

## Gods amongst satyrs Dioses entre sátiros

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As a kind of theatre which found plenty of room for fantasy and folk-tale motifs, satyr plays were especially suitable for the display of riddles as well as enigmatic language. As a matter of fact, this theatrical genre makes itself out to be an awkward enigma for modern readers (and eventually audiences). The inclusion of a satyr play in the set of four pieces of work presented to the dramatic contests raises the question of what sense could be made of this rather light-hearted *appendix* to the overwhelmingly serious spectacle of three consecutive tragedies.<sup>1</sup> Much guesswork has been

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<sup>1</sup> Texts and fragments of the satyr-plays are cited and quoted according to R. Krumeich, N. Pechstein & B. Seidensticker (eds.), *Das griechische Satyrspiel*, Darmstadt, 1989 (= KPS). We will use the titles of the plays as in P. O'Sullivan & C. Collard, *Euripides Cyclops and Major Fragments of Greek Satyr Drama*, Oxford, 2013 (= O & C).

made about the point of introducing a bunch of buffoons cavorting with serious gods and heroes. However the question remains of how ancient audiences could possibly perceive so much continuity while we are inclined to see worlds so wide apart.<sup>2</sup>

In this respect, the gods of satyr drama make for an interesting case in point. Until now, they have attracted little scholarly attention, most probably by reason of the assumed continuity between tragedy and satyr play with regard to the mythical subject and the appearance (costumes and masks) of characters other than Sylenus and the satyrs. In order to come up with the «straight man, funny man' brand of humour», highbrow characters should retain most of their elevated tragic dignity. In this paper we put to test the theatrical *continuum* that bonds satyr plays and tragedies with regard to the appearance of gods on stage, in order to establish what effect the company of satyrs, and the savage world they inhabit, have on divine figures, beyond making them seem slightly «pompous or ridiculous».<sup>3</sup>

The continuity, however, is far from clear in the case of heroic characters like Heracles, Sisyphus, or even Theseus, Polydeuces and Iason, who could embody prototypical figures specific to satyr-play action.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, we are led to wonder if there was a divine world we could consider somehow distinctive of the satiric stage. Although the scarce remains of satyr-plays require caution to be exercised on any studies regarding such texts, we can still put forward some brief basic ideas on the issue, so as to pay due tribute to a scholar who has taught us so much about ancient theatre in general and more specifically about comedy and satyrs.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The «principles» stated by M. Griffith, «Satyr Play an Tragedy, face to face», in O. Taplin & R. Wyles (eds.) *The Pronomos Vase and its Context*, Oxford U.P. 2010, pp. 49-52, elaborate on the close connection of both genres.

<sup>3</sup> Both the description of the peculiar sort of satyric humour and its effect on outstanding characters come from O & C, pp. 3-4; see also Seidensticker in KPS, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Seidensticker in KPS, p. 25, lists the following types: «Oger», «gute Held», «starke Hans» and «der listige Schlauberger». In vase painting some of the above mentioned heroes are occasionally impersonated by satyrs, but whether these images are related to specific satyr-plays is a debated issue, vid. F. Lissarrague, «Why satyrs are good to represent?», J. J. Winkler & F. Zeitlin (eds.) *Nothing to do with Dionysus?*, Princeton, 1990, pp. 228-236, esp. 232-233.

<sup>5</sup> A. Melero, «El drama satírico», in J. A. López Férez (ed.), *Historia de la literatura griega*, Madrid, 1988, pp. 406-422; «La dramaturgia del drama satírico», in E. García Novo & I. Rodríguez Alfageme (eds.), *Dramaturgia y puesta en escena en el*

### 1. A stage full of gods

The first consideration to be made in order to ascertain the peculiar quality of the divine world staged on satyr plays concerns the proportion of godlike characters that could eventually appear in a piece.<sup>6</sup> The very limited number of characters allowed in satyr plays has indeed the quite interesting side effect of producing easily all-god pieces of work.<sup>7</sup> By a happy coincidence, this is the case of two of the best-known fragmentary satyr plays. Sophocles' *Ichneutai* presents his audience with a variation on the charming story of Hermes' wondrous childhood, enacted by Apollo, Kyllene and Hermes, whereas *Inachus*, by the same author, featured the river-god with this name, as well as Hermes, Iris and, according to some interpretations, Zeus himself in a mysterious black disguise, not to mention the monstrous Argos. Judging by the titles, an all-divine cast could be presumed with some good plausibility in other satyr plays as Sophocles' *Orythia*, *Dionysus child*, *Eris*, as well as in Achaeus' *Hephaistos* and *Iris*.

