

view has been efficiently studied in the West. Even the fifteenth century murmured¹: and it would indeed have been strange, if the readers of Shakespeare and of succeeding dramatists had accepted such a plot with satisfaction. But they never have so accepted it. On the contrary they have transmitted it with manifest discontent, actually concealing its absurdity, so far as possible, by artifice. If we add that until times within living memory the exponents of Aeschylus were necessarily and properly engrossed by the preliminary difficulties of language and grammar (Paley's edition was actually the first exception in English), we shall not accuse our instructors of adding much authority to a tradition which they would have been only too glad to disbelieve.

In reality the plot of the *Agamemnon* is perfectly coherent and natural. In one detail it is judiciously improbable. When, by the announcement of the herald, the queen's interpretation of the beacon is disproved, the elders would have acted most prudently if they had forthwith questioned him severely on the subject: and we may therefore, if we please, call it in a certain sense improbable that they should act otherwise. This 'improbability', as nothing would have been easier than to avoid it, the dramatist must be supposed to have sought. And he had good reason. It would have been a gross violation of the true and vital probabilities of the case, and a great loss to the dramatic interest, if he had represented the design of Aegisthus as never running near to failure. Only by the favour of circumstances, and of human blindness or weakness for one circumstance, could a design so audacious succeed at all: and Aeschylus has wisely chosen, that this ingredient of necessary chance shall not be concealed but exhibited.

In one other matter the dramatist has disregarded, not indeed probability (very far from it), but a certain expectation, which we, accustomed to the modern conditions of the stage, might have formed from the course of the play. A modern playwright, having to tell all his story for himself, would have thought it desirable, by way of accenting the construction and rounding off the development, to introduce, after the triumph of the plot, a plain description of the artifice by which it was conducted, or at least an allusion to it, such as appears in the *Choephoroi*. The absence of any such allusion in the *Agamemnon* (for the passing glance of Clytaemnestra in *v.* 1436 is not sufficient to

¹ Schol. in *Cod. Flor.* to *v.* 509 τινὲς μέμφονται τῷ ποιήτῃ ὅτι αὐθήμερον ἐκ Τροίας ποιεῖ τοὺς Ἕλληνας ἤκοντας.