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Introducing new messengers

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The most typical forms of the general type of the messenger were described and introduced, above. In addition, some of the most illustrative uses of the messenger were analysed and explained using the examples of *Oedipus the King*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Glass Menagerie*, which are the canonical dramas that established, (re)defined and developed the convention.

One of the common features of all these uses of the messenger is that they enlarge the stage. By the use of narration (be it a limited short report or a story-framing point of view), the fictional world of the stage broadens and takes on new dimensions. These dimensions may be spatial and temporal, if relating them to the physical properties of the stage, as well as contextual if relating them to the narratological aspect of the story/plot construction.

Another feature comes into play is when the messenger brings information of greater relevance to the audience than to the characters. Such reports have neither a direct influence on the development of the plot nor contribute to any motivations. However, all become a part of the fictional world of a given play, while the dominant mode of delivery is storytelling. While the fact that messengers do not usually have a name and they may possess attributes (a traveller's costume or props such as a letter) works on the performance level as an easily decodable signal, it is the switch from action to narrative that signals their arrival in the first place.

Some characters have an unquestioned right to step out of the action and turn to storytelling. The messenger is the most common example[29] – exception can perhaps be found in classical drama, though, where there is a universally accepted analogue to the messenger: "Choruses, both tragic and nondramatic, might seem a more likely analogue for the messenger. Not only do they often incorporate narrative into their performances; unlike gods and prophets, choruses also acquire little, if any, authority from their identity. They, like

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29) There are various other cases of utterances which do not reside in action in the classical dramatic forms, including prologues and epilogues, morals, summaries, calling-outs and songs. We are primarily interested in such change that leads to the delivery of new information, and thus to an enlargement of the world of the stage.

the messenger, in fact, are nameless" (Barrett 50). This analogue affects all the recent uses of the chorus (such as in the Brechtian tradition) that revive this classical convention. Still, there are also a number of other roles that the chorus plays. The main difference between a messenger and a reporting chorus lies in the fact that: "the chorus can act as a kind of companion to the audience: a shock prepared for is a shock mitigated just enough to keep people in their seats. Generally the chorus stands (like the audience) outside the action, but (unlike the audience) makes comments and often has a stake in the outcome" (Bloom, "Introduction to Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*", 17). In other words, the chorus is strongly motivated to report, as its reporting co-determines its own fate. In this sense, the messenger has little or no stake in the action to which he or she contributes[30]. A messenger's motivation (as little or nothing takes place in drama and on stage unmotivated) lies elsewhere – not in his own fate but in pushing the action forward when other characters are "stuck" in their well-being, in creating a context for the events of the play, or in presenting ideas or facts from the actual world (historical, political and scientific "lessons").

The exclusivity if access to information does not, by any means, lie in the fact that no other character would be allowed to become a messenger or a narrator – quite to the contrary: one of the most common properties of the new messengers lies in the fact that they are transformations of characters with a name. The exclusivity lies in the lack of necessity to create motivation for the change of the mode for the character. While all other characters must prove, through action or speech, their exclusive access to a certain fact or event from outside the stage, and thus motivate the temporal shift in their role, the messenger is equipped with this privilege without the need to explain why he can (or must, or wants to) report.

Messengers' reports are regarded as reliable.[31] Although they may, from the narratological point of view, establish the unreliability of another character's point of view (for example, by presenting disruptive or inconsistent facts with another character's promoted narrative, thus altering the present meaning of the story or the character's role which has been dominant so far)[32] in themselves, they do not contain contradictions or inconsistencies.

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30) The reader should remember that Cleopatra's threats to the messenger (i.e. an immediate outcome of the messenger's action) is a case in point rather than a denial of the claim because, as explained above, it is the breach of the convention to not hold messengers responsible for the nature of their news which is played out in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

31) Let me state here that I am purposefully using the opposite term to Wayne C. Booth's *unreliable narrator*, who in his *The Rhetoric of Fiction* deals with an unreliable narrator who is "is mistaken, or he believes himself to have qualities which the author denies him" (159). Such a narrator leaves hints to the reader or audience (even a fictional audience, as in the case of *The Arabian Nights*, for example) of his unreliability in order to be "revealed", and thus restructure the understanding of the narrative as such. When there are traces in a narration signalling unreliability, often in the form of contradicting elements in the storytelling, it is in order to let the reader/audience discover the "true" version of the story which is different from the one presented. Thus, the unreliable narrator manages to deliver two layers of the story (the presented one and the "true" one). Motivations for unreliability may be numerous and it is not the aim of this footnote to give an account of them – for the purpose of this book it is important to note that the *reliability* of messengers' narration concerns the "small" narrative reports, within which it is practically impossible to leave the signals of unreliability.

32) As will be shown in the study of *Copenhagen* by Frayn.

