

THE MESSENGER IN SHAKESPEARE

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THE MESSENGER IN SHAKESPEARE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION--GENERAL FUNCTIONS OF THE MESSENGER

The messenger genus is a broad one. It contains several species and sub-species, some of which will hardly seem to belong to the group until they are examined from a functional or structural standpoint. An attempt will be made to break this great group into three species. The dividing lines will necessarily be somewhat arbitrary because there is definitely some overlapping between them.

The great nameless group of messengers, listed in the plays merely as messengers, or as posts or heralds or pages, is a species that would no doubt represent broad variations within itself. The social or political order to which a given individual of this group might belong would usually be difficult to determine. The manner in which he is treated would be an uncertain guide: the sender or receiver of the message would tend to treat him in accordance with the style of his own character. The gravity of the message itself might offer some clue, if not to the social and political importance of the messenger, at least to his worthiness, reliability, and physical stamina.

The second group is actually composite: it contains those named members of the cast plus all those who bear vocational

labels, such as soldiers or police, who carry messages. It is logical to deal with these two species as one because some of the named members are also known under their vocational titles.

The third group consists mainly of the supernatural or preternatural elements, including gods, prophets, soothsayers, ghosts, apparitions, and witches; in addition, it embraces such elements as the chorus and dumb show, dramatic devices which, to a considerable extent, perform messengerial functions. The relationship of the chorus to the supernatural is fairly close but not absolute. For instance, the chorus in Aeschylus' Agamemnon is composed of men too old to fight, even when the Greeks invaded Troy ten years before. Since men theoretically acquire wisdom in growing old, their words may approach prophecy. Otherwise, these men may be thought of as interpreting the natural signs around them either rationally or intuitively, or they may simply look a little deeper into psychology than the others. They do not possess the power to give any explicit information as our prophets do. Cassandra, for instance, could look back, presumably not from recollection of the events--she would not have been living then--but through divination, to see the feasting of the father on his children.

Such items as choric comment and expository material will be introduced wherever it applies to the characters under discussion.

One of the principal problems in delimiting the messenger class stems from the difficulty of determining whether a given player's role is chiefly that of carrying a message or of simply doing an errand or of carrying out a commission. The one function may shade into the other, and there is no easily definable criterion to apply in determining whether to include or reject certain people from the study. Nevertheless, ample consideration has been given to each individual problem, and even the doubtful inclusions could be given some justification; decisions to include or not to include certain characters, then, are not purely dogmatic.

In general, the rule will be to exclude inconsequential errand-bearers, such as servants who announce the arrival of visitors to their masters or tell them that their drink is ready. Some of these people are functionally important as seen from the aesthetic view. For example, they may help to reveal the character or social standing of their masters; but they are rarely of structural importance to the play.

But preceding the task of delimiting and defining the messenger class was the problem of selecting representative Shakespearean plays on which to base the study. Then, for the purpose of giving the reader a little better insight into Shakespeare's messenger creations, it seemed necessary to choose additional plays for comparison, not only from Shakespeare's contemporaries but also from two other groups,

representing the high-water marks in the drama of Greece and Rome. A more satisfying perspective should result from the addition of these extra dimensions of study.

Six Shakespearean plays are used: The Comedy of Errors has been selected as representative of the early or experimental comedy; As You Like It, the romantic comedy of Shakespeare's more mature years; 2 Henry VI, the chronicle play of the earlier years; 1 Henry IV, the chronicle play of the mature years; Macbeth, pure tragedy; and Antony and Cleopatra, tragi-history of his full maturity.

Four non-Shakespearean Elizabethan and Jacobean plays are used: William Stevenson's Gammer Gurton's Needle, representing the early imitative comedy--influenced greatly by the Romans; Ben Jonson's Volpone, or the Fox, standing for mature comedy with only moderate classical influence; Christopher Marlowe's Edward II, representing a fairly high development of the chronicle play; and John Webster's The Duchess of Malfi, exemplifying the tragedy.

Two Roman comedies, Terence's The Brothers and Plautus' The Menaechmi, are included, along with Seneca's Agamemnon, which typifies Roman tragedy.

Finally, four Greek plays--one comedy and three tragedies--are examined. The comedy selected is The Frogs of Aristophanes. The tragedies--Aeschylus' Agamemnon, Sophocles' Oedipus the King, and Euripides' The Hippolytus--are not intended to show any differentiation of types, but

are intended merely to represent the three great tragedians of Ancient Greece.

Next, messengers are considered as functional links in the structure of the various plays by showing how they serve as a means of economy in the saving of time and in avoiding the necessity of attempting to stage difficult scenes; and how they help to integrate and coordinate plays with dual or multiple plots, particularly in relating subplots to main plots.

Then, the abilities and characteristics of the messengers will be discussed, with considerable attention being given to the types of messages they carry. A chapter will also be devoted to the treatment, in terms of rewards and punishments, which is meted out to the messengers. Finally, some attempts will be made to show, from the evidence cited, how Shakespeare's use of messengers differs from and agrees with the use of messengers in the plays selected for comparison.

CHAPTER II

CLASSIFICATION OF MESSENGERS

The "nameless" class of messengers is quite numerous in Shakespeare's tragedies, chronicles, and tragi-chronicle plays, if such a conclusion can be drawn on the basis of the limited number of samples studied. It is nonexistent in the experimental comedy and in the romantic comedy examined.

After the elimination of possible duplications, seven of this nameless class remain in Antony and Cleopatra, three in 1 Henry IV, eight in 2 Henry VI, none in As You Like It, none in The Comedy of Errors, and two in Macbeth, besides servants and attendants. In Edward II, there are four; in The Duchess of Malfi, none; in Volpone, none; and in Gammer Gurton's Needle, none. In Aeschylus' Agamemnon, there is one; in Sophocles' Oedipus the King, none; in Euripides' Hippolytus, none; in Aristophanes' The Frogs, none. Seneca's Agamemnon, Terence's The Brothers, and Plautus' The Menaechmi have none.

In Antony and Cleopatra, however, indirect mention is made of the use of messengers who would number in the hundreds. A messenger arrives to Caesar, one who would seem to be Caesar's chief liaison officer, who informs Caesar that he will be able to furnish him with news of developments every

hour of the day.¹ Since at this time Caesar is confronted with a sort of two-front war, against Pompey and against the pirates, Menecrates and Menas, one would be obliged to double any first estimate that he might make of the number of men engaged in Caesar's communications system. He should also remember that as many messengers would be going as would be coming at a given time.

Besides this, on the other side of the Mediterranean, Cleopatra is soon to warm the earth with the feet of her messengers to Antony. Alexas reports to Cleopatra that he has met about twenty of them on his return trip to Antony.² This would imply her use of at least forty messengers, just to report the daily doing of Antony to her and perhaps her own flights of feeling to him.

In Antony and Cleopatra it is found that the nameless messengers gradually give place to more important people with names or titles, such as ambassador, as the play progresses. In the other plays examined, the types are mixed rather evenly, when several types are used.

In these same plays the list of messengers who are dignified with titles or labels indicating their vocations reads

¹Antony and Cleopatra, I, iv, 35-36. This reference and all succeeding references to the works of William Shakespeare--Richard II, 1 Henry IV, 2 Henry VI, Macbeth, The Comedy of Errors, and As You Like It--are based on Hardin Craig, The Complete Works of Shakespeare (Chicago, 1951).

²Antony and Cleopatra, I, v, 62.

almost like the dramatis personae. In Antony and Cleopatra there is one schoolmaster, Euphronius; there are two soldiers; and there is one referred to simply as an "Egyptian." Also there are, among Cleopatra's attendants, Alexas, Mardian, who is a eunuch, and Charmian; among Caesar's friends, Thyreus, Dolabella, Proculeius, and Gallus; among Pompey's friends, Menas, whose vocation is piracy, and Varrius; among Antony's friends, Eros, Dercetas, and Ventidius, a general; besides, there are Octavia, who is Caesar's sister and Antony's wife succeeding Fulvia, and Antony himself.

1 Henry IV has the following serving as messengers: Sir Michael, a friend of the Archbishop of York; Sir Walter Blunt; Sir Richard Vernon; Thomas Percy, the Earl of Worcester; Douglas, a Scottish earl; John of Lancaster, a younger prince; Bardolph, one of Falstaff's companions; Sir John Bracy; and an unnamed nobleman.

2 Henry VI has a soldier, one gentleman, Duke of Buckingham, Lord Clifford, Vaux, Earl of Salisbury, Duke of Suffolk, and the Duke of Somerset.

As You Like It has a courtier named Le Beau, a feudal landholder called Oliver de Boys, his two brothers, Orlando and Jacques, and two shepherds, Corin and Silvius.

Macbeth has a sergeant, a murderer, a doctor, Ross, Macduff, Macbeth, the heir apparent Malcolm, and Seyton, an officer attending Macbeth.

The Comedy of Errors has the two slave boys--the Dromios, a courtesan, an old merchant named Aegeon, and the ruler of Ephesus, Duke Solinus.

Edward II has a mower; Beaumont; the earl of Arundel; a Frenchman called Levune; the wife of Edward, Queen Isabella; the son of Edward, Prince Edward; the Lord of Winchester; the Bishop of Winchester; Rice ap Howell, who is some sort of administrator of "Bristow"; and two of the younger Mortimer's "creatures," Matrevis and Gurney, besides Lightborn.

The Duchess of Malfi has only one, namely Borsola, who is listed in the dramatis personae as "gentleman of the horse to the Duchess."

Volpone has the commandadori, or officers of justice; Castrone, a eunuch, servant to Volpone; Nano, a dwarf, servant to Volpone; Mosca, a parasite; and Corbaccio, "the crow," an old gentleman.

Gammer Gurton's Needle has a bedlam named Diccon, a housemaid Tib, a field laborer Hodge, a houseboy Cock, and an officer named Master Bailey.

In Aeschylus' Agamemnon there are a watcher on the palace roof and a herald; in Oedipus the King, Creon, the brother-in-law to the king, and two shepherds; in Hippolytus, the nurse of Phaedra and the henchman of Hippolytus; in The Frogs there is Xanthias, a slave, who is the servant to Dionysus.

Seneca's Agamemnon has Eurybates, a herald from Agamemnon. The Brothers has Syrus, the clever and mischievous servant,

who is a slave; Geta, an old slave; Hegio, a friend of the poor Sostrata; and Demea, the strict father. The Menaechmi has Cylindrus, a cook; a physician; Peniculus, a parasite; and Messenio.

Not so numerous is the supernatural-praternatural-choric group. There is a soothsayer in Antony and Cleopatra; there are three witches and their queen Hecate, three apparitions, and the Ghost of Banquo in Macbeth; in 1 Henry IV, a spirit looking after the interests of Glendower is mentioned;³ in 2 Henry VI, a spirit appears to Eleanor, the Duchess of Gloucester and her co-conspirators;⁴ in The Duchess of Malfi, Act III, scene iv, use is made of a dumb show in banishing the Duchess, Antonio, and their children. There is a chorus of old men and a prophetess, Cassandra, in Aeschylus' Agamemnon; Oedipus the King has a chorus of senators or elders of the Theban state, and an old prophet, Teiresias; Hippolytus has a chorus and two goddesses, Aphrodite and Artemis; The Frogs has a chorus of votaries, a chorus of frogs, and a god, Dionysus; Seneca's Agamemnon has a chorus of Argive women, a chorus of captive Trojan women, the Ghost of Thyestes, and Cassandra, the prophetess. The other plays under consideration lack these supernatural elements and the device of the chorus.

³1 Henry IV, IV, iv, 16-18.

⁴2 Henry VI, I, iv, 25-43.

Another class of messengers might have been made up of those unnamed household attendants and servants generally serving on a menial basis. But the duties of this group in most of the plays consist of running errands and performing little acts for their superiors so trivial that it scarcely seems necessary to record them in any detail. Structurally they are superfluous in the plays; aesthetically, however, these roles may be quite valuable.

Thus it appears that numerically the nameless messengers are widely employed by Shakespeare in the chronicles; they play some part in his tragedies, but little or no part in the comedies. Among Shakespeare's contemporaries, the same type of messenger, the nameless one, is used in the chronicle, but not in the comedy and tragedy. In classical tragedy he is used, but not in classical comedy. The named messenger and the nameless with vocational label are employed throughout the plays studied, but the greatest number appears in the Elizabethan chronicles and tragedies, constituting almost in themselves the dramatis personae. The purely supernatural elements are most copiously employed in Shakespearean and classical tragedy; the preternatural and choric elements are most widely used in classical tragedy, having little use elsewhere.

CHAPTER III

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MESSENGER IN THE FUNCTIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

The messenger and messenger-like elements are important in almost all plays in helping to bear the burden of the plot, even if there is but one plot to the play. But in those Renaissance plays which are constructed on a multiple-plot basis, the importance of the messenger becomes aggrandized, for he carries his part of the main plot load and also some of the load of the subplots. Besides this he is almost always essential in helping to bring together the various plots at convenient points to make the audience feel that it is viewing a unified piece and not just a series of scrambled episodes. In addition to this co-ordinating function of the messenger, it will be seen that he serves thrift by reporting actions which would be cumbersome to show directly, and that he serves art by helping to create the illusion of the passage of time.

In The Comedy of Errors, Shakespeare has observed the unities of time and place, following his principal source, The Menaechmi, but he has introduced a subplot, the Aegeon-Aemilia-Solinus story. This subplot is closely tied to the main plot at the beginning of the play and at the end,

between which parts it lies dormant. The first half of the subplot is the source of the greater part of the exposition for the entire play. For this reason the two characters in this portion of the plot perform a messenger-like service. The conversation between Aegeon and Solinus is the device for describing the antecedent action. When these same two encounter Aemelia and the principal characters of the main plot at the end, then complete recognition takes place as the two plots merge.

