

Line Transposition in Euripides *Alcestis* 1094–1096

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EDITORS AND COMMENTATORS have long been distressed by two lines in the stichomythic dialogue between Admetus and Heracles in the final scene of the *Alcestis* (1094–1095). Wilamowitz suggested deleting them and most editors put them between square brackets.¹ The text offered by the manuscripts is as follows (textual variants in line 1094 will be discussed below):

{Hr.} γυνή σε παύσει καὶ νέοι γάμοι πόθου.
{Ad.} σίγησον· οἶον εἶπας. οὐκ ἂν φόμην.
{Hr.} τί δ'; οὐ γαμεῖς γὰρ ἀλλὰ χηρεύση λέχος;
{Ad.} οὐκ ἔστιν ἥτις τῷδε συγκλιθήσεται. 1090
{Hr.} μῶν τὴν θανοῦσαν ὠφελεῖν τι προσδοκᾶς;
{Ad.} κείνην ὅπουπερ ἔστι τιμᾶσθαι χρεῶν.
{Hr.} αἰνῶ μὲν αἰνῶ· μωρίαν δ' ὀφλισκάνεις.
[{Ad.} ὡς μήποτ' ἄνδρα τόνδε νυμφίον καλῶν.
{Hr.} ἐπήνεσ' ἀλόχῳ πιστὸς οὐνεκ' εἰ φίλος.] 1095
{Ad.} θάνοιμ' ἐκείνην καίπερ οὐκ οὔσαν προδοῦς.
{Hr.} δέχου νυν εἴσω τήνδε γενναίων δόμων.
{Ad.} μή, πρὸς σε τοῦ σπείραντος ἄντομαι Διός.
{Hr.} καὶ μὴν ἀμαρτήση γε μὴ δράσας τάδε.

¹ G. Murray, *Euripidis Fabulae* I (Oxford 1902), reports Wilamowitz's suggestion (*per litteras*) in his apparatus, although in his own translation of the play he actually deleted 1093–1094: cf. L. P. E. Parker, *Euripides. Alcestis* (Oxford 2007) 269. A. M. Dale, *Euripides. Alcestis* (Oxford 1954), J. Diggle, *Euripidis Fabulae* I (Oxford 1984), D. Kovacs, *Euripides* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1994), and Parker put 1094–1095 between square brackets. Only L. Méridier, *Euripide* I (Paris 1926), and G. A. Seeck, *Euripides Alkestis* (Berlin 2008), keep the manuscript text unaltered. For other proposed emendations of these lines see nn.6 and 8 below.

H.: A woman and a new union will put an end to your longing.

A.: Hush! What a shocking thing you have said! I should never have
thought it of you.

H.: What? Will you never marry but keep a widower's bed?

A.: No woman shall ever lie beside me. 1090

H.: Do you suppose you are doing your dead wife any good that way?

A.: Wherever she is, she must be held in honor.

H.: I commend you, truly. But you deserve the name of fool.

[A.: You will never call this man a bridegroom.

H.: I commend you for being faithful to your wife.] 1095

A.: May I die if ever I betray her, even though she is gone!

H.: Take this woman, then, into your generous house.

A.: I beg you by Zeus who begot you, do not ask this!

H.: And yet you will be making a mistake if you do not.

(transl. Kovacs)

The main problem with line 1094 is that the only way to understand the *ὡς* sentence is as depending on an implicit *ἴσθι* (a usual construction, suggested by a manuscript variant). However, on such an interpretation the *ὡς* clause should be constructed not with a participle but with a finite verb.² Furthermore, apart from grammatical faultiness, it is also stylistically awkward, since Admetus' assertion refers directly to Heracles' *αἰνῶ μὲν αἰνῶ* in 1093, obviating the second part of the line (*μωρίαν δ' ὀφλισκάνεις*). Besides, both 1094 and 1095 have been often criticized as adding nothing to the progression of the dialogue.³ Only a few scholars focusing on the theme of *philia* in the play have defended 1095, arguing that far from

² Parker, *Alcestis* 269: e.g., in the same play, *Alc.* 800–802; also Soph. *Aj.* 39, *Phil.* 117. There are instances with *ἴσθι* (or similar verbs) + participle negated with *μή* (e.g. Eur. *Heraclid.* 983; Soph. *Ant.* 1063, *Phil.* 253, 415, *OC* 1154–1155), but in all these cases the imperative verb of knowledge is explicit, never omitted. Some early editors attempted to emend the negative participial clause to introduce the more usual *οὐ* (cf. n.6 below), but *ὡς* followed by participle may also be constructed with negative *μή* (cf. n.10).

