

Reading Shakespeare's Stage Directions

Everyone in *Othello* calls its main character 'Moor' at some point in the drama. Brabantio, Roderigo, the Senators, Montano, Cassio, Lodovico, Emilia, and Desdemona all use the term of address, often when Othello is present, and it is not only Iago for whom it is a more common appellation than Othello's own proper name. His derogatory language in the opening scene, however, establishes an association of the name 'Moor' with the accusation of sexual transgression: 'your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs' (1.1.117-9). The play's double title, printed prominently as a running head across both the 1622 and 1623 editions – '*The Tragedy of Othello The Moore of Venice*' – thus has its counterpart in the divided form of address for its main character within the dialogue.

One aspect of both texts, however, is almost entirely consistent in how it designates Othello: the stage directions. Throughout the First Folio text, stage directions always use the name 'Othello', just as his speech prefix is the standard '*Oth.*' Characters in the play may perform the renaming that shifts Othello from individual to type, that's to say, but the apparatus of the play as printed in 1623 does not. The quarto of 1622 is also consistent in the speech prefix '*Oth.*', and largely uses the name 'Othello' in its stage directions, with three distinctive exceptions. When Othello and Desdemona leave the Venetian courtroom in 1.3, Othello promises 'but an houre | Of loue, of worldly matters, and directions, | To spend with thee' (Shakespeare 1622: D^v). It is an early example of what Michael Neill has explored as 'the obscure erotic fantasies that the play both explores and disturbingly excites in its audience' (Neill 1989: 390): an explicit textual concatenation of race and sex in the evocation of their offstage bed, already obscenely foregrounded in the play's imagination by Iago in his opening charivari. It is therefore particularly striking that the exit stage direction in the quarto reads '*Exit Moore and Desdemona*' (Shakespeare 1622: D^v). The racial transgression that so titillates the play is underlined by its first example of a shift in the stage direction from name to type. Summoned to the Duke's war cabinet, the military general enters with his name; exiting for a stolen hour honeying with his Venetian bride, he has become 'Moore'.

It is therefore not surprising, perhaps, that the next time such a shift in address occurs is at an analogous moment. Drawing Desdemona back to their chamber after the disturbance of Cassio's brawl, with the reassuring 'All's well now sweeting | Come away to bed', Othello is again 'Moore' in the exit stage direction (Shakespeare 1622: F2^v). What Neill dubs the play's 'scopophile economy' is further excited by the play's own pornographically inspired anonymity, the use of a 'perverted erotic stereotype' of 'Moor' (Neill 1989: 396). The third and final such stage direction example is, inevitably, in the play's last scene, with the marriage bed, decked with wedding sheets and with the body of Desdemona, in full sight. Taunted by Emilia as a 'murderous Coxcombe', Othello's impotent revenge is also racialised in the direction: '*The Moore runnes at Iago*' (Shakespeare 1622: M4^v). As the play's dialogue acknowledges, 'that's he that was *Othello*': the play's apparatus appears to withdraw its endorsement of Othello's individuality at these critical moments when it reinscribes him as the sexual or violent early modern racial generalisation, 'Moor'.

Despite the central importance of race to the play's recent critical history, no modern edition notes these differential uses of the word 'Moor' in quarto stage directions as significant. Editors who routinely repopulate their text with quarto oaths, such as the play's first word 'Tush', do not show the same interest in the specific form of its stage directions. These examples of 'Moor' in the play's apparatus complicate Leah S. Marcus's suggestion, based solely on the play's dialogue, that 'the play's most racially-charged language' exists in the Folio text only (Marcus 2004: 23), and that, if the revision theory of the two texts is accepted, the reviser of Q to F has 'revised in the direction of racial virulence' (Marcus 2004: 30). Editing *Othello* continues to be particularly beset by ideological assumptions masquerading as textual ones (Potter 2003). Explaining her new introduction to the Arden edition of *Othello* originally edited by E.A.J. Honigmann, Ayanna Thompson suggests that while her predecessor's 'editorial decisions remain both useful and admirable, the birth of early modern race studies changed critical approaches' to the play since its publication in 1997 (Thompson 2015: 5). Her generous implication is that editorial practice is absolutely distinct from race studies: treatment of the quarto stage directions might suggest otherwise. In using 'Moor', a term for Othello borrowed from one of the other characters in the play (since Othello never calls himself 'Moor'), those anomalous quarto stage directions enact a narrative abdication of the central character's

worldview. They betray a shift in narrative sympathy: a shift that, whatever its causes, can only be experienced in reading. If these stage directions are meaningful, they are meaningful for readers and need to be understood as part of a reading process which integrates them with the dialogue with which they have so much thematic and lexical overlap.

