

such impiety might expose them to the chastisement of the gods in the course of the voyage home. They have actually suffered such a chastisement. The queen, in short, knows so much that it becomes an interesting enquiry how much exactly she knows, and what is the source of her knowledge.

And for the third indication let us turn to the continuation of the story, to the moment in the *Choephoroi*, when Orestes has entered the palace to execute his vengeance, when the murderers of Agamemnon are about 'to be slain by stratagem even as they slew'.<sup>1</sup> It is thus that the chorus, expectant without, sum up the issue to be decided. 'Now either shall the bloody violence of the murderous axes make an end utterly and altogether of Agamemnon's house: or else Orestes, *burning a fire and a light for liberation and lawful rule*, shall win again the high prosperity of his fathers.' It is plain that in the first part of the alternative the metaphor of the axes is chosen for its reference to the manner of Agamemnon's death. What was it that suggested in the second alternative the choice of the far from obvious metaphor of a fire? Certainly nothing in the plan of Orestes himself as given us in the *Choephoroi*. Is it not at least a fair *prima facie* conjecture that this also refers to the former plan of his enemies; and that the restoration of the lawful monarchy is likened to the lighting of a fire for liberty, because by the lighting of a fire for tyranny it had been formerly overthrown? But if this is so, we must revise our reading of the *Agamemnon*.

Setting out upon the line thus indicated we might proceed in two ways. Either we might re-examine the play throughout and draw at each point conclusions as to the facts or the dramatic *action*, as distinct from the mere words, which the text assumes. Or, anticipating the conclusion, we may first sketch the story continuously, as we suppose it might have been told in outline, before the play was performed, by any one who knew the version current at the time in Athens, and may then justify our 'hypothesis' by explaining from it the construction of the play. We will take rather the second way, as putting the narrative and the dramatic version in their true order, and will begin with a hypothetical narrative. But in doing this we shall not attempt a distinction, for which there are no materials, between the general outline which the poet took from current legend and the minor details which he may have introduced himself.

<sup>1</sup> *Cho.* 853: see also *ib.* 887.