

THE HERALD OF HYLLUS? IDENTIFYING THE ὙΛΛΟΥ ΠΕΝΕΣΤΗΣ IN EURIPIDES' *HERACLIDAE**

At Euripides' *Heracleidae* 630, an anonymous character arrives onstage to report the arrival of Hyllus' army, and returns at 928 accompanying the defeated Eurystheus.¹ He is generally identified by editors as a *therapōn*, following the *dramatis personae* of the hypothesis. Mastronarde briefly challenges this assumption, stating that 'he is a soldier, not a servant'.² There are, however, four reasons to identify the character as neither a soldier nor a *therapōn*, but as Hyllus' herald. Although none of these reasons is conclusive on its own, the cumulative weight of the evidence is compelling. This identification contributes to the structural coherence and thematic development of the play, and gains special significance from the play's interest in the representation of absent characters.

EVIDENCE

1. Self-introduction

When Iolaus asks the newcomer who he is, saying that he looks familiar (638), he identifies himself as Ὑλλου πενέστης (639). The term *penestēs* is not a common one, but it seems to indicate that he is a servant;³ it might even be argued that he is specifically identifying himself as one of the Thessalian Penestae, a group often compared with

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¹ Parallels for the return of an anonymous character include the Spy at Aesch. *Sept.* 369, the Old Tutor at Soph. *El.* 660 and 1326, the Guard at Soph. *Ant.* 384, the Tutor at Eur. *Med.* 1002, and the Nurse at Eur. *Hipp.* 433 and 601. Note that these recurrent characters are not generic servants, but figures with specified roles.

² D.J. Mastronarde, *Contact and Discontinuity* (Berkeley, 1979), 96 n. 64. Military service is implied both in his description of troop deployment and at 678–9: ἄλλ' εἴμ' ἐρήμους δεσπότης τοῦμὸν μέρος | οὐκ ἂν θέλωμι πολέμοισι συμβαλεῖν. The distinction between slave and soldier may not be as clear-cut as appears as first glance. P. Hunt, *Slaves, Warfare, and Ideology in the Greek Historians* (Cambridge, 2002) has argued for the under-documented importance of the unfree in classical Greek warfare, and there may be a Euripidean parallel if the old messenger in *Helen* is a slave (that is, if lines 728–33 are genuine), as he is described as having served παρ' ἄσπίδα (734–5).

³ There is a tendency to assume that all anonymous servants in tragedy are slaves (cf. E. Dickey, *Greek Forms of Address* [Oxford, 1996], 232), partly because of the fluid terminology used for the unfree (cf. e.g. K. Wrenhaven, *Reconstructing the Slave* [London, 2012], 9–10 and bibliography). However, on the logistical difficulty of ascertaining slave status in Greek sources, see A. Sommerstein, 'Slave and citizen in Aristophanic comedy', in id., *Talking about Laughter* (Oxford, 2009), 136–54, at 136–8.

the Spartan helots.⁴ Yet comparison with other plays shows that it is rare for generic servants in tragedy to introduce themselves,⁵ or even to be addressed as individuals.

Self-introduction is, however, relatively common among Euripidean heralds, and it coincides in every instance with the use of circumlocutory formulae instead of the technical term *kēruξ*. In *Hecuba* Talthybius identifies himself as Δαναϊδῶν ὑπηρέτης ('servant of the Greeks', 503); at *Heracles* 823, Iris identifies herself as 'the gods' servant' (τῆν θεῶν λάτριν), as does Hermes at *Ion* 4 (δαμόνων λάτριν).⁶ The nature of these circumlocutions is suggestive: each strongly stresses the subordinated role of the herald through a general term for servant, and each term is defined by a genitive specifying the subordination.⁷ There is no explicit indicator of a heraldic role, yet there is absolutely no question – in terms of both mythology and dramatic function – that these 'servants' are heralds, and that their identity would have been clearly conveyed to the original audience by costume elements, especially the distinctive staff (*kērykeion*).⁸ The servile terms used in self-introduction by heralds – both human and divine – are therefore figurative and indicate not low social status, but relative subordination.⁹