Perhaps we can see what might be at stake in this redirected hermeneutic emphasis by taking up one recent and influential argument about the status and transmission of Shakespeare's texts. As part of his ongoing investigations into what his book calls *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (2003), Lukas Erne has suggested that stage directions are unnecessary where spectators can see what is happening. Their presence therefore indicates a text specifically prepared for the page. Thus the stage direction '*She kneels downe*' in the First Quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* after Juliet's line 'Good father, heare me speake?' is not included in the amplified, and to Erne more literary, Q2 lines: 'Good father, I beseech you on my knees/ Heare me with patience, but to speak a worde' (Erne 2003: 223). The longer, 'literary' version has absorbed the stage direction into its dialogue for the benefit of readers.

But there is an ontological problem in Erne's argument. Neither Q1 nor Q2 of *Romeo and Juliet* is a performance: both exist only in print, only in that they are read texts. As such, as documents that exist only in the hands of their readers, perhaps there is less substantive difference between the two. Readers either *read* that Juliet kneels in a stage direction or *read* that she kneels in her own speech. Only if we imagine that one read text is in fact somehow actually a performed text, to which reading is an incidental activity, does this discrepancy actually illustrate the difference between showing and telling. In reading, both the stage direction '*She kneels downe*' and the character's line 'I beseech you on my knees' are diegetic rather than mimetic. It makes little difference whether the narrative of action is presented within the dialogue or outside it, since for readers these are all forms of printed information to be absorbed, assessed, and synthesised as part of reading. Marco de Marinis' insistence on the 'irreversible' nature of printed stage directions – in that they represent a kind of 'theatrical transcoding' from which 'it is *never* possible to move "backward"' to dramatic performance – is helpful here (de Marinis 1993: 29): stage directions are instead part of a forward momentum into the act of reading.

John Jowett argues that stage directions ‘lead a double life’: as text, ‘words that signify’, and as witnesses to ‘a different semiotic system, that of stage action’ He goes on to amplify their separate status, and to justify a different approach by editors in presenting them to modern readers, because, unlike the dialogue, ‘their realization is not in language’ (Jowett 2007: 147). My approach in this essay challenges the assumption that stage directions exist primarily or exclusively as the semiotic encoding of performance. Instead I suggest that we should reinstate stage directions in early Shakespeare texts as the property of readers, and as understood instances of a different mode of narration in printed playbooks. That is, *contra* Jowett, their realization is precisely in language. I begin by uncovering two related critical emphases: on original stage directions as either posthoc clues to a recoverable textual prehistory in manuscript or on stage, and in editorial stage directions as helpful anticipatory instructions for future or imagined performances. I suggest instead that we should locate stage directions in their post-authorial, post-theatrical life on the page, developing the narratological implications of the position that all stage directions in early printed texts, whatever we might speculate about their provenance, exist in the act of reading. They are all read by readers, whether or not they were drafted with readers in mind, and wherever they might fall in the various theatrical and authorial taxonomies. In print form they function as snippets of narrative, susceptible to narratological analysis. I thus use narratology to think about the voice of stage directions in Shakespeare’s First Folio, and their function in inscribing plot. Throughout my aim is to suggest ways of thinking about stage directions less as nuggets of textual or theatrical information and instead in terms more closely correlated with narrative theory and reader response criticism.

Studies of early modern stage directions have long been preoccupied with questions of provenance. Stage directions in printed playbooks are thus primarily interesting to scholars as traces of the text in a prior, even original state. This conjectural former existence might be in an authorial manuscript, a theatrical working copy, or the experience of seeing the play on the stage: what matters is that all these possibilities suggest that the stage direction is an elegiac remnant of something prior, and that its

main interest therefore lies in the access it promises to the recessive manuscript or performance witnesses to the drama.

The New Bibliographers distinguished between 'literary' and 'theatrical' stage directions in order to try to categorise the nature of the papers lying behind the printed text. R.B. McKerrow observed: 'what could be more natural than that a skilled dramatist closely connected with the theatre and writing, not with any thought of print, but with his eye solely on a stage production, should give stage directions in the form of directions to the actors (as they might appear in a prompt-book) (McKerrow 1931: 273). John Dover Wilson suggested that in imperative stage directions such as 'ly downe' or 'sleepe' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 'we hear the managerial voice giving real "directions" to the players' (the adjective 'managerial' makes it clear that he takes this to be some theatrical bureaucrat, not the dramatist) (Wilson 1940: 80). Although many textual critics have complicated these early divisions between literary and theatrical stage directions, they still tend to focus on what they tell us about textual transmission.

