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## **From Sorrow to Joy. Satyric Heroism, Admetus, Heracles, and the Audience's Emotions in Euripides' *Alcestis***

**ABSTRACT:** The link between emotions shown on stage and those experienced by the audience is central to defining theatrical genres. Yet some plays resist clear classification, as already noted in antiquity. Euripides' *Alcestis* is a much debated case: despite its tragic atmosphere and the absence of a satyr chorus, scholars have pointed out satyric elements. Previous explanations have not adequately considered the audience's emotional reaction to Admetus' passage from grief to joy through Heracles' intervention. A key issue is the contested interpretation of Admetus' character. Drawing on Brillante's view of Admetus and on Pattoni's insights into the metatheatrical role of tragic and satyric interplay, this paper re-examines the problem by focusing on the shaping of Heracles' heroism and his bond with Admetus. It argues that Heracles triggers a specific mechanism of emotional release, which makes the audience follow Admetus' shift from pain to joy.

**KEYWORDS:** Euripides, *Alcestis*, Admetus, Emotions, Greek theatre.

### **1. Introduction**

Ever since ancient theatre, the relationship between the way emotions are represented on the scene and the emotions that a play induces in its public has been crucial for the definition and the identity of theatrical genres. Just like any literary genre (or, more generally, any literary work), tragedy, comedy and satyr drama are marked by specific contextual and formal features. Through their combination, the poet steers the spectators' emotional engagement with the story and its characters, as well as their emotional response to what they watch and hear, also based on their expectations<sup>1</sup>.

Nevertheless, the definition of some plays was already puzzling for ancient scholars. One of the most well-known cases is Euripides' *Alcestis*, which was staged as the fourth play of his 438 BCE tetralogy: this slot was usually occupied by a satyr drama, but *Alcestis* does not have a chorus of satyrs; moreover,

<sup>1</sup> See especially Coplan 2004; Grilli 2021, pp. 105-114. On affective narratology, see de Bakker, van den Berg and Klooster 2022, pp. 11-13; Huitink 2022, pp. 415-417 (with further bibliography); on the ancient drama spectators' emotions, see Gołąb 2023. For an example, see Cairns 2017 about pity and horror.

it departs from a tragic premise, even though it still ends joyfully, like satyr dramas. Thus, unsurprisingly, the genre of this play has long been a topic of debate<sup>2</sup>, which makes it a good case study to reflect on the relationship between dramatic formal features and emotions. In particular, this paper will try to address the *vexata quaestio* of *Alcestis*' definition by focusing on the audience's emotional response to the plot and the characterisation of its main male heroes, Heracles and Admetus.

Traditional male heroism in myth often follows a typical narrative, which shows structural similarities with the rites of passage and may display initiatory traits: a young man on the brink of adulthood undertakes a trial, often in a setting marked by the subversion of social norms, and is rewarded with honour, power, and a wife – although not all elements recur in every mythical episode of this kind<sup>3</sup>. Satyr drama – where the protagonist often faces and overcomes a monstrous creature, freeing the captive satyrs in a remote or untamed setting<sup>4</sup> – ironically reimagine this pattern. The presence of the satyrs has two key effects: it diffuses the tension built by the preceding tragic trilogy<sup>5</sup> and prevents

<sup>2</sup> Already one of the *hypotheses* preserved in medieval manuscripts, part of the collection generally attributed to Aristophanes of Byzantium, speaks of the κωμικότερα καταστροφή and associates it with *Orestes* as an example of δράμα σατυρικότερον as εἰς χαρὰν καὶ ἡδονὴν καταστρέφει, which is typical of the κωμῳδία rather than of the τραγικὴ ποίησις; other sources that might be traced back to Tzetzes also mention Sophocles' *Electra* as a, more or less, comparable case. About the origin of such expressions and their unsafe reliability to define *Alcestis*' dramatic genre, see now Carrara 2024, pp. 296-325.

<sup>3</sup> On the 'biography' of the hero in myth, see Pellizer 1991, pp. 15-28. On the narrative pattern of the heroic quest, see Bettini, Borghini 1979; Brillante 1991; Pellizer 1991, pp. 29-45; Pellizer 1997; Huys 1995, pp. 27-49 and 335-341; Guidorizzi 2012, pp. 467-474. On the controversial relationship between such mythical schemes and rites of passage, especially rites of initiation into adulthood, see at least Brelich [1958] 2010, pp. 107-110; [1969] 2013, pp. 505-511; Graf 2003; Dowden 2011. I use the term *initiation* – without going into the merits of its troubled history (see Graf 2003, pp. 3-8) – to refer generically to the practices of aggregating young people to the adult community through the acquisition of the functions associated with the various social groups, according to the terminological delimitation proposed by Brelich 2013, pp. 28-40.

<sup>4</sup> On these themes of satyr drama, see Seaford 1998, pp. 33-44; Voelke 2001, pp. 72-83 and 301-327; Cipolla 2003, pp. 2 and 4-5; O'Sullivan in O'Sullivan, Collard 2013, pp. 28-39; Seidensticker 2020, pp. 10-11; Antonopoulos 2021, pp. 30-36. On the settings of satyr drama, see Voelke 2001, pp. 37-51; Antonopoulos 2021, pp. 28-30.

<sup>5</sup> On this function of satyr drama, see Rossi 1972; Voelke 2001, pp. 392-403; Palmisciano 2008; see also De Santis 2016 on the relationship between this aspect and politics. On the place of satyr drama in the dramatic tetralogies, closely connected to this function, see Di Marco 2016; Cipolla 2022; Carrara 2024 (according to whom satyr dramas were not necessarily present in every tetralogy); more specifically on the relations between tragedy and satyr drama in the evolution of Greek theatre, see now Palmisciano 2021 and 2022 (and cf. *infra*, § 4). Other hypotheses have also been advanced on the functions of this theatrical genre, although they are not mutually exclusive: see Seidensticker in Krumeich, Pechstein and Seidensticker 1999, pp. 34-39; Voelke 2001, pp. 403-412; Lämmle 2013, pp. 93-98; Antonopoulos 2021, pp. 17-21. On satyr drama as a mixed genre characterised by licentiousness and vulgarity, see Matelli 2022, pp. 86-87.

the audience from fully identifying with the protagonists' experiences<sup>6</sup>. Thus, in order to reflect on the genre of *Alcestis*, it will be crucial to check whether it has something in common with this dramatic pattern as it emerges across Euripides' production.