Moreover, if we take into account not only the sheer number of gods appearing in the play, but the prominence of their roles on stage, it should be said that godlike figures (other than Dionysus) become remarkably more active amongst satyrs than in plays with human choruses. In all likelihood gods played a prominent, even protagonist, role in Aeschylus' *Isthmiastai*, *Circe*, *Lycurgus*, *Nurses*, *Prometheus the Fire-Kindler*, *Proteus* and *Justice*, and the same should apply to Sophocles' *Judgment*, *The Dumb*, *Pandora*, *Momus*, *Hybris* and *Salmoneus*. It seems that gods became rarer on Euripidean satyr plays, where only Hermes features as a character of importance, as far as we can say from the scarce remains from his plays.

Still, we have to consider a further factor that would upset significantly the balance in favour of the divine satiric cast. As a mat-

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*teatro griego*, Madrid, 1998, pp. 205-217 as well as «Observaciones sobre los coros satíricos», in J. V. Bañuls - F. De Martino & C. Morenilla (eds.), *El teatro clásico en el marco de la cultura griega y su pervivencia en la cultura occidental*, Bari, 2006, pp. 387-403.

<sup>6</sup> The abundance of gods in satyr-drama has been perceptively pointed out by Seidensticker in KPS, p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> *Prometheus Bound* is the only tragedy with an all-divine cast of characters, all of them (as Hephaestus, Prometheus, and Hermes) rather appropriate to satyr-plays, as we shall see below.

ter of fact, satyrs are, indeed, divine too.<sup>8</sup> It is important to draw attention to this fact because the standard definition of satyrs' nature focuses on their morphology and has them usually described as a blend of men and (mainly) equine animals. Consequently they are seen as subhuman beings and a bestial foil to human ideals of figure and behaviour.<sup>9</sup> In spite of that, we wonder if they should not be held, all the same, as godlike beings in the fringes of divinity, who could connect men with gods.<sup>10</sup> According to O'Sullivan, as sons of Sylenus, whose divine nature was ascertained in Antiquity, they should enjoy a superhuman condition, which by the way could be made source of jokes.<sup>11</sup> Their traditional partnership with the Nymphs in their frantic activities points at their superhuman condition as well.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Olympians vs. Satyrs

Thanks to the *papyri* which preserved significant fragments of satyr plays by Aeschylus and Sophocles, we have some access to some details of its dramaturgy and see what could happen when gods and satyrs become involved in the same plot. Curiously enough, what we find is a sort of conflict between Olympians and satyrs. In this regard, a most unexpected situation takes place in *Isthmiastai*, where satyrs mutiny and defect Dionysus and his choruses, the god to whom, by the book, they would belong naturally (fr. \*\*78a 23-36; 78c). However, this is not the only time when satyrs describe their condition as slavery under Dionysius. In the opening lines of Euripides' *Cyclops* Sylenus openly says that their attachment to the god is all but servitude (*Cyc.* 1-2, 709), although a pleasant one (*Cyc.* 63-75; cf. *Ba.* ). In *Ichneutai*

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<sup>8</sup> P. Voelke, *Un théâtre de la marge. Aspects figuratifs et configurationnels du drame satyrique dans l'Athènes classique*, Bari, 2001, pp. 83-90.

<sup>9</sup> S. Goldhill, *Love, Sex and Tragedy. How the Ancient World Shapes Our Lives*, Chicago, 2004, pp. 67-74.

<sup>10</sup> Klaus Junker, «Ahenian Theatre Culture around 400 BC», in Taplin & Wiles, *op. cit.*, p. 137-138, The only figure wearing a mask and dancing as an «authentic» coreut in the Pronomos Vase «serves compositionally to unite god and mortal».

