the whole reputation of the drama considered as a drama. Indeed the author of the Greek Introduction in the MS., whose ideas respecting the plot as a whole we are content to borrow, is on this point candid enough. 'This part of the play,' he coolly says, after describing the exits of the king and of Cassandra, 'is admired, as astonishing and sufficiently pathetic.' It would be easy to show that this significant *expressio unius* represents also the opinion of the moderns, and that, notwithstanding the rich beauties of the whole, every one more or less openly wonders, why the magnificent central picture and the exquisitely carven frame should be so ill fitted to each other.

For with the entrance of Aegisthus the difficulty begins again. It even becomes so great that it cannot be tolerated, and the knot has to be cut by change of the text. Nowhere is it more apparent than in the finale, how much the dramatist relied for the exposition of the story upon the visible action and upon the previous knowledge of the spectators, how imperfect as a narrative are the mere speeches and odes by themselves, and how serious a task for us, who have neither stage-directions nor authoritative preface, is the reconstruction of the indispensable remainder. We find Aegisthus speaking upon the stage; but how he comes there, where he comes from, and how his appearance is connected with the action up to this point, are questions not to be answered by the mere perusal of what is said. So much however is plain (and admitted), that language is used which cannot be reconciled with the current conception of the story. According to Aeschylus, it is supposed, the overthrow of Agamemnon is entirely the work of Clytaemnestra. Her paramour, being, as the Argives tell him, a dastard, remains hidden in the palace or neighbourhood, and appears only to exult when the deed is done. (Why he should have run the enormous risk of being there at all, if he had no part to play, and whether his conduct is not even more foolish than cowardly, are questions which might occur to us in passing.) But this being so, it is strange that Aegisthus should not only attribute the success to himself, but applaud himself vehemently for the ingenuity by which it was attained: and it passes comprehension that the Argive elders should take him at his own valuation as the principal agent, and should speak of the queen, the sole agent, as having merely 'joined in' the plan. 'It was I,' says Aegisthus, 'who combined and contrived all the difficult plot[1].' What plot? There is no plot. There is no combination or contrivance at all. The king comes to his palace, the queen (how could she less?)

[1] *vv.* 1604—1609.