

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### SOPHOCLES

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#### *Introduction. The forms of Sophoclean narrative*

Like all Attic tragedians, Sophocles makes ample use of narrative in his plays: we have messengers, the chorus, and protagonists who, in the form of continuous narrative, dialogue, or a combination of the two, relate their own or other people's experiences, functioning as secondary or intra-dramatic narrators.<sup>1</sup> The dialogical form of narration is new in comparison to epic and historiography, and it may be useful to start this chapter by taking a closer look at this development. For one thing, dialogue is a natural vehicle for narrative in a dramatic context, and Sophocles, who strives for an unobtrusive presentation of information, often turns to this form. We find dialogical narrative as part of expositional prologues, e.g. in *Aj.*, where Ajax' nightly onslaught on the flocks is presented to the spectators in two successive dialogues between Athena and Odysseus (40–50) and Athena and Ajax (91–117).<sup>2</sup> Often narrative precedes the *rheseis* of messengers or reporter-protagonists, e.g. in *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1237–1296, where the report of the death of Jocasta follows on a dialogue (1223–1236) in which the news is briefly announced, and *Electra* 871–919, where in a dialogue Electra Chrysothemis recounts how she found a lock of Orestes' hair, and then proceeds with what she herself calls (892) a full and detailed narrative,

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<sup>1</sup> There is no single systematic study on Sophoclean narrative, but Goward 1999 and Barrett 2002 discuss many of its aspects and forms in general, while Roberts 1989, Kraus 1991, and Markantonatos 2002 specifically discuss the narratives of *Ph.*, *Tr.*, and *OC*, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *OT* 103–131 (death of Laius presented in dialogue between Creon and Oedipus); *Tr.* 61–93 (Heracles' latest exploits, recounted in a dialogue between Hyllus and Deianeira).

which is in a continuous form.<sup>3</sup> The combination of introductory dialogue, which presents the main news and whets the appetite for the full story, and detailed *rhexis* is a logical one and is also employed by Aeschylus (→) and Euripides. In Sophocles a narrative often evolves back into a dialogue which, while not narrative itself, does contain a reaction to the narrative just recounted; an example is *Electra* 764–803, where chorus, Electra, and Clytemnestra react—in dramatically different ways—to the news of Orestes’ ‘death’ in the presence of the messenger, the Old Slave.<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes Sophocles employs dialogical narration when he wants to keep up the pace, rather than slowing down to the detail of a *rhexis*, e.g. in *Antigone* 1278–1316 when, after a detailed messenger-speech on the death of Haemon (1192–1243), the death of Euryclea is reported in dialogue only.<sup>5</sup> On other occasions the dialogical mode of presentation is exploited for special effects, as when the chorus interrogates Oedipus about his sad past (*OC* 510–548), and especially when Oedipus finds out the truth about himself in a series of interrogations of Jocasta (*OT* 726–770), the messenger from Corinth (1017–1053), and the shepherd (1121–1185).

Although Sophoclean drama is full of narrative, there are also moments when narration is avoided altogether: e.g. Odysseus in *Philoctetes* 3–11 briefly touches on the fate of Philoctetes, but then cuts himself short. His avoidance of narration is motivated by the plot (as he himself says, there is no time for conversation), but the story of Philoctetes is not one in which he played a positive role, and hence his reluctance seems to be psychologically motivated as well. Finally, there is the playwright, who saves up the story, which will be told in full and pathetic detail later (263–264, 285–316, 676–718). Likewise, Orestes’ cutting short the story of his own and Electra’s suffering during the past years in *Electra* 1288–1292 (and cf. the Old Slave doing the same in 1364–1366) is not only

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Aj.* 214–284, 719–747; *El.* 660–679; *OT* 726–770; *Ant.* 223–248, 384–406, 988–997, 1155–1191; *Tr.* 225–247, 663–671, 734–748; *Ph.* 317–342; 542–602; *OC* 324–360, 1579–1585.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Aj.* 783–812; *OT* 834–862, 1286–1296; *Ant.* 278–331, 441–445, 1244–1256; *Tr.* 291–334, 375–392; *OC* 385–420, 1666–1669.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Tr.* 180–199 (a messenger informs Deianeira how Lichas reported to the Trachinian people Heracles’ victory; the story will be told in full by Lichas himself in 229–290), 1114–1142 (Hyllus tells Heracles about the death of Deianeira, which in 899–946 had been reported in full by the Nurse).

