



*Narrative Authority: From Epic to Drama.*  
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## Summary

### **Narrative Authority: From Epic to Drama**

At the centre of this thesis are the narratives in epic, lyric, and the choral odes of tragedy. Previous scholarly work has argued that there are continuities between these genres and shown that the choral odes of tragedy contain many characteristics of epic and lyric. A prime example is Herington's *Poetry into Drama* (1985). The aim of this project is to make a contribution to this line of research by investigating if and how the tragic poets adopted – and developed – narrative techniques from their epic and lyric predecessors.

The argument focuses on the subject of narrative authority, or the competence that a narrator claims to have to give a reliable account of events. This form of authority is based on the relationship between the narrator and his narrative as well as his knowledge of the events in his narrative. I argue that an investigation of this subject can help interpret epic, lyric, and tragic texts. Discussions and analyses of texts, therefore, are an important part of this thesis.

In the introduction, I provide an overview of publications on the continuities between epic, lyric, and the choral odes of tragedy, and on the narrative characteristics of lyric and tragic poetry. Then I present my research questions and methodology. With regard to narrative authority, I distinguish the four most common. Firstly, narrators can be aided by the Muses, omniscient goddesses. Secondly, 'internal narrators' may recount what they have seen themselves. Thirdly, those without personal knowledge may base their accounts on others' reports. Fourthly, some do not give an explanation of how they gained their knowledge of the topic.

I also present three dominant narrative concepts. The first is 'I *versus* we'. An internal narrator may emphasize his own role in the story by using 'I' frequently or by using 'we', for example when the narratee was present or when he experienced something with others. Secondly, focalization (narrative perspective) is important: narrators may tell a story as if they are experiencing the events or from a later point of view, equipped with *ex eventu* knowledge. Lastly, I address *metalepsis*, or the breaking or blurring of narrative boundaries. This includes episodes when it is unclear whether a narrator or one of his characters is speaking and of *apostrophe* (when the narrator addresses a character).

Chapter 1 examines the aforementioned topics in Homer's epics. Both start with the primary narrator invoking the Muse. The primary narrator also poses questions to the Muse. The answer of these questions comes from the Muse and from the narrator himself. Thus the narrator presents himself as a professional singer. The Muse is also mentioned in relation to the two other singers in the *Odyssey*, Demodocus and Phemius. Although the narrators have not seen in person the events they recount, the Muse's contributions give them the authority of eyewitnesses.

The (ordinary) secondary narrators are not assisted by the Muse. Often they are internal narrators who recount events that they have seen. To contribute to the understanding of the authority of internal narrators, I investigate how they refer to themselves and their narratees. These narrators use 'we' to involve the narratee more closely into the story, which creates authority. By contrast, when they use 'I', they emphasize their own or someone else's (heroic) role within the group. Internal narrators do not automatically have the authority to recount events they have not seen, but often they circumvent or break such restrictions.

When narrators are not eyewitnesses, they may refer to someone who acts as their narrative source. These 'reported narrators' often have an authorizing function ('other people say so, hence it is true'). On the part of the primary narrator 'Homer', the reported narrators arguably signal allusions to pre-existing poetry.

Finally, narrators may not need to explain the source of their knowledge. If this is the case, the source of their knowledge is often evident. This also occurs in narratives told by (omniscient) gods and stories about gods that do not directly influence the narrator's own situation.

Chapter 2 examines lyric. The Muse is often found in lyric, especially in odes with an 'epic flavour' (e.g. Pi. *Pythian*. 4). Questions posed to the Muse occur frequently in lyric, and also a reference to the omniscience of the Muse and multiple references to the close collaboration between a narrator and his Muse can be found. Unlike in epic, the Muse is not mainly used to authenticate the narrator's knowledge, but to function as a goddess who gives the poems and their subjects eternal fame.