³ Cf. Dale, *Alcestis* 127: “to say nothing of the grammatical *tour de force* of passing over *μωρίαν δ' ὀφλισκάνεις*, this is all rather feeble and pointless.” Parker, *Alcestis* 169: “these two lines are a very flat repetition of what both have already said.”

being redundant, it emphasizes Admetus' loyalty and love (not so evidently synonymous as moderns often think).⁴ However, suppressing these two lines undoubtedly makes 1096 a neat and meaningful answer to 1093.⁵

As an alternative to deletion, suggestions have been made to emend the participle in 1094 to καλεῖς, or to accept the secondary variant καλεῖν, which surely comes from the syntactic difficulty of the sentence opening with ὥς, but does not solve it. Following a manuscript in which ἴσθι is written above ὥς as an explanation, some conjectures have inserted it into the sentence. Unsurprisingly, none of these suggestions have been successful among most editors.⁶

A third possibility is altering the order of the lines, supposing an instance of line transposition, “an extremely frequent error

⁴ S. Schein, “Φιλία in Euripides' *Alcestis*,” *Mētis* 3 (1988) 201 n.69; G. R. Stanton, “Φιλία and ξενία in Euripides' *Alkestis*,” *Hermes* 118 (1990) 44 n.8.

⁵ Dale, *Alcestis* 127, “1096 is more effective as a rejoinder to 1093 than to 1095”; Parker, *Alcestis* 269, “while 1096 does not follow well on 1095, μωρίαν δ' ὀφλισκάνεις in 1093 invites Admetus to restate his position.”

⁶ H. W. Hayley, *The Alcestis of Euripides* (Boston 1898) 59, selects some conjectures to 1094: “ἴσθ' οὔποτ' — καλῶν Wakefield, ὥς οὔποτ' — καλεῖς Herwerden, οὐ μήποτ' — καλεῖς Kvizala, ὥς μήποτ' ἴσθι τόνδε νυμφίον καλῶν Weidner (rejecting ἄνδρα). Kirchhoff conjectures that two verses have fallen out before this line.” There are other possible solutions: my colleague Felipe Hernández Muñoz calls my attention to the fact that ὥς μήποτε is an uncommon construction particularly used by Euripides (six times but none in the other tragedians), while ὥς μήποτε + participle seems to be a syntactical hapax in classical times, and to the parallel (not only syntactical, but also situational and even phonetically similar) of Phaidra's utterance in Eur. *Hipp.* 420 ὥς μήποτ' ἄνδρα τὸν ἐμὸν αἰσχύνασ' ἄλῶ (“so that I will not be caught shaming my husband”): he therefore conjectures the subjunctive καλῶ instead of the participle καλῶν, which would clear away the grammatical difficulty with an easy correction of a common aural error. However, in my opinion the verb καλῶ (or ἄλῶ) in the first person would fit strangely with Admetus referring to himself as ἄνδρα τόνδε as object of his own action (compare the same expression at *Alc.* 1084).

in poetry.”⁷ A. Garzya recovered a forgotten proposal made in 1868 by K. Schenkl in a footnote in a review:⁸ “die Verse 1093–5 also angeordnet werden müssen: 1095, 1094, 1093, indem nur so ein richtiger Zusammenhang und eine entsprechende Construction hergestellt wird.” This means transposing Heracles’ two utterances (I keep original line numbers for the sake of clarity). However, even if the ὥς sentence of 1094 becomes grammatically acceptable (see next paragraph), saying ἐπήνεσ’ before αἰνῶ μὲν αἰνῶ seems counter to the logic of the speaker, and the progression in Heracles’ thought is absurdly zigzagging: after his surprised question in 1091 he would be praising Admetus’s faithfulness (1095) and then he would recall that nevertheless he will be considered mad (1093).

Schenkl was on the right track, but it is Admetus’ lines, not Heracles’, which must be transposed. Transposing lines 1094 and 1096 solves all linguistic and literary issues. This is the resulting dialogue:

{Αδ.} κείνην ὅπουπερ ἔστι τιμᾶσθαι χρεῶν.	
{Ηρ.} αἰνῶ μὲν αἰνῶ· μωρίαν δ’ ὀφλισκάνεις.	
{Αδ.} θάνοιμι’ ἐκείνην καίπερ οὐκ οὔσαν προδοῦς.	1096
{Ηρ.} ἐπήνεσ’ ἀλόχῳ πιστὸς οὐνεκ’ εἶ φίλος.	1095
{Αδ.} ὥς μήποτ’ ἄνδρα τόνδε νυμφίον καλῶν.	1094
{Ηρ.} δέχου νυν εἴσω τήνδε γενναίων δόμων.	

