

CRISTIANO MINUTO

«ΤΗΝ ΚΑΤΑ ΣΤΑΥΤΟΝ ΕΛΛΑ»:
CHOOSING THE RIGHT WIFE IN GREEK TRAGEDY

ABSTRACT

The article aims to examine the presence of the theme of not marrying above one's station in Greek tragedy. This theme will be investigated in some plays written between the 5th and the 4th century BCE, such as *Prometheus Bound*, some extant and fragmentary plays of Euripides and the *Rhesus* attributed to Euripides. Particular attention will be given to the context where the theme is found, the various functions it has in each tragedy and its implications for dramaturgy and audience reception. The article will show how tragic poets skilfully used the theme in question to serve different purposes and reflect on real-life issues, as is often the case in theatrical performances.

In book XVII of Homer's *Odyssey*, the goatherd Melanthius, upon seeing Eumaeus and Odysseus, who is disguised as a beggar, addresses an insulting speech to them (ll. 217-232). At the beginning of the speech, Melanthius says that as ever the god brings like and like together (ὡς αἰεὶ τὸν ὁμοῖον ἄγει θεὸς ἐς τὸν ὁμοῖον, l. 218)¹. This famous Homeric line was extremely popular in the ancient world, being quoted and used by many authors, from Plato to the Byzantines². Moreover, the idea of the close bond between two people of the same station, which the line conveys, became proverbial, as showed by the well-known motto ὁμοῖος ὁμοίω³.

When referred to an erotic context, this motto often involves the theme of not marrying above one's station. In this paper, I aim to investigate the presence of this theme in Greek tragedy. While its occurrences have been highlighted by commentaries on individual passages, it has never been explored, as far as I know, in a comprehensive and systematic way. I intend to examine the various functions

¹ See J. RUSSO – G.A. PRIVITERA (a cura di), *Omero. Odissea*, V, Milano 1985, p. 172.

² See the examples collected in L. MALTEN, *Ein neues Bruchstück aus den Aitia des Kallimachos*, «Hermes» 53 (1918), p. 155; C.W. MÜLLER, *Gleiches zu Gleichem. Ein Prinzip frühgriechischen Denkens*, Wiesbaden 1965, p. 167 n. 47; R. TOSI, *Dizionario delle sentenze latine e greche*, Milano 2021⁴, pp. 1179-1181. See also the remarks by G. MASSIMILLA (a cura di), *Callimaco. Aitia. Libri primo e secondo*, Pisa 1996, pp. 406-407, and A. HARDER (ed.), *Callimachus. Aetia*, II, Oxford 2012, pp. 967-968, on Call. *Aet. fr. inc. lib.* 89, 9-10 Massimilla (= 178, 9-10 Harder).

³ See Apostol. XII 68 Leutsch; *Mantiss. Prov.* II 39 Leutsch, in E.L. VON LEUTSCH (ed.), *Corpus Paroemiographorum Graecorum*, II, Gottingae 1851.

the theme in question has in different tragedies, as well as its implications for dramaturgy and audience reception.

Let us begin with *Prometheus Bound*, a play whose author⁴ and date⁵ are much debated, even if it is probably earlier than the other tragedies we will consider. After the episode of Io, the Chorus sing the third stasimon (ll. 887-906): lines 887-893, belonging to the strophe⁶, concern us here.

ἦ σοφὸς ἦ σοφὸς ἦν
 ὃς πρῶτος ἐν γνώμα τόδ' ἐβάστασε καὶ
 γλώσσα διεμυθολόγησεν,
 890 ὡς τὸ κηδεῦσαι καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἀριστεύει μακρῶ,
 καὶ μήτε τῶν πλοῦτῳ διαθρυπτομένων
 μήτε τῶν γέννα μεγαλυνομένων
 ὄντα χερνήταν ἐραστεῦσαι γάμων.

Wise, wise indeed was the one
 who first mentally weighed up this idea
 and gave verbal expression to it,
 890 that it is better by far to marry among one's own,
 and not, if you are a worker, hanker after marriage
 with those whom wealth has spoiled
 or who put on upper-class airs.

Through an emphatic anadiplosis (ἦ σοφὸς ἦ σοφός, l. 887), the Chorus introduce the mention of an unspecified wise man, who first recommended marrying according to one's station. In the scholia on these lines⁷, the man is identified

⁴ The complex issue of whether Aeschylus was the author of *Prometheus Bound* is beyond the scope of this study. See, for example, the contrasting views of M. GRIFFITH, *The Authenticity of 'Prometheus Bound'*, Cambridge 1977 and M.P. PATTONI, *L'autenticità del Prometeo incatenato di Eschilo*, Pisa 1987, and the bibliographical references in I.A. RUFFELL, *Prometheus Bound: The Principle of Hope*, in *A Companion to Aeschylus*, ed. by J.A. BROMBERG – P. BURIAN, Hoboken 2023, pp. 160-161 and 166-168.

⁵ See A. LESKY, *Die tragische Dichtung der Hellenen*, Göttingen 1972, pp. 145-146; M. GRIFFITH (ed.), *Aeschylus. Prometheus Bound*, Cambridge 1983, p. 32; G. MORANI – M. MORANI (a cura di), *Tragedie e frammenti di Eschilo*, Torino 1987, p. 30; A.J. PODLECKI (ed.), *Aeschylus. Prometheus Bound*, Oxford 2005, pp. 199-200; I.A. RUFFELL (ed.), *Aeschylus: Prometheus Bound*, London-New Delhi-New York-Sydney 2012, pp. 18-19; I.A. RUFFELL, *Prometheus Bound...*, cit., p. 166.

⁶ The Greek text and English translation are by A.J. PODLECKI (ed.), *Aeschylus...*, cit. The authenticity of the strophe has been questioned by H.J. ROSE, *A Commentary on the Surviving Plays of Aeschylus*, I, Amsterdam 1957, p. 309, due to its contents. A.J. PODLECKI (ed.), *Aeschylus...*, cit., p. 188, however, observes that the tone of the strophe is in line with other feelings expressed by the Chorus in the tragedy.

⁷ See C.J. HERINGTON (ed.), *The Older Scholia on the Prometheus Bound*, Lugduni Batavorum 1972, pp. 213-214.

with Pittacus, one of the Seven Sages, about whom an anecdote made famous by an epigram of Callimachus is told (*AP* VII 89 = *HE* 54)⁸. When a stranger, hesitating in his choice of a wife between a woman of his own station and another of higher standing, asked Pittacus for advice, he directed the stranger to listen to some children who were playing with tops nearby. As one of them exclaimed «Lead the one within your reach» («Τὴν κατὰ σαυτὸν ἔλα», l. 12), the stranger resolved to marry the first woman. According to Diogenes Laertius (I 80-81 Dorandi), who reports the story in his life of Pittacus, where he also quotes Callimachus' epigram, the sage was advising from personal experience, for his wife, who was better born than he was, treated him haughtily.