## 2. Satyric heroism in Euripides

Most of Euripides' satyr plays have come down to us only in meagre fragments. Therefore, we can barely reconstruct their plot. *Busiris* likely dramatized Heracles' slaying of the eponymous Egyptian tyrant, infamous for executing foreigners: the only relevant fragment is fr. 313 K., a reflection on the unhappy condition of slaves, who are prevented from telling the truth if it does not please their masters<sup>7</sup>. *Eurystheus*, as suggested by fr. 371 K., depicted Heracles' twelfth labour – capturing Cerberus from Hades – and the conclusion of the hero's trials after Cerberus frightens Eurystheus: among the fragments, we can trace a possible reference to the slaying of the Hydra of Lerna (fr. 373 K.), reflections on the loyalty expected from servants toward their masters (fr. 375 K.), the difficulty to find a firm criterion to judge human τύχαι (fr. 376 K.), the inability of the 'name' of 'illegitimate child' to destroy the nature of a valiant man (fr. 377 K.), and the higher consideration commonly enjoyed by wealth compared to actions (fr. 378 K.)<sup>8</sup>. *The Harvesters*, already

<sup>6</sup> According to Di Marco 2016, p. 6: «l'azione rappresentata, in conseguenza dell'introduzione di creature semiferine e assolutamente fantastiche quali i satiri, assume un'impronta decisamente surreale, sì che lo spettatore non solo non è indotto all'immedesimazione nelle vicende dei protagonisti del dramma, ma – al contrario – è costantemente sollecitato a prenderne le distanze». With greater precision, I believe, Napolitano 2005, p. 54, speaks of «un'adesione, per così dire, riflessa, finalmente distesa e divertita, lontana tanto dalla patetica immedesimazione tragica quanto da quella, scettica se non addirittura lucidamente disperata, messa in moto dalla commedia: coinvolgimento e distacco, appunto; adesione e sorriso».

<sup>7</sup> On the myth, see van Looy in Jouan, van Looy 2000, pp. 37-41. That *Busiris* was a satyr drama is attested by a papyrus *hypothesis* (P.Oxy. 3651 = T iiiia K.; see Meccariello 2014, p. 179) and by the grammarian Diomedes (*Gramm. Lat.* 1.490.18 Keil). The dating is unknown, although the depiction of Heracles chained and carried off by black men and in the presence of a satyr on an Attic red-figure vase datable to around 450 BCE might suggest that this is one of his earliest works. On the difficult reconstruction of the play, see Pechstein 1998, pp. 137-140; Krumeich, Pechstein, in Krumeich, Pechstein, Seidensticker 1999, pp. 417-419; Kannicht in *TrGF V*, p. 369; Collard, Cropp 2008a, pp. 318-319.

<sup>8</sup> On the myth, see van Looy in Jouan, van Looy 2000, pp. 133-135; Collard, Cropp 2008a, pp. 403-404. That *Eurystheus* was a satyr drama is attested by the testimonies of frs. 373 K. (Pollux 10.145) and 380 K. (Steph. Byz. *s.v.* Τύραρος). The few fragments that have come down to us do not provide any useful indications for the reconstruction of the play (see Pechstein 1998, pp. 172-176; Krumeich, Pechstein in Krumeich, Pechstein, Seidensticker 1999, pp. 428-430; Kannicht in *TrGF V*, p. 419; Collard in O'Sullivan, Collard 2013, pp. 392-393): some of them, however, seem to suggest that Heracles lamented his condition (van Looy in Jouan, van Looy 2000, p. 136).

lost by the Hellenistic period, was part of Euripides' 431 BCE tetralogy. It likely depicted Heracles killing Lityerses, who forced his guests to harvest crops before beheading them and tying their bodies to grain sheaves<sup>9</sup>. *Sciron* concerned Theseus' slaying of Sciron, a monster who killed passers-by (in the play they were attracted by the satyrs offering prostitutes, cf. frs. 675-676 K.) by pushing them off a cliff near Megara: the hero's physical impressiveness is referred to in fr. 676 K. and his heroic mission is alluded to in fr. 678 K., where it is emphatically stated that «it is good to punish the bad» (καλὸν κακοῦς κολάζειν); in the few preserved fragments, one can also trace allusions to other exploits of his, such as the clashes with Procrustes (fr. 676 K.) and Sinis (fr. 679 K.)<sup>10</sup>. There is slightly more information on *Syleus*: the play staged the killing of Syleus by Heracles. The former used to force passers-by to work in his vineyard and then kill them. Heracles was sold to him as a slave by Hermes at the behest of Zeus due to the murder of his guest Iphitus. The various accounts of the play focus on the indomitable temper of the hero, who is predictably reluctant to servitude (frs. 688-690 K.)<sup>11</sup>, especially towards a

<sup>9</sup> The *hypothesis* of the *Medea* attests that already at the time of Aristophanes of Byzantium only the title of the play remained: on its subject therefore, one can only speculate (cf. Pechstein 1998, pp. 284-286; van Looy in Jouan, van Looy 2000, pp. 143-144; Kannicht in *TrGF* V, p. 425; Collard, Cropp 2008a, p. 413). Nevertheless, Lityerses is also at the centre of a later satyr drama, Sosithus' *Daphnis or Lityerses*, in which Heracles also intervenes to kill the Phrygian king (see Cipolla 2003, pp. 398-406).

<sup>10</sup> Nothing more can be reconstructed of the drama, whose date is unknown. We have a lacunose papyrus *hypothesis* that mentions the task entrusted to Silenus and the presence of the satyrs, but breaks off before even getting into the heart of the dramatic action (*P.Oxy.* 2455, fr. 6 = T iia K.; one could add fr. 5 or fr. 7 of the same papyrus, but the question is much debated and, given the poor state of preservation of the text, probably unsolvable: see van Looy in Jouan, van Looy 2002, pp. 35-38; Collard in O'Sullivan, Collard 2013, pp. 398-399; Meccariello 2014, pp. 290-295). On the *Sciron* and the myth, see Pechstein 1998, pp. 239-242; Krumeich, Pechstein in Krumeich, Pechstein, Seidensticker 1999, pp. 449-456; van Looy in Jouan, van Looy 2002, pp. 39-46; Kannicht in *TrGF* V, p. 662; Collard, Cropp 2008b, pp. 148-149.

<sup>11</sup> One could also add fr. 687 K., albeit its belonging to the *Syleus* is not to be taken for granted. It is quoted as Euripidean, but without attribution to a specific work, by several sources; in Philo of Alexandria, *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 98-104 (= T iiib K.), however, the author assigns it to Heracles and shortly afterwards mentions frs. 688-691 K., ascribing them explicitly to the *Syleus*, to whom the first fragment has therefore been attributed as well: the hero would be showing unwillingness to be enslaved by Syleus (Kannicht in *TrGF* V, p. 674; Collard, Cropp 2008b, p. 170) or to be threatened by him following the devastation of the vineyards (Pechstein 1998, pp. 256-258). That the fr. 687 K. surely fits well into the framework of the plot of this satyr drama, of which, however, very little remains to us, does not seem to me enough to certify such an attribution; all the more so, since the fragment refers to a conventional characterisation of Heracles, which could make sense elsewhere as well. It was van Groningen 1930, pp. 293-296 who questioned its belonging to the *Syleus*; his doubts seem to be shared (apart from a probable confusion between fr. 687 and fr. 691 K.) also by van Looy in Jouan, van Looy 2002, p. 83. The issue is overlooked by Friesen 2020, even though he notices how the quotation of fr. 687 is in line with Philo's usually selective and poorly contextualised reuse of Euripidean material, unlike what happens with the other fragments from the *Syleus*.