A.: Wherever she is, she must be held in honor.

H.: I commend you, truly. But you deserve the name of fool.

A.: May I die if ever I betray her, even though she is gone! 1096

H.: I commend you for being faithful and loving to your wife. 1095

A.: Because you will never call this man a bridegroom! 1094

H.: Take this woman, then, into your generous house.

(my translation, adapting Kovacs’)

⁷ L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars* (Oxford 1968) 159. Transposition, however, must be justified, see n.20 below.

⁸ K. Schenkl, “Literarische Anzeigen: *Euripidis fab. et. trag. v. Kirchhoff, Pflugk u. Klotz*,” *ΖῴσιG* 19 (1868) 348 n.8; A. Garzya, *Euripides. Alcestis* (Leipzig 1980), follows Schenkl’s proposal, but emends 1094 with the secondary variant καλεῖν.

Thus ὥς ... καλῶν is much better understood. There is no need to postulate an implicit verb ἴσθι (or any other implicit imperative like ἔπαινε), which would present the aforementioned grammatical difficulty of having a participle instead of a finite verb. Admetus simply continues the sentence of Heracles in the previous line.⁹ He does so with a participle that conveys the cause (from Admetus' subjective viewpoint, underlined by ὥς) of Heracles' *epainein*.¹⁰ The negation with μή instead of the more usual οὐ in a (future) participial clause starting with ὥς has some celebrated parallels in tragedy;¹¹ and the μήποτ' of 1094 can be easily justified with any of the much-debated explanations that these syntactical constructions have received (μή has been said to underline the subjectivity of the character, to introduce a generalising statement, and to be

⁹ E.g. Eur. *Ion* 312–313 quoted below. L. Schuren, *Shared Storytelling in Euripidean Stichomythia* (Leiden 2015) 39, analyses some cases of “completion of one interlocutor’s utterance by the other” (e.g. Eur. *Or.* 775–776, {Ὀρ.} εἰ λέγοιμ' ἀστοῖσιν ἐλθῶν ... {Ἴο.} ὥς ἔδρασαζ ἔνδικα, although in this case ὥς has a finite verb).

¹⁰ The causal sense of μή + participle seems derived from the more common conditional sense of this sort of construction (with or without the reinforcing ὥς): cf. H. S. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1956) 618, 621, and the bibliography quoted in nn.12–13 below. From “in so far as you are not calling this man a groom,” the slight step to “because you are not calling” is easy.

¹¹ The closest is Soph. *Phil.* 935, ἀλλ' ὥς μεθήσων μήποθ', ὦδ' ὄρῳ πάλιν (“he looks away as one determined never to give it up”): cf. J. M. Stahl, *Kritisch-historische Syntax des Griechischen Verbuns der klassischen Zeit* (Heidelberg 1907) 777 (“vereinzelt wegen der voluntativen Bedeutung des Futurums”); also *Ion* 312–313, {Κρ.} ἡμεῖς σ' ἄρ' ἀῦθις, ὦ ξέν', ἀντοικτίρομεν. {Ἴων} ὥς μὴ εἰδῶθ' ἥτις μ' ἔτεκεν ἐξ ὅτου τ' ἔφυν (CR: “so in my turn, stranger, I pity you.” ION: “Because I do not know who gave me birth and from whom I descend”); Eur. *Herac.* 693, ὥς μὴ μενοῦντα τᾶλλα σοι λέγειν πάρα (“talk on, if you like, I will not stay to hear the rest”). For this last case see the comments of J. Wilkins, *Euripides. Heraclidae* (Oxford 1993) 139; and J. Diggle, “Further Notes on the *Heraclidae* of Euripides,” *PCPS* 28 (1982) 60–61 (repr. *Euripidea* [Oxford 1994] 225; his conjecture μενοῦντι would not affect the grammatical parallel).

influenced by an implicit imperative).¹² Most clearly, the speakers' intentional subjectivity emphasized by μή is patent in Admetus, who projects his will into Heracles' future (negative) action. Besides, this sentence can also be taken as yet another instance of the tendency of the Greek language to expand negations with μή in substitution for those with οὐ.¹³

