

Agamemnon is introduced, sternly refusing the celebration of the customary burial rites. Teucer boldly stands forth the protector of his brother's remains, and by the generous intercession of Ulysses, the former rival of the deceased, who appears on this occasion in a more than usually favourable light, the ceremonial is allowed to take place. A short moral from the Chorus concludes the piece.

The events recorded in the first portion of the play (vv. 1—133) are supposed to take place the day after the adjudication of the arms of Achilles by the Atridae to Ulysses, and in the early dawn concluding the night in which Ajax, frantic with rage at his defeat, has slaughtered the flocks belonging to the Grecian army, together with their shepherds, supposing them to be the Atridae and Ulysses. The suspicion of the deed having fallen upon Ajax, Ulysses tracks him from the spot where he had been seen, with a bloody sword in his hand, to his tent. Here Athene, suspended in air by a stage contrivance, appears to him, and informs him that Ajax is within his tent, and that he is the author of the massacre in question. After stating the cause of the deed, and that in a fit of madness, which she had designedly sent upon him, he had imbrued his hands in the blood of the sheep, instead of his foes, she summons forth Ajax from his tent, having first withheld his sight so that he cannot see Ulysses. The hero comes forth and boasts that he has already slain the two sons of Atreus, and purposes inflicting even more ample vengeance upon his successful rival Ulysses. On his re-entering his tent for this purpose the goddess addresses to Ulysses a lecture on the frailty of even the bravest and wisest of men, and exhorts him in consequence to cultivate humility and reverence towards the gods. The drama may be considered as divided into three parts, the madness of Ajax, his suicide and his sepulture.

The judgment of the Poet has been impugned for introducing towards the close of the drama the prolix discussions between Teucer, Menelaus, Agamemnon, and Ulysses respecting the burial of Ajax, considering that the play would have terminated so much more suitably with the death of the hero. In this objection there is certainly much truth; the disputes in question enfeeble considerably the interest of the drama; but on the other hand it is observed by Lobeck (ad 1127) and Dindorf that without this episode the material afforded by the madness and suicide of Ajax alone would have been too scanty to make up a play of the usual length; unless indeed he had commenced the piece with the ὄπλων κρίσις, as Attius and Pacuvius appear to have done in their *'Armorum iudicium'*, if we may judge from the fragments that remain. The entire story of Ajax and Teucer was dramatised by Æschylus in a trilogy consisting of the Ὀπλων κρίσις, Θρήσσαι and Σαλαμίνιαι; in the middle one of which the death of Ajax takes place; but from the fragments that exist we cannot learn much of the action or connection of the three pieces. "The opinions of antiquity, which regarded a man's burial as an essential part of the destiny of his life, allowed a continuation of the action after the death of the hero. Teucer, the brother of Ajax, contends, as the champion of his honour, with the Atridae, who seek to deprive him of the rites of burial; and Ulysses, the very person whom Ajax had hated most bitterly, comes forward on the side of Teucer, openly and distinctly acknowledging the excellencies of the deceased warrior" (Müller Liter. of Anc. Greece, p. 350).