κακός, as he is «the biggest enemy of bad men» (fr. 692 K.): during the play, Heracles set fire to Syleus' vineyards, roasted his best bull, challenged him to a drinking contest (fr. 691 K.)<sup>12</sup> and finally killed him with his club (fr. 693 K.)<sup>13</sup>; he spared, however, his daughter Xenodoce, probably to have sex with her (fr. 694 K.)<sup>14</sup>. Little or nothing is known of *Autolycus*, *Epeus*, *Lamia*, and *Sisyphus*, which, nevertheless, seem to include usual satyric motifs, such as athleticism, deception, and monstrous beings<sup>15</sup>.

The most complete source we have is *Cyclops*, the only fully preserved satyr drama. The play, probably belonging to the late phase of Euripides' production<sup>16</sup>, staged the famous Homeric episode of the encounter between

<sup>12</sup> «A comic counterpart to Heracles' usual means of overcoming opponents, physical violence» (Collard in Collard, O'Sullivan 2013, p. 413).

<sup>13</sup> According to van Looy in Jouan, van Looy 2002, p. 83, however, in the exhortation to the φίλον ζύλον contained in the fragment one must trace a sexual double meaning: the fragment would, therefore, be placed in the same context as fr. 694 K., in relation to the union with Xenodoce; more cautious, though possibilist, in this regard Collard in Collard, O'Sullivan 2013, p. 413.

<sup>14</sup> About this play we have essential information in later testimonies, cf. T ii-iiiia-b-c K.; in particular, from T iiib K., as well as from the supplements to the defective text of the papyrus preserving T ii K., we derive the satyric character of the drama, otherwise unattested in the fragments. On the myth and the reconstruction of the play, of unknown date, see Pechstein 1998, pp. 275-283; Krumeich, Pechstein in Krumeich, Pechstein, Seidensticker 1999, pp. 457-473; van Looy in Jouan, van Looy 2002, pp. 75-83; Kannicht in *TrGF* V, pp. 673-674; Collard, Cropp 2008b, pp. 169-171; Collard in Collard, O'Sullivan 2013, pp. 404-407; Carrara 2021, pp. 205-210; Magnani 2022.

<sup>15</sup> The situation of the *Autolycus* is complicated: two versions seem to be attested, both undated (see Pechstein 1998, pp. 40-41), but we only have vague information about a possible plot (*Tz. Chil.* 8.435-453), related to Autolycus' deception of a man in order to obtain his daughter in marriage (see van Looy in Jouan, van Looy 1998, pp. 332-335; Krumeich, Pechstein in Krumeich, Pechstein, Seidensticker 1999, pp. 403-412; Kannicht in *TrGF* V, p. 344; Collard in O'Sullivan, Collard 2013, pp. 384-387; Giuseppetti 2020, pp. 280-282): most notable is the tirade against the athletes preserved in fr. 282 K., in which the *persona loquens* questions the validity of the τιμή traditionally reserved for athletes according to the vacuous heroic ideal, since, according to the speaker (perhaps Autolycus with the intention of discrediting rivals in love, with inevitable comic effect given his probable negative characterisation), one should give priority to the ability to contribute advantageously to public life (cf. Giuseppetti 2020, pp. 282-295). Deception was probably also at the centre of the *Sisyphus* (415 BCE), whose only significant fragment (fr. 673 K.) might bear witness to the presence of Heracles, complicating the identification of the play's plot (cf. Pechstein 1998, pp. 185-217; in Krumeich, Pechstein, Seidensticker 1999, pp. 442-448; van Looy in Jouan, van Looy 2002, pp. 29-33; Kannicht in *TrGF* V, pp. 658-659; Collard, Cropp 2008b, pp. 142-143). Only the title remains of the *Epeus* (cf. Pechstein 1998, pp. 141-144; van Looy in Jouan, van Looy 2000, pp. 93-94; Kannicht in *TrGF* V, p. 390; Collard, Cropp 2008a, p. 361), while of the *Lamia* we have only the two initial verses (fr. 472m K.), preserving the self-introduction of the monstrous being (cf. Pechstein 1998, pp. 177-184; van Looy in Jouan, van Looy 2000, pp. 333-335; Kannicht in *TrGF* V, p. 517; Collard, Cropp 2008a, p. 557).

<sup>16</sup> On the dating of the *Cyclops*, see Seaford 1982; 1998, pp. 48-51; O'Sullivan in O'Sullivan, Collard 2013, pp. 39-41; Hunter, Laemmle 2020, pp. 38-47. According to Wright 2005, pp. 54-55, the *Cyclops* might have concluded the tetralogy of «escape-plays» which he suggests Euripides staged in 412 BCE (after *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, *Helen*, *Andromeda*: only for the last two, however, we do have certainty about the date).

Odysseus and Polyphemus in Sicily, one of the innumerable πόννοι faced by the Ithacan hero on his journey back from Troy<sup>17</sup>. Indeed, the Trojan enterprise is repeatedly recalled in the play as the hero's main identity trait, but it is regularly contrasted with a 'lower' point of view. Once landed on the island, while talking to Silenus, Odysseus presents himself as the king of the Cephallenes, coming ἐξ Ἰλίου, and a veteran ἀπὸ Τρωκῶν πόννων (107)<sup>18</sup> thrown by a storm to Sicily. The island is described as a desolate and wild heath, inhabited only by the uncivilised Cyclopes, who even eat human beings (115-128)<sup>19</sup>. Despite this bold presentation with a Homeric tone, Silenus responds that he knows Odysseus not for his heroic grandeur, but rather as a sly chatterbox and the son of Sisyphus (104)<sup>20</sup>. The Trojan episode is revisited in lines 177-187: Odysseus' heroic image, underscored by the mention of the city's sacking (178), is contrasted with the lasciviousness of the satyrs, who fixate on Helen and claim she deserved to be raped due to her lustful nature<sup>21</sup>. Odysseus' and Silenus' different characters also emerge with comic

<sup>17</sup> On the «transmodalizzazione intermodale» carried out by Euripides and the relations between the Homeric hypertext and the Euripidean hypotext, see Napolitano 2005. See also Seidensticker 2020, pp. 26-33, according to whom the literary parody touches on other genres and texts as well: in this cultured irony the scholar identifies a distinctive trait of Euripides' satyr drama; and yet, as Di Marco 2013, pp. 22-25 demonstrates, the tendency towards intellectual play is, in fact, an identifying trait of this theatrical genre, even outside Euripides' dramaturgy.

<sup>18</sup> As Seaford 1998, p. 124 points out, this nexus, while it occurs three times in the *Cyclops*, does not appear elsewhere in Euripides' production. As O'Sullivan observes in O'Sullivan, Collard 2013, p. 146: «these hardships [...] comprise a genuinely heroic counterpart to the 'hardships' which Silenus melodramatically complained about in the first line of the play», a tone that the scholar also retraces in Silenus' lines in this section.