The other major interest in early modern printed stage directions has been as evidence of contemporary stage practice. Richard Hosley's taxonomy of stage directions as 'theatrical', in that they refer 'to theatrical structure or equipment', or 'fictional' ones that operate within a 'dramatic fiction' remains influential, not least because, as Hosley acknowledges, his distinction 'corresponds to that drawn by textual critics between directions usually written by a book-keeper and by an author'. Hosley suggests that 'theatrical directions will occasionally furnish clues about the stage for which they were written', and he discusses, for example, the kind of gallery that might have been implied by Rose play stage directions such as entries 'upon the walls' (Hosley 1957: 16-17). Gathering together their *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in Early Modern English Drama*, Alan Dessen and Leslie Thomson suggest that while dialogue is 'shifting sands' when trying to understand theatrical practice, relying on stage directions is 'to stay within the realm of what was or could have been done in the original productions' (Dessen and Thomson 1999: viii), suggesting a legible and dependable back projection from stage direction to production. In these kinds of analysis, it is not the prior textual life of the stage directions that is of interest but their relation to dramatic representation. Both approaches identify stage directions as

temporally and textually disjointed clues to the past – either in the theatre or in the manuscript – rather than as integral parts of the play’s present in the hands of a reader.

Relatedly, stage directions have tended to be a point of considerable editorial intervention in modern editions and accounts of their procedures. McKerrow judged them to be ‘accessories’ ‘to some extent’, and advocated that the best text for the general reader would be one furnished ‘with full stage directions aiding them to visualize the action as it would be if staged by a reasonably conservative producer’. (McKerrow 1939: 53). Stanley Wells’ treatment of stage directions in his *Reediting Shakespeare for the Modern Reader* is revealingly titled ‘The Editor and the Theatre’, again suggesting that the sole purpose of these textual elements is to provide scaffolding for actual or supposed performance: ‘The principle operative here is a theatrical one: that the editor may sometimes be able to provide information at a point equivalent to that at which its visual correlative would be apprehended in the theatre’ (Wells 1984: 76). The Oxford Shakespeare recognises that ‘early editions are often deficient in directions for essential action’ so ‘we try to remedy the deficiencies’ (Wells and Taylor 2005: xli), drawing on the idea that theatrical manuscripts were accompanied by ‘an unwritten paratext... a life-support system of stage directions’ supplied by the author himself (Wells and Taylor 1987: 2). Life ebbs from the supine dialogue, the image suggests, without the iron lung of editorial stage directions.

The Oxford Shakespeare works to an effective blueprint of print drama described by Martin Meisel in his book *How Plays Work: Reading and Performance* (2007): ‘Reading plays in the fullest sense, then, means being able to read the dialogue and descriptions as a set of directions encoding, but also in a measure *enacting*, their own realization’ (Meisel 2007: 1). For Meisel, as for the Oxford editors, the play’s dialogue and stage directions interlock in a reading process that is essentially visual or theatrical. In the same vein, Ernst Honigmann’s essay ‘Reenter the Stage Direction’ urges editors to be bolder in ‘textual tidying’ of stage directions, since this ‘could greatly help future producers of the plays’ (Honigmann 1976: 117). Margaret Jane Kidnie proposes a new edited page layout that ‘builds into the spatial presentation of the page the textual indeterminacy typical of directions found in early modern printed and manuscript drama’ to ‘transfer the interpretative activity from the editor to the reader’ (Kidnie

2004: 165). All of these varying prescriptions suggest that extant Shakespearean stage directions are inadequate and in dire need of amplification by editors. The effect of these injunctions may well be to produce texts that are more able to enact 'their own realization' in the minds of attentive readers, but they may also have the unintended consequence of ignoring the specific form and impact of those early stage directions that are present, in favour of more consistent and expansive editorial intervention.

Textual critics have often proposed an absolute conceptual distinction between the spoken text of the play, to which the editor owes particular fidelity, and its outlying apparatus, which demands less commitment. M.J. Kidnie, drawing on the work of Roman Ingarden, distinguishes between a play's *haupttext* (dialogue) and its *nebentext* (side text). She suggests that *nebentext* 'includes those features that distinguish drama from a genre such as prose fiction' (Kidnie 2000: 460). These features are visually distinguished on the early modern printed page. For example, stage directions are often, but not always, typographically differentiated from play speeches, tending to be in italics and to be centred or aligned to the right hand margin. Editorial theories of the difference between dialogue and apparatus suggest that such differences are unique to – even ontologically constitutive of - the printed play.

