watch, and shout encouragement
To the young men as they sweat and strain to win,
Excited each to see who'll be **her** man!
My brother, come. Let's work the details out!

Aigyptos and Danaos leave together

Chorus

Strophe

Nemea! At Ammon in the sandy wastes
Far west of Thebes I once heard tell
Of an oracle than came from Zeus

Foretelling how, in time to come
A mortal youth of his own seed,
Remote descendant of our race,
To rescue men from fear would do
At Nemea some noble deed
A deed Pelasgians will always praise
Throughout the country where their cattle graze.

Antistrophe

To honour Zeus, and celebrate
His victory, with the monster slain,
And people saved, he'd found the Games,
Which then in time would bring renown
To Nemea. To honour Zeus
They'd build a temple and they'd name
The Games for him, and there, to win
A crown of leaves, for honour's sake,
The best would race, on foot, on horse,
In chariots, thundering round the course.

Strophe

Ammon, Egyptian name for Zeus.
A ten-day journey from the banks
Of Nile, from Memphis, crossing dunes
Impassable without a guide
Who steers a course with ancient skill
Through reading star-signs, gifts of Night.
They say that Ammon, to avoid
A son he'd angered, once disguised
Himself with fleece and curving horns
As of a ram. Egyptian Zeus is shown
In temples, seated on a throne,

Antistrophe

Serene with ram's horns on his head.
In lands Pelasgos ruled, there is
A second oracle – the twin
Of ours in Egypt. Twin black doves,
Black like Egyptians, were released
From Thebes in Egypt – one flew west
To Ammon, while the other flew
North to Dodona. Twin locations where
Zeus speaks the truth to men reveal
Why Egypt and Pelasgia, we think,
Have mighty gods who share a link.

Strophe

No one can read the mind of Zeus.
Many believed they understood
The plans and schemes which he forms deep
Within his inscrutable mind.
The Danaids once thought they knew
What fate Zeus had marked out for them.
So wrong! They failed in their attempt to find
A way to comprehend his subtle mind.

Antistrophe

It's Aphrodite Zeus dare not defy.
Although Zeus has a loyal wife,
Not even he escapes the power
Of love, the drive to copulate
With mortal girls, with goddesses
With Naiads, Dryads, Oreads.
Egyptian Aphrodite is our mother, nurse

Our ruler, Guardian, Mistress of the Universe.

Strophe

She rules our lives. All aspects of
Our mortal life are her concern.
We need her, we admire her, we
Revere her, worship her as she demands we do.
Like Io, founder of our race
We picture her as horned, or with
The face and head of a young cow,
The Sun's disc resting on her brow.

Antistrophe

And she it was the Danaids
Insulted, when they turned their backs
On us, their cousins, fine young men,
As suitors, lovers, husbands too.
They listened to the loathsome plot
Their father hatched to keep them barred
From men, sequestered, far away.
To Aphrodite's shocked dismay.

Strophe

While virgin Artemis approved.
They worshipped her each day and prayed
She'd keep them always safe from me,
But Aphrodite they now venerate,
And show they bitterly regret
Their former insult to the Cyprian.
Now we look forward to the Games,
Where we'll compete and claim a bride,
And win a wife to sleep beside.

Antistrophe

Our uncle used the name of Zeus
To cover up his evil plan
To be the king of Argos. He
Will not evade the sharp-eyed bird
That watches out for sin, reports
To **Zagreus**, Lord of Death and Dark,
The Snatcher, who will take him from
The land he thought was his by destiny
But gained by vilest perfidy

Fr 5

Danaos returns, from making the arrangements..

Danaos

I have informed my daughters of the plan,
How you will race to win the bride you choose.
They listened carefully to my words
And all agreed the Games would calm their fears.
No action was required of them, beyond
Their full consent they would accept the man
Who was allotted them, without demur.
A man with daughters is a lucky man.
They're trained to honour and obey
All the instructions that a father gives!

Lynkeus

Then let the Games begin! I know who I
Would choose! I shall try hard to win the race.
I and my brothers have waited so long
And patiently to claim the partners you
Agreed, and swore, should be our wives

Danaos

Your mission is fulfilled. Are you now satisfied?

Lynkeus

Yes. if the girls have truly changed their minds.

Danaos

Of course they have. They do what they are told!

Lynkeus

But really changed? or 'just to please papa'?

Danaos

They love their father. That's why they agreed.

Lynkeus

Love you? Or, rather, is it fear they show?

