

Misunderstanding Peter Elmsley (Eur. *Medea* 151–154)

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A brilliant classicist and an editor of Greek tragedians on an altogether firmer footing of first-hand acquaintance with the manuscripts, Peter Elmsley (1774–1825) left quite a few conjectures of his own discreetly placed in the margin. While often palmary and deserving to be promoted into the text, ἀπλάτου in Eur. *Medea* 151 in the meaning ‘longing for the forsaken marital bed’ Elmsley imparted to it, sits ill in the broader context and, although accepted by the majority of editors has, in the course of its life, shifted in the direction of ‘unapproachable’, ‘monstrous’, to mean ‘the bed of death we should not approach’. Often unequivocal when referring to wild beasts of Heracles’ labours, in subtler contexts, like the one under discussion, it is often believed to be confounded with ἀπληστος often transmitted by part of the ms. tradition. In the case of *Medea* 151, however, the change is unnecessary, since ἀπληστος of LP can not only offer the meaning ‘insatiable’ referring to ‘marital bed’, but also the fear of the ‘overweening power’ of the ‘bed of death’ which suits what is the first reaction of the Chorus to Medea’s haughty desire to be struck by a thunderbolt of Zeus.

Keywords: Ancient Greek tragedy, Euripides, textual criticism, Peter Elmsley.

Quite a number of both recent and time-tested editions of the tragedies of Euripides have accepted a change introduced by the English classicist Peter Elmsley (1774–1825) in his edition of the *Medea*.¹ Not having the dare to plant it straight into his text — a quality all but lacking in most of his contemporaries — Elmsley discreetly set it in the margin. His commentary offers an insight into the workings of a mind not content with the meaning ‘insatiable’ and willing to have ‘unapproachable’ (better still, ‘no longer approached, forsaken’) instead.

τίς σοί ποτε τὰς ἀπλάτου κοίτας ἔρω, ὦ ματαία; σπεύσεις θανάτου τελευτάν; μηδὲν τότε λίσσου.	151
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151 τίς L et V³ et Σ^{hb}: τί ΗΩΡ et ^{li}Σ^v: καὶ Η^s ἀπλάτου Elmsley: ἀπλάστου ΗΩι: -ήστου DLP et B^s et Σ^{hb}: cf. Σ^{hb}ov ἀκορέστου **152** ἔρω Η^{e2} Tr: ἔρω codd. **153** σπεύσεις Blaydes (vel σπεύδεις): σπεύσει ΗΩιLP et Σ^{hb}

“What is this longing you have for the forsaken bed, you foolish woman? Will you hasten your end in death? Never pray for this.”²

¹ Elmsley 1818, 106 ad loc.

² The translation offered is virtually that of Kovacs 22001, 299, but slightly altered to suit the original intent of the conjecturer. Kovacs has ‘the bed of death, the bed we should not approach’. The text is Diggle 1984, 100.

To briefly set the scene, the Chorus have just arrived at Medea's door and enquire after her. She is yet inside. The Corinthian women have heard her cries from their own porches, as did the audience, and are come. Hence it is of trifling importance whether they have actually been standing at their own doors, which is more natural, or mobbing Medea's back door for a while. With growing anxiety (their switching to lyric dactyls in line 135 proves that they have just learned of the extent of trouble in Medea's household), they ask whether Medea is easier, but as proof of the opposite soon hear her renewed laments and a terrible desire to die (line 98: πῶς ἄν ὀλοίμαν; 144–147: διὰ μου κεφαλᾶς φλόξ οὐρανία / βαιή τί δέ μοι ζῆν ἔτι κέρδος; / φεῦ φεῦ-θανάτω καταλυσαιίμαν / βιοτὰν στρυγερὰν προλιποῦσα). Taken aback and falling on the basics of life for support (ὦ Ζεῦ καὶ γὰρ καὶ φῶς of line 148), the Chorus admonish her mildly, trying to avert her haughty mind from this desire back into a well-trodden path of 'nothing to excess', 'Zeus will avenge you.' Whether they do it by bluntly telling her that she could have contained her desire for her husband, or that she should not be wishing for the 'insatiable', or, through the conjecture, 'unapproachable' bed (of death) is the matter of contention.

The needlessly complicated apparatus of J. Diggle³ cited for line 151 could, for the purposes of this note, be handily pared down to ἀπλάτου Elmsley : -άστου vel -ήστου *codd.* Elmsley's argument is the following: his conjecture stems from the reading of the majority of the mss. ἀπλάστου in itself rightly discarded as *nimis Doricum* for ἀπλήστου since the context is against taking it to mean 'not to be copied by artists', from πλάσσω.⁴ By what is a palaeographically easy guess, it is turned into ἀπλάτου (from πελάζω), meaning, in Elmsley's own words, *eodem sensu quo* τὰς ἀνάνδρου κοίτας [ὀλέσσασα λέκτρον] v. 423 (= 436 of all present-day editions). ἄπλατον *proprie est id cui nemo* πελάζει, πλάθει *sive* πλησιάζει.⁵ The cause for Medea's distress is thus her longing for κοίτη ἄπλατος, 'the bed no longer frequented by her husband', 'forsaken bed' while ἄπληστος, to his mind, is a common slip towards the more facile.

