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Studies in Honour of Guido Avezzù

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Alcestis: Pro-Satyrical or Simply Romantic Tragedy?

JORDI REDONDO

Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to investigate whether the Euripidean play *Alcestis* really follows the model of satyr drama. For nearly two hundred years the play has been considered a tragicomedy, a satyr drama, a comedy, or a pro-satyrical drama. Recent research, however, argues for a different explanation, treating it as a romantic tragedy, so that there is room for a contrasting analysis. To this end, I will examine the language of the first intervention of Heracles, as this scene has often been singled out for its parallels with satyr drama. The result of this partial research will cast some light on the question of which literary genre must be recognised in this play.

Introduction

The 438 BCE dramatic piece entitled *Alcestis* replaced the satyr-drama that supposedly was to close the tetralogy presented in the tragic contest by Euripides. The result was not so bad if we take into account that Euripides came second, after Sophocles. This interesting information has been provided by our ancient sources. The first *hypothesis* just exposes the argument in a very brief statement of some ten lines, so that no character is described, unless we accept as a tenable account the phrase Ἄλκηστις, γυνὴ τοῦ Ἀδμήτου ('Alcestis, wife of Admetus'). The second *hypothesis*, however, in no more than fifteen lines, can rightly be included among a number of ancient Greek texts on the literary theory of the Classical Age.

For our purpose, the relevant section of this second *hypothesis* is the following:

πρῶτος ἦν Σοφοκλῆς, δεύτερος Εὐριπίδης Κρήσσαις, Ἄλκμαιῶνι
τῷ διὰ Ψωφίδος, Τηλέφῳ, Ἀλκήστιδι. . . . τὸ δὲ δρᾶμα κωμικωτέραν

ἔχει τὴν καταστροφὴν. . . τὸ δὲ δρᾶμά ἐστι σατυρικώτερον, ὅτι εἰς χαρὰν καὶ ἡδονὴν καταστρέφει παρὰ τὸ τραγικόν. ἐκβάλλεται ὡς ἀνοίκεια τῆς τραγικῆς ποιήσεως ὃ τε Ὀρέστης καὶ ἡ Ἄλκηστις, ὡς ἐκ συμφορᾶς μὲν ἐρχόμενα, εἰς εὐδαιμονίαν δὲ καὶ χαρὰν λήξαντα, <ᾶ> ἐστι μᾶλλον κωμωδίας ἐχόμενα.

[The winner was Sophocles, Euripides was second with *The Cretan Women, Alcmaeon across Psophis, Telephus, Alcestis*. . . The play has a rather comic outcome. . . The play is rather satyric, because it turns to joy and pleasure, in opposition to the tragic technique. Both *Orestes* and *Alcestis* are cast aside as plays inappropriate for tragic poetry, for they originate in misfortune, but end up in happiness and joy, which are rather components of comedy. (my translation)]

Therefore, we are informed that Euripides assumedly made a clear-cut innovation in replacing basic constituents of the tragic plot with others taken from the comic and satyric genres. It is important to bear in mind that the dramatic authors were divided into two classes: tragic writers who composed tragedies and satyr dramas, and comic writers who composed comedies. Surprisingly, the author of the second *hypothesis* does not make any distinction between satyr drama and comedy: the play was “rather satyric”, but “has a rather comic outcome” and displays “components of comedy”. Probably, the author of this *hypothesis* was unable to distinguish between satyr drama and comedy.

The influence of these observations has for many years guided the discussion of modern scholars. Nonetheless, in my opinion this influence has been in many aspects misleading: first of all, it causes some confusion about the difference between comedy and satyr drama, as pointed out above, something which may be due to the later chronology of the *hypothesis*; second, there is no specific remark about the place assigned to the play by Euripides and this could lead to the conclusion that the satyr drama was now and then suitable to be replaced with a tragedy; and third, the term *katastrophe* involves a hermeneutical problem, since it can be translated as ‘outcome’, but also as ‘evolvment’; then, if we choose the first translation, the strength of the comedy depends mainly on the happy ending of the play; but if we choose

the second translation, it depends on the whole plot.

As it is not now the occasion to deal with *Orestes*, I will concentrate on *Alcestis*. Actually, this problem should be raised with regard to both plays, but the question needs further study and comment.

