

What happened was this. In the palace the king found all in readiness both for sacrifice and lustration, for which preparation the festivities commanded in the morning had furnished a pretext¹. He went, as custom commanded, to bathe before the ceremony. Clytaemnestra, eager for the delight of taking her revenge with her own hand, had marked for herself this moment. She had even descended to plan the details of the bath so as to increase the helplessness of the victim. There with an axe she slew him, and his councillors, wrought by the agony of the foreseeing Cassandra to a paralysing terror, learnt his fate and theirs from his dying cry.

For now at last they began to realize the situation, and saw that the adulterers and their adherents had struck down not only the king, but with him the liberties of Argos². Resistance was impossible. The fortress was in the hands of the conspirators, the remnant of the king's army entrapped and overpowered, the country surprised, and the loyal without a leader, the young heir Orestes being absent and the elders themselves in the power of the enemy. Among the people, between the victory and the loss of the fleet, more hearts had perhaps been lost than gained. Nay, the elders themselves were forced to confess that of the chief conspirators Clytaemnestra at least had a foul wrong and a presentable cause, nay, even that their own cause was not clear, for what had they done to save the innocent Iphigenia? To the name of Iphigenia the queen instantly appealed, and the counsellors could not but allow that as between her, the mother, and them, in some sort the murderers, it was a doubtful case. Thus does Aeschylus moralize at once both the personal and the public aspects of his story³.

But whatever compunction even the friends of Agamemnon might feel in the presence of Clytaemnestra gave way to pure rage when Aegisthus with his ruffians entered the fortress and joined the queen where she stood with her defenders around her and the dead bodies at her feet, exulting in his 'just restoration' from exile⁴ and boasting the skill with which he had conducted the successful design. At the sight

the queen's permission, in Argos, what can the elders possibly mean by speaking of their 'inexplicable fears'? Obviously on this supposition the danger of Agamemnon must be imminent and certain, and the elders, who did not warn him, are in fact nothing less than accessories to his death.

¹ *vv.* 1040—41.

² *v.* 1354, 1495—97, and the concluding scene *passim*.

³ *vv.* 1410 foll., 1554—1560 etc.

⁴ *v.* 1607. The language of Aegisthus here would of itself suffice to show that he comes from abroad and now for the first time appears publicly in Argos.