The expository detail, begun in the subplot, is completed in the main plot in the conversation between the merchant and Antipholus of Syracuse. In warning Antipholus of the danger of being found in Ephesus, the merchant mentions to him the Syracusan merchant taken into custody earlier in the day and condemned to die before sunset.¹ This background glimpse ties the two plots together, even this early, with just a slender thread.

The main plot is fundamentally one of mistaken identity. The greater part of the confusion emanates from the mistaking of the identity of the two sets of twins, and especially of the servant twins, who are generally running with some errand or carrying some little messages for their masters. Thus they are kept in a constant state of circulation. The

¹The Comedy of Errors, I, 11, 1-8.

more they move around the more are the opportunities for befuddling everybody, including themselves.

The first meeting between the Syracusan branch of the family and the Ephesian branch takes place when Dromio of Ephesus, having been sent by his master's wife to tell his master that his meal is ready, meets Antipholus of Syracuse.² Thus the trouble starts.

The courtesan, who has become involved with the Antipholi by receiving gifts from the one and giving them to the other for alterations, adds her bit to the masterpiece of confusion by deciding to go to Adriana with her troubles.

One might say not only that the messengers tie the main plot with the subplot and tie the main plot into a tight knot but also that the messengers and their actions almost constitute both plots.

In the discussion of the remainder of the list of plays, no emphasis is given to the role of the messenger in helping to weave together the various elements within a given plot. It is of interest to note, however, how the messenger carries the burden of the plot in such plays as 2 Henry VI. It would even be rewarding to show how the messengers bridge the gaps between plays in the historical tetralogies, as between 1 Henry VI and 2 Henry VI, if time permitted.

²Ibid., I, 11, 41-52.

In the romantic comedy of As You Like It, the two subplots and the principal plot are closely integrated by messengers or near-messenger travelers. If it is assumed that the Forest of Arden-banished Duke theme is the principal plot, and that the Oliver-Orlando controversy and the shepherd theme are the subordinate plots, then the way in which the points of contact are sewed together can be seen.

Orlando's appearance at the usurping Duke's to challenge the wrestler is the first touching of the two plots. Le Beau makes a little stitch when he warns Orlando of his danger.³ Orlando makes another when he repairs to the forest, and with a show of force, announces old Adam's need for food.⁴ He then takes his place in the main plot. Oliver brings these two plots closer into contact when he comes to the forest searching for Orlando. After his rescue from the snake and the hungry lioness, his message to Ganymede further merges the plots.⁵ Jacques de Boys, coming just at the end of the play with his message that the usurping Duke has repented and will restore his brother, resolves all the remaining difficulties of the play, and furnishes the last link between the opening and the closing situations, thus bringing about a final closure of the plots.

³As You Like It, I, 11, 273-279.

⁴Ibid., II, vii, 127-129.

⁵Ibid., IV, 111, 92-94.

The other little plot of As You Like It, consisting of the pastoral theme of Corin, Silvius, William, and Phebe, is co-ordinated with the main plot in part by people serving as messengers. Corin, for instance, goes to Rosalind to tell her of a Cupid-inspired episode then taking place in another part of the forest. It is the scene in which Silvius is scorned by Phebe. The latter is advised by Rosalind, who arrives to see the contest but is not content to be a passive watcher, to ". . . sell when you can: you are not for all markets."⁶

Silvius further knits the plots by delivering Phebe's "taunting letter," in which she shows her attraction to the youth Ganymede.⁷ It might be added here that Oliver plays an important function by his delivery of Orlando's message to Ganymede, the one in which he describes the encounter of Orlando with the lioness. This message serves economy well and obviates the necessity of staging either a very dangerous scene or a very unconvincing one.⁸

1 Henry IV has two plots, the King Henry-Hotspur discord and the Falstaff-Prince Hal conviviality. It is hardly necessary to discuss the contention here as to which is the principal and which is the subordinate theme.

⁶Ibid., III, v, 60.

⁷Ibid., IV, iii, 6-12.

⁸Ibid., IV, iii, 128-133.

These two plots touch four times at well-spaced intervals through the media of messengers: first, when Sir John Bracy comes to Falstaff--at the Boar's-Head Tavern, of course--to leave word that Prince Hal is to consult with his father the next day;⁹ secondly, when Prince Hal sends Bardolph with letters to his brother, Lord John of Lancaster, and to the Lord of Westmoreland, probably with instructions about the march against Hotspur, which will soon begin;¹⁰ thirdly, when Sir Richard Vernon tells Hotspur that Prince Hal with his boon companions are all in arms;¹¹ and fourthly, when Worcester delivers Prince Hal's challenge to single combat.¹²

The main plot in 2 Henry VI consists of the varied factional machinations aimed at Henry, or aimed at the power behind Henry; it includes the Yorkish ambitions, which come to the fore, but are not resolved, in the last parts of the play. If the play has any subplots, they would consist of the Jack Cade rebellion, which is actually a phase of the Yorkish plan, and possibly the business of Duchess Eleanor and her supernatural solicitings, though the latter might be considered only an enlarged episode with a fairly close bearing on the main plot. A consideration of these two, however, as subplots, even if only in an elementary sense,

⁹1 Henry IV, II, 1v, 317-319.

¹⁰Ibid., III, 111, 218-220.

¹¹Ibid., IV, 1, 97.

¹²Ibid., V, 11, 46-47.

will show what the messengers have to do with integrating them with the main plot.

Buckingham volunteers to take to the king the news of the discovery of Duchess Eleanor in league with Margery Jourdain, the witch, with Bolingbroke, the conjurer, and with John Hume and John Southwell, priests, who are practicing witchcraft against the king.¹³ This is about all there is in the way of messengerial liaison between the Duchess plot and the main plot.

The Jack Cade theme is tied to the main theme in several places by messengers. First, when Stafford observes the strength that Cade is gathering about him, he sends a herald throughout the town to proclaim all those who are up with Cade as traitors.¹⁴ Next, a messenger interrupts the queen's sighing over the severed head of Suffolk to warn that Cade and his rebels are in Southwark, that Cade proclaims himself Lord Mortimer, and vows to crown himself at Westminster; he describes Cade's ragged, ruthless army and announces the death of Sir Humphrey Stafford and his brother. Cade has announced, according to the messenger, that all scholars, lawyers, courtiers, and gentlemen are to be put to death.¹⁵

¹³Henry VI, I, 1v, 79-80.

¹⁴Ibid., IV, 11, 186-187.

¹⁵Ibid., IV, 1v, 27-37.

Almost immediately another messenger announces to the king and queen that Cade has taken London Bridge.¹⁶

Some time later Buckingham and Clifford come from the king to Cade and his army to announce pardon for those who will forsake Cade.¹⁷ Then they announce to the king that Cade has fled.¹⁸

The messenger who announces the taking of London Bridge has cheated the reader or theatre patron out of a good skirmish scene. Still, to be reasonable about it, he would have to admit that its staging would be complicated. It is only one small incident, too, amidst much violent action, and the dramatist must get along with his play. The messenger who describes Cade's army, too, saves the dramatist's time and the producer's money. It would not be easy nor cheap to show a whole army; yet Buckingham and Clifford pretend to show it when they announce that Cade has fled. Probably the king could see the army but the audience could not.¹⁹

The one spirit which the Duchess's partners bring from the nether world performs its part in the joining of the plots too. It gives an authoritative glimpse into the future: Henry is to be deposed by a duke; Suffolk shall die by water; and Somerset should shun castles.²⁰

¹⁶Ibid., IV, iv, 49.

¹⁷Ibid., IV, viii, 5-10.

¹⁸Ibid., IV, ix, 10-13.

¹⁹Ibid., IV, ix, 11-12.

²⁰Ibid., I, iv, 33-38.

Since in Macbeth Shakespeare has observed the unity of action, providing only one plot, there will be few messengers to discuss in this chapter. It is true that the witches might almost constitute a subplot; however, it seems a little more logical to treat the witches as a chorus than as a subplot. They perform all the functions of the classical chorus except that of the exodus. In the first scene, this chorus of witches creates the mood and atmosphere for the play. In the third scene the witches make their prophecies, that Macbeth will become Thane of Cawdor, later king, and that Banquo's issue are destined to wear the crown. In this they go beyond the point where the Greek chorus stops, for the latter generally confined itself to reflecting the prevailing mood, or at most expressing a deep concern that something unpleasant is about to happen. The Greek chorus is never specific as the witches are.

Like the members of the classical chorus, though, the witches chant in unison, talk among themselves, and enter the episodes directly by talking point-blank with the actors.

The prophecies not only prepare the audience aesthetically for subsequent action but also serve as strong motivations for the action itself. For example, the preparation by the witches of their world-famous Irish stew, containing as it does so many savory ingredients, is the dramatic device for the power by which they hope to lead Macbeth on to his damnation. The witches can, by adding a few extra simples,

make Macbeth feel the impact of their authoritative predictions by bringing up their masters. Since Macbeth chooses that it be done this way, then, they conjure up the three apparitions who tell him such equivocal facts that his confidence rides so high that his fall becomes inevitable. This practically constitutes Act IV, scene 1, and here the function of the witches is structurally completed, for the impetus of the action which they motivate is sufficient to carry it to its conclusion without their further aid.

A brief look at some instances of effective choric comment might be taken before the next play is examined. After the doctor has witnessed the sleep-walking of Lady Macbeth, he advises the gentlewoman to

. . . look after her;
Remove from her the means of all annoyance
And still keep eyes upon her,²¹

which admonition foreshadows the suicide of Lady Macbeth.

Another instance is Macbeth's comments, after seeing Banquo's ghost:

It will have blood; they say, blood will have blood:
Stones have been known to move and trees to speak;
Augurs and understood relations have
By maggot-pies and choughs and rooks brought forth
The secret'st man of blood.²²

This foreshadows his own downfall.

Antony and Cleopatra is well unified, but it has the elements of two stories, separated for the most part in distant

²¹Macbeth, V, 1, 83-85.

²²Ibid., III, iv, 122-126.

and distinct geographical locations. One of the plots, the principal one, consists of the affair between Antony and Cleopatra; the other centers around the intrigues of Caesar's world. The far-flung aspects of the whole are brought together mainly by the use of messengers, who help to knead the dough into one big loaf.

A few of those who perform this function are the following: the messenger who brings word to Antony that Fulvia has risen in rebellion against Caesar;²³ the messenger who reports Fulvia dead;²⁴ the messenger who reports from Rome to Cleopatra that Antony has married Octavia;²⁵ Octavia, who returns to Rome to try to bring about peace between her husband and her brother;²⁶ the schoolmaster, whom Antony sends to negotiate with Caesar;²⁷ Thyreus, who is sent by Caesar to treat with Cleopatra;²⁸ Eros, who composes a letter for Antony to be dispatched by messenger, after Enobarbus has gone over to Caesar's side;²⁹ Proculeius, Gallus, and Dollabella, who are sent by Caesar to trick Cleopatra;³⁰ Dercetas, who hastens to Caesar with news of Antony's suicide.³¹

²³Antony and Cleopatra, I, ii, 93-96.

²⁴Ibid., I, ii, 122.

²⁵Ibid., II, v, 23-106.

²⁶Ibid., III, vi, 39.

²⁷Ibid., III, xii, 5.

²⁸Ibid., III, xii, 26-33.

²⁹Ibid., IV, v, 12-17.

³⁰Ibid., V, i, 61-72.

³¹Ibid., V, i, 5-12.

In Antony and Cleopatra there is also an interesting example of choric comment. When Menas speaks of the marriage of Octavia and Antony as a bond uniting Caesar and Antony, Enobarbus sees the band as one which will strangle their amity, for ". . . Octavia is of holy, cold and still conversation"; consequently, Antony will revert to Cleopatra and Octavia's sighs will then "blow the fire up in Caesar."³²

An instance of thrift in Antony and Cleopatra is Antony's reporting to Scarus--actually to the audience--the sea battle, which he is observing from a high point of land. In this way Shakespeare obviates the need of attempting to stage what would be a rather difficult scene to lend verisimilitude to.³³

In the other Elizabethan and Jacobean plays studied, the messenger, with respect to plot co-ordination, is unimportant, chiefly because the plots lack the complication of Shakespeare's.

For instance, Edward II, by Marlowe, has only one clearly developed plot, the Edward-Gaveston-Spencer inspired action, with the semblance of a minor plot, breaking away from the main plot somewhat, in the Mortimer, Junior-Queen schemes. There is also an incident which might have splintered off into a little plot in itself, the capture of the Senior Mortimer by the Scotch. But this never develops; in fact,

³²Ibid., II, vi, 123-135.

³³Ibid., IV, xii, 1-9.

as far as the world knows, the Senior Mortimer is still rotting in a Scottish prison.

If the Mortimer, Junior-Queen schemes do constitute a minor plot, it is well integrated with the other, and quite a number of messengers play their parts in keeping them together. For example, the Earl of Arundel goes from Edward to Mortimer, Junior and the other barons requesting that the captured Gaveston be given a reprieve to visit the king;³⁴ a herald arrives to Edward from the barons, after the death of Gaveston and after Edward has elevated Spencer, demanding the removal of the new favorite;³⁵ Rice ap Howell informs Mortimer and Queen Isabella that Spencer and the king have sailed for Ireland;³⁶ the mower informs Rice that the king and his companions are disguised and are hiding in a certain abbey.³⁷ But these people, perhaps aesthetically helpful, are not very significant in the play nor very interesting in themselves.

