

A satyr in the closet: the relationship between *Orestes* and *Cyclops*

I propose to discuss the performative and thematic relationship of Euripides' *Orestes* and his *Cyclops*. The dating of Euripides' *Cyclops* is not a settled matter. Notably, several recent commentators refrain from any strong judgements about the play's date (e.g. Hunter and Laemmle 2020). Yet, in general, there seems to be a growing consensus that the play comes late in Euripides' career, with the cumulative weight of evidence pointing to 408 BC – the very year in which *Orestes* was first staged. The implications of dating *Cyclops* to 408 BC are great, not least because it would mean that *Orestes* and *Cyclops* are the only tragic-satyr pair from the same tetralogy to have survived.

However, despite the promise that interpreting *Orestes* and *Cyclops* alongside each other holds for our understanding of the relationship between tragedies and satyr plays, few have ventured to read the plays together. To wit, only Toph Marshall (2001) has paid much attention to the potential relationship between the two plays. In restating the case for dating *Cyclops* to 408 BC, Marshall lays stress on *Cyclops*' poetic and theatrical self-awareness, highlighting especially the verbal and performative allusions to Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. Taking his cue from Froma Zeitlin's (1980) influential characterization of the allusive texture of *Orestes* as a palimpsest, Marshall goes on to suggest that Euripides' final tetralogy in Athens was tied together by an exceptional literary self-consciousness.

My aim in this paper is to develop Marshall's basic claim. Cautiously accepting the date of 408 BC for *Cyclops*, I will argue that, more than merely sharing *Orestes*' broad concern for theatre history, the satyr play pointedly echoes and reconfigures the tragedy's strategies and patterns of allusion. Notably, both *Cyclops* and *Orestes* respond closely, though in different

ways, to the same play, Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. And while, as Craig Jendza has argued recently (2020), *Orestes* engages indirectly with Aristophanes' polemic against Euripidean tragedy in *Thesmophoriazusae*, *Cyclops* instead appears to respond explicitly to the Aristophanic parody (most clearly on l. 222). I will also explore how the *Cyclops* echoes the staging of the chorus in *Orestes* to contrast the interaction of actors and the chorus in the two plays. By tracing these shared points of poetic and performative self-consciousness, I will suggest that Odysseus' success in rewriting his epic script in dramatic form in *Cyclops* functions as a positive counterpoint to Orestes's failure to redefine his mythic-literary identity by attempting to kill Helen, which, as Zeitlin has shown, only replays the original matricide.

References

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