<sup>19</sup> On the anti-historical but dramaturgically functional portrait of an uncivilised Sicily, see O'Sullivan 2012 (and cf. also Silva 2005, pp. 19-20). On the anthropological contrast between Odysseus and the Cyclops, in which also the satyrs have their share, see Konstan 1990. Nevertheless, one can trace a higher degree of civilisation in Euripides' Polyphemus than in Homer's monster: the comic effect of this has been highlighted by Mastromarco 1998, who also points out how such operation is already recognisable in other comic and satyric versions of the same episode, such as Epicharmus' *Cyclops*, Cratinus' *Odysseuses*, Callias' *Cyclops* and Aristias' *Cyclops* (about this, see also Seaford 1998, pp. 151-153; O'Sullivan in O'Sullivan, Collard 2013, p. 162; Seidensticker 2020, pp. 28-29 and 163; Hunter, Laemmle 2020, pp. 4-7 and 115-116). As regards the status of satyr drama, Palmisciano 2008 points out how this reworking of Polyphemus guides the audience's emotions first towards fear and then towards relaxation through the farcical degradation of the monster.

<sup>20</sup> Since Sisyphus is a typical character of satyr dramas, Hunter, Laemmle 2020, pp. 18-19 and 119-120 point out that «Silenos' view of Odysseus is thus appropriately satyric». On the *deminutio* of Odysseus' heroism in these words, see also Seaford 1998, p. 123; Napolitano in Napolitano, Rossi 2003, pp. 106-107; O'Sullivan in O'Sullivan, Collard 2013, p. 44; Seidensticker 2020, p. 113.

<sup>21</sup> On the satyric degradation – also involving parodies of Sapphic motifs (see especially Di Marco 2013, pp. 231-237) – of the usual punishment envisaged for Helen, *i.e.* death, see Seaford 1998, p. 137; Paduano 2005, pp. 70-71; O'Sullivan in O'Sullivan, Collard 2013, p. 156. A similar

dissonance at 193-202. When Silenus sees the Cyclops returning, he suggests that Odysseus hide in the cave. Unlike in Hom. *Od.* 9.216-236, where Odysseus ignored his companions' pleas and fatally chose to hide inside the cave, here he refuses. Fleeing from a single man, after having faced an entire army, would dishonour the Trojan enterprise<sup>22</sup>. In Odysseus' view, the standard achieved through the past πόνος substantiates the attitude to be held towards the current one.

When confronting Polyphemus, the hero again evokes the sack of Troy, receiving a response that partly echoes Silenus' earlier remarks: the δεινὸς πόνος of which Odysseus speaks (282) is called αἰσχρὸν στράτευμα by Polyphemus (283), for it was led for a single woman (283-284). The hero attempts to rehabilitate the enterprise, defined as θεοῦ πῶγμα (285)<sup>23</sup>, thanks to which, moreover, they have protected the gods' altars in Greece, including that of Poseidon, the Cyclops' father; hence, Polyphemus should offer him and his companions hospitality, other than out of respect for the duty of ξενία and pity for men who have already endured so much suffering (290-312). Odysseus' usual persuasiveness, however, turns out to be useless. Polyphemus is heedless of divine honours and religious laws, much less is he capable of pity, being interested merely in his own well-being (316-346): his only belief is ἐμπιεῖν γε καὶ φαγεῖν (336)<sup>24</sup>. The hero feels lost and laments having escaped the Trojan

degraded presentation of the *casus belli*, serving to emphasise the vanity of a war fought over a bad woman, also occurs in Ar. *Ach.* 523-529, where Dicaeopolis argues that the Peloponnesian War arose out of a futile dispute over the abduction of three πόρνοι or λαικίστριαι: therefore, this might as well be a comic *topos* exploited in pacifist propaganda, perhaps in the wake of Hdt. 1.1-5, here clearly presupposed (cf. Olson 2002, p. 209; on the Herodotean passage, see Asheri in Asheri, Antelami 1988, pp. 262-263; Vandiver 1991, pp. 114-124); on the other hand, it is also possible that Aristophanes had in mind precisely the celebrated archetype of the Trojan War, fought for Helen's abduction, to which Herodotus also refers in the quoted passage.

<sup>22</sup> On the parody of the Homeric hypotext, also due to obvious scenic needs (getting into the cave would interrupt the scenic action), and on the comic dissonance between Odysseus' magniloquence and the degraded context, also increased by the previous exchange between the hero and Silenus, see Gargiulo 1996, pp. 16-20; Napolitano in Napolitano, Rossi 2003, p. 113; Paduano 2005, pp. 14-15; O'Sullivan in O'Sullivan, Collard 2013, p. 158; Hunter, Laemmle 2020, pp. 13-14 and 140; Seidensticker 2020, p. 147.

<sup>23</sup> A fatalistic and hasty response that seems to expose Odysseus' embarrassment at the futility of the reasons for the enterprise (cf. Paduano 2005, pp. 20 and 78-79; Hunter, Laemmle 2020, p. 157).

<sup>24</sup> On the supplication scene and Polyphemus' reply, cf. the intertextual analysis between this passage and the Homeric text carried out by Paduano 2005, pp. 18-24, who also highlights the echoes of contemporary issues dear to Euripides, such as Panhellenic ideology, the reflection on war, the relationship between νόμος and φύσις in political and social relations, and the relationship between men and gods. In particular, as O'Sullivan 2012 has demonstrated, Polyphemus shares many traits with the tyrant's typical characterisation. See also Seaford 1998, pp. 51-56; Napolitano in Napolitano, Rossi 2003, pp. 120 and 122-124; Hunter, Laemmle 2020, pp. 20-21; Seidensticker 2020, pp. 29-30 and 185.

πόνου just to come across a being that transgresses the rules of ξενία. In defiantly invoking Athena (and then Zeus) to protect him, he defines the present condition as an even greater and more dangerous πόνος than the one he has already faced (347-355)<sup>25</sup>.

Nevertheless, it is precisely his heroic temper that will allow him to prevail in this situation as well. Having witnessed the violent death of some of his companions, devoured by the Cyclops, Odysseus seeks revenge on Polyphemus and plans to escape with the satyrs. The satyrs believe that Odysseus plans to ambush Polyphemus alone, either to slit his throat or hurl him off a cliff (ἔρημον ξυλλαβὼν δρυμοῖσι νιν / σφάξει μενοινᾶς ἢ πετρῶν ὄσαι κάτα, 447-448)<sup>26</sup>. However, the cunning Ithacan, true to form, intends to deceive him (δόλιος ἢ ἐπιθυμία, 449)<sup>27</sup>. The chorus acknowledges his renowned σοφία, as Odysseus reveals his actual plan: to get Polyphemus drunk and then blind him with burning embers, allowing for their escape (451-479). The concern for the safety of his companions (478-479) remarkably recalls the Homeric Odysseus<sup>28</sup>.

