CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

EURIPIDES

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To appreciate the distinctiveness of Euripides' use of narration, we need to bear in mind three general principles governing the use of narration in tragedy. (i) All narration in drama is *embedded* narration; there is thus always a signifying relationship between the embedded narrative content and the framing situation, especially the voice and intentions of the narrating figure in communication with the intradramatic narratees. (ii) It is in the nature of tragic performance that all significant action is in some sense unseen, and mediated through 'narration' in the broadest sense: the past and future, the offstage world, states of mind, the designs of gods are all inaccessible to direct representation, and access comes only through variously problematic categories of verbal report. (iii) Tragic drama actively explores the boundaries between narration and neighbouring modes of discourse—between telling and showing, between narrative and argument in persuasive rhetoric, and especially between narrative focalization and the modality of other, non-narrative kinds of world-building through language.

Precisely because these boundaries are so blurred in practice, it is important for analytic purposes to mark a clear formal distinction between narrative and more strongly modalized forms of mediated action in tragedy—such as the proleptically oriented categories of plans, wishes, prayers, threats, vows, fears (all of which can, but need not, be presented in narrative form); analeptic forms such as regrets and accusations; and beliefs, feelings, and desires about the present. For these purposes, tragic narrative may be circumscribed as dealing with past, present, or future *events* (rather than states of mind, judgment, or gnomic opinion) presented by their narrator as non-provisional *fact* (rather than modalized states of potentiality), whether or not they are actually true—and normally related to the narratee as *news* (except for the special cases of agonistic narrative, where narrative is used to present competing, contested analepses, and choral paradeigma, where analeptic narration expands the causes or significance of present events).

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Within this framework, Euripides' distinctive uses of narration are strongly connected to formal elements of structure. Euripidean drama is patterned around formally positioned slabs of narration, each with its own characteristic poetics, and the modulation between these gives the Euripidean play much of its characteristic shape.[1] The following survey addresses the functions of narrators and narratees in the five main narrative loci: prologues, choral odes, narratives in *rhesis* within episodes (including messenger-speeches), agones, and closing narratives. It necessarily omits such extraordinary *sui generis* coups as the dying Alcestis' hallucination (a narration of counterfactual events in present time) and the many passing glides in and out of narrative in dialogue, in the plotting of intrigue, and in non-agonistic *rhesis*.

Prologues[2]

Euripides' pervasive use of the formal prologue was already recognized as a trademark device by his own contemporaries (Ar. *Ra.* 946–947; cf. 1197).[3] The form of a monologue on an empty stage is usually traced back to *Eumenides*, but there the Pythia does seem to imagine a human audience of prospective consultants (31–33), though probably offstage. The two probably post-Euripidean prologues, *Iphigenia at Aulis* and *Rhesus*, use an entirely different form, a later development of the Sophoclean duologue in which the audience eavesdrop on a two-handed conversation: in both cases, a remarkable *nocturnal* summons and instruction, deliberated between the two voices in the Iliadic night-time space between action when armies are silent and plans can be laid.

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[1] In an important discussion, Goward 1999 identifies as the most distinctive feature of Euripidean narrative the use of formal narrative in prologue and *exodos*, and a corresponding diminution in the role of overt prolepsis (dreams, oracles, curses, etc.) in the body of the play; this, she argues, is part of a wider strategy of diminishing the teleological shapeliness of the Aeschylean and Sophoclean tragic universe in favour of a world-picture dominated by chance. Other consequences, noted by Segal 1992, include a more self-conscious marking of literary form and contrivance; new kinds of plotting that require more initial narrative equipment; and a more self-conscious approach to myth.

[2] The key discussion is Erbse 1984, *q.v.* (6–19) for survey of earlier literature; see also Imhof 1937: 26–45; Schmidt 1971; Strohm 1977; Hamilton 1978; Segal 1992; Katsouris 1997.

[3] Among the many discussions see especially Erbse 1984: 3–4; and Dover 1993: 337–339.