The messenger's authority is a key issue. A messenger with no authority ultimately fails to play his role. The question which arises is, where does his authority come from? In classical drama, the source of his authority lies most often in the fact that he claims to be an eye-witness of the event he is reporting similarly to a narrator who serves as the literary substitute for the bard in the classical epic. As was described in an earlier example, the messenger informs others about Iocasta's death and Oedipus's blinding of himself, and his voice is given the authority to speak, precisely because he announces that he delivers what he saw. Another source of authority of the messenger's report lies traditionally in the fact that he often serves as a deputy of another, absent figure, who is equal or higher in rank to the receiver of the message (in the dramatic sense – another equally or more important character of the play –, or in the social sense – a character's superior). In such case, the messenger's authority is founded in being a substitute for another (a king, a queen or any significant nobleman), or even a deity, mediating his or her words.

As far as the structure of such a report is concerned, the information about the authority of the messenger's speech either precedes his appearance on the stage (he is introduced by another character) or it is a part of the opening of his speech. At this moment, the messenger is still partaking in the dramatic dialogue as a part of the plot. It is after the authority of the news is established through the standing of its bearer, that the messenger may switch his role. He becomes the storyteller, the informant, and he performs a narrative function.

Now, it is important to define what sources of authority for the messenger's speech there are in the case of new messengers. It is to state the obvious to say that the convention of the use of the messenger has survived. That is, in other words, that these basic and well-established sources of authority of the messenger's voice have remained in use. The new messenger is often a witness or a herald. However, these two identities need to be commented upon, as their status has changed. The word *eye* dropped out of the eye-witness compound, as new messengers have many other means of observation. Given the state of the present day epistemology[33], there are many other means of observation that empower the new messenger with authority. Among them, there is various technological equipment and, often, the media. Therefore, the new messenger has a wide range of possibilities to gain authority. There are various issues at play: for reasons of expediency, let us create a reverse pyramid of its sources. Set down below, are five of these various issues:

Firstly, the authority is founded in speech and closely connected to the use of language (in the case of performance, often accompanied by a signal within a system of theatrical signs such as costumes, the conventional "flourish" of trumpets, and the like). The most typical signal lies in the switch from acting out to storytelling, as was discussed at some length earlier. This change in the mode of delivery from a large to a small dramatic narrative lends the authority of a small-scale narrator. to the messenger.

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33) I am alluding to the indeterminacy principle where a "true" observation of a sub-atomic particle is principally impossible as the observer influences the observed object, which is an idea developed at large in *Copenhagen* by Frayn and *Hapgood* by Stoppard, to give examples from the plays with which we are concerned here.

Secondly, it is the utility of this device for dramatic/theatrical expression, as far as the use of the literary/dramatic convention is concerned. The authority of such a character lies in his particular function within the "narrative grammar" of the plot-construction, where he appears as a certain type, the one that brings the news.

Thirdly, a reporting messenger as a device of the narrative has the power to contribute to the development of the story, and his words affect what happens further in the plot. His authority is thus granted to him by other characters and confirmed by the development of the story.

Fourthly, reports have the ability to transgress the fictional and the actual and, as such, they often play the role of the "hooks" on which a story hangs. It need not be a metaphysical dimension (explanation of rules valid in a certain fictional world), it is often the contextual references to the actual world that contribute to an understanding of the meaning of the story.

And, last but not least, i.e. fifthly, what matters is the grounding of reports in the social reality outside the frame of fiction – our actual world, where the audience and the stories played out meet in a playhouse. In other words, this is a link between fiction and the society. The messenger's authority in this context is borrowed from authorities valid outside the fictional frame.

This last, fifth, issue, the broadest one, which transcends the realm of fiction, is the principle which underlies the rebirth of the messenger from the "old" (classical, realistic) type to the "new". The fact that the social reality has found a suitable character type to project itself onto and penetrate into the narrative frame, makes it possible to leave aside the conventional messenger as a witness or a herald and create a "new messenger". The difference between the two lies primarily in this: for the "old" messenger, the role is their occupation. It is the messenger's (only) job to learn a piece of information and deliver it. The new messenger is no longer labelled as "messenger"; it is in the nature of his or her other occupation (the one grounded in the social reality) to learn things and only then, with the authority of this other occupation, report this information to others. In other words, the old and the new messengers share the first three sources of their authority, but the new messenger self-assuredly borrows it from the fourth and fifth as well.

It is the "other occupation" that makes this possible. Deriving from what has just been said, the new messenger's authority is rooted in the fact that some occupations are privileged in their access to information and their possession of this information is taken for granted, as trustworthy and undisputed. Who then are these "new messengers" on which , in principle, this work is based? They are a multitude (and this list is by no means exhaustive): journalists and reporters[34], politicians and their assistants[35], scientists and teachers[36], detectives and police officers[37], historical characters[38], (perhaps not surpris-

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34) For example, *Alphabetical Order* and *Night and Day.*
35) For example, *Democracy.*
36) For example, *Hapgood, Arcadia* and *Copenhagen.*
37) For example, *The Real Inspector Hound.*
38) For example, *The Twentieth Century Cycle*, *Rock'n'Roll* and *The Coast of Utopia.*

ingly) dramatists and literary scholars[39], as well as many others, one's imagination being the only limit. And, as it is the deliverer's occupation that may give authority to a report (and create a new messenger), it may also be technology, such as the media (newspaper, radio, and TV) or any other "gadget".

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39) For example, *Arcadia* and *Afterlife*.