The Duchess of Malfi is a loosely-constructed play, but it has a single plot. Aside from what is said of Bersola in

³⁴Christopher Marlowe, Edward II, ix, 30-67. This reference and all succeeding references to Edward II, as well as all references to William Stevenson's Gammer Gurton's Needle, John Webster's The Duchess of Malfi, and Ben Jonson's Volpone, or the Fox, are based on Elizabethan and Stuart Plays, edited by C. R. Baskerville, V. B. Heltzel, and A. H. Nethercot (New York, 1950).

³⁵Edward II, xi, 151-179.

³⁶Ibid., xvi, 55-67.

³⁷Ibid., xvii, 46-59.

another chapter, only two short items belong here: first, that Delio and his friend Antonio furnish, in the initial scenes of the play, rather lengthy exposition; secondly, this play contains, in Act III, scene ii, an example of the dumb show, frequently employed during this period to aid in the understanding of certain phases of the plot. Its use here consists of the banishment of Antonio, the Duchess, and their children, expressed toward them by the Cardinal. The dumb show in this case is enacted to the accompaniment of song in the Shrine of Our Lady of Loretto.

Jonson asserts in the prologue to Volpone, or the Fox that he will observe the "laws of time, place, person," and that "from no needful rule he swerveth." The play, however, contains a subplot, the parts relating to Peregrine, Politic Would Be, and Madame Would Be, which, incidentally, does not advance the action and is not structurally integrated to a satisfactory degree with the main plot to make the reader feel that it is essential.

Except, then, to help bear the burden of the main plot, messengers are not very important in Volpone. Mosca does deliver a message to Madame Would Be, who is visiting Volpone, much to the latter's disgust, in an attempt to draw her out of the main plot. He tells her that he has seen her husband, Politic, rowing off in a gondola with a "most cunning court-
esan."³⁸ Mosca's lie is effective.

³⁸Volpone, III, v, 16-20.

When Corvino says to Mosca, "My partner. . . shalt share in all my fortunes," Mosca answers, "Excepting one. . . your gallant wife."³⁹ This little edged allusion to Corvino's wife, the first time that she is mentioned, is ingenious choric comment. The reader knows immediately that Corvino's wife is something extraordinary and that henceforth she is to be in the action. Such an unusual way of introducing a woman is bound to cup all prurient male ears.

Gammer Gurton's Needle has a prologue which gives antecedent action and a slight summary of the plot. Diccon furnishes exposition in Act I, scene 1, and Tib adds detail about the losing of the needle.⁴⁰ Diccon, as a lying news-bearer, carries much of the burden of the plot. Baldwin refers to him as the mainspring of the action,⁴¹ which he clearly is. There are few complications and no subordinate themes, as the unities are carefully observed.

Seneca's observance of the unity of place coupled with his ambition to relate widespread action makes the messenger a necessary and organic part of his tragedies. The messengers taken in turn--the Ghost of Thyestes, Eurybates, and Cassandra, with a bit of assistance from the choruses--practically constitute the play of Agamemnon. They are the

³⁹Ibid., I, v, 81-82.

⁴⁰Gammer Gurton's Needle, I, iii, 28-37.

⁴¹T. W. Baldwin, Shakespeare's Five-Act Structure (Urbana, 1947), p. 410.

structural framework, even more so than in the Shakespearean chronicle play.

The actual events which could be shown on the Roman stage--if Seneca was ever attempted on the Roman stage at all--were greatly restricted by the principle of unity of place and by the restraint which kept violence off the stage; but these limitations necessitated a great amount of reportorial relation of the events happening off stage, sometimes in remote places. Essential exposition of underlying causes of action were effectively described by the same agents.

There are two choruses in Seneca's Agamemnon, one of Argive women and the other a band of captive Trojan women. However effective these choruses are in other respects, they are not important in any messengersial function. The Ghost of Thyestes, however, in opening the action of the play, performs an important expository aid in showing what the tragedy is founded on and in inciting his hesitant son Aegisthus to revenge--like Hamlet's father's ghost. Eurybates' relation of the events of the storm and the shipwreck, of course, could never have been staged with effectiveness, except with the tricks of modern movie-making. The greatest chance for realism then was to relate the action.

Cassandra is an integral part of the plot too. She looks both before and after. She fills in some details of

the fall of Troy⁴² and announces little previews of coming attractions, such as her own and Agamemnon's death, and the eventual doom of Clytemnestra.⁴³ Standing outside the palace, she describes the entrapment of Agamemnon in Clytemnestra's cloak and his murder.

In Terence's The Brothers we find a prologue and a summary. The prologue is merely a defence against "malicious critics" who Terence hears are about to attack him for borrowing too much of his plot and for accepting too much aid from his friends in writing his plays. The summary gives a brief outline of the story, though it is hardly necessary, for the plot is not a complicated one. Micio also furnishes background information in Act I, scene i.

Structurally, the messenger parts proper are almost negligible. The scene is a street in Athens in front of the houses of Micio and Sostrata, where all of the action takes place, perhaps within a single morning. The plot is relatively simple, has no well-defined subplots; hence there is no particular problem in binding the simple elements of the plot together.

Plautus' The Menaechmi is far simpler than Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors, but its plot is not to be followed

⁴²Seneca, Agamemnon, III, 625-636. This reference and all succeeding references to Seneca's Agamemnon are based on The Tragedies of Seneca, translated by Frank Justus Miller (Chicago, 1907).

⁴³Seneca, V, 1013.

without some attention. The prologue covers the extensive background and antecedent action in a leisurely fashion; this is a distinct advantage in interpreting subsequent events. But since the plot is based largely on coincidental situations, there is little necessity to link the parts with natural happenings. Yet, since the coincidences involve the messenger, that is, Messenio, he could not readily be dispensed with. Peniculus, too, is organic in the plot, but his actions are not based on coincidence--he is hungry.

In The Frogs of Aristophanes those who serve as the chief messengers, Dionysus and Xanthias, are structurally essential to the play in both their messengerial and their non-messengerial capacities. This comedy has, besides, two choruses, one of votaries and one of frogs. Neither performs any messenger-like function; the former is largely lyrical and the latter is satirical, representing inferior poets and symbolizing coarseness and materialism. In the choral odes which follow the parados, prayers are offered to Bacchus and Demeter and the stage is set for the debate in the agon. This chorus enters directly into the satire with a sharp prick at a demagogue who "contrives the top-most place of the rascaldom to hold,"⁴⁴ gives directions on how to get to

⁴⁴Aristophanes, The Frogs, 79. This reference and all succeeding references to Aristophanes' The Frogs as well as all references to Aeschylus' Agamemnon, and Sophocles' Oedipus the King, are based on The Treasury of the Theatre, edited by John Gassner (New York, 1951).

Pluto's residence,⁴⁵ and describes Xanthias as a dexterous clever man.⁴⁶

In the Greek tragedies the chorus does not anticipate specific incidents, does not foretell nor prophesy so much as it presages or forebodes; the nature of the impending evil remains mysterious even to the chorus. But this foreshadowing is artistically effective in preparing for the action, in binding it together, in arousing suspense, and in creating the illusion of the passage of time; hence the chorus becomes structurally and functionally significant. The backward glimpses of the chorus, too, as in Aeschylus' Agamemnon, are important in furnishing the audience with antecedent action. Even though the Greeks were familiar with the myths on which the tragedies were based, it was doubtless pleasant to be reminded. In the play referred to, the chorus recalls Atreus' killing of Thyestes' children and serving them to Thyestes as a punishment for seducing his wife;⁴⁷ it also recalls the sacrifice of Ephigenia and the launching of the thousand ships for Troy.⁴⁸

The chorus further integrates itself into the structure of the tragedy by another device. For instance, though it generally recites in unison, sometimes the leader or some other member enters the dialogue with the actors proper.

⁴⁵The Frogs, 79.

⁴⁶Ibid., 80.

⁴⁷Aeschylus, 12-13.

⁴⁸Ibid., 11.

In this way the leader exchanges sentiments with Clytemnestra and Aegisthus about the murder which the last two mentioned have just committed.⁴⁹

Cassandra, the prophetess, does about the same for Aeschylus' play as she does for Seneca's. She is an organic part of the play. Aesthetically, too, she prepares the audience for the murder of Agamemnon and herself, and she is a link in the catastrophe, a strong motive for murder, because Clytemnestra is jealous of her.

In Sophocles' Oedipus the King, the function of the chorus, made up of old men of the Theban state, is chiefly lyrical, and it does little more than to echo the sentiments which it hears.

Teiresias, however, is particularly important in this play. His message contains the key to the catastrophe: through him is brought about the discovery and recognition of Oedipus as the unknown offender against the state of Thebes. The proof of Teiresias' pronouncement comes, of course, when the Corinthian shepherd attempts to remove all suspicions from Oedipus' mind that he might still defile his mother's bed.⁵⁰ In attempting to do this, the shepherd divulges the old secret that Oedipus is the son of Laius who was supposed to have been destroyed in infancy.

⁴⁹Ibid., 29.

⁵⁰Oedipus the King, 45.

In Euripides' Hippolytus, approximately two thirds of the characters serve as messengers, not counting two goddesses and a wax tablet which bridges the world of the living and the dead. It also has a chorus.

The lying wax tablet left by Phaedra is cataclysmic. It unjustly and irrevocably implicates Hippolytus in the crime which results in the downfall of everybody of importance. Equally crucial is the action of Phaedra's nurse in telling Hippolytus of Phaedra's secret, which revelation precedes Phaedra's suicide.

The goddess Aphrodite furnishes expository facts by ranting on Hippolytus' scorn for her, and she initiates action by plotting to ruin him.⁵¹ Through a deus ex machina appearance Artemis performs the duty of revealing true identity, thus exonerating Hippolytus and showing Theseus the bottom of tragic despair.

The chorus discovers the suicide of Phaedra and gives the alarm, but when semi-chorus 1 suggests cutting her down, semi-chorus 2 rejects any idea of action by saying, "The busy meddler treadeth perilous paths,"⁵² having in mind, probably, the fate of the nurse who has tried to help her mistress. The chorus acquaints Theseus with the state of his household

⁵¹Euripides, Hippolytus, 185-186. This reference and all succeeding references to Hippolytus are based on An Anthology of Greek Drama, First series, edited by C. A. Robinson, Jr. (New York, 1954).

⁵²Ibid., 207.

when he returns at the moment of Phaedra's suicide,⁵³ but when Theseus asks why she has hanged herself, the chorus feigns ignorance, having sworn to Phaedra never to reveal the secret.⁵⁴

⁵³Ibid., 207.

⁵⁴Ibid., 204.

CHAPTER IV

ABILITIES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF MESSENGERS WITH RELATION TO THE TYPES OF MESSAGES THEY CARRY

The messengers who are merely nameless in Shakespeare, as well as those of the same type in the other plays under study, always appear to be adequate to the task and sometimes more than adequate. They perform feats of memory, on occasion, which would shame a college student; for they deliver long messages, sometimes verbatim and sometimes embellished in beautiful language. Their corporal endurance at times is equally remarkable.

Among this great class of messengers and among those who are regularly named members of the cast and those who are here designated as bearing vocational titles, the spread of abilities and other human characteristics is broad indeed. In general they are people who are well selected for the parts they are to perform, whether little or big, trivial or urgent. Their abilities often singularly fit them for their jobs.

For an example of especial ineptitude, on the one hand, if the reader will look into a play which in a strict sense is not a part of this study, he will find the servant of Edmund, Duke of York, in Richard II, whom the master starts to send to

his sister-in-law, the Duchess of Gloucester. But just then the servant recalls that he happened to go by the Duchess's that very morning and learned that the Duchess had died. Yet the simpleton forgot all about it and did not inform Edmund as he was supposed to do.¹

But this man is definitely the exception. If his mental equipment is sluggish, he contrasts sharply with another whose alertness is unquestioned, namely, Sir William Blunt. Blunt must traverse many many miles in conveying messages for Henry IV and his loyal forces, from the north of England to London and from London to Shrewsbury. He understands the importance of his messages, on which sometimes the fate of the island hangs, and he executes his duty in a business-like, even a statesmanlike, way. He is neither overawed by the majesty of the king nor is he impressed by Hotspur's heated declamation on the abuses the rebels have suffered at the hands of the king. He is unmoved by Hotspur's personal compliment too.

That Blunt is of some consequence in state affairs is evinced by his clear-cut advice to Henry IV: he suggests that the king overlook Hotspur's refusal to give up the prisoners which the foppish lord had demanded.² This intercession for Hotspur, when both of the principals are likely to become

¹Richard II, II, 11, 90-97.

²Henry IV, I, 111, 70-76.

rash because of their anger, demonstrates Blunt's capacity for mediation and shows his sympathy and understanding for a man placed in Hotspur's position by the sweet-scented lord.

When the showdown approaches between the king and Hotspur, and Blunt conveys the king's "gracious offer," Blunt becomes impatient with Hotspur's rather long-winded harangue in listening and substantiating his grievances before he comes to his succinct summary. "Tut, tut, I came not to hear this," he comments, and proceeds to resolve the business and to end the interview by urging Hotspur to accept Henry's offer.³ Throughout, Blunt is firm but tactful, brief but not curt.