acceptable in terms of plot and psychology, but also understandable from the point of view of the playwright, who had already dealt with this subject in two earlier narratives (254–309, 585–605).<sup>6</sup>

*The marking and function of narrative*

As a rule, when narratives are presented *en bloc*, the beginning and end are explicitly marked. Narratives may start off with an emotional preamble, as they often do in Homer (→), e.g. *Trachiniae* 1–5, where Deianeira introduces the story of her life as follows: ‘There is an ancient saying among men, once revealed to them, that you cannot understand a man’s life before he is dead, so as to know whether he has a good or bad one. But I know well, even before going to Hades, that the one I have is unfortunate and sorrowful.’<sup>7</sup> In the majority of cases we find a metanarrative remark, which announces the act of narrating and often stresses the reliability of the narrator: ‘I was sent for this purpose and therefore will tell you [how Orestes died]’ (*El.* 680), or ‘I was there, dear mistress, and will tell you, and I shall suppress no word of truth. For why should I try to soothe you with words which will later brand me as a liar? Truth is always best’ (*Ant.* 1191–1195).<sup>8</sup> The actual narrative typically starts off with the particles *gar* or *epei*. Sometimes we find epic devices for starting off a story: asking after the main characters (‘What mighty antagonists entered the lists ... Who set out for the ordeal of the contest?’: *Tr.* 503–506; cf. *Il.* 1.8), or the ‘there is/was X’ motif (‘There is a cape in Euboea ...’: *Tr.* 537;<sup>9</sup> cf., e.g. *Od.* 9.508–519).

The end of a narrative may be signalled by the use of the present tense, which describes the situation to which the events of the story have led (e.g. *Aj.* 65: ‘and now he [Ajax] is torturing them, bound as they are, inside his dwelling’),<sup>10</sup> or a metanarrative remark (e.g. *OC* 1665–1666:

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *OT* 685–686 (the chorus declines to tell Iocaste about Oedipus’ altercation with Creon); *OC* 361–364 (Ismene declines to tell Oedipus and Antigone about her own suffering, because there is now more pressing news, viz. the quarrel between Oedipus’ sons), 1148–1149 (Theseus modestly declines to recount his victory over the Thebans; the playwright’s motive is that this battle had already been evoked by the chorus in 1044–1095).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Aj.* 134–140, 430–433, 1266–1271; *El.* 254–260; *Tr.* 153–154.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Aj.* 284, 748; *El.* 892; *OT* 707–710, 771–773, 1237–1240; *Ant.* 407a, 998; *Tr.* 472–474, 672–673, 749, 899; *Ph.* 603–604a; *OC* 1291, 1586.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *OT* 103; *Tr.* 555, 752, 1159; *Ph.* 604b.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Aj.* 323–327; *Tr.* 36–48, 943a.

‘And if anyone thinks I speak foolishly, I would not beg for the credence of those who think I am a fool’),<sup>11</sup> or, most often, a conclusion (e.g. *El.* 307–309: ‘When things are so, my friends, there can be no good sense or piety. No, when things are bad, inevitably one’s conduct must be bad also’).<sup>12</sup> The conclusion is usually accompanied by or evolves into some form of exhortation to action: ‘keep good faith’ (*El.* 916–919), ‘show what you’re worth’ (*Ant.* 37–38), ‘I curse you’ (*Tr.* 807–812), or ‘I supplicate you’ (*OC* 1326–1345). This is an important characteristic of dramatic narrative: it is never told by way of entertainment to while away time, as stories may be in epic, but it always has a function within the plot: characters report events because these events call for action and reaction.

#### *Internal and external narrators*

What kind of narrators do we find? Not surprisingly, most dramatic narrators are internal, characters who are recounting events in which they themselves played a role. The degree of their involvement may range from protagonist to affected person to mere witness: Philoctetes is given ample opportunity to recount his miserable life over the past ten years (*Ph.* 263–316) and Deianeira sums up her fearful life (*Tr.* 1–48<sup>13</sup>); an example of a story told by a person affected is the sacrifice of Iphigenia as recounted by Electra (*El.* 558–579), who wields it as an argument in the *agon* with her mother;<sup>14</sup> typical witness-reports, finally, are the messenger-speeches, which will be discussed below.

