

*Philology*

## **Information Transmission in Intermedia: Messenger Speeches as Informative Source and Visual Pattern in the Multimedia Context of Ancient Greek Theatre**

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**Intermedia as a synthesis of art forms has been increasingly popular in the modern world. Classical Greek drama became paradigmatic in terms of both poetics and intermedia already in antiquity. Drama as a genre required the synthesis of various forms of art and literature. Therefore, tragedy is to be qualified as socially targeted intermedia in its essence, as texts are brought to life through the combination of auditory, performing and visual art including music, choreography, pantomime, stage design, costumes, masks and all what constitutes the world of theatre. Messengers play an important role in Greek tragedy as they recount the most appalling events of the drama. Viewers, who were expected to reconstruct the events from the messenger's narrative, were aided by scenes displayed on the ekkyklêma. Messenger speeches were usually accompanied by a pantomime. Moreover, narrative techniques employed by the messengers added visual and acoustic effects to their words. Thus, messenger speeches in tragedies can be described as visual narratives and combination with nonverbal media – visual art. My paper aims to discuss messenger speeches in *The Persians* by Aeschylus as a source of information as well as visual art patterns in the context of intermedia. If we consider the technology of ancient Greek theatre, we can argue that not only classical drama in its entirety, but each of its elements, including messenger speeches, are to be qualified as poetics-centered multimedia. © 2020 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.**

Ancient theatre, messenger speeches, intermedia, narrative

Intermedia which implies existence of synthetic forms of artistic culture is particularly popular in the modern world. In the antique era, the genre of the classic Greek drama represents a paradigmatic phenomenon in terms of poetics and intermediality. Development of drama required a synthesis of many forms of literature and art. Thus, it may be said that the tragedy is intermedial itself and at the same time it is directed at the social medium. Its

peculiarity lies in the fact that visualization of these texts is carried out in the format of visual art, which implies use of media such as music, choreography, pantomime, plastics, scenography, costumes, masks and everything related to the world of theater. Thus, it may be said that the dramatic show in the antique period was a large demonstration of main genres of art in general [1].

Our paper is not intended to describe the antique theater in detail. However, it is interesting, according to the information that reached us, where and when the idea of the theater was born and how several artistic media were presented at the stage simultaneously.

As it is known, small amphitheaters used to be located in palaces of the ancient residents of Minoan Crete (the 1st half of the 2 millennium BC). However, nobody knows until now what was presented there [1]. As for drama, its formation in its classical form began in Hellas in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. According to the Poetics of Aristotle, two main forms of the Greek drama – both the tragedy and comedy – were related to the cultic festival of Dionysus. The Greek philosopher offers two principles – dithyramb and satirical drama, while comedy developed from originators of phallic songs or improvisations of narrators (1449a; IV). There is a controversy on this issue among scientists, but this is the only reliable source preserved by the antique world [2]. Scientists argue over this topic, however the hypothesis of the well-known scholars of the Greek religion, Walter Burkert and Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood has become more and more popular in connection with the origin of the Greek tragedy recently. According to Burkert, while the meaning of the term "comedy" is understood in the science more or less correctly as the "Comus Song", i.e. the song associated with a certain ritual, in case of tragedy, the organic connection with the religious ritual should be seen even more. The name of the genre was originated not from the teams dressed like goats but the participants of the ritual of sacrificing the goat to Dionysus. This ritual was performed by tragodeses [3]. It is known that other cultures also have the tradition of carnival, song, dance from the ancient times. Trance, lamentation or ridicule, animal masks, costumes are not uncommon for them but the peculiarity of festivals of Dionysus was that it united all these elements and presented them in one space. Serious and unserious, tears and laughter,

music, speech, plastics, violence of trance and joy of colorful carnivals were rather organically combined with each other [1:149]. The Greeks made a significant step to move drama from a cultic show to the esthetic sphere which was followed by formation of the classic drama. According to scientists, one of the main reasons for growth of popularity of Dionysus in that period was that democratic tendencies were gradually enhanced in the society and peasants became actively involved in the political life. Thus, we may think that drama is rather social itself.