But, in fact, printed plays were not the only place where early modern readers might need to deploy an interpretative facility across representational modes on the page. One obvious example is the careful typographical sophistication of Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calendar* (1579), where different narrative voices and reading requirements are represented in the transitions between blackletter, roman and italic type founts. Early playbook readers who might also have read adjacent prose fictions would also have been accustomed to toggling between extended passages of direct speech and shorter passages of narrative direction or plotting as part of the same reading experience. If we look, for instance, at a book read by Shakespeare, and his source for *As You Like It*, Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde* (1590), it is immediately clear that the pages are divided typographically between passages of direct speech and of narration printed in blackletter, songs and other poetic interludes, printed in italic, and roman headings that mark off significant moments in a manner reminiscent of stage directions in printed plays. When the lovers Rosalynde and Rosader woo, their alternate speeches are set out with centred speech headings in the manner of a

playtext (Lodge 1590: K3-K4). Examples of other stage direction lookalikes include the roman headings ‘Rosalynde passionate alone’ (Lodge 1590: I2) and ‘Saladynes discourse to Rosader unknowen’ (Lodge 1590: L4). The point here is that variant typefaces are being used to signal different forms of narrative – in Kidnie’s terms, a kind of haupttext and nebentext - in the printed text, and that readers of playtexts may well have brought a facility in negotiating these typographical code-switches from other reading material. Rather than finding stage directions inconsistent or inadequate, that’s to say, they may have instead implicitly understood them as exemplary instances of what Wolfgang Iser calls ‘structured blanks’ that ‘stimulate the process of ideation to be performed by the reader on terms set by the text’ (Iser 1980: 169) – or to put it another way – as narrative to be read.

Whether or not they are produced with readers in mind, then, printed Shakespearean stage directions are there to be read. Indeed, sometimes reading gives information that is in narrative excess of the performed scene. The final scene entrance of *The Winter’s Tale*, for example, appears to pre-empt its coup de theatre: ‘*Enter Leontes, Polixenes, Florizell, Perdita, Camillo, Paulina: Hermione (like a Statue:) Lords, &c.*’. To read this text is to be privy to a kind of parenthetical narrative hint, since to be ‘like’ something, rarer in stage directions than in dialogue, is generally a relation of visual rather than essential similarity (Titus is not, but only ‘*like a cooke*’ in the final scene of *Titus Andronicus*; the kings’ courtiers are ‘*habited like Shepheards*’ at the masque in the first act of *Henry VIII*). Readers thus register a textual raised eyebrow about the status of Hermione who, the spoken dialogue of the play maintains, died from her husband’s cruelty some sixteen years previously. Some of what has come to be known as dramatic irony – the comfort of audiences in knowing more than is understood by the plays’ characters – is amplified through similarly revealing stage directions. It is clear to readers of early texts of *1 Henry IV*, for instance – whereas it is not to Prince Henry – that Falstaff ‘*fals down as if he were dead*’ (f5v). Readers of *Cymbeline*, by contrast, share the false perception of the two brothers that their guest is dead: ‘*Enter Arvirargus with Imogen dead, bearing her in his Armes*’ (sig bbb). To read the stage directions is not always to occupy a privileged narrative position.

If stage directions are taken as fragments of narrative to be read, in many cases they respond to the kind of close or 'literary' reading that we are used to applying to the lines spoken by the plays' characters. Relatively few analyses have taken such a literary-critical approach. Stage directions have been valuable as textual clues or inadequate and therefore editorially supplemented as framing narratives of dramatic action. Marga Munkelt is unusual in attending to stage directions as part of the poetic fabric of the play text, although I do not share her assumption that these meanings convey the intentions of the author. Munkelt cites the stage direction at the beginning of Act 5 in the 1623 Folio text of *1 Henry IV*: '*Enter the King, Prince of Wales, Lord John of Lancaster, Earle of Westmerland, Sir Walter Blunt, and Falstaffe*', suggesting that, by separating the Prince so decisively from Falstaff, the order of persons here exposes the 'incompatibility of the subplot and main plot' and that 'Falstaff's isolated position [she doesn't note it, but the lineation of the stage direction means he is actually alone on a line] contrasts with Hal's integration into the sphere of the main plot' (Munkelt 1987: 255). That's to say her argument is that the stage directions do not primarily encourage the reader to visualise them and thence to take their implication of new alliances among the play's personnel. Rather they are to be read as literary narrative.