A special form of narration consists of a narrator reporting events about which he or she has merely *heard*. In *Electra* 417–427, for example, Chrysothemis reports to Electra Clytemnestra’s dream (‘They say that she was once more in company with your father and mine ... That is the story I heard from someone who was present when she told

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *El.* 761–763; *Tr.* 289a–290; *Ph.* 389a, 620a.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *El.* 916–919; *OT* 720–725, 814–833, 1280–1285; *Ant.* 37–38, 1023–1032, 1240–1243; *Tr.* 173–177, 484–489, 807–812, 943b–946; *Ph.* 389b–390, 620b–621, 1343–1347; *OC* 382–384.

<sup>13</sup> Discussion in Hulton 1969: 51–52; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 75–76; and Heiden 1989: 21–30. Cf. *OT* 771–833; *OC* 960–1002.

<sup>14</sup> Discussion in Goward 1999: 111–112. Cf. *Aj.* 284–330; *Ant.* 21–38, 49–57; *Ph.* 603–621; *OC* 361–384.

her dream to the Sun').<sup>15</sup> By presenting the dream in the form of a hearsay report (and secondhand hearsay at that) Sophocles adds to the casualness with which Chrysothemis approaches it. She has not interpreted it (as Electra will shortly do), indeed has grasped so little of its meaning that she almost left the stage without telling Electra about it.

Hearsay narration can be exploited to great effect since—as Sophoclean characters themselves are only too aware (cf. *El.* 885–886 and *Tr.* 67, 425–426, 747)—hearsay is a less reliable source of information than autopsy. One example is *Oedipus Tyrannus* 103–131, where Creon can tell Oedipus about the murder of Laius only indirectly, repeating what the one survivor recounted at the time; finding out the exact circumstances of this event will take up the entire middle part of the play (707–862). The most protracted example is found in *Trachiniae*, where Deianeira is informed of Heracles' attack of Oechalia in a series of hearsay reports: (Hyllus:) they say Heracles was a slave to a Lydian woman the past year, but is now attacking the city of Eurytus (61–93); (messenger:) I heard Lichas say that Heracles has been victorious (180–199); (Lichas:) Heracles has been a slave of the Lydian Omphale for a year (he told me) and because this was due (he said) to Eurytus, he has sacked his city by way of revenge (229–290; here Lichas' reference to Heracles as his source serves to back up the true part of his story and thereby commend the false part); (messenger, correcting Lichas:) in fact, Lichas told the Trachinian people that Heracles sacked Oechalia because he wanted the daughter of Eurytus, Iole (335–374); (Lichas:) I said that I had *heard* that the captive woman is Iole the daughter of Eurytus (395–435) ... yes, Heracles sacked Oechalia in order to get Iole (472–489). The function of this protracted use of hearsay narration is to point up Deianeira's isolation: she is last in a convoluted and unreliable chain of communication.<sup>16</sup>

Only occasionally do we find external narrators. Here speakers, usually the chorus, recount events of what for them, too, already is a mythical past in which they themselves played no role: 'the body of Danae too endured to give up heaven's light in a brass-fastened dwelling, and immured in a tomblike chamber she was held prisoner. And yet she was highly esteemed by reason of her birth, my child, and she was treasurer

<sup>15</sup> Discussion in Goward 1999: 107–108.

<sup>16</sup> Gellie 1972: 62; Heiden 1989: *passim*; Kraus 1991: 83–88; and Goward 1999: 91–96. Cf. *Aj.* 134–200; *El.* 566–579; *Ant.* 21–36; *OC* 374–381.

for Zeus' golden-flowing seed', says the chorus to the absent Antigone (*Ant.* 544–548).<sup>17</sup> As in Homer (→), Pindar (→), and Aeschylus (→) these stories of the past are invoked in order to provide a parallel (whether by way of similarity or contrast) to the situation at hand on stage; the way in which the parallel is intended is not always clear (is the chorus consoling Antigone, exhorting her to accept her fate, shying away from their own responsibility?).<sup>18</sup> They display the typical allusive and elliptical style that highlights certain events (which are necessary for the 'message'), while at the same time leaving out others. Thus in the case of the 'Danae' story, both prehistory (why Danae was immured) and aftermath (her escape with her son in a metal chest) are suppressed, while the nature of her 'honoured house' and 'Zeus' golden-flowing seed' is left for the narratees to fill in. Conversely, the detail in her story that corresponds most closely to Antigone's situation, her imprisonment, is mentioned twice, in terms that recall that heroine's present predicament. Their external status turns these narrators into authoritative speakers: they are not bound by the restrictions of narrators who are themselves part of the events and thereby lack an overview, but can narrate omnisciently, at times embracing 'the whole of human knowledge'.<sup>19</sup> Of course, their omniscience applies only to their competence as narrators; as interpreters of the play's action the chorus is as restricted and as partial as the other participants.