The central contention of Erbse's detailed analysis is that what Euripidean expositors tell us is true, and a canon of reliability for the criticism of subsequent untruths. Yet as Hamilton (1974, 1978) and Segal (1992) have shown, the prologues still leave gaps and ambiguities, and their narrators are anything but objective, impersonal authorities; a striking case is Electra in *Orestes*, who at 16 and 26–27 pointedly elides parts of the narrative that sit uncomfortably with her public character. And as we shall see, closer examination also reveals that the so-called 'detached' prologues are full of complex, sometimes contradictory, indications of the presence of narratees within the play which widen rather than limit their narrative's engagement with its context.

The range of prologue narrators is extremely broad: in the nineteen complete plays, we have five gods, a satyr, and a ghost, alongside a spectrum of mortals ranging from title characters (*Andromache*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Helen*) to nameless slave (*Medea*) and peasant (*Electra*). There are nevertheless some revealing patterns that reveal the distinctiveness of Euripides' approach. Where the prologue speaker is a mortal, Euripides consistently presents victims or other impotent or marginal figures; the only male narrators are Electra's nameless husband and the aged Iolaus and Amphitryon, while the named female speakers are consistently captive and/or besieged (often as suppliants). The effect is to enter the Euripidean play from a perspective of wide access to narrative content but limited power over its development. In the prologues, narration is an expression of disempowerment; as speech acts, the prologues express lament, prayer, the abandonment of hope. Heroines who do break out from victimhood to violence (*Medea*, *Hecuba*, *Electra*) are not given prologue narration; viewed initially through other eyes, they are presented as objects of study rather than *ab initio* sympathy. The five divine narrators, and the ghost of Polydorus in *Hecuba*, are a particularly complex group, being privy to information outside the reach of human consciousness. Their narrations are more markedly proleptic, and sometimes have the illocutionary force of command or promise. Yet though gods and ghosts know all, they will not (and cannot) tell all, so that in practice their accounts leave tantalizing spaces for the spectator or reader to fill; and in contrast to the mortal narrators, they are invisible to all the play's human cast,[4] and so do not communicate with the world of the mortal action at all.

[4] Hecuba is onstage throughout the dialogue of the gods in *Troades* (36–38), yet is oblivious to their presence; the other divine prologists are alone on stage.

This raises a fundamental question: who are the *narratees* of all these soliloquies on seemingly empty stages? Aristophanes' *Ranae* took it for granted it must be the Athenian audience, as regularly in comedy. But there is no explicit audience address of the kind routine in Old and New Comedy;[5] instead, tragedy consistently assumes a Homeric universe with its permanent audience of unseen spectators, whose tacit homologies with the audience in the theatre are central to tragedy's model of the ironic structure of its world.[6] Divine speakers come closer to acknowledging the presence of a theatrical audience, but even these never resort to second persons; instead, their use of deictics and other demonstrative terms (such as Aphrodite's *deixō* at *Hipp.* 9, or Poseidon's words at *Tro.* 36) evokes a subtler pragmatics of implicit expository address to quasi-overt narratees, of whose presence they are conscious but whose actual identity and location in the narrative are left unspecified.

But even mortal prologists do not exposit in a vacuum. Rather, they draw tacitly or explicitly on a range of available narratees on stage: self, unseen gods, textually invisible attendants, or simply landscape, empty air, sunlight. Since all of these are irresponsive, the distinction between communicative address and non-communicative apostrophe is not always solid.[7] These unresponding audiences may also be blurred, combined, or juxtaposed: thus the pedagogue in *Medea* describes the nurse as talking to herself (51), while she herself claims earth and sky as her narratees (57). Iphigenia, similarly, describes her audience as *aithēr* (43; she at least is unattended), yet 37 makes it clear that she is also aware of, though not speaking for the ears of, the listening gods. But while prologue narrators may make free use of such communicative tropes as deictics, interactional particles, and rhetorical questions,[8] they do not address themselves to a *responsive* narratee on stage. Orestes is unconscious during Electra's narration; Hecuba is oblivious to the gods' conversation; and even when the expositor does share the stage with a listener,[9] the intended audience is generally more open.[10] As a rule,

[5] See Segal 1992: 96 on the rhetorical question opening *Heracles*.

[6] See more fully Lowe 1996 (esp. 523–524) and 2000: 180.