In the following scene, Odysseus' dialectical skill emerges as he conveniently manipulates language to deceive Polyphemus. In offering him wine, the hero tells him to enjoy it and not to share it with his brothers, since this will be more honourable (532). Odysseus aims to entice the Cyclops with the promise of τιμή as social recognition, appealing to the common norms of civilization<sup>29</sup>, which Polyphemus disregards, instead prioritizing being more useful (533)<sup>30</sup>. The Cyclops envisions the revelry that would follow from sharing the wine and mocks as foolish anyone who drinks without indulging in it fully (537).

<sup>25</sup> On the tone of this prayer, see Napolitano in Napolitano, Rossi 2003, p. 126.

<sup>26</sup> Perhaps a reference to typical motifs of satyr drama, as well as Odysseus' heroic reputation (cf. Hunter, Laemmle 2020, p. 191).

<sup>27</sup> The *lectio* ἐπιθυμία transmitted by manuscript L is sometimes corrected, according to Musgrave's conjecture in his 1778 edition, to προθυμία: on this issue, see O'Sullivan in O'Sullivan, Collard 2013, p. 187; Seidensticker 2020, p. 228.

<sup>28</sup> See Hunter and Laemmle 2020, p. 199 for some examples, including Hom. *Od.* 9.421. Moreover, as Seaford 1998, p. 194 observes: «The concern Od. shows for his companions in Homer (*Od.* 9.421) is made more heroic here by the circumstance, necessary to the drama, that Od. could if he wished escape without returning to the cave». On the character of the cunning hero in satyr drama, see Voelke 2001, pp. 340-366.

<sup>29</sup> O'Sullivan in O'Sullivan, Collard 2013, p. 199 notes that, here as before, Odysseus addresses the Cyclops using terminology that would seem more suited to a hero or a king.

<sup>30</sup> Hunter, Laemmle 2020, p. 212 highlight Polyphemus' surprising communitarian spirit (cf. also Paduano 2005, p. 98), although I do not think it is appropriate to speak of a «democratic» virtue of being χρήσιμος [...] to one's φίλοι»: in fact, this is a principle already in force in the aristocratic φιλία of Homeric society. On the anti-symposium set up by Odysseus, see Rossi 1971; Napolitano 2001.

Odysseus, however, retorts with a rhetorically sharp statement, using a chiasmic structure, to assert that, on the contrary, such a person is truly σοφός (538)<sup>31</sup>.

After getting Polyphemos drunk, Odysseus exhorts the satyrs to prove their manhood by acting together with him (590-595)<sup>32</sup> and invokes divine favour to grant him and his fellows another success after the Trojan κάλλιστος πόνος, otherwise it must be believed that τύχη rather than the gods rules the world (599-607)<sup>33</sup>. True to their cowardly nature, the satyrs abandon Odysseus during the critical moment (624-662). Despite the defection, the plan succeeds: the Ithacan remarks that he has avenged his companions and thus lived up to the Trojan deed (692-695)<sup>34</sup>, while he now prepares to sail back with the satyrs.

The analysis of the *Cyclops* shows aspects that the fragmentary dramas let us see only partially. The construction of the hero in satyr dramas, although based on the 'quest' narrative pattern, takes on an ironic twist due to the contraposition between the magniloquent heroism of the protagonist and the degraded world of satyrs and monstrous beings. In particular, the former is often substantiated – also by means of intertextual hints that, unfortunately, one is able to appreciate only in the case of the *Cyclops*<sup>35</sup> – by recalling other famous feats in which he has already demonstrated physical prowess and noble temper; moreover, at least for Heracles, these aspects combine with traits linked to his comic characterisation (cf. at least *Syleus*). On a narratological level, the liberation of the satyrs from a monster far removed from the norms of civilisation replaces, following the successful heroic feat, the assumption of sovereignty; similarly, marriage is replaced by sexual enjoyment (cf. e.g. *Syleus*), in line with the obscene tones reserved to female figures (e.g. the prostitutes in the *Sciron*, Helen in the *Cyclops*).

<sup>31</sup> Seaford 1998, p. 204 underlines the «Hellenic urbanity» immediately apprehended by the Cyclops, from which Odysseus must dissuade him, with clear ironic effect given the 'pedagogical' role he assumed regarding the rules of the symposium.

<sup>32</sup> An exhortation that, addressed to the satyrs, inevitably appears «comically incongruous» (O'Sullivan in O'Sullivan, Collard 2013, p. 209) and «wryly amusing» (Hunter, Laemmle 2020, p. 226).

<sup>33</sup> As in the previous prayer, there is a hint of aggressive scepticism, almost a challenge to divinity (Paduano 2005, p. 104). The reference to the Trojan feat serves here «as a rhetorical ploy for his prayer» (O'Sullivan in O'Sullivan, Collard 2013, p. 210).

<sup>34</sup> While in Hom. *Od.* 9.479 Odysseus interpreted Polyphemos' punishment as an expression of inescapable divine justice (cf. Seaford 1998, pp. 223-224; Seidensticker 2020, p. 303), which in any case seems to be at least presupposed here too (cf. O'Sullivan in O'Sullivan, Collard 2013, p. 223).

<sup>35</sup> The essential role of intertextuality in Odysseus' characterisation in the *Cyclops* is highlighted by Mureddu 1993: she speaks of a constant parodic reference to the epic model, which passes, moreover, through the filter of the negative connotation often assumed by Odysseus on the theatrical stage.

### 3. Heroism in *Alcestis*

As already explained in the introduction, Euripides' *Alcestis* represents, to the best of our knowledge, a *sui generis* case. Although it was staged as the fourth drama of the tetralogy of 438 BCE, the play does not have a chorus of satyrs; moreover, the first part focuses on a tragic event, namely the collapse of Admetus' household following Alcestis' self-sacrifice to save her husband's life. Heracles' arrival, though, shifts the narrative focus toward a rescue plot. After learning of the grief that has struck the household that hosted him, Heracles resolves to honour Admetus' hospitality by confronting Thanatos and restoring Alcestis to life (837-860). In this speech the hero, determined to show χάρις to his host, gives proof of his temper, for he declares himself even ready to descend into Hades and fight against such a frightening creature. As early as the prologue, Thanatos is portrayed as incapable of χάρις (60-61), hateful to men and gods (62), cruel (64), and in the hero's speech, he is pictured in the execrable act of drinking the blood of his victims on the grave (πίνοντα τύμβου πλησίον προσφαγμάτων, 845, where the alliteration emphasises the horror). Once returned to Admetus' palace with a veiled woman, who will turn out to be the revived Alcestis, Heracles tells the king that he gained her πολλῶν μόχθῳ (1025): she was a prize for victory (νικητήρια, 1028) in an ἀγών, described as a πόνος worthy of athletes (1027), in which horses, cattle and, indeed, a woman were awarded to the winner. Therefore, it would have been αἰσχρόν for him to give up such κέρδος εὐκλεές, which Heracles reiterates to have conquered σὺν πόνῳ (1035). The vocabulary here recalls the atmosphere of the athletic games celebrated in epic and epinician poetry<sup>36</sup>. Admetus is initially reluctant to accept the gift, as he promised his wife not to remarry (1038-1118), but Heracles' insistence leads to the ἀναγνώρισις and the reconstitution of the marriage (1119-1158).