The foppish lord referred to in the above paragraphs does not appear in the action proper. He is described by Hotspur some time after the battle with the Scots, at which battle he had approached Hotspur. All that anyone can know of him is what Hotspur relates. But what a description of a man, and how one would relish the exchange between him and Hotspur, if an account of it had only been preserved! This dainty fellow, according to Hotspur's account, lacked any semblance of diplomacy. He obtruded himself into the center of the carnage and made his demands, not neglecting to show his elegant distaste for the sight of blood and the smell of gunpowder.⁴

The other two noteworthy messengers in 1 Henry IV are Sir Richard Vernon and the Earl of Worcester, who are sent

³Ibid., IV, 111, 89-113.

⁴Ibid., I, 111, 29-69.

together to bear Hotspur's grievances to Henry, Worcester serving as the chief spokesman and couching his message in bitter terms, which likely express his own spiteful sentiments rather than strictly those of Hotspur.⁵ He probably feels that he can afford to be rude to the king, for he means to see the rebellion proceed anyway, confident that he can induce the weak-kneed Vernon to falsify the king's terms to Hotspur. Neither Vernon nor Worcester has enough cerebral tissue in his head to divine the disadvantage of the rebels' military situation.

In the early part of 2 Henry VI, the nefarious Suffolk serves as Henry's chief messenger and ambassador, or rather he completes the business which he undertook for Henry in 1 Henry VI. That he is an artful conniver is evidenced by the length of time that he enjoys the king's confidence and the queen's intimate favors before he is finally exposed and banished. His glib tongue has prevailed with Henry that he should have Margaret against the better counsel of Henry's wiser and more scrupulous advisers. He has, of course, also persuaded Margaret that she should be his paramour, before the action opens in 2 Henry VI.

By the time Henry sends him to summon Gloucester to trial, however, Suffolk's sins cannot any longer be palliated by a tongue accomplished in chicanery. Henry is not deceived,

⁵Ibid., V, 1, 30-71.

on hearing of Gloucester's death, by Suffolk's honied words,
 "Comfort, my sovereign! gracious Henry, comfort!"⁶

Buckingham and York, whose wings trail only slightly less in the dust, take over the chief nunciatory duties of the falling Suffolk, even before Gloucester's murder. It is they who ensnare the Duchess of Gloucester in the witchcraft plot, and it is Buckingham who rushes to St. Albans to tell Henry about it. Anticipating complete success of the trap, Buckingham garnishes his speech to the king with half-truths and outright lies:

. . . Lady Eleanor, the protector's wife,
 The ringleader and head of all the rout,
 Have practiced dangerously against your state,
 Dealing with witches and with conjurers:
 Whom we have apprehended in the fact;
 Raising up sprites from underground,
 Demanding of King Henry's life and death.⁷

The weak-minded Henry believes every word.

Buckingham's powers of persuasion are exemplified on another occasion, when, with Clifford's help, he goes to Jack Cade's rebels and manages to call the erring sheep back to the fold. Actually, this success is more to Clifford's credit than to Buckingham's, though, for it is Clifford who appeals to their patriotism by mentioning the imminent danger from France.⁸ This was a ticklish matter to begin with, and one requiring disciplined nerves, for the vacillating rabble

⁶2 Henry VI, III, 11, 38.

⁷Ibid., II, 1, 165-175.

⁸Ibid., IV, viii, 5-55.

was already inured to the smell of blood. Had they not been appeased by Clifford's rhetoric, they might just as soon have taken advantage of their power over the two and disposed of them summarily. Luckily for their own slimy skins, they proved sufficient unto their task.

The Earl of Salisbury, as spokesman for the commons after the murder of Gloucester, delivers to Henry and his household staff a moving and effective address demanding Suffolk's death or banishment. The power of his speech and his worthy motives are witnessed by his enemy, Suffolk, who accuses him of being a willing spokesman and of being desirous of showing what a quaint orator he is.⁹

Hereward T. Price, in commenting on the appropriateness of the figures of speech which Shakespeare invented for certain characters, figures which are used by nobody else, says, "The speeches, for instance, of Winchester and Henry are colored by reminiscences of the Bible. Suffolk, on the other hand, delights in the oversweet and silken imagery of conventional poetry."¹⁰ It would be interesting to pursue this study further, but the task, even limited to our messengers, is scarcely within the scope of this thesis.

In As You Like It, Act I, scene ii, Le Beau's speeches telling the ladies of good sport to be witnessed is quite

⁹Ibid., III, ii, 242-277.

¹⁰Hereward T. Price, Construction in Shakespeare (Ann Arbor, 1951), p. 37.

in the character of the courtier. Le Beau seems callously unmoved by the waste of calcium in the bodies of Charles' three unhappy challengers, but he shows some humanity in warning Orlando away from the court after his victory over the bone-cracker, Charles. Le Beau's description of the exhibition is concise and graphic, when he comes to the point of his story; but he has no cleverness of speech to hold his own against the girls and Touchstone.

Oliver's character in the early parts of the story is obvious from Orlando's recital of his own mistreatment, and from his conversation with Orlando in the first scene of the play. In this conversation Oliver reveals himself the bully toward his younger brother; but when Frederick sends him to search for his brother, his cringing "O that your highness knew my heart in this!" shows his cowardly nature.¹¹ Later, however, in the forest, after Orlando's merciful self-sacrifice for him, he becomes completely remorseful. In delivering Orlando's excuses to Ganymede, he phrases a speech of beautiful poetry, praising Orlando and telling of his encounter with the snake and the lioness, saving until last the climactic revelation of his own identity.¹²

Orlando, in serving as his own messenger of love to Rosalind by penning the pretty verses for her and hanging

¹¹As You Like It, III, 1, 13.

¹²Ibid., IV, 111, 99-121.

them on the bushes, shows a simplicity fitting only to a pure romance. His verses do perhaps express a real love for her, though they jig along in a style more suited to one of the shepherds than to the hero. Touchstone is able to handle Orlando's meter with extreme ease in his parodies. Still we can see how these lines might touch a girl's heart, especially a heart that has already become highly sensitized:

Thus Rosalind of many parts
 By heavenly synod was devised,
 Of many faces, eyes, and hearts,
 To have the touches greatest prized.¹³

There is a close relationship in The Comedy of Errors between the messengers and the types of messages they carry; this is to say that Shakespeare has selected his messengers well, even in this "experimental" comedy, and has them speak in character. The Dromios, for instance, are simple slave boys, who are at least as honest and as intelligent as their masters. They are sent hither and yon on simple errands and with messages easy to remember. They do not fail their masters, except through errors in identity; but they are playful fellows who enjoy a little clown-like word play with their masters, who appreciate their little wit and give them freedom to fraternize with them when occasion is suitable.

The message which the courtesan bears to Adriana would seem to be in perfect character, for, in order to cover up

¹³Ibid., III, 11, 157-160.

her own complicity in the petty thievery of Antipholus of Ephesus, she decides to inform Adriana that her husband "rushed" into her house and took her ring away by force.¹⁴

Aegeon is, of course, a messenger of a different kind; or rather he performs a messenger-like function by filling in extensive expository information. He is a merchant, and quite a bold one, considering the chance that he takes in landing at Ephesus while loyally searching for his sons. He is reluctant to discuss his troubles with Solinus, but on the latter's insistence he does. Though condemned to die, he retains his dignity and speaks to Solinus with the courtesy of a perfect gentleman. In like manner Solinus treats him.

Solinus, similarly performing messenger-like service by relating many details of antecedent action, is himself a man of kindly feeling; but he is firm in upholding the laws which it is his duty to execute, determined, no doubt, not to set a precedent of whimsical application of them. It is his trust in human nature that allows Aegeon a day of grace in which to make a last effort to find his ransom. This business includes the whole of Act I, scene 1.

The modest sergeant in Macbeth is every pound the soldier. His own part in the battle he makes no mention of, but his courage was affirmed by Malcolm. His courage still holds

¹⁴The Comedy of Errors, IV, 111, 95-96.

while he is apparently bleeding to death, if his wounds are not bound soon. Yet he gives terse account of the important happenings of the day, embroidered with masculine imagery.¹⁵

In this play, it falls to the lot of Ross to serve as the bearer of some of the best and the worst news delivered by anybody. He brings tidings which corroborate the sergeant's story. His recital is brief and soldier-like, but he is inspired by the triumphant moment to use one of the most ringing lines in all Shakespeare. When Duncan asks where he came from, his answer is,

From Fife, great king;
Where the Norwegian banners flout the sky
And fan our people cold.¹⁶

But later Ross is obliged to tell Macduff about the assassination of his family. His kind-heartedness makes the task almost impossible for him; so he evades it by giving all the other news that he can think of and by masking his answers to Macduff's questions. His halting efforts betray a most troubled spirit.¹⁷ Then he happens to be the luckless one to have to tell Old Siward that his son was killed in the final battle. He does it in the kindest way he can, by coupling the death message with the heart-felt praise that touches one to the core:

¹⁵Macbeth, I, ii, 8-41.

¹⁶Ibid., I, i, 48-50.

¹⁷Ibid., IV, iii, 164-213.

. . . Your cause of sorrow
Must not be measured by his worth, for then,
It hath no end.¹⁸

This time he does not falter.

Macduff acts as messenger three times in the play. The first time he serves, he announces to the other lords that Duncan has been murdered. He rushes out in uncontrolled grief and fury to raise the alarm in disordered ejaculations and scraps of sentences.¹⁹

The second instance is the time when, fleeing the wrath of Macbeth, whose banquet he has failed to attend, he becomes the messenger of the Scottish lords to the court of Edward the Confessor. Here he looks up another expatriate, Malcolm, who, testing his motives, misleads him into thinking that he is unfit to be Scotland's king. Macduff then in his consummate honesty tells Malcolm that he is not fit either to reign or to live. His feeling is so deep for the condition of his country that he cries out in despair, "O Scotland, Scotland!"²⁰

His third appearance is the event of his bringing in Macbeth's head with the declaration,

. . . behold where stands
The usurper's head; the time is free.²¹

¹⁸Ibid., V, viii, 39-46.

¹⁹Ibid., II, iii, 69-85.

²⁰Ibid., IV, iii, 1-100.

²¹Ibid., V, viii, 54-55.

When Macbeth himself arrives home, after having ridden hard to try to be the first to bear the news to his lady that Duncan would spend the night at their castle, he may be tired and breathless from his exertion. His speech is short and jerky; it consists, in the whole interview with Lady Macbeth, of one full line and two half lines.²² His inarticulateness is more likely the result of his excitement over what is taking place in his imagination. The witches have just promised him great honors. The situation arising from Duncan's desire to spend the night at Macbeth's is tailored perfectly to fit Macbeth's plans for bringing into immediate effect what was promised him. In an "aside," before Duncan tells him of his planned sojourn at his castle, Macbeth has said,

. . . why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature?²³

We see from this that Macbeth is perturbed before he starts the ride home.

The first murderer, serving as messenger to Macbeth at the banquet to report success in disposing of Banquo but failure in the mission by allowing Fleance's escape, boasts that he cut Banquo's throat and left him in a ditch with

²²Ibid., I, v, 59, 61, 72. ²³Ibid., I, 111, 134-137.

twenty trenched gashes in his body.²⁴ This is an example of professional pride ascendant over modesty. That he and his assistant are simple-minded yahoos may be inferred from the ease with which Macbeth is able to convince them that Banquo is their enemy and that he is responsible for their unfortunate condition.

The murderers never waste words. The first murderer, in his initial interview with Macbeth, characterizes himself and does it with a sort of eloquence when he explains to Macbeth as follows:

And I another
So weary with disasters, tugg'd with fortune,
That I would set my life on any chance,
To mend it or be rid on't.²⁵

The doctor reports to Macbeth the condition of his patient, Lady Macbeth. Since Macbeth is at this time under many treublous loads, the doctor waits for him to ask about Lady Macbeth. Then he tells Macbeth briefly that Lady Macbeth's ills are mental or spiritual rather than physical, and he claims no power to aid her to recovery. His manner is that of a modest physician of the present day who is conscious of the ethical standards of his professional organization.²⁶ Though he seems to be quite at ease in this short

²⁴Ibid., III, iv, 9-32.

²⁵Ibid., III, i, 111-114.

²⁶Ibid., V, iii, 37-46.

interview, it can be assumed that he is uncomfortable, for his final "aside" reveals his feelings,

Were I from Dunsinane away and clear,
Profit again should hardly draw me here.²⁷

Seyton, an officer attending Macbeth, is calm and collected under the stress that wrecks Macbeth. Of course Seyton does not feel any responsibility for this state of affairs. He answers his lord's questions to the point, and, it can be imagined, in an even modulated voice calculated to calm Macbeth's jangled nerves.²⁸ Sticking with Macbeth to the last, he shows himself loyal and brave.

The servant who bears Macbeth the message that ten thousand English soldiers are approaching Dunsinane is barely equal to the task. He is so scared that he can hardly get a whole sentence out.²⁹

The messenger who comes to Macbeth some time later is in little better state of mind. He has seen the grove moving toward Dunsinane, and, although he feels the obligation to report what he has seen, he is not entirely convinced himself that his eyes tell him truly. It is such a different sort of thing from all else in his experience that he declares he does not know how to express it.³⁰

²⁷Ibid., V, 111, 61-62.

²⁸Ibid., V, 111, 29, 31.

²⁹Ibid., V, 111, 12-18.

³⁰Ibid., V, v, 30-38.