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. *El.* 145–152 (Electra recalls the stories of Niobe and Procne), 504–515 (the chorus relates the chariot race of Pelops, the first of many mishaps in the house of Agamemnon, to which a new one is now about to be added; for the audience, the theme of the disastrous race recalls the scheme of Orestes' 'death' in a race, which is about to be related), 837–847 (chorus and Electra recount the story of Amphiaraus and Eriphyle), 955–965 (Lycurgus), 966–987 (Cleopatra); *Ant.* 823–833 (Antigone recalls the fate of Niobe by way of a parallel to her own sad fate); *Tr.* 503–530 (the chorus recount the story of how Heracles and Achelous fought over Deianeira, illustrating the force of Aphrodite, who is presently responsible for Heracles' infatuation with Iole; thus a story from the recent past has already acquired the status of a mythological tale, known to all); *Phil.* 676–679 (Ixion). Comparable in function are the brief anonymous paradigms presented by Menelaus and Teucer in *Aj.* 1142–1146 and 1150–1156.

<sup>18</sup> Burton 1980: 124–132 and Gardiner 1987: 92–93.

<sup>19</sup> Goward 1999: 22.

*Messengers*

One group of narrators is deserving of a separate discussion: the messengers. As in Aeschylus (→) and Euripides (→), all Sophoclean plays, with the exception of the *Philoctetes*, feature at least one messenger-speech, in which a character, usually anonymous and of low social status, reports offstage events, not seldom the bloody climax of the play.<sup>20</sup> Sophocles, typically, has well integrated this traditional device into his plays. Thus his messengers are characters who (i) sometimes play a role in the rest of the play as well (Lichas and Hyllus in *Tr.*, the Pedagogue in *El.*), (ii) have distinct personalities (notably the guard who reports the two burials in *Ant.*), and (iii) sometimes act as messengers on more than one occasion (the guard in *Ant.*, the second messenger in *Ant.*, who first reports Haemon's death, then Eurydice's). The messengers do not tell their stories of their own accord, as is usually the case in Aeschylus and Euripides, but are sent by one of the characters in their story to report what has happened (and hence to set in motion new action). Thus the messenger in *Ajax* is sent by Teucer to report Calchas' prophecy to Ajax, in an attempt to avert the danger it contains.<sup>21</sup> A final device by which Sophocles integrates and naturalizes this potentially alien element of narrative into the dramatic context is by having it not only preceded by a dialogue (as in Aeschylus and Euripides), but also followed by one, in which the messenger is asked for extra information or joins the discussion about his news (*OT* 1286–1296; *Ant.* 1244–1256; *Tr.* 291–334, 375–392; *OC* 1666–1669). The preceding dialogue, in which, after a brief announcement of the main news, one of the characters asks for detailed information is a fine method of justifying the length of the narrative that is to follow. The same purpose is served by the dramatic quality of the narrative, which includes speeches, historic presents, and many graphic descriptions. Or as one messenger puts it: 'the briefest way to tell my news would be to say that Oedipus is dead. But to tell briefly what has happened nor the words nor the deeds that took place there allow' (*OC* 1559–1560).

Messengers are in principle internal narrators, though their role is often restricted to that of a witness. Indeed, it is because they have been eyewitnesses that they can now act as messengers, and hence this fact

<sup>20</sup> *Aj.* 748–782; *El.* 680–763; *OT* 1237–1285; *Ant.* 249–277, 407–440; *Tr.* 749–812, 899–946; *OC* 1586–1666. Goward 1999: 26–32 and Barrett 2002: 76–101.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *El.* 669–670; *Ant.* 272–277; *Tr.* 285–286.

is invariably stressed: 'So much as this I know, for I was present' (*Aj.* 748) or 'I saw with my own eyes the dire calamity of my father and did not merely hear about it' (*Tr.* 746–747).<sup>22</sup> Though often no more than witnesses, they are emotionally affected witnesses: 'what we saw next was terrible' (*OT* 1267) or 'such was this event, terrible to relate, and for those who saw it, as we did, the worst disaster of all that I have beheld' (*El.* 761–763); in the latter case, the conventional emphasis which a messenger places on his autopsy has additional significance, in that he is telling a false tale. But the messenger does occasionally play a role in the events, most notably the guard in *Antigone*, who reports the two burials of Polynices (223–331, 384–445).<sup>23</sup> It is precisely his involvement which determines much of the tone of his stories: the first time he is reluctant to report the burial, and even fearful, conscious as he is of his own failure as a guard; the second time, he is both exhilarated and sad to be able to tell who did it and, handing her over, to save his skin.