Besides the grammatical advantage, this minimal alteration of the text gives these two lines a more dense literary meaning that assures their authenticity: θάνοιμι' answers directly to μορίαν δ' ὀφλισκάνεις, which was part of the solution both in Wilamowitz's deletion and Schenkl's transposition. After this climactic demonstration of Admetus' self-assertion that leaves no doubt about his inner change after Alcestis' death (now he is really able to sacrifice his life), the stichomythia runs smoothly, with each line echoing the previous one and paving the way of the following ones. Heracles starts by being persuasive: "I praise you because you are faithful and loving to your wife." With this sentence he reassures Admetus that he does not consider him mad, but a good husband, thus implying that his upcoming petition that Admetus host the woman is in fact (as

¹² The participles negated with μή instead of οὐ have been much discussed, often singling out use with ὡς as a particular construction: Kühner-Gerth, *Ausführliche Grammatik* II 200–203; A. C. Moorhouse, "On Negating Greek Participles, Where the Leading Verbs are of a Type to Require μή," *CQ* 42 (1948) 35–40 (38 n.1 for constructions with ὡς); A. F. Braunlich, "Euripides *Medea* 239 and 815: μή with the Causal Participle," *AJP* 77 (1956) 415–418; W. K. Pritchett, "Mή with the Participle," *AJP* 79 (1958) 392–404; P. W. Wallace, "Mή with the Participle in Longus and Achilles Tatius," *AJP* 89 (1968) 321–333; A. C. Moorhouse, *The Syntax of Sophocles* (Leiden 1982) 330–333. Moorhouse holds generic characterization to be the main explanation, while Pritchett (396, the only one to mention *Alcestis* 1094) thinks it is due to an implicit imperative.

¹³ Pritchett, *AJP* 79 (1958) 392–404; Wallace, *AJP* *AJP* 89 (1968) 321–333; Moorhouse, *Syntax of Sophocles* 331, whose explanation of these cases is "this would be an early part of the general extension of the use of μή with participles which is seen in later Greek. It is notable that generic (characterising) sense appears in a number of the Classical examples, and this may be held responsible for the growth of the causal use."

the audience knows) respectful of his promise.¹⁴ Admetus is encouraged by this praise to recall the literal terms of his promise in 330–331 (κούτις ἀντὶ σοῦ ποτε / τόνδ’ ἄνδρα νύμφη Θεσσαλὶς προσφθέγγεται).¹⁵ But for the audience now the setting is ready for the apparently shocking order that precipitates the happy ending of the play: “now receive this one inside your noble house” (1097).

As a result of the transposition, there is a remarkable symmetry of line 1097 with the preceding one (1094): νυν echoes μήποτ’, opposing Admetus’ absoluteness with Heracles’ matter-of-factness; τήνδε echoes τόνδε, with the ironical juxtaposition of both spouses;¹⁶ and the wedding theme suggested by νυμφίον is echoed by δέχου εἴσω δόμων, “receive into your house,” which is precisely what a groom does with the bride.¹⁷ In this way, Euripides starts building the “renewed wedding” of Admetus with his wife, to which he will allude repeatedly in the

¹⁴ Seeck, *Alkestis* 199, rightly defends 1095 as more than a doublet: “Herakles will daraufhin darstellen, dass er nicht die Treu als solche (scil. Torheit) tadelt.” Moreover, the distinction between *philos* and *pistos* full makes sense in the context of the play, cf. n.4 above.

¹⁵ For Dale, *Alkestis* 127, these lines would be the cause of the interpolation of 1094. Yet its full meaning is that Admetus recalls his earlier promise, precisely adopting a more internal tone (from “calling” to “being called”), to underline his own sacrifice. The play is full of internal references that echo in these last dialogues those in the first part of the play: cf. M. Herrero de Jáuregui, “The Meanings of σώζειν in *Alkestis*’ Final Scene,” *Trends in Classics* 8 (2016) 205–225.

¹⁶ Schuren, *Shared Storytelling* 182–183, shows some instances in which ὄδε is anaphoric, referring to what has been said before, instead of pointing to a present person: in this case τήνδε unites ironically both kinds of deixis: it is in both senses Admetus’ ἄλοχος.