Elsewhere, Munkelt notes the stage direction for the fight between Hal and Hotspur: '*The Prince killeth Percie*'. It is the only time Hotspur is named in the play's apparatus by his family name, and thus the alliteration of the stage direction amplifies Hal's own description of their fatal parity:

I am the Prince of Wales; and think not, Percy,
To share with me in glory any more.
Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere,
Nor can one England brook a double reign
Of Harry Percy and the Prince of Wales. (5.4.62-6)

The harmony of 'Prince' and 'Percie' in the stage direction emphasises that structural equivalence between the two young men that has been so important from the beginning of the play and the king's wish that Hotspur were his real son. To develop Munkelt's approach: this stage direction is not simply literary, it is a particular kind of narrative. *1 Henry IV* is a play particularly attentive to the power of naming: Falstaff's

name for the Prince, 'Hal', conjures up a world of intimacy far distinct from the King's preferred 'Harry', even as Falstaff's own name is a substitute for the more toxic and topical original 'Oldcastle'. The onomastic precision of the direction '*The Prince killeth Percie*' appears deliberately to echo Prince Henry's own lexis and emphasis at this point in the play.

This apparently simple and descriptive stage direction offers itself, therefore, as an unexpected example of what theories of prose would recognise and locate in the late eighteenth-century novel, as free indirect discourse. Writing brilliantly of this technique, Henry Louis Gates Jr identifies free indirect discourse in terms that are highly suggestive for the role of stage directions in drama. Quoting Michal Ginsberg, Gates proposes that free indirect discourse 'is a *mimesis* that tries to pass for a *diegesis*' or perhaps vice versa, such that 'we are unable to characterize it either as the representation of an action (diegesis) or as the repetition of a character's words (mimesis)' (Gates 1988: 208). Studies of stage directions have been trapped by the concepts of descriptive or prescriptive diegesis, but the terms of Gates' insight offer a way to read published stage directions as free indirect discourse, that third term between showing and telling, or between action and representation.

This narrative style is common elsewhere in Shakespearean stage directions once we look for it, and reading stage directions as examples of free indirect discourse reveals some surprising narrative affiliations and sympathies. *Antony and Cleopatra* opens with Philo's deeply disapproving account of Antony's erotic servitude to Cleopatra. For Philo, the warrior Antony is emasculated from his former military virility and 'become the bellows and the fan/ To cool a gypsy's lust'. The stage direction immediately following corroborates this assessment: '*Flourish. Enter Anthony, Cleopatra, her Ladies, the Traine, with Eunuchs fanning her*'. The insistently feminised list of personnel identifies Antony as what early modern English understood as effeminate: 'womanish, unmanly' and perhaps 'devoted to women' (OED *effeminate* 1 and 3). The repeated word 'fan' aligns Antony with the eunuchs and the women in Cleopatra's retinue. The voice of the stage direction here aligns itself with Philo's perspective. Rather than descriptively or neutrally indicating how the main characters could or should or did enter the stage, that's to say, the direction is, in Mieke Bal's explanation, an 'activity of focalization': 'the relationship between the "vision", the agent that sees, and that which is seen' (Bal

1996: 118). It extends Philo's speech and his narrative consciousness, and, we might say, introduces the entire Egyptian narrative of the play from a particular censorious Roman perspective. As Bal notes, where the point from which the elements are viewed lies with a character in the fiction, 'that character will have a technical advantage over the other characters. The reader watches with the character's eyes and will, in principle be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character' (Bal 1996: 118-9).

This stage direction works by collocation or framing: placing Antony in a lexical field corroborating the charge of voluptuousness against which he struggles to defend himself throughout the play. Antony is a character in his own story, rather than his own focaliser. The case of *Coriolanus* is rather different. Here the hero's disdain for Rome's lower orders runs through some increasingly derogatory stage directions. The common people are introduced as 'a *Company of Mutinous Citizens*' in the play's opening direction. They are demoted to '*Plebeians*' (sig.bb) and then as a '*Rabble of Plebeians*' (bb2) and '*the rabble againe*' (bb2 v) as the fraught vertical relations of the play's polis worsen. Both the terms 'plebeian' and 'rabble' are used by Coriolanus and other patricians during the play: Coriolanus never speaks the more respectful form of address denoted by the word 'citizen'. The play is thus progressively focalised through patrician views in the partisan vocabulary of the stage directions. Elsewhere, stage directions point to more mobile forms of focalisation. In the Folio text of *Titus Andronicus*, a stage direction '*Enter the Emperor, Tamora and her two sons, with the Moore*' in Act 1 sets the pattern for Aaron's designation when in company, when he tends to be identified as a type rather than an individual. His solo entrance in the following scene, '*Enter Aaron alone*', suggests a quite different, individualistic focalisation. The stage directions cue a different engagement with the character and a different perspective on him: again, an experience available only through attention to the stage direction as a snippet of free indirect discourse.

