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COMIC PRIAMEL AND HYPERBOLE IN
EURIPIDES, *CYCLOPS* 1–10

Our only fully extant satyr play begins (Silenus προλογίζει) with the following
address to Dionysus and his statue:

> ὦ Βρόμιε, διὰ σὲ μυρίους ἔχω πόνους
> νῦν χὤτ᾽ ἐν ἥβηι τοὐμὸν εὐσθένει δέμας·
>
> πρῶτον μὲν ἡνίκ᾽ ἐμμανὴς Ἥρας ὕπο
> Νύμφας ὀρείας ἐκλιπὼν ὠιχου τροφούς·
>
> ἔπειτα δ᾽[1] ἀμφὶ γηγενῆ μάχην δορὸς   5
> ἐνδέξιος σῶι ποδὶ παρασπιστὴς βεβὼς
> Ἐγκέλαδον ἰτέαν ἐς μέσην θενὼν δορὶ
> ἔκτεινα—φέρ᾽ ἴδω, τοῦτ᾽ ἰδὼν ὄναρ λέγω;
> οὐ μὰ Δί᾽, ἐπεὶ καὶ σκῦλ᾽ ἔδειξα Βακχίωι.
>
> καὶ νῦν ἐκείνων μεῖζον᾽ ἐξαντλῶ πόνον.   10

The careful structure of this opening paragraph—emphasized above by spacing—
has yet to be appreciated properly (Seaford in his commentary on v. 5 even goes so
far as to talk of 'a rambling complaint'). In particular, these lines' status as a type of
priamel[2] seems nowhere to have been recognized; but: (1) a priamel often opens a
complete work (e.g. Sappho 16, Pind. *Ol.* 1, 11, Bacch. 14, *Dith.* 19) or an important
new section within such a work; (2) the priamel has been defined[3] as 'a series of three
(occasionally more) paratactic statements of similar form [which] serves to empha-
size the last', and we have in the present passage three such paratactic statements
of which the first two (πρῶτον μέν [3–4], ἔπειτα δ᾽[4] [5–9]) certainly operate in the
manner described, listing two earlier exploits in connection with Dionysus, 'to

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[1] δ᾽ is Heath's emendation of the Laurentian's γ᾽. The latter is preserved by, for instance,
Diggle in his *OCT* and Seaford in his commentary. But see n. 4 below.
[2] For a bibliography of recent studies of the priamel see my commentary on Soph. *Tr.* 498ff.
W. H. Race's *The Classical Priamel from Homer to Boethius* (*Mnemos.* Suppl. 74 [1982]) is
particularly helpful.
[3] By West in his commentary on Hes. *Op.* 435–6. Cf. Race (n. 2), 9 and 43, n. 26.
[4] We need δέ (following on v. 3's μέν and completed by v. 10's καὶ νῦν) to clarify this paratactic
pattern. Compare such priamels as Sappho 16.1–4 (οἱ μὲν ἱππήων στρότον, οἱ δὲ πέσδων, / οἱ
δὲ νάων φαῖσ᾽ ἐπὶ γᾶν μέλαιναν / ἔμμεναι κάλλιστον, [ἐγὼ δέ κτλ.], Plato, *Lysis* 211d–e ὁ μὲν
γάρ τις ἵππους ἐπιθυμεῖ κτᾶσθαι, ὁ δὲ κύνας, ὁ δὲ χρυσίον, ὁ δὲ τιμάς· ἐγὼ δέ κτλ., Eur.
Hec. 623–8, *Suppl.* 234–6, *Hel.* 397–400, fr. 316 N², fr. 1059 N² δεινὴ μὲν ἀλκὴ κυμάτων
θαλασσίων, / δειναὶ δὲ ποταμῶν καὶ πυρὸς θερμοῦ πνοαί, / δεινὸν δὲ πενία, δεινὰ δ᾽ ἄλλα
μυρία / ἀλλ᾽ οὐδὲν οὕτω δεινόν κτλ. (other examples in Race [n. 2], 44–5, 53, 80, n. 109, and 90,
n. 134). γ᾽ has no parallel in such contexts, and the Platonic instances of πρῶτον μέν ... ἔπειτά
γε alluded to by Seaford ad loc. are irrelevant for the reason he cites (they span 'intervention by
another speaker'). Heath, whose sensitivity to the applications of γ᾽ had been whetted by his
predilection for the *remedium Heathianum*, was right to emend. (Ussher's note ad loc., deeming γ᾽
'unnecessary' regularization, shows how dangerous failure to recognize common literary patterns
can be. Hermann's ἔπειθ᾽ ὅτ᾽, adopted by Kovacs in the new Loeb Euripides, might be thought to
provide a 'when' word to balance ἡνίκα in v. 3. But in fact, in an elegant *variatio*, we already have