¹⁷ Schuren, *Shared Storytelling* 63–66, analyses the ambivalence of γυνή as “woman” and “wife” precisely with the example of the last scene of *Alkestis*. Although her conclusion that the woman is not the real Alkestis is unconvincing, she shows how the dialogue plays with deictic and non-deictic meanings.

following lines.¹⁸ Tragic irony is patent: line 1097 is taken by Admetus as a blunt rejection of his previous noble position, but Heracles and the audience know that this order is precisely a consequence of the faithfulness to his matrimonial promise that Heracles and the audience have just witnessed. The transition in Heracles' utterances is entirely logical for the audience (though not for Admetus), so no lacuna needs to be posited before 1097.¹⁹

It remains to be explained how this transposition could have occurred.²⁰ An accident in transmission may have a variety of causes, and there are many examples in classical literature of omission and transposition of lines for which there is no apparent palaeographical cause. This is even more common in dramatic texts in which actual performances of the piece may have caused alterations in the text. So there is no imperative need to find a specific cause that justifies the transposition. However, a possible reason might be at least suspected in the fact that the affected lines have a similar ending, which is the most typical cause for a copyist omitting some of them, which

¹⁸ On the nuptial imagery in the last scene see M. R. Halleran, "Alkestis Redux," *HSCP* 86 (1982) 51–53, and "Text and Ceremony at the Close of Euripides' *Alkestis*," *Eranos* 86 (1988) 123–129; Parker, *Alkestis* 275–276; H. P. Foley, "Anodos Drama: Euripides' *Alkestis* and *Helen*," in R. Hexter and D. Selden (eds.), *Innovations of Antiquity* (New York/London 1992) 133–160; R. Buxton, *Myths and Tragedies in their Ancient Greek Contexts* (Oxford 2013) 201–218; Herrero de Jáuregui, *Trends in Classics* 8 (2016) 205–209, 218–219.

¹⁹ Parker, *Alkestis* 270 (supposing 1097 comes after 1096) says that it "is a glaring non sequitur" and proposes *exempli gratia* at least two lost lines of this sort: "Heracles: 'do you believe I am your friend and wish you well?' Admetus: 'yes, I certainly do.' Heracles: 'then receive this lady'." This misses all the ironic effect, but in any case with the transposition proposed here, line 1097 cannot be said to be a non sequitur.

²⁰ Cf. M. D. Reeve, "Interpolation in Greek Tragedy, III," *GRBS* 14 (1973) 149 n.9: "transposition of a self-contained and dispensable passage is never preferable to deletion unless some palaeographical cause can be found for the error." In this case both conditions (palaeographical consistency and indispensability) are sufficiently met to defend transposition against deletion.

would entail a later correction, by the same or another copyist, in which the lines are reinserted in the wrong order. Consecutive lines 1093, 1096, and 1095 end with a sigma, though admittedly a single letter is not a very compelling argument to suspect confusion. However, the possibility of a slip of the eye in this passage is strengthened by the similarity of the strings of last letters in the crucial lines (in uncial form, taking into account the respective similarity of angular and round letter shapes): 1092 -ΕΩΝ, 1093 -ΝΕΙC, 1096 -ΔΟΥC, 1095 -ΑΟC, 1094 -ΛΩΝ, 1097 -ΜΩΝ. A possible *saut du meme au meme* between lines 1092 and 1097 would explain the omission of lines 1093–1097. And another likely possibility is the confusion of 1093 -ΝΕΙC (with round epsilon) and 1095 -ΑΟC, which would explain the omission of 1096 and 1095.²¹ A later correction, by the same or another copyist, adding the omitted two lines in the margin or below, would have caused their insertion after 1094.

Whether or not caused by these palaeographical reasons, once the transposition took place, the new position of line 1094 would have led to the aforementioned variant καλεῖν and the gloss ἴσθι because of the awkwardness of the resulting syntax. Besides the linguistic difficulty, the transposed text presented a literary problem, since Heracles' transition to 1097 was not explained: that is why editors such as Kirchhoff or Parker posited a lacuna. The two transposed lines were indispensable, and their absence from their original place caused awkwardness.

²¹ I am grateful for this idea to my colleague Álvaro Cancela. He also suggests a possible confusion of 1096 -ΔΟΥC and 1095 -ΑΟC that could cause the omission of one line. These proposals resist well West's judgment: "the palaeographical argument is looked up to as an ideal by many whose understanding of palaeography is minimal and who think that in order to make a conjecture palaeographically plausible it is only necessary to print it and the transmitted reading in capitals": M. L. West, *Textual Criticism and Editorial Technique* (Stuttgart 1973) 59 n.11. Besides, Cancela underlines that many omissions of lines in poetic texts have no apparent cause (e.g. Soph. *El.* 1244 is omitted in T).

Line transposition is a common phenomenon in poetic (and particularly dramatic) texts that, furthermore, can find here palaeographical justification. But above all, it makes this passage grammatically sound and literarily consistent. We can be confident, therefore, that the original order of the lines was 1093/1096/1095/1094/1097.

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