The topics of wealth and birth, on which the anecdote of Pittacus is focused, are evoked by the Chorus at lines 891-893 of our passage, where it is argued that a person of humble origins should not wish to marry a woman who leads a luxurious life because of her wealth, or boasts about her nobility⁹. The parallelism and assonance of lines 891 and 892 highlight that wealth and birth are on equal footing¹⁰, both contributing to making a marriage between people from different backgrounds inappropriate.

In light of what has been said, the Chorus' reflection in *Prometheus Bound* can be regarded as an expression of conventional wisdom, which is widely shared by the audience¹¹. However, it is not common for this reflection to be used to interpret the story of a female character (namely Io), since in tragedy the issue of social and economic disparity between spouses is usually addressed when a man has imprudently chosen to marry a woman of a higher rank. As the rest of the stasimon shows (ll. 894-906), the Chorus call for moderation, urging against aspiring to a divine wedding: the love of the gods is often a harbinger of misfortune, and the case of Io is a clear example of this¹².

⁸ On this epigram, see A.S.F. GOW – D.L. PAGE (eds.), *The Greek Anthology. Hellenistic Epigrams*, II, Cambridge 1965, pp. 205-207; E. LIVREA, *Da Pittaco a Bisanzio. Storia critica di un epigramma di Callimaco*, in E. Livrea, *Da Callimaco a Nonno. Dieci studi di poesia ellenistica*, Messina - Firenze 1995, pp. 45-58; W. LAPINI, *Studi di filologia filosofica greca*, Firenze 2003, pp. 13-33; A. GULLO (a cura di), *Antologia Palatina. Epigrammi funerari (libro VII)*, I, Pisa 2023, pp. 415-418.

⁹ As D.J. CONACHER, *Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound. A Literary Commentary*, Toronto 1980, p. 65 notes, there is an ironic contrast between the terrified deprecation of marriage above one's station and the celebration of Prometheus' wedding to Hesione, one of the Oceanids, which was recalled by the Chorus in the previous stasimon (ll. 555-560).

¹⁰ See M. GRIFFITH (ed.), *Aeschylus...*, cit., p. 246.

¹¹ See G. FERRARO (a cura di), *Eschilo. Il Prometeo incatenato*, I, Napoli 2000, p. 107.

¹² See L. MEDDA (a cura di), *Eschilo. Supplici. Prometeo incatenato*, Milano 1994, p. 159 n. 149. For an overview on marriage in the myth of Io, see A. PROVENZA, *Un destino paradigmatico. L'ibrido e la necessità del γάμος nel mito di Io*, in *Συναγωνίζεσθαι. Studies in Honour of Guido Avezziù*, a cura di S. BIGLIAZZI – F. LUPI – G. UGOLINI, Verona 2018, pp. 167-193.

The specific treatment of the theme of not marrying above one's station in *Prometheus Bound* is not isolated in tragedy. Consider Euripides' *Antiope*, a play whose date is uncertain¹³, where the protagonist is another of Zeus' unlucky lovers.

The second episode opens with Antiope entering the stage and addressing the Chorus (*fr.* 204 Kn.): at this moment, it is possible that her son Amphion is standing slightly apart, alone or with his brother Zethus. Antiope tells her miserable story (*frr.* 180 and 207 Kn.), prompting Amphion to react with disbelief (*frr.* 209 and 210 Kn.), and is therefore forced to dispel his doubts (*frr.* 205 and 208 Kn.). Three fragments which contain either Antiope's expressions of sorrow, or the Chorus or Amphion's comments (211, 214 and 218 Kn.), probably belong to this scene. Instead, there is great uncertainty over two other fragments (217 and 222 Kn.), which deal with the painful condition of the slaves (217) and with Justice ultimately showing who is not evil (222). If these fragments too can be attributed to our scene, they should be interpreted as a reference to Antiope's mistreatment at the hands of Dirce, the wife of Lycus, and as a prophecy that the truth will be revealed¹⁴.

Noteworthy for our analysis is *fr.* 214 Kn.¹⁵, handed down by Stobaeus (IV 22, 93 Hense) and, in a partial form, by an Oxyrhynchus papyrus (*POxy.* 3214.6 Haslam)¹⁶, providing an anthology of Euripidean quotations¹⁷.

¹³ Most editors do not take a position either in favour of an early (427-419 BCE) or later date (411-407 BCE). See, for example, F. JOUAN – H. VAN LOOY (éd.), *Euripide. Tragédies*, VIII.1, Paris 1998, pp. 220-221; C. COLLARD – M.J. CROPP – J. GIBERT (eds.), *Euripides. Selected Fragmentary Plays*, II, Oxford 2004, p. 269; R. KANNICHT (ed.), *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, V, Göttingen 2004, p. 274; A.M. BIGA (a cura di), *L'Antiope di Euripide*, Trento 2015, pp. 34-36. More recently, S. CASTELLANETA, *Sulla datazione dell'Antiope di Euripide*, «Frammenti sulla Scena» 1 (2020) argued that Euripides' *Antiope* can be dated to the spring of 407 BCE.

¹⁴ See A.M. BIGA (a cura di), *L'Antiope...*, cit., pp. 44-45. For other hypotheses on the reconstruction of this scene, see T.B.L. WEBSTER, *The Tragedies of Euripides*, London 1967, pp. 208-209; J. KAMBITIS (éd.), *L'Antiope d'Euripide*, Athènes 1972, pp. XV-XVII; P.A. DE NICOLA, *Sulla trama e sul testo dell'Antiope di Euripide*, «RAAN» 48 (1973), pp. 222-224; F. JOUAN - H. VAN LOOY (éd.), *Euripide...*, cit., p. 233; C. COLLARD – M.J. CROPP – J. GIBERT (eds.), *Euripides...*, cit., pp. 262-263.

¹⁵ Note that some scholars have proposed assigning this fragment to Euripides' *Antigone*. See the bibliographical references in R. KANNICHT (ed.), *Tragicorum...*, cit., p. 301. C. COLLARD – M. CROPP (eds.), *Euripides. Fragments*, VII, Cambridge - London 2008, pp. 222-223 print it in a section of unplaced fragments between *Antigone* and *Antiope*.

¹⁶ For a recent study of this papyrus, see M.C. MARTINELLI, *GNOM 44 (P.Oxy. 3214)*, in *Corpus dei papiri filosofici greci e latini*, II.3, Firenze 2017, pp. 312-320.