Danaos

Respect, not fear. They know what's best for them.

Lynkeus

I trust as wives they'll show the same respect.

Danaos

They will be thrilled to serve their husbands' needs.

Lynkeus

They won't defend that cherished chastity?

Danaos

Each has her bedroom all prepared for love.

Lynkeus

We men are eager to be welcomed in.

Danaos

My girls will give you what you've waited for!

Lynkeus

We've waited long enough. Let's thank the gods.

Danaos

I and your father are now friends again.

Lynkeus

But is that so? You've let him down before.

Danaos

How could you doubt that I'm sincere in this?

Lynkeus

It's hard to trust you once you've played him false.

Danaos

My love for him is totally sincere!

Lynkeus

Alas! He knows your trickery of old!

Danaos

And I know how he held me in contempt.

Lynkeus

I fear you have some secret plan to ruin him.

Danaos

But why should I not want to bring him joy?

Lynkeus

You've never dropped your jealousy of him!

Danaos

Jealous of him? What foolish talk is this?

Lynkeus

Or your ambition, to be a greater king!

Danaos

The Argives made me king - against my will!

Lynkeus

You can't deny you always wanted it!

Danaos

I came here merely to protect my girls

Lynkeus

Protect yourself, you mean. That 'prophecy'!

Danaos

My life was threatened by a son of his.

Lynkeus

To trust such foolish rumour was your choice.

Danaos

Is it then foolish to believe the gods?

Lynkeus

It was some evil man and not a god.

Danaos

Gods often use men to unveil their thoughts!

Lynkeus

You used it as a pretext to arrange ...

Danaos

...Arrange a secure future for my girls

Lynkeus

The 'trip to Argos' you had always planned!

Danaos

Nonsense. My girls were terrified of rape!

Lynkeus

A marriage contract hardly counts as rape!

Danaos

They felt they were in danger, under threat.

Lynkeus

The threat that you invented! Nothing real!

Danaos

But you boys caused them real fear, that's true!

Lynkeus

You told them lies, to make them want to flee ...

Danaos

Quite wrong – they naturally fear violent men.

Lynkeus

...So you'd have your excuse to bring them here....

Danaos

That's utter nonsense, and you know it is.

Lynkeus

... And claim asylum so the king would give ...

Danaos

All Lies! I cannot listen to your lies!

Lynkeus

... You fully-armed protection for yourself.

Danaos

No, no. He knew the gods were on our side.

Lynkeus

You lied before the gods – including Zeus!

Danaos

Zeus guards the rights of helpless refugees!

Lynkeus

You lied, and falsely used the name of Zeus.

Danaos

It's very clear Zeus saved my daughters' lives.

Lynkeus

You made Pelasgos scared of Zeus, **that's** clear...

Danaos

Of course he was afraid to anger Zeus!

Lynkeus

...Which made him fight a war he did not want ...

Danaos

He knew by helping us he'd have to fight.

Lynkeus

A fight in which you hoped the king would die!

Danaos

When you attacked his land, that made him fight!

Lynkeus

We came to talk, persuade you to see sense.

Danaos

Yes, with a fleet and army at your back.

Lynkeus

Without the threat of force, you can't have peace.

Danaos

You could have brought a single ship, or two.

Lynkeus

Pelasgos then would soon have forced us home.

Danaos

Your father clearly means to conquer us.

Lynkeus

To oust the king who tricked his way to power

Danaos

No trick. The people chose me as their king

Lynkeus

You're twins. His right to rule's as good as yours.

Danaos

So he intends to take my throne by force?

Lynkeus

Yes, if he must. You know his army's strength.

Danaos

Beer-soaked Egyptians beat wine-drinking Greeks!

Lynkeus

Wait till you see what savage beasts they are!

Danaos

I told my daughters that to frighten them.

Lynkeus

You've seen the Argives routed once out here!

Danaos

They'll be much tougher with new leadership!

Lynkeus

Let there be war, to see who rules this land.

Danaos

I am the people's choice. Their rightful lord!

Lynkeus

Not so. You lied and cheated to be king.

Danaos

He brought his army here to fight with me.

Lynkeus

Since you said you would not negotiate!

Danaos

So, you intend to take my city and my throne?

Lynkeus

If that's the only choice you leave us with.

Danaos

I see your father planned this from the start.

Egyptians are so good at weaving plots.

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Lynkeus

I'm not Egyptian, I'm as Greek as you!