In Antony and Cleopatra the messenger who brings news to Antony about Fulvia's rebellion in Rome and about the success of the Parthian in Syria, Lydia, and Ionia finds no embarrassment in giving the first part of his story, for he understands the Antony-Cleopatra liaison, which was common knowledge. So he does not expect Antony to be much disturbed by what his wife may do; but he is afraid, until reassured, to give the worst of the news. Then he almost goes too far, for his manner of starting and then breaking off a speech tells Antony that he is blaming him for the losses to the Parthians.³¹

Alexas, one of Cleopatra's attendants, probably a man of the Egyptian nobility, is sent by his mistress to find out where Antony is, who is with him, and what he is doing. Alexas is to torment him with her frowardness: if he is sad, Alexas is to tell him that Cleopatra is dancing; if he is mirthful, Alexas is to report her sick. He is instructed to go quickly and return.³² What sort of man should be sent on a mission of this kind is problematical. Possibly there is something about Alexas that qualifies him; however, this seems like the sort of perversity that should be entrusted to a eunuch, like Mardian, for instance.

³¹Antony and Cleopatra, I, 11, 92-116.

³²Ibid., I, 111, 1-5.

Cleopatra sends him again to Antony, whose whereabouts are somewhat indefinite but at considerable distance from Cleopatra's court, probably to spy and to report on him. In answer to Cleopatra's fervent questions, Alexas, on his return, gives her a pearl which Antony has kissed several times and sent her. When Alexas gets this much out, he complains that Antony's speech sticks in his heart. Possibly his constraint is caused by the intimacy of the message. Nevertheless he proceeds to say that Antony will piece out her throne with kingdoms and make her mistress of all the East. Alexas quotes Antony directly in this extravagant but quite poetical speech.³³

So, for whatever may be known about Alexas, these instances will have to suffice. It is not much; he has some modesty left, or shyness, and he can remember a message word for word. He does appear in another scene, in a mixed group of Cleopatra's attendants, where he fails to exhibit the same delicate sensitiveness to the intimate phases of life.³⁴ Possibly his modesty is feigned or perhaps he is not easy in Cleopatra's presence.

The man who brings Cleopatra the message that Antony is married to Octavia is either a paragon of honesty and a stoic, or one lacking in imagination and ability of adaptation. He

³³Ibid., I, v, 35-49.

³⁴Ibid., I, ii, 80-83.

sticks by his message to the letter even though he is almost beaten senseless.³⁵ However, when he is called in again, probably the next day, he has apparently lost some of his regard for the notion that honesty is the only policy, for now he demonstrates a bit of malleability which saves his aching bones.³⁶

The schoolmaster, Euphronius, is sent by Antony to Caesar with his petition to be allowed to remain in Egypt or in Athens. Dolabella, who announces him to Caesar, reasons that Antony is down to the bottom of his barrel--

. . . he is pluck'd, when hither
He sends so poor a minion of his wing,
Which had superfluous kings for messengers
Not many moons gone by.

The approach of the schoolmaster substantiates Dolabella's estimate of his position: he comes in with full meekness, knowing himself as formerly so petty to Antony's ends.³⁷ Perhaps Euphronius is sent by Antony because Antony supposes that a schoolmaster ought to know some rhetoric and should be able to use his powers of persuasion. But Euphronius shows no aptitude for negotiation. He dumps out his principal petition along with its substitute, without first dicker-
ing for the principal one.³⁸ He is so obsequious that he fails to gain any advantage for Antony. Yet he is not

³⁵Ibid., II, v, 23-106.

³⁶Ibid., III, iii, 4-41.

³⁷Ibid., III, xii, 3-25.

³⁸Ibid., III, xii, 11-15.

negotiating from a position of complete military defeat. Antony has some strength left, as he later shows.

Thyreus is selected by Caesar to go to Cleopatra. He is to offer her anything, to use his eloquence and cunning.³⁹ When Thyreus arrives, he shows his powers of improvisation by telling Cleopatra that Caesar understands that she has embraced Antony not for love but through fear. His language is fluent and honied, befitting the accomplished courtier, and Cleopatra appears to receive his blandishments in good grace;⁴⁰ but it is scarcely likely that such a clever one as Cleopatra would be deceived by all this.

Mardian is sent by Cleopatra to Antony to tell him that she is dead and that she died with Antony's name on her lips. She could not have found one to phrase her message to produce a more poignant effect on Antony. These are the words that turned Antony into a very rage of grief:

. . . the last she spake
Was 'Antony! most noble Antony!'
Then in the midst a tearing groan did break
The name of Antony; it was divided
Between her heart and lips; she render'd life,
Thy name so buried in her.⁴¹

A clever but self-seeking messenger is Dercetas, who, hoping for reward, runs to Caesar to report that his master Antony is dead. He is so quick to see an assumed advantage

³⁹*Ibid.*, III, xii, 26-33.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, III, xiii, 53-82.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, IV, xiv, 29-34.

that one wonders how it is that he has not already deserted Antony and attached himself to the more prospering Caesar. His psychology seems sound, however, to gain his end--he bears good news, and he tries to show his fierce loyalty to his last master.⁴²

Caesar, hoping to be able to show Cleopatra in a Roman triumph, but afraid that Cleopatra may do something to herself in desperation, sends two of his friends or henchmen, Proculeius and Gallus, to speak her fair and to forestall her.⁴³ Now, ironically, Antony had told Cleopatra that Proculeius is the one man of Caesar's whom she can trust.

Proculeius is suave, too suave, for Cleopatra does not believe him. She suspects what Caesar plans, and when Dolabella arrives to strengthen the hands of Proculeius and Gallus, she learns the truth. Dolabella proves to be more loyal to his conscience than to Caesar. He is touched with pity for Cleopatra's plight and lets her know what Caesar will do with her.⁴⁴

One shall not find so interesting a variety of messengers among the other Elizabethan dramatists. Marlowe's Edward II, a chronicle play, has several, however.

⁴²Ibid., V, 1, 5-26.

⁴³Ibid., V, 1, 61-68.

⁴⁴Ibid., V, 11, 110.

It cannot be known just what sort of person Beaumont is nor anything about his position near the king; but when it is concluded that Gaveston may return from exile, Edward bids Beaumont to fly to Ireland ". . . as fast as Iris or Jove's Mercury." So the man must be rather fleet-footed. His only words are "It shall be done, my gracious lord."⁴⁵

The Earl of Arundel serves as Edward's principal messenger. On one occasion he goes to the Junior Mortimer, Lancaster, Pembroke, and Warwick, requesting that Gaveston be given a short reprieve to visit the king before he is executed.⁴⁶ Arundel has the complete respect of his enemies, who regard him as an honorable man. His persuasion finally overcomes the opposition to his suit. He remains loyal to the disgusting Edward.

Levune, the Frenchman, is an important newsbearer between England and France, employed by the sovereigns of the two countries. It is not possible, however, to deduce very much about the kind of man he is, except that he seems to be completely successful in his missions.

Three other people--Matrevis, Gurney, and Lightborn--serve as messengers in Edward II. The first two have little by which they may be differentiated, but bear common traits, all low, cowardly, and cruel. Lightborn, though, is an individualist. By profession he is a murderer, and he is

⁴⁵Edward II, iv, 370-372.

⁴⁶Ibid., ix, 32-36.

somewhat vain over the techniques which he has perfected. He makes preparation for a murder in the manner of a surgeon readying things for an operation.⁴⁷

Borsola, the only consequential messenger in The Duchess of Malfi, is a strange mixture of flavors, generally on the sour and bitter side. He is found first hanging around Ferdinand and the Cardinal, making himself available for any kind of bizarre business, but constantly complaining of the lack of appreciation of him on the part of those whom he serves.

The first job that he gets is to spy on the Duchess for Ferdinand, to see whom she favors among the men.⁴⁸ He has an uncanny ability to get information. He knows just where to be and when to be there; he knows how to secure the trust of the very ones that he conspires against.

But Borsola is a frustrated man; every time that he completes a mission, he is spurned; but he always comes back at the call of Ferdinand or the Cardinal to take another message or to do another piece of clandestine work.

Yet when the reader feels that he understands Borsola completely and decides that he is unmixed evil, a perfect Machiavellian villain, and that all the moralizing which Borsola has done is pure hypocrisy, then he reforms.

⁴⁷Ibid., xxii, 28-32.

⁴⁸The Duchess of Malfi, I, ii, 192-196.

Pescara characterizes Ferdinand by saying, "A very salamander lives in his eye. . .";⁴⁹ it would seem apt to describe Borsola by saying that a chameleon lives in his skin.

We find particularly true about Borsola what Rupert Brooke says about Webster's characters in general--

. . . Ultimately the most sickly, distressing feature of Webster's characters, their foul and indestructable vitality. . . . They kill, love, torture one another and without ceasing. A play of Webster's is full of the feverish and ghastly turmoil of a nest of maggots. . . .⁵⁰

F. L. Lucas says that Borsola is ". . . like an old bloodhound, kindled to excitement as the Duke brings back to his imagination the details of the hunt of intrigue."⁵¹

All the servants of Volpone are used to run errands and carry messages except Androgyno, the hermaphrodite. Nano, the dwarf, and Castrone, the eunuch, busy themselves in the affairs of their master. All the servants play around, having a good time. Nano describes Androgyno as having descended from Pythagoras through sundry intermediate stages, including that of an ass. These characters speak in rhyming couplets, sometimes quite irregular in form, and they reflect a good deal of satire. When Volpone sends Nano and Castrone into the streets to start the rumor that he is dead, he tells

⁴⁹Ibid., III, 111, 50.

⁵⁰Rupert Brooke, John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama (New York, 1916), p. 162.

⁵¹F. L. Lucas, The Complete Works of John Webster (New York, 1937), p. 136.

them to "do it with constancy, sadly."⁵² Evidently these servants are well trained in the wiles of Volpone and Mosca and they know how to play their minor parts.

Mosca, of course, is the constant messenger in Volpone, always busy carrying some sly word here and planting another there. Even if his messages are almost invariably lies, he has ways of making people believe him. Doubts against his motives soon evaporate when he explains. He is convincing mainly because he is always ready with the right answer. He does not have to hesitate a second; hence even his lies seem purely spontaneous. It may be assumed that he anticipates his difficulties, sees his hearer's doubts in advance, and gets himself into mental trim to brush them away. Like a good boy scout, he is always prepared. But there is no further resemblance. His cunning advances his own ends--to help him gather in the fruit of the harvest, which he eventually expects to have for himself, and to enjoy the exhilaration of outwitting other selfish people.

Mosca does not indulge in long speeches as his master does. He does not depend upon oratory to hypnotize his victims to sweep away their reason. But he is foxier than the fox himself, a fact which his admiring master will not deny, but takes delight in. His craft is incredible, but it works. Affairs are dark indeed when Voltore deserts the "cause," but

⁵²Volpone, V, ii, 60-63.

still Mosca would have won the day with his masterful counter-stroke, had his fox-like wit not been hitched to a pig-like greed.

In the same play, Peregrine tells Politic that a certain fool in England has just died. He would seem to be a fool whose existence was in Peregrine's head only, conjured up to start Politic on a thread of discourse. Politic claims that he knew this fool, knew him as one of the "most dangerous heads living within the state"--that is, he was a spy, a class of folk which Politic seems to be an authority on. This particular spy, according to Politic, had some fascinating tricks which he employed in his profession. For instance, he received intelligence from the Low Countries weekly, in cabbages, which intelligence the so-called fool redispensed "in oranges, muskmelons, apricots, limons [*sic*], pone-citrons, and Colchester oysters."⁵³ He also used other ruses: he would receive messages from travelers in trenchers of meat at banquets, and, before the meals were finished, convey answers in toothpicks.

To keep up the enlightening conversation, Peregrine also suggests that baboons have been used as spies. Yes, Politic knows of some such instances, in a French plot, but the baboons revealed themselves, being extremely given to women.⁵⁴ Politic would have one believe him to be well-nigh omniscient

⁵³Ibid., II, 1, 68-78.

⁵⁴Ibid., II, 1, 88-93.

and constantly in touch with figures and plans on the shadowy side of law's pale.

Diccon, released from Bethlehem as a harmless lunatic, proves himself in Gammer Gurton's Needle as a clever mischief-making rascal, but far from harmless. His manipulating the strings of all the puppets in the village requires a fertile imagination, a strong set of nerves, and a propensity to deceive by innuendo or by outright lies, whichever strikes his fancy. It is almost as if he sets out to demonstrate that a madman has a wit superior to all the rest. He makes a rather strong case.

A look now at the principal messengers in the Greek plays will show how they compare in ability and quality with their counterparts in the Shakespearean and other Elizabethan plays. Beginning with Aeschylus' Agamemnon, it will be found that there are two important ones, Cassandra and one simply called a herald.

Cassandra is the prophetess of Apollo, but nobody believes her prophecy. When she is about to look into the unknown, she seems to rave and her speech is strange, like that of one who is mad.⁵⁵ But aside from her gift of being able to foretell the future, she has the weaknesses and all the capacities for pity and sorrow of a saintly woman.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Aeschylus, 25.

⁵⁶Ibid., 26.

The herald shows his piety by making a prayer to the gods and especially to Hermes, the messenger god:

. . . Gods all, here met, to you I make my prayer.
Hermes, the herald, whom the heralds love,
the sovereign dead who sped us on our way,
kind welcome give these whom the spear has spared.⁵⁷

He shows that he is a man of flesh and blood by reviewing all the hardships of the soldiers in the camp--the crowded ships, the wet and the cold, the ice and the snow, the lice.⁵⁸ He wants the praises of the bearer of good news, not bad news; so when asked about the fate of Menelaus, he objects to mixing the bad with the good and speaks only a short time in describing the storm and the wreck of the Greek ships.⁵⁹

In all, the herald speaks one hundred thirty-four lines. However, this is not necessarily any great feat of memory, for he apparently speaks only what is common knowledge among the surviving Greeks, and he speaks his own words in his own way.