Unlike the contemporary audience, Athenian citizens did not have an opportunity of watching a play every day. In the antique Greece, the audience could watch performances only at theatrical festivals. Today, the best works of the world art are presented at theatrical or film festivals. The festive mood of interest of spectators is worth mentioning. Hellenes used to organize dramatic contests in the classical Athens and later in other polises with such spirit. Two large festivals – the Great Dionysia and the Lenaia used to be held in Athens by the Hellenes with great aspiration. The images that have reached us show how comparatively simple costumes used to change from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC and how they became more grandiose and colorful. In our modern life, some performances, installations or mono-plays are created for a single performance, however, the contemporary world has an opportunity to view the works of well-known artists and stage directors in various spaces many times. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC all dramatic plays used to be staged only for some festival, however, the text of the play remained and an interested reader certainly could become familiarized with it. A significant change occurred in the Greek theater from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC – staging of plays began many times. Playwrights used to stage not only their own drama, but also the plays of classic authors. Possibly, this laid the ground for taking the performances to various cities and states at various

times. The theatrical life became widespread in the entire Hellenic world.

One more significant feature is common for the antique theater. The most horrible tragedies are not staged in the classic tragedy. Everything is described by the messenger which has the function of conveyance of tragic events in the narrative form. His narrative had to drive emotions, fear, terror, sorrow, tears, compassion etc., which according to Aristotle, led to catharsis in humans (*Poetics* 1449b21-28). Antique theater is known for high quality of tragedy. Actually, the messenger creates a simulation of optic vision of events using narrative techniques. The mimic expression made on *ekkyklêma* helps the messenger to a certain extent. Generally, the narration of the messenger is accompanied by illustration with the language of pantomime. In the course of narration, the messenger simultaneously uses the type of narrative techniques which allow him to give its own narration a visual and acoustic effect. In fact, words of the messenger in a tragedy may be seen as a visual narrative and collaboration of the latter with non-verbal media, which implies a visual art.

The purpose of my paper is to review the speech of the messenger in *The Persians* by Aeschylus as the informative source and visual art pattern in the intermedial context of tragedies; it is also interesting whether it is possible to perceive the speech of the messenger as the visual media. Therefore, I will limit myself by *The Persians* which is a tragedy dedicated to the historic topic and represents an interesting attempt to make the Greek audience experience compassion to the enemy simultaneously with the joy of victory.

The horrible information about destruction of the Persian fleet is given to the residents of Susa by the messenger whose speech is full of emotions, tragedy and the misery caused by war. Particular nature of this dramatic composition is that the defeat of Persians stirs up sympathy among the Greek audience to a certain extent. Tragedians mostly use a messenger as so-called informer of the

events happening beyond the stage. In his speech, he should describe everything that happened. This figure has its place in the genealogy of a tragic messenger which is presented in the part of the main fact. In a tragedy, this is merged with an ordinary message – *angelia* [4]. The initial speech of the messenger conveying a tragic reality of the Persians, consists of 29 rows. The messenger is referred to as ἄγγελος. His name is unknown. Researchers have repeatedly discussed to what extent this speech corresponds to the chronicles of the antique epoch. In this case, the researchers are interested to what extent the narration of the messenger about the battle of Salamis and heroes who died there corresponds to real historic facts [5:76]. However, one thing is clear that the role of a messenger in a tragedy is the closest to the mission which the disseminator of information could have performed when conveying the story of the Greek-Persian battle. Aeschylus seems to prepare the reader for the fact that Hellenes are getting ready for victory. The messenger conveys all this from the position of a defeated party in his longest speech (80 rows – 352-432). He tells Atossa that the tragedy of Persians was so big that even ten days would not be enough for him to convey everything: "Be certain of this: no other single day saw the deaths of so many men" (429-430).