¹⁷ For the Greek text of Euripides' fragments I have used, here and elsewhere, the edition by R. KANNICHT (ed.), *Tragicorum...*, cit. The English translation is by C. COLLARD – M.J. CROPP – J. GIBERT (eds.), *Euripides...*, cit.

κῆδος καθ' αὐτὸν τὸν σοφὸν κτᾶσθαι χρεῶν.

A wise man ought to marry at his own level.

The fragment evokes lines 887-890 of *Prometheus Bound*. The phrase κῆδος καθ' αὐτὸν can be compared with the sentence τὸ κηδεῦσαι καθ' ἑαυτὸν (l. 890); moreover, the idea that a wise man should marry at his own level recalls the reference to the sage who, according to the Oceanids, first conceived this idea and gave verbal expression to it (ll. 887-889). When we consider these formal analogies alongside certain details of Antiope's myth, such as the love of Zeus and the misfortunes associated with it, the reasons for the evocation of the theme of not marrying above one's station in *Antiope* appear to be similar to those in *Prometheus Bound*. It is therefore likely that our fragment is uttered by the Chorus¹⁸ and takes the form of a broader reflection, with a markedly gnomic overtone, prompted by the unhappy story of a tragic heroine that the Chorus have just heard.

The last case where the theme we are investigating involves a remark of this kind, but also foreshadows some implications we will find in other tragedies (see below), is the fourth episode of Euripides' *Electra*, a play which is currently believed to date between 422 and 417 BCE¹⁹. Electra delivers a speech of accusation in front of the body of Aegisthus, recently killed by Orestes (ll. 907-956)²⁰: we are particularly interested in lines 930-937 of the speech²¹.

930 πᾶσιν δ' ἐν Ἀργείοισιν ἤκουες τάδε·
 «Ὁ τῆς γυναικός» οὐχὶ «τάνδρὸς ἡ γυνή».
 καίτοι τόδ' αἰσχρὸν, προσστατεῖν γε δωμάτων
 γυναῖκα, μὴ τὸν ἄνδρα· κάκείνους στυγῶ
 τοὺς παῖδας, ὅστις τοῦ μὲν ἄρσενος πατρὸς

¹⁸ This hypothesis is supported by J. KAMBITIS (éd.), *L'Antiope...*, cit., p. 97 and, somewhat doubtfully, by F. JOUAN - H. VAN LOOY (éd.), *Euripide...*, cit., p. 233 and A.M. BIGA (a cura di), *L'Antiope...*, cit., p. 391. Instead, C. COLLARD - M.J. CROPP - J. GIBERT (eds.), *Euripides...*, cit., pp. 294-295 print our text among the unplaced fragments of the tragedy and argue that it is addressed by Antiope against Dirce (see p. 322).

¹⁹ See the discussion in G. AVEZZÙ (a cura di), *Euripide. Elettra*, Milano 2025, pp. LIII-LVI.

²⁰ D. KOVACS, *Euripidea altera*, Leiden-New York-Köln 1996, pp. 110-117 proposes expunging lines 916-924, 930-937 and 941-951, and posits a lacuna after line 914. For a defence of the transmitted text, see G.B. DONZELLI, *Sulle interpolazioni nell'«Elettra» di Euripide*, «Eikasmós» 2 (1991), pp. 109-110; N. DISTILO, *Commento critico-testuale all'Elettra di Euripide*, Padova 2012, pp. 447-448, 450-451, 454-455 and 457-458; M. CROPP (ed.), *Euripides. Electra*, Oxford 2013², p. 207; G. AVEZZÙ (a cura di), *Euripide...*, cit., pp. 369-370.

²¹ The Greek text and English translation are by M. CROPP (ed.), *Euripides...*, cit.

- 935 οὐκ ὠνόμασται, τῆς δὲ μητρὸς ἐν πόλει.
ἐπίσημα γὰρ γήμαντι καὶ μείζω λέχη
τάνδρὸς μὲν οὐδεῖς, τῶν δὲ θηλειῶν λόγος.
- 930 And this is what all the Argives said of you:
«The man's his wife's», and not «The wife's her man's».
This, though, is shameful, a woman in charge of the
household and not the man. I despise those children, too,
who are known in the city not by their father's
935 name but by their mother's.
For if a man makes a notable marriage above his station,
the man is of no account beside the woman.

Through the *topos* of role reversal between man and woman²², Electra highlights three aspects that are degrading for Aegisthus. First, she alludes to the fact that it was Clytemestra who brought him to her home and introduced him to the kingdom (ll. 930-931)²³; then, she notes that the household is shamefully in Clytemestra's hands (ll. 932-933), and finally expresses her contempt for Aegisthus' children²⁴, who are not known by their father's name, but by their mother's (ll. 933-935)²⁵. Electra's speech ends with a general observation belonging to popular wisdom: when a man marries a woman out of his league, people only care about her, not him (ll. 936-937).

Strictly speaking, this observation does not accurately portray Aegisthus' situation, who is not inferior to Agamemnon from a genealogical point of view, but is as worthy of being the husband of Clytemestra. Electra's speech appears rather to be prompted by Aegisthus' shameful subjugation, which leads him to refuse the role a man should play in a couple's relationship, with all the tragic consequences this entails on a social level. From the perspective of Electra, Aegisthus' humiliating condition is akin to that of someone who enters into a marriage

²² This *topos* is used elsewhere by Euripides (see, for example, *Or.* 742, with the commentary by E. MEDDA (a cura di), *Euripide. Oreste*, Milano 2001, p. 288 n. 106) and, in the case of Aegisthus, it is also attested in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, where the character's cowardice and his inferiority to Clytemestra and Agamemnon himself are often stressed (see ll. 1224, 1258-1259 and 1625-1627).

²³ Instead, in Hom. *Od.* III 272, Nestor says that it was Aegisthus who brought Clytemestra willingly to his home.

²⁴ A reference to Clytemestra and Aegisthus' children is also found at lines 62 and 626.

²⁵ With due differences, the idea also appears in S. *El.* 365-368, where Electra provocatively urges Chrysothemis to be called by her mother's name. See J.D. DENNISTON (ed.), *Euripides. Electra*, Oxford 1939, p. 162; N. DISTILO, *Commento...*, cit., p. 455; M. CROPP (ed.), *Euripides...*, cit., p. 208; G. AVEZZÙ (a cura di), *Euripide...*, cit., p. 372.

of convenience and accepts a subordinate position to his wife²⁶. Therefore, it seems that Euripides took inspiration from the story of Aegisthus to draw the audiences' attention to a real social problem and foster a reflection on it²⁷.