Status Quaestionis

Already in 1836, after some earlier comments – by Heine and Goethe, for instance – on the actual genre of the play, Glum developed in his doctoral dissertation the information provided by the *hypothesis*. The character of Heracles attracted his attention as a comic and satyrical hero (Glum 1836: 58-61), but his conclusion did not support the thesis that *Alcestis* was a satyr drama; in his opinion its genre was a blend of tragic and comic elements.¹ Only a few years later did Düntzer argue for a tragicomedy (Düntzer 1839).² Likewise, in 1847 Köchly suggested that *Alcestis* should be understood as an attempt to create a new dramatic product able to satisfy the viewers (Köchly 1847: 388; the same conclusion has been later supported by Bernhardt 1869: 458-60, Ritter 1875, and Sutton 1971: 55). In the same year, Rauchenstein went one step further, as he did not argue for a tragedy blending comic elements, but for a *Mittelgattung* with two opposite sections, a tragic one, first, followed by a comic one, and the German *Schauspiel* was therein a big influence (Rauchenstein 1847: 17). He also pointed out that it was not right to consider the play from a mainly comic perspective – as especially Köchly did, among other scholars, mainly French – (Rauchenstein 1847: 15). Rauchenstein noted the strong differences between this middle genre and satyr drama, for the only real link was the character of Heracles (16; the same argument in Humphreys 1880: 191). Nonetheless, there were other scholars who tried to hold up the interpretation of *Alcestis* as a satyr dra-

1 Glum 1836: 57: “. . . leuioris argumenti fabulam componere Euripides uoluisse, quae ad dramatis satyrici et leuitatem et hilaritatem fere accederet.”

2 Düntzer 1839: 192: “choro illo satyrorum rejecto novum extitit prioris dramatis satyrici genus, fabula ex hilari et severo mixta, γένος μικτόν, simul animum commouens et risum excitans.”

ma (Hartung 1843: 229-30³; Buchholz 1864; Klein 1865: 448), or as a comedy (Wilken 1868; Bissinger 1869: 17-8).⁴

On the contrary, Sittl and Cucuel supported the view that the play follows the rules of tragedy and rejected the idea that the loss of *Alcestis* could be seen from a comic perspective (Sittl 1887: 334; Cucuel 1887). A similar statement was made by Jöhring in 1894, when he refused to see *Alcestis* as a satyr-play, or as a comedy, or as a burlesque tragedy, for parody did not have any significant role in the action (Jöhring 1894: 16). Nonetheless, he noticed that one of the main characters was an odd, outlying tragic hero, Heracles.⁵ More recently, also Fritz (1962) considered it a tragedy.

Schmid & Stählin adhered to the theory that the play is some sort of tragicomedy, since it does not follow the standard structure of tragedy, but makes room for comic features (1961: 339, 344, 348). They also noted the comic treatment of the theme in the fourth century BCE already commented upon by Bernhardt.⁶ Grube also accepts an interpretation of *Alcestis* as a tragicomedy, not as a satyr drama (Grube 1961: 131, 332-4). This genre of tragicomedy has received further support (Barnes 1968: 26-8; Segal 1971: 553-8). In 1971 Charles Segal advocated the view of the play as a tragicomedy, and that only *Helen* followed the same pattern.⁷ In

3 Hartung 1843: 229: "docemur enim satyrici dramatis locum Alcestidis fabulae ab Euripide assignatum fuisse et natura sua satyricis esse quam tragicis fabulis propriorem visam esse antiquis." It is of course quite deceiving the absolute dependence on the second hypothesis.

4 Wilken 1868: 15: "Artis formam pertinere ad comicum genus iudicabimus, nec tamen non admodum magnum interesse discrimen inter comœdiam (Aristophaneam) et satyros. Satyri enim (quoad nobis licet conicere) paene nihil agebant, nisi ut iocis lepore lascivia detinerent delectarentque multitudinem."

5 Jöhring 1894: 13: "Herakles spielt die Hauptrolle im zweiten Theil des Stückes. Es gehört dieser zu jenen gewaltigen Helden, aus welchen der Dichter leicht echt tragische Charaktere gestalten kann. Aber Herakles in der *Alkestis* ist uns nicht als ein tragischer Held vorgeführt."