A clue to the function of such circumlocutions can be found in the context of the only extant example used in introduction by another character: in *Prometheus Vinc-tus*, Prometheus describes the approaching Hermes as τὸν Διὸς τρόχιν, | τὸν τοῦ τυράννου τοῦ νέου διάκονον ('the lackey of Zeus, the errand-boy of the new tyrant', 941–2), and this description sets the scornful tone of his entire interview with Hermes.¹⁰ These phrases correspond exactly with those used by heralds in self-introduction; however, the deprecation of Prometheus' language is softened through

⁴ This possibility was brought to my attention by Mark Griffith. The Heraclidae generally and Hyllus in particular are sometimes associated with Thessaly in mythology (e.g. Ephorus, *FGrHist* 70 F 15 on Hyllus' adoption by Aegimius; Diod. Sic. 4.58.6 on the Heraclidae retreating to Thessaly after Hyllus' death). The Athenian audience was aware of the Thessalian Penestae, who are mentioned at Ar. *Vesp.* 1270–4, and the scholiasts on this line explicitly derive the name from a son of Heracles. Demosthenes (13.23, 23.199) even states that the Penestae fought as cavalry at Eion. However, I am not convinced that Euripides is using this term in a technical sense here (cf. J. Ducat, *Les pénestes de Thessalie* [Paris, 1994], 33). There is no mention of a Thessalian link in any extant source before the fourth century. In our play Euripides includes only Trachis and 'Achaean towns' (193–4) in the wanderings of the Heraclidae, and makes no mention of the provenance of Hyllus' army; nor is there any cavalry mentioned in the descriptions of the battle, which we might expect if the Thessalian link were implied.

⁵ Of approximately two dozen speaking servants in Euripides (excluding non-generic slaves such as nurses and tutors), only two introduce themselves as servants: the servant of Capaneus (Eur. *Supp.* 634) and the servant of Orestes (Eur. *El.* 766). It should be noted, however, that both of these servants are, like the *penestēs* in *Herac.*, messengers who are initially unrecognized, and then greeted as ὦ φίλτατ[ε].

⁶ In six other cases across the three tragedians, heralds are identified upon arrival by choruses or other characters using the term *kēruξ*, who call attention to their approach: Aesch. *Ag.* 493, *Eum.* 566; Soph. *Trach.* 227–8; Eur. *Herac.* 49, *Supp.* 396–7, *Tro.* 230–1. The identification of the Egyptian herald in Aesch. *Supp.* is, as I argue elsewhere, exceptionally and deliberately delayed. Herald's do use the term *kēruξ* and its cognates in connection with themselves, but only obliquely (much as ordinary servants indicate their servitude). For example, the herald in *Ag.* invokes Hermes *kēruξ* as his patron (515), and Talthybius in *Tro.* uses the term in reference to his *past* interactions with Hecuba (236).

⁷ Compare e.g. Hecuba's announcement of the second appearance of Talthybius at *Tro.* 707 (τόνδ' Ἀχαιϊκὸν λάτριν, 'this Greek lackey').

⁸ There are no explicit references to the *kērykeion* in extant tragedy; however, *kērykeia* are included in the list of props suitable for male actors in Poll. *Onom.* 4.117.5–6.

⁹ Cf. *Tro.* 415, where Talthybius calls himself 'a poor man' (πένης).

¹⁰ Compare also Cassandra's general criticism of heralds at *Tro.* 424–6: ἦ δεινὸς ὁ λάτρις, τί ποτ' ἔχουσι τοῦνομα | κήρυκες, ἔν ἀπέχθημα πάγκοινων βροτοῖς, | οἱ περὶ τυράννους καὶ πόλεις

the heralds' own use of such terms into self-depreciation. This suggests a convention of self-effacement by which heralds emphasize both their loyalties and their lack of autonomy.

"Υλλου πενέστης follows the pattern of heralds' self-introduction both textually and contextually. The fact that the character uses this phrase to introduce himself is therefore not a straightforward indication of his servant status, but rather suggests very strongly that he may be a herald.