Social and even legal implications are more closely associated with the theme of not marrying above one's station in two fragmentary plays by Euripides: *Captive Melanippe* and *Phaethon*. The date of *Captive Melanippe*²⁸ and the reconstruction of its plot are both much debated. It is possible, however, to ascribe some fragments to specific thematic groups, one of which deals with marriage (501-503 Kn.). If we leave out *fr.* 503 Kn., whose anapaestic metre suggests that it is uttered by the Chorus, either in the *parodos* or in the *exodos*²⁹, *fr.* 501 and 502 Kn., both of which are in iambic trimeters, turn out to be much more problematic: it is unclear whether they belong to the same scene and who is the *persona loquens*. Let us read *fr.* 502 Kn., handed down by Stobaeus (IV 22, 94 Hense)³⁰.

ὄσοι γαμοῦσι δ' ἢ γένοι κρείσσους γάμους
ἢ πολλὰ χρήματ', οὐκ ἐπίστανται γαμεῖν.
τὰ τῆς γυναικὸς γὰρ κρατοῦντ' ἐν δόμασιν³¹

²⁶ For a different interpretation, see N. DISTILO, *Commento...*, cit., p. 455; M. CROPP (ed.), *Euripides...*, cit., p. 207. The theme of marriage of convenience reappears at lines 1097-1099 of the tragedy. Since these lines, which are also handed down by Stobaeus, without being attributed to any specific author (IV 22, 122 Hense), are regarded as interpolated by most scholars, I have chosen not to consider them in my analysis. See D.L. PAGE, *Actors' Interpolations in Greek Tragedy. Studied with Special Reference to Euripides' Iphigeneia in Aulis*, Oxford 1934, pp. 76 and 102; J.D. DENNISTON (ed.), *Euripides...*, cit., p. 185; J. DIGGLE (ed.), *Euripidis fabulae*, II, Oxonii 1981, p. 103; O. MUSSO (a cura di), *Tragedie di Euripide*, II, Torino 1993, p. 599 n. 95; N. DISTILO, *Commento...*, cit., pp. 545-548; M. CROPP (ed.), *Euripides...*, cit., p. 222; G. AVEZZÙ (a cura di), *Euripide...*, cit., pp. 400-401. The authenticity of lines 1097-1099 is defended by A.N. MICHELINI, *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition*, Madison 1987, pp. 220-221; H.P. FOLEY, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, Princeton-Oxford 2001, p. 237.

²⁷ On the stimulation of the audience's critical thinking in Euripides' *Electra*, see J. BARRETT, *Electra*, in *Brill's Companion to Euripides*, ed. by A. MARKANTONATOS, I, Leiden-Boston 2020, p. 279.

²⁸ On the contrast between the supporters of an early date (around 425 BCE) and those who favour a later date (between 415 and 412 BCE), see the bibliographical references in F. MONTE-MURRO, *La Melanippe Desmotis di Euripide. Tra panellenismo e propaganda*, «Frammenti sulla Scena» 1 (2020), p. 13 n. 69.

²⁹ See C. COLLARD – M.J. CROPP – K.H. LEE (eds.), *Euripides. Selected Fragmentary Plays*, I, Warminster 1995, p. 278; R. KANNICHT (ed.), *Tragicorum...*, cit., p. 550; O. MUSSO – A. BURLANDO (a cura di), *Tragedie di Euripide*, IV, Torino 2009, p. 364 n. 16.

³⁰ The English translation is by C. COLLARD – M.J. CROPP – K.H. LEE (eds.), *Euripides...*, cit.

³¹ F. JOUAN – H. VAN LOOY (éd.), *Euripide. Tragédies*, VIII.2, Paris 2000, p. 388 and O. MUSSO – A. BURLANDO (a cura di), *Tragedie...*, cit., p. 364 accept the emendation of this line proposed by B. SNELL, Review of H. VAN LOOY, *Zes verloren tragedies van Euripides. Studie met kritische*

5 δουλοῖ τὸν ἄνδρα, κούκέτ' ἔστ' ἐλεύθερος·
 πλοῦτος δ' ἑπακτός ἐκ γυναικείων γάμων
 ἀνόνητος· αἱ γὰρ διαλύσεις <οὐ> ῥάδιαι.

Men who make a marriage above their rank,
 or marry wealth, do not know how to marry.
 The wife's sway in the house
 enslaves the husband, and he is no longer free.
 5 Imported wealth coming from marriage with a woman
 brings no benefit; for divorces are <not> easy.

Lines 1-2 of the fragment focus on two motifs, the superiority of birth and the abundance of riches, that we have already found at lines 891-893 of *Prometheus Bound*, as a part of a broader reflection on how a wife should be chosen wisely. In the following lines 3-6, two other motifs appear, with obvious social and legal implications. The first one, to which Euripides – as we have seen – also briefly alludes at lines 932-933 of *Electra*, is the dominant position of the wife in the household, which transforms the husband from a free man into a slave (ll. 3-4): in other words, nobility and wealth are expressly presented as instruments of oppression in the hands of the wife, who uses them to force her husband into a kind of 'domestic captivity'.

The second motif deals with the dowry, which can be disadvantageous as it makes an eventual divorce difficult (ll. 5-6). This aspect evokes a real legal problem, to which the audience must have been particularly sensitive and receptive: although the husband became the administrator of the dowry and was entitled to enjoy the income of it, he was also obliged to return everything to the wife or her guardian, if the marriage ended by divorce or if there were no children³². It

uitgave en vertaling der fragmenten, Bruxelles 1964, «Gnomon» 39 (1967), p. 331: τὰ γὰρ κρατοῦντα τῆς γυναικὸς ἐν δόμοις. Instead, A. NAUCK (ed.), *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, Lipsiae 1889², p. 522; C. COLLARD – M.J. CROPP – K.H. LEE (eds.), *Euripides...*, cit., p. 262 and R. KANNICHT (ed.), *Tragicorum...*, cit., p. 549 print the line as it is transmitted by Stobaeus' manuscripts, but follow Gesner in emending ἐν τοῖς δόμοισι τὸ ἐν δόμοισι. See O. HENSE (ed.), *Ioannis Stobaei Anthologium*, IV.1, Berolini 1909, p. 532.