Unsheathe your sword, and fight me if you dare!

You are my uncle, but I can't stand by.

My father's claim to Argos is as good as yours.

Danaos

Then fight me, man to man,

Lynkeus

Then draw your sword!

Danaos

My blade is ready!

Lynkeus

I'll soon make you bleed ...

Danaos

Come on, then let it be...

Lynkeus

...a duel to the death ...

They draw their weapons and fight

Suddenly INACHOS, god of the River Inachos, founder of Argos, former king, father of Io and ancestor of the twins, appears, dripping with water.

Inachos

Stop there! My name is Inachos, the king
Who founded Argos - reigned for sixty years!
Now I'm a god. I say step back! Stop that!
I was there sleeping in my river-bed,
When your commotion woke me up. For shame!
When I ruled Argos, I was called upon
To judge a **real** contest: there were two
Immortals claiming that this land was theirs.
Hera the queen of heaven and the spouse
Of Zeus: Poseidon was her challenger.
I made my judgment, took the consequence:
The Earthshaker, Poseidon, caused my waters
To run dry – I suffered agony, But I
Refused to change my verdict even so.
I'm pleased that after all this time, my line
Has come again to rule in Argos. But
Danaos' reign will not be long! The line
Of future kings will be descended from
A daughter of your seed, Danaos, and
A son of Aigyptos. These cousins shall
Unite in love, and shall together found
A dynasty. Descended from this pair
A daughter, Danaë, like Io, shall,
When visited by mighty Zeus, produce
A son, a friend to gods, who'll win renown
Throughout the world for his heroic deeds.
This I, Inachos, prophesy, as their
Great-great-great-great-great-grandfather.
[He is losing the thread, and remembers why he came]
What is the meaning of this brawl, this spat,
This squabble which disturbed my rest?

I know you: my descendants, through
Unhappy Io's sad affair with Zeus.
Your father, Aigyptos, agreed his sons,
Should be joined with your daughters, Danaos.
Belatedly a match that should have been
Consummated long long ago. I'll watch
The young men from my river-bank compete
To win the race and claim their prize of choice.
One of Aigyptos' sons, no one knows which,
Will be the winner, and claim as his bride
The best of all your daughters, Danaos.
May all the cousins' troubles henceforth cease.
May doves and hawks now share their nests in peace!

He vanishes

Lynkeus

Thanks, Inachos. Your cooling waters seem
To have put out the flames of our dispute.
His prophecies of your demise and how
One of Aigyptos' sons will soon be king,
I scorn as ramblings of a senile mind.

Danaos

I too regret my hasty words. I fear
My need to see these marriages succeed
Revealed the passions that are driving me.
The sooner our daughters and yourselves
Are joined as one, the sooner we'll conclude
A lasting peace between our dynasties:
Egypt and Argos as allies and friends!
Lynkeus
My wedding should be all that's on my mind.

I pray to Zeus, and every god: fulfil
My dream to win the one girl I desire!

Lynkeus leads the chorus as they move to take part in the Games.

Chorus

Strophe

Marriage was ordained by god
To be a simple thing.
Two men, two heads of family
Come to agreement.
Too young to understand
A boy, a girl become betrothed,
To taste the joy of Aphrodite
Once the virgin's swelling breasts proclaim
Like blushing apples
Ripeness for womanhood,
Her womb receptive earth
Now moistened for
the seed of life
The man implants.

Antistrophe

As every lion, every deer,
And every hawk or dove
Unites in natural harmony
So every maiden,
Every youth feels drawn
To propagate the human race.
To stay aloof, to stay outside
In life-long abstinence is not a place
Where youthful creatures

Seek to entomb themselves.

The marriage feast awaits

The torches blaze

The gifts are given

The bride unveils.

Strophe

Artemis watches the young girl

Jealously, protectively

As she matures to womanhood.

Mindful of the right she won

To roam a huntress through the woods

Innocent of the touch of man.

Hera, all-fulfilling, supports her on

The steep and rocky path,

Through stress of marriage

Guiding her in the ways of men.

To use the anger

Caused by husbands frailties

To bind him closer.

Antistrophe

Aphrodite blesses the girl

nervously, tentatively

Exploring satisfaction, joy,

Excitement as the married pair

Unite and share the marriage bed..

Then Hera when her pains begin

Supervises childbirth while warding off

The virgin Artemis

Who loves to punish

A young girl as she strains to bring

her unborn baby
Into the world. If it's a boy
She will be praised.