The parallels with satyric heroism are unmistakable: a hero – whose labours are invoked immediately upon his entrance (476-506), foreshadowing the hap-

<sup>36</sup> Parker 2007, p. 256 and Seeck 2008, p. 193 recall Hom. *Il.* 23.262-270 to emphasise how the feat is framed in the epic imagery of the games rather than in the historically known one (see also Susanetti 2001, pp. 268-269 for other examples of the link between μόχθος/πόνος and praise). Pattoni 2008, pp. 1245-1246 also notes the reversal of the situation, since the contest for Alcestis does not celebrate her entry among the dead, but marks her return among the living. Roisman in Luschnig, Roisman 2003, pp. 208-209 perhaps over-emphasises the underlying irony of this scene, in which Heracles plays on Admetus' ignorance of the truth by narrating his feat according to the heroic *topoi* (see also Paduano 1993, p. 138), in a tone that seems excessive to brand as «clumsy and confused». On the other hand, as Markantonatos 2013, pp. 110-112 and 124-127 points out, the story invented by Heracles sounds particularly appropriate to the mythological background of the hero, which the poet integrates into his treatment of the story of Alcestis and Admetus.

py ending foretold by Apollo in the prologue (65-67) – vanquishes a monster reminiscent of a satyric ogre, embodying values such as *φιλία*, *ξενία*, and *χάρις*. In this instance, he goes further by defying a fundamental law of the human condition, the irreversibility of death, thereby restoring order to a disrupted household. Heracles' fight against Thanatos probably already figured in Phrynichus' *Alcestis* (fr. 2 Sn.-K.). We have no information about the dramatic genre as well as the details of the plot of this play<sup>37</sup>. Nonetheless, Serv. Dan. 4.694 (= fr. 3 Sn.-K.) testifies to Euripides' dependence on Phrynichus' play: in particular, the former is said to have borrowed the detail of Thanatos coming to cut off Alcestis' hair armed with a sword (Eur. *Alc.* 74-76). The defeat of Thanatos at the hands of a hero, moreover, likely appeared in the nebulous *Sisyphus* by Aeschylus, sometimes considered a satyr drama. In fact, two titles are attested for this play (*Sisyphus Drapetes* and *Sisyphus Petrokylistes*). Both seem to refer to the story told by Pherec. *FGrHist* 3 F 119 about the cunning hero's double escape from death (first by chaining Thanatos and then by tricking Hades) and his exemplary punishment among the dead. It is not clear, however, whether they were one or two separate plays, nor do the fragments allow us to determine the dramatic genre to which they belong, also because of the apparently unhappy ending<sup>38</sup>. In any case, both Phrynichus' *Alcestis* and Aeschylus' play(s) on Sisyphus demonstrate that the motif of the heroic struggle against Thanatos predates Euripides' *Alcestis* and appears in stories centered on the balance between life and death – motifs that are not incompatible with satyr drama<sup>39</sup>. Nevertheless, in Euripides' *Alcestis*, the absence of the satyrs shifts the emphasis to emotions and ethics.

To assess the overall impact of the drama, an adequate analysis of Admetus' character seems crucial – though it has perhaps not been fully explored yet. This character has, in fact, been a subject of disagreement among scholars. In my view, the most balanced reading is that of Carlo Brillante (2005, pp. 13-30), who describes him as «un personaggio profondamente toccato dalle disgrazie, coinvolto in eventi che non ha voluto e ai quali non può porre rimedio, non sospettabile di viltà o di ipocrisia» (p. 20). Starting from the prologue, the king is indeed portrayed as a pious man, *φίλος* of Apollo (10). In the following episodes, especially in the second one, the audience has the chance to see first-hand the emotional bond that unites him to his wife and sympathise with his

<sup>37</sup> See Parker 2007, pp. xv-xvi; Matelli 2022, pp. 92-96.

<sup>38</sup> On Aeschylus' *Sisyphus*, see Podlecki 2005; Germar, Pechstein, Krumeich in Krumeich, Pechstein, Seidensticker 1999, pp. 182-188; Collard in O'Sullivan, Collard 2013, pp. 290-295.

<sup>39</sup> See Seidensticker 1982, pp. 137-139; Susanetti 2001, p. 44. On the «brouillage des frontières» that often characterises the satyric genre, see also Voelke 2001, p. 299.

pervasive grief over her imminent departure. In the third episode, moreover, the audience can appreciate his praiseworthy respect for the moral and religious obligations linked to *ξενία*: faced with the perplexity expressed by the chorus about his choice to welcome Heracles as a guest at a time of mourning for the house, without even informing him of what had happened, Admetus justifies his actions, noting that informing Heracles would have led him to refuse hospitality, an unthinkable slight against foreigners (*ἀτιμάζειν ξένους*, 567)<sup>40</sup>.

The sole character to criticise Admetus is his father Pheres, who does so in the fourth episode: as a part of his captious self-defence, he accuses his son of loving life as much as he does and of having also shown *ἀψυχία* (696) by trying *ἀναιδῶς* (694) to escape death. On Pheres, however, there hangs from the outset the criticism of Apollo and Alcestis, which foreshadows his unsympathetic portrayal in this scene<sup>41</sup>: hence, his accusations of cowardice cannot compromise the overall positive image of Admetus, even if not *stricto sensu* heroic<sup>42</sup>. Nonetheless, his father's words deeply touch him and start a realisation of his own mortal condition<sup>43</sup>. From 935 onwards, Admetus pronounces a *rhexis* in which he explains why his wife is luckier than him (935), having died gloriously: from now on, he will live a painful life (941), suffering at home from loneliness, while outside from the accusation of *ἀψυχία* (956) and from the bad reputation (959) that will accompany his misfortunes<sup>44</sup>. Ad-

<sup>40</sup> As Conacher 1988, pp. 38-39 observes, Admetus' choice duplicates the hospitality once granted to Apollo and foreshadows the happy unravelling of the affair (cf. also the chorus' words at 597-605).

<sup>41</sup> On the complex evaluation of the *agon* and the image of Admetus and Pheres that emerges, see Brillante 2005, pp. 30-39 and Parker 2007, pp. 177-179, whose conclusion I agree with: «Admetus and Pheres do not belong to an idealised world of romance and chivalry, and neither emerges from this scene with much credit, but that need not prevent us from enjoying one of Euripides' most powerful and interesting debates».

