

Supplixes and the Persæ are still lyric in their character, bearing the stamp of the drama's origin, but in the later plays, the Seven against Thebes and the Orestian Trilogy, we enter into the realm of the drama as it is now understood, *i.e.*, the delineation or impersonation of character is the chief feature in the play, and action, at the same time, is freely represented on the stage. The later plays are characterized by dramatic energy, intensity and concentration, power and scope.

Before proceeding to discuss the Agamemnon, let us try to understand what the nature of tragedy is. Tragedy is a drama that awakens in us a sense of the sadness that is in life, but in such a way that we do not receive from it a feeling of unrest, but rather one of thoughtful sympathy and repose. After seeing the presentation of a drama, as Prof. Campbell puts it, the spectator, instead of continuing to mourn over Oedipus or Heracles and their distant woes, returns with deepened thoughts and strengthened resolution to encounter for himself the stern realities of life, or to bow in silent contemplation before its mystery.

A character is not suited for the hero or main personage in tragedy who has no traits of nobility or greatness. He must carry with him the sympathy of the audience, *i.e.*, their attitude must be sympathetic although their approval is withheld, even when, like Macbeth, his career is becoming steeped in crime. He should have great aims or opportunities which are thwarted by some weakness in his character or withdrawn in an unavailing struggle with fate. For this reason tragedy is not a presentation of highly wrought sensational events, or mere portrayal of passion, but the whole course of the action is tinged with lofty imagination and with reflection or thought. Thus it is brought into harmony with life, enriches its content and enlarges its horizon. Aristotle's definition brings before us in a few words the main features of tragedy. Tragedy is an imitation of action, serious and complete, and characterized by greatness, through pity and fear effecting the purification of such feelings. By exciting pity, fear and awe over scenes which are worthy to evoke these feelings in their greatest purity and intensity, the mind, by contemplation of such lofty scenes, is emancipated from selfish and unworthy thoughts, feelings and points of view which tend to dominate the individual soul. Tragedy also exerts a soothing and consolatory power. Those that have passed through sorrow or suffering, see in the presentation an unfolding of their own feelings, with which, in the deepest, they do accord, but which it is beyond their power to express; and so receive comfort from the thought that their case is not beyond human sympathy. The Greek point

of view is insufficient in that it describes tragedy as imitation rather than ideal creation.

Thus when we see clearly the true significance of tragedy, the truth is brought home to us that it is of universal interest, since it touches life at all points, and is ennobling in its influence, inasmuch as it tends to uplift the soul to a life of purer thought and feeling.

In reading the Agamemnon we cannot but be impressed with the clearness and boldness with which the characters stand out. There is no mistaking what their feelings and nature are. The chief traits alone are given, without any rounding by bringing the chief personages in contact with anyone apart from the main interest and action of the play.

The tragic power of the scene from the entrance of the king to the end of the play is of the highest order. Instinctively the spectator feels, in the midst of ceremony and pomp, an oppression in his breast ominous of dark and terrible deeds. The frigid meeting of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, the pathos of the scene in which Cassandra tuned her lay most swanlike for her end, the indignation and denunciation of Clytemnestra by the chorus and her shameless avowal of the deed, disclaiming any bond of duty or affection, and the angry altercation with Aegisthus, are unsurpassed in the tragic art.

But let us here insert a short sketch of the play. Agamemnon, king of Argos, having sailed with a great armament to Troy, to avenge the treachery of Paris in carrying off Helen, arranged with Clytemnestra to transmit the news of his success by means of a series of beacons extending across the Aegean sea. Accordingly on the night of the capture of Troy, by the successful carrying out of the plan, the news reached Argos before the morning.

At this point the play opens. The watch man who has kept his post on the castle roof for a year, announces the message to the queen, who at once orders the fires of sacrifice to be lit on every altar, and summons the elders to the palace.

After some delay, just about day break, the queen appears when the elders respectfully ask the cause of the joyful demonstration. On being informed that Troy is captured, they are filled with amazement, and when after some questioning an account of the means of communication by the fire beacons is related, the statement conveys to them little satisfaction. The queen retires from the stage and the chorus sing a long ode, dwelling chiefly on the fate of the Greeks before Troy. At the conclusion of the ode a herald enters who announces that Agamemnon has arrived. In this scene the herald relates the sufferings and hardships of the army during the investment of Troy, and gives an account of a terrible storm which burst upon them on their voyage