³² See W. WYSE (ed.), *The Speeches of Isaeus*, Cambridge 1904, pp. 296-297 and 314-315; C.A. SAVAGE, *The Athenian Family. A Sociological and Legal Study Based Chiefly on the Works of the Attic Orators*, Baltimore 1907, pp. 68-69; J.W. JONES, *The Law and Legal Theory of the Greeks. An Introduction*, Oxford 1956, p. 177; A.R.W. HARRISON, *The Law of Athens. The Family and Property*, Oxford 1968, pp. 52-57; W.K. LACEY, *The Family in Classical Greece*, London 1968, pp. 108-110; D.M. SCHAPS, *Economic Rights of Women in Ancient Greece*, Edinburgh 1979, pp. 75-77; L. FOXHALL, *Household, Gender and Property in Classical Athens*, «CQ» 39 (1989), pp. 32-39; C.A. COX, *Household Interests. Property, Marriage Strategies, and Family Dynamics in Ancient Athens*, Princeton 1998, pp. 75 and 119-120; R. OMITOWOJU, *Rape and the Politics of Consent in Classical Athens*, Cambridge 2002, p. 117.

follows that the larger the dowry, the greater the power that the wife could exert over her husband³³.

The only character of *Captive Melanippe* to whom fr. 502 Kn. can be referred is Metapontus³⁴, the eponymous king of the city of Metapontium and the husband of Siris, who welcomes Melanippe into his palace. Unlike Siris, who must have been an important character in the drama³⁵, the role of Metapontus is unclear³⁶. Judging by our fragment, he married a woman of higher station, who puts him into a subordinate position and limits his freedom of action. Since the surviving fragments of the tragedy do not suggest that Metapontus intended to abandon Siris³⁷, the mention of divorce at line 6 should be understood as a more general reference to the constraints on a man marrying a woman who is nobler and wealthier than he is.

The theme of the different social standing of Metapontus and Siris must have been relevant in the plot of *Captive Melanippe*, but the fragmentary nature of the play makes it difficult to determine exactly what this entailed. It is likely that Euripides used this theme to highlight the fragile nature of the relationship between the two characters and emphasize the problems arising from their inability to have children of their own and from Metapontus' decision to adopt Melanippe's children, which caused Siris great suffering³⁸.

³³ It is worth noting that many attempts were made to reduce the size of dowries throughout Greek history. See C.A. SAVAGE, *The Athenian Family...*, cit., p. 71; D.M. SCHAPS, *Economic Rights...*, cit., p. 79. According to Plato (*Lg.* VI 774c), the outcome of such attempts would be less insolence on the part of the wives and less humiliation and servility on the part of the husbands.

³⁴ See C. COLLARD – M.J. CROPP – K.H. LEE (eds.), *Euripides...*, cit., p. 247; F. JOUAN - H. VAN LOOY (éd.), *Euripide...*, cit., p. 371.

³⁵ See M. HUYS, *The Tale of the Hero Who Was Exposed at Birth in Euripidean Tragedy: A Study of Motifs*, Leuven 1995, p. 321.

³⁶ According to T.B.L. WEBSTER, *The Tragedies...*, cit., p. 155, Metapontus only appeared at the end of the tragedy, after the death of Siris.

³⁷ The detail is attested in a scholium on line 461 of Dionysius' *Periegesis*. See C. MÜLLER (ed.), *Geographi Graeci Minores*, II, Parisiis 1861, p. 449. On the many versions of the myth of Melanippe, a list of which is found in C. COLLARD – M.J. CROPP – K.H. LEE (eds.), *Euripides...*, cit., p. 240 and R. KANNICHT (ed.), *Tragicorum...*, cit., pp. 537-538, see H. VAN LOOY, *Zes verloren tragedies van Euripides. Studie met kritische uitgave en vertaling der fragmenten*, Bruxelles 1964, pp. 244-253; A.M. BIGA, *Euripide e la storia di Melanippe a Metaponto*, «Hesperia» 32 (2015), pp. 210-218.

³⁸ See fr. 491 Kn., with the observations by R. WÜNSCH, *Zu den Melanippen des Euripides*, «RhM» 49 (1894), p. 100; H. VAN LOOY, *Zes verloren tragedies van Euripides...*, cit., pp. 273, 276 and 303; M. HUYS, *The Tale of the Hero...*, cit., p. 355 n. 948; F. MONTEMURRO, *La Melanippe Desmotis di Euripide...*, cit., p. 17 n. 92. Other scholars argue that the fragment does not rule out the possibility that Siris eventually gave Metapontus children, as we read in Hyg. *fab.*

The other tragedy of Euripides where the theme of not marrying above one's station has social and legal implications is *Phaethon*, which recent editors date to around 420 BCE³⁹. The fragment which interests us here (775, 158-159 Kn.) belongs to the first episode of the tragedy (*fr.* 773-777 Kn.)⁴⁰. A herald solemnly calls for silence, because Merops, the king of Aethiopia and the supposed father of Phaethon, is about to announce his son's wedding, which will take place that very day (*fr.* 773, 111-118 Kn.). Since Phaethon's marriage is not found elsewhere in Greek literature, this is very likely an invention of Euripides. The identity of the betrothed, almost certainly a divine character, is obscure and many hypotheses have been made: one of the Heliades or Oceanids, Aurora, Selene, Aphrodite and Harmonia⁴¹.

After the herald's announcement, there is an *ἀγών* between Merops and Phaethon⁴², which has come down to us in a severely incomplete state. One of the topics of this *ἀγών* must have been Phaethon's refusal to marry, as can be inferred from *fr.* 775, 158-159 Kn.⁴³ This fragment is quoted by Eustathius of Thessalonica (1731, 54-55 Stallbaum), in his commentary on Hom. *Od.* XIII 15, while only the second line is also transmitted by Plutarch (*Mor.* 498a), but in a metrically incorrect form (τὸ σῶμα πεπραμένον τῆς φερνῆς ἔχων)⁴⁴.

186, 5. See D.L. PAGE, *Select Papyri*, III, Cambridge - London 1941, p. 110; T.B.L. WEBSTER, Review of H. VAN LOOY, *Zes verloren tragedies van Euripides. Studie met kritische uitgave en vertaling der fragmenten*, Bruxelles 1964, «JHS» 86 (1966), p. 180; T.B.L. WEBSTER, *The Tragedies...*, cit., p. 152.

³⁹ See F. JOUAN – H. VAN LOOY (éd.), *Euripide. Tragédies*, VIII.3, Paris 2002, p. 233; R. KANNICHT (ed.), *Tragicorum...*, cit., p. 800.

⁴⁰ On the reconstruction of this episode, see T.B.L. WEBSTER, *The Tragedies...*, cit., pp. 223-224; J. DIGGLE (ed.), *Euripides. Phaethon*, Cambridge 1970, pp. 38-40; F. JOUAN – H. VAN LOOY (éd.), *Euripide...*, cit., pp. 240-241.

⁴¹ For these hypotheses, see the bibliographical references in F. JOUAN – H. VAN LOOY (éd.), *Euripide...*, cit., pp. 236-238 and O. MUSSO – A. BURLANDO (a cura di), *Tragedie...*, cit., p. 499 n. 28.