2. *Alcmene's confusion*

When Alcmene arrives onstage, she seems to have heard the sound of Iolaus' voice and nothing else; she therefore wonders aloud whether another violent Argive herald has arrived (μῶν τίς σ' αὖ βιάζεται παρῶν | κῆρυξ ἄπ' Ἄργου; 'has someone come to do you violence again, a herald from Argos?', 647–8). This in itself implies very little; however, Alcmene goes on to address the *penestēs* aggressively and defensively (ἀσθενῆς μὲν ἢ γ' ἐμῆ | ῥώμη, τοσόνδε δ' εἰδέναι σε χρή, ξένε· | οὐκ ἔστ' ἄγειν σε τούσδ' ἐμοῦ ζώσης ποτέ, 'I may be weak, but you must know this, stranger: you shall never take these children away while I live', 648–50). It seems, then, that whatever she sees confirms her expectations; she continues to assume *after* she has seen the *penestēs* that he is indeed an Argive aggressor, and she speaks to him in terms that parallel Iolaus' first encounter with Eurystheus' herald.¹¹ Only Iolaus' verbal reassurance that the newcomer has come from Hyllus allows her to distinguish him from the anticipated Argive herald.¹² This strongly suggests that the *penestēs* is visually recognizable as a herald.

3. *Dramatic functions: report and challenge*

The two scenes in which the *penestēs* appears follow the same format: a report followed by an unsuccessful challenge to a plan put forward by a named hero. In his first scene, he reports on Hyllus' military position, and then tries to dissuade Iolaus from joining the battle. His second scene begins with a set speech reporting the victory, followed by his failed attempt to restrain Alcmene's wrath. Both his reporting functions and his challenges to named heroes are more appropriate for a herald than for a generic messenger or servant in tragedy.

It has recently been acknowledged that the standard term 'messenger' is misleading;¹³ most such figures are not in fact the bearers of an entrusted message, but rather independent witnesses who voluntarily describe an offstage event. By contrast, heralds in tragedy are sent for a particular purpose by an offstage entity in whose interests they

ὑπρέται; ('This lackey is clever. Why are they called "heralds", these objects of hatred for all mortals, who are merely servants hanging around kings and cities?')

¹¹ Cf. J. Wilkins (ed.), *Euripides: Heraclidae* (Oxford, 1993), ad 646ff., who notes particular parallels between Alcmene's speech and Iolaus' address to Eurystheus' herald at 23, 39, 58, 64, 66.

¹² This could be made clearer in performance through the careful inflection of Iolaus' lines: θάρσει, γεραιά, μὴ τρέσης; οὐκ Ἀργόθεν | κῆρυξ ἀφίκεται πολεμίους λόγους ἔχων (654–5). The enjambment of κῆρυξ might suggest a slight stress upon Ἀργόθεν as the real focus of the negation: 'no Argive herald has come, bearing an enemy's words'.

¹³ E.g. M. Dickin, *A Vehicle for Performance: Acting the Messenger in Greek Tragedy* (Lanham, 2009), 1; S. Perris, 'What maketh the messenger? Reportage in Greek tragedy', in A. Mackay (ed.), *ASCS 32 Selected Proceedings* (2011, ascscs.org.au/news/ascsc32/Perris.pdf), *passim*.

are assumed to be acting.¹⁴ The *penestēs* is no chance witness but a sent representative, as is suggested in the first scene by his eagerness to return to Hyllus (678–9) and made explicit in the first speech of his second appearance (especially 938). The official nature of his initial reporting function in both scenes therefore supports his identification as a herald.¹⁵

His subsequent interactions with Iolaus and Alcmene are also far more typical of a herald than of an anonymous servant.¹⁶ Generic servants rarely contradict or challenge named heroes, and when such conflicts take place they are clearly and conspicuously marked as exceptions. In the most extreme case, at the end of *Helen* (1627–41), when a slave tries to physically prevent his master from killing his own sister, the difference in their status is repeatedly highlighted (1630, 1638, 1640–1). This emphasis on the exceptional nature of a subordinate's intervention is also found in less extreme situations, as in *Hippolytus* (88–120), when the old servant very cautiously questions Hippolytus' exclusive worship, and in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* (49–63), when an old slave-woman deferentially gives advice to Deianira. Generic servants and slaves in tragedy therefore do not challenge named heroes without highlighting the exceptional nature of the intervention.

By contrast, no herald in tragedy appears without engaging or being engaged in some conflict, although the nature of this conflict ranges from the direct violence of the herald of Eurystheus at the beginning of this play to Talthybius' endurance of Cassandra's invective in *Troades*. The intervention of the *penestēs* falls in the middle of this range. He remains sympathetic to both Iolaus and Alcmene, but in both cases categorically opposes the hero's proposed course of action. This tension is reflected in the curious mixture of bold and respectful language throughout the dialogues and exemplified in particular lines (e.g. 682, 961) and words, such as the ambiguous ὦ τᾶν ('sir', 688).¹⁷ Like enemy heralds elsewhere in tragedy, he concedes the inevitability but not the rightness of the heroes' actions (692–4, 974); however, his disapproval focuses not on the actions in and of themselves but on the unsuitability of the particular heroes as agents (e.g. 731, 972–3).