We might develop this interpretative suggestion at more length by comparing two versions of a longer stage direction: the description of the players' dumbshow as printed in Q1 of *Hamlet* (1603) and in the 1623 Folio. In the play on stage, Hamlet establishes himself as interpreter of the action, introducing the players and providing a gloss on their actions, explaining both the plot and the occasion. 'What means this,

my lord?’ asks Ophelia, and Hamlet’s riddling reply ‘miching mallecho’ remains one of the play’s interpretative cruxes. It’s an explanation that apparently only he understands. Perhaps it’s appropriate, then, that the entire stage direction narrating the dumbshow in the Folio text seems to be a further example of free indirect discourse. The dumbshow stage direction purports to describe an autonomous action but in fact reveals itself lexically to be a further example of Hamlet’s own narrative control on his play. Just as Hamlet’s own descriptions of events, such as his condemnation of unseemly public intimacies between his mother and stepfather for instance, are often taken by modern directors as implicit stage directions for how the couple should behave, so too his perspective shapes the depiction of events that are apparently distinct from him.

The Folio stage direction reads:

Hoboyes play. The dumbe shew enters. Enter a King and Queene, very louingly; the Queene embracing him. She kneeles and makes shew of Protestation vnto him. He takes her vp, and dcclines his head vpon her neck. Lays him downe vpon a Banke of Flowers. She seeing him a-sleepe, leaues him. Anon comes in a Fellow, takes off his Crowne, kisses it, and powres poyson in the Kings eares, and Exits. The Queene returnes, findes the King dead, and makes passionate Action. The Poysoner, with some two or three Mutes comes in againe, seeming to lament with her. The dead body is carried away: The Poysoner Wooes the Queene with Gifts, she seemes loath and vnwilling awhile, but in the end, accepts his loue. Exeunt.

Tiffany Stern has noted that the dumb show ‘seems to express Hamlet’s point of view’ in its ‘stress on the queen, on her behaviour, and on the ease with which she moves from man to man’. She picks out ‘passionate’, and ‘seems’ as echoes of Hamlet’s repeated reference to ‘untrustworthy passions as against real emotion’ within a broader ‘distrust of seeming (pretending) against being’ (Stern 2012: 278). There are other specific lexical pointers too, that align the stage direction with Hamlet’s habitual forms of expression. In particular, the colloquialism ‘fellow’ echoes as a repeated part of Hamlet’s vocabulary (‘you hear this fellow in the cellarage’, ‘I would have this fellow whipped’, ‘I will speak to this fellow’, ‘a fellow of infinite jest’); ‘anon’, too, is one of his conjunctions (‘you shall see anon’). Gertrude’s ‘neck’ is a particular focus of Hamlet’s sexualised revulsion, imagining Claudius ‘paddling in your neck with his

damned fingers'. These words and attitudes align the stage direction with Hamlet. But there is another shadow, an echo of another speech here: not only does the dumbshow action corroborate the Ghost's account of his murder, it echoes its narrative and, more significantly, its vocabulary. 'Loath', 'crown', 'ears', 'decline', 'seeming virtuous', 'sleeping' are words shared between the stage direction and the Ghost's speech in 1.4. The location of the free indirect discourse of the stage direction shifts between the Hamlets. If we compare this with the version of the dumb show published in Q1 of 1603, we can see that it is much less narrative in tone:

*Enter in a Dumbe Shew, the King and the Queene, he sits downe in an Arbor, she leaves him:
Then enters Lucianus with poyson in a Viall, and powres it in his eares, and goes away:
Then the Queene commeth and finds him dead: and goes away with the other*

The only piece of vocabulary to echo significantly elsewhere in the play is the specificity of the word 'vial', which comes from the Ghost's account of his murder. Otherwise the direction appears disembodied from the play's characters and their specific ideolects. The narrative effect of the two versions here is quite distinct.