⁴² For an overview on *ἀγῶνες* in Euripides, see M. LLOYD, *The Agon in Euripides*, Oxford 1992.

⁴³ Some scholars have proposed placing the fragment at the beginning of the tragedy, either in the prologue or in the dialogue between Phaethon and his mother Clymene. See the discussion in S. ONORI, *Frammenti di una tragedia familiare: conflitti generazionali nel Fetonte di Euripide*, «Frammenti sulla Scena» 0 (2019), pp. 83-85.

⁴⁴ See J. DIGGLE (ed.), *Euripides...*, cit., pp. 127-129; A. BARIGAZZI, *Il Faetonte e il Bellerofonte di Euripide in un passo di Plutarco*, «Prometheus» 16 (1990), pp. 97-106; IDEM (a cura di), *Plutarco. Se la virtù si debba insegnare*, Napoli 1993, pp. 186-188. The English translation of the Euripidean fragment is by C. COLLARD – M.J. CROPP – K.H. LEE (eds.), *Euripides...*, cit.

158 ἑλεύθερος δ' ὢν δοῦλός ἐστι τοῦ λέχους,
πεπραμένον τὸ σῶμα τῆς φερνῆς ἔχων.

158 Although he is a free man, he is a slave to his marriage-bed,
for he has sold his body for the dowry.

The idea that a man ceases to be free and becomes a slave to his wife due to her wealth recalls lines 3-6 of the above-mentioned *fr.* 502 Kn. of *Captive Melanippe*. The gnomic tone of Phaethon's words, which is typical of oratorical debates⁴⁵, suggests that the young man, engaged in an ἀγών with his father Merops, is using a wise and universally shared statement to strengthen the reasons for his refusal to marry. While these reasons remain unclear, our fragment sheds light on at least one of them: Phaethon is not willing to sell himself for the dowry (φερνῆς, l. 159)⁴⁶, because this would result in him losing his social and legal independence⁴⁷.

Euripides' introduction of the detail of Phaethon's marriage is aimed at increasing the protagonist's tragic experiences⁴⁸. His desire to discover his father's identity is due not only to a rightful wish to understand his origins, but also to the urgent necessity of establishing his true lineage, given the prospect of a marriage above his station, which risks having bad consequences, if he is not the son of Helios. By evoking a real problem of contemporary Greek society⁴⁹, Euripides breathes new life into a famous mythical tale and explores unexpected features of it.

I would like to conclude my analysis with two plays, Euripides' *Andromache* and the *Rhesus* attributed to Euripides, where the theme of not marrying above

⁴⁵ See J. DUCHEMIN, *L'ἀγών dans la tragédie grecque*, Paris 1945, p. 101.

⁴⁶ This is the technical term which, together with προίξ, refers to dowry in the Attic language of the classical age. On the relationship between these two terms, see D.M. SCHAPS, *Economic Rights...*, cit., p. 100.

⁴⁷ Another reason which is often evoked by scholars is Phaethon's aversion to marriage as such, similarly to another famous character from Euripides' theatre, namely Hippolytus. See T.B.L. WEBSTER, *The Tragedies...*, cit., pp. 224-225; K.J. RECKFORD, *Phaethon, Hippolytus, and Aphrodite*, «TAPhA» 103 (1972), pp. 409 and 422-423; C. COLLARD – M.J. CROPP – K.H. LEE (eds.), *Euripides...*, cit., p. 199. However, F. JOUAN – H. VAN LOOY (éd.), *Euripide...*, cit., pp. 243-244 and S. ONORI, *Il corpo al prezzo della dote: per un'indagine sulle ragioni della riluttanza alle nozze nel Fetonte di Euripide*, in *The Forgotten Theatre II. Mitologia, drammaturgia e tradizione del dramma frammentario greco-romano*, a cura di L. AUSTA, Baden-Baden 2020, pp. 101-105 disagree with this interpretation.

⁴⁸ See H. WEIL, *Observations sur les fragments d'Euripide*, «REG» 2 (1889), p. 327; F. JOUAN – H. VAN LOOY (éd.), *Euripide...*, cit., p. 236.

⁴⁹ See J. DIGGLE (ed.), *Euripides...*, cit., pp. 125-127.

one's station has implications which are unusual in Greek tragedy. I begin with *Andromache*, a play that most scholars date to around 425 BCE⁵⁰, focusing on lines 1279-1283⁵¹.

1280 κἄτ' οὐ γαμειν δῆτ' ἕκ τε γενναίων χρεῶν
δοῦναί τ' ἐς ἐσθλοῦς, ὅστις εὖ βουλευέται,
κακῶν δὲ λέκτρων μὴ ἴπιθυμίαν ἔχειν,
μηδ' εἰ ζαπλοῦτους οἴσεται φερνὰς δόμοις;
[οὐ γάρ ποτ' ἂν πράξειαν ἐκ θεῶν κακῶς.]

1280 And so after that should not whoever is prudent
marry from the noble and give in marriage to the good,
and not desire a bad marriage
even if it brings a lavish dowry for the house?
[For they would never suffer misfortune from the gods.]

These lines belong to the conclusion of Peleus' response to a previous speech by his wife Thetis (ll. 1231-1272) and are followed by a brief intervention by the Chorus (ll. 1284-1288), which brings the tragedy to its end. Line 1283 is regarded as interpolated by most scholars: it is quoted by Stobaeus (IV 22, 100 Hense), but in a slightly different form (οὐ γάρ ποτ' ἂν πράξειαν ἐς τέλος κακῶς), as belonging to Euripides' *Antiope* (fr. 215, 3 Kn.), and it seems superfluous here. Instead, lines 1279-1282 pose greater problems. The authenticity of these lines, which are also quoted by Stobaeus, albeit with some variations, but are not attributed to any specific tragedy of Euripides (IV 22, 120 Hense), has been questioned by some scholars⁵² and defended by others⁵³. We are also inclined to believe that lines 1279-1282 are genuine.

In Peleus' speech, the theme we are examining is approached in an original

⁵⁰ See P.T. STEVENS (ed.), *Euripides. Andromache*, Oxford 1971, p. 19; J. DIGGLE (ed.), *Euripidis fabulae*, I, Oxonii 1984, p. 276; M. LLOYD (ed.), *Euripides. Andromache*, Warminster 2005², p. 13; E. SCHARFFENBERGER, *Andromache*, in *Brill's Companion to Euripides*, ed. by A. MARKANTONATOS, I, Leiden-Boston 2020, p. 143.

⁵¹ The Greek text and English translation are by M. LLOYD (ed.), *Euripides...*, cit.

⁵² See G. NORWOOD (ed.), *The Andromache of Euripides*, London 1906, p. 120; P.T. STEVENS (ed.), *Euripides...*, cit., p. 246; J. DIGGLE (ed.), *Euripidis...*, cit., p. 332; M. LLOYD (ed.), *Euripides...*, cit. p. 177.