<sup>42</sup> For instance, as Parker 2007, pp. XLVIII-XLIX and 264 has shown, the complete heroisation of Admetus proposed by Burnett 1965 and 1971, pp. 42-43, seems somewhat excessive. In this regard, particularly revealing are his inclination to weep, highlighted by Segal 1992b, and the expressive consonances traced by Pattoni 2006, pp. 208-221 and 2008, pp. 1227-1256 between Admetus and paradigmatic female characters such as the Andromache of the *Iliad* or the Penelope of the *Odyssey*, counterbalanced by the epic-heroic undertone of Alcestis. Nevertheless, in my view, these should be taken as rhetorical-expressive aspects functional to the characterisation of the two, not implying an actual inversion of gender roles in the *oikos* (as maintained, for example, by Segal 1992a; Blaise 2008, pp. 42-44; Slater 2013, pp. 36-37; Bergadano 2022, pp. 166-170; cf. *contra* Pattoni 2006, p. 219 who rather insists on Euripides' intertextual strategies), which is, moreover, belied by the very reasons for Alcestis' act. Admetus' non-heroism is linked to the emphasis on the human dimension by Del Corno 1998, pp. 168-170; cf. also Diano 1968, p. 343.

<sup>43</sup> Rather than an actual maturation (cf. Carpanelli 2005, pp. 29-32), Paduano 1993, p. 22 and Brillante 2005, p. 23 speak of Admetus' mere awareness of his own painful fate.

<sup>44</sup> On Admetus' comparison of his fame with that of Alcestis, see Parker 2007, pp. 238-239. Roisman in Luschnig, Roisman 2003, pp. 204-206 places the emphasis, somewhat ungenerously, on Admetus' selfish point of view.

metus prefigures the slanders of fictitious accusers, who will brand him with cowardice for having refused death while also trying to shield himself behind his hatred of his parents. These remarks reflect a pattern of anticipatory shame, often directed at imagined audiences, akin to Phaedra's 'Great Speech' in Euripides' *Hippolytus*<sup>45</sup>. As for Phaedra, this enhances her sympathetic portrayal. Overall, Admetus is a psychologically multifaceted character, at the mercy of a whirlwind of emotions produced by grief and embedded in the complexity of affective relationships and of the dialectic between individual conscience and public opinion.

In this regard, the view of personal honour that emerges by analysing the relationships between the characters in the play is also of particular interest. At 1103, Heracles justifies his gift to his friend by telling him νικῶντι μέντοι καὶ σὺ συννικᾷς ἐμοί, a paradigmatic statement of the vision of honour as a positive-sum game shared by the human characters of the play (cf. Admetus and Alcestis at 154-155, 282-289, 430-434)<sup>46</sup>, with the obvious exception of Admetus' selfish parents. The situation appears to be different for the play's divine characters. In the prologue, Thanatos had begun by reproaching Apollo for his attempt to limit the τιμαί of the underworld gods. Such act is presented as an unjust offence (ἀδικοεῖς, 30)<sup>47</sup>, as Thanatos also rejoices in his own honours (53), namely his own divine prerogatives, which he jealously defends as the very symbol of his own status in the world of the gods<sup>48</sup>.

In keeping with his own nature, Heracles – a demigod who has not yet become the celebrated hero<sup>49</sup>, but whose descent from Zeus he himself insists on in his self-imposed exhortation to fight Thanatos (837-839) – seems to place himself

<sup>45</sup> See Cairns 2020. Parker 2007, p. 242 rightly recalls the similar context of Hom. *Il.* 22.104-108, in which Hector manifests the same self-laceration in the face of the imaginary scenario of what others will say of him: the Trojan hero shows here that he has internalised the prevailing socio-ethical code (Cairns 1993, pp. 81-82), a process that for Admetus only now comes to completion (ἄρτι μανθάνω, 940). As Wißmann 1997, pp. 273-275 points out, central to Admetus' reflection is the concern with the disvalue of cowardice: this is the outcome of the previous clash with his father.

<sup>46</sup> This is undoubtedly the correct interpretation of the verse (cf. Parker 2007, p. 271), whereas Conacher 1988, p. 197 reads the initial νικῶω as Heracles' victory in the present dispute between the two: if this were the case, Admetus' reply in the following verse, in which he agrees with Heracles but reiterates that the woman must leave, would make no sense. On the relationship between αἰδώς, personal honour and recognition of the honour of others in the *Alcestis*, see Cairns 1993, pp. 288-290.

<sup>47</sup> Parker 2007, p. 59 emphasises the use of legal vocabulary.

<sup>48</sup> See Susanetti 2001, pp. 159-160. Cf. Aphrodite in *Hipp.* 7-8 and Dionysus in *Bacch.* 321. On the «primordial» portrayal of the fight between gods in the prologue of the *Alcestis*, and especially on the negotiation of Thanatos' godly status, see Campos Daroca 2015, pp. 50-74.

<sup>49</sup> See Markantonatos 2013, pp. 98 and 108-109.

in the middle. Standing in for Apollo, he defies the fearsome god of death and demonstrates his heroic status; nevertheless, he uses it to serve *φιλία* among mortals, ultimately resolving the tragic situation caused by the shared sense of honour held by Alcestis<sup>50</sup>. Unlike what happens in satyr dramas – as well as in those ‘initiatory’ tragedies in which the hero performs a feat with a woman as the prize (cf. e.g. Euripides’ *Andromeda* and *Oenomaus*) – glory will, in fact, be the only real gain for Heracles from the *ἀγών* (1141). The one who materially benefits from the prize, the revived Alcestis, will be Admetus<sup>51</sup>, since he is rewarded for his *αἰδώς* with the passage from sorrow to joy both in his soul (1125, 1138, 1157-1158) and, as a reflection, in the city community (1154-1156)<sup>52</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusions

Overall, in *Alcestis*, the reimagining of satyric heroism serves less to punish a monstrous villain than to reward a virtuous man. Throughout the play, the sympathetic adhesion of the audience is channelled on him. Also, from the very beginning, the public is aware of the happy resolution of the story and, as in the *Ion* and then typically in Menander, is thus led to focus on the emotions deriving from common human limits without the filter of *φόβος* in view of the outcome.

As regards the question of the dramatic genre of the play, the debated in-

<sup>50</sup> In this regard, Paduano 1968, pp. 156-159 rightly denies the apparent intellectual simplicity of Heracles’ character and emphasises the relationship of *συμπάθεια* established with Admetus. As Segal 1992b, p. 155 points out: «This Heracles not only vanquishes Death, the ultimate heroic exploit; he is also perceptive about his friend’s feelings (826-28) and expresses compassion for the loss, with sympathy for the need to weep (1081). He thereby enables his weaker comrade (and perhaps those in the audience who identify with him) to have both the tearful grief and the rescued wife». Admetus, for his part, also in the face of Heracles’ reproaches for having kept silent about his misfortunes and for not having treated him as a *φίλος* (1008-1018), retorts, as previously to the chorus, claiming that he did so not out of contempt (*ἀτίζων*, 1037, indicates here precisely the disrespect associated with the breaking of the *φιλία*), but so that his friend would remain there as his guest (cf. Parker 2007, p. 257). On the *φιλία* between Heracles and Admetus, see also Brillante 2005, pp. 40-42; Silva 2021, pp. 193-194.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Conacher 1988, p. 195.