The contexts in which ἄπλατος is attested reveal the meaning 'unapproachable', 'monstrous' more readily than 'foresaken'. It is Ajax's αἴσα, his 'monstrous fate', πεφóβημαι λιθόλευστον Ἄρη / ξυναλαγεῖν μετὰ τοῦδε τυπεῖς, τὸν αἶσ' ἄπλατος ἴσχει in Soph. *Ai.* 256;⁶ the monstrosities of Heracles' labours, δράκοντα πυρσόνωντον, ὅς <σφ'> ἄπλατον ἀμφελικτὸς / ἔλικ' ἐφρούρει, κτανῶν in Eur. *H.F.* 397–9; βουκόλων ἀλάστορα, λέοντ', ἄπλατον θρέμμα κάπροσῆγορον, / βία κατειργάσασθε in Soph. *Trach.* 1092–4; or else τοιόνδε Τυφῶς ἐξαναζέσει χόλον / θερμοῖς ἀπλάτου βέλεσι πυρπνούου ζάλης in Aesch. *Prom.* 371–2. In the case of *Ajax* and *Prometheus* ἄπληστος is transmitted by the part of ms. tradition, but rejected. In both one could attempt an offensive, since Ajax will have to come to grips with his fate and suffer to the full, to *fulfil* it,⁷ while Aetna can well be called 'insatiable', and ἄπλατος is only borrowed from Pindar (*Pyth.* 1, 21, where v. 22–23 could support ἄπληστος just as well).⁸

³ Diggle 1984, 100.

⁴ See West 1966, 211 ad v. 150–152.

⁵ Elmsley 1818, 106, ad v. 149, 150.

⁶ Finglass 2011, 88, 215.

⁷ 'Monstrous' is a rather weaker adjective than 'unapproachable', but 'insatiable' feels quite in place with Ajax: his overbearing pride breeding madness which has just abated, giving way to fresh pain — shame so extreme it leads to self-destruction.

⁸ Snell–Maehler 1980, 60.

The conjecture has enjoyed almost unanimous support, but what we saw as Elmsley's *κοίτη ἄπλατος* seems no longer to refer to the bed of a deserted wife, her 'broken marriage', but the 'bed of death'. N. Wecklein ("das Lager des Todes"),⁹ H. Weil (« trope amené par le mot de Médée θανάτω καταλυσαιμὴν βιοτάν, équivaut a τύμβου ου θανάτου»),¹⁰ G. Murray ("the cold bed in the clay"),¹¹ D. Page ("Medea has just said *not* 'I long for my husband', but 'I long for death'"),¹² and recently J. Diggle,¹³ D. Kovacs ("the bed of death"),¹⁴ V. Di Benedetto (« L'«orribile giaciglio» è quello della morte »),¹⁵ and D. Mastronarde ("the terrible bed of rest, that is, death")¹⁶ have all availed themselves of it, and understood it with rare solidarity. It is what common sense requires in this situation, but it may be wrong to claim with Mastronarde, that "Elmsley restored the sense required by the context",¹⁷ because the context can serve both ends.