⁵³ See A. GARZYA (a cura di), *Euripides. Andromacha*, Leipzig 1978, p. 49; O. MUSSO (a cura di), *Tragedie di Euripide*, I, Torino 1980, p. 540; A.H. SOMMERSTEIN, *The End of Euripides' Andromache*, «CQ» 38 (1988), pp. 243-246; D. KOVACS (ed.), *Euripides. Children of Heracles. Hippolytus. Andromache. Hecuba*, II, Cambridge-London 1995, p. 388; D. ARNSON SVARLIEN – R. SCODEL (eds.), *Euripides. Andromache. Hecuba. Trojan Women*, Indianapolis-Cambridge 2012, pp. 56 and 184-185.

way: rather than opposing marriage between people of different social backgrounds and economic means outright, Peleus raises an ethical issue. The problem does not lie in marrying nobly and giving one's children to honourable families – indeed, this is typical of a man who is prudent (l. 1280) –, but in aspiring to marry a bad woman only for her dowry (φερνάς, l. 1282)⁵⁴.

Peleus' reasoning can be regarded as the moral of the entire tragedy, which is perfectly in line with what the character stated elsewhere throughout the play and mirrors the different choices made by himself and his nephew Neoptolemus. When Menelaus tries to kill Andromache and her son, Peleus intervenes in their defence and recalls that he had advised Neoptolemus against marrying into Menelaus' family and taking the daughter of an evil woman into his home⁵⁵. Moreover, Peleus urges future suitors to take care and be sure to wed the daughter of a worthy mother (ll. 619-623)⁵⁶, and also argues that it is better to have a father-in-law who is poor and decent, rather than rich and despicable (ll. 639-641)⁵⁷. In line with these statements, Peleus did not marry Thetis for her wealth, but for her noble origins and nature, as implied at lines 1279-1280. Ultimately, he reaps the fruits of his foresight, because Thetis promises to make him an immortal god (ll. 1253-1256): these are the advantages of his marriage⁵⁸.

By contrast, Neoptolemus made a different choice, which is alluded to at lines 1281-1282. He married Hermione, a selfish woman who does not care about him and often behaves cruelly and impiously⁵⁹; she has indeed illustrious parents,

⁵⁴ We have found the same technical term in E. *Phaëth. fr.* 775, 159 Kn. See footnote 46. In the rest of *Andromache*, the dowry is always called ἔδov (ll. 2, 153 and 873), a term which usually refers to the gifts offered to the bride's father in the Homeric poems (see, for example, *Il.* XVI 175-178; *Od.* VI 158-159), but which already takes the meaning of "dowry" in Pi. *O.* IX 10. See P.T. STEVENS (ed.), *Euripides...*, cit., pp. 86-87.

⁵⁵ She is Hermione, the daughter of Helen and the bride of Neoptolemus.

⁵⁶ On this address to an imaginary audience, see P.T. STEVENS (ed.), *Euripides...*, cit., p. 171; M. LLOYD (ed.), *Euripides...*, cit., p. 144. More generally, see D. BAIN, *Audience Address in Greek Tragedy*, «CQ» 25 (1975), p. 20; D. BAIN, *Some Reflections on the Illusion in Greek Tragedy*, «BICS» 34 (1987), p. 4. It is also worth noting that the opposition between κακῆς γυναικός (l. 621) and ἐσθλῆς ... μητρόσ (l. 623) evokes the opposition between ἐς ἐσθλοῦσ and κακῶν δὲ λέκτρον at lines 1280-1281 of our passage.

⁵⁷ On this kind of contrasts, often used by Euripides, see W. ALLAN, *The Andromache and Euripidean Tragedy*, Oxford 2000, pp. 186-187.

⁵⁸ On the function of the marriage between Peleus and Thetis in Euripides' *Andromache*, see M.S. MIRTO, *La figura di Teti e la crisi del gamos eroico nell'Andromaca di Euripide*, «MD» 69 (2012), pp. 45-69; D. MILO, *Suggestions and Themes in Thetis' rhesis in Euripides' Andromache*, in *The Staying Power of Thetis. Allusion, Interaction, and Reception from Homer to the 21st Century*, ed. by M. PAPROCKI – G.P. VOS – D.J. WRIGHT, Berlin-Boston 2023, pp. 92-104.

⁵⁹ For an overview on Hermione, see H.M. ROISMAN, *Euripides: Andromache*, London-New York-Oxford-New Delhi-Sydney 2023, pp. 74-81.

but they are often portrayed negatively by the other characters in the play. Euripides does not make the reasons of Neoptolemus' choice explicit, but one can guess that an important role was played by Hermione's rich dowry. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the woman's first words on stage are precisely about her dowry (ll. 147-154): she mentions the gold circlet adorning her head and the embroidered robe she is wearing, which are the gifts from her father Menelaus and an integral part of her huge dowry (πολλοῖς σὺν ἔδνοις, l. 153). Later in the tragedy, the nurse tries to reassure Hermione, who fears that Neoptolemus will punish her for the failed attempt to murder Andromache and her son, arguing that he will never reject his bride: Neoptolemus did not take Hermione prisoner at Troy, but obtained her as the daughter of a nobleman, with a rich dowry (σὺν πολλοῖς ... ἔδνοισι, ll. 872-873)⁶⁰.

Peleus' speech at lines 1279-1282 is therefore consistent with the dramatic developments of the tragedy, giving an overall interpretation of it, which sheds new light on the theme of our analysis. Marriage above one's station is not to be avoided in itself, provided that the woman is led by sound moral principles, the lack of which cannot be compensated for by a large dowry.

Equally unusual is the treatment of our theme in *Rhesus*, most likely the work of an imitator of Euripides in the 4th century BCE⁶¹. In the first episode (ll. 52-223), after Dolon volunteers to spy on the Greeks and report to the Trojans on their plans, Hector discusses with him about the reward he should receive (ll. 164-183). More precisely, he tries to guess what Dolon wants in exchange for his feat and therefore makes a series of hypotheses, including marriage to one of Priam's daughters, gold, prisoners, a rich ransom, and the spoils of war. Dolon flatly rejects all of these rewards and dispels Hector's doubts by explicitly asking for Achilles' horses⁶². Let us consider Hector's first hypothesis (ll. 167-168)⁶³.

⁶⁰ This reasoning implicitly suggests that, if Neoptolemus divorced Hermione, he would have to return the dowry to her. See P.T. STEVENS (ed.), *Euripides...*, cit., p. 199. On the power that the dowry grants to Hermione, see W. ALLAN, *The Andromache...*, cit., p. 178; L. PAPADIMITROPOULOS, *Marriage and Strife in Euripides' Andromache*, «GRBS» 46 (2006), p. 149.