The messenger mentions that he witnessed everything that happened (266-67). He sees not only the destructed ships, but also the details of the end. He is the most distant from and at the same time the closest to the scene [4:34]. Aeschylus presents the messenger as the all-seeing narrator of the Battle of Salamis. He is free from any spatial restrictions. In this regard, the Persian messenger resembles the messenger of Homer which can see everything from close and far distance. The play writer tries to create the effect of simultaneousness of action by juxtaposition of people participating in the scene's locations, visions or voices which represents a particular artistic value of the tragedy, in particular, this scene of battle. The scientists

consider that this effect is achieved by skillful use of the spatial perspective of the narrator [6]. The concept of spatial perspective is a concept developed by narratology. It implies narration of the event on the basis of location of the narrator in the specific space and his vision. Therefore, three types of spatial perspectives are differentiated: a) Panoramic spatial perspective, which implies the narrator's positioning at a considerable distance and overseeing the totality of the events; b) Scenic spatial perspective, which implies the narrator's positioning within the scene and directing the narrative from this perspective; and c) Close-up, which is also referred to as the term: zoom in [6:140]. It should be mentioned that when describing the battle scene, the messenger will use all three types of the spatial perspective. By his speech and narrative techniques, he actually creates a simulation of the optical vision of the event. It may be said that this or that event is mentally visualized and to achieve such effect, the narrator uses only words. It is noteworthy that narration occurs only by words, and therefore, the narrative makes the visual effect. To make the above clear, we will provide several examples from each type of spatial perspective.

Description of the battle starts from the line 410 and continues through the line 426. This segment is characterized by frequent alternation of the spatial perspective of the narrator. For example, in lines 407-409 the messenger presents a scene with a large-scale panoramic description ("The Persians answered that shout with a frightened murmur ... but there was no time to do anything. Ship crashed her bronze beak upon a ship"), then through the lines 409-411 narration is replaced by the spatial scenic perspective ("...the first being a Greek one that sheared off the figure head of a Phoenician ship"). In this great battle, from showing the space, the messenger focuses on one specific scene and using narrative techniques goes to description of the battle between the Greek and Phoenician ships [6:142]. We find a number of examples of "zoom-

in" in the speech of the messenger. One of the most impressive is the tears of the defeated Xerxes who was watching the situation in the sea from an elevated place (465-470). In addition, Aeschylus rather skillfully uses acoustic effects in the speech of the messenger (388-90; 393; 397; 426-27), which enhances the artistic effect of the text. He tries to describe the sea full of parts of ruined ships and the coast of Salamis covered with dead bodies using visual and acoustic characteristics. This is accompanied by effects of day and night lighting which are rather clearly demonstrated in the narration of the messenger (377-79; 384; 386-87; 429). For example: "Groans and wails spread all across the wide sea right up until the black darkness of the night came and covered it from sight" (426-428). In my opinion, apart from semantic principle, Aeschylus will use the principles of rhythmic organization (sound expression) which may be perceived as the simulation of dubbing. In such case, abundance of occlusive sounds is observed (κ, π, τ) adding more drama to the text, however this does not break the metric dynamics:

καὶ νῦξ ἐχώρει, κοῦ μάλ' Ἑλλήνων στρατὸς  
κρυφαῖον ἐκπλοῦν οὐδαμῆι καθίστατο·  
ἐπεὶ γε μέντοι λεθκόπωλος ἡμέρα  
πᾶσαν κατέσχε γαῖαν εὐφραγῆς ἰδεῖν... (384-387)

If we consider the main function of the messenger to show and restore the fact that took place but was not played on the stage, we may think that his speech is the informative source and visual art pattern in the intermedia context of the theater. It is also noteworthy that the long speech of the messenger by which it tries to bring the facts of the past to the real scenic time – in the spatial continuum, this narration may also be perceived as the visual media. However, the speech is certainly conveyed using narrative techniques and verbal formatives expressing the vision. It may be said that Aeschylus used all optimal available opportunities for obtaining intermedia. Thus, if we consider the

technical means of that period unlike the modern digital technologies, we may think that not only the classic drama as a whole but also its separate elements, for example, speech of the messenger in the antique theater represent the intermedial

phenomenon implemented in the language of poetics.

