Structures of Epic Poetry

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Volume II.2: Configuration

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Contents

Part V: **Communication**

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Principles of communication in Greek and Roman epic – a short introduction

After the first four sections of our second volume traced the adventures of the epic protagonists against ruthless opponents in battle (vol. II.1, sect. 1) and against the forces of nature during their voyages (vol. II.2, sect. 2) through time (vol. II.2, sect. 3) and space (vol. II.2, sect. 4), the fifth and final section of volume II.2 is dedicated to the most pervasive, and perhaps also the most influential structure in epic poetry: scenes that focus on the various types of and occasions for communication between epic characters.

The combination of the two narrative modes of διήγησις ("narration", "report") and μίμησις ("imitation", "representation") was already established as the key characteristic of the epic genre in antiquity:[1]

Plato, *Republic* 394b–c:
ὀρθότατα, ἔφην, ὑπέλαβες, καὶ οἶμαί σοι ἤδη δηλοῦν ὃ ἔμπροσθεν οὐχ οἷός τ’ ἦ, ὅτι τῆς ποιήσεώς τε καὶ μυθολογίας, ἡ μὲν διὰ μιμήσεως ὅλη ἐστίν, ὥσπερ σὺ λέγεις, τραγῳδία τε καὶ κωμῳδία, ἡ δὲ δι’ ἀπαγγελίας αὐτοῦ τοῦ ποιητοῦ – εὕροις δ’ ἂν αὐτὴν μάλιστά που ἐν διθυράμβοις – ἡ δ’ αὖ δι’ ἀμφοτέρων ἔν τε τῇ τῶν ἐπῶν ποιήσει, πολλαχοῦ δὲ καὶ ἄλλοθι, εἴ μοι μανθάνεις.

"You have conceived me most rightly," I said, "and now I think I can make plain to you what I was unable to before, that there is one kind of poetry and tale-telling which works wholly through imitation, as you remarked, tragedy and comedy; and another which employs the recital of the poet himself, best exemplified, I presume, in the dithyramb; and there is again that which employs both, in epic poetry and in many other places, if you apprehend me."[2]

Aristotle, *Poetics* 1448a19–24:
ἔτι δὲ τούτων τρίτη διαφορὰ τὸ ὡς ἕκαστα τούτων μιμήσαιτο ἄν τις. καὶ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῖς καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ μιμεῖσθαι ἔστιν ὀτὲ μὲν ἀπαγγέλλοντα, ἢ ἕτερόν τι γιγνόμενον ὥσπερ Ὅμηρος ποιεῖ ἢ ὡς τὸν αὐτὸν καὶ μὴ μεταβάλλοντα, ἢ πάντας ὡς πράττοντας καὶ ἐνεργοῦντας τοὺς μιμουμένους.

A third difference in these arts is the manner in which one may represent each of these objects. For in representing the same objects by the same means it is possible to proceed either partly by narrative and partly by assuming a character other than your own – this is

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1 Cf. de Jong (1987a, 1–14) and de Jong (2005).
2 This translation is taken from Shorey (1969).

Homer's method – or by remaining yourself without any such change, or else to represent the characters as carrying out the whole action themselves.[3]

Communication in ancient epic can take many different forms: it can be expressed in a variety of narrative techniques ranging from narrative reports of speech acts (NRSA) to indirect (IS) and free indirect speech (FIS), as well as direct (DS) and free direct speech (FDS).[4] In Graeco-Roman epic a distinction is traditionally made between four levels of speech representation:[5]

1. Narrator speech = the epic narrative (primary narration – focalisation): NF1
2. Character speech
    (a) Character speech in *oratio recta* (secondary narration – focalisation): NF1 [NF2Cx]
    (b) Character speech in *oratio obliqua* (secondary focalisation): NF1 [F2Cx]
3. Embedded speech
    (a) Embedded direct speech (tertiary narration – focalisation): NF1 [NF2Cx (NF3Cx or Cy)]
    (b) Embedded indirect speech (tertiary focalisation): NF1 [NF2Cx (F3Cx or Cy)]
4. Speech inserted in embedded speech
    (a) Directly reported speech in speech inserted in embedded speech (quaternary narration – focalisation): NF1 [NF2Cx (NF3Cx or Cy {NF4Cx, y or z})]
    (b) Indirectly reported speech in speech inserted in embedded speech (quaternary focalisation): NF1 [NF2Cx (NF3Cx or Cy {F4 Cx, y, or z})]

The final section of volume II.2 primarily focuses on Level 2a: direct speeches by epic characters which can be grouped in clearly identifiable clusters of speeches that belong to the same communicative context. These scenes can consist of any number and combination of speeches:

1. Soliloquies: *secum* speeches either of groups or of individuals with themselves.
2. Monologues: speeches that are incomplete representations of dialogues or group conversations of which only the opening speech or the reply are reported, but never the full speech exchange.
3. Dialogues: a conversation between two characters in which at least two consecutive speeches, one from each speaker, are reported in *oratio recta*.
4. General interlocutions: a conversation between three or more characters.