emphasize the last' (v. 10). Furthermore, (3) words like μυρία and πολλά frequently stand at the start of a priamel (cf. Soph. *Tr.* 1046–7 ὦ πολλὰ δὴ καὶ θερμά, καὶ λόγωι κακά, / καὶ χερσὶ καὶ νώτοισι μοχθήσας ἐγώ, Bacch. *Dith.* 19.1–2 πάρεστι μυρία κέλευθος / ἀμβροσίων μελέων[5] etc.), so that the adjective in v. 1's μυρίους ἔχω πόνους is idiomatic in this context; (4) similarly, at the *end* of a priamel, we often find phrases such as καὶ νῦν or νῦν δέ (cf. Soph. *Tr.* 1103, Hom. *Il.* 2.272–4 μυρί' Ὀδυσσεὺς ἐσθλὰ ἔοργε / . . . / νῦν δὲ τόδε μέγ' ἄριστον ἐν Ἀργείοισιν ἔρεξεν),[6] so v. 10's καὶ νῦν is equally at home. (5) Even the rhetorical question at v. 8 φέρ' ἴδω, τοῦτ' ἰδὼν ὄναρ λέγω; may be relevant, since such questions are frequent at the climax of priamels (e.g. Aesch. *Ag.* 1017ff., *Cho.* 594–5, Soph. *Tr.* 504–6),[7] though here it *leads into* that climax.

The uncovering of a priamel, even one that has been overlooked by all commentators on the *Cyclops* and all collectors of the rhetorical device in question,[8] may seem a trivial feat. But there is an additional and more important factor to the present passage. Like Heracles' great speech at Soph. *Tr.* 1046ff. (from which several of the parallels adduced above come), Silenus' monologue combines its priamel with another rhetorical feature,[9] one that since Netta Zagagi's important study of Plautus[10] we have come to know as 'mythological hyperbole'. Commenting on the Sophoclean passage, Zagagi observes[11] that in it Heracles 'belittles his past experiences in comparison with his present distress . . . the passage falls into the category of that familiar pattern of thought in which the present occurrence on stage is declared to have surpassed former mythological events (even though these events were also personal experiences of Heracles)'. The same may be said of our passage (not mentioned by Zagagi)[12] where Silenus, like Heracles, though to comic effect, treats

a when-*clause* with βεβώς (Kassel: γεγώς) at the end of v. 6, and the last thing needful, especially after v. 2's ὅτε, is another *word* meaning 'when'.)

    [5] For further instances see Race (n. 2), 31–2, 81, 112.

    [6] For further instances see Race (n. 2), 32 and n. 2, 36, 38, 75, 93. Cf. 88 and n. 131.

    [7] For further instances see Race (n. 2), 14, n. 43, 87ff. On the device of the rhetorical question see also below n. 24.

    [8] For a list of some other Euripidean priamels see Race (n. 2), 95–8 and 98, n. 158. Add e.g. *Held.* 892–7 (cf. Wilkins ad loc.). In the light of the following discussion we should note that Race (n. 2), 98 supplies from Euripides a satyric (or at least pro-satyric) example of a priamel 'which has a *Nachleben* in Roman comedy', with *Alc.* 747ff. (monologue opening of a servant's complaint about Heracles: for Plautine analogies see Race [n. 2], 114–15): πολλοὺς μὲν ἤδη κἀπὸ παντοίας χθονός / ξένους μολόντας οἶδ' ἐς Ἀδμήτου δόμους, / οἷς δεῖπνα προύθηκ'· ἀλλὰ τοῦδ' οὔπω ξένου / κακίον' ἐς τήνδ' ἑστίαν ἐδεξάμην. This is formally similar to the example from the *Cyclops*: both begin with references to many experiences in the past (*Cycl.* 1 μυρίους . . . πόνους ∼ *Alc.* 747–8 πολλοὺς . . . ξένους) and both reach their climax with a comparative adjective (*Cycl.* 10 μεῖζον' ∼ *Alc.* 750 κακίον') taking us to the present. See further Ed. Fraenkel, 'Eine Anfangsformel Attischer Reden', *Glotta* 39 (1960), 2–3 = *Kl. Beitr.* 1.506–7 and Zagagi (as cited below, n. 10), 43.

    [9] At this point of transition from priamel to 'mythological hyperbole' it may be worth stressing that a 'list of hyperbolic statements' is identified by Race (n. 2) 58 as characteristic of the priamel. Cf. ibid., pp. 15–17 on superlatives (and comparatives) in priamels (cf. n. 25 below) and see my remarks in *Hermes* 113 (1985), 249 on superlatives in mythological paradeigmata.