6 Schmid & Stählin 1961: 349: "Der Stoff ist nach Euripides von keinem griechischen Tragiker mehr behandelt worden, wohl aber von Komikern: Aristomenes in dem 388 aufgeführten Admetos und Antiphanes in einer *Alkestis*." See Bernhardt 869: 461.

7 Segal 1993: 227: "The *Alcestis* is a domestic tragicomedy with a mixture

any case he refused to view them as plain comedies,⁸ even if he admitted that there were many comic elements; he also adopted the term *prosatyric*.⁹ The link with the tragedy *Helen*, performed in 412 BC, has also been stressed by Foley (Foley 1992) and Hall.¹⁰

From a different perspective, the play's closeness to the genre of satyr drama has also been remarked by Sutton.¹¹ With a similar approach, Dale stressed the role of the god and hero Heracles, as formerly did Rauchenstein and Humphreys.¹² Contrariwise, the place of *Alcestis* as the closing play of the tetralogy was not considered by Dale a strong argument.¹³ Also Parker, like some other scholars long before her, has recently cast some doubts on the requirement of ending one's tragic tetralogy with a satyr drama (Parker 2007: xx). An extra-literary argument on this

of fairy-tale atmosphere and intense personal suffering that in the extant plays reappears again only in the *Helen* some two decades later."

8 Segal 1993: 50, 86: "It . . . transmutes tragedy not so much into comedy as into fairy tale. . . . For all of its flirting with tragic form and tragic emotions, then, the *Alcestis* ends in comedy. . . . But of course this is not comedy".

9 Segal 1971: 58 defines the play a "combination of tragedy and comedy . . . tragicomic, prosatyric hybrid that is the *Alcestis* itself." See also Seaford, who remarks the distance between tragedy and satyr drama (1984: 24-5).

10 Hall 1997: xxiii: ". . . Theoclymenus seems to have walked in almost straight from the satyric stage. There are other features reminiscent of satyr drama, especially the motif of Menelaus' shipwreck and the coastal setting. It may, therefore, be that Helens's gender-transgressive quality has more to do with satyric than comic drama."

11 Sutton 1971: 56: ". . . it is assumed that the comic elements of the *Alcestis* are a hallmark of its satyric ancestry . . ."

12 Dale 1954: xx: ". . . The main pro-satyric note in the *Alcestis* is struck by the scene after the departure of the Chorus for the funeral (747ff.). Here we have the figure of Heracles presented in a manner discreetly reminiscent of the traditional burlesque Heracles, the coarse glutton and drunkard who rouses himself to perform prodigious feats of strength against the local monster or bully."

13 Dale 1954: xix: "Neither the Hypothesis nor any other ancient source makes any comment on Euripides' departure from normal practice in introducing the *Alcestis* instead of a satyr-play at the end of a tetralogy. One would expect this to mean that the phenomenon was by no means isolated, and indeed in the list of extant titles of Euripides the number of satyr-plays is for whatever reason far short of one-quarter of the whole, and a much smaller proportion than in Aeschylus and Sophocles."

matter was instead purported by Marshall at the price of formulating a rather extreme hypothesis: Euripides decided to present a satyr-drama without any satyr as a protest against the decree of Morychides (440/439 BC) (Marshall 2000). Of course this theory is not demonstrable, but this does not make it valid (for a different view see Slater 2013: 1-14).

Ambrose, also on the basis of a non-philological methodology, established that loyalty inside the family was a constituent topic (Ambrose 2005). Other topics, always taken from the social context, have been underlined by Roisman (2005). Still in keeping with the anthropological perspective, which is the current leading critical approach to ancient literature, Slater explains the introduction of satyric elements after an attempt to restore the standard relationships inside a couple (Slater 2005).¹⁴

Other concepts applied to *Alcestis* are those of Burnett, viz. *compound plot* and *reversal tragedy* (Burnett 1971: 22). In his extensive study on the matter, Wright defines these plays as “escape-tragedies” (Wright 2005). Much closer to the original Greek text than any other of the aforesaid scholars, Pattoni prefers to consider *Alcestis* as a “romantic tragedy”.¹⁵ Mantzilas seems to mix different ideas, but his argument – hesitant indeed – can exemplify a certain state of confusion.¹⁶ Mastronarde, however, takes an alternative

¹⁴ Some of the perspicuous observations of Slater have their precedent in Segal (1993: 85, 86): “The victory over death and the reestablishment of a disturbed social order through (re-)marriage also shatters the generic limits of tragedy by using the themes of comedy. . . . This is not just a happy ending, but one that shows the social order restored to its ‘normal’ condition after previous inversion. The wife-hero is now silent, submissive, and an object of masculine exchange. The husband, by association with his friend, has regained an aura of dignity, strength, and heroism.” The reestablishment of a former harmony inside the couple seems the same dynamizer of the plot suggested for the genre of the imperial novel by Konstan 1994.

