

memnon now imminent. Declaring his fate and her own to be inevitable, at last in despair she enters the palace.

“In this astonishing scene Aeschylus seems to have touched the limit of what speech can do to excite pity and terror. The cries come forth to Apollo, repeated louder and more wildly as the inspiration grows upon her; she smells the ‘scent of murder on the walls’ of the bloody house to which she comes as a prisoner, and visions rise, first of the past wickedness, then of the present; and lastly she bewails in songs of ‘searching and melting beauty’ her own piteous fate. The chorus sustain the part of the Argive citizen, sympathetic and horror-struck, and finally bewildered and overpowered by her clearer and clearer prophecies of the bloody deeds that are imminent.” (Sidgwick.) Of the relation of this scene to the general effect of the play I have spoken already in the narrative. It should be observed however that here again the general action is essential to the comprehension of the spoken scene. Critics have objected (not unnaturally, if the play be read without reference to the action) to the helpless behaviour of the elders at the moment of the murder; and in fact long before this, as they are alarmed if not convinced (*v.* 1212) by Cassandra, their hesitation is only to be explained by a manifest impossibility of acting to any effect. But in truth they appear helpless because they are so and know it. From the previous incidents and the present situation of affairs it is plain that if the king is truly in danger, then also they themselves are prisoners. They would not have been suffered either to enter the palace or to leave the fortress. It is not at all unnatural that old men in such a situation should be utterly paralysed, but it is by the action more than by the words that the situation is portrayed.

*Fifth Scene (vv. 1342—1576).* Clytaemnestra, The Elders, etc. The dying cry of Agamemnon is heard within, and while the elders are still pretending to consider the situation, the palace is thrown open and discloses Clytaemnestra standing over the bodies of her two victims.

From the language of the elders (*vv.* 1353—1356), it is evident that other signs, besides the king’s cry, declare the triumph of the plot. In fact the stage, in Greek parlance the *orchestra*, rapidly fills again with the exultant crowd and the indignant few (see *vv.* 1400—1411), among these some of the fighting-men returned from Troy who are disposed at the last (*vv.* 1625, 1633 etc.) to try a desperate struggle. With regard to the majority of the soldiers, we are manifestly to suppose them surprised and slain (as in Homer) at the moment of Agamemnon’s murder. In an ancient Greek state a ship-load of veterans, if allowed fair play, would have been masters of the situation, and the tyrants dared not spare them, if they would. It is this which explains and justifies the prominence and pathos given to the character of the herald, whose part is in every way superior to that of the king. From his entrance to his exit (see *vv.* 508—512, 572—577, 655—657, 676—677) his language is ominous. And in truth he is actually near to death, and is thus a tragic character as much as the rest.

A curious question arises here as to the exact manner in which the king’s death is represented. Modern readers infer from the text that the interior of the palace is not shown to the audience until Agamemnon and Cassandra are lying dead; and the inference seems natural though not necessary. On the other hand the Greek hypothesis says expressly that ‘Aeschylus is peculiar in representing Agamemnon as