The *penestēs* therefore acts and speaks according to the conventions of heralds in tragedy, rather than those of generic servants. The possible exception to this is the latter part of his first appearance, as he returns with the armour from the temple (720–47).

¹⁴ Cf. F. Yoon, *The Use of Anonymous Characters in Greek Tragedy* (Leiden, 2012), 22–4.

¹⁵ His first report is no less official for being informal; the stichomythic format is not common, but it is paralleled in Talthybius' initial report of the distribution of captives at *Tro.* 235–78.

¹⁶ A similar observation underlies Mastronarde's identification of the *penestēs* as a soldier. It will be evident that I follow the current majority attribution of lines 961–74 to the *penestēs* and Alcmene rather than L's attribution to Alcmene and the chorus; see bibliography at W. Allan (ed.), *Euripides: The Children of Heracles* (Warminster, 2001), ad 961–74, especially the exception J. Davidson, 'Two notes on Euripides' *Heraklidae*', *Athenaeum* 84 (1996), 243–7. It surprises me that this attribution has very rarely been contested on the grounds of the incongruity of a servant or slave having the authority to challenge Alcmene's resolve (e.g. A. Burnett 'Tribe and city, custom and decree in *Children of Heracles*', *CPh* 71 [1976], 4–26, at 11 n. 12). I wonder, however, whether an early editor gave these lines to the chorus for this very reason, thinking it unlikely that an individual slave could be so direct; something similar seems to have happened at the end of *Helen* (cf. D.P. Stanley-Porter, 'Who opposes Theoclymenus?', *CPh* 72 [1977], 45–8 and bibliography; contra e.g. W. Allan [ed.], *Helen* [Cambridge, 2008], ad 1627–41).

¹⁷ It is also worth noting that no slave in tragedy uses this vocative to a free person, as the *penestēs* does to Iolaus at 688; it is used in prose and tragedy to imply deference and/or impatience between people of equal social status (cf. Dickey [n. 3], 159). In comedy, however, cf. *Ar. Eq.* 494 and 1036.



FIGURE 1 Lucanian column-krater, Berlin 1969.6. Credit: bpk, Berlin / Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany / Johannes Laurentius / Art Resource, NY

In the comic or pseudo-comic context,¹⁸ the visual and verbal correspondences with the complaining, load-bearing slave of comedy are striking. Nevertheless, this parallel does not imply the literal slave status of the *penestēs*; comic effect in such a scene might well be heightened by casting a free character into an incongruous role.¹⁹

4. Lucanian column-krater, Berlin 1969.6

The vase shown in [Figure 1](#), painted within approximately 30 years of the composition of *Heraclidae*, is generally agreed to be associated with the play though not a faithful representation of performance.²⁰ The central figure of the painting is clearly marked as a herald by his *kērukeion*. He was originally identified by Greifenhagen²¹ as the servant of Hyllus. However, because of the presence of the *kērukeion*, scholars since Greifenhagen have almost unanimously identified him as the herald of Eurystheus, and interpretations of this scene have focussed on the figure's alleged aggression.²²

¹⁸ The comic elements of this scene are undeniable, although their purpose and effect are disputable. I am persuaded by C.W. Marshall's argument, made at the 1995 joint meeting of CACW/CAPN in Banff, that the scene serves as a tribute to the comic Heracles, in parallel with similar tributes to other aspects of Heracles in the play.

¹⁹ Cf. Dionysus' and Xanthias' alternation of servant and hero costumes and roles at *Ar. Ran.* 492–673. The case of Hermes in Aristophanes may also suggest that heralds in comedy are conventionally more servile than in tragedy.

²⁰ E.g. O. Taplin, *Pots and Plays* (Malibu, 2007), 129; Allan (n. 16) and id., 'Euripides in Megale Hellas', *G&R* 28 (2001), 67–86; Wilkins (n. 11), xxxii; M. Schmidt, in *LIMC* s.v. *Herakleidai*, A.a.3; A. Trendall and T.B.L. Webster, *Illustrations of Greek Drama* (London, 1971), III.3.21; A. Greifenhagen, *Frühlukanischer Kolonettenkrater mit Darstellung der Herakliden* (Berlin, 1969).