Internal narrators are relatively scarce in lyric. One of the rare examples, which also includes an internal narratee, is Sappho (fr. 94). Another example is found in Pindar's *Pythian* 1, where the narrator refers to 'seeing' Mount Etna. Mount Etna is a location not only within the storyworld, but also in the

ode's lyric frame and probably within the field of view from the location of the performance.

Appeals to other narrators are more common. These reported narrators often have an introductory function. Especially the Pindaric narrator alludes to earlier poetry to reflect his conception of both his own role and the function of his poetry: older poetry has safeguarded a story's existence and authority for the future, and he will do the same for the subject of his poetry. Lyric narrators can also signal an allusion to a poem with a simple 'they say', and they can disguise modifications of a story by appealing to reported narrators. When an apostrophe is combined with reported narrators, the narrator often reflects (and urges his audience to reflect) on the veracity and/or relevance of the story (e.g. Alcaeus fr. 42, Stesichorus' *Palinodes*, Pi. O. 1). The narrator in Sappho fr. 58 uses a *verbum dicendi* in the past tense. I argue that this emphasizes the contrast between past and present.

Chapter 3 focuses on the choral odes of tragedy, in which narrators mention the Muse only twice. In *Trojan Women* 511–76, the chorus invokes the Muse in order to emphasize similarities with, and also deviations from, epic poetry. The role of the Muse changes: she does not so much authenticate the narrators' knowledge, but rather ensures the topic's and poem's fame. The idea of the Muse ensuring someone's fame ties in with the stasimon in *HF* 1061–41.

The chorus often reflects upon the events on stage from a wider perspective, also in a temporal sense. Internal narrators, hence, occur rarely in the choral narratives, except when the choral narrators' own history is the topic of their ode (Euripides' *Hec.* 905–52 and *Tr.* 511–760). As internal narrators, they combine different narrative perspectives (*experiencing* and *narrating focalisation*) to explain how they experienced the fall of Troy while reminding their audience of their story's unfortunate ending. The choral narrators customarily use first-person singular forms when they narrate their fate but plural forms for the city's initial joy.

Next, I analyse choral odes in which narrators quote other narrators. The chorus uses these other narrators mainly to create authority: reported narrators suggest that the topics are well known. The poets, in turn, use this device to disguise invented traditions. Several additional effects may be produced by reported narrators. Like in lyric, in *Libation Bearers* 585–651, *Philoctetes* 676–729, and *Medea* 824–65, the narrators make explicit comparisons between the present and mythical past by using reported narrators. Yet, in the choral odes of tragedy, this explicitness additionally underscores the exceptional situation of a character on stage, since this is even

worse than what the chorus knows from stories. In E. *Electra* 432–86, for instance, the chorus conveys eyewitness reactions to the arms of Achilles by means of their informant. On the other hand, reported narrators may be used by narrators to spawn doubts as to the story's veracity, as in E. *El.* 699–746 (golden lamb ode), and in *IA* 751–800. The critical stance taken by the narrators creates authority for themselves.

In most tragic embedded narratives the chorus members do not explain how they know the events they tell. In these cases, they probably tell a traditional story or narrate what they have seen. This unmotivated omniscience may have been inherited from epic and lyric narrators.

In the parodos of *Agamemnon*, the subject of Chapter 4, the Argive elders do not explain how they know what they tell. I argue that the presentation of the story by the chorus of Argive elders suggests that they have seen the events they narrate, and that they closed their eyes at the moment when Iphigenia is sacrificed. Then I argue that the Argive elders' claim of authority at the beginning of the parodos' lyric part is based on their old age and status. The poet, in turn, signals to the audience that the story is reliable enough to form the basis of the *Agamemnon*, even of the whole *Oresteia* trilogy.

In the conclusion, I summarize my research findings per category (appeals to the Muses, internal narrators (autopsy), appeals to reported narrators, and no explicit explanation) in order to provide an overview of the development of narrative techniques from epic to the choral odes of tragedy.