

τῶν δ' ἀδοκίτων πόρον: Surprise and the Function of Euripides' Prologues

Many of Euripides' prologues feature a relatively long speech in which, among other things, some sort of prediction is made about the events to come in the play. Although this seems to [anticipate](#) the conventions of New Comedy, most commentators have focused on how it is different: whereas in New Comedy divine beings would reveal much of the plot, Euripides, they claim, played with his audiences' expectations or deliberately misled them (e.g. Dodds, [1960](#)). In this paper, I will argue that, while Euripides' prologues may include an occasional *suggestio falsi*, they are far more remarkable for the amount they reveal about the plots of their plays.

I will focus on Euripides' first and last surviving plays, *Alcestis* and *Bacchae*. March (1989) argues that Dionysus' discussion of a possible battle between the Thebans and Maenads in *Bacchae* is designed to mislead (contra, Hamilton 1974; Seaford 1996). The case is quite different in *Alcestis* (a play Dodds does not refer to): Apollo predicts the happy ending, giving the audience everything but the name of the hero who will save Alcestis. This apparent 'spoiler' has elicited various attempts and explanation and justification (e.g. Hartigan 1991).

I will make the case that Euripides' prologues tend, like the *Alcestis*, to reveal much more of the plot than modern audiences expect, rather than playing with their expectations. Investigation of this topic will lead to further discussion of interactions between tradition and innovation, suspense and surprise, as well as questions of audience (and character) foreknowledge, an issue relevant from the works of Homer down to the present day.

Bibliography

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