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3 This translation is taken from Fyfe (1932).

4 Cf. Nünning (1994, 294).

5 This is a modification of de Jong's speech representation model; see de Jong (1987a, 168). On Ovid's narrative technique in the *Metamorphoses* which contains by far the greatest number of Level 4 speeches and even speeches of a higher order, cf. Avery (1936) and Sharrock in volume I.

Conversations in ancient epic predominantly adhere to the Cooperative Principle of Communication,[6] which, according to Grice (1975, 45–6), consists of a set of four norms that a speaker is expected to observe:

1. Maxim of quantity:
   – Make your contribution as informative as is required.
   – Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
2. Maxim of quality:
   – Do not say what you believe to be false.
   – Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
3. Maxim of relation:
   – Be relevant.
4. Maxim of manner:
   – Avoid obscurity of expression.
   – Avoid ambiguity.
   – Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
   – Be orderly.

This is why instances in which the Cooperative Principle is purposefully or unwittingly violated by an unreliable speaker are highlighted by the epic narrator.[7] He either reveals the speakers' reasons for attempting to deceive their respective addressee(s) – e.g. through the omission or misrepresentation of key facts, the invention of misleading messages and prophecies by a higher authority, or the impersonation, both verbal and physical, of other characters – or he draws attention to the speaker's own deception or lack of knowledge which has led to their incomplete or incorrect claims. In both cases, the discrepancy between the reader's knowledge of the speech's falsehood and the addressee's ignorance thereof are generally stressed and poignantly underlined by an abundance of dramatic irony.

Out of all the structural elements discussed in this compendium direct speeches can also have the greatest impact on the pace and rhythm of the narrative, depending on their overall length, which can vary from not further identified brief exclamations that do not even fill a single line to long rhetoric masterpieces of a few hundred lines to lengthy narratives of the hero's adventures which stretch over several books.[8] Their function also vastly differs: they can either drive the nar-

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6 Cf. Grice (1975, 45): "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged."

7 The question of the primary narrator's own (un)reliability, which is, by contrast, not explicitly discussed in the epic, is a separate issue. On the concept of unrealiability, cf., e.g., Booth (1961), Nünning (1998), and Nünning (1999).

8 Direct speeches take up between one third and more than half of the epic narratives included in this compendium. For a general introduction to direct speech and rhetoric in ancient epic, cf.

ration forward, as in the case of battle cries that start a war or Vergil's directional prophecies, or they can create a narrative pause or digression from the main plot of the epic, for instance, by addressing parallel stories that can take the reader beyond the confines of the epic plot, like the songs of Homer's Demodocus or Valerius' Orpheus.[9]

In addition to having a great impact on the structure of the epic, direct speeches also have an important characterising function. This applies, in particular, to soliloquies, both by gods and mortals (e.g. Juno's rage monologues in Silius' *Punica* or Medea's interior monologues in Apollonius' and Valerius' *Argonautica*), as well as speeches in councils, both divine on Mount Olympus and mortal on the battlefield, which are convened at a moment of great crisis and decide over the fate of the epic heroes and the outcome of their heroic mission. The protagonist's effectiveness in this communicative context is just as important and impactful as his own performance on the battlefield: a successful epic hero is not only a great warrior but also an excellent leader, and therefore a skilled speaker with the ability to inspire, sway, or re-motivate his entire army. The prime example for the epic hero's need to aspire to this double qualification is the lament of Achilles' mentor Phoenix in Book 9 of the *Iliad* (Hom. Il. 9.437–43):

> "πῶς ἂν ἔπειτ' ἀπὸ σεῖο φίλον τέκος αὖθι λιποίμην
> οἶος· σοὶ δέ μ' ἔπεμπε γέρων ἱππηλάτα Πηλεὺς
> ἤματι τῷ ὅτε σ' ἐκ Φθίης Ἀγαμέμνονι πέμπε
> 440 νήπιον οὔ πω εἰδόθ' ὁμοιΐου πολέμοιο
> οὐδ' ἀγορέων, ἵνα τ' ἄνδρες ἀριπρεπέες τελέθουσι.
> τοὔνεκά με προέηκε διδασκέμεναι τάδε πάντα,
> μύθων τε ῥητῆρ' ἔμεναι πρηκτῆρά τε ἔργων."