²¹ Greifenhagen (n. 20), 14.

²² E.g. Taplin (n. 20), 129: 'here he has actually laid hands on Iolaos. The painting suggests that he might even have started dragging him away by force'; Allan (n. 20 [2011]), 77: 'his aggressive grabbing of Iolaos' throat ... evokes the extreme and ... uncommon violence of Euripides' opening scene'; Wilkins (n. 11), xxxii: 'the aggressive gesture against Iolaos' throat ... identifies the herald of

Yet this is not a scene of violence.²³ As Greifenhagen saw,²⁴ the expressions of the figures are neutral and the postures of both the herald and Iolaus are relaxed. Most importantly, the herald is touching Iolaus' shoulder and not, as most recent scholars have asserted, the throat. Furthermore, neither shoulder nor throat is a typical point of contact in scenes of violence. While the shoulder is sometimes grasped in pursuit scenes,²⁵ this is very rarely the case in stationary compositions. In the few visual representations that do depict aggressive grips on the shoulder, the violence of the scene is made explicit by the brandishing of a weapon, while the attacker's arm grips the far shoulder with the elbow either straight or up.²⁶ This is very realistic; it is difficult to move a seated person by gripping the near shoulder with the elbow down, as in our image, particularly with the body turned away from the 'victim'. This herald is therefore pressing down on Iolaus, not pulling him away.

The mostly likely interpretation of this vase-painting is therefore that it reflects not the opening scene of violence, but one of either reassurance (as Greifenhagen suggests) or restraint.²⁷ Both of these functions accord perfectly with the role of the *penestēs* in our play, who comes to reassure the Heraclidae with good news, and then tries to prevent the ancient Iolaus from joining the battle. If this vase is indeed a representation of *Heraclidae*, then the central figure cannot be the herald of Eurystheus but should be identified as the *penestēs*, and the *kērykeion* supports the internal evidence that he is not a literal servant, but a herald.

SPECULATION ON CAUSE OF CONFUSION

If this is the case, we must suggest a reasonable account of how the information might have been lost between fifth-century composition, performance, reperformance and the scholiasts.²⁸ The root of the confusion is certainly the absence of the term *kēruξ* combined with a literal interpretation of *penestēs*. As we have seen, this seems to be a convention tied to self-introduction; however, in the other extant examples of circumlocution the character is a named herald familiar from mythology (Iris, Talthybius or Hermes), which precludes the possibility of confusion.

Eurystheus'; Schmidt (n. 20), 725: 'der sitzende Iolaos vom Boten des Eurystheus, Kopreus, bedrängt wird.'

²³ Contrast Policoro 35302 (in e.g. Taplin [n. 20], 127), generally agreed to be a representation of the opening scene.

²⁴ Greifenhagen (n. 20), 9.

²⁵ Lucanian examples include Denver AN 108 and Naples Stg. 35 (in e.g. A. Trendall, *The Red Figured Vases of Lucania, Campania and Sicily* [Oxford, 1967], vol. 2, Plates 3.1 and 4.1 respectively).

²⁶ See e.g. Ruvo, Museo Jatta 36955 (n.1.32) (in e.g. Taplin [n. 20], 69) and various representations of the death of Aegisthus (see *LMC* s.v.). It should be noted that there are comparatively few (and virtually no Lucanian) published parallels for physical contact in non-erotic, non-pursuit scenes; it is therefore necessary to generalize from other styles.

²⁷ Compare e.g. the young man comforting the mourner on Bari 1535 (in e.g. Trendall [n. 25], Plate 18.2, although Taplin [n. 20], 168–9) suggests that he is 'keeping her under guard', and Hermes restraining a young armed Amphiion or Zethus on Melbourne Geddes Collection A 5:4 (in e.g. Taplin [n. 20], 190–1).

²⁸ The silence of the scholiasts on this character contrasts sharply with their energy in providing names and information for other anonymous characters such as 'Kopreus' and 'Makaria' in this play, implying that no indication of the *penestēs*' identity survived to their time.

