Perhaps because he is simply a herald, the Talthybius of Euripides’ *Trojan Women* has received comparatively haphazard and unsophisticated critical treatment. When considered at all, he has been dismissed as banally patriotic and spineless,\(^1\) discounted as utterly uncomprehending,\(^2\) impugned as cruel and harsh,\(^3\) praised as a sympathetic and humane counterpoint to the cruelty of war,\(^4\) and appreciated as a distinct character, compassionate but myopic, especially regarding the religious dimension of the Trojan women’s suffering.\(^5\) Such a lack of consensus implies that this Talthybius is invested with more complexity than the scarcity of critical treatment might suggest. Even more important, in my view, is that no critical treatment to date has considered the literary and narrative function of Talthybius in the *Trojan Women*. Irene de Jong (1991) does not discuss the Talthybius of the *Trojan Women*, justifying the *prima facie* impression that he does not fit the standard mold of Euripidean messengers. A pragmatic reading of his role in the narrative of the drama suggests that Euripides has drawn Talthybius’ character somewhat ambiguously, neither too sympathetic to the Trojans nor too insensible to their sufferings, by turns respectful and imperious. A more important result of such a reading, however, is the convincing impression that Talthybius is, unlike the standard Euripidean messenger, an active agent in the narrative, rather than a narrator of actions. He seems to play a crucial structural and narrative role in the dramatic enactment of the fate of the Trojan survivors.

Irene de Jong’s analysis of Euripidean messenger-scenes, although it does not discuss the *Trojan Women*, presents us with some important general observations on the narrative role of herald characters. Her first observation (1991, 12-8), which seems to apply to our Talthybius, is that Euripidean messengers are not omniscient and that they have certain restrictions placed on the extent and accuracy of the information they impart. Talthybius’ cavalier dismissal of Cassandra’s prophesies (E. *Tr.* 419) exhibits his ignorance of her divine proclamations and therefore the limit placed on his knowledge. In addition, the entire narrative of hostage allocation is implicitly based on the inaccurate assumption that the ships

\(^1\) Lee 1976, xxiv-xxv.
\(^2\) Webster 1967, 178.
\(^3\) Conacher 1967, 144.
\(^5\) Dyson & Lee 2000, 141-73.
will make it back to Argos, which we know from the prologue and Cassandra’s speech will not be the case. Talthybius is certainly not omniscient.

De Jong’s second chapter (63-72) argues that Euripidean messengers are not neutral, detached and objective outsiders. This argument is based in part on the experiencing focalization of their speeches. Because, de Jong argues (60-2), Euripidean messengers narrate the progression of an event step by step as the action was experienced by one involved in it, the information they present is a recapitulation of the experience of the subjects in the speech told from their individual perspectives and not an objective, distanced report with the benefit of hindsight. She identifies (114-5) the generic messenger character’s “evaluations, interspersed criticism and engagement . . . use of epithets, comparisons and denomination” in order to prove that his perspective is one with biases and feelings, neither an “emotionless camera” nor “the mouthpiece of the poet”. The art of the messenger-speech lies in the projection onstage of the experiences of events and persons offstage.

While de Jong’s observation that Euripidean heralds are not omniscient clearly applies to the Talthybius of the Trojan Women, this second argument and its explanation of the narratological function of the heralds is more problematic, perhaps explaining her exclusion of the Trojan Women from her analysis. It is true that this Talthybius displays partiality, exemplified by his personal and emotional involvement several times in the drama. Twice when he has come to take Astyanax away, he refers to his own opinion of the orders he must convey (E. Tr. 710-1, 786-9):

οὐχ ἑκὼν γὰρ ἄγγελῶ 710
... τὰ δὲ τοι αὐτῆ χρῆ 786
κηρυκεύειν, ὥστε τὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ ἄναιδον τῆς ἡμετέρας γνώμης μᾶλλον φίλος ἔστιν.

‘Unwillingly do I serve as messenger... It should be the duty of a man without pity and who is more a friend to ruthlessness than I to impart such information.’

He also reacts emotionally to the sufferings of the Trojan women (E. Tr. 1130-1):

... μετ’ αὐτῶ Ἀνδρομάχη, πολλὰν ἐμοί δοκρῶν ἄγνωστόν... 710
‘... with him Andromache, who elicited many tears from me...’

These depictions of Talthybius’ emotions and the subtler implications of his judgments argue strongly against the notion that he could be an impartial observer or