#### *Overt narrators*

Sophoclean narrators are overt narrators, who reveal their presence as a narrating subject at many points and in many ways. To begin with, there are the metanarrative remarks which, as we have seen, often mark the beginning and the end of a narrative, but which also occur in the course of an account. In the latter case they may have a structural function, emphasizing a new or crucial phase in the story, e.g. *OT* 1169: 'Ah, I have come to the danger point in telling my story.'<sup>24</sup> Next, there are evaluative or emotional qualifications: Electra refers to the relationship of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as 'their final outrage' (*El.* 271); the Theban priest calls the Sphinx 'the cruel singer' (*OT* 36) and the oracles which Oedipus received 'the shameful predictions of my cruel oracles' (*OT* 796–797); Antigone talks about 'the unhappy corpse of Polynices' (*Ant.* 26); the chorus refers to the sons of Oedipus as 'the unhappy two' (*Ant.* 144); Deianeira calls herself 'unhappy' (*Tr.* 16), etc. Then there are comments, e.g., *El.* 696–697: 'So far, things stood thus; but when one of the gods does mischief, not even a mighty man

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *OT* 1238, 1263; *Ant.* 423, 432, 1192, 1207, 1216; *Tr.* 742–743, 888–889, 912; *OC* 1646, 1654.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Hyllus in *Tr.* 749–812, nurse in *Tr.* 899–946, messenger in *OC* 1586–1666.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *OT* 800; *Tr.* 678–679.

can escape'; the comment serves to articulate the narrative, marking its climax.<sup>25</sup> Sometimes comments are couched in comparisons, e.g. *Ant.* 424–425: 'Antigone cried out bitterly', says the messenger, 'with a sound like the piercing note of a bird when she sees her empty nest robbed of her young; just so did she cry out, weeping, when she saw the corpse laid bare.'<sup>26</sup> With this pathetic image, the messenger—thus far concerned only for himself and hence critical of the burial—now shows some sympathy for the person who carried it out.

### *Narratees*

Narratives in drama are nearly always recounted to someone: the chorus, but as a rule one or more of the protagonists as well. The presence of these secondary or intra-dramatic narratees is acknowledged with a greater or lesser degree of intensity. The mildest form are vocatives, usually friendly or ingratiating in nature ('my dear', 'friends', 'child'), but occasionally more negative ('you shameless insolence', 'you wretch': *OC* 960, 978). The abundance of vocatives which Philoctetes employs when recounting to Neoptolemus the story of his solitary years in *Philoctetes* 260–316 (cf. 260, 268, 284, 300) underscore the argumentative function of this narrative: soon he will ask his narratee to take him with him. Sometimes the narratee is not present on stage, but apostrophized: a god (*Aj.* 172–181, *El.* 95–102) or the sun (*Ant.* 100–106), called on in their capacity of witness. In some cases a more active involvement of the narratees is solicited in the form of 'there you could have ...' passages (e.g. 'if you had been close at hand to see the nature of her action, you would indeed have pitied her': *Tr.* 896–897),<sup>27</sup> or questions (e.g. 'And then what kind of days do you think I pass when I see Aegisthus sitting on my father's throne ...?': *El.* 266–274).<sup>28</sup>

Where the narratee is actually a character in the story being recounted, we are dealing with second-person narration, often quite forceful in tone: the Theban priest, leading up to a request for help from Oedipus, recalls the king's former help: 'For it was *you* who came to the city of

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Aj.* 150–161; *OT* 777b–778. See also nn. 8 and 13 for comments at the opening and end of narratives.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Aj.* 215; *El.* 98; *Ant.* 113; *Tr.* 32–33, 530.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Tr.* 365, 692; *OC* 969, 1587–1589.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Ant.* 1194–1195; *Tr.* 742–743; *Ph.* 276–278.