Sophocles' messengers in Oedipus the King belong to the very high and the very low classes. Creon and Teiresias represent the high class. Creon, of course, is brother-in-law to King Oedipus, destined to assume the regency for Oedipus' sons when Oedipus blinds himself. In this play Creon is wise, just, and loyal; he is respectful to Oedipus, far from subservient, however.

⁵⁷Ibid., 17.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., 18.

Creon is regarded highly by Oedipus at the beginning: he is sent to the oracle of Apollo to try to find out what is to be done to purify the city of Thebes in order to remove the curse of pestilence.⁶⁰ The welfare of the royal house and of the city is at stake.

It is Creon who advises Oedipus to send for Teiresias, the blind prophet, to interpret the message which Creon has brought. After divining through the flight of birds, Teiresias is very reluctant to bring his message to Oedipus; even when he comes to Oedipus, he refuses to tell what he knows. Angered, however, by Oedipus' taunts and accusations, he reveals the sordid facts;⁶¹ for Teiresias, though endowed with a supernatural gift, still has the passions of a man of this world.

Of the other messengers, both are shepherds or former shepherds. The one who comes from Corinth with news for Oedipus rather happily announces the death of Polybus, since Oedipus is to take the Corinthian throne and the messenger hopes to profit from bearing the news to him. Apparently ambitious or grasping, he is quite forward with his information.⁶²

At this time he does not seem to be following his former vocation as shepherd, but he is attached to the king's household.

⁶⁰Oedipus, 34.

⁶¹Ibid., 37.

⁶²Ibid., 45.

The other shepherd-messenger proves to be as hesitant as the first is overready. He knows that his kind heart prevented his carrying out his instructions, many years before, to dispose of the infant intrusted to him for exposure and death. He feels that he has everything to lose by talking; so the truth must be pried from him.⁶³

Two important messengers appear in Euripides' Hippolytus, the nurse of Phaedra and Hippolytus' henchman or follower.

The nurse is old and gray. She has been a faithful servant; but she wheedles Phaedra's guilty secret from her.⁶⁴ Fidelity to one's husband is not a necessary virtue, according to the nurse's thinking. The gods themselves are guilty of illicit love; besides Phaedra's love is not her fault, but was willed by the gods.⁶⁵ She reasons, then, that the right action is to bring the principals together, and this she attempts to do. Under the pretext that she has a charm to break Phaedra's attraction to Hippolytus, the nurse goes to Hippolytus and reveals Phaedra's passion,⁶⁶ supposing, no doubt, that he would welcome the illicit relation.

She attempts to play the part of the pander, but she does it through sympathy for her mistress and fear that her mistress is about to die. Yet, there is something of the philosopher

⁶³Ibid., 47.

⁶⁴Hippolytus, 195.

⁶⁵Ibid., 198-199.

⁶⁶Ibid., 201.

in her. She is capable of some rather profound thinking, has some worldly wisdom. Note how she muses:

. . . O'er all man's life woes gather thick;
 Ne'er from its travail respite is.
 If better life beyond be found,
 The darkness veils, clouds wrap it round;
 Therefore infatuate-fond to this

We cling--this earth's poor sunshine-gleam:
 Nought know we of the life to come,
 There speak no voices from the tomb;
 We drift on fable's shadowy stream.⁶⁷

Then, when the scheme goes awry, she defends herself thus:

. . . Had I sped well, right wise had I been held;
 For as we speed, so is our wisdom's fame.⁶⁸

The chief messenger, as such, in Hippolytus is the friend of Hippolytus, simply called his henchman, who reports the wreck of Hippolytus' chariot to Theseus. He speaks a total of ninety-eight lines, eighty-two of which constitute one single speech, which pictures graphically the running horses, the appearance of Poseidon's bull, and the resultant wreck.⁶⁹ His is an impassioned speech which shows his love for his friend and master, and the heroism of Hippolytus. He evokes great pity for Hippolytus by showing that, regardless of his bravery, he has human fears and suffers purely human pains.

Dionysus, as he appears in The Frogs of Aristophanes, has few if any godly attributes. That he is immortal may be assumed, but the only supernatural ability that he demonstrates

⁶⁷Ibid., 190.

⁶⁸Ibid., 204.

⁶⁹Ibid., 218-220.

is his making the trip to Hades. And even Xanthias does this without anybody's or any god's overt help. He even has to carry Dionysus's equipment.

Dionysus possesses not just human failings and vices but failings and vices almost on an infrahuman plane. His mind dwells on food, drink, and sexual gratification. He also thinks of the entertainment of the theatre, but one can imagine that he considers this type of entertainment only while his body is recovering from the surfeited appetites of the first three--food, drink, and sex. He is cowardly and cruel, and apparently rather weak physically, as one might expect from his preoccupation with dissipation; he seems unable to take care of himself.

He has considerable relish for the argument in the agon, but he admits that he cannot comprehend some of the subtler meanings in the contention between Euripides and Aeschylus. His lack of understanding does not prevent him from interspersing his own comments, which are anything but profound, as,

O good, by Hermes!
I've not the least suspicion of what he means.⁷⁰

Now Dionysus's slave Xanthias is a perfect foil for his master: he is physically strong, valiant, and sensible if not shrewd. If he is imposed upon, it is because he is socially

⁷⁰The Frogs, 90.

inferior. He has a zest for freedom and regrets that he was unable to fight in the navy, so that he could have won his freedom. He was "4-F," or whatever that status was called about 500 B. C. in Greece, because of an eye disease. He has good common sense.

In Seneca's Agamemnon, as in Aeschylus' play of the same title, we have two principal characters who come within the scope of this chapter: the same or a similar Cassandra and the messenger who reports the previous action of the story.

The messenger, whom Seneca gives the name Eurybates, is a remarkable man. He speaks one hundred fifty-nine lines, constituting almost one sixth of the entire play, in his delivery of the message, not counting twenty-six lines which are merely introductory. The medium in which he speaks is strong virile poetry, highly rhetorical and declamatory, abounding in imagery of terror and unearthly beauty of the storm which wrought such havoc on the returning heroes and their captives.⁷¹ Listen to three lines, taken almost at random:

No lofty mast with hanging spars remains,
But, helpless hulks, the shattered vessels drift
Upon the boundless sea.⁷²

Yet he describes all this reluctantly, at Clytemnestra's urging, not wishing to mix the bitter and the sweet, protesting

⁷¹Seneca, III, 420-579.

⁷²Ibid., III, 505-507.

that he is sick at heart and pleading inability to tell the woeful tale.⁷³

Syrus, in Terence's The Brothers, is the clever servant. He is the type of underling who can come through with immunity from any kind of trick or tom-foolery, because he is blessed with a tongue containing a built-in lubrication system guaranteed for the life of the machine.

Demea, the father of the two young men who steal the slave girl, is the thrifty and unbending parent. He believes in hard work and little pleasure in rearing his off-spring.⁷⁴ His lack of absolute wisdom is demonstrated by his lack of complete success, but his brother demonstrates the results of the other extreme, equally lacking in success.

In searching out his brother, Demea is motivated chiefly by his anger and by his I-told-you-so attitude.

Peniculus in The Menaechmi is a low creature who picks up a sort of living by hanging onto Menaechmus of Epidamnus. When he is lucky, he gets a little free entertainment at such houses as Erotium's. However low he may be, though, he is a sensitive soul, especially on an empty stomach, and is easily offended. He has no more loyalty than will serve the ends of his next meal and is quite ready to avenge himself on Menaechmus by tattling on him to his wife.⁷⁵

⁷³Ibid., III, 414-417.

⁷⁴The Brothers, 121.

⁷⁵The Menaechmi, 105.

Erotium is just what her name indicates and what her profession would make her. Apparently she entertains all customers, though she claims to confer special favors on the better class. She is not above twisting the truth to a serviceable pattern when it is more profitable that way.

CHAPTER V

TREATMENT OF MESSENGERS

Many factors determine what treatment, in terms of rewards and punishment, a particular messenger in the works of Shakespeare or of the other dramatists under consideration will receive. It is obvious that what is deserved is not always what is received. There is definitely no merit system for messengers. Occasionally, however, when all the circumstances are felicitous, then the messenger receives his proper reward, which might range from a bag of gold to the privilege of kissing the blue veins of a woman's hand.

But when the circumstances are not so fortunate, when the sender or receiver of the message chances to be angry or engrossed with other matters, or when the message itself happens not to be of a welcome variety, then the messenger may get punishment in the form of a beating, or banishment, reproach, or even death.

Frequently, the messenger is simply ignored, or seems to be, the stage directions and dialogue not furnishing any clue as to what happens to him. Yet in these instances, apposite stage business, inferred from the character of the people involved, can be supplied by the actor.

Definitely the most explicit and decisive reactions to the messengers, in rewarding and punishing them, is found among the Elizabethan playwrights, with Shakespeare furnishing the most interesting studies.

It should be noted that some of the specific forms of reward and punishment, as Cleopatra's drawing a knife on a messenger, are business interpolated by the editors and do not appear in the First Folio edition.¹

Beginning with Shakespeare's 1 Henry IV, let us analyze the treatment given to the messengers in these plays. It is our fervent hope that the hard-riding Sir William Blunt receives more rewards for his pains than anything in the play indicates. Henry does commend him for bringing the news of Hotspur's capture of Douglas, and no doubt the commendation of one's sovereign goes far with any Englishman.² When, later, Hotspur rebels and Henry sends Blunt to him with his "gracious offer," Hotspur treats him with great consideration. He says that everything speaks of Blunt's deserving and good name and wishes that he were of their determination.³ That is, he would like to have Blunt to bulwark his faction.

On another occasion, Blunt reports what he considers to be important news to Henry but is told with too much brevity

¹Antony and Cleopatra, II, v, 73.

²1 Henry IV, I, 1, 62-70.

³Ibid., IV, iii, 30-37.

for politeness that his news is five days old. The king then turns to the prince to continue making campaign plans and pays no further attention to Blunt.⁴

Of course, Blunt is one of those pseudo-kings whom Henry turns loose in disguise at Shrewsbury in order to divert attention and blows from his own precious being. Blunt's final reward for his willingness to appear in battle in the guise of the king is death at the hands of Douglas, who first thinks, naturally, that he has killed the king, just as, when he had killed Sir Stafford in the same guise, he thought that he had killed the king.⁵

Just how Hotspur treats the foppish lord, who appears to him in the heat, blood, and sweat of battle against the Scotch, a lord who smells of perfume and shows too plainly his lack of taste for his present surroundings and who demands Hotspur's prisoners for the king, is not known; but, in the light of Hotspur's usual heat, it would not be difficult to imagine. It is likely that the offended lord exaggerates the vehemence of Hotspur's reply, however, for the king is deeply vexed by it. Hotspur denies that he refused the prisoners.⁶

Falstaff has in mind to cut off rather close to the trunk the messenger who comes to the tavern to talk with Prince Hal. He will, he says, ". . . send him packing"; but

⁴Ibid., III, 11, 164-173.

⁵Ibid., V, 111, 1-21.

⁶Ibid., I, 111, 29-69.

it is likely that he changes his mind when he discovers that the messenger is Sir John Bracy and comes from the king.⁷

When Worcester and Vernon take Hotspur's list of grievances to the king, the latter preaches them, especially Worcester, quite a sermon on loyalty.⁸ Later, after Worcester's capture and after the revelation that Worcester has lied to Hotspur about his message, the king, though obviously angry, shows some restraint in simply calling him "ill-spirited." Then he sends both him and Vernon expeditiously to their death.⁹

Hotspur receives two messengers in succession just before he joins battle at Shrewsbury. He is too busy to receive the first one at all; the second one tells him that the king is marching on him. This pleases Hotspur and he thanks the messenger for breaking into his speech to his soldiers and calling him to the action that he so dearly loves.¹⁰

In 2 Henry VI, the Earl of Suffolk, having just returned from France with the beautiful Margaret and her father's communications, pleases Henry so much with his seeming successes that he is made a duke at once.¹¹ But later when Henry sends Suffolk to summon Gloucester to his trial, and Suffolk

⁷Ibid., II, iv, 327.

⁸Ibid., V, i, 9-21.

⁹Ibid., V, v, 1-14.

¹⁰Ibid., V, ii, 80-93.

¹¹2 Henry VI, I, i, 38-65.

returns with the information that Gloucester is dead in his bed, Henry spurns him and castigates him with his tongue in these words:

. . . Hide not thy poison with such sugar'd words;
Lay not thy hand on me; forbear, I say;
Their touch affrights me as a serpent's sting.
Thou baleful messenger, out of my sight.¹²

In a short soliloquy, Cade says that he, Mortimer, is lord of the city, and henceforth it will be treasonous for anyone to call him by any other name than Mortimer. Just then a soldier runs up, apparently having some exciting news. He shouts, "Jack Cade! Jack Cade!" What his message was the world will never know, for on Cade's order he was brained in his tracks. This is perhaps the most arbitrary treatment accorded to any of the messengers.¹³

Le Beau, the courtier in As You Like It, by delivering to Rosalind and Celia information about the coming attraction, the wrestling match between Charles and Orlando, is looked upon rather condescendingly by those ladies, and even by the fool, Touchstone, for regarding the breaking of bones a proper feminine delight.¹⁴ However, later in the same scene he finds Orlando grateful to him for informing him that the usurping duke disapproves of the entire de Boys

¹²Ibid., III, ii, 15-48.

¹³Ibid., IV, vi, 1-9.