A complementary factor may have been the *penestēs*' use of terms for 'master': δεσπότης (678) and δέσποιν[α] (928). A literal interpretation of these terms is perfectly reasonable; however, as Dickey (1996 [n. 3], 95–8) notes, in tragedy as in prose the term can be used for a ruler by subjects as well as by literal slaves. It is primarily an indication of subordination or loyalty rather than of technical status. We therefore find the herald Lichas repeatedly referring to Deianira as δεσπότης or δέσποινα in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* (e.g. 407, 409, 434, 472, 481), while choruses of free individuals, such as the sailors in *Philoctetes* or the chorus of Argive women in Euripides' *Electra*, also use such terms. Like these characters, the *penestēs* uses the term to emphasize his loyalty to Hyllus and the Heraclidae, and he does so at key moments: as he first tries to take his leave (678) and as he arrives for the second time (928).

A third factor may have been the striking role of the herald of Eurystheus in the play, in comparison with whom the *penestēs* is unremarkable. The potential for confusion is exemplified by the case of the Lucanian krater painting. It seems to have been very unusual for more than one herald to appear in a single play;²⁹ any mention of such a figure in contemporary records of the play, written or oral, might therefore have been taken to refer to the more memorable representative of Eurystheus. Yet since several major heroes are absent during the action of *Heraclidae*, the use of several heralds is eminently appropriate, as I shall argue below.

SOME EFFECTS

My insistence on the precise identification of the *penestēs* may seem pedantic. There are, however, at least two important effects produced by specifying his identity as a herald and not as a slave or a soldier.

1. *Structural parallels*

Costuming the *penestēs* as a herald highlights an important structural element in a play with a reputation for lacking coherence.³⁰ Euripides places the three agonistic herald scenes, which are crucial to the changing portrayals of Iolaus and Alcmene, at the beginning, middle and end of the play. The audience is therefore encouraged to assess, compare and reassess both of the old heroes as they face different challenges in similar contexts.

First, we are invited to compare the prologue with the first appearance in which Alcmene mistakes the *penestēs* for an Argive herald. The visual parallel of a young herald facing a defensive old hero complements the verbal correspondences of Iolaus' and Alcmene's speeches, noted by Wilkins,³¹ and reinforces the impression not only of a 'second prologue' but of a recapitulation. Structurally, this draws the two halves of the play closely together, highlighting the unexpected reversal of fortune in the second half. In terms of characterization, it also suggests a similarity between Iolaus and Alcmene, who react to a perceived threat with the same admirable courage and resolve.

²⁹ The only other extant tragedy that stages two heralds is Eur. *Supp.* (395–597), in which one of them remains conspicuously silent; most other plays in which a herald appears also make use of a generic messenger.

³⁰ See the bibliography in Allan (n. 16), 21–2.

³¹ See n. 11 above.

The parallel is particularly important in establishing this characterization of Alceme; without it, her role in this scene is brief and almost foolish, but the contextual parallels draw on the prologue – and by extension, on Iolaus' role during the whole first half – to establish her essential heroism.

The exodus, however, contrasts sharply with both preceding herald scenes. The parallel scenes in which the *penestēs* opposes first Iolaus and then Alceme invite the audience to compare the two figures once again.³² The audience is also encouraged to compare the exodus with the prologue, which emphasizes the famously problematic reversal of power dynamics and sympathies as the victim and persecutor roles are exchanged. Once again, costuming the *penestēs* as a herald adds a visual parallel to complement the verbal, structural and thematic 'echoes of the earlier scene in the later' noted by Lloyd.³³

2. Representation of Hyllus

This play makes extensive use of the onstage representation of absent figures, particularly through Eurystheus' herald in the prologue and the anonymous daughter of Heracles in the central episode. Through these figures we are given clear impressions of two characters who dominate the play while remaining offstage: Eurystheus and Heracles. A third figure who is conspicuous by his absence from the play is Hyllus; however, unlike his enemy and his father, he is generally dismissed in discussion.³⁴ However, as a herald the *penestēs* provides an important point of contact with his master. Unlike so-called 'messengers', heralds in tragedy are often used not merely to convey information about an event but to create an impression of the sender; the conventions of the genre encourage the audience to think of the herald not just as presenting his master's orders, but as representing the master himself.³⁵ Identifying the *penestēs* as a herald therefore subtly encourages the audience to associate his speech, actions and characterization with the absent Hyllus.