    [10] *Tradition and Originality in Plautus* (*Hypomnemata* 62 [1980]). Cf. the same author in *CQ* 36 (1986), 267.

    [11] 42–3. Cf. my commentary ad loc.

    [12] Zagagi (n. 10) does mention (44–5) two other hyperbolic passages from the *Cyclops*: 320–1 where Polyphemus says Ζηνὸς δ' ἐγὼ κεραυνὸν οὐ φρίσσω, ξένε, / οὐδ' οἶδ' ὅτι Ζεύς ἐστ' ἐμοῦ κρείσσων θεός and 351–2 where Odysseus prays to Athena νῦν νῦν ἄρηξον· κρείσσονας γὰρ Ἰλίου / πόνους ἀφῖγμαι κἀπὶ κινδύνου βάθρα. And she observes that these verses stand near or at the beginning of the speech or section of a speech that contains them. But she

himself as a legend in his own lifetime, whose former *ponoi*, tough though they were, are quite surpassed by his present suffering. What sets these two instances apart from the other examples of 'mythological hyperbole' from Greek drama amassed by Zagagi is that they involve the speaker's own past mythological career, whereas the remaining instances of 'hyperbolic comparisons', from Greek Tragedy and New Comedy, feature other mythical figures.[13] But their similarities with these passages surely outweigh the differences.

Zagagi comes to be discussing the relevant thought pattern as part of her attempted controversion of one of Eduard Fraenkel's most influential Plautine theories: that mythological hyperboles, which occur particularly at the start of monologues in Plautus' adaptations of New Comedy originals, were the Roman playwright's own addition.[14] She, by contrast, cited potential examples from Greek tragedy and from New and Middle Comedy.[15] But some scholars had already noted some of these instances and did not find them sufficiently close in tone to the relevant Plautine passages;[16] and even after Zagagi's exhaustive survey, some critics persisted in this view. So, for instance, H.D. Jocelyn[17] thinks that she has been unable 'to parallel exactly the Plautine combination or that aspect of the combination, for which Fraenkel coined the term "Skurrilität" '.[18] Almost by definition, Greek tragedy must fail to supply any parallel for this, and Zagagi's passages adduced from New or Middle Comedy have seemed problematic to some. But it must be allowed that the further genre of satyr play does, in the passage I am dealing with, come remarkably close to the tone required.[19]

It is, then, humour of a scurrilous sort for bald (cf. v. 229), fat, old Silenus (we are reminded of his age as early as v. 2) to be referring to his past heroic labours 'as he goes about his menial work'. This last consideration is, in fact, crucial. δοῦλοι in v. 24 (of Silenus and the chorus) 'is in emphatic position' and the same line ends with the

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overlooks our passage, which actually opens a monologue, in a manner characteristic of Plautine mythological hyperboles.

[13] Soph. *Tr.* 1046ff. and Eur. *Cycl.* 1–10 share a strikingly large number of features: *Cycl.* 1 μυρίους ἔχω πόνους ~ *Tr.* 1101 ἄλλων τε μόχθων μυρίων ἐγευσάμην, *Cycl.* 2 ~ *Tr.* 1056 (δέμας at verse-end, of the speaker's own body), *Cycl.* 3 ~ *Tr.* 1048–9 (Hera as the persecutor of her husband's bastard son), *Cycl.* 5 ἀμφὶ γηγενῆ μάχην δορός ~ *Tr.* 1058–9 ὁ γηγενής / στρατὸς γιγάντων, *Cycl.* 6–7 ~ *Tr.* 1058 (references to spears), *Cycl.* 10 καὶ νῦν ~ *Tr.* 1103 νῦν δ' (both in climactic statements: see above, n. 6), *Cycl.* 10 ἐκείνων (sc. πόνων) ~ *Tr.* 1091 ὑμεῖς ἐκεῖνοι (sc. βραχιόνες): in both cases of past and distant events. Euripides is making Silenus claim 'heroic status' (see below, n. 22) and may conceivably have drawn on Sophocles' monologue for the appropriate colouring (absurd, of course, in its new context). Euripides' own *Heracles*, indeed, also shares some features with the opening of the *Cyclops* (e.g. *Cycl.* 7 ~ *Her.* 907) (Enceladus) and *Cycl.* 1 μυρίους ἔχω πόνους ~ *Her.* 1275 μυρίων ... πόνων [see n. 22 below]). But the *concentration* of the occurrences in *Cycl.* 1ff. and *Tr.* 1046ff. is very striking. Heracles often features in Plautine 'mythological hyperboles': see Zagagi's (n. 10) general index s.v. 'Heracles ... in hyperbolic comparisons καθ' ὑπεροχήν'. For Heracles as the 'hero' of many satyr plays see Dana F. Sutton, *The Greek Satyr Play (Beitr. zur kl. Phil.* 90 [1980]), 168.