¹⁴As You Like It, I, ii, 96-146.

family and for warning him to leave before he meets some vengeance.¹⁵

Oliver is rather roundly treated by the usurping duke when the latter sends him to warn his brother Orlando to come to him. Failure, he threatens, will mean that Oliver loses the lands and other property which he holds in fief from the duke.¹⁶ The happy conclusion never allows this issue to be brought to a head. However, just before Oliver reaches his destination in the Forest of Arden, he is made the subject of an argument between a green and gold snake and a hungry lioness, each determined to have him if the other fails--perhaps as a sort of providential justice for the mission that he is on. But Orlando, against whom the mission is aimed, saves him from both.¹⁷ It goes without saying that Oliver receives more than poetic justice in this adventure.

The two shepherds, Corin and Silvius, both serve as messengers. Corin is always held in high respect by everyone, except possibly by Touchstone, who, in pure fun, damns him to hell for living by the copulation of cattle.¹⁸ Silvius too is treated decently, except by Phebe; but when Silvius brings Phebe's "challenge" to Ganymede, the latter arranges it so that Silvius eventually gets the girl.

¹⁵Ibid., I, ii, 274-280.

¹⁶Ibid., III, i, 1-12.

¹⁷Ibid., IV, iii, 105-133.

¹⁸Ibid., III, ii, 83-90.

The treatment given messengers in The Comedy of Errors gives a striking illustration--if a Dromio-like pun is pardonable--of what happens when subordinates seem to do the wrong things, through no fault of their own. The only messengers in the play who are placed in such positions as to deserve rewards and punishment are the two Dromios. On the first encounter between the Syracusan household and that of Ephesus, that is, when Dromio of Ephesus is sent by his mistress to tell her husband that his meal is ready, Dromio of Ephesus is beaten by Antipholus of Syracuse for what he takes to be either stupidity or rank familiarity on the part of a strange servant.¹⁹

That, in fact, is to be the accustomed treatment throughout the day for this unhappy boy as well as for his equally unhappy brother. It is their hap to meet the wrong people at least 50 per cent of the time, for the law of averages is operating smoothly this day even if nothing else is; consequently, they absorb punishment almost everywhere they come to rest, from both the masters. It would not seem necessary to follow them through the streets of Ephesus to prove the point. However, it should be mentioned that Dromio is given his freedom on one occasion, not because of any message he bore but because he delivered Antipholus of Syracuse

¹⁹The Comedy of Errors, I, ii, 42-92.

from captivity. There was one thing wrong with his freedom, though: it was granted by the wrong master.

Macbeth furnishes several instances of clear-cut treatment of messengers. For instance, the witches are scandalously abused by Macbeth, though they do not seem to mind. On his second meeting with them, he addresses them as "secret, black, and mid-night hags."²⁰ He orders them around as if they were his personal property rather than the prognosticators of his fate. When they refuse to satisfy him completely, he invokes an eternal curse on them.²¹

The sergeant who brings the glad news of the triumph over the Norwegians and rebels is received with praises for his bravery by Malcolm, whose life he has saved. The king himself lauds him and orders him to be cared for:

So well thy words become thee as thy wounds;
The smack of honor both. Go get him surgeons.²²

How Lady Macbeth rewards the bearer of Macbeth's letter, containing the witches' prophecy, we do not know; but the next messenger who comes bringing the news that Duncan is to spend the night at her castle is taken care of. "Give him tending," Lady Macbeth orders; "he brings great news."²³

²⁰Macbeth, IV, 1, 48.

²¹Ibid., IV, 1, 105.

²²Ibid., I, 11, 1-43.

²³Ibid., I, v, 38.

Then when Macbeth, who has ridden hard to be the first to bring the news to Lady Macbeth, arrives, he is received in joy without measure:

. . . Great Glamis! worthy Cawdor!
Greater than both by the all-hail hereafter!²⁴

Only the first of the two murderers is a messenger; he brings word that the mission is half completed. Macbeth is too much disturbed to offer any immediate reward for the success or punishment for the failure.²⁵ He had, however, promised that if they would perform the murder he would grapple them to his heart and love.²⁶ On the face of things, it seems unlikely that he ever brought about this close bond.

Ross appears as a messenger on several occasions. He is never manifestly rewarded for substantiating the sergeant's glad tidings, nor looked upon with any disfavor for conveying some of the worst news to his friends; namely, informing Old Siward that his son was slain in battle,²⁷ and telling Macduff that his family have all been slain. Before conveying the last-mentioned message, he says to Macduff,

Let not your ears despise my tongue for ever,
Which shall possess them with the heaviest sound
That ever yet they heard.²⁸

Macduff himself is an exile from Macbeth's tyranny and a messenger to the expatriate Malcolm. The latter treats

²⁴Ibid., I, v, 55-56.

²⁵Ibid., III, iv, 12-32.

²⁶Ibid., III, i, 104-106.

²⁷Ibid., V, viii, 39-43.

²⁸Ibid., IV, iii, 201-207.

Macduff with great suspicion until he is convinced that he is not Macbeth's spy.²⁹ He is probably slapped on the back repeatedly, however, if that happens to be an old Scottish form of congratulation, when he brings in the news that Macbeth is slain and carries tangible evidence of the fact in his hand.³⁰

The doctor tells Macbeth something about his lady's state of health, confessing that his art can offer no remedy. His feelings are scarcely respected when Macbeth growls, "Throw physic to the dogs; I'll none of it."³¹

Seyton, Macbeth's officer, informs him that Lady Macbeth is dead. Macbeth is too grief-stricken and world-weary to respond to this messenger at all;³² yet his accustomed treatment of Seyton is that of consideration.

Soon another messenger enters. Macbeth becomes impatient on seeing him and demands his message. When he hears about the grove moving on Dunsinane, he calls the messenger a liar and slave and threatens him with hanging on the nearest tree ". . . till famine cling thee"; but then he says that if the message is true, the messenger may do the like for him.³³

The worst treated messenger in Macbeth is the poor servant who runs to Macbeth with the news of ten thousand

²⁹Ibid., IV, iii, 18-24.

³⁰Ibid., V, viii, 54-55.

³¹Ibid., V, iii, 47.

³²Ibid., V, v, 16-28.

³³Ibid., V, v, 29-41.

approaching English soldiers. Macbeth is already so overwrought that he has just given orders that no more reports be brought to him. The servant is blanched with fear as he rushes in. Macbeth is so angry at this panic that he keeps interrupting the message with all sorts of vituperative epithet. He calls the servant a "cream-faced loon," "lily-livered boy," "patch," and "whey-face," and then orders him out.³⁴

Antony and Cleopatra furnishes some of the best examples of despotic treatment of messengers, especially by people who are emotionally disturbed or who have overpowering struggles facing them.

In the first scene, Antony refuses even to hear a messenger, who has probably traveled from Rome to Egypt with his news. Antony is too busy courting Cleopatra. In the second scene, Antony receives a messenger, probably the same one, who bears news which he is very reluctant to deliver. "The nature of bad news infects the teller," he says, probably meaning that such news infects the teller with bruises. But Antony is in a reasonable mood, so he answers,

When it concerns the fool or coward. On;
Things that are past are done with me. 'Tis thus;
Who tells me true, though in his tale lie death,
I hear him as he flatter'd.³⁵

He is as good as his philosophy, on this occasion.

³⁴Ibid., V, iii, 11-19.

³⁵Antony and Cleopatra, I, ii, 92-103.

A soothsayer is called upon by Cleopatra's attendants to prophesy concerning them. The scene is a sportive, bawdy one, and though the soothsayer tells them what later proves to be true, he is treated with levity. For instance, when he tells Charmian that she will outlive the lady she serves, a prediction which has at least equivocal value as truth, Charmian answers, "O excellent! I love long life better than figs."³⁶ Later, when the same soothsayer gives Antony the benefit of his skill, he is told bluntly to leave, but he is not otherwise abused; Antony realizes the truth of his prophecy.³⁷

Cleopatra receives a messenger from Antony, who is in Rome. She says to him before he can speak, "Hear thy tidings in mine ears." But she suspects that Antony is dead, and, on mere suspicion of that, calls the messenger villain. She says, however, that if Antony is well and free, she will give the messenger gold and lend him her bluest veins to kiss. The messenger assures her that Antony is well; she gives him gold, but threatens him with pouring the gold, in a molten state, down his throat, if by saying that Antony is well he means that Antony is well because he is dead. She comments that she does not like the messenger's looks, even before she gets the full message, and threatens to strike him before he speaks again. Then she promises him a

³⁶Ibid., I, ii, 31.

³⁷Ibid., II, iii, 10-35.

shower of gold and a hail of pearls if he tells her that Antony is alive, well, and not captive to Caesar; but she interrupts so much that he cannot tell his story. Eventually when he manages to tell her that Antony is married to Octavia, she curses him and strikes him again and again. He protests that he brings the news, that he did not make the match. Cleopatra tells him to revoke his message and she will give him a province and any other gift that he desires. When he repeats that Antony is married, she draws a knife on him and he runs away.

She calls him back and apologizes, in a manner, by saying,

. . . Though it be honest, it is never good
To bring bad news: give to a gracious message
A host of tongues; but let ill tidings tell
Themselves when they be felt.

But the highly volatile Cleopatra is not really mollified, for when the messenger, in answer to repeated questions, maintains that Antony is married to Octavia, she curses him again and chases him away.³⁸

In the next act, the same messenger enters again and is subjected to further gauche cross-examination. By this time, however, the messenger is able to see the advantage of coloring his observations, for he sees that Cleopatra is determined to get the kind of report from him that she desires to hear. So now the messenger asserts, all in answer to what a

³⁸ibid., II, v, 23-106.

lawyer would term "leading questions," that Octavia is not so tall as Cleopatra; that Octavia has a low voice, a quality which Cleopatra thinks is against her; that she creeps instead of walking; that she is a widow of about thirty; that she has a foolish face; and that her forehead is "as low as she would wish it."

This sort of dissembling is just what Cleopatra wants and is willing to pay for. She gives the messenger gold, apologizes for her "former sharpness," says that she finds him most fit for business and will employ him herself.³⁹

Thyreus, Caesar's messenger to Cleopatra, easily inveigles his way into her graces. She invites him to kiss her hand. But Antony enters to see this display of chivalry; he orders his attendants to take Thyreus out and beat him until he whines aloud for mercy.⁴⁰

Antony's treatment of this messenger, we may infer, is due not to the message itself, since Antony scarcely knows what the message is, but to the fact that the messenger is allowed the privilege of kissing Cleopatra's hand. Actually the messenger is obliged to absorb the punishment which Antony would prefer to expend on Cleopatra.

An instance illustrating the manner by which messengers are allowed freedom to pass to and from enemy territory is

³⁹Ibid., III, iii, 3-41.

⁴⁰Ibid., III, xiii, 47-152.

the provision which the soldier suggests that Enobarbus make for the messenger who has brought his gold and Antony's greetings. The soldier says, "Best you safed the bringer out of the host"--meaning to provide him with a safe conduct guard.⁴¹ Another instance of safe conduct is arranged for Euphronius, who is about to return to Cleopatra and Antony.⁴²

Decretas, Antony's friend, angles for favor with Caesar by running to him with the premature announcement of Antony's death. Whether or not Caesar takes him into his service is not made clear, but a reasonable conclusion is that he does accept him.

By Shakespeare's contemporary dramatists, the messengers are neither so copiously employed nor so decisively treated. In Edward II, for instance, the daughter of the late Earl of Gloucester receives a post with the joyful news that her fiancé, Gaveston, is to be returned from banishment, but no reward for the post is indicated. A post arrives to Mortimer, Junior, informing him that his father is captive to the Scotch, but again there is neither reward nor punishment.

The Earl of Arundel, a friend of Edward, appearing as Edward's messenger, is treated with genuine courtesy by Mortimer and his fellow rebels. At first they refuse the king's request, which Arundel conveys to them, to allow

⁴¹Ibid., IV, vi, 20-23.

⁴²Ibid., III, xi, 25.

Gaveston a reprieve. Arundel offers himself as hostage for Gaveston's return; but the earls refuse to permit Arundel, an honest man, to jeopardize himself for a scoundrel.⁴³

The Frenchman Levune, employed to bear messages between the French and English courts, seems always to be trusted and otherwise treated respectfully. Once he is given a bag of gold, but this is not his reward: it is to be used to purchase a certain attitude toward Isabella on the part of the French noblemen. We have the feeling, though, that a man like Levune, whose vocation is spying and whose avocation is bribing, would also be likely to reward himself with a portion of the bag.

Edward talks rather gruffly to the herald sent by the rebellious barons to demand the removal of Spencer, the king's new lover, and sends him away brusquely.⁴⁴ Mortimer, Junior, receiving from Rice ap Howell the old Spencer as prisoner and a message that the younger Spencer has sailed for Ireland, says to Rice,

Your loving care in this
Deserveth princely favors and rewards.⁴⁵

But he does not produce any of these at the moment. A man called simply a "mower" informs Rice of the whereabouts of the king, who is in disguise. The mower asks if he will be

⁴³Edward II, ix, 30-67.

⁴⁴Ibid., xi, 151-179.

⁴⁵Ibid., xvi, 65-67.

"remembered." Rice tells him that he will be and invites him to follow into town.⁴⁶ It sounds as if the mower will soon glory in a glass of ale or so.