Linda McJannet's valuable study *The Voice of Elizabethan Stage Directions* traces 'the emergence of an efficient, unobtrusive, self-effacing dramatic code' for stage directions in print drama of the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean period (McJannet 1999: 137). She summarises and gives numerous examples of this 'impersonal and objective tone' (McJannet 1999: 193). Perhaps we might see Q1 Hamlet's dumbshow stage direction as part of this broader trajectory. Nevertheless, my suggestion here that some Shakespearean stage directions approach the narrative condition of free indirect discourse finds a different and more personal, subjective tone to these elements of the text, and suggests some of the ways they respond specifically to reading and to readerly attention.

The difference between the more subjective and detailed Folio and the neutrally descriptive Q1 dumbshow stage directions, and their narrative content, recalls a

famous example in narratology. In a much-quoted passage of *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), E.M. Forster distinguished between plot and narrative with a royal example:

We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. “The king died and then the queen died” is a story. “The king died, and then the queen died of grief” is a plot’ (Forster 1962: 87)

Stories, he suggests, feed an undiscerning readership with the ‘and then’ of serial events. ‘Consider the death of the queen. If it is in a story we say “and then?”’. If it is in a plot we ask “why?”’. Plots, by contrast, require ‘intelligence and memory’ (Forster 1962: 87). For Forster, the difference between plot and narrative is as much social and educational as it is syntactic and formal: informed readers appreciate plots and uninformed ones crave stories.

Forster, as the title of his work makes clear, is distinguishing his analysis from Aristotle whose literary focus is drama, and focusing instead on the world of prose fiction. But nevertheless his account is suggestive for a discussion of drama and its readers. In its absence of causality or of adverbial modifiers and its focus on sequence, ‘The king died and then the queen died’ approaches the condition of a stage direction. What distinguishes it from a usual stage direction is the tense. While there are a handful of plays with past tense stage directions – such as the dumb shows in *Gorboduc* - stage directions exist in the present tense or imperative mode (and perhaps, as McJannet notes, sometimes in ‘elliptical forms of plural indicative directions’, such as ‘[They] draw’) (McJannet 1999: 116). If the syntax does not quite fit, the story certainly does: the narrative the example gestures towards seems more familiar to us from the contours of the theatre than the novel. Forster’s exemplary story is, after all, an impressively brief counter-*Hamlet* as projected from the point of view of its puritanical young prince: a foreshortened and ethically complete version of the dumbshow we have already discussed. What Hamlet most desires at the opening of the play as he compares his disgustingly vital mother with the ideal widow she should have become, is that implied normative hierarchy of ‘the king died, and then the queen died’:

Why, she would hang on him

As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on, and yet within a month -
Let me not think on't; frailty, thy name is woman - (1.2.143-6)

Gertrude's refusal to play the widow's part that the story would allocate her propels both Hamlet and *Hamlet*: it orients the play from 'and then' towards 'why?'. The stage direction minimalism of 'the king died and then the queen died' might suggest that, in Forster's terms, stage directions give us story rather than plot.

The issue is complicated by early modern uses of the word 'plot', or 'plat', to refer to a document listing actors' entrances used by theatre personnel to organise or run a performance. As Tiffany Stern identifies from the seven surviving examples of such plots, these documents are predominantly concerned with 'movement out onto the stage and exits at the end of scenes from the stage' (Stern 2009: 211). The majority of extant plots refer to character by their fictional names, occasionally supplemented with the name of the actor, such as the example from the British Library plot for *The Battle of Alcazar*: 'Enter Muly Mahamett mr Ed: Allen' (Stern 2009: 212), but they show little consistent interest in fictional space (in Hosley's terms, they are 'theatrical' rather than 'fictional'). 'Plot' in this specific technical early modern sense looks much like Forster's simple 'story': the terms, perhaps helpfully, begin to merge as they do in the reception of Forster's ideas. Forster's distinction between story and plot is one echoed throughout narrative theory's interest in *histoire/recit* or in *fabula/sujet*. These distinguish between the totality of the narrated events on the one hand, and the form of the narrative discourse in which they are represented, on the other. But Forster's stress on implicit causality as the defining feature of plot has been challenged. Revisiting that exemplary case of royal mortality, Gerard Genette proposes that 'The king died' is itself sufficient, as every event is already a minimal narrative. As he adds: 'there are time and places for story; there are time and places for plot' (Genette 1988: 20).