Cadmus and released us from the tribute we were paying, the tribute of the cruel singer ...' (*OT* 35–36). Conversely, in order to demonstrate the incompetence of Tiresias, Oedipus recalls the seer's role in the episode of the Sphinx: 'Why, come, tell me, how can you be a true prophet? Why, when the bitch-sphinx sang her song, did not *you* speak some word that could release the citizens?' (*OT* 390–392).<sup>29</sup>

There is also a special form where the narratee who plays a role in the story is absent and we are again dealing with an apostrophe. A particularly forceful example is *Ajax* 134–171+182–191, where the chorus of Salaminian sailors give their—incredulous—version of Ajax' nightly massacre of the herds in the 'you' form, addressing their lord Ajax, who is still in his tent. The choice of this form is effective, in that it underscores the chorus' dependence on their king (which they themselves explicitly acknowledge: 'little men are best supported by the great ... we have not the strength to defend ourselves against them without you': 160, 165–166), and leads up to the epode where they actually call out for him to come out of his tent. Finally, a narrator who does not use second-person narration may yet abundantly insert 'you' forms, as Hyllus does in his report to his mother of the manner in which she poisoned his father Heracles (749–806): 'as Heracles was about to sacrifice, there came Lichas bringing *your* gift, the robe of death. He put it on, as *you had instructed*, ... When Heracles asked Lichas through which scheme he had brought the robe, Lichas told him that it was *your* gift alone ... Heracles hurled himself to the ground, uttering many cries and dwelling upon his disastrous marriage with *you* ...' In this way Hyllus leads up to his forceful conclusion: 'These are the plot and the action, mother, of which *you* are convicted, for which may avenging Justice and the Erinyes punish *you!*' (807–809).

In general, the conclusion of a story, containing an exhortation to action, addresses the narratees: thus Tecmessa ends her report to the chorus about Ajax' madness with 'Come friends, for this is why I came, go in and help him, if you have any power to do so! For such men are won over by the words of friends' (*Aj.* 328–330). The most active involvement of the narratees is found in dialogical narratives. Here the narratee actually speaks, and by his questions prompts or steers the narrative: e.g. '(messenger:) Teucer gave orders that Ajax be kept within the shelter of the hut and not allowed out alone. (Tecmessa:) And where

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Aj.* 134–200, 1273–1297; *El.* 11–14, 585–608; *OT* 1017–1053; *Ph.* 1324–1347.

is Teucer, and what is the reason for saying this? (messenger:) He has lately come back. He believes that this departure [of Ajax] seals the fate of Ajax. (Tecmessa:) Ah me, from what man did he learn this? (messenger:) From the prophet who is son of Thestor ...' (*Aj.* 795–801).<sup>30</sup>

Narrators can also be their own narratees, as is often the case in choral narratives, where the members of the chorus address each other (or no one in particular); naturally, in such cases the primary narratees, the spectators in the theatre, will have a greater sense of being addressed themselves than when other narratees apart from the chorus are present (→ Aeschylus and Euripides). When the chorus are narrating events in which they themselves are involved, their internal narration employs 'we' forms. This is the case in *Ant.* 100–147: 'Beam of the sun ..., you who moved off in ... flight the man ... that was raised up against *our* land ... and flew to *our* country ...; he paused above *our* houses. ...; but he went, before his jaws had been glutted with *our* gore ...', etc. This 'we' narrative, recounting the quarrel between Polynices and Eteocles in terms of its effect on the city, presents an effective contrast with the previous scene, in which the same event had been looked at from the point of view of the family by the sisters Antigone and Ismene.<sup>31</sup>

As always, it is important to take into account the different functions which narratives may have for the primary and secondary narratees. Thus the 'argument' function of the mythological examples in *Antigone* 944–987 may be to console or exhort Antigone, and to warn Creon, while their 'key' function may be to suggest to the spectators the catastrophic consequences of thwarted desire. In the same way, the report of Orestes' death in *Electra* 764–803 has different effects on Electra (who is shattered), Clytemnestra (who is sad for a brief moment but otherwise relieved), and the spectators (who know it to be a false tale and can admire the old man's narrative talents).

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<sup>30</sup> For other examples, see the discussion of dialogical narrative in the introductory section.

<sup>31</sup> Gardiner 1987: 84–85.