> "How can I then, dear child, be left here without thee, alone? It was to thee that the old horseman Peleus sent me on the day when he sent thee to Agamemnon, forth from Phthia, a mere child, knowing naught as yet of evil war, neither of gatherings wherein men wax preeminent. For this cause sent he me to instruct thee in all these things, to be both a speaker of words and a doer of deeds."[10]

Reitz in volume I. See also Elderkin (1906) and Lipscomb (1909). Simone Finkmann, Christopher Forstall, and Berenice Verhelst are currently in the process of developing an open-access database for direct speech in Greek and Roman epic from Homer to Late Antiquity, which will provide a comprehensive overview of the most important statistical data on direct speech representation.

9 For a more detailed analysis of narrative digressions, cf. the introduction to time in ancient epic by Reitz/Finkmann in this volume.

10 This translation is taken from Murray (1924).

How devastating a leader's failure to deliver an encouraging speech can be is perhaps best exemplified by Lucan's juxtaposition of Caesar's inspiring speech (Lucan. 7.235–302) and Pompey's lack of a similarly convincing exhortation (7.337–84) prior to the Battle of Pharsalus in Book 7 of the *Bellum Ciuile*. The outcome of the battle is anticipated and seemingly decided by the respective success and failure of their speeches.

Just as military campaigns and epic voyages, which virtually map the topographical motion, are generally confined to the horizontal axis for the mortal protagonists, but can also move along the vertical axis when gods, mortals, and the dead interact with one another, the communication among characters in ancient epic can both occur on the horizontal axis among 'peers' or it can cross spheres when supernatural powers and humans converse, or when humans attempt to be reunited with the deceased or to receive important information from them for their on-going heroic mission.[11] These two main communicative contexts can be subdivided as follows:

1. Same-sphere communication (horizontal axis):
   (a) Communication among mortals (esp. banquets, war councils, and messenger scenes)
   (b) Communication among gods (esp. divine council scenes and messenger scenes)
   (c) Communication among the dead (esp. as a backdrop to necromancies and dreams)[12]
2. Cross-sphere communication (vertical axis):
   (a) Communication between the gods and the living (esp. apparitions, dreams, and prayers)
   (b) Communication between the gods and the dead (esp. in the context of necromancies)
   (c) Communication between the living and the dead (esp. dreams and necromancies)
   (d) Communication with the help of intermediaries (esp. prophecies, necromancies, and messenger scenes).

As is evident from this list, the aforementioned subtypes cannot always be clearly separated. While some scenes, such as apparitions, are exclusive to one category, other speech contexts, most notably messenger scenes, are so variable as regards their cast of characters and addressees that they occur in multiple communicative contexts. Whereas gods, mortals, and the dead are able to communicate freely within their respective peer-groups, special measures are generally required for cross-sphere communication: the speaker and addressee are often in need of an interpreter who acts as an intermediary and interprets and/or delivers the information in question (e.g. prophets, necromancers, and messengers), they can

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11 On the vertical and the horizontal axis of the epic canvas, cf. Hardie (1986, 267–85) and Hardie (2018, 218).

12 The instances of communication among the dead are so few that they do not receive a separate treatment in this volume. For examples of this group, cf. Finkmann on necromancies in this volume.

require special measures to facilitate the conversation, especially in the form of sacrificial rituals (to appease the gods or to enable the dead to speak),[13] or they necessitate a change of the respective speaker's or the intermediary's appearance (through disguise or as part of a dream vision).[14]

Our selection of speech contexts attempts to provide a cross-section of the many different types of communicative contexts and exemplarily allows us to identify their narrative patterns, examine their function in the epic plot, and trace their development throughout the epic tradition. The degree to which the chosen scenes are formalised within their particular speech context can vary greatly: some scenes, such as divine councils, banquets, and messenger scenes, are highly formalised and contain a rather fixed narrative pattern (as well as providing the opportunity to compare repeated speech clusters), while others, such as apparition scenes and prophecies, offer the authors more flexibility but still retain a clearly recognisable narrative structure.

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13 Cf. Augoustakis/Froedge/Kozak/Schroer on sacrifices and rituals in volume II.1 and Finkmann on necromancies in this volume.

14 Cf. Reitz on apparition scenes in this volume.

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