Strophe

We men, our expectations are
Remote from those of womankind.
Our first advantage I would say:
We all are spared the pains of giving birth:
In pleasure we beget our sons,
And they are born, and grow
Without much effort on our part.
And next –our women's bodies are our property,
They're owned us: we are not owned.
And third and most importantly
We do not have to place our hopes
In one woman, in one wife.
There is no need at all for any man
To limit his attentions to one wife.

Antistrophe

Like Zeus himself, we are all free
To plough whatever fields we choose
And sow the seed in fertile ground
Or scatter it to fall where'er it may.
All wives, like Hera, may get mad
And scold; But mortal wives
Have no divine resource, and lack the power
To turn their rivals into cows!
Ares, Apollo, Poseidon,
No god was happy with one wife.
From wives we want obedience,

Respect, and quiet submissiveness.

Danaos

I shall continue my charade. No one
May know the wedding plans I've made.
And outwardly I shall seem calm, composed.
Here comes my brother, he believes, in truth,
Our bitter quarrel is no more, that we
Are partners, friends, each straining to ensure
Our children's wedding will bring peace and joy
Not just to us but to each girl and boy.

Enter Aigyptos. He pauses out earshot of Danaos.

Aigyptos

Delighted, but amazed my brother forced
Himself to recognise my sons desires.
He really thinks by giving in he's saved
The monarchy he stole with lies from doom.
He thinks we'll take our brides and sail back home,
And leave him to enjoy his reign in peace!
How wrong he is: my army waits outside
The walls. But I do not intend a siege.
My sons are welcomed in the town as friends:
With fifty men inside, when once they're wed,
The gates will open, and at little cost.
Argos is ours. Few lives, if any, will be lost.

The brothers greet each other with fulsome extravagance.

Welcome, dear brother, help me celebrate!
They're on their way back now, to bless

Their choice of partner with a wedding feast,
Which well-trained slaves of mine have organised.
The couches are prepared, on which quite soon
The young men will recline, while their new brides
Attend. Some wives to serve the choicest meats
This fertile land I govern can produce,
Thanks to Demeter's generous hand.
Others to pour the wine into their eager cups,
The wondrous blessing Bacchus offers us.
Lithe dancing girls are there entertain
With gentle music, and to gratify
Their manly appetites. Their wives meanwhile
Shall leave the men and go to purify
Themselves, washing their bodies, as is fit,
In water from the stream of Inachos.
Then they shall be adorned and veiled
(One might say "dressed to kill"!)
To honour Aphrodite as they should.

Chorus enter in pairs, the Aigyptiads clasping the Danaids by the wrist. As the marriage was agreed by both fathers, they are now married. Lynkeus and Hypermestra lead the procession

Lynkeus

I am so pleased and proud to lead my brothers with
Their wives, new-chosen and new-won, to celebrate
The wedding-feast. We fifty couples will savour
This glorious day we've longed to see for countless years.
My father and my uncle, too, now reconciled at last,
Begin an era filled with peace and brotherhood.
The day is done, the race is run, the prizes won.

Thanks to the favour of the gods, and much
To my surprise I finished first, I won!
My brothers are all very pleased to have
The prizes which they won, through sweat
And toil. Bousiris won Automate,
Enkelados Amymone – the star –
Who caught the eye of men, and even gods –
Lykos took home the noble Agauë;
Daïphron, bravest man I know, won Skaië,
Whose name belies her beauty and her brains.
Proteus, who should by rights have won first prize,
Was thrilled to win the fair Gorgophone:
Her pin-sharp wit will keep him entertained!
So that leaves me. Who is my bride to be?
Meet Hypermestra! I have loved and longed
To be with her since childhood. All that time!
She's not the prettiest, nor the cleverest,
She's no skill with the shuttle or the lyre -
No poet, painter, nothing special - but
I love her and I hope she'll love me too.

Chorus – *epode*

We thank the gods for giving us our brides.
Our father, too, Aigyptos, must be fully thanked.
He never faltered in his love for us, he was
Prepared to go to war with Argos for our sake.
Thanks to the gods, again, he won the victory
With little bloodshed, though perhaps the king
Who tried to keep our brides from us deserved to die.
And we must thank our uncle Danaos, who now we see
Was right to shield his daughters from the harm
He feared would come to them. We thank again

The gods who helped him change his mind.
To think that once we truly thought our wives
All hated us and wished to see us dead!
Thanks also to you Peitho, gentle child
Of Aphrodite, who revealed to us
That Lust without Persuasion is not Love.
It's time to leave the marriage-feast, and take
Our new-won virgin brides to bed at last.
Come raise the flaming torches! Let them be our guide
To bed, that our long yearning may be satisfied.