<sup>11</sup> O'Sullivan & Collard, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>12</sup> On the superhuman nature of nymphs see Jennifer Larson, *Greek Nymphs. Myth, Cult, Lore*, Oxford U.P., 2001, p. 4; on their close connection to satyrs, see, *ibid.*, p. 91-100. According to Hesiod (fr. 123 West) the satyrs, together with nymphs and Kouretes, were the offspring of one of Phoroneus' daughters, probably Iphthime.

the satyrs are promised freedom by Apollo (223-4), but freedom from whom or what? It has been suggested that here too Dionysus should be the master, but it could be equally possible that the satyrs were owned by Apollo himself, as he is apparently in the position to free them.<sup>13</sup> In any case, satyrs are not completely at their ease in a world where Olympian gods are in charge and wield their power more or less forcefully. Satyrs in these plays, fickle and scatter-brained as they are, do not forget of their freedom, and they appear to hint at an original condition of liberty which, as a matter of fact, could have some (mythological) truth in it. In this regard, Hedreen pointed out that the satyrs of Dionysus would be in fact only a part of a much dispersed race of creatures spread all throughout the Greek world. The followers of Dionysus would specifically belong in a «Naxian cycle» of myths according to which the god arrived to the isle and, amongst other exploits, attached to himself the satyrs there by means of his all-powerful weapon, wine, which makes those poor simpletons, formerly used to spring water, ravish. Satyrs on stage, then, have some point when they see themselves as subjects to Dionysus in comparison with other creatures of their kin.<sup>14</sup>

Conflict between satyrs and Olympians come up in Aeschylus' *Amymone* too, where a sort of «free» satyr appeared. In her way to fetch some water in an Argos hardly affected by a drought, the Danaid Amymone woke up by chance a dozing satyr (may be in his afternoon nap) who, only to be expected, rushed into giving chase of her. The sudden intervention of Poseidon, invoked *in extremis* by the maid, managed to prevent the rape, but the god, who for his part had pretty the same intentions, was successful where the satyr failed and seduced Amymone to his satisfaction. In ap-

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<sup>13</sup> Regarding this issue see, M. Griffith, «Slaves of Dionysos: Satyrs, Audience, and the End of the *Oresteia*», *CA* 21 (2002), pp. 195-258.

<sup>14</sup> Guy M. Hedreen, *Silens in Attic Black-figure Vase-painting. Myth and Performance*, Ann Arbor, 1992, pp. 66-91, esp. 70-79; 91: «The silens are not the ever present associates of Dionysos; they are not «attributes» of the god. Rather, they are involved in a discreet group of Dionysos, and they otherwise retain their identity as independent demigods». According to Hedreen, the Naxian cycle underlies VI<sup>th</sup> century vase painting and some important Dionysiac festivals, but «was completely eclipsed by the image of silens created in fifth-century Athenian satyr-play» (p. 79). According to our suggestion satyrs in certain plays had an inkling of their ancient freedom from Dionysus.

preciation for the pleasant intercourse, Poseidon makes a source flow to alleviate the drought afflicting Argos. In Amymone's drama, then, we find both the conflict between satyrs and Olympians, and interestingly enough, a case where an Olympian god turns out to behave in a quite satiric way, this time successfully.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. The Olympus integrated and beyond the Olympus

A third and last aspect of the issue to be considered concerns the range of the divine universe appearing on the satiric stage. To begin with, the satiric medium seems to be appropriate enough to «integrate» the Olympian family with outcasts and new comers, some of dubious origins, and put them up in the pantheon. Sophocles' *Trackers* provides a most fitting example of a myth regarding how a divinity of «marginal» origins should work out a way to become a brand-new member of the divine society.<sup>16</sup> Hephaestus, a god deemed too humble to rub shoulders with the heroes of tragedy, was, from very early on in Greek art, quite comfortable amongst satyrs and probably not infrequent in satyr-plays. One of them, Aristias' *Hephaestus*, cast him as the main character, and put on stage the myth of his triumphant return to Olympus by the grace and persuasion of Dionysus.<sup>17</sup> A play entitled *Little Dionysus* was attributed to Sophocles, and the only remaining fragment suggests that the invention of wine by the divine child was part of the argument.<sup>18</sup>