⁶¹ See V. LIAPIS (ed.), *A Commentary on the Rhesus Attributed to Euripides*, Oxford 2012, pp. LXVII-LXXV; A. FRIES (ed.), *Pseudo-Euripides, Rhesus*, Berlin - Boston 2014, pp. 22-47; M. FANTUZZI (ed.), *The Rhesus Attributed to Euripides*, Cambridge 2020, pp. 16-41.

⁶² Quite different is what we read in the dialogue between Hector and Dolon in the corresponding episode of Homer's *Iliad* (X 313-332): here Dolon immediately asks for Achilles' horses and Hector swears that he will grant them to him. See W. RITCHIE, *The Authenticity of the Rhesus of Euripides*, Cambridge 1964, p. 67; O. MUSSO – A. BURLANDO (a cura di), *Tragedie...*, cit., p. 588 n. 35; M. FANTUZZI (ed.), *The Rhesus...*, cit., p. 230.

⁶³ The Greek text and English translation are by M. FANTUZZI (ed.), *The Rhesus...*, cit. and D. KOVACS (ed.), *Euripides. Bacchae. Iphigenia at Aulis. Rhesus*, VI, Cambridge - London 2002 respectively.

- 167 Εκ. σὺ δ' ἀλλὰ γήμας Πριαμιδῶν γαμβρὸς γενοῦ.
 Δο. οὐδ' ἐξ ἑμαυτοῦ μειζόνων γαμεῖν θέλω.
- 167 He. Well then, marry and become brother-in-law of Priam's sons.
 Do. I do not want a marriage tie with my betters.

The reward that Hector imagines Dolon desires has political implications and entails an elevation of his social status, through marriage to a Trojan princess. By placing this reward at the beginning, the author of *Rhesus* reverses the order of the gifts that, in another Homeric episode, Agamemnon is willing to bestow on Achilles, in the hope that he will come back to fight alongside the Greeks (*Il.* IX 121-157): in this passage, Agamemnon's promise to give Achilles one of his three daughters (Chrysothemis, Laodice or Iphianassa) is made at the end. Achilles refuses to marry above his station (*Il.* IX 388-400)⁶⁴, as does Dolon in *Rhesus*, although for different reasons.

Dolon's words are inserted into a markedly comic context⁶⁵. Lines 164-183 evoke a peculiar dialogic device, known as 'the guessing game', which is frequently attested in Greek comedy and consists in a bantering exchange between two people, the aim of which is to disclose some kind of information through a progressive series of guesses⁶⁶. In Aristophanes, for example, there are many scenes where a character makes various attempts to try to know something: the title of the play where Euripides staged a hero dressed in rags (*Ach.* 418-431); the true nature of the illness afflicting Philocleon (*V.* 74-88); the reasons for the travel of Dionysus to the underworld (*Ra.* 52-67). From a thematic perspective, one may compare a scene from Menander's *Perikeiromene*, where the guessing game deals with the identification of the reward the slave Daos wishes to receive from his master Moschion, after a service he has just rendered him (*ll.* 275-291)⁶⁷.

Dolon's refusal to marry one of Priam's daughters in *Rhesus* activates this comic

⁶⁴ See B. HAINSWORTH (ed.), *The Iliad: A Commentary*, III, Cambridge 1993, p. 114.

⁶⁵ On the comic aspects of Dolon's episode in *Rhesus*, see A.P. BURNETT, *Rhesus: Are Smiles Allowed?*, in *Directions in Euripidean Criticism. A Collection of Essays*, ed. by P. BURIAN, Durham 1985, pp. 20-25.

⁶⁶ For an overview, see M. FANTUZZI – D. KONSTAN, *From Achilles' Horses to a Cheese-Seller's Shop. On the History of the Guessing Game in Greek Drama*, in *Greek Comedy and the Discourse of Genres*, ed. by E. BAKOLA – L. PRAUSCELLO – M. TELÒ, Cambridge 2013, pp. 256-274. The guessing game is also found in Euripides' theatre, where it has the function to stir pity and related emotions in the audience. See M. DUBISCHAR, 'Microstructure' in *Greek Tragedy: From Bad to Worse – Wrong Guesses in Euripidean Stichomythia (Including a Comparison with Aeschylus and Sophocles). Part I. Description and Analysis*, «Mnemosyne» 60 (2007), pp. 1-24.

⁶⁷ On the relationship between this Menandrian scene and our passage, see M. FANTUZZI – D. KONSTAN, *From Achilles' Horses to a Cheese-Seller's Shop...*, cit., p. 265-273.

mechanism, which prompts Hector to make many hypotheses on what Dolon is keen to obtain. Euripides' aim is to create a sense of amusing suspense, by delaying the awaited mention of the 'right' reward for Dolon, which, as anyone who has read the *Iliad* knows, consists in Achilles' horses.

All in all, we have seen that the theme of not marrying above one's station is treated in various ways in Greek tragedy, from the 5th to the 4th century BCE, and has interesting implications for dramaturgy and audience reception. Sometimes, the theme belongs to conventional wisdom, when it is used either to make a comment on the stories of Io and Antiope, suffering because of Zeus' love, in *Prometheus Bound* and Euripides' *Antiope* respectively, or to blame Aegisthus' choice to refuse the role he should play in marriage, in Euripides' *Electra*.

Elsewhere, the theme has clear social and legal implications, evoking a real problem to which the audience is particularly sensitive and receptive: I am referring to the wife's dominant position in the household, due to her large dowry, and to the husband's loss of freedom. Precisely this problem is alluded to in Euripides' *Captive Melanippe*, where it leads to speculate on Metapontus and Siris' relationship, as well as on the consequences of Siris' sterility, and in Euripides' *Phaethon*, where it stands out as evidence of the poet's intention to transform and 'update' a famous myth.

Finally, the theme is exploited in unusual ways in Euripides' *Andromache* and in the *Rhesus* attributed to Euripides. In the former tragedy, Peleus urges to pay attention to the moral integrity of a wife, regardless of her wealth; in *Rhesus*, Dolon's wish not to marry a woman of a higher rank is inserted into the dialogic device of the guessing game, which delays the disclosure of a well-known detail of the story, to the audience's great amusement.

These results show that, in Greek tragedy, the theme we have investigated is not just a variation on the motto 'like to like', applied to an erotic context. On the contrary, we deal here with a dynamic and multi-faceted topic, which is skillfully used by tragic poets to serve different needs, concerning characterization, plot development and audience engagement, and to reflect on real-life issues, as is often the case in theatrical performances.

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