[14] *Plautinisches im Plautus* (Berlin, 1922) ~ *Elementi Plautini in Plauto* (Florence, 1960).

[15] 32ff. and 26ff. respectively.

[16] See Zagagi (n. 10), 29.

[17] *CR* 31 (1981), 192, in his notice of Zagagi.

[18] Where Fraenkel got the term from is unclear: cf. 'scurrill Plautus' in Milton's *Areopagitica (Complete Prose Works* 2.510).

[19] In the following paragraph all words within inverted commas (except 'scurrility' and 'mythological hyperboles') are quoted from Seaford's commentary on the relevant verses (Oxford 1984). The confirmation thus supplied is striking, since Seaford is not approaching the passage from the angle of 'mythological hyperbole', a term he does not use.

word λατρεύομεν.[20] Silenus' own particular employment involves him in sweeping out Polyphemus' cave (vv. 29–30). Presumably he entered with his rake (see Seaford on v. 33) and tried to sweep a bit, before launching into the mock-heroic evocation of his own labours. Even without any such visual and bathetic counterpointing of the ludicrous contrast here and, with comic brandishings of the rake, at δορός . . . δορί in vv. 5 and 7, we are surely very close to the 'scurrility' of the Plautine slave, the humour of whose 'mythological hyperboles' derives largely from precisely this type of bathetic incongruity.[21] In v. 1 πόνοι shows that 'Silenus is claiming heroic status: cf. Heracles' ἀτὰρ πόνων δὴ μυρίων ἐγευσάμην' (Eur. *Her.* 1353).[22] In v. 6 'Silenus inflates his part in the battle' against the Giants: according to tradition 'never do the satyrs (or Silenus) engage in serious combat'.[23] In fact 'the boast is so unlikely that', with φέρ' ἴδω at v. 8, 'even Silenus momentarily doubts it'. The passing suggestion here that it may all be a dream is not merely humorous undercutting (the comic and colloquial tone are observed by Ussher in his commentary): it also has a distancing effect analogous to the use of such devices as *aiiunt* or *audivi* in Plautus' hyperboles.[24] Finally, the 'emphatic' ἐξαντλῶ in v. 10[25] is part of a pattern of 'overdramatisation of [his] sufferings by . . . Silenus'. We are already fairly near the world of the self-dramatizing slaves of Plautus, in particular Chrysalus and Pseudolus.

Let us finally look at Silenus' role elsewhere in the drama, to see whether he displays any other traits of the typical slave whom we later meet in Plautus. We can say that he is indeed hostile and disloyal to his master Polyphemus behind his back, especially when drunk (v. 163), though prepared to fawn before his face (vv. 250ff.), with a

