
Euripides’ *Alcestis* was staged at the City Dionysia in 438 BCE, as part of a tetralogy that also included *Cretan Women*, *Alcmene in Psophis*, and *Telephus*. Sophocles took the prize, while Euripides placed second. The standard English-language commentary on the play is by A. M. Dale (Oxford, 1954), and is based on Murray’s now outdated text; there is also a useful Aris and Phillips student edition by D. J. Conacher (Warminster, 1988). A serious and substantial replacement for Dale has long been wanted. Unfortunately, the volume under review does little to fill that gap.

Parker’s Introduction begins with brief treatments of *Alcestis in Myth and Legend* (focussing on the story’s presumed background in folklore), *Alcestis in Greek Literature* (both before and after Euripides), and *Euripides and Alcestis* (casting a generally skeptical eye on the play’s allegedly “pro-satyric” elements). A careful, systematic discussion of the poet’s themes and characters is lacking, and only a few words are offered in passing about the three “lost” tragedies that made up the balance of the tetralogy. Instead, the bulk of the Introduction is occupied by long, desultory treatments of the modern reception of the *Alcestis* by poets and critics; the latter section is distinguished by a systematic hostility toward “feminist” readings of all sorts. Although P. discusses the manuscripts and their affiliations in detail, she provides no stemma. Nor does she offer any assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of other recent editions, such as Garzya’s 1983 *Teubner* or Kovacs’ 2001 *Loeb*. The striking lack of attention to staging in the commentary (discussed below) is apparent already here, in the absence of any discussion of the division of parts among the actors (one of whom plays Apollo, the female slave, Alcestis, Heracles and Pheres, and sings, while the other plays Death, Admetus, and the male slave, and does not sing; a child singer is also needed). The Introduction closes with an extended discussion of the play’s meters; this is generally clear and helpful, although the terms “blunt” and “pendant” ought to have been defined.

P.’s text is drawn from Diggle’s OCT, with minor changes here and there, and with some consolidation of sigla in the apparatus. The alterations from the OCT have been clumsily carried out, and virtually every page of the text is now marred by typographical errors, omitted material and the like.

Thus for example: Hypothesis (a): line-numbers and apparatus have been omitted.

Hypothesis (b) § 5, 13, 14: spaces within the angle brackets (which appear to be in a different font from elsewhere in the text) should be closed up.

Hypothesis (c) is not labeled as such, and should be cited as POxy. 2447.1–16 (not simply as POxy. 2457, which also preserves part of a hypothesis to Euripides’ *Aeolus*). Line-numbers have been omitted, as has the critical apparatus. 10: correct spacing.


Apparatus. Problems with extra and missing spaces are ubiquitous (e.g. 51, 71, 75, 95, 167, before 213–45, 213, 218, 225, 232). 40: read ἄπει; 80: read τίτον. 82: add colon after “codd.”. 218–25: note is out of place. 276: note on ἄνω τόλμη actually refers to 277.
Similar lack of attention in matters of detail is apparent throughout the commentary as well.

For example: 477 n. should be 476 n.; 478 n. should be 477 n.; 477ff n. should be 476ff n.; 502 n. should be 502–3 n.; 614–738 n. should be 614–740 n.; 627 n. should be 627–8 n.; and 1042 n. should be 1042–4 n. 490 n. and 496 n.: lemmata are out of order. 526 n.: άμβλοκε should be bold. p. 186: header should read ‘666–71’ (not ‘668–71’). 1116 n.: read β6274.

Of the 100 ancient references I checked at random in the commentary, I noted only four outright errors (345–7 n., p. 122: the text of Thphr. HP 4.3.4 reads ἐπὶ τῆς αἵτως σύλλογος; 448–9 n.: for ‘Nonnus 2.329’ read ‘2.128’; 432 n.: for ‘Athenaeus 7.284–6’ read ‘7.284ff–5ff’; 679–80 n.: in [A.] PV 311 read τεθυμμένος, not τεθυμμένον). The summary of the action in Aristophanes’ Wasps on p. 131 is also garbled. On the other hand, P. routinely fails to provide inclusive line-numbers for citations (315–14 n.: read ‘Ag. 131–4’ for ‘131n’, and ‘Supp. 355–7, 399–400’ for ‘357, 399’; 452 n.: read ‘Nem. 4.18–19’ for ‘4.19’; 604–5 n.: read ‘Ag. 98–3’ for ‘98’, and ‘S. Tr. 682–3’ for ‘682’; 458–9 n.: read ‘Hel. 526–7’ for ‘526’), and often does not note omitted portions of lines or line-divisions accurately (334–5 n.: Pl. Phd. 117c; 442–4 n.: S. Tr. 359, 1085–7; 445–7 n.: S. OC 1221–4; 565 n.: E. El. 50–4). Citation-style is problematic throughout; comic poets, for example, are most usefully cited simply by Kassel-Austin fragment-number rather than by PGW volume- and page-numbers, while Presocratics require full Diels-Kranz numbers. A further unnecessary burden is placed on non-specialists, and on students in particular, by P.’s regular failure to give the tragic poets’ names along with their play-titles, e.g. referring simply to ‘Tr.’ rather than ‘S. Tr.’.