They process off towards the city, shepherded by the Nympheutria

Agyptos

My blessings go with you my sons. May you
Find happiness tonight as you perform the rites
Of Aphrodite with your chosen wives.
Tomorrow early you will lead them down
Towards my ships, drawn up there on the beach.
As wives, they will be glad to get on board
And settle down without protest this time!
Our ships will take them home to Egypt, where
They will attend my sons' needs every day,
As was agreed so long ago, before my brother
Decided he would hide their brides away,
And then transport them to another land,
So terrified of love my sons might show! *[Exit]*

Danaos

Well girls, the hour has come for you to do
What is expected. Just remember all
The advice I've given you throughout the years.

Soon you must show your husbands what you feel
For them and give them all they've waited for.
When it is dark, and you are in your beds,
Don't be afraid to show emotions, and
Don't let your father down, don't disappoint
The guide and mentor you've not once
Shown disobedience to, in all your lives.
Your husbands long to give their hearts to you,
How thrilled they'll be when you unveil for them
And let your hair stream loose, amazing them
With wifely skills they never dreamed you had! *[Exit]*

As in The Suppliants, the young Argives who've been present as soldiers, escorts, waiters etc come together to form a second Chorus.

Argives

Strophe

Although the gods
Have often utilised Deception,
When mortals try hard to deceive
Disaster usually ensues.
This is because the gods
Immortal as they are
Evade the sequels to their deeds.
Just as when Zeus
Seduced Io, our founder's child.
It was she, the mortal
Who was forced to pay the price,
While Zeus escaped
Perhaps with just a scolding from his wife.
Once Zeus disguised himself as Artemis
To snare a girl he loved,

Who hated sex, preferred to hunt wild creatures in the woods.
Zeus had his way,
The girl it was,
Who, when the vile impersonation was disclosed,
innocent Kallisto, that Artemis destroyed.

Fear dogs my mind; foreboding floods my heart,
May all be well, may happiness prevail.

Antistrophe

I fear we've yet
to see the final consequences
Of Danaos' deception of his twin.
He has not paid a price so far
For his dream to be king
In Argos, and not yet
Nor have the daughters who obeyed
His every wish
Been punished for this masquerade..
Aigyptos and his sons
are riding high – their army waits
outside our gates,
We have no way of knowing what comes next.
Do they intend to conquer us, subject
Us to Egyptian rule?
The wedding that they wanted for so long has come to pass.
What of the gods?
What's in their mind?
Will Zeus, who sees that men keep oaths let Danaos
Gather in profit from his career of lies?

Fear dogs my mind; foreboding floods my heart,

May all be well, may happiness prevail.

Strophe

What will the outcome of this wedding be,
A wedding that deceit made possible?
And what of golden Aphrodite, who
Was brutally offended by the father
Of these girls, a goddess known to be
Not trifled with, severe, implacable?
Is his disease medicable?

Fear dogs my mind; foreboding floods my heart,
May all be well, may happiness prevail.

We pray that Aigyptos's troops return,
And soon, to Egypt's rich well-watered land.
He has men, power, to attack our town
Dethrone his brother and disrupt our lives;
That all Aigyptos' sons find joy tonight;
That every Danaid is now happy just
To lead the life that every woman must.

Fear dogs my mind; foreboding floods my heart,
May all be well, may happiness prevail

Young girls join with boys holding lighted torches, to escort the Aigyptiads and Danaids to their marriage beds.

Boys

Hymen Hymenai' O!

Girls

Hymen Hymenai' O!

Boys

Hymen Hymenai' O!
Make this a joyful night!
Our torches burning bright!

Girls

Hymen Hymenai' O!
The men have bed-time on their mind.
Pray the gods they will be kind!

Boys

Hymen Hymenai' O!
For this they've waited all their lives
Finally, they claim their wives!

Girls

Hymen Hymenai' O!
The wives have all been purified.
Their eager husbands wait inside

Boys

Hymen Hymenai' O!
They long to see their wives unveiled
So soon now the girls will yield

All

Hymen Hymenai' O!
Hymen Hymenai' O!
Hymen Hymenai' O!
Hymen Hymenai' O!

AMW Marshfield Woods May 2020