

treatise of Aristotle on the drama remains to prove, what the extant plays confirm, that the Athenian public, so far from being indifferent to consistency, attached to it an importance much greater than the moderns, and more perhaps than is reasonable. And observe further, that the successors of Aeschylus had a temptation, and so far an excuse, for taking liberties in the matter of time, which Aeschylus himself had not. After Aeschylus 'the unity of time', that is, the restriction of the play to a continuous action or, as it is sometimes put, to an action 'within one day', grew into a practice and apparently into something like a rule. It is not always observed; the *Supplikes* of Euripides, for example, does not conform to it, nor does the *Andromache*. But there was a tendency to observe it; and the tendency produced, as it was sure to do, some questionable treatment of this artificial 'day', though neither Sophocles nor Euripides, nor any one else that I know of, ever presents us with a 'day' like that of the *Agamemnon*. But Aeschylus did not observe the practice at all. The second scene of the *Eumenides* is separated from the first by an interval of months, if not of years¹. If therefore he wished to bring into one play the fall of Troy and the return of the Greeks, he had no need to appeal to any dramatic license, nor any temptation to distort the facts. His successors could not have done so consistently with their usual practice, and probably would not have thought it desirable. But to account for the supposed structure of the *Agamemnon*, we must assume that Aeschylus, who ignores the 'unity' in the third play of the trilogy, adopted it for the first play in this self-contradictory form, that the action of one play ought nominally to fall within one day, but that in this 'day' may happen whatever events we please. I think it may safely be asserted that such a theory was never professed by any author or critic whatever.

As I see no reason to think that the popular mind in the time of Aeschylus was in this respect very different from the popular mind now, I will offer a Socratic parallel, not the less just because it is homely.—Scene: A room in London. Time: Early morning. Servants discovered preparing the room. From their conversation it appears that the master of the house has been for some time in Africa, and that the conduct of his wife, in relation to a person too often received, is causing them much anxiety and a strong desire for the master's return. They have learnt with satisfaction that their mistress is expecting soon to hear that he is on the way home. A telegram arrives for the lady,

¹ See the description of Orestes' intermediate wanderings, *Eum. vv.* 239—241, 284—5, 454—5.