In her preface, P. describes her Alcestis as a compromise between a scholarly edition of the play and one aimed primarily at undergraduates who still need help reading the Greek. Although professional Hellenists may be disappointed by the pedestrian character of much of the commentary (e.g. 9 n.: ‘The imperfect ... stresses continuity in the past’), they have thus been forewarned. Much more important, readers with a weaker command of the language and less familiarity with Greek culture and literature will be ill-served by this edition. Although much of the commentary consists of glosses of varying length, the Greek is often handled roughly and carelessly.

For example: aorists are routinely translated as perfects (e.g. 15 n., 34–7 n., 488 n.); at 39–40 n. οἶδα should be taken with ὑπνηθηκαί rather than with ἔβοσκεῖτο, as the location of the caesura makes clear (‘It is always my habit to carry this with me,’ not ‘It is my habit always to carry this with me’); at 57 n. the definite article is ignored; at 121–6 n. τὸόν is ignored; at 181–2 n. the ὅν in 182 is ignored in the initial gloss; at 226–7 n. δύσμωτος ἀδείας means not just ‘being deprived of your wife’, but ‘by being deprived of your wife’; at 239–43 n. τὴν ὅπε is ignored; at 288–9 n. the participle is concessive (not simply ‘having [things] in which I was taking pleasure’), but ‘although I had things ... ’), and on p. 116 ναὶ is ignored; at 490 n. the second gloss is misleading, since the Greek does not include an emphatic pronoun.

The internal logical structure of the text – how arguments are made and developed, and action motivated and explained, and character articulated and manipulated – meanwhile, gets little or no comment. Instead – and despite an acknowledgment early on (p. xlv) that Euripides’ characters are not real people, and that it is a critical fallacy to treat them as such – P. constantly engages in psychological speculation, attempting to explain the characters’ words by the hidden feelings they supposedly have (e.g. 38 n., 52 n., 280–392 n. on p. 113, 497 n., 511 n.). The myriad details of everyday life to which the text refers, and in which under-
graduates in particular might reasonably be assumed to feel some interest, meanwhile, often receive no comment; thus, for example, there is no discussion of household altars at 170, of garlanding them at 171, or of mourning conventions at 215–17. Perhaps most striking, even basic staging issues frequently receive no attention, and what notes there are routinely fail to treat *Alcestis* as a piece of live theater intended for performance before an audience. Thus when Apollo enters from Admetus’ house at the beginning of the play, he carries a bow; indeed, this must have been an important part of how the original audience – who did not have the characters’ names given to them in the text, as we do – recognized him. But P. mentions the bow only at 18, when Death refers to it. So too, although Death certainly enters at 24 (ἔδη δὲ τόνδε Θάνατον πιῶοντος πέλεια υς), and 24–7 serve to cover his movement across the stage to Admetus’ door, P. has him enter at 28, which is merely when he first speaks. Nor does she mention the sword in his hand (74–6), or the fact that both characters exit at 76 or so (Apollo into the wing and perhaps a few lines earlier, Death presumably into Admetus’ house). She similarly ignores the exit of the slave-woman at 76; alerts the reader to the presence of mute slave-attendants with Admetus, who emerges from his house to greet Heracles at 507, only at 546–8 (and is there really more than one slave?); makes no mention of Admetus’ exit into the palace at 567; and fails to observe that the most significant reason for having the male slave leave the stage at 836 – as is clearly right in any case, since the speech by Heracles that follows is directed to his own heart and hands – is that the same actor must return at 861 as Admetus.

At the very least, a good modern edition of an ancient play ought to offer a relatively clean text and apparatus; an introduction that puts the work in its literary, social, and historical context; accurate and effective assistance with the Greek, including precise and complete references to ancient works cited to elucidate it; and answers not just to obvious traditional questions, but to others that may not have occurred to readers, in the hope of opening up new aspects of the text to them. The new *Alcestis* disappoints on all these counts.

Minneapolis

*S. Douglas Olson*

---


Sind die uns überlieferte Stücke des griechischen Dramas des 5. Jh. v. Chr. Lesestücke, die in der Regel nur einmal auf der Bühne gebracht wurden, oder sind sie eher Zeugnis einer lebendigen Aufführungspraxis? Mit dieser Frage und den sich daraus ergebenden Konsequenzen für die Exegese beschäftigt sich das vorliegende Buch.

Aus der Perspektive des «Performance Criticism» untersucht Revermann (R.) die Komödien-Bühne, die zumindest im 5. Jh. v. Chr. im Unterschied zur Tragödien-Bühne «busy» war, in den Bewegungen der Schauspieler und allen damit verbundenen «elements of theatricality: costume, stage configuration, use of space, interaction with the audience, props, enunciation, gestures, to name but