Parting company with the Olympians, we turn our attention to other godlike figures belonging to the fringes of the divine, as

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<sup>15</sup> See KPS, pp. 91-97, esp. p. 95, where the possibility of other divinities appearing in this satyr play (Aphrodite, Hermes, Apollo, Eros) is mentioned. The evolution of the scene on the vases may lead to think that there were several other satyr-plays on this subject. The versions told by the mythographers, which are associated with Aeschylus' play, featured a satyr as one of the characters, which is rather uncommon, cf. Apoll., 2.1.4, and Hyg., *Fab.* 169a. On Amymone as a nymph, see Larson, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>16</sup> In a cup from the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, which has been related to a satyr-play by Pratinas, several satyrs assault Iris and Hera, the latter being defended by Hermes and Heracles, vid. infra on Iris, notes 17 and 18.

<sup>17</sup> On the 'Return of Hephaestus' in vase painting, see Hedreen, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-26. For those vase paintings which could be related to performances of this myth by a satyr chorus already in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, see Hedreen, *op. cit.*, pp. 115, 135-136. Other satyr-plays where Hephaestus could have appeared are Aeschylus' *Isthmian contestants*, as well as Sophocles' *Cedalion*, *Pandora (or Hammerers)*, and *Daedalus*.

<sup>18</sup> S. Scheurer and R. Bielfeldt in KPS, pp. 255-258.

satyrs themselves do, who were also given important roles on the satyric stage. There is ample room for conjecture here, but the titles preserved are at least indicative of a liking for divine figures far beyond the Olympian pantheon. Some of them come characteristically from the lineage of Pontus, «a highly varied tribe» so rich in monstrous creatures, which could feature in tragedy only within narratives by messengers' speeches or cursory mentions.<sup>19</sup> The appearance of the goddess Iris, like her masculine counterpart Hermes, in the company of satyrs in vase paintings from late in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE until the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> BCE was not considered out of place, which has led some scholars to the conclusion that some satyr-plays featuring Iris had already been composed at that time.<sup>20</sup> We know for certain that a satyr-play by Achaëus was named after her, and her appearance in Sophocles' *Inachus* was highly plausible as well.<sup>21</sup> In addition, some of the best-known monstrous breeds of Pontus' lineage featured in satyr plays such as Aeschylus' *Sphinx*, *Lion*, and (maybe) *Phorcides*.<sup>22</sup> A Sophoclean play of title *Cerberus* is attested, which could hardly be a tragedy; all the same, it is almost certain that the monstrous dog which featured in Euripides' *Eurystheus* would have scared Eurystheus to death, if we follow the testimony of vase painting.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Jenny Strauss-Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos*, Cambridge, 2003, p. 20 s.

<sup>20</sup> On these vases some satyrs harass Iris who defends herself forcefully, cf. KPS, p. 59-60 and 526 s.

<sup>21</sup> Little can be asserted about the plot of Achaëus' play. Erika Simon linked several scenes on the vases with a story about Hera trying to spoil Dionysus' cult by sending Iris to steal some sacrificial meat from the altar, with the resulting reaction of the satyrs, see «Satyr Plays on vases in the time of Aeschylus», in D. Kurtz & B. Sparkes (eds.), *The Eye of Greece. Studies in the Art of Athens*, Cambridge, 1982, pp. 123-148.

<sup>22</sup> The «Theban tetralogy» included *The Sphinx* as a satyr-play, where satyrs, as rivals to Oedipus would try to solve the riddle and so to obtain Iocasta's hand (KPS, p. 195 s.). Oedipus' encounter with the Sphinx was a much cherished scene by vase painters, and we have various versions in the burlesque form, which may be connected with Aeschylus' play, see Simon, *art. cit.*, p. 141. *The lion* was a title of a satyr-play by Aeschylus, KPS, p. 161-164. The possibility of *Forcides* being a satyr-play is put forward in KPS, p. 207. According to Pechstein and Krumreich, in KPS, p. 373, the river god Achelous may well appear in the satyr play preserved in *POxy* 1083 (F \*\*1130) generally attributed to Sophocles.