[20] 'The enslavement and menial labour . . . of the satyrs in satyr-drama' is discussed as a theme by Seaford, 33–5.
[21] 'Satyric humour is in large measure generated by the wildly ludicrous juxtaposition of the heroic and the comic': Sutton (n. 13), 159. Cf. ibid., 169ff. on figures like Silenus as cunning 'entrepreneur', and 168 ('satyric incongruity is profoundly subversive'). All this could be applied to the world of Plautine comedy.
[22] See further n. 13 above. For the theme of πόνος in Euripides' *Heracles* see C. W. Willink, *CQ* 38 (1988), 86–9. μυρίους ἔχω πόνους will therefore be 'paratragic' (like, perhaps, τοὐμὸν εὐσθένει δέμας in v. 2: see Seaford ad loc.). See in general P. Rau, *Paratragodia* (*Zetemata* 45 [1967]) and, for the phenomenon in our play, Seaford's commentary, index s.v. 'Paratragedy'.
[23] For such 'inflation' of a mythical role in Plautine hyperboles cf. *Bacch.* 946 where, in the context of the sack of Troy, the slave Chrysalus boasts *miles Menelaust, ego Agamemno, idem Ulixes Lartius* (on the 'grotesque amplification' of Chrysalus' character thus achieved cf. G. Williams, *Hermes* 84 [1957], 452).
[24] So e.g. Plaut. *Merc.* 469f. *Pentheum diripuisse aiiunt Bacchas: nugas maxumas / fuisse credo, praeut quo pacto ego divorsus distrahor*; *Bacch.* fr. 15 Lindsay *Ulixem audivi fuisse aerumnosissumum*, 925 *Atridae duo fratres cluent fecisse facinus maxumum*. Cf. Zagagi (n. 10), 37, n. 79; 40, n. 86. Since *Cycl.* 8 talks (idiomatically: see Seaford ad loc.) of *seeing* a dream, one might also compare the mythological hyperbole at *Capt.* 998ff. *vidi ego multa saepe picta, quae Accherunti fierent / cruciamenta* etc. (cf. Aesch. *Eum.* 50–1 εἶδόν ποτ' ἤδη Φινέως γεγραμμένας / δεῖπνον φερούσας [sc. Ἁρπυίας]). See further Zagagi (n. 10), 28 concerning the rhetorical question in the context of such hyperboles.
[25] The verb in ἐκείνων μεῖζον' ἐξαντλῶ πόνων is with its adverb equivalent to that in αὗται δ' ἁπάντων ὑπερέχουσι τῶν κακῶν (Anaxilas fr. 22.7 KA [*PCG* 2.288]) and such Plautine examples as *Bacch.* fr. 15 Lindsay *Ulixem audivi fuisse aerumnosissimum, / quia annos viginti errans a patria afuit; / verum hic adulescens **multo Ulixem anteit <fide>*** etc. Cf. Zagagi (n. 10), 29ff., 71–2 for other relevant Plautine verbs (*antecedere, superare*, etc.). For the force of the comparative μεῖζον' cf. from the start of the same fragment of Anaxilas ὅστις ἀνθρώπων ἑταίραν ἠγάπησε πώποτε, / οὗ γένος τίς ἂν δύναιτο παρανομώτερον φράσαι; Eubulus fr. 6.1–2 KA (*PCG* 5.191) θερμότερον ἢ κραυρότερον ἢ μέσως ἔχον / τοῦτ' ἔσθ' ἑκάστωι μεῖζον ἢ Τροίαν ἑλεῖν. Cf. Zagagi (n. 10), 28ff. It is significant (see n. 13 above) that Heracles is the speaker in the second passage (cf. Hunter ad loc. [his fr. 7]).

mendacious pretence of loyalty (vv. 230ff.).[26] The most obviously absent link with the archetypal Plautine slave is higher cunning (as opposed to a base sort of animal guile). But in our play it is of course Odysseus who provides the required trickery and resourcefulness.[27] If we had other completely preserved satyr plays (especially Euripidean ones) we might see more links with New Comedy.[28] But even with our present limited resources, the ten lines here re-examined supply a new dimension to the familiar issue of Euripides' influence upon New Comedy. Netta Zagagi has already observed that 'the fact that Euripidean hyperboles tend to occur following the opening lines of monologues or long speeches . . . seem[s] to have established a special link between Euripidean Drama and New Comedy . . . The occasional practice of intro-ducing hyperbolic comparisons involving mythological events into the beginnings of speeches and monologues is first met in Euripidean Drama.'[29] The findings of the present note confirm and corroborate that view.

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[26] See Seaford's note on v. 273: Silenus' 'position of trust . . . is a measure of his master's insensitivity'. Cf. on 539. This is already a significant step towards the world of Plautine slaves and masters.

[27] It may be significant that, like Heracles (see n. 13), Odysseus features in Plautine 'hyperbolic comparisons καθ' ὑπεροχήν': see Zagagi's (n. 10) general index s.v.. Euripides' Silenus repres-ents a sort of debased and comic version of Odysseus (cf. G. Wetzel, *De Euripidis fabula satyrica, quae Cyclops inscribitur, cum Homerico comparata exemplo* [Wiesbaden, 1965], 44, n. 7 etc.). For 'clever men and tricksters . . . as the heroes of satyr plays' see Sutton (n. 13), 162.

[28] Sutton (n. 13), 195, n. 525 has some speculation about 'instances of satyric influence on classical literature' ('evidently rare').

[29] Zagagi (n. 10), 45–6. The same scholar on 19–20 expresses the view (in criticism of H. H. Law, 'Hyperbole in mythological comparisons', *AJP* 47 [1926], 372) that 'it would be extremely unsafe to attribute to Euripides (or to any other poet) any significant influence on Hellenistic Lit-erature in the matter of the use of hyperboles in mythological comparisons, although Euripides may possibly have inspired the use of these in comparative or superlative form in monologue openings in New Comedy.' For a more general treatment of the issue of Euripides' influence upon New Comedy, see her later book *The Comedy of Menander* (London 1994), subject index s.v. 'Euripides: and New Comedy'.