¹⁵ Pattoni 2006: 13-14: “Tuttavia, a fronte di una vicenda dai potenziali risvolti antitragici, Euripide ha scelto di ridurre drasticamente l’elemento comico-satiresco, che qui appare sostanzialmente confinato alla scena dell’ubriacatura di Eracle, e di valorizzare per contro la componente tragica, che è legata soprattutto alla protagonista femminile.”

¹⁶ Mantzilas 2011: 83, n. 112: “It is true that only some scenes follow the tragic patterns. Most of them sound like parodies. . . . We are not sure that

way. He suggests that modern scholars must abstain from the rigid category established by Aristotle, since he was trying to fix “a metaphysical core of the tragic genre” (2010: 58), which was not to be found in reality. His position on *Alcestis* is the same, so that he recommends not to look for an *etiquette* (2010: 55-7).

Not only to sum up, but also to give a personal opinion on the disputed matter of the genre of the play, my position is the following: on the one hand, *Alcestis* can hardly be considered a comedy, although some comic elements are indeed at work in the play – the reversal of the main character, for instance. Yet, the lack of real parody, among other constituents of the comic genre, raises a substantial objection against the interpretation of *Alcestis* as a comedy. On the other hand, a satyr-drama without its satyrs¹⁷ – without any trace of their heavy mockery and crude obscenity, and without its sophisticated, ludicrous and striking dialogue – would be a modern intellectual creation, but *sine fundamento in re*, since the viewers of fifth-century Athens would have been absolutely shocked by this unjustifiable *tour de force*.

As above mentioned, my approach to the matter will deal with Heracles’ linguistic features. In so doing, I will also argue for a scholarly methodology permanently linked to the study of the original texts, as a preliminary step for later interpretation.

The Linguistic Evidence: Are There Satyrical Features in the Language of Heracles?

This paper will deal only with the character of Heracles, and only with his first intervention in the play. Should the hallmark either of the satyrical or of the comic language be there, it would prove the blend of tragedy, comedy and satyr drama, and maybe even the substitution of the tragic style with the satyrical, the comic, or both of them. The question has not been dealt with before, as far

the presence of a satyrical . . . drama as a fourth play in the tetralogy was obligatory. Perhaps the early date of the play explains the fact that the tragedy genre was not yet completely formed.”

¹⁷ Hartung (1843: 231) suggested that satyrs were replaced with the character of the servant.

as I know, with only a partial exception. More than a century ago, Humphreys recognised, although in passing, that the character of Heracles was the only exception in terms of moral behaviour and dramatic style.¹⁸

In the dramatic literary languages, which deal with composite structures, it often happens that any change in the stylistic tone is not performed suddenly, but it is partially anticipated beforehand. This is also the case with *Alcestis*, where the intervention of Heracles on the stage is preceded by the following words spoken by the servant:

ποτήρα δ' ἐν χείρεσσιν κίσσινον λαβῶν
 πίνει μελαίνης μητρὸς εὐζωρον μέθυ
 ἕως ἐθέρμην' αὐτὸν ἀμφιβᾶσα φλόξ
 οἴνου· στέφει δὲ κρᾶτα μυρσίνης κλάδους
 ἄμουσ' ὑλακτῶν· δισσὰ δ' ἦν μέλη κλύειν.
 (Eur. *Alc.* 756-60)

[Then taking an ivy-wood drinking-bowl in his hands and drinking unmixed wine, offspring of the dark grape, until the fire in it enveloped and warmed his heart, he garlanded his head with sprays of myrtle and howled songs out of tune. There were two sorts of melody one could hear. (Kovacs 1994)]