Three other characters--Matrevis, Gurney, and Lightborn--serve Mortimer in various messengerial capacities, besides other capacities, all dishonorable, including the torturing and at last the murdering of Edward. Their rewards are scarcely in keeping with their services--or perhaps they are too. Gurney flees from fear of the people; Matrevis is given permission to do likewise, after Mortimer threatens to act as his confessor;⁴⁷ and Lightborn is in turn murdered.⁴⁸

The only messenger of importance in The Duchess of Malfi is Borsola, whose services and machinations are discussed elsewhere. Though the strains on his conscience are many, yet, for years of service he accepts some gold from Ferdinand on one occasion,⁴⁹ constant abuse and mistrust, and finally the torture of remorse and death.⁵⁰

Like Borsola in The Duchess of Malfi, Mosca in Volpone is the only messenger of particular interest here. His intrigues are just as complex, too, done with the hope of

⁴⁶Ibid., xvii, 117-118.

⁴⁷Ibid., xxiii, 1-9.

⁴⁸Ibid., xxii, 115.

⁴⁹The Duchess of Malfi, I, ii, 187-195.

⁵⁰Ibid., V, v, 53.

praise from his master and an eventual windfall of reward in the form of all of Volpone's hoard. He secures the former, receives fulsome plaudits from Volpone daily, not to mention the commendations of those whom he fleeces. But his final reward is exposure and sentence by the avocatori to life in the galleys.⁵¹

The chief manipulator of the action and about the only messenger in Gammer Gurton's Needle is Diccon. He carries his messages back and forth from Dame Chat's to Gammer Gurton's. All his messages are false, of course, but he comes out almost scatheless in the end, having had a thoroughly good time throughout the day's action. When Master Bailey discovers that his fraudulent news-bearing is at the bottom of all the trouble, Dr. Rat proposes hanging as his just punishment. But Master Bailey thinks this somewhat harsh, and he makes a counter-proposal; to wit, that Diccon take an oath on Hodge's leather "breech" to accept free ale from Dr. Rat whenever it is offered, to refrain from offering more than once to pay for his drink at Dame Chat's, to try to help Gammer find her needle, never to take Hodge for a fine gentleman, and to treat Gammer's cat, Gib, with proper decorum.⁵²

⁵¹Volpone, V, xii, 107-114.

⁵²Gammer Gurton's Needle, V, ii, 273-287.

In some of the Greek plays the messengers are treated like automatons, rather than human beings, not mistreated, but disregarded after fulfilling their functions. That is true of Aeschylus' Agamemnon, except in the case of Cassandra, who is put to death, not because of her prophecy but because of Clytemnestra's jealousy.⁵³

In Sophocles' Oedipus, four messengers are rewarded or punished. Creon is sent to Apollo's oracle for information, but his news is not definite enough to stimulate Oedipus either to anger or generosity. When Teiresias arrives, though, and with reluctance discloses that Oedipus is the guilty one, Oedipus condemns both Teiresias and Creon. He believes that they have conspired to take his throne. He will listen to no explanations and threatens Creon with death. Teiresias he browbeats shamefully, accuses him of treason, charges him of having planned the murder of Laius, and insults him for his blindness, mental and spiritual as well as physical.⁵⁴

A messenger, shepherd from Corinth, comes to Oedipus' court to report the death of Polybus and the choice of Oedipus as the new king there. He comes, he says, because he hopes to reap some reward when Oedipus returns to Corinth. But his information leads to suspicions on Oedipus' part that Teiresias may have been right about his killing Laius

⁵³Aeschylus, 26.

⁵⁴Oedipus, 37-41.

after all. A second shepherd is brought, the one who had been commissioned to expose Oedipus as an infant. But he is so scared that he will not give any information. Oedipus has his attendants to force him to talk by twisting his arm.⁵⁵ It is not clear how the Corinthian messenger is rewarded, but it is likely that in the stress of the situation he is ignored.

In Euripides' Hippolytus, the only messenger that we need to deal with here is Phaedra's nurse, who, in hope of relieving her mistress's suffering, divulges the guilty secret to Hippolytus. Phaedra curses her for her interference and orders her thrown out.⁵⁶

Aristophanes' The Frogs has two messengers, Dionysus and Xanthias, who, on their trip to Hades to summon a poet back to earth, encounter some figurative ups and downs, in relation to their mission, as well as the literal one. In the first place they are laughed at heartily by Hercules, to whom they repair for directions about roads, resting places, stews, and other items.⁵⁷ Then Xanthias finds that he will have to walk around the lake, as Charon will not take anybody in his boat who is so lowborn.⁵⁸ On arrival, Dionysus discovers that it may have been a mistake to come disguised as Hercules, for Hercules had not established a very

⁵⁵Ibid., 46-47.

⁵⁶Hippolytus, 204.

⁵⁷The Frogs, 74-75.

⁵⁸Ibid., 76.

praiseworthy reputation on his visit to Hades; consequently, when Dionysus is taken to be Hercules, he is reviled by Aeacus, Pluto's doorman, and cursed until he falls in a timorous heap.⁵⁹ Then Dionysus encounters the cookshop hostesses, who accuse him of having, on his first visit, eaten sixteen loaves of bread, twenty bits of stew, all of the garlic, besides fish and cheese; and when the bill was presented to him of having looked fierce and having bellowed like a bull. Then the hostesses say what they would like to do to him: knock his teeth out with a rock, pitch him in deadman's pit, and scoop out his gullet with a reaping hook. Things begin to look less rosy to Dionysus; so he makes Xanthias change clothing with him, whereupon Xanthias is struck by Aeacus and his assistants, who have followed them; but Xanthias is pretty deft and does not suffer more than his several antagonists.⁶⁰

But Dionysus and Xanthias suffer the most severely when each attempts to prove himself the god and the other the man. They exchange whacks with a whip, it being assumed that the man, not the god, will cry out first.⁶¹

Cassandra, in Seneca's Agamemnon, as in Aeschylus' play, is doomed to die.⁶²

In Terence's The Brothers, though several characters do service as messengers, only two, Syrus and Demea, come in

⁵⁹Ibid., 80.

⁶⁰Ibid., 81.

⁶¹Ibid., 82.

⁶²Seneca, V, 1013.

for any special treatment. Syrus, a slave, is rewarded at the end of the play by being given his freedom and by being lent a sum of money to set himself up in business. His wife too is freed. It is hardly necessary to say that he deserves none of this good fortune.⁶³

Old Demea, having been informed by Hegio that Demea's son Aeschinus has deserted his pregnant mistress for a slave girl, goes in search of his brother Micio, whom Demea holds responsible for Aeschinus' misbehavior, to "pour all this into his ears."⁶⁴

In this quest, Demea is shamelessly treated by his brother's slave Syrus. When Demea asks Syrus how to find Micio to give him "news of more outrageous wickedness done by that nice young man [Aeschinus]," Syrus, in order to keep the old man occupied while his young master enjoys his slave girl and also to punish him for wishing to inform Micio, directs him on an aimless trudge which consumes the greater part of the day as well as the old man's strength.

Here are some of Syrus' directions, shorn of ornament:

Do you know that colonnade at the butcher's shop down the street? . . . When you've crossed that go straight up the street; when you've come there, there's a hill leading downwards; down that you go, and then there is a chapel on the right; close by that there is a lane. . . . There where the great wild fig tree stands. . . . Go that way . . . you must come back to the colonnade again;

⁶³The Brothers, V, ix.

⁶⁴Ibid., III, v.

indeed there is a much shorter way, and less chance of missing it. . . .⁶⁵

In Plautus' The Menaechmi, Messenio and Peniculus are the important messengers. The latter, having been cheated out of his dinner at the courtesan's, decides to avenge himself on his patron, Menaechmus, by going to his wife Adriana and telling her that Menaechmus has stolen her robe and given it to the courtesan. He asks the wife what reward he shall have. She promises to do the same favor for him when he has a loss like hers. But Peniculus says he has nothing to lose.⁶⁶

Messenio, who is the prototype of the Dromios of Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors, suffers the same pains for his efforts. Like Dromio of Ephesus, also, he is freed by the wrong master. However, his own master confirms his freedom.⁶⁷

⁶⁵Ibid., IV, ii.

⁶⁶The Menaechmi, IV, ii.

⁶⁷Ibid., V, vii.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

So you have them--posts, heralds, pages, messengers; soldier, schoolmaster, murderers; gods, prophets, witches; besides many important and not so important named members of the casts, like Alexas, Blunt, Bracy, Clifford, Suffolk, Le Beau, Silvius, Ross, the two Dromios, Aegeon, Levune, Lightborn, Borsola, Mosca, Diccon, Master Bailey, Creon, Xanthias, Syrus, Peniculus--whatever their names or quality or title. They criss-cross the plays with their news, their orders and instructions, their pleas and persuasions.

From the standpoint of numbers alone, Shakespeare's employment of messengers greatly exceeds the use of them made by his contemporaries, or by the Greeks and Romans. This is particularly true of the unnamed variety; but even Shakespeare's use of named members of the cast, in the chronicle plays especially, reads almost like the dramatis personae. Fewer messengers are used, however, in the comedies of Shakespeare than in his other types of plays. The Greek comedy found rather slight use for the messenger, but Roman comedy used named messengers more extensively. So did Shakespeare's contemporary writers of comedy.

In tragedy, Shakespeare exploited the supernatural messenger well, but not very much elsewhere in his plays. As Ransome says, "In Macbeth Shakespeare calls upon us to prepare for a plot in which the supernatural is to supply the motive force, and in which the leading character, Macbeth, is to be the protégé of an unseen world of violence."¹ His contemporaries found little use for this element, but the Greek tragedians and Seneca made the most of it.

The significance of the messenger in plot structure has several aspects. He helps to bind the parts of a single plot together and to carry the burden of a given plot. In this respect, the messenger is of some importance in all the plays under consideration--Shakespeare's, his contemporaries', the Greeks', and the Romans'. For example, one may look at Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors to see how the Dromios knit the main plot, or how Messenio does the same for The Menaechmi, Borsola for The Duchess of Malfi, and Mosca for Volpone. Similarly the burden of plot is carried by the messengers in the tragedies of the Greeks and of Seneca, who, though stressing the inner conflicts of man and though observing all of the unities, still liked to portray sensational scenes of great violence. But since a modest restraint prevented such excesses from being shown directly on the stage, it was necessary to supply messengers to relate the action.

¹Cyril Ransome, Short Studies of Shakespeare's Plots (London, 1924), p. 78.

The messenger is especially significant in Renaissance drama in helping to co-ordinate the plots within a play--subplots with main plots. And since Shakespeare's plays, all types, are generally quite complex, frequently carrying several themes at once, this function of the messenger has its highest development in his work. A good illustration of this function is Bracy's going to Falstaff at the Bear's-Head to have him to tell Prince Hal to meet his father next day. This is the initial knot tying the two main threads of plot. The Greeks and Romans did not need this function of the messenger, for their plays were based on single themes.

Some of the economy effected by messengers includes reports which save staging scenes of storm, shipwreck, battle, duel, murder, and fight with a hungry lioness in the French "jungle." These scenes are narrated with perhaps added rather than lessened effect, for there are limits to the degree of realism which can be created by stage properties and first-hand action in such scenes. It is more pleasing to the Western audience, for instance, to have pursuit of one fast rider by another fast rider described by messenger rather than to have, as might be done in the Chinese or Hindu theatre, the pursued and the pursuer astride stick horses making a rocking motion to indicate reckless abandon in the chase. The Occidental theatre developed in the

direction of realism rather than stylization and symbolism. Westerners like it better that way.

In helping to create the illusion of the passage of time, the messenger is of considerable moment, when it is considered, for instance, that twenty years of an epic-like chronicle must be compressed into a two-hour production and still carry the audience along in a fair state of suspended disbelief. This function is found well illustrated in Shakespeare's chronicles and tragedies. It seems an important function too in Marlowe's Edward II. The messenger proper in Greek and Roman tragedy, however, does not serve this end to the same extent, this constituting one of the chief functions of the chorus.

One of the impressive facts about practically all of the messengers is their adequacy. They almost always seem able to do their jobs and to do them in the best manner possible. This is particularly true in speaking of Shakespeare's unnamed messengers and those of the Greek tragedians and Seneca. Rarely is there an instance of ineptitude, negligence, or dishonesty among them. The peculiar abilities fitting them to their tasks include physical stamina, which enables some of them to make long journeys and then to return immediately or to go elsewhere, and exceptional memory, which makes possible their repeating long messages, which they sometimes phrase in poetic or especially effective speeches. Another notable characteristic is their ability to exclude

personal interest, never to boast of what they do, and to bear their hardships unflinchingly.

The treatment meted out to these messengers is as variable as the messages of the people they serve. Mere whim or chance is too often the factor which determines the treatment they receive. Sometimes the news itself fashions the messenger's treatment--good news, reward; bad news, punishment. But, of course, the greatest factor is the character and temperament of the one who sends or receives the messenger.

Generally speaking it is Shakespeare's messengers who receive the most decisive treatment in terms of reward and punishment. The Greek messenger is apparently forgotten once he has divulged what he knows, but this is not often the case with important Shakespearean messengers. Somebody will usually go to the trouble to pay them, compliment them, or strike them. One was even killed before he had spoken five words.

Finally, Shakespeare makes use of a wide assortment of messengers: the nameless ones in great numbers, frequently a great percentage of the named members of the cast, and some supernatural ones. In only one category have the Greeks outdone him, in the use of the supernatural; but Shakespeare's use of the supernatural is almost natural, if a paradox is admissible.

Shakespeare not only employs more messengers but he also uses them most convincingly and to the greatest advantage in performing for him their varied functions. And the best of it is that most of them are characters of interest, men of flesh and blood with courage and enterprise.

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