<sup>23</sup> Cerberus' appearances are clearly connected with the feats of Heracles, meaning it could possibly be an alternative title to Sophocles' other Heracleian plays (*Heracles*, *On Taenarum*), see KPS, p. 274. On *Eurystheus*, cf. N. Pechstein,

The logic of putting these monstrous creatures together with gods is up for debate, but they both belong to the time when gods were in the making, and as such they are part of the theogonic process which gave the world its shape and governance.

Another divine lineage on the sidelines which thrust characters onto the satiric stage was that of the Titans and their descendants. Prometheus had the leading role in the satyr-play of the tetralogy presented by Aeschylus in 472, *Prometheus the Fire-Kindler*, where satyrs were astonished at the sight of fire and messed around with it recklessly.<sup>24</sup> A Sophoclean satyr-play entitled *The Dumb*, according to the most plausible hypothesis, dealt with Prometheus' gift to humankind, but the story intertwined with another one about a drug that brought about immortality.<sup>25</sup>

From Titanic ancestors too, Circe was the leading character in a play by Sophocles named after her, about which nothing can be said for certain, except that it dealt with the famous Odyssean episode. There is, however, an interesting mythological point to be made about Circe's genealogy: *via* Oceanus it connects her not only to Prometheus, but also to Hermes, a god who can be considered as close to the satyrs as Dionysus himself. In this regard, it has recently been remarked that the maternal ancestors of Hermes (Atlas) are the key to some insights into the complexities of the divine world as it is produced in archaic poetry. In the story of how Hermes negotiates his access to his share of divine honour, two species of divinity are confronted, an «atlantic» relegated one, inactive, hidden and marginal, and the Olympic gods who divide among themselves spaces and privileges.<sup>26</sup> In keeping with this thought-provoking reading of the *Hymn to Hermes*, we suggest that satyr-plays presented their audiences with plenty of active gods from very different walks of (divine) life, who belong to a time when not all the issues between them (or with humankind) had been altogether settled.<sup>27</sup>

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*Euripides Satyrographos. Ein Kommentar zu den Euripideischen Satyrspielfragmenten*, Stuttgart-Leipzig, 1998, pp. 142-176.

<sup>24</sup> See O & C, p. 282-289.

<sup>25</sup> According to one possible reconstruction of the play, the Dactyli featured in it, see S. Sheurer and R. Bielfeldt in KPS, p. 353-355.

<sup>26</sup> D. Jaillard, *Configurations d'Hermès. Une théogonie hermaïque*, Liège, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> The case has been made for archaic satyr-plays presenting satyrs fighting alongside Dionysus in the Gigantomachia, in order to explain the many represen-



CAMPOS DAROCA, Javier, «Gods amongst satyrs», *SPhV* 18 (2016), pp. 41-50.

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ABSTRACT

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Although gods abound and play an important role in satyr-plays, their appearance has not drawn much scholarly attention so far. In this paper we suggest that satyr plays produce a richer and more active cast of godlike beings than tragedy did, and put forward some features of this peculiarly satiric divine world.

KEYWORDS: Ancient Theatre, Satyr-plays, Religion and Ancient Theatre, Greek divinities, Satyrs.

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RESUMEN

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Pese a la relativa frecuencia de las figuras divinas en la escena del drama satírico, su presencia no ha despertado demasiado interés en la investigación. En este trabajo se plantea la necesidad de explorar esta versión teatral del mundo divino para plantear sus preferencias y su peculiar naturaleza más diversa y activa que la de los dioses trágicos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Teatro antiguo, drama satírico, religión y teatro, divinidades griegas, sátiros.

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tations of satyrs bearing *peltas*, vid. Hedreen, *op. cit.*, p. 110 and notes 35-37. A satyr-play by Sophocles staged a story related to Salmoneus, whose hubristic pretensions to divinity were punished by Zeus, but it is difficult to say whether the plot was derived from that story, vid. S. Sheurer and R. Bielfeldt in *KPS* pp. 384-387.