*A Sophoclean speciality: false narrative*

Taking his cue from the Homeric lying tales (→ Homer) and Aeschylus (*Ch.* 674–690), Sophocles loves to insert false narratives. The longest and least complicated instance is the pseudo messenger-speech voiced by the Paedagogue in *Electra* 680–763. It serves to back up the news of Orestes' death, which in turn forms part of the larger scheme of Orestes who, in disguise, enters the palace and kills Clytemnestra and—later—Aegisthus. His death could, of course, have been reported much more briefly, along the lines set out by Orestes in 49–50 ('tell them that Orestes is dead by an accident, fallen from his moving chariot in the Pythian games'), but the Paedagogue actually spends more than half of his tale on an account of Orestes' successes before his accident and the first half of the dramatic chariot race, including a detailed list of the contestants. Of course, this attention to detail serves to increase the authenticity and hence the authority of his invented tale (which will indeed be believed without any reservation by his narratees Clytemnestra and Electra). But the picture painted here of an Orestes proving his mettle in the most heroic of athletic contests (cf. 693–695: 'He was proclaimed as an Argive, by name Orestes, son of Agamemnon, who once gathered the famous armament of Greece') has a considerable effect on Clytemnestra, who briefly takes pride in her son and hence grieves over his death, however desirable it is (766–771), and above all on Electra, who now has all the more reason to regret the loss of such a brother (808–822). At the same time, this invented tale embodies the theme of 'power brought low' (the beautiful and apparently invincible young aristocrat Orestes unexpectedly crashes), and as such it can be said to anticipate, for the spectators, Clytemnestra's impending downfall.<sup>32</sup>

Lichas' report on Heracles' sack of Oechalia in *Trachiniae* 248–290 is not so much false as misleading, focusing as it does on Eurytus' insults and Heracles' revenge, which consists in taking the former's city, but leaving out the crucial fact that he had another motive for wanting this city, viz. Eurytus' daughter Iole.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Macleod 2001: 107–132. To my mind, her suggestion that the tale actually functions as a warning goes too far: the Paedagogue is clearly not trying to warn her.

<sup>33</sup> Analysis in Parlavantza 1969: 28–30; Heiden 1989: 53–64; and Kraus 1991: 84–85.

Two highly intriguing false narratives are those in *Philoctetes* by Neoptolemus (329–390) and the Merchant (542–561). They are a mixture of true and false, and even their false elements are of relevance to the play as a whole. Let us take a closer look at Neoptolemus' tale. Odysseus and Phoenix came to fetch him from Scyrus (true), telling that he was the only one who could take Troy (after the prologue Neoptolemus knows that this is only partly true, since Philoctetes and the bow are also necessary; hence his somewhat bitter comment here: 'whether it was true or after all a fiction': 345). Having arrived in the Greek camp at Troy, he was greeted as a second Achilles (this may be a detail invented to increase the persuasiveness of his tale, but nothing speaks against it being true), but when he asked the Atrides for the armour of his father they refused, as they had already given it to Odysseus. When Odysseus, too, refused to hand it over, he decided to go back to Scyrus (false).<sup>34</sup> Where Neoptolemus unknowingly foreshadows the course of the play itself (until the forceful intervention of Heracles): Odysseus and Neoptolemus have come to fetch Philoctetes, there will be disputes over his bow (865–1080, 1218–1302), and at some point Neoptolemus will decide to go back to Scyrus (1402–1408). Thus for a long time there will be more truth in Neoptolemus' narrative than he himself realizes.

### *Conclusion*

Sophocles' drama features a great deal of narrative and a wide variety of intra-dramatic narrators. This may be due in part to a technical factor (his abandonment of the trilogy, which means that what preceded the play must somehow be presented in the course of the play itself), but much more to a thematic one (Sophoclean characters are often in the grip of the past). His predilection for narrative was a challenge to Sophocles, so much a man of the theatre: how can this undramatic element be integrated into his plays? His solution is to chop up narrative into dialogue or, when it is presented *en bloc*, to frame it by dialogue; to make his characters intensely interested in the content of the narratives, to which they react forcefully; to endow even the most functional

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<sup>34</sup> There are other analyses of Neoptolemus' tale: some consider it a lie from beginning to end; others think that the part about his being refused the armour of his father is true, because when Philoctetes repeats the fact in 1364–1365, Neoptolemus does not correct him.

narrators of all, the messengers, with real personalities or with a role elsewhere in the play. Moreover, he varies the status of the narratives: some are no more than hearsay reports, others are downright lies. In this way they fascinate, puzzle, and surprise both the characters on stage and the spectators in the theatre.