Features that must be commented upon are the literary dative *kheiressin* ('in his hands'), usually called Aeolian from the ancient grammarians onwards; the adjective *kissinos* ('of ivy'), only found here and in the *Bacchae* (Eur. *Alc.* 756, *Ba.* 177 and 702); a second adjective, now a compound, the hapax *euzōros* ('unmixed'); with an opposite value, the noun *methy* ('wine'), a non-literary word which is often found – of course – in the *Cyclops*, but on-

18 Humphreys 1880: 191: "It is . . . composed in the tragic metre throughout. . . . There is not a passage in it (with one barely possible exception) of so comic a character that it would, even had it been in the *Cyclops*, have admitted any comic license. The characters are all of a serious and elevated order with an only exception, Herakles; and he combines two opposite qualities. The noble quality predominates in all the scenes in which he appears, except where he discourses to the servant on the brevity and uncertainty of human life and fortunes; and also here he means to be serious".

ly twice in the tragic plays, and both times it is spoken by a servant (Eur. *Alc.* 757, *Io* 1198, *Cycl.* 149. This satyr drama also attests the verb *methyo*, cf. *Cycl.* 167, 448, 535, 538, and 671); the temporal sentence *heos ethermene* (until . . . warmed); and the participle *hylakton* (howling). The use of the temporal conjunction *heos* with the indicative is not at all a common feature of the Attic dialect, but it is in Ionic. The Attic construction is always with the subjunctive and the modal particle, as attested in the public inscriptions (Meisterhans & Schwyzer 1900³: 251). Instead, Aeschylus – yet not Sophocles – prefers the Ionic construction (Aesch. *Pers.* 428, 464, *Ch.* 1026). There are, however, two different expressions, *heos* meaning ‘while’ and *heos* meaning ‘until’. The Euripidean instances are not so many, three and five respectively.¹⁹ Finally, the verb *hylakteo* (‘to howl’) is very rare in tragedy,²⁰ but the word is not uncommon in comic plays (Eup. 207, Aristoph. *Ve.* 904, 1402).

The demonstrative pronoun *houtos* (‘you there’) instead of the second person personal pronoun *su* opens l. 773, the first Heracleian intervention. This feature was already indicated by Stevens (1976: 37). In the Euripidean production, this sociolinguistic device is also used by Jason, Agamemnon, Orestes, a servant, and the Cyclops, always in recitative sections (Eur. *Med.* 922, spoken by Jason, *Hec.* 1127 and 1280, spoken by Agamemnon, *Hel.* 1627, spoken by the servant, *Or.* 1567, spoken by Orestes, and *Cy.* 552, spoken by the Cyclops). Therefore, as a device it is rather infrequent; as a colloquialism, it is not at home in the lyric sections; as a linguistic innovation that most probably originated in a non-literary milieu, this expression is used only by characters not showing remarkable culture and politeness. Dale explained this use of *houtos* as follows: “This form of address by the demonstrative pronoun is not, except where the further context makes it so, rough or insulting” (Dale 1954: 109). In a similar way, Page also tried to diminish the strength of the rough language employed

19 Eur. *Hec.* 16-18 (*ter*), *IT* 1391, *Hel.* 60 (with the meaning ‘while’); Eur. *Alc.* 758, *Or.* 238 and 621, *Hipp.* 1232 (*bis*), *IT* 972 (with the meaning ‘until’). All the examples are in recitative sections.

20 The only examples are Soph. *El.* 299 and *Alc.* 760. The Sophoclean character is Electra, full of anger and ready to use ominous words (see also Roisman 2004: 105-6).

by Jason when addressing Medea: “Thus used, implies that the person addressed is not showing sufficient attention. It is rather impatient, almost brusque, but less so than οὗτος σὺ” (Page 1938: 141). Yet, the general use of *houtos* does not fit within this alleged ‘absence of roughness’; on the contrary, the colloquial use of this pronoun, when it does not express the resumptive, denotative value which is associated with its use in the written language, very often conveys a connotative meaning that expresses a despective and rough manner of addressing the interlocutor. The feature is beyond any doubt attested in our sources. For instance, this despective value of *houtos* can of course be found in the Aristophanic comedy, as shown by the following example taken from *Clouds*:

οὐ μὴ σκώψει μηδὲ ποιήσεις ἄπερ οἱ τρυγοδαίμονες οὔτοι.
(Aristoph. *Nu.* 296. The example is taken from López Eire 1996: 112n216)