The *penestēs* is not as strongly characterized as other representatives of absent figures in this play; nevertheless, this is in itself potentially suggestive. While Eurystheus is portrayed through his herald as brash and violent, and Heracles is portrayed through his daughter as brave and noble, Hyllus is portrayed through his *penestēs* as prosaically unheroic and ineffective. His failure, contrasting with the heroic successes of Iolaus and Alceme, is reflected by the failure of his *penestēs* to influence them.³⁶

³² This comparison is of course encouraged regardless of how the *penestēs* is dressed. Cf. Yoon (n. 14), 69–70; the reappearance of the *penestēs* in an unexpected reprise of his earlier role as unsuccessful challenger draws our attention to the similarity in age and intractability of the two named heroes, while highlighting the dissimilarity of our responses to their positions. We are also encouraged to compare the fates of Iolaus and Eurystheus, both old men led offstage by the reluctant *penestēs*, but to very different fates.

³³ M. Lloyd, *The Agon in Euripides* (Oxford, 1992), 76.

³⁴ E.g. I. De Jong, 'Three off-stage characters in Euripides', *Mnemosyne* 43 (2001), 1–21, at 2; Wilkins (n. 11), xiii; Allan (n. 16), 27.

³⁵ Cf. Yoon (n. 14), 22–4.

³⁶ If the *penestēs* is portrayed as unusually young, like the beardless herald on the column-krater (cf. C. Goblot-Cahen, 'S'habiller et se déshabiller en Grèce et à Rome [II]: Le héraut entre l'éphèbe et le satyre', *Revue Historique* 642 [2007], 272–5), then the contrast with the aged heroes is even more pronounced.

Our dominant impression of the *penestēs* is one of pragmatic limitation. His report of the military preparations (664–77) is factual and functional, and minimalistic in its stichomythic brevity.³⁷ His subsequent conflict with Iolaus brings his realistic perspective into sharp contrast with the old hero's ludicrous optimism; however, his common sense is disregarded. Similarly, in the final scene, the *penestēs* is contrasted with Alcmena; where she is intensely vengeful, implacable, and self-centred – which is to say, heroic – he is reasonable, deferential towards Athens, and (once again) ultimately unsuccessful.

These contrasts are paralleled in the messenger's juxtaposition of Hyllus' and Iolaus' challenges to Eurystheus (799–866). Hyllus is presented as a capable leader, proposing a duel as a sensible alternative to all-out warfare.³⁸ However, it accomplishes nothing; Eurystheus ignores his rational proposal just as Iolaus and Alcmena ignore the rational objections of the *penestēs*. In the end, heroic passion prevails over common sense. It is Iolaus, not Hyllus, who triumphs from Hyllus' own chariot on the battlefield, and it is Iolaus' miraculous transformation, not Hyllus' diplomacy, that is rewarded by the gods and celebrated by men. Finally, it is Alcmena's heroic drive to vengeance that dominates the end of the play, contravening Hyllus' diplomatic concession to Athens' will.

The *penestēs* therefore lays the groundwork for the audience's impression of the ordinariness of Hyllus, contrasted explicitly with Iolaus and Alcmena, and implicitly with Eurystheus and Heracles. Hyllus' absence throughout the play exaggerates the importance of his herald as a representative, and the result is underwhelming: neither the *penestēs* nor his master is able to compete and succeed in a heroic context.

Identifying the *penestēs* as a herald is therefore not only probable, in view of the internal and external evidence, but meaningful. The usual misidentification is understandable, given the circumlocution used in the character's self-introduction. However, correctly identifying and costuming the character as a herald has significant implications for the audience's awareness and appreciation of important elements of the play: the careful construction of the plot, the contrast and comparison of the heroes onstage, and the representation of the heroes' offspring.

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³⁷ Contrast the elaborate descriptive speeches given by 'military' messengers, such as the Spy in Aesch. *Sept.* (375–652), pre-battle, and the messengers in this play (799–866) and Eur. *Phoen.* (1090–1199) and *Supp.* (650–72), post-battle.

³⁸ Other traditions may also suggest a similarly prosaic characterization of Hyllus; for example, in Ps.-Apoll. *Bib.* 2.8, Hyllus' literal interpretation of a prophecy that the Heraclidae should return to the Peloponnese after the 'third harvest' leads to disastrous consequences, and is later criticized by the oracle.