[7] On apostrophe as second-person narration → Introduction and → Lycophron.

[8] Ar. *Thesm.* 868 makes fun of this trope by introducing a second party to answer *Hel.* 56.

[9] See the table in Schmidt 1971: 5 with 4 n. 15.

[10] Thus Amphitryon speaks of Megara in the third person, with deictic, at 14 and throughout until she speaks to engage him directly in dialogue at 60 for her

the presence of a responsive listener closes off prologue narration: the arrival of a second character, or of the chorus, forces a suspension of narration, a targeting of address, and a modulation from past to present time.

Messenger speeches and related narrative rheseis

In a detailed survey of the engagement of Euripidean messenger-speech narrators both in their narratives and with their on-stage audiences, de Jong shows that messengers play a vital role in constructing the 'open' dialogic interplay of perspectives and evaluations that characterize the Euripidean world-picture. Particularly important for present purposes is her demolition of the myth of the 'objectivity' of the messenger as narrator, through her exposure of pervasive touches of focalization, references to autopsy, and address to the on-stage narratees.[11] Yet as Barrett demonstrates, there is simultaneously a tendency towards the messengers' self-effacement as presences in the stories they tell: by ambiguous self-positioning in the scene, by referring to spectators in the third person, by distancing themselves from other spectators mentioned in their narrative, or by instances of focalization that strain the limits of autopsy.[12]

As de Jong points out, the traditional anonymity of the tragic messenger does not mean that such narrators are faceless, disengaged nonentities. On the contrary, Euripidean messengers are all closely aligned with one party to the play's central dialectic. They are anonymous not because they are characterless ciphers, but because they are slaves, and tragic slaves are always unnamed; 24 out of 30 speakers[13] are slaves, while the peasant in *Orestes* is a feudal dependant of Agamemnon's family, and the professional herald Talthybius, though a free man,

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supplementary narration. In *Heraclidae*, Iolaus is accompanied by the mute Heraclids, but speaks of them in the third person until Copreus' arrival at 48 prompts an urgent appeal to the boys to gather close.

[11] Barrett 2002: *passim*.

[12] Barrett 2002 (esp. 74–96), who adduces *El.* 826–829; *HF* 930–934; and *Med.* 1156–1157.

[13] Reckoning from the canon in de Jong 1991: 179–180 (*q.v.* for earlier corpora) and 189–190, but with her definition relaxed for purposes of this discussion to admit also the six narrative *rheseis* and one messenger lyric (the *Hecuba parodos*) excluded from her canon of messenger-speeches as such.

regularly speaks as though fulfilling the role of a servant of the collective commanders. Strikingly, not one of the tragic messengers is female (there is only the *therapaina* in the prosatyric *Alc.*)—in part, perhaps because they need to ferry news from the public world offstage, but also perhaps for reasons of narrative authority.[14]

The chorus is always present for messenger narratives, and in nine instances it is the sole audience; in *Supplices* it is the principal narratee, though Adrastus is also present; elsewhere the messenger addresses himself primarily to a solo character, but the chorus still offer their own response. In such cases the alignment of sympathies is potentially complex, since the choral perspective may be significantly at odds with that of the principal narratee. Though in a majority of cases the narrator and all onstage narratees are on the same side, in seven the messenger faces a hostile audience,[15] and there are six more where the chorus' sympathies conflict with those of the messenger's principal addressee.[16] Even the messenger's own loyalties can be divided: Hippolytus' groom is Theseus' slave as well as Hippolytus', but champions his young master over the old, while Pentheus' slaves similarly call their master's judgment into question. And to complicate things still further, the on-stage narratees may differ from the messenger and/or from one another in their response to the *content* of the narration; thus, for example, Medea is no friend to Jason's slave, but is delighted by the content of his narration, at the same time as the chorus are sympathetic to the narrator but appalled by his tale.

Choral narration

Unsurprisingly in view of the increased narrative element in the prologue, narrative *parodoi* are rare in Euripides, and limited to cases of immediate autopsy—as in *Hecuba* 98–153 (hesitantly counted with the previous section's narrative *rheseis*, since it brings news to an on-stage narratee), *Ion* 184–218 (strictly, mimetic rather than narrative), and *Iphigenia at Aulis* 164–302. But narrative *stasima* are more common, and

[14] On the gender, status, and authority of tragic messengers see Barrett 2002: 99–101.