Encamped across the firing line is U. von Wilamowitz, and B. Gentili¹⁸ who followed him in preserving the reading of LP *ἀπλήστου κοίτας*, 'insatiable for the marital bed'. „Wie kann es so schwer dir fallen, / das Bette des Mannes zu missen, daß Ruh' im Tode du suchst?“¹⁹ runs Wilamowitz' translation. It is mild compared to how he expressed himself in a private letter to G. Murray: „Wie soll diese κοίτη ἄπλατος sein? Welcher sollte sie sich oder jemand sonst sich nicht nähern können. ἀπλήστου ist ganz richtig. 'Weswegen verlangst du nach unersättlicher κοίτη?' D.h. bist du denn immer noch auf den Besitz eines σύγκοιτος aus? Griechische Frauen meinen, daß Medeia 'den Mann' nun entbehren könnte. Das könnte man à la Zola sagen 'qu'est ce que vous avez toujours besoin de coucher avec.'“²⁰ The homely truth is pressed too hard for us not to wonder how the Chorus know, to which Wilamowitz can only arbitrarily suggest that they should know better: „Schon ματαία zeigt, daß die zahmen korinthischen Ehefrauen es der Medea verdenken, daß sie auf ihre Eherechte an Iason nicht verzichten will: das ist ihnen ein ἔρωσ ἀπλήστου κοίτας. Daß Medea sterben möchte, haben sie gehört: also ist es dieser ἔρωσ, der sie dahin bringt. τὸ ἀπλήστως ἐπιθυμῆν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἐπὶ θανάτου τέλος ἐπέγει.“²¹ B. Gentili goes on to suggest that insatiability, of which incontinence is only a manifestation, is characteristic of Medea throughout the play and well outside it. One must concede that the Medea type is not often found on the ground undiluted, but judging by the terms she wields, love is not her first concern in a way *πίστις* and *τιμῆ* are: ἀνακαλεῖ δὲ δεξιάς, πίστιν μεγίστην (22), ὄρκων δὲ φρούδη πίστις (492), ἔχω πόσιν καὶ πιστὸν ἢ τάλαιν' ἐγώ (511), πιστὸς οὐκ ἔφν (698), ἄτιμοι δ' ἔσμεν οἱ πρὸ τοῦ φίλοι (696), σὺ δ' οὐκ ἔμελλες τᾶμ' ἀτιμάσας λέχη / τερπνὸν διάξειν βίοντον.²²

⁹ Wecklein 31891, 48.

¹⁰ Weil 21879, 17.

¹¹ Morwood 2005, 109.

¹² Page 1938, 81.

¹³ Diggle 1984, 100.

¹⁴ Kovacs 22001, 299.

¹⁵ Di Benedetto, Cerbo 1997, 118–119.

¹⁶ Mastronarde 2002, 195, ad loc.

¹⁷ Mastronarde 2002, 196, ad loc.

¹⁸ Gentili 1972, 62–63.

¹⁹ Wilamowitz 21906, 203.

²⁰ Bierl, Calder III, Fowler 1991, 37.

²¹ Wilamowitz 1880, 511–512.

²² Thus not as Murray would of her: "Medea desolate and half mad, asking for nothing but the one thing he will not give. Love to her is the whole world", Murray 1913, 82, 84.

We cannot — not even Wilamowitz could — tap into the mind of an artist, less so with an explanation of a scholar at hand, and Elmsley clearly meant his conjecture to refer to Medea's devastation over her broken marriage. Should the Chorus be indeed concerned with her longing for her husband (it is only in his mouth that we hear this reproach late in the play, 1338: εὐνής ἕκατι καὶ λέχους σφ' ἀπόλεσας), it will deal with it later, in 155–159. If the argumentation of D. Page has held such a sway over generations of scholars, his examples from Sophocles could help support the reading ἀπλήστου without going into the unnecessary detail. ὁ παγκοίτης Ἄιδας of *S. Ant.* 810, or τὸν παγκοίταν θάλαμον of 804, 'the unsparing, unremitting death' is one step short of being 'insatiable', and it would not be in the wrong direction should we take it and keep ἀπλήστου κοίτας ἕρος in the text.

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Непонятый Питер Элмсли (Eur. *Medea* 151–154)

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Питер Элмсли (1774–1825) заслуженно считается одним из первых филологов, осознавших важность критического сличения рукописей и установления их взаимоотношений во времена, когда исправление рукописного текста *ope ingenii* считалось основной задачей и заслугой критика, а выбор рукописей, принимаемых за основу издания, был

зачастую произвольным. Также и среди принадлежащих ему конъектур многие прочно вошли в традицию и принимаются в текст практически всеми современными издателями. В заметке рассматривается судьба одного из менее удачных исправлений — ἀπλάτου в ст. 151 «Медеи» Еврипида, при рукописных чтениях ἀπλάστου (большинство рукописей) и ἀπλήστου (Laur. 32.2 и Palat. gr. 287). Вопреки смыслу, который вкладывает в ἀπλάτου κοίτας ἔρος Элмсли (*eodem sensu quo τὰς ἀνάνδρου κοίτας*, то есть *оставленное ложе*) издатели, принимающие его конъектуру, понимают текст иначе — как *неподступное* ложе смерти. Замена ἀπλήστου на ἀπλάτου едва ли оправдана: ἀπλήστος выразительнее описывает силу *ненасытного* ложа смерти, которой просит Медея, в то время как ее страсть к Ясону не очевидна из ее слов и мысли, сосредоточенной вокруг πίστις и τιμή (ἀπλήστος отстаивал Виламовиц, но как Besitz eines σύγκοιτος). На основании этого предположения можно подвергнуть сомнению и некоторые другие места (Soph. Ai. 256; Pi. Pyth. 1, 21), в которых ἀπλήστου также иногда является чтением ряда рукописей.

Ключевые слова: древнегреческая трагедия, критика текста, Еврипид, Питер Элмсли.