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*ფილოლოგია*

## ინფორმაციის გადაცემა ინტერმედიაში: მაცნის სიტყვა, როგორც საინფორმაციო წყარო და ვიზუალური მოდელი ანტიკური ბერძნული თეატრის მულტიმედიალურ კონტექსტში

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თანამედროვე სამყაროში განსაკუთრებით პოპულარულია ინტერმედია, რომელიც მხატვრული კულტურის სინთეზური ფორმების არსებობას გულისხმობს. ჯერ კიდევ ანტიკურ ხანაში ისეთი ჟანრი, როგორც კლასიკური ბერძნული დრამა, პოეტიკისა და ინტერმედიალურობის თვალსაზრისით პარადიგმატულ მოვლენას წარმოადგენს. დრამის განვითარებამ ლიტერატურისა და ხელოვნების მრავალი ფორმის სინთეზი მოითხოვა. ამდენად, შეიძლება ითქვას, რომ ტრაგედია თავადაა ინტერმედიალური, რომელიც ამავე დროს მიმართული იყო სოციუმისკენ. მისი თავისებურება კი იმაში მდგომარეობს, რომ ამ ტექსტების ვიზუალიზაცია ხდება ვიზუალური არტის ფორმატში, რაც გულისხმობს ისეთი მედიუმების გამოყენებას, როგორებიცაა მუსიკა, ქორეოგრაფია, პანტომიმა, პლასტიკა, სცენოგრაფია, კოსტიუმები, ნიღბები და ყველაფერი, რაც განეკუთვნება თეატრის სამყაროს. ბერძნულ ტრაგედიაში მნიშვნელოვანი როლი მაცნეებს ეკისრებათ, რომლებიც, ფაქტობრივად, ყველაზე უფრო შემადრწუნებელი ტრაგიკული მოვლენების ნარატივით გადმოცემის ფუნქციას ასრულებენ. შესაბამისად, ამგვარი სცენა მხოლოდ სიტყვით გადმოცემული ინფორმაციით შეიძლება წარმოდგინოს მაყურებელმა, რაშიც მას გარკვეულწილად ეხმარება ეკიკლემაზე განხორციელებული მიმიკური თანხლება. ჩვეულებრივ, მაცნის თხრობას თან ახლავს მონათხრობის პანტომიმის ენით ილუსტრირება. მაცნე თხრობისას ამავედროულად იყენებს იმ ტიპის ნარატიულ ტექნიკებს, რომლებიც მას საშუალებას აძლევს საკუთარ მონათხრობს ვიზუალური და აკუსტიკური ხასიათი მიანიჭოს. ფაქტობრივად, მაცნის სიტყვები ტრაგედიაში შეიძლება განვიხილოთ, როგორც ვიზუალური ნარატივი და ამ

უკანასკნელის კოლაბორაცია არასიტყვიერ მედიუმებთან, რაც თავისთავად ვიზუალურ არტს გულისხმობს. ჩემი მოხსენების მიზანია, განვიხილო ესქილეს „სპარსელებში“ მაცნის სიტყვები, როგორც საინფორმაციო წყარო და ვიზუალური არტის მოდელი ტრაგედიის ინტერმედიალურ კონტექსტში; აგრეთვე საინტერესოა, შესაძლებელია თუ არა აღვიქვათ მაცნის სიტყვა ვიზუალურ მედიად. თუკი გავითვალისწინებთ მაშინდელ ტექნიკურ საშუალებებს თანამედროვე ციფრული ტექნოლოგიებისაგან განსხვავებით, შეგვიძლია ვიფიქროთ, რომ არა მარტო კლასიკური დრამა მთლიანად აღებული, არამედ მისი ცალკეული ელემენტებიც კი, მაგალითად, მაცნის სიტყვა ანტიკურ თეატრში, სწორედ პოეტიკის ენით განხორციელებულ მულტიმედიურ ფენომენს წარმოადგენს.

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