Time and places for story in stage directions are numerous, although importantly they capture their events in perpetual present tense rather than the past tense of Genette. But in early Shakespeare texts there are examples of stage directions functioning in more complex narrative ways: perhaps these might be read as instancing time and

place for plot. To take some First Folio examples: the introduction of '*Adriana, wife to Antipholis Sereptus, with Luciana her sister*' at the beginning of act 2 of *The Comedy of Errors* seems curiously to identify one new character by reference to another character not on stage or previously mentioned. One effect of this is descriptively to thicken out the interlaced sociality of the play's depiction of Ephesus. Like this example, the directions '*Enter Rosaline for Ganimed, Celia for Aliena, and Clowne, alias Touchstone*' (*As You Like It*) or '*the Emperour brings the Arrowes in his hand that Titus shot at him*' (*Titus Andronicus*) or '*Enter Sir Richard Ratcliffe with Halberds, carrying the Nobles to death at Pomfret*' (*Richard III*) or '*Enter Buckingham from his Arraignment*' (*Henry VIII*) each go beyond the minimum format, and use more complicated syntactic structures to convey information verbally that is in excess of what might be performed. That's to say, they do narrative work for the reader. The direction in *Coriolanus* '*Titus Lartius, having set a guard upon Carioles, going with Drum and Trumpet toward Cominius, and Caius Martius, Enters with a Lieutenant, other Souldiours, and a Scout*' uses the stage direction neither to cue nor to describe action but to state that it has already happened ('having set'). In *Henry VIII* the deictic direction '*Enter Lorde Chamberlaine, reading this Letter*' suggests that both the written text of the stage direction and of the prop letter are to be similarly interpreted by the reader.

Similarly in *Timon of Athens*, the direction '*Enter Lord Timon, the States the Athenian Lords, Ventidius which Timon redeem'd from prison. Then comes dropping after all Apemantus discontentedly like himselfe*' implies a causal relationship between these clauses. It seems unlikely, given how much narrative play-readers must have been habituated to holding in their minds, that the reminder of the particular debt owed by Ventidius to his Lord is a practical consideration (Timon agrees to help him only a couple of scenes before). Rather the stage direction can be read as narrative. The same is true of the reiterations of familial relationships in the parade of ghosts cursing Richard III before the battle of Bosworth: '*Enter the Ghost of Prince Edward, Sonne to Henry the sixt*' and '*Enter the Ghost of Anne, his Wife*'. In their designations of the spirits, the stage directions serve both as reminder and recapitulation of the plot, and as amplification of Richard's unnatural internecine brutality. In *2 Henry VI* the direction '*Enter two or three running over the Stage, from the Murther of Duke Humfrey*' does comparable narrative work. In terms of conveying what is happening it is surplus, immediately duplicated in the following speech which confesses 'We have dispatcht the Duke as [Suffolk] commanded'. In narrative terms, however, it articulates the distinction between showing and telling not

in terms of the difference between performance and reading, but in alternating the fictional texture of dialogue and narrative. The stage direction works to construct the playtext as literary: not in intention or provenance, but in its reception by the reader.

The most famous stage direction of all may be the best place to end this survey. *The Winter's Tale's* 'Exit pursued by a Beare' is the only stage direction to have become a famous and recognisable quotation in its own right, implicitly asserting its claim to be read as a literary or narrative fragment alongside the dialogue of the play. Indeed, it has probably become its play's best-known line. But commentary on the line has tended to be preoccupied with the question of past or hypothetical performance, and the question of whether a bear, perhaps even a fashionable Jacobean polar bear, might have been brought on stage (Biggins 1962; Bristol 1991). Compelling as these questions are, my suggestion here is a simpler one. The pleasure of this stage direction is derived from the pleasure of reading. It is not primarily referential but poetic or literary. It enacts the shock that it presents, since it is an exit stage direction which has no preceding paired entrance. The indefinite article 'a', where 'the' might have been more expected, executes the joyfully random ursine irruption into the narrative. Part of its effectiveness derives from careful crafting and associations. Its seven syllables produce the trochaic tetrameter – evoking the otherworldly meter of *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* fairies, or the elegiac 'Fear no more the heat o'the sun' in *Cymbeline* (4.2.259), or the songs of Spring and Winter that end *Love's Labours' Lost*. Closer to hand, the stage direction's specific meter is echoed in Autolycus's ballad 'Lawn as white as driven snow' (4.4.219). Like the trickster Autolycus himself, this stage direction is a boundary-crosser, intervening to divert the play from tragedy to comedy and combining with the figure of Time, the transition to a new location in Bohemia, and the move from verse to prose to disrupt the play's generic shape. The stage direction simultaneously evokes and disavows any speaker as it inserts itself between comically impossible mimesis and unattributed diegesis. But in demanding, and rewarding, reading, it is exemplary of the narrative work stage directions can do for the reader of early Shakespearean texts.

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