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WHEN IS IT REASONABLE TO PRAY TO THE GODS (EUR. *ALCESTIS* 218)?*Tatiana V. Kostyleva*

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This brief note defends the manuscript reading δῆλα against δεινά conjectured by J. Diggle in Eur. *Alcestis* 218. Deeming the transmitted δῆλα “inconsequential”, he confidently prints the rather ubiquitous δεινά in its place. Although the corruption proposed by Diggle is palaeographically easy, it does not contribute to the better sense of the whole passage.

Keywords: Euripides, *Alcestis*, J. Diggle, conjectural criticism.

Eur. *Alcestis* 218:

— ἴξῃσις τις ἢ τέμω τρίχα	215
καὶ μέλανα στολμὸν πέπλων	
ἀμφιβαλώμεθ' ἤδη;	
— δεινά μέν, φίλοι, δεινά γ', ἀλλ' ὄμως	
θεοῖσιν εὐξόμεσθα· θεῶν	
γὰρ δύναμις μεγίστα.	220

218 δεινά...δεινά Diggle : δῆλα...δῆλά codd.¹

“— Will someone come out, or shall I now crop my hair in mourning and put on my black garments? — It is terrible, my friends, it is terrible, but still we shall pray to the gods, for the gods' power is supreme.”

Post-Digglean Euripides is universally acclaimed as being in superior shape — elegant, lean, logical and never really saying anything “inconsequential”. At certain times when the Euripides of our tradition did fall slightly short of this exacting standard, he has been helped along — through a well-grounded choice of readings, conjecture, excision or obelus — by the masterly hand of his OCT editor, J. Diggle, a subtle and sound critic of all things Euripidean. It is one of these conjectural helpings along that I will venture to discuss in this brief note.

¹ Diggle 1984, 46 is the source of the new text. The tradition is confined to his apparatus.

The Chorus of the elderly men of Pherae arrive at the doors of the palace to enquire about Alcestis, for her last day has come (77–130). They are trying to judge in a down-to-earth, practical way by certain external signs whether she is yet alive, or they can put on mourning. The house is silent (77, 86–8) and there is nobody around to announce the news (89), but Admetus could not have buried her yet, for the best of women cannot have deserved such an inconspicuous burial (93, 96–7); moreover, there is no lustral basin on the porch which the tradition demands (98–100), no lock of hair, shorn in mourning for the newly dead (101–2). There are no manifest signs of mourning; still, it is the very day (105) and the Chorus plunge into hopelessness (112–30). Prayer is in vain (119–20), the only saviour is himself dead (121–9) and “to what hope of life may I now cling?” (130) is the question that will touch to the quick even the least responsive in the audience. At this point, a Handmaid comes out and tells in admirable detail how Alcestis is spending her last hours (157–196). When she leaves to announce their friendly presence to her masters, the Chorus, overpowered by emotion, begin a brief prayer (more like an outcry) for deliverance, since now they know that Alcestis is still alive (212–4). They probably split into two semi-choruses representing individual speakers and sing alternatively (at least the change of speaker is evident at 218), expressing first hope of someone coming out of the palace in a short while and bringing them the latest news (the daggered $\xi\xi\iota\sigma\iota\ \tau\iota\varsigma$ makes acceptable sense, but is unmetrical, hence the wish of Wilamowitz to get rid of $\xi\xi$ - and have $\alpha\iota\alpha\iota\ \epsilon\iota\sigma\iota\ \tau\iota\varsigma$; meaning “will someone come?” which, however, adds a hope of some deliverer coming from other, probably heavenly quarters)² or else they are already thinking of putting on mourning (216–7). And here comes the verse in question. The other semi-chorus (or the Leader, thus Murray in his translation³) begins with $\delta\eta\lambda\alpha\ \mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu, \phi\iota\lambda\omicron\iota, \delta\eta\lambda\acute{\alpha}\ \gamma', \acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda' \ \acute{\omicron}\mu\omega\varsigma$ which Diggle found “inconsequential”⁴ and authored a conjecture $\delta\epsilon\iota\nu\acute{\alpha}\dots\ \delta\epsilon\iota\nu\acute{\alpha}$ which he adopted straight into his text.⁵ But it seems at best flat. The corruption of $\Delta\epsilon\iota\nu\acute{\alpha}$ to $\Delta\eta\lambda\lambda\alpha$ (as well as the reverse) is in itself welcome palaeographically and it is surprising that so few cases of it have been registered so far. Diggle at least gives only one example, *S. Phil.* 502,⁶ where $\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau' \ \acute{\alpha}\delta\eta\lambda\alpha$ was conjectured by Wakefield instead of $\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha\ \delta\epsilon\iota\nu\acute{\alpha}$ of the manuscripts.⁷ Here $\delta\epsilon\iota\nu\acute{\alpha}$ is a pedestrian slip, and $\acute{\alpha}\delta\eta\lambda\alpha$ improves the sense of the whole passage, easing the near-repetitive “fearful and dangerous” ($\epsilon\iota\sigma\omicron\rho\acute{\omega}\nu\ \acute{\omega}\varsigma\ \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha\ \delta\epsilon\iota\nu\acute{\alpha}\ \kappa\acute{\alpha}\pi\kappa\iota\kappa\iota\nu\delta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\omega\varsigma\ \beta\rho\omicron\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma$) while both making room for the positive outcome $\pi\alpha\theta\epsilon\iota\nu\ \mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \epsilon\ddot{\upsilon}$ (503), and cohering better with “dangerous” that anticipates troubles to come. But we may doubt whether this example supports the conjecture proposed in the *Alcestis*. The