[Don’t make crude jokes or fool around like those wretched comic poets. (Halliwell 2015)]

I will try to go further in the same direction indicated by López Eire. Thus, an extended colloquial use of this *houtos* is proved by the Attic judicial oratory from its most ancient texts, those of Antiphon:

δείσεται δ’ὕμῶν οὗτος μὲν ὑπὲρ τῆς μητρὸς τῆς αὐτοῦ ζώσης . . .
ὅπως δίκην μὴ δῶ etc.²¹ (Antipho 1.23)

[My opponent will plead for his mother, who is still living . . . that she should not pay the penalty to the fullest. (Gagarin and MacDowell 1998: 14)]

A second example, now from Lysias, will help to give the utterance its exact value:

ἐπ’ ἐκφορὰν γὰρ αὐτῇ ἀκολουθήσασα ἢ ἐμὴ γυνή, ὑπὸ τούτου τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὀφθεῖσα, χρόνῳ διαφθείρεται. (Lys. 1.8)

21 See Redondo 2004: 42n66: “notice the use of the connotative demonstrative pronoun for making allusion to the opposing party with scorn and distancing” (my translation).

[For it was while attending her funeral that my wife was seen by that fellow and eventually corrupted by him. (Todd 2000: 17)]

Of course the syntactic form in Heracles' line, casting *houtos* as a vocative, is much more scornful than the examples taken from oratory. It is instead close to the following examples taken from comedy:

οὗτος τί τὰ σκευάρια ταυτί βούλεται;
(Aristoph. *Ec.* 753)

[You there! What's all this household stuff you've got? (Halliwell 1998: 182)]

οὗτος τί ποεῖς ἐτεὸν οὐπὶ τοῦ τέγους;
(Aristoph. *Nu.* 1502)

[Hey you, up there on the roof, what d'you think you're doing? (Halliwell 2015: 83)]

As shown by these passages, the vocative use of *houtos* is immediately followed by a question. The tone of the speaker is not at all friendly and cosy, but threatening and even ominous. In my opinion, these data confirm that it is not right to diminish the strength of this opening utterance, because it conveys an inkling of Heracles' characterization in *Alcestis*.

Only in this opening line does Euripides make Heracles talk again in a rather coarse way: τί σεμνὸν καὶ πεφροντικὸς βλέπεις; ("You there, why do you look so grave and care-worn?", Kovacs 1994). This phrase is constructed with βλέπω ('look') and an internal resultative accusative, i.e. *βλέμμα, but here the speaker substitutes it with an adjective. Let us quote a couple of Aristophanic examples from the comedies *Knights* and *Wasps*:

κᾶβλεψε νᾶπυ καὶ τὰ μέτωπ' ἀνέσπασεν.
(Aristoph. *Eq.* 631)

[It looked mustard and knit its brows. (Sommerstein 1981: 69)]

ἀνδρῶν τρόπος / ὄξυθύμων καὶ δικαίων καὶ βλεπόντων κάρδαμα.
(Aristoph. *Ve.* 454-455)

[You'll know who we are then, fierce, righteous, steely-eyed.
(Dickinson 1970: 184)]

A completely different expression appears in the solemn tragic style of the first of the great three tragedians, Aeschylus. In this case the linguistic expression takes a completely different meaning from a sociolinguistic perspective, since now the accusative is taken from an abstract noun, which conveys a more solemn expression, far from the vividness of the colloquial register:

αὐτὸς δ' ἐπιλάλαξεν, ἔνθεος δ' Ἄρει
βακχᾶ πρὸς ἀλκίην θυιάς ὡς φόβον βλέπων.
(Aesch. Sept. 427-8)

[The warrior himself has raised the war-cry and, inspired by Ares he raves for battle like a maenad, with a look to inspire fear. (Weir Smyth 1952: 101)]

Actually, all the examples attested in the dramatic genres come from comedies (Aristoph. *Ach.* 254, *Eq.* 631, *Pax* 1184, *Ran.* 603, *Eub.* fr. 35 K.-A.), with the only exception of this Euripidean passage; consequently, it becomes a tragic *hapax*. Even if we take into account the obvious differences between the comic phrase *napy* (*origanon*, *kardama*, and the like) *blepein* and the passage from *Alcestis*, this one would remain as an example of paratragedy.

