

audience cares first of all for the story, and is not to be put off with profundity of thought, or splendour of language, or sounding rhythm, or with all of these things together.

Now it will be allowed that in the *Agamemnon*, as commonly read, the mechanism of the story has received from the author no consideration at all. According to Aeschylus, it would seem that for an adulteress to kill her king and husband upon a day of triumph, and to raise her paramour to the throne, is an enterprise too plainly facile to require any explanation of the means. Of course the returning monarch will have no suspicions and receive no warning; of course, however abruptly he may arrive, he will find all prepared for the deed; of course when he has fallen, any slight mutiny on the part of his soldiers or subjects will be instantly and easily suppressed. But that Aeschylus should have been content to treat the matter thus is remarkable, not only from the general conditions of theatrical art, but for two more particular reasons. It is odd that if he really did not care, and did not expect any one to care, how the events came about, he should become scrupulous in explanation just at the point where the story is simplest, at the actual striking of the murderous stroke. If, in defiance of likelihood, we once suppose the king to walk ignorant and unsuspecting into the palace where, to the knowledge of his faithful servants and subjects<sup>1</sup>, his queen is living in adultery, we can imagine a hundred ways in which the wife, if so minded, might compass his death. Yet the poet exactly describes the very peculiar device by which the murderess made sure that her victim should have, as she says, 'neither defence nor escape' (*v.* 1380). Strange that he should have regarded this, and disregarded the only real and pressing questions, how she got her chance and how she secured her impunity! And again it is odd, that even if the tragedian did not observe for himself that in such a case the preparatory conditions must be a vital part of the plot, he should not have recognized this when it had been emphasized long before by the original narrators of the story.

The version of the legend current at the date of the *Odyssey* is there given incidentally several times<sup>2</sup>. According to this, Aegisthus, the lover of Clytaemnestra, wooed her during the absence of Agamemnon, and with much difficulty induced her to quit the house of her husband for his own. Upon the return of the king Aegisthus bade him to a feast, and there treacherously fell upon him and slew him, Clytaemnestra

<sup>1</sup> *vv.* 37, 620, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Od.* 1. 35 foll., 3. 247 foll., 4. 512 foll., 11. 405 foll.