² See Bierl, Calder, Fowler 1991, 39 with n. 148; for the observation, see Seeck 2008, 87. Parker cites the suggestion of Ch. Collard to understand $\epsilon\iota\sigma\iota\ \tau\iota\varsigma$ ($\lambda\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$); “Will some rescue come?”, or else (her own idea?) $\epsilon\acute{\omicron}\sigma\tau\iota\nu\ \acute{\epsilon}\tau'$; “Is she yet alive?”, see Parker 2007, 99 *ad loc.*

³ Murray 1915, 14.

⁴ Diggle 1969, 36–7 = Diggle 1994, 9–10 (with minor additions).

⁵ He is alone in accepting it, so it seems. The recent editors either oppose it (Conacher, Seeck, Parker), or do not admit it into their edition (Kovacs). Some scholars find the number of unnecessary conjectures in his text alarming. See, for instance Kamerbeek 1986, 92–101.

⁶ He also refers to an article by Dawe, 1968, 16, who conjectured $\delta\eta\lambda\acute{\omicron}\nu$ for $\delta\epsilon\iota\nu\acute{\omicron}\nu$ in *S. Phil.* 755, but gave no further examples either.

⁷ It is not universally accepted. In fact, recent editors of Sophocles (Webster 1970, Kamerbeek 1980, Schein 2013) do not even mention it; in the new Loeb Lloyd-Jones prints $\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau' \ \acute{\alpha}\delta\eta\lambda\alpha$, but translates the vulgata “seeing that for mortals all things are full of fear and of the danger”. Jebb does mention it, but does not discuss it, see Jebb 1898 *ad loc.*

Chorus do know that Alcestis is still alive,⁸ but have also learned from the Handmaid that she is wasting away rapidly (203–6), so these cryptic “it is clear, my friends, it is clear indeed”, in the situation when nobody (or nothing) comes out all the way up to 233, may suggest that they are almost losing hope (she might have died in the interim and the audience is being held on tenterhooks), but bracing themselves to prayer and rekindling slight hope in the audience. To pray and have hope in the face of a clear-as-day outcome is more trying than to pray because “it is terrible”,⁹ but there is nothing “inconsequential” about it.

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КОГДА МОЛИТЬСЯ БОГАМ РАЗУМНО? (EUR. ALCESTIS 218)

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В настоящей заметке рассматривается конъектура Дж. Дигглы к ст. 218 «Алкестида» Еврипида. Вместо рукописного δῆλα, которое издатель считает «неуместным» и «нелогичным», он предлагает читать δεινά, которое, по его мнению, удачно характеризует ситуацию. Несмотря на то что предполагаемая порча δεινά в δῆλα возможна палеографически, δεινά в контексте драмы Еврипида — очевидная банализация.

Ключевые слова: Еврипид, Алкестида, Дж. Диггль, критика текста.

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⁸ Hayley fared ill in Diggle’s discussion (n. 4), since he dared suggest in his fine and well-balanced commentary *ad loc.* that “[it is clear that] Alcestis is dead and the mourning should be put on”. But only as an alternative meaning, his other suggestion being “or we may understand ὅτι οὐκ ἄν γένοιτο πόρος κακῶν ... It is hard to tell whether 218–19 is an answer to 215–17, or a continuation of 213–14 without regard to the intervening words of the other semi-chorus” which is a reasonable view. See Hayley 1898, 93 ad v. 218. Cf. Dale 1954, 69, *ad loc.*

⁹ From the point of view of grammar “it is clear, but we shall still pray” needs the adversative much more than “it is terrible, but we shall still pray”. See Seeck (n. 2) *ad loc.*