[15] *Hec.* 518–582 and 1132–1182; *Tro.* 1123–1155; *IT* 260–339 and 1327–1419; *Or.* 1395–1502; *Bacch.* 1043–1152.

[16] *Med.* 1136–1230; *Hipp.* 1173–1254; *Suppl.* 650–730; *Hel.* 1526–1618; *Bacch.* 434–450 and 677–774.

there is also frequent use of shorter narrative inserts as paradigms or aetiological flashbacks, as well as some lyric recapitulation of events already witnessed or recounted (as at *Or.* 327–331). An inventory of narrative odes would probably include *Andromache* 1009–1046 (the fall of Troy), *Troades* 511–567 (the sack of Troy), *Electra* 432–486 (the shield of Achilles), *Iphigenia in Tauris* 1234–1283 (foundation of the Delphic oracle), *Phoenissae* 1019–1066 (the Sphinx), *Orestes* 807–843 (Agamemnon's murder), and the special case of *Iphigenia at Aulis* 751–802 (a vivid prolepsis of the coming war for Helen).[17]

Euripidean *stasima* are particularly characterized by a movement from general to specific, far to near, impersonal to personal, and light to dark; for narrative odes, this generally entails a transition from past to present and from third-person analeptic narration to more modalized and proleptic forms of first-person discourse such as prayers, hopes, and speculations. Thus a common pattern is for *stasima* dominated by narrative of past events to modulate into a non-narrative reflection situated in the present, in which the choral narrators' present situation and perspective progressively (or abruptly) takes over from a more objective narratorial stance. In *Alcestis* 569–605, the narrative subject of Apollo's labour for Admetus leads to reflection on Admetus' present hospitality and the chorus' prayer that it will be rewarded; at *Andromache* 275–308, a narrative account of the judgment of Paris modulates into counterfactual speculation about a world in which Cassandra's advice had been heeded and Paris done away with at birth.[18]

The identity and authority of these choral narrators follow well-recognized patterns. Euripidean choruses are normally female, and the male choruses in the extant plays[19] are all geriatric (*Alc.*, *Hcld.*, *HF*), if

[17] On all these passages see Hose 1990–1991 (index locorum ad loc.); cf. Panagl 1971, whose list of 'dithyrambic' stasima excludes the *Andromache* and *Orestes* odes but includes the examples listed in the next note (excepting *HF* 348–441.).

[18] Cf. *Hec.* 629–656 (Paris and the Trojan War, hence the present sufferings of the chorus of enslaved survivors) and 905–952 (the fall of Troy, hence their prayer for Helen's present or future doom); *El.* 699–746 (the golden lamb of Argos, hence Clytaemnestra's crime and its present consequences); *HF* 348–441 (Heracles' labours, hence the present despair of his family and friends); *Hel.* 1301–1368 (Demeter and Persephone, hence Helen's neglect of their cult as the root of her present suffering); *Phoen.* 638–689 (the story of Cadmus, hence prayer to Epaphus to save the land of his descendants now); and *IA* 1036–1079 (the wedding of Peleus and Thetis contrasted with the imminent sacrifice of Iphigenia).

[19] Evidence for the identity of the choruses in the lost plays is marshalled by Hose 1990–1991: 22–27.

we discount *Rhesus*' Trojan warriors and *Cyclops*' generically obligatory satyrs; aside from these last two, there are no young men or male slaves. All are bystanders or victims, excluded from the processes of power by age or sex, and in the latter case sometimes also by enslavement (*Hec.*, *Tro.*, *IT*, *Hel.*, *Ion*) or alien status (*Phoen.*). They generally align closely with the interests of one party, especially if both the chorus and a central character are female; this is especially the case in plays of intrigue and conspiracy (*Med. Hipp. Andr.*, *Hec.*, *El.*, *IT*, *Hel.*, *Ion*, *Or.*), with only the problematically authentic *Iphigenia at Aulis* following the alternative Sophoclean pattern (*Antigone*, *Electra*) of a conspiracy hatched in the prologue from which the chorus are excluded.