After using these two linguistic devices – the demonstrative *houtos* used as a vocative, and the *blepein* phrase – Heracles's language turns into a plain tragic style, not especially embellished with rhetorical ornaments. Just a few lines later, at l. 775, we find a poetical term, the compound adjective *euprosegoros* ('affable'), which can be considered as a Euripidean coinage (Eur. *Hipp.* 95, *HF* 1284). A similar comment can be made on the participle *synophryómenos* ('who knits his brows together'), first used by Sophocles in a lyric section (Soph. *Tr.* 869), and now by Euripides.

The following lines present the same tragic tone, which is supported by a small number of elements only, but clear enough to convey the required stylistic touch. For example, at l. 793 the conjunction *eiper* ('if really') shows the addition of an adverb – now in a suffixal function – that not only gives it the syntactic nuance of

scularity, but also the artistic tone of the speech of a character. In *Alcestis eiper* is attested five times (Eur. *Alc.* 303, 327, 516, 525 and 793). In 1997 I pointed out that the addition of this suffix conveys a stylistic touch of sophistication (Redondo 1997: 316-17). At line 796 we find another literary conjunction, now *hothouneka* ('that'). This conjunction – a linguistic trait typical of tragedy – is attested only six times in the extant Euripidean production (Eur. *Alc.* 796, *Hel.* 104, 591, *Ion* 662, frs 326, 862 Kn.).

If we now pay attention to the remaining interventions of Heracles, there are just a few colloquialisms that could enhance the view that Euripides was unquestionably trying to provide the hero with the rhetorical colour of the comic or satyrical characters. Moreover, these linguistic devices close to a non-literary standard are generally not very remarkable indeed: we can list but a couple of instances of *crasis*, l. 812 *mon* – a *crasis* quite common in Euripides' early production (Eur. *Alc.* 484 and 812, *Med.* 567, 606, 733 and 1009, *Heracl.* 647, 1198, *Andr.* 82, 896, 1058, *Hipp.* 318, 794, 1160 and 1164) – and l. 831 *kâta* ('and afterwards'); and *alla* ('well') at line-beginning, ll. 826 and 827, which could suggest the rhetorical figure known as *hypophora* (see Denniston 1954²: 10-11. A good example of this rhetorical device is Antipho 5.58), but remains a colloquial expression (Denniston 1954²: 7 and 20-21).

Therefore, the choice of the poet was not at all to present on the stage a character speaking in the comic or the satyrical way. Accordingly, the result of this analysis is that the linguistic evidences are not pointing to a satyrical style. As a matter of fact, it should be equally right to understand the play as pro-satyrical as much as pro-comic, since none of these approaches leads to a satisfactory explanation of the language spoken by Heracles in his first scene as he addresses the servant.

A Brick in the Wall: My Conclusion

After this partial analysis of a section of the play, my conclusion can only be provisory and cautious. In my opinion, there are no linguistic and stylistic arguments in favour of an interpretation of *Alcestis* as a comedy or a satyr drama. Therefore, the "recogniz-

ably pro-satyrical” drama advocated by Dale (1954: xxi) fades away and concurrently the tragic dimension of both the hero Heracles and the scene recover their full brightness. Certainly, it is beyond any doubt that Euripides incorporated some colloquial, non-literary devices just when Heracles had to appear on the stage, as I tried to show. Yet, these non-tragic features are only circumstantial, for the author did not make an extensive use of them. This artistic strategy is limited to a short section of the tragedy. But what kind of tragedy? Many scholars of great authority – Maria Pia Pattoni and Niall W. Slater, in recent times – have made solid contributions to the understanding of a play that contains significant changes in the featuring and treatment of the heroes on stage: the characters of Admetus and Heracles, for instance.

If the play must be assigned to a dramatic genre according to the linguistic features analyzed in this paper, *Alcestis* can only be a tragedy. It is of course not a play like *Agamemnon*, *Oedipus*, or *The Trojan Women*; all its close models are Euripidean, and include the plays *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Ion*, and *Helen*, besides the fragmentary *Andromeda*, and probably other tragedies. From the chronology of these plays, it may be inferred that the romantic tragedy began with *Alcestis*, but this is a matter that does not concern the present paper.

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