<sup>52</sup> On the happy ending of the play, see Burnett 1971, pp. 45-46; Slater 2013, pp. 65-66. A more complex reading of the happy ending is, however, proposed by other scholars: e.g. Seidensticker 1982, pp. 150-152 thinks that the light tones mask the fable-like, i.e. unrealistic, character of the story, to the advantage of an Admetus, according to the scholar, who does not deserve such benefit; Gregory 1991, pp. 39-44 focuses on the return to the starting situation, undermined by the challenge to the natural order of human affairs caused by Apollo’s gift; Carpanelli 2005, p. 32 believes that Alcestis’ final silence adumbrates the difficult rehabilitation of Admetus as ruler (admittedly, without convincing evidence in the text); according to Blaise 2008, Heracles’ gift is not, in fact, a gift, but the gods’ revenge for the violated natural order, for it will force the two lovers to experience death for a second time in the future.

interpretation of the scene between the servant and Heracles at 747-836 proves decisive. After 746, the chorus atypically exit together with Admetus for Alcestis' funeral procession. This seems to mark a new beginning in the dramatic action<sup>53</sup>: the servant enters the scene and laments the insatiable voracity of the gluttonous and drunken Heracles, who has even started a κῶμος amid the funeral celebrations for Alcestis, of whose death the hero is still unaware. After listening to his unsolicited lesson in hedonistic living, the servant reveals to him why κῶμος and γέλως are inappropriate at that moment, setting in motion the events that would lead to the drama's happy ending. Several scholars downplay the comic aspects of this scene<sup>54</sup>. In fact, according to the persuasive reading provided by Maria Pia Pattoni (2006, pp. 187-207), they ought to be considered as a symptom of the almost metapoetic dialogue between theatrical genres that runs through this *pièce*<sup>55</sup>. The usual comic-satyrical Heracles comes through in the middle of a tragedy and becomes the heroic agent of a particular mechanism of emotional release: not only is this realised in the progression of the plot, as normally happens in satyr drama, but it also materialises in Admetus' emotional journey, which reflects the effect the last drama of the tetralogies was meant to produce in the spectators. In other words, by sympathising with him, the audience is led to accompany and mirror the king's passage from sorrow to joy.

<sup>53</sup> Among the few occurrences of the chorus' exit and subsequent second entrance or epiparodos (Aesch. *Eum.* after 231; Soph. *Aj.* after 814; Eur. *Hel.* after 385; [Eur.] *Rb.* after 564; see Di Benedetto, Medda 2002, pp. 239-240), the most strikingly similar to the *Alcestis* scene are the ones in *Helen* and *Rhesus*: here, as in the *Alcestis*, it marks a new beginning in the stage action, with a reduplication of the prologue and the parodos (see Allan 2008, pp. 194, 205 about the *Helen*; Liapis 2012, pp. 228-229 and Fries 2014, pp. 337-339 about the *Rhesus*). On the dramatic expediency of choral exits and re-entrances, see also Taplin 1977, pp. 375-376 about Aeschylus' *Eumenides*; Most, Ozbek 2015 about Sophocles' *Ajax*.

<sup>54</sup> For example, Paduano 1993, pp. 118-119 ascribes Heracles' grotesque traits simply to the servant's offended grief; Markatonatos 2013, pp. 120-121 and 129 (also following Parker 2007, pp. 159-160) treats Heracles' comic-satyrical interlude as a negligible parenthesis in the character's tragic and moralised portrayal in the *Alcestis*; Matelli 2022, pp. 88-100 also downplays the significance of the comic-satyrical elements and considers them fleeting moments of relaxation of the tragic tension, pointing to the folkloric derivation of the motifs generally thought to be symptomatic of the satyrical character of the *Alcestis* (although this does not seem to me to exclude the perception of a thematic affinity on the part of the audience: cf. Diano 1968, p. 344 who identifies evidence of the fable-like halo conferred by Euripides on the hero's feat precisely in the comic veil that envelops him); slightly more nuanced is the interpretation of Zanetto 2014, pp. 277-279, according to whom the insertion of the comic element, recharged with sapiential content, is functional to the recovery of the tragic sense.

<sup>55</sup> See also Aélion 1983, II, pp. 352-353. On the mixture of tones as a distinctive feature of the *Alcestis*, see also Burnett 1971, pp. 29-32; Seidensticker 1982, pp. 129-139; Del Corno 1998, pp. 158-161; Susanetti 2001, pp. 42-44; Brillante 2005, p. 46; Slater 2005, p. 92; Pattoni 2008, pp. 1225-1226; Jendza 2020, pp. 55-59; Silva 2021, pp. 188-190.

It remains unclear whether Euripides' decision to close his 438 BCE tetralogy with a play like *Alcestis* reflects specific historical circumstances<sup>56</sup> or signals a broader decline in the satyric genre, as some scholars suggest. Recently, Riccardo Palmisciano (2021; 2022) has – in my view, convincingly – argued that satyr drama and tragedy should be considered originally «manifestazioni complementari della stessa arte drammatica» (2022, p. 44): the σατυρικόν that is mentioned by Arist. *Poet.* 1449a 20-28, which later branched out into two distinct genres for cultural-historical reasons in the evolution of theatrical forms. This hypothesis would suggest that presenting a fourth drama with a happy ending – but without satyrs – was not an overly daring experiment, nor was *Alcestis* necessarily a unique case<sup>57</sup>. As a matter of fact, due to the genetic affinity between the two genres, «dramma satiresco e dramma senza satiri collocato in quarta posizione sono entrambi manifestazioni del genere tragico e, oltre a forma e posizione, condividono la funzione» (2022, p. 40)<sup>58</sup>. One should therefore be content to call the *Alcestis* a 'fourth drama', whose effect, as Slater (2005, p. 95) put it, «is that of a whole day's festival offering on fast forward».

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<sup>56</sup> According to the hypothesis of Marshall 2000, recently taken up and enriched by Jendza 2020, pp. 60-66, Euripides' experiment would be a retort to the controversial decree of Morichides (440/439 BCE), which might have imposed to μη κωμωδεῖν: the tragedian would have deliberately interpreted the dictate in an etymological sense, as a ban on producing 'κῶμος-songs', and created a drama aimed at defending the playwrights' artistic freedom and reflecting on the relationships between dramatic genres. The interpretation of the decree is, however, much debated (cf. Matelli 2022, pp. 87-88); *contra* Marshall, see especially Di Marco 2013, pp. 69-88.

<sup>57</sup> See now Carrara 2024 for a global reconsideration of the *communis opinio* about satyr dramas in the tetralogies.

<sup>58</sup> For a different view about this *vexata quaestio*, see at least Cipolla 2017.

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