All these choral narrators exhibit a standard narrative competence characterized by (1) unlimited access to earlier myth, whether or not it is closely continuous with their own experience; (2) limited access at the time of their first entry to information about the present state of affairs in the city, based on hearsay rather than autopsy, though not regarded as problematic on that account; (3) restriction of access thereafter to what is reported onstage, supplemented with highly unauthoritative and subjective speculation about offstage and future events. As generally in tragic choruses, the narratorial *persona* is a complex fusion of the communal 'I' of choral lyric (the Pindaric 'I' of the primary narrator is not heard) with the awareness and focalization of their own dramatic character.[20] Only rarely is choral narration overtly addressed to an onstage narratee. Rather, the chorus' narrative stance conforms to the conventions of lyric narrative, addressing itself to an unspecified collective narratee: notionally fellow *choreutae*, but readily extensible, via the chorus' role as embodiments of the consciousness of the community, to embrace the spectators in the theatre (→ Aeschylus and Sophocles).

Agonistic narration

Agonistic narrative is a particularly fluid type, merging readily into other modes of discourse; the narrative element is strongest in *Medea*, *Hecuba*, *Heracles*, and *Troades*, but as Lloyd notes, formal blocks of demarcated narration are the exception rather than the rule in Euripi-

[20] See especially Gould 1996 (stressing the latter element) with Goldhill 1996 (counter-emphasizing the former).

dean agonistic *rheseis*.[21] Instead, the regular pattern is for an argument to drop in and out of narration *ad hoc*. As Dubischar's taxonomy stresses, the pragmatics of the Euripidean agon involve a clear if flexible structure of roles: there is always (1) a plaintiff; (2) a second party who (depending on the type of *agon*) may be either an opponent or a sympathetic sounding-board; and there is optionally (3) an umpire figure, who may or may not be the same as the second speaker. (In *Andr.* and *Supp.* the plaintiff and opponent speak their cases to the judge separately.) The chorus is always present as on-stage (secondary) narratees, and conventionally offers brief verdicts on the speakers' cases, but it is never the principal narratee, whose role defaults instead to the *kritēs* where available or otherwise to the rival speaker, and only in *Heraclidae* does the choral verdict seem to affect the action.

The engagement of narrators and narratees with the narrative element in *agones* is determined principally by these roles. The narrative is overtly focalized, and heavily punctuated with analytic argument. The past exists to validate arguments in the present: to be raked over for grievances and claims on duty, so that the commonest narrative trope is a turn from Then to Now. For similar reasons, agonistic narrative is particularly given to forensic counterfactuals, in either conditional or interrogative form. Thus the core of Medea's case against Jason (475–491) is expressed in a narrative of her services to him and his disservice to her, culminating in a complex counterfactual alternative under which his behaviour might have been defensible. Jason then replies to this narrative at 526–568 by systematically re-narrating the same events with a different motivation, segmenting his retelling into a series of formally itemised forensic responses to the principal accusations embedded in Medea's narrative catalogue. This agonistic exchange of roles between narrator and narratee creates two versions of the same story in which the narrating party is guiltless and all fault lies with the narratee. But both narrations are embedded in longer and more diverse forensic *rheseis* which contextualize the function of narrative as merely one among many modes of verbal contestation, and the construction of rival narratorial identities and authority is itself part of this wider agonistic discourse.

[21] Lloyd 1992: 24–25, 42.

Narration apo mēkhanēs and other exodos narratives

Euripides' predilection for the *deus ex machina* (ten in the extant plays, if we admit *Rhesus* and disqualify *Medea*) and more generally for proleptic narrative in the *exodos* sequence, gives his plays a highly distinctive pattern of closure, discussed in detail by Dunn (1997). The *deus* proper, marking the sudden arrival (often in the midst of crisis onstage) of a new, omniscient voice from an essentially outside world, involves a violent shift of perspective away from the pointedly restricted understanding of the characters into a vertiginous glimpse of lives and ages to come, in which the story of the play becomes continuous with, and aetiologically foundational to, the history of the audience's own world.

As narrator, the typical Euripidean *deus* is omniscient, authoritative, and beyond the reach of simple canons of moral judgment—whence the debate, stretching back to Verrall, over how such figures can be reconciled with the narrative authority of the human body of the play. But they are also partisan and judgmental, supporting one side against the other and sometimes taking sides in divine factions (*Hipp.*, *El.*). Euripidean *dei* speak as though the futures they tell are already written: 'Long ago', says Dionysus at the notorious *Bacchae* 1349 of the events both within the play and beyond it, 'my father Zeus assented to these things'. Such omniscient narration of things to come runs close to the modalized forms of proleptic speech-act such as command, promise, and vow. The closing narrators are more than mere truth-speakers; their very ability to speak with authority about the future gives them a force of incontrovertibility which carries the weight of a determinative order and takes immediate precedence over alternative courses of willed human action.[22]

In three cases (*Med.*, *Hcld.*, *Hec.*) the *exodos*-narrator is not a god but a mortal narrator who has been central to the conflict in a strongly bipolar play, and now uses the authority of prolepsis in a final clash with the surviving antagonist. The source of such figures' sudden narrative authority, with its epic roots in the clairvoyance of the dying Patroclus and Hector, is not always clearly disambiguated in the text. Polymestor attributes his eerie knowledge of Hecuba's fate to 'Dionysus, prophet to the Thracians' (*Hec.* 1267), and perhaps we are not encouraged to wonder why Polymestor's own blinding was not included in the god's

[22] Bushnell 1988 (contrasting the much weaker narrative authority of Euripidean *manteis*); Barrett 2002: 50.

revelations, while Eurystheus' foreknowledge is similarly due to 'an old oracle of Loxias' (*Hcld.* 1028). But though Medea has proven supernatural powers, she does not spell out the source of knowledge that allows her so effectively to blur the distinction between what could be mere statement of intent (1378–1380, 1384–1385), effective prediction of an institutional commemoration (1381–1383), and outright prophecy of the bizarrely improbable (1386–1388). This, combined with the strongly partisan status of such narrators in a polarised, agonistic drama, gives their final predictions an elusive, troubling force.

The narratees of the Euripidean *exodos*-narratives are so constructed as to bring out the fundamental duality between primary and secondary audiences which is so fundamental to tragedy's use of the dramatic medium to express a view of the world. The very content of the prolepses underlines the contrast between the on-stage narratees for whom these events are still in the future and the narratees in the theatre for whom they are in the past. This is reinforced by the further concentration on proleptic elements that connect to cult foundations or other narrative traces left in the Athenian audience's own world. Indeed, the authority of the *exodos*-narrators comes primarily from the theatre audience's knowledge that their fulfilment has the double certainty of what has happened and what is still present. In this, as in Euripidean narrative as a whole, the clash of perspectives between different narrators and different levels of narratee seems designed to maximize, rather than to disguise, significant contrasts in the way human experience is viewed and interpreted, and even (as the studies of Segal, Dunn, and Barrett suggest) to interrogate the forms of representation itself.

Conclusion

Narration in Euripidean drama is closely tied to the heightened marking of formal elements which characterizes Euripidean dramaturgy as a whole: not just the formal prologues and *ex machina* speeches which bookend the action with static narrative blocks, but the more highly conventionalized *stasima* and formal debates within the body of the play. The choices and handling of narrator are closely associated with the distinctive Euripidean exploration of issues of power; between prologue and *exodos*, and often in the prologue itself, the initiation of narration is overwhelmingly an activity of the disempowered, and narrative an expression of and a substitute for the access to control of events

that eludes figures marginalized by gender, age, or status. But by the same token, Euripidean drama is interested in modulations of narrative *sensu stricto* into more determinative and empowering kinds of speech-act: communication, persuasive argument, and above all the plotting of intrigue, which provides a mechanism by which the very narrator figures who have been marginalized in the play's initial structures of power can use their powers of narration, hitherto an expression of disempowerment, to convert a sequence of events from a